

Rise of the  
**IRON EAGLE**

A Novel



Book One

**ROY A. TEEL, JR.**

Rise of the  
**IRON EAGLE**  
A Novel



Book One

ROY A. TEEL, JR.

Rise of The  
Iron Eagle  
A Novel  
Roy A. Teel Jr.

Rise of The Iron Eagle  
A Novel  
Roy A. Teel Jr.  
*The Iron Eagle Series: Book One*



An Imprint of Narrowway Publishing LLC.

Copyright 2014 by Roy A. Teel Jr.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews, without prior written permission of the publisher.



Narrowway Publishing LLC.

Imprint: Narrowway Press

P.O. Box 1431

Lake Arrowhead, California 92352

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

First Edition



Ebook: ISBN: 978-0-9766392-9-9

Teel, Roy A., 1965-

Rise of The Iron Eagle: A Novel, Book One in The Iron Eagle Series/  
Roy A. Teel Jr. — 1st ed. — Lake Arrowhead, Calif. Narrowway Press  
c2014.p. ; cm.ISBN: 978-0-9887025-0-9 (Hardcover)

1. Serial Killers — Fiction. 2. Police, FBI — Fiction 3. Crime — Fiction 4.  
Drama — Fiction  
5. Mystery — Fiction 6. Suspense — Fiction. 7. Romance — Fiction.  
Title.

Book Editing: Finesse Writing and Editing LLC.

Cover and book design: Kathleen Beall Meyer

Author photo: F. E. Arnest

*This novel is dedicated to those who take action  
as opposed to those who have been acted upon.*

## **Also by Roy A. Teel Jr.**

### **Nonfiction:**

*The Way, The Truth, and The Lies: How the Gospels Mislead  
Christians about Jesus' True Message*

*Against the Grain: The American Mega-church  
and its Culture of Control*

### **Fiction:**

*The Light of Darkness: Dialogues in Death: Collected Short Stories  
And God Laughed, A Novel*

*Revenge is an act of passion; vengeance of justice. Injuries are  
revenged; crimes are avenged."*

### **Samuel Johnson**

*"All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing."*

### **Edmund Burke**



Seal of the Iron Eagle

# Chapter One

*“What’s The Iron Eagle?”*

The old man looked at the bum asking the question with disdain. “The Iron Eagle isn’t a thing; it’s a person – if you can call him that. He’s one of the sickest serial killers I’ve ever come across in all my years in this business.” The bum was sitting next to the office building where the old man had his office. “You’s Barry Mullin, ain’t ya?” The old man didn’t answer. “Yea, I recognizes ya from the paper, though it’s been a few years. I heard you’s a drunk, only yous got a home.” The old man didn’t say anything; he just kept walking toward the entrance of the building. He was slow, but he was walking. The bum called out again. “Hey! Yous don’t have to be rude. I knows your face, that’s all. Can yous spares a cuppa bucks for a fellow drunk?” Mullin kept walking. “You snotty piece a shit ... I knows yous gotta few bucks.” The old man yelled back, still walking, “Not for a son-bitch like you.”

He saw Bruce Provonce, the building super, whom he yelled at. “It’s fuckin’ July, asshole, and it’s a hot one. How ‘bout some air?” He kept walking toward the stairs as Bruce yelled back. “You want air, old man? Open a fuckin’ window; and while you’re at it, pay your goddamn rent. You owe me now two weeks back.” The old man brushed him aside with his hand as he started up the four flights of stairs to his office. He pondered the question from the bum, and the fact that the bum had recognized him. It had been a long time since anyone he didn’t know recognized him. He hadn’t been called by his first name in years. He liked being called ‘old man’ because he felt it justified his shitty attitude toward people. He passed one of his neighbors on the way up who offered a friendly greeting. He just shrugged and told him to shut up. He finally made the ascent to his office, unlocked the door, and removed two bottles of cheap scotch and a twelve pack of beer from the brown paper bag he had been carrying under his arm. He knew that Steve Hoffman would be coming soon to retrieve his instructions. He put the beer in the small fridge and placed the two bottles of scotch on an old filing cabinet next to his desk. Bruce had followed him up to his office and was standing in the doorway when he turned around.

“Where’s my fuckin’ rent?” The old man walked over to his easy chair, pulled a cigarette from his pocket, and lit it. “There’s no smoking in this

building, asshole; it's the law. Put it out." Mullin sat down and took a drag and blew the smoke at Bruce. There was an open can of warm beer and a half-eaten bag of whole peanuts next to him on an old TV tray. He grabbed the two and took a drink and popped a few nuts in his mouth. "Look, asshole, I want my damn rent ... now cough it up." Mullin scowled in frustration, finally reaching into his pocket and pulling out a wad of bills with a small white piece of paper wrapped around it. He fanned out the bills and peeled off four hundreds and threw them at Bruce. He walked in to pick up the money then drew back with a look of disgust. "Now was that so damn tough?" The old man didn't respond. "This place smells like a combination of sewer and sweat shop. You're not a hebe. Why don't you shower once in a while? And clean this fuckin' place up; it's a pigsty in here. If the Health Department ever raids me, they'll close me down for good." Mullin just sat drinking his beer. Bruce turned to leave and said, "I'll talk to Steve. He seems to be the only person you listen to anymore. I don't want him to end up an alcohol-soaked bum like you. He has a reputation in this town, a helluva lot better one than you. The boy's educated, and, unlike you, he gives back to society in his work." The old man didn't say a thing. He just sat smoking and drinking. The door closed, and he could hear Bruce mocking the words on his door. "'Barry Mullin, Private Investigator.' You couldn't investigate your head out of your ass." His voice faded as he walked away and down the stairs. The old man yelled back at him. "Don't you go gettin' the boy involved in my business, you son-bitch, or I'll kick your ass."

He sat in his sweltering office, brushing the remnants of peanut shells off his shirt; the sweat had pooled around his neck, and his bald head shined in the afternoon light. His pale thin skin and gaunt face made him look malnourished. He had a cigarette burning between the fingers of his left hand, and the yellow stain from the tar of his smokes had formed a yellowish brown ring around his fingers. Steve came in but didn't say a word. The smell of sweat, body odor, beer, booze, and cigarette smoke hung heavy in the air. He wouldn't be in this environment for anyone but the old man. He had been kind to him in his own way through his formative years. Now in his early thirties, everything he knew about the world and the people in it, or scum as the old man called them, he learned from him. He felt he owed him, so he dealt with the shit that Mullin dealt and helped him.

The old man saw him enter and without saying a word reached into the pocket of his bootcut jeans and pulled out a hundred dollar bill wrapped around a slip of folded white paper and handed it to him. Until Steve broke the silence, the only sound in the room was the hum of an old box fan in the office window. “You sure you want me to do this?” The old man looked up at him with an icy stare. “Boy ... I’ve been doin’ this shit for forty years. I picked up the tip from the police scanner. I know where they think he will strike next, and I’m gonna be there first. Got it?” He nodded. “I’m gonna go get that son-bitch.” The old man’s voice was gravely from years of smoking and drinking. Steve recalled stories the old man had told him about his years as a U.S. Marshal. He had been retired for nearly 20 years and started his own private investigation service right after retirement.

The old man stood up from his chair and walked across the small one room office to a steel desk where papers and folders were strewn all over. There were several full ashtrays on the desk along with the bottles of scotch and a couple of empty and half empty bottles. He reached around to the back, opened the center drawer, and grabbed a carton of cigarettes along with one of the near empty bottles, then pushed some of the papers out of the way and went back to his chair. The wall behind the desk was covered with awards and certificates. Steve remembered the story of the Mission Stalker and how the old man had tracked him down when the cops couldn’t figure out the case. That guy had killed ten people before the old man caught him. There was a yellowing framed front page newspaper in the middle of all of his awards and certificates. The banner headline read, “*America’s Top PI Catches the Mission Stalker – All Can Rest Easy Tonight.*” It was stories like that that had inspired him and kept him trying to help the old man. He had been like a father to Steve, who referred to his biological father as a “sperm donor.” The old man yelled, “Get away from my fuckin’ desk,” as he wiped a dribble of scotch from his chin. His speech was slightly slurred, but he had seen him much worse.

He walked back over to the office door. The old man sat in his chair with a cigarette hanging out of his mouth and ordered Steve to get him another beer from the small refrigerator. He complied and then sat down on the corner of a small filing cabinet next to the office door. “Are you sure about this, old man? I mean, this guy has killed 30 or more folks. He’s not your run of the mill serial



killer.” The old man cracked open the beer and took a sip then sat the can on the arm of his chair and took a deep drag off his cigarette. “You worried ‘bout me boy?” Steve nodded. “Now what the fuck makes you think this guy’s any different from any of the rest of the sons-a-bitches I caught in the past? That university you graduated from messed up your head.” There was a tipping point when speaking to the old man, and once he pissed him off there would be no further opportunity to speak. “This guy’s different ... he’s ... savage.” The old man pressed his back against his chair in a stretch, and with a yawn in his voice said, “We’re all savage, boy...that’s the nature of the beast. Only this guy’s going to be more satisfying to get.” “Why?” “Because he killed my granddaughter.”

There was silence. Steve hadn’t known. “Now, get your ass out of here and get me the things on that paper. Meet me at Legion Park at nine sharp tonight and don’t fuckin’ be late.” Steve left the office and walked out to his car. He pulled the cash and the note from his pocket and went over the things on it. He was surprised by the content of the list: *a box of latex gloves, two bottles of rubbing alcohol, a pair of medical scissors, three two-liter bottles of Pedialyte, two gallons of distilled water, a bag of salt, a bag of sugar,* and a few other items. He looked at the list for a long time before he entered the local drugstore to pick them up. He knew from the items on the list that the old man had more than catching a killer in mind. After he made the purchase he had a few dollars left, so he stopped and bought a sandwich. It was nearly seven, and he had some time to kill. He nervously watched as the second hand on the clock on Jerry’s Deli wall clicked in steady persistence toward an unknown future.



Back at his office, the old man was packing a bag with every kind of medical supply imaginable. He had two collapsible IV poles and IV and catheter tubing. He placed several vials of a prescription anesthetic that he could dissolve into an inhalable solution to knock out his prey, as well as several different kinds of surgical tools, into the bag. He also pulled a nine millimeter handgun out of his desk drawer and placed it in his shoulder holster. He placed two twelve gauge shotguns in his bag with several large syringes and needles in sealed medical kits. He had his own emergency room, and he was taking it all with him. One thing was certain – he wasn’t planning on turning this sicko over to the police.

He had plans of his own.



Legion Park was right off Interstate 10 in Boyle Heights, one of the roughest parts of Los Angeles. If you were looking for anything illegal ... this was your shopping center. Drugs, guns, hookers, anything a low life scum could want was there. The old man pulled into a parking spot well away from the action in a dark corner of the lot. He sat in the car with the window half down, smoking a cigarette when he heard the sound of Steve's car pull in next to him. The old man popped his trunk open and didn't make a move. He sat there enjoying his smoke, waiting for the goods to be placed in the trunk. The old man was a well-known figure in the park, the only "white boy" allowed according to the local gangs. He had no concerns about the element. Hell, he passed out there at least twice a month after dropping off one of the girls he picked up for entertainment. It was a strange relationship he had with this element.

He was a former law man and every one of them knew it, but for some reason they watched out for him. He couldn't count how many times he had woken up the next day in his car after passing out – the key in the ignition; the windows up in winter, down in summer. If the weather was cold, he would find himself, at minimum, with his jacket on, but most of the time someone covered him with an old blanket, usually one of the local homeless people, and lit a trash can fire next to the car. If it was summer, the windows would be down and depending on how he passed out, pants on or off, he would always find all of his belongings, including cash and weapons, right where he had left them. In some strange way, they respected the old man for who he was and the things he had done, and they thought of him as one of their own. He never would acknowledge it, though. He would often berate the locals for doing their business, but they would move on to another location and leave him be. Steve called it the scum bag neighborhood watch. The old man laughed his ass off the first time he ever heard the term, but deep down he knew it was true.

He heard a thump in his trunk, and the lid slammed down. Steve slid into the passenger seat. The night was as hot as the day, and he had the engine running so the air-conditioning would give him some relief. "You want me to go with you?" The old man never looked over at him. "Nope ... best you get on home, boy ... you don't want no part of this collar." He looked on as Steve sat motionless. He

grabbed the passenger door handle and pulled but didn't open the door. "You aren't looking to arrest this guy are you?" He knew the question was rhetorical. The old man didn't answer. "Well, old man, I think that's a helluva stupid idea you're planning. I would also be remiss if I didn't warn you not to take the law into your own hands. Remember that college that you say messed up my head? I followed your lead, and you taught me everything I know, so I have to go on the record here as a special agent and tell you not to do this." There was a pause and silence in the car as he continued. "I understand why you're doing it, but you're not going to come out on the success end of this one. I've spoken my piece. You do what you want to. I think you should leave this up to me and the Sheriff's Department. We'll catch him."

Not a move, not a comment, just a dead stare out the front windshield. Steve pushed the door the rest of the way open. "As far as I'm concerned, we never had this conversation." There was no response. He stepped out of the car then bent down and looked at the old man and said, "You know, I've got your back if you want it." The old man just nodded as he stubbed out his cigarette in the overflowing ashtray. He never looked over at Steve. "You can ignore me 'til the cows come home, old man, but you know as well as I do that if you go after The Iron Eagle alone he's going to kill you." He didn't respond, just motioned for him to close the car door. "I'll say my goodbyes to you now, and thank you for helping me become the man I am today." Mullin didn't respond; he just waved his hand and drove away. Steve got into his car and started to follow him at a distance. He knew the old man could pick up a tail with little effort, but he felt he needed to try. He lost sight of him, as he thought he would, as Mullin turned onto Elm Street.



Eleven thirty-two was the time on the clock in the old man's car when he parked outside Sumner Mill Works. It had been a wood manufacturing plant until the recession hit and the owners shut it down. At one point in the history of the plant, half the population of Boyle Heights had been employed there. Hell, he even worked there as a kid just before he was drafted in '69. He sat watching the locked gates. The area was quiet, and there was no activity. Mullin knew in those moments that he wasn't alone. He was out there, somewhere, watching.



Behind a wood pile, a pair of eyes with night vision goggles was watching the parked car. The black figure moved silently in the direction of the vehicle. The old man lit a cigarette and waited for movement, any movement, so he could take his revenge. He took a drag off the smoke and put his head back on the headrest – the red hot cherry tip of his smoke the only light in the car – when suddenly he heard the passenger side door handle being pulled. He reached for the gun on his right side, but he never got there as suddenly everything went black.



“You came to kill me,” said a disembodied voice out of sight of the old man. His head was foggy, and the voice was being disguised. He tried to look around, but he felt sick. “Are you confused as to where you are?” He tried to move, but he was restrained to a chair. He bent his head forward and threw up. The fog in his head was lifting, and he could see a light in the corner of the room. He felt a hand on his back patting him like a child, and then he felt the restraints being removed from his wrists. He moved to stand up, only to fall on the concrete floor into his own vomit. He moved his feet, but he had leg irons on. He lay for several minutes on the cold floor. It felt good against his body – the smell of his own stomach contents of no concern in the moment. He was now almost fully alert and called out, “Where are you, you son-bitch?” His voice echoed off the walls of what appeared to be an empty room. The voice responded, “I’m right over here, Barry.” He looked in the direction of the voice and saw the silhouette of a person in a doorway. From his vantage point he couldn’t make out any details, just a fuzzy figure with a very bright light behind it.

“How the fuck do you know my name? No one calls me that.” He saw the hulking figure dressed all in black head towards him, no discernible face with the light shining in the old man’s eyes. “Now now, Barry. Is that any way to speak to an old friend? I suppose you would prefer that I call you ‘old man,’ right? If you ask me, it’s just downright disrespectful for a man of your reputation.” The voice kept moving around, and the old man couldn’t figure out where it was coming from. “Your head is getting clearer, correct?” Mullin rolled onto his back and fought to sit up while yelling, “Fuck you, asshole! Where are you, mother fucker?” He felt a strong pair of hands grab him under his arms and start dragging him toward the door. He still couldn’t see his captor, but he could

feel his feet dragging on the smooth concrete floor toward the brightly lit doorway. He felt his body being lifted into the air and then gently laid down on a flat, soft surface. “Barry, Barry, please keep the profanity down. I’m a sensitive person. I would never speak to you in such a manner.”

Mullin realized that he was lying on a bed, and he felt the hands as they gently tied each of his wrists to it. “You haven’t answered my question, Barry. I asked if you came here to kill me.” “You’re goddamn right I’m here to kill you, you son-bitch.” He felt the arms release him and watched as the figure walked to the end of the bed. There, in front of him, stood a man dressed all in hospital white. He was wearing a surgeon’s hat and mask with a helmet on with a clear glass eye protector. “Nice disguise, asshole!” There was no response. He just stood there looking at him. He had no way of determining the height, weight or facial features of his captor. He had no idea how high off the floor the bed he was laying on was, and the voice was definitely disguised. “You said I know you, asshole. Who the fuck are you really?” He saw the man move toward a table and pull open the bag that the old man had packed at his office. He began unpacking the contents and laying them on two small steel tables, weapons on one table, tools on another.

“Barry, were you really going to use these things on me?” He didn’t respond. “Cat got your tongue, Barry? I asked you a question.” The old man didn’t say a thing. He could feel his heart beating quickly in his chest, and he was starting to have trouble breathing. “You know who I am, Barry, and if I didn’t know better I would think from the contents of this bag that you were planning to drug and torture me.” There was a bit of a laugh. “Tell me that I’m wrong.” Mullin laid there for a few seconds and then said, “You killed my granddaughter, you son-bitch, and I’m gonna kill you.” The man never turned; he just kept placing the tools on the tray, and once the bag had been emptied he placed it on a chair near the bed and rolled the table over next to him.

“I didn’t know she was your granddaughter when I killed her, Barry. If I had known that at the time, I would never have separated the two of you. She was a bad girl, Barry, and she was trying to cover up for you. You are a very, very bad man, and you have been covering up an even bigger secret for a friend, haven’t you?” “What the hell do you know?” the old man blurted out. “In all honesty, by a slip the three of you made. I know your friend’s depraved, Barry, and I know



where to find him. Want to tell me about it? I will make this quick and painless if you will give me more details.” “Go fuck yourself. You don’t know shit. There’s no way you could know shit... I’m not telling you anything.” “Have it your way. I suppose I should allow you some time to think over the things I have asked you about.” The old man started to calm down a little. “You said I know you, but I don’t recognize you or your voice.” The man turned to face him and moved a bright light over him obstructing the view of his face. “You do know me; you know me well. You have been tracking me for several years. As I said, if I had known that Jill Makin was your granddaughter things would have been different; I do deeply apologize for the pain you must have endured. I certainly understand why you would want to kill me. It’s way out of character for you though, Barry. You have always pretended to be a law abiding person; however, pretenses eventually come into the light, don’t they? You should be ashamed of yourself.”

“Ashamed my ass, you son-bitch. You let me go now, and I will spare you your life.” The man reached behind the old man’s head for something while responding, “Ah, you will let me live, but you would still deny me my freedom. I have to admit, Barry, I don’t believe you. I’m quite certain that if the roles were reversed you would not be letting me go or even listening to any argument that I had in my defense.” “You have no argument in your defense, asshole. You are a murdering son-bitch, and I came to stop you.” “By murdering me?” He resisted the restraints and said, “I’d be doin’ society a favor.” He heard the sound of an electric motor behind his head, and he knew that it was the sound of a saw or a drill. “So you’re apologizing to me for killing my granddaughter, and now you’re going to kill me?” “Ironic, huh?” His heart began to beat fast again, and a sense of fear gripped him that he had never felt before. “Wait ... we can work this out. Answer a question for me.” He heard the clink of metal hitting metal on the table next to him. “Of course, Barry, anything.” “Why did you kill my grandbaby?”

There was some rustling around, and he saw the man’s hands come toward him with a pair of scissors, and he began to cut his shirt open.” “She was hardly a baby. She was a U.S. Marshal just like her grandfather, and she was getting a little too close for my comfort and my cause. She knew my true identity, and she knew that I knew what you’d been doing. She knew about the cover-up that you were assisting your friend with, but this is nothing new. You know all this.” He

pulled the shirt open and then cut open his undershirt. “I see you still like to wear those ‘wife beaters.’” Barry started freaking out as the cold steel pressed against the skin of his chest. “Look ... even if I know you, I will keep quiet, just let me go. I only know you as The Iron Eagle. I don’t want to see your face. If I know you, I can tell you that you have done a great job of disguising your voice and your appearance. There’s no way I could ever identify you based on what I’ve seen. So, if you do feel bad about my granddaughter, show your remorse and let me go.” He felt something cold being slathered on his chest, and he began to scream.

“Barry, Barry ... calm down, calm down. You don’t think that I’m going to make you feel any pain, do you? You finally identified me by that nickname that has followed me for so many years – a nickname you and Jim O’Brian put on me in the beginning. At least Jim has had the decency to stay bound to his convictions. I bear him no ill will.” The old man was surprised by that response. “No ... you’re not going to hurt me. You feel bad about my granddaughter and what you did to her. You’re going to let me go ... right?” He felt a prick and then a sting in his right arm and looked down to see that an IV had been put in. He kept talking as The Eagle injected something into the IV, and he started to feel numb. His head was clear, but he couldn’t feel the restraints or the coldness of his chest or the room. The Eagle moved over to look in Barry’s eyes, and he could see that he was feeling no pain, but he wanted to be certain.

“Barry ... I need you to focus. Do you see this scalpel in my hand?” He nodded slowly. “I’m going to touch your skin. Tell me if it feels cold, okay?” The old man blurted out some obscenities, but he didn’t feel anything. There were a few minutes of silence between the two, then the sound of the motor started, and he could feel pressure in his chest. Blood and bone fragments were striking him in his face. He couldn’t scream; he was out of breath. The giant hands placed a steel cage over his chest, and he recognized the contraption from many an autopsy as a rib spreader ... and it was being pressed into his chest. There were a few more moments of silence between the two men. The old man could feel pressure as if someone were pulling his chest apart, then The Eagle stood to the old man’s side and said, “Barry, I want to show you something.” He saw The Eagle’s hands reach down into his chest and pull out a beating heart. At first, he was so amazed at what he saw that he didn’t realize that the heart he was

seeing was his own. He could actually see it beating faster and faster as his anxiety level rose. He felt no pain; he was in shock.

“Barry,” The Eagle said in a calm voice. He looked in the direction of The Eagle’s voice and at his face. He laid the heart on his chest in plain view and moved his hands toward his head. “Barry ... I’m truly sorry for the pain I caused you. I hope that you will find it in your heart to forgive me. You have caused a great deal of pain yourself, and you have gone to great pains to make sure that no one knows the truth about you and the others. I’m going to leave public perception of you alone. The truth will come out at some point.” The Eagle lifted Mullin’s heart to show it to him again. He continued, “I wish we could continue our dialogue, but I have a commitment I must keep, so I’m going to kill you now.” He placed the heart on the old man’s chest and then took off the helmet and mask that he had been wearing. The old man’s eyes grew large. “It’s you, son-bitch; it’s you...you been fuckin’ with all of us all along! How could you?” The Eagle threw the head gear on the floor and said, “I would have thought you’d have some more creative last words, but then, look who I’m talking to.” And with a quick sweep, he clamped the old man’s aorta shut, and the blood supply to the brain was cut off. He watched as the old man’s pupils dilated, and in a matter of seconds without a word he was dead.

# Chapter Two

*'Steve went back to his house to shower and dress for the day which he knew was going to be a long one.'*

**T**he buzz of his cell phone roused Steve from sleep. It was still dark outside, and he groped for the flashing phone. "Hoffman," his voice groggy and sounding like he had been in a deep sleep. His wife, Molly, roused in bed next to him but only for a moment. There were a few seconds of listening while lying back on his pillow in the dark, then he sat straight up in bed and turned on the nightstand light. "Okay. I'll be there as fast as I can." He jumped out of bed and threw on the clothes he had been wearing when he met the old man the night before. Molly sat up in bed as he moved around the room but never spoke. Within minutes he was pulling into the same parking lot he had pulled out of just a few short hours earlier at Legion Park. There was yellow crime scene tape in the distance. There were several locals who frequented the park still hanging around. It was four fifteen a.m. when he parked. He jumped out and walked up to one of the officers on crowd control, flashed his FBI ID and asked, "Where's Jim?" The cop pointed off in the direction of the crime scene tape which he could see was all around the old man's parked car. He walked toward the car, but he knew what he was going to see.

He saw Jim standing at the back of the car talking to one of his officers. Jim O'Brian was true to his Irish heritage; he was a fourth generation cop. Steve always joked with him because at 5'8" and 240 pounds Jim was a heart attack waiting to happen. He carried the bulk of the weight in his belly. Steve had tried for years to get him on a diet and exercise plan, but he would have nothing to do with it. His red hair and freckles looked like liver spots in the glow of the street lights. His uniform was, as usual, unkempt, and he had a cigarette in his hand as Steve approached.

"We have a hell of a mess here, Steve." Jim had been a detective in the homicide division of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department for 20 years. He and the old man had been very close friends. They were in the marshal's office together until Jim was shot arresting a fugitive and had to retire from the force. He had to convalesce for almost a year after which he joined the LA County Sheriff's Department. He liked dealing with homicides; it kept him on

the streets and in a controlled environment. He was also a master at puzzles, and he looked at each crime scene as a puzzle that he needed to put together to catch the killer. Steve took a look around; outside of the crime scene tape, there was little out of the ordinary.

“Who found him?” “Good question. Dispatch received a 911 call about a half hour ago that there was a body in the park. We sent a unit out to take a look around, and they found the old man’s car and him inside.” He looked around at the few people who were not police. “Did anyone see anything?” Jim grabbed an extra pair of blue latex gloves and handed them to Steve. “Not so far. We’ve talked to everyone who was here when the first patrol came in, and they all said the car was just sitting there. No one thought there was anything out of the ordinary. Hell, Steve, if we hadn’t gotten the 911 call we probably wouldn’t have known about it until morning. Even my deputies don’t bother with his car if they see it here ‘cuz he’s here so much.” Steve nodded and put on the gloves. The two men walked over to the car. The driver side door was open, and he could see the old man sitting in the front seat with something on his chest. He asked for a flashlight, and when he shined it on the old man, he just shook his head.

“What?” asked Jim. “I saw him yesterday afternoon and then again here in the park about nine p.m. last night. “What did he say when you saw him?” He looked at the old man’s body in the car. His chest was open, and his heart was resting between his open chest and the steering wheel. “Shit Jim ... he was half drunk and in a mood. He said that he had picked up a tip on where to find The Eagle.” Jim shook his head. “I don’t know of any LAPD messages about The Iron Eagle. There haven’t been any killings attributed to him since that U.S. Marshal ... What was her name?” Steve interrupted, “Jill Makin.” Jim laughed. “Shit. I can never remember her name. That’s the last killing that we have connected to that case. This case has none of the hallmarks of that killer. What made you bring it up?” Jim shuffled his feet in the dirt and sand next to the car. “You didn’t know Makin. She was his granddaughter.” “WHAT? We never had any connection between Barry and the victim.”

Steve walked back over to the car and took a closer look with the flashlight. Nothing that he saw had any of the earmarks of The Iron Eagle. He called out to Jim and asked, “What do you think the cause of death was?” He walked back to the car, looking in over Steve’s shoulder with the light shining on Barry’s body.



“Well, I’m no medical examiner, but I would say the cause of death was having his heart ripped out of his chest. That seems to me like a surefire way to die. What do you think?” Steve wasn’t amused. “Okay, smart ass. Are you done with the jokes? Can we do a little police work, or do you need to work out your standup routine for the coroner?” Jim apologized, and the two men examined the body more closely.

Jim grabbed a midi recorder from his pocket and began to make notes of the crime scene. Just as he started speaking, the crime scene photographer showed up and started snapping pictures. Steve whirled around and snapped at him. “Get the fuck out of here. We’re trying to process a crime scene.” The photographer snapped back, “What the fuck do you think I’m trying to do? A Victoria’s Secret shoot?” Steve got his composure and said, “Give us a few minutes, okay?” The photographer backed off, and Steve turned back to the car. The two men studied the body. They knew they couldn’t touch it until the coroner was on scene, so they had to do the best they could with their eyes. Jim noted that there was some kind of steel clip on the old man’s chest. Steve looked in closer and knew right away what it was. “You’re right on the money, man, only it’s not just a clip; it’s a surgical clamp, and it’s on his aorta.” They looked at each other and then said what they were thinking simultaneously, “Pre or post-mortem?” Steve looked at the wound and the clip then pulled his head out of the car. “If I had to venture a guess, premortem. The old man was alive when he was cut open.”

Jim pulled out of the car as well and said, “The son of a bitch cut his heart out while he was alive? Jesus Christ ... this is a new one for me. This is not the work of The Iron Eagle.” Steve walked to the rear of the car and sat down on a parking block. Jim followed and sat beside him. “Have you put a call in to your team yet?” Jim asked. Steve just sat for a few minutes not saying a word, trying to gather his thoughts. A few moments later he said, “No. I got your call and came right over. You were too cryptic in your message. When you told me your guys found the old man’s car here in the park I figured he passed out or something.” Jim pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and taped the top until one fell into his palm. He lit it and took a couple of hits. “Well, it’s my jurisdiction for now unless you think it’s The Eagle, then you should send in the forensic team from your local field office.” Steve pulled his cell phone from his hip and hit speed dial.

“This is Special Agent Hoffman, ID 556554A. I need you to send my team to Legion Park; we have a homicide.” Jim looked down at the ground; the sun was starting to rise, and there was a faint glow on the asphalt at his feet. The coroner’s van pulled up, and he was about to go meet with them when he said, “Steve, I know you two were close. You’ve called your team, so you obviously think this is the work of The Eagle. Are you taking over my investigation?” He stood up as did Jim and said, “No ... let’s work this one with mutual cooperation. If this was the work of The Eagle, this takes things into a whole new realm. I think it’s best that we stay together on this. Agreed?” He reached out his hand to Jim who shook it and walked over to the coroner’s van. He called out to all of his people as Steve’s FBI vans were pulling into the park.

“Okay people, here’s the deal. This is going to be a joint department investigation; we will be taking the lead, and all information on the investigation will be relayed to the FBI through Special Agent Hoffman and his team. We all know each other, so let’s be good boys and girls and see if we can find the person who killed our friend Barry. I know you all knew him as the old man, but he’s gone and we need to work with his name. As you all also know, Steve and Barry were very close, so let’s show a little sensitivity in the handling of this matter. Let’s go people. There’s a killer out there, and we’re going to find him.” Steve walked over to the first van and spoke to his team leader and explained the situation. Everyone went to work processing the scene. Steve went back to his house to shower and dress for the day which he knew was going to be a long one.

# Chapter Three

*'He called out to the firemen who were still on scene, and they were able to use pry bars to open the makeshift door. No one was prepared for what they would find on the other side.'*

Every street has its secrets. Lives lived undercover, that neighbor who's just a bit off. The one who doesn't talk to people or, just the opposite, seems to be in everyone's business and is a neighborhood leader or gossip. The person who grew up in the area. Everyone knows him or her, or so they think. Elk Drive is like any ordinary street in West Covina, California: streets lined with hundred-year-old oaks, manicured lawns, and friendly neighbors who look out for one another. Stew Roskowski is the kind of neighbor anyone would want to have. He has lived in the upper middle class neighborhood for three decades. He's the principal at the local middle school and is a pillar of the community. He does fundraisers for his school, runs several after-school programs for his students, and often throws pool parties and other celebrations at his home for his students and their parents during the school year. One of the things he is best known for is his summer block party. The neighborhood blocks off the street on the first day of summer break, and there's a big celebration for those students moving on to high school, as well as those students who've worked hard all year. Stew's known for his dedication to his students and for running one of the finest schools in the San Gabriel Valley. He received the mayor's citation as a community leader the previous winter, and he's also well respected in academic circles for the way he turned the school around when he took it over five years earlier. Prior to that, it was an underperforming, dilapidated school with poor attendance and was fraught with gang and drug problems. However, when Stew took over, things changed in a hurry, and over the five years since he became principal, the school became a poster campus for others in the county and the country to emulate.

Stew always looked forward to this time of year, but this year was different. There was a heaviness in the air. One of their beloved eighth graders went missing two weeks before the end of the school year. There were posters all over the area, and the police and other local law enforcement had been scouring the area looking for any clues to her disappearance. Stew stood before the

neighborhood on a small platform where a band had been set up and asked for quiet from the crowd. The stage was built in the middle of the street right in front of his house. He held a microphone close to his mouth and asked for a moment of silence for Cheryl Pruitt, one of his students, and prayed for her quick return to her family who was present in the crowd. He spoke of his time with her and what a wonderful student she was and asked that anyone with information on her disappearance please contact local law enforcement. Her parents were teary-eyed as he made a plea to the person or persons who took Cheryl, asking only for her safe return.

He said, "I know that this is a bittersweet party this year. The Pruitt family will be holding a candlelight vigil for Cheryl tonight at First Trinity Church on Palmer Avenue. Please come and show your support for Cheryl and her family. And, please, please, if you know anything about her disappearance, contact law enforcement right away. We want Cheryl back safely with her family and with her school family."

He held up a poster and pointed to a table where people could pick up information and posters. He encouraged people to post them everywhere they could. He invited Cheryl's father to come up and make a public plea for her safe return. The local media was there, and they walked amongst the party goers doing interviews and getting information on what Cheryl was wearing along with her description for their nightly news broadcast. Stew took back the microphone from her grief-stricken father and said, "Cheryl is five feet, two inches tall with green eyes and long blond hair. She was last seen wearing a pink blouse with blue jeans and white tennis shoes. She has an infectious laugh and a wonderful smile. So please help us bring her home safely." The festivities finished up about five p.m., and Stew helped the rest of the neighborhood to clean up and put their street back in working order. He then bid farewell to his neighbors and went home to clean up before joining the vigil at nine that night.

He walked up the manicured entry to his colonial style home, waving at his neighbor who had just returned home from work. He unlocked the door and walked into the kitchen to put some things away that he had brought to the party. He was just setting down a dish in the sink when he heard a rustling noise coming from one of the back bedrooms. There, on a small double bed, lay Cheryl Pruitt, nude and tied at the wrists and ankles to the bed frame. She was

gagged, and her face was streaked with tears of fear, pain, and sadness. “What the hell is going on in here, young lady?” he asked while walking over to the bed and checking her restraints to make sure they were intact. “What did you do?” He looked around the room to see if there was anything out of place. All of his sex toys were where they belonged; nothing seemed out of the ordinary. He picked up a small whip and walked over to the bed and struck the child on the torso. “You behave yourself. Did you enjoy my speech and hearing your daddy asking for you to come home safe?” The little girl had already been crying; the pain of the whip only exacerbated it. Now she was in hysterics. Stew just laughed and threw a blanket over her lower half and said, “You should be ashamed being undressed and uncovered like that. You deserve to be punished. I will deal with you in a few minutes.” He walked out of the room smiling and humming as he went back to the kitchen.

The house had been built back in the 1930’s and was one of the few homes in the area that had a basement. He walked through the kitchen to an old painted green door that led to the basement. He turned on the light and walked down into the musty cold room. In the corner of the basement were five cages used for keeping dogs, only instead of dogs three of the five cages had young girls in them. All were malnourished and nude, bruised, and cold based on the fetal position they were all in. “Hello, my pets,” he said with a smile and a friendly voice. They made no sound. He walked over to a set of cabinets and pulled a box off one of the shelves. It was full of photographs of him and young girls. There were hundreds. He looked at several of them and as he did he became aroused. He knew he didn’t have time to act out his arousal on Cheryl right then; he had to shower and dress for her vigil. He took three photographs with him when he went back upstairs. He spoke both to himself and the caged children, “I will feed you pets when I return home.” He smiled and walked over to the cages and poked one of the girls with his finger. She jumped, and he let out a laugh. “Then I will introduce you all to my newest pet. We are going to have so much fun.”

He went back upstairs to the master bath, disrobed, and walked into the shower. He had pinned the photographs of him raping a young girl to the back shower wall so they wouldn’t get wet. He stepped into the shower and slathered petroleum jelly on his penis and began to masturbate, all the while staring and smiling at the pictures. The semen shot out of his cock with ferocity as he looked



at the photograph of Cheryl Pruitt screaming in agony impaled on his cock, his arms holding her on top of him facing away from him in the direction of the camera. “Oh, how I can’t wait for the opportunity to do the same to your asshole, little Cheryl, my little beauty,” he whispered to himself as the aching in his groin ceased. He then soaped up and finished his bathing.

He had just shut off the water and was starting to shave when he heard the sound of something heavy fall in one of the rooms. He walked toward the room where Cheryl was when he heard the sound again. It was coming from her room. He opened the hall closet and pulled out a piece of barbed wire. “If she thinks she’s going to cause a commotion before her vigil she has another thing coming,” he muttered as he opened the bedroom door. Sure enough she wasn’t on the bed. “Oh God, she’s escaped. I’ll be ruined.” The room was very small. There were only two places she could hide: under the bed or in the bedroom closet. The bedroom door was locked with a double-sided keyed deadbolt; there was no way she could exit that way, and the windows were barred. He looked under the bed, but she wasn’t there. “Cheryl,” he called out softly. “If you come out of the closet now, I will not punish you for misbehaving.” He held the barbed wire high over his head, ready to strike the child the second she came out of the closet. The door knob turned, and the closet door opened a crack. He moved closer until his face was almost against the door. His flabby, fat, nude frame was ready to press against the door in the hopes of pinning her, so he could beat her soundly with the wire, but there was no further movement.

He was getting angry and knew he had to get to the vigil or people might think something was up. He didn’t have the patience, and he said as he grabbed the door knob, “You brought this on yourself.” He flung the door open and moved with a sweep of the wire downward. The wire didn’t hit anything inside but imbedded itself into his thigh causing him to scream. He fell back onto the floor, trying to pull the barbed wire out of his flesh, when suddenly a tall, powerful figure dressed all in black stepped out of the closet and grabbed him by the throat. He picked Stew up with one hand, all two hundred and fifty pounds of him, and threw him across the bedroom, his body hitting the wall and knocking him unconscious above the bed where Cheryl had been restrained.



“911. What is your emergency?” There was no sound on the other end of the

line. The dispatcher asked again, but there was still no reply. She kept the line open and could see from her reverse directory the address of the caller. The address on ElkDrive was flashing on her screen, and she kept trying to speak to whoever was on the other end of the line. She suddenly heard deep breathing as if someone was asleep but no other noise. The dispatcher looked at her call log and saw that unit 57 was the closest patrol in the neighborhood. “Unit 57. This is Dispatch. We have a 911 in your area. Over.” “This is 57. Send us the address, and we’ll run. What’s the situation? Over.” “57, I have a caller on the line, nonresponsive to dialogue, not sure if they’re down or what, but there is someone on the line. Over.” “Roger that, Dispatch. We have the address and are en route. Over.”

She held the line as she waited for a response from the dispatched unit. She heard knocking on the door of the house and the calls of the officers through the open phone line. “This is the police. Open up.” “Dispatch, it looks like a faked 911 here. There’s an alarm company sticker in the front window and a sign in the yard. Looks like a crank call. Over.” The dispatcher responded, “Roger. I don’t think so, 57. I can hear heavy breathing on the other end of the line. Over.” “Unit 57 here. The door is locked. You want to call the alarm company and see if the homeowners are in town? This could be someone ‘SWATTING’ the homeowner. Over.” At that moment, she could hear the voice of the officer’s partner coming toward him saying that he had been around the whole house, and there was a broken lower window going into what looked like a basement. “Dispatch, it looks like we have forced entry. Send backup. Over.” “Roger 57. Backup is en route. Over.” “Roger that. We’re going to force entry. Over.” The dispatcher could hear the sound of glass breaking and the thud of the officer’s bodies against the front door of the home. It seemed to the dispatcher like an hour of silence when there was a call back. “Dispatch. We need an ambulance and fire to this location. Over.” The dispatcher sent out the distress call. She held the line a few more moments waiting to be cleared to hang up. “Dispatch. Backup is on scene, and we can hear the ambulance. We are going to need two more ambulances stat. Over.” “Roger 57. Units are en route. What’s the situation? Over.” There was a lot of commotion in the background before the officer radioed back. “Well, Dispatch, we have found four young girls. One of them appears to be the missing Pruitt girl. We can’t confirm that yet. Over.” “Copy

that, 57. I'm patching you over to command. Good work. Over." "Good work to you, Dispatch. Can you get me the name of the owner of this property?" "Roger 57. The owner is Mr. Stewart Roskowski. Over." "Roger that. It looks like we broke up a kidnapping. Send in a detective unit. Over." "Roger that, 57. Is the homeowner on the premises? Over." "That's a negative, Dispatch. Over." "Roger. Patching you through. Over."

Jim's unit was sent in from LA County to investigate with West Covina PD. When he arrived on scene, he asked where the homicide was but no one had an answer. He was told that four young girls had been found alive, between eight and fourteen; three had been in cages in the basement; the fourth was, indeed, Cheryl Pruitt, who told the police that she was rescued by a man who hid her behind him in the closet of the home. Jim walked up to speak to the first two officers on scene and asked why homicide had been called in. They both shrugged their shoulders. "So let me get this straight. You two have your guns and badges, and you're cops. Jesus Christ! I just drove all the way from downtown. I'm a homicide detective not a missing person locator. Now someone better give me a good goddamn reason why I'm here!" He scowled as one of the West Covina PD detectives emerged from the house sheet white. Jim recognized him and called out, "Tony. What the fuck is going on? Do you have a homicide here, or are you stiffs busting my balls?" Tony only nodded. Jim talked to the first two officers on scene, and they explained that they found the missing Pruitt girl. They didn't know much else. Jim asked where the girl was, and they pointed to an ambulance with the back doors open. He walked over to the unit where the little girl was. She was sitting in an ambulance awaiting transport when he went over to speak to her. She was wrapped in a blanket, and the paramedics were setting an IV as she sat shivering.

"Cheryl, my name is Detective O'Brian, sweetheart." She jolted from the prick of the IV needle. "It's okay, honey; you're safe. The paramedics are going to take you to the hospital. We've called your mom and dad; you will be together soon." She started to cry. "I need to ask you some quick questions. Can you understand me?" She nodded. "How did you get to Mr. Roskowski's house?" She was shaking badly but he needed to get what he could from her now. The paramedics gave her five milligrams of Valium to relax her, and she started to calm down. "Did you hear what I asked you, Cheryl?" She nodded. "Can you

tell me?” “Mr. Roskowski invited me to his house after finals.” Jim held his midi recorder to take her statement. “Did Mr. Roskowski bring you to his house from school?” She shook her head. “Then how did you get to his house?” She told him that he asked her to walk to a grocery store about a mile from school. He had some errands to run, and he would meet her there. She said that when she got there she saw the front of his car behind the store, so she walked back to see if he was there. “When you got to the back of the store was he there?” She shook her head. “Do you know where he was?” She shook her head again. “Do you remember how you got to his house?” Once more, she shook her head and started to slip off to sleep.

Jim put his hand on her head and asked, “Did Mr. Roskowski do bad things to you here in his house?” She was starting to fall asleep as she replied, “I woke up, and I was in a room on a bed. Mr. Roskowski came in and told me to take off my clothes. I told him no, and he hit me with a long stick. I begged him not to hit me. I begged him, but he hit me again, so I took off my clothes. Then he took off his clothes and started taking pictures of me. I did all he asked, so he wouldn’t hit me anymore, but he wouldn’t stop.” Jim could see the trauma in her face. Her eyes were red, and she was bruised on her face and arms. “One last question, Cheryl. Did Mr. Roskowski touch you?” She was almost asleep but whispered to Jim as she was going out, “He put things inside me. He put his penis inside me. He hurt me, he hurt me ... screaming, I was screaming.” The Valium finally lulled her to sleep, and Jim turned off the recorder. He softly told her, “It’s over, Cheryl; you’re safe. It’s going to be okay,” and he stepped out of the ambulance.

Once the ambulance was out of sight, he went back into the house. “How are the other three girls?” “They’re a mess, Jim. Someone hurt them really, really bad.” “Sexual assault?” The young female detective he was speaking to from the WCPD was really shook up. “I need you to focus. Are the first arriving officers still here?” She pointed to two officers standing off to the side near the front door. One was tall, thin, and looked to be in his early forties. The other, five foot eight and a more muscular build and also much younger. Jim walked over to them as they were getting ready to clear the call and get back on patrol. “Other than the girls, was there anyone else in the house?” The tall officer responded, “Yes. A body. We received a dispatch from a 911 operator. At first I thought it was a false alarm, then my partner came back from canvassing the house and

found signs of forced entry. So we called for backup and made entry.” “Is that when you found the girls?” “No ... we started to search the house, and we found the first girl in a back bedroom on the floor. I recognized her right away as the missing Pruitt girl.” “What about the other girls?” “My partner started through the house. He heard screaming, but he couldn’t tell where it was coming from. When backup arrived, they started to search the residence and found a basement. When they entered, they found the other three girls, nude and locked in dog kennels.” “And the dead body?” “There was a horrible smell. I recognized it immediately as the smell of death, but we had not cleared the house at that point. The body was discovered by backup.” “Any sign of the homeowner?” “Negative. We searched after we had the girls and the house secured but no sign.” “Do you know if anything else was found?” He nodded, “Yea ... go to the basement. It will answer all of your questions.” “Did you know who the homeowner was when you were first called on scene?” “No ... but Dispatch gave me the information once we had made entry. It’s Stewart Roskowski, the principal at Coston Middle School.” Jim nodded and walked back into the house.

The neighborhood was abuzz with news and police choppers. There were neighbors milling around and none of them knew what was going on. He could hear people asking questions, but there were no answers. He walked back into the house and grabbed a pair of blue latex gloves and started to look around. He heard a voice call up to him from the basement. “Detective, you need to see this.” He walked down the stairs, and one of his deputies was standing over a box of nude photos of children.” “Looks like we got ourselves a real pervert here.” Jim nodded. The basement was now well lit, and he could see the kennels where the girls had been kept. He looked around more and saw several more boxes of photos. There was a strange mix of old and new photographic technology. Everything from old black and whites to Polaroids and other types of film and more modern digital photographs. A yellow tarp covered the body, and he could see that the figure was small. He walked to the back of the basement and leaned against the wall, and when he did the wall gave way. He pushed on it a little more and called out to two of his people to come over to try and help him open the door, but it was somehow locked.

He called out to the firemen who were still on scene, and they were able to use pry bars to open the makeshift door. No one was prepared for what they

would find on the other side.

# Chapter Four

*‘He had vanished into thin air, or, as Jim told Steve in one of their conversations, “Into the talons of The Iron Eagle.”’*

Stew Roskowski woke up in a dark room. His head was throbbing, and he had no idea where he was or how he got there. He was dizzy; he tried to move his arms, but they were restrained to his sides. He was cold, extremely cold, like a thousand knives were being driven into his flesh. His head was still foggy when a slit of light hit his eyes, and a tall muscular man entered the room. He was groggy but not groggy enough not to ask where he was. The Eagle moved out of his line of sight and came back with a large five gallon bucket in his hands and poured the contents all over him. It was ice water, and for the first time he realized why he was so cold – he was nude, and he was drenched in water and ice. He was lying on a steel table which was conducting the cold through his body like electricity. His teeth were chattering as he asked, “Who are you...why are you doing this to me?” The Eagle said nothing but reappeared with another bucket and poured it over his head, chest, and genitals. He cried out from the pain of the ice water; it felt like fire.

“You’re awake now, aren’t you Stew?” The voice wasn’t familiar to him. “Yes! ... Yes! Please, no more.” The Eagle walked out of sight again and came back with another bucket and placed it in front of the steel table. “Are you pleading for mercy, Stew?” “Oh God, yes. Mercy, please, mercy.” The Eagle picked up the bucket and spoke as he poured the water over Stew’s body. “What’s God got to do with it? Where was your mercy when those children begged it from you?” Stew started crying uncontrollably. “Please ... please, I beg you. Please don’t kill me.” The Eagle stepped back into the light, but Stew couldn’t see his face. “Really Stew? You’re kidding, right?” “I’ll do anything. I will confess to everything. I’m so sorry for the things that I’ve done. I’m sick. I have a mental illness. That’s what the doctors have told me. It’s a compulsion that I can’t control. I will make a full confession to the police. Take me in. I’m ready to pay for my crimes.”

The Eagle pulled a chair out of the darkness and sat down. “You are correct, Stew. You are going to make a full and complete confession. You are also correct that you deserve to pay for your crimes.” Weeping and weeping, he responded,

“I was very bad to my pets. I should have treated them better.” The Eagle sat back in his chair. “Your pets? Stew, you have a warped sense of reality. You didn’t have pets. You abducted, raped, tortured, and then murdered young girls. They weren’t pets; they were human beings just like you...well, not just like you; you are a savage animal.” Stew didn’t know what to say. He was so cold that he was starting to black out. “Stew...oh...Stew...I can’t have you falling asleep. I need your full attention. You and I are going to relive some of your greatest hits...if you know what I mean.” Stew started screaming as light flooded the room and his eyes adjusted. He could see all of the instruments of torture that he had used on his victims. He felt the table start to move toward the light, and he screamed all the way through the door. It crashed closed on Stewart’s screams with a hollow steel sound.



Jim had put a call into Steve because he knew that he would need him and his resources on this case. Steve pulled up with his investigators in a van behind him. He walked up to Jim and shook his hand. “So what do you have here that would concern the FBI?” “The Iron Eagle.” Steve’s face showed no reaction. “Are you saying that you think that this is the home of The Iron Eagle?” Jim shook his head. “Then what?” Jim started for the front door, and Steve followed. They walked into the bedroom where Cheryl had been held. Steve looked around and at first nothing seemed of any real interest; then he saw it. He walked over to the wall behind the bed where it appeared a large object had struck, leaving a huge break in the plaster. He took a pair of gloves and tweezers and pulled off a piece of black material and placed it in a plastic bag. There was blood on the wall, and it had pooled in a small amount on the mattress below. “Which girl was in this room?” “Pruitt.” “Was she bleeding?” “Nope!” On closer examination he saw that the blood had been drawn with a pen like object from the pool across the mattress. A pair of wings were painted on the pillow in blood. At first glance it looked like a Rorschach ink blot, but on further review it was the deliberate calling card of The Eagle. “He took Roskowski?” “It sure as hell looks that way,” Jim said as he walked out of the bedroom and toward the bathroom where Roskowski had been showering.

He pulled back the shower curtain and pointed to the photographs on the wall. Steve looked hard at the three pictures before asking Jim who the girl was.



“That’s the Pruitt girl. I spoke to her in the ambulance when they were taking her to the hospital. She told me that he had done this to her, but here she is, her contorted face and his cock in her pussy.” Steve shook his head. “Do you always have to be so damn vulgar?” “Hey, I call them like I see them, and I see a sick pedophile with his cock in a fourteen-year-old girl. Now that’s vulgar.” Jim turned and started toward the basement. When the two men made it to the hidden room, Steve knew that Mr. Roskowski was in the hands of The Eagle. “How many bodies have you found?” “We’ve recovered four alive and at least fifteen dead so far. The coroner is working with us, but this is turning into an archeological dig.”

“So The Eagle has Roskowski. Innocent,” Jim asked, “until proven guilty?” “No...I feel a confession coming.” Steve walked out to his car. Jim was behind him, and he couldn’t help himself, “So we know we’ll get a confession...but most likely posthumously.” Jim lit a cigarette as Steve opened the door to his car. “I have to admit I feel no urgency in finding Roskowski. It’s in my jurisdiction, and my team will work it up,” said Steve as he called for his crime scene investigators to come to the house. “I want to be updated on everything that you find here. I’m also going to have my team pull a comprehensive background check on Roskowski. I have a feeling that what you found in there is only the tip of the iceberg.” Jim nodded, smoke from his cigarette blowing out his nose as he waved Steve off and walked back to the house. “Hey...you better stop smoking those things; they’re going to kill you,” Steve yelled. “I have a feeling that the job will get me long before the smokes do.”

When Jim got back into the house he saw the lead CSI walking out from behind the false wall in the basement. “Well, what are we dealing with?” He had known Jade Morgan for ten years, and she looked horrible. She was a hardened CSI. He could see, however, that this scene had gotten to her. She walked toward the back door without saying a word as he followed. When they reached the back stairs she began to vomit, and he reached out to grab her. “What the hell’s going on, Jade? Did you come to work sick?” She wiped the sweat from her face. She was flushed, and if he didn’t know better he might’ve thought she had the flu. She pulled her shoulders back to get some air. “I’ve never seen anything like what’s in that house.” “Come on, Jade; you’ve seen your fair share of crime scenes.” “You haven’t been back inside in the last hour, have you?” He shook his

head. “Go in there and then come back and tell me it’s just another crime scene.” He was startled by the seriousness of her tone. He stood up, and, without saying a word, walked back into the house and down the stairs into the basement.

Plastic had been put up around the opening of the door to the hidden room. He could see that Jade’s team now wore full hazmat suits. He pulled back the plastic, stepped into the room, and the smell alone made him gag. What he saw next was like nothing he had ever seen in all of his years in homicide. The room which once was about the size of a one hundred square foot closet had three separate doorways each draped with plastic. As he entered the nearest, he looked into the now well-lit rooms. His olfactory senses were assaulted by the stench of death, then he could see what he could only equate to the catacombs he had seen in Europe years earlier. Burial chambers stacked with bodies in varying degrees of decomposition. Some were just bones, others were recognizable, and all of them were children. The combination of smell and sight assaulted his senses. He became violently ill, running up the stairs and barely making it to the back door before vomiting on Jade, still sitting on the steps.

She didn’t move; he didn’t know what to say. They both just stared at each other until Jade got up and grabbed a hose and began to wash his vomit off her smock. Jim walked out into the yard and collapsed in the grass. Jade walked over toward him but didn’t completely approach. “I saw three separate rooms off the initial room that we found,” he said. “Are the contents the same as the first?” She knelt down on the ground behind him. “There is one other burial chamber, and the third is...” she paused, “what I can only describe as a medieval torture chamber.” “Is there anyone in there?” Jim couldn’t see her, but he could hear her breathing. “Yes.” “Is there anyone alive in there?” There was a long pause. “He brought his victims in there alive, and based on my quick review of the contents of the room, he worked very hard to keep them that way while he did the unspeakable to them.” Jade paused then asked, “Do we know anything about the homeowner?” “Yea...he’s the principal at one of the best schools in the area.”

He heard her stand up, and he did the same. She looked at him and said, “Well, these children didn’t come from his school I can tell you that. It looks like he’s been collecting these kids for a very, very long time. He has become very, very good at what he does.” Jim turned to look her in the eye. “He may have been doing this for a long time, but someone else found out before law

enforcement.” She had a confused look on her face. “I don’t understand.” “There was a 911 call made from the house that led police to find the missing girl and then accidentally the three others that are now in the hospital.” She had a thoughtful look on her face, “Was it the girl who called 911?” “I was only able to interview her for a few minutes before they took her to the hospital, but from what I gathered from her she didn’t make the call. She told the first officers on scene that someone else was in the house, and that he saved her and protected her from her assailant before the police arrived. You haven’t processed the rest of the house yet have you?” She shook her head. He started walking toward the house and said, “Follow me.”

She did as he asked and followed him to the bedroom where Cheryl had been held. He pointed to the bed in the corner of the room. It now had crime scene markers all around it, and there were a few FBI agents mulling around. She walked over to the bed and looked down at the pillow where a large yellow marker sat. A sad look fell upon her face. “The Eagle,” she said softly. He nodded. “Is this the girl’s blood?” He shook his head; she called to one of her team members to get into the room. “Get a sample of this blood over to the lab stat. Have them type, cross, and rush a DNA analysis. Have we harvested the scene for DNA?” The tech just gave her a glazed look. “Jade, we’ve been digging in a basement for the past several hours. There was no sign of a homicide up here.” She ordered him back to the basement, grabbed a crime scene kit from one of the cases, and started carefully bagging things from the home. She started in the bathroom and worked her way to the kitchen. When she was finished, she handed the bags to one of her associates. “If this ends up in court, I want this scene processed by the book. Start a chain of custody report for all DNA evidence. I don’t want questions on who had what down the road. And get them to the lab right away.”

Jim had been watching her on the periphery as he scoured the scene for other evidence. After Jade had sent off the specimens, she asked if Roskowski was in custody. He shook his head. “Well, are you planning on getting him into custody?” He sat down on a chair in front of a table in the kitchen. “Would love to do it, Jade, but Mr. Roskowski is missing.” “The Eagle.” “Are you asking me or telling me?” She sat up straight. “This is not the work of The Eagle; it doesn’t fit his profile.” He nodded. “But The Eagle was here?” He nodded again. Her

face got a strange look on it, one he didn't know how to read. "The Eagle took Roskowski?" "That's the way it looks, Jade. Steve and his team are working on The Eagle aspect of this case; we need to focus on processing this crime scene and trying to figure out just how many kids are in that basement. And who they are." She put her elbows on the table and put her head in her hands. "Shit, Jim... the son of a bitch is going to kill Roskowski before we can get any answers out of him as to whom he has in this house." He stood up and tidied his suit coat. "You're right and wrong. If The Eagle follows his previous M.O., he will kill Roskowski...however, he will also get a detailed confession out of him before he does." She stood up as well. "That's not his fuckin' job! It's your job. This animal needs to face justice." "Which animal are you referring to, Jade?" She started down the stairs to the basement, yelling "both of them" back at him.

