

Sample chapters from
Revelations (Book Six in The Ro Delahanty Series)
Chapter Eighty-Three: Business-Speak

Friday, January 9, 2009, 9:00 a.m.

Ogden Mercer, as expected, easily carried the Fort Armstrong County Sheriff's vote in November. In fact, he overwhelmed his opponent, the department's Capt. Glenn Easter. For every yard sign for Easter, there were ten for Mercer. For every radio ad for Easter, there were a half dozen Mercer spots. There were no billboards or TV ads for Easter; there were both for Mercer.

At one of their lunches prior to the election, Ro asked her brother if Mercer's campaign seemed to be unusually aggressive for a local election. He'd said indeed it was.

When she asked if Pat Delahanty Communications was the agency placing the ads, he sniffed. "I wish. My best guess is they've spent at least a couple hundred grand on the campaign, maybe more. But what's really odd is one of my friends at KLEE says the campaign is being managed by an agency out of Des Moines specializing in political work."

Ro frowned. "What does that mean?"

"My guess? Mercer has higher political ambitions."

"Governor?"

"Well, it might be a stretch... More like state senator or state rep, maybe Congress."

Interestingly, the cop grapevine had it the law enforcement community's vote was about evenly split between the two candidates. She was sure most of her fellow deputies voted for Easter, believing he was a Ballard clone and not being sure what sort of boss Mercer might be.

A couple of weeks after his loss, Easter announced he was leaving the department to become assistant chief of security for HALICO – whose initials stood for Home, Auto and Life Insurance Company of America – a national insurance company whose high-rise headquarters was in downtown Stephenson, over in Illinois. The consensus among deputies was the new job would be less stressful and a more financially rewarding stepping-stone to retirement. Nobody said it was also because he didn't want to work for Mercer, but the thought was there.

What no one knew at the time was Easter's departure was only the beginning of a complete shakeup of the department – as Foxtrot had predicted – which they would learn about this morning.

Today was Sheriff Mercer's first all-staff meeting, so the mood was a combination of anticipation and curiosity, with an undercurrent of trepidation. The differences from how Ballard conducted his sessions were small, but noteworthy.

Where there used to be platters of donuts, bagels, and muffins, along with urns of coffee, at the back of the room, today there were no refreshments.

Where a slide of the sheriff's department five-pointed star badge and a legend saying "Iowa's Oldest Law Enforcement Agency" was usually projected up on a big screen behind the podium, now it was an American flag.

Where Ballard mingled with the staff prior to the meeting, exchanging greetings, able to address whoever he was talking to by name, Mercer was nowhere to be seen.

Where Ballard shared the raised platform with Jaclyn Zahn, the department's administrative services director, and Major John Spears, the Chief Deputy and his second in command, the new sheriff mounted the dais alone.

Sheriff Ballard always wore a regulation departmental uniform, right down to a sidearm. Which Ro took as his way of saying, "Even though I'm in charge, I'm still one of you, a fellow cop." Sheriff Mercer was wearing a suit.

In fact, Ro suppressed a smile, recalling how her brother used to sniff dismissively at his fellow TV ad sales reps who all wore suits: "Why do they all think they need to look like bankers?" With his dark suit, white shirt, dark tie, and neutral, business-like expression, Ro thought Mercer was doing a good impersonation of a financial type.

One thing stressed in her bachelor's management class was a boss, whether a front-line supervisor or the CEO, was constantly sending messages to those around him or her, in what they wore, in their facial expressions, in their gestures, in the words they used, and mostly how they delivered those words.

Ro felt uneasy about the messages she was perceiving from Mercer, but tried to tell herself it was because she was used to Ballard's style and needed to give this new guy a chance.

Mercer got right down to business. No friendly "Thanks for coming" opening.

"Please be seated." It was not a request, but a command.

Where Ballard eschewed the room's sound projection capability, delivering his remarks with his own booming voice, Mercer's over-amplified words filled the room and instantly silenced every conversation.

"Today I will share some organizational changes to the sheriff's department I believe will enhance our operational efficiency and resource productivity," he said.

