

The
J.A. KONRATH
Reading Order Checklist

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Introduction

My name is Joe Konrath, and I write stories.

You might know my Lt. Jacqueline “Jack” Daniels mystery/thriller series that I write as J.A. Konrath.

Or maybe you know the horror novels I write as Jack Kilborn.

Or perhaps you know the Codename: Chandler female spy novels I write with Ann Voss Peterson.

Or you might have seen the books I’ve done with Blake Crouch.

Or you could have heard about the erotica I write as Melinda DuChamp. Or my foray into science fiction with my Timecaster series.

Or maybe you have no idea who I am or what I write, but you’d like to give a new author a try.

However you came upon this ebook, I want to thank you. I also want to tell you a little more about who I am and what I write, but first here are some bare-bones checklists.

You can also get this entire ebook, for free, on my website, www.jakonrath.com. It is a pdf file that you can also print.

The Lt. Jacqueline “Jack” Daniels Series In Order

#1 - [WHISKEY SOUR](#)

#2 - [BLOODY MARY](#)

#3 - [RUSTY NAIL](#)

#4 - [DIRTY MARTINI](#)

#5 - [FUZZY NAVEL](#)

#6 - [CHERRY BOMB](#)

#7 - [SHAKEN](#)

#8 - [STIRRED](#) (with Blake Crouch)

#9 - [RUM RUNNER](#)

#10 - [LAST CALL](#) (coming soon)

EXTRA NOVEL #1 - [SHOT OF TEQUILA](#)

EXTRA NOVEL #2 - [SERIAL KILLERS UNCUT](#) (with Blake Crouch)

EXTRA NOVEL #3 - [LADY 52](#) (with Jude Hardin)

Those are my main novels where Jack is the hero. I suggest reading the main novels before the extras. [SHOT OF TEQUILA](#) takes place ten years before [WHISKEY SOUR](#). [SERIAL KILLERS UNCUT](#) features many of the villains from the Jack Daniels series, and takes place over a thirty year period. [LADY 52](#) takes place between [BLOODY MARY](#) and [RUSTY NAIL](#).

You can also get some of these ebooks in bundles: [WHISKEY SOUR/BLOODY MARY/RUSTY NAIL](#) and [DIRTY MARTINI/FUZZY NAVEL/CHERRY BOMB](#)

Jack Daniels Shorts

[JACK DANIELS STORIES](#) (short story collection)

[RACKED](#) (short with Jude Hardin)

[BABE ON BOARD](#) (short with Ann Voss Peterson)

[FLOATERS](#) (short with Henry Perez)

[BURNERS](#) (short with Henry Perez)

[PLANTER'S PUNCH](#) (short with Tom Schreck)

[JACKED UP!](#) (short with Tracy Sharp)

[STRAIGHT UP](#) (short with Iain Rob Wright)

[CHEESE WRESTLING](#) (short with Bernard Schaffer)

[ABDUCTIONS](#) (short with Garth Perry)

[BEAT DOWN](#) (short with Garth Perry)

[BABYSITTING MONEY](#) (short with Ken Lindsey)

[OCTOBER DARK](#) (short with Joshua Simcox)

[BANANA HAMMOCK](#) (a Harry McGlade 'write your own damn story' adventure)

These shorts can be read in any order, but the order listed above is a good one. I suggest reading them after reading the novels.

Codename: Chandler Stories in Order

#1 - [HIT](#)

#2 - [EXPOSED](#)

#3 - [NAUGHTY](#)

#4 - [FLEE](#)

#5 - [SPREE](#)

#6 - [THREE](#)

#7 - [FIX](#) (with F. Paul Wilson's Repairman Jack)

#8 - [RESCUE](#)

#9 - FREE (coming soon)

These are the nine stories I've written with Ann Voss Peterson. Jack Daniels has cameos in several of them ([press here for where.](#))

Technically, [FIX](#) comes between [NAUGHTY](#) and [FLEE](#), but it was written years later, and I recommend reading in the above order.

You can also get some of these ebooks in bundles: [HIT/EXPOSED/NAUGHTY](#) and [FLEE/SPREE/THREE](#)

J.A. Konrath/Jack Kilborn Horror Novels in Order

#1 - [ORIGIN](#)

#2 - [THE LIST](#)

#3 - [AFRAID](#)

#4 - [TRAPPED](#)

#5 - [ENDURANCE](#)

#6 - [HAUNTED HOUSE](#)

#7 - [WEBCAM](#)

#8 - GREYS (coming soon)

Chicago Homicide Detective Tom Mankowski used to work for Jack Daniels, and he appears in [THE LIST](#), [HAUNTED HOUSE](#), and [WEBCAM](#), along with a few Jack Daniels titles ([click here to see which ones.](#))

Timecaster Sci-Fi Novels in Order

[TIMECASTER](#)

[TIMECASTER SUPERSYMMETRY](#)

TIMECASTER STEAMPUNK (coming soon)

BYTER (coming soon)

The Timecaster series features a future Chicago cop named Talon Avalon, who is Jack Daniels's grandson. Even if you aren't a science fiction fan, if you like Jack Daniels you might enjoy these, as they have the same fast pace and sense of humor. Harry, Jack, and Phin also appear in these.

