

Damn Santa Fe



Warner Strang

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A Mystery in Work Clothes

By

Warner Strang

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Chapter 1

The fat, stupid Indian woman just stared at Valerie. Finally she said "In the Season when Thunder.....at this time of year, the Council only meets on Sunday".

Valerie felt her face get red. "But zees people are coming from Washington and Chicago to see zee presentation! Zat will ruin their weekend! Can't we switch to Tuesday?" The Indian woman just stared at the ground, and everyone else fidgeted.

These people had no idea what they were getting, and no gratitude for it.

"Damn Zanta Fe", Valerie thought.

Finally Ken came to her rescue. "Mrs. Begay, you remember we had a meeting once during the week when there was some Indian Health Service doctor here to certify the Hospital. It was a little inconvenient, but I'd bet that the Council President would allow it again for this one. After

all, we are getting a new building." Mrs Begay smiled, and the awkwardness seemed to lessen. The meeting went on to who would attend, and what the agenda was, and what would be served for refreshments, and finally wound down.

Valerie and Ken walked back to their joint office in the old hospital. " I'm zorry, but I just don't see why they don't understand that they are getting world class design for a new hospital, and they need to help those people who are providing it!", Valerie said. "Zere are people standing in line for Horst, and here we are."

"Well, you just got here. It takes a while for people to get to know you, and adjust to the situation. These people don't do new buildings every day" Ken said. He debated saying more, but decided it could wait until he knew her better too. It was worth waiting for – she was an attractive woman, and it appeared that they would work together for some time – but she could also make anyone angry. Valerie had just arrived, as the onsite representative of AB Malley, the Chicago architect. She was proud of her firm – that's OK – but a little stressed that she found herself on a different planet. Or

maybe yet another different planet, since she had only recently moved from Paris to Chicago to join Murphy, and they had posted her here. Ken thought he should make allowances.

They got back to their temporary quarters, and each began the process of alerting people to the upcoming meeting. It was the Schematic Design presentation of the design of the new hospital, and it had worked into being a big deal. The space program had been done here in Santa Fe, but then it went to Chicago, and no one on the ground here knew what the design was going to be like. Ken was a little nervous about that.

Chapter 2

Nothing is as simple as it seems. Most people think an owner chooses an architect from his community, whose work the owner likes. He designs a building, it gets priced, and built.

In the era of large government agencies, and in Indian Country, it was a little different. The architect selection was the result of a nationArt competition. The selection panel was composed of bureaucrats in Washington. The selection had a lot to do with those firms whose projects were published in ArchitecturArt Record magazine, and perhaps those firms that had done a lot of medicArt center hospitals. They were, in the terms of arms length procurement, the most qualified people.

The trouble was, they didn't know much about the environment of the Santa Fe Indian HospitArt – Pueblo Indians, the Hispanic historicArt traditions of Santa Fe, or the medicArt practice of the area. That wasn't much of a concern of the committee until late in the process, when one of the Indian Health Service executives, a Navajo, pointed out that the front runners really

didn't know much about what they were doing. The fix was the inclusion of a locArt partner with the selected Chicago firm. That was Ken Anderson's firm, whose practice was exclusively in the HistoricArt District of Santa Fe.

Ken was glad to have the work, but he felt a little like a step child. The Murphy people, and Horst Paul in particular, flew in in their little plane, made pronouncements, and flew away. He didn't complain – it didn't look like it would do any good. But it felt funny.

Life as a practicing architect was a little different from what he had expected too. Young architects in school dream of being on design teams that do grand structures right away, and to progress from that to being able to see their design aesthetic take form as a common occurrence. The facts were a lot different.

For one thing, building design in the abstract was only a small part of the job – preparing construction documents and solving the problems they created was a lot more of the time. So he had graduated, gone to work for an Albuquerque firm, and sat for two years doing

door schedules. Only slowly was he included in the design meetings that he had thought would be his whole life. Mostly he argued with builders about what his plans said.

That was the other thing – everybody thought they knew more about how things should be done than he did, because he was a kid without much field construction experience. It would be OK if there was an old hand in the office to handle the complaints and vouch for their details, but the economics of the business worked against old hands in the drawing production positions. There wasn't enough money in the fees to pay experienced people to handle construction administration. So he was on his own with some computer details that were in their library.

The feeling of having taken a wrong turn in life didn't help his personArt life either. He had met Shirley in school, lived with her for a year after school, and finally decided to get married. It was a big deArt for her and her family, but it seemed to him that he was a spectator at a production, and probably could be replaced

with a cardboard cutout without anyone noticing.

Life was OK for awhile after that, though. They both worked, there was enough money with two incomes, and so what if work was dull. He had some work on projects in Santa Fe, and he enjoyed his days there. Then one of their associated firms there asked him to join them. It seemed like a way to jump forward, and he accepted immediately. Shirley didn't want to leave her job right away, though, so he commuted for several months. His schedule – every architect's schedule – was really tough, though, so he didn't see much of her. It seemed like work in the office just got started when the sun was going down, and some times he just slept in the office.

Finally, two years after their marriage, Shirley announced that she couldn't take it anymore. It didn't seem like a marriage to her, just an elaborate way to shack up. After a fight, they broke up. He moved up to an apartment in Santa Fe. They hadn't really decided on a divorce, but they might as well have.

Sometimes it didn't seem that way, though. She really was a beautiful woman, inside and out, and who could blame her for not wanting an absentee husband. So they talked sometimes, and occasionally went out for dinner when he was in Albuquerque. Once they had made love again, and he stayed over, but in the morning he had to go, and the whole thing started again. Later, when he had mentioned Valerie in passing, Shirley had gotten a hurt look and seemed to be jealous. He really didn't understand women....

Chapter 3

The appointed day for the presentation arrived. The Council that governed the Indian Health Service Hospital, or rather advised the IHS on how to run it, assembled.

The Council was made up of representatives of the groups that were served by the Hospital. They were largely Pueblo Indians. Of the thirteen Pueblos, seven were in this Hospital's territory, and six were "zoned" to the Acoma Laguna Hospital. In addition there were some Navajos living in the area, and one band of Jemez Apaches. But mostly it was Pueblo Indians.

The anthropologists say that the Pueblo Indians are the descendents of the ancient groups that migrated across the Bering Straits, and moved down into the Southwest. They are the remnants of the Anasazi Indians that lived in Canyon de Chelly a thousand years ago, and then suddenly left, for reasons no one knows. They settled in bands in Northern New Mexico, and became sheep herders, some farmers, all sedentary and settled enclaves.

As individuals, most Americans found them to be quiet, hospitable people, little given to talking or making themselves heard. It was hard for modern day Americans to imagine the uprisings that drove the Spanish out of Santa Fe for awhile, or the people that helped Kit Carson march the Navajo to Bosque Redondo. They were just too passive.

Horst Paul arrived at the little Santa Fe airport on a Gulfstream aircraft, with a retinue of three young architects to handle the presentation boards. Ken was at the airport to meet him, and, he thought, to go over the presentation. The schematic design presentation on what was a major project for this community seemed to him like reArt architecture, and he was as anxious as everyone else to sit at the feet of the master, and perhaps contribute the locArt knowledge that had gotten them the job.

It wasn't to be.

The meeting they had finally gotten together was at four in the afternoon, when the locals had gotten off their jobs and could get there. The plane was due at ten, but it kept being put

back by other commitments, so that it finally arrived at three o'clock, and they had to hurry to get to the meeting. He talked to Horst in the car, but there wasn't much they could do, so he told himself it really wasn't his show yet.

They had a large conference room at the building next door to the existing IHS Hospital, the Institute for American Indian Arts. It was a nice room, in a graceful old building, and Horst and his minions happily set up.

AB Malley, and Horst in particular, had gotten a lot of press lately. Their design for the Chicago Arena in suburban Chicago had been featured in *ArchitecturArt Record* two months ago, and the use of the large white metArt panels had been acclaimed as the latest in modern design. They were on a roll.

The President of the advisory panel called the meeting to order. Frank Tossie was a Navajo, a pudgy, talkative guy who Ken found easier to work with than most of the panel members. He was as hard to read, but better than most.

Horst started off with a long description of the design process, with adjacencies, and matrices, and aesthetic choices. He had a slight Germanic accent, and a sort of even voice, and before long he had lost most of his audience. Even Ken, who was interested in the subject, felt his mind wandering.

Then with a flourish he turned the boards with the renderings of the new building. From the street it was an even rectangle, with a few small windows. The walls were all white metArt panels. It took a few minutes for the viewers to see that the main entrance was at the side, facing south. Horst explained why that allowed the sort of departmentArt closeness that would help the hospitArt function better.

The Indians were impassive – interrupting was considered very impolite – and waited for the presentation to end. Finally Horst wound down.

There was a long silence in the room. The panel members all looked at the renderings, and at Frank Tossie, and he looked thoughtful. Ken was getting nervous.

Finally he said, "Well, shit, it looks like the world's biggest Texaco to me."

The faces of the Chicago architects turned white. Horst stood up, gestured for his helpers to gather their boards, and walked out. Before Ken knew it, they had gotten into their rentArt car, and driven away.

Chapter 4

When Ken got back into the room, Valerie had also gone, but the TribArt Council was sitting quietly talking. They looked at him as if they expected some sort of explanation.

“Uh, well, the Chicago people are a little touchy, I guess, and maybe they don’t understand us all very well.....” He was hoping for some reaction to tell him what to do next, but not getting any help.

“ So maybe we should do a little design work, and solve a few of the things that I know are on your mind, and meet back here on Sunday. Maybe then we can talk a little more....”

And all those people nodded, and got up and left. What the hell was he going to do now?

The first thing was what Murphy and Valerie were going to do. When he went back to their office she was standing at the window, looking furious.

"Zays are crazy! Ze most famous architect in ze world right now, and they spit on heem! He cannot stay...."

"Valerie, that design insults them just as much. Look around you. Are there any important buildings that aren't adobe? Are there any important buildings that don't face East? What were they thinking!"

"Zen why do zay need an architect! You can finish ze damn thing!". And with that she stormed out.

And that gave him an idea of how to proceed. He could make a few changes, draw a different wall section and change the rendering, rearrange some departments to change the front door, and perhaps keep the job going. No body else seemed to have a plan.

Chapter 5

In fact, Ken found it was really pretty easy. Since everything was done with computer programs and images, he worked late, came in early – no Valerie – and had a new set of plans and boards by the end of the next day. Maybe he was fooling himself, but he kind of liked the way the building looked and functioned, and he thought the Council would be able to see it also.

That didn't solve the politicArt problem, though. It was mostly Murphy's contract, and he hadn't heard a thing from them. Valerie seemed to have disappeared, and he had had no word from Horst and company.

