

# The crime of the century

A little family planning.

**Geoff Brumfiel**

A cold spring rain pounded the windshield of her cruiser. She sighed, turned up the collar on her overcoat and sprinted from the car to the porch. It was too early to play detective, but here she was.

"Hey Joe," she mumbled, flashing her shield to the cop outside the front door. She stepped inside and lit up a cigarette, pausing to let her eyes adjust to the gloom.

"Come on in, lieutenant," shouted a voice from the next room.

"Christ," she thought to herself. "How does he always beat me to the scene? And why is he sounding so goddamn perky?" She checked her watch, it wasn't even seven.

The body was curled up on the kitchen floor like a baby; the rookie stooped over it, peering at it like he'd never seen a corpse before. Who knows, maybe he hadn't; he'd only been on the force for 25 years.

He glanced up and flashed her a grin. "Morning lieutenant."

She glared at him. "What can you tell me?"

"Well," he said, unplugging his tablet from the data port on the dead man's neck. "His name is Henry Watson, age 275, Washington DC resident. The guy is — sorry, was — a researcher at the National Institute of Radical Life Extension up in Bethesda. Looks like he worked on organ regeneration, mainly lungs." He paused. "I guess he's the reason you can puff on those cancer sticks without getting cancer."

"Spare me the poor schmuck's life story," she snapped. "What'd he die of?"

"Looks like a myocardial infarction," he said, glancing down at his tablet.

"Heart attack, huh?" she smirked. "Haven't heard that one for a while."

She flicked her cigarette into the sink and walked over to the dead man's refrigerator. Pizza, soda, cake. "This guy ate like a pig," she thought to herself. Not that it mattered what you ate these days.

She took a soda, and walked back to the body to have a look. The rookie interrupted her thoughts: "Our boys think he's been dead for at least a week, but it's hard to tell. His immunobots are still fighting off infections, so he hasn't started stinking the place up," he said.

"I see," she said, and pulled from her pocket a thin, silver tablet identical to her partner's. She pushed a button on



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the side, and it whirred into life.

"Good morning lieutenant," the tablet said smoothly.

"Morning Gracie," she replied. "I need you to run a diagnosis of our stiff's nanosystems."

"One moment, please," the tablet hummed softly in her hand. "I'm showing an abnormality. Mr Watson's cardiobots have been inactive since 2246."

"That's almost 15 years!" the rookie said.

"Yeah," the lieutenant growled. "And with his diet, it's no wonder he dropped dead. Without his little nanofriends to scrub his arteries clean, the guy's cholesterol must have gone through the roof. Gracie, do a round-up of the usual suspects."

"Hold please, processing," the tablet droned. "Wait a moment, lieutenant, I have a suspect. Mrs Erin Marie Howard, age 72, of 414 Darrow Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Mrs Howard is Mr Watson's great-great-great-granddaughter. Married to John Howard, age 94. She's currently employed as a biomedical nanotechnician at GSK-Syngenta-PhilipMorris. I'm showing she illegally deactivated Mr Watson's cardiobots from a remote terminal on March 10, 2246 at 14:24:37."

"But why would she kill her great-great-grandfather?" the rookie asked.

"That's three greats," the lieutenant interrupted.

"I'm showing Mrs Howard has a conception licence application pending with the Bureau of Births and Population Management," the tablet crooned.

"Well there's your answer," the lieutenant said. "The girl wanted to have herself a baby, and she knew the feds wouldn't let her unless someone in the family happened to keel over, which doesn't happen too often these days. Gracie, ask Judge Hastings to issue us an arrest warrant."

"Wow," said the rookie. "I've never heard of a case like that. Talk about cold-blooded."

"I'd say something like this comes along every hundred years or so," the lieutenant sighed and leaned against the kitchen counter, taking a swig of the deceased's soda. "The girl probably barely knew Watson. She was so much younger than he was; they're hardly even related. Why not bump the old guy off? Clever too, giving him 15 years to do it to himself — too bad for her our boys used the time to develop AI crimepads like Gracie here."

"Judge Hastings would like to know what charges you're filing against Mrs Howard," the tablet asked.

"Murder, Gracie," the lieutenant replied. "Murder by natural causes." ■

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