

# Mary's Contractions

by

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## Dedications

I would like to dedicate this story to several people but primarily my prison buddy “Turtle”. I only wish I could remember his real name but we all knew him as “Turtle”. Before I met him I was only capable of writing 50 or 60 page short stories but his wisdom put me where I’m at today and he believes I may be the next Stephen King. Also I’d like to dedicate this story to another author I met in prison my man “Unique” and I’d like to thank him for steering me in the right direction when it comes to publishing. I would also like to dedicate this story to my beloved sister Dana and her husband Sam for providing me with a peaceful environment to write my stories. I would also like to throw out one last dedication to my mother because any jailbird will tell you there’s no other love out there like the love we have for Mom. Any dedications that are left I would like to devote to my readers because I know if you dedicate the time to finish reading this story you will not have any regrets.



## Introduction

Bombs are showing up on people's door steps and the FBI and ATF have to act quickly. The case is so enigmatic that they have to utilize all of their resources because of the patriot Act proceeding 911. Monica Freeman is just starting her first year as a cop and can't wait to get her hands on some of the action. She leaves behind a promising career in psychology to become a cop because she no longer finds it challenging.

What she doesn't realize is her boss is going to put her on an assignment where she can use those skills for the ultimate challenge. Two weeks with a mental patient. They feel if she goes deep inside a mental patient's head that they might find similar patterns in behavior to catch the terrorist they're looking for. The mental patient thinks he can help in a big way but Monica is skeptical and feels her superiors are leaving her in the dark. Can a delusional schizophrenic help Monica catch one of Philadelphia's most dangerous killers? And who is Mary Maimer?



# CHAPTER 1

“Shhh.... You musn’t laugh that will only upset him. Actually, maybe you should try your best not to look happy. This one doesn’t like to be around happy people..”

I shut my mouth. I Immediately thought of my grandmother in ICU then a somber look quickly chased away any giggles I had left. Being brought up to speed on such short notice was ..... how could I possibly describe it? Exciting?

“Do you think that patient will ever figure out he’s got a streamer of toilet paper hanging out his butt?” I whispered.

I knew I shouldn’t laugh. I’d seen plenty of stuff like this before but it eventually gets old after a while. The 2 years I’d spent working on the 8th. floor over at the hospital felt like wasted time. I never felt like any of my patients truly suffered from mental instability, just issues, it was always the issues. Breakups, the bereaved, and yes of course, the indigent. Bums, hoboes, homeless or whatever you want to call them. They usually checked in just to stay warm in the winter time. Can’t say that I blame them.

My boss placed her index finger above her lips signaling me to be quiet as we slowed our walking speed to a near creep. It was my first year as a cop and I wanted to impress the heck out of my boss. I try not to bootlick but I’m not going to turn down a chance to get chummy. At least not in this economy anyway.

“I don’t get it, why does this patient think he’s so special that we have to shut up when were around him?” I whispered into her ear.

It was nice having a female for a boss. Don't get me wrong, I like working with men but girls can get so much more done without the distraction of, well...you know. We even had joked about how we would one day utterly destroy the glass ceiling. Girl domination we used to call it.

"Paranoid schizophrenic that's why. They're not a hundred percent sure yet of his diagnosis but were definitely going to help them look into it."

"Aw come on Nancy. They all say that. What's the real reason why?"

"Respect."

"Respect?"

I tried to speculate where she was going with this. This was definitely getting interesting.

"Because security has asked us to that's why. This patient has been here longer than any of the other patients and has never given our staff a problem. We keep our tone and mood at a bare minimum just out of respect. It seems to be working. Actually, we shouldn't even be whispering because if he hears our whisper he'll only assume we're talking about him."

"We are"

"I know"

"So we got ourselves a live one?" I asked jokingly.

My boss rolled her eyes in approval.

"Yeah we got ourselves a live one. Don't screw this up."

We stopped outside the patient's door that had been slightly pushed in. I braced myself for whatever I was about to look at. I didn't care either way. I was the one that was the cop. I had already seen too much just in my first year in the force. There wasn't anything really that I haven't already seen before.

"He's not going to hurt us is he?"

"Are you kidding? This one?" Nancy couldn't help but smile. It quickly diminished as she pushed on the door.

Nancy's huge frame blocked my vision of the creature I was about to meet. Nancy is a big girl. She once told me that she was the first African American

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woman to play high school football. She claims that she was better than more than half of the guys on her team. I never doubted it. I've learned to stay out of her way when she's pissed. What could I say, this whole thing was starting to look like a scene from the movie *Silence of the Lambs*. I followed Nancy into the room.

"Hey kiddo, is everything okay in here? They're saying you haven't come out much today. Is there anything you wan't to talk about?"

The creature refused to acknowledge our presence. Nancy pushed on.

"I have someone here with me today that wants to ask you some questions. Do you have a minute?"

I got eye contact for a split second and then the patient quickly averted his eyes and stared at my size 8 Nikes. They were pointed right at him. His eyes stayed staring at my shoes.

"Can you tell your Nikes to stop staring at me?" Pleaded the creature.

I could tell that his hair had just been cut. There were many spots that had been missed. Whoever had cut his hair was obviously in a hurry. His head looked like a lawn mower had run over it. Even my little brother wouldn't settle for a haircut like that.

I was no fool to this game. His intentional diverting of the eyes meant one of two things. He was hiding something, or he was just trying to play crazy. At this point I assumed the latter but truthfully I just didn't know. I would definitely find out. They say I have the persistence of an olympic swimmer. I don't swim. I run.

There goes a saying that a fool is quick to open his mouth. I opted to keep silent and let the creature continue on with his show. I wanted to get a good look at the creature I would be dealing with for the next couple of weeks.

Nancy broke the silence as I studied the creature.

"Hun I don't see Mr. Freddy. Oh I get it, are you supposed to be Mr. Freddy?"

"No, I'm Mr. Gary. Yesterday I was Mr. Freddy. I guess I forgot to change the card."

*Great. Multiple personalities* I thought to myself.

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My boss quickly picked up a number 2 pencil from the tiny desk and erased Mr. Freddy with the pink eraser attached to the pencil. I had never seen so many bite marks engraved into a pencil in all my life. The eraser however looked completely unscathed. Evidently Mr. Freddy (or Mr. Gary) didn't make too many mistakes or the pencil was merely a stress reliever. The rafts of hand written documents piled up on his desk suggested the pencil was more than just a chew toy.

The creature watched in absolute horror as Mr. Freddy slowly disappeared and loose eraser shavings peppered the linoleum floor.

"Hun you know you're not allowed to alter the name on your name card. Security reasons bud. If you want to keep this mutual respect thing going you gotta work with us. You don't want to thwart the guards that do the night count. Believe it or not they actually like you."

The creature said nothing. He finally took his eyes off my shoe and snuck a furtive glance at me. They had already warned me at the front desk that it was hard to get steady eye contact from this one. Something about a paranoia and that people were constantly reading his mind? A pair of sunglasses sat on the desk next to his writings. I wondered if maybe he felt like putting them on.

"They stole my hair and I wan't it back. I'm not leaving this room until all my hair grows back!"

He seemed really upset about his haircut. I wondered how long it was before whoever it was butchered it. I let Nancy continue to prep the creature while I brewed up a look of concern. Stupid haircut. *No laughing* I told myself.

"Hun who stole your hair? It looks okay to me." Said Nancy.

"They killed Shaggy! Now I have to wear sunglasses to keep the other patients from monitoring my thoughts. I liked my long hair blanketing my face thank you very much."

Nancy looked over at me and then filled me in.

"His family was just here a few days ago and his father tried to give him a haircut. I guess they just didn't like the shaggy look. He seemed relieved after they cut it, so, I dunno."

She shrugged her massive shoulders then focused back on the creature.

"Well don't you worry bud, you're going to have plenty of time to grow it all back. The doctor doesn't feel you're ready just yet."

"I've been here at least a month."

"Yeah well you just keep taking that medicine okay, you're doing good. My friend here she's a cop but she used to work in places like this. She's only here to help you and maybe there's a possibility you can even help us."

The creature actually smiled. I didn't like where any of this was going but I was determined to do my job. *Get inside this creature's mind* I kept telling myself. Weird thing about us girls is we want to understand what it is we later intend to destroy. Men are less patient, when they don't understand it, they destroy it. It makes me sick how many video games my younger brother has destroyed out of mere frustration when he couldn't get them to load.

I took a different approach then the creature would have ever expected. I even surprised myself.

"So how are things with your mother?"

Bingo. The look in his eyes said it all. His pupils dilated quickly and filled with legions of demons. This man was dangerous, or at least had the potential to be. His face was flush red like he was about to explode. He looked at me with those hateful eyes but the hate diminished the longer he stared at me. I was just too pretty for him to stay angry for long.

A slight chuckle followed along by a goofy smile. He was already learning to dissemble.

"What kind of opening statement is that?"

"It's just the stuff I'm so used to asking, I'm sorry." I said.

I wasn't sorry. I wanted to read his body language ASAP. Nancy had given me tid bits on the ride over of the history between this patient and his mother. I had trouble believing most of it. You hear so many of these stories that most of them end up in one ear and out the other.

"Do you know how many counselors and psychiatrists have tried to get me to tell them things about my mother?"

"And you never told them?"

"Heck no!"

"Why not?"

“Reverse psychology”

“You took psychology?”

I watched the expression on his face. This creature was going to be a lot easier than I thought. I was already picking up on his body language. He was so far telling the truth.

“No I never took psychology. I barely managed to finished high school, but I’m smart enough to know that leaving them in the dark would only make them assume something dire had happened to me. Things so dire that I wouldn’t even be able to talk about it.”

“So then you did want them to know?”

“No”

“Huh?”

Now I was the one confused. I was starting to feel like the creature was trying to spin me.

“Let’s just drop the subject. This is starting to feel gay. Why are you here?” He asked.

I looked at Nancy and she picked up the manila envelope from the desk. Apparently she had set it down while observing the creature’s little show. She handed it to me and I released the rubberband that held it together.

“We have a little problem that we think you can help us with.”

“Little?”

“Well nobody has technically died yet but someone has already been seriously hurt”

“I don’t get it. How do I fit into all this?” He asked directing his question directly to me.

I didn’t want to tell him but he had already been straight up with me earlier. I figured the truth couldn’t hurt him.

“Profiling.”

“Profiling?”

"Yeah, your name came up in our data base."

The creature quickly became excited but yet looked somewhat relieved.

"I knew it! They really do do that kind of stuff. They have computers now where the feds can type in key words involved in unsolved crimes and a whole list of potential suspects comes up. I even heard they have equipment now that can hone in on phone conversations designed to pick up words like **Kill, Bomb, Drugs, etc.**"

Time was already being wasted. I didn't particularly care to update this patient on the latest counterterrorism technology. I pulled the front page of the newspaper from the manila envelope and tossed it onto his lap. The weight of the paper pushed deep into his micro thin polka dot gown. I found it rather disturbing that he had not earned his clothes yet. *A month?*

From the time he picked it up to the time his eyes actually hit the paper was crucial. I watched his every move. His eyes widened when he read the headlines. I got a sick feeling in my stomach when his eyes moved to the story. There was a smile. Not a nice smile but an impish one. He knew something. I knew it.

"This is yesterday's paper. I've been here for at least a month I'm sure. Just ask the people at the front desk. The nurses see me every day. I....uh...I don't understand?"

"We obviously already know that you didn't do this okay hun, we were just hoping that somehow you can help us figure out who did."

I felt like I was talking to a two year old. Nancy left the room to give us a tete-à-tete conversation. Nothing at all looked neat about the room. A chair sitting off in the corner had an opened box of pop tarts of some flavor that I've never heard of. A pile of crumbs lurked beneath the chair. My new patient was far from a clean feak. I went for the box of pop tarts.

"Do you mind if I move these pop tarts onto your desk for a while so I can take a seat?"

"Sure take them with you on your way out. I took one bite into them and nearly puked all over the floor. My mother gave them to my father to give to me. They expired almost 2 years ago."

I was used to seeing balloons and flowers, but pop tarts? Evidently this creature came from an unusual family. I took the chair and moved it up closer to the bed so I could interview. My presence caused the creature to scoot fur-

ther back onto his bed. I certainly wasn't going to sit on the bed. God only knows what this guy does in his free time. I placed both my hands on my lap and leaned in forward a little while I spoke. My new patient already looked nervous. Perhaps he was just intimidated by me. I wasn't going to kiss him or hold his hand, I just prefer to get close when I interview.

“A teenage boy almost died in the hospital yesterday. The ATF and bomb squad are completely flummoxed..... I.”

I got cut off.

“What's flummoxed mean?”

“It means they're confused”

“About what?”

“The bomb, the motive, none of it makes any sense.”

“Was the bomb meant for the boy?”

The creature now gave his undivided attention. I made a mental note. Just talking about bombs seemed to get the creature all jazzed up.

“Were not really sure at this point but it's very unlikley. The boy was only in seventh grade and must have been at the wrong place at the wrong time and inadvert-.....accidentally picked up the explosive.”

I tried my best not to use big words that would prolong this interview. Nancy told me this patient tends to play stupid a lot just for kicks. I guess it's some kind of facade he puts on when he wants something.

“So you came to visit me to tell me about an accident? What let me guess, some kid was playing with a quarter stick and now somebody else is to blame? This is ridiculous!”

I took a deep sigh and tried to hold my cool. I knew Nancy would have flipped out by now.

“Look the way it blew up and the way it was put together has us all a little scared. Were talking about a small IED hidden inside a pack of cigarettes designed to detonate upon picking it up off the **ground**.”

I articulated that last word to keep his attention. His face lit up from shock and he grabbed his chest.

“Oh my gosh you guys are going to have your hands full for awhile. Sounds like your dealing with a mercury switch. I heard the CIA really hates mercury switches.”

“No” I replied

“No?”

“The bomb squad ended up finding all the remnants of the IED and submitted the remains to forensics. They’re still working on it right now actually, all evidence has been catalogued, but there’s a huge problem.”

The creature squirmed around a little bit but I still had his attention. It was hard to believe this guy was 33 years old by the way he was acting. I wondered how he ever finished high school.

“I used to watch all their stupid shows on the discovery channel. I didn’t know there was a project too big for those guys in forensics.”

“Yeah well they’re having a real tough time trying to locate any traces of mercury right now.

The top forensics leader is still scrutinizing the remains but is coming up empty handed. There’s a lot to this case that just doesn’t make any sense.”

“What was the kid doing picking up a pack of cigarettes in the first place? What would his parents say about that?”

Jeez. For a so called paranoid schizophrenic this creature wasn’t so out of touch with reality. I noticed the sweat marks he was leaving from rubbing the palms of his hands into his gown. He didn’t seem to realize that he was doing it. Maybe it was just from the medication. Nancy had told me that this one doesn’t warm up to strangers very well. Something about a social disorder.

“The kid only began talking this morning because he was in shock all day yesterday afternoon. He swears up and down all he did was pick up the pack of cigarettes and had plans of finding it’s owner or throwing it away. He never got a chance to open the box. The cigarettes were sitting on the front porch plain as day. Needless to say his morning off to school was not off to a good start.”

“How bad off is the kid?”

“He’ll never pick up a pencil again and be able to write like I see you like to do. Metal shrapnel manage to puncture his heart. He’s lucky to be alive.”

The creature scratched his chinny chin chin and mulled over the newly-found news on his lap. He kept his gaze on the article but my vision was not sharp enough to determine which parts he was reading.

“Sounds like you guys have a maimer on your hands.”

He furled the paper and placed it on my lap. I checked his cuticles but saw nothing. *Pencil Chewer* I told myself.

“Yeah, well were worried this maimer may strike again.” I said.

A part of me wondered if maybe the maimer was just warming up before the bigger bombs came out.

Nancy stormed into the room startling us both.

“Come on we have to go now,” she said tugging my arm,” There’s been an emergency!”

I left the newspaper article with the patient and proceeded to head out the door.

“Wait! I never got your name! What’s your name?” pleaded the creature.

We scampered out the door nearly tripping over each other. Life as a cop was still proving to be exciting and on the beat. I turned my head as I shouted back to the creature.

“My name is Monica it was nice chatting with you!”



## CHAPTER 2

Nancy was a big girl but she still had it in her. Don't ever think that just because someone is heavy that they can't move fast. We caught our breath when we reached the elevator and Nancy's cell rang once again. She handed me her gloves and leather satchel so she could focus all of her concentration on the phone call. Nancy was my boss but hey what could I say? Even she had a boss too. I listened intently as the elevator car took us down to the first floor.

“Okay, okay. Are there any casualties? Uh-huh I see. What time did it happen? Oh my gosh that sounds awful! Is she going to be alright? Okay were heading down to the station now.”

Nancy hung up the phone with a look of dismay on her face. I pruned for information while I had the chance.

“What? What is it? What happened?”

“There's been another bombing. Soccer mom this time.”

“Another pack of exploding cigarettes?”

“No. This one is really sick. Lady opens a small manila package thinking she's getting some free promotional vitamin pills and the bottle explodes before it ever makes it out of the envelope. They're not even sure yet if this is the same bomber.”

The elevator doors swung open and we swiftly exited the car and headed towards Nancy's Chevy Tahoe. Nancy always insisted that big girls needed to drive big vehicles. I myself drive a mini cooper, convertible of course.

“Why wouldn’t it be the same bomber?” I asked.

“The package was mailed all the way out from California. I’m sure there’s a connection but I don’t think this guy is working alone.”

“This guy?”

Nancy looked at me as if I must be joking.

“Come on Monica, Since when are women into this kind of explosive nonsense?”

We boarded the Tahoe and slammed our doors shut in unison.

“I just don’t like to rule anything out. At least not this early into the game.”

“Game? You think this is a game?”

I strapped on my seatbelt and gave my boss a staredown until she finally cracked a smile to show she was not serious about the accusation. We play these little head games with each other all the time. Nancy doesn’t like it when I question her judgement and finds little ways to get back at me. I did feel like she was one up on me with the game comment. I placed the gumball lights on the dash and Nancy all but ran people off the road.

This city of Philadelphia was looking more and more like that video game my little brother used to play all the time. Grand Theft Auto *Vice City*? I think that’s what it was called. Nothing but chaos permeated this part of Philly. We zoomed down the Rosemont freeway dodging dirtbikes and sometimes even four wheelers. None of the Philadelphia people really cared out here enough to follow PennDOT regulations. Out here I’d bet one out of three cars actually has auto insurance. It was rare that you’d see a cop heckle someone for driving without a license or a missing plate. We were just simply too busy handling more important matters like chasing drug lords, bank robbers, and in this case..... I hate to say it..... A terrorist.

## CHAPTER 3

Us girls don't do coffee. We do cappuccinos. Two steamy hot mocha cappuccinos were sitting in front of the coffee pot by the time we reached the station. Who put them there I don't know but my guess is probably our lovely secretary Ms. Honey. Nancy and I swiped the drinks and took our seats in the oval room. We commonly referred to this conference room as the oval room because of the big mohogany oval shaped table that had been at this station for nearly 30 years. We were two sips into our cappies when the door swung open and Nancy's boss stormed into the room. He was followed by the postal inspector. I have never met a postal inspector before but if you ask me he looked more like a doctor. They both had disheveled looks on their faces.

"Girls, girls, I'm glad you could be here on such short notice. This here is postal inspector Mike Stevenson." Said Nancy's boss lightly touching the inspector's shoulder.

We shook hands with Mike then he pulled out a chair and took a seat. At this point I'd have to say that Nancy's boss was definitely cuter than Mike but I could literally feel the intelligence radiating from this inspector guy. Nancy always made me swear not to tell her boss that she found him dead sexy. They were both happily married but Nancy always liked to keep her eyes open. She leaned over and whispered into my ear.

"That's my boss Bill. Isn't he a cutie?"

I smiled and grunted in approval. Both of these guys had to be at least 10 years older than me.

Unfortunately I don't yet find men that are in their mid thirties very attractive but I would never let Nancy know that.

Bill fixed himself a cup of freshly brewed coffee while the postal inspector opened his briefcase and fished around for things meant to be used for the overhead projector. We were all wound up from the excitement except for Bill. If I had to describe Bill in one word? Judicious. A former Navy Seal that was known for getting things done. Nancy told me once that Bill's father helped out in a big way somehow with chasing the Zodiac Killer. Unfortunately the Zodiac killer was never caught. Excellence ran in Bill's family. He was 6ft 5" tall and nothing but raw sinewy muscle from head to toe. He always had a grave look on his face from the years that he had spent sniffing out danger. I think Nancy said much of his family had migrated to the U.S but he still has some relatives left in Southern Africa. His long ebony fingers looked the size of Michael Jordan's hands. Nancy swoons over this man.

The postal inspector set up the projector while Bill finished stirring up his coffee. Bill was a patient man and never liked to rush anything. He took his time taking his seat at the oval table with us. I had already figured Nancy's boss liked to stand as much as he could to show off his enormous height. Either that or he was just simply in no hurry to sit next to Nancy and put up with her drooling over him.

The lights went out. I exhaled a deep breath and prepared myself for this show about to begin.

## CHAPTER 4

The images Mike was showing us were disturbing. Nancy was sure to let out some groans of disgust. The pictures were so gory we had all completely forgotten to sip our coffees. One thing is for sure. If I ever have kids I'm not letting them anywhere near firecrackers. Not even matches.

The inspector paused on a picture of a little mexican boy with a mutilated eye that looked like it had been mawed off by a bear. The oval room got silent as we gaped with horrified looks on our faces.

“Let’s not forget that the fingers are not the extent of the damage possible from these IEDs folks. This photo was taken in 1994, Mexico City. That’s an 11 year old boy your looking at. Permanently blind in his right eye.”

I had questions. I wanted to ask them before he could continue on to the next slide.

“Is that photo somehow related to this case?”

I felt like I was being a wise guy but he did say the photos were shot in Mexico City. What does that have to do with Philly? Mike quickly pushed the button on the remote to bring us to the next picture on the overhead projector.

“Oh no, no, no... I'm just showing you this to prepare all of you what you'll be in for should these Co2 bombs continue to plague this city of Philadelphia. This is not the first time Co2 bombs have surfaced. This stuff happens in Mexico all the time but the U.S never sheds any light on it.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“Basically we don’t want to give any potential terrorists any new ideas. We have enough problems of our own to worry about.” Mike hit the back button on the remote, “This kid not only lost some of his fingers but his right eye is gone due to his stupidity of making one of these things himself. Don’t be fooled by his innocent look. They found in his diary detailed plans of what he intended to do with these things. This isn’t the first time a bomb maker inadvertently blows up himself. Kind of a Karma thing if you ask me.”

Nancy went for my cappuccino to distract me so she could have her time to talk. Evidently her own cappuccino was empty already.

Nancy piped in.” Hey you never know, maybe the bomber were dealing with might blow himself up.”

We all smiled and chuckled. We like that idea. Nobody likes a terrorist. Especially a homegrown one. I snatched my cappy back from Nancy when she wasn’t looking and took a swig. I was still confused about something and I wanted answers. Bill was still scribbling some notes but managed to do it without taking his eyes off the screen. Eventually I too would someday develop that skill. It was my turn to pop a question. I knew I would have a lot of them.

“Were sitting here looking at the aftermath of these Co2 bombs which I presume almost anybody can get their hands on one if they wanted to. What I’m not quite clear on just yet is how exactly does my mental patient tie into all of this?”

Inspector Stevenson didn’t even have to think to answer my question.

“Same MO.”

I was ready for him. I leafed through some of my documents I found last night while researching my patient and pulled them from my folder.

“Do you mean the same MO that was broadcasted all over the World Wide Web for everybody to see? I don’t know which newsies got the bright idea to list and broadcast every component to the mail bomb my patient mailed 10 years ago but here it is.”

I handed Mike a paper I had printed off of the internet but he only took a glance at it then handed it back to me.

“Yes I’ll look at it later when I find some time. Let’s not forget that your mental patient mailed a bomb to a doctor. I believe they dubbed it a weapon of mass destruction as a matter of fact? Your patient’s work is very similar to what were looking at right here.”

Mike pushed a button on the remote and the room got quiet. This was it. This is what brought us in on such short notice today. The projector flashed to the next picture and we found ourselves staring at the aftermath of the mail-bomb discovered earlier this morning. Pieces of the plastic vitamin bottle were splayed out on the table along with the remnants from the parcel. The bomber had gone as far as to include styrofoam peanuts within the package. Evidently the explosion had turned the styrofoam pieces into black marshmallows. I actually felt a pang of fear staring at the bomber’s handywork. This was the work of a professional. Somebody had spent a lot of time on this.

“How was the IED primed to explode?” I finally asked.

Bill stopped writing. The bomber’s work was just too much for us not to stare at it. Mike pulled out his laser pen and pointed to a chunk of the plastic bottle that had a tiny pinhole. There was much metal pieces from the Co2 bomb mixed in with plastic rubble. He kept the laser pointed at a particular piece of the shattered plastic bottle.

“Do you see that small hole punctured into what used to be the side of the bottle?” We all nodded, “The bomber ran fishing line right through that pinhole and fastened the end of the line to the bottom insides of the business envelope. All those styrofoam peanuts you’re looking at were packed inside of the parcel to hide the line. Basically this was designed to explode as soon as the recipient would pull out the bottle from the envelope. In this case the victim didn’t even stand a chance. Lady thought she was getting some herbal vitamins, reached in the envelope, and boom. The postal service really hates this kind of stuff. The drug trafficking we can deal with but these terroristic acts really make us look bad.”

“So I take it there was some kind of triggering device inside of the bottle that the line was tied to?” Piped up Bill.

It was good to see Nancy’s boss finally joining into the conversation. This time I jotted down some notes. *Bomber goes through great lengths to prevent his packages from looking suspicious.*

“Folks were talking common household items. The triggering device was nothing more than a simple hair piece! If I didn’t know better I’d think we might be dealing with someone who is handicapped and can’t get out much because a lot of this stuff you could find just laying around your house.”

I added to my notes. *Bomber prefers using household items....Handicapped?* I wanted to learn more. I paused from my note scribbling.

“What about the exploding pack of cigarettes incident yesterday? Common household items?” I asked.

Nancy’s boss Bill cut in and curled his giant index sausage finger in my direction. His finger looked just like that adorable alien’s finger from the movie E.T.

“Monica I don’t think the cigarette bomb incident has anything to do with Inspector Stevenson’s line of work. Mike deals only with mail crimes remember?”

I felt stupid. I bit my nail in frustration without even realizing it. Mike just smiled to show his support. It was an affable smile, not a cocky one. I could already tell at this point that inspector Stevenson was probably one of those smart quiet kids in school that spent nearly all his free time reading books. Book worms we used to call them. Those book worms often end up landing jobs with six figure incomes just like inspector Stevenson I suspected. Actually my own income wasn’t too shabby these days come to think about it.

We never did get to see a picture of the poor unsuspecting soccer mom who opened the package but I felt like I had already seen enough for the day.

I just hoped our bomber (or bombers) didn’t have any intentions of striking again in the imminent future. Tomorrow would be another day.



## CHAPTER 5

It felt good coming home to my apartment. No floppy eared dog with stinky breath to greet me at the door. I liked that. Don't get me wrong, I like dogs, just when they're not in my apartment. Owning a dog just doesn't go over too well in my line of work. I grew up with dogs all my life and I've learned they can be a real messy handful. Worse than 3 yr. olds sometimes if you let them.

Before the days of cellphones I used to enjoy racing over to the answering machine as soon as I got home hoping for a call from Perry. Perry Perry dingleberry I used to refer to him when I wanted to torment. We've been dating on and off since high school.

A package was layed in between the storm door and I nearly tripped over it on my way in. I felt my heart skip a few beats and the scare caused me to drop my entire mental patient's dossier onto the kitchen floor. I caught my breath. It was just the phonebook. Hopefully our mad bomber doesn't get a bright idea to hide his infamous bombs inside one of these. Verizon would get their handful of complaints for sure.

I picked up the scattered papers just as quickly as they had fallen onto the floor. I admit to being a clean freak. Perry never understands why I give him a good tongue lashing just for forgetting to use a coaster for his drinks. I layed my patient's file onto the kitchen table and rushed to the bathroom. I needed to check my face.

When I looked in the bathroom mirror I made a mental note to myself. *Minus a Christmas present for Perry Perry dingleberry.* I'd told him one too many times. Christmas was still seven months away but my family is always known

for getting a head start on things like Christmas shopping. I took a cloth and wiped away my boyfriends left overs from his flossing adventure so I could clearly see my what should be impeccable face. I straightened back my shoulders to prove to myself I was nowhere close to needing a boob job. My friends in school always used to call me Laura Croft when they were joking around. *Tomb Raider Chick* the jocks used to refer to me. I can still remember Johnny Cooks witty pickup line before I turned him down. *Hey Tomb Raider chick, wanna spelunk with this hunk?* I told him no before he could even finish talking and walked away. That made mother proud. Johnny Cooks was captain of the football team. Mother always assured me that jocks made lousy husbands. *They get drunk all the time and they're wreckless* she used to say. Perry wasn't a jock. Perry was a nerd. My family likes nerds.

I fixed my face the best I could. In my line of work you could never spend enough time pampering your face. I see new people every day and I'm determined to look my best. I keep my long dark brown hair neatly brushed and pulled back so it doesn't fall in my face. I found a few eyebrow lashes that needed plucked. Hopefully nobody stared at my face long enough to realize I had a few lashes that were a little bit too long. I don't usually make mistakes. Mistakes get made when people rush. Today I was rushed.

My face looked presentable in all but 5 minutes, not that it mattered anyways. I had no intentions of showing it the rest of the day. Usually I shower as soon as I get home but I'm about to be profusely sweating for the next 30 minutes right in the middle of my living room floor. I raced upstairs to my bedroom and changed into my cute little pink jogging suit. I grabbed a freshly cleaned hand towel and headed back downstairs to my early Christmas present. It's only early May and I'm already running the AC.

I have a top of the line treadmill I keep right in the middle of my living room floor. The streets of Philadelphia are not fun to jog on and I don't like guys gawking at me at the gym. This was Perry's genius idea of an early Christmas present. He claimed he had nowhere to hide it and figured I wouldn't mind getting it early. For once he was right. I'm usually the one that's always right.

The high powered treadmill was more than just a treadmill. It was one big play toy. Although I was the only one standing on my living room floor I would not be the only one running. This particular treadmill was the latest hot commodity and I was about to jog with my friends on the internet. There was a giant 46 inch plasma screen built on the front of it with a built in mike. I must say coolest invention ever. Yes, cooler than the Wii. Do you really think much calories get burned swinging a joystick around? Get real.

I turned on the plasma screen and logged on to the game. There were four other runners online waiting to compete in the next race. So many people are doing this virtual running game that you never have to wait for more than 5 minutes for the next race. I recognized Missbunnyfoot32 on the screen logged in for the next race. I was determined to beat her. Again. My virtual runner screen name is SpeedQueen55. There was 2 minutes left until the next race would start. I stretched out my hamstrings than quickly ran over to the sink to fill my water bottle. This girl doesn't do bottled water. Waste of money. Perry thinks I'm weird for that.

A number 10 flashed on the screen for the countdown and the treadmill belt began moving on it's own. This thing is so cool. It has a built in sensor mounted to the back of the belt in case you can't keep up and start to slow down. There's also one mounted to the front which speeds the belt speed up should you be able to run faster. There's no need to push buttons to control the speed. The sensors do all the work to match the belt with your speed.

The game started and I got to see the girls on the screen. Silverbulletchick656 was already talking smack.

"I'm bringing the heat this time sluts!" Said Silverbullet.

We weren't sluts. Hey do you think you males are the only ones who exchange pleasantries?

"Come on girls lets just play nice." I said into the mike. (I was always the positive one)

I could hear the motor to my treadmill whirring as I ran towards the front of the belt to get the speed built up. I was going to dust these skanks. I started out at 6.6 mph just incase my muscles decided to cramp up at the beginning of the race. Starfly212 came onto the screen and passed all of us like dust in the wind. We would see her alongside of the road gasping for breath after the first mile. All of us already knew this. Starfly212 was just a tease to get us all motivated. To the best of my knowledge she never won a race with us.

My jog was slowly turning into a sprint. The screen showed I was going 9.1 mph and I was in second place but still trailing Silverbulletchick656. I knew at this point I would have to rely on some tunes from my Ipod for that extra push. I looked down at the cubby hole and realized I didn't have my Ipod. It was charging on the dock below my entertainment center and way out of arms reach. I shouted into the mike.

"No Ipod girls. Speedqueen forgot her Ipod. This race isn't going to be fair."

“Ha sucks to be you! I don’t even own an Ipod.” said Silverbulletchick656

My distraction was working. Silverbullet was slowing down and I was literally 10 ft. behind her. Sometimes we even tell funny jokes with hopes it will slow down our oponents with laughter, then cramps. After the first mile the treadmill began to incline as the screen showed we were running up a hill. I knew this was my moment. My calf muscles throbbed as the treadmill manuevered upward making it feel exactly like running up a hill. I pumped my arms and pushed on. My father used to tell me to imagine reaching for a doorknob to better my arm pumping technique.

Before we reached the crest of the hill I managed to sprint past Silverbullet. I had been running up hills since I was 11 and had legs strong as a horse. There was only less than a quarter mile to go and I was way ahead of the pack. I was at a full sprint with the screen showing me barreling at 9.9 mph with a commanding lead. I wanted to give a strong ending performance. I’ll admit, I’m a showoff but when it comes to running I always feel compelled to give a hundred and ten percent. My wind was dying out and I had to shut my eyes occasionally and push to maintain my speed. When I opened my eyes the second time I couldn’t believe my eyes. Starfly212 was almost crossing the finish line!