Operational efficiency... Resource productivity... I know business-speak when I hear it, Ro thought, not meaning it as a compliment. She always assumed she was working for an organization whose central focus was public safety, not costs and revenues.

"As you know, the sheriff's department's former administrative services director transferred to a similar position with the county last summer, and there has been an interim supervisor since. Over the coming months we will be transferring the department's administrative functions to private contractors outside of the department who we believe can operate those areas more proficiently and at a considerable cost saving to the county," he said.

There were audible mumblings of "Huh!" and sucking in of breaths as the impact of what he said sank in.

“Mr. Dimmick, who served as interim director, will be my administrative assistant and coordinate the transition. Employees impacted by this change will receive priority for other available positions with the county or will receive severance allowances.”

There was no apology or even the slightest hint of empathy concerning something like two dozen clerical and administrative types, mostly female, were about to lose their jobs, ones some had had for years.

Chapter Eighty-Four: Demoted

Friday, January 9, 2009, 9:12 a.m.

But Mercer didn't give anyone time for a pity party.

"Today, I am also announcing the following promotions and new duty assignments. As you are aware, Major Spears retired last fall. Captain Mosher is being promoted to major and will assume the duties of Chief Deputy."

Not much of a surprise, as Ted Mosher, a twenty-eight-year veteran, oversaw deputy operations, so logically was the next in line.

"Lieutenant Pettit is being promoted to captain and will supervise deputy operations," Mercer added.

That was the shocker! Pettit was now the third ranking officer, even though only having been with the department for a little short of three years. There were several more senior lieutenants Mercer could have picked. Where Pettit was occasionally Ro's boss before, she would now be in her direct chain of command. It was not a reassuring feeling.

And, apparently, Ro was not the only one surprised, as there were audible mumblings and glances of incredulity.

Ignoring the reaction, Mercer plowed on, "Captain Schnell will move over to take charge of building and equipment operations."

In effect, it was a demotion for Schnell, who for the last two-and-a-half years supervised jail operations, a much bigger part of the department. Ro felt bad for him. When she was a rookie and on regular third shift patrol, he was her commander and a good boss.

Wouldn't surprise me if he doesn't join the parade of retirees, she thought.

But the new sheriff was far from finished.

"I'm pleased to announce Lieutenant Reed Timmons from my former department will join the sheriff's department as a captain and will supervise jail operations."

Now caught in a cynical mood, Ro thought, *Oh, I get it; you want loyalists in your senior ranks.*

"Our Lieutenant Art Givens is being promoted to captain and will be in charge of courthouse security."

When Givens was a shift commander, Ro worked for him when on three to eleven duty. While she didn't know him well, he seemed like a good cop, yet couldn't help feeling as one of the department's half-dozen black officers, courthouse security was certainly a showcase position.

Mercer saved two biggest shockers for last.

"Chief Sloan of the Lee's Landing PD and I have coordinated these two changes and we are in full agreement with them. Lieutenant Garcia of the LLPD is being promoted to captain and will become full commander of the Joint SWAT Unit. Lieutenant Pease of our department will be his

assistant commander. And Lieutenant Raul Gutierrez will move over from the LLPD to join us as second shift commander and will serve as the department's armorer."

After a brief pause, Mercer simply said, "Thank you, you're dismissed," and left the podium. No, "Are there any questions?" No rah-rah, "I know this is a big change, but we can work through it as a team." Not even a "Be safe out there."

That was it; slam, bam, thank you ma'am!

He had just turned the department upside down with no real justification other than vague and unsupported references to "efficiency" and "productivity."

He had pushed aside or outright demoted several officers who she respected, not the least of which was Tom Pease.

And had taken away her armorer's position, for her a source of great pride, and did it publicly. As far as Ro was concerned, it was unconscionable. Unable to help it, her rage side flared.

As the meeting broke up, Ro remained in her spot in the audience, not knowing which way to go, which group to join, paralyzed by her anger and confusion, but then noticed now Captain Pettit moving toward her purposefully and waited.

