A dark-colored car is shown in profile on the left side of the image. The background is a gradient of green and yellow, with a bright, glowing light source on the left side, creating a lens flare effect. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

A FORD  
FAMILY  
MYSTERY  
SHORT  
STORY

# HIT AND RUN

MARCY McCREARY

FEBRUARY 1978

**S** NOW-DUSTED EVERGREENS lined the narrow road. The headlights of Will's Oldsmobile Cutlass illuminated the ghostly trees as he navigated the curves. Although it was neither raining nor snowing, the road was wet and shimmery from yesterday's snowstorm. The air temperature had risen into the upper forties, producing an ethereal layer of wispy fog floating above the four-foot snowbanks along the edge of the road.

Will turned slightly to his right. Vera's eyes were closed. It was only seven o'clock, but she had two martinis before they left the house. She didn't have to come with him, but she insisted. Said she needed to get out of the house for a bit of fresh air. Behind him, two thirteen-year-old girls whispered and giggled.

"Dad, can we listen to music?" Susan leaned forward. "Lori has two new cassette tapes."

"If it ain't Bob Dylan or Led Zeppelin, it's not going in my tape deck."

"No one listens to that anymore. Lori has Kate Bush and Blondie. You'll like it. I swear."

"Hand it here," Will said, extending his right hand toward the backseat, palm up. He took the *Parallel Lines* tape from Lori and popped it into the cassette player. "I'll be the judge of that."

As the opening bars of "Hanging On The Telephone" kicked in, Will slowed down as he passed a man walking towards them, on the opposite side of the road.

Vera opened her eyes. She swiveled her head toward her left and squinted. "A hitchhiker?" she slurred.

"Or someone who drank too much and decided to walk home instead of getting in his car drunk," Susan said, hoping the message would land where she wanted it to.

It did. Vera shifted in her seat to face her daughter. "I never drink and drive. Ask your dad."

Susan folded her arms across her chest and slammed back into her seat. "Sure. You just drink and pass out."

"Watch your tone with me, Suzy or Susan or whatever it is you want to be called this year."

"Whoa, everyone," Will grouched. "Everyone go to your corners and take a few deep breaths. It's foggy and I need to concentrate. So no more bickering. Let's get Lori home safe and sound."

Will came around a slight bend, then slammed on the breaks. "What the hell?"

A dark sedan was stopped in the middle of the road. Headlights blazing. The driver's-side door open. A buck on the hood.

"Wait here," Will directed.

Will hurried up to the dark sedan, then quickly ran back. He reached under the glove compartment, grabbed the police radio microphone, and powered on the unit. "Dispatch, this is Detective Will Ford, over."

"Go ahead. Over."

"Accident on Michigan Road, between Strangel and Kahn. Need an ambulance for unconscious female passenger. I believe the driver is wandering toward Route 52. I don't think he's injured, although he may be disoriented. Need a patrol car to pick him up. Also, notify the Wildlife Department for deer removal."

"Holy shit," Susan whispered to Lori.

Vera spun around and silently admonished Susan with a squint.

"What? You say it all the time."

"Enough already you two." Will jumped out of the Olds and headed back to the sedan.

A six-point buck—easily 150 pounds—lay on the hood of the car. Dead. One antler had smashed through the windshield on the passenger side, the tip just six inches short of the woman's forehead. Shards of glass had sliced open her cheeks and forehead, some pieces still embedded. The side window was bloody where she must have slammed her head on impact. Will reached over and felt for a pulse. Faint. But there.

Will withdrew his head from the car. A muffled cry caught his attention. But when he peeked back in, the woman was still out cold. The soft, whimpering sound arose from the back seat. Will threw open the back door to find a toddler, wrapped in a gray wool blanket, laid out across the back seat.

Will leaned into the car. The toddler gazed up at him, seemingly unhurt, definitely frightened. "It's okay. It'll be okay," Will whispered. He checked around her body for blood and found none. Her parents had jury-rigged the seatbelt to hold her in place as she slept. Will unlatched the seatbelt and gently maneuvered her out of the backseat. She shivered slightly as he walked back to his car. Will could make out the wide-eyed expressions of his three passengers.

Susan opened the door, then slid to the center seat. Will placed the toddler next to Susan.

"Hi!" Susan said. "You're safe here with us." Susan glanced up at her Dad, then turned back to the toddler. "What's your name?"

