

THE MURDER OF MADISON GARCIA

🦋 A FORD FAMILY MYSTERY 🦋

MARCY
McCREARY

**THE
MURDER
OF
MADISON
GARCIA**

THE MURDER OF MADISON GARCIA

👁️ A FORD FAMILY MYSTERY 🐾

MARCY
McCREARY



CamCat
Books

CamCat Publishing, LLC
Brentwood, Tennessee 37027
camcatpublishing.com

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

© 2023 by Marcy McCreary

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, address CamCat Publishing, 101 Creekside Crossing, Suite 280, Brentwood, TN 37027.

Hardcover ISBN 9780744308303
Paperback ISBN 9780744308402
Large-Print Paperback ISBN 9780744308419
eBook ISBN 9780744308426
Audiobook ISBN 9780744308433

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data available upon request

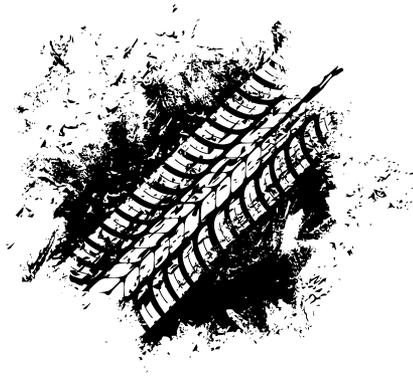
Book and cover design by Maryann Appel

5 3 1 2 4

FOR LEW







1

SUNDAY | JUNE 30, 2019

I SLID underneath the bubbles. My knees poked out above the surface. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. When I came up for air I heard “Radiate”—my phone’s ringtone. I lifted my body, turning toward the sound, and my boobs collided with the edge of the tub. Damn, that hurt. I inched my fingers across the floor but the phone was unreachable, resting on the far edge of the bathmat. I gave up and submerged my body back into the warmish water. *If it’s important they’ll leave a voice mail.*

With the tips of my fingers sufficiently wrinkled, I reached for the towel that lay crumpled on the toilet lid. With the towel secured around my midsection, I picked up my phone. A missed call from my daughter Natalie. I hit “Recents” to call her back and noticed an incoming call from the night before. A red phone number, indicating a person who was not in my contact list. Boston, Massachusetts, was displayed below the number. Probably one of those spam calls—a request for my social security number or a plea from a political fundraiser. There seemed to be a lot of that lately with the presidential campaign heating up. The

American people had taken sides—lefties, centrists, right-wingers—and it wasn't pretty. *It never used to be this way.* Or maybe it was, but social media and cable news were exaggerating and exacerbating the divisiveness. Made me think of that Stealers Wheel lyric: “Clowns to the left of me / Jokers to the right / Here I am stuck in the middle with you.”

After applying a fair amount of goop to tame and defrizz my curls, I slipped into my black yoga pants and gray drawstring hoodie. I settled on my bed, opened my laptop, and googled “reverse lookup.” Curiosity is a strong motivator to get to the bottom of things—and as a detective, it was hard to pass up the chance to solve this little mystery. I entered the phone number into the rectangular box at the top of the screen. The results page displayed the name Madison Garcia, a resident of Brooklyn, New York, not Boston, Massachusetts. I opened my Facebook page and typed “Madison Garcia” in the search box. There was one Madison Garcia living in Brooklyn. But the page was private. And her profile picture was a black cat. When I clicked on the name, I was greeted with a handful of pictures she must have designated shareable and therefore accessible to the public. There were people—mostly millennials—in the photographs, but no one I recognized. All personal info was hidden.

“Susan, you up there?”

“Yeah!” I shouted, closing the lid. “I’ll be right down!” I plucked a tissue from the box on the bedside table and blew my nose, then headed downstairs with the laptop tucked under my armpit and the box of tissues in my grip.

“Feeling any better?” Ray asked.

“Fucking summer cold. Just popped a DayQuil.” I shook the tissue box. “And I got these bad boys.”

“You look like shit.” A beat later he added, “And I mean that in the nicest way.”

“Good save,” I said before I blew my nose with more force than necessary. “What’s your plan today?”

“I’m heading into the station soon. Chief assigned me to work on those bungalow robberies. Seems we have a serial cat burglar in the area.” Ray put on his serious face and wagged his finger. “You are to stay put. I’ll pick up dinner tonight.”

