

Unwanted Family
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Preface

June 12

Two paramedics rushed the young, black-haired woman in through the emergency room doors.

“We have an unconscious, 20-year-old female, shotgun wound to the abdomen and head trauma!”

“Get the trauma team!” Doctor Callahan called to the intern on duty as he directed them into emergency room number two.

After a quick analysis of her condition, he ordered, “Prep her for surgery – STAT!”

Chapter 1

June 8

Although Rudy Burke was in his sixties, he was fit. He had to be to continue working safely as a private investigator. His wife, Georgia, had convinced him to dye his graying black hair last year, but he grew it out again, deciding it was too much trouble to keep it up. Although the returning gray temples were back, that was less important than ease of maintenance. Thus, he kept it short, in a butch cut. Most people never guessed his mixed racial background, and he called himself a mutt. He dressed casually most of the time, preferring blue jeans and a polo shirt and, of course, quiet shoes.

Clutching his briefcase, he walked in through the side door of the old warehouse as instructed. Coming in from the bright sunlight, it took a moment for his eyes to adjust to the dark expanse. A black man in faded coveralls and several days of stubble shut the door he’d just entered and frisked him. After he checked Rudy’s ID and examined the contents of his briefcase, he led him through several rooms. Rudy saw several other men in the room, and Roy Jackson stood to the right. Rudy nodded, wondering what had caused the anxious look on Roy’s face. Since Rudy had done some less than legal actions in his past, he became worried that the Feds found out.

Rudy had been working with Roy for some time now. With Roy being a detective, Rudy thought their arrangement had been perfect. But when Rudy discovered Roy’s involvement in a corrupt incident from over three years ago, things changed. At first, Rudy had trusted Roy with his life. But now, after learning what Roy did – even though Rudy knew Roy had a good heart – he would always have nagging doubts about his choices. Rudy had insisted that Roy go to the Feds, confess, and make a deal for the two of them to work at bringing down the powerful syndicate that had infected the city of Portland. Rudy hoped the deal would get Roy a lighter sentence out of it. They both knew there was no guarantee, but working with the Feds would certainly have a better outcome than getting caught.

Of course, Rudy’s grandniece, Callie Cooper, broke off her engagement with Roy when he finally told her what he did. As she put it, “It’s bad enough that he was dishonest, but I can’t be with someone I can’t trust.” For Roy, that was the hardest part of this whole mess.

So here Roy stood wearing civilian clothes, short sleeved shirt, blue jeans, and running shoes in the warehouse. Since he had arranged this meeting between Rudy and the Feds, his demeanor didn't fit. His green eyes seemed distraught, and he ran his fingers through his dark brown hair. His six-foot frame seemed weak and unsteady as he shifted his weight from one foot to the other. Something was wrong, and Rudy wondered if their "deal" had fallen through.

A bearded man with a ruddy complexion, cautious brown eyes, and bushy eyebrows stood up to shake hands. "Rudy Burke?"

"Yeah, that's me." Rudy shook his hand and looked him over. He figured the man was wearing a disguise. As he headed towards the back of the warehouse with Burke, another man joined them. Rudy got another glimpse of Roy. Something wasn't right.

"Special Agent Brooks here. Let's talk as we walk." He headed for the back end of the warehouse.

"Isn't Roy going too?"

"No ..."

Since Roy was so crucial in getting everything started, Rudy wondered why he wouldn't be included. The thought that Roy might be charged and go to prison after all made Rudy's stomach churn. Poor Roy, he had worked so hard to try to make up for what he did, and now this. When he thought about how he had convinced Roy to work with the Feds, he felt nauseated that he would be responsible for Roy being put away.

Brooks added quietly, "... he's our bait."

"What do you mean?"

"The mob thinks he wasn't discovered in the clean-up of the police station. So, we're going to be ready when they contact him for more bribes ... the bait."

Rudy nodded solemnly. *No wonder he's nervous.* "So, what do we do now?"

"First, we want to thank you for that collection of new evidence. We're working to overturn all the cases where wrongly convicted people were sentenced to prison. And we're working on the evidence to arrest the actual guilty parties in all those cases."

On impulse, Rudy laughed aloud and raised his hand for a high five.

Brooks responded enthusiastically.

"You moved pretty fast. What happened?"

"The tech guy at the station, Maxwell – you called him Todd?"

"Yeah. What about him?"