Melinda DuChamp Erotica

[WANT IT BAD](#)

[FIFTY SHADES OF ALICE IN WONDERLAND](#)

[FIFTY SHADES OF ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS](#)

[FIFTY SHADES OF ALICE AT THE HELLFIRE CLUB](#)

[FIFTY SHADES OF JEZEBEL AND THE BEANSTALK](#)

[FIFTY SHADES OF PUSS IN BOOTS](#)

[FIFTY SHADES OF GOLDBLOCKS](#)

[THE SEXPERTS – FIFTY GRADES OF SHAY](#)

[THE SEXPERTS – THE GIRL WITH THE PEARL NECKLACE](#)

THE SEXPERTS – LOVING THE ALIEN (coming soon)

The DuChamp novels are funny and sexy. They're also very graphic and meant for open-minded adults. This is erotica for smart people who like to laugh. Ann Voss Peterson is my main co-writer on these.

You can also get some of these ebooks in bundles: [THE COMPLETE FIFTY SHADES OF ALICE](#) and [THE COMPLETE FIFTY SHADES OF JEZEBEL](#)

Everything Konrath in Order

I've written a lot, so this list may seem a little daunting. If you like mystery/thrillers, I suggest starting with the Lieutenant Jacqueline "Jack" Daniels Series. If you like sexy spies, start with the Codename: Chandler series. If you like horror, start with the Konrath/Kilborn Horror Collective. If you like science fiction, start with the Timecaster series. If you like erotica, start with the Melinda DuChamp series.

But if you really want to read EVERYTHING I've done, here's the best order to read it all:

[WHISKEY SOUR](#)

[BLOODY MARY](#)

[RUSTY NAIL](#)

[DIRTY MARTINI](#)

[EXPOSED](#) with Ann Voss Peterson

[HIT](#) with Ann Voss Peterson

[NAUGHTY](#) with Ann Voss Peterson

[65 PROOF](#)

[FLEE](#) with Ann Voss Peterson

[SPREE](#) with Ann Voss Peterson

[THREE](#) with Ann Voss Peterson

[SHOT OF TEQUILA](#)

[SUCKERS](#) (short with Jeff Strand)

[SERIAL KILLERS UNCUT](#) with Blake Crouch

[ORIGIN](#)

[THE LIST](#)

[FLOATERS](#) with Henry Perez

[BURNERS](#) with Henry Perez

[DISTURB](#)

[FIX](#) with F. Paul Wilson and Ann Voss Peterson

[RESCUE](#)

[RACKED](#) (short with Jude Hardin)

[LADY 52](#) with Jude Hardin

[FUZZY NAVEL](#)

[CHERRY BOMB](#)

[AFRAID](#)

[TRAPPED](#)

[ENDURANCE](#)

[GRANDMA?](#) Parts 1 -5 with Talon Konrath

[SHAKEN](#)

[BABE ON BOARD](#) (short with Ann Voss Peterson)

[WILD NIGHT IS CALLING](#) (short with Ann Voss Peterson)

[STIRRED](#) with Blake Crouch

[DRACULAS](#) with Blake Crouch, Jeff Strand, and F. Paul Wilson

[HOLES IN THE GROUND](#) with Iain Rob Wright

[HAUNTED HOUSE](#)

[RUM RUNNER](#)

[WEBCAM](#)

[JACKED UP!](#) (short with Tracy Sharp)

[STRAIGHT UP](#) (short with Iain Rob Wright)

[CHEESE WRESTLING](#) (short with Bernard Schaffer)

[ABDUCTIONS](#) (short with Garth Perry)

[BEAT DOWN](#) (short with Garth Perry)

[BABYSITTING MONEY](#) (short with Ken Lindsey)

[OCTOBER DARK](#) (short with Joshua Simcox)

[LAST CALL](#) (coming soon)

[TIMECASTER](#)

[TIMECASTER SUPERSYMMETRY](#)

TIMECASTER STEAMPUNK (coming soon)

[FIFTY SHADES OF ALICE IN WONDERLAND](#) (erotica)

[FIFTY SHADES OF ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS](#) (erotica)

[FIFTY SHADES OF ALICE AT THE HELLFIRE CLUB](#) (erotica)

[WANT IT BAD](#) (erotica)

[FIFTY SHADES OF JEZEBEL AND THE BEANSTALK](#) (erotica)

[FIFTY SHADES OF PUSS IN BOOTS](#) (erotica)

[FIFTY SHADES OF GOLDILOCKS](#) (erotica)

[THE SEXPERTS – FIFTY GRADES OF SHAY](#) (erotica)

[THE SEXPERTS – THE GIRL WITH THE PEARL NECKLACE](#) (erotica)

THE SEXPERTS – LOVING THE ALIEN (coming soon)

Technically, that still isn't everything.

