

The Pen is Mightier
By Rhonda Eudaly

Carter Hunt sat back and stared at his computer screen with a self-satisfied smile. The final chapters of his sixth, consecutive best-selling novel were coming along nicely. He picked up a very expensive fountain pen, and after making a note, he studied the light playing off the gold accents of the blue marble barrel.

A flicker of movement in the computer monitor caught his attention. The pen was taken from him. The 14K gold, extra fine point nib buried itself in his neck, rupturing the artery and ink cartridge. Blood mixed with ink splattered the computer monitor.

#

Detective Sergeant Garrett Burrows watched the Medical Examiner make his preliminary analysis as a forensics team swept the upscale apartment. Carter Hunt was dead for a reason, and he'd been assigned to the case. As a metropolitan homicide detective, Garrett thought he'd seen it all, but this was new.

"Garrett!"

The sturdily built detective turned to see his partner hurrying toward him. "What is it Jackson?"

Jackson Kelly was Garrett's exact opposite. Garrett was a bear of a man in a rumpled suit and overcoat pushing fifty. All that was missing from the hardboiled image was the cigarette and fedora, but one must change with the times. Jackson, however, was barely thirty with *GQ* model good-looks and a wardrobe to match. They'd been partnered together for Garrett's experience and Jackson's ability to smooth Garrett's chronic rough edges.

"Ginger Martin's here - the girlfriend."

Garrett nodded as they headed toward the plush living room. Standing indignant and increasingly frightened in the doorway was a tall, statuesque red-head. For the first time in Garrett's recent memory, the sight of a living person made the jaded homicide detective stop short.

"We'll take over," Garrett said to the uniformed officers and turned to the woman. "Ms. Martin? I'm Sergeant Burrows. This is Detective Kelly."

What little color remained in her flawless, pale skin drained away as she gazed blankly at the detectives. "Something's happened. Is Carter all right?"

"I'm sorry to have to inform you, ma'am, but Carter Hunt's been killed."

"*Killed?* You...you mean...he's dead?"

"I'm afraid so, Ms. Martin. I know this is a bad time, but we need to ask you a few questions"

Ginger composed herself the best she could. "Yes, yes, of course. I'll help in any way I can."

Garrett led her over to an overstuffed sofa and looked at Jackson. The younger man nodded once. "I'll go see how the forensics guys are doing. Maybe talk to some of the neighbors."

Ginger kept a tight grip on her self-control for as long as possible, but a blind man could see she was about to fall apart. Garrett was *not* a blind man.

"How well did you know Carter Hunt?"

"We've been friends for a long time, then we dated for the last six months," she said. "I can't believe someone would...how did...?"

"He was stabbed," he said, watching her reaction. "With a fountain pen."

If possible, she paled even more. "Was...was it a blue one? Expensive? Heavy?"

"Yes."

"I gave him that pen for his birthday." Her composure broke and tears started to fall. Garrett looked around, found a box of tissues, and passed them to her. She took several gratefully and wiped her eyes. Even in tears, Ginger Martin was a beautiful woman. Garrett hated to think how such a loss was going to affect her. However, Garrett's job was dealing with the deceased, not the survivors.

"Could you tell me who would want to see Carter Hunt dead?" he asked. "Did he have enemies?"

"He used a lot of real life in his books," Ginger answered. "There are probably more than a few people who weren't happy with him."

"Could you be more specific?"

"If I saw his address book, maybe. Some things he wrote were too specific to be from memory. He had to have notes or something."

"Thank you. We'll take a look."

"We're all done here, Garrett," Jackson said from the doorway.

The detective stood, reaching into his suit jacket pocket for a card. "If you think of anything else, please let me know."

As he moved to go, Ginger reached out to stop him. "Carter was important to me, Sergeant. Will you keep me informed?"

"Of course, Ms. Martin."

Ginger left before the detectives, and they weren't the only ones to watch her go. Jackson noticed Garrett's heightened interest. "You sure you want to get involved with that?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Jackson."

"Uh, huh," Jackson responded. "By the way, there's no sign of forced entry or struggle. Whoever killed him had a key. He knew 'em."

"Then we better find his address book and journal."

"Haven't seen anything like that yet," Jackson said. "I'll have the computer checked. It's probably electronic. Be careful with her, Garrett. She's trouble."

