

HAPPY DICK'N

By

Adam Zend

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PROLOGUE

In 1991 two stories intertwine; first as a series of murders in Hot Springs, Arkansas, forces two newly partnered homicide detectives — ‘Donald Smith’ a gay, preppie upper-class male and ‘Angel Jones’ a tough, street-savvy lesbian—to solve the murders while trying to come to terms with their own self bigotry, and second the ruminations of Detective Smith's grandfather concerning ‘Frank Turner’ and his K-9 German shepherd ‘Jack.’

CHAPTER ONE

Her hearing not as keen as in her youth, Agnes Blakewood strained to hear through the apartment wall what the two male voices were arguing about next door.

She could only make out a word or two when she heard the loud noise. The bang startled not only her, but her mangy cat Horace.

12:11a.m. the dusty round-faced clock on the wall displayed as she took note.

Going into her eighty-ninth year, she was a widow for more than twenty of those years. She and her companion Horace were still clinging to life, such as it was.

Agnes sat motionless, not sure what had happened. She didn't care for the young man in the adjacent apartment; it was the downstairs, corner unit, number twelve. He treated cats badly, and to her, that was a sin. Finally making her way over to the window, she peeked out, but couldn't see anything from her angle.

The apartment stairs were located directly in front of the building. Straining her weak eyes, she now spied someone standing on the stairs, about a third of the way up; he was looking toward her neighbor's door.

Slowly the figure descended and emerged into the soft glow of the only street lamp near their complex. It was Ryan Wily, the young college student who lived directly above unit twelve. Agnes took an instant liking to Ryan when he helped her with her groceries one late afternoon a few months back.

She went and cracked her door open a few inches, and Ryan was now

standing only a couple of feet away, staring intensely at apartment twelve's door, which was ajar. His attention now turned to the light coming from Agnes' doorway.

Squinting, he made out her small frame peering at him in the darkness. "Mrs. Blakewood, are you all right?" He spoke louder than normal due to her hearing impairment.

Agnes pushed the door wide and ventured out. "Ronny, what was that loud noise?"

Ryan didn't mind that she sometimes called him by the wrong name. Overlooking it mainly because of her age, and he didn't have the heart to correct her.

"I think it came from apartment twelve," he stated pointing toward the door.

"Well young man, the Christian thing to do is knock and make sure the man is okay, even if he is a jerk," she said in her straightforward manner.

Leaning forward, Ryan pressed the door buzzer and held it for several seconds before releasing it. "I didn't hear anything, I think it's broken."

Agnes pulled her nightgown tighter around her narrow shoulders to ward off the night air. "Never mind the fancy buzzer, just knock on the damn door. Horace is waiting for his treat," she said in her sassy tone.

Complying, several hard knocks were applied, yet no response came forth. He now peered through the half-opened door.

"Well, what do you see?" she asked impatiently.

"I can see a man's leg," he said as he turned to face her.

Agnes took Ryan by the arm and pulled him from the doorway. She pushed the door open herself, she observed the half-naked body of her neighbor lying face up on the living room floor. His eyes were open and staring at the ceiling.

Agnes moved in for a closer examination, at which time she spotted the hole in his chest, near his heart. A thin line of blood had trailed toward his neck.

"Better call the police; this man has kicked the bucket for sure," she said with no sympathy in her voice.

Ryan stood frozen, unable to take his youthful eyes from the ghastly sight.

Agnes turned from the body, and seeing his facial expression, waved her petite hand in front of his face to break his trance.

Startled, he stepped back a bit, but Agnes seized his wrist and shook it. "Pay attention Robby! Go call the police right now! You hear me, boy?!"

"Ah, yes...call the police...ah...yes, right now...I'll go call them," he mumbled as he finally took off up the stairs heading for his phone.

The neighborhood was usually quiet. There had never been such excitement in this area of the city in over thirty years.

Ryan headed straight for his phone, whose headset was designed in the shape of a football. For a college student, his apartment was the typical mess; beer cans and empty pizza containers thrown everywhere, piles of unwashed clothes lying in small mounds, bugs galore all over the dirty dishes in the sink. Dialing 911 into the phone he noticed sweat had formed on his brow.

Agnes glanced up at the digital clock resting on the counter-top in the kitchen; time was 12:38 a.m. It seemed longer, but even now she could make out the approaching sirens.

"Nine-one-one, what is your emergency?" the female voice asked.

"I...I...think he's...shot, he's...got a hole...in...in...his..." Ryan stammered in his out-of-breath and frightened voice.

"Just relax son," the calm female voice said. "Now take a deep breath, and tell me your name?"

Ryan filled his lungs with air, and then choked, coughing out the old air, while gasping to take in fresh air.

"Can you hear me?" she asked, listening to his episode on the other end of the line.

Ryan regained control. "I'm sorry..."

"Everything will be fine. My screen shows you're calling from 2218 Park St, apartment twenty-four. Would that be correct?"

Ryan coughed a few more times, and then cleared his throat. "Yes...that's my apartment."

"And what is your name?" she continued.

His mind went blank as he stood staring out through his open door.

"Sir, I need your name?!" she hollered into the phone.

"Ryan...ah, Ryan Wily...I'm sorry," he said snapping out of his daze.

"All right Ryan, just relax for a moment. When you're ready, please tell me who has been shot?"

"The guy in apartment twelve; he's just inside his door."

"Okay, do you know who shot him?"

"No, I heard a loud noise, and I went down to check on Mrs. Blakewood, and his door was partially open. I saw him lying on his back. Mrs. Blakewood told me to call you guys," he rattled on.

"Who is Mrs. Blakewood?" the dispatcher asked.

"She lives downstairs next to apartment twelve."

"Okay Ryan, I have units responding. Can you tell if the man is still alive?"

"I think he's dead; his eyes are open, but he's not moving...maybe he's still alive...I'm not sure...he might..." Ryan couldn't think straight anymore, the shock had brought on confusion.

"All right, just relax. Do you know the man's name?"

"Yes, it's James Butler, I think."

"Okay then, just go wait for the officers to arrive, and don't touch anything inside apartment twelve, understand?" she asked still typing on her emergency screen.

"Yes," he said hanging up and proceeding down to meet the officers.

Agnes could now see the flashing lights turning onto Park Street. She turned just as Ryan was descending the stairs. "I'm going to tend to Horace. If the police need anything, just tell them to knock."

Ryan stood, hands in his pockets, nervously awaiting their arrival.

"Ray, did you hear what I just said?!" she raised her voice.

"Yes Mrs. Blakewood, I'm sorry. If the police need to see you, just have them knock," he recited.

The first to arrive were Officers Brenda Dearborn and her rookie partner Jamale Johnson, from the Hot Springs City Police Department. Behind them was Sergeant Harold O'Leary from the sheriff's office. Fire rescue Unit 319 and Ambulance Unit 73 arrived within seconds of the others.

Officers Dearborn and Johnson entered first to establish all was safe for the paramedics' entry. Sergeant O'Leary came in next, followed by the others.

"He's as dead as they come," O'Leary said, leaning over the body as he observed the entry wound to James Butler's chest.

After the paramedics verified for themselves, they agreed it was now a job for the coroner's office. They packed their gear and departed.

“Radio in and tell dispatch we’ll need homicide and the coroner’s office notified,” Officer Dearborn instructed her rookie partner.

“Just hold up there, missy,” O’Leary stated as he placed his hands on his rotund hips. “You’re out of your jurisdiction; this is the county’s homicide, not the cities.”

“Don’t try that macho shit with me. I’m no rookie, buster. This is in the city limits, so it’s our jurisdiction, not yours,” Officer Dearborn lamented.

“Well, rookie, maybe not, but you don’t know a damn thing about where the boundary line starts and ends. It ends at Park Street for the city limit,” O’Leary said, trying to stare her down.

“Back off fat man!” Dearborn commanded in her stern voice.

“Hey, we’re all on the same side, right?” Officer Johnson interjected as he stood closer to his training partner to show support.

“You better listen to your boy, missy, before you get in over your head.”

“Boy! Who you callin’ boy?” Dearborn demanded. “And don’t call me ‘missy’ again, understand?” She was riled up now, and ready for a fight.

“Now you know what I meant when I said boy, and it has nothin’ to do with color, and callin’ you missy ain’t no put-down neither. So let’s simmer down a bit; all it takes is one call and we can clear this all up,” he said with a slight grin on his face. “Now, do you really want me to call and wake up your chief at this time of night?”

Brenda Dearborn looked over at her partner, and then back at Sergeant O’Leary. He had called her bluff, and she knew it. Not completely sure as to which department had jurisdiction, she figured she could con O’Leary. She gambled and lost, so it was time to retreat.

O’Leary assumed command of the crime scene and radioed his dispatcher to send out the forensics team, coroner’s crew, and the homicide squad. Most of those called out at this time of night would surely be asleep. The first person didn’t arrive on the scene for nearly an hour.

Jake Elderman and his assistant Ed Gorman of the county morgue came first. They approached the open door and were met by O’Leary who was just inside, smoking a fat cigar.

“Who’s that with you, Jake?” O’Leary asked, squinting as he peered into the darkness.

“That’s Ed Gorman, you remember him from your daughter’s wedding

last month, don't you?"

"Oh, now I can place him, sure, he was an usher if I recall correctly."

"That was me, all right," Ed said smiling.

"What? Forensics ain't here yet? Those guys are a bunch of lazy shits. If I had a dime for every time I beat them to a crime scene, I could be sittin' in my condo in Miami about now," he said as he slapped O'Leary on the shoulder, while wearing a big grin on his rather thin face.

Meanwhile, several deputies had cordoned off the crime scene area around the apartment building.

Lieutenant George Milhouse pulled up. The place took on the appearance of an active beehive, he thought as he approached Sergeant O'Leary.

"So, Harold, tell me what you think you're doing?" he said anxiously as he flashed a cross look.

O'Leary took note of his superior's facial expression and his tone of voice, trying to discern his true demeanor, which he failed to do.

"I'm not sure what you mean by that, George," he said, still trying to figure out if he was serious or just fooling around.

"Harold, I was told that you threatened the Hot Springs city officers. Would that be a true statement?" He glared at his old friend.

"Who told you that?" O'Leary asked rather sheepishly.

"Never you mind who told me, just answer the damn question!" the lieutenant shot back, clearly agitated now.

"Well, not in so many words, but I held my ground," he said, almost sounding apologetic. "Why, what's the problem?"

Lieutenant Milhouse rolled his eyes and threw his hands into the air. "Why don't you ever listen to what is said in roll-call? Not once, not twice, but three different times it was announced that the city boundary line now extended to include Park Street. You're out of our jurisdiction. The county prosecutor can't touch this case. Son-of-a-bitch! How many times am I going to have to cover your ignorant ass? Shit!" The lieutenant's face was blushing red as he stood shaking his head in disbelief.

"Sorry," was all O'Leary could bring himself to say in his most pitiful-sounding voice. Staring at the pavement like a small child who had just been scolded by an angry parent.

"Sorry my ass! I'm not about to make the call. You're going to call the

Hot Springs police station and apologize for the mix-up. Then you're going to gather all the crime scene evidence and personally hand it over to their detectives when they arrive. You understand me?" he got right up into O'Leary's face. "Look at me! Did you hear what I just said?"

O'Leary moved back a half-step and looked at his old friend. He knew he had pushed him too far this time. "Lieutenant, I'm very sorry I put you in this kind of position. I will apologize and straighten this mess out right now, sir."

"You're damn right you will," he said as he turned and headed for his cruiser. The lieutenant's tires squealed and smoked as he sped away.

Sergeant O'Leary tried to relax and regain his composure as he started directing everyone to stop what they were doing. Once he had all the evidence he told the others to go on home, he listened as Ed and Jake from the county morgue whined and complained as they left. Now it was time to make the call to the Hot Springs station and apologize for the misunderstanding. It would be one of the hardest calls he ever had to make.

CHAPTER TWO

Spring of 1991 and the city of Hot Springs, Arkansas, had a police force of only seventy-seven officers. They managed to handle everything from jaywalkers to homicides. Their basic problems were along the same lines as the bigger cities, such as Little Rock.

All had their problems to contend with, such as the one facing Chief of Police Rachel Temme. A feisty lady in her early fifties, with long auburn hair, she was tall, just short of five-eleven, with a lean, athletic build. Didn't believe in wearing make-up; just natural beauty was her style.

Joining the department as a self-defense instructor some twenty-seven years ago, she worked her way up through the ranks. Decorating her office gave her immense joy, as it had been an earlier hobby for her just out of college. Her office was ultramodern, sleek, and contained a glass-topped desk with a stainless steel frame. It was accompanied by a black designer desk chair.

Located behind her desk were six large file cabinets painted in dark shades of pink. On the right wall was a large smooth, glass-paned window, out of which one could glance and view the police cruisers in the side lot. Over on the other side was a small, black cloth sofa with stainless steel legs. A series of small photographs hung over the sofa depicting blue jays in various settings. The floor looked to be white marble which was highlighted by the pastel mix of yellow and orange covering the walls and ceiling.

She had come in early due to a rather strange phone call she had received earlier. The call was patched through the city dispatcher and transferred to her home. A Sergeant O'Leary of the sheriff's department had a rather odd story concerning a homicide, and how a mix-up had occurred concerning who had jurisdiction. It was followed by an apology, which she accepted gracefully.

She already notified the city forensics and coroner's office to send their personnel to the crime scene, along with several city police units. All she needed now was to assign a detective team to get the ball rolling, but therein lay her dilemma. All her detectives were already assigned other caseloads except Detective Donald Smith, who currently had no partner. He had received her '911' page and was just now arriving at the station.

Detective Smith knocked on the glass door with the stenciled 'CHIEF OF POLICE' displayed boldly on the glass.

"Please, take a seat, Detective." She pointed toward the sofa.

As he entered, he experienced the same impression he had the last time he was called to her office, that all the odd colors just made no sense. It seemed to him, some psycho had run amuck with a multicolored spray gun.

Donald Smith, who preferred to be called Donny, stood just barely five feet seven inches and maintained the body of a welterweight boxer. He had the chest and abdominal muscles of a wrestler, and the biceps of an Olympic discus thrower. Being an avid jogger kept his thigh and calf muscles toned and ready for action, not to mention his rock-hard buns.

Young, only thirty-three, he was astonishingly handsome for a detective; nothing like the old, over-the-hill types that made up the rest of the homicide division.

Stylish short black hair complemented his strong cheek bones and chiseled jawline. Clean shaven, with smooth skin covering his entire almost hairless body. Had it not been for his career as a police officer, he could have easily been a male model in one of the current women's fashion magazines. Dressed in a navy blue suit, a red and white pinstriped tie only added to his masculinity. The very image of a 'man' women wait their entire lives trying to catch.

In the all-male homicide squad, he was the youngest by far to reach the rank of detective. Openly gay, and proud of it, not only broke the hearts of the local female population, it left him without a partner, as the other homophobic officers refused to team up with him. This was the chief's problem. Who would be assigned to work with Donny and not be offended by his obvious sexual preference?

Chief Temme had already heard the whispers—'fag' and 'queer'—as the other detectives passed her doorway. Alas, she finally came up with the perfect solution to her puzzling dilemma.

"Good morning, Chief," he said with a sleepy expression on his boyish face. "What's up with the '911' call?" Donny flashed his famous smile.

"Save the charm, we've got a problem as you're well aware. None of the other detectives feel comfortable working with you," she said frankly.

"Yes, I know, it's the homosexual thing, isn't it?" he said still smiling.

"I should say it was a problem, but I've found a unique solution," she stated, now grinning herself.

“Hey, I’d rather work by myself than with one of those pot-bellied bigots.”

“You know departmental regulations; no detective works alone, period. But, as I just said, I have the perfect answer to our little problem of you needing a partner who won’t mind if you’re gay.”

“And what did you come up with?” he said, as he leaned forward on the edge of the sofa. His curiosity was now piqued. Knowing Chief Temme was a very intelligent woman, he also knew she had a sinister sense of humor.

Rachel sat at her desk with her hands clasped in front of her, showcasing her long, slender fingers. Clearing her throat, she began, “As you may or may not know, Alvin Korba has resigned and been hired over at the State Police Post. I interviewed an applicant just yesterday, and found her to be the perfect one to replace Alvin. She’s from a small town, just over the Arkansas border in Texas. Her arrest record speaks for itself. She’ll be arriving any minute now, and starts today as your new partner.” Rachel observed Donny’s face for his reaction to the news she dropped in his lap.

“A female detective, I should have thought of that,” he said, easing back on the sofa. A feeling of relief washed over him, as now he wouldn’t have to contend with the old guard and their hatred of gays. Fear of being thought of as a ‘fag’ or ‘cock sucker’ by a new partner had caused him some sleepless nights, but now, he could relax. A female partner would be more understanding, he felt, especially since women have been treated poorly by the old male establishment for decades.

“Oh, it gets better; she’s also a lesbian and proud to be one. Actually, she’s damn proud of it. As I’m sure you’ll soon discover for yourself,” she said with a short laugh.

Surprised for a moment, Detective Smith sat stunned. Regaining his composure a few seconds later, “You put me with a lesbian?”

“That’s right, and I expect you to show her around, get her familiar with our procedures. Understand?” she said in her official ‘chief of police’ tone.

“Yes, I fully understand. When do I...” Several raps on the glass door interrupted him in mid-sentence.

“To finish your question, you get to meet her right now,” Rachel said as she waved her new detective in.

“Detective Angel Jones, I’d like to introduce your new partner, Detective Donald Smith,” Chief Temme said.

“Just call me Donny,” he said standing and extending his hand.

Grasping and shaking his hand, “Okay, Donny, you can call me Angel.”

Donny was momentarily caught off-guard. Angel Jones stood a good three inches taller than him, and outweighed him by a good twenty pounds, all muscle, with little body fat. Angel’s yellow-blond dyed hair was short and spiked on top, with a tight razor cut on both sides. Yet it was shoulder-length in the back. Her right ear contained seven piercings; the left ear held only three. A diamond nose-stud adorned her left nostril and while she spoke it was evident her tongue had been pierced as well.

The black sleeveless jacket and black zip-up motorcycle boots matched her outdated red leather mini-skirt. Each forearm contained an obvious tattoo; one of a lion’s head on the right with the ominous beast baring its fangs, and the other containing a winged angel.

Donny was rubbing his hands together, trying to get the blood circulating again after the bone-crushing grip his new partner had just delivered.

“All right, now that you two have met, I have a case already in progress for you to investigate. It’s over on 2218 Park Street, apartment twelve. A man named James Butler was shot once in the chest.” Chief Temme handed a slip of paper with the name and address on it to Detective Smith.

“James Butler? What’s this guy’s story?” Donny asked, looking up from the paper slip.

“Why that would be your job to figure out, Detective Smith, isn’t that in your job description?” Chief Temme said while shaking her head in disbelief at his silly question. “Forensics and the medical examiner are already there waiting on you two.”

“We’re on it Captain,” Angel said as she pulled open the office door.

“Its ‘Chief,’ not ‘Captain,’ Detective Jones,” she said in her official stern voice.

“Yes ma’am, I hear ya. Okay, let’s go Donny,” Angel said as she went into the hallway.

Donny glanced over at Rachel and rolled his eyes.

“I knew you’d like her,” she grinned, then waved him on.

“I’ll get you for this,” Donny said as he shook his finger mockingly at her.

“Just do your job, and remember it’s her first day, so be nice. That’s an order.”

Donny caught up with Angel, who was standing at the edge of the parking lot, looking over the cruisers.

“We’re the dark gray one over by the fence,” he said pointing. “Tomorrow we’ll sign out a set of keys so you’ll have access to everything at the station.”

“Sounds great, I can’t wait.” Angel headed for the old Ford LTD, followed by her new partner. She was a go-getter from the start.

“So, how long have you been on the force?” she asked as they drove from the parking lot heading to the crime scene.

“Twelve years now. I made detective less than a year ago. But I haven’t had a steady partner, none of the bigots wanted to team up with me.”

“Oh yes, the ‘fag’ issue. I’ve run across the same shit in Texas. Good ol’ boys just love to fuck with the gays and lesbians down there,” she said in a somber voice.

“I’ve just got to ask, where do you carry your gun?” Donny’s curiosity got the better of him. He just couldn’t see, with such a tight outfit and a mini-skirt to boot, where on earth she could conceal it.

“Well nosy, I don’t carry a big 9mm like you tough guys. I carry a small .22 Magnum in my see-through panties,” she answered with a big grin.

“In an emergency, can you pull it out fast enough to protect yourself?” he shot back.

“Honey, you’d be damn amazed how fast my panties come off when the need arises,” she said without blinking.

“Yeah, I’ll just bet they do,” he replied sarcastically.

Donny wasn’t impressed with his new partner so far. The profanity and sexual innuendos he felt were crass and a sign of poor upbringing.

The over-the-top piercing, tattoos, and the gaudy outfit she was wearing embarrassed him personally and professionally. Nevertheless, he was determined to bite his tongue and keep his thoughts to himself, if at all possible.

“You live with someone, or do you do the bar scene and pick up young boys?” Angel asked.

There came a long silence as Donny was taken aback for a time at how rude and intrusive Angel’s questions seemed to be getting. Sure she was

just trying to get a feel for her new partner, he surmised, yet her questions were crossing the line of decency, or at least his understanding of it. There were limits, he felt, to even what a partner should know and have access to concerning one's private life.

"Look, I don't feel comfortable talking about certain things, if you don't mind?" He figured she would understand, especially since they shared a common background, with both being gay.

"So, you a bottom or a top?" Angel persisted in trying to pry personal information from him. She was very adept at getting under people's skin, and he was no exception.

"What?" Looking over at her in disbelief. "Obviously you have a hearing problem, or is it some kind of learning disability?"

"Fuck, what's your problem? I'm tryin' to get closer to you so we can be a fuckin' team...back each other up when the shit goes down. You hear what I'm sayin' pretty boy?" she shot back.

"I don't care for your negative attitude, and for your profanity that spews from your potty mouth. I don't know why lesbians feel the need to be so macho," he said, now turning onto Park Street.

"You can kiss my tight ass, sissy boy. This is who I am and I'm not changing my ways to please your dumb ass, you hear me?" The agitation was evident by the stare she was giving Donny.

She felt he was just like all the other male pigs she'd come across in her lifetime, stupid and selfish, and only seeing her as some kind of freak.

Donny pulled up to the curb about a half block from the apartment building, since all the parking spaces were occupied by forensics, medical examiners and police cruisers. They exited the car, and as Donny came around the front of the vehicle, he spied Angel standing on the sidewalk with her arms crossed in front, glaring at him.

"So, we gonna conduct ourselves as fuckin' professionals or what?" Angel said as he came up to her.

"Whatever," he said as he walked past her heading for the crime scene.

Angel turned slowly and watched Donny, then finally proceeded to follow his lead. Giving him time to adjust to her abrasive personality was what the situation called for, or so she thought.

Officer Dearborn and her partner Officer Johnson were securing the outside area when they spotted the detectives coming up the street.

"Good morning, Detective Smith," Dearborn said. Leaning over to get

a better view of the female following him, she whispered, "Who's the crazed-looking hooker following you?" She asked in earnest.

Donny had to smile at that question; it confirmed that it wasn't just he who thought Angel was creepy looking. "Officer Dearborn that would be my new partner, Detective Jones."

"A bit on the flaky side, huh?" Dearborn said as Donny shook his head in the affirmative.

Officer Dearborn explained the earlier situation concerning the boundary line dispute with Sergeant O'Leary, and that they were then sent back several hours later to re-take the crime scene per Chief Temme. When they arrived, O'Leary handed her the crime scene info and just walked away, never said a word.

Donny read over the information and made his way to the apartment. Angel was already leaning over the body, making mental notes to herself. She didn't believe in writing things down; she had a photogenic mind.

The city forensics unit had already been given all the evidence collected by the county squad, and had gathered what little more they required. The coroner's crew was waiting for permission to take the body.

Donny put on his rubber gloves and gave James Butler's body a good going-over before giving the nod to the coroner's boys. As they bagged up the corpse, Donny approached Angel to see what conclusions she might have come up with; he wanted to compare notes as it were.

"Well, Angel, what are your thoughts on this homicide?" His tone was soft and informal.

"I'd say, Detective Smith, the bastard's dead, how 'bout that?" Her tone was harsh, and it was evident she was still upset over their conversation from the ride over.

"Okay, so we got off to a rocky start. I'm willing to apologize and to start over. Can you at least meet me halfway?" Donny asked in his most sincere voice. His priority was to solve the case, not get into a battle of wits with his new quirky partner.

Angel stared at him for a few moments then extended her right hand. "I'm Detective Angel Jones. It's nice to meet you, Detective Smith. May I call you Donny?" She followed her mock re-introduction with a warm, personal smile.

Clasping her hand, he shook it gently. "Yes, you can call me Donny, and may I call you Angel?"

“Yes, please do. Now then, back to business. So what did the sheriff’s department notes say?” She was happy he apologized.

“Not much, something about there being no sign of a break-in, so they deduced he must have opened the door willingly, so he knew his murderer. Said there were no drugs found in the apartment, so they ruled out a drug deal gone bad. They listed two people to interview. Agnes Blakewood in apartment eleven and Ryan Wily in apartment twenty-four. That’s about all they had.” Donny said looking up at Angel. “You have any theories what might have occurred here Angel?”

“Yes, I think the butler did it,” she said laughingly. “Get it? The butler did it—James Butler?”

“Yes, very amusing Detective.” Donny was in no mood for her silliness, yet he didn’t push it. He felt he was already on thin ice with Angel.

“Lets’ go interview apartment eleven, and then apartment twenty-four, all right?”

“After that, how ‘bout we see what those shitheads back at the lab came up with for the ballistics? See what caliber the gun was. Those forensic jerks any good at their jobs?” Angel cracked wise.

“We have an excellent lab facility, and a dedicated team of workers. They’re more than able to do the job at hand, thank you,” he shot back, feeling the need to defend his teammates. She was getting on his nerves again, but he maintained control of his temper.

“Maybe tomorrow we can get a fuckin’ copy of the autopsy report.” Angel added.

“One step at a time, Angel, one step at a time.” He half-heartedly figured he must have really pissed God off to be saddled with such a foul-mouthed demon dyke like her.

“I don’t feel right just going by the sheriff notes. Let’s do a quick investigation of Butler’s apartment, and see what we get before interviewing the neighbors,” he said turning and looking for Angel’s response.

“Okay, lets’ do it, my little superstar,” she said, not meaning to sound condescending, yet that’s how he heard it.

The medical examiners technicians who had been listening to the odd exchange between the two detectives simply shrugged their shoulders as they transported the body out to their vehicle.

“This is what I got from my examination of Butler’s body. There was a

single entry wound to the upper chest cavity, and no exit wound on his back. No sign of a struggle or fight, no marks of any kind on his body. Whoever shot him didn't force the door open, there were no signs of tampering or pry marks on the door or windows. Butler was wearing only gray sweat pants, no socks, shoes or shirt. No wristwatch, rings or jewelry of any kind. He was clean shaven and there was a smell of after-shave, so he probably took a shower recently. He was tall, and in great physical condition, so I doubt he was afraid of whomever he saw through the peephole. Oh, and I figured by the size of the entry wound it's most likely a .38 caliber weapon." Donny said as he finished up his little summation. Removing his rubber gloves, he adjusted his tie.

"Pretty observant for a prissy little fag. Maybe you're smarter than you look." Angel said with a sarcastic gleam in her eyes.

"Now don't be jealous of my investigative skills," he said trying to give her a little dig.

Angel didn't take the bait; she held her tongue, for now.

Donny announced, "Okay, time to check out the neighbors."

CHAPTER THREE

A WEEKEND OF STORY TELLING...

The Musical Forest, located on the southern tip of Hot Springs, Arkansas, is host to a legend handed down from an ancient Indian tribe, which dwelled in this area some 300 years ago.

The eerie sound of Indian drums, or the haunting tones of flutes were said to drive those unlucky enough to camp overnight into seeing hallucinations of demons and ghosts.

Over the years, musical sounds have been reported by campers and local townspeople alike. Some claim to hear screams of wild creatures, while others reported ghosts and dark figures roaming in the woods.

Frank Turner, born and raised with the knowledge of the Musical Forest, was never concerned with the local folklore. He enjoyed the forest with his best friend, Harry Carmichael. From boyhood to senior citizen, the forest was a large part of their lives.

Frank, a happy, yet moody type, stood almost six feet tall and was bald, except for some gray tufts of hair around his ears. He was lean except for a small pot-belly, not uncommon for a man of his advanced years. Playing pranks on anyone who was gullible enough to fall for them brought him great joy. But woe unto those individuals who dare challenge him, for he would dig in his heels and stand his ground like a true ancient warrior.

On his retirement, Frank was presented a German shepherd puppy. It was thought it would bring him enjoyment, and help pass the idle time. Instead it guided him in the direction of service, as he trained his new pet with instructional schools in search and rescue programs.

A fifteen year friendship of trust, dedication, and personal protection developed between the two. Frank at all times maintained complete control of his pet, or was it the other way round some might argue.

Frank's wife, Virginia, had gray hair rolled up into an old traditional bun, similar to what her mother had sported throughout her later years.

She was only five foot five, and had a few extra pounds, but she carried them well. Supporting Frank's rescue efforts, although she wouldn't be caught dead in the Musical Forest after dark.

The ranger forced his way deep into the forest. Climbing through dense honeysuckle, and unyielding briars, that ripped and scratched at his exposed bare skin.

It was easy to see how one could find their self lost in such a place. There were no trails or paths to guide one through these thick woods. Curtains of sticky spider webs clung to the ranger, and seemed to defy his many attempts to scrape them off. Mosquitoes buzzed and dive bombed him incessantly causing him to lose his concentration. Swatting with both hands and moving ever faster gave only short periods of respite from the imposing winged demons.

Hearing a strange sound, he suddenly stopped and turned in its direction. Without warning, he stumbled, lost his balance, falling feet first through thick ground cover into a deep crevice. Its narrowness held him in an upright position as he slid deeper into the earth. He fought against its rough edges until he wedged to a halt in the darkness. His legs were painfully twisted beneath him. Dirt, rocks and dust continued to fall as the fear of being buried alive now entered his thoughts. As momentary panic overcame him, he tried to shout, but his mouth quickly filled with dirt. Spitting and clawing wildly at the sides of the crevice, desperately seeking a handhold.

As the falling debris settled and stopped, and his panic attack subsided he became aware of a sharp pain in his right leg. Straining to see how far he had descended, his heart sank when he saw it was nearly twenty feet.

Rose, the housekeeper, shuffled across the porch. The flip-flop of her worn house slippers snapped his mind back to reality. The horror of that long ago event still haunted him.

Now retired, Ranger Larry Smith—Detective Donny Smiths grandfather—relaxed in his favorite rocker. He and his wife Marty built a humble cottage together some forty years ago. Marty's sudden heart attack last year left her husband feeling his life had also ended.

Now he sat and reminisced how she loved the little cottage located near the Musical Forest. He once marveled at how Mother Nature brought forth the masculine aroma of the beautiful woods. Rocking quietly, he awaited the arrival of his grandson, who was dropping by to celebrate his seventy-first birthday.

Rose was a thin, small framed woman with a feisty temperament. She

came out three times a week to clean and aggravate the retired ranger. Somewhere between the age of thirty and forty-five, according to who she's telling, she had the heart of an angel, and the vocabulary of a lumberjack. The old ranger liked to tell everyone she could fight her way out of any tavern in the county.

Rose was also known for her occasional psychic predictions, making known future events and whatnot that uncannily came to pass more often than not.

Watching from the front window as the old Ford LTD turned onto the gravel drive, she went out on the porch to join the ranger, "Wake up lazy, your grandson is comin' up the drive. I want to see a smile on your wrinkled old face, and no cussin' nor arguing, is that clear?"

"Jesus H. Christ I'm not deaf. Stop bitchin' at me, and I wasn't asleep," he snapped back.

Rose held the porch door open for him, and watched as he slowly moved from the rocking chair. "Hurry up, you're letting flies in." He went in the living room and sat on the couch.

Rose pulled the door open before Donny had a chance to knock. "Wipe your feet before you come in, I just vacuumed this old worn out carpet. Where did you get your driver's license? You squealed in here on two wheels. Kids today shouldn't be let out of the house without proper supervision," she rambled on.

Entering, he ignored her as he greeted his grandfather, "Happy birthday gramps. Look what I got. Eric baked you a white cake with crème cheese icing, and I know it's your favorite." Handing the cake to Rose, he sat next to his grandfather on the couch.

Rose was aware that Eric was Donny's male lover and companion. Out of respect for the old ranger she held her tongue. But deep down she knew in her heart the Bible was the word of God. A man who lay's with another man is damned to hell for eternity.

She took the cake and flip-flopped into the kitchen. Soon returning with a tray filled with pieces of cake, and a small pot of coffee, "I'll eat the cake, but I won't wear a party hat." She fussed.

"How's things at the police department?" Grandpa Larry asked.

"Pretty good, nothing big going on." Donny didn't want to discuss his new partner or the case they were assigned.

Rose took care of the dishes after they finished their cake and coffee.

Donny removed three old photographs from his shirt pocket. Handing

them to his grandfather, "I found these pictures in the bottom of an old cardboard box. Who is the man with the German shepherd? What's the story behind these pictures?"

He reached for his reading glasses, put them on, never bothering to clean the smudged lenses. Holding the yellowed and age wrinkled pictures at arm's length, he carefully studied each one.

The first picture showed a man holding a puppy in his arms. The second showed him wearing blue jeans and a white tee shirt, standing by the steps of a ranger station fire tower, with a half-grown German shepherd. In the last picture, the shepherd was fully grown, and it had him by the leg dragging him across the yard.

"Gramps, I never saw a black shepherd that large, he's huge. You know that guy?" Donny coaxed.

"I've told you about my forest adventures, haven't I?" His grandfather said looking puzzled.

"I'm not sure who you told, but it wasn't me, Gramps." Donny figured if he could get him reminiscing about the past, he wouldn't feel so sad and lonely on his birthday.

"Well then, let's go out on the porch and I'll tell you about my friend and his dog," he said as Donny followed him out. Seated in his rocker, the retired ranger began his trip down memory lane. Donny sat on the old porch swing.

Rose emerged from the house with a chair from the kitchen table and plopped herself down. The old ranger tossed her a long look.

"What? I can listen if I want too, just start talkin' and there won't be any trouble," she said folding her arms over her chest.

It was the spring of 1951. Frank Turner and his wife, Virginia, always got up early for breakfast. They were relaxing, sipping coffee, when Frank noticed every light in the house next door were on. He watched from the kitchen window for a short while.

"This is strange; the Carmichaels never get up this early. I can't stand the suspense, I'm goin' over there."

Virginia parted the curtain for a better view. "If something was wrong, I'm sure they'd phone us. Sit down, and drink your coffee, and behave yourself."

Ignoring her he removed his hunting jacket from the hall closet, and reached to the top shelf for his flashlight.

The Turners lived next door to Harry and Ann Carmichael for nearly

thirty years. Frank Turner had followed in his father's footsteps, and entered the plumbing business and the two worked alongside each other. After his father's passing, he continued to make service runs, while his wife efficiently ran the office.

Harry Carmichael, was a husky likeable fellow, always in a cheerful mood, and enjoyed a joke as well as anyone. He was chatty, which was an asset in his career as a salesman. During his lifetime he sold everything from; real estate, automobiles, farm equipment, furniture, and even false teeth for a short time.

Ann, his lovely wife, had been an elementary school teacher, and she also enjoyed sewing and gossiping. She was heavy set and of a sunny disposition. The Carmichaels retired around the same time as the Turners.

Frank slipped his jacket on, and quietly opened the back door. Stepping outside into the early morning darkness, he turned his flashlight on. Crossing the back yard to his neighbor's house, he stopped by their back door and listened. Virginia watched him from the kitchen window as he finally knocked on the door. When no answer came, he realized something was wrong and opened the unlocked door and proceeded inside.

Straining, he tried to hear any sounds coming from inside the house. Suddenly, he heard footsteps pounding from the bathroom, heading in his direction. Frank steeled himself for whatever encounter might face him.

Harry bolted from the bathroom at full speed. He was carrying an arm full of towels, and a sloshing pan of hot water. "Follow me to the basement, we have an emergency!" Yelling as he raced by.

Frank stumbled as he hurried down the stairs, but quickly regained his balance as he charged down to help deal with whatever the emergency might be. There before him he found Ann on the basement floor surrounded by five squirming newborn puppies.

"Everything is under control. Queenie and her pups are all right. I have all the towels and hot water I need," she said taking one of the towels to wipe the sweat from her face.

Frank sat on the stairs, and held his chest. "I thought I was havin' a heart attack comin' down the stairs. I'm glad everything is okay."

Donny listened intently as his grandfather continued the story. Rose, too, was all ears.

Queenie, a registered shepherd, had won search and rescue awards

from all over the state. Two years earlier, her right foreleg was injured when she inadvertently stepped into a steel trap while on a training exercise. Harry retired her from service when her leg didn't heal correctly.

As Queenie nursed her pups, Ann stood up and let the towel fall to the floor. "Come on boys, lets' go upstairs, and have some coffee to celebrate."

"What about the dirty towels?" Harry asked pointing at the bloody mess piled on the floor.

"Forget the towels, I'll clean up later," she said starting up the steps.

The men followed her up to the kitchen. Harry pulled a chair from the table and sat down. He sighed deeply, "I'm glad that's over. Running up and down those stairs is exhausting. Next time Queenie has pups, let her have them in the living room," he laughed.

"Put your mind to rest about the next time. The vet said this would be her last litter. She's old, and her health isn't as good as it used to be," Ann said as she washed her hands and started the coffee.

Harry pulled his pant's leg's up, and began to massage his tight calves. Without looking up he spoke, "Frank, you'll have the first choice. You get the pick of the litter."

Frank sat across from Harry at the table, "That's an easy choice. I'd love the little solid black one. But you really should let me pay for him?"

Ann spoke as she placed cups on the table, "That's not necessary, you've been a good neighbor, and with your retirement coming in a few months the puppy will be ready to leave Queenie. By then, you'll be ready to take on the pups training and the like."

"You'll have no trouble with training. Contact those fellows I told you about, and enroll him in their training school. They'll do the rest," Harry assured him as he rolled his pant's leg's down.

Frank finished his coffee before excusing himself. He returned home to tell Virginia all about what had taken place at the Carmichaels.

CHAPTER FOUR

THREE WEEKS EARLIER...

I've finally fallen asleep, yet I feel an evil presence lurking near by. My bed, a small queen size, is pushed up next to the wall. Old worn maroon-colored sheets lay crumpled on top. I sleep with three pillows; one under my head, and one on each side as I flip from side to side throughout the night, no cover, only using the top sheet.

The walls are of cheap wood paneling, with nicks and scratches scattered about. An old wooden desk and chair I procured at the city dump rests in the corner. I've found lots of little treasures there. Just a few nails in the right spots made it strong and sturdy again, gave it new life. Unfortunately, Mom hates it. Says it's trashy.

No pictures or paintings adorn my walls, just one overhead light on the ceiling, with small blue angels stenciled into the glass dome that surrounds the seventy-five watt bulb. Nothing else is present in my tiny bedroom, not even a rug to cover part of the faded wood floor.

Sleeping mainly on my left side in the fetal position, I face the wall. Generally, I sleep in the nude, except during the winter months. Clothes are too restrictive; they make me feel controlled. I'm not really sure why, they just do. Probably some deep psychological thing I'm not yet aware of.

The door is standing wide open. Only the dim light from the corridor shines into my room. Something awakens me, a strange stirring. I strain to bring myself to full consciousness. Sounds like the wooden floor creaking, soft footsteps perhaps making their way toward my room.

They have stopped. I feel the presence of someone standing in the doorway. A shiver begins to ripple over my naked torso as my mind begins to race. Who is it? What do they want? Why me?

The questions subside as I now become aware of the sounds of heavy, labored breathing. The type of breathing an elderly man makes when he's walked up a long flight of stairs, or has been unduly excited in some fashion.

There is a long pause, the footsteps, the breathing, they have grown louder; he's walked up to my bed. Standing right behind me; his warm breath floats over my exposed shoulder. Now frozen with terrifying fear, I want to turn and look at him, but I can't move. I dare not open my eyes; please God, make him leave!

Something small, something cold, presses up against my back. As he cocks the hammer back on the revolver, I suddenly realize the cold steel of the barrel of the gun is resting up against my pale skin. A deep panic rises within me. No longer can I resist; I must turn and face him. Gathering up as much courage as I can, I turn my head and open my eyes...BAM!

Death is the final destination in one's life. Feared by many, welcomed by the sick and infirm, and yet met with indifference by the enlightened ones. Ultimately, everyone must embrace its inescapable grasp, although as to when our fated destiny comes for us, no one knows for certain.

I pray that death will come later for me, that I still have plenty of time left to experience my mortal self. Still, I have an uneasy suspicion that death is watching, closely scrutinizing my every move. All I can do is place my faith in divine intervention, and pray that a miracle will arise to see me safely through the next few weeks.

Allow me to introduce myself; my name is Simon Lee Teel. Next week I will turn thirty-one years old, assuming I live long enough to celebrate my birthday. I'm a white male, standing five feet seven inches and currently weighing in at one hundred forty-two pounds.

My thin build is hardly frail, yet I don't work hard to keep my physique strong and toned, possibly due to my German and Irish ancestors, who also bequeathed to me my hazel-green eyes, and my long blond hair,

which reaches my shoulders.

As far as my vocation is concerned, I must state the position for which I am best suited appears to be unemployment. If I take seriously the comments others have pointed out to me, I might reach the conclusion that I am somewhat delusional, but in truth, I think I am just easily bored.

My mother, Nora Louise Teel, lives in a small two-bedroom home and allows me to stay with her rent-free. She is even gracious enough to provide me with a certain amount of spending money, which eases the strain of not receiving a paycheck.

Loving and jovial, she is truly a wonderful mother, the kind of parent every child should be blessed with, although she can be a bit overly protective at times. On her last birthday she turned forty-nine, again. Truth be known, she's actually fifty-three, but vanity strikes at the hearts of all the ladies, I feel, even the very religious ones, such as she.

Hair the color of black coal, that artificial shade one can get only from a box. Were nature allowed to reveal her true color, gray would shine forth, thus dispelling the falsehood of her true age. A vain woman? Perhaps, but truly sweet, kind, and caring nevertheless. Not to mention plump; standing not even an inch more than five feet, she carries one hundred eighty pounds very nicely. Any estimates she herself might give of her actual weight would probably be no more accurate than the number she states as her age.

The personal secretary to the head psychiatrist at some Catholic hospital is her preferred work. The home I share with my mother is located in Hot Springs, Arkansas, the only city in the United States that is situated entirely within a national park. It was the boyhood home of former President Bill Clinton. Oddly enough, even though Arkansas was his home state, one would be hard-pressed to find many residents who have a high regard of Ol' Bill. Still, I have to admit, I always liked the guy.

Hot Springs is named for the forty-seven hot mineral springs located at the base of East Mountain, and it is mainly a tourist trap with thoroughbred horse racing at Oaklawn Park, and lets' not forget the famous bathhouses on Bathhouse Row.

Beautiful rolling hills covered with large evergreen trees and emerald-green lakes make you realize God put this place on earth just so we mortals could have a little taste of heaven.

For me, the next few weeks will be hellish and cruel, which I may or may not deserve, depending upon whose point of view you believe, mine or theirs. My recurring nightmare, I fear, may very well foretell of

my impending doom.

As I opened my eyes, I was lying on the floor near my bed, naked, covered in sweat, my chest still pounding from the fierce thrashing and screaming I had just underwent. My eyes focused on the hallway light beaming into my room. Moments passed, my senses returned as I regained my bearings.

Mom's voice now echoed down the short corridor, yet I couldn't quite comprehend her words. As usual, my yelling awoke her out of a sound slumber. Mom's room was at the other end of the hallway. She knew exactly what was taking place since I relive this same nightmare every few weeks.

Entering my room, she paused momentarily to locate the light switch just inside the door. With me still on the floor—yet now sitting upright—she made her way over to my trembling body. Not breathing as hard as before, I pulled the sheet over my exposed genitals. Mom didn't care for my sleeping in the all-natural.

Always prepared, she came with a large bath towel she kept folded on her night table just for my 'episodes,' as she called them. Kneeling down beside me, she started drying the sweat from my face and shoulders. I anxiously awaited the soft-spoken words she'd use to calm and quiet my frazzled nerves. This time however, there were no soft, reassuring words of comfort. She was upset; not worried or frightened, but openly angered. Taking her hands and clasping them around my face, she turned my head up to gaze straight into my watery eyes.

"Do you remember the promise you made me three days ago?" she said, breaking the silence. "Do you?!"

Hearing the anger in her strained voice as I looked into her eyes, I could see the tears welling up. Somewhat calmer and settled now, I did remember the promise she had pestered me into making. That if I had another episode, I'd check into the psych-hospital where she worked to seek help with the nightmare, and all my other problems. But I only agreed then just to get her to stop badgering me about it.

"Yeah, I remember the promise I made," I whispered. "But I've changed my mind; I'm not goin' to some stupid shrink." I pulled her hands down away from my face and covered my nakedness as I stood.

"You gave me your word, your promise..."

"Well...I lied!" My voice rising as I interrupted her.

She reached out to touch my arm, but I pulled away. I sensed the anger wash over her round, soft face.

Extending her right hand and pointing her index finger, “You will go with me in the morning to the hospital for help, or I’ll have no choice but to throw you out of my house!” Her voice rang forth with righteous condemnation. “Do you hear me, Simon?!” She folded her arms across her chest as if daring me to defy her new found courage. “Well, I’m waiting for an answer?”

She spoke with such authority. Stunned for a brief moment, I truly felt she meant business. No job, no money, nowhere to go, so I agreed to do as I had promised earlier. “All right, I’ll go.”

Unfolding her arms, she came forth with one of her loving bear-hugs. “Now get in bed and get some rest. Mommy loves you very much,” she said tucking in the sheet.

Had I only known what awaited me at the psych-hospital...I would have truly contemplated suicide.

Sounds of mother making breakfast roused me from my sleep. The same breakfast—scrambled eggs, toast, and a glass of Pepsi-cola—she has made herself since Father passed away. Dad wouldn’t allow us to drink anything except milk or water. Most people would have called him a hard-core Baptist minister.

Named Eugene Thomas Teel, he died at age fifty-five just a short time ago. Standing six feet three inches and weighing in at one hundred ninety pounds, he was a strong and powerful man of God; even up to the very minute he died of a sudden and unexpected heart attack.

Short brownish-gray hair, and deep-set blue-steel eyes gave him a very profound and intense, almost sinister, look. Standing behind the pulpit, he bristled as hell and damnation spewed from his lips. His meek flock was literally scared of him; God must have been so proud.

After his death, Mom started buying Pepsi-cola by the case. She has a glass at every meal now.

Bouncing down the hallway, she stuck her grinning face through the doorway. “Get up, sleepy-head; we’ve got a lot to do today.”

“I’m up,” I said in my usual nasty tone. It took me an hour or so to fully wake up.

Her grin changed to that of a half-frown. “Make sure you wash your greasy hair, and shave...and use lots of soap; you smell.”

“I’m going to the nut-house, not the prom,” I popped off.