Stepping in front of Ro, the officer only made things worse. "Deputy..."

Enough was enough! This woman had done it before, in effect demoting her by not addressing her by her rank, the longstanding practice in the department. And each time previously, Ro let it slide, not today.

"Sergeant!" Ro said curtly, clearly interrupting the superior officer.

Pettit blinked, taken aback at what was easily impertinence bordering on insubordination, but then relaxed her face and said, "Sergeant," except there was the slightest shade of condescension in how she said it. "I wanted to make you aware the sheriff thought it was important the details of his reorganization plan were not leaked before he made his announcement. No one knew of these changes."

Oh, and that's supposed to make me feel better!

"I hope you understand," Pettit continued. "Sheriff Mercer believes the armorer's position needs to be with a ranked officer. It is no reflection on your performance so far. In fact, he authorized me to designate you as assistant armorer and assure you we are looking forward to you continuing to perform your duties in the same professional manner."

Ro raged inside. *I don't believe this shit! You demote me in front of my fellow officers and expect me to be 'professional.'* *You don't even know the meaning of the word!*

This flashed through Ro's mind but was not articulated. She may have swallowed her anger for the moment, but it would not be forgotten, nor forgiven.

With a conscious effort, Ro hardened her cop face into a glare of displeasure, sincerely hoping Pettit noticed, and said flatly, "10-04, Captain."

It was her way of saying, but not out loud, "I acknowledge receipt of your information. You want professional? Well, it's exactly and only what you're going to get from now on."

There was a two second stare down between the two women, which Pettit broke by turning and walking away. Ro felt a minor victory.

Maybe it was because her judo training taught her how to compartmentalize her anger, box it in and set it aside so it wasn't in control. Maybe it was because her innate optimism let her hang on to the thought a new CEO may organize things his way. Maybe it was because she was looking forward to a visit to Neshnala later in the morning – off duty until second shift – and then a nice long run among the trees at the back of the state park.

At any rate, she took several deep breaths, calmed down, and left the meeting.

Chapter Eighty-Five: Boxes on a Table of Organization

Saturday, January 10, 2009, 8:00 a.m.

In the cop world, being SWAT was like being in a fraternity. While everyone had their own specialized skills and their own personality quirks, the unchallenged sine qua non was complete trust in one another. It had to be. Because, literally, your life was in the hands of your fellow team members.

Which is why the next morning, at their regular first Saturday training session, now Captain Garcia and Lieutenant Pease were waiting for their team's arrival.

If this was a routine meeting, during the twenty minutes before settling down to business, there would be lots of gabbing and joshing. Since the team came from three different departments, unless there was a call-up in the interim, most would not have seen their colleagues in a month. And usually, Garcia and Pease were out among the team, taking part.

Not today. The sight of the two commanders sitting side-by-side in front of the room, looking serious, yet not overly so, silenced any chatter.

Most of the arriving cops helped themselves to coffee at the back of the ready room and took seats at narrow conference tables. While there were a few "What the heck's going on?" glances, they waited silently, trusting they would be briefed.

The last to arrive at a few minutes after eight, Sergeant Greg Geertz of the Gilbert PD, looked around at everyone sitting in place with expectant expressions, glanced at the coffee machine, but then quickly and with a guilty expression turned to find a seat.

Pease broke the ice. "Get your coffee, Sergeant. Although these other guys might be moping around like they're at a funeral, believe me, it's not so bad."

There were a few mirthless chuckles.

After Geertz found a seat, Garcia said, "Of course, you're aware of the announcement at the sheriff's meeting yesterday. I'm sure the cop grapevine took care of that." Then, with an uncharacteristic sly grin, added, "Why, I hear it even gets all the way out to Gilbert."

Sergeant Evan Gresham, the other Gilbert officer on the team, straightened up in his chair and looked around with an exaggerated clueless look, like he didn't have any idea what they were talking about. Then, with a perfectly deadpan expression said, "If you recall, it was foggy yesterday, so we couldn't quite make out all the semaphore signals coming from the LLPD."

