

Those Who Will

by Gary Markman



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For Karen, my biggest fan
And a true hero

For Leslie, my Rock
And my favorite doctor

In loving memory
Mel Hornick
My Teacher

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Pfc Nathan Abramowitz
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Capt Katherine Kendall Dalton
Cdr Thomas Kendall
Maj Reuben Michlin
PO3 Clinton (CJ) Stites
CPO Harold (Lefty) Sturtevant

Chapter 1

Bob Jamison was not a religious man.

Yet, when anyone saw him smile at his daughter, Melanie, they knew he was giving thanks to his God.

This particular Saturday, Bob Jamison had awakened early. Five AM on a Saturday morning was early even for him. He lay in bed next to his wife of 15 years. Martha loved the security she felt when her back rested gently against her husband's muscular chest. After listening to Martha's gentle breathing for a minute, Bob rolled over on his back, being careful not to jostle the bed too much, as he intertwined his fingers behind his head, feeling his still thick head of black hair. He was absently staring at the ceiling, but what he saw was a scene from the night before, as if it were playing on a screen. Just after dinner, Bob had been on their back lawn where he was stretching in preparation for his nightly two mile run. He'd heard a noise, but as he was staring straight into the setting sun he could see nothing for a moment but a blazing orange aura. Suddenly, without warning, Melanie came hurtling out of the blinding sun, right at her father. She was laughing happily, riding her bike, her long, blond hair waving wildly behind her. She swerved at the last minute, doing a 180 in the process, and skidded to a stop a few feet from him. Bob Jamison was startled, and his first unconscious reaction was to lower his head slightly and tense his body as if preparing for physical conflict. He was unaware that a low, guttural, growl had escaped his clenched lips before he realized that the "threat" was 10-year-old Melanie.

And he smiled.

Melanie, who was still laughing, had leaped off her bike, and in one long jump, wrapped herself around her big, muscular daddy. “Ooh, I love when you growl. Do it again,” she cooed happily, her little arms wrapped around his thick neck, her mouth a few inches from his right ear. Bob, gently placed his large hands under his daughter’s armpits, and lowered her to the ground, where he stared down at all four feet 8 inches of her lithe, seventy pound body, and mustering as much of a tone of parental authority as he could, pronounced, “Young lady! Where is your helmet!”

Melanie jumped up, kissed him on the cheek, and said, “Oh, Daddy! You worry too much.” But she knew she had to run back to the house and retrieve her bright, white helmet, which she did, with her father running with her the whole way, pinching her little bottom a few times just for good measure.

Melanie Jamison loved being alive. She was a precocious kid, never having been convinced that she wasn’t capable of doing just about anything. She was the star of her fourth grade, co-ed basketball team, beating all the boys. She won the NFL punt, pass, and kick competition, much to the chagrin of her mother. She was the best student in her class, and she always participated in all the fund raising activities. And despite her abilities and success, she was very popular with the girls in her class, and while the boys were prejudiced because, after all, she was a girl, they would admit secretly that she was pretty cool.

She had pale, blond hair, which she loved to wear in a ponytail; big blue eyes that were filled with wonder; and if you looked closely, you’d just be able to make out six light freckles randomly dispersed around her nose. She loved to wear the Yankee cap her father had bought her, and when she tucked her ponytail into it, she looked much like a boy, something her friends would tease her about. Her mother worried about her slender body constantly, telling her daughter, “You’re all skin and bones. Eat.” To which Melanie would giggle, jump up from the table, give Martha a quick kiss on the cheek and run outside to play.

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As Melanie came home for dinner one night, her father sternly asked, “Where have you been young lady?” because Melanie had been twenty minutes late, and had been nowhere around that he could see.

Melanie ran over to him, jumped in his lap, resting her little arms on his broad shoulders, and cooed, “Oh Daddy. You’re always worrying!” Bob Jamison had never stayed angry with his daughter for more than about a minute, and as she jumped up, they began the millionth running of their favorite game, tag.

Bob Jamison, though not a big man, was very muscular. He stood about five ten, weighed a little over two hundred pounds, and was pretty much as rock hard as he’d been when he went to summer training camp with the Chicago Bears as their fifth string running back. He’d played football for a small college in Montana, and he’d been the last man taken in the NFL football draft. He never made it with the Bears, being one of the first to be cut, but he was very proud of how far he’d gotten—“eighty per cent on guts,” he’d like to say, “...and twenty percent talent.” Everyone agreed that his daughter had gotten his athletic genes, something he loved. His friends asked him if he had wanted a son, and they never believed him when he said, “Nope. Before she was born, all I wanted was a happy, healthy kid. And after she was born I couldn’t be happier with Mel.” His friends didn’t really believe him, but it was the truth. Melanie Jamison lit up her father’s life. And Bob Jamison loved his daughter with everything in him.

Saturday dawned with the kind of promise only a spring day could offer. The pale blue of the early morning sky gradually deepened and the few wispy clouds that had lingered from the mist of the night before quickly disappeared. Bob Jamison quietly slipped out of bed, careful not to wake his wife. He gently lifted a corner of their comforter and gingerly placed it over her shoulders. He threw on a pair of ratty gym shorts and a white tee shirt, and headed for Melanie’s room. Melanie and her dad had a Saturday ritual of going for a long bike ride when the weather permitted, and they had a contest of sorts. Melanie liked to lay in bed feigning sleep as her father would tip toe into her room, and just

before he'd wake her, she'd jump up and yell, "Gotcha". Whereupon Bob would yell back, "Got me! I got you!" And he'd pick up Melanie as if she weighed no more than a feather and twirl her around the room, as Melanie would squeal as only a little girl could. Martha would sit up in bed, having been awakened by the racket from her daughter's room, and smile to herself. She loved this Saturday ritual, which usually ended with Bob and Melanie hopping on their bikes and pedaling off to wherever.

After Bob & Melanie had pedaled for over an hour, they happened upon a small waterfall at the side of the road, something Melanie had never seen before. She was fascinated by the majestic arching of the water and the rainbow of colors that the morning sun manufactured among the droplets. "Dad, let's go explore it!" Melanie was already off her bike and running down the trail.

"Sweetheart, we can't. We have softball practice. We have to get back."

Melanie had been so taken with her fascination of the waterfall that she'd forgotten about practice. It just wouldn't look good for the coach and star player not to show up. So, reluctantly, Melanie trudged back up the path and retrieved her bike. As her father tousled her hair, he said, "We'll come back, Mel. I promise." And the two of them started pedaling back toward softball practice.

After practice was over and all the girls had been picked up by their moms and dads, as Melanie helped her father load the bats, balls, bases, rakes, and spare gloves into their dusty, eight year old, Subaru station wagon, she said, "Hey Dad, let's go back to that waterfall. OK?"

Bob, who had a ton of chores to do, said, absently, "Maybe later, Honey. I've got some things to do."

Melanie shrugged, a little sad, but said nothing. She knew if she told her father of her plan, he'd squelch it.

After Bob unloaded the softball paraphernalia and went into the house, Melanie took off on her bike heading for the waterfall. She knew her father would be upset with her for going so far from home, but she

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rationalized in that little girl way, “Well, he didn’t say I couldn’t.”

Melanie had been pedaling for a little over 30 minutes, eagerly getting closer to the waterfall when she saw a black Jeep Cherokee in her mirror. She pulled to the side of the road, but the car slowed and stayed about thirty feet behind her. At first, Melanie thought nothing of it, believing that the driver was being extra cautious about driving behind a kid on a bike. But something about the car made her a little nervous, so she stopped her bike. The car also stopped, still thirty feet behind. Now Melanie was more than a little nervous, and she jumped back on her bike and started pedaling for all she was worth. The car started again, remaining behind the little girl.

Melanie had now traveled almost four miles from home, and she was growing tired. The car began to speed up and Melanie noticed that instead of pulling out toward the middle of the road to pass her as all the other cars did, this one was staying close to the side of the road.

Chapter 2

Antonio de Galvez was a very bad man.

He was not an abused child. He did not live in the streets. His belly was always as full as he wanted it to be. In fact, his parents doted on him. Mightily. He was the youngest of five children. His father, Rodolfo de Galvez was an abogado—an attorney—in Mexico City, and his madre, Senora Elena Castilla Vazquez de Galvez devoted her life to caring for her four daughters, the youngest of whom was sixteen when Antonio was born. Senora Elena came from the Spanish aristocracy, her father having been the mayor of Castillan del Mar, a small town in the south coast of Spain. Rodolfo had a successful practice, and through the years, gradually worked his way into the political machinery of Mexico City. Rodolfo worked hard, always making it a point to be wherever he needed to be. If the mayor was wooing gringo money men from Los Estados Unidos, Rodolfo was at the mayor's side. If the governor needed a "situation" smoothed over with a minimum of fuss, Rodolfo was there. Rodolfo saw to it that the VIP guests were entertained lavishly in every sense of the word, not infrequently supplying women as well, although he personally would never disrespect his wife and family by partaking in the festivities.

And so his practice flourished. Rodolfo de Galvez was a happy man. Almost. He had one fervent wish, and that was to have a son—an heir if you will—a male child to pass along the name de Galvez to future generations. Although he loved his four daughters—not infrequently jumping through the kind of hoops only little girls could put their

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daddies through—he had an ache inside him for *his son*. Four times he rushed his beloved Elena to the hospital only to have the doctor come out of the delivery room; four times presenting him with “a beautiful, healthy, baby girl.” Rodolfo never spoke to his wife about it, but she sensed his disappointment—once even hearing him tell a friend, wistfully, “How I wish I had a son like yours.” Elena, not being knowledgeable in the finer points of biology, yet being the deliverer so to speak, blamed herself for somehow failing at the business of producing children. By the time she was pregnant with her third daughter, she was in church every morning faithfully lighting candles praying that she would be blessed with a male child.

So, when little Antonio was born, there was a celebration the likes of which Mexico City hadn’t seen in a long, long time. Rodolfo de Galvez had his heir. Elena de Galvez had been blessed, and had in turn, done her duty and made her husband truly happy. The resentment felt by Antonio’s sisters was secondary. Rodolfo was never aware of it, and Elena—though well aware of it—would just think sadly to herself, “Get used to it. It is the way of men.”

By the time he was six, Antonio was the ringleader of his little group of playmates. His parents smiled every time they looked at him, but his nanny, Hidalgo Cisca, looked at little Antonio differently. Hidalgo was truly a gentlewoman, and she loved children. All children. Never having had any of her own, she felt that all children were hers. And she meant that in only the most benevolent way. Hidalgo was a short, stocky woman in her mid forties. She still had the jet black hair of her youth, with but a few strands of gray beginning their gradual intrusion. Her warm, brown eyes told all that was necessary to tell about Hidalgo. So, when she saw little Antonio bully the other boys, she became at once concerned and conflicted. Her duty was to little Antonio and to the de Galvez family, and yet what he did to the other children concerned her considerably.

When she thought back on the day, she always remembered the exact time, for she was standing practically in front of the old clock in the kitchen. Antonio was screaming at his friend Juan.

"You promised,!" Antonio shrieked at Juan.

"Did not! Did not!" replied Juan in that outrage that is unique to falsely accused young children.

"Did too! Did too!" shouted Antonio.

"You're a liar!" screamed Juan, as he turned to leave.

"Oh, yeah!" And with that, Antonio shoved Juan over the railing of the porch on which the boys were standing, little Juan falling the eight feet to the concrete pavement below and landing flat on his back.

By the time Hidalgo had raced as best she could down the stairs to Juan, he sprang to his feet and ran away screaming for his mommy. Horrified, Hidalgo walked slowly; very, very slowly, up the stairs to find her duena, Elena.

"What is it, Hidalgo?" Senora de Galvez knew Hidalgo's every nuance, and she could clearly see that the nanny was greatly troubled.

"Senora...I...I..." Hidalgo knew how Elena regarded her son, and had no idea how to gently approach her. So, she just blurted, "Senora, Antonio just pushed his friend Juan over the balcony and I think he's badly hurt."

For a moment Elena said nothing, her face suggesting that she perhaps hadn't heard the nanny. Then, a warm, almost benevolent, yet disturbingly blank look took over. "Now, now, they are just little boys. Come, let's see if Juan is all right."

"He's gone, Senora. He ran home crying."

"Well then, he can't be hurt too badly can he?" replied Elena brightly.

"But...but..." Hidalgo simply did not have the words.

"Oh, Hidalgo," cooed Elena as she put her arm around the older, shorter woman, "I know how much you care for the little ones. Come. I will call Juan's mother and make sure he is alright."

And as Hidalgo watched, Elena dialed Juan's mother.

"Senora Batista, this is Elena de Galvez, Antonio's mother."

"Yes?"

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“I understand that Juan fell before and I just wanted to make sure he’s all right.”

“He’s fine. Would you please excuse me? I have to attend to my daughter.”

And with that, Juan’s mother hung up the phone, and Antonio never saw Juan again outside of school.

Elena at first looked puzzled, but then she shrugged, and once more putting her arm around Hidalgo, said, “See? He’s fine.” And she walked away as Hidalgo stared after her shaking her head sadly.

That night, as Elena lay beside her husband, she felt inexplicably uneasy. “Rodolfo?”

“Yes, Elena?” Rodolfo responded woodenly, not catching the tone of his wife’s voice.

“Hidalga...,” Elena didn’t quite know how to express what she felt. “Hidalga...came to me today...with...some concerns...”

She now had Rodolfo’s attention, and he propped himself up on one elbow as he turned to her inquisitively.

Elena continued, “Hidalga felt that Antonio has been bullying his friends.”

At that, Rodolfo felt a surge of anger. “What! Nonsense! He’s just a little boy. What happened!”

Elena recounted the nanny’s story while her husband listened, his air completely dismissive. He reached over and turned out the light as he gave his wife a peck on the cheek. “Go to sleep, my dear, it’s nothing.”

But while Elena, her concerns put to rest, quickly fell asleep, Rodolfo once again recalled that day. He’d thought of the day his son had been born many times. It was almost a movie in his mind, and he lay there in bed and watched yet one more time.