“You heard what I said, don’t you dare embarrass me at work, Simon,” she said making her way to the kitchen.

So I did as I was told. You'd think I was ten years old. It's rare that I get to eat breakfast; I'm not usually up until after noon.

Mom packed my suitcase while I had a bowl of cereal, and a can of Mt. Dew. I too love my sugary poison. She was a bit perturbed; most of my clothes were soiled. I admit, cleaning up, washing clothes, and bathing are not my forte.

Packing so many clothes told me I'd be at the loony-bin for more than a couple of days. I placed the suitcase in the trunk of her old faded white Pontiac, which was still in good running condition.

We arrived around 8:35 a.m. at the hospital, and we could have arrived much sooner had I been allowed to drive. I swear I saw a four-year-old pass us on a tricycle. The hospital was an old red brick building standing five stories, and located not too far from the main highway, surrounded by trees, and large rolling hills.

Back in her prime the first floor contained an emergency room, lots of office space, and a rehab pool. The second floor, the main hub, contained the operating rooms, and several adjoining patient recovery rooms. The supply office and physical therapy rooms were located on the third floor. Rehabilitation and hospice care units were on the fourth, and on the top, the fifth floor, one could find the locked psych ward.

That was back in its glorious hay-day. Now, all the floors—with the exception of the fifth—had been closed down. Its current function for the small community now was that of a psych facility.

The Baptists built the original structure back in the late '20s, but over the years they couldn't afford to keep the doors open due to the high operating costs. So, in the early '50s they sold it to the Catholic Church, but they too ran into financial difficulties in the early '80s. They ended up evaluating the needs of the local community, and closed everything except the psych unit.

Mother had already called ahead, and made arrangements with her boss, Doctor Andrew Crawford, who was a licensed psychiatrist, and was an ordained Catholic priest. Father Andy, as he preferred to be called, was the current director of the hospital psych unit.

As we entered, Mom motioned for me to sit in the lobby. There was this phenomenal old lady sitting at a small receptionist desk just inside the door, who looked to be in her late eighties. She, at my mother's request, phoned the fifth floor, and announced our arrival. I was left to sit with the old lady as Mom proceeded to her office on the first floor.

Granny tried to make small talk with me, stating her name was Bertha, Grace, or something along those lines. She rattled on about

being some kind of volunteer. I don't remember much; I wasn't interested in her, or her life's story. Staring mostly at the floor, she finally took the hint, and shut up.

About twenty minutes passed when a male nurse finally arrived to retrieve me. His name tag said 'James Butler, RN,' and he looked to be in his mid to late twenties, I guessed. Later, I heard he was twenty-nine. He was tall, a little over six feet, and around one hundred eighty pounds or so. The rugged type with a thick muscular build which reminded me of a fierce warrior. Brown hair cut somewhat in the style of a military flat-top, with dark-brown evil eyes that seemed capable of penetrating deep into one's innermost sanctity. That place where only you and your creator should know what lurks in the quietness of your soul.

Clean shaven, he was wearing a white short-sleeve shirt and white pressed trousers, accompanied by white sneakers; no socks were visible.

As he approached, "Are you Simon Teel?"

"Yep, that's me," I said, standing to greet him.

"My name is James Butler. I'm the RN in charge of the unit. Follow me, and we'll get started on your paperwork," he said as we headed for the elevator.

As I entered behind him, he pushed the fifth floor button. The ride up was short, but very uncomfortable to say the least. Not only did he not speak, he turned to face me, and just stared almost without blinking. My impression was he felt I was just another nut case who was weak, and beneath him on the evolutionary scale. Of course, that was just my first impression.

The elevator stopped, but the doors didn't open. "Doors stuck?" I asked sheepishly, breaking the silence.

"No," he said, finally breaking off his intense stare while pulling a silver key from his pocket. Inserting it into the small stainless steel panel, the doors opened as he turned the key clockwise.

Stepping out, James started to explain about the elevator. "There are only two ways off this floor. The elevator which takes a special key, and the door at the other end of the long hallway which leads to the stairs. That door is always kept locked."

"Besides you, who else has keys?" I inquired shyly.

"That's not your concern," he said as he turned, and proceeded down the hall. I was taken on a short tour of the unit.

There were two hallways; one short, the other twice as long. Both intersected at the nurses' station in an 'L' configuration. The nurses'

station was completely sealed except for one door, and a small counter window where patients lined up to receive medication.

The long hall was well lit with fluorescent lights. It basically contained small patient rooms, except for the last two rooms. One was the group therapy room; with several old couches, a large TV, and a small upright piano. The other was a lunch room where the 'nuts' could receive their daily meals.

The patient rooms were furnished each with a single bed, and one chair only. Each had a bathroom consisting of a commode, sink, and a shower stall. No bathtub.

The short hall contained no rooms except one, which was located at the end of the corridor. There stood a large steel door.

"What's on the other side?" I asked, pointing to the large odd door.

James stopped, turned his head toward me. "Disobey my instructions, and you'll find out what's behind that door."

I could tell by his grin it was probably better that I didn't know what lurked behind the ominous door.

Proceeding on I was a little shocked to discover there was only one other patient here besides myself, and she was due for release at noon. So after twelve o'clock, I'd be their only patient. But they were expecting four more from a private sanitarium next week. Their insurance was running out, yet they still required more treatment. Gracious Father Andy agreed to transfer them here. So, for at least a week the place would be all mine.

James escorted me to one of the small rooms. The brown wooden door had the number thirteen on it in bright yellow. Since I'm not a superstitious person, I didn't give it any thought.

"Unpack your suitcase. I'll be back in a few minutes, and we'll start processing your paperwork," he stated in a stern fashion.

The bed contained only white sheets, and one pillow. No blankets to be found anywhere in the room. The chair frame was of scratched, faded wood, with old green cushions. From the only window, one could see the rear parking lot down below. There was a clear view of the large hillside, with scattered trees, and lots of large rocks mired in the reddish clay. The window was encased in thick, shatter-proof glass, or so I was told.

I found several drawers built into the bathroom wall, with no closet or any clothes hangers present. Stuffing my clothes into the drawers, I realized Mom was correct; they were in need of a good washing.

Staring out the window the trees seemed so lifeless, and sad...

“Okay, lets’ go!” James shouted as he stuck his head through the open door. Startled at first, I froze, unable to speak. “Did you hear me?” he snapped.

“Yes,” I said, finally pulling myself together. I followed him down the hall to the nurses’ station.

Opening the door with one of his several keys located on a ring attached to his belt. There were two office-type chairs on rollers inside. A medium-sized cabinet held various narcotics, and other medications, which were secured by a combination padlock. An adjacent room contained a small refrigerator, ice maker and a commode.

Off to one side was located another small room with two wooden chairs next to an old metal desk with peeling gray paint.

James pointed at the small room, and I entered slowly. Damp, chilly, with walls painted a dull white. One fluorescent light—same as the hallways—hung overhead.

“Sit down,” came the command as he entered, and walked around the desk. The chair was hard, and most uncomfortable. Pulling out some papers, he placed them on the desk.

“I have some forms you are required to sign. I’ll explain them first, and then if you have questions, you can ask. Do you understand?” he said, staring straight into my eyes. I nodded in the affirmative.

“First we’ll go over the ‘Doctor/Patient Confidentiality Statement’ form. It basically says whatever you, and the doc talk about stays between the two of you. You understand?”

“Sure,” I said.

“Either respond with a yes or a no,” he said smugly.

“Yes!” I raised my voice.

James focused in on my face. “You think you’re really cute, don’t you?” His cold eyes were glaring as his nostrils flared.

I’m not sure why I raised my voice; maybe I was tired of his shitty attitude toward me. I lowered my head. “I’m sorry.”

Let’s continue, so answer my question, yes or no?”

“Yes,” was my meek reply.

James handed me a form to sign. After signing, he reached over the desk, and jerked it from my hands. I froze for a second; he then seized

the pen from me as well.

“You’ll have plenty of time to read it later.” Retrieving another form from the desk drawer, he glared at me.

“Before we start filling out your medical history, let me give you an idea of what to expect later. You will be given three tests; an EEG, an IQ test, and a psychological essay evaluation. You understand?”

“Yes.”

“You are required to attend therapy sessions with your assigned doctor each day, except weekends. After each session your doctor and the head of the unit will confer, and evaluate your progress, if any. You understand?”

I shook my head in the affirmative.

“I didn’t hear you, what was your reply?” James snapped.

“Yes.”

“Don’t make me remind you again. All right then, the next set of questions will cover the areas of your family, medical, and employment histories. Be as precise, and accurate as possible. This will become part of your permanent record.”

“I understand.” I shifted my weight in the chair as I leaned forward to give the appearance I was fully cooperating.

“What is your father’s full name?” James began.

“Ah, Eugene Thomas Teel.” I had to momentarily stop to think. To his face I called him Sir or Father, yet behind his back I referred to him as the ‘Old Bastard.’

“Living or deceased?” he said with no emotion.

“Deceased.”

“At what age did he die?” James focused his intense gaze upon my face as he asked that question, yet he seemed to be looking right through me.

“He was fifty-five,” I said matter-of-factly as James broke off his odd stare.

“What was the cause of death?”

“Heart failure.”

“What was his main employment?”

“He was an ordained Baptist minister of a mid-sized congregation.” James continued his questions with a blank look upon his face. “Did he smoke, drink, or use any kind of medication or narcotic?”

“Didn’t smoke, drink or do any kind of dope. Only thing he was high

on was God Almighty.”

“Mother’s full name?” James asked without making notice of my previous remark.

I started to lip-off, and tell him he should know her name since she works here, but no sense in getting him pissed off. “It’s Nora Louise Teel, and yes, she is living at this time,” I said with a straight face.

“Imagine that,” James said in a most sarcastic tone. “What is her age?”

“Fifty-three,” I said trying to recall correctly.

“Is her employment here at the hospital her only job?”

“Yes.” Mom loved working at the nut house; she made friends easily, and could hold a conversation even with the crazies. I, on the other hand, didn’t really care to be confined with a bunch of mental defectives. So I was glad I’d be the only one here soon, even if just for a week.

“Does she smoke, drink, or use any type of medications, including narcotics?”

“The only drugs she takes are prescribed by her physician.”

“Such as...?”

“Stuff for high blood pressure, and female crap...I think.”

James moved on. “Any brothers or sisters?”

“No brothers, but I have...or I mean I had a younger sister. Debra Sue Teel and she died at twenty-seven from suicide. She drank, smoked cigarettes, and anything else she could get her hands on. Did cocaine, heroin, and loved marijuana. Probably tried everything out there at least once.”

“While alive, what was her main employment?” James asked without making any judgment or facial expression on my little statement.

“A massage therapist,” I didn’t mention she was also a stripper.

“All right, follow me,” James said standing, and heading out the door.

I was escorted down the long hall to a small examination room, which contained a black padded stool, and a table with worn, faded black foam padding on a steel frame. It was anchored to the floor with thick silver bolts. Several tall filing cabinets painted a dull white matched the walls, and ceiling.

Once inside, James closed the door, and locked it. He motioned for

me to sit on the table. It was kind of creepy; the only light was a one-hundred watt-bulb suspended from the ceiling on a thick cord. It looked like something out of a horror flick, yet for only one bulb, it was bright.

James retrieved a clipboard from one of the file cabinets. It already had some type of form on it. I could partially see what he was writing. Something about patient number 222-77, white male, blonde hair...

Turning suddenly, he focused his intense stare upon my flushed face. I quickly looked away, pretending not to be paying any attention. He resumed writing after breaking off his threatening gaze. Moments later he stood, and faced me. "Take your shirt off."

"Why?" I asked a little embarrassed.

"I'm required to do a basic physical for our medical records. Patients have to submit to this."

"Well...I don't..." I was really getting nervous now. I could feel my face blushing bright red.

"You can remove the shirt, or I can remove it for you. But just know this; you will regret it immensely if I have to do it!" His eyes narrowed as his lips tightened. The anger was very apparent in his raised voice.

I slowly complied with his threat, removing my shirt, and placing it next to me on the table. I felt somehow ashamed; why, I'm not quite sure. Maybe it had something to do with my Christian upbringing. Being raised in a home controlled by a fire-and-brimstone Baptist can be intimidating, to say the least. Modesty was just one of the many virtues forced upon my sister, and myself while growing up in such a controlling religious environment. I still recall the first day I dared to utter—out loud—my first cuss word.

I was nineteen, and away from that home my father ruled with his self-imposed divine will, sanctioned by Almighty God. The offensive word I spoke was 'SHIT' and it was the true beginning of my rebellion against my father, and his beliefs.

"Stand up, and raise your arms up over your head," James said while putting on a pair of rubber gloves.

I did as I was told. Those rubber gloves made me more than a little fearful, yet I kept my composure.

James used some type of medical gadget to probe in my ears, up my nostrils, and down my throat. "The small gold ring in your left earlobe and the stainless steel ring in your right nipple are to be removed."

He handed me a large tan envelope to deposit them in. Removing

both, I placed them inside, then handed it back. I could tell by his disgusted look, he didn't think much of my body piercing. James also noted a small tattoo of a dagger on my left forearm.

"Remove your shoes, and socks," was his next command.

Complying, I now felt the cold floor beneath my bare feet. He jotted down something but I couldn't see what it said.

I asked, "You worked here long?" Trying to lighten things up with a little conversation. Mainly I was trying to feel less embarrassed, but he ignored my small talk.

"Remove your pants, and place your billfold, belt, keys, and whatever else you have in your pockets into the envelope," he said handing it back to me.

I unbuckled my belt, and unfastened my pants, placing everything in the envelope before pulling them off. I felt cold, and was now aware that I was trembling.

James scribbled more entries on his medical form as he circled me, eyeing every part of my legs thoroughly. "Remove your underwear." The order came as he finished writing.

I dropped the envelope, and it made a smacking sound as it struck the floor. "I don't feel..." I tried to speak in hopes of saving myself the further embarrassment of standing completely naked before a stranger who obviously didn't care for me. Less than human was my impression of how James truly saw me.

James interrupted before I could finish my sentence. "Don't speak; just do as you're told!" he barked.

"Yes sir." I slid my underwear down, and let them fall to the floor as I covered my exposed genitals. His demonic eyes locked onto mine with such intense force I dared not look away.

"Raise your arms over your head." His voice was bold, and gruff. I hesitated. "Do it now!" Hatred was conveyed in his agitated tone. I shuddered, and slowly raised my arms.

He took my penis in his right hand. "Spread your legs apart."

I complied, now afraid not to do as ordered. There I stood with my legs apart, arms over my head, totally exposed with some crazy male nurse holding my dick in his cold grasp. I felt more like a criminal than a patient.

James bent down, giving my penis a thorough examination. After a full minute he encircled my testicles with his left gloved hand. Slowly he

applied pressure until I winced in pain. Abruptly, he let go of my balls, and stood to face me, still holding my penis with his right hand.

“Is there a problem?” he asked unemotionally.

“Yes sir, that hurt,” I shamefully whispered. He released his grip on my dick. “Can I please lower my arms now?” I spoke in the way a frightened child would speak to an angry parent.

“Yes, and bend over, and grab your ankles. Keep your knees straight,” he responded.

I definitely didn’t like the sound of that dictate. My level of humiliation was about to reach its peak. He squeezed some type of off-yellow gel onto his right gloved index finger.

“I said bend over, and grab your ankles!” James shouted.

Bending over, I now became aware I was covered in sweat. Placing his left hand on my lower back, he positioned himself behind me. A shiver rolled over my skin as his warm breath made contact with my cold, damp flesh.

“Don’t move, you may feel like you’re going to have a bowel movement, but for your sake, you better not if you catch my drift.” Forcing his finger deep into my anus, I heaved, yet stayed in control. His finger rotated in all directions, searching for what, I don’t know; I didn’t want to know.

After a minute or so, he stopped, and began sliding his finger in and out slowly. The sensation of the movement caused me to experience strange stirrings. My penis started to fill with blood. As he continued the motion; the harder and longer my dick became. Long and slender, it now stood fully erect. Shame washed over my being, and was then replaced by agony to the point I felt faint.

James abruptly halted his invasion of my ass, and said as he removed his finger, “All right, stand up now.”

Not only did I stand erect, my penis rose to its glory as well. James studied my erection, picked up his clipboard, and notated ‘homosexual’ on the form.

“I’m not a homosexual,” I blurted out in a hoarse whisper.

Crossing out ‘homosexual’ he replaced it with ‘bisexual,’ as he sneered at me.

“I’m not...”

“Get dressed, and return to the small office so we can finish up,” he

said as he walked out.

After he exited, I grabbed a couple of tissues to wipe that gooey gel of my ass. While dressing, my erection subsided as I returned to normal. No more perspiring or flushed face.

Entering the office, James was already seated, and appeared to be extremely impatient. Sitting, he started in again with his inquisition.

“Are you married?”

“No, never been.”

“You have any children out of wedlock?”

“No.”

“What is your highest level of education?”

“I graduated high school.”

“What was your grade point average?”

“One-point-nine.” I said looking away.

James wrote ‘D average’ on his form as he continued. “Are you currently employed?”

“No, not at the moment.” A flash of shame came over me as James wrote ‘Destitute’ on his form. I detested James and his stupid questions.

“Where do you reside?”

Now I felt like a loser as I answered. “With my mother.” I figure he thinks I’m a mama’s boy.

James made no facial expressions, he simply continued on. “Do you have any phobias we need to be aware of?”

I wasn’t quite sure what he was asking. “Do I have what?”

“Fears? Such as small, tight places, anything like that?”

He spoke rapidly when his patience started to run thin. James’ demeanor switched from unemotional one minute, to rage the next, or so it seemed to me. I think he’s the one that needs therapy. Yet I kept my thoughts to myself, and answered his silly questions. “Yes, I’m afraid of heights, and public restrooms.” I didn’t mention that I’m now afraid of male RN’s and small examination rooms, since he finger raped me.

Noting my response, he also noted I was of average physique, well fed, and a poorly groomed Caucasian male.

“Are you now using, or have you used in the past, alcohol, marijuana, tobacco products or any type of narcotics?”

“I smoke pot on occasion, and I sometimes drink beer.”

“How much marijuana do you consume per week?” James asked directly.

“Ohhh...maybe one or two joints is all. Just to help me relax, you know.”

His look told me he wasn't buying it. So what, it's nobody's business but mine. James didn't pursue the drug issue.

I watched as he wrote that I presented normal patterns in the areas of speech, posture, facial expressions, basic social behavior, and concentration span. One notation said I showed signs of mild depression accompanied by mood swings. I'm not sure what all that conveyed, but he seemed satisfied.

“We're finished, follow me,” he said leading me back to room thirteen.

Taking my suitcase, he started rummaging through it, confiscating my shoe laces, plastic razors, wristwatch, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, and toothbrush. He said I could sign out the toiletries from the nurses' station each morning. They were to be returned within thirty minutes, and had to be checked back in. This was for our mutual protection he said.

James explained about them providing three meals a day on the unit. I could request a snack anytime. Watching TV or reading in the group therapy room was permitted, as long as it wasn't in use. No playing the old piano; didn't say why, just not to touch it.

“Have you had breakfast yet?” James asked as he walked to the doorway.

“Yes, we ate before we came.”

“You have thirty minutes before we begin the tests I spoke of earlier.” His voice was now rather pleasant as he headed down the hall.

“Ah, who is my therapist?” I asked, hurrying to the door.

Stopping in mid-stride, he turned to face me. “Her name is Doctor Linda Lerner; she is a licensed psychologist, and also certified in hypnosis.” Turning, he resumed heading for his destination.

Lying on the bed, I tried to relax, still a bit wired-up after that physical-from-hell James had given me. Staring at the ceiling, I daydreamed about what the upcoming tests might reveal about me, hoping they wouldn't be anything like the physical exam earlier.

“Simon, wake up!” James yelled as he entered my room.

Alarmed, I sat straight up, and swung my feet off the bed onto the floor. I must have dozed off. Standing in the doorway, he seemed to enjoy his dominion over his new 'slave.'

“Come with me; it’s time to complete your processing,” he said, turning for the hallway.

Once again, I did as ordered, following him like a scared child. James escorted me back to the same room where the physical was performed. I was ordered to remove my shirt, and lie on the cold table. A small medical gadget was wheeled up by my head and plugged into a wall socket. It hummed, and buzzed for a few seconds. James applied little, round-shaped suction cups to my scalp, and then plugged cables that connected them to the medical device.

“What’s this thing supposed to do?” I asked in a low, soft voice, not wanting to invoke his wrath.

After a few minutes, he broke the silence. “You’re undergoing an electroencephalogram, or for you high school grads, we call it an EEG. Don’t confuse it with an EKG,” he said smugly, trying to make me feel stupid.

“So, what’s the difference?”

James stopped messing with the gizmo and stared at me. “The EEG measures electrical activity in your brain, whereas the EKG measures heart muscle activity,” he said grinning.

Twenty minutes later I was told to put my shirt on as he pulled the suction cups off. I was then taken to the therapy room, where he handed me a clipboard with a set of ninety-eight questions on it. All were true/false type of questions. James told me to sit anywhere, and let him know when I finished.

“What’s this measure?”

“It’s an IQ test stupid. Shut up and get started.”

What a prick he was. After an hour or so, I finally finished the test. James appeared out of nowhere. “Finished?”

“Ah, yes, I’m done. Now what?”

“Last test,” he said while taking one clipboard and exchanging it for another. Blank paper was all it contained.

As he sat down beside me, all my muscles tensed up, as if responding to an imminent attack. His eyes glared. I could sense some deep hatred within this man. Did he really hate me, or was he just mad at everybody?

“Listen up, I don’t want to repeat myself, understand?” He leaned in closer as I tried to lean away.

“I understand,” I said as a chill crept up my spine.

“All right, this is an essay assessment test. You’ll have only sixty

minutes to write an essay that deals with your current state of mind. Think you can handle that, sport?" His voice was filled with arrogance.

"Yes, I can do it."

"Then get going, the clock's ticking, and don't forget to give it a title." Off he went.

Placing the pen to paper, the words flowed effortlessly. I finished within forty minutes.

James leaned his head through the doorway to check my progress. "Done?"

Standing up, I wandered over and presented him my essay masterpiece. Taking it, he made no sign of approval or disapproval.

"I'll bring you something to eat, and then you'll be seeing Doctor Lerner."

"Ah, sure," I said, making my way over to the dining area.

James walked in, dropped a tray of food in front of me, and left without uttering a word. Food wasn't bad; carton of two percent white milk, small green apple, old-looking banana, large ham sandwich, and a small bowl of chicken noodle soup. Devouring everything except the nasty banana, I left the mess for James to clean up as I headed for my room.

A strange, unsettling feeling overshadowed me back in my room. An eerie premonition, one conveying agony and pain...mine, I feared.

CHAPTER FIVE

Donny's grandfather stood and stretched. Rubbing the seat of his britches, "One of these days, I'll buy a cushion for that darn rocker." Sitting down he continued his story.

The weeks seemed to fly by. Frank and Virginia were winding down the plumbing business. He traded the old blue Chevy company truck, with over a hundred thousand miles on it, for a cherry-red Ford pickup with only six thousand miles on the odometer.

That weekend he planned to lay a brick walk from the house to where he decided to plant grapes, and build an arbor. Nothing too fancy; it would be ten feet long, four feet wide, and six feet tall. Enclosing the sides and top with chicken-wire for the vines to wrap around as they grew. The instructions on how to build an arbor came from one of Frank's many magazines he loved to browse.

He was looking forward to growing the biggest, juiciest grapes in the state. The same as his father had grown when he was a child.

Frank ate breakfast in a hurry. Wanting to get an early start, he waved to Virginia as he hurried to the garage. He double checked the equipment, and tools needed for the job ahead. All was in readiness.

The puppies next door at the Carmichael's started yapping up a storm as Harry approached them with their breakfast.

Frank locked the garage as he headed across the yard to the fenced in area where Queenie and her pups were being fed.

"Had breakfast? I got plenty of puppy chow if you're hungry?" Harry teased him.

"The little lady fed me earlier. I had a cold bowl of gruel, and it'll last me till lunch," he laughed.

"Better not let Virginia hear you say that." Harry said scrapping the last of the puppy chow out of the pan.

Frank leaned on the fence, and watched the pups eat. Hooking his thumbs in his belt, "I've got an idea. You reckon I'd be okay if I took the

black pup now? Let him get acquainted with my place?"

"Sure, as soon as he's finished, he's all yours." Harry agreed.

Frank snatched up the pup a few minutes later, and headed for his red pickup. No time like the present he figured to get the pup use to riding in the truck. Excited, the pup jumped from the side window, to the dashboard, to Frank's lap, while wagging his tail non-stop.

Frank waved to Harry as he backed out of the drive and headed down the road. The pup enjoyed the experience, but soon tired and snuggled close to Frank's leg as the drone from the engine lulled him to sleep.

After a short while, Frank returned and the change in motion woke the pup. Leaping into action, he once again jumped all over the place.

Frank smiled at his antics. "Easy boy, we're home."

Climbing out he turned just in time to catch the pup as he too rushed out behind him. "Be careful, slow down, you'll have all day to play." Frank laughed, and sat the pup on the ground. Becoming alert, he stood erect, his head held high as he cautiously looked in every direction. Satisfied, he ran around the yard, nose close to the ground. It was a new world of sound, and scent, as he circled the house, and came to a stop at Frank's side.

"How you like your new home?"

With tail wagging, he became bolder in his investigations. Each new discovery provided a wealth of things to play with. After several hours of this fascination, he found a quiet spot on the front porch, and fell asleep.

Frank in the mean time had been working on building his new arbor. He checked on the pup from time to time.

The silver four door sedan eased into the drive so quietly it wasn't noticed. Virginia was proud of her old car. It ran, and drove like new. She and Frank had an agreement; he'd not drive her car, and she'd not dare drive his truck.

She tooted the horn to gain his attention, because she wanted help with the groceries. Brushing the dirt from his knees he hurried to the car, "Hi honey, I'm ready for a break."

"I got some burgers for you and your new friend. Where is the little guy?"

"He's pooped out. Last I saw he was snoozing on the porch, I'll feed him later." Frank said helping with the bags.

His eyes closed, lying on his side, he appeared to be asleep. Suddenly, the black pup perked up his ears, listening intently to a strange musical sound. Now fully awake, he walked to the edge of the porch, and looked in the direction of the nearby forest.

Fascinated by the sound, he jumped from the porch, and cautiously made his way across the large field. Stopping, he studied the dense woods before him. Feeling confident, he followed the mystical music as he entered the thick growth. Each time he attempted to move closer to the sound, it changed directions, and seemed to move deeper into the forest.

Undaunted, he stealthily continued to pursue the new, and exciting interest. Stopping suddenly, the musical sound became silent. Unsure what to do, he stood motionless, ears pointing straight up, listening for any sound in the now quiet forest.

Turning slowly in every direction, and watchful for any sign of movement, an eerie sensation of fear started to vibrate through his small body as he crouched, and began to cower. Mosquitoes buzzed around his little snout. Turning around, he headed back in the direction he had come from, afraid to venture any further.

Virginia finished lunch, "I'll fetch your little friend. You can feed him," she said heading out of the kitchen. Entering the living room through the open arched doorway, she stopped. Pushing open the screen door she went out onto the front porch. The door spring pulled the door shut behind her with a bang! How many years will that door slam shut before he does something about it she thought?

Looking around, the pup was not on the porch. She walked around the front, and side yard, without any sign of him. Whistling, she called for him as she made her way to the back yard.

Frank opened the back door, and hollered at her, "You're going to attract every dog for two miles. Just go to the front porch, and pick him up," he grumbled.

"He's not on the porch. I can't find him. I've been all around the house. If he wandered off into the woods, we'll never find him," she snapped at him, now standing with her hands on her hips, and a look of agitation on her face.

Frank searched his pants pocket for the truck keys. Now remembering he left them in the ignition switch. "I'll drive across the field to the forest, and blow the horn, if he hears it, he'll come."

"I'll wait here. If he doesn't show up soon, I'm going to the ranger fire tower for help," she said, remembering the Carmichaels were on

vacation.

Frank raced across the rough field, and braked the truck to a halt where he thought the pup might have entered. He started beeping the truck's horn. Virginia became impatient, and started for the ranger's station. It was located in a remote section of the forest, and was difficult to reach. She'd been there once before with Frank. It was down a narrow dirt road that's pock-marked with ruts and holes. She left a cloud of dust, driving faster than normal, dodging the low hanging tree limbs, as the wild brush scraped the sides of her car.

At last, she turned into the ranger station lot. Stopping next to a dust covered jeep, she hesitated a moment before climbing the steep ladder leading up to the lookout point. Reaching the top, she was out of breath not realizing how high up it was.

"I was on duty when she arrived," the retired ranger told his grandson. Pausing, he asked Donny, "Want more cake? If you do, Rose can get it for you?"

Rose gave the old ranger a furious look as she turned toward Donny. "If you can wait an hour, I'll fix you boys something to eat. You shouldn't eat cake again; it'll make you fat like your grandpa."

"That's okay, I can wait till then." Donny answered as he winked at his grandfather.

Virginia caught her breath, and explained about the lost pup. At that time, I couldn't do anything officially, but promised to come to her house after my shift ended. She waved as she descended down the ladder. On her drive home she whispered a prayer for the lost pup to return safely, and asked God to protect the finish on her silver car.

Virginia turned into the drive, and parked next to the house. Climbing from the car, she heard Frank, still blowing the horn. Cupping her hands around her mouth, she shrilly whistled, and waved her arms to attract his attention. Stepping from the truck, he looked in her direction. She motioned for him to come to the house.

Entering the house, she waited for him in the kitchen. When he arrived, she explained, "The ranger said he'd stop by later, and for us to relax. Said he might return on its own."

After ten minutes of drumming his fingers on the kitchen table, Frank couldn't relax. Pacing the floor, he went from one window to another to look out. His frustration finally got the better of him. "I can't stand it any longer. I've waited as long as I can," he said heading out the door. Walking across the field of knee high fox-tail, and cocklebur weeds he made his way to the woods. Shouting for the pup didn't bring any

response other than to make him hoarse, so he finally gave up and returned home.

Virginia steeped a pot of tea, even though she knew he hated tea. "Here, let this trickle down your throat. It'll sooth the pain, and relax the tightness."

He stared at the cup a long time. Finally taking a sip, he faked choking, as he knew she was watching.

The lost pup was confused. This was a new experience, and he didn't like it. He found a fallen tree, and worked his way among its branches. Hiding under its protective cover, he made himself as small as possible, not sure what to do next.

Donny's grandfather crossed his legs, "Has it been an hour yet? I'm gettin' hungry."

"Just keep talkin.' I'll let you know when it's time," Rose growled.

The old gentleman laughed as he continued on.

The ranger arrived and turned in the driveway. The Turner's were waiting on the porch. Virginia spoke to the ranger first, "Haven't seen or heard nothin' so far."

"I doubt he'll come back tonight. It's almost dark. After the sun sets, I think he'll find shelter, and stay put. I'll be here early in the morning. We can decide then what to do next," he said.

The Turners were alone in the drive, as the ranger drove away. "The Carmichaels are comin' home tomorrow. They'll have Queenie with them. We'll get Harry to set Queenie on her pups scent." Virginia said turning toward the house.

"Good idea," Frank said following her.

CHAPTER SIX

Knocking on the door to apartment eleven, Detective Smith took a quick look around. He could see the small parking lot to his right, as the building was barely fifteen feet from the sidewalk. Not a bad area for an older, two-story, red brick complex. Small, only twenty-four units, yet still quite cozy, he thought.

The door creaked open slowly until the chain-lock stopped its advance. Donny spied the thin-framed, elderly lady peering out at them.

"I'm Detective Smith, and this is my partner Detective Jones. May we have a moment of your time?"

"I'm no fool; show me your badge," Agnes shot back. Donny glanced at Angel, who rolled her eyes as he produced his shield, and held it up for her to view. Closing the door, they heard the chain slide off, and then the door was pulled open.

"I'm Agnes Blakewood; would you two like some tea? I just brewed a fresh pot," she said as they entered.

"No thank you, ma'am, we're fine. We need to speak to you about the shooting in apartment twelve," he said taking out his notepad. "Did you happen to hear anything?"

"Why, yes, I did. Sounded like two men arguing, but I couldn't make out what they were saying. My hearing isn't what it use to be."

"Is there anything you can tell us?" Angel asked.

"Not really, just that I heard the shot at 12:17. I remembered looking

at the clock, and telling Horace that didn't sound good," Agnes said.

"Horace? Might we have a word with him?" Donny inquired.

"Oh, no, he's my cat, my best friend. Do you like cats, Officer?" She asked looking intently at his face.

"Yes, I do," Donny replied smiling.

"How about you, young lady? You like cats?"

"Can't stand the gruesome fur balls. I'm into attack dogs myself."

Agnes arched her shoulders, and took offense at Angel's remark. She made her way to the door. "I think it's time you left," she said, looking directly at Angel.

"Thank you for your time, Mrs. Blakewood," Donny said, heading for the door.

Horace jumped up on the old sofa, and hissed as Angel followed her partner out. Agnes slammed the door, almost hitting Angel.

Angel stopped, "What's her problem?"

"I think you insulted her cat," he answered.

"Well, fuck her, and her mangy cat," Angel said as she started up the stairs. "What's the number on that 'Ryan what's-his-name' kid?"

"Its apartment twenty-four, directly above twelve," he said following her up to the second level.

Angel pounded on the door with her fist. "Police! Open up!" she shouted.

Donny stood there, shaking his head, and wondering if his new partner had some mental problem he wasn't yet aware of. "This isn't a drug raid, Angel; it's just a fact-finding mission."

"Whatever," she replied indifferently. She was raising her fist again to pound on the door when it started to open.

Young Ryan greeted the officers. "You here about the murder?"

"Yes, may we come in?" Donny asked.

"Sure can," he opened the door wider. Angel advanced, with Donny bringing up the rear.

Ryan launched right in telling his story. "It was around quarter after twelve when I first noticed the loud voices. I was watching McLintock on TV at the time..."

Angel interrupted, "Mac who?"

"McLintock, the movie with John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara. I've got it on VHS. I just love westerns," Ryan lamented to the officers.

Please continue," Donny said.

"Anyway, a few minutes later I heard a loud noise, but I didn't think it was a gunshot at the time.

"Why not?" Angel asked.

"Well, it didn't sound like the guns on TV."

"So, then what happened?" Donny asked.

"I went on watching the movie, but then I heard a car as it drove off. So I looked out the window. It was dark, I couldn't make out the color, but it was an older model Buick. At least, I think it was a Buick; maybe it was something else," Ryan said as he checked out the detectives' facial expressions. He felt he wasn't helping much.

Angel asked, "What did the driver look like?"

"I don't know, the car was so far up the street, I couldn't tell."

"Is that when you called 911?" Donny asked, still writing everything down.

"No, I slipped on my shoes and thought I'd sneak down the stairs to see what was going on. That's when I saw Agnes' door start to open. She saw me on the stairs, so I came on down and asked if she was all right. That's when we discovered the door to apartment twelve was ajar. Looking in, you could see that Butler guy on the floor. Then I went and called the police."

Looking around the sparse apartment, it brought back memories of Donny's earlier days as a college student at the University of Arkansas. Clothes, empty beer cans strewn about, sink full of dirty dishes, and only a mattress on the floor to sleep on. Typical college kid Donny reasoned, except he figured Ryan was into girls.

"You know this Butler guy very well?" Angel now took over the questioning.

"I saw him coming and going a few times, but he never spoke to me. Never even nodded, or gave a little wave; not a very sociable person, I figured."

"Why you say that?" Angel continued.

"Most of what I heard about him came from Agnes. She said he was a jerk, and not to trust him. Something to do with him disliking cats. She said people who hate cats have no soul and end up in hell or something like that."

Donny glanced over at Angel to see her reaction to his statement.

Angel sneered at Donny. "Fuck cats and old people." Turning back to

Ryan, Angel asked, "So, anything else you can remember, besides the shit about fur balls?"

"Not that I can recall. I was pretty nervous, I guess. I never called 911 before."

"You have any more questions?" she asked, facing Donny.

"No," he said placing his pad in his inside jacket pocket.

"Thanks, if we have more questions, we'll contact you. Oh, and if you think of anything else, just give us a call," Angel chimed in as she started for the door.

"What's the number I can reach you at?" Ryan asked.

Donny handed him one of his personalized cards containing his rank, name and office number. Ryan thanked him and secured the door as they left.

Midway down the stairs, Angel stopped and turned to Donny. "Look," she said, now pointing at Agnes Blakewood's apartment window.

Donny focused on the window just in time to see the white lace curtains close. "So, what's your point?"

"Nosy old motherfucker," Angel said, descending the last few steps.

"Let me guess, you're mad because she said you're going to hell for being a cat hater?" Donny said with a chuckle.

"Don't take her side, you cat-lovin' faggot," she snapped back.

Once in the unmarked cruiser, Donny radioed the dispatcher for the parents' address of James Butler. He was informed the mother was residing at 553 Frederick Lane. As the detectives pulled away from the curb, they spotted a TV news van pulling up in front of the apartment building.

"Here come the goddamn vultures," Angel quipped.

Donny stepped on the accelerator as they sped down the street heading for Frederick Lane, which was only a few miles down the road.

A small house, with white aluminum siding, stood about sixty feet from the roadway. They turned slowly onto a narrow, gravel driveway located on the left side of the older house. The grass was sparse, with patches of red clay areas all about. It had been neglected for quite some time, they noticed as it came into view. The houses on both sides of the street were in the same condition. No middle-class here; just lower-class older folks.

"Pretty quiet neighborhood," Donny said exiting the vehicle.

As they approached the front door, Angel noticed the handwritten note taped to the screen door. "Says not to knock, to go to the rear door."

They made their way around to the back of the house. Donny rapped on the door with his right knuckle. As the door opened, they froze when the barrel of the .22 caliber rifle came into view. A tall woman looking to be in her mid to late fifties leveled the gun on Donny's midsection.

"Why you two snoopin' round my house? No drugs here for your kind," she said eyeing the two intruders.

"Wait a minute, we're police officers," Donny rattled off. "Let me show you my credentials, and my badge," he said, slowly reaching into his jacket. Pulling them out, he held them up for her inspection.

Lowering the rifle, "That biker-chick with you?"

"That is Detective Jones, my partner," Donny responded, grinning at her comment. "Are you Mrs. Butler, the mother of a James Butler of 2218 Park Street, apartment twelve?"

"Call me Geneva, and yeah, I'm his mother. Jimmy in trouble with the law?"

"May we come in for a moment?" asked Donny.

"No, say your piece from there," she said blocking the doorway with her body, still holding the rifle.

Angel stepped up beside Donny and asked, "So when was the last time you saw or heard from your kid?"

"Why?" Geneva asked.

"Because he's dead, that's why," Angel blurted out.

"Somebody kill him?" The expression on her face never changed.

"Why you think someone killed him?" Angel asked, leaning closer into the doorway.

"Jimmy ain't no saint; everybody who ever met him knows that. Mean to the core, that boy was."

"Anyone special you care to mention who might have wanted him dead?" Donny interjected.

"No...no one special," Geneva answered back casually. "Now don't get me wrong, he was a good man until his little brother, my youngest boy, committed suicide. After that, he changed, became mean and ugly,

and didn't seem to care about people no more. Sonny, his younger brother, and him hung out together on weekends. Played ball and all that crap. Sonny's death hit Jimmy pretty hard; never was the same after that. But, life goes on I tried to tell him. He wouldn't listen to an old drunk like me."

"Where is James father in all this?" Donny asked.

"Bastard ran out on us when the boys were very young. Damn alcoholic, always messin' round with other women. Cheated on me every chance he got, dumb asshole. I had no choice but to start workin' the streets, and I picked up the bottle along the way. Damn child welfare agency came an' took Sonny from me, Jimmy was already eighteen. Poor kid was sent to one of those group homes. Jimmy never forgave me for that, said I'd burn in hell for what I let them people do to Sonny," she said as a single tear ran down her right cheek.

"Who did James blame for his younger brother's suicide?" Donny asked.

"Sonny wrote in his suicide note that some child care worker, no name given, had picked him up on the highway the night he ran away from the group home. Said the guy let him stay at his apartment, but made him have sex with him. Later, the guy got tired of Sonny and told him to get out or he'd hurt him bad. Sonny was ashamed of being the guy's bitch, so he wrote a suicide letter, mailed it to Jimmy and made his way to the highway that night. Stood on the side of the road until one of those semi-trucks came barreling down the road. Police said at the last minute, he stepped in front of the truck. Driver said nothin' he could do; he slammed on the brakes, but he hit poor Sonny doing sixty-five miles an hour. Coroner said he was dead on impact..."

Geneva fell back into the house, down onto the dirty floor. The rifle hit and slid several feet before it came to rest. Sobbing hysterically, she held her chest.

Donny rushed inside and knelt down to offer aid. Angel stood in the doorway, casually, observing the spectacle. Donny helped her to a chair by the kitchen table. Angel now came inside and leaned against the wall, still observing. Donny consoled Geneva until she regained her composure. She thanked him for his kindness.

"So, to continue..." Angel said dryly.

Geneva looked up, still wiping tears from her cheeks. "Some partner you have there," she said to Donny. "Not much left to tell, except Jimmy said if he ever ran across that bastard who hurt Sonny, he'd be one sorry cocksucker."

"So you haven't had much contact with James, I take it?" Angel said, trying to solicit more information from her.

"That's right." Geneva glared at Angel; she took an instant dislike to her. "I think it's time you two left me alone."

"Sorry for your loss, ma'am," Donny said as they exited.

Once in the car, Angel broke the silence, "Wasn't that pleasant? So Mom's a drunk, a prostitute and God knows what else..."

"Have some compassion; the poor woman lost both of her sons. That's not an easy thing to face, even under these circumstances," he said, trying to reach an emotional level with Angel.

"You didn't fall for that line of shit she was layin' on so thick, did you, queer boy?" Angel rolled her eyes in mock disbelief.

Donny wouldn't give her the satisfaction of an answer. Starting the car, he backed out onto the roadway and headed up to the stop sign. Pulling up on the opposite side was the white TV news van.

Angel pointed, "Look, the fuckin' vultures. I hope your girlfriend, the prostitute, pulls the same shit on them."

"What?" Donny asked.

"I hope she shoves that rifle in their faces, that's what," Angel replied laughing.

"Are you on some kind of medication I should know about?" Donny asked half seriously.

"Medication? You're joking, right?" Angel registered a puzzled look on her tight face.

"Seriously, something isn't right about you," he retorted.

"Fuck you...you stupid faggot! I don't abuse drugs, shithead!" she shrieked, and then flipped him the bird.

"Well, in that case...maybe you need some medication!" Donny yelled back, now fidgeting and trying to adjust his tie.

One could feel the intense body heat coming off Angel. She tried to control her temper, yet her fuse was already lit. She drew her hands into tight fists as her biceps flared with anger. "If you weren't my partner, I'd stomp your sissy little ass into the dirt!" she roared, then slammed her right fist into the dashboard.

Donny bristled with excitement, as he knew he had scored a direct hit on a major nerve, and he loved it. Smiling all the way back to the

station, he parked the cruiser.

Angel flung her door open, and then slammed it hard as she stormed off. Donny exited the vehicle and made his way to his chocolate-brown 1968 Nova, his pride and joy. He felt he had the upper hand now.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Rose went in to make lunch. Donny leaned over and asked his grandfather, “Rose still do her psychic thing?”

“Sure does, I don’t pay it much mind, but some folks in town go visit her from time to time. Wantin’ answers to their silly questions.” He said.

Donny had heard rumors while growing up about Rose having séances at midnight, and gazing into a crystal ball and whatnot. Brushing it off as just gossip, he figured it was just talk from the small minded town’s folk.

Larry Smith and his grandson now waited patiently on the porch for Rose to serve their lunch trays. She insisted they eat off the trays, and outside, so it would be easier for her to clean up any mess they made. She came forth with food and drink.

The retired ranger munched on his sandwich as he continued with his story.

I arrived before daybreak at the Turner’s place. I could hear Frank out in his truck, blowing the horn. I walked across the field to where Frank was parked. He explained his plan to use Queenie to locate her pup. So I started out on my own. I wanted to explore the gully the old timers talked about; it had been formed during an earthquake some years earlier.

The forest had a thick smothering under growth with no trails or paths to follow. I’d been out an hour or so working my way through the dense brush, looking for landmarks. I was listening for sounds from the lost pup. Without warning, I suddenly stumbled, and fell into a deep crevice. The narrowness of the crevice held me in an upright position, as I fell feet first. There seemed to be no bottom, as I scraped, and rubbed against the rough and jagged sides. I finally wedged to a halt. Both of my legs were twisted under me.

After the small rocks and dirt settled, I was now conscious of severe pain in my right leg. It must be broken I thought. I started to feel nauseated, and faint. I struggled to reach the whistle in my shirt pocket, all the while praying I’d have enough air in my lungs to blow it. I could barely see due to all the dust in my eyes, and the sides of the crevice pushed against my chest, as I tried to breathe. Death entered my mind

as I struggled to maintain a positive attitude. For a short time I fell reproachfully silent.

After a sleepless night, the lost puppy cautiously looked around. The forest seemed to be safe. From his hiding place, he hadn't heard any noise, or frightening sounds for several hours. His ears perked straight up, turned forward, as he scanned the area in all directions. Sniffing the air, he slowly moved from his safe haven. With his nose to the ground, he checked for a familiar scent.

Suddenly, he stopped, and crouched into a defensive stance. Wheeling to his right to face the odd sound, he strained to listen. Nothing but silence met his ears. Moving forward his nervous fear turned to curiosity as the strange sound came at him again. Silently he continued in the direction of the odd sound. Looking down, he now found himself peering into a deep, dark hole. His keen sense of smell announced the presence of a man. Confirmation came as the man moved and the pup's eyes zeroed in on his target.

The trapped ranger was unaware the pup was above him. Unable to take a deep breath he blew the whistle with all his might. The horrendous, sharp blast rang forth into the pup's ears. Leaping backward, the stunned pup responded with a loud bark, followed by a growl.

Rose finished her lunch, and then proceeded to take up the trays from the two men. Donny hadn't quite finished, but he didn't make a fuss. Rose flip-flopped into the house with the trays.

The retired ranger rocked back and forth slowly waiting for her return. Once she settled in he began again.

Frank was nearly run over, as he stood in the middle of the Carmichaels drive. As they got out, with Queenie in tow, he explained what had happened, and that they needed Queenie's assistance.

"Where was the last place you saw the pup," Harry asked snapping his leash to Queenie's collar.

"Last time I saw him he was on the front porch asleep." Frank quickly explained about Ranger Smith already out looking for the lost pup for an hour or so.

Queenie was led to the front porch; she quickly picked up the scent. Harry removed the leash and she jumped off the porch heading across the field.

"We may as well go inside. No tellin' how long the search will last," Virginia said to Ann.

The men hustled across the field, trying to keep pace with Queenie. She moved ahead, and entered the forest. They lost sight of her.

“We’ll never catch up. Let’s go in about a hundred yards and wait for her to talk to us. When she gets close, she’ll start a series of high pitched barks. Then we can locate her,” Harry said.

Queenie tracked from the strong scent of her puppy. Locating the direction the pup took, she moved on.