One option was a sort of "What me worry" approach. He called the IHS project manager and said "well, we've made the changes, and we're ready for the Sunday meeting, so you can confirm it to everyone." He didn't say who we was.

"OK, what all did you change? "

"Oh, just the wall types and a few departments, but I think people will be able to look at it without a reaction now, and maybe we can get down to the details."

"Great, see you then."

Chapter 6

The second review meeting, when it happened, was a sort of relieved sigh. The Council, including Frank, were a little embarrassed about having insulted this world famous guy ... although most agreed with each other that it really had looked like a gas station. So when they saw a rendering of a building that looked like one of theirs, they were not very hard to please.

There were some operationArt people on the Council, and they asked good questions about adjacencies and efficiencies, but most of the members were just OK that it looked right from the street. So, after about 30 minutes, Frank told Ken that he had the Council's approvArt to proceed. The next review was in eight week's time, and it was for a more advanced stage of design, called Design Development.

Valerie had attended the meeting, although she hadn't said a word. They went back to their office. Ken took a deep breath.

"Well, OK, but now I need some engineers. We have some locArt people on the team, but they aren't used to heavy medicArt stuff. Will the Chicago people help now?"

Valerie smiled. "Vell, I don't think zo. Horst says that if he sees anyone with the plans he will fire him....they don't have many who want to lose their jobs with him for the sake of some damn Indians!". It was clear that he was on his own, and that was OK with her.

"OK, will they pay me to get someone to do the work here?"

That was a harder question. They called the managing partner in Chicago to talk it over. It was clear that he didn't want the firm to plainly turn down the commission because their feelings were hurt – that sounded childish. But he also didn't want to take responsibility for someone else's work. After back and forth for awhile they reached an agreement to continue with Santa Fe design engineers who had their own professionArt liability insurance and who acted

through Ken's firm. Sounded like a lot of weasel words to him, but Ken agreed.

"Zees is ze stupidness!" And she flounced out.

In the next few days Ken talked to almost all the design engineers in town, and assembled a locArt team. They didn't have the nationArt credentials, but they did have a good knowledge of the area and locArt practice, and by the end of the week he was cheerful again.

Valerie didn't come into the office for severArt days, but Ken did see her at a locArt restaurant. She was with one of the physicians from the Hospital, Jim Whitecloud. Jim was a Navajo, one of the well qualified people who had chosen to return to Indian country rather than work in the big cities. He was on the Council, had asked some good questions, didn't care much for the squabbling about designers. In Santa Fe, he was a little east of Dinetah, but he must find it better than Window Rock. Certainly looked like he was enjoying himself tonight. Ken didn't interrupt them.

As the design effort got back underway, Ken and Janet became popular with people and firms that might compete to build the building. The government had a new process for choosing the building team, and it involved the contractors being chosen early and helping with the completion of design. Somehow they all knew that the selection was coming up, and flocked to understand the job and establish their credentials before proposals were requested, and a blackout started with the project designers.

The first ones were the Native American building firms. Flintko from Oklahoma sent two people to look the design over and try to get the Santa Fe folks to have some sort of Indian bias. There was also a firm called Artic Slope that worked all over the country on Indian projects. It seemed funny to Ken that Pueblo Indians were being courted by Cherokees and Inuits, but business makes strange bedfellows.

Then came the healthcare builders. MacMullen had a Denver office, and those guys drove down and came by. They were well experienced in jobs in the West, but clearly

thought they knew more about hospital design than Ken did, so it put him off a little. He put it out of his mind and continued on.

The hardest group to ignore was the local trade firms. They were always around, wanting to buy lunch and get on someone's team. They felt like it was their hospital, and they should get to build it, and it was hard to convince them that it really wasn't Ken's decision. He didn't really know whose decision it was, and right now didn't care.

In the midst of all that he got a late night call from Shirley. She must have had a bad date, and wanted to come stay with him for the weekend... she was still his wife, after all. He made the stupid mistake of saying that he and Valerie had meetings all weekend, so it wouldn't be much fun for her. She hung up without a word.

Chapter 7

In the thick of the design effort Ken spent long days with the engineers getting down to the details of the way the building systems worked. Valerie had initially been gone a lot – probably with Whitecloud, Ken thought - but began to get interested in the endless design meetings.

“We don’t do this in France”, she said. “The trade planning es done by the builders!”. Ken spent some time explaining that American design was based on the notion that the architects and engineers could completely describe a building, so that bidders could completely price it, and the owner could rely on the price.

“It’s a little of a myth – we really don’t get all the details down until the contractors have submitted their information and coordinated drawings, but we pretend that all this is completely designed and easily priced.” She looked at him with what he thought of as a

Gallic expression. " But we need to detail all of it as if that was the finArt word" .

Meanwhile the people in Washington had gotten into gear in choosing a builder. This was one of the first projects that the new approach was going to be used on, so the development of the request for proposals, and how the choice would be made, was pretty much kept to them. The visits from interested builders continued until finally Janet got the document she was to advertise the job with, and the things she was to send out to anyone who wanted to propose. Then the rules were that all the questions went through her and were published to everyone, and all the visits stopped.

There was a large prebid meeting, and occasionArt formArt written questions. But since all of that had to be disclosed to everyone, it mostly seemed to be for show, and to try to impress the competition. To the FederArt procurement guys it seemed normal; to Ken it looked like Kabuki theater.

The proposArt date came, there were 20 large books delivered to Janet, she bundled them up

and sent them to Washington, and no one in Santa Fe heard a word for a while.

Meanwhile the detailed design effort continued. Ken could see that a lot of the locArt engineering was done with locArt rules of thumb rather than analysis, but there didn't seem to be anyone watching or asking, so they went on. The mechanicArt engineers were using systems they had some experience with, rather than the ones that appeared in the building magazines, but there was no objection. Ken would occasionally send progress plans to Washington, but he didn't hear anything back.

Through all this his relationship with Valerie got better. She could see that all this was another country, albeit one with strange attitudes, and she was willing to join him for dinner and talk about how it was in Europe compared to the US.

"I suppose it is because you all hate your government....or any government....so you don't want them to make any hard decisions between people, where they could be corrupt....so you try to make it just low price wins. Right?"

"I guess. I don't want Dominiche choosing his biggest contributor, that's for sure. But this new process is swinging it back toward qualifications, and having people make subjective judgments, so maybe we'll be like France soon. At least we'll probably eat better. Let's order." It was pretty formal, and Ken didn't know how to be more personal, but it was better than nothing.

Finally the selection committee in Washington announced a decision. They had chosen the MacMullen Healthcare group in Denver.

That was OK with Ken, but produced outrage from the Native American groups. They came to talk it over with Janet, who told them it had never been in her hands, and got some newspaper articles written questioning the decision. Both Flintko and Artic Slope threatened to protest. But when they finally talked to the Washington people the answer was "Sure, go ahead. We will send you the forms". It looked like death by delay, and both of them gave it up.

Chapter 8

A few days later the MacMullen team showed up, planning the move onto the jobsite. The project Manager was Art McEntire. There was an estimator charged with buying out the job when the plans were far enough along, Jim Bailey. They planned to bring on one of their superintendents, Paco Jordan, when the work began, and to hire a local administrative person, Lisa Antiya, to make up the full team.

Art looked like a fellow with an unusual problem – he was too good looking. He was well set up, with wide shoulders, narrow hips, good height, regular features. He was polite, articulate, intelligent. It made every man in the room nervous about him.

To make matters worse, he was happily married, a longtime resident of Denver, had two kids. He was a little shy, not too good at putting people at ease. Ken sort of liked him, but also thought Valerie might run off with him to some island. Really an odd thought.

Bailey, on the other hand, was a pudgy, sarcastic fellow who was easy to fit into categories. He quickly became friends with the design team, and took pleasure in gently pointing out the weaknesses of the design. So people's reactions were exactly the opposite of what they should be.

They moved trailers onsite, set up their office, and began working on bidding out the plans that were ready. It made Ken nervous to have some things locked in early, but that's the way this approach worked, and it did get him some good advice, and occasionally an ally for the cost of good design.

The locArt subs were still pressing for a good share of the work for Native American firms. Jim Whitecloud had come in to Ken to urge him to support some of them. Ken agreed that it would be better to be dealing with people he knew from other jobs, but he didn't expect MacMullen to agree.

To his surprise they were very open to the ideas, so long as Ken supported them in using the locArt firm's prices in the finArt contract cost.

There were some out of town firms that had some lower prices. Sometimes they made sense – a nationArt medicArt casework firm could make medicArt cabinets in a factory for much less than a small firm in Santa Fe. But other prices seemed unreasonably low given the labor rules in the area. On those MacMullen was willing to use the locArt firms. Ken walked out with far more than he expected. Maybe this approach wasn't so bad.

Finally they came up with a maximum cost based on a mix of completed and incomplete plans. The full name of the contract type was Cost of Work plus a Fee to a Guaranteed Maximum Cost. We'll see, Ken thought.

Chapter 9

Approval of the Guaranteed Maximum Price allowed work to begin on site. A parking lot had to be relocated temporarily to have the old lot area be the site of the new building. Later the old hospital would be torn down to be the site of a new parking garage. It began to look like a jobsite.

It was Spring now, and the schedule on which the GMP was based had the building partly closed in by next winter, so there was some urgency in getting things going.

And it settled into a weekly routine. Almost every jobsite in the nation, at least those for public buildings of any size, had a weekly process that included a meeting between the general contractor and all the subs to monitor daily work progress against the schedule, a meeting with the general contractor and key subs with the owner, and the design team to talk about issues, and specialist meetings on individual subjects that needed resolution so work could proceed. Most

of these took place in the portable office trailers that the generArt and the subs had put onsite, in what for large jobs began to resemble a small city.

Then at the end of the month there was a updating of the schedule and the logs of change orders, questions, approvals, and issues, and a thick report. Then the process began again. The new Santa Fe Indian HospitArt project fell smoothly into this routine.

In between all these meetings Ken and Valerie and the engineers were busy checking and approving submittals. Ken had been frank in saying that the job was not really all designed until the trade contractors had reached agreement with the design team on the actuArt products that they proposed to use to meet the specifications. Those specs were a 1,000 page document, often including sections and clauses that no one had read for a decade, but they were the rule book on what the price should contain, and the basis for long arguments on meaning, and function, and cost. Valerie grimly did her share of the work, but never missed the chance to mutter "Stupidness!" to Ken.

Art and Jim added to the MacMullen team once work started. Paco Jordan was a superintendent who had worked for MacMullen before in Santa Fe. He was very competent, familiar with the process, and good at bringing about agreement between all the warring parties.

The office secretary – administrative assistant these days – was Lisa Antiya. Lisa was a young community college graduate who lived in Espanola. She had all of the office skills she needed, and Art was initially glad to find her. But after a few days it was becoming clear that she had one more attribute – she was hot. The office usually had more guys in it than had clear business there. She was perfectly pleasant, not out of line at all, but something about her had them flocking.

