

Chapter One

Politically Correct Cops

New York City, present day

David “Duke” Garvey put his left foot into the 84th Precinct detective squad and then pulled it back. He stood outside the open doorway, flipping the file folder from one sweaty hand to the other, working up the courage to walk in and meet his new squad. After eleven years as a beat cop, he’d finally received a promotion to detective and was awarded his gold badge. Even after his lieutenant had read him the letter from the Chief of Police, for the second time, Duke was having trouble believing it had finally happened.

The treasured promotion was not without a price. It had taken three months of physical therapy to repair the damage to his right shoulder where the bullet had punched through. But he’d saved the little boy’s life and killed the hostage taker. It was front-page news for almost a week until the Yankees clinched the division and seemed to be destined for another World Series.

Duke looked at the door and sighed. It was Brooklyn and not one of the prestigious midtown precincts. But the way his mom glowed at the promotion ceremony was enough to convince him he made the right choice. He could have waited another six months. An older detective in Midtown South had taken a bullet in a shootout and was talking about early retirement. A friend in Central Robbery offered an entry-level position, but Duke wanted a job in Homicide. Even the opening at twice the pay in New Jersey wasn’t enough to get him across the river. He’d spent too much time on the city streets to succumb to the boredom of suburbia.

When all was said and done, the Jamaican born cop’s decision came down to stylish clothes versus what uniformed cops called “the bag.” Getting out of the blue serge uniform had been goal number one. Of course, the bump in pay was a nice finishing touch, but Duke Garvey was a man known first for his wardrobe. Despite the washer and dryer in the basement of his building, all of Duke’s clothing went to a professional laundry. T-shirts and jeans came back starched and ironed. Even his socks and undergarments were dry-cleaned. Every suit in his closet came from a bespoke tailor.

The wardrobe and his soft voice were the keys to his successful nightlife. Women spoke in hushed voices about his sexual prowess. His phone number was passed around more than the city's best restaurant. One recent girlfriend bought him a hoodie with the words "Satisfaction Guaranteed" stenciled on the front. It was rumored that he'd had intimate relations in the hospital with two different nightshift nurses while he was recovering the gunshot wound.

Rounding out his resume was Duke's skill in the kitchen. His friends and fellow cops raved over his culinary expertise and constantly sought him out for recipes and advice. Duke's name was first on every guest list for a summer barbecue, departmental dinner, or gathering of cops over a keg and grill party. Duke, the chef, always came dressed for the occasion. For a simple two-person barbecue, he had a choice of six clean aprons, matching toques, and oven mitts. It was a struggle for his girlfriends to outshine him on a date, and none of them cooked as well as the young Jamaican with red hair.

His thirty-third birthday, the previous weekend, had been celebrated with Juliana Tolkowski, his NYPD partner for the last nine years and current roommate. They'd been living together for just over two months, but had been shacking up for several years. Their affair was the worst kept secret in the precinct.

Joking that he'd probably make her move out now that he was plain clothes and a much higher pay grade, Juliana had pulled her suitcase from his storage closet and dusted it off when Duke left for his first shift that Monday morning. No one prior to her had lasted as long in his apartment.

Closing the top button on his sport jacket, Duke took a deep breath and strode into the squad, trying his best to hide his apprehension. He made it as far as the second footstep when a much shorter man leaned out of a glass-enclosed office and shouted at a senior citizen who appeared to be desperately in need of a meal, seated to Duke's left.

"Loviccio, we've got a DOA. 1070 Park Place on the second floor, apartment 2B. Uniformed officers are already on the scene." He walked over and handed the man a small, pink piece of paper.

The somewhat malnourished detective, who Duke surmised was Loviccio, rolled his chair back from the desk where he was sitting and nodded at the piece of paper. "Jankowsky's still at the hospital with the rape victim from 147 Midwood Street."

Gazing around the squad, the shorter man shook his head and folded his arms across his chest. He had a yarmulke with an embroidered Jewish star clipped to his hair that fluttered as he swung his head back and forth. “Where the hell is the squad?”

Loviccio brushed back his gray curls and shrugged. “Busy day. Everyone’s still out on the street. I’ll head over there and start working the case. Radio Jankowsky and let her know to meet me there when she’s done at the hospital.”

The short man shifted his attention toward Duke. “Can I help you?”

