



DOUBLE DANGER

Extra Content

A Michigan Romantic Suspense

Tribby Plants & Nancy Tucker

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FLINT, MICHIGAN

While we recognize the problems Flint, Michigan, has been having with lead-tainted water, we haven't mentioned it in the book, other than an oblique reference along the way. Hopefully, awareness has been raised and the old pipes containing lead will be replaced, and the people of Flint will soon have access to safe water.



Downtown, Flint, Michigan, taken from Genesee Towers, CC BY-SA 4.0

What follows is a previous incarnation of the Prologue. We decided not to use it since it is from Will Stevens' Point of View. We thought if we put Nick in the thick of things at the beginning, the stakes would be higher.

PROLOGUE

Escanaba, Michigan

SHERIFF'S DEPUTY WILL STEVENS WAS ASLEEP when his cell phone buzzed. He rolled over and grabbed it before the sound roused his wife, Cathy. Two forty-two a.m. She didn't stir.

A text from a state trooper. Will's heart skipped. The screen read: 9500 10-49 Nickels Come Now.

It meant a fire with injuries. God. His best friends.

Will pulled jeans over his boxers and tugged on a T-shirt, then clipped his badge to the pocket of the shirt. He slipped on his work shoes, tied the laces and grabbed his weapon from the top shelf of the closet. At the door he paused and looked back at Cathy. She slept on her side, one arm under the pillow.

Will closed the door softly behind him, hoping Cathy wouldn't wake. She would know soon enough.

He tiptoed past his daughter's bedroom and down the stairs. Moments later he was in his patrol car. Fueled by adrenaline, he raced

down empty streets toward the Nickels' house. In the aftermath of heavy thunderstorms, smoke floated on the now quiet air, creating a pall over half the town. He smelled it blocks from the fire. His best friend's house was burning. The text had said injuries. Travis was supposed to be out of town. What had kept him here? Caroline –

Don't think ahead. Focus on the moment He hit the brakes, and his patrol car skidded around the corner on the wet pavement. Down the street, flames glowed red through the haze.

The trooper who had texted Will held a small crowd back with outstretched arms. He waved Will through. At the end of the block Will braked hard. His car screeched to a stop behind the sheriff's car, four patrol cars, a State Police cruiser, two ambulances and all three of the town's fire trucks. He slammed the gearshift into park and jumped out, leaving his blues flashing.

The tree-lined street, normally a quiet neighborhood, bustled with activity. Two public safety officers – disheveled from sleep and half dressed – kept the crowd at bay. Will pointed to his badge, pinned to his pajama top. The officers and crowd parted.

For an instant he stared in fascinated horror at the fire that engulfed the house. His friends' home.

A firefighter hurried up to him, barely recognizable under a layer of sweat-streaked soot.

“Dave,” Will shouted above the commotion. “What's going on?”

The other man pointed and started around the house, talking as he walked. “We got here too late, Will. The house was already lost. Travis is in bad shape, but he won't let us move him until he talks to you.” He stopped and put a hand on Will's arm, drew in a deep breath and swallowed. “We didn't get Caroline out.”

“Oh, God.” Loss stabbed a physical pain into Will's gut.

There would be time to grieve later. Right now he had to be strong for his friend. He followed Dave. They skirted volunteer firefighters who held hoses and shouted to each other, barely heard above the fire's roar.

Behind the house, smoke-diffused flames illuminated a knot of

shadows. Two rescue workers leaned over a gurney, and three firefighters were poised at the foot. Sheriff John Hanson stood back a few paces, arms crossed over his chest. His face was florid, his mouth set in a scowl, eyes watery. He caught Will's gaze and shook his head.

Will's best friend, Travis Nichols, was strapped down on the gurney, his torso bare, his face covered by an oxygen mask.

"Travis," one of the paramedics said. "You gotta let us take you."

Travis's head moved slightly. No.