The day was dark; the black and gray swirling clouds belying the fact that it was shortly after noon. The air was still; heavy and sweaty; punctuated with flashes of heat lightning as well as Elena’s incessant screaming and moaning. Fierce bursts of rain slammed against the

windows of the stately, pink stucco hospital, the very best in Mexico City.

Rodolfo sat in the waiting area near the birthing room, idly watching the huge drops of rain splatter against the small window. For some reason he seemed transfixed as he saw the huge drops slam into the impenetrable shield of the window, harmlessly breaking into tiny droplets, then sliding to their demise on the windowsill, a few feet below. He couldn't help wondering if his dream would share a similar fate.

Roberto considered himself to be somewhat of a heroic figure. After all, he was the *numero uno* abogado—attorney—in Mexico City. Yet, Rodolfo's "heroism" was limited to the field of politics, and there was no way in hell he was about to hold his wife's hand as she was birthing their fifth offspring. Although Rodolfo would never give voice to his feelings, he nevertheless felt that Elena was being somewhat melodramatic with all her wailing and screaming. After all, she'd already been through this before, sadly birthing four daughters. While Rodolfo had the luxury of being relaxed, protected against the fierce storm, as well as against the equally fierce political forces that permeated his life, his wife, just a scant 20 feet from her husband, writhed in agony as yet another contraction seemed to be tearing her in two. Aware of little else other than the periodic, excruciating pain that her God—surely a man she believed—rewarded women with for their loving sacrifice of childbirth, she was still able to feel, in the deepest recesses of heart, the cold fear that had been with her during the entire term of her pregnancy. She was not afraid of the physical pain, for she knew that—horrific though it was—it was also temporary. Nor was she afraid that her baby would have some horrible birth defect. She had felt the life inside her, and she knew as only a mother could that her baby was healthy. No, she feared that once again she would fail at her duty and give life to yet another daughter.

Rodolfo was surprised to realize that he had dozed off, and he awakened, momentarily confused by the afternoon darkness as the

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pounding rain grew even louder against the windows. A few seconds later, the beaming nurse came into the tiny waiting room. As Rodolfo was still struggling for consciousness, all he'd heard the nurse say, was, "Proud Papa." He rushed into the birthing room where Elena held the baby, now cleaned and wrapped in a warm blanket, suckling at her breast. Tears streamed down her face in seeming contradiction to the huge smile on her face. Rodolfo stopped momentarily, dead in his tracks, his heart filled to its brim, for he truly did love his dear Elena. Before he could get to her side, he realized she'd been speaking to him, yet the phrase, "your son..." had just penetrated his consciousness. He knelt gently by her bed, stroking her forehead with tenderness she hadn't felt from him in what seemed eons, tears now pooling on his cheeks. After a few moments, still kneeling by his beloved wife's side, he looked down at her, and then, very gently, touched his son, stroking his tiny back with two fingers. Elena watched her husband with equal tenderness, realizing in her heart that he still loved her after all these years. The nurses stood in the background, not wanting to interrupt the scene they felt privileged to witness.

Suddenly the room lit up as if it were high noon, and a scant second later an incredibly loud clap of thunder startled everyone. The lights flickered briefly, and Rodolfo was startled to hear hailstones pounding on the windows and the pavement below. He hadn't witnessed a storm like this in Mexico City since he was a child.

As Rodolfo instinctively reached over, pulling the blanket more tightly over his son and his wife, a burst of hail slammed so hard against the window, it cracked; the sound not unlike a gunshot. As the nurses rushed to the window with pillows and blankets, attempting to protect mother and child from the storm, another flash of lightning lit up the room.

Such had been the portent announcing the birth of Antonio de Galvez.

Rodolfo didn't understand why he seemed transfixed over that day, and he just rolled over and went to sleep.

Hidalga was very conflicted about her little charge. On the one hand, she reasoned, Antonio was but a small child, young and very much in the formative stages of his life. Hidalgo felt reassured when she thought these things. But on the other hand, there was something about little Antonio that made her feel very uncomfortable.

Just before Antonio's eighth birthday, Hidalgo visited her niece, Salina. Salina's cat had just had a litter of kittens, and it was quite an event in the family. Hidalgo thought to herself, "Maybe if Antonio had the responsibility of caring for a living thing, he'd become... well... softer, gentler." And, so it was that she presented Antonio with a little kitten for his birthday present.

"Antonio, look what Hidalgo has brought you," smiled his mother as Hidalgo handed the kitten to him.

Antonio took the little ball of fluff in both hands and held it away from his body with his arms extended. He seemed to be studying it as if he'd never seen such a thing before. He said nothing, and just stared at the little animal for a full minute. His parents looked at each other, puzzled until Hidalgo, said softly, "Why don't you put him down, Antonio. He looks uncomfortable." Antonio bent down, and placed the kitten on the floor, whereupon it started purring and rubbed against him, much to the delight of all present—except Antonio. Antonio just walked away from the kitten and went to play with one of the many toys he'd received from his parents.

Two days later, Hidalgo watched from the kitchen window as Antonio was walking in the alley at the back of the house. The little kitten was tailing along with him. Antonio stopped for a moment and looked down, away from the little animal. Hidalgo could not see what he was looking at, but she saw how trusting the little kitten was as it purred against Antonio's leg. Suddenly, Antonio picked the kitten up in his left hand, and with his right, jabbed a sharp stick into the kitten's

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head, killing it instantly. He then looked around and seeing no one, stuffed the kitten into the garbage, turned and walked away smiling.

Hidalga was so stricken with horror that she was literally paralyzed for a full minute. She turned and raced to the nearest bathroom and threw up intermittently for nearly a half hour, sobbing uncontrollably between her convulsions. Elena, hearing Hidalgo's sobs, came to the bathroom door. "Hidalga, are you all right?"

"I...I'm sick senora. Please...please just...just let me be..."

"All right, Hidalgo. But please call me if you need help."

Hidalga had been with the de Galvez family for fifteen years, had helped raise Antonio's youngest sister, as well as Antonio, both from birth, and was generally considered to be one of the family. Elena and Rodolfo de Galvez were kind, generous people, and they saw to it that Hidalgo wanted for nothing and that she was not overworked.

Finally, after an hour Hidalgo came out of the bathroom. Elena stared at her with great concern, never having seen her nanny looking like this. Her skin was pasty, her lips dry and cracked. Her eyes red and swollen. "Hidalga! What is it! What is wrong!"

Hidalga had all she could do to keep control of herself. Her life had been reduced to one task. One ostensibly simple task that was not simple at all. She had to get out of there. She had to get the hell out of there. Now. Her mind raced, and she was surprised to hear her own voice. "Senora, my...my sister is terribly ill, and I'm afraid I must go to her immediately." Hidalgo had never once lied in her life, but she could think of nothing else to say.

"What's wrong, Hidalgo? You were just there for your niece's party..."

"I know, senora. It was sudden. The doctor called with the test results. I'm afraid..." And with that she burst into uncontrollable sobs once again. Elena came to her immediately and cradled Hidalgo in her arm as Hidalgo coughed and sobbed. Finally, she stood erect, walked to the door, and said, "I'll come back when I can," lying once more.

Hidalga, a very pious woman, had come to the conclusion that little Antonio was the devil incarnate and she had no intention whatsoever of going anywhere near him again. Not ever.

As Antonio grew, although he did well academically, his parents were being called in to school more and more for disciplinary reasons. One day, when he was twelve, he was in the boys room with his pal, Ferdie. They were smoking and trying to decide who exactly was the ugliest girl in their class when suddenly the door swung open and standing before them was Senor Alberto Ruiz, their teacher of English, and one of the most respected—and one of the sternest—teachers on the faculty. Alberto Ruiz was a classic. Tall, distinguished, graying at the temples, articulate, and very, very passionate about his love; English literature. He loved the children, but only the most perceptive of them realized it—and even then, usually not for many years.

“Just what do you boys think you’re doing?” he asked quite rhetorically. Ferdie, upon hearing the door opening, had literally swallowed his cigarette, and immediately raced to a sink and started gulping water.

Antonio just stood there, cigarette in hand and replied calmly, “Smoking, Senor Ruiz,” as he took another long drag.

“Antonio, you flush that thing this instant and report to the head master’s office. You, too, Ferdie.” As he glanced over at Ferdie, Antonio slowly walked to a toilet, took another drag, and flushed the cigarette.

Senor Ruiz was a man of great dignity who prided himself on controlling his emotions in front of the children, and so he had to call on all his training and conviction to keep from whaling the tar out of that little snot nose, Antonio.

Elena and Rodolfo de Galvez were summoned to the headmaster’s office forthwith. They joined Senor Ruiz, Antonio, Ferdie, and Ferdie’s mother.

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The headmaster spoke first. "Senor and Senora de Galvez, Senora Contrera, your boys were caught smoking in the boys room. As you know..."

The headmaster, a man who brooked no disagreements, was stunned because Ferdie interrupted. "Excuse me, sir. But I was the one smoking. Antonio had taken the cigarette from my mouth because he was trying to get me to stop. Antonio wasn't smoking."

Senor Ruiz stared at the headmaster, then at Antonio. Antonio had the faintest trace of a smile crease his lips.

The headmaster was speechless. He looked at Senor Ruiz who was simply stunned.

The headmaster, now in a most awkward position, said simply, "I see. Senor and Senora de Galvez, Senora Contrera, would you please come into my office? Boys, would you please wait here."

When the contingent was comfortably settled in the headmaster's inner office, Senor Ruiz started to speak, but the headmaster cut him off. "We seem to have somewhat of a dilemma here. On the..."

But Rodolfo de Galvez cut him off. "Headmaster Cortez, I don't see the problem. Ferdie explained what happened. And," he glanced at Senor Ruiz, "I can understand how Senor Ruiz could have mistaken the situation."

Senor Ruiz, normally a calm man, was not accustomed to having either his authority or his veracity questioned, and he was clearly bristling as he started to speak. "Senor de Galvez..."

But with a wave of his hand the headmaster cut him off once again. "Senor de Galvez, with all due respect, I believe the situation is quite clear..."

Rodolfo's face was ever so slightly flushed as he sat forward in his chair and interrupted the headmaster, "Yes it is..."

But the headmaster was having none of Rodolfo's strong-arm tactics. "Please allow me to finish, sir."

The tension in the room had become quite palpable and each in his turn shifted nervously in his seat, but the headmaster continued, calmly

but sternly. "It is clear to me that the boys have fabricated a story, as boys will often do when they are caught being in the wrong. I'm afraid I will have to consider appropriate disciplinary action." And with that, he rose, signaling that the meeting had ended. Elena glanced at Rodolfo whose face was impassive, as he rose with the others. Once the adults entered the outer office, the headmaster said, "I will contact you all to apprise you of the punishment. Good day."

Rodolfo made certain that he was the last in the exiting procession, and, just before he crossed the threshold of the headmaster's office, he turned to the headmaster, looked him in the eye, and said very quietly, "You are making a mistake." And he left.

The trip home was a silent one for the de Galvez family. Antonio and his mother each expected Rodolfo to say something, but he was silent. And he remained silent as he closed the door to his ample leather and mahogany study, where he picked up the telephone.

A scant hour after the meeting, the phone rang in Headmaster Cortez' office, and as soon as the headmaster heard the voice of the president of the board of education, he knew what was coming. The president had just received a phone call from the mayor. A very brief phone call, the gist of whose message was, "Whatever the hell the problem is with the de Galvez kid, fix it."

So the headmaster was not surprised to hear the mellifluous tones of Emerito Lopez, the president of the board. "Headmaster Cortez, I'll come right to it. I've been made aware of a problem with one of your students, the de Galvez boy..."

The headmaster would not give Lopez the satisfaction of playing the game, and so he simply said nothing. Lopez continued, "Well...I understand the boy was caught smoking. I realize that it is a violation of the school rules, but really, Cortez, he didn't kill anyone..."

"Yet," thought headmaster Cortez to himself.

"So, perhaps, if the boy apologizes, we could see fit to allow him this one boyish infraction."

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Headmaster Cortez liked his job. He felt that he was an excellent leader and one who could mold boys into men. He also realized that if were fired—which was a certainty if he did not play along—he'd be molding no one into anything. And so, he acquiesced. "As you wish Senor Lopez." And he hung up the phone.

Ferdie was suspended from school for three days, and when he returned, Antonio walked up to him and handed him the equivalent of ten U.S. dollars. Ferdie looked at the money in his palm and in an incredulous voice blurted, "Hey, Tony. You said twenty dollars! This is ten!"

Antonio, who had already turned his back and was walking away, just smiled as he turned to Ferdie. "You want to keep the ten or not?" Ferdie kept the ten, not wanting to incur Antonio's wrath.

As Antonio went into the school, Senor Ruiz, who had watched all this from his classroom window, met Antonio in the hall. "You may have a lot of people fooled Antonio, but there are two people you'll never fool."

"Really, Senor Ruiz? And who would those people be?" replied Antonio sarcastically.

Senor Ruiz stared hard at the young boy. "You...and me," he said as he walked away.

He watched Antonio carefully in school that day and Antonio pretended not to notice.

At the end of the day, as Antonio was leaving, he turned to Senor Ruiz, and for no apparent reason, waved and smiled at the teacher. The smile was exaggerated; artificial, almost macabre, and it sent a cold shiver down the teacher's spine.

When Senor Ruiz awoke the next morning, he found his pet Chihuahua, gutted and tied to a tree in front of his house. The dog's mouth had been grotesquely pulled open in a bizarre caricature of a human smile. Terrified out of his wits, Senor Ruiz quit the school the next day.

Antonio's parents doted on him. To them he was their shining light. But by the time Antonio was seventeen, his sisters, who were all grown and with families of their own, refused to bring their children anywhere near Antonio. Although none of them had actually witnessed anything that would have warranted such a decision, they each responded to him the same way: with cold, stark fear. Angelina, the youngest of the girls, whispered to the others while looking at Antonio one day, "El Diablo." The others crossed themselves and nodded silently, fearing that their parents—or worse, Antonio—might hear.

In school, Antonio ran with a fast crowd. He'd lost his virginity at the age of twelve with a sixteen-year-old neighborhood girl, and he had developed a reputation as a Don Juan with some of the girls in his class, many of whom unashamedly and immodestly threw themselves at him. However, as is so often the case with sexual bragging, the stories were far more interesting than the facts, as Antonio didn't actually "do it" with any of the young ladies. Nevertheless, ego being what it is, the legend grew.

