

This is an excerpt from the newly published book entitled **Death From Desire**, which comprises two stories of murder, suspense and drama.

Deadly Desires

Fictional Crime Thriller

Mark R. Beckner

The stories in this book are purely fictional, created by the imagination of the author. Any resemblance or likeness to any location, place, incident, or person, either alive or dead is only a coincidence or used factiously.

Copyright © 2021 Mark R. Beckner
All rights reserved

The scanning, uploading, copying, reproduction, or distribution of this book without the author's permission is prohibited.

Mark R. Beckner Publishing

Chapter 1

Tyler and Miranda were sitting outside enjoying their lattes at one of the many beachside cafes on Miami Beach. It was a beautiful Tuesday morning. The sun was glistening off the rolling waves as they soaked it all in and watched seagulls circling above. Tyler was having some difficulty finishing his latte, as he had not been feeling well in recent days.

“Why not?” asked Tyler, as he felt the cool ocean breeze against his cheek.

“You knew the rules, Tyler,” responded Miranda.

“Yes, but things can change. We have a wonderful thing going here. I think I’m falling in love with you.”

“Tyler, that’s not an option. I made that perfectly clear. I’m not in love with you, and I have no interest in a permanent relationship. This was purely for enjoyment and as an escape. I thought you understood that.”

“Yes, I did,” sighed Tyler, “but I need you now. Who else can I turn to? You have fulfilled my life like no one else. We can continue to see each other, right?”

“Look, I’ve got a meeting to get to. Why don’t you come over tonight, and we can discuss this over something stronger than coffee? Maybe we can agree on an arrangement.”

“I would like that. What time?”

“Why don’t you come over after work at seven o’clock. I’ll have some margaritas ready.”

“Thank you. I’ll see you then.”

Tyler Vincent had a successful law practice in Miami, Florida, with his law partner, Tony Rialto. They had built their success in defending employers and corporations against plaintiff lawsuits over various grievances, ranging from discrimination claims to product liability claims. Vincent had recently won a big case defending a chemical company against a plaintiff family who had sued over allegations that its insecticide had contributed to their son’s cancer. Vincent had convinced the jury there was no connection between the use of the product and cancer, so long as the product was used correctly. The company was so pleased with the outcome, they paid Vincent an attractive bonus in addition to his regular fee.

Not only was Vincent a successful attorney, but he was quite handsome as well. He was 35 years old and stood at 6’-2” and weighed approximately 200 lbs. He had brown hair, brown eyes, and a chiseled chin. He would often take time away from the office to jog for thirty to forty minutes several times a week to stay fit. Vincent sometimes believed his good looks and verbal skills helped him win over jurors, especially the women. His suits were always tailor made and quite expensive.

Miranda Castaneda recently filled a void in Tyler Vincent’s life. He had been seeking excitement, passion, and companionship when he met Miranda Castaneda five months ago. Miranda was a beautiful woman of Cuban descent. She had long, dark hair, big chocolate brown eyes, a well-proportioned body, and long slender legs. She was also very charming. She was just the type of woman he had been dreaming about. And the sex with Miranda was highly

satisfying. He had not had sex like that in years. Tyler found himself falling in love. Unfortunately for Tyler, Miranda did not feel the same way. He was hoping he could change her mind or at least continue their relationship.

After Miranda left Tyler at the beach café, he returned to his office in downtown Miami. His feeling of illness was getting stronger, and he felt the urge to vomit. He went to his private bathroom and emptied his breakfast into the toilet. He immediately felt some relief, but continued to have sharp pains in his lower back. He had been having symptoms for about seven days, and today seemed to be the worst. *If this doesn't get better soon*, he thought, *I will need to see a doctor*. Tyler took pain medication, removed his shoes, and laid down on his office couch. He soon fell asleep. When he awoke, it was already 2:00 pm. The medication and sleep seemed to help. He ate a leftover muffin from the office kitchen and then finished some paperwork before leaving the office.

At 7:00 pm, Tyler arrived at Miranda's well-maintained and elegantly decorated home in Coconut Grove. Miranda opened the door for him as he strode up the walkway.

"Hello, Tyler," greeted Miranda.

"Hi, it's so good to see you," said Tyler, as he gave her a big hug.