"Lily," she murmured. She snaked her arm out out of the tightly-wrapped blanket and held up three fingers. "I'm three."

"Lily, do you know your mommy and daddy's names?" Will asked.

The toddler shook her head.

"That's okay." He glanced over Lily's head noting Susan's worried expression. "I'll check the glove compartment for registration. We can easily run the plates. I'm sure we'll find a relative. And her dad couldn't have wandered off too far."

"It's odd that he didn't try to flag us down when we passed him," Susan said, loosening the blanket around Lily.

Will nodded. "Yeah, I thought that too."

"Well, he seemed disoriented," Vera chimed in. "Maybe he hit his head and has amnesia. I saw a movie where this exact thing happened."

"I'm sure there's a logical explanation . . . although, amnesia would be at the bottom of my list," Will said.

"Okay. Well, just trying to be helpful."

They all jumped slightly as the sound of a siren pierced the still air. As the flashing red lights came into view, Will headed back to the injured woman.

The ambulance pulled up in front of the dark sedan. The paramedics unloaded their medical boxes and gurney and hurried to the passenger side. A car on the opposite side of the road slowed as it passed the ambulance, its driver craning his neck to take in the scene. A few seconds later, a patrol car pulled in behind Will's Olds. No sooner than the patrol officers exited their vehicle, a tow truck pulled up behind it. The assortment of headlights illuminated the surroundings, casting shadows in every direction.

"Hey Andy, Carl," Will called out to the police officers as they approached. "Some guy hit a deer. He wandered off, maybe to get help. His wife is badly injured. His daughter is okay. She's in my car. But we should probably have her checked out by the paramedics."

"Good thing you came along," Andy said. "We can take it from here."

Andy accompanied Will back to his car to retrieve the girl.

Will reached in and lifted Lily out. "You're going to go with this nice policeman."

"I want my mommy." Lily started to cry. Soft gulps, followed by sniffles.

"You're going to go see your mommy now," Susan said, leaning partially out the door in an effort to deter a full-blown meltdown.

Lily quieted down as she was passed from Will to Andy.

When Will settled in the front seat, Susan slid forward. "Dad, I think we should turn around and look for Lily's dad."

"What about getting Lori home?" Will peered into the rear view mirror. "Your parents are going to be worried that you're not back by now."

Lori rolled her eyes. "Trust me, they probably haven't even noticed I'm not back yet. I got two older siblings and a younger brother. I'm invisible."

"I know it can feel like that sometimes in a big family," Will consoled.

"C'mon Dad. A few more minutes won't matter."

"Well, I would like to turn back and see if I can find the guy. It's been, what? Ten minutes? Maybe he's still walking."

Lori leaned forward slightly. "I'm sure it'll be fine, Mr. Ford."

Will executed a flawless three-point turn, then headed back in the direction from which they came.

"If we can't find the dad and Lily's mother dies, maybe we can adopt Lily," Susan said.

"That's an awful thing to say," Vera scoffed.

“Well, I think it’s sweet of you to offer up our home,” Will said, in an attempt to defuse another argument between mother and daughter. “But . . . I’m sure there’s a relative that’ll take her in if something happens to her parents.”

“Maybe you can babysit her,” Lori offered. “If her Mom is stuck in the hospital and the dad is working, that might be a nice gesture.” Lori leaned forward. “Perhaps you can let someone know that Susan and I would do that, Mr. Ford.”

Will smiled. “Sure thing. Okay, everyone keep your eyes peeled for that fellow.”

They drove several miles in silence, each gazing out their window into the pitch black.

When it was clear that they were not going find the man, Will turned the car around.

After dropping Lori off at her parent’s house, Will radioed his partner, Jimmy Tillman, and asked him to meet up at the police station.

Vera snorted. “So you’re dealing with this tonight?”

“We’ve got an unconscious, critically injured Jane Doe and a disoriented John Doe walking around the woods. Not to mention, a little girl who I would like to reunite with a relative. So, yeah, I’m going in tonight.”

They all remained silent as Will drove back to their house. No sooner than he pulled into the driveway, Vera jumped out of the car and slammed the door shut. She stomped up the porch steps, then disappeared into the house.

“Dad, can I come with you? I got a good look at the guy. I can sketch him for you.”

