

A PSYCHOLOGICAL CRIME THRILLER
BASED ON THE HORRIFYING TRUE STORY

IN THE ATTIC

The poster features a dark, textured background. In the center is a silhouette of a man. Inside his torso, a glowing scene of an attic is visible, showing a wooden floor, a staircase, and a window. To the right, a close-up of a woman's face is shown, looking downwards with a concerned expression. The overall color palette is dominated by dark reds, browns, and blacks.

*"I'm so terrified; that
psycho's going to kill me."*

GARRY RODGERS

In The Attic

Warning

***In The Attic* is based on a true crime story. This tells of a vicious, double ax-murder that actually occurred. The horror of this crime is not embellished, nor abbreviated. Explicit descriptions of the crime scene, factual dialogue, real police procedures, and accurate thoughts of the killer and detective are portrayed. Some names and locations are changed for privacy and commercialization.**

Chapter 1 — Friday, June 10th - 4:55 pm

“I’m so terrified... that psycho’s going to kill me.” Maria Dersch trembled like it was twenty below.

“What’s his name again?” I clicked my pen. Maria sat across the plain, metal desk. We were in a small police interview room with no windows or distractions on the walls.

“Shaughnessy.” Maria swallowed. “William... Raymond... Shaughnessy.” She double swallowed. “But he goes by Billy Ray.”

I’ll never forget Maria’s anguish—her voice hesitant, like a condemned woman stepping up to the guillotine... knowing what waited for her above.

Maria said it again. “I’m so terrified that psycho’s going to kill me.”

Yeah, yeah. Heard this before.

As a cop near retirement, I don’t know how many times I heard that line. “He’s gonna kill me. Or, “I’m gonna kill you.”

It’s always exaggerated. They usually bring this shit on themselves.

But, this was one time—the only time—in my homicide investigation career where I heard it right from a real victim. Or someone about to be a real homicide victim, that is.

“Okay, Maria. I need a statement from you and I’m going to record it.” I pointed at the mic.

She nodded, wiped her nose, and whispered. “Okay.”

“And I need you speak up so it can be clearly transcribed.”

Maria Dersch nodded again. She’d come to the police station for a restraining order against Billy Ray Shaughnessy—a man I’d soon spend hours with in this same little room. A uniformed officer took the start of Maria’s complaint but, hearing the severity of violence in what she said, immediately called for a plainclothes investigator from the Serious Crimes Section to take over. I’m the poor bastard who got handed the file.

“Where’d this happen?”

“Up on Machleary Street. Four six nine Machleary. Like, three blocks away. At the dead end.”

“Here in Nanaimo, right? I just want that clear for the record.”

Nanaimo is a small, seaside city of around a hundred thousand on the east side of Vancouver Island in southern British Columbia, Canada. It’s straight-across from the craziness of Vancouver—one of the world’s most expensive, exotic, and erotic cities. Nanaimo is world-

class, too—a mecca for international students and tourists. It’s a cruise ship port, a hub of higher learning, and the gateway to unlimited outdoor adventures.

But Nanaimo has its own seedy underworld. Sleazebags and skitzos, junkies, drunks, and weirdos, low-lives and homeless, hardcores and hookers, perverts, pimps, and psychos. We, the cops, try keeping these losers from killing themselves and they keep us employed.

It’s a zero sum game.

“Yeah.” Maria coughed and touched her throat. “I mean yes.”

“When did this happen?”

“Well, it’s been ongoing...but really got bad this morning...he had his knife out...at my throat...threatened to kill...kill me...but I offered to...have...have...I didn’t offer...I gave in.”

Listening to the recording, you can just feel Maria’s fear. It resonates. Chills. Terrifies, as she said. It’s like she’d been attacked by a wild animal, anticipating its return.

“Can you give me some background? What’s your relationship with this...,” I glanced at my notes. “Bill Shaughnessy.”

Maria put her head in her hands. I gave her a few moments, judging this young lady.

Kinda mousey with long, blondish-brown hair. Maybe a hundred and twenty pounds. Germanic, I think from the color, looks, and name. Left ring finger’s bare and nails are painted an odd yellowish-gold. Got the piercings. Probably tattooed to the nines. Skin’s kinda rough. So are her teeth. It’s June and a warm summer day. She’s wearing a heavy jean jacket. The western kind with the fleece collar. And a burgundy scarf wrapping her neck?

Blood-colored, I remember.

Maria started to talk. She stared down at the floor through big, plastic-framed shades. “He’s my boyfriend. Ex-boyfriend now. Like, we were never engaged or married or anything, although he’s been trying to, and I guess that’s what started the problem because I tried to get rid of him, get him to leave, but he won’t and now, he’s threatening to kill me if I leave him...or...God help...he says if I ever have someone else.”

“How long have you known him?”

“Six months. Actually, less, because we met just after New Year’s.”

“How did that come about?”

Maria’s knee was bouncing and she was lint-picking her jeans.

Ripped jeans. Ones with the ready-made, horizontal slashes.

“I met him through a friend. A friend who babysits for me. I’m a single mom with a one-year-old daughter and Becky, my friend, knew Billy Ray through another friend. We’re all wanna-be musicians.”

“So, Bill’s not your daughter’s real father, eh?”

“It’s Billy Ray.” Maria looked to her left. “No. No. Karliana’s dad is another guy I used to date. Earl...Karliana’s real father...we were never married or even lived together, but we’re still good friends. He’s got visiting rights to Karliana.”

“What’s the dad’s name?”

“Earl. Earl Barker.”

I jotted it down. “Do Bill and Earl know each other?”

“Oh, yeah. Like, we all jam together.”

“Is there a conflict between Bill and Earl?”

Love triangle. That’s usually behind these things.

“There’s a conflict with any guy Billy Ray thinks I might...you know...”

First priority. Protect the kids.

“How is Bill with your daughter? How does he treat her?”

Maria looked up. “Actually...really good. He treats Karliana like his own daughter. He’s almost...like...obsessed with her. Obsessed with me...and Karliana. It’s like he’s possessed or something.”

“Where is your daughter right now? She’s not with...”

“No, no. Karliana is with my friend Becky. Rebecca Rigg.”

“So, she’s safe?”

“Yes. Absolutely.”

“Now, Bill was living with you?”

Maria stared at the floor. “Yes. He moved in right away after we started dating. He was new to town...had no place to stay...so I felt sorry for him...he seemed nice and needed help...so stupid me...took him in...and...”

Oh yeah. A stray rescuer.

“When was that?” I prompted her.

“January fourteenth.” She started to cry. “It was my birthday.”

I waited for Maria to compose. “How were things at first?”

