

NORTH COAST MYSTERIES

ECHO OF TERROR

CHAPTER ONE

June 20th

ROB

I had my cellphone cradled against my ear and shoulder as I gathered clothes for work. “It will be fine,” I said, sounding more patient than I was as I tossed a gray shirt and black slacks onto the bed. It was hard to muster patience at the ass crack of dawn.

“Well, she usually only stays there for a weekend,” Elena said on the other end. “This time she will be there for two whole weeks.”

Pulling a tie and socks out of my dresser, I shut the drawer harder than necessary. “I have raised a child before.”

“I know that, Rob.” I swear I could hear her rolling her eyes.

“Trust me when I say Russ was a hell of a lot more complicated than Sofia.”

“Well, yes, I’m sure, but —”

“Has Sofia ever tried to stick a fork in an outlet?”

Pause. “No.”

“Has she ever driven your car into an electrical pole?”

“Uh, no.”

I pulled on my slacks. “Has she ever tried to throw your cat out the window with a parachute attached to it?”

“...No.”

“I think I can handle it.”

“There is the flip side of this where my kid isn’t a sociopath and yours is.”

“Good-bye, Elena.” I hung up my phone and chucked it onto the bed, shaking my head and muttering obscenities under my breath. I finished getting dressed and walked out into the kitchen, where my little brother was pouring himself a bowl of Frosted Flakes. Glancing at my watch, I raised my eyebrows. “What the hell are you doing up this early during the summer?”

He spun around from the counter. “I wanted to ask you a question.”

My phone beeped. I pulled it from my pocket. It was a text from homicide detective Chico Mendoza, with an address and a ‘*meet me. vic: Ken Abel.*’ That could mean nothing good. “What’s that?” I asked, not looking up.

“Can I spend Tuesday night at my friend’s and then hang out there until like 5 on Wednesday?”

I turned off my phone and stuffed it in my pocket, meeting his eyes. “Which friend?”

“Doug.”

I wrinkled my nose as I grabbed an apple. Doug was not my favorite.

“Jeff will be there too,” he added, knowing I like Jeff.

Tossing the apple back and forth between my hands, I asked, “What are you guys going to do?”

“No clue. Probably play video games. We might see if we can get Doug’s mom to take us to Tower City or something.” He bounced up and down on the balls of his feet, looking hopeful.

I shrugged, taking a bite of the apple. “Sure. I don’t care.”

“Great! Thanks.”

The weather was beautiful. There wasn’t a cloud in the deep blue sky and the temperature was pushing 85. Very rarely did I call off work for anything short of near death but the way the sun was beaming down through my windshield was tempting. However, there was the matter of that text from Chico...

I took a sip of my coffee as I pushed the glass bullpen door open at the FBI field office. As I approached the corner of the room where my desk was, I began to slow as I spied my boss, Lilah Matthews, standing back by the desks, talking and laughing with our co-workers. Her shoulder-length brown hair was pulled up into her usual bun. Her emerald eyes locked onto mine as I closed the distance from me to my desk. My body warmed at the way her gaze followed me.

“Agent Karlton,” she said casually.

“Agent Matthews.” I sat my coffee down. “How was D.C.?”

“Busy and kind of boring. How’s it been going here? Agent Winters was just telling me that the two of you worked a case together in my absence and that she’s decided you’re not a horrible human being anymore.”

“No, no,” Stevie Winters said, holding up a finger. “I said I decided he wasn’t a horrible agent anymore. I didn’t say anything about human being.”

I tossed Winters a glare and then turned back to Lilah. Fairly certain she was fucking me with her eyes but I could be wrong. She was a hell of a lot more than just my boss, and we hadn’t seen each other in over a month. “It’s been going pretty well.”

“Good.”

“I got a text from Chico to meet him this morning. I’m not sure what’s going on yet.”

“Head over and see what he has. Take Jason with you and keep me updated.”

I nodded. “Yes, ma’am.”

Definitely fucking me with her eyes. When you haven’t seen the woman you regularly sleep with for over a month, you tend to get turned on by the slightest things she does...particularly when she’s giving you the look she normally would before you take off her clothes.

Jason Pritchard cleared his throat from his desk. I glanced in his direction. His lips were twisted into a smirk, giving me a look, apparently having caught the tension between me and Lilah. As my best friend, he was one of only a handful of people who knew about Lilah and I, and just how damn complicated our friendship was.

