

# DEFINING Diana

A novel by  
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 Bundoran Press  
Publishing House

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Cover Illustration: Dan O'Driscoll

The author would like to acknowledge the help of many members of Calgary's Imaginative Fiction Writing Association for their critical input during the writing of this novel and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts for their financial support.

Published in Canada by  
Bundoran Press  
4378 1st Ave  
Prince George, BC Canada  
V2M 1C9  
[www.bundoranpress.com](http://www.bundoranpress.com)

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Defining diana / Hayden Trenholm.  
Prince George, B.C.: Bundoran Press Publishing House, 2008.

285p.; 22cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9782052-0-1

Printed in Canada.





*This book is dedicated to my wife, Elizabeth, for her constant support and to my good friend, Jim Sellers, for helping me understand why I am who I am.*



## Chapter 1

The woman was lying on her back when her body was found. One arm lay across her small breasts as if in a show of modesty; the other was stretched out pointing to the only piece of furniture in the small apartment, an antique wooden chair. Her hair was short, spiky and that white blonde colour that usually comes from a botched modification. Her skin, too, was the colour of parchment but that was because she'd been dead for twenty-four hours. I knew from bitter experience that when they turned her over her back would be blotched almost black from the settled pools of blood. There were no visible tattoos, body jewelry or external modifications, though the lab might find something once they looked inside her. Looking at her face, I judged her to be about twenty but she could have been five years on either side of that. One eye, blue, was open and staring up to heaven. *They used to think, I thought, if the eyes were open, that the last image a person saw before they were killed was recorded on the retina.* But that, unfortunately, is just an old detective's tale.

I arrived on the scene just before four in the afternoon, three hours after the initial report was phoned in. I wasn't happy about being late and I sure as hell wasn't about to discuss the reasons why with the officers there. Inspector Willa O'Reilly was standing over the body and checking her watch when I burst through the hole where the apartment door had once been. I joined her and stood staring down at the dead girl.

"You're late, Frank," she said.

I shrugged. We're pretty informal at the Special Detection Unit but

I didn't really appreciate being scolded by my second in command. If I'd had a good reason I'd probably have said something but I didn't think falling asleep at my desk qualified.

"What have we got, Billie?" I asked.

"Willa, Frank. Or Inspector O'Reilly," said Willa. "Only my husband called me Billie."

"Sure," I could feel my face flush. Since returning from stress leave, Willa had been increasingly edgy, but she had never snapped at me in public. I looked over at Detective Buzz Wannamaker, who was lounging against one wall of the room, chatting to a couple of uniforms and occasionally making an entry in his ever-present palmtop. He looked back and arched his eyebrow — the one that hadn't been replaced by strip of jewel-encrusted metal.

"What are you waiting for, Buzz? Get her bagged and down to the morgue. You know Cat likes her meat fresh."

"We were waiting for you, Chief," said Wannamaker. Wannamaker called any one who outranked him 'Chief.' I think it's some form of aboriginal humour.

I grunted my assent and stepped away from the corpse. Wannamaker snapped his computer shut and slipped it into his jacket pocket. He gestured to the uniforms and they came forward with sour expressions and a body bag. Wannamaker filmed them loading the corpse so there could be no later charges that the body had been molested or treated without proper reverence. The last thing the SDU needed was an indecency charge from the self-appointed purveyors of public morality in the New Unity Party.

"So what's so special about this one? Willa?" I asked.

"If you'd read the..." Willa took a glance at my face and shut up. She knew where the line was even if it didn't always stop her from crossing it. She looked down as Wannamaker zipped the bag shut over the still-staring face. "Jane Doe in a locked room. No ID, nothing on the NET, fingerprints, retina, dental, DNA, all negative."

I let the sudden formality pass. Things were tense these days in the Calgary Police Department. I tried not to take offence even when it was offered. "So? Invisible people aren't unknown..."

"Just rare," said Willa, "and most of them aren't white, either."

"Eastern Europe?" I asked. The new Russian Empire still hadn't got around to universal citizen registries. Border security was supposed to keep undocumented refugees out but it was a big border, especially now that so much of the Arctic Ocean was navigable.

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Willa shrugged and scrunched up her nose. “Maybe,” she said, “but the initial gene scan gives a ninety plus match as Anglo and over seventy as from right around here.”

I don’t have that much faith in the use of technology when it comes to police work and on other days, I might have said so. Instead I nodded. “I’ve got a hunch you’re right,” I said. “This girl looks Albertan. She probably grew up on one of the religious colonies south of Calgary. Home birth, community schooling, no run-ins with the system. That could explain the empty file.”

Willa started to object. I held up my hand.

“I don’t want to think about the other possibilities. Not yet.” Willa suspected every empty file represented a person whose life had been stolen.

For once, she didn’t argue.

“Cause of death?” I asked.

“Podnarski couldn’t say. She took some samples and...”

“Cat’s been here already?”

“Jesus, Frank, we called this in three hours ago. What were you doing? Sleeping?”

*Great*, I thought, running my hand through my hair. *I probably have desk head*. The fact I had fallen asleep at my desk didn’t make matters better.

“That’s insubordination, Inspector.”

Willa’s back stiffened. “Yes, Sir.”

“Sorry, Willa. It’s this Reid thing... That’s why I was late. I was reviewing the file and lost track of time.” That didn’t sound right, even to me, but Willa decided not to push it.

“Reid?” She asked.

“The exec who offed his wife and business partner,” I said.

“Right,” said Willa. “What are we doing with that one? I thought it was over in domestic homicide.”

“It was.” I gripped my temples between thumb and forefinger and rubbed gently. Napping always gives me a headache. “We had two more last night.”

“Domestics? I don’t see...”

“Last night Randall Kowarski, the CEO at NeWest Oil, pulled the trigger on the Chairman of his Board. And his entire family. An hour later, a banker named Sheila Gant produced an automatic assault rifle at a society do up in Mount Royal. Eight dead and thirty two wounded.”