The pup stood over the trapped ranger as if guarding him from some unseen evil force. Providing soft barks, from time to time, as if he was trying to reassure the ranger that all would be okay.

Queenie moved swiftly through the woods as she finally located her offspring. The pup licked her face in surprise and relief.

Ranger Smith heard the commotion, straining to look up he focused in on the two dogs. What a wonderful sight he thought. Help must be near at hand.

Queenie started her barking call, which Frank and Harry responded to immediately. They had been sitting on an old log discussing cures for athlete’s foot. Unaware of what they were about to find, they forced their way through the thick brush.

Frank slapped a mosquito on his neck, “That must have been the mother of all mosquitoes.”

Harry glanced over, “She left a nice size welt. Them little black suckers are the mean ones.”

Three startled rabbits scampered in different directions when Frank stepped over a log, almost right on top of them. “I wish they wouldn’t do that. Scares the daylights out of me.”

They started to work up a sweat when they reached Queenie and her pup.

“Hot damn, you found your pup. Good girl,” Harry said rubbing and scratching her.

Frank picked up the pup and examined him. “Looks to be in fine shape, fine shape indeed.”

With a smile, retired ranger Smith told his grandson, “Boy, was I happy when I heard what was taking place above me. I shouted as loud as I could.”

Harry dropped to his knees, and saw the ranger. Turning to Frank, “There’s a guy down there.”

Frank rushed to his side, lost his balance, and bumped into Harry almost knocking him in the crevice. Frank grabbed Harry's arm, and stopped him from falling in.

Peering into the dark hole, Frank's eyes finally focused on the man staring back, "Is that you Ranger Smith?!"

They could hardly hear his muffled, raspy reply. Frank removed his ball cap, and scratching his head, "How we gonna get 'em out?"

"I got an idea. I'll take the dogs to the house. Then I'll have the girl's phone the sheriff's office. I've got an extension ladder, and a strong rope. With help, we can get him outta there," Harry said.

"Don't just stand there wastin' time, get movin', I'll wait here with the ranger," Frank said.

The girl's saw them coming and ran across the field to meet Harry. Handing the puppy to Ann, "Hold onto him. Don't let him down. I don't want him to follow me when I go back. The ranger fell in a deep ravine. I need my ladder and some rope to get him out."

Harry found the equipment he needed without difficulty. Hoisting the coil of rope over his shoulder, he lifted the ladder, and centered his weight as he carried it. Ann had already notified the sheriff's office.

Harry said, "Tell the deputies he's about a mile west of the two large oak trees. I need Queenie to guide me back, but I'll send her back to guide them to us."

Stumbling through the forest, he now realized how difficult it was to carry the rope, and ladder through the quagmire of growth. Slowing down, he tried to keep the ladder from snagging onto every tree limb and bush.

Frank had removed most of the underbrush from around the site. A few moments later he heard them coming.

"My adrenalin has gone ka-put. Let me catch my breath," Harry said slumping down to sit.

Frank uncoiled the rope, and lowered one end to the trapped ranger, "This'll give you something to hold onto."

Reaching for the rope, "I got it. Lower it a little more, and I'll tie it around me," he said in a weak voice. He struggled to secure the rope. Every movement was painful. Wedged in too tight, he couldn't wrap the rope around his chest. "Pull the rope up, and tie a loop on the end with a slip knot. Then lower it over my arms. I'll try to hold them up, and work it over them," his voice growing weaker.

Frank fashioned a slip knot, and lowered it over the outstretched arms of the ranger. Working the rope under his arms and securing it to his chest, the ranger was now exhausted. Frank tied the other end to a large tree for support.

Harry regained his strength, and helped with the ladder. They extended it to where it almost touched the ranger.

Frank dragged a large tree limb across the ground. "Don't do anything until we secure the ladder," he called to the ranger. Shoving the limb through the ladder rungs, he rested the ends on each side of the crevice. "Everything is ready up here. Are you ready down there?"

"All my weight is on my legs. I can't move myself up the ladder. Pull the slack out of the rope, and lift the weight off my legs."

They pulled the rope tight. Feeling the weight of the ranger, they continued to pull slowly while being as careful as possible.

Gritting his teeth as the pain shot through his body, the ranger yelled, "That's enough!" They stopped pulling, and held the rope steady.

His breathing was labored, "I got my good leg, and foot on the ladder. I think my other leg is broken, I can't move it. I'll try to tie myself to the ladder. Give me some slack."

In the distance, they heard two gun shots. "That's the rescue party," Harry said. Signaling to Queenie, she took off to fetch the deputies.

Frank called to the ranger, "Take a breather, we'll wait for the others to arrive. We'll need all the help we can get to hoist you up."

The deputies arrived and assisted in freeing the ranger. First aid was administered, and the ladder was used as a stretcher to carry him back to a waiting ambulance.

Frank and Virginia rested in bed after the two day ordeal. Pulling the covers around his neck, he cleared his throat, "Maybe we should get a mule. It could carry ladders and such in case another emergency arises." Virginia pretended not to hear him. "I read in a poultry magazine, we can order fifty Dominicker chicks for a small price, and we could..."

Virginia bolted straight up in bed. With clenched teeth she said, "Not on your life! If you think I'm gonna wring their necks, soak them in scalding water, pick off their feathers, clean out their insides, fry them in a skillet, and place them in front of you, just to have you sit with tears in your eyes, because you can't eat your little friends, you're sadly mistaken. No chickens! And no mule either! Now go to sleep!"

After a few moments of silence, "Honey, how do you feel about

Angora Rabbits?" Frank asked sheepishly.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Jerking the door wide open, James Butler burst into my room. "Your door is to stay open at all times during the day. Only at night can it be closed, and then, staff will make periodic checks on you. Understand?"

"Yes sir," I replied a bit startled.

"All right, Simon, it's time for your first therapy session with Doctor Lerner," he said as he swiftly passed back into the corridor. Following, James led me back to the small office where I was originally processed.

"Wait in here," he said, disappearing down the hall.

Sitting down, I looked up to see Doctor Lerner entering the room. She was tall I thought for a black woman, somewhere around five feet ten inches, I'd say, maybe taller. At first glance she looked to be in her early forties. A rather large, full-figured woman; close to two hundred thirty pounds or more. Dark-brown eyes, and long shiny black hair done up in fancy gold braids. She wore a pink blouse, and black slacks with a black suede jacket. Very stylish with low-heeled shoes to match. Even her briefcase was a polished jet black. Her fingernails were painted with glittery gold polish to match her braids.

Overall, she emerged into the room in a quite professional manner, yet I found the nail polish a bit much. Very tranquil, very nurturing, and

non-threatening she came across to me.

Her soft, gentle voice gave the feeling of self-confidence as she spoke. "Simon, it's my pleasure to meet you. I'm Doctor Linda Lerner," she said extending her right hand.

Such a simple gesture came across as serene and graceful. I reached out and shook her large, yet very soft hand. "Ah, it's nice to meet you too," I said, trying to be polite.

"This office is so small; shall we go to the group therapy room? We'll be much more comfortable there. Since you're the only one here, we have it all to ourselves. Is that all right with you, Simon?"

Pausing for a moment, "Ah, I thought there was another patient here till noon?"

"She was released early, so you're the only one for now," she replied with a broad smile. We headed for the therapy room. Entering, she closed the door behind us.

"Please, have a seat on the sofa," she said, motioning toward the one in the center of the large room. She sat down, placing her briefcase on her lap as I too sat down. Removing a small cassette recorder, she placed the device between us.

"Did the RN explain the 'doctor/patient' form to you earlier?" she asked.

"Yes, he did."

"And do you fully comprehend what he explained, Simon?"

"Sure," I said, even though I wasn't really sure. I didn't want to seem stupid to her.

"Very well then, let me just say that all of our sessions together will be recorded, and Doctor Crawford, or who we refer to as Father Andy, we will be reviewing these tapes as time passes. No one else will have access or be allowed to listen to the tapes. I keep them locked away in my private office."

"Fine with me." I wasn't sure if she was making a statement or seeking some kind of response from me.

Pressing the record button on her machine, "This is Doctor Lerner, primary caregiver for Simon Lee Teel, patient number 222-77. This is our first session together." She eased back onto the sofa, getting comfortable.

"Simon, I'd like to begin by discussing your early childhood years. Can

you recall any special events that had an impact on your life back then?"

"Well, I'm not sure where to start." I was a little flushed.

"I want you to do something for me, take a deep breath and hold it for the count of seven, and then let it out. Can you do that for me, Simon?"

I nodded my head, and slowly drew in a deep breath, and counted slowly to seven in my head. Expelling the air in my lungs at the end of count seven, I felt calmer, a bit more relaxed.

"Now, just begin anywhere you wish." She spoke softly, as if soothing a troubled child.

"Ah, well, as a young boy I remember living out in the country. Riding my bike through the woods, and playin' down by the creek that ran behind our old house..."

"Simon, please tell me what you recall concerning your grade school years."

"Ah, I loved recess, playin' tag with the other boys out on the school yard. I could run fast, like a wild deer back then."

"Were you close to any of your playmates," she asked.

"No, not at school, I was very shy then. But I had a friend who came, and played with me at home."

"Tell me about your friend," she said pulling out a large notebook. She began to take written notes now.

"Well, he was a young Indian boy, looked to be Apache. He usually showed up when I was worried, especially if it had something to do with school. I hated school; only thing I liked was lunch, and recess, that was it. I was just so shy, everyone intimidated me."

"Was the Apache boy real, or was he your imaginary friend?" she asked. "He was real to me."

"How did he help you when you were worried?"

"I'd be out in the field behind our house crying, and he'd appear, and ask what was bothering me. I'd tell him, and he'd suggest how to deal with whatever it was, then we'd go play in the woods till dark. Then I'd go home."

"Are you still in contact with your Apache friend?"

"No, I was probably about ten the last time I saw him."

Doctor Lerner seemed to be watching my facial expressions, "Why did

you stop speaking to him?"

"My mother called me in for supper one evening, and told me she didn't want me playin' in the woods so late. I made the mistake of tellin' her it was all right because of my friend. She demanded to know who he was, so I told her about him. She laughed at me, and told me never to speak to him again. Said it was crazy to believe in such things. Said they'd come lock me up in the nut house. He never came around after that."

"Simon, as a young boy, did you ever harm or mistreat any animals?" She had no tone in her voice of accusation. I felt comfortable talking to her.

"I remember my first BB gun I got for my ninth birthday. I ended up shooting a robin that was perched high up in an old persimmon tree. When it fell, it flopped around a minute or so before it died. I don't know why, but I started crying. I buried it in a shoebox in the field behind our house. I made a cross out of my mother's old wooden clothes pins. I felt bad for several days after that." I said, looking down at the floor. A brief moment of shame came over me.

"James Butler, the RN, wrote in your chart that you suffer from two phobias. Do you know why you have a fear of public restrooms?"

"Yes, I was in third grade. At school, I had to crap really bad, so I went to the restroom, and the stalls didn't have any privacy doors, so I went all the way down to the last stall. Two older boys came in and found me. They started pointing, and laughing at me. I was so embarrassed. After that, I'd wait until I got home from school. I never went into the restrooms again."

"Did you overcome that fear?" she asked politely.

"I use public restrooms now, as long as the stalls have privacy doors, but if there are a lot of people in there, I wait, and go later."

"Simon, can you tell me of your fear of heights?"

"I was playing at a friend's house. I was about twelve I think. We were up in the bed of his dad's pick-up truck playing. I lost my balance, and fell backward over the side. I landed flat on my back, knocking the wind out of me. When I couldn't catch my breath, I panicked, and jumped on my bike, pedaling as fast as I could for home. By the time I reached home I had stopped crying, and was breathing normally again, but I've been afraid of high places ever since."

"Your mother Nora came to see me earlier. She provided me with a couple of items; one pertaining to grade school, and the other one deals

with your high school period. I've read over these two papers, and I would like to get your thoughts concerning them. If, that's okay with you?"

"What papers?" I asked, a bit hesitant. God only knows what stuff my mother kept from my school days. I'm sure whatever it was, I would be embarrassed by it.

Shuffling around in her briefcase, she produced the two items, and handed them to me.

"The top one is an English assignment you wrote while in the seventh grade, which you titled, 'True Love.' Simon, I'd like for you to read over it to refresh your memory, and then we can discuss it."

TRUE LOVE

I was walking past the bathroom. I happened to see my sister standing in front of the mirror combing her hair. So being of sound mind and body, I walked into the bathroom and took her by the hair and started shaking her head up and down. After a few loud screams she started to throw punches. I was hit first in the left arm, then in the chest and I was kicked in the right knee. I then started to return the punches. I hit her first in the stomach, then in the left shoulder and the right ear. Then she bit me in the left hand. I screamed and quickly put my hands around her neck and began to strangle her. Her face started to turn red so I let go of her neck. Then like a flash she stomped on my right foot and pushed me to the wall. I then took my right hand and raked it across her face. She screamed real loud and ran out of the bathroom crying. I then proceeded to my bedroom which was about six feet away. About two minutes later my sister came to my room. She kicked open the door and in her hands lay a 24-inch baseball bat. Her eyes were red as fire. She walked over to where I was sitting and in a loud, deep voice she said, "You want to play some baseball?" The End.

As I finished reading over the first paper, I handed it back to Doctor Lerner. She returned it to her briefcase.

"The teacher gave you an 'A' for imagination; how did that make you feel?"

"I don't remember."

"Simon did this fight between your sister and yourself actually take place?"

"No, we never fought like that," I said crossing my right leg over my

left, trying to get more comfortable.

“Do you remember what prompted you to write such a story?”

“I don’t know, sometimes, goofy crap just pops into my head. I’m not sure where it comes from,” I said, shrugging my shoulders. I started to read over the other paper when Doctor Lerner reached over, and pushed it down on my lap.

“We’ll get to the other one in a moment; for now, I want to stay with your early years, if that’s all right?”

“Fine by me.”

“Did anything happen during that time period that still bothers you to this day?”

I lowered my head; looking into her eyes now made me uncomfortable.

“Simon, please, tell me what happened. Trust me; I’m not here to harm you or judge you in any way. Please be honest, even if it brings up past emotional stress, because you can release those old, negative feelings, and move on with your life.” Her words were filled with compassion and love.

“Something did happen, but it wasn’t during school time,” I slowly began, and I felt she really wanted to help me. So I took a chance and decided to open up, to reach deep into that dark, emotional place where I locked away the sad memories of that time.

“When was it?” she asked, patting my knee with her soft, plump hand.

“During summer break, not long after school let out.”

“Simon, take a deep breath, and let it out slowly...can you do that for me?”

I did as she suggested. “My mother dropped me off at my aunt, and uncle’s house. They were out of town, but one of my cousins who stayed home agreed to watch me while she went shopping with her friends. Mom told him she’d pick me up late that evening. I saw her give him ten dollars to baby-sit me. He was seventeen, and I was twelve at the time. After she drove off, we played some games, watched some TV. Later on, he had me come to his bedroom. Said he had a special game we were going to play.” I stopped. I became embarrassed. I could feel my face flushing red.

“Simon, did your cousin sexually abuse you?”

Lowering my head, I began to cry softly before I answered, "Yes, he got me naked on his bed, tied me up and sodomized me."

"All right, Simon, it's okay." Doctor Lerner placed her hand back on my knee, and gently squeezed my leg. "Did you become sexually aroused during this ordeal?"

I flushed red again as I answered, "Yes, I got an erection."

"Please continue, you're in a safe place now, don't be afraid or ashamed."

"Ah, most of the time he was talking to me."

"What was he saying?"

"Stuff about how I was getting stronger, and that I was becoming a man. How brave I was, and that this was the path to manhood. I remembered I stopped crying. I wanted to be a man. People don't treat kids very well sometimes, and his talking was working. I did want to be a man, and he said men don't cry, only babies cry. Made me swear not to tell anyone, especially my mother. Said God would be watching me to see if I broke my promise. And if I did, I'd feel his wrath."

"You're doing well, please continue," she said patting my leg again.

"He wrapped his arms around me, and gave me a hug. Then he said it was time for ice cream, and he held my hand as he led me into the kitchen. He said I was a man now; I could shoot his 9mm pistol out in the woods. I loved that."

"Did you inform your mother what had taken place when she returned to pick you up?" She asked.

"No, I never told anyone till now," I said.

"Did your cousin ever molest you after that episode?"

"Yes, he watched me several more times during that summer."

"Did your male cousin ever perform oral sex on you, or you on him, Simon?"

"No, men don't do that, only queers, he said," I blurted out, not wanting to be judged.

"How do you feel toward this cousin now that you have reached adulthood?"

"After that summer, he went his way, and I went mine."

"As a young boy, do you remember what type of sexual fantasies you were experiencing then?"

"Ah, I fantasized about women in bondage, tied up naked."

"How did you come to see women tied up in the nude?"

"I found one of those cardboard barrels with steel bands wrapped around it in our old garage. I pulled the lid off, and it was full of these old detective magazines. They had pictures of half naked women who were tied up in different ways on the covers. Made me so horny, I'd jack-off to them."

The cassette recorder clicked off. Doctor Lerner opened the compartment, and flipped the tape over, then closed the compartment. She pressed the record button as she picked up her note pad. "Now then, I'd like to come back to this at a later date. Let's move on for now, shall we, Simon?"

"Sure, fine with me, you're the Doctor."

"I wish to turn to your high school years, is that all right with you?"

"Yes," I said shrugging my shoulders, as if I cared.

"How did you feel about high school?" She continued.

"I hated it. The students there let me know real quick where I fit in the pecking order. I was poor white trash as far as they were concerned. We were country folk, and our house was one hundred and nine years old at the time. It was falling apart; we had no indoor bathroom, just an old white outhouse in the back yard. Only one sink in the kitchen which drew water directly from an old well. No hot water, just cold well water. Pipe always froze in winter, so we tied a rope to a plastic bucket, and dipped it straight out of the well. Mom boiled any hot water we needed on an old gas-burning stove. Only heat came from an old pot-belly stove in the kitchen, and a few space heaters in the bedrooms. We burned coal in the pot-belly stove, sometimes newspapers or wood. We had no AC, except for a small window unit in our parent's bedroom. Hotter than hell in the summer and colder than a witches-tit in winter...ah...sorry, I didn't mean to sound..."

"That's quite all right, Simon, just speak as you normally do, I'm not offended."

"Our house was infested with roaches, and spiders, but it was home. When I was growing up, I didn't know what poverty was until I reached high school. Wearing second-hand clothes and bathing once a week didn't seem so bad to me. But those well-to-do kids let me know real quick where I fit in," I said in an angry tone.

"Simon, how did you feel at that point in your life?"

"Ah, well, I guess my self-esteem was pretty low. I didn't like the others, and they didn't like me."

"Who gave out the discipline, your mother or father?"

“Mainly Mom spanked us for the small stuff, and Dad dealt with the big stuff.”

“How often did your father need to punish you?”

“Only twice,” I replied candidly.

“Only twice? You must have been really good?” She said fishing for more information.

“I don’t know about that.”

“The first time, tell me about what you did, and what was his punishment?”

“I was fourteen, and he told me to sit down, and read the Bible from cover to cover. Gave me a week to do this. Then we were going to discuss anything I didn’t understand. I was pretty cocky then, so I ripped the front cover and back covers off the Bible he gave me. I was dumb enough to present him the two covers, and told him I didn’t care for any of it. Big mistake to say that to a God-fearing minister. He lost it, grabbed me by the back of my neck, and took me to the old garage. He jerked my pants down, and whipped me with his belt. Must have smacked me twenty times. Made me kneel, and bow my head as he knelt beside me, praying out loud for God to forgive my sin I had committed against his holy book. After awhile, he simply stood, told me to go to my room, and reflect on what I had done. Which meant no supper that night.”

“Simon, what did you do to get punished a second time by your father?”

“I had just turned seventeen, and I was hanging out with one of my friends, the kind Dad didn’t approve of. As you know, I didn’t care much for religion. My friend told me he didn’t believe in Jesus, so I called him a liar, and told him I had a test that would tell if he did or didn’t believe. He agreed to take the test, and he failed it.”

Doctor Lerner leaned a bit closer, giving me her full attention. “What was this test?”

“I called it the ‘F.J.C.’ test. I told him, all he had to do to prove he didn’t really believe was to repeat three words out loud. The words were ‘Fuck Jesus Christ.’ He couldn’t do it, which told me, deep down, he really did believe. My mistake was that my father overheard our conversation. It was like he just came out of the darkness, and grabbed me. Back to the old garage again, but this time he laid the belt on pretty heavy. I had big red welts on my back and ass. Yet this time, after the praying, he turned, and stared at me for the longest time. Then he

spoke...said he was deeply, and profoundly ashamed of me.”

“How did that affect you?”

“At the time I couldn’t have cared less. But, later on, when he died, I felt very sad that I couldn’t measure up to his expectations. That I didn’t try harder to make him proud of me.”

“Our time is nearly up, so let’s move on for the moment. Simon, I’d like to discuss the second paper your mother gave me; it pertains to a speech you recited in your freshman speech class. ‘Satan’s Revenge’ is the title you gave it.” She handed the paper to me so I could read over it to refresh my memory.

Satan’s Revenge

Once upon a time there were four angels. The first angel, whose name was ‘Love,’ was born on a beautiful white cloud between the bright glowing sun and the spectacular stars that shined in the universe above. The second angel, whose name was ‘Peace,’ was born on a wonderful red blanket of flowers with holy rays of gold sunshine landing upon them. The third angel, whose name was ‘Harmony,’ was born on a soft bed of silk feathers. The fourth angel, whose name was ‘Satan,’ was born in a trash can on main street.

One day, god walked into a room made of solid gold where the four angels came daily to sing and dance and recite poems of love and joy. God walked over to where the four angels were sitting, pulled a whip from his pocket and cracked it sharply against the wall. Then God said, “Have you learned anything new?”

The first angel said, “I see no evil.”

The second angel said, “I hear no evil.”

The third angel said, “I speak no evil.”

Then the fourth angel said, “I see it, I hear it, and I speak it. So what you gonna do about it?”

God said, “I never did like you, Satan. So I’m banishing you to earth.” God raised his hand and there was a big flash of light and the fourth angel vanished from the room.

When he hit the earth, he said, “I’ll get even with God. I’ll become mean and cruel and I’ll steal and kill and burn people’s souls, so god won’t get them.” Then he said, “How can I do this?” Then it came to him. “I know I’ll become a speech teacher.” The End.

"I remember this speech, so I'm ready for your questions," I replied softly, I was getting tired.

Doctor Lerner wet her lips with her tongue, and then asked, "Was your speech teacher a man or woman?"

"A woman."

"Simon, tell me, how did she react to your speech?"

"When I finished, I returned to my seat. It was so quiet in that classroom; all the other students were waiting for the teacher's response. She played it very cool, went on as if nothing happened. She gave me a C plus for my speech, and I did pass the class at the end of the semester, barely."

"What prompted you to give such a speech?"

"I hated the teacher, I hated speech class, and I hated that they could force me to stand up in front of all those rich kids to be judged like that. So it was my way of getting revenge, I guess."

My face was a bit flushed; it brought back some bad emotional feelings. Feelings I thought I had overcome.

"Well, that's all the time we have for now. Do you have any questions before we end this session?" she asked politely.

"Ah, yes, what's behind the steel door on the short hall?"

"Why, it's the shock therapy room, but don't worry, we don't use it any more."

"Oh..."

"Any more questions?"

"No."

Doctor Lerner leaned forward to help push her heavy bulk up off the couch. She placed her note pad, and tape recorder inside her briefcase, and made her way to the hallway.

Stopping at the door, she turned, "I'll see you later in the afternoon for another session. So get some rest if you wish, goodbye Simon."

"Bye," I said, stretching out on the couch. I liked Doctor Lerner, she seemed genuine.

"Wake up!" James shrieked as he entered.

I bolted upright, not sure what was happening, yet I found my bearings very quickly.

“Your lunch is on the table in the dining room; let me know when you’re done,” James said as he left, not waiting for a reply.

I was hungry. After a brief stop at the toilet, I made a bee-line for the food. Everything was plastic; fork, spoon, plate, and even the tray. There was a small piece of corn on the cob, mashed potatoes with lumpy-brown gravy, and what looked to be a thick slice of roast beef covered with gravy. A carton of two percent white milk, a small green apple, and that old banana. I devoured everything except that nasty banana.

Finished, I made my way over to the nurses’ station, and informed his majesty, King James, that I was done. Now it was nap time, so off to my room I went.

Seems like I just closed my eyes when he burst in, “Keep the damn door open at all times during the day hours! Did...you...not...understand?!” James shouted.

“Sorry, I forgot,” I mumbled, now sitting up straight, and wiping the sleep from my blurry eyes.

“Go wait in the group therapy room for your next session.” The agitation was apparent in his voice; nothing I did pleased this guy.

Forty minutes later Doctor Lerner arrived. She entered smiling, as if life was filled with joy and hope. “Good afternoon, Simon, did you enjoy your lunch?”

“Yes, it wasn’t bad at all.”

“Remember, you are allowed a snack anytime, just ask.” Her cheery voice echoed through the room as she sat next to me.

“Okay.”

“Are you comfortable, Simon?”

“Yeah, I’m fine.” Doctor Lerner always concerned herself with my well-being. I figured it was some kind of mothering instinct.

“All right, let me start the recorder, and we’ll get started.” She pushed the button down as I watched the cassette tape slowly begin to turn.

“Your mother came to see me a short time ago in my office; she expressed concern over some things that have taken place in the last few years. At this time, if you don’t mind, I’d like to briefly explore these

concerns. Would that be possible?"

"Sure, I can't wait to hear what the old biddy had to say about her son," I replied sarcastically.

"Old biddy? Is that how you feel toward your mother?"

"Sometimes, depends on my mood I guess."

"Tell me about dealing in drugs and stolen weapons?" She said with no judgment in her tone of voice.

"What...? Sure, I smoke a little marijuana from time to time, but I don't sell drugs. She always exaggerates everything I say. All that really happened was I worked as a janitor at a coal company for a short time. I cleaned their central lab, where they processed coal samples. Some friends came out late one night, and asked if they could measure out some marijuana on the coal company's small precision scales. I said sure, no big deal, and while they were there, they asked if I wanted to buy a small .22-caliber revolver for twenty bucks. So I bought it. I never dealt or sold any dope."

"Simon, what happened to the gun? Do you still have it?" Her tone turned serious.

"No, I sold it to a local farmer a few weeks later for thirty-five bucks."

"Your mother said you were involved in the rape of a local neighbor girl, and that you threatened her parents with death if they told the authorities."

"For heaven's sake, I never raped the neighbor's kid! Mom made that all up. She's the one that needs therapy!" I yelled, trying to make myself sound more convincing.

She reached over, and patted me on the leg as she had done in our first session in an attempt to calm me. "Simon, just relax, no one is judging you...but why do you suppose your mother would make up such a story?"

"She's mad because I told her I wasn't going to give her any of the insurance money, that's why."

"What insurance money would that be?" Doctor Lerner asked with a puzzled look on her round sweet face.

"The money from my father's death. He had a life insurance policy, of which my sister and I were the beneficiaries. And since my sister committed suicide, it all goes to me," I explained.

“Your father left nothing for your mother?”

“That’s right, not one thin dime.”

“Do you know why?” she asked.

“I don’t have a clue.”

“Let’s move on; your mother stated you had sexual relations with your sister, which resulted in her becoming pregnant. She also said you took her to get an abortion. Can you shed some light on these statements, Simon?”

A lump formed in my throat as I lowered my head. Clearing my throat I proceeded. “Well, part of its true, but not as bad as she made it sound. I did get her pregnant, but Mom took her to the clinic for the abortion,” I blurted out.

“Did your father know?”

“Hell no! We didn’t want the wrath of God to come down on us, not even my mother wanted that.”

“What was your mother’s initial reaction when she discovered you, and your sister were having sexual relations?” she asked candidly.

“Mom cried, then prayed, then cried some more. Told us it was a sin against God, and our beloved father. She forbade us to even touch each other ever again. Mom was as scared as we were of what Dad would do if he found out. She made us swear on the Bible to never sin again. Then she found out about the pregnancy, and made arrangements to get an abortion on the sly in another city. She was not only afraid of our father; she was scared the scandal would ruin her reputation as well.”

“Did you keep your sacred vow to your Mother?”

“We tried, but temptation got the better of us, so we just did a better job of hiding it from her and dad. We used condoms so no more babies.”

“Simon, how did it make you feel, knowing your sister was carrying your child?”

“I really didn’t give it much thought,” I said nonchalantly.

“All right then, let’s move on for the time being. Are you currently having financial trouble? I ask because your chart says you are unemployed, and living at home,” she said, turning to a new page in her note pad.

“Not any more since I filed bankruptcy. That wiped out all my

debts," I said a little ashamed.

"What was your experience with bankruptcy? What frame of mind were you in at that time?"

"Well, that damn attorney charged me six hundred bucks to file, and made it sound like a walk in the park. But a week before my court date, I was sick and depressed. I didn't feel human anymore, like I was nothing. But facing that judge was extremely upsetting. I remember someone calling my name, and I had to walk up, and face the judge. I was in a panic. I thought I was going to jail. I was so scared and ashamed.

I see why desperate people walk into a place, and kill everyone in sight, it's like life has no meaning when you feel worthless. Those people who go and shoot others, they're just trying to get their pride and dignity back. Even if it's only for a brief moment before they kill themselves or someone kills them. It's a strange feeling of helplessness."

"How did you feel after the judge discharged your debts?" she asked.

"It was like someone had lifted a great weight from my shoulders, I was so relieved. It's great not owing anyone, anything."

"Our time is running short, tell me about your nightmare you've been having?" she asked, finally leading up to what brought me here.

"Ah...well, I'm in bed, lying on my side, facing the wall. I hear footsteps coming down the hall. They get louder as the guy comes nearer. When the footsteps stop, he is standing at my bedside, facing my back. As I finally fight through the fear, and get up the courage to turn and see who it is...BANG! I'm dead."

"When you come out of the nightmare, what is taking place?"

"I'm usually covered in sweat, and I'm yelling 'NO NO' or 'STOP' or so I've been told by my mother."

"What upsets you the most about your nightmare, Simon?"

"I guess, not knowing who he is, and why he shoots me."

"I'm sorry; our time is up for this session. I have other appointments at my home office." Doctor Lerner gathered her things, preparing to leave.

I felt so tired, so off I went to my room to rest. Seemed like I hadn't slept in days. Upon reaching my room, I noticed Doctor Lerner down the hall looking for her key to unlock the elevator. Collapsing onto

my bed, I tried to force myself to sleep, but to no avail. My nerves were too much on edge after that therapy session. Dredging up all those old memories, I realize some things should stay buried. I don't look forward to our next session. Who knows what evil thing I've done that will come to haunt my dreams.

CHAPTER NINE

The retired ranger crossed his legs, and helped himself to the cookies that Rose sat on the small table beside him. "This better be regular coffee, and not that decaf stuff," he said, taking a sip from his favorite blue cup.

"Shut up and drink it, and stop dropping crumbs everywhere," Rose snapped.

"Well Donny, Frank was never very good at finishing what he started. Yet the one thing he did manage to finish was Jack's obedience training."

"Who's Jack?" Donny asked as he fanned a fly away from the cookies.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. Frank named the pup after Stonewall Jackson, his favorite civil war hero." Ranger Smith said. He wiped his mouth, and sat his cup down. "Every other day, Frank would take Jack on training runs through the forest. Sometimes early in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon or even at night. Jack and Frank were best buddies. Jack grew into a well developed adult shepherd."

After a few weeks of sweet talk, Frank finally convinced Virginia to allow him to have fifteen Dominicker chickens, a blue nose mule, and a pair of Angora rabbits. That kept Frank busy for several months building the chicken coop, rabbit hutch, and a small barn to house the mule. Frank loved working with his hands.

Early each morning Jack had been trained to walk a complete round of the small farm. His first stop was the chickens, which he loved to sneak up on and bark. They scrambled in all directions squawking. Jack then headed for the barn, where the old mule would be waiting to snort at him, having been forewarned by the ruckus of the chickens. Next on his round would be the rabbits, and finishing up trotting around the rest of the perimeter of the farm.

"I need to use the bathroom, so stop talkin' till I return," Rose said heading inside.

"I hope you're not getting tired of my stories?"

"Not me, I'm excited to hear more," Donny said yawning.

Rose emerged from the house "Shhh! Be quiet you two, and listen to

that strange noise. It's comin' from the forest," she whispered.

All three sat still, making no sound or movement. They listened intently to the strange sound.

"It's only the wind blowing through the trees. You aren't startin' to get jumpy, are ya Rose?" the old ranger laughed.

"Absolutely not," she said sarcastically, folding her arms across her chest.

Donny turned toward Rose, "I hear you still dabble in fortune telling for the gullible townsfolk?"

Rose glared at Donny, and bristled at his snide remark. "So you don't believe in the spirits little man?"

"Just hocus-pocus for the weak minded," he quipped. Donny looked to his grandfather and winked. The old ranger responded with a grin, he knew Donny's wisecracks about her psychic abilities would get a rise out of her.

Rose drew near Donny, and reached out with her right hand grasping his left wrist, she said, "Don't move, and don't be afraid."

Donny flinched momentarily, and then looked at his grandfather who was grinning from ear to ear. Looking now at Rose, her head was slightly tilted back, and her eyes were closed as if in a trance state.

She began to speak, her voice low and heavy. "Beware the fair haired woman; she brings forth physical pain, and emotional suffering. The mark of a beast is upon her flesh. You have been warned." She opened her eyes, and let go of Donny's wrist. She simply turned, and walked back into the house without speaking another word.

Donny looked over at his grandfather, "What was that all about?"

"Pay her no mind, she gets goofier ever year," he said laughing at the strange look on his grandson's face.

Pulling out his red and green polka-dot handkerchief, he wiped his chin. Rose came out on the porch with a fly-swatter. She smacked the old ranger's leg with it.

"Ouch! Why did you hit me?" he cried out, as he rubbed his leg.

"A fly was on your leg," she defended herself, holding the swatter in a menacing manner.

"I didn't see any fly; you got a mean streak in you. Put the swatter down, and be quiet so I can get on with my story."

“You mean your tall-tales,” she said with a smirk.

It was eleven o’clock on Halloween night, and Frank turned the TV off. He slumped back in his recliner, and closed his eyes.

“Please turn off the lights, and let’s go to bed,” Virginia said. She had sat at the front door all evening, giving out candy for the few trick-or-treaters that wandered by.

Early the next morning, the Dominicker rooster strutted around the fenced in chicken yard. Stopping, he crowed at the rising sun. Virginia snuggled under her pink comforter her mother had made four years earlier. She heard the crowing, and wanted to pull the covers over her head. But finally crawling out of bed, she knew if she didn’t get up before Frank, he’d dirty every dish in the kitchen trying to make coffee.

Yawning, then stretching, she quietly made her way to the closet, and removed her lavender robe from its hanger. Easing the closet door shut, she began to tip-toe toward the bedroom door.

“Hey, why are you sneaking around? You make more noise than a cage full of turkeys,” Frank said, as he sat up in bed.

She didn’t bother to answer him. Proceeding into the living room, she opened the drapes, and the venetian blinds. Looking out into the yard she suddenly cupped her hands to her cheeks in disbelief, “Oh my God! Frank, come quick! You’re not going to believe this,” she yelled.

Leaping from bed too fast, his legs became entangled in the pink comforter. He finally kicked free as he ran into the living room wearing only his boxer shorts, and his sleeveless T-shirt.

Running to Virginia’s side, he now took in the strange site, “Some little snot has tepeed the whole place. I’ve never seen so much toilet paper in my life. Everything is covered. The trees, the fence...oh my god, not my truck! It looks like a parade float!” Frank screamed.

Heading for the kitchen window, he looked out into the back yard. “Holy mackerel, the mule barn, the grape arbor, and even Jack’s dog house are covered. I can’t believe it. When I find out who done this, I’m gonna kick their ass clear up to their shoulders! No good, rotten, sons-a-bitches!” He was beyond mad.

Virginia came into the kitchen, “Settle down now, you’ve played some sneaky tricks on others in your time.”

“Well, Jack never barked, not even once. So whoever it was, he must have known them. So that narrows it down some.” Frank hurried to the bedroom and dressed. He then retrieved the large plastic leaf bags from under the sink. They worked late into the evening, removing as much

toilet paper as possible.

“The streamers up on the top branches will have to wait for a good rain storm to knock’em down,” Virginia said pointing up.

Frank glanced up as he threw another full leaf bag into the back of his truck. “I’m pooped, let’s call it a day. You look like you could use a nice, hot bath, honey.”

“You know, whoever did this is probably still laughing. And nobody touched the Carmichael house next door,” Virginia said grinning.

“If I find out who did this, we’ll see who has the last laugh,” he said staring angrily into the distance.

Rose grudgingly lifted herself from her chair, when she heard the phone ring. “Stop right there, I’ll be right back.”

Donny stood, and stretched his legs. “When Rose is done, I’ll call home, and let Eric know I’ll be home soon.”

Donny’s grandfather was open-minded enough to not say anything negative about their lifestyle. What a young man does with his life is his business he figured. Plus he had met Eric, and found him to be a pleasant young man who seemed to truly care for his grandson’s welfare.

The heavy flip-flop footsteps vibrated the floor as Rose returned. “That was my old man; he thought somethin’ happened to me. I’m usually home by now. Told me to get my big butt home, now!”

Donny had a surprised look on his face, “Has he ever hit you?”

“No, he just talks big. Once, way back when, he raised his fist to me, and I broke his nose, and put a few knots on his head. He ain’t got the nerve to manhandle me,” she said.

The retired ranger propped his feet on the porch railing, and laid back in his rocker. Lacing his fingers behind his head he said, “We can finish up tomorrow, if you don’t mind?”

Rose jumped right in, “Don’t you two start without me in the morning. I’ll come over and make breakfast, then you can start up where you left off.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Donny replied.

Rose stepped between the two, as the old ranger stood to hug his grandson. “Just one minute old man. Before I go, I want to know one thing, and I expect the truth. Look me in the eye, and give me an honest answer. Are you the one who teeped the Turner’s house, yard and

everythin' else back then?"

"Well, I was asked if I knew anything about it, but I never admitted to anything," he said grinning, then laughing out loud.

"I knew it. I knew the minute you told that part of the story, that you did it," Rose laughed.

"Shame on you grandpa," Donny said as he too joined in on the laughter.

CHAPTER TEN

The sun broke through the bedroom window; Donny was excited as he woke, for he would be returning to see his grandfather today. Enjoying the story telling, and listening to the old rangers adventures gave him pleasure. Rolling over onto his side, he faced his true love, Eric Bane. Eric was two years older than Donny, and was in perfect condition. Standing two inches taller, at first glance one would have thought them to be brothers. Same dark hair, chiseled muscular body, and smooth skin tone. Donny and Eric made the perfect couple.

Eric worked the brain injury unit at the Hot Springs medical center as a registered nurse. It was a profession he cared deeply for, and he took his responsibilities very seriously when it came to helping the sick, and injured. He had a strong spiritual side, believing Reiki-energy to be a part of the healing process, equal to, if not superior to western medicine.

Donny gazed at Eric's naked torso, half twisted in the satin sheets. As he started to run his fingertips over his abdomen, stirring Eric to open his blue eyes slowly. His yawning turned into smiling as his eyes came to rest upon his lovers face. Grinning, Donny slowly moved from the center of Eric's stomach, down to his navel, running his fingers around the rim, as if stirring a cup of coffee.

Eric knew all too well what that grin meant, and he was more than willing to comply with the subtle hint from his mate. Donny slide his

hand down further, feeling the outer edge of supple pubic hair as he leaned closer, both coming together in their first passionate embrace of the morning.

Softly, Eric parted Donny's lips with his eager tongue, letting it dart in and out. Donny now made no pretense of teasing his companion; he seized his penis, which was rapidly filling with blood...

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Came the noise from the large fist as it struck the front door of the apartment.

"Police! We know you queers are in their! Come out with your dick's up!" Angel shouted, and then laughed hysterically.

Both men froze at first, stunned by the cry of 'Police.' Then Donny recognized the voice.

"Whooo...is that?" Eric stammered, breathing heavy.

"That damn, dyke, bitch, Chief Temme partnered me up with as a joke," he said pulling on his sweat pants, and now heading for the front door.

"Donny, don't do anything rash! Remember your temper!" he cried out, as he too started to dress.

Reaching the door, Donny jerked it open to find Angel still laughing. "Who the hell do you think you are? Yelling 'queer' outside my door, we have to live here you goddamn dyke!" he screamed into her face.

Holding her side with one hand, and wiping tears off her face with the other; she tried to stop laughing as she looked at her enraged partner. "I've been waiting years to pull that on somebody; it was fantastic. I almost pissed my panties," she said calming down a bit.

Donny was beside himself in anger, and humiliation at what just occurred. Breathing hard, and with a flushed face, he took in a deep breath. "What are you doing here?"

"I thought if we'd spend some time together...we could get to know each better. What do you think?" Angel said sincerely.

"What do I think? No fuckin' way, and don't you ever come to my apartment again!" he shouted as he slammed the door in her face.

Angel yelled through the door, "Come on sissy-boy, it was just a joke!"

Eric came into the room, and spied Donny still looking out the peephole. "So that's the dyke from hell you were telling me about. I can't believe she did that. Doesn't she realize this is an upscale area? Our neighbors won't tolerate that kind of display."

Angel returned to her faded, powder-blue, old Ford Ranger pickup, and drove off with a smirk on her face.

"I told you she was crazy, and she needs to be under a doctor's care," Donny said facing his lover.

Eric walked up and hugged him tightly, softly whispering in his ear, "Everything is fine now, please relax. I love you very much, and if you come back to bed, I'll give you a baby oil massage...you know how much you love my massages."

"I'm sorry I flipped out, but that woman gets me so mad..."

"Don't think about her, just come with me," Eric said, leading him by the hand to the bedroom. The massage did the trick; Donny relaxed into his old self once again. As the two lay cuddling, Eric surveyed their apartment as he took notice through the bedroom door.

Both loved the Queen Anne style jewelry cabinet sitting in the corner of their spacious bedroom. It complimented the Colonial canopy-size bed they were laying on, made of fine cherry, with a walnut finish. Their prize piece was the china cabinet done in solid oak, with a dark cherry stain from the Colonial period as well. The rest of the apartment was furnished in the traditional style colonial features, from living room to the kitchen. It was sheer luxuriousness, coupled with true sophistication. A gay couple's Shangri-la.

Eric loved being close to Donny, his smooth supple skin, the fragrant musk smell from his armpits, and groin. He released his tight embrace of Donny, and slid his hand down his muscular abdomen until he reached his lovers erection. He could feel by Donny's throbbing member he ached to find release. Eric guided his companion onto his back as he slowly caressed, and kissed his rock-hard nipples. His hands trembled with excitement as he worked his way down to his engorged penis. It was sheer perfection, he thought, as he licked, and then sucked it deep into his throat.

Glancing up, he saw the beads of perspiration glistening on Donny's chest as he arched his back in heavenly bliss. Continuing his assault on Donny's purplish delight, he felt his partner fast approaching climax. Eric slowed his advance on the mighty member in his mouth, and listened softly as Donny began to moan. That was his signal to quicken the sucking strokes.

Donny's body stiffened with anticipation, faster and faster, until he convulsed, spewing hot spurts of cum into Eric's eager mouth. Swallowing hard several times as Donny gave out his last, long moan; he held his penis in his mouth until it went soft. Eric moved up to embrace

him with a soft kiss on his wet lips. Donny relaxed, and lay staring off into oblivion, as he was brought back by the sensual kiss.

Eric grinned, his dimples flared as he flushed red with expectation, for now it was his turn to embrace ecstasy.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I opened my tired eyes, noting the hospital hallway was only partially lit. Making my way over to the window, I saw only darkness looking back at me. One light below in the parking lot illuminated a single vehicle, that of a Chevy pickup. Heading for the nurses' station, I could see upon my approach, an elderly black man sitting behind the counter absorbed in his newspaper.

"Sir?" I said, trying to gain his attention.

Lowering his paper, he folded it in half, and placed it on the counter. Standing, he came toward me. "You must be Simon," he said, extending his gruff hand, one that was no stranger to hard work.

"Ah, yes sir," I said, shaking his hand.

"I'm Leroy Washington; I'm the mental health tech on duty tonight. Actually, me and Ol' James Butler are doin' twelve hour shifts till the others arrive next week. He's the day man, I do nights. Rest of the staff took off till then," he said, as he motioned for me to come in and sit down.

"Jus' call me Roy, everybody does." Leroy was around six feet, probably one hundred seventy pounds I'd guess. Looked to be in his late fifties I guessed, or maybe his early sixties. Not much hair, but a neatly trimmed grayish goatee and mustache. Seemed to be in pretty good physical shape, for his advanced years. Kind of muscled, yet with a small pot belly. His shoulders were wide, and thick, with a thin face graced by a high forehead, and sympathetic brown eyes. Skin was the color of dark chocolate.

"You hungry?" he asked. His voice was strong, yet gentle, and complimented his well mannered and tolerant disposition.

"Ah, not really. What time is it?"

"Pert near two," he said glancing at his watch.

"Two? In the morning?" I asked.

"Yes sir, you sleepin' pretty good there. I checked you a couple times, fast asleep you was," Leroy said.

We made small talk for a short time. He told me about the town of Hot Springs, and what it was like when he was a small boy. Seems Al Capone, the gangster, used to vacation here back in the 1920's. Came here for the hot mineral baths.

The famous gangster was visiting one of the resorts, when another gangster fired a shotgun blast at him, but missed. Capone waited, and later got his revenge by killing the man who put the hit out on him. We talked for about an hour, and then I started yawning.

"The doc left an order for sleepin' pills, but I don't think you havin' any trouble in that department," Leroy commented.

"You're right; I don't need any pills to get me to sleep. I think I'll head back to bed. Nice to meet you, Roy."

"Tell me, son, do you remember seein' me before?" he asked as he stood to walk me to the door.

"Sorry, I don't remember you. Have we crossed paths before?" I was now a bit curious at his question.

"Maybe, maybe not. You go now, and get some rest. I'm sure they planned a big day for ya." Picking up his newspaper, he sat back down as I headed for my room.

I liked Roy; he was the total opposite of James-the-jackass. He was everything James butler should have been. Within minutes of my head touching the pillow, I was sound asleep once more.

Mourning arrived way too early to suit me. I heard footsteps coming down the corridor. Opening the door, James strutted in. He came right up to my bed, and stared at me. Wiping the sleep from my eyes, I tried to focus.

"Why are you still in your street clothes? Did you take a shower last night?" His voice stern as he waited for my reply.

"What?" I said, a little confused by his rapid talk.

"Did you take a shower before bed?"

"No sir, I was too tired, I just went straight to bed." I mumbled.

"That's what I thought, so I brought your razor, shaving cream, and a few towels. Take off those dirty clothes, and come into the bathroom." He said turning on the water in the shower.

A horrible fear came over me; surely he wasn't going to watch me bathe.

Popping his head through the bathroom doorway, "Did you hear me? Strip!" he shrieked.

Forcing myself to speak, "Please sir, my I have some privacy?"