She pulled her sunglasses slightly forward and dabbed with the scarf. “So-so. He was supposed to get a job...but every day...just sat around the house. He’d pick guitar...sing...do song-writes...he’s actually a good singer...he’s always making things into songs. But more and more he’d spend a lot of time staring off into space. Finally, I got pissed off because he was such a leech, and then he started becoming more and more...aggressive...hurtful...mentally...physically...”

“Does Bill have substance abuse issues?”

This usually goes with the package. Defense will chew it up...if...this ever ends up in court.

Maria shook her head. “No. He doesn’t drink much, then only a couple beers. He smokes-up...we all do...everybody I know does...but he doesn’t do hard drugs or nothing. That’s what attracted me in the first place. He seemed like this nice, clean guy. Not like the rest of the...whatever...losers around here.”

“How did things go off the rails?”

There was a long pause. Maria wrapped her arms around her midsection, leaned forward, and rocked. “Well...he...he kept getting weirder and weirder, like so possessive. So...psycho. I have a part-time job. Server at the MGM Restaurant and he started restricting where I could go. Who I could see. He’d walked me to work, and then be there when I’d got off. He took care of Karliana. Would have her in the stroller while walking me.”

Oh yeah. I see where this is going.

Actually, I couldn’t. I had no idea where this was going. Now, looking back, my only thoughts are *if only...if only...*

“Like, it kinda worked out for me. Him helping with Karliana and around the house, but then it got to the point where he did nothing but sit and stare. He wasn’t even picking, or writing, or making up songs, and did nothing to help out and...like, he’s got a serious, serious mental problem. But...at first I didn’t see it. I...I guess I didn’t want to see it.”

“Mental problem?”

Maria rocked, her arms wrapped around her mid-section in a self-embrace. “He’s real secretive about his past. He had a problem in the past, and I know he was taking medications

because I looked in his backpack and he had pill bottles. Empty ones. So I checked what they were, and they're for mental problems."

"Do you remember what they were?"

She squinted behind her sunglasses. "Cloza...pine and Zip...rasi...done. I think that's how you say them, I looked them up. Then I got scared."

"I'm not that up on meds," I said, writing them down. "What're they for?"

Maria released her arms from her chest. "They're for, like, skitzos, psychos...weirdos like them."

I stopped writing. Looked at her. She was full-on vibrating. "Okay. Did you ever talk to him about it? About his mental...medical health?"

Her hands rushed to her jaw. "God, no!"

"Fair enough. What do you know about his background? Does he have a record? Ever in trouble with the law?"

Maria winced. "I...I know he had a DUI, but I don't think he's ever been to jail or anything serious. He's never held a job long...then only labor jobs. He's played in bands and calls himself an aspiring musician. Especially a song writer. Like I said, he's secretive, especially about his family and background, but he's got a mother who he calls every once in a while. Bums money off her. She lives in Vernon. In the Okanagon."

"How old is he?"

"Twenty-six. Four years older than me...God, I thought he was going to kill me." Maria shuddered as if I'd raked my nails down a blackboard. "I was so...so...terrified."

Hmm... she keeps saying how she felt...how she feels. Starting to get an okay read on her.

That's the sign of truthfulness experienced investigators know to watch for. Emotions. Real victims express their emotions because they're real. They lived the event. So many complaints we got were not truthful. I wouldn't say totally made up, but not exactly as reported. That's how people are. They make shit up and they have their reasons. But virtually no one can invent emotions, so investigators watch for that. If the complainant isn't reporting emotions—how they felt during the assault—then it's a good indicator they're not genuine. Genuine victims are fixated on how they felt. Maria was giving indications of being genuine.

I went on. "Okay. Now I know this is going to be difficult, but I need you to tell me what happened. Why are you in here today?"

Maria took a deep breath, She locked her fingers as if praying with closed fists. Her eyes shut. She paused. Swallowed. Re-wrapped her arms. And said, "It got bad about a week ago when I told him this wasn't working and it was time for him to leave. He went real weird... real weird... and told me how much he loved me. How much he loved Karliana. How we should get married. How he never wanted to be with anyone else. How he never wanted me to be with anyone else. And when I told him it was over, he just turned like this cold... monster. He went to hit me, but held back. Then tried to hug me and kiss me and grope me as if trying to...to..."

I gave her some time. "To?"

She opened her eyes. Made a yeck-face. And continued. "He forced me...at least I just gave in...and then once he...he turned into this super-nice guy like nothing happened."

"Did you have a previous sexual relationship with him? Ongoing?"

Maria stared past me. "We did...I...we were a couple."

"Understandable." I'd interviewed many sexual assault victims and knew to give Maria her space. "What happened next?"

She kept staring off into space. “He was okay for about a day, acted like nothing happened. I was thinking of moving out and just taking Karliana and running. But it’s, like, my house. Actually, it’s my brother’s house. Jim owns it. It’s a double lot with two houses. Jim and his wife, Debbie, live in the big house next door and they let me have the smaller house. It’s actually a two-bedroom place and I have it for free. It really helps out.”

Not sure...not sure...she sounds sincere...

“So, was Bill paying for anything?” I was trying to establish their legal relationship. There’s no clear line on common-law. It comes down to a pattern of mutual support and dependency as well as how deep the relationship goes, especially the sexual relationship, and sexual acts require consent. Consent can be direct or implied. Courts get strange when it comes to that.

“Well, sometimes when he got money from his mom, he’d chip in for food. But he never worked, other than some jam nights at the Queens, and never bought anything like furniture or anything like that. Never even bought clothes for me, but he did buy stuff for Karliana.” She paused, slightly shaking her head. “It was like he was trying to take Karliana as his own daughter.” Maria glanced up. “But he never hurt her. Ever.”

Maria silenced. She stayed staring straight ahead.

Hmmmmmm...

“Tell me what happened next.” I cued her. There’s a fine line between leading a witness and coaxing them to talk. Courts get picky about that, too. For good reason.

She closed her eyes. “There was a couple more times that he got weird, like psycho, when I’d bring up the subject of him having to leave. He’d hint, actually saying that if he couldn’t have me and Karliana, then nobody else could. He’d see to that.”

“What...what did you interpret that as meaning?”

“That...he...was threatening...to kill us. No, kill me if he couldn’t have me. He didn’t say that about Karliana. I don’t believe he’d ever hurt Karliana. It’s me. It’s me he threatened. It’s me he’s gonna kill. God, what would happen to Karliana if he killed me? Who’d...who’d...I can’t imagine.” Maria began whimpering. “Anyway...it...it got worse.”

This...Okay. This girl’s for real.

“Go on.”