Everybody had their share of troubles in the aftermath of the Asian

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wars ten years ago but Calgary had gotten through it better than most. Until now. I'd been a cop for thirty-six years and 2043 looked like it was going to be worse than any five of them put together.

"Jesus, if this keeps up they'll have to put the Chamber of Commerce on the endangered species list."

"Chief Arsenault's sentiments exactly," I said. "I'm pulling Chin off the Angels of God thing down in... Anyway, we'll cover it at the staff meeting on Monday." I paused. "So we got a Jane Doe, dead from unknown causes. What makes this a case for Calgary's elite?"

"Did I mention the locked room?" Willa crossed to the window and looked down at the departing police van.

"Yeah, what about it?" I asked.

"Locked from the inside, with no external key access. We needed a diamond blade to cut through it. Windows are sealed units. Ventilation provided through narrow ducts equipped with micron level screens. Nothing much bigger than an oxygen molecule can get in or out. Video surveillance shows her entering the lobby two days ago. There's nothing on either video or electronics from the elevators or the stairwells, though Wannamaker won't rule out tampering. When she came in, she was fully dressed."

"Where are her clothes now?" I looked around the empty room.

"No trace of them," Willa said.

I stared at the patch of carpet where the body had lain.

"Have you checked with the landlord? Who rented this unit?"

"That's just it," Willa said. She was smiling now, in the way she always did when she knew I wasn't going to like what she had to say.

"Go on," I said.

"This apartment is new and has never been rented. The door access is keyed to the landlord's — a Mister Guillermo Ricardo — gene signature. Real high tech stuff. Supposedly unbreakable code."

"If it was a locked room with no record of a security breach," I asked, "how come we're here?"

"Anonymous tip," said Willa, "Untraceable line."

"No such thing."

"Take it up with the phone company."

I frowned. "Okay. Come on, Willa, let's have the rest."

"Like I said, Podnarski couldn't determine the cause of death," Willa said. "The body didn't have a mark on it, except..." She paused for half a second. She knew exactly how long it would take for me to snap at her. "She had sex, either just before or while she died. There are

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contusions around her vagina as well as some slight bleeding from the vagina walls. Whoever or whatever it was must have been pretty big.”

“Whatever?”

“There was no ejaculate. Either a condom or something artificial. Metal or plastic. Whichever it was, there’s no trace of it. Vanished like the clothes. And one more thing...”

I nodded for Willa to go on.

“If there was someone else involved, he, or she, was either using a full body condom or was Jane Doe’s identical twin. There isn’t a trace of any DNA except hers. No skin, hair, saliva, blood, nothing.”

“You can say that based on a preliminary scan?” I asked, “Podnarski’s good but...”

Willa grunted. “Podnarski was on the scene before the uniforms. I don’t think the woman has a life — spends her days off listening to the police scanner. She’s not even a...”

I cut her off. “Cat Podnarski is a valued member of the team, Inspector. We’ve been through this before.”

“But there are questions...”

“But nothing, O’Reilly.” I was getting mad now despite my best efforts. “If every member of the Special Detection Unit was as dedicated to her duty as Cat...”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing,” I said, “unless it means something to you.”

“I was entitled to that leave...”

“Absolutely. Though the timing...” I let the last few words hang in the air between us, half regretting having said them. I knew the pain Willa had gone through and I felt like a prick for bringing it up.

Willa bit her lip to keep from responding. She took a deep breath and looked out the window.

“Anyway,” she said, exhaling, “Cat was here with a full scan unit. She went through this place with a fine-toothed filter — before she let any of the rest of us through the door. I think we can say the report is accurate.”

“That it?” I knelt down where the body had been and ran my fingers lightly across the carpet as if I could somehow detect something Podnarski’s equipment had missed. “Look, Willa,” I said after a moment, “I’m sorry I came down on you so hard...”

“It’s okay,” said Willa, even though I knew it wasn’t.

“No.”

“I just need to know where I stand, Superintendent,” said Willa.

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“Frank.”

Willa didn't respond.

“You're my 2IC,” I said, “my right hand. I can't run the SDU without you. You know it and I know it — though I just as soon the rest of the squad didn't know it. They'd eat me alive.”

Willa laughed despite herself.

“That's better,” I said. “I need you to act like my second in command, Willa. The SDU either hangs together or we're damn sure going to hang separately.”

Willa nodded. She knew I was right. The Calgary Police Department and its Chief needed the SDU, especially lately. But needing something seldom makes you like it. There wasn't a man or woman on the force who wouldn't like to see us screw up — like the misfits everyone thought we were.

“We've got too much work for too few cops as it is. This may be the hunk of hay that screws up the dromedary's posture.”

“You been working on your clichés, Frank?”

It had sounded good when I practiced in front of the mirror. “All I'm saying, Willa, is we need to be a team.”

“Look, Frank,” Willa nodded, “I'll do my best.”

“That's all I ask. Now, if you're sure we haven't missed anything?”

“Other than the tobacco ash from a hand-rolled Nicaraguan cigar...”

“Pardon?”

“Ah...” Willa blushed. It looked good on her.

“It's okay, Willa.” I smiled. “I get it. Now, Watson, let's get out of here.”

Willa's cellular buzzed. She glanced at the ID.

“Podnarski,” said Willa. “You forget your phone again?”

“I think I dropped it,” I said. “Put it on speaker.”

Willa flipped the cell to broadcast mode and held up the phone.

“What have you got, Cat?” I asked. “Toxicology give you the cause of death?”

“I wish,” came back Podnarski's voice, raspy from too many cigarettes and not ever enough sleep. “Preliminary tests didn't show anything. According to her blood and tissue, she should still be walking around. The body scan was inconclusive so I cut her open about five minutes ago but everything looks fine. Heart, lungs, liver, brain—all in perfect condition. Except they aren't working.”

“Five minutes doesn't tell the whole story...”