## CHAPTER 6

I pumped my arms and legs as fast as they would go but it was no use. With the distance we already cleared I don't see how anybody would have enough wind left to be zipping at 12 mph like Starfly. There were grunts and groans emanating from the screen amongst the group. We all couldn't believe what we were seeing.

"You know that girl ate her wheaties today!" said Silverbullet656

"I didn't even know these treadmills go that fast!" said Anitarunfaster34

My mouth stayed shut. I was still in shock. Everybody knows that second place is first loser and guess what? I was stuck in second place.

Our treadmills slowed down to a walking speed and I went for my water bottle. This was such crap. Something just didn't make since. Starfly212 never wins a race. Had she been practicing? We all shut up when we heard Starfly begin with her bragging rights.

"You girls are easy! I think I'm ready to race again."

It remained silent as we all gasped for breath. I checked my heart rate. 185. Not bad for a girl only 26. I swallowed some water and then suddenly realized something. This race wasn't a fair race. I immediately let the team know.

"Ha! You must think were idiots starfly212. Hey I gotta admit you had us fooled for a split second."

“I don’t know what you’re talking about? I just dusted all your butts!”

I tried to talk but was still heaving over and catching my breath. How could anyone possibly talk after sprinting 3 miles? That’s how I knew she cheated.

“Nice try. Maybe Superman can do a sprint like that and then talk like a lawyer articulating to his jury. What did you do? Jump off the treadmill half way through the race and then leave your hand on the front sensor to speed it up?”

I love being smart. My sleuthing skills have always been superb. That’s why I’m in my line of work. Starfly212 laughed into the screen. She knew she was caught.

“You guys always win! Why do you have to rain on my parade SpeedQueen55?” (She knew not my real name)

I logged off. I was done talking to these whores. Actually I was pissed off at Starfly for cheating but I can’t say that I blame her. Let the consistant loser win for once. It gives them hope. Even if they have to cheat. Believe it or not I was intrigued with Tanya Harding’s stunt she pulled on Kerrigan during the olympics. It showed she cared enough to go all out like she did and brake the law. Secretly I admired Starfly212 for figuring out a way to manipulate the treadmill and win the race.

My Playboybunny hand towel was soaked in sweat by the time I got off the treadmill. I guzzled down 32 ounces of tap water so fast I was spilling all over the carpet. Sushi came over wishing it was milk I was spilling. Hey just because I refuse to get a dog doesn’t mean I can’t tolerate a Siamese cat. Cats are more independent and not nearly as messy, or annoying. I gave Sushi a quick scratch on the butt then raced upstairs to shower.

Halfway through my shower I somehow manged to hear my cellphone ringing through the splashing water. At my young age you can bet I hopped out of the shower to try to catch the call. Because of what was happening, I’m on the clock 24/7 until things settledown. I still had Aussie shampoo in my hair by the time I picked up my cell.

“Yes, Hello?”

“You sound out of breath. Is everything alright?”

“Perry what the frick man! I’m standing here stark naked with soap dripping from my hair all over the carpet.”

“Whoah! Sounds exciting...”

“Perry, don’t start. Is this important?”

“Whoah...What’s with the sudden attitude. Did somebody finally beat you in that virtual treadmill race?”

I can talk to Perry however I want. He’s my little nerd and I can get away with it. More frothy soap oozed off my shoulders and onto the floor. Perry Perry Dingleberry just wasn’t getting it. I wanted to get back to my shower ASAP.

“Well yes and no. It’s a long story. I’ll tell you what, call back in ten minutes.”

“Okay I’m heading ov-...”

I hung up on my boyfriend. I could’ve sworn I heard him say he was on his way over. I didn’t want him over today but I have trouble turning down company. Since I’m one of those smart chicks, the shower water was still running when I finally got the chance to hop back in. I had never shut the water off to answer Perry’s call. Nothing is more annoying than standing in front of the tub freezing like an idiot patiently waiting for the water to get hot all over again.

It felt good once my body was nice and squeaky clean. I’m one of those freaks that cranks the shower water up as hot as it will go. I don’t have a hot tub and a steamy hot shower helps loosen up stiff muscles. My Connaire hairdryer was the first thing I picked up after I wrapped a towel around myself. I like holding the hairdryer. It almost feels like holding a gun.

I heard a loud shout above the screaming of my Connaire. I put the big plastic gun down and shut it off. There was an intruder in my house. I had a good idea who the intruder was.

## CHAPTER 7

Perry brought me a red rose. Ladies, when a man is still bringing you roses after you've been together for 8 years, don't throw something like that away. Over the years Perry has started to fill out more and actually grow some masculine shoulders. Late bloomer my mother used to call him. He has dark sincere eyes and a chisled chin with a throbbing vein in his neck that comes out when he gets excited. Pearly whites of course, but don't all of us educated people have that? I did a good look over my lover before I let him inside. His cargo shorts were wrinkly but that was the style these days. Perry always looked good in just about anything. I then stared at the rose.

"Aww....My Perry Perry Dingleberry got me a rose!"

I went to reach for it but he placed it behind his back and smiled. I thought he was playing so I wrapped my arms around his waist and tried to grab it.

"Lemme have it Perry I want it!" I pleaded.

He continued to twirl it around so I couldn't grab it.

"If I'd of known you wanted one I would've gotten you one but this isn't for you."

I stopped tormenting and pulled my arms back to my side.

"What, do you have another girlfriend you forgot to tell me about?" I doubted it.



“No silly, this is for your grandma.”

I felt that familiar pang of anxiety get slapped across my chest. That same feeling you get when a doctor drops you some bad news about a loved one. I love my grandma. Everything I do in life I do for grandma. If it wasn't for her I wouldn't be who I am today. Needless to say grandma got me where I am today. Grandma paid for my college. My grandma's love is what motivates me.

Perry calmly handed me the rose and politely smiled showing his pearly whites. I didn't bother to look for crusties between his teeth because I knew I had earlier wiped them off my bathroom mirror. I lovingly wrapped Perry in my arms and managed to keep myself from crying as we embraced.

“Perry, the nurse called today and advised us not to bother visiting her tonight. She's still in ICU and has no cognition whatsoever. Grandma's so incompetent right now she refers to every nurse that walks in there as Monica. We already have credit for visiting her today so there's no point in us stopping by.”

I hugged him a little longer and harder until I felt my towel starting to unfurl around my waist. I quickly grabbed the towel before it slipped down from my waist and wrapped it a little tighter. Perry already knows that there will be none of that. We are both virgins and saving ourselves for marriage. That's at least what we tell our folks anyways. I placed the rose in the flower vase that sat in the middle of the kitchen table. Perry helped himself to whatever he could find in the fridge while I ran upstairs and threw on some clothes. He likes it when I'm dressed in uniform but today would not be his lucky day. He knows if he wants to catch me in uniform he'll have to bring me in my lunch while I'm on duty.

I came downstairs sporting a pair of tightly hugging *Mudd* jeans and a cute little pink shirt with tiny sleeves. The shirt had the number 7 showing on the front which was naturally faded. The styles are so hard to keep up with these days it makes me wonder if clothes from the 50's might be the next style. I ran faster down the stairs when I couldn't believe what I caught Perry doing.

“Hey! You're in big trouble buster... I told you the V8 juice is off limits. I don't have time to keep going to the store. Drink the lemon tea in the back of the fridge or make yourself some coffee.”

Perry put the cap back on the V8 juice and reddened in the face because he knew he'd been caught. It was too late because he had already filled the glass.

“Hun this isn’t for me. I poured this for you babe.”

“Uh-huh” I said.

I swiped the glass from him and imbibed. People that come over know that nothing pisses me off more than someone drinking up all of my V8 juice. My healthy tomato juice is off limits. I went in the fridge and pulled out the lemon tea for perry and poured him a glass. I let him chug half of it down before I walked him over to the kitchen table and sat him down. I picked up one of the manila folders concerning my patient. He spread his legs way out underneath the table and slouched in his chair making himself comfortable.

“So this is why you’ve been ignoring me the past two days? Got yourself a doozy of a case huh?” He grunted.

I ignored his sarcasm and pulled out some of my patients file from the folder. In the two years of working at the hospital I can’t say I’ve ever heard of complete patient confidentiality. HIPAA is a real joke. Do you really think us doctors and nurses don’t talk to our loved ones and friends about what we see in the work place? Come on get real. I handed some documents over to Perry for him to take a look at. He seemed kind of jazzed up that I was letting him be a part of this. Perry gazed at the aftermath of the mailbomb remnants spread out on the forensics table.

“Whoa! This looks professional. This is the work of your patient?”

“No. My patient is over in the psych ward at Lincoln Hospital. Been there for a month now.”

“Month? What happened to signing a 72 and being on your way?”

The average patient that comes into a behavioral Health Unit for treatment signs a 72 Hour notice and leaves the hospital in less than three days. It solely depends on their circumstances and the doctor has the authority to prolong their stay.

“The doctor says my patient is extremely delirious. He’s brilliant at times and then catatonically stupid the next minute. Just the other day he was accusing the hospital staff of poisoning his water.”

Perry chuckled to himself. I always had some interesting stories for him. His job in computer programming was nowhere nearly as exciting as my work.

“I don’t get it. How does our little nutcase tie into all this?”

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I dunno. Probably doesn't."

Perry was getting confused. He picked up the other photographs to scrutinize.

"So why does your boss want you to spend the next couple of weeks with a mental patient?"

"Same MO"

"Same MO?"

"10 years ago my patient mailed a bomb to a doctor. The bomb he fashioned together is quasi with what were dealing with now. These bombs weren't designed to kill, they're designed to maim."

Perry's face looked intrigued. It's not often that you hear about a bomber with intent to maim.

"I guess that explains why our mental patient is in the lunny bin and not in jail. What happened to his doctor?"

"Oh..that's not why he's in the hospital. That was an old case and he already served his time for that, 5 years I think it was..."

"5 years? He mails a bomb and only gets 5 years?"

"Yes well it never went off actually. He turned himself in just hours after he mailed it and they rendered the package safe."

Perry was getting on my nerves. I didn't particularly want to discuss my patient's past because the story would go on forever. I wanted his help with what we had our hands full with right now. My patient's funny story of why he decided to mail a bomb to his doctor would have to wait until another day. Sushi pranced over and rubbed up against his legs like she always does when he forgets she's under the table.

"Sounds like our mental patient has a conscience." said Perry

I noticed Perry was already using the word "Our mental patient" and including himself in on the case. Sometimes I like to be selfish with my work but I think in this case two heads are better than one.

“That’s my point exactly. Nancy thinks there’s a pattern in behavior with my mental patient and this bomber that’s going around maiming people. Unless this guy plans on turning himself in very shortly, I don’t see the relation.....Perry..., Nancy wants me to get inside this guy’s head!”

“Sounds fun. Hey the Great One always said if you want to catch a fish you gotta think like a fish. Your mental patient might be able to be of some assistance to you. What does he get for helping you by the way?”

I finally cracked a smile and pushed my hand into his shoulder. Perry grinned and caught my hand before I could knock him off the chair.

“He gets to stare at my pretty face. That’s what he gets.” I joked.

I imagined it had been a very long time since my patient had been in a relationship. Especially after what the doctor had done to him some 10 years ago. The chances of him being popular with the ladies was pretty slim. It probably made his day just being able to say hello to me.

“I dunno... I think I’m starting to get jealous.”

Perry and his jokes. He had a very serious side to him but today he was being extra perky for some reason. I spread out the photos of the recent bombings and pointed to the photo of a pack of Marlboro 100s that had been blown to smithereens.

“You see this? A thirteen year old boy picked this up off the front porch on his way to school one morning.”

“Father leave it there?”

“His father doesn’t smoke. His father is a pastor and no his father didn’t leave it there.”

Perry closely studied the photograph. I think he felt special getting to look at classified information he was not permitted to view.

“Maybe your mental patient left it there. If he likes to blow up doctors maybe he likes to blow up pastors too.”

I glowered at Perry. Now he was just being stupid.

“I already told you for sure my patient has been in inpatient for at least a month now. Guards check on him every night and there’s no way he could slip out. Not without a key card. He’s definitely accounted for 24/7.”

Perry looked at the photograph a little more intently.

“So how did this thing go off anyway?”

“The kid just picked it up. As soon as he picked it up it blew up and took off half of his right hand as well. He’s still alive but seriously injured and very much traumatized. He’ll be emotionally scarred for the rest of his life.”

“Ouch! Sounds like a mercury switch.”

I wanted to better understand exactly what Perry meant by mercury switch. My mental patient had mentioned mercury switches also. I squinted my eyes. Perry knew the question was coming. He answered my question before I could even ask it.

“Occasionally there’s been bombings where a bomber will use a mercury switch as a triggering device. CIA really hates it. When a package is tilted more than 45 degrees the mercury moves and completes an electrical circuit. I’m sure the bomber had a safety switch located somewhere outside of the box.”

“No” I said curtly.

“No?”

Perry checked each and every photograph in hopes to locate some evidence of a prior existing safety switch no matter how small it may be.

“I don’t get it. If the bomber is clever enough to hide a bomb inside a pack of cigarettes there’s no way he’s going to be dumb enough to forget to use a safety switch. He’ll risk the chance of blowing himself up!”

I put on my know-it-all face and picked up one of the photographs Perry wasn’t looking at.

“Well...Apparently he didn’t blow himself up, now did he?”

I like watching Perry get frustrated. It takes a lot to give Perry Perry Dingleberry a brain fart. Out of frustration my lover scrutinized the photographs hoping to find something the ATF may have overlooked. I heard a vibrating sound and watched my cell phone trying to jiggle it’s way off the counter and onto the floor. I jumped from my seat and rescued it before it could fall onto the floor. I recognized the number. It was Nancy.

“Monica...Get down to the station. The bomber has struck again.”

## CHAPTER 8

My mini Cooper weaved in and out of so much traffic that it made me feel like a needle and thread. I was zipping down Rosemont and squeezing myself between harried motorists in this city of so called brotherly love when I suddenly realized something. Sushi. Momma's Kitty Kitty had gone a whole day without being fed and suddenly I was left feeling irresponsible. I whizzed past a Freight truck with a couple of broken tail lights then slowed down so I could call Perry.

Perry barked into the phone, "Hey what happened? One minute I'm sitting here with the love of my life and the next minute she takes off like Superman. Is everything alright?"

"Perry I'm sorry. I'll let you take me out to dinner tomorrow night I promise. I probably won't get back until late tonight. Are you by chance still at my apartment?"

"Well yeah you didn't even give me a chance to finish my iced tea. What is it that you need?"

"Can you see if there's any cat food left in Sushi's bowl and check her water too?"

I could hear stumbling sounds in the back ground. I hoped Perry hadn't tried to swipe any of my V-8 juice.

"Ahh....looks like Sushi has been eating something other than cat food because there's plenty of Purina oozing out from the bowl. Water looks good too."

I wondered if maybe one of the neighbors down the street had been feeding Sushi again. I've deduced already that my cat has a privy life of her own and may even love somebody more than she loves me. There's been a couple times my kitty has been gone for half of the day and comes back smelling like perfume. I have to admit whoever my cat hangs out with has an awful lot of love for my Siamese cat.

"Okay thanks Perry, I gotta go."

"Wait! Aren't you gonna tell me what's going on? Are they going to finally let you in on all the action? Or are they gonna keep having you get inside of that fruitcake's head?"

"He's not a fruitcake Perry. He's mentally challenged."

"Whatever."

"I don't know what they're going to have me do or why they need me in this case. It's part of my job Perry. I just follow instructions until I can finally work my way to the top."

I had utmost confidence in myself that I would work my way up the chain of command as high as it would go or as high as it would take me. I didn't want to go far in the field of law enforcement because of the money. I wanted to achieve for the prestige. And of course for Grandma. Grandma always insisted that they had to keep a set number of women in law enforcement. Otherwise it wouldn't be scrupulous.

I could tell that Perry seemed saddened that we couldn't have a splendid evening together. Ever since I entered the force we really didn't have many more of those evenings of surfing through boring cable channels and sharing fat free popcorn. My life was always on the go which in turn caused Perry to pick up a hobby. Weightlifting. My little Perry was finally bulking up. I passed a brown station wagon and a Mitsubishi Lancer parked along side the freeway. It looked like a drug deal but I didn't have time for it. I had more important matters like working with a mental patient that probably couldn't even help with the case. Being a newbie in the police force always panned out leaving you with the short end of the stick.

"Well... I'll leave Sushi some more water just in case but then I'm going to get going."

"Okay thanks. I appreciate it."

"Uh-huh... Hey... Monica, be careful alright?"

“Okay hun, bye.”

I hung up the phone. Perry and his jokes I swear. Be careful? I don't think he realized I wasn't about to get into anything dangerous. I then chuckled to myself out loud. Perry was probably referring to my driving.



## CHAPTER 9

As soon as I had gotten down to the station Nancy had sent me straight back to the hospital to query my mental patient. From what she had told me they still didn't have the exact details of the bombing but more information would be coming in tonight. Nancy had brought me up to speed the best she could and immediately sent me down to Lincoln Hospital to talk to the nut. As for my honest opinion about all of this? I don't think my patient has the potential to be of any help to us at all. I should probably spend our time together getting him some therapy and see what bothers him about his mother. I'll use reverse psychology on him and just pretend like I'm not all that interested in hearing the stories about his mummy. He'll probably just end up wanting to tell me anyway.

The psych ward wasn't anything like you see in the movies. It was rare that you heard the moanings of their cries or witnessed any of their ludicrous behavior. And no there wasn't any long dark creepy hallways or padded rooms flanking the halls. The only thing spooky about this place was my mental patient's haircut. When I turned the corner I saw that it appeared like a young hispanic nurse was already trying to do my job. I walked a little faster to witness the show. The nurse saw me coming but didn't feel threatened by my presence. She almost looked relieved to see me.

"Thank god you came back! He's been acting like this since you left this morning."

The nurse was holding a silver platter with about 20 or so thimble sized paper cups perched on top. The patients probably wished that the cups were jello shooters but they weren't. She was completely dressed in white and wore a pair of secretary glasses to add prettiness to her face.

I slowed down my steps when I heard what sounded like a child's voice coming from my patient's room. My patient is 33 years old but I could have sworn I heard a familiar nursery rhyme being sung from inside of his room. Was my patient singing the itsy bitsy Spider? I stayed away from the doorway so my patient couldn't see my presence. The song got louder every time it got repeated.

"The itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout. Down came the rain and washed the spider out."

The nurse remained calm and nice. She was amusing herself by pretending to analyze our patient's cute little nursery rhyme. Maybe she felt showing an interest in his little world would help make handing out meds go a little bit more smoothly. I stayed back and let her try out her skills.

"Who's the itsy bitsy spider?"

"I'm the itsy bitsy spider." said the creature in a three year old's voice.

The singing continued but the nurse cut him off.

"What about the rain that washes the spider out? I didn't see it raining today?"

I stayed hidden behind the doorway and assimilated everything. I also was amused by all of this. I liked this nurse. I think she had a sense of humor.

"You're the rain! You're the rain because you work for the evil government. The government is the rain!"

I sensed at this point that my mental patient may even be pointing a finger at the nurse by the tone in his voice. He seemed highly upset. Why he was talking like a three year old I did not know. The nurse continued to play her role.

"Hun I don't work for the government I'm just a nurse."

She looked at me and rolled her eyes. Perhaps she was enjoying pretending to do what it is that I do. I gave my utmost attention and let her finish. She was finished. The nurse looked at me with a look that suggested that she had seen it all and this was nothing new. She picked a medicine cup from the tray and held it out like it was candy.

"Hun are you ready to take your medication? This will help wipe out that little spider."

There was no answer. There was a pause and then the song picked up where it had left off.

“Out came the sun and dried up all the rain...”

Our creature stopped singing. Either he'd forgotten the rest of the words or he sensed my presence. I assumed the latter. I whispered into the nurses ear.

“Ask him about the sun.”

The nurse smiled at me. She was enjoying this from what I could tell. A grown ass man acting like a three year old and singing nursery rhymes.

“Hey hun, who's the sun? Who get's to dry up all the rain?”

“God is the sun. They say he's three in one.”

I suddenly recalled some of my Biblical teachings and remembered the trinity. God the father, God the son, and God the holy spirit. There was a good chance someone had at one point tried to introduce christianity to my patient. It's ashame he didn't stick with it. He may have been more successful in life. I stepped in front of my patient's doorway to look for the itsy bitsy spider.

The moment I layed eyes on the creature I knew something was terribly wrong. Somebody had done something to my patient.

## CHAPTER 10

I knocked the medicine cup out of the nurses hand before my patient could grab it. The nurse appeared shocked but did not retaliate. There was a prominent look of confusion on her face but she stepped back. I pinned the creature to the wall and shoved two fingers down his throat.

His eyes rolled back in his head and he could barely keep his balance. Before I could pull my fingers back out I felt something worse than a paper cut.

I'd been bitten by the itsy bitsy spider!

I wrestled my patient to the ground and subdued him. As doped up as he was he couldn't put up much resistance. The only thing he could keep going was that sick smile. The nurse dropped the tray to the ground and stepped back. I checked my fingers for blood but there was none. I pushed my fingers back into the patient's mouth and that's when all the pills came spewing out. I kept him pinned to the ground so he couldn't move.

"Quick! Get security in here. There must be close to 50 pills coming out of his mouth." I said retrieving my fingers and examining the bite marks.

Maybe the creature was smiling because I was on top of him. His sickly smile made me very uneasy. I think my patient was enjoying all of this but it was still my job to save his life.

"Why'd you do it? You must've swallowed over 50 pills."

I wiped off my fingers onto his gown. Most of the pills were time released capsules and it had made a sticky mess all over my fingers. Some of the loose pills were already sticking to the floor.

“Cuz nobuggy luvv me that’s why. I don’t even luvv me.”

His eyes rolled back into his head once again. He was in bad shape. It looked almost as if he was having a seizure. I wondered what kind of pills he had taken and how he had managed to get them. The smile went away and I could tell he was in some pain. From what I’ve heard this patient doesn’t get many visits. Maybe he purposely did this for more attention or maybe he really wants to kill himself. Paranoid Schizophrenics are very hard to predict.

“You have a family don’t you? I’m sure they love you.”

I allowed the creature to roll over on his side and puke out more pills. I was starting to get grossed out. I should’ve had gloves on for all this. A terrorist was lurking about and here I was detoxing a thirty three year old man acting like a child. At this point I was going to get irate with Nancy if there didn’t end up being a connection into all of this.

“Have you seen my dog? Where’s my dog? Lilly where are you stinky?” He blurted out.

My patient looked all around pretending to find his dog. I didn’t know they allowed pets into the hospital but perhaps they made special exceptions for the crazies. I let off the patient and watched him crawl around on his hands and knees looking for his dog. It was a sad sight for sore eyes but I knew any second they’d be wheeling off my patient to go flush out his stomach.

“Lilly! Come over here stinky. Where’s my stinky dog?” He said now sniffing the ground.

At this point it took all I had to keep a straight face. My patient was on his hands and knees sniffing the shoe laces on my Nikes. I crossed my arms and watched. As long as he didn’t touch me I was okay with this for now.

“Lilly was here wasn’t she? I can smell her spoor all over you.” He said while looking up at me.

I smiled lovingly but kept my guard up and my arms crossed. This one was putting a lot of work into his show and I was starting to wonder why. I watched him take one more sniff of my laces and then he just completely passed out.

Before I could respond the medics raced in and placed him onto a gurney. They wheeled him out while I stood in the middle of my patient's room wondering what to do next. I studied the bite marks on my fingers up close just to be sure there was no signs of bleeding. There wasn't. A nurse making his rounds stopped at the doorway when he caught me holding my two fingers up to the light. He was dressed in white scrubs and had a head that shined like a bowling ball.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

I retracted my hands from the light and quickly shoved them into my pocket. Baldy dude entered the room to try his hand at playing doctor and probably look for an opportunity to flirt. He tried to grab my hands from my pockets but I wouldn't pull them out. I took a step back to let him know I was rejecting his services.

"I'm fine thanks."

"Are you sure? I thought I saw you looking at your hands. Did one of our patients attack you?"

I kept my hands in my pockets and wished he'd leave. There was no ring on his finger and he seemed like the type that would drive me crazy if I had to spend any amount of time with him.

"I'm fine really. It was my fault because I came at him. He probably won't even remember it in the morning because of the state of mind he was in."

I peeked over at the creature's desk and got an upclose look at the deep bite marks in his pencils. *Chew toys* I told myself. Baldy dude shrugged his shoulders then pushed his clipboard into his chest like he was using it as a shield to block my refusal. Perry better not ever go bald on me. I find some bald men attractive but this guy is not one of them.

"Okay suit yourself but I think you should let us take a look at it in case it gets infected or something like that. My name is Brett by the way. I gotta finish making my rounds but let me know if you need anything."

Brett backed his way out of the room slowly as if hoping I would change my mind. I suddenly thought of something my baldy friend could help me with. I caught his attention just before he fully finished turning around.

"Wait Brett! Maybe there is something you can help me with."

He turned around to face me with a big loving smile and lowered the clipboard he was using to shield his fragile heart from my coldness.

“Sure just name it.”

“Do you know what kind of medication they have him on?”

The bald nurse just chuckled out loud then leafed through some pages on his clipboard.

“Oh you’re referring to Mr. Freddy or should I say Mr. Gary. Heck, I can’t even keep up with this guy most of the security guards think he’s a trip. Can you believe he changes his name each day according to the alphabet? Tomorrow he’ll just wake up thinking he’s Mr. Harry or something. It must be some pretty good meds they have him on. Just let me check, ah...here it is. Looks like they got our boy on Giadone and Haldol. Yeah the Haldol is no joke. If he’s a true schizo they usually dope them up with Haldol.”

“Thanks.”

I wrote the medications down in my little pocket sized note pad. The big yellow pads we seldom use anymore and they just get in the way. I like to keep things simple. As a general rule of thumb lawyers are the only ones that still use the big yellow pads on a regular basis. I peeked up at Baldy and could see the wheels turning inside his shiny head. Judging by the look on his face I had a pretty good idea what was coming next. I braced myself and reluctantly let him ask what it was that he wanted to ask. He scratched the back of his head pretending to have an itch and averted his eyes to gather his thought.

“Hey I was just wondering, uh...maybe if your not doing anything tomorrow night we could go out for a bite to eat at the new restaurant that just opened up down the street from where I live. I mean I don’t want to pressure you or anything I just thought I’d ask.”

I smiled all cutesie wutsie to show my gratitude. I’m not one of those snobby chicks that makes a whole drama out of a simple invite. Instead I gave the usual excuse that Perry had taught me.

“I’m sorry. I’d love to but I think my boyfriend might have a problem with it. He gets kind of jealous when I date people behind his back.”

I knew at this point a gentleman or a monster would be unveiling right in front of my face. I have to admit that saying no to guys in the past has caused for some potty language to ensue. I’ve learned to turn down dates in a nice way but I can’t do it every time.

“Oh no, no, no. I didn’t mean it like that. I’m in a relationship also. Working here gets boring and I’m sure that all these mental health workers here can concur that one can never have too many friends.”

“Well thanks for the invite but Perry and I have such busy schedules that we don’t even have the time for a social life. We barely find enough time to see each other.”

To my surprise there was no look of disappointment on baldy’s face. Instead he appeared to be trying to hide his true emotions and what looked like a sick smile. I observed the smile on the nurse’s face and could sense that it wasn’t self controlled. The smile was catatonic. A pang of trepidation hit me when I realized something. I had seen that very same sick smile before. Something wasn’t right about baldy dude. I could just feel it. That’s when it all made sense.

I had seen that very same smile on my patient.



## CHAPTER 11

Brett was halfway down the hall before I finally went chasing after him. By the look on his face it almost seemed like he had expected me to change my mind. He slowed down but did not stop walking.

“Wait! I’ve changed my mind. You’re right, one can never have too many friends. It’s just been a hectic day and I’ve already got too much on my mind.”

Baldy dude kept walking and I could sense the smile although I was too far behind him to see it. I figured maybe he could somehow help me with figuring out what really had happened with my patient.

“Nah it’s cool. I understand you’re busy and all. I probably shouldn’t have asked.”

I’ve met a lot of jerks before. I definitely have to give this guy props. Baldy dude knows how to play it out. If I wasn’t with Perry I may have given this guy a chance on me.

“No, no, really. It’s not a problem. I don’t think Perry will mind.”

Brett finally stopped walking to gather his thoughts. This time the clipboard was not being squeezed into his chest for protection but instead dangled at his sides to accept my welcoming.

“Hey why not just bring Perry with? I mean is he cool like that?”

“Ah yeah. We’ve been with each other too long for Perry to be the jealous type. I’ll run it by him and see what he thinks.”

Brett pulled a business card from his pocket and handed it to me. I glanced at it. Apparently he does some type of computer repair on the side. Perry would have no problems bonding with him.

“My cell number is on the card. I fix people’s computers on the side. Does seven Oclock sound alright?”

I looked at the number and then placed it in my pocket.

“Sure. I’ll probably call you around five. Hey it was nice meeting you but I have to get back there and look over that patient’s room.”

“Okay. Sounds great. I have a few more rounds to make. Lemme know if you need any more help.”

We parted our seperate ways and got back to work. Brett was off my mind the minute I turned around and headed back to the room. I was going to see for myself what may have caused my patient to want to kill himself. I knew the creature enjoyed writing and may have left some clues behind.

It didn’t take me long to figure out where my patient had been hoarding up all of his pills. As soon as I pulled back the shower curtains I immediately noticed a strange blue streak line oozing down the shower walls. I picked up a bar of soap and noticed it had been hollowed out underneath. Maybe at some point the creature had forgotten about it and let it get wet. That would explain the blue streak trying to make it’s way to the bottom of the tub. I was angry that the hospital was administering him time released capsules. They should’ve been crushing up his pills like they do now in the federal prisons. I placed the bar of soap back where I found it and was about to exit the bathroom when I noticed the top of the toilet. The lid above the flusher handle was slightly askew. Perhaps the mental patient had some more hidden secrets.

I carefully lifted up the ceramic lid and took a peek inside. Nothing. Why had the creature messed with the lid to the toilet? I guessed that maybe he used to hide things inside his toilet or maybe he was seriously contemplating whether or not he found himself a new hiding place. But a hiding place for what? He was in a psych ward not a prison cell. I doubted the hospital staff did room searches here. I did my best to leave the toilet lid just as it was and then I carried on with my investigation.

His entire bedroom smelled like armpit and stinky sock. The bed wasn’t made properly and his pillow had yellow sweat stains which probably came from his stinky head. I tip toed over to the desk to examine the rafts of loose-leaf paper all piled up like old newspapers ready to be tossed away. My eyes perused his writings as I tried my best to focus on key words like “bomb” or

“kill”. I even tried my best to look for the word “maim”. Nothing. Not only did nothing seem to draw any alarm but I felt the creature’s writings were downright stupid. It looked like the work of a three year old.

I chuckled out loud when I read a short story about a monkey that thought he was a horse. The writings were definitely weird but remarkably unique. I don’t know what style of writing my mental patient prefers to write but I was guessing children’s books. I rifled my way through the bottom until I stumbled upon some drawings on white copy paper. Evidently the creature wasn’t much of an artist. All of the drawings were basically stick people scrawled in crayon. One particular drawing caught my eye. A stick woman holding a sword. I believed the stick lady holding the giant bloody sword in her right hand was supposed to represent something.

Something told me the character was meant to be the creature’s mother.

## CHAPTER 12

By the time I made it back to my apartment I was exhausted. As I pulled my mini Cooper into the driveway I had one thing on my mind. Bed. I needed sleep and I needed it without the distraction of Sushi. Momma's kitty kitty was just going to have to sleep on the living room sofa tonight.

I fished around for my house key as I raced up the front door when suddenly I stopped dead in my tracks. The door was slightly ajar and I noticed all of my lights were still on. I checked the driveway one more time just to make sure my eyes weren't playing tricks on me. They weren't. Perry's car was gone. Somebody had broken into my home.

I ran back to my car and grabbed the 9mm I keep under my seat. I knew I should probably call the police but why? I am the police. Something that could end up only being a false alarm would really make me look stupid.

I hunkered down as I tip-toed my way back up the front porch steps. Both of my hands were on the gun and I felt my heart thud as I unlocked the safety switch. I slowly pushed in the front door and crept inside. Sushi did not come to greet me. I listened carefully for noises but I heard nothing. I kept both hands on my 9mm with my right index finger lightly resting on the trigger.

"Perry? Are you still here? I didn't see your car out there."

Dead silence.

"Sushi? Is momma's kitty kitty alright? Come here Sush" Still nothing.

The only sound I heard was the ticking sound emanating from the living room clock. My jaw dropped to the floor when I looked inside to see the mess the perpetrator had left for me to clean up. The entire apartment looked like a tornado had ripped through it. All my books on the shelf had been tossed onto the living room floor.

The kitchen looked even worse. Every cabinet door and utensil drawer was left wide open. Somebody was looking for something but what?

I reached for my cellphone and immediately phoned Perry. He answered on the fourth ring.

“Monica? You alright? Why are you calling so late?”

I cut right to the chase.

“Would you mind explaining to me what the frick happened here while I was gone?”

“Babe, I don’t know what you’re talking about?”

I was furious but I tried to keep my tone to a minimum. Grandma tells me people with short tempers that cuss like sailors are more prone to health risks and only makes them look like an idiot. I took a long deep breath.

“Sushi is missing. The front door was left wide open and it looks like a tornado tore this place apart. Did you remember to lock the front door when you left?”

There was hesitation. That told me that at least one piece of the puzzle had been solved.

“Perry?”

“I....uh... Sushi managed to slip out the door when I went out to my car to look for my phone charger. I spent all night looking for her while you were gone but I think she went to go visit that stranger you keep telling me about. It’s possible I got distracted and forgot to lock the front door.”