"Sang like a canary. We convinced him that his slight build and pretty-boy looks would make him a target for predators in prison. He showed us money trails and ratted out the captain, confirming the captain's connections. Then, when the captain realized there was no escape, he asked for protective custody and relocation in exchange for what he knows about his contacts with the syndicate and his testimony against the Governor." Brooks turned left and started up the stairs.

"What about the Governor?"

"He isn't cooperating – won't say a thing."

"I'd say it's probably because he's family."

Brooks paused at a landing, apparently to digest that information. "Well, with all the evidence that came out against him at the trial, his permanent residence will be federal prison. And he'll still go to trial for the murder of the man he stole the identity from twenty years ago. Remember that box of evidence you gave us? One of the pieces of evidence turned out to be the murder weapon – even had the governor's prints on it. So, I'd say he'll be locked away for a long

time. The DA is pushing for life on that one.” He patted Rudy’s shoulder as he shook his hand. “Thanks for getting that to us. We were suspicious of several of his crimes for a long time, but the murder was a total surprise and the tie-in.”

“So, do you want me to tell you the rest of what I know?”

Brooks reached the third floor and opened the door to a hallway, which apparently held offices. “We’ll get to that. We’d like you to work with a stool pigeon that has inside information. We’ve already interrogated him, but we’ll record as you two collaborate. With his information and yours, we’ve already been able to arrest those four dirty cops at the precinct.”

“The captain, Novak, Harrison, and Maxwell, right?”

He nodded.

“I don’t know how much this stool pigeon told you, but what Detective Jackson and I told you should be plenty to get them put away for a long time.”

“True, but our stool pigeon had details that glued everything together.”

Rudy really wanted to know who this informant was and what other information he told them. “Just for my own curiosity, and if you can tell me, I’d like to know what charges and evidence you’ve got on them.”

“So far, it’s tampering with evidence, interfering with a police investigation, aiding and abetting a felony, and obstruction of justice – several counts each. And we aren’t even done yet.”

Rudy smiled.

Brooks opened the last door on the left where Roy and two other men were inside. He acknowledged them with a slight nod. “As Detective Jackson told you, since you were so critical in our investigation, we’d like your assistance in going after the crime syndicate that’s behind all of it. Since you have a history investigating them, you may know something else.”

“Okay.” Rudy assumed he’d be working with an undercover Fed that was part of the investigation.

The bearded man led Rudy out of the room and handed him an FBI vest so he would look like he was part of the team.

Brooks led Rudy into a darkened room, stood in front of a one-way mirror, and pointed to the thin man sitting at a table on the other side of the mirror. “This is the man you’ll work with. You may already know him.”

When Rudy looked at him, his mouth dropped open. The thin man’s brown dye job was nearly grown out, including the sideburns, revealing graying black hair. And he’d regrown the notorious pencil mustache. “Pierre?! He’s supposed to be dead!”

Rudy Burke’s steely poker face had failed him, revealing shock and confusion. Although he recouped quickly, he was irritated with himself at this momentary loss of control. In his wildest dreams, he never imagined that he’d see this man again.

His thoughts flashed back to the very beginning of this whole mess. Early in his career as a private investigator in the early 1970’s, Rudy worked as a file boy in a lawyer’s office. One of the lawyers hired him to follow his second wife, Alice – long story. It turned out to be his longest assignment ever, lasting more than two decades. Near the end of the assignment, Rudy assumed she was merely having an affair with Pierre. It wasn’t until a couple of years ago that he found out Alice was also working with Pierre in various criminal activities.

Alice’s daughter, Sharon Cooper, found out about the affair when inventorying her mother’s mansion and found Rudy’s reports to her father. Rudy’s assignment had been to follow Alice; thus, he had foolishly neglected to do a complete workup on Pierre. Now, he blamed himself for not catching Pierre’s connections with the mob. Because the syndicate connection wasn’t

discovered and subsequently not in the report he gave to her father, Sharon never learned about it. Rudy had made a pact with Sharon's husband, Jack, never to let her find out about Alice's connections. He figured Sharon had already suffered enough. So, when Rudy thought Pierre had died, he was actually relieved; he assumed the secret was safe. Now that Pierre was alive, the threat of Sharon finding out reemerged with a vengeance.

"So, you've met." Brooks observed dryly.

When Rudy heard the suspicion in his voice, he vowed to himself that he wouldn't betray himself again. He couldn't allow another lapse in control. Although he had only been married for a short time, he suspected Georgia was learning his unconscious, but subtle, signals even when he thought he had total control. Professionally, however, a lapse could be deadly. He turned to face Brooks. "Not technically. But I have to know. How'd this happen when all the news reports said he was dead?"