“Then this morning...he’d been moping around and being all weird and I could feel him. I don’t know how to describe it, but it was like vibes of weirdness coming off him. I told him I can’t live like this and he’d have to leave, and then he just...flipped. He grabbed me and told me...grabbed me by the throat...he’s got this knife...it folds and he carries it on his belt and lately, he’s been unfolding and folding it...and I know that it’s a sign of what he could do to me...and now he pushed me onto the couch and told me to lay still...that he could kill me anytime he wants...and I’m so freaked out...e has this knife at my throat...and this absolute blank look on his face...like this totally psychotic look...and then he drops the knife on the floor and puts his hands around...on my neck and starts choking the living shit out of me...”

Jesus...Fucking...Christ!

Maria stopped. She breathed deep. And went on.

“And I’m struggling back...and I thought he was going to kill me...choke me to death...and I was blacking out...and he suddenly stops and says he...this is exactly what he said...‘I don’t want to fuck you while you’re dead. I want to fuck a warm pussy and cum inside you while

you're still alive. After that, I could kill you. I could kill you any time I want. And if you ever leave me, I swear I will kill you'. That is exactly what he said."

Oooh, man! This is nasty.

"Then what happened?"

"I...I just gave in and let him do it...do his thing..."

Hate having to ask this question.

I set my pen down. "What...What were the sexual acts?"

Maria stayed silent.

"I have to know this." I pressed her. "It's a legal requirement. I need to know."

"He...he... forced...me..."

"I need you to speak up, Maria."

Slightly louder, "He...he forced me to give him oral sex, and then he had intercourse.

Vaginal intercourse. On top. And, yes, if you have to know, he came...ejaculated...inside me."

"I also need to know for a legal requirement...what was your state of mind as to consent?"

Maria stared right past me. She took her time answering. "There is no doubt in my mind if I didn't give in, he would have choked me or knifed me to death." Maria hung her head. "I was so scared. He is a true...psycho. A psycho. Like, all the time he was...he was...raping me...he kept calling me Chloe. Chloe. He...he...kept calling me Chloe."

"Chloe?"

"Yeah... Chloe."

"Who's Chloe?"

"I...I have no idea. He called me Chloe before...when...when he was in his states. His...his...psycho states."

I wrote "Chloe", then set my pen on the desk. "Maria, can you take your sunglasses off?" She'd had them on through the whole interview. I suspected black eyes.

She removed them. No bruising, but notably bloodshot. Fear and crying does that.

"Let's have a look at your neck."

Maria slowly unwrapped her blood-red scarf, exposing a purplish-blue mess of claw marks.

Talk about corroborating evidence!

I left, got a digital camera, came back, and photographed her injuries. I considered taking Maria to the hospital with a rape kit but, given the known-to-known relationship, from an investigational point it was useless.

"There's something else you need to know." Maria rewrapped her scarf. "He left right after attacking me and I called my friend, Becky, who had Karliana, to pick me up. We went out for about two hours and when I came back, he'd returned, cut up some of my clothes, probably with his knife, and was gone again. It freaked me right out, and Becky said, 'You've got to go to the cops and get a restraining order against him.' So, it took me a bit to get the courage, and then I came here."

He cut her clothes?

Now, after many years in police service, I'd investigated a lot of violent crimes and this violent crime was hoisting a huge red flag up its staff.

“You’ve done the right thing, Maria, but this is not a restraining order situation. I think you’re in real danger here. Any idea where Bill is now? I need to arrest him and get him into custody so we can get some legal control on him.”

“No. Billy Ray’s his name. He was gone when I got home and the door was locked. But he has a key. I don’t know where he went. He’s got no friends. Nowhere else to go. Unless he’s hanging around downtown, but he’s got no money. He’s probably back at the house now. God, I can’t go back if he’s there.” She leaned forward and rocked. “Oooh...I can’t go back there.”

“Does he know you’re here?”

“No... he’d for sure kill me if he found out. He’s like...psychotic...a psycho. He wasn’t making sense the last I saw him...saying ‘Chloe’...‘Chloe’...”

“Where’s Karliana now?”

“I told you. She’s with my friend, Becky, at her place.”

“Okay, Maria. I need to go to your place. I’ll see if he’s there and I’ll arrest him and I need to see the cut clothes and photo them. I need you to come, too. Don’t worry. I’ll take some other police officers along. We’ll put you in a secure car and we’ll clear the house. Once it’s safe, you can go in, but we need to protect you till we find Billy Ray.”

Maria dropped her face in her hands. Elbows on knees. Silently shaking.

“I’m so terrified that psycho’s going to kill me.”

In The Attic — Friday, June 10th - 4:55 pm

Is this the real life? Is this just my fantasy? Am I caught in a landslide? Have I escaped from reality? I open my eyes. Look up at the skies...I seeee...

I’m just a poor boy...don’t need no sympathy. Cause I’m easy come...easy go...little high...little low...any way the wind blows. Doesn’t really matter. Nothing really matters...to me.

Maria...I’ll kill you dead. Put a blade against your throat. Slice across it. Now you’re dead.

Maria...our lives had just begun. But now you’ve gone and throwed it all away.

Maria...I mean more than to make you cry. You’ll be dead this time tomorrow and I’ll carry on...carry on...nothing really matters...to me.

Too late...your time has come. I’ll send shivers down your spine, make your body ache all the time. Say goodbye to everybody. You’ve got to go. Got to leave it all behind. Anyway the wind blows. Nothing really matters to...ah...me.

Boom! Batta-ta-watta!

Boom! Batta-ta-watta!

I see a little silhouetto of a girl.

Karliana. Karliana. Will you do the Fandana?

Thunderbolts n’ lightning should be very, very frightening to you.

Oh Karliana. Karliana. Karliana Figaro...

I’m just a poor boy. Nobody loves me. I’m just a poor boy from a poor family. Not sparing your life from this monstrosity.

Easy come? Easy go? Will I let you go? Maria, will I let you go?

Fuck, no!

No, I will not let you go!

Fuck, no!

*No, I will not let you go!
Let Me Go...oooh.oooh...?
Fuck, no! I will not let you go!
Billy Ray has a sharpened blade put aside for you! For you! For you!
Maria, I just gotta kill you right outta here! Right outta here! Just gotta kill you right
outta here...
Boom! Batta-ta-watta!
Boom! Batta-ta-watta.
Boom! Batta-ta-watta...
Oohooo-a waaa...
Nothing really matters...
Nothing really matters...
Nothing really matters...
Too-ooo...ahhahh...meee...*

Chapter 2 — Friday, June 10th - 5:45 pm

The residence at 469 Machleary Street was a sweet little place—not what you’d expect for a house of horrors.