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“Naw,” said Cat, “I figure I’ll be poking around in there all night, but I thought you should know. She had a phone link implanted in her skull. Set to record if she was asleep, unconscious or, in this case, dead. There are seven messages backed up, stuff that came in after she went off-line.”

“Did you listen to them or did you follow procedure?”

“I...” she gulped. “I thought you might want... Sorry, I’ll...”

I definitely needed to brush up on my people skills. “Good call. Upload the info to O’Reilly and send the implant to Wannamaker. So what do they say?”

“I can’t make sense of most of it. Some of them are code, maybe. But I can tell you one thing.”

“Yeah?”

“Her name was Diana.”

## Chapter 2

Catherine Podnarski's report was on my desk when I got into work Tuesday morning. Typical of her to work right through the long weekend. Maybe Willa was right and she didn't have a life outside the forensic lab. Poor kid. She works harder than any cop on the force but will never get a badge. A lot of lives were ruined by what their families did during the Troubles.

I slipped the chip into the holoviewer and Cat's image appeared hovering over my desk like a miniature angel. I listened with half an ear while scanning through my mail. There was not much new from her preliminary report Saturday afternoon.

The young woman — Cat put her age at nineteen — was in excellent shape, other than the fact she was dead. There had been no damage to any of her major organs and no indication of either poisoning or infection in her blood or tissues. Her stomach and large intestine were empty, indicating she hadn't eaten for at least twenty-four hours before she died. My own stomach growled at the thought and I rummaged through my desk until I found a chocolate bar. Keep this up and soon I'll start to resemble Nero Wolfe. No visible wounds on the body, other than the contusions inside the vagina. Cat was now uncertain as to their cause.

"At the microscopic level, they appear more consistent with cellular rupture — the technical term is 'lysis' — rather than external tearing. The phenomenon is centered mostly around nerve cells though there was ancillary damage to the surrounding tissue, like collateral damage around the site of an explosion. No sign of inflammation so it must have happened just before or during death. Pretty weird, eh, Frank?"

Exploding nerves in the vagina. It sounded like the plot line from a second-rate snuff film. It seemed a long shot but I made a note to see if Diana's face rang any bells with any of the sex-dream merchants on

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the stroll.

“I’ve done some tests based on best guesses but they came up negative.”

There was a long pause and I reached for the terminate button.

“The only other thing out of the ordinary,” Cat continued, “is an extremely high serotonin level in the brain. No indication she was on anti-depressants, or any other known substance—legal or illegal. Whatever caused it, she must have died happy.”

The door chimed and I put Cat’s report on hold, her image frozen in mid-gesture.

“Come,” I said and the door slid open. Willa slipped into the room with a cup of steaming liquid in each hand and a printout under her arm.

“You’re in early,” she said, “I thought you could use some coffee.”

I took one of the cups and breathed in the vapours. “Half Colombian, half- Kenyan.”

“Frank, you are amazing,” Willa laughed. “I would have thought thirty-five years of police station poison would have dulled your palate. Um, I thought you were taking an extra day off — to go fishing with your brother.”

“Mike found himself a new poptart. Cancelled at the last minute.” I took another long slug of coffee to wash the bitterness out of my voice. Ever since my long-lost brother had returned to my life, there had been a lot of broken promises. “Family, eh? What can you do? Always ready to dump you for a little bit of post-adolescent tail.”

“Right,” Willa said, her eyes shifting away to an unoccupied corner of the room. I felt suddenly stupid for forgetting that Willa’s husband had walked about eight months earlier, dumping her for a seventeen year old.

“Sorry, Willa, I...”

“Forget it, Frank,” Willa smiled. “I’m doing fine.”

“Yeah,” I said. “What’s the print-out?”

“I had Wannamaker run a correlation on the connections between the three shooters - Reid, Kowarski and Gant,” she said. She flopped the printout on the desk. “I knew you’d want a hard copy. It runs to eight pages.”

“Fuck me. Eight pages? Isn’t that a lot?”

“Not really,” Willa said. “Mount Royal is a pretty closed community. The elite pretty much stick together these days.”

“They always did,” I said. “Anything interesting?”

“Not that I could see. Some business connections but they were mi-

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nor and all seem pretty legitimate. Belong to the same country clubs, had some interests in common, golf both live and holo. That kind of thing. Shared circle of friends. Reid and Gant are fifth cousins.”

“Genetically based mental illness?”

“Not likely. Wouldn’t explain Kowarski in any case.”

I flipped through the pages without really looking at them. Three people, all successful, respected in the community and without a blemish on their files. Now they were all down at the psych ward, undergoing tests. *Lucky they could afford lawyers*, I thought, *or they’d be bent over in the county slammer, providing fresh entertainment to the inmates*. I corrected myself. Kowarski and Reid would be bent over. I wasn’t sure what position Sheila Gant would be in.

“What about M.O.s? Stories?”

“They all used guns,” Willa said, waiting for a reaction from me. I didn’t take the bait. She sighed. “Reid and Kowarski are registered owners but we don’t have a clue where Gant got the machine gun. As to their stories, well, their lawyers kept them from saying too much. All three seem to be suffering from delusions. Reid says his partner was shagging his wife.”

“Was he?”

“No se.” Willa liked to throw a little Spanish into her conversations. She said it kept her in touch with the street, where Spanglish was becoming the language of choice among street kids, even the Asian ones. I often wondered if she knew I had a thing for Spanish women. “There’s certainly no evidence for it. Besides Reid divorced the woman six years ago and has been married twice since then. Seems doubtful he’d care.”

“Weird.”

“It gets weirder. Kowarski claims his victims, the, uh, Bonnettis, had hired a bunch of dwarves to spy on him.”

I looked up at that. “Dwarves?”

“I know what you’re thinking,” said Willa. “We ran a full blood chemistry on him before the lawyer could get an injunction. Even took hair samples. If he’s a crackhead, he’s been clean for at least three months, which is the last time he had his hair cut. His paranoia seems naturally induced.”

“Tests show anything else?”

“Yeah, there was a shit load of endorphins in his blood stream, like he’d just run the marathon. They were his own though.”

