

THE PERFECT SIN

Mr. & Mrs. Smith meet The DaVinci Code

Introducing Charlie ...

Based in her hometown of Albuquerque in Northern New Mexico, **CHARLOTTE (CHARLIE) PARKER** has been eking out a good living as a private investigator. Building her agency since she graduated from college almost twelve years ago, her cases have consisted mainly of divorce, (estranged and bitter spouses, looking for proof in court of major transgressions), and insurance fraud. However, she has built a reputation on her thoroughness, attention to detail, and an insatiable appetite in unraveling the inconsistencies of human nature. With the help of her brother, **RON PARKER**, a highly regarded homicide detective, Charlie has learned her craft well, and often uses Ron in discovering information that would normally be difficult to obtain.

Charlie and Ron's parents were killed in an auto accident just after Charlie graduated high school, and Charlie has lived in the family home ever since. Her home is an old Victorian house on the edge of town, where she converted several rooms on the main floor as her agency's unique offices. Her brother Ron, his wife, and their three boys live only a few miles away.

Just passing her thirty-third birthday, with shoulder-length auburn hair, soft hazel eyes, and supple, long legs, Charlie is engaging, appealing, and nobody's fool. She is incredibly smart, and athletic, though has never considered herself overly brave, and has a sense of humor that often borders on self-effacing. With her lack of pretension, and endearing smile, she is a woman other women feel comfortable being around. But, dressed to kill, she can turn every male's head at any gathering. Her style is easy going, and she is most comfortable wearing jeans and little makeup.

Living in Albuquerque her whole life, Charlie's idea of a good time is heading to her favorite restaurant – always with her big red mutt, **RUSTY**, by her side – for the delights of a steaming plate of green chili chicken enchiladas, and cool margaritas. The owners have watched her grow up – and only for Charlie do they let her sneak Rusty into a dark corner.

It was only six months ago that she met her husband, **DRAKE LANGSTON**, thanks to her brother Ron. Drake is just over seven years Charlie's senior — and an incredibly handsome man with a touch of gray trimming his dark hair at the temples. Very unassuming, confident, and comfortable in his own skin, he is Charlie's match in every way.

After twenty years on the force, Drake recently retired from the Albuquerque police department as a search and rescue helicopter pilot to open his own business. Saving for years to buy his own chopper, Drake had just started up his new venture when Ron called him to help his sister with some aerial reconnaissance she needed on a case. From the moment Drake and Charlie met, sparks ignited. What was once unimaginable to both soon became an accelerating spiral of attraction and connection at its deepest level.

In fact, the only thing that matches their incredible bond of love and respect is their shared love of the outdoors — and anything adventurous. With Drake's support, Charlie has just completed her final lesson in their helicopter, and now has her license.

One short year ago, neither believed that they needed anyone else to be fulfilled — now; they can't imagine life without the other. Little do they know that the strength of their love together will soon be tested to the limit.

By the end of Act I it is December 1st, and a perfect, quiet wedding is taking place in Hawaii. Charlie and Drake are getting married on a hilltop at sunset, with palm trees and a tranquil ocean as the perfect background.

At that exact moment, in Albuquerque, New Mexico, a young and charismatic priest is being brutally murder inside the town's most prominent Catholic Church.

Unbeknownst to anyone, in just a short while, these two events will collide – in the winter playground of the rich and famous, Taos, New Mexico.

The characters in this story are many, and diverse ... ranging from high society to those at the very center of the Catholic Church. All of this is woven into the rich tapestry of the ruggedly beautiful Taos landscape. And the newly united soul-mates, Charlie and Drake, are about to find out that their bond will grow stronger the more they are pulled apart.



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TELEPLAY OUTLINE

ACT 1

LATE FALL:

- Shot of Vatican - camera closes in to reveal a priest, **FATHER RAMON ROMERO**, (age 33) talking with a man, dressed in a business suit, partially hidden by the shadows. As they talk, the priest angrily shakes his head "no!" We then see the man showing Father Ramon something (like a newspaper article) that clearly disturbs the priest.
- We cut to inside one of the "inner sanctums" of the Vatican. A heavy door is being opened and hands are reaching in to remove three crosses - camera pulls out to reveal that the person is Father Ramon. He looks around as he puts the items under his robes.

3RD WEEK IN NOVEMBER:

- AIRPORT entering the USA: Father Ramon is coming through customs. A heavy silver cross hangs around his neck. He tells the customs inspector that he has a few other personal artifacts in his carry-on case. The inspector smiles and lets him through.

EST SHOT: ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

EST. SHOT: An old Victorian home on the outskirts of Albuquerque.

This is the office of "Charlie Parker Investigations."

CUT TO:

CHARLIE PARKER is running through the main reception area towards her well-decorated and spacious office to answer the phone. Turning the corner too quickly, she

trips on a small area rug covering the hardwood floor just inside her office. We see an arm reach out to save her ... it is **DRAKE LANGSTON**, who is already answering the phone:

- A man named **ELOY ROMERO** representing the Taos Ski Association is calling to offer Drake the opportunity to use his helicopter during the Christmas holiday. He will ferry the wealthy guests to the top of the most unreachable mountains for heli-skiing.
- Since they are to be married in Hawaii next week, on December 1st – a mere two weeks before they need to be Taos - our couple agree that this opportunity can definitely serve as a fantastic honeymoon.

EST. SHOT: TAOS, NEW MEXICO

CUT TO:

- Ramon drives up to mother's home in Taos - is greeted with great warmth by his sister, **MARIA ROMERO CONNOR**.

DISOLVE TO:

- Maria and Ramon are at a rooftop cafe in downtown Taos.

Across the street below — coming out of the art gallery — they see Maria's husband, **MICHAEL CONNOR** with the Taos Art Gallery owner, **DAPHNE DUMONT**, and the same man we saw talking to Ramon at the Vatican ... **MARTIN JOUGRESON**, an international art thief.

- Maria indicates that Michael has several "business" meetings with Daphne - who owns the art gallery. Ramon does not tell his sister that he recognizes the other man.

But he does suggest that Maria not tell Michael that Ramon returned a week early and that they went to lunch. Ramon states that he will call Michael next week. Maria assumes that her brother is being kind with her.

- As they are finishing lunch, Ramon tells Maria that he has decided not to spend the night at their mother's home. All he says is that he has some "unfinished" business to attend to.

- *Early evening - same day:*

Father Ramon is entering a very old Catholic Church in Taos, beautifully lit for Christmas.

CUT TO:

Father Ramon is sitting in a small office with many books and warm fire glowing. Behind the desk is an older priest, **FATHER FITZSIMONS** looking kindly at Ramon ... Ramon tells the priest that what he has to say may end his career in the priesthood — but that he's finally willing to take that chance.

ONE WEEK LATER - DECEMBER 1ST:

- Early morning - Hawaii - top of a mountain (Round Top).

A helicopter is landing at a clearing that is busily being prepared for a wedding. With all the activity happening, we focus on **RON PARKER**. He is waiting as the pilot – his sister, Charlie Parker - and her passenger, Drake Langston, get out of the chopper. Charlie has just received her helicopter license, and this is the first time she has flown Drake ... which provides a great source of teasing for both Drake and Ron.

At sunset tonight Charlie and Drake will be married on this romantic spot – a perfect plateau in paradise.

Ron is Charlie's older and very protective brother, and a homicide detective with the Albuquerque Police Department. It is because of Ron that Drake and Charlie met. He introduced them a little less than a year ago - just after Drake had retired from the Albuquerque police department as a Search & Rescue helicopter pilot. Having just opened his own business, it is his chopper that Charlie just landed.

INTERCUT THE NEXT TWO SCENES:

- ALBUQUERQUE – NIGHT (10 P.M.)

INTERIOR, FATHER RAMON'S OFFICE:

We see Father Ramon being bludgeoned, but we can't see his assailant.

- HAWAII – SUNSET – EXTERIOR MOUNTAIN TOP:

We see Drake and Charlie in the final moment of the wedding ceremony ... ending with their kiss.

ACT 2

DECEMBER 19TH:

Taos Airport - small private airport at the base of the mountains.

