

Dangerous Consequences

Chapter One

Judge Carla Sutherland caught herself daydreaming and realized that she'd been sitting at her desk doing nothing for the last ten minutes.

She knew what was bothering her. She was starting a new murder trial today. Not that she hated murder trials. It was just that she had a difficult time with them. The worst ones were the ones where all the evidence against the defendant was circumstantial. That always meant that she would have to rule on the admission of each piece of evidence, one by one.

Those trials always took much longer than she thought they should. She hated long, drawn out trials.

She really thought the prosecution had a weak case and wondered how it would turn out. She knew most of the outcome depended on how well the prosecution presented their case and how the jury looked at the evidence.

Well, enough procrastinating. She needed to go through her mail then start on reviewing the file on that new murder case before she went into her courtroom to begin it. She always did that at the beginning of each day. Then she would go over the larger file again before leaving that afternoon.

Half way down the stack of mail, she found a plain envelope with no return address only her courthouse address.

Without touching it, she looked at it carefully. It felt lumpy and upon closer inspection; she realized that the envelope was of an odd shape. She picked up her phone to call her secretary.

Ana Maria Garcia was secretary and receptionist for Carla and three other judges whose chambers were in a square with Ana Maria's desk in the middle.

"Ana Maria, could you ask Bernie to come in here, please?"

She sat there, not moving, staring at the envelope until there was a knock on her door.

Bernie Young, the bailiff, stepped in when she called out for him to do so.

"What can I do for you Your Honor?"

Carla pointed at the bulky envelope. "I'm not sure I want to open that thing. What do you think Bernie?"

Bernie stepped up to her desk and leaned over so he could scrutinize the envelope without touching it.

Without leaning back up, he looked at Carla. "I would say we need to clear the area and call in the bomb squad."

She was already rounding her desk and heading for the door.

"It might be nothing, but we'd better have them check it out."

Carla led the way out into the reception area where Ana Maria and Bernie had their desks. Like Ana Maria, Bernie served the other three judges too.

Bernie leaned over his desk and grabbed the phone.

While he was calling it in, Carla stepped over to Ana Maria's desk. The poor woman was getting a frightened look on her face.

"Ana Maria. Are any of the other judges in their chambers?"

“No Ma’am, they all have early court times.”

“Good. We need to leave the area. There is a suspicious envelope in my mail and Bernie is calling in the bomb squad to have them come check it out.

“Oh my!”

Ana Maria, a grandmotherly woman in her early sixties leaped to her feet and followed Carla out the door.

Several county deputies met them before they made it to the stairway. They must have already been in the building.

She and Ana Maria went down the stairs as the deputies went into each office to evacuate them. Soon, there were about thirty people standing around in the front lobby downstairs.

Carla wondered if they were safe enough since they were still in the building. But there were quite a few walls and the ceiling between them and the letter.

Ten minutes later, four deputies came through the front door and hurried around the security checkpoint to the stairs. They were all heavily armed and covered with armor.

She said a silent prayer for their safety as they did their job.

Then she stood there listening to the halted conversations going on around her. Everyone was speculating if the letter held a bomb or not.

Carla almost laughed at the preposterous scenarios she heard thrown out around her.

A long ten minutes passed before the bomb squad sergeant came out the stairway door and he seemed to be searching for someone.

Carla stepped out from the crowd. “I’m Judge Sutherland. Are you looking for me Sergeant?”

He gave her a brief smile. “Yes, I am Your Honor. Could you come with me back to your chambers? It’s safe now.”

He spoke loudly to address the rest of the group. “It’s all clear. You can all go back to your offices now.”

Carla followed him up the stairs and back down the hall toward her chambers.

When they reached the reception area, she observed the rest of the bomb squad gathered around the work table leaning over it.

They all stepped aside as the sergeant motioned for Carla to join him at the side of the table.

There on the table, she saw the envelope spread open and several small metal objects with wires attached to them were lying next to it. Her eyes drifted to an index card sized piece of paper lying next to the metal objects. She quickly read the large block letters.

NEXT TIME IT WILL BE REAL!

She caught her breath and looked up at the tall sergeant who was watching her closely.

He nodded his head toward the table. “It was a bomb all right, but it wasn’t armed.”

Just as she was trying to figure out which question to ask first, she heard a commotion at the doorway. She turned to look as Sheriff Harris and Chief of Police

Ryan both stepped into the room, arguing as they came. That didn't surprise her at all.