“He had abnormal brain chemistry?” An alarm bell was ringing in

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my own head.

“They all did.” Willa laughed. “At least they acted like it. Gant insists her victims were alien invaders.”

“Get a search warrant.” I keyed open my contacts file. “Try Judge Manning. He owes me a favour. I want full medical scans of Reid and Gant. Do Kowarski again, too. Every test we got. I want Cat to handle this personally.”

Willa looked uncertain. “She’s off-duty until Thursday.”

“What’s your point, Inspector O’Reilly?” I looked down at the printout on my desk. I was surprised when Willa spoke again.

“There’s one other thing, Frank,” she said.

I looked up. Willa was smiling.

“Shit. What is it?”

“You’ve got a visitor,” said Willa. She extracted a business card from her breast pocket and glanced at it. “A Mr. Luke Matthews. From the New Unity Party.”

“And it’s not even a Monday.”

|||

Matthews was tall. Not abnormally so, but enough to be annoying. Slim, too. Probably doesn’t have a spare ounce on him.

I sucked in my own gut as I stood. Matthews glanced at my hand before shaking it briefly. *Checking for dirt under my nails, no doubt*, I thought, resisting an urge to look myself.

I gestured to the lone empty chair. Matthews didn’t move.

“What I have to say won’t take long,” Matthews looked at the nameplate on my desk, “Superintendent Steele.” The man’s voice was deep and resonant. I suspected it was being modulated, though personal modifications were disapproved of by the New Unity Party.

“Say it then,” I said. “I know it’s against party policy to admit it but some of us public servants have work to do.”

“The New Unity Party has nothing but admiration for the work you and your colleagues do,” said Matthews. “Generally.”

“But...?”

“There is the matter of Detective David Ross.”

I tried not to wince. I had my own problems with David Ross but I wasn’t in a sharing mood, especially not with some self-righteous fanatic out to score political points at our expense.

“Would that be the most decorated officer of his age in the history of the Calgary Police Force?” I asked. “Or are you referring to a differ-

ent David Ross?”

“No one questions Detective Ross’ courage,” said Matthews, “Merely his methods.”

“Everything my officers do is within the letter of the law.” As far as anyone has been able to prove, I added silently.

“At the New Unity Party, we are more concerned with the spirit than the letter.” Matthews smiled.

“I suppose.” Get to the point, asshole, I thought, smiling back at Matthews with what I hoped was my most benign expression.

“You don’t like me, do you, Frank?”

So we’re on a first name basis now; that can’t be good. “I don’t know you that well, Luke.”

Matthews leaned across the desk. He looked down at the pile of papers on the desk. I gathered them together and shoved them into a drawer. Matthews chuckled.

“But I know a great deal about you, Frank,” said Matthews. “You joined the police force in 2007 at the age of twenty-one. You compiled an excellent if unspectacular record and achieved the rank of Superintendent by the time you were fifty. You were eligible to retire two years ago but instead took over the command of the Special Detection Unit after your predecessor put his service revolver in his mouth.”

“One of the many reasons I seldom carry my gun. I can resist anything but temptation.”

Matthews nodded as if I had said something profound. “You’ve been married twice, divorced as many times. You have a son and a daughter, neither of whom you’ve seen in over five years. A deadbeat brother who just turned up after a twenty-year vacation from reality. Your net worth is practically zero, except for your credits in a nearly bankrupt pension plan.”

Listening to this guy was like probing a sore tooth with your tongue. I leaned over and activated my desktop. “Give me an ID on Luke Matthews, age about thirty-five. Connected to the New Unity Party. Two can play at this game, Matthews.”

“Do you think so?”

I glanced down at the screen.

Matthews name glared back at me. There was an address and phone number listed — the same as on the man’s business card. The final line of the report stated that Matthews had no criminal record and that all other information was protected under the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act.

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“I’ve lived a very simple life, Superintendent,” said Matthews.

I could feel the pulse in my temple start to throb. I took a deep breath and tried to keep my voice calm.

“Look, Mr. Matthews, I really am busy today. I’ve got fourteen active cases and only four detectives to handle them. If you have a point to make, I suggest you make it. And, as for the rest of it, I don’t give a goddamn shit what you know about me. My personal life is my business, so unless you have a professional comment to make, let’s move on from me to the reason you’re here.”

“A professional does not use the name of the Lord in vain,” said Matthews, his voice icy.

“Two minutes.”

“Very well,” said Matthews. “David Ross violated the civil rights of Reverend...”

“I know all about the complaints of Reverend Day. Internal Affairs found no basis for them.”

“Your internal affairs department is hardly sympathetic towards...”

“Are you accusing the department of systematic bias?” I asked. “Perhaps I should call legal.”

“Not necessary,” said Matthews. The man’s smile had disappeared. “Reverend Day is...”

“... a man of the cloth. I know. And I’m sure he’d never lie about a thing like this. But you know how the courts are. There were no witnesses.”

“There were no witnesses because Detective Ross failed to take a legal documenter as required by...”

“For which he was reprimanded.”

“A slap on the wrist.”

“Perhaps I should have turned him over my knee and spanked him.” I was starting to enjoy myself. “Now if there is nothing else.”

“I thought you might be a reasonable man, Frank,” said Matthews. “But I was clearly wrong.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Not as sorry as you will eventually be.”

“That’s it, Matthews. I don’t have to take this crap from a two-bit bagman for a third rate political party.” I said, rising from my chair. “I suggest you say good-bye now. Because, in case you haven’t noticed, there’s no legal documenter in here either.”

Matthews’ eyes narrowed and he took a step back. I had the sudden impression that Matthews was a lot more dangerous than he looked.

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There was a sharp rap on the door, which swung open before I could respond. Cat Podnarski stuck her head through the opening.

“Frank,” she said, “there’s a call... sorry, didn’t realize you had company.”

“Mr. Matthews was just leaving.”

