

## Chapter 1

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) — Since the discovery of the afterlife, police departments across the country can't retain officers and are finding it increasingly difficult to hire new ones, according to a Department of Justice study released today.

“Even before the discovery, many departments were bracing for a wave of retirements as officers hired in the mid-1970s approach retirement. ... But since 2000, recruitment goals are down nationwide 25 percent,” the study said. “At the same time, violent crime, which was on the decline in the mid-1990s, has risen sharply. And most of the violent crime increase is not related to drugs, theft or property crimes, but to civil disorder: riots and demonstrations.”

Deputy Attorney General Rosalind Bresnahan, speaking at a press conference to announce the study, said, “The riots may have peaked at the end of the millennium, but the potential is always there. The level of violence is escalating and the risks the police face are forcing many officers to think, ‘Is this job worth the risk?’”

Munroe peeked around the doorway and ducked back.

*Shit!* thought Munroe. *I don't have to do that. I'm dead, remember. Oh yeah, that's right,* he said to himself. *Bullets cannot harm me. I'm Superman!*

He moved back into the open doorway and looked at the dark void of the room. His sight slid into the infrared but he saw nothing. No electrical or water services seemed to enter this room in the sub-basement of the old train station. *I never knew this cow town had anything this old,* he thought, *or this big.*

He pulled back out of the empty room and continued down the brick-walled corridor, following the infrared glow of the water pipes above him. He almost

imagined he could hear the drip of water. How long had he been down here? Five minutes at the most, he thought. *Damn! If I could only wear a watch. They might be getting worried back there. Worried about what?* he countered. *They know nothing can happen to me.*

Munroe continued down the corridor and peeked through a glass door that showed a confusing scene. Lit only by a desk lamp somewhere in the back, he saw the shapes of mountains, in fact the same Rocky Mountains he saw every day looking west.

He looked at the sign printed on the glass door — “Platte Valley Model Railroad Engineers.” It was a vast model train layout. *Interesting, I got to check this out sometime.*

Suddenly to his left he saw a glow move in the corridor and disappear as the suspect he'd been following ducked into another one of the little rooms. *How many are down here? I must be out beyond the walls of the building. I think I'm underneath the train platforms.* He continued down the corridor and saw that the pipes overhead stopped. Sliding back into visual light, he saw that the wall he faced confirmed that the corridor ended here. Looking to his right, where the person had run, he saw a solid door that was partially open. Sliding back into infrared, he saw on the door the smudge of a handprint now fading into invisibility.

The door left an eight-inch gap against the frame. *A little tight, but some momentum should get me through.* He backed up and willed himself through the opening, feeling himself stretched thin and tensing himself for the spring of his essence reforming.

*Ugh, hate that. OK, let's see what's here.*

Only a small amount of light spilled through the open door, but it was enough for Munroe to make out that the room held stacked boxes about four feet high. Moving down the aisle formed by the boxes, he could see a small man huddled behind a

large semi-automatic, using the boxes for cover. The room was maybe 10 feet by 20 and contained only the boxes, darkened fluorescent overhead lights and the suspect.

*Maybe 20 years old, a kid,* thought Munroe, and definitely not matching the description of someone almost six feet tall and well built. He might be Hispanic and he probably was a gang member and he most definitely was scared.

This was not a good situation. Only one way into the room and the kid had the doorway covered. *If they can't talk him out, he's leaving here dead.* Yet again, Munroe wished he could do something, anything physical. *If only I could wail and clank chains like Marley's ghost.* He moved closer to the kid to see if he had any other weapons besides the semi, which he now recognized as a .45-caliber Colt M1911, a beautiful weapon. *Wow, big expensive gun for a small kid.* The kid seemed to think so too, as he took the gun out of his right hand to wipe his sweaty palm on his pants. As he did so, he exposed the left side of it.