It took Jim's team, as well as the others, two weeks to process the house and the property. When all was said and done, a total of sixty-three bodies were found and were being processed by the coroner. In Jade's preliminary report, she stated that it would very likely be impossible to identify most, if not all, of the remains. Jim and Steve had put out an APB for Roskowski; however, even with the tools at their disposal neither the FBI nor the LA County Sheriff had been able to locate him. He had vanished into thin air, or, as Jim told Steve in one of their conversations, "Into the talons of The Iron Eagle."

# Chapter Five

*‘Steve started laughing. It became infectious, and the entire room broke out into laughter. They knew it was wrong but couldn’t help themselves’*

STEWART!” His eyes fluttered open and then closed again. He felt a cold sensation in the vein of his right arm. “STEWART,” the voice called again, only this time he heard it loud and clear, and his eyes shot open. The man standing next to him was dressed in a pair of jeans and a red polo shirt; he was very tall. Stewart didn’t recognize his face. His features were chiseled, strong, very Nordic with piercing blue eyes and blond hair cut in a flat top and shaved on the sides. His arms were huge, and Stewart could see the blood vessels popping out from his biceps and forearms. “I see you’re a body builder, so you know that the body is a temple!” His eyes were open, but he was far from aware of where he was or what was going on. He tried to move, but his arms and legs were too heavy to move. He turned his head and asked, “Who are you?” The Eagle sat down next to him. “Justice.” He just stared into Stewart’s face; his eyes devoid of emotion. “How long have I been out?” “Long enough for me to learn the true depths of your depravity.” Stewart didn’t respond. “Well,” he continued, “we have some work to do.” Stewart was still muddled in his head, “Oh, yes. I need to get to the school and attend to the children. I also need to feed my pets.” He felt a sharp blow on the side of his face. The strike came with such force that it knocked out two of his teeth. “No ... Stewart ... you are never going back to the school ... and you are never going to hurt another child. What you are going to do is tell me the names of the sixty-three children found in your basement and buried in your backyard. You are going to give me every name, gender, and age, and you are going to give them to me in chronological order.”

Stewart could see a clear tube connecting an IV bag to his arm. He tried to pretend to nod off but felt another cold flush in his veins and was suddenly very alert and eager to talk. “What are you giving me? That stuff is really good!” “It’s a medication to help you remember. Do you remember begging for your life the night I took you from your home?” He was quiet for a moment. “Yes ... you’re going to spare my life. Where are the police? I will tell them everything.” The Eagle took a small black microphone and hooked it onto a sheet covering

Stewart's body. Suddenly, Stewart heard the sound of an electric motor, and his head began to rise on the table. As he rose, he could see a camera and lights in front of him. There were several flat screen television monitors in different locations around him. One was right next to the camera, and he could see the full length of his body and the sheet covering him.

"Think of yourself as a celebrity, Stewart. You're going to tell the world your story." "What story?" "The story of the 'Catacomb Killer.' That's what they're calling you in the media. Your name has been in the headlines of every newspaper and news report since I took you." "Who is the Catacomb Killer?" "You are, Stewart. Pay attention when I speak to you." He showed him the front page of the Los Angeles Times. The page had a photograph of Roskowski with the banner headline: 'Catacomb Killer Sought After Gruesome Discovery in West Covina Neighborhood.' Stewart stared at the headline for a few seconds and then looked over at his captor. "You're going to kill me, aren't you?" "You're getting ahead of yourself, Stewart. That all depends on how cooperative you are." "I'll talk. I'll talk; just don't hurt me." The Eagle didn't say a word. He pointed the remote at the camera, and Stewart's face was on all the screens.

Over the next four days, The Eagle tortured and interviewed Roskowski until he had gathered the last details about his final four victims. "Wow," said The Eagle when he had gotten through the final interview. "That was a hell of a confession. You did good, Stew." Then he untied Stewart's right hand and gave him a pen. "Sign your name on the bottom of your confession." Stewart did as he was directed then handed the pen back to The Eagle. "So, do I get to go to the police now?" "No, Stew, I'm afraid not. There's no sense in wasting the time of law enforcement as well as the courts. Why should the taxpayers have to pay to house you and make you comfortable in a prison somewhere? Think about the families and parents of your victims. Do you think they should have to relive the horrific things that you did to their children?" There was silence. "You see my point don't you, Stew? It's just so unsavory, and we both know that you will grandstand in order to enjoy the suffering of your victims again in the faces of their families. No, you won't plead out. You would want a trial and the opportunity to relive what you did to each of those children. You and I know that you have a very, very good memory, and you remember every one of your victims in great detail. You would plead insanity, which would go back and forth

for months, until you'd be found competent to stand trial where you'd be found guilty. Then, as if it that wasn't torture enough for the families of your victims, the penalty phase would let you relive your sick perverted fantasies once more. It's just not right." The Eagle watched as the sheet covering Roskowski rose near his penis as he listened to The Eagle's words. "Even now as I talk about it, you're getting aroused. No, Stew. I feel the only fair thing to do is for me to carry out your sentence; you have already admitted guilt." No response from Stew. He laid still; the pup-tent of his penis rising.

"Well, now that we have that out of the way, it's time to get into the formalities of your punishment." Silence met his statement. "Not much for talking now, huh? Well, don't worry. You're all done talking. It's time for you to feel real pain, the kind you made those little girls feel." Stewart became aware of a large table next to his bed that was covered with a sheet. It had been there since he first woke up, but he had not looked at it out of fear. The Eagle left the camera on so that Stew could see himself on the television screens. "So, let's get right to it." There was a pulley-like contraption above him, and he realized that there were very thin wires on the corners of the sheet that covered him. The Eagle had been talking toward the camera and not to him when he noticed the cables. The Eagle pushed a button on the remote, and the sheet lifted off the table to reveal his nude body and his very own items. "Do you recognize these items, Stew?" He said yes and started to cry. "DON'T START," The Eagle said to him very sternly. "I've had enough of your whining and complaining." There was a warm feeling in Stewart's arm as he noticed the clear liquid being injected into his IV. "What did you give me?" "It's a muscle relaxer and pain enhancer, Stew. It's a drug that's used when you have surgery. It paralyzes you. I use a lower dose, so you can still breathe on your own, but you still have complete sensation. In fact ... this drug heightens the pain. You'll love it."

Stewart looked over at the screen and could see his nude body. He saw no visible restraints, and he tried to move to no avail. "You're going to find moving a bit difficult. I grabbed your drug concoction when I took you from your house, so you are feeling just what those little girls felt when you were 'playing' with them." Stew looked at his body on the monitors. He was bruised and bleeding all over, yet he didn't recall how he got such serious injuries. The Eagle smiled at Stew as he pushed a button on the remote and a video of him with one of his

victims started to play. He was nude and his little victim was on her stomach with Stew on top of her. He watched with intensity and began to get aroused again. He commented on the clarity of the picture, and he recognized the screams and said the name of the girl. “You do have an uncanny memory when it comes to your crimes, Stew.” The video went dark, and The Eagle brought out one of Stewart’s own scalpels which he used on his victims. Within a few seconds, Stewart was screaming uncontrollably, pain was searing through his entire body. He could see his own blood spraying into the air, but he didn’t know where it was coming from.

Stewart felt his captor’s large arms grab him and flip him onto his stomach. “Well, this disgusts me to no end, so let’s get you done. I have other things to do today.” The Eagle pulled out a large power tool that was intended for cutting. Rather than spinning, the mechanism oscillated, and the blade had been replaced with a very large dildo. “I believe this is one of your favorite ‘toys.’” Stewart began screaming as the tool started vibrating, and he watched his own face and nude body on the monitor as the dildo was inserted into his anus.



It had been two weeks and nothing from Stewart Roskowski or his believed captor. Steve had just finished some paperwork at his office and was getting ready to leave for the night when a courier showed up with a package for him. There was nothing on the padded manila envelope but his name; however, he had a pretty good idea who sent it. He knew there was no sense in interrogating the courier; he most likely received it through his company and took it via their instructions. Steve had received other communications from The Eagle the same way through the years, and he knew the futility in chasing down the folks who brought the messages. He took a pair of gloves from his desk and put them on and then closed his office door. He held the envelope with a pair of tweezers, cut a slit in the top of it, and turned it upside down, allowing the contents to fall out onto his desk. There was a DVD and several folded pieces of white paper in the envelope. On the front of the DVD case, there was a very distinct thumb print, and, on the reverse, in red and black, was the emblem of The Iron Eagle. It was an eagle with black and crimson wings spread wide in a display of power, its black head with crimson eyes facing straight ahead, clenching a black and crimson rod in its talons. On the right end of the rod, the bird clutched a bundle



of arrows, and at the other end was a circle with the scales of justice. He picked up the phone and called down to the lab to let them know they would be working late.

He then placed the objects in an evidence bag and walked down the three flights of stairs to meet with his team. He called Jim and asked if he had received anything from The Eagle, which he hadn't. "Whadda ya got," he asked. "The usual calling card of The Eagle with the exception of the fact that with the distinctive folded paper he sent a DVD." There was a chuckle on the other end of the line, "Hmm...you think he's going into the porn business?" They both laughed, and Jim asked if he could come by. Steve told him it was fine, and he went on with his investigation. Jim stopped at a local coffee shop and picked up a large container of regular coffee and all the sandwiches they had left from the day on the way over to Steve's office.

Jim arrived with a large box and was greeted at the front door by security. They did the usual security check on the packages and then sent him up to the lab. As he approached the door he called out, "Delivery." Steve opened the door and let him in. "What the hell, Jim?" "Anyone here had dinner?" He got nothing but blank faces from Steve and his team. "Well, here you go. I brought dinner, and you guys have the movie." There was a little laughter, everyone grabbed a sandwich, and they all sat around in the lab eating and making small talk. Finally Jim stood up and asked, "So, are we going to see this DVD on the big or small screen?" There was a little humor in the room, but there was also a real sense of tension. This was a whole new world that they were about to enter. They had been searching for The Eagle for over a decade and never once had he been as brazen as this.

The DVD case and contents had been cleared by the lab techs for any booby traps or other hazardous materials. Steve opened the case and took out the shining disc. He flipped it over; the emblem of The Eagle was burned onto the disc. Jim chuckled as he said, "Well...he's getting downright professional, isn't he?" Steve placed the DVD into a player, and it started playing on its own. There was a white room, and they could see a table and an image on it. A figure moved over toward the table and said, "Please state your full name for the record." "Stewart Evan Roskowski." His voice was strained and very scared; there was a pronounced quiver in it. "State your current vocation and the name and address

of your current employer.” “I am the Coston Middle School Principal. 14115 Coston Street in West Covina.” The only sound on the disc was the voice of Roskowski now. Several sheets of paper with writing on them were placed in front of the camera. Steve knew they were the pages he held against the white screen behind him in the lab earlier. He hadn’t read their content, but he was relatively certain what they contained.

The Eagle spoke, “I hold before you the full and complete confession of Mr. Roskowski, signed and dated. My only regret is that I did not find him sooner. Mr. Roskowski, you have confessed to the rape, torture, and murder of seventy-seven children.” Steve’s team looked on in shock. Jim leaned toward Steve and asked, “I thought only sixty-three.” He nodded and then replied, “I guess there are more.” The DVD continued. “They weren’t children,” Roskowski cried out, “I’m sick. I have a mental illness. It’s a compulsion that I can’t control. I told you that. I’m not responsible for my actions.” Roskowski may have been uttering the words, but his facial expressions, wild eyes, and body language told a different story. One of Steve’s CSIs commented, “He’s lying. He knew damn well what he was doing.” The voice of The Eagle continued to press Roskowski. “Yes, you did tell me that, Stew. You also told me that they were your ‘pets.’ You and I know that you knew exactly what you were doing!” Roskowski screamed at The Eagle, “They were my pets; I had the right to do whatever I chose to do with them. I take good care of my pets and only discipline them when they are naughty.” His voice was deliberate and convincing. Jim turned to Steve and said, “The Eagle is a pure psychopath.” Steve waved his hand in a gesture of silence and at the same time shook his head no.

There were a few moments of silence, and then the camera was raised so that the viewers could see the whole face and body of Roskowski covered by a white sheet with numerous devices on a nearby table. They couldn’t make out all of them, but they all recognized several as instruments of torture. “Jesus,” Janet cried out, “this is one sick person.” She was the newest member of the team. She had just graduated from the academy at Quantico, and this was her first field assignment. Jim replied, “Which one?” No one replied; they just kept watching.

The Eagle spoke again, “The instruments and tools you see on this table are the property of Mr. Roskowski. They are the tools that he used on his victims, and they are the same tools that have been and will continue to be used on him.”

Roskowski started screaming as a hand, presumably that of The Eagle, took a circular knife and laid it under his chin. “That looks like a scraping scalpel used in abortions or D&Cs,” one of Steve’s team members said. The sheet lifted off of the victim on its own, drawn as a magician would remove a covering from a levitating assistant. The nude body of Roskowski was exposed, bloodied and bruised. His genitals were swollen and discolored as if they had been beaten. The hands of The Eagle moved the tool slowly and deliberately. He used the instrument like a pen, moving it slowly from Roskowski’s neck down his chest and abdomen until it came to rest on his penis. A small line was being carved into the full torso of Roskowski as the instrument was moved and a line of crimson lay in the wake of the blade. All the while Roskowski was screaming, but he remained still as the steel tool was descending toward his genitals.

The voice of The Eagle rose above the screams of his victim. “Mr. Roskowski, you have admitted guilt in the torture, rape, and murder of all of your victims. I hereby sentence you to endure the same long and brutal death that you inflicted on them. May God NOT have mercy on your soul.” With that, The Eagle took Roskowski’s penis and scrotum in one hand and twisted and pulled them straight up. Roskowski’s screams continued as The Eagle used the tool in his other hand to emasculate Roskowski. The scream was deafening; arterial spray struck the camera lens. Several of Steve’s staff looked away; one ran to a nearby sink and threw up. Steve, Jim, and most of the others just watched as two huge arms covered by white sleeves with hands covered in black gloves drove a solid stainless steel rod into the hole that once held Stewart’s penis and testicles. Smoke rose as the unit cauterized the wound, and the screams of Stewart Roskowski echoed through the room. “Oh my God...I can’t believe the cruelty I’m witnessing,” said one of Steve’s profilers. Jim piped up, “I know this killer; you ain’t seen nothin’ yet.”

The Eagle grabbed Roskowski and flipped him onto his stomach. His ass was bloody and bruised, and The Eagle moved out of camera range for a moment and then returned with an oscillating device with a large rubber penis on it. The screams of Roskowski continued as The Eagle drove the dildo into Stewart’s anus, and the decibel level of his screams rose as the screen began to fade to black. The blood curdling screams commenced until they, too, faded out.

There were a few moments of silence broken eventually by Jim. “Well...that

was interesting. So where do you think we'll find Mr. Roskowski and his junk?" He asked it in such an off-the-cuff manner that Steve started laughing. It became infectious, and the entire room broke out into laughter. They knew it was wrong but couldn't help themselves. Only Janet remained silent with a look of horror and disgust on her face. "So, do you still think that The Eagle isn't a psychopath?" Steve turned to the room's other inhabitants. "Look people, I know that this is a new phenomenon for this killer, but we see this type of thing every day." "The hell we do," said Janet, "we see corpses, we see photographs, but we don't see a serial killer kill his victim before our very eyes." Steve remained standing. "Mr. Roskowski didn't die as a result of what we just witnessed." Janet looked confused. "What are you talking about? This sicko just sentenced Roskowski to death and cut off his genitals. He's dead." Steve let out a little chuckle. "Janet, I know you're new to the field, so I'm going to give you a little latitude here. Mr. Roskowski was still alive and screaming when the video ended. Now, we all know based on The Eagle's past behavior that Roskowski is most likely dead." Jim quipped quietly under his breath just loud enough for all to hear, "I sure as hell hope so." "We just haven't had the ... opportunity ... that's as good a way to put it as any... to witness The Eagle at work. This opens a whole new window into the mind of The Eagle, so let's try to learn from this without hysterics. We are professionals. Our focus needs to be on catching The Eagle and finding Roskowski."

Janet sat back down, and Jim looked over at the clock. It was half past twelve. "Well, guys, it's been fun. Thanks for dinner and the bloody movie. I'm going to take myself home and get some sleep. Next time we all meet, let's try to watch something a little more upbeat, huh? Like the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*." He chuckled and started to walk toward the office door. Steve followed. The two stopped in the hall; Jim took a cigarette out of his top pocket and placed it behind his ear. "Jim, you asked me if this proves that The Eagle is a psychopath. No way. He's a sociopath, pure and simple." "That's crazy. Sociopaths aren't violent by nature." "You're right, but this is no normal sociopath we're dealing with. I've suspected for some time that The Eagle isn't your run of the mill serial killer." Jim laughed, "Ya think?" "I think he's one of us." "Are you saying that you think The Eagle's a badge?" "Yes..." Jim looked around with a sneaky stance. "So, do ya think it's you...or me?" A smile grew across his round face. Steve couldn't help himself and started laughing. "Stop being a smart ass. I'm serious. I really think this guy's brass." "Well even if he's not local, state, or

federal, I have to admit he thinks his balls are made of metal. Too bad Roskowski's weren't." That sent them both into hysterics and brought Janet out into the hall to see what the commotion was all about. They tried to act cool, but Janet wasn't amused. She leaned back against the wall in the hall as several of her fellow agents were exiting for the restrooms. Jim and Steve spoke out of ear shot for a few more minutes, and as the last of her colleagues returned to the lab she asked, "Why do they call him The Iron Eagle?" Jim was suddenly interested again and followed Steve and Janet back into the lab, so he could hear the story, or more exactly, explain the story, of The Iron Eagle.

# Chapter Six

*‘His heart was pounding, and he lowered his weapon when suddenly he felt an arm reach out and grab him by the throat, disarming him with the other hand.’*

It was a quiet night at Coston Middle School. Jonnie Stokes had just put his flashlight on his desk after doing his rounds of the school grounds and buildings; it was just past midnight. He had taken the graveyard security shift to make ends meet while he was finishing up his senior year of college. He pulled up his belt, and his pepper spray canister fell to the floor. He reached down to pick up the canister as it rolled across the floor, and a shadow rose up from behind him. He went to make a defensive move, but it was too late.



When they had gotten situated in the lab, Steve had everyone sit down. He looked at the young faces staring back at him. This was a whole new generation of field and special agents. He was feeling old looking at the faces of twenty somethings. “Okay, before we get into the history of The Iron Eagle, by a show of hands, how many of you have JD degrees.” Six of Steve’s team members raised their hands. “How many of you have a masters degree or higher in accounting?” The other four hands went up. Jim snickered, “No wonder you can’t catch a killer.” Steve snarled at him, but Jim was unmoved and asked, “What do you call 100 lawyers at the bottom of the sea?” The question was met with silence. “A good start,” he laughed. Steve just shook his head. “No lawyer jokes tonight, Jim.” He got quiet and sat down in a corner of the room; the story of The Eagle never got old.

“Janet just asked a great question about how The Iron Eagle killer got his nickname. Does anyone in this room know the answer?” Before Jim could finish clearing his throat, Steve shot him a look. “Anyone other than Jim...who better keep his mouth shut.” Bob Walters raised his hand. He had more seniority than anyone else in the room. “Bob.” He stood up. “Well, the way I understand it, it started off as a joke out at the Camp Pendleton Marine Corps base in San Diego in early 1999.” Steve nodded, “So what’s the story as you know it, Bob?” “There was a Marine who was found murdered in his barracks. It was an extremely violent killing with no apparent motive.” “What made the killing so violent?”

Steve sat back in his chair. “The killer had stripped the victim, and he was found face down with an iron fireplace poker sticking out of his rectum.” “What’s the significance of the poker?” “That’s how the nickname originated. There was an eagle’s head on the handle protruding out of the victim. It was a hooked poker, and one of the investigators from the JAG’s office made a joke about the poker and The Eagle’s head.” Steve remained relaxed in his chair, “So is that it? Is that the whole story of how The Eagle got his nickname?” Bob shook his head. “No...a few weeks after the killing, the JAG’s office received a manila envelope with a written confession in the dead soldier’s handwriting. The note confessed to the rape and murder of several young boys from the San Diego and Los Angeles areas. A search of missing persons at the time turned up the names, and the confession gave detailed directions to all of their remains. The bodies were found in shallow graves in the deserts outside of San Diego and on the base. The autopsy report on the soldier reported that he had died as a result of blunt force trauma.” “Well, then what was the deal with the poker?” Jim got a smile on his face as Bob continued. “The medical examiner determined that the poker had been inserted into the victim’s rectum while he was still alive, and that the poker had been heated to nearly 900 degrees based on the cauterizing effects on the bowel.” “So, in essence, it cooked his colon.” “Yea...” “Anything else about the case at the time?” Bob shook his head and sat down.

Jim stood up and Steve didn’t try to stop him. “I was one of the lead investigators for the Sheriff’s Department on the case since the crimes happened off base and most of the victims were from LA County. We would learn only after the confession of the dead soldier that he, in fact, was a serial killer that had been preying on young men and boys between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four. The first missing person’s case had been filed in 1988. The killer was extremely savvy and was able to go undetected until his own murder in 1999. While I was investigating the case, several letters were received from the killer denouncing the investigation and stating that he did it for the protection of the public. The military didn’t want the issue to get out into the mainstream media for fear it would tarnish the Corps, so the JAG’s office buried the reports until 2002 when they were retrieved by the local media through a Freedom of Information Act request.” Janet asked, “Why would anyone ask about the case so many years later?” “There had been five similar killings between ‘92 and ‘99.

A reporter with the *Times* received an anonymous tip that there had been killings of a similar nature covered up by the military. The documents were declassified and released to the media. When the reporter working on the case started to do more investigating, she ended up finding me. When she called me for an interview, I saw no problem with speaking to her. She interviewed me, and, a week later, a front page article appeared in the *Times* with the heading, ‘The Iron Eagle, Serial Killer or Vigilante?’ While I was misquoted several times in the article, the comparisons drawn by the reporter to the behavior of The Eagle was rife with accuracies, so I didn’t request a retraction. Since then, The Eagle has killed several more times, but it doesn’t receive the press that it did then.” Janet stood up and said, “So the bottom line is this guy is some kind of vigilante?” Steve chimed in, “The Eagle has...to our knowledge ... only killed other serial killers. He has never killed anyone else.”

Jim interrupted, “That’s not true Steve. We have been able to connect him to the recent murder of U.S. Marshal Jill Makin and to the murder of Barry Mullin who turned out to be her grandfather.” There was a moment of silence, and Janet spoke again, “So this guy kills indiscriminately? If he had killed others, then they seem like random acts of violence. Perhaps it’s only a coincidence that the people he has killed, with the exception of the last two, turned out to be serial killers.” Steve chimed in, “No...while it is true that the two most recent murders attributed to The Eagle are non-serial killers, his motive is vigilante style justice, and his killings, to him, are justified.” Janet flung her head back, flinging her long black ponytail with it, her brown eyes glaring at the whole room but fixed mostly on Steve. “How can this guy know that his victims are serial killers? We don’t know that we are dealing with serial killers a majority of the time until links or patterns start to appear.” Steve stood up and shrugged his shoulders, “Janet, that’s a hell of a good question, and I wish I had an answer for you. All we know for certain is that he has gotten to several serial killers that local and federal law enforcement have been looking for, or he located them before we have been able to connect the dots. Sometimes law enforcement didn’t know they existed at all.” She got an indigent look on her face, “I have to say that the nonchalant attitude given to this killer is disturbing to me.” “It’s not nonchalant...we have been actively seeking him for over a decade. I inherited him from my predecessor, and I hope that I catch him before I hand off the



assignment to the next behavioral science investigator.” She sat down.

Jim stood up and said, “Well, it’s been fun kids. It’s always nice to take a walk down memory lane; I have been hunting this killer from day one. I can tell you that I have had and I have heard many, many ideas of who the killer is, or who he might be, and so far none of the ideas have panned out. As the person in this room with the most experience with this guy, I can tell you that he is going to be one hell of a hard guy to catch.” He started toward Steve and muttered loud enough for the room to hear, “Like we ever want to catch the guy; he’s doing us a favor.” That brought a great deal of anger from those in the room including Steve. He settled them down and walked Jim out. “Did you really have to go there?” Jim pulled the cigarette from behind his ear as the two men entered the parking lot. He pulled his Zippo from his pocket, and the flame lit his round face as he bent his head forward to light the smoke. The cherry on the tip of his cigarette was all that Steve could see as he stood there in the dark. “Someone had to say it, Steve; the guy’s doing us a favor.” “What about Barry and Jill? They weren’t serial killers, and he killed them.” Jim took a drag and exhaled a white cloud into the night air. “Well, I figure they either did something we don’t know about yet, or they got too close, and he had to eliminate them.” “Jesus Christ, Jim...do you know what you’re saying? You’re saying that this son of a bitch will kill anyone who tries to stop him.” Jim opened his car door with his smoke clenched between his teeth. “True dat.” He was just getting into the car when both his and Steve’s cell phones went off simultaneously. They both answered and said the same thing when they hung up, “Coston Middle School!”



Steve and his team arrived on scene at the same time as Jim’s. The school was abuzz with police, state, federal, and county law enforcement. Police and news choppers flew overhead. Police choppers shined nightvision lights down on the school and its surrounding neighborhood. Steve and Jim walked into the main entrance and asked for the first officers on scene. One pointed to three men off in the corner; there was a paramedic attending to one of them. As Steve and Jim approached, they could see that they were two WCPD officers and what looked like a school security guard. The medic was attending to the guard’s head. The reason for Steve’s presence was obvious; he was wearing his blue windbreaker with bright yellow FBI letters on it. Jim was in street clothes;

however, he had his badge on his belt clip and his gun in a holster over his shoulder. Steve asked who found the body. The guard raised his hand, his head still down with a compress on the back of it. He asked what happened. "To tell you the truth, I don't really know. I had just come back from doing my rounds when I saw a shadow behind me, and the next thing I know I come to, and I'm in Mr. Roskowski's office, and Mr. Roskowski...or what's left of him ... is sitting in his chair." Jim asked the direction to the office. The guard pointed behind him, and both men told him to stay put. They would need to interview him.

The two men entered, and, there, sitting behind his desk, was Stewart Roskowski. He was nude, eyes wide open in a look of sheer panic. His mouth was open and blood had been dripping down onto his chest. Both of his arms had been skinned, and as Jim and Steve moved around to the back of the desk they could see that he was impaled on some type of long instrument, but they couldn't tell what. Burned deep into the middle of his chest was an eagle. "Well, we don't have to look too far to see who did this, huh?" Steve just stared at Jim. "Well... it's true!" Jim asked if the coroner had been called and was told someone was en route. Steve instructed his team to start investigating. "This is federal jurisdiction now. We take the lead; all reports to me and cc other parties as needed." "Well, a cause of death is going to be a tough one," Jim said in a serious tone. "What? No smart ass comments? You were so certain on Barry's cause of death. This one has you confused?" Steve was looking at Roskowski's face. He studied it for a few seconds and then said, "He died from suffocation." "How the hell did you come up with that one?" He pointed to his mouth and the blood that had dripped onto his chest. Upon closer examination, the two men could see that there was an object inserted into his throat. Steve chimed in this time, "It would seem that The Eagle forced him to 'deep throat' his own junk." Jim saw it, too, "Oh man...so all the rest of this shit is premortem. Mother fucker!"

They walked back out to the security guard who was now sitting up with no paramedic in sight. Jim asked if he wanted to go to the hospital. The guard shook his head no. "Tell us what you saw, heard, anything." He went to stand but was still a little light-headed, so he sat back down. "There's not much to tell. I finished my rounds and bent over because my pepper spray had fallen to the ground, and when I came to I was in Mr. Roskowski's office." "You said that just before you went out you saw a shadow behind you." "Yea. I never saw anyone,

and then I saw a shadow come up from behind me. A big-ass shadow, but I never got the chance to turn around.” “Be glad you didn’t,” said Jim. The kid was startled. “You think if I had seen him I would end up like Mr. Roskowski?” Steve interjected, “No...but there’s a good chance that you wouldn’t be here to talk to us about this at all. Did you hear anything? Breathing, footsteps, a voice.” He just shook his head. “Not a thing, sirs. I just came to, and I was lying on the floor next to the body.”

He sat for a few seconds, and then he said, “I’m still a little groggy, but now that you mention it, it might have been a dream, but I thought I heard the sound of choking or gagging when I was starting to come to.” They both went back to the office where the body was and each touched the corpse. “He’s still warm,” Steve said. “The son of a bitch killed him here.” Jim looked out the window that was behind Roskowski’s desk. It looked out over First Street which intersected with Coston. There was an empty lot with heavy ground cover between the school and the street at the corner of First and Coston. He looked at his watch; it was one fifteen a.m. He motioned to Steve to follow him. The two men left the room and walked out into the hall.

“He’s still here!” Steve looked at Jim’s face; it was grave. “The Eagle?” Jim nodded. “Where?” “The corner of First and Coston.” “Did you see something?” Jim shook his head, “I just have a hunch. “Okay...I’ll exit toward First and you exit toward Coston. We will work our way up and meet at the corner.” Steve pulled out his weapon. Jim motioned, “No...don’t pull the gun. If you go out armed, the choppers are going to pick you up. Take off your windbreaker; just walk out calmly and cross the street. I’ll do the same.” The two separated, and Steve hit First before Jim even got out of the building.

He started walking the street, staying in the shadows. He had a perfect view of the school as he walked and of the office where Roskowski’s body remained. He tried to look down the Coston side, but he couldn’t see Jim. He figured he was doing the same shadow play that he was doing. As he approached the corner of First and Coston, he noticed an overgrown clump of dark bushes and trees that were on the empty corner lot. He reached into his jacket and pulled his weapon. He moved deeper into the brush, out of the light of the school and street lamps, until there was almost no light. He heard a rustle behind him, and he jumped, jerking his weapon toward the bushes behind him. A rat scurried from one of the

bushes and headed toward the street. His heart was pounding, and he lowered his weapon when suddenly he felt an arm reach out and grab him by the throat, disarming him with the other hand. He was in a choke hold; there was nothing he could do. The arm was massive and pressed his face into the grass and weeds of the lot.

“I intended for you to come looking for me.” The voice was disguised but not the way it sounded on the video. “Detective O’Brian can’t be far behind.” Steve felt the arms pulling him back away from the lights of the school, away from safety. He felt the ground change over from dirt and weeds to asphalt. His weapon was taken and the choke hold released. He was laying face down on the ground. He heard rustling in the bushes ahead of him, but it was too far off, and he dared not make a sound. “Special Agent Hoffman, I want to apologize for killing Mr. Mullin. I know you two were close, but he was a bad person who had done and had knowledge of others who had done even worse things.” Steve moved to turn from his stomach, and he was greeted by a towering figure dressed all in black. There were no discernible features, and he was not acting threatening in any manner. He was just standing there looking at him. Steve raised his hand to his throat and coughed. The dark figure raised a finger to his face as a gesture of silence. Steve asked, “Why did you kill my friend?” There was no movement. “It’s complicated.” Steve felt a little more bold and said, “He knew you, didn’t he?” His voice was hoarse from the choke hold, and he was keeping his voice low as not to end up getting killed. “Yes, but that’s not why I killed him. You will learn in time why he’s dead. I will tell you that he and Mr. Roskowski knew each other very well, and he knew all about Mr. Roskowski’s hobbies.”

Steve sat up, and with a whisper he said, “I don’t understand. You killed Barry, and you killed his granddaughter. Why did you do that? What had she done wrong?” The Eagle didn’t move but said, “Ms. Makin was getting too close to me. I assure you, however, that I didn’t intend her any harm initially. In the end, while her death protected my identity, what happened to Ms. Makin was a fortuitous yet tragic accident and not by my design. I didn’t know about the relationship between her and Barry until near the moment of her death.” “Is that supposed to somehow make me feel better? Is it supposed to justify your actions?” The dark figure dropped his head a little and responded apologetically,

“No sir.” “Who the fuck are you? Why are you doing this?” Taking a step back from Steve, he said, “You know who I am, and you know why I’m doing what I’m doing. I just wanted to talk to you one on one and apologize to you for taking Mr. Mullin out of your life.”

Steve was now becoming irate; however, he could tell that The Eagle recognized his anger. “You can’t just go around dispensing justice the way you see fit.” The Eagle stood looking down at him on the ground. “I do what I can to save lives. I’m in their heads faster and faster these days. I can see them now, and I’m getting better at spotting and stopping them. Soon I will be able to stop them before they kill.” “You’re not a fucking clairvoyant. You can’t read minds. You’re killing people, and it’s my job to stop you.” The Eagle bent down close to Steve’s face and whispered, “If you keep tracking me, I’m going to have to kill you. I don’t want to, Agent Hoffman. I like you. I think you’re a good man. You don’t understand why I’m doing what I’m doing yet, but you will. I can be friend or foe; you will have to decide which. I will be in contact again.”

He turned toward the alley where he had drug Steve. There was rustling in the brush coming from the Coston corner of the street. The Eagle stood up tall and with a firm even voice said, “Detective O’Brian!” This time he was not quiet. He was intentionally louder. Jim stepped out from the bushes with his weapon trained on The Eagle. “It’s good to see you again.” Jim didn’t say a word. “Please lower your weapon.” There was a tense moment between all three. Jim complied. “Thank you...that’s really no way to greet the man who saved your life, detective. Please take Agent Hoffman back to the crime scene. I’ve promised to contact him again. Good night gentlemen.” And in a flash he disappeared into the darkness of the alley.

Jim calmly reached his hand out to Steve. Once on his feet, he started to run into the darkness. “STOP,” yelled Jim. “The only thing that you will achieve is to end up winded. He’s gone.” “You two have met before?” Jim didn’t say anything; he just holstered his weapon and started to walk back toward the school. “Jim...what the fuck? Do you know who this guy is? Because he sure as hell knows who you are!” Jim kept walking. They made it to the corner of First and Coston and were now in the light of the school and all of the action. Jim stopped and looked at the school but not at Steve. “I didn’t know who he was... Barry and I were working on a joint task force. He had tracked a bail jumper, and

Barry, being an ex U.S. Marshal, had the heads up on serving the warrant and taking the guy into custody for the reward. Do you remember that I got shot?” Steve nodded. “We were making an arrest in San Diego. It was a routine warrant; the suspect had no history of violence. It was pre-dawn, and we approached like we would any other nonviolent offender. Barry knocked on the door and called out to identify himself. I was standing to his right. The next thing I know there’s gunfire; it was a shotgun blast that caught me on the left side of my chest, inches from my heart. Barry was able to take cover, but I was hit hard and couldn’t get to cover. The perp was making a move down the front stairs toward me with the weapon trained on me, and Barry was pinned down on the opposite side of the house. There was no backup. I couldn’t reach for my weapon because my left arm had been hit. I was ready to get it when there was a shot over my shoulder, and the perp dropped. I saw the hulk of a man through the darkness behind me. He said, “You’re welcome” and disappeared. We would learn later in our investigation into the shooting and arrest that the perp was responsible for the death of three hookers. They found the evidence in his apartment after searching the premises. The only thing I can figure is that we got there at the same time as The Eagle. He was obviously going to kill the perp, and did, and in the process saved my life. This is the first time I’ve seen him since that morning. I had no idea that the man who saved me was The Eagle.”

Steve didn’t know what to say. The two walked back to the school and finished up with their people. Steve looked at Jim as they walked out of the school toward their cars. “Thank you.” Jim smiled. “You want to get a beer?” “It’s 5:30 in the morning.” He laughed. “You know the old saying: it’s five o’clock somewhere. Come on. I know just the place. You’re gonna love it.”

# Chapter Seven

*‘And with that Jim walked on down Atlantic to his car, leaving Steve standing on the corner looking at the buildings and businesses, lost in what his next move was going to be.’*

**T**he Los Angeles River winds its concrete way through the LA basin. They call it a river, but it’s really a flood control channel that starts in the San Fernando Valley and winds its way through the basin until it pours into the ocean in Long Beach. The Basin River Killer, as he has been nicknamed, has been stalking these riverbeds and washes for nearly forty years. He’s very particular about his prey. He likes the homeless and infirm, the kind of people who aren’t missed, who never get reported to the police until their bodies are found. Every now and then, over the past four decades there’s been a missing person report, but they are almost always reported as transient family members who either didn’t show up for a holiday or someone from one of the shelters noticed they were missing. The cops don’t give them much attention, which is why he likes to prey on them. He has a very specific body type but gender doesn’t matter. He likes them meaty, too thin and he can’t do the things he likes to do with and to them.

He lies on his stomach in the predawn light in tan camouflage peering through a pair of night vision goggles. He’s been stalking two men for the better part of a week, and they are finally in an area where he can grab them without being noticed. He stands up and walks back to his white windowless van and pulls out onto the basin floor and drives over to where the two men are camped. He stops in front of the makeshift camp and exits the vehicle. He’s got two Tasers on each hip, zip ties, and duct tape. He moves silently and surprises the sleeping men. In a matter of minutes, both are incapacitated and are in the back of the van headed for his home. He’s excited at the result of his hunt, and he whispers back to the two dazed men, “We’re going to have a lot of FUN!” His high pitched, breathy laugh is diabolical.

The drive home is relatively brief. He has a small cabin off Parson’s Trail in the hills overlooking the San Fernando Valley. The road is an access road, so the only traffic he ever gets is either from the electric company when they service the nearby power lines or fire crews if there’s a fire in the area or they are doing

maneuvers. He's been fortunate in his forty years living in the hills and has never had to evacuate. The van pulls up to a large solid steel gate, and he pushes a remote. The gate creaks slowly open, and he pulls the van in as it closes behind him. He backs up to a small storage container he has set next to the cabin. He opens the container doors and the van's back doors and drags each of the men into the container. Inside, a crude lighting system has been erected. A patch of hay is in the corner of the unit – a makeshift bed for those unfortunate enough to occupy the container. Bolted to the walls are several different types of restraints, some steel and others leather; there are a litany of different power tools, saws, drills, belt sanders, grinders. The average person would think it was your run of the mill workshop, but it was anything but.

He pulled his victims over onto the hay and grabbed a long leather whip and began to shout instructions to the men to disrobe. When they resisted, he began striking them repeatedly until both men were undressed and cowering in the corner on the hay. "You two smell like pigs; you should be ashamed of yourselves." Mounted to one of the steel walls was a fire hose, spooled on a hose rack with a high pressure nozzle on the end of it; it was hooked up to a fire hydrant in the middle of the unit. "You need to be cleaned," he said as he was unspooling the hose. There was a hydrant key in place, and he turned it to open the valve and then began spraying the men. The two were still dazed and had no idea where they were or what was happening. They were screaming, "Why... why are you hurting me...why...I'm sorry. I won't do it again. I'm sorry." Their screams and pleas were the first shot of adrenaline he received from his prey. He loved the sound of begging and pleading in the opening hours of his time with the Swine he had captured. He turned off the hose and rolled it back up. The clothes were picked up and thrown into an old oil drum with the top cut off that he used for his victims' laundry. The men were separated and each chained to the wall, one on each side facing each other. Their bare flesh burned against the hot steel container as he lashed them tight to the unit walls; they screamed against the restraints, fearing what might happen next.



Jim and Steve sat at a small table in the back of Santiago's bar in East LA. The small restaurant and bar had been in the Santiago family for nearly five generations. In a part of a city riddled with gang violence, drug trafficking, and



prostitution, Santiago's was a bastion of safety for locals and strangers. Nothing violent from the area was allowed inside or within a thousand feet of its walls; this was a rule handed down from generation to generation and passed on to the neighborhood where it sat. No one ever crossed the line at Santiago's! Javier Santiago was the fifth generation operator and at seventy-seven was grooming his thirty-five-year-old son, Valente, to take over the business. Santiago's was the only public establishment where you could walk in on a Friday night and find gang members of every race and affiliation, warring or not, drinking, talking, partying, and having a good time. The bar was the stuff that urban legends are made of. The stories of how it came to be were as varied as the groups that inhabited the bar.

The most credible story, and the one that Javier verified, was that in 1906 after the great earthquake in San Francisco, a lot of the survivors fearing more destruction left the city and moved south settling in LA. The bar at that time was one of the few watering holes for both horses as well as people. One evening, a fight broke out between three men of varying ethnicities. Javier's first generation relative took a shot gun from behind the bar, and, without saying a word, shot all three men dead then dragged their bodies into the street and stacked them on top of each other. When the sheriff came in to investigate, they asked him why he had done this. He is said to have responded, "This my tavern; it feed my family; it feed my customers; it will not feed the hate of men. If they come here to fight, they come here to die, not by fighting each other but by being killed by me. Men will get along here or die." Word spread like wildfire throughout the city then the state and even across the country. For the next three years, people came from far and wide to test the story, and every one of them died. No conversation and no warning. If they came in armed and were aggressive (and not lawmen), they were shot, no exceptions. There had not been a reported act of violence in that bar since 1910.

The walls were littered with old and new photographs. Each wall was dedicated to a different theme. One wall had signed photos of celebrities, sports figures, and music icons of the past and present. The wall adjacent to it was what Javier called the 'political' wall. There were dozens of photographs of U.S. presidents, congress people, state and federal judges, even several Supreme Court judges, as well as the current chief justice and several from the past. To

look on those walls was to look back in time. The ceiling of the bar was covered in newspaper front page headlines dating back before prohibition. It was Javier's own fresco like that of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican. It was a living history museum and like Michelangelo, Javier lay on his back on a small scaffold built for the bar and placed the pages as his ancestors had been doing since they opened the bar in 1898. The back wall was reserved as a shrine. It held the names, badge numbers, and photographs (if they existed) of every police officer, sheriff's deputy, California Highway Patrol officer, or fireman or medic killed in the line of duty dating back to 1898.

Jim and Steve sat with a beer in front of them, neither man saying a word. Javier brought over an ice bucket with six beers in it and placed it next to the table. "Romantic," Javier said and laughed. He looked Steve up and down. He had never seen him before. He knew Jim very well; he'd been coming in for decades. Javier broke the silence, "Well, Jim, I've not seen your friend before, but he's a badge?" Steve looked at him confused, "How do you know I'm a badge?" Javier pointed to his blue windbreaker with FBI written on the sleeves as well as the front and back. "If you not a badge, you in big trouble. Is a crime to...how you say...imperson?" Jim interrupted, "Impersonate." "Si...do that of a federal officer. So you FBI; Jim why you not bring..." He didn't know the man's name. Jim spoke again, "I'm sorry, Javier. This is my very good friend Special Agent Steve Hoffman of the FBI. I've never brought him in because I just never had the time. Plus, Steve and I don't run with the same crowd." There was a laugh from the old Mexican, and he said, "Well, you now know our place. Everyone here family. You need anything, Javier help you. Si?" Steve nodded his head and thanked him as the old man hobbled back over behind the bar.

"Jesus, how long have you been coming here?" Jim took a drink of his beer and sat back in his chair. "Shit, let's see...Barry and I started coming here after the academy and that was...oh hell, you're making me think about just how damn old I am. A long time, okay?" Steve laughed and took a drink of his beer. "So, do you want to finish telling me about what happened between you and The Eagle?" Jim took another swig of his beer and called out to Javier for permission to smoke. "Is illegal to smoke in bar, Jim. You know that!" Jim brushed him off and placed the unlit cigarette in his mouth. "It gives me something to chew on. Steve, I told you everything I know about The Eagle. He saved my life; shit, he

saved Barry's life that day." Steve asked if Barry knew who The Eagle was. Jim finished off the beer and grabbed another from the ice bucket. "About two weeks after Jill was killed, Barry called me and asked me to come by his office. When I got there he was pretty well blitzed. I'd known Barry for a lot of years, so him being blitzed was nothing new. What was new was he was crying; now that's behavior I had never seen in him. Barry was one of the meanest hardcore cops I had ever known." Steve interrupted and said, "He was a racist, Jim."

There was a laugh. "The fuck he was. Barry couldn't be a racist. He hated everyone. He didn't care about race, creed, religion, sexuality, disability, gender or age. He hated everyone equally. That was one of the things I liked about him; you always knew where you stood with him. He didn't mince words. He told you what he thought of you and your ideas, and he hated the term 'politically correct.'" Steve nodded. "Anyway, when I got to his office he was sitting behind his desk holding a photograph and crying. I asked him what was going on. He showed me the picture of Jill." "You told me you didn't know that he was related to her." "Yea...sorry about that. I lied. We were close friends. He also thought a great deal of you. He loved you in his own way even though the two of you weren't blood." There was a moment of silence and a nod. "So, answer my question, Jim. Did he know who The Eagle was?"

"I'm getting to it. Shit. So I got him calmed down, and he started telling me about Jill, telling me that she had been investigating The Eagle. He said that the last time he spoke to her she told him that she was working to set up a sting to catch him." "Well, we know that didn't go well." Jim nodded his head slowly, his eyes looking down at the floor. "Barry told me that he had intercepted a radio call on his scanner, and that there had been reports of suspicious activity at Sumner Mill Works. He said that the call referred to The Eagle and that he was going after him." "You were his friend, Jim. Why didn't you stop him?" Jim's face got angry. He swigged his beer and said loudly to Steve, "Why didn't you?" There was a pause. Steve knew Jim had him.

"I didn't really think he would go through with it." "Yet you went out and purchased everything he asked for?" Steve slammed the beer down on the table, and the few folks in the bar looked over at the two men and then went on about their business. "Fuck you!" Jim cracked the top on another beer and said, "Fuck me? No. Fuck you...You were the last one to see him alive; he never told me

when he was going after him. He just told me about the scanner. You, on the other hand, knew about all of it and even aided him in his pursuit of The Eagle.” Steve leaned in toward Jim sitting across from him and asked, “So Barry’s blood’s on my hands?” Jim shook his head. “Barry knew exactly what he was doing. His blood is on his own hands. I just wanted to make sure that the two of us are on the same page.” Steve took a drink of his beer and said, “I offered to go with him that night.” Jim didn’t respond. “I also told him that he was going to die.” Still no response, the cigarette between his teeth only released when he parted his lips to take a swig of his beer. Jim broke his silence, “Well, if you had gone with him you’d be dead, too.” The look on Steve’s face was all the revelation that Jim needed to see. “Look,” said Jim, “The Eagle told you why he killed Jill and Barry.” Steve got an indignant look on his face, “He may have told me his twisted reasoning for killing them, but that in no way justifies his actions.” “The guy helps us out.” “Bullshit...he’s a sociopath. He may have been just killing serial killers, but he has broken the pattern and killed innocents. He killed a law enforcement officer; he killed our best friend.” Steve’s face was red in anger after making the statement. Jim saw it and tried to ease him down, “I know...the guy crossed the line, and now he has threatened a federal officer and me.” “We have to catch this guy before he kills someone else in our law enforcement family.”

Jim just shook his head. “I just don’t get it; he saved my life. It just makes no sense to me that he would kill the very people he was helping.” Steve was finishing off his beer when he answered, “He told us his reason. Jill was too close to catching him. Barry had done something or knew something that The Eagle felt deserved his death. Shit, he said that Barry knew Roskowski and what he had been doing; our meeting with him tonight was too cryptic. In all honesty, while Barry didn’t deserve to die like he did, the fact that he’s dead is probably the best thing for him.” There were several moments of silence between the two men. “Well...I need a shower and some sleep,” said Jim. Standing up, he thanked Javier for the beer. Steve stood as well, and Jim started for the door. “Wait!” Jim turned around. Steve asked, “Aren’t you forgetting something?” “What?” Steve shook his head. “Pay the damn tab.” Jim looked over to the bar and called to Javier, “Javier...Steve said I need to pay you for the beer!” Javier started laughing, “No public safety person ever pay for anything in my bar. You

put your life on the line to protect me and the people. You can always eat and drink free here. This is home to you...now go and be safe.”

The two men walked out into the bright LA morning sunlight. It was half past seven. “You didn’t respond to my statement,” said Steve. “Yes...we need to catch him. You tell me where you think we need to start.” They stood looking at each other while standing on the corner of East Beverly and South Atlantic with the sound of the 60 Freeway in the distance. “Steve, I have a backup of homicide cases that’s six months old and that’s just current cases. I have a cold case file room that’s decades old. I can’t divert resources to one murderer when I have hundreds of others that need to be solved. You have way better resources than me. The Eagle is just as much your jurisdiction as mine. Expend your deep resources to find him.” Steve paced in front of the bar. “Shit...shit...shit...I have a backlog of murder cases that my office is investigating. I can’t just divert federal money for one guy. I mean this isn’t Osama fuckin’ Bin-Laden. The Eagle isn’t on the ten most wanted list, not yet at least.” “He’s not on any list; the guy’s a ghost, and outside of Jill and Barry’s murders, he has uncovered many dangerous serial killers that we didn’t even know existed. Look at Roskowski. While we weren’t able to save the past victims, we know that predator will never harm another human being. The only way we’re going to catch The Eagle is if he fucks up, either commits some high profile killing, or we stumble upon him while working a case.” Steve stared out at the street and the passing cars. “He won’t fuck up, Jim. This guy is way too cool, way too collected; he knows exactly what he’s doing and who he’s looking for. The only way we’re going to catch him is to do what he told me he’s able to do. Get into his mind and be able to be proactive in figuring out where he will strike next.” Jim started for his car, “Well, you feebees have been doing all kinds of mind altering experiments through the years. Trying to get into the heads of serial killers. Have you even done a profile on The Eagle?” Steve had a sheepish look on his face, “No.” “Well, why the hell not?” “What do we fuckin’ profile? You said it. The guy’s a ghost. We’ve never had a serial killer who only killed other serial killers.” Jim laughed and said, “So The Eagle is profiling his victims, which means he has the education and the tools to do the job. Gee...it seems to me that that information could be used to start a profile for The Eagle. Look I’m tired, and I’m off duty. I need a hot shower and sleep. I don’t know what you have going on, but you do your thing and I will do mine. We will keep in touch. Let’s try to see if we can work together to profile this guy. Outside of dumb ass luck. it’s the only way we’re gonna catch him.” And with that Jim walked on down Atlantic to his car, leaving Steve standing on the corner looking at the buildings and businesses, lost

in what his next move was going to be.

# Chapter Eight

*‘What Jim didn’t know was that someone else intercepted the call to the crime scene and was also watching the goings on.’*

Parson’s Trail’s silent. Other than the occasional call of a hawk, raven, or crow, nothing could be heard. It’s high noon and a hot one. The storage container doors are closed, and Francis Statler, also known as the Basin River Killer, is cooking himself a steak and some eggs for lunch. The hum of a window air conditioner in his living room is the only sound in the cabin. He’s dressed in a pair of blue coveralls, nothing on underneath them. They’re wet with perspiration, and he sits down at the table in his kitchenette and eats his early afternoon meal in peace. He loved the solitude of his home. He inherited it after his grandmother and grandfather disappeared decades ago. He was a suspect, but the cops could never get enough evidence to arrest him. He laughs every now and then when he walks out onto the five acre property and visits their shallow graves. Looking around reminded him of them, and he took a bite of the bloody meat on his fork and said, “I’m due to visit you, Grandma and Grandpa. I will take a walk out to your grave tonight. I know you’re both happy I buried you together.”

He had had a busy morning. He finished up his second round of cleansing the Swine and decided he would take a little nap and then have some food before he started his afternoon activities with his prey. He finished his meal and filled a five gallon jug with water and threw some ice cubes into it before heading out to the steel shed. The thermometer on the side of the cabin was in the shade, but it showed one hundred five degrees. “Well, I better give those two some water, or they’ll expire prematurely,” he murmured to himself as he walked across the grassless gravel drive to the tan building. He opened the front access door, and his senses were assaulted by the smell of human feces and blood. Inside, the container was pitch black. He groped for a few seconds until he found the light switch. He clicked it on, and the two men began screaming.

They each had a steel bondage mouth restraint with a metal bit on each side holding their mouths and jaws open. There was no way to speak or close their mouths. He closed the door, and the noise disappeared behind it. He dropped the cooler on the floor and grabbed a long piece of barbed wire wrapped with

concertina wire that shimmered in the lights above his head. He walked over to one of the men who was bloodied and hanging by the restraints and told him to shut up. He dropped the piece of wire to the ground at the man's feet and walked back to the water jug. You could hear a pin drop in the container; the silence was deafening. He filled a rusty old coffee can with some water and walked back over and stood staring at his victim with the can of water in his hands. He put the can down and picked up a funnel with a long piece of clear plastic tubing on it and approached his victim.

"You want some water?" The man looked away. "You have to have water. Why it's... one hundred and twenty-two degrees. You need water." The man refused, so Francis picked up the funnel and drove the flexible tubing down his throat, bypassing his windpipe, and shoving the tube straight into his esophagus. Francis allowed it to hang down onto the man's chest as he leaned down to retrieve the can of water. At five foot eight, one hundred ninety pounds, Francis wasn't strong enough to handle a victim one on one unless restrained so keeping his victims restrained and sometimes sedated was very important. He always felt inferior to all people as a Black man, even others of his own race. He didn't discriminate and prided himself on being an 'equal opportunity killer.' In fact, one of the two men he had in his shed was Black. He stood on a small stool in front of his victim and poured the cool water into the funnel.

"Nice and cold...feels good right?" The man's head was forced back, and there was no way to speak. He left him in that position with the tubing in his throat and did the same to the man across from him. All the while, the two men hung against the hot steel walls. Francis walked over to a tool bench and picked up a drill with a one inch drill bit in it. He walked back over and stood between the two men. "Well, let's get you both some more nice...cool...water." He spent the next half hour filling the can and dumping the contents into the funnel until each man's abdomen was distended from the weight of the water. He took a small container that had two malleable pieces of rubber in them and placed one in each of his ears. He was speaking in a matter of fact manner as he placed the product into his ears. "I have to have ear protection. You know, sometimes, the decibel level can get quite high in here. But don't you two worry. I can still hear you, though your voices are softened by my ear plugs."

He grabbed a soft light brush and began to stroke the penis of the first man.



The man's penis began to rise, and, as the erection got harder, Francis moved to grab the drill. He kept stroking the penis while the distention in the man's abdomen started to decrease. "Ah...the water is being absorbed into your blood and intestines and is headed for your kidneys. Wonderful! You will have a full bladder very soon. He took the man's penis in one hand and the drill in the other and cored down through the tip of his penis into the urethra. The screams were deafening. He pulled the drill bit out, blood and liquid dripped from its end. He grabbed a piece of corked wood that was a little over one inch in diameter and three inches long and jammed it into the end of the man's penis. He made no noise as he had passed out from the pain. The other man had been watching all of this unfold and began screaming and thrashing as Francis picked up his tools and walked toward him. He finished with the second victim who, too, had lost consciousness.

Francis broke open some smelling salts and placed them under each man's nose. They each awoke with the same screams of agony. He had removed the tubing from their throats but left the mouth apparatus in place. He had a chuck key in his hand and was turning it slowly to remove the drill bit while asking, "Who here has to pee?" The two men were sobbing and screaming as Francis placed a two and half inch wood drill bit into the drill. It was pointed in the center and then winged out. It was used for drilling out holes for door knobs and other wood working projects. He stood between the two men with the drill ready for use. He pulled on the trigger several times as he pointed it at each man. "Well, neither one of you wants to speak up, so I guess I will just choose the old fashioned way: eenie, meenie, miney, moe." Then, he walked over to his second victim and began to beat him with the steel wire, shredding the man's skin with each strike. The screams gave him a huge adrenaline rush, and he grabbed the drill, pulled the trigger to full power, and began to drill into the distended bladder of his victim. Blood and urine flowed out over his hands onto the ground. The man's friend hung on the wall across from him watching, listening to the screams, knowing he was next.



The call came in to Jim at six thirty p.m. that two bodies had been discovered in the LA river between Tampa and Corbin. He was in Chatsworth, so he wasn't too far from the scene. When he arrived, there was local media and the usual

onlookers. He walked up to the officer directing traffic away from the scene and asked for the first on scene. The officer pointed toward the river and the wash walls where two patrol officers were standing. He half walked, half slid down the steep concrete walls into the middle of the basin. "What do we have?" he asked. One of the cops looked at him and said, "Nothing that's your business; this is LAPD jurisdiction. What's the Sheriff's Department got to do with it?" He smiled and turned to one of the other nearby officers. "Where's the watch commander?" "Not on scene yet." He looked back at the smart ass officer and said, "You're in my river basin, asshole. This entire area is my jurisdiction. Now why don't you use that smart ass mouth for some good and tell me how you ended up on MY scene. Or do you want to wait for me to talk to your commander?" There were a few moments of tension broken by a familiar voice calling out to Jim.