Morning – light snow:

ELOY ROMERO is waiting outside as a jeep drives up, and a helicopter is landing. Charlie gets out of the jeep with her dog, **RUSTY**, as Drake lands, and gets out of the chopper. Eloy greets both of them — and we sense that there is a good connection between them all.

Eloy is an affable man in his late thirties, the top ski-instructor for the Taos Ski Association, and the person who originally contacted Drake about bringing his chopper to Taos. He has also been assigned to Drake to help with the clients and the heli-skiing.

The Ski Association has rented Eloy's family's cabin for Drake and Charlie to use for the next few weeks. Halfway up the mountain, the cabin is conveniently located between the airport and the ski lifts at the top of the mountain, and it hasn't been used in years. Eloy was pleased that the honeymooners could use the place over the holidays, and told them to be sure to make use the old family Christmas decorations stored in the attic.

Once the two jeeps drive up to the cabin in the woods, Eloy helps them get settled inside. They exchange all the pleasantries of getting to know one another, and before the fire in the massive fireplace starts to warm the room, they're feeling like friends. Eloy stays for dinner, and although he indicates that his family has recently suffered a tragedy, his mood and personality are both warm and outgoing.

Although it's dark out, it's still early when Eloy heads all the way down the mountain to the town of Taos, where he owns a condo. And, with the beauty and snow of this winter wonderland surrounding them, Charlie and Drake take this opportunity to start their honeymoon off properly.

THE NEXT DAY – DECEMBER 20TH:

Early the next morning - skies are clear and sunny. Charlie and Drake are "lounging" in bed — and we have time to see the warm, and often humorous, interaction between the two.

Suddenly there's violent knocking at the cabin door. When they rush to open the door, Eloy's sister Maria is standing there. She is a classy and attractive woman in her late 30's, dressed simply, but smart. She introduces herself, telling them that she is Eloy's older sister, and apologizes for appearing at their door unannounced. They can see that she's distraught, and encourage her to come inside.

Maria tells them that Eloy was arrested early this morning – and he has been booked on murder. Feeling that Charlie could help him, Eloy begged Maria to come and ask Charlie and Drake for their help in person. He understands that this might be uncomfortable for them, but he really feels that he's in a lot of trouble and he needs someone he can trust.

She goes on to tell them that her husband, Michael Connor - a family estate attorney - is already contacting a top criminal lawyer in Albuquerque ... where the murder took place. When Charlie asks who Eloy is accused of murdering, Maria replies, "Our brother ... a priest."

It's less than 45 minutes later when Charlie, Drake and Maria arrive at the Taos jail. However, before they can even get near the front door, they have to push themselves through a mob of reporters and cameras. This is now a very high profile case.

Once inside, they join Eloy, the Taos Sheriff, Steve (and the Romeros' cousin), Maria's husband Michael, and the chief homicide detective from Albuquerque (who we find out later is Charlie's brother Ron's boss) - along with a FBI agent.

Quickly, Charlie and Drake are brought up to date: Eloy and his brother, Ramon, had fought — over their wealthy mother's diminished health care — in the priest's new Albuquerque office the day he was murdered. Eloy never denied this when the authorities first talked to him right after his brother was murdered. Eloy claims it was late afternoon when he left his brother — which witnesses verify — and that he drove directly home to Taos. By then, it was evening, and he never left his condo until the next morning. And no ... he has no one who can confirm this.

However, now two weeks later, the homicide investigators have found the murder weapon in a forest on the outskirts of Albuquerque — a solid, heavy glass paperweight. Although it was apparently wiped clean, they were able to lift a partial fingerprint that belongs to Eloy.

Eloy will be kept in the Taos jail until the next day, when he will be transported and arraigned in Albuquerque. This wealthy ski destination is now getting a lot more attention than it wanted.

When Charlie and Drake leave the jail, Charlie drops Drake at the airport for his first client — a major young Hollywood star, **JASON KIRK** and his entourage.

While waiting for his client, Drake is doing a pre-flight — and a car pulls into the small airport. In the car is **SUSIE MONTGOMERY**, and her brother, **FRED MONTGOMERY**, who appear to be somewhere in their mid to late thirties. They flew in from Texas to Albuquerque, rented a car, and headed to their cousin's home in Taos for the holidays ... but somehow, they missed the turnoff for the town, and are now they are completely lost. After having a friendly conversation, Drake directs them back down to Taos, just as his clients show up in a stretch limo ... which definitely impresses the Montgomerys.

After dropping Drake off, Charlie immediately goes to the cabin, and calls her brother Ron, an Albuquerque homicide detective. She asks him why an FBI agent would be involved in this case — since the FBI agent was less than forthcoming when Drake asked him. This is the information she gets from Ron:

- It appears that the FBI was contacted by Interpol to "observe" Father Ramon because Father Ramon was one of several people — including priests — who had been at the Vatican when some valuable artifacts had been stolen. When the Vatican found the artifacts missing they contacted Interpol.
- Interpol is watching all "insiders" ... those who had special access to the artifacts and who have since left — and are now in several countries throughout the world. This is not a crime the worldwide press yet knows about, and if the artifacts had not been chosen recently to go on "tour," the theft might have gone undetected for years.
- Father Ramon's murder has now become a red flag to the FBI — and they assume that Eloy has something to do with the Vatican theft as well. The stolen artifacts are a strong motive for Eloy killing his brother in the eyes of the District Attorney.

Aware that her brother Ron is now a part of the investigation team for the Ramon murder in Albuquerque, Charlie doesn't press further. For the first time in her professional relationship with Ron, she realizes that there are answers she's going to have to find elsewhere. She surprises herself when she reflects that the opposite is also true: there very well may be things she can't afford Ron to know ... yet. It's definitely going to be a new dimension to their close relationship.

Drake arrives home late in the afternoon — and Rusty does his self-appointed duty by greeting his new master with great affection. Charlie hands her husband a hot-toddy, sits him on the overstuffed couch by the fire, and tells him about Ron's conversation.

Next, it's Drake's turn. He tells her that they've been invited to a reception for a new young artist at the "elite" Taos Art Gallery the next night. When Drake tells her who

invited them - his Hollywood star client - Charlie flips. She's not a star-gazer, but she loves that actor. They agree to go.

When their discussion turns back to Eloy, Charlie comments, “Who could not like Eloy? He’s a carefree fellow who certainly doesn't appear to have the personality of a murderer.” Drake agrees, but states that he’s been in law enforcement work too long to be surprised by anything.

They both acknowledge that they really have too little information. Having no where else to start, they decide to visit the family matriarch, **CONSUELO ROMERO** at her home – even through she is in an advanced state of dementia. Since Maria has come up from Albuquerque to stay with her mother for the holidays, it will also be an opportunity to talk to her about her brother Eloy.

Sharing some warm and wonderful moments together, Drake and Charlie soon move to the fur rug in front of the fire. Then, after agreeing that they must cut down their Christmas tree soon, little else is said ... for a long, long time.

DECEMBER 21ST:

The next night, Charlie and Drake arrive late at the art gallery – it’s snowing, and it takes awhile to get down the mountain. They just happen to arrive – fashionably late – at the same time as Jason Kirk, the Hollywood star and host for the evening. After greeting outside in the snow, they enter the festively lit gallery together.

Of course, “arriving with the host” puts Charlie and Drake in a very favorable light with the cream of Taos society that’s crowded into this elite space. Everyone believes that Charlie and Drake are a part of the star’s entourage — and our handsome couple soon gets to bask in the same lavish attention given the Kirk party.

HOPE MONTGOMERY, a beautiful 45-year-old specimen of perfection, and one of the wealthiest women in the world, approaches them immediately and introduces herself. Then, working their way through the crowd, Charlie meets a very grounded, and rather fun native of Taos, **MAGGIE COLLINS**.

With striking red hair and a matching personality, Maggie has lived in Taos all of her 42 years. Her parents helped put this place on the map – but raised Maggie with no illusions as to what’s important in life. With a great gift of the comic, Maggie offers Charlie a wonderful run-down of the town’s main players.