Nor would he have any of the more traditional *senoritas*. Instead, he cast his eye on Rosa Morales, a sixteen year old, from a strict Catholic background. Rosa was not beautiful, but she did have a soft, angelic face, framed by a helmet of jet-black hair. Her face was bereft of any suggestion of the guilt felt by so many young Catholic girls who had been raised under the doctrine of Original Sin and the constant specter of hell. And her eyes...if it's true that the eyes are the mirror of the soul then Rosa had the soul of an angel. She was diminutive, barely standing five feet tall, and the boys teased Antonio, because Rosa had not really developed much in the way of womanly attributes. In fact, there were those who, at a distance, sometimes mistook her for a young boy. But Rosa would have nothing to do with the flamboyant Antonio. Nevertheless, Antonio pressed on despite rejection after rejection.

One day, a young seventeen year old, Alejandro de la Cruz, moved into their neighborhood from the Dominican Republic. Alejandro was a talented baseball player, having played for the Dominican national team, and he was being scouted by a number of major league teams. He

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was also a bright, courteous, young man. For Rosa it was love at first sight. And Alex as he was called, fell equally hard. Antonio's friends would rib him unmercifully at having "lost his Rosa" to this boy scout.

One day, Antonio confronted Rosa in front of her house. "Rosa, ..." he blurted.

Rosa, who had been lost in some thought of her own, hadn't noticed Antonio, so she replied in a somewhat startled way, "Oh...Antonio... how... how are you?" Rosa could never explain the nervousness she felt around him.

Antonio, for all his bravado and false sense of confidence, was flustered. "Uhhh...Rosa..." She looked at him absently, as one might at a telephone pole or some other inanimate object. This did not make Antonio's words flow any easier, but he stammered along nonetheless. "Rosa, look...I've asked you out, and you say no. You say your parents won't let you date. You say..."

But Rosa just cut him off, not with words, but with the gentlest, kindest look Antonio had ever seen. She then spoke softly. "Antonio. I am flattered. You are a strong, handsome boy. But I am in love with someone else..."

Antonio's face fell; his face turned to stone, his eyes squinted. He said nothing. Then, he smiled, turned, and walked away. His smile sent a shiver down Rosa's spine.

Two weeks later, Antonio called Rosa, much to her surprise. "Rosa, this is Antonio..."

Rosa's voice caught in her throat, and an inexplicable fear crept over her as she interrupted Antonio wondering how she was going to get rid of this pest. "Antonio, look...I don't want to hurt..."

Antonio laughed as he interrupted, "No, no Rosa. I called to apologize. I realize that I was making a fool of myself, and I just wanted you to know that I'm sorry. I think you and Alex make a fine couple."

Rosa was amazed, but very pleased and more than a little relieved. "Oh...Antonio...thank you. That is so nice of you. I...I...guess I don't know what else to say..."

Rosa, who still just wanted to get Antonio out of her life, and who was very pleased that this was how it was going to happen, felt enormously grateful to Antonio, yet she didn't know how to close the conversation. Antonio just continued. "Well, Rosa, I'd like to make amends to you and Alex. My parents and I would like you both to be our guests at our summer cottage this weekend. I assure you that my parents will be more than adequate chaperones."

Rosa had heard about their summer "cottage". It was anything but a cottage, in the mountains overlooking Lake Chapala, and was nothing short of magnificent, with a backdrop of snow peaked mountains and trails that led to the clearest, ice blue lake in all of Mexico, the second highest in all of North America. The "cottage" had 3 wings, 8 bedrooms, 4 baths, a jacuzzi, a steam room, an indoor swimming pool, and an appropriate complement of servants. Although, Rosa had misgivings, she reasoned that with Antonio's parents there and Alex, what could be wrong? And so she asked her parents for permission, which they granted enthusiastically; her father not unaware of the obvious political connections that Rodolfo de Galvez had.

Antonio, his parents, his youngest sister, Maria Christina, Rosa, and Alex arrived at the villa—for that is truly what it was—on Friday evening. The youngsters went for a quick dip in the pool, a full Olympic size pool at that, and they laughed together and enjoyed themselves. Antonio showed no signs of the obvious jealousy that had seemingly plagued him for so long. They enjoyed a dinner of Flautas De Pollo, one of Antonio's favorites and retired for the night.

The next morning the three kids took a walk along the cliffs overlooking the lake. Suddenly, Antonio turned to Alex, and nonchalantly said, "Hey, Alex. Are you into diving?"

"Sure. I've done some diving back in the Dominican Republic. In fact, I went off a thirty foot cliff once."

Antonio smiled. "That's great. Think you'd like to try a fifty foot cliff?"

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At this point, Rosa became concerned, but both boys laughed at her, each bragging to the other. Alex was starting to like this boy who had been worrying his Rosa so much.

Antonio led them to a flat, barren ledge that overlooked, the lake. There was barely room for the three of them but they squeezed onto the ledge, Rosa in the rear, Antonio in front. Rosa got a queasy feeling in the pit of her stomach as she looked down at the shimmering water below. Beautiful though it was, it seemed so much smaller than it had appeared from the villa. As Rosa and Alex were momentarily mesmerized both by the splendor as well as by the suggestion of danger at the scene before them, without a word, Antonio, ripped off his shirt, pushed past Alex and made a beautiful, letter-perfect swan dive into the crystal water below, barely making a splash. Rosa and Alex just looked at each other in awe of Antonio's feat. Alex was feeling a little nervous as he now realized he'd been implicitly challenged by Antonio. And although Alex realized that Antonio was setting up a contest for his girl, he also knew that it mattered not at all to Rosa, because she was truly his. Nevertheless, the teenage male ego being what it is, Alex felt that he had to prove something, if not to Rosa, then to himself, and so he prepared to take the plunge. Whereas Antonio had literally ripped his shirt off in a rush of bravado, Alex carefully unbuttoned his, his fingers growing cold with fear. But, he reasoned, he was an excellent athlete, and he had done thirty feet before. "But," a voice inside him said, "that damn lake looks mighty small." Nevertheless, after Antonio returned from his climb up the mountain, his hair dripping, a huge smile creasing his face, Alex was irrevocably committed. He walked slowly to the edge of the ledge, Antonio by his side, both boys peering down. Rosa found herself involuntarily shrinking back, away from the ledge, the back of her hand pressed against her mouth. Alex crouched, his arms reaching back, and he sprung forward and upward. But just as he did so, Antonio deliberately slipped backward and with his left foot, swept Alex' right foot to the side. The impact, though not great, was enough to throw Alex precariously off balance, and as he hurtled through space to the icy water below, he frantically twisted to try to

right himself. He did a complete three sixty in the air and hit the water with his right shoulder first, immediately followed by his head which was turned slightly left. It is not a well known fact that the surface tension presented by water can equal that of concrete if a body falls through a great enough distance, and although the distance traversed by Alex was not sufficient to produce such a disastrous result, the impact did, nonetheless, dislocate his right shoulder as well as knocking him unconscious, and he sank in the water like a rock. As Rosa rushed to the edge screaming frantically, Antonio leapt into the lake —seemingly in an attempt to rescue Alex. Although he could see Alex' prostrate form clearly in the crystal clear lake water, he deliberately dove in such a way as to narrowly miss the unconscious Alex. He kept up the charade for a full three minutes, surfacing periodically, feigning that he was looking frantically, and diving again. Finally, he grabbed the submerged Alex, cradling Alex' chin under his right arm, he pulled the still unconscious boy to the surface and started dragging him toward shore. As he did so, he was shocked to realize that Alex was still breathing. Antonio immediately submerged the now coughing Alex a few inches beneath the surface. Alex, now barely conscious, tried feebly to fight his way to the surface, but in his bruised and weakened condition he was no match for Antonio's strength. The slow swim back to shore took another two minutes, and by that time Alex was no longer breathing. By the time Antonio pulled Alex' lifeless body onto the shore, Rosa, who had half run, half fallen down the awkward stone path, grabbed Alex and started pulling him as well. Antonio swiped her aside with one arm, yelling, "Rosa, no! I've got to do CPR." And he proceeded to feign doing CPR on Alex. He would hold Alex' nose closed and make believe he was blowing air into his mouth, but no air was forthcoming, and after a few minutes, he rolled over, acting exhausted and gasping for air. Rosa rushed to Alex' quite dead body and threw herself on him, beating his chest with her fists, screaming and wailing, "Noooooo...!"

Senor, Joaquin Goquet, the local jefe de policia, did not need to be a descendant of Sherlock Holmes to suspect that Antonio was not the hero he portrayed himself to be.

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Antonio's reputation—his notoriety—was a growing concern in the community. And in a community as small as theirs, everyone knew everyone else's business. So, even Rosa's very recent rejection of Antonio was almost common knowledge. He strode into the office of his best detective, Sandoval Gomez, a shrewd, wily veteran of 15 years, and a good friend of Joaquin. "Sandoval, we have a problem."

Sandoval looked at boss, knowing at once where the conversation was going. He said nothing and just nodded.

"Sandoval, the kid is really a bad one. But he's..."

Sandoval thought nothing of completing his boss' sentence. "Si, Joaquin. Bad and smart. A combinacion.muy malo."

Joaquin sighed, and said to no one in particular, "Si, and with a padre as connected as they come."

Sandoval just nodded.

Nevertheless, Antonio was brought in for questioning, his father at his side.

"Antonio, why don't you tell us the chain of events that led to this tragedy?" Chief Goquet was being very solicitous with the elder de Galvez present, and Antonio gave the complete account. When he was finished, the chief thanked him for coming in, and complimented him on his heroic action. Just as Antonio was about to leave the chief's office, he said, almost as an afterthought, "Antonio, there is one more thing. Why did you bring your friends to the lake?"

Without hesitation, Antonio replied, "Senor Goquet, it is the most beautiful water I've ever seen. You can see the bottom of the lake from the top of the cliff it is so clear and pure."

"Yes," sighed the chief, as his eyes met Rodolfo's, "and so I confess to being a little puzzled as to why you had such trouble locating poor Alex in the water."

Antonio froze for just a split second, but it was enough to tell the chief that everything he suspected was true. Alex had been murdered.

Rodolfo stared hard at the chief, and said quietly, in his son's defense, "Perhaps his agitation and fear clouded his judgment for a moment or two," and with that he turned his back on the chief and led Antonio away.

The chief had a dilemma. On the one hand, in his gut he knew that Antonio had killed Alex. On the other hand, his “gut” was not going to be admissible as evidence in a court of law. Rosa was not much help. Her account of Antonio’s “fall” at the start of Alex’ dive was inconclusive, and while Antonio had been drowning Alex, Rosa had been racing down the stone path and thus saw nothing until Alex had been pulled ashore. Further complicating this very sketchy evidence was the fact that the police chief had five children, a wife, a mistress, a job and a pension, all of which he intended to keep. So, when he received a phone call from the mayor, and then one from the governor, “just inquiring as to the situation with the de Galvez boy,” his only response was, “No, sir. It was an accident.”

That said, the chief wanted no further part of Antonio de Galvez and so through a series of intermediaries, it was gently—yet unambiguously—suggested to Rodolfo de Galvez that perhaps the family should consider a university in Los Estados Unidos for their prodigal son. It would be best for all concerned.

Antonio left his home that fall for a small college in southern California, where he reported, “The women are blond and willing, and the studies are a joke.” Antonio, of course, simply blew off his studies, rarely—if ever—attending class. He found the young ladies far more willing to share their charms than Rosa was, and Antonio did some serious partying. He enjoyed his reputation as a Don Juan, although if the truth be known, he never actually had sex with any of the young ladies. Each young lady, not wanting to admit that she was the only one who couldn’t please him, did more for his reputation than he did.

It didn’t take him long to get connected with some local drug dealers, and after not very long he had a thriving business as the main supplier for the campus. One night, there was a raid on a local fraternity and the students were rounded up and brought in for questioning. One young man was Antonio’s connection to that fraternity, and after he was released on bail, he came to Antonio crying. “Man, I don’t want to

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do time for this. They're talking about ten years. You gotta help me, man."

Antonio studied the young man carefully. "Pauley, Pauley, Pauley," Antonio cooed soothingly. "Haven't I always looked out for you?"

Pauley, who was more than a little panicked, agreed, his hopes rising. "Sure, Antonio. But..."

Antonio smiled. "So? Do you doubt me?"

"No, Antonio, but the cops..."

"Pauley. The cops are bluffing. Listen, if it makes you feel any better, I'm going to have you meet with my lawyer. He's absolutely the best, and he'll tell you exactly what to expect."

Pauley, feeling reassured, replied gratefully. "OK, Tony, when can..."

"Pauley—listen. My guy is legit. We can't just meet him in his office for something like this."

Pauley was listening intently, and he understood. Of course, he reasoned, you can't just walk into a lawyer's office and tell his secretary, "Hi, I'm here to talk about the drug deal." And so, Pauley was buying Antonio's story and his sincerity.

Antonio stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Let's do this. Meet me on Las Palomas Road at 1:00 AM, and I'll take you to him. Okay?"

Pauley started relaxing for the first time. "Sure Antonio. Thanks!"

Antonio smiled his most reassuring smile, and assured Pauley, that all would be well.

Antonio arrived at the meeting place a half hour early and he carefully staked out the area. Though it was nearly pitch black, there was enough moonlight, and Antonio was familiar enough with the spot so that he could set things up as he wanted. Almost exactly at the appointed time the near total blackness grew perceptibly lighter, then quite bright as Pauley's car pulled up. Pauley got out, and in a half whisper, half shout, called, "Tony? Tony?"

Antonio snuck up behind Pauley and simply said, "Boo!" And Pauley nearly jumped right out of his shoes as Antonio laughed, putting his arm around Pauley's shoulder. He was leading Pauley off to the side

of the deserted road and Pauley was walking with him, when Pauley said, "Hey, Tony, where are we going?"

"Just over here Pauley, away from the lights of your car."