"No, your mother called, and said you have a problem with daily hygiene. So I informed Father Andy, and he ordered supervised bathing be put on your chart. Once a day, every day. Now get undressed, or will it be necessary for me to use force?" James barked with an evil smile.

I'll have to remember to thank Mom for her call, the fat bitch. Removing my shirt, socks, and pants, I entered the bathroom still wearing my shorts.

James started out the door into the hallway, and said as he left, "I'll be back in a minute, and get those shorts off."

Removing my shorts, I thought how humiliating it was to have someone watch you bathe yourself, yet it was worse to have James do it. Returning with a fold-out chair, he sat down facing the shower stall. "Here, take this, and get in," he said handing me a bar of pink soap. I reached in to adjust the water temperature.

"Let's go, I don't have all day!" One could feel the agitation in his shrill voice.

The shower had no door or curtain for privacy. I had a momentary flashback of when I was in grade school, and two boys found me on the commode. I prayed I wouldn't end up with a fear of shower stalls after this.

The stall was all lime-green tiles, with a three-inch step up to keep water from spilling out. After getting wet, I started to lather up the soap when James spoke, "Turn off the water, and use the soap on your oily hair first."

"Is there any shampoo?" I asked, turning off the shower. My tone was almost pleading.

"No, use the soap like I said."

I did as commanded, lathering up my dirty hair. Reaching to turn the water on to rinse the soap from my hair...

"Don't waste the water, go ahead and soap up the rest of your filthy body. And make sure you use plenty on your armpits, crotch, and your nasty ass." He grinned as if the experience gave him some inner pleasure in humiliating me.

I began with my face and neck, moving to my shoulders, chest, armpits, stomach, and what little I could reach of my back. Then I applied more soap to my legs and feet. Lastly working over my pubic hair, penis, and my balls, and lathered up my butt last. Finishing, James

leaned forward in his chair.

“All right, raise your arms, and turn around so I can make sure you didn’t miss any areas.”

I turned beet red, but did as directed by the Nazi bastard. I was now aware of his acutely never ending gaze.

‘Okay, you can rinse now.’

The cold spray hit me first, as I frantically tried to adjust the temperature. Starting with my hair, I continued rinsing the soapy lather all the way down my naked, shivering torso until all was clean. Shutting off the water, I flushed red when I spied James staring at my genital area. I waited for his next command, not daring to move or cover myself.

After a long silence, shame overtook me, “Can I please have a towel?” I begged as I looked down at the floor in submission, like a whipped dog.

“There’s a towel on the sink next to your razor. Don’t forget to shave before you come to breakfast,” James said as he abruptly stood up, folded the chair, and left with it.

God, what an asshole, I thought as I dried off, and started to shave.

Later, after I finished up, I found the food already sitting on the table in the dinning area. Scrambled eggs, two strips of crisp bacon, white toast and a carton of chocolate two percent milk. There was also half a peach in heavy syrup, in a little plastic cup. It was delicious.

With a baleful look in his black eyes he watched me from the doorway. “Why haven’t you returned the razor to the nurses’ station as required?”

“I’m sorry; I’ll go get it right now, sir.” I jumped up, and ran to my room, grabbed it, and returned with it before the wrath of James befell me again.

James said, “Doctor Lerner is waiting for you.”

Off I went; she was in her usual spot, tape recorder ready to begin. “Hi Doctor Lerner, am I late?”

“Heavens no, Simon, not at all. Please have a seat, and we’ll get started,” she said turning on the recorder.

“Your mother has turned over your personal diary, and I want you to know I have read it. I feel I owe you an apology, but in my defense I was seeking more insight into who you truly are. It was my hope that your private thoughts would help me to help you,” she said, patting my leg.

“Don’t worry about it; I’m not mad, not at you anyway. Mom’s always snooping around in my room when I’m not home. She cares for me; she just doesn’t know how to help me,” I replied as I patted her hand.

Doctor Lerner smiled. “And what kind of help do you believe you require, Simon?”

“Not her kind, but maybe your kind, we’ll see.”

“Simon, I would like to discuss some of the information I noted in your diary at this time. If that’s okay?” she asked.

“Fine with me”

DIARY ENTRIES:

May 21 – Group home called about resume I sent. Got interview for May 25th.

May 25 – Met Dick and Sara, house parents. Job pays \$800 per month. Requirements: 1. Assist house parents when on duty 4 days a week. When off duty, me and female worker run house. 2. Drive 15-seat passenger van. 3. Prepare meals. 4. Pass medications. 5. Supervise kids. Job title is Child Care Worker, live-out position. Kids are from 7-18 years old, racially mixed, males and females. Start on 28th. (State law requires female worker be present anytime female child in house).

May 26 – Had damn nightmare again.

May 28 – Sara introduced kids (State allows maximum of 10 per home) Robin, age 16, silly black girl, seeks attention. Alan, age 16, lazy white boy. Tyrone, age 12, crazy black boy. Rita, age 17, Hispanic, suicidal at times. Shonda, age 16, black girl, bad attitude. Donna, age 14, white girl, shy and withdrawn. Pedro, age 13, loud Hispanic boy, loves attention. Meli, age 15, pregnant Jap girl. Sonny, age 16, gay white boy, smart ass. Only 9 kids at this time. Introduced live-in female worker, Blanche, early 50’s, bossy, loud Hispanic bitch. (State says pregnant kid can’t stay in home) Meli scheduled to be removed soon. Dick and Sara said kids have been physically, mentally, and/or sexually abused.

June 1 – Taught how to administer medication. (State requires kids visit psychiatrist once per week) All kids on medication to control behavioral problems. Two are on controlled narcotics. Kids line up to take meds in full view of staff. (State requires medications count each day by staff and locked in cabinet)

June 2 – Kids have Blanche upset. Came on duty, found her crying in family room at rear of house. She forgot to put van in park, rolled backward into street from drive. Driver's door was open, knocked her down. Not hurt, just scared and embarrassed. Kids laughed at her all day. Told her I'd have to report this to house parents, she's pissed at me. Stupid bitch.

"Simon, on June second, the incident with the van and Blanch, why did you feel inclined to report her to the house parents?"

"So she'd know not to mess with me. When I spoke, she'd better listen or she'd be sorry."

"It was a form of control?" Doctor Lemer asked.

"Sure, I guess so."

"Simon, do you enjoy having control over women?"

"Sometimes I do; most women I've met needed a strong man's direction in their lives. But I've also met men, weak men, who needed to be dominated."

"Have there been any men you personally dominated?"

"No," I said lying.

"In what way do you feel weak men should be dominated?" she continued.

"I don't know, I guess through sex or force." I said hesitantly. I felt like she was trying to trap me.

"All right then, let's move on for now."

DIARY ENTRIES:

June 3 – Visit from the social worker assigned to house. Martha, early 60's, short, fat black lady. Talk! Talk! Talk! I didn't think she'd ever shut up. Given training class on child abuse. DULL! Tyrone punched me in lower back as we passed in hallway. Put on room restriction. (State says room restriction used when kid physically acts out)

June 4 – New arrival, Jake, age 13, tall, thin white boy, wild! Threatened Tyrone with kitchen knife on first day. Dick and Sara talked with him about attitude problem. Meli was removed from house. Sent to

women's shelter until kid born. Meli said one of the group home boy's is father, but won't name the little punk. I don't believe her, boys are too stupid. Blanche baked 32 cupcakes for kids. Passed them out after dinner. Kids fought over them like pack of wild dogs. Pure animalistic behavior, should use whip and chair on these mindless shits.

June 5 – All day long, Blanche screaming at those damn kids. Kids fighting and screaming at Blanche and each other. Lost my temper, yelled at kids and Blanche! Everybody mad at me. Fuck'em all! Tired of everyone acting like idiots. Later, other group home workers invited us on a dinner trip to McDonald's. Drove to their home and followed them. Manager asked us to leave, kids almost destroyed play area. Kept disrupting other patrons. Scared their little children. Staff was upset, I found it hilarious! Laughed my ass off.

June 6 – Asked Henry: Why can't cure cancer? He said on higher level, cancer is wonderful lesson to experience. Said it is a disease that brings one full circle. Whatever that fuckin' means. I think Henry talks over my head on purpose. Said I should think deeper. Thinking deeper gives me a headache. I just want to go happy dick'n in the woods.

June 7 – Blanche quit, moved out, kids happy, me too. Pedro lost his temper and yelled at house mother. Dick thinks his medication level needs raised, so had me take him to Doctor Quack. Raised his meds, Pedro pissed off. Alan and Robin caught sexually touching each other behind house. Both given room restriction and counseling by house parents. Tyrone punched me again. He's back on room restriction.

June 8 – Sara asked me to take live-in position, just until hire another worker. Need a female. Agreed to move in with the demonic creatures for short time only.

June 10 – Moved my stuff in. Pedro hit Jake, has black-eye. Two-day room restriction. (State law says staff worker not allowed to use force on child) House parents warned me, kids can file assault charges against staff for as little as grabbing them by the arm in a threatening manner.

June 11 – Damn nightmare again! My yelling didn't wake anyone up.

June 13 – Big shots from home office coming down to visit and inspect kids and house. Prepared special dinner for them. First decent meal since I started. (State requires balanced dietary plan for all meals be posted in house) Never, ever, do we have what is on posted menu. House parents said cheaper to substitute hamburger in place of steak. Dick and Sara only serve shit they can cook in large pot. Spaghetti, chili and vegetable soup. Kids sick of same old crap. I bet money saved on steak goes into house parents' pocket. Pinned Pedro to floor and tickled shit out of him, kid loved it. Poor little bastard wants just a little love

and attention, me too.

June 14 – House cat set off alarm system at 3:20 a.m. (State requires alarm system to keep males and females separated at night) Keep the horny boys from screwing the stupid girls.

“Simon, on June sixth, you mention ‘Henry.’ Who is he?” Doctor Lerner asked.

“Ah, I don’t want to talk about him,” I said breaking eye contact.

“Simon, you need to be open and trusting if I’m to help you.”

“You wouldn’t believe me...you’d think I was nuts. I’d never get out of this place.”

“I promise you, nothing you say would make me think you’re crazy. I just need to understand how you think, how your mind works. What motivates you? If I don’t understand something, I’ll ask you to explain it so that I will understand. Can you follow what I’m trying to say, Simon?” Her gaze told me she was sincere.

“Yes.”

“Okay, please tell me about Henry,” she began again.

“He’s my guardian angel, but he’s not speaking to me right now,” I said, checking her face for signs of disbelief, but none were forthcoming.

“Your angel, how do you know his name?”

“That’s what he told me to call him.”

“Simon, how do you communicate with him?” she asked in her pleasant voice.

“I send him a thought, and if he feels like it, he answers back. I hear his voice inside my head.”

“Do you hear any other voices?”

“No.” Now I figure she thinks I’m nuts.

“Why is your voice not speaking to you?”

“His name is Henry, and he’s not some phantom voice telling me to worship Satan; he’s my guardian angel,” I said, getting agitated.

“Simon, please remain calm, I didn’t mean to disrespect your angel. Please continue,” Doctor Lerner started rubbing my leg in an attempt to relax me.

“Well, he won’t talk to me because I accidently killed an old lady by mistake.”

Doctor Lerner made no facial gestures in response to my statement. "Please explain, Simon."

"She was a resident at a nursing home I was working at. She paid me to put her out of her misery. I crept into her room, but I got confused in the darkness and suffocated her roommate by mistake. Henry warned me not to do it, but I was cocky and did it anyway. Turns out I wasn't so smart after all; the lady I was suppose to kill died in her sleep the next night of natural causes."

"Was there a police investigation?" she asked.

"No, old people die all the time in nursing homes."

"Simon, how did killing the wrong person make you feel?"

"Man, I felt bad; I've been depressed ever since. Henry stopped helping me, and my nightmare returned. It's been hell, and now I'm in the nut house...ah, sorry, I meant to say the mental hospital."

"We talked about your nightmare earlier; is it the same one as before?"

"It's more intense, like more real. I feel like it's really going to come true. It's hard to explain, like death is stalking me. Somebody is really going to shoot me, and I can't stop it from happening," I said, breaking out in a sweat.

"Do you feel you deserve to die for the things you've done to others in the past?"

"No, I'm no worse than anyone else. I was trying to do good, trying to change myself into a better person. I just strayed off the path a bit," I said wiping a lone tear from my left cheek.

"Simon, tell me what 'happy dick'n' refers too?"

"You've never heard that expression before? Aren't you from Arkansas?" I asked.

"No, I'm originally a South Carolina girl." Doctor Lerner said pretending to fan herself.

"Well, happy dick'n is somethin' the men folk say around here. It's like when others say they're sauntering or strolling along. It's just an expression. Means a man is happy, like his dick is free to swing from side to side as he moves through the woods at a leisurely pace. Happy go lucky, does that make sense?"

"Yes. I take it that most females don't use that expression?" she said grinning.

“That’s true, I never heard any of the ladies use that expression.”
I was now smiling.

DIARY ENTRIES:

June 18 – Talked Tyrone, Alan and Pedro into playing badminton. Fight erupted within 5 minutes. Tyrone on room restriction for hitting Pedro across face with racquet. No major damage, just swelling. Stupid-ass should learn to duck. Dryer stopped working; repairman found dead hamster hung-up in motor. Sara said all right to falsify bed-check sheets. (State requires staff make checks on kids throughout night) I don’t make any checks, let’em run away.

June 19 – Asked Henry if there are such things as space beings or extraterrestrials. Said yes, but Creator doesn’t allow them to mingle with those on Earth too much. Said visit us to see how far we have advanced. Let us know we aren’t alone in universe. Sometimes abduct us to run tests and whatnot.

June 21 – Nightmare again.

June 22 – Drove kids to K-Mart, twenty minutes later, security had Jake in custody. Accused of sexually acting-out. They found him in women’s restroom masturbating. Barred from returning. Little bastard has no concept of right and wrong.

June 23 – Forgot to give Pedro his medication, big mistake, tore house apart, piece by fucking piece. Started fights with everyone who crossed his path. Tried to give him meds, refused them. (State says punishment for continual acting-out is to restrict weekly allowance) What moron comes up with these rules? Threatened Pedro with hospitalization, he calmed down, took meds. No more crap from him.

June 24 – Police came by; Dick and Sara said 20 pills were missing, narcotics. They blamed other child care workers who come over on weekends to help out. Police said street value was \$1200. If they only new.

June 26 – House parents decided to have treasure hunt in house to cheer up the monsters. After treasure hunt, Sara and Dick mad. Little fiends destroyed house searching for hidden items. Been a while since I laughed that hard. House parents are so naïve; these shits are too old and big for that childish stuff.

June 27 – Jake threatened kid at school with sharp pencil, house parents had to meet with principal. Going to kick him out of summer school

program, but put on probation instead. Sara tried to counsel Jake, became upset and took a swing at her. Dick restrained him on floor. Called Doctor Quack, he ordered Jake into psych unit. (State allows psychiatric hospitalization for maximum of two weeks) Police transported Jake, Sara called family meeting to inform rest of kids. Shonda cussed Sara, left room. Kids upset, think house parents overreacted. Hell Dick should have kicked Jake's ass and that would have been the end of it.

June 28 – Shonda acting better, but not speaking to house parents. Boys watching two cats screwing outside, Sara mad because won't stop. Drove juvenile delinquents to local festival. Hated it, complained it was too hot, boring and had no money to spend. Bunch of lazy shits.

June 29 – Preparing supper, Tyrone's turn to assist as kitchen helper. Told the little snot to make two pitchers of lemonade. Cussed me, raised his little fists, lost my temper and yelled at him. Scared the little nigger. Gave me the finger and ran outside. No more shit from him.

June 30 – Finally! Hired a female child care worker for live-in position. Della, age 34, white lesbian, will move in after orientation. Playing cards with Tyrone, let him win, poor nigger kid is twice as dumb as the ignorant spics around here. Poured glass of cold water on Donna's head while she was watching TV. She might be shy, but has a temper, went nuts, chased me out of house. Silly bitch.

July 1 – Della started her two days of orientation. Gave Robin's birth control pill to Jake by mistake. Other boys teasing him about growing tits, Jake mad. Laughed for ten minutes. Told Della would have to report her, she pissed. Stupid dyke. Drove Pedro and Tyrone to psychiatrist office, raised their meds. Doc said they are getting too wild. No kidding, try living with these animals. House cat came upstairs again, set off motion alarm at 4:05 a.m. Kicked it down the steps. Haven't seen it since.

July 2 – Henry popped in, said I couldn't ask a question this time, mad at me for saying the word nigger. Said for my information, he's black! Just my fuckin' luck, God gives me a black guardian angel. Apologized to Henry, told him I wouldn't say it ever again.

July 3 – Della moved in, I moved out, thank God. I've gained 13 pounds. I'm stressed to the max. Someone went into meds room and stole \$20 bucks from my wallet. Reported to house parents, I'm sure they really give a rat's ass. Hell, it was probably one of them that took it.

July 4 – Refused to take kids to fireworks display down by the river, kids mad. Barricaded themselves in girl's room, tried to set mattress on fire. Had police break through door, all were taken to juvenile detention

center. House parents given custody back by judge. Let them spend night in lock-up, scared hell out of younger ones.

July 5 – Kids back home, not speaking to staff, like I really care. Police called, said had run away from other group home. Kid gave our phone number to cops. Doesn't want to return to his group home. Police said 4th time in last 6 months he's been picked up. Dick had me pick him up and drive him back to other home. Met his house parents outside, didn't want him back, tuff shit, made kid get out of van and drove off. Shitheads.

July 6 – Shonda threw water balloon at me, missed, hit Della, she mad. Robin paying me \$2 a week from her allowance, she stole my \$20 from wallet.

July 8 – Dick sent me to food bank. They only charge group home .12 cents per pound for shit nobody else will eat. Loaded van with that puke. Sent to training class, learned: 1. never put kid's family down. 2. Let kid help you. 3. Never tell kid how he/s he feels. 4. Conflict is healthy, can change through it. 5. Let kid talk about positive side of his/her family. 6. Kid always seeks family, whether present or not.

"Simon, June the nineteenth, your question to Henry concerned space beings. Do you believe in space aliens?"

"Henry never lied to me, as far as I know. If he says they exist, then as far as I'm concerned there are little aliens flying around the galaxy."

"Have you personally seen, or been in contact with an alien?"

"No," I replied.

"On June twenty-fourth, twenty pills were taken. Did you steal those pills?" Doctor Lerner asked with a concerned look on her face.

"Yes, I sold them, I needed the money. No one got arrested," I said, pleading my case.

"Simon, June thirtieth, you refer to lesbians, niggers and spics, why do you feel the need to use such language to describe others?" She stopped making notes on her pad and focused on my face.

Shame flushed onto my face. "Out of fear I guess, to make me feel superior over them, cause sometimes I feel insecure," I replied honestly.

"Why do you refer to the children's psychiatrist as 'Doctor Quack?' Am I to make the assumption you hold little regard for psychiatry,

Simon?"

"No, some like you are okay, but some are just as nutty as their patient's." I said candidly.

Doctor Lerner stared at me for a moment, wondering whether to believe me or not. "Let's proceed. On July second, you discovered Henry was black; how did that make you feel?"

"Until then, it never crossed my mind. Made me think, how many whites and blacks would stay racist if they knew their guardian angel might not have the same skin color they have?"

"July third, after your twenty dollars was stolen, you implied it might have been the house parents. What was your feeling toward them?"

"They were a couple of burnt-out-losers, just like I was. When you're stressed out, it's hard, very hard, to care for others. I didn't love myself back then, which makes it hard to love others," I said letting out some inner truth.

DIARY ENTRIES:

July 9 – Sara called a family meeting. Kids said Della calls them names, threatens them with punishment. Della mad. Stormed off to her room. Sara told kids would talk to her. Little shitheads never said a word against me. Let Shonda beat me out of \$15 bucks playing cards. Needs money for new dress for job interview. She happy. Had to attend CPR class, what a bore. I wouldn't do CPR on these little monsters, fuck'em.

July 10 – Bought new clothes for Jake. (State provides clothing allowance of \$225 for new arrivals) Hell, \$225 didn't buy much, state is pretty cheap. State cares for these little demons as much as house parents and staff. Jake hit Tyrone, bloodied his lips. Room restriction given. Later, found Jake in boy's bathroom, sitting on commode, naked, sound asleep. Woke him up, said was jerking-off, got tired and nodded off. Told him to get dressed. Lazy punk. Don't even have enough energy to masturbate.

July 11 – Nightmare again. Who's holding that damn gun?

July 12 – Drove Shonda to job interview, she upset, couldn't read most of application form. Helped her fill it out. Later, went to mall parking lot and gave her a driving lesson. Scared at first, but calmed down and loved it. Told her not to tell Dick or Sara.

July 15m—played baseball in field across street with kids. Alan hit

Tyrone with ball by mistake, fight broke out. Ended up with all kids fighting, sent everyone to bed, tired of their bullshit.

July 16 – Boy Scout leader called, Jake acting out, sprayed Scout leader with hose. Picked him up, he's no saint, but can't help liking him. Scout leader is a jerk. No punishment for Jake, instead bought us each a banana split. Caught Robin behind house with neighbor boy, trying to kiss him. Seen me coming, pushed him away, and said he attacked her. Lying bitch, told him to leave, Robin on room restriction, she's pissed. Little whore.

July 17 – Sent to restraint training class, shown how to take down and restrain out-of-control kid without hurting them. Della said if Jake keeps aggravating her, she may quit.

July 18 – Della and me sore from training class. Tyrone refused to go to Boy Scout meeting, told him to get in van or I'd beat the hell out of him. Jerk got into van. Nice talk doesn't work on these street-wise punks.

July 20 – Della tried to restrain Jake, big mistake. Warned her not to mess with him, but she's so smart. She grabbed Jake and tried to take him to floor, instead, he slammed her into wall. Pinned her there, while Pedro grabbed her ankles and jerked her feet out from under her. She hit the floor, Jake jumped up and down on the poor dyke. Heard her screaming, made Jake get off of her. She cried for half an hour before she could finally sit up. Refused ambulance. She wanted boys punished. No way, she started it, fuck her. Not speaking to me, boy, that really hurts my feelings, ha ha.

July 21 – Asked Henry who's holding the gun to my back, wouldn't answer.

July 24 – Rita threw vacuum cleaner down stairs at Della, on room restriction. Sonny-the-fag disappeared, listed as run away by police. Found pill in Donna's room, questioned her about it. Said hasn't taken medication for months, pretends to swallow, then spits it out later. Told her to do a better job of hiding pills before house parents catch on. I'm burned out, don't care if she takes meds or not.

July 25 – Prepared van for food bank run. Alan was my assigned helper, lazy bastard was supposed to help unload van. Found him lying on bench on front porch. Yelled at him, ran off down street. Went inside, found Della sitting on sofa reading one of her lesbo mags. Lazy dyke, slapped magazine out of her hands, told her better get up and start unloading van or she'd be one sorry bitch! Never said a word. Never saw anyone work so hard and fast. Alan came back later, stayed away from me.

“Simon, on July ninth, you let Shonda win fifteen dollars from you so she could buy a new dress. How did that make you feel?”

“It felt good. I wasn’t always nasty to the kids.”

“You seem to have a problem with the state system; can you tell me why?”

“The state don’t care about these kids, or it would treat them better. Nobody cares for these delinquents. Not the burned out staff and house parents, and not the state. If they did, they’d take action against all the abuse.” I muttered.

DIARY ENTRIES:

July 26 – Della quit and moved out, wonder if it was something I said. Kids cheered as she drove off, house parents didn’t even say so-long. Saw Sonny-the-fag walking on the highway, picked him up and took him to my apartment. Amazing what a boy will do to keep from being sent back to a group home.

July 27 – Sara called, said didn’t need me anymore. What? Told me to call social worker, Martha, then hung up. Bitch! Wonder who finked on me? Called on ad about working with disabled and retards, set up interview for 29th.

July 28 – Henry popped in, I asked about how much truth to Ten Commandments? Said God never gave such commandments to live by. Said organized religion made those up to further their control over the poor and ignorant masses. Damn religious fanatics.

July 29 – Interview, job pays \$6.80 an hour, plus .20 cents a mile. Called In-Home Trainer for five male clients. Start August 1st. Received letter from social worker, said terminated for letting ward-of-court who was unlicensed drive passenger van. Said I was negligent in fulfilling my duties. I hope the motherfucking juvenile delinquents burn the group home down!

“Simon, July the twenty-sixth, you found Sonny walking along the highway and picked him up. You took him to your apartment, I take it

from the way you worded the entry, you sexually abused him?"

"No, he said he'd do sexual favors for me if I didn't make him go back to the group home," I said lying with a neutral expression on my face.

"Did Sonny perform oral sex on you?" Doctor Lerner continued.

A surprised look came over my face as I answered, "Never."

"Did you perform oral sex on Sonny?"

Startled, I answered, "I'm not a fag!"

"So, you had anal sex, but no oral sex, is that correct?"

"That's right," I shot back.

"Simon, what would your definition of a homosexual be?"

"Any man who sucks dick."

"You wouldn't consider anal sex with a man to be a homosexual act?"

She persisted.

"No, because you can screw a woman in the butt and it doesn't make you a fag." I felt vindicated, at least in my own mind.

DIARY ENTRIES:

August 1 – Met my five clients at adult program building. I'll work at their homes after training. Dean, age 15, fat white boy, severely retarded. Can't speak, read or write. Uses American Sign Language. Said I'd be given a course in ASL later. Robby, age 26, black guy, mainly repeats whatever you say. Severely retarded. Art, age 39, Hispanic guy, brain injury from car accident. Has short term memory-loss. Shane, age 41, black boy, numb from neck on down. Mildly retarded. Has motorized wheelchair. Billy, age 13, white kid, legs amputated from car crash. Can't read or write too well, uses cheap wheelchair. For now, I just observe, get use to being around them. Moaning, slobbering and all that other shit they do normally.

August 3 – Went with Steve, early 40s, pot-bellied white guy with dirty beard. Picked up his client and observed him teach different skills. His client couldn't do any tasks. Steve explained how to fill out paperwork, showed me how to cheat on time limits. When do 30 minutes, put down 60 minutes, so we get our full pay and don't have to spend so much time with the slobbering idiots. I like Steve already.

August 5 – Gave Sonny-the-fag some cash, told him to be gone when get home later, or he'd be one sorry cocksucker.

August 6 – Worked adult program, had me feed wheelchair clients. Poor shits so over-medicated, could hardly stay awake. Pretty sad, staff keeps them doped so don't have to mess with them.

August 7 – Boring. Training class, watched stupid videos on how to deal with retards.

August 8 – Sister came by, gave me \$20 and bag of groceries, bottle of vodka, got drunk and fucked.

August 9 – Trained with Steve again, showed me how he arrives at client's house around dinner time and gets free meal. Sly dog thinks he's a ladies' man, pot-bellied fat ass.

August 12 – Nightmare getting unbearable. Scares me.

August 13 – Adult program, retard attacked male staff worker with broomstick, not hurt, had to restrain and medicate retard. These retards are strong when they lose their tempers.

August 15 – Worked with Zelda, old white lady, showed me how to screw off in style, just another lazy bitch.

August 17 – Training class again, spent rest of day at adult program watching staff abuse retards. Almost feel sorry for them, staff treat them like cattle.

August 18 – More training classes. Met new boss, William, age 26, fat black guy, I'll call him Willie. Won't be my boss until Sept. 9th when he finishes his training.

August 23 – Worked with first client on my own, Shane, can't bathe himself so I bathe, oral hygiene, dress and groom him before we start tasks. Thank God only have him one day per week, I'm so tired of it already.

“Simon, why would you take a job with the disabled clientele, when you obviously didn't care for the group home children?” she inquired with a puzzled look on her cheery face.

“Because no one wants to work with retards or abused kids, so it's easy to get hired on,” I said straight out.

“On August fifth, if Sonny hadn't left as you directed him to, what would you have done to him?”

“Roughed him up a bit, I suppose,” I said without hesitation.

“Simon, did you have sexual relations with any of your male clients?”

“Who in their right mind would want some slobbering idiot to have sex with?” I said, somewhat agitated at her suggestion.

“Simon, do you think individuals with mental illnesses are idiots?” she shot back.

Trying to sound apologetic, “Ah, I was just trying to make a point, but it came out wrong.”

“From your September fourth entry, to your ending entry of March eighteenth, you make very few entries. Was there a reason for this?”

“Not really, I was just depressed I guess. My energy levels were low.”

DIARY ENTRIES:

September 4 – Had wild dream, forced into sex-change operation. Now I’m a beautiful female, enjoy men forcing me into sex. Can feel their hairy, sweaty bodies pressing down on my soft flesh. Penetrating me with their long, thick dicks. What a wild, wet dream, so horny when woke up, had to jack-off.

September 6 – Training at Art’s house, cooking lesson. While making muffins, he dropped tray in oven. Batter started to burn and smoke. Set off smoke detector. His mother went nuts, mad as hell, we couldn’t stop laughing.

September 11 – Driving Art to adult program, he tried to throw floor mat out window. Asked him why, said looked old. Told him to leave my shit alone. Dumbass. Sent to sign up for ASL, hate it already. Ten week class, more stress.

September 14 – Picked up two wheelchairs. One for Billy and one for me. Went to mall, Billy wanted me to experience what it’s like to be in wheelchair. Rule was no one was to know I wasn’t a cripple. Wheeled my sore ass all over mall trying to keep up with Billy. Arms sore and numb. People stayed away from us as we rode through stores, like we were diseased or something. How sad the ignorant people are. Overall, had fun. Billy ran circles around me and loved it. Old lady approached and asked how I became wheelchair bound. Told her I was riding a bicycle and a school bus hit me and knocked me into ditch. Bus drove on and left me there, guy in pickup stopped and young kid jumped out and stole my bike and drove off. Finally mailman next morning found me and called 911. Poor old lady felt so bad, gave each of us a ten-dollar bill, gullible old bitch. Laughed later in car.

October 8 – Slow day at adult program. Tired of working with mental defectives, can’t tell the staff from the retards anymore.

October 11 – Drove van load of nuts to Special Olympics, spent the

night. Three were assigned to my room to watch. Only two double beds, made all three sleep in same bed. I'm not sleeping with some creepy freak next to me.

October 20 – Nightmare again. Henry asked if I was ready to change my life. Told him would think about it.

October 22 – Told Henry I'd try it his way, anything to get rid of nightmare. He said no more salt, sugar or food fried in grease. Must take B-complex vitamin daily. No more soda pop. No more profanity.

October 25 – Shane in hospital, some kind of infection. Not doing well per Docs. Poor guy passes out each time they draw blood.

October 27 – Boss Willie called, Shane doing poorly. Docs told his dad can't stop infection, not responding to drugs. Slipped into coma, put on ventilator. Docs said will probably die soon.

November 2 – Feel better, vitamins and non-greasy food working. Picked up Billy, had us sit in cold weather outside grocery store collecting donations for Special Olympics. Froze our butts off. How sad, exploit handicapped to make a few bucks. Poor Billy shivering in his wheelchair holding that cold plastic bucket so people would feel sorry and give money. Store manager wouldn't let us sit inside doorway. Said customers don't want to see that kind of display when purchasing food. Took in \$87 dollars in four hours. I bet poor Billy won't see a dime of it.

November 3 – Henry popped in, said to go to Shane's hospital room in evening. Said for me to place left hand on his forehead and right hand over his heart area. I was a bit scared, but did as he asked. No one at hospital tried to stop me from entering his dark room. Did as I was told. Henry said stop and go home after ten minutes. Standing in dark room, my arms felt heavy and tingly while touching Shane. When finished, started to leave, over in corner, a man was sitting in a chair on other side of bed. Guy never spoke, just watched me.

November 7 – Boss Willie called, said Shane out of coma and off ventilator. Docs said tests show no sign of infection. Be discharged in a few days. Henry is a miracle worker.

November 15 – Workers having a private party, got invited. One female said I came across as cold, intellectual and cute. Told her she came across as bossy and gossipy. Not speaking to me now. So much for honesty.

December 8 – Feeling good, lost 8 pounds so far. Teased Shane and Art in car, got them to laugh. Sister came by after work, wanted sex, told her no, would rather go to a movie. She left mad.

January 8 – Poor Billy crapped all over himself, cleaned him up. Hate it when that happens. Henry popped in, asked if something was missing? I'll be, stopped having nightmare. Feel great. Lost 17 pounds. Back to my old self.

January 24 – Boss Willie said I had to drive van load of clients to another Special Olympics. Said it wasn't my turn to drive. Sent me to see director, told him no, fired me, told to turn in my paperwork. Fired again, imagine that.

February 4 – Got hired at Nursing Home, start as nurses' aide on February 5th.

"Simon, on September fourth, your dream of becoming a female and having sex with strong men. Have you had this dream on more than one occasion?"

"Maybe," I said coyly.

"You are the dominant person in your sexual encounters we have discussed thus far. Yet this dream or fantasy would strongly suggest an underlying feeling to be the dominated one. This clearly shows a pattern leading to latent homosexuality," Doctor Lerner surmised.

I shrieked, "I'm not gay!"

Doctor Lerner paused a moment while I stared at the floor. "All right, let's move on for now. September fourteenth, you were pretending to be wheelchair-bound at the mall. You told an elderly woman a lie concerning how you came to be in that situation. A total fabrication. Do you find it easy to lie?"

"Sometimes."

"Have you lied to me during our session time together?" she said, examining my facial gestures.

"No, I haven't lied to you," I boldly said, lying straight to her face. I seem to have a knack for lying when it suits my need to do so.

Her expression didn't reveal whether she believed me or not. She simply made a notation on her pad and pressed forward with her questioning. "October twenty-second, that was the day you told Henry you were ready to change your life...why?"

"I was burned out, stressed out and I truly couldn't stand that awful nightmare any longer. I was thinking of suicide," I said in earnest.

“So, at this point did you regret all the pain and suffering you caused others to experience?”

“Sure, I guess I did.”

DIARY ENTRIES:

February 19 – Asked Henry why God allows such bad things to happen to me? Said God doesn't cause bad things, that we ourselves chose these things to happen to us. Major events that seem negative are life lessons for our spiritual growth. What nonsense he feeds me. God hates me, it's that simple.

February 26 – Female nurses' aide slapped old lady in face, fired her. She just burned out, low pay and long hours done her in. Emptied bedpans, urinals and catheter bags. Wiped I don't know how many butts. This job way too hard for such low pay. My feet, legs and back ache, and now have blisters on my toes from running up and down hall answering call-lights.

March 16 – Old lady gave me big bunch of cash to terminate her pitiful and painful existence. Pleaded with me, felt sorry for her, and I need the money. Mercy killing seems all right to me, shouldn't have to suffer if don't want to. Henry told me not to do it. Told him isn't murder if ask for it, remember free will. Went into her room around 2am and used my hands to pinch her nose and mouth shut. She tried to pull my hands away, but too weak. Her legs and hips jerked and twisted, finally went limp. All over in 6 minutes.

March 17 – Big mistake, in dark, suffocated wrong old lady. Henry popped in, said my chance at redemption ended with murder of one of God's children. I would now have to endure the fate he hoped to avoid through positive changes I was making. I broke out into heavy sweat, became nauseated and vomited.

March 18 – The nightmare has returned, it's worse than ever! Henry's not talking to me anymore. I'm screwed!

“Simon, on March the seventeenth, you realized you murdered the wrong woman. How did you feel after that event?”

She was now rushing me along I felt, possibly our time was running short. Pausing, I became agitated. I finally answered her with a smart-ass question of my own, “You just love that word ‘feel’ don't you?”

She leaned back away from me, a little surprised by my sarcastic question. Hesitating only momentarily, she re-engaged me. “Please stay

focused on the questions I ask, Simon.”

Now I wasn't sure what to say, she called my stall tactic, I crumbled emotionally. “Sorry,” I squeaked out.

“Well, our time for now has expired,” she said, turning off the recorder. She yawned and glanced over to see if I had noticed.

I quickly made out like I was now absorbed in finding the TV remote. She hoisted her large frame off the couch, and headed for the hall. I turned the TV on and stayed to relax for a while. I'm emotionally drained, all this shit is getting to me. I can't take much more of this mind-fucking routine.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Rose arrived early, and started breakfast. Donny was just pulling in when he spotted his grandfather picking up the newspaper in the front yard. They entered the house together and proceeded to the kitchen. Rose was busy as a beaver as the two sat down. The old ranger winked at his grandson, lifted his spoon, and tapped it loudly on his coffee cup. The sudden clanging caused Rose to jump, and swing around quickly.

"I'm moving as fast as I can. If you pound on that damn cup one more time, I'll take that spoon, and bop you on your hard head with it," she growled.

"How about some service. You got two hungry men here," he said grinning.

She served up breakfast, and sat down at the table with them. When finished, she cleared the dishes away as they headed for the porch. "Don't start till I finish these dishes!" she shouted after them.

They made small talk while waiting for her grand appearance. It wasn't long; they heard the flip-flop coming their direction. Shifting his weight in the rocking chair, he cleared his throat, and continued with his story telling.

Virginia busied herself baking a yellow cake and had decided on chocolate frosting. Hearing the phone ring, she answered, "Hello, oh, Sheriff Sparks...yes, Frank's home. He's in the garden counting tomatoes. "Oh, my goodness, how long has he been missing? How old is the child? Yes...I know exactly where that is. I'll have him and Jack over there right away."

Virginia turned the back doorknob that Frank had just painted gold, and failed to tell her. She mumble something under her breath, and shouted from the opened door. "Frank, Jack, come to the house.!"

Jack was resting under the grape arbor. It served as his lookout station. Jack knew by the sound of her voice it was time to get serious. He caught up with Frank in a flash and trotted along with him, as they raced to the house.

They rushed inside and found Virginia in the bedroom. She tossed his favorite coveralls, and checkered shirt onto the bed, and pulled his boots from the closet.

“What’s going on?” Frank asked.

“What’s that on your hands?” she said pointing.

“Err...I painted the back doorknob. Be careful if you go out,” he said sheepishly.

“Thanks for the warning,” she said showing him the palm of her hand. He didn’t answer. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he began to put on his coveralls.

Virginia relayed to him the message from the sheriff. Frank knew the Nelson family lived just eight miles away. Expecting to make the trip in fifteen minutes or less. Frank and Jack hurried to the truck. After elbowing Jack from behind the steering wheel, he started for the Nelson’s home. Virginia stood in the front yard, but didn’t return their goodbye wave, as she was busy cleaning the paint from her hand.

Frank, normally a moderate driver, increased his speed. His mind was preoccupied with the lost child. The red pickup careened around a sharp curve, and sped along a road that was bounded by heavy brush and dense woods. At first he failed to see the buck deer, as it leaped from the cover of the brush, and darted into the road. Frank slammed the brakes hard, but not in time to avoid hitting the buck broadside. The animal was knocked, tumbling to the side of the road. It scrambled to its feet, and staggered for several steps, and collapsed in the middle of the road.

Jack was thrown to the floor of the truck by the sudden stop, and impact. He bounded back to his seat, and wildly looked out the front windshield, searching for the deer. Frank quickly examined Jack for injuries. Finding nothing visible, he and Jack appeared to be okay. They both squeezed through the truck door, at the same time. Jack ran in the direction of the downed deer. Frank shouted a command to halt, that brought Jack to a complete stop.

“Never rush up on an injured animal, Jack, you might be sorry,” Frank said, as he cautiously approached the buck.

No warning was given when the buck snorted, and struggled to its feet. It charged Frank, slashing at him with its antlers, ripping off the front part of his shirt. It slashed a seven inch long gash across his chest, and knocked him hard to the ground. Jack charged the buck, and stopped short, as Frank shouted again to halt. The buck continued to snort, and stamp his hoofs, as he wobbled across the road into the dense forest. Now out of sight, Jack was excited, and wanted to pursue

the deer. He made several false starts in its direction, but held his ground waiting for instructions from Frank.

Clutching his chest, Frank rose and made his way to the truck. He pulled the first aid kit from under the front seat. "Get in the truck Jack, I'm not bleedin' too bad. This pressure bandage will do for now."

Frank sat and rested for a moment in the truck. He removed the tattered shirt and rummaged under the seat again, pulling out a dirty tee shirt he used to check the truck's oil. "At least it's in one piece," he said to Jack, as he eased it over his head, and the pressure bandage. Climbing from the truck, he wanted to survey the damage to the front of the truck. The fender and grill had been heavily damaged from the impact.

"Well, Jack, how are we going to explain this to Virginia?" Jack wasn't listening, he stood at his side, but his full attention was on the area where the deer had disappeared into the brush. "I know, he didn't go very far, but we've got other things on our mind now. Let's check out the truck, and see if it'll run."

Frank started the truck, and very slowly drove down the road. Hearing no strange sounds, "They don't make trucks like this anymore. This old Ford is a real warhorse."

Increasing the speed, they arrived finally at the Nelson's home. It sat close to the road, and was enclosed with a chain link fence, that went around the entire large yard. Frank noticed several deputies outside the fence. Stopping in front of the house, Frank snapped the leash onto Jack's collar. They both pushed through the door together.

"One of us has to lose weight, or decide who gets out first," Frank grunted, and clutched his chest. It was stinging, and causing a burning sensation now. He nodded to one of the deputies as he headed his way. The deputy's attention was drawn to Frank's dirty tee shirt and the underlying bandage.

"What happened to you?" He now noticed the damaged truck. "You didn't let Jack drive over here did you?"

"I wish he was driving. I hit a buck a couple miles back, and he showed me what he thought about it."

"You need to go to the hospital?" the deputy inquired.

"No, not now, but when Virginia finds out, she might put me there permanently. What's the situation here?"

The deputy, still unsure about Frank's injuries, finally said, "The missing youngster is four years old. The last time he was seen, he was

playing in a sandbox in the back yard.”

“Are the parents’ home?” Frank asked.

“The mother is inside. She’s very distraught. Her sister has been notified, and should be here pretty soon. The father is out with some deputies, the back gate was found partially open. The boys’ older brother is in the house with his mother. What do you need from us?”

“Just something the boy was wearing is all.” Frank said.

The deputy handed him a small shirt provided by the mother. Jack nuzzled and sniffed as Frank led him to the sandbox. Jack started to track. Immediately Jack hit on the scent of the boy, and followed the trail. He worked his way to the side of the house and stopped. Rising up on his hind legs, he placed his front paws on the side of the house, and excitedly sniffed the weather boards.

Frank broke him off the track, and led Jack back to the sandbox. Jack once again tracked around the yard and stopped at the same place beside the house. Frank studied the side of the house. No windows or doors were near where Jack led him. He closely checked the foundation for any crawl space the child could have entered. Frank decided the boy must have played there earlier in the shade. Coaxing Jack to the back gate, he started him tracking in that area.

Whispering into Jack’s ear, “Come on boy, you’re embarrassing me. Let’s check the outbuildings. I guess the accident has you upset. Just calm down. You’ll be back in your prime soon. Just settle down,” he said rubbing Jack’s neck and head.

Frank entered the open garage door. Jack pushed past him, and made a fast sweep through the garage. Jack returned to a pail with liquid inside, and began to examine it. “Halt!” Frank screamed when he saw what Jack was doing. He quickly dipped his finger into the substance and smelled it. “This is anti-freeze. I know it smells, and tastes sweet, but it’ll kill a dog faster than a bolt of lightning. Never forget this odor, and leave it alone.” Jack turned around, and continued to a ladder that lay on the floor of the garage. He tracked from one end to the other. Giving a soft growl, he turned toward Frank and gave a short bark. Frank stepped outside the garage, and asked one of the deputies to fetch the boys’ brother.

The older boy entered the garage with the deputy as Frank pointed to the ladder, “You boys have this ladder outside today?”

“Yes sir, we were playing ball, and the ball went on the roof. It rolls down and gets caught in the gutter sometimes. We use the ladder to get our ball back.”

“Do you usually leave the ladder there?” Frank asked.

“Well, if we forget to put it up, mom or dad puts it up.”

Frank picked up the ladder and was halfway to the house when the pain in his chest caused him to drop it. Two deputies ran to his aid. “I’m okay; help put this ladder against the side of the house.”

The deputies picked up on what Frank was getting at; one scrambled up the ladder to check the roof. The deputy cautiously made his way over to the chimney.

“Call the fire department, he’s wedged about eight feet down, head first!” the deputy yelled down.

His partner on the ground yelled up, “Is he alive?”

“No!” he shouted back.

“I’m sorry I can’t stay, and help you get ‘em out. I’m feelin’ mighty sick, and my chest hurts. Me and Jack are goin’ home,” Frank said, with tears in his eyes.

Letting Jack enter the truck first, he climbed in. Leaning out for a moment, he felt like vomiting. After several deep breathes, the nauseated feeling passed. Driving past the spot where he struck the deer, he decided not to stop. He’d have Virginia call the ranger station when he got home and report it then.

Jack laid his head on Frank’s lap, and didn’t move the rest of the way home. When the truck stopped, Jack trotted to the grape arbor, and stretched out on his side. Frank slowly entered the house through the kitchen door. Virginia had seen the damaged front of the truck, and immediately noticed the dirty tee shirt, and bandage bulging under it.

“Get out of those dirty clothes, and into the bath tub. I’ll see to your chest, and have a snack ready when you’ve cleaned up,” she said rushing about.

He didn’t answer, just did as he was told. Not sure what had happened, she knew that now wasn’t the time to ask. While he finally got into the tub to soak, she went to the back door and called Jack. After a careful examination, she feed and watered him. She returned to the kitchen, and laid out medical supplies for Frank. Time now to go find out what had happened and patch him up.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Today is a good day to solve a murder, Donny thought as he awoke. Rambling out of bed, he was off to take a shower, while Eric started breakfast. After toweling off, Donny admired himself in the full-length mirror attached to the bathroom door. He took pride in his appearance, even if it seemed a little self-centered on his part. Moving to the sink, he began his daily routine of shaving, styling his hair and so forth. Finishing, he'd join Eric in the kitchen.

Eric prepared fat-free blueberry pancakes, with fresh-cut strawberries on top, black coffee and a small glass of fresh squeezed orange juice.

After eating, the two kissed as Donny headed out the door for the office. Now, if he could get through another day with the dyke from hell, he thought.

As Detective Smith strolled up to his office desk, he spied Detective Jones standing nearby, holding a small box. As he sat, she placed the box in front of him.

"Have a Krispy Kream donut," she said. "They're fresh from the oven," she continued, trying to make amends for her weekend early morning visit.

"No, thank you," Came Donny's snide reply, still a bit miffed.

She shrugged her shoulders as she went to her desk. "So, where we headed next?" she said, trying to engage him in conversation. Donny made no reply.

"Okay, I'm sorry, is that what you need to hear?" Angel blurted out.

Donny pretended not to hear her. Moments later he spoke. "We need to visit the hospital where that guy Butler worked and interview the staff there," he said as if nothing had occurred between them.

They made their way to the old unmarked cruiser and Donny drove them in the direction of the hospital, which was across town.

Angel spoke first. "Well, can you believe it?"

"Believe what?" he asked while momentarily eyeballing her.

"Our last names, Smith and Jones. Kinda odd, wouldn't you say?"

"Whatever," he replied, not sure what her point was.

"So, Donny, who's your roommate?"

Shifting uncomfortably in his seat, he said, "I don't discuss personal things, period."

"Oh, now I get it, some stud screwed you and then dumped you. It's cool," Angel said.