Meanwhile, the two people he helped at the airport approach Drake. A beautiful soft-spoken blonde, Susie, and her brother, Fred Montgomery re-introduce themselves — and laughingly admit that their cousin Hope’s home was where they were heading when they ended up lost on the mountain. These appear to be people Drake can enjoy, and they spend their time together over several drinks ... since getting to the large buffet table seems a daunting task to Drake. When Charlie approaches the threesome, Susie and Fred already know quite a bit about the couple.

It’s after midnight when Hope’s limo turns into the gated driveway of her hacienda. Once inside, Hope immediately excuses herself for bed, leaving her cousins, Fred and Susie, comfortably sitting next to the exquisitely decorated 20 foot Christmas tree in the massive living room. Fred pours his sister and he a drink, and when he’s sure that Hope is nowhere around, he asks Susie what she thinks of Charlie and Drake. “I like them a lot – they’re smart, knowledgeable, and unpretentious. I’m comfortable with them. Fred replies, “Me too. I think they could be very helpful. Why don’t I call them in the morning?”

Susie and Fred Montgomery have a very interesting business proposition to discuss with our protagonists. Even before they know it, Charlie and Drake’s “work/honeymoon” is going to make for a very busy dance card.

ACT 3

DECEMBER 22ND:

In spite of the long and festive evening the night before, Charlie and Drake realize they must find something to help them in Eloy's case. So, they're up early and arrive at the Romero's family estate in Taos about 9 a.m.

Consuelo Romero is the mother of Ramon, Maria and Eloy — and was once a very strong matriarch. A religious woman whose husband died when her youngest, Eloy, was ten, she continued to increase the family holdings through very shrewd financial investments. It was only three years ago that she was diagnosed with dementia — but during this time she has declined rapidly. Her health is now failing, and she has around the clock nurses living in the house.

However, when Ramon arrived home from two years at the Vatican, and saw how much his mother had deteriorated, he felt that one of her children should be living with her ... the obvious one being his younger brother. Ramon then asked Eloy to give up his work, and condo, and live with their mother full time. This, of course, is what they were arguing about the day that Father Ramon was bludgeoned to death,

Maria is now staying at her mother's home over the holidays, and welcomes Charlie and Drake there. She explains that her husband, Michael Connor, comes up to Taos whenever he can leave his law practice in Albuquerque. However, because of Eloy's incarceration — and imminent transfer to the Albuquerque prison, Michael is there this morning; but leaves the house shortly for a "business meeting."

Charlie, Drake, and Maria spend about 45 minutes talking to Consuelo in her bedroom — which turns out to be quite an experience. Later, Maria confirms that Ramon was not always the saint her mother thought he was ... nor was Eloy the good-for-nothing that Ramon and her mother pictured him as. In fact, as Maria tells them, it is Eloy who spends many hours next to his mother's bed — even when she can't acknowledge him.

Hoping to find some small clue that will help them understand why Ramon was killed, they ask if Ramon left any possessions at the house they can go examine. Maria tells them that when he went to the Vatican, Ramon left a large chest of things up in the attic, and that they were welcomed to go through it. There in the chest they find several journals, and Maria sees no reason why they can't take them home to their cabin to read. After all – he was a priest ... what is there to hide?

Immediately after their meeting at the Romero estate, Drake and Charlie meet Fred and Susie for an early lunch at a fashionable Taos restaurant. Fred wastes no time in telling them why he and his sister need their help. He tells them that they believe that Hope is an impostor – and want Drake and Charlie to investigate based on these facts:

1. Two years ago, the real Hope was living in Rhode Island. When her long-estranged father in San Francisco was dying, and it was apparent she would inherit everything, Hope wrote a letter to her cousins (which they show to Drake and Charlie). She felt that her uncle, their father, was unfairly left out of the patent that made her father a billionaire. She was going to rectify that. Also, Hope wrote that she had a very old, very beautiful, and very expensive broach – something her father had given her as a little girl. It belonged to their mutual great grandmother ... and she wanted Susie and Fred to have it.
2. They have waited two years with no word from Hope – and most of their phone messages have gone unanswered. They finally pushed a visit on her when they found out that she would be spending some extended time at her home in Taos over the holidays. (This) Hope now denies that they have any right to the inheritance, and tells them that she lost the broach.
3. Desperate, Fred and Susie went through Hope's things when she was out the day after they arrived. Buried way in the back of a very deep walk-in closet, they found a scrapbook (at least 20 years old) of a B-rated actress who had appeared on Broadway and in a few small films. The actress – whose stage name was

MONICA FRANCES – could look like a younger version of the existing Hope – but it’s hard to tell. They give the scrapbook to Drake and Charlie to take home.

Although at this point Drake and Charlie really don’t know whom to believe, Drake tells Fred to get him something with Hope’s fingerprints on it. After that, they’ll tell them if there is a case to pursue. As Drake and Charlie discuss later, as genuine as these two seem, they could just be very pleasant gold-diggers.

However, before heading to the airport for a client, Drake finds time to call Ron about the well-known Hope Montgomery — and the possibility that this Hope and Monica Frances, the actress, are one and the same person.

It’s still early afternoon when Drake and Charlie part, which gives Charlie an opportunity to visit Taos’ Catholic Church, where Ramon was assigned when he first became a priest.

Here Charlie meets the older senior priest, whom she takes to instantly. **FATHER FITZSIMONS** is a warm and affable man in his early 80’s; tall with a tiny wisp of gray hair almost perched on top of his head. He confirms that Ramon displayed signs of brilliance early on as a new priest - and yes, he advanced quickly in the church hierarchy. The Father is deeply saddened by Ramon’s death ... only stating that he was a young man who had much to bear. The senior priest is not at a liberty to discuss anything in detail; but tells Charlie that he wants to know the truth about Ramon’s death. He encourages Charlie to keep in contact – and while he can’t be specific without breaking his vows, he tells her that he’s always here to answer any questions he can.

By late afternoon, Drake and Charlie meet at home. They discuss what they know about both cases — along with their doubts. A phone call from Ron provides another dead-end: The actress’ stage name, Monica Frances, was not her real name. Thus, - no social security number or anything that might link the two women. Also, Monica Frances basically dropped off the face of the earth several years ago. All they can do now is wait for the fingerprints.

Putting all this behind them for a couple of hours, Drake, Charlie, and Rusty head out into the forest to find their perfect “first” Christmas tree.

After they cut down the tree and bring it in, Drake starts a roaring fire, pours wine for the two of them — and settles down ... with Rusty sprawled across his legs ... to read Ramon’s journals.

Meanwhile, Charlie goes through the huge box of Christmas ornaments that Drake found in the attic. Since Eloy’s family hadn’t been up here at Christmas for over ten years to use the decorations, Charlie was fascinated how little dust appeared on the top of the box. Drake just smiles at her observation, and settles down to read.

It’s just about 45 minutes later that Charlie is getting to the bottom of the Christmas box. At the bottom, under several layers of cloth and tissue, Charlie finds three solid, silver crosses with what appears to be intricate hand-carved details. With their heavy weight, and size much larger than anything one would put on a tree, they appear to be very valuable — and very misplaced in this box. Charlie instantly remembers why the FBI agent was so interested in Ramon’s death.

At about the same moment, Drake – still sitting nearby – finds a letter tucked into one of Ramon’s journals that states on the envelope: “To be opened upon my death:” He has just finished reading it when Charlie reveals her discovery to him.

A few minutes later, after examining the artifacts, Drake tells her, “I think I may have a connecting link” – and he reads her the letter:

It appears to be a confession to God, and a plea for forgiveness and absolution. It talks about the death of the woman Ramon loved deeply – and about the “fruits of our love.” From the letter they discover that Ramon and a young girl met when he was a new priest in Taos, when she was home from college during the summer before her senior year. And after reading it several times, the only conclusion that Charlie and Drake can

come to is that she died during an abortion that Ramon encouraged her to have – and that he was with her at the time the operation was done.

Only the ringing of the Charlie's cell phone shakes our couple out of the shock of their recent discoveries.