I was super pissed. This is not the first time my boyfriend has done something clumsy. He claims his high intellect causes him sometimes to be absent minded like they claim Einstein was. He is no Einstein. I’ll never forget the time he accidentally locked us out of the car on our Valentine’s Day date. Do you know how cold it gets in mid February?

“Perry this is serious. Somebody broke in here and I think they were after something. Get your butt over here now. It’s going to take forever to clean this mess up.”

“Okay, okay. It’s almost midnight and I have to wake up early tomorrow but I’m coming over. Did you call the police?”

“No.”

“Well I suggest you do so. I’ll be there soon.”

I hung up on Perry. He still had me pissed for being such a klutz. I’ll be danged if I have to clean up all this mess myself. I turned off my cellphone in case he tried to bail out on me at the last minute. I don’t have a land line. Nobody does anymore these days.

My first thought was to check on my jewelry box. I raced upstairs and into my bedroom.

Nothing upstairs appeared to be out of kilter. My jewelry box was safe and sound and I didn’t find any jewelry missing. Why on earth did someone break into my home? What was it that they were after?

I remembered that there was kitchen utensils spread out all over the kitchen floor so I raced back downstairs. Somebody had gone through my patient’s files I had left on the table but I reminded myself that it could have been Perry. It didn’t appear that any of the documents were missing but that didn’t exclude the fact that the perp may have had a digital camera and took pictures.

A light bulb went off in my head.

My .38 revolver.

I keep a .38 revolver in my knick knack drawer below the coffee maker. I raced over to the drawer and yanked it open. The hand gun was missing. Somebody had broke into my home and stole my Smith&Wesson. A gun registered in my name and completely covered with my finger prints.

## CHAPTER 13

Perry showed up still in his pajamas. His *Curious George* pajamas.

I think he thought it would lighten my mood. It didn't. Not until I noticed he had a 24 ounce cinamon roll flavored cappuccino in his right hand. Perry knows they're my favorite.

I ran up to him and gave him a big hug. It was all I could do to keep from crying. I was disgruntled. My tears were held back but there was a whimper in my voice.

"Aww...my little dingleberry. You're not going to believe what they did."

I let go of him and swiped the cappuccino. I knew I shouldn't drink this stuff so late but it was looking like an all nighter. Perry tried to palliate for his mistake.

"Well, at least they didn't burn the place down. This place doesn't look too bad. Anything turn up missing yet?"

I wanted to at least taste my cappy before I got into my little spiel. I held up my index finger while I gulped down two swigs of cinamon roll.

"Yeah, they took my .38 revolver. I'm in deep shit for this one."

Perry looked surprised at my potty mouth. Sometimes the truth can't be told in euphemisms.

Perry whipped out his cellphone to phone the police. I snapped his phone shut before he could punch in the last number.

“What are you doing? You need to call this in.”

“Were not calling the police.”

“Why?”

“Why? Because it will make me look irresponsible that’s why. When they examine the front door and see there’s no forced entry they’re gonna wonder what kind of idiot leaves their front door unlocked in the bad lands of Philadelphia.”

It was my first year with the force and the last thing I wanted to do was demonstrate anything but perfection. I had a friend in the Air Force that was forced to stand outside of her dorm room and stare at her door for 12 straight hours because she had accidentally locked herself out. I didn’t want any of my higher uppers finding out about my mistake. Or should I say Perry’s mistake. I watched him place his cell back into his pocket.

“Okay, whatever. Have it your way. I’m not going to argue about it. Let’s get this place cleaned up.”

Perry went straight for the virtual treadmill and closely examined it. God forbid anyone try to steal my early Christmas present. It was nice to get something 7 months before the Lord’s birthday. I’d be using it a lot more come this winter when it gets too cold to run the track at the high school.

I had Perry put on some latex gloves before I let him touch anything. We both paid close attention to what we were doing in hopes of finding any clues the perp may have left behind. I was already starting to feel uneasy about not calling it in. If that gun got used as a murder weapon I would have a lot of explaining to do to the Homicide Unit. Perry was picking up my red candle lighter from the kitchen floor when I stopped him.

“Leave it alone Perry.”

“Huh?”

“We gotta call this in. I can’t jeopardize my career with this coming back on me.”

I watched him happily display his know it all smile. I wanted to smack him for the shitty grin. I hate it when he does that. He slowly pulled his cell phone out from his front pocket.

“Do you want to call it in or should I?”



I kept my hands on my hips as I glowered at the dork.

“You’re the one who left the door unlocked. You call it in.”

I stomped out the front door without ever looking back.

“Wait! Where are you going?” Shouted Perry from behind the screen door.

I got lost in thought realizing I had left my cappuccino behind. I was still pissed and wasn’t about to go back and get it.

“You can explain everything to the police. I’m going to find Sushi.”

## CHAPTER 14

The call came early in the morning, 6:30 AM to be exact.

For once I had gotten some good news.

Grandma.

The nurse on the phone sounded so excited it was as if she felt Grandma was somehow related to her as well. Evidently Grandma was up and addem'. They told me they haven't seen Grandma this good in over a month. I wasn't about to let this opportunity slip away from me no matter what the circumstances of my job. I was going to visit Grandma today and I opted to go without Perry. I decided the rose he'd left on my kitchen table for her could go in his honor.

The lady at the front desk recognized me immediately. The flutter in her eyes sometimes freaked me out. She was always telling me how pretty I look. Perry swears up and down he thinks she might be a lesbian. Today she was wearing a white silk blouse and her hair looked like it was still getting shorter. Usually ones hair tends to grow longer with time but apparently that's not true with her case. Ellen's hair was definitely shorter. And she was really beginning to look like a dike.

"Hey monica! It's so good to see you! No Perry today?"

I played along. Lesbians don't scare me.

"Nah, he's been a bad boy so I left him at home."

Ellen cupped her mouth.

“Oh my gosh are you serious?”

I chuckled and smiled for my lesbian friend.

“Nah, he’s not at home. He’s at work. He did piss me off last night though.”

“Well what exactly did he do?”

I looked at my wristwatch. Maybe it wasn’t the smartest thing in the world to discuss relationship issues with strangers. Some of my friends have lost their jobs because of the aftermath drama being broadcasted on the internet. Facebook is the king pin of scuttlebutt. Perry and I have opted to close out our facebook accounts.

“Aww it was nothing. Just the usual petty stuff. Can I sign in?”

“Oh sure.”

Ellen slid me the clip board and I signed my name. I do a lot of signatures in my line of work so over time my John Hancock has come to look more like a *Jo Ha*. I think Ellen tried to hold onto my hand as I handed her the pen back. It didn’t matter because I was already running down the hall. Grandma was in room 202. I knew that already.

When I entered the room I thought they had moved Grandma to another room. I didn’t realize what I was looking at was my Grandma until she put on her horned rimmed glasses to better inspect her favorite grand daughter. Her soft brown curly hair was not so mussy like I was so used to seeing it. I could tell my grandma’s morning was off to a good start because evidently she had just gotten out of the shower. She smiled when she recognized me and I raced up and gave her a great big bear hug. I also threw in a kiss on the cheek.

“I missed you grandma! We were all worried.”

We continued to embrace and I could feel her shaky bones shaking incessantly. I figured maybe it was the medication or maybe she was just really excited. I hoped for the latter. She was hugging me pretty firmly. I heard a nosy nurse at the door trying to be a part of this special moment.

“Monica hun, just look at you. You are getting so strong!”

I let go and backed up so Grandma could better inspect me. I think she enjoyed squeezing my arms. I kind of wished that my hair was done up as nice as hers but it was still early in the morning. It felt so good just to see Grandma

smiling. She's been battling strokes for what's feeling like months now. My mother was killed by a drunk driver when I was only 16 so Grandma is all I have left. I have such disdain towards drunk drivers that it was my mother's demise that prompted me to become a cop. I don't go easy on drunk drivers. It's simply irresponsible. Perry drinks sometimes but he's responsible about it.

While Grandma was looking me over I noticed her pillow was too sallow looking for my likings. It was probably from the iodine.

A nurse was still standing at our door basking in our happy little visit. I ripped the pillow case from Grandma's pillow and walked it over to the red headed nurse still smiling at our enjoyment. She looked to be about in her early twenties and had an affable smile. I judge people by their smiles. Not supposed to, but I do anyway.

"Hey, Grandma here needs a new pillow case. Can you take care of this for me?"

I draped the pillow case over her chalk stick arms.

"Sure no problem. That's why I came back here today. Today all of our residents get new sheets."

The nurse quickly exited the room so Grandma and I could be alone. I noticed Grandma was staring at my hands. How had I forgotten about my fingers? I quickly tried to stuff my right hand into my front pocket but Grandma pulled it back out. She looked very concerned.

"Hun what happened to your fingers? Did Perry do this?"

She closely examined my fingers while I chuckled at her remark. Perry wouldn't dream of doing this. He knows I can kick his butt.

"I got bitten by the itsy bitsy spider, Grandma."

Grandma's eyes got bigger. Everybody knew about the itsy bitsy spider. Grandma knows all the nursery rhymes. She's read all of them to me since I was little. My favorite was Clifford The Big Red Dog. Who could possibly say no to a dog the size of a house?

"Well did you get that itsy bitsy spider? This looks like a serious bite."

I chuckled some more because of the way she said it. Talk of spiders gets Grandma all excited.

“Oh you don’t have to worry about the itsy bitsy spider. The state has him safely locked up in the mental ward.”

I could tell Grandma was getting confused. She held her look of concern but still procured a warm smile just for me. A smile just to let me know she was enthused to see me. I continued on with the story rather than leave her hanging.

“I’m working a rather unusual case Grandma. Actually a stupid one and I’m not even sure why I ever agreed to it.”

Grandma’s eyes got bigger and I could tell that I had her utmost attention. I love the way Grandma hangs onto my every word. (At least when she’s healthy enough to do so anyway.)

“I’m supposed to get inside a mental patient’s head. Find out anything he knows. The whole thing feels like a waste of time but I’m doing it anyway. My boss thinks he may have information that can help us stop a terrorist. I really doubt it but I still have to do my job.”

Grandma just smiled and revelled in every second she had to spend with me. Lately I haven’t been able to get any long visits in. Something was always popping up.

“Oh he sounds like a dear young lad. He’s going to help you stop a terrorist?”

Grandma was one to find the good in everyone. My little brother screws up all the time and she still thinks he’s a saint. I showed Grandma the bite marks on my fingers once more to remind her.

“I don’t think he’s a good man Grandma. My mental patient thinks he’s the itsy bitsy spider. It wasn’t nice what he did to me.”

Ironically Grandma continued to defend the itsy bitsy spider.

“Ooh I’m sure he plans to appologize sweetheart. Maybe he was just a little bit confused. What’s his diagnosis anyway?”

I was starting to wonder just how competent she really was. Surely there had to be somebody out there that Grandma despised. She tells me that it’s not good to hate. Hating is unhealthy she always says.

“I think they said he’s got that schizo affective disorder thing going on. I don’t know what his problem is but he sure is pretty strange. One minute he’s

holding an intelligent conversation, the next minute he's acting like a two year old."

I pulled up a chair so Grandma could have the entire bed to herself. I still couldn't believe she was able to sit up all on her own. I suddenly realized the nurse had forgotten to take Grandma's sheets. Maybe she planned to pick them up when she brought the new ones. I know that I over react when it comes to health care for her but how could I help it? I'm her favorite grand daughter.

"You know I can remember when you were just two years old. You were so cute. Cute as a button. Grandpa and I used to love taking you to the mall to show you off. Your brother too, but he didn't come until years after. You used to have this stuffed bunny that you never let anybody touch, it was so funny. Do you still have it?"

"Yes grandma."

Of course I still had it. Bun Bun had sentimental value. My brother tried to hide it from me once and I ended up flushing one of his favorite GI-Joes down the toilet. I could never figure out what happened to Bun Bun's left eye but I imagined my brother had something to do with it. My thoughts of Bun Bun was making me feel nostalgic. Suddenly Perry's rose came into mind. I had accidentally left it in the car.

"Grandma, Perry got you something but I accidentally left it in the car."

Grandma's eyes lit up. She liked getting gifts. Especially since she knew that we could afford it.

"Well that was thoughtful of him. You don't have to go all the way back outside to get it sweetie. You can bring it with you next time you visit."

I had expected that answer. Grandma would take another visit over a gift any day. She was probably thrilled to have leverage to ensure an imminent visit from me. I can't say that I blame her. When you reach Grandma's age life is all about spending time with the grand children. Hopefully in Grandma's case, some great grandchildren too would one day come. Grandma tried reaching for a styrofoam cup she had sitting on the table next to her bed. I rushed over and grabbed it for her so she didn't have to strain herself. The cup was filled with ice cubes and nothing else.

"It's nothing but ice cubes Grandma. Did you want me to get the nurse to bring you something to drink?"

Grandma laughed. It felt good to see my grandmother in such good spirits.

“Oh no no sweetie, I like to chew on the ice. You’ll understand when you get my age.”

I was going to argue with Grandma until I remembered she had dentures. She could probably chew the ice up into a slushy if she wanted to. I watched her chew on the ice cubes while I bedazzled her with my stories.

“Somebody broke into my apartment last night Grandma.”

Grandma stopped chewing.

“I told you it’s not safe to live in that part of Philadelphia. Did grandpa ever tell you what he does with his wallet any time he has to go into the city?”

“He told me once but I can’t remember. Something about only bringing twelve dollars or something like that.”

Grandma looked pleased that I pay attention when grandpa tells me stories. My little brother never listens to half of the stuff they tell him.

“Grandpa carries two wallets when he goes into Philly. He keeps a wallet in his back pocket with only twelve dollars in it while he keeps his real wallet in his sock.”

“Oh, okay. Now I remember.”

Grandpa always had some good stories he told me when I was little. My favorite story was how his family handled going to the bathroom on long trips. A hole got drilled into the floorboards and everything just splashed out all over the roads. His father used to tell him that they were not stopping for nothing.

The medication Grandma was on appeared to be wearing off. I don’t think my grandmother had the slightest clue that she looked like she was starting to fall asleep. Just seeing me today was probably more excitement than she’s had in a good while. Maybe not though. The nurses all love my grandmother to death and can’t seem to spend enough time with her. I knew my grandmother was being well taken care of.

I had an eerie feeling I was being watched. I turned around and heard a shuffling sound at the doorway. I leaped over to the doorway to identify the intruder. Unfortunately I wasn’t quick enough and the only glimpse I caught was a bald shiny head.

## CHAPTER 15

*She knew they would never figure out who she was. She liked being invisible to the entire system. No priors. No petty thefts. Not even something as simple as a traffic citation. She had spent the last twenty five years making herself completely invisible to almost all of society. The only people that knew of her were a few strange old ladies from the little run down church. She could walk into a bank, rob it, and leave her finger prints all over the front door glass if she wanted to. They could never get anything on her. Because they didn't know she existed.*

*Her intentions today had nothing to do with robbing a bank, she had money. Her intentions today had to do with seeking out justice for her son. They had done things to him. Sick twisted things that they just had no right to do. Things that had endangered his life. Things that would traumatize his life forever. They had teased her boy and made caricatures of him. They were not nice people and they needed to pay. She wanted them to pay with their lives but what fun would that be? She wanted to watch them suffer. Watch them suffer like her boy had been suffering all those years. She knew until somebody actually died the FBI was more apt to handle her acts of terror lightly. That would give her the edge she needed. The edge she would thrive on until it became time to break out the big stuff. She was a bomber that was panning out to be one big tease.*

Mary Maimer reached into the freezer and pulled out a carton of Marlboro light 100s. She wasted no time shoving them into the home made freezer cooler that would keep the carton at an icy 18 degrees. “*The IEDs must be kept below 32 degrees or they become live*” the mastermind had told her. She still couldn't believe she had been smart enough to think of hiding the miniature WMDs inside her freezer. Nobody would *ever* look there. Everybody knew that the probability of finding anything good to eat in Mary Maimer's freezer



was pretty slim to nothing. They'd be lucky to find a yogurt in the fridge if it wasn't out of date.

She contemplated on whether or not she should send the authorities a note. Didn't all serial killers eventually leave a note? Mary Maimer was not her real name but that was the name she would use. She had been a mother of three children. A devout christian in her own little way. And yes she had once been a Sunday School teacher. Those little brats. They would never grow up to worship Jesus. All the philandering, the sex jokes, and now those filthy ipods? God help their souls. She was sure that every one of them had picked on her boy at one point and time. The years and years she had spent seething in her favorite rocking chair had done a number on her mind. Mary maimer had no compassion for anybody. Not even her own children but that was only because she was teaching them discipline. *Thou shalt not spare the rod* her King James Bible had taught her. She took the verse to heart. Made a game out of it actually.

From what the papers said she was three for three. The teenage boy, the soccer mom, victim number three, all of whom she had never met. That was the beauty of her plan. No motives. She had motives all right but that would have to wait until the end. The random bombings were just to thwart the detectives. Distract them from the final target. She got the idea from the beltway snipers. They were just randomly shooting strangers to eliminate themselves from becoming suspects. Their real target would have just gotten mixed up in the bunch.

Mary took a long drink of her cocktail to calm her nerves. The V8 juice just seemed to taste so much better with vodka. Nothing like Mary drinking a bloody Mary. Her van got 28 miles to the gallon so she was not concerned about the trip. Philadelphia was only 66 miles from where she lived. All of the bombings could only take place in Philadelphia in order for her plan to work. Philadelphia. The city of brotherly love that had showed absolutely no love whatsoever to her boy. Philadelphia was only the beast that she desperately wanted to take down. She knew the beast was foreboding and powerful but she didn't care. She had Jesus on her side and she was sure God had told her she could take down the entire giant. She would do it just like Davy did to Goliath. When the time was right she would destroy the brain of Philadelphia. Everybody knew what that brain was.

When the Bloody Mary was finished she changed into her favorite flower dress. The one she liked to wear on Easter Sundays. Sometimes she felt sure the pastor coveted her in that dress but she could never be too sure. She never told the pastor the real reason she sits in the back of the church is to prevent getting an upclose look at those nasty moles on his face. No other pastor quite had moles like his. They were large and prominent. Even had dark thick hairs

growing out of them. It made her wonder how his wife kissed him at night. Mary looked at herself and admired herself in the mirror. Was she getting too paranoid? Could she perhaps throw on a hoodie like her role model the UNAbomber? Was it okay to look suspicious in Philadelphia? Perhaps the brightly colored flower dress would draw too much attention to herself. But how could anybody possibly see her if she had no intentions of getting out of the driver's seat? Does anybody even wear dresses in Philadelphia? They should or else they were going straight to hell for dressing like a man. Mary Maimer had a better idea. Culottes.

Culottes were basically a cross combination of a dress and a pair of pants. Until you moved your legs culottes made you look like you were wearing a dress. Mary had coerced her oldest daughter to wear them to school. All the kids made fun of her. But they would one day pay, now, wouldn't they?

When Mary was finished dressing she put the dog in the cage. It was nice having the house all to herself with the kids all grown up and the hubby at work. The hubby was dispensible but she had plans of keeping him around for the next couple of years. He didn't drink or smoke and it made her look mentally stable. Married people don't go around bombing people. Everybody knew that.

When the mutant of a dog stopped it's crying, Mary picked up the freezer cooler. Her dog was really the only thing in the world she could show compassion towards. It wasn't the dog's fault it was cursed with a teeny tiny little head that was connected to massive bulky shoulders. She never would've been able to get the dog had her brother not turned into a raging alcoholic and could no longer take care of the dog.

Mary Maimer opened the side front door to her 2008 Chevy Astro van and placed the freezer cooler on the front seat. The monkey she had spent nearly 6 months training came running up from the back seat to greet her. Tito. Tito would no longer be needed to deliver the phone book on those cold wintry days. She had something else for Tito to deliver in the wee hours of the night. She was going to have a very good time in Philadelphia. Yes she was.

## CHAPTER 16

The mental patient woke up screaming. He had had a terrible dream. He tried to turn around to get back to sleep but his body felt completely paralyzed. Had he almost died? What was that black charcoal stuff they had shoved into his mouth? Were they trying to poison him? Maybe it was merely used for detoxing but he could never be too sure.

The creature tried to stir once more but couldn't budge an inch. Somebody had tied his arms to the bed, if it was even a bed he was sleeping on. It felt more like an ironing board. What had he done yesterday to get himself here? What happened to the pretty lady? The Tomb Raider chick. He tried to free his arms but the leather straps held him down. He had donned suicide prevention vests before but what the heck was this they had him strapped to?

It was dark and scary and in a sick way he kind of liked it. The seclusion felt like a form of solace. In his mind he was praying for a psychotic episode. Experiencing psychotic episodes felt like landing on the moon. As cool as being trapped in a movie. Meds weren't working so well for him anymore. He yearned for dehydration. That would trigger the best psychosis. It was time to leave this place. They had already told him they had no intentions of letting him go anytime soon. He would figure out a way to break out.

The creature tried to look around the room but even his head was tied down. Was it because he assaulted an officer? It wasn't his fault. She was trying to stick her grimy fingers in his mouth. Gosh, he really loved this place. It was so much better than jail. Every inmate will tell you a three hundred pound cow looks like a babe in jail. But this place? Packed with chicks. Lots of chicks that were probably still in college. That cop had put an end to his hospital fantasy and now he didn't have the slightest clue where he was at. Should he still help her? After all, she did save his life. He may have died from all the pills he

had swallowed. It was neat that his pills came in capsules. He had practiced so much that it got to the point he could surreptitiously slither the pills under his tongue and even drink the water to make it look like it was going down. State hospital workers were always lazy. They would never figure it out.

His head scraped against the leather straps as the creature tried to get his bearings. Trepidation hit him when he could finally tilt his head enough to see the walls. They were padded walls. Just like in the movies. He remembered the time he had figured out the Federal Bureau of Prison's ultimate finking tactic to get inmates to rat on one another without putting themselves in jeopardy. The room with the padded walls in prison was merely an office. One big snitch office that the feebies had built for the inmates to get a chance to leave their tier and rat out their buddy's. That way when they got back to their tier they could look their ratted out friends in the eye and tell them they had only taken a trip to the room with the padded walls. It was a genius idea and the feds had come up with it. Flanking their entire office with white nerf padding. Freaking ridiculous. Little did all the inmates know when the creature had been scooped up from his tier the idiot was ratting on himself. He really took no interest in other people's business.

The creature quickly realized that this room with the padded walls was no fink office. There were no mama's boys with nerdy glasses grilling him about what possessed him to mail a bomb to a doctor and then call 911 afterwards. No. This was real. He'd better start acting normal from here on out or he'd be getting spoon fed while strapped to this bed. Wait a second, he liked that idea actually. The getting spoon fed part. He could pretend he was a great emperor and the nurses were his slaves sitting around and feeding him grapes. Maybe they could even read him stories about the Cat and the Hat. The creature likes the Cat and the Hat. Green Eggs and Ham was his favorite.

Visions of children's stories danced around in his head while the creature closed his eyes. He wanted to prevent himself from being exposed to the sight of the padded walls. When he opened his eyes a dark mysterious man was standing over him and writing things down. What was being written down the creature did not know but something was totally freaking him out. The creature knew this man. This mysterious strange man was wearing what he always saw him in. An expensive black pinstriped suit that only a rich doctor could wear. This man in the suit had been following him around since he was only 17. Any time the creature had landed himself in an institution this man could always be seen snooping around. There was something very distinct about this mysterious man that the creature could never forget him for. A mysterious looking wrist watch.

This tall handsome mysterious doctor was only known to the creature as **The Man**. In his mind he always referred to this man as *The Man with The Watch*.

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## CHAPTER 17

I wanted my day to continue to have things going my way. No more bombings or apartment break ins. And I especially didn't want any more spider bites. I decided that I was going to take it easy today. I had no qualms about it after what I had just witnessed 5 minutes ago. Somebody else was doing my job. Some mysterious doctor dressed in a jet black suit. I wanted no part of this anymore and I was already on the phone with Nancy as I walked out to my car.

“Nancy, I know I'm the newbie on the force and all, obviously at the bottom of the totem pole, but come on! This is all getting ridiculous!”

“Why what's wrong? I thought you would have some fun getting to know our little nut and listening to his crazy little stories about his mom. What's wrong girl? You can talk to me.”

I defended myself the best I could. I didn't want to go overboard on this one. I just didn't know what other tricks the creature in there had up his sleeve. I was starting to think he liked being in there. Patiently waiting for me in there. He was probably already making some sort of talisman for me with the plastic beads. I wanted to stay away from him.

“Well first of all there is already some doctor dude in there talking to him as I speak right now. Kind of good looking actually. Older maybe, but very handsome and intellegent looking. I didn't want to interrupt whatever he was doing but it almost seemed like they knew each other.”

I heard a long sigh into the phone.

“Woo, woo, woo, back up. This guy wasn't a lawyer was he?”

“I don’t think so why?”

“Lincoln Hospital has been under scrutiny for the past 6 months or so. Patients have been complaining about some types of forms of abuse. What exactly happened last night? You didn’t lose your patience with our little nut did you?”

I laughed at the *little nut* comment. I still couldn’t believe my patient’s harrowing story about what led him to almost mail his doctor a bomb. His story would never get old. I only wish I could meet the doctor he almost decided to blow up. His doctor was very old and probably passed away by now from old age.

I barked into the phone. “No, no. I saved his life, remember? Our little nut was trying to kill himself. Why? I do not know.”

I wished I could turn the volume down on my phone before I went deaf. Maybe Nancy was just really excited.

“He doesn’t get many visits you know. No job, no girlfriend, no prospects. He doesn’t even have any kids. The guy is kind of a loner. I can see how he might be feeling a little depressed.”

It was just like Nancy to know it all. I keep trying to assure her that know it alls have the most to learn. She never seems to get my jokes.

“I understand Nancy, but that still doesn’t give him the right to bite my fingers.”

“That little prick bit your fingers? Are you going to press charges?”

I started up my car and put it into gear. Nancy wasn’t about to talk me into going back into there. At least not today anyways.

“No, I’m just going to let it go. I don’t think he’s gonna let me get inside his head if I have charges pending against him.”

“That’s smart thinking Monica. I like the way you think. Bill is very confident that your mental patient might be able to help us out. Find out what kind of books he likes to read. Where he likes to go to the movies. What he does for social activities. If he has any. Studies show that bombers tend to live like recluses. Just like your mental patient. Were looking for patterns with that same type of behavior so we can figure out how to catch this guy.”

Why Nancy was telling me what I already know, I have no idea, but I played along. I wanted to be behind the action with the alphabet boys. I wanted to investigate the crime scenes and investigate all that I could. Instead I am supposed to spend my next couple of weeks conversing with a mental patient 6 or 7 years older than me and probably still a virgin. And not by choice.

“Okay thanks for the insight. I’m going to do everything I can to pump out as much information out of him as possible. Maybe there’s a link in all of this and we can figure out how to put the pieces together to the puzzle. I’m doing the best I can.”

I nosed out of the parking lot and flipped on my left turn signal. I did a quick intake of the traffic and realized it wasn’t happening. I flipped on my right turn signal instead. With one hand on the gear shifter and one hand on the wheel, I had my cell phone crooked into my shoulder. I swear they keep making these cell phones smaller and smaller. Crooking the phone into ones shoulder will eventually be a thing of the past.

“Well hey that’s great monica, you just use your skills to get the information we need. I’m going to call the hospital to get more information about the man in the dark suit you were talking about. The last thing we need is some imbecile mouth piece shielding us from our patient.”

Nancy and her jokes. What could I say? I did my best to keep my cell from slipping down my shoulder. I don’t like using my knees to steer my car. Only if I have to. I continued reporting to my boss.

“I really doubt our patient has the means to hire an attorney. Maybe an imaginary attorney in his mind. I’m pretty sure the man in the suit was a doctor. He definitely looked more like a doctor.”

“Well okay, but I’m still going to look into it. Maybe we should give the patient some time to convalesce.”

“Sounds like a good idea Nancy.”

“Is everything okay with your grandma?”

“Yeah she’s doing great. I haven’t seen her this good in months. Her hair actually looked better than mine.”

“I’m glad to hear that Monica. I wish I still had my grandma but she’s in heaven now.”

The thought of heaven caused me to take my eyes off the road and look up to the sky. What I saw shocked every bone in my body. I quickly pulled my mini Cooper off to the side of the road.

“Nancy you’re not going to believe this.”

“What? What’s wrong?”

I squinted up at the sky at what looked like at least fifty or so helium balloons all tied together. It was slowly hovering over the sky but that wasn’t what bothered me. The balloons were holding a massive white paper sign. It looked like some kind of message. I squinted my eyes once more to make out the words, I couldn’t believe my eyes. My cell fell onto my lap.

“Monica? You still there?”

I continued gawking at the sky. This was totally mind blowing. This wasn’t happening. Not here in Philadelphia.

“Nancy you’re not going to believe this.”



## CHAPTER 18

It appeared that the balloon concoction was blowing my way. The words slowly came to life while I shielded my eyes from the sun. Evidently the weight of the sign was bringing it down from the sky. It reminded me of the methods of advertising they utilize at the beach. Planes with big flying signs. I read the message.

**PHILLY WILL**

**FEEL THE**

**WRATH OF**

**MARY MAIMER**

My instincts kicked in and I immediately started taking pics with my cell. The scorching sun was still blinding me so I flipped down my visor to shield my eyes. I felt something land on my lap but I didn't bother to look down to see what it was. I snapped a few more pics and stored them into my phone. When I finally looked down there was a business card on my lap. The business card advertised a local computer repair shop. It gave the name of a computer repairman. The name was Brett Konkle. Baldy dude.

Had I forgotten about my date with the nurse? I wanted to smack myself for being so forgetful. Meeting this Brett guy tonight might not be a bad idea after all. Maybe there was a chance he could help me gather information concerning my mental patient. I didn't want to spend any more time with that nutcase than I had to. I had bigger things to do. I placed the business card inside my purse so I wouldn't lose it.

Other motorists also pulled off to the side of the road to take some pictures. Across the street I saw a group of teenage thugs showing off their one speed bicycles. I could hear one of the boys yelling and pointing to the sky.

“What the hell does wrath mean?” Shouted the skinniest one.

I yanked up the E-brake and jumped out of the car. I was going to pump some information out of these teenage boys. They probably should’ve been in school but I had no intentions of heckling them for that. Siting them for truancy would be a waste of time and only hurt their parents pocket book. Most of the school teachers here in Philly would probably pay money just to have their students stay home.

I started in their direction and almost whipped out my badge. That would be a bad idea. A group of boys like this would take off running for sure. The black skinny kid stepped out from the throng to acknowledge my presence. He had a gold medallion chain the size of a jump rope. I have to admit, it almost looked real.

“Hey did you guys see which direction that big bunch of balloons came from?”

“Why? you a cop?”

I was not in uniform.

“Do I look like a cop?”

The skinny little punk looked me up and down. I put on my sweetest smile to show him I enjoyed the compliment.

“Yeah you look like a cop. You white and you look like you could probably run as fast as me.”

I was sure I could out run this twerp but I was not about to prove it. At least hopefully not today.

A fat kid in a red Wu-tang shirt emerged from the group and tugged on his buddy’s arm.

“Come on man. You know we don’t talk to the POH-lice.”

I did what any smart person would do. I went for my money clip.

“Here. Here’s ten bucks. You can probably buy a whole lot of *Faygo* with this. I just need to know where those balloons came from.”

The teen took hold of the ten dollar bill but didn’t put it in his pocket. Instead he waived it in front of my face.

“You think we gonna go buy cheap soda with this? What, you some kind of racist?”

I got defensive. I lived in Philly for a pretty good while. I didn’t play these head games. I reached for the ten bucks.

“Don’t drop the race card on me. I was just trying to be nice. I’ll ask the kids down the block.”

The little punk wouldn’t let go of the bill.

“Aight, aight, we help you out. I’m pretty sure I seen it coming from that way.”

The kid pointed in the direction of the hospital from where I had just been. All of this crap was starting to freak me out. I looked the kid square in the eye.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah I’m sure why would I lie?”

He grinned and looked away from me. Maybe my mind was playing tricks on me, I’m not sure, but it seemed like it was happening all over again.

I was looking at that same sick smile.

## CHAPTER 19

The new restaurant Brett was talking about turned out to be very elegant. I did the right thing and left Perry Perry dingleberry at home.

It didn't take me long to figure out the real reason why I was here tonight. Baldy dude was using me as a wing woman. When I ambled into the posh little sea food restaurant I observed Brett seated at the bar and flirting heavily with the bar tender. A little blond bombshell that looked way too young for him. The young bar tender hung on to his every word while empty tumblers lined up around her bar top like sitting ducks. I knew the restaurant had just recently opened up but I couldn't help but wonder how long little miss blond bombshell would last. I did like the name of the restaurant. The Lone Shark. Cute, I liked it. Especially the enormous saw-toothed shark mounted on the wall staring right at me.

I plucked out my cell phone from my leather purse and turned it off. I don't like to lie to people and I didn't want anyone to know I was here.

The bar tender saw me coming towards Brett and I think my intrusion just saved her job. She immediately stopped gabbling and occupied herself with replenishing her customers drinks. Brett caught on and finally turned around. I barely recognized him without his hospital scrubs. He was wearing brown cargo shorts and a hawaiian looking button down dress shirt. His leather sandals hugged the bottom of his bar stool. Needless to say, baldy dude looked like he was dressed for the beach. My presence shocked the bull piss out of him. I don't think he expected me to show up. Eventually he finally smiled. A normal smile.

“Hey-y-y... I didn't think you'd show up. Where's Peter?”

