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**WHAT WE BUEY**  
**by Carolyn Arnold**

ALSO BY CAROLYN ARNOLD

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Standalone Title

*Assassination of a Dignitary*

CAROLYN  
ARNOLD

**WHAT**

**WE BURY**

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Sample of *What We Bury*

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**S**he's dead."

Those two words brought Madison Knight to 982 Hillcrest Drive in the middle of a Saturday afternoon in March. It was a quiet neighborhood in the south end of Stiles, a city of about three hundred sixty thousand, and it had been her real estate agent, Estelle Robins, who'd called. When Madison saw the name on caller ID, she'd assumed Estelle had found the perfect place for Madison and her boyfriend, Troy Matthews. Boy, had she been mistaken.

Madison parked in the driveway, admiring the raised bungalow with its grayish-brown brick and beige siding. It couldn't be older than fifteen years. The front door was under a small overhang, and that's where Estelle was standing, her arms wrapped around herself as if she were cold, but the temperature today was unusually warm. Some of the more northern states would envy their spring-like weather in early March.

Madison got out of the car and approached Estelle. She was normally the picture of calm and put-togetherness, but her hair was frizzed around her heart-shaped face, and her eyes were wet and wide. Her brown eyeshadow was smudged beneath her right eye, but her mascara had stayed in place.

"Omigod, Madison. I didn't know who else to call, but you'll know what to do."

"You did the right thing." Madison was a Major Crimes detective with the Stiles Police Department. Troy could have tagged along, as he was also a detective for the department, but his primary

role was leader of a SWAT team. Solving murders was her thing. “Where is she?”

“In the shed. I’ll take you there.” Estelle led the way to a side gate next to the garage. Her hand was shaking as she worked the latch.

Madison followed Estelle down a concrete sidewalk toward the backyard. “How did you find her?”

“There’s supposed to be an open house.” Estelle spoke over her shoulder. “I was making sure the property looked good.” Estelle stopped and hoisted a chain-link gate at the end of the walk that was hinged on the fence and wedged against the brick of the garage.

To the right was a deck, and ahead was a manageable yard. The rear of the lot was framed by mature cedars and a chain-link fence. There was another gate back there, and it appeared open.

Estelle pointed to a shed with a concrete foundation and beige siding. It was about twelve feet wide and twenty feet long.

“She’s in there.” Estelle shivered. “I can’t believe this is happening.”

Madison laid a hand on her arm. “It’s a lot to process, for sure, but I’m here now. You said you had an open house scheduled—”

“Oh.” Estelle ran a hand through her hair, making it even more frizzy. The extension of her arm revealed a beautiful big-faced watch, which she consulted. “It’s scheduled to start in fifteen minutes. I wasn’t thinking... There are still signs around the neighborhood.”

Madison nodded. “I saw them on the way. They need to be taken down and the open house—”

“Canceled. Yes, I understand completely.”

“Can you manage collecting the signs, or do you want help?”

Estelle rubbed the back of her neck. “I can handle it.”

Madison nudged her head toward the house. “We’ll also need to contact the homeowners and make them aware of the situation. I’ll need to question them too.”

Estelle chewed on her bottom lip. “I will call them.”

“Okay, after you get the signs.”

Estelle sniffled but stood tall, as if finding some strength. “I’ll get the signs and come right back.”

Madison headed across the lawn to the shed. The door was toward the rear of the building and next to a window. The handle

had a keyhole. She gloved up and turned it. Unlocked. Had it been left that way or picked?

She stepped inside, immediately catching the stench of blood—something she didn't have much tolerance for despite her chosen profession. She swallowed roughly, and her stomach tossed, but she pushed forward.

She took her phone from her coat pocket and activated the flashlight to get a better look. The window let some light in, but the space was still immersed in shadows.

The beam went over stacked patio furniture, as well as shovels and garden tools that leaned against the wall and were laid out on a shelving unit. There were a couple large containers for cushions and garden pots in various shapes and sizes.

Madison edged farther inside, following drips of blood, and rounded a lawnmower.

And there she was. Jane Doe. Late forties, possibly fifties. Blank stare, pool of blood—Madison gazed at it. She was getting better at handling messy scenes, and she tamped down her visceral reaction as best she could, but it didn't help that she'd been battling with nausea lately anyhow.