It's Ron. Eloy's alibi of leaving Albuquerque several hours before his brother's murder no longer holds up: Eloy and his car were identified on a video tape in an Albuquerque gas station only a few miles from the church ... *twenty minutes before Father Ramon was bludgeoned to death.*

Not only is the DA encouraged – but the FBI now believes that Eloy could well have been part of the Vatican thefts ... even though a thorough search of Eloy's – and his mother, Consuelo's - homes have turned up nothing.

After hanging up with Ron, Drake and Charlie realize that it's only going to take the FBI a short while longer to realize that there is one more Romero home to search – and that they're in it.

And, how innocent is their client? Or his dead brother?

All our newlyweds wanted to do was cut down their first Christmas tree and enjoy the evening.

Now, they'll spend the next several hours finding a safe hiding place for what they believe are some of the Vatican's most precious artifacts. In essence, making them possible accessories to murder after the fact.

ACT 4

DECEMBER 23RD:

Early the next morning, Charlie and Drake drive the hour to Albuquerque to meet with Eloy. Because Ramon was killed in this jurisdiction, Eloy has been transferred to the prison here. However, they specifically time it to arrive well before Michael (Eloy's brother-in-law), and Eloy's new criminal lawyer, **JOHN SHULTZ** — giving them some valuable time alone with their client.

As expected, Charlie's brother, Ron Parker, is now a part of the case in Albuquerque — but it is he who gives them a chance to talk to Eloy without police interference. Charlie and Drake are walking on thin ice ... they can't tell anyone about the artifacts, or of Ramon's love affair ... all of it only making it worse for Eloy. And, as of now, they're wondering if they have a client they can believe.

Eloy refuses to say where he was for the missing four hours between the time he left his brother's office at the church, and the time he was spotted in the gas station in Albuquerque ... when he was supposed to be back in Taos. His only response is that “you have to trust me.”

With a stern warning that what they are about to tell him should not be revealed to anyone yet - they tell him about the artifacts found in the Christmas decorations. Eloy is truly stunned. He can't believe that his brother would be a part of anything like that.

Even realizing how bad this may look for him, Eloy still will still not account for his missing time on the day of his brother's murder — and a heated discussion regarding his innocence builds tension between Drake and Eloy.

Although the conversation is ended when Michael and John arrive, the tension is palpable as the two lawyers walk into the locked meeting area set aside for prisoners. John Shultz makes it very clear that if there's something he should know – he'd better hear it right now. Again, Eloy says nothing.

During the open meeting, Charlie asks if money could appear as a motive for Eloy. Michael replies that each of the three children — his wife, Maria, and her brothers, Eloy and Ramon — were to divide the estate ... mainly large real estate holdings ... upon their mother's death. Killing Ramon for that would make no sense — Eloy was going to inherit plenty on his own ... especially considering Eloy's simple lifestyle. Michael further tells them that as an estate lawyer, and a close member of the family, he was appointed executor of the estate by his mother-in-law, Consuelo, several years ago.

After they leave the prison, Drake and Charlie take the opportunity of being in their hometown to check on their house. On the way over, they realize that what was most revealing at the meeting was what they had observed: They were already aware that Michael dressed expensively — as many junior law partners do. They had also noticed that the few times they had seen her, Maria's simple pieces of jewelry were expensive. However, she could have received them from her mother. More importantly, Drake recounts something to his bride that has been troubling him. Drake is an art lover — especially of sculptures. When he and Michael talked at the gallery reception, Michael mentioned that he possessed a rare sculpture that Drake now states, “is way out of reach for most folks.”

Rounding the corner to the quiet tree-lined neighborhood where Charlie's home is located, they see Charlie's surrogate **GRANDMOTHER ELSA** outside gardening. An avid gardener, and Charlie's long-time neighbor, Elsa is also watching over the renovation of Charlie's — and now Drake's - home. Several months ago, a fire had gutted the long-time family home that Charlie has lived in since her parents died, when she was a senior in high school.

Elsa, a strong Eurasian woman in her late 70's wearing her usual wide brimmed hat, hugs Charlie and Drake with a gusto that would make strong men faint — and then kneels down to greet the ever loving Rusty. As she stands up and smiles, she says, “Well, it's about time you two reported in — I'm getting tired of tracking you through the press!” When Charlie tries to make light of it all, Elsa responds with, “Oh for heavens sake child — what has it been ... a week since you went up there for you honeymoon? I figured you'd be into some mischief by now ... besides, I can get anything out of your brother!”

Late afternoon, on their trek back to the higher elevation of Taos, Charlie is looking at the house plans on her laptop computer while Drake drives – and Rusty sleeps. They speculate on the increase of land value the two decades few years – in spite of the economy — thus increasing the Romero estate. Charlie indicates that tomorrow morning she'll do a general background check on the internet regarding Eloy, Maria, and Michael – and their mother, Consuelo.

When their conversation turns to Ramon they ponder ...

“If” Ramon was truly a middle-man for the Vatican artifacts ... who was he going to turn them over to? If it were Eloy – why would he have told them to use the Christmas decorations - where the artifacts were hidden? Little seems to make sense ... so far.

NEXT DAY – CHRISTMAS EVE:

While Drake takes several clients up for heli-skiing, Charlie's chore is to spend all morning on the internet:

- She is researching to see if she can match the three silver crosses to anything in the Vatican – since she is convinced that these are the missing artifacts. In trying to protect Eloy until she has correct information, she knows that she can't turn to Taos' priest, Father FitzSimons, or her brother, Ron, for help.
- She makes a call to Maria to question her about the crosses. Maria responds that she's never seen any crosses —but maybe her mother bought them long ago.
- Charlie does a background check on Michael that confirms that he's definitely not from a family with a lot of money. Although, as he said, he did attend the same college as Ramon, and that they were roommates - which is how he met Maria.

- She finds that Michael's law firm – while well known in New Mexico - doesn't seem to support the lifestyle Michael appears to be living.
- She starts her search for the land that the Romero family owns.

By early afternoon Charlie calls **MAGGIE COLLINS** ... her delightfully level-headed friend who knows everything about Taos. Since meeting at the art gallery reception, Maggie has quickly become Charlie's new best friend in town.

In responding to a general inquiry about "religious artifacts," Maggie suggests that Charlie talk to the owner of the Taos Art Gallery, **DAPHNE DUMONT**. Giving her a little background, Maggie informs her that it is well known that Daphne, after graduating from college on the East Coast, studied art in Europe, and became an expert in art antiquities.

Since Charlie needs to desperately find a Christmas present for Drake, she takes this opportunity to head into town. Before going to the art gallery, she goes into the local jewelry store.

The scene opens as Charlie is finding the perfect gift: She decides on matching rings for Drake and her, since they had never found the time to buy a real set before their marriage ceremony in Hawaii. She feels that it's going to be the perfect gift for their first Christmas. And, as a tribute to their honeymoon, both rings will be designed by a local artist. She pays for the rings — and has the jeweler box and wrap a gift card saying that the rings will be designed to Drake and Charlie's specifications.

Just as she's about to leave the wealthy heiress, Hope Montgomery, comes in. She insists that Drake and Charlie come to the holiday brunch on December 26th that she's hosting at her hacienda. After finally accepting — just so she can get out of the store — Charlie realizes that it's too late to go to the art gallery, and she and Rusty head home.

It's a glorious Christmas Eve afternoon. Just as Charlie and Rusty drive up to the cabin, Drake is getting out of his jeep. The love, warmth, and connection between the two of them – as they begin to share their first Christmas together – is palpable.

The sun is just going down on Christmas Eve – and Charlie and Drake will have the opportunity to stay in their Honeymoon Hide-Away until they leave for Hope's brunch on December 26th, the day after Christmas.

This is an important time, as we see the dynamic relationship unfold between this very special couple.

