

# A Lifetime of Deception

A McKinney Brothers Novel

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## PROLOGUE

1971

Abbie Glover was on her back with her legs high in the air and her feet in stirrups. She was used to being in this position, but this time she was in pain. Sweat poured from her face and neck as the nurses monitored her vital signs and those of her unborn baby. Her gown was soaked, clinging to her shoulders, breasts, and back. The air in the room was cool, but Abbie was immune to the chill as her body tensed with each pain. Her contractions were very close now and the obstetrician was coaching her through her next moves.

She didn't trust the doctor or the nurses. They were all here at the request of the United States Air Force, she was sure of it. They were supposedly staff of Penrose-St. Francis Medical Center, but she knew better. She knew the Air Force set up the delivery team. She hated the military. She hated anyone associated with the military. She hated that her baby was going to be born with military doctors and nurses attending. But there was no turning back now. She was here on her back and her baby was going to be born any time now.

"Okay, when you have this next pain, push as hard as you can. I can see the top of the baby's head now." The doctor's instructions went in one ear and out the other. Abbie wasn't thinking about pushing. She was thinking about the bastards that had put her in this position, fifteen years old and pregnant. Her own mother disowned her when she found out Abbie was pregnant. Her father was long gone. He'd bugged out on Abbie's mom fifteen years before, as soon as he found out that she was

pregnant. He didn't want to be strapped with a kid. He had a future and he didn't need that sort of baggage holding him back. So she raised Abbie alone as best as she could, but she was far too young for that responsibility. Throughout her youth, Abbie was passed from relative to relative until none of them wanted her any longer. She was always in trouble and never did what she was told.

She wound up in foster care in Colorado Springs, Colorado near the Air Force Academy. That's where she learned how to turn on the charm and make a living as the party girl. She made some good cash servicing the young cadets at the academy. She managed to keep from getting pregnant until now. But here she was, legs in the air, pains coming faster than she could handle them. She started to scream as the next contraction hit. "Holy shit! Oh God, this hurts!"

"Push harder, Abbie. You need to push as hard as you can." The doctor was trying his best to be supportive, but Abbie was having none of it.

"I'm pushing, you fucking moron! God I hate you Air Force pricks!" She groaned loud then squealed as the contraction started to subside. A nurse took a cloth and wiped sweat from her face and neck. Abbie jerked her head towards the attending nurse and shouted, "Get that away from me you bitch!" The nurse rolled her eyes when she turned her back to Abbie. She got another dry cloth from the stack on the table by one wall of the delivery room and prepared to wipe her face down again when the next contraction started. Abbie let out another scream, this one more intense than the last.

Patiently, the doctor continued to coach in a calm voice, "Abbie, you need to push as hard as you can one more time."

She swore at the doctor again. Less patient people would have walked out of the delivery room and let her deliver her own baby, but they were professional medical staff. They'd heard much of this before. Foul language like this was usually hurled at the father of the newborn during delivery. But there was no father to target today, so the staff took the brunt of the abuse.

Only the man in the far side of the birthing room was actually military. He was there to observe the delivery. His orders were to report back to the Superintendent of the Air Force Academy, Lieutenant General Wilson Chester, as soon as the child was born. Specifically, he was to listen to everything the mother said during and after the birth.

The delivery room staff was a bit uncomfortable with the guest, but they had no choice. The military, or someone within the military, was paying the bill.

The baby's head was beginning to make its way out of the birth canal and the doctor told Abbie to relax as best she could until the next contraction. "This may be the push that does it so save your strength and try to really push this next time."

Abbie angrily shouted, "Look you motherfucker, there ain't no resting and I'm pushing as hard as I can. If you think you can push this kid out, have at it. AHHH!" The next contraction started. "Ahh! God this hurts. God I hate you bastards! I'll kill every one of you Air Force pricks for this!"

The staff was so stunned at this outburst that they didn't hear the doctor say, "Here it comes." The doctor had to yell to his staff to get moving and take the baby so he could get the umbilical cord clamped and cut. A nurse wiped the baby girl clean. She took the baby's weight and recorded the APGAR score. Seven. Not too bad for the baby of such a young girl.

