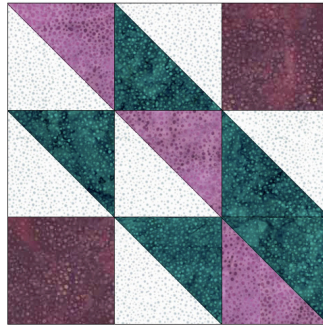




Deadly Games
Mystery written by Penny Pislán
Mystery quilt designed by Cynthia McNutt Scollard



Chapter 1 — Autumn Trails

Homicide Detective Dominic Bridger found the street leading to the crime scene easily enough. There were emergency vehicles everywhere, their flashing lights illuminating the entrance to the quiet neighborhood. Dominic pulled off to one side behind a cruiser, grabbed gloves out of the box under his seat, and got out of his truck.

A police officer walked toward him as he approached.

“This area is closed off,” the officer said. “You’ll have to leave.”

Dominic took his badge out of his pocket and showed it to the officer.

He nodded and stepped aside. “The body was found about a half a block down on the left.” He pointed in the general direction.

“Have the crime scene investigators shown up yet?”

“They have. Detective Jackson is with

them.”

As Dominic headed in the direction the officer had indicated, Homicide Detective Greg Jackson appeared from between two cruisers.

“What took you so long?” he asked.

Dominic looked at him as though he’d lost his mind. “I’m not on-call. You are. You’re lucky I’m here.”

Greg chuckled. “I am lucky you’re here.” His mood turned somber. “How did the lovely Miss Underwood take the news?”

“She’s upset. I tried to explain that we did the best we could but we’re at the mercy of the district attorney and whether or not he thinks he can get a conviction.”

“She knows that Quicksall will be in prison for a long time, though. Right?”

“She does, but that doesn’t bring her sister back. And she realizes that four manslaughter charges aren’t going to add much to his sentence, if he’s found guilty.”

“He’s got a murder charge for the Congressman’s son. That ought to lock him up for awhile.”

“Yeah, but he’s not paying much for Molly’s sister or for the others he killed with his actions.”

“True. She’ll be all right, though. You’ll be there, of course, to comfort her. You know, when you ask her out.”

“I swear my mom must be paying you,” Dominic said, glaring at him.

Greg laughed. “She paid me twenty dollars to say that. Okay, I’m being serious now,” he said when Dominic’s expression darkened. “I need your expertise.”

“I’ve been a detective, what? Only a few months longer than you?”

“It still makes you the senior detective.”

Dominic rolled his eyes. “All right, I’m here. Show me what you’ve got.”

They walked the half block to the location of the body. It was in front of a chain link fence that surrounded a designated water channel. The area was roughly the size of the property belonging to the houses on either side of it.

“Is this the primary crime scene?” Dominic asked.

“We don’t know, yet. There were no witnesses.”

“Who found the body?”

“A jogger. She almost tripped over him in the dark.”

Dominic crouched down. “Why is she out jogging in the dark?” he wondered aloud, not really expecting a reply. He looked up. The streetlights in front of the houses on either side of the channel were burnt out. “These two streetlights are out.”

Greg shrugged. “I don’t know what to tell you. They were out when I got here.”

“I would assume so. Is this how she found him or her?” Dominic asked. “Half laying in the street?”

“Yeah. That’s what she told me, anyway.” Greg crouched down on the other side.

“Have you called the ME?”

“I did. He said he’ll be here shortly. He’s probably waiting for the CSIs to finish their job first.”

“Have you touched anything?”

Greg shook his head.

“Did the jogger call 911?”

“Yes.”

He looked around. “Is she still here?”

“She’s in one of the cruisers.”

“Has she given a statement?”

“Not yet. I haven’t had a chance to talk to her. She was pretty hysterical when I got here but I can’t hear her crying now so she seems to have calmed down some.”

Dominic nodded. “Give me a few minutes and we’ll talk to her.”

He took the ever-present notebook and pen out of his pocket and flipped it open to a blank page. He noted the day, date, time, and weather conditions at the top, then sketched the crime scene. When he was satisfied that he had captured all the details, he rose to his feet. Greg did the same.

They both turned at the sound of footsteps. Herbert Richardson, Assistant Chief Medical Investigator in the Woodland Park Coroner’s Office stopped beside them and looked down at the body.

“What have we got here?” he asked.

“We’re not sure,” Dominic said.

“Your body is halfway in the street,” Richardson pointed out.

“Yes, it is. And before you ask, no, I don’t know why.”

“Maybe he collapsed that way,” Greg offered.

Richardson glanced at Greg and arched a brow. “Halfway in the street?”

“It could happen.”

“Have you taken any pictures?” Dominic asked Greg.

“No.”

“Will you take pictures?” he asked, sighing.

“All you had to do was ask,” Greg pointed out. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and took some pictures of the body and of the surrounding area, then he walked across the street and took pictures from that direction.

Richardson chuckled. “I’m surprised you agreed to work with him again after last time. I thought he drove you nuts.”