“Shut up,” I snapped.

He stood. “I’m driving.”

I rolled my eyes and turned to Stevie. “The vic’s name is Ken Abel. Can you run a background check for me while we’re gone?”

She blew out an over dramatic sigh. “Get me coffee on the way back and I suppose I can be persuaded.”

“I’m not buying you that peppermint bullshit you drink.”

“I’ll text you.”

Ugh, I was going to regret this.

Five minutes later, Jason and I were in a Bureau car heading toward the middle of nowhere.

“I don’t know why you insist on driving everywhere,” I said, fiddling with the stations on the radio, trying to find something decent. You would think the Bureau could spring for Sirius or some shit.

“Because your driving sucks.”

“I am a way better driver than you,” I retorted, settling on a rock station before sitting back in my seat.

“Excuse me?” Jason asked, barking out a laugh. “Who out of the two of us has more speeding tickets?”

“That doesn’t make me a bad driver; just a fast driver.”

“I’m definitely a better driver than you. I’ve been driving since I could walk.”

“A tractor doesn’t count,” I retorted.

“Says who? And I was driving a damn Combine when I was fourteen. Have you ever driven a Combine?”

“No, Jason. No, I didn’t grow up in Hicksville like you did.”

“You grew up in Pennsylvania,” he retorted, turning off of E. 9th onto the Shoreway.

“In West Philly! I’m more adept at dodging gangs and bullets than cows and cornfields.”

Jason snickered. “I’ll take cows and cornfields any day, thanks. The traffic here still makes me twitch.”

When some god-awful bubbly gum pop song started playing, I hit the scan button. “I’m getting Sofia for two whole weeks starting tomorrow.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Is that the longest she’s stayed with you?”

“Yes. They’re officially moved in to their place in Lakewood. Which means that she will be moving in with me part time.”

“Wow. How you taking it?”

“Oh, I’m fucking terrified.”

He laughed. “At least you’re honest.”

We drove ten miles into thick, winding woods before we even hit the police block. After that, it was another half mile walk through deep mud and heavy brush before we reached the crime scene tape. That 85-degree weather that had felt so fantastic earlier was making me sweat my balls off by the time we reached the crime scene.

Chico assessed us as we approached, a thinly veiled smirk on his face. “I hope you boys didn’t pay a lot of money for those suits.”

I looked down at myself. The mud was halfway up my calves, the shoes were ruined, and I had more than a few bristles stuck in my jacket, which I had taken off and slung over my shoulder. While he was a good guy and we got along, he couldn’t help but poke fun at us being pencil-pushers while he was stuck in the trenches. I used to be a cop, so I did get it. But I wasn’t about to give him the satisfaction. “I’ll live. What’s going on?”

“We found this guy dumped out here,” Chico replied. “Responding officers thought it was a mugging gone wrong at first. But his wallet hasn’t been touched. We ran his name. He’s Ken Abel, a tech geek for a major DoD contractor from New York.”

“Department of Defense?” I furrowed my brow. “That doesn’t sound like a random mugging.”

“That’s what I thought. I figured maybe this was a little more up your boys’ alley, given the ties and crossed state lines.”

“What was the preliminary cause of death?” Jason asked.

“Trauma to the head,” Chico replied, “but we don’t know yet if that’s what killed him. M.E. said the autopsy results would be back in a few hours. She said there were signs of torture but they also may have been old.”

“Is there any evidence around the crime scene?” Jason asked.

“They’re still working on it but so far we haven’t found anything. It looks like he was just dumped here. Whoever dumped him covered their tracks pretty well. I don’t think this was random.”

“I’ll call our Evidence Response Team to come out and lend a hand,” I said. My phone beeped. I pulled it out of my pocket as I added, “It might help things go faster.” Casting a glance at the screen, it was a text message from Stevie saying, ‘*get back to the office.*’ I turned to Chico. “We may have something on our vic.”

LILAH

I was standing in Special Agent-in-Charge Thomas Snow's office as he assessed my notes from my time in D.C. The man was huge, with broad shoulders like a linebacker and arms the size of my head. He was one of the few men who could actually intimidate me. Probably because he reminded me of my father. "What are your future plans, Agent Matthews?" he asked, not looking up from the notes as he leafed through the papers. "Do you plan on plateauing here or moving up?"