“Yes sir,” I said, military salute included.

My phone rang and we both glanced at it. I swiped to answer. “Chief?” I bobbed my head a few times as Ray shot me dirty looks. “Got it. On my way.”

“Susan, is this your idea of staying put?”

“Dead body over at Sackett Lake.” I blew my nose again in my semi-used tissue. “Besides . . . it’s just a little summer cold.” I coughed up some phlegm and headed back upstairs to change into real clothes.



A POLICE vehicle and an ambulance were parked along the road leading down to the lake. I spotted Officer Sally McIver and her partner, Ron Wallace, at the edge of the parking area. Two paramedics stood beside a black Lexus, the only car in the small lakefront parking lot.

Sally waved as I got out of my car. Ron held up a roll of police tape and shook it like a tambourine. I looked out toward the lake and took in the scene. From this distance, the dead woman in the car simply looked like she was daydreaming, staring out at the placid water without a care in the world. Her platinum-blond hair was the only visible trait from this vantage point. I retrieved my packet of protective outerwear from the trunk, then joined them.

“What can you tell me?” I asked Sally.

“You sound like shit,” she replied.

“Top of the morning to you too.”

“That guy over there tapped on the driver’s side window,” she said, pointing to the gray-haired gentleman with a German shepherd by his side. “Thought she might be sleeping or something. When she didn’t

respond he opened the door. Saw the blood. Then he called 9-1-1. Ron and I got here about five minutes ago.”

One of the paramedics approached us. “Multiple stab wounds to her torso. I noticed a bathing suit in the back seat. Perhaps here for a swim and was robbed?” He shrugged, then sighed, clearly not thrilled with how his day was starting out. “All yours.” He turned and headed back to his partner.

There wasn’t much we could do until Gloria and Mark showed up. Gloria Weinberg was our forensic photographer. Back in the Borscht Belt days, when the Catskills resort hotels were in full swing, she took pictures of the guests who would then purchase their portraits encased in mini keychain viewers.

Now she photographed crime scenes . . . and the occasional wedding. And once, the crime scene of a murder victim whose wedding she had photographed. Mark Sheffield was our crime-scene death investigator. He had joined the Sullivan County ME’s office last fall—wanted to get away from the grim murder scenes of the city. Wait until he got a load of this blood-soaked tableau.

I turned to Ron. “Let’s get a perimeter going. From this area here all the way around to the water,” I said, sweeping my arm across the landscape to indicate the area I wanted cordoned off. I wiped my nose on my sleeve. “Sally, run the plates. I’m going to have a little chat with the man who found her.”

I approached the gray-haired man and introduced myself.

“Benjamin Worsky,” he said in response.

“Okay, Mr. Worsky. Just a few standard questions and you can be on your way.”

“It’s no trouble. None at all. In all my years, never thought I’d come across a . . . a dead body. Poor woman.”

“When did you happen upon the car?”

“I left my house at seven o’clock on the dot. I’m a man of habit. Seven on the dot every morning to walk Elsa.” He petted the top of

Elsa's head. "It takes me ten minutes to walk from my house to this spot, so I would say I spotted the car around seven ten. But I didn't think anything of it and continued my walk past the car. But when I came back this way—and I'm thinking that would be around seven thirty, because I walked another ten minutes and then turned around—the car was still here."

"Why did you approach the car?"

"I'm not really sure. Perhaps a sense that something was wrong." He looked down at Elsa who looked up at him. "Elsa was a bit agitated. Maybe it was that. So I peered in and the driver didn't look well." He frowned and raised his hand to his heart. "I tapped on the window just to ask her if she was okay and when she didn't answer, I opened the car door. That's when I saw the blood and called 9-1-1."

"Did you touch anything?"

"Just the car door handle."

"Did you see anyone else around, either when you came through or off further on your walk?"

"No. But you might want to visit with a woman who lives up the road a bit. She walks along the lake every morning at six o'clock. She might be able to tell you if the car was here at that time."

"Yeah, that would be great. Her name?"

"Eleanor Campbell."

"I know her. The woman with the birds, right?" I chuckled softly, recalling Eleanor Campbell's birds driving Dad crazy when we were working the Trudy Solomon cold case last year. She was a character you didn't easily forget.

"Yeah, budgies, I believe," Mr. Worsky replied.

