

Backfire

A Frank Carver Mystery

My name is Frank Carver. I've lived in Norfolk County my whole life, except for the four years I spent in the Army. I was always athletic. In high school I played football and baseball, but off the athletic field I was shy and introverted. That was probably the result of being an only child, which made it difficult to even ask a girl for a date. So, aside from my athletic endeavors, my high school years were spent immersed in schoolwork. I graduated second in my class. I could have gone to almost any college, but since my parents didn't have a lot of money, I decided to go to the local university where I earned a BS degree in Electrical Engineering. After graduation, I joined the Army. Before starting basic training, they gave me a series of tests and told me I would be perfect for a position in Army Intelligence.

After basic they sent me to another school where I was trained as a spy. During that training, they realized I had a knack for languages, so they sent me to a school to learn Arabic. When they thought I was sufficiently proficient, I was sent to a base in Kuwait. As it turned out, I never had the chance to work on any secret missions. My job was to evaluate information supplied by the field agents.

As the end of my enlistment approached, I decided I wanted a change. The Army offered to pay for graduate school if I joined the reserve, so I agreed. After I was discharged, I went back home. My parents gave me a big "welcome home" party.

The day after the party, I went to the university to register for graduate school. It was April and classes wouldn't start until September, so I had some time on my hands. My parents had been planning to take a vacation for

some time, but didn't want to board Chester, their collie. Since I was home, I would be able to take care of him while they were gone.

They were going to drive to Maine and spend a few days at Acadia National Park. Then, they were going to drive into Canada and spend some time in Quebec before coming home. They never made it to Canada. On Interstate 95, just south of Houlton, Maine, a truck driver on the south bound side fell asleep. His truck crossed the median and hit my parent's car head on. They were killed instantly.

I suddenly found myself on my own. I had very little money and my parents had no life insurance. I consulted a lawyer in anticipation of suing the trucking company, or the driver, but the driver was an illegal alien from somewhere in Central America and didn't even have a driver's license. The company that owned the truck carried minimal insurance. The small settlement from the insurance company paid the lawyer, and there was just enough left over to give my parents a decent burial. I made a small profit when I sold their house, but I knew I was going to have to go to work instead of school.

The Norfolk County police department was looking for people, and they preferred to hire veterans. I was hired immediately as a patrolman. I worked in that position for two years and became eligible to take the examination to become a sergeant. I passed the exam, and when a sergeant's position became available six months later, I was promoted. That was four years ago.

It was my first day as a homicide detective. After receiving my promotion two weeks earlier, I decided to use up some of my unused vacation time and go on a fishing trip that I been thinking about for a long time. I had been on the job only two hours when the call came in. A male victim was found in a motel room. I got into my unmarked car and made the short drive to the Goodnight Motel. When I arrived in the room, I saw Mike Stevens, the local beat

cop, standing next to the bed. On it was a naked man, his buttocks exposed for all the world to see.

It was hard to tell the victim's age without looking at his face, but I guessed he was in his mid-forties. There were no apparent signs of violence, so I was confused about why I had been called to the scene. Before I could ask, Mike said, "Hi Frank, if you're wondering why you're here, it's because this is victim number three. Since you were on vacation for a couple of weeks, I wasn't sure you knew there were two other bodies found in the past ten days under identical circumstances."

"You're right; I don't know anything about it."

"The other two victims were found in the Stardust Motel. They were both found naked on a bed in the same pose as our current victim. In all three cases, the rooms weren't rented for the night, there was no clothing or other personal items found in the rooms, and the desk clerk had never seen the victims."

I was thinking about the case and was about to ask Mike a question, but at that moment Jill Tanner, the smart shapely county medical examiner, walked in with her assistant. She looked at me, smiled, and said, "Hi Frank, I hope you had a good vacation, because I suspect this case is going to ruin the next several weeks for you."

"Hi Jill," I responded. "I was about to ask Mike about the cause of death in the other two cases, but since you're here, please tell me what you know about our victims."

"Obviously, I haven't checked out our most current one, but both of the others were middle aged males. We haven't been able to identify either of them. We tried both finger prints and facial recognition, but there were no hits. The autopsies revealed both men died because some of their internal organs disappeared."

“Please define ‘disappeared’. I don’t understand how somebody’s organs can disappear. Were they surgically removed?”

“No, the organs weren't surgically removed. There was no indication on either victim they were cut open. In the first victim, his liver, left kidney, and right lung were gone. Our second victim was missing his heart and a substantial portion of his brain. I have no idea how the organs were removed, so I thought the word disappeared would be appropriate.”

“Okay, this is really creepy. Who has been investigating this so far?”

“The chief has been working on this himself, and he got the state police involved too. But there hasn’t been much progress made as far as I know. I’m sure the chief will dump this case on you now that you're back from vacation.”

“I haven’t seen him since I returned, but I’ll discuss the case with him when I’m at the station. Please let me know what you find out about victim number three as soon as possible,” I said as I walked out of the room.

I had no idea where to even start. None of the victims had been identified. Their naked bodies were somehow placed into locked rooms, and they died as a result of having some of their organs removed. I suddenly remembered I hadn’t asked Mike who found the body, so I turned around and started to go back to the room.

Before I got there, Mike walked out and I asked him my question.

“In all three cases, a call was received by the front desk to report a problem with the room. When somebody went to check out the problem, they found the body.”

“Can I assume the calls were placed from the rooms?”

“Yeah, but the rooms were all thoroughly checked for fingerprints and we were able to match all the prints we

found to people who worked at the motel in either maintenance or housekeeping. There were no other fingerprints, so the rooms must have been meticulously cleaned since the last guest had stayed there. Also, all the people from the motel staff who were in the room have been employed by the motel for several years. The forensics people will be here shortly. As soon as Jill is done, they'll get started."

"Thanks Mike. You know, the more I learn about this case the more confusing it gets."

I went back to my desk at the station and sat there thinking about the case. My mind was wandering. While I was sitting there I felt a tap on shoulder. Chief Mitchell, a large heavy-set man with red hair, bushy mustache, and a loud gruff voice, asked, "Did I wake you up?"

"No chief, I was thinking about this case. Jill told me you were doing the investigation yourself. Can you tell me what you found so far?"

"So far we haven't found much. We questioned the employees at both motels, but none of them could provide any additional information. The night clerk at the Goodnight Motel said that a few hours before the body was discovered, a woman called the motel and asked to be connected with the room where the victim was found. The clerk told her the room was empty and the woman hung up."

"So, you think the woman called to find out if the room was occupied? I guess that makes sense, but how did she get into the room?"

"Frank, this is your investigation now. I put you into this position in homicide because I think you're probably the most intelligent and logical person in the department. I have confidence in you and I'm sure you will figure this out." The chief smiled and walked toward his office.

I found myself deep in thought again when the phone rang. It was Jill. She said, "I think you should know our latest victim wasn't from around here. During a quick examination I found evidence of recent dental work, and the materials used haven't been utilized in the United States for twenty years. I think the only place they're still used is in Eastern Europe and Russia."

"Maybe the Russian embassy can help us identify the guy. Please send some pictures of our victim along with his fingerprints to the Russian embassy in Washington."

"I'll do that in the next fifteen minutes. As soon as I'm done with the autopsy, I'll call you."