"How are you feeling?"

"Better. I took some medication and a nap. That helped some, but I've only had a muffin since this morning."

"Would you like me to fix you something?"

"No, I better not eat anything else."

"Well, I hope you can still join me for a couple of margaritas. I've got them all blended up already."

"Yes, they might help me sleep later tonight."

Miranda led Tyler to the back patio, which bordered a small, landscaped pond with a waterfall. Several Koi fish swam in circles around the pond. They sat in red cushioned chairs with a small, round metal table between them. Miranda handed Tyler a frozen margarita fresh from the blender, with a slice of lime attached to the rim. Tyler took a long sip, and the icy refreshing drink helped quench his thirst and remove the dryness from his mouth.

"Miranda," started Tyler, "you know how much I enjoy your companionship. I hope we can continue to see each other."

"I don't know," said Miranda in a soft voice. "You know my position about getting too involved."

"Yes, I know, and I'm sorry if I scared you this morning. I do love you, but I can respect your wishes. I just want to keep seeing you."

"If you are sure," said Miranda, "that you can keep our relationship strictly as one of just friends, with benefits, of course."

"It's not what I prefer, but yes, if that means we can keep seeing each other."

"Alright, then we can keep our friendship. But I want to be clear. I am not interested in anything permanent and certainly not in getting married. Been there, done that."

"Yes, I know where you stand. Thank you, Miranda. You are all I have right now."

"I know, now let me refill your drink for you. You must have been thirsty."

"They taste good." Tyler knew he probably shouldn't be drinking alcohol with his recent stomach issues, but he thought the alcohol might help reduce his back pain.

Miranda got up and went inside to fill their glasses. Tyler stared into the pond and watched the fish swim

around as he thought about his future. So much was about to change. He was relieved that he would at least still have Miranda as a girlfriend. Miranda returned to the patio and handed Tyler another full margarita. They continued to chat while sipping their drinks. Tyler finished his second drink and felt a bit dizzy. *Miranda must have put a little extra tequila in these drinks*, thought Tyler. He was also starting to get nauseous again.

"It's probably about time for you to get going," suggested Miranda.

"I was hoping to spend the night here."

"That would be nice, but I have some paperwork to do tonight and need to be at work early tomorrow. I need my rest. How about Saturday night?"

"Well, alright," said a disappointed Tyler. "But I'll be thinking about you."

"I'll be thinking about you as well," responded Miranda, with a mischievous grin.

Tyler gave Miranda a goodnight kiss and headed out the door. He could feel the pain in his back flaring up again. It felt like a muscle cramp that he could not get rid of. As he drove home, he continued to feel nauseous, and his breathing became labored. *I'm going to have to see a doctor in the morning. This is more than just a simple flu bug.*

When Tyler arrived home, he parked in the garage, then struggled getting out of the car. He gingerly walked to the door and quietly entered his house. He made it to the bedroom, slipped off his outer clothing, and fell into bed.

Chapter 2

The next morning at approximately 4:00 am, the phone rang, waking Detective Rick Baez. Baez rolled over and grabbed his cell phone off the bedside table.

"Hello? Say what?"

"It's John Randle. Wake up."

"I'm awake. What do you have?" asked Baez.

"Patrol found some dead guy in his car at Stratton Park with a hose running from the exhaust pipe to the front window," advised Sergeant John Randle of the Miami-Dade Metro Police Department.

"A suicide?" asked Baez.

"Looks that way, but who knows for sure. How soon can you get there?"

"Hmm, let me see. I can be there in 40 minutes."

"Okay, I'll meet you there," responded Randle.

Baez dragged himself out of bed, quickly shaved and brushed his teeth, then looked for a clean shirt to wear. He had no more shirts hanging in his closet, so he had to sift through the enormous pile of dirty clothing in the corner of his bedroom. He found one that smelled okay and shook it to get some of the wrinkles out. Fortunately, he still had one pair of socks and underwear in his dresser drawer. After dressing, he rushed to the kitchen and grabbed his coffee cup from the sink, then rinsed it out. He poured himself a cold cup of coffee from the pot he made the day before. He placed the cup in the microwave to warm the coffee. Baez stretched his five-foot, eleven-inch frame and ran a brush through his thick, dark hair. His weight was proportional to

his height, but he had recently put on a few extra pounds around his mid-section. He knew he should work out more often but couldn't seem to find the time.