"Hey! Nobody dumped me!" Donny shot back, his voice strained with agitation.

"Well don't have a hissy-fit," she said in her condescending tone.

"Hey, not that it's any of your business, but I happen to be involved with a really wonderful man."

"Don't flip out, I was just wondering, you know, since we're partners and all." Angel tried to sound apologetic.

"I don't feel comfortable talking about Eric."

"Your little butt-buddy is named Eric, how cute," she chuckled.

Donny cringed; he couldn't believe he let his lover's name slip out.

"So, you guys into anything kinky, like bondage or S&M?" she persisted.

Donny glared over at Angel. "What is your problem? Don't you understand I don't want to talk about us!" Fuming as his blood pressure began to rise. He was so caught up in the heat of the moment he inadvertently drifted across the center line into oncoming traffic.

"Watch out!" Angel yelled as she grabbed the steering wheel and pulled them back safely into their lane, as horns blared past them. "Okay, okay, I'll shut up before you kill us, pussy boy." Angel pretended to zip her lips shut.

Donny gripped the wheel tightly as he concentrated on the road. Both remained silent for the duration of the trip.

Arriving at the hospital, Donny was now calm and in control once again. The volunteer receptionist sent them to Father Andy's office. The detectives entered through the open door leading to the outer office.

Nora Teel, Simon's mother, was at her desk reading a murder mystery novel. She looked up as the two approached. "May I help you?" she

asked in her pleasant, sweet voice.

"Yes ma'am, I'm Detective Smith and this is my partner, Detective Jones," Donny said adjusting his tie.

"Alias Smith and Jones, wasn't there a TV show by that name?" Nora inquired of the officers.

"I wouldn't know," Donny responded as he looked over at Angel.

The outer office was a modest-sized room with walls of faded walnut paneling, with slightly worn brown carpet. Nora had a green foam-padded chair on rollers, which seemed out of place with the rest of the office décor. There were four large filing cabinets along the right wall. Many pictures of her family adorned her desk. There was a small electric typewriter. No plants, yet one large picture of an old civil war sailing ship hung over the file cabinets. A large wooden door led into another office about three times the size of her office.

Father Andy's office had a medium sized oak desk, containing a telephone, fax machine, and a portrait of him shaking hands with the bishop. There was an elegant, high backed, brown leather desk chair, along with several tan file cabinets, and a medium-sized, brown leather sofa. Two more brown leather recliners were adjacent to the sofa. An oak coffee table sat in front of the sofa and a large fish aquarium was mounted near the desk.

Many bookshelves, containing volumes on psychiatry, theology and psychology lined one entire wall. The golden-brown carpet matched the paneling, which gave the office a surreal aspect. Hung on the wall behind the desk was a large, golden crucifix. To complete the imagery, a rather huge portrait of Jesus Christ was hung next to it. One had the feeling of a Holy Sanctuary upon entering.

"How can I help you detectives?" Nora asked with a curious expression on her pudgy pink face.

"You would be...?" Donny asked, pulling out his pad.

"I'm Nora Teel, Father Andy's personal secretary. Am I in some sort of trouble?" she asked as her face turned a shade whiter.

"No ma'am, we're investigating the homicide of James Butler."

"Yes, I heard the dreadful news on the radio. I was so shocked to hear someone had murdered poor James. He was such a good man, and a very hard worker. I don't know how they will ever find someone who can fill his shoes. I said a prayer for him, for God to open his heavenly arms and welcome James into his loving kingdom."

Angel peered over at Donny and rolled her eyes, unable to take in all the religious mumbo-jumbo that just spewed forth from Nora's mouth.

Donny ignored Angel and remained professional as he continued. "We'd like to ask you a few questions, if you don't object?"

Nora smiled and tugged at her long-sleeved dress as she gave Detective Smith her full and undivided attention. She was more than willing to cooperate with the police. Her genuine sincerity came through as she spoke. "Oh, of course, I'd be happy to answer your questions if I possibly can. Please have a seat."

They sat as requested, making themselves comfortable. Donny adjusted his tie as he started with his questioning. "How long did Mr. Butler work here?"

"James worked here almost two years, one of our very best RNs, if not the best. We've been very proud of his performance." She gushed.

"Were there any staff members who didn't like James Butler? Someone he might have had trouble with recently?"

"Everyone liked James, well, except for Doctor Lerner. They didn't have a very professional relationship, I'm afraid," she said.

"Doctor Lerner?" Donny quizzed.

"Yes, Doctor Linda Lerner, she's on a two-week suspension right now."

Angel cut in. "Why was she suspended?"

"Father Andy and her disagreed on Simon's treatment plan. She lost her temper and he was forced to take disciplinary action against her," Nora stated.

"What is Father Andy's real name?" Angel asked in a gruff tone.

"Why, that would be Andrew Crawford, the head of the hospital."

"Who's this 'Simon' character?" Angel prodded.

"He's my son, and he's very disturbed. But he's getting the best care possible under Father Andy." Her voice beamed with joy.

Donny interjected, now that he felt Angel was off track, and his suspicious nature now became aroused. "So James Butler and this Doctor Lerner didn't get along?"

"Oh no, they had a huge fight the other day. I was coming off the elevator onto the fifth floor, and I heard them arguing." Nora loved to

gossip, and couldn't wait to tell her story to the detectives.

"So, what were they fighting about?" Angel asked, butting in again.

"Doctor Lerner accused James of raping my son, Simon, and she said if it were true, she'd have him fired and personally see that he was prosecuted as well," Nora said.

"How did Butler respond to her threat?"

"James told her he never assaulted Simon, that he was making it up to get released," Nora rattled on excitedly. "That if she didn't back off, they'd find her body floating in the river."

"Do you think Butler raped your son?" Angel continued, watching her face for signs of deception.

"No, Simon is a pathological liar, he'll say anything to get his way. Even as a child, always lying." She sighed.

Rejoining the questioning, Donny asked, "Is Father Andy in his office?"

"No sir, he would be up on the fifth floor, substituting for James until he can find a suitable replacement for him. Do you wish to speak with him?"

"Yes, and we'd like to have a word with your son, Simon, also," Donny replied.

Nora telephoned the nurses' station. Father Andy answered and gave permission for the detectives to be admitted to the locked unit. They were escorted by Nora, who unlocked the elevator panel when they arrived on the fifth floor.

The doors opened, revealing the elderly man who was the director of the psych hospital. Father Andrew Crawford was sixty-one, and white. His excessive alcohol consumption over the last several years had started to take its toll. Standing a little over six feet, he walked slightly hunched over, and was a rather thin man for his height. He had a full head of silvery-white hair which he combed straight back. Black-framed glasses with thick lenses almost hid his pale-blue eyes. Age spots dotted his forehead and hands.

There was a small, neatly trimmed mustache of white hairs, which extended only to the corners of his sagging mouth. Dressing conservatively, he wore a white buttoned short sleeve shirt, covered partially by an old brown sweater. Accompanied by light-brown slacks, with matching shoes. No socks. Only on special occasions did he wear his priest-collar. He waved to Nora as the elevator doors closed.

Extending his right hand in greeting, "Well, Detectives, how may I help

Hot Springs' finest?"

"Your secretary told us about the threats made between Doctor Lerner and James Butler, and about the suspension. You have anything more you care to tell us?" Donny asked.

"No, not really, just that James was an excellent RN, and that he will surely be missed around here. And, that I truly believe in my heart, Linda Lerner had nothing to do with his death. They weren't seeing eye-to-eye on Simon Teel's treatment plan, but not to the point of murder," Father Andy said, his voice filled with remorse.

"We'll need to speak with Doctor Lerner; can you provide her home address for us?" Donny asked.

"Oh, yes, of course, I'll call down and have Nora provide you with it on your way out."

"Before we go, we need to speak with Simon Teel if that's possible?" Donny asked.

"Oh, I'm sorry, but as his doctor, I must state for the record that at this time, he's in no condition to be questioned by the police."

"Are you saying that as his psychiatrist?" Angel chimed in.

"Yes, he's not coherent enough at this time to answer questions. Once he becomes more stable mentally I'll advise your department."

"All right then, let us know when he's improved." Donny said.

"Anything else I can help you with?" Father Andy asked.

"No, I don't think so. You have any more questions, Detective Jones?"

"Yeah, what's that Simon guy in for? Is he psychotic?" she asked bluntly.

Donny wheeled around to face Angel. "I can't believe you just said that. Do you know how insensitive that sounds?" he scolded.

"Whatever," she said, rolling her eyes.

"Sorry Father...we're leaving now," Donny said.

Father Andy set the elevator to descend to the first floor after the detectives stepped inside. "Have a nice day," he said as the doors closed.

Donny stared at Angel as the elevator started down. She felt his gaze upon her, yet decided not to engage him verbally. Sensing he was spoiling for a confrontation. They went by Nora's office and picked up the address for Doctor Lerner. Angel was surprised. Once in the car,

Donny was totally professional, and played it as if nothing had happened.

A short time later, arriving at the address, they pulled into a circular drive, and stopped at the front double doors. The beautiful Victorian-style house was large, and the manicured lawn was painstakingly landscaped.

"Looks like the doc has cash coming out her ass," Angel noted. As Donny pushed the doorbell, chimes were heard to play a melody of 'Moon River.'

Angel, as usual, banged on the door with her fist, which caused Donny to look away, shaking his head in disbelief at how crude she was.

Linda Lerner was watching one of her favorite soap opera's when the doorbell chimed, followed by loud pounding. Heading for the door, she peered through the peephole. She could make out two strange individuals. "Who are you?!" she yelled through the door, still observing them.

Donny told Angel to stop pounding.

"Why?" Angel asked, drawing back her fist.

"I thought I heard a voice," he said, straining to hear.

Again, Linda Lerner shouted, "Who are you? What do you want?!"

"We're police, we need to speak with Doctor Lerner," he yelled back.

"Hold your badge up to the peephole!"

Donny produced his shield and held it up. After a few moments, the door opened.

"How may I help you?" she asked, looking directly at Donny.

"We're investigating the murder of James Butler, may we come in?"

"Murder? How did he die?" she asked with a look of surprise on her round face.

Donny didn't reply to her question as they entered, instead he continued with his own. "Do you own a gun, Doctor Lerner?"

"Yes I do. I keep it in my desk at the hospital, but it came up missing about a week or so ago. Why, have you found it?"

Angel rolled her eyes as she placed her hands on her hips. "So you're going to stand there and feed us this line of shit?"

Doctor Lerner placed her right hand over her chest, followed by her

jaw dropping open in the shock of Detective Jones' insinuation. Catching her breath, she spoke, "How dare you speak to..."

"Please, let's not get ahead of ourselves; Detective Jones merely meant to ask what happened to your gun?" Donny interrupted the two ladies.

Doctor Lerner studied Detective Jones, looking her up and down in a menacing fashion, making it crystal clear she didn't approve of her or her profanity. "As I said, it came up missing. I don't know if it was stolen or what."

"Did you report it to the police?" Donny politely inquired.

"Well, no, I wasn't that concerned. It has gone missing before, and seems to return with no effort on my part," she said with no reservations.

Angel abruptly cut in. "Your gun disappears and re-appears and you don't think something's wrong with that fuckin' picture? Huh, doc?"

"You take your foul mouth and get out of my home right now!" Doctor Lerner roared as she opened the door. "Get out this instant!" she said, pointing toward the open doorway.

"Fine with me!" Angel's voice came thundering back as she exited the premises.

Doctor Lerner put her hand up to stop Detective Smith from following his partner out. "You may stay," she said, slamming the door shut behind Angel.

"I'm sorry for my partner's rudeness, she's new and having..."

"You don't have to apologize; I just want to help in whatever way I can."

"Can you account for your whereabouts two nights ago at around 12:15 a.m.?" Donny asked.

"I was home, in bed, at that time of night." She said without hesitation. "Do you really think I'm capable of murder?"

"Can anyone confirm you were home at that time?" Donny continued.

"No, they cannot. You'll have to take my word for it," she said, sounding agitated.

"You had a disagreement with James Butler at the hospital, at which time you both threatened each other, is that correct?" he persisted.

"We may have disagreed on some things, but I surely wouldn't

murder him.”

“Did you take him serious when he said he’d kill you and dump your body in the river?”

“Heavens no, he was just talking tough, like most immature men do when they feel a woman has gotten the better of them. I don’t think he was capable of murder.”

“That’s all for now. We may have more questions for you later. You’re not planning any trips out of town are you?” He asked, putting his note pad away.

“No, I’m not.” She opened the door for him.

Angel was sitting in the cruiser listening to the radio. Donny got behind the wheel.

“So, what’d the fat bitch have to say?” Angel started in.

“Said she didn’t do it, and doesn’t have an alibi,” he said.

“You remember that old lady, Agnes Blakewood, said she heard two people arguing. Could have been Butler and the Doctor?” Angel wisecracked.

“I don’t put much stock into what the old lady said. Especially with her hearing problems,” Donny put forth for Angel to digest.

“Let’s go to the station and see if any of the forensics shit has been completed yet,” Angel said as Donny pulled out of the driveway.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Father Andrew Crawford was sitting at Doctor Lerner's desk, looking over some papers that had been left out when she arrived. Judging by her facial expression, she was visibly upset as she approached her boss.

"Father Andy, you know very well I don't appreciate it when you use your master key to gain access to my office. And furthermore, I truly must take exception with you when you go through my private papers," she said in a sarcastic tone of voice.

Father Andy looked up. "All right...all right, let's not have a scene," he said vacating her chair.

She placed her things on her desk, and as she eased her heavy bulk into her chair, Father Andy took up the chair across from her.

Doctor Lerner leaned forward and placed her palms flat on the cool surface of the desk top. "So, Father, what brings you to my office?"

"What's your diagnosis of Simon Teel?" he charged right in.

"From the few sessions we've had so far, my preliminary evaluation would be that he suffers from verbal and possibly physical abuse stemming from his childhood. Simon shows signs of depression, accompanied by a high level of stress. His low self-esteem is complicated by his insecurity and inadequacy as an adult, which stems from his adolescence. A reoccurring nightmare causes sleep problems, which lead him to abuse alcohol and other drugs he uses to self-medicate. Overall, I feel he is not a danger to himself or to others at this point in time. My recommendation would be outpatient therapy once a week."

"That's your professional opinion?" Father Andy asked, standing up.

"Yes, it is, and if nothing else presents itself in our coming sessions, I'll be discharging him soon," she said, leaning back in her chair.

"I listened to your tape recorded sessions, and I read his diary. You didn't mention he hears voices in his head, and that he murdered an elderly lady. It's obvious to me he's a danger to himself, and to others. Just where did you get your degree, Doctor Lerner, from one of those

home study courses?" he said, throwing his hands in the air.

Doctor Lerner pushed herself to a standing position, facing Father Andy. "Please don't speak to me in that condescending manner, and as far as Simon Teel is concerned, I'm not sure if he is a habitual liar or a pathological liar, but there is great doubt as to where the truth begins and the lies end. So until further analysis, I'll use my professional judgment to decide a course of action concerning his treatment. And by the way, there have been numerous advances in psychiatry since you were in school, Doctor Crawford," she hissed.

Father Andy glared at Doctor Lerner; a nerve was struck with her flippant remark about his education. "It's obvious; you don't fully understand what's taking place with this patient. Pending further evaluation, Simon Teel will be confined here for a full 180-day review," he stated heading for the door.

"Just a minute, you can't be serious? Simon is—"

Father Andy wheeled around in the doorway. "I'm the director of this hospital and my orders stand! And, I don't want to hear any more about it! Just see that he and his mother are informed of the committal!" he yelled as he slammed her office door behind him.

She sank back into her chair. "What is wrong with that man?" she said softly to herself.

Regaining her composure, she inhaled deeply and picked up the phone. Nora's extension rang at her desk. "Hello," she answered in her sweet voice.

"This is Doctor Lerner, I've been asked to inform you concerning Simon's stay here. Father Andy has committed him for a full 180-day period, pending further evaluation."

"How wonderful, I feel so much better knowing he'll get the help he truly needs." Her voice conveyed relief.

"Whether it's in Simon's best interest or not, will remain to be seen," Doctor Lerner added with reservations.

"Well, thank you for letting me know, I appreciate it." Nora said happily.

"Yes, well, I'll say goodbye for now." She hung up the phone and pondered how the committal would affect Simon's therapy.

Father Andy left the hospital shortly after Doctor Lerner had departed. He had an appointment with the bishop concerning the hospital and church business. Stopping at home briefly, he retrieved

some financial papers which the bishop had requested. Just as he was locking the back door, the phone started ringing. Reopening the door, he grabbed the wall phone in his kitchen.

“Yes?”

“This is James Butler.”

“Is there a problem, James?”

“Yes, Simon Teel has become combative.” His voice remained steady as the lies spewed forth.

“In what way is he acting out?” Father Andy inquired.

“He refused to take a shower, and then assaulted me physically. He then threatened suicide,” James stated boldly.

“Oh my God! Well, use whatever means you deem necessary to bring him under control. Do you need me to come back to the unit to assist you?”

“No, I can handle it from here.”

“Well, okay then.” Father Andy hung up, knowing James was trained to deal with this type of situation.

James headed down the hall and crept into my room, where I was still asleep. Approaching the bed, he carried a small cup of water and a pink and blue capsule. I felt something kick the bed, rising up, not sure what to expect.

“Take this; it was ordered by Father Andy,” he stated while handing me the capsule and liquid.

“What is it?” I asked, a little hesitant.

“That’s not your concern, just put it in your mouth and swallow.” James commanded.

Not wanting to set James off, I complied and washed the pill down.

“Open your mouth,” he demanded. I did as ordered. “Raise your tongue,” he said, verifying the pill had been swallowed. “All right, you know the drill; get your clothes off while I get your toiletries.”

I obeyed, reluctantly. I didn’t have much to take off, as I was only wearing my shorts and socks. After removing them, I felt dizzy. I started for the shower, but the room started to spin; I fell back onto the bed. Unable to sit up, I now wondered what James had given me.

Entering the room, James did not have my toiletries; instead he had a small bottle of hand lotion and a pair of padded wrist-cuffs. I couldn’t

form the words to ask what was happening.

James seized my naked body by my left arm and leg, flipping me over onto my stomach. I was totally helpless to stop him. I remained conscious, yet had lost all motor control of my body.

Disrobing, James spread my legs apart as he positioned himself behind me. Pulling my arms back, he attached the padded cuffs to my wrists, securing them behind my back. I could feel the cold lotion being poured onto my anus. James spread my butt cheeks wide as he forced his hard erection deep into my ass. The pain was immense and constant as he kept thrusting, pounding away with his full force in a deliberate motion.

“Do you remember what you did to him?!” James shrieked in my right ear.

Finally ejaculating, his orgasm gave him some unknown triumph over me. The assault stopped as James withdrew his dick from my tender ass.

Leaning closer to my head, he said, “Now you know what it feels like, shithead! Now you know what he felt!” he yelled.

James picked up his clothes and departed my room. Unable to move from the drug’s effect, I lay naked, my wrists still bound together, wondering who he was referring to. Had I really hurt someone as ruthlessly as James had just hurt me?

Closing my eyes, my mind raced, trying to think of who it could have been. Failing to think of someone, I tried to sleep, yet the throbbing pain in my ass kept me awake. Henry was correct; you reap what you sow in this life, I guess.

Paralyzed, I opened my blurry eyes, searching for answers. Tears welled up, yet not from remorse, but from the impending fear I knew James would inflict upon me later. How much torment must I endure at the hands of a psychotic? Who was this mysterious individual James was seeking revenge for?

That afternoon, Doctor Lerner returned to the hospital. She dreaded having to tell Simon of the committal. Stopping by the nurses’ station, she found James reading a suspense novel.

“Good afternoon, everything been quiet around here?” she inquired, trying to make polite conversation.

“Did Father Andy call you about Simon?” he said, trying to sound concerned.

“No, I haven’t spoken with him. Was there a problem?”

"Yes, I'm afraid Simon went berserk and attacked me in his room. He threatened to cut his wrists with a shaving razor." James said.

"My goodness, is he all right?"

"Yes, Father Andy ordered me to restrain and medicate him. He's resting in his room."

"I'd better check on him." She said heading for his room.

"Wait! He's fine, I was just down there," James said, standing up.

Stopping momentarily, she turned and looked at James, then proceeded on her way. She knocked softly, waited a few seconds then entered. At first, she couldn't believe what she saw; Simon, face down, naked and restrained.

"Simon? Simon, it's Doctor Lerner, can you open your eyes for me?" She covered his lower half with a sheet, as she undid his wrist-cuffs and let them drop to the floor.

Opening my eyes, my head was much clearer than before. The drug had almost worn completely off. She helped me turn over and into a sitting position.

"Can you dress yourself, Simon?"

"I'll try," I said, steadying myself on one arm.

"I'll give you some privacy so you can dress. Please come to the therapy room when you're able." Off she went down the corridor.

Dressing, I made my way to the group therapy room. Moaning as I lowered myself onto the couch. Doctor Lerner was already set up and ready to go.

"Are you in some kind of pain, Simon?" The concern in her voice was reassuring.

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Let me start my recorder and we..."

"No, I don't want to be taped," I spoke softly.

Doctor Lerner focused on me as she complied with my request. "Okay, Simon, can we talk about your earlier behavior with James Butler?"

"He hates me," I blurted out.

"Is that why you assaulted him?" she said looking deep into my eyes.

"I never attacked James, if he said I did, he's lying."

“James stated you also threatened suicide, is that also a lie?” she asked.

“What? He gave me a pill and then raped me!” I bellowed.

“Simon, I want you to stay calm, can you do that for me?” she said while giving one of her reassuring knee pats.

Taking a deep breath. “Look, I didn’t try to kill myself, and I didn’t try to hurt James.”

“Simon, you need to be completely honest with me. I know you don’t like taking supervised showers and you’re not happy being here. Are you positive you did not lose control and strike James?”

“I swear, I never touched him, he drugged me, then raped me. I swear to god.”

“I want you to return to your room and rest, while I have a little chat with Mr. Butler.” She placed the recorder in her briefcase and rose up from the couch.

“Please don’t make him mad at me, please?” The fear was growing stronger inside me.

“Simon, you have nothing to fear from him, and you have my word there won’t be any more abuse. Do you hear what I’m saying?”

“Yes, ma’am.” I heard the words, but I was still afraid. As she went to confront James, I returned to my room to try and rest as she suggested.

She found him still reading his novel, “James, I’d like a word with you,” she said entering the nurses’ station.

Placing his book down, he stood to meet her face to face. “What’s the problem?” he asked indignantly.

“Simon’s version of what transpired between the two of you, greatly differs from what you claim occurred earlier,” she began, watching his body language and facial expression for signs of deception.

“It happened as I said it happened. That little liar is denying it because he wants you to feel sorry, so you’ll let him out. He’s a con artist, so don’t fall for his little-boy routine.”

“I will be speaking to Father Andy about this incident,” Doctor Lerner stated, unable to discern if he was lying or not.

“Whatever, Doc,” he said. Sitting down, he resumed reading.

She made her way down to her office on the first floor, dialing Father Andy’s number.

"Hello," the female voice said.

Recognizing her voice, Doctor Lerner asked, "Nora, can you connect me with Father Andy, please?"

"I'm sorry, he's over at the bishop's office, can I take a message?"

"No, this can't wait; can you connect me with the bishop's office?"

"I guess so, if it's that important," Nora said with some hesitation in her voice.

"It is indeed that important." Doctor Lerner responded sternly.

Nora placed her on hold, than made contact with the bishop's office. After contact was established with Father Andy, she transferred the call.

"Hello?"

"Father Andy, this is Doctor Lerner."

"Is there a problem at the hospital?" he asked.

"I'll come straight to the point. Did you give James Butler permission to medicate and restrain Simon Teel?" Her voice was hurried and agitated.

"Doctor Lerner, I'm in the middle of a very important meeting with the bishop, so let me say this only once. James has my full backing in this issue, patients like Simon lie for many reasons, and he's lying now. Good day." He hung up.

She slammed the phone down onto the receiver. Old fart should retire, she thought to herself. Pausing a moment, she considered what he said. Simon could be lying; his past history shows he has a knack for it.

A frown appeared as she now remembered she had forgotten to tell Simon of his committal. Yet, there was something sinister about that James Butler, she could feel it in her bones, he had a dark side to him. As she contemplated her last thought, she recalled that just being in his presence evoked a feeling of unspeakable wickedness that seemed to hover over him.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Virginia was awakened by the crow of the rooster. She sat up on the side of the bed and stretched. Frank's restless night gave her reason for concern. Tossing and turning in his sleep until well past midnight. To her surprise, he was already up, and in the kitchen trying to make coffee.

"Be careful; don't burn the coffee like last time, you set off the smoke detector, remember?" she laughed.

"I did not; the darn thing just went off for no good reason, piece a junk." Frank mumbled.

She gave him a big hug, "Ouch, not to tight, my chest is really sore." He complained.

"Maybe you need to see the doc?" she suggested, knowing full well he'd never go.

"No way, I'll be fine. Greedy doctors charge too much."

Frank sat at the table, and now spoke just above a whisper, "I had the little Nelson boy on my mind all night. If we could have gotten there quicker, maybe we could have found him sooner, maybe..."

"You did all you could, God wouldn't ask no more of you and Jack" she said cutting him off. Virginia started massaging his tense neck muscles. "I think you boys should take a few weeks off, and just goof around the place. You've had your nose to the grind stone for way too long. It's time to relax."

Frank stretched out on the couch for his afternoon nap, and was soon sound asleep. Jack sat under the grape arbor, and scratched his ear with his hind leg. He too laid down for a rest. Virginia used her free time finishing her needlepoint. Wasn't long before the phone jangled, it sounded twice as loud as normal.

She recognized the voice on the line, "Hello Sheriff...no, I'm sorry, but Frank is asleep. What...you say two boy scouts are missing? Camping out in the forest? Well, Frank's still not over the death of the Nelson boy...what...okay, I'll tell him."

She placed her hand on his shoulder, and gently patted him, "Wake up honey. The sheriff just called."

"What did he want? Did you tell him I'm nappin'?" he grumbled, his eyes still closed.

"I certainly did." She said returning to her needlepoint.

Frank pulled himself to a sitting position, and moaned as he felt the soreness in his chest. "Well, you gonna tell me what he said?"

"The sheriff mentioned something about two boy scouts, but I don't think it's that important," she baited him.

"I know what you're up to, you're tryin' to get my curiosity up, so go ahead, tell me what the man said already."

"Oh, you wouldn't be interested. You're still tired, and your chest hurts. Plus you're upset about the child and all." She rattled on.

Frank's agitation had reached its peak. "If you're not gonna tell me, I'll call and ask him myself."

Clearing her throat, Virginia finally gave in. "He said something about two boy scout's that were lost. Isn't that the funniest thing you ever heard? Boy scouts getting lost, I thought scouts were trained to not get lost. Listen to this; the sheriff's dogs keep losing the scent. It's like the scout's vanished into thin air. You never hear of girl scouts getting lost..."

"Whoa woman, this sounds serious, I can't take time off if someone is lost. How you think Jack would feel if we didn't help find those poor boys? Call the sheriff and get the particulars while I dress."

She called as directed, "They said the sheriff is down by the Tennyson Farm, you'll find him there."

Retired Ranger Jackson explained to his grandson and Rose that the old Tennyson Farm had been vacant for years. It was grown over with weeds and saplings, right near the forest.

Rose chimed in, "My old man said that farm was haunted." She leaned over the porch railing, and spit on the lawn.

Donny exchanged glances with his grandfather, who smiled, and said, "Please let me continue with my story, and stop interrupting." Rose gave him a ruff look as he cleared his throat and continued.

Frank motored over the back road slowly, still a little unnerved from hitting the deer. Jack stared out the side window as they moved along. Finally pulling into the grass covered drive, Frank made his way up to the old barn, where the patrol cars were parked. The adventure was about to begin.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Arriving at the police station, the detectives went straight for the forensics lab. The lab tech in charge of their evidence was sitting at a long hard-top counter, studying a bluish liquid in a small test tube. His name was Sean Meyers, and he'd just turned twenty-six. A tall, thin man with thick glasses and long brown hair, reaching down to his shoulders. The long white lab coat gave him the classic appearance of a nerd.

Replacing the test tube in a steel holder on the counter, he then noticed the detectives approaching. "Come to see what we've come up with, Detectives?" Sean began the conversation.

"Yes, we have," Donny replied.

"So, what's your new partners' name, Detective Smith?" Sean asked, eyeing Angel.

"This is Detective Angel Jones," Donny said pointing to her.

"Hi, my name is Sean Meyers, nice to see they finally found someone to work with Detective Smith," he said grinning.

"Back off, slime ball." Angel pumped her chest up and flexed her biceps.

Sean took a step back, not sure what to make of her. Turning to Donny, "Well, Detective Smith, we ran ballistics on the slug retrieved from Mr. Butler's chest. It came back as a .38 caliber. We traced it back to a five-shot Smith and Wesson revolver registered to a Linda Lerner," Sean said, reading from a printout sheet.

"Image that," Angel said.

"What else do you have?" Donny asked.

"Not much, no fingerprints other than the deceased, no foreign fibers or other items that didn't match up to stuff already belonging to Butler. Seems whoever shot him, didn't enter the apartment, just popped him from the doorway," Sean stated.

"Looks like it's time to pay that fat bitch another visit. Don't you think so, pussy-boy?" Angel asked flexing her cheek bones as a smirk came

across her tight face.

Detective Smith flushed red as the 'pussy-boy' comment registered on Sean's face. Sean broke eye contact with Donny, not wanting to embarrass his friend. Donny turned and made a hasty retreat out the door into the hallway, followed by Angel.

He reeled around and confronted her. "Just who the hell do you think you are, bitch?!" he shouted, looking up into her face.

Angel stood silent, not sure what was causing his outburst.

"I have to work with these people, and you open your big mouth and call me a 'pussy-boy' in front of a fellow colleague, not to mention a personal friend," Donny said, poking her chest with his finger, as the anger was building to fever pitch inside him.

She now caught the gist of his outburst, but she felt he went too far in physically touching her in order to make his point. Now, she too, felt the infuriation of his actions rising from within. "You need to step back, before I put my boot up your ass, faggot!" she howled.

"Fuck you! You cunt!" He blasted back as he shoved her back against the wall.

As Angel bounced off the wall, she hit Donny with an explosive right upper cut to his weak jaw, which snapped his head back. Stumbling backward, he caught and braced himself against the opposite wall. Angel advanced fists up, ready for battle. Donny pivoted, and placed a side-kick straight into Angel's abdomen. Doubling over, she dropped to her knees. Donny moved in for the kill shot, a straight right-cross to the head. This would be the knock-out punch that would teach her whose boss.

Angel looked up just as he drew back his fist; she fired off a short jab of her own. Donny's blow found its target; his punch struck with such force, she landed several feet away. Angel's jab found its mark too; her fist connected with his groin. Donny collapsed into the fetal position. He could barely breathe; the pain was so intense tears fell from his tightly closed eyes. Angel was on her back, semi-conscious, unaware of where she was.

Sean observed most of the confrontation through the lab doorway. He ran to his friend's side. "We need some help down here!" he hollered, now assisting Donny.

Several officers and a few detectives came to see what all the commotion was about, including Chief Rachel Temme.

"What happened here?" Chief Temme demanded.

Sean spelled out the events from what he had seen and heard to Chief Temme.

Angel was now fully conscious and leaning up against the wall. Her vision was blurred, and her head was throbbing. Stabbing needle pains circled behind her eyes. She could hear voices, yet not make any sense of what they were saying to her.

An officer tried to help Donny into a sitting position, but the pain was still too much.

“Call for an ambulance,” Chief Temme ordered. “They need more than we can provide here at the station,” she continued while kneeling beside Angel.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Nora had made an appointment with Doctor Lerner for 10:30 a.m. Arriving on time, she was met at the door.

The sunshine streamed through the open curtains, giving one the sense of a quiet park. Nora was wearing a full-length dress with long sleeves, which was light blue and decorated with tiny pink flowers. This was accompanied by her traditional low-heeled black shoes. Wearing make-up and sporting a bun-style for her dyed dark hair. It was still easy to see she had been the conservative wife of a Baptist minister.

"Please, have a seat," Doctor Lerner said as she too made her way around her desk and sat down. "So, what is it you wish to discuss?"

Nora tensed, then relaxed. "I took an early lunch break, so my time is limited. First, I want to thank you for treating my son..."

"You know from working with Father Andy that anything Simon says to me is strictly confidential," Doctor Lerner stated, not sure where Nora was heading with this conversation.

"Yes, I understand that. I'm here on my behalf, not that of my son." She spoke in a hurried fashion.

A gentle smile appeared as her eyes worked their magic on Nora. "All right then, just sit back and relax, and tell me what's on your mind."

"I've been afraid for my very life, that is, until you told me of Simon's committal. His nightmare used to occur just every other month, but lately, it comes weekly. I was worrying myself sick. I thought he might snap and kill me in my sleep." The desperation showed in her raspy voice.

"Now, put yourself at ease, Nora. Simon is in a safe, protective environment where he can receive the care he needs," she reassured her.

"Thank you so very much for helping my boy. I better get back to work; I know Father Andy is expecting you later to discuss Simon's test results."

As they stood, Doctor Lerner came around her desk and placed her comforting hand on Nora's shoulder as they walked to the door.

Time seemed to fly by for it was now time to confer with Father Andy. Making her way down the corridor to his office, she found Nora not at her desk, so she proceeded on to his door and softly knocked.

“Come in!” he shouted.

Entering, she found him sitting at his desk, leaning back in his chair.

“Nora mentioned she saw you today, what did you girl’s talk about?” His tone seemed to demand an answer.

Responding sarcastically, “May I sit down before the inquisition starts?”

Father Andy smiled. “By all means, make yourself at home.”

Sitting, she glanced at his old, sad face. “Nora was just voicing her concern for her safety.”

“Well, he’s confined now, she can rest at ease.” He said with no remorse as he continued. “Well, I don’t have all day; did you bring Simon’s test results?”

Staring for a few seconds, her face turned pale. Doctor Lerner slowly produced several papers from a file folder. Swallowing hard, she handed the papers to him. Father Andy spent several minutes reading over the results.

TEST ASSESSMENT RESULTS OF PATIENT #222-77 SIMON LEE TEEL

Neurological (EEG) – test shows abnormal EEG.

Intelligence (IQ) – subject score was 93. (Note: 70 or below, mental impairment. 120 or above, genius range)

Essay Evaluation – Following tendencies note: A. Verbal/Physical Abuse. B. Mental Stress/Fatigue. C. Insecurity/Low Self-Esteem. D. Mild Depression. E. Rejection/Feelings of Inadequacy. F. Chemical Dependency. G. Psychosexual Immaturity.

END OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE OF PATIENT #222-77 SIMON LEE TEEL

“Simon’s EEG shows abnormal,” Father Andy stated with concern.

“Yes, but as you are aware, that in itself doesn’t suggest anything out of the norm.” She noted in Simon’s defense.

"I see by his IQ score, he's not too bright." He continued.

"It's in the average range; not everyone is a genius."

"Un-huh," he mumbled, still reading. "His essay results are interesting. Where is the essay paper he wrote? I want to read it." His tone was most impertinent.

Doctor Lerner resented him, not because he was white, but because he was a typical old man who had allowed himself to grow arrogant throughout the years. She handed him the folder which contained Simon's essay. Without even a nod or thank-you, he began to read.

THE LIAR SPEAKS TRUE

It was sunny and warm. Birds sang, and the sky was a golden blue with feathery white clouds scudding about. Okay. Let's stop right there. I lied. It wasn't sunny, it was raining. The birds weren't singing. The only bird was an old crow sitting on the mailbox across the street, getting wet and waiting for the traffic to die down so he could snack on a dead dog.

The sky wasn't blue; it was dark-gray and nasty, an all-around crappy day. I was twelve years old. My mother wanted me to go to my aunt and uncle's house while she and her friends went shopping. I didn't want to go. My aunt smelled bad, and my uncle was senile. All right, so I lied. He wasn't senile, but she did smell funny. So my wonderful, loving, caring mother dropped me off at their house. Wait a minute. Let's clear up something before I continue. Mom wasn't wonderful, loving and caring. I felt guilty and just said those nice things about her. She was a pain in the rump, bossing me around and sticking her nose into my business. From the way she acted, I thought she got stuck in her PMS cycle and couldn't get out. She was no salt of the earth. My sister and I called her, "The old lady from hell."

Yes, I'm telling you a story, a short one. It may seem long, but it won't be. Let's get on with it. Mom dropped me off, and I got lucky. The old folks weren't home, just my seventeen-year-old cousin. He was great. To tell the truth, he was fantastic. Tall, athletic body, nice tan, and lots of girlfriends.

Back then, girls made me sick. I stayed away from the ugly creatures. They were mean and snotty, always wanting to kiss me to get me in trouble. It made me want to puke. Now that I think about it, they haven't changed much since I grew up.

Where was I? Oh yeah, my cousin. He got to baby-sit me, even though I didn't consider myself a baby. At twelve, I was a well-built and intelligent kid. Lying? Sure, I'm lying. I know. You think I need therapy. Who doesn't? Back to my story. I wasn't intelligent and well built. I was short, fat, and a bit stupid. Since it was raining, we stayed inside, playing games and watching cartoons. I wasn't into cartoons, but he sat there in a trance, watching that junk.

After two hours, he took me to his bedroom and said we'd play a fun game. He took off his clothes and got on the bed, then he told me to get naked and join him. I don't know why, but off came my clothes, and on the bed I went.

I do know why. I wanted his approval. I wanted him to like me. I was at that age in life, wanting to fit in and belong. So he had me face down on the bed. He told me to put my arms behind my back, then I had to spread my legs. From his bottom dresser drawer, he produced a pair of hand cuffs and a bottle of baby oil.

Wait a minute. Don't jump ahead of me. You've already assumed I'm going to get handcuffed, and with that baby oil, some unspeakable act is going to occur. You figure this is just another of those child abuse stories that are so popular in today's society.

You're wrong! Why? Because I lied about the handcuffs and the baby oil, that's why.

The truth was, we got naked and jumped onto the bed, but instead of those unspeakable acts of abuse you were just thinking about, he taught me how to masturbate. He was cool about it. He took the time to explain it and show me, using himself as an example. He showed me how to cause an erection, how to manipulate my penis to ejaculation, and how to achieve a full orgasm. It was fantastic! Learning how to masturbate was the highlight of that summer. I did it several times a week for the rest of summer.

Hold it. That was a little white lie. I really masturbated two or three times a day, every day. I was so horny back then. These days, if I cum once I need a nap. Okay, it's more like eight hours of sleep. It wears me out. (I only cum twice in my dreams)

All right, I confess. I'm lying again. I already knew how to masturbate when we got naked and jumped onto the bed. That wasn't the first time we did that routine. We'd been doing it for months. It was more of a mutual, oral stimulation thing between us. No, we weren't homosexuals. At least I wasn't. It was just fun.

Okay, so it was a gay thing. He was gay. I was sexually confused and a

little excited. I was only twelve. That's pretty young when you are considering sexual awareness. Twelve-year-old boys aren't expected to be masters at lovemaking. That doesn't happen until we reach sixteen. At eighteen, we become universal masters of lovemaking.

Sure, I know. I must've fallen asleep, and I've been dreaming. I'm awake now. Back to my story. Where was I? Oh, I just confessed to it being a gay thing, on his part. That's another one of those little white lies. I was gay, and he was the one who was sexually confused and a little excited.

Have you figured it out yet? That's right. I was the seventeen-year-old. He was the twelve-year-old. His mother, who was just like him—short, fat and stupid—dropped him off at our house. My parents were away for the weekend. My dad is senile, and my mother does smell funny.

Anyway, she dropped him off, and we got naked. That's right. We didn't play games; we didn't watch any stupid cartoons, not when there was sex to be had. We were screwing like rabbits in heat. We forgot to use protection, and I got pregnant. You know rubbers or condoms or whatever you call those things. Oh? You want to know how someone can get pregnant when it's a story about two males. You've already guessed haven't you? I lied. That's right. I'm really a girl. For seventeen, I was a knockout. I had large, firm breasts and slim, sexy hips. Many men tried to spend an evening alone with me. Are you a little confused at this point? No? I'll let you in on a little secret. Women make the best liars. It's because men are so naïve, and most are just plain stupid. I can wiggle my behind and jiggle my boobs, and they'll believe whatever I tell them. I love having that kind of control over men. Where did I leave off? Ah, yes. I mentioned getting pregnant. You're probably wondering if I was so smart, how did I get pregnant, and how can I possibly take care of a child at my age?

Its confession time again. No, I am really pregnant...again...but I'm expecting six little ones this litter. That's right, I said litter! If you guessed I'm a bitch, you're right. No, not that kind of bitch! I'm a female dog kind of bitch, a toy poodle, all white and fluffy. Well, more dirty and muddy was closer to the truth. I'd been out in the rain, but I didn't care. I was having fun. The twelve-year-old was a dog too, a solid black Dane. At least, that was how I saw him. You know how it is when you're in love, your lover always seems better than he is. What was he really? To tell the truth, he was a short, fat beagle.

He was a bit stupid, too. I was in heat, and I wanted him badly. I can't wait until my owners find out the father of my litter is a beagle. They'll probably die. Now you see why I didn't use a condom. I might as well

'fess up' to the whole truth since we've come this far. It wasn't raining. It was snowing; I didn't want you to think I was stupid enough to be standing paw-deep in snow while some dumb beagle was trying to figure out how to mount me.

There I was, shivering in the snow up to my belly. He sniffed my butt while I wondered what a girl had to go through to get laid in her own yard. I wish I had gone with the collie who had come through the neighborhood last week. There was a smooth talker. I didn't trust him. Must have been the dog collar he wore. His name was SPIKE.

Yes, I laid him too. I admit it. That's why they call female dogs bitches. We love all the boys. Can you handle one more confession? It's the last one. I know what you're thinking. I've told a few lies here and there, but those were just little white ones. Really, I'd never lie to someone as nice as you. Come on. It's true I'm a toy poodle. I mean I was a toy poodle. I'm in doggy heaven now, and that damn collie caused it. I was chasing him and ran across the road, but I didn't make it. A red pickup truck ran me down. The old jerk didn't even try to slow down. I was flattened like a pancake.

Now you know why that stupid crow was sitting on the mailbox. He kept swooping down to take bites from my poor dead body. I hope he choked. It's time for me to go now. Lord Dog is calling. You know what dog spelled backward is, don't you? That's right. So when he calls, I come a-running. I just wish he wouldn't use that darn dog whistle. It hurts my ears.

I just thought of something funny. Since I'm a ghost, and I wrote this story, that would make me a ghostwriter. Oh no, Lord God's rolling up a newspaper. He must've found the slipper I peered on. Gotta go. Yes, I lied again; She's rolling up a newspaper.

THE END

Father Andy finished reading Simon's essay and handing it back to Doctor Lerner he said, "Kid has some serious issues, wouldn't you agree?"

"Nothing that can't be worked out in therapy," she replied.

"Well, keep me informed; you may go now," he said rudely, as if dismissing a subordinate worker.

She could not believe how insensitive he had become. She wondered if it was life itself, or the Catholic Church that made him a miserable, decrepit fellow. There was no spark of true life to be seen in his

despondent gaze, merely a lifeless shell that no longer lived, just simply existed.

Standing defiantly, she departed his office without uttering a word, for she knew deep in her heart, she was right about Simon. And the day would soon come, that he too, would know she was right.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Frank and Jack emerged from the pickup. The sheriff and some deputies were near the barn.

“So, where did the scout’s enter the woods?” He asked as he approached.

“It’s not boy scouts that are lost; it’s what they call webelos. Those smaller kids that haven’t become scouts yet or something like it.” The sheriff explained.

“Webelos, I thought you was talkin about teenagers. Me and Jack are ready to go.”

Harry Carmichael pulled up and parked near Frank’s truck. “Hey! Virginia said you two were out here. She said I should come along and keep you outta trouble,” he said laughing.

Frank grinned, “Well let’s get going.”

As the sheriff led them to where the boys entered the woods, he also explained how his dogs would track so far, then lose the scent. He’d like for Jack to start his search at the scout’s base camp.

Reaching their campsite, Frank asked for some clothing or gear they had touched so Jack could get the scent. The sheriff showed them the tent the two boys shared.

“All this belongs to them.” The sheriff said pulling back the flap on the tent.

Frank let Jack sniff around and then let him start his track. Jack moved about the campsite, and then started to track in the direction of a very dense section of the woods. The boys appeared to have left the main path. It became easy for Frank and Harry to see why they became lost.

The sheriff whispered to Harry, “We’re near the spot where my dogs lost the scent.”

Harry acknowledged with a nod, and hurried to keep up with Frank and Jack. Suddenly Jack lost the scent. He stood still. Ears erect as his eyes seemed to focus on everything around him. Lowering his nose close to the ground, he slowly began to backtrack. Circling an old oak

tree, he stopped, sniffed the air and went away from the first track he had followed.

Frank called to the others, "It looks like the boys tried to find their way back, but veered off in the wrong direction. Don't worry; Jack is on a hot scent now. It won't be long; we'll have those little squirts home."

Jack tracked the webelos for a short distance, and came to a blacktop road, that ran through the forest. Jack sat, and waited for the others to catch up. He then searched both sides of the road, and returned to Frank and sat down again.

"Well, it looks like the trail ends here. The boys must have caught a ride with someone. Check and find out if they've returned home yet?" Frank said to the sheriff.

Using his walkie talkie he called his dispatcher, and had her call the boy's homes. She reported back that there was no sign of either boy.

Frank walked to the center of the road, and shielded his eyes from the sun glare with his hand, "Is that a dirt road down there on the left?"

"Yes, but it doesn't go anywhere. It dead ends. It's used by squirrel hunters, and berry pickers," the sheriff answered.

"Listen fellers, I'll go with Jack down that way. Go get the cars and meet us down there."

Harry and the sheriff started through the woods, while Frank and Jack made their way along the shoulder of the road toward the dirt lane.

"It's only a quarter mile, so you can put your tongue back in your mouth," Frank said to Jack.

Jack started to move faster, causing Frank to hurry in order to keep up. Reaching the lane, Jack immediately started to track. Frank could hear the approaching cars. Twenty yards down the lane Frank knew Jack had hit on a hot scent. He waved his arms at the others trying to attract their attention as Jack left the dirt lane and headed into the dense woods.

Harry beeped the horn to let Frank know he had been seen. Frank followed Jack into the woods. Pushing his way through the thick brush, he came upon Jack. He was in a crouched position. Ears pointing straight up, and turned forward. The hair on the nape of his neck was bristled.

Poised as if to attack or defend himself from some unknown adversary. Frank stopped a few steps behind Jack. Listening intently, he didn't hear or see anything. Moving slowly to Jack's side, he wasn't real

crazy about being caught in the middle of an animal fight.

Frank commanded Jack to hold his position as he slowly moved past him, where he stepped within inches of a dreadful sight. Unable to move, or speak, he started to feel lightheaded, and held onto a nearby tree. Still fearing he might fall, he lowered himself to a kneeling position. His head was whirling.

Jack remained motionless, frozen in his defensive stance. The others now arrived at the horrific spot. The two lost boys had been bludgeoned to death. There was no need to check their vital signs. Both nude bodies were tied with strong cord. Their faces and heads had been savagely beaten. It was impossible to identify who was who.