"The original plan was to go all the way."

He lifted his eyes to meet mine, his brows up. "Director. Impressive."

"I tend to be pretty ambitious," I said with a short laugh. "But, uh, now a'days I'm thinking Special Agent-in-Charge is probably a good plan. Gives me a couple decades before retirement to get there."

"I don't think it's going to take you a couple of decades to make SAC." He leaned back in his chair. "If I had to make a prediction, I'd say you'll be there within the next ten years. That gives you a whole other decade to work with. Don't put yourself in a box, Agent Matthews. You're good. There are only two people in this entire field office I feel could one day be Director of the Bureau — you and Agent Johnson. I have a lot of respect and admiration for Agent Johnson, so you should consider that a high compliment."

"I do, sir," I replied solemnly. "I think that Agent Johnson is one of the best agents I have met in many years. I appreciate being placed in the same category as him, so thank you."

"You want him to be your replacement here when you move on, don't you?"

"Yes, sir," I replied.

“I think he would do well as supervisory agent over violent crimes.” Snow crossed his giant arms in front of his chest. “When are you looking to start moving up?”

“I was figuring in about 4 or 5 years to start looking into an ASAC position.”

“You’ve been with the Bureau for about 14 years now, Agent Matthews.”

“Yes, sir...that’s correct,” I replied slowly. I knew where this was going.

“Do you mind if I ask why it took you so long to move up?”

Yep, there it is. “I was only a few years in when 9/11 happened. I was in Newark then, working on a civil rights squad. I volunteered to help out in New York. It was...” I paused, my throat tightening.

His face softened. “Difficult.”

“Yeah.” I cleared my throat. “A couple of years later, I started working in New York doing counterterrorism. I was planning to move up after that. But then a few years after I started working in New York, my brother was killed overseas — military. That kind of threw a wrench into things.”

“I heard that you volunteered to lead the terrorism task force in Clearwater because of your brother. I also heard that you kicked ass.”

I couldn’t help but laugh. “Uh, I was struggling during my time in Florida, but leading that task force was the best therapy I could have participated in. Honestly, sir, to make a long story less long, dominos kept falling and I was not prepared or capable to be a supervisor of a unit until last year.”

“You’ve done an exceptional job in your short time here. You’ve got Agent Stedman working with people without whining about how unfair they are, and actually have him learning things and being useful. You also don’t cower to the fact that his father is in high places, which I

admire. That's more than I can say for the supervisor before you. You've taken Agent Karlton, an agent who showed more potential than any agent I'd seen in years but also one who had more authority problems than I'd seen in years, and turned him into someone I can actually trust. You've been here a year and you've turned the violent crimes unit from borderline chaos into a well-oiled machine."

Smiling, I said, "Thank you, sir. That means a lot."

"Any time you need a recommendation, you come see me. I'll recommend you to be damn Commander in Chief if that's what you want. You're going places, kid, and don't ever let anyone tell you differently."

Except for that part about the fact that I'm sleeping with one of my agents. "Thank you, sir. I appreciate it." My phone chirped. I pulled it out of my blazer pocket and glanced down at it. It was a text from Stevie, *'meet me in the conference room asap.'*

"Duty calls?" Snow asked.

"That would be correct."

I was entering the conference room the same time Rob, Jason, and Chico were. Stevie was sitting at the end of the table with a laptop. "What's going on?" I asked.

Stevie pushed a folder toward me. "Ken Abel was traveling through Cleveland with an NSA Intelligence Analyst named Mitch Hawkins and two U.S. Marshals. They were on their way to federal protection, where they were to await a federal trial. Now Abel is dead and the analyst and two U.S Marshals are missing."

I was idly flipping through the folder and stopped, noticing the name of one of the two marshals: Davis Weber. Sighing, I sat the folder down and rubbed my eyes.

“One dead DoD contractor, two missing Marshals, and a missing NSA analyst?” Rob said. “That doesn’t sound good.”

I leaned back in my seat. “It would seem I have a somewhat personal attachment to this investigation. One of the missing U.S. Marshals is Davis Weber, my ex-fiancé. I would prefer if that information didn’t leave this room so our friendly neighborhood ASAC doesn’t find out and yank me off the case.”

Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge Perry Hudson was in charge of the violent crimes unit, among other units in the office. He was my direct superior. He also could not stand me because I was not only a woman but smarter than him; not that it took much.

