

The
Town
Time
Forgot

Lisa Colodny



THE TOWN TIME FORGOT

LISA COLODNY



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Strategic Book Publishing and Rights Co.

12620 FM 1960, Suite A4-507

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To Phyllis, Misty, & Curtis Phillips
To John, Sandy, & Len Colodny
To Pat Alonzo
For Samantha, always

IN MEMORY:
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CHAPTER ONE

The air inside the black sedan was thick and musty with the stale aroma of greasy burgers and strong coffee. The older man behind the wheel sat slumped so that he looked much smaller than he actually was. He had pushed the seat as far back as it would go to accommodate his belly, but it still rested against the steering wheel. He looked quickly at the younger man in the seat to his right and took a long sip from the silver flask hidden inside the breast pocket of his wrinkled suit jacket.

He found it hard to believe that Labor Day had already come and gone, and that the city would be decorated for fall with the expectation that Halloween was around the corner. As he leaned back in the seat, he considered how, even in the darkness of night, New York City was lit up with life: City buses cruised by at lightning speed while a lady of the evening loitered about, hoping her luck would change. The undercover police car camouflaged by the activity still stuck out like a sore thumb. It didn't matter though; it was still his city, and it was a part of him.

The younger man stirred from his slump against the door and announced to his partner, Detective Mike Squires, "Should you be drinking that here? We're on a stakeout."

The older man smiled as he lifted the silver flask gently to his lips. "Go back to sleep, Gates. Pretend you don't see nothing."

Christopher Gates pulled himself off the window and settled into a

slouch. He grabbed binoculars from the dashboard, nearly dumping the two-hour-old Styrofoam cup of coffee onto his lap. “Nothing is what we’ve seen all night.” He pushed his hand through his unruly brown hair. “God, I hate stakeouts.” Although the evening was cool, it was warm inside the car. Gates had tossed his black leather jacket into the backseat, so his leather holster was clearly visible as it lay near his left underarm atop the pale blue shirt that was just a shade lighter than the faded blue jeans he wore.

Squires rolled the window down just enough to allow the smoke from the cigar he had lit to escape. “You know, Gates, you could alleviate some of this boredom by telling me about the newest cutie you’re dating.” He combed his thinning, brown hair with his hand and made a pumping motion. “Just jump to the good parts. Are you still with Monica?”

Gates rolled his eyes. “No, she and I broke up a few weeks ago.” He pulled the cigar away from the other man’s hand and tossed it out the open window. “I thought you were quitting?”

“I tried.” Mike’s chubby hand reached for another cigar from the box that sat in the front seat between them.

“Mike, those things will kill you. And I can’t stand the smoke in the car.”

The older man pushed at his arm. “I’ve been an NYPD detective for over twenty years. I only got six months left ’til retirement.” He lit the cigar. “Then I can spend all my time arguing with my wife instead of you.”

Gates handed him a cup of coffee from a big blue thermos. “Your wife is great. You know that! Plus she deserves a medal for putting up with you for, what has it been, twenty-five years?”

Squires nodded and held up his cup as if he were making a toast. “Yes, you’re right. She is a gem. In fact, you’re more annoying than she is.” He took a bite from the sandwich that Gates had brought him several hours earlier. “Stop procrastinating and tell me about the latest Gates conquest. I’ve been married for nearly twenty-five years; I have to live vicariously through you.”

“Told you, Mike, I haven’t been out in several weeks.” His impatience was evident by his mechanical tone.

“You sick?” Squires questioned, trying to sound concerned.

“No, just been thinking about my life. I’m not a kid anymore.” He hesitated as if he were uncomfortable with the admission. He paused to select just the right words. “I’ve been with a lot of women in my life, Mike. But I’ve never had an actual connection with any of them. It was just sex.”

Mike was listening with an odd look on his face. He squeezed Gates’s shoulder and nodded. “I got to tell you, man. That was just beautiful. My boy is becoming a man.”

Gates said nothing at first, but then he took a deep breath and said, “That’s great. I wasn’t sure you’d understand, and I didn’t want you to bust my. . .”

