

Out of My Way

Chapter One

Logan McKenzie had always thought of himself as a reasonable man. Sure, he was. How could he have made it for over twenty years with the Lakeland PD otherwise. Ha! The biggest test was spending the last fifteen years of that time working under Captain Mitchell Talbot, as a detective, then as a sergeant. Anyone who could do that deserved a medal of some kind.

But right now, his teenage daughter had just thrown him for a loop. And of course, right after she'd dropped her bomb on him, she'd left the room. Typical teenager all right.

Man! He was getting too old for this.

"Melissa!"

His shout was greeted with silence from her room. But he could hear her moving around in there from his new vantage point in the hallway outside her room.

He wasn't sure what to do next when Melissa's door opened and her face appeared in the small opening.

"Dad! You keep forgetting that I'm nineteen years old now and that makes me an adult, in case you didn't realize it."

Logan fought off the nasty remark he'd been about to throw back at her. Then he stepped back against the wall and took a deep breath.

Letting it out slowly, he said, "I know that Kiddo. It's just that I guess I didn't really understand what you were trying to tell me before."

Melissa looked like she'd been ready to keep attacking but when Logan said that, she slumped against the door frame for a moment before turning around and going back into her room. She plopped on the edge of the bed, crossed her arms, and glared at him.

Well, at least she hadn't slammed the door in his face this time. He took a chance and followed her into the room, pulling the chair away from her desk and sitting it near the bed.

Once he was sitting in the chair, he took a deep breath and let it out slowly before speaking again. "Okay, I'm ready to listen this time. Try me again."

She tried to smile at him then said, “I just said that I’ve been going to church with my friend Stacie.”

She looked around the room then back at Logan. “And I said that I’ve been saved and now I’m going to be baptized Sunday and I would like for you to be there.”

Logan thought about that for a second. He still wasn’t sure what she was talking about but he knew he needed to go along with her. Well, today was Wednesday. Surely, he’d be able to figure out what was going on with his daughter by Sunday.

He tried to smile at her when he said, “Sure, Kiddo. Just tell me when and where and I’ll be there. Haven’t I always tried to be there for you?”

Tears began to streak down her cheeks then.

“Yes, Dad, I know you have, especially since Mom died.”

Logan leaped to his feet and stepped over to pull Melissa into a hug as she stood to meet him.

Twenty minutes later, Logan was sitting at his kitchen table drinking a cup of coffee. He didn’t usually drink coffee that late in the day but he knew he’d need the caffeine for a stakeout later that night. He had a tip on a possible drug deal.

Melissa came into the kitchen and leaned over to hug him.

“I’m going to work now. Since it’s Wednesday, I should be home by ten thirty.”

“Okay, Kiddo. I’ll be gone for a while tonight, so I’ll see you in the morning then.”

When she left, Logan sat there looking into his coffee cup and thinking about how his life had come to this point. Here he was sitting alone at night. He’d never expected to be alone at forty-five. He’d thought that he and Melanie would be together forever.

Melissa had talked about God before? God! Well, he’d like to know where God had been when Melanie had wasted away and finally died from that cancer.

Melissa was all he had anymore. That was why he had panicked before when she got so mad at him. He couldn’t lose her too. And yeah, he’d known of families where teenagers got so mad at their parents that they just ran away from home.

Wait a minute! Melissa was nineteen. She was a responsible girl and as she’d said, an adult now. She was going to college and working. She wasn’t the type who would ever leave him that way.

After a few more minutes of his mind being virtually blank, he looked down at his watch. Well, enough of the bad memories. He had a job to do. He had to go break up a drug deal.

Soon, he was in his trusty old Crown Vic headed for a small park in the section of town that was mostly Hispanic. He really stuck out there in the daytime but it was going to be a moonless night and that would help him stay undetected. But of course, that was why the drug people had chosen this particular night. They wanted to be in and out of that park before anyone noticed something was going down.

But, Logan was ready for them and the rest of his squad would be too. He was scheduled to meet the others at the back of a convenience store not too far from the park.

As soon as Logan pulled his gray unmarked car into the back area, two of those new SUVs pulled into the area beside him. He frowned at those big, conspicuous units. Even though they were unmarked too, they still stuck out like a sore thumb, especially in the Hispanic section.

Oh well, as long as he didn't have to drive one of those monsters, he couldn't complain too much.

He stepped out of his car to meet with his detectives. Two stepped out of each vehicle and they all gathered around him for final instructions.