Recognizing both Gresham was a teaser and that they needed to lighten things up, Garcia picked up on the joke, "Any rumors you might have heard I am now chief law enforcement officer of the known universe are greatly exaggerated."

Precisely because Garcia was not known as a joker, and because his observation was so droll and over-the-top, it produced a hardy laugh. Looking around the room to make sure he had everyone's attention, Garcia turned serious. "First, I trust what is said in this room stays in this room."

There were nods of agreement and mutterings of, “Yes, sir.”

“Yesterday morning, I gather at the same time the county people were hearing about the new sheriff’s reorganization” – Ro thought she detected a hint of sarcasm in the way Garcia said “reorganization” – “I was called to Chief Sloan’s office and informed about the adjustment” – there was unmistakable scorn in how he said “adjustment” – “to the command structure of the SWAT unit. While I wasn’t told this explicitly, I got the impression the change originated in the sheriff’s office and Chief Sloan was not enthusiastic about it but went along out of professional courtesy.”

Then rising from his chair, he leaned forward and rested his hands on the table in front of him, again pointedly looking at each person in the room. “I want to be absolutely clear about this: Lieutenant Pease and I have been and always will be the co-commanders of this SWAT unit, period. Someone” – he rolled his eyes dismissively – “may have moved boxes around on a table of organization to satisfy some...” He left the thought hanging. “But as far as you are concerned, nothing has changed for us.”

Then Pease rose to stand next to his fellow commander, “And I don’t want to hear any second guessing, any bitching. We do our jobs the way we know how” – the way he said “we” was a clear unspoken suggestion he meant “no matter what some outsider says” – “because we are professionals.”

There were mutterings of “Damn right” and “Got it,” as well as a smattering of applause.

“So, let’s get to work,” Pease said.

There was a lot of scrapping noise as chairs moved into position at the tables.

Chapter Eighty-Six: The Seven-Year Rule

Tuesday, January 13, 2009, 2:30 p.m.

"Hello, in the vault. It's Tom Pease."

"Hey, L.T., c'mon in."

Stepping around the heavy, still ajar gun vault door, Pease said, "I didn't want you taking a shot at me because you thought I was like those lowlifes you ran into your rookie year."

On the job as a sworn deputy for only a matter of weeks, Ro was involved in a shootout with bad guys who got the jump on Pops Waters and were trying to highjack automatic weapons sent to the regional shooting range for an upcoming demonstration by the Iowa State Police.

Ro shrugged. "Don't remind me of that damn fool who thought she could take down three shooters single-handed. Pops and I were lucky to walk out of there in one piece."

Pease chuckled. "It's not the way Pops remembers it." Glancing down at an open wooden crate, about the size of a large suitcase, and at the wicked-looking Heckler and Koch UMP she was holding, he said, "So, the H&Ks came in."

"Late this morning," Ro said. "In an armored car, no less. There must have been a dozen forms to sign before they'd offload the crate."

"How many came in?"

"Four."

"As I recall, we asked for eight."

"Yeah... But it isn't uncommon to not get everything you request."

Last summer, the Joint SWAT unit applied for the full auto submachine guns as part of a U.S. Department of Defense program to distribute surplus military equipment to local law enforcement. Debating whether to ask for the automatic weapons or rocket-propelled grenade launchers, they chose the former.

"I didn't come to see our new toys... In fact, I didn't even know they arrived."

"You weren't supposed to, no offense meant. Nobody was supposed to except me."

"None taken," he said. Then, jerking his head toward the SWAT ready room down the hall, said, "I do need to talk to you, though."

"Uh oh, am I in trouble?"

"Not with me."

"But I am in trouble with someone."

"I'll let you decide."

When they arrived at the ready room, at this time of day empty, Ro made a cup of tea and Pease coffee from a single-serve machine. After they took their seats, he said, "There is something you need to know about."

"Okay..."

“Eventually, this’d probably get out, so we wanted you to hear it from us and not the rumor mill. Garcia met with the new sheriff this morning. It seems Mercer wants to institute a rule requiring seven years’ experience before joining SWAT.”