She put a hand on her stomach, resembling, in a way, the dead woman, who had an arm cradled across her lower abdomen. Blood had seeped around her palms to the back of her hands and between her fingers. She'd been stabbed at least a few times, from the looks of it, each blow in the vicinity of her gut.

Doe's dress, casual—blue jeans, a light jacket unzipped, a gray T-shirt, black-heeled boots. Her makeup was artfully applied, and given the macabre circumstances, she was rather beautiful even in death. Her hair was wet—like her clothing—and spread around her head like a halo on a folded blue tarp. She must have been caught in last night's rain before seeking shelter from the storm. Aside from the tangible quality of death clinging to the air and the blood, it could almost be imagined that she'd slipped into the shed for a nap.

It was heartbreaking to think she'd died alone, bleeding, while rain beat against the metal roof. Had it hypnotized and soothed her as she drifted into darkness? Or had she fought for life?

There were no personal effects near the woman—no purse or phone—but her identification could be in her pockets. Madison wasn't going to go rummaging until she had backup.

No immediate sign of the murder weapon either.

Madison turned away and started making the necessary calls. Patrol officers to cordon off the property; her partner-on-the-job, Terry Grant, to assist her; Cole Richards, the medical examiner; and crime scene investigator and head of the forensics lab, Cynthia Baxter—or Baxter-Stanford now that she had married Lou Stanford, another Major Crimes detective.

She ended her last call, and the silence was deafening. Soon the property would be crawling with law enforcement and crime scene investigators. But for now, it was just her and Jane Doe.



**O**fficer Tendum sent me back.” Terry Grant, Madison’s partner who was three years younger than her thirty-six, was coming toward where she was standing next to the shed. Every one of his blond hairs lay perfectly in place, and his cheeks were flushed. She’d probably disturbed his run—something he chose to do for fun and exercise. To her, running was the devil’s pastime.

He nudged his head to indicate the building. “The victim’s in there?”

“Jane Doe, yep.” She hated to think of the murdered as *victims*, detesting the assignment of a label to a once-living individual, loved by people.

She stepped aside for Terry to enter the building but stayed outside. “She’s behind the lawnmower,” she told him.

Terry poked his head through the doorway. “You’re not coming?”

“No, I’ve seen her.”

“You all right?”

“Yes, why wouldn’t I be?” She raised her eyebrows. Her distaste was something she did her best to hide, but if she were honest with herself, she hadn’t been too good at pulling it off.

“Uh-huh.” Terry disappeared again.

She rolled her eyes and followed him.

“Estelle must have had quite a shock,” he said.

“Yeah, you could say that.” She came up next to Terry, who was standing at Doe’s feet. “I didn’t see any sign of the murder weapon, and given the blood drops leading from the doorway, I’d say Jane Doe walked in here.”

Terry pointed a finger to the walls. “No spatter. This isn’t where she was stabbed.”

“I agree. We’ll need to establish the primary.” That being the scene of the crime. “The rain from last night would have washed away any blood outside leading to the shed, so it won’t be easy. But I did notice something while I was waiting.” Madison headed outside and gestured toward the back of the yard. “The gate’s open. She might have come through there. She was stabbed and bleeding, seeking shelter—”

“Why not look or call for help?”

“Maybe she tried? She also could have been in a state of delirium and shock.” Madison couldn’t imagine anyone thinking rationally after being stabbed.

“Okay, well, if I remember the area right, there are some bars and restaurants a street south. Burnham Street. We may be looking at a date gone wrong.”

Madison recalled Doe’s dolled-up face and her apparel. “If that’s the case, dating just got a whole lot less attractive.”

“Hey, nothing like working a crime scene on Saturday afternoon,” Cynthia Baxter-Stanford said, as she approached with her employee, Mark Adams. She went on. “Lou and I were just about to open a bottle of wine and watch a movie.”

“Still in the honeymoon phase,” Terry affirmed. “Before long you’ll be fighting over who has the remote. He’ll be drinking beer or whiskey; you’ll be on your own with the wine...”

The way Terry spoke, a person would think he hated married life, but he loved his wife Annabelle and their eight-month-old daughter, Danielle, above all else.

“Guess time will tell.” Cynthia winked at Madison.

