

SEARCHING SOLUTION.



The

**Nanon
Factor**

BY

WAYNE CAREY



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THE NANON FACTOR

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SEARCHING SOLUTION: > HELP

CHAPTER ONE

■ R. CROSBY WALLACE WAS DEAD. Sam had never seen a dead body, but on an instinctual level, he knew—even before he entered the room—that his friend, sprawled on the carpet, arms out, eyes staring at the ceiling, was dead. As he drew closer, he could see the scientist wasn't breathing. He smelled odors that shouldn't be here. Blood, and something sharp that burned his nostrils. That must be gunpowder. He could taste it mingled with the fresh summer breeze coming through the open door. Dr. Wallace's own scent was different. There was sourness to it now.

Sophia walked past Sam and padded around the body, her head bent down.

"He's dead," she told him, her voice small, as though she were afraid to break the silence.

"Thanks, kid," he said. "I would never have guessed that."

"I could smell it from the basement stairs before we came into the living room."

He and Sophia had been in the room they shared in the basement, enjoying an old movie on the flat-screen TV. Well, he had been enjoying it. Sophia had gotten bored with *Casablanca* after the first few minutes and had curled up on the couch beside him to nap. Her attention span was as short as she was, especially when it came to classic movies. Nevertheless, she was more familiar than he was with the scent of death. His nose might be better, but she was more discriminating.

Because they had been in the basement, they never heard an intruder. Never heard the shot or the fall of Dr. Wallace's body.

The killer could have broken in, or Dr. Wallace could have opened the door. They could have had a lengthy conversation, or the killer could have shot him from the front porch as soon as the door was open.

Sam looked at the door, examining the frame and the locking mechanism.

“No sign of forced entry. Dr. Wallace must have opened the door himself.”

Outside, the neighborhood was rising to the early morning. It was such a peaceful neighborhood, with mostly families and a few retired couples. Some would be preparing for work, others for enjoying the sunny, warm day to come. And in the middle of this peacefulness, a killer had come and murdered their friend.

“I should have been here,” he said. He growled from deep in his throat. He wanted to roar. “What good am I? I should have protected him. I could have stopped it from happening. I could have saved him.”

Sophia came up beside him. “It isn’t your fault, Sam. You might not have been able to do a thing. You could be dead, too. That gun would have had more than one bullet.”

Sam looked back at Dr. Wallace. His chest ached.

“I’ll miss him too, Sam. We can’t change what happened. I wish I had been here too. I would have scratched his eyes out, but we weren’t here.”

“We can’t change what happened, kid,” Sam agreed, “but we can still do something. We can catch the killer, find out who did this, and then scratch his eyes out and rip out his throat.”

“Us? What can we do?”

Sophia swished her tail in irritation. Sam had seen that expression on the sleek black cat before, mostly when he insisted on watching old movies they had already seen a hundred times.

“So you’re a cat and I’m a dog. We can do plenty. I’m a German Shepherd and I’ve been bred for this sort of thing.”

“And what have I been bred for?” Sophia asked, lifting her

whiskers into the air in that haughty way of hers.

Mostly sleeping, he wanted to say, but he refrained. “For intelligence,” he said instead.

“Well, I am certainly more intelligent than you, Sam dear.”

He had to give her that. She read a lot. Sam preferred movies. He couldn’t sit with a book, because his paws had problems turning the pages. He had ruined a few early readers that Dr. Wallace had used for teaching written English.

“Besides, kid, we aren’t exactly your typical cat and dog.”

She lifted her head with a slight tilt, her tail straight up. “Certainly not! I’m much more attractive. Beauty and intelligence are a lethal combination.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

Sam was a prototype, an experiment, the first stage to enhancing intelligence. He was also a mistake. Dr. Crosby Wallace owned a nanotechnology company that concentrated on advancements in medicine, particularly in neurobiology. His goal had been to use his manufactured nanomolecules to enhance brain functions, especially memory. Cognitive enhancement, he had called it. It was designed to help people with a problem called dementia. Sam didn’t understand much of it, and he didn’t particularly try to. Dr. Wallace called them nanons. They had been injected into him, and later into Sophia, and they did more than make them a smarter cat and dog. They multiplied, combined, and provided intelligence on the level with humans, though Sophia insisted she was smarter. It was like having a computer in his brain. Dr. Wallace was just beginning to understand how enhanced their intelligence was. Sam had demonstrated incredible understanding in the lab at Wallace NanoTech, so much so that Wallace had brought him to live in his home. Then, he brought in Sophia, transferring some of Sam’s nanons to her. He started to teach them English. Of course, neither Sophia nor Sam could talk. They never would. They didn’t have the equipment to form a vocal language.