I have some titles that are included in other titles. For example, many of my short stories that you can buy as singles on Amazon, like [SHAPESHIFTERS ANONYMOUS](#) and [SYMBIOS](#), and my story collections [HORROR STORIES](#), [CRIME STORIES](#), and [JACK DANIELS STORIES](#), are all compiled in [65 PROOF](#). I also wrote several stories with Blake Crouch, such as KILLERS and BIRDS OF PREY, that are compiled in [SERIAL KILLERS UNCUT](#). So if you see something that isn't on this list, it's probably already in one of those two collections.

I also wrote a book of funny, sometimes obscene, poetry under the name J. Andrew Haknort, four parody How To books under the pen name Dr. Hans Uberass. These were basically joke books for my close friends, and were written on controlled substances. Don't feel like you need to read these, and don't judge me on their quality (or lack thereof). But for the completest, here they are:

DUMB JOKES & VULGAR POEMS by J. Andrew Haknort

HOW TO GIVE GOOD SEX by Dr. Hans Uberass

HOW TO STOP FARTING by Dr. Hans Uberass

HOW TO GET RICH by Dr. Hans Uberass

HOW TO ATTRACT THE OPPOSITE SEX by Dr. Hans Uberass

I also wrote two non-fiction books about writing and publishing:

[A NEWBIE'S GUIDE TO PUBLISHING](#)

[BE THE MONKEY](#)

Main Characters

I have many recurring characters, and often they show up in each others' stories. Some even appear in the work of other writers. If you want to know everywhere a certain character pops up, here's a list of where you can find them.

Lt. Jacqueline “Jack” Daniels is a forty-something Chicago cop (though later in the series she becomes a private investigator)...

Lt. Jacqueline “Jack” Daniels in Main Works

[WHISKEY SOUR](#)

[BLOODY MARY](#)

[RUSTY NAIL](#)

[DIRTY MARTINI](#)

[SERIAL KILLERS UNCUT](#) (with Blake Crouch)

[FUZZY NAVEL](#)

[CHERRY BOMB](#)

[SHAKEN](#)

[SHOT OF TEQUILA](#)

[STIRRED](#) (with Blake Crouch)

[LAST CALL](#) (with Blake Crouch coming soon)

[JACK DANIELS STORIES](#) (collected stories)

[PLANTER'S PUNCH](#) (with Tom Schreck)

[FLOATERS](#) (with Henry Perez)

[BURNERS](#) (with Henry Perez)

TRUCK STOP (short, included in [SERIAL KILLERS UNCUT](#), [JACK DANIELS STORIES](#), and [65 PROOF](#))

[BABE ON BOARD](#) (short with Ann Voss Peterson)

[WITH A TWIST](#) (short, included in [SERIAL KILLERS UNCUT](#), [JACK DANIELS STORIES](#), and [65 PROOF](#))

[STREET MUSIC](#) (short, included in [SERIAL KILLERS UNCUT](#), [JACK DANIELS STORIES](#), and [65 PROOF](#))

[JACKED UP!](#) (short with Tracy Sharp)

[STRAIGHT UP](#) (short with Iain Rob Wright)

[RACKED](#) (short with Jude Hardin)

[CHEESE WRESTLING](#) (short with Bernard Schaffer)

[ABDUCTIONS](#) (short with Garth Perry)

[BABYSITTING MONEY](#) (short with Ken Lindsey)

Lt. Jacqueline “Jack” Daniels in Cameos

[FLEE](#)

[SPREE](#)

[THREE](#)

FREE (with Ann Voss Peterson coming 2016)

[THE LIST](#)

[TIMECASTER SUPERSYMMETRY](#)

TIMECASTER STEAMPUNK (coming in 2016)

PUSHED TOO FAR (by Ann Voss Peterson)

BURNED TOO HOT (by Ann Voss Peterson)

DEAD TOO SOON (by Ann Voss Peterson)

THE TEN COUNT (by Tom Schreck)

Harry McGlade is a private eye and Jack's former and present partner. He appears in almost all of Jack's main works, and also pops up in a few other places...

