

TIME EXPOSURE

Maggie

Chapter 1

Georgetown, Washington, D.C.
Wednesday, June 5, 2000, 5:30 p.m.

Maggie Thornhill turned her ten-year old Beemer onto Dumbarton Street and hit the brakes. At the far end of the block, blue and red lights flashed atop two police cars, their reflections mirrored in the wet asphalt. An ambulance siren cut off in mid-wail as it careened past her, and the static hiss of police radios radiated shivers up her arms.

Across the street, people clustered, advancing closer to the police cars, hungry for a news bite. She didn't recognize any of them but then she'd only just moved into the neighborhood. The crowd parted for the Medical Examiner's van as it drove unhurriedly to its final destination. Her house.

She bailed out of her car and bolted down the street in a panic-fueled run. Her brain scrutinized the tableau in front of her. No fire engines, so no fire.

A uniformed officer was rolling out yellow tape between two trees. As a digital photographer with law enforcement, a crime scene was familiar territory to Maggie. But she had never imagined her house being taped off. Hot bile singed the back of her throat. What the hell was going on? Her heart beat double time as she pushed her way through the crush of neighbors. Finally she reached her front steps and rushed at the uniformed officer.

"That's my house." Maggie tried to maneuver past the cop but he stood firm as a pillar of stone. "Let me through. What are you doing? I live here."

"Sorry, Miss, you'll have to stay back."

She recognized a man coming down the steps of her brownstone. A short, wiry homicide detective with thinning blond hair. He wore his usual tan jacket, button-down shirt, and no tie. Frank Mead.

“Frank,” she cried out.

“It’s okay, Officer, let her through.” Mead stepped toward her. “Been trying to reach you.”

“Did you try my cell?” She rummaged through her pockets, pulled out the iPhone. The display was dark. “Battery’s dead. Goddammit.”

Mead blew out a breath. “Um hmm.”

“What’s going on in there?”

“We got a call from Carlos, uh, something. . .” Mead flipped through his notes.

“My contractor called you?” She rasped out the words.

“You’re renovating this old place?”

“I inherited it,” Maggie said. “Been in the family over a century and a half. Carlos was checking the basement for mold and dry rot or whatever they check basements for. . . Frank, what are you doing here? The ME too. Did something happen to one of Carlos’ men?”

Mead took her arm and ushered her up the steps to the front door. “They’re all fine.”

“Thank God.” She could breathe again.

He opened the door turned to the neighbors gathered below. “Go home, folks, everything’s under control. Nothing to see. Go on.”

He led Maggie inside.

“Then what the devil happened?”

“Carlos and his boys were doing their job when they found a body behind a false brick wall.”

“A body? My God. What false wall?” She pressed fingers against her forehead as if she could force this new information into her brain.

Mead led her through the kitchen to the open cellar door and started down. “Good thing the lights are working down here. You could break your neck.”

Maggie followed him down. “Can’t believe. . . a body? Hidden?”

“Yeah, but not just *any old* body.”

“Whose body?”

He didn’t answer.

She glared at the back of his head and frowned. He wouldn’t give her answers until he was ready.

At the bottom step all she could see were dingy brick walls, chunks of mortar, layers of dust, cobwebs befitting Dracula’s castle, and old bottles and boxes leaning precariously on tilted shelves. Four generations of detritus she’d have to clean up.

Mead pointed to a part of the wall that had been dismantled, brick by brick. “This false wall was constructed after the house was built.”

“It doesn’t look new.”

“Carlos says it’s nearly as old as the original walls.”

“Someone walled up a body in there?” She turned to face him. “But not just *any old* body?”

“Have a look.” He walked over to the false wall, now only three feet high and shined a flashlight into the dark space.

“It isn’t *any old* body,” he said. “It’s a *very old* body.”

Maggie leaned in. She found herself staring at what remained of a human being. A human being who hadn’t been alive in a long, long time. The skull and skeleton were shrouded in a thin layer of mottled brown, leathery skin, eye sockets long empty, mouth open in a silent O. What was left of the clothing were only strips of fabric, riddled with insect holes and crusted with dirt. Her throat constricted, choking her voice to a whisper. “Oh my God. It’s a mummy.”