I chuckled lightly and held on tight to my purse. I wasn't ready just yet to sit down. At least here at the bar anyway. I could tell Brett was only on his first drink. There was \$16.50 splayed out on the bar top in front of him.

"Oh you must mean Perry. He has to work extra late tonight." I lied.

It sounded like music to his ears. He pulled out a bar stool for me to sit down. I looked at the bar tender. She quickly looked away but I knew she was watching us. *Wing Woman* I told myself.

"Here sit down. Let me buy you a drink."

I shook my head no. I don't sit at the bar. Bar stools are for loud mouthed people seeking attention. We didn't need any of that tonight.

"I'd rather we didn't. Let's go find us a booth."

Brett looked disappointed that his wing woman was not giving in to his plan. I noticed some guys a few seats over grinning as they watched baldy dude's dinner plans get dictated by a woman. Brett picked up his pile of bills from the counter and followed me. I didn't turn around because I already knew what he was looking at. Perry would be upset if he knew what pair of jeans I was wearing.

I stopped at a spacious booth that looked well isolated. The table looked squeaky clean and it had a white votive candle in the middle that looked like it had been recently lit. A beautiful painting of an enormous wave flanked the wall of our booth. I set my purse down on the seat and pushed it close to the wall. I could tell Brett was getting nervous with my impromptu seating arrangements and I was loving every second of it. I figured his friends were still watching because Brett shrugged his shoulders.

He placed his drinking money back into his pocket before he took a seat across from me. I was glad he brought his beer with him because I had plans of loosening his tongue. Any alcoholic will tell you. *Liquor loosens the tongue*. He took a mediocre swig from his glass before he questioned my unusual seating arrangements. A man of his caliber should be up for anything. That is at least if his goal was to impress me. He started off with sarcasm.

"So I take it you don't want me to buy you a beer?" he said with a drawl.

"I don't drink beer. My mother was killed by a drunk driver."

His sarcasm curtailed and he put down the glass.

“Ouch...Sorry to hear that. I've always been a social drinker. Did you want me to get rid of this?”

I suddenly felt kind of stupid. If I could get this guy to drink til he finks, why, I'd be partially responsible if he got a D.U.I. Didn't they call that a catch 22? Maybe getting Brett drunk was a bad idea. Perhaps there was a chance he'd answer all my questions just so he could be able to call me his friend. *Wing woman* I told myself. I was his wing woman for the evening.

“Oh it's okay. It happened a long time ago and I'm over it now. They're just gonna waste it anyways so you might as well finish it.” I said

I knew that was a lie. I would never be over the death of my mother.

A waiter came over with menus for us. Just looking at all the zits on the waiter's nose gave me a pretty good idea why Brett got all the play from the waitresses in here. Our waiter may as well have introduced himself as Napoleon Dynamite. I tried not to think of dynamite right now. God only knew what the terrorist we were looking for was up to. Brett gave away his brewsky to Napoleon. I guess he was trying to impress me.

“Here I can't drink this. I think it's gone skunky.” he said to the waiter.

The waiter looked pretty surprised. For a Seafood restaurant just opening up, their joint wasn't off to a great start. He picked up the glass but did not sniff or inspect it. At least he was professional. Butt ugly, but professional.

“I'm sorry sir. Would you like another one? On the house of course.”

My baldy dude played it out.

“No thanks. I think I'm no longer in the drinking mood. But I would like something to eat. So would my friend here.”

Brett was talking to our zit faced waiter like he was a superior. The waiter looked as if he was used to it and I told myself Brett better leave this poor sorry sap a good tip. We were handed our menus and then the waiter left us alone to read them over. I finally had Brett to myself. We pretended to read our menus until he finally tossed it down and broke the ice.

“So I was just curious. What's a cop want with one of our mental patients? Is he in trouble or something?”

I adjusted myself into the booth and lightly pushed the candle until it was centered to my liking.

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“No. He’s not in any trouble. At least not any that I know of anyway. My boss thinks he has some information that can help us out.”

Brett just laughed and looked around for his drink. He had momentarily forgotten he had given it away to the handsome waiter.

“Tell me you’re not serious?”

I nodded my head. I was serious. I was serious because I was determined to do my job. Brett just continued laughing and shook his head. I was getting curious now.

“I don’t get it. What’s so funny?”

He tried his best to control himself. I waited patiently.

“That guy doesn’t even know his own name half of the time and you guys think he can help you out? I hope you’re not working a high profile murder case.”

I shook my head no but I didn’t give him anything else. My plan was to get him to do all the talking.

“How did he end up in the hospital?” I asked

Brett just grabbed his chest to help stifle his laughter. He seemed to be very entertained that my mental patient would be the topic of conversation tonight.

“Oh, oh my. This is gonna be good. Wish I woulda kept my beer. I can tell you all kinds of stories about that guy. It’s okay to tell you because you’re a cop right?”

I nodded my head.

“Good. Were not supposed to discuss patient information but I guess this is okay. Our little nut was picked up right in the middle of a busy intersection. I was there the day the police took him in to us. It’s a good thing they did.”

“Why? What was he doing? Did he threaten to kill himself or others?”

“He didn’t have to. His state of mind was deemed a threat to others.”

“Well what was he doing?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

I didn’t get where he was going with this. I worked in a hospital for two years. We refuse to commit new patients unless they threaten others or threaten to kill themselves. It’s usually called a 302 commitment. Brett still seemed excited to tell me the story.

“That’s just it! Our little nut was doing absolutely nothing. The light had turned green at least 100 times and he just sat there in his car lost in some kind of trance. Nothing wrong with his car and he wasn’t popping the clutch. Somebody finally called the police and they found him deeply engrossed in a mental state of catatonia. Not to mention they found empty prescription bottles splayed out on the front passenger’s seat. Quite a tale huh?”

I nodded. I’d heard worse. There was the time we committed a naked man bleeding from head to toe. Then there was the time a woman rushed into the emergency room with a swiss army knife still stuck in her wrist. I didn’t particularly care to share these stories with Brett. I wanted info on my patient.

“So what kind of things was he saying when they brought him in?”

Brett chortled once again.

“Eh-heh. Something about accusing us of planting demons inside of his cash register. Then he was saying something about not being a virgin.”

Okay. Now I laughed too. With what the doctor did to him some 10 years ago, he may as well grow himself another cherry. I did however find it interesting that my patient’s behavior that day was congruent with his past. The hospital probably greeted him like a lost prodigal son.

“Alright, alright. The police commit him to the hospital. Then what?”

“Then we place our orders I guess.” laughed Brett.

I looked up to see Napoleon Dynamite pretend not to be interested in our discussion. It wouldn’t surprise me if he himself had at one point been committed himself. I ordered the Boom Boom shrimp and an ice tea with extra lemon. Brett ordered flounder. I hoped the flounder wouldn’t give him gas. Perry had that problem on one of our dates once before. It wasn’t fun.

I dropped the next bomb on baldy dude.



“Do you talk to my patient a lot?”

Out of respect Brett patiently waited for me to pick up my fork as well. I couldn't help but think his gentleman act was just a role he played in hopes of getting into my panties. If he only knew how stubborn I was.

“Honestly.....I think out of all the people in there....I may be the only one he talks to.”

“Why?”

Brett took his steak knife and began cutting. It was then that I noticed something about him I wished I would have noticed before.

Baldy dude's left hand had some stubbly nubs for fingers. I could still hear the postal inspector's words in the back of my mind. *Sometimes these bomb makers inadvertantly blow themselves up.*

## CHAPTER 20

By the time I got back to my apartment I was completely exhausted. I enjoyed my dinner date with Brett but I still felt something creepy about him. Just the simple fact of knowing the creature back at the hospital had befriended him, left me a little worried. Birds of a feather flock together they always used to say. He had told me that the two nubs for fingers on his left hand were a result of a terrible weight lifting accident. Supposedly he claims to have been a big weight lifter in High school and had gotten his fingers stuck between the bar on the bench press. I sensed that he was lying but what could I do? He had told me almost everything I wanted to know about my mental patient.

I unlocked my front door and stepped inside. Sushi immediately came running up to my legs. I was so glad momma's kitty kitty had come back. When I went for the lights in the living room I nearly jumped. A man was waiting for me and sitting on my couch. I didn't have my gun on me. It didn't matter because I recognized Perry's voice immediately. He was holding something in his hand. It looked like a pizza flyer.

"Long day at work?" he asked.

I pranced over to the kitchen and laid my purse on the kitchen table. I took in a deep breath. Perry never told me he was stopping by tonight. I wasn't about to tell him just yet about my date with Brett.

"Hectic as usual. I'm learning some interesting things about my patient."

I stared at the pizza flyer he was holding in his hand. He was fanning himself with it. Perry doesn't usually like pizza so I was getting suspicious.

“What’s with the pizza flyer? Are you gonna order us a pizza?”

I hoped to God he said no. Those Boom Boom shrimp I had earlier were doing a number on my stomach.

“Well we can if you want. I just brought you over this to show it to you. Apparently *you* never got one.”

“What are you talking about? Didn’t you find that pinched inside the storm door?”

It was just how they did in Philadelphia. Pizza shops and Chinese restaurants have their young underlings run around the neighborhood and drop off flyers to people’s residences. The economy was seedy and businesses were desperate for business, so businesses never failed to advertise. Perry continued to waive the flyer like it was a prized trophy.

“Nope. Evidently everyone yesterday got one of these but you. I swiped this one from your neighbor.”

I was glad the topic was something so stupid as a pizza flyer. I was not in the mood to talk about Brett. Perry would only get his feelings hurt if he knew he had a chance to come with.

“Okay I’m lost. Where are you going with this Perry?”

I didn’t sit down. It was late and I just wanted to go up to bed. Sometimes I wish police work was only Monday thru Friday 9-5 but it’s not. Police work is round the clock.

“Well don’t you find it odd that when your apartment got broken into yesterday everybody in the neighborhood got one of these pizza flyers but you?”

At that moment everything made sense. I never did trust those little hoodlums that ran around the neighborhood and stuck pamphlets in my door. A .38 revolver would probably come in handy for one of those guys. I heard rumors that the delivery guys in Philly get robbed all the time.

I pranced my cute little butt over to Perry and sat on his lap. Then I wrapped my arms around his neck and kissed him. My little Perry Perry dingle berry was useful after all.

“Did you tell the police any of this yet?”

“Did you want me to?”

“No. I’m gonna catch that little bugger myself. You’ll see.”

We embraced once again and I felt his naughty little hands sliding down me. I didn’t know what Jesus would do in this situation but I had made up my mind. My little dingle berry was spending the night.

## CHAPTER 21

My batteries felt like they were recharged when I woke up in the morning. Perry made me a hot cup of tea but then had to rush off to work. I was only 26 years old and already drinking Earl gray tea. Grandma would be so proud. It's not very often that I find the time to finish an entire cup of hot tea but I knew today I wouldn't have to rush into work. Today I was going to visit the creature that tried to bite my fingers off. Today I was going to visit the itsy bitsy spider.

I kept my eyes peeled for the mysterious man dressed in the jet black suit. I had so many questions for him but the people up at the front desk assured me the man was literally like a ghost. He never talked to anyone but the creature and he left as fast as he came. Maybe my mental patient could fill me in on who he was and what he wanted.

A security guard showed me the way to where they kept the craziest of the crazies. The room with the padded walls. When we got there the room was completely vacant. My first thought was that my little nut had figured out a way to escape. The security guard assured me otherwise.

“Don't worry. They probably moved him back to his old room. We don't keep people in this room very long.”

I nodded. I already knew that. I also knew I didn't want to hang around this security guard very long. He reeked of B.O and his big long beard looked like something my cat could hide in. He escorted me to the creature's room and luckily left me to fend for myself. I could hear his beeper going off.

“I have to go check out something on the third floor. He shouldn’t be a problem for ya. If he is don’t be afraid to give us a shout.”

I nodded and watched mr. stinky walk away. Just watching him made me so glad I no longer have to work in a place like this. Grandma was so happy when I got into law enforcement.

When I walked in I observed the creature reading the Bible. It looked like a King James version. He didn’t acknowledge me until I had walked halfway into the room. I guess his suicide mission was a complete failure. I was just glad he at least knew who I was.

“Did you know....,did you know that this book sold more copies than any other book ever written? And yet it’s soooo boring.”

“What’s your favorite verse?” I asked

“Why Galations 5:18 of course. So concise yet so motivational.”

“Do you know how it goes?” I asked. I was very curious.

The creature looked me straight in the eye and began reciting the verse verbatim.

“If ye are led by the holy spirit ye are under no law.”

*Great.* I thought to myself, *Now my little nut thinks he has an excuse to do whatever the heck he wants.* Nancy had told me that he had come from a family of Bible extremists and I should probably watch my language around him. I tried throwing him a curve ball.

“Did the holy spirit lead you to bite my finger?”

I brandished my finger so he could see his work up close. His eyes widened and quite truthfully I’d have to say he looked a little shocked. I’m not even sure he remembered I was the one who saved his life.

“I did that?” He asked dubiously.

I nodded and let him take a closer look. I kept my guard though in case the holy spirit led him to get a little crazy on me.

“I’m sorry if I did that. I’ve never bitten anyone before. I’m a writer not a fighter.”

“You don’t have any diseases do you?” I just wanted to be sure. I’d know he’d been to prison.

He just laughed like I’d made some kind of joke.

“I haven’t made love in over ten years. Wanna know what she said? I’ll bet you want to know what the big girl from the trailer park said. I can see it in your eyes. You want to know what she said that night.”

*Hmmm...delirious and catatonically stupid?* I was starting to believe it. Maybe his previous lawyer would’ve made a better psychiatrist. I could see now why he didn’t try too hard to plea bargain some of the creature’s trumped up charges.

“I’m not really here to discuss your love life. I was hoping you could help me with what’s going on right now. The bombing incidents remember?”

My mental patient looked perplexed. He put the Bible down and pulled onto his socked heels until he looked like a pretzel.

“So you’re not here to grill me about my mother?”

The look in his eyes suggested he probably had some pretty good stories to tell me about mom. What my patient didn’t know was mine was dead and he should probably be happy just to have a mother. I was not about to listen to this guy defame his very own mother. I had way more important matters to discuss.

“Maybe later we could talk about your mother. But right now I was hoping you could answer some of these other questions for me.”

I figured I’d play it safe and start off with a little I.Q quiz just to be sure I wasn’t dealing with an absolute retard. ( Although I had already made up my mind that I was.)

“I need you to do me a favor and count down 7 from a 100 as far as you can go.”

There was that sick smile. Maybe my patient had a joke for me? I really didn’t know.

“93-86-79-72-65-58-51-44-37.....”

I cut him off.

“Okay okay, that’s good enough. You don’t have to go down any more.”

Jeez. That was the first time that ever happened to me. And in record speed! The creature just smiled at me. I finally got the nerve to ask.

“What’s so funny?” I asked.

“Why is it always seven? Didn’t you head doctors ever think maybe I would eventually memorize those numbers?”

“Somebody had you do this before?”

“All the time. Are you now gonna ask me to describe my father and mother in just three words?”

I chuckled realizing my little nut had some bragging rights for seeing the most psychiatrists. I’d have to invent some word power games on my own and not go by the book with this one. I understood now why Nancy portrayed this mission as a challenge. A mental challenge. I placed my iced coffee cappuccino on his little desk and hopped on the bed next to him. I figured his trip to the padded walls probably gave the hospital a chance to finally wash his sheets. Maybe he would open up and talk more if I wasn’t staring him dead in the face. I already knew he’s very uptight about people trying to monitor his thoughts and what not.

“How about we start off by telling me what some of your hobbies are besides writing. What do you like to do in your spare time?”

The creature just chuckled like I had asked a rhetorical question. Maybe I was but I was bound and determined to get inside this creature’s mind. *If you want to catch a fish.....think like a fish* I told myself.

“Well how could I possibly have any other hobbies? I’m in the hospital remember? Were you planning on taking me out to go golf? Could golf be a hobby?”

On a day like this it didn’t sound like a bad idea. I could easily get permission and didn’t have to worry about him running away. If he thought he could out run my ass he had another thing coming.

“Sure we could do that. Where did you want to go?”

I watched him grab and squeeze his knee caps. That expained the two palm sized sweat marks on his gown. He had rubbed them right into himself.



“Oh that’s probably gonna be a bad idea. Too hot outside. Plus I don’t think these guys are ever gonna give me back my clothes. They think I’m suicidal but I’m not.”

Hmmm... I wondered about his so called reverse psychology he talked about when we first met.

“Okay that’s fine. Let’s just pretend were not in the hospital. What do you think you’d be doing on a day like this?”

I already had my own theory. Porn shops. Lots of porn shops.

“I dunno. I never really had much friends to be able to go out and do anything. I guess you could say I didn’t really have any hobbies.”

My mental patient probably didn’t even realize it but he was already helping me out a great deal with information. Regular joe schmoes that went out and did things with their friends obviously didn’t have time to be building bombs. So where would a bomber most likely hang out?

“I see you seem to enjoy writing books. Do you also enjoy reading them?”

“Oh absolutely! I have a short attention span so I tend to try to read books by Patterson. You know James Patterson by chance?”

I had heard of him before but never read any of his books. Most of my stuff at home were Sue Grafton novels. A sudden thought entered my mind. Bombers deprived of social lives resorted to probably watching T.V or reading books. The last time I checked the cheapest place to find lots of books was a library. There was a chance the terrorist we were hunting could be spending some time hanging out at a library. We didn’t have many of those here in Philly that’s for sure. I took out my pocket notebook and jotted some things down.

Maybe there was a chance this little nut could help us out after all.

## CHAPTER 22

Perhaps I was just in a really good mood, or perhaps I found myself taking a shining to my mental patient. Whichever it was didn't matter because I was definitely enjoying myself. Mr. Harry (my mental patient) sure had some interesting stories to tell me. We went from Mr. Freddy to Mr. Gary and today my mental patient was claiming to be Mr. Harry. Supposedly the whole multiple personality thing had to go in alphabetical order. I finally got the nerve to inquire about the mysterious man in the jet black suit.

“So who was the man in the dark suit that came to visit you yesterday?”

The creature became exhilarated. His precarious face lit up like a light bulb.

“Oh you must mean the man with the watch. I'm not sure what his name is. He's been following me around since I was 17, it's kind of spooky if you ask me.”

“Why do you call him the man with the watch?”

“Have you seen that guy's watch? Oh my gosh I'll bet he spent thousands on it. That thing has like 20 or so buttons on it. That's what makes him who he is. He's the man with the watch. I think he might be a doctor.”

“What did you guys talk about?” I asked.

“I Honestly don't even remember. I was still in the room with the padded walls.”

I ended up just dropping the subject altogether. Especially since he mentioned that the man was more than likely a doctor. That meant that we were safe.

We were laughing about the jokes he was making about his last therapist when he suddenly stopped himself in mid sentence. I knew something else had crossed his mind.

“What? What’s wrong? I was liking that part about your therapist reminding you a lot of Mr. Vandresian from that cartoon Beavis and Butthead. My little brother used to watch them all the time.”

Mr. Vandresian was Beavis and Butthead’s school teacher. He had long brown hair and donned the whole “hippie” attire. My mental patient swore up and down his last therapist looked and acted just like him. I found that rather amusing. He probably told him a lot to get in touch with his inner feelings. My mental patient probably found that pretty gay.

“I just thought of something. Were sitting here talking about my last therapist and there’s still a terrorist on the loose. Maybe there’s something I don’t know. Did they catch him already?”

Reality seemed to hit me all at once. I’m glad that my patient was pointing out that we were getting side tracked.

“Were not really sure that the terrorist is a “Him” anymore.”

The creature just smiled. It had probably been a while since he’d heard anything like that.

“Yeah right. A female bomber that’s cute. Like anybody will ever believe that.”

I cleared my throat from the sticky gook in my throat my iced coffee had left me. My mental patient’s breath stunk so bad earlier, I opted to give him a stick of gum. He ended up taking three pieces. I enjoyed watching him chew because the more frustrated he got the more he went to work on the chewing gum. I was just glad I could keep him from chewing up all his pencils.

“Well she sent us a message yesterday. A message for the whole world to see.” I said.

“How the heck do you post a message for the whole world to see?” He said scrunching his brows.

“Evidently Mary Maimer has a creative mind like you. She used a whole bundle of helium balloons.”

“Mary maimer? Jeez. I’m guessing that’s not her real name.”

I shook my head no. Nobody had a last name like that.

“Hey I just thought of something. Maybe your right. Maybe it really is a girl. I can tell you one thing for sure. It definitely isn’t a guy with big hands.”

I whipped out my note pad once again in case maybe he was onto something.

“Well why not?” I asked.

“Didn’t you say one of the bombings was an exploding pack of cigarettes? If somebody managed to stuff an entire bomb into something as small as a pack of cigarettes they either had small hands or else they’re a woman. Because women tend to have small hands.”

I couldn’t help but look at the creature’s hands. For as tall as he was, his hands weren’t looking too big. I remebered the time on the radio the DJs were poking fun at each other for having small hands. I guess it was supposed to mean something. Grandma always told me to look for big feet. I guess I could safely scratch off Bill from the suspect list. Bill was Nancy’s boss and had hands the size of sausages. Nancy would be happy to know her secret crush was not capable of these terrorist acts. The creature watched me jot some more notes down.

“Hey do you by chance have any pictures of the bombs? I think I’d like to take a look if you don’t mind. Aren’t I entitled to it at this point?”

I picked up the manila packet and nearly knocked over my iced coffee in the process. I could see him eyeing up my drink on the table. Maybe this hospital had a cruddy menu. I wasn’t really sure. I pulled the photos out from the folder.

“Oh sure sure. Knock yourself out. The ATF has already collected all the evidence so I don’t think there’s anything you can help us with just by looking at these pictures.”

The creature looked the photos over but didn’t seem to spend a lot of time on any particular one. He was a little less intrigued than I thought he would be.

“Didn’t you say that the terrorist used a mercury switch?” he asked.

“No they never found any traces of one but the IEDs performed like as if a mercury switch was used.”

“Hmm...” was all the creature said, “I don’t see any safety switch. It doesn’t make any sense to use a mercury switch without using a safety switch.”

I was getting thirsty so I slurped some iced coffee through my straw. It was back to discussing bombs I guess. Definitely not a girl thing.

“It’s funny you say that. That’s exactly what my boyfriend said.”

“Yeah, I figured you had a boyfriend.”

“How did you know?”

“Because every time I’ve seen you so far you’re entirely on point. Let me guess. You’ve been with him for a while.”

Jeez. I thought I had good sleuthing skills. Evidently my mental patient reads a lot of Sherlock Fox as well.

“Well we have our moments like all couples I guess. Is there anything in those photos you think you can help us with?”

The creature scrutinized the photos while he chewed the living crap out of the gum. I think I actually enjoyed watching him go to town on the cinamon flavored gum. I don’t even think a dog could chew on a bone that fast.

“I think I might have figured something out.” he said after lowering the photo.

“May I?”

Before I could ask him what he was talking about he went straight for my boob. I backed up but he was too quick for me. My ID card had been removed from my dress shirt. I hissed.

“What are you doing?”

“I need this for a second. I want to show you something. Something that might explain why you guys never found a safety switch.”

My first thought was my mental patient was stealing my identity. But then I realized we looked nothing alike so I let it slide.

“Can I see your drink for a second?” He asked politely.

Hey, if it contributed to counterterrorism why not? Besides my iced coffee was pretty much near empty. All that was left in it was ice.

“It’s empty but I can get you another one” I said, “All that’s in here is ice.”

“That’s okay. The ice is all I need. I think I figured out what our terrorist used for a safety switch.”

I thought it was cute that the creature said “Our” he probably thought he was going to be the next Lincoln Rhyme. This was Lincoln Hospital after all.

The creature immediately went right to work. I watched him dig around through the ice cubes until he found one he liked. He inserted the small ice cube right inside the roach clip to my ID tag then held it up to my face. I stared at a small piece of ice pinched inside of a metal roach clip. Very exciting.

“I don’t get it. Why are you showing me this?”

“Just imagine if I tucked two wires inside of this roach clip. I got a funny feeling once this ice melts are wires will be touching together. All the bomber would have to do is keep the pack of cigarettes below 32 degrees. If he did he wouldn’t need a safety switch.”

We stood there in awe. And sure enough 4 minutes later the ice had completely melted and the roach clip clamped itself together. If the bomber was keeping these things cold enough, there would be no need for a safety switch. They could use something as simple as a roach clip. I suddenly thought of something that didn’t quite add up.

“Well what about after the ice melts and turns to water. Doesn’t gunpowder become deactivated once it becomes wet?”

I watched the chewing gum go nearly 100 miles an hour inside of the creatures mouth. Catatonia was plaguing my mental patient once again because all he gave me was a smile. It was that same sick smile. All of a sudden he popped a big giant bubble right in front of my face. I felt a few loose strands from the bubble get caught in my hair.

“Sometimes the answers were looking for in life,” he paused, “.....Are right in front of your face.”

## CHAPTER 23

I raced home immediately. I had spent enough time with my little nut today and I wanted to try a little experiment of my own. In my own home. Just like my mental patient was doing 10 years ago when he was trying to figure out how to mail a bomb to his doctor. From the information I gleaned, it wouldn't surprise me if some of that doctor's other patients were doing the same. My mental patient informed me that there were at least 45 lawsuits pending against his doctor. That's a lot of angry men. Angry men that aren't apt to inflict malice because they don't have the balls to. That's actually a joke. My patient was the one rare exception.

The whole ride home I chewed on a piece of chewing gum for what would later be my experiment. I was starting to have a pretty good idea what the bomber might be using for a safety switch.

When I got home I removed the gum from my mouth and rolled it into a ball. I then waited several hours for it to freeze. While I waited I cleaned up the apartment a little bit and checked my face in the mirror. I found teeny tiny pieces of chewing gum stuck in my hair from my mental patient's enormous bubble. His words lingered in the back of my mind. *Sometimes the answers were looking for in life, are right in front of our face.* I had caught on to his innuendo and realized he was trying to tell me something.

I didn't have a roach clip but I managed to find a clothes pin in the knick knack drawer that I use to seal shut bags of opened potato chips. I removed the piece of chewing gum from the freezer and examined it. It was hard as a rock. I clamped it inside of the clothes pin and then hit the start button on my stop watch. The clothes pin didn't appear to be moving but I had a funny feeling with in a few minutes the gum would soften and the clothes pin would

clamp together. I wasn't even building a bomb and I was already getting excited just from the experiment. It made sense now how my little nut could totally be into this kind of stuff.

Five minutes later the chewing gum completely flattened. If I would have had wires stuck in between there they would have connected by now. I immediately called Nancy. I was glad I finally had some stuff to report. She answered on the second ring.

"Nancy you're not going to believe this. Our little nut actually ended up being a big help."

Nancy was in a bad mood. I could tell. Maybe she didn't get to hang out all day with Bill. She swooned over that man. His gallant behavior always seemed to turn her on.

"Well that's good because as of now we have absolutely nothing but some finger prints that belong to a monkey. Were looking for a fricking monkey Monica!"

Okay that thought had never crossed my mind. I was starting to become convinced that maybe the terrorist really was a woman. A woman could only be that smart as to get an innocent monkey to do her dirty work. Mary Maimer was proving to be very dangerous. E-mails and phone calls we can trace. Letters can be scrutinized. But the threat with the balloons in the air was just plain genius. It was a sure way to get everyone's attention.

"Well you had better start looking for a monkey parading around town with a cooler then."

"Why? Are we chasing Curious George?" Asked Nancy sarcastically.

"My mental patient and I believe that the reason no safety switch had been discovered was because the perp could have been using a roach clip and a frozen piece of chewing gum. If that is the case then the terrorist is probably using some kind of cooler to keep the packs of cigarettes below 32 degrees. Once those IEDs thaw out they become live because the gum softens 4 minutes later."

"You know I think the bomb squad did find an unexplained roach clip. I'm not sure about a piece of chewing gum but I'll have them look into it."

"Thanks Nancy."

"Sure. Do you have anything else to report?"



“Yeah, I think the terrorist probably has very few friends and spends some time at the library. And I don’t mean on the library’s computer. I think our girl is too smart for that.”

I don’t even know why the libraries in Philly even have books in them anymore. You can walk into any library these days and find people waiting in line to use the internet. The books on the shelf rarely ever get touched.

“Okay we’ll send out some detectives to hit up all of the local libraries and ask some questions. Unfortunately I have some more bad news.”

I took in a really deep breath. I had a pretty bad feeling whatever it was, wasn’t good.

“What happened now?” I finally asked.

There’s been another bombing. Ten of them actually. This time somebody actually died.

I stared at the piece of chewing gum that had completely softened and squished like a pancake. I didn’t like any of this. I knew if we couldn’t come up with a motive soon, there was a chance Mary Maimer would never be caught. Just like the Zodiac Killer.

## CHAPTER 24

I poured myself a tall glass of V-8 juice then poured some vodka in it for good measure. With all that was happening I needed to unwind a little bit. Did Nancy just tell me **Ten** bombings? Jeez. I was starting to think Mary Maimer had a lot of animosity towards Philadelphia. Then I suddenly remembered the big floating sign I had seen in the sky. *Philly Will Feel The Wrath Of Mary Maimer*. Evidently our girl was pretty serious. If Mary Maimer was truly a girl. I couldn't see how a woman could possibly have that much hate bottled up inside of her.

I was going over some of my notes when I heard my storm door suddenly open and close. I knew exactly what the noise was from and I immediately laced up my nikes then tucked my 9mm behind my back. I raced over to the front door and looked both ways up the street. Nothing. But then something conspicuous caught my eye. A little Chinese boy holding a bundle of flyers.

“Hey!” I yelled, “Come over here. I want to talk to you.”

I learned quickly that was a bad approach. When the kid saw me he took off running. I chased after him.

It was getting dark and he was pretty quick. Before Perry got me the virtual treadmill I used to run on these streets all the time. I knew every hidden alley like the back of my hand. I wished I hadn't mixed in that vodka but I knew I had enough adrenaline to keep me going. If this little punk thought he was going to get away from me he had another thing coming. I pumped my arms and legs and chased him down Spruce street. He had a commanding lead but I had an advantage on him because he was dropping flyers and leaving a

trail. All I had to do was follow the trail of pizza flyers to know which way he was going.

By the time we reached Plum street I was gaining on him. He looked back and saw me but was still not giving up. I wanted to fire a warning shot in the air but I was afraid it would land on the back of his head. Hopefully he wouldn't get the bright idea to turn around and open fire on me instead. This was the badlands, not the ritzy suburbs. People out here do actually have the balls to open fire on the police. It's on the news all the time. North Philly is known for it. We lost 6 officers last year.

I pushed harder and harder until I could no longer feel my lungs. I was picking up a second wind and knew this chase would soon be over. I wished my virtual treadmill friends could watch this. I'm sure Silverbullet656 would be impressed by all of this for sure. The chinese boy's luck finally ran out and he accidentally tripped over a trash can he didn't see that was protruding out from a gated fence and tipped on it's side. I listened for a scream from the fall but I didn't hear one. I figured he at least probably scraped his knee. My little brother screams over a simple paper cut.

I pounced the boy before he could get back up and quite honestly I think he liked it. I was on top of him and kept him pinned to the ground. He was laughing and looked to be no older than maybe 13. Kids out here know they can get away with murder and end up only getting a slap on the wrist. What's sad is their parents know this and often get them to do their dirty work. Welcome to the system.

"Where is it? Did you sell it already?" I was pissed.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I didn't take nuthn'."

The chinese boy didn't try very hard to free himself. I wondered if I was the first girl to ever be on top of him. I kept him pinned down and couldn't help but bury my fingernails into his wrists. I had no time for cute little games.

"Where's my gun? I know you took my gun or you wouldn't have taken off running."

The china man just giggled like a big elmo toy. His giggle was giving himself away because I figured something out real quick. I let go of him and picked up my .38 revolver from the ground. It had fallen underneath the trash can when he fell. I was just glad to get my gun back before it ended up getting used in some heinous crime. Nancy would never let me hear the end of that.

"Hey that's my hammer! I need that." pouted the boy.

I placed my .38 along with my 9mm I had tucked back inside my jeans. I was still trying to catch my breath and was already having thoughts of punching the little brat. I hoped his parents would emerge from around the corner. I figured I may as well question the little buggar.

“How did you know I had it?” I asked with a demanding tone.

“Everybody knows you have it. You’re a cop remember.”

“How did you know where to find it?”

The kid finally stood up and dusted himself off.

“I dunno. Lucky guess.”

“What did you plan on using it for?”

“Hey lady look around you! This is the badlands! Do you know how many pizza guys get robbed out here? We need that gun for protection.”

“Who’s we?”

“I share that piece with my brother. He uses it most since he works more than I do.”

“What’s your brother’s name?”

I hoped that his brother was at least 18. Then maybe the charges would stick.

“Are you crazy? You want me to rat out my brother?”

I thought about it for a split second and put myself in his shoes. The finking rate in Philadelphia is higher here than in any other city. I kind of admired the punk for not wanting to squeal.

Out of respect to the kid I turned around and walked away.

## CHAPTER 25

We all gathered around and seated ourselves in the Oval room. Nancy looked stressed out and her hair was a mess. She looked like she was losing sleep with all that was going on. Even big sausage finger Bill was constantly fidgeting. Philadelphia had never experienced a threat quite like this. I myself was also a little nervous. Bill layed down his pen then smashed his fist into the table.

“Something just doesn’t make sense in all this. The monkey prints, the aimless motives, is this supposed to be all the work of just one man? Or should I say woman? Heck I don’t even think we know anymore!” Said Bill.

He stood up from the table to go make himself a cup of coffee to calm his nerves. Nancy and I never like it when he gets angry because he’s been known to throw things. Men and their anger issues. What can I say? I knew if we didn’t catch this terrorist (or terrorists) Bill was never going to let the case go cold. Bill never gave up. Ever. I remained calm while Nancy tried to fill us in on where we were at.