[BANANA HAMMOCK](#)

[TIMECASTER](#)

[TIMECASTER SUPERSYMMETRY](#)

TIMECASTER STEAMPUNK (coming in 2016)

[FLEE](#)

[SPREE](#)

[THREE](#)

FREE (with Ann Voss Peterson coming 2016)

PUSHED TOO FAR (by Ann Voss Peterson)

BURNED TOO HOT (by Ann Voss Peterson)

LOST HOMICIDAL MANIAC, ANSWERS TO SHIRLEY (by Jeff Strand)

INSIDE OUT (by Barry Eisler – an alternate version of McGlade)

Tom Mankowski is a Homicide Detective who works under Jack Daniels...

[THE LIST](#)

[HAUNTED HOUSE](#)

[CHERRY BOMB](#)

[SHAKEN](#)

[STIRRED](#)

[WEBCAM](#)

[RUM RUNNER](#)

Tequila Abernathy is a former mob enforcer...

[SHOT OF TEQUILA](#)

[SERIAL KILLERS UNCUT](#) (with Blake Crouch)

[SPREE](#) (with Ann Voss Peterson)

[LAST CALL](#)

[RESCUE](#)

The Konrath/Kilborn Horror Collective is where I take the surviving characters from my various scary books and bring them all together...

[ORIGIN](#) (Dr. Frank Belgium)

[THE LIST](#) (Tom Mankowski)

[AFRAID](#) (Josh VanCamp and Fran Stauffer)

[TRAPPED](#) (Sara Randhurst)

[ENDURANCE](#) (Mal Dieter and Deb)

[HAUNTED HOUSE](#) (all of the above)

Chandler is a female spy who works for a secret government agency...

[FLEE](#) (with Ann Voss Peterson)

[SPREE](#) (with Ann Voss Peterson)

[THREE](#) (with Ann Voss Peterson)

FREE (with Ann Voss Peterson coming 2016)

[HIT](#) (with Ann Voss Peterson)

[EXPOSED](#) (with Ann Voss Peterson)

[NAUGHTY](#) (with Ann Voss Peterson)

[FIX](#) (with Ann Voss Peterson and F. Paul Wilson)

[RESCUE](#)

[LAST CALL](#)

Luther Kite is a serial killer created by Blake Crouch...

DESERT PLACES (by Blake Crouch)

LOCKED DOORS (by Blake Crouch)

[SERIAL KILLERS UNCUT](#) (with Blake Crouch)

[SHAKEN](#)

[STIRRED](#) (with Blake Crouch)

[LAST CALL](#)

Lucy and Donaldson are serial killers...

[SERIAL KILLERS UNCUT](#) (with Blake Crouch)

[STIRRED](#) (with Blake Crouch)

[LAST CALL](#)

ON THE ROCKS

A Lt. Jacqueline “Jack” Daniels Story

“She sure bled a lot.”

I ignored Officer Crouch, my attention focused on the dead woman’s arm. The cut had almost severed her left wrist, a flash of pink bone peeking through. Her right hand was curled around the handle of a utility knife.

I’d been in Homicide for more than ten years, and still felt an emotional punch whenever I saw a body. The day I wasn’t affected was the day I hung up my badge.

I wore disposable plastic booties over my flats because the shag carpet oozed blood like a sponge wherever I stepped. The apartment’s air conditioning was set on freeze, so the decomposition wasn’t as bad as it might have been after a week—but it was still pretty bad. I got down on my haunches and swatted away some blowflies.

On her upper arm, six inches above the wound, was a bruise.

“What’s so interesting, Lieut? It’s just a suicide.”

In my blazer pocket I had some latex gloves. I snapped them on.

The victim’s name was Janet Hellerman, a real estate lawyer with a private practice. She was brunette, mid-thirties, Caucasian. Her satin slip was mottled with drying brown stains, and she wore nothing underneath. I put my hand on her chin, gently turned her head.

There was another bruise on her cheek.

“Johnson’s getting a statement from the super.”

I stood up, smoothed down my skirt, and nodded at Herb, who had just entered the room. Detective First Class Herb Benedict was my partner. He had a gray mustache, Basset hound jowls, and a Santa Claus belly. Herb kept on the perimeter of the blood puddle; those little plastic booties were too hard for him to get on.

“Johnson’s story corroborates?”

Herb nodded. “Why? You see something?”

I did, but wasn’t sure how it fit. Herb had questioned both Officer Crouch and Officer Johnson, and their stories were apparently identical.

Forty minutes ago they’d arrived at apartment 3008 at the request of the victim’s mother, who lived out of state. She had been unable to get in touch with her daughter for more than a week. The building superintendent unlocked the door for them, but the safety chain was on, and a sofa had been pushed in front of the door to prevent anyone from getting inside. Crouch put his shoulder to it, broke in, and they discovered the body.

Herb squinted at the corpse. “How many marks on the wrist?”

“Just one cut, deep.”