Madison thought Cynthia’s plans sounded like a lot more fun than what Madison had been up to before the call. She and Troy had been in a heated discussion about their future, specifically where they saw themselves living, but it seemed to be a cover for a topic they were avoiding. At least she was. She was confident he was going to propose at Cynthia’s wedding a few weeks ago—just the way he’d been acting and looking at her. Even Cynthia thought

for sure he was going to pop the question. But he still hadn't asked, and it left her feeling prickly and easily irritated. But whether he was responding to her energy or battling his own thoughts, he hadn't been too pleased when she said she had to leave.

Cynthia and Mark went into the shed and got to work, while Madison and Terry remained outside the door. They wanted to know if Jane Doe had a phone or ID in her pockets to start with, but they gave the investigators some space.

Several minutes later, Cynthia stepped out from the shed, a camera strapped around her neck. "There's something you're going to want to see."

Madison gave a curious glance at Terry and followed her friend inside, Terry at her heels.

Cynthia pointed at the pool of blood on the left side of the body. Mark shone a flashlight on the area.

"What am I looking at?" Madison crouched down.

"Right there. See it?" Cynthia swooped a fingertip over an area of blood. "It's rather faint to the naked eye, but—" she lifted her camera and held it so that Madison and Terry could see the screen—"it shows up quite clear in a photo."

"Is that..." Madison squinted at the screen.

"Letters written in blood?" Cynthia said. "Yep. And given the caked blood under the index fingernail of her right hand, I'd say she wrote it herself."

"GB." Madison straightened up, placed her hands on her hips. "What does it stand for?"

Terry took out his phone, pecked on it. "GB can stand for gigabyte, Great Britain..."

Madison looked at her partner. "Just a guess, but I think Doe had something—or someone—else in mind. Maybe the first two letters of her killer's name or their initials?"

"So she knew her killer?" Terry volleyed back. "We're leaping to that."

"I'm just spitballing, Terry, and keeping an open mind."

"Since when?" he shoved out with a chuckle.

Madison met Cynthia's gaze, and her friend said, "He does have a point."

“Very funny, you two.” Madison said. “But let’s focus on the case, not me. Any sign of forced entry?”

Mark walked over and put the beam of a flashlight on the doorframe and handle. “Doesn’t look like it, and I’d say the lock wasn’t picked. No scratches in the metal other than the normal wear and tear that comes with sticking a key in and out over time.”

“We’ll ask the homeowners if they leave it unlocked. Do we have an ID?”

“I was just getting ready to check her pockets before...” Mark shot a look at Terry, then asked Cynthia, “You have all the pictures you need of her before I proceed?”

Cynthia nodded her go-ahead.

Mark lowered near the body, aware of the placement of his feet, and slipped a gloved hand into Doe’s jacket pocket. “Nothing in this one.” He rummaged in the other one and pulled out a balled-up tissue, lip balm, and a piece of paper. He was about to put the items into a clear evidence bag.

“Wait,” Madison said. “Anything written on it?”

Mark dropped the tissue and balm into the bag, then took the paper in both hands and unfolded it. Madison stepped closer and could see the page was lined and whole, probably removed from a small notebook. She read what was there.

“The name Alan Lowe and a number.” She took out her phone and placed the call. The line rang while Terry and Cynthia watched her. Mark went on to check Doe’s jean pockets, front and back.

Madison’s call was shuffled to voicemail, and in the greeting, Lowe announced himself as a financial adviser with Stiles Investment and Savings. Madison was familiar with the bank. Lowe was a new name to her. “Mr. Lowe, this is Detective Madison Knight with the Stiles PD. Please give me a call when you get this message.” She rattled off her number and ended the call. Best to keep things vague for now. “It’s a banker,” she said. “The number either rang through to his desk extension or his cell phone. Hard to say.”

Mark resumed full height. “Nothing in the pockets of her jeans.”

“Also, no purse, wallet, or phone,” Cynthia added.

“Guess it’s official. Meet Jane Doe.” Madison sighed. She’d hoped the name was only a temporary assignment, but it seemed it would be hanging around a bit longer.

## Three

**I'm also not seeing any personal effects or jewelry on her person,** Madison observed. "No earrings, necklace, rings, or watch."

"Maybe we're looking at a mugging." Terry shrugged his shoulders.

Really, until they had more to go on, it was far too soon to lean heavily in any one direction. Cynthia and Mark went back to processing the scene. Mark placed yellow, numbered markers and a ruler beside each drop of blood, and Cynthia took a photo.