A clump of smoldering debris landed on the lawn a few yards away. A firefighter stomped it out. Will squinted against the sting of acrid smoke. Tears gathered in his eyes. He blinked them away and swallowed his emotions.

The paramedic, Kyle Johnson, waved him closer. Like most of the men on the scene, Will had gone to school with him. Played football. Kyle had been a defensive back. Now he held a bag of saline in one large hand as if holding a sparrow, and pressed down on a dressing on one side of Travis's chest. Another paramedic put a strip of tape over an IV line in Travis's left hand. He was young, looked barely out of high school. Will didn't recognize him.

Will touched his friend's bare shoulder. Travis flinched and groaned, but did not open his eyes.

"Tell him to let us take him," Kyle said. "The chopper from Marquette'll be here in minutes. We've got to get him in the ambulance."

"Is he ... burned?" Will said.

"No." Kyle injected a syringe into a port on the IV line. To Travis he said, "This should help the pain, man, but please say we can take you."

Again, a slight head shake.

Kyle turned to Will. "Some smoke inhalation. Apparently he got out before the fire really got going. But he's lost a lot of blood."

Blood? "What the hell happened?"

"Looks like a knife wound," Kyle said. "Punctured a lung, sliced his shoulder. We need to get him in the bus and put in a chest tube so

he can breathe.” He looked down at his patient. “If we wait any longer –” He shrugged. “Convince him, will you?” He lowered his voice. “If we don’t take him now, he’s not gonna make it.”

Will leaned close to his friend. “Trav?”

Travis’s eyelids fluttered open. He raised his right hand and touched Will’s arm. No strength in his fingers.

Will took his friend’s bloody hand. It felt cold. He leaned down. “You were supposed to be on a plane tonight.”

“Canceled.” Travis pulled his hand away and tugged the mask up to free his mouth. Blood flecked his lips.

“They closed the airport because of the weather,” Sheriff Hanson said behind Will.

“Gotta talk.” Travis’s voice, barely audible. “Private.” His eyes moved to the others who hovered nearby.

Will looked up. “Can you guys back off?”

“One minute,” the paramedic holding the IV bag said. “But if he nods off, we put him in the ambulance.” He laid the bag on Travis’s legs.

“I’ll be right over there,” Hanson said, gesturing to the back of the yard.

Travis’s grip tightened. “Caroline – you have to –” He coughed, gritted his teeth. His breathing sounded wheezy.

Will’s throat tightened. “You gotta let them take you, buddy.”

Travis’s eyelids closed, and his hand went limp. Will was about to motion for the paramedics, but Travis spoke in a breathy whisper. “Find ‘em ...”

“Who?”

“In the house. Waiting killed Caroline. So much blood.”

Bile rose in Will’s throat. “Who?”

Travis groaned. “Dunno ... knife” His body shuddered. Tears squeezed from his eyes. “Hurts. Get ‘em. Promise.”

“Travis, you don’t need revenge. You need medical attention.”

Travis nodded, a small movement. “Promise. Call ... Agency.”

Will glanced around to see who was close enough to hear. The



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insane crackling of the fire drowned out all but the loudest shouts.

“They’ll help,” Travis whispered. “Call –”

“All right,” Will said. He knew who to contact.

Travis fumbled for Will’s hand, pulled him closer. “Now.”

“I promise.”

Travis’s lips moved. Will leaned close to his friend’s face.

“Tell them,” Travis said. “Tell them Big Bad Wolf. They’ll come.
Big Bad –”

“Okay, buddy,” Will said. “I got it.” He swallowed a lump in his throat. Shock overcame the adrenaline that had gotten him here. His stomach lurched.

Travis’s hand fell from Will’s grasp. Will motioned, and the paramedics and firefighters maneuvered the gurney toward the waiting ambulance.

Behind Will, the roof and walls of the burning house collapsed with a roar. A fountain of sparks billowed into the night sky.