After downing his lukewarm coffee, he looked around for his gun and holster. He knew he set it down somewhere after getting home the previous night but could not remember where. He'd probably had a bit too much to drink the night before. He finally located the gun and holster under a t-shirt on the kitchen table. His car keys were found among some old frozen food tins on the kitchen counter.

As a single man who worked long hours, Baez found little time to clean the two-bedroom stucco bungalow he rented in the South Miami area. His home was sparsely furnished, and the only thing hanging on his wall was a Miami Dolphins poster. He also had a seventy-inch, high-definition TV to watch his football games. He had a cleaning lady come in every other week to pick up and clean the place. However, he always had to leave a big tip on the kitchen table for her, as she would often complain about how hard it was to always pick up after him before she could clean. The extra money seemed to satisfy her enough to keep her from quitting.

After making sure he had everything he needed, he headed out the door, got into his detective car, and drove toward the scene. He arrived 30 minutes later. Sergeant Randle met him as he exited his vehicle and told him what he currently knew.

Dispatch had received a call on a suspicious vehicle sitting in the parking lot near the basketball court in Stratton Park at approximately 3:20 am. The first officer arrived at 3:26 am and found a male subject sitting in his car. The car was running with a black plastic corrugated hose taped to the tailpipe. From there, it ran to the front driver's window.

The hose was stuck in a two-inch gap at the top of the window. All the car doors were locked. The first officer broke out the window with his metal baton, pulled the male out of the car, and checked him for signs of life. He then called for medical assistance. However, the victim had been dead for too long to revive him.

Baez walked toward the car, a dark blue BMW 8 Series Gran Coupe. *Nice car*, thought Baez as he got closer to the car. The front driver's door was standing open, with small pieces of shattered glass on the ground, in the black leather driver's seat, and on the floorboard. The black hose was still connected to the tailpipe, with the other end now lying on the ground. The first officer had turned the car engine off. The deceased male was lying on his back, approximately fifteen feet from the car. He had been left there after paramedics attempted to bring him back to life. The male appeared to be approximately 50 years old, Hispanic, and well dressed in a light-blue, pinstriped button-down shirt, black dress slacks, and black dress shoes.

Randle looked at Baez. "Looks like he got all dressed up for his big exit."

"Yeah, I've seen it before," said Baez. "Some people like to look their best before killing themselves. Plus, this guy obviously had some money, so maybe he only had nice clothes. You said the car was still running when the first officer arrived?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"And then the officer broke the window and pulled the victim out?"

"Yes."

"Alright," said Baez, "get the coroner out here to take care of the body. I don't want to touch anything just in case

this is not what it looks like. We also want our forensic folks to process this car.”

“What are you thinking?” asked Randle.

“Nothing really, just a little strange to do this in a public park. Too easy to get discovered before the deed is complete. Of course, at three o’clock in the morning, few people are out and about in this part of town.”

Several patrol officers set up crime scene tape around the car while Baez and Randle waited for the coroner to arrive. At 5:20 am, a deputy coroner, Susan Mills, showed up on the scene and began to examine the body. Baez asked her to try to locate an identification.

After carefully examining and photographing the body, Mills located and removed a wallet from the victim’s right rear pants pocket. She handed it to Baez. Wearing protective gloves, Baez searched the wallet. He found \$320 cash in the victim’s wallet, along with a driver’s license and several credit cards in the name of Dominic Lopez. Based on his driver’s license, Lopez was 5’9”, 175 lbs., and 52 years old.

Baez handed the driver’s license to Randle. “This name is familiar to me. Does it ring a bell for you?”

Randle looked at the photo and name for several seconds. “I believe this is the Dominic Lopez who owns the string of car dealerships in Miami-Dade.”

“If true, that explains the nice car and wad of cash in his pocket,” responded Baez. “Even so, that’s a lot of cash to have on hand. Did you know this guy?”

“Ran into him a few times when looking into thefts from his car lots or criminal mischief, that sort of thing. But I didn’t know him well. He seemed like a nice guy, though. Maybe he was dealing with some personal problems.”