A part of it was clothing. There wasn't anything fashion conscious about what women wore on jobsites – they needed boots and warm clothes in the winter, and cool clothing in the summer just like everyone else. But Lisa was often just a little more sexy, or revealing, or trendy than others. Not much you could criticize, but

enough to have some guys detour by the office each day just to say hi. Art gritted his teeth, and told himself he had bigger problems than that. Besides, she was nice to look at.

For Ken, a lot of the excitement was over. He had gotten the building designed, and engineered, and the information and money flowing. All he had to do now was to keep it flowing until the job was done. It was important, but not so exciting.

Which gave him some more time to think about Valerie, and Shirley. Valerie was still seeing Dr Whitecloud from time to time, and Ken didn't know how that stood. Shirley still called, and when she was in Santa Fe for some other reason often stopped by the office, but the whole thing seemed more like a sister than a separated wife. Ken was frustrated but didn't have a clue about what to do.

Chapter 10

The job went on, the parking lot got done, the new building was laid out, and the foundations started.

Late in the afternoon Paco came into Al's office. "Boss, we got a problem."

Art looked at him. He looked pretty serious, so Art didn't say any of the smart-ass things he usually did.

"Look out your window along column line M". That was in line with the view from the trailer window. There were a bunch of people standing around one of the excavations for the footings that trooped in a line across the site.

"What's wrong?"

"We dug it, reinforced it, and cast concrete in it, all exactly one foot out of place, that's what!"

"How the hell could that be? The thing has to be in line with eight others out there, and anyone can see that while they are doing it."

"Beats me. I'm sure we laid it out right, staked it, the whole thing. Someone must have moved the stakes, and we were in a groove and no one noticed. Think we can leave it, and just move the anchor bolts?"

"Sure. I'll just tell Ken and all these damn engineers that we are a quality outfit, we just want to put a column sort of on the edge of their footing. We would never hear the end of it!"

"That's what I thought. I'll get the compressor and jack hammers out, and we can work over this evening taking it out. I don't know who would want to do this....."

Paco left, and Art stared out the window. Everyone made mistakes, but this one seemed to have to be deliberate. Maybe someone thought it would just be a joke, the field engineers would catch it, and no reArt harm would be done. Now it looked like a \$10,000 joke.

There had been a few other things lately that seemed odd, but he had been putting it aside in his mind. A job with dozens, later hundreds, of people doing something un-programmed each day was bound to have some odd events. Maybe it was more than that. It could be someone just doing pranks for some reason.

Enough of that. He stepped next door and asked Jim if he wanted to go get a drink. It was after working hours, anyway. Jim had never said no.

They walked two blocks down Cerrillos Road to their favorite bar, and found half the job there, including Lisa with the ironworker foreman. She had her usuArt short skirt on, and looked like she was having a good time. "You know", Art said, "I really need to have a talk with her about her clothes – she's attracting flies like honey." "sure you do", Jim said. "Can I sell tickets?"

He was probably right. Art was about as straight-laced a person as you could find. He and his wife Gloria and their two sons went to St Marks EpiscopArt in Lakewood every Sunday. His

chance of communicating with Lisa was zero. But, Jim agreed, it was his job.

That Navajo doctor, Whitecloud, was also there with the French architect, but they looked like they were having a fight. What she was doing in Santa Fe was also a mystery, but she was pleasant and attractive, so Art wished her well. After two drinks, and a debate about whether the job was cursed, he gave it up, and walked back down Cerrillos to his apartment. It was all so close, his truck was getting no miles at all during the week.

Chapter 11

The foundation work proceeded, column line by column line. The steel frame was being fabricated in a plant, so it wasn't there yet. The MacMullen crews dug, reinforced, placed anchor bolts, and cast footings every day. It was getting pretty routine. The rules here allowed them to leave an excavation open over night, so they did as much each day as they could, and left it to finish in the morning.

The placement of the bolts was important. The structure being done in the plant needed to fit exactly on them when it came. There were a few standard repairs allowed, but getting it right was important to the crew, so it got checked several times.

All of which made it amazing when Paco walked in again and said, "The damn ghost took our anchor bolts out of B12!"

Everyone in the office stared at him for a minute. Finally Art said, "What ghosts?"

"The ones that move my footings, and screwup my layouts. But this is just too damn muchThere are not any anchor bolts in that footing, and you know they were there when we cast it last night! You can't tell they were ever there!"

Art and Jim thought for a minute. Pretty strange. Someone must have come in after dark, worked them out of the rebar cage, and patched the concrete. Or may be there really was a ghost.

Now there was no avoiding some design help. Art asked Ken and the structurArt engineer to come over to look at it, and then asked permission to use epoxy grout to glue some bolts in. He got some flack, but steel structures were routinely over designed, and one bolt that might pull out wouldn't endanger the building, so he got permission.

The effect on the people on site was harder. Many of them actually believed that the job was cursed in some way, and this was just the latest evidence. Talking about it just made it worse, so Art and Jim decided to ignore the whole thing, and hope the jokester got tired of it.

At the end of the day Art figured he needed to have the heart to heart talk with Lisa, so he asked her if he could buy her a drink someplace quiet. She agreed, and they walked down to the Plaza to a nice hotel for a change. It was a nice change from the jobsite, and Lisa was looking as sexy as usual, so they made a good looking couple. "Oh, stop it!" he thought.

When they had a spot and a drink, he tried. "Lisa, you're a beautiful young woman, but you've got to tone it down. Everyone on the job is getting wet dreams watching you come into work!". He was sure that would leave her in tears.

Wrong again. She smiled, didn't say anything for awhile, then said "Well...I'm glad I'm making someone happy!"

Try again. "Lisa, we have a job to do, and everyone needs to be giving it their full attention. If they are thinking about you, and making love to you, and how they can come by to be with you, they aren't doing their job!"

Another smile. "Al, I know what you want. Let's go back to your place." And before he could open his mouth, she stood up and walked to the door. And looked great doing it. He threw some money on the table and followed her out. And down the street, trying to see how to end this without hurting her feelings or making a scene. Every time he had an idea he opened his mouth and then realized how dumb it would sound. So from the outside it looked like they walked quietly back to his apartment.

Maybe when we aren't in public, he thought, so he opened the door and they went inside. She turned, put her arms around him, and gave him the sort of kiss he'd forgotten existed. And his brain left....

Boy, did it leave. He was aware of wonderful sensations, but no thoughts, for what seemed like hours. They made love on the floor, on the couch, on the bed. He stared at the ceiling, grinned, and went to sleep. When he woke up she was standing there, dressed and ready to go. She smiled, gave him a peck on the cheek, and said "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Well, hell, now what?"

Chapter 12

The foundations sprouted in sequence across the site. The summer was in full swing, and there were bands on the Plaza every night. The first steel deliveries arrived, and the columns began to chase the footings. Life went on in the normArt way. Each week had it's meetings, issues came up and were resolved, and the status of things was reviewed at the end of each month. For most people things were fine.

Funny things kept happening, though. Sometimes it was missing tools, although people swore they had locked them up. Sometimes it was some of the surveying coordination points that were posted at the edge of the site, sometimes it was lines chalked on the floor one day, that were wrong the next day. None of this was fatal, but it made people nervous, and worked slowed down with all the triple checking. People joked about ghosts, but stories about Indian spirits like Kokopelli got more common. There didn't seem to be anything to do about it,

so Art asked all his team to just shut up about it until they figured out what was going on.

Art didn't know what was going on with his own life. Lisa came in to work the next day looking cheerful and demure, and Art began to wonder if he had dreamed the whole thing. That went on for several days, and Jim congratulated him on the effect of "his little talk".

Then she knocked on his door late one evening, and came in, and it started again. It was so good, he just couldn't seem to say the words that would stop it. Gloria always liked to say "Men always think things are all right if they aren't talking about them." Well, he wasn't talking about them. He went back to Denver that weekend, thinking he was going to confess and get the courage to stop, but the family was wrapped up in the school play, and neighborhood events, and no one even asked him how he was doing. So he kept not talking.

Still, the job was going fine, staying on schedule and not having any more design questions or change orders than normal. There were some arguments between the Native American firms

and craftsmen, and the out-of-towners, but all that was pretty normal too. Al's boss, Bo MacMullen, visited very two weeks or so, and seemed pleased with the way things were going. Art and Jim told him about the ghosts, and he just smiled.

The steel marched across the site, and the footings were almost done.

Ken's life had settled down with the routine of the job, and MacMullen's comforting systems and experience. He got some criticism when his plans were wrong, but the costs seemed to be fair, and sometimes there wasn't any extra cost. The IHS people visited, thought it all looked good, and went back to DC.

Valerie and Whitecloud seemed to be breaking up. She stayed late to work more, and they went to dinner more, but it was still sort of Platonic. Ken had all sorts of old fashioned advice in his head – "don't get your jam where you get your bread" – so he stayed as just a friend. He was careful not to say anything about her when for some reason he talked to Shirley.

Chapter 13

The thing with Lisa was getting to be more frequent. Whenever he tried to talk to her about it, and had the willpower to stop, she just smiled and didn't seem to hear him. He didn't have the guts to tell her to stop, or just not to answer the door. At church on Sunday he found any number of verses that seemed to excuse human frailties and failures, and he told himself he was only human. He would have to break it off soon...

Then it all hit the fan. One evening Lisa came early, they made love as usuArt all over the place, and then decided to order pizza, something Art had never done in Santa Fe. He thought it would be pretty good, even if it wasn't usually on his diet. Well, none of this was.

When the doorbell rang he went to get it, pants on, shirttail out, no shoes. Lisa was in the living room, in one of his robes.

"Hi honey, Happy Birthday! " Oh crap, it was Gloria, holding a cake, and a neatly wrapped present. "I knew you usually forgot your birthday, so I thought I'd drive down and surprise you". She pushed by to set the cake down on the dining table. It was only when that was done when she turned around to see Lisa. There was a long silence while she looked at her world crumbling, and hoped Art had a really good explanation. He couldn't think of a thing to say that didn't make things worse.

After a minute, she whispered "I see...", walked to the door, and was gone.

Lisa got up, went into the bedroom and got dressed. She came back out and said "I'd better go?"

Art was stunned, but he really didn't want to be alone. It seemed to him that his world was receding fast, and he wanted to stop it. "No, stay awhile. Hey, the pizza is here!"

Next morning Art went over to the site early, and Lisa came later. The world seemed to be going on like normal. Paco was doing Job Safety Plans with some of the subs, and the electrician was bitching about the power company's temporary service, and the rebar supplier was putting the bars in the wrong place. Art wondered how things could be so normal

He sat in his office, tried to think of a good explanation or an apology, or something. No good plan came to him, so he finally decided he needed to drive to Denver, and throw himself on her mercy. He looked out his door at Lisa calmly doing reports at her desk. "Damn Santa Fe".