“Monica believes she is making some progress with the mental patient. Fortunately for us it looks like the little nut is willing to help us.” said Nancy.

I didn’t open my mouth just yet. In times like these I like to wait until it’s my time to speak. I wondered if Bill knew caffeine would only induce his stress, not make it better. He walked towards us holding his coffee mug and stroking the handle with that big thumb of his. I could tell he was thinking of something.

“So were relying on a man, or should I say little boy, to help us catch a woman?”

Nancy chuckled at that one. I have to say I did too. We all knew what the doctor had done to my mental patient many years ago. I figured it was now safe to talk.

“There’s nothing tangible that suggests the terrorist is a woman other than the sign. There’s a possibility the sign could be just one big ruse to misguide us.”

Nancy’s eyebrows went up as I watched her concur. She wasn’t the type to feed me to the lions. Even if it meant making herself look like an ass. We watched Bill prance back over to the coffee maker and pull out something from the drawer underneath. I was astonished to see him coming at us with a small piece of chewing gum stuck in a ziplock baggie. There was also a roach clip in the bag. Evidently my bubble gum theory was right.

“Unless the terrorist is a man with extremely long hair. This piece of bubble gum suggests the perp is a woman.” Said Bill.

He tossed the ziplock baggie onto the table in front of us. The long thin hair entwined in the chewing gum looked too prominent. I wasn’t buying it. I wondered if forensics had tested it yet for DNA. Bill placed his hands on his hips and let us examine it. I could hear him breathing heavy. This bothered him.

“Can they do a DNA sample on this?” I asked.

Bill finally cracked a smile.

“Yeah. Were evidently dealing with one sick Monkey!”

“A monkey chewed on this?” asked Nancy. She seemed perplexed. We all did.

At this point I was coming up with theories of my own. Either Jane Goodhall had gone postal, or we definitely had one sick monkey on the loose. This was proving to be just too much. It made me think of Perry’s curious George pajamas he liked to wear. Then I thought of my mental patient and what he might be doing right now. If he knew there was an evil monkey on the loose would his Biblical teachings grant him the right to spank it. Was he spanking the monkey?

## CHAPTER 26

My mini Cooper convertible was zipping through city traffic like a teenage punk on a crotch rocket. Bill had insisted we all get back to work ASAP and that time was running out. I had no say in the matter. But quite truthfully I felt like I was being left in the dark. I knew there was a casualty but Bill refused to fill me in on all the details. *Just go get inside the boy's head* was all he told me. Nancy informed me that the recent 10 bombings all happened on the same day and that the bomber had stepped up her game. Thumbtacks. Evidently the terrorist was now loading pieces of thumbtacks inside the CO2 canisters for extra shrapnel. The nail-like shrapnel had penetrated somebody's heart and killed them. Bill wouldn't tell us who, but I imagined it must be somebody important. All I knew was that all the bombings were identical and were happening very quickly. Exploding packs of cigarettes left right on people's doorsteps. Scary if you ask me.

When I pranced my little fanny into the hospital Brett saw me and tried to stop me. I couldn't believe I actually let him grab my arm and he held onto it for a while before he let go.

"Hey are you here to visit that little nutcase? He's been acting weird all day."

I know I'm a loyal son of a gun. But I think I actually liked Brett touching my arm. I can't remember the last time another guy other than Perry tried to touch me. They usually felt too intimidated to touch me. Grandma keeps trying to push Perry and I into marriage. Sometimes I just feel like going on one big fling before that ever takes place.

"Oh how so?"

Brett smiled like a peacock. Whatever he was about to say obviously was going to have some humor in it.

“We can’t get the guy to keep his gown on. He refuses to wear it. Says there’s demons embedded into the fibers and he can feel them eating away at his skin. Your mental patient has been sitting on his bed buck naked pretty much all day. Cone and all.”

*Did he just say “Cone and all?”* Maybe I shouldn’t ask. I had heard that my patient had accrued many nicknames over the years. Till this day, the internet still disports the after math of his plastic surgeon’s finest work that was performed on him.

“So you’re telling me my patient is sitting on top of his bed completely naked?”

Brett burst out laughing and grabbed my arm once more then whispered into my ear to taunt me.

“Your friend is still in his birthday suit sitting on his bed reading a book. By the looks of things...I think he’s expecting you.”

I gave it a minute to let it all sink in. If Nancy really thought I was doing this, she had another thing coming. I went to reach for my cell phone butt Brett stopped me.

“Hey you’re not chickening out are you?”

His hand was on my shoulder now. I didn’t know what to think. I never let strange guys get this close to me but this was Brett. Something mysterious about this guy that turned me on. Maybe it was because he acted so cocksure around me, I dunno. A side of me likes a man with confidence.

“I’m just calling my boss that’s all.”

The stubbly fingered hand stayed on my shoulder and I so desperately wanted a close up look at his deformed hand but I dared not look. I even for a second imagined he could be the killer but I knew that was absurd. Nurses don’t do those kinds of things. They help people, not destroy people. I didn’t look at his hand but I felt it rubbing my shoulder. His hand was icy cold.

“So did you enjoy yourself on our date last night? I thought you looked terrific.”



Now I had enough. I politely removed Brett's hand from my shoulder but made a point of not to look at it. Secretly I think he wanted me to look at his maimed hand. Maybe this was just a game to him.

"Yeah I had a really nice time but I got to go."

I made a bee line towards the elevator and I could hear his footsteps trailing behind me. I hope this wasn't one of those freaks that didn't take no for an answer. People that stalk cops aren't very bright. I had baldy dude being a little brighter than that.

"Wait! Wait! Don't you still have to interview the patient? You're not mad at me are ya?"

I didn't even respond. Instead I found myself moving a little faster towards the elevator. I breathed in a sigh of relief when the elevator doors closed and I no longer had to see that bald shiny head of his. My nerves were so shot my fingers were actually shaking as I punched in Nancy's phone number. She answered on the first ring. We always answer each other's calls on the first ring when we think we're getting close to solving things.

"What's wrong girl? Did you come up with something already?"

"Nancy I'm not doing this anymore. You'll have to put me on another assignment."

"Woo, woo, woo. Slow down girl. Don't tell me that little nut bit your finger again. I'll go in there and squish that itty bitsy spider myself."

I imagined she would. There are plenty of men out there that are afraid of Nancy. One of her best friend's husbands still regrets the day he thought he'd smack his wife around. Nancy nearly put the lanky old man in a coma.

"No, no, no. It's not that. Actually I wish it was only that, but it's worse. Our boy is not wearing any clothes."

The laughter blasting into my phone almost blew out my ear drums. I'd never heard Nancy laugh that hard. She tried to say something but couldn't because she couldn't stifle her laughter. I couldn't help but wonder if my mental patient had encountered some laughter in his day just like this. I patiently waited for Nancy to get herself under control.

"Oh-hoh-ho....Ah-heh-heh....Is he really flashing that little thing around? Oh my gosh this is just too real."

I heard snorting sounds. Evidently my boss was laughing her way into tears. I still didn't think the whole situation was very funny. I didn't know what kind of prank the creature was playing but I'd better not find out Brett put him up to this. I remember him telling me he was the only one in the hospital the creature ever talked to. If this was some kind of sick joke it wasn't very funny.

"Nancy I'm being serious. I want out. If you think I'm going up there you're crazy."

I heard my boss take in a deep breath. She had finally managed to stop laughing.

"Girl I can't just put you on another assignment. It doesn't work that way. Bill tells me what to do and I tell you what to do. Why don't you just keep the lights out when you're in there so you don't have to look at him."

*Very funny Nancy* I told myself, *Like I really want to be in a dark room with a demented naked man.* The doors swung open and a burly security guard stepped into the elevator with me. The man was covered in tattoos and looked intimidating. I came up with an idea.

"Hey Nancy I think I came up with a solution to the problem. I'll let you know how I made out later today."

"Okay, you do what you gotta do girl. Hey....why don't you figure out what's bothering him about his mother."

I flipped my cell phone shut then smiled at the big intimidating security guard towering over me.

Today I intended to do just that.

## CHAPTER 27

The creature finally got his wish. He no longer had to wear the demon infested gown that was eating away at his skin. Instead I got the security guard to see to it that our patient don a suicide vest. A suicide vest is a big blue blanket made of sturdy vinyl material. It was chew proof and had strong velcro straps that fastened together in the back. All I had to do was lend my hand cuffs to Mr. security guy while I waited patiently outside his room. My tattooed friend came out with a big smile when he finally had my patient situated and ready for me.

“He’s all yours mam. I cuffed him in the front. Hopefully I didn’t put the cuffs on too tight. I’ve never cuffed anyone before.”

I didn’t peek into the creature’s room just yet. When I glanced up the hall I saw a bald shiny head poking out from around the corner. It disappeared as quickly as I saw it. I hoped my patient’s freaky behavior wasn’t rubbing off on other people as well.

“So is he decent? I can go in there now?” I asked skeptically.

The burly guy gave me an assuring smile. His tattoos looked skewed probably from his muscles getting too big. He folded his arms so I could see the razor wire tattoo circling his huge biceps.

“Oh, I don’t think he’ll bite you. He’s just putting on a show. It must be his time of the month.”

We both smiled at that. I had heard that my patient had once ran around a cafeteria in his birthday suit. Apparently running around naked is what he does when he wants something.

The security guard walked away and I took in a deep breath before I walked in. If he was sitting in there naked all day there was probably a good chance a stench was still lingering. Unfortunately today my patient didn't look too happy to see me. I hoped he didn't plan to act like a three year old today. He glowered at my presence. I tried my best to be nice. Maybe he was going through some mental trauma.

"May I come in?" I asked in a near whisper.

It felt like dejavu all over again. The creature was staring at my Nikes. I couldn't get him to lift his eyes from off the ground.

"Those are nice Nikes." He said, "I have a pair but the hospital won't let me wear them."

I haven't seen a despondent look on somebody's face like that in a long time. I couldn't help but wonder what kind of thoughts went through a mind like his. It did seem kind of sad that he had been here over a month and the hospital still didn't know what to do with him. The front desk said he only got one visit from his immediate family and that was it. No friends. Not even a nagging girlfriend ever came to see him.

"You look pretty depressed. Is the hospital treating you alright?"

The creature crossed his arms and scrunched up his bushy eyebrows. Maybe something had happened while I was away.

"No! They keep trying to force me into all sorts of patient group meetings. They keep threatening to bump me back down to red if I don't participate. I'm not playing their stupid games and I'm not giving them the opportunity to monitor my thoughts."

I knew what he meant by getting bumped back down to red. The treatment plans sometimes use the red, yellow, green code in deciding whether or not the patient is ready for discharge or not. Red was not good. Yellow means you're half way there. Green you're soon going home. I used my skills in an attempt to collect information about his mother. I had a pretty good plan on how to speed things up.

"Well you have been here quite a long time. You're mother must be worried sick over you."

I thought about sitting down but then changed my mind at the last minute. I could tell by the look in his eyes he wanted me to stay awhile. If he saw me sit down he'd just assume I had plans of staying around for a while and the last thing I wanted was the three year old boy in him to come out. Maybe if I stayed by the door he'd open up a lot faster with hopes I stick around.

"I doubt it." he said frowning.

"What makes you think that?"

"She's probably too busy sitting at home reading her reader's digest. She's been doing that for the past 25 years now I think."

I wondered how long it could take to read an issue of reader's digest. It usually doesn't take me more than 15 or 20 minutes. Perhaps his mother is a slow reader. For some reason I doubted it.

"So I take it she's retired or disabled maybe?"

That seemed to be my golden ticket. My question had brought my patient's smile back to life. He seemed to be amused at my query.

"Yeah right. That woman has more energy than any other woman her age I know. My life sure would've been easier if she was disabled."

My magic was working. I wondered if the creature was figuring out I was already prying. I kept my questions concise. That's usually the trick to doing these kinds of things. I kept my tone very soft and pleasant.

"Why's that?"

"Psst! Cuz that woman's got a lot of energy!"

"So what does she do with it all?"

"Drive us all nuts. Lots of coffee pots out the window. The usual."

"You sound like maybe you were entertained by all her energy. Were they your coffee pots she was throwing out the window?"

"No they were dad's. I'll bet that guy has been through over a hundred coffee pots throughout their marriage. Everybody knows that mom runs that house."

The creature was spilling his guts and not even realizing it. I had already deduced that it was imperative for his mother to have that control. I just wanted to know more about her. I sensed that it bothered my patient that his mother was a control freak.

“Has your family ever undergone any family counseling?”

“Who my mom? Yeah right. She thinks its evil and a waste of money. Mom always told me since I was a little kid that the government is evil and nosy. She even used to bribe me with candy bars when I was little if I promised not to tell my counselor things.”

Now I had my little itsty bitsy spider cornered and just where I wanted him. I didn't know what kinds of stories he told his previous counselors and psychiatrists but I was going to open that emotional scar. The one that his last counselor could never open.

“What kinds of things didn't she want you to talk about?”

I could sense that my patient was getting nervous so I kept my distance. Supposedly this is the part where the head doctors reach a grid lock. Unfortunately I was getting no response. I saw that his eyes were getting rheumy so I knew I at least stood a chance. Supposedly every shrink he ever saw could not get him to shed a single tear. He was like a walnut that couldn't be cracked open. Living in his little box secluded from the rest of the world. I was going to pull him out from that box.

“I dunno, I guess things that I was too young to realize she wasn't supposed to be doing.”

His eyes were bouncing all over the place and I could tell he was trying to stay strong. He tried to hide the hurt in his eyes but I could still see it. Deep down I think he wanted to tell me but he was too embarrassed. His eyes continued to dart all over the place and I could see his heart pulsating right through his chest. Something was really bothering him.

“Were these things you talk about things that she was doing to you?” I asked hesitantly.

He continued to lower his head and hide his face. When I heard the light snuffles that was when I knew it was coming.

I stood at the doorway and leaned against the threshold. There was an eerie silence and then the unthinkable finally happened. My mental patient broke down and cried.

## CHAPTER 28

His stories were too detailed for him to be conjuring them up off the top of his head. The picture he was painting in my head was so profound it sounded like a horror story. On the contrary, it helped me make some sense of his behavior and why he always seemed to be on his guard. One thing was for sure. It explained why he devoured his food at meal times as if the food was going to get up and run away. I couldn't believe the story he was telling me.

“So you were how old when she was doing this?” I asked quizzically.

“I dunno. Maybe 4 or 5 I guess. I don't think I was in school yet.”

I was still in shock. I wanted to know more about his mother's bright ideas she had for raising her children. It was kind of interesting to say the very least.

“Well how long did she give you to finish eating the gruel on your plate?”

My patient wiped away the last of his tears. I had him so worked up that I don't even think he realized that he was spilling his guts. His answers were quick and I could tell there was no way he was feeding me a line of BS.

“The timer always got set on the stove for 5 minutes. When the timer went off sometimes she gave me an extra 10 seconds before she took me back to the bedroom. That turkey neck gruel she used to make was always real hard to get down. There were many times I just couldn't do it.”

“And if you couldn't eat it on time she took you back to her bedroom?”

“No no. She took me back to my sister’s bedroom. She **used** to take us back to her bedroom but she said it was too close for the neighbors to hear.”

“To hear what?” I asked.

I was already making so much progress and my patient didn’t even seem to have a clue. I am very proficient with beating around the bush to get the information I need. I knew his last counselor was a man and they tend to lose their patience when it comes to prying. My patient stared at my Nikes and began mumbling.

“Guess mommy going gung ho with her sword!” There. He finally blurted it out.

“She used a sword?” I was completely shocked. I had never quite heard of anything like this.

“No. Not a real sword. It was a big thick stick that she had personally painted into a sword.”

I suddenly remembered the drawing. The creature couldn’t draw worth crap but I had stumbled upon a stick lady holding a sword. I guess I was right about the stick lady representing his mother. Paddling probably used to be a common thing back in his day but I imagined there might be more to the story in his case.

“What do you mean by going gung ho with the sword. Did she ever hit you with it?”

The creature sat up in his bed a little more straighter then stared at his cuffs. I had a pretty good feeling what he was going to ask next.

“Mam. These cuffs are on a little tight and I don’t even know why I’m wearing them. Can’t go nowhere. Do you think you can at least loosen these for me a little?”

I reached for my hand cuff key I keep on my key chain. I didn’t really see a point with keeping the cuffs on so I just took them off.

“You can promise me that you wont take this vest off right?”

The creature chuckled. He was starting to sound like he was feeling better.

“Mam this thing is strapped up from the back. Somebody is going to have to help me take this thing off when I get my gown back. I’ve worn one of



these things several times before when I was in prison 10 years ago. I didn't understand the point of the hand cuffs."

At this point I figured it would be a good time to sit down. Instead of sitting in front of him I decided to sit down next to him on the bed so he didn't have to look at me when he talked. I really wanted to hear the end of the story about his crazy mommy with the sword. I dusted off some eraser shavings before I planted my butt next to his. I wondered how long it had been since he last showered. Luckily the excess perfume I put on earlier probably provided enough coverage for the both of us.

"Okay, so back to the story of your mother beating you with a sword. Did-"

"I never said my mother beat me with a sword! You put words into my mouth! Now I know why my mother always told me that the government is nosy and evil!"

I looked around the room for a candy bar, Perhaps his mother was here earlier and had already came up with the bribe. Then I remebered the out dated pop tarts. Maybe she just no longer cared anymore what the little nut was saying about her. This was definitely getting interesting.

"Okay but you said earlier your mother took you into a bedroom and went gung ho with a sword. What exactly did you mean by all that? I'm confused. you're saying she never hit you with it?"

I got no response. I didn't dare look over at him but I could hear little sniffls leaking from his nose. Maybe his mummy had a full round house swing. I dunno. Then the tears rolled down heavily and I knew it was real. Were not supposed to touch the patients but I put an arm around him to console him. He was weeping heavily. No thespian in the world could put on a show like this.

"It's okay." I whispered

It was too bad he didn't have his gown because he had nothing to blow his nose into. I reached into my purse and handed him a kleenex. He sopped up the tears running down his chin.

"You don't understand. Everything was like a big game to her. Sometimes she would intentionally miss and hit me on the bottom of the legs where it was more sensitive. There was a time once she even drew blood. But it gets even worse."

I scratched his back lightly with my finger nails. This story was getting all too deep. I hoped Brett didn't peek in on us because I know he would probably find all of this very amusing seeing me play nurse with a nut case. Grandma says God has special love for the crazies.

“What gets worse? You can talk to me hun.”

“She turned the disciplinary beatings into some kind of sick twisted game she came up with. A game where it was up to me and my noise level when the beatings would finally end.”

## CHAPTER 29

I have counseled so many patients in my day that I can't even remember. Usually their stories go in one ear and out the other. I have to admit that the things my mental patient was telling me was causing me to get a little rheumy eyed. When I realized it was bothering him I managed to hide it. Somehow I couldn't help but feel my patient truly believed he deserved every beating. I've never seen such a disgruntled look in all of my life. I imagined there was probably a lot of mental abuse as well. I still had more questions for him I wanted to ask.

“Do you think your mom still enjoys hurting people?”

He really had to think on that one. Maybe his meds were kicking in and he was starting to lose focus.

“I dunno. It's just her and dad over there right now and of course the animals.”

“What kind of pets do they have?”

“Oh just a cat and two dogs and Tito.”

I noted that he didn't count Tito into his cat and dog calculation. It piqued my interest and I was starting to get a little suspicious about something. I didn't want my patient to think I already knew too much so I beat around the bush.

“So I guess Tito is a pet rabbit?”

“No Tito is a Mon-” He stopped himself mid sentence, “Hey can we talk about the bombs now. I think I may have figured out why you people never found any traces of mercury.”

I didn’t say anything at first. I was still trying to figure out why my patient suddenly deviated from the topic we were discussing. Usually when patients do that it meant they were uncomfortable and wanted to hold something back. I wasn’t going to dictate everything we talked about, so I played right into his little game.

“Oh? How’s that?” I asked.

“Maybe the cigarette bomb was tied to a string that was taped to the ground. That could be possible. Kind of like a booby trap.”

I wondered how long it had been since this little nut had even seen boobies. Maybe he should have treated himself to a boob job instead so he would at least have something big to play with. I know, I need to go to church. Occasionally these dirty thoughts cross my mind. Grandma says I should pray when I get these thoughts. Pray that they go away.

“Sounds good but no. Forensics determined there was nothing at all jutting out from any of the packs of cigarettes.”

“Did you say packs of cigarettes? Are there still more of these things going off?” He said with concern.

I solemnly had to shake my head yes. It made me sick how much destruction Mary Maimer had managed to get away with so far. I was already thinking there would be a death penalty in it for her.

“The ATF and FBI are handling the case for right now. There’s not much we can do until we can find a motive for the bombings except methodically collect evidence. Unfortunately it’s turned into a high profile case and I can’t legally discuss with you all the details.”

I saw that sick smile on him once again. It wasn’t the one he showed when he was nervous but rather a victorious one like he felt he was one up on me. I wasn’t about to let him know that earlier I almost got him to say the word monkey. And I’m not talking about the three wise monkeys. The monkey we were looking for was a loose cannon. Much like my mental patient. And apparently his mother too.

“Yeah, it’s okay I understand. My younger brother is a cop just like you so I know there’s sometimes things you guys aren’t allowed to talk about.”

Jeez. Nancy had never mentioned that to me. I wondered if maybe his younger brother looked anything like himself. Hopefully he didn't act just like him or the police Academy has really lowered the bar. It was still hard to believe my mental patient had at one point managed to worm his way into the Army. His records show only a 5 week stint but nonetheless he had still managed to somehow get in.

It made me wonder why my patient was deviating from the subject of his mother. He continued discussing his brother's accomplishments while I pretended to listen. I tried my best to think of a way to slowly worm him back into what we were talking about earlier. He proceeded to babble when suddenly I came up with something to say.

"I guess your mother must be pretty proud of him." I finally said.

"Oh yeah. He's always had mommy wrapped around his little finger. They share bank accounts, car titles, heck, they even share names on those little return address stickers. He even got the nickname *Momma's Lil Bear*."

I thought that sounded so cute. From what he was telling me his mother and his younger brother must be pretty close. I have seen married couples share names on return address stickers but mother and son? That was a little bit strange.

"So what kind of nickname did your mother give you?" I asked out of curiosity.

The creature looked down at the floor and stared at my Nikes. I hoped he wasn't planning a way to steal them from me. I've never seen anybody so infatuated with my sneakers.

"I had two nicknames mommy used to always call me. Butchies and momma's lil dickies. When she wanted to torment she used to say in a shrill voice *"Here dick, dick, dick. Where's momma's little dickies?"*

At that moment I knew I was working hard for my money. I wanted to burst out laughing so bad but I knew his mother's bantering may have disturbed him as a child. It was sounding like maybe my mental patient grew up with not really a whole lot of encouragement.

"So when you say torment. What do you mean by torment?" I asked.

"Oh she tormented us kids all the time. Probably my sister the most the older we got. I once got so angry I told her she's my tormentor not my mother. I was pretty upset."

“Was she still physically hurting you then?”

The creature finally looked up at me. He was no longer teary eyed but I could see that devil transpiring into his pupils. It was the same look Robert Blake gave Deborah Walters when she asked him if he had murdered his wife. I have seen this look before and it is very threatening.

“That lady woke up at the buttcrack of dawn every day thinking of ways to torment the kids. She never worked and had all the time in the world to be creative with her punishments. At one point the neighbors three houses down got tired of hearing human screams emanating from our house and called the cops. Mom tried to convince the police that we used to have screaming contests and there was nothing to worry about. The cop didn’t buy her story and forced us kids to expose our buttocks. He probably didn’t see much because much of the marks were a little lower towards our legs. I was scared. I don’t like showing my ass to the POH-lice. They never do nothing for us any way and they are extremely lazy. I think the cop told her it was okay to paddle but asked her to tone it down a notch. Wanna know what new punishment ideas mommy came up with?”

At this point I was glad the creature couldn’t see my face as I sat astride with him. I couldn’t help but wonder what his mother looked like during his tweenie years. Was she pretty? I deduced that she probably was for her to be able to get away with so much. With all the energy she had she was probably in shape. Handicap people are often not capable of disciplining their children. Their kids grow up to be brats usually. I rubbed my knee caps and stared at the red laces on my Nikes. I knew what he was about to tell me would be profound.

“Mom got so pissed that the government was being nosy she finally got the bright idea to start spanking the bottom of our feet.”

I was completely shocked. I have heard many a tales but this was all too weird. Many of parents used to spank their children back in those days but it was starting to sound like maybe this woman revelled in it. That saying spankers used to say “*This is gonna hurt me more than it hurts you*” obviously didn’t apply to this woman. I almost felt compelled to meet her.

“The bottom of your feet?”

“Yeah. The bottoms of our feet. She even moved the beating location to the bathroom so she didn’t have to worry about windows. Mom would take us in one by one and sit on the toilet while she waled the bottoms of our feet. I believe she took great pleasure in it. God forbid you scream because then you only end up getting more. The only discipline that wasn’t orchestrated

was what she called *Smart Talk*. Being smart with mommy got you a good whack across the face.”

“With the sword?”

The creature gave me a slight chuckle.

“No with the hand. She probably wishes she could use the sword. Actually she probably wishes while we were in the bathroom she could just drown us in the tub. Mom wrote me a letter while I was in prison telling me how happy she was when they let Andrea Yates off the hook. Do you remember Andrea Yates?”

Yes. I remembered the case against Andrea Yates. Supposedly she had managed to get the doctors to determine she was mentally ill. There are still a lot of people traumatized by what she did. I find it disturbing that evidently Yates had fans. Apparently the creature’s mother was one of them.

“Did you ever strike back at your mother?” I asked.

“No.”

“What kept you from doing that?”

“She was pretty and I was scared. By age 13 I managed to get on intensive probation for stupid pranks and I knew the cops already didn’t like me. I figured a retaliation against mother would get me a quick trip to jail.”

Some how I believed him. It was hard to believe 10 years ago the federal government portrayed him as a terrorist. He looked so innocent and something told me this little nut had never caused any malice to anybody. But the malice inflicted upon him, well, that was a different story.

“Has anybody ever tried to place you in foster care?”

“Yes once when I was 17 and in my senior year of school. I spent three months of my senior year in a state hospital but unfortunately nobody wanted to adopt me. By the time I was getting ready to be discharged from the hospital I was soon turning close to being 18. The hospital told me there was no need to place me in foster care since I would be an adult in a few months. Those jerks wasted three months of my time for nothing!”

I looked at my watch. We had spent a lot of time chatting and I was getting a pretty good picture painted inside of my head of the creature’s mother. I looked at the 3x5 note card he had setting on the desk. It said Mr. Harry.

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Maybe the hospital wasn't giving him any more grief about him changing his name on the card. I realized that maybe the daily changing of his name had nothing to do with his mental illness. The stories posted on the World Wide Web about this man is enough to make anybody want to change their name. I was just glad the creature was under control and not trying to bite my fingers off. A poster was hung over his desk that I had not seen earlier. It was a painting of a young boy on his knees and praying. His hands were clasped together and he was looking up towards the sky. Evidently my mental patient must still have a religious side to him. It was the words on the poster that caught my attention.

*When in doubt just look up.*



## CHAPTER 30

Lincoln Hospital wasn't known for being the most cleanest place in the world. The rubber sofas had dirty shoe marks and the halls were covered in dust bunnies. The state usually doesn't feel obligated to provide a Taj Majal environment for mental patients. They would be swamped with patients if they did. Behavioral Health units are designed to break a patient down; then build them back up slowly. It's kind of like the Army.

When a patient gets admitted to the hospital they go into a special waiting room while the hospital gets paper work ready. Sometimes they may have to wait several hours for their first meal while they are processed. Depending on their behavior a security guard may blockade their door. Lockdown confinement rarely ever happens. The patient is given some privacy behind curtains where he/she may undress and change into a gown. All of their personal belongings on their person must be examined and checked in. Usually at any time it takes hours and hours before a patient is finally designated to their room. It's a lot like going to jail but without the squatting and coughing. For the most part patients that are compliant are treated with respect and dignity. There are more people that have been signed in and done their 72 hours in the hospital than you can possibly realize. Undergoing a psychiatric hospital visit doesn't necessarily mean you will be plagued with a mental illness the rest of your life. The majority of patients that do their three day stints in the hospital resolve their issues and get better.

I still had the sniffles by the time I reached the elevator. I kept picturing this wicked witch waking up each morning with vigorous energy contemplating what evil she planned to do to her children. Maybe there was marriage problems, I didn't know, or maybe there may have been some serious financial issues. The creature did tell me several times that his mother had spent

nearly her whole life secluded to that house. No job, no volunteer work at the library, not even a newspaper route.

The elevator doors opened up and I quickly forgot about my patient. Brett was standing inside the car smiling. His smile looked perverted and I didn't like it. I was going to make a dash for it but I knew that would be embarrassing for a police officer like myself. I slinked between the car doors and stepped in the far right corner. I clenched my purse and looked down. I didn't say anything but I could literally feel him trying to undress me with his eyes. That's when it happened.

Baldy dude pushed me into the corner of the elevator's car and kissed me before I even knew what was happening. Nobody has ever come onto me so strong and quite truthfully it scared the dickens out of me. He was sucking on my mouth so strong that I couldn't scream for help. My instincts kicked in and I used all my strength to knee him in the balls. I don't know if he thought I would like it, but this bald guy had just messed with the wrong girl. He should have stuck with the chicken head blond at the restaurant. He yelped in pain and I freed myself.

The car doors opened and I ran out of the elevator. When I looked back I could see Brett kneeling over and cupping his manhood with his hands. I do believe I put that boy in a lot of pain. A part of me actually admired his brazenness. Perry would never pull a stunt like that on me. I could still hear him writhing in pain as I scampered down the hall and towards the parking lot doors. When I turned around for the last time I couldn't believe the words coming out of his mouth.

"You know you like it baby!" He shouted down the hall.

Needless to say there won't be anymore dinner dates with Brett. I would report our little incident in the elevator to the staff up front. I could press charges but it would be a complete waste of time. He would say we were already friends and the blond bombshell at the restaurant would remember my face. Plus I didn't want Perry to find out about our little date anyways. Perry sometimes gets jealous when I hang out with other men.

By the time I got back to my mini Cooper my cellphone was ringing. I unlocked the driver's side door before I flipped open my cell and answered. It was Nancy.

"Hey why do you sound out of breath? Everything alright out there?" She sounded concerned. Bless her heart.

"Yeah Nancy. Everything is okay." I lied.

“That’s good because I believe were getting close to solving all of this mess.”

“Why’s that?” I asked. I got in the driver’s seat and buckled up.

“You remember that strand of hair stuck between the piece of chewing gum?”

“Yeah. What about it?”

“We believe that hair belongs to the patient’s mother.”

I took a deep swallow and realized something. Now I knew why my patient was so reluctant to talk about his mother.

The creature’s mother was Mary Maimer.

## CHAPTER 31

It didn't bother me that she couldn't see me. It didn't even bother me that she couldn't even hear me. I just wanted her to know that I was there. And although she showed no signs of knowing who I was, I was convinced she could still feel my presence. I would always be there for my Grandma.

Perry held my hand while we stood over Grandma's bed. She was not doing well. I had remembered to bring Perry's rose this time. The nurse had advised us to not wake her up but I so desperately wanted to talk to her. I wanted to tell her everything. She would be proud that I caught the little punk that stole my hand gun. She would be proud of the progress I was making on the case. And I know she would be proud that I kneed baldy dude right in the balls while on the elevator. I had so many stories for her but unfortunately she wouldn't be able to understand a single one of them right now. All we could do is wait for another day for her to hopefully get better. It's been like this for months now.

"She doesn't look good." whispered Perry into my ear.

"I know. It's happening all over again but she'll get better. She always does." I whispered back.

Her hair still looked okay but she had mustard stains around her lips. I wanted to wipe it off but didn't want to risk waking her up. The nurse had assured me earlier that it had been a long day for Grandma. According to the nurse I already got credit today for visiting her earlier this morning. Once again my grandma was convinced the nurse was me. Grandma was still referring to every nurse that entered her room as Monica.

I was happy to see that the pillow case and sheets had been changed. Her gifts on the desk looked like they could be a little more organized but that was something I enjoyed doing myself. I could sense Perry was getting bored because he was already screwing around with his blackberry. I fixed a get well card that had accidentally fallen over when I heard Grandma stirring in her bed. I turned around and watched her grab Perry's arm.

"Monica I'm so glad to see you darling," she said stroking his hairy arm.

Perry smiled and played along. I guess he didn't mind being me for a while. There were strange grunts and groans coming from Grandma and I was starting to get concerned. I put down the card and pushed Perry away before Grandma thought I had turned into a hairy werewolf. Perry went back to his blackberry while I tried to console her.

"Grandma. It's me Monica. Are you feeling alright today? I can call in a nurse if you'd like. You don't look so good today."

There was coughing and she tried to reach for the styrofoam cup perched on the side table. I walked around the bed and grabbed it for her. It was just a third full and the water inside it felt warm. She could barely talk but she managed to point to a blue plastic pitcher sitting on the desk. I had a pretty good idea of what it was she wanted.

"Is there ice in there? Is that what you want?" I asked.

I knew she liked to chew on ice cubes because of her dentures. She shook her head yes and I popped the lid off of the pitcher. There was ice in it, and plenty of it. I filled the cup only three quarters full so her palsied hand wouldn't be shaking ice cubes all over her self. Just looking at the ice cubes reminded me of my mental patient and his demonstration with the roach clip from my name tag. I couldn't help but wonder what he was up to right now.