"Good thing trouble's our business, then, isn't it, Jackson?"

#

They weren't able to recover much from Hunt's computer, but they did find his desk calendar if nothing else. However, it was written in Hunt's unique code. Garrett was frustrating, time consuming work trying to decode it. However, they were beginning to get a consistent, if unflattering picture of Carter Hunt. Apparently, the world-class author

was also a world-class jerk.

"Why do people feel the need to code these things?" Garrett asked, picking up the notebook-sized calendar. "Who actually cares when a guy has a dentist appointment?"

"Depends on the dentist." Jackson didn't look up as he commented. "And what was being drilled."

"Maybe we could get some help..."

Jackson looked at his partner over the rim of a coffee cup. "Ginger?"

Garrett shrugged. "She's known him a long time, and she wants to help."

"That's a bad idea, Garrett. I can't believe *I'm* the one telling *you*. She's a suspect for crying out loud. A good suspect, too."

"Jackson..."

"Don't 'Jackson' me, Garrett, it's police work 101. Ginger had means, she had opportunity..."

"What's her motive?"

"The man was a yutz. That makes her close to the top of the list, and you want her to *help* us with the investigation?"

"Make your point, Jackson," Garrett growled.

"Come on, Garrett, I know you've been seeing her lately - be careful, would ya? I've seen women like her before, and I don't want to see you get hurt."

"Your concern is touching, Jackson, but I can take care of myself."

#

Garrett struggled to decipher Hunt's code on his own later that night. He sipped at a cooling cup of coffee as he doodled on a separate sheet of paper. He thought he was about to get a break, when his doorbell rang. He looked up, blinking to come back to reality, only to wonder who it could be that time of the night. Ginger stood on the doorstep looking nervous and even a little frightened.

"Ginger? What are you doing here?"

"I...I'm not sure...can I come in?"

Garrett stepped aside. "Yes, yes of course. Please, come in."

Garrett brought Ginger a cup of coffee. She took a sip and stared into the depths, obviously distressed over something. He sat down next to her, and after a moment, he took her hand. "What's wrong?"

"Carter's funeral was today. Everything I see or touch...it all reminds me of him. I just started driving and ended up here." She put down the cup and got up to pace. "I probably shouldn't have come..." She paused at the desk and picked up the calendar. "I know this. Where did you get Carter's?"

Garrett went over and took the notebook away. "You know I can't really get into the particulars... Besides, I'm off duty."

Ginger looked deep into his eyes. Her hazel eyes flashed mischievously. "I find it hard to believe that you're ever off duty." She left the desk and continued her tour of the room, checking out bookcases and knick-knacks. "Have you figured out Carter's code yet?"

"Excuse me?"

"Carter's code. He had a paranoid streak in him. He trusted only a few people."

"Were you one of them?"

Ginger nodded. "We'd known each other a long time."

Garrett let her talk after that, about whatever she wanted. He tried not to feel too guilty about using anything she said to further his investigation. But he couldn't help feeling that something in her rambling would be the key to solving the murder.

"I don't want to talk about Carter anymore," Ginger said a while later.

"What do you want to talk about?" Garrett asked.

Ginger pushed herself away from the mantel and met him as he crossed the room toward her. "Who says I want to talk?"

Even though Garrett knew it wasn't the smartest thing to do, but he couldn't resist the invitation. Something about her full lips asked to be kissed, and he didn't want to disappoint them.

The phone rang, interrupting the moment. Garrett had to shake his head to clear the remnants of the spell. He almost stumbled going for the phone.

"Burrows," he answered gruffly.

"I interrupted something," Jackson said on the other end.

Garrett glanced at Ginger and sighed. "Maybe."

"Sorry. Something's come up."

"Is it important?"

"Important enough that I don't want to talk about it over the phone. You still have the calendar, right?"

"Yes."

"I'm coming over."

"Now?"

"Yes, now. Be there in ten."

Garrett hung up the phone, puzzled. When he turned back to Ginger, she was watching him intently. "Problem?" she asked.

"I'm not sure, but Jackson's on his way over. He says it's important..."

"I should go," she said. "Maybe I shouldn't even have come." She gathered her things and headed for the door.