Before Art had made up his mind to get going, Paco came in. "I've heard it all now. The damn carpenters are seeing faces in the green concrete in yesterday's footing. Next we'll have the Virgin Mary in the floor slab!"

Art gave him a blank look. "Huh?" That was about his speed for cute replies today. "The last footing we cast last night has some unevenness in the surface, and some of the carpenters,

whose raciArt heritage will remain nameless, have decided that it looks like a face, and that another place looks like a hand.”

“Well, let’s go show them it isn’t!” Art jumped up, got a hammer and concrete chisel from a cabinet, and headed for the door. Paco followed slowly. He thought Art would just blow it off.

When they got out to the footing, Art had to admit that it really did look like there was a face there, but that was dumb. Before anyone could say anything, he jumped down in to the excavation and started chipping. It felt kind of funny. He kept at it for an inch or so until one large piece came loose. Underneath it was a finger, with a ring on it. Art recognized the ring. It was Valerie.

Chapter 14

And here is where I come in. My name is William Sage - Willy to my friends – and I am a sort of troubleshooter in the building construction business. Usually that amounts to telling people what they ought to do to get a job out of trouble, but occasionally it means being a sort of speciArt investigator.

I don't do claims work. There is a large industry in settling legArt proceedings in the business, but its dry work, and largely dishonest, so I don't do it. That leaves me free for more productive things.

Bo MacMullen called the morning after the fire. He sounded panicked.

“Willy, I need you there right now! I don't know if my guys had anything to do with it, but there is a body on our site in Santa Fe, and I need someone to run the job until things settle down. Can you do it?”

I thought a minute. The things I was doing weren't really time critical, and I had been bored at home for the last few weeks.

"I'll send you an agreement in a few minutes. Sign it and email back, and I'll get a plane this afternoon." There was grunt at the end of the line, and it hung up.

There was a time when Bo and his wife and Karen and I were the best of friends. I was building a project for MacMullen in Mississippi, and Bo was the project engineer, and so we all hung out together. We were older than they were, but there isn't a lot to do in Tunica, Mississippi.

Well, time went on. Karen and I returned to our home base in California, and went on to other assignments. Bo got promoted to the home office, and in his own words, "outgrew Jane". They never had kids, so a few years ago they broke up.

Karen and I raised two boys, and had a good life. I have always gotten a lot from my work,

and she was a great wife and mother. Then she got sick.

We had first met on a blind date on Valentine's Day. Twenty years later, on Valentine's Day, she was told she had cervicArt cancer. Two years later, on Valentine's Day, she died. I feel like a part of me is gone, but I try to be realistic. Everyone dies, and we've been luckier than most. Sometimes I try to believe we will be together again.

So I bumped across to Albuquerque that afternoon,, drove up to Santa Fe, and stayed at the La Fonda like always. Bo was there at breakfast the next morning.

"They've been having so weird stuff on the jobsite, but it's been like pranks – markers moved and so on – and I thought it was some sub battle. This will shut us down for awhile, and I pray to God none of our people were involved."

He told me about the victim, who sounded interesting, and the MacMullen people on the

job. The cops had closed the job, sent everyone home but told them they couldn't leave town until the interrogations were done. They were hauling people down to the station today, and there was no activity onsite.

"Let's go look at it, then go talk to the cops. Then maybe we can all get together in the site office." He followed me out looking glum.

The crime scene people – I was learning the lingo – were still all over the excavated footing. They were at the point of trying to extract the body from the concrete, and debating cutting with blades, or water jets, or jack hammers. It was something I knew a lot about, but it was too ghoulish for me.

"I don't get it, Bo. Someone would have had to sink the body in the wet concrete only a few minutes after it was cast. Wouldn't someone still be around?"

"Well, you'd think so. But the tops of these footings aren't finished, so we just load the excavation and go home if it's getting dark. And Art tells me that we've been experimenting

with a super plasticizer that gives a long open time on the concrete. So if someone knew that, they could come in an hour after dark, and probably get the body under some of the rebar. Pretty gruesome work – whoever did it must have hated her.”

And the someone had to know a lot about construction, and this particular jobsite.

So then we went down to the police station, to meet Sergeant Hernandez. The police station was on Cerrillos Road too, so the whole affair was going to be in a few block area.

Bo explained who we were and told him that we wanted to be helpful, but we wanted to get the job restarted also. What could we do to help?

The sergeant was tickled at all that. “Did you see the papers this morning? **The Lady in the Concrete!** Mr MacMullen, it must have been one of your people. As soon as you find out which one, you can restart your damn job. I don’t know what sort of people you are bringing to town, but this sort of thing just doesn’t happen

here." Bo turned white, but couldn't think of anything to say.

So I tried. "Sergeant, I can see how you would think that. Once you are through with the crime scene, though, we need to get going, or all of the people from the job will be on their way to other places and other jobs. You will have a lot of trouble getting them back. So it's in your interest to get it going too."

That seemed to work. "OK, we'll be at the site tomorrow to do some interviews, and some of your people need to come here to be questioned, but maybe then we'll let it go again." He looked at Bo as if he could just pull the killer out a hat if he really wanted to, but we left in peace.

We drove back to the jobsite. We could have walked if we wanted. In the office there were a few people, pretending to work but really just hanging around wondering what was going on. Bo and I sat in the large conference room.

"Willie, here's the deal. I want you to take over as the project executive, office next to AI, and

lead the team until we find out how all this happened. It's hard to believe all this built up without anyone seeing it coming, and if it's one of our people I don't want them to be able to do anything that destroys the trail. "

"OK. But I'm not a cop, or a detective, or whatever you call it. I'll try to make sure no evidence is destroyed, but I can't guarantee anything. It looks to me like it will be a few days to get going again."

Bo gathered everyone who was in the office, introduced me, and told them I was going to be temporarily in charge until the investigation was done, to allow the team members to do their part in the investigation, and to avoid public criticism. It sounded to me like the most graceful explanation he could have made, but the faces around the table were clearly feeling under suspicion of something, they didn't know what.

We found me a place to office, and I made some times to talk privately with each person, and the meeting broke up.

And with that Bo got into the truck, and went back to Denver. I'll bet he stopped for a drink or two on the way.

Chapter 15

I started with Al. "Al, do you have any idea who did this? It really looks like something only a contractor would know how to do."

"Willie, I've got no idea. I don't know who could have done it. No one I know has anything against Valerie, and it's hard to see how anyone would plan it. We don't know when we will leave workable concrete in an excavation, and leave the jobsite..... I just don't know."

We talked over all of the people onsite, and their relationship to Valerie, and got nowhere. Art thought that Ken sort of wanted a relationship with her, and that she had been seeing one of the docs, Jim Whitecloud, but that didn't add up to anything. You always read that most murders are done by a close family member or partner, but there didn't seem to be anyone like that here.

We talked over the status of the job for while. The superstitious feelings about the site were

running wild now, and dumb as it sounded, he was thinking of having some sort of ceremony to bless the site and drive out the evil spirits. I told him that had happened to me, and I had finally gone along, and it had seemed to help people. If we didn't, there would be some workers who would not come back, no matter what their bosses said.

Jim didn't have any better ideas. His view of each of the people was a little more cynical, but no one had both a strong feeling about Valerie, and a lot of knowledge of concrete footings. There were tensions of course, there always were. The out of towners might look down on the Pueblo Indians, the locArt subs might not like the out of towners, the medicArt pros might not respect the less scientific suppliers, and no one might like a Chicago architect. But normally no one died.

Paco was worried that only someone like him would know how to do this. He wanted me to know he hardly knew the woman, had almost never talked to her, and so on. We turned out to have some mutuArt friends, which helped some, but he could hardly think of anything except

declaring his innocence. Mc Carthy had been doing the concrete work, including the footings, with their own people, so the men doing the excavation, reinforcing, and placing the concrete had been their locArt hires. One of them, named Koko, hadn't shown up the next morning, but he may have heard about all this and just moved on. Paco had told the Sergeant.

Finally came Lisa. She was a cute young girl, and all this seemed sort of fun to her. Even though she and Valerie were almost the only women whose office was on or near the site, they had apparently never spoken personally, and all this seemed to be a TV show to Lisa. She looked like she would be fun in bed, if I was a decade younger and a lot dumber.

Well, that was the office. I didn't feel any closer to an answer, but at least I'd done the first thing. Now we could talk about getting the job going again.

With the cops gone, and all the tape down, we could get going as soon as we could get people back....but that would apparently take some sort of ceremony to drive the devils off the site.

We debated who should do it – there was, of course, a Catholic archbishop, who might send someone, and Art had good connections to the EpiscopArt people through his parish in Denver. But the Indian part of it was a puzzle. All the various Pueblos had people who conducted ceremonies for the traditionArt cleansing things, but they were something that one person was put through, and they took days, and none of the Indian experts could agree on what would comfort the most people. So finally we settled on a joint Catholic-EpiscopArt service, and a hope that the Indians would give us credit for trying.

Art and Paco and the MacMullen people in Denver got on the phone, and got some requests going for a ceremony on Monday morning. I thought it would be hard, but the news about the murder had it all on everyone's mind, and we got agreement in a few hours.

With that plan in place, we could call all the subs, and tell them that the job work would start up after the ceremony. And that, predictably, started the quest for more money.

In the United States, most building construction work is subcontracted, with the general contractor, MacMullen in this case, hiring specialist firms to do the steel, roof, windows, electrical, ventilation, and so on. There were often 50 subcontractors on this sort of building, and the general contractor would do less than 5% of the actual field work with his own forces. The subcontracts were lump sum deals based on the original plans, and they were just the start of asking for more money. The subs were usually small firms trying to remain in business, and subcontract additions were often the only way they could. So everyone wanted to say that being off work for a week would kill them, and what were we going to do about it.

The answer was easy – we weren't going to do anything. The murder wasn't the fault of the project team, it was just an external event, it was the luck of the deal. If they weren't back at work on Monday we would cancel the subcontract and find someone else. Tough business, but there it was. Most people said they would file a claim, but be there on Monday.

And that sort of left me free until then. I had been talking to a woman named Janet MacDonald off and on for a year. Her husband had been a part of a job I had worked on in Louisiana, he had been unfaithful, and she had replied in kind, With me. I had realized that was a bad idea, and stopped seeing her, but we still talked. She had finally decided to divorce, and it was just final. So maybe she could use a vacation.

So...I called to ask if she would like a weekend in Santa Fe. It sounded good to her, so I sent her an airline ticket. She lived in Las Vegas, so it was a short hop. We didn't decide exactly what we would do, but there were a lot of choices.