"Okay, great. If you can just give your address to that officer over there, I said, pointing at Sally, "then you're free to go."

"I don't mean to step out of line here, but you sound awful." Mr. Worsky tugged at his whiskers. "You should really be in bed."

I suppressed an eye roll. Or maybe I didn't.



A BLUE Honda Accord pulled into the parking lot. The blaring rock music ended abruptly when the ignition cut out. Mark's lanky legs emerged first. When he fully stood, he maxed out at six feet, six inches. His nickname was Pencil, and he seemed to have no qualms about that. He had a penchant for wearing khaki pants and tan shirts and his hair was the color of graphite.

He was such a good sport about his nickname that at last year's Halloween party he wore a tan T-shirt with "No. 2" emblazoned on the front. He opened the trunk of his car, pulled out a pair of overalls, and suited up.

"Good morning, ladies! What brings you out on this fine, fine day?" Mark winked. He looked over at the black Lexus. "Ah. Has the scene been photographed yet?"

"No. Still waiting on Gloria," I said checking my watch. "Thought she would've been here by now. She lives just a little ways up the road." As if on cue, Gloria's Chevy pickup rumbled up the road. "The gang's all here."

I coughed into the crux of my elbow.

"You sound like shit," Mark said. "Bad cold?"

"Yeah, I'm on the back end of it." He nodded and lifted an eyebrow in that way people do when they don't believe you. So I added, "No longer contagious."

We watched as Gloria pulled off the tarp and lifted her gear from the rear bed.

"Sorry for the delay, guys. I was over at Horizon Meadows." Gloria laid her camera bag on the ground and slipped into her protective wear. "My sister was in a bad state this morning. Fucking Alzheimer's. They're moving her to Level Six care." She knelt and removed two cameras. She hung one of the cameras around her neck and held the other. "There but for the Grace of God go I."

We all nodded.

“I’ll start with a few global photos,” Gloria said, snapping the shutter to capture the entirety of the crime scene from a distance.

I donned my PPE, then trailed behind Mark and Gloria as they walked toward the victim. As we neared the body, she threw a question over her shoulder, “Is this how you found everything?”

“Minor scene contamination,” I replied. “A passerby opened the driver-side door and the paramedics checked for life. But we haven’t touched a thing.”

“You sound like shit,” Gloria said.

“That seems to be the consensus today.”

The humidity was setting in, further irritating my sinuses and making it harder to breathe. My hands were also a sweaty mess. More so than usual.

On days like this it was hard to tell whether my palmar hyperhidrosis (both an annoyance and source of embarrassment, especially when it came to handshakes) was the cause of my sweaty palms or whether the clammy air was simply making my hands wet. I dragged my palms along the front of my pants to sop up the moisture. Then I slipped on my bright blue latex gloves.

We stood bunched together at the open driver’s-side door while Gloria laid her duffel bag on the pavement and unpacked her yellow number markers and photo scales.

“Do we have an ID on the woman?” Mark asked.

“Still working on that,” Sally replied, as she zipped up her white Tyvek jumpsuit.

Mark crouched down next to the body. “What a fucking blood-bath.”

“Looks like someone stabbed her and walked, drove”—I looked out at the lake—“or swam away.” I peered over his shoulder to get a closer look. “Mid- to late twenties. Maybe early thirties?” I sniffled, trying to suction back the escaping mucus. “I suck at guessing ages.”

"I'm getting a late twenties vibe," Mark said.

"No signs of a struggle. Perhaps she knew her attacker. A date gone sideways?" I inferred.

"I don't see a purse," Sally said, cupping her hand like a visor over her eyes and gazing into the passenger's-side window. "There's a duffel and a bathing suit on the backseat."

"Try the door," Mark said.

Sally opened the passenger's side door. "Not locked."

"How about the rear door?" I asked.

Sally opened the rear door. "Not locked."

Gloria moved around the rear of the car to take midrange and closeup photographs of the items on the backseat.

Sally's phone pinged. She glanced at it, then said, "Car is registered to a Samantha Fields, a doctor who lives in Brooklyn. Should be easy enough to find someone who can provide a positive identification." She drummed her fingers on her cheek. "Unlocked doors. No handbag. No phone. I'm thinking robbery."

"Or someone trying to make our job harder by making us think it's a robbery," I suggested.