Duke smiled and held out his paperwork. “Perhaps I can help you. I’m your new detective.”

Raising a single eyebrow, the short man walked over, took the folder, and dropped it on the nearest desk. “Lieutenant Bernard Moscovitz.” He held out his hand. “And you are?”

“David Garvey, but everyone calls me Duke.” Shaking the lieutenant’s hand, Duke relaxed and looked around the squad.

“Well Duke, no one gets paid to stand around and admire the artwork here.” He spun on one heel toward the skinny man who’d gotten up from his seat. “This is Detective Ronald Loviccio. He’s four years from retirement, he’s cranky, but he’s the best detective to ever investigate a crime.” Lieutenant Moscovitz smiled at the senior sleuth. “Ronnie, take Detective Garvey and see what you can teach him about dead bodies.”

Detective Loviccio walked over to Duke and poked him in the stomach. “Too many carbs.” He shook his head slowly. “Turns to fat that you’ll never lose. And who did your hair? I’ve never seen a black man with red cornrows. You tie that shit yourself?”

Startled, Duke took a step back and pointed at the hollows of Loviccio’s cheeks and freckled forehead. “You stand around too long and some mortician is going to pump your skinny face full of embalming fluid. And yes, I do my own hair. My girlfriend tried and couldn’t get the knots tight enough.” Folding his arms across his chest, Duke furrowed his brow. “Anything else you’d like to know?”

With a deep sigh, Lieutenant Moscovitz turned slowly and walked back into his office, slamming the door closed behind him.

Loviccio led the way downstairs and out to the chaotic array of marked and unmarked police vehicles parked on Tillary Street. Walking over to a brown Chrysler sedan with dents on both driver side doors and no hubcaps, he jingled the keys and looked over at Duke.

“You know your way around Brooklyn?”

“Not yet.” Duke scratched an itch on the back of his neck. “I worked patrol in Midtown North and a short stint on Staten Island right out of the academy. Haven’t spent much time in Brooklyn.”

Loviccio nodded. “I’ll drive, but you need to spend some time reading maps and driving around the borough. They don’t like it when I drive.” He pointed at the dents and shrugged. “Not all of them were my fault.”

They got into the sedan with Duke in the passenger seat, buckling his seatbelt before he closed the door. Loviccio started the car and tapped the switch to turn on the emergency lights. Looking over at Duke, he laughed. “First time that seatbelt has ever been used.”

“You said—”

“Relax, Duke. I’m actually one of the safest drivers in the squad.” He started the engine and peeled out from the curb, a cloud of white and gray tire smoke behind them.

During the twenty-minute drive from Tillary Street to Park Place, they had three narrow misses, including a pedestrian who flipped them his middle finger as he jumped back onto the curb. Detective Loviccio, who drove with one hand, two feet, and minimal attention to the outside world, told Duke about his lifelong battle with his weight. From his childhood years as a fat baby and then an overweight toddler, to constant ridicule from his school friends, and finally a failed romance with a woman who crushed the scales at three-hundred pounds.

Loviccio had vowed to lose the weight before he entered the police academy. He joined the Peace Corps for a yearlong assignment in Guatemala, where he promptly got sick and lost over a hundred pounds before his bowels stabilized. Having reached a weight that he felt comfortable with, the detective went out of his way to maintain it.

However, his conversion from fat to thin brought with it a need to preach healthy living to anyone who would lend an ear. In the detective squad, that meant no one. On the streets, his words struck anyone overweight who came within the sound of his voice. Over the years, he’d

been cursed at, had all sorts of small objects thrown at him, and twice a mildly obese person had attacked him—once with a baseball bat and the second time with a frozen leg of lamb.

“So what do you eat?” Duke reached into a pocket of his sport jacket and pulled out a pack of chewing gum, offering a stick to Loviccio who refused.

“Well, I’m a vegetarian, so no meat of any kind.”

“In a city famous for its hot dogs?”

Loviccio slapped the steering wheel. “Poison on a bun. Do you have any idea what’s inside those dirt-water dogs?”

“Hebrew National? Nothing but beef.”

“Bullshit. You ever been to one of their factories?” Spinning the wheel hard, Loviccio brought the big Chrysler around a corner on two wheels, banging into the curb with the rear tire.