He looked around the group. His squad had been one detective short since his old partner Ernie had retired six months ago. He hadn't pushed for a replacement since he had a strong feeling that they were going to give him another female detective this time.

Well, he looked at Pam Stillwell and had to admit that the young woman with light brown skin was able to blend into almost any situation Logan sent her into. And, if he was being honest about it, she had turned out to be a fairly good detective.

The other three were Dave Norris, Larry Horton, and Mick Garcia. Dave and Larry were good detectives and because of their quite average looks they too could blend in elsewhere. Of course, Mick was invaluable to Logan in the Hispanic section. He was the one who'd come up with the tip about the possible drug deal tonight.

"Okay, guys. This is it. Everyone knows exactly where to be at all times and I don't have any last-minute changes to throw at you."

He looked from face to face in the dim light of the store's security light. "Let's go get those drugs!"

An hour and a half later, Logan was sitting in his car at one corner of the park still waiting for something to happen. From his vantage point on a side street, he'd seen nothing and he knew none of the others had either or he would have heard about it.

He was beginning to wonder if this was going to be one of the many false leads they'd had with this drug organization. In fact, there'd been several false leads over the past few months.

He didn't want to close things down just yet. Over the years, he'd developed a kind of sixth sense about these things. Right then, his gut was telling him that this was still going to happen.

Hopefully, the others would all stay put just a little longer.

Logan's eyes were beginning to get a little gritty from staring out into the darkness for so long. Finally, he saw a pickup with no lights on moving slowly down the street he was sitting on. It had a shell on the back.

He quickly slumped down to stay out of sight as the truck passed his car. Once it was past him, Logan raised his head just enough to see over the steering wheel. He kept watching as the truck turned into the park's open parking lot.

When the truck stopped, it was in the middle of the lot so that they could take off fast in any direction if they needed to.

Well, half of the deal was here. Where was the other half?

Just then, Logan could barely make out another pickup with no lights coming from the other side of the park. It too had a shell on the back. Okay, things were progressing just right. All they had to do now was wait until the two vehicles were side by side and they could surround them.

The second pickup was moving even slower than the first one. Logan kept wanting to urge it on to move faster.

Finally, the two trucks were side by side and Logan picked up his mic. "Let's go!"

The three unmarked units hit the parking lot from all three entrances at the same time and stopped with their front bumpers almost touching the trucks.

Logan flipped his mic to loud speaker and said, "Police! Don't anyone move!" Then he repeated it in Spanish.

The other four detectives and Logan jumped out of their vehicles and were pulling open the trucks' doors and opening the hatches on the shells.

Everything seemed to be going great until a shot rang out to break the stillness of the dark evening. Logan somehow knew that shot had hit flesh. He looked around the scene and when he saw Pam go down, he knew for sure.

There was only one man in each truck and Logan's other three detectives quickly put them on the ground, so Logan ran back to his car and called for an ambulance.

He was expecting some patrol units who had been assigned for backup to show up but was surprised when he saw two strange cars, which were clearly unmarked cars, come to a screeching halt behind his Crown Vic.

He knew those cars weren't LPD. But who were they? He hadn't asked the SO for help. So, that only left the Feds. Great!

Four men jumped out of the cars and the closest one was cussing a blue streak and headed straight for Logan.

Logan, still holding his weapon which was pointed at the ground, called out in a loud voice. "I'd better see four badges really quick or I'm going to start shooting."

All four of the men froze and very slowly held up their badges. Logan didn't have to be very close to know they were DEA. He'd seen those badges enough times over the years. And it always meant trouble for him every time he saw one.

"That's good. Now, don't come any closer. Turn around and get in your vehicles and get away from my crime scene. You have no reason to be here."

The guy who'd been cussing before, spoke up. "I'm afraid I have to disagree with you. We've had this little transaction scoped out for a week and were ready to take them down when you people got in our way."

Logan laughed. "That's not how I see it Fed. We're LPD and this is our turf. You want to work on our turf, you gotta clear it with us first. And I sure don't remember seeing anything come through the station lately."

By then, several patrol units and an ambulance had arrived. Logan wanted to get over there to check on Pam but he couldn't do so until he got rid of the Feds.

Logan smiled as he noticed that there were two patrol units behind the two Fed cars effectively blocking them in.

"If you don't leave right now, you'll be leaving in the back seats of those patrol vehicles."