Madison nudged Terry's arm. "Let's go see if the homeowners are here yet."

"Sure."

"We'll leave you guys to it," Madison said. "Keep us posted if you find anything."

"Always do," Cynthia responded in a singsong voice that caused Madison to smile. She might have the slight tendency to micromanage.

Madison and Terry were just exiting as Cole Richards had a leg lifted to enter. The medical examiner's assistant, Milo, was behind him.

"You're leaving just when I arrived?" Richards smiled at her, the expression showcasing his white teeth and crinkling the dark skin around his eyes.

"Don't worry. I'll be back." Madison returned the smile, thankful that things between them had finally returned to normal. A couple years ago, Madison had pried into his personal life, exposing an

old, yet still-painful wound, and another time not long after that, she'd questioned one of his rulings.

"I have no doubt." Richards laughed, and he and Milo proceeded inside.

Madison and Terry were making their way to the back door, and Officer Higgins was coming toward them. Higgins had been her training officer when she first joined the Stiles PD.

"What is it, Chief?" Madison accepted his desire not to advance rank, but it didn't stop her from using her affectionate nickname for him. After all, if Higgins had wanted to be police chief, he could have been.

"Just wanted to let you know that the Bernsteins are ready to speak with you, whenever you're ready."

"The Bernsteins?" Madison asked.

"Oh, figured you knew. The homeowners. Oliver and Rhea. They're in the house with Estelle."

"Good timing. We were just going to check on that."

Higgins started walking back in the direction of the house.

"Hey, Chief," she called out to him.

Higgins turned around. "You really need to stop calling me that."

"I don't see why."

"Probably because he's not the chief," Terry pointed out.

*As if I don't know that...* Troy's sister, Andrea Fletcher, had taken the post after the previous chief had retired.

"Are officers knocking on doors in the neighborhood yet?" she asked Higgins.

"Just getting started. I'll let you know if anything useful comes back."

"When they're finished on Hillcrest, it might not be a bad idea to have them canvass Burnham Street." He looked at her, some confusion in his eyes, and she turned and gestured to the open gate at the rear of the yard. "Terry and I were thinking she might have come through there."

"Okay. I'll make sure that happens."

"Good, and have them keep an eye out for the primary. It's not looking like she was killed here."

“You got it.” Higgins took a step, stopped. “That all?”

“For now.”

“All right, then. The Bernsteins are in the front sitting room. Just go through that door on the lower deck and up the stairs to the left.”

“Thanks.” His form disappeared through the side gate, and she turned to Terry. “Let’s hope the Bernsteins can give us a name for Jane Doe.”

Madison got the door for her and Terry. The place smelled of garlic, ground beef, and tomato sauce.

A man’s voice carried down to the entry. “What’s this going to do to our property value?”

She felt an instant dislike. Murder wasn’t convenient for anyone, least of all the deceased, but it would seem the man was more concerned with his bottom line than the fact someone had died on his property.

The entry was more of a breezeway. It was a straight shot from the back door to the front. One set of stairs went down and another up. The walls of the staircases were open-sided with spindles that made it easy to see the spaces above and below. The stairs going down looked like they led to a large room, and up, to the sitting room Higgins had mentioned.

“Madison?” Estelle’s head popped up over the top railing.

Madison wiped her feet on the mat, and Terry followed suit.

The upper level was beautiful. Glistening maple floors, large windows, and an open-concept floorplan. The sitting area was to the immediate right at the top of the stairs. A hallway veered to the left and likely led to a bedroom or two and a bathroom. And behind the living room was a dining area, the kitchen to the left of that.

Estelle’s hair had been pulled back, the frizz smoothed out, and her makeup fixed. Knowing the woman as Madison did, she was a true professional and would have wanted to present a strong front for her clients.

“Madison,” Estelle began, her gaze skipping over Madison to Terry. “This is Mr. and Mrs. Bernstein.”



Sixty-somethings. Both with gray hair and faces so similar they could have been siblings rather than a married couple. They were trim and had mirroring expressions of shock. The woman's cheeks were flushed, and the man's body language was stiff and rigid. They were seated on a dark-blue couch.

"I'm Oliver," the man said, "and this is my wife, Rhea."