Will stared out the car windshield as the house lights powered on. He knew Susan did not want to be alone with Vera, who was probably pouring herself a tall one right now. “Okay. Let me just have a word with your mom.”

“PARK YOURSELF there,” Will said to Susan, pointing at his desk chair. I’m gonna have a chat with Jimmy.” He tossed his car keys on his desk.

Susan plopped down on the swivel chair and spun around several times. She plucked a pencil out of the desk drawer and found a scrap of paper in a wire basket full of unopened mail and stapled reports.

A few minutes later Will and Jimmy returned.

“Hey kiddo,” Jimmy said.

“Hey Detective Tillman.”

“Dad tells me you got a good look at the guy.”

“Susan has a keen eye.”

“Yeah? You should follow in your old man’s footsteps.”

“Don’t give her any stupid ideas.” Will turned to face his daughter. “Tell us what you saw.”

“The man had beady eyes, shoulder length hair, and one of those half beards,” she said, pinching her chin.

“A goatee?”

“Yeah. Here. I made a sketch of him,” Susan said, handing Jimmy the scrap of paper.

Jimmy blew a low whistle. "You got a future as a sketch artist, young lady. Anything else you remember about him. Height? Weight?"

"He was tall and thin. Oh, and he was holding a woman's purse. Kinda like the one mom has. About the size of a toaster with little handles and a snap at the top."

"Wow. You saw all that as he passed by."

"Yeah." Susan shrugged her shoulders.

"That might explain why the woman in the car didn't have a handbag with her," Will said. "How come you didn't mention this before?"

"I don't know." Susan tapped the pencil on the desk. "You didn't ask me what I saw."

They all jumped slightly when Will's desk phone rang.

"Detective Will Ford. Uh-huh. Okay, thanks." He turned to Jimmy. "The car is registered to a Mr. Ned Baumgartner. Lives in Poughkeepsie. And get this . . . he reported the car stolen earlier today."

"Shit." He glanced at Will, then Susan. "Sorry."

Susan snorted. "You can curse if you want. It's my mom's favorite word. I hear it all the time."

Jimmy's eyebrows shot skyward, unsure how to respond. So he changed the subject. "We have enough for an APB."

Will picked up his car keys. "Let's see if we can interview our Jane Doe. Maybe she's come to."

"Can we find out what happened to Lily?" Susan asked.

"Sure. But when it comes to interviewing kids, we usually rely on social workers to do the questioning." Will scratched his head. "Although, not sure how much a three-year-old could tell us about her parents stealing a car."

Will zipped up his jacket as they headed out into the chilly night. The temperature had dropped a few degrees in the last hour or so. Jimmy wanted to take his own car so he could head home afterward, so Susan jumped into the front passenger seat of the Olds yelling, "Shotgun!"

Will pulled out of the parking lot and headed toward Monticello Hospital. He glanced over at Susan, who had a grin plastered on her face. "Whaddya you smiling about?"

"Oh, nothing."

"C'mon. I know you, Susan. Cough it up."

Susan smacked her dad's arm gently. "Is this how you interrogate criminals?"

"Yeah. And they always crack."

She snorted. "Okay, if you really wanna know . . . I was thinking about what you said to Jimmy. That I've got a keen eye and I'm super observant. Maybe I should consider a job as a detective."

Will side-eyed Susan. "Y'know, those are good skills for being a lawyer or a doctor too."

"Hate to burst your bubble, but I have as much chance of becoming a lawyer or doctor as I do becoming a ballerina. My grades suck and I got flat feet."

"You can do something about your grades," Will said as he pulled into the hospital lot and parked alongside Jimmy. "Your feet, well, I'm afraid you're stuck with those."

The three of them made their way to the nurses' station. When Will inquired about their Jane Doe, he was told she was still unconscious and Lily was asleep in one of the rooms on the pediatric floor. *Kept for observation*, the nurse volunteered. The group was asked to sit tight in the waiting area while one of the on-duty nurses tracked down the doctor on rounds.

Five minutes later, a gray-haired man holding a clipboard approached them. A stethoscope hung from his neck, the silver disk tucked in the chest pocket of his white lab coat. "I'm Dr. Abrams. I'm assuming you're the police officers seeking to identify our Jane Doe?"