When no one moved, Logan said, "Tell your SAC to get in touch with Sergeant McKenzie tomorrow and we'll work things out between us then."

The guy shook his head. "We don't have a SAC right now. I'm the acting SAC."

"What's your name?"

"Morrison."

"Good. If you want to work with us, then be in my office tomorrow morning at ten."

The guy cursed some more under his breath but he turned and headed back to one of the cars and the other three agents followed him.

Now. Finally, Logan could check on Pam.

He rushed over to the other side of the two drug vehicles and caught her just as they were loading her into the ambulance.

She looked up at him and said, "I'm good, Logan. Was that a bunch of Feds trying to horn in on our bust?"

Logan had to laugh. That was Pam all right. He'd come to realize that the woman was tough as nails.

"Yep. But I sent them packing." He looked down at her right leg which was bandaged. "You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm just dandy." She motioned to the EMTs. "They said it was just a flesh wound in my thigh and they patched me up real good."

"Great. I'll see you at the hospital in a little while."

Logan stood there and watched as they loaded Pam into the ambulance and kept watching until its red and blue lights were out of sight.

Then he turned to find Mick at the rear of one of the trucks. As he approached, Logan didn't need a K-9 to tell him there were about thirty bundles of marijuana under a tarp Mick had pulled back.

"Good haul, eh Sergeant?"

He slapped Mick on the back and said, “You bet. Let’s get all this down to the station and get it processed. You’re in charge. I’m going to the hospital.”

As soon as Logan pulled into the hospital emergency room parking lot, he groaned. He recognized two of the unmarked vehicles already there. One was his captain’s and the other one was the chief’s. Great! That was all he needed. He just wanted to make sure Pam was going to be okay and then go home to get some much-needed sleep. Not going to happen any time soon now.

He cringed when he entered the waiting room and immediately saw the chief with his entourage gathered around him in the far corner of the room. There was even a TV news crew there filming something that the chief was saying.

Logan stayed back from that group until the TV people finished and headed for the exit.

Just as he started that way, Chief Tony Wilson looked up and seeing Logan, called out, “Sergeant McKenzie, you’re just the man I want to talk to.”

Logan knew that wasn’t good. He had a feeling that somehow, the Feds had already gotten to the chief. And Logan could have predicted the outcome of that one. Wilson wasn’t called ‘The Willow’ around the station for nothing. He tended to lean one way or another depending on which way he felt was best for Tony Wilson, not necessarily what was best for the LPD or even Lakeland itself.

Logan stopped in front of the chief who was flanked by Commander Wiley, the Watch Commander, and Captain Talbot who was Logan’s boss in the Detective Bureau. Great! At least Wiley had always given Logan a fair shake. He sure couldn’t say the same for the other two.

“Logan.”

Logan cringed. Whenever the chief called anyone by their first name only, he was trying to get personal with them. And in Logan’s experience, that was never a good sign, especially for him.

“I just received a call from the DEA.”

Logan opened his mouth to defend himself but Wilson held up a hand between them.

“Don’t say a word. Just be in my office at 0800 tomorrow morning and we’ll meet with the DEA. Let’s see if we can’t smooth over some of the feathers you ruffled tonight. “

With that, Wilson turned to the others and ignored Logan. He took that as his cue to go check on Pam.

After Logan checked on Pam, who was in great spirits and already wanting to get out of the hospital, Logan had gone home. Melissa had been home but no sounds were coming from her room so he’d gone straight to bed and slept like the dead until six the next morning.

Melissa had come out of her room just as Logan was leaving for the station. So, they had barely greeted each other with a hug before he had to leave. But the key was that she no longer seemed mad at him. Good.

As a detective, Logan normally had flexible hours. It always depended on what he had going that day and what he’d done the day before. Especially on days when he’d been out the night before, he usually went in to the station late.

But not today. No, today he had to be in the chief’s office at eight. Logan knew that whenever he had to go to the chief’s office it could be so unpredictable. Therefore, he always dreaded it. But today’s meeting was going to include a Fed he’d held a gun on last night. It had to be bad.

There was no way of knowing how the chief would lean on this one but Logan wasn’t too sure that he would favor his own detective though.

Logan entered the front office from the long hallway that ran from the rear of the building to the front. He saw the Fed right away. He could always tell by the suit. It was light gray with a light blue tie. He couldn’t be sure that this was the guy he’d had a standoff with last night but from the angry glare he was giving Logan, it was a good bet that he was.