Matthews nodded and turned on his heel. He paused at the door and looked at Podnarski. “Hello, Catherine.” He glanced back at me and then left without another word.

“You know that guy?”

“Not really,” said Cat. “We... took some classes together somewhere, I think. What did you say his name was?”

“Luke Matthews.”

“Matthews? Yeah, yeah, that sounds about right.”

“Something I can do for you Cat?”

“Not for me. Dave Ross is in trouble again.”

Maybe it was a Monday after all.

## Chapter 3

The National Asian Bank occupied most of one of the high-rise towers of Banker's Hall. It had risen to prominence in 2027 when one of the big seven charter banks merged with several institutions fleeing the final crackdown by the Chinese in Hong Kong. It had become the biggest bank in Canada and one of the biggest in the world two years later when it gobbled up the assets of two Seoul banks right before the little altercation that left most of the Korean peninsula a radioactive ruin. I've always wondered about the timing of that, but, then, my psych profile says I'm more than a little paranoid.

A lot of governments had fallen and more than a few countries had ceased to exist or had fragmented into pieces in the aftermath of Korea but the National Asian Bank, like a lot of other global corporations had kept getting bigger and more powerful. In a lot of places they acted like independent countries. We hadn't gotten that far yet in Canada, but the constitutional amendments of 2036 that gutted federal powers in favour of provincial rights made it only a matter of time.

I held my ID against the scanner and waited for it to process the holographic coding. After about a minute, the armoured elevator door ground open. A courier, probably trying to deliver a subpoena from one of the bank's less-than-satisfied customers, tried to dart on board after me. The doors slammed shut with a lot more speed than they opened and only the kid's enhanced reflexes saved him from losing an arm.

"Better luck next time," I said to the mirrored surface of the doors. The ride up took thirty seconds or so and I was left to stare at the slightly distorted image of my own face. I ran my hand through my hair trying to get it to lie flat against my skull, a battle I'd been losing for the last fifty years or so. I realized I'd forgotten to shave and rubbed the salt and pepper stubble with one hand. *At least*, I thought, *it helps hide the jowls.*

The elevator shuddered to a halt on the thirty-sixth floor. Two bank

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dicks, in full body armour and sporting twin semi-automatics, confiscated my Berretta before letting me through to see their boss. I thought momentarily about asking to see the registrations for the arsenal but thought better of it when I took in the grim expression on Lily Chin's face.

She was sitting in a low leather chair in the security chief's office. The chair was big enough to make Detective Sergeant Chin, who barely topped one fifty centimeters, look like a child waiting in the principal's office. Which, I guessed, was the intent anyway.

The entire office was set up to enhance the power of the man sitting behind the broad mahogany desk. It was a style that had first appeared in corporate culture about forty-five years before but here was taken to such an extreme as to be almost laughable. Almost.

The desk was big enough to land a small plane on and was completely free of paper or any other sign of work being done. Even the phone and computer terminals were hidden from direct view, at least from my side of the desk. The whole thing was elevated on a pedestal so the work surface was well over a meter off the floor. Higher still was the big man's chair, a swivel affair in black leather with plenty of gleaming silver buttons and knobs on the arm rests. I wondered if the guy behind the desk knew how to operate all those gadgets.

I looked past the bulky figure in the chair to take in the view from the bank of floor-to-ceiling windows stretching behind him. The other towers that clustered in the downtown core obscured most of the span but off to the left I could see a short stretch of the river, its waters glittering in the early afternoon sun. Through another gap I could see all the way to the mountains. It was one of those brilliantly clear days you still get in Calgary when the wind is just right and the two peaks I could see looked like mounds of ice cream.

It had taken me about two seconds to take all this in but that was too long for the man behind the desk. He cleared his throat impatiently and gestured for me to sit down in another of the low slung chairs. I decided to take a page out of Luke Matthews' book and stay on my feet. The layout and the view the security chief's bosses had granted him pretty much told me everything I needed to know about the way business was conducted in this office. I didn't intend to give my counterpart any more advantage than he already had from being on his home turf. Maybe I can get him down to my office some day.

I drifted over to the windows and stood with my back to the bank executive admiring the view.

## Defining Diana

“Superintendent Steele, I presume.” His voice sounded like metal being filed.

“No,” I said. “Doctor Livingston.”

The man didn’t laugh. He got out of his chair and came down and stood beside me. It made me wonder why he bothered with all these power games. Despite my own one hundred and eighty centimeters I had to lift my head to look in his eyes. The man stuck out a massive hand for me to shake. *Here comes the bone-crusher*, I thought, but the grip proved surprisingly gentle, almost soft.

“Darwhal Singh,” he offered. I was surprised. There were a lot of Sikhs in the security business but this one wasn’t wearing either a turban or a kirpan. He must have belonged to one of the breakaway temples that had sprung up in British Columbia over the last ten years.

“Mr. Singh,” I said. “What seems to be the problem here?”

“Perhaps it would be better to discuss this in private.” He flicked his eyes in Chin’s direction and she stiffened. Chin wasn’t very big but she’d shown on more than one occasion that she could be plenty tough. But then she was still only twenty-nine and hadn’t had the toughness ground out of her.

“Head back to HQ, Sergeant Chin. I want you to work on the Mount Royal case. Report to Inspector O’Reilly when you get in.” I wanted to hear that report myself. Why, I wondered, was Lily Chin providing back up to Hammer Ross without my knowledge?

Chin looked like she had something to say but instead popped to her feet and snapped a salute at me as if she’d been doing it all her life. I watched her exit before turning my attention back to Singh. He was grinning, a mouthful of gleaming ivory highlighted by a diamond stud in one of his incisors.

“She’s a pretty good cop,” he said. “Cute, too.”

“I hadn’t noticed.”

Singh winked at me in what was supposed to be a ‘Come on, we’re all boys here’ way. It only made me more determined to get him to my office someday. He took me by the arm and led me around the desk to one of the leather chairs.

“Please have a seat,” Singh said, still grinning. “Would you like a refreshment? Coffee, soda, or perhaps, a whiskey?”

