

Looking Out

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Chapter One

Virginia Faulkner, Ginny to most everyone, was smiling. Her young rookies were all finished with their Field Training now. She had enjoyed watching the four of them graduate from the police academy then finish their training on the field.

They were a delightful group of two boys and two girls. Well, maybe she should really call them men and women. But all of the members of the Rockland Police Department were her boys and girls, at least to her they were. After all, was that not one of the privileges of being seventy-three? Most people were young to her.

Her thoughts were interrupted when her husband's longtime friend, Dean Adams, came into her library where she sat with her babies, her Giant Schnauzers.

Dean knew not to interrupt her thoughts any further until she spoke to him. But her thoughts had already been interrupted, so she looked up at him and smiled.

"Good morning Dean. I trust that you had a restful night's sleep."

He simply smiled back at her as he settled in the wingback chair beside her own.

"I didn't want to interrupt. You seemed to be so deep in your thoughts just now."

Ginny giggled softly and said, "Oh Dean, I was just thinking about how much my four rookies have matured in the last ten weeks and also how much they have learned."

She took a moment to look at Dean and think about him. As had been her Leroy, he was a year older than her and still quite the distinguished looking man who very much looked the retired doctor and hospital director that he was. He was a couple of inches taller than her own five eight and his thinning gray hair was still enough to make him dashing when combined with his mustache and goatee.

The dear man had been there for her so much in the eight years since her Leroy had gone on to be with the Lord.

Ginny was pleased when Dean seemed to be waiting for her to complete her previous thought. Good for him.

"Well, I was just thinking about how things have progressed with my first two projects as you so aptly call them."

She smiled fondly as she recalled the two romances that had occurred over the past months.

"You do know Dean that the first two projects each included one of the children who practically grew up in my home."

Dean smiled back at her. "Oh yes our own Bob Coleman and Rachel Anderson." He snickered. "It did my heart good to see the misguided plans of our illustrious mayor and the oh so dignified judge thwarted, so to speak."

Ginny giggled again. "Oh Dean, that is such a delightful way to put it. Yes, Bill Coleman and Willard Anderson did plot for years to bring Bob and Rachel together. I am just so glad that they each found someone else to love."

Ginny clapped her hands and said, "Now it is time to focus our attention on the third of our projects involving my four rookies."

“Ah yes, Ginny. I personally have been looking forward to this one. I still can’t see how you plan to bring those two together. As far as I can see, Sandy Wells and Jake Harper do not like each other at all. They always seem to be arguing about something.”

Ginny just grinned back at him and he asked, “Okay, Ginny, I know that look. You know something that I don’t know and it would probably help me immensely to understand how you plan to proceed.”

Ginny took pity on the poor man and decided to enlighten him.

“Yes, my dear Dean.” She so loved to call him that. It had such a fine ring to it. “I will tell you what caused the continuing animosity between Sandy and Jake.”

She waited until she knew she had his attention and that he was not going to speak.

“During the first week of the academy, back in January, Jake made the mistake of tripping and falling into Sandy. Then, as he tried to right himself, his hands seemed to have landed in rather inappropriate places and Sandy took offense. Then, no matter how much he apologized and tried to explain that it was an accident, she simply would not believe him.”

Dean laughed loudly. “And that has been the cause of all the arguments between them ever since?”

“Yes, it certainly has.”

“Don’t you think that it’s a little extreme for her to hold that against him for seven months?”

Ginny shook her head. “No, Dean, I do not. You see, there is something about Sandy that you do not know.” She paused to let that sink in. “You will remember that both of her parents are professors at the U of A and she literally grew up on that campus. Well, when she was still in high school, she was attacked as she was walking across the campus late one night.”

“She wasn’t ...?”

“No, thank God but she probably would have been if a campus police officer had not come along just in time.” She paused again for effect. “The police officer was a female.”

Dean leaned back in his chair and smiled to himself. “Then maybe that could explain, at least partially, why Sandy wanted to be a police officer herself?”

Ginny giggled softly again. “Yes, Dean, I would think that you are most certainly correct in making that assumption.”

They enjoyed a few minutes of companionable silence until Dean leaned toward Ginny and asked, “Are you about ready to tell me how you plan to eliminate such a challenging obstacle between Sandy and Jake in order to bring them together?”

Ginny’s giggle this time was much louder than normal. “Oh Dean, I so enjoyed our last two couples, but there was not all that much that we had to do. Those kids were going to come together sooner or later with or without our help.”