The doctor said, "Record date and time of birth, February 2, 1971, 1632 hours. Oh, that's 4:32 PM for her civilian records."

Abbie turned her head away from the child when the nurse presented her with her new baby girl. She said, "She doesn't stand a chance with me. Take her away. I don't want to see her."

The nurse protested, "You'll change your mind when you've had some rest. This has been very traumatic."

"What the fuck do you know about me? I said take her away. I want to give her to someone who can love her. I can't. Now get her out of here and get me out of here."

The nurse gave her a sad look and turned with the newborn and headed towards the nursery. Before she left the delivery room she turned and asked Abbie, "Do you have a name for your baby girl?"

Abbie spat, "Bastard."

The entire staff stopped what they were doing for a moment and stared at Abbie. Then one by one, they returned to their tasks. This would be a delivery they would never forget. The nurses decided to call the baby Rebecca because they had just been talking about books they'd recently read. One of the books was *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. They all agreed that it was a beautiful name and this baby was a

beautiful baby. If Abbie came to her senses she could choose whatever name she wanted, but for now she was Baby Rebecca.

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Major Harold Trent reported to General Chester that the birth went well and the baby, a girl, was in fine condition and care. He also reported that the woman who gave birth to the infant did not want the child. He was certain that the child would be given up for adoption.

The General's response was, "You make certain that takes place. If that baby can be sent out of state so much the better. When the mother is healthy enough to be discharged, you be there and give her this package. Make sure she goes to the opposite side of the country from that baby. This woman is to have no contact with the baby or the adoptive parents. Is that understood, Major?"

"Yes sir," was his answer, but he did not understand. He figured that the General had his reasons and did not question his orders, but he left the office with many unanswered questions.

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On May 15, 1971 at a smoke-filled Colorado Springs pub, four young graduates, now United States Air Force Lieutenants smoked cigars and hoisted a round of shots to their success. They'd completed the tough requirements of the Air Force Academy. They'd also dodged a bullet.

"Hey Milt, we made it." He took a puff on his cigar then held his second shot of Jack Daniels high in the air. His three companions raised their shot glasses as well.

"Hell yeah. Salute!" The four drank their shots and put the glasses down hard on the table.

"We need to drink a round to your old man. He saved our asses."

The other three frowned at their fellow graduate. Milton Chester in a quiet, but firm tone said, "Shut the fuck up, man. What if someone overhears you talking about that shit? Our asses could be right back in the sling." The others nodded in agreement. Milton continued, "We have to vow to each other that we'll never talk about this to anyone. Ever! Understood?" He looked hard at each man. They each nodded agreement. "Good." He paused then said, "Fill 'em up."

His old man may have saved their asses, but it wasn't before he'd cold-cocked his son for nearly ruining both their careers. Milton put down the shot glass and rubbed his jaw at the memory.

But their little problem was gone. One half left the state heading

east, the other heading west. It was time to forget about that little lapse in judgment and move on. There were Air Force careers to be made. The four had their orders. Their bright futures awaited them.

For Abbie, the future looked bleak. She'd been given enough money to get out of town and a little extra to keep her mouth shut.

For baby Rebecca, the future was unknown.

# Chapter 1

1997

“It’s the damnedest thing I’ve ever seen. Denny Wilson found him laying here in the bedroom with the gun in his hand,” Detective Reid Hansen said. “We got a call from a lady next door, a Mrs. Julie Dornside. She lives in the house to the east. Said she heard a loud noise from the house, but said that the lady that lived here moved out several weeks ago. The story was that her husband was killed in Europe.” Detective Hansen looked around the small bedroom, being careful not to step in any evidence. The ‘evidence’ consisted of blood, brain matter and bone fragments. He continued, “Said she didn’t know her real well. It must have been the shot that she heard. You can see that it was suicide, but why did this guy kill himself in this empty house? We haven’t had a chance to question any of the neighbors yet. He’s probably stationed at the Air Force base. He’s got the military haircut. The guy looks pretty squared away.”