However, there was an effect of the nanons that Dr. Wallace

had only suspected. Sam and Sophia could talk to each other. Well, “talk” might be the wrong word. Communicate. They heard each other inside their heads. Not their thoughts. Those were still private, and they couldn’t read minds, although sometimes, Sophia scared Sam into thinking she could. No, it was as though the nanons in their brains could communicate with each other. Molecule-sized cell phones. Dr. Wallace knew there was some kind of communication between them, and he would have eventually figured out how it worked, except now, he was dead.

Sam lifted his nose and tried to separate the scents traveling on the warm breeze. Cordite was strong, so was the smell of death and blood. He ignored those, pushing away the familiar odors of the house, Sophia, and the yard outside. And there it was, a tiny trace. A bit of machine oil and something that was very human. Perspiration. A small trace, a wisp on the breeze, clinging to the front door and the porch. However, it was unique from any other human, and it belonged to the killer he was going to track down.



CHAPTER TWO

HATIE TYLER BREATHED IN DEEPLY, concentrated, and threw a punch as she breathed out. Then she gave a side snap kick, moved left, and continued through the next ten steps of her kata. She was dressed in baggy gray sweat pants and an oversized Old Navy tee shirt, her dark brown hair tied in a ponytail that whipped with each movement, sweat already covering her face. She hadn't expected the morning to be so hot, but then, it was the middle of June. It was usually a little cooler at six in the morning, which was one reason she liked to come out into the backyard this early for her workout. In addition, there usually wasn't anyone around to bother her. She typically planned on a half hour to work on her karate, then another half hour for a short run. That loosened her up for a more serious workout later.

She hadn't paid attention to the man walking past the house. When she stopped, toweled off her face, and took a sip from her water bottle, she played the scene over in her mind and realized how strange it was. Okay, so there'd be an occasional jogger trotting by, and she knew all the neighborhood runners, at least by face, if not by name. She passed two or three every morning when she ran, and sometimes, during her evening run. This guy wasn't one of them. For one thing, he wore a dark suit. He wasn't the paper-boy, Jimmy Heinz, who was one of the few regulars up this early. He wasn't anyone from the neighborhood. He might be a Mormon or Jehovah's Witness or something like that, but they usually traveled in pairs and carried Bibles or literature. Or a salesman, but they usually carry stuff too. She definitely recalled his hands

swinging free as he walked, and his head looking straight ahead, so he wasn't searching for an address. He wasn't a cop, because she knew most of the local police officers, since her father was a detective.

So, who was he and what was he doing in the neighborhood?

Katie decided to cut her workout short and start her run. Maybe in the direction the guy was going, just to see where he might be headed.

But on her run, she saw only the lady with the long blonde ponytail and the bright pink spandex doing her slow jog, Mr. Yan walking his Golden Retriever, and Jimmy Heinz on his BMX. The guy must have had a car around the corner, which was strange. Why not park in front of the house you were visiting? And which house had he gone to this early?

Breathing heavy, she made a wide circle of several blocks and headed home, then slowed to a walk two houses away from her own home, her tee shirt soaked and her hair dripping with perspiration.

Then she noticed the front door open at Dr. Wallace's house.

So . . . anyone visiting Dr. Wallace and parking around the corner would have passed her house twice, and she could have missed him the first time. One part of the mystery solved, sort of. But why would the door still be open? Dr. Wallace's pets might get out, though they were pretty well behaved animals and never wandered the neighborhood like some dogs and cats.

She turned onto the walk, up the steps, and approached the open door.

"Dr. Wallace? Hello?" No answer. "Dr. Wallace? It's me, Katie Tyler, from next door."

Dumb thing to say. Of course, she was from next door. He knew her, knew her family. They'd lived next to each other even before she was born.

She drew closer, calling out again. Still no answer.

His old Buick was still in the driveway, so he hadn't gone to work. Maybe he was upstairs, couldn't hear, and didn't realize the

door was still open.

A faint meow answered.

Sophia's sleek black body appeared out of the inner gloom of the house. The cat stopped at the threshold and looked up sadly at Katie. Sophia was usually more animated, her green eyes flashing with curiosity. Now, she hung back, her eyes glancing down, blinking, her whiskers drawn back against the angles of her face.