Well-kept. For this part of town.

The one-story bungalow with the steep roof was in the old city quarter—probably built in the 20’s when Nanaimo was a booming coal town and shipping hub. Now, that end of Machleary was being reclaimed from derelict rooming houses, rentals, and mortgage take-backs. But there was something different about this yellow house with the white trim and the wooden-shingled architrave accenting a stained glass front door.

Something distinctly different.

Maria rode with me in my unmarked police Explorer. It had blacked-out windows so she could sit locked safely inside while we checked her place for Billy Ray Shaughnessy. By “we” I mean, myself and two uniformed officers who arrived in a marked car, equipped for prisoner transport.

I parked two addresses to the west and got out, looking more like some gray-haired, cheesy realtor in a shirt and tie than a cop packing a 9-mil loaded with thirteen Eagle Talons in a shoulder-holster under my dark blue windbreaker.

We stood on the sidewalk, at the entrance to the gravel drive, and planned for a minute. The house—cottage, I should say—was set back about fifty feet from the curb and partly obstructed by two big, old, deciduous Larch trees that were probably planted when it was built. They cast tentacled shadows that reached for the left-side window. That was Maria’s bedroom.

Like all cops effecting an arrest, we looked for an escape route should Billy Ray decide to bolt. Usually we’d have a police dog standing by but Max, our four-legged set of fangs, was on another call. The yard was partly fenced. To the right, was a laurel hedge that even Brer Rabbit couldn’t pass. The rear was partitioned from an apartment block by a six-foot row of vertical cedar boards, but to the left, or the east, there was an open stretch of lawn dotted with shrubs and garden beds before it reached a bigger, two-story house that was considerably newer.

Must be her brother, Jim’s.

Maria told me there were two doors in her cottage—the front, that she normally used, and a back porch door that was barricaded by stacks of boxes. Just to make sure, we put one officer at the rear while the other uniform and I circled the house, peering in the windows. Curtains blocked the bedrooms and bathroom, but the living area and kitchen were clear. No sign of anyone inside.

Maria was positive there were no firearms in the cottage and said Billy Ray never talked about guns. But that folding knife business made me nervous and every cop ever trained in self-defense knows the twenty-one foot rule. It's the distance where a man with a blade is fair game for taking a chest-load of hollow-points.

I used Maria's key to unlock the front deadbolt. Drew my Sig Sauer. Pushed open the door.

"Mister Shaughnessy?" My voice was loud and clear, reverberating throughout. "Police officers. You in here?"

Quiet.

Again. This time louder. "Bill Shaughnessy? Police here. We want to talk to you."

Nothing.

I motioned for my uniformed backup to keep a watch to the right—the living room/kitchen area while I opened Maria's bedroom door. It was dim with the curtains closed.

Seems vacant.

I stepped in. It contained a double bed with the mattress right on the floor, a nightstand and lamp, a white baby crib, and Maria's clothes hanging in an open closet.

Nowhere to hide.

Back in the living room, I called again. "Bill Shaughnessy? You in here?"

No response.

We cleared the rest of the cottage—kitchen, second bedroom, bathroom, and the back porch with all its empties, bags, and boxes.

No sign of Billy Ray.

We went back to the curb. The two uniformed officers signed off and drove away. I got Maria from the SUV. She still had the scarf covering her neck bruises and the big pair of dark sunglasses over bloodshot eyes. We walked back to the cottage and through her doorway.

Maria stopped. Grabbed my arm. And gasped. "He's been back!" She pointed to a black ball-cap with a Gibson guitar logo and a black, zip-up hoodie with an AC-DC patch on the back. "That's his hat and pullover. He always wears them."

Maria shook. She put her hands over her mouth. I checked the hoodie's pockets. They were empty.

Maria was ready to run. "Are you positive he's not here?"

"Positive," I said. "Unless you have a basement..."

"No. There's no basement."

I could hardly hear her. "Do you have a crawlspace?" I was thinking on my feet.

"No." Maria shook her head. "But there's a shed at the back of the yard by Jim's place. He might be hiding in there."

I'd seen the shed when we did the walk-around and assumed it was the neighbor's. "You stay in here, Maria. I'll go over and check. Lock the door and only open it for me when I get back."

Maria looked like I was feeding her to the gators. "I am not staying here by myself! He's got keys!" Terror radiated from her.

Good point.

“Okay. Is your brother home? Let’s take you over there.”

“I didn’t see his truck, but Debbie should be. Her van stays in the garage.”

Maria moved into me. I put my hands on her arms and swung her toward the door. She leaned out, spun her head and checked about. Right. Left. Up. Down. Back and forth. We walked up the street to Jim and Debbie Dersch’s big, green two-story. Maria pushed the buzzer, still looking around.

I looked to the weathered, old shed at the property line. Then back at her cottage.

What I didn’t notice was a small window. It was rectangular—maybe a foot wide and two feet tall with a cross of white-painted mullions dividing it to four separate panes—located in the east gable wall just below the peak of her cottage’s high-pitched roof.

In The Attic — Friday, June 10th - 6:10 pm

Bitch! Fucking bitch! Maria! You fucking bitch! Bitch pig! You called the cops!

I can see you, Maria. You’re standing in the sun. You got your scarf wrapped around.

Fucking sunglasses on, baby.

You filthy ditch-pig. I can see you. Standing with a cop.

You got your pants pulled down. Sunglasses on.

And I can see you. Legs open to everyone.

You went and did this, Maria. You caused it. You pushed me too far, Maria. Now, you’ve gone and called the cops. You deserved a fight, Maria. You got what you deserve and you’re going to fucking well deserve what you’ll get. You’re going to get what you deserve. You deserve to die, Maria, but Chloe doesn’t deserve to die. All fucking bitches, Jezebels, deserve to die. But Chloe’s not a fucking bitch. Not a Jezebel like you, Maria. Slut. Whore. Jezebel.

I was better before I met you, Maria.

I had money in the bank and a two-dollar bill and I was the cat all over the hill.

And, hey, I’m good lookin’. What’s I got cookin’? I’m a-cookin’ somthin’ up for you.

Chloe. I have Chloe. I’ll always have Chloe. She is so much better than you, Maria, and Chloe doesn’t look like you. Chloe is beautiful and she is sexy and smart and Chloe... she is the thing. I am the thing and Chloe loves me. Not like you, Maria.

You never loved me Maria. Oh yeah, you say you love me, but you can’t love when your dead and Chloe couldn’t love me if she was dead and you have it coming, Maria.

Chloe, she changed her address and she packed up and took herself all over the hill till the cat caught up and paid the two dollar bill and Chloe came back because she loves me.