“Maybe, or someone wasn’t pleased with the color car he sold them.”

Randle gave Baez a look of surprise.

“Yeah, I know, too soon to make jokes,” said Baez. “Do you know if he has family?”

“I know he has two sons who help him run the dealerships.”

“I’ll look him up when I get back to the office.”

One of the crime scene investigators (CSIs) located a cell phone in the front console of the car. He placed it in a clear plastic bag and gave it to Baez. Baez stuck the phone in his jacket pocket. No suicide note was found in the car. *Maybe we will find it at his home*, thought Baez.

Before leaving the scene, Baez asked Mills to send him the report with the medical examiner’s finding once the autopsy had been completed. She advised that the autopsy would take place in the afternoon, and the preliminary report would be ready the following day.

Back at the office, Baez began the process of getting background information on Dominic Lopez. Based on his research, he found that Dominic Lopez was indeed the owner of a chain of car dealerships in Miami-Dade County. He owned dealerships affiliated with several different auto manufacturers, and a couple of his lots only dealt in used cars. He was well known in the Miami area. It was easy for Baez to find public information on Lopez. Baez learned Lopez was married and had three children. Lopez’s wife’s name was Valerie, and they had a home in an exclusive neighborhood in Miami Beach. The address of the home matched the address listed on Lopez’s driver’s license. His two sons, Ricky and Regis, both helped manage the dealership business. Lopez also had a twenty-year-old daughter by the name of Randi. He could not find information on her current whereabouts. By 7:15 am, Baez was ready to contact Mrs. Lopez to inform her of Dominic’s

death. Baez contacted on-call Victim's Advocate Shelly Rivers, explained the situation, and asked her to meet him in front of the Lopez residence. She said she could be there in 45 minutes.

At approximately 8:15 am, Advocate Rivers pulled up behind Baez's detective car across the street from the Lopez residence.

"Hi, Shelly, thanks for coming out so quickly," greeted Baez.

"No problem, I was already up and dressed for the day when you called."

"This may be a tough one and likely to attract a lot of media attention," cautioned Baez.

"Yes, which will make it harder on the family."

Baez knocked on the front door of the Lopez residence. The location and size of the home were indicative of the wealth Lopez had accumulated. Valerie Lopez was already dressed when she answered the front door. Baez introduced themselves and asked if they could speak to her. Valerie invited them in and led them to a sitting room. All three of them sat down.

"Mrs. Lopez," started Baez, "we have some sad news to tell you. I'm deeply sorry to have to tell you that early this morning, we found your husband Dominic deceased in Stratton Park."

"Oh, my god!" exclaimed Valerie. "What happened!?"

"We are not sure yet, but he was found sitting in his car in the park. It appears as though he committed suicide."

Valerie lowered her head and placed her hands over her face while letting out a guttural scream. Rivers got up from her chair and kneeled next to Valerie, placing her hand on her shoulder. They both allowed Valerie to sob for a few moments without saying anything.

Once she somewhat composed herself, she asked, "how did he kill himself?"

"It appears he asphyxiated himself by running a hose from the exhaust to the inside of the car. But this is just a preliminary cause of death. We won't know for sure until we get the coroner's report," advised Baez. "Do you have any idea why he may have wanted to take his own life?"

Valerie sat in silence, staring at the floor with tears running down her cheeks. Rivers pulled out some tissues and handed them to Valerie.

Baez allowed her some time before asking again. "Mrs. Lopez, anything you know may help us understand what happened."

"The kids will be devastated," sobbed Valerie. "They love their father."

"I'm sure he loved them as well. So, why would he want to kill himself?"

After a few more moments of silence, Valerie finally said, "I don't know, maybe because we were splitting up. But that was his doing."

"You were getting divorced?"

"Yes, that is what he wanted."

"If he wanted the divorce, why would he take his own life over that?"

"That's what I don't understand," replied Valerie between sobs.

"Were there any problems with the business?"

"No."

"Sorry, but I have to ask. Did you find any letter or note that might have indicated Dominic was going to do something like this?"

"No."

"Does he have a computer here at home?"

"No, but he has one at work. The only thing he has personally is an iPad."

