

Blast from the Past

Book Excerpt

Spencer, Maryland – Deep Creek Lake – Present Day

“Gnarly, it’s time for to go to your appointment.”

Lovely in her soft grey Chanel suit, rose-colored blouse, and stylish pumps, Archie Monday, assistant to the late Robin Spencer, hurried up the stairs to the second floor of Spencer Manor and down the hallway to the master suite. The rose leather clutch bag under her arm was a perfect match for the fedora she wore over her pixie-styled blonde hair.

“Gnarly, are you in here?” She threw open the double doors to find the German shepherd sitting in the suite’s bathroom doorway. “There you are. It’s time to go.” She gestured for the dog to come to her.

Instead of obeying his favorite human, Gnarly whined and turned his attention back to the happenings inside the other room.

“Go where?” Mac Faraday called out to her from the bathroom.

She crossed the width of the suite to peer in at him. The sight that greeted her wasn’t what she had expected from the son of Robin Spencer, whose roots were as blue-blood as they come.

The clichéd appearance of a wealthy man calls for him to be tall, dark, and handsome—maybe ruggedly handsome—and at the very least, well-groomed. A man of wealth is best able to achieve this requirement by hiring others—like plumbers—to do the dirty work.

Two years after his inheritance allowed him to retire from his career as a homicide detective, Mac Faraday had chosen to ignore that rule.

His middle-class upbringing had a different rule: If you can do it yourself—no matter how dirty the job—it’s a waste of money to hire someone else to do it for you.

Determination had drawn Mac’s handsome face into a scowl. His blue eyes were narrowed into slits focused on the toilet in which he was plunging away. Water splashed upwards to spill over the sides and drenched the lower half of his sweatpants down to his bare feet.

Even in this less than glamorous setting, Archie did find his arm and chest muscles, bulging from the workout, appealing. When Mac yanked the plunger up from out of the toilet, in the process

splattering the water across his firm stomach and down the front of his pants, she reconsidered that assessment. *Maybe not that appealing after all.* She asked, "What are you doing?"

"What does it look like?"

"Why?"

"It's stopped up." He shook the dripping plunger in Gnarly's direction. "And I have a feeling I know who did it."

Uttering a whine, Gnarly moved to hide behind Archie's legs.

She jumped to the shepherd's defense. "Why are you blaming Gnarly? He doesn't use the toilet. You're the only one who uses this toilet."

"You've used it." Mac reminded her of her frequent nights spent with him in the master suite. "Maybe I should blame you."

She folded her arms across her bosom. "I wouldn't go there if I were you."

"That's why I'm blaming Gnarly." He again pointed the plunger at the dog. "Look at him. Do you see that guilty expression on his face? He's done something, and I suspect it has to do with this toilet."

"Even if he did drop something into it, how did he flush it?" She giggled. "Mac, he's a *dog*."

The phone on the bed stand rang before Mac could come up with a response. "Answer that, will you?" He returned to his plunging.

"I need to take Gnarly to the groomer," she called in to him while trotting to the king-sized bed that they had been sharing.

Mac Faraday had inherited the mansion from Robin Spencer, who, as an unwed teenager, had given him up at birth. However, his late mother had stipulated that her research assistant and editor, Archie Monday, was permitted to live in the stone guest cottage tucked away in the rose garden for as long as she wanted.

The beautiful green-eyed blonde had come with the house, and Mac Faraday was in no hurry for her to move out ... nor was she in any hurry to leave.

Spencer's police chief David O'Callaghan didn't sound his usual jovial self when Archie answered the phone. After a quick hello, he asked for Mac.

"David, you sound terrible," she observed.

"My weekend's been shot," he replied. "One of my cruisers was stolen last night."

"Are you serious?"

Mac came into the bathroom doorway. "What's wrong?"

She told him, "One of David's police cruisers got stolen."

David told her the reason for his call. “Tell Mac that I’m going to miss the game this afternoon. I need to fill out a ton of reports and find out how someone was able to break into our garage to steal a police cruiser.” He added, “Our guys are going to be the laughing stock of the state for this.”

In Archie’s other ear, Mac was asking, “Does he need any help finding the scum who stole it?”

“It was probably some bored teenagers pulling a prank,” she told them both.

“Committing a felony doesn’t make for a very good prank,” they told her in unison.

Seeing the time on the alarm clock on the bed stand, she announced, “Gnarly and I are late.”

She handed the phone to Mac.

“Where are you taking Gnarly?” he asked her.

“To the groomer,” she said. “It’s the first Saturday of the month.”

“What does that have to do with it?”

“Mac?” David called to him from the phone.

“Gnarly has a standing appointment for the first Saturday of the month,” she said with her hands on her hips. “Ten-thirty with Misty. He gets the works.”

“What’s ‘the works’?”

“Mac, are you there?” David asked him.

Archie ticked off each item on her fingers. “Shampoo, deep conditioner, teeth cleaning, toenails clipped, aromatherapy—they’re having a special today on strawberries and champagne—and—and this is Gnarly’s favorite—a deep body massage.”

Gnarly pawed at her hand.

“For a dog?” Mac’s voice went up in pitch.

“Dogs need pampering, too.”

