

LETHAL

INTENT



Gayle Farmer

**To Jeff,**

**You never let me down, not once**

**You always lift me up**

**You are my inspiration in all things**

**Thank you for loving me**

**Gayle**

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# LETHAL INTENT

*Gayle Farmer*



## Chapter 1

“Palm Springs for the week? The whole week? Sounds like a ball.”

Ella Russell pored over the brochures, eyes wide with anticipation.

Her fiancé, Jim Sessions, gave her a broad smile. “Well, not exactly. The club we’ll stay at is in Indian Wells. It’s gorgeous, but poles apart from Palm Springs. All the towns in the Coachella Valley have a unique flavor of their own; very different. I think you’ll have a good time.”

“What do you mean? I’ve never been there. Tell me what it’s like.”

“In its original state, the desert is beautiful in a savage kind of way, I guess; surreal. Pour a little water on it and something will grow. In the spring, after a rainy winter, the whole valley erupts in a carpet of wild blossoms. It’s incredible. And the flower and citrus smells are almost overpowering.” He glanced at the brochures she read, smiling.

“They settled Palm Springs first, which is why the tourists refer to the whole valley that way. The village of Palm Springs maintains that old movie colony feel, very quaint and different from the rest of the valley, like old Hollywood. They saved many of the original buildings and much of it is so unique they use it for settings for movies. They used Tahquitz Canyon for that old film, *Lost Horizon*. It’s a theatrical town, very artsy-fartsy, even today. Many of the old timers still live there.”

She pointed at one of the brochures. “Where’s this ... El Paseo? The shops look like Rodeo Drive.”

## GAYLE FARMER

He chuckled. "Didn't take you long. Very much akin, lots of similar boutiques. It's in Palm Desert. Right next door to Indian Wells which makes it very convenient for us."

Ella picked up another brochure and grinned, dark blue eyes alight. "They sure focus on their leisure time, don't they? Tennis, golf and horses. Must be nice."

"Pricey, to say the least, but cost never seems to matter. They have two things in common ... an obsession for golf and tons of money. Most of them are choking on it. They can't seem to find ways to spend it fast enough."

"I'm sure there's a support group for that, or maybe it's the heat," she said with a titter. "Talk about a problem. Too much money ... must be hard to deal." She pointed at a different brochure and grinned. "Well, I accept the challenge. Party time."

Delightful nibblets of information enticed her to visit the finest selection of haute couture in the desert; a particular yellow sundress beckoned.

Yawning, she looked up from the pamphlet and blinked. "How'd you get invited to a charity golf tournament anyway? I didn't know you played that well."

He pushed his chair back from the table and stretched his arms high above his head. "I used to be a good amateur player, but it's been a while. They'll pair us up with famous professionals, give us handicaps and stuff like that. The news people will be there interviewing and taking pictures. You know how it is with charity events. It's more like a circus stunt than a serious game, I guess, and it's for a good cause."

"But how did you get picked? Who sponsored you?"

"Being a PI has its perks. You remember last year with the porn ring and the runaway I found, Mary Jessup? She got involved in all that stuff, remember? Well, her dad, Mort, is head of the committee that chooses the amateur players. I mentioned to him once in passing that I enjoyed a game of golf and the next thing you know, here we are. They choose from what they consider worthy recipients who do pro bono work for the less fortunate." He harrumphed. "Don't you love that phrase?"

"Which one? Pro bono or less fortunate?"

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Chuckling, they continued to plan their upcoming adventure. Ella had a quick thought and turned to him in question. "How big is the house we're going to stay in?"

Jim grinned at her, green eyes crinkled at the corners. "Huge. Five bedroom suites, a pool and two private Jacuzzis. I don't know how much more we could ask for in a free vacation home and yes, it's fine with me if Terry and Lenny join us. We have the house for the whole week, but the tournament only lasts three days. We'll start play early in the mornings, finish before noon and after that, we're free to roam."

"Cool. This is so exciting. We can visit all the towns, right, get a feel for their differences, check out the shopping? The restaurants? Which one is your favorite?"

"I guess if I lived there, I'd choose Palm Springs. Rancho Mirage is almost all country clubs. They call it the home of Presidents and movie stars. Size-wise, it has the largest number of country clubs, although Indian Wells is a close second. Palm Desert is more commercial, not only in the older sections along Highway 111, but it expanded El Paseo a lot so the shopping is world class. Hard to pick a favorite, really, they're all so different."

"I can't wait to explore." Ella pointed at the clock and yawned again.

"I'm with you, kid; beat complete. Let's go home. You're finished around here, right?"

Nodding, she moved into his arms, running her finger through blond silky waves. They rocked together a moment and she murmured, "You're not all *that* tired, are you?" She cupped his butt.

"I'm never that tired."

Arm in arm, the lovers walked down the hall. Two large black shapes padded along behind them, their nails clicking on the tile.

\* \* \*

Terry Wagner sat in the lounge of *ELLA'S* supper club in Hollywood, chatting with her twin about their upcoming trip and making an itinerary of things they *had* to do in the desert.