"Would you mind if I took the iPad so that we can look to see if there is anything on it to give us some idea of why he might have done this?"

"It would probably be in his condo."

"His condo?"

"Yes. Once he decided he wanted a divorce, he moved out. He is renting a condo in Edgewater."

"How long has he been in his condo?"

"About two weeks."

"Okay, Valerie, I'll probably need to talk to you some more at a later time."

Baez turned to Rivers. "Do you have someone else coming out to help you?"

"Yes," said Rivers. "Another advocate is on the way and should be here soon."

"Great, I will need to interview all family members at some point, but can you help Mrs. Lopez with notifications of the family?"

"No problem, that's part of what we do."

"Thank you, Shelly. Mrs. Lopez, I'm going to leave you with Shelly as I've got more follow-up to do. I will get back to you once I have more information, okay?"

"Yes," she sobbed. "Thank you."

"Do you mind if I look around Dominic's office before leaving, just to see if there may be anything that might help clear this up?"

"I don't mind. His office is down the hall on the right."

Baez then walked down the hall to Lopez's office and checked the papers on his desk. He then looked through the desk drawers, trying to find any note or letter Lopez may have left behind. Everything he found appeared to apply

only to the car business. Baez could hear Rivers consoling Valerie as he left the house.

When he returned to the police department, Baez took the cell phone recovered from Lopez's vehicle and logged it into evidence with a request for digital forensics to search the phone for any possible information that could help the investigation. He then called Derek Frapke, one of the CSI's who responded to the scene and searched the victim's vehicle.

"Hey, Derek," said Baez, "did you find anything of interest in the vehicle?"

"No, not really," replied Frapke. "It seemed awfully clean. We did find a drink glass that we collected, and we were able to get a few prints. But given the location, they will probably belong to our victim. However, while we were cleaning up, some guy walks up and tells us he saw our victim's car and another car parked next to it during the night. When he saw the police activity this morning, he thought he should say something."

"Really?" said Baez. "Did he give a time when he observed this?"

"He said it was close to two o'clock this morning. I was going to text you his information. His name is Tony Mateo. I will text you the phone number after we hang up."

"Great. What about that drink glass?"

"It had a small amount of liquid in it that smelled of alcohol. We will log it into evidence."

"Maybe he needed some liquid courage to stay put in the car. Thank you, Derek."

It was not long after hanging up when Baez received the text message with Mateo's phone number. Baez immediately called him.

“Hello, this is Detective Baez with the Metro-Dade Police Department. I’m calling about our incident today at Stratton Park.”

“Yes, hi Detective,” began Mateo. “I have been waiting for someone to call me.”

“I understand you may have observed our victim vehicle and another vehicle in the park last night.”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“Why don’t you just tell me what you observed.”

“Sure. I was out walking my dog around two o’clock when I noticed two cars in the parking lot near the basketball court. It seemed unusual, as it is rare to see anyone there at that time of night. One of the cars was a dark BMW, and the other was a small to mid-sized white car, possibly an SUV.”

“Did you see anyone?”

“Not really, but there was someone in the BMW.”

“How do you know that?”

“The car was running, and the brake lights came on a couple of times while I was looking.”

“Was there anyone in the white car?”

“I couldn’t tell, but I don’t think it was running.”

“What kind of car was the white one?”

“I’m not sure. Maybe one of those small SUVs, something like that. To be honest, I was more interested in the BMW. It was a nice car.”

“What else did you see?”

“Nothing. After my dog did his business, I headed back home across from the park. I just thought it was strange to see two cars at that time of night, and they were parked side by side. I walk my dog most nights and rarely see even one car.”

“Mr. Mateo, you’ve been immensely helpful. Thank you for coming forward,” concluded Baez.

Interesting, thought Baez, now we know there were two cars in the lot at around two o’clock, and one of them belonged to Lopez. Could the other car be related somehow?