It was John Zimmer, an LAPD Captain who heard the call and decided to stop by on his way home. He and Jim went back a lot of years, so when Zimmer started chatting with him, the officer with the smart mouth started to walk away. Jim saw him out of the corner of his eye, "Hold on there, officer. You two get over here." He looked at the name tag on the smart ass. "John, this is Officer Reed. When I arrived on scene I wanted to ask him some questions, and he responded with, gee, what was it that you said to me? Oh yea ... 'Not your business.' John, would you tell Officer Reed what I have to do with it?" John's face got grave, "How long have you been on the force?" "Six months, sir." "Six whole months?" "Yes sir." "I suggest you look up proper procedure and jurisdiction when you get back to the station because this is LA County jurisdiction, and you just insulted not only a very good friend of mine but one of the best homicide detectives in law enforcement. You two were first on scene?" "Yes sir." "Then I'm going to go over and talk to some of the media folks to try and placate them, and you two are going to politely apologize to Detective O'Brian and then answer every question that he has. Am I clear?" "Yes sir!" John turned to Jim. "We'll catch up in a few. Let me go and calm the media." Jim smiled as he walked away. He then turned to the young officer with a big smile on his face and asked, "So, smart ass, do you want to answer my questions now?"

The young officer apologized up and down. Jim finally told him to shut up

and said, "I have enough of your lip prints on my ass. Tell me how you ended up here." "We received a call at six p.m. that two bodies had been discovered in the basin." "Okay...so then what did you two do?" "My partner and I spoke to an indigent who was upset. He said that two of his friends were down in the river, and they were dead. So I asked him to stay put while I called for backup, and we went down into the basin to have a look." "Where's the indigent?" They pointed to an old man in tattered clothing sitting against the fence off in the distance. "He's been apprised to remain on scene to be interviewed," Reed's partner told Jim. "Okay...why don't the three of us take a walk down to the crime scene?" He started over toward a makeshift tent area in the middle of the basin. There, side by side, were the nude cut up remains of two men. He knew immediately what he was dealing with. He grabbed his cell phone and called for his team, then he questioned the officers and went to speak to the old man.

Jim limped his way back up the steep sides of the basin to where the old man was sitting. He was dirty, his clothes were grungy, and Jim half anticipated needing a slum interrupter to help with his questioning the witness. As he approached, the old man stood up and looked Jim in the eye. Jim told him to relax, but he stood silent. "I'm certain you're traumatized by what you found here. Can you tell me how you came to find these men?" "They hadn't shown up for breakfast, officer. It has been our habit to break bread each morning at six thirty, going on ... oh at least ten years." His proper stance and grasp of the English language caught Jim off guard. He was expecting a babbling fool. Instead he had a man of sophistication, at least in his verbal skills. "So they missed breakfast. What made you decide to come looking for them?" The man was leaning against the fence. "It is our custom to play chess in the afternoon, or I should say I have been working on teaching them the game. Gerald had a keen intellect, but he had never been properly educated. His partner, Raymond, was a tad below dull normal, so chess was out of the question for him, but he liked to pretend that he was involved and would ask questions."

"Did you see anyone around the bodies when you arrived?" He nodded. "I know this is hard to talk about, but can you tell me what you saw?" He smiled and said, "It's not hard at all for me to discuss, officer. I was an infantryman in World War II and in the Korean conflict. This is not the first time I have seen a body torn asunder, sir. I did see a person standing on top of the river looking

down at me as I approached their encampment.” “Can you describe him to me?” “He was at quite a distance, at least a hundred yards, short, squat heavy, wearing a hooded sweatshirt. I’m not saying that he had anything to do with this, you understand, simply that he was out of place for the time of day, and in a most peculiar spot on the edge of the basin.”

Jim scratched his head. “I don’t understand. Why would he be out of place here at any time, let alone when you found the bodies?” There was a laugh. “Dinner was being served at the mission. Those of us who call the basin home would already be in line for our meal. He was out of place in my opinion because he didn’t appear to be homeless. He appeared to be watching to see my reaction when I found my friends.” “Could you make out his race?” “I’m afraid not. When I realized that my friends had been killed, I stayed looking around their bodies. I didn’t touch anything. This appeared to have startled the man, and he ran over the top of the basin across Victory Boulevard and disappeared.” Jim was shaking his head, “Okay, sir.” “Reginald.” “I’m sorry.” “My name, officer. My name is Reginald.” “Okay Reggie...I want you to stay here until I get one of my officers to take a formal statement from you.” “Reginald, officer. My name is Reginald, not Reggie, or anything else.” Jim turned to walk away and said, “Yea, okay, whatever. Just stay put.”

Reginald cleared his throat and Jim turned back around to face him. Reginald had a very disapproving look on his face. In looking at him, Jim noticed for the first time that he was a rather distinguished looking man. His clothes were tattered, but he was clean; the dirt that he saw looked like river mud and was probably picked up going down the basin hill. He had grey hair and a stiff tight jaw line. His eyes were deep set, dark brown, and had a slight twinkle in them as he spoke. “I would appreciate it, officer, if you would speak to me and not at me. I would also appreciate it if you would show me the same courtesy you would show any other human being. I can see that you look down your nose at me and those like me; however, believe it or not, I choose to live this way. I’m quiet affluent; I have just found that the people here on the streets are much more real. You might be surprised at just how many of us choose this life instead of being forced into it. There are a great many exceptions; I, however, am not one. So please treat us like human beings and not like cattle or worse, the dregs of society.” Jim looked stunned and apologized and politely asked him to remain

where he was until one of his detectives could speak to him. A smile broke across Reginald's face, and he said, "Certainly, officer, thank you."

Jim made his way back down into the basin and to the bodies. His team arrived within ten minutes, and he put a call in to the coroner as well. "Okay people, let's process the crime scene. We all know what and who we're dealing with here, so let's do a very clean job." He grabbed Neil Baldwin, one of his sketch artists, and asked him to go up and take a report from Reginald. Neil started up the embankment but Jim called him back and met him halfway. "Oh, and be polite to him. He is quite a unique personality. I just got verbally bitch slapped by him in the nicest way." Neil smiled and told Jim he would do his best and started up the hill.

Jim walked back over to the bodies. The two men, one Latino, the other Black, were each put on display. Their nude bodies were arranged over trash and broken pieces of wood. Their torsos had been cut in half and laid next to each other. The Latino's torso was under the upper half of the Black and vice versa. Their hands and feet had been removed and were placed on the wheels of two shopping carts next to each body. Their faces were contorted, and their bodies badly beaten into almost a jelly consistency. The Killer always left a calling card. Jim called for his forensic team to get samples and photos as he looked for it. He scoured the area very carefully and was just about to give up when he saw a small brown skin-colored roll under the tent five feet from the victims. He called one of his team members to bring him a pair of gloves. He grabbed the roll with a pair of tweezers. "Skin?" asked the forensic investigator. He nodded. "Do you want to read it here?" Jim looked around; he knew the killer was in the area... watching. There were so many places that he could be hiding in plain sight. He shook his head. "No...I'm not going to give the son of a bitch the satisfaction." He bagged the skin and placed it in an evidence bag. He knew the note was nothing more than a taunting of him to catch the killer. He had read every one since he started searching for the killer nearly two decades ago. He signed off on the note sample and headed for his car. He placed it in a paper bag and drove it back to the station. When he got in he went straight to the lab and placed the roll on a glass table with bright white lights under and over it. He gently unrolled the scroll of human skin to see the message written in his victim's blood.

"My dear, Detective O'Brian. It was great seeing you today. I left this Swine for you to remove from the river. Filth must be dealt with. We must keep our environment clean. You

of all people know that I am doing my part to clean up our river. You must do yours.

Until next time, BR"

Always a taunt with a hint but never anything solid to go on. The profile they worked up on the Basin River Killer had changed over the past two decades that Jim had been working on the case. The profile was much more difficult because the killer didn't have a specific gender or race that he hunted. The crime scenes, however, were always the same, and the manner in which he tortured and killed his victims varied little. His profile had the killer as a white male between the ages of 55 and 64, between six foot and six two with a thin to medium build. What he did to his victims required a great deal of privacy and also either a sound proof location or a rural one. They had found tire tracks at several of the dump sites but nothing unique. His notes were always written on the skin of his victims. Sometimes he would kill singles, other times doubles but never more than that. And this was the first killing in nearly a year. Jim was starting to think, hope, that something had happened to him, but he was alive and well.

When the rest of his team arrived at the lab, they met to discuss their findings. He knew that they would need to wait for the autopsy report to get an official cause of death, but he already knew what it was. They died from loss of blood due to amputation. The son of a bitch started sawing off body parts while his victims were alive and conscious. What Jim didn't know was that someone else intercepted the call to the crime scene and was also watching the goings on.



Francis walked across the park from the basin after he saw Jim leave with his note. He was disappointed that he didn't read it while he was watching but those disappointments happen. "He'll read the next one in front of me," he mumbled to himself as he walked over to the corner of Tampa and Victory into a medical building parking lot to his van. He casually got into his van and pulled out of the lot onto Tampa and headed north toward his home in the San Fernando Valley hills. Behind him, a black Chevy Silverado turned out onto Tampa following the van from a long distance. The truck had GPS, and the driver had slid a small transmitter under the steel frame of the van. He didn't need to worry too much about following close, he just meandered along Tampa watching the arrow on his GPS make its way up the road, making a few turns, until it stopped at 15 Parson's Trail, lot number 7768859.

Once Francis' van had stopped, the driver pulled the Silverado into a

Wendy's restaurant and ordered a meal with a chocolate frosty and sat in his truck looking at the blinking arrow on his screen. He also had a police computer mounted on the dash, and he plugged in the license plate number of the van. *Marcus Statler. Valencia, California.* He and his wife had been reported missing many years ago according to the data on his screen. There were no wants or warrants on the plate, and its registration was nearly five years out of date. He picked up the radio in his truck. "Dispatch, this is Swenson. I'm taking a dinner break. Over." "10-4 Swenson. You're Code 7. Out." He finished his meal and went into the restaurant to use the bathroom. It was getting dark as he approached his truck when he heard a familiar voice calling to him from a distance. He turned around, and it was Jim O'Brian. "John?" He walked toward Jim and the two men met in the middle of the lot. There was a quick exchange of handshakes and Jim asked, "How the hell have you been? I haven't seen you in months." He smiled and started to walk Jim back to his car. "Hi Jim. I'm sorry. I've been buried with a couple of cases. I also took some vacation time. How are you doing?" Jim asked if he was still working white collar crime downtown. John smiled, "No...I was promoted...um...it will be two years next month. I'm working homicide."

"I had no idea. The last time I saw you, you were the lead detective in money crimes. Congratulations on the promotion. I haven't seen you at any crime scenes that I've been on." "You probably won't. I'm working West LA and Santa Monica. It's been pretty slow, thankfully, nothing too hair raising. I hear you. Can't say the same." Jim laughed, "Nope, I'm on my way home from the office. We just found two new victims of the Basin River Killer." John nodded as they walked, "Yea, I heard the call come over the scanner. What do you have?" "Two males, hard to put an age on them. One Latino, the other Black, both mutilated. Waiting while the coroner works the scene with my people. Are you going over?" "I haven't received a call to investigate that one, Jim. Do you need help? I can call in and ask to be assigned to the case if you like." "No. My team is wrapping things up and will head back to the lab. It would be nice if you could stop by and take a look at the note." "Skin again?" Jim nodded. "Let me guess. It was written to you." Jim nodded again. "He's getting even bloodier in his killings. I've been doing this for a lot of years, John. I don't have the coroner's cause of death yet, but I could see it in their faces. He really made them suffer."

“He enjoys watching his victims suffer, Jim; he gets off on it.” “There’s never any sign of sexual assault.” “That’s not why this guy kills. He doesn’t do it for sexual arousal; he kills for the adrenaline rush. He likes the power he has over them. He says he’s ‘cleaning the river,’ but what he’s really doing is playing God!” “A God complex?” “Oh yea, classic. You don’t have that in your profile?” Jim shook his head. “It never crossed my mind. I think I’m going to ask Steve Hoffman to come in on this one and do a profile. Hey...what do you say? You want to come down to the office tomorrow and meet with Steve and me? The things you just said about the killer leave me thinking a new pair of eyes might help us revise the profile on this guy.”

John finished off the frosty and said, “You bet. I’ve never worked with Steve, but I’ve heard that he’s a brilliant profiler.” “He is, but he’s been distracted with Barry’s death and trying to profile The Eagle. Actually, we’re both working on that one. I just admitted to him today that I knew that Jill Makin and Barry were related.” “Really? I didn’t know that you and Barry were that close.” “Yea, we worked together in the U.S. Marshal’s Service over twenty years ago. We were partners of sorts until I was shot and left the department.” “I remember the newspaper story when you were shot. I’m sorry to hear about Barry.” There was an awkward pause and then John continued. “Um...I know you put a lot of time into the Basin River case and those notes. I read a few. He’s been elusive.” “Taunting me is more the word for it. He wants me to catch him. He’s going to slip up eventually, and we’ll get him.” John threw his cup in a trash can next to Jim’s car, “I think you can count on that!” Jim looked at him strangely. “What do you mean?” “Sooner or later, they all slip up.” “Well, you have that right. I just hope we can get him into custody before another person suffers at his hand.” John nodded and said he had to get back on duty. “No problem. Can you come by tomorrow about two p.m.?” “You bet, Jim. I’ll be there. I’m happy to give you my two cents worth and to meet Special Agent Hoffman.” “Great!” Jim had a big smile as he got into his car, “I’ll see you tomorrow. Be safe out there.” John extended the same to Jim and walked back to his truck. He called in and cleared the Code 7 and started driving up Tampa toward the hills with the Parson’s Trail location blinking on his GPS.



# Chapter Nine

*“This whole mess is just getting to me. Of course, the kid is welcome.*

*You never know who can shed new light on old ideas.”*

Francis had pulled the van around the back and was hosing it out when he heard the sound of a vehicle on the access road. He didn't give it a lot of thought and just finished up and then pulled the van back in front of his cabin and went inside. He took off the black sweatpants and hooded sweatshirt he was wearing until he was down to a pair of black shorts and a black t-shirt. The logo on the front of the shirt had a happy face on it in bright yellow with the slogan, 'Have a Nice Day!' He placed the clothes on top of a hamper in his bedroom and started the shower.



The Eagle pulled up the access road until he could see the lights of the cabin in the distance. He parked well out of sight and walked up the road to the front of Francis' home and surveyed the layout. He looked at the steel gate but saw no latch. He was sure it had a transponder, and, sure enough, he located a small antenna connected to a garage door opener. It was a very common model.

He could hear water running in the cabin and the sound of singing. "So Francis likes to sing in the shower," he said as he walked back to his vehicle. He pulled a case from the passenger seat and walked back to the steel gate protecting the cabin. It was dark, and he was dressed in full black body armor, as well as having a pair of night vision goggles on top of his head. He opened the case and pulled out a laptop. He accessed the Internet, bringing up the owner's manual for the garage door opener that was connected to the gate, as well as all existing codes to operate it remotely. It took less than thirty seconds. The shower was still going when he pressed the enter key on the laptop, and the gate started to creak open. He heard the shower shut off as the gate started opening and heard the sound of a large vehicle heading in his general direction. The Eagle moved into the brush across from the open gate and waited.



Francis stepped from the shower clean and refreshed. He grabbed his towel and began drying off when he heard his gate opening and a vehicle on the access road. He calmly walked over to his bedroom closet and took out a Remington

twelve gauge shotgun. He had it loaded with .410-000, triple-aught, buck shot. It had great close up kill capability and was perfect for home defense. He put on a pair of shorts and a shirt and walked toward the front door. He slowly opened it and looked toward the open gate. He could see lights coming toward his cabin. He placed the gun on the edge of his porch and walked out to the gate. As he approached, a county fire truck came rambling by. He waved while standing in the middle of the road, and they stopped. A fireman stepped from the vehicle in full gear, approaching Francis. The engine was still running with its high beams and orange and yellow running lights on. It was like Christmas. The sound of the engine made it hard to hear. A large shadow passed between the light and darkness in the direction of the house, but Francis was too distracted to make much of a note of it.

Francis motioned and when the firefighter was right in front of him he asked if everything was okay. He yelled that everything was fine, and that they were on maneuvers and trying out some new equipment that the department had just installed. The firefighter explained that they were equipping all units with remote transponders that would allow them to scan garage door codes and open them remotely in the event of a fire and evacuation situation, so they could see if there were people or vehicles in the garages. “This is new technology, so we’ve been out here doing some testing at our training facility with different transponders. Is there a problem, sir?” “My gate is open, and I didn’t open it,” Francis said loudly but calmly. “Sorry about that. It might have been us. The unit scans arbitrary yet common remote codes. It has a pretty long range, so it might have been us. He pulled the radio on his coat close to his mouth, and Francis could hear him ask if they still had the unit operating. Francis looked around for the source of the shadow and saw two coyotes heading toward his home through the darkened light. The driver shut off the engine and several firefighters approached the two men. The driver called out, “I didn’t get that last call. What’s up?” “I was trying to see if you still had the remote unit on.” The driver nodded and walked back to the truck and pushed a button, and the gate on Francis’ house began to close. A smile of relief grew across his face. “Thank you so much for stopping guys. I was afraid that someone was trying to break in.”

They told him it was fine and asked if he wanted them to reopen his gate just to be sure. Francis nodded emphatically, and they allowed the unit to open it

again. He thanked them and started back toward his driveway and the open gate. The truck started up and drove off. Francis waved at them as he walked back across his yard. He was relieved and picked up the shotgun from the front porch and walked back into his cabin, closing the gate behind him from a button inside the front door.



It was half past eleven when Jim called Steve to see if he could meet with him tomorrow to work on a profile of the Basin River Killer. He got voicemail and left a message to call him back. He was done for the day and drove over to Santiago's for a beer. It was a weeknight, and all was quiet in the bar. He ordered some chicken wings to snack on and sipped his beer, trying to wind down from the day's events. Valente came over to the table and sat down with him. "How are you doing, Detective O'Brian?" Jim smiled and put his beer down. "How is it that you speak perfect English and your father does so poorly?" Valente laughed. "My father doesn't like the American vocabulary, not to mention that the English language is so difficult to learn. In Spanish, we have a simple spoken and written structure. It's not hard to understand at all." "Where did you go to school?" "I graduated from East Beverly High and went to college at UCLA." "You graduated from UCLA?" Valente nodded. "What did you study?" "English." Jim busted out in laughter. Valente followed. Javier was seated behind the bar and looked over at the two laughing men. He yelled out to Valente, "Valente....cerveza mesa la dosis!" Valente pushed away from the table and said, "Si...papa," and picked up the beers for table two. Jim saw Steve walk in the front door and yelled out to Javier, "Javier, dos cerveza, por favor." Steve walked over and sat down, asking Jim when he started speaking Spanish. "Hey, I can do a lot of things you don't know about. What brings you out at this late hour?" Steve was sitting in the chair across from Jim. Actually, when he sat it was more like a controlled fall. "I just wrapped up a call with Washington and need something to wash the taste of politics out of my mouth." They laughed. The beers came, and they toasted a long day and sat quietly drinking.

After a few minutes Jim said, "I ran into an old friend this evening while I was driving back to Chatsworth." "Okay." "He's been a detective with LAPD for quite a few years, and he used to work a white collar crimes desk but was recently promoted to homicide." "Anyone I would know?" "I doubt it. Name's

John Swenson.” Steve shook his head, “Never heard of him. Homicide, huh? Good for him. I don’t recall the name from any of the scenes we’ve been on lately.” “You wouldn’t. He works West Hollywood and Santa Monica.” “Oh... tough beat.” He said it laughingly and Jim nodded. “I invited him to come down to the station tomorrow to talk with us while we work up a new profile on the Basin River Killer. I thought since he’s a rookie to homicide he could learn a thing or two.” “I don’t get paid to train multijurisdictional agency personnel.” “Oh...don’t get an attitude, Steve. Shit. I figured since we’re going to be there with our teams the kid could stop in. Besides, he has some interesting ideas on the killer.” “Well, shit, Jim, why didn’t you just say that...hell, he can work up profiles for some of our other cases, too.” He took a drink of his beer and then apologized. “This whole mess is just getting to me. Of course, the kid is welcome. You never know who can shed new light on old ideas.”

Jim ordered two more beers, and Valente brought them to the table. “Steve Hoffman, I want to introduce you to Valente Santiago. Valente, this is Steve Hoffman, or should I say Special Agent Steve Hoffman? FBI, Los Angeles field office.” “Nice to meet you, Valente.” “It’s one a.m., Javier,” Jim bellowed, “can Valente sit with me and my amigo for a few minutes and talk?” Javier looked over at the three men with a disapproving eye. “Si,” he responded wearily. “Gracias.” “So,” said Valente, “what’s the topic of conversation?” Steve seemed surprised by his good English, and Jim smiled and recapped Valente’s UCLA experience. “Impressive,” said Steve, “so are you going to follow in your father’s footsteps and take over the bar?” “He wants me to, but I really want to go to law school.” “That’s a noble ambition. I take it your father doesn’t agree?” Valente shook his head. Steve asked if he had put in any applications for law school. Valente nodded and said, “I just received an acceptance letter from UCLA.” “A very good school,” Steve responded. Jim started laughing, and Valente looked at him like he had three heads. “I’m sorry, Valente. I’m not laughing at you; I’m laughing at my amigo. He graduated from UCLA School of Law many, many years ago.” “So, you’re a lawyer?” Steve shook his head and told him he worked for the FBI.” “What do you do at the Bureau?” Steve sighed, “I work in the Behavioral Science Office of the Los Angeles Homicide Division.” Valente looked at him oddly and asked how a law degree qualified him as a behavioral specialist. Jim couldn’t help himself, “Yea man...how does

that qualify you as a profiler?” “I have a MSW from UCLA with an emphasis in criminal behavior.” “Ah...so you’re trained in matters of the mind.” Steve nodded. “Why bother with law school?” “At the time I was going to school, it was part of a package deal I had with my employer.” “Did they pay for your education?” “Pretty much, after my masters program.” “Wow...who did you work for?” Jim just smiled. “The FBI. There was a time when it was part of the requirement to be an agent; you had to have a law or accounting degree. All of that has changed now, but then it was part of what the Bureau wanted in its agents.”

Steve asked Valente, “So do you think you will go on to law school given your situation with your father?” Valente shook his head, “No, not me...this is home, and I want to do well by the people I love here. I joined the Marine Corps after the September 11th attacks. I did three tours in Afghanistan and one in Iraq. The government paid for my education when I got out of the Corps, and all of the people of this neighborhood stood by my father and my family while I was away.” Jim smiled, “I had no idea you were a veteran. I chewed a lot of dirt in Iraq in the Gulf War when I was in the Corps reserves. Who did you serve under?” “Colonel Colleen Bolton.” Jim sneered, “WOW...I never served under her, but I heard she was a real ball buster. I also heard that she’s a stone cold fox.”

Valente nodded and smiled, “Yes, I served directly under her in a black ops unit for the last two tours of my hitch. While she is very, very beautiful, it wears off real fast when you see the military commander side of her.” Jim nodded, “I’ve heard that about her. She was busted out of the Corps a year or two ago wasn’t she?” Valente nodded sadly, “Busted out is the wrong word; she was railroaded, and she is none too happy about it.” “Do you keep in touch with her?” “We became friends after I left the Corps. I talk to her now and then but not much lately.” Jim smiled and dropped the subject. Steve was quiet as the exchange took place. He didn’t serve in the military, and Jim made sure to rub his face in it whenever possible.

It was pushing two a.m. when Javier called out to Valente. “Well, gentlemen, I have to get some work done. Thank you for the talk.” And with that he walked back into the kitchen. Jim took the last gulp of his beer as did Steve, and they agreed that it was high time to go to their homes and get some sleep. They bid good night to Valente and headed out. “So, I’ll see you in twelve hours at my

office?” Jim laughed, Steve nodded, and the two went their separate ways.

# Chapter Ten

*'His chiseled features, sea blue eyes, and near-bald head with a Marine style flat top and blond stubble caught several of the ladies, and one of the gentlemen officers, off guard.'*

It was half past two when Francis heard rustling outside his bedroom window. It had woken him from a sound sleep and was loud enough to disturb him over the hum of the window AC unit. He rolled out of bed and put on his slippers and walked to the front window. "The damn coyotes better not be in the trash cans again." He grabbed a flashlight and unlocked and opened the front door. He had a baseball bat in his hand; he didn't want to waste ammunition on wildlife. He heard the rustling noise again coming from the far side of the house. He stepped off the porch and into the darkness, moving the light back and forth as he walked. He got to the edge of the cabin and shined the light into the area of the container. The doors were wide open, and the silhouette of a figure stood in the darkened opening.

He rushed back into the house and grabbed his shotgun and ran back out calling out, "Who's there?" There was no response. He moved closer to the container and with each step he realized that it was a very large man standing with his back to him. "I don't know who you are, but you've trespassed onto the way wrong property, pal." He lifted the shotgun and pumped the gun to load the chamber. There was no movement from the person. "On your knees. Now," he ordered, but the man didn't comply. "Raise your hands in the air and turn around." There were a tense few moments as the man slowly raised his hands and turned toward Francis. When he turned, Francis couldn't see his face, just a large man dressed in black facing him. "You see this shotgun? I can blow your head clean off from where I'm standing. Now you get down on your knees, then lie face down on the ground with your hands behind your head, or I will send you straight to hell." "You first," the man said and moved toward him. Francis pulled the trigger and heard only the click of the firing pin. Within seconds, the man had disarmed him and struck him with the butt of his shotgun. Francis looked up from the ground where he had landed and said, "Who are you?" "Justice" was the response, and then the butt of the gun struck Francis on the side of the head, knocking him unconscious.



Steve was running five minutes late as he rolled into Jim's office for their meeting. Jim and Steve's entire staff were there waiting. "Sorry I'm late, folks. I was caught up on a conference call." He smiled and took a seat but nothing happened. Jim looked at the clock on the wall and said, "I have asked a young friend of mine to join us this afternoon. He's with the LAPD and is new to homicide. We talked last night, and he had some interesting ideas on the Basin River Killer, so I asked him to join us. Let's wait five more minutes, and if he's not here we'll get started. They all just sat there twiddling their thumbs when John came through the door, breathless. "I'm so sorry, everyone; I was all the way over in Santa Monica and lost track of time." They remained silent.

To say that John was a magnificent human specimen was not doing him justice. He was dressed in a dark blue LAPD polo shirt with the badge over the left pocket, which was tucked into a pair of Levi's that were beyond tight. His chiseled features, sea blue eyes, and near-bald head with a Marine style flat top and blond stubble caught several of the ladies, and one of the gentlemen officers, off guard. He stood in the doorway smiling, his shirt straining against his huge arms and chest. He was wearing a police issue black leather belt with his shield clipped to the right side, and his sidearm and handcuffs were on his left. He was wearing a pair of high top Nike sneakers, and at first glance he looked like a Nordic God.

Jim stood up from his desk and said, "Well, it's about time...everyone, let me introduce you to Thor." There was a little laughter in the room. "Jesus Christ, John. What the hell have you been doing for the past several years? You look great!" John smiled sheepishly and took a seat in an empty chair near Steve, who was looking at him with total awe. "Okay...all kidding aside guys, this is John Swenson, and he's with homicide in West Hollywood and Santa Monica. Steve leaned over toward him and said, "You know how to make an entrance, young man." He smiled as Jim continued. "Okay, John, all of these folks are members of my staff and Steve's. We don't have time for names, and the ugly guy who just spoke to you is Special Agent Steve Hoffman, FBI. I asked him to stop by and give us some tips. Let's talk about the Basin River Killer. His latest victims were brutalized far beyond anything we've ever seen from this guy. Why the escalation in brutality?" Marcy spoke first, "It would appear that he doesn't feel



that he's getting enough attention, and perhaps thinks that he needs to be more brutal to his victims to drive us harder." Jim frowned. "Seriously...that's what you think is driving the increased violence? The guy has been killing people for over four decades. I inherited this guy when I took this job twenty years ago. I think he knows that we're looking for him. John, tell my people what you told me about this guy's reason for killing."

He stood up and addressed the room, "While this person is killing at random, there is a pattern in the crime scenes that I have been on in the last two years down in my area. This guy likes to watch his victims suffer. He gets off on it... Jim and I talked about it last night. The lack of sexual assault to his victims, male and female, and the types of victims that he grabs tell me that this guy isn't doing this to get off sexually. His crimes may seem random, but they aren't. He only picks homeless indigents, people that won't be missed. I think that the guy has a God complex. He gets an adrenaline rush from the suffering of his victims. We all know that he has one particular body type that he seeks and that means folks with a few extra pounds." Steve interrupted, "And, John, why do you think he wants them heavy?" John looked Steve right in the eye and said, "Too thin, and they die too fast; the same if they're too heavy. He wants his victims to have a nice full BMI, so that he can take his time torturing them. He wants to hear their screams and pleadings. He wants them to beg him to allow them to live. This guy likes what he's doing, and he has up to this point been very, very careful not to get caught."

"Why do you say up to this point?" Jim asked. John still had his eyes fixed on Steve. "Well, I took the liberty of reviewing the case file last night after we spoke. When he took his last two victims, he took them early in the morning, and he killed them the same day." Steve asked him how the hell he knew that. John smiled, "It's all in the case file for this killing. The interviews that were conducted on scene have several of their homeless friends telling us they were with them at their camp until as early as four a.m. yesterday. Several other witness accounts noticed that the two men didn't show up at the mission in Van Nuys, only a few blocks from their camp, for breakfast, which these two victims did daily. So if we take into account that it was approximately four a.m. when the last person saw the men alive, and their remains, no sense in calling them bodies, he hacked the hell out of them, were found by another transient at or

before six p.m., it tells us that they were grabbed by the killer between four and six thirty a.m. yesterday.” Steve interrupted again, “How can you nail down such an exact time for their abduction?” “Oh, that’s easy,” said John. “In reading the interviews, several of the homeless said that the two men were always among the first at the mission for breakfast, and the mission starts serving at six thirty a.m.” “So, why doesn’t anyone report them missing?” came a question from one of the other CSIs in the room. “That’s an easy and obvious one. They weren’t gone long enough for anyone to make a report. They missed a meal, no big deal ... while their friends noticed, there could have been any number of reasons, so no one is going to consider foul play over one missed meal.”

Steve piped up, “Interesting observation, and you got all of that from just yesterday’s report.” John nodded. “So you looked at the crime scene photos?” He nodded again. “What do you make of the fact that he only kept them for twelve hours when he has been known to keep victims for days or even weeks?” One single word was the response. “Heat!” Everyone looked confused. Jim asked, “What the hell does heat have to do with it?” John moved to the middle of the room. “In looking at the photos, the skin on their backs showed serious blistering and second and third degree burns. The burns weren’t inflicted intentionally by the killer. He had to have had them in a location that got very, very hot. I also noticed that their burns were ridged, as if they were pressed against some type of corrugated steel. I tried to see if I could get a match to the type of burn scars on the victims, and I found that they were consistent with the walls of a steel shipping container. Those containers, when they have outlived their useful lives on ships, are sold and, a lot of times, converted into mobile storage containers. The ones you can rent or buy. I looked at the photos of some local containers online and found that the burns matched the seams in several storage containers that are sold and rented out by local businesses here in the valley.”

Jim interrupted John and motioned for Steve to come up front. He walked over toward the door, and the two started whispering. “Where the fuck did you find this kid?” asked Steve. “Hell, Steve, two years ago he was working a desk in white collar crimes in the Rampart Division; I ran into him last night, and now he’s a homicide detective.” “Jesus Christ. This guy has ESP or something. We need to talk to him alone. Let’s clear our people out.” Jim nodded and the two

walked back to their prospective areas. “Okay folks, this has been fun, but we need to get back to work. I want you to think about what John has told us and do a little more digging. John, can you spare a few minutes to speak with me and Steve?” John nodded and sat down as the room cleared out. When the last person had left, Jim invited John and Steve to join him in his office.

They walked down the stairs to the first floor. No one said a word. They walked in, and Steve was impressed. The office was immaculate. There was an oak desk in the center with a long sofa on the back wall and two nice fabric chairs. All the furniture was trimmed in oak and stained to match the desk. Awards and commendations that Jim had received over the years covered the walls, and there was a stool beside the window with an ashtray and a pack of cigarettes. Jim sat in his black leather desk chair and invited the two men to sit as well. “Wow,” Jim said, and Steve seconded it. “John, you have seriously only been working as a homicide detective for two years?” He nodded. “You gleaned all of the detail that you just provided just by looking at some photos and doing an internet search?” He nodded again. “What else, John...what else do you know about this killer? You said he has made no mistakes so far.” “Yes, but he messed up this time.” Steve asked how so. “Well, it’s not a mess up that’s going to lead to his capture right away, but we now know that he places his victims into a storage container and that the container is outdoors.”

“Okay, John, let’s say that you’re right about the container. There are thousands of those in yards all over the county,” said Steve. “True...and that’s where he messed up. We can narrow the field by looking for remote locations where storage containers are outdoors.” Jim laughed and so did Steve. “You’re a smart kid, John, but even if we eliminate all of the containers in earshot of neighbors that still leaves thousands, if not tens of thousands, in remote locations.” “However,” John continued, “the last three killings have all been within two miles east or west of Tampa and Corbin in the San Fernando Valley. That tells me that the killer is killing his victims faster because of heat, and that he’s dumping them closer to his home location for ease of transport. This guy isn’t very strong. We can see that from the way he dumps the bodies. No one ever sees him. He sets up the bodies in some type of large box truck or van, then drives the victims to the scene. He then can roll the bodies out of the vehicle and move the sections around the way he wants. He cuts them up in part as torture,

but, once dead, he keeps cutting to make them easier for him to move.” The two men just stared at him.

“What do you think about our profile of the killer as a single white male?” asked Steve. John sat back in the chair, “You’re wrong.” Now he really had Steve’s attention since he wrote the most recent update of the killer’s personal profile. “How are we wrong, or, more directly, how am I wrong? I updated the profile two years ago.” “I’m sorry, Special Agent Hoffman. I meant no disrespect, but your profile has one serious error.” The race you have for the killer is wrong.” “Really...so what race is he?” “He’s Black.” Jim and Steve looked at each other in total bewilderment. “And just what the hell do you base that on?” “Great question! You see, as I was going over the profile and some of the past killings, as well as yesterday’s crime scene photos, I noticed something so minute that anyone could have missed it. Six months ago, the killer left the body of a transient female near the edge of the basin in Hollywood; I was working the crime scene. The woman, while being quartered, was still too large for the killer to move, so he pushed her body out of the back of his vehicle in sections as he slowly pulled it forward. The last section of the corpse was dropped in front of a surveillance camera near an access gate down into the basin. I noticed the camera and ordered the film for the prior twenty four hours. I was able to mark the discovery of the victim’s remains with the time. I watched the video and sure enough at six twenty-eight a.m., ten minutes before the first call came in about the killing, the video showed a Black male pulling a dark object to the top of the basin. He dropped the body part and moved out of the frame. I don’t think even he knew that the camera was there.” “Where the hell is the film?” asked Jim. “I put it into the file and wrote it into the report.” “Why didn’t you say anything to me?” John looked confused, “Jim, I’m sorry, but I didn’t know you were the lead on the case. I just wrote up the report. I was still new to the job, and to be honest no one really gave the whole thing a lot of attention. In fact, the joke at the station was ‘just another basin file.’ There was no reporting officer for the killing.” Jim nodded, understanding, and Steve finally stood up and said, “John, if you would be so kind as to pull that file and video and bring it by my office on Wilshire, we can analyze it and perhaps make out a face.” “You bet,” he said excitedly. “I can run it over to you tomorrow afternoon. Steve told him to come over at three p.m. Jim said he would try to join them, and with that they parted to head back to their perspective assignments.

# Chapter Eleven

*'He could hear clipped and hushed tones as he lay on the floor waiting for help.'*

**F**rancis came to in total darkness. He wasn't sure where he was or what was happening. He felt liquid dripping down his legs and realized it was his own sweat. As he became more alert, he recognized that he was inside his container, restrained to the very wall his victims had been restrained to just hours earlier. His back was aching against the steel; his skin was burning. He began screaming, but there was no response to his cries. He struggled against the restraints when suddenly he remembered that all of them had an emergency release. "Phew...the releases. I have to feel for the emergency releases," he said out loud and moved one hand at a time, feeling with his fingers for the release. He found it on his left hand side and pulled down and it released the grip. His hand slipped through the restraint, and he moved to release his right hand. He was still not fully aware of what he was doing because he forgot about the leg restraints, and he ended up falling face first onto the steel floor. "Ouch...shit..." He reached around and was able to release his leg restraints and stand up. He had gotten out of the restraints but was disoriented and faced with a much more daunting task. He had booby trapped the container, so that when the doors were shut and locked, if any of his prey ever got loose, they would be seriously wounded while trying to find the exit. None of the traps could inflict fatal injuries; he designed them to inflict punishment and to incapacitate his prey until he returned. The problem, he realized, was that he didn't know where the back ended and the front began.

He slid his feet slowly across the floor trying to feel for a trip wire. He hit a slick spot and slid forward right through one of the traps. He screamed in agony as a piece of barbed wire struck him just above the thighs and wrapped around the lower part of his torso. He fell to the floor, embedding the wire into his flesh. He writhed in agony, at first cursing obscenities, and then, as the wire dug deeper into his flesh with each movement, pleading for help. He knew, however, that there was no one to hear his cries. There would be no help coming. He would die laying on the floor of his own torture chamber. He moved his hand down toward his abdomen and found the end of the wire on the right side of his hip. He gently

pulled on the wire, but the barbs were so deeply imbedded that he couldn't remove them.

Hours passed as he worked to release himself from his own trap. By the time he was free of the wire, he was exhausted, dehydrated, and barely able to move. His mind raced as he mumbled less coherently, "Where am I in relation to the front doors?" He knew that there were three other traps in the container, and the first was three feet inside the entrance. Had he been struck by the first one entering the container or the last at the far end? He knew he didn't have a lot of time before he would lose consciousness, ensuring he'd never make it out of the unit alive. While wobbly, he began to drag his feet gently, once more seeking the exit. He was unstable, and his right leg was jerking with each step. He could feel the blood and sweat running down his legs making movement that much more treacherous. "If I can get to the front, I can open the emergency latch and be free." His voice echoed in the container, and he moved forward a few more feet over a fifteen minute period.

Certain that he was at the front of the container, Francis picked up the pace. He rushed forward with more speed until he hit a solid surface. He put his hands on the wall and began to cry, "Oh, thank God! I made it to the doors." He felt around the edges looking for the emergency release but felt only steel; it took him a few more seconds before he realized he was at the rear of the container. He screamed with a high pitched howl. "Oh God! I have to get to the entrance." His breathing became erratic, and he jerked in panic. He put his hands at his sides and spoke to himself in the darkness, "I've tripped the farthest trap in here, so I know I have at least ten feet before I have to worry about another wire. I can do this." He moved swiftly in the opposite direction, then slowed when he counted out ten feet. He moved his feet slowly along the floor, looking for the next wire and felt it just on the top of his right foot. He slowly lifted his foot and stepped over the trap; he was disoriented and lost count of the traps. "Two down, one to go," he said out loud in excitement as he moved further toward the entrance. "Once I get out, I can hide and kill the monster who put me in here." He was mumbling almost incoherently under his breath as he moved. He felt the slap of the third trap on his flesh before he felt the trip wire on the floor. This one was set higher and hit him at the groin and wrapped its way up to the top of his chest. He slipped in his own blood and sweat and landed on his back. He was

almost numb but felt the barbs penetrating the flesh of his back as his head hit the steel floor, knocking him unconscious.



Steve got back to his office a little after four. He sat down and looked at the sea of photographs on his desk. He had a cork board behind him and on either side of him were three separate crime scene photos. Two of the boards had photographs of the latest Basin Killer victims and the other had the photograph of a young girl found last week in Beverly Hills near the court house. She had been strangled and then shot after being sexually abused. Janet walked in while he was looking at the photographs. "Agent Hoffman, may I have a word?" He motioned for her to take a seat. "What's on your mind, Agent Simmons?" She was distracted while looking around at the boards when he asked the question again. She pulled herself back from the photographs and cleared her throat. "I'm sorry, sir; I wanted to ask you about Detective Swenson. We met this afternoon at Detective O'Brian's office." "What about him?" "He looked very familiar to me" "So?" "Well, I mean like I've seen him before." He sighed loudly, "Agent Simmons, I don't have time for your *déjà vu*. Is your seeing him connected to any of our investigations?" She fidgeted in her chair, "Not directly, sir. It just struck me when he came into the room that I have seen him before, and I do think it was at one of the crime scenes." "Oh for God's sake, Janet...he's a fuckin' cop. He's also a homicide detective; it's very likely that at some point in the past year that you've been working in my office that you may have seen him somewhere. I don't understand what your problem is." She started to stand. "Sit down," he barked, and she did as she was told. "Just tell me what you felt when you saw John walk into the meeting this afternoon." Her face got grave, "Fear!" He sat back in his chair and looked hard at her. He could see that she had goose bumps on her bare arms. Her dark black hair was pulled into a ponytail, keeping it out of her face. He looked into her brown eyes, and he could see that there was true fear. He leaned forward, his eyebrows wrinkled, his hands folded in front of him on his desk. "What made you afraid of John?" She looked over at one of the boards with photographs on it. "I don't know, sir. There was just something about him that made my skin crawl. I have seen him before like a face in the crowd at a crime scene. Not as an investigator but as a...spectator."

Steve looked down at his desk and then back at her face, "Are you asking me

or telling me?” She shook hard like she had had a shiver go up her spine and then said, “It’s probably just me, sir. Not to be gross, but it’s getting close to that time of the month. It’s probably just hormones.” He smiled, “It’s not gross, Janet, and those feelings are important. I’m sure there’s nothing to it, but if you think of anything else with regard to Detective Swenson you come and talk to me about it. Okay?” She smiled and nodded in agreement. “Now, if you will excuse me, I have some phone calls to make.” She excused herself, and Steve picked up the phone and called home. He got the answering machine. “Hi honey, it’s me. Looks like it’s going to be another late night. I know I promised that we would go out tonight, but I have to ask for a raincheck. I’ll call you later.”

After he hung up, his office phone rang and he answered thinking it was his wife. Instead, it was Jim’s voice on the other end of the line. “Can you work tonight?” Steve sighed, “Yea...I just left Molly a message that I had a late night ahead of me. What’s up?” “I’ve been thinking about our conversation this afternoon with John, and I think that the kid has some really good points. I also think he schooled you on the Basin Killer if he’s right and the guy is Black. I want to compare case files and see if we can get John to meet us at Santiago’s later tonight to see what he sees in the files.” Steve was tapping a pen on his desk, “Yea...whatever. You call John. I have to meet with my staff over the autopsy reports that we received on the two most recent killings. By the way did you get the reports?” There was a moment of silence, and he heard the rustle of papers. “Yea, I’ve got them right here.” “So what do you think about the findings?” He heard more fumbling, so he told Jim to forget about it and just read the reports to him.

“Both victims were alive the entire time. The ligature marks on the victims’ hands and feet were actually overlaid.” “Huh?” “The victims were restrained by their hands and feet for most of the torture, but the sick bastard used tourniquets to keep the bleeding down while he cut them up with a chainsaw. The coroner’s report says that both of the victims were not only alive while he cut them up, they were conscious.” “Ow! This guy is traveling into a whole new area of twisted.” “Traveling? This guy has just stamped his passport with the blood from these two sadistic killings. John’s right; he likes this, and he needs more and more brutality to get his thrills. Where he has gone months and even years between killings, I think we’re going to see weeks or even days now.” Jim



growled into the phone, “We have to find this fuck...I’ll call John and see if we can meet tonight. What time?” Steve looked at his watch. It was just five p.m. “Let’s try for eight. I’d like to get home before morning and spend a little time with my wife.” There was a laugh. “That’s why I’m a confirmed bachelor.” “No,” Steve laughed, “you’re single because no woman can stand to be around you for more than ten minutes...and you were married before.” “Yea, but you know how that turned out.” There was a laugh. “Well, Jim, in her defense, you were home for nearly a year after the shooting. You drove her to try and stab you.” They both laughed, and Jim said he would call John and then call him back.

Francis woke to see the faint light of sunset not three feet from him. He was lying on the floor of the container, the wire still wrapped around his body. He was in agony and called out, “Hey...Hey...Is there anyone out there? I need help...I’m hurt.” He saw a shadow pass outside the container and then heard a cell phone ring. He could hear clipped and hushed tones as he lay on the floor waiting for help. A few seconds later the door swung open, and The Eagle stepped in dressed in a white jumpsuit with a big smile on his face.



Steve’s cell phone rang as he was talking to his staff about the autopsy report. He saw that it was Molly, so he excused himself and stepped out into the hall. “Hi sweetheart. Did you get my message?” “Yes, Steve, I got it. Honey can’t you break away for just a few hours, so we can have dinner? I haven’t seen you in the daylight in nearly a month. I’ll make it worth your while!” Her voice got sexy and sultry on the other end of the line. “Baby, I know you will. Jim and I are going to meet tonight to go over the Basin River Killer’s profile. He has a new kid who works homicide for the LAPD. I met him today, and he has an uncanny sense of awareness. I think he could really help us in redoing the profile.” “What time are you getting together?” “I don’t know for sure. Jim’s calling the kid to see if we can meet at eight.” “I’ll make you a deal. If you can’t meet at eight, you can meet me at Bella Donna at seven for dinner, then I will take you home and curl your toes and you can curl mine. And I promise to let you go at midnight to meet with the guys.” A smile grew across his face and he said, “Deal! I’ll call you as soon as I hear from Jim.

He hung up and returned to the meeting. They were discussing the autopsy

reports when his cell rang again, and it was Jim. “What’s up?” “John can’t make it tonight; he has a previous engagement. He said he can meet us tomorrow afternoon at Santiago’s.” Steve smiled and said that would work out great. “You’re getting laid tonight, aren’t you?” Steve walked to the door and stepped out, “You bet your ass I am, and I get to spend the whole night with the woman I love.” “That’s great, Steve, but how does Molly feel about that?” Jim roared, and Steve tried to keep his enthusiasm in check. “What time tomorrow, asshole?” Jim was trying to stop laughing and said three o’clock. “Sounds great. See you at three.” Jim was still talking when Steve hung up the cell and speed dialed Molly.

“Hello.” Molly’s voice was quiet on the other end of the line. “Hi honey. We’re all set. I have the whole night free. I’ll see you at Bella Donna at seven.” There was a little giggle from Molly. “What are you doing?” he asked. “I’m out with Gail, and we’re trying on clothes.” Gail had flown in from New Jersey to stay with them a little over a week earlier and was in her last week of ‘sun and fun LA style,’ as she called it. The girls had been nearly lifelong friends since meeting at the University of Chicago. Gail was an undergrad at the university, and Molly was working in administration when the two met and hit it off. They were kindred spirits and became close friends and confidants before Molly moved to LA where she met and married Steve. Gail moved to New York after being accepted to Columbia University where she would meet her husband-to-be. While there was a fifteen year age difference between Gail and Molly, it had no impact on their friendship. The bond between the two women never changed; it only grew stronger with distance. After Gail graduated, they kept in touch and visited each other the same time every year. Molly would go out to see Gail and her husband, but Steve rarely joined her because of work. Gail’s husband, Bob, was a New York City Police Officer, so the two men had a lot in common and both saw very little of their wives. Steve knew Bob mostly from telephone conversations.

Molly’s laughter continued until she surprised Steve by saying, “Gail wants to know if I like her boob job.” He stepped outside the lab and closed the door. “Well...do you?” She laughed again. They were in a changing room, and Gail had her top and bra off. “They look great, Gail, now put your bra back on.” “I’d like to give her a man’s opinion,” Steve said, “send me a picture.” “Really? “You tell her that.” He heard some fumbling, and Gail’s voice came on the line. “Hi

Steve!” Gail was always bubbly and upbeat. “Molly said you wanted to ask me something.” He started stammering, and then he heard Molly in the background. “He’s wants you to send him a picture of your boobs.” They were both laughing when he heard Molly saying, “You didn’t just do that?” He was still trying to understand what was going on when his phone vibrated in his hand. He took it away from his ear, and there was a text from Molly with an attachment. As he stared at the message logo, Molly piped up, “Steve, I swear if you look at that photo you are going to be in big trouble, mister.” “Hey...she sent it over to me. I think I have a duty to look at it.”

There was silence as he clicked the message and the attachment opened. There in his text in box were two of the most luscious breasts he had seen in years. Not that Molly’s weren’t great, but Molly was forty five and Gail was only thirty. Despite Molly’s yelling, he kept looking at the photo. “Sorry, honey, I just got a text” he laughed. “You really sent it to him...oh my God. I’m going to spank your ass, young lady.” He interjected, “Can I watch?” He heard Gail in the background saying loudly that he could see them in person at dinner tonight. Molly came back on the line, “So we have the whole night? You’re not going to break away on an emergency call?” He told her no. “All right, then we’ll meet you at Bella Donna. You can see her cleavage, mister, but that’s all.” He laughed, “Yes, honey.” “Okay, I love you. See you at seven.”

Steve quickly gathered his composure as Bill Jensen walked out of the lab to see if everything was okay. Steve nodded and said he would be right in; he needed to use the bathroom.



The Eagle drug Francis by his right leg across the steel floor, barbed wire embedded in his flesh, bumping the barbs deeper as he went. He screamed in pain. The Eagle just threw him against the container wall, driving the barbed wire still deeper. “You’re hurting me,” he cried as The Eagle laughed. “I’m hurting you? Hmm...well I guess you’re starting to get a taste of what you’ve been doing to your victims.” Francis’ face stayed straight. “I have no idea what you’re talking about. This is my workshop. Who did I hurt? I don’t understand.” The Eagle grabbed the open end of the wire and pulled with a great deal of force; Francis spun like a top being pulled by its string while blood and flesh fell to the floor. Some still clung to the wire in The Eagle’s hand. “So what do you call

this?” The Eagle held up the wire so Francis could see it. “A nonlethal security system?” Francis lay on the floor writhing in agony. “Please, please. I’m begging you. No more. I haven’t done anything to you.” “Francis, your injuries are of your own doing,” The Eagle said smiling, “so far.”

He moved to the tool table off in the corner of the container and picked up one of Francis’ drills. There was a wood cutting blade in it covered in flesh, bone, and blood. It was cordless, and he walked toward Francis with it in his hand. As Francis began to scream, The Eagle told him to shut up and threw him onto the hay in the corner of the container using only one hand. For Francis, the feel of the straw burned his nude flesh. “Now, Francis, do you remember what I said to you when you asked who I was this morning?” He was groaning in pain, confused, and trying to push himself up against the hot steel of the container. “Francis, I need you to focus...do you remember who I am?” He nodded. “What? I can’t hear you.” Francis moved slowly against the container, the heat feeling good against his fresh wounds. “Say it, Francis. Who am I?” He shook his head. “Francis, don’t make this harder than it needs to be; if you answer my questions, it’s going to go so much better for you.” He started to cry and crumpled into the hay, sobbing ...“Justice...you said you were justice.” The Eagle smiled, “That’s right, Francis; you can call me Mr. Justice. Those who know my work call me The Iron Eagle.” Francis started screaming uncontrollably as The Eagle flipped on the lights inside the container and pulled the steel doors closed, slamming the bolt lock shut behind him.

## Chapter Twelve

*‘He pulled the hooded figure close to his face and whispered, “You’re about to have a really bad day.” ‘*

Steve finished up with his staff and raced to meet Molly and Gail at Bella Donna in Sherman Oaks. He pulled into valet parking, and, Phillip, the lone valet, ran over to his driver’s side door. “Good evening, Agent Hoffman.” “Phil, I’ve been coming here for 20 years; you’ve been parking my cars for the same amount of time. Are you ever going to call me by my first name?” There was laughter, and Phil said, “Not likely. Molly and Gail are already seated.” “Thank you.” “I’ll back your car into its usual spot in case you need to leave in a hurry.” He thanked Phillip and went into the restaurant. Angelo Distigliano was standing at the front desk when he came in. “Agent Hoffman, so nice to see you.” “Hi Angelo. Where are the girls?” He heard the sound of female laughter and said, “Never mind. Can’t miss the cackle of those two.” There was a little laughter between the two men, and Angelo followed him over to the table. Molly jumped up and gave him a big hug and kiss, and Gail did the same. “How long have you two been here, and how many glasses of wine have you had?” They looked at each other like two children trying to keep a secret. Angelo was standing behind him. “Oh...Angelo,” Steve looked back. “Yes sir. The ladies are on their second bottle.” “Have they eaten anything?” “I believe some bread, sir.” “Let’s get the usual for the three of us, please my friend, so we can soak up some of the wine.” Angelo smiled and said, “Vino good for the soul, Agent Hoffman. The girls, they be fine.” “It might be good for the soul, but it’s bad for the head in the morning.” Angelo departed for the kitchen as Steve sat down.

“Well, I see you two have had a fun day.” They both laughed and Gail leaned over toward Steve and asked with a slight slur, “So, do you like my new tits?” Molly laughed, slurring as well, “You better not have looked at those pictures, mister! They’re vulgar.” “Hey,” Gail responded, “these are my tits we’re talking about.” Molly patted her shoulder in a drunken manner and told her she was sorry. “But this is my husband we’re talking about. I don’t want him looking at my best friend’s breasts.” “Oh please, Moll ... you’re one of my best friends. You and Stevo...he can look at my tits without losing his mind.” She looked at

him and winked, “Right Stevo?” She flung her glass spilling wine on him and the table. “Oops. Didn’t mean to do that.” He wiped off his suit coat with a napkin. “Okay,” he said, “let’s cut back on the wine until we get some food in you two.” He pulled the ice bucket with the wine away from the table, and the women began to pout. “We only see each other twice a year, sweetheart; we’re just out for a little fun.” “I understand Molly, but let’s try to keep the fun from ending up on the bathroom floor.” The girls laughed and took yet another sip.

“So what have you two been up to?” They both got shy smiles and whispered to each other. He knew what that meant. “Okay...let’s table that question. Did you find anything nice while shopping?” Molly looked at him disapprovingly, “Steve, you don’t care what we bought or where we were, so cut the crap. We had a nice day and a nice time together.” Angelo came back with salad and asked Steve if he wanted a drink. He ordered a vodka tonic and a bottle of Pellegrino for the table. Steve slid the ice bucket back over after they had eaten their main course, and the girls were a little more sober. Molly had just finished her meal when she looked at Steve and asked, “How was your day, sweetheart?” Gail cringed...she knew what Steve did for a living, and she didn’t want to hear any gory details. Steve knew from Bob that Gail didn’t like to hear about police work. He said it was a fine day and left it at that. When dinner was done, Steve had Phillip park Molly’s car in the back of the restaurant. “Every year, eh, Agent Hoffman?” “Molly and Gail will pick it up tomorrow. Good night, Phillip.” “Good night, sir.” Steve got into his car with the two girls and drove home.

Molly and Gail were ahead of Steve as they walked up to the house. They lived in a very nice gated community in Sherman Oaks, south of Ventura Boulevard. The house had wonderful views overlooking the San Fernando Valley. As soon as the two women entered the house, clothes started coming off. He picked them up as the two ascended the staircase toward the bedrooms. By the time he got to the master bedroom the two nude women were laying on the bed staring up at the ceiling. “Wow,” Gail said, “the room is spinning.” Steve went over and lifted her up, “Okay...a spinning room is the first step toward a vomit party.” Molly sat up on her own and said, “It’s not spinning, silly...it’s kind of...wavy... like we’re on a ship.” He started to pull down the covers when Molly asked, “You have the whole night home, right?” He nodded. “Well, let’s fool around.” He stared at the two of them. Gail piped up, “Wow...I’ve never

seen Steve at a loss for words. Consider it a birthday present.” Molly nodded in agreement, and the two women began to undress him.

He had fantasized about Gail the entire time that he knew her. She was a beautiful woman with natural blond hair and deep, almost sea green eyes. She stood all of five feet and was curvy in all the right places. Molly wasn't much bigger and had a figure defying her age. Molly let her long black hair down, and her brown eyes scanned his body. Before he knew it, the three were romping in the darkness until they all passed out from exhaustion.



Steve's phone rang at six fifteen a.m., and he reached over to grab it off the belt clip from his pants on the floor. Molly and Gail were nude in an embrace next to him, and he was sitting on the edge of the bed in shock at what had happened. He thought it was a dream, but when he looked over and placed his hand on Gail's nude ass, she smiled and cuddled up against Molly. He didn't need to pinch himself; the ringing phone was proof that he was awake. He gathered his faculties and answered the phone. The voice on the other end of the line was not a familiar one. "May I speak to Special Agent Hoffman?" "This is Hoffman. Who's this?" "My name is Detective Brian Salter with the Long Beach Police Department." He pulled the phone away from his ear and looked at it with confusion. "Okay, detective, why the hell is Long Beach PD calling me?" There was a pause. "We found your business card in the purse of a Jane Doe that we have here near the Pike." "A Jane Doe...you have an empty purse with just my card in it?" "Yes sir. We need you to come down and see if you can ID the body." "Is this a homicide investigation?" "Not at this time, sir. There's no physical sign of trauma to the body. She was discovered by a jogger on a park bench down here near the Pike." Steve got his bearings and started to gather his clothes. "Okay, I'm en route. Is the coroner on scene?" "En route, sir." "Okay, I'm on my way. No one moves the body until I'm there!" He kissed Molly on the cheek and told her he had to leave. She smiled and kissed him back and said, "Happy birthday, Mr. Hoffman!" She never opened her eyes. She just tightened her grip on Gail as he smiled and walked into the bathroom to dress.