Before answering, I slipped a little gadget out of my pocket. Wannamaker had built it and claimed it would screw up any kind of surveillance ever invented. The thing looked like a wallet but hummed and whirred when turned on and every once in a while gave off a little flash

of light. Singh frowned when I set it on his desk. It was my turn to grin.

“A whiskey would be fine.” *Just one*, I thought, *to prove I can do it*.

I waited until Singh poured the drinks, whiskey and soda for me and a plain soda for himself, before sitting down. Singh settled into the other low-slung seat and we sat for a minute like that, without saying a word. Wannamaker’s device hummed in the background.

“I should have known the head of the SDU would have a few tricks up his sleeve,” said Singh at last.

“You’re the one who wanted privacy,” I said. “Where’s Detective Ross?”

“Quite safe, I assure you. Hardly even bruised.” Singh said. “Would you like to see him? I have a monitor set up.”

*Singh’s enjoying this*, I thought, *and why not?* Without serious federal oversight, the banks, like the airlines and other centrally regulated businesses, did what they wanted without much attention to the legalities of things. The provinces soon found they were way out of their league when it came to regulating world-spanning corporations and the company executives found it was way easier and cheaper to buy local politicians than national ones. Everyone was happy except the average citizen. But who cared about them except dinosaurs like me?

It was doubtful Singh would actually hurt Ross – much – that would entail far too much bother and paperwork – but he would have no compunction about holding him in confinement, likely on a trespassing charge. Corporate police forces didn’t have any jurisdiction on the street but inside their own buildings they were the law.

“I’ll take your word for it,” I said. “What seems to be the trouble?”

“You are aware of our little problem.” Singh had a nice way of understating things. National’s little problem involved nearly eighty billion dollars in ‘misplaced’ securities. Usually it wasn’t something local cops got involved in, but the prime suspect in the case had recently been ‘re-assigned to the marketplace’ and was now a private citizen. As such, he fell under local jurisdiction, especially since he had so inconveniently disappeared.

“Yeah,” I said, “Detective Ross is in charge of the investigation.”

“And I have no problem with that at all,” Singh lied. “It is our company’s policy to cooperate with local authorities in these matters. But your officer seems to be unwilling to work with us. He was... abusive... to Mr. Rhigetti, my assistant, when questioned about his methods.”

## Defining Diana

Abusive probably didn't half describe it. Ross despised corporation cops. It was one of his most troubling, and endearing, qualities. Still, Singh didn't sound too concerned about Rhigetti's health, so neither was I.

"Detective Ross came barging in here this morning, waving a warrant and demanding access to our computers." Singh paused long enough to take another sip of his soda. "We have certain obligations to our clients to maintain their confidentiality."

"I can see that. Of course, its hard to keep the customers happy when you let someone waltz off with their money."

"We did not let someone waltz off..." Singh had raised his voice for the first time. I decided to see where that might lead.

"Now, Mr. Singh," I said softly, "the money came out of encrypted currency transfer records. Those are supposed to be triple A plus security files. Are you suggesting that could be done without inside help? I think Allan Whitlaw was one of your vice-presidents."

A thin line of sweat had appeared on Singh's upper lip. Someone higher up must be putting the bite on him. He didn't look like he cared much for the feeling. Singh stood up suddenly, spilling his drink down the front of his pants. I suppressed a smile.

"We no longer believe that Mr. Whitlaw was involved in this crime. His disappearance is, what is the term, a red herring?"

I stood up on that, my knees cracking in unison.

"If Whitlaw wasn't involved, who was?"

"This is a delicate matter, Superintendent Steele," said Singh, "and it needs to be handled with considerable care. I don't believe Detective Ross is the person for the job."

Singh was probably right but I was damned if I would admit it to him. Ross had his good points. At thirty, he had developed a skill at dealing with the harder elements of the Calgary underworld that some cops never get. A combination of intimidation and diplomacy had earned him the respect of a lot of people who didn't respect much of anything. When it turned out that Whitlaw was a regular in one of the vilest dens of depravity in the city — a sleaze pit run by a guy named Conklin — Ross had seemed the obvious man for the job. But if it were true that something or someone else were involved, then Ross could be disastrous. I repeated my question, ignoring the trickles of sweat that were now starting to run down my sides and the sudden anger that had begun to clog the back of my throat.

"Quit jacking me around, Singh," I said, "Who do you suspect?"

## Hayden Trenholm

“Whom?”

“What?”

“Whom do we suspect?” His private school accent practically dripped with contempt.

I wasn't sure who was more surprised, me or Singh, when I slammed National's security chief onto his back on top of the desk. Singh gulped air and tried to get his hands around my throat. I snapped his head against the desk until he stopped.

“Listen, I don't need some corporate dickwad correcting my fucking grammar. I want Ross released and I want him released right fucking now. And I want the details of what you fuckers have uncovered. You understand me?”

Singh nodded his head, his face gone grey. *He's probably glad, I thought, that Wannamaker's jammer had kept this little incident from being recorded. It would hardly increase his credibility to be seen being thrown around by an aging and overweight city cop.* I let go of Singh's jacket and helped him off the desk.

Strong-arm tactics had never been my forte but I had learned a long time ago that tactics had to adapt to suit the circumstances. Sometimes you had to act like a tight-ass bureaucrat from Scotland Yard, sometimes with the martini-quaffing sophistication of Nick Charles and sometimes like Philip Marlowe dealing with a two-bit hood. That's why I kept protecting Ross from Internal Affairs. I saw a little of myself in the kid and kept hoping Ross would develop some smarts to go along with his toughness.

Singh busied himself at the bar. This time he added some whiskey to his soda. I stood at the window looking out, mostly so Singh wouldn't see I was flushed and winded from the exertion of pushing him around. I promised myself, again, to cut out the sweets and to spend more time on the exercise machines. I'll probably do it at about the same time I get around to reading *War and Peace*.