"What's wrong, Sophia?" Katie asked. "Aren't you feeling well?"

Sam appeared next, towering over the cat, his head tilted down, eyes looking up towards her.

Then she saw the interior of the house beyond them, with Dr. Wallace sprawled out on the floor.

She hurried through the doorway, and then froze. At first, she thought he had a heart attack, had fainted, or something. But he was too still. He wasn't breathing. She remembered her CPR training, but it was intimidating to perform it for the first time on a real person. One hesitant step closer and she realized that it would not be necessary. There was a hole in his forehead. A bullet hole. Dr. Wallace had been shot and he was very, very dead.

Sam pushed his head against her leg, breaking her from her shock.

She reached down to scratch his ear. "Oh, I'm so sorry, Sam. What happened?"

And Katie knew what happened, to some degree. The man she had seen had come to Dr. Wallace's house and killed him. This was murder. Homicide. She had to get her father. Right now.

She reached down and lifted Sophia into her arms, cradling her like an infant.

"Come on, Sam. Come with me. We'll get my dad. He'll find out what happened. You come over with me so we don't mess up the crime scene."

She held down the panic until she reached the sidewalk, and then she ran. Tears streamed down her face.



CHAPTER THREE

TWO PATROL CARS, A CORONER'S wagon, and a forensics department van sat at the curb in the normally quiet neighborhood in front of the house of the late Crosby Wallace. An unmarked car sat in the driveway behind Wallace's Buick. Another pulled into the driveway of the house next door, as Detective Michael Tyler stepped out onto the porch of that house. He straightened his tie when he saw the car park behind his own departmental Crown Victoria.

Captain Carmine Rizzo, a stocky man in his late forties, pulled himself free of the Ford and glared at Tyler.

"Happened in the house next to yours?" he asked.

Tyler nodded. "Yep."

Rizzo shook his head as they walked together across the lawn. His voice was like a handful of pebbles grinding together. "Thought the address sounded familiar. Heck of a thing to have a murder right next door to a police detective. Doesn't do much for our image, now, does it? Our presence is supposed to instill a sense of security. Well, I guess this blows that away. Go on, give me the rundown. What happened?"

"The victim is Dr. Crosby Wallace. Looks like someone came to the door about six this morning. He opened the door and was shot once in the forehead. The shooter left that way." He pointed behind them. "Probably in a car he parked around the corner or someone picked him up. No sound of a gunshot, so he used some sort of sound suppressor. It's got all the earmarks of a professional hit."

Rizzo grunted. “We don’t get many of those around here, thank God. Nothing stolen? You said he’s a doctor. Did he have any drugs on the premises?”

“He’s a research scientist, CEO of a biotech company in the Glendale Industrial Park. Doesn’t look like anything was taken, and it doesn’t look like he had any chemicals or drugs in his house.”

They stopped in front of Wallace’s house and Rizzo watched the forensic scientists fussing over the door and entranceway. He glanced back to the street, where neighbors clustered in small groups at a safe distance on lawns and porches. One patrol officer was circulating among them, notepad in hand, asking questions.

“I take it you were first detective on the scene,” Rizzo said.

“Yeah, I called it in. My daughter found the body.”

Rizzo turned, eyes wide. “Your daughter?”

“Yeah, she runs every morning, saw the door was left open, and went up to see if everything was all right. She thought his cat and dog might run away. She found Wallace dead and ran right home to tell me. I was just having breakfast.”

“She didn’t disturb the scene, did she?”

“She knows better than that. She took the cat and dog over to our house, so they wouldn’t disturb any evidence.”

“Smart kid. Is she the one that used to hang around the department? Doesn’t she want to be a cop?”

“Yeah.”

“Some kind of martial arts expert?”

“She’s working on her black belt.”

“How old?”

“Sixteen.”

Rizzo grunted again. “Where does the time go? Seems she was just a little kid running around the station, trying to get into case files. That’s gotta be tough, finding the body. It ain’t that nice finding one in our line of work, especially the first time, but for a kid . . . She okay? You need someone for her?”

“Nicci Goldman’s with her at our house. I just checked on them. Nicci’s talking with her, getting a description of a guy Katie saw before she found the body. She might have seen the shooter.” Not only was Nicci a good detective, she was friendly, sympathetic, and knew Katie. And she had a degree in psychology. Katie had once interviewed her for a school report, and Nicci and her boyfriend had been over for diner a few times.