Jim's phone rang at seven forty-five. He was half on and half off the hide-a-bed sofa in his single apartment in Whittier; he was also hung over from the

night before and in no mood to talk. “WHAT?” he yelled into the phone. “Jim, it’s Steve. I need you in Long Beach ASAP.” He looked around the apartment. “Hang the fuck on.” There were empty beer and vodka bottles, and a box of half-eaten pizza on another box he was using as a coffee table. He pushed a couple of pizza boxes out of the way, filled with crust and half-eaten pizza, as well as some pieces that were growing penicillin. He stood up and walked toward the kitchen area where there was an overflowing ashtray and a pack of smokes and a lighter. He lit a cigarette and put the phone back to his ear. “What the FUCK are you doing in Long Beach at this fuckin’ hour? I thought you were off last night?” The line was quiet for a moment and Steve spoke, “Jim, I need you down here now. I got a call this morning from a LBPD detective. They found a Jane Doe with my card in her empty purse; they called me to ID the body.” Jim scratched his crotch through his boxer shorts as he hunted around for his pants, the cigarette hanging out of his mouth. “Okay...that’s a strange one. So are you on scene?” “Yes!” “You want to add any fuckin’ more detail to that statement?” He could hear the beeping sound of a vehicle backing up. “No...just get down here now.” “Okay...okay...where the fuck are you?” “I’m at the Pike on South Pine Avenue. Just take Ocean to Pine and head toward the water. I’ll be waiting for you at the entrance.” The phone went dead while Jim was putting on his shirt. He grabbed a coffee at the Starbucks across the street from his apartment and headed for Long Beach.

When he pulled up to the main entrance less than a half hour later, he saw multiple police units, the coroner’s van, and Steve standing on the curb. He parked in front of one of the LBPD black and whites and got out. “What the hell’s going on, Steve?” He knew right away by the look on Steve’s face that something was very wrong. Jim became more contrite and walked toward him with a bit more hesitation. Steve looked sick. “What’s going on? Why are you down here on a Jane Doe? Is it a homicide?” He shook his head and pointed in the direction of the yellow tarp over a park bench in front of the park entrance. Jim walked over and showed his ID and lifted the tarp. His face sank, and he put the tarp back down and walked back to Steve. “Who found her?” “A young female jogger, about five forty-five this morning. She called it in to 911.” “Have you interviewed anyone here yet? Have you talked to the jogger?” Steve looked dazed as if he had just woken up, “Um...yea...she said that she saw a woman



sitting on the park bench when she passed at around five fifteen, and when she came back by at quarter to six she was still sitting there. She said she decided to approach her and realized the woman wasn't breathing." "Did she see anything out of the ordinary other than the body?" Steve shook his head. "I only took a quick look; I'm sure you have seen more. Any sign of trauma? Did she live down here?" He shook his head again. "Shit, Steve, she's just a kid. How long has she been with your team?" "Not quite a year." Jim moved Steve toward a bench about thirty feet from the body. "Do you know much about her personal life?" "She didn't have a personal life. That girl ate and breathed CSI work, and she loved working for the Bureau." "Are you going to call the family?" Steve nodded and told him about his discussion with her about John, how she thought she recognized him, and how he gave her the shivers when she looked at him.

The coroner's workers opened the back of the van, and, with the help of the police, lifted Janet Simmons' body onto the gurney. They placed her in a black body bag and covered her corpse with the distinctive red velvet blanket just as a news crew showed up on scene. Steve turned to look as they pushed the gurney into the back of the van. "I asked that they do an autopsy immediately," said Steve. "I understand. Let's get to the cause of death." The two men stood up as the van pulled away. A group of people had gathered on a small bridge near the entrance. Jim and Steve started walking in the general direction of the group when a tall slender figure started to move away from the front of the group. Steve noticed it right away and pointed in the direction of the person. Jim noticed, too, and they walked faster toward the group. The figure began to push back against the crowd and then broke out in a full sprint. Steve yelled out and called for backup to stop the runner. The two men ran up the ramp toward where the person had been standing but only saw the figure disappear into a crowd further down the beach. "They have security cameras everywhere here, right?" Jim nodded. "Let's go pay a visit to the security office. We need all the film for the past twenty four hours."

They were unable to get a real description of the runner as everything moved pretty fast. They did learn that it was a Black male who looked to be in his early twenties who was wearing a black track suit with a hood. One woman who was standing next to him said that he was breathing really hard when he saw the two men start talking. She didn't have anything more than that. Steve and Jim both

called their offices and requested subpoenas for the security tapes, and the park made copies of not only the past twenty four hours but the past week, which was as far back as they stored information. Steve walked back to his car with Jim on his heels. “We’ll get to the bottom of this, Steve.” “Janet Simmons is dead, Jim, and I need to know why.” “Do you still want to keep the meeting with me and John for this afternoon?” He nodded. “Okay, I’ll see you then. Do you want me to call John and tell him what happened?” Steve shot him an odd look, “Why would you call John? He didn’t know her as far as I know. We can tell him this afternoon. I have to get to the office. I have a difficult phone call to make.” With that he slid behind the wheel, started the engine, and drove off toward the 710 Freeway. Jim made a few notes and then left for his office as well.



John Swenson pulled into the underground parking structure of his condo just before seven a.m. He parked and pulled a gym bag from the back of the truck. He grabbed the GPS unit off the dashboard and left the Basin River case file with the film on the passenger seat to take to Steve later in the afternoon. He locked up the truck and was walking toward the elevator when he caught sight of a dark figure moving in the shadows. He pretended not to notice and pulled out his keys which had a transmitter tag that operated the doors and elevators of his condo complex. He had purchased the condo on East Seaside Way three years earlier. It was on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor with a great view of the Long Beach harbor and looked out over the Queen Mary and other attractions. He placed the transponder against the black pad next to the elevator when the dark hooded figure stepped up behind him. The elevator doors opened, and he felt the muzzle of a gun being pressed into his back. “Get in!” John calmly walked into the elevator with the gunman behind him. As the doors closed, John asked, “So, I take it you don’t live in the building.” There was no response. John pressed the button for the twenty third floor which was the penthouse where two units occupied the top of the building. The gunmen still didn’t make a sound as the elevator began to rise up into the building. “You know...if I were you, I would put down the gun.” There was no response. “Okay,” John said as he moved quickly to the right of the gunman, grabbing his right arm and twisting it while disarming his left. He pulled the hooded figure close to his face and whispered, “You’re about to have a really bad day.”

Since the elevator was at the sixteenth floor when he disarmed the man, he pressed the button for twenty. His unit was directly adjacent to the elevators. The doors opened, and there was no one in sight. He pushed the man toward his front door and passed his hand over a scanner, and the door opened. Once inside the front foyer of his condo, he pushed the gunman down. The impact knocked the man's hood off; he was a young Black kid, mid twenties, with a bald head and a teardrop tattoo below his right eye. The kid said nothing and just pulled himself up on his hands so he was sitting. John dropped his gym bag on the counter and took off his jacket. The kid could see that his intended victim was not just massive in his build, he had a gun and a badge on his belt. "Shit man...shit... muda fuka...shit!" He was shaking his head as he sat on the floor. "I'd never beens able to make yous as five-o...shit." John pulled out a barstool next to his kitchen bar. The kid looked around at the condo. It was immaculate. There was a black leather sofa and chair in the middle of the living room that faced a very large flat screen TV. There was a black cabinet that contained electronic equipment on one side of the TV and another unit of the same make filled with DVDs and CDs. There were all kinds of art on the walls, and a small rug that the sofa and chair sat on. The room had two large windows that were behind the TV which flooded the room with light, and he winced as he looked around. The floor he was sitting on appeared to be white marble. There were two doors on either side of the room, and a glass door that looked like it led to a patio. He could see a king size bed in one room, the other was too dark. "I could'a scored, bro...you gots some nice shit."

John sat backwards on the barstool with his huge arms on the back of the chair and his head resting on his hands. "Well...you could have 'scored bro' if you hadn't been so stupid, so what's the deal? You doing a gang initiation, or are you just a thug?" He kept looking around the condo; his eyes casing the place as if he was going to come back and rob it later. He spoke as he looked, "Naw bro...I's full crip, man...I needs some cash. I needs to get me a fix." John didn't move, "So what's your drug of choice, my bother?" He stopped casing the place and looked at John with a fearful look. "I'm no dope fiend, man..." "Really... then what kind of 'fix' is it that you need?" He started to shake. "Look man...I sometimes likes to use me some coke." "The drink or the drug?" John laughed but the kid didn't. "What's your name?" "Joe." "Seriously man. I'm a cop."

What's your full real name." "My name's Joe...I knows my rights, muda fucka. I don't have ta say shit ta ya."

John grabbed his gym bag, unzipped it, and pulled out a laptop computer. He opened it and sat it on the counter next to his chair. The unit had two red squares: one on the left and another to the right of the keyboard. He placed his right thumb onto the red light on the right square, and the screen lit up. An electronic voice emitted by the computer came on and said, "Login verified." John started typing as Joe looked up at the screen. He saw a large Department of Justice seal in the right hand corner and the initials "NCIC." He didn't say a word, but John could tell by his expression he knew exactly what he was doing. "I's not telling yous no more man...I want my lawyer." John laughed, "Well, you have that line down in proper English. I haven't read you your rights yet, bro. I'm just a citizen that's being robbed at gunpoint." He took the laptop to the floor and instructed Joe on where to place his right thumb. He refused. "I knows my rights."

John looked up at the clock in his kitchen, and it was half past eight. "Look...Joe...I have a busy day ahead of me, so put your thumb on the red button, or I'll cut the damn thing off and put it on myself." "Yous a cop...yous can't do dat." John sighed, stood up, and pulled a cleaver out of the knife block on the counter. "I already told you...right now I'm a citizen being robbed at gunpoint by you. As a citizen I have a right to protect myself which means I can blow your head off right here, right now, so why don't you do us both a favor and put your thumb on the laptop and save me from having to clean your blood off my floor?" Joe looked at John for a long time, but just as John started to move toward him with the cleaver, he reached out and placed his thumb on the red square. "Geez, Joe, was that so hard?" He slid the cleaver back into the butcher-block holder. Joe started to speak when John interrupted him, "Shush." He pulled the laptop back and placed it on the counter where Joe could see the screen. It didn't take but a few seconds, and the screen was filled with information. "Oh man," John said, "Billy the Kid. That's a hell of a street name, 'Joe,' or should I say William Arnold Nelson, lifelong member of the Rollin 60s Neighborhood Crips street gang. You're a long way from Hyde Park, bro...you looking to move up in the world?" There was no response. "Wow! Look at all of these warrants. How have you been able to hide so well, Billy? Murder, accessory to murder, attempted murder, rape and sodomy on a child under

thirteen, possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute. Oh man, the list goes on and on. You're a bad man Billy. Why do they call you Billy the Kid?" No answer. "Cat got your tongue?" Nothing." Well, Billy, you came to the right guy." "What da fuck you mean 'right guy?'" John got up and walked into the kitchen which allowed Billy to stand up. He moved to the front counter in front of John and said, "You way too relaxed bro; you thinks I only has one piece?" John had his back turned, Billy made a fast motion for his waistband when his face went blank. John turned around with a banana in one hand and a nine millimeter in the other. "I assume you were reaching for this?" He placed the banana on the counter in front of Billy and dropped the clip out of the bottom of the weapon and cocked it to release a shell that was in the chamber. Once he knew the weapon was cleared, he placed it on the counter next to the fruit and walked around to Billy.

He grabbed him by the neck of his sweatshirt and drug him into the guest room, throwing him to the floor. He could see Billy, and Billy could see him as he took out a pair of latex gloves, put them on, and began to carefully search him. "Man, dis is fucked up...you ain't no cop." He finished the search and recovered drugs as well as a knife, a wallet, and a pair of women's panties. "I know you're not a cross dresser, Billy. Where did these come from? Not talking. Okay then...I have a meeting in a couple of hours, so you're going to take a nap while I'm out." "The fuck I am; if yous a cop, yous arrest me." John shook his head. He grabbed a pair of zip handcuffs from his weapon belt and placed them on Billy's wrists and ankles. He didn't resist. John took a piece of nylon rope and hog-tied him. There was a large steamer trunk in the corner of the room. He walked over, opened it, and picked up Billy and placed him in the trunk. He pulled a roll of duct tape from a shelf behind him and ripped off two pieces. Billy started to say something when John started to place the tape over his mouth. "I's fraid of small places, man." "You mean you're claustrophobic?" He nodded. John put the tape over his mouth then walked back into the bathroom and took out a vial of liquid and a syringe, "You're six foot two, a hundred eighty pounds. Sound right?" Billy nodded slowly. He filled the syringe and walked back over to Billy. "This is an inch and a half twenty three gauge needle. I'm going to give you an injection, and you're going to sleep for about twelve hours given your body mass." He looked into Billy's fear-filled eyes, "This is

going to sting a bit,” and he drove the needle right into Billy’s sciatic nerve.

It only took a few seconds and Billy was out. John closed the lid to the trunk and locked it. There were air holes in it, so there was plenty of air for its current occupant. John walked out of the guest room while taking off his shirt. He went into the bathroom and took off his t-shirt and jeans and stood nude, looking at himself in the mirror for a moment. His chest was ripped as well as his abs. His arms bristled with muscle, and he wasn’t even trying to flex. He ran his hands across two deep scars; one on his left peck, and the second one that ran across his abdomen. “For the good of a nation,” he said to himself. Since he had body built professionally many years ago, he struck a few poses and laughed. He brushed his teeth then started the shower. He set the water as hot as he could stand it then turned it even hotter once under the water. His face was calm as he put his head back under the shower. His eyes were closed, and he allowed the stress to drain out of his body. He stood for a few moments in quiet meditation, then soaped up and washed his hair and face. He lifted his manhood to clean himself completely then rinsed and jumped out of the shower. The shock of the cold shrank his pores instantly but not his penis. He stood somberly looking at his reflection in the full length mirror then turned and walked to the closet to dress. Since he was going to the FBI’s headquarters on Wilshire, he decided to wear his dress uniform. After a little breakfast, he left the condo for work. When he got down to his truck, he was greeted by one of his neighbors from two floors down. She was a flight attendant who was off for a week and wanted to hook up with him. They spoke for a few minutes and made plans for dinner later that evening. They were friends with benefits; he didn’t want to get tied down and neither did she. It was half past one when he started for Westwood and Steve’s office.

# Chapter Thirteen

*‘Carl’s posture softened and he asked, “Do we have any suspects?”*

*Jim watched for a movement from John, but he remained completely calm.*

*“Everyone is a suspect until cleared, Detective O’Brian.”*

**J**im pulled into the police parking at the federal building on Wilshire. He was in jeans and a t-shirt. John was walking across the parking lot in his dress uniform when Jim called out, “Shit, John, you’re not going to a funeral or decoration ceremony.” John laughed, “Hey, I want to make a good impression on Special Agent Hoffman.” “You’ll make an impression all right.” They got through security and made their way to Steve’s office. They knocked on the open door, and he waved them in while reading something very intently. They sat down in the two chairs in front of Steve’s desk. Steve’s office, unlike Jim’s, had a very institutional feel. He sat behind a government issued steel desk with a black steel telescoping desk lamp and a mid-sized glass globe that shimmered in the afternoon light and cast rainbows off the walls. There were two files on his desk and a slew of crime scene photographs. There was a credenza behind him with photos: some of him with dignitaries, the director of the FBI, the President of the United States, and several with a woman that John guessed was his wife. On the wall behind his desk was a handsomely framed law degree from UCLA along with professional and academic citations and awards. There were three cork boards with crime scene photos on them; two had the photos from the recent Basin discovery, the other had a deceased nude female that John knew nothing about.

John leaned in toward Jim and whispered, “Does he teach?” Jim nodded but didn’t say a word. There were a few filing cabinets and a set of chairs next to the wall near the door to his office. He had a nice view of Westwood through his office window, but outside of that the office was unremarkable. He put down the report he was reading and looked over at the two men with a look of confusion as if he had forgotten why they were there. John was preparing to hand Steve the case file on the Basin killing when Jim looked at him and said, “Steve lost one of his team members this morning.” John looked at him gravely and offered his condolences. Jim was just about to tell him what happened when Steve put down the file and began speaking. “One of my newest field agents was found dead in

Long Beach this morning.” John didn’t respond, but Jim did, “Did you hear from the coroner?” Steve nodded and picked up the file, “The autopsy report says that she had been raped and sodomized. The cause of death, however, can’t fully be determined until the toxicology reports come back. The preliminary cause of death is listed as a massive coronary induced by physical trauma.” “But we didn’t see any signs of injury.” Steve nodded, “The coroner’s report and the autopsy photographs show that she had been restrained both on the front and while she was face down.” “Any signs of a struggle?” “No...it appears that she did what she was trained to do. She didn’t resist, so her physical injuries are minor. Based on the report, she appeared to have a genetic heart condition that the coroner believes led to her death; however, he won’t release his full findings until after he gets the tox reports.” Jim sat back in his chair, “Jesus, Steve, I’m sorry. I didn’t know Janet well, but she seemed like a good kid and a sharp investigator.”

John was silent for a moment then asked if there was anything missing from the victim. “Her purse was empty with only my business card in it.” “What was she wearing?” “According to the report, tan blouse, black skirt, tan bra, and black shoes.” John asked, “Was she wearing underwear?” Steve looked at the report, “None listed.” “May I see the case file?” Steve handed it across the desk to him. John looked at the autopsy photographs concentrating on the torso. He asked Steve for a magnifying glass. He looked through the glass and then handed the file back. “She had been wearing panties prior to the rape; there’s a faint panty line on her torso, either bikini cut or thong.” Jim looked over at John, “You deduced that from looking at a photograph?” John nodded with a serious expression on his face. Steve sat back in his chair, “How can you be so sure?” “The evidence is right in front of you. All you have to do is look.” Jim asked for the file and looked at it with a similar intensity. “He’s right, Steve. There’s definitely a panty line.” He handed the file back to Steve who closed it and then looked at John intensely and said, “After we had our meeting yesterday, Janet came to me and said that she recognized you. She said that there was something that was familiar about you and that it scared her.” John shrugged, “I can assure you Agent Hoffman that I had never met Janet before yesterday. I can’t speak to what her concerns were, perhaps I have one of those faces that just looks familiar to some people.” Steve sat back in his chair, “May I ask where you live



Detective Swenson?” “Long Beach, sir.” Steve sat up in his chair, “Where?” “I own a condo at 525 East Seaside Way.” “How far is that from the new Pike amusement park in Long Beach, detective?” “It’s right off Pine Avenue, a stone’s throw from my complex, sir.” John never took his eyes off Steve.

“Can you tell me of your whereabouts last night between midnight and seven a.m. today?” “I got off duty yesterday at four p.m. and ran some errands. I went to the gym at midnight and worked out until three, then had some breakfast at Norms on Anaheim Street in Long Beach, and went to my condo at around seven a.m. I slept until one p.m. and then dressed and drove to your office with the case information and the film we discussed yesterday on the Basin River Killer.” Steve calmed down. “I’m sorry, detective. I didn’t mean to insult you.” “You didn’t, sir. If I lost a member of my detective family, and I had a conversation like the one you described to me, I would ask the same questions.” Jim looked hard at John and Steve. “Steve, you don’t seriously think that John had anything to do with Janet’s death, do you?” John interrupted, “In cases such as this, everyone is suspect until all suspects have been eliminated. I noticed in the coroner’s report that there was semen found on the body.” Steve nodded, “You have my permission to cross my DNA with the DNA on Janet’s body, sir.” Jim looked over at John and said, “You’re volunteering your DNA?” “It’s on file with the department, Detective O’Brian; we all give samples when we join the force. It’s no secret, and I have nothing to hide. I want Agent Hoffman to feel that he has done his due diligence with me. He obviously feels, based on his conversation with Ms. Simmons yesterday, that she feared me, and since I live in close proximity to the location where her body was found, I’m an obvious suspect. Agent Hoffman can have my DNA sent over to the coroner while we sit here going over the Basin River file. They can do a comparison for DNA identification and have an answer before I leave the building.” Steve looked at him curiously then picked up the phone and called LAPD headquarters and spoke with Human Resources. John signed a form that Steve had faxed over, and his DNA was in the hands of the coroner within fifteen minutes. “So, shall we talk about the Basin River Killer while we wait for the results?” asked John as the two men sat mesmerized.



It was three thirty p.m. when Steve, Jim, and John walked silently into the

crime lab, one after the other. You could hear a pin drop. John had the Basin River file under his arm, and Steve had Janet's under his. He put the folder down on the lab counter and sat down on one of the stools. Bill finally broke the awkward silence. "We know that Janet's dead; what we don't know is what happened." Steve motioned for everyone to sit down. Jim stood over in a corner of the room behind the rest of the staff, and John stood off to Steve's side. Jim was watching John's reactions as Steve recapped the morning's events and findings. When he mentioned that Simmons was raped, there was a gasp in the room. "The coroner is tentatively ruling her cause of death as a massive coronary due to a genetic condition that was exacerbated by the violence of the rape. From what we can glean from the report, the perp is a secredor as semen was found on Simmons' person, so we have DNA evidence that has been harvested and is being processed through CODIS and NDIS." Carl Martin, one of Steve's long time lead investigators interrupted, "That's all fine and dandy, but unless this bastard has a criminal record and has been through state and or federal systems that harvest DNA for indexing, it's unlikely that we'll get a hit." "Carl," Steve strained, "you're letting your emotions cloud your judgment. This is proper procedure in any homicide investigation. Our friend and colleague is dead. While we are all in a state of shock, we must remember that we are the investigative body of the federal government. The loss of one of our own is tough, but we have to treat this like we would any other potential homicide." Carl's posture softened and he asked, "Do we have any suspects?" Jim watched for a movement from John, but he remained completely calm. "Everyone is a suspect until cleared. Detective O'Brian and I, however, spotted a tall thin male in a hooded sweatshirt on scene in the crowd. The suspect fled as we approached to speak to him and has not been located. We don't have a physical description of the person outside of what I have given to you. He is now a person of interest, and I will be doing a press conference with local and state media at six p.m. tonight."

Steve looked over at John and asked for the Basin River file. John handed it to him. "John Swenson has some new revelations on the Basin River Killer that we discovered yesterday when we spoke after our group meeting. It appears that there is some film footage which we need to analyze, footage of the killer dumping part of one of his victims." He turned to John and said, "John, take it

from here please.” John stood and began to tell the story of the film, but as he did the telephone in the lab rang, and one of the agents called Steve away. John didn’t miss a beat. He kept on speaking while Steve was on the phone. Steve hung up and walked over to Jim, whispering something to him. Jim interrupted, asking John for a word in private. Steve was waiting in the hall when John came out. “That was the coroner’s CSI DNA investigator.” John nodded. “They crossed your DNA with the perp’s, and I owe you a huge apology.” “None is necessary, sir. Shall we get back?” Steve nodded and nothing more was said on the matter.

The men came back into the room and John continued. “When I first became a detective in homicide with LAPD, we had a case of a dismembered female left along the basin, cut into four sections. There was a city camera nearby that had been placed in the hopes of catching taggers and other illegal activity. I advised the supervising detective, and she ordered copies of the films. Upon reviewing the film, a half hour prior to the discovery of the body I was able to get a look at the killer. The film is very grainy, and it was dawn, so there was a contrast between the street light over the entrance and the rising sun. However, I was able to determine from the film that the killer is African-American. “Were you able to figure out why he cuts up his victims?” “Yes, but I didn’t need the film for that answer. I don’t want to rehash what I already explained yesterday, so I’ve prepared an addendum for your current profile so everyone can see what I’ve observed.” He distributed the three page document to everyone and walked over to a white board at the end of the room. “Is it alright if I use this board, Agent Hoffman?” Steve nodded. In great detail, John laid out his theoretical profile addendum on the Basin River Killer. Jim moved across the room, letting Steve know the DVD was ready. He nodded while listening intently to John. When he was finished, they played the DVD.

“As you can see from this time/date stamped surveillance film, the body part is laying on the edge of the basin at six forty-five a.m., and you can see that the person who discovered the body part sees it and flees the scene. We know that a 911 call was placed, and the caller was interviewed by detectives.” “Excuse me,” Jim interrupted, “did you interview the caller?” John shook his head. “I was new to the homicide unit, so they had me doing more mundane tasks on this crime scene. I did, however, notify our lead detective of the camera, and she ordered

the video as I stated. Now, if I back up the film to six a.m. and we move forward, we see the killer coming into the frame at six twenty-eight a.m. And if we watch it in slow motion, we can see that he is pulling something. For the next forty five seconds we can see that he is African-American and having some trouble moving the piece of the corpse into position.” Steve finally spoke, holding John’s profile in his hand, “You say in your profile that you believe that the killer cuts up his victims for ease of movement because he’s not strong enough to move the whole body.” “Yes, sir.” “Yet the damage that he inflicts on his victims requires a great deal of strength.” John smiled. “Not really, sir.” “Explain.”

“If you turn to page two, you can see the similarities in damage inflicted by the killer. However, as I studied multiple case files from other jurisdictions, I noticed a pattern in the way that he was killing his victims. While at first the killings seem random, I was able to see that several different patterns actually appeared. First, the killer has no regard for the sex of his victim, and he always picks large people because he needs them to have some girth and body fat, so he can keep them alive while he inflicts pain. His victims are still large when he’s done with them, so he cuts them up for ease of disposal. He also picks indigent homeless people that won’t be missed.” “That’s not a news flash, John, that’s in the case file. “Yes sir. What isn’t in the case file is why he picks these people.” Jim piped up and said, “He picks them because even if someone does miss them, the cops are not going to give an indigent the same attention as someone with a nine-to-five, a wife, or a kid!” John’s smile never left his face, “Yes sir, but that’s not the only reason. He sees them not as humans but as animals.” There was silence in the room. “What?” asked Steve. “There’s one thing that’s not noted in the case file but can be seen in the photos of the victims. They’re all clean when we find the bodies.” There were blank stares around the room. “They’re covered in blood and dirt when we find them,” said Carl. “No...they’re not. Look at yesterday’s victims again.” They all reviewed the photo log, but it was Carl who caught the connection first. “You’re right. The blood is only on the ends of the amputations; the bodies are clean.” “And if we look closer so are their clothes. They are left neatly folded near the bodies.” Again, stunned silence. “Are you saying that this guy is washing the victims and their clothes before he kills them?” “That’s exactly what I’m saying.” Jim stood in the corner and said, “That makes no sense!”

John went on, “It actually makes perfect sense if we look at our killer from a global perspective. He takes what he perceives to be the equivalent of Swine off the street then cleans and tortures them. After the rush subsides, he cuts them up and cleans them, folds their clean clothes, and dumps the bodies.” “So, the killer has some sick sense that he is cleaning up the streets?” John shook his head, “No...this guy has a God complex. He gets a rush from the begging and pleading; he also feeds his sexual fantasies by cleaning their nude bodies.” “But there has never been any sign of sexual assault to any of his victims,” came a statement from the group. “You don’t have to touch what you see in order to live out a fantasy; this killer sees his victims as filthy Swine and would never degrade himself by touching them. That would be revolting. He gets his rocks off by looking at their nude bodies as he cleans them.” “And what, pray tell, does he use to clean them without touching them?” asked Steve. “Oh, that’s easy...a high powered hose. Probably a fire hose. It serves two purposes: one literally sprays the dirt off their flesh, while inflicting non-lethal pain at the same time. I walked over next to Steve, and let the rest of the staff take it all in. Jim looked over at John and said, “Man...I don’t want to play in your brain.” There was a laugh. Steve told them that they were tabling the Basin case for now to focus on Janet’s case. He thanked John for the information and asked him for his cell phone number as the session broke up for the evening. It was six p.m., and John told the folks in the room that he had a date and excused himself. Jim followed Steve back to his office, and the two men stood looking at each other in stunned silence.



John got back to his truck and called his lady friend and told her he would have to beg off dinner due to police work. When he walked into his condo, he could hear the faint murmurs of Billy in the trunk in his guest room. He walked into the now dark room and said, “Billy ... Billy...Billy...man, have you been a bad boy.” He grabbed his gym bag and put some clothing in it with his laptop. He filled a syringe with more liquid and opened the trunk. Billy was covered in sweat and was dazed as he looked up at John staring down at him. “Billy, what did you do last night?” His eyes were glazed over. “I think the more appropriate question is who did you rape last night?” Billy’s eyes grew wide as the needle struck. He screamed through the duct tape as the needle pierced the same

injection spot again. As he was slipping into unconsciousness, he heard John speaking, “Well, what to do with you? Your DNA is most certainly in the databases, so they are going to make you by morning. I certainly can’t keep you here. I guess I will take you over to Francis’ house. He has a great torture chamber, and you’ll make a great companion for him as I decide what I’m going to do with you.” He looked down at Billy’s sleepy eyes, “Oh, don’t you worry about these things. I’ll take care of the details. You get some sleep.” John took a small knife out of his pocket and laid it on Billy’s cheek. He could feel John pulling down his pants and underwear; he tried to resist and felt a hand grab his penis. John showed him the knife. “I see that you have never been circumcised; we’ll have to fix that.” Billy felt a sharp pain in his penis and passed out. John pulled back the bloody knife and pulled Billy’s pants back up. “That’s going to hurt like hell when you wake up.”

He closed and locked the lid to the trunk. He placed it in its leather cover, then he loaded it onto a dolly and threw the gym bag on top. He wheeled everything to the elevator. Two of his neighbors stepped off as he was stepping in and asked how he was doing. He smiled at the male couple as one of them said, “You know, John ... you don’t have to take your leather gear out of the building if you want to play! Gary and I play all the time. I’m sure you’ve heard a whipping or two in our unit.” He threw a limp wrist towards John. “Okay guys. You always make the same joke. You know this is my workout gear; I’m not into the lifestyle that you two are.” They smiled at him, Gary hugging his partner. “Why do the handsome studs always have to be straight?” Neil frowned. “That’s no way to speak in front of Neil, besides he is a very handsome man. Now you two get along. It was nice seeing you. I have a workout and then a date, so I must bid you good night.” Something thumped inside the box. The men stepped back looking shocked. John laughed, “Haven’t you ever heard a dumbbell shift in a box before?” There was nervous laughter as he pushed the button for P3. They all waved as the door closed, the smile never leaving John’s face.

# Chapter Fourteen

*'He had been let in on a secret, a very dark secret, one that would not allow sleep to come as he lay in the darkness listening to the soft breath of the women he loved.'*

Jim's phone buzzed on his hip as he was having a beer at Santiago's. He looked at the caller ID. Unidentified. "Fuck 'em." He called out to Valente, asking for another beer. It was only his second, and the night was young. He heard Javier sound out a greeting as Steve came walking in the door. Jim asked Valente to set them up with an ice bucket and six beers. He moved over to an open table, and Steve joined him. "So how the hell are you doing, Steve?" He flopped down in the chair across from Jim and said, "You won't believe this, but twenty four hours ago I was getting ready to have sex with Molly and her best friend Gail." A huge smile grew across Jim's face. "No fuckin' shit? So... did you?" Steve got a shy smile on his face as he grabbed a beer. He cracked it open and said, "You're goddamn right I did!" They clinked bottles in a toast to what had been a great night.

Jim asked if he had told Molly about Janet. Steve shook his head, "Molly and Janet had only met a few times, but Moll really liked her, and they talked quite a bit by phone. I don't want to upset her while Gail's in town." Jim took a swig of his beer and yelled out to Javier, asking if he could smoke. Javier didn't even respond; he just waved a dismissive hand in Jim's direction, so Jim simply clenched the unlit smoke between his teeth. The phone in his pocket buzzed, and Steve heard it. "What's that?" "That, my friend, is a message left by an unknown caller." Steve took a swig of his beer and put his arms behind his head. "Shit Jim...what the fuck is happening to the world? I have an affinity for all of my agents, even though I do everything I can to disassociate my feelings for them." "It can't be done, my friend; we are too close in our working relationships. We spend more time with our teams than our own families." Steve nodded, drinking his beer. "So what brings you here tonight if you had a threesome last night? I would think you could have another tonight." Steve just shook his head. "No. That was a one-time thing. I'm still trying to figure out how I'm going to face Gail's husband, Bob, the next time I see him." Jim started laughing. "You don't think he knows? Believe me he knows, and it's quid pro quo, my friend. Either

Molly and Gail have already done him, or they are going to do him the next time they're all together. My advice to you is to just take it as a good thing and don't ask any questions." "Don't ask any questions? Are you saying my wife is planning to cheat on me?" Jim laughed despite the smoke clenched between his teeth. "You're kidding, right? You fucked your wife's best friend...with your wife...that's not cheating. That's a fantasy. You've obviously made comments to Molly about Gail, so they threw you a little party. What did Molly say when it was over?" "Happy Birthday." "I rest my case."

"How does that prove a case for you to rest?" "Man...you really need to lighten up. You're going to have a stroke. It means that your wife loves you enough and trusts you enough to throw you a piece of tail nearly twenty years younger than you for fun. Gail lives in New Jersey. You two aren't going to run off together..." There was a thoughtful look on Jim's face. "Are you?" Looking disgusted, Steve said, "NO!" "I had to check. Then it's all good. You lived out the fantasy, which you've confessed to me a million times through the years. So ... was she good?" Steve got a huge smile on his face, and Jim raised his beer bottle again in a toast. "So leave it be. If Molly reciprocates with Gail and Bob, or already has, it's not your business. You both got some of the same pussy. How many young guys want an older woman?" Steve knew he was right.

"So, that was one hell of a speech that John gave today. What do you make of this kid." Steve shook his head, "I'm about ready to make him an offer to come work for me." "I was thinking the very same thing; the kid would make a hell of an agent." Steve nodded. "Have you heard back on the DNA on Janet?" Steve said no. Jim took another drink of his beer and said, "I think the perp will be in the database. You have to admit that was damn ballsy of John to offer up his DNA." Steve took a drink of his beer, "Yes and no...he knew he had nothing to do with her death, so he had nothing to worry about." "That's true. But still, to be that open in a homicide investigation? I wouldn't have done it." "Seriously? Even if you knew that you had nothing to do with it, you wouldn't volunteer if asked?" "Fuck no. You and I both know that the ninety nine point nine percent accuracy claim about DNA is bullshit. Damn, man, you're an FBI profiler and a DNA expert; you don't remember the Troyer tests in Arizona? Shit, Kathryn Troyer, the medical examiner in Arizona blew that theory out of the water years ago. There's no way I would offer up my DNA for testing unless it was ordered



by a court, my friend. It ain't as accurate as we claim, and you know it!" Steve nodded. "All you need is some moron who doesn't handle the DNA sample correctly and contaminates the specimen, and you have every investigator from your scene matching the DNA ... or did you forget about the Dallas crime lab scandal. Nope, John may have known he had nothing to do with it, but he doesn't know how lucky he was that you blinded the sample. Shit ...you send that sample over with his name on it and someone in the lab has a hard on for him, and the next thing you know he's sitting in jail or prison until an independent lab can do a report to exonerate him, and even then it depends on just how badly that specimen has been tainted. He could have gone to prison for life because someone didn't like him." Steve didn't say a word.

The two men sat drinking their beers when Jim remembered the message on his cell. He picked it up off the table and called his voicemail. He had it on speaker, and a female voice came on the line. "Hi Jim, this is Barbara. Can you give me a call when you get this? I need to ask you a question? Thank you so much. I look forward to hearing from you." Jim closed the phone and took a drink of his beer. "Well," Steve asked, "are you going to call her?" "Yea...I just need to get my head straight. I haven't spoken to her since Jill's funeral." "Did you know her well?" "You could say that." Steve reached for another beer and as he cracked the cap he asked, "So are you still paying her alimony?" Jim flicked the top of the bottle he was drinking from, "That's a story for another day, my friend."



The gate creaked open on Parson's Trail as The Eagle pulled his truck into the driveway and closed the gate behind him. He walked over to the storage container, opened the doors, and clicked on the light. He removed Billy's unconscious body from the trunk, stripped him, and placed him in the restraints on the wall. It was just after nine p.m. when he stepped out of the container briefly and went into Francis' house to change into a pair of white coveralls. Billy hung on the wall directly across from Francis who was also unconscious. The Eagle grabbed a couple of smelling salts that Francis had in his little bag of tricks and cracked one open under Billy's nose. He thrashed against the restraints, his feet hitting the wall of the container. "Time to wake up, Billy...you and I need to have a talk. His eyes opened, and, for a few seconds, they were

blurry. The Eagle passed the salts under Billy's nose again, and as he thrashed his eyes began to water. "You need to wake up Billy."

Billy's vision began to clear, and he saw a figure on the wall across from him. At first he thought it was a mannequin, but quickly realized that mannequins are not anatomically correct, and he could see a penis that looked more like a piece of raw meat. The man was completely nude with a piece of metal in his mouth holding his jaws open. He was bloody and bruised and Billy started yelling at the sight of him. The man didn't move, and Billy was sure he was dead. Suddenly, The Eagle got in his face, "Shut up, Billy. I will introduce you to Francis in a little while, but first we need to talk." Billy kept yelling, and The Eagle struck him in the solar plexus, knocking the wind out of him. "Much better." He walked over to the tool table and picked up a pair of surgical cutting scissors. For the first time since coming to, Billy realized that he was nude, and his penis was really aching. The foreskin of his penis was slit halfway up his shaft, and he had dried blood on his thigh. The Eagle took the scissors and cut away the rest of the foreskin. Billy was screaming bloody murder, and The Eagle duct-taped his mouth once more. It barely lowered the decibel level of Billy's screams.

"I bet that hurts like hell, Billy." The Eagle grabbed a baggie from his gym bag and took a handful of white powder from it. He then took out a bottle of water and asked Billy if he was thirsty. He nodded, so The Eagle removed the duct tape and placed the bottle to his lips. "Not all of it. I need some for another part of your anatomy. He replaced the tape over Billy's mouth and reached down and grabbed his skinless penis. In an instant, he had poured the water and the white powder on the open wound. The scream from Billy, even through the tape, was deafening. The powder wasn't powder after all; it was salt. The Eagle laughed and said, "It gives a whole new meaning to rubbing salt in an open wound, huh?"

Francis began to rustle across from Billy. His head had been down, but he slowly raised it to see The Eagle stepping away from Billy's wound and screams. Francis' face was bruised and swollen; he couldn't speak very well. He mustered what little strength he could and said, "I don't know who you are kid, but I can tell you that you and I are in the hands of 'Justice,' or as he is known in the newspapers, The Iron Eagle. Start doing what I've been doing for the past three

days...pray to die!” His head slumped down onto his chest. “Francis, you are such a drama queen,” said The Eagle as he struck his genitals with a piece of his own barbed wire. He flinched but was too weak to do much else. Billy screamed even louder as The Eagle walked back toward him.

“Okay, Billy, here’s how it’s going to be. You’re going to tell me about all of the women and girls you’ve raped and killed. Got it?” Billy started to cry. “Oh Billy, ‘Billy the Kid,’ the tough crip. You’re nothing but a lowlife rapist.” The Eagle pulled the tape from his mouth. “You a cop...ya supposta protect people. Not hurt ‘em.” “Billy, I’m not a cop right now. Right now, I’m justice, and where you end up is going to hinge on how you answer my questions.” He reared back and struck Billy hard across the thighs with the barbed wire; he moved in close and whispered into Billy’s ear, “You’re going to tell me everything, Billy. All of your deepest, darkest secrets. You’re going to confession, Billy, and you know what they say about confession ... It’s good for the soul.” Billy slammed his head back against the container wall, tears running down his face, nodding his head as The Eagle pulled the wire slowly and deliberately against the grain of his flesh. “Yes, Billy, confession is good for the soul, especially when the flesh is weak.”



It was half past ten when Steve left Santiago’s for home. Jim pulled the cell phone from his pocket and dialed Barbara’s number. The phone started ringing and a groggy female voice answered “Hello.” “Hey, Barb, it’s me.” There was some soft rustling before she responded, thanking him for the call back. “You sound surprised.” “Well, we weren’t hitting high notes the last time we spoke.” “Hey, just because we weren’t getting along doesn’t mean I stopped caring about you. We were married for twenty years. What’s up?” “I wanted to ask if there has been any progress in Jill’s murder.” “Well, other than a rising body count, not really.” “I heard that Barry was killed.” “Yea...Steve and I were on scene after they found him; Steve said that The Eagle killed Barry as a mercy killing.” “That’s a pretty twisted idea.” “Well, profiling these guys is Steve’s job. We don’t have much to go on in Jill’s death other than Steve’s confidence that it was The Eagle. How are you doing? We haven’t had two words since the funeral. Are you sleeping at night?” “With the help of sleep meds; it’s still all surreal...I keep expecting her to walk through the office door or into my house at any second.”

“You two were partners for a long time in the Marshal’s office. I know how it feels. It takes time. You know...Barry and I spent a lot of years working together and as friends. After Jill was murdered, he took a huge dive, and in my own twisted way I think his death was the best thing to happen to him. While I don’t like how he died and who killed him, I’m at peace with the idea that he’s not suffering anymore.” “I suppose that’s as good a way to look at it as any. I finally got up the nerve to clear Jill’s things from the house. She spent the bulk of her time living in my guest room. We didn’t have much of a life; work consumed it.” “Well, if you ask me you need to take a long vacation, get the hell out of town for awhile, get a change of scenery.” “I don’t have my travel companion anymore; God, I miss her.” She started crying, and Jim knew her too well. “Are you alone?” “Yes.” “I’m coming over.” “Thanks.” He hung up, waved goodnight to Javier, and headed for Barbara’s house, his old home in Tarzana.



When Steve walked through the door of his home, Gail and Molly were sitting in the living room talking on the couch. They got quiet when he entered, and Molly walked over and threw her arms around his neck and started to cry. “Why Janet?” she sobbed into his suit coat. He knew there were no words that could comfort her. He held on to her tight, and soon Gail joined in the hug. She was the wife of a cop; she knew what it was like to lose a part of your police family. “How did you find out?” he asked. “The six o’clock news conference that you did. Why didn’t you call me first?” There was anger in her voice, and Steve knew it was justified. “I’m sorry, Moll; I didn’t think you’d be watching.” The home phone rang, and Steve broke free to answer it; it was Bob calling from Jersey. They spoke for a few minutes but neither talked about Janet. It was an unspoken rule. They exchanged some casual conversation and Bob made an off the cuff joke about Steve’s threesome. “I had a feeling you knew about that,” Steve said. “Did you have fun?” “Yea!” “That’s one thing about my Gail; she’s dynamite in the sack.” “You’re okay with this?” “Oh yea...Molly told us about your fantasies about Gail, and we talked it over, and I told them they should do something nice for you. I left it at that.” “Have you and Moll...” he stopped himself. There was a chuckle on the other end of the line, “Steve, I’m a thirty-two-year-old man...your wife’s hot. What do you think?” There was some nervous laughter, and Steve handed the phone to Gail.

Molly had walked into the kitchen and was sitting at the table. “Do you have any leads on the killer?” she said, wiping the tears away with a napkin. “Not really. Jim and I saw a suspicious person on scene, but we didn’t get a good look at him. There are security cameras all over that park. I’ll have the films in the morning; we’ll catch the bastard.” “When you catch him, I want you to kill him.” That shocked him. Molly never talked about any crime, let alone vengeance. “You know I can’t do that. It’s my job to catch the bad guy; it’s up to prosecutors and a jury to deal with the criminal.” “For what...so the guy can get a nice warm prison cell, ‘three hots and a cot’? So he can live a comfortable life behind bars while the taxpayers foot the bill as he brags about his crime?” “Molly, what the hell’s gotten into you?” “I’m sick, Steve. I’m sick and worn out. I know you think that you’re the only one dealing with this shit, but you’re not. You don’t know how many times I’ve come to your office to surprise you when you’ve been working on cases through the years to keep the fire burning between us, only to find you asleep at your desk surrounded by cork boards with gruesome photographs of dead people, your desk piled high with grey profile folders. It used to scare the hell out of me; I used to look at you sleeping so peacefully with such violence all around you and wonder what kind of person could do that. But through the years I’ve come to understand your work and how important it is to society. But this animal, Steve, this animal doesn’t deserve to live.” He stood behind her with his hands on her shoulders, “Moll, you’re tired. I know this has come as a shock, but you’re asking for vigilante justice, and I can’t and won’t do that. We will investigate this case, and we will find and arrest this perp.”

She was quiet for a moment and then whispered “What about The Eagle?” Steve moved around the table and sat down in front of her. “What do you know of The Eagle?” “I know that he kills killers. I know that he makes them suffer the way they made their victims suffer.” “You read the article on Roskowski, didn’t you?” She nodded, “I’ve been following The Eagle in the papers for a few years. I know you’re trying to stop him, but if you ask me he’s just doing what needs to be done. He only kills serial killers; you said that yourself in conversations we’ve had.” He shook his head slowly, “That’s not all together true. He killed Jill Makin and Barry Mullin, and they weren’t serial killers.” “If he killed them, he had to have a reason.” “Well they weren’t killers, Moll; they

were law enforcement. My guess is that one or the other of them was getting too close to him, so he killed them before they could expose or capture him.” “Well, I don’t know all of the details about The Eagle, that’s your department. I just hope that he finds Janet’s killer before you do!” He couldn’t believe his ears. His sweet, loving wife wanted an eye for an eye and wanted it without a judge or jury. “Molly, the only thing that separates us from them is the rule of law. We have a constitution, even the guilty have rights. Innocent until proven guilty, Moll.” She stood and looked down at Steve, “Oh give me a fuckin’ break. You know, and I’ve heard you say it a thousand times, guilty until proven innocent. You have also said more times than I can count that our court system is broken, that these people in prison live better than we do. They don’t have to worry about healthcare, holding down a job, food, clothing. They have it made in prison. Hell, Steve, you even said that the lifers in their cell’s twenty-three hours a day have a problem free life.” “I get angry, Moll. I say things that I don’t mean. How could life in a cage twenty-three hours a day be better than a life in the real world? Come on. When I say those things I’m just blowing off steam. I took an oath, Moll, and I have to stand by it.” “Even if it means that the bad guys go free, or they live a life of comfort at our expense?” He started for the living room, “Ultimately, yes. Unfortunately, the answer is yes.”

When he entered the living room, Gail was sitting on the couch in a bathrobe that was half opened revealing her bare breasts. She was sipping a glass of wine. “Bob sends his regards and condolences, Steve.” “Thanks.” “Molly is pretty shook up over her friend’s death.” He nodded. “She wants the killer killed not captured.” “I know. We just had this conversation.” Steve sat down on the loveseat adjacent to her, and she moved over to sit next to him. He didn’t see Molly standing in the doorway between the kitchen and the living room, but she was within ear shot. Gail refilled her wine glass and offered him one, but he refused. He could tell that she wasn’t drunk by a long shot. “I want you to think about something, Steve. What if, instead of Janet, it had been me or Molly? Would you still think that upholding the constitution and the rule of law was so damned important?” She took a sip of her wine while she waited for the answer. She could see Molly out of the corner of her eye standing in the doorway. He didn’t respond.

“Steve, Bob has been a New York cop for ten years. When we met, I didn’t

know what being a cop's wife was all about. When we got married, I learned very fast. The first year I mourned him. I knew that every time he walked out that door there was a better than average chance he wouldn't come back through it again. I cringed when the phone rang, and I feared everything. On our first wedding anniversary, Bob gave me a pin. It was an NYPD shield with his badge number and a second number below that. I asked him about the unknown number, and he told me it was mine, that I was part of the precinct family. That the family takes care of its own. He told me to wear it at all times, that way if I was in trouble or if fellow officers saw me on the street they'd know who I was. To be honest I didn't understand the whole concept at the time. I smiled and thanked him, but I was a little pissed off; I wanted flowers and jewelry, not a shield.

"I didn't wear it after he gave it to me. He often told me to put it on, but I didn't listen. One night, five years ago, I was walking home from work. It was raining, and I couldn't catch a cab. I was able to get the bus and took it to our street in the Bronx. There were two beat officers on the bus with me, but I didn't greet them, and since I wasn't wearing my pin I was just another pretty face in the crowd. I also wasn't paying any attention to other people around me; I didn't see the two guys watching me from the back of the bus. When the bus stopped I got off...and for six and a half hours so did they...on me!" Steve's face dropped in shock, "I didn't know. I never heard about this. Does Molly know?" Molly walked into the living room, "I know." "Why didn't you tell me?" "Bob called me and told me about what had happened and asked me not to tell you." "But why? I could have sent resources. I could have helped." Gail shook her head, "No, Steve, you couldn't have helped. I was in the hospital for nearly two months. I was able to give enough of a description of the two guys that Bob and his detectives were able to find them. One night, Bob and two of his detectives came to see me in the hospital. They had a mug shot book, and they showed me photographs of dozens of perps. Molly was there. She flew out the second Bob called." Steve looked over at Molly who nodded in agreement.

"I saw the faces of the two men in the book and asked if Bob knew where they were. He told me not to worry about it; they would take care of it. I got out of the hospital a week later. When I got home, amongst the flowers and well wishes, there was a copy of the *New York Times* on the kitchen table laid out

with a front page story, and on the paper was my pin. The news article was about the brutal killing of two men whose bodies were found floating in the Hudson River. The headline read, 'Hudson River Killer Strikes AGAIN!' I read the article, and it turned out that the two guys that were found mutilated in the Hudson were the same two guys that raped me. The paper had printed their confession which was found by police when they searched their apartment after their bodies were found. In their confession, I learned the depth of their depravity and how very fortunate I was to be alive. Those two men had raped and killed ten women over two years. I was not only their last victim, I was the only survivor." Steve looked down at the floor, "Our Patterson, New Jersey field office has been working to find that killer for nearly ten years." Gail got up and poured Molly a glass of wine, and the two sat together on the sofa adjacent to Steve.

Gail continued, "I never asked Bob anything about the article or the two men. From that day forward, I made sure that I had that pin on every outfit that I wore and that it was prominently displayed." Steve looked over at the two women sitting side by side on the couch. "So the Hudson River Killer is Bob?" She shook her head, "No, the Hudson River Killer is the NYPD's way of eliminating the dregs of society. It's a team of cops that are a subset of the formal detective unit, think of it as a police force within a police force. They hunt down and kill the worst of the killers. Then they dispose of the bodies the same way every time, and it looks like the work of a single serial killer." "So this wasn't just vengeance for you?" "No," she said softly, "it was personal though. They caught the two men and extracted the confessions then turned them over to Bob. He took care of the killing." "And you think this is okay?" "Yes!"

Molly sat looking at Steve and then asked, "So what are you going to do, Steve? Call your Patterson office and tell them that the killer is a badge or a multitude of badges?" He didn't know what to say. He just sat there looking at the two women. "If someone hurt Molly, I don't know what I would do." Molly took a sip of her wine, "I know you better than you know yourself, and I know exactly what you would do." "Really?" "Yes...really! You would avenge me. You would do to the person or persons whatever they did to me only a hundred times worse." He looked at the grandfather clock in the corner; it was half past midnight. "I love you, Molly. I know the evil that is in the world, but I don't



know if I could kill another human being out of revenge. In the line of duty, absolutely, but in private, as a vigilante...let's hope I never have to find out." He looked over at Gail and asked, "How did you get over it...the violence, the violation that you endured?" She smiled, "Bob and his friends brought the video home to me, and I got to watch retribution." "And that made it okay with you?" "It gave me closure ... between seeing those men suffer and die in the most brutal way possible, and having close friends like Molly and others to lean on, it made it easier for me to let it go." He shook his head, "Well, I have to tell you, Gail, you have had a remarkable recovery. I would never have guessed in a million years that you went through the trauma that you did. It breaks the rules of every profile and of every psychological rule about survivors of violent crimes that I was trained in."

She smiled and stood up, "Seeing the person that you love and who loves you extracting vengeance on your behalf is very, very therapeutic. Molly, I know that you're hurting. I'm going to be in town until Saturday, and since it's only Tuesday, if it's alright with you and Steve, I want to spend the rest of my stay in your bed with you." Molly didn't flinch, "I would like nothing more." Steve sat on the loveseat looking at the two women then asked, "Is that an invitation for me to join you both in our bed for the rest of your stay?" Gail smiled and took off her robe and dropped it on the couch as she walked toward the stairs leading up to the bedroom. Molly followed behind her. "If I have learned anything from my experience, it's to enjoy life to the fullest. If it's okay with Molly, I want to be as physical with the two of you for the rest of my trip as I can be. Molly nodded in agreement and waved for Steve to come to bed.

His head was swimming at three a.m. when the three had finished making love. He was lying between the two sleeping woman who each had their arms resting on his chest. He thought about the conversations and the confessions, and he had no idea how to reconcile any of it. He had been let in on a secret, a very dark secret, one that would not allow sleep to come as he lay in the darkness listening to the soft breath of the women he loved.

# Chapter Fifteen

*'He couldn't remember the full content of the nightmare he had been pulled awake from, but The Eagle was in it. His dark silhouette in the alley was all he remembered from the dream. He noticed right away that he was alone.'*

Jim arrived at Barbara's just after midnight. He parked in the driveway. The front porch light was on, as well as a light in the living room window. He and Barbara had been married for fifteen years before Jim was shot while on duty serving a warrant. When he came home after the shooting, he was different, and the relationship between them was, too. They met in the academy while preparing to become U.S. Marshals. It was one of those cliché love at first sight things. They finished their training and both went to work for the Marshal's office. Jim was a field agent tracking down bail jumpers and escapees, working his way up to Supervising Marshal, and Barbara worked in the federal prison system attending to inmates, transporting them to and from court, and working the holding units at central detention.

For the first ten years of their marriage, they worked odd shifts, so one was coming home when the other was going to work. They only had time for quick sex and perhaps breakfast or dinner together before heading off. After Jim's shooting, he was forced to retire, and for nearly a year he was home. Barbara was still working full-time, though she did take six weeks off to help Jim acclimate to being home. However, resentment began to build between the two of them as Jim was disabled and Barbara was being promoted through the ranks until she became a field supervisor, the position Jim had when he was shot. As their twentieth anniversary loomed, they knew things weren't going to work, but they didn't give up hope. Jim was eventually able to get on with the Sheriff's Department. That first year was reminiscent of the early years of the marriage. Two staggered schedules, two ships passing in the morning or night. The sex was less frequent, but they got along a lot better. It was short lived, though. Jim was promoted to the head of homicide, which meant he was spending less and less time at home, and Barbara's schedule became more fixed, which freed up her evenings and weekends.

Barbara filed for divorce a week before their twentieth wedding anniversary.

Jim wasn't surprised by the filing; he just wished she would have warned him. Instead, he was ambushed by two of his deputies who thought it would be funny to serve the summons on him in a staff meeting. The idiots as he referred to them now, assholes then, thought it was some civil litigation that was related to department business. They didn't bother to look at the pleading, so when they grandstanded at the staff meeting and served him, he was taken totally by surprise. He could laugh about it now; the two rookie detectives might be able to laugh about it now, but they weren't laughing when he busted them down to patrol duty for a year.

He walked up the familiar walk to the front door, and it opened before he could knock. Barbara was barefoot in a t-shirt just above her knees, and he smiled as he walked in. Her legs still looked really nice for a woman her age. Jim was only two years older, but he had not aged with the same grace that Barbara had. She invited him in and gave him a huge hug and didn't let go. He hugged her back and held her until she released. She walked into the living room holding Jim by the hand and sat him down next to her on the couch. "Would you like a cup of coffee?" "Sure." She went into the kitchen and for just a moment he caught himself feeling the safety that came from the sounds of her working in the kitchen on the rare weekends that they were home together. He had a vague memory of sitting in his recliner in the living room on a hot July day, a baseball game on the TV, and dozing in the afternoon sunlight. He heard the clink of the cups as she was putting them on the counter, and for a fraction of an instant he was back at home with the woman he loved and planned to grow old with.

