

# **Death of An Intern**

A Laura Wolfe Novel

**By Keith M Donaldson**

## **SYNOPSIS**

Laura Wolfe, a tenacious beat reporter for The Washington Star, tracks a D.C. serial killer who butchers pregnant women and steals their fetuses, dumping the bodies in an obscure part of the city naked and with no identification. When Laura is shown the body of victim number two, she recognizes her as someone named Janet who she had met at a reception for the Vice President of the United States.

The victim is quickly identified as Janet Rausch and Laura begins digging into her background. When the public Janet does not jibe with the private one, Laura begins to question whether there may not have been more to Janet's death than being a serial killing victim. The mounting evidence Laura accumulates stimulates her inquisitive mind into believing Janet's murder was planned. The only one to believe that. Her startling revelation confounds both her lawyer husband and her best friend Max Walsh, Captain of Homicide for the Washington MPD. She persists anyway and goes from the dirty back streets of the nation's capital, to the Virginia suburbs, and into the polished halls of political Washington, as the public is terrorized by a third murder very much like the previous two.

Laura Wolfe, a tenacious beat reporter for the *Washington Star*, tracks a serial killer who butchers pregnant women, steals their fetuses, and leaves them with no ID. When the police show Laura one victim's body, she recognizes Janet Rausch, an intern from the US. Vice President's office.

The mounting evidence leads Laura to believe that Janet's murder was planned. Laura's startling revelations take her from the dirty back streets of the nation's capital to the polished halls of political Washington, as the public becomes more terrorized by each horrifying murder.

# 1

## Second Street, NE

It was a rainy April night in the nation's capital, with wind gusts turning umbrellas inside out, tearing them from frustrated hands. The torrents blurred the nighttime beauty of monumental Washington.

On 2nd Street, NE, within close proximity to the brightly lighted Capitol dome, there were few lights. This was not the part of town where spotlights lit buildings, unless it was for a police search. Tightly drawn curtains and boarded up windows prevented inside light from getting out. The back streets were dark and invisible in the shadow of the Federal enclave, the business areas, and tourist hives.

It was the perfect place.

In a corner house, a clinic for unwed mothers-to-be quietly attended to its clients' needs. Like the once lovely house, which practically had the Washington Mall for its front yard, 2nd Street had seen better days.

This night, a stranger sat parked in a black cargo van a half block from the clinic. The torrential rain obscured any view inside, however, the hooded person sat passively behind the wheel, attention fixed on the clinic's front door. The van's radio went from soft rock to an announcer reading headlines and a weather forecast. The weather would improve - the rain would stop after midnight. Tomorrow would be a clear and sunny day in the low 70s. A beautiful day in a beautiful city.

Except for one person, the driver reflected.

The clinic's last class should be ending any minute and the women would flow out. Would one come toward the van? Would she be alone? Last night, the women had dispersed in all directions. Two went past where the van now sat. Either was ripe for selection, but last night had been for planning only. In addition, it hadn't been raining.

The stalker had done a complete survey of the neighborhood. There were no construction barriers obstructing the roads. No stores were along the escape route that the driver had selected. No clutter of cars. No stores to be robbed, or bringing the police. This was a quiet, rundown residential neighborhood.

A police scanner sat on the van's front seat and announced no local disturbances. Bad guys didn't go out on nights like this. Well, with certain exceptions. A gust of wind shook the van, as the rain kept beating down.

A light was reflected on the windshield - the clinic's porch light had come on. Women gathered under the small portico, turned up collars, pulled up hoods, tested umbrellas. Two walked down the half dozen steps to the sidewalk and turned in the opposite direction. A third stopped at the bottom to say a final goodbye. She turned, bent her head down under her small, virtually useless, umbrella to ward off the relentless bombardment, and walked quickly away toward the van.

No one followed her.

The approaching woman was alone. Stealthily the stalker moved through the van to the rear, opened its doors, and then stepped out carrying a large box, placing it in the middle of the sidewalk. Its positioning would force the oncoming woman to step closer to the van. Hidden by the van's doors, the driver waited. The pedestrian nearly stumbled over the box. She adjusted, then did as expected. She sidestepped it to the outside, all the while looking down, stepping carefully to avoid falling off the curb into the stream of water flowing down the gutter.

The stalker was swift. Strong gloved hands grabbed the woman. In one was a chloroformed rag, which the attacker held against the struggling woman's mouth, instantly preventing a scream. She dropped everything in an attempt to free herself, but the anesthetic quickly reduced her to a crumpled mass. Her deflated body was shoved into the van. The mugger climbed in, quickly pulling the doors closed.

Moving with mad purpose, the assailant strapped the woman down and gave her another dose of chloroform, just to play it safe, even though the ride would be short. Up - ahead, the clinic's light went off. The street was again dark and lifeless. All to the kidnapper's liking.

The driver eased the van eased out of its snug harbor, and drove past the clinic, leaving 2nd Street in its wake, the woman's bag and umbrella in the gutter.

The van was soon on K Street, NW, heading west through the central business district, and then under the Whitehurst Freeway to Georgetown's waterfront. A black cargo van fit in well here with the usual Mercedes or Lexus; a very eclectic place Georgetown. The parking lots were mostly empty, unlike the norm. People were not idly out on this unpleasant weeknight. No drunks to contend with. The van passed Wisconsin Avenue, rumbled over old trolley tracks and potholes, and moved under Frances Scott Key Bridge.