DECEMBER 26TH – 11AM:

HOPE MONTGOMERY'S PARTY

At the brunch at Hope's hacienda on December 26th half of Taos is in attendance. It's a festive party with the 7000 square foot home decorated professionally, and adorned everywhere with elegant Christmas lights. The 16-foot table in the dining room is heavy with food; and a bar is set up in the living room between the 20-foot Christmas tree and the walk-in fireplace. Among the 75 guests, everyone we have already seen in the story is here. Among other things, we find out:

1. As Fred slips Drake something with Hope's fingerprints on it – he tells Drake that he and Susie will feel more comfortable moving to a hotel.
2. Her new friend, Maggie, tells Charlie that she is a close friend with the parents of the girl that Charlie has described: a local college girl who died during an abortion several years ago. Maggie states that the girl was a lovely young woman named **BRITNEY McCULLEN**. Maggie also reluctantly agrees to call the father, **LAWRENCE**, and tell him that Charlie would like to meet with he and his wife, **ELIZABETH**.
3. Charlie and Drake privately ask Maria what reason her brother Eloy would have for not revealing where he was for several hours after visiting his brother in Albuquerque the day he was murdered. Maria says nothing. Desperate,

Charlie asks if Eloy could be having an affair with a married woman. Maria is devoted to her brother, and all she can say is, “Trust me; Eloy is not having an affair with a married ... woman.”

4. Michael eyes Daphne Dumont, the owner of the art gallery ... and Maria notices, but says nothing.
5. As Michael moves closer to Charlie, he hears Maria ask Charlie if they found anything in Ramon’s journals – Charlie replies “nothing of significance.”
6. Later, Charlie asks Daphne if she knows anything about “religious artifacts” – to which Daphne replies that she’s not an expert; but she might know someone who is.

DECEMBER 26th – 4PM:

The snow is again beginning to fall when Charlie and Drake return to their cabin late that afternoon. As soon as they park the jeep, they can tell that something is terribly wrong. The door is ajar – and Rusty doesn’t seem to be anywhere around. They enter the cabin – which has the appearance of being ransacked. The crosses are still well hidden – but Rusty is missing. Panic and fear overtake them as they find him in the enclosed back porch... unconscious, with blood coming out of a bad wound in his head.

They race to get blankets wrapped around him — and finally into the Jeep. As they head down the mountain to the vet in Taos, the snow is falling so hard they can barely see the mountain road. *But, they valiantly push forward in an effort to save Rusty before he’s lost to them forever.*



ACT 5

NIGHT OF DEC. 26TH THROUGH EARLY MORNING OF 27TH:

- During an intense scene at vet hospital – the doctor is finally able to tell them that Rusty is critical, but she “believes” that he will pull through.

MID-MORNING – DECEMBER 27TH:

Ron Parker drives up to Taos from Albuquerque to discuss both cases (Father Ramon and the heiress, Hope) ... and arrives shortly after Charlie and Drake return to the cabin – both are physically drained and emotionally tired.

First order of business — the result of the lab’s test on the fingerprints that Drake got to Ron reveals the following:

Hope Montgomery is actually an impostor whose real name is Monica Frances Hamilton ... AKA Monica Frances, which she took as her stage name. Her fingerprints were on file because she worked at a low paying government job a few years ago ... thus providing her social security number as well. The last known employment they have for Monica was working for Hope Montgomery’s father, MONTY – starting two years before he died.

After hearing what happened to Rusty, Ron concludes the conversation with: “Charlie you’re basically in over your head ... and I know that there are things you’re not telling me.” When she says nothing, Ron looks to Drake. Drake can only respect Charlie’s decision, and tells Ron that there is nothing they know at the moment that can help the investigation. Frustrated, but not surprised, Ron can only respond with ... *“why do I not find it odd that only days after you’ve started your honeymoon, you’re already involved in two very strange cases.”*

After Ron leaves, Charlie and Drake set out in different directions to find some answers.

Since Maggie has informed her that the McCullen family is willing to meet with her, Charlie heads over to their home – with no idea how to handle the sensitive information she possesses about Father Ramon and Britney.

It is evident to Charlie that these parents are two people who have suffered greatly since their daughter's tragic death four years ago. The mother, **ELIZABETH MCCULLEN**, is a pleasant woman - although lacking in any internal spirit. And, the father, **LAWRENCE MCCULLEN**, is a courteous man, but with an undeniable bitterness brewing beneath the surface. Lawrence is a devout Catholic, and through their conversation Charlie realizes that he still has strong feelings of appreciation for the man who helped them with their daughter's passing – Father Ramon. They are definitely still shaken by his death. Charlie explains that her reason for visiting them is to get a better idea of who Father Ramon was. Charlie soon realizes that she has learned all she can from the McCullens; she thanks them for sharing their thoughts and leaves.

In the meantime, Drake is meeting with Fred and Susie at a restaurant just down the street from the hotel that Hope's cousins moved into that morning. Unbeknownst to them, Hope sees Drake with Fred – which for her, sends up a red flag. Disturbed, she rushes home. It only takes her a short while to discover that her scrapbook is missing.

By late afternoon Charlie is the first one to return to the cabin — which gives her some valuable time to work on the internet. Her search has been on-going the past few days, but today's work finally puts everything in prospective:

Michael ... through a series of shell companies ... has been a heavy investor in several venture capitalist operations that never panned out. She also discovers that several major pieces of property that were part of the Romero estate have been sold.

When Drake returns, information is shared regarding both cases over a well-needed glass of wine. As tired as they are, several important decisions are made regarding Hope:

- If their going to find out anything about the real Hope, they need to go to her home in Rhode Island – and check out her life before she became one of the wealthiest women in the country.

- Fred and Susie had given Drake an old newspaper article about Hope that was written just after Hope’s estranged father died in San Francisco:

The article reveals that the real Hope was a dressmaker, happily living a quiet life in the small town in Rhode Island where she had lived since she was a very young girl. Her mother, who had brought Hope to that Rhode Island town after she and her husband had gone through a bitter divorce, had died several years before the article was written.

Hope, having not seen her father since she was seven, had no idea why he left his estate to her. As far as she was concerned, she had no interest in seeing her famous father before he died – and no interest in his vast estate. The article mentions several of Hope’s wealthy society clients for whom she had been creating dresses for over two decades.

- Drake feels they can talk to some of Hope’s clients, and perhaps they will lead them to someone who knows her well ... surely she had to have at least one close friend.

Drake books a flight to Rhode Island for them both – to leave first thing in the morning. But for now – all Drake can do is hold Charlie. This is the first time in ten years that she’s been without her devoted friend, her golden lab, Rusty. The emotional toll has finally rendered her unable to do anything ... other than to dissolve in her husband’s arms. Thankfully, sleep comes quickly for both of them.

DECEMBER 28TH - MORNING

The two of them are awakened early with a call from Daphne – who has found someone who can advise them regarding religious artifacts. She’d like to set up a meeting for that afternoon at her art gallery. Charlie thanks her, but tells Daphne that she and Drake are going to be out of town for a least 24 hours – and maybe longer. They agree that Charlie will call Daphne as soon as she returns.

After that conversation, Charlie unexpectedly breaks down – telling Drake that she can't leave town while Rusty is still critical. It takes a while, but she finally convinces her husband to go without her.

Drake has just enough time to get to Albuquerque and catch the flight to Rhode Island. At least he has Hope's old address from the letter that she sent her cousins before she took over her father's estate. It's a small town, and his expectation is that there might be a long-standing neighbor who can lead him in the right direction. Wanting to get back to Charlie as soon as he can, Drake's hoping that lady luck will be on his side.

DECEMBER 28TH – LATE THAT NIGHT:

After carefully putting her gun under her pillow, Charlie had slipped into bed early. With the strain of the last 48 hours weighing heavy on her body, sleep came quickly.

Now, not aware of what sound awoke her – or what time it is — Charlie shoots straight up in bed. Within seconds she realizes that the sound she heard was a car turning into the driveway ... and now someone is breaking into the cabin. Charlie grabs her gun, and slips into the bathroom. She takes only a minute to call her brother Ron – on speed dial — and tell him that she needs help.

Carefully moving downstairs, the perpetrators hear her footsteps on the old cabin's stairs. A cat and mouse game is played in the dark. Although she does get a shot off, she only grazes one of the two thugs – which make them both very angry.

In the darkened cabin, they finally overtake Charlie. However, it's anger that rules her as they rough her up. She repeatedly refuses to tell them where the artifacts are. Holding on to consciousness, she tells them that police are on the way. After deciding that taking her with them would be a foolish move, they leave – but only after warning her that Rusty was just the first casualty in this very serious game.