I took off the blood-soaked booties, put them in one of the many plastic baggies I keep in my pockets, and went over to the picture window, which covered most of the far wall. The view was expensive, overlooking Lake Shore Drive from forty stories up. Boaters

swarmed over the surface of Lake Michigan like little white ants, and the street was a gridlock of toy cars. Summer was a busy time for Chicagoans—criminals included.

I motioned for Crouch, and he heeled like a chastened puppy. Beat cops were getting younger every year; this one barely needed to shave. He had the cop stare, though—hard eyes and a perpetual scowl, always expecting to be lied to.

“I need you to do a door-to-door. Get statements from everyone on this floor. Find out who knew the victim, who might have seen anything.”

Crouch frowned. “But she killed herself. The only way in the apartment is the one door, and it was locked from the inside, with the safety chain on. Plus there was a sofa pushed in front of it.”

“I’m sure I don’t need to remind you that suicides are treated as homicides in this town, Officer.”

He rolled his eyes. I could practically read his thoughts. How did this dumb broad get to be Homicide Lieutenant? She sleep with the PC?

“Lieut, the weapon is still in her hand. Don’t you think...”

I sighed. Time to school the rookie.

“How many cuts are on her wrist, Crouch?”

“One.”

“Didn’t they teach you about hesitation cuts at the Academy? A suicidal person usually has to work up the courage. Where was she found?”

“On the floor.”

“Why not her bed? Or the bathtub? Or a comfy chair? If you were ending your life, would you do it standing in the middle of the living room?”

He became visibly flustered, but I wasn’t through yet.

“How would you describe the temperature in this room?”

“It’s freezing.”

“And all she’s wearing is a slip. Little cold for that, don’t you think? Did you read the suicide note?”

“She didn’t leave a note.”

“They all leave notes. I’ve worked these streets for twenty years, and never saw a suicide where the vic didn’t leave a note. But for some strange reason, there’s no note here. Which is a shame because maybe her note would explain how she got the multiple contusions on her face and arm.”

Crouch was cowed, but he managed to mumble, “The door—”

“Speaking of doors,” I interrupted, “why are you still here when you were given an order to start the door-to-door? Move your ass.”

Crouch looked at his shoes and then left the apartment. Herb raised an eyebrow.

“Kinda hard on the newbie, Jack.”

“He wouldn’t have questioned me if I had a penis.”

“I think you have one now. You took his.”

“If he does a good job, I’ll give it back.”

Herb turned to look at the body. He rubbed his mustache.

"It could still play as suicide," he said. "If she was hit by a sudden urge to die. Maybe she got some terrible news. She gets out of the shower, puts on a slip, cranks up the air conditioning, gets a phone call, immediately grabs the knife and with one quick slice..."

He made a cutting motion over his wrist.

"Do you buy it?" I asked.

Herb made a show of mulling it over.

"No," he consented. "I think someone knocked her out, sliced her wrist, turned up the air so the smell wouldn't get too bad, and then..."

"Managed to escape from a locked room."

I sighed, my shoulders sagging.

Herb's eyes scanned the view. "A window washer?"

I checked the window, but as expected it didn't open. Winds this high up weren't friendly.

"There's no other way in?" Herb asked.

"Just the one entryway."

I walked up to it. The safety chain hung on the door at eye level, its wall mounting and three screws dangling from it. The doorframe where it had been attached was splintered and cracked from Crouch's entrance. There were three screw holes in the frame that matched the mounting, and a fourth screw still remained, sticking out of the frame about an inch.

The hinges on the door were dusty and showed no signs of tampering. A black leather sofa was pushed off to the side, near the doorway. I followed the tracks that its feet had made in the carpet. The sofa had been placed in front of the door and then shoved aside.

I opened the door, holding the knob with two fingers. It moved easily, even though it was heavy and solid. I closed it, stumped.

"How did the killer get out?" I said, mostly to myself.

"Maybe he didn't get out. Maybe the killer is still in the apartment." Herb's eyes widened and his hand shot up, pointing over my shoulder. "Jack! Behind you!"

I rolled my eyes.

"Funny, Herb. I already searched the place."

I peeled off the gloves and stuck them back in my pocket.

"Well, then there are only three possibilities." Herb held up his hand, ticking off fingers. "One, Crouch and Johnson and the superintendent are all lying. Two, the killer was skinny enough to slip out of the apartment by going under the door. Or three, it was Houdini."

"Houdini's dead."

"Did you check? Get an alibi? "

"I'll send a team to the cemetery."

While we waited for the ME to arrive, Herb and I busied ourselves with tossing the place. Bank statements told us Janet Hellerman made a comfortable living and paid her bills on time. She was financing a late model Lexus, which we confirmed was parked in the lot below. Her credit card debt was minimal, with a recent charge for plane tickets. A call to

Delta confirmed two seats to Montana for next week, one in her name and one in the name of Glenn Hale.