“How much is all this going to cost?” Mac asked.

“Only two-hundred and twenty-five dollars.”

“Only two hundred and twenty-five dollars?” Mac objected. “I don’t spend that much a year on my own hair, and I’m a human.”

“And you look like it.” She kissed him. “I have to go. Misty is very popular. She will only hold Gnarly’s appointment for ten minutes. Once I was late, and she gave his appointment to a chow. Gnarly was in a snit the whole next week until Misty was able to fit him in.”

Gnarly uttered a whine mixed with a bark before charging down the stairs. Archie tucked her handbag under her arm and hurried after him.

With a shake of his head, Mac sat down onto the bed and brought the phone to his ear. "Dave ..." All he heard from the other end of the line was a dial tone.

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Gnarly loved riding in Archie's royal blue Escalade. Mac would always order him to the back seat, which the German shepherd would ignore. Not so with Archie. When riding with his favorite lady, he was invited to ride shotgun in the front passenger seat and stick his head up through the sun roof when the feeling struck him to do so.

After climbing into the SUV, Archie noticed that the bangs of her shortly cropped blonde hair were curling funnily. That would not look good at the book club luncheon at the Spencer Inn, for which she was already running late. While the automatic garage door went up, she licked her fingertips and finger combed it.

Gnarly pawed at her arm to urge her to get moving.

"Sorry, Gnarl, I can fix them later at the Inn." She put the car into gear and backed out of the garage, which housed Mac's black SUV and red Dodge Viper. The last stall was still home to Robin Spencer's yellow classic 1934 Bentley Park Ward convertible, which the late author had rarely driven. Mac had yet to drive it. He was afraid of wrecking it.

In the heart of Maryland, the cedar and stone home, known as Spencer Manor, rested at the end of the most expensive piece of real estate in the resort area of Deep Creek Lake. The peninsula housed a half-dozen lake houses that grew in size and grandeur along the stretch of Spencer Court. The road ended at the stone pillars marking the multi-million dollar estate that had been the birthplace and home of the late Robin Spencer, one of the world's most famous authors.

Along the stretch of Spencer Point, Archie waved to the Schweitzers, who lived in the last house before crossing over the bridge, and then turned right onto Spencer Lane, which took her around the lakeshore. She noticed the Spencer police cruiser fall in behind her after she made the turn.

With her eye on the speedometer, she eased her foot on the gas to stay under forty-five miles per hour. With the other eye, she glanced at the black and gold SUV through the rearview mirror. She squinted in an effort to see who was driving.

It wasn't Deputy Chief Art Bogart. He had his own cruiser. David was still at the station. Any of the dozen officers on the police force would have waved to her when she drove past.

I have a bad feeling about this... who's that in the passenger seat?

The alarm inside her head kicked up the tempo a notch. The Spencer police department did not operate in teams. The force was too small. Each officer had his own cruiser and patrolled alone. If backup was needed in the small resort town, another officer would be only a few minutes away.

Something's not right—not right at all.

The blue lights flashed on in the cruiser behind her.

“We have company, Gnarly.” She eased her SUV over to the side of the road. Through the trees on the right, she could see that the lake was tranquil. Most of the residents of Spencer were still waking up and starting their day. Across the road, the woods and trails led up the mountain on which rested the Spencer Inn, another part of Mac Faraday’s inheritance.

In her side and rearview mirror, Archie watched the two men with silver police shields pinned to their uniforms, dark glasses, and hats, get out of the cruiser. She could see by the fit of their shirts that they were wearing amour vests.

Gnarly looked over his shoulder and growled.

“Easy, Gnarly.”

While the driver approached Archie’s side, his partner came up along the rear passenger side. They were both wearing utility belts with guns, batons, and radios.

With her right hand, Archie reached into her clutch bag that she always kept tucked in between her seat and the hand break.

The driver reached around behind his back.

“Down, Gnarly.”

Gnarly lay down in the seat.

When she saw the butt of the gun come out from behind his back, Archie, her eyes on the target in her side rearview mirror, fired three shots from her pink handgun, engraved with *The Pink Lady* across the muzzle, over her left shoulder. The first shot took out the rear driver’s side window before ripping through the gun man’s neck. The other two went through his head before he hit the ground.

In one movement, Archie threw her right arm around to fire out the rear window at the partner who only managed to get one shot before she hit him in the lower neck. Her second shot went through his head.

The world seemed to stop.

Breathing hard, she clutched the gun and stared in the rearview mirror for any sign that they were still alive and would try again.

The next thing she was aware of was Gnarly clawing at her. When she didn't respond, he licked her face. She had no idea of how long she had been sitting there.

"Oh, my!" She heard someone yell.

Archie opened up the car door and stepped out.

A car filled with tourists had driven up to the scene. Seeing the woman in a Chanel suit holding a pink handgun and standing over two dead police officers next to a cruiser that still had its blue lights on, they immediately became hysterical. The tires burned leather on the road when the car sped away.

After checking out the two men, Gnarly, assured that they were dead, came back to sit in front of Archie. His big brown eyes were questioning. *What just happened here?*

Archie knelt down and took the paw he offered her. "Well, Gnarly, it's a long story."