## GAYLE FARMER

*ELLA'S* would close for the week they'd be gone to undergo a much needed revamping. It would reopen upon their return with a facelift, a brand new menu and much fanfare.

Terry let her gaze drift along the wall from one framed poster to another. "I'm glad you're keeping the musical motif. You wouldn't believe how many customers comment when they see their favorite singer up there. I have dibs on that one of Clapton if you ever want to part with it. Rock never dies, I guess."

She nodded at the bleached oak, guitar-shaped bar that dominated the room. "Talk about unique. I'm glad you decided to go for it; a real eye-catcher, for sure."

Ella grinned. "New carpets and a paint job will make everything look clean and fresh and the changes will be subtle. I just want to spiff up a bit, not do a complete makeover." She glanced around the room, proud of her decorating scheme.

"Oh, did I tell you? Amy and Tony will come with us on vacation. Poor Amy gets so blue if I leave her alone. Jim thought they might benefit from a week with Rudy at the training farm but she wouldn't like it. Our other choice was leaving them at the shop to sulk all week long. This is much better."

They heard a shifting, scraping sound, followed by a sigh. A sleek black head popped up from under the table. Sharp ears perked, bright inquisitive eyes darted from Ella to Terry. She whined lightly and placed a gentle forepaw on Ella's leg.

"What a beggar you are, Amy. We aren't really talking about you and you know it. You're just spoiled rotten and looking for a handout."

Amy stretched, fore and aft, ending with a yowly, sing-song whine of pleasure.

"What? What do you want, Amy?"

The dog sat again and offered Ella her other paw.

"Do you want to sing, Ames? Sing. Sing!" Ella made a wo-wo sound which the dog found irresistible, and together they raised their voices in song. As loud as one sang, the other sang louder. Soon they howled.

"You guys need to take that act on the road," Terry said between giggles. "She must have a full octave."

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Amy ended on a high note and then barked as if to say, *feed me*.

Right on time, Al appeared at the kitchen door, plate in hand. "Amy, catch."

The Doberman whirled at the sound of his voice, spotted the piece of flying meat and sprang into the air. Her jaws snapped closed with a click and she swallowed the scrap before she hit the ground. Amy turned to Al for another.

With a sigh of resignation, Ella said, "We're just about to open, Al. Is the bar ready?"

"I got ya. Come on, Ames, let's go in the back room and eat this. You're not allowed to frolic in the bar. You must behave with decorum. Here, catch."

\* \* \*

Terry glanced at the scenery flashing past them as they sped along the freeway. The green vegetation of the valley turned sparse and brown. Sand dominated the grass and the air, now invisible, smelled crisp and dry. The piercing, vivid blue of the sky stretched before them, cloudless.

"I'm glad we decided to drive up alone. I love my sister and all that, but I don't feel like we're attached at the hip. Besides, even as big as the Suburban is, they're taking the dogs and that means, with suitcases and all, we'd be packed in like the proverbial pickles."

She grinned at Lenny Browning, former homicide detective, boyfriend and long-suffering but mostly silent passenger. She patted the dashboard of her car. "Isn't this so much more fun?"

"Not to me, frankly. I feel like we're rolling along on the cement, waiting to be stepped on by the big guys. It's worse with the top down." He glanced uneasily at the dashboard and his eyes widened. "You're doing about three hundred dollars over the speed limit."

"Don't be silly, Angel was made for speed." Her laughter bubbled, snatched away by the wind.

"Tell that to the Chippie when he pulls you over."

## GAYLE FARMER

The miles rolled by in easy silence. Talking with the top down at that speed required intense use of the vocal chords. Whatever had to be said could wait.

Lenny shook his head and thought about his old Crown Victoria or his present ride, a Suburban like Jim's ... vehicles that gave you a sense of safety and protection, some substance.

The little Jag purred in appreciation, cruising along at an easy ninety. The empty freeway invited the excessive speed and the newly installed fuzz buster showed that the coast was clear. They'd passed the SUV a while back.

Terry stopped at a prearranged place in Banning to refuel and stretch their legs. While they waited for Jim and Ella to catch up with them, Lenny tanked up. They arrived just as he removed the gas nozzle and replaced the hose in its holder.

Jim pulled up to the next pump, got out and began to refuel while Ella ran to the restroom.

"You have quite the lead foot, wench," he said to Terry, a glint in his eyes. He glanced at Lenny and grinned. "You're gonna be sorry one of these days. That gets expensive."

"I told her, but she just ignored me. When it comes to that car, she just has entirely too much fun, don't you think?"

Ever the coquette, she cocked her head and winked. "Why, kind sir, I was just letting the kitty run a bit. Sorry if your bus can't keep up."

Gurgles of laughter rippled from deep in her throat, parting her full lips in an infectious smile. The steady breeze blew her dark burgundy hair in all directions; glints of plum highlights glimmered in the sun.

Ella joined them, offering bottles of cold water.

Serious now, Jim said, "We exit at Cook Street and take it to the end. Just fight the urge to race me, Terry, or one day I'll show you what's under my hood."

For a moment she stared at him. In unison, she and Ella turned their eyes toward the Jag.

"Yeah, right."