Chloe is the present. You are the past, Maria, and the past will never become the future because you cannot live in the future. You cannot live in the past. You can only live in the present. You can’t live in both.

It’s a zero sum game, Maria.

Zero sum game.

Many people think they can live in the future but to live in the future you must have lived in the present and you must have lived in the past. All great people who lived in the past and those who live in the present will be great in the future if they live on.

If...they live on.

And Chloe always tells me I am her future. Chloe tells me that and I am the one who makes you crazy. Maria, you told me I was the future and I made you crazy, too. But Chloe was the first and Maria, you are the last, the first and the last, and Chloe wants to live on just like you, Maria. You want to live on. If someone lets you live on.

I'm not going to let you live on.

I can see you, Maria. Down there on the ground. You got a cop with you. He's got a blue jacket on.

I can see you. Blonde hair shining in the sun. You got your hair pulled back. Sunglasses on, baby.

And I can tell you my love for you will still be strong after your fucking life breath is gone.

I will kill you. Kill your blue eyes shining in the sun. I saw you walking real slow.

Fucking everyone.

I can see you. Standing there with a cop.

You got your scarf wrapped around. Choke-marks on, baby.

I can see you. Standing there with a cop.

I can see you. Standing there with that cop.

But I will still kill you...

After that blue jacket cop-man is gone.

Chapter 3 — Friday, June 10th - 6:15 pm

Debbie Dersch answered her door.

She looked at Maria and put her hand to her mouth. “Oh. My. God! What has he done to you?”

Maria let out a cry I can only describe as a rabbit being caught in a predator’s jaws. “He’s going to kill me. He...he...this afternoon he...” She broke into wails.

Debbi hugged Maria, stroking the back of her head. “It’s okay. It’s okay. You’re safe with us.”

I gave them a minute, then identified myself, showing Debbie my badge and saying I was going to arrest Bill Shaughnessy for assaulting Maria. I didn’t say sexual assault. Maria could tell her the details if she wanted. “Have you seen Bill today?” I asked Debbie.

“No. I haven’t. And I never want to see that psycho again. He’s gotta go.” Debbie held Maria tighter, then stepped back. “Where’s Karliana?”

Maria didn’t look up. “She...she’s at Becky’s.”

“Good. You guys gotta stay with me and Jim till that piece a shit is locked up.” Debbie glanced at me. She was a big woman—a heavy-chested woman who could probably do more damage to Shaughnessy than most cops. “He needs to be locked up. Something’s really wrong with him. Mentally.”

I told Debbie I wanted to check her shed and look around her yard. “Go for it,” she said, taking Maria inside and shutting her door.

The shed was about eight by twelve, eighty feet away, across a lawn that was due for a mow. I thought about radioing for back-up, but my cop-sense wasn’t going off.

Shaughnessy wasn't described as big or powerful, and I knew assholes who beat on women were chicken-shits when dealing with men. Maria described him as my size, 5-11 and about 170, and he'd be the guy bringing a knife to the gun fight.

I stood to the left of the shed door. Cop Training 101. Never stand in front of the door. Sig-Sauer in my right hand, I called "Bill Shaughnessy. Police. You in there?"

Nothing.

"Police. You got the option of coming out or get pepper-sprayed inside."

A bluff. Still nothing. Maybe it's empty?

I grabbed the handle and swung the door to my right. Just a couple of old lawn mowers, a wheelbarrow, parts of a fertilizer spreader, hoses, rakes, shovels, a log splitter, hoes, gas cans, potting soil, and everything else you'd expect to find in a garden shed, except for a dangerous psychopath, about-to-become a mass murderer.

Those eyes watched from somewhere else.

A silver F-150 4X4 pulled in the drive. A big man who looked like he could be on Duck Dynasty got out. He gave me a look like "What're you doin' in my swamp?" then noticed the handgun I hadn't re-holstered. His mouth curled down. His chin jutted. And both his open hands rose above his shoulders. Guns have that effect on people.

"It's okay. Police officer here."

His expression didn't relax. "What's the problem?" He looked about.

I flashed my badge and introduced myself, asking who he was.

"Jim Dersch. These are my properties. Whaddaya need?"

"Your sister, Maria, filed an assault complaint against Mr. Shaughnessy. I'm trying to arrest him but can't find him."

"That fuckin' asshole. Where's Maria?"

"In the house with your wife."

He glanced at the big, green residence, then back at me.

"The baby?"

"She's with Maria's friend. Becky, I believe her name is."

"What'd the fucker do to her?" His fist clenched.

"Physically, she's bruised. Emotionally... Maria's terrified."

"It's been coming." Jim shook his head. "Much as I love my sister, she has this thing for losers. I've... we, Debbie 'n me, been telling Maria to ditch that retard for weeks. Something's real wrong with that dickhead."

So I'm hearing.

I raised my brow. "Any idea where I can find Shaughnessy? We got to get him off the street and cool this thing down before someone gets seriously hurt.

"Off the street and into the fuckin' ocean, if I had my way." He nodded at the cottage. "Obviously you checked the little house, not that there's much to it."

"Yeah. He's not there. And I searched your shed, too. Any other buildings on your property?"

"Just what you see."

"Any chance he might have gotten into your main house?"

"He doesn't have the balls to break into my house. The guy's a fuckin' coward."

"Any idea where he might be?"

“No idea. Far as I know, he’s got nowhere to go. Might just be roaming town. Don’t care as long as he stays the fuck away from her.”

Despite his rough exterior, I got the impression Jim Dersch was a decent, hard-working guy with a solid moral core. Maria would be safe with him until we rounded-up Shaughnessy.

“I need Maria to come back to her house,” I told Jim. “There’s some damage I want to photograph.”

“What kind of damage?” His tone changed from alarmed to pissed off.

“Nothing to the house. Maria tells me he cut up a bunch of her clothes.”

“Cut up her clothes? That guy’s fuckin’ sick. Sounds like some kinda message he’s trying to send.”

I agree. And I don’t like it.

The whole situation suggested ugly—real ugly—especially if Shaughnessy wasn’t scooped and legal controls put on him, including a remand for psych assessment. My mind rolled with a to-do list—sexual assault with a weapon and unlawful confinement charges laid tonight, warrant issued, arrest plan developed with other officers, fan-out info...

I walked back to Maria’s cottage thinking it’d be a late night. My scheduled shift ended at 4:30 p.m. and I was already into overtime. That went with the job. You don’t take on a detective role expecting bankers’ hours and a rule of survival is you don’t take your work home with you. You can’t—absolutely can’t—take it personal, or it’d drive you looney.