He ran and grabbed the younger paramedic’s sleeve.

“Is he going to make it?” Will shouted.

The man shrugged and shook his head. With the firefighters' help, the two medics loaded their patient into the ambulance and climbed in after him. Will couldn't tell if Travis was breathing. The doors slammed, and a firefighter pounded on them. The vehicle started away, lights flashing, siren wailing, a dismal sound in the hazy night.

Grief heavy in Will's heart, and pent-up tears finally streaming down his cheeks, he headed back to his patrol car. He dreaded bringing the grim news to Cathy. Back in the relative quiet and privacy of his cruiser, he made Travis's phone call first.



ESCANABA, MICHIGAN

THE WORD “ESCANABA” roughly translates from various regional native languages to “land of the red buck” although some people maintain that it refers to “flat rock”. Escanaba was an Ojibwa village in the early 19th century.[7] As an American settlement, Escanaba began as a port town in the mid-19th century, gaining importance to the Union as a shipping point for iron ore, lumber and copper during the Civil War. In his poem “The Song of Hiawatha”, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow described how Hiawatha “crossed the rushing Esconaba” referring to the river.

Excerpted from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Escanaba,_Michigan



Escanaba, Michigan, CC BY-SA 3.0

MICHIGAN'S UPPER PENINSULA



Mackinac Bridge, gateway to the Upper Peninsula. Yoopers live north of the Mighty Mac, and trolls live south of it. CCO License Pixabcom



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Tahquomenon Falls - CC BY-SA 3.0



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Lake Michigan, along US Highway 2 - CC BY-SA 3.0



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Could this be where Nick and Alyssa camped? - CCO License Pixabay



Lake Michigan shore in Elk Rapids, Michigan. - © Trilby Plants

ALYSSA MALLORY'S BACKSTORY

I DON'T REMEMBER MUCH about my very early life. I have a couple of stuffed animals and a well-loved doll called Chloe in a box in the top of my closet, along with a few treasured children's books. But other than that, I brought very little with me to Aunt Ellen and Uncle Henry's.



Alyssa © Alexandr Sherstobitov, 123rf.com

My parents and older brother died in an automobile accident when I was four. My brother was seven. We were on our way to someplace, I don't know where – maybe Dairy Queen. A car ran a red light and plowed into us. Before the accident, I remember singing and laughing in the backseat with my brother. Then my father yelled and there was a hard clunk on the car and we spun sideways.

I woke up in the hospital with Aunt Ellen sitting beside me, looking sad, and Uncle Henry hovering in the doorway. My arm hurt and my leg, too. I called for my mother, and Aunt Ellen looked even sadder. She told me very gently that we had been in an accident. I don't remember what she said or how she told me that my mother and father and brother were all dead. I do remember that she said, "I will take care of you now. Uncle Henry and I will always take care of you."

I cried. The nurse came and gave me something to make me sleep,

so things were a little fuzzy after that. Later I learned that I had a broken arm and a heavily bruised leg and some bumps and bruises from the crash. The child seat in which I was riding probably saved my life. Much later, I learned the driver had been speeding and trying to beat the light. He hit the driver's side of our car at a high rate of speed, killing my father instantly, and probably my brother, who was on that side, as well. My mother, in the passenger seat, died before the ambulance got to her. The driver of the other car jumped the curb and hit a tree. He died, too.

So I was the miracle. I survived.

No one talked about it too much until I got older. When kids would ask me about my mom and dad, I learned to say, "They died. I live with my aunt and uncle."

Aunt Ellen and Uncle Henry adopted me and took good care of me. Ellen Mallory was my father's much older sister. She married Henry Green late in life; they had no children of their own. When I came into their lives permanently, Ellen was in her late 40s and Henry was ten years older. They were more grandparent age than parent age. And they had no idea about how to raise a little girl.