Ro knew most departments had a minimum requirement for SWAT, but it was usually three, four, or five years; she never heard of one demanding seven years.

Narrowing her eyes, she said, “If my guess is right, I’m the only one on the squad with less than seven years as a cop.”

He nodded. “Let’s say they went back and forth for quite a while. Garcia told him you are one of our best team members and kicking you off the squad would create a real morale problem with the rest of the crew. But he thinks what swung things around is when he said there was a real danger the issue wouldn’t stay within the department. How would it look if the press started asking why a cop decorated for valor couldn’t be SWAT?”

Ro was silent for a few seconds, trying to push aside her rising anger, but wasn’t successful.

“So, am I off the team?” She said it louder and with more vehemence than intended or was necessary with Pease, who she believed to be on her side.

“No, you are not. Mercer’s gonna have his seven-year rule. But you’re being grandfathered in because you qualified under the old rules. Garcia insisted on it.”

Ro sighed with relief. Except the news didn’t entirely assuage her pique.

“L.T., what the hell’s going on here? They took away my armorer’s designation. I’ve got Captain Pettit riding my butt all the time. Now this...”

Pease paused, like deciding whether to go all the way, then said, “Deputy, not to put too fine a point on it, they want you off the force.”

Staggered, Ro couldn’t believe it. Yes, she’d had run-ins with Pettit, but ascribed them to a female jealousy thing. The idea of a larger hidden agenda never crossed her mind.

“Why? Do they think I’m not a good cop?”

Pease chuckled, then apologized. “I know, it’s not funny, except it is ironic. No, it’s the exact opposite. You’re too good a cop.”

“That doesn’t make any sense. How can you be too good a cop?”

He sighed with no little exasperation. “Look, I’ve worked with you for how long? A little over two years? I’ve seen how you conduct yourself day-to-day, and I have seen you under fire. Everything you do revolves around one goal, to be the best cop you can.”

Ro gave him a half-frown look, silently saying, “Well, of course, doesn’t everybody?”

“Deputy, your single-minded motivation, as laudable as it is, unfortunately blinds you to other aspects of being a cop, especially the inevitable politics involved in any large group.”

“I don’t have time for that shit!” Again, said with more anger than she wanted.

“As far as you’re concerned, it’s an unwelcome distraction from doing your job. And that’s your problem. For example, you might be aware,” he put air quotes around “aware,” “most of your fellow deputies respect you, but I doubt you realize how much. In the same vein, while I know you shrug off the hero cop stuff, out there in the community, it’s what you are. Again, not to put too

fine a point on it, Mercer and his colleagues are afraid you'll run for sheriff one of these days... And could win."

"Ridiculous... It's the last thing I'd want."

She did not overlook the parallel between the situation and her brother. *Tuck didn't want to be on the Prentiss board. I sure wouldn't want to be sheriff. I can't imagine where we got such an independent streak from.*

"I know. Sheriffs don't ride around in patrol cars and face down bad guys, which is where your heart is. But Mercer and his people don't know that. And who's to say, maybe four years from now, if fellow deputies are urging you to run and if community leaders are reassuring you, they'll back you? Well, you might reconsider."

Ro sighed. "Okay, I understand what you're saying. They're trying to push me out, get me to quit on my own."

"Exactly. They know they can't fire you outright, not unless you commit some major faux pas like shooting a civilian. So, my advice for now is do your job, keep your head down and don't draw their fire."

You and Pops been talking? she thought, remembering a similar conversation with her friend and mentor. "Pops Waters once said about the same thing to me."

"Well, he is sort of like our Jedi Master Yoda, isn't he? So, I'd take his advice to heart."

"Did you know before I became a deputy, I was involved in sport shooting?"

"I remember something about you being the Iowa champion."

Ro nodded. "In sport shooting, the one unforgivable sin is firing on a non-threatening target."

Pease put his hands up in a "There you have it" gesture and said, "So, no drawing down on civvies. That shouldn't be too hard to remember."

They both laughed, although it had a sardonic tenor.