Mark leaned over the body to get a closer look at the stab wounds. "Three wounds . . . here, here, and here," he said pointing to each incision. "What's this?" he muttered, mainly to himself. "Well, lookie here." Mark reached down into the footwell and pulled out an iPhone. He held the phone up to the woman's face and the device sprang to life. "Here you go," he said handing me the phone.

I hit the green-and-white phone icon on the lower left corner of the phone. "Holy shit. This is *not* Dr. Samantha Fields."



ELDRIDGE SUMMONED me into his office as soon as I got back to the station.

“Everyone’s going to be breathing down my neck on this. The press. The sheriff. Whaddya got so far?” he asked.

I set the scene, then said, “I believe the victim is Madison Garcia. I received a call last night at nine forty from her number and that outgoing call is on her phone’s “Recents” list.”

“What did she say?”

“I was asleep when the call came in and she didn’t leave a message. Sally tracked down the owner of the Lexus, a Dr. Samantha Fields, who said she had loaned her car to a Madison Garcia for the weekend. There’s also a husband, Rafael Garcia, who we have yet to connect with. Left him a message about an hour ago.”

“Rafael Garcia? Hmm. Why do I know that name?” Eldridge strode to the door of his office. “Hey Roger. Get in here.”

Roger placed both hands on his desk and pushed downward as he stood. Phlebitis in his legs made it hard for him to stand from a seated position. He was just a few months away from retirement and had no intention of hanging up his badge early just because his legs felt like two pieces of lumber. “Yes, sir.”

“Does the name Rafael Garcia sound familiar to you?”

Roger scratched at his chin and nodded. “Sure does. Isabela and Luis’s kid. A bit rough around the edges, if I recall. Bad-boy type. Heard he’s in finance, or maybe it’s banking. Same difference, I suppose. Anyway, done good for himself. Married a local girl, Madison Garmin. Joke was she married him because she only had to change the last three letters of her last name. Get it? Garmin to Garcia.”

“The *i* stays the same right?” Eldridge said.

Roger’s eyes narrowed. “Oh yeah! You’re right, Chief. Just the *m* and the *n*.” He turned to me, as if to fill me in. “Her parents died when she was in high school. From carbon monoxide poisoning. Her mother left the car running in the garage after returning from grocery shopping.”

“Madison Garmin? That name sounds familiar.” I pulled a Kleenex from the tissue box on Eldridge’s desk and gently blew my nose.

“Your dad is good buddies with her grandfather . . . Irving. In fact, Madison ended up living with her grandparents after her parents died. Your dad can probably tell you more than I can.” Roger puckered his lips and sighed. “Y’know Susan, you really should be home in bed. You’re going to infect us all.”

My irritation grew but I held my tongue. He was right, of course. I shouldn’t be out and about breathing on people. But I was on the back end of this thing, and I was pretty sure that meant I was no longer contagious. But just try and explain that to anyone while you’re wheezing and sneezing. “Is this Madison?” I asked, showing him a polaroid of our murder victim that Gloria took at the scene.

“Haven’t seen her in a while, but pretty sure that’s her. Shit, man, so young,” Roger mumbled. “Am I excused?”

Eldridge nodded, then turned toward me. “So your dad knows the family?”

“Yeah,” I answered tentatively, sensing where this was going.

Eldridge laid his palms on the desk and leaned forward. “I’m thinking of assigning this to someone else. Perhaps Marty. I don’t need your family intertwined with yet another case like last year’s Trudy Solomon—”

“That’s exactly why I should be on this case,” I snapped. I took a deep breath, knowing I needed to back off a bit. “My dad knows the family—they like him, trust him. That could work to my advantage.”

“Or it could cloud everyone’s judgment.”

I met and held Eldridge’s stare. “Look, I’ll recuse myself if lines get blurred or crossed, but at least let me take a first stab at this.”

Eldridge grunted and leaned back. About five seconds ticked by until he said, “What’s your next move?”

“Sally is canvassing the area, asking nearby residents if they saw anyone lurking around the area last night or this morning. The witness we interviewed at the scene—a guy named Benjamin Worsky—told me there’s a woman who walks the area every morning. Just so happens

to be a woman who helped us with the Trudy Solomon case last year. Remember Eleanor Campbell?”