He got up and walked into the kitchen. "So what's up, Barb? We haven't had more than three words in almost...geez ... five years?" She continued making the coffee and put out some chocolate-striped shortbread cookies that she knew he liked. She didn't respond as she set the table. "Okay, have it your way." He walked over to the table and sat down. The coffee was brewing, and she sat down at the table while she waited. There was a brief silence until she said, "I don't want to be alone tonight." He took a cookie off the plate and took a bite. "Why not?" The coffee pot dinged, and she filled their cups. "You know that Jill and I were very close." She sat a cup in front of him; he took a sip and dipped the cookie in it. "Well yea...you two slept together!" Barbara's expression changed from one of sadness to one of shock. "You knew?" He laughed under

his breath, “Barb...I loved you very much. I still do, but I knew that you and Jill were lovers.” “When did you find out?” He drew a deep breath and coughed a little, “Oh, let’s see, shit...we’ve been divorced, what, five years? You and Jill became partners on the force ten years ago, so nine years ago.” “But how? We never made it public.” He laughed again, continuing to enjoy his coffee. “One of the disadvantages of my new career in the Sheriff’s Department was having more freedom to come and go. You were off duty for a weekend, oh, about three years before you filed for divorce. I had a quiet Saturday, so I decided to come home early and surprise you. I brought roses and a bottle of Champagne and came home in the early afternoon. When I pulled up, I saw that Jill’s car was parked out in front of the house, so I knew that surprising you was out of the question. I left the stuff in the car and just came into the house. Guess what?” She didn’t respond. “I came in, and there was no sign of the two of you. I heard some giggling and rustling coming from upstairs, so I followed the noise and found the two of you in bed.” “Why didn’t you say something?” He took another cookie and dipped it in his coffee, “What the hell was I supposed to say? ‘Hey, I stopped by to surprise you for a nooner and found you and Jill having sex. Can I join in?’” She started to blush. She had her hands on her lap and looked down at the table, “I’m sorry Jim...”

He finished off the coffee, stood up, and walked over to the cupboard above the built-in oven. He opened the cabinet and reached way back and pulled out a bottle of Glenlivet. “Aged twenty years. Well, it’s been up there for at least ten more, so this is probably even better than before.” He grabbed a highball glass and offered a drink to Barb who nodded. He took another glass out and said, “Ice, as I recall?” “Yes, please.” He returned with a generous pour for each of them. “So why is tonight different from any other night, Barb? Why don’t you want to be alone?” He took a pack of cigarettes from his top pocket and asked if it was okay to smoke. She nodded and asked for one. “Now, I know I’m in a dream; you quit smoking three years after we were married.” “I picked it back up again after Jill was murdered.” He put two cigarettes in his mouth and lit them both and handed her one from across the table. “Romantic,” she said with a smile. “Nope...low on butane.” As he clicked the lighter shut, she started laughing. “That’s my Jimmy, a man with a plan.” He laughed, “Nope. You don’t want me leaning over your stove to light my cigarette.” She laughed again. “It

would be tough to light; it's electric now." "Just my fuckin' luck!" They both laughed, sipping their scotch and smoking.

"You didn't answer my question, Barb. What's up?" She took a drag off the smoke and a sip of her drink. "Jill knew the identity of The Iron Eagle." He sat back in his chair, one eye half shut from the smoke rising up from his nose and mouth. "Really! Did she share her revelation with you?" "I'm sitting here talking to you, so what do you think?" He laughed and said under his breath, "Sorry. Stupid question. Do you have any theories on who he might be?" She gulped her scotch and slid the glass across the table for a refill. "I don't know his name, and I don't know what he looks like, but I can tell you that he's a shield. Not federal. He's either Sheriff's Department or local PD... and he works homicide." He poured the scotch into her glass and said, "Well that really narrows it down. How did you come to this revelation?" "The night before Jill was murdered, she told me that she met a guy a few months earlier that she was certain was The Eagle." "Go on." He took a drag off his cigarette and then topped off his scotch. "Jill was an avid physical fitness freak. She had been talking about this guy she met at the gym who was a big time fitness guy. She told me that the two struck up a friendship when they learned that they were both in law enforcement. She said he hit on her, and she told him she was gay. She said he laughed and commented that he runs into that a lot. Over the next five or six months, she talked this guy up like you wouldn't believe." "Do you think that he was trying to flip her back to the home team? She was a hottie!" Barbara frowned at him, which made him smile because it was the way she frowned at him for all of those years. "No, smart ass. Jill was gay; I'm bi." He looked at her with surprise. "No shit...so if I stay with you tonight I get laid?" She smiled, "Well, duh!" He puffed up his chest, "Well, this is turning out to be a great start to a new day. Finish up your story because I'm really, really horny."

She shook her head slowly with a sheepish smile on her face and continued. "About a week before her death, she told me that she invited the guy to the house for dinner. She wanted me to meet him. I thought, no harm, so I agreed. I asked her if she knew anything more about his police work and that's when she told me he was a homicide detective. I asked what department or division, but she didn't know. The following week, the night before he was to come for dinner, she told me that she was canceling the date. When I asked why, she said

she had a bad feeling about him. She said he had done some things that she thought were peculiar. When I pushed her a little harder, she told me that she had a strange feeling that the guy was The Eagle.” “Okay, so what happened after that?” “The night that he was to come to the house she called him from her cell and told him that she couldn’t do dinner. After she hung up, she told me that she had to run an errand and would be back, but she never came home.” “Hmm...” Jim poured another scotch for each of them and asked, “Where’s her cell phone?” “She took it with her. They didn’t recover it with her body.” “You have her cell number, right?” She nodded. He took out his phone and asked her to give it to him. He typed the number into his PDA and asked who the phone carrier was. “Okay, tomorrow, because I’m going to be in SUCH a good mood, I’m going to subpoena the phone records from the carrier for Jill’s phone. It should give us the information on the number she called that night and could lead us to The Eagle.” She got a smile of relief on her face. “Thank you, Jimmy. This means so much to me.” He finished his scotch and said, “Really? How much?” She stood up and took off her t-shirt; she was nude underneath it. She walked over to him and rubbed her triple D breasts in his face, then ran off up the stairs. He was in hot pursuit, dropping his clothing as he ran after her, complimenting her really nice ass all the way up the stairs.



Steve woke with a jolt and sat straight up in bed. He was sweating. He couldn’t remember the full content of the nightmare he had been pulled awake from, but The Eagle was in it. His dark silhouette in the alley was all he remembered from the dream. He noticed right away that he was alone. He heard the shower going and the girls talking. “Well, I don’t have to ask if it was a dream this time.” Gail popped her head out from the bathroom and asked, “Do you want to join us?” He was still groggy, but not groggy enough not to realize that he only had a few more days of this kind of treatment. He jumped out of bed and headed for the bathroom. The girls were standing in front of the mirror exchanging comments on each other’s figures. “Molly, you are way too self conscious; you have a great figure.” Gail placed her hands on Molly’s breasts and squeezed gently. “The key to the perkiness of your breasts is you never had children. You have a very beautiful and voluptuous figure, not an ounce of cellulite on you. Isn’t that right Steve?” He came in behind them and put his

head down on Molly's neck, "You have one hell of a body, Mrs. Hoffman," and patted her on the ass. She smiled and turned and gave him a big kiss.

"So how'd you sleep?" "Okay until about five minutes ago. I woke from a hell of a nightmare." "Want to talk about it?" He shook his head. The shower was running, and Gail stepped into the glass enclosure. Molly looked at her body on the other side of the shower glass and said, "Well, I can tell you one thing, honey, I'm glad we put in the double shower when we remodeled the bathroom." She laughed as she stepped in behind Gail. The shower had areas to sit to steam and sauna, as well as double shower heads on opposing walls. Molly was under one and Gail the other, and they were chatting away when Steve stepped in. "You are very dirty, Steve." Gail smiled and soaped up a washcloth and started to bathe him. Molly joined in, and he got a good cleaning from the girls ... and then got dirty again. They exchanged kisses all around, and the girls got out of the shower, and Steve stayed in to wash his head. He started losing his hair when he was sixteen and had only light patches of hair on the sides of his scalp. He had been shaving his head since he was in college, and the look fit his personality. Molly always thought it made him look both sophisticated and intimidating. He massaged the shampoo onto his bald scalp as the girls continued their conversation.

"Really, Moll...the next time you come out to see me, I'm going to take you to my stylist in midtown, so you can get a new cut but also see just how much better you look than the prunes that come into the shop." Steve laughed under his breath as he put shaving cream on his face and scalp and shaved. When he was finished, he stepped out, and Gail put her hand on the top of his head and said, "Smooooth!" He smiled. "I always wondered how you kept that shiny cue ball look." She laughed a deep belly laugh, and Molly smacked her on the hip with her towel. "Be nice! That's my husband." The three looked at each other and broke out laughing hysterically. They finished up and went downstairs for some breakfast.

It was Wednesday and Steve didn't have any appointments until late in the afternoon, so they lounged around the house sharing war stories and memories of Gail's mother, the funny and the poignant ones. Gail's mother, Patricia, had passed away from breast cancer several years earlier. Molly knew her well, and the two had been lifelong friends. Steve knew her through Molly and had told

Molly on many occasions that he liked Patricia a lot. Steve looked at Gail who had removed her robe because she was hot and was laying nude with her back arched over an ottoman in front of his leather chair and asked, "What would your mother say about what we're doing?" She got a serious expression on her face then a pouty one and said, "She'd be pissed!" "So, she wouldn't like your behavior or ours?" She started to giggle, "No...silly. My mom loved you very much, and she had a real hard and heavy crush on you. She confessed it to me only days before she died. She told me that the first time Molly introduced the two of you she felt sparks." He looked over at Molly sitting with her robe open and her feet up on the foot rest. She had a smile on her face, "Gail," she said, "I never told Steve how your mother felt about him." Gail frowned. "My mother would be jealous, Steve, and she also wouldn't have wanted to share you with Molly or anyone else."

He looked at the two of them and said he really had no idea that she felt that way about him. Molly moved over onto the main couch next to Steve, "She was one of my best friends, and she was very much in love with you. But she also loved and respected me, and she would never have gotten in the way of my happiness." Gail asked, "Since we're on the subject of my mother, Molly, are we ever going to talk about the elephant in the room?" That question was met with silence. Steve knew what it meant, and so did Molly, but it wasn't a conversation Molly wanted to have. Molly laid her head on Steve's lap. "What's the point? Steve and I have talked this over with three doctors. My life is in limbo, Gail. I just finished the second round of chemo and was hoping we could have a nice week." Steve didn't say anything; he just put his hand on Molly's head and stroked her hair. It wasn't a conversation he wanted to have either; he'd made that clear in several arguments with Molly. Gail asked, "What stage are you, Moll?" There was no response. "So you have a prognosis, don't you?" Molly started to cry and sat up. She was angry and said, "Howard Cohen is handling our affairs. He's been my friend all my life. Steve and I are leaving things in his hands. I'm in remission, and that's all I'm going to say about this."

Steve walked over to the living room window and looked out on the street and the valley below. Gail frowned and said, "I'm sorry. It just feels like you're trying to hide from your illness by spending time with me. It's not my place to judge, and I'm very sorry that I brought it up. I love you both. I just want the



best for you.” Steve turned around and said, “Gail, Molly and I have had long and heated heartfelt conversations about her situation. Neither of us is willing to allow a doctor to take away our hope, so they can dish out all the prognosis’ they like. I have been, and will continue to be, supportive of Molly, whatever she chooses to do in her battle with cancer. There’s nothing more to be said on the subject.” Gail sat with her head down as if she’d just been scolded. Molly dried her eyes and asked, “Who wants some food?” Gail forced a smile as did Steve. Over an early brunch, the three agreed that there would be no further conversation of Molly’s illness for the rest of the visit. Molly could see the pain in Steve’s eyes, but they had made an agreement before Gail’s visit, one that included details that would be shared with no one, not even her.



Jim woke up confused. He looked around the room and for a few moments he didn’t know where he was. He felt an arm on his chest, and he looked over to see Barbara sleeping next to him. The alarm clock showed six thirty a.m. “Who needs a damn alarm clock?” he muttered to himself. Barbara nuzzled into his chest. It all came back to him, and he laid there trying to make heads or tails of what had transpired. He was also concerned for Barbara’s safety after learning about Jill and her hunch about The Eagle. Jim moved her arm and kissed her on the forehead as he slid over to sit up on the edge of the bed. Barbara woke up and said with a sleepy voice, “Oh God!” Jim didn’t respond. He walked bare-assed to the bedroom window and looked out. “Having some regrets, Barb?” She was visibly hung over. “Too much scotch but no regrets about last night.” His clothes were strewn all over the bedroom. He began picking them up without saying a word. “Are you regretting last night, Jim?” “Not at all...it was nice to have you in my arms again; it’s been a long time.”

She complained that it was hot and threw the covers off so that she was lying nude on the bed. Her graying red hair on the pillow and pale skin against the sheets made the freckles on her legs and arms stand out against the white linen. He must have stared at her a little too long because Barbara pulled herself up on her elbows and asked if he was okay. He nodded, putting on his underwear, “Just taking it in, Barbara; a mental picture for lonely night activities.” She laughed, “Do you have to go now? It’s so early; come back to bed.” He didn’t know what to do. He knew that he still loved her very much, but he also knew that the two

of them were oil and water and any reconciliation would be short lived. “Barb, I stayed because you were afraid. You were vulnerable, and, well...I was horny... I’m a guy. I’m not going to pass up a nice piece of ass, especially if it’s thrown at me. But you know as well as I do that this is going to lead down a bad road.” She got out of bed and grabbed a robe off the back of a rocking chair. “It doesn’t have to be that way, Jimmy.” He was pulling on his pants when she said it. “Then tell me how it can be, Barb. You miss Jill; you had a moment of weakness, and I took advantage of it.” “Do you really think that’s what happened?” As he continued to dress, he answered, “Hell...Barb. I don’t have a damn clue. You seem to have the answers. You tell me.” She walked over to him and gently put her hands on his face, “Oh Jimmy...I’ve missed you. You’re right. I loved Jill, and I still do, but I love you, too... I have always loved you. What happened between us had nothing to do with weakness. It had to do with desire and being with the man who always made me feel safe.”

He finished buttoning his shirt and was putting on his shoes. He grabbed his shoulder holster with his nine millimeter in it and said, “Just because you feel safe with me doesn’t mean that we should keep this going. I love you, too, but you know that when push comes to shove we’re oil and water, babe. I had a great time ...” She interrupted him mid sentence, “Then let’s work with this from the great time aspect. We both have something the other wants.” He stopped fastening his holster and looked at Barbara with curiosity. “Okay, I’m listening.” He sat down on the window ledge as she walked over and sat near him. “We agree that we still love each other, right?” He nodded. “We also agree that we both have physical and sexual desires that we want fulfilled.” He nodded again. “I also agree that we were definitely oil and water when married, but last night proved we are still best friends, and we have a lot of years between us, and we know each other like the backs of our own hands. So, I propose, and I want you to think about this, that you move back into the house with me. I’ve been thinking about it for a few weeks. You can have the guest room, and I will keep this room. We’ll come and go as we please, and we’ll see whoever we please, but when the day is done if we’re home together and there’s no one else in our lives, and we’re in the mood, we’ll have sex!” He started to laugh, “So, friends with benefits, fuck buddies!” She frowned at him, which drew a smile out of his otherwise sullen expression. “No, we’re not fuck buddies. We’re old friends who

know each other and...can live together without conflict...provided that you keep your bad habits in your room.” She laughed.

“Look, Barb, you make a compelling case, and to be honest I was laying here with you this morning concerned for your safety. But given our past, do you really think this is a good idea?” She stood up and dropped her robe then laid back down on the bed facing away from him, “You tell me!” He pulled hard on his holster and stood up, “Oh hell, woman...you flash that ass at me and then ask me to turn you down? I don’t need to think about it, just give me a goddamn key and the alarm code, so I don’t get my ass shot coming into the house if you’re not here.” She smiled and jumped off the bed like a little girl. She ran over to her nightstand and pulled out a white envelope. She handed it to him. He looked down, and it had his name on it with the words ‘Welcome Home’ underneath. “Well, you have been giving this some thought.” He opened the envelope and there were two house keys, a remote for the garage, and a piece of paper with the alarm code. There was also a product label inside, ‘Anal delight, light lubricant.’ He looked at her with a strange face. “Oh, don’t look at me like that. You know I love it, and so do you. So, if I’m going to be back with a man, I want *this* lubricant! He laughed out loud, “Where do I get this stuff?” “It comes from Europe. I’ll email you a web link, so be a doll and order two large bottles.” “Hey, why do I have to pay?” “Because it’s my ass that’s taking the pounding, baby!”

He laughed and Barbara grabbed him and laid a big kiss on him while he was putting on his jacket. He shook his head, “Fuckin’ women...you can’t live with ‘em, and without ‘em you have to jerk off.” He was walking toward the bedroom door when he yelled back, “I’m keeping my fuckin’ apartment!” “You’re goddamn right you are,” she hollered. “If I get tired of your shit, I can kick you to the curb again!” As he walked out the front door and headed to his car, he stopped halfway across the walk and went back inside. “Hey Barb...” “Yea.” He had a serious tone in his voice, “Listen...keep the doors and windows locked and set the alarm when you’re here alone.” She came to the top of the landing, nude and striking a pose, “Why Detective O’Brian ... are you worried about little old Barbara Spencer?” She had a little southern twang in her voice. He looked up at her standing in the early morning light. “Yes,” he said softly. He had a look on his face that she had never seen before. “Yea...I’m worried about you, especially

after everything you told me last night.” A half-hearted smile crossed her face as she thanked him. “I’ll do everything in my power to protect you, Barbara, but you’re going to have to do your part.”

She agreed. “Set the alarm when I leave; you don’t want to fall into the hands of The Eagle.” She turned toward the bedroom but stopped and called to him before the door closed. “Jim...you’ve been trying to nail this guy for nearly ten years. Killing Jill was WAY out of this guy’s norm. Do you really think he will come after me?” Jim looked around the house and said yes and no. “The Eagle, with the exception of killing of Jill and Barry, has only killed other killers, and, between you and me, I don’t have a problem with it. I also think Jill and Barry were killed for reasons we may never know but were related to something really bad. I think that if he feels or knows that you have an idea of who he is, yes, he will come after you. And if he does, he’s not getting you without getting me. But I think you’re safe as long as he feels that you don’t know his identity.” He closed the front door, and she heard the key turn the deadbolt lock. She went back into the bedroom to take her shower and set the alarm to “stay,” so that the motion detectors were off in the house. Everything else was armed.

# Chapter Sixteen

*'The lights suddenly came on in the unit, and the doors opened. He was back!'*

The hills were dry in the San Fernando Mountains. Southern California was in the midst of a severe drought, and there hadn't been more than ten inches of rain in almost three years. For Angelinos, it was just another summer. For the mountain residents, it was a whole different story. The mountain folks lived with the very real danger of fires in a way that the city folk didn't. There was a tug of war between the two; the mountain people needed their tourist dollars but not the risks they posed to the forests they called home. Every year, without fail, a city dweller would wander off into the forest, get lost, get cold, start a camp fire, and inadvertently start a forest fire.

Despite that potential danger, The Eagle had really taken a shine to Francis' set up. It was private and quiet, and he could move around without the need for stealth while doing the work of 'Justice.' The Eagle had moved some of his personal effects into Francis' house and set up a new surveillance system, so he knew what was happening on the property when he was on and off premises. There were also a few modifications to the container, so that Francis' medieval booby traps would no longer be necessary. The Eagle had the container set up so that once he brought a victim into the unit, there was only one way out, and that was in whatever manner and condition that he saw fit. There were also several escape routes set up in the event he needed to evacuate quickly due to fire or other unforeseen circumstances. The Eagle burned his emblem into a large piece of oak he picked up while hiking in the surrounding hills and proudly displayed it on the back wall of the container. Its wings were crimson and black, and its talons gripped a cluster of arrows and the scale of justice. Red lights beamed from its eyes, and the crimson colors glowed ominously.

The Eagle had also replaced Francis' primitive torture items with more state of the art equipment, as well as a surgical table for what he referred to as "Extra Special Procedures." Billy had learned from The Eagle who Francis was and what he had done. He heard Francis' confessions in multiple torture sessions, as well as from Francis directly when The Eagle wasn't around.

It was the beginning of August, and The Eagle had had Francis for nearly

two weeks and Billy a week less. Billy was feeling confident that he was building a bond with his captor, so he was picking up more formal language when addressing him. Billy, while still restrained, had been allowed down off the wall and had access to a cot that The Eagle had put down in place of the straw. Since he had rendered Billy's penis useless by removing the head after circumcising him, it was now only a matter of time before The Eagle decided how to dispatch him. He had left the urethra intact so Billy could urinate, but he would never get sexual satisfaction again, assuming The Eagle would allow him to keep what remained. He told Billy that he hadn't decided if he was going to remove the whole thing or not as punishment for his crimes. Billy had hurt a lot of women and girls, and The Eagle told him, "Rape is devastating. You took something from those people that they can never get back: trust, a feeling of safety, for some their virginity, and many others their lives."

The Eagle asked him about Janet's killing on the first day in the container. "I swear, Mr. Justice, I didn't kill that white girl...I raped her, yes sir I did, but I didn't kill her. I grabbed her in a parking garage. I saw her drive in and park, so I waited until no one was round, and I hid under the driver's side of her car. When she came back and opened the door, I grabbed her feet and pulled her down. I took her keys and drove down to the port, and I raped her on a picnic table. She didn't fight. I thought she was into it. When I was done, I dropped her off near the Pike. I seen her walking toward the Pike entrance, Mr. Justice. I swear... when I dropped her off she was alive and fine." The Eagle told Billy while he didn't kill her outright what he did to her caused her death, and as far as he was concerned he killed her. Billy tried to justify her death by telling him that if she had that birth defect she was going to die anyway, so he didn't see it as his fault. He even told Francis that he felt that Mr. Justice was going to let him live.

Francis was being kept alive and tortured twice daily on a sadistically ritualistic schedule. The Eagle had destroyed Francis' body but gave him IVs and medications to keep him alive. On one particular evening when the two had been left alone, Francis was very alert as he had been given a high dose stimulant to make sure he was wide awake and acutely able to feel the torture he was having inflicted upon him. Francis talked about the excitement of killing, how he enjoyed the screams of his victims, and his desire to clean the river of the filthy Swine who tainted it. "I have to tell you, Billy, there's just nothing more

exhilarating than holding that saw blade over the Swine after I have placed the tourniquet on the body part to be removed and hearing the pleading and praying to me. Oh...Billy, it's heaven...I love it. In that moment, I am God. I love to hear the Swine pray to me, to beg me. Those are the moments that make life worth living. I never raped anyone. I've heard The Eagle talk of what you've done. You're just a filthy rapist. I would do more to you than he has done. I hate rapist Swine."



All conversation had stopped and the container was dark as the two men were sleeping as best they could. The lights suddenly came on in the unit, and the doors opened. He was back! They both wearily looked over at The Eagle. He had a certain intensity on his face. Francis knew that this was the end; at least he was praying out loud that finally The Eagle had come to finish what he started.



When Steve got to the office, he had several voicemail messages. All routine except for one. The voice on the message was the same voice he had heard in the dark alley near Coston Middle School when he and Jim found Roskowski's body. The message was short and to the point.

*"Good day, Special Agent Hoffman. I noticed that you have been spending a little more time at home the past several nights. It's good to work on your marriage, keep the fire burning so to speak. The young lady who has been staying with you is very attractive, a relative I assume. I have a gift for you. Meet me at Legion Park tonight at eleven. It won't take long. I don't want to interfere in your personal life...too much." There was a pause and the voice continued, "Oh...and I know I don't have to say it, but I will... come alone."*

Silence followed. He saved the message and then sat down in his chair looking out the window. He looked at his watch. Half past five. The last time he was in Legion Park was when Barry's body was found. He picked up the phone and called Jim but got his voicemail. "Jim, it's Steve. We need to talk. I just received a message from The Eagle. Call me." He called Molly and asked if they could have an early dinner. She was fine with it, so they met at seven instead of nine. The three of them enjoyed a wonderful meal and great conversation. Molly could tell that there was something going on with Steve but couldn't put her

finger on it. When dinner was done, he told the girls that he had some last minute business to clear up and would meet them at the house after midnight. As she waited for the valet to bring her car around, she asked him what was going on. He smiled and said, “Nothing, sweetheart. I have some clean up on Jill’s case that I need to get done, and the DNA evidence came back on the perp in Janet’s rape. The lab found a match in the database.” She looked at him closely, “There’s something that you aren’t telling me!” He shook his head as Phillip pulled up with her car. “You and Gail go home, relax, have a drink, and have one waiting for me when I get home.” She started to walk toward the driver’s side of her car, and he followed. “I know you, and I know that whatever it is is damned important for you to stand me and Gail up.” He smiled, “I’m not standing you up; I’m just going to be a little late, that’s all. Gail goes home in less than two days. Do you really think I’m going to miss out on the last few nights of fun?” She smiled as did he; she kissed him and pulled him close to her body and whispered into his ear, “Be safe, my love.” She could see the tension in his eyes. “You need to relax, mister. I’ll see you in a few hours. I love you.” “I love you, too. Drive safe.” He watched until her taillights disappeared onto the freeway onramp. He walked across the street and tried Jim’s cell again, but all he got was voicemail. He had two side arms, Glock 380s as well as two nine millimeter handguns in shoulder holsters under his jacket. “He didn’t say to come unarmed, just alone.”



Jim was sitting at his desk a little after ten when he realized that he had left his cell phone in his car. He had taken it out to input the cell number of the suspected Eagle and dropped it on the front seat when he went into his office earlier in the day. He gave the number to the department’s cyber crimes unit to do a cross on the phone to see who it belonged to. He had been in his office a little over an hour when he learned it was a prepaid phone registered to Mr. John Smith. All of the research led the department on a wild goose chase of P.O. boxes, beginning in New York and terminating at a mailing service in Salt Lake City, Utah. He cracked a joke with one of his investigators that the guy might be a Mormon. He could find nothing to connect the owner to the phone. But the one thing he hadn’t done was call the number.

He grabbed a cup of coffee and walked out to his car to retrieve the phone.



He put it in his pocket without looking at it. He took out a smoke and lit it in the hot night air. He stood leaning against his car when his cell rang. The caller ID was blocked, and he was just about to put it back in his pocket when he saw that he had a voicemail message icon on the phone from a previously missed call. He flipped the ringing phone open and said, "If you're a fuckin' telemarketer, screw off. If you're a charity, I gave at the office, and if you're a bill collector, go fuck yourself. I don't pay my bills." He heard Steve say, "Nice way to answer the phone, asshole!" Jim laughed, "What's up, Casanova?" "Jim, it's ten thirty." He looked at his watch, "Wow! So it is. What do you want?" "I received a voicemail from The Eagle asking me to meet him in Legion Park tonight at eleven. He said he had a gift for me." "Where the fuck are you now, Steve?" "I'm crossing Gibbing, headed over to the park." "Son of a bitch...don't pull into the park. Turn on First and park at the corner of Pleasant. I'm on my way. Don't go in without backup!"

He didn't wait for Steve's response. He just threw his still-lit cigarette onto the pavement and took off, running his lights and siren until he was three blocks from the park. If there was one thing Jim knew, it was that no one, not even The Eagle, would give the sound of sirens a second thought in that part of town. Traffic parted, and it was quarter to eleven when he saw Steve's car parked a few rows down. He walked over and knocked on the passenger window; Steve unlocked the door, and Jim got in. He looked over at Steve staring in the direction of the park. "What exactly did he say in his message?" Steve pulled out his cell and called his office voicemail and handed Jim the phone. After listening, he pounded his hands on the dashboard and said, "Shit...that son of a bitch has been watching you." Steve didn't react. "I don't think I'm the only one he's been watching." He looked over at Jim. "You think he's been watching me?" Steve nodded. "Well if he's watching me, he's been watching Barbara, too." Steve looked at him strangely. "Later ... assuming we're still alive. I talked to Barbara last night, and she gave me a cell phone number that she claims Jill thought was The Eagle's." "Did you run a trace?" "No...I've been jerking off. Of course I ran a trace. John Smith. All of the addresses are dead ends." "Have you called the number?" Jim sat quiet for a few seconds, "No!" "Well in five minutes I'm going to walk into Legion Park to pick up my gift. You're my spotter. When you see that I'm engaged in conversation with him, call the

number.” “Yea, like he’ll have the cell on him. Even if he does, we don’t know how he will react.” Steve looked at Jim and said, “I have a pretty good idea how he will react.”

The park was eerily quiet. It was early by this park’s standard, and there was no one in sight. Steve walked over to the curb and sat down. Jim made his way to the park and was able to move into an area that was unlit. He moved toward one of the bathrooms that the pimps and drug dealers had darkened for their events and pushed the door open and went inside; the door was spring loaded, and he heard it slam shut behind him. It was dark, and he started to make his way toward the light coming in through a window at the far end of the building. He made his way there but tripped on something as he got to the window. He didn’t dare shine a flashlight; he figured it was some trash from one of the homeless occupants. There were murmurs and moans echoing off the walls, but he couldn’t tell if they were inside or out. They weren’t moving, so he wasn’t worried about them. He spoke quietly under his breath, “If you’re getting or giving a blow job, do me a favor and shut the fuck up!” He made his way to the window. He had a clear view of the lot, and he could see Steve sitting on the curb. “Nice move,” he whispered to himself, “parking where they found Barry and sitting where we sat after we found the body.” He unclipped the holster on his side and pulled out his cell phone. He knew he couldn’t shoot from his position, but he could get to Steve in seconds; all he could do now was wait.

Steve sat for a few minutes. When he heard rustling behind him, he stood up and turned with a quick jerk, pulling his weapon. He saw something moving on the ground in the shadows near some bushes and moved toward the object and unknowingly out of Jim’s line of sight. He moved with his gun trained on what he now recognized as a person on the ground. As he got closer, he could see it was a Black male, hog-tied and nude. The eyes of the tied man stared straight up behind him. The shadow of The Eagle rose up from behind Steve; he had been perched in a tree, and in a fraction of a second he was on top of Steve, knocking the gun from his hand. He pulled him over to a darkened building. “I came here with a gift, and you come here with a gun? Special Agent Hoffman, that’s just rude.” The voice was disguised once again. Steve’s vision was blurred because he’d hit his head when The Eagle landed on him.

The Eagle grabbed Steve by the jacket and began to search him, placing all

of his weapons into a trash can behind him. The Eagle was clothed in all black, and his face was covered. There was no way to make out weight or race, just that he was tall. "In your message, you said you had a gift for me. Is this it? Attacking me?" "No...I come bearing Agent Janet Simmons' killer." He pointed to the hog-tied man. "How do you know he's the killer?" There was a little laugh from The Eagle, "Let's just say he ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time." "I don't understand..." "He tried to rob me at gunpoint the day Agent Simmons' was found." Steve couldn't help himself; a laugh just spontaneously erupted from him. "This guy tried to rob....you?" "Yes...while it turned out badly for him, it turned out to be quite serendipitous for you." "So, he's confessed?" The Eagle placed a gloved hand into a pocket of his jacket and took out a piece of paper and handed it to Steve. "This is quite a departure from your M.O." The Eagle shook his head, confusing Steve. "This is the first time that you've left one of your victims alive."

The Eagle lifted Steve to his feet and pushed him over toward the nude man. A light appeared from behind him, and he turned to see that The Eagle was shining a flashlight in the direction of the victim. He looked down to where the light was pointed and could see an object protruding from the victim's inner thigh. "The blade has severed his femoral artery; as soon as I remove it, he will bleed out in less than 60 seconds." "So, you brought him to me so I could watch him die?" "His confession says it all, Agent Hoffman. I can't allow him to live." Steve had his hand on the back of his head where he had been hit and asked why not while wincing in pain. "That should be obvious, Agent Hoffman; he's seen my face." Billy started shaking his head violently in a gesture suggesting he wouldn't give up anything about The Eagle. "The guy's street name is 'Billy the Kid.' He's part of the Rollin 60s Neighborhood Crips." Steve looked down at him on the ground and said, "You were a hell of a long way from home." Billy looked up with a hapless look in his eyes. "In interrogating him ..." "You mean torturing him." "Splitting hairs; you have your methods; I have mine." "Mine don't include torture and murder!" "Well, Billy's did. He's a new breed of serial killer, and you'll find all the information in the confession. Billy, here, didn't kill Agent Simmons. He confessed to the rape, but claims he dropped her near the Pike and saw her walk off toward the entrance." "Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

The Eagle started to speak when something started ringing. “Ah!...” he said, calmly and coolly pulling the phone from his pocket. “Agent Hoffman, you didn’t keep your word. I asked you to come alone.” He flipped the phone open and spoke, “Good evening, Detective O’Brian.” Jim was silent on the other end of the line... he put his hand over the receiver and bent down below the window and whispered to himself, “Oh God...Barb.” He put the phone back to his ear. The Eagle spoke again, “Cat got your tongue, detective? As you know, I’m here with Agent Hoffman, and we’re just getting ready to wrap things up. I’ll make you both a deal. Detective O’Brian, I have a pretty good idea that you’re in the restroom on the far side of the park. You will find it difficult to exit as I took the liberty of locking the hinges when I put some of the park residents into the building with you. I know you can’t see them, but I assure you they are in there with you and all are alive and well. However, I knew that Agent Hoffman wouldn’t make a move without his faithful friend, so I took a little insurance policy out on you both.” Steve didn’t make a move. Jim already knew where this was going. “Barbara is a lovely woman, detective. She’s a very chatty lady ... not so much right now.” The Eagle kept the phone to his ear as he spoke to Steve, “Agent Hoffman, your wife, Molly, and her friend, Gail, are very attractive. Chatty, too. Now, I know you gentlemen want to see your loved ones again in one piece...I make that as a statement to Agent Hoffman. It appears that he has a wonderful relationship with his wife and her friend.” The Eagle tilted his head to Steve in the form of a wink.

“Detective O’Brian, since you and Barbara are divorced, and from what Jill told me in our conversations over the several months that we were friends, it was an ugly divorce. You might not be as troubled by your ex’s premature and, I assure you, brutal demise. However, I have found that even ex’s harbor deep positive feelings for their former spouses, so I’m going to go out on a limb and say you don’t want her harmed.” Jim heard Steve say, “You bastard. If you hurt one hair ...” The Eagle cut him off, “Yea, yea. This is not the time for clichés, gentlemen. I need you to focus.” Billy thrashed a bit on the ground. “Relax, Billy, I’ll get to you in a minute.”

He continued speaking to both men while holding the phone to his ear, “I’m going to pull the knife out of old Billy boy here.” In a quick upward motion, he grabbed the handle, and although Steve couldn’t see it, he felt blood hitting the side of his pants and heard the throbbing, spitting sound of blood exiting Billy’s

leg. Billy thrashed briefly, and then grew quiet. “Okay ... that’s done, so I’m going to take my leave. You are both welcome for the gift, and you can collect your loved ones when I call you.” And with that The Eagle disappeared into the thick brush at the back of the park. Jim was screaming from the bathroom while Steve checked Billy for a pulse...he was dead.

# Chapter Seventeen

*'She leaned in like she was going to kiss him but instead hauled off and smacked him in the face.'*

**T**he Eagle made his way back to Francis' van and took off for the 10 Freeway headed to the house on Parson's Trail. He pulled off his mask, and sweat was running down his face. He turned on the police scanner and waited for the call. He drove the speed limit so as not to attract any attention and heard Jim's voice come over the scanner, calling for backup at Legion Park. All the way back to the house, he listened to the police chatter. By the time he was closing the steel gate at Parson's Trail, the scanner was buzzing with traffic. They had SWAT on scene, the whole neighborhood locked down, and they were conducting house to house searches. He parked the van behind the container and went into the house. It was half past one when he stepped out of the shower and slipped into bed. He had police scanners in the bedroom tuned to state and federal authority frequencies and laid in the darkness, drifting in and out of sleep as the drama unfolded.



Steve was calling Molly and Gail, but there was no answer at home or on their cells. Jim was trying to secure the scene and told the teams he and Steve had to attend to some business related to the case and to call them if they were needed. The two men ran for their cars with Steve calling out, "It will go faster and be safer if we move together. Jim ran over to Steve's car, and he blasted the siren as they headed for his house looking for Molly and Gail. As they drove, Jim told him everything that happened the night before with Barbara. Steve called for backup at his home; he instructed the dispatcher to send out three units, no sirens, and to hold a position away from his residence. Jim gave the same instructions for Barbara's house, as they sped down the Hollywood Freeway.

They arrived on scene and all was quiet. Steve radioed his agents to take perimeter positions to secure the house. "No one gets in but me and Jim, and no one gets out but me, Jim, my wife, and her friend." They didn't try to be sneaky. They walked to the front door and entered with guns drawn. There were no lights on downstairs, so the only light that they had to move by was the ambient

light from the street. Steve motioned to Jim to move toward the kitchen as Steve moved into the formal living room. Nothing was out of place, and they cleared the lower level of the house quickly. They started up the stairs when Steve heard a thumping sound coming from one of the rooms. They moved side by side in sweeping motions covering each other as they ascended the staircase. They entered the hallway that led to all rooms. There was a faint light glowing underneath the master bedroom door. Steve motioned to Jim, and they moved slowly down the hall, taking positions on each side of the door. Steve signaled one, two, three, and they burst into the room.

The nightstand light was on, and the bed was pulled down as if Molly and Gail had been preparing for bed. They heard the thumping sound again coming from Molly's closet. Jim pulled the doors open and both men stepped in, guns aimed at the source of the sound. There, on the floor, gagged and hogtied, were Molly and Gail, both in t-shirts for bed. Steve radioed for back up, and the house was abuzz with law enforcement. They freed the two women, and Molly grabbed Steve in hysterics; Gail just sat on the floor almost catatonic. Molly was crying and trying to tell Steve what happened while he held her and told her she was safe. He moved over with Molly still in his arms and took hold of Gail's arm. She looked over at him and smiled. "Well," she said, "you don't have that happen to you every day." Jim and Steve were both staring at each other. "She's in shock," Jim said. The paramedics showed up on scene and gave Molly a mild sedative to calm her down. They checked out Gail and for all intents and purposes she was fine. Once Molly was calm, Steve walked over to Gail and asked if she was alright. She nodded emphatically and asked if she could call Bob. He said in a few minutes; he needed to ask her some questions. With Steve's house cleared and the girls accounted for, Jim told Steve he was headed to Barbara's and would call after he knew more. They shook hands, and Steve thanked him. Jim just shook his head, "It's what we do; throw me your car keys." Steve asked if Jim wanted him with him, and he said no. He had people on scene and was sure that Barbara was fine.

After Jim left, Steve sat down in a chair in the bedroom across from Gail and asked if she could tell him what happened. She smiled and said, "You bet." He looked at her and asked, "Are you sure you're okay?" She nodded. "Steve, remember the story about what happened to me? My captors tied me up and did

unspeakable things to me. I worked through that; this was nothing.” “Okay, so what happened? And don’t leave anything out.”

“Molly and I came home after dinner and had a few drinks and talked. We were just getting ready for bed when the doorbell rang; Molly answered it while I was putting away our glasses. She came into the kitchen and said there was no one there. I told her that someone might be trying to see if we were home. We started up the stairs when the doorbell rang again. I told Molly to go up, and I answered it. When I opened the door, there was once again no one there. As I turned my back to close the door, it came back and slammed me in the back of the head. I hit the floor and felt a very large pair of arms pick me up and carry me upstairs into the bedroom. I heard Molly scream, and the next thing I know we’re being hog-tied and gagged and put in the closet.” “Other than being hit by the door, did the person hurt you or touch you in any bad or personal manner?” “Did the guy try to cop a feel? No...he was actually very polite and apologetic for putting us through this. He promised that he was not going to hurt us; he just needed us away from our phones for a little bit. He was very gentle in the way he handled both of us and put us in the closet and shut the door.” Did you get a look at his face?” “Nope...he was wearing some sort of mask. It wasn’t a ski mask; it was like latex or leather. It was hard to make out any features other than his height. He was tall...really, really tall. And dressed all in black.” “If you had to guess, how tall would you say that he was?” “Oh wow...to me, he was like seven feet tall or taller. But I’m not the best judge of height. I think Bob is tall, and he’s five nine.” “Did he say anything other than he wasn’t going to hurt the two of you?” “Yea...after he put us in the closet, he checked my head, put up a finger and had me follow it with my eyes and asked me a few questions. He told me he wanted to make sure I didn’t have a concussion. I told him I would live, and he apologized again for the ambush. Then he addressed Molly and said, ‘Mrs. Hoffman, please accept my deepest apologies for my behavior. I meant you neither harm nor disrespect. I’m certain your husband has mentioned my nickname in conversation, please allow me to introduce myself, I’m The Iron Eagle, and with that he closed the closet doors.’”

Steve now understood why Molly was hysterical and Gail was a little calmer. He asked one of his agents to escort Gail to the hospital and to take her statement. He walked over to Molly, who was now on a gurney. “Moll, it’s okay.



I'm here. She looked over at him with a dazed look on her face. "He was here in our home, Steve; the animal you have spoken of so many times. He touched me." "Did he touch you inappropriately?" "Inappropriately? Steve, this psycho killer that you've been talking about for years tied me and Gail up and put us in our closet. He was in our home!" "Gail said that he talked to you." She nodded. "What did he say?" "That's the strangest part of all of this, Steve. He was a true gentleman. He was gentle; he was kind; he was very apologetic. He was so formal that I didn't feel like I was being violated; I felt like he was trying to protect us. How twisted does that sound?" Steve put his hand on her cheek and told her it wasn't twisted at all.

"They are going to take you to the hospital with Gail just to be checked out. I'm going to be right behind them." "I know the house is a crime scene," she said, "but don't bother looking for prints or DNA. There are none. This guy knew what he was doing." He nodded as they started to wheel her toward the stairs. She called back to him, "I saw Jim when you came into the closet? Where is he?" "The Eagle claimed that he had taken you, Gail, and Barbara. He's on his way to check on her." "Don't worry about me and Gail; go find your friend. He helped you save us. I know he and Barbara have been on the outs for a long time, but he is going to need you. I'll call your cell when they are ready to release us from the hospital." He kissed her on the lips and told her that he loved her and watched as they took her to the ambulance. He saw that Gail was sitting next to her as they closed the door. He told his people to secure the scene, and he called out to one of his agents and said, "I need the keys to your car." They came flying through the air and landed in his hands, and he drove off into the night headed for Barbara's house.



When Jim arrived at Barbara's, all was quiet. He had three units secure the premises and then approached, gun drawn. When he opened the front door, the electronic voice of the alarm started saying "armed away," so he put in the code and shut off the alarm. He knew he didn't need to do much searching; Barbara wasn't there. He walked both levels of the house and found no signs of struggle. Everything was in order. When his deputies entered, he told them to do a crime scene search as he took a look around the kitchen. Their coffee cups and highball glasses were still in the sink from last night. He was just about to walk out of the

kitchen when he noticed a white piece of paper under a magnet on the refrigerator. He called to one of his people and asked for a pair of gloves. He put them on and took the paper off the refrigerator.

Sorry, detective you just missed  
Barbara. You will find her in the  
bathroom at Legion Park

Respectfully yours The Iron Eagle

“Holy shit!” Jim started for the front door as Steve was approaching. “Is she here?” “Fuck no...the son of a bitch took her to Legion Park.” Steve looked perplexed. “Where in the park?” “Well, if I have to guess, I’d say she was in the bathroom with me the whole time.” “Holy shit.” Jim looked at him with disdain, “I just said that!

They were back at the park in less than half an hour. The coroner had a tent and yellow tarp over Billy’s body, and Jim and Steve ran to the bathroom where he had been held up. There were several local detectives on scene but none that he knew. He asked how many people were in the bathroom. A female detective replied “eight, seven males and one female.” “Were any of them injured?” She shook her head. “Where are they?” “They were transported to County for evaluation.” “How long ago?” She looked at her PDA and estimated ten minutes earlier. They raced back to the car and on to County Medical Center. “She’s going to be so pissed,” Jim said as they sped down the 5 Freeway. “Hey, what do you care? She’s your ex, and she’s alive. She should be damn grateful.” “No, Steve, you don’t get it. I promised her last night that I would protect her; the damn guy killed her lover, and now she’s been in his arms. This ain’t gonna be good. Shit, shit, shit.”

Steve’s jaw dropped. “Barbara and Jill were lovers?” Jim nodded. “And you knew?” He nodded once more. “That’s why she divorced you?” Jim got pissed and yelled, “If you want my fuckin’ life story, I will be happy to give it to you at a later time. Right now, I’m about to enter the lion’s den, and she is going to bite my balls off.” “Relax. How the hell could you have protected her? He got Molly and Gail.” “Cold comfort, brother. You didn’t run out of the bathroom while your wife was restrained in the room with you.” Steve thought it over and said,

“Yea ... you’re screwed. Are you still paying alimony?”

When they entered County Emergency and Jim had identified himself and who he was looking for, the nurse rolled her eyes and said, “Follow me.” She walked them back into the ER, and he could hear Barbara before he saw her... “I don’t need a fuckin’ IV; what I need is a drink.” He walked around the corner, and she was sitting on the side of a hospital gurney in the same t-shirt she was wearing the night before. She saw Jim and Steve come into the room and glared at Jim as she yelled, **“YOU LEFT ME!”** Her voice boomed off the walls of the ER. He walked over to her and said, “There was no way to know you were there. I’m sorry. I’m just so glad you’re okay.” Her eyes softened, and she reached her hands out to him. He approached, and she took his hands and pulled him close to her. She leaned in like she was going to kiss him but instead hauled off and smacked him in the face.

**“YOU FUCKIN’ LEFT ME, YOU SON OF A BITCH!”** Her voice boomed through the ER again, only this time a nurse moved closer and said, “You yell one more time, and I’m gonna stick a needle in your ass, and you’re going to sleep. Got it?” Jim snapped back, “Jesus Christ, Barb. I didn’t know you were there. Shit...the fucker said he had Steve’s wife, her best friend, and you. She grabbed him in a huge hug and kissed his face and apologized. Steve just stood off in the corner with a look of bewilderment. “Let’s go home,” she said quietly. Jim took her hand, and Steve came over and helped her up. As she got her discharge papers, Jim heard one of the nurses comment that it was good to see her go. They all got into Jim’s car and as they drove off she said, “Thank you for coming to get me. I still can’t believe **YOU LEFT ME THERE, YOU SON OF A BITCH!** But I love you!”

# Chapter Eighteen

*'The shocked look on Marty's face was answer enough for Sara.'*

**J**ohn walked into Starbucks at the corner of Topanga and Lassen just before six thirty a.m. He got a coffee and a copy of the *Daily News*, and the headline said it all, "'Billy the Kid,' Crips Gang Member and Serial Rapist, Body Found in Legion Park: Iron Eagle Said to Be Killer." He shook his head, "I should really start looking for the people who leak this stuff." He walked to a flower shop a few doors down to purchase a dozen long-stemmed red roses. His truck was parked in front of Country Deli, a local landmark for nearly fifty years. He knew the area very, very well, but he knew it for all the wrong reasons. He pulled out of the lot and headed west through the neighborhoods of oak and eucalyptus trees, following Lassen as it turned from a busy thoroughfare into a quiet neighborhood of post-World War II homes and horse properties, until he reached the entrance to Oakwood Cemetery.

He parked his truck outside the large black wrought iron gates and the ivy covered brick walls of the cemetery and walked through the entrance and up the steep incline of the main road. He walked past a blue and white striped tent; a small backhoe sat quietly where fresh earth had been moved, and a concrete burial vault sat on the ground next to the newly-opened grave. He walked out into the cemetery grass and stopped in front of a grave marker set beneath a huge California Live Oak. He looked at the gray and white granite and its inscription, 'Amber Lynn Swenson.' He knelt and brushed away the fresh cut grass, so the whole inscription was revealed. 'Loving Wife and Beautiful Soul. April 8, 1978 – March 20, 2003.' Placing the flowers on the stone, he sat down, leaning his back against the tree. "I miss you, honey. I miss my best friend. I'm sorry I've been away for so long." He heaved a sigh as a tear rolled down his face, and he whispered, "I'm still looking for him, Amber Lynn. For the man who took your life and our life together away." He wiped the tears from his eyes, his lower lip quivering. "I know I've told you, and I don't know if you are somewhere where you can hear me or not, but I'm sorry. If I had just been on time that night, he wouldn't have gotten you." He wiped the stone with a handkerchief from his pocket and laughed. "You always made fun of me for being old fashioned ... but you were glad I had it the night I asked you to marry me. How could I know that

this same piece of linen that dried your tears of joy at our engagement would later dry my tears of sorrow at your funeral.” John paused for a moment, his anger rising up. “He’s still out there, Amber, hurting women and children. I can’t let that continue. I will find him...and I will avenge you and all the others he’s tortured and killed. He’s a sly one; so far below the radar not even law enforcement sees his pattern or knows that he even exists. The randomness of his killings and the large area that he covers is his protection. I thought I had him with Roskowski. He was evil but wasn’t the man who did this to you.”

He stood up and walked toward the unmarked piece of land next to Amber’s headstone. “This is my spot, baby, right next to you. I’m not afraid of death... I’m afraid of dying before I catch him and bring him to justice.” He leaned down on his hands and knees and gently touched his lips to her name. “Rest, my angel. The next time I come back, it’ll be to tell you that I got him.”



The ER at Northridge Hospital Medical Center was packed. Doctor Sara Cook was in the final week of her emergency medical fellowship and had already been offered a very prestigious position at Scripps Mercy Hospital in San Diego as head of the ER trauma center. She was on her second to last seventy-two hour shift at Northridge and was pulling the chart for her last patient of the day. She opened the chart and recognized the name immediately. Walter Cruthers. She pulled back the exam room curtain to find Mr. Cruthers sitting up on the hospital gurney bent over in pain. “Walter...sit up straight.” He did as she asked, and a smile broke out across his face. “Hello Sara.” “Walter, you can’t keep doing this.” “Doing what?” She closed the curtain and placed her hands on her hips. “You can’t keep coming into my ER with imaginary pains and made up symptoms just to see me.” “It’s the only way I can see you, Sara. You refuse to go out with me.” She scowled at him and then looked over his chart. Walter sat admiring her.

“You are so beautiful, Sara!” She flipped a page in his chart and said, “Stop it, Walter, and don’t call me by my first name. It’s Doctor Cook.” “My, you’re in a feisty mood today, Sa... sorry, Doctor Cook.” She closed the chart and said, “Your vitals are fine, Walter. I’m releasing you.” “Now, wait a second, Doctor Cook. You have to examine me. You did take the Hippocratic Oath, correct? To do no harm? Wouldn’t sending me away without at least checking my complaint

be a violation of that oath?” She pressed the stethoscope against his chest, then moved to his back and said, “Deep breath.” He complied. She had him do it four times quickly just to make him dizzy. “It says that you’re having chest pain.” “Yes...chest pain.” “Walter, your blood pressure is normal, your lungs are clear, and your heart rate is normal with no arrhythmias on the EKG that we ran when you came in.” She made a note in his chart and closed it. “Walter, you are a very healthy sixty-five-year-old man. Now I want you to put your shirt on; I’m releasing you.” He started to take off the hospital gown when he asked if his age was preventing her from accepting his dinner invitation. She shook her head. “Walter, you seem like a very nice, handsome man. However, one, you are old enough to be my father if not my very young grandfather, and, two, you’re not my type.”

He asked what type that would be while buttoning his shirt. She shrugged and walked over to wash her hands. “You have been in this ER ten times in the past six months. You always come in when I’m on duty, and you request me. Walter...you are one step away from a restraining order. I like you, but I’m coming off the end of a very long shift, and I have a lot of packing to do. You understand that this time next week there will be a new fellow here in my place, right?” “I hear what you are saying, but I don’t understand. You were offered a very lucrative employment agreement with this hospital.” She looked confused. “How could you know that? I did accept a position with Scripps Mercy in San Diego.” “Well, Doctor Cook, I haven’t been completely honest with you about who I am. You see, Sara, I’m president and CEO of WEC Medical Services.” She shrugged her shoulders as she was writing on his chart, “Yea right. Perhaps I need to recommend putting you on a seventy-two hour psych hold; you’re delusional.”

He smiled at her as he stepped down from the table, “I assure you, Doctor Cook, that I am who I say I am.” “I don’t have time for this, Walter. I really need some sleep.” He pulled out his cell phone and made a call. Sara shouted at him about hospital policy but heard him continue just the same. “Hello, Margaret. This is Walter. How are you today? Oh, that’s wonderful. Listen ... is Marty in his office.” There was a pause, and Sara stood silent. “Hello, Marty; its Walter. How are you today? Well, I’m so happy to hear that. Listen, I don’t mean to bother you, but I stopped into the ER and have been conversing with Doctor

Cook. I was just telling her how disappointed I am to hear that she has refused our offer to stay with the hospital.” Sara was now angry and reached out and took the phone from his hand. “Hello, to whom am I speaking?” The voice on the other end of the line was immediately familiar. “Sara! What are you doing on the line? I was just speaking to Mr. Cruthers. This is Martin Powers, your friendly hospital administrator. Would you be so kind as to put Mr. Cruthers back on the phone?” Her face sunk as she handed the phone back to Walter.

“Hi Marty; I’m back. Oh no, no problem. I think Doctor Cook thought I was trying to pull a ruse on her. Listen, this is the first that I’m hearing that Doctor Cook turned down our offer.” She sat down on the stool near the exam room desk with her head in her hands. Walter continued, “She tells me that she has taken a job with a hospital in San Diego.” He listened intently. “I see...Scripps is a wonderful hospital but not one that I control Marty. I like to have the best talent on staff in my hospitals. Why didn’t you bring this to the board, so we could vote on countering the offer? Oh...I see. Doctor Cook didn’t request a counteroffer; she has always wanted to work at Scripps. Well, that’s a horse of another color. Okay, then, I’m going to be up to see you later on, and we can talk about this a little more. Sure, sure, I will ask Doctor Cook to stop by and see you before she leaves today. No, Marty, this will have no impact on WEC’s investment in this hospital. I made a commitment to your board of directors. Our money will remain here.”

He grabbed his suit coat and placed the phone in the side pocket. “Marty asked you to stop by before going home.” The smile never left his face. “Oh my God! Walter, why didn’t you tell me who you were?” “I want people to like me for who I am not for how much money, power, or influence I wield.” She shook her head slowly. “It wouldn’t have mattered, Walter, and it doesn’t change the fact that I’m not going on a date with you. I’m going to go see Mr. Powers, and then I’m going to go home, take a hot bath, drink a glass of wine, and pack.” He nodded saying, “I understand now,” and walked out of the room totally rejected, his shoulders slumped and dragging his foot as he went.



Walter sat in his Mercedes listening to Beethoven’s 5<sup>th</sup> symphony in an adjacent parking structure. He was parked two rows back from Sara’s car on the other side of the parking structure and was waiting for her to emerge. He

thumped the steering wheel in time with the music, “You only think you’re leaving me, Sara...you only think that.” On the floor of the passenger’s side was a half-opened black bag. Inside was a roll of blue duct tape, white nylon rope, and a red and black labeled brown bottle with the letters ‘Chloro’ on it.

Sara was changing clothes when Doctor Stephanie Olsen came into the room. “So I hear that you finally met Walter Cruthers?” She shook her head, “No...I’ve seen Mr. Cruthers as a patient in my ER for almost six months; he just revealed his connection to the hospital to me about ten minutes ago.” “You sound angry. What’s up with that?” She had buttoned her blouse and was putting on her flats while sitting on a bench in front of her locker. “The problem is the guy has been hitting on me for weeks, and he didn’t have the decency to tell me who he really was.” Stephanie shot her a look. “Who cares? He’s tall, dark, and handsome, not to mention filthy rich, from what I hear.” “That’s not the point; I told him he’s not my type.” “He’s still not your type? A hunk who’s loaded?” Sara shot a look back at her. “You know there’s a lot more to life than money.” “Yea, that’s what they tell me, but I’m following the advice given to me by my grandmother. Marry the first time for love and the second time for money.” Sara looked at her indignantly. “That’s horrible. I want love; the money will come if it comes.” “I wish he were wooing me.” “You want him? You can have him. If I see him again, I’ll tell him you’re interested. I don’t get it. Why am I always beating the men away from me?” Stephanie looked at her in disbelief, “You’re kidding, right?” She grabbed her by the arm and pulled her over to a dressing mirror. “Take a good, long look at yourself. You’re a natural blond with stunning emerald green eyes, a body perfect for your five two frame, great skin, huge boobs, a bubbly personality, a great sense of humor, and an infectious laugh. What’s not to love about you?”

She pulled away from Stephanie and went back to her locker. “Just once in my life I would like a man to look at me and see me, not the package, just the person inside.” “Oh Sara...you got it going on, girl...there’s no way that any man is going to think you’re anything more than eye candy until you start talking. It’s when you start talking that your love life goes into the toilet because you intimidate the hell out of people.” Stephanie started to undress, “Girl, I’m a damned attractive Black woman.” Sara nodded in agreement. “All I can tell you is I’m taking my grandmother’s advice except I’m marrying for money the first



time. You know what I'm saying?" Sara nodded and excused herself to meet with Marty. "They can offer me what they like; I'm taking the job at Scripps. It's close to my family and friends, and, who knows, maybe the man of my dreams." "Well, those are great ideals, but if I were you I'd be preparing myself for their next offer. Start your life new here. San Diego isn't that far away. You can always stay in touch with family. Medicine is getting very competitive. Follow the money, girl." Sara waved her off as she walked out



Martin Powers was waiting when she arrived at his office. He invited her in and offered her a beverage, which she refused. "Thank you for stopping in before you head home, Sara. I really appreciate it." "No problem, Marty, but I'm really tired, so what can I do for you?" "Stay." "No." "You're an excellent trauma surgeon, Sara; this hospital needs talent like yours. You save lives." She sat motionless in the office chair as she told him that she would still be saving lives, just at another facility. She reminded him that she'd heard through the grapevine that the new fellow had a great reputation as a trauma surgeon. "He does have a stellar reputation; however, he's going to need guidance, a mentor, and you're the glue that keeps this place together when the world is falling in on us." She shook her head. "No, Marty. You have a great staff here. I have done my time; I'm ready to go home and be with my friends and family. Scripps is a great hospital, and it's underserved when it comes to trauma surgeons and ER specialists. I save lives, Marty. I do the very best that I can to make that happen. Now I really appreciate the talk, but this hospital is going to be just fine without me. I'm going home to get some sleep."