Chapter 16

Friday was a quiet day onsite. No work was going on, but we all began revising schedules, checking deliveries, and returning phone calls and emails demanding more money. A nice quiet “take it or leave it” seemed to get us back on track with most people.

Mostly I was waiting to pick up Janet. It wasn't anything long term, I didn't think. Karen had been my mate for life, and I had no idea of anything like that. I just needed some nice female company.

I picked her up at the airport, and we went to eat at La Fonda. It was nice to be with someone who didn't want me to solve all their problems right away, and to talk about entertainment. Santa Fe did indeed have a lot of choices. We could go out to the Opera, which was going on then, or drive over to the Grand Canyon and hike down that, or hang around Santa Fe. The city had a new museum district, Museum Hill, that had some exhibits that had gotten good reviews, and we could shop on Canyon Road, or

visit the Gloria O'Keefe Museum. We finally decided to do that.

But first, we could go back to the room, and just enjoy each other.....

Chapter 17

When I put Janet on the plane on Sunday night I felt a lot better about the world, and a lot more optimistic about solving the Santa Fe Indian HospitArt problem. After all, someone had done something very specific and difficult, and how hard could it be to find who did it? It just took some imagination.

But first, getting the job going again. When I got to the jobsite I found that Art had stayed in town all weekend to get a stage of sorts set up, and the various clericArt folks were assembling and planning. I've never been much of a believer, so I stayed away.

We had a good crowd, though, including almost all of the people we needed to get back to work, as well as all of the newspaper and TV people who wanted to get viewers with pictures

of the concrete footing with a large piece carefully carved out of it. The Archbishops had agreed on a joint sort of service, without any sermons or homilies, and so in an hour it was done. People were unpacking tools, and starting equipment, and life was getting back to normal.

And that meant meetings. We would be back to organizing life around the items needed for the subcontractor meeting tomorrow, and the owner meeting on Wednesday. We all sat and went through the normArt items, and what we intended to do about each of them. There was some catching up to do, but not much, since the office people had been sitting around for a week without any progress on site to bring up new problems.

One of the items seemed odd, though. A submittArt on some of the expensive fixed medicArt equipment had gotten rejected by an owner review group of the doctors, even though it had been approved by the design team. All this was clear to all of the project team because. Like most modern jobs, this one used an electronic information system that tracked

submittals, requests for information, change orders, contracts, and daily communications, and whoever set this one up had not restricted who could see discussions inside the design approval groups.

The issues looked like the docs wanted a different brand of very expensive units, and the architect checking the submittal felt that the contractor had met the specifications, which were normal for a semi-rural hospital like the Indian Hospital. It caught my eye because the doctors group was headed by Jim Whitecloud, and the architect reviewer was Valerie.

Oh well, I had to go talk to Ken, the onsite architectural rep, anyway, so I put that on my list. He had an office in the adjacent building, the Institute of American Indian Arts. I found him sitting there looking pole axed.

We had met last week, but I told him I wanted to learn some more about Valerie and the job, so I could help MacMullen get back on track. That set him off.

“Willie, someone with MacMullen did this, and I don’t want anything to do with them until we find him and put him away. It had to be a contractor to do it....”

Bad start, so I tried a shock treatment. “ Not necessarily, Ken. You could have done it, and almost anyone else around here that had been watching the footing construction could have. They could have just gotten lucky that there was some wet concrete right there when they needed it. So until we get some better evidence, we’ll just need to work on the problem, and not go off half cocked.”

That seemed to do some good. “Well, you can think that, but I can’t imagine anyone else getting that idea. I can’t get the image of her in that concrete out of my head....”

I asked him to give me a short history of the project from his point of view. I guess he really wanted to talk, because he started at the beginning, and took me through the need for the building, and the design history, and the incident with Horst Paul, now famous, continuing

through the contractor selection and the odd incidents and pranks to today. Long story.

Finally he stopped. "So, Ken, who had any reason to hurt Valerie?"

"Not a damn soul! She was a lovely person, and a good friend to almost everyone here." I let that sit for a minute, and he went on. "Of course, there are pressures in every job. The Indians think that the gringos are taking advantage of them, and the white guys think the Indians are stupid, and the hospitArt building people think everyone else is not a part of the club, and Valerie thought that the way we do some things in the US was weird – but those things happen on almost every job, and no one dies."

I asked him when he had seen her last. I know the cops do that, so I was just poking around. "I told Hernandez, I left work early for an appointment with another client, so I didn't see her late in the afternoon. After the meeting I went on to my apartment, and spent the evening at home alone. Guess I don't have an alibi."

I told him I didn't think he needed one, and went on back to the site office. I still had no clue who might have done this, and I was getting tired of thinking about it.

Back on site the problems were more normal. Some of the MacMullen people, including the elusive Koko, hadn't come back, and couldn't be found, so Paco was trying to get some good people out of the union hall. That took some calling in of favors, since the people on the bench right now weren't usually much good. He had gotten an excavator operator, and a couple of laborers, and was back to feeling OK.

The agendas for the week's meetings were finalized, and the long lists of Requests for Information, submittals being reviewed, safety problems, schedule updates, and so on were ready. The army travels on its agendas....

I was about to call it a day, and go back to my room and call Janet to see that she was back OK, when Hernandez showed up. He had some more questions to ask each person there, and spent an hour getting blank looks and "beats me" answers. I didn't feel like I could leave,

being the company's answer to the problem, but I didn't have a clue either.

Finally he got around to me. "You know," he said "it ain't like the TV shows. We get maybe 10 homicides a year here, and all of them are obvious. Some guy thinks his wife is fooling around, and shoots both of them. We collect all this forensic stuff, and do these tests, but it's to keep the defense lawyers from getting him off. No mystery. But this one is different. No obvious motive, fancy way to kill someone, almost everyone is from somewhere a long way away. So...you got any good ideas?"

"Well, no, I'm really a stupid contractor. What did the autopsy show?"

"Nothing, or at least nothing that wasn't the result of being cast into a concrete statue and then jack hammered out. No bullet holes. She had concrete in her lungs, though, so she died by suffocation. Bad way to die, if you think about it.

Fully clothed, no recent sexuArt contact – much as you can tell. There isn't a whole lot of forensic data about concrete coffins."

I thought that over. "The crew knocked off at about 5:00, and sundown was officially 30 minutes later. With this plasticizer the concrete would have stayed workable until 7:00. So sometime in there we could imagine that she was walking to her car, which would have taken her past that footing, and someone came up, bashed her head in, and put her into the concrete. Whoever it was would have had to get into the excavation with her, to work her on down. It's not really liquid, just sort of like cake batter. So when they climbed out they would be covered with concrete, and had to hose off, leave in wet clothes, go somewhere and clean up, dispose of the dirty clothes. Did you check for old clothes or concrete stains in people's vehicles?"

"Yeah, and everyone has them. It's what you guys are doing all day."

We sat for a few more minutes, but didn't get any good ideas. This might be an unsolved crime.

Chapter 17

The next day was my first appearance at a standard weekly jobsite fixture – the weekly sub meeting. After everyone got their crews to work, they gathered at the office, drank coffee, and practiced complaining.

The subjects were almost the same no matter what site and what state you were in. Everyone started with the safety report, and discussed any accidents or near misses that happened since the last meeting. No one had the gall to list the murder as a safety event, which showed how upset they were. Then Paco went over the short term schedule, and made sure everyone knew where their crews were supposed to be for the next two weeks. As usual everyone couldn't start something until everyone else was finished, and beside which the silly sob's were just screwing around and costing all of us money. In an odd way all this was a comfort to me, since it was so normal.

Then we went over the RFI status. An RFI was a Request for Information, which was a polite way of saying that the plans and specifications didn't tell us everything we needed to know. Because all of this was very legalistic, any reArt question got put into writing, entered into an electronic system, and answered by layers of design and management people. If the answer could be seen as adding to the reasonably inferable cost of the work, then it became a change order request. All this was an elaborate game, but it too was comfortingly normal.

Then came the submittals being reviewed. It used to be that they got turned in and settled in the first few weeks, but the more technicArt buildings got, the more the systems were really designed by the specialty contractors that provided and installed them. These were coyly called "deferred submittals", and they went on for months. The medicArt equipment one I wanted to hear about was listed, but no one present knew anything about it. Maybe tomorrow.

Finally new subjects and open discussion. Everyone wanted to know what the latest was

on the murder, and how it would affect us here, and how it could have happened. I think a few of them got ideas of how to do away with their boss. And that was it.

After the meeting was a sort of weekly gossip session. It seems that the missing Indian workers, including Koko, had gone on to a job in Albuquerque, and were telling everyone that the Santa Fe site was cursed. The subs that were about to start work, like ductwork installers, were finding some trouble getting people to go. Not a big problem, but one we all needed to watch. I got Koko's phone number from one of the guys, thinking that Hernandez really needed to talk to him.

I tried out an idea I had been thinking about. We would soon have cast the floor and roof decks, and winter was coming on. Some of my friends in California had been experimenting with essentially enclosing the building with plastic film placed outside of some scaffolding. That allowed the inside to be heated, and the work to continue through bad weather, and in much more comfort. It wasn't in Bo's estimate, but it seemed to me that it might pay for itself, and

keep the subs from using recent events to delay until better weather. I asked people how they would feel about it, and got some guardedly positive responses. I'd see if I could get it done.

The rest of the day passed quickly. Most of the hard subjects brought up in these meetings were settled in later small meetings, and those things took most of the time. There was some moaning and crying, but in generArt people on a construction site figure that they are all in it together, and come to some common sense solutions pretty quickly. I sometimes wanted to give the US Congress a set of plans, and see what they could do.

The next day was a different story. The weekly owners meeting included the IHS project manager, the tribArt council president, the head of the medicArt committee, the architect, some engineers, and the builders onsite team, now including me. This group was less adept at bitching, but also less adept at getting over it.

Some of them were like Ken – they thought some MacMullen person must have killed Valerie. Some were just upset. As we went through the

agenda no one wanted to make a decision, and several items were put off "until the investigation was over". I thought about trying my approach to Ken, but I didn't think it would work in a large group where we didn't know each other at all.

On the subject of the medicArt equipment submittal, Jim told everyone that Valerie had been right – the specs didn't require what the medicArt committee had later demanded. If they really wanted that, it was a giant add. The head of the medicArt committee was Jim Whitecloud, and he insisted that Valerie had been wrong, that the equipment was what any first rate hospital needed, and if the design team hadn't specified it correctly that was their problem, they could take it up with the professional liability insurer. That got Ken and Janet Begay scared and defensive. No real conclusion, and the meeting broke up.

This looked more like a job for a diplomat than a builder, but I made myself a mental list of the shuttle diplomacy that would be required to get all these people back to doing their jobs.