Will reached out his hand. "I'm Detective Will Ford and this is my partner, Detective Jimmy Tillman." Will glanced over his shoulder at the girl slumped on one of the chairs. When he saw the doctor following his gaze, he added, "That's my daughter Susan."

Susan smiled and waved.

"So, how's our patient?" Will asked as he huddled with Jimmy and Dr. Abrams.

"In rough shape, but her vitals are steady. She sustained a head injury, and her face is cut up and swollen from flying glass. We've bandaged her up and she'll heal, but I'm afraid there might be some permanent scarring. The good news is that she's not in a coma, but she is slipping in and out of consciousness."

"Can we see her?" Jimmy asked. "We got questions about the car they were driving in." He paused, and when he didn't get an immediate reply, he added, "Turns out the car was stolen."

The doctor raised, then quickly lowered, his eyebrows. "That's not my concern right now. She's in no condition to see anyone. Trust me, she isn't going anywhere, so I suggest you all get a good night's sleep and come back in the morning. Late morning. Dr. Batelle will be on rounds then."

"And Lily?" Susan asked, seemingly appearing out of nowhere. "How is she?"

The three of them loosened their circle to let her in.

"She kept asking to go home. We had a nurse read her a bedtime story and she fell asleep." The doctor crossed his arms and drummed his fingers on his biceps. "So, if you'll excuse me now, I've got to continue my rounds."

WILL SLIPPED out of the house, careful not to disturb Vera or Susan, asleep in their respective beds. It was Saturday and he saw no reason to wake them. Besides, Vera and early-morning sunlight weren't exactly on speaking terms. And Susan would beg him to come along to the hospital. Best if he leaves quietly, without fanfare.

The hospital was abuzz when he arrived. The bleary-eyed night shifters were gone and in their place, wide-awake doctors and nurses hustled down hallways, chattering and exchanging greetings. Patients filled waiting areas, reading magazines or books, or simply staring ahead, perhaps too nervous about their impending appointments to concentrate on anything.

Will was conferring with Dr. Batelle when his partner Jimmy arrived.

"We're going to reunite mother and daughter shortly. See if that doesn't rouse our Jane Doe a bit," Dr. Batelle said. As if on cue, a nurse approached holding Lily's hand. The doctor squatted to match Lily's



diminutive stature. "Your mommy got a little hurt in the car accident, so she has some bandages on her head. But she's getting better." He smiled, then added, "She's asleep now, but maybe you can whisper in her ear how much you love her. I bet she'll like that."

Lily pursed her lips tight and nodded. "Mommy not dead?"

Dr. Batelle eyes widened, seemingly shocked at the girl's question. "Oh honey, no. She just hit her head really hard. She's just in a deep, deep sleep."

The group entered the room. The patient lay slightly propped up, her face obscured by a breathing tube. Bandages covered the top of her head and about a third of her face. The other two-thirds were swollen and plum-colored. She was hooked up to a heart-monitoring machine. A tube snaked from her arm to an IV drip bag.

Lily dug herself into the folds of the nurse's white dress as they approached the bed.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," the nurse whispered. "Can you say something to your mommy, so she can hear your sweet voice?"

Lily slowly peeled away from the nurse and peered up at the woman in the bed. "Mommy? Wake up. I wanna go home." She blinked away tears, then looked up at the nurse. "Can I go home now?"

Will stepped forward. "Why don't you and I get a brownie and a glass of milk and we can chat." Will glanced around the room. "If that's okay with every—"

A knock at the door interrupted Will. A plump, forty-something woman cleared her throat, then entered. "I'm Marjorie Simons." She glanced around at their confused faces. "The social worker assigned to Lily." She flashed a smile at Lily. "If I may have a word with the detectives," she continued, crossing her arms over her brown cardigan.

Will and Jimmy followed Marjorie out of the room and down the corridor a bit, away from the hubbub.

"I understand you would like to question the little girl," Marjorie said.

Will nodded. "It's no longer just a matter of needing a first or last name of her parents or finding a relative. The car they were in was stolen."

"Oh my."

"We're hoping Lily can tell us something about what her parents were up to yesterday," Will continued. "Where they went, where they were going, that sort of thing. If this guy stole that car, they were on the run. Probably not even from around here. Until we find the missing man or our patient wakes up, Lily is our best chance at the moment to get some answers."