She grinned. “But I fear that will not be the case with Sandy and Jake.” She paused to collect her thoughts. “I had hoped that arranging for them to have apartments that were directly across the hall from each other, would do more than it has.”

Dean frowned. “But Ginny, how ...?”

She giggled again. “Oh Dean! Do you not recall who owns that apartment building?”

Dean laughed loudly again. “Oh yes, Ginny. I had completely forgotten that you do indeed own that building.”

She waved a hand in the air between them. Frieda saw it and stretched her head up for Ginny to scratch it. Then, of course, she had to scratch Fritz's head on the other side of her chair as well.

Ginny kept her thoughts to herself for several more minutes knowing that she had Dean so well trained that he would wait for her until she was ready to resume their conversation.

"I still think that throwing them together is going to be part of the answer to bringing Sandy and Jake together as a couple." She paused. "So, I have arranged for them to be partners now that they are off FTO."

Ginny had known Dean for over fifty years and did not think that she had ever heard him laugh as loudly and so much as he did at her little announcement.

When he finally controlled his laughter, he asked, "And when is this new arrangement due to begin?"

"Tomorrow." She smiled mischievously. "The poor dears think they are going to be on second shift again but that will not be. You see, among the officers at the Rockland Police Department, the only ones who usually want the day shift are those who want to be able to spend their evenings with their families."

Dean nodded so she continued. "Most of the officers, especially the young and single ones do not care for the day shift because they think it is too slow and full of mundane calls. They prefer the action of nights."

Dean laughed again. "So, you not only arranged for them to be partners but you also stuck them on the slower day shift so they had more time to talk."

Ginny giggled again. "You are so perceptive sometimes, dear Dean."

They both laughed at that.

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Sandy Wells was happy. She had made it through the police academy then ten weeks of Field Training. Now, she was finally going to be out there on her own. All by herself. Wow! It felt fantastic. She was now really and truly a police officer.

She was still basking in the joy of having spent the weekend with her parents in Tucson. For once, they had both come down from their academic clouds and had actually spent the entire weekend with her. She'd especially enjoyed going up Mt. Lemon with them. She always loved to do that in the summer since it was thirty degrees cooler up there than it was down in the lower desert.

Now it was Monday and she needed to go into the station to get her new assignment, her regular assignment, that is. It felt great to think that she would no longer have to worry about what her FTO wanted her to do. Now, she would be on her own out there in her own car with only the shift sergeant back at the station to tell her what to do.

She was humming as she stepped out of her apartment but then her mood took a nosedive when she saw Jake Harper coming down the hallway toward her. Why couldn't she have waited just thirty seconds longer before leaving her apartment? She was not in the mood to deal with Jake the Jerk right now.

Well, thankfully, he must have been preoccupied as well, since he merely glared at her as he opened his door and slipped into his apartment without saying a word.

Good!

That was the way she liked her confrontations with the guy, quick and painless.

By the time she made it down the stairs from the third floor to the parking lot, she was humming softly to herself again. She wasn't about to let Jake ruin her good mood.

She jumped into her pride and joy, her red Mustang, and decided to put the top down to enjoy the fresh air. After all, it was only in the eighties right then, not like the one hundred five that was forecast for that afternoon.

She was still smiling and humming when she drove through the gate into the compound behind the station. The wind felt marvelous as it blew through her short hair. That was one thing she loved about her short pixie cut. All she had to do when she parked was just run her hand through her hair once and it was back to normal again.

Once inside, she went straight to the bulletin board outside Patrol Commander Wincowski's office. She knew she was going to be assigned to the White Team now and that was fine with her. Both teams worked four ten hour shifts. Her old team, the Blue Team was on from Friday through Monday but the White team was on from Tuesday through Friday. The two teams overlapped on Friday which was usually their busiest day.

She was looking forward to having her weekends off every week. Wow! She could think of lots of things to do with those three days off every week now that she didn't have to worry about making it off FTO anymore.

She scanned the list of officers assigned to the third shift and didn't see her name. That was good, she'd been on that shift for three weeks of her FTO and had not liked it at all.

She did see Tyler Randall's name on that list though and thought that might be nice for him and his fiancée, Rachel, since she worked basically the same shift at the hospital ER.

She then began looking down the second shift list and still didn't see her name there either. But she did see Donna Parker's name on it. That was good, it would probably give her more time with her fiancé, Bob.

Finally, she looked down at the day shift list and saw her name on there. But, what in the world was going on here? She saw her name all right but there was another name next to hers which usually signified that that person would be her partner. No! It couldn't be! Jake Harper? No! Never!