“Frank, take Jack to the car. I’d like to keep this crime scene free of any disturbance for the investigators,” the sheriff said, helping him stand.

Harry was aware of Frank’s shocked condition. He coaxed him, “Frank, call Jack off. I’ll drive you to your truck, and follow you home. There is nothing more we can do here.”

Shaken, and weak, Frank signaled for Jack to come. Pushing through the brush, they made their way to Harry’s car parked on the dirt lane. As Harry arrived at Frank’s pickup, he asked, “You okay to drive?”

“Sure, I’ll make it. I’ll sit here a few minutes, and give Jack a chance to catch his breath.”

“Uh, sure, when you’re ready I’ll follow you two home,” Harry said, patting him on the shoulder.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Detective Angel Jones was treated for a mild concussion. After twenty-four hours of observation, she was deemed fit to be discharged from the hot Springs medical Center.

Detective Donald Smith only required minor treatment, ice was prescribed for his groin injury, and even though the head x-ray displayed a very small hairline fracture of his jaw, the on-duty physician said it wasn't serious enough to warrant wiring his jaw shut. He was released within seven hours of arriving.

Chief Rachel Temme had made contact with both detectives and informed them that in order to return to duty, both were required to meet first with the departments' psychologist, Doctor Randall Ridenour. This was standard procedure after an event of this type had occurred between two officers.

Doctor Ridenour was in his late forties, an average sized man, with short blond hair and a thin mustache to match. Adding his blue eyes to the mix gave a hint at his German heritage. His dress and mannerisms were in line with his position as the police psychologist for the Hot Springs Police Department. Professional to the core, yet, he believed in giving latitude in special circumstances, if he felt they warranted such treatment.

Sitting at his faded, plain wooden desk in a straight-backed chair, he felt secure and comfortable. Humble and even tempered, he had a knack for seeing through the lies and made-up stories of his patients, and could usually get to the truth.

No pictures adorned his plain walls, nor any plants were to be found within. His office was painted a neutral shade of white, with several tan file cabinets. One large chair, with white foam-padded cushions, sat across from his desk.

A knock at the door signaled his first appointment of the day, Angel Jones.

Opening the door, "Please come in Detective. Chief Temme has informed me of the reason for your visit. Please have a seat."

Angel had already decided it was in her best interest to watch what

she said.

“So Detective Jones, just relax, take a deep breath, and remember, I’m not here to judge you. Just to find out what we can do to correct the current situation between you and your partner. Chief Temme was very adamant when she spoke to me that you two were to remain partners, and that she feels you two would make an excellent team. That is, once you overcome your differences,” Doctor Ridenour said.

“I too wish for us to be teammates,” she said cautiously.

“Please tell me what transpired between the two of you which led up to the brawl in the hallway.”

“Well sir, I guess you could say I was being nosy, prying into his personal life, and he took exception to it. I know I come on strong sometimes, but that’s just my nature. Being a lesbian is difficult enough in our society, and I don’t put much faith in men in general, but I did try and make an effort with Donny. He’s not a bad guy, I just wanted to get to know him better. I pushed too hard, I should have backed off and waited until he was ready to talk on his terms. But in my defense, when you’re on the streets, you have to know you can count on your partner to be there for you when things get down and dirty. So I’ve been trying to feel him out, I guess, and with my looks and personality, I’m rubbing him the wrong way. But when he poked me with his finger, and then called me a cunt, I went off. No man is going to put me down. I’ve struggled too damn hard not to be a second-class citizen.” Angel’s words came from deep within her heart.

“Well Detective, are you willing to make a fresh start with Detective Smith?” He asked, feeling she was speaking true.

“Yes, I am.”

“Okay then, I’ll advise Chief Temme you’re ready to return to duty.”

“That’s it?” she asked.

“Yes, thank you for being so forthcoming. Have a nice day.”

Angel felt relieved as she left his office. She made her way home and spent some quality time with her companion, just relaxing.

As the sun announced itself as late afternoon, Doctor Ridenour’s last appointment was just coming down the corridor.

Trudging slowly, Donny paused outside the door to straighten his tie. Letting out a heavy sigh, he rapped on the office door.

Doctor Ridenour greeted him pleasantly and had him take a seat. He rattled off the same spiel he had given to Angel about speaking to the

chief and how he was aware of the incident.

“So, Detective Smith, please relax, take a moment if you need to, and just remember, I’m not here to judge, but merely to find out what we need to do in order to get you back on the job,” he said.

Donny just stared at Doctor Ridenour as he fidgeted nervously with his tie.

“Are you in any physical pain, Detective Smith? I see your jaw is still a bit swollen,” he observed.

“Yes, a little, but doing better each day,” Donny whispered.

“Please tell me in your words what occurred between you and your partner, Detective Jones, which caused your fisticuffs in the hallway,” he began.

“I’m not sure where to begin,” Donny responded.

“Well, what would you say upsets you the most about Detective Jones? Please be as specific and honest as possible.”

“You know from working here that I’m gay, and I’ve tried to conduct myself in an upstanding and totally appropriate manner. It’s hard enough to be young and get respect from the older, more experienced detectives, and it’s even harder to be gay as well. Then to have my new partner show up looking like a circus freak, it was just too much. And all the personal questions about me and my companion, and the profanity...not to mention the gay put-downs. Her lack of respect, that, in-your-face lesbian kick-ass routine, just embarrassed me to no end. I guess I just snapped. I have some issues to work out about the gay thing I suppose,” Donny said, still not speaking much over a whisper.

“The only person you have control over is yourself. Therefore, we can only change ourselves, and use restraint and tolerance when dealing with others who are different. No matter how they are different. Can you follow my line of reasoning?” Doctor Ridenour asked.

“You’re right, the fight was totally my fault, I’m going to apologize to Detective Jones, and make an effort to see things from her perspective. Being new to the force, not to mention the fact of her being a lesbian, has probably put her in a stressful situation indeed. I myself can relate to her feelings of isolation, and trying to fit in where you’re not wanted,” Donny stated sincerely.

“I think you’re ready to seek out a fresh start with your new partner. Should you need to talk further, feel free to stop by whenever you desire. My door is always open.”

Doctor Ridenour stood and leaned across the desk. Shaking hands, Donny departed. He was already running his apology through his mind, for he knew it wouldn't be an easy thing to face Angel, especially after the free-for-all they just went through.

Summoning his inner courage, he would stand tall, and face her like a man.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Doctor Lerner met Simon in the group therapy room for their late afternoon session.

“Good afternoon, I see you’re already settled in and ready to proceed,” she said, making herself comfortable next to him.

“Yeah, I’m ready, I guess,” I said.

“Simon, I’d like to try hypnosis, did I mention that to you earlier?”

“I don’t think so.”

“I’m certified in hypno-therapy, and I’d like to place you in a hypnotic state; would that be all right?” she asked.

“Sure, I guess so,” I said, figuring it couldn’t hurt any.

“First I need to inform you that your voluntary stay of thirty days has been changed to 180 days of confined supervision. I know this —“

“Wait, what do you mean voluntary? You’re saying I didn’t have to stay here and let James abuse me?” I asked, the anger starting to boil inside me.

“Simon, didn’t you read the papers you signed?” She asked, patting me on the knee.

“No, James said I could read them later. I thought I wasn’t allowed to leave; now you’re saying I have to remain here six months?” I felt like crying, like I’d been conned.

“I’m so very sorry you didn’t realize what your rights were, but Father Andy signed the committal papers, with your mother’s consent. At the end of which, if all goes well, you will be released,” she explained in an apologetic tone.

Her sympathy came across as genuine. I now wasn’t so mad, yet I wasn’t sure how to feel.

“Simon, may we still continue with the hypnosis?”

“Yeah, go ahead,” I said in a bit of a haze.

After a short period of relaxation techniques, and soft verbal queues, she achieved her goal. I was responding to her suggestions. The last

thing I remember was counting backward from ten, when I got to three, I was out.

“Simon? Can you hear my voice?”

“Yes.”

“Is the one known to you as ‘Henry’ with you?”

“I don’t...”

“Simon, stay with me...I would please like the one called Henry to come forward,” Doctor Lerner asked in earnest.

“Yes, greetings, I am Henry. Salutations, warmth and friendship to you. Just know that as I come at this time, the complex uncertainties that are in effect upon your dimension cause confusion, or the paradox of confusion. Just be aware, I will not address any questions pertaining to the one you call Simon Teel at this time.”

“Why will you not answer questions concerning Simon?” she inquired.

“I will repeat for the last and final time, no questions will be answered concerning Simon. Now then, would you be interested in hearing about one of your past lives?” Henry asked.

“Simon, I’m afraid I don’t hold with the belief in reincarnation.”

“You are speaking to me, not Simon, and you may address me as Henry. Now, it matters not whether you believe in it or not. Do you wish the information?”

“If this will help open up the lines of communication, than please continue,” she said, turning on her tape recorder to capture the difference between when Simon speaks and his so-call angel, Henry.

“In the past life I will be speaking on, that life you have already completed, you were one who performed as a doctor. Not the type of doctor you are now, but more of a medical doctor. I am placing you right in the middle of the Revolutionary War in this country. You were not Martha Washington. You new of her and some others, but your name, a common name, was Joann Wilson. Now, there were three marriages. Two of the gentlemen were killed in the war and the other one outlived you. You lost two very close together. You were close to much of the fighting at that time, which spread all over a great area. Most of your life, though, was spent in the Virginia region. Now then, May thirtieth was the date of your birth. The year was 1741. In earth years, you were going into your ninety-third birthday when you passed away. You were born in what the Indians call a wigwam. You were not an Indian. In that life, you had a very limited training as a nurse, but

were called upon to do the acts that a doctor would do in a type of emergency. You did many midwife acts and you doctored many people. There were no doctors available many of the times in the areas where you were at, and you assumed those duties. You had a lot of courage. You had a lot of instinctive skills. You liked to use, or were adept at using, a knife in the way of surgery. Your experience with a knife was a holdover from a prior life. A life prior even before the one I'm now telling you about. In that life you were a man. You were a brute, you did commit chaos and murder. You bludgeoned people to death with instruments of war. So in that life I am speaking of now, the last one, the sight of blood and gore didn't bother or annoy you. Do you follow me?" Henry asked.

"Thank you for the information, but I really want to talk about Simon," she replied in hopes of moving the conversation into a more suitable direction.

"Simon has already explained to you who I am, therefore, I must decline your request. But let me say this in parting. This is a warning to you, be very careful in the next few days concerning who you allow to enter your home. Be very alert, danger surrounds you," Henry cautioned her.

"Why are you so reluctant to answer my questions? Henry...? Henry...? Simon, can you hear me?"

"Yes," I replied, my mind seemed to be moving through a thick fog.

"Are you in contact with Henry?" she asked.

"No, I told you he stopped talking to me after I killed the old lady by mistake," I heard myself say through the fog.

Doctor Lerner tried a test question on Simon. "What did you think of the information Henry just gave me?"

"What information?" I asked.

"Were you not aware of our conversation?"

"I told you I don't hear him anymore."

"All right, I'm going to count to five, and when I reach five, you will awaken and feel refreshed and happy. Do you understand, Simon?"

"Yes."

"One...two...three...four...five. How do you feel?"

Opening my eyes, the fog was gone. I felt rested and relaxed. "I'm fine. Are we done already?" I asked, rubbing my eyes.

“Yes, we’re done for now Simon. I’ll see you tomorrow,” she stated as she packed up her briefcase.

I turned on the TV. I was feeling really great. She should hypnotize me every day, I thought.

Stopping at the nurses’ station, she called Father Andy to inform him she had spoken with Henry during her first hypno-therapy session.

“What do you mean he talked about reincarnation and past-lives? That’s bull-hockey,” he responded. “I’m not sure what you’re babbling about, but notify me when you have another session with him and I’ll sit in,” he said, hanging up, not sure who needed help more, Simon or Doctor Lerner.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Dinner consisted of a large pizza; with mushrooms, olives and extra tomato sauce. A side order of bread sticks, with garlic dipping sauce, and a one liter bottle of Coke. Angel, being the larger of the two girls, consumed the major portion. Her companion, Melody Hoppel, ate only one slice, mainly due to her petite size. Melody had long coal-black hair, which draped down over her narrow shoulders, stopping just short of her waist. Barely weighing ninety-five pounds, and reaching only four feet nine inches, she appeared from a distance to be a small child.

Yet, peer into her ocean-blue eyes, and one could tell she had experienced life to its fullest, even for a girl of only twenty-two. Her silky, pale-white skin gave the look of a captivating ghoul. No make-up, just simple beauty and ruby-red lipstick graced her thin, moist lips. Melody was wearing only a black thong, which matched her black nail polish decorating her fingers and toenails.

They were sitting Indian-style on the floor, facing each other..., separated only by the pizza box. Several candles flickered and smoked as they slowly burned. Unpacked boxes were stacked everywhere from their recent move, yet no furniture had been delivered; only an old queen-sized mattress lay on the bedroom floor.

Bare walls seemed to grow and shrink, like ocean tides, with the flickering movements of the candlelight. As shadows moved across Melody's alabaster skin, Angel finished the last slice of pizza, than washed it down with five big gulps of Coke, straight from the liter bottle. The resulting belch almost extinguished one of the nearer candles, which evoked a giggle from her lover. It was a shy, little girl kind of giggle. Melody looked into her deep, penetrating eyes, the full view of her powerful, striking companion.

Angel was clad only in a red bra and her black-leather motorcycle boots. Melody slid the pizza box over as she moved in to straddle Angel's lap, trying to wrap her tiny legs around her waist.

Grabbing her young concubine, Angel exposed her breasts, as she pushed her large firm nipples against Melody's small erect nipples. Holding her under her arms, Angel easily manipulated her small frame.

Merging into one, Melody's thin lips parted as her lover's tongue

invaded her inner being. She moaned, and then whimpered like a frightened puppy as Angel slid her hand between her thighs, pushing her thong aside. She advanced her long, thick middle finger into her moist vagina. She began rocking back and forth in a slow rhythm, as Angel increased her thrusting. Claspng her arms tightly around Angel's neck, she trembled with anticipation, crying out as she climaxed.

Angel stopped thrusting, just a slight twitch of her thick finger would spark another wave of quivering orgasms. Melody was completely spent and crumpled against Angel, breathing heavy as the tears of delight streaked down her flushed cheeks. She pulled her weak head up and whispered in her lover's ear, "I love you."

"I love you too, baby," Angel whispered back, as she carried her into the bedroom and laid her down and cradled Melody in her loving embrace. They drifted off to sleep, feeling a deep sense of love and total commitment only two women could share.

Less than an hour had passed when Melody opened her eyes. She felt her mate's fingertip brush across her lips. Slightly turning her head, she smiled as their eyes met. "You're so beautiful," she said rolling over to face Angel. "I know what you need," she said, as a grin formed on her glowing face.

"And what might that be?" Angel said, playing coy.

She got up, and returned with a large green, two-headed dildo, and a small jar of petroleum-jelly. Kneeling down, she parted Angel's legs. "Just lie back and relax."

Angel complied with her request willingly, for she knew what came next. Unlike Melody, she liked it a bit hardcore and kinky.

Melody lowered her face between her legs and began her lover's sexual journey with a little cunnilingus. Angel's back arched slightly as she fantasized about being subdued and ravaged by six nasty whores, their sweaty hands running all over her, penetrating her every orifice, and her helpless to fend them off. As her fantasy played out in her mind, Melody applied some jelly to the dildo and inserted it deep into Angel's eager anus.

Angel cried out, "Fuck me hard, you bitch!"

Melody now greased up her tiny fist and drove it into her lover's pussy, plunging deeper and deeper with each assault, until her small fist and forearm could forge no further. She could feel her companion's vaginal walls starting to constrict, which foretold of her impending explosion, as she continued her thrusting motion.

Reaching up with her free hand, she took hold of as much pubic hair as possible, and jerked it hard. Angel's knees slapped together, squirting her juices in pulsating bursts all over Melody's firm, little breasts. She could no longer move her arm due to the powerful waves of Angel's orgasms.

As Angel slowly released her death-hold on her lover's arm, Melody began to withdraw her fist. Once free she moved closer to be by her side. Angel embraced her as sweat ran down between her breasts.

"Thanks, I needed that," she sighed softly.

"You're welcome my love," Melody said through a tender smile. The girls lay together, cuddling for a short time, both very content that they had found their true love.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Virginia was on the phone with Ann, when Frank came in the back door. "He just came in, I'll call you back later," she said hanging up. She wondered where he went, as she finally located him in the bedroom. "Are you going to give Jack his bath?"

"Maybe later, I want to be alone for now, okay?" he said in a low voice.

She quietly stepped from the bedroom, and closed the door behind her. Sitting in her recliner, she examined the sweater she had started to knit. Unsatisfied with it, she pulled the yarn to unravel it, and wound it into a ball. Tossing the ball of yarn into her sewing basket, she closed her eyes and tried to relax.

Later, Frank regained his composure, and related in detail to his faithful wife the horror they had found, and how proud he was of Jack.

"I'll give Jack his bath now." He said.

"I've bathed the beast already," she said. "Now it's your turn...you want lavender or lilac bubble bath?"

"Maybe a little of each," he said as he made his way to the bathroom.

Three days after the webelos were discovered the sheriff paid the Turner's a visit. As he arrived at the house Jack streaked across the yard to greet him. Jumping from the car he clapped his hands together, "Hi ya Jack, you look rested. Where's that ugly old man who thinks he's the boss around here?" The sheriff continued to rub and pat the excited animal.

Frank had been gathering eggs when he heard the commotion. He stuck his head out of the chicken coop, "Over here, you over-the-hill peace officer!" he shouted.

Sitting down the basket of eggs the two old timers shook hands.

"It's a real shame about the other day. I'm not used to seeing things like that. It was a real shocker. I've seen bad things on TV, but it doesn't compare with real life," Frank said. He motioned for the sheriff to come sit with him on the porch.

The sheriff noticed some of the streamers of toilet paper hanging

from some of the upper tree branches. "You ever find out who tepeed your place?"

"No, not yet, but sooner or later I will."

Crossing his legs the sheriff said, "The investigators have finished at the crime scene. They didn't find much evidence, but what they did get was important. You and Jack don't mind, I'd like for you two to go nose around once more. See if anything else turns up."

"Sure, what you doin' right now?" Frank asked.

"Well, not much of nothing. Let's go."

The sheriff parked on the dirt lane as Frank and Jack pulled up behind him.

"When are you going to get the damage on the front of your truck repaired? My nephew in town has a repair shop. I'll talk to him; he can repair it like new."

"I don't want it repaired. That damage gives the truck character. There isn't another truck in the state like this one," Frank boasted.

"Not on the road there isn't, but the junkyard is full of'em," he said, grinning.

Frank held a tight grip on Jack's leash as they started through the woods. Jack suddenly jumped as a wild rabbit scurried from its hiding place, and disappeared into the dense brush.

"Easy old boy, I know you're keyed up. I'll turn you loose soon," Frank said, calming him down.

As they neared the site, Frank let Jack sniff around then unsnapped the leash. Jack with his nose to the ground started to track. Covering the crime scene, the dirt lane and back again, Jack circled around and sat next to Frank.

"Well, it appears that's the end of that track," Frank patted Jack's head and rubbed his belly.

Jack suddenly stood and veered off into the dense forest.

"Where's he going? Is it that rabbit again?" The sheriff asked.

"What'd you think he's doing, he's on a hot track!" Frank yelled as he stood and ran after Jack.

Jack pushed his way through the dense growth for several hundred yards. Then stopped and sat down.

The Sheriff and Frank struggled through the woods, and finally

reached the spot where Jack was sitting. They stopped and stared at the ground in front of them. It was easy to see a horror had taken place. The brush had been flattened, and mashed to the ground. Dried blood splatters were everywhere.

"I guess you know what this means. One of the boy's made a run for it. He was caught here, and killed here I'd say. Then the murderer carried him back to where they were both found. You've got two crime scenes," Frank offered.

The men stood in silence, and closely studied the area. The Sheriff then had an idea as he asked Frank what he thought.

"Tell me, if only the killer and the boy were here, could Jack ignore the scent of the little boy, and track the scent of whoever else was here?"

"Why, I never thought of that. I'll give him some command signals and see if he can track the other scent." Frank set Jack to track, then stopped him saying 'No' several times. Jack immediately started to circle a wider area. With his tail low to the ground and swinging from side to side as he pursued the new scent. He backtracked to the original site, then turned into a heavy growth of honeysuckle, and stopped. With a low growl he sat.

"He's found something," Frank yelled.

The two men forced their way through to where Jack sat. Next to him they discovered a bloody tack hammer. The Sheriff bagged the evidence. As they reached their vehicles, the Sheriff dispatched his crime scene investigators to come and go over the new area the murder weapon was found. Frank was filled with excitement as he related the details to Virginia. She sat on the back steps, and listened, while he filled her in.

Later, after the Turners settle into bed, Frank raised up on his elbow, "I read about a wonder chair in my magazine. It swivels, reclines, stands you up, and sits you down. It has one of those built-in vibrator's, and it only costs..."

"Stop right there. You are not getting some over-priced fancy chair, which you'll break within a week. And if you think I'm gonna sit around here listening to you harp about what a piece of junk it is, you're sadly mistaken." She said sternly.

"But..."

"Forget it!" She raised her voice to make her point. "Oh, and by the way, I forgot to tell you. Some man came by to see you when you were

out with the sheriff. He wants to check the house for termites. Said something about the basement foundation. He'll be here in the morning." Virginia added.

Frank rolled over on his side. "Baloney, I wanted to sleep late in the morning," he mumbled.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Arriving on the fifth floor, Doctor Lerner unlocked the elevator door. Exiting, she could hear country music coming from the direction of the nurses' station. James was in his usual spot, reading.

"James, may I have a moment of your time?" She began the conversation as she entered.

"What's up, Doc?" His voice was a bit on edge.

"James, you know if it can be proven that you assaulted Simon, you could be sent to jail, do you understand that?" She spoke with authority.

"Hey, don't threaten me, you have no idea what I'm capable of doing to you," he said standing up to confront her.

"Are you threatening me?" She stood her ground.

"You think anybody would really care if some old fat black bitch was found floatin' face down in the river?" James said staring down at her.

"How dare you! You just lost your job! You hear me boy! You're fired!" she shouted, the emotion high in her throat. Tears began to fill her eyes.

"You don't have the authority to fire me, I only take orders from Father Andy!" he yelled back.

"Mark my words, you racist little bigot, you're terminated, just as soon as I speak to Father Andy." She wheeled around and stormed off toward the elevator.

"Fuck you! You stupid bitch!" James hollered as he flipped her the finger.

As she neared the elevator she ran into Nora who was just coming out.

"Doctor Lerner, is everything all right?" Nora asked.

Doctor Lerner entered the elevator without saying a word. Descending, the tears were streaming down her cheeks, but she took in a deep breath and regained control over her emotional state. Arriving at her office, she immediately telephoned Father Andy.

“Hello.”

Recognizing his voice she launched into her complaint. “James Butler just threatened my life, and I want him fired immediately!” She demanded.

“Now, now, calm down Linda, and tell me what happened.” Father Andy tried to sound sympathetic.

“I was discussing Simon’s allegations of rape, when he threatened to kill me. Said he would dump my lifeless body in the river.”

Father Andy could hear the fear in her trebling voice. “Well, for now, I want you to stay away from James. I’ll deal with this,” he said confidently.

“No! I want him fired right now!” she shouted into the phone.

“Now Linda, I have to investigate this properly, or there could be a lawsuit.”

“You don’t know how upset I feel, I’ll go to the police if I must. I want—”

“You’re a professional, now get control of yourself, Doctor Lerner. I said I’d check into this matter.” Father Andy slammed the phone down.

She slammed her phone down, struggling to remain in control. Her hands trebled with anger. In order to get a better handle on the situation, she decided to go home and relax. If he didn’t take some type of action, she told herself, then she would be forced to do so.

Later that day, Doctor Lerner returned to the hospital for Simon’s session. She stopped by Father Andy’s office before going up to the fifth floor.

As she entered, Nora smiled, “Hello Doctor Lerner.”

“Is he in his office?”

“He’s on the phone right now, but he said if you came by, that he’d meet you up in the therapy room.” Nora explained.

“That suits me just fine. Ah, by the way, do you know if he spoke with James Butler today?” She inquired.

“I don’t know, is there a problem?” Nora asked, already aware of what had happened earlier.

“No, I was just wondering, thank you.” She proceeded to the unit.

Moving down the corridor, James came into her view. As they crossed, neither spoke, nor made eye contact. Doctor Lerner found

Simon watching an old rerun of Gunsmoke on the television.

I turned the TV off as Doctor Lerner sat down on the couch.

"Is everything going okay, Simon?"

"Sure."

"Father Andy will be joining us in a few minutes. Is that all right?" she asked in her motherly voice.

"Sure," I said, glad to see her. When she was around, James left me alone, so I was happy.

"Before he arrives, I'd like to ask, has James given you any more trouble?"

"No, he didn't even stay in my room for my last shower. I was kind of surprised," I told her, smiling.

"That's good, I don't think you'll have any more problems with him," she said doing her patting-on-the-knee routine.

I heard the elevator doors open, then the faint sound of two voices whispering softly. Doctor Lerner must have heard them too. She turned her head slightly, pretending not to notice, yet straining to hear what their conversation might be. I too strained, but could not make out anything.

The whispering ended as the shuffling of old, worn shoes approached. Father Andy entered. He looked a bit haggard, and his sad, lifeless eyes hid some unspeakable pain. Something from his past I guessed. Who knows what memories haunt an old, lonely man.

"How are you doing today, young man?" Father Andy asked, now slumping down onto the other couch. He let out a pitiful sigh as his pale eyes focused on me. Crossing his left leg over his right, he folded his hands and placed them in his lap.

"I'm feeling okay." I didn't care for Father Andy much. Something about him didn't seem right; his words had a false ring to them.

"Doctor Lerner, are we ready to begin?" he asked.

"Yes," she said without further comment.

I was once again placed in a hypnotic state by Doctor Lerner, while she was being carefully scrutinized by Father Andy.

"Simon, can you hear my voice clearly?" she asked.

"Yes," I said as my mind entered the foggy realm. It seemed I was

drifting through space, feeling very peaceful.

“Henry, this is Doctor Lerner, will you come forth, and speak with Doctor Crawford and myself?”

“Greetings and friendship to all present here. Yes, I will speak with you,” Henry replied.

Father Andy glanced over at Doctor Lerner; his gaze told her he didn’t believe what he was hearing. “How do we know you are Simon’s guardian angel, and not simply his subconscious mind speaking to us?” Father Andy’s tone was sarcastic, to say the least.

“Question me on things Simon would not know,” Henry replied.

Father Andy stroked his chin, pondering for a moment the challenge that had been put forth by Henry. “If you’re a true angel of heaven, explain our divine Lord’s view concerning abortion.”

“For your limited understanding, let me say, at no point in time is the mother violating the laws of God by undergoing an abortion. And, that is to say, at no point in time is the physician violating the laws of God by performing an abortion. Remember, God’s laws have nothing to do with mankind’s laws. God’s laws are eternal; they remain constant and do not change. Mankind’s laws are ever-changing, one day for, the next against. Let me further say for your limited understanding, God does not recognize any religion upon the earth. None whatsoever. God is not Hindu, Catholic, Baptist, Muslim, Buddhist, or Jewish. These and all other religions are creations of mankind, not of God. Do you—“

Father Andy jumped to his feet. “This is blasphemy!” he roared.

“Now, please don’t lose your temper, Father Andy,” she pleaded.

“I’ve heard enough! This session is over!” he screeched.

“Please remain...”

“Shut it down, now!” he demanded as he stormed out.

The fog cleared from my mind as I was summoned from my dreamy adventure. As I opened my eyes, I was now aware of only Doctor Lerner being present in the room.

“How do you feel Simon?”

“Pretty good. Where’d the priest go?” I asked.

“He had to return to his office for an important phone call. Nothing for you to concern yourself with,” she said lying.

“Are we done?”

“Yes, Simon, you may relax or get a snack if you wish,” she said packing up her stuff.

Once down on the first floor, she headed for Father Andy’s office. Storming through the outer office door, she loomed in on Nora. “Is he in there?” Doctor Lerner demanded.

Nora was taken by surprise at her abrupt entry. “Wha...he...” she stammered.

Doctor Lerner blew on past Nora, bursting through his office door.

Startled, as he looked up from his desk, he was taken aback by her bold entrance. “How dare you barge into my personal sanctuary,” he growled, as he regained his composure. Now he was standing to meet her challenge.

Nora came in behind Doctor Lerner. “I’m sorry Father, she ran right...”

“That’s quite all right, Nora, return to your duties. I’ll deal with Doctor Lerner,” he said waving her out.

Nora closed the door behind her, yet stayed close to eavesdrop on their conversation.

“Well, speak your piece, I don’t have all day,” he said, sitting down.

“First, I am a professional, but at this point, I’m not sure what you are, sir. And as far as the voice of Henry that Simon—“

“Don’t mention that ‘Henry’ voice to me. Simon has a God-complex and I am ordering Thorazine and electroconvulsive therapy to begin today!” He shouted.

“What are you talking about? Simon doesn’t need Thorazine, or shock treatment!” she shouted back.

“You better calm down right now, Doctor Lerner!” He said shaking his boney finger at her. The authority was strong in his voice.

“Don’t you dare point that hypocritical finger at me! You’ve lost your mind!”

“Get out of my office!” Father Andy had reached his limit with her.

“I’m calling the hospital board and reporting—“

“That’s enough! You are hereby suspended for two weeks without pay! Now get out!” he stood, pointing toward the door.

“Suspended?! We’ll see who gets suspended!” she yelled as she stormed out.

Nora barely moved from the door when it burst open. She heard everything that had transpired between the two. She returned to her desk and pretended not to know what had happened.

Father Andy took out a form and began to scribble out his diagnosis of Simon Teel:

Patient #222-77 Simon Teel suffers from a God-complex associated with psychotic episodes. His observed tendencies are: 1. Deviant sexual behavior 2. Drug/Alcohol abuse 3. Cruelty to animals/human beings 4. Tendency toward arson 5. Neurological impairment 6. Memory loss/blackouts 7. Anger management issues 8. Obsessive sexual thoughts 9. Paranoiac episodes 10. Violent outbursts 11. Exhibits amoral/antisocial behavior 12. Habitual liar.

Compulsive tendencies are: 1. Excessive masturbation 2. Voyeurism 3. Hallucinations coupled with hearing demonic voice (i.e., Henry).

Patient orders: Placed on anti-psychotic (Thorazine) and daily electroconvulsive regimen, coupled with therapy sessions in a controlled, locked ward confinement, pending further evaluation.

Signed

DR. Andrew Crawford

Dir. of Psych Services

Nora typed up the special orders, and personally hand-delivered a copy to James Butler, up on the fifth floor. She took a little delight in gossiping about what she heard through the office door. James was indeed very interested in their conversation.

Driving home, Doctor Lerner realized she needed to calm down and get a handle on things. She headed for the place where she knew she would find emotional comfort.

"Welcome to Burger King, may I take your order?" the young female voice asked from the speaker.

"I would like two double Whoppers with everything, and extra cheese. Two large fries and one slice of your Dutch-apple pie."

"Anything to drink with that?" the voice squawked from the speaker.

“Yes, a large Diet Pepsi.”

Paying and receiving her food, she parked in the busy lot. She was a little self-conscious when it came to eating in public, due to her plus-size. Finishing her meal in record time, her emotions were now satisfied. Now she planned her next move. She would go home and call Bishop Saltory, who was head of the hospital board.

Arriving home, she dashed for the phone; not wanting to lose her momentum in doing what she felt was justified.

Bishop Luciano Angelo Saltory was an elderly man of seventy-three, a firm believer in the Catholic Church and its doctrines. Short, just barely five feet tall and thin build; he was of Italian descent. He was almost completely bald, except for some patches of gray around his ears, and he did sport a thin gray mustache.

The bishop wore all the official robes of his traditional position, and was extremely proud of his many years of faithful service to his Holiness, the Pope. A very soft-spoken man; nevertheless, he had learned over the years to come directly to the point when required to do so. Father Crawford and Bishop Saltory had been friends for over twenty-five years.

As the phone began to ring, Doctor Lerner eased back into her sofa.

“Operator, how may I direct your call?” the elderly female voice asked.

“Yes, this is Doctor Lerner; I’d like to speak with Bishop Saltory please.”

“One moment please.”

Doctor Lerner heard several tones, then a ringing sound.

“Yes?” the male voice answered.

“This is Doctor Linda Lerner; may I please speak with Bishop Saltory?”

“I am he, have we spoken before?” His voice sounded like that of an old grandfather, pleasant and gentle.

“I don’t believe we have, I’m calling concerning a problem with Father Crawford,” she began.

“Oh, yes, he telephoned just a few minutes ago, and I am aware of the situation, Doctor Lerner.” His voice filled with sadness.

“Let me explain...”

“I am sorry, but after speaking with my old friend, I feel it was

within his power to suspend you, Doctor Lerner. Now you must use this time wisely, to decide if you truly wish to help us at the hospital, or if maybe it is time you resigned and concentrated on your private practice.”

“I don’t think you know all the facts, sir,” she said in an effort to explain what had actually happened.

“I am sorry, Father Andrew’s decision in this matter stands. Please have a nice day. Goodbye.”

Doctor Lerner couldn’t believe he sided with Father Andy. The only explanation she felt was that he must have lied to the Bishop.

The stress was mounting; her left eyelid began to twitch. She picked up the TV remote and decided to relax and let the tube wash over her. Tomorrow she would tackle this daunting dilemma, when she was rested and refreshed.

James Butler stopped at the entrance to the group therapy room. “Hey, kid!” He shouted to be heard over the television.

“Yes?” I said puzzled by what a weird day it had been so far. He immediately made me feel uneasy.

“Come with me,” he ordered as he turned.

I followed, afraid to ask what was up. Coming off the long hall, we entered the short hall, and now stood in front of the steel door. Unlocking it, he pushed the door open. I froze. I didn’t want to enter, remembering his earlier threat.

James grabbed me by the wrist and yanked me into the room. Closing the door, he locked it with a key, which he returned to his pants pocket.

The room contained a steel-framed bed with black padding on top. It was bolted to the floor, and had leather restraints built into it. There was a small machine located at the head of the bed, with dials and small knobs, with a large meter divided by yellow and red zones.

There was a set of what looked to be headphones attached to it. The room was empty, except for the bed and device. The walls were painted a faded pale white, and the floor was painted a dull gray.

“I’ve been given instructions to administer ECT followed by drug therapy,” James said.

“Please, can I see Doctor Lerner?” I started to plead.

“Doctor Lerner is no longer your doctor. Father Andy has taken over your case. He ordered this treatment.”

I felt sick, shaky all over as my skin turned ash-white.

“Take your clothes off,” James demanded.

“Why must I remove—“

James slapped me across the face so hard I fell back into the wall.

“Take your fuckin’ clothes off, now!” he yelled.

Frightened, I did as I was told. Standing naked before him, I trembled with fear.

“I tell you what, Simon, you suck my dick, and I’ll let you go back to your room. I’ll simply write that you had your treatment, how’s that sound?” His tone was now flexible.

“I don’t think—“

“It’s either that, or I’m gonna fuck you in the ass again. And then I’ll strap you down and fry your brains out. So, what’s it gonna be?” he snapped.

Getting my brains fried didn’t sound like fun. I forced myself to move closer to James and got down on my knees.

“Good decision,” he said, unzipping his pants. Pulling out his semi-hard penis, he wiggled it in front of my face. James grabbed the back of my head and pulled me in. I opened my mouth as he pushed his penis in. As he started to thrust in and out, it became rock hard. Several times I gagged, yet he kept at it.

Thank God, it wasn’t long before he ejaculated. I spit his cum on the floor and wiped my lips with my forearm. James put his dick back in and zipped up. I stood. My knees hurt from the hard floor surface. I gathered my clothes up.

“Put those down. Did you really think I’d let you off, shithhead?” He started unbuckling the restraints that were attached to the bed.

I was almost in shock. How stupid and naïve I felt. “Please, I did what—“

James grabbed me by the throat with his right hand. “Lay down on that bed, or I’ll hurt you fuckin’ bad!”

Letting go of my neck, he pointed toward the bed. The clod plastic cover made me wince as my bare ass made contact first. I stretched out as my legs and back came to rest on the bed. James set to work, placing

my right wrist in the restraint and securing it. Then, he did the same to my left, followed by my ankles. Several long leather restraints were secured over my chest, waist and above my knees.

“Open your mouth,” James ordered, then inserted what looked like a dog collar with an oversized football player’s mouthpiece attached to it, which he secured behind my neck. A wool-padded leather restraint was placed over my face, which kept me from raising, or turning my head. Part of the restraint crossed over between my lips and nose, and the other part crossed over my forehead. He attached something to my temples.

Laying there naked, strapped down, I could hear James starting up the odd device above my head. Soft, buzzing sounds emanated from the device, and then I could feel the bed pulsating with strange vibrations as he turned the dial up and down. I began to sweat, and started to tremble all over as the fear gripped me. I panicked, and struggled against the restraints.

“Before I fry your brains, would you like to know why I’m doing this?” His voice was low, almost a demented whisper.

All I could do was to stare up at his face, yet, I did want to know why he was hell-bent on torturing me.

“You remember a boy named Sonny? You should, you took him to your apartment when he ran away from that fuckin’ group home you worked at. Now do you remember you called him Sonny-the-fag!” he yelled, his face now only inches from mine.

I did remember now, the awful things I had done to that poor kid. The guilt and shame came forth as I started to cry.

“He was my little brother, and I know what you did to him. Now you’re gonna suffer for his death!”

The shock hit home as I was unaware of Sonny’s death. The look in my eyes told all.

“What? You didn’t know he committed suicide? He kept a diary, and I read all about the horrible things you did to him. You drove him to suicide! He jumped into the path of a semi truck on the interstate; it was going eighty miles an hour when it struck him. I almost couldn’t identify his body. It made me sick, and for the next six months, you’re gonna wish you were dead. And I’m gonna grant that wish, because you’re not leavin’ here alive! You hear me!” He was consumed with sheer rage.

James turned the dial, my body went stiff, and then the muscle

spasms erupted. Voltage ripped through my brain, and pain gripped me. I could faintly hear James' laughter as the pain was replaced by unconsciousness. Something forced me to open my eyes; it was James, slapping my cheek.

"So, you're back. One little jolt and you piss all over yourself."

My body ached, and the pain was tremendous as my muscles twitched uncontrollably. My head was pounding in waves.

"Let's turn up the juice a little. Remember, you reap what you sow, you motherfucker," he said as he twisted the knob.

My abdomen pulled tight, muscle spasms forced me to strain against the leather restraints. Blackness once again came for me.

I finally came around. My head restraint was off, and so was my mouth gag. My head was turned to one side, and I could taste and smell my own vomit as my senses returned.

That last zap must have been pretty overwhelming. The room seemed blurry and I was now aware of my throbbing head. I slowly scanned what little I could see of the room. James now came into view; he was standing on the other side of me.

"Still alive, what a pity," he said with a short laugh. He was holding something to my left arm, yet I couldn't focus enough to figure out what it was.

"Well, shithead, time for your Thorazine injection. This double-dose should fuck you up nicely."

A sharp pain stabbed into my arm. I could feel the burning liquid moving up my arm, then spreading over my chest until it reached my heart, then a sheer moment of panic followed by nothingness.

When I finally woke, I was in my room, all cleaned up and wearing pajamas and neatly tucked into bed, with fresh, clean sheets. I heard footsteps coming down the corridor, and fear welled up inside me. What did that maniac James have in store for me now? That sick feeling appeared in my stomach as the door crept open. To my tearful surprise it was Leroy Washington.

"So, you awake now. You been out for quite a spell," he said, checking my vital signs.

I burst into heavy sobbing, as the fear left me. I sat up and wrapped my arms around him, overjoyed at his protective presence,

He enveloped me in his arms and softly whispered, "You safe now boy, can't no evil touch you now."

"Where's James?" I asked as I regained control of my emotional state.

"Butler went off duty long time ago. I found you in the shock room, you surely were a sight. I cleaned you up and put you to bed." He said.

"Thank you Roy." My arms were shaking, too weak to hold myself up any longer. I let go and lay back down.

"That's right, you rest now. Later, I'll fetch you somethin' to eat."

Pulling the sheet up around my shoulders, he then slowly stroked my hair. His soothing touch put me at ease as I drifted off to a peaceful sleep. "You safe now, boy, let Roy watch over you."

I felt something tapping my shoulder. Opening my eyes, Father Andy was standing over me. "It's time to get up, Simon."

I sat up and swung my feet onto the cold floor. "Where's Roy?"

"He went off duty," Father Andy replied.

"Where's James?" I was almost afraid to ask.

"I'm sorry; he's no longer with us, Simon. I'll be filling in until the rest of the staff returns. I've put some fresh towels in the bathroom. After you shower, come have some breakfast," he said, heading out the door.

Finally, they fired that bastard, I thought. No more torture bullshit from him. I found the food tray on the table as he said. Cereal, with two percent milk, one orange, two slices of toast and a bowl of oatmeal. I devoured everything. I was starved.

Finishing, I wandered over to the group therapy room to play with the TV. Father Andy came in a few minutes later and sat down where Doctor Lerner usually sat.

"How do you feel, Simon?" he asked as he picked up a tablet and ink pen.

Turning off the television, I faced him. "I feel tired, but okay."

"Simon, tell me, what do you remember from your ECT therapy?" he began.

I paused for a moment, thinking hard, my mind seemed a blur. "I don't really remember much, just bits and pieces."

"Do you still feel James Butler abused you?" Father Andy inquired.

"I'm pretty sure...I think...maybe he...well, I don't know..." I was all mixed up from the shock and drugs James had given me.

"So, you now have doubts as to whether anything actually occurred? Maybe your subconscious mind created the attack because you were upset at having to be here in the first place. You disliked James, so you targeted him. Do you think that's possible, Simon?"

"I guess it's possible," I answered, not sure what to believe anymore.

"How do you feel toward James Butler, now that he's dead?" Father Andy continued prodding.

"Dead?" I was surprised, and now a little glad.

"Yes, he was murdered, and the police are investigating."

"I'm not sure how I feel about him," I said lying. I was glad he was dead.

"Okay then, it's time for your ECT treatment, please come with me, Simon."

Standing, he led me down to the short hall and through the steel door. I wasn't sure why, but I became very afraid of that room, not able to recall what had happened the last time I was in there. I momentarily froze in the doorway.

"Simon? Hey! Simon!" he shouted.

"Sorry, sir," I mumbled as I proceeded on in. I began to take my clothes off, not sure why, but it seemed the thing to do somehow.

"What are you doing?" he asked as a puzzled look came over his gruff face.

"Sorry, I'm not sure what to do."

"Just lie down on the bed, please, and put this rubber mouthpiece in your mouth, so you don't bite your tongue."

He placed the headset on my temples. No leather restraints were used. I was sure James used restraints on me; maybe my subconscious mind was playing tricks on me.

"Just relax and let the energy do its work, Simon."

Electricity passed through my skull, but not like before. No pain, no muscle spasms, just a numb feeling, then came the darkness.

Within a short time, a lone voice pierced the darkness, my eyes opened, adjusting to the light. The voice grew clearer. "Simon, I need for you to sit up. I'm going to stand you up and pivot you into the wheelchair. Do you hear me?" Father Andy asked.

Not sure what my reply was, I was helped up, turned, and put down again. My feet were placed on the shoe pads, and my arms were folded into my lap. Wheeling me to my room, he helped me into bed. Disappearing for a moment, he returned with a syringe, swabbed my left arm with alcohol, than I felt a sharp pain as he inserted the needle. I felt the burning drug as he pushed the plunger. Once again, darkness.

Father Andy placed a small pillow under my head, pulled the sheet up over me and left. I would sleep like a zombie, oblivious to the fact that my mind was losing all memory of the tortures I had endured at the hands of James Butler.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

“Rise and shine sleepy head. It’s time to gather the eggs, pull the loose fuzz from the bunnies, and turn your blue nose cousin out to pasture. And don’t forget the termite man will be here,” Virginia sang.

Frank didn’t open his eyes. He managed to answer her with, “Today would be a good day for you to drive your car to the river, and don’t stop until your hat floats.”

“My mother warned me you’d never amount to a hill of beans, and my mother was never wrong,” she laughed.

Frank tossed his cover off, and sat on the edge of the bed. “I can’t decide if we should get twin beds, or not. I could sleep in the basement, or I could sleep with old Blue in the barn. Either way I’d get more sleep.”

“I heard that. How burnt do you want your toast?”

Frank now half awake, stumbled his way to the kitchen, and sat at the table. After rubbing his eyes, he picked up a piece of still warm toast from the serving dish. “Honey, congratulations, you got a third degree burn on my toast, and this is by far the greatest cup of lukewarm coffee I’ve ever had,” he grumbled.

“Oh Frank, you’re so romantic. I hope this morning never ends,” she said faking a blush.

Virginia removed the cold coffee, and burnt toast. She lightly tickled his ear in a playful manner.

Now fully awake, and in a better mood, he hunched his shoulders, and said, “I must have ticks on me from the woods. I can feel them crawling on my ear.”

“After we eat, I’ll use Jack’s flea and tick powder to dust your head and ears,” she laughed.

He smiled, as she served him his breakfast of hot coffee, and lightly toasted whole wheat bread, with lots of strawberry jam. She then placed her breakfast on the table, and sat to enjoy her bagel and cream cheese.

“Please pass the cream dear,” she said sweetly.

Frank half-heartedly scooted the cream pitcher a few inches as he said, "Now you're gonna ruin a good cup of coffee. Pouring cream in it should be illegal."

The phone ringing in the living room attracted her attention. She chatted for several minutes, and returned to the kitchen, where Frank was rinsing his cup and plate.

"That was Ann. She and Harry are coming over this weekend for an indoor picnic. Ann said the gnats flying around her face made her dizzy, and gave her a headache the last time we ate outside. We'll eat at the kitchen table. You and Harry can find a spot in front of the television set, and tell lies to one another all afternoon."

Frank put on his white ball cap, with red USA letters on the front. He adjusted it so the bill would shade his eyes. "I've never heard of an indoor picnic," he said stepping out the back door.

Jack spotted the old timer and dashed to his side, as they began their daily routine. They hadn't got very far when Jack's ears perked straight up. His eyes held fast on the car he didn't recognize. Tensing up, a soft growl started to build in his throat.

"Easy Jack, I think it's just the termite guy. Come on, let's go introduce ourselves."

The visitor stopped his older model pickup and stepped out. He was dressed in blue jeans, and a white tee shirt. Smiling and waving to Frank he said, "Good morning, Mr. Turner, I'm Bill Morgan. I spoke with your lovely wife yesterday about an inspection for termite damage. With your location so close to the forest, it makes you vulnerable for termite infestation."

Jack moved close to Frank's leg, and Frank could feel the pressure of Jack's body against his leg. Jack began to growl again.

"Here, what's the matter with you? Calm down," Frank commanded.

Bill Morgan attempted to ignore Jack, "Say, aren't you the fella with the dog that helped the authorities with the Boy Scout murders?" he asked.