### **Meanwhile.....**

Paul Hummel couldn't help but bask in the sunshine beaming on his face as he walked away from his shiny new black Mercedes Benz. He had just bought it last week with the bonus he received for his well written detailed story. Mary Maimer. While the salary of a journalist always fiddled, Paul always celebrated anytime he did a good job on a big story. He knew that eventually some day he'd be able to write for The Wall Street Journal once his contract went through. He hadn't even told his wife yet about his plans to move out of Philadelphia.

He let the sun beat down on his face as he walked over to the mailbox to get the mail. In a way he was actually looking forward to the bills because he planned to pay them all at once. A basketball pounded on the driveway across the street in a steady beat. Paul already knew who it was without even having to turn around. Joe Hurtz. He had already warned his 9 year old son not to play with Joe because Joe smoked cigarettes. Those cancerous cigarettes that he had spotted Joe smoking behind the bushes on numerous occasions. There was no need to squeal to Joe's parents, he just didn't want him ever playing with little Timmy.

Paul reached into the mailbox and pulled out a manila business envelope along with the rest of the mail. The bills he was used to seeing, but the manila parcel really caught his attention. He laughed when he read the bold lettering printed on the bottom right hand corner. **NOT PENIS PILLS**. Jeez, somebody sure had a sense of humor. He shook the package. It sure sounded like some kind of pills were in there. Maybe one of his coworkers had ordered him some manhood lengthening pills as some kind of joke. It was probably Steve. Steve was all about the gay jokes.

When he stepped inside his six bedroom house he could smell freshly baked chocolate chip cookies wafting through the air. It looked as though his wife actually did something today other than sit around and watch *Desperate House Wives*. Paul pushed the bills to the side and set the package on the counter. He jiggled it once more and could hear the pills swooshing around. Maybe he'd try some of the herbal pills just for good measure. He always wondered if those lengthening pills ever really worked or not. Not that he really needed any help in that department.

Before he opened the package he took notice of the return address. It was a company based out in California. Maybe the manhood rejuvenating pills tended to be big business out there. Those movie stars in Hollywood always seemed to have utmost concern over their image.

Paul peeled away the top end of the 6x9 envelope and watched the styro-foam peanuts dance onto the floor. He fished around through the white peanuts until he felt a plastic bottle. When he went to remove the bottle from the package his whole world flashed right before his eyes.

A bright white flash blinded him from the package. There was an extremely loud explosion and he could no longer feel his hand. Myriad pieces of thumbtack shrapnel penetrated the envelope and stippled his entire chest. Skin melted away from his hand but he could not feel it. His heart beat rapidly while he used his remaining strength to pick up the phone and dial 9-1-1. A trail of blood followed him as he reached for the phone.

He punched in the three numbers and tried to catch his breath as he waited. All he could think about was Molly at this point. There was nothing. No dial tone, no ringing, just absolute silence. Had someone cut the line? All he could hear was the high pitched ringing sound in his head.

Mary Maimer's finest work had momentarily deafened him.

## CHAPTER 32

It was turning out to be another bad dream for the creature. He woke up screaming and clutching to his blankets. The night mares disturbed him but in a way he actually liked it. It gave him something to brood over for the rest of the boring day. It was the one thing the government would never be able to take away from him. His imagination. They'd never figure out how to put hand cuffs on that. But then again that was what the pills were for. Invisible handcuffs. The drugs that stifled the activity of the mind. Enough dosage made one completely oblivious to what was going on around him. The psychotropical meds were just a never ending vicious cycle game to him. One week he'd take them. One week he wouldn't. It was like he had to prove to himself he would never let himself fall into the med addiction.

The creature pulled the blankets off of himself then quickly yanked them back up. Why was it always so fricken cold in these places? Did they purposely do that so the patients would never want to leave their beds? The simple thought of the *keep patients in bed* conspiracy caused the creature to toss the blankets onto the floor. He was getting out of bed and there was nothing they could do about it. Maybe he should brush his teeth for that cop lady that came to visit him. She was pretty and smelled nice. The creature liked it when she sat so close to him. She sure smelled nice. She even looked a lot like the main character on that video game he'd once bought his ex-girlfriend. Tomb Raider. Maybe the nice lady would come to visit him today.

He stood over the sink and regressed his past while he brushed his teeth. *It's ashame they don't have dental floss in these places* the creature thought to himself. He brushed away while his mind wondered back 6 years ago. He couldn't help but think of his prison buddy Richard. Richard was mentally ill like himself and one of the funniest black guys he had ever met. One morning the crea-



ture saw Richard sitting on a chair next to his bed and brooding. It was only 4am and too early for anybody to be up yet. But there was Richard sitting in a chair next to his bed brooding and staring into space. The creature thought nothing of it and went back to sleep. An hour later he opened his eyes and noticed Richard hadn't moved from the chair yet. He appeared to be stuck in some kind of trance. The creature was starting to feel uneasy because Richard was staring right at him. He tried desperately to get back to sleep but couldn't. When he opened his eyes once again Richard was still staring at him but this time he held up a razor to his wrist. That's when Richard finally smiled.

*"It's a good day to die." Richard had said.*

The creature couldn't believe what he was seeing. He'd heard Richard bickering earlier in the week about the B.O.P (Bureau of Prisons) not wanting to pay for his expensive psych meds any more. They were at a halfway house in Philadelphia and the majority of the inmates couldn't find jobs. The simple fact that the innocent 169 pound creature couldn't find work in over two months daunted the other inmates from looking. Most of them didn't know about his hidden handicap and therefore couldn't understand why he couldn't find work. The creature stared in awe as Richard took the razor blade to his wrist and let himself bleed all into the pillow. It almost seemed like Richard enjoyed it.

The opaque mirror made the creature look like a monster. He liked the people here but he really wished he could see himself in a better reflecting mirror. The toothpaste tasted no better than the nasty stuff he brushed his teeth with while he was in prison. Sometimes it got boring here but it was safe here and far better than jail. If he could keep his pencils and paper he wouldn't mind spending the rest of his life here. No strange women giving him the evil eye. Just people of authority trying to read his mind. And the best part about it? No bills.

He desperately wished Shaggy would come back. He knew it would take at least 14 months to bring back Shaggy. They wouldn't be able to monitor his thoughts with his thick long hair blanketing the front of his face. He could be in his own little world. A world that never stopped and something was always happening. A world of fine ingenuity that only he himself could understand. The creature didn't believe in keeping his true thoughts on paper. Oh no, no, no. Journals and diaries were completely dangerous. Only a fool logged in his daily thoughts. The creature kept everything in his head and he liked it that way. His Federal probation mandated that the brain pickers had the right to see him once a week and pick his brain. He played all the counselors and shrinks like a fool. Every now and then he'd toss them a bone and let them know what momentarily disturbed him. But the promises? Heck no. The creature could never tell them that.

There was a rustling sound coming from the doorway and the creature put down the toothbrush. Was it the lady? She seemed so nice and understanding but had he told her too much? Did she want to know more about his mother? He couldn't help but think of all the candy bars mother used to give him if he promised not to tell the big black counselor things when he was just entering the seventh grade. Mother even tried to keep the counselor out of the house by insisting they sit on lawn chairs on top of the hill. The big man wasn't buying it and insisted on going inside of the home. Mommy steered them towards the empty room in the basement. The two of them sat on the carpet hoisting themselves against the wall and talked about nothing. It was too embarrassing to talk about what mommy did.

The creature mosied out of the bathroom to look for the lady but she wasn't there. Instead it was the person he least suspected. It was the man with the watch!

The tall dark mysterious man slipped out of his room the moment the creature spotted him.

“Wait! I have questions for you!” pleaded the creature.

It was too late. The man with the watch had disappeared the moment he stepped out of the room. The creature loved the man with the watch. The man that had been following him around since he was only 17 years old. He didn't have the foggiest idea what the man's name was but he could never forget that watch. It had so many buttons and dials on it you'd think it belonged to James Bond. The man with the watch barely talked much and when he did it was very low key. He articulated slowly and spoke of nothing but pure knowledge. The creature never saw the man with the watch smile but in a way he didn't want to. That would only ruin it. He liked the mental images he saved of the man with the watch. The man with the watch would always be a mystery. In a weird sort of way the creature hoped he would never find out the man's name.

## CHAPTER 33

I brought my mace this time and I had every intention of using it on Brett if I had to. I was in no mood to play games and I wanted to complete this assignment and move on. A terrorist was at large and we thought we now had a pretty good lead. Unfortunately we had one serious problem. The creature's mother was invisible to our criminal system. The simple fact that her youngest son was a rising all star cop didn't help matters either. We had to be careful or we'd have a lawsuit from hell on our hands. Nancy was trying to gather information from friends but just like the creature, Mary Maimer basically had no friends. And coworkers? That would pan out to be a big joke. The feds dugged into her social security records and saw nothing but goose eggs for her earnings. Zero. The lady had been a house wife her entire life. Detectives were keeping a close watch on her but it was up to me to pump the creature for information.

I weaved between nurses pushing wheel chairs and gurneys and kept a close eye out for Brett. My right pocket was filled with bazooka bubble gum. I guess I felt bad for my patient's pencils. Chew toys. He had told me yesterday that his truck driving instructors loved watching him go to town on the gum when he missed gears. The creature had to take up gum chewing because he said cigarettes were getting too costly. I figured he'd be excited when he'd see how much gum I brought him.

Something caught my eye when I stepped inside the elevator and took one last look down the hallway. Who was that dark mysterious man? That's when it dawned on me. The man with the watch. I went to step out of the elevator but it was too late. By the time I tried to squirm out the car's doors had already shut on me. I was so upset. I had so many questions for the man with the watch. I never got his name but I knew he knew a lot about my patient.

I watched the floor button lights light up and patiently awaited that familiar ding sound. Call me weird but I love the dinging sound of an elevator. I assuaged my anger reminding myself that I was already in good with my mental patient. It shouldn't be too hard to get the creature to tell me about the man with the watch. Especially since I had bubble gum.

When I finally got to his room he was fully clothed. No gown or suicide vest this time. I was surprised to see he had managed to somehow talk the hospital into getting his duds back. His Nikes were the same style as mine except his were jet black. Now I know why he stared at my shoes so much.

I walked in with caution not knowing what tricks he had up his sleeve today. Quite truthfully I was just glad he wasn't naked.

"Hey I see the hospital finally let you have your clothes. Are you showing signs of improvement?"

My mental patient just laughed. I didn't see the humor but apparently he did.

"No. I doubt they'll ever see signs of improvement from this guy. I had to make a deal with them."

"And just what kind of deal was that?"

I was curious. I'd never known the doctors in these kind of hospitals to make any deals with mental patients. Obviously there had to be more to the story.

"I promised to never to get naked again if they would let me wear my street clothes. See, actions speak louder than words."

The creature proudly stood up from his bed to model his street clothes for me. I wasn't surprised at all how he dressed. He didn't strike me as the type to be into dressing like a hood rat with the droopy drawers and gang bang attire. I was surprised however how old his clothes looked. His out dated K-mart jeans and beat up tee-shirt didn't seem to go too well with his brand new Nikes. I couldn't help but wonder if maybe someone else had bought the Nikes for him.

"Those are nice sneakers. Do you like to run?"

"No. I don't like to run but it helps keep the weight down. I have more fun lifting weights."

*Yeah well maybe you should've spent more time on that instead of making bombs* I thought to myself. I still couldn't blame him for sending his infamous package to the doctor. I googled his surgeon's name and found nobody had anything nice to say about him. The internet made him out to be a surgeon from hell. I wondered how my patient had stumbled across him in the first place. Probably the internet.

When the creature was done showing off his street duds he plopped himself onto the bed and sat straight up. He seemed to have a lot of energy and I wondered if he took his meds today. Usually I can tell just by a close scrutiny of the eyes. When a patient looks too alert, it probably means they're off their meds. Unless they're on a low dosage of course. I sat down next to him and he immediately stood up. Had I brushed against his butt? I was pretty sure that I hadn't. I watched him pick up a piece of typing paper and one of his pencil chew toys. The eraser looked like it still hadn't been used. It was hard to believe a man could do so much writing and never make any mistakes.

"What are you doing?" I finally asked.

"I want to show you something."

He grabbed the paper and pencil and sat back down next to me on the bed. I have to say at this point he had my utmost curiosity. Nothing like a drawing illustration from a nut case. I wondered if he was going to draw stick people holding swords. I never told him I had been snooping around his room.

"Do you like drawing illustrations?" He asked. "One of my therapists used one on me once."

I already knew he couldn't draw worth a crap but something told me he had something interesting to share.

"Sure, I love visual illustrations. They're good for helping us remember."

I watched him write out the letters to the alphabet making them go down the page. After he wrote out all 26 letters he wrote them out again only this time he went up the page with them. By the time he was done "A" was at the top of the left hand column and "Z" was to the right. Now I was really debating whether or not my patient had taken his medication today.

"This is what I like to call a reverse alphabet code. A secret code the government doesn't want us to know about where "Z" equals "A" and "A" equals "Z" do you get it?"

I played along. Evidently my little nut was about to show me something stupid.

“Oh neat. You mean like a cryptogram. I used to do those in the Sunday paper.”

“Yeah, yeah. Like a cryptogram only I believe the government has left us hidden clues right in the alphabet. I’m about to prove to you that the whole world is upside down just like this alphabet.”

“Okay I’m lost. What are you talking about?”

“Well what’s the number one thing the justice system is always after. The thing that dictates the final ruling in any court room?”

“I dunno. I guess the evidence along with the testimonies.”

“Exactly! The judicial system is always after the truth but what is it that they always settle for?”

I was getting confused. Where was he going with this?

“I don’t know. The facts I guess.”

“Exactly! Because the courts can never handle the truth so they settle for the proof. But what if I told you proof will only kill you in the end.”

I watched him write out the word “PROOF” on his piece of paper. He then pointed his pencil towards the letter key code. A code where A=Z, B=Y, C=X, and so on. I did the right thing and played right into his game. This little nut sure was getting a lot of free therapy from me today. I would make sure it wouldn’t be anything more than the usual 45 minutes. This nut sure had way too much time on his hands. I watched him place a “K” below the “P” and then an “I” below the “R”. Pretty soon he had spelled out the word. **KILLU**. I was impressed that he did manage to catch my attention.

“That’s interesting.” Was all I could think to say.

“That’s interesting? It’s more than interesting. Don’t you see lady. Our own government is trying to kill us!”

*Nut job, nut job* I silently told myself. Something told me that he had more demonstrations. I watched him write out the word “TRU†H” on the piece of paper. The second “†” he drew extra big resembling a cross. Very unique.

“You see lady. We all yearn for the truth but we settle for the proof. If we just learned to trust people like we used to do years ago this world wouldn’t have so many problems. We have so many problems because everyone seeks proof. I believe that having the truth is a wonderful gift that everyone should have. I found these clues in the alphabet which was written by man but the real truth is over there.”

I watched my little nut point to his King James Bible sitting on the desk. I hoped he wasn’t one of those whackos that created his own meanings from the verses. I had heard some stories of people using quotes from the Bible to justify their behavior. Hopefully my mental patient wasn’t one of them.

“You’re absolutely right. The truth is a wonderful gift.” I said.

The creature began to decipher the word “TRU†H” using his reverse alphabet code. A “G” went below the “T” and then an “P” went below the “R”. Ironically he didn’t tamper with the second “T” that he had drawn into a cross. I quickly deduced that he had to leave the second “T” alone in order for his demonstration to work. He ended up drawing another cross below it instead. By the time he was done he had spelled out the word “GIF†S” below the word “TRU†H”. It truly was quite amazing. Or not.

“See lady. There are lots of GIFTS in the TRUTH. Man is backwards and goes after the wrong thing. They say a man’s best friend is his dog but if you read it backwards it spells GOD. Man is backwards.”

I wanted to applause for his wonderful demonstration. I was glad that he didn’t spend all of his time thinking about bombs. I thought maybe he had the potential to be a motivational speaker. If he could just get that evil smile under control. I wondered what his God thought about that.

“So that’s it? Do you have any more?”

“Oh. There’s plenty more. I’m about to show you why I’ll never trust the government again. I’m going to take you back 13 years ago to when my world first turned upside down. Literally.”

Did he just say abouts? I have never heard a white guy talk like that. Maybe there was some black people he talked to in jail.

I kicked back and let the creature continue on with his show.

## CHAPTER 34

It looked like the creature was trying to draw out some sort of time line. I can't say I've looked at a time line since history class in the fifth grade. People just didn't use them too often. This time my mental patient used numbers instead of letters. He wrote out three dates on a piece of paper but didn't include the year. 11-6, 1-16, and 11-6 once again. He assured me that these were important dates in his life. I stared at the three dates and tried to speculate where he was going with this. Nothing like a live demonstration from a nut. He pointed to the first date. November 6th.

"Do you see this? This is the first time my world actually turned upside down. Literally. I'm going to show you why I can't ever trust the government."

"Who does the government consist of? You talk about the government a lot." I asked.

My mental patient reddened in the face and squeezed hard on the pencil.

"When I say **government** I'm talking about anyone that has dictatorship over me. It can be anyone. A school teacher, a drill sergeant, a prison guard, even a head doctor. I'm convinced they're all evil."

Jeez. My mental patient was starting to sound like his mother. I wondered how much time he had spent with her since he's been out of jail.

"Okay, so tell me about November 6th." I said to get him back on track.

"When I was just 20 years old my entire world turned upside down. Literally."



“How so?”

“Because 13 years ago on November 6th. was the day the government promised me I would leave for ARMY training in Ft. Benning. They changed their mind at the last second and screwed with my head.”

“Why?”

“They found out about the fight I got in when I was only 18. It wasn't really like a fight at all. It was more like I got attacked by 21 Asian sorties.”

“So what was the fight over?”

“It's a long story about a China man and a spoon. A funny story actually but that's not the point. The point is the government lied. I was supposed to leave November 6th but didn't end up leaving until the next day. I still have a flask my sister had made me with the November 6th. departure date engraved into it.”

“So how did your world end up turning upside down?”

The creature circled the first date written on the piece of paper then sat up a little straighter in his bed. I could smell a little bit of body odor on him. Maybe he did his showering in the evening.

“When I got the call early in the morning November 6th. I was very thwarted. I didn't like the fact that I had already told all my friends that that was the day I was scheduled to leave but the government had changed it's mind. Later that evening I got in my car and was headed to my buddy's house to say one last goodbye and I ended up totalling my car on the way. When I woke up my entire car was upside down and the rear spoiler was in my lap. People say I'm an upside down kind of guy but that day my world had literally turned upside down.”

My patient sure had some interesting stories. I wanted to know more about the attack from the Asian sorties but he seemed like he wanted to move on with the demonstration. It still made no sense why he had to write the dates on a piece of paper.

“Okay. So tell me about the next date. Did you misplace the dash or does that one say January 16th.?”

The creature circled 1-16 several times with his pencil then stuck his pencil chew toy in his mouth. I remembered the gum in my pocket and quickly pulled it out. I would do anything to rescue a good pencil.

“Aw...sweet! You got gum?” He asked anxiously.

I handed him a couple of pieces and watched him unwrap three or four pieces. It would be too much for the creature to try and chew just one piece at a time. He took the pencil out of his mouth and circled several more times.

“See this date here? This is January 16th. the day I died.”

“You don’t look dead to me.” I said.

“Oh believe me mam, after what the doctor did to me I am very much dead. My life from here on out is basically just overtime.”

I wanted to ask him something but I figured out what he was talking about. The doctor he thinks killed him must be the doctor he almost mailed a bomb to. It made National news when they dubbed his 3 inch homemade explosive a WMD.

“I take it that was the day the doctor performed his surgery on you?”

“Yup. At 8:30 in the morning. I really wished I never would have woke up that day. The doctor made an egregious error the moment he brought me back from the anesthesia. He never should’ve let me come to.”

I hoped the little nut didn’t think he was going to sit here and expound all the details of his botched surgery. It grossed me out and that was something he should be discussing with his psychiatrist.

“Okay. So what about the last date. I see you have November 6th. written out once again.”

The creature circled 11-6 several times with his mawed up pencil. I snuck a furtive glance at my watch and realized it was getting close to lunch time. This free 45 minute therapy session was about up. If he wanted more he would have to fork out \$55.00 an hour like everybody else. I didn’t know if I could muster up the patience today to sit here and try to decipher the meanings to these allegories.

“Oh that dates back 5 years ago. That was the day the Feds promised to release me from Federal prison and let me go to a halfway house.”

“Well did it happen?”

“Yeah, but I was awfully skeptical when that day finally came. The government has lied to me so many times in the past I didn’t know what to believe.”

When I knew I was getting discharged from the ARMY for medical reasons they screwed with us almost every day. A big drill sergeant would step out onto the balcony and tell us all we could leave and go home and then say he was just kidding. We didn't think it was funny but the drill sergeants did."

I couldn't help but yawn. The creature caught me yawning and could tell I had bigger things to move onto. Bigger things like catching a ruthless terrorist. He continued to circle all three of the dates written on the piece of paper. I had already made up my mind that my little nut lived a life with too much time on his hands. I wondered if he was working a job before he was admitted into the hospital. Hopefully he didn't have plans to look for hidden meanings inside the stitching patterns of his jeans. Nutty people do nutty things. We had a patient that used to do that.

"So is that the demonstration? I'm afraid I don't quite understand why you wrote out these dates."

He scrunched up his eyebrows like he couldn't understand why I hadn't picked up on it yet.

"Don't you get it? These are significant dates in my life. Leaving for the ARMY, the dangerous surgery, and of course the day I got out of prison. I think these dates are trying to tell me something."

I had one thought on my mind at this point. *Koo Koo. Somebody was acting a little bit kooky.*

"What's that? What do you think these significant dates are trying to tell you."

"Well, people have always thought I'm an upside down kind of guy for mailing a bomb and then calling 9-1-1. But look what happens when I turn this paper upside down."

The creature flipped the piece of typing paper around so that we were reading his so called significant dates in his life upside down. I pictured him sitting in his totaled car upside down in the middle of the road with the rear spoiler in his lap. I was a little stunned when I looked at all three dates on the paper.

The dates all read 911.

## CHAPTER 35

The spanish guy behind the counter looked at me like I was crazy. His potbelly protruded over the counter top like it wanted to sit down. His tatoos looked to be over 20 years old by the looks of the stretched out ink. I was just glad he didn't smell because I had had enough of that over at the hospital.

"I'm sorry. Did you say Marlboro lite 100s?"

"Yes." I said.

He stuck his tiny fingers over his mouth while he scoured the cigarette rack. I had never seen a man of his age take so long to locate a pack of Marlboro lites since I moved to Philly. All I could deduce at this point was he could just be being a jerk or my good looks had him lost in thought. Believe it or not but I have had that happen to me before. Strange men thinking I'm their savior. He even took his good ole' time ringing them up.

"I'm sorry. You just don't strike me as the type to smoke. These for someone else?"

"Yeah, my nephew out in the car." I said caustically.

Hey stupid questions get stupid answers. That's what my friend Marcy from high school used to tell me.

"Mam we have a policy. I can't let you walk out with that. The company is very strict about the sale of tobacco to minors."

I pointed to my mini Cooper parked in the front of the Seven Eleven store I was standing in. The tattooed man squinted a little bit but I could tell he saw it was empty. Obviously he was too dumb to pick up on my sarcasm of my nephew joke.

“Oh I see he has escaped.” he said still squinting.

I grabbed my change and the cigarettes before he could find more stupid stuff to talk about. Maybe I shouldn't have joked about the nephew in the car but I don't like it when cashiers try to turn a simple transaction into a high school reunion. Grandma tells me that people who talk too much can't be productive people because all of their time is spent chatting. She says the only productive chatterbox she knows of is the pastor.

When I got back into my car the spanish man was still squinting at my car. Maybe he thought a little kid was going to pop his head up from the back seat I dunno. Since my car is a stick shift I opened the pack and lit one up before I took off. I still couldn't believe I was smoking a cigarette but my patient's detailed stories of his mother had my nerves on edge. By the sounds of what he told me he made it out that his mom woke up each morning and got straight to work on tormenting her children. From the way he was talking this lady didn't even so much as take a ten minute break because that would only give a chance for the wounds to heal.

My car was in fourth gear by the time I actually inhaled for real. I couldn't help but wonder what my patient acted and looked like when he was just a little child. Was he a hellion? Did he have a cherub like innocent face? Was he such a stinker that his mother just couldn't keep up with him? I found it strange that my patient never mentioned any drug use. By him or his mother. Usually when there is alcohol in the picture it often ends up inducing violence. The creature never mentioned his mommy being a drunk. I felt a jiggle in my pants and my heart sank. I had a feeling it was Nancy calling and the last thing I wanted to hear about was another terrorist attack. I threw the cigarette out the window and answered my cell. I recognized my boss' voice immediately.

“I hope you don't think you're done for the day girl.” She barked into the phone.

“Why?”

There was a long pause and then a sigh.

“It's still happening. I don't want to talk about all the details over the phone. Can you meet me somewhere?”

I thought of all the places I didn't want to meet her at. The Lone Shark was one of them. I was still trying to erase Brett from my mind.

"Sure just name it and I'll be there."

"Are you hungry?" She asked. Nancy was always hungry.

"Yeah a little bit." I lied. I wasn't hungry in the least.

"Good lets meet up at Quackies. Can you be there in 45 minutes?"

Quackies Bar and Grill is one of Nancy's favorite hang out spots. She's not much into seafood or mexican cuisine but she loves to put down a burger. Sometimes two or three if she feels up to it.

"Sure. I can be there in 15 if you'd like." I replied.

"Sounds good. How about we make it thirty?" Nancy waited two seconds. "Okay. Thirty it is. Dinner on me of course." She said before I could answer.

It's fun dining with Nancy because I have yet to pay a single bill. She always tells me that I'm too skinny and should eat more. I've tried to pay my half of the bills before but she says I'm too young to be worrying about that kind of stuff. She knows about my mother passing away. Secretly I think sometimes she tries to fill in that void.

When she hung up the phone I suddenly realized I had only thirty minutes to hide all the evidence. The raunchy evidence of nicotine. I felt guilty groping around the inside of my purse while trying to drive a 5 speed at the same time. My attention was on anything but the road. Luckily it didn't take long for me to find a small perfume sample I keep in my purse for emergencies. I was also glad I hadn't given away all of my gum to the creature. I've never seen a mental patient be so infatuated with bubble gum. Maybe it was just as fun as chewing on pencils, I really didn't know. Once I was pretty sure my stinky nicotine smell was disguised I reached up to the visor for a CD. I didn't have to look at any of them because I already knew exactly which slot I keep my favorite CD in. I used my finger nails to help dig it out and I knew exactly which album I was holding. *NO DOUBT*

Gwen Staffani's voice echoed across my 3inch subwoofers as I tried to get myself together. It was the title of the song that was reminding me of my mental patient being bribed by his mother with candy bars. *Don't Speak*.

## CHAPTER 36

The coolest thing about owning a mini Cooper is when it comes to the parking. I couldn't help but laugh while watching Nancy try to squeeze that big blue Tahoe of hers between a Suburban and a big Navigator. I hoped she planned on leaving the vehicles next to her a can opener so they can get out. Fortunately Nancy doesn't know that I make little jokes to myself when I see her struggling with her weight. Being large and in charge like Nancy doesn't always have it's perks. Sure people can't push you around but sometimes the jeans can end up costing you more. I really doubt Nancy frets over the price she has to shell out for jeans with the salary they have her on.

We sat at the very back corner table facing the exit. I think Nancy watches too many Born Identity movies but she insists she really enjoys watching people enter the restaurant. She studies their faces and tries to speculate their current events. Did somebody just piss them off? Did they look like they really needed to go to the bathroom? Another hard day at work? Nancy speculated it all.

I sat in the seat facing the wall so Nancy could play miss nosy. When somebody is paying for my meal I pretty much let them dictate. Unless it's Perry of course. He only gets to dictate what we do in the bedroom when were not going through family photo albums.

Nancy said, "I hope you at least had a good day because I know I sure didn't."

"Why what happened now?" I asked.

“It’s still happening. We don’t even know if it’s a one man operation anymore. This could be a serious group of terrorists.”

“Aw come on Nancy. Why would a group of terrorists want to get involved with these teaser bombs. It makes no sense. Terrorist groups wouldn’t waste all of their time and resources just to maim people.”

Nancy sucked up Mountain dew through her straw. She’s one of those that has to wrap her fingers around the straw instead of the cup when she drinks.

“I’m just telling you what it is girl. May I remind you we already have one casualty and as of today it looks like another one is on the way.”

I felt my heart sink to the floor. So far I didn’t know any of the victims but I dreaded thinking the day would come. I kind of wanted to call my little brother to make sure he was okay. These psychopaths often don’t quit until they get caught and Nancy’s long face told me it might just be a while yet.

“So what happened now?” I asked. I almost felt I would be better off just not knowing.

“They got a journalist this time. It wasn’t a pack of cigarettes left on the door step. This was another mailbomb.”

“Are you sure that it’s related to this case?”

“Oh absolutely. It was fashioned exactly the same except this time the bomber used penile lengthening pills instead of herbal vitamins.”

I noticed Nancy’s face lit up when she said *Penile Lengthening* pills. I guess there would be no big explosion happening in the victim’s bedroom that night. I’ll bet his wife would have lots of questions for him later.

“Is he gonna make it?” I asked.

“We don’t know. He’s in critical condition at the hospital. The shrapnel really tore him up bad.”

The waitress came walking up to our table and did an excellent job of staying oblivious to the disheveled looks on our faces. Maybe I would throw a few bills on the table after we left. I’ve done it a few times and Nancy doesn’t know about it.

“Are you twos ready to order?” She said with mirth in her voice.



It was rare that you saw a red head with pigtails in this area of Philadelphia but here was Pipi Longstocking standing in front of our table. The girl only looked to be about 16 and was more than content just to have a job. If Nancy and I weren't so tied up I might try to talk to her about pursuing a career in law enforcement. I watched my boss check her menu one more time and then grab her stomach.

"You know what, I think I'm just going to have some of the French Onion soup. That will be all for me today."

The girl didn't argue or try to lay down any daily specials on her. The look on Nancy's face was still a look of disgust from our discussion earlier. Nancy looked at me like I better give the waitress something more to write down on her pad. I was still surprised she didn't feel like filling up on burgers today.

"And you mam?" The waitress said so sweetly.

Her eyes were so tuned in I doubted that she ever made mistakes. She was radiant and glowing like a butterfly and had the confidence of a Hollywood star. I truly felt this girl exuded very much potential. We need this kind of stuff on the force.

"I'll have the Ceasar Salad thank you." I said in a sweet voice as well.

Nancy gave me a look of disappointment. I knew this wasn't sitting well with her.

"Don't let it stop you just because I'm not eating. I know you were at that hospital all day girl. Order yourself some food before you starve to death. Jeez. Look at you."

I flushed red in the face from embarrassment. The waitress just smiled at me like as if she heard this kind of stuff all the time. Her skin was so pale and I could tell she didn't get out in the sun much. Maybe she was one of those bookworm geeks that stayed in her room all day and read mystery novels. I really didn't know. I grabbed my stomach like Nancy had done earlier.

"My stomach is still churning from those turkey sandwiches I had at lunch. I'll be fine with just the salad." I said.

The waitress gave me another reassuring smile and wrote the salad down on her pad. She gave Nancy one last look to make sure she was okay with it. Nancy nodded and the girl spun around and headed towards another table. Customers were piling in and we liked it that way. When it gets too quiet we have trouble with eavesdroppers.

“Wasn’t she cute?” Said Nancy. “She looked like she spent some time on those pigtails.”

“Well she was very professional. She looked to be only about 16. She’s off to a good start.” I said.

Nancy curled her fingers around her straw and sucked up some more mountain dew. She hunkered over her beverage as she did this and looked around the diner as if someone might try and sneak up and snatch it from her. I love watching Nancy and her theatrics. She sucked a few more times then sat up straight.

“So how did it go at the hospital? Is the mental patient still in there talking about his mother?”

I reached for my ice water and took a sip. The water tasted like it ran through rusty pipes.

“Oh he told me lots of stories about his mommy alright. Some real tear jerkers to say the least.”

“What kinds of things did he tell you? Anything shocking?” She asked.

I also straightened up in my seat then steepled my fingers together. I leaned in a little towards her like as if I was about to whisper her a secret.

“Basically from everything I analyzed, my patient’s mother was a control freak. Since he was a toddler that woman didn’t even give him a chance to breathe. I was also able to deduce that his mother was a Baptist extremist. Unfortunately I’m not convinced all of her motives revolved around the Bible.” I leaned over the table a little more towards her so she could hear, “Nancy I think she used the Bible as a scape goat to beat the devil out of her children. I mean from what this guy was telling me this lady went right for the sword from the moment she woke up.”

“A sword? She beat her children with a sword?”

I could feel her heart beating through her shirt. Nancy didn’t like child abuse. She was a firm believer in time outs.

“I guess this lady loved spanking so much that she painted the paddle into a sword. I don’t think these were the usual *This is gonna hurt me more than it hurts you* kind of beatings. I believe this woman really went buck wild with the sword.”

Nancy sat up and fondled a lock of her silky jet black hair. There must have been lots of customers coming in because she kept looking around to make sure nobody was ear hustling.

“What about the father? Was he a part of it too?”

“My patient says once in a blue moon his father spanked but only when they truly deserved it. He didn’t make a game out of it like his mother and he only swacked on the buttocks.”

I could tell that Nancy was still a little upset. Maybe she was imagining little children getting the crap beaten out of them.

“A lady and her sword. Who does she think she is. Sheila?”

I chuckled a little bit when I pictured the cartoon villain holding her sword.

“I dunno maybe.”