* * *

Within minutes of Mead calling up to the street, the ME thudded down the rickety steps. “Whatcha got?”

Mead pointed her toward the mummy. “You might want to suit up, it’s pretty. . .”

The Medical Examiner, Doctor Jemena Wooley, an African American woman of shorter than average height and wider than average weight, had already squeezed her bulk into the cramped space behind the wall. She eyed Maggie as she pulled on her surgical gloves. “It’s Maggie, right? I’ve seen you at the Forensics Lab. I didn’t think you actually took crime scene photos.”

“I don’t,” Maggie said. “I analyze them. This is my house.”

“No kidding?” The ME ducked down into the space and began her examination of the corpse.

Minutes went by. Mead tapped his foot. “Jemmy, what’ve you got? “And don’t give me that *wait ‘til the autopsy* shit. ”

“Male. Dead a long time. Long time.”

“That’s it?” Mead said.

“Wait for the autopsy.” Jemena stood up with a groan. “Man oh man, I’ve got to go back to Weight Watchers.” She brushed dust off her sleeves then called out to the crime team who were awaiting instructions.

In minutes they swarmed the basement. Without disturbing the body, they took photographs and gathered whatever evidence they could vacuum and scrape up. That crew departed and Jemena and an assistant readied the body for removal.

“Is there a special protocol for removing mummies?” Maggie asked.

Mead was about to comment when they heard Jemena shout. “You should see this.”

Maggie darted to the wall, looked over. The corpse had been lifted onto a stretcher.

“The body camouflaged this.” Jemena shone a flashlight onto an old satchel. “Let’s get some photographs here,” she called.

Mead pulled purple surgical gloves out of his pocket and handed Maggie a pair. Both snapped them on. When photos and evidence were gathered, Jemena handed the satchel to Mead. He laid it on the floor. Maggie angled a work light on it.

They crouched over the faded blue canvas bag, about sixteen inches wide by twenty inches long and four inches thick. The leather shoulder strap was almost worn through. The flap was cinched to the bag with a large rusted buckle.

“Could it be an old mail bag?” Mead asked.

Maggie turned the satchel over. She felt a trickle of sweat run down her back. The musty smell of earth and time attacked her nostrils. She wrinkled her nose, held in a cough.

“Are those initials on the flap?” Mead said.

She ran her fingers over the threads of the letters. A tiny whimper escaped her lips.

“What are they?”

“J.A.T.”

“Who’s J.A.T?”

“Joseph Andrew Thornhill.”

“The famous Civil War photographer?”

“And my great, great, great grandfather.” Maggie looked up from the satchel and stared at Mead. “What in the name of God have we found?”

Chapter 2

Smithsonian Institution
Sunday, June 9, 4:30 p.m.

Maggie stood in the great hall of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, her favorite place on earth, second only to her brownstone on Dumbarton Street. Because she was descended from a famous Civil War photographer, she'd spent countless hours over the years visiting the exhibits on the Civil War and attending lectures on Civil War photography. The study in her house was dedicated to memorabilia from that time period and Joseph Thornhill's photographs. It was, indeed, Joseph's work that had inspired her to become a photographer.

Now, a chill ran through her as several chords of the national anthem were struck and the wall at the far end of the room began to rise, revealing an American flag that had flown over Fort McHenry in 1812. The flag was kept out of the public eye in temperature and light-controlled conditions. It was only displayed on special occasions such as this one: a fundraiser for the Museum with special guest, the United States Senator from Massachusetts, Fitzhugh Morley Wade. Fitz, as his friends and constituents called him, was always willing to help the museum raise private funds.

He approached her, handsome in a dark gray suit, a sky blue shirt that matched his eyes, and a *Save the Children* tie. “Hello, Maggie. Don’t you get goose bumps whenever that flag is in view?”

“I’m glad you were able to arrange a viewing tonight.” She tilted her cheek for Fitz Wade to kiss. “Where’s T.J.?”