She took command of the situation.

"Gentlemen, why don't we go into my chambers where we can sit and discuss this situation properly."

It surprised and pleased her when they both followed her. The bomb squad sergeant came too.

As soon as they were all situated, Harris and Ryan argued again over whose jurisdiction this was.

Carla raised her voice. "Gentlemen. Frankly, I don't care whose jurisdiction this is. Apparently, someone has threatened my life and I would hope that both of you could use the various resources of your respective departments to find out who sent this threat."

When the two men didn't speak but continued to glare at each other, Carla turned to the sergeant.

"Sergeant. Please fill us in on the situation as you see it"

The sergeant looked at his boss, the sheriff who nodded his head back at him.

"It's wired like an actual bomb but minus the explosives."

"Would you consider this to be a real threat then?"

"Yes ma'am, I would."

* * *

Coach Forrest Jenkins sat in his office in the locker room. He should feel great. He had the best job an old jock like him could hope for and everyone predicted his football team would go to state this year.

But he couldn't get out of the funk he'd been in all week long. Today was the first day of school and he'd get to practice his team starting with sixth hour now. Great. He should be happy.

He didn't have to think much about why he was in this mood. He'd found a bag behind one of the trash cans out in the locker room. He didn't know much about drugs, but he thought it was meth. What was that stuff doing in his locker room?

The shrill sound of his desk phone ringing interrupted his thoughts. When he answered, it was the principal's secretary.

"Coach. Mr. Hernandez wants to see you in his office right away."

"What's going on Joan?"

She lowered her voice. "I don't know but a police detective is in there with him."

"And they want to see me?"

"Yes. He said he'd explain it to you when you get here."

Before he could hang up the phone she added. "You'd better hurry, I haven't seen Mr. Hernandez this upset in a long time."

Forrest looked down at the bag on his desk. He slipped it in his desk drawer, locked his office door and took the long walk up the hallway to the principal's office. As he walked, he couldn't help but run lots of things through his mind. Why would a police detective be in the principal's office and why did they want to talk to him?

He knew he had done nothing wrong. He hadn't even had a traffic ticket since he was a teenager. He tried to go the speed limit, and he never frequented bars or anything like that. He knew they were trouble magnets and besides as a teacher and coach, he needed to set a good example for his kids.

Then it hit him. One of his players was in trouble. That hit him hard. Then he thought of the bag in his desk. No! It couldn't have anything to do with drugs. Could it?

All the rest of the way to the office, he tried to think of who it might be.

When he stopped at Joan's desk, she pointed at the principal's closed door.

"He said to go on in when you get here."

Forrest knocked lightly on the door before opening it. He didn't know what he'd expected to see when he finally saw the detective, but he didn't expect the tall woman with short red hair and freckles across her nose and cheeks.

She almost looked like a student at first. Then he looked down at the badge and gun on her belt. She was for real all right.

Hernandez spoke first. "Forrest, this is Sergeant Cantrell with the Stillwater Police."

He saw her hand coming at him and could barely meet it half-way to shake it. He was still in shock from the whole situation.

They all sat down, and Forrest noticed the two visitor chairs in front of the principal's desk were turned slightly so everyone could see each other without having to turn their heads.

Forrest tried to size up the woman without her noticing but every time he looked her way, she caught him and stared him down.

Finally, Hernandez cleared his throat and placed both hands on his desk.

"Forrest, I'm afraid that Sergeant Cantrell has disturbing news to tell you."

He looked at the woman and nodded his head.

She leaned back in her chair and continued to study Forrest for a long moment.

"Coach Jenkins, I won't beat around the bush. We have arrested the older brother of one of your football players and we suspect the younger brother may be involved too."

Forrest felt like someone had belted him in the gut. He couldn't breathe for a few seconds. His first thought was that he hoped it wasn't one of his key players. But then he wanted to kick himself for having that selfish thought.

One of his boys was in trouble and he should try to help the kid, not worry about his team's chances at the playoffs.

"Who is it?"

She looked at Hernandez who cleared his throat again.

"First, we need to caution you, Forrest, that nothing said in this room can leave it. Do you understand?"

He nodded his head, but the cop gave him a hard look.

"Yes, I understand."

The detective studied him for a moment.