Before Logan reached the Fed, the chief’s door opened and Chief Tony Wilson stood there and motioned for them to come in.

Great! Logan didn’t see anyone else and knew he was sunk. Most of the other times he’d been in the chief’s office, there’d been

others, usually a commander or two but at least Captain Talbot. Not today though. It looked like it was just going to be the three of them. Not good! Nope! Not good at all!

Without a word, the chief took his place at the head of his conference table on the other side of the room from his desk. Logan quickly took a seat on the far side of the table leaving the side near the door for the Fed.

Logan had never been in the chief's office when he didn't have a small pile of papers in front of him on the table. He seldom referred to any of the papers. He usually just sat there shuffling them the whole time they talked.

After a long awkward moment, Wilson turned to Logan and said, "Sergeant McKenzie, did you or did you not hold a loaded weapon on four Federal agents last night."

"Yes sir, I did. But they came flying up out of the dark right after one of my detectives had been shot during a drug bust. I couldn't tell who they were at first. I had to protect myself and my people."

Logan almost smiled at how red Morrison's face had turned. Good.

The chief turned to Morrison. "Why were you in that park last night Agent Morrison?"

Morrison kept giving Logan a dirty look for a few seconds longer, then turned to Wilson and said, "We had a tip that a drug drop was going down in that park last night."

He turned another dirty look on Logan. "And we were just about to close in on the drop when his people got in the way."

"Wait a minute here, Agent Morrison. I think you've got that a little backwards. We were doing our job in our city when you got in our way."

He put emphasis on each time he said 'our.'

Morrison began shouting back at Logan as they both came up out of their seats.

Chief Wilson pounded his fist on the table and yelled, "Gentlemen, stop your arguing right now." After he glared at each one, he said, "Now if you will both sit back down, I think we can come up with a workable solution."

When Logan and Morrison both sat back down, Wilson turned to Morrison and asked, "Are you willing to work with us on this case to put this drug operation out of business?"

Logan didn't like the sound of that at all. He looked at Morrison and was somewhat relieved to see that he didn't seem to like it any better. Good.

Morrison reached out and grabbed a glass of water that was sitting in front of him. After taking a long drink, he said, "Our current leadership frowns on sharing our info with other agencies."

Logan was almost proud of Wilson when that seemed to make him mad. He stared at Morrison for a long moment before responding.

"Then I see no need for this meeting to continue any longer Agent Morrison."

No one moved or spoke. Each one was staring down, either at his hands, the way Logan and Morrison were, or at the stack of papers the way the chief was.

Finally, Morrison spoke. "Maybe there's a way we can do something."

Wilson smiled and said, "I'm listening."

Morrison took another drink and said, "We can share some of our intel on Marshall's organization, but I don't think we can actually work with your people side by side, so to speak."

The chief looked at Logan. "Can you work with that Sergeant McKenzie?"

"I'm not sure sir. It all depends on what he means when he says some intel."

The chief didn't speak but looked back at Morrison.

Ignoring Logan, Morrison continued looking at the chief.

"Well, Chief Wilson, since we don't have a SAC at the moment, anything I might agree to could be changed once we do get one. So, I don't feel like I can truly say how much and how far we can cooperate."

The chief stood then and said, "In that case, Agent Morrison, I think that we are wasting our time right now. Get back to us when you do have a new SAC."

Logan and Morrison both stood then and Morrison started for the door. When he reached the doorway, Chief Wilson said, "And by the way Agent Morrison. The next time you show up the way you did last night, you'd better identify yourself immediately."

He looked down at the papers in his hands as Morrison opened the door. But Wilson wasn't finished yet. He gave the Fed a small smile.

"If I'd been where McKenzie was last night, you'd probably be in the morgue right now."

Logan wanted to get out of that office quick, before Wilson had a chance to change his mind.

As Logan passed him on his way to the door, Wilson touched Logan's arm.

"By the way Logan, I didn't just say what you think you heard me say. Do I make myself clear?"

Logan couldn't help the grin that spread across his face then. "Yes Sir. You've made yourself perfectly clear. And may I add this? Thank you, Sir."

The chief laughed loudly then and said, "Get out of here. But don't think that you're totally in the clear on this little incident. I have a feeling that we're going to have to work a lot more closely with those guys. I've heard a rumor that their next SAC is going to be one who is quite progressive for a Fed."

With that, Logan escaped the chief's office and made his way up to his office as quickly as he could. He wasn't about to talk to anyone on the way either.