Duke tightened his seatbelt. “What about fish? Sushi comes straight from the sea.”

“By way of a freezer, a defrost, maybe frozen again and then cut on a bacteria-infested countertop by chefs who sneeze on the fish, cough on the rice, and spit on the seaweed paper to get it to stick together.” Loviccio rolled the window down and blew a chunk of phlegm across two lanes.

“So I’ll ask again, what kind of food do you eat?”

He rolled the window up and switched hands on the wheel so he could point at Duke. “Fresh vegetables, none of that frozen, processed crap. I bake my own bread using only organic ingredients, and I drink tea instead of coffee.”

“That’s it?”

“Well, that and an occasional bottle of whiskey.”

Duke closed one eye and stared at Loviccio. “A bottle?”

“Know anyone who can have just one drink?” Loviccio grinned. “Plus, there’s no meat in whiskey. Just barley, malt, water, and time.”

“How often?”

“As needed.” He adjusted the rearview mirror. “Once or twice a week.”

“And you think that’s a part of healthy living?”

Detective Loviccio pulled up to the crime scene and threw the Chrysler in park. “No. That’s just to keep me sane in this crazy city long enough to put in my papers.”

They squeezed through the crowd of uniformed cops, nosy neighbors, and wailing family members to get into the bedroom at 1070 Park Place, apartment 2B. The body was male, approximately twenty-years-old, splayed out, face up on the bed in the master suite. The corpse was dressed in a white t-shirt with two bloody pools on opposite sides of the chest and nothing else. The look of surprise on the dead boy's face and the position of his arms out to the sides made Duke think the kid wasn't expecting to die today.

"He looks so peaceful." Duke shook his head. "Relaxed."

Loviccio sighed and reached into his back pocket, tugging out four disposable gloves. He handed a pair to Duke.

"Rule number one of detective work is to never add to the scene of the crime." He pulled the gloves onto his hands and stepped over close to the corpse. "Your body is filthy. You constantly shed skin, hair, and fluids. You must keep them from contaminating the crime scene."

"So, no sex with the victims?"

Loviccio looked at Duke with his eyebrows raised and put a hand on Duke's chest. "You're not one of 'them' are you?"

"Them?"

"Necros. Nut jobs who get off seeing a dead body. Maybe even having intimate relations with it." He dropped his hand and stepped back from the bed, looking hard at Duke. "We had a Medical Examiner who couldn't keep his hands off the corpses, especially the females."

"You're serious?"

He nodded. "As a hangnail."

"He screwed the dead bodies?" Duke's face curled in horror.

"Six of them before he was collared." Loviccio pointed at the dead kid on the bed. "Two of them were boys just like this one."

"Jesus."

"Yeah, that's what the judge said just before he sentenced him to seventeen and a half years in prison." Walking around to the other side of the bed, Detective Loviccio knelt and lifted one of the dead boy's arms. "Rigor has set in. Has to be dead at least five or six hours." He looked at his wristwatch. "Close to dawn. Probably four or five o'clock in the morning."

One of the uniformed cops came into the bedroom. “Parents said he came home from a party after midnight with a friend. Male. The parents expected to see their son at breakfast. When he didn’t come out of his room, they knocked, went in, and found him like this.”

“You speak directly to the doorman?”

“Yeah. He said a well-dressed man with a cane and Mets cap came out around quarter after five. He’d never seen the guy before tonight, but he was certain it was the same guy who walked in with the deceased just after midnight.”

Duke grinned. “They’re never Yankee fans.”

“And of course, the well-dressed man didn’t sign the guest register.” Loviccio lowered the boy’s arm. Lifting the t-shirt from the boy’s waist up toward his neck, he moved some chest hair out of the way and examined the bullet wounds. “Large caliber. Close range. Look at the powder burns on the t-shirt.”

“The parents didn’t hear anything?” Nodding toward the door, Duke looked at the officer. “Was the door closed?”

The cop shook his head. “I don’t know about the door. It was open when I arrived. And as far as the parents go, they both take medication to sleep. Could have shot the kid with a bazooka and they’d have slept through it. But they did say he’s had several different friends spend the night recently.”

Loviccio scanned the room. “Anybody find a cellphone?”

Another shake of the head. “Parents said he has one and tried to call it, but the call went straight to voicemail. No other cellphones in the house.”