She stomped over to the nearest empty desk and almost fell into the chair there. Her world had been so complete and so rosy just a few minutes ago. But now, it had collapsed around her with a loud crash that was still ringing in her ears.

She didn't know how long she sat there in a stupor that way, but she finally came out of it when she heard someone calling her name. She looked up to see Sergeant Fay Kincaid leaning over her with concern clearly showing on her face.

"Sandy, are you all right? What happened?"

Then before Sandy could clear her mind long enough to speak, Fay followed Sandy's eyes to the bulletin board and then snickered. "I guess you saw your next assignment."

All Sandy could do was nod her head and close her eyes, hoping it would all go away.

She heard a scraping sound and she opened her eyes to see Fay pulling another chair into the cubicle to sit next to her. Sandy had always liked Fay who had been one of her FTOs before Fay made sergeant. She was a little shorter than Sandy and probably around thirty.

Sandy also knew that Fay's husband had died from cancer a couple of years before.

Fay reached out and touched Sandy's arm and waited until Sandy turned her eyes on her.

"Sandy, I'm not sure how that happened or especially why it happened." She took a deep breath. "But, I do know that you and Jake Harper can't go on fighting and arguing the way you do. It's not good for department morale and could ultimately result in some sort of discipline against either or both of you."

She blew out a sigh. "Look at it this way Sandy. Maybe being together all day will allow both of you to be able to get over whatever it is that's causing these bad feelings between you two."

Sandy's mind was beginning to clear enough for Fay's words to begin to make sense.

"You mean that it will either make or break our relationship." She had to snort at that. What relationship?

"Yes, that is exactly what I'm saying." She patted Sandy on the shoulder and left as she said, "Think about it, please."

Sandy did think about it. That was all she could think about all the way home. Then as she entered her building, she hoped that she didn't run into Jake this time. She wasn't sure what she would do if she did.

Then she thought of something else. Did he know about their assignments yet? No. He couldn't have or surely he would have said something nasty to her when they met in the hallway earlier.

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Jake Harper considered himself to be a fair-minded man, and tried to show it to everyone. But when he had been walking down the hallway toward his apartment and Sandy had stepped out of her apartment almost directly in front of him, he had to think that she had planned it that way.

That was why he hadn't been able to say anything to her. He knew that if he had, it wouldn't have been good and they would have stood there arguing for too long. He'd been hungry and wanted to eat his lunch not argue with that stubborn, unforgiving woman.

He'd just finished his lunch when his cell phone rang. He looked at the caller ID and saw that it was Tyler, so he answered it.

"Hey Jake. I just got back from the station. Have you found out what your new assignment is yet? They're up on Wincowski's bulletin board."

"Nah, you said you were going in this morning, so I figured I didn't need to. Please tell me I didn't get stuck on third shift again."

"No, you didn't get stuck on third shift, I did. But I think it might work out pretty good for us since Rachel gets off at six. With me getting off at eight, we'll be able to do things together during the day or even the early evenings."

Jake waited, expecting Tyler to tell him what his assignment was so he finally asked, "Well, did you see what my assignment is?"

There was a pause on the line that was beginning to make Jake more than a little uncomfortable.

"You got the White Team, day shift."

"Man! I wanted the evening shift. After all, that's where most of the action is. But, I guess I'll get used to it after a while."

He could hear Tyler clearing his throat then and wondered what the guy wasn't telling him. He didn't have long to wait though.

"You're not going to like this Jake. But you're going to have a partner."

"A partner? Why would they do that?"

Tyler groaned then and Jake knew there was more and he definitely wasn't going to like it.

"Your partner is Sandy Wells."

"What?"

Jake felt like someone had sucker-punched him, right in the gut. All the air left his lungs in a loud whoosh.

After that announcement, Jake couldn't get off the phone quick enough. He had to do some major thinking.

The first thing that hit his mind was that he certainly hadn't left Upstate New York to come all the way out to Arizona to be treated this way. There had to be someone he could appeal this to, some way he could get out of it.

There was no way that he and Sandy Wells could be in a car together for ten hours at a time without killing each other. That was all there was to it.

Not only that, but he didn't really think Wells could hold up her end of any kind of partnership. He'd have to be constantly looking out for her as well as himself. Not good!

Then he had a thought. Ever since he'd been in this town, everybody kept telling him that Ginny Faulkner could get done anything she wanted to in the RPD. So, that's what he'd do. He'd beg her to get him out of this assignment and into another one that would be better. Anything else would be better.