Only one man did the talking, and it was not a voice that Charlie could recognize – in fact, he was talking through a very thick ski mask. As they leave, he kicks Charlie in the side as she’s spread out on the living room floor. His parting comment to her is, “You’re playing a dangerous game, and you’re way out of your league – think about it.” Within a few minutes the police arrive, lights blazing – but Charlie has passed out.

ACT 6

NEXT DAY – DAWN, DECEMBER 29th:

Breaking all speeding records, Ron had arrived from Albuquerque around midnight - just as the ambulance attendants were wheeling Charlie's gurney into the small Taos hospital.

Now, as dawn breaks, he helps her into his car so he can take her back to the cabin. In spite of strong protests from both the doctors and Ron, Charlie has insisted that her brother take her home before Drake returns from his quick trip back east.

Ron takes this moment to tell her, once again, that he doesn't think leaving the hospital is the wisest choice. Charlie responds quickly with, "The last thing I want my new husband to see is his wife ending up in a hospital the first time he leaves her — for God's sake, I'm a detective! Do you believe that Drake's ever going to trust me to do my job if I can't convince him that I'm really all right???" Ron knows when his sister is on a roll, and lets her whined down. He says nothing while he starts the car, and heads out on the highway. A few moments later Charlie quietly responds with, "I'm only lucky that they were pros — and that I feel much worse than I look."

Understandably, this very protective brother is really, really angry — and now he wants to know the whole truth from Charlie. On the ride up the mountain, she brings Ron up-to-date on everything that she and Drake have discovered.

After arriving at the cabin, we see where Charlie has cleverly hidden the crosses. Ron has only read a detailed description of them, but their weight, their beauty, and their relative simplicity leads Ron to believe that these are in fact the stolen Vatican artifacts.

Charlie is more than aware that her brother must now turn over this most recent information to both the Albuquerque police and the FBI.

However, Ron also has new information — a computerized picture of the actress, Monica Frances Hamilton, from the police lab. It clearly shows how — with a little cosmetic surgery — Monica could have transformed into the Hope they now know. Of course, they have to prove it.

On the other side of the country, the last 24 hours in Rhode Island have proved rewarding for Drake. Through a wealthy client, he does find Hope's only close friend — a much older woman named Judith Cross. She welcomes Drake, since she has been worried about Hope.

No real communication in the last two years — and a strange response to the one letter Judith sent Hope — brought Judith to a mixed conclusion. At first she assumed that Hope had been overwhelmed by her new found wealth. But experience had long taught Judith that people really didn't change that radically when they have lost or gained wealth.

Unbeknownst to anyone, Judith had been holding several boxes of Hope's most treasured possessions. Hope had told Judith that she was going to go to San Francisco for about a year to handle her father's estate — and then she was “going to get the hell back here where I belong!”

Drake is given permission to go through the boxes — where he finds the family brooch that the impostor told Fred and Susie was lost. With this discovery, Drake is able to make the 3pm EST flight back to New Mexico — but in his rush, he has no time to call Charlie and tell her that he's on his way home.

DECEMBER 29TH – EARLY EVENING:

Drake arrives home about 6pm PST — exhausted, and surprised to find his brother-in-law resting on the couch. It only takes Ron a few minutes to fill Drake in on Charlie, who is now napping upstairs. As he runs upstairs to their bedroom, Drake fights both the fear and anger that is gripping his body.

It's only an hour later that Ron, Charlie, and Drake are meeting with the FBI in a small room at the back of the Taos Catholic church. For obvious reasons, the FBI has taken a very low profile until now – so much so that no one is even aware that they are in Taos. After talking to Ron that afternoon, and having formulated a plan, the FBI requested this meeting. They feel that the only way to actually get to those at the heart of the art-theft ring is to set up a sting involving Charlie and Drake. The sting starts with Daphne, the owner of the art gallery. They know that she was the only one who knew that Charlie and Drake were going to be out of town – and therefore, the cabin supposedly empty.

For the first step in setting the trap ... Charlie calls Daphne to tell her that she now wants to meet with the person that Daphne believes can help Charlie identify the artifacts. The meeting is set for the day after tomorrow – December 31st, New Year's Eve Day.

NEXT DAY – DECEMBER 30th:

Ron and Drake have decided that the only way to find out more about the real Hope is to go to San Francisco – where she was last known to be. They fly out early, so they can first meet with the San Francisco police – who now have a search warrant for the estate of Hope's deceased father, Monty Montgomery.

After much discussion, Ron and Drake had finally convinced Charlie to ask Maggie to come over to the cabin for the day. And, although she was thoroughly checked-out by the FBI, all Maggie is told that Charlie had been attacked by an intruder, and that it most likely had to do with the Father Ramon case.

While Charlie was less than thrilled about Ron and Drake's protectiveness – especially since there is a plainclothes detective just down the hill in an unmarked car – she truly enjoys Maggie's company. Since her mother's death almost fourteen years ago, Charlie hasn't had time to form any real bonding relationships with other women – other than her Grandmother Elsa. Now, she eagerly looks forward to sharing time with Maggie – a woman she feels she had an instant rapport with the minute they met. Charlie can't help

but smile as she reflects to herself how much her life has changed – actually, how much she has changed – since she has been loved by Drake.

After lunch, Maggie lies down for a while, and Charlie takes this opportunity to make two more phone calls. As she takes her cell phone outside to sit in the sunny, but crisp cold air, she can't help but long for Rusty. On a day such as this, the world and all its inhabitants were under his domain! It's a little less than an hour later that Charlie has completed her calls to both Eloy's sister, Maria, and Father FitzSimons, the priest at the Catholic Church in Taos. It's amazing – Charlie reflects – the answers you get when you know what questions to ask.

As the day progresses, it is during a conversation with Maggie that Charlie finds out that Michael has been having a love affair with the gorgeous art gallery owner, Daphne – and that it's a pretty much accepted fact by most everyone in town. Maggie laughs in amazement at how much outsiders (which basically both Daphne and Michael are) underestimate the Taos grapevine. Obviously, neither of the two lovers realized how truly “small” a town in which they chose to have their tryst.

CUT TO SAN FRANCISCO – AFTERNOON OF DECEMBER 30TH:

After the SFPD, along with Ron and Drake searched Monte Montgomery's estate, it became apparent that something was missing. Here was the home, and work office, of one of the world's most important contributors to the development of the microchip. It once contained an extensive computer lab – but apparently, that room no longer exists. Not that the room has been remodeled into something else – the room physically is no longer there.

When the search warrant had been pulled, it had specifically included his lab office. Judging by a set of drawings the police pulled, which had been filed at city hall years before when Montgomery's architect was requesting a building permit for the lab ... what was once a room off the cellar, is now just a very large brick wall.

Almost an hour later, as Ron and Drake watch, the San Francisco Police Department uncovers the lab once well hidden by that false brick wall.

And in true Edgar Allen Poe fashion – the room does indeed contain a very decayed, and very dead body.

ACT 7

SAME DAY – DECEMBER 30TH

Evening - Taos:

The Taos Sheriff's department has been notified by the SFPD about Monica Francis Hamilton – the woman they have known for two years as Hope Montgomery.

That night, Hope is attending a major fundraiser in association with a visiting ballet company. At the evenings end, while crossing the massive lobby of the theatre, Hope sees the sheriff waiting quietly at the main door. His eyes are focused only on her. Her walk slows, and she acknowledges him with a rye smile. She realizes that what she's feared the most has become a reality. At that moment, a large group of people walk between Hope and the sheriff ... and when they are gone, so is she.

The sheriff quietly turns, and walks down the outside steps to the street level, where Hope's limo – now hemmed in by two sheriff's cars - is parked. At this point, several of Hope's guests - some of the most influential people in the state – are approaching the limo to get in.

From around the side of the building, Hope appears ... flanked by two deputy sheriffs guiding her to the center of the activity. Holding her head high as the crowd turns their attention in her direction, she is brought directly to the sheriff. He handcuffs her, and tells her that she is under arrest for the murder of the real Hope Montgomery. As he reads Monica her rights, the people around her are stunned – but all Monica can do is quietly smile.