She stood up, but Marty stopped her. "Sara, I've been authorized by the board to give you a blank check offer to stay with the hospital." Her facial expression was hard for him to read. "I'm afraid I don't know what that means." "It means, my dear, that you can name your price, and the hospital will pay it to keep you on staff as our ER Chief of Staff and supervising trauma surgeon. We're offering you the opportunity to run the whole department; the only people you'll answer to are me and the board." She sat back down. "This is Walter's doing, isn't it?" Marty walked back over to his desk and sat down. "Walter has insisted that we do everything in our power to retain you; however, your credentials and reputation speak for themselves. WEC owns the hospital, Walter

is the president and CEO, but his influence was not the whole reason for this offer.” She threw her hands in the air in anger, “Listen, Marty, I’m a surgeon not a psychiatrist, but even I know that’s not true. There was no one begging me to stay at the hospital after our initial negotiations. I’m a doctor, Marty, and a damn good one, but I’m not going to be held hostage by one man no matter how much power he wields.” “It’s not like that, Sara, really.” “Come on...I’m supposed to believe that the hospital had a sudden change of heart and decided I’m so damn important and irreplaceable that now, three months after we finalized the agreement and I had interviewed with five hospitals and received the offer from Scripps, which, let me remind you, was less than what you were offering in our previous conversations, after the going away party and the final farewells that the check book suddenly opens, and I can have any amount of money I want because the hospital needs me? I’m sorry, but I’m not buying it!”

He shrugged and folded his hands on his desk, “Sara, please don’t get angry.” She sat up straight in her chair. “Don’t get angry? Did you know that Mr. Cruthers has been in our ER ten times in the past six months?” “That’s not a surprise; he does that with all of his hospitals.” “Really? Did he tell you that all ten visits were with me? That he requested me as his attending when he came in every single time? Did he tell you that he made advances toward me, Marty? Unwanted advances? That he has told me repeatedly how beautiful I am and has asked me to dinner at least five times?”

The shocked look on Marty’s face was answer enough for Sara. “The man’s a freak, and I don’t give a damn how much money he has. I told him today that I’m on the verge of getting a restraining order against him.” He raised his hands in a motion to calm her down, “Now, let’s not get hasty here. I’ve known Walter for three decades. While he’s a bit eccentric and unorthodox in his approach, I assure you he didn’t intend to frighten or offend you in any way. He’s quite harmless; he’s just not well oriented when it comes to dealing with women.” “Yea...well, tell that to the board and see what they have to say about it!” “Sara, you’re getting off topic. This is about your future in medicine. I’m quite certain that I can speak with Walter, and he will cease the advances.” “And if you tell him to leave me alone, that I meant what I said, and that I have no interest in him, he’s still going to put pressure on you and the board and offer me that blank check?” “Mr. Cruthers may be unorthodox, but he’s a fabulous businessman. He

knows an asset when he sees one. Tell you what, I will speak to Walter and explain how you feel about this and talk everything over with him, if you will promise me to keep an open mind and at least think over the offer until your hopefully not final shift on Friday.” She looked at him thoughtfully.

“Sara, not to pry too much, but could your judgment in this matter also be clouded by bad memories?” She suddenly looked as though she had been hit by a fast moving train. She was quiet for several minutes, and Marty entertained the silence. “Bad memories,” she said, looking off into space. “Marty, it never crossed my mind!” “Not your conscious mind, but what about your subconscious mind? You forget what I did for a living before I became the administrator of this institution.” “You were a psychiatrist,” she said softly almost under her breath. He nodded. “Bad memories...” And like a flood gate opening, her tears began to flow. “Yes, Sara, bad memories. You know what I’m talking about. Did it ever occur to you that you took the job at Scripps for lower pay not just to be closer to family but to try and escape something here?” The whole of the conversation struck her like a lightning bolt, and those memories flooded back. “I hadn’t thought of it until this very second, Marty. Until you reminded me. You’re right. I am running. Running from my memories of Amber.” “I didn’t want to bring it up. It’s been several years, but I thought that it needed to be said. This is your future we’re talking about. I know that you and Amber were best friends and went through medical school and your residencies here.” She nodded. “And it was here in this very office that I sat with you and her husband, John, and a lot of police officers when they told us that she had been murdered.” “Not just murdered, Marty...raped, tortured, and dumped nude in a dumpster behind the House of Pancakes. She didn’t deserve to die like that.” “No one deserves that.”

“Oh God! I remember the funeral and John, my God, poor John. There was no way to console him.” “You two were close and remained friends, if I remember correctly, after Amber was murdered. Have you spoken to him recently?” “Um...I called his cell a few months ago, but he didn’t return my call. The last time I spoke to him would have been ...six months ago. I told him I was finishing up my fellowship here but didn’t know where I was going to be when I was done. He told me he had been promoted to detective and was now working homicide.” “I had no idea. Is he looking for Amber’s killer?” She shook her head. “Not according to what he told me. When we talked he said there were no

new leads and that Amber's file was now in the cold case department. I asked if he was searching for the killer, and he said that officially he couldn't because it would be a conflict of interest, and the department would not allow it because he couldn't be impartial. But he loved her with every ounce of his being. He might not be allowed to look formally, but I'm certain he's looking on his own." "You should try to reach out to him again, Sara; he might help you get a little more perspective on what you're facing and the decisions that are ahead of you. Do I have your word you will think about the counteroffer?" She nodded, thanked him, and then excused herself.

She walked to the bathroom and splashed some cold water on her face and then went to the doctor's lounge. She took out her cell phone and called John's number. Much to her surprise, he answered. "John...it's Sara. How are you?" There was a moment of silence before John responded, "Sara...wow! It's so good to hear your voice. I'm doing well, working hard but doing well. How are you doing?" She spent a few minutes talking to him about what was going on, and he asked if she had time to grab a bite to eat. She quickly answered yes and told him she was afraid that he was angry with her and wanted to cut their ties when she didn't hear back from him. John offered his apologies and an explanation of being backlogged with work.

"I've been working with the county Sheriff's Department and the FBI on some cold case serial killings." She asked if he still thought that Amber was the victim of a serial killer. He coughed a little on the other end of the line and said, "Oh Sara...it's seems like a lifetime since I lost Amber. A lot of water has passed under the bridge. How about I pick you up at the hospital, and we catch up?" "You have a deal. Are you local?" "As strange as it might sound, I'm sitting at the corner of Reseda and Roscoe looking at the sign pointing toward the ER." "Why don't you meet me at my car? I'm parked in structure one right next to the ER." She asked if he knew where that was but quickly realized her mistake. "You know the parking lot. I'm sorry." "Not at all, Sara. It's been a long time. You're on the second level, correct?" "Yes. I'm still driving my silver BMW." "I'm pulling around the corner now, and I'll meet you by your car. I'm in a black Chevy Silverado." She picked up her purse and told him she was on her way. The elevator arrived quickly, and before she knew it she was on the ground floor headed out the ER doors heading for the parking structure.



Walter saw Sara emerge from the bank of elevators three cars ahead of him. He took a white cloth from the bag and poured a small amount of the Chloroform on it as he exited his vehicle. She was just standing near the elevator not moving toward her car. He moved quietly between two other vehicles and then across the lot and worked his way down to the car next to hers. He heard the screeching tires of a vehicle entering or exiting the structure and stayed low. Sara started to make her way across the lot toward her car; she was rustling around in her purse as if she was looking for her keys. She approached the driver's side door, and he heard her doors unlock. He moved to the front edge of the adjacent car just as she was reaching for the door handle, and he stood up as her back was to him. Slowly, with the cloth at his side, he moved forward. Just as he motioned to grab her, a large black truck came around the corner of the structure and stopped behind her car. He dropped down quickly, waiting for the truck to pass, but instead it stopped. Quickly, he slinked a few cars back and saw Sara run over to the truck. Through the light of the garage, he recognized the driver.

Sara ran to John. There was an embrace and words spoken, but Walter was too far away to hear what was being said. She was nodding her head emphatically as she ran back toward her vehicle and started the engine. John got back in the truck, and the two sped off out of the structure. Walter moved quickly to his vehicle and sped after the two vehicles headed onto Roscoe Boulevard. They drove west until they were in Chatsworth and pulled into the parking lot of a restaurant. Walter had been following at a distance and parked across the street, watching Sara and John. The shock of seeing John suddenly overtook Walter, and he lost track of what he was doing and hit the gas as opposed to the break. The car lurched into traffic causing several vehicles to screech to a halt. He saw John and Sara look over in his general direction and sped across the intersection and down Roscoe toward Valley Circle muttering to himself, "He didn't see me. I'm sure of it. How does he know Sara?" Back at the restaurant, John was hugging Sara. He had been keenly aware of the black Mercedes tailing them. He saw the plate and burned the number into his memory.

# Chapter Nineteen

*“Hell, going home is going to be boring. I might have to ride the subway or do a ride-along with Bob to keep the adrenaline rushing.”*

**J**im awoke at six thirty a.m. in the guest bedroom of Barbara’s house. He’d only gotten a few hours sleep since Barbara kept him up yelling at him. He knew her too well, and, when she was on a tirade, he just had to let her go. He got up and went into the bathroom, standing over the toilet as he waited for his prostate to cooperate. “Fuckin’ bitch getting old,” he snarled as the stream began a broken flow. He smiled as he looked around the bathroom and saw that Barbara had unpacked his toiletries and put them away in the order that he liked. He quietly opened the door to Barbara’s bedroom to see her sleeping peacefully on her side. He smiled again and went to make himself a cup of coffee.



Steve was awakened from a deep sleep by two hands grabbing him tight. It was the girls, and they were snuggled against him like frightened children. He was a sandwich again and dared not move; he knew they needed their sleep. Unfortunately, his colleagues at the Bureau didn’t care about that, and his phone started ringing. He moved from their grip and quietly answered, “Hoffman.” Gail’s husband, Bob, was on the other end of the line. “Hey Steve. How are the girls?” Walking out of the bedroom and down the stairs to the kitchen, Steve said, “They’re a bit shaken up, but they’re okay. How are you doing?” Steve asked, opening the fridge and pouring himself a glass of orange juice. “Well, to be honest, it took every ounce of self control I had not to jump a red eye when I got her call. Gail sounded fine, a little too fine if you ask me, and I know she’s flying back tomorrow night, so I stuck it out.” “Yea, Moll asked if she wanted to go home early, but she wouldn’t hear of it. She wants to do a little more work on her tan.” They both laughed. “That’s my girl, Steve. Nothing gets her down. So what d’ya make of this Iron Eagle character?”

“You know, Bob, I’ve been working on his case along with an LA county sheriff’s detective who has become a close friend to me. The Eagle’s M.O., up until recently, has been to track down, capture, torture, and kill serial killers. But over the past several months, he’s broken his own pattern and has killed two innocents. One was a federal marshal and the other her private investigator

grandfather, who was a retired marshal and a man who was like a father to me. The claim from The Eagle is that one was getting too close to identifying him, and the killing of her grandfather was, in my own opinion, a mercy killing. I knew both of these people very well.” “The papers say that he killed a gangbanger.” “Yea. In that case, The Eagle admitted that he got the perp through dumb luck; the guy tried to rob him after raping and killing one of my agents.” “Well, bad for the banger; good for you. The guys here in New York feel we need legislation that allows for killing of known gang members. We figure it should be a low level misdemeanor with a \$5 fine.” There was laughter on the other end of the phone.

“Actually, it turned out good for the community. I learned that his DNA has been tied to seven other rapes and murders in the LA area.” “They’re killers alright, but I haven’t heard of any of them being serial killers.” “They’re not serial killers in the sense that we would describe a serial killer; however, when they get into cars and drive the streets preying on other gangs, it’s really the same idea.” “Yea...it’s the innocents that always get me.” “My late friend used to say that there are no innocents; lately I’m beginning to understand what he meant.” “Well, hey, I’m glad I got the chance to talk to you. I’ve got roll call, and my partner...she’s looking at me most disapprovingly. Make sure you send my wife home to me safe and sound.” Steve told him will do and hung up.

He had just finished off his juice when Molly came into the kitchen. She was still groggy from the medication, but she had her faculties. “Who were you talking to?” “It was Bob. He called to see how Gail’s doing.” She grabbed a glass and poured herself some juice and sat at the counter sipping it. “Is Gail still asleep?” She nodded. “I swear, Steve, that girl can sleep through anything.” “Do you recall anything new from last night?” “No...I have to say, for a brutal serial killer, he was very polite and quite apologetic for ‘disturbing our evening.’” “Well, he might be polite but don’t have any illusions about him. He’s a savage and merciless killer.” “I know. There was just something. I felt he really was sorry, almost sad, about what he was doing to us.” “Even though you and Gail were only with him for a short time, it is very common for captives to feel compassion for their captors. It’s basic psychology. He was using you as bait, so we wouldn’t stick around looking for him.” I suppose you’re right, but I’m not afraid of him anymore.” “You better get those thoughts out of your head right

now, Moll. You need to be afraid of him and to respect that fear. He's been in our home; he knows you, Gail, me, and this house. There is nothing that tells me that he won't come back. I have assigned a detail to patrol and guard you for the next week." "Gail will be gone tomorrow; why do I need round the clock protection?" "It's just for a little while, Moll." She poured more juice into her glass and took a drink. "If you ask me, it's a waste of time and resources. I'm telling you, Steve, he won't come back here again." "How can you possibly know that?" "Call it women's intuition."

Gail came walking into the kitchen rubbing her eyes. "What's up?" Molly poured her a glass of juice, and she sat down. "I heard your phone. Is everything okay?" "Yea...no problem. It was Bob calling to check on you." "I love him so much. He's such a sweetie." "How are you doing?" Steve asked, and Molly looked over at her, wondering the same thing. "I'm fine...I got a great night's sleep. You guys know how to throw a party, let me tell you. I've been in a threesome, drank myself silly, been getting a great tan out by your pool, oh...and I've been abducted by a brutal serial killer. Hell, going home is going to be boring. I might have to ride the subway or do a ride-along with Bob to keep the adrenaline rushing. Though his partner doesn't like me very much." She smiled, and the three laughed a little until Steve asked her why.

She talked as she slathered cream cheese onto a bagel. "A woman knows when another woman doesn't like her. It's no big deal. Bob and Carla have been partners going on five years. They spend a lot of time together, a lot more than he and I do." Molly was starting a pot of coffee and asked Gail if she thought Bob was having an affair. Gail laughed as she was chewing, "Of course not. You can't have an affair when you have been given permission to fuck your partner." Both Molly and Steve stood paralyzed. Steve asked, "What?" Gail took another bite of the bagel and laughed, "I'm just kidding..." She looked over at Molly with a sad look in her eyes. Steve saw it, too. "How long have they been carrying on, Gail?" Molly asked quietly. "I'm not sure. I think at least a year, maybe two. She just had a baby last year. Bob has been spending more time 'working,' if you know what I mean. I don't see that much of him. I don't want to bring a lot of drama into my last day and a half with you two. This is old news. I want to have some fun. Since The Eagle won't be coming back, so what are we going to do on my last day in town?" Molly said, "Lay out by the pool,



listen to some music, drink, and relax. What about you?” Molly looked over at Steve as he put his glass in the sink and started for the stairs. “Me...I’m going to take a shower, get dressed, put on my gun and shield, and try and see what I can learn about this psycho.” “I thought you said he’s not a psychopath,” said Molly while he was still within earshot. “It’s a figure of speech, Moll. It’s just a figure of speech.”



John and Sara were sitting in a corner booth of the restaurant. They both ordered breakfast and were quietly sipping their coffee. Sara broke the awkward silence by asking what had brought him back down to the valley. The last they had spoken, John had just purchased a condo in Long Beach. His expression was somber. “I had a rough night and came to visit Amber.” Sara didn’t say anything; her eyes just welled up with tears. He looked over at her and saw it coming and reached out his hand and placed it on hers. “It’s okay, Sara; this is only the second time I’ve been back since the funeral. I was missing her a lot, and I’ve had a rough several weeks on the job. I just needed to be near my best friend.” She wept openly, and he moved over to sit next to her. He wrapped his arms around her and held her, and as he did the tears started to flow from him as well. She didn’t reciprocate the embrace. She left her hands folded in front of her on the table as John pulled her close and whispered in her ear. “I’m sorry, Sara. I didn’t mean to upset you. I know you were like sisters.” He looked down at Sara, and for a fraction of a second he was holding Amber. The two looked so much alike. He remembered how frequently people mistook them for sisters; some even thought they were twins.

Sara disappeared into his huge arms and let her head rest against the side of his chest until they were both cried out. She reached for her napkin, and John loosened his grip on her. “You okay?” She nodded, so he moved back to his spot. The booth faced the entrance to the restaurant as well as the bathrooms and rear exit. She wiped her eyes as did John, and she smiled. “The consummate protector.” He looked confused. “You always face the entrance. You have the place covered. I remember Amber getting frustrated with you because she would want to sit in cozy corners away from everyone while you insisted on being close to the activity everywhere you went.” He laughed. “It’s my training, Sara. They drill it into you in the academy – always know your entrance and exits and

be prepared at a moment's notice for anything. It's second nature for me. Have you been to the cemetery since the funeral?" Sara looked down at the placemat in front of her. "I have to confess, and I would only confess it to you, I go over there twice a month, every other Tuesday. I know this will sound strange, but on at least one of those days I bring a lunch with me and a mini-bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon. I eat my lunch and drink our favorite wine and talk to her." He smiled. "Well, you were a great friend to her, Sara, and she loved you a lot. She looked up to you and emulated your commitment to medicine."

She smiled a sad smile, "My fellowship is up with Northridge. They've made me a generous offer, but I've taken a job with Scripps in San Diego." "More money?" She shook her head. "It was pointed out to me this morning that I'm leaving the hospital and a great opportunity as a way of getting away from Amber's memory." He didn't respond right away. "Well, if there's one thing I can tell you, you can run, but you can't hide. I thought moving to Long Beach would help, but it hasn't. The scenery's different, but the void is still very much there. I often wish I would have kept the house in Granada Hills. At least when I'm wandering the house on those sleepless nights I would be wandering in a familiar place where there were good memories. Instead, I find myself wandering unfamiliar territory with only photographs and out of place furniture confusing my senses." Breakfast came but neither had much of an appetite, so they made small talk and picked around their food. "So," John asked, "are you seeing anyone?" "There's no time. You know how demanding the ER is. I just came off a seventy-two hour shift. I was planning to go home, take a hot bath, drink a glass of wine, and sleep for a few hours before packing for San Diego." "Has something changed your plans?" He sipped his coffee and waited for her response. "Well, yes and no...the job at Scripps is there, and I have accepted it, but the hospital has come back and made me an offer that I would be crazy to refuse." "So, tell me about it."

She explained about Walter, the months of hospital visits, and the endless requests for a date. She told John who Walter was, and he told her that Walter sounded like a very determined suitor. She nodded. "I don't know how to explain it, John. He's a very handsome man, a lot older than me, sixty five. One of my colleagues is pressing me to take him up on his offer, and now he has pressed the hospital board into giving me a blank check offer and basically the keys to the

ER as the Chief of Staff.” “So, what’s the problem?” “I can’t put my finger on it,” she said, “but there’s something about him that bothers me.” John placed his napkin on the table and looked her straight in the eye. “In as much detail as you can tell me, what it is that bothers you?” She shuddered a little. “I don’t know, John. The guy has been coming into my ER for months and never told me who he was. As far as I knew, he was just some guy looking for attention. Then about three months ago, he started wooing me with all kinds of flattery and requests for dates. One of my friends and colleagues, Stephanie, is all over me about the guy, telling me to date him, and reminding me how beautiful I am. I get tired of the same old lines, John. I want a man to recognize me as an intellect instead of a body or face. I want what Amber used to tell me about your relationship. The way you two met and fell in love. I want that so bad.” She could see both the happiness and sadness in his face as he spoke. “We met because of you, Sara. Have you forgotten that?” She pushed the food around her plate and told him to ignore her, that she was just overtired and malnourished.

He sat back against the booth and asked, “Seriously, tell me more about the guy.” Sara told him about Walter’s position and influence, the frequency of his visits, including today’s. “He was in the ER with you this morning?” “Yes. Why?” “What does he look like?” “Six foot, black hair, deep brown eyes. He has a muscular build for a man of his age.” “You’ve seen him naked?” “I’m a doctor, John. He’s come in as a patient, so, yes, I’ve seen him naked.” “Does he have any markings, birthmarks, tattoos, piercings, things like that?” “John, you know I’m not supposed to divulge that information on a patient. There are laws, you know.” “Yea...but he tipped his hand on those laws when he disclosed that he is basically your employer, and he’s done things that, in my opinion, rise to the level of sexual harassment.” “You know...Marty had a similar reaction when I told him the things that Walter had done; however Marty really downplayed it, telling me that he’s a smart businessman and knows talent when he sees it. That’s why the new offer.” “Did you ask Marty if the offer would still be on the table if you rebuffed Mr. Cruthers’ advances?” “Yes. And he said that he would speak to Walter and asked me to at least think about their offer until Monday.” “Hmm...” “What?” “You didn’t answer my question about body marks.” “He has a tattoo on his left upper arm, ‘USMC’ with a bulldog underneath it.” “So he was in the Corps...interesting.” “What do you mean?” “That tattoo is a common

tattoo that Marines get after boot camp.” “You were a Marine. Do you have a tattoo?” “No...not my thing. But based on his age, he would have been eighteen right around the time the Vietnam war was ending; he could have been on the ground at the close of the war.” “Are you thinking PTSD?” “Who knows...what we do know is he’s very wealthy, and he’s got his eye on you.”

“What do you think I should do, John?” He sat up straight in his seat. “Sara, I can’t answer that question objectively. It sounds to me like they are offering you a lot of cash and security to stay on the job. I would have to give that real consideration given the state of the medical industry today.” She smiled a half-hearted smile and said, “I wish Amber was here. She would know what to do.” He smiled, “If Amber was here, you wouldn’t be questioning any of this.” She laughed a little under her breath and said, “Okay, mister, enough about me. What about you? Seeing anybody?” “He laughed and told her he saw people all the time. “Okay, smart ass.” He shook his head. “I have a question to ask you then.” “Shoot.” “If I decide to stay with Northridge, how would you feel about seeing me again?” John was taken totally by surprise. “Umm...wow ... why would you want to date me again? I’m a cop, and you made it clear you wouldn’t be involved with a cop.” She looked at him with a look of passion, “Because you know me inside out, because your wife and I were best friends, and we all hung out together ALL THE TIME! Because you never once looked at me in a way that was longing for just my body. You respected my mind. And the main reason is because seeing you again brought back so much to me. I remember introducing you to Amber while we were dating. As for your line of work, I’ve grown up a lot since the early years. I’m not saying I’m ready to dive in head first with a cop, but if there is any cop I would like to try it with it’s you.”

He smiled and pulled her hands across the table to his. “That’s why I reminded you of it; it’s also a big part of why I moved away after Amber’s murder. Every time I looked at you, I saw her, and it was killing me. But the years have helped that feeling, and, to be honest, seeing you again has made me feel so good. You’re like a breath of fresh air I haven’t had in my life for a long time. My love for Amber is something I will probably never be able to express in words. But Amber also knew, and she reminded me often, just how much you meant to me. She wasn’t jealous; she made that clear, but I can’t tell you how many times she would ask me why you and I broke up. She thought we were

good together, and she could see the love I still had for you. I have never told that to another soul. She knew that I still had a deep love for you, and she encouraged that love on a platonic level. That's why I left so soon after Amber's death. I couldn't face the memory of her that I saw every time I looked in your eyes." Sara was misty-eyed when he finished. "Okay, thanks for making me cry again. Amber knew about my feelings for you, and we agreed and promised each other never to speak of them except with each other. But I did confide in her that I was jealous when you two hooked up because I was deeply in love with you. I also confessed that the reason I pushed you away was my fear of your occupation. I couldn't bear the thought of a day when you might walk out the door for the very last time and what words might or might not have been spoken in that last conversation." "The perils of police work. Amber never got used to it, but we also never parted without saying 'I love you,' and that is the one thing that I have had some cold comfort in is that those were the last words I spoke to her the night she went missing."

The waitress brought the check, John threw some cash on the table, and the two of them got up. He walked her out to her car where they paused. "Whether you decide to stay or to take the job in San Diego, I would like to start seeing you again." She smiled. "That makes me so happy." He held her face in his hands, and she took his face in her hands and kissed him ever so gently. "I have to pull another seventy-two hour shift this weekend, but I will be off next Wednesday through Saturday. Let's try spending some time together!" "I have a ton of vacation time, so I'll put in for those days next week. I'll give you a call and let you know if there are any issues. You still have your house on Gothic in Granada Hills?" She nodded. "Then I will give you a call over the weekend, and if all goes well I will see you again next Wednesday." He gently hugged her tiny frame and gave her another gentle kiss before they parted ways. He watched as she drove out onto Roscoe.

When she was out of sight, he opened his police computer and typed in the license plate number of the Mercedes that had almost caused the crash when they arrived at the restaurant. Just a few seconds later, the information appeared on his screen: 'Walter Erickson Cruthers. 1 Cliffside Drive. Malibu, California. No wants or warrants.' John closed the lid to the computer and turned out onto Fallbrook headed toward Highway 101, which would take him to Malibu Canyon Road, PCH, Cliffside Dr., and finally, Cruthers' home.

# Chapter Twenty

*He had taken a bite of his sandwich when results of the scans started to pop up on the screen. He looked at the screen in confusion.*

Steve got to the office at half past nine, and no one said a word. He walked in, got a cup of coffee, went to his office, and shut the door. He looked over at the cork boards and the photographs on each. Janet's case file was in the center of his desk with "SOLVED" stamped in bold red ink on it. He felt his rage growing and grabbed the glass globe paperweight off his desk and threw it with his full force and fury against the wall. It shattered upon impact. There wasn't a sound outside his door.



Jim left Barbara's house without saying goodbye. He knew that they understood where they were at, and he would speak to her again tonight. He wanted to let her sleep as she'd been through enough. He let out a little laugh as he was getting off the 405 Freeway at Wilshire, "The Eagle has no idea how lucky he is she didn't get a hold of any part of his anatomy." He pulled into police parking and went up to Steve's office. The first thing he noticed was the quiet. The second thing was that everyone was staring at him. He got to Steve's door and knocked, but there was no response. He turned the handle and saw him sitting at his desk. He turned to the quiet staring staff and yelled, "What? You've never seen a man who's paying a shitload of alimony to an ex-wife who was kidnapped by a serial killer and left alive, and he's happy about it?" Nothing but stoic faces. "On second thought, it is strange that I would be happy about it... think of all the alimony I could have saved if he had just done his job. Shit." He snapped his fingers raising his right leg in the air in a motion of disappointment and walked into Steve's office.

Shards of glass littered the entryway. Jim walked through the broken glass and said, "Doing some redecorating, I see." "I forgot that my walls are concrete." "And don't forget bullet proof." The exchange wasn't meant as humor so much as a way for the two men to let down their hair after the harrowing night before. Everyone and everything they held dear was, for a brief moment, taken from them. They didn't have to say it; it was implied in their demeanor. They were very fortunate that The Eagle didn't kill their loved ones. "What's

with the file?" Jim asked. Steve slid it across the desk; Jim looked at it and slid it back. "Fuck 'em...fuck the whole bunch of 'em!" Jim took a cigarette out of his top pocket and put it in his mouth. "Have you called John?" Steve asked flatly. "Naw...he's a rookie. This isn't up his alley. Besides, it's not his goddamn jurisdiction." "I'm going to call him in for a formal interview, Jim." "Then why ask if I made the damn call?" He shrugged. "I knew you would. When?" "Well...I figure I should probably have the janitorial service clean up the glass first." "I see." "Do me a favor." He wasn't making eye contact with Jim, just looking off into space somewhere out his window. "Sure." "Call John and ask him to email me his résumé." "No problem."

Jim called John and made the request on Steve's behalf. He rattled off Steve's email address and made sure that John had written it down. "When can you get that emailed?" "It's current, Jim. I can ask HR downtown to email it over to Agent Hoffman now. He'll have it in five minutes." "Hang on John," Jim said without covering the mouthpiece. "Hey shithead! John says you'll have his résumé in five minutes. I figure since I have him on the line, when do you want to interview him?" John could hear the whole conversation. "What time is it?" "Ten." "See if he can meet me here in my office at three." "Hey, John, you get that?" "Sure...I'm on duty until eight, but I will take my dinner break to meet with him." "He said okay." There was a moment of silence followed by a muffled conversation. "Okay John. Agent Hoffman will see you at three. Oh... and don't wear your dress uniform, just come in whatever you're wearing in the field, okay?" "Yes sir." "Your dress uniform freaks us out." "Are you going to be there, detective?" "That's a hell of a question...Steve, am I going to be here? John's asking." Silence. "Well, John, based on the lack of response, I would say...what the fuck. I'll be here. See you at three." He hung up and put the phone back in his pocket. "That's a hell of a good call, Steve. This kid's got fuckin' ESP or something." "I have an opening, and the kid knows his way around a crime scene. I don't know why, but I think I will feel much better about the girls' safety having him working for me." "I can't argue with that...if there's anyone who can help to give us some insight into The Eagle, John's the one to do it."

Jim got up just as the cleaning people arrived, saying that while he'd love to stay and help redecorate, he had detective work to do. "I have to spend the rest

of the afternoon filling out goddamn reports on the adventures of last night and this morning. I'll see you back at quarter to." He walked out the door. Steve heard him yelling all the way down the hall, "What the fuck are you all looking at? Get to work! You're wasting my tax dollars."



John called HR as promised. The woman on the phone gave him a hard time, telling him that the FBI makes requests for information through their own recruitment process and that his request was unusual. He explained that Agent Hoffman directly requested his résumé, and after a little haggling was told his résumé had been sent. It was noon, and it had been a quiet morning. He was traveling west on Malibu Canyon Road, and, after twisting his way through the canyon, he came out the other side to see the Pacific Ocean ahead of him, Pepperdine University on his right, and some open fields to his left. He turned onto PCH and headed down the coast. Walter Cruthers' address was flashing on his GPS. When he got to Cliffside Drive, he found a gated community. He showed his ID to the rent-a-cop at the gate and was let in. Cliffside Drive covered a lot of ground in Malibu. When he entered the enclave, the street numbers started in the five thousands. It was a wealthy area occupied by a lot of celebrities, but the bulk of the residents were just common folks. Business people, wealthy business executives, producers, agents, and the list went on. The street was also very deceptive. High walls, well-manicured hedges, and gates hid multimillion dollar mansions. He reached 1 Cliffside Drive at half past twelve. It was barely marked and was the last house at the end of the drive. It had a most unassuming entrance.

Unlike the majority of his neighbors, Mr. Cruthers didn't have large gates or high walls. John could see the entrance to his home from the street, so he pulled off near a sand dune about a block from the house. He parked out of sight and pulled a metal case from behind the seat of his truck. He opened it and removed two electronic devices. One was a small black box marked 'Counter Surveillance System.' The unit, which had a belt clip and had been obtained through his military contacts, was designed to detect every known type of listening device; it also picked up infrared security and a wide range of differing radio signals. The second device was no bigger than a small cell phone, and he turned it on and placed it in his pocket. The device was designed to detect any and all security



cameras and devices, hardwired or wireless, and their frequencies. The unit automatically blocked the transmission of a signal, or looped its signal, so that he couldn't be detected by any security device on Cruthers' grounds.

He walked toward the entrance of the home and up the drive. The scanner on his hip vibrated, alerting him to listening devices in the area. He had both units set to automatically scan for signals and block them. All of this happened in a fraction of a second. He was getting buzzes from both his hip and his pocket as he approached the house. There were no cars in the drive, and from the outside the house was very unassuming. There were no signs of life as he approached the front door, but his systems were going crazy. They were blocking everything and anything. He would be able to download the data to his laptop when he was finished walking the premises and would be able to see exactly what types of surveillance Cruthers was using. He walked past the front door and found a small gate with a latch that lifted easily. What he found on the other side of the gate was an incredible home.



Walter had thought of heading for home after seeing John and Sara but decided to go back to talk to Marty. He backed into his parking space in the garage and went to the administrative offices. He walked into Marty's office as Margaret was finishing up with a call. "Mr. Cruthers. It's so nice to see you. How are you doing today, sir?" She was in her late fifties and had a matronly manner about her, which Walter liked. He had asked her out a couple of times, but Margaret was happily married, yet she was always flattered when he would make an advance. It became a game the two of them played, one that had gone on since he took over the hospital in 2001. "Margaret, my love, my day has been so dreary, but seeing your smiling beautiful face makes me forget all my troubles." She blushed and buzzed Marty's office to let him know he was there. "You can go right in, Mr. Cruthers."

"Margaret, we have known each other for over a decade. When are you going to address me by my first name?" "It just doesn't seem proper, Mr. Cruthers." "Well, Margaret, I'm going to make it proper. From now on, please call me Walter." She smiled. She had never been given permission to address him any other way. She also knew Walter's temperament, and if he instructed you to behave in a certain way, you did so. She had seen both sides of Walter.

The kind, affectionate man, and the ruthless, angry businessman who would, could, and had destroyed many a career. “I’m flattered, Mr....I mean, Walter. Mr. Powers will see you now.” He bowed slightly toward her and walked into Marty’s office. “Don’t get up, Marty. I wouldn’t want you to acknowledge me as your superior.” Marty stood straight up and apologized. “Oh sit down, Marty. I don’t want you to kiss my ass right now.”

Walter began pacing and asked about the conversation with Doctor Cook. Marty just shook his head. “I did as you asked, Walter, and she’s promised to think things over and to get me an answer by the end of her shift on Monday.” “That’s not acceptable, Marty. I want this woman, and I want her on board now!” “What do you want me to do, Walter? Tie her up and hold her against her will?” Walter looked disgusted and sat down. “I want you to do your damn job. If there is one thing about your management style that I don’t like, it’s your easy going nature.” Marty shrugged and asked, “Are you seriously offering Doctor Cook a blank check? The board will never go for it.” “The BOARD? I am the board, Marty. The BOARD will do whatever I tell them to do. Besides, Sara is not a greedy woman; she’s practical.” Marty’s face grew more serious, and he lowered his voice, “Sara said that you have seen her in the ER ten times in the past six months.” “Yea...so?” “She said only her, Walter. She also said that you’ve made unwanted advances.” Walter crossed his legs and asked, “Where are you going with this?”

“Sara is a great doctor, and I agree that she will make a great Chief of Staff for the ER, and I even think I might have persuaded her in our conversation this morning before she left the hospital. The one thing that she wants is for you to stay away from her.” Walter smiled, “Good, very good, then my plan worked.” Marty looked confused. “Plan? What plan?” “You know that I’m much too old for her. I had planned to make her uncomfortable so when it came time to negotiate her contract I had this card to play. It’s perfect. You will be able to tell Doctor Cook that you spoke to me, and I have agreed to cease and desist from further advances. That I have been duly chastised, and that I will not bother her again.” “That’s great, Walter, but you’re not her only reason for leaving.” “And what, pray tell, would her other reason be?”

“I don’t know how much you know about Doctor Cook’s background, but she came to this hospital with her best friend, Doctor Amber Swenson.” Walter

sat still and replied, "Okay, so what does that have to do with anything?" Marty asked if he knew anything about Doctor Swenson's passing, and when he said no, Marty shared the details of her rape and murder. Marty's face was grim, and Walter could see that Marty was emotionally troubled. "I'm very sorry. I had no idea. WEC only had the hospital for about a year and half, and I had not taken a hundred percent control yet. What does that have to do with Sara?" Marty paused for a moment before telling the story of their lifelong friendship including their tenure as colleagues and surgeons. Walter asked, "Do you think the memories of her late friend...what did you say her name was?" "Amber Swenson." "You think that this is coloring her reasons for wanting to leave the hospital?" "That's exactly what she told me." "How strange."

"What makes it so strange, Walter?" "Sara is a doctor; she deals with death on a daily basis. It just seems strange that she would allow the death of her friend to jeopardize her future and her career after all the hard work she has done to advance it." "She's not jeopardizing her career; she's taking a lower paying job to be close to her family and friends. She wants to escape the memories that are associated with this hospital." "I still don't understand, Marty. If she has felt this way since the death of her friend, why did she stay on and not move to another facility? She always had that option." Marty's face lit up, "That's a really good question. She was early enough in her residency that she could have requested a transfer."

"So you say that Doctor Swenson was murdered?" "Yes." "What do you recall of her?" "She was a wonderful young woman, very full of life. She was an outstanding physician. Her patients loved her. She and Sara worked as a team in the ER. She was getting ready to celebrate her second wedding anniversary. Actually, if my memory serves me correctly, she was reported missing the morning after her anniversary." "Is her husband on staff here at the hospital?" "No, he's not a doctor." "Really? That's unusual." "As I recall, Amber didn't want to work in the same profession with her spouse. I remember when she told me she was engaged; she was so young and so excited. My wife, Teresa, and I attended their wedding." "So what did her husband do?" "He was a Los Angeles Police Officer." Walter's face took on a look that Marty couldn't make out. "What type of officer?" "Well, when Amber was killed he was a patrol officer. He had only been on the force for a little over a year." "Did you know her

husband well?” “John? Oh yes, very nice man, but if he pulled you over, you’d be terrified.” “How so?” “John was a lifelong body builder. At six feet four, two eighty, he was a scary looking man. He was a gentle giant though. He worked security here at the hospital between shifts to make ends meet.”

“So that’s how he met Amber?” “No, as I recall, she met John through Sara.” He had an astonished look on his face. “Was Sara trying to date her way out of a ticket?” Marty chuckled and explained that Sara and John had been a couple in the past, and Amber got to know John initially as a friend before they ended up a couple.” “Hmm.” Walter looked at his gold Rolex and said, “Nice talking with you, Marty. Let’s do everything we can to keep Doctor Cook here, okay?” Marty nodded as Walter opened the door. He was just getting ready to leave when he turned to Marty and asked if he’d kept in touch with Swenson after his wife’s death. Marty shook his head but asked why he wanted to know. “I just wonder if he stayed in law enforcement after something so horrible happened to his wife.” Marty responded as Walter held the office door open, “He did. When Sara and I were speaking this morning, she mentioned that she’s still in contact with John, and that he’s still in law enforcement in Los Angeles.”

Walter walked into the outer office where Margaret was filing some documents. Marty was behind him when Walter said, “I wish I had had the opportunity to have met Doctor Swenson. She sounds like she was quite a personality.” “She really was Walter; she really was.” He bid farewell to Marty and Margaret. Marty just stood there shaking his head and said to Margaret, “He might own the hospital, but he’s a strange man.” Margaret just smiled as she closed the filing cabinet, and Marty walked back into his office closing the door behind him.



It was half past two when John left Cruthers’ home and headed for L.A. He stopped at a sandwich shop around the corner from Steve’s office and had a cheesesteak and soda while he downloaded the data he had recovered. He had taken a bite of his sandwich when results of the scans started to pop up on the screen. He looked at the screen in confusion. “Only five sensors outside and two infrared cameras...Hmm.” The next report began to fill the screen. “The house is a fortress,” he said with a mouthful of sandwich, “inside and out.” The reports gave a very intricate layout of the house based on the security systems in place. He noticed that there was a very heavy concentration of surveillance equipment

in the center of the house. “This is not equipment to keep someone out...it’s to keep something in.” He closed the laptop. There was still a lot of data he needed to download and go over back at the house on Parson’s Trail. For now, he needed to finish his lunch and see Steve Hoffman.

# Chapter Twenty-One

*'He turned off the lights and headed back to shore. He backed the boat into its slip, then hosed it off to make sure it was clean and fresh for his next guest.'*

Jim arrived at Steve's office at quarter to three as promised. The mess was cleaned up, and there didn't seem to be anything else missing or broken from his desk. Steve wasn't there when he came in, so he sat down behind the desk, put a smoke between his teeth and his feet up on his desk, and waited. John was going through security when he saw Steve walking across the hall toward the elevator with a cafeteria tray in his hands. "Good afternoon, Agent Hoffman." He smiled, "Call me, Steve." "Yes, sir." "And don't call me sir. You don't have the job yet." He nodded as the elevator doors closed.

When they arrived, Jim had his feet planted firmly on the desk and was chewing aggressively on the unlit cigarette. "For God's sake, Jim, take your damn feet off my desk, get the fuck out of my chair, and if you have to chew on something might I suggest you take up gum!" Steve pushed Jim's feet off his desk. Jim moved to another chair where he promptly put his feet back on the end of Steve's desk, continuing to gnaw on his cigarette. John could see that he was doing it to annoy Steve. "Please sit down, John. As you can see, this is a pretty informal process." Steve grunted out the last words as he shoved Jim's feet off his desk yet again. Steve had John's employment file as well as military records in front of him. "I have to say, John, you have a very impressive résumé. Served a four year hitch in the Marine Corps where you were in Special Forces." John nodded. "What did you do?" "I'm afraid that's classified, sir. You would have to request that information from the Department of Defense." "You should be able to answer this then; were you part of a 'black op squad?'" "Affirmative, sir." "Highly decorated, I see. Earning the Navy Cross, a medal second only to the Congressional Medal of Honor. Silver and bronze stars, two purple hearts, and honorably discharged. Why didn't you stay in the military?" "I fell in love, sir." Steve laughed, "Given these awards, it seems like you loved the Corps." "My time in the Corps taught me a lot about honor, sacrifice, and service; we lived by a code in the Corps. I loved the men and women that I served with, sir." "You earned these medals for acts of valor." "Agent Hoffman, I didn't do anything that

I thought I deserved a medal or anything else for. Those medals were conferred upon me by my superiors and fellow soldiers. I lived and still live by the credo 'leave no person behind.'" "Do you also stand by the unspoken credo 'avenge your brother's blood?'" "In a time of war, sir, you don't have time to think. That's trained into you. You do the job, and you protect those who can't protect themselves."

"Understood. You graduated summa cum laude from USC with a degree in psychology and a minor in criminal justice. An MSW from USC as well. It's no wonder that you can think like these guys. Why the hell aren't you working for me?" "It was another life, Agent Hoffman. I was planning on going into private practice when I graduated as a psychologist while I pursued my PhD, but things didn't work out like I planned." "So what brought you into police work?" "It was a great forum where I felt I could apply both my military training and my education in a hands-on way while I was working on my PhD." "I see, but you never went back to school." John shook his head. "You were admitted to the Los Angeles Police Academy in 2000 and became a sworn peace officer that same year." He nodded. "I see that you are still in the reserves." "Yes, sir; once you leave the military, you are required to remain on active duty call up." "Were you activated after your discharge?" John looked Steve in the eye, "I'm afraid that's classified as well, sir."

Steve shrugged. "Married March 20, 2001 to Doctor Amber Lynn Melman." There were several photographs in his HR file; two of them had his wife in them at two different award ceremonies. "She's a very attractive young woman." John spoke quietly, "Yes, sir, she was." Steve had spoken before he had finished reading his file. "I'm sorry, John, that was incredibly insensitive of me." Jim had practically been nodding off until he heard the conversation about John's late wife. After hearing her name, he said, "Blond hair, green eyes, born 1978. Her body was found in a dumpster on March 21, 2003." They both looked over at him. "I worked the case, John. I should say that I'm technically still working the case, though it is a cold case and has been for eight years." "I didn't know, detective." "Yes, John. I was there that morning when she was discovered by an employee of the restaurant. You don't strike me as the forgetful type. I interviewed you after the killing." "With all due respect, Detective O'Brian, that was a moment in my history where I talked to a lot of people. We could very

well have met, and you might have interviewed me, but the first two weeks after my wife's murder are a blur." "I'm sorry, John. Your wife's case holds a significant place in my memory." "And why is that, detective?" "Call me Jim." "Why is that, Jim?"

"Your wife disappeared the night of your second wedding anniversary from the Oak Room in Hollywood. You were a patrolman then, and I interviewed you about the night before. You told me that you were late getting to the restaurant because you and your partner were on a domestic battery case in the Crenshaw District. When we spoke, you were blaming yourself for Amber's death. I was having a problem with the case because in the previous six months I had two other similar cases. One was a child, a ten-year-old girl from Orange County; her body was found stuffed in a freezer box in the back of her parents' home. Everyone was all over the parents, but they were cleared by DNA. The other was a thirty-five-year-old Black female, same attack pattern as the girl. Both had been raped and tortured. This was not your run of the mill torture either, Steve. What happened was nothing short of horrific. After the discovery of your wife's body, I started to see a pattern and even started a profile of the killer, then the killings stopped. I have always held that these three were the work of one killer. I'm sorry, John. It just all flooded back to me. Steve, if this guy is a serial killer, he makes The Iron Eagle look like a saint."

"That's quite alright, Jim. The memories come back to me nightly. I, too, think that my wife was the victim of a serial killer." Steve sat back in his chair and closed John's file. "So if you two are so sure, " he looked right at Jim, "then why didn't you tell me about it?" "The evidence was way too thin...I tried to get permission for a team in '03, but resources were low, and we didn't have any more killings in my jurisdiction." "So you think he's still killing, just not in your areas?" They both said yes quickly and at the same time. "Interesting. John I want to put in a request with your department for you to come over and work with me on a trial basis for six months as an Intel Analyst. The salary is \$98,000. I will work out your benefits between LAPD since you will really be a consultant from the LAPD. But don't worry, you will have the same or better benefits than you have right now." "I'm not worried about that." "Well, you should be. We don't make a lot of money for what we do." "What am I being hired to analyze, sir?" "I'm putting you on as the lead analyst in The Iron Eagle



killings.” “I’m sorry...you want me to profile The Iron Eagle?” “Yes, John. I think you have the skills to do it. What do you say?” He laughed a little under his breath and said, “Sure.” Steve said, “I really feel good about this,” and Jim agreed. “I’ll work out the details, but I want you in my office at nine a.m. tomorrow.” “Do I need to talk to my superiors?” “No...you are now working for me. Get your shit together because tomorrow you’re going to help us take down this son of a bitch.” He smiled, shook both of their hands, and left the office.

After he left, Steve looked at Jim and said, “This kid is a pro. I really think that he can give us a lot of insight into The Eagle, not to mention other cases.” Jim nodded, the cigarette still clenched in his teeth. “I can’t see how we can go wrong. The kid has all the right tools and training, and he has a motivation to find The Eagle.” “What motivation is that?” “His wife, dumbass. Who knows; it might have been The Eagle who killed her.” “No way. Doesn’t fit the profile.” “Well, lately The Eagle hasn’t been fitting his own profile. I just hope between the three of us we can take him down.”

John walked out of the building, quietly got to his truck, and radioed in that he was back on duty. He pulled out of the parking lot and pulled over near the veteran’s cemetery across the street from Steve’s office. He was well out of sight of anyone in or near the building. He put the steel case on the floor then placed both hands on the steering wheel and, without even understanding it himself, began to laugh hysterically.



Sara got home and did just as she had planned. She took a hot bubble bath and drank a glass of wine while listening to some smooth jazz, after which she went to bed for a long needed rest. What she didn’t do when she woke up was start packing boxes. Instead, she grabbed a legal pad and listed the pros and cons of staying at Northridge Hospital. From the outset, the pros were outweighing the cons with the largest pro being John. Even with him living in Long Beach, a relationship could work. The only big con for her was his job. She jotted down, ‘Can I live with the knowledge that the man I love might walk out the door and never come home?’ Then, she remembered the box. She got up and went into the bedroom and opened the hope chest at the end of her bed. Buried under old clothes, comforters, and pillows was a small oak box with an eagle burned into the top and the initials, ‘U.S.M.C.’

John had made the box for her after he had completed basic training at Camp Pendleton in San Diego County. She opened the box and a flood of memories and emotions came back to her. She was against him joining the Marine Corps; she read that in one of her letters to him while he was still in basic. Another letter was from John when he was in Special Forces training. She read the quotes from her in his letter responding to her resistance to his serving in such an elite and dangerous position. She pulled out a file of communications and documents that she received from him and the Department of Defense. She had become John's family when they started dating. There was a note from some of their friends encouraging what he was doing. She peeled away page after page until she came to a letter dated May 19, 1998 from the Department of Defense addressed to John stating he and his unit were to be activated. She read her hand written note below it, "I begged you to stop this madness, but you insisted it was for the good of a nation. I asked what that eagle had ever done for you, referring to the American Eagle on the Great Seal of The United States of America, and your only response was more than you'll ever understand."

There was an envelope she had sent to John at an APO while he was on duty that had been returned undeliverable. She looked at the date and knew that it was the 'Dear John' letter that she had sent breaking up with him. Her thoughts went back to the gratitude that she felt that he never got that letter because she received a call from Walter Reed Hospital that John was being treated for injuries he received in the line of duty. She remembered the frazzled flight to get to him as fast as possible and her tears at seeing him on a ventilator. He'd been shot in the chest. She remembered the ceremony when he was awarded the Navy Cross. She read the letter from him inviting her out to see him at Camp Pendleton where he was stationed for the last two years of his duty. She remembered the disappointment in his voice when she called to tell him that she wouldn't be able to come down, that she was under a heavy workload with her internship and couldn't get away. Then there was 'The Letter!' It was from Amber, dated January 18, 2001. It was the invitation to her wedding; she was marrying John. She dropped the papers back into the box and broke into tears. "Why Amber? Why? How could you handle John's risky life when I couldn't?"

She put the box down on the floor in front of the hope chest and walked back to the table. She looked over the list and crumpled it up. She took a red marker

and wrote in large letters, “I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. I WILL NOT LOSE JOHN TO MY FEAR AGAIN!” She tore the paper out, folded it neatly, and placed it in the envelope with the invitation. “This time I’m going to work harder to make it work; this time it’s going to be my name on that wedding invitation.” She put everything back in its proper place in the hope chest and closed and locked it. She had the key tied to a piece of black yarn, and she placed it on her bedpost and dressed for the evening.



When The Eagle returned to Parson’s Trail, he checked everything out, and all was fine. He put on his white coveralls and went out to the shed. Francis was clinging to life, taking shallow, fast breaths. “Well, Francis, based on your confession, I have extracted revenge for each of your victims.” Francis didn’t move. “It’s time that I finish you.” He removed the harnesses that had held Francis to the wall of his own container for nearly three weeks. He allowed his body to drop onto the hot steel floor. He pulled four tourniquet kits from a shelf, grabbed Francis’ nude and bloody body, and dragged it over to the steel table. He picked him up and threw him down on the table. “I’m sorry for not being more gentle Francis. I’m a bit pressed for time, plus you don’t deserve it. I’m treating you just the way you treated your ‘Swine.’ The only difference is they were innocent human beings, Francis. You...are the Swine, and it’s time to butcher you.” He grabbed some smelling salts and broke one open beneath Francis’ nose. He convulsed from the odor, and his eyes sprang open. He suddenly realized that he was off the wall and got excited; it was short lived. The Eagle injected him with a drug, and he was suddenly wide awake and in agony.

The tourniquets were laid on his chest, and the first was being placed on his right foot just above the ankle. “No...Mr. Justice. I’m begging you. Don’t do this to me. I was wrong. I’m a bad man. Take me to prison. I don’t deserve to be free.” He felt the tourniquet cinch so tightly that he lost feeling. He saw The Eagle’s giant hand reach for another one, and he methodically moved from limb to limb until each hand and foot was dark purple from lack of blood flow. Francis heard the sound of the chain saw before he saw it. “Your preferred surgical tool,” The Eagle said with a smile looking Francis in the eye. He never took his eyes away from Francis’ face as he began cutting off his right hand. Francis screamed in agony as his limbs were removed one by one. He screamed

the scream of the damned, the screams of hell, knowing he was about to be sent there in pieces.

When The Eagle finished removing all of Francis' limbs, there was nothing but a living torso with wide open eyes. The Eagle pulled him by the shoulders to the end of the table allowing his head to fall back off the end. He could see Francis looking around, then Francis said, "I can still feel my hands, feet, arms, and legs. If you untie me now, I can run." The Eagle moved behind him, looking down at the limbless man. "You are not restrained, Francis. You're free. Run." There was some momentary flopping on the blood-soaked table before Francis realized his situation. "So, this is what the Swine felt?" The Eagle shook his head. "No, Francis. They felt every ounce of pain that the chain on this saw inflicted on them. I've seen the crime scene photographs and studied the autopsy reports. You kept their pain so well managed that while your victims were in agony, they could feel the knives of this chain saw cutting through their flesh and bone." He looked up at The Eagle. "Where are you going to dump me?" The Eagle pulled the cord of the chainsaw, and it fired right up, "That's for me to know and you to never find out." And with that he lowered the saw to Francis' neck, and slowly, ever so slowly, began to remove his head, starting from the sides, stopping short of the carotid arteries, and then moving up the back, severing Francis' spinal cord at C-7. He was now totally paralyzed but still able to breathe. Small amounts of blood poured from the wounds, but the main arteries were intact. He was three quarters of the way to being decapitated when The Eagle looked into his eyes and said, "I bet you have one heck of a neckache. Let me massage that for you." He raised the saw over Francis' head, so he could see it lowering toward his throat. He screamed until the screams were drowned out by his own blood and head dropping onto the floor. The Eagle picked it up and held it between his hands. "You're not dead yet, Francis. I know that from the studies done by Dr. Beaurieux in 1905. You didn't know that you would still have consciousness for twenty-five to thirty seconds, did you?" "Francis' eyes fluttered. "Only ten second have gone by, Francis." He took his fingers and poked them into Francis' spinal cord; the disembodied face contorted in pain. "Hell of a thing to learn now, huh? You could have tortured your victims for a half a minute more after you removed their heads. Well, that's how life goes, I guess. And yours is about to go." He threw Francis' head against the wall; it

rolled back toward him, its eyes open and glazed, pupils fixed and dilated. Francis was dead. The Eagle placed the head onto the torso and then began to stack the body parts on it as well in preparation for transport.



Walter Cruthers returned to his home in the late afternoon. He parked his Mercedes in the driveway and pressed the remote. He heard the system disarm as he walked up the front walk and through the entrance to the house. The house staff had not yet arrived to prepare his evening meal. He took off his suit coat and grabbed a can of soda on his way to the formal dining room. The table had been set earlier in the morning for two. The dining room was massive, over two thousand square feet, and could comfortably seat up to fifty guests. Walter was well-known for his elaborate parties and celebrity guests, and he spared no expense when entertaining.

Tonight's place settings were at the far end of the enormous table, which was set with the finest crystal, silver, and china. He took a large remote control off one of the buffets in the dining room and pressed a button, raising the window coverings. His home was a "technological marvel," according to the cover of *PC Magazine* that was laying on the coffee table in the family room. In all, the house was thirty-five thousand square feet, which included a private gym, indoor and outdoor pools, a recreation room, a media room that seated one hundred with state of the art audio and video equipment, and ten private guest suites. The house graced the cover of *Architectural Digest*, which was also on the coffee table. Walter recalled with pride the description of his home, its decadent kitchen complete with a sushi bar and dessert center. The article commented on how much Mr. Cruthers enjoyed ice cream and other types of desserts.

While the house was considered an architectural masterpiece, two areas set the house apart from any other known home. First, the master suite boasted over five thousand square feet of living space with ornate custom made furniture. Every piece had been designed by Mr. Cruthers with the help of his assistant and his interior designer. The walls of the bedroom retracted electronically to reveal the Pacific Ocean. The property was on twenty acres and had a twenty thousand square foot boat house for his private custom-built yacht. It was really more of a ship with over ten thousand square feet of living and sailing space. He also had several smaller watercrafts he used for ocean recreation. The other unique aspect

of the home, according to the article, was the fact that it was completely self sustaining. It required no outside services. The property made use of a state of the art desalination plant that provided the home with unlimited fresh water. The article commented on Mr. Cruthers' eco-friendly environment, and the fact that he had a near zero carbon footprint. The house had both solar and wind power and a first of its kind domestic system for harnessing methane gas that was processed and used for cooking and heating. All systems were redundant, so if any one failed there was another to back the others up. The home could never lose its functionality, no matter what might be happening in the outside world.