Even though Ginny had given him a card once that simply had her name and her cell phone number on it, he didn't call her. He didn't want her forewarned about why he was coming and he knew she'd get it out of him on the phone if he called.

So, fifteen minutes later, he was parking in the large parking area in front Ginny's huge single-level house. He quickly made his way to the front door and knocked.

Ginny's Hispanic housekeeper opened the door for him and grinned up at him. "Miss Ginny waiting for you in the library. You know the way."

With that, she closed the door behind him and disappeared through a nearby door. He stood there for a moment wondering what in the world was going on. Ginny couldn't be expecting him ... could she?

Well, he'd never find out standing in the foyer. So, he headed for Ginny's library where he'd spent a considerable amount of time over the last several months.

Ginny was, as usual, sitting in her large wingback chair which many called her throne with her huge black dogs flanking her.

As Jake came closer to Ginny, both dogs leaned forward slightly and began to growl softly. He didn't know much about dogs but he had heard that they can sense when someone is upset and he certainly was upset.

He took a deep breath as he approached and let it out slowly in an attempt to calm down. It certainly wouldn't do for Ginny's dogs to attack him before he even had a chance to ask her to help him.

He stopped a few feet away just as Ginny reached out with both hands and patted the dogs on the head while saying, "It's okay babies. Jake is one of us. Okay?"

With that, Jake was surprised to see both dogs settle back and actually lean their huge heads on her chair arms.

"It is all right Jake. My babies will not bother anyone who is not bothering me."

He was no dummy. He knew there was a warning in that statement. So, he wasn't going to bother her. He only wanted to ask her to do a favor for him. That's all.

She motioned for him to sit, which placed him a little too close to the female dog for his comfort.

Ginny giggled then. "Oh Jake, if you could have seen your face when you walked through that door just now, you would know why Fritz and Frieda were ready to protect me."

She watched as he settled himself in the chair then she giggled again. "Jake, my boy, I am certain that you will soon see the wisdom of you and Sandy being partners."

Now, he really was messed up. She'd known he was coming so naturally she would also know that he was going to be partners with Sandy. Then, it didn't take much for her to figure that he was really ticked off about it all.

Okay, he'd better be extremely careful how he handled things from here on. He'd heard stories about how people who upset Ginny were soon history with the RPD.

He forced himself to think about what he'd have if he lost this job. Nothing! Still, it couldn't hurt to ask for her help, could it?

"Okay, Ginny, I have a feeling that since you know all about it, you even arranged for it to happen. Isn't that right?"

Ginny giggled softly like he'd heard her do hundreds of other times.

"Why Jake, I do believe that you are beginning to get the overall picture here in Rockland."

She didn't really answer his question but he knew the answer anyway. He had to try one more time though.

"Do you mean that you think it will be good for Sandy and me to be partners?"

"Oh yes, dear boy, I certainly do and if you will but give Sandy a chance, I think that she just might turn out to be quite the opposite of what you think she is."

When he just sat there with a blank look on his face, she giggled again. "After all, dear boy, aren't you quite the opposite of what Sandy thinks you are?"

That one threw him for a loop and he knew he'd be thinking about it for a long time.

He couldn't get the old girl to talk any more about him and Sandy so he left shortly afterward.

As he drove home, he wondered if Ginny was right. She couldn't be, could she?

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Sandy couldn't sit still in her dinky little apartment any longer. She had to get out and she had to talk to someone who would be sympathetic to her plight.

So, without even thinking about it, she raced down the hallway to the stairs and down to the first floor. Then she ran down to where Donna and Rachel's doors were directly opposite, just as hers and Jake's were.

When she stopped in the hallway between the two doors, she knocked on Donna's door then stepped across the hall and knocked on Rachel's door.

Both doors opened at the same time and the other girls stood there looking so much alike wearing jeans and white t-shirts. They were both five four with brown hair, only Rachel's was shoulder length and darker than Donna's long light brown hair.

Donna took one look at Sandy and pulled her inside her apartment with Rachel following close behind and closing the door.

Donna continued pulling Sandy until they reached the sofa where they plopped down together. Then Rachel sat down on Sandy's other side.

Donna finally spoke. "I take it that you found out what your new assignment is."

Sandy could only nod her head as she fought the tears. She never cried and she wasn't about to let Jake Harper push her to tears.

Rachel looked around her at Donna. "What are you talking about?"

Donna frowned and said, "Well, it seems that the powers that be down at the PD think that Sandy and Jake should be partners now on the day shift which is the slowest of the three shifts."

"Oh!"

