

Chapter I

The run cut into the base of the mountain, twisting and turning with the land, bubbling past old farms, past pine and spruce and deciduous trees waking from winter slumber, gurgling beneath small bridges on gravel roads, down past a mansion built by some retired executive looking to get away from it all, down through the gap between the mountain and its neighbor, down to join with the river just south of Centerville. A paved road kept the water company, winding through the mountains alongside it. Where the run entered the gap, splashing over a series of rock steps, an unpaved track slipped southward into the trees, climbed the slope, and ended at a small, run-down shack.

On the porch, a man in a scarred old bentwood rocker creaked back and forth, back and forth, his blue eyes directed at the treetops yet not focused on them. Few ever saw those eyes, but those who did frequently remarked how old they seemed compared to the body that hosted them. Vietnam veterans said he must have seen serious action in Afghanistan or Iraq; his eyes were *that* kind. Others speculated he had lost a wife or a child, or both. Not that anyone knew. He rarely came to Centerville, and then only to buy food. He arrived like a shadow, conducted his business, spoke to no one, and left like a faint breeze falling still. Whatever tragedy had befallen him, it seemed to have drained most of the life from him.

Had he talked to anyone, had anyone uttered such speculation, he would have shook his head. He was, in fact, already dead.



Its official name was a mouthful: Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport. The Supreme Court Justice's name had been appended in 2005, but most people referred to it simply as BWI or, if feeling formal, BWI Marshall. Typically ranking somewhere in the mid-twenties on the list of busiest U.S. airports, the terminals never felt all that busy to Phil Walters. His travels had taken him through more frenetic airports as well as quieter ones, but on the whole he liked BWI best. It felt roomy without sprawling, and ticked along efficiently.

This morning, Saturday, April second, the concourse seemed a bit subdued. Walters would have expected more travelers on a weekend, but their absence made it easier to spot the man he had come to find. Just over there at the kiosk, printing out the ticket for his flight to Denver, Detective Lieutenant Rick Peller had a tired look about him. His right shoulder sagged under the weight of his black carry-on, and when he turned Walters could see that his eyelids were drooping. The lieutenant stood just under six feet tall and looked fit for a man his age—about fifty, Walters guessed. His dark hair, thinning a bit and showing a touch of gray at the temples, was neatly combed with a part on the left. Peller studied his ticket as he began the walk to the gate, but he hadn't gone five paces before he stopped and cast a glance at Walters. He then pocketed the ticket, shoved the strap of his carry-on farther up his shoulder, and stood gazing out the huge windows to the parking garage beyond.

Walters bit his lip. It appeared Peller was waiting for him. How the detective had known escaped him, but there was no sense in playing games.

"Good morning, Lieutenant," Walters said as he approached. "Might I have a word?"

"I suppose," Peller said without enthusiasm.

Walters extended his hand. "Phil Walters."

Peller hesitated then accepted the handshake. "You already

seem to know me.” His eyes played over Walters for a moment, then he indicated a row of plastic chairs nearby. The two sat. “Let me guess. You’re a reporter.”

“A writer,” Walters replied.

“Ah. You’re writing a book on the Fibonacci murders.”

Walters couldn’t help but laugh. He supposed the whole thing was too obvious. Why else would a total stranger be approaching Peller just now?

“I’m sorry, but I can’t help you. I’m leaving on vacation. My flight will be boarding in about half an hour, and unless you have a ticket, security won’t let you follow.”

“Actually, I wanted to propose a collaboration.” Seeing Peller start to shake his head, Walters added quickly, “You don’t have to answer now, but here’s the thing. When incidents like this happen, all the major publishers scramble to contract books with insider bylines. They were on it well before you caught Freiberg. And let me tell you, there is a great deal of money to be made here. This is a story millions of people want to read.”

Peller unshouldered his carry-on and set it on the seat next to him. He gazed down at his black sneakers and seemed to be pondering the offer. Walters held his breath in anticipation.

“I’m afraid,” Peller said at last, “that I’m the wrong person for this. You should talk to Captain Morris.”

The writer slumped and exhaled. “I already did. She said I should talk to you.”

Peller cracked a smile. “Don’t feel bad. You’re in the same boat as ever other writer on this one.”

“You’ve been approached by someone else?”

“Twice. I gave them the same answer. I can’t do this. For several reasons.” He stood and picked up his bag, adding, “None of which you’d understand. Good bye, Mr. Walters. I’m sorry.”