Chapter 18

At the end of the day I asked Paco if I could buy him a drink, and get some feedback on the idea of wrapping the building. I had some photos and other stuff I wanted to show him, and I wanted to try out the Blue Corn. He gave me a funny look, but followed me over there.

The HIPAA fabric idea – that’s what one type was called – looked good. You needed to leave some openings, and use some way to close them against the weather, but it gave people a place to work in the winter in comfort, and it might change the sub’s ideas about the job. It would cost MacMullen a couple of hundred grand, but it looked to Paco like it might be a game changer. Ok so far.

“Paco, if I’m going to help I really need to know what was going on between people here. Unless I get a better idea, the cops can’t figure it out, and everyone will go on thinking that someone with MacMullen is a murderer. That can’t be good.”

He sat for a minute. "I really hate gossip, Willie. Guys on jobsites are like a bunch of old women, only worse. I've always stayed away from it." More pause.

"But maybe you are right. We can't go on like we have been – people look at me funny in town, and I get a lot of people sort of staying away on the chance that I'm part of it. I really don't know what to do...."

"Maybe it's easier with questions. Did Ken have a thing going with Valerie that might have made him explode?"

"Well, I dunno. He looked to me like he would like to, the way he looked at her in meetings, but I think she was dating that Whitecloud guy for awhile, and them just working. If there was anything going on I didn't see it. We had all the usuArt drama in our office, but I didn't see it with her."

"OK, what 's the drama in the office." I was getting to think of myself as a shrink.

"Willie, there is always a lot going on. I guess you've heard about Art and Lisa...." I told him I was clueless as usual. "To make the story short, she sort of pushed him into bed, and his wife caught them, and now Art only goes home every other weekend to argue with Gloria and do his wash. I keep thinking he'll wake up, and stop thinking with his dick, but it's been going on for a while now. Nothing to do with Valerie, though."

"You know, I've spent most of my life on jobsites a long way from home, but I never cheated on Karen. Seems dumb to me."

"Me, too, Willie, but you know a lot of guys do, and figure no one will know. Even with Ken, who separated from his wife in Albuquerque a year ago, the fact that he was working with Valerie made his wife mad. She came by a few times, saw Valerie, and went away hurt. Ken thought about divorce, but he's pretty shy, and I don't think he wanted to give up entirely yet."

"How about battles on the site? Some people are always at war."

"Well, all our little mysteries had a lot of people spooked, but they didn't know who to blame it on. I never heard anyone say Valerie brought zombies or anything."

"Did she screw anyone on submittals? I know it seems stupid, but did she?"

"Not except the medicArt equipment thing you just heard about. Otherwise most of them have been fine, pretty smooth. Mostly she felt like the trade specialty subs knew more than she did, so she took their recommendations. Pretty nice lady, really."

I thought a little while about that as an epitaph. Then, "OK, who would know about the long open time on the concrete? Usually you couldn't do what this one did. "

Paco thought everyone knew about it. When Art had requested the addition to the concrete mix at approval, the structurArt engineer had been worried about it, and asked that MacMullen use it in some lower strength applications early in the job to see how it performed. That had been discussed at

meetings, and around the site when people were surprised at how long it took the footings to set up. But the strength test had gone fine, actually up some, so they had been allowed to use it in slabs and walls, and so far it was all good. So the answer was "Everyone knew."

But there was something different about that footing. It was one of the few without a tight layer of upper bars, which would have kept the body from sinking down. The only people who knew about that would be the people digging it, reinforcing it, and casting it. I asked Paco to write their names down; the only one I had heard of was Koko.

"So what's the deArt with Koko?"

Paco frowned. "Koko is the human version of the nutty hound who acts funny all the time, is scared of his shadow, but has one really strong talent. There has never been another excavator operator like him. If you want to make your numbers on excavation, he's your man."

"Think he had any reason to hurt Valerie?"

“Nah, even Koko isn’t that superstitious.”

And that was about all the useful information I could think to ask about. We had another beer, went through the formality of bitching about the quality of the construction plans, and went home. At least I had more to think about.

Chapter 19

The job went smoothly for the rest of the week. In an odd way the murder and the cleansing ceremony seemed to help – people seemed to have wiped their minds clean, and went back to routine. No one lingered or gossiped, though, so it was a quiet efficient jobsite.

We finished casting the second floor slabs, and started on the roof slab, which could be a future floor on this building. The extensive underground plumbing was going in at grade, so the first floor slab would be awhile. Bo bought into my idea about wrapping the building, so we started planning the scaffolding to hold it out away from the exterior. It occurred to Paco that if we could get a temporary roof on we might be able to keep the inside dry enough to start early on the water sensitive things, so we worried about that some. I didn't have many distractions, and Janet was busy with her work, so I stayed in Santa Fe and went to work every day. All work and no play makes Willie a dull boy....

That held up for the next week too. Bo came down from Denver, bought me lunch, and asked if I had solved the mystery yet. I had to admit that I hadn't, and any of the ideas I had had sounded stupid the next day. He went away thinking that my exterior wall film and I were going to cost him the profit on the job, but at least no scandal.

The controversy on the medicArt equipment had come up in the owner meeting on both weeks. Ken had gotten some outside input that reinforced the belief that the originArt specification had been the right one for a hospitArt like the Santa Fe Indian Hospital, and that the medicArt staff had delusions of grandeur. It also appeared that none of the outside experts was familiar with the vendor they wanted to use, which was odd in that closed little world. Finally Ken and the design team had approved MacMullen's submittArt and ordered the equipment, over the objections of the medicArt committee. I thought Whitecloud was going to yell a Navajo war cry and stab Ken in the meeting.

Paco and I were asking ourselves what the hell that was about later on, when Lisa came in. She said, "You guys don't know? Dr Jim Whitecloud owns half of that company, and the sale at that price would have made their year. That's what he and Valerie broke up about!"

"How the hell do you know that! You didn't even talk to her."

"Men!", she said, and flounced away. It had been awhile since I had seen anyone "flounce", and it was kind of cute.

It was about the first thing that I had heard that provided even the smallest motive for Valerie's death. But it didn't explain the way it happened, and I knew the cops had been told that the medicArt staff didn't normally go onto the jobsite, so any one of them would have stuck out. Still.... I'd ask him about it.

By the end of the week it was time for a break. I got a flight back to San Jose, and drove over to Los Gatos. The house had been closed up except for Aurora's weekly cleaning, so it was musty, but felt like home. I got some groceries,

invited the one of my sons and his family over, and got the grill going. It was one of those times I missed Karen desperately, but still counted myself lucky.

There were a million chores that needed doing, and I spent a good time Saturday and Sunday morning being a normal person. Then Sunday afternoon I got back on the plane to Albuquerque. I brought my fishing gear with me, though.

Chapter 20

Back on the job things still seemed OK. We had gotten the roof deck cast, and the exterior wall scaffolding up, and the blue protective film going on on the outside of the scaffolding. The building looked like a big blue faceless object in the middle of town, and drivers on Cerrillos Road were slowing down to see what was going on.

Monday was like every Monday – what's the schedule, what goes on the agenda, why isn't so and so here. I sometimes wonder why we make weeks seven days long, since we

consume 40% of the work time starting and stopping.

We got another visit from Sergeant Hernandez, but it seemed to be a formality. They hadn't made any reArt progress, he said. Valerie's family, from Toulouse, had finally come, and the body had been released to them, still with some concrete on it. None of them knew what could have caused this, and they had acted like they were outside the civilized world. She had been insane to come here.

Later in the day I was walking the job – an old habit – when Paco came over and said “watch that excavator for awhile, Koko is back! ” All of the foundations had been excavated, but there was a lot of large trenching to be done, and apparently the mysterious Koko had decided to return to work on those crews. The machine was in high speed all the time, working so quickly that most of the crew gave it a wide berth so it didn't hit them. It was almost dancing.

“Lets come by and talk to him at quitting time. He doesn't slow down for anything till then.” So Paco and I came by at exactly 3:30, and we sat

down in the little lunch tent on the edge of the site. I let Paco do the talking – Koko looked like he would run off if I opened my mouth.

They caught up on mutuArt friends for awhile. Then Paco said, “So why did you come back? I thought you felt like the job was jinxed.”

“Well, I did...all that stuff going on made me feel bad, and I thought that French lady was a Jonah...but she got hers, and you had a blessing, and I ran out of work in Los Alamos, and I heard things were going OK, so I decided to come back....” He looked a little wild eyed to me, but I guess that isn’t a crime.

Paco said. “Did the cops talk to you? I told them you had left the site, but they couldn’t find you , and it was driving them crazy.”

“Yeah, they caught up to me, and gave me a hard time for awhile, but I wasn’t here, I went to get a drink with friends, and so finally they left me alone. It gives me a funny feeling to think about her suffocating in the concrete, though.”

"You got any ideas about it? Seems like it needs to be one of us, but I can't think who has any reason.'

"Paco, I feel like the spirits got her. She got mad at me once for getting dirt on her, and then things started going wrong around here, and I feel like she was just asking for it. Los of things were happening for no reason, and I think this is just one more. Maybe Kokopelli got her. " He looked at me with the weirdest look, the whites of his eyes wide. Right now he was my favorite candidate, just on the basis of weirdness. I went back to the apartment wondering how I could get him to admit it.

Chapter 21

The job was blessedly busy, though, so I didn't get much chance to think about it for awhile. We had gotten the roof deck all cast, and the protective outer film was going on, and winter was coming on quickly, so we needed to get everyone moving on the next few steps. The exterior was metArt studs, gypsum board, and a plaster layer that looked like adobe, and we got them started working within the new outer skin. It was something new, though, and it took awhile to get the bugs worked out of it. Once we did, though, it seemed like it would help everyone improve the usuArt sequence of construction. We put in more heaters and lights, and made a big deArt about how comfortable it was to work here.

The "secret" deArt with Lisa and Art gradually got less secret. Art went home every two weeks, but it looked like things there were pretty bad, and he usually only stayed one night. Sunday afternoon he was back in the trailer. When anyone asked him about his wife he mumbled "fine" and changed the subject.

All of this was about the only reArt human drama on the jobsite though, so I started thinking about how it could have lead to something like Valerie's death. That seemed stupid, though, since Valerie didn't have anything to do with it. On the other hand, Ken's wife might have some thoughts. Paco and Jim thought Ken had the hots for Valerie, and maybe Ken's wife – what's her name – was mad about that. I filed that under "not too likely". I'd ask Art about it, but he was pretty incapable of that sort of thinking right now.

More important, the trout fishing season was coming to an end in late November, and I hadn't gone. I decided that I would take a few days off, rent a nice sort of travel coach, and go up to Chama to fish. I had always wanted to see what those big things were like on a trip, and It seemed like a good time to get away before the bad weather closed in.