Nancy said, “I’ve heard of cases like these. Adults trying to use the word of God to pacify their unexcusable behavior. Our lady is probably a big fan of the King James Bible?”

I nodded my head. “My mental patient has a King James Bible sitting on his desk. I think his family gave it to him.”

Nancy grunted. “I’ll bet our lady knows about Proverbs 23:13.”

I was surprised. I didn’t think my boss had any education in the Bible. I myself had forgotten all the verses Grandma had me memorize as a kid.

“What’s it talk about in Proverbs 23:13?” I asked skeptically.

I was even more surprised when Nancy recited it for me.

“Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.”

“That’s pretty impressive. Were you a church girl growing up?”

Nancy laughed.

“Oh no. We played dungeons and dragons growing up. I remembered that verse about a year ago from the Dudley case in a little town outside of

Houston that I can't remember the name of. They get real crazy out there in Texas with the Bible. I think your patient's mother would have fit in out there."

The Dudley case suddenly came into mind.

"Oh. I remember that one. Wasn't that the one where some church out there had some pastor that felt compelled by the lord to beat the devil out of people?"

Nancy nodded her head.

"If you read the next verse in Proverbs 23:13 you might come to the conclusion that the creature's mother actually had love for him."

I seriously doubted it. Not after the creature confessed he was beaten once for using too much soap. Not after he told me about the 45 second showers. Not after he told me once that his sister was grounded for a month one time for stealing a kleenex. I had already made up my mind that his mother's madness had come from serious financial issues. Later I would look up the social security records to back that up.

"What does it say in verse 14?" I asked.

Nancy finally cracked a smile while she twirled her straw. She loved knowing things that I had yet to learn.

"You'll have to read your Bible."

## CHAPTER 37

Unfortunately I couldn't find a King James Bible but I managed to find an NIV (New International Version). Sushi played around at my feet while I flipped through the chapters. I didn't realize it but the book of Proverbs was in the old testament. I really can't remember the last time that I picked up my Bible but I'll bet it's been over a year or two. Grandma reads hers all the time. She says it puts her in a good mood.

When I finally found Proverbs 23:13 I tried to focus on one word. "Beat". I did not see it anywhere in the verse. I went to verse 14 but I did not see it in that verse either. It was too bad. Maybe my patient's mental health could have been salvaged had his mother based her discipline methods on a Bible more up to date with the times. I was still determined to get ahold of her social security records. If alcohol and drugs were not a contributing factor to the beatings then I'm sure a financial debacle would have done it.

I put my Bible back in my lower dresser drawer and then got undressed. After all this craziness happening I needed a good run with my girls on my virtual treadmill to clear my head. Tomorrow would make the eighth day on my assignment that was supposed to only be two weeks. I couldn't wait to get back to some more serious police work. That was the whole reason I became a cop in the first place, was to get out of this mental health treatment crap. Sometimes I think those mental patients are used to getting so much attention they're not going to be able to keep themselves together if they get in a real accident and need to get rushed to the hospital. There would be a lot more bed space if they did away with mental health. I doubted the country of Somalia spent millions on mental health care like our country does.

I squeezed myself into a pair of blue running shorts that I still had from college. I don't know why Nancy thinks I'm so skinny because these shorts certainly didn't feel droopy. I keep trying to tell my boss the secret to weight loss. Hydration. And I don't mean soda. Drinking lots of water fools the stomach into thinking it's full. I'm sure Nancy already knows that. I think she likes being big because it gives her that feeling of being in charge. I threw on a white sleeveless tank top that had absolutely no writing on it. All my favorite sports bras were already in the hamper. I knew I needed to do a load of laundry but sometimes I'm able to talk Perry into doing it. He doesn't usually fret about it which makes me believe he might be an underwear sniffer. I really didn't know and didn't want to know. I don't ask questions when someone volunteers to do my laundry.

When I went back downstairs Sushi kept trying to trip me. It gets on my nerves when I'm in a hurry and she purposely tries to get tangled in my feet. I've thought about getting another kitten for her to play with since I'm basically never home. It might not be a bad idea as long as they could get along with one another. I stepped on the treadmill and realized I had forgotten my Ipod once again. I was about to step off of it when I changed my mind at the last second. I still had the Bible on my mind and I found myself asking What Would Jesus Do? Did they have Ipods to listen to in those Bible times? Their idea of music back then was probably a harp with strings. I decided I was going to try an experiment. No Ipod.

Starfly212 was the first to log on. I hoped she didn't have plans to cheat again like she did in the last race. This virtual treadmill was designed for fun and exercise not for someone to play pranks. But if Starfly212 got her kicks from cheating on this game more power to her. I just want the girls to be happy and have a good time. I'm not going to intentionally lose just because they never win. They'll just have to try harder that's all.

There was three minutes until the next race and I knew that would be plenty of time for me to stretch out. When you do as much running as I do on a daily basis it doesn't take quite as long to stretch out. I can't even think of when the last time it was that I pulled a calf muscle or a hamstring. One day I hope to be able to do a 26.2 mile run. A marathon. Perry says I shouldn't get too obsessed with it because if I burn too much fat I could start losing some in my chest. I don't think that's going to be a problem anytime soon.

The treadmill belt started to whirl and we started our 5K run off like a herd of turtles. All of us except Starfly212 of course. She always started the race darting off and we all enjoyed passing her after the first mile. This race was feeling so weird without my Ipod. I'd have to rely on my competitors repartee for entertainment.

“No Ipod for SpeedQueen today girls.” I said into the mike below the screen.

“No Ipod for SpeedQueen today girls.” iterated Missbunnyfoot32 in a mocking voice.

Evidently somebody had jokes today but I'm not the type to show anger. At least not to a bunch of strangers in cyberspace. There were 6 of us racing today and I started off at 6.6 MPH. I like staying in the middle of the bunch and then sprinting past everyone to the finish line. There's been some rainy days where the players are so unmotivated I maintain first place the entire race. Today was not looking like one of those days.

Halfway into the race I really started to feel it. Boredomness. We were all panting too heavily to be able to talk with one another and I knew at this point all of the other girls were jamming out to their Ipods. This race was no longer feeling fun and I felt myself slowing down. I needed some tunes but the only music I heard was the stomping sounds of my nikes pounding on the treadmill belt. I looked up to see that I had fallen into 6th place already. My thought wondered towards my mental patient and the stories he told me about the kinds of music permitted in the household. From my understanding all music out there was evil except for some hymnal gospel radio station. I couldn't help but wonder how the creature was able to do his workouts with slow paced hymnal music. Had he cheated? Had he found ways to sneak music into the home? It was still hard to fathom that his mother considered even christian rock music evil because she claimed the beat was too worldly. Nothing like the christians calling the christians evil.

I found that I just couldn't do it. I could still run the race but I just couldn't give 110%. Not without my Ipod. It was starting to make sense now why my patient told me when he lived at home he spent a lot of time staring at the walls. What else could he do? Everything else was evil!

“SpeedQueen55 are you alright? I've never seen you finish in last place.”  
Said Silverbulletchick656

I was glad to see her win the race. It has been a while since she landed first place. I guzzled down some warm water left over in my water bottle before I talked into the mike.

“Yeah. I'm fine. Rough day at work and I don't have my Ipod.”

Silverbulletchick656, “Did you lose it or is it broken?”

“Neither. I just didn't feel like getting it. Long story.”

My treadmill stayed at a slow walking speed and I quickly logged off the screen. Those girls sometimes end up talking for hours after the race. Sometimes they ask questions about my job and I didn't want that today. I still had a lot of questions for my mental patient. And I definitely had a lot more questions I intended to ask about his mother.



## CHAPTER 38

*It was Wednesday night and soon time to leave for church. Nothing like a good old fashioned prayer meeting where the old foggies could assemble and pray for the lost souls of the younger generation to come. The world was just becoming too evil with teenagers texting on their phones and listening to their evil Ipods with evil music. Surely the people that participated in these things were going straight to hell. First class probably.*

Mary Maimer put on her extra long dress that came all the way down to her ankles and was more fluffy than the one she wore in her wedding. She wasn't going to hell like the rest of the world, Oh no, no, no. The pastor had assured all the women from the pulpit that long pants on a woman was pure evil. Anything that was the least little bit provocative was a sure ticket right to hell. Shorts on a man was just as evil. The Baptist men learned to sweat it out in the summer time.

Tito came over and tugged on her dress as she stared at herself in the mirror. She had to be careful not to stare too long because she believed narcissism was a sin as well. Sometimes she wondered about her youngest being a narcissist. It was rare that he ever had a hair out of place or a forgotten pimple on his face. Even when he wasn't wearing his uniform he kept himself looking like a pretty boy.

“Look you stupid monkey. Mommy has to go to church now and pray for the sinful ways of the world. We can play when I get back home.”

Tito scratched under his armpits and then took a sniff. This was his way of reminding his master about something. Something very important.

“Already used my bent and dent deodorant see? 13 cents with my double coupon.”

Mary Maimer lifted up both of her arms exposing gooey white left over residue stuck in her hairy armpits. Tito cupped his monkey paws over his mouth and laughed. His master’s armpits were just as hairy as his!

“Oh if you think that’s funny check this out.” Said Mary lifting up her dress and exposing her hairy legs. She was pretty sure that showing some skin to a monkey wasn’t yet a sin. She wouldn’t go to hell for exposing herself to a monkey.

The monkey cupped his paws over his mouth and continued to laugh. He liked Mary Maimer. She was funny. The only time she didn’t act funny was when they made their trips to Philadelphia to deliver the phonebooks. They didn’t feel like phonebooks any more. They were a lot more smaller and icy cold. Tito wasn’t really sure what it was that he was trained to put on people’s door steps. It didn’t matter to him because the expired black bananas from the bent and dent store made his trips well worth it.

“Are you ready to go in your cage?” She asked.

Tito put his monkey paws over his eyes and shook his head no. He knew what “Cage” meant.

“Well that’s too bad. Mark’s at work and I can’t trust you here by yourself. You’ll have this whole place trashed.”

She quickly finished brushing her hair and then opened up the cage for Tito. When her work in Philadelphia was done the monkey would have to go. Luckily Tito didn’t know that.

Mary was about to leave for church when she noticed the mail lying on top of the ledge. All of them looked like the usual bills except for one. It was a letter from the mastermind. She pried her fingernails under the seal of the envelope and slowly ripped it open. The mastermind had assured her that good ole fashioned mail was the best way to communicate. E-mails were monitored and phone calls were no good because they always listened in, always. It was a one page letter that was folded into thirds. Mary unfurled it and put on her glasses. The mastermind always wrote thinly using a lightly shaded pencil so the nosy mailman couldn’t hold the envelope up to the light and read it. The letter read,

*Dear Mary,*

*I hope this letter reaches you soon because from now on we have to be careful.*

*They are starting to put the pieces together and it is no longer safe out there for the monkey.*

*You need to dismember him then burn him up in the woodstove along with this letter.*

*From now on I need you to use the launcher gun like I wanted you to use in the first place.*

*They are probably already watching you so be careful.*

*Yours truly,*

*The Mastermind*

Mary folded up the letter and stuck it in her pocket. This was not good news at all. She was starting to like Tito but now the monkey must go. She knew she had to listen to the Mastermind or he would come and kill her for not obeying. He had already assured her that this was the will of God lest the prophecy be fulfilled. Mary Maimer always listened when the message came from God. She took one last look at Tito still staring right at her and smiling in his cage.

“I’m going to find a way out for us, Tito. Ye will not surely die.” She said to the monkey.

He bounced up and down in his cage. “Eeeh-eeeh-eeeh-eeeh.” Was all he could think to say. Tito had no idea what his master was saying. English was too hard for a monkey to learn.

Mary Maimer looked at the clock and saw that if she didn’t leave now she would be late. People would wonder why she was late because it never happened. Tito’s dismemberment would have to wait until later tonight after she got home. She stormed out the door and climbed into her little blue bubble like car. 43 miles to the gallon. Mary liked to keep things cheap. Sometimes she felt guilty driving the big white van to Philly with all the gas is burned. It was one of the newer kind where the side door could open by itself with the push of a button. Mary liked not having to get to close to the explosives. She had already explained that to the Mastermind.

She was half way on her way to church when she felt it starting to happen again. Somebody was following her. She could just feel it somehow. She did exactly what the Mastermind had advised her to do. Nothing. No looking in the rearview mirrors. No sudden turns. No sudden acceleration or even de-

celeration for that matter. Doing these things would only make her look suspicious. The Mastermind had assured her if she was caught in this situation she should not deviate from her usual routine. Doing so would only cause them to end up using more caution.

Mary Maimer went 5 miles per hour over the speed limit just like she had been told. She couldn't help but think about what it would be like to use the home made launcher gun. The Mastermind had assembled it himself using a paintball gun which he had personally modified. The barrel of the gun looked so scary to her but he assured her it did a wonderful job and was capable of launching a pack of cigarettes close to 80 yards. It had an air pressure dial on the side which could be set at different pressures depending on how far you wanted to launch a pack of smokes. The barrel was wide and rectangular instead of round. Using the trained monkey was her idea but the Mastermind advised against it. She didn't want to use the launcher gun because that required her to handle the explosives herself when she had to load it. Mary didn't relish the idea that once a pack of cigarettes was removed from the cooler she only had 4 minutes before the sucker became live. After 4 minutes the pack would explode once somebody held it in the upright position. She wasn't the type that would enjoy holding a live grenade.

She was still thinking about how she didn't look forward to using the home made launcher gun when something caught her eye. She couldn't help but look up in her rear view mirror because she knew something wasn't quite right with it.

Mary Maimer knew it was way too early in the year for the red and blue lights dancing in her rearview mirror to be nothing more than merely Christmas decorations on someones property. She didn't think she was speeding but she pulled over just to be sure.

For the first time in 10 years. Mary Maimer was going to be late to church.

## CHAPTER 39

The creature woke up kicking and screaming. Why did he keep having these bad dreams? Was it the new medication he was on? Were they putting something in the water? Thoughts of paranoia plagued him while he squirmed around in the bed. A big part of him felt ashamed. The pretty lady had managed to procure from him family secrets. They would question his mother and she would know he squealed. He would not be allowed back in the house ever again. The hospital would figure out he had nobody that cared about him and end up taking advantage of him just like they did when he was 17. Every day they would coerce him to sample new experimental medication that was detrimental to his health. And they did it because they knew they could get away with it.

Once the hospital would learn that his mother had disowned him they would turn him into a human guinea pig. He could still remember that little red pill better known as haldol. Tiny but dangerous. The first time they had administered it to him at the age of 17, he layed for days on a concrete floor in a puddle of drool. The medicine had took him out of touch with reality but the hospital staff still picked on him anyway. They tugged on his arms and drug his body across the floor and insisted that he go to their evil little school. They forced him to play games that involved touching other people and crawling through legs of other boys. When he refused to play in these gay reindeer games they threatened to keep him in the hospital even longer. They even kept him away from his high school friends who tried to pay him a visit. His friends had driven for miles to come and see him but all they would allow was for him to look at them through a fuzzy black and white T.V monitor. He could still remember his two friends sitting in an empty waiting room patiently waiting to see him. The hospital never let them in. Back then the hospitals wouldn't even allow him to see his own flesh and blood sister. His

mother had behested that no visitors were permitted to see him, not even his one and only sister. Needless to say the hospital adhered to her request.

The creature continued to stir in his bed while he thought about his past. It was uncomfortable sleeping in his clothes but he knew this was the only way to keep warm. The thin bed sheets did very little to keep him warm and although it was mid May the hospital liked to keep the temperature extremely low. Doing so kept the germs from spreading which kept the hospital workers healthy. The coldest part on his body was his icy cold feet. He could sleep with his Nikes on but that had already proved to be too uncomfortable. The doubling up on socks was a better idea.

The blinding sun penetrated through the venetian blinds and tried desperately to warm up the room. The creature liked the warmth but despised the sunlight. His eyes were more sensitive than an eagle's and sunlight made him sneeze. He had spent years living in an apartment alone with black trash bags covering up the windows so not even a smidgen of light could seep through. He didn't believe in vampires but he sure liked to live like one.

The funniest part about being a schizophrenic was at any moment you could be whoever you wanted. The creature even believed that sometimes he had the ability to enter another person's body and get inside of their soul. He could see what they're seeing. Touch what they're touching. And the best part about it? He could hear out loud what they were thinking. He laughed at his own nuttiness as he picked up the mauled pencil and erased away Mr. Larry. Today he was going to be Mr. Marty. He liked that name. Marty was the name of his old cellmate. The 62 year old man that could crank out 60 pushups without breaking a sweat. Marty could hit home runs batting from the opposite of his usual batting position. An avid artist and extremely gifted. The old man had advised him to run away far from his family when he got out but the creature didn't listen. Marty's story of what led to his incarceration was a book in itself. Actually it was more like a movie. Dodging a life sentence, Marty had managed to come out with 25 years. He would not forget the two years he lived with the creature. With wanting to keep things on a spiritual level the creature wrote out his old cellmate's name in a certain way. He felt the "T" should look more prominent and resemble the cross. He pushed on the pencil to bolden the letter until the name card looked right.

### Mr. Mar†y

The creature knew that the good Lord would be proud that he was keeping him in his thoughts. Marty never believed in God but he was still a good person on the inside. Every sunday Marty would cook yummy burritos that he knew how to make with the shoddy ingredients from the commissary. He was very respectful and kind towards the creature. Marty's only flaw was

he liked to kiss butt with the correctional officers. The creature never understood that. He laughed at the old man when he walked half a mile up a hill to return a correctional officer's pen. The creature was not alone because even the guard laughed at him. Any other inmate would've pocketed it.

The pencil got put down when a big dark shadow got caught in his peripheral vision. The quiet mysterious shadow had come like a thief in the night. The creature automatically knew exactly who it was.

It was the man. The man with the watch.

## CHAPTER 40

I ran full speed this time. I knew the mysterious man was just like a ghost. I was bound and determined to catch him this time. The man saw me coming this time but he did not run away. I had so many questions for him. Questions like, who was he? And what did he know about my patient?

When I reached my patient's room the man with the watch was still standing in the threshold and leaning on the doorway. His big masculine hand was gripping the outside of the doorway and for the first time I got to take a look at his watch. It wouldn't surprise me if I later found out the price of his watch was worth more than what I paid for my car. It had so many dials and instruments that I couldn't help but wonder where someone could buy such a thing. I'm not a watch person but if I was, I would want one just like it.

The man did not acknowledge my presence but I was just glad he was not running away from me. I noticed he had an envelope in his other hand. He seemed to be enthralled by whatever was going on inside the creature's room. It was then that I realized my mental patient was probably putting on another one of his little shows. When I heard him singing that same familiar nursery rhyme I knew it was going to be a long day. I stood behind the man with the watch and eavesdropped in on my patient's little show.

“The itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout. Down came the rain and wiped the spider out. Along came the sun and dried up all the rain and the itsy bitsy spider went up the spout again.”

I finally had the nerve to whisper into the mysterious man's ear.

“How long has he been like this?” I whispered.



The man's head turned slowly towards me and I could finally see into his eyes. It was like looking into the tree of knowledge. The man with the watch did not smile. My patient had already told me before that this man does not smile. Everything about the man seemed to be impeccable and I couldn't even find a smudge on his glasses or a trace of lint on his suit. His dark hair was neatly combed and I could see a wedding band on his left hand. The few wrinkles I was able to detect led me to believe this man was a lot older than me.

"He's been like this since I got here." Said the man. The creature continued to sing the itsy spider.

"Has he told you anything?" I asked. I wanted answers but I didn't want to pry too fast and come off as being rude.

"I don't think our boy is going to be doing too much talking today." Said the man without looking at me.

The creature continued to sing aloud. "The itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout. Down came the rain and washed the spider out. Along came the sun and dried up all the rain. And the itsy bitsy spider went up the spout again."

I couldn't help but recall what the creature had told one of the nurses the last time he was singing that song. *Who's the itsy bitsy spider?* The nurse had asked. *"Me"*. *"Who's the rain?"* *"The government."* The creature had replied. What really made me think was the last question. *"Who's the sun?"* And the creature's answer? *"God"*.

The man with the watch and I stood at the doorway and watched my patient. He was still singing out loud while laying on his bed. We got no eye contact from the creature and he continued to ignore us. I couldn't help but think about how his lawyer had once described him. *Brilliant and talkative one minute, then catatonically stupid the next*. I had already seen plenty of the creature's shows but the man with the watch seemed to be quite entertained. My patient was acting like a three year old child and I guessed he had never seen anything quite like it. I did find it interesting that the man with the watch referred to my mental patient as *"Our boy"*.

"Why's that? Why don't you think he'll be talking to us today?" I asked quizzically.

The man did not smile. He kept his gaze on the creature and would not look at me. Quite honestly I was getting irked by his ignorance. I wanted to tug on his arm but I was too afraid it might ruin his million dollar suit. Instead I got on my tippy toes to talk a little louder into his ear.

“Excuse me mister! I’m working a case concerning this patient and I could really use your help if you know something!” I hissed into his ear.

The man with the watch didn’t seem phased in the least bit. I was inferior to him. Just a city cop newbie trying to make a name for myself. For all I knew this man probably belonged to the CIA or something. I was definitely sure this man was somebody of importance. I hollered into his ear once again but he remained steadfast. The only thing I saw move on his entire body was his left arm.

The man never looked at me. Instead he ever so slowly raised his left arm over his shoulder and handed me the envelope. It was an envelope addressed to the head of personel at the hospital. It had some old Three Stooges stamps along with some two cent stamps that I’ve never seen before. What really caught my attention was the return address at the top left hand corner.

The envelope had come from the creature’s mother.

## CHAPTER 41

Before I could open the envelope I smelled the presence of another female. If I had to guess I'd say *Love Spell* from Bath and body works. I turned around to see a nurse dressed in purple scrubs looking at me as though she knew me. She smiled at me and then stared at the envelope.

“Oh hi Monica! I'm glad you got that. We just got that in the mail today from the patient's mother. She's very concerned about a letter she got from her son and thought maybe we should take a look at it to see if he needs an adjustment in his medication.”

I slowly reached into the envelope and groped around at whatever was in there. A part of me was upset that I was not one of the first to retrieve this letter.

“You mean this is a letter that my patient wrote?” I asked hesitantly.

The nurse nodded and smiled big enough for me to see her pearly white teeth.

“Um-hm, we were very disturbed when we read it. Something about dismembering a monkey and burning it in a woodstove.” She said sounding concerned.

I felt my heart sink. My thoughts began to intersperse in all directions. I looked over at the man with the watch but he paid no attention to me. He was still watching the creature's show. I was getting sick of hearing the itsy bitsy spider lyrics. I wished my patient would learn a new nursery rhyme. I pulled

out a letter that had been folded into thirds and carefully read it. I was shocked at what I was looking at.

*Dear Mary,*

*I hope this letter reaches you soon because from now on we have to be careful.*

*They are starting to put the pieces together and it is no longer safe out there for the monkey.*

*You need to dismember him then burn him up in the woodstove along with this letter.*

*From now on I want you to use the launcher gun like I wanted you to use in the first place.*

*They are probably already watching you so be careful.*

*Yours truly,*

*The Mastermind*

I was so confused that I couldn't even stay focused. Perhaps what I was experiencing was similar to one of the psychotic episodes that often plagued my patient. Surely this had to be some kind of sick joke. Had the creature played me like a fool? Had he been the mastermind behind all these terrorist acts with his psycho mom acting as an accomplice? None of this was making any sense. The man with the watch moved his arm from the doorway exposing my patient's namecard that supposedly changed according to the alphabet. Naturally of course my patient had scribbled a different name onto the card with his pencil. I remembered him popping gum into my face one day and telling me that sometimes the answers were looking for in life are right in front of our face. I studied the name card.

Mr. Mar†y

I suddenly recalled his picture diagram and remembered him telling me about the hidden messages he found in words using a reverse alphabetical code. One of his demonstrations he showed me was reversing the word "Truth" and describing to me that there are hidden "Gifts" within the truth. When he deciphered the word with his code I vaguely remember him leaving the second "t" alone because it was to resemble the cross and that was not to be tampered with. I wondered if maybe my patient's name card was revealing a hidden message. I think at this point I had a pretty good idea who Mary Maimer was. I also had a feeling that the man with the watch knew a great deal about my patient and his history. My patient might be one to hallucinate and hear voices, but I believed him when he told me that this man had been following him around since the age of 17.

I ducked under the man's big arm that was supporting the doorway to question my patient. He was still singing the itsy bitsy spider and appeared oblivious to both of us. I wanted to wipe that sick smile off his face but I didn't like knowing I had a witness behind me. Instead I shook him to get his attention. The creature just smiled and stared into space while singing his song.

"The itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout. Down came the rain and washed the spider out."

That's when the man with the watch finally spoke.

"You're wasting your time. This man has done years in prison and is acutely aware of his rights."

I let go of my patient and accosted the man that seemed to know it all.

"You know this guy don't you? How long have you known my patient?" I asked.

The only thing that moved on his entire body were his lips. His legs didn't shake a muscle nor did his facial expressions change in the least. I could tell that whoever this guy was, was very professional.

"I've been keeping up with your patient for years now. He still looks the same since I first encountered him at the age of 17. I'm very convinced that he hears voices and he has been known to hallucinate. His behavior interests me."

I shook my head and let out a quizzical look while placing my hands on my hips for good measure.

"Who are you?" I finally asked.

"I am the Chief Psychiatrist for the state of Pennsylvania. I was the first doctor to sign a 304 commitment for your patient. Your patient is mentally ill."

*Well duh!* I thought to myself.

The creature had once told me that doctors and psychiatrists are still fascinated at the origin of his mental illness which started for him at the age of 17. Schizophrenia. My patient once believed his plumbing instructor was trying to choke another student. The cops were called but they took my patient away instead. Nothing ever happened. Purportedly. My patient believes otherwise.

“So why do you keep following him around?” I asked.

Once again the man would not move. The creature had assured me that when this man moved he moved with a purpose.

“Curiosity.” Was all he said.

I figured maybe he knew more about the subject at hand. I had to speak a little louder to be heard over the din emanating from the creature. He was putting on quite a show but I knew it was fake. I’d seen stuff like this before.

“What about his mother? Is she really behind all of this?” I finally asked.

The creature abruptly stopped singing. He was witnessing what he had never seen before. The man with the watch was smiling.

## CHAPTER 42

“Oh his mother is sitting in her favorite rocking chair at home reading the latest issue of reader’s digest. Your patient here claims that’s what she’s been doing for the past 25 years now.” Said the man with the watch.

I didn’t know it took 25 years to read reader’s digest but at this point I imagined maybe his mother was a pretty slow reader.

“So she’s not behind any of this?”

Once again I saw that look of certainty in the doctor’s eye. This man knew a great deal.

“Nope. All of this was just another one of the creature’s shows.” Was all he said.

I have to admit. I was flabbergasted. My mind was still interspersing. I think I could feel my stomach tightening from all the exasperation.

“Your saying my patient acted alone in all of this?”

The doctor sullenly nodded his head. What really made no sense to me was that he didn’t seem surprised.

“But how is that possible? He’s been here over a month and hasn’t left the hospital.”

The creature quickly began singing the same nursery rhyme again so he could shut us out from his world. It even looked like he was rolling around on his bed like a baby.

“All of this work was done with contraptions that your patient had planted 6 months ago. Getting himself signed into the hospital for an iron clad alibi was all part of his brilliant plan.” Said the man.

I felt my heart skip a few beats. I was in utter shock. I knew that this man was telling me the truth. I looked at the poster hanging with the picture of the little boy looking up to the sky and praying. And then of course there was the caption below it. *When in doubt look up*. My patient was not only the mastermind but Mary Maimer as well. I should have been able to piece all of this together a lot sooner. Schizophrenics are notoriously known for having multiple personalities. I handed the letter back to the man and took off running.

Everything came up from my breakfast this morning. I was puking so bad that I could feel my throat burning like it was on fire. I stood in the laundry room alone hurling up chunks of a bagel into the laundry room sink. I was feeling dizzy and still in a great deal of shock. I had just spent the last 8 days up close with a ruthless terrorist. A terrorist that had managed to make me feel sorry for him with stories about his mother. All those innocent people that had been seriously maimed and one had even died. All of it was just absolutely disgusting. I hoped that my patient didn't mind jail because if he thought he was spending the rest of his days in a comfy hospital he had another thing coming. Nancy and I knew some of the finest prosecutors and we would have them pushing this issue to the fullest extent of the law. I still had many questions like *How did my patient manage to do all of this?* That's when I felt another hand on my arm. It was hairy and I noticed the hand had some missing fingers. That's when I knew who it was. It was Brett.



## CHAPTER 43

“Are you alright? I thought I heard someone throwing up.” Said Brett shaking my arm.

I regained my composure and yanked his arm away from me. Doesn't this guy seem to get it? I don't want this creep touching me. It disturbed me knowing that Brett had befriended the creature upon his admission to the hospital and I wanted nothing to do with either one of them. I turned on the sink handle and watched my breakfast go down the drain. I had so many questions but so few answers. What did the man with the watch mean by contraptions? How could my mental patient possibly be capable of doing all of this by himself?

Cold water continued to flow from the faucet which I ended up splashing on my face. I was such a nervous wreck that it wasn't even funny. I have met some bad people before but never have I ever spent so much time with a killer up close. Now all the impish smiles were starting to make sense. My mental patient had been laughing through this entire ordeal. This all had been one of the creature's shows. I was going to see to it that it would be his last.

I raced back down the halls towards the creature's room. The man with the watch was still standing in his doorway only this time it looked like he was jotting notes. I could still hear my patient singing the itsy bitsy spider. I looked at the handsome doctor with an imploring look.

“Why? What led my patient to do something like this?” I asked.

“Contractions.”

“Contractions?”

“Your friend Mary Maimer here couldn’t deal with the contractions that came after his plastic surgery. He wanted to blow off the doctor’s hands but the government told him he wasn’t allowed. So he decided to go after everyone else’s hands instead.”

“So he somehow managed to do all of his dirty work using contraptions?”

The man with the watch wouldn’t take his eyes off of my mental patient. The only response I got was a nod. It was like the doctor thought he was staring at a newlyfound alien. My patient’s behavior evidently enthralled this man. I felt my cell phone vibrating in my pocket. I looked at the number. It was Nancy.

My boss spoke very fast. “Hey girl, it’s me. We need you to come down to the station ASAP.”

“Nancy you’re not gonna believe this I-”

I got cut off.

“We already know. Just get down to the station as soon as possible.”

Nancy hung up the phone. I was still in much shock. Something serious must be happening down at the station for my boss to hang up like that. I reached in my cute little purse and pulled out a business card. I handed it to the man with the watch, the chief psychiatrist, or whoever he was.

“Here give me a call when you get a chance. Make sure the hospital keeps a close watch on this guy.” I said pointing to the creature.

The man still had a serious grave look of curiosity but he stuck the card in his pocket. I hoped he didn’t plan on asking for the envelope back because I had no intentions of handing it back to him. From the looks of things I think he planned on spending the next several hours just standing there and watching my patient’s little show. His face didn’t show it, but I think for some reason he was highly entertained.

I have to admit I did feel stupid running past nurses pushing wheel chairs, but Nancy had told me to get back to the station ASAP. In this line of work you don’t question things you just do them. That was the key to being successful in the force.

“Where you going sweetheart?” Shouted an old man on a gander sitting in his wheel chair.

I didn't even bother to stop and look at him. Hospitals were starting to get on my nerves and a big part of me was glad this thing was finally coming to an end. It's still hard to believe I had the patience years ago to put up with these kinds of people.

My hands actually shook as I tried to put the key in the ignition. Was this thing finally coming to an end? Would this be like one of those horror movies where I become the victim? Quite truthfully I was just glad my car didn't blow up. They never should've let my patient out of jail in the first place when he tried to blow up his doctor some ten years ago.

That would prove to be their worst and biggest mistake.

## CHAPTER 44

When I reached the oval room it looked like day one all over again. Everybody was there even the postal inspector. The only one I didn't recognize was an athletic looking white guy with too much hair gel.

How this new guy fit into our little group I didn't know, but I imagined I would soon find out. The only sound that could be heard was the coffee maker percolating. Everybody took a seat around the big oval table except for Bill. He was always in charge for doling out the coffee. Bill and his coffee. It's like they were made for each other.

I really felt uneasy around the postal inspector and didn't relish the idea that he was sitting right next to me. I could still remember his adamant opinion on agreeing with the feds with dubbing a 3 inch home made explosive as a WMD. I guess they have really lowered the bar. I'd hate to see what they dubbed something a little more substantial like a grenade. Before Bill got a chance to pass out the coffees I pulled the envelope out of my purse and layed it on the table. It didn't get any response from anyone sitting at the table. I was starting to get nervous because everyone's eyes were directed right at me. Did they expect me to get us started? I surmised that they did. I unfurled the letter and held it up for all of them to see.

"This is a letter that my patient wrote to his mother. There never was a sick monkey. Just my sick patient." I said. ( I wanted to sound professional).

There was still a deadpan look on every face in the room. I was starting to feel something was up.

Why was everyone looking at me like I was a stranger trying to sell corny magazines. I put down the letter and scrunched up my eyebrows.

“What? What is it? Do I have smeared lipstick on my face?” I knew that I didn’t.

That’s when the silence finally broke loose. Nancy was the first to start clapping and then the rest of the group joined in. I was completely lost. I knew we had made some major progress but we still had a lot of case work to do. My boss stood up from her chair and walked over and gave me a great big bear hug.

“Congratulations girl you passed the test!” She said still squeezing me.

There were more applauses and for once I got to see Bill smile. I was still clueless as to who the over hair geller guy was. Nancy squeezed me as I sat there dumbfounded.

“Test? What are you guys talking about?” I wanted answers.