“Yeah, the woman with the uncanny memory and the two birds named after a sitcom. Laverne and Shirley?”

“Yup. That’s her. Heading over there now.” My phone rang. “Detective Susan Ford.” I glanced up and mouthed to Eldridge, “It’s him . . . Rafael Garcia.”



ELEANOR CAMPBELL’S house was situated at the edge of Firemans Camp Road, the road leading down to Sackett Lake. I was surprised to find Eleanor in the throes of packing, being that just eight months ago she informed my dad and me that she would never move from this house. (“I plan to die here with my budgies,” she had said.) Stacks of boxes lined the hallway and most of the furniture was gone. I peered into the living room. The green velvet sofa with the faded armrest was still there. As were the birds, Laverne and Shirley.

“Change of heart?” I asked, motioning toward the boxes.

“My nephew insisted after I took a nasty spill a few months ago. It took a lot of finagling but the folks at Lochmore Manor said I can keep my budgies . . . as long as they don’t disturb anyone.” She led me into her kitchen. “You alone this time?”

“I am.”

“I so enjoyed your father’s company. He’s at Horizon Meadows, right?”

“Yes. You still have a great memory.”

“I wanted to move there, but they wouldn’t budge when it came to my budgies. They said it’s a slippery slope. If they allow my budgies, then they open the floodgates to pet snakes and exotic monkeys. What a load of crap.” Eleanor handed me a cup of coffee. “So, are you here because of the murder?”

“You know about that?”

“Word travels fast in these parts, Detective Ford. Benny rang me this morning, said you might be paying a visit. Hence the fresh pot of coffee.” She held up her cup.

“Mr. Worsky—Benny—told me that you take early-morning walks down by the lake. Did you see a black Lexus in the parking lot?”

“I do and I did.” She turned her head abruptly at the sound of the birds chirping in the other room. “Mind if we go to the living room?”

I followed Eleanor and wove my way around the boxes to the green sofa. I carefully lowered myself on the edge of the worn seat cushion, remembering the last time I sat on it and nearly sank to the floor.

“Hello Laverne. Hello Shirley,” I said in the direction of the cage.

“*Hello! Hello!*” Shirley screeched. Laverne paced sideways on her swing.

“So you took a walk this morning?”

“Sure did. I walk almost every morning. Beautiful birds down by the lake. Lovely blue herons. I get up at six o’clock and I’m out the door by six twenty. It takes me fifteen minutes to walk down to the lake, and then I walk along the shoreline a bit. My daily exercise.”

“Which means you saw the car in the parking lot at around six thirty-five this morning?” I asked, hoping to speed along the interview.

“Correct. You’re very good at math, Detective Ford,” Eleanor said with a quick smile.

“I was an art history major, but I can do simple math if I have to.” I took a sip of coffee. “Did you see anyone in the car?”

“I did. I saw a young woman with long blonde hair. I assumed she was sleeping and didn’t want to disturb her. I now wish I’d taken a closer look.”

“Did you see anyone else, either near the car or along your walk?”

“No. But I did see something strange last night. Well, not strange. But different.”

“Go on. Anything you saw might be helpful.”

“Sometimes I have trouble sleeping, especially on humid nights. So I went out on my porch at around ten thirty. I remember because the news had just ended. Figured I’d get some fresh air before turning in, rock on my rocker. That’s when I saw headlights coming up the road and turn onto Firemans Camp Road.”

“Was it the black Lexus?”

“That I can’t be sure of. It was dark. But it was a dark car.”

“Did that strike you as odd? A car turning onto that road.”

“Not really. Back in the day it was a necking spot. Do they still say necking? Anyway, it was a place where teenagers went to kiss and swim. “Midnight Swim” it was called. At least that’s what my nephew told me when I used to see cars head down there at night. But I don’t think it’s a thing anymore. That was like ten, fifteen years ago. So no, I didn’t think twice about it.” She sighed. “I wish I did though . . . could have saved someone’s life if I called the police.”

“You did nothing wrong, Eleanor. You had every reason to believe it was just a bunch of teenagers out for a swim.”

Eleanor forced a smile. “You’re right, of course. But still.”

“By any chance, did you see the driver?”

“Not really. Even though they passed right in front of my house, it was too dark to see them clearly.”

“Them? So there were several people in the car?”

“Just two.”