*Damn! The safety's on. And the hammer isn't cocked. Crap, I don't think this kid shot anyone.*

Munroe had to act quickly. He flew through the door so fast this time he didn't even feel the stretching. He recited his turns, left, right, left, left and up two flights of stairs and past the SWAT officers flanking the stairwell. He looked wildly for his partner and found her talking to the lieutenant.

Yamaguchi turned instinctively to her right when Munroe's "voice" came through her ear buds.

"I found the suspect. He doesn't have a hostage. He's at the far end of the station in the sub-basement. He's got a .45 semi but the safety is on and the hammer is not cocked."

She turned back to the lieutenant. “Munroe found him. No hostage. Says he’s armed with a .45 automatic but that ... he’s got the safety on and the hammer isn’t cocked.”

“Tell him I think it’s an M1911, the Army automatic. Tell him I don’t think this kid is the shooter. Maybe we have a chance we can get him out alive.”

She relayed this and his description of the suspect. The lieutenant gave her a look that Munroe recognized — complete disbelief that she wasn’t making it all up. “Yeah, and I bet he’s a retired beekeeper and walks with a limp,” the lieutenant muttered.

Munroe tried to ignore the terminal’s translation, even though the beekeeper gag impressed him. “Tell him the suspect is in a storeroom with one door. He’s got it covered. He’s hiding behind boxes. Cardboard boxes.”

“How does he know this isn’t the shooter?” asked the lieutenant.

“Lieutenant,” she said for herself, “the witnesses said there were two suspects — one large heavysset, one small and everyone agrees only one shot fired. The other suspect must be somewhere else.”

The lieutenant nodded and used the microphone clipped to his lapel, probably to tell dispatch that the other suspect was still at large, although her terminal translated the lieutenant’s words for Munroe as “unintelligible speech.”

The lieutenant turned and looked where he imagined Munroe must be and made himself larger. *He’s trying to intimidate me. How funny.* Yamaguchi shied away from the lieutenant’s body language and Munroe temporarily lost the field of her terminal.

“... this kid who fired.” Munroe only caught the tail end of the lieutenant’s remarks as he reacquired the field, but he could guess the gist.

“Because a scared kid who’s fired his gun isn’t going to put the safety back on and lower the hammer because of fond memories from his NRA safety class.” She

relayed this without his sarcasm, he noticed. Which was probably wise because he saw the lieutenant's grimace relax.

"I'll go in ahead and confirm the safety is still on and it isn't cocked." She relayed this and added her own comment, "I'll have to go with your guys and relay for Munroe."

The lieutenant nodded and asked, "What's the distance for a TASER?"

She relayed for Munroe: "It's too long. I make the room 10 by 20 and he's at the far end. We'd want to get him to come out."

"Hard to get a shot in there anyway," the lieutenant said to himself. "Tear gas?" The lieutenant was now beginning to ask questions as if Munroe was actually there.

She relayed: "There's a problem, the door opens the wrong way. Someone would have to get up close and you'd have to toss it in but you really wouldn't expose yourself and the room would fill up fast."

"OK, Munroe, you'll advance and lead us in. Gooch, you stay with ..." — the lieutenant looked around — "... Jenkins. I'll brief them and then we go in."

The lieutenant left them and she wandered away from the knot of men surrounding the lieutenant. "Sounds like he's actually starting to believe you exist," she said.

"Sounds like he's starting to trust you, too," Munroe replied.

"Can we get this kid out alive?" she asked.

"Don't know. He's pretty scared and he has an awfully big gun. It all depends on whether he still hasn't cocked it when we come in."

"We should have a signal," she said.

"Right. Once I know he has hasn't cocked, I'll say ... OK, what should I say?"

"You say ... you say safe! That means it isn't cocked, the safety is on and we can try a TASER shot."

“OK, safe means it’s safe to go,” Munroe confirmed.

“Talking to yourself again?” the lieutenant asked behind Yamaguchi’s ear. She turned to face him.

“Yes ... uh, I mean we have our signal arranged. Alex will tell me it’s safe to proceed, and I’ll tell you.”