She has given the performance of a lifetime. Tableau.

THE NEXT DAY – DECEMBER 31ST

NEW YEAR'S EVE

Late Morning:

Charlie finally receives a call from someone she has been trying to track down for several days. Her name is Joan Whitmore ... she lives in Los Angeles ... and, she was Britney

Lawrence's closest friend and roommate in college. In fact, Charlie finds out that along with Father Ramon, Joan was with Britney when she died as a result of the abortion.

Charlie had taken a chance and left a heartfelt message several days ago on Joan's answering machine. She told her that she was investigating Father Ramon's death, and had reason to believe that it was his involvement with Britney that eventually led to Ramon's death. Of course, Charlie was referring to Ramon being blackmailed. But what she found out from Joan – startled Charlie down to her core:

The abortion, and Britney's death, had taken place in Los Angeles near UCLA - the college they were attending. Joan was very distressed over the death of her friend, and she cared deeply for Ramon – so attending Britney's funeral in Taos was impossible for her to consider. In fact, it took Joan several years to get over the tragic outcome of this love affair that these two - basically good people – had found themselves in.

Since she and Britney had just become roommates the year that Britney died – which was their senior year – Joan never had the opportunity to meet Britney's family. So ... it was quite a surprise to Joan when Britney's father, Lawrence, appeared at her apartment six months ago – over four years after Britney's death. He told Joan that life for he and his wife died when their daughter died ... and that he finally realized he had to start seeking some answers.

At this point in the story, as she is telling all of this to Charlie, Joan dissolves in tears. A chill goes up Charlie's spine as she realizes that she knows what Joan is going to say next.

Joan confesses that after talking with Lawrence for a while, and seeing the incredible pain in his face, she broke down and told Lawrence that Father Ramon was his daughter's lover. Then, Joan desperately tried to show Lawrence that Ramon and Britney loved each other – but that they were caught in a world that they knew would be repulsed by their

love. All Lawrence could reply with was ... “But, he was a man of God, and we trusted him. He was a priest and eight years older than our daughter!!”

Charlie has been on the phone with Joan for over an hour when she finally puts the phone down. Drake has been sitting next to her the whole time, and after a minute or two she quietly asks him, “Can you imagine how Lawrence must have felt? That the man that consoled them — Father Ramon — was also Britney’s lover ... and then he committed yet another sin by encouraging her to have an abortion.” Drake responds quietly, “This must have eaten at Lawrence — a devoted father and a devout Catholic ... having this information all those months while Father Ramon was overseas.”

Charlie and Drake realize that it would do absolutely no good to tell anyone about this information at this point — certainly not on New Year’s Eve. After all, they really don’t know anything concrete — and obviously the Lawrence family isn’t going anywhere.

Besides, in less than an hour, they have to be down the mountain and wired for their meeting at the art gallery. Ten minutes later they leave the cabin just as it starts to — once again - snow.

That Afternoon:

The sting is in place:

Drake and Charlie arrive on time for their meeting with Daphne at the Taos Art Gallery. Two FBI vans are positioned nearby — fully wired.

Five minutes later, a man wearing a priest collar strolls up the street, and then into the art gallery. Daphne introduces him to our couple as a priest who has specialized in studying the hundreds of artifacts stored in the Vatican.

As he is looking at the pictures of the artifacts that Charlie has given to him, Drake starts to unpack the real pieces. He politely tells Drake that it won’t be necessary to see the original artifacts — and not to bother unpacking them.

He tells them that he will do some research and get back to them after the holidays – probably the 2nd or 3rd. He quickly goes on to say how sorry he is that he has to leave, but that something came up just before he got here. In fact, that’s the reason he was late. He begs their forgiveness, and leaves. Somewhat bewildered, Drake and Charlie thank Daphne for all her help, and exit.

Within seconds after Drake and Charlie start their Jeep and head down the street, Charlie’s on her laptop to Ron asking, “What happened?” Ron responds by calling Charlie on her cell. It appears that the man who was posing as a priest and antiques expert is really a low level (at least until now) international thief named MARTIN JOUGRESON. They were able to make him on their computer before he left the gallery. “Unfortunately,” Ron continues, “he seems to have made us as well. But, the ball’s in his court now – we’ve got a tail on him.”

That afternoon at the cabin, Charlie and Drake settle into the couch in front of a roaring fire. *It is here that they are finally able to put all the pieces together:*

What has become apparent by now is there is a definite link in the triangle of ...

1. Michael – the brother-in-law to both the victim and the accused murderer.
2. Daphne, the Taos Art Gallery owner – with strong ties to the international art world.
3. Martin Jougreson – who blackmailed Father Ramon in the first place, and is apparently an international art thief.

Through Daphne, with whom he is obviously involved, Michael supplied the art thief with intimate knowledge of Father Ramon’s affair, and the subsequent death of Britney. Michael was the only person close enough to Ramon to have known this information.

Michael’s motive? As executor of the Romero estate, he had sold several pieces of valuable land over the years – investing the money poorly in the stock market. Therefore, he desperately needed the money this caper would bring before he was exposed.

As a result of Charlie's conversation with Maria the other day, they now know that Father Ramon returned a week earlier than expected, and came to Taos to see his mother. It was when he and Maria were having lunch in downtown Taos that he saw Michael, Daphne and Martin, the art thief who had blackmailed him in Italy – all coming out of the art gallery together across the street.

It was at this point – probably that afternoon - that he must have hidden the artifacts in the closest place he could think of – which was his old family cabin that hadn't been used for years.

Also, after talking with Father FitzSimons the other day, Charlie now knows that Father Ramon did visit the elderly priest that same night. All Father FitzSimons would confirm was that Ramon said that his life was going to change very soon ... "I have, with the Grace of God, now found the courage that I never thought I possessed." That meeting took place only a few days before Ramon was bludgeoned to death. Perhaps he was going to return the artifacts to the church and take his licks – maybe that's why he was killed?

Soon, the last touch of sunlight of the old year leaves the cabin ... leaving Charlie and Drake bathed only in firelight ...

NEW YEAR'S EVE:

Charlie & Drake step out on front porch to look at the breathtaking scenery at midnight – hoping to get a full view of the fireworks from the ski resort at top of the mountain.

Just as the fireworks conclude, the art thief, Martin Jougreson, steps up behind them. "Lovely display ... but let's make this short, if you want to be around this time next year, I suggest you get the crosses for me."

As Charlie is producing the crosses from their hiding place inside the cabin, Drake's cell rings. He looks at the number and tells Martin that he'd better answer it. Martin agrees – but listens next to Drake's ear.

It's Ron calling to warn them that Martin gave the FBI the slip – “we lost the tail about an hour ago.” All Drake can say is ... “Okay ... no problem ... everything's fine here.” Ron starts to say good-bye – but almost as an afterthought, he asks Drake one more quick question: “So, what did you two do to celebrate this evening?” Drake shrugs it off with, “Oh, we just stayed in and watched TV – then we went outside to catch the fireworks.” Ron laughs as he responds to his brother-in-law, “Oh sure ... you watched TV ... that's just what honeymooners do! Okay, I get it, I'll get off the phone ... just remember to call us if you even think Martin is anywhere around.” Still laughing, Ron is sounding very unconcerned as he hangs up.

However, as soon as the receiver hits the cradle, Ron turns to the other agents, “he's there – let's get going.” When they ask how he knows, Ron replies that he tried to help Drake fix the TV in the cabin several days ago – and they couldn't get it to work.

The snow is beginning to fall as Martin ushers Charlie and Drake into their car. His plan is to have Drake fly him to Albuquerque so he can then get out of country. Against Drake's arguments that every major airport will be watched, Martin responds: “I have people who will make sure I get out of the country.” And, he doesn't seem to care that the weather is making it rapidly impossible to go anywhere – he's going to make Drake fly anyway. “After all, what have I got to lose at this point ... and you have no idea how incredibly valuable these little trinkets are to art collectors. What's a little adverse weather when 25 million dollars is at stake?”

During the ride down the mountain, Charlie is talking to Martin - trying to get as much information as she can. She finally angers him – and he retaliates by saying that he should have “closed your mouth permanently when I had a chance.”