As the two young men approached a moderate incline, Antonio stopped suddenly and said, "Shh, Pauley, and he clamped his hand over Pauley's mouth but quickly released it."

Pauley turned, his back now to Antonio, as he stared off toward the lights of his car, which were bright enough to make it impossible to see anything in the darkness beyond. "Tony, what..."

But Pauley never finished his sentence as Antonio, with his right hand, had reached around to the left side of Pauley's neck, and deftly sliced clean through his jugular vein with a hunting knife. Now, incapable of speech, and at first unaware of what had just happened, Pauley turned to Antonio, not quite able to make out the bemused look on Antonio's face. At first Pauley felt a burning sensation in his throat and he involuntarily reached there with his hand. Feeling the blood rushing out, he had an initial reaction of simply trying to understand what was happening. But he died before he ever actually knew why. As Pauley collapsed to the ground, Antonio dragged his lifeless form down the embankment and placed Pauley into the shallow grave that he had dug just a short while ago. He then covered the makeshift grave with leaves and rocks. He walked briskly up the embankment, turned off the lights and ignition of Pauley's car, placed the car in neutral, and pushed it down the embankment not far from where Pauley was buried. He then walked the quarter mile back down the road, got in his own car, and drove home. His task complete, and the loose ends now neatly tied, Antonio de Galvez went home and slept like a baby.

By the time a few years had passed, Antonio had made quite a name for himself among the higher-ups in the local criminal fraternities. He had earned a reputation for being very thorough and even more ruthless. And one day he was called in to meet with Senor Ismael Rodrigo, a man Antonio had heard much about.

Senor Rodrigo looked like everyone's grandfather. He was in his late sixties, with thinning white hair, and a benevolent smile. He

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believed in the adage, “You don’t sell; you simply give people what they need.” As a young man, he found that some people needed weapons. He cared not at all that these people were looking to overthrow a Central American government. To this day, he proudly admitted to being Fidel Castro’s first supplier. But when the Russian government—through some rather persuasive emissaries—informed him that they were now the exclusive supplier to Senor Castro, Rodrigo decided it would be a good time to look into a career change. He then found that certain people wanted drugs. And so he became one of the largest drug traffickers in Mexico and Central America.

After some years, he awoke one morning to find his chauffeur sitting in his living room, his throat slit, and his tongue tied into a bizarre knot. Shortly after that gruesome discovery, he was informed by a Colombian drug cartel, that he was selling into their exclusive territory, and he knew once again, that a career change was highly advisable. By then, he had enough money to buy some small governments, which, in fact, he did, so he took some time off and thought about his future. He certainly didn’t need to work, but he liked running businesses. After doing some investigating, he happened upon some gringo lawyers who arranged adoptions for wealthy gringo couples who desperately wanted to be parents, and who were willing to pay considerable monies and ask no questions.

Ismael Rodrigo really liked this business. In his former business it was necessary to have an Uzi in his briefcase. In this business, no such equipment was really needed. He dealt with wealthy gringo lawyers in large leather and mahogany offices. He sipped fine brandy, and he didn’t need to worry that he’d leave his meeting to find that someone had given his chauffeur a manicure using a chain saw. But better yet, he actually deluded himself into thinking he was a benefactor. After all, he was supplying little ones to couples who would care for them and offer them a life of wealth and splendor.

Ismael Rodrigo's reputation was such that even Antonio knew that when Senor Rodrigo summoned, you came. And so as he waited in the designated location, expecting a sleek stretch limo to pick him up, he wondered what lay ahead. But instead of a sleek limo, a beat up Chevy circled the block twice and then stopped. When the rear door opened he got in and was immediately frisked and blindfolded; no words exchanged.

After a ride of about 30 minutes, he got out of the car, his blindfold was removed and he was led to a small shack in the woods. Inside the shack were two chairs and nothing else. In a few minutes Senor Rodrigo entered and motioned to Antonio to stay seated. "My, my. You are a nasty little peon, no?" And he smiled at Antonio.

Antonio said nothing, not yet being able to read this old man. Senor Rodrigo continued. "So, how is the drug business? Kill anyone lately?"

Antonio still said nothing, and Senor Rodrigo—a man whose reputation afforded him the luxury of not wasting time—got up and started to leave. He turned to look at the still silent Antonio, "Well, I guess we won't be doing business. They told me you were smart, but obviously they were wrong. By the way, that was a nice kick move you put on that poor de la Cruz kid. And drowning him? Nice touch. Too bad, though. He was a hell of a shortstop."

Antonio stared in amazement, shocked that anyone could know such a minute detail of his dispatching of Alex de la Cruz all those years ago. "Senor, please sit. I'll listen."

The older man lowered himself laboriously into a chair and stared at Antonio briefly before speaking. "Antonio, I'll be blunt. You are a sick bastard who makes my skin crawl."

Senor Rodrigo's bodyguards saw the fire in Antonio's eyes, and each stepped back a pace, not quite moving his gun hand, but rather getting himself ready. Just in case. Completely unconcerned, Rodrigo continued, "...but you are smart. Very smart. And that's what I need in my business. I'm getting old, Antonio..." and with that the older man gave a rueful smile, "...but God bless, business is good; actually too good. And I'm looking for the right man to join me."

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Antonio blurted, "So what's the deal?"

The older man smiled again, this time without kindness. "Ahh, the impetuosity of youth; you want to know what's in it for you?"

Antonio just stared. And Rodrigo decided to just cut to the chase and be done with this sick peon. "Here's the deal. I get...ummm... requests...for people who want to adopt children. You get me the children. I take care of the adoption. You get one-third..."

Antonio cut the old man off, his tone flat, "One-third of what?"

The old man smiled, then let out an involuntary sigh, ignoring Antonio's impudence, and responded, "My fees range from \$100,000 up to \$250,000 depending on the job."

Antonio just nodded. "How do we contact each other?"

The old man had started to get up. He paused, staring into Antonio's eyes. "We don't. I contact you."

Antonio nodded as the old man continued, "If you try to contact me, you'll never hear from me again. If you cross me, you'll be dead within twenty four hours." And with that he got up and left with his bodyguards in the white stretch limo that Antonio had been originally expecting, leaving the beat up Chevy for Antonio.

Senor Rodrigo had explained to Antonio the risk/benefit analysis of drug trafficking compared to child snatching, and Antonio listened carefully. Both Senor Rodrigo and Antonio were bad guys. The difference between them was that Senor Rodrigo—in his own twisted rationalized way—truly thought of himself as a benefactor to childless couples. Antonio de Galvez was titillated at the thought of snatching children.

So Antonio de Galvez switched careers. And he prospered at the terrible expense of grieving parents all over the United States.

He was smart, and he found his work easy. Young mothers were a perfect target because they were so easily distracted when they had their little ones out and about. His personal favorite was to find a gas station near a highway. He would wait until a young mother pulled in to get gas, and when he found one foolish enough to leave her baby

strapped in the child seat while she went to pay, Antonio would jump in the car, use the key, or at worst, hot wire the ignition—and take off.

He also found easy prey in department stores. One day, Antonio was trolling a department store, and he found a young mother pushing a stroller. She was about 25, tall, pretty, he thought, and well dressed. He walked right up to her and smiled, as he looked down at her son, a cute, little blond boy of about 13 months. “My, my! What a cutie!” he exclaimed.

The mother beamed, first looking down at her son, then at Antonio. She thought Antonio was not only very nice, but also quite handsome. “Thank you. He’s quite a handful, but we love him.”

Antonio smiled, bid her good day, and walked away. He estimated that her dress size was about a 6, and so he went and picked out a very nice blue dress that he thought would be her taste. He returned to her, carrying the dress. “I’m sorry to bother you, but...well...I was going to buy this for my girlfriend, and I wondered...”

She smiled. “And you want my opinion?” she was flattered.

“Well, yes, if you don’t mind.”

She took the dress from Antonio, inspecting it carefully. “Yes, this is very nice. You have good taste.”

Antonio smiled his best disarming smile. “Do you think a red one might be better? She has your coloring.”

The mother took the bait. “Hmmm?” She looked over at the rack from which Antonio had taken the dress. “Let me see...” and she walked toward the rack, turning her back on Antonio and her baby. She was gone less than a minute. As she was walking back to Antonio, inspecting the dress as she did, she started to say, “Well, red is nice, but...” and she looked up and didn’t see Antonio. She was puzzled, and so it took her another ten seconds to realize that her baby was gone. Her blood immediately turned to ice and she let out with a blood-curdling scream, “*My baby! He stole my baby!*”

A security guard who was nearby came running over as every shopper stopped dead in his tracks. As soon as the guard understood what had happened, he whipped out his walkie-talkie, pushed the

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button, and shouted, “*Code Blue! Code Blue! Code Blue!*” Within seconds the store’s automatic lock down system was activated and every door in the store was locked. One uniformed, and one plainclothes security guard were stationed at one exit. That exit was then opened and was the only way to leave the store. Other security guards were canvassing the store looking for the child.

Antonio meanwhile had done this before. When he’d left the mother, he carried the little boy under his coat and he held a cloth soaked in a small amount of chloroform against the baby’s nose. The baby was asleep in less than 30 seconds. He carried the baby into the men’s room where he went into a stall. He carefully placed the sleeping baby on the floor, resting on his coat. He then got out a pair of scissors, and crudely cut the baby’s hair. Then, he dyed the baby’s hair a dark brown. He pulled out a small pair of overalls from his coat pocket, and changed the baby’s clothes. He then cut his own long, black hair, which he liked to wear in a ponytail. He dyed his hair blond and he inserted cotton into his cheeks, to make him appear heavier than he was. Once this was accomplished, he picked the baby up and carried it out of the men’s room. He got in line at the exit along with the other shoppers.

The security guards were standing at the exit with the baby’s mother. They were scrutinizing each exiting customer, being sure to check for any way one of the customers could have hidden a baby on his person. A number of customers had babies, and these were checked carefully. Antonio approached carrying the sleeping baby against his shoulder. He smiled at the security guard, ignoring the mother. “It’s his nap time and I’m running late.”

The security guard nodded, and was about to let Antonio leave the store, but the mother, who had recognized neither Antonio nor her baby, felt that something just wasn’t right. Then she saw the little sneakers her son had on. Antonio had not changed the baby’s shoes. She screamed. “*That ’s my baby! That ’s my baby!*”

Antonio immediately rammed his shoulder into the uniformed

security guard and tossed the sleeping child at the mother. Antonio sprinted from the store with the plainclothes security guard racing after him. In the middle of the parking lot, Antonio stopped, whirled, and pulled out his Desert Eagle, 44 magnum automatic. He had had it fitted with a laser sight, and as he saw the red dot move from the security guard's leg to his chest, he squeezed the trigger. Just as he did so he was shot in the arm with a slug from the guard's Glock 9 mm. Antonio felt the searing pain in his shoulder, but just before he turned to run, he saw the security guard fly backwards from the force of one of the most powerful handguns on the face of the Earth. The bullet penetrated the guard's heart and exited his back leaving a hole the size of a man's fist. Antonio smiled, then leapt into his car and sped off.

That episode not only soured him on using department stores as his hunting ground, it also soured him on infants and toddlers because they were always with a parent.

In a chance conversation with a colleague he'd met, he found that there was also a huge market for older children—especially boys. This market was not as well known or publicized as the baby market, but it existed nonetheless. This colleague was looking for a partner, as his former partner had met an untimely demise at the hands of a drug dealer who found this boy snatching business to be beyond anything even he could stomach.

Antonio was duly cautioned that in this new line of work, even the bad guys were against you. But Antonio was titillated at the idea of his new venture, and he decided to take the risk.

Chapter 3

The phone rang on Thornton Fowler's desk. Annoyed at the intrusion as he might be at a mosquito, he absently picked it up with his left hand as he continued writing with his right. "Fowler," he barked.

"Thornton, this is Pete Jacobs. The flight number you want is 1702. American. It arrives at JFK at 1630."

Fowler just mumbled, "Thanks Pete. I'm on it," as he continued to write.

Antonio de Galvez was not on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted List. But he was numero uno on Agent Fowler's and Fowler had a file on Antonio that was six inches thick. An informant had told Fowler that de Galvez was entering the country via a flight from Mexico City to New York. Fowler could have had Antonio de Galvez easily. There's not a hell of a lot of ways to get off a commercial flight, and if he'd wanted to, he could have arranged to have the marines waiting with him at Kennedy Airport when de Galvez arrived. But Agent Fowler didn't want the marines. Agent Fowler wanted credit. And credit would not be his if de Galvez was arrested at Kennedy. If de Galvez was brought down as part of some public spectacle, they'd have to send him back to Mexico where the government would put him in a room, lock the door, and throw away the room. Not an unjust end for Senor de Galvez, but no publicity for the Bureau, and more importantly, none for Agent Fowler. It would be much better, thought Agent Fowler, if they could catch him red handed. Then they could prosecute him here in the states,

and he, Thornton Fowler would receive the credit for capturing this international scumbag.

It's been said that the eyes are the window to the soul. If that were true then Thornton Fowler had no soul. His pale blue eyes offered nothing, but they hid a computer-like intelligence and memory to match. He made his mark at the Bureau by cracking a kidnapping case in which he recognized the perp in a supermarket. The perp had shaved his beard and dyed his hair blond, but that didn't fool Fowler. When asked how the hell he'd recognized the man from a photo that ostensibly looked nothing like the man, Fowler just smiled. In truth, he had no idea himself. His wife of twenty years would kid him that the part of his brain which was supposed to be used for noticing things such as "the couch was moved to the other side of the living room", were instead reserved for Thornton's criminal records. He was so unobservant about the normal, mundane things of life, that in the couch episode he had nearly fallen to the floor as he absently went to sit where the couch had been, not where it now was.

He was a very unimposing man; forty three years old, five nine, badly bald—he tried to hide his baldness by combing what little hair he had in just the right way—and he had a noticeable paunch, although he was far from obese. He was a furious chain smoker who had never tried to quit. Many people underestimated Agent Fowler. And that was a big mistake.

Although not a political animal by nature, it didn't take Fowler's computer brain long to realize that if one wanted to get ahead in the Bureau, there were certain realities which one needed to heed. Rule number one: don't make mistakes. Rule number two: If you do make a mistake, see rule number one.