Herb called the precinct, requesting a sheet on Hale.

I checked the answering machine and listened to thirty-eight messages. Twenty were from Janet's distraught mother, wondering where she was. Two were telemarketers. One was from a friend named Sheila who wanted to get together for dinner, and the rest were real estate related.

Nothing from Hale. He wasn't on the caller ID either.

I checked her cell phone next, and listened to forty more messages; ten from mom, and thirty from home buyers. Hale hadn't left any messages, but there was a 'Glenn' listed on speed dial. The phone's call log showed that Glenn's number had called over a dozen times, but not once since last week.

"Look at this, Jack."

I glanced over at Herb. He set a pink plastic case on the kitchen counter and opened it up. It was a woman's toolkit, the kind they sold at department stores for fifteen bucks. Each tool had a cute pink handle and a corresponding compartment that it snugged into. This kit contained a hammer, four screwdrivers, a measuring tape, and eight wrenches. There were also two empty slots; one for needle nose pliers, and one for something five inches long and rectangular.

"The utility knife," I said.

Herb nodded. "She owned the weapon. It's looking more and more like suicide, Jack. She has a fight with Hale. He dumps her. She kills herself."

"You find anything else?"

"Nothing really. She liked to mountain climb, apparently. There's about forty miles of rope in her closet, lots of spikes and beaners, and a picture of her clinging to a cliff. She also has an extraordinary amount of teddy bears. There were so many piled on her bed, I don't know how she could sleep on it."

"Diary? Computer?"

"Neither. Some photo albums, a few letters that we'll have to look through."

Someone knocked. We glanced across the breakfast bar and saw the door ease open.

Mortimer Hughes entered. Hughes was a medical examiner. He worked for the city, and his job was to visit crime scenes and declare people dead. You'd never guess his profession if you met him on the street—he had the smiling eyes and infectious enthusiasm of a television chef.

"Hello Jack, Herb, beautiful day out." He nodded at us and set down a large tackle box that housed the many particular tools of his trade. Hughes opened it up and snugged on some plastic gloves and booties. He also brandished knee pads.

Herb and I paused in our search and watched him work. Hughes knelt beside the vic and spent ten minutes poking and prodding, humming tunelessly to himself. When he finally spoke, it was high-pitched and cheerful.

"She's dead," Hughes said.

We waited for more.

“At least four days, probably longer. I’m guessing from hypovolemic shock. Blood loss is more than forty percent. Her right zygomatic bone is shattered, pre-mortem or early post.”

“Could she have broken her cheek falling down?” Herb asked.

“On this thick carpet? Possible—yes. Likely—no. Look at the blood pool. No arcs. No trails.”

“So she wasn’t conscious when her wrist was cut?”

“That would be my assumption, unless she laid down on the floor and stayed perfectly still while bleeding to death.”

“Sexually assaulted?”

“Can’t tell. I’ll do a swab.”

I chose not to watch, and Herb and I went back into the kitchen. Herb pursed his lips.

“It could still be suicide. She cuts her wrist, falls over, breaks her cheek bone, dies unconscious.”

“You don’t sound convinced.”

“I’m not. I like the boyfriend. They’re fighting, he bashes her one in the face. Maybe he can’t wake her up, or he thinks he’s killed her. Or he wants to kill her. He finds the toolbox, gets the utility knife, makes it look like a suicide.”

“And then magically disappears.”

Herb frowned. “That part I don’t like.”

“Maybe he flushed himself down the toilet, escaped through the plumbing.”

“You can send Crouch out to get a plunger.”

“Lieutenant?”

Officer Crouch had returned. He stood by the kitchen counter, his face ashen.

“What is it, Officer?”

“I was doing the door-to-door. No one answered at the apartment right across the hall. The superintendent thought that was strange— an old lady named Mrs. Flagstone lives there, and she never leaves her home. She even sends out for groceries. So the super opens up her door and...you’d better come look.

. . .

Mrs. Flagstone stared up at me with milky eyes. Her tongue protruded from her lips like a hunk of raw liver. She was naked in the bathtub, her face and upper body submerged in foul water, one chubby leg hanging over the edge. The bloating was extensive. Her white hair floated around her head like a halo.

“Still think it’s a suicide?” I asked Herb.

Mortimer Hughes rolled up his sleeve and put his hand into the water. He pressed her chest and bubbles exploded out of her mouth and nose.

“Didn’t drown. Her lungs are full of air.”

He moved his hand higher, prodding the wrinkled skin on her neck.

“I can feel some damage to the trachea. There also appears to be a lesion around her neck. I want to get a sample of the water before I pull the drain plug.”

Hughes dove into his box. Herb, Crouch, and I left him and went into the living room. Herb called in, requesting the forensics team.