At first, I was alternately over-indulged and over-protected. Then they tried strictness as a policy. Finally, with some help from caring school teachers and much younger neighbors with children of their own, they came to a good balance. Aunt Ellen's greatest strength was her willingness to listen and to treat my problems and concerns as real and worth consideration.

When, at ten years old, I wanted to dye my hair pink, she gazed at me thoughtfully and said, "You'd look good in pink." Then she offered to buy me a wig, so I could try it out. We bought the wig. I never dyed my hair.

Uncle Henry's greatest strength was that he knew everything, but he was very humble about it. He read everything. Ellen and Henry ran an antique shop and he usually worked at the counter. His customers routinely came in with stories about their lives and the places they had been. When someone talked about shopping in Salem, Massachusetts,

for antiques, he would go out and get a book on early Salem. Then he would tell me about it. I learned about witch trials from Uncle Henry's conversations. He didn't shelter me from knowledge. In fact, he taught me how to shoot a gun. I know that seems strange, but we lived in the city and Uncle Henry kept a gun for protection. Aunt Ellen was after him to get rid of it, now that they had a child in the house, but he thought it better that I learn about how to be safe.

When I was 11, he took me to a farm and showed me how to load it, how to use it safely and how to shoot. I was really nervous at first, but he was very gentle and calm and I learned easily. I was a good shot, both with Henry's revolver and the farmer's rifle. I could kill a clay pigeon with 80% accuracy. Pretty good for a pre-teen.

But then someone broke into the shop and Uncle Henry died. Aunt Ellen and I never talked about it. I think if we had I wouldn't have experienced the nightmares.

Then, just when my life was orderly, I crashed into Nick Trammel's car, and everything changed.



TRAVIS NICKELS' BACKSTORY



Nick © stokkete, 123rf.com

I'M A YOOPER BY BIRTH. Born and raised in Escanaba, Michigan. My mom raised me alone with help from my grandmother. I came to understand from Grandma Maki there were issues about my father, but he was never in the picture.

High school wasn't much fun for me. I wasn't an athlete. I was a geeky kid. When I was in sixth grade, my mom wouldn't let the school put me ahead a grade because she knew that even though I was smart, I was socially awkward. It was the right choice. If they had put me with my intellectual peers, they should have put me in high school. So they let me take algebra at the high school. By the time I got to high school I'd taken all the high school math classes. I enrolled in AP Calculus.

When I was in middle school I became good friends with Will Stevens. We shared an obsession with computers, but Will had the analytical mind while I had the holistic mind. I saw patterns. Will said I was a real life Sherlock Holmes because of my ability to make deductions.

Like the time I figured out that Kevin Wilkerson had a thing for

Cathy Johnson who I really liked. But I'd never said anything to anybody about how I liked Cathy. Kevin was in our Dungeons and Dragons group. He figured out I liked her from something I said. I knew he was plotting something to embarrass me.

He decided it would be fun to tease me in front of Cathy and her girlfriends one day at lunch, so Will and I hatched a plot. Will called Kevin over to the trash on our way out of lunch. Will pointed into the trash barrel and said he saw what looked like Kevin's backpack in the barrel. Kevin went to investigate. Kevin was short for his age and had to lean into the barrel to see.

I had squeezed a bunch of honey packets into my hand. Will offered to hold Kevin so he didn't fall in and I put my honey-filled hand on Kevin's head and pushed him over the edge. I have to give Kevin credit. He didn't rat us out. Just told the lunch supervisor we were trying to help him get his retainer from the trash. When she asked about the honey in his hair he said he must have landed on some.

Will and I respected Kevin for that and we made amends and moved on. The irony is that Will asked Cathy to senior prom and they ended up getting married, while I married the new girl in town, Caroline Simmons. Her father was a mucky-muck at the paper mill. That's how I got the job after college.