“I believe I underestimated you, Superintendent,” Singh said. His voice was hard and I was sure he was plotting some revenge. Something nasty.

“People usually only do that once,” I said, keeping a threat in my own voice. I took a deep breath. Time to play good cop. “Look, Singh, I like cooperation as much as you do. Tell me what you know and I'll assign another officer to... assist Detective Ross.”

Singh nodded.

“There is some film you should see,” he said. “However, your lit-

## Defining Diana

tle device might prevent it.”

I got rid of my whiskey, then flipped off the jammer and slipped it back in my pocket. Singh fiddled with some of the knobs on his swivel chair and a panel slid aside on one wall to reveal a large holo-cube. The windows went opaque as the room lights dimmed.

It looked, at first, like a computer-enhanced aerial surveillance recording. The images had a hazy red shift, like those produced with infrared filters in a time-lapse photograph. Stacked columns of glittering wafers looked a lot like the Calgary skyline. But as I looked closer, I could see some differences. Here and there, dark solid blocks squatted like misshapen toads in midst of the streaming light. I picked out police headquarters as one of those. And the streams of fire that ran on the dark corridors between the buildings were too steady and too straight to be vehicle headlights as I'd originally assumed.

“Data structures?” I guessed.

“Right the first time, Superintendent Steele,” said Singh. “What you are seeing is a computer representation of information flows between various corporations headquartered in the city. The wafer stacks are individual databases and the various coloured lines the links between them. The red lines are relatively open and used for day-to-day banking activities, the green are encrypted and the blue represent higher security access nodes. The dark blocks represent computer systems that are not directly linked into the financial NET, such as the police department, for example. You will note they are only connected to the main NET by single red lines — used mainly for transferring payroll information and the like.

“This particular set of images was taken six days ago, the day our files were compromised. It's part of the on-going monitoring done by the Alberta Securities Commission. Not very thorough and not hard to tamper with, if you know how.”

“Wait a second,” I said. “If this is ASC surveillance, what are you doing with it? The ASC isn't supposed to provide corporations...” I shut up before I sounded like I knew even less about how the world worked than I actually did. The ASC meant well but these days provincial public servants were paid even worse than police. If someone hadn't sold the info outright to Singh, he'd undoubtedly been ordered to turn it over by his political bosses. Sometimes I thought the New Unity Party was right and we should clean out the whole scummy lot of them. Too bad electing the NUP would be like using a nuke to solve your cockroach problem.

“Go on.”

“Normally we wouldn’t even bother looking at material like this,” said Singh. “However, when our investigations into Mr. Whitlaw’s family and colleagues turned up nothing, neither any trace of him nor any indication that he had our money...”

Singh was grinning again but there wasn’t a drop of humour in it. I didn’t like to think what those people had gone through. Narco-probes are against the law, but, once a technology becomes cheap and easily available, people without morals tend to use it. In the last thirty years, business ethics had become as much of an oxymoron as military intelligence or honest politician. That explained the missing turban. Sikhs were tough but they operated under a strict moral code. Singh’s code was obviously written on corporate letterhead.

“In any case,” Singh went on, “there wasn’t much else to go on. Mr. Rhigetti, a dull but exceedingly meticulous officer, turned up this.”

Singh adjusted the controls and the images in the holo slowed down until I could actually see each individual data transfer as a discrete packet of light. An arrow appeared in the middle of the picture. A glance over my shoulder told me Singh was manipulating it. It was a good thing he was, because I probably would have missed it otherwise. The arrow pointed to where a stream of red pulses was spewing out from the police database. A single blue packet suddenly appeared among the red, like the lonely black sperm in Woody Allen’s classic film, *Everything You Wanted to Know About Sex*.

The packet slipped along the corridors between the structures until it reached the database belonging to the National Asian Bank. A few minutes later, another blue packet emerged from the bank — or the same one as far as I could tell — and returned to police headquarters where it disappeared from view.

“And that, my dear Superintendent,” said Singh, “is how someone stole eighty billion dollars.”

“Now hold on just a minute,” I sputtered. “Are you saying the Calgary Police Department ripped off your bank?”

“Well, it certainly appears that way, doesn’t it?” Singh’s grin threatened to separate his head into two pieces. “In my opinion... why don’t you restore our privacy, Superintendent?”

I nodded. Singh didn’t think the police were involved but he wasn’t about to say so on the record. Never give up a weapon until forced. I set up the jammer and Singh offered me another whiskey. I shook my head, no. Another small victory. I needed a clear head. Singh was leading me

## Defining Diana

somewhere and I at least wanted to see the cliff before I stepped off it.

“All right,” I said, “what’s your theory?”

Singh steepled his hands in front of his face and peered at me through the gap between his palms. “I believe,” he said with great deliberateness, “that someone with enormous skill has infiltrated your data systems and used it as a filter to take our money.”

“And what makes you think that?”

“I could give you a long technical story but I’ll keep it simple and to the point. Our best hackers couldn’t find a trace of the money in your data banks or any indication of a program capable of faking a triple A plus information pulse.”

I said nothing and waited for the other shoe to drop. Singh didn’t disappoint.

“What’s more,” Singh said, “our own surveillance systems can’t find a trace of the pulse entering our computer, even though we know the exact moment and place it came in.”

“I guess the government still has a few tricks up its sleeve after all. The ASC monitoring...”

“...was deliberately left in place. Whoever this operative is, he wanted to leave a signature, and he wanted to leave it in a system that was too unsophisticated to be able to trace him to his home node. Hence, the ASC.”

Singh leaned back in his chair and stared out the once again clear windows.

“And do you have any idea who this operative is? Or *whom* he works for?”

“Not really,” said Singh. That was his story and he was sticking to it. Then he sighed and looked straight at me. “We did find one thing when we were rummaging around at police headquarters. There was an ASCII read.me file stuck in a directory where every other file was double encrypted. It stuck out like a sore thumb.”

“Or like the label on Alice’s medicine bottle?” The reference obviously escaped Singh. “I take it you read it. What did it say?”