“Are you sure of that?”

“The whatchamacallit light was on in the car..”

“The dome light?”

“No. The light under the rearview mirror.”

“The map light.”

“Look at that, never too old to learn something new.” She tapped the side of her head. “So, yes, that map light was on. Thing is, couldn’t tell you if they were male or female, but there were definitely two of them.”



DAD WAS as predictable as a solar eclipse. You knew exactly where he would be and when. At noon on a Sunday he would be on his second cup of coffee in the lunch cafe at Horizon Meadows, reading the sports section of the *New York Daily News*, poring over the stats of recent baseball games. You can set your watch by it.

“Hey Dad,” I said taking the empty seat beside him.

He glanced up and then back at the paper. A barely audible harumph escaped his lips. He was still nursing his anger toward me. But it was nothing compared to the animus directed at my mother upon learning how she deceived him those many years ago. Two weeks ago, Mom did what she promised me she would do when she hit her six months sobriety mark—reveal to Dad a secret she’d harbored for forty years . . . that she knew all along what had happened to Trudy Solomon, a local woman who went missing in 1978, a case Dad was assigned to and couldn’t crack. And even worse, she’d helped Trudy “disappear.” Sure, Mom had her reasons for doing what she did, but Dad was having none of it. And honestly, I didn’t blame him one iota. I had hoped the tension between them would be at a simmer by now, but that was naive, considering how much that case affected his life. My bigger worry was whether my mother would turn back to the bottle for solace. Recovering alcoholics don’t need a reason to start drinking again. But if she wanted an excuse, this was it. Clearly my father understood this, but he couldn’t see past his own anger.

Not yet.

“So you get wind of the Madison Garcia murder?” I asked.

Dad tipped down the edge of the newspaper. “Yeah. Irving called me. He and Audrey are a wreck, as you might imagine. First their daughter, now their granddaughter. That there is some serious grief to deal with. Any leads?”

“Remember Eleanor Campbell, the woman with the birds?”

“Yeah.” Dad chuckled, probably recalling how Eleanor flirted with him last year when we interviewed her about Trudy Solomon. “She a suspect?” he said with a smirk.

“A witness, smart aleck.”

“She saw what happened?”

“Not exactly.” I explained to Dad what she saw and then described the crime scene.

“Shit.”

I thought he would say more, but he just solemnly shook his head. “Dad? You okay?”

“Yeah, go on.”

“I thought you might be able to fill me in on what happened to her parents. Just looking to get the big picture on her life.”

Dad folded the newspaper in half and stuffed it into his backpack. He ran his fingers along the edge of the table as if he was playing piano. He abruptly stopped, then sighed. “Sad story. I remember it like it was yesterday. Huge snowstorm that day, and Robin—Madison’s mother—drove up to the ShopRite to get some provisions. Maybe she was distracted or flustered or something, but when she got home, she left the car running in the garage. The fumes got to them.”

I had scanned the incident report. The door from the garage to the house was halfway open, giving the fumes a pathway into the house. Madison’s father, Todd, was in the spare bedroom on the first floor. Madison told the police he had the flu and had been staying in that room, quarantining himself.

The assumption was that after Robin put the groceries away, she went into the den to watch TV. That’s where she was found: in the den, TV on.

“And Madison found them?”

“No. Her boyfriend did. Rafael Garcia—who, as you know, became her husband.”

“So where was Madison?”

“Madison was at a girlfriend’s house at the time. At some point that afternoon, she texted Rafael and asked if he wanted to join her at the friend’s house. She also asked him to stop by her house on the way and pick up ‘the stuff.’ Which we later found out was pot she had stashed in a box under her bed. He said he rang the doorbell and when no one answered he peered into the windows and saw Robin. He banged on the glass, and when she didn’t respond, he walked around to the garage. He said he heard the car running and put two and two together, broke a window, crawled in, then called 9-1-1.”

I had heard dribs and drabs of this story through the years, but never the details. Dad and Irving were—still are—good friends. Robin met Todd at Boston University in 1987—both majored in hospitality management. Robin got pregnant her senior year at BU but graduated with honors. Todd secured a management position at a boutique hotel in Boston and Robin worked part-time at a catering company. According to Dad, Irving and Audrey campaigned like crazy to get Robin and Todd to return so they could be more involved in Madison’s life. They finally relented in 1996 when Madison was five years old.