Detective William Banks’ face was tight, jaw clenched so that the cleft in his chin was exaggerated. He looked around the bedroom. It was small, about nine feet by eight feet, painted institutional green. The floor was asphalt tile, cream color with light colored streaks running through each tile. A section of tiles near the bedroom were stained grey, apparently from a puddle of hot water, ruining the wax finish. In the hall next to the bedroom was a closet with a slatted door that looked like it housed the furnace or maybe the hot water heater. Across the hall

from the closet was the single bathroom. Further down the hall were the other two bedrooms, each nearly the same size as the one in which they stood. The tiles at the perimeter of the room were cracked from where carpet strips had been nailed through them into the concrete slab. Besides the smell given off by the pool of blood and brain matter, the room had the faint smell of dogs. It was a good thing that the carpeting had been removed or the whole house would wreek from the smell. The police were on the scene within ten minutes of the first call, so there was no body decomposition. In this temperature, the body could have laid for days without any noticeable decomposition. It was like a meat locker in the house. He asked Reid, "How long have you been out of the Marines; thirty years?"

"Twenty-seven. Why do you ask?"

"I thought only active duty military said *squared away*." Banks stood with his arms at his side and directed his gaze to the body on the floor before him. The pool of blood had stopped expanding and was starting to dry at the outer edges of the flow to the right of the victim's head. Significant brain matter and skull fragments were scattered across the room where the exit wound had given way to the explosion inside the young man's head. He was apparently on his knees when the shot was fired and he fell at an angle to the 'V' shaped debris field. "Anybody check his ID?"

"Nope. Body hasn't been moved at all yet. We're just getting to that. The crime lab guy just took about a million pictures. He's waiting for us to turn the body over so they can take a million more of him turned right side up." Detective Hansen stood at the victim's feet, hovering over everyone in the room. At 6'5" and 235 pounds of muscle, he looked like he could still be a marine. His blond, but graying, hair wasn't cut military-close, but was neatly

trimmed. He was dressed in a heavy, thigh-length, black leather, winter coat that was unzipped, exposing the shoulder harness that he wore for his Glock 9mm semi-automatic. His heavy gloves were shoved in his coat pockets. From his blue jean pants, he pulled a set of latex gloves and put them on with a snap. He appeared more relaxed than Banks. His casual demeanor around dead bodies used to annoy Banks. At automobile accidents where victims were bloody beyond recognition, Hansen was almost jovial. He would be the one to help pull the bodies from wreckage and assist the paramedics with getting bodies on gurneys. Banks was going to confront Hansen on this until he found out that Hansen had seen a lot of death in Vietnam. He was in Quang Tri during the Tet Offensive and nearly his whole company was killed. He was shot in the left leg and left torso. He only survived because the bullet hit and broke a rib, but was deflected away from any major organs.

The air in the house was nearly as cold as the air outside. The temperature had barely reached 30 degrees and the wind chill was brutal. This was typical for North Dakota in early spring. It was Saturday, March 24. Federal taxes were due to be mailed in less than a month. That thought gave William Banks more of a chill than the weather conditions. He still hadn't started his taxes. His plan had been to finish them this weekend and be ready to mail them Monday morning on the way to the police station. His weekend plans had just changed.

While pulling on his own latex gloves, Detective Banks looked around the room, but there wasn't much to see. Two walls were blank, nothing on them but paint. A third wall had the only window to the room which faced north. It looked out to the front lawn and the nearly identical houses across the street. The fourth wall had a double closet with bi-fold doors and the door to the room.



The room, like the rest of the house, was empty. He looked down at the young man lying sprawled out before him in an unnatural position, his right arm under his body, his left out to his side above his head. He wore a thin coat, a light tee shirt, blue jeans and sneakers; not exactly the right gear for North Dakota this time of year. His skin was tanned, another indication that he hadn't been in town long. The only way to get a tan this dark in North Dakota this time of year was at a tanning booth. This tan looked natural.