Special Agent Fowler had worked his way through the ranks of the FBI, and had been assigned to the Washington Bureau five years before. One year ago, he'd been given the unenviable task of heading up the task force to crack a child smuggling ring based out of Mexico. The ring specialized in kidnapping young boys, usually between five

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and ten years of age. Unlike the trafficking in illegal babies in which the goal was to place the babies into the homes of very affluent parents who were willing to ask no questions, this ring was selling young boys into white slavery—and not to affluent pseudo parents. The ring's activities so disgusted and enraged every decent and semi-decent law enforcement official in the US as well as Mexico that even the Mexican government had agreed to cooperate fully in the effort to stop the ring.

When Agent Fowler found out that the New York City police had received the same tip as he had, he immediately went to the detective in charge. "Detective Johnson?" inquired Agent Fowler of the male receptionist in the squad room.

The receptionist just jerked his thumb in a backwards motion toward a small, slender black man sitting at a desk leafing through a phone book. Ralph Johnson looked too dapper to be a cop. He wore a crisp, white shirt, dark blue print tie. His black loafers were freshly shined and were more than an adequate complement to his sharply creased slacks. The only concession that Detective Johnson made to his police work was that his suit jacket was hung neatly—sans hanger—on a hook in the back room.

At the mention of his name, Detective Johnson stood up and walked around his desk, hand outstretched as he approached Thornton Fowler, a pleasant smile creasing his lips. He briefly stared at the ID Fowler was displaying. "Agent Fowler, how may I help you?"

Thornton Fowler looked around somewhat uncomfortably, then back at Detective Johnson. Fowler's appearance was a rumpled contrast to the detective's. His white shirt had the remnants of a mustard stain above the left pocket. His navy blue pants were badly in need of pressing, and his scuffed, brown shoes simply begged for the fashion police. Fowler never noticed the sartorial contrast as he looked at the detective. "Is there somewhere we can speak privately?"

Detective Johnson led Agent Fowler into an interrogation room and motioned to a chair. He studied the FBI agent carefully as he sat down next to him, and he deliberately said nothing.

Most people are uncomfortable with silence, but Ralph Johnson

was not one of them. He'd found long ago that people—particularly guilty people—found it quite disconcerting, and more often than not wound up saying something revealing just to break the silence. He was surprised to realize that he was treating this fellow cop as he would a potential criminal under investigation. Thornton Fowler looked at the detective and cleared his throat. "Detective Johnson, it's my understanding that you are pursuing a Mexican perp, Antonio de Galvez?"

"Yes, we received a very credible tip that he's coming into JFK later this afternoon."

"Well, I'm going to have to ask you to let the Bureau handle this one."

Although Detective Johnson wasn't particularly invested in the pursuit of de Galvez, he had read the reports, and he wanted to make damn sure that the only way Antonio de Galvez was leaving Kennedy airport was in cuffs. And he knew that if he, Detective Johnson, were there that was exactly how it would happen. So, he wasn't happy. "Agent Fowler, would you mind telling me what's going on?"

Thornton Fowler had been expecting this. He'd worked with local cops many times, and they were never happy about taking a back seat to anyone—especially not the Bureau. But he knew how to handle the situation. He'd done it often. He lied. "Detective," he started in hushed tones, leaning forward, "we've been following this de Galvez guy for a long time. He's working with some people here in the states who are...uhhh...well...pretty high up..."

It always worked like a charm. And even Ralph Johnson, who was no dummy, immediately had images of some great political scandal. And since it seemed that everyone had a universal dislike for politicians, he was only too willing to step aside and let the Bureau do their thing.

"I see, Agent Fowler. Well then, good luck to you." And with that, he stood up, extending his hand once again.

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And so, Agent Fowler got two agents from the New York office of the Bureau to work with him on the case. Fowler's plan was simple in concept: tail de Galvez until they caught him in the act. But as Agent Fowler was about to discover, there can often be a very large gap between the concept of a plan and the implementation of said plan.

The agents tailed de Galvez to the northern Bronx, where he picked up a black Jeep Cherokee that had been parked and waiting for him on the Grand Concourse, just north of Fordham Road. Fowler was following in one car, and the two agents tailed Fowler in another. Then, they'd switch off so as to greatly lessen the chances of having one car spotted. They tailed the Cherokee down Gun Hill Road, where it turned off on Bouck Avenue, a small residential street. Fowler realized there was too great a chance of being spotted if he continued on the narrow street, and so he tensely barked into his radio, "Jim, break off here. I'll take this end. You go to the south end of Bouck and cover there."

"Roger that," said Jim Kalavakis, the senior of the two New York agents, as they looped around the narrow street and took up position at the south end of Bouck. So, they were now covering both of the travel options of Antonio de Galvez. But Antonio de Galvez was neither stupid nor careless, and even though he was not aware that he was being followed, he had a plan to protect himself from the possibility. As he drove down Bouck Avenue, out of the sight of all three agents, he flashed his brights in a pre-determined signal. Upon seeing the signal, the ramp of a large moving van slowly descended, and after a minute, the black Cherokee drove up the ramp, into the van, and the ramp closed behind it. When the large moving van leisurely drove past the two New York agents, they hardly noticed it.

Agent Fowler, for all his intelligence, had swallowed the hook, the line, the sinker, and the rod. And he lost the trail of Antonio de Galvez.

Chapter 4

Bob Jamison couldn't hear his wife who was twenty feet below the top rung of the ladder upon which Bob was standing as he was repairing siding on their house. He absently noticed that the hot afternoon sun had started to wane somewhat, and although the breeze that had started up, couldn't really be called cool, it was nonetheless a breeze, and Bob was grateful for the cooling. Since Martha was seemingly agitated about something, Bob reluctantly decided to trudge down the twenty feet of ladder.

"Bob, where's Melanie? She isn't home." Martha had a history of being a worrier—something her husband chided her about many times. She was trying hard to hide her concern, but she was failing miserably.

"Sweetheart, she's just out riding her bike. She's fine." But when Martha turned around to walk back inside the house, Bob glanced at his watch, a feeling of uneasiness beginning to settle into his gut.

Melanie too was feeling uneasy as she glanced quickly over her shoulder at the increasingly ominous looking black Jeep Cherokee that was now coming slowly closer. Now she was very scared. As she started pedaling even faster, the car finally began to pull around her, and just as her little heart stopped beating quite so fast, the car angled right in front of her. She swerved to avoid hitting the car, and her bike tumbled down a small embankment. Bike and girl tumbled over small rocks and twigs before landing in a heap at the bottom of the small

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ravine. As Melanie started to get up, feeling dazed, she saw the figure of a man hovering over her, and she came face to face with Antonio de Galvez.

She stared at Antonio, and he stared back. As Melanie had had her ponytail tucked under her cap, he hadn't realized that he'd been chasing a girl, and he was actually impressed that a girl could be so athletic. Antonio had no use for girls, as his business dealt exclusively with young boys, but he had less use for witnesses, and so he scooped up Melanie and started carrying her back to the jeep. She started beating on his chest with her little fists, screaming, "Put me down you bastard! My father is going to kill you!"

At this, Antonio just smiled, and he continued struggling up the embankment with Melanie. As he approached the jeep, a car appeared out of nowhere, and slowed alongside the jeep. A teenage boy leaned out and said, "Hey mister, is everything okay?"

Antonio smiled and said, "Yes, thank you. My little girl is just learning to ride her bike and she had an accident, but she's okay."

The kid was in a hurry to get to work, and so he just took off, failing to notice either Melanie's pleading eyes or the fact that Antonio's hand was holding a hunting knife pressed firmly to the back of her neck. As Antonio continued toward the jeep, he heard another car coming in the distance. He quickly turned and slid down the embankment still clutching Melanie, but Melanie had grabbed a rock on the way down, and as soon as they reached bottom, she turned and smashed the rock into the side of Antonio's head. As he reached for his head, a fierce, burning pain now ricocheting through his skull, Melanie freed herself from his grasp and started running up the embankment. Antonio was now furious, his rage building as blood trickled down the side of his face. He quickly caught Melanie, grabbing her foot and pulling the little girl down the embankment. He pinned both her arms. She stared up at him and he smacked her with his open hand. Melanie then spit right in his face and kned him in the groin. As he instinctively reached for his crotch with one hand, Melanie freed her right hand and scratched Antonio's face. Enraged, he punched her tiny face with all his might, breaking her nose. He then flipped her over, and with his knife, ended little Melanie's life.

He staggered to his feet, looking around for any signs of people. There were none. He dragged the little girl's lifeless body a few feet to an indentation in the soil, and started to cover her body with leaves. Quickly realizing that his car was sitting out on the road for all to see, he stopped burying Melanie, and ran up to his car. He drove it a mile down the road, where the moving van had been parked. The ramp automatically lowered and Antonio drove the jeep right into the van. The ramp retracted, the door lowered, and the van started up.

Melanie was due home at six. By six twenty, Bob Jamison walked out the door to look around for his daughter, feeling annoyed that once again she was late. By six thirty, he was nervous, no longer annoyed. By seven he was scared, and his wife started calling Melainie's friends. By seven thirty his wife was on the phone with the local police and Bob was in his car scouring the local roads. He actually drove past his daughter's burial place twice, but her bike was not visible from the road. He returned home to find his wife crying. "Hon, what is it. Is there..."

She looked at him, "No, it's just..." and she broke down sobbing against his chest. He held her tightly, and she regained control and continued, "...I just know she's gone, Bob," and she broke down again.

Bob Jamison got on the phone with Sheriff Stewart who had explained to Mrs. Jamison that they weren't authorized to do a missing person search for twenty-four hours. Fortunately for Sheriff Jesse Stewart, he was not standing next to Bob Jamison when he said it, but was rather a few miles away, because Bob probably would have hit him. "*You listen to me,*" Bob exploded, "...you've known Melanie since she was born. Our goddamn *kids* play together! And you're telling me you can't start a search until *tomorrow!*" Sheriff Stewart had been under considerable pressure to control his budget and was being asked to account for every paper clip—much less overtime—but he knew Bob was right.

"Listen, Bob. I'm sorry. We'll round up the boys right now."

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Over two hundred men and more than a few women began their search just after 8:30 PM. At about the same time, the news of Melanie's disappearance was broadcast over the local radio and cable TV stations. A short time later, the doorbell rang at the Jamison house and eighteen year old Chad Turner stood there practically trembling. "Is Sheriff Stewart here, please," he managed to stammer.

Jess Stewart strode over to the door. He knew Chad from coaching Little League, but he didn't know much about the boy. He viewed Chad with considerable curiosity. "What is it son?"

"Sheriff," then he added, spotting Bob Jamison, "Mr. Jamison, I..."

The sheriff put his left arm around Chad's shoulders and ushered him into the living room. "Sit down, son."

Chad sat on the couch, fidgeting. "Well, I saw Melanie before. I..."

Bob Jamison had leaped out of his chair and was standing barely a foot from Chad, fists clenched. Chad involuntarily started to back up on the couch, his eyes growing wide with fear.

Jess Stewart immediately pulled Bob back. "Bob! Let him talk."

Chad started talking very fast. "My God! Mr. Jamison. I didn't do anything to Melanie. I saw her...at least I think it was her. She was at the side of the road..." then he started crying. "I didn't realize it was her. I was in a hurry 'cause I was late for work. I didn't think much of it and then...and then I heard the radio. And I realized..." Chad was barely controlling himself.

Chad paused, took a deep breath, and then told them the whole story.

Within ten minutes Jess Stewart's sketch artist was at the Jamison house, and fifteen minutes later they had a workable likeness of Antonio de Galvez. Thirty minutes later, Antonio de Galvez' likeness was being faxed across the country and an APB was issued across thirteen states.

A little after ten o'clock, three of the volunteers spotted a tent in the woods and when they investigated they found a very confused young Hispanic man with blood on his hands. They quickly ascertained that

he spoke little or no English, and when they went to pull him out of the tent, he whirled and punched one of the deputies, and raced out of the tent. The chase was on. He raced across the woods, where he ran into six more members of the search party and he was immediately apprehended just as the first group caught up. The deputy who'd been hit charged into the man and punched him hard in the stomach, doubling him up. The man, totally bewildered and with the wind knocked out of him, started babbling in Spanish that he didn't steal anything and that he didn't know it was private property. No one in the group understood Spanish, but they did understand a man with blood on his hands who was mighty, mighty scared, not to mention very much out of place in those particular woods.

The deputies cuffed him and drove him to the sheriff's office where Jess Stewart and Bob Jamison met them. Jess stared at the man and then, solemnly at the artist's rendition of Antonio de Galvez. The resemblance was remarkable.

Although there are exceptions, by and large, men deal with their emotions through actions. The stronger the emotion, the more dramatic the action. Bob Jamison's emotions were a violent cauldron of paralyzing fear and immeasurable rage, and they swirled through his being putting him literally on the brink of insanity. There was no way to measure his love for his daughter, and the mere thought that there were people who existed on this planet who would even think of harming her was more than he could ever bear to think about. The fact that this horrifying thing probably did happen put him in a state that simply negated any humanity he ordinarily possessed. Flowers need sunlight to grow. That is a fact. Bob Jamison needed to act in order to survive as a man. That too was a fact.

Bob Jamison took one look at the man and lunged for him, screaming, "*Where is my little girl! If you hurt her I'll...*" but before he could complete his sentence, two deputies dragged him back, and two more locked the perp in a cell, as much for his own protection as anything else.

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Just as Bob struggled free from the deputies, the door to the office opened, and three volunteers stood there, each staring at Bob Jamison. One of the men unashamedly had tears streaming down his face. All the men in the room turned to the door as one. Bob stared at the men and they at him. The room was deathly quiet. It was as if they all felt that if no one spoke, then that which they now all knew to be true would not be admitted into their reality. Bob fought with everything in him not to be seeing what he saw, and to not know what it meant. But reality won out. He let out a low guttural cry, sank to his knees, and started pounding on the hard tile floor with his fists, screaming, "*Oh no. Oh my God, no! Not my little girl! Oh please! Not Mel! Not my little girl!*"

Jess Stewart knelt beside him, his arm around Bob's shoulders as Bob sobbed uncontrollably, not noticing that his hands were bleeding from the pounding he'd given the floor. Jess looked up at one of the men who'd found little Melanie's body, and said, simply, "How?"

