

Gold weighed heavier on Detective Second Class Adolph Anderson's mind than Sonja Maria Sanchez's squeaky and faltering alto intonation. The temporary suppression of his gag-reflex choking to the greasy bacon aroma that her apartment's spinning ceiling fan blades whipped into a swirling four-directional smell, settling like a loose noose loop on his collarbones, diverted his effort to decipher her choppy English. Rather than asking her to repeat, he pressed his left elbow into her living room recliner's cracked vinyl armrest as he rotated his cocked left ear toward her in faked rapt attention. Behind his well-practiced facial facade, his skeptical police mind wandered to how he'd solve a week-old bar shooting homicide as Sonja Maria's voice projection dipped into the threadbare diamond-patterned carpet.

She hesitated twice without Adolph prompting or encouraging her to continue. The seething, curdling waste-of-time anger churning in the pit of his stomach wasn't totally because of her. He'd given that dubious honor to Bridgetown Police Chief Ronald Howard who'd ordered him on this wild goose chase.

He left the notebook in his left hand closed as Sonja Maria described the vague deportation threat, her physical damsel-in-distress cowering, and her feared sexual assault. Her droopy, glistening lower eyelids combined with her rubbed-red calloused fingers didn't distract his chomping-at-the-bit for an exit strategy that wouldn't rile her to file a citizen's complaint. After eight years of desk-based crime investigation that had followed ten years of discarding shoes whose soles had been scraped holey by walking a Bridgetown, Iowa, beat, his numbing brain had heard Ms. Sanchez's fuzzy TV-drama scenario too many times to count.

He'd already scribbled notes detailing her visible lack of bruises on her forehead, chin, arm, and the below-the-knee skin of her rail-thin frame. "So, you didn't go to the hospital?" Why he delayed his departure with an objectively answered question, Adolph couldn't fathom. He'd

called the hospital to learn no admission record existed for Sonja Maria Sanchez, the name she'd given him and, thus, no traceable rape kit evidence. *Wouldn't take an armchair genius*, he thought, *to determine that any effort he spent trying to nail this gossamer suspect wouldn't enhance his jury-verified reputation for jailing criminals*. With his chance for a gold shield needing a high percentage of cases closed, he planned to administratively deep-six this investigation as fast as he could without risking charges of insubordination or dereliction of duty. What Ms. Sanchez said and didn't say in the last twenty minutes failed to disclose the quintessential crime-solving clue required by him to jerk the heretofore-camouflaged conviction straw from the community's haystack of suspected criminals.

While he dallied in lifting the position-control lever on the side of Sonja Maria's recliner, he didn't express a new gripe that surely the late morning August sun would be, as he sat, superheating the interior humidity of his locked Monte Carlo parked on the street into ready-to-drip perspiration. He twisted his right hand to massage relaxation into his chin muscles. He hoped the gesture would radiate thoughtfulness, similar to a local judge's gesture performed before letting guilty vermin free with probation, rather than locking their butts into a well-deserved jail cell. "Hmm. You've got that right." His manufactured empathy fatigued his caffeine-starved brain. Adolph's mounting disgust for this colossal waste of time splashed in his stomach like a limestone brick plunging into the surface of a nearby backwater river pool.

If Adolph abandoned logical reality and believed the story behind the streaking tears, choked words, and pregnant pauses, Sonja Maria, a hard-featured woman who'd celebrated her thirty-fifth birthday the previous month, had been overpowered and/or drugged by an unknown attacker and raped at St. Mary's, a local college populated by scores of comely co-eds. And, acting like an unfeeling hooligan facing a victim whose cheeks dripped pitiful tears, Adolph, by

having this loving mother repeat the alleged sordid details into a mini tape recorder, renewed her inner being torture and enhanced her scarred memory. While true he strove day and night to keep his town that included his high school daughter and arthritis-disabled wife safe, it was guaranteed that, if he bent a legal rule or two, he dismissed the transgression as necessary to remove another scumbag from city streets. To ensure Bridgetown's security, and earn a longed for gold shield, he said to Sonja Maria he needed to go and would call her if more info needed.