

SECOND WATCH

A Novel by

L O W E N C L A U S E N

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Chapter 1

From the top of Phinney Ridge, Katherine Murphy saw the Ballard Bridge rising over the Ship Canal that separated Ballard from Queen Anne Hill and Magnolia Bluff. The canal was like a river that separated two states of mind. Seattle's Queen Anne and Magnolia neighborhoods were green and residential while Ballard's industrial waterfront stretched bare and low along the canal as if a flood had swept through it and removed the frills. From the Ballard side, steam rose from a steel mill east of the bridge and dust from a concrete plant to the west. Beneath the bridge a pleasure boat ducked out of the way as a fishing trawler headed out to sea. The fishing season had already begun, and the fishing boats left behind were coming out of dry dock with no time to waste.

On the bench seat of the police car, Katherine sat beside her new partner as she had in the police academy a few years earlier. It was a quirk then of the alphabetical seating that Murphy's *M* and Stevens's *S* placed them, the only women in the academy class, in desks side by side surrounded by men. They were still surrounded, but the dark blue cuffs on her long-sleeve gabardine shirt showed the years of daily wear and her black leather gun belt was dulled and bruised. Her deep brown eyes saw more and saw differently than before and seldom rested. From the outside corners of her eyes faint wrinkles fanned out on her smooth skin like tentative pencil tracks on a newly drawn map.

It was Katherine's first day working with Grace Stevens on the footbeat in Ballard, her first hour on the Second Watch. She had moved from the night shift downtown because Grace had asked her, and no one had ever asked her before. She had always been a partner by default, when there was nobody else, when there was no choice.

With a new partner, new surroundings, new uncertainties, Katherine had the same feelings she'd had as the rookie on her first night on the street a few years earlier—except it was high noon, or nearly so, and Grace was not like the training officer who had barely and begrudgingly acknowledged her presence. And Katherine didn't feel sick to her stomach as she had when that first night began and ended, and on many nights thereafter.

Grace pointed out streets and directions to orient Katherine to her new beat. It was usually quiet, Grace said—a drunk fisherman now and then, a merchant's complaint, a panhandler or two. Occasionally something serious would cross their paths, but in Ballard people took care of their own problems.

But Ballard, Katherine thought, of all places for them to work. With its Scandinavian names on business after business and storefront after storefront, it was like another country. She wondered how Grace had ever arrived at this western bulge of the city, why the police department would send her here, and why she would stay even if they did. She could ask herself the same questions. Ballard was so far out of the way of her normal life, the normal roads she took, that she couldn't remember being in the neighborhood more than a few times since she had moved to Seattle as an eighteen-year-old college student.

As Grace entered a long straight street from its southern tip, she turned to Katherine and told her they had come to Ballard Avenue, "the center of the universe." She smiled when she said it.

It was that smile that had interested Katherine from the first days of the academy. There was something about it that set Grace apart from her, from the rest of the recruits. It was a cautious smile that didn't invite or permit anyone to come too close, and yet there was

something unmistakably appealing about it, a vulnerability that showed through the caution.

On Ballard Avenue a man crossed in front of the police car, waved to them, and stepped onto the running board of a truck parked in the middle of the street. Farther down, another man crossed with a long pipe balanced on his shoulder, and another passed him pushing a handcart. Katherine had seldom enforced jaywalking ordinances downtown, but here everyone walked from one side of the street to the other as if they had never heard of the law.

Trees rose from the buckling sidewalks with new spring leaves reaching delicately into the lower wires of power lines. Old brick buildings crowded against the street with advertisements painted a hundred years earlier on their walls. For all that Katherine could see, she had slipped back into another time.

“Usually we stop here first,” Grace said, “but we’ll go a little farther today.”

Grace turned and dropped down a gentle decline to Shilshole Avenue. She followed the waterfront west past the Ballard Locks, which divided the fresh water of the Ship Canal from the salt water of Puget Sound. As the street curved north on Seaview Avenue a marina stretched for a mile behind a rock breakwater and hundreds of sailboats lined up row after row, their empty masts bobbing in the restrained waves. Grace continued into Golden Gardens Park at the far tip of the Ballard sector and swung into a parking stall facing the water.

On Puget Sound a few sailboats chased the wind between Golden Gardens and Bainbridge Island. The Olympic Mountains stood like a faded watercolor far in the distance. On the beach gentle waves danced onto the sand and then crept back again. A mother stood with a pair of small shoes in her hand and watched her child wade into the water. The little girl screamed with delight when a wave went higher than she expected and soaked her rolled-up pants all the way to her waist.