Practically everything in Washington was named for somebody, and then later renamed to accommodate a new Saint, while discarding the old one. There'd be no ceremonial naming for the woman in the rear of the van. Maybe a moment, a brief news item, but then she, too, would become old news. The van glided into a lot occupied by commercial vehicles and parked. Those vehicles would not see their drivers until the pre-dawn hours.

There was plenty of time. The abductor clamored eagerly into the back.

## 2

“Your name?” The receptionist, dressed like a nurse, asked me.

“Laura Wolfe. I called—”

“Sign in here,” the woman’s dispassionate voice interrupted, “and have a seat. The doctor will see you shortly.”

My mind was actively collecting clever retorts, but I chose dutifully to sign in. I went to a chair farthest from the door.

I felt a wave of apprehension, as my mind flashed over what I needed to do, or should have done. I’d left a message for Mary, my motherly news assistant. She’d worry and call my husband, Jerry. I didn’t want that. I rationalized why I didn’t need to be here, since I’d already killed the rabbit. I quickly corrected that thinking. I had decided this story would not leave my lips without official corroboration from two respectable sources – i.e., a second opinion.

I wanted to pace, but the other women in their different phases of pregnancy sat calmly. Maybe I should have listened to the radio or read the paper as I usually do before leaving our apartment. Even though I didn’t have a story in today’s edition, I liked reading my peers’ stories.

I felt frumpy. I looked at my feet to be sure I wasn’t wearing unmatched shoes.

I had set my alarm a half hour early, showered quickly, and bypassed having my specially brewed coffee. I wanted to slip out quietly before Jerry got curious and started asking questions. That’s the trouble with being a person of habits and having a very observant husband.

I looked up as a woman, who looked like she was about to deliver at any minute, -came in. She talked with the receptionist and took a seat.

Jerry was no longer a criminal trial lawyer, but he still had a discerning eye. Fortunately, after three years of marriage, he was used to my flakiness. I checked my watch. Come on. I need to get this over with and get to work.

I wondered how Jerry felt when his two sons, Scott and Colin, now into their adolescent bravura, were born. Having a child together was important to us, but we had waited to allow us - me - time to adjust to married life. Although this was my first marriage, I had not been celibate. However, no relationship went six months, and at no time did I do the live in thing.

I exhaled a little too loudly and drew the attention of one waiting room partner. “It’s the waiting.” I gave her a weak smile. She smiled back, nodding. Enough for conviviality, I wanted—just then a woman came out of the inner office. Interrupting my thoughts. Maybe I’d be next.

Before leaving home earlier, I’d given Jerry a quick peck goodbye, while he was reading *The Star’s* Metro section. He always checked the paper to see if any of his clients were in the news. However, I knew he also looked for a *Laura Wolfe contributed to* attribution. He never had to search for my byline - he always knew minutes after I did.

Actually, I’m not that impulsive any more. I’ve been a beat reporter with *The Star* four years and have a *page-one* story to my credit, which got me some good attention. However, the truth be known, I enjoy the crime beat. That’s how I met Max Walsh, MPD’s Captain of Homicide, who, in a way, is responsible for my being in this waiting room. He and Jerry had been friends before I came to Washington.

Over time, Max and I became respectful of each other's work, and even had an occasional lunch together. Although most of my colleagues found the hulking African-American, difficult, I found he had a softness about him. He was around 50 and a native Washingtonian.

The turning point in my life came when he called about a very good friend he'd like me to meet. From the minute I met Jerry, I knew he was for me. We married eight months later.

I looked at my watch. I picked up a magazine and flipped through the pages.

The inner door opened. "Ms. Wolfe, the doctor will see you now."

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"You're fine physically, but you'll have to take some extra precautions."

"What's wrong? What did you—?"

"There's nothing wrong, beyond what we already knew."

What was he saying? Was he covering up something?

"...this may have been why you had trouble conceiving," he was saying.

"I understand." I nodded. "Since I have conceived, isn't that behind us?"

"Everything is fine," he said reassuringly. "If you take good care of yourself, you won't have any worries."

That was it? The appointment was over? I'd seen that attitude many times in too many interviews not to catch it in a doctor's office. No. He was talking again.

"...so, I recommend you cut back a little."

"Quit my job!" This was an unexpected consequence of being pregnant. That was also a bad reaction.

"No. Adjust your life style; get more rest," he said unperturbed.

What? A siesta after lunch? My mind was on fire. He didn't know the newspaper business. There were deadlines every minute. "I will - I mean, I always take care of myself."

"Diet is important. Stretching, light aerobics are good. Just be sensible with everything."

That made me feel more at ease. "Thank you."

I'll have to read up—get a load of books. I'll get Jerry to monitor my every move. He was great at red flagging. I can—will do this.

"Call if you have questions. Stop out front, Helen will have a prescription for—"

"There is something wrong!" I blurted.

"Oh, no, nothing like that. It's for anxiety. You can break a tablet in half, even, take the edge off a little."

He gestured as if I'd know, and I nodded as if I did.

"They come in handy. I occasionally take one. Taken sparingly they will have no effect on your driving, or motor skills. Oh, and no alcohol, or caffeine," he admonished.