“I understand,” Mike said, “and that’s the biggest crock of shit you’ve ever come up with. What angle are you working this time?”

Chris shrugged and scanned the surveillance area again with the binoculars hoping the conversation was over. “I knew you wouldn’t get it Mike.”

“What’s to get? You are a good-looking guy; women stand in line hoping you’ll notice them. In the three years we’ve been partners, I’m not aware that you’ve ever spent a night alone unless you count those three nights you spent in the hospital after that drug bust in Manhattan. You get more action than any guy I’ve ever known.”

“I want something more than just empty sex. I’m thirty years old, and I’ve never had a meaningful relationship with a woman in my whole life. I’ve had sex with dozens of women, but I’ve never been in love.”

Mike finished the sandwich and tossed the balled-up cardboard carton into the back of the car. “So you’re not dating at all? No juicy story to help break up the monotony of the stakeout?”

Gates smiled back. “Sorry. Not this time, man. ” He looked at his watch and motioned to the building they were watching. “It’s almost two A.M. It’s your time to nap. I’ve got the next watch.”

Mike settled back in the seat, reclining it almost all the way back. It took some time to adjust himself and his jacket to fit comfortably behind the steering wheel. Gates snatched the binoculars from the seat and scanned the area again, making a note of the time and status of the

all clear.

“Gates?” Mike didn’t open his eyes or look up.

“Yeah, Mike?”

“I think you’ve made a good decision, and I hope you find what you’re looking for.”

Gates replied without removing the binoculars from his face. “Thanks Mike.”

* * *

Mike wasn’t sure how long he’d napped, but when he awoke to Gates yelling, “Movement!” it didn’t feel as if much time had passed. A crackle over the radio validated Gates’s observation, and after the two were given directives, they exited the vehicle. As Gates slid out of the car, he grabbed a very large shotgun from the backseat and followed his partner.

Mike Squires may have been a few pounds heavier—more than a few, actually—and significantly older than Gates, but the way he maneuvered around the parked cars in the alley of the building, you never would have known it. He was waiting against the cover of the wall when Gates came up behind with the shotgun. Squires had his gun drawn and made an indication to Gates to go in low while he went in high. Gates nodded and held up three fingers. Sequentially, he counted down. They took the back door with a splintering thud.

As they crashed through the door, the chaos that ensued was a well-choreographed dance between those under surveillance and the myriad of assorted protective agencies. Gates and Squires had their weapons pointed at three people, including two who were undoubtedly packing very large packets of white powder into a wooden crate labeled IRS Office Appliances. Gates caught movement from behind and turned, cocking the shotgun as he spun around, to face another group of intruders. One was a young woman. She held a large SIG rifle and made her way into the open space behind several wooden crates. Gates recognized her as soon as he saw her and turned to provide backup for Mike. He called out, “NYPD!” and held up the badge that hung from his neck on a silver chain. In a similar fashion, she called out, “US Marshal!” and turned to her partner. “We got company—NYPD on site—so let’s

everyone be careful.”

The two men packing the bricks of white powder took the opportunity of the regulatory confusion to duck behind the larger crates and open fire. They called something out in Spanish, and three more men appeared and opened fire. Within minutes, both sets of officers were pinned down and returning heavy fire. Gates yelled into his radio, “Officers need help! NYPD and US Marshals on site!”

A few minutes later, he called out, “McKenzie, you guys okay?”

“Yes, we’re pinned but we’re okay. Your team?”

“On site—just sit tight. Help is on the way.”

“Ten-four.”

Seconds later, Gates was stunned to hear a Spanish voice call out from behind them. “Gentlemen, hold your fire. I am coming out, and I’ve got company.”

He was even more stunned to see her come out first with her hands in the air and a gun at her back. The man behind her was big, about two hundred fifty pounds. He walked slowly, positioning her in front of him and keeping her at arm’s length by a big hand clamped on her shoulder. He was an old man but only slightly taller than McKenzie was. His thick arms were covered with masses of dark hair, and his shoulder-length hair was thin and unkempt.

She made her way toward Gates looking like she was bored. “Elan, you’re smarter than this. If you shoot me, then every federal agent in the Northeast ...”