The area was in steep decline by then. Hotels were shuttering their doors, one after the other. It also meant property was cheap and easy to come by. Todd bought several acres of land adjacent to Sackett Lake. In the 1960s, a hotel on that parcel had burned to the ground; from the ashes rose an exclusive spa, attracting a far different clientele than the older hotels, bungalow colonies, and sleepaway camps that once dotted the lakefront. Shangri-La, Todd named it. ‘Escape to Paradise,’ its tagline.

And escape people did. People with money. That place was super expensive, super exclusive, and super secretive.

“She called me last night.”

“Who? Madison?”

I nodded. “Maybe she was in some kind of trouble. But she didn’t leave a message. So perhaps it was something she thought could wait

until she got ahold of me. That tells me she wasn't afraid for her life. Well, at least last night, when she called me."

My phone rang and I swiped to answer. "Yeah."

"Rafael's on his way," Eldridge said. "He'll be here in two hours."

"Roger that. I'll head back shortly." I slid my phone into my back pocket.

"Have you spoken to Jacob Bowman?" Dad asked.

"Who?" I turned my head slightly and expelled a delicate sneeze.

"You really shouldn't be out and about with that bad cold."

I waved my right hand, swatting away his reprimand. "Who is Jacob Bowman?"

"Old business partner of Todd's. And the one guy I know who would benefit from Madison's death."



I LED Rafael into a room in the precinct that looked more like a cramped den than an interrogation room—two beige loveseats faced each other, a light oak coffee table in between. A lamp with a low-watt bulb graced one of the two teak end tables, casting a shadow across the far corner of the room. The decades-old carpet was a dull brown with a mosaic pattern that hid the myriad of coffee stains spilled over the years. A plug-in air freshener did little to mask the amalgam of body odor that seemed to never dissipate. This room was meant to feel less confrontational, an attempt to re-create an informal chat in someone's home. It fooled no one.

"I get it. The husband is always the prime suspect," Rafael offered up. His downturned eyes, surrounded by thick, long eyelashes women would die for, gave him an inherent melancholy quality. Maybe he was happy on the inside, but his eyes innately played the part of a deeply saddened husband.

"Until we rule them out," I countered.

“Of course. That’s why I’m here. Rule me out and get on with finding out who did this,” he said in a let’s-get-down-to-business kind of way.

“We’ll need your fingerprints and a DNA sample.”

Rafael nodded. “I got no problem with that. Expected as much.”

“We spoke to Madison’s grandparents and they had no idea she was even up here. Do you know why she was in the area?”

“She had a meeting with Jacob Bowman.”

Okay, that got my attention. Two mentions of this guy in one day.

Rafael continued, “If I were you, I would look closely at him. He was her father’s silent partner.” He air-quoted silent. “That guy couldn’t be silent if you stuck a sock in his mouth and covered it with duct tape.”

“In what way was he a partner? And why do you think I should be looking closely at him?”

“Todd and Jacob held shares in each other’s businesses. Todd was the majority owner of Shangri-La with fifty-five percent of the shares. Jacob was and still is the majority owner of New Beginnings, that posh recovery center in Liberty, with fifty-five percent of those shares. They had a mutual agreement that their shares would be bequeathed to each other if they were to die.” He leaned forward and slightly tilted his head, as though letting me in on a secret. “Except, Todd left his Shangri-La and New Beginnings shares to Madison. Seems Todd had changed his will without conferring with Jacob . . . or Madison. It was a surprise to her as well.” He snickered, as though slightly amused by this business backstabbing. “But on the plus side, Todd didn’t completely fuck over his business partner—it was stipulated that if—” He pressed his lips together, then cleared his throat. “If Madison passed away before Jacob, Jacob would inherit Madison’s New Beginnings shares.”

“And the Shangri-La shares? Who would get those upon Madison’s death?”

Rafael swallowed hard and his eyes watered when I said the word ‘death,’ but he quickly regained his composure. “As her husband, those

shares would end up with me.” He must have seen my eyebrows shoot up, and added, “If you’re thinking that’s a motive for murder, Detective, think again. I had no interest in that business. None.”

Plausible, I thought. The guy was seemingly successful. But greed is a powerful motivator to do awful things.