I’d cut through the yard and passed the east side under the gable-end with the high window, then hit the keyless entry to my Explorer and got out my scene bag with camera. I stood on the front steps for five minutes before Maria came over. Jim was beside her. Maria unlocked the door. She waited till Jim and I entered. Jim took a quick walk around, satisfying himself it was safe.

“Let’s have a look at your clothes, Maria.” I had my camera out.

“They’re in my bedroom.” The door was open, which is how I left it. She flicked the switch, clicking-on a lamp on a nightstand between her mattress and the crib. Her closet was to the right, covered by a mauve curtain which she pulled aside, exposing a rod about six feet long, the closet thick with women’s clothes. A white plastic stand with open shelves—the kind you get on sale at Walmart—held folded jeans, sweaters, and tops.

“Oh my God!” Maria stepped back, putting her hands to the side of her face. “He’s cut up more!” She stepped ahead and pulled out a black-leather jacket, showing me a slice about six inches long that ran from underneath a pocket on the left breast diagonally downward to the side seam.

I’m no tailor, but it was obvious the jacket—a fairly expensive leather jacket—was ruined. A matching cut was on the right.

“Jesus Christ!” Maria threw it on the bed. She reached for a dress. I described it in my report as a blue cocktail dress, for lack of a better term. It was cut with a Y-incision across the front, much like an autopsy’s done. “This wasn’t done before I left to go see you.”

Maria took a pair of what I reported as designer jeans—I’m not good with brand names—from the plastic stand and unfolded them. The crotch had been slit in a circle and the four-inch diameter swatch of fabric was set back in place.

Maria started to cry. “This isn’t fair. He’s ruined my best clothes. I can’t afford to replace them.” She laid face down on the bed with her hands clasped behind her neck and sobbed.

Jim Dersch came in. He looked at the jeans I was holding. I showed him the hole.

He stayed silent for a few moments, patted Maria on the back, then took the jeans from me and examined the cut. He looked at the black jacket. Back at the closet. Then at me.

“You better hope you find that cocksucker before me, or you’ll have a murder on your hands. I’ll kill the fucker for doin’ this.”

I’d heard the angry talk many times and just let ‘er slide. I assumed Jim had seen the bruising on Maria’s neck, but had no idea if she’d disclosed the sexual part of the assault. I had to keep the official face on and readied the camera.

Wonder what I’d do if this was my sister? Or...my daughter...

My cell phone toned on another matter—call display said it was my wife. I excused myself and stepped out to explain that I’d be late again.

Now, there’s something you should know about how detectives operate. Usually we’re paired with a partner, but this week my partner—a woman we called Harry, but that’s for another story—was away on a training course, then taking some vacation time. Normally, Harry would be dealing with a female sexual assault victim like Maria. There’s something comforting about the woman-to-woman and Harry was good, real good, with her interviews. This week—and next—I was on my own.

By the time I wrapped up my conversation with my wife Maria had composed herself. There’s only so much a girl can take, I suppose. Now, she was furious.

“Look at this!” Maria was standing at the closet, taking more things off their hangers and handing them to her brother. “My Disney hoodie! He’s sliced Pooh’s eyes out! What the fuck is wrong with him?” She had at least a dozen articles of clothing in a pile and was finding more cuts.

I asked Jim to lay the clothes on the bed. I gave him a plastic forensics ruler to hold beside each cut while I photographed them. In my notebook I created a list with an approximate value attached to each item. My report detailed that Billy Ray Shaughnessy sliced thirty-one separate garments for a conservative value of over two thousand dollars.

Maria put it well. “What kind of a sick fuck does this?”

“I’ll pay for the replacements.” Jim Dersch assured her. He turned to me and thumbed at my notebook. “And you can put in your police report that I’ll be collecting it outta his hide.”

Sick fuck is right.

In The Attic — Friday, June 10th - 6:25 pm

She calls me a sick fuck. Sick fuck! What’s wrong with me, she asks.

I’ll tell her what’s wrong. It’s her. Maria is what’s wrong. Not me. Nothing’s wrong with me. I’m cool. She’s not cool. She’s not cool. She’s the sick fuck! Maria’s a sick fuck. Sick fuck! Sick fuck, Maria! Sick fuck who fucks sick fucks! Maria the sick fuck fucker. Mariaaaa. Sick fuck fuck fucker. My Maria...

Big talk from big brother. Murder me. Murder me. Big Jim says he’s going to murder me. Big Jimbo. Big Jim-Jim-Jimmy Boy. Jimbo says he’ll murder me. I’ll murder you, Big Jimmy Boy Jimbo! I’ll murder all of you!

Murder Maria. Murder Jim. Murder Deb. Debbie-Deb Big Tits Deb. I’ll kill all of you and set your houses on fire. All of you will be dead and you’ll burn.

You’ll burn. Burn. Burn. In a ring of fire. A ring of fire.

*You'll go down. Down. Down. And the flames will go higher.
And you'll burn. Burn. Burn. In a ring of fire.
A ring of fire.*

Big Jim tough-talker. Big Jimmy-Jim.

Jim be nimble. Jim be quick. Jim Flash sat on a candle stick because fire is the devil's only friend. And as the flames climbed high throughout the night, I saw the sacrificial light and I saw Satan lavish with delight. The day... Maria and Jimmy and Debbie... Died.

Take it from my hide, will you Jimmy Boy? Big Jim Jimmy Boy. Tough Jimmy Boy. You can watch your sister burn, Jimmy Boy. I'll cut you, my pretty. I'll cut your pretty throat and stab your pretty heart and I'll cut it out and hand it to Big Jimmy Boy Jimbo. And I'll tell Jimmy Boy why.

Because Maria called the cops. Maria called a blue jacket cop. I hear Maria telling blue jacket cop I cut her clothes. Blue jacket cop says thirty-one clothes. I cut thirty-one clothes? Maria told that to blue jacket cop.

Maria's a faker. She's a liar. Liar.

She lies to me. Lies to me. I wanna know. Who she really sees.

What is wrong with me? I'm not supposed to be. Happy all the time.

But I'm willing to bet. It doesn't matter yet. As long as she doesn't mind.

Telling lies to me. Lies to me. Maria tells lies to me.

Maria says she loves me. Maria says she needs me. True love should never die.

But Maria doesn't love me. Maria says she hates me. Now Maria is going to die.

She says she loves me, then says she doesn't love me, and then Maria tires to be like Clohe. No, Maria's not like Chloe. Maria doesn't even know Chloe.

Chloe really loves me. Chloe really cares. I don't have to cut up Chloe's clothes. Chloe could cut up her own clothes. Chloe could cut up her clothes with her own knife. Folding knife. But Chloe doesn't deserve it.