Frank acknowledged that he was, and held a firm grip on Jack's collar, and ordered him again to sit as Jack bared his teeth.

"I'll get my equipment from the truck, and we can get started in the basement. It'd be best if the dog stayed outside during the inspection. He doesn't seem to like me," Morgan said.

"I've noticed that. It's probably the termite spray he smells on your

clothes,” Frank noted.

Without warning Jack lunged. Knocking him to the ground, he repeatedly bit, and ripped at the arms, legs, and face of Bill Morgan, who fought wildly to ward off Jack’s attack.

Stunned at first, Frank regained his senses, and fought to grab Jack’s collar while shouting commands for Jack to stop, but he continued his relentless assault. Jack now had the man face down on the ground, and was shaking him like a rag doll.

Virginia had been watching from the house, and was stunned at what was taking place. She ran to the back door, and removed Frank’s shotgun that was hanging over the door. Rushing outside she pointed the gun upward and fired a blast into the air. The discharge startled Jack and he reeled away from the sound. Frank seized the moment to grab Jack’s collar to control him. Jack lunged toward the bleeding man on the ground, and almost pulled Frank off his feet. Holding tight, he restrained Jack, dragging him to his kennel and locking him in.

Virginia gasped as she surveyed Bill Morgan’s wounds. She told Frank to stay with him as she then went into the house to phone for an ambulance. She returned with a first aid kit. Frank was exhausted from wrestling Jack into the kennel. Laying down on his back, he gasped for air.

It seemed like forever waiting for the ambulance to arrive. The paramedics relieved Virginia, and started treatment. Frank pulled himself to a standing position, and held on to the kennel gate. He motioned to Virginia for help. Rushing to his side with a lawn chair, she helped him sit.

“What’s wrong? Are you all right?” she asked in a frantic state.

“I think it’s a heart attack. I can’t breath. I’ve got pain in my arm and chest,” Frank choked and coughed out the words.

Virginia yelled to the paramedics for help. A female paramedic laid Frank on the grass, as she checked his vital signs. “He’s hyperventilating. Do you have a paper bag or sack he can breathe into?” she asked Virginia.

“Yes,” she said heading into the house.

The Sheriff pulled to the side of the road as the ambulance left the driveway. The driver slowed, and called to him as they passed, “This guy’s chewed up real bad, but no vital injuries. He’ll be okay.” The ambulance siren then blared as it zoomed for the hospital.

Sheriff Sparks located Frank and Virginia in the back yard. Frank was

breathing into a paper sack, while she stood next to him, rubbing his shoulders. The sheriff noticed Jack was locked in the kennel.

“Is Frank going to be okay?” he asked.

“Yes, he’ll be fine as soon as he calms down. He’s improved much already,” she answered.

“It might be a good idea to put Frank to bed, and be sure to keep Jack confined until we hear from the county health department. They always contact the owner whenever an animal has bitten someone. They worry about rabies and what not. I’ll have this guy’s truck towed from your drive. I’d like to look it over,” he said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Detective Smith was waiting in the parking lot for Detective Jones to arrive. This being their first day back together since the hallway incident, he figured to seek a fresh start, and get on with their murder investigation.

Melody and Angel pulled into the rear lot. They kissed as Angel got out of the driver's side. Melody slid over and drove off.

"Detective Jones, may I have a word with you?"

She hesitantly approached, not sure what to expect. "Yes."

"This is a bit awkward, but I truly wish to say I'm sorry for what happened the other day between the two of us. And, I'm sorry for using the 'C' word. I hope we can make a fresh start, and become good partners," he said looking humbled.

She took a deep breath, and let out a sigh of relief. "I too want to apologize for my behavior, and you're right, I'd like a fresh start as well," she said softly.

He looked into her sincere face. "Hi, I'm Detective Smith; it's my pleasure to make your acquaintance, Detective Jones."

"Please call me Angel," she said with a smile of approval.

"Okay, Angel, and please call me Donny," he said returning her smile.

"Well, I think the captain wants us to get back to work," Angel began.

"You mean, the chief, don't you?" Donny said as he winked at her.

"Yes, of course, the chief." She laughed.

They headed inside together and made their way to the homicide department. As they made themselves comfortable at their desks, they began to peer over the reports again looking for anything out of the ordinary.

"Let's see, ballistics says the gun used was a .38-caliber Smith and Wesson revolver registered to Doctor Linda Lerner. That tells me we should pay another visit to the nice doctor," Donny said, handing the report to his partner.

"Sounds good to me," she replied.

The two were heading out when they passed Chief Temme's office. "Detectives, I need to see you both in my office, right now!" she cried out.

Donny flushed red and Angel froze momentarily as the chief's words echoed into the hallway. Regaining their composure, they cautiously entered her office.

"I see you two are working together, good, so where are you off to?" Rachel inquired.

"We got the results of the ballistic report and were heading out to speak with the owner of the gun, a Doctor Lerner," Donny explained quickly.

"Not Linda Lerner?" Chief Temme asked.

"Yeah, that's the one. Why?" Angel chimed in.

"I just got the call; they just found her body at her home. She was shot once in the head, that's all the information I have right now."

"You're kidding?" Donny said in disbelief.

"Well, there goes our number one suspect," Angel said, glancing over at Donny.

"It's time to hustle, boys and girls, let's get on this before the press start terrifying the public with talk of a serial killer on the prowl," she said pointing for them to leave her office.

Pulling into her driveway, Doctor Lerner directed her remote and pressed the tiny green button to activate her garage door opener. After entering, she pushed it again to secure it behind her. Gathering up her briefcase, she fumbled with the keys to the kitchen door.

The kitchen was fashioned in many shades of soft blues. She made her way down the hall past the first bedroom, which she had converted into her private office, and entered the second bedroom.

That was where she spared no expense for her comfort. She had a king-sized bed with a mattress of goose feathers, and pillows to match. Sheets, covers and pillow cases were all done up in pink. Walls, ceiling, and even the carpet were done up in slightly darker shades of pink. Long, flowing pink curtains completed the elegance. It was the very opulence of form and grace.

Kicking off her shoes, she removed her clothes and entered the bathroom. It was decorated in a kaleidoscopic array of greens, yellows

and orange. It was a breathtaking vision of wonder. Due to her bulky size, she enjoyed a roomy shower, rather than a bathtub.

Refreshed after a hot, steamy shower, she dressed in her favorite violet bathrobe, and headed for the kitchen, where she made herself a diet cola and grabbed a large bag of chips. Plopping down on her extra large sofa, she located the remote and turned on the evening news.

Consuming the chips and soda, she drifted off to sleep, mentally exhausted from all that had occurred in the last few days.

She suddenly woke, turning her head slightly to one side. Picking up the remote, she pressed the mute button. Now the sound was clear, someone rapping on the front doors. Heaving herself off the sofa, she looked through the peephole and recognized the person standing on the other side of the door. It was late, past midnight. Her instinct told her not to open the door, yet, she knew the individual, so she felt compelled to see what was wrong.

Unlocking the deadbolt she eased the door open. "What are you doing here at this time of night?"

She saw the brilliant flash of light, yet never heard the explosion as the bullet tore through her skull. The impact snapped her head back violently, as her body followed. Her flabby bulk bounced off the floor several inches before coming to rest. As her legs twitched momentarily, her left arm jerked off the floor, then dropped with a thud.

Blood trickled in a single line down the left side of her half-turned face. Only a small stain appeared on the floor, as her assailant had vanished into the cool darkness.

Once again, evil had triumphed over good, as the demons and angels kept score.

Officers Dearborn and Johnson were the first to arrive on the scene. They spotted the young boy standing by his bicycle in the driveway.

"You the one who found the body?" Officer Dearborn asked.

"Yes, I was delivering the morning paper, when I saw the door standing open. Is she dead?" he asked.

"You just remain right here; the detectives will want to question you later, understand?" she responded.

"Yes, I won't leave."

Two more police cruisers pulled up as the officers entered the home, verifying she was dead, and no one else was in the residence. They started putting up yellow 'POLICE DO NOT CROSS' tape, while waiting for

the others to arrive.

Sergeant O'Leary from the sheriff's department pulled up.

As he approached, Officer Johnson spotted him. "I don't believe it."

"What?" Officer Dearborn questioned.

He pointed toward O'Leary. "Guess who's coming to dinner," he said half jokingly.

"You start your shit here and I'll whip your old mangy ass!" she barked as O'Leary came up to them.

"Now hold on there missy, don't get all riled up. I heard the call and just came by to see what happened. It's all yours, I swear," he said with a chuckle.

"Stay back out of the way and I mean I better not have to tell you twice, you hear me?" she commanded.

"Why, yes ma'am." O'Leary said grinning.

Donny allowed Angel to drive for the very first time, to prove his newfound trust in her.

Angel drove slowly to the murder scene, not wanting any mishaps along the way. She felt his eyes watching her as she noticed he was drumming his fingers on his right thigh.

They finally arrived, having to park on the street due to all the police and forensics vehicles already there.

"I didn't think Hot Springs had this many cars," Angel quipped.

"Everybody had beaten them to the crime scene, even the meat-wagon with the coroner's tech crew were standing around.

"After that little scene you and Doctor Lerner had the last time we were here, I'm thinking maybe you whacked her last night," Donny said smirking.

"Ha, ha, funny man, you're really cute," Angel remarked in a snide manner.

"Just kidding, I thought we needed to lighten things up a bit," he said making a point.

"Yeah, I guess you're right, I need to learn to take a joke better."

They glanced around the outside and noticed nothing strange, except Sergeant O'Leary standing behind the yellow tape.

"What's he doing here?" Donny asked Officer Dearborn as he

approached the front doors.

"Being a total jerk and a witless buffoon would be my guess, sir," she said nudging her rookie partner's elbow. Both smiled in agreement.

"See that he keeps his fat ass outside," Angel blurted out as they entered the premises.

"Yes ma'am," Officer Dearborn replied, staring at O'Leary.

"You believe this place?" Donny said observing the roomy homestead.

"Yep, the doc sure lived high on the hog," Angel agreed.

They pushed their way through a throng of officers and technicians.

"Listen up; I want all uniformed officers outside! Now! Let's go, this isn't a rummage sale!" Detective Jones ordered.

The detectives stood fast as the uniforms filed out the doors. Angel knelt by the body as the last one exited. Now only the technicians remained. They were almost finished gathering evidence, what little there was. Donny was making notes as he wandered through the house. Angel was putting on her rubber gloves as forensics finished taking photographs of the body and surroundings.

Coming full circle, Donny ended up back at the corpse. "Looks a lot like the Butler murder, doesn't it?" he said leaning over Angel's shoulder.

"Yeah, the bullet hole is about the size of a .38-caliber, think it might be the same gun used on Butler?" she asked.

"Once Sean Meyers has a chance to run it through his ballistics lab, I think we may just have a match."

"Well, no sign of a struggle, no torn clothing, no skin under the long nails. No sign of forced entry, all this rules out robbery." Angel surmised.

"Yes and her purse in the kitchen still has cash and credit cards in it. Her jewelry is still in the bedroom," Donny added.

Detective Smith gave the okay to remove the body. They watched as the two techs struggled to roll the heavy victim into the black, zip-up body bag. Then they watched as the techs almost had to drag the bulky corpse to their van.

"They couldn't pay me enough to do their job," Angel said shaking her head.

"I don't know, they seem to like it," Donny replied.

"Yeah, right," she mumbled back.

"No forced entry; she willingly opened the door to whomever," he continued.

"Just like the Butler case, no forced entry," she agreed.

"Officer Dearborn said little Jason Newman, the paper boy, found her body and rode up the street and told his older brother Wayne, who called 911," Donny read off his note pad.

"So, we're back to square one?" Angel asked.

"I guess so. Let's stop in and get a location on her parents so we can deliver the bad news. Maybe they new of someone who wanted her dead," he said heading for the cruiser.

"Sounds like a plan," she said following him out.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Two days later, the Sheriff returned to the Turner's home. He noticed Frank inside the kennel sitting in a lawn chair, with Jack at his side. The gate was closed and latched from the outside. Approaching the kennel, he rested his elbow on the gate.

"Don't tell me Virginia has you in confinement too?" he grinned.

Frank and Jack both just sat, and didn't answer him.

The Sheriff decided to try another approach. "Well then, how's Jack like being penned up?"

"He likes it the same as you'd like it. He's not happy about it," Frank growled.

Virginia heard the sheriff when he drove into the drive, and came out to greet him. "Hey, we have rules around here. Don't feed the animals, and don't pester them neither," she laughed.

"Okay," the sheriff smiled.

Frank didn't budge from his chair, "What's on your mind?" he snapped.

"If your wife will put you on parole, we can go inside the house, and I'll explain something to you," he said wiping the sweat from his forehead.

"Well?" Frank said looking at Virginia.

"Well, what?" she said pretending not to understand.

"Are you going to release me or what?"

"I'd be happy to release you, just as soon as we discuss bail money." She said.

"Oh no you don't. No blackmail, just unlock the gate." Frank's voice was strained.

Virginia laughed as she unlocked the gate. The men followed her inside, and into the living room. Sitting the Sheriff turned toward Frank.

"I was worried the other day when I first saw you breathing into a paper bag. I just knew I'd have to hire six pallbearers, because you don't

have six friends," he chuckled.

"You've just about wore out your welcome," Frank shot back.

"Hush Frank, let's hear what the man has to say," Virginia said.

The Sheriff cleared his throat and began, "I'll start by saying Bill Morgan isn't the real name of the man involved in this matter, and he's not a termite inspector. We checked with all the exterminators in the area, and no one knew him, or sent him to your home. We ran his fingerprints, and found out he had a record. His real name is Paul Daniels. He's from out of state, and served time for robbery, and child pornography."

"Why, I never dreamed," Virginia said in shocked disbelief.

"Yes and we found a lot of evidence in his truck, a sledgehammer with blood on it, which we believe to be the other weapon used besides the tack hammer. We have a strong case against him," the Sheriff stated.

"Wait a minute. What was he doin' at our house acting like a termite inspector?" Frank asked scratching his right ear.

"He gave an oral confession, but hasn't signed a written one. He could change his story at any time. He stated he returned to the scene, where the boys were found in the woods. He planned on posing their bodies, and placing rubber masks on them to hide their injuries, and then take nude pictures. He said there is a huge market for them overseas. When he arrived the bodies were gone. He found out you and Jack had already found them. He became so angry that he wanted revenge. He planned to kill you and Jack, and most likely Virginia as well, so there'd be no witnesses."

"Crime-in-Italy, I'm speechless. This is hard to believe. Did he really say those things? Are you tryin' to scare us? If you are, you're doin' a good job of it," Frank said.

"I'm not trying to frighten you. I'm just giving you the facts," the Sheriff replied.

"I spoke with the vet about Jack concerning his aggressive behavior, and the attack. He said Jack probably recalled the scent and sensed danger. He responded by protecting his owner," he said.

"So we can let him out of the kennel," Virginia asked.

"Sure, if you haven't seen any signs of aggression, turn him loose," the Sheriff responded with a reassuring smile. "And you can turn Frank loose also. Let him out for good behavior," he said winking at Virginia.

"Smartass," Frank mumbled as they laughed.

“Oh, by the way, that Daniels fella will be released from the hospital later today. We’ll be taking him straight to jail. So, I’ll need a statement about what happened here. When you feel up to it, come to my office, and we’ll get it over with.”

“We’ll come by in the morning,” Frank said.

“I’ll keep an eye out for ya,” the Sheriff said heading for his car.

“Whatever. I’ll tell you one thing; I’m not looking forward to a trial, and all that other crap. I know justice must be served, but it can be a real pain at times,” Frank said expressing his opinion.

Sheriff Sparks smiled, and started his patrol car, and waved as he headed for town. Frank ambled off in the direction of the kennel. Freeing Jack brought a smile to his old face. They wandered around the property until Virginia called them for supper.

After a meal of honey fried chicken, a plump one from the coop, mashed potatoes, and green beans from Frank’s garden, hot baked bread, with fresh grape jelly from the arbor, the Turner’s retired to the porch swing to enjoy the pleasant evening.

“Don’t swing too high. You know it makes me dizzy,” he complained.

Virginia heard the phone ring, and nudged him with her elbow, “Okay dizzy, it’s your turn to answer the phone.”

Without moving, he said, “You know it’s for you. My friends never call after supertime. They know I watch TV then, and I don’t like being bothered.”

“You go answer that phone or I’m going to swing higher. You hear me?”

“All right. Stop nagging me,” he grumbled as he got up slowly.

Frank was on the phone for quite a while before returning to the porch. Sitting next to her, he placed her hand in his.

That was the sheriff. That Daniels fella escaped from the hospital. Hot-wired some guys’ truck in the rear parking lot. The truck had a .22-caliber rifle, and a box of shells under the driver’s seat. They chased him but lost him out in the county. One of his deputies later found the truck abandoned near the forest. The gun and shells were also gone. Their K-9 dog caught up with him in the woods and Daniels shot the dog. They have surrounded the area. The search has been stopped because it’s too dark now. They are holding their positions to keep him trapped until daylight.”

Virginia squeezed Frank’s hand, and didn’t speak. She knew what he

was thinking.

“The sheriff wanted me and Jack to come in the morning, and see if we can locate that murderer. I told him we’d be there.”

“Frank Turner, you promise me you won’t do anything heroic?” Virginia asked as her eyes welled up.

“Now, now, don’t get all emotional, we’ll be fine. You’ll see. Let’s go inside and watch some TV before bed.” Frank stood, still holding her hand as he led her into the house. Morning would come soon enough.

The Dominicker Rooster’s persistent crowing aroused Frank, who reached over and turned off the alarm clock before it went off. He hated the nerve jangling noise it made. Easing out of bed, he tip toed into the kitchen. Starting the coffee, he accidentally dropped the coffee can onto the hard floor. He froze for a moment, but heard no sound from the bedroom.

Making his way to the basement, he found his coveralls and rubber boots. After dressing he went outside to greet Jack. They made their usual patrol of the property, finding everything in order.

Frank entered the house and was surprised to find Virginia in the kitchen scrambling eggs. “Good morning honey, I did my best not to disturb your sleep. Did you rest okay last night,” he asked politely.

“Yes, I slept well, until you got up and started that racket in the kitchen,” she laughed.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I was quiet as a mouse.”

“Sounded more like a big rat rooting around to me,” she snickered.

After breakfast they headed for the sheriff’s office to make their report. Pulling up in front, Frank noticed one of the patrol cars was covered with dust, and appeared to have been driven over rough terrain.

Entering the office, they were greeted by one of the deputies. “Have you heard the news?”

“What news?” Virginia asked.

“The manhunt is over. The sheriff shot and killed Daniels early this morning. He refused to give up and fired on us” He said.

“Well I’ll be,” Frank said astonished.

Virginia was relieved. They made their statements about what had occurred when Daniels was at their house, and after signing them they went home.

Exhausted from the past several days, the Turner's made an early night of it.

"I read an article in a magazine about raising Polly Parrots for fun and profit. What do you think?" he asked.

In a falsetto voice she answered, "Does Frank want a cracker? Does Frank want a cracker?" Virginia was laughing so hard she couldn't hear what he mumbled, something about being warned by his mother.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Detective Jones gunned the engine of the unmarked police car, as she impatiently waited for her partner to emerge from the station.

Stepping into the parking lot, Detective Smith made a slight adjustment to his blue and white striped tie. Getting in on the passenger side, he buckled the seat belt across his lap.

"So?" Angel asked, dropping the car in drive and accelerating slowly out of the lot.

"Turns out our Miss Lerner has no parents, she's an orphan. I spoke with Officer Dearborn, she did a door-to-door of her neighbors. Both next-door neighbors were sound asleep and heard nothing. But, the one across the street, Beatrice Buttersmidt, said she didn't hear the gunshot, but her toy poodle, Sapphire, woke her around 12:40am barking like crazy. She got up to see what the dog was yapping about, and saw a white Mercury Cougar slowly driving by."

"The old biddy didn't happen to catch the license plate number?" Angel chimed in.

"As a matter of fact, she did." Donny said grinning.

"Are you kidding?" she asked in disbelief.

"I ran it through DMV and got a hit. Belongs to an Adam Earl Nixon, over on Lexington Street. At the next light, turn left," he instructed Angel.

"Which one is it?" she asked approaching several apartment buildings.

"Says, building three, apartment 402, there...that one on the end," Donny said pointing.

Angel pulled into the side parking lot. They entered only to discover the single elevator was off line for repairs.

"You believe this shit?" Angel said staring up the flight of stairs.

"What are you complaining about, you're in great shape," he noted.

"Well, thank you for noticing," she said starting up.

Reaching the fourth floor, they stopped, took a short break and continued. Locating apartment 402, they could hear rock-and-roll music booming through the door. Donny knocked loudly on the door. The music went silent, followed by the door opening to reveal a young man of possibly twenty or thereabouts.

Showing his badge, "I'm Detective Smith and this is my partner, Detective Jones. Are you Adam Nixon?"

"Hey, Donny, what's up man?" Adam said raising his right hand for a high-five greeting.

Donny looked at Angel and shrugged his shoulders, then faced Adam. "Excuse me, you know me?" he questioned.

"Don't remember me, do ya?" the boy shot back lowering his hand.

"Sorry, I can't place your face, or your name."

"It's okay, man; it was a couple years ago. I have my father's last name, you know, since the divorce and all," Adam continued.

"So, kid, just how do you know Detective Smith?" Angel asked growing impatient.

"My mother's your boss, Rachel Temme; she went back to her maiden name."

"You're Chief Temme's son?" Angel asked, looking at Donny.

"That's right, come on in," he motioned for them to sit down.

The apartment was a typical, young, single boy's pad; clothes, trash, beer cans, strewn everywhere. The place was in need of a good cleaning.

They sat on the worn-out, ripped brown cloth couch, which was missing one leg, which had been replaced by a thick dictionary to level it out.

It now dawned on Donny where he had met the kid. "You were at the Christmas party a few years back, now I remember. Your hair was shorter, and you dressed better then. I wondered who you were with, but other things were going on. I guess I overlooked you, sorry."

"No sweat man, nobody pays attention to teenagers. So, what brings you here?" Adam inquired.

"You own a white, 1986, two-door Mercury Cougar?" Donny asked.

"Yeah, Mom bought me that old car, why?"

"Where were you last night between midnight and 1 am?"

"I got off work at 12:30 and went to make the money drop," Adam answered.

Angel interjected, "Money drop?"

"Yeah, I work at KFC over on Florida Avenue. After the night manager counts up the receipts, he puts them and the cash in a zip-bag, and I drive it over to the night deposit box at the bank."

"So after you dropped off the bag, where to then?" Angel asked.

"Right here to my humble little kingdom," he said grinning.

"What route do you take from work to the bank?" she asked.

"From Florida, I go right on Cherry, then left on Walnut to the bank, then I continue on down Walnut. Once I pass the Food-Mart, I turn left onto Lexington and I'm home."

"Lerner's place is on Cherry Street, looks like just a simple case of coincidence to me," Donny stated to Angel.

"Who's Lerner?" Adam asked.

"Don't sweat it kid," Angel said heading out of the pigsty.

Donny followed her out and yelled back, "Do us a favor, don't tell your mother you saw us!"

"No sweat man!" he hollered, closing his apartment door.

Heading down the four flights, Angel said, "The Chief would have shit a brick if we arrested her kid for murder," she laughed.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, ballistics matched the bullet to Lerner's gun," Donny said as they arrived on the first floor.

"So now what?" she asked, not sure if he truly forgot to tell her, or was just holding out on her.

"Doctor Lerner said she kept her gun in her office at the hospital. Let's go see who had access to it, shall we?"

"Very clever for a fag, Detective Smith." She winked.

"I have my moments, Detective Dyke." He winked back.

They exited the side door and Donny beat her to the car. "I'll drive; I want to get there while I'm young."

"Don't start anything you can't finish." Angel gave Donny a serious look.

"Sorry," he whispered.

Donny squealed the tires as he peeled out of the apartment lot. She made a big show of putting on her seatbelt, which he pretended not to notice. Arriving at the hospital, they made their way to Father Crawford's office.

"Sorry to barge in, but your secretary isn't at her desk," Donny said.

Looking up from his desk, "That's quite all right, please be seated. I must apologize; I'm a bit out of sorts, with all that has happened of late." Father Andy replied.

"And what happened, if you don't mind my asking?" Angel asked.

"There's the James Butler murder, poor boy, he was a good man. And now, poor Nora, my secretary, her son Simon escaped the locked unit last night. Well you know the rest of that tragedy, being the police," he said lowering his head.

"And just what would be the rest of that tragedy?" Donny asked, not sure of what he meant to convey.

"Why, Simon attacking his mother, Nora of course."

"I'm afraid we haven't been informed of that, is she all right?" Donny asked.

"Yes, of course, but she had to shoot her own flesh and blood. Simon tried to kill her, she had no choice."

"Is Simon dead?" Angel blurted out.

"No, he's alive; they have him over at the Hot Springs Medical center. I think he's under police guard." Father Andy replied.

"Oh, that explains why we weren't notified, it wasn't a homicide," Donny lamented to Angel.

"I've been praying for guidance on how best to help Nora in her hour of need," Father Andy said rubbing his head.

"How did that Simon guy escape? Ain't this place locked twenty-four/seven?" Angel asked rudely.

"I spoke with our night tech, Leroy Washington. All he knows is that when he checked on him at three am, he was in his room. But on the

four am check, he was missing. He searched everywhere and couldn't locate him. He found the door leading to the back stairs unsecured. I'll be conducting a more in-depth investigation next week." Father Andy reported.

As Leroy came on duty, a deep sadness was heavy on his heart. Knowing from his many years how life plays out, he knew if Simon remained in the psych ward, he would either die, or even worse, go insane from the horrible drugs and shock treatments. Sorrow came over him as he stood and watched Simon sleeping in his room.

Leroy watched as Father Andy pulled out of the parking lot below. He faced a serious dilemma, but one he knew to be right in his soul. Entering his room, "Boy, wake up, you got to go."

Opening my tired eyes, Roy came into view; he was hovering over me. I felt safe when he was near, even though I wasn't sure why. "Roy, you on duty now?"

"I need you to get dressed," he said as he handed me a set of clothes.

Even in my tired state of mind, I could sense something wasn't right. Roy never seemed to rush, or be in any great hurry, yet now, he acted like time was important. "Is something wrong?"

"Yes boy, somethin's wrong. You stay here, you gonna die here, so get dressed. You gotta' leave this evil place, you hear what I'm tellin' you boy?" He said helping me dress.

"Yes sir," I said dressing faster. I wanted out more than he wanted me out. It's been hell, locked in this torture chamber.

"Here, put this in your pocket, help you start a new life," he said handing me three, \$100 bills.

"Thanks. I'll pay you back when I get on my feet again."

"You don't owe me boy, I owe you." Leroy said in a serious tone.

"What for?" I asked, puzzled at his remark.

"Never you mind, now let's get you outta' here," he said leading me to the elevator. Unlocking it, the doors opened. He pushed the first floor button as I got in. Giving me a big bear hug, he then stepped out as the doors began to close. "God bless you Simon, you did a stranger a great kindness."

I gave a little wave; the doors closed and the elevator descended. As the doors opened, I felt free again. I made my way through the darkness, heading home to get some personal things. I figured I could stay with Mom's brother, Uncle Scott in Texas for a short time.

I was hoping to make Mom understand how awful that place was, since I hadn't seen her since the day I arrived. But, even if she didn't understand, I was heading for Texas. Uncle Scott and I always got on pretty well.

After walking for almost two hours, or so it seemed, I could see home, just up the way. I could make out a faint light that was on in the kitchen.

Changing the subject, Detective Smith now started the questioning toward the real reason for their visit. "Father, who had access to Doctor Lerner's office?"

"Let me think for a moment...besides her, I have the only other key."

"We'll be needing your key to look around her office, if that's okay with you sir?" Donny asked.

"I'm sorry, you should really ask her permission, since it is her private office," Father Andy replied.

The detectives glanced at each other. "You're not aware of her death last night?" Donny asked.

"My God, she's dead?! What happened?"

"She was shot point-blank in the head, and where were you last night," Angel asked, stepping up into his face.

Father Andy leaned back. "Surely you don't think I had anything to do with her death?" he gasped.

Donny reached up and took hold of Angel's arm, and with a gentle tug, he intervened. "No, we just need to cover all the bases, you understand."

Angel turned and looked at Donny; he released her arm. She turned back to face Father Andy. "Yeah, nobody's accusing you of murder, not yet anyway. So, how about that key, Father?"

Flabbergasted, he fumbled around in his desk and produced the key. Turning it over to the detectives, he slumped into his chair and with his elbows on the desk; he lowered his face into his hands, and began to cry softly, as the news of her death struck home.

Donny and Angel made their way to Doctor Lerner's office. Opening the locked door, they conducted a thorough search, including her desk, but no gun was found.

“So, what now boy genius?” Angel quipped.

“You think Father Andy is capable of murder?” Donny asked in earnest.

“Anybody can kill given the right motivation.”

“Let’s go have a look at that escaped guys shooting,” he said.

“That Simon guy?” she asked with a puzzled look on her face.

“Yes, I want to see the police report; something isn’t right about all this. Everybody is connected to this place in some way, and that’s too much of a coincidence.”

“So, it’s off to the station we go,” Angel sang.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Rose jumped to her chair, and pointed her finger at the retired ranger, "Stop right there. Don't say another word. I'm fixing lunch, and I don't want to miss any of this story."

"This'll be a good time to have a break, because the event I'm about to tell you will take some time," he replied.

Donny moved his chair closer, "Grandpa, have you heard the strange music in the forest?"

"Many times. The first time it happened I was camping on Eagle Ridge. I swear as I lay in my tent that night, I distinctly heard Indian drums. It lasted for several hours, and it's safe to say, I didn't sleep well that night."

"Be quiet out there!" Rose yelled from the kitchen. "I want to hear everything, too. Wait for me!"

She kicked the screen door open with her foot, and balanced a tray of sandwiches to the porch, and placed it on a small table, "Okay, let's hear your tale."

Donny and his grandfather each took a sandwich. The retired ranger lifted the bread, and examined the lunchmeat. Rose stopped eating, and gave him a look that could kill. He replaced the bread, and had a healthy bite. She smiled, and continued to eat.

"Let's see now," he said between bites as he began his last story.

It was late afternoon and Frank was bored so he set his mind to thinking. Going into the kitchen he approached Virginia who was washing dishes.

"I'm thinking of testing Jack." Frank began.

"Uh huh, so you're going to test Jack, are you? And just how do you plan to do that?" she asked.

"I'm gonna let the blue nose mule out, and chase it into the woods. Then I'll have Jack search for him. A good plan, don't you think?"

"No, it's a poor plan. Your timing is off," Virginia said looking him straight in the eye.

“What you mean my timing is off?” Frank challenged.

“It’s too late in the day to do your little test. If Jack can’t find that old mule before dark, it’ll be out in the woods all night. My rule is to wait until early morning to conduct your little test.” She shot back.

“I wasn’t gonna do it now. I planned all along to do it tomorrow morning.” Frank walked into the living room. “And where’s all these rule’s comin’ from?”

Virginia didn’t answer him. They spent the rest of the evening not speaking.

Early the next morning, all was back to normal in the Turner household. Frank brought Jack inside so he could turn the mule loose in the forest. He led the mule deep into the forest, and taking off the lead rope, he slapped it on the rump, and sent it running into the wilderness. Frank returned home using a different route. Jack was waiting just inside the back door.

“It won’t be long now, old friend. Give me a few minutes rest, and I’ll turn you loose.”

Frank enjoyed a hot cup of coffee, while Jack watched his every move. He reached over, and gave Jack a super head rub, and ear scratching.

“Well, let’s hit the road,” Frank said heading for the back door.

Entering the small mule barn, Jack was instructed to take the scent. Sniffing and nuzzling around the stall, he sat down. That was Frank’s signal that he was ready to track.

Giving a hand gesture he said, “Go find old Blue. He’s lost.”

Jack started his track sniffing around the barn, then moving out further until he located the trail Frank and the mule had taken earlier into the forest. Frank beamed with pride. With ears erect, and turned forward, Jack glided through the woods with ease following the erratic course set by the wandering mule. After awhile, he stopped and held his head high. Visually scanning the entire area in front of him, he seemed alerted to something lurking nearby.

Frank was experiencing a difficult time trying to keep up with Jack, and he was glad he stopped to look around. Jack started tracking and once again stopped to look around. Frank noticed he was acting uneasy, but he allowed him to resume his track. As they approached a small stream—which was three feet across and about a foot deep—Jack stopped to drink the cool running water.

Suddenly, Jack focused on a sound Frank couldn’t hear in the distance.

A soft growl emerged from deep within his throat.

“What is it? I don’t see anything.” Frank said looking in all directions.

Jack slowly crossed the small stream with Frank right behind him. They went about a hundred feet when Jack stopped. He went into a defensive stance, with his nape hair standing straight up. Trying to focus in on the danger that lay before them, Jack stood on guard.

Frank still could not see or hear anything, so he froze by Jack’s side. He had no idea what to expect. Now he was silently cussing himself for not bringing his gun.

Jack began to growl openly, and loudly as he and Frank could now make out the crashing sound coming toward them. They were both taken by surprise due to the speed at which the attack occurred.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The officer working the front desk was just polishing off another glazed donut when the detectives walked in. Wiping the glazed icing from his lips, he started in with a sarcastic remark, "And how may I help two of Hot Springs' finest?"

Like all the others, he was aware of their gay orientation, and though not bold enough to say it to their faces; he considered them queer, with all the ramifications the word carried in his small-town mind.

"We need to see the report made on the Simon Teel shooting," Detective Smith stated, noting the sarcastic overtone.

"Comin' right up," he said picking through a stack of reports. Locating the correct one, he gave it to the detective.

"Thank you." Donny and Angel proceeded down the corridor and into the homicide department. Nearing his desk, Donny became aware of his desk chair missing. Looking around the room, it was nowhere to be found. Angel now noticed it missing, and gave a quick scan of the area.

"What'd ya do with your chair, sport?" she asked.

Laughter from the hallway gave way to suspicions that some of the other detectives were jerking his chain. He decided not to take the bait, and leaned up against the side of his desk, facing Angel, who was sitting back in her chair.

"Want me to kick their ass for ya?" she asked in a serious manner.

"No, they want to play games, like little children. Best thing to do is ignore it. Otherwise, they'll just get worse."

"That might be your attitude, which is fine with me, but they fuck with my stuff, and somebody's getting' a black eye. You remember that old saying, 'The bigger they are, the harder they fall?' Well, my old man said, 'The bigger they are, the harder you hit'em.' Those pot-bellied bigots want to start some shit, fine with me. I'm ready to kick ass," she said giving a finger in the direction of the laughter.

Donny listened, but decided not to get into a debate on how to best deal with rednecks in the department. He continued reading over the officer's report of Teel's shooting.

“So, what’s it say?” Angel asked the impatience evident in her voice.

“Says about 5:40 am, Nora Teel heard breaking glass coming from the kitchen door. She went to investigate, at which time she saw a man’s arm reaching through the broken glass trying to unlock the deadbolt. Running to her bedroom, she retrieved her revolver, a .38-caliber Smith and Wesson. As she left her bedroom, she was confronted by her son, Simon Teel, who had escaped from the mental hospital several hours earlier—”

“How did she know he escaped?” Angel interrupted.

“Doesn’t say,” he answered.

“Go on,” Angel said as she waved her hand.

“Says he yelled obscenities and told her he was going to kill her for putting him in the nut-house. He advanced on her with a claw hammer, which she stated he raised over his head and charged her. She screamed, and then pointed the gun, at which time he turned and started to run. She states she fired one shot, the blast frightened her, and she dropped the gun. She then ran to her bedroom and dialed 911 and reported the attack. She stayed in her room until the police units arrived. Officer’s Drake and Manchild were the first to arrive on the scene. They found the kitchen door open, the glass knocked out. Simon Teel was found lying on a bed, on his left side facing the wall. He was unconscious, and the officers called for an ambulance at that time. One entry wound was found on his upper back region. Nora Teel was found in another bedroom down the hall.” Donny finished his summation of the report.

“That’s interesting; you think there’s a possibility the .38 is the same one used on Butler and Lerner?” Angel questioned.

“I think it’s time to visit Sean Meyers down at the lab.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

The detectives maneuvered through the corridors, passing several fellow officers on their way. A few snickers and odd looks were sent in their direction. Donny remained professional, yet Angel couldn’t refrain from flipping the bird to her counterparts as they passed.

Arriving at the forensics lab, they found Sean peering through a microscope.

“Sean, might we have a moment of your time?” Donny inquired.

With a slight turn of the scope’s larger knob, he stepped back from it.

“Take a look, Donny.”

“And just what would I be looking at?” He asked closing one eye as he leaned in for a peek.

“That my dear sir is the slug that was removed from a Simon Teel, over at the medical center. Guess what? It’s a perfect match to Linda Lerner’s gun,” Sean stated with great pride.

“I think it’s time we talk with Nora Teel,” Angel suggested.

“I think you’re right,” Donny said following her to the door.

“Wait!” Sean yelled.

“What?” Donny asked returning.

“I have the results of the other evidence we processed; you want it?”

“Let’s hear it,” Angel answered.

“The claw hammer didn’t have Simon Teel’s prints on it, only his mother’s prints were found on it, and he wasn’t wearing gloves. Also, the glass in the kitchen door wasn’t broken from the outside in, it was broken from the inside out,” Sean reported to the detectives.

“So someone made it appear he had broken in, when in fact, he hadn’t,” Donny noted.

“Yeah, makes sense, seeing how the hammer didn’t have his prints on it,” Angel agreed.

“Anything else to report, Sean?” Donny asked.

“As a matter of fact, yes, your boy Simon had a bad case of powder-burns at the impact site. Which means —”

“Which means his mother couldn’t have shot him from a distance as he was running from her. She, or whoever, must have been right up on him, with the gun barrel almost touching his back. Correct?” Angel asked.

“Correct, Detective,” Donny responded.

“One thing more,” Sean broke in. “I received the phone records you guys wanted on that James Butler and Linda Lerner. So I also took the liberty of requesting, in your names, the records for that Nora Teel. I figured since the gun matched the earlier shootings, you’d want them as well.”

“You know, that’s breaking the law, my sneaky little friend, but you’re right, we’d like to see those as well.” Donny spoke half-seriously.

"Who cares if he broke the law, what'd you find out, spunky?" Angel blurted out.

"Well, nothing unusual on the first two, but that Nora Teel, she made a call just forty minutes before she called 911, to Andrew Crawford." Sean said.

"How long did they talk?" Donny asked.

"For ninety-three seconds."

"Very interesting indeed, thanks Sean, but next time, let me know what you're up to first," Donny chided.

"Sure, sorry dude," Sean said not making eye contact.

"You think Nora could shoot her own son?" Donny asked Angel.

"Maybe, maybe not, but I do believe an old, burned-out priest could." She answered.

"A man of God?" Donny said with a perplexed look on his face.

"He's as close to God as I am," she sneered.

"So, your theory is...?"

"Ah, I see it this way, Simon shows up, Mom takes him in and once he's in bed, she calls her boss. The Father comes over and shoots him, then makes it look like he broke in. Has her say he was enraged and tried to kill her. The good Father had access to Lerner's gun in her office; he could have taken it, shot Butler, than replaced it in her desk easy enough. Then later, he shot Lerner with it and kept it. And now, got called, came over and shot Simon with it. Then concocted this lame story Nora told. It's plausible," Angel stated.

"What's his motive?" Donny asked.

"How should I know, it's just a theory. You got a better theory?" she asked a bit agitated.

"Well, maybe Nora did shoot her son."

"What was her motive? What was her motive for shooting Butler and Lerner?" she asked.

"I'm just speculating, hell; maybe they both killed the other three. And don't ask what their motive would be, I don't know." Donny said now agitated himself.

"Let's bring Nora Teel in for questioning, see if we can break her down. And while she's here, let's have your buddy Sean give her a paraffin test to see if she's fired a gun recently," Angel offered.

“The paraffin test is old news; we’re high-tech now. Sean uses that neutron activation analysis device. Suppose to find even the tiniest traces of gunpowder imbedded in the skin.” Donny corrected.

“Well whoopee, let’s use the fancy machine,” Angel said rolling her eyes.

CHAPTER THIRTY

As the beast broke through the thick brush, its growls thundered as it set upon Frank. It was the largest black bear he'd ever seen. The bear vigorously mauled his shoulder as Jack tore into the beast's hind quarters.

Unexpectedly, the bear released Frank in order to deal with Jack's relentless attack. Ferociously he wheeled, and tore Jack loose, slamming him across the ground. Bouncing back, Jack was in a frenzy. He ripped and tore into the enraged black bear once more. The two rolled over and over thrashing about in the high brush as Frank wildly tried to strike the bear with a tree limb.

The bear knocked Jack spinning into a tree, and lashed out at Frank, catching his leg, which sent him flying through the air. Crashing almost head first, Frank landed in a thicket of honeysuckle, which softened the landing somewhat.

Its claws had slashed Frank's leg open from his waist down to his knee. The black bear broke off its attack unexpectedly. Suddenly turning, it disappeared into the woods. Frank could hear it scrambling through the brush, as it made its retreat.

Bleeding from his shoulder, and left leg, he hobbled to where Jack was laying against the tree. Jack was licking at his wounds. Stumbling, and falling beside him, Frank sat down.

"Well Jack, I'll tell you the truth. We lost round one. I think we better throw in the towel, and head for home before he comes back for round two. Let's get outta here," he said standing up. Jack rose up a bit wobbly as they started for home.

Weak from his injuries, Frank stopped from time to time to rest. He worried he couldn't make it. Finally, he collapsed to the ground not sure how far they had traveled, he was exhausted.

"Jack my old friend, you go on ahead and get Virginia. I'll rest here." He moaned as he propped himself up against a tree.

Jack sniffed his master and then headed on. He painfully made his way through the forest to the back door of the house.

Virginia heard the sound and came to see what was going on. "Oh my

God Jack, you look like you were run over by a buzz saw.”

She quickly checked his injuries, and rushed him into the house. Bandaging his bleeding wounds with gauze and tape, she headed for the first aid kit. She unlocked Frank’s gun box and loaded his forty-five caliber pistol. Jack followed her as they made their way to her car. She drove to the woods where she then let Jack take over as guide.

With Jack being injured and Virginia not at home in the woods, they moved at a snail’s pace, or so it seemed. They finally reached Frank, who had tried to bandage his wounds with his shirt. He did a fairly good job on his leg; he stopped the majority of the bleeding. But, it was difficult for him to focus on his shoulder injury.

Virginia dropped to one knee, and began to help. She cleaned the shoulder wound with alcohol, and taped a pressure bandage on it. She then turned her attention to his leg and repeated the same procedure.

Frank was having difficulty keeping his eyes open. Weak and in pain, he tried not to move much. Jack lay next to him, as if to offer what little comfort he could muster.

“You boys stay here. Don’t move from this spot. I’ll go get some help. Frank, hold on to this.”

He opened his eyes, and saw she was handing him his pistol. “Listen, tell the sheriff it was a black bear, and he should be careful. It’s still around this area, I think.”

Virginia managed to find her way back and phoned the authorities in town, and also called the rangers station for assistance. The last call she made was to the veterinarian who told her he’d come to the house as soon as possible.

Harry and Ann Carmichael saw her dash into the house. They called and after Virginia told them the story, they said they’d be right over to give aid and comfort.

As the emergency crew arrived, Virginia got into the lead vehicle and showed them where they needed to enter the forest. Arriving on the edge of the woods, the sheriff’s deputies, paramedics and several rangers began unloading their rescue equipment.

Frank was drifting in and out of consciousness. Unaware that Jack had now risen to a defensive stance with his ears pointing straight up, he turned forward. The blood matted hair on the back of his neck and shoulders was flared, and puffed up. What at first looked like a grin on his snout, slowly turned into a vicious savage snarl, as he bared his teeth.

Realizing something was wrong, Frank tried to sit up. It was difficult

for him to focus; he could barely make out Jack standing between him and the dense woods. Frank checked the gun, making sure a bullet was in the chamber and ready to fire. He knew they couldn't withstand another attack. Making an effort to protect his faithful companion, Frank ordered Jack to back off, and to go home. Repeating his command in a calm, yet forceful voice, Jack didn't budge, holding his ground to protect his master to the very end.

Jack's right eye was nearly closed from the first brutal attack by the black bear. He was relying mainly on his sensitive hearing, to tell him the position of the menacing beast.

Frank could also hear the approaching bear, its weight cracking the underbrush as it circled around them. Fever was burning in Frank's brain, his vision now almost gone; he made one last attempt to spare Jack's life. "Jack, I command you to go home. Break off. Break off. Go home now!" he yelled.

Jack remained firm, never wavering for a moment. His head turning to follow the sounds as the mighty beast circled them, moving ever closer. Frank was too weak to stand, he tried to prop himself up in a better defensive position.

Without further warning the thrashing sound from the woods came straight at them. Jack instinctively charged the rapidly advancing hulk as it burst through the dense brush. Frank rolled over on his stomach, and fired four quick shots at the massive blur, that was now less than ten feet from him. The wounded bear turned and disappeared into the dark forest. Frank knew by the sounds, it ran only a short distance, and collapsed.

"Jack! Jack! Where are you?" Frank couldn't see him. Trying to stand once more, he crumpled to the ground. Suddenly, he felt Jack at his side. "Good boy, Jack, good boy, stay close to me. If he comes back, let me know. I think I got a couple rounds left. Stay alert; I need to rest my eyes a bit." He said slumping over unconscious.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

“Detectives?” the desk officer hollered as they were about to exit the station.

“What?” Donny asked nearing the desk.

The officer handed the desk phone to him. “It’s the Medical Center, something about that guy who was shot.”

“This is Detective Smith, who’s this?”

“Yes detective, this is Doctor Haroldson, I was informed someone from your department needed an update on my patient, Simon Teel. Is that correct?”

Donny wasn’t sure who called, but he did have questions for Simon Teel. “Ah, yes, Doctor, when can we see him for questioning?”

“I’m afraid it might be some time before he’s able to answer questions. He’s barely in stable condition at this time, so for now, he’ll stay in the unit, where we can keep a close watch over him.”

“Thanks for your call; I’ll check back in a week or so.” Donny said.

“That would be fine,” he said hanging up.

“What was that all about?” Angel inquired.

“Simon’s doctor said he’s not yet stable enough to answer questions.”

“So, it’s off to Nora’s place as planned?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said.

“Detectives Smith and Jones, do you remember me?”

As they turned, to their complete surprise, there stood Nora Teel. They simultaneously looked at each other, then at her.

“May I please have a word with you detectives?” she said ever so politely.

Detective Smith cleared his throat, “Why, yes ma’am, as a matter of fact, we were just on our way to see you.”

“Oh?”

"Please come with us; we'll use one of the empty interrogation rooms. That will give us some privacy," Donny explained leading her to the last room at the end of the hall.

The old wooden chair screeched as it was pulled from under the faded wood table. The simple room contained no two-way glass or hidden camera's; it was mainly an after thought. On the opposite side of the table were two fold-out steel chairs.

Donny motioned for Nora to occupy the wooden chair, as he and Angel sat in the others.

"Would you care for something to drink?" Donny offered.

"No thanks, I'm fine." Nora replied.