Munroe said to her, “Tell him I’m going back down to make sure he’s still in the room and I’ll backtrack to meet you at the stairs one floor down.” She relayed this.

“Sounds good,” the lieutenant said and turned back to the others.

“Good luck, Alex,” she said. When she realized he’d already left, she said.

“Stupid. It’s me who needs luck.”

Munroe quickly returned to the storeroom, happy he had remembered the way and found the suspect still crouched behind the boxes. The kid was now shaking. *I hope those aren’t the shakes you get after you just shot someone*, Munroe thought.

He left the kid and returned to the stairs as the SWAT team was just reaching the floor above. He connected with Yamaguchi, who relayed in a whisper, “Munroe says the suspect hasn’t moved and we can move down to the sub-basement.”

Munroe had already gone back down to the sub-basement and was waiting for them after again checking the suspect’s location. Through Yamaguchi, he directed them through the turns until they reached the corridor that led to the storeroom. From what he could tell, they moved silently and he hoped the kid would be unaware of their presence.

Once in position, the SWAT leader called out to the suspect several times and told him to throw out his weapon and come out unarmed. After not hearing any response, he ordered everyone to put on their gas masks. Then he detailed one of his men to deliver the tear gas through the door. Munroe kept up a back and forth, checking to make sure the kid was still behind the boxes — and happy to see he had shrunk even farther back into his hiding spot — and then telling Yamaguchi

the kid probably couldn't see the lower half of the doorway. She told the SWAT leader who signaled to the man with the tear gas, who then rolled it into the room and ran back to the others.

Munroe remained by the door, not eager to squeeze through the opening again. After a few seconds, gas came billowing out the door and down the corridor to the waiting SWAT team.

*Damn!* thought Munroe, *why's he doing that?* as he saw the SWAT leader push Yamaguchi back behind his men, effectively blocking the corridor and his access to the terminal she wore on her arm.

Movement from the door caught his attention and he saw the opening widen at the same time he saw the SWAT team stiffen, their weight shifting into their upper bodies.

The gun poked through the doorway and he saw that the safety was still on and the hammer still down. Munroe ran back to the others just as Yamaguchi shouldered her way through the officers who stood before her, exposing her right arm and the terminal she wore.

Munroe moved so fast he hit the wall of cops and bounced back but he had acquired the field long enough to say "Safe!" He saw her lips open and say the words, and then the team leader yelled his command. As the suspect came through the door amid the billows of tear gas, the beams from the laser sights of two TASERS and several assault rifles met the suspect in the chest. In a clearly defined moment, Munroe could see the darts and trailing wires of the TASERS leave the muzzles, which is when he realized that the darts would pass through him to the suspect.

There was no time for him to do anything and he knew the current was already passing through the wires when he felt something faint, like the memory of the limbs he'd once had when they were beginning to fall asleep. But the wires quickly

shifted position as the suspect dropped and the cops rushed forward to secure him. Yet again Munroe bounced off a wall of cops and found himself squeezed between the end of the corridor and their bodies. He forced himself over them and came back down the other side and saw her standing, left behind when the others rushed the suspect.

He came up beside her and caught the field of the terminal.

“... roe!” she said and he knew she was calling out his name from the shape her lips made.

“I’m here, Linda.”

“Alex, you OK? I lost contact ...”

“I bounced off 600 pounds of cop. Then I found out what a TASER feels like to a dead person.”

“And?”

“Kind of tingly.”

After an hour of the endless waiting, debriefing and milling around that always resulted after a SWAT incident, Yamaguchi and Munroe were told to go home.

“I’ll want supplemental reports from you and Munroe,” the lieutenant told her. “And tell Munroe he did a good job.”

“I’m sure he heard, lieutenant.”

“He might have said something about you,” Munroe told Yamaguchi after the SWAT lieutenant left. “If you hadn’t moved forward when you did, I wouldn’t have been able to reach your terminal.”