"I have extensive experience in questioning children," Marjorie said, rolling her shoulders back. "You have to be careful not to ask leading questions because they'll tell you what they think it is *you* want to hear. It's not that they're intentional lying, but they are children and their aim is to please."

"We'd like to be in the room when you talk with her," Will said.

Marjorie nodded. "I have no problem with that . . . as long as you remain silent. She seems to like you, and that will help. But, just to warn you, from the looks of her she recently turned three, so it's not going to be easy extracting answers. On average, a thirty-six-month-old has a vocabulary of about five



hundred words. Some three-year-olds know their parents' names at this age, even their surname, but if she's closer to two than to three, it's less likely she can tell us."

Will glanced at Jimmy, then back to Marjorie. "Well, let's hope she can tell us something."

LILY'S FROWN morphed into a slim smile when Will placed the chocolate brownie and a paper cup filled with milk on the table.

"Dig in," Will said, then parked himself on the far side of the table next to Jimmy.

Lily gobbled up the brownie.

Once it was established that Lily was unable to tell them her parents' first names or last name, Marjorie pulled a pad of drawing paper and a small box of crayons from her satchel. Lily looked on with amusement as Marjorie drew a black car with a stick-figure man in the front driver's seat, a stick-figure woman in the front passenger seat, and a stick-figure child laying across the back seat. She picked up a red crayon and drew curly hair on the child figure. Marjorie turned the paper toward Lily.

Lily pointed to the red-headed stick-figure in the back seat. "Me!" she exclaimed.

"That's right. That's you. And this was the car we found you in yesterday," Marjorie said, tapping the drawn car. "Is this the car your mommy and daddy always drive?"

Lily shook her head.

"Is it a new car?"

Lily nodded.

"Were you with Mommy and Daddy when they got the new car?"

Lily's face contorted in confusion. She shook her head vehemently. "I don't like that car. I like the green car. I wanna go home."

"Soon, honey." Marjorie glanced at the detectives. "Can I ask you a few more questions?"

Lily nodded. She picked up the paper cup and gulped down the milk. A thin milk mustache formed on her upper lip.

"What happened to the green car?"

Lily wiped away the milk mustache with the back of her hand. "It broken."

"I see. So Daddy had to get a new car?"

Lily shrugged. "I like green car."

Marjorie turned toward Will and Jimmy. "This line of questioning is too complicated for her." She swiveled back to Lily. "When is your birthday?"

Lily held up her thumb, index, and middle finger. "I'm three."

"You're a big girl. Do you know what month you were born?"

"Daddy says I born with baby Jesus."

Marjorie looked up. "That could mean that her birthday is on December twenty-fifth. Just two months ago. It maps out to her language skills."

"Do you know someone you call Aunt or Uncle?"

"Aunt Cassie!"

"Anybody else you call Aunt or Uncle?"

"Uncle Phil. He's funny." She touched the top of her head and giggled. "No hair!"

"And Aunt Cassie? Can you describe her?"

Lily pointed at her head. "Hair like me."

Marjorie picked up the red crayon. She drew another stick figure with curly hair. "Red with pretty curls?"

Lily nodded.

Will cleared his throat. When Marjorie turned toward him, he whispered, "Can you ask her where she lives?"

"Lily, do you know the name of the town you live in?"

She shook her head as tears dripped down her cheeks.

Marjorie turned toward the detectives. "That's enough. Let's reunite Lily with her mother." She gathered up the pad and crayons and tossed them in her bag. She stood and held her hand out to Lily. "Shall we?"

Jimmy leaned toward Will. "Let's find the red-headed Aunt Cassie and the bald Uncle Phil."

"Sure, and let's look for a needle in a haystack while we're at it."

Dr. Batelle poked his head in the room. "Our Jane Doe just came to. She's groggy, but she's reacting to stimuli. You should be able to ask her a few questions."

The doctor led the way with Will, Jimmy, Marjorie and Lily trailing behind.

The doctor stepped aside and motioned Will into the room. The ventilator had been removed from the woman's face. She turned her head slowly toward the group. Her dark brown eyes were glassy and bloodshot.

"Lily, look, Mommy is awake!" Marjorie exclaimed, craning her neck over the men standing in front of her.

Lily slipped through the legs of the adults and ran to the far side of the bed. She lifted her heels off the floor and stood on her tiptoes for a few seconds. Then she lowered her heels. She peered up at the group of adults on the other side of the bed. "That's not Mommy."

