

# P.J. TRACY

A MONKEEWRENCH NOVEL

SHOOT  
TO  
THRILL

**SAMPLE  
CHAPTER**

## PROLOGUE

From top to bottom and everywhere in between, Minnesota was a bleak and frigid place in January, whether you were shivering on a blizzard-swept western prairie or paralyzed under a foot of snow smack in the middle of Minneapolis. But there was no greater sense of winter desolation than on the north shore of Lake Superior, where the big water that looked like an ocean was forever pushing enormous blocks of sharded ice against one shore or another.

The past two weeks had been particularly cruel to the lake. A parade of low-pressure systems had stalled, battling each other for command of the winds, freezing the great body of water almost to the horizon line. It was profoundly disturbing to see something so powerful completely subdued, like King Kong in chains on a Broadway stage.

Randy Coulter had a lot of empathy for the lake, because he knew what it felt like to be the helpless victim of a greater force, trapped by circumstances he was powerless to change. But that was the old Randy—the new, improved Randy finally had the power to make things happen. And if he could muster the guts, he'd make something happen today.

The trail on the edge of the cliff provided spectacular winterscape views for the snowshoers and cross-country skiers who frequented the winter resorts along the shore, and their numbers were legion in the week between Christmas and New Year's. City dwellers accustomed to the protective environment of crosswalks and guardrails flocked to the north in a foolish fit of adventure, where you actually had to rely on your own good sense instead of the nanny state to keep you safe.

Randy slipped out of his snowshoes and off the groomed trail, testing each step toward the edge of the cliff with a pole to make sure there was frozen earth beneath the windswept snow. The closer he got to the lip of eternity, the colder the wind that blew on his face. He began to despair, thinking that no would-be athlete would venture out on such a day, when the barometer rose and the temperatures

plummeted. They were all inside their cozy cabins and resort rooms, frolicking in hot tubs or drinking in front of a fire, and Randy would be the only soul to see this cliff today.

He had to drop to the snow on his stomach to safely examine the magnificent sight over fifty feet below him. The shoreline bristled with stalagmites of frozen water that vaulted upward from the shore like monstrous icy teeth, just waiting for something substantial to gnaw on.

‘Beautiful,’ he whispered.

‘Hey. You okay?’

Randy nearly tumbled over the edge at the sound of a male voice behind him, and then looked over his shoulder and saw everything he would never be. From the logo on the Gore-Tex suit he knew immediately that the man drove a foreign sports car and had left a probably augmented blond woman back in his cabin, and for a moment he felt himself shrink away, curl inside himself, until he remembered the power. ‘Thank God,’ he said, and the man’s waxed brows moved into a frown.

‘Are you hurt, buddy? How can I help?’

Randy closed his eyes. ‘I think there’s a body down there,’ he whispered, rising to his feet. ‘I didn’t know what to do . . .’

‘You’re kidding.’

‘No, really.’

‘Jesus Christ.’

‘Do you have a cell phone?’

‘Sure. Let me get a look first.’

‘Okay, but be careful. It’s a little slick out here near the edge.’

The man removed his snowshoes, moved cautiously toward the edge and peered over. ‘I don’t see anything.’

‘You have to come further this way. Those ice spikes block the view . . . oh, man, this is horrible, I’ve never seen anything like this . . .’

Randy felt the man’s hand come down firmly on his shoulder. Oddly, he found the touch comforting.

‘Take it easy, buddy. Just relax, take a breath. It’s down there?’

Randy didn’t have to fake the tears. They came on their own, and he couldn’t imagine why. ‘Right . . . down . . . there . . .’ he pointed, and when the man leaned forward to follow his finger, Randy locked his knees and braced his legs and pushed against the man’s back with all the strength he had.

The wind carried away the prolonged scream as Randy just stood there, looking out toward the horizon, his face expressionless. It might have been seconds or hours when he finally fell to his stomach again and peered over the edge.

It looked like Mr. Gore-Tex was humping one of the ice stalagmites, and Randy thought that was pretty funny.

‘I told you there was a body down there,’ he whispered, then pulled a tiny video camera out of his parka pocket and hit the zoom button.