

MELODIE CAMPBELL



# THE B-TEAM

The case OF the ANGRY First Wife

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*The case OF the ANGRY FIRST Wife*

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

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# ONE

**We had been summoned.** There was no other way to put it.

“Why does she want us?” asked my twin brother, Dino, sitting next to me in the passenger seat of the Mustang.

“No idea.” It was baffling. She’d never done this before. And somehow it made me uneasy.

“You nervous?” Dino wriggled in his seat.  
“I am.”

“Ditto.” Our great-aunt is a legend in the industrial city of Hamilton, aka The Hammer. You know the expression *cat burglar*? Suffice it to say her nickname in the family is Kitty.

Of course, those infamous burglaries were all long before. Kitty retired a few years ago after breaking an ankle in a bad fall while leaving a second-story window. Now she divides her time between her little house in the forest and the Holy Cannoli Retirement Home, visiting my elderly relatives who reside there. Many of them are dotty. Not Kitty. Her brain cells are in for the long haul.

“Could we have done something wrong?” By wrong, I didn’t mean breaking-the-law wrong. Natch. I snuck a glance at Dino.

There was an unfamiliar frown on his otherwise angel-perfect face. “Surely we’d be facing Mom instead.”

I shivered.

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Nearly there. I pulled into the parking lot behind La Paloma, the upscale bistro owned by our uncle Vito. It serves as the family meeting place. But we try not to make that public. So we walked in the front door this time, just like normal restaurant patrons. It was uncommonly quiet inside.

Dino took off his sunglasses the way that detective in *CSI Miami* does. I let my eyes adjust to the dark. The place was empty except for Kitty. She was seated by herself at a table near the back, drinking an espresso.

Of course there was a white tablecloth on the table. This was a class joint.

Kitty grinned and waved us over. “*Ciao*, Del. Dino.”

I leaned down for my usual two-cheek kisses. Her face was a road map of wrinkles, the skin soft and powdery. Her once-dark hair had advanced from gray to pure white. But the brown eyes were as sharp as ever.

We slid into chairs opposite her. She got right to the point. “You two know what I mean when I say *The A-Team*?”

Dino squinted. “That TV show from the eighties? The one about the Vietnam vets who became vigilantes?”

“That’s the one.” She leaned forward. Her dark eyes gleamed. “They’re a bunch of old guys now. Retired. So I’m starting a new one.”

“New TV show?” I asked, perplexed. Surely she knew the A-Team wasn’t real.

“Nope. Vigilante group. I talked to your mom. We need one, with all the senior scams these days.” She leaned back in the chair and looked off into the distance with a spooky smile. “I’m thinking of calling it...the B-Team. And Del, we want you to run it.”

My brother groaned.

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**That was five months ago.** A whole lot has happened since then.

There are four of us vigilantes now. Me, Dino, Kitty and Ritz. Hard to describe my old pal from high school. Her real name is Rita, but we call her Ritz, after the crackers. Big hint there. Remember Murdock from *The A-Team*? Back in the politically incorrect days of the eighties, he would have been what we called “certified crazy.” Ritz is not far off that.

We operate from an empty house in Hamilton. Kitty has a small supply of them. She calls this her “two-story pension plan.” Clever idea to park her laundered earnings in real estate. Mom helped her with financial planning. When Kitty needs money to fund our operations, she simply sells another house.



I remember very clearly how this particular job got started. It was a Saturday afternoon, which explained why I could be there. I have a different job during the week. Kitty and Ritz covered the office Monday to Friday. Ritz had wandered in earlier, looking for company. When the phone rang she grabbed it and answered in her characteristic gruff manner.

“B-Team. Make it snappy. We’re busy.”

I grimaced. Yes, you had to be tough, being female in this game. That’s Ritz. Pure rawhide.

As she said on the phone, we’re the B-Team. We deal in justice, not the law. Sometimes the law lets you down. We try to rectify that.

Ritz turned to me. “It’s Kitty. She wants to talk to you.”

I grabbed the receiver from her hand before she shoved it in my face. Ritz is a tad abrupt.

“Yup,” I said into the phone.

“Still on for tonight?” Kitty’s voice was

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businesslike. She knew I wasn't happy about this job.

"Yeah. Sure." I wasn't the type to back out.

"Del, are you sure about Ritz? This is a tricky one."

I looked over at the person in question. Ritz was cleaning her fingernails with the corner of a business card.