The patient tried to speak. The first sounds came out as a squeak. "I've been . . . I was . . ." She swallowed hard. "Kidnapped." She gazed down at Lily. "I think she was too."

Will reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a folded sheet of paper. He unfolded the sketch and held it up in front of the woman. "Is this the man who kidnapped you?"

She blinked rapidly as tears rolled down her face. "Yes."

Will lowered the paper and showed it to Lily. "Do you know this man?"

"Daddy," she said, sniffing.

"Where's your mommy?" Will asked carefully.

"Mommy in heaven." Lily started to sob.

The nurse swept her up and moved toward the door. "I'm taking her back to pediatrics," she declared, backing out into the hallway.

Marjorie spun around to face the detectives. "This is why she told the doctor her mother was dead. Because she most probably is. And all this is confusing the heck out of her."

Jimmy scratched the side of his head. "Then why did she call this woman mommy earlier?"

"First of all, were you able to really *see* the patient with the breathing tube, the bandages, the stitches, the swelling? And second, as I explained to you earlier, she was asked to say something nice to her mommy, so to please us, she did just that. And third, if you're barely three years old, the concept of death is not easy to comprehend, especially the finality of it. If Lily was told her mom was in heaven, she might have perceived that as temporary . . . like being on vacation."

Will stepped closer to the Jane Doe. "What is your name?"

"Linda." She sniffled. "Linda Beckman."

"Did he say why he kidnapped you?"

She shook her head. "He said I would find out when we got where we were going. And that he wouldn't hurt me if I did what he told me to do. The little girl was asleep in the car and I just assumed he kidnapped her too." Tears rolled down her swollen cheeks.

"So what are we looking at here?" Jimmy asked. Before anyone could offer up a theory, he answered his own question with more questions. "A man kidnaps a woman to what? Create an instant family? Take care of his daughter?"

Linda gasped suddenly, reclaiming everyone's attention. "He had a gun."

Will turned to Jimmy. "Let's put out the word he's armed and dangerous. The gun is probably in the handbag he—"

A young nurse, slightly out of breath, suddenly appeared in the doorway. "There's a man at the nurses' station waving around a gun demanding to pick up Lily. And sir, the girl who was with you last night showed up this morning with her mother looking for you and Lily. They're in that area."

It took every ounce of willpower for Will not to charge out of that room. "Everyone stay calm," he ordered. "We handle this like any other hostage situation."

"Where's Lily?" Marjorie yelled.

"She's safe. Ramona took her to one of the empty rooms in pediatrics for a nap."

Jimmy picked up the receiver and called the chief. When he hung up, he turned to the others, "Police have already been dispatched to the hospital."

Will peered down the empty hallway, then turned to Jimmy. "I'm going unarmed. Cover me."

Jimmy unholstered his gun and followed Will out of the room. "Lock and barricade this door," he said over his shoulder to Marjorie. The two moved slowly down the hallway toward the nurses' station. "Easy does it," Jimmy whispered.

Will spotted Susan and Vera in the corner of the room, but did not draw their attention. The last thing he needed was the gunman making the connection.

Will held his hands up, palms out, as he gingerly walked into the open space of the nurses' station. "How can I help you?" Will said calmly.

The man swung around. The sketch wasn't far off. The nose was wrong. It was larger in person.

“Whoa, there. Can we have a chat without the gun?”

The man shook the gun. “Who are you? Where’s my daughter?”

“Your daughter is not here. She’s been taken to a safe place. I’ll take you to her, but you have to put the gun down.” Will kept his head still but shifted his eyes left and right to take in the scene around him. He hoped the ten or so people in the waiting area would remain quiet and not make any sudden moves. “And how about we let all these folks go so the two of us can come up with a plan.”

“No one is going anywhere until I walk out of here with my daughter. I already lost my wife. I’m not losing Lily.” The man started to cry. “All I want is a family. That’s all I ever wanted. It’s what God demands. Lily was born on Christmas Day. A present from God. She’s my angel. My angel. She needs a mother. She cries for her mommy every night. I wasn’t going to hurt that woman. I saw her and knew she would be perfect.” Tears streamed down his cheeks. “The perfect mommy for my Lily.” The man lowered his gun.

Will carefully stepped forward.