"We arrested Kurt Goodman for possession of drugs with intent to sell."

Forrest wasn't surprised about Kurt. He'd been a bad apple throughout his high school years. Then it hit him. His younger brother, Shawn, was Forrest's starting tight end. No! Shawn wouldn't do anything like that, would he?

The sound of the sergeant's voice brought Forrest out of his thoughts abruptly when he realized she was talking to him. He'd better listen.

"Coach Jenkins. I have a search warrant on its way here right now to search Shawn Goodman's school locker and his P.E. locker."

Forrest leaned back as if someone had hit him. What? Could they do that? One look at Hernandez told him she could, and Hernandez would help her too.

Man! What was going on here?

"Do you have to do that in the middle of a school day?"

"Yes, I'm afraid I do. In fact, I think it's the best time to do it. If Shawn Goodman is dealing here at the school, there should be drugs in one of his lockers right now."

Forrest blew out a sigh. "Okay. What do you want me to do?"

"First, I want you to go with Shawn and me to get him to unlock his lockers, so we can search them."

He didn't like the sound of that. He figured that wasn't all she wanted him to do.

"Then after that, we would like for you to give us access to your practice this afternoon with no one knowing who we are."

He couldn't think but he knew he needed clarification.

"How many people are we talking about?"

She smiled at him then. "Just my partner, Detective Helen Wright and me."

When he spoke, she interrupted him. "We won't be wearing badges or guns, so the team won't know who we are."

Forrest looked at Hernandez. "Do I have a choice?"

Hernandez shook his head.

"Okay. I guess I can be ready whenever you are Sergeant."

There was a knock on the door and the secretary stuck her head in.

"The other detective is here now."

They all stood, and Sergeant Cantrell looked at Forrest. "Let's go."

When they stepped out of the principal's office, Forrest saw a scared looking Shawn Goodman sitting in a chair near Joan's desk.

Shawn must have known what was going on for he stood and followed Forrest and the detectives out the door and down the hall to his locker.

Once there, Shawn unlocked the locker and stepped back. Forrest held his breath until Sergeant Cantrell stood back up and frowned. "Let's go to the locker room now."

She had obviously not found anything in the first locker. Forrest was hoping the same would be true with his other locker.

There was no one in the locker room when they entered. Good. After Shawn opened his locker for them, it didn't take the detectives long to realize that there was nothing there for them either.

Forrest breathed a huge sigh of relief as he turned to Sergeant Cantrell who waved her hand at Shawn.

"You can go back to class now."

As soon as Shawn left, Forrest sighed and turned to the sergeant. "I have something in my office I need to show you."

They followed him inside where he pulled out his drawer and retrieved the bag. When he placed it on the desk, both detectives leaned over it.

"That's meth. Where did you get it Coach?"

He didn't want to look at the sergeant but did. "I found it this morning behind one of the trash cans out there in the locker room."

Sergeant Cantrell stepped up to him. "Our search warrant doesn't cover the rest of the locker room but if you give us permission, we can search it but not any of the locked lockers."

He frowned. "Go ahead. I don't want this stuff in my locker room."

* * *

Even though Carla had expected the bomb squad sergeant to tell them that the threat was real, it still hit her hard. She had always worked diligently at being as fair to all parties as she could. Who would be so angry with her to threaten her life?

She had to stop that line of thought. It would never get her anywhere. Besides, she was thinking like a judge. She had to remember that she had been a prosecutor for fifteen years before she'd become a judge. That was probably when the one behind the threat became angry with her. She had put many criminals in prison during that time. Any one of them might want revenge.

Before any of the others spoke, Carla looked at the two men who headed up the two police organizations in the county. "I will expect you two to cooperate in a joint effort in finding this person or persons and bring them to justice."

Still nothing from either one.

"And I expect you to cooperate fully with each other."

She paused for effect. "And if you don't, I wouldn't want to be you if you ever set foot in my courtroom again."

She glared at each of them one at a time. "Do I make myself clear?"

They both spoke at once. "Yes, Your Honor."

"Okay then." She turned back to the sergeant. "Is there anything else you need from me Sergeant?"

"No, Your Honor."

As he was leaving, she spoke to the chief and the sheriff again.

"I will have my secretary pull any files that resulted in convictions of defendants who may wish to do me harm."