“Any hits from the other tenants?” I asked the rookie.

He flipped open his pad. “One door over, at apartment 3010, the occupant, a Mr. Stanley Mankowicz, remembers some yelling coming from the victim’s place about six days ago.”

“Does he remember what time?”

“It was late, he was in bed. Mr. Mankowicz shares a wall with the vic, and has called her on several occasions to tell her to turn her television down.”

“Did he call that night?”

“He was about to, but the noise stopped.”

“Where’s the super?”

“Johnson hasn’t finished taking his statement.”

“Call them both in here.”

While waiting for them to arrive, I examined Mrs. Flagstone’s door. Like Janet’s, it had a safety chain, and like Janet’s, it had been ripped from the wall and the mounting was hanging from the door. I found four screws and some splinters on the floor. There were no screws in the door frame.

A knock, and I opened the door. Officer Johnson and the super. Johnson was older than his partner, bigger, with the same dead eyes. The superintendent was a Pakistani man named Majid Patel. Mr. Patel had dark skin and red eyes and he clearly enjoyed all of this attention.

“I moved to this country ten years ago, and I have never seen a dead body before. Now I have seen two in the same day. I must call and tell my mother. I call my mother when anything exciting happens.”

“We’ll let you go in a moment, Mr. Patel. I’m Lt. Jack Daniels, this is Detective Herb Benedict. We just have a few...”

“Your name is Jack Daniels? But you are not a man.”

“You’re very observant,” I deadpanned. “Did you know Janet Hellerman?”

Patel winked at me. Was he flirting?

“It must be hard, Lt. Jack Daniels, to be a pretty woman with a funny name in a profession so dominated by male chauvinist pigs.” Patel offered Herb a look. “No offense.”

Herb returned a pleasant smile. “None taken. If you could please answer the Lieutenant’s question.”

Patel grinned, crooked teeth and spinach remnants.

“She was a real estate lawyer. Young and good looking. Always paid her rent on time. My brother gave her a deal on her apartment, because she had nice legs.” Patel had no reservations about openly checking out mine. “Yours are very nice too, Jack Daniels. For an older lady. Are you single?”

“She’s single.” Herb winked at me, gave me an elbow. I made a mental note to fire him later.

“Your brother?” I asked Patel.

“He’s the building owner,” Officer Johnson chimed in. “It’s the family business.”

“Did you know anything about Janet’s personal life?”

“She had a shit for a boyfriend, a man named Glenn. He had an affair and she dumped him.”

“When was this?”

“About ten days ago. I know because she asked me to change the lock on her door. She had given him a key and he wouldn’t return it.”

“Did you change the lock?”

“I did not. Ms. Hellerman just mentioned it to me in the elevator once. She never filled out the work order request.”

“Does the building have a doorman?”

“No. We have security cameras.”

“I’ll need to see tapes going back two weeks. Can you get them for me?”

“It will not be a problem.”

Mortimer Hughes came out of the bathroom. He was holding a closed set of tweezers in one hand, his other hand cupped beneath it.

“I dug a fiber out of the victim’s neck. Red, looks synthetic.”

“From a rope?” I asked.

Hughes nodded.

“Mr. Patel, we’ll be down shortly for those tapes. Crouch, Johnson, help Herb and I search the apartment. Let’s see if we can find the murder weapon.”

We did a thorough toss, but couldn’t find any rope. Herb, however, found a pair of needle nose pliers in a closet. Pliers with pink handles.

“They were neighbors,” Herb reasoned. “Janet could have lent them to her.”

“Could have. But we both doubt it. Call base to see if they found anything on Hale.”

Herb dialed, talked for a minute, then hung up.

“Glenn Hale has been arrested three times, all assault charges. Did three months in Joliet.”

I wasn’t surprised. All evidence pointed to the boyfriend, except for the damned locked room. Maybe Herb was right and the killer just slipped under the door and...

Epiphany.

“Call the lab team. I want the whole apartment dusted. Then get an address and a place of work on Hale and send cars. Tell them to wait for the warrant.”

Herb raised an eyebrow. “A warrant? Shouldn’t we question the guy first?”

“No need,” I said. “He did it, and I know how.”

. . .

Feeling, a bit foolishly, like Sherlock Holmes, I took everyone back into Janet’s apartment. They began hurling questions at me, but I held up my hand for order.

“Here’s how it went,” I began. “Janet finds out Glenn is cheating, dumps him. He comes over, wanting to get her back. She won’t let him in. He uses his key, but the safety chain is on. So he busts in and breaks the chain.”

“But the chain was on when we came in the first time,” Crouch complained.

Herb hushed him, saving me the trouble.