Walters watched Peller as he made slowly for security and passed through on his way to his flight. The writer still had two

more contacts to make, but it didn't look promising. The whole team, he suspected, was working from the same playbook. Yet something else was up with Peller. Walters would have bet on it.

That detective, he was hiding something.



“Eric! Hey, Eric, wait up!”

Detective Sergeant Eric Dumas stopped in mid-stride and planted both feet on the carpet. He'd made it halfway from the door of his second-floor apartment to the stairwell before his neighbor Ozzie White realized he was passing by. White's hearing was uncanny. He seemed to be able to distinguish Dumas' footsteps from everyone else's, even through a closed door. At least, that was the only explanation Dumas could think of for the sheer number of times White had stopped him in the hall.

Dumas turned and smiled politely. “What's up, Ozzie?”

“I really got something for you this time. Man, you gotta see this one.” He rushed over and held out a sheet of printer paper. “She's got an *incredible* pair of . . .”

“Ozzie, stop. I told you, I'm not interested in blind dates, especially not when they're arranged over the internet by you posing as me. I mean, come on.”

White shook the paper at him. “Just have a look. You won't regret it.”

With a sigh, Dumas took the proffered printout and looked at the photo. The light in the hall was so dim he could barely see the young lady's face or make out what she was wearing, although Ozzie hadn't been lying about her curvaceousness.

“Interested?”

Dumas gazed at his neighbor, who at the moment reminded him of nothing so much as a dog panting hopefully for its master's approval. “She's very beautiful,” he said. “But I'd rather you let

me find my own woman.” He handed the paper back. Crestfallen, White accepted it. Dumas could feel those pleading eyes following him all the way to the stairwell.

Just as he stepped down the first step, White called after him: “But you never find one!”

Dumas descended the stairs at a modest clip, stopped to retrieve his mail, and left the building. He found White alternately amusing and irritating. The two of them were about the same age, but Ozzie’s interests were far more worldly than Dumas’. He worked as an assistant manager at a cell phone store and always had the latest gadgets to play with. Over the four and a half years Dumas had known him, White had had a succession of nine girlfriends—some live-in, some not—and had pursued several times as many get-rich-quick schemes, none of which panned out. He seemed concerned, if not actually scandalized, by Dumas’ lack of female companionship. Once when Corina Montufar had stopped by, White had come bounding down the hall to meet her, and was sorely disappointed when the much-anticipated girlfriend turned out to be just a colleague.

Dumas smiled at the memory as he got into his light grey Subaru and started the engine. Montufar, he thought, wouldn’t be a bad match for him, although he was pretty sure she wouldn’t appreciate the suggestion. *And that right there*, nudged a voice in the back of his brain, *is why you don’t have a girlfriend. You’d always be comparing her to Corina.*

Sternly, he told the voice in the back of his brain to shut up. He shuffled quickly through the mail, mostly credit card offers and coupons for stores he wouldn’t shop again until Christmas, and tossed it on the seat. As the envelopes fanned across the upholstery he realized that one item wasn’t junk. He fished it out and stared at the return address.

Ethan Dumas. Plano, Texas.

Uncle Ethan.

He turned off the engine and stared at the envelope as though it had been overnighted from Pluto. A knot growing in his stomach, he gingerly opened the envelope and pulled out the sheet of stationery within. He held it for several minutes, still folded, while half-formed thoughts swirled through his mind.

Twelve years ago, Uncle Ethan had told him in no uncertain terms that the family didn't want him around anymore. Since then, Dumas hadn't been in contact with any of them: not a letter, not a phone call, not an email.

Dumas' hands shook as he unfolded the paper and read:

Dear Eric,

I heard about the murders out there and got to thinking. It's probably well past time we buried the hatchet. Philip is dead, killed three years ago in Juarez. Your aunt's been seriously depressed since then. Other things I can't bear to think about have happened along the way.

You may not believe it, but I probably did you a favor. Now it's time to come home. Give me a call.

Sincerely,

Uncle Ethan

Dumas read it a second time. *Just like that?* he thought. *You shove me out the door and then twelve years later order me back?*

He crunched the letter into a ball and threw it onto the floor of the car.



Eduardo Montufar didn't look too bad for a man who'd had skull and pelvis fractured in a car wreck three and a half weeks ago. Fortunately his injuries hadn't been as bad as they might have been, and he was able to leave the hospital just five days after the accident. He was now able to move around using a walker, so long as he avoided putting weight on his left leg, and as usual his

optimism sustained not only himself but his entire family.

His sister Corina, though, didn't like what was coming out of his mouth today. She struggled to keep the smile on her face as he said, "Summer is coming. I'm looking forward to playing some . . . some . . ." He made a swinging motion with his right arm. "Baseball."