"I'm Detective Madison Knight, and this is my partner, Terry Grant."

"Also a detective," Terry added with some levity.

Estelle's gaze returned to Terry and she offered him a reserved smile.

"We have some questions for you..." Madison gestured toward an available cream-colored wingback chair.

"Absolutely. Sit wherever you'd like," Oliver told her.

She sat, and Terry dropped into another chair, first setting aside two throw pillows.

"We can imagine what a shock this must be," Madison said to start.

"It's shocking all right." Rhea blew out a breath and glanced at Estelle. "When Estelle told us what was in our shed..." She searched for her husband's hand, and he gave it to her.

"We can't show you a picture of her right now." Madison proceeded to describe Doe's looks. "Does that sound like someone you might know?"

"Could be." Oliver's voice was strained. "Hard to really tell without seeing— Do you have a name for us?"

"Unfortunately, there was no ID with her. Were you home last night?" They didn't have time of death yet, but it seemed safe to conclude Doe had died sometime during in the night, given the fact she was rain-soaked.

"I stepped out for some groceries about six and got home around seven," Oliver said. "Rhea was here, though. She made lasagna."

That explained the smells in the home.

"I was here all afternoon yesterday," Rhea volunteered. "Spent most of it downstairs in a recliner reading the latest Carolyn Arnold novel."

Madison pressed her lips into a tight smile. She'd never heard of the author, but that wasn't a surprise; her schedule didn't leave her much time to read.

"And from seven on?" Terry asked.

"We were here together." Oliver glanced at his wife and continued. "We watched Netflix until bed."

Madison glanced around the room, and there was no television.

"We watch it downstairs in our media room," Oliver said, seeming to notice Madison's search.

"What time did you go to bed?" Terry asked.

"Rhea went around nine thirty, and I fell asleep on the couch but staggered up to bed at around midnight."

*Up.* So the master bedroom must be down that hallway. Maybe if she wasn't there for a murder investigation, she would have appreciated a tour. "Did either of you hear or see anything in the night?"

"I didn't." Oliver accompanied his verbal answer with a shake of his head.

"And you, Mrs. Bernstein?" Madison prompted. "Maybe a noise in the wee hours?"

"Wee hours..." Rhea's blanched. "Come to think of it. I got up to use the washroom."

Madison leaned forward. "What time was this?"

"Oh, say about one in the morning. I can't remember exactly, but when you said, 'wee hours,' it sparked a memory. I heard a thump outside, but I was basically still asleep. Just figured it was nothing. The rain was lashing against the windows in the bedroom."

"You never looked out to see what it might have been?"

Rhea met her gaze. "I didn't. I'm sorry."

Madison ran through the possibilities in her head. The noise could have been Doe closing the shed door—then again, it could have been anything. "Do you normally keep your shed locked?"

"Never found a need to before." Oliver's eyes went downcast.

The Bernsteins had been fortunate not to have a break-in. They were only two blocks east and one north of the downtown core. There was a lot of petty theft in the area, including unlocked cars

being riffled through for cash. “You probably know what I’m going to say,” Madison smiled.

“That we should lock all our doors. Don’t worry. We will now,” Oliver said.

“One more question and we’ll leave you for now,” Madison began, “but is your back gate normally open or closed?” She recalled how it was sitting crooked on the hinges, and without getting a close look, it was hard to say if it was just a tricky gate that didn’t latch.

“It should be closed,” Rhea said tentatively.

“Okay, thank you.” Madison walked over to the Bernsteins with her card. Rhea took it from her. “Call me if you have any questions or concerns. Or if you think of anything else that might help us with the case.”

She and Terry saw themselves out through the rear door to the lower deck.

“So the Bernsteins didn’t know her, or at least say they don’t,” Madison said. “But who really knows? It’s not like we had a name to give them or a picture. I guess what I’m struggling with is why Doe went in their shed. And did she know it was sitting unlocked or just strike it lucky that way?”

“Let me consult my crystal ball...”

“Smart-ass.” She punched him in the shoulder.

“Hey.” Terry rubbed where she’d hit him. Sometimes their relationship was more like siblings than work partners.

“I’m just saying we’ve got to figure this out.”

“This is where I’d say, ‘no poop,’ seeing as I don’t swear.” He smiled, but she rolled her eyes and shook her head. Her “brother” certainly had a way with words.

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