The weekly routine of meetings and decisions kept going on, of course. We had gotten past most of the early submittArt approvArt battles, and now the weekly tension was mainly if the subs were on schedule, and why did things look

different than people expected, even if they were like the plans.

On one of those meetings to find a solution I went over to Ken's office late in the afternoon. As I got there a young woman was rushing out, on the verge of tears. She ran into me, said "Excuse me!" and stumbled on. She looked like a proper young woman, glasses and low heels, nicely dressed. But very upset.

Ken was just inside the door, looking like he wanted to go after her, but not knowing what to say. I made a "what's going on?" face at him, and he responded "My former wife. Still is, I guess. Shirley. Damn I don't understand women."

It turned out that Shirley had hoped that the loss of Valerie on the job had made Ken want to get back together. It had made him unhappy, but not convinced that Shirley was the answer, especially since she wanted him to give up his practice in Santa Fe and come back to Albuquerque. They had just had another in what seemed like a long run of heart-to-heart talks that ended in her running out crying.

I asked him some questions that I thought were casual and disconnected, about her background and knowledge of his projects, and construction in general. The answers sounded like she really didn't know much about his work, or his interests, and I wondered how they ever got together. But I guess that's true of a lot of people.

After a minute, though, he caught on. "Willie, are you thinking Shirley could have anything to do with Valerie's death! That's bullshit ...she doesn't know concrete from maple syrup! And she's the sweetest girl in the world! And I really didn't have much to do with Valerie anyway, and Shirley really knew it, she's just lonely and worried!"

I backed away, and we went on to debate a change order about the type of ceramic tile they really wanted. We reached a fair conclusion, that we could announce tomorrow, and I went on my way. But I didn't forget Shirley, even if I couldn't see how she could have done it.

I went back to thinking about a fishing trip. I had been to the little Cimarron River just north of Santa Fe, past Angel Fire, a few years back, and I wanted to go again. On top of that, I really wanted to try Chama and maybe on up into Colorado. And what I really wanted to do was to try one of those enormous motor coaches you see on the highway. The idea of taking off with your home on your back, and going wherever you wanted in comfort, was a sort of American dream that had been with me for awhile. With Karen, I had been held back by common sense, and gas mileage, and a dumb movie with Jack Nicholson, but now I wanted to try it.

I was shopping with the people in Santa Fe that rented those things, and I finally settled on a 34 foot Georgetown. It was kind of large for one guy, but I could take it for a week, and maybe go off and get some better ideas. I told Bo he owed me a week of vacation, and he seemed to take it OK. I hadn't solved any mysteries, but the job was going fine, and MacMullen hadn't been in any scandals. Yet.

Chapter 22

So Friday night I went and got the rig, got a lesson in driving it, parked it on the jobsite, and Saturday morning I took off. At Eagle's Nest I stopped off at the fly shop and asked if there was a good place to park it near the river, not in one of the many roadside parks but someplace quieter. The fellow at the desk phoned a friend, who gave me permission to park on his land a little way from one of the streams feeding the river. I was in hog heaven.

I set up in a little grove by the stream, opened the poke out sides, and went fishing for awhile, even if it was the middle of the day. To prove life was kind, I caught two little brown trout for dinner.

There is nothing so conducive to clear thinking as trout fishing. It is usually slow, in rhythm with the water flowing by, in a beautiful setting, and it's pretty clear that the thinker is just a small piece of the naturArt world, not really too important. It was a good place to think about the Santa Fe Indian HospitArt project.

Directing the team building the building was my main job, and that was going fine. But I had thought I could also find who had done that to Valerie, and I was stumped. It had been several weeks, the police had no forensic evidence and no leads to speak of, the body had been examined and gone, and there wasn't any ongoing avenue of investigation. Zip.

I had only flimsy ideas of the possibilities. My favorite was Koko, since he seemed half crazy, thought Valerie was unlucky, and had initially run. Then there was Jim Whitecloud, who had some money motive, but Valerie's death hadn't really helped him. And then there was Shirley Anderson, who could have mistakenly thought Ken was deeply involved with Valerie. None of those ideas were very good, but they were all I had.

So OK, big guy, what to do? The obvious answer was "forget it, finish the job, go home". The only trouble with that was the image of Valerie suffocating in a pool of concrete.

By that time it was time to fire up the grill, cook the trout and some potatoes, and watch some television before an early bedtime. Yeah, it had a satellite TV.

Next day I was up early, working up the stream as it got away from the road. I managed to get all fouled up in several trees, so I settled down to jigging through an area of low grass and small ponds. Not a spot for large fish, but a good place for more small ones, and I got three in the next two hours.

I sat out and had a store bought sandwich I had brought, and approached the mystery again. Maybe there was something I could do that would flush out the information we needed. The cops couldn't run games on people – well, only some games – but I could try anything I wanted. I spent some time thinking about what I could do that would inspire Koko to confess, and again I came up dry. He might have a cleansing ceremony, watch some sun rises, throw some pollen in the air, but he wouldn't volunteer for the white man's prison.

Back to nature, and thinking like a trout. I sometimes told myself that I could imagine the balance of food and the energy of getting it that was the daily life of a top water fish, and deduce where I would be if I was a trout. Sometimes it worked, but sometimes it didn't, and if I was honest with myself it was probably just luck in any case. Nonetheless I enjoyed thinking I had it all figured out. No great detective, but a hell of a trout.

That evening I sat in my mobile home and checked the fishing reports from Chama, further up in New Mexico, and southern Colorado. It looked a little better up there, and I wanted to see how this machine was on the road, so the next day I packed up and moved north.

The Chama River is a great place, but it is some work to get into it. If you are a sort of lazy goof who comes in a wheeled palace, you have to get ready for a three mile walk to get into the best areas. Nonetheless, it was great when I got there. I had been too uppity to stop and ask for advice this time, so I used my standard go to rig – an elk hair caddis and a beaded drop – and it

worked great. I got four large cutthroat trout the first evening, and I felt like the originArt hunter.

The motor coach had been OK on the road, and the whole thing was fine, but I was beginning to see that it sort of changed your mentality from when you started out with a backpack and a rod for a few days. Maybe there would be a day, but it seemed like it wasn't yet. If Karen had been with me it would have been perfect. She never liked roughing it and this would have been a way to be together that she would have liked. Too bad.

I had about given up on some scheme to get Koko to confess. It even sounded stupid when I said it. Maybe there was something I could do to eliminate the others, and maybe if I stirred things up some I would get lucky.

On the other hand, I was getting an idea that might at least eliminate the other two people I had in mind, and at least qualified as doing something. I would go talk to Hernandez when I got back.

Chapter 23

I fished the Chama River for the rest of the week, and drove back to Santa Fe on Sunday. It had been a good vacation, but as usual after a few days off I was anxious to get back to work.

The next morning I was at the job early, checking that things had gone according to plan. The blue wrap we had put on the scaffolding around the building was holding up well, but it gave the whole thing a sort of odd appearance. The newspapers had joked about it, but the guys inside were happy to be warm, and they had commented to the news vans that it was a great idea.

Most of the week's plans had gone OK. Sparky had gotten his permanent transformers, always a milestone. The windows were going into the half finished walls, and the window flashing had started. All of us had spent a lot of time in the last few years fixing water leaks at windows, and fighting off claims of harmful mold, so we all walked by each window several times while it was being placed. As usual, I thought that the main function of lawyers was to scare the shit

out of the rest of us, and so avoid some mistakes. The best law is the law you are afraid to use.....

By mid afternoon I could go see Hernandez.

"So, Sergeant, how is the investigation going?"

"Willy, you know as well as I do that it isn't going at all. We don't have any reArt physicArt evidence, we have only the weakest of motives, and no one at all has an alibi. I hate to think of her in that concrete, but the case went into our unsolved file last week."

I told him about all my speculations and ideas, but I could see that he thought I had read too many books. Finally I said "Don't you have her personArt diary in your evidence locker?"

"Sure. It's in French, of course, but we had one of our people read through it, and it didn't have anything we could use."

"Can I borrow it? I have an idea."

"Sure, knock yourself out. I'll check it out to you, since we have a copy." I was surprised, but at

that point I think he mostly wanted to get a looney amateur out of his office. We went down to the evidence room, he checked it out to me, and I got out of there before he thought about it all.

The book itself was lovely, a rich red leather with cream pages. It was the sort of thing that young girls wrote their secret thoughts in a long time ago, when they had secret thoughts that weren't on Facebook. I took it back to my place to try to read.

Which didn't get me anywhere. I had taken Spanish, once could read Don Quixote, but now just had jobsite Spanish, and no French. I gave up after a few minutes, and watched TV as usual.

Next day at lunch I visited a store I had seen on Canyon Road and got a thin disk, some even thinner speciArt batteries, and at another store a leather case with a speciArt concealed pocket. Undercover elephant strikes again.

The next morning I brought it in, put it on the conference table in my office, and went about

our usuArt meeting dominated business. The MEP coordination argument and proposed change orders were the subject of the day, so I forgot about the book for most of the day, and left it on my table overnight.

Chapter 24

Right on queue the next morning, though, Lisa came in to my office and picked it up. She had been looking a little less tantalizing in the last few weeks, but I hadn't been paying much attention, and now I wondered what was going on.

"What's this?"

"It's Valerie's diary. The cops have put the case in the cold case files, and about given up, so they let me have it for awhile. It's in French, and I can't read it, but I'm going to ask Janet to visit weekend after next and go through it with me. The cops couldn't read it, and didn't care enough to find someone who could, I guess."

"Pretty book", she said, gave me a look I couldn't interpret, and walked out. Later I heard her giving the story to Jim, Al, Paco, and anyone else who asked. Tell-a-woman.

The week went on as usual, with the diary sitting there all day and night, and no one paying any attention.

I decided I needed to pay some attention to my co-workers lives, though, if only as a diligent manager. I didn't want to ask Paco for the lowdown again, but Ken seemed to have picked it up.

" It seems, " he said, "that Art and Lisa are breaking up, and Art is going back to his wife. He's been going home on weekends for awhile, and not just for an afternoon to see the kids. Lisa doesn't seem that broken up by it, but I got that from the plumbing foreman, who she seems to have her eye on."

I felt a hundred years old. "Isn't there anything there more than that?"

"Willie, I'm no authority, but it doesn't look like it."

I had forgotten Ken's situation. "How is Shirley? Do you see her often?" I didn't know how to ask if she had killed his girl friend.

"She still seems to think I was involved with Valerie, so I just see her from time to time. I don't know how to prove it to her."

“Well, if I get anything out of the diary I’ll pass it on.” He knew about it before I came in, thanks to the locArt network.

