

## Chapter 1 *A body*

In January they found the girl's body.

They found it in Pine Crest. Pine Crest is a small town about 90 miles from Denver, in the Rocky Mountains. In the past it was famous for silver and gold. But now it's a place where people go on vacation; they ski there in the winter and walk in the mountains in the summer. Movie stars have homes there. It's beautiful and it's quiet when the snow falls. And the snow falls a lot in the winter. Pine Crest isn't usually the kind of place you find a dead body. Denver's the place for that, not Pine Crest.

Oh, of course sometimes there are skiing accidents, like in all ski resorts. I remember that a young man died about three years ago. He was skiing too fast and he went into a tree. It's sad, but it happens. But murder – killing someone – well, that's different.

So that January morning my boss, Leo Cohn, Chief of the Denver Police, called me into his office.

'Girl's body in Pine Crest, Flick,' said Leo. Leo was thin and worked too much. He never sat down. Now, he was standing near his desk. 'They found her yesterday.'

'Oh?' I said.

'It looks like someone killed her,' he said. I didn't say anything. 'Murder,' he said, as if I didn't understand. I waited. He didn't look at me. Then he said, 'I want you to go to Pine Crest.'

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-69379-0 - Dead Cold  
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‘Ha!’ I said. ‘So that’s what you want. But Leo, why me? It’s too soon. It was just two months ago ... I can’t!’

‘Flick, you’re the best,’ he said, ‘and you need to get out of Denver ... it’s the best thing.’

‘Listen, Leo ...’ I started, but I stopped. Leo looked me in the eyes.

‘Come on, Flick. Bill Gershon, the Chief of Police there, is an old friend of mine. He’s not happy. If it’s murder, it’s bad for business. No-one wants to ski when there’s a killer about.’



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Well, yeah, I thought, as I looked out of Leo's window at the city, a dead body was bad for business. I knew Pine Crest. I used to go skiing there on the weekends. The town made its money from the thousands of visitors who went there every year. The restaurants, cafés, hotels, ski school, all made money from the people who went to beautiful Pine Crest for their vacation.

'And the girl?' I asked. 'Was she a visitor?'

Leo smiled. He could see that I was interested. 'Yes,' he said. 'She was there on a skiing vacation with some friends from college. Someone found her in the swimming pool at the hotel where she was staying.'

'She died in the swimming pool?' I asked. 'I mean ...'

'Looks like somebody drowned her,' Leo said.

I looked at him.

'She was twenty-three years old,' Leo said softly.

'And?' I asked.

'You'll get what you need from Gershon,' said Leo.

I got up to leave.

'Oh, and Flick ...' said Leo. I turned at the door.

'I want you to get this one and I want you to get it fast,' he said. 'First because it'll make the Denver Police Department look good. And we need that.'

'And second because you think it's good for me to get out of the office and back to work?' I said.

Leo didn't say anything, but it was true. He was helping me in his way.

'OK, Leo,' I said, 'but remember, it was just November, just two months ago ... that Scott ...'

'Yeah, yeah, I know. But Flick, Scott's dead,' said Leo. His voice was kind, but strong. 'And you've got to live.' He

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turned away from me and looked out of the window. Leo was finished.

I walked to my office to get the things I needed for a few days out of town: my notebook, cell phone and car keys. I thought about November, thought about Scott. Detective Scott King of the Denver Police. Then I took my gun and put it under my jacket.

I went downstairs to the parking lot. Scott and I worked together for four years. We were the best, the best the Denver Police Department had. We loved catching killers, robbers, all of Denver's criminals. But we were more than that, we were friends too. Scott was my best friend. Then one stupid, cold day in November, Eddie Lang killed Scott. And I saw my best friend die.

'Yeah,' I thought, 'Scott's dead and I've got to live.' Most days it was difficult.

I shook my head and Scott's face went away. I took my keys out of the pocket of my jacket and looked at the most beautiful car in the world, my red 1957 Chevrolet. My Chevy. I smiled. That car always made me smile. Some days it felt like it was the only good thing in my life.

I drove home fast to my apartment on Alameda, went in and packed a bag. I changed into my blue suit and looked at myself in the mirror in the bathroom. I looked OK. I looked like I came from the big city. I felt my gun inside my jacket. I was ready. Ready to find a killer ... without Scott.

Fifteen minutes later I was driving on I70 to Pine Crest, Colorado. I was trying to forget about Scott. And I was trying to forget about Eddie Lang.