“Do we have any idea what the trial was about?” Chico asked.

“I’m working on it,” Stevie said. “At the moment I keep hitting a gigantic ‘classified’ brick wall.”

I stepped over to the laptop and put in my credentials. When I attempted to access the files, I received the same message. “That’s disheartening.” I stood and looked over at Chico. “You’re welcome to stay on the task force. We aren’t taking over, but we do have jurisdiction until someone higher decides to boot us out.”

“Fine with me.”

“Alright,” I said. “Anybody checked out his place yet or heard anything from the M.E. about the cause of death?”

“Nope to both,” Chico replied.

“Chico, how about you head over to the morgue and see how long it’s going to be and let her know to speed it up if at all possible? We’ll check out his place and keep trying to get info on this court case.”

“Aye, aye, Captain.” He left.

I met Rob’s eyes. “Can we talk?”

We headed just outside the conference room. “This case could get tricky quickly.”

“I know,” he said simply.

How could I put this delicately? Hesitating, I opened my mouth to speak. Rob held up a hand, interrupting, “You don’t have to say it. I talked to Luke and told him that he should take point on the case.”

“You did?” I asked, hoping I sounded less surprised than I was.

“Yeah. I think if we want to keep Hudson’s nose out of it, it would be better for me not to be involved, given he hates me. I also am not sure if I’m ready for something quite this big.”

Who the hell was this guy and what did he do with Rob Karlton? “Wow, that’s...impressive, Rob.”

He shrugged. “Sometimes I get it right. Are you okay with this Davis thing?”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine,” I said dismissively. “Do you want to come over tonight after work?”

The way his eyes darkened a little at the suggestion sent a shiver up my spine. “I’ll be there.”

“Great.”

ROB

Luke, Lilah, Stevie, and I headed over to Abel's apartment. We were going to head off to the manager to get a key but the door was ajar. We entered cautiously, guns drawn. There was a blonde woman in a business pantsuit with her back to us, rifling through some papers on a desk. It wouldn't have taken a real well-trained eye to notice the gun on her hip.

"FBI," Lilah said. "Put your hands up and turn around slowly."

The woman paused and slowly turned around, holding her hands out, palms up. She started to move her hands.

"Hey, hey, hey." I shook my head. "Don't."

She indicated the edge of her blazer, which she slowly opened with two fingers. Then she pointed toward a breast pocket. "Check it."

I stepped forward and pulled out an identification wallet. I opened it. "Department of Homeland Security?"

"Special Agent Tish Wilson. I'll take that, thank you." She took her ID and placed it back in her pocket.

"And just what the hell are you doing here?"

"One would assume the same thing that you are." She buttoned her blazer. "Only I got here first."

"How about sharing with the rest of the class?" Lilah suggested.

"How about I see your credentials first since all I'm seeing right now are a bunch of guns that should be put away by now."

We all holstered our guns and showed her our credentials.

“Lilah Matthews.” Wilson cut her eyes to her after she examined her ID. “You know Davis Weber.”

“How in the hell do you know that?”

“Oh, you’d be surprised what I know,” she retorted ominously. “And one thing that I know for sure is that you kids are in way over your heads. So I suggest that you step back and just let me deal with it.”

“How about no?” I suggested.

“We keep hitting a road block when we attempt to find out about the trial,” Stevie said. “I suppose that would be your doing?”

“Something like that. Who all is involved in your task force?”

“The four of us,” I replied, “another agent, and a homicide detective who caught the Abel murder case.”

“What I’m about to tell you does not leave this room, so they’re SOL.”

We all exchanged a glance before turning back to face her.

Wilson crossed her arms. “Hawkins is an NSA Intelligence Analyst who intercepted information about a domestic terrorism cell that was planning a major cyber terrorism plot against the United States. Abel had just finished his work with a DoD weapons contractor and was contacted by the leader of the terrorism cell, asking for his cooperation. Abel saw an opportunity to work as a double agent and he agreed to help. What he didn’t know was the leader is ex-black ops and a master of torture. So the help turned out to involve him being tortured for information about the National Cyber Security Division and the United States Emergency Readiness Team – both of which he knew nothing about.

“Abel managed to escape. He reported the incident and we secured him. We also secured Hawkins, who had already reported what he’d come across to his bosses, who in turn reported it to us. We pooled their information; we found locations, got names, and made an arrest.”