Chloe could cut up Maria. But not with the knife. Chloe has a blade. Not a knife. A blade. Blade in a hoop. Rusty blade in a metal hoop. Hoop with a blade on a long wooden handle. Chloe got it from the shed. Chloe sharpened it. Chloe sharpened it thirty-one times. Chloe cut Maria's clothing thirty-one times.

Chloe will cut Maria.

Thirty-one times.

Chapter 4 — Friday, June 10th - 6:35 pm

Before leaving the cottage, I had more words with Maria and Jim in the bedroom. Maria was quietly folding her cut clothes—all thirty-one items—and placing them in two laundry baskets.

“What'll happen now,” I told them, “is I'm heading back to the police office before shift change and brief the night watch on what's occurred and who to look for. We're going to go full out on arresting him. But I don't know what Bill looks like, other than your description, Maria. Do you have any photos of him?”

She frowned and scrunched her nose, then took her iPhone from her jacket pocket and scrolled about. “Lots. Which ones do you want?” She handed me the phone.

I paged through at least twenty. Until an image of Billy Ray Shaughnessy etched in my memory—an image that remains in my mind to this day.

Most of her snapshots showed happiness and fun, which all couples should want. Maria on his knees with her arms around his shoulders. Billy Ray strumming a guitar. Billy Ray passing a joint. Billy Ray holding Karliana. More with Billy Ray and Karliana. Billy Ray at the kitchen table making a goofy face. Selfies with Maria and Billy Ray. More of Billy Ray and his guitar. All appeared happy and normal.

How did things turn out so bad?

One image I couldn't describe. One you had to see to understand.

Maria was at the kitchen table, laughing with some dude, and Billy Ray was a bit in the background. It was his look. It wasn't hate. It wasn't anger. It wasn't jealousy. It was something beyond that. Something more sinister.

I did the finger-spread and enlarged the image, shuffling over so his face was centered. It wasn't his expression. It was his eyes. Vacant. As if his soul was gone.

I stared at him for probably ten seconds. He wasn't a bad looking young man. A white guy. Dark brown hair that was fairly long, tied back in a pony-tail. Wispy mustache and a few days growth on his cheeks and chin. No scars or tattoos visible on his face or neck. Nothing really remarkable about him.

Except for his eyes. The image was clear. Real clear. But I couldn't tell the color. They weren't blue. Not green. Not gray. Not brown. I can't think of a name for the color, but I can think of a name for the eyes. Dead-fish eyes. Cold-fish eyes. Like looking into a black hole of humanity.

They were the same when I met him in person.

“Do you want a copy of that?” Maria was watching me. “I can email it, or I can download here and print it off.”

“Email's best. Here's my business card, by the way.” I opened my badge holder and gave her a couple cards, writing my direct cell number on them.

She entered my info into her phone.

No stranger to texting, I'll bet.

In seconds, my cell vibrated. The same eyes had been electronically transferred through the ether.

“I'll be back a little later.” I closed my scene bag. “But before I go, I want to make sure we have a safety plan working. Maria, you obviously can't be alone till we have Billy in custody. What works best for you?”

She'd already thought this out. “Well, all Karliana's stuff is here, so it's best I stay here. Becky's on her way over now with Karliana and she's going to stay the night with me. I might have someone else stay over, too, so there'll be a bunch of us. Even if Billy Ray shows up, I don't think he'd do anything with anyone else around.”

Jim Dersch was also thinking. “The asshole has a key for this place, so I'm gonna go right up to Home Depot and get a couple new deadbolts. One for the front. One for the back.”

“We all have our phones.” Maria clutched hers. “And we can call 911 if he's back.”

I had a thought. “Hey, Maria. Does Billy Ray have a cell?”

I could just ping it and locate him. Isn't technology great?

She shook her head. “No. He tried, but they wouldn't give him credit and he never had enough money to buy a phone or get minutes. He just borrowed mine.”

So much for that idea.

“Okay. Here’s some added police insurance. For situations like these, we have portable radios with a side emergency channel. I’ll get you one and you keep it with you so the second something’s wrong you just key the mic and it goes right to the dispatcher. It’s way faster than 911. I’ll bring you one when I come back.”

For the first time, I saw Maria slightly smile.

She touched my arm. “I’m lucky I got a cop who cares.”

I wish she could say that about her ex.

A car pulled into the gravel drive.

“That’s Becky with Karliana.” Maria headed for the door.

I followed and saw a beater of a Honda Accord that’d be tough to sell. A dumpy young lady—roughly the same age as Maria—got out and Maria ran to her. They had a long embrace. I couldn’t hear much of their conversation, but I did hear the word “psycho.”

Maria let go and hustled around to the passenger’s front. She opened the door and unbuckled the car seat, picking up her bundle of joy and walking toward me.

Karliana was a little darling. Just like in the photos. Blonde curls. Light blue eyes. Double helping of cheeks and a mouth clamped on a soother. Definitely her mother’s daughter.

As a father of two myself, I could relate.

“This is Karliana.” Maria presented her to me. “She’s what I live for.” Maria kissed her. “Aren’t you, punkin?” She kissed her again.

Karliana looked at me and played shy, burying her face in her mom’s shoulder, gripping a bunch of Maria’s hair.

It probably hurt, but that doesn’t matter to mothers. They walked into the house and I left in my Explorer.

In The Attic — Friday, June 10th - 6:50 pm

Blue jacket cop wants to arrest me. Blue jacket cop has to find me. Blue jacket cop left to go find me. Blue jacket cop won’t find me. Blue jacket cop doesn’t know where to find me. Blue jacket cop will come back. Blue jacket cop will bring a radio for Maria. Blue jacket cop will leave again. Leave Maria alone with the radio. Blue jacket cop can suck my dick.

Maria can’t call. Not when she’s dead. Dead people can’t call.

Big Jimmy Boy thinks he’s so smart. Big Jimmy Bob Jimmy Boy’s going to change the locks. Haha! Big Jimmy Boy changes the locks! Big Jimmy Boy changes the locks to lock me in.

Lock me in.

If you lock me in, I’ll never stop.

If you lock me in. If you lock me in, I’ll never stop. Never stop.

You got me ticking. Gonna blow my top.

Spread out the oil. The gasoline.

Fire’s smooth. I’m a mean, mean machine. Yay!

My eyes dilate. My lips go green. My hands are greasy. I’m a mean, mean, machine.

If you lock me in.

If you lock me in, I’ll never stop. Never stop. Never stop.

I'll make Maria cry. She'll be the wind. At double speed. I'll send her places that she's never, never seen.