The words themselves sounded fine, but they seemed to come out a bit too slowly—or was that just her imagination? At any rate, he shouldn't have had to fish for the name of his favorite sport.

Eduardo was lying on the sofa in the living room of his modest ranch-style house. A subdued clatter came from the kitchen where his wife Sylvia was busy making dinner; from the backyard came the laughter of their children, Jimmie and Susannah. Montufar tried to relax and soak up the comfortable sounds of the children playing and of onions being expertly chopped on a wooden cutting board. She could almost slip back to her own childhood, almost forget her worries.

Almost.

"In another month," Eduardo mused, his gaze slipping from her face to the world outside the window. The sun shone brightly on houses and cars and trees. "I should be ready to . . ." He waved again, this time toward the window. "You know."

"Just promise me you'll listen to the doctors," she said, again forcing a smile.

"Like I have a choice. Ella pleads, the doctor commands, and you give me that cop glare." He mimicked his sister's sternest face.

Montufar laughed, but stopped short as a movement outside the window snagged her attention. A short, sandy-haired fellow had just sprung from a red sports car and shoved the door shut. Now he stood motionless, staring at the house as though checking for booby traps.

Eduardo scratched his cheek. “Friend of yours?”

“Never saw him before.”

Finally making his decision, the man approached the door at a determined pace and knocked. Eduardo nodded at his sister, who rose and answered.

“I’m sorry to disturb you,” the man told her. “I’m looking for Detective Sergeant Montufar.”

“And you would be?”

The man held out a business card he’d been concealing in his palm. “Phil Walters. I’m a writer.”

Montufar took the card and studied it. It was simple and elegant, with the writer’s photo occupying the upper left corner and his name, phone, and email address opposite.

“Looks like you found me,” she said.

“I don’t mean to impose, but could I have a word?”

“Being a writer,” Montufar replied, deadpan, “I hope you have more than one.” As Walters laughed, she stepped aside and motioned him in. “I suppose you know this is my brother’s house.”

“Yes, and I’m sorry if I’m intruding, but I’m in a bit of a jam and I was hoping you might help me.”

Montufar led him in, introducing Eduardo, who smiled broadly and shook the writer’s hand. She resumed her place and motioned Walters to a recliner. Sitting on the edge of the seat, he pitched his project: a first-person account of the investigation into the Fibonacci murders, with her byline given pride of place and earning her a handsome cut of the royalties.

“I’m flattered that you would think of me, but I really don’t feel qualified,” she said when he had finished. “Captain Morris would be a better choice, or Lieutenant Peller. Although, he’s just left on vacation.”

“Yes, I know,” Walters said, his voice wavering between irritation and exhaustion. “Why is it none of you people will go for this?”

Montufar leaned back and stared at the ceiling. She knew she was hedging, but she didn't think she could explain, and indeed there were things she couldn't in good conscience tell him. Inevitably, the military angle had been played up in the press, prompting certain elements to remind the department about a billion times about the "negative impact on national security" if the full story got out. They had agreed among themselves to pretend they had no clue what had plunged Lucas Freiberg into murderous insanity. It wasn't entirely obfuscation; in all honesty, they only knew part of the story anyway.

"It's complicated," was all she said.

Eduardo had watched silently, his eyes moving from one to the other as they conversed. When neither seemed to know what to add, he offered his own observation. "It's too soon."

Walters turned a surprised look on him. "I'm sorry?"

"You don't know what Corina and the others went through. They have a lot of emotion and stress to work through. It's only been . . ." He held up three fingers and studied them. "Three weeks, I think."

Walters just stared.

Eduardo shrugged apologetically. "I was in an accident. I may have lost count."

"My publisher wants this story three weeks *ago*," Walter said. "It's not too soon. It's nearly too late!"

Montufar rose. "I'm sorry, Mr. Walters. I've given you my answer. Now my brother needs his rest."

Walters looked at his feet, then nodded and stood. "All right. But you're throwing away a pile of cash. You know that, don't you?"

"There's more to life than money," Eduardo said before Montufar could reply. "No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Walters paused at the door. “I don’t think your sister’s soul is at stake here. I just want to help her tell an important story.”

Montufar didn’t say anything further, but simply held the door until Walters had passed through and was well on his way. Then she quietly closed it and returned to her brother’s side. Taking his hand, she stroked his fingers. “You’re a lot brighter than you look,” she chided.

He lay back and closed his eyes. With a childlike smile, he said, “I know.”