“So the trial involves the leader of the terrorism cell?” Lilah asked.

“Yes. The trial is against him – Declan Haun. Unfortunately, Hawkins had some meaningful evidence in his possession that he was going to turn over once he was in a more secure location. Without that, Haun will more than likely walk. The U.S. Marshals were transporting Abel and Hawkins to a remote location until the trial. We lost contact with them at 8pm last night. We still haven’t recovered the vehicle. The tracking devices that were kept on the Marshals have apparently been trashed because they aren’t broadcasting any signals. The threat was high enough with the possibility of a major network attack. But if they have Hawkins alive...he’s been a high clearance level NSA Intelligence Analyst for five years now. The massive amount of information that he has stored in his brain; the things that he knows about this country...it could bring the United States to its knees if it fell into the wrong hands. Not to mention that we have no idea what they may have gotten out of Abel before they killed him.”

“Who did Abel work for?” Luke asked.

“That information is classified. But suffice to say that the work involved weapons.”

The air in the room was thick as the information settled heavily on all of us.

“Guess you weren’t joking about being in over our heads,” I said.

“Yes, well...it’s a little too late to change your minds now. You are now involved whether you like it or not. Oh, and by the way? Don’t think that means you’re going to know everything about this investigation. I still outrank your security clearance on every level.” Wilson smiled, cocky. “Welcome to the big time, kids. I suggest you get a good night’s sleep and

come find me tomorrow morning. You don't mind me using your office as a nerve center, do you? Nah, didn't think so." She walked off.

Lilah glared in her direction. "Do I act like that?"

"Nah," I said with a head shake. "You're much worse."

Back at the office, we broke the news to Jason, who did not seem too broken hearted. "I have a huge caseload right now," he said, "so that's kind of okay."

Luke approached, tucking his phone into his pocket.

"How'd Chico take it?" Lilah asked.

"It's Chico." He shrugged. "He took it fine. He said that the M.E. didn't have the autopsy results back when he went but that she probably does now."

Lilah turned to me. "Head over there with Stevie and see what we can get. After that, everybody call it a night. We'll meet back at the office first thing in the morning and see what Special Agent Bitchface has to say."

I cocked an eyebrow. "It's kind of amusing to see someone get under your skin."

She just slow blinked a few times. Nobody got under her skin quite like I did.

Stevie clapped me on the back. "Come on. Let's go see your favorite person."

That was, of course, sarcasm. The medical examiner was a cute little thing named Mandy whom I had been intimately acquainted with in the back of a vehicle at one point in time. It hadn't ended well.

"Agent Winters." Mandy's voice dropped a few degrees as she added, "Agent Karlton."

My smile was tight as I acknowledged, "Mandy." I cleared my throat. "Anything on our murder vic yet?"

“Yes.” She pointedly handed the folder to Stevie. “COD was blunt force trauma to the head. He was bashed in the back of the head by a heavy blunt object – possibly a metal baseball bat or a pipe. It shattered the back of his skull and broke his neck.”

“What about the signs of torture?” I asked.

“Some of it was old; probably weeks before he was murdered. It does appear as though he may have been beaten prior to his murder, as there was a lot of fresh bruising on the body.

“Time of death?” Stevie asked, holding the folder out for me to take.

“You’re looking at between 7 and 9 pm last night.”

I flipped through the file, looking through the photos. “Any forensic evidence?”

“Nope. Not a thing.”

“Thanks,” I said.

She just glared at me.

“Wow.” Stevie shook her head as we made our way through the hallway. “You sure know how to woo a girl.”

“I wasn’t trying to woo her.”

“You were trying to fuck her.”

“I *did* fuck her.”

“And obviously you did something to piss her off.”

I opened the door and held it for her. “All I did was have a one-night stand with her and didn’t call her back after she shoved her number into my jacket pocket. I wasn’t looking for a booty call; just a one-night stand. Why can’t some women just understand that?”

We reached the car. “It never occurred to you that maybe she didn’t consider it a one-night stand?”

“It was in the back of a car, for Christ’s sake.”

“You’re a regular Prince Charming,” she said in a bitchy tone, opening her passenger door.