“No big,” she said. “I know you can’t pass through solid matter. They don’t.”

Munroe said nothing. He knew the other cops were quite well aware of his limitations intellectually, but she knew Munroe as a person, as her partner. Most of

the other cops only regarded him as a piece of high-tech equipment, represented by the terminal on her armband, or at best as their pet ghost.

“Come on, Alex, let’s get out of here.”

As they passed through the train station lobby, they passed the SWAT officer who threw the tear gas into the room. “Hey, good night, Gooch,” he called out to her. She raised her hand and gave him a small wave, but didn’t look back.

“I thought you hated being called that,” said Munroe, as he tried to keep up with her stride and the rise and fall of her terminal’s interface field. “Aren’t you going to tear into him?”

“I’m too tired to tell him off. Besides, he’s one of the cute ones.” She opened one of the doors to leave the station and kept it open the extra beat required to make sure he made it through. Outside it was after 1 a.m. and Munroe was surprised to see how busy the street was until he remembered it was the weekend before Christmas and downtown Denver did have a nightlife, even when the temperature was in the teens.

“Oh, yeah, what was his name?” he asked.

“Bimmelman, Schimmelman, something like that?”

“It’s Zimmerman. Officer Arliss Zimmerman, as you well know.”

“Yow. OK, maybe not cute enough to make up for that name.” Munroe decided not to throw back at his partner her full name, Laurelinda Yamaguchi.

They reached their parked cruiser and Munroe waited for her to open the door. Again, she waited the extra beat that allowed Munroe to get in before her. He instantly found the large field of the police cruiser’s terminal and felt comforted by the luxury of full Internet access. He immediately began checking his email and Facebook page and blog. Yamaguchi meanwhile pulled out her ear buds and took the portable terminal off her armband and inserted it into the charging dock.

Munroe found little other than spam emails that offered to reconnect him with his loved ones or dubious methods of engaging in disembodied sex. He did, however, see the latest email from Apple that promoted their new, home AfterNet terminal. *Nice*, he thought, *if only I had a home*.

He deleted everything and looked back at Yamaguchi, who as usual was already listening to the local public radio station. At this hour, it would be the BBC World Service. If he let this go on, she would start talking about how evil U.S. foreign policy was, and he'd remind her there was a Democrat in the White House, and she'd counter how he and his fellow Republicans had controlled Congress for too long. He had to do something quick.

“So, how's your mom?”

“Oh, don't get me started.” She turned down the radio because she clearly would start. “Do you know she actually called the watch commander the other night because I missed a chat with her last week ... ” Munroe knew he had some peace and quiet while she recounted her tales of horror about her wacky Japanese mother who made such a looming presence in her life. Munroe logged in to the AfterNet to see the latest news, then entered the Lost Love forum, his favorite guilty pleasure.

“Looking for Mr. Wright” was the most recent post and Munroe read about Mrs. Nora Wright. Her husband died five years ago and would he please get in touch with her because her new husband just couldn't give her the satisfaction that he had and would he be kind enough to share his secrets with husband number two.

Although the post was only an hour old, there already were 60 replies, mostly from women wondering what secret Mr. Wright possessed and that they'd be happy if he'd share his secret with them or their partners as well. Munroe realized that as a purely intellectual exercise — and that's all he had left now — he was kind of curious himself. He was just about to start his reply when he realized that she had just said that they'd returned to the department.

He quickly replayed her rant and was pleased to see it contained little new and that the entire conversation had been one sided. *That's just one of the things I like about her*, he thought. *She knows I'm interested in her life but doesn't require me to keep telling her "uh huh" and "is that so."*

She parked the car in the garage and said, "OK, that's enough for me tonight. I'll do my report in the morning."

"If you want, I'll write yours and you can just sign it," he offered.

"Oh, would you? Maybe after that we can plant some evidence." She was a stickler for following the book.

"Hey, it's not like we shot anyone. You didn't see anything I didn't see."