“He’ll be here any moment,” Fitz said.

Maggie thought how much father and son looked alike. Maybe she’d marry T.J. someday and become Mrs. Thomas Jefferson Wade and the wife of an up and coming federal prosecutor.

A woman’s voice, “Maggie, dear, so glad you could come.”

“Dorothy, it’s been a long time.” Maggie clasped the older woman’s hands in hers. As always, the Senator’s wife looked like she stepped out of a Neiman Marcus window. Not a blond hair out of place, crimson lipstick contrasting with even white teeth.

“We don’t see enough of you these days,” Dorothy said. “Although I don’t wonder with the mischief you’ve been up to.”

Maggie arched her eyebrows. “Mischief?”

Fitz said, “Imagine. Maggie Thornhill, my future daughter-in-law, makes the Washington Post.”

Maggie’s face blushed at the reference to daughter-in-law. “Discovering a body in my basement is not how I hoped to claim fame,” Maggie said.

“But a mummified body,” Dorothy said. “Incredible. Any idea who it might be?”

T.J. arrived and interrupted the conversation. He put an arm around her shoulders. “The press had a field day with Maggie’s story. Turned it into a series. Pictures of the old house,

history of its occupants, plus background on how bodies turn into mummies, crime scene forensics, all kinds of gory stuff. Nothing on the other find, however.”

“What other find?” Dorothy asked.

A short, round man with eyeglasses thick as the window glass in her attic edged his way into their group.

“Speaking of the Civil War, hello, Homer.” Fitz turned to Maggie. “This is Homer Catesby, professor at GWU. He’s an expert in Civil War photography, written tomes on the subject. In fact, he just won an award for--”

“Ach, never mind, Fitz.” Homer grinned at Maggie. “Don’t bore the woman to death.”

“I’m familiar with your work, Professor.” Maggie offered her hand. “I’m Maggie Thornhill.”

“She’s the young woman from Dumbarton Street,” Fitz said.

Homer bobbed his head and gripped her hand with the exuberance of a baseball fan. “Oh yes, yes, I’ve been reading about you, Miss Thornhill. In my opinion Joseph Thornhill was the best Civil War photographer of them all. Far better than Brady and Gardner and Sullivan.”

“I agree, Professor.” She reclaimed her hand from his tight grip.

“So fascinating,” he said. “Have they identified the remains yet?”

“No, it’s much too early,” Maggie said.

“I imagine it will take some time to date it as well, discover if it’s someone from the Civil War,” Homer said. “Good God, what a find that will be.”

A waiter brought a tray of champagne and everyone reached for a flute.

T.J. spoke. “We do know it’s a male, at least.”

“Is it possible the body is Joseph?” Catesby asked. “Or is that too far-fetched?”

It seemed to Maggie that everyone was waiting for her answer.

“Maggie?” Dorothy said. “Could it be Joseph? He lived there, didn’t he, with his wife and son?”

“A number of Thornhills have lived there since, Mother,” T.J. said. “It could be another ancestor.”

“Perhaps.” Dorothy looked skeptical. “Maggie, you never said what else you found in the basement.”

“There was an old satchel,” Maggie started.

“Under the body,” T.J. finished.

She cast him a sharp look. “Will you let me tell the story?”

T.J. grinned. “Sorry, go ahead.”

“Under the body was a knapsack with the initials J.A.T.,” Maggie said.

“Joseph Andrew Thornhill,” Catesby said. “Then the body could--”

“The satchel might be Joseph’s, but we don’t know who the body is.” Maggie said.

“Yet.”

T.J. jumped in again. “We’ll know once the DNA comes back.”

“Ahh,” Fitz said. They took some of your DNA, Maggie?”

She nodded, feeling her blood fizz like the champagne in her glass at the thought of the possibilities.

“What about this satchel,” Dorothy said. “Was there anything inside? Were--?”

“Inside were letters between Joseph and Sara, his wife,” Maggie said.

“Love letters?” Dorothy said. “Oh, Maggie, how romantic. Anything else?”