Garrett caught her arm, stopping her. "No, don't say that. I'm glad you felt like you could."

He wasn't very good at the sensitive, comforting thing, but he was trying. She smiled at him and touched his face. "That's sweet, thank you."

He stared into her eyes. His large, rough hand covering her soft, smooth one, holding it to his cheek.

"I really should go." She pulled her hand away gently. "You have work."

He walked her to the door, keeping hold of her hand to prolong the contact. Jackson would arrive any minute, and Garrett wasn't in the mood to explain her presence. She kissed his cheek as she left, and he fought the urge to touch the spot.

Jackson's car pulled up just as Ginger's pulled away. The younger detective kept looking at the disappearing tail lights as he came up the walk with a small box. "Was that Ginger Martin?"

Garrett nodded absently.

"What was she doing here?"

"I was about to find out when you called," Garrett replied. "What's so important?"

"I'll tell you inside," Jackson said ominously.

Garrett shrugged and followed his partner inside, closing the door behind them. "Okay, there's no one here but us chickens, Jackson. What's this all about?"

"I had a talk with Hunt's publisher, Barbara Wallace. Carter Hunt was a bigger yutz than we've been led to believe."

"How's that possible?"

"Apparently, his fiction that wasn't all that fictional. Some prominent toes were definitely stepped on."

"Then why not sue him?" Garrett asked, not liking where the conversation was going. "Why kill him?"

"The material he used isn't the kind of stuff people want on the public record. A trial, even an inquiry would bring out too many dirty secrets - even if he did change the names to protect the not so innocent."

"What's the point, Jackson?" Garrett didn't like prompting his partner.

Jackson handed over the box he'd brought in with him. "This is Carter Hunt's latest manuscript. It came in two days *after* he died. No one knew he'd finished it. I think you need to read it."

"Jackson..."

"We'll trade," Jackson said. "You read the book. I'll tackle the calendar. Besides, I think I have an idea for cracking the code. It's a computer thing you wouldn't care about since you're technophobic."

"I'm a traditionalist, not technophobic. What's wrong with paper and a pen?"

"Ask Carter Hunt that. Where's the calendar?"

Garrett handed over the file and the calendar. He took the manuscript and showed Jackson to the door.

"Just keep an open mind, Garrett," Jackson said, going out the door. "And don't rule out any possibility."

"Good night, Jackson."

After the younger man had left, Garrett opened the box containing the thick manuscript. "This is going to take forever," he muttered to himself. He settled down in his comfortable chair and started to read.

#

Garrett had just finished lighting candles when the doorbell rang. He went to let Ginger in. She was dressed to kill in a curve hugging and emphasizing dress. He tried to disregard the metaphor.

"You look tired. Hard day?"

"Just long," he said, letting the exhaustion creep into his voice. "I had a really late night last night. Come in, dinner's about ready."

"You didn't have to go to all this trouble."

"Trouble's my business." The joke came off half-heartedly. "Something to drink?"

"Whatever you're having is fine."

"I hope you're hungry." He poured two glasses of wine.

"Starved," she said from closer than he anticipated. She followed him into the kitchen and took one of the glasses. "It smells delicious. Are you sure I can't do anything?"

"Just make yourself at home. It'll be ready in a jiffy."

"Jiffy?" I haven't heard anyone use that word in years." She wandered back out of the kitchen. Garrett watched her as she headed into the living room. She ran her hand over the desktop and froze as she saw the manuscript. She turned quickly, even guiltily as she heard him moving in the dining room.

"Dinner's ready," he said from the doorway. "You all right? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Something reminded me of Carter," she said, going past him. "What's for dinner?"

She swept past him into the dining room. Garrett paused a moment before following her. After they sat down, Garrett noticed Ginger moved her food around her plate and ate very little. He couldn't fail to notice.

"I thought you were hungry," he finally said.

"I'm sorry, it's really good. I wish I could eat more. Let me do the dishes. It's the least I can do since you went to so much trouble."

Garrett watched Ginger clear the table for a moment then got up and went into the kitchen himself. He quietly followed her and started making coffee while she loaded the dishwasher.

"How's the case?"

Garrett heard the forced casualness, and his heart sank. "We've had a break. A big one."

"Oh? Can you talk about it?"