Walter set the magazine down and went into his closet to change clothes. The phone rang, and his system identified the caller as his IT engineer, so Walter accepted the call. "Good afternoon, Gerald. How are you this beautiful day?" "I'm doing well, Walter. Thank you for asking. I was able to set up the remote sensors off the master suite wine cellar that you asked for." "Excellent, Gerald, just excellent. Was it too difficult?" "Well, it would have been easier if you had allowed me into the wine cellar to run hard-line cables. I installed wireless units, and they are really new technology, Walter, so I can't vouch for their accuracy. If you start getting false alarms when you use them, let me know, and I'll try another work around." "Gerald, I've told you, as well as the staff and everyone who comes to my home, that I keep in that cellar the rarest of all of the fine fruits of the vine. The value of the cellar's contents are without measure. Even I rarely enter my own cellar unless I'm pouring a distinctive vintage for a very, very special guest. That's why I have the second cellar off the kitchen." "It's your money, Walter. I just wanted to make you aware that the sensors are in, and I will activate them remotely upon your request but be prepared for bugs." "Well, to hell with bugs. I'm certain you will resolve any issues should they arise. Activate them, my boy." "Yes, sir, I'm doing it now. You don't need to do anything; they are integrated into your system." "Great! So I don't have to fuss with anything else?" "That's correct. Everything still operates as it always has; the new zones are programmed into your remote. However, you can't bypass these units when they are on, so they are either armed all the time when you have the system on, or they are off when you have the system off."

"Wait. What if I have the house armed to stay like at night when I go to bed and the inner house motion detectors are bypassed? Does this mean that if I have

a guest, and I want to enter my cellar, I have to disarm my whole system?” “Yes and no.” “What the hell does that mean?” “It means that if you want to enter your cellar at any point while you’re in the house, you will have to disarm the system but only in the house. All of your exterior security will remain armed, and you can, though I don’t know why you would, reactivate the system from in the wine cellar if you are worried about intruders. I suppose you could also use it as a very cold panic room.” “I already have three panic rooms, Gerald. Why would I need a fourth?” “Just remember to deactivate it when you enter or exit.” “Well, this is most inconvenient; you will need to work out a better system.” “Let me into the wine cellar, Walter. I need ten minutes to patch into the data center in there, and the whole thing will be hard-wire integrated and will be much more reliable.” “I’ll think about it. Thank you for the call and the information.” “Walter, I know I asked you this before, but I have to ask again. Why do you need such a large home and such elaborate internal security measures? I understand wanting to protect your home, but, Walter, you have more security for that one wine cellar than you do for every property and office building that I handle for you. You live alone for God’s sake, and your staff has no access. It baffles me.” “The contents of the cellar are extremely valuable and of huge sentimental, as well as monetary, value. Protecting its contents is my number one priority.” “Well...okay. Will you need me for anything else this evening?” “I hope not. Enjoy your night. We’ll speak again next week. Good night, Gerald.” “Good night to you, Walter, and, as always, thank you for the business.” The line went dead, and Walter paced near the entrance to the cellar. “What a bother. Better safe than sorry, though.” He changed into a pair of sweats and headed for his gym.

Margarita was at the house at six sharp along with three other cooks and servers. She let herself in and began to prepare the evening’s menu. Walter walked into the kitchen in a robe, drying his hair with a towel, still wet from his shower. “Good evening, Margarita” “Good evening, Mr. Walter. You have a guest for dinner this evening, sir?” “Indeed I do, my dear.” “That is four times this week, Mr. Walter. Don’t tell me that you might be settling down?” He smiled and assured her that this young lady was just a temporary companion whom he had met a few weeks ago. She smiled and instructed everyone on their duties. “Shall we do as in the past week? Prepare and place everything in chafing

dishes in the dining room?” He nodded and told her he had to dress for dinner and to call him in his room when dinner was served. It was half past eight when he received her call. He thanked her over the intercom, and then moved to a small closet that housed closed circuit televisions, and he watched as the staff left the premises. Once he knew that he was alone, he armed the outer house and walked down a flight of stairs to the wine cellar. The door to the cellar had both a retinal scanning lock and a fingerprint recognition lock. He placed his right eye over the scope and his right thumb onto the red plate, and the door buzzed open. The cellar was cold, fifty five degrees, perfect for his wines. He walked to the back of the cellar and pulled on a bottle in the left hand corner. When he did, the wine racking moved to expose a secret door with a brightly lit red room behind it. The room was only a few degrees warmer than the wine cellar on the other side of the door, and he walked in humming a snappy tune he had had on his mind all day. The door closed behind him, and he addressed his special guest.

“Good evening, Lisa. I trust you have had a pleasant day.” In front of him, in the middle of the room, was a torture rack, and restrained to the rack was a beautiful, fully nude redhead. Lisa was gagged with a leather strap and a red ball in her mouth. She tried to speak, but he couldn’t understand her. There were three doors in the room; the bathroom door was open, and Walter walked in and turned on the light. The room almost glowed because of its white porcelain fixtures. It was immaculate. He washed his hands, all the while speaking to the restrained woman. “You are going to love dinner tonight, Lisa. We are having pheasant under glass with all the trimmings. I hope you’re hungry. Based on the fact that I haven’t fed you in two days, you probably are. I don’t want you to lose that girlish figure of yours.” He laughed as he walked back into the room while drying his hand with a white towel. “Lose your figure. Impossible. You’re still a young girl. A beautiful, young, supple fifteen-year-old girl. Hmm...you are so well developed for your age. I swear the first time I saw you I thought you were in your twenties. Your body lies about your true age. I love the fact that you are a real redhead. Pubic hair doesn’t lie.” He rubbed his hands together and said, “We should have a little treat before dinner, don’t you agree?” He walked over to the door directly adjacent to the bathroom and opened it with his remote, releasing the magnetic lock and turning on the light. In it was every type of torture device known to man.



“You know, Lisa, that rack is over five hundred years old. I picked it up in Spain, oh, twenty years ago. It was used during the Spanish Inquisition. A masterful system for extracting confessions. I had it completely refurbished and brought back to its original state with a few modern upgrades, of course, so that it would do what it was created to do, inflict PAIN! It may be a medieval device, but the designer understood human anatomy, pain tolerance, and endurance.” He took down a long, black bullwhip and walked back into the room facing the girl. “So, Lisa, are we going to have a nice intimate evening?” She nodded wildly. “Are you excited about serving me and my manhood?” Again, she nodded emphatically. “Oh, that’s just wonderful. He dropped the end of the whip to the ground holding the handle tightly. “What I enjoy about this particular whip is the insulated handle, so I don’t get the sting of the drawback when it strikes your flesh.” She screamed through the gag, and he moved over to her and took it off. He placed his finger over her mouth and said, “Shush...you know the rules. Only speak when spoken to, and I will not tolerate any screaming. Understood?” She nodded. “Also, the felt covering allows me to whip you soundly without leaving any marks. That’s just so excellent; all the pain without the scars. And I get the excitement of meting out punishment, or in this case reinforcing what the punishment will be for your misbehaving. You understand?” She nodded slowly and turned her head, wincing as she waited for the first strike of the whip.

The floor of the room was smooth concrete, and he said, “Well, I suppose we should get this done, so you can serve me the rest of the evening.” He moved his wrist, and the tip of the whip struck a corner of the rack. It didn’t hit the girl, but she flinched, and a tear rolled down her face. “Ah...ah now. You know the rules. You have three strikes of the whip coming to set the tone for the evening. Every time you make a sound, or I see a tear, you add another. Do you really want a repeat of last night?” She shook her head, keeping her head turned and her eyes closed. “I would think not, child. I had to hit you thirty-five times. Do you know how much my wrist hurt after that? You don’t want to inflict that kind of pain on me again, do you?” Once more, she shook her head. “I didn’t think so.” He flicked his wrist again and the tip of the whip hit the wood and steel between her legs but didn’t touch her skin. She didn’t move. “Ah...you know the game; good girl. You won’t know when the three strikes are going to hit you, so you need to be prepared. He flicked his wrist again, only this time the whip whirled up and

struck her on her breasts. She didn't move, flinch, or make a sound.

“One. I had the most stressful day. One of my doctors is threatening to leave our hospital family. To say I'm unhappy is an understatement. You understand how much I love my hospital staff and the patients that we treat.” The whip tip struck the floor on the girl's left side, missing her flesh. “I mean, look at you. I took you home with me from Malibu General where you were a candy striper, and I have been taking care of you this past week. Right?” As the whip struck her on the torso, she nodded but didn't react to the pain. “Two,” he said with a thrill in his voice. “You are doing so well. I'm certain that my wrist and your flesh will only have to endure one more. So, anyway, I'm thinking of having her to the house as my guest. Of course, that means that I will have to find you other accommodations. He whipped her once more, hitting her breasts again but not a sound was made. He rolled up the whip and said, “Well then, dinner!”

“We'll talk about your new accommodations over dinner. I want this room ready for its next occupant. I'm hoping that I might be able to keep her for a long time.” He stopped and said, “Oh darn, I almost forgot. It's time for a photo of you on the rack.” He took a digital camera from a table and a remote control that was sitting on the same stand. With a push of a button, the rack tilted straight up and Lisa was hanging by her wrists and ankles. She howled in pain and Walter frowned, saying, “I should whip you again, but I'll let it slide. I'm in such a good mood. Okay, on three say cheese...” He lifted the camera, and at the same time pushed a second button on the remote; 110 volts of electricity passed through the girl's body as he took the photograph of her contorted features. He shut it off fast, and her body stopped convulsing, and her breathing was shallow. Her eyes remained closed. “I just needed that shot for my collection. A little keepsake to remember you by. Now, let's get some dinner in you.”

He unstrapped her from the table, and she tumbled onto the concrete floor. “Lisa, you are quite clumsy.” He lifted her up by her left arm until she was standing. “I must say I love what you're wearing for dinner.” Her nude skin was pale; her nipples were hard from the cold, and he walked behind her, pushing his foot into the small of her back as they moved out of the cellar toward the dining room. Once in the room, he had her sit in a chair opposite him and took a set of leg irons and placed them around her ankles. The restraint was also a torture device; a steel rod holding her legs apart with small steel spurs on the inside that

punctured her skin when he tightened them. She whimpered as he pressed the locks closed. A look of blind anger and hatred grew across his face. “You haven’t learned a thing, have you?” He cinched the ankle locks tighter, and she screamed. He struck her hard across her breasts, knocking the wind out of her. She tried to cry and breathe at the same time. He stepped down on the steel bar between her legs, and she howled again. “Have it your way, Lisa. I will not tolerate insolence. I’ve been working to train you, and you have ignored my every effort. If you have not learned by now, then you are quite hopeless.”

He walked over to the buffet where the chafing dishes were keeping the food hot. He pulled out one of the steel serving spoons and placed it directly on the burner underneath one of the warming trays. He took a plate from his side of the setting and hummed the song that had been in his head all day while filling his plate with the delectable meal. He then brought the plate over to the table. “I will eat my meal in silence. If you make but a sound to disturb my meal, you will be sorry.” Lisa did as she was told until Walter moved her chair, and she cried out in pain. He didn’t say a word, just took hold of her chair and moved it effortlessly across the floor and placed it against the wall. “You anger me, Lisa; I just wanted to have a quiet meal together and then adjourn to the bedroom, but you had to make a sound without permission.” There was a hot pad on the heating table and he placed it on his hand. “You wouldn’t want me to get burned, would you?” There was no reaction. “I like to leave my mark on my lady friends, something they can remember me by. In your case, I need to make room for my next guest, and since you have decided that you no longer want to play by the rules I’m going to use this spoon to punish you.”

He lifted the chair, sending Lisa to the floor face down. He put his right foot into the middle of her back and with his left hand grabbed the large steel spoon, now white hot, off the burner and placed it on her ass. A blood curdling scream filled the room as she wailed and thrashed under his foot as he moved the spoon from spot to spot. “Oh my...the smell of your burning flesh is revolting.” She continued to scream as he continued moving the spoon over the back of her body, leaving no area untouched. He grabbed her by the hair, dragging her as the leg irons cut ever deeper into her flesh. He stomped on her back, knocking the wind out of her again, and walked to the open wine cellar and into the red room. He returned moments later with a steel bucket in his hand. He removed her leg

irons and rolled her onto her back. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry...I’ll be good. I promise I’ll be good.” He took the master remote he had used earlier and pushed a button, opening the walls of the bedroom and letting in the pale moonlight glistening off the water. There were no lights outside. He disarmed the exterior security and dropped the bucket in front of a now kneeling Lisa.

“I’ve learned through experience it is best to ask my guests to leave when I feel they have overstayed their welcome.” She looked down into the bucket in front of her, and she could make out a hammer and some large long objects. “What are you going to do to me, sir?” Her young eyes looked up at him with sadness and pain. He didn’t respond but grabbed her by the hair, and she began to scream for help. “Scream long, hard, and loud, child. There isn’t a soul who can hear you.” He dragged her out the open walls, fighting him all the way down a concrete walkway that lead to the boathouse. He didn’t have her tight enough, and suddenly she was free. Lisa took off in a full run across the grass. Her screams were magnified by the walls around the backyard and also drowned out by the crashing surf. Walter stood watching her run across the lawn but made no effort to run after her. He pulled the remote from his pocket and watched as she ran in the direction of the side gate. He pressed a button on the remote and Lisa went from a full run to flopping around on the wet grass like a fish out of water. He released the button and walked across the lawn to where she lay taking deep, hard breaths.

“Lisa, Lisa, Lisa...do you think that you can escape me?” He grabbed her again and began to drag her back toward the boathouse. She was unable to resist. He could hear her weeping, powerless to fight him. The doors opened automatically upon his approach, and he dragged the girl inside, and the doors closed behind them. The lights were on, and she could see wood planking and beams as well as a large boat. “I see you’re admiring my small sea craft. Well, don’t you worry. We’re going for a ride right now.” He pressed the button on the remote, the bedroom walls closed, and the electronic voice said, “armed, away, exit now.” He pulled Lisa up a small gangway onto the boat where he zip tied her hands and feet together. The bay doors opened out to the Pacific, and the boat pulled out onto the open sea. As the doors closed behind them, the boat’s motor roared through the darkness. His GPS was the only light on the boat. It glowed with an eerie red light that shined on Walter’s face making Lisa scream

in horror.

The motor's roar began to lessen as the boat slowed, and he saw his position. He also had a sonar scanner usually used for deep sea fishing flashing on the dash in front of him. "Oh, Lisa, we're here!" He stopped the engine; the sea was calm but as black as pitch, and the stars were bright above her head. Walter held a large two by six over his shoulder, which he dropped near her head, the sound reverberating off the boat deck. He pulled two large black objects out from under the seating area. "Lisa, do you like to swim?" She started screaming again as he took a knife from his waistband and cut the zip ties off her wrists. He dragged her over until the upper half of her body was on the wood. He placed his left foot against her chest and took the hammer and one of the objects from the bucket. He moved down on her with his knee and grabbed her left arm, pulling it out straight and placing a U-shaped object over her wrist. Before she knew what was happening, he hit the object with the hammer, and it drove into the wood, pressing her wrist hard against it. He did the same with the other wrist until she was unable to move either arm. "I'd like to say that what I'm about to do is going to hurt me more than it's going to hurt you, but that would be a lie."

He turned on a deck light, and she looked from side to side to see her wrists. She saw Walter remove two long, thin objects from the bucket. He dropped them next to her side then picked one up and held it in his left hand over her left forearm and jammed it into her flesh. She felt the stab of a cold piece of steel just above her wrist bone, and with two swift blows, Walter drove a spike through her lower forearm and into the wood. She screamed in agony as he repeated the same on her other arm and continued screaming and babbling incoherently as he nailed two black objects to each side of the wood. "I know I asked if you like to swim, but what I really meant was do you like to dive? You have two twenty pound weights attached to your new arm bling." As he pushed her toward an opening on the boat he said, "Here is where we say goodbye; I have a lot of great photographs and video of our time together." She was still screaming as he pushed her overboard into the icy sea, her cries and screams falling almost immediately silent as her body sank below the water. With a search light, he stood looking down into the water where the last of the air bubbles were breaking the surface. "I had a great time," he said. "This is a most perfect send off for you and me. Bon voyage." He turned off the lights and headed back to shore. He backed the boat into its slip, then hosed it off to make sure it was clean and fresh for his next guest.

# Chapter Twenty-Two

*‘Jim looked at the two of them when they got on scene and said, “Oh guys, this is going to be one for the record books.”’*

**J**ohn arrived bright and early for his first day of work with the FBI. He had been processed with incredible speed, being as his new employer was the federal government, and he knew from personal experience it could take six months to get a pencil approved. He had learned just to buy things himself. Security called up to Steve’s office, and John was ushered off to Human Resources. He arrived at the federal building at eight forty-five a.m. and was sitting in Steve’s office with a government issued side arm, name tag, and temporary field credentials by nine fifteen.

“I’m impressed, Agent Hoffman. I’ve never seen the federal government work so fast.” “I told HR not to screw around; I needed you on a very important case. Plus, it didn’t hurt that you already have the highest federal security clearance available.” “Well, sir, you have pull in the government that I have rarely experienced.” They both laughed, then Steve asked if he wanted a cup of coffee. John declined. “I don’t drink caffeine.” He looked John up and down and asked if he was one of those butt-ass crazy health weirdos. “You need to be more specific.” Steve shook his head and asked if he drank. “You need to be more specific, Agent Hoffman.” “Great! I have a smart ass on my hands. Do you drink alcohol?” “No sir. Alcohol clouds the judgment.” “Smoke?” “Nope.” “Do drugs?” “Nope.” He looked at John’s physique, “Steroids?” “No, sir.” “How the hell can you have a build like yours without steroids?” “Dedication, Agent Hoffman. A strict workout and weight lifting regimen, a healthy diet, as much sleep as the job will allow, and a lot of water.” “For God’s sake, please tell me that you eat meat!” “Oh yes, sir...high in protein. I eat foods high in protein and low in fat.” “Beef has fat.” “Yes, but I eat lean cuts. Is this line of questioning a part of the job because I don’t see its relevance?” Steve shook his head and asked John to follow him.

They walked two doors down to a bare office with a desk, a chair, and a desk lamp. “This is your office. I’ll have research bring up all known cases on The Iron Eagle; I want a preliminary profile from you by three.” “I will do my best, sir.” “No, John, you will do better than your best; I want to see some solid

insights into this killer.” “Agent Hoffman, may I ask you a question?” “What?” “While I know that you and the Bureau have been hunting The Eagle for nearly a decade, it seems to me that there are higher profile serial killers that you should focus on...like the Basin River Killer. I gave you and your staff a lot of information. I bet I could give you a better profile on him faster.” Steve sat down on the edge of John’s desk. “I know you don’t know me very well, so I will make this short and to the point. That killer entered my home and Jim’s home and took what was precious to the two of us. He knows where we live; he knows our lives, wives, and families. He pushed this into a whole new arena when he entered our private lives. I want a solid profile on him as fast as possible. I don’t want him coming back and doing to our families what he did to Marshal Makin and Barry Mullin.” John nodded his head, “I understand, Agent Hoffman. It’s personal. Get me the files, and I’ll get you a preliminary profile as requested.”

Steve went to walk out but stopped. “You don’t know what it’s like to have the person you love more than anything in the world torn from you. I know that we found them alive and unhurt, but its cold comfort knowing he could come back again.” He turned to leave when John cleared his throat and said with a great deal of emotion, “I do understand, Agent Hoffman. You read my file. What you can’t possibly understand is having the love of your life, your best friend, ripped away and killed in a brutal, sadistic manner. They found my wife, too, Agent Hoffman, but she wasn’t unhurt, and I can’t go home and hold her anymore. I have to live with the fact that her killer is still out there, and there isn’t a damn thing I can do about it. I may never know who took her or why.” As he spoke, Steve could see the anguish and raw emotion in every fiber of his being. “I’m sorry, John. That was very insensitive of me. But I ask you to put yourself in my shoes.” “Yes, sir. I will see you at three.” Steve walked out, and John sat down behind the desk. It was only a matter of minutes before two staffers came into his office with two boxes of files. He took the files out of the boxes and spread them out on his desk and the floor. He opened his laptop and began to write. He didn’t need to open the files; he knew what was in them, but he had to create a profile of The Eagle that both humanized him, and, at the same time, gave a credible profile that Hoffman wouldn’t see through.



Jim was driving to his office when he received a call that a body had been

found by a jogger in the LA River, off Balboa Boulevard in the basin near Balboa Park in Encino. He acknowledged the call, pulled a U turn, and jumped onto Desoto Avenue. He turned left onto Victory and followed it until it intersected with Balboa. The crime scene wasn't hard to find; there were media and black and whites all over the place. He parked across from the basin and crossed the street. He didn't need to flash his badge; all of the guys on scene knew him. He approached the commander and asked, "So what do we have, Rick?" He was trying to fend off the media and talk to Jim without giving too much detail. "It's a mess, Jim. Give me a second. 'Listen, folks, I have no comment on this situation at this time. We just arrived on scene; we are securing the area and interviewing witnesses. I will hold a news conference in two hours to update you on our progress.'" The questions were still flying from reporters as he walked away with Jim hot on his heels. "So what do we have?"

Rick looked at him and said, "A crime scene that stretches nearly a mile, starting right here and heading west through the basin. I've been a cop a lot of years, Jim, but I've never seen anything like this." "The Basin River Killer?" Rick shook his head, "Yes and no." "Can you be a little less specific, Rick. I don't think that was vague enough for me." "I have no idea...the M.O. follows the basin killings, but if this is him, he has taken the display of his victims to a whole new level." "Do you have any idea how many victims we're dealing with?" "Jim...what we have are parts...lots and lots of parts." "Okay." He looked down at his watch; it was two thirty. He called Steve's cell and blurted out, "Meet me at Victory and Balboa in Encino. We have a whole new ballgame with the Basin River Killer. Is John on duty with you?" "Yes." "Bring him. I have a feeling that what we have here IS the Basin River Killer." "If it's him, why do I need John? I have him working on The Eagle profile?" "Because I have a feeling Basin's the victim, and I bet you know who must have found him."

Steve bolted straight toward John's office. He was sitting at his desk typing and told him he'd have his preliminary profile within another five minutes. Steve explained the situation and told him to grab his things as he was about to get a crash course in crime scene profiling. "But I already did a profile on the Basin River Killer." "Yea, well, if Jim's right, we will be throwing it in the trash...he thinks the victim at the scene is the Basin River Killer." John smiled, "Oh, well



then, that's a whole different ballgame." "Grab your coat; we need to move." John grabbed his coat and laptop as they headed out.

"Can't you go anywhere without a computer under your arm?" John placed it on the floor of Steve's car as he fastened his seat belt. "I can assure you, Agent Hoffman, that you want me to have this computer if we are going to a crime scene." As they headed south on the 405 Freeway toward Encino, Steve asked him to explain. "Well, with this little computer I can process an entire crime scene on screen while your investigators are still putting on their gloves." "How the fuck do you do that?" "Technology. Embrace it; it's your friend, not your enemy. You would be amazed at the information that can be gleaned through this system." "Yea, yea, yea...I understand email and cell phones. Outside of that, I don't understand shit about computers. That's a young person's game. And call me Steve." "Oh, now that's not true, Steve. You spend two days with me, and I will have you speaking computer and text-speak like you're a teenager." "I'll pass. That's why I have people like you, so you can extrapolate the information from your little computer and tablets and whatever other technology you have." John let out a laugh, "So, where are we going to meet Jim?" "The river basin at Victory and Balboa in Encino." "Should be interesting."



Sara called John's cell phone but got his voicemail. "John, it's Sara. Hey, I really enjoyed the talk and seeing you again was so wonderful. I want to see if you want to get together for dinner tonight. I don't want to wait until Wednesday. I've been thinking things over on the job front, as well as some of the other things we talked about and want to bounce something off you. Give me a call on my cell. I've had a great nap, and I'm just taking it easy. Hope you have the evening free. Love you." She returned to the book she had been reading on her E-reader as she laid in the sun soaking up the rays. She heard her phone beep, telling her that she had a new email, but she ignored it as she laid in the sun feeling sleepy. It was quarter past three, and she just wanted to enjoy her afternoon in peace. She had no sooner dozed off when she heard her doorbell. "Jesus Christ, what now?"

She left her phone and E-reader on the lawn chair and went to answer the door. It was a florist delivering her two dozen red roses. The card read, 'From a secret admirer,' and it didn't take her two seconds to guess who sent them. She

called Marty at the hospital and asked if he had spoken to Walter. He told her that he had indeed spoken to Walter, that he understood how she felt and agreed not to make further advances. He also said the offer was still on the table. She calmed down and put the flowers on the counter in the kitchen. She thought about it and decided that they must be from John and let out a sigh of relief and went back to her book and the sun.



John's phone buzzed as they were pulling onto Balboa off the 405. He pulled it out and saw that Sara had called. He asked Steve if he could return the call, and he nodded. He listened to the message and then called Sara. She picked up quickly and thanked him for calling her back. "No problem," he said, "it's kind of a hectic time, Sara. I got your message and would love to have dinner with you tonight. I'm en route with my new boss to a situation, but I'll be off at six." Steve glared at him. "Well, I might be off at six. Why don't I call you when I know I'm free, and we can make plans." "That sounds great. I don't want you to feel pressured; I just want to bounce some ideas around." "No problem. I will call you later." He hung up and was getting out of the car on scene when he received a text message from Sara thanking him for the roses. "Roses ... what roses?" he said out loud. Steve looked at him and asked, "What? Who did you send roses to?" "No one." He sent Sara a text to tell her they weren't from him. Jim was approaching them as John's phone buzzed in his pocket, but he couldn't look at the message or respond. Jim looked at the two of them when they got on scene and said, "Oh guys, this is going to be one for the record books."



There was a small red dot blinking on Walter's cell phone. It was the signal from a small transponder he had placed with the roses when they were being prepared to be sent to Sara. It just happened that Walter owned the flower shop that the roses came from. He had stopped in and done the arrangement himself. When he was putting it together, he included a small packet that looked like rose food but actually contained a transponder and a powder, which was a powerful antistatic that was odorless and tasteless and turned to a gas when added to water. It would knock out anything within three feet. He would know when the packet had been opened as the red light would stop blinking. He sat patiently in the afternoon sun listening to his music and watching the blinking dot on his

phone. What he didn't know was that one of Sara's neighbors, Sally, a widow who spent her days knitting near her front window, was watching him watching Sara. Nearly forty-five minutes passed before the red dot on Walter's phone stopped blinking. He started his car and slowly pulled out and drove down the street. He drove on toward the corner and turned left out of sight.



There was a loud crash as Sara fell, holding the vase of roses after she had put the powder into the water. She collapsed onto her kitchen floor, losing consciousness.

# Chapter Twenty-Three

*“Well I don’t know about you, Steve, but I have enough of John’s lip prints on my ass that if he were wearing lipstick I could paint a toilet seat.”*

John opened his laptop as they approached the first in a series of crime scenes in the basin. He took out a small item and plugged it into the USB port on his laptop. “What the fuck is that?” asked Jim, who was wearing a pair of white latex gloves and examining the severed forearm of the Black victim. “It’s an IR camera. It will allow me to photograph each piece of the crime scene and send it to the lab to process while we’re here. “Are you telling me that this is real time detective work?” He nodded while running the unit over the severed limb Jim was looking at. “Hey, cyber boy? If you need a clue, I can tell you that is just one of about a dozen pieces.” John finished the scan and hit send and followed the two men from location to location. “What kind of twisted fuck would do this?” Jim said as he poked at the severed head, the final piece of the victim which was prominently displayed over a DVD case and an all too familiar manila envelope.

They were still processing the scene when Jim called the men over. “Take a look.” John and Steve looked down at the envelope with Steve’s name prominently written in what could only be assumed as the victim’s blood. He looked over at John and Jim and said, “We won’t have to worry about the Basin River Killer anymore.” Jim couldn’t help himself, “Well, I wonder what sick ass shit The Eagle found on this guy.” John didn’t say a word. Steve looked over at him and asked, “Well? You were working on your profile of The Eagle. Did you see this in your observations.” John shook his head. “It all depends on what we’re dealing with here. Based on my observations of the body parts, they all appear to be from the same victim. If that holds true, it’s a dramatic shift in The Eagle’s killing.” Jim piped up, “Unless that envelope and DVD contain a confession and the identity of the Basin River Killer.” “Oh, bullshit, Jim. This fucker only did the DVD thing in the Roskowski case. What are the odds he would do it again?” “Well,” John chimed in, “I haven’t seen the file on Mr. Roskowski. Perhaps the killer is trying to communicate with you in a new way.” Steve looked at John and said, “What the fuck do you know about The Eagle?

You've been an FBI profiler for less than twelve hours. You don't know shit about this killer." He nodded and started typing on his laptop again. Jim looked over and told John just to type the notes. "You are brand new to this killer; you know very little about him. Steve and I have been on almost every one of his crime scenes together, and I've been on them all."

John stopped typing. "You've been on all The Eagle's crime scenes?" "Yes, sir. I was there when they found the first victim he killed at Pendleton. I was there when he got his nickname." "I had no idea, detective. So, you really have been searching for him for a long time." "I thought we covered this. Now let's get this evidence back to the lab. Steve, I think your team should process the scene." He nodded in agreement. John started to walk over to one of Steve's team members. "John, where are you going?" "To work on processing the scene. I'm part of your team, right?" "Shit, John, you're consulting. I want you back at the office with me, so we can all look over what The Eagle has left us this time and see who it is he has killed and why." He closed his laptop and tucked it under his arm. "You're the boss; whatever you say." The two men looked at him with condescension. "You're the boss? Jesus, man, I'm trying to work with you and teach you how to catch a serial killer. You have no idea how valuable this education is." "With all due respect, sir, you're wrong. You have no idea how grateful I am to be here working with the two of you, learning the ins and outs of great forensic work as well as psychological profiling. You're really helping me to better understand how the FBI and the Sheriff's Department profile and categorize serial killers. This is invaluable information. This is the type of education that gives me a whole new insight into how this work is done. I'm very, very appreciative." Steve and Jim started for their cars. Jim looked over at Steve as they left the scene with the envelope and DVD from The Eagle and said, "Well I don't know about you, Steve, but I have enough of John's lip prints on my ass that if he were wearing lipstick I could paint a toilet seat." The three of them laughed as they headed for Steve's office and the FBI crime lab.

It was half past five when John read Sara's text about the confusion over the roses. He sent a text back to her letting her know that he would have to get back with her; he was going to be working late.

# Chapter Twenty-Four

*'He was out of sight when she mumbled to herself to play along. "It's the only way you're going to come out of this alive," '*

**W**hen Sara started coming to, the room was cold, very cold, and dark. She had no idea where she was or what had happened. She had a terrible headache and felt cold steel and wood against her back. And she was nude. She called out but there was no response. She tried to move her arms and legs, but they were heavy and felt restrained. "Hello...is anyone there? Please. I need help. I'm hurt, and I'm cold. Is anyone there?"

Walter was sitting in his bedroom security room looking at her on his closed circuit television. The infrared camera allowed him to see her even through the darkness. "What a body," he murmured to himself. "She's going to be a lot of fun. But she's not like my usual dates; she's hardnosed and independent. I've only had a few of those, and it didn't end well for them." He pushed a button on the remote, and the lights came on. He could see her nude body quite clearly now. "Oh, how exciting...I'm going to make myself feel so good using every inch of that body! I will have to be patient with her. Strong willed women are much harder to break. I will have to take her by force the first few times, but she'll come around. I just know she will." He zoomed in on her face with the camera and could see the fear and confusion in her eyes. "Yes...patient...I must be patient. I just know that she's the one for me."



Steve had ordered his team to meet him in the lab. When the three men arrived, they went in an entrance that neither Jim nor John knew existed. There were no security guards or scanners, just a fingerprint thumb scanner beside the locked door. John looked closely at the mechanism, observing how Steve used it and what thumb he used. He asked Steve, "Hey, when do I get access like this?" Steve didn't look at him, he just said, "When you're all grown up!" It was meant as a joke, but John didn't take it that way. The only thing on the other side of the door was an elevator. He surveyed the room and expressed his surprise about the low tech security. Steve pressed the button, and the elevator doors opened. When they reached the lab, all of his agents were working on different projects. He called them together and placed the DVD on a table. The container was emblazoned with the mark of The Eagle on the front and a thumbprint on the

back.

“Okay, folks, The Eagle has upgraded his technology and his way of communicating with us. I would venture a guess that the print belongs to our victim.” Jim sarcastically chimed in by saying that maybe the print belonged to The Eagle and perhaps he was giving himself up. Steve ignored the remark and handed the DVD to one of his assistants. He walked over to the light table. The envelope was really thick but flexible, so he could tell it contained paper. He opened the envelope, pulled out the contents, and the projected images appeared on the screen. John watched all of this with a skeptical and relaxed look on his face. The first page document was titled ‘This is the story of the Basin River Killer, otherwise known as Francis Statler.’

“What the fuck? ... The Eagle has gone from serial killer to biographer?” Jim said with a laugh. There were a few chuckles which stopped when Steve turned the page. It was a table of contents and a “cast of characters.” They all knew what that meant.

Chapter One: The Story of Francis Statler  
Chapter Two: The Inspiration to Kill  
Chapter Three Catch Me if You Can  
Chapter Four: Running Under the Radar  
A Guide to Killing and Hiding in Plain Site  
Chapter Five: The Confession

“A how-to guide,” Jim cried out. “This is fucked up. I mean really fucked up.” Steve looked at John and asked him his thoughts. He looked at the TOC and said, “This was probably being written by the victim at the time he was found by The Eagle. Until we look into it deeper, it’s hard for me to say just what this is, but what I can tell you based on what we have already seen, this is going to become a profiling guide on serial killers in the future.” Everyone in the room laughed except Jim and Steve. “You glean this from the first two pages of what looks to be a lengthy document? What if it’s some kind of fucked up psycho manifesto?” John crossed his huge arms and looked thoughtfully at the documents on the screen. “I don’t think so. I think this guy had been writing this ‘book’ for some time, probably years, but there’s only one way to find out.” Steve nodded, and they spent nearly three hours reading over what turned out to be the lucid, logical, and very, very disturbing manifesto of the Basin River

Killer.

It was handwritten, uniform, clearly documented with dates, places, victim names, and the manner in which he killed them. It also mentioned how the killings made him feel. The cast of characters contained the names of the victims in chronological order with the dates of abduction and dates of death. Mark Summers, the quietest member of Steve's team, suddenly blurted out, "This list reads like the credits at the end of a movie!" Summers was a forensic expert and worked for the most part with reconstructing victim's faces when only a skull had been located in Jane and John Doe situations. He didn't say anything more. The victim count was staggering with the first abduction of two men occurring in December 1969. The final entry told of the two homeless men found in the basin in the past couple of weeks. In all, there were one hundred and thirty-five names. All ages, races, and genders. The only common trait among the victims was that they were all heavy set.

When they got to the confession, the writing changed tremendously. The hand was shakier, and the penmanship less clear; however, the document was easy to read, coherent, and lucid. The final chapter answered John's statement about the document becoming a text book on serial killers. And its closing chapter solidified it for everyone in the room:

In the beginning, I killed for the sheer joy of killing. I became better and better at it. As I matured in my actions, I realized that I was doing a service to society by ridding the world of the Swine that infest our streets and alleys, the filth that pollutes our river and its basin. I only regret that I won't be able to finish what I started. Perhaps the reader of this document will pick up where I left off, learn from the way I did things, and keep working to cleanse the Swine from our river and clean up our great city. I don't know how but The Iron Eagle found me, and he says that I must experience everything that the Swine felt at my hand. The Iron Eagle calls himself justice. I am the Swine; he has told me so. He told me that I killed human beings with families and friends, that they had their lives ahead of them, and that I decided to play God. As for the lives he claims I took from them, they were stealing the life from the river and contaminating it with their filth. They deserved to die, and I would do it again. One piece of advice: keep your mind, soul, and



sexual desires in check. In the beginning of my cleansing of the Swine, I almost fell victim to the desires of the flesh. It happened only once, and I never acted upon it. Keep yourself clean and separated from the Swine, for once you contaminate yourself, you will be ineffective and unable to do the work of keeping our river clean.

Francis Statler, aka, The Basin River Killer.

The room was completely silent. While the detail conveyed was gruesome, Jim commented on how well the killer expressed himself even knowing that he faced certain death at the hands of The Eagle. Steve chimed in on that point, “He was calm because there was a huge part of him that felt he was indestructible. He had a God complex coupled with a psychopathic personality disorder, which allowed him to exhibit great restraint within society and controllable rage. That’s what made him the perfect serial killer and kept him under the radar for over four decades. These killings were performed in a desolate location by Statler, and we have to find that location.” Jim and John nodded and Jim said, “Well, its half past nine, people, and we haven’t gotten to the evening movie. I’m sorry, but I didn’t bring sandwiches and coffee this time. But we might all be glad for that.”

Steve motioned for the lights to be turned off and the DVD to be played. The setting was different as was the manner in which Statler was killed. The one constant in the video was the conversation. The Eagle’s voice, cold, calculating, and disguised. He conversed with Statler as he methodically tortured him. The wood carving of The Eagle with its crimson eyes was always prevalent in the background as The Eagle meted out Statler’s punishment, even as he amputated him piece by piece. The large gloved hands were the only discernible image of The Eagle.

As the film came to an end, The Eagle held Statler’s severed and bloody head in front of the camera, and the eyes moved momentarily. There was a distinct cringe of pain as the gloved hand of The Eagle pressed into Statler’s still bleeding spinal cord. His eyes became fixed and his pupils dilated as The Iron Eagle flung the head across the room and into a wall, and the screen faded to black. When the film ended, there was no vomiting or craziness. Steve said sadly, “While Janet had a thing for the melodramatic, I wish she was still with

us, even if it meant getting a laugh at her expense.” There were a few sad smiles, and John piped up and said, “I didn’t know Janet, but I think we can all take some comfort in the fact that her killer was found.” Heads around the room nodded in agreement.

“Okay,” Steve said, “It’s now eleven p.m. We have a confession. We have ... a new reality version of chainsaw massacre. There is nothing more for us to do; it’s in the hands of the coroner. Let’s break for the night, and, unless something new pops up over the weekend, let’s take the weekend off. I think we could all use some time with family and friends and to get away from this, if only for a few hours.” There was stunned silence until Jim spoke up. “Wait...the diabolical FBI criminologist ... the serial workaholic Special Agent Hoffman is recommending a few days off? Someone break out a video phone and record this because I’ve known this guy for nearly two decades, and I have never heard those words come out of his mouth.”

Steve turned to John and asked how the profile of The Eagle was coming along. “I did a baseline case study with the information I could glean from the case files. Today’s case makes it only the second actual hands-on visual case work on The Eagle’s killings. I can give you the profile, so you can read it over the weekend, but I can tell you that I’m going to be making some significant changes to it.” “Well, email me what you have so far, and we’ll talk over the weekend about the revelations that you have already brought up and the ones that were confirmed by the manifesto and the DVD.”

“Okay, let’s break for the night. I will see you all on Monday morning, bright and early.” Everyone packed up their things and walked back to their offices. John closed his laptop and went back to his office as well. Steve and Jim stopped John and said jointly, “You earned yourself a beer.” He laughed and said, “You know I don’t drink, but I’ll gladly join you gentleman for a beverage, just tell me where.” Jim gave him directions to Santiago’s and told him to meet them there in half an hour. He agreed and finished packing things up. He called Sara but got voicemail. “Hi Sara, as luck would have it, I just got notice that I have the weekend free. I have some business to wrap up, but I thought I could stop by when I’m finished. It will be early morning, but I know you have that comfortable guest room, so if it’s okay with you I would like to stop by and crash at your place. I know you monitor your answering machine, so if there’s a

problem just give me a call back. If not, I will see you in a few hours.” He hung up and headed for Santiago’s.



It was half past ten when Walter decided to make an appearance in the wine cellar where he had Sara. He undressed, put on a warm terrycloth robe, and grabbed a second one from his closet. Sara was alert, and the look of shock on her face when the door opened and Walter walked in said it all. “Walter, what in God’s name are you doing to me?” Much to his surprise, her tone was one of anger not fear. “I’m freezing. Where are my clothes? Where am I?” He walked over to her and released her hands and feet and helped her up. He gave her the extra robe that he had in his hands, but he didn’t respond right away. “Walter! Where am I, and how did I get here?” He walked over to the bathroom and flicked the switch. The light from the room was blinding. She could hear water running, and when Walter emerged drying his hands with a white towel, he said, “I’m so sorry for this, Sara. I just didn’t see any other way.”

“Any other way for what?” Her voice was loud and resonated off the concrete floor. “Can’t you see, Sara? We were meant to be together. I’ve never desired a woman the way that I desire you.” She was at a loss for words but only for a moment. “Where are we?” “In my home, Sara. Well, a very special part of it.” She looked at the open door where Walter had entered. She pointed in the direction of the opening and asked, “Where does that door lead?” He got a shy smile. “Into my wine cellar and then my bedroom.” “Your bedroom? Walter, just what are you planning here?” He moved toward the third door in the room and asked Sara to follow. She stood firm at first, but her feet were bare, and the floor was cold, so she followed him hesitantly.

The room was large, it had the same red walls but white carpet. She walked in and felt a sudden rush of relief from standing on the cold concrete floor. She looked around the room; it was very neat and tidy. There was a king-sized bed with an elaborate bed frame and headboard; she also noticed that the room was warm. Walter showed her the bathroom with a hot tub and shower, as well as a dry heat sauna. There was another door that she guessed was a closet, but when she went to open it, it was locked. “What’s in here, Walter?” He smiled, “Oh that’s a special room. Only a handful of my closest friends have ever been in there with me.” That statement alarmed her. She knew that she was in trouble,

that Walter was not well, so she tried to use her medical training to manipulate him. “Well, I’m your friend, Walter. Do I get to go in there?”

He smiled pleasantly at her. “Oh, my dear Sara. First, you really, really don’t want to go in there, and please don’t patronize me. You and I are not friends; you told Marty as much this morning. He told me about the whole conversation. I really believe that we can be friends, Sara. I believe that we are really much more than that. I know you don’t see it that way right now, but I think that over time you will come to love me as much as I love you.” There was a pair of chairs in a sitting area, and she walked over and sat down on one and invited Walter to join her. He complied and sat next to her. “Walter, the conversation I had with Marty was related to working for the hospital as well as asking that you not make any more unwanted advances. Marty made the counteroffer and said that you agreed to my terms.” He nodded. “Then why have you brought me to your home against my will?” “I don’t want you to leave me, Sara. I don’t want you to go to San Diego.” She smiled and patted his bare knee. “I’m not going to San Diego, Walter. I’ve decided to accept the offer and stay with Northridge.” A smile grew across his face. “That’s wonderful news, Sara. That makes me so happy.” “I’m very glad that you’re happy, Walter, but taking me to your home against my will is wrong. I would like to go home now.” He stood up and walked out of the room, speaking as he exited, “You must be starving. I had my staff prepare us a small meal. Would you care to join me in the dining room for a late night snack?” He was out of sight when she mumbled to herself to play along. “It’s the only way you’re going to come out of this alive,” she whispered before telling Walter she was starving and following him to the dining room.

# Chapter Twenty-Five

*“You an alcoholic or something? Its okay; we’re all friends here.”*

*Steve piped up, “Hey...the guy just started working for me. We are not friends. No offense, John.”*

**T**here was no one in Santiago’s when John arrived, Valente was standing behind the bar cleaning some glasses; he looked up and recognized John immediately. John recognized him as well, and there were a few moments of awkward silence. John asked, “Is this your place, Valente?” “No. It’s now my father’s; it’s been in our family for over five generations. He wants me to take it over, but I’m still on the fence.” John ordered tonic water, which Valente gave him with a wedge of lime. “How long have you been out of the Corps?” he asked Valente. “Um...four years.” “You were special forces, so you’re still on active reserve, right?” Valente nodded. “You, too?” “Yes.” He fidgeted nervously as John sipped his drink. “So...how is Colonel Bolton?” Valente looked at the floor as he responded. “I don’t know, John. I haven’t spoken to her since her court martial.” John put the drink down on the bar and looked him in the eye, “Does anyone in this room know about your MLS in the Corps?” Valente laughed, “‘Multiple listing service?’ You would think we were realtors. No. No one knows; it’s classified.” “I know you talk to Colonel Bolton. Please pass along my sincerest regrets over her treatment by the Corps. She didn’t deserve what they did to her.” Valente just nodded and nothing more was said.

John sat sipping the beverage when Jim and Steve came through the door. They were arguing over something, and Jim was both yelling at Steve and calling out to Valente at the same time. “Oh shut the fuck up, Steve. Valente, a bucket of beers over here, please.” He plopped down on a seat in front of one of the bar tables. Steve followed suit, and John walked over and joined them. Jim looked at his glass with the lime in it, “I thought you said you didn’t drink?” “It’s tonic water.” “Hmm...I don’t know, Steve. You hired a guy who doesn’t smoke, drink, or swear.” “Do you swear, John?” “Are you asking if I swear an oath or if I curse?” Jim shot him a look and said, “Curse, smart ass!” He took a sip of his tonic and said, “I used to, a long time ago. I try not to now. It helps me keep perspective.” “How the fuck does not fuckin’ cursing help you keep any

goddamn perspective?” He looked at Steve with pleading eyes. “Hey...don’t look at me; I want an answer as well.” Valente came over with the beers and put the bucket down next to the table. Jim grabbed two, popped them open, and handed one to Steve and said, “A toast to The Iron Eagle for leaving our wives and friends alive.” They clinked bottles and took a drink. “So what the fuck do you make of this whole situation, Steve? The Eagle kills that little street thug, then takes our girls, ties them up but doesn’t hurt them, and then gets me in a shitass load of trouble.” John got a strange look on his face. “What happened to you?”

“Oh man...you’re just a kid. I know that you were married, and I mean no disrespect to your late wife, but The Eagle screwed me big time.” “How so?” “Well, he grabbed Steve’s wife and her best friend and tied them up in his bedroom closet. Okay, that’s bad.” He looks at Steve and says in a softer tone, “You know that I love Molly, Steve; I’m really glad that she wasn’t hurt.” Steve nodded and continued drinking his beer. Jim continued, “Does The Eagle cut me a break? Fuck no. First, he booby-traps the door to the head that I’m hiding in, so I can’t get out to help Steve. How the fucker knew I would go to that bathroom is beyond me.” Steve interrupted, “Oh...I didn’t tell you. He booby trapped all of the bathroom doors in the park. He didn’t know which one you were going to go into, so he had his bases covered.” “Great...thanks, Steve. I feel a lot better now. May I continue?” Steve gestured for him to continue. “So, now I’m locked in the head, I get out, and learn that The Eagle has taken the girls. We take off for Steve’s...” “Why didn’t you each go to your own homes?” “I’m divorced,” Jim said, “Steve’s happily married. It was a knee jerk reaction. Anyway, the girls were alright, so I took off to check on my ex. I get to her house and find a note from The Eagle telling me where she is.” “And where was that?” John asked. “Get this...he hog-tied and gagged her and put her in the bathroom that I was in at Legion Park while covering Steve. He leaves me a polite note, and the long and short of it is I left her in the bathroom because I couldn’t see her or even know she was there. She ends up at County; Steve and I go there to get her, and when we find her she rips my head off. You have to understand, Barbara is full-blooded Irish, born and raised in Dublin, and moved to the U.S. to go to college.

“I spent the rest of the night trying to calm her down while she kept

screaming ‘YOU LEFT ME!’ I tried to explain, but she didn’t care. I’d been freaking out because I was certain that The Eagle had killed her.” John interrupted, “Why would you think that The Eagle would kill her?” Jim stopped and slowed down, “Oh...I’m sorry. You’re new to the drama that is my life. You see, my wife divorced me several years ago because she’s, and I just learned this two nights ago, bisexual. I caught her in bed with her partner several years before she filed for divorce. So, to make a long story short...” “Too late,” Steve interjected. “Asshole. She left me for her.” “I still don’t understand why you would worry about The Eagle killing her?”

“My wife’s lover was Jill Makin; she was a recent victim of The Eagle.” “Okay, but how do you get from your ex-wife’s lover being killed to The Eagle killing your ex?” “She confided to me that Jill told her the night before she was murdered that she thought she knew who The Eagle was. She told my ex that she had met the guy, and he was a shield, and that she let him know right away that she was gay and had no interest in men. Anyway, she said that the friendship flourished, and she was going to have the guy over to their house for dinner. However, the night before, Barbara said that Jill canceled the dinner, and that she was going to do some more checking on her new friend.”

John’s glass was empty, and Jim called to Valente for a refill. John thanked him as Jim asked if he wanted a couple of fingers of vodka in it. John thanked him for asking but said no. “Have you ever had alcohol before?” John nodded, which made Jim ask if he’d had some bad experience with it. “You an alcoholic or something? Its okay; we’re all friends here.” Steve piped up, “Hey...the guy just started working for me. We are not friends. No offense, John.” “None taken.” “It’s okay, though, to confess your sins here. Jim, and I are both lapsed alcoholics.” “No, it’s nothing like that. My wife was a wine enthusiast, and we shared that passion. After her murder, I hit the bottle pretty hard. I woke up one day after missing a week of my life with no memory of what happened and realized that alcohol wasn’t the answer, so I gave up drinking. Who knows? Maybe I’ll take up wine as a hobby again, but right now I like to keep my head clear.” “Amen to that,” said Jim, and Steve and Jim toasted.

“So you think that because your ex-wife was in a relationship with one of The Eagle’s victims that he’s going to come after her?” “Yes.” “Does she know anything about him at all?” “She has his cell phone number!” John took a sip of

his drink. Jim said he ran it but nothing came up. “Then why are you afraid; it doesn’t sound like she knows anything about The Eagle.” “I called the cell phone from the head last night when Steve was talking to The Eagle before he killed the kid, and The Eagle answered and addressed me directly. He knew who I was, which means he knows where I got his cell phone number.” John took a drink of his tonic and let out a little laugh.

“Did I say something funny?” “Yea sort of.” “What?” “Hey, I know I’m new on the job, and I’ve only done a cursory profile on The Eagle, but based on his past behavior and the facts you’ve shared, neither you nor Barbara have anything to worry about.” Steve and Jim both sat back in their chairs. “That’s a pretty ballsy statement, John. How can you be so sure?” “I can’t put it into words for you guys, call it intuition, a gut feeling. I don’t think that The Eagle will come anywhere near your families again.” “That’s exactly what Molly said.” “You know, Steve, if there is one thing I have learned in my years as a police officer, a soldier, and a husband, firsthand experience with a person is always a good indicator of their future behavior. I’m not saying it’s a hundred percent, but I would say that the odds of The Eagle coming after your families again are about as good as the three of us hitting the lottery at the same time.” “Well, thank you for your insights, John. I will take them into consideration. It’s now half past one. I’m going home to my wife and her best friend because she leaves tomorrow.”

Jim laughed, “So you want to hit that one more time before she leaves?” Steve laughed, “One more time? Try two or three. Shit, I’m going to try to get Molly to drive when we take her to the airport, so that I can get a blowjob from her before she gets on the plane. I’m telling you ... Gail could suck a golf ball through a garden hose.” They all laughed. “What about you? You going back to Barb’s tonight?” He nodded, “Yea...I’m horny, and even though she’s pissed at me she thinks I saved her life. I know I’ll get some good sex after she yells at me some more.” “What about you, John? Two days off. Any big plans?” “No sir... I’m going to spend the weekend working on the new information on The Eagle, and since he got to the Basin River Killer before we did, I want to try to see what we missed.” They got up together and said good night to Valente. Before they went to their cars, Steve stopped them both and admitted that he was glad that The Eagle got Basin River.” Jim said, “Got him? The Eagle made the guy feel



everything that he did to his victims. He saved the taxpayers and the families of the victims a ton of time, money, and heartache.” John looked at the two men and said, “Yea...but that’s vigilante justice. You don’t have a problem with that?”

“Do we have a problem with it?” Jim interrupted Steve to say that on the record he’d say it was wrong and dangerous and that the police should handle it. “Off the record, however, I think the guy’s a badge. I think he knows exactly what he’s doing, and if he gets a whiff of a killer God help him. The Eagle is a well-trained, methodical thinker. Steve just told me that he thinks The Eagle is a sociopath, not a psychopath. If you ask me, I think he’s a cop with a grudge. Someone hurt him or someone that he loved, and he’s hunting for him. I think that the guys he’s caught so far were just lucky coincidences or flat out accidents. If I’m right, and he finds the man he’s hunting for, God help him. I don’t think law enforcement will even know about it.” Steve and John both remained silent. They all shook hands and went their separate ways, at least for a couple of days.



John called Sara’s cell phone again but got her voicemail and was getting concerned. He left Santiago’s and drove straight to her house. He got there a little past two a.m. Her car was parked in the driveway, and there were no lights on inside. He knocked on the door, but there was no response. There were no other cars around her house, nothing that would tell him that she had guests. He walked back to his truck and grabbed his Maglite and started to walk the perimeter of the house. He walked to the back gate and was able to access the backyard. The back of Sara’s house had large windows that looked out over a lap pool and Jacuzzi. He knew the house well. Sara had purchased it while they were dating. It was a cute little two bedroom, two bath bungalow in a great neighborhood on a corner lot with a guest house behind it right at the corner of Gothic and Aldea in Granada Hills. He walked around the pool and flashed the light into the living room windows. There was nothing out of the ordinary; the house was immaculate, which is how Sara had always been. As he looked into the living room, a memory of Amber came back to him. He saw her sitting on the couch the first time they met. He remembered Sara introducing him to her and the sparks that he felt when their eyes met. He was staring with the flashlight

a bit too long because the next thing he heard was, “Freeze right where you are. Drop the light and put your hands in the air.” He complied and as the officers approached he said, “I’m FBI, and I’m armed. My ID is in my back right pocket.” One of the officers ordered him face down on the ground with his arms out to his sides, and he complied. The other approached and slowly removed John’s weapon and dropped it next to his body. He heard the other officer calling for back up. Within three minutes there were six units surrounding the house, and his ID had been taken from him. He sat with his back against the glass windows of Sara’s living room in handcuffs.

One of the officers approached, removed the cuffs, and handed him back his ID and his weapon. “What are you doing here?” “I was checking on a friend. We were supposed to have dinner, and I was late because of a homicide. My friend is an ER doctor at Northridge Hospital; it’s very unusual for her not to answer her phone.” One of the cops asked for her name and barked out to several other officers, “This is Sara Cook’s home, guys. Her friend here, Agent Swenson of the FBI, is looking for her.” John told him that her car was there, but she wasn’t answering the door or her cell phone. “When did you last see Sara, Agent Swenson?” “About seven a.m. yesterday morning. We had breakfast together when she got off shift.” “Did you speak to her after that?” “Yes, briefly, on the phone and via email. I was supposed to have a free night, so I was planning on having dinner with her.” A cop who recognized her name walked up to him and asked, “Are you hitting that?” “First, that’s none of your business, and, second, I hate that phrase.” “I’m sorry if I offended your sensibilities. I’ve asked her out half a dozen times, and she won’t even give me the time of day. What’s your secret?” “She’s an old friend, and she doesn’t date cops.” “You’re a cop.” “Yes I am. I was also a Marine before I was a police officer, and now I’m a federal agent. Sara can’t handle the uncertainty of the police lifestyle.” “I guess you know her really well.” “I do, and I know that something’s wrong.” He had no sooner said the words when he heard an officer call out that he could see broken glass on the kitchen floor.

They rushed the front door and entered the house. Within five minutes, the house was lit up like a shithouse in the fog. They found a broken vase with two dozen long-stemmed roses but no sign of a struggle. John looked around the scene very carefully; he found the note that came with the flowers. He asked for

a pair of crime scene gloves, and one of the officers handed them to him. “It’s not a crime scene at this point, Agent Swenson. It’s at best a missing person. I bet she just went out with a friend.” “How do you explain the broken vase and the roses?” “I don’t know. Maybe they fell off the counter when she left.” John shook his head. He took the card and put it into an evidence bag. He noticed the open packet of rose food on the edge of the counter. That’s when he picked up the odor, the sweet odor, “Oh, this guy is good. Mask the chloroform smell with the roses.” He picked up the rose food packet with a pair of tweezers. As he was placing it in the evidence bag, he saw the faint edge of a transponder chip in the single sugar-sized pouch. He placed it into his evidence bag and looked around for any other clues. He took a sample of the water on the floor from the vase which was almost completely evaporated and a scraping of the dried liquid. He said, “We have a missing person’s case here. Who wants to take the report.” The first officer on scene reminded him that they couldn’t make a missing person report until she had been gone for twenty-four hours. John nodded, took his bag of evidence, and announced he was leaving the scene. He told them he would file a report if he did not hear from Sara by morning.

As he was walking toward his truck, he heard a shrill little voice call his name, “John...John...is that you son?” He turned around to see Sally Owens on the corner with her walker. “Oh, Mrs. Owens, I’m so sorry. I didn’t see you over there. I can’t believe you recognized me.” She smiled and said, “You’re a hard fellow to forget, Officer Swenson.” He smiled and apologized for all the commotion. She asked if everything was okay, and he explained that Sara was missing. “Oh my,” she said, “that’s terrible.” “Mrs. Owens, did you see Sara today?” “Why yes, yes I did. I saw her drive up this morning and go into her house.” “Did you see anything out of the ordinary?” “Well, now that you mention it, I saw a truck delivering her some flowers earlier this afternoon.” “Do you recall if there was a name on the truck?” “Yes. Evans Florist. They’re on Sherman Way in Reseda.” “Did you notice anything else out of the ordinary?” She thought for a moment and said no. “Thank you, Mrs. Owens. Why don’t you get some sleep. The police are working on it.” She smiled, and John turned and went back to his truck. He knew there was foul play, but he didn’t want to tell the black and whites. He learned a long time ago that street cops are clueless.