“Save it, McKenzie. Who says I’m going to shoot you?” He aimed her toward the other officers, careful not to step out from the shield provided by her body. “Toss your weapons and walk out slowly with your hands up.” He waited patiently for a minute. “I don’t want to hurt her, officers, but I will.” He grabbed a handful of her long, dark hair and pulled so hard that her head snapped back and she let out a small groan. Elan pulled her closer and wrapped his arm around her neck. He made a show of inhaling a deep breath against her hair. “She’s very pretty boys... I may hold off a bit on killing her.” As a show of force, he pushed himself up close behind her and pumped his groin against the blue denim of her jeans. “Would you like that, McKenzie? I would think that after all these

years of chasing us, you would want to spend some private time with me.” She said nothing.

“Elan!” a voice called from the darkness of the building behind them.

The old man seemed nervous: He licked his thin lips, and his eyes drifted toward the sound of the voice. “Esti,” he stammered, as if he were afraid, “look who I caught for you.” He said this as if he was offering her up to him.

The figure who appeared from the darkness made his way slowly and deliberately toward them. A semi-automatic rifle hung from his left shoulder. He was a tall, muscular man with dark eyes and close-cropped hair. “For me?” He advanced closer to them. “If you caught her for me, then why are your hands still on her, Elan?”

The old man loosened his grip around McKenzie’s shoulder and backed away from her to allow some space between their bodies. “I’m sorry, Esti. I didn’t mean to disrespect you.”

Gregor Esteban smiled and waved the comment away. “Old friend, it’s okay. We’ve been together for many, many years, yes?” As he drew closer to them, he indicated to the back of the building into the darkness from which he’d emerged. “I have her. Go prepare the van. She’s coming with us.”

Elan pushed her toward Esteban and walked obediently into the darkness. Once Esteban had his grip on McKenzie’s shoulders, he pulled her shirt from the waistband of her jeans as if he were searching for another weapon. Finding none, he grabbed the tail of the shirt and pulled her into an embrace. He smirked as he raised his gun and fired two quick shots into the back of his retreating friend.

As if the old man was expecting it, he fell to the ground without uttering a sound. Esteban pulled McKenzie tighter and spat at the old man as he lay dying. “Never touch what belongs to me, my old friend.”

It was just the distraction she needed to make her move. She delivered her elbow into his gut and groin with such force that he doubled over. Giving him no time to recover, she kicked the inside of his leg, and then she delivered a blow to his back and head so harsh that he crumpled into a ball and lay motionless. “Have you had enough private time, Esteban?” She pulled him up by his arms. “Get up!”

Gates motioned for the other intruder to come out, and within seconds, all of the men were lying on the floor with their wrists tied behind their backs with white plastic ties. Gates motioned to the one who had battled with McKenzie and lost. “Nice catch, Agent McKenzie; you nabbed a big fish—Gregor Esteban, second in command of the Raynaud cartel.”

He extended his hand to her. “How are you, Mac?”

She ignored his hand and motioned to her partner. “Brad Michaels, meet Detective Gates.”

Gates indicated to Mike. “This is Detective Mike Squires. Mike, this is Agent Devon McKenzie.”

Michaels cut in and asked, “Why’s the NYPD staking out Esteban?”

Gates’s answer was almost too quick. “You’re in New York City, and they are dealing drugs. A better question might be what the US Marshal’s interest is?”

McKenzie stepped in between them. “Put them back in your pants boys—can’t straighten this out here. Secure the prisoners, secure the site, and let’s all get back to the station safely.”

She pushed in closer to Gates. “I was fishing for the big fish—not the number two man.” Then she strode out the door.

* * *

Mike led the line of prisoners into a waiting NYPD police van, but his focus never left Gates and the marshal. It was obvious that they knew each other. The air had been so thick in the warehouse after the smoke settled that no one could get a breath. He watched the exchange between the two of them and secured the shotgun back into the holder mounted to the backseat of their police sedan. He waited patiently for Gates to return to the car so that they could head back to the station. He knew that the marshal would be waiting for them at the precinct, and he wanted the story on McKenzie before they got there.

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