The gun was a Beretta 92F 9mm, the sidearm issued to military police and combat units. Banks knelt down, cautiously pulled the Beretta from his hand, flipped on the safety with a fingertip and placed it in an evidence bag. He rolled the body on its left side so that he could get into the victim's right rear jeans pocket. He pulled out a black tri-fold wallet and looked at its contents; \$239 cash, a Visa Card, a picture of an older couple, probably his mom and dad, and one military ID, enlisted. Staff Sergeant Kevin R. Reardon, US Air Force. He'd been in since January, 1992.

Banks looked up at Hansen, still standing above the body. "You were right, Air Force, active duty. He was probably stationed at Grand Forks. Is there anything at all in the house?"

"We just started looking, but you can see for yourself, it's pretty well cleaned out. I mean, even the cupboards are bare."

Banks looked around the room again. It was definitely empty, except for the contents of Kevin Reardon's head all over the one side of the room. "Okay. Anything else before we get started?"

"Nope. Just real creepy. Maybe we'll find out he was depressed or something and we can finish this by dinner time. I'm starved."

Banks gave Hansen a sideways look with a raised eyebrow. "I'm worried about you. You should get some help with your emotional outbursts." Banks looked back down at the body of Kevin Reardon and shook his head. "You know, people are supposed to be getting happier now. Hell winter's over. It's all the way up into the teens at night."

They both chuckled.

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The neighbors to the west of the Reardon home, a Mrs. McFarland, said that Mrs. Reardon packed up and was headed to Pensacola, Florida. She said Mrs. Reardon told her that her parents lived down there. In fact, her brother came up to help her pack. She said she was a military brat. Her dad was supposedly in the Air Force. That seemed odd to her husband, Master Sergeant Daniel McFarland, because she seemed a bit spoiled for a military kid and she didn't know the Air Force lingo at all. But not all military kids fit the standard mold.

Mrs. McFarland said one other strange thing was that Mrs. Reardon was selling several of Kevin's power tools before she supposedly learned of her husband's death. Her explanation was that Kevin wanted to sell the tools because he no longer had the time to do any hobby woodworking. She sold several expensive power tools for real cheap. Mr. McFarland had remarked that he thought Mrs. Reardon was getting ready to leave her husband. He'd seen it many times before where a young military bride gets tired of the separation from a spouse who's been deployed for long periods of time. It puts a real strain on any marriage, particularly a new marriage when the bride is young and not used to being away from her husband.

Hansen was just about to pull out of the drive when a woman came up to the car making a circular motion with

her hand, the universal signal to roll down the car window. When Detective Hansen did so, the woman introduced herself as Mrs. Lillie Weickoff. Mrs. Weickoff was a short, plump woman in her early thirties. She had a round face and a pair of chins. She was wearing jeans, a heavy jacket and a scarf. She had dark hair and too much blue eye shadow over her dark gray eyes. She said that she was wondering what had happened. When detective Hansen wouldn't offer any information, Mrs. Weickoff said, "Look, I know that there's a dead body in there and folks are saying that it's Kevin Reardon, but I don't think that's right. I met Kevin. He was the nicest man. He'd do anything for you. It's so sad that he was lost over there. His wife was a bit different though, not nearly as nice as Kevin. Her brother was a weird character, too. He didn't look like her too much. They packed up and left just a week ago, March 16<sup>th</sup>. I remember because we, my husband and I, were going to go to lunch and then head out to Walmart. We needed to get a present for my mother-in-law. So I remember that they packed up and left in a U-Haul. They spent most of the day loading. My husband asked if they needed help and they said no, that they wanted to do it themselves and make sure that nothing got dropped or broken. So we just watched them pack up from our house over there." She pointed to one of the houses across the street.

"Mrs. . . .?"

"Weickoff. Lillie Weickoff. You can call me Lil, everyone else does."

"Yes, Lil. Tell me about Mrs. Reardon."

"Her name is Belinda. She's short, a little over five feet tall and thin except she's built pretty well, if you know what I mean. She turns guys' heads, that's for sure. And she has light colored hair, almost blond, but more sandy colored. Her face is thin and her eyes are a bit

sunken. They always looked like she wasn't getting enough sleep, you know, dark circles underneath."