"Thank you but no, I'll write it myself."

She pulled the portable terminal out of the charger and slipped it into its armband and replaced her ear buds. She opened her door and for once was a little too quick for Munroe, who was slammed back into the car by the door. Yamaguchi instantly knew what she had done and quickly opened the door. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she said.

"Wow, when you get pissed off ..." he said, after getting out of the car. She laughed and said, "I said I'm sorry."

They walked inside the department and entered the secure area. She signed herself out and set her radio into the charging rack. She said goodnight to the front desk officer and walked to the door and waited for him.

"Goodnight, Alex."

"Goodnight, Linda. Hey, I forgot to ask, did you find something for tomorrow night?"

"I'll say I did, and it's a killer, and no, I'm telling you nothing about it, you'll just have to wait." She paused with her hand on the door handle and said, "I still feel bad about you having to hang around the department all night."

“Oh, it’s not so bad. I have the whole Internet to wander around and I can get out if I want to.”

“You know, the offer still stands.”

“Thanks, maybe I’ll take you up on it someday.”

“I am serious. Think about it,” Yamaguchi tried to look where she imagined Munroe to be and was a few inches high. She eventually put on a lopsided grin, shrugged her shoulders, waved bye and left.

The field disappeared as she walked away. Munroe observed how the swing of her hips translated to her thick, black ponytail and to the various items of cop equipment she wore on her belt. He felt like a lecherous old man and then remembered that’s what he was. Sixty-two when he died, crapping through a tube, two ex-wives who hated him and thank God no kids. *What a shitty way to die*, he thought. *And Linda thinks of me as a cute puppy, or maybe a gay friend*. That’s probably what kept him from taking up her offer of letting him stay in her apartment. He was a harmless, sexless creature to her, and although he could still remember what the tightening of his groin felt like, he knew he was a harmless, sexless creature.

*Heavy sigh*, he said to himself and moved toward CID.

The Criminal Investigations Division was a large open room with a sea of desks where the detectives worked. Although Yamaguchi and Munroe weren’t detectives, they were assigned a desk in the room. At this time of night, the whole floor was empty except for a handful of cops in the adjacent break room. They were watching TV in the corner of the room. *Barney Miller*, he noted. He’d always liked *Barney Miller*. He wished they’d turn on the captions.

Munroe settled in before the terminal at his desk. Unusually his chair was there, which made it easier for him. He saw that Yamaguchi had put his picture back on his desk and so once again he confronted his physical self. It was the picture taken when he hit the 15-year mark with the Seattle PD. He'd been a homicide detective for five years then and had cleared a high-profile murder investigation that year, so his career was flying high. He was accepting a plaque from the chief, but Linda had blown it up and cropped it so that only he was in the picture. There he was, still feeling young at 50, with thick, dark hair only hinting of gray, big boned and clumsy looking even in this pose. He was smiling and he thought he looked good. Hard to reconcile with the last memory he had of his face. It was in the hospice and it was the last time he was still able to wash his own hair and comb it in the mirror afterward. He had lost fifty pounds, his face was pale and he'd given up shaving. He'd recognized a dead man's eyes when he'd seen them and the whole farce of getting better and leaving the hospice was finally over. He knew he'd be dead in a week, and he was right.

*Damn! I went through this the last time I saw this. I got to tell Linda to get rid of it.*

But Linda needed it, he realized. *Maybe if she sees me as a real person, sees me as the man I once was, I won't just be Casper the Friendly Ghost to her. And maybe if I stop playing hide and seek with it, maybe I can come to deal with it, too.*

Munroe forced himself to ignore the picture and captured the field of the terminal. The display instantly came alive and the terminal recognized him. He opened a report form and entered the details of the arrest and submitted it. Then he made another one for Yamaguchi. Picking his words carefully, he tried to make it obvious that her action to get the terminal field in the open might have saved the suspect's life. He forwarded the form to her and would let her decide whether she'd use it.