The other two girls seemed to be waiting for her to say something so Sandy finally looked at one then the other and said, "I can't believe they would do that to us. Don't they know that we just don't get along ... at all."

She looked at Donna. "It has to be against regulations to put two rookies just off FTO together as partners. If it isn't, then it should be."

When Donna didn't say anything, Sandy was about to complain again but Rachel interrupted.

"Sandy? I would like to think that I'm your friend."

When Sandy nodded, Rachel continued. "Well, I don't know anything about police regulations or such things." She took a breath and continued. "I have known Ginny almost all of my life and I would be willing to say that she arranged this."

Sandy stared at Rachel like she'd just lost her mind and noticed that Donna was giving her the same look.

"Here, let me explain something." Rachel placed a hand on Sandy's arm. "Ginny, as both of you probably already know, has a special place in her heart for our police department and all the people in it."

They both nodded so she continued. "I also think that both of you know that Ginny has a great deal of influence over everything that happens, not only in the police department but in all of Rockland."

Sandy was beginning to see where Rachel was headed and didn't think she was going to like the destination. So she asked, "Are you saying that Ginny arranged this?"

Rachel nodded. "I certainly am."

When both Sandy and Donna started to speak at once, Rachel held up the hand that had been on Sandy's arm. They both stopped with their mouths open.

"Think about it. Donna, didn't Ginny have a great deal to do with getting you and Bob together?"

"Yes, she sure did."

"Right. And she also did a lot to bring Tyler and me together."

Donna and Rachel both looked at Sandy then when she gasped.

"You don't mean that Ginny is going to try to get Jake and me together, do you?"

Both of the others simply nodded and Donna said, "Yeah, I think I see what Rachel's getting at now and I have a feeling she's right."

"No! Never!"

Sandy could feel the tears threatening again and fought desperately against them.

Rachel took a deep breath and let it out slowly and Sandy knew she was building up to something drastic so she leaned back and waited.

"Sandy. As I said before, I'm your friend and I certainly want what is best for you." When she paused, Sandy looked over at her in anticipation.

"But I think that it would make it easier for me right now to be able to help you if I knew exactly why you and Jake don't get along. There has to be something. Did he do or say something that you didn't like? What happened?"

Rachel must have looked at Donna because she said, "Don't look at me. I'm as much in the dark about this as you are."

Sandy shook her head. She couldn't talk about this. But then she realized that if she was going to be able to survive being trapped in a car all day with Jake, something was going to have to give, one way or the other.

"Okay, I guess you're right." She took a deep breath then and let it out slowly trying to compose herself and fight off the tears at the same time.

"I think I need to tell you about something that happened to me when I was in high school. I was sixteen."

She paused to collect her thoughts. "You two remember that my parents are both professors at the U of A and were even before I was born. That's where they met. Well, I literally grew up on that campus and I was all over it at all times of the day or evening."

She blew out a sigh. "I guess I just need to say it. I was walking home one night on campus when I was attacked by two men."

She heard a sharp intake of breath from both of the other girls.

"Yes, they were going to rape me all right. They tore my clothes off but before anything else happened, a campus police officer came along and they ran off."

Rachel wrapped an arm around Sandy's shoulders and Donna placed a hand on her arm.

"Oh Sandy, that must have been horrible!"

She looked at Rachel and nodded her head. She sighed again and prepared to tell the rest.

"Well, with that in mind, you may be able to understand why I reacted the way I did to something Jake did back at the academy."

She could tell that they were both anxiously waiting for her to finish.

"Okay, it probably wasn't that big a deal but I was walking toward Jake one day and he tripped and fell into me. Well, when he tried to stop himself, he grabbed hold of me to keep from falling."

Both of the other girls leaned back and Donna said, "I think that Rachel and I can both guess where his hands went."

Sandy nodded, glad that she didn't have to spell it out for them.

Donna was the first to speak. "Did he apologize?"

"Yes, he did, but at the time, I thought that he'd taken advantage of the situation to really feel me up, so to speak."

Donna pushed more. "Do you think that now?"

She merely shook her head and frowned.

Rachel slapped her knee and cried out. "I'll bet that Ginny knows all about that."

Sandy gave her a questioning look and so did Donna. When no one said anything, Sandy said, "So, how does that change anything?"

Rachel laughed then. "Don't you see. If Ginny knows about both of those incidents and still arranged for you two to be partners, then she feels that you will be able to get over it."

That shocked Sandy so much that she couldn't talk about it anymore until she gave it a lot more thought. She stayed a few more minutes until she could gracefully leave.