Chapter 3

It was early morning, and Tyler Vincent was in no condition to get out of bed. He felt extremely inebriated with a pounding headache. He was groggy and had severe pain in his abdomen and chest. He attempted to get up by rolling over until he felt a cold, sticky substance against his left cheek and chin. It smelled horrible. He managed to lift his head a bit and realized he had vomited sometime during the night. He was now lying in the contents from his stomach. This made him wretch, but he could only dry vomit as there was nothing left in his stomach but some acid that burned his throat. He flopped back down on his back and tried to catch his breath. He was having trouble breathing. Just then, the bedroom door flew open so quickly the doorknob slammed against the adjacent wall.

“Where the hell were you last night!” screamed Kristy Vincent, Tyler’s wife.

Vincent could not answer.

“I suppose you were out screwing around again, you son of a bitch! Look at you, so drunk you vomited all over yourself. I agreed to let you stay here for a few days only if you held it together.”

Vincent attempted to speak but could say nothing.

“As soon as you sober up, I want you out of here!” screamed Kristy. “By the time I get home from work, you better be gone. Go live with whoever your new girlfriend is. I just want you out of here!”

Finally, Vincent managed to softly say, “help me,” between shallow breaths. However, Kristy didn’t stop yelling long enough to hear it. She slammed the door shut and left for work.

It was close to noon, and Baez was still working at his desk when Detective Leah Mitchell walked in. Detective Mitchell was a 31-year-old African American with short, curly black hair. She was five foot ten, slender build, with well-defined muscles, especially in her legs. She was known as a tough cop. She joined the police force shortly after graduating from the University of Miami. She had attended the university on a track scholarship as a sprinter. Her specialties were the 100-meter race and 400-meter relay race. She helped the team take the conference title during her junior year, and she could still outrun most of the younger officers on the force.

“Hi, how’s it going, Leah,” greeted Baez.

“Okay, still working on my homicide from last week,” Mitchell responded.

“You about ready to close it out?”

“Oh yeah, not a hard one to figure out when you’ve got the suspect in the house with the murder weapon. What are you working on?”

“I picked up an apparent suicide from Stratton Park early this morning. Guy parked his car and ran a hose from the tailpipe to the driver’s window. It didn’t take long for him to die.”

“Sounds like an easy clearance for your stats,” suggested Mitchell.

“Maybe. There are a couple of loose ends I need to run down, and I’m still waiting on the report from the medical examiner.”

“What are your concerns?”

“Have you heard the name Dominic Lopez?”

“Of course, he owns several large dealerships in town.”

“Well, he’s my victim, and as of right now, I haven’t found a reason he would kill himself. I also have a witness who saw a second car parked next to my victim’s car at around two o’clock this morning. He also had three hundred and twenty dollars in cash with him. Why have that much cash if you’re going to kill yourself?”

“No family issues?”

“Only that his wife said he wanted a divorce.”

“Hmmm,” pondered Mitchell. “Maybe that would be a reason for the wife to commit suicide, but the husband? There has to be more to the story.”

“Oh, I’m sure there is. I still have plenty of interviews with family and acquaintances to do.”

“Alright, let me know if you need anything.”

Mitchell then laughed. “By the way, is that a new shirt?”

“Are you a comedian now?” replied Baez.

“No, but you look like you slept in that shirt.”

“I got called in the middle of the night and didn’t have a clean one, okay?”

“Hope you are wearing clean underwear,” said Mitchell as she walked away.

“Thanks,” replied Baez.

Moments later, Victim Advocate Shelly Rivers called.

“Hi, Shelly. How did things go with Mrs. Lopez?”

“As well as can be expected,” she said. “Mrs. Lopez was not very forthcoming with information, but she was upset over the pending divorce.”

“And just to confirm,” said Baez, “it was Dominic who wanted the divorce, right?”

“Yes, she was clear about that. We stayed until both sons arrived. The daughter is a student at Florida State, so it will take a while for her to get home.”

“Thank you, Shelly.”

“One more thing I wanted to pass along. The oldest son, Ricky, told me that mom had received an anonymous letter a few weeks ago telling her Dominic was having an affair. He said mom was upset after getting the letter. It may explain why Dominic wanted a divorce.”

“Well, now that’s interesting. It puts a unique twist on the case. I’ll definitely follow up on that. Thanks again.”

“You’re welcome.”

