

The Mating of Mata – George Meech

Excerpt from Chapter One

The night was hot, the air thick and heavy with rain-forest-like humidity. As the sun completed its downward arc toward the horizon, black clouds, charged with the electricity of a looming summer storm, gathered around the mountains to the north of the city of Vancouver. The hollow rumble of boxcars being shunted through the rail yards next to the river echoed up the hill, challenging the thunderclouds to a duel of sound.

A trace of smoke oozed out the barrel of the silenced .38 that hung from Trigger MacDonald's right hand. His good eye narrowed, and he scanned the area for any further signs of movement. He rubbed his hand over the back of his neck and surveyed the damage he'd caused. One man lay dead, facedown in a ruby-coloured puddle of blood. A second was crumpled in the entrance to the room, still twitching, as he, too, prepared to meet his maker. The smell of gunpowder that Trigger enjoyed so much was overpowered by a wicked stench, the result of the first man losing control of his bowels and bladder at the moment of death.

"What did you say?" Trigger asked the corpse at his feet. "You want how much for a kilo of this stuff?" He laughed out loud as he slipped the revolver into his waistband. "Sorry," he continued, "I thought I told you I like to negotiate these things."

The muzzle of his Smith and Wesson had flashed five times in as many seconds. Trigger knew better than to waste five bullets on only two targets. But a strange power had overcome him, and the finger that had jerked off the rounds seemed to have grown a mind of its own. The barrel was still warm from the hastily fired shots. He wiped the sweat from his palms onto the legs of his jeans. The heat from the gun barrel radiated through to his groin.

He sat on the arm of the sofa and, through his mouth, sucked air deep into his lungs. His heart was racing. A panic had seized his body and he cursed at the tremor in his hands. Although he hadn't experienced it many times in his life, he'd actually felt true fear. In those few seconds after he'd delivered the first two shots—the instant he became aware that there was more than one person present in the cockroach-infested bungalow—a wave of something completely foreign to him had started in his toes and surged upward into his brain. The sensation unleashed a heart-pounding anticipation that he might next feel hot chunks of lead ripping into his flesh. It wasn't at all like the adrenaline rush he got each time he stepped out the door of an airplane with a sack of silk and rope strapped to his back. This was a bad feeling, one that threatened to take control. The next time he helped himself to a smuggler's stash, he would need to have an ally watching his back.

Excerpt from Chapter 2

Phil Redson was sitting at his desk flipping through the watch reports from the previous night. His fingertips beat out a soft tattoo on the desktop as he flipped through the notes page by page. There was a short knock before the door to his office swung open.

"Good afternoon, Staff Sergeant Redson. How are you?"

"Staff Sergeant Redson?" Phil replied with a chuckle. "You're being kind of formal, aren't you? What happened to just plain hello, Red? Or better yet—hey, Newfie?"

"Well, I heard you just made it through number twenty-five. I figured that probably called for a certain amount of formality."

The Mating of Mata – George Meech

Phil sighed. “Yeah, it’s true,” he said. “Twenty-five years of service to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and six different detachments from here to Labrador. Not too bad for a fisherman’s kid from Cape Bonavista, eh?” He rose from his chair to shake hands with his old friend, Frank Draycott of the Vancouver City Police Department. “It’s been a while,” he went on, “I haven’t seen you since Thompson’s retirement dinner last year. What, are you lost or something?”

Frank shook his head. “No,” he said, “I’m not lost. This is just a social call. It’s my day off and I was out this way, so I thought I’d drop in and buy you a coffee. I haven’t heard from you in so long that I wanted to make sure you and that lovely wife of yours hadn’t buggered off back to Newfoundland or something.”

Phil made a face. “I spent the first twenty years of my life trying to get off that piece of rock,” he said. “That was quite enough for me. Back home, you’ve got two choices as far as a career. You’re a fisherman, or you’re a fisherman. I figured I’d be more suited to hauling in bad guys than hauling in lobsters.”

“I know. You always wanted to be a big-city cop, right?”