I made a mental note to revisit his interest in obtaining those shares when I had a better handle on the state of their marriage and Madison’s involvement in the two businesses. “Any idea why Todd bequeathed his shares to Madison?”

“I think he wanted Madison to earn income from these businesses. Maybe he thought she would be interested in running Shangri-La one day.” Rafael clenched his fists. “But Jacob was impatient and constantly badgering Madison to sell her shares to him. And if I find out he did this . . .”

“Wait, are you about to confess to a future crime?”

Rafael jabbed his finger in the air. “The point is, if I don’t think you guys are getting the job done, I’ll go and hire a private detective to sort this out. You sure you up for this? You sound mighty sick to me.”

“It’s just a summer cold.” I shifted slightly, then leaned over the coffee table. “You’ve been mighty cooperative and I appreciate that, but threatening to involve a third party won’t get this case solved any faster. And in fact, it might muck things up. I will keep you informed as much I can.” I leaned back. “Tell me, what is it you do? For a living?”

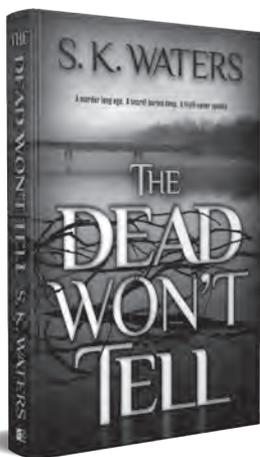
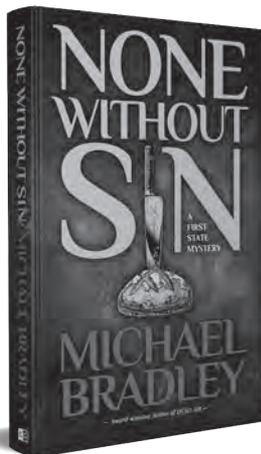
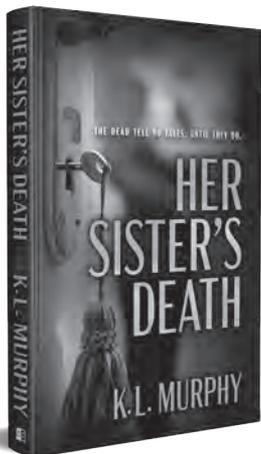
“I’m a hedge fund manager. At Paulson Capital.”

I nodded as I made a note of that. I hadn’t a clue as to what a hedge fund was, let alone what managing one would entail. But I kept my ignorance to myself. In matters like this, the Internet came in handy. Plug in “hedge fund manager” and, voilà, the answer would be at my fingertips—perhaps a website titled “Everything You Wanted to Know about Hedge Fund Management but Were Afraid to Ask.”

“Did you glean anything from her journal?”

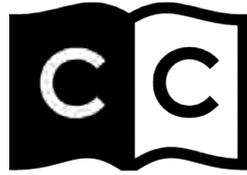
“Journal?”

MORE SUSPENSEFUL READS FROM CAMCAT BOOKS



Available now, wherever books are sold.





CamCat Books

VISIT US ONLINE FOR MORE BOOKS TO LIVE IN:
CAMCATBOOKS.COM



CamCatBooks



@CamCatBooks



@CamCat_Books

SOMETIMES THE TRUTH DOESN'T SET YOU FREE . . . IT GETS YOU KILLED.

WHEN MADISON GARCIA, A WOMAN WITH PAST TIES TO THE town of Monticello, NY, is found stabbed to death in a car at Sackett Lake, Detective Susan Ford teams up with her father, retired Detective Will Ford to find the killer. Soon they learn that Madison was planning to confess to “clear her conscience,” but what did she want to confess? And who wanted to silence her?

Their investigation uncovers family secrets involving an inheritance, accidental death, money laundering, extramarital affairs, and family rivalries. Everyone has a secret and deception runs rampant.

In the Ford Family Mystery series, cold and current cases collide when Detective Susan Ford teams up with her father, retired Detective Will Ford, to solve small-town murders.

“I shudder to think how differently this would have played out if only I had picked up the phone.”



**CamCat
Books**

Cover Design: Maryann Appel
Photography: Gawrav Sinha



BE THE FIRST TO HEAR about new CamCat titles, author events, and exclusive content! Sign up at camcatbooks.com for the CamCat Publishing newsletter.