The man swiftly raised the gun. “I told you, I’m not leaving without Lily. Everyone stays.” He squinted at Will. “Are you a cop or something?”

“I’m just someone trying to help. Why did you leave the scene of the accident?”

“I panicked, okay? But I went back and saw all the police and the ambulance.” He waved the gun as he spoke. He stopped abruptly. “Wait. You were there. I saw you there.”

Will held up his palms. As he took a small step forward he thought about the precarious nature of family. Tenuous threads. One slight pull and the unraveling begins. *When did the threads come loose in our family? When Vera started to drink? When I made the job a priority over our marriage? Which of us tugged first?* Will inadvertently turned his head toward Vera and Susan. And in that split second, Will realized his mistake. Not just because he saw the fear in their eyes, but because he just telegraphed his weak link as a negotiator.

The man followed Will’s gaze. “Those two were with you.” The man spun his body away from Will and pointed the gun in their direction. “How would you feel if you lost your wife and never got to see your daughter again?” He cocked the hammer of the gun.

Will charged the man, throwing him off balance. A shot rung out, hitting the lights above. Glass rained down. Screams erupted around him. Jimmy placed his shoe on the man’s wrist as Will wrestled the gun out of his grip and flipped him onto his stomach. Jimmy handed Will a pair of handcuffs as police swarmed the floor.

Vera and Susan were still crumpled together on the floor against the wall when Will ran over to them. He lowered himself next to Susan and let out a sigh.

“Are you okay, Dad?”

“Yeah.” Will put his arm around Susan.

Susan ran her sleeve under her nose and sniffled. “Why do you think he did this?”

Will looked up at the man as the police escorted him out of the lobby. With a blank stare, he staggered forward in handcuffs, his shoulders slumped in defeat. Will shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

He knew he didn't have a good answer. At least not one that would satisfy. "Sometimes, desperate people do desperate things."

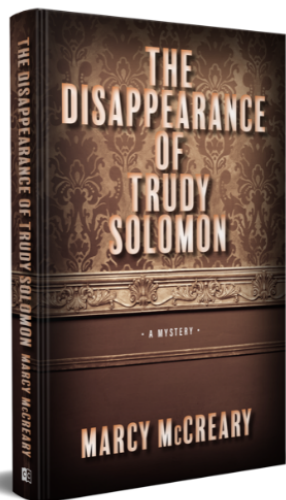
"It's warped thinking. That's what it is." Vera leaned against Susan and squeezed her hand. "And to think, this guy might've gotten away with this if he didn't hit that deer."

**THE END**



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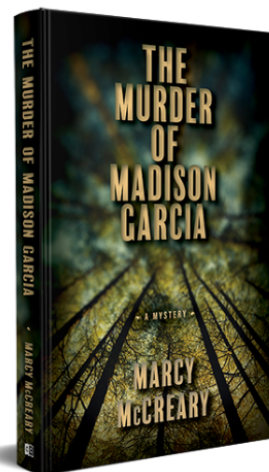
## THE FORD FAMILY MYSTERY SERIES



When skeletal remains are found, everyone assumes it's Trudy Solomon, a Catskills hotel waitress who disappeared forty years ago. However, it's quickly discovered that Trudy is alive and living in an Alzheimer's facility in Massachusetts. When Detective Susan Ford shares the news with her dad, retired Detective Will Ford (the original detective on the case), he convinces his daughter to reopen Trudy's case. And what they discover puts them both on a collision course with secrets from their past.

Detective Susan Ford notices a missed call on her phone from a number she doesn't recognize, and when Madison Garcia is found stabbed to death the next morning, Susan realizes that Madison was the one who had called her. But why? Susan teams up with her father, retired Detective Will

Ford, to find the killer, and their investigation soon threatens to uncover Madison's family's secrets—leading the Fords to have to figure out which of one Madison's many secrets was the one that got her killed.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



After graduating from George Washington University with a B.A. in American Literature and Political Science, **MARCY MCCREARY** pursued a career in the marketing field, holding executive positions in marketing communications and sales at various magazine publishing companies and content marketing agencies. With two daughters and two stepdaughters living in four cities (Brooklyn, Nashville, Madison, Seattle), Marcy spends a lot of time in airplanes crisscrossing the country. She lives in Hull, MA with her husband, Lew.