This infuriates Drake – who slams on the brakes – just as they hit a patch of ice. The car swerves. The gun goes off just before the car's violent movement causes the gun to be

ripped from Martin's hand. Drake is hit – and the car goes over road to embankment not far below.

We see the Martin climb out with crosses. He tries unsuccessfully to push the car over the next cliff nearby. Charlie is pinned by the airbags – but she is desperately trying to call on her cell phone.

Realizing this, Martin pushes the car even harder. Drake is bleeding and almost unconscious, but he is reaching under the seat for his small, hidden pistol. Just as Martin gets the car to move, a shot rings out.

As the police cars approach with lights blazing, their headlights sight Martin Jougreson, lying in show the color of red, eyes wide open – with a perfect bullet hole in the center of his forehead.

And with that ... Charlie and Drake's first New Year's Eve together comes to an end — making them realize that honeymoons really can be murder.

ACT 8

NEW YEAR'S DAY – DAWN:

Charlie comes into observation room where Ron is watching the interrogation of Michael and Daphne by the FBI – both in different rooms. He asks about Drake – who is now out of surgery – and if Charlie's okay. She answers, and then, after watching for a bit, tells Ron something we can't hear.

Ron goes into Michael's interrogation room and, after asking a question or two, he starts to leave ... walking pass Michael as he does. Suddenly, Ron trips and starts to fall ... grabbing Michael's arm to balance himself. When Michael literally winces out loud in pain, it becomes apparent that he was the one who was grazed by Charlie's bullet at the cabin.

Michael gives it up ...

He explains about all the investments that went south the last few years. His intension was to sell valuable family land as the real estate market boomed, and invest it into the stock market where it would really make money. Somehow, one poor investment lead to another— leaving Michael desperate. He knew that once his mother-in-law, Consuelo, died everything concerning the estate holdings would be revealed, and he would be exposed.

It was only this desperation of having lost so much of the family money that lead him to supply the incredibly sensitive information to the art thief regarding his best friend and brother-in-law, Father Ramon.

Michael is now quick to tell them tell them that it was all Daphne's idea – and that Martin was her contact ... a man she knew when she was studying art in Europe. Michael does say that he had no motive to kill his brother-in-law – since Ramon had the crosses – and that's what Michael needed to solve all his problems.

In the other room Daphne is now more than eager cut a deal and turn on Michael. However, when she comments that they were “so close to pulling this off” ... the agent counters with, “Not really, the real crosses have been back at the Vatican for several days now.”

Ron goes back into the observation room with Charlie.

They discuss the obvious - that no one seemed to want Ramon dead at this time. It appears highly unlikely that anyone in the art-theft ring would have murdered Father Ramon – at least not until they had the crosses.

Ron concludes with, “We’re at a dead end.” To which Charlie replies, “Maybe not.” She tells Ron what she found out only a few short hours ago from Britney’s roommate, Joan. Charlie concludes with, “We’ve always assumed that the stealing of the artifacts and Father Ramon’s death were related — when in fact, they appear to be nothing but a sad and tragic coincidence.

By 10 a.m. on New Year’s morning, Charlie and Ron are at the McCullen’s front door. Elizabeth comes to the door and is near hysterical. She has no idea where her husband Lawrence went. They both arose early, and when the television news started telling of the events leading up to Father Ramon’s murder ... revealing that Father Ramon also stole valuable artifacts from the Vatican ... Lawrence went ballistic. He left in an outrage, and now Elizabeth is somehow afraid that he’ll do something rash.

For Charlie, there is only one place she believes that this deeply devout man would be.

They find him at church – sitting alone. He denies nothing.

Lawrence is very, very angry – and tortured to the depths of his soul. But ... he is not about to break another one of God’s laws by killing himself. However, to have heard just

this morning that Father Ramon stole artifacts from the Vatican — and that in doing so, his daughter’s name will be linked with his and exposed to the world, is almost more than he can stand.

Lawrence reveals to Charlie and Ron that he killed Father Ramon out of passion — grabbing the heavy glass paperweight in an unexpected blind rage when he confronted Father Ramon in his office. He remembers very little ... other than driving out of town, wiping the blood and fingerprints off the paperweight, and tossing it out of the window into the forest at the edge of Albuquerque.

Lawrence makes no effort to leave when Ron starts to put the handcuffs on him. Then, standing in the light of a stain-glass window, he looks at the other two and says quietly, “My family has been destroyed by the person we trusted — a representative of God. I am a religious man, but I will never be sorry for killing Father Ramon.

EPILOGUE:

A few days after the new-year starts, Charlie picks Rusty up at the vet hospital. A few blocks later, she swings into the Taos General Hospital where a nurse has Drake in a wheelchair, waiting outside for her.

We see Charlie pull up to the cabin ... and with a little effort; she is able to get both Rusty and Drake settled in.

By early evening, the snow is kicking up again, and there is a roaring fire in the fireplace. Rusty is happily curled up on his “bed” nearby. This is the first night Charlie and Drake have been together in the New Year ...

They toast each other - agreeing that this is one honeymoon they’ll never forget:
A new year ... a new life ... they’re *alive*, and in love ... and that’s good enough for the two of them.

So ... now in a very fast paced — and dangerous — two weeks, Charlie and Drake have begun their life together. They have solved two murders, and been at the heart of one of the most important thefts in art history ... all because they thought that Taos would be a romantic place for their honeymoon.

And ... by all that’s holy ... if this honeymoon is any indication – Charlie and Drake are going to have a very, *very* interesting life together.

THE PERFECT SIN

CHARACTER LIST

CHARLIE (Charlotte) PARKER

Private Investigator
(age 33)

DRAKE LANGSTON

- *Helicopter pilot with own company*
 - *Ex-Search & Rescue for Albuquerque police*
 - *Charlie's new husband*
- (age 40)

RON PARKER

- *Albuquerque Homicide Detective*
 - *Charlie's older brother*
- (age 43)

RUSTY

Charlie's faithful golden lab – who goes with her everywhere.

(age 10)

FATHER RAMON ROMERO

Bludgeoned to death

(age 33)

MARIA ROMERO CONNOR

•*Sister to Ramon & Eloy*

•*Married to Michael*

(age 31)

ELOY ROMERO

Ski Instructor

(age 28)

CONSUELO ROMANO

Ill mother of Ramon, Maria, Eloy

(age 60)

MICHAEL CONNOR

•*Estate Lawyer*

•*Married to Maria*

•*Father Ramon's college roommate/best friend*

(age 33)

DAPHNE DUMONT

•*Taos Art Gallery owner*

•*Mistress of Michael*

(age 35)

MARTIN JOUGRESON

International Art Thief

(age 45)

BRITNEY McCULLEN

•*Died during abortion at age 21*

•*Father Ramon's love*

LAWRENCE McCULLEN

Father to Britney

(age 55)

ELIZABETH McCULLEN

Mother to Britney

(age 50)

B STORY

HOPE MONTGOMERY

(MONICA FRANCES)

One of world's wealthiest women

(age 45-50)

FRED MONTGOMERY

- *Cousin to Hope*
 - *Brother of Susie*
- (age 35-40)

SUSIE MONTGOMERY

- *Cousin to Hope*
 - *Sister to Fred*
- (age 33-38)

Minor Characters

MAGGIE COLLINS

- *Taos “regular”*
 - *Befriends Charlie*
- (age 45)

GRANDMOTHER ELSA

- *Charlie’s surrogate grandmother*
 - *Lives next door to Charlie in Albuquerque*
- (age 70)

JASON KIRK

- *Superstar*

FATHER FITZSIMONS — Taos Catholic Church

- *Senior priest in Taos Catholic Church*
 - *Oversaw Father Ramon in his first church*
- (age 75)*

JOAN

- *Britney's college roommate*

STEVE ROMERO

- **Taos Sheriff**
 - *Also the Romeros' cousin*
- (age 40)*

JOHN SHULTZ

Criminal Attorney/Eloy's attorney
(age 60)

Hope's friend in Rhode Island
(age 55)

Main FBI Man
(age 55)