“So, she found the body and may be a witness. Tough break. What’s your connection with the victim? Know him well?”

“We’ve lived next door for years. This was his mother’s house. He never moved away and inherited it when she died. My kids pet-sat for him once in a while, popped in to feed the animals when he worked late. My mother-in-law owns the industrial park where his company is. She might have even invested in his start-up. I’m not sure. We don’t talk much.”

“Is that Elizabeth Glendale?”

“Yep.”

“I forgot your ex was her daughter. What’s your ex up to? Still running all over the world?”

Tyler felt the acids burning the lining of his stomach. “Europe, I think. Haven’t talked much to her, either.”

Rizzo shook his head, and then climbed the steps to the house. Tyler knew that look. It said that Megan Tyler was nuts, and that might be clinically proven if she ever stopped long enough to be examined. However, three years ago, she decided to spend her inheritance by traveling the world in search of herself, exploring the artist inside, abandoning him and their two children. Filed for divorce and took off.

“We’re done,” Steve Norris, head of the forensic team, announced. “Coroner’s ready to bag the body.”

Tyler followed Rizzo inside. The captain circled the body, walked around the room, and nodded to the other detectives and officers present. The scientists were packing up and leaving. The photographer was done, zipping up his camera bag. Rizzo gave the

go-ahead for the coroner to have the body removed. Then he walked around again. Finally, he stopped in front of John Perez, who was making some notes in his notebook.

Tyler was partnered with Perez more often than not. He was thirty, a tall, slender African American, with hair so short that it looked shaved, and he refused to explain how his family had a Hispanic name. The theory was that there was Spanish or Mexican in the family's dim past, but Perez would always shrug it off and say it was a common name where he came from, which was actually Toronto.

Rizzo motioned for Tyler to join them.

"Tell you what," Rizzo began, "Mike, I think you're too close to the case. What with your daughter a witness, you being neighbors and knowing the victim, then the connection with your ex's mother, I'm pulling you off and making Perez lead detective."

"What?" Tyler said.

Perez was younger, and with less experience. He had been lead detective on only a handful of cases, and none of them dealt with a professional style killing. Of course, Tyler hadn't been involved in a professional murder either. They were too rare. But he had led a number of murder investigations, and this was personal, though he wasn't going to tell Rizzo that.

"Captain . . ." He couldn't come up with a convincing argument.

"You're personally involved, Tyler," Rizzo said.

"Captain," Perez said, "with all due respect, I don't think I should lead. Mike at least has some knowledge of the victim. He has a starting point. Me, I haven't a clue where to start. I mean, a contract killing on a scientist? I think Mike should stay as lead."

"Well, Detective Perez," Rizzo said, his voice a low rumble, "that decision is not yours to make. It's mine, and I will not have the media blasting us over this. You are the lead detective. However, I see your point about Tyler's involvement. Tyler, if you can assure me this isn't personal, you can partner with Perez in the

investigation. But Perez is lead and he'll fill me in on every aspect of the case."

"This isn't personal, Captain," Tyler said, almost biting his tongue with the lie.

"Good. Then get this case solved as quickly as you can, gentleman." He motioned for Tyler to follow him as he headed toward the front door.

"Sir," Tyler began, "if this is about the Hernandez Case, I don't think—"

Rizzo spun on him. "That's right, you don't think. Tyler, Hernandez was just one example. You hounded the wrong person. You were sloppy. You used to be good, but the past couple of years have been pretty touchy. You're unfocused. I can understand it. Tough break with the family problems, but get over it. You can't let personal baggage interfere with the job. And this case is too personal with you to start with. With the media tearing us apart, I don't need you messing things up. Do you think the reporters forgot what happened with Hernandez? Look, stick with Perez, stay in the background, play by the book, don't say a word to the press, and work on getting your reputation back. I want the old Mike Tyler back, but until then, stay under the radar."

He stomped toward his car.

○ ABOUT THE AUTHOR ○



A life-long fan of science fiction, Wayne Carey grew up reading H.G. Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Isaac Asimov, and all the grand masters of the genre, guiding him toward a career in science with degrees in biology and education and providing the desire to write from an early age. A love of classic and noire films, such as Casablanca and the Maltese Falcon, also influences his writing.

He and his wife, Brenda, live in the wilds of Central Pennsylvania with their three children, who provide a great deal of inspiration for his work.