Sheriff Harris spoke first. "We should go back to before you were a judge. As an ACA, it would have been easier for you to make enemies."

"You are correct. I'll see what we can do in that area as well."

They left then, and she hid her smile until they were out the door. They sure hadn't left as loudly as they'd entered. Good.

After the two men were gone, Carla stood in the middle of the room staring at the door that was still open. She didn't like the way they left. True, they weren't arguing anymore but, were they going to work together? Or would they conduct separate investigations and not share with each other?

She wracked her brain for a way to get them to cooperate. She didn't think her little threat had fazed either one of them especially since she'd never had either one of them in her courtroom.

She didn't know Chief Ryan well since he'd only been the chief for four months and had come from the Phoenix area to take the job. So, she wasn't sure how he might act.

Now, Clayton Harris was a different story. She almost let a giggle escape. She knew Clayton. At least she had before he left to join the Phoenix Police Department. Even though he was eight years older than her, their parents had been good friends. He had always teased her unmercifully. To think she'd even had a teenage crush on him for a while. But that was before she grew up and learned a lot more about men.

Again, she had to remind herself to stop procrastinating and get to work. She had a trial starting in fifteen minutes.

She was back behind her desk when her phone rang. It was the intercom and when she answered it, Ana Maria told her that a Detective Wright was there to see her about a search warrant.

There was a soft knock on the door.

"Come on in Detective."

When the detective stepped inside, Carla tried not to show her surprise. She'd never met this detective before and wasn't sure if she was with the city or the county. Then she remembered that Stillwater PD had a black female officer. This must be the one, and she must have made detective.

She looked down at the gold shield on the detective's belt and had her answer. Stillwater PD.

"I don't think we've met before Detective."

She stepped around her desk with her hand out. They shook, and Carla returned to her desk chair.

"Have a seat. Can I assume that you have recently made detective?"

"Yes, Your Honor, first of May."

"Well congratulations. What can I do for you today?"

The detective looked uncomfortable.

"Relax Detective. No matter what you may have heard about me, I don't bite."

The other woman laughed nervously but still didn't speak up to tell Carla what she wanted.

"Please, Detective. I assume that Sergeant Cantrell sent you here."

"Yes, Your Honor."

"Well then. What kind of warrant do you need?"

Detective Wright breathed deep again. "Actually, I need two search warrants. The first one is for the residence of a Kirk Goodman. We arrested him with a substantial amount of meth in his car."

Carla liked to keep the warrants separate when possible.

"Okay, who and where?"

When Detective Wright told her, Carla jotted down notes for Ana Maria, so she could make it out for her signature.

"What is the other one?"

Wright frowned then and seemed unsure of herself again.

“This one is a little different. We suspect Goodman’s younger brother as well and would like a warrant for his two lockers at the high school.”

Carla leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. She had to think about this one for a moment.

“Why at school?”

“We think Shawn Goodman is selling at the high school.”

“When do you plan to do your search?”

“As soon as I can get to the school with the warrants. Sergeant Cantrell is out there right now meeting with the principal and the football coach.”

Carla needed to think about the school one a little more.

After a long moment in thought, she made more notes and handed them to the detective. “Please take this out to my secretary and she’ll get the residence one ready. I need to think a moment about the school one.”

When the detective came back in, Carla had decided. She didn’t want drugs in the school where Bruce was a student. She jotted down the notes for Ana Maria on the school warrant and handed them to the detective.

After Detective Wright left, Carla forgot about her trial folder. She was so upset that there could be drugs going around in Bruce’s school and even in his locker room.

Bernie knocked three times on her door which was their signal that the lawyers and jury were in place in the court room.

She shook her head to clear everything else out of her mind as she took her robe off the clothes rack and put it on.

Well, she was as ready as she would get.

* * *

Forrest was watching the horseplay of some of his football players. He was sitting behind his desk watching through the glass that separated his office from the locker room.

He couldn’t keep his mind off the drugs he’d found that morning. He couldn’t believe Shawn was involved. He was thankful the detectives had found nothing else in the locker room that morning.

He had to get his mind on his team now. Practice was about to start, and he had to give it all of his attention.

He stood, picked up his ever-present clipboard, and made his way through the locker room to the outside door. Once there, he turned to face the room, placed his whistle to his lips and blew two short blasts.

“Outside! Let’s get this practice going. Now! Move it!”