“One word,” said Singh. “Or possibly a name. Dakiel. Does it mean anything to you?”

I shook my head.

“Nor to me. But right now it is all we have.”

Singh stood up and I realized the interview was over. I retrieved Wannamaker’s jammer. Singh offered to buy it as he showed me to the door.

## Hayden Trenholm

“Not for sale, Darwhal.” He laughed and shook my hand. This time I got the bone crushing.

As I turned to go, a thought occurred to me. “Do you know a banker named Gant?”

The pallor returned to Singh’s face. He walked slowly back to his desk and I thought for a minute he wasn’t going to answer. When Singh turned, his face was a grim mask.

“We signed an agreement three days ago with Ms. Gant. She was to replace Alex Whitlaw. Of course that’s off now.”

*Curiouser and curiouser*, I thought. Enough to make the little grey cells ache.

## Chapter 4

Willa sat up, her heart pounding. It was still dark. There was someone at the foot of her bed. There was...

No one else in the room.

Willa glanced at the digital readout. Just after three a.m. She crawled out of bed and stumbled down the hall to the kitchen for a glass of water. She wondered if she would ever sleep through the night again, if she would ever get used to sleeping alone again. After fourteen years of marriage...

Willa shook her head. Don't go down that road. She thought briefly of returning to bed. Instead, she wandered into the living room and flipped on the stereo. Soft jazz poured from the speakers. She listened for a moment and then turned it off again. I've got to get some new music files. All the old ones remind me of... She stopped that thought before it could go any further.

"Work," she said, startled by the sound of her own voice in the stillness of the apartment. "Work is always better than thinking."

"Computer, log on SDU, code Willa plus or minus 2 B." The desktop whirred to life. A recording of Lawrence Olivier intoned, "To be or not to be," indicating the connection was complete.

Willa called up the file on the Jane Doe, or, rather, Diana Doe. This one bothered Willa. Her younger sister, Ann, was almost the same age as the dead woman. Ann had been a surprise to Willa's parents, arriving fifteen years after they thought they were done with parenting. Maybe that was why they had done such a lousy job raising her, why Ann had disappeared onto the streets when she was fifteen. It was Ann's disappearance that had led Willa to apply for a transfer to the SDU from homicide – a career ending move from the point of view of most of her colleagues.

Willa still sometimes tried to trace her sister but so far she'd had no luck. Ann had vanished as if she never existed — just like this Diana.

Willa shuddered. That was the more likely explanation for the dead girl's lack of identity. She was someone's property, her own past wiped clean and replaced with whatever fantasy her current master chose. The government claimed The Disappeared were an urban legend, nothing more than a glitch in the national identification system. Willa had seen too many things that weren't supposed to exist to believe that claim.

She scanned the autopsy report. There wasn't much new from the preliminary report. Willa didn't bother with the details. Forensics weren't her strong suit. Attached to the report were the seven messages taken from the woman's recording implant.

The first two voices were metallic sounding. Willa suspected they were artificial but these days it's hard to say. In any case, they were spouting gibberish, though vaguely familiar sounding gibberish. It was the third message that caught her attention. A woman's voice, Willa thought, high and sweet.

"Diana, prov, five, three. Dakiel knows."

Dakiel. Who the hell is Dakiel?

She listened to the third message again.

"Diana, prov, five, three. Dakiel knows."

Prov. Prove? Prague? Prole? Some variation, a slide slang of another word. An abbreviation? Prov. Profit?

She called up her dictionary. Prov. abbr. Province; Proverbs (OT). *Religion. I should have paid more attention in Sunday school*, thought Willa.

It only took a few minutes to find an on-line Bible.

"For the lips of a strange woman drop as a honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil. But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell."

Sounded like a death threat.

Someone warned Diana that Dakiel knows. What? That she's a strange woman? That she is smooth as oil? A liar, then. A deceiver. A betrayer. But who is doing the warning and why? Whoever it was, she was too late. Or was she? The message might have been recorded while Diana was asleep or deliberately off-line. Recorded and not erased. Willa sometimes kept messages on her pager for a couple of days, when it had a number or a detail she didn't feel like writing down.

So. Diana gets a warning that someone named Dakiel is on to her. She goes into hiding. But it's too late. He gets to her anyway. Kills her somehow — method yet to be determined. Takes her clothes and... and

## Defining Diana

locks the door behind him from the inside. Right.

Willa listened to all seven messages. The first two, the fourth and the seventh were all in the same mechanical voice, speaking the gibberish she knew she had heard before. Message three, cryptic, biblical and threatening. Message five.

“Di, it’s Mom. When are you coming home? We all miss you. There was a man here asking about you. Very good looking. Is there something you haven’t been telling us? We’re going up to the cabin this weekend. Your father and brothers would be glad to see you. Why don’t you rent a car and come out?” Not one of the disappeared then. Just a regular member of society who doesn’t happen to exist. Willa wondered if this message was just another form of code.

Message six. Man’s voice.

“Diana. I’m really getting worried. There’s a lot of mierde going down. I’m heading out first thing in the morning. I think you should think about it too. These hombres you’re hanging with are all fucked up. All fucked up on God. Chingada Cristeros. (a harsh giggle) This isn’t what we signed up for, honey. These guys don’t see the difference between what they’re doing and what... (muffled sound, something breaking in the background) Shit. Diana. (dead air)”

*I should have listened to these yesterday*, thought Willa. She called down to dispatch to see if there was another unsolved murder or a missing person report. Male. Probably under twenty-five. Possible gang member. Nothing.

Willa leaned back and stared up at the ceiling. *I should go back to sleep*, she thought, though the idea of crawling into the empty bed made her feel faintly nauseous.

*How long? How long are you going to haunt me, Harry?*

Willa closed her eyes. *I’ll just sit here for a minute*, she thought, *and then I’ll go down to the gym.*

When she opened her eyes, the morning sun was streaming across her face and her pager was beeping insistently for her attention.