"Well then, what was it you wanted to see us about?" he began.

"I was wondering what will happen to my son, Simon, since the tragic circumstances of—"

A sudden knock at the door brought everyone's attention toward it.

Slowly it opened and Chief Rachel Temme's head leaned in. "Sorry to interrupt, I need a word with you two."

"Excuse us, we'll be right back," Donny said as the two stood and went out into the hall.

"I have a Father Crawford in my office. Said he wants to speak with you two." Chief Temme said.

"He say what about?" Angel asks.

"Yes, he wants to confess, so I put him in interrogation room four. He's all yours," she said walking off.

"That's kind of ironic, isn't it?" Angel states.

"What's ironic?" Donny asks not sure of her meaning.

"A priest wants to confess, get it?"

"Yes, I get it, ha ha." He said dryly.

Popping his head back into the room, Detective Smith addressed Nora, "Please forgive us, something has come up. Would you mind waiting here for a few minutes longer?"

"Why no, anything to help out." Nora smiled sweetly.

"Thank you." Closing the door he started for room four, with Angel in tow.

Interrogation room four was well equipped; with two-way observation glass, video camera and recorder, blue steel-framed padded chairs and a steel-framed table to match. Looking through the two-way glass, they watched Father Andy sitting quietly, head hung low. His breathing was so shallow; one at first glance might think him dead.

"I think it would be better if I spoke to him alone," Donny insisted. "You can observe and listen from here, Angel."

"Why?" she asked.

"Sorry to say, but people seem to tense up around you," he fostered as delicately as possible, not wanting to spark a fight.

"Go ahead, no sweat off my ass," she said, her voice a tad strained, yet controlled.

"Thanks for understanding."

"Whatever," she sighed, now looking distant.

Entering the interrogation room, "Sorry to keep you waiting Father. Can I get you anything to drink?"

"No, I'm fine, thank you," his weak voice cracked.

"Okay then, the police chief said you had a confession you wanted to make, is that correct?" Donny started his questioning.

"Yes, that is correct."

"Do you mind if I record this on tape?"

Father Andy looked toward the video-camera. "If you must, then please do so."

Detective Smith positioned the camera and started taping; as he pushed the small button on the side, a tiny red light glowed steady. Donny gave a brief introduction of who was present, the date and time, and was now ready to begin.

"At this point, I need you to state for the record that you are here of your own volition, and that you waived your right to having an attorney present."

"I'm Andrew Crawford and I'm here on my own behalf. I need no attorney to help me. Whatever happens now is up to our Lord and Savior. I'm ready for his judgment of my sins."

"Ah, very well then, let's begin with your motive for shooting James Butler."

"I...I didn't kill James," he stammered out.

"You did not murder James Butler?" Donny asked puzzled.

"No, of course not," Father Andy answered slouching back in his chair.

Detective Smith studied him for a moment, than proceeded with his next logical assumption. "Very well then, please tell me why you murdered Linda Lerner."

"What? I didn't kill poor Linda; she was my friend and colleague." He stated.

"Are you here to confess to the shooting of Simon Teel?" Donny now asked, not sure what was taking place.

"No, I didn't shoot Simon. He was my patient for God's sake."

The door to the interrogation room burst open, and in stormed Detective Jones. "Just what the hell are you here to confess then!" she shouted.

Father Andy reeled to one side, almost falling out of his chair. Detective Smith jumped to his feet, as he too was startled by her abrupt entrance.

Regaining his composure, "Detective Jones, I'd like to speak with you out in the hall, now!" Donny roared.

Angel stepped away from Father Andy. As she came to the doorway, she turned and pointed her finger at him. "I'll be right back, don't you move."

As Angel walked up to Donny, he spoke, "What the hell was that Nazi Storm Trooper shit all about?"

"He's jerking your chain, that pleasant, fancy psychological crap is bullshit. Give me five minutes alone with him and I'll have this case all wrapped up." She said staring into his eyes.

"You really don't get it, do you Detective Jones. That 'Dirty Harry' shit doesn't fly anymore. Time to grow up, and join the new age of interrogation."

"Fuck you, don't tell me how to do my job, you punk-assed faggot. I solved more homicides in Texas than you've even investigated here in Podunk, Arkansas."

The rage was building; her eyes danced and her nostrils flared. Donny couldn't afford having another fist-fight with her, and he valued his job. He decided to reason with her, to try and reach her intellectual side, if possible, before things got out of control.

"Angel, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to criticize your investigative skills.

I'm sure your tactics work, but I just wanted to try the soft approach first."

Angel stepped back. "I hear what you're saying. I know I get impatient sometimes. Sorry for the 'punk-assed faggot' remark. I get a little wound up, as you already know." Her tone was strained, yet apologetic.

"Yes, I've seen you in action, and my balls still ache." He laughed.

She grinned at his statement. "All right, I get your drift. Go back in, I'll be a good little girl and just observe."

"Thanks partner." Donny patted her on the shoulder as they parted.

Closing the door behind him, he made his way over to the table and sat. "Sorry for the interruption Father, all is well now. I need to understand something. You came to confess, but not to shooting anyone, is that correct?"

"That's correct, I didn't shoot or murder anyone," Father Andy replied softly.

"Now then, what are you here to confess to, Father?" Donny began the questioning again.

Slowly, he summoned the courage to expel the demon that had haunted him for so long, "Many years ago, when I was just a simple parish priest, James Butler was a young altar boy who assisted me in my religious duties. We became very close, and I'm...I'm afraid my lust...got the better of me. I prayed, and prayed, but..." Fighting back the tears and emotions he held inside for so many years, they finally broke free, and his sobs gushed forth.

The door opened. Coming in Angel handed Donny a box of tissue. She came closer and whispered in Donny's ear, "Tell the priest to blow his nose, and to get on with it. He's startin' to get on my last nerve." She returned to the observation room.

Donny, as always, was astonished at how little compassion Angel had for her fellow man. Handing the box of tissue to Father Andy, "Here, these may help."

Pulling out several wads of tissue, he began to clean up his face. Wiping away the pool of tears that had descended onto the table top, he then cleaned the mucus from his upper lip. Finally sopping up the slobber on his chin, he was now ready to start again.

Donny sat quietly, waiting for him to regain his composure, as Father Andy blew loudly into a tissue, trying to clear his nasal passages to ease

his breathing. Donny flinched when the loud snort echoed throughout the small room. Angel, seeing and hearing what had just occurred, broke into laughter.

"Sorry Detective, I didn't mean to startle you," Father Andy consoled.

"Are you ready to continue?" Donny asked.

"Yes, I..." Tears started to well up in his bloodshot eyes.

"Just say it, and you'll feel much better, Father," Donny said.

"I...molested James." The flood of tears and slobber erupted once more.

As those three words hung in the air, Donny made the decision to press on. "Father, I know this is hard, but we need to move on."

Feeling some relief now that it was out in the open, he wiped his nose and finished dabbing his eyes with another wad of tissue. "This happened over several years. Later, I left that small parish and worked my way up to where I am now. I had long since forgotten about little James, the quiet, shy, altar boy. But he hadn't forgotten about me. A few years back, he just appeared out of nowhere. Told me if I didn't give him a job, he'd go to the authorities and ruin me. I'd have lost everything..."

"Not to mention the possibility of jail," Donny added.

"Oh yes, that too, weighed heavy on my tormented mind. So I gave him the position as head RN on the locked unit, but that was n't enough. He later wanted cash, and eventually he demanded more and more."

"So Butler was blackmailing you?"

"Yes, that's correct. But he kept demanding more. I didn't have it. I became desperate. With nowhere to turn, I started stealing from the hospital funds," he said lowering his head in shame.

"Wait a minute, he's blackmailing you and you're embezzling money from the hospital?" Donny asks, trying to keep the facts straight.

"That's correct, but I never killed him, I'm guilty of embezzlement."

"And child rape," Donny noted.

Father Andy began to break down again. Tears streamed down his puffy, red cheeks.

"For the record, did you murder James Butler?" Donny asked point-blank.

"No, I did not."

“For the record, did you murder Linda Lerner?”

“For heaven’s sake, I didn’t murder Linda or anyone else!” He bellowed.

“Take it easy, Father, it’s my job to ask,” Donny spoke in a soft, reassuring voice. He figured it was best to keep him calm and relaxed as possible during this trying ordeal.

“On the early morning that Simon Teel was shot, Nora Teel phoned your home about forty minutes before she called 911. What did you two speak about? And remember, we’re taping this, and it can be used against you in a court of law,” he warned sternly.

“I’m not here to lie, but to get the truth out, Detective. Nora never spoke to me that morning. I was asleep and the answering machine picked up. I played the messages later when I got up. She simply called my name several times, asking me to please pick up, yet she said nothing further.” His tired, raspy voice grew weak.

“May we have the taped message?”

“I’m sorry, I already erased it.”

“Would you be willing to take a neutron activation test? It checks for gunpowder residue on the hands,” Donny asked.

“Yes, I will Detective.” Father Andy was emotionally exhausted. Slumping forward, he rested his head on the table.

“Relax for a few minutes Father; I need to confer with my partner.” Donny turned the video-camera and recorder off, and then exited the room. Angel was standing right outside the door as he came out.

“Think he’s lying?” Angel asked.

“I think he’s being truthful.”

“I saw the way he looked at you, like you were on the menu, pretty boy,” she laughed.

“What? On the menu?” Donny flashed her a puzzled look.

“You know, he wants to fuck you in the ass, sweet-cheeks. Once those priests get a taste for young boys, they’re hooked.” She grinned wryly.

“I can’t believe they let you carry a gun, you’re not right in the head.” Donny said, shaking his head in disbelief at her warped sense of humor.

Angel stopped laughing, and pretended to put on a serious face. “All right, so let me guess. We get your buddy, Sean, to run the gunpowder

test on 'Father Horny' to see if he's fibbing or not, correct?"

"Yes, I'll have him placed in a holding cell, then I'll schedule the test, and then we'll speak to Chief Temme to see what charges we need to bring against the Father." Donny said.

"Then we square-off with Miss Nora, the little Christian lady, with her long plain dresses, right?" Angel said mockingly.

"Yes," he said dryly.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

The rescue squad was stunned when they heard the gun shots from the forest. The Sheriff ordered the medical team to follow at a distance until the all-clear was given. Fearing the shots foretold of the black bear's return, they proceeded quickly.

The heavily armed Sheriff and his deputies entered the woods following Virginia's instructions, and the general direction of the gunshots. They moved swiftly, yet cautiously as their adrenalin began to take over. The Sheriff, without warning, turned his ankle and fell while trying to navigate the dense underbrush. The pain was too great to continue, so he ordered his deputies to go on ahead. He'd wait for the medical team bringing up the rear.

Frank had become delirious, and when he caught the sound of the approaching officers, he thought the bear was returning to finish him and Jack off. He attempted to fire his gun in the direction of the sound. Getting off only one shot, which went wild and struck a nearby tree, he dropped the gun due to pain and exhaustion.

After hearing the close shot, the deputies honed in on his exact location. Calling out to Frank, they received no response. He was now slumped over on his stomach, semi-conscious, with Jack lying next to him.

As the deputies approached, and found them both in bad shape, they radioed for the others to come quick. The deputies secured the area.

It was an ordeal making Sheriff Sparks, Frank and Jack comfortable as possible for their trek out of the forest. All were carried out on stretchers. The vet was waiting with Virginia and the Carmichaels at the edge of the forest. Frank and the Sheriff were placed in ambulances and hustled off to the hospital. Virginia and Ann slid in next to Harry as he followed the ambulances to town. The girls held each other and softly cried and prayed for Frank's well being. Jack was placed in the veterinarian's van, and taken to his office in town.

Three hours after arriving at the hospital, the surgeon entered the waiting room. A solemn expression on his face brought silence to those in the room. Stopping just inside the arched doors, he wiped perspiration from his brow. His light green surgical clothes were wet

from heavy sweating. Taking a deep breath as he approached Virginia he began, "The condition of Frank is grim. His injuries are severe. The surgery has helped, but because of the damage, we won't really know something until tomorrow morning. We discovered a heart problem, which made the surgery somewhat difficult. He may recover from the animal injuries, but the stress of the attack on his heart is another story. We'll just have to wait and see. We are giving him medications to stabilize his heart; it just depends on how well his body responds. He's being moved to the ICU."

"Can I see him?" Virginia asked, her hands trembling.

"Give the nurses' a few more minutes to get him settled in, and then you can see him. I already told them you'd be staying the night." The surgeon replied.

"Thank you so much, Doctor." Virginia said as she began to cry.

"Like I said, we'll know more in the morning." He excused himself, leaving Virginia with the Carmichaels.

Ann said as she held Virginia, "We'll stay with you. You and Frank are in our prayers."

"You've always given me strength, and I need that strength now," Virginia said as the tears streamed down her cheeks.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Chief Temme was relaxing in her office, her eyes transfixed on a beam of sunlight that was slowly advancing across her desktop. She watched, mesmerized at the tiny dust particles dancing in the light. The sudden knock at the door momentarily startled her as she sprang forward in her chair. Smoothing her hair back and adjusting her lavender blouse, she spoke calmly, "Come in."

Detective Jones pushed in ahead of Detective Smith.

"So, did Father Crawford confess to the murders?" Rachel asked.

"Hell no, the old bastard confessed to rapin' that Butler guy when he was an altar boy..." Angle started in.

"Detective Jones!" Chief Temme boldly cut her off.

"What?" Angel asked, taking note of the look on the chief's face.

"Don't use profanity in this office and in my presence again, is that perfectly clear?" Her commanding voice was strong and full of authority.

Angel's facial expression was one of complete surprise. "I'm very sorry, ma'am, it won't happen again."

Donny grinned, he'd been waiting for Angel to be put in her place, and Rachel was just the right person to do it.

"Detective Smith, anything further to report?" Rachel asked, her tone pleasant, clearly showing her fondness for him.

"Yes ma'am, the good Father was being blackmailed by James Butler, and he was embezzling funds from the hospital to pay him off. Yet he adamantly states he did not murder James, or anyone else for that matter."

"You believe him?" Rachel asked.

"At this point, yes, I do," he replied glancing over at Angel.

"Anything to add, Detective Jones?" she asked.

"No ma'am," Angel responded in a hushed voice.

"We just stopped to see if you had an idea on how we should proceed

concerning the Father. I had him placed in a holding cell, and the lab is going to test him for gunpowder residue," Donny continued.

"Depending on what the test shows, talk to the assistant D.A. and see what they want to charge him with," she stated.

"Okay, we also have Nora Teel in an interrogation room; we're going to talk to her in a minute about all that's happened," Donny added.

"Fine," she said picking up some papers on her desk.

The detectives looked at each other.

"Was there something else?" Chief Temme questioned.

"Ah, no ma'am," Donny said turning to exit. Angel closed the door behind her as she followed him out.

"What's her problem?" Angel asked as they walked down the hall.

"The Chief thinks people who use profanity are weak, pathetic losers of low class," he put forth, lying with a straight face.

"Aw, you're making that up, right?"

"Believe what you want, it's a free country."

Angel pondered what he said as Donny phoned the lab and made arrangements for Father Andy's test.

Entering the interrogation room, the detectives found Nora right where they had left her. She was sitting quietly, reading a murder mystery novel.

"Shall I interrogate her first, or do you wish to use your out-of-control crazed-dyke routine on her?" Donny asked grinning.

"Crazed-dyke routine?" Angel repeated with a look of contempt on her face. "How about we both interrogate her, partner?"

"Fine, after you, partner." Donny stepped aside so she could charge forth in her usual manner.

"Whatever," Angel replied, noting the snide implication in his voice.

Entering the room, Angel sat down as Donny strolled in, "Sorry you had to wait so long, Mrs. Teel. Can I get you something to drink?" he asked.

"Oh no, I'm fine, but thank you for asking." She placed her novel back into her purse as Donny finally sat down. "And please, call me Nora."

"All right then, Nora, so why have you come to see us?" Donny began.

"I was just concerned, what will happen to my son, Simon, since the tragic circumstances that took place after his escape?"

"Nora, I'm going to be honest with you. We don't believe the story you gave the officers about how Simon was shot. And we know you phoned Andrew Crawford forty minutes before you called 911. The forensic evidence shows there was no break-in, and the claw hammer didn't contain Simon's fingerprints. So why don't you tell us what really happened?" Donny said.

Nora broke into tears. She drew several tissues from her purse. Lowering her soft, pudgy face into the tissues, she now wept without restraint.

Angel turned to her partner. Once she had his attention, she rolled her eyes, signaling her belief Nora was putting on an act. Donny shrugged his shoulders, not sure what to believe at this juncture.

Angel decided to bluff her into talking. "Hey! You've not fooling anybody. We know you called Father Andy, and he came over and shot Simon, then tried to make it look like he attacked you. And if you don't confess, you'll go to jail right next to him, you hear me!" She bellowed.

Nora's eyes grew wide; her crying dwindled to barely a snivel as she took in what Angel just said.

"Nora, Father Andy is just down the hall undergoing a lab test to see if he fired a gun recently. If he—"

Nora interrupted Donny. "He's here, at the police station?"

"That's right, and we're going to charge him with the murders of James Butler and Linda Lerner, and the attempted murder of Simon," Angel blurted out.

"Oh my poor Andy, he's done nothing wrong. He's the most loving and gentle soul I know. He's innocent, you must let him go. I'll tell you everything if he goes free," she pleaded with the detectives.

"Nora, we can't make that kind of promise, but I swear, we will do what we can if you cooperate fully," Donny stated.

"Very well then, I'll tell you everything, just please, don't hurt Andy."

"We need to move to another room which is set up for videotaping your statement, so please come with us," Donny said, escorting her down the hall.

Once inside they started the camera as the three of them settled in to begin the question and answer sequence. Nora waived her right to have an attorney present.

"Please, start at the beginning, and take your time," Donny said.

"I was awakened by Simon; he was knocking on the kitchen door. When I saw who it was, I let him in. He was so hungry; I warmed him up a bowl of my vegetable soup, and made him a ham sandwich. Poor boy, he drank two glasses of milk. He was so tired, he went to his room. Said he would be leaving after he rested. Well, I didn't know what to do, so I called Andy, but he didn't pick up. After a minute or so, I called his name again, but still no answer, so I finally just hung up. Simon was ruining all of our plans," she said calmly.

"What plans would that be," Angel asked.

"Andy and I have been seeing each other for some time now." She blushed.

"You're lovers?" Angel asked

"Yes," she answered with a shy smile on her rosy-cheeked face.

"So what was this plan you referred to?" Donny redirected her.

"I knew James Butler was blackmailing Andy, and he was at his wit's end. He didn't know what to do; the hospital had scheduled an audit, which gave us only six months before he'd be exposed. So I told him about the insurance money from my late husband's death," she said.

"Just how much did your late husband leave you?" Donny inquired.

"Oh, that bastard didn't leave me a dime; he left it all to our children, Debra Sue and Simon." Her tone was most distasteful.

"So how did you plan to get the insurance money for Father Andy?" he asked.

"My plan actually started a year ago. My late husband set up his life insurance policy so that six months after his death, our children were to split the money equally."

"How much cash are we talking about?" Angel asked.

"The policy was for \$300,000."

"Isn't that a lot of cash for a poor Baptist minister?" Donny interjected.

"Oh, we never paid the premiums that was part of his benefits. The church took care of the payments to the insurance company."

"Please continue," Donny said.

"Well, to be honest, it wasn't my plan, it was my daughter's plan," Nora stated.

“What was your daughter’s plan?” Donny asked.

“To murder her father, Eugene, my husband. We were so tired of living under such a tyrant. So Debra Sue met this man at the strip club she worked at who was a pharmacist, or something, and for sexual favors he gave her a drug that would kill and make it seem as if the person had a heart attack. So she slipped it to her father in a glass of milk just before he went to bed. We found him dead the next morning. The autopsy report said it was a heart attack, so the insurance company notified us that in three months, they would bring out the two checks, one for Simon and one for Debra Sue. Each would get \$150,000.”

“Was Father Andy involved at that time?” Donny questioned.

“Oh no, not back then,” Nora replied.

“You and your daughter were going to split her half of the money, was that the plan?” Angel chimed in.

“No, we decided since all went so well with Eugene, that we’d kill Simon and Debra Sue would collect all the insurance money. Then we’d split it between us.”

“So how were you going to murder Simon?” Donny asked.

“We hadn’t thought that far ahead yet, but we had decided it should be me who kills him, since she killed her father.”

Nora spoke frankly as if simply discussing the weather, or some other trivial thing.

“But I didn’t trust Debra Sue, so I killed her.” Nora said with no emotion in her voice or expression.

The detectives were stunned at how she showed no sign of remorse. They glanced at each other in amazement at how candidly she was confessing.

“How did you murder your daughter?” Donny asked as he resumed the questioning.

“She would come home drunk most weekend nights after working at the strip club, so I took a half bottle of sleeping pills and mixed them into a bottle of beer. She drank it without hesitation and staggered off to bed. When I checked on her she was barely breathing, so I put a pillow over her face and held it there. She was so far gone, she hardly struggled. The poor dear was gone in a few minutes. I called 911 and they ended up ruling it to be a suicide. So that now meant all the money would go to Simon. He was my favorite.”

“So what went wrong?” Angel asked.

"Well, that lazy little bastard said he wouldn't share any of the money with me, after all I had done for that ungrateful little snot."

"Was he aware his father was murdered?" he asked.

"Oh no, he didn't have a clue we killed his father or that I killed his sister. Simon would have had a fit. He loved his sister more than anyone else," Nora said.

"If Simon died, were you the next in line for the money?" Donny asked.

"Yes, as the sole survivor in the family, it would go to me."

"So you were planning Simon's demise?" Donny continued.

"Oh, heavens no, that would have caused the insurance company to investigate. Too many deaths that close together, and they wouldn't pay off," she said.

"Go on, please," Donny said.

"It was at that time I spoke to Andy about a plan I came up with. Andy and I are madly in love with each other, and I knew the predicament he was in with James Butler. So he finally gave in to the plan I worked out to get Simon into the mental hospital, where Andy could use shock treatment and drugs to drive him insane. Then I could file for power-of-attorney over him and gain control of the money when it came. That way, we could use part of the money to cover the funds Andy had stolen, so no one would be the wiser."

"But Simon's escape threw a monkey-wrench into your plans?" Angel asked.

"Yes, I don't know how he got out, but I was so shocked when he showed up at the house. I phoned Andy, but couldn't reach him. I panicked, so I played the loving mother, and then it came to me. I decided to kill him and make it look like he went crazy and attacked me."

"Where did you get the .38 Smith and Wesson revolver you shot Simon with?" Donny asked.

"I took it from Doctor Lerner's desk drawer. I borrowed the key Andy had in his desk to get into her office. After I used his key, I put it back so he wouldn't know," Nora said in a harsh voice.

"Nora, did you murder James Butler?" Donny questioned.

"No, I had thought about it, but Andy agreed to help me only if we didn't hurt James. Andy's plan was to put the hospital funds back, and then pay James a large sum as a final payment. Then announce his

official retirement, and we were going to Florida to live in peace on what was left of the insurance money and his pension. But I knew James wasn't going to leave us alone, so I was planning his death when someone else beat me to it. I don't know who it was, but I was thankful they saved me the trouble..."

A sharp rap on the door interrupted the proceedings. It was Sean Meyers with the lab results from the gunpowder test on Andrew Crawford. Sean stuck his head in as Angel met him at the door.

"So, what's the word, lab rat?" Angel wisecracked, and then smiled.

"Too bad you're hitting for the other team, I find you to be very sexy in a Viking kind of way," Sean said smiling back.

"Well big boy, there are times when my companion and I desire a real, flesh and blood, big dick to satisfy our animal..."

Donny's face now popped between the two. "Are you shitting me, we're right in the middle of solving one of the biggest murder investigations in the history of Hot Springs, and you two are discussing a sexual threesome." Donny's agitated, strained whisper was heard by Nora, who pretended not to notice.

"Damn it Sean, keep your prick in your pants, and tell me what the test revealed," he said staring at him.

"Sorry Donny, the test shows no traces of residue on his hands. Happy now?"

Donny closed the door in Sean's face, and pointed toward the table for Angel to return to her seat.

"Yes master," she whispered mockingly.

Donny adjusted his tie as he returned to the table, sitting, he faced Nora, "Sorry for the interruption; please continue."

"Where was I?" she asked.

"You were explaining how you shot your son," Donny said.

"Oh, yes, I called Andy to ask him what to do, but there was no answer, just his machine. I panicked and decided to shoot Simon and make it look like he broke in and attacked me with the hammer. After he went to his bedroom and fell asleep, I got the gun and slowly crept down the hall. I paused for a moment at the doorway; he was lying on his side facing the wall. I can't say for sure, but I think he was awake. Slowly I walked up and stood behind him. Raising the gun, I pointed it at his back, but I must have leaned over too far in the dark, because the barrel touched him, and he tensed up. Then I knew for sure he was

awake. His head started to turn toward me, so I squeezed the trigger. His head slumped down on the pillow.”

“Why did you not finish him off?” Angel chimed in.

“I thought he was dead.” Nora replied.

“Please go on,” Donny said.

“I went to the kitchen and removed the hammer from under the sink. I broke out the door glass and put the hammer on the hallway floor. Then I went to my bedroom and dialed 911 to report the attack,” she said non-emotionally.

“So, Nora, you freely admit to murdering your daughter, Debra Sue; and to the attempted murder of your son, Simon. What about Linda Lerner?”

“Yes, she should have left Andy alone. She had to go, and like I said, Andy had nothing to do with these murders, nothing whatsoever,” she added.

Donny turned the video-camera recorder off, as he motioned for Angel to come into the hall. “Just stay seated Nora, and there will be an officer down shortly to escort you to a holding cell, all right?” He asked.

“Thank you Detective Smith, I’ll wait right here. But, before you go, would it be possible to see Andy?”

“Let me speak to the Chief, and I’ll get back with you, okay?” he stated.

“Yes, thank you.”

Detective Smith and Detective Jones returned to the homicide department after sending an officer to retrieve Nora.

Walking up to their desks, Donny’s chair had disappeared again. “I can’t believe those juvenile delinquents took my damn chair again. I’m getting so tired of this bullshit!” he fumed.

Angel pushed her chair over to Donny, and then sat on top of her desk. “See, problem solved partner.”

Sitting, he responded to her gesture. “Thanks, partner.”

Angel began. “Let me see if I’m following this all correctly. The good Father rapes little James Butler the altar boy. Growing up, he blackmails the good Father, who in turn embezzles from the rich hospital, right so far?”

“So far, so good,” Donny agreed.

“Then sweet little Nora stands by while her darling daughter kills dear old Daddy. Mommy then decides she can’t trust her, so she kills her and makes it look like suicide. Nora then plots with her lover, the good Father Andy, on how to drive her son insane to get control of the insurance cash. But in the meantime, Doc Lerner pokes her nose too far up the Father’s ass, so Nora whacks the bitch. Still on the right track?” Angel asks.

“Sounds like a winner so far.”

“So, who shot that Butler dude? Both Nora and the priest say they didn’t do it,” she questions.

“Either one or both of them are lying, which wouldn’t seem plausible since they confessed to everything else. Or, someone else at the hospital had access to the gun, or when it was in Nora’s possession, someone got it from her, used it, then returned it to her,” Donny hypothesized.

“Maybe they took it from Nora without her knowledge, and replaced it without her knowing it was gone?” Angel added.

“We need to find out who else knew of the revolver’s existence,” he said.

“Where do we start oh great one?” Angel asked sarcastically.

“Why, it’s elementary, my dear Watson, follow me,” Donny said mimicking Sherlock Holmes.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

The night nurse took Frank's vital signs, and made notations on his

chart as morning broke. Doing so awakened Virginia who was near the bed sleeping in a chair. She checked on Frank, who was still sleeping, then made her way to the lounge area.

The Carmichaels were already up; Harry and Ann were looking over the morning paper that had been brought up earlier. They met up with Virginia and decided to go in search of breakfast. As they were about to exit through the lobby doors, they spied Ranger Larry Smith coming in.

"Well, hello." He greeted everyone. "How's Frank doing?"

"He's still resting; the doctor is coming to check his progress in about an hour the nurse said." Virginia looked tired and worn out, but she was putting on a brave front for the others.

"Well, he's in our prayers," Larry Smith said trying to give some comforting words.

"Has anyone gone out looking for the black bear?" Virginia asked him.

"Volunteer rangers rode out on horse-back at daylight to search," Ranger Smith said. "It's been over twenty years since anyone reported seeing a black bear in these parts."

"Frank said he fired at least four shots at the bear. He couldn't remember for certain, but he's positive he hit it. He told me, he heard it fall a short distance away," she explained.

"Yes, I know. We investigated the area where we found Frank and Jack. There's several things I'd like to tell you. We haven't found the site where Frank and Jack first encountered the bear. We hope the group that rode out this morning will locate it. We did however search the site where we found Jack and Frank. But we didn't find any evidence of the bear having been there," Ranger Smith stated.

"What was Frank shooting at?" She said with a puzzled look on her tired face.

"We found your mule not far from where we found Frank. It had been shot twice, and was dead. What we think happened is that Frank and Jack mistook the mule for the bear. The vet said that Jack had a bullet wound in his left side. We think Jack charged, just as Frank opened fire, and he was hit by one of the four shots."

Virginia and the Carmichaels looked stunned, as they listened to the Ranger's account.

Ranger Smith continued, "When the rescue party came near Frank, he fired another shot that struck a tree. We believe he heard them coming and thought it was the bear returning. Because of his severe injuries, we

feel he was pretty much out of it at that point.”

Everyone was silent. Virginia and the Carmichaels just stared at the ranger. Harry noticed Virginia wiping tears from her eyes. They all turned as the Doctor approached them in the lobby.

“I was just looking for you. Frank has made much improvement during the night. He’s now stable. I believe he’ll have a normal recovery. His injuries are responding well, and his heart and vital signs look good. If we can prevent a secondary infection, he should be out of here in a few weeks.”

“Oh, thank God,” Virginia said finally smiling.

“He’s awake if you’d like to see him, just don’t stay too long. When you do leave, I gave instructions for the nurse to give him a sedative,” the doctor said.

As they entered his room, Frank gave a little wave. Virginia gave him a kiss, and a light squeeze, afraid to hug him too tightly.

“We were worried about you, until the doctor said you were doing great, so we decided to stop worrying,” she said grinning.

“Wait a minute. That doctor don’t know anything. I’ll be in here for at least a year,” Frank grumbled.

“I guess you could stay here, and do janitorial work at night, to help pay your bill,” she said.

“Whoa, if I have to work, I’d just as soon be home.” Changing his tune.

Ann and Harry greeted him with a kiss from Ann, and a handshake from Harry.

Frank changed the mood with a somber expression. “I’m worried about Jack. Have you heard anything about his condition? Maybe you could slip him in here, and hide him in the other bed?”

Virginia sat on the bed, holding his hand as if to never let go. “You know better than that. Besides Jack’s doing better than you. He’ll be released in a few days. They want him to take it easy for awhile. I plan on training him to drive your old red truck, so he won’t have to walk so much.” Virginia gave a phony laugh.

“Oh no you don’t. Keep him out of my truck, and if he should learn to drive, he’ll have to pay for his own gasoline.” Frank wisecracked.

The nurse entered the room with a tray. She had Frank’s medicine. Filling a paper cup with water, she handed it to him. A floral delivery arrived as the nurse finished observing Frank swallowing the pills. It was

a beautiful basket of white and pink carnations.

“Tell your friends to stop sending flowers. It looks like a funeral home in here. It creeps me out,” Frank mockingly complained.

After visiting another fifteen minutes, Frank started to fall asleep from his medicine. As his visitors were quietly leaving, he cleared his throat and said, “I thought you people would never leave.”

“Just keep it up. You’ll have me in the bed beside you,” Virginia mustered up a laugh.

Arriving home, Virginia noticed activity at the forest edge. It must be the rangers returning from their search for the black bear, she thought. Entering the house, she kicked off her shoes and stretched out on the couch.

She was going to rest for a bit, then have something to eat. Instead, she fell into a deep sleep. Hours passed, slowly waking up, she squinted at the clock over the television. Realizing how late it was, she made her way to the bedroom and lay down again, not realizing how exhausted she was.

Virginia was awakened by the phone ringing early the next morning. Answering, she recognized the veterinarians’ voice.

“Mrs. Turner, I’m afraid I have some sad news. At ten minutes after eight this morning, Jack passed away. It was a combination of the bear attack injuries and the gunshot wound. I’m so sorry; I know what he meant to you and Frank.”

Virginia, with tears flowing down her cheeks asked, “Would you make the arrangements to have him cremated for us?”

“Yes, Mrs. Turner, we’ll take care of it. I’ll phone in a few days, and let you know when his ashes are ready.”

At the hospital, two doctors and several nurses were in Frank’s room. During the early morning, his condition had taken a turn for the worst. One doctor was listening with his stethoscope to Frank’s faint, erratic heartbeat, when he was startled by Frank’s sudden outburst.

“You old rascal, Jack.” He laughed. “Thank God you’re here, boy. I sure did miss you. I can’t wait to get back out to the forest.” Frank’s eyes were closed but he was smiling. He slowly inhaled and exhaled several times, then stopped breathing.

The doctors checked his vital signs and agreed he had expired. They pronounced him dead at eight twenty am. Phoning Virginia, the doctor passed on the unpleasant news.

She phoned the Carmichaels, who came right over. They drove her to the hospital and later helped with the funeral arrangements. They spent the evening back at the Turner home reminiscing about Frank and Jack's adventures over the years.

She had Frank cremated, as was his wish. A few weeks later she took Frank and Jack's ashes and spread them out in the forest. She now felt with the two of them gone, she would sell the little farm, and move into town.

Virginia only lived seven months, and passed away peacefully in her sleep. The Carmichaels saw that she was cremated and that her ashes were scattered in the same location as Frank and Jack's were in the forest.

Ann told Harry about the dream Virginia had about three weeks before she passed, "Virginia told me she dreamed that she was walking near the forest edge, it was a beautiful, sunny day. She said as she neared the woods, Jack came running out of the forest, and started licking her hand. Then she looked up and Frank came walking out, smiling as he hugged her. She said Frank told her it was time, and he took her by the hand, and led her into the wonderful forest. Virginia said after that dream she felt finally at peace."

The retired ranger wiped a tear from his eye after finishing that story. "Throughout the years many reports kept popping up. All about an old man and his German shepherd, roaming through the forest, helping people that were lost."

"What an amazing story, I've heard about the old guy and his dog. I had no idea you were involved. Have you ever seen Frank Turner and his dog since they passed on?" Donny asked his grandfather.

"Many people claimed to have seen them, but so far as I can recall, I've not run across them yet." He replied.

Rose turned her head slightly, trying to focus on where the strange music was coming from. Standing, she became a little startled. "Well I'll be damned."

Donny and his grandfather looked at Rose, and then they stood, looking in the same direction as she. There was an elderly man walking along side a German shepherd. The small group standing on the porch silently watched as the figure of the man and dog went happy dick'n along the edge of the forest.

Rose gasped as the old man and his dog stopped, turned toward the house. The man removed his ball cap, and waved it in a greeting to them.

Rose grabbed her chest, "Holy shit," was all she could say as she stared without blinking.

The old ranger waved, and shouted to them, "Hello Frank! Hello Jack!"

The two figures turned, and then vanished into the musical forest. After they were out of sight, they could still hear the faint sound of Indian drums.

Rose spoke slowly, "Tell me that wasn't them?"

The old ranger turned toward Donny and Rose, "Looks like the reports are true. Good to know they're still helpin' folks out."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Chief Temme thanked the desk sergeant for escorting the elderly gentleman to her office. "Please, sit down," she said.

The proud man removed his fedora as a gesture of compliment toward the lady who was addressing him. Respect and manners were something he learned in his early youth, a time when such things were held in high esteem. "Thank you, ma'am."

"The sergeant said you had information on the murder of James Butler?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am, I do."

"May I have your name?" Chief Temme asked, pulling out a small sheet of paper to write on.

"My name is..."

Jumping up from her desk, she spoke as she rushed to her office door, "Excuse me for one moment." Entering the hallway she shouted at the two detectives who just passed by, "Stop right there!"

Angel and Donny wheeled around, a bit caught off guard by her shout.

"Where you two think you're going?" she demanded an answer.

"Just trying to tie up some loose ends," Donny rambled out.

"Step in my office," she said returning to her chair.

As Donny started to follow her, Angel took his arm, "What the hell did we do now?" she whispered.

"Beats me, let's go face the music," he said continuing on.

"Sir, my apologies for the interruption, but these are the two detectives who are working the Butler case. You really need to speak with them," she explained quickly.

The elderly gentleman stood to greet the detectives. Shaking hands with both, he announced, "My name is Leroy Washington, and I work at the hospital. I have news about that James Butler shooting."

Donny and Angel were relieved now that they knew they weren't in trouble with the chief.

"I'm Detective Smith, and this is my partner, Detective Jones. If it's all right with the chief, we'll go down the hall to one of the interrogation rooms and take your statement. Would that be okay?"

"Yes sir, that'd be right fine with me," Leroy said.

Leading him down, they entered and settled in. Donny began the questioning, "Now then, Mr. Washington, you have some information concerning..."

The door opened. It was Officer Dearborn. "Really sorry to bust in on your meeting, but there's a problem down at the holding cells."

"Can't you see we're busy, honey!" Angel snapped at her.

Officer Dearborn flashed a nasty look at Angel, then leaned close to Donny and whispered in his ear, "The chief said you're to come right now."

"Excuse us Mr. Washington. We'll be right back," he said motioning Angel to follow him.

Just past the large community cell were four single holding cells. The single cells contained only one, medium-sized hard plastic chair.

Father Crawford had been placed earlier in the last cell on the right. Dearborn stopped short as she pointed toward the end cell. Donny and Angel continued to advance, at which time they saw Chief Temme standing outside the cell door.

"What happened?" Donny asked as he came up beside her.

Now the three male officers came into their view. Two were holding up the limp body of Father Andy, as the third was standing on the plastic chair, desperately trying to unbuckle the belt that had been tightened around his neck.

"Does he have a pulse?" Chief Temme asked as the officer's finally got him down.

They placed him on the cell floor and checked for signs of life. "No pulse and he's not breathing," one officer advised.

"Start CPR, the ambulance is on its way," Chief Temme ordered.

"I thought it was a sin to commit suicide, especially for a priest," Angel noted.

"When you've done what he's done, what's one more sin?" Donny said.

Chief Temme wheeled around. "Hey! Take that kind of talk

elsewhere, detectives.”

“Sorry,” Donny whispered.

“There’s nothing you can do here. I’ll keep you posted on the outcome.” She said.

Donny looked around the other cells, and then took Officer Dearborn aside. “Where’s Nora Teel? She was supposed to be put in a holding cell.”

“Sorry, we were on our way to get her when this happened,” she explained.

“Well, put her on a suicide watch. When she finds out about her lover trying to kill himself, who knows what she’ll do.

“Yes sir, I’ll get right on it.” Dearborn said.

“You believe this shit?” Angel asked as the two headed for the interrogation room.

Donny took hold of the door knob, and then glanced at Angel, “You’re right, this is really strange.” He pulled the door open and found Leroy standing over by the two-way glass, looking at his reflection.

“Sorry for the interruption, sir, please take a seat,” Donny said sitting himself.

Angel remained standing, leaning against the wall.

“Is everything okay?” Leroy asked.

“Yes, nothing to worry about. So, you have some information for us concerning the Butler murder?” Donny once again asked.

“Yes, I shot James Butler,” Leroy stated straight out.

“How did you know James Butler?” he continued, a little caught off guard by his forthright statement.

“Detective Smith, this would be a good time to advise Mr. Washington of his rights, and to turn on the recorder, don’t you think?” Angel said sarcastically.

“Ah, yes indeed, you’re correct Detective Jones.” Donny blushed a little at his oversight. Advising Leroy of his rights, he activated the video-camera.

After making all the required statements, Leroy waived his right to an attorney, so they proceeded with the interview.

“How did you know James Butler?” Donny asked.

"I'm a mental health tech at the hospital. I work the night shift. James was the RN in charge. That made him my boss," Leroy answered.

"Please tell us how you came to shoot James."

"I didn't mean to shoot him. You see, I went to his apartment just to scare him, so he'd stop hurtin' the boy."

"What 'boy' would that be?" Donny asked.

"Why, Simon Teel. He was an angel sent from heaven, yes he was, sent from heaven in answer to a father's prayers." Leroy said.

Angel came over, sat down, and leaning forward, "What makes you think he was heaven-sent?"

"My son, Shane, he's crippled. Has no feelin' from the neck down to his toes. Can't feel nothin' but the wind on his face. But he's a good son. I love him dearly, I truly do, yes sir. He got real sick, so bad they took him to the medical center. Doctors said some kind of deadly infection was killin' my boy, and weren't nothin' could be done to save him. Told me to start makin' funeral arrangements." Tears started forming in his tired eyes.

Donny placed the tissue box in front of him, "You need a moment sir?"

"I'm fine."

Angel chimed in with her usual unsympathetic nature, "Go on."

"My son, dyin' right there before my own eyes. My beautiful wife gave her life bringin' him into this world. He came too early. Such a tiny thing, but still a gift from God. Shane wasn't right from birth, but he meant the world to me. So there I sat, watchin' my only seed, dyin' more each day. I got down on my knees right there in the hospital, and prayed for the Lord to send one of his angels down from heaven to fix my son. I prayed mighty hard, yes sir, I truly did. I never once lost faith in God. I knew he'd see me through this awful time, yes sir. I prayed day and night, and on the third day, God sent me an angel. He came in like a shadow, laid his holy hands on my boy, and I swear before Almighty God, I could see golden light comin' from his hands, and it was goin' into my son. Lasted...I don't know, but as sudden as he came, he left. I will never forget the look that young angel gave me. Looked in my sad eyes, and smiled, yes sir, he smiled. I knew then my boy, Shane, was gonna live, yes sir, God had answered my prayers," Leroy said bypassing the tissues and retrieving a handkerchief from his back pocket.

"Do you need a moment Mr. Washington?" Donny inquired.

"No sir, I'm fine."

"Let's move this along," Angel groaned as she rolled her eyes at Donny.

"It weren't no time, and my Shane came out of his coma. A short time later he was off the breathin' machine and was fine. Doctors ran many tests, and couldn't believe the infection was gone. One said it was a miracle. I know in my heart, it was God workin' a miracle through that angel of his. That angel was Simon Teel. I knew him right off, first day I laid eyes on him at the locked unit. He didn't remember me, but I remembered him. His face burned into my memory from that night he came and laid hands on my boy."

"So why did you shoot James Butler?" Angel asked growing impatient.

"James was pure evil, torturing one of God's angels here on Earth. I knew he hated poor Simon, I don't know why, but he was dead set on hurtin' him somethin' terrible. I couldn't allow that...God wouldn't allow that, no ma'am." Leroy explained slowly.

"How did you get the gun?" Angel blurted out.

"James had a key to Father Andy's office. So one night I took his keys from the nurses' station. I used his key to open Father Andy's office, and I got his key to open Doctor Lerner's office to get her gun. I swear I only wanted to scare James so he'd leave Simon alone, but the evil was just too strong in him. Well sir, even after he called me a dirty nigger, I didn't pull the trigger, but he tried to take the gun from me and that's when it went off. I swear I didn't want James dead, just to scare him, so he'd stop hurtin' the boy." Leroy sighed.

"Why confess now?" Angel asked.

"The guilt sent me to my pastor, and he said I should face up to what I done. Said God would see me through this ordeal. Well, ma'am, here I am."

"You wouldn't have any idea how Simon Teel escaped from the locked unit, would you?" Donny asked.

"Yes sir, I let him out down the elevator," Leroy admitted.

"Why did you free Simon after you killed James? Didn't that take care of the problem?" Angel asked.

"No ma'am, it didn't, because Father Andy was still usin' shock treatments and them strong drugs on the boy. Each day the boy got worse, so I had to do somethin' before God's little angel would be lost forever. So I set him free."

"Mr. Washington, please remain here, and in a few minutes an officer will come to escort you to another area," Donny said.

"Yes sir, I understand." Leroy said.

The detectives headed down the hall and came face to face with Chief Temme. She addressed the two in a soft tone. "The priest, Andrew Crawford didn't make it. They pronounced him dead in the ambulance, sorry. You did get his confession on tape?" she asked.

"We sure did," Donny replied.

"All right then, let's wrap this mess up so I can release a statement to the press. By the way Detectives, excellent work." Chief Temme continued on her way.

"Hell's bells, they all came and confessed, we didn't do shit," Angel whispered to Donny.

"Hey, it's over, let's type up our reports and go home," he said placing his hand up on her shoulder.

"Yeah, you're right, if that stupid cunt wants to give us credit, so be it," Angel quipped.

Donny turned, his face blazed with anger. "Don't you ever call Rachel a cunt! Don't make me whip your ass like before!" he shouted.

Angel stepped back and doubled up her fists. "Say what? Whip my ass...why you puny little runt, I'll..."

Chief Temme yelled down the hallway, "Is there a problem, Detectives?!" Her voice echoed down the corridor. Both Angel and Donny turned toward the Chief.

Simultaneously they answered, "No."

Angel turned to Donny, "Well, look at it this way, in twenty years, we can retire...partner." She smiled a big, toothy grin.

Donny placed his hands on his hips as he stared down at the floor. For he knew deep in his soul that one day they would indeed be good partners and even friends, but for now, with a slight moan he simply said, "Shit."

EPILOGUE

***** FIFTEEN MONTHS LATER *****

LEROY WASHINGTON: Charged with manslaughter in the shooting death of James Butler. The trial ended in a hung jury. A poll of the jurists found one vote for guilty, and eleven votes for not guilty. The prosecutor decided against a costly retrial. He felt Mr. Washington would probably be found not guilty anyway. Leroy Washington was released from custody. He is still employed at the psych hospital, and still cares for his son, Shane.

NORA LOUISE TEEL: She suffered a mental breakdown shortly after receiving news of Father Andrew Crawford's suicide. She was institutionalized for thirty days, at which time she was declared competent to stand trial. First-degree murder charges were brought for the murder of Debra Sue Teel, and Linda Lerner. An attempted murder charge for the shooting of her son, Simon Lee Teel was added. The conspiracy to commit murder charge in the death of her husband, Eugene Thomas Teel, was dropped. Nora Teel waived her right to a jury trial, and pleaded guilty to all counts. She asked the judge for leniency. The death sentence was handed down by the presiding judge. Nora Teel is now on death row. Condemned prisoners in Arkansas are put to death by lethal injection. She is in the appeals process of her death sentence at this time.

SIMON LEE TEEL: He made a full recovery from his gunshot wound. The life insurance policy by his father paid out the full \$300,000 benefit claim. Since he had no health insurance, after paying off the hospital stay, and the subsequent rehabilitation costs, he was left with only \$13,000. Simon Teel is currently taking classes at a community college, and working part-time as a mental health tech at the psych hospital along side his friend, Leroy Washington. The shooting incident by his mother ended the reoccurring nightmare. Due to positive changes in his

life, Henry is now communicating with Simon once again.

HENRY: Humankind will one day truly understand why their Supreme Creator has allowed his children to experience disease, murder, starvation, rape, war, and the like...and they shall be so very thankful for those life lessons.

The End