Baez then called both sons, Ricky, and Regis Lopez, to set up interviews. They wanted to spend the remainder of the day with their mother, but both agreed to meet with Baez the following morning. After arranging these interviews, Baez grabbed his jacket and headed out the door. He would go to the primary dealership owned by Lopez and where he kept his corporate office. The sons, Ricky, and Regis, each served as general managers at other locations. Baez wanted to find out what the employees close to Dominic Lopez may have known.

Upon arrival, Baez found the dealership had been closed for the day. A sign was posted on the door advising customers the dealership was temporarily closed due to a family emergency. Baez could see that several people were milling around in the offices. He pounded on the door and held up his badge. The assistant manager, Jimmy Hernandez, answered the door.

“Come on in, detective. I’m the Assistant Manager here.”

“Thank you. I’m sorry about the loss of Dominic.”

“We appreciate that.”

"I was hoping I could ask you and maybe the general manager a few questions about Dominic."

"Sure, let's go into my office."

Once in the office, Hernandez closed the door. Baez wasted no time.

"Were you aware of any problems or concerns Dominic may have had that would lead him to take his own life?" asked Baez.

"The manager, Lucas Perez, and I were talking about this before you arrived. We know he was having some marital issues."

"What type of issues?"

"He told us he was in the process of getting a divorce."

"Did he say why?"

"I don't know many details, but something about his wife always nagging at him over this and that. He also thought she spent too much money."

"Do you know if he was having an affair?"

"I don't, but Lucas might. He was closer to Dominic than I was."

"Was he depressed over the collapse of his marriage?"

"Um, not that I saw. In fact, he seemed somewhat relieved that he was going to get a divorce. He appeared to be happier, if that makes sense."

"Well, you never know in these types of situations. Is it possible for me to speak with Lucas?"

"Yes, let me go get him for you."

Baez waited for several minutes before Lucas Perez entered the room and introduced himself as the General Manager who worked directly under Dominic Lopez. He also described himself as a good friend of Dominic's. Perez was 41-years-old but looked young for his age. He was visibly upset over Dominic's death.

"I'm very sorry for the loss of your friend, Lucas."

"Thank you, sir. If there is anything I can do to help, I will."

"You're already doing it, Lucas. Some of these may be difficult to answer, but they are important questions."

"I understand, Detective."

"Okay. Were you aware of Dominic having an affair?"

"He wasn't very forthcoming about that, but yes, he was seeing someone. I think he was embarrassed by it but also excited by it. He and his wife, Valerie, were not getting along so well. He thought she nagged him too much, and life had gotten boring with her. He was looking for more excitement."

"And that excitement came in the form of dating another woman?"

"Again, I don't know who, but yes, he had another woman in his life."

"Did he tell you this?"

"Not initially, but things got heated at home when his wife received a letter telling her about an affair."

"Tell me more," encouraged Baez.

"All I know is that one day she received a letter, and Dominic was upset about it. He said no one else knew, so he wondered who could have sent the letter."

"Did Dominic's sons know about the letter?"

"Yeah, because I know the younger son, Regis, was angry about it."

"Angry enough to kill dad?"

"Oh no, nothing like that. Both sons loved their dad. He was just angry because it upset mom so much. Demanded to know if it was true."

"Did Dominic admit it was true?"

“Not initially, but eventually he told his sons he was seeing someone.”

“Lucas, did Dominic ever talk about or mention killing himself over all this?”

“No, and like I said, other than being upset over the letter, he seemed his usual self. He seemed to be relieved after deciding to get divorced.”

“Is there anyone you can think of who might have wanted to hurt Dominic? Angry customer or something?”

“No, I can’t think of anyone who would want to harm Mr. Lopez. He was friends with everyone.”

“Okay, Lucas, thank you for your time.”

By the time Baez returned to the office, it was almost 5:00 pm. It had been a long day, and Baez was exhausted. Detective Leah Mitchell was heading out the door.

“Have a nice evening,” said Baez.

“Oh, I’m not going home,” stated Mitchell. “I just got called out on an unattended death.”

“No other details?” asked Baez.

“All I know is that the wife came home from work and found her husband dead in bed. At least that’s what she told dispatch and the first officers on the scene.”

“I’d give you a hand, but I’ve been up since four this morning.”

“Nope, I got this. He probably had a heart attack or something. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Sounds good,” said Baez.