"They argue," I went on. "Glenn grabs her arm, hits her. She falls to the floor, unconscious. Who knows what's going through his mind? Maybe he's afraid she'll call the police, and he'll go to jail- he has a record and this state has zero tolerance for repeat offenders. Maybe he's so mad at her he thinks she deserves to die. Whatever the case, he finds Janet's toolkit and takes out the utility knife. He slits her wrist and puts the knife in her other hand."

Five inquisitive faces hung on my every word. It was a heady experience.

"Glenn has to know he'd be a suspect," I raised my voice, just a touch for dramatic effect. "He's got a history with Janet, and a criminal record. The only way to throw off suspicion is to make it look like no one else could have been in the room, to show the police that it had to be a suicide."

"Jack," Herb admonished. "You're dragging it out."

"If you figured it out, then you'd have the right to drag it out too."

"Are you really single?" Patel asked. He grinned again, showing more spinach.

"If she keeps stalling," Herb told him, "I'll personally give you her number."

I shot Herb with my eyes, then continued.

"Okay, so Glenn goes into Janet's closet and gets a length of climbing rope. He also grabs the needle nose pliers from her toolbox and heads back to the front door. The safety chain has been ripped out of the frame, and the mounting is dangling on the end. He takes a single screw," I pointed at the screw sticking in the door frame, "and puts it back in the doorframe about halfway."

Herb nodded, getting it. "When the mounting ripped out, it had to pull out all four screws. So the only way one could still be in the doorframe is if someone put it there."

"Right. Then he takes the rope and loops it under a sofa leg. He goes out into the hall with the rope, and closes the door, still holding both ends of the rope. He tugs the rope through the crack under the door, and pulls the sofa right up to the door from the other side."

"Clever," Johnson said.

"I must insist you meet my mother," Patel said.

"But the chain..." Crouch whined.

I smiled at Crouch. "He opens the door a few inches, and grabs the chain with the needle nose pliers. He swings the loose end over to the door frame, where it catches and rests on the screw he put in halfway."

I watched the light finally go on in Crouch's eyes. "When Mr. Patel opened the door, it looked like the chain was on, but it really wasn't. It was just hanging on the screw. The thing that kept the door from opening was the sofa."

"Right. So when you burst into the room, you weren't the one that broke the safety chain. It was already broken."

Crouch nodded rapidly. "The perp just lets go of one end of the rope and pulls in the other end, freeing it from the sofa leg. Then he locks the door with his own key."

"But poor Mrs. Flagstone," I continued, "must have seen him in the hallway. She has her safety chain on, maybe asks him what he's doing. So he bursts into her room and strangles her with the climbing rope. The rope was red, right Herb?"

Herb grinned. “Naturally. How did you know that?”

“I guessed. Then Glenn ditches the pliers in the closet, makes a half-assed attempt to stage Mrs. Flagstone’s death like a drowning, and leaves with the rope. I bet the security tapes will concur.”

“What if he isn’t seen carrying the rope?”

No problem. I was on a roll.

“Then he either ditched it in a hall, or wrapped it around his waist under his shirt before leaving.”

“I’m gonna go check the tapes,” Johnson said, hurrying out.

“I’m going to call my mother,” Patel said, hurrying out.

Herb got on the phone to get a warrant, and Mortimer Hughes dropped to his hands and knees and began to search the carpeting, ostensibly for red fibers—even though that wasn’t his job.

I was feeling pretty smug, something I rarely associated with my line of work, when I noticed Officer Crouch staring at me. His face was projecting such unabashed admiration that I almost blushed.

“Lieutenant— that was just...amazing.”

“Simple detective work. You could have figured it out if you thought about it.”

“I never would have figured that out.” He glanced at his shoes, then back at me, and then he turned and left.

Herb pocketed his cell and offered me a sly grin.

“We can swing by the DA’s office, pick up the warrant in an hour. Tell me, Jack. How’d you put it all together?”

“Actually, you gave me the idea. You said the only way the killer could have gotten out of the room was by slipping under the door. In a way, that’s what he did.”

Herb clapped his hand on my shoulder.

“Nice job, Lieutenant. Don’t get a big head. You wanna come over for supper tonight? Bernice is making pot roast. I’ll let you invite Mr. Patel.”

“He’d have to call his mother first. Speaking of mothers...”

I glanced at the body of Janet Hellerman, and again felt the emotional punch. The Caller ID in the kitchen gave me the number for Janet’s mom. It took some time to tell the whole story, and she cried through most of it. By the end, she was crying so much that she couldn’t talk anymore.

I gave her my home number so she could call me later.

The lab team finally arrived, headed by a Detective named Perkins. Soon both apartments were swarming with tech heads—vacuuming fibers, taking samples, spraying chemicals, shining ALS, snapping pictures and shooting video.

I filled in Detective Perkins on what went down, and left him in charge of the scene.

Then Herb and I went off to get the warrant.

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December 2015