The note of studied unconcern was still there. Garrett heard it hundreds of times. Suspects used it when they thought they could get information from the police. Nine times out of ten, that suspect was guilty of the crime. Garrett's heart sank even more, but did not break.

"Jackson's cracked Hunt's code. It'll still take some time to decipher, but until then, we have manuscript."

"The manuscript?"

Garrett couldn't even look at her. "Yeah, the publisher gave us a copy of Carter's manuscript. She was shocked. She didn't know he'd completed it before he died. She said it was a real departure for him, like nothing he'd ever done before."

"Really?"

"Cream for your coffee?" he asked, turning to the refrigerator.

"Sure. Did you read it?"

"Yes."

"I wish you hadn't done that, Garrett." She wiped the blade of a long knife carefully,

studying the razor sharp edge.

"I know."

She sighed and turned. "Then you know."

Garrett looked at her and at the knife. "It was you, wasn't it? The one in the book?"

She stepped up and slammed the knife into its slot just past Garrett with an anger that could've been murderous. "I knew he was up to something. He was being too secretive, too full of himself. He wouldn't let me read the manuscript. He wouldn't even let me anywhere near the computer. I should've..."

"You know I'm going to have to take you in."

"Take me in where?" Understanding dawned in her stormy eyes. "You're *arresting* me?"

"He's not. I am."

Ginger whirled to see Jackson standing in the doorway with two uniformed officers flanking him. She turned back to Garrett pain, anger, and confusion warred in her expressive eyes. As she was being handcuffed, those eyes turned pleading. "Please, Garrett, don't...I didn't kill Carter...*I swear!*"

Garrett turned away. Jackson hung back as the other officers took her out. He patted the older man on the shoulder awkwardly. "We did the right thing."

"I'm not so sure."

#

Garrett couldn't rid himself of the niggles in his mind that perhaps Ginger might not be guilty. He shook himself free of the thought. He had to go with the evidence, and not what his heart - though Jackson would argue another part of his anatomy was involved - wanted to believe. There was still something that made his brain itch enough that he had to keep looking.

Garrett finally looked over at Jackson. "You've read Carter Hunt's books, haven't you?"

"Yeah."

"The publisher said this one was different, right?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

Jackson shrugged. "It seemed rough. All the stuff was there for the story, but it bounced all over the place. I just figured it was a rough draft and hadn't been edited yet."

Garrett sat back and tapped his chin with his pen, a thoughtful look in his eyes. Jackson sat back and studied him with a suspicious look of his own. Jackson could almost see the wheels turning in his partner's mind.

#

"You wrote for Carter Hunt, didn't you?" Garrett asked Ginger from across an interrogation table. "Before he shut you out, you did most of the writing for him, didn't you?"

She stared at the table. "Yes. After we started...dating...Carter started writing. I knew what he was doing, at least enough to warn my mother if she ever read the book. We'd known each other for years, and though he *said* he'd never do it, he knew too much about me *not* to use me."

"Tell me the rest," Garrett prompted. "I have to know, and it's all going to come out anyway."

"Do I need a lawyer? I know that no matter what I say, there's really good circumstantial evidence against me. It doesn't take a genius to figure out Carter knew his killer."

"Yes."

"I gave him the murder weapon. I've used that pen dozens of times. There's probably some kind of fingerprint of mine on it."

"It was wiped clean."

"And I was the next 'victim' of one of his books. It doesn't look too good for me."

"No. It doesn't."

"I wasn't the only one with a key, Garrett, and I may have started out in the book, but the girl at the end isn't me."

"What're you saying?"

"Carter had an affair while we were together."

"How do you know?"

"I caught him in a lie, and he didn't deny it. He's done it before, and I *did* read the manuscript. He must've emailed it to me right before he died. *I* was the one who sent it to Barbara when I got it." She paused for a moment and sighed. "You were almost right, Garrett. Carter did all the dirt digging, and he put the stories together. I just made it readable on a large scale and gave it some style."

"Why'd he trash you in his book? It sounds like he needed you."

"Because I told him I wasn't going to do it anymore. I wanted to do my own writing. He told me to go ahead. He didn't need me anyway. I think he sent me the manuscript out of spite."

"Why were you ever with him?"