“Joseph’s journal. From his days on the battlefield. Think of it. The War between the States. In Joseph’s own words as it happened. Gives me chills just thinking about what he saw and thought and felt.”

“A journal, Holy Christmas,” Catesby said.

“Have you had a chance to read any of it yet?” Dorothy asked. “What’s in it?”

Before she could answer, Catesby asked, “Maggie, were there any photographs in the satchel?”

“Yes, Professor, there were photographs.”

“Photographs. From Joseph Thornhill,” Catesby said, sloshing champagne out of his glass in his exuberance. “That no one has ever seen. Lord. Tell me more. Please.”

“Yes, Maggie, tell us,” Fitz said.

The group surrounded her like she was suddenly a celebrity.

“When I held that bag in my hands there was no sleep for me that night. . . or much since, for that matter. I had to begin reading Joseph’s diary right away. And then, I couldn’t stop.”

“And the photos?” Catesby asked.

“Between reading and typing notes from the letters and diary, I did a quick examination of the photographs.”

Catesby leaned in as if to capture every word.

“Although they are brilliant in their depth and breadth,” Maggie continued, “some of the figures in the pictures need more clarity, more definition.”

“Is there anything you can do to sharpen them?” Fitz said.

“Of course, she can do it,” T.J. said. “She’s the director of the Georgetown University Digital Lab, isn’t she?”

The band launched into the national anthem again and the wall at the far end of the hall began its journey downward. The American flag disappeared, sealed once more in its environmentally controlled chamber until its next appearance.

Fitz Wade's chief-of-staff stepped up. "Time to say goodbye to everyone, Sir."

"I expect to see you soon, Maggie, at the Plantation." Fitz always referred to his stately colonial home in Arlington, Virginia as the *Plantation*. The chief-of-staff hustled him away.

"Bye, Dorothy," Maggie said as the senator's wife strode off behind him.

Maggie remained in the Great Hall with Homer Catesby, waiting for T.J. to return. Her thoughts were like a thousand jigsaw puzzle pieces waiting to be assembled into a final picture.

As if he could see inside her mind, Homer said, "You can't stop thinking of the diary, can you?"

"No."

"Can you tell me a little about what Joseph wrote?"

"It's like I was with him on the battlefield. I smelled the sulfur of gunpowder, the rank odor of blood and decaying flesh. I saw the torn bodies, bent and twisted, like so many tossed marionettes."

He nodded, eyes wide.

"I pictured the landscape, burnt and scarred, damaged by the ruined redoubts and rifle-pits, blasted stone bridges and outhouses." She paused, gazed out into space as her mind relived Joseph's words. "And the pain. I felt it. I hurt."

Catesby continued for her. "The terrible loneliness and fear that the soldiers experienced. Makes me shiver."

She looked at him. He was someone who understood.

“Can you. . . will you let me work with you on your photographs and documents?” he asked.

“I can and I will.”

Homer broke into a toothy grin. “Thank you. And will we help the police identify the body and solve the mystery?”

Maggie’s thoughts flitted back to the body and the satchel. Joseph had lived in the house. The satchel bore his initials. But her experience in working on criminal investigations proved that things weren’t always as obvious as they seemed.

Homer interrupted her musings. “The body could be someone more recent than Joseph, you know. Maybe a relative or even just a workman, a house boy who got himself murdered.”

“When the DNA results come back, I’ll at least know whether it was a family member.”

“What do you think?”

Maggie steadied her gaze on him. “I know what history tells us about Joseph. So do you.”

Catesby nodded. “One story says he died of a strange illness and was buried in a secret grave. Another purports that he abandoned his wife and child and ran off to the Orient with another woman.”

Maggie felt Catesby’s gaze on her. “We might never know the truth but one thing we do know. Joseph Thornhill vanished one day without a word at the end of the War.”

Joseph

*This dust was once the man,
gentle, plain, just and resolute,
under whose cautious hand,
against the foulest crime in history
known in any land or age,
was saved the Union of these States.*

Walt Whitman, The Civil War Poems

Chapter 3

Washington City
July 9, 1861

A bell rang in the darkroom alerting Joseph Thornhill that a customer had entered the gallery. In the dim crimson light, he groped for a towel. The bell rang again.