He started down Gothic toward Kennedy High School when he realized he

needed to get back on the freeway. He turned around just passing Sara's house when he saw Sally Owens waving a handkerchief in the air. He stopped his truck in the middle of the road and jumped out. "Is everything okay, Mrs. Owens?" "Oh, John, I'm so glad I caught you. I totally forgot." She handed him a piece of paper. "This car was parked in front of my house for a long time this afternoon. It seemed suspicious, so I wrote down the license plate number." He unfolded the paper and saw that Sally had written 'black Mercedes' and the license plate number. He leaned down and gave her a kiss on the cheek." "Thank you, Mrs. Owens. This will help a great deal. You get some sleep now, but please don't mention this to anyone else. I will handle it." She nodded in agreement, and he helped her back into her home. He got back in his truck and started down the street toward Balboa Boulevard. He plugged the plate number into his dash computer, but he knew before the information came back who the car belonged to. Walter Cruthers.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

*'The house was a labyrinth, and as he looked over the data, closely memorizing every twist and turn, he felt like a mouse in a maze.'*

Jim got to Barb's at two a.m. and let himself in, resetting the alarm behind him. The house was dark except for a lone light emitting from the kitchen. He tossed his keys in the basket next to the door. Barbara was sitting at the old butcher block table sipping scotch with the uncorked bottle in the middle of the table. He didn't say a word as he took a highball glass from the cupboard and filled a bowl with ice. He threw a couple of cubes into his glass and into Barb's, poured himself a drink, and sat down across from her. There was silence between them as Barb stared off into space. He took a smoke out of his shirt pocket and offered her one. She took the cigarette, and he lit it for her and then lit his own. "Are you still pissed at me?" "No...I really wasn't pissed at you." "You want to talk about it?" "There's not much to talk about." "How did he get you, Barb?"

"I came home from work. The house was armed. I unset the alarm and dropped my keys in the basket. I had a bag of groceries and was planning on surprising you with a steak dinner. I know how much you love a good porterhouse. I was putting the groceries away when I heard a man clear his throat. At first I thought it was you. I turned around, and he was sitting right where you're sitting now." "What did he look like?" "He was dressed in all black." "What color were his eyes?" "He was wearing a black mask, but it wasn't like a ski mask or a costume mask. It was flat black, almost like latex. His eyes blended with the covering like he had a film over them." "How tall?" "He was sitting the entire time; he told me what to do, and I did it." "So what did he tell you to do?" "He placed a pair of zip tie cuffs on the table in front of me. He asked me to please turn and lay facedown on the floor." "Did he really use the word 'please'?" "Yes...I have to say he was very polite and apologetic while abducting me. He took my wrists and put the cuffs on; he asked if they were too tight, and I told him no. He told me he didn't want to hurt my wrists. I did as he asked, and I felt him tie my feet and then put a blind fold on me like one of those black out masks people use for sleep." "What then?" "He apologized for Jill's death." "Huh?" "He gently lifted me off the floor and put me back on this chair.

He told me that Jill's death wasn't his fault; it was her own." "Okay, you're losing me." "Do you want me to tell you what he said or not?" "Sorry. Go on."

She took a deep drag off the cigarette and a swig of her scotch. "He wanted me to know the truth about Jill's death. I didn't say a word. He told me that Jill had met him at the gym the night after canceling dinner and invited him out for coffee. He accepted, and she drove. Instead of driving to the local Starbucks, she pulled her service weapon and told him they were going for a ride to Sumner Mill Works. When they arrived, she ordered him to walk to the main entrance of the mill. That's when she said, 'I know who you are, and I know what you're going to do.' He told her he didn't understand, and she ordered him to his knees, but he didn't comply. He heard the whir of a bullet passing his ear before he heard the sound from her weapon. He ran to hide and watched her go back to her car to get her Maglite. As she searched for him she said, "I know that you're The Iron Eagle, and I know that you're planning on killing my grandfather. He was only doing what you've been doing by trying to clean up the streets. He's fed up with the prostitutes and the junkies, so he's been eliminating them. I'll make you a deal, you come out and I'll take you in...that will go a long way toward advancing my career."

Barbara paused to take another drag off her cigarette and swallowed the last of her scotch. Jim got some more ice and poured them each another glass. "Go on," he said calmly. "He said that Jill was in such a hurry to kill him that she didn't follow proper procedure in clearing him of any weapons. He told me that as she drew nearer, he pulled his weapon and prepared to fire, but it wasn't necessary. She was so intent on looking for him that she didn't see the ravine on the opposite side of the wood where he was hiding. He told me he saw the ravine and made a noise to draw her attention; she turned in his direction but lost her footing and fell down an embankment, landing neck first on a concrete block. She had struck her throat and was struggling to breathe." "Some of this rings true to the crime scene, but she had been strangled, and The Eagle left his calling card. Why would he do that if he was the intended victim?" She took a drink and stubbed out the cigarette. Jim offered her another, and she took it, only this time her hand was shaking. "I asked him that very question. He said she was still breathing and able to talk, and that she became really distraught and told him that she was certain he was The Eagle and that he knew about her grandfather

and his friend, Stewart Roskowski. He said he took a pair of latex gloves from his pocket and told Jill that she was correct. That he was The Eagle. And he thanked her for the tip about her grandfather and Roskowski.

“He said she started to cry while gasping for air, and he didn’t want to see her suffer. He told her that she was dead as a result of her own bravado and strangled her to end her misery. He left his calling card to draw her grandfather to the scene.” “Did he say the name of her grandfather?” She shook her head. “That explains a lot.” “What does it explain?” “It’s a long story.” “Did he say anything else to you?” She nodded and told him that he had no intention of harming her and apologized again for Jill’s death. “He said he had wanted to explain it to me for some time, but it was a little difficult to do given his situation.” Jim finished off the last of his drink as did Barbara, and he took the glasses to the sink and washed them out. “What I don’t understand is why he took me at all if he meant me no harm.” Jim spoke while drying the glasses with his back to her, “He took you to hurt me.”

He turned around and saw the perplexed look on Barbara’s face. “He told Steve that he had taken the people that we loved the most as insurance for his escape before killing the kid. He got to Molly, her friend, and then you.” “That makes no sense. We’re divorced. We hadn’t even talked in nearly five years.” Jim put the glasses back where they belonged and sat down in the chair. “I think he was banking on me still having feelings for you and wanting to protect you.” “Was he wrong?” “Did I come breakneck speed into the ER looking for you?” She smiled. “You big softy!” “You know how I feel now, but, had it been a few days earlier, who knows!” She stood up and walked over to him and pressed her chest against his. “And what do you think would have happened if you hadn’t loved me and come looking for me?” He looked down at her beautiful blue eyes looking into his, her red cheeks and perfect lips. He bent his head forward and kissed her and said, “Your cute little ass would still be at County, or you would have had to take a cab home.”

She frowned and kissed him back, then whispered “You left me, you son of a bitch.” “Ah...but I came back for you, you nasty little prig.” She laughed and grabbed his ass and said, “Come on. I need a good fucking.” “What you need is a good spanking,” he said laughing. She grinned and said, “You’re right. You need to put me over your knee and give my ass a good whipping.” She took off

up the stairs, her t-shirt rising and lowering as she ran panty free. “I’m taking the whole weekend off, young lady. You’re gonna be sore and walking bow legged come Monday.” “I sure as hell hope so,” she said as they disappeared into the bedroom.



Steve found Molly and Gail curled up together on the couch in the living room asleep with the television on. He went into the kitchen and poured himself a glass of orange juice and sat down in the breakfast nook looking out at the street lights. He took a piece of paper that was laying on the table and a pen and started jotting down some notes. ‘Jill Makin, Barry Mullin, Stewart Roskowski, Francis Statler, Billy the Kid...’ he looked around the kitchen and whispered to himself, “You’re an efficient and merciless killer. Who the fuck are you?” He put the pen down when he heard a sleepy voice enter the kitchen; it was Gail, and she asked if he had just gotten home. He nodded. “Long day.” He finished off his juice, “You could say that. How was your day?” “It was nice.” She pulled three empty wine bottles and a gin bottle from under the sink and said, “It looks like it will just be you and me in bed tonight. Molly really tied one on.” “Did you two drink all that?” She shook her head, “I had a bottle and a half of wine. Molly kept the party going and polished off the rest of the wine and the last of your gin before passing out on the couch.” “Hmm...” “Oh, don’t be too hard on her.” He nodded. “I don’t get it. How can you be so relaxed?” “It’s all about perspective, Steve. First, I knew that the man who was in this house the other night wasn’t going to hurt us.” “How could you know?” “I’ve been down that road. I would have known. I also know that life is finite; we all have a date with death, so live for today for tomorrow we die.” He laughed, as did she. “What are you drinking?” “Orange juice.” “Straight?” He nodded. “Oh, now that just won’t do.” She grabbed a bottle of vodka, another glass, and the orange juice and said, “follow me.” “What about Molly?” She looked into the living room where Molly was asleep in a blanket and yelled, “MOLLY, STEVE AND I ARE GOING TO HAVE DEPRAVED SEX. YOU WANT TO JOIN US?” There was a loud snore from the couch. “I don’t think she wants to join us.” He walked behind her up the stairs, “What if she wakes up and comes looking for us?” “Well, depending on when she finds us, she will either find me sucking your eyeballs out of your head using your cock as a straw, or you fucking me up the ass because I want it



really, really bad, and Molly's only an occasional fan. Or perhaps she'll just find the two of us spent and asleep when we're done." Steve was following blindly after her. "That okay with you?" "I'm sorry, what...I stopped listening after you said you were going to use my cock as a straw." She laughed as she pushed him down on the bed and undid his pants. His eyes rolled back in his head when she took him into her mouth.



It was half past three when John walked into the container at Parson's Trail. He opened his gym bag and took out the equipment he had used earlier in the day at Cruthers' house. He attached the USB cables into his laptop and downloaded the contents from the units. Two spreadsheets popped up, one showing all of Cruthers' security zones, both hardwired and wireless, as well as their functions. The next page was a very detailed blueprint of the house. "Thank you, Mr. Cruthers. You obviously don't understand counter intelligence map scanning." The blueprint included a legend, which gave John a very precise look inside the home. The house was a labyrinth, and as he looked over the data, closely memorizing every twist and turn, he felt like a mouse in a maze. If he was to move about without Cruthers knowing he was there, he would have to know the house by memory, both inside and out. The total square footage was mind boggling, but much to his good fortune, the largest concentration of security units were located in a very small area of the home, and based on what he could glean from the blueprint and security data, it was the master bedroom or a room adjacent to it.

He was able to pull Cruthers' file and saw that he was ex-military. Marine Corps. Drafted in '73 and discharged honorably in '77. He was a Vietnam veteran, a chopper pilot, and the leader of an amphibious assault unit. He was the President and CEO of WEC Medical Industries, which owned and operated three dozen for-profit hospitals on the west coast. The report showed that Cruthers founded the company in 1980, and that it went public in 2000. The list of medical facilities WEC owned was huge, and John scanned the hospital and medical clinic names for familiar ones. He saw Northridge Hospital and the date it was acquired by WEC. They took over full control in 2001.

Cruthers had no criminal history, not even a parking ticket or traffic violation. John cross-referenced the hospitals with a public record search

through Experian and used every state and federal database he could access. He also cross-referenced media outlets and news stories using keyword optimization, using rape, murder, kidnapping, missing persons, and assault in his search. The computer scanned the databases, and although he was getting a lot of hits, most were related to substance abuse and anger management services provided by WEC-owned facilities. He was getting ready to pack it in and head for Cruthers' house when three unique hits caught his attention.

The first was about a missing girl last seen in the waiting room of the West Hills Medical Plaza. Her body was found in a dumpster in Whittier a week after her disappearance in November '99. The second article mentioned a missing nursing student from Canoga Park Regional Hospital. Her family reported her disappearance in February 2001, and her body was found seven months later in an abandoned house in South Central LA. Then, there was the story on the front page of the *Los Angeles Daily News*. 'The body of Doctor Amber Lynn Swenson was discovered on Wednesday, March 21, 2003, after being reported missing by her husband, Officer John Swenson of Granada Hills the previous day. The article didn't go into the details of her death; he knew what the murderer had done to her. He compared the three cases and saw the pattern that Jim had been talking about. All three victims were taken or worked at medical facilities, and all but one, Amber, had been missing for months. He pulled the case files and autopsy reports on the other two victims, and their injuries were consistent with Amber's. But with one huge exception. The other victims had been abused and tortured over a period of months according to the coroner's reports. Amber was only with her killer for twenty-four hours, and the coroner put her date and time of death between ten p.m. and one a.m.

"Why didn't you keep Amber longer?" he mumbled to himself. He found an obituary describing her as a strong-willed and powerful physician and friend. 'Amber was passionate about saving lives and would never take no for an answer. She refused to bow to pressure when it was applied.' "Oh my God," he said out loud, "you killed her because she wouldn't comply with your demands!" He closed the search engine and studied the blueprints long and hard then filled two gym bags with equipment and donned his black outfit, and headed for Malibu. He didn't know what Cruthers' game was, but he was certain that Sara was with him, and he knew it was against her will.

# Chapter Twenty-Seven

*‘He laid in the bed, his imagination running wild, with tears running down his face, thankful for what he had and afraid and sad about their future.’*

**W**alter had served Sara a wonderful meal and then took her back to the bedroom off the large red room in the wine cellar. He was a perfect gentleman, outside of ignoring her requests to go home. She heard the door lock behind him as he walked out of the room in the wee hours of the morning. Exhausted and light-headed, she realized that Walter may have drugged her; she had to find a way out. She went into the bathroom, but there were no windows or other signs of an exit. She walked the room pounding on the walls, only to learn they were concrete. She got to the locked door and tried with all her might but could not get it open. She didn’t know it, but Walter was sitting in his little room watching her every move. He smiled as he watched her moving around like a mouse in a cage. She finally gave up and collapsed onto the bed and fell asleep. Once Walter saw that she was asleep, he went to bed. The sun was just starting to rise when he closed his eyes.



John pulled his truck behind the same dune he had parked behind the day before. He put on his mask and ran across the street in the pre-morning light, aided by the shadows of palm trees and brush. He made his way to the driveway and turned on the unit sensor on his belt. He used an imaging and visualization technique he learned in the Corps, and he moved from zone to zone undetected. He moved down to the beach and then disarmed the system leading into the boat house and entered. He placed one of the gym bags under the tarp of a small vessel in a slip next to the entrance. He looked around and could see that the entire building was sensor sensitive, and the doors leading in were motion activated. He took a mental inventory of the building and where he had stowed his equipment before moving to the house.

The sensor unit on his hip beeped twice, letting him know that the area was active. If it sent off a soft, constant tone, he would know that he had tripped a sensor. He moved toward Walter’s bedroom. There was a large infinity pool built right up to the bedroom windows. There was only one small door leading out of

the room to the pool, but he knew that wasn't right and upon further examination he could see that the walls were on rollers, and they opened. He moved silently behind the bedroom where the greatest concentration of internal sensors were located and found an air intake shaft. While observing the house, he was impressed with the amount of cement that was used in its construction. He used a pen knife to remove the air intake screen and entered the shaft. It was large enough to allow his whole frame to fit with his gym bag in front of him. Based on the blueprints, these were intakes that fed four areas of the house. He guessed that at least two of the four were panic rooms, allowing Cruthers to take refuge in the event of a robbery or natural disaster.

He moved in the direction of the room with the largest amount of sensors. He took a small black box from his bag, turned it on, and put it back. "That will jam any signal that his sensors might be putting out," he whispered as he moved down the shaft. When he reached the end he could see a bright light, and as he moved closer to the grill he could see a gray concrete floor and red walls. There were motion sensors on the grill that he knew were jammed, so he slid his pen knife into the grill and moved to loosen it from the wall. He was concerned that it might be anchored in with concrete bolts, but the grate was merely set with an epoxy resin. He worked feverishly to loosen the grate, and when it broke free it started to fall toward the floor. Before the whole thing came crashing down, he caught the top of it.

He lowered the gym bag to the floor and then slipped from the shaft. He pulled out a small torch from his bag and placed the grill back in place then heated the sides of the grill until the resin softened and the steel reattached to the wall. He looked around and knew that there were infrared cameras in all directions; he scanned the room and saw three doors. In the middle of the room he recognized the unit that took up the bulk of the space; it was a torture rack, and he moved in for a closer look. The rack was impressive, definitely medieval, and probably from the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> century. It had been refurbished and modernized. Where there was once cloth webbing, it had been modified with steel. He could see that the unit had been adapted with electrical cables that, based on the size of the wiring, could deliver up to 220 volts to its victim. The table had a receiver, and he knew that this was Walter's pride and joy. It definitely let him know that Walter, at minimum, was in the bondage and S&M

lifestyle. He took out four small round canisters the size of golf balls and placed them on the steel rack where the restraints were fastened and placed them onto the steel that held them in place. They were conductors and would intensify or block the current that the table had been modified to supply. It would also allow him to block the current remotely if Sara ended up on the rack. He pulled out a remote sensor and was able to grab the controlling signal. With a few presses of a button, he had taken control of the table. The first unit made a sharp click when he placed it near the steel. The magnets on the units were strong, and he was careful when placing the other three.

He moved across the room and tried each door, but they were locked. He pulled out a small remote control and pressed two buttons. The red light on the top of the unit scanned back and forth until he heard a click releasing the lock on the first door. He opened it slowly. It was dark inside, and he was temporarily blinded by the white in the room when he switched on the light switch. It took a few seconds for his eyes to adjust, but he realized he was in a bathroom that looked more like a nuclear clean room. He looked around, but there was nothing of interest to him, so he exited the room, turning off the light behind him. He moved to the next door and did the same thing. The lock clicked, and he opened the door and turned on the light. He looked around and whispered, "Impressive." Every type of bondage and torture device known to man was in the large room. "The guy is kinky...but that doesn't make him a killer." He moved amongst the instruments, and as he did he could smell the distinct odor of dried sweat and blood.

He moved on and found a small hook-like device that reeked of bodily fluids. "Okay...this guy is not just kinky; he's a killer." He took the device and slipped it into his bag. He moved out of the room, and as he shut the door he left the light on. He looked back to make sure the room was well lit. He took the remote out and set the two locking codes into its memory. There was a door on the other side of the room, and as he moved toward it the sensor on his belt beeped three times. The sensor to this door was live. He moved the remote into 'program' mode and there was a click, and the lock opened. He locked the signal into his unit, opened the door, slipped in quickly, and closed it behind him. The sensor on his belt let out a low sustained tone. He knew that the sensor had been tripped. What he didn't know was if anyone was monitoring things on the other

end.



Walter was fast asleep at eight a.m. when he heard the alarm. It woke him, but by the time he was fully alert the sound had stopped. The sun was shining, and he laid back down for a few seconds, then shot out of bed and went to his remote room closet. He looked at the monitors, but they showed nothing but static. “What the heck?” He walked out of the closet and called Gerald and told him what he was experiencing. “Let me log in remotely, Walter, so I can have a look.” He could hear Gerald humming and typing. When he came back on the line he said, “It looks like the wine cellar video has been knocked out. I warned you that this could happen. Do you want me to send someone over to troubleshoot it?” “What about the rest of the sensors and cameras, Gerald? Are they working properly?” “I’m running a scan now.” He was still humming, “Everything looks fine, Walter. It’s the two wireless units that are causing the problem.” “Well, shut them down!” He had anger in his voice that Gerald hadn’t heard before. “Are you okay, Walter? You don’t sound like yourself.” Walter regained his composure and apologized, saying he just wanted to be able to see his cellar. “I’m sorry, Walter, but I can’t shut the two wireless units off remotely. They are not integrated into the system that way. I told you yesterday I need to hardwire them. If you want, I can come over or send someone over. We can work on them right away, but I need access to the cellar to hardwire them, or we’ll need to remove them.”

“Oh, Gerald, I don’t want the bother over the weekend. Come on Monday first thing, okay?” “Yes, Walter. Don’t fret; your wine is safe. You just won’t be able to see or hear it for the weekend. I don’t know why you need to hear it, but, hey, that’s your thing.” “You’re right, Gerald. I’m overreacting. You told me there could be glitches. I know the unit is secure, and, since you say the house is fine, I trust your judgment. Enjoy the rest of your weekend.” He hung up the phone and walked back to the closet; the monitors still had snow, and he had no audio. “Well, I will just have to make conversation with Doctor Cook the old fashioned way.” He dressed for the day and asked Margarita to prepare breakfast for two and asked her to bring it to his bedroom sundeck. She nodded and continued with her preparation.



The Eagle carefully moved across the floor of the dark room on his hands and knees with his bag in his mouth. He heard rustling ahead of him and stopped. He had night vision goggles in his bag but didn't want to make a move until the sound ceased. When it stopped, he gently unzipped his bag and felt for the goggles. He placed them on his head, clicked the switch, and the room was lit. He could see a bed directly in front of him. He stood up and looked around the rest of the room. There were two other doors besides the entrance. One of the doors was open, and he walked quietly over to look inside. It was a bathroom. He turned around and looked at the bed and saw Sara asleep on a pillow, curled up in a robe.

He pressed his hand against his throat to make sure that his voice altering disc was on the larynx and whispered, "Ms. Cook." She rustled a bit but didn't wake. When he took her hand, she didn't react, so he checked her eyes and could see her pupils were dilated. Given the blackness of the room that would be normal; what wasn't normal was the deep breaths she was taking. He had slept with her enough through the years to know she had been drugged. He looked around the room to the second door over from the bathroom. He moved over to it and placed the remote unit against it, and the red light started moving back and forth until it toned and the lock released. He set the remote for that door as well and now had all the doors in the room programmed, so he could access them. He turned the knob and pushed open the door when suddenly his goggles went white; he knew that a light had come on.



Walter opened the door to the bedroom where he had put Sara. John was in the dark doorway with the door barely cracked. He could see Walter enter with a syringe in his hand. He walked over to Sara, rolled up her sleeve, and gave her an injection. She didn't respond to the pain. It was only a few seconds before she was alert. "Walter? What's going on?" "Good morning, Sara. You're a little confused. Right now you are experiencing what is known as lost time." She sat up on the bed and looked down at the robe. She could see her own cleavage and asked, "Where are my clothes, Walter?" "How about some breakfast? You look hungry. We can talk over our meal." She got up and was a little wobbly. He caught her as she started to fall back onto the bed. "You want to move slowly, Doctor Cook. I gave you a powerful sedative earlier." "You drugged me?" "You

had a rough night, and I knew you wouldn't sleep, so I put a little something in your beverage at dinner." "What did you give me, Walter?" "Please calm down. It was just Valium."

She was regaining more and more of her faculties as John watched and listened. "How much drug did you give me, Walter? Benzodiazepines can be fatal if not dosed properly." "You needn't worry about that. Let's have some breakfast." She clutched her chest and said, "I'm having some tachycardia," and started to cough. "It's harmless; it's supraventricular tachycardia. You'll be fine. I gave you a stimulant to wake you up." "Walter, what the hell are you doing? You've kidnapped, drugged, and done who knows what else to me." "Oh Sara... kidnapped is a strong word. We're on a date." She looked at him, perplexed. "A DATE?" "Please don't raise your voice, Sara. I don't like being yelled at." "Well, you better get used to it, pal. I want my clothes, and I want out of this room. I'm going home." Walter looked sad. "I was really hoping that we could spend some quality time together, Sara. You were so pleasant last night after we talked. We had a nice meal. Now, I have breakfast for the two of us out on my sundeck. It's getting cold as you argue. Can we talk about these things over breakfast?" "NO! I WANT OUT OF HERE. I WANT TO GO HOME, WALTER. YOU HAVE A SERIOUS PROBLEM." His dejected look fell away as he grabbed her by the hair and pulled her out of the room.

The Eagle crawled out of the dark room and followed, not that Walter would have seen him in his blind rage. He struck Sara in the face and tore the robe from her body, throwing her to the floor. "I tried to be polite. I tried to be respectful, and you continue to disrespect me. Fine, I will treat you in the manner fitting a two dollar whore." She was sprawled nude on the concrete floor. He grabbed a leather strap from the rack that he had been pulling her toward and tied her left wrist. Using the strap, he pulled her over to the table. There was a steel clip on the other end of the strap, and he opened the latch and connected it to the steel mesh of the table. He walked over to the torture room and moved to open the door, digging around in his pockets for the remote when he realized he must have dropped it in all of the confusion in the guest room. The Eagle saw his fumbling and noticed a small black device on the floor by the bed. He grabbed it and rolled under the raised bed, it was nearly two feet off the floor and the Eagle had to be careful not to hit the steps that led up to the bed on both sides. He slid



under the dust ruffle, keeping out of sight, as Walter began walking quickly in his direction. The Eagle could see his feet and hands as he methodically searched for the remote. He could see motion on the bed above him as Walter looked desperately.

“Where can that thing possibly be?” He knelt down on the floor and began to feel around near the bed. The Eagle placed the remote in front of him just underneath the edge of the bed. Walter must have seen the dark color because his hand reached in to grab the remote. He no sooner had the remote when he felt the grasp of a hand on his arm. He screamed as The Eagle pulled him toward him. Walter’s eyes were huge as he stared back into the deep black eyes of The Eagle under the bed. He kept a firm grip on Walter’s arm, and with all his might stood up against the box spring and mattress, and the bed went flying as The Eagle rose from the floor holding Walter firmly by the arm. His hulking frame made Walter look like a child. He pulled him up by the arm and threw him against the wall, the concrete stunning him. The Eagle dragged his body into the bathroom, and he zip tied his hands and feet, then hog-tied him. He took a piece of nylon rope and put it around Walter’s neck and tied the other end to his feet. If he attempted to move, he would strangle himself. He grabbed his bag and walked out into the red room where Sara was restrained on the table. She started screaming when he came into the room.

“Silence! I’m here to help you not hurt you.” She stopped screaming and asked, “Who are you and where’s Walter?” “Walter is...let’s say...napping. As to who I am, you might know me by reputation or nickname. I’m The Iron Eagle.” She started screaming uncontrollably, and as he tried to calm her down he mumbled “Where’s the Valium when you need it?” She shot him a dirty look. “That’s not funny. So, you heard what he did to me?” He nodded. “Well, what are you going to do about this?” He untied her wrist and said, “First, I’m going to get you somewhere safe.” He handed her the robe, and she put it on. “I have no idea where I am, so how can I go somewhere safe?” He took her by the hand and walked her out of the room. They walked through the wine cellar and into Walter’s bedroom. He crossed over to the sun deck where breakfast was waiting. “Now, listen to me very carefully,” he said, “I don’t know what I’m dealing with here.” She cringed while looking into the lifeless eyes in the mask. “You don’t know what you’re dealing with? Are you blind? This nut job kidnapped and

drugged me, stripped me and had me chained to that, that...table thing in there last night. Then he drugged me again, and he just slugged me and ripped off my robe. After all of that, you still don't know what you're dealing with? Are you diminished in some way?"

He started laughing, and he could see that she was getting more and more angry. "Look, I want you to stay right here." He opened the gym bag and laid it on the table. He pulled out a small case with two small brown objects inside. He said, "Which ear do you use when you speak on the phone?" "What?" "Please, just answer the question." "My right ear." He took out one of the brown objects and said, "I'm going to place this into your ear." "The hell you are..." She pulled back as he heaved a sigh, "Look, Sara...is it?" She nodded. "I'm trying, at minimum, to keep you from being raped, but I think in reality from being murdered. This is a two-way transmitter; it will allow you to hear me and vice versa. It will also allow me to hear you if you're in distress. Now, I need to go find this guy's panic room, and I need you to sit still until I return. Okay?" "How do I know you aren't going to kill me?" He shrugged. "Believe me, lady, if I was going to kill you, you would already be dead." She tipped her head to the right, and he placed the unit into her ear canal. "I'm going against my better judgment and trusting you." "The way I see it, you don't have many options." He started to leave but stopped, "Oh...and if you get any bright ideas about running off, the whole house and the grounds are booby trapped, so if you run, while Walter might not have killed you with his own hands, his traps just might." "You're a real people person, aren't you? You should do motivational speaking." He just shook his head as he walked away with her yelling, "I can take care of myself, you know... I took self defense classes when I was in school."

He walked back toward her and said, "Really? And how are those classes working out for you?" She shot him a look, "He got me by surprise." He walked toward her and half bent down, "He got you by surprise? He just kicked the shit out of you. Might I suggest a refresher course? That's if I get you out of this alive. If you know my M.O., I'm usually dealing with folks who have done really bad things to people. In your case, so far, I'm not too late." He left her at the table in her robe looking out at the sea. There was a basket of pastries on the table. She took one and started eating.



Jim and Barbara were lying next to each other in bed completely spent. They didn't sleep a wink; she looked over at him and said, "We haven't fucked like that since we were kids." "I don't think we've ever fucked like that." They were breathing heavily and were covered in sweat. She laughed and said, "How cliché is this? Two old farts laying in bed smoking cigarettes after sex." He laughed, "Oh shit...think of it like one of those old black and white gangster movies. The PI gets the sexy client into bed." They chuckled and continued their conversation until late into the morning.



Molly staggered bare-assed and hung over into the bedroom. Steve was asleep with Gail on his chest. She shook her head and said, "Well, he has certainly enjoyed himself this week." She went into the bathroom and promptly threw up. She had a skull crushing headache, so she took some aspirin then brushed her teeth. She staggered back to the bedroom and slid in next to Steve, putting her hand on his chest. He roused from sleep and asked if she was okay, "Never again, Steve, never again." He looked alarmed. "But you two started it. I just took advantage." "Not that, silly...I'm never mixing wine with gin ever again." His laughter woke Gail, and she rolled off his chest and onto her back. She asked the time in a sleepy voice. Steve lifted his arm and looked at his watch, "Eight fifteen. What time is your flight?" "Five thirty." Steve put his arms around the two woman and held them tight. He could hear them both gently breathing as they fell asleep. He laid there thinking about all that had happened in the past week and over the past several months. He turned his head and pressed his nose into Molly's hair and took a deep breath. For the first time since he learned she was sick, he started thinking about what his world would be like without her. He tried to put the thought out of his mind, but it wouldn't go away. He laid in the bed, his imagination running wild, with tears running down his face, thankful for what he had and afraid and sad about their future.



The Eagle knew that Walter had a panic room in his bedroom; it was just a matter of finding the entrance. He also knew that, like the rest of the locking mechanisms in Walter's house, it would be an electromagnetic lock, so the most difficult thing was to find the entrance. He scanned the room visually. There were several promising areas. There was a large library off the master suite with

ornately carved mahogany book shelves. He moved around the area concentrating on the internal walls but nothing moved or gave a reading on his remote sensor. He walked across the room and placed the remote against the only outside facing case and picked up a signal. He moved the remote slowly over the books until the unit's red lights began to move back and forth and lock into position. He heard the click of the lock release and found the book on the shelf where the strongest signal emanated, "The Complete Works of Edgar Allen Poe." He shook his head. "This doesn't bode well."

When he removed the book, a secret door opened into the room, and behind it was a solid steel door. There was a flat knob, and he pushed it. The door opened much to his surprise out toward the sea instead of a room. It revealed a staircase. He walked down the stairs which opened into a huge underground bunker. "Walter, I have to admit you have an ingenious way with architecture." He pressed a button on a panel at the bottom of the stairs, and the room lit up. It was a home within a home. Every aspect of the house could be monitored from this location; it had a living room and a full kitchen. He heard a faint hum, so slight he thought it was a fan, but, in actuality, it was a generator. There were three other rooms off the main room and each was a bedroom with its own bath. He just shook his head as he went back for Sara.

As he approached the top of the stairs, he heard a strange sound in his ear piece. He ran through the bedroom back to Sara only to find her unconscious, laying face down on the table. "What the hell?" He lifted her head, and she had raspberry jam on her face. He pulled her back in the chair and found a half-eaten pastry in her hand. "She's going to be pissed!" he said out loud as he picked her small frame up from the table and carried her to the room. "I can take care of myself," he whispered, "I know self defense." He laughed to himself as she snored in his arms. He took her into the panic room and laid her on a sofa. He found some bottled water in the kitchen and put it next to her on the coffee table. He started for the exit and looked back one more time at her sleeping face, smiling and shaking his head as he moved up the stairs.

He locked the door, closed the bookcase, and headed for the red room beyond the wine cellar. When he entered the bedroom, he could hear Walter groaning. He walked into the bathroom and picked him up and took him into the bedroom and laid him on his side on the mattress on the floor. "Walter.

WALTER!” His eyes opened, and he shuttered in shock when he saw The Eagle looking back at him. “What are you up to, Walter? What are you doing here?” He didn’t respond. “You’re not just a bondage or fetish freak, that much I know. Why did you take Sara...and more importantly ... who else have you taken? Why and what have you done with them?” The Eagle scanned the room. He looked over at Walter who was staring off in the direction of the bathroom. The Eagle followed his line of sight and realized he wasn’t looking at the bathroom, he was looking at the closet that The Eagle had hidden in when he first came into the room. “Hmm...” he said playfully, “what’s in the closet, Walter?” “Don’t you go near there. That’s hallowed ground. You are not worthy!”

“What makes that room so holy, Walter?” When he didn’t respond, The Eagle moved for the door. “You will never get the door open; you’re not worthy.” The Eagle took out the remote that Walter had been looking for and showed it to Walter.” He cried out as The Eagle pushed the button, and the lock clicked open. In an effort to stop him from entering the room, Walter was trying to kill himself, pulling with the full force of his legs against the rope that was around his neck. He was deep purple when The Eagle ran over and cut the rope. Walter’s feet hit the mattress hard, and The Eagle removed the rope from around his neck and retied him in a regular hog-tied position. “Well, well. Whatever is in there has you really freaked out.” He walked back toward the door with Walter screaming in the background.



Sara could hear screaming in her ear. She was dazed and trying to make sense of the noise and her ever-changing surroundings. She saw the bottle of water and was dying of thirst, but it seemed like every time she consumed something in Walter’s house she ended up drugged. The screaming had stopped, and it was quiet in her right ear again. She suddenly remembered that The Eagle had placed a hearing device in her ear. She picked up the bottle of water and looked at it very closely. She could see that the seal on the plastic band around the cap was unbroken. “Oh, what the hell.” She cracked the bottle open and took a drink of the water. She heard a rustling sound in her right ear and then a gasp.”



The Eagle heard Sara waking up as he entered the room while Walter screamed in the background. He flipped the light switch and gasped at what he

saw. The room was the modern day equivalent of a dark room. All four walls were covered in photographs. There was a small table in the far corner of the room with a digital printer and a camera sitting on it. He started to examine the photographs and realized right away what he was looking at. "Walter, you sick, depraved man. This is a shrine. These are photographs of your victims." There had to be a hundred different photographs on the walls. They were grouped on the walls in fours. As he looked at the pictures, a pattern started to appear. It was a chronology of the time he spent with his victims. One of the first sets of photographs showed a young attractive woman. In the first picture she was smiling and playful; in the second, she had a look of fear in her eyes. She was nude, strapped to his rack, and her face was contorted in pain in the third. But the fourth was the most disturbing of them all. Her forearms had blood running down them where she had been nailed to a large piece of wood, and Walter was in the picture with her. She was beaten and bloodied, and Walter was holding her up like one would hold a trophy. He had a smile on his face and was giving a thumbs up sign.

There were pictures of a boat, which The Eagle recognized from stowing his gear before entering the house. In another set of pictures, there was a very young nude girl nailed to a board with large black balloon-like objects on each side. She couldn't have been ten and was screaming in pain as Walter held her high over his head, her feet tied at the ankles. He was smiling big again and posing like a strong man, lifting the child over the head of his shirtless body. There was a sign hanging around the child's neck that read, *'Look Mommy. I like to free dive. No hands.'* He also noticed the open side to the boat where swimmers would climb on board. Walter was holding the child over the water. "Walter, what have you done?" He stormed into the room and grabbed him by the shirt and screamed, "What have you done, Walter? What have you done?" There was no reaction.

Sara could hear the events unfolding. She didn't know what The Eagle was looking at, but she could tell that it was terrible, whatever it was. He walked back into the room and opened his gym bag and exchanged his black leather gloves for a pair of latex ones. He moved his fingers across each photo. Every one was the same as he went around the room. He thought he was at the end of them when he saw a small cluster of photographs set off from the others. They

were grouped the same way, but these were different. It was a group of three separate women. He looked closely at the first one. It showed a scowling woman in her mid-thirties. In the second, she was nude on the rack, distorted in agony. In the third, she was being sexually assaulted, and the final picture looked like a crime scene photo of her dead body on the ground. He moved his finger over the others until it froze over a half covered photograph. There on the wall before him was a photograph of his wife, Amber. She was expressionless initially; in the second, she was being sodomized by Walter. He was holding a camera in his hand, shooting the picture in a mirror so he could see Amber's face contorted in agony. The third photograph showed her contorted face, her nude body on the rack, and her eyes wide with fear and suffering. And in the final picture, Walter stood next to her, smiling as always, giving his thumbs up gesture, holding her nude body up against the dumpster where she was later found, with a little sign hanging above her breasts that read, *'I did my doctor!'*

The Eagle took down the photographs of Amber and put them in his pocket, and Walter saw him do it. He left the rest of the room intact and calmly walked toward Walter. He picked him up by the ankles and carried him out into the red room, sweeping the floor with his head as he went. "Ten years, Walter, nearly ten years, I've been searching for you." He threw him down on the ground next to his rack, and his head hit the side of the wood and steel table. The Eagle drove his right leg into Walter's shoulder, pressing it into the pointed steel on a corner of the rack. As Walter screamed in pain, The Eagle walked over to the torture room. He returned with an assortment of devices. He placed them on a rolling table with his gym bag. He cut the rope, removed the zip ties, and drove his knee into Walter's balls. While he coughed and spit on the ground, The Eagle opened the restraints on the torture rack and put Walter on it. He didn't say a word as he beat Walter on the rack. Sara could hear Walter screaming in agony but didn't understand why The Eagle was torturing him. She was helpless to do anything ... or so she thought.

She looked around the room and saw a phone on a desk in the corner. She ran for it and picked it up and placed it to her right ear. The feedback was deafening, and she dropped the phone to the floor. She moved to pick it up again when she heard The Eagle's voice. "You took her from me, Walter. You took the love of my life from me, you bastard." Sara stopped everything and put down the

phone. She paused and listened.

The Eagle pulled a photograph from his pocket and showed it to Walter, “Do you recognize her, Walter? Do you?” Walter cried in pain. The Eagle said, “Allow me to jog your memory.” He unzipped the back of his mask and pulled it off. There was feedback in Sara’s ear as she heard a zipping noise and then the rustle of material. She heard Walter start screaming and she could hear The Eagle say, “Take a good long look into my eyes, Walter. Do you remember me?” Walter’s screaming and talking at first were undiscernibly terror stricken. The sounds he was making were of a man who had seen a ghost, a horrible creature that scared him beyond the ability for rational thought. She heard him crying, and as he cried his words became clearer and clearer. “I’m sorry; I’m so sorry. I beg of you, please stop this.” The Eagle held the photograph up to Walter’s face and asked, “What’s her name, Walter? Tell me her name.” He cried out, “No. Please. You don’t understand. Let me go.” “Her name, Walter. Tell me the name of the woman you’re torturing in this picture.” Sara froze. Walter tried to arch his back against the steel and wood of the rack. “I don’t remember. It was a long time ago.” “Wrong answer, Walter. You know her name. Tell me her name.” Sara could hear Walter sobbing when he spoke a name she could never have expected to hear. “Amber...Doctor Amber Swenson.”

“Your memory is just fine, Walter. Yes. This is my wife...you took her from me. You tortured, raped, sodomized, and then killed my beautiful wife.” He held up the picture of Walter sodomizing Amber. “What are you doing to my wife in this picture? You sure look happy. Look at the agony in my wife’s face.” “I wanted her to be my girlfriend, but she refused me.” “What are you doing to her, Walter?” “Please ...” “Walter.” “Raping her.” “No. You’re doing something even worse. What are you doing that has you so excited?” “I’m performing sodomy on her...” “Is that what you were going to do to Doctor Cook, Walter?” Sara started crying and calling out to him, “John...if you can hear me, please, please come and get me out of this room.” He had totally forgotten that she was in the house. Even worse. She was wearing the ear bud he had given her. She had heard everything. “John, please. Please, John, come for me.”

He struck Walter in the middle of his chest, knocking the wind out of him, then took the remote and said, “I know what this table is capable of...did you do to Sara what you did to my wife.” “No...I swear! I placed her on the rack, but I



didn't hit her or harm her in any way." "So you didn't run a hundred and ten volts of electricity through her body?" He shook his head. "Good," and he pushed the button sending the current through Walter's body. As he convulsed under the strain of the current, he bit through his own tongue. The Eagle shut off the power and looked at Walter, now a victim of his own masterpiece of torture. He was still convulsing on the rack when The Eagle said, "If you will excuse me, I have another matter I need to attend to."

He walked out of the room and went to get Sara, who ran into his arms before the door was all the way open. "Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God, John!" She kissed his face, tears running down her cheeks. He embraced her and cried as well. "It's been you all along?" He nodded, his mask off and face covered in sweat, his eyes red with tears. "You have been trying to find Amber's killer?" He nodded. "You never hurt a good person?" He shook his head no. "You found all of the serial killers that are attributed to The Eagle?" He nodded. "You are The Iron Eagle." "Yes," he said softly. He pulled her out in front of him; his arms outstretched holding her by the shoulders. "Are you going to call the police?" "No...I just want to be there when you kill this madman. Can I see the pictures?" He didn't want to show her, but her eyes told him she needed to see. He took them from his pocket and handed them to her. She gasped as she looked at the last photograph, tears rolling down her face. "He was going to do this to me?" "Worse." Her face grew solemn. "Where is he?" He turned and walked back to the cellar and the red room. Walter saw John come back into the room with Sara right behind him. He wasn't sure how to react, but he grew excited. "Sara, my love. You've come to talk some sense into Mr. Swenson. Tell him, darling. Tell him how in love we are." Silence met his greeting.

She walked over to the table where John had set several items and grabbed a long black board with holes in it and started beating Walter's genitals. He screamed and John stood by watching, saying nothing. "That's for what you did to my best friend, you sick fuck!" He screamed and begged for mercy. John walked over to Sara and took the board from her hands; she was shaking and crying. "You may not want to be here for what I'm going to do next." She didn't move. He pushed a button on the remote that raised the table. He released the restraints from Walter's wrists and ankles, and he fell crying to the floor. He crawled toward John only to be kicked in the face as he reset the restraints. Sara

looked around. “Where is the room?” He pointed to the bedroom where she had been restrained, and she left them. John called out to her not to touch anything. He picked Walter up and placed him face first against the wood and wire of the rack and restrained his wrists and ankles again. He lowered the table back down. Walter had his head to the right, looking over at John who was pulling a long tube with a plug on it out of his bag. “I have been carrying this item with me for nearly ten years. I’ve been saving this for when I found the killer of my wife. Walter recognized the curling iron and started screaming. “I read my wife’s autopsy report and what was done to her by her killer. This is a very special modified unit, and it is just for YOU, Walter!” He took out an orange extension cord and plugged it into the wall between the two rooms.

Sara walked through the now destroyed bedroom and into the closet. She looked at the photographs. The women and young girls all nailed to pieces of wood on a boat with Walter smiling in every picture. She looked carefully and noticed that there were many photographs of water with bubbles on the surface. She yelled to John, “I know why no one ever caught on to Mr. Cruthers as a serial killer, John.” There was no response. She walked back into the room as John was putting petroleum jelly on Walter’s rectum and all over the curling iron he had in his hands. “After he killed Amber, he figured out that he needed to dump the bodies where no one would find them.” John nodded. Walter was still. “You’re going to feel a little bit of pressure, Walter,” and he inserted the curling iron into his rectum. Walter yelped as the ten inch long oversized barrel was forced deep into his anus. John took a belt and strapped it to each side of the table across Walter’s ass and then attached it to the curling iron to make sure that it would stay in place. He then took the two cords, walked up to Walter’s face with the sockets in hand and said, “Things are going to get really HOT for you! Doctor Cook and I are going to step into your bedroom to prepare for your departure.” He plugged the cords together, and the two walked out as Walter began to scream.

John closed the door to the cellar and went into the small closet where Walter liked to watch his victims. He took out the frequency jammer and turned it off. Suddenly all of the monitors came to life, and they could see and hear Walter thrashing on the rack. “At least here I can control the volume.” He turned it down, and they watched him scream and squirm. “You know the rectum is very

vitreous; he could bleed out,” Sara said coldly. “He won’t. I made some modifications to the unit. It’ll get twice as hot, nine hundred degrees to be exact, and I have it programmed to shut off after two minutes. Any bleeding will be cauterized as it happens.” “He’ll bleed out when you remove it. All of the tissues will adhere to it. He’ll die almost instantly.” He smiled. “Who said anything about removing it?” She smiled back at him. “You know this type of torture is urban legend?” John looked at Walter thrashing and screaming on the monitor. “Well, perhaps, BUTT...you and I know it has been done.” Sara looked coldly at the screen and Walter and asked what now. “We need to prepare Mr. Cruthers’ boat, so we can take him ‘free diving.’” She smiled and took John’s hand as they opened the walls of Walter’s bedroom and walked down to the boat house.

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

*‘She was walking between the stairwell and the parking pillar where her car was parked when the call was dropped. ‘*

It was three p.m. when Molly left with Gail for the airport. Steve had so much work to do that he couldn't go with them to see Gail off. She grabbed him and laid a huge kiss on him and said, "This has been the most fun I've had in a long time. We have to do it again the next time I'm out." Steve got a big smile on his face and asked when she was coming back. Molly frowned at him. "I told you this was a one time thing, mister. When Gail comes back again, we sleep in our separate beds." He lost some of the gleam in his eye, but Gail winked at him and made a lewd gesture with her hands. He hugged Molly and winked at Gail. The girls left for LAX, and Steve went in to read John's profile of The Eagle. As he read, he started to see a pattern. John proposed that The Eagle was in search of justice for someone who had wronged him or someone that he loved. "Here's a newsflash, this does not explain nor does it create a serial killer with a desire for revenge. The two don't translate into violent behavior toward multiple victims." He continued reading the profile until he nodded off in the chair in his study.

Gail and Molly talked the whole way to the airport about the adventures of her visit. Gail said she had a great time. They laughed together as they drove down the 405 Freeway toward LAX. Gail looked serious and asked Molly, "When are you going to break the news to him?" Molly stared straight ahead at the freeway. "He knows." "How much does he know, Moll? Don't leave him out in the cold. You've been together too many years to do that to him." "Gail, I've been talking to Howard Cohen. He's been my lawyer and best friend for forty years. I've asked him to handle things, and Steve knows that." Gail got a somber look on her face. "You've spoken of Howard at great length through the years, and I know how much you love him. Have you told him?" She nodded. "What stage are you?" There were tears in Molly's eyes, and she wiped them away while trying to drive. "Four." Gail started to cry. She whispered under her breath, "Oh my God...how long?" Molly couldn't speak and just shrugged her shoulders, fighting with every ounce of strength to hold it together. Tears streamed down Gail's face as the car exited the 405 at Century Boulevard. She

pulled her cell out of her purse, and called the airline to check on her flight status. The automated voice relayed a flight delay due to weather. “Well, it looks like you and I are going to have a little more time together, Moll. Will you stay with me and have a beer and talk?” She nodded, her eyes filled with tears as she gripped the steering wheel for dear life, gasping and sniffing as they headed to the airport’s short-term parking and a conversation that Molly didn’t want to have but needed to.

“You need to tell Steve. You need to tell him everything. You owe him that.” There was a tense moment of silence. “You’ll take care of him, Gail. I know that. I will tell him soon. Let’s leave it at that.” They didn’t speak the rest of the way to the airport; Gail just nodded in understanding and that was all.



Jim and Barbara finally got out of bed about three p.m. They prepared a meal together in the kitchen and talked about old times. He confessed to her that he was hopelessly in love with her; she agreed that he was hopeless, but that she was hopeful that the two of them could build on their newfound relationship and perhaps have a life together again. He told her that he loved her, and she reciprocated the feeling as the two sat down to a late afternoon lunch of porterhouse steaks, baked potatoes, and asparagus. Barbara opened a wonderful Cabernet, and they toasted to new beginnings and old flames with a clink of crystal and the sound of cutlery on fine china.

Molly saw Gail off and walked back to the parking lot. She hit the unlock button on her car as she walked across short-term parking at LAX and looked back at the planes taking off, knowing that Gail was on one of them. She pulled her cell phone from her purse and hit speed dial. “Howard, it’s Molly. How are you?” She was walking between the stairwell and the parking pillar where her car was parked when the call was dropped.



Steve reported Molly missing at ten p.m. that night. Her car was found unlocked and untouched at midnight in short-term parking. Her phone and purse were on the passenger seat, but there was no sign of her. Molly Hoffman was missing.



John and Sara carried Walter, half conscious and moaning, down to his boat.

They threw him on the floor in the back face down, the belt and iron still securely in place. They pulled the boat out, closed the doors, and sped out into the late afternoon sun. John drove on the open sea following Walter's preprogrammed GPS favorites in the Garmin mounted on the dash. Walter had named the spot 'Free Diving.' The location was a mile and a half off shore, and there was a strong breeze, and the water was choppy. John stopped the boat and pulled out one of the precut planks that Walter had in his boathouse. He took the bucket from under the seat where Walter laid and threw the piece of wood down onto his back. He heaved at the weight of the wood and labored for breath. "I have to admit, Walter, you put a hell of a lot of thought into this. I like the touch of using a deep router to make a nice deep groove around the whole piece of wood then filling it with molten lead. You have made your own anchor." Sara chimed in, "It was also an added bonus nailing the twenty pound sinker weights to the sides after you affixed your victim to the wood." John flipped Walter onto his back, the hot steel iron now cured into his rectum. He screamed from the agony of the iron pushing deeper into him and the reality of what he was about to endure. "Well, we would love to chat with you all night, but we have dinner plans."

He took Walter's left arm and pulled it tight against the wood. Sara handed him one of the horseshoe-shaped pieces of steel, and John slammed the hammer down onto the steel, pinning Walter's arm to the wood. He did the same to his right arm, stretching Walter so hard and flat that he pulled his arm out of its socket. He looked Walter in the eye, as he wailed in pain and said, "I just want to make sure that you get the whole experience." Walter screamed as the first spike was driven through his lower forearm. Sara laughed as John drove the second in and pulled his body over to the open side of the boat. He nailed the two weights to the sides of the board and then untied his ankles. "Okay then, I'm not one for mementos, Walter, so there will be no pictures. However, you won't be needing these anymore." He grabbed Walter's scrotum and penis in his hand and swept over his anatomy with his field knife, removing them in one quick motion. With blood squirting from the hole where his manhood had been, John smiled, showing Walter his bloody penis and testicles as he threw them into the sea.

"Enjoy the water. You might make a meal for the local sharks before you hit the deep water." John took the knife and cut the arteries in Walter's arms and

legs then hung him over the side of the boat, allowing the blood to flow down into the water. “I’m not going to let you have the peaceful death of bleeding out, Walter. I want you to feel everything that your victims felt. Then, I’m going to watch your body sink down below the surface with the satisfaction of knowing that you will drown while looking up at this boat and seeing me wave goodbye.” And with those words, he looked Walter in the eye and said, “May God not have mercy on your soul.” He threw Walter into the sea face up, so that he could see John’s face as he hit the water as his anchor carried him to his deep, watery grave.

John and Sara stood on the upper deck as Walter’s body sank beneath the choppy sea. They could see his feet fluttering as if trying to swim to the surface, but all that returned were residual air bubbles from Walter’s lungs. The two sat side by side as John drove the boat back to Walter’s home. They scrubbed the house for any sign that Sara was ever there and then called 911 from the home phone, leaving all of the evidence in plain sight. The two got into John’s truck and headed back to Sara’s. “So, what’s my story?” “You were at my place in Long Beach waiting for me to come home.” “How did I get to your place?” “Your old friend and new employer, Walter Cruthers, offered you a ride and dropped you off before he went home for the evening.” “I guess it’s true what they say.” “What’s that?” John asked. “The devil is in the details.”

# Evil and the Details

*Book Two: The Iron Eagle Series*

## Prologue

Steve Hoffman stood on the front porch of the home he shared with his wife, Molly, looking out over the lights of the San Fernando Valley. It was nearly three a.m., and he couldn't sleep. It had been nearly two months, and there was no sign of his wife. The nightmares were relentless, and he had to drink himself into unconsciousness or wander the house as he was doing this morning. As he made a cup of coffee and sat staring at the clock, his cell phone rang. "Hoffman." There were a few moments of silence before he told the caller he was en route. He was already dressed, so he locked up the house and set the alarm. He left a note on the kitchen table for Molly should she return in his absence. It had been there since the night she vanished.



Jim O'Brian was already on scene when Steve arrived and was pacing near the edge of Balboa Park with a cigarette in his hand, talking on his cell. He saw Steve making his way across the parking lot and hung up the phone, took a drag off the cigarette, and said, "I have to hand it to you, Steve, you're one subtle son of a bitch." Steve was looking at Jim with a blank look on his face. Jim pointed at Steve's jacket. "FBI..really...F...FUCKING...B...I? I mean, Steve, this is a homicide, and it's in my jurisdiction. I called you for a damn consult. Thank you for advertising to the fuckin' media over there." Steve shrugged his shoulders and told him to get over it and asked, "What do we have?" Jim took a hit off the cigarette and started walking across the grass in the park to a yellow tarp on the edge of some bushes. He pointed at the tarp, and Steve leaned down and lifted the edge. Steve looked for a long time, shaking his head. "Who found the body?" Jim pointed to two patrol officers off in the distance. The two men walked over and Steve asked, "Which one of you found the body?" An older officer with a large beer belly and a bad attitude responded. "My partner and I are assigned to walk the park throughout the night. I found him a little past three." "Did you see anyone in the area when you found him?" He shook his head. Jim asked if he touched anything. "I checked for a pulse before I realized his throat had been slit. I got some blood on my hands." Jim shook his head and motioned to Steve,



and they walked away.

Jim threw his hands in the air. “You know what this means? He contaminated the scene!” “He couldn’t have known when he found the body; he did what any one of us would have done.” Jim nodded and said, “Yea...well, if he’d used a goddamn flashlight he would have seen the fuckin’ blood!” Jim had just finished talking when the coroner’s van pulled up. They saw Jade Morgan jump out with her team and walk toward Jim and Steve with a smile on her face. “So...?” Jade asked. Jim said, “Male, between twelve and fifteen.” “Gang hit?” Jim shook his head. She walked over and spent about ten minutes with the body before walking back to Steve and Jim who were talking on a knoll. It was nearing five a.m. and the faint hint of sunlight began to brighten the horizon. Jade had a somber look on her face as she spoke. “Definitely not a gang killing. I won’t have an official time of death or preliminary cause until I get him on the table.” Jim crowed, “Oh fuck, Jade, the kid’s throat is slit from ear to fuckin’ ear; you know goddamn well what killed him.” She looked at Steve and asked how he was doing. He shrugged and asked for an immediate autopsy. She agreed and told them they would have more information in a day. She walked off and Jim said, “No sense in standing here with our cocks in our hands. You and I know we have a new serial killer on our hands.” Steve looked on as the sky brightened against the ominous rain clouds; a few sprinkles hit their faces. “So, why did you call me, Jim, if you don’t want the FBI’s help?” He was just getting ready to answer when they heard John Swenson’s voice calling to them as he approached the knoll. “This one is messy, Steve; this is the third kid in two weeks, all dumped in parks. It’s your case now. I’m officially turning it over to you and your telepathic sidekick,” Jim said as John approached.

“Another kid?” Jim nodded. “Is it the FBI’s case now?” Both Jim and Steve nodded. “Jade will have a preliminary report later in the day. John you go take a look at the scene and get our people out here to photograph and take control. We’ll meet back at the office later this morning.” John nodded and walked up toward the yellow tarp. Jim took a cigarette out of his top left pocket, lit it, and said, “I’ve got a feeling it’s going to be a hell of a day, Steve, a hell of a day.”



Howard Cohen had just finished breakfast and was getting ready to leave his apartment for his office when his phone rang. He answered it and stood silent

listening. He hung up the phone and walked out of the apartment and took the elevator to the basement parking structure. He walked around the corner into a dimly lit corridor when he heard a quiet female voice say, “Thank you for coming down, Howard.” He turned to see Molly Hoffman standing alone in half darkness. The only sound that could be heard as they looked at each other was the sound of the rain pounding the street outside the building.

## **About the Author**

Roy A Teel Jr. is the author of several books, both nonfiction and fiction. He became disabled due to Progressive Multiple Sclerosis in 2011 and lives in Lake Arrowhead, CA with his wife Tracy, their tabby cat, Oscar, and their Springer Spaniel, Sandy.