“That is something I have never claimed to be,” I said, opening the driver’s side and looking over the top of the car at her. “I have never gone into these things giving any intentions other than it being a good time. No numbers, rarely names exchanged. I use lines but I have never used a ploy or lied to a girl to get her into bed. I am attractive, I have a nice smile, and I’m a damn smooth talker — that is all that I have ever used. So when I whisper in a girl’s ear, ‘do you want to get out of here?’ and we go fuck in the back of a Taurus, explain to me why that should mean something more than what it is. Seriously. I’m asking. Because I don’t get it.”

Stevie shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“Because you think I’m an ass who doesn’t deserve an answer?” I asked knowingly.

“I’ve never really been a hook-up kind of chick so I don’t have any experience to go with. But if you’ve sincerely never lied or used BS ploys...as much as it pains me, I suppose...you’re right.”

I blinked a few times. Had I heard her right? “Thank you.”

LILAH

That evening, Rob was barely inside the living room when I shoved him up against the wall, snagging his wrists and pinning them above his head. His sharp intake of air as my knee subtly brushed against his crotch made an involuntarily grin cross my lips. My teeth sunk into the flesh between his neck and shoulder. The growl that rumbled from his throat made me think more than a few nasty thoughts.

“I am going to do unspeakable things to you tonight.” I brushed my lips against his ear, teeth dragging across flesh.

“Somebody’s horny,” he said with a breathless grin.

I let go of his wrists. He left them where I had placed them without even having to be told. There are no words to describe just how much that turned me on. “I haven’t been laid in a month.” My eyes locked onto his as I unbuttoned his shirt. “I’m strapping you down and riding you until your eyes roll into the back of your head.”

“Mm...you should leave town more often.”

Yanking his shirt over his head, I tossed it to the side. I leaned in, my lips grazing his as a hand fell to the front of his slacks. He shuddered slightly and clenched his fists. But, to his credit stayed exactly where he had been placed.

I pulled him away from the wall and gave him a solid crack on the ass. “Bedroom. Now.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he teased.

Later that night, we were lying in bed together. My body was still in a state of bliss as Rob ran his hand up and down my thigh, his skin warm against mine as we lie naked with our limbs tangled around one another. It was absurd just how much I had missed this...

He brushed some hair away from my face. “So you hadn’t been laid in a month, huh?”

“Nope. You?”

“Same.”

Silence.

“Are we...” He paused.

I slid my eyes in his direction. “Are we what?”

He shook his head. “Nothing.” He studied my face. “I’m glad you’re home.”

“Me, too. I missed my bed,” I said, snuggling up to my pillow.

Rob rolled over so he was above me. Moving in closer, his breath was hot against my lips for a moment of hesitation as his eyes searched mine. Then he settled in for a long, deep, passionate kiss. My nails dug into his shoulders and my toes curled. I was moaning softly into his mouth before he pulled back. I stared up at him, breathless. “What was that for?”

“Nothing. Just...” He hesitated. “I guess maybe I missed more than your bed.”

Rob Karlton had missed me. Moreover, he had roundabout just told me so. How hard must that have been for him?

“You didn’t have anyone lecturing you for a whole month,” I said with a short laugh, trying to diffuse the awkwardness. “I would think you’d have loved it.”

“You lectured me via text and telephone. Only difference was you weren’t within striking distance.”

I chuckled. “True.” My eyes darted back and forth, searching his face. Good god, I had actually missed him too. What the hell was happening to me?

Rob propped himself up on his elbow, regarding me. “Are you really okay with this Davis thing?”

I stared at the blanket in silence as that question swirled around in my brain. No, not at all.

“I’m not trying to be a dick here, but you know that you would bug me about this until I came clean,” he said.

“Yes, I would,” I said with a nod, lifting my head up to meet his eyes. “And the truth is that I am worried and also trying to prepare myself for the worst. We both know how these kinds of situations usually end.”

He smiled ruefully. “Yeah, I know.”

“I don’t have feelings for Davis any longer,” I added, mulling that over as I said it. “But he’s a good guy and he’s a good Marshal. He has a family that cares about him very deeply. I would hate for anything bad to happen to him.”

Rob didn’t try to bullshit me by saying, ‘well maybe...’ because that wasn’t Rob’s way. Rob Karlton didn’t sugarcoat shit and he didn’t pity people. And quite frankly, it was refreshing. You may not always like him or know what was going on with him, but you always knew where you stood.