“What time did they find him?” Loviccio fixed the dead boy’s shirt and turned to the cop. “Did they say?”

“Yeah. The eight o’clock morning news was just comin’ on the television, according to the mother.”

Duke picked up a magazine from the floor. “*Chains and Cheers?*”

“Whips and leathers.” Loviccio pulled another issue of the same magazine from a pile on top of a nightstand. “The favorite journal of the rough trade crowd.”

“Gays who beat each other?”

He nodded. “And worse, as evidenced by our dead body. You got a name for the deceased?”

“Vincent Marsden. Twenty-one on his last birthday.” The cop tore a page out of the small notepad he’d been reading from and handed it to Duke. “Parents knew he had homosexual leanings, but they didn’t know about the other shit.”

“Anything missing other than the cellphone?” Looking around the room, Duke found a wallet on the floor and placed it on the bed.

The cop checked his notes. “Nothing, according to the parents, and the wallet has thirty-one dollars and a credit card, so it doesn’t look like a robbery. I put it back on the floor where I found it. Looks like two faggots had an argument and one lost.”

Loviccio glared at the cop, raising a hand of admonishment. “Yo, watch that shit before you get stuck in a re-adjustment class for a few nights of unpaid overtime.”

“Sorry.” The cop raised his eyes toward the ceiling. “Two *homosexuals* that had an apparent disagreement.”

Duke looked down at his Italian leather shoes and smiled. He’d been through a couple of readjustment classes in his eleven years on the job. Words were far more powerful today than when he’d graduated the academy. No one called him ‘black’ or ‘negro’ anymore. The ‘N’ word was never uttered by a cop, even when talking about the most despicable skulls. Political correctness was the new normal, and every cop was expected to preach it.

Even the term ‘African-American’ had taken on derogatory meanings. Duke was proud of his Jamaican heritage, even though his bloodline was tainted along the way with racial hatred of a different kind. His mother, who could trace her lineage directly back to Marcus Garvey, one of the earliest leaders of the black freedom movement, had raised him to ignore skin color and treat all people as equals.

He still bore faint scars on his lower back where she’d smacked him with a stalk of raw sugar cane when words he didn’t fully understand popped from his mouth in anger. His mother had gone so far as to cut open the boy’s thumb with a knife to show him his blood was the same color as a white boy whose nose Duke had crushed with a fist in anger.

When they left the island, a month after Duke’s fifteenth birthday, his friends taunted him that he was going to live with the white man and follow the white man’s laws. Duke’s mother explained that there were only two sets of laws: God’s and man’s. Color had nothing to do with it. Break God’s laws and he’d have to answer to God and his mother in order to be forgiven. Break man’s laws and he could go to Hell for all she cared.

Duke saw that it came down to a choice between the clergy and the cops. He figured he'd have a better chance with criminals than with angels and signed up for the police academy on his eighteenth birthday at his mother's urging. The worst of it was having to trim his shoulder-length red dreadlocks that he'd started growing as a toddler. A barber across the street from the academy shaved his head half an hour before he reported on the first day. Duke had been weaving cornrows on his scalp ever since.

Rolling the body over, Detective Loviccio checked to see if the bullets had gone through the corpse and were underneath it, awaiting discovery.

"No luck. The Medical Examiner will have to find the slugs. They're still inside." He let the dead boy roll back. "Any of the neighbors hear the shots?"

The cop shook his head. "Nothing, but they all said there was loud music around three this morning. One of them called it in, but the officers who responded met the neighbor in the downstairs lobby. She told the cops that the music had stopped just before they arrived."

Loviccio let out a long breath. "And I'm guessing there are no security cameras in this building."

"Correct." The officer closed his notepad and shoved it into his back pocket. "Nobody other than the doorman saw them arrive. It's possible that the guy the doorman saw leave was the shooter, but according to him, the guy was too casual about the way left. Just kinda sauntered out of the building. Looks like another one of those cases where nobody saw nothin'." He walked over to the doorway and turned back toward the two detectives. "Good luck, gentlemen."

Duke took a long look around the bedroom. "You think there are many well-dressed men with canes wearing a Mets cap in Brooklyn?"

"Nah. Most of them would be wearing Yankee's hats." Loviccio lifted the crime scene tape and stepped out of the bedroom. "The Mets suck this year."