The man, tears still streaming down his face, made a motion running one finger across his throat just as Bob Jamison looked up. The distraught father, no longer human, whirled, and in one motion, snatched the thirty-eight revolver out of Jess Stewart's holster, showing the startled sheriff over, and as the sheriff fell backward, Jamison raced toward the cell. His eyes were unseeing. The rage that had exploded within him simply overwhelmed him. His rationality was gone.

As the sheriff leaped to his feet screaming, "*No! Bob, No!*" One of the deputies pulled his gun and aimed it squarely at Bob's back screaming, "*Drop the gun. Now!*"

But Bob Jamison could neither hear nor see at the moment. His life was reduced to a simple choice for him: live or die. And for Bob Jamison, at that moment, to live meant to act. And to act meant to eradicate from the face of the earth all the evil that could ever possibly harm a little girl again. That evil was embodied in the form of the animal who was locked in the cell.

The deputy took careful aim, but as his finger tightened around the trigger, he found that he could not shoot a man he'd known for years and coached Little League with. Bob Jamison however, could, would, and did. He emptied six shots into the man in the cell, missing with

none. Blood erupted out of the man's chest and head, and he died virtually instantly. As the sixth shot was fired, one deputy and Jess Stewart tackled Bob Jamison and wrestled him to the floor, Jess Stewart slapping on the cuffs. Both men threw Bob Jamison into an adjoining cell where the distraught father sat, staring straight ahead like a somnambulist, neither seeing nor hearing, and for a while at least, not feeling.

The sheriff and the deputy opened the cell door to look and see if by some miracle the perp was still alive, but such was not the case. The two men looked at each other, neither voicing their singular unspoken thought, "What the hell do we do now?"

Jess Stewart and Bill Taylor, the local priest, went together back to the Jamison house to tell Mrs. Jamison about Melanie. Although the priest had made many visits informing loved ones of the passing of their beloved, he'd never had a situation such as this, and he was unable to think of words at that moment. Jess Stewart would have given a month's pay to be anywhere else on the planet other than right where he was.

Martha Jamison had never been strong when facing negativity. She chose instead to avoid it whenever possible, and she had actually developed an ability of sorts within herself to more or less bury any unpleasantness. It was as if she believed that if there were no bad words then there could be no bad things. When she saw the two men in the driveway, a chain of events started within her. She immediately put her hand to cover her eyes almost as if she were trying to will away the meaning of what she saw. As the furious, immeasurable grief exploded through her body searching for some outlet, she fought with all that was in her to give it none, trying instead to bury it. It was an automatic reaction, borne of years of practice. Unfortunately, the forces arising out of this horrific event were now well beyond anything she could possibly control, and her being was simultaneously facing both the immovable object and the unstoppable force, with the ability to handle neither. She opened her mouth wide as if to scream, her eyes growing

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very large. But no sound came. Her face was contorted into a grotesque mask of unspeakable horror. Finally, as it must, the forces demanded their reckoning, and something inside her simply caved in as she sank to the floor, eyes wide open, but unseeing. And that was how the priest and the sheriff found her just a moment later.

It was nearly eleven the next morning and Jess Stewart's eyes were red rimmed from lack of sleep and the gut wrenching grief he felt. Bob Jamison was asleep in a cell, having been medicated by his family physician, then placed in a cell since he had nowhere to go and Jess figured that was the safest place for him. Melanie's body had been taken to the medical examiner, and the news spread through the small community like a brushfire. Schools were empty and churches were full. People were grief stricken, and simply terrified out of their wits.

Jess didn't think the day could get any worse, but he was very wrong.

Delores Melendez, the medical examiner, came into Jess Stewart's office looking far older than her thirty-nine years. She had worked in Detroit during some of the worst gang uprisings and had seen pretty much all that there was to see. She had chosen this sleepy little hamlet because she didn't want to see any more human carnage. But now she had.

Jess looked at her, "So, what do we have, Delores."

Delores and Jess Stewart had worked together on many investigations, mostly automobile accidents, and although they weren't friends, they had considerable respect for each other's abilities. Delores said tiredly, "She put up one hell of a fight, Jess. We had skin samples under her nails and hair and blood samples." Delores stopped, fighting back tears of her own.

The sheriff had trouble with his words. "Was she...was she..."

Delores saved him the need to say the word, "No. There was no sexual assault." And she added in a monotone, "She died quickly."

Jess just nodded, not finding as much relief in that news as he'd hoped.

Delores clearly had something on her mind and her attitude suddenly changed. She looked around, and walked over and closed Jess' door. "Jess we have a problem. A very big problem."

Jess looked at her quizzically, his brain was hitting on two cylinders from lack of sleep. Delores continued, her voice now significantly lower, "Jess, the man who got blown to hell here last night was not the perp." Jess looked at her as if she'd started speaking a foreign tongue, and so she spelled it out for him, "He didn't kill Melanie."

Jess' head just fell and smacked against the desk. He stayed there almost a full minute, not wanting to deal with the implications. Finally, with great effort, he lifted his head, and looking directly at Delores, said woodenly, already knowing his question was foolish, "Are you sure. I mean..."

But Delores just looked at him, holding his gaze and said quietly, "Whoever killed Melanie had type A negative blood. The poor bastard who got wasted was O positive."

Jess and Delores met later that day at the crime scene. There was no one around, not even the morbid curiosity seekers who had populated the area earlier.

Jess looked at Delores, and sighed, "Is there anything we can do?"

Delores said, "Jess, I've known Bob for a long time, my daughter slept at their goddamn house, but..."

Jess interrupted, "Look, the guy looked like some sort of vagrant, probably with no family...no ties. He had no ID. If we just..."

Delores shook her head sadly, "Jess, you've been in the business longer than I have. How many times have you seen things jump out of the woodwork and bite somebody in the ass?"

Jess' brain was trying furiously to come up with a way of saving Bob Jamison, but Delores was right and he knew it. Bad enough that Bob had taken the law into his own hands, but the fact was he'd killed an innocent man. You just couldn't make that go away.

Jess stood there stroking his chin, and Delores continued. "There's

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one other thing to consider. If we do what you're thinking, then we no longer have a perp, right? I mean...he's dead." Jess nodded, and Delores went on, "So the hunt is called off, the FBI backs out, and that mother-fucker skips away clean. Is that what we want?"

Jess responded, dully, "No."

Delores responded, almost gently, "Look, Jess, there's nobody in this community whose heart isn't broken for Bob and Martha. Do you really think they're going to send him away?"

Jess brightened at that, realizing that Bob Jamison had a good chance of getting through this without doing jail time.

The news hit the community like a thunderbolt. Had Bob Jamison killed his little girl's killer, not only would he never have been convicted, he would have been a hero. But, sadly that was not what had happened. The town's sentiment by and large was, "Poor Bob." But nobody wanted to take it beyond that. Not even the local prosecutor, Kane Clelland, who at that very moment was calling on Jeremy Bishop, the town judge.

Kane was a man in his late forties who had lived in the town nearly his entire life. Jeremy Bishop was a crusty old feller, who'd moved to Byram nearly twenty years before, when he was in his forties. He'd seen quite a bit, having been a prosecutor in Brooklyn, New York. Like Delores, he'd seen enough of human depravity to last many lifetimes and so he decided to come to a place where his toughest tasks would involve dealing with DWI cases—which he dealt with harshly.

Kane Clelland liked things to fit neatly into tight little packages. He hated loose ends, and he hated ambiguity and conflict even more. The thought of his trying this case practically gave him hives, and so he was ready to beg the judge to allow a different plan. "Jeremy, I can't try Bob. For Chrissake, I've known him for twenty years. We play poker!"

Jeremy was—of course—way ahead of Kane having thought about many more implications besides the one directly involving Kane. Jeremy had thought of a change of venue, but he didn't want to do that because he knew that Bob's best chance was to be tried by the local folks. Then he had an idea, "Kane, I agree with you. A very good friend of mine is the DA for Kings County. Let me make a call."

Chapter 5

The phone rang on Monica Culvert's desk, which was, as usual, a shambles. Monica's mind was as organized as they come, but that was the extent of her organization. Her one bedroom apartment, where she lived alone, was a mess. Her desk was a mess—although she knew where everything was. Monica, though not really attractive, was not a mess. She was fifty-three years old and had risen through the ranks to become the District Attorney of Kings County on her merit. In her early days, the word was that she was actively engaged in the process of sleeping her way to the top; however, this was not true, the rumor having been started by some jealous male colleagues. She had hired Kevin McCarthy straight out of law school because she liked his dedication and his unemotional approach to some very emotional cases. She felt like she could trust his judgment.

As she absently picked up the phone, forgetting that she had instructed her secretary not to interrupt her, she was very pleased to hear the voice on the other end.

“Monica! This is Jeremy. How's life in the big city?”

She smiled at hearing his voice. Monica and Jeremy had dated for almost two years just ten years before, and when both decided that their respective careers would not be able to sustain a long distance relationship, they made the decision to “just be friends”. Much to their surprise, they remained friends and their mutual respect for each other grew through the years. Still smiling, Monica said, “The city is great. How's your retirement community?”

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Jeremy laughed. “Seriously, Monica, we have a situation here, and I can use your help.”

Monica listened, her eyes watering, as Jeremy told her the story. “So, Monica, I can really use one of your people to try this case. What do you think?”

“Jeremy, I have just the man.”

And just after she hung up, she called Kevin McCarthy into her office.

Kevin McCarthy was an Assistant District Attorney and he’d risen to that prestigious office by always following his ramrod belief that, “The law is the law. Period.”

He grew up in a family of moderately religious Catholics. They went to church every Sunday—unless a previous engagement intervened. And they went to confession a few times a year.

Kevin was enrolled in Sunday school when he was six, and he learned about Original Sin—the doctrine that we are all born “guilty” and that we must spend our lives repenting. It scared the hell out of—or rather, into—that six year old. He argued with his parents whenever they wanted him to miss Sunday school. He felt it was his duty to attend. One summer his family took a trip to Disneyworld—the attending of church services in Orlando not being on their itinerary. Kevin was so upset that he spent that Sunday throwing up in their hotel room until his mother promised to take him to confession the next day.

He attended the local parochial schools where the nuns did little to change his World View—frequently beating some of the students for various infractions. Kevin himself had received only one such beating in all the years he attended. He was eight years old, and when learning of the Sin of Pride, he asked, innocently, “But Sister, doesn’t the Pope feel proud that he can help so many millions of people?”

So Kevin quickly learned the rules. And he played by them. Religiously.

At the age of ten, while in the fifth grade, the sister stepped out of the room for a few minutes, leaving the class with the instruction to be quiet. Some of the boys in the class took advantage of the situation and

started to chat among themselves. Kevin turned, raised his hand to his lips, and said “Shhh”. He was rewarded after school with his first black eye. But he would not fight back. He had been taught, “...turn the other cheek.”

In college, Kevin became fascinated with the law. He was also deeply troubled by the injustice he saw around him —particularly racial injustice. His family had kept him out of the local public school system primarily to “shield” him from any interactions with the local Black populace, and so Kevin had never really interacted with any people of color. But as he learned of the horrors that went on —particularly in the south, he became a vocal spokesperson for the liberals in his college. Although only standing five eight, his manner—which conveyed the courage of his convictions—caused people to pay attention. His clear blue eyes, ramrod straight posture, and deep, resonant voice conveyed an air of authority.

While in college, Kevin fell in love with Carmella Salazar, and she with him. Carmella had her father’s Latino fire and her mother’s Germanic discipline. She and Kevin made quite a team running their organization, Students For A Free Society. The goals of the organization were a little vague, as they tended to focus more on protesting the wrongs of society rather than developing a plan of action. In truth, rather than having true goals, the organization was about helping people feel good.

Carmella was no small woman, standing almost five foot ten, and although not fat, she was big—for a woman. In contrast to Kevin’s stature—at five eight and slender, many thought them an odd couple. When Carmella’s Latina fire and Kevin’s stoic reserve were added to the picture, they made an odd looking couple indeed. But that was by conventional standards, and neither Kevin nor Carmella gave much of a damn about any standards save their own. Many of their friends mistakenly thought that Carmella “wore the pants in the family” so to speak, but that was simply due to surface observations. In truth, both Carmella and Kevin were independent agents in their relationship; very independent.

As Springtime approached, and campus unrest was climbing

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toward a zenith, to be sadly, brutally, and dramatically punctuated by the slaying of a college student by a national guardsman, Carmella and Kevin found themselves thrust into the role as leaders of a march on Selma, Alabama to protest that state's refusal to grant equal rights to Blacks. Kevin handled all the business, arranging for buses and organizing the logistics of the march. Carmella's job was to keep pouring gasoline on the smoldering flames of student passion, which she found everywhere.

The day before the buses were to leave—there were no less than forty buses—Carmella returned to the small, off campus apartment they shared, to find Kevin looking very, very troubled.

“What is it hon,” she inquired, her curiosity piqued, as she went to put away her things. This was not like Kevin.

Kevin looked her in the eye and said, “I can't go.”

Carmella stopped walking, and turned to look at Kevin. She didn't understand what he meant. “You can't go where?,” she asked somewhat nonchalantly

Kevin replied evenly, “I can't go on the march.”

Carmella just stared, incredulous. She knew how passionate Kevin was about civil rights, and about this march in particular. She knew how hard he'd worked. “What happened, hon?” she said gently, knowing something very major must be going down.

Kevin took a deep breath, exhaled, and said, matter-of-factly, “I found out today that in Alabama it's a state law that they can exclude Blacks from private property. What they're doing doesn't violate any laws.” He looked very chagrined and defeated.

She just stared at him, uncomprehending. “So what. What are you saying?”

He sighed, “I can't violate the law. It's one thing if they're in violation of federal law, like when they wouldn't let Blacks attend certain public schools, or vote. But this violates no laws; not even federal law.”

Carmella laughed. “You're putting me on, right?” But Kevin just stared at her, feeling helpless.

Carmella could feel her temper rising, and she fought for control.