“He did drive me nuts,” Dominic said. “I’m here because he called me and guilt-tripped me into showing up. I think he thinks we’re partners now.”

“Are you on-call?”

“No. He is.”

“I see. Okay, well, let’s see what we’ve got here,” Richardson said, pulling on a pair of gloves.

Dominic took notes while Richardson did his examination. It took about 15 minutes. Greg joined him as Richardson was finishing up.

Richardson stood and pulled off his gloves. “Male. Twenty-five to thirty-five. Maybe a little older. I’ll know more when

I get him back to the morgue. No specific cause of death, although it looks like he has a broken cheekbone and there are contusions, all on the right side of his face. Because of that and the way he’s lying, I’m thinking hit and run, but don’t quote me on that.”

Dominic inhaled a sharp breath. A hit and run with no witnesses was going to be hard to solve. Hopefully, the CSI crew got some good evidence.

“A hit and run,” Greg groaned. “If they hung around and did the right thing, they would be in much less trouble.”

“Maybe the driver panicked,” Dominic said.

“I’ll wait until the crew finishes up before releasing the body from the scene. Is that agreeable to you boys?” Richardson looked at Dominic, who nodded. Then he glanced over at Greg and got the same response.

“Are you going to do the autopsy tonight?” Dominic asked.

“Possibly. It depends on what’s going on when I get back to the office.”

“Let us know. We’ll be there.” To Greg, he said, “Let’s go interview the jogger. Then we’ll talk to the people who live here,” he pointed at the houses on either side of where the body was found, “and the rest of the neighbors.”

“Sounds good.”

The jogger was sitting in the police cruiser closest to the entrance to the street and as far away from the body as possible. Although she couldn’t really see much from where she was, she made sure to keep her face averted from the crime scene. Greg

was right; she seemed to have calmed down.

Dominic knocked on the window, opened the door and crouched down, putting himself close to eye level with her. She appeared to be fairly young, maybe early twenties. She was probably going to be traumatized after this. He introduced himself and handed her his card. Greg did the same.

"I need to take notes, if you don't mind..." He was going to take notes whether she minded or not but he decided to make her think she had a choice.

She nodded.

He wrote the time at the top of a blank page in his notebook. "Can I have your full name, date of birth, address, and phone number?"

She gave him her phone number, but rather than give him the rest, she pulled a small wallet out of a pocket on the side of her pants and handed him her driver's license.

Olivia Louise Adamson. She lived a couple of streets over.

"Did you hear anything or see anything as you were jogging?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Did you hear anything earlier?"

She thought about it for a moment. "I heard two pops, and then what might have been glass shattering. Then, I heard a car speeding down the street, but I couldn't tell where it was coming from."

"Pops?" Dominic asked, his interest piqued. "Like gunshots?"

"Maybe," she said, frowning. "I'm not sure."

"Was it dark out at that time?"

"Yes."

"How long after that did you go jogging?"

"Half hour, maybe," she said, shrugging.

He was trying to put together a timeline. He would check with dispatch to find out what time the call came in to 911 for the exact time.

"How long had you been jogging before you found the victim?"

"Fifteen minutes or so."

"And how long ago did you make the call to 911?"

"I don't remember. Less than an hour ago, I think, but more than half an hour ago."

He looked at his watch. It was 6:25 p.m. So, she placed the call sometime between approximately 5:25 and 5:55 p.m. She started jogging at about 5:10 to 5:45 p.m. Which means she heard the car at 4:15 to 4:45 p.m. At least that gave them something to go on when they started questioning the neighbors.

He finished up his questioning, then offered to have one of the police officers walk her home.

"Oh, yes. Please." She put her hand on his arm. "Thank you. I'm a bit nervous about walking alone."

Calling over one of the officers standing near his car, Dominic asked him to walk Ms. Adamson home.

"If you think of any details you might have forgotten," he told her, "you can call either one of us using the numbers listed on our cards."

She nodded as she walked away with the officer.

"What do you think?" Greg asked.

"I think that it's not really dark out at

4:15 p.m., so I'm leaning more towards 4:45 p.m. for the time she heard the car speeding down the street." He looked up at the two streetlights closest to the crime scene. Had the location of the body been selected because the dark could hide the murderer's activities or was it just a coincidence? Dominic didn't really believe in coincidences.

"Hey, Detectives."

Dominic and Greg turned toward the CSI calling out to them.

"We found something interesting."

The detectives walked over to where Jack Potter was standing near the streetlight to their left. He flashed a light on the grass under the pole. Something glittered in the beam.

"What is it?" Greg asked.

Dominic reached for the man's flashlight. He shined the light onto the grass and crouched down for a closer look.

"What is it?" Greg repeated.

"Shards of glass," Dominic said. He looked up, shining the light up the pole to where the glass dome should have been. It wasn't there. The jagged edges of where it had been were clearly visible. They checked the other streetlight, just to be sure, and found the same damage. "She heard shattering glass," he pointed out.

"Who?" asked Jack.

"The jogger who found the body. Do me a favor."

"Sure."

"Look for bullet casings."