"Sometimes love makes you do stupid things, and he wasn't always like this. Before he became 'the' Carter Hunt, he was actually quite a nice guy. But I promise you, Garrett, *I did not kill him!* No matter what the circumstances say."

"So what now?" Jackson asked in the hallway a few moments later.

"Aren't you supposed to say something like, 'You don't believe her, do you'?"

"Why? You believe her, that's all that matters."

#

"You gentlemen wanted to talk about Carter Hunt?" Barbara Wallace asked, going around her desk and sitting in the expensive leather chair. She radiated power, and knew it.

"You knew, of course, that Carter Hunt didn't write all his own material." Garrett made it a statement.

She didn't blink, nor did she answer.

"You knew, of course, that Ginger Martin was leaving Carter Hunt to write her own books," Jackson said, also not asking a question.

"She had a contract!" Barbara didn't catch herself in time.

"Isn't she in jail for Carter's murder?"

"The law only prohibits someone from making money off a crime they've been convicted of. And with Carter Hunt dead, I'm pretty sure that contract is null and void. Ginger Martin can write anything she likes now."

Barbara composed herself quickly. "Then why're you coming to me?"

"We thought you might be able to help us out," Garrett said, flipping through his notebook. "You see, it appears there was more to Hunt's last book than most people thought. An alternate ending or more notes or something. Ginger said she saw Carter hiding pages, but she can't tell us where. She says she'd know where it was if she saw it, but since she's in jail, that doesn't help us."

"I still don't see what this has to do with me."

"We were hoping *you* might know where his hiding place would be," Jackson said.

Barbara looked perplexed. "*Me?* Why me?"

Garrett shrugged. "According to Ginger, you were the only other person Hunt trusted. He might've confided in you."

"I'm sorry, he didn't. Carter wasn't a very trusting sort."

Jackson and Garrett stood to go. The younger man nodded politely. "It was worth a shot. Thank you for your time."

#

A shadow moved through the darkness with sure, quiet steps in Hunt's upscale apartment, into the bedroom, and straight to the closet. Just as it knelt down and removed a box, the lights flashed on.

"Looking for this?" Garret held up a brad bound manuscript and an envelope.

Barbara Wallace made a lunge for it, but Garrett easily sidestepped her as Jackson restrained any further movements. The older man leafed through the pages.

"What were you looking for, Ms. Wallace?"

"You already know."

"You were afraid of what Hunt wrote about you? That he spelled out all your deepest, darkest secrets in his book?"

"You should know..." Barbara narrowed her eyes. "There's no second copy, is there?"

Garrett fanned the manuscript he'd been looking through. The pages were blank. "Yes, but this..." He held up the envelope. "This isn't empty. He did leave behind some

notes."

Barbara sagged in defeat.

"I have to know one thing."

"What?" Barbara asked. "You want to know why I did it? I had to stop the book. I had to stop Carter. If that book had gotten out, I would've been ruined."

"Oh, I don't doubt that. That's not it."

"What, then?"

"Why the pen?"

"You know that old saying?"

"What saying?"

"The pen is mightier than the sword. He was going to use that pen to destroy me. I returned the favor."

Garrett nodded to Jackson. "Get her out of here."

#

"What will you do now?" Garrett asked Ginger as they walked hand in hand through the park.

"Oh, I'm still going to write."

"About this?"

"Oh, no. Besides, who'd believe it?" She stopped walking and turned to him. "Thank you."

"What for?"

"For not giving up. I owe you my life."

Garrett stubbed the toe of his shoe in the dirt. "Aw, shucks, ma'am, I was just doing my job."

"It was more than that, and you know it. Which is why this next part is so difficult. I like you a lot, Garrett, but I'm leaving town for a while. Maybe for good."

"What?"

"Some friends have a cabin up in the woods. I'm going there for a while to clear my head and start my own writing."

"Oh." Garrett dropped her hand and started to turn away.

She stopped him. "It's not goodbye, Garrett."

"Then what is it?"

She kissed him a way that he'd only seen in movies. His toes curled. His head swam. After an eternity in an instant, she broke the embrace and winked saucily. "It's come up and see me sometime."

Before he could form a coherent word, she was gone. Jackson materialized at his elbow. "I told you she was going to be trouble."

End