“You are lost,” Redson replied. “You’re in Coquitlam, pal. There’s no big-city action going on out here in the suburbs. A busy week around this joint means we pinched more than our quota of jaywalkers.”

“Yeah?” Draycott said and smiled. “I guess you haven’t read the paper yet this morning then.” He released a copy of the *Vancouver Sun* from under his arm and dropped it on Phil’s desk.

“Son-of-a-bitch,” Phil complained. “This is that reporter, Semak again. We have one little double homicide and she’s got to go blabbing it all over town. Christ, that woman’s got a big mouth.”

“Yeah,” Frank said, “that’s reporters for you. I still haven’t been able to get over what she wrote about us last month.”

“Which story was that?”

“The one about the Vancouver Police Force being a bunch of overweight, doughnut-eating thugs. That piece really got under my skin.”

“I remember that one. Something about half the guys not being able to find their handcuffs cause their bellies hung over their belts so far.”

“Eating doughnuts and drinking coffee. That’s what police work is all about, right?”

“That’s what they told me when I signed up. I’d like to fire a couple of rounds past her head so that she knows what it’s like to be shot at.”

“You’ve been shot at?”

“I’m just kidding,” Phil replied. “This is Canada, for Christ’s sake. I’ve only ever had my gun out of my holster a couple of times.”

Draycott laughed. “Me too,” he said. “I fired a warning shot once, back when I was a beat cop. The watch commander had me filling out forms for the next week. Then there was that cow.”

“Cow?”

“Yeah. It was about thirty years ago, back when I was young and dumb as a sack of hammers. I was working traffic down on South Granville. You know where the stockyards are, down below the Fraser Arms Hotel?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, this cow escaped and went running down Granville Street. The whole area went into full panic mode. I pulled my motorcycle over, whipped out my piece, and shot the bloody thing.”

“You shot a cow, in the middle of Granville Street?”

“Yeah. Six times. I emptied my gun into the thing. You know all the talk lately about mad cow?”

The Mating of Mata – George Meech

“Yeah.”

“Well, you should have seen this son-of-a-bitch. Talk about your mad cow.”

“I think they mean crazy, not angry.”

“Crazy, angry, I’ll tell you. I didn’t really have time to decide whether it was nuts or just really pissed off. Anyway, that’s when I learned not to trust reporters. I was on the front page of the *Sun* the next morning—big grin on my face, smoke pouring out of my gun, and a dead cow at my feet.”

“I bet you filled out some paperwork on that one.”

“I’ve still got writer’s cramp.”

“Well,” Redson said, “all I know is that now we gotta drop everything and go running around town asking a bunch of questions and stuff.”

“That’s going to screw things up.”

“No kidding. I’m thinking we might have to put off the crib tournament for a few days.”

Draycott laughed then pulled out a chair and sat down. He spun the newspaper around and read the first few words aloud.

Redson’s fingertips began their dance on the tabletop.

Draycott looked up from the paper. “Jesus, that’s annoying,” he said.

“Sorry,” Redson replied. “I don’t even notice that I’m doing it. Nervous habit, I guess.”

“The police are baffled, it says here. What have you got so far?”

Phil spun around in his chair, leaned forward, and propped his elbows on the desktop. The grin on his face disappeared as he snapped back to reality. “Not much,” he said. “The pair was new in town. They had some history back east. Drugs mostly—small time, though. A handful of arrests, but no convictions.”

“Anything turn up at the scene?”

“Yeah,” Phil said. “Too much stuff. The place was a pigsty. The forensics people couldn’t isolate anything that we could directly link to the killer. We’ve got five bullets, that’s all. They’re on their way to ballistics now. All we can say so far is that they appear to be .38s. We still don’t even know for sure if they all came from the same gun.”

“When do you think you’ll hear from the lab?”

“This afternoon, at the very earliest. I still don’t have the luxury of my own ballistics department like you big-city cops. I’m still humping my evidence down to the central RCMP labs at Thirty-Third and Heather, then waiting my turn along with every other goddamned detachment in the province.”