Chapter 24

The next day was consumed by the question of utility design, and who was really responsible. Our little myth that the construction documents told the builder exactly what to do was weakest on the point of the routing of utilities around the structure and above ceilings. That seems pretty easy, and most people would say, "Well, the consulting engineers lay it out, and the contractor puts it in that way." The trouble is, the engineers didn't really know enough to get the layout right, so they listed their drawings as "diagrammatic only", and left the specialty subcontractors to actually produce the plans that told people in the field what to do. You can imagine what the sheetmetal detailers and piping designers thought about the consulting engineers.

When it all didn't fit too well, the subs first tried to do the cheapest thing. When the engineers objected, the subs said, "OK, here's what it will cost you." Then we had a sort of well worn debate, and finally came to a conclusion in

each case, allowing some change orders and not others. I could hear the ghost of Valerie muttering "Stupidness!", and I think Ken could also.

We got through it, and through the weekly sub meetings, and got ready for the owner meeting the next day. A regular day in the building factory.

In the breaks I got to walk around, see the windows getting flashed, the ductwork going in, and some interior walls being built. There were a few safety problems, but they got straightened out with a word, and the job seemed fine. They really didn't need me here, I thought, but it seemed to make everyone comfortable, and it looked like Bo wasn't going to take the chance of putting Art back in charge.

The owner's meeting was the next day, and I had left Valerie's diary out on the conference table, so Whitecloud would ask about it. When I told him it was Valerie's, and we were going to

translate it to see if that lead anywhere, he turned as white as a Navajo will ever get.

"Why don't you mind your own damn business? It was her personArt thoughts!"

"Well, Dr Whitecloud, the dead don't have privacy rights, and in any event it is still evidence in a crime, even if the cops have let me have a copy. I'll let you know if there is anything about you." He walked out, took a walk around the site, but came back for the meeting. He was now neck and neck with Koko for the crime in my mind, but that's no kind of proof.

The diary sat on my desk for the rest of the week, with me occasionally trying to translate, but no one else paying any attention.

Chapter 25

That changed on Friday night.

I had been checking my cell phone every few hours when I wasn't in the office. Some of the guys and I had gone out for a drink at the end of the week, and then to a locArt steakhouse for dinner. When I was through I checked my phone, and got the information I had been hoping for.

I had gotten a very thin location device at the Canyon Road store, and it was small enough and thin enough to insert in some pages of the diary, with a few pages coped around it. It sent a signArt to my cell phone, in the same way that the "Find your phone" application worked for cell phones that were lost. I could see the little blue dot begin to move on my cell phone screen. Someone had taken the diary from the office, and was going somewhere with it.

I expected to see the blue dot move a small way to the current hospitArt to Whitecloud's

office, or out to Las Campanas where he lived, or maybe down the interstate to Albuquerque if Shirley had it. Instead, it moved north on IH25, toward Denver. What was that about? I got in the truck and followed it.

I was about an hour behind the blue dot, and it kept going steadily at the speed limit. It's a long drive to Denver, but I was hoping that the dot was going somewhere closer. I really had no idea where it was going.

Tracking the diary itself probably wasn't going to tell me much of what I wanted to know, so I had also included a modified cell phone in the diary case I bought. It had long life batteries, and I could turn on the microphone in the telephone from my phone without it making a noise, so I could hope to hear what was happening to the diary, or conversations, or something as I followed it. I could record the conversation on the voice recorder on my phone if I wanted. I would just have to take my chances with the batteries lasting, and the case staying with the diary. This wasn't the best plan I ever made, just the only thing I could think of in a week of fishing.

So I turned the phone on, to see what I could hear. What I heard was the car radio in whatever vehicle was carrying the diary and its case. After a few minutes I decided I wasn't going to get a confession from the radio, and turned it off.

The blue dot went on and on. The drive to Denver takes six hours, and I had to stop a couple of times for breaks and coffee. The dot just kept going.

I got to thinking about Colorado. My great grandparents had left upstate New York to homestead in Eastern Colorado in the late 1800's, and moved to Cheyenne Wells to grow dryland wheat on 640 acres. They lived in a sod house, with a wind that my grandmother said had driven her mother almost crazy. They stayed for the two years needed to own the land, and then moved into Denver, and my grand-dad went to work for the railroad. They lived there, on South Pearl Street until they died. My grandfather had gone to the School of Mines, gone into the oil business, moved around. My dad had grown up in Dallas, went to Houston, then moved to California to head a

small construction company. I grew up there, went to CArt Poly, and went into building construction as the most naturArt thing to do. We all had just bumped around the country, looking for the things that gave us satisfaction, and a better life. Now I was driving by the beginning of it.

We got into Denver, turned west on Highway 6, got off on Arapaho, and I followed my dot into a suburb called Lakewood. I drove by the house that it looked like the dot was in, and parked in an empty parking lot down the street.

It was 2 in the morning, but I turned the remote cell on anyway.

"...we'll talk about it in the morning, I'm beat."

"...what does it prove? I don't believe a thing you say!"

" OK...OK. It proves I didn't have a thing to do with Valerie. You shouldn't have hit anyone, but you hit the wrong person!"

"Al, you've ruined my life, and our family, and you want me to feel bad because you were screwing two women! No way!"

"Gloria, I wasn't "screwing" Valerie. She was a perfectly nice woman you confused with someone else...who is also a perfectly nice woman I messed up and had a fling with. You picked the wrong one to conk over the head."

"I don't believe you, and a diary written in Greek won't help."

"Gloria, it's written in French. You read French well, remember, since you spent two years there as a kid. You can see, if you want, that Valerie had nothing to do with me. I'd like you to believe that, so we can move on and get back together."

Muffled sobs. I listened for a while more, but nothing more came out of it. I turned the phone off, and thought it over.

I thought I could see the outlines of the story now. It wasn't like any of the things I had thought. Gloria had killed Valerie because she

thought that Valerie was the one Art was having an affair with. The concrete business must have been an accident, or something.

I went and found a motel, and was sound asleep in 30 minutes.

Chapter 26

I woke up late, turned the phone on, heard nothing for awhile, turned it off and went to IHOP for breakfast.

When I got back to the motel room and turned the phone on it sounded like the diary was still sitting between them.

"So, what are we going to do?"

"We're going to say to ourselves we both made terrible mistakes, and go on. The kids need us, and we need each other. No one needs to know."

"I killed someone, and no one needs to know..."

"Their knowing won't help anyone, and it sure will hurt us and the kids!"

"Maybe you're right. I'm so sorry..."

I turned the phone off, and sat and thought. It was Art McEntire and his wife Gloria for sure. What do I do now?

I decided that it wouldn't work to go confront them now. None of my evidence was admissible, and without it there wasn't any evidence at all. If I roused them now there would never be any.

So I made sure to save the audio files, and mailed them to myself just in case, checked out and headed back to Santa Fe. I spent the next six hours imagining scenarios in my head as I drove. I hated the thought of Valerie suffocating in the concrete, but I also hated the thought of a family with the mother running from the law, or spending her life in prison, or being executed because of a stupid loss of temper. But maybe it was planned, and she knew about the concrete footing somehow, and that's what she deserved. Who made me the judge?

I hadn't made up my mind by the next day, but it was Sunday, so I drove back to Eagle's Nest, and went fishing again, and finally came up with a plan. It wasn't completely legal, but I would take that chance.

Chapter 27

The next day after the staff meeting I asked Art to stay for a minute, and shut the door.

"Al, there isn't an easy way to say this. I know that Gloria killed Valerie. My evidence isn't airtight, but once I give it to Hernandez they will dig until they find some that is. You need to go home and prepare her. If you return and surrender to Hernandez here I will withhold the evidence and let you shape her defense the way you want, but if you aren't here by this evening I will turn over the evidence and let the law come get her."

He didn't look as shocked as I expected. "Somehow I knew it wouldn't stay secret, and we couldn't go on living that secret. We've been talking about it all weekend, and I think we are ready. I'll go now, and be back here by 9 tonight." He got up and walked out.

Well, now I got to sit around and be nervous. If they ran, I would have to give the audio to Hernandez and admit that I gave them the choice. That was probably some crime,

although I didn't know what you would call it. I had thought all this out, but I was still feeling a little stupid.

I spent the day doing Al's job, getting ready for the weekly meetings, and walking the site. All the time I was thinking how lucky I had been to be faithful to Karen, and to have a clear conscience.

After work I went to get a drink, and dinner, and went back to the office. As nine o'clock approached I looked out of the window, and saw Al's truck pulling in. Gloria was with him. They came into the trailers, and into my office.

"Gloria, we've never met, and I'm sorry to be the one to do this, but I think this is the best way."

She was a attractive blond woman, the picture of a suburban housewife with small children. Didn't say a word.

"Before we go over to the police, can you tell me how it happened?. I won't repeat it, but I can't imagine what happened."

She had a low, pleasant voice, and it sounded like she had been rehearsing the story.

"I came down to tell Art to his face that it was over between us, and that I would be filing for divorce. I was upset, and angry at the woman who had made him unfaithful to me and our family. I parked in the temporary lot and started across the site to the office. It was dark already, and I was picking my way when I saw a young woman coming from the office. I knew there was only one woman working there, and that was the woman who had taken my life away.

"I picked up a piece of rebar, and stepped behind one of the backhoes. When she got past me I swung as hard as I could at her. It hit her in the back of the head with an awful sound, and she staggered into one of the holes the men had been digging. I only realized then that I had probably hurt her very badly, and maybe killed her, and that I was in danger myself. I looked into the hole and saw that she was half sunk in concrete that was still wet. Then I thought that if I could push her all the way down the concrete would set, and no one would ever know, and I would be free. Maybe Art would come back,

and things would be the same. So I jumped in and stomped on her until she was near the bottom of the hole. I got out, went back to the car, wrapped myself in a towel, and drove home."

We all sat in silence for a minute. "OK, let's go see Hernandez." I had told him to be ready for something, and we arrived to a small welcoming committee. She got her Miranda warning, and called their attorney, and I went home.

Epilogue

Gloria plead guilty to manslaughter, and served two years in a New Mexico women's prison. Art visited weekly, and took another job to stay near her in New Mexico once the Indian Hospital was finished. When she got out they moved to Albuquerque and took up life about where they had left it. I don't really know how bad the kids suffered.

I finished the job with Jim, Paco, and Lisa. Bo was not happy that the murder had something to do with MacMullen, but the case had fallen out of the news and didn't get back in, so he rode it out.

Lisa dumped the plumber for the sheetmetal foreman, and they were together when the job finished. I don't know what happened after that.

When it was over I went home to Los Gatos, took a few weeks off, and started another job in Florida. I spent some pleasant time with Janet, but my appreciation for my life with Karen had deepened, and Janet seemed to sense it. So it

isn't serious in the long run. The only things that are really important to me these days are my sons, and my job.

The End