Her voice now significantly louder, and with a very different tone, she continued, “You’re *serious?*”

Kevin just nodded.

Carmella simply exploded, “*You’re serious! You’re not going ton the march because it’s against the fuckign law!*” She was literally spitting.

Kevin was no dummy, and he knew Carmella well. He knew where this was going, but he was as powerless to stop it as he was to change the direction of the Mississippi River. He responded evenly, “They have the legal right to do what they’re doing.”

Carmella was flat out livid by now, and she slammed both her palms on the coffee table as she leaned menacingly toward Kevin who was still sitting on the couch. Her voice got lower, but she countered that by turning up the sarcasm dial, “Let’s see if I get this straight, Mr. Churchill. You won’t fight Germany because concentration camps are not against the fucking law in Germany!”

Kevin just stared straight ahead, meeting her gaze, but he said nothing.

She stepped back, her hand on her chin, and stared at Kevin as if trying to see something that she could not quite grasp. Her tone changed, and she dropped the sarcasm. “What about what’s right? Has that stopped counting for you?”

Although Kevin had asked himself the very same questions, he had no answers. He simply could not—would not—act against the law. And knowing full well what was about to happen, he responded weakly, “Whatever is right or wrong, it is always wrong to violate the law. I cannot do it.”

Carmella’s face changed right in front of him, and she was no longer the woman he knew and loved. A light had gone out in her eyes, and she said, almost without emotion, quietly, “You spineless bastard,” and she turned and walked out of the apartment, being very careful not to give him the satisfaction of slamming the door.

That was the last time Kevin ever saw Carmella Salazar.

After Carmella left, Kevin retreated into a world of study and reflection. At graduation, he ranked number one in his class, and pretty

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much had his pick of any law school in the country. He chose St. John's in New York where he studied criminal law. He was President of the Law Review, and was generally considered to be a walking law library. He could cite precedent as no other student in his professors' collective memories.

When he graduated, he had his pick of law firms, but chose instead the Public Defender's office in Brooklyn, New York. His long-range plan was to be at the "other table"—in the District Attorney's office—and he knew he had to learn how the opposition worked.

He met Betty Winslow while in law school. Betty was a hard working young woman who had one goal for herself; to make money. Lots of it. Well...really two goals; power being the second. But the money definitely came first. And she focused her efforts on civil law. Specifically, she planned to use her ample talents as a trial attorney for plaintiffs in large settlement cases.

Betty stood a striking five eight, with short blond hair, long legs, and a smile that many said could disarm a bomb. What she lacked in softness, she more than made up for in sex appeal. Although Betty's mother never gave her the "women need to use their bodies, not their brains" speech, Betty nevertheless learned that lesson early on. Though she was always at the top of her class, she always managed to play up to the boys, never letting them feel threatened. On more than one occasion she even played the role of the "dumb blond" when it suited her needs. And so, she was very popular through high school and college.

Her father, though a good man, was very dull and supported his family of five as best he could doing manual labor. To make ends meet, Betty's mom had to take in other people's laundry, and occasionally clean houses when she could—in addition to raising five kids. That her mother was "old" at thirty was not a surprise, and Betty vowed that this would not be her life.

Betty viewed men as a part of her Life Plan. She used them. She used them for sex on the rare occasions when her needs required it, and she used them to further her education. With her legs, her smile, and her

innate ability to “play” people to her advantage, she had no problems whatsoever. But there was fly in the ointment of Betty’s Life Plan: her religion. She was raised Catholic, and although not a religious person, she nevertheless couldn’t shake that unique conscience that gets hammered into young Catholic children; especially girls.

And so, when she found out in her third year of law school that she was pregnant, the news was not greeted with very much joy. Betty wanted a child about as much as most people long for the joys of poison ivy, but she was a “hard wired” Catholic. Her logic, her rationality, told her to have an abortion. She was—after all—an outspoken advocate of women’s choice. But she had been programmed as a child and she could no sooner have an abortion than she could fly. For her it was simply impossible.

She cried. For the first time since she was eight years old she cried. For a full day she cried. On the second day, she woke up, told herself that she would develop a plan and move on.

With her Catholic programming still alive and well, her brain told her she needed a husband. Not only did Catholic girls not have abortions, they also didn’t have babies out of wedlock. So she started a systematic search. She realized that she needed a husband who would be a complement to herself. Not in terms of her personality, but in terms of her career. She realized that it would be very beneficial to her career if she married a man with political potential. She wanted an idealist to her inner pragmatist.

It didn’t take her long to set her sights on Kevin. He was number one in the class. He was the president of the Law Review. He was a candidate.

Kevin was walking out of class one day, when Betty ran into him—literally. A crude, yet effective ploy. Betty’s books scattered all over the pavement, and she apologized profusely as she bent down to pick them up, her short skirt riding up her thighs. Kevin, who hadn’t had a date—much less sex—since Carmella, couldn’t take his eyes off Betty’s legs. As she brushed her hair away from her forehead, she stammered in her most girlish way, “I am *soo* sorry. I’m just so clumsy. Please forgive me.”

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Kevin managed an awkward smile as he bent down to help her. “No, please, it was my fault.”

Betty flashed him The Smile as she stuck out her hand and said, still kneeling down, her skirt well up on her thigh, “Hi. I’m Betty Winslow.”

Betty and Kevin dated for two weeks. Although she often had no clue as to what he was talking about when he went off on his circuitous legal tangents, she made him feel that he was not only the most brilliant legal scholar on Earth, but also the sexiest man alive. She listened—ad nauseum. And she smiled—and giggled. Often.

Kevin was smitten. He didn’t realize just how much he had missed that admiration he’d gotten from Carmella. He’d never taken much pride within himself. He just took himself for granted. Carmella made him feel good, actually admired. Betty made him feel like some combination of Jesus Christ, Zeus, and Clarence Darrow.

Betty played Kevin like a fine violin.

Act two of her plan unfolded one Saturday night, when she’d invited Kevin to her apartment for dinner and studying. Betty wore a simple, but very feminine blouse, though unbuttoned in less than a suggestive way, it nevertheless showed a trace of cleavage if she moved a certain way. She also wore a fairly short A-line skirt, which showed her legs to their full advantage. After dinner, they sat across from each other at her dining room table studying. Their eyes would meet not infrequently, and Betty would flash her best girlish smile.

After an hour, Betty suddenly looked puzzled, crinkling her nose in her best “innocent little girl” imitation. “Kevin, can you tell me what this means?” she said as she stood up and brought her text to his side of the table. Of course, Betty knew full well what the passage meant. She placed the book on top of Kevin’s and leaned over to point out the passage. Kevin felt like his eyeballs were going to explode clear out of his head as he tried to focus on the passage and keep his eyes off Betty’s cleavage. He digested the passage as best he could, and offered an explanation which made absolutely no sense whatsoever, as his brain was occupied elsewhere. Betty looked down at him, “Thank you. You are just *soo* smart.” And she bent over and lightly brushed his lips with her own. The heat rose within Kevin immediately, and he stood up and

took her in his arms and kissed her passionately. She matched his passion—faking her own—as she began to writhe, pressing her body against his. Kevin was as out of control as he ever got, and he took her hand and led her to the couch. He laid her down on the couch, and started unbuttoning her blouse while she held his head in both her hands and kissed him with her tongue. Kevin caressed her breasts and Betty moaned softly. His hands then reached for the hem of her skirt and slowly lifted it. Suddenly, she pushed him away, leaped to her feet, and screamed, “*No. No. I can’t. My God I’m so sorry!*” And she ran out of the room into her bedroom.

Kevin was stunned. But his Catholic upbringing immediately kicked in and in thirty short seconds he went from being the horniest man on the planet to the guiltiest. He sat down on the couch, his passion now gone, and placed his head in both his hands as he said to himself, “My God! What have I done!”

Fifteen minutes later, Betty came out of her bedroom. Her eyes were red—from rubbing, not crying—and her makeup disarranged. She stood five feet from Kevin, holding a tissue in one hand, and said, “Kevin, I am so sorry. It’s just...”

Kevin interrupted her. “No, Betty, it was my fault. I shouldn’t have...uh, gotten so aggressive.”

She smiled and said, “How about if I make us some coffee?”

Kevin—who was infinitely grateful at not being thrown out and equally grateful that the very awkward moment had been broken—said, “Sure. That would be great.”

When Betty returned with the coffee, they sat and talked. By the time they finished talking—as the sky was beginning to lighten from the first attempts of the sun—Betty had made Kevin feel like he was the biggest stud alive and that it was only her very strict Catholic upbringing which somehow managed to prevent her from “going all the way”. She apologized over and over as she let him know how she understood how a man with his obvious burning sexuality must have found it so very difficult to stop. And she made him feel like a true hero for putting his integrity—and her—above his primal urges.

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Kevin left her apartment that morning feeling more alive than he had since...well, since forever.

He couldn't study. He couldn't sleep. He couldn't eat. He had a very severe case of Betty Winslow.

Not having heard from her for four days, he came to her apartment about eleven at night. Although Betty didn't know when he would come, she knew that he would. And she had Act Three ready and waiting, answering the door in her favorite nightgown. "Kevin! I was going to call..."

Kevin cut her off, his face very, very serious. "Betty. May I come in?"

She led him by his hand to the couch where he continued, "I've been doing a lot of thinking. And I know that this is a crazy time," he giggled nervously as his brow started to glisten with sweat. Continuing, he took her hand, "I know we're both really busy, and...uh, everything, but..."

Betty smiled, took his hand in both of hers and pressed it to her cheek. "Sweetheart, why don't you just say what's on your mind?"

When Kevin heard "sweetheart", any hesitations he had were immediately vaporized, and he blurted out, "Betty, I love you. Please marry me."

To which she responded by leaping into his arms and hugging him till his bones creaked. Although she couldn't force herself to cry, she managed to look as though she were about to, and she buried her head in his chest and held him. After a few minutes, he lifted her chin in his hand and kissed her softly. She responded with an explosion of faked passion, which took Kevin completely by surprise. She probed his mouth with her tongue and when she felt his tentativeness, she took his hand and moved it to her breast. Kevin began, cautiously, to follow her lead, and after a while, when she placed her hand on his crotch, he gently moved her away, and said, breathlessly, "Betty, I thought we'd..."

As she put her hand back, she murmured softly against his lips, "No, silly. It's all right if we're engaged."

They were married a month later.

Betty waited as long as she could to tell Kevin she was pregnant. When he returned from school that night, he found her seemingly crying in their bedroom. “Sweetheart, what is it?” he said tenderly.

Betty turned and just grabbed him, clinging for all she was worth. He kissed her on top of her head and gently moved her away, and looking into her eyes, said, “Honey. What?”

She blurted out, “Oh Kevin. I’m pregnant.” And she buried her face in his chest once again.

Kevin was shocked because he’d been very careful to use protection. He absolutely did not want a child and he knew that she didn’t either. They’d planned on having children when the time was right, but this certainly was not that time. But what to do? What to do? His mind was racing a mile a minute, and of course he thought about the obvious choice. But he was Catholic.

He looked at her, his wife, and said simply, “Darling, I love you. And I don’t know how in hell we’re going to make this work. But we will.”

Betty kissed him hard on the mouth and said, “Kevin, you’re the most wonderful man I’ve ever known. I thought about having...you know, having an...” She made it seem like she couldn’t get the word out, then continued, “But I just couldn’t...”

He interrupted firmly, “No. Of course not!” He then told her, lovingly, “Well, I can’t do the delivery part, but I swear that I’ll do everything else.” And she kissed him again.

Little Brian McCarthy was born less than eight months later, but Kevin was too busy to be concerned about the timing. He had a few other things on his mind.

It has been said that having children is “the best kept secret”. What is meant by that is that if you have not had any and are contemplating having kids, you can get a good sense of what it will be like by doing the following: imagine your life as you now know it. The things you like. Your habits. Your pleasures. Your leisure time. Got it? Now, forget everything you just thought of. It’s gone—forever—especially the leisure time. Oh, and sex? Think of it this way. Sex takes on a new

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meaning. It becomes the little box on a form where you put in an “M” or an “F”. And that’s it for sex.

Kevin and Betty were as prepared to have a child as most: meaning not at all. They had a nursery all ready—painted lovingly in neutral yellow. They had little clothes picked out. Yes, private schools and even colleges as well. Savings plans. The whole works. Well, almost. The one thing they didn’t prepare for was the kid. Why? Because you can’t prepare for a kid. A kid is a person. A new one you haven’t met before. He has needs. Lots and lots and lots of needs. Constant needs. And his communication skills are rather rudimentary.

So, it was a surprise only to Kevin and Betty that when little Brian was born, the shit hit the fan like nothing they could ever have imagined. Betty had had to deliver by Caesarian section after twenty-two hours of labor, and was not the bravest soul imaginable, needing lots and lots of recovery time. Kevin, though he had every good intention to help out as much as possible after the birth, had exams to prepare for. And little Brian simply didn’t care.

During various wars, one of the “enemy’s” tactics to obtain information from captured prisoners centered on depriving them of sleep. One of the most effective ways of doing that—oddly enough—is not to keep the subject awake, but rather to let him fall sleep—briefly. And then startle him awake...over and over and over again. Deprived of REM sleep, the brain cries for respite, and eventually will pretty much do whatever is needed to get it. Prior to that time however, the subject tends go through various unpleasant stages, not the least of which is becoming exceptionally cranky.

Now, while it’s true that babies are not trained by “the enemy” prior to delivery, they do nevertheless come completely knowledgeable in all the techniques of sleep deprivation, and little Brian was better than most.

As a result, Betty and Kevin were extremely unhappy campers for quite some time—Betty especially, since her “love” for Kevin was nothing more than a means to an end, had a very hard time indeed.

As the years passed, Kevin always pointed to Brian’s arrival as the turning point in their marriage, and try as he might, some part of him

blamed little Brian. His wonderful, loving Betty had changed—and not for the better. She became demanding, shrew-like at times, and as a mother, she was a great attorney.

Betty, on the other hand, had it all. Her practice flourished. She was great at what she did—which was to manipulate people: juries, Kevin, the partners at her firm. Her relationship with her husband was basically where she wanted it to be. She was guiding his career toward the governor's mansion, and her own toward being the first female partner in her firm.