“Brrrr,” Katherine said. “That water has to be cold.”

"It is," Grace said. "You and I would freeze out there. Kids don't have any nerves."

The little girl ran back to dry land and stomped her feet in the sand. Her mother walked over to her and extended her hand, but the girl headed out to sea again. She jumped when the next wave came and raced it to shore. Katherine laughed with the child. The mother looked back at the police car as if she had heard her laughter, but the police car was too far away.

"There's already talk about us," Grace said.

Katherine turned away from the child and looked at her.

"What kind of talk?"

"You know," Grace said. "Two women working together."

"Men work together."

"That's different. They have no choice."

"Lucky us," Katherine said.

"It doesn't bother you?"

"No more than anything else."

"There are men with a lot more seniority than you and I who would like to have our beat. There are only two footbeats left in the north end—one in the U-District and the one we have in Ballard."

"So why don't they have it?"

"Because we do. This was Wes Mickelsen's beat until he retired. He was my training officer when I got out of the academy, but he never took another recruit after me. I think Rigmor would have given him hell if he dumped me."

"Who?" Katherine asked.

"Rigmor Jensen. She has a little grocery store on Ballard Avenue. Haven't you heard of her? I thought every cop knew about her."

"Not me," Katherine said.

"You'll meet her as soon as we leave here. I think you'll like her."

"I'm sure I will."

Grace looked straight out the front window toward the endless row of waves that relinquished themselves on the shore. Katherine saw

Grace smile at the water, but it wasn't the smile she had seen earlier.

"I remember that about you," Grace said. "You were always sure of yourself. You probably never wonder if you can handle this job."

Katherine was silent until Grace turned away from the water and looked at her. "I wonder every day," Katherine said, "but I don't know why you would. I remember that academy instructor you threw out the door."

"I didn't throw anybody through a door."

"Off the mat, then. He was supposed to teach us self-defense, but he was nothing more than a bully. He especially liked picking on us, but he picked on you once too often, and you threw him completely off the mat. He wanted to get even, but they sent him to the emergency room instead. I could have cheered right then. I wish I would have."

"That wasn't such a fine moment," Grace said. "It nearly got me fired."

"It was the best moment I had during all those miserable months. You don't know how many times I wished I could have done that."

"It's all in the technique."

"No, it wasn't. You just picked him up and threw him, and he never bothered us again."

"I guess he had it coming," Grace said.

"He sure did. Do you remember how many stitches he got?"

"Seven," Grace said. "I often wished I hadn't done it. You would have used your head instead of getting mad and throwing the guy into a table. I think they respected you more because of that."

"They didn't respect either of us," Katherine said.

Grace looked back at the water, back to the time of the academy classes, and silently nodded her agreement.

The cold water finally chilled the little girl enough so that she allowed her mother to take her hand. The child sat on her mother's lap in dry sand beyond the reach of the waves, and the mother brushed sand from the girl. She pulled warm stockings onto her daughter's feet and slipped shoes over them. Then she pointed to the police car and

raised the little girl's arm to wave. The two women waved back to the child and the mother.

"I was surprised when you called me," Katherine said.

"It was Wes's idea."

"Really?"

"I told him about you."

"Me?"

Radio's voice interrupted Katherine's question by asking for their location. Grace picked up the microphone and told him they were in Golden Gardens.

"It's a bit of run," Radio said, "but all my other cars are tied up. I have a report of a dead body at the Fremont transfer station, 800 block 34th West. Can you handle that for me?"

"Affirmative," Grace said. She put the microphone back into the holder, restarted the car engine, and looked over at her new partner. "This is a fine way to start."

"What's a transfer station?" Katherine asked.

"A garbage dump," Grace said as she backed out of the parking stall.

"It doesn't sound like a call for our footbeat."

"It's not," Grace said, "but we're like an umbrella car, too. When the district cars are tied up, we'll get their calls."

Grace drove out of the parking lot and onto the main road, driving faster than normal but not using the blue lights until she came to an intersection. Even then she stopped before passing through a red light.

Katherine didn't dread the call as she would have a year or so earlier. It was a dead body that they were going to find, no longer a person. She knew what to do. If there were suspicious circumstances, and certainly there would be at a garbage dump unless it was somebody who keeled over with a heart attack, they would secure the scene and call Homicide. She would have to look at the body, but that seldom bothered her anymore. She had seen enough of them downtown—old men mostly who drank themselves into oblivion.