Forrest stepped aside to let his players storm past him toward the practice field on the other side of the stadium. As he stepped outside, he glanced at the other back door to the main building and saw two women teachers going in that door.

It was easy to recognize Lisa Sherman’s long red hair hanging down her back. That was one fine looking woman and best of all, she’d agreed to go out to dinner with him tonight. Great!

Just before she disappeared through the doorway, she glanced his way and gave him a little finger wave.

Forrest couldn't wait for tonight. He hadn't been on a date for months and didn't even feel bad about breaking his own personal rule of not going on weeknight dates during football season. He'd told himself it was okay since the season hadn't started yet. Their first game wasn't until the twenty-second, a week and a half away.

He couldn't help noticing the two detectives standing at the end of one of the end zones of the practice field. They were trying to blend in with some other observers, mostly parents. Good.

Before practice had gone more than half an hour, Forrest was sweating and took off the blasted dress shirt the school forced him to wear during school hours. He was much more comfortable in a t-shirt. Even though they were at around three thousand feet elevation in Stillwater, it still got hot on an August afternoon.

They'd gone through their warm-ups and were ready to work now. They weren't near as ready for their first game as he wanted them to be. He didn't like the schedule this year. They had always had easy opponents for their first game or two. But no, not this year. They were playing the team they beat by one point last year to advance to the state playoffs. Not good.

He watched as his assistant coach, Wally Ingram, set up an offense and defense for a scrimmage.

After watching each of the other players individually for a short time, Forrest turned his attention to his senior quarterback, Bruce Sutherland. Bruce had been a good quarterback last year, but Forrest was sure the kid would become a great one this year. That was, if he could stay healthy.

That was the greatest fear of any coach. Here, his fear was real. Bruce's older brother, Joel, had been a great quarterback too. He had been well on his way to playing for a major university when he blew out his knee at the end of his senior year.

Now poor Joel was just another student at ASU, not the football star he should have been.

Suddenly, Forrest felt like someone kicked him in the gut. He wanted this for Bruce so bad. He liked the kid. Bruce reminded him of himself at that age. In fact, Bruce was the same size that Forrest had been back then and still was today.

At six-two, Bruce wasn't tall by pro standards anymore, but he could make up for it with his powerful arm.

All too soon, practice was over, and the boys were trudging toward the locker room. Forrest remained sitting on the sideline bench and looked up to see Bruce stop in front of him.

As soon as he saw the boy's face, Forrest could tell that something was bothering him. He waited to see if Bruce would tell him without him having to ask.

After a long moment, Bruce sighed and dropped to the bench beside Forrest. He set his helmet on the ground in front of him and looked out across the practice field.

"Coach?"

Forrest waited.

"How does a guy like me go about making sure he doesn't get injured and still play a good game?"

It pleased Forrest, and he even felt honored, that Bruce was asking him the question that most boys asked their dads. He knew Bruce's dad had died when the boy was very young, and he had grown up without a father figure. Forrest had noticed that same thing when he'd had Joel on his team.

Sure, their mom had always been a staunch supporter of not only her sons but the whole team. She was at every game even if it was as far away as Tucson or Flagstaff. She even came to a lot of their practices too.

He knew she was a judge and had to be a busy person, but she always seemed to take time for her sons. Even though Forrest avoided that kind of high class woman, he had to admire her for some things like how she was always there for her sons.

Back to the question.

"I would say the worst thing you can do is to think about it too much. You can't play if you're always afraid that you'll get injured. In my book that's the quickest way to get injured."

"But how do I keep from thinking about it? I don't want to end up like Joel."

No. Forrest didn't want that either but what could he say to reassure the boy? Then he thought of some material he had in his office about concentration and how to direct your thoughts where you wanted them to go.

Forrest leaped to his feet and turned to look down at Bruce. "Okay. Let's go into my office. I have some things I think you can use to help keep your thoughts away from all that negative stuff."

As they walked toward the locker room, Bruce stopped and looked at Forrest.

"You mean motivational stuff?"

"No. This isn't the same stuff we throw at you guys all the time. This is more for concentration and direction. You'll see when you get into it. Okay?"

Ten minutes later, Forrest watched the now encouraged young man leave his office with a book and a folder in his hands. He felt good about his time with Bruce.

Now, as he sat down at his desk, he could concentrate on his date with the hottest teacher at Stillwater High School.