In high school I made a stupid mistake. I thought it was okay to hack into a government website and got caught. The FBI showed up at my grandma's door. Instead of arresting me, they recruited me for the NSA. I took an offer of a full ride to Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh. I agreed to work for the Agency after graduation for five years. Instead of assigning me to an office at NSA, they helped me get the job at the paper mill. It allowed me to travel. Nobody except Will knew about my real job.

I fixed computer systems and servers. I wrote and installed software for big corporations, banks and governments. But as an NSA agent my real job was helping foreign assets defect, along with a lot of money, their personal funds and probably other dark money.

There were two others in my cell. Two men who were good hackers, who did what I did. We never met our boss face to face.

Then my wife was killed. It was not an accidental fire like the news said. She was murdered because of my job. The assassins almost finished me, but I survived and went into WITSEC, Witness Security, with a new identity.

Then two men came after me, and my new life blew up. If I had been the only target, I could have lived with that. But they went after another innocent civilian.

They tried to kill someone I cared about.



NICK TRAMMELL'S BACKSTORY

I WAS BORN IN MADISON, WISCONSIN. My mother was a senior in pre-med at U of W at the time. Her parents were farmers in southern Wisconsin. I never knew my them. My mom said they kicked her out when she took up with my father. They thought it was scandalous when she got pregnant.

My father tended bar at one of the college hot spots when my mom met him. Mom found out she was pregnant, and they planned to get married. A drunk driver crashed into their car one night. My father was killed, my mom injured.

She raised me alone. She became a nurse and worked as a home caregiver in Madison.

School wasn't much fun for me. I wasn't an athlete. I was a geeky kid. Everybody called me Nick the Brain. My mom wouldn't let the school put me ahead a grade because she knew that even though I was smart, I was socially awkward.

In sixth grade I went to the high school for algebra with an eighth grader. I was walking down the hall with the other kid, when this jock confronted us.



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“Where do you think you’re going?” he said.

“Algebra,” I said.

He laughed. “You can’t be more than twelve. What’re you doing at the high school?”

I realize now I shouldn’t have said what I did. I looked him in the eye. “I’m getting an education,” I said. “When you’re slinging burgers, I’ll be in college.”

I walked away. The other kid with me said he was scared the jock would come after us, but he just stood there. He never said anything to me again. I sometimes wonder how he turned out.

I was fascinated by computers. I learned how to code from Abe Fortin, a teacher who ran an after school computer club. I refined my coding ability with a gang of hackers, but I left the group when I found one of them was into black hat hacking. He was arrested and did time for breaking into some big computer system.

Fortin helped get me a scholarship to Northwestern. I graduated with a degree in computer science. My first job was an IT expert for a shipping company in Chicago, but I didn’t like punching a clock. I became disenchanted with the stress and lack of autonomy of the position. Fortunately, I had started my own consulting company on the side. It quickly became more lucrative than the IT job, so I quit that and went to work for myself.

Then three years ago my mom died of cancer. It was a difficult time in my life. My girlfriend left me. She said there was nobody else, just that she was unhappy with the long hours I was working. Always on call. I kind of dropped out of everything for a year, then I went back to school and got my Master’s degree in computer science.

That’s my backstopped story. If you check on any of this, it will appear real. Three years ago I “died” and was reinvented in my new life. I lost my wife to an assassin. There’s an unwritten rule in government black ops: family is off limits.

In my new identity, I got a job at a small community college in Wisconsin teaching computers. I kept my consulting business on the side. When Flint U of M offered me the summer job as Dr. Harbin’s

associate, I accepted. I thought it would be a welcome change. And I hoped it would turn into a full time position. If I hated it, I could always do the consulting full time.

Then that whole mistaken identity thing happened. I could have been killed. Not to mention the kindergarten teacher.



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THANK YOU

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NANCY TUCKER, formerly of Flint, Michigan, lives in Northern Michigan with her husband and two dogs. She writes fiction, non-fiction and dabbles in poetry. Her favorite color is purple, or sometimes red.