Brooks nodded. "He was afraid for his life, and apparently he was right. When he was let out of prison almost a year ago, the syndicate put him back in charge of their books. Then, somehow, two million bucks disappeared from their off-shore account, and they decided it was him who took the money." Rudy's heart skipped a beat, but he maintained his cool façade. "That's why they wanted to ice him. So, he called us to make a deal. We save his life, and he gets revenge for the betrayal. We had an ambulance ready because we wanted to make sure that no news reporters got wind of it from actual paramedics. Of course, we put him in a secured medical facility and arranged for the fake news reports of his death. In exchange for his cooperation to get hard evidence on the syndicate, we'll give him a new identity; and when all is done, everyone will still believe he's dead."

Still in disbelief, Rudy sat down carefully in a chair next to a small table. *No wonder Roy looked so nervous!*

Brooks eyed him. "What's this hesitation all about? You know something?"

"Before I go in there, you have to tell me everything he's told you."

Brooks folded his arms. "That's not how it works."

"I'm not going in there without knowing what he said."

"This is highly irregular." He glared at Rudy for a few seconds, sat down across the table from him, and eyed him. "Look, we've been investigating this syndicate for three years now. With what we've already discovered from Pierre's statements, Roy's information, your contributions, and statements from the dirty cops, we have a good picture of what's going on, but not enough to prosecute yet, and we still need to get the kingpin."

"And?"

"There were five divisions to the syndicate. Two have been busted – the gambling ring last year and the police infiltration that we busted last week. That leaves art smuggling and forgery, drugs, and protection. Each division has a handler; Pierre handled art before he went to prison, but someone else is running it now, and Pierre's given us all the names involved. The handlers are the only ones that report to the kingpin, Andre."

Rudy's heartbeat quickened. He forced himself to breathe naturally. *Just listen*, he told himself.

"That way, the muscle doesn't know Andre from Adam. Now, he told us about a big yearly mandatory meeting. It's disguised as a week-long family reunion, and the next one is in just a few weeks. So, we're arranging to take them down when they meet. Here's the place, date, and time for it."

Brooks wrote down the information, handed the piece of paper to Rudy, and continued, "He's also given us the locations of the hubs for each division. Since you already know so much, we want to bring you in on the plans to take them down."

Rudy studied the paper for a moment and nodded. "Was there ever a mention of me or suspicion of someone following him?"

Brooks eyed him. "Do you think he knows you?"

"Unlikely. I supplied a lot of information to you, and I had to follow him in order to get it, so I don't want to go in there if he might recognize me."

Brooks nodded. "He never mentioned anything."

Rudy swallowed hard. Although he always wore a disguise when following Pierre, there was the possibility that Pierre might recognize his face from any one of several close calls. It was a gamble, but he followed Brooks and another agent into the room where Pierre was waiting.

Pierre watched him carefully from his seat at the small table. Somewhat reassuring, Pierre's body language didn't reveal any signs of recognition. However, Rudy had learned that wasn't always foolproof, so he kept his guard up.

Brooks pointed to Rudy. "Pierre Martine, this is Rudy Burke" Rudy cringed inside. Too late, he realized they should have used an alias. "... you'll be working together. Everything said here will be recorded."

Rudy was careful to conceal his disdain for Pierre when he reached out to shake his hand. He would never forget how much pain this man caused as a result of his connection with Sharon's mother. He was just thankful that Sharon never found out the extent of Alice's indiscretions.

Brooks directed Rudy to sit down opposite Pierre. "So, Pierre, fill Rudy in on what you know."

"Everything? Again?"

Brooks nodded slowly. "That's what I said."

When Pierre was finished listing names, nicknames, descriptions, addresses, operations, and contacts, Brooks asked, "So, that's everything?"

"Why would I withhold anything after what they did to me? Besides, I've told you this stuff five times already."

"Just making sure."

As they discussed the details, Rudy contained his impatience and nodded.

When they finished with the details for the takedown, Brooks walked Rudy out of the small room. During his escorted departure, Rudy was troubled.

On the way home, Rudy wondered, *Pierre has to be protecting Frankie by giving them a fake name. I wonder why Roy didn't speak up about who the kingpin really is? Maybe he did and Brooks is testing me to see if I'll say something. 'Cause if Roy told them, they'll get suspicious if I don't. But if Roy didn't say anything, and I say something – that'll ruin his deal.* He decided to stop making his head spin and call Roy later.