Reid asked Lil, "Did she have any tattoos or piercings, besides ear piercings, I mean? Like an eyebrow or nose?"

Lil folded her arms across her chest and looked thoughtful for a moment, as if studying a picture in the air next to Reid. She slowly shook her head and said, "I don't believe that she did, at least none that I can remember. She seemed like the type that might, but I really don't recall seeing any tattoos or any stuff like that. One thing she did have was a birth mark under her left ear. I remember that because it looked like West Virginia. It was about the size of a quarter. It was really unique. I remarked about it one day and I think she was upset. It may have made her feel a bit uncomfortable. You know how some folks are, like a zit that you can't hide."

"What about her hands and fingers. Did she wear any nail polish, bite her nails, have any scars on her hands? Were her hands rough or smooth? Did she wear any rings, like a wedding band or diamond?"

Again, Lil took the thinkers pose. This time, she was quick to answer, though. "Her hands were pretty smooth and she wore a solitaire, about 1/3 carat."

"Did she work?"

"No, she couldn't have. She never left the house long enough to have a job."

"Do you remember any remarkable characteristics about Mrs. Reardon's brother? Any scars or other distinguishing features?"

"Well, he had jet black hair. It looked dyed black. He was about 6'5" tall or more and about 150 to 160 pounds. He was real skinny."

Detective Hansen asked Mrs. Weickoff, "Can you remember his eye color? Did he have any tattoos or

piercings?”

“Sure. He had very dark eyes, so brown that they were almost black. He didn’t have any tattoos or other weird markings. His skin was real pale and he didn’t have any freckles at all. Same with Belinda. No freckles except her birth mark. But her skin wasn’t pale. Odd, huh?” She was going to keep talking, but Detective Hansen interrupted.

“What kind of clothes was he wearing? Did he have proper clothes for this climate?”

“Yes, he did. He had a black leather jacket and black leather gloves. Every time I saw him, he wore black. He looked like one of them . . . what do you call it when they have pale skin and wear all black? It’s an old word.”

Hansen asked, “You mean Gothic?”

“That’s it. He didn’t wear any spiked collars or wristbands or anything like that, but if you put some of that stuff on him, he’d have fit right in with them.”

“Did you ever have a chance to talk with him close up?”

“Absolutely. I talked to him face-to-face a couple of times. He wasn’t very talkative, almost introverted I’d say, but he did speak. Of course it may have been that they were mourning with Kevin’s death and all. It probably wasn’t a real good time to get to know him.”

“Lil, would you mind if I show you Kevin’s ID? We’re trying to figure out what’s happened here and it would be helpful if you could positively identify Kevin.” Hansen exited the car, went to the house to retrieve the ID card and returned moments later. Mrs. Weickoff was talking with another neighbor. She spoke to Detective Hansen as he approached, “Detective, this is Janice McFarland. She’s met the Reardons before and can verify my description.”

“I sure can,” Mrs. McFarland stated with certainty.

“He is, or was, just as Lil described him, if she said 5’10” and 160 pounds, brown hair, cut military style.”

“That’s what she said. Is this Kevin Reardon?” He held the ID card in front of both their faces and held it there for only a second when both ladies nodded their heads in unison.

“That’s Kevin.” Lil’s stated. Mrs. McFarland nodded in agreement.

“Thanks, ladies. You’ve been most helpful.”

“But who is the dead guy in the Reardon’s house?”

“You will probably hear about it on the news, but the dead guy in the house is Kevin Reardon.”

“Well, who was killed in Europe then?”

“That’s the question of the day. I hope we can find out quickly. You mentioned that Mrs. Reardon said they were headed to Florida?”

“Yes. Pensacola.”

Hansen nodded, got back in the car and backed out of the drive, narrowly avoiding a police car and a rescue truck. He headed north on 20<sup>th</sup> street then west on US Route 2 towards the Grand Forks Air Force Base.