"I'm never sure about Ritz," I muttered into the phone.

Kitty rang off.

Ritz turned to me. Her dark, beady eyes were a stark contrast to her flaxen curls.

"You don't need me until tonight." It was a statement.

I shook my head. Ritz is our weapons gal. There is nothing she doesn't know about hardware and tearing things apart. I like to tease her about the tools she carries. Ritz has screwdrivers where other women carry lipstick.

“Then I’ll be at the range.” Ritz lifted her squat body from the beat-up office chair. She grabbed her backpack from the floor and sauntered to the door. “See you tonight.”

A few weeks ago, I asked Ritz why she risked her freedom doing vigilante jobs with us. *I hate it when innocent people get crapped on by scumbags* was her answer.

Can’t argue with that. I got an uneasy feeling as I watched her leave.

# TWO

**At seven that night,** we had a final conference call over the Internet.

Dino was on the line from New York. His handsome cherub face filled the screen. “I cased the joint earlier this week. No alarm system in evidence or on record. Second-floor windows left open.”

Kitty said, “They’re going to Vegas for the weekend.”

“How do you know that?” Dino said.

“We have the same cleaning people,” said Kitty. “They talk to me.”

Everyone talks to Kitty. Such a sweet little old lady. She could charm the sharks in the sea, let alone the ones on land.

If they only knew her like we do...

“What’s the backstory?” asked Ritz. Her pug face dominated the screen.

It took me a moment to remember that Ritz hadn’t been in on the first meeting for this job. Without the background, she didn’t know the reason we were doing it.

“We’re working for wife number one,” said Kitty. “Angela. Recently divorced, not her idea. We’re after a diamond necklace that belongs to her. The new wife has been swanning around town, wearing it like a big trophy. It isn’t hers to wear. Angela wants it back.”

I couldn’t keep my mouth shut. “This isn’t exactly a hard-luck story.”

“Del, we’ve discussed this.” Her voice was impatient. “The necklace was given to Angela by her grandmother. Not her ex.”

“I’m not so thrilled about risking my butt for rich people.” I mean, this wasn’t exactly Robin Hood material. Usually, we helped people who had been preyed upon by heartless bastards.

“Angela isn’t rich. The lawyers got rich. You know how it goes.”

I still grumbled.

“Okay, how do the rest of you feel? Do you want to pull out?” Kitty asked.

“I don’t really count since I’m not there to be part of it,” said Dino.

“Ritz?”

“Nah. It’s a job. I like jobs,” said Ritz.

Typical response from Ritz. It made me shiver.

“Del?”

I sighed. “I’ll do it if Ritz does. But I hope

our next job is a little more in line with our mandate.”

“You just don’t understand, Del.”

“You’re right. I don’t.”

“We don’t discriminate against people based on income or anything else. If they’ve been done wrong, we step in. Simple as that.”

“Yeah, yeah. I hear you.” What she said was true. Kitty set the rules. Kitty set us up in this business to begin with, and she paid our expenses. It’s her baby. I figure it’s her way of making a bid for heaven after a somewhat questionable early career.

Our mission is to help the underdog. That is, people who have been on the losing side of a bad deal and will likely suffer greatly because of it. Our most recent cases involved restoring someone’s good name, and preventing a blackmailer from preying on the helpless. Both noble endeavors.

This divorcee was hardly an underdog,

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and helping her get back an heirloom diamond necklace was not the sort of thing I like to take risks for.

But I thought the world of Kitty. And if Kitty wanted to do this, I would swallow my feelings and do it.

“See you at midnight,” I said.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**I suppose I should thank** actor George Peppard. The leader of *The A-Team* was my kind of guy. I grew up with that show and, from the beginning, was determined to form my own vigilante group. I became a writer instead but never forgot that original goal. And so *The B-Team* now has life in print.

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**Melodie Campbell** got her start writing stand-up comedy. Her fiction has been described by editors and reviewers as “wacky” and “laugh-out-loud funny.” Winner of ten awards, including the 2014 Derringer and the 2014 Arthur Ellis for *The Goddaughter’s Revenge*, Melodie has over two hundred publishing credits, including forty short stories and thirteen novels. She is the former executive director of Crime Writers of Canada. She lives outside Toronto, Ontario. For more information, visit [www.melodiecampbell.com](http://www.melodiecampbell.com).