The North Precinct radio operator went on with other calls—an accident on Aurora, a stolen car in Greenwood, a fight in the University District. Their call became buried beneath the pile that had gathered at shift change.

A line of waiting cars blocked the entrance to the transfer station, and Grace turned into the exit lane. The line continued on the driveway that ran past the weigh station and around a large concrete building where the garbage was dumped. A man standing on the exit scale waved them forward. Katherine rolled down her window, and he bent down to her level.

“It’s up there,” he said. He pointed to the concrete building.

“What’s up there?” Katherine asked.

“A body, I guess,” the man said. “Didn’t they tell you?”

“They told us,” Katherine said.

“Is this the only way out of here?” Grace asked.

The man bent lower so that he could see Grace, too.

“Unless you’ve got a key for the other gate,” he said.

“Did anybody leave since you called?” Grace asked.

“Nope. Roscoe won’t let anybody out.”

“Who’s Roscoe?” Grace asked.

“The shift manager. What do you want me to do with all these cars?” He gestured to the line that flowed out to the street.

“Tell them the dump is closed,” Grace said.

Grace drove up to the cavernous building, turned sideways in the driving lane, and blocked the exit with the police car. On one wall of the building lines of castaway appliances stood beside steel bins of glass and recycled metals. On the other side a two-foot-high concrete barrier ran the length of the building. There was a deep pit beyond it. Three garbage trucks stood in a row at the far end of the building, and cars were still backed up to the pit, but nobody was throwing anything in. A short man in white overalls hurried toward them.

“I told everybody to stay just where they are,” he said. “I’ve got a ladder over by the body. Jim saw it when he backed up the bulldozer.”

“Are you in charge here?” Katherine asked.

“That’s right. Roscoe Burnett.” He stuck out his hand. “Damn glad to see you. We get all kinds of stuff dumped here, but I’ve never had anything like this.”

Katherine shook Roscoe’s hand, although she didn’t shake every hand extended to her.

Grace began walking toward the ladder whose top rungs rose above the concrete curb. Katherine followed her to the edge of the pit and saw the bulldozer twenty feet below. Ten feet in front of it was a large black garbage bag embedded in the mass of garbage, and Katherine could see the form of a knee sticking through the bag. She couldn’t see any other part of the body.

“Are you sure it’s real?” Katherine asked Roscoe, who had followed her.

“It looks real to me,” Roscoe said.

“Did you touch it?”

“No, ma’am. I sure didn’t.”

“We’d better check it first before we call anybody,” Grace said to Katherine. “I’ve got some rubber gloves in the trunk.”

Grace hurried back to the car, and Katherine grabbed the top of the ladder. She pushed on it to see if it was steady. Heights always bothered her.

“I’ll hold it for you,” Roscoe said. He reached for the ladder and held the rails with both hands.

Katherine swung her leg onto the first step below the curb. The ladder sank farther into the mass of garbage below her. She looked down and then quickly back up. Slowly, a step at a time, she descended into the pit, looking straight ahead at the concrete wall.

“You’re almost there,” she heard Roscoe say.

She looked up and saw Roscoe at the top. Grace was ready to start down. Katherine stepped carefully off the last rung of the ladder onto a pile of wood and plaster debris. It was firm beneath her feet. She

released the ladder and walked carefully around the bulldozer, testing each step before giving it her entire weight.

The height of the ladder didn't seem to bother Grace. She descended quickly to the bottom. Once in the pit, however, she moved just as slowly and carefully as Katherine. She was wearing rubber gloves and handed Katherine another pair.

The knee was real, and the flesh was torn so deeply that it exposed the bone. Katherine brushed away leaves and cut grass that lay on top of the bag until she was sure she had found the head. It felt like there was more than one bag around the body. She tried to gently rip an opening in the bag, but it was hard to get it started. Grace knelt beside her on the other side of the body and clenched the plastic beside Katherine's hands. Together they ripped it away until they could see the face.

"It's a young girl," Katherine said.

Her fingers encased in the rubber glove, Katherine touched the girl's neck to feel for a pulse, even though she knew that life had left this girl long before. Grace stood up and pulled the radio out of her holster.

"I'll call the sergeant," Grace said, "and get another unit here to help us. We need to seal off the whole dump site."

Katherine nodded her agreement. There was nothing they could do down in the pit. All their work was up the ladder that Grace had already begun climbing. Even so Katherine didn't leave. She remained in the pit and looked into the girl's lifeless eyes.