“Jeb?” Joseph called out. “The Gundersons are here.”

He poked his head through the door and looked down the hall. “Jeb?”

Joseph wiped his hands on the towel and threw it aside.

Why did he have to do everything?

He unrolled his sleeves and stomped down the stairs one level to the entry hall of the Mathew Brady Photography Gallery. He was glad to open the door if only to stop the persistent ringing bell.

The door burst open and three round pudgy children stampeded past.

“Whoa, now, hold on.”

“Tut, tut, Mister Thornhill,” said the obese patriarch. “They’re just exuberant at the prospect of having their portrait done.”

“Ahh, yes, of course. Do come in, Mister and Missus Gunderson.”

Jeb, his assistant, gray and grizzled with stubble on his chin, arrived, an apology spilling out. “Sorry--”

“Never mind,” Joseph said. “Is the blue room in order?”

“Yes, Joseph. This way, Ma’am, Sir, if you will.” Jeb led the way upstairs to the studio where skylights provided the necessary lighting. Joseph followed.

They passed through the second-floor waiting room, a handsome and functional room with dark oak wainscoting, leather chairs and a Persian rug embellishing a plank floor.

One of the Gunderson children stopped at the main attraction of the room. The other two gathered around him.

“What’s this?” the boy asked, his eyes shining with curiosity.

“That’s a stereoscopic view box,” Joseph said.

“What does it do?”

“Let’s take a look.” Joseph smiled at the opportunity to show off his prized possession. “Slide in one of those cards,” he indicated the nearby box of stereo slides, “and see what happens.”

The child selected a card and with Joseph’s guiding hand, inserted it into the view box slot. He pressed his eyes to the viewer. “Yipes, it looks, it looks real, I mean not like a pitcher.”

“You mean picture. Exactly,” Joseph said. “That’s a magic box. Makes the picture look three-dimensional.”

They all took turns looking into the viewer, ooing and aahing. One of the children knocked over the slide box and the slides scattered across the floor.

“Careful, don’t. . .”

The little girl raced to pick them up, stepped on one and Joseph heard it shatter.

“No, it’s all right, I’ll get them.” Another child rushed over.

All of the children were grabbing at the slides.

Joseph heard another one crack.

“All right, now, children.” Mister Gunderson shooed them toward the staircase.

“Upstairs for our photographs. Upstairs.”

Joseph gathered up the stereoscopic slides and stacked them back in the box. Two were broken and he growled as he tossed them in a rubbish bin. Jeb would handle the family now, thank God. There were three more sittings scheduled for the day, but at least they weren’t bankers’ families. They were soldiers.

Joseph thought back to three years ago, when he was a photographer’s apprentice. He cherished it, couldn’t believe his good fortune to land at Mathew Brady’s Gallery and train with the best. Brady himself and Alexander Gardner. Alex, his mentor and dearest friend. Alex inspired him to love the craft of photography. Alex just hadn’t taught him to abide the portrait sittings of society matrons, pompous bankers and their persnickety brats. Joseph sighed.

It was a good thing Alex had the foresight to order the extra *carte de visite* cameras. Otherwise, they’d never been able to accommodate the hundreds of newly commissioned soldiers who wanted photographs. Soldiers who arrived daily from all over the North.

It had been just three months since Fort Sumter. Joseph almost enlisted in the army. Too many excuses stood in his way. He couldn’t leave Brady a photographer short. He needed the

income. And he couldn't leave Sara. Lovely Sara Kelly, whom he'd been courting all that time. But even Sara couldn't help him dispel this disquietude about spending the rest of his life taking pictures of God-awful dull subjects.

In truth, it was more than restlessness with his current occupation, more than mere ambition to move on. This was his country and he yearned to defend it the best way he knew how. If not as a soldier then as a photographer, documenting the conflict for history.

Something had to change or he'd go mad.