“Any signs of forced entry?”

“Nope. Whoever the shooter was, it looks like he was invited in. We’ve got a good fix on where he was standing. The pattern of blood spatters from both victims put the gunman in the centre of the living room. It looks like he shot the first guy, then spun completely around to shoot the second guy from the same spot.”

“Drug deal gone bad?”

“Robbery is my guess. We found trace amounts of cocaine all over the place, but we didn’t find any drugs, or any cash. At this point, though, there could be a number of reasons for two guys getting whacked in the middle of the night. Maybe they were late with their cable bill or something.”

The Mating of Mata – George Meech

Excerpt from Chapter 15

The rumbling of the garage door followed the sound of the Harley wheeling into the driveway. Mata took a deep breath and told herself to be strong. She paused for a few moments at the door. She reminded herself again of what had to be done as the garage door rolled to a close. She turned the doorknob.

Scott jumped at the sound of the opening door. “What do you want?” he growled.

“I hope you’ve come to get your stuff.”

“And just what’s that supposed to mean?”

“I told you Scott. I want you to pack up your things and get out of my house.”

Scott began to laugh as he stepped off his bike. “Yeah,” he said. “Sure thing. I’ll put that on my list of things to do.”

“Scott,” Mata said, “I’m serious about this. I warned you about the cocaine. I want you out of here.”

“Drop dead, woman. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Scott, this is my house. I’m not putting up with this any longer.”

“Putting up with what?”

“The way you’ve been treating me. I know it’s the cocaine that’s making you act like this, but Scott, I just can’t trust you anymore.”

“Give it a rest, Mata. I snort a little coke every now and again. I don’t know why you’re making such a big deal out of this.”

“Don’t lie to me, Scott. Go look at yourself in a mirror. Do you even know how much weight you’ve lost? You have to stop taking that crap. You’re up one day and down the next. I don’t even know who I’m coming home to anymore. You’re at the point of needing more and more of that nonsense, aren’t you?”

“I’m not doing that much. Once and a while with Trigger, that’s all.”

“I told you not to lie to me, Scott. What are those marks on your arms? Mosquito bites? You’re shooting the stuff now, aren’t you?”

Scott reached out and grabbed a handful of Mata’s shirt. He pushed her into the wall and slapped her hard across the left side of the face. Her head twisted to absorb the force of the blow as the back of his hand returned to make contact with the right side of her face. She looked into his eyes a split second after receiving the two strikes to her head. They were white hot and boiling with rage.

“The only thing I feel like shooting around here is you. This house is half mine and I’ll do whatever the fuck I want in it. Do you understand?”

He tightened his grip on the collar of her shirt while raising his hand to administer another blow to her head. Mata gasped for air as her shirt collar closed tightly around her throat. She raised her hands to protect her face. For the first time ever, she was truly afraid for her life.

Scott maintained his hold on her shirt collar. He held her up against the wall and stared into her eyes. Mata had never witnessed that kind of anger before. She wanted to tell him again to pack up his things and get out of her house. She could tell by the fire in his eyes that it was not a time to antagonize him any further.

Scott eased his grip on her collar. The fist that was raised to strike her unclenched and slowly lowered to his waistband. He pulled the Glock from the top of his jeans and stuck it into her belly. He dragged it upwards to the base of her breasts, and shoved it hard into her chest. He raised it again and placed the barrel under her chin. He held it there so Mata could feel the cold steel pressing against her

The Mating of Mata – George Meech

skin. His thumb pulled back the hammer of the pistol. The sound of the cocking mechanism burned into Mata's brain.

“I'm getting real tired of coming home to this bullshit,” he said. “Maybe you should pack up your things and go. I don't need you, or your money. I don't even like you anymore.” He released her and let her fall to the floor. “I'm going over to Trigger's.”

Mata collapsed on the ground and gasped for breath. She held her tongue as the garage door rumbled open and Scott pushed his bike outside.