

WATERFELL – by Rob Steele

Chapter 1

I know people hate me. I'm not likable. I think it's my personality. I'm abrasive and blunt. I've never been particularly liked wherever I go, and I don't really mind. I know I'm generally a pain in the ass even with people I work with. Some of them are used to me and consider me a friend, which is great and all, but sometimes being a general pain in the ass is helpful in my line of work.

I'm a cop. Homicide lieutenant, if you want to be picky. But it really works with my aforementioned personality. I have to be hard on people. Someone's died. My job is to find out why they're dead and bring the person who ended that life to justice.

It's rarely an easy job. Sure, sometimes you find a wife standing over her recently shot husband with a shotgun. That doesn't happen nearly as often as you might think. It would make my job a lot easier, but sometimes you catch an interesting one that makes you want to find out. Mysteries. That's why a lot of us got into this business, and today... we've got one.

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Summer Springs subdivision. It's a far cry from the borderline trailer park of August Acres that I usually get called to. I swear, we could have just an August Acres division and it would stay busy. No, today, it's Summer Springs. One of the 'well-to-do' parts of town.

It has a golf course, walking trails, a swimming pool. My wife has been on me for years to move here. It's a shame that a homicide lieutenant doesn't make enough to live here. I hear it's got a \$5k homeowners association fee... annually! That's steep. And I hear they're almost as much of a pain in the ass as I am. All the lawns must be manicured. Not just cut, manicured and sculpted. Trash cans must be brought in within twelve hours of the garbage pickup. No parking is allowed on the street.

I'm not really sure how they get around the legality of the parking issue. That's something that the city is supposed to take care of – the parking tickets, I mean. And the trash can thing irks me because: what if you're out of town? The lawns here certainly are nice, though.

But it's the pool that interests us today. I'm greeted at the gated pool by a security guard who has to let me in with an electronic key. I see that the coroner, Dr. Seong-ho Young is already here, at the far, deep end of the pool, as is Detective Scott Walker, the latter of whom is interviewing what appears to be a mother and child. I recognize one of the two officers in the pool as Jacob Trawn. He's one of the two divers we've got. I assume the other officer is the other one. I just haven't met him yet.

The divers are standing in wet-suits in the deep end of the pool, which should give you a good indication of how deep it really is. There's a tile on the side of the pool that says "5 ft." What I don't understand is what they're doing in the pool.

I tell the pool guard not to let anyone in the pool, which becomes a little redundant as I belatedly notice officer Cortez putting up crime scene tape. I tell the guard not to leave and make my way to the deep end of the pool, bypassing the interview Walker is doing. "So what's with the wet-suits? And where's the body? I mean, there's enough of us here, right?"

Dr. Seong-ho Young, one of my oldest friends, both literally and figuratively, chuckles. "He's down there," he says, casually pointing at the divers. "We're trying to figure out the best way to bring him, or

her, up.” I arch an eyebrow and look into the pool. At first glance, I don't see a body. The water is clear and the bottom of the pool is blue. Apart from the divers and their shadows, I'm not seeing anything. I give a sideways glance and Doc explains. “Look at their shadows.” I look again and realize that they're not consistent. The morning sun should be casting shadows in a straight line across the bottom of the pool, but they aren't.

“What the hell is that?”

“Well,” interjects Trawn, from the pool, “it looks like someone's painted an air duct tube the same color as the pool bottom, stuffed a body in it, and weighed it down with bricks. If you're not looking for it, you're not going to see it. I didn't until I was in here.”

“Looks like no one saw it,” Walker throws in, walking over from the mother and child, who retreat to the shallow end of the pool near the security guard. He consults his notebook, “Mrs. Janice Sievers and her daughter Amanda, age 12, say that the pool opened at the beginning of April and no one's noticed until today when she was walking a lap in the pool and tripped over it. I told her to wait over there for the CSIs to take her prints and a DNA swab. She says the pool usually closes in September and opens about this time every year, but not many people pay attention to it when it's closed. The guard is only on duty when it's open so no help there.”

“So, what we're looking at,” I look dejectedly back into the pool, “is a body dump that may have happened sometime between October and two-weeks ago?”

“Or even after the pool was opened,” Walker added. Rather unhelpful, I thought.

“Guys,” I say to the divers, “just take the bricks out and put them up here. I doubt CSI is going to be able to get anything like DNA or fingerprints off brick after an hour in the water, much less possibly months.” Trawn nods and submerges toward one end of the tube with his partner mirroring him on the other while everyone topside snaps on some rubber gloves, just in case. They make short work of the bricks, standard cinder-blocks, and the tube becomes much more visible as the ends begin to float. The divers each take an end of the tube and pull it to the surface where Walker, Doc and I pull it out of the water.

“That's still kinda light, isn't it? I haven't looked yet. Just tell me it's not a kid. I don't want to deal with something like that today.”

Doc Young looks in from the opposite end of the tube from me. “No, not a kid,” he says as I hear the ruffling of plastic wrap. “But rather badly decomposed. Or nicely. Depends on how you look at it. Looks like a young woman, judging from the swimsuit. Blonde, but I'm reserving the ethnicity until we get her out of here. Age is undetermined, too. But she is of a slight build. We'll have to wait for the CSIs to show up. They might be able to find something on the tube itself.”

I look around at the fenced in pool, noticing that there is only the one gate, but in place of the fence on the shallow end, there's a pool house. It likely has a door. If I had to hazard a guess, someone brought something into the house, then into the pool. That would look a lot different than someone just bringing in an enormous, well, burrito into a pool area.

I ask Walker if he asked our witness about how one uses the pool house. He checks his notes, gotta work on this kid's memory, and replies, “she says that it uses the same key the pool gate does. But the house has to be 'rented' from the HOA [HomeOwners Association] before it should be used. She says she doesn't know of anyone who has used it herself. The HOA makes it, ahem, *a little cost-prohibitive*, she says.”

“Meaning?”

“She says it's \$300 per hour.”

“Are they fucking high?” I exclaim looking at the pool house, which is really just a brick bungalow. “No wonder no one rents it out. Anyway, check with this HOA and see if we can find out who the last person to use it was.”

“Already on that,” he winked. “I send Officer Davis to them to get a list of everyone who's used the gate or the house in the past, er,” I see him count off months in his head, “well, since the pool closed for the season.”

“It's six months, Scott,” I tease with a pat on the shoulder before turning to Seong-ho. “Let me know what you find out.” He nods an affirmative as I exit the scene. Lieutenant paperwork is sitting on my desk. Way too much of it, and they all know it. I pass the CSI van on my way back to the precinct. I have a feeling this case is going to get complicated.

It's not long before I find out just how right I am.