At the very thought of madness Alexander Gardner careened into the waiting room like a tornado. As always, his bow tie sat askew under his beard and his elbows poked through holes in his brown nubby jacket. He grabbed Joseph's arm and forced him into a divan.

"Good grief, Alex, what on earth is going on?"

Alex flopped down beside him and sucked in a deep breath.

"I've had a special offer I must consider, and you, my friend, are an important part of my decision." He played with his beard.

"Speak then, for heaven's sake. I've got work to do."

"Aye, aye. I've told you about me dear friend from Scotland, Allan Pinkerton?"

"The detective?"

"The very same. He's working for the government now in the Secret Service."

"Secret Service? I didn't know there--"

"You said, speak, so let me finish, man. Pinkerton wants to appoint me to General McClellan's staff as a photographer for the Secret Service."

Joseph sank back in the divan, his heart thrumming. "What does that mean?"

"I will be responsible for photographing maps and charts and for taking photographs to identify spies or enemy agents for the Federal Army. Whenever there's suspicion of spy activity, I'm to take random photos of crowds and gatherings and Pinkerton's men can use the images to identify spies."

"How on earth will they do that?"

"Based on intelligence provided by scouts and Federal agents."

A buzz of excitement shot up Joseph's spine.

"Photographers also record potential battle sites," Alex went on, "to help commanders prepare their divisions or take pictures of bridges, railroad tracks and the like for the Corps of Engineers."

Joseph looked at his friend, really looked at him hard, seething inside, not with anger but with envy as sharp as a nail in his stomach. How wonderful it must feel for Alex to know he would work out in the open air, the green fields, photographing the conflict for history, serving his country. He was astonished at his feelings and even ashamed.

Alex seemed not to notice. "I expect this sounds more exciting than it actually is, but t'will give me the chance to photograph the battlefield. Which is what I really want to do." His eyes glittered, sparking Thornhill's jealousy like the fuse of a bomb.

"I would like you to accompany me as my assistant, Joseph. Mostly to take field photographs, but occasionally," Alex lowered his voice, "occasionally, to work on Secret Service missions. I have already obtained permission from Pinkerton, though you'll need to have a formal interview with the man."

The air seemed to have been sucked from the room.

"Me?" Joseph said. "Talk to Pinkerton?"

Alex laid a hand on Joseph's. "There is no other man I trust or respect more."

Joseph blinked.

"Think on it, man." Alex threw out his arms expansively.

"A chance to photograph history in the making. To help your country track down spies. Be a hero."

Oh God, here is my chance to get out of here.

"Remember what you were saying not too long ago about being sick and tired of studio portraits?"

"But me? A spy?" *Dare I say yes?*

"You'll be serving your country."

"Have you told Brady yet?" Joseph asked, the thrill of adventure building.

"No, but you may recall he's the one who originally jumped on the opportunity to photograph the battleground. He's already obtained his license to follow the Union troops."

"Hmm. I wonder how his failing eyesight's going to hamper that decision."

"Sure 'n it will make a difference if the war goes on a while."

"Most people think one brief and bloody skirmish will end the war quickly."

"Aye, that may well be. For now, I want to maintain my position with the Brady Gallery, so I will request a sabbatical, if you will. And you could too." Alex stood and placed a hand on Joseph's shoulder. "Please, Joseph, come with me."

A loud crash from upstairs followed by Jeb's hollering, reverberated through the gallery. Joseph flinched.

"Timing is so important in decision-making, don't you think?" Alex grinned. "What do you say?"

Joseph studied his friend and his brain wrestled with a decision. At once, he felt an overwhelming sense of relief, though a tickle of fear crawled up his arms. A vision of Sara Kelly's face appeared before him--the russet hair, emerald eyes, enchanting smile--and briefly he wondered what she'd think. He knew in his heart, soul and mind that she was his one true love. Sara would be distressed by this news but he prayed she would stand by his decision. She must, for he had no choice.

“We could get killed, you know,” Joseph said.

“Aye, that we could.”

"How quickly can you get the licenses?"

Gardner reached into his pocket and waved two small pieces of paper between his fingers.

Joseph burst out in boisterous laugh.