Bill handed out coffees and paused at the muscle head guy with too much hair gel.

“None of this ever happened thanks to this guy right here.” Said Bill releasing his big sausage fingers from the man’s coffee cup.

I let Nancy squeeze me but I put on my game face. I hope these people weren’t going to tell me that they built a big time machine which they used to rescue all of the IEDs. I watched Bill rest his big ebony fingers on the man’s shoulder.

“This here is your mental patient’s probation officer Dean the Machine. He tipped us off about the patient’s contraptions and we were able to rescue them before they launched.” Said Bill patting the man’s shoulder.

When I heard the word “launch” all the pieces to the puzzle were put together at once. *Of course! The creature was trying to tell me all along that sometimes the answers were looking for are right in front of our face. Why didn’t I figure out his clues earlier? The itsy bitsy spider climbed up the water spout. My patient was probably concealing his contraptions in the gutter.* I thought to myself. I was already imagining what one of his contraptions might look like. I still had a lot of questions.

“But what about the big floating sign in the sky? I saw it with my own eyes.”

Bill looked at Dean. Dean just smirked but said nothing.

“I guess we were a little late locating that one. That contraption involved one of those big blue 40 gallon trash cans with a tiny hole in it and a yard stick. I’ll tell you one thing. That patient sure had a lot of free time on his hands to be able to come up with all those calculations.” Said Bill, “It took us a good while to figure out that big puddle of water below it.”

Nancy finally let go of me and sat back down in her seat. I tried to stay on point but none of this was making any sense. Were these people trying to tell me that this whole thing was a big lie? No explosions, no severed fingers? At least it now made sense why they wouldn’t tell me who died. Because in actuality, nobody died. This was all some sort of test. A test that I was still clueless as to the reason behind all of this.

“But what about the newspapers Nancy gave me on my first day on the assignment? I suppose you have an answer for that too?” I asked.

That got me a nudge from Nancy. It was good to see her in such a good mood.

“Those newspapers were doctored sweetie. These people are the government. They can do whatever they want to.”

I knew that my patient would like to hear something like that. He was always talking about the insidiousness he believed permeated our government. If they could control his thoughts surely they could fabricate newspapers. He would be impressed that they made it look so real. The door swung open and suddenly everyone got quiet. I turned around and saw a big dark shadow behind me. The ambiance in the entire room suddenly felt foreboding and I knew I had felt this mysterious presence before. I turned around to acknowledge the intruder standing behind me.

It was that man. The man with the watch.

## CHAPTER 45

The man with the watch sashayed around the room while holding what looked like a mouse trap. He was carrying it like as if it were on a silver platter. I really felt this man showed a genuine interest in my mental patient. At this point I was able to deduce that the mouse trap contraption in his hand was probably created by my patient. He set it on the table for all of us to take a look at. He then pulled a teeny tiny spiralled shaped straw from his pocket and placed it next to the contraption. I noticed the convoluted straw shaped like a curly fry had a very small copper bb inside it. The bottom of the straw had two tiny wires pierced through it which I guess caught the bb from exiting the straw.

“That looks just like a crazy straw only significantly smaller.” I said, “Why does it have a bb in it?”

The man with the watch picked up the 1 1/2” piece of spirally straw and flipped it upside down. The tiny copper bb spun around inside the straw until it finally rested on the bottom and got caught between the two tiny wires pierced at the bottom. It kind of reminded me of watching my little brother play with his sliding bead toys when he was two years old. He would push on the beads and be fascinated watching them spiral down the metal twisty wire. The man with the watch flipped the straw over once more as if it was a sand dial from a board game. The tiny bb circled it’s way to the bottom once more.

“This was the key piece component to your patient’s dangerous contraptions.” He said holding it up for me to see.

“I don’t get it. Why does that straw draw such a scare?” I asked.

The doctor shook the straw in his hand and stared at the copper bb inside it. To him the device was so simple but yet so complex.

“Why go to great lengths to get ahold of a mercury switch when you can use a bb trapped in a straw? This is really quite creative.....and cheap!”

I was still just a little bit confused. Being mechanically inclined was not exactly my forte. Perry would have a better understanding of all this.

“So why is it shaped like a curly fry from Arby’s?” I asked.

The man with the watch set the straw back down on the table and steepled his fingers.

“It appears our boy has a good understanding of the laws of physics. His intricate plan never would have worked had he actually used a mercury switch because this mouse trap contraption here was used to launch his IEDs from the gutters on his victim’s roofs. He had no choice but to come up with this spirally design to keep his IEDs from exploding in mid air.”

I really didn’t know too much about the laws of physics but I did recall the story about a bowling ball and a penny. Our science teacher had once told us that if both fell off a 10 story building at the same time they would both reach the ground at the same time even though their weights were different. I guess what the doctor was trying to tell me was that with all the flips and turns of the IEDs being launched in the air, the bb still wouldn’t be able to make it’s way down the curly straw to detonate it. The IED would only create gravity for the bb once it was no longer free falling. Maybe my little nut was a genius after all.

“So what about the mouse trap? How did that work?” I wanted to understand everything.

All eyes were on the mouse trap contraption sitting on the table. I noticed it had a battery pack and a thick mercury thermometer glued to it. The bottom of it had lead weights that acted like stilts about an inch long. My guess was the weights were glued to the bottom to prevent the device from floating down the gutter in the event of a heavy rainstorm. I could see how rushing water would still be able to flow through it without causing the contraption to float away. A lot of thought had definitely gone into this. I even noticed fishing line tied to the mouse trap. My mental patient must have thought he was quite the engineer. The man with the watch slid the mouse trap contraption up close to me so I could examine it. It even had wooden ledges glued to the side to keep the Marlboro lite 100s from sliding out.



“This thing is a lot less complex than it looks. This home made contraption was designed to launch the IED once the temperature outside reached 93 degrees. You can plainly see here where the patient has two sewing needles pierced inside the thermometer at the 93 degree mark. Once the mercury inside it reaches the mark it completes an electric circuit which activates the battery pack to heat up those two wires twisted together. As you can plainly see here the patient has fishing line wrapped around the wires. Those wires will get hot enough to melt right through the fishing line.”

“Thus launching the IED through the air.” I finished for him. I was getting a pretty good idea of how his contraption worked.

Bill cut in before the doctor could say anything. The doctor leaned back and let him take over.

“Correct. This mouse trap provided just enough force to be able to flip the IEDs off the roof and onto the ground. Had we not intercepted these things this operation would have been successful. We have his probation officer to thank for preventing these contraptions from launching IEDs onto peoples front porches from way up in the gutter. Your patient had even gone so far as to conceal his contraptions with pine needles.”

I was getting confused again. Bill had just told me my patient concealed his contraptions with pine needles which meant he must have gotten the chance to plant them. Didn't Bill also say the IEDs were intercepted?

“So your telling me that you guys caught my patient red handed while he was in the process of planting these contraptions in people's gutters?” I asked.

Dean the Machine said, “Oh no, no, no. It wasn't exactly like that. Your patient had no idea he was being followed by me when he planted these things. We didn't want to arrest him on the spot because we wanted to build a solid case first. I've kept him under close surveillance for about 6 months now.”

*Jeez! I thought to myself. This story keeps getting weirder and weirder. First we're all trying to hunt down a terrorist and now we learn that absolutely nothing has happened at all. Should I be angry or glad? Actually I was a little bit of both. Angry these people had been lying to me about everything but glad that nobody ended up getting hurt. My patient was turning out to be quite a person of interest. He would probably like the idea of knowing he was the topic of conversation today. I doubted that he ever did any big things in life. I rubbed both of my hands into my forehead and tried to keep myself together.*

“Wait so let me get this straight. All this stuff went down 6 months ago and were just now shedding some light on it? Why did my patient wait so many months to get himself checked into the hospital for his iron clad alibi?”

This time the man with the watch did the talking.

“Because he knew exactly what he was doing. His whole idea was brilliant. Your patient spends most of his time observing. Watching how things work, studying the weather, even watching how people handle and open things. Sometimes there are flukes in the winter but never does the temperature reach 93 degrees. Your patient has been studying the farmer’s almanac.”

“Okay so why has all of this been one big secret?” I asked.

This time everyone in the room had their eyes fixated on the doctor. The man with the watch. But the doctor said nothing.

Dean said, “This whole show was entirely the doctors idea. He needed information about creatures of habit for his next book and we needed time to build a solid case to put your patient away for a long time. We had anticipated that your patient would call 9-1-1 like he’s always done before after he commits a crime. We were all just patiently waiting for that call.”

“But it never happened.” I muttered out loud while pursing my lips.

The more these people spoke the more things started to make sense. Basically what happened was my mental patient had figured out a clever way to sharpen his MO. Once a bomber, always a bomber. Unfortunately this one was smart enough to realize he had a conscience and was horrible with disguising his body language. He devised a plan so enigmatic, that even if he confessed to being the bomber, we may not have necessarily believed him. Capitalizing off of his mental illness, was a brilliant idea. The hospital kept him so doped up usually nothing but stupidity ever came out of his mouth. Not to mention the confinement would probably prevent him from wanting to squeal on himself. But what about the mail bombings? Was that the work of my patient too? Was he capable of mailing bombs from California while he was 2000 miles away?

“What about the mail bombs? Were they done with contraptions too?” I asked.

This time the postal inspector Mike cut in. His face was as serious looking as the man with the watch. They both had a lot of resemblances.

“That contraption involved magnets and scared us the most. Had we not intercepted those as well we would have absolutely no evidence to provide a case. His mailing contraptions had more thought put into it than anything. Your patient had at one point driven out to California and concealed his contraptions inside some of the drop off mail boxes. Had we of ever been able to figure out he used contraptions to mail the IEDs it would have been too late.” Said the inspector.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because the contraption was designed to mail itself to another location once it released the package. The contraption was concealed in a package by itself. That’s why these mail bombs were so small, because they had to be in order to stay concealed underneath the box.” He said with certainty.

I couldn’t believe I was hearing all this. My patient, a 33 year old man that had fooled me into believing he had the mentality of a three year old child was capable of building small machines to mail packages and launch disguised IEDs off rooftops without him even having to push a button or make a phone call. Instead of building all of these heinous things he probably should’ve just wrote a book about it.

Quite truthfully I thought his short stories about monkeys thinking they were elephants sucked. He should’ve used his free time to hone up on his writings and become a prolific writer.

I noticed Nancy was playing footsies with Bill and making eye contact which made me suspicious. Bill doesn’t like to be flirted with when he’s serious at work. I gleaned that Nancy was trying to hint him about something but I had no clue what it was. She kept nodding her head in my direction. I finally couldn’t help myself but ask.

“You guys told me this was all just a test. What exactly were you talking about? I’m still confused. Why were you guys clapping when I came in earlier?”

Nancy looked at Bill. Bill grunted and pulled out some papers from under inside his folder.

Bill said “Monica. We feel that all of your special skills can be put to better use some place else. Were not forcing you to do this but Nancy and I put a recommendation in for you and I think you should consider it. This position offers a six figure salary and you’re very much qualified.”

I felt my heart thud to the floor and then get lifted back up again. I liked my job and I liked working with Nancy but these people were offering me

something pretty good. Grandma would be so proud if she knew I was landing six figures. I found myself grabbing my neck while hemming and hawing.

“Wha- what position is that?” I blurted out.

Bills eyes filled with effervescence. I could tell that he was enthused.

“Monica we are prepared to offer you a position in the department of Homeland Security. Do you accept this offer?” He said like he was announcing a wedding proposal.

Before I could say anything we were all startled when the door swung open. I turned around to see who it was.

## CHAPTER 46

Perry stormed into the room with Grandma in tow. I nearly peed my pants. This was all like a big dream. I hadn't seen Grandma walking in over 6 months. Grandma looked great and Perry didn't even embarrass me with a hideous outfit. He had on the nice leather shoes I bought him last Christmas and was sporting a nice yellow polo shirt. Grandma looked just as good as she did in my college graduation. I was going to personally thank whichever nurse it was that helped her get dressed. Her rosy red dress looked all too familiar. I ran up and gave Grandma a great big bear hug.

“Grandma! These people offered me a position in Homeland security.” I said hiding my tears of joy into her shoulder.

I could hear Nancy talking in the background. I kept my head crooked into Grandma's shoulder. I was so glad to see her standing on her own.

“I guess that means she accepts.” Said Nancy to her boss.

Perry came over to join in our hugging circle and make it bigger. At this point I don't think I'd mind if the whole group decided to join our big merry circle. I've never been this excited in my life. I knew my mother was up in heaven looking down on us. She would be so proud of me and I'm sure she would be crying as well. It was then that I felt the vibration running down my legs. I reached down to pry Perry's hands from my legs but Perry's hands hadn't left our shoulders. The vibration obviously wasn't from Perry messing around. The jiggling in my pants was coming from my cell phone. At this very moment I decided that I officially hate cell phones. I answered it anyway. I kept my freehand on Grandma's shoulder.

“I’m kind of busy right now. Is this important?” I barked into the phone.

“I’m not really sure, but it’s important to your patient. This is Carla. I’m a nurse at Lincoln Hospital.”

“What can I do for you Carla?”

“Your patient is demanding to see you.”

“Right now? I’m sort of in the middle of something right now. I’m sure it can wait.” I replied.

I noticed it suddenly got very quiet in the room. We all knew that my mental patient was safely locked down in a mental ward. But that didn’t mean we had managed to safely retrieve *all* of his contraptions. There may be more to this mystery that we didn’t know about.

“He’s threatening to kill himself if he can’t see you. What do you want me to do?” Asked the nurse.

*Tell him to go ahead and kill himself.* I thought to myself. I wouldn’t dare say something like that over the phone. I still deemed my patient mentally unstable and a threat to society. I hoped to God that they never let him out. Nancy probably agreed with me that he belonged in jail. I couldn’t help but think my patient actually liked it in there. I think the mental ward was like a second home to him. Maybe that’s why he spent almost half of his life in and out of psychiatric wards.

“Okay I hear you.” I sighed, “Just tell him I’ll be over there within the hour.”

I think I could literally feel the nurses relief over the phone. I wondered if my patient was still singing the itsy bitsy spider and driving them all nuts. Brett probably thought the whole thing was funny. It still made me sick to the stomach that baldy dude had befriended him from the door.

“Alright I’ll let him know. He’s been acting up all day. I hope the doctor changes his meds soon. He’s driving us all crazy. Brett is the only one who seems to be entertained by his little shows.”

I chuckled. I could pretty much picture in my mind what was going on over there. I knew if my patient was taking his clothes off then they would definitely have their hands full for awhile. I was so glad my new position in Homeland security probably wouldn’t involve working from inside a hospital.

"Yeah. I know all about his shows." I looked around the room for anyone who might concur. Nancy and the man with the watch both raised their brows. They knew.

"Okay. Did the doctor let you see that letter? We were all concerned."

"Yes Carla, I saw it."

"Okay. We'll see you when you get here. Sorry to have interrupted whatever it is you're doing."

"Okay bye."

I flipped my cell phone shut. I knew whatever it was my patient wanted, was probably something stupid. He probably just missed staring at my pretty face. Maybe he had another weird visual illustration he wanted to show me. I didn't know and quite frankly I didn't care. I was only going as a favor to the nurses. I know what kind of nonsense they have to put up with and it's a lot considering their lousy pay. I unlocked myself from our big group hug and picked up my purse from the chair. Nancy stood up from her chair and blocked me with her big huge football player frame.

"Where you going hun? You don't have to stay on beckoning call for that little nutcase." Said Nancy.

I gave her *the look* and my boss stepped out of the way. My gut feeling was there still was more to this story that hadn't been discovered yet. I couldn't help myself. I had to find out and I would do everything within my powers to get to the bottom of this. I paused right before I opened the door and turned around. Everyone including Grandma all had confused looks on their faces. I guessed at this point that nobody wanted to see me go.

"I'm sorry everyone. But this girl has to go and finish up her work."

I shut the door behind me and walked into the final chapter of the creature's next show.

## CHAPTER 47

I slinked down the halls of Lincoln as furtively as I could. I even grasped tightly my purse to eradicate any jingling sounds that might emanate. Maybe I enjoy sneaking up on the creature just for kicks or maybe I'm just down right curious what this weirdo does in his free time, I dunno. My heart rate accelerated as I ambled my way closer towards his room. I hoped I didn't have on too much *Avon* because then the creature could possibly smell me coming. I wanted to catch him in the act as long as it didn't involve him in his birthday suit. I surmised at this point that they were probably soon going to transfer him to the federal detention center next to the FBI building in downtown Philadelphia where they can keep him under a close watch. The security here at Lincoln isn't the greatest. This is a hospital where they have the right to take your personal belongings but they'll probably get sued if they ask patients to turn around, squat, and cough.

I tip-toed up to my patient's room and carefully listened for lyrics to the itty bitsy spider. I couldn't make out any singing but I definitely heard lots of laughter. Hysterical laughter. When I poked my head into the room I was astonished at what I saw. There he was, standing in the corner of the room with his nose all but pressed into the crevice of the wall. I could only deduce at this point that my patient was trying to conceal his guilty face. I tried to sneak up behind him but he must have smelled my perfume.

"I knew you would come. I could smell your *Avon* a mile away." He said without ever turning around.

For someone that struck out with women, I was impressed with his knowledge of perfumes. I was not in the least scared of this guy. I even felt as though I could take him down in a fight. What did scare me about this patient



was his dangerous mentally unstable mind. We could put the cuffs on this man all we wanted to, but there was still nothing we could do to stop his mind. As precarious as this man portrayed himself, I still believed this man had the potential to become a monster. A ruthless killer once told me, *"People don't become monsters on their own, people like you create us."* My mental patient wasn't the only person in the world to have much disdain towards the government. There were a lot of freaks out there just like him. I knew he experienced a lot of adversity and many people had wronged him in life.

"That was quite a show you put on for us. Why do I have a feeling that the show is not yet over?" I said. I found it rather strange that he was standing in the corner like he was being punished. I've never had a patient do that on me before.

I expected him to turn around but he did not. Instead he let out a sinister laugh and shoved his nose further into the corner. I wondered if maybe this was supposed to be another one of his visual demonstrations.

"You didn't really think I would let those bastards be the one to end the show when it's **my** show did you?" He said without moving an inch.

"I dunno. The last time an overseer tried to dictate one of your shows you berated her and hung the phone up on her. Isn't that right?"

The creature just laughed. I knew that his memory was good enough to recall the time he hung up on the program director's boss when she would not allow him to go visit his family on his birthday when he was still stuck in the halfway house just two miles up the road from here. He had a steady job and was allowed to trek all of Philly. But put him in the dark cloistered woods of Lancaster County? The halfway house thought better of it. They kept him there the whole six months.

"Do you know that the last time I was standing in the corner like this was because I was using too much soap when Mommy tried to get me to clean out the cracks in the basement? I've been standing here maybe 15 minutes at best and my mind is already playing tricks on me. I'm trying here to go the whole hour but I'm afraid if I turn around to look at you you'll tack on another 15 minutes. When I was a kid I often ended up standing here for two hours straight."

In a way I was kind of glad that the creature was using the remainder of his time here at the hospital reliving his childhood because I knew once they threw him in FDC his celly would not take a shining to his little shows. It's good that he get it all out of his system now.

“You’re not going to get another 15 minutes if you turn around and look at me, I promise. It’s okay now to talk to me about what’s bothering you.”

There was more chortling but I could tell he was trying to stifle it the best he could because it sounded more like snorting from a pig. He still wouldn’t turn around but I could sense he was definitely nervous.

“Do you know the last time I was chuckling like this I was standing before a federal judge just waiting for them to say the word “Penile” but you know what? It never got spoken. They did however say the word “Bomb” at least a 100 times. Why do you think that is?”

I found myself scratching away a piece of bubble gum from the floor with my Nikes. I didn’t have time for the creature’s little head games, honestly I didn’t. I wanted to know how many more cards this little prick had up his sleeve and if anyone was in imminent danger. I felt myself growing impatient.

“I ...I dunno. Maybe they thought that word was inappropriate. It’s not a word that comes up often in our judicial system.” I said hoping he’d like my answer.

“But surely you know about the penal code. There is a penal code isn’t there? Am I in violation of the penal code?” He said bursting out laughing.

There was no confidence in his laugh whatsoever. From the sounds of it I think he was getting ready to break down crying. I hoped I could get the information I needed before that happened. Quite truthfully I was just glad he was fully clothed.

“What do you mean by the show is not over yet? Is anyone else in danger?” I asked. I got still more laughter.

“Anyone else in danger? Yeah, I’ll tell you who else is in danger. Me!” He said finally turning around and sticking his thumb into his chest. “That’s what this show is all about. Me.”

“What do you mean? What’s going to happen next?” I asked.

“My show gets moved into the big courts. That’s what happens. Once that happens I’ll finally get my chance to laugh right back at the government.”

“Why’s that?” I said bracing myself. This story had already twisted in every direction.

My mental patient walked away from the corner and sashayed his way towards the desk. A part of me felt he was up to no good and I almost reached out and stopped him. I felt relieved when I saw his hands reach for the Bible his mother had given him. It was crimson red and I noticed it was a King James version. The creature spread open the good book right down the middle like he was spreading out a map. The core in the middle opened up and I heard something inside of it slide down the spine. It was a little red plastic chip that said *Sony* on it. A memory card reader of some type. It wasn't much bigger than a penny and I stood there shocked while my patient picked it up and pinched it in his fingers.

"See. I'm not going to let you bastards screw me like you guys did ten years ago. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." He said proudly flourishing it still. "I already knew I was being followed but I just played along."

"What's that? Are there pictures on there I take it?"

"More than just pictures on this. I have live video footage of all my evil deeds. Bomb makings and all. Except there's a catch."

I felt my heart pounding into my sternum. God only knew what kind of movies this guy used to watch in his free time. Maybe sick twisted movies like *Law Abiding Citizen* that probably gave him sick ideas. I always raise a stink when my little brother plays those "M" rated video games with blowing people's heads off. I pretended to show little interest in that chip because if he knew how bad I wanted it he just might not give it to me. Instead I continued to play my role of little interest.

"So what's the catch?" I finally asked.

I kept my gaze at the desk to let him breathe. His probation officer told me this one can't take a stare down. It brings back flashbacks from his childhood. Maybe his mother always insisted on looking him in the eye when she grilled him. I dunno. What did catch my attention was the writings piling up on his desk. I noticed a piece of typing paper sitting on top that looked like a rough copy to a cover of a book. The captions read **Mary's Contractions** with a hand drawn spider right up above the second letter "C". The what I presumed *Itsy Bitsy Spider* was leaking a trail of blood down the letter "C" making the word "Contractions" look like the word "Contraptions". A sickening chill went up my spine when I remembered the creature teaching me how to be more observant. Those two words were spelled very much alike. My patient continued to grasp my attention by flashing the little red chip.

“You know all those contraptions and IEDs I built?” He said twitching the chip back and forth, “Every last one of them was a dud. They look real yes but I really doubt those alphabet boys were thorough enough to rip apart the plastic casings to the wiring. Every last one of those wires were faulty. Those bombs didn’t have a chance in hell of functioning. The joke is on you guys and this chip proves it. Had you studied and delved into my past just a little more you would have realized we are all creatures of habit and you should’ve seen the pattern.”

I placed my hands on my hips like I always do when I’m in defense mode. I have to admit. The creature had my utmost attention.

“And what pattern is that?” I said caustically.

“Of all the dumb crimes I’ve done in life you should’ve noticed that each and everyone of them has never caused any harm or malice to anyone but myself. There are patterns to every criminal’s behavior and you should have known that.” He said finally looking at me with those soft brown eyes.

The creature handed me the chip without looking concerned that I would keep it. I figured if he was capable of all these things then he was probably smart enough to have a spare chip buried somewhere. I took the chip and placed it into my purse. I looked deep into his puppy brown eyes and saw that he looked like he wanted to cry. A man that constantly struggled. A man that had never found love in his life. And a man that had never, ever hurt anyone at all.

“Why? Why did you go through all of these great lengths to hurt only yourself?” I whispered while looking deep into his hurtful eyes.

He paused for a while and took a deep breath. I could tell that he was re-gressing. I had an inkling that he was about to get into one of his long stories. He breathed out another long sigh.

“You know, I don’t know if you guys realize this, but, how should I say this? I’m a writer not a fighter. A long time ago I was hunting deer with my father. Actually if I remember just right it was right before they took me into federal custody. My dad was extra excited that he managed to procure a doe tag which meant he didn’t have to limit himself to only shooting a buck. I of course was stuck with just a regular hunting license which meant I could only shoot a deer if I saw horns. Antlers. I really didn’t care because I had been hunting since I was twelve years old and never been able to shoot a thing. My luck finally changed that day.”

"How's that?" I asked. *Here comes another one of his stories* I thought to myself.

"Well, we were standing in the thickets of the woods and really couldn't see that far out in front of us. I couldn't even see my father because he was about 100 yards away from me. I was propped up against a tree with my finger resting on the trigger of my .30-30 when I heard shots ringing out from a distance. At first the shots sounded distant but I got excited when they progressively got closer. Usually when a deer comes around my gun is propped up against a tree and I am watering the grass. I knew this time I was catching a break because this time I had plenty of time to get ready. I knew a deer was coming my way so I got myself ready. Sure enough a deer came my way and stopped dead in it's tracks when it finally saw me. It was standing just twenty yards to my left and I already had it in my crosshairs. I was never so excited in all my life. This was going to be my very first deer and I knew it would make my father proud. When the deer realized my gun was pointed right at it it tried to hide behind a tree. That only gave me more time to hone in on my aim because I knew it had to poke it's head out eventually. It was looking like a surefire kill. Deer aren't easy to kill when they're on the move. When it finally poked it's head out I was utterly disappointed."

"Why?"

"No horns. I wasn't allowed to shoot it."

"Did you shoot it anyways?" I really hoped he was going somewhere with this story.

"No. But I should have and every day I live to regret it."

"Why?"

"The deer had been seriously maimed from the other hunters shooting at it. I saw a huge cessant pool of blood dripping from below it's belly. It's common for a deer to take a long time to die from a belly shot. I wanted to put it out of it's misery but I was afraid I would get in trouble for shooting a doe when I never put in for a doe tag so I left it go. The shooter eventually came our way but we were never able to find it. Those deer can run for miles before they die."

"Okay I get it. So what's the point to this story? I'm sure there's some kind of meaning to it."

"There is you know why? When I had that doe in my crosshairs it was looking right at me." He said while starting to snifle, "I'll never forget the

look in that deer's eyes after it had been seriously maimed. And you know what? After 10 agonizing years, I see that same look everytime I look at myself in the mirror.”

I felt my eyes getting rheumy as well. Another emotional moment with my mental patient. It was hard but I looked deep into his soft brown eyes. They looked mostly disgruntled and confused. I believed that in this man's lifetime he had experienced a lot of hurt. That's when I noticed something else in his eyes. It looked like a reflection of a dark mysterious shadow. Somebody else had slipped into the room without me knowing. I turned around to face our intruder.

It was the man. The man with the watch.

**THE END**

# Epilogue

## 5 Years Later

Perry and I snuggled up on my couch while we watched my little brother shoot zombies in the head with a plastic gun. I usually don't want him hooking up his Playstation to my television but since it was his birthday today I allowed it. My mental patient ended up having the time of his life performing his last and final show in the courtroom right here in Philly. I patiently waited for ATF special agent Chris Wexel to finish portraying my patient to be a monster before I pulled out the red chip. The creature laughed the whole way through it because he'd never seen those alphabet boys so irate. Unfortunately the judge didn't think it was funny and still had the right to charge him with unlawfully making explosives which is still a felony even though they were duds. I tried to defend the creature the best I could but the judge still insisted he needed to be put away. Secretly I think that's what the creature wanted because he smiled when the judge sentenced him to an insane asylum indefinitely or until a doctor deems him fit for society. I doubted it would ever happen, but a part of me believed that the day would finally come when he could convince a psychiatrist to give him one more shot. Usually every couple of months I go to visit him and he always insist that I read his crazy stories. My favorite one was the story about a man that never talked leading everyone to think he was a mute but he wasn't.

Little Anthony sat there zapping more zombies in the head while I continued to mull about what the creature was up to right now. The last time I visited him he was growing his hair long so the other people couldn't monitor his thoughts. When he's not writing stories he's usually sitting around reading his King James Bible. I wanted to take it from him. I don't feel comfortable with him getting any more outlandish ideas with that thing and I even told one

of his psychiatrists. One day I tried to trade him my NIV Bible but the creature put up a fight and insisted that the NIV version was perverse. He had many Baptist preachers to back him up on that. And what really threw me for a loop? My mental patient was now claiming to be an ordained pastor. He now calls himself Pastor Edwards.

**Meanwhile.....**

Pastor Edwards sat indian style sitting on his bed and reading his Bible while laughing hysterically. He liked the story he was reading about Davy and Goliath. Davy was just a small boy but managed to take down a 9ft. giant with just a single stone to the forehead from his sling shot. Davy had went right for the brain. The creature was learning that the best way to take down your biggest adversary was to go right for the brain and everything else would come tumbling down. Maybe that's why for years shrinks had been focusing on his brain. Did they think he was a monster? He smiled then giggled then smiled once again. His nemesis was right here in the heart of Philadelphia. 26 months the white hats of Philly had shielded him from the sun before he was finally designated to a prison up state in the mountains. The creature smiled even more. He knew exactly what would be considered the *brain* of Philadelphia.

**Meanwhile.....**

**Marty's House by the lake**

The mailman couldn't wait to finish up for the day. It was only his first week on the job and they had started him just two weeks before Christmas. He hadn't had the chance to get familiar with his route yet but he couldn't help himself from stopping to admire the house by the lake. It was a beautiful house made of solid wood with a chimney that looked historic. He doubted anybody lived in it and he'd never seen any cars in the driveway. The mailman pulled alongside of the mailbox but noticed something slightly out of kilter. There was not one mailbox, but rather two this time. Perhaps someone lived there after all and felt the need for a second mailbox. If he didn't know better it looked as though the new mailbox had just magically popped out of the ground because the big pile of mulch below it looked mused and there were even pieces of mulch stuck between the flag. Nonetheless the mailman opened the box and peeked inside. He was rather surprised when he noticed the package. He checked the return address out of curiosity. The package was being mailed by a Judge Hummell. It had Christmas stickers on it and it was addressed to City Hall of Philadelphia. He shook the package a few times just out of curiosity. If he didn't know better it sounded like maybe a bunch of pens. He placed the package inside his Jeep with the rest of the outgoing mail.



### 3 Days later

So much mail was coming into City Hall that it put the security workers in a pissy mood. They didn't like that each and every package had to get screened. Today Nathan and Brian were screening the incoming mail and they had already spent much of the day bickering at one another. Christmas was right around the corner and nobody really felt like working. Nathan was watching the X-ray machine and Brian scrutinized the mail coming off the belt. Brian had spent most of the day daydreaming but Nathan was staying on point. Nathan always stayed on point that's why he always got to watch the X-ray machine. That's when suddenly the belt stopped moving.

"Hey man! What the frick? Why'd you stop it?" Said Brian. He always wanted to speed through these kinds of things so he had more time for cigarette breaks.

"There's a package here I want to check out. It looks kind of funny on the X-ray machine." Said Nate.

"Aw come on man. You want to check out everything. Why don't you go apply at Homeland Security while you're at it." Joked Brian.

Nate picked up a box cutter and carefully cut down the center of the package.

"Hey I'm just taking caution like were supposed to, remember? It looked like a bunch of pens on the X-ray but I just want to be sure. Some lady came in here a week ago and advised us to be extra careful with examining this stuff. You should have seen her Brian. She was hot. Looked just like that tomb raider chick, what's her name, Laura Croft."

Nate pulled down the flaps and found himself staring at a box full of red pens. Nice big pens made of solid nickel.

"Hey whatever dude. I just want to get this show on the road. I'm having a nic fit over here." Said Brian.

Nate picked out a pen from the top and carefully unscrewed it. It was just a pen. He then proceeded to pick up another and unscrew it as well. Brian stood there glowering with his arms crossed.

"Hey come on man. You can't be serious. There's like at least 50 pens in there. Don't tell me you're gonna stand there and unscrew every one of them!"

Nate ignored his coworker and read the writing on the pen. It had the words “City Hall” embossed in gold ink. They appeared to be really nice pens. A paralegal sitting at his desk noticed the two of them arguing about the pens and walked over towards them.

“Hey do you guys think you can keep the noise down ....Oh my gosh are those new pens?” Said the paralegal excitedly.

Nate said, “Yeah it looks like they came from a judge. A Christmas gift to you guys I guess.”

“Aw sweet! Were always looking for pens around here.” He said grabbing the entire box away from Nate.

“What are you doing?” Said Nate.

The paralegal kept the box of pens in the crook of his arm and turned to walk away. Other secretaries and City Hall workers peeked out from their cubicles.

“Hey buddy. We all need pens around here. I’m going to hand these things out.”

Nate and Brian just shrugged their shoulders. It was not their job to stop him. Besides, it would take forever to go through all fifty pens.

The paralegal distributed all 50 pens throughout each cubicle. Every single City Hall employee was delighted to have an extra pen on hand. A 36 year old prosecutor couldn’t wait to get her hands on one of the big red pens. She curled the metal pen tightly around her fingers and then pushed the button.

Mary had spoken once again.

## About The Author

Pastor Edwards is just the ghost writer name for Blake Steidler. Blake was born and raised in the farmlands of Lancaster County PA. Blake is a 2000 graduate and an avid runner who carries a class A CDL along with a Bible certificate from a Bible program. He has survived 10 hospitalizations for psychotic episodes since the age of 17 when he believed his teacher was choking another student but nothing happened. He continues to take his psychotropic meds and write interesting stories.