Sex happened infrequently, and only when Kevin needed an ego boost. He was a confused puppy. Whenever he felt weak and indecisive about something, Betty seemed her most turned on, and she brought him back to experiences he remembered from their early lovemaking—pre-Brian. He would typically awaken the next morning invigorated, confident, and feeling on top of the world—ready for anything. And while in that space, he made some very beneficial career moves, not the least of which was becoming an ADA.

And now, he was about to tackle a trial that could make or break his career.

Chapter 6

As the Jamison trial was ready to begin, the day dawned bleakly—almost prophetically. Dark gray clouds swirled overhead, and periodic, torrential downpours, accompanied by wild, unpredictable flashes of lightning and booming thunder, slammed horizontally against anything foolhardy enough to be in the way. But Kevin was upbeat. He knew this was his opportunity, and he felt equal to the challenge. Monica had gone over the case in detail, and then he spent over three hours poring over the various reports. That he was met with considerable disdain from everyone he met—except for Judge Bishop—was not a surprise to Kevin. Betty had explained—at great length—what to expect, and as usual, she'd been right on target.

He parked his Chevette in the courtroom lot and dashed for the entrance, managing not to get too wet in the process. He was dressed in a gray sharkskin, Brooks Brothers suit which cost him more than he could afford.

Jury selection was pro-forma. There was no way Kevin was going to get an unbiased juror, and he knew it.

As the trial opened, the courtroom was jammed. It was as if, somehow, people felt they had to pay their respects to little Melanie, and had to somehow support Bob Jamison. Martha Jamison had been taken in an ambulance to a local hospital, where she remained in a catatonic trance.

Kevin McCarthy looked every bit the city slicker and was greeted

and treated with all the respect and courtesy one would expect from the local townsfolk. None whatsoever. But he didn't mind. He knew what he had to do: get on the jury's side.

"Ladies and gentlemen. I usually like being a prosecuting lawyer, but today I am deeply troubled."

The jury and the court were very still, Jeremy staring at Kevin wondering what he had up his sleeve. Kevin continued, "An unspeakable tragedy has occurred. I am a father, and as a father, and simply as a human being, my heart goes out to the Jamisons." He paused and cleaned his glasses as he cleared his throat. "A little girl has been murdered," he said softly. Then his deep voice rose to almost a bellow, "*Murdered!*" People involuntarily moved in their seats as his booming voice startled them.

He continued rhetorically, "Can we understand the incredible grief, the ferocious rage which must have coursed through every cell in Bob Jamison's body?" He again paused, looking at Bob Jamison. "Absolutely," he continued, his voice more subdued. "Absolutely," he repeated, as he walked toward the jurors.

"But, ladies and gentlemen," he paused as his eyes swept over each jury member, "we have two tragedies on our hands. An innocent man, Alberto Sosa, was also murdered." Jeremy's ears perked up at the mention of the dead man's name. Up until then he'd been listed as a John Doe and no one had been able to trace him.

Kevin continued, "Do we know if Alberto Sosa had a little girl? Do we know if Alberto Sosa had a mother? A father?" He raised his voice again, "NO! We have been so consumed by the magnitude of this tragedy, that we have only allowed ourselves to look at one victim." He looked again at Bob Jamison. Jeremy thought Kevin's use of the word "we"—thereby making him one of the townspeople—was brilliant.

"But there are two victims here, ladies and gentlemen, Melanie Jamison and Alberto Sosa." He looked again at the jurors and continued, "Can we understand why Bob Jamison murdered Alberto Sosa? Absolutely. He thought Mr. Sosa was the murderer of his daughter." He looked sympathetically again at Bob Jamison and he walked back, away from the jurors, and said softly, "Mr. Jamison made

a mistake.” The jurors strained to hear him, and he repeated in a loud voice, “Mr. Jamison made a mistake.” Once again he removed his glasses, and walking toward the jurors, repeated, “A mistake.”

Looking at Bob Jamison, he continued, “Could this mistake have been prevented?” He paused, looking at the jurors, “Absolutely. How? By allowing the system to do its job, that’s how!” He pointed at Sheriff Stewart and at Delores Melendez who were sitting side by side. “Sheriff Stewart does an excellent job, as does Ms. Melendez. They discovered in less than twenty four hours that Mr. Sosa was *not* the person guilty of this heinous crime.” He looked at Bob Jamison, and continued, “I’m going to say that again, ladies and gentlemen. They found out in less *than twenty four hours* that Alberto Sosa was not guilty of committing any crime.” His voice grew quiet, and he took his glasses off and then continued, putting them back on, “And ladies and gentlemen of the jury, this is *precisely* why we have laws and law enforcement officials. We have people who are trained to find the truth *before* they act, not after. So that none of us, in the heat of the moment, kills an innocent man.” He looked again at Bob Jamison, who sat stone faced and unmoving. His voice took on a somber tone. “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, do you realize what would have happened were it not for the professionalism of Sheriff Stewart and Medical Examiner Melendez? The real guilty party would still be out there and no one would be looking for him!” He slammed his fist down into his palm, emphasizing the point. “That’s right, ladies and gentlemen, we would all think that our children were safe because Bob Jamison took the law into his own hands!” He looked directly at Bob Jamison, who was as still as a statue. “And that is why, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you must—as conscientious citizens—do the right thing and—as difficult as it will be for you—you *must* find Mr. Jamison guilty as charged.” And with that, he returned to his seat.

Jill Stockton was three years out of law school. She had been a psych major in college, and was always fascinated with the workings of the human mind. She decided to apply her abilities to the practice of law, specifically to the defense of the accused. She easily got a job in the

Public Defenders office, and from there was assigned to many, many cases. She'd actually pled over one hundred cases in the three years since law school, and her win rate was over ninety percent. She was twenty-six years old, with blond curly hair, and baby blue eyes. She was quite slender and although pretty, rather than having men think of her sexually, the effect was more that men thought of her as a young girl. When she went to see an R rated movie, wearing jeans and a T-shirt, with her golden locks falling softly on her forehead, she had to show ID to get in.

Although she couldn't dress that way in the courtroom, she did, nonetheless dress so as to capitalize on her "Shirley Temple" looks. She wore a navy blue dress with a white, ruffled blouse, its high collar rising to her neck. Her dress fell demurely at the top of her knee, and she wore matching, navy pumps. Some jurors at first thought she was someone's daughter, not the defense counsel.

Jill's voice was feminine, but assertive, and did not match her physical appearance. She approached the jurors and looked at them gravely as she began her closing arguments. "Ladies and gentlemen, my esteemed colleague..." she said, gesturing toward Kevin, "...expressed compassion toward Mr. Jamison. But this is not a case about compassion, it is about understanding." The jurors looked at her quizzically, expecting that she would be almost begging them for compassion, and so did Kevin and the judge. She continued, "I don't want your compassion, but I do want your understanding. I want you to understand what it was like for Mr. Jamison as he went through the hours preceding his learning of his daughter's death." She walked a few steps back from the jurors, her back to them, then turned and continued, "Please bear with me ladies and gentlemen. Picture a loved one. Perhaps your child..." Jill knew that ten of the jurors had children under the age of twenty-five. "...perhaps your husband or wife or parent. They have not returned home when you expected them. At first, maybe you're a little annoyed, but as time passes, you're nervous. Now, they're two hours late, and you've called all their friends, but to no avail. You are scared. You have that feeling in the pit of your stomach which we've all experienced." She paused for effect. "It is

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cold, stark fear. The kind of fear that your mind fights not to let in.” She walked over to get a glass of water, deliberately causing her hand to shake as she poured. She wanted the jury to see fear. Returning to the front of the jurors’ box, she continued, “You call the sheriff and he organizes a search. After yet another hour, you are completely beside yourself, barely able to think, much less function. Your mind is screaming for peace—for relief from this cruelest of tortures.” Her voice was almost gentle. “Then something happens. The sheriff’s men bring in a suspect who matches the description of a man who was seen kidnapping your loved one. You fight for control. Emotions overwhelm you. But you manage to hold onto the slim hope that maybe, just maybe...” She deliberately let her voice fade as she walked over to get more water. Her hands were now shaking dramatically. She turned back to the jurors, sipping at the water, still holding the glass. Suddenly the door opens, and a man is standing there crying. A big, tough looking man is crying as he looks at you. Instantly you know your worst fears have been realized.” Then she deliberately dropped her glass, the loud noise startling everyone in the courtroom, even the judge who marveled at her theatrics.

After the glass was cleaned up, she turned to Jeremy, “I’m sorry your honor. It’s just...” the judge interrupted her with a wave of his hand and said in a neutral voice, “Continue counselor.”

Jill went on, “Your mind snaps. You cannot hear. You cannot see. But you must act. There is the man who did this horrible deed. In a fit of complete irrationality, you strike back. There is a gun just a foot from your hand. There is the man who has destroyed your life...your little girl...You grab the gun, and before you know what you are doing, you strike back.” She repeated “...before you know what you’re doing.”

She stopped, looking at each juror, repeating quietly, “You strike back.”

She went to get more water, but at the judge’s instruction, the bailiff supplied her with a paper cup and poured the water for her.

Jill returned to the front of the jurors’ box. “Ladies and gentlemen, are there any among us who honestly believes that in these circumstances we would not have gone temporarily insane?” She again

paused, looking at the jurors, letting the phrase “temporarily insane” sink in.

“Am I saying that it is right to take a human life, whether that life be innocent or guilty? Of course not. Am I asking you to be compassionate with Mr. Jamison? No. Compassion is not your job. But understanding is.” She again paused for effect. “Ladies and gentlemen, if you can honestly say from your heart that you have no doubt that you would have acted completely rationally and properly, then you must find Mr. Jamison guilty as charged.” She turned briefly to face Bob Jamison, then turned back to the jurors. “But, ladies and gentlemen, if you believe that there is a shadow of a doubt...that perhaps you too might have acted irrationally under the pressure of such an horrific event, then it is your duty to find Mr. Jamison not guilty by reason of insanity.”

And with that, the opening arguments ended.

As Kevin lay in bed that night, staring at the ceiling, he remembered the words of his wife. “She will plead temporary insanity, but you must stick to the law...just not too hard.”

When his startled look asked the unspoken question, “why?” she responded with a gentle smile, as she stroked his cheek, “Because this is one case you don’t want to win.”

At that, he quickly sat upright, but Betty just touched a soft finger to his lips and smiled. Kevin started to sputter, “But...but...” Betty just took his head in both her hands and pulled him to her. She kissed Kevin, gently at first, then with a growing passion—albeit faked. Kevin responded—as always—instantly, and he made love furiously.

All Betty would say to him in the morning as he was leaving was, “Remember, Darling, don’t fight the insanity defense,” and she thought to herself, “What a moron.”

The trial was short. There was no conflicting evidence. The defense counsel wouldn’t try to establish any doubt that Bob Jamison had—in fact—done exactly what he did. The trial would be decided with the closing arguments, which essentially re-stated the opening arguments.

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The jury deliberated for exactly one hour and twenty minutes, and as they somberly filed in, the courtroom became hushed. Judge Jeremy Bishop, banged his gavel but once, and he turned to face the jury. Mr. Foreman, have you reached a verdict?

The foreman, a man who played golf with Jeremy, replied in somber tones, “Yes, your honor. We have,” as he proceeded to hand the verdict to the bailiff, who then handed the slip of paper to Jeremy. Jeremy showed no emotion as he read the verdict, and somberly handed the paper back to the bailiff, who returned it to the foreman.

The judge continued, “In the matter of the people versus Robert Jamison, how do you find?”

The foreman responded in the same somber tones, “We find the defendant not guilty by reason of insanity.”

Little emotion was forthcoming from the spectators. Instead of an explosion of congratulations and back slapping, there were murmurs of approval. A few people started crying. Kevin sat motionless, his head resting on one of his hands. If you looked at Jill Stockton very closely, you might have noticed a slight smile cross her lips—but only briefly. Bob Jamison neither smiled nor moved, and he barely acknowledged Jill’s hand on his shoulder, as she got up to leave. It was only when Jess Stewart came up to him, after most of the courtroom had cleared, that Bob Jamison rose, and the once-powerful man half walked, half stumbled out of the courtroom.

Jess Stewart was half supporting Bob as they walked into the parking lot. “Bob, Shirley and I would like you to stay with us for a while. At least until...”

Bob Jamison’s voice was flat and barely above a whisper. “Until what, Jess? Until I wake up and find out that this was some horrible nightmare? Until I get my family back? Until I get my Mel...” and his voice faded, but no tears came.

Tears did come to Jess Stewart though as he stared helplessly at his friend. “Bob, if there’s anything...”

Bob Jamison just looked at Jess Stewart. “Jess, you’re a good man, and a good friend. Thank you.” And with that each man got into his car, and parted ways.

Jess Stewart was surprised when he saw Delores Melendez sitting behind his desk as he walked into his office the next morning. She looked worse than she had when she’d told him that the dead man was not the perp. Delores stared at Jess, started to speak, and then stopped.

“Delores, what is it?”

She looked as if she were going to cry.

“Delores...”

“Bob Jamison hung himself last night,” she said simply, and then, unable to hold it in any more, she started sobbing.

Jess Stewart didn’t realize that his legs had given way, and he just sank to the floor, his head buried in his arms, his soul pleading for relief from the agony he now felt.

By the time Kevin McCarthy returned home, Betty had heard the news, and she had a wonderful celebration waiting. His favorite dinner was in the oven, the baby was asleep, and the candles were lit. When he walked in, she threw her arms around him, and said, Congratulations, Darling. You were wonderful!”

Kevin stared at her blankly, “Wonderful? I lost.” And with that, he brushed past her and went to bed.

The double tragedy of Melanie Jamison and Alberto Sosa led the state legislature to enact the Sosa Law, a law against vigilantism. Kevin, as the prosecutor in the trial had been called on to support the passage of the law, which he did with eloquence and passion, stating to the legislature, “If we don’t do this, we will have many more Alberto Sosa’s,” and he added solemnly, “ and Bob Jamisons.”

The Sosa Law was passed unanimously.