Love the day when I'll never stop. Never stop. Never stop. Never stop. Never stop.

I'll make Maria cry.

Maria. Cry. Cry. Cry. Cry. Yeah!

Big Jimmy Boy Jimmy Bob locks me in.

Locks me in to never stop.

Never stop.

Never stop.

Chloe won't never let me stop.

Chapter 5 — Friday, June 10th - 6:55 pm

I was late for the watch briefing. They normally start at six forty-five and run less than fifteen minutes so the previous shift can be out the door by seven. Twelve hours is a long haul for the grunts in the harness. That's cop-speak for the uniform or patrol division. They're bagged by the end of a shift.

Sergeant Bev O'Sullivan looked up from her laptop. It was connected to an Apple Smartboard on the briefing room wall. She was B-Watch's Commander—passing info on to fourteen other members, including two traffic cops and two bearded guys in jeans from Street Crew. Seeing me at a shift briefing was a bit rare. O'Sullivan instinctively knew I had something important. She gave me the “just a sec” sign and closed off her last piece. “Go ahead,” she signaled.

“Hey, everyone.” I stepped up beside O'Sullivan. “I need about five minutes, so hang in here.” I set my iPhone on the table. “Around four this afternoon, I got involved with a complaint that started being described as a spousal assault, but turned out to be a full-on rape with a weapon and unlawful confinement. The victim is terrified her ex is going to come back and kill her. I think there's real potential for this thing to go sideways, so I'll bring you up to speed. Especially you guys working south.”

If you know cops, you'd know the reaction was typical. Some sat up—knowing me, if I was concerned, then they should be, too. Some raised their brow with a roll of their eyes and a “heard this before” expression. A few thought they were better off improving their ticket stats because their annual assessment was due. And one might be thinking about a problem going on at home. Cops have personal lives, too.

“Okay. This happened at a residence at four-six-nine Machleary. Up at the dead end.” Now I had the four south-zone members' attention. “Maria Dersch is the complainant. William Raymond Shaughnessy is the bad guy. Her ex-boyfriend. Goes by Bill or Billy Ray. Anyone heard of these two?”

Several officers muttered, “No”. Some shook their head. Some jotted the information in their notebooks.

“History is, Maria Dersch lived with Shaughnessy for about four months. The guy's a bit of a loser. Not employed. Leach. Started the mental and physical abuse pattern. Then became the obsessive-possessive behavior. She tried to kick him out, but he wouldn't go. We've all seen it before. By the way, she's got a one-year-old daughter who isn't his.”

Like before, a bunch of the officers muttered, “yeah”. Some nod their head. Some jotted notes.

“There’s some incidents of forced sexual compliance prior to today. She figured it was easier to give in than fight him. But today, around one p.m., she finally laid it down and gave him the boot. He held a folding knife to her throat, and then choked her nearly unconscious, threatening to kill her if she rejected him. It carried on to forced fellatio and vaginal intercourse. Her neck looks like she’d been hung.”

Several officers muttered, “fuck”. Some winced. The ones scribbling notes stopped.

“Gets worse. He left on his own. She went to confide in a friend. She comes back. He’s come and gone again, but he’d cut up a bunch of her clothes.”

A whole bunch of “uh-ohs.”

I looked about. “Right. Gets even worse. Maria Dersch’s friend convinces Maria to come into the office and apply for a restraining order. A bloody peace bond.” I shook my head. “So her details were taken at the counter, and then I got involved. I took her statement and suspect there may be even more going on that this guy’s done to her. You know how complainants do that. Forget. Minimize. Whatever. You gotta be in their shoes to be in their heads.”

Bunch of “yups”. Especially from the female officers. Sergeant O’Sullivan nodded.

“So, I went over to the complainant’s house at around five with two members from C-Watch and we searched the place. Going to arrest him. Nothing. He was gone, but get this. He’d been back again and cut up more of her clothes. Thirty-one articles in total.”

O’Sullivan spoke up. “Don’t like the sound of this.”

I agreed. “So this evening we have to locate and arrest Bill Shaughnessy before this gets ugly. Those threats and that repeated cutting have every sign of a really volatile situation.”

“What’s he look like?” someone asked.

“Just getting to that.” I patched my iPhone to O’Sullivan’s laptop and called up Shaughnessy’s image. The one with the vacant soul. “This is recent. Within the last month. Anyone recognize him?”

A bunch of “nopes”. Some shakes of the head. About half snapped the Smart-board image on their phones.

“What’s his background?” someone asked.

“CPIC says no warrants or observations. CNI shows one impaired conviction. PARIS has a few minor entries, but basically, nothing. He’s twenty-six and clean. Except for an impaired driving charge.”

“Don’t let that fool you.” O’Sullivan spoke from experience. “What’s happening tonight? I mean, from your investigation end. And her protection.”

“Okay.” I left Shaughnessy’s image up on the screen. “There’s ample grounds for sexual assault with a weapon and unlawful confinement charges. I’ll get those sworn right after this and get a warrant. But he’s arrestable, as is. Right now.”

A bunch of “for sures”. Many nods of the head. Some looks at the clock.

“Before you go.” I switched images. “I want you guys, especially you guys working south, to know this house in case you have to respond immediately.” I put an image of Maria’s little yellow and white cottage up on the Smart-board. “Again, it’s four six nine Machleary on the south side on the dead end. The yard’s pretty much fenced in and the complainant’s brother lives in the big, green house to the east. Kind of difficult to run out the back if he shows up and you have to attend.”

The south members were paying attention. Others were getting ready to go.

“One last thing, everybody.” I raised my voice. “The complainant has people staying with her until we get Shaughnessy off the street and I’m getting a portable for her so she can radio dispatch in an emergency. It’ll be on Tac Channel 2, so set your scan for that.”

The south members nodded.

“Any idea where this guy—” a south member glanced at her notes. “This Billy Ray Shaughnessy might be?”

I shook my head. “No. The complainant says he has no other friends in town and nowhere to go. He has no vehicle and no money. I’m going to check some of the bars, as well as the downtown parks and the seawall. Typical places for homeless to hang out.”

“How big is the house and yard?” she asked. “Like, are there any small spaces to hide? Like, I’m thinking if he’s really intent on hurting her, then he’s somewhere where he can watch. That going back and forth and cutting up clothes really freaks me.”

“With you on that.” I closed off the Smartboard. “The house... I call it a cottage... is really small. Two bedrooms. One bath. Kitchen. Living room. Back porch. That’s it. We searched it twice. He’s not there.”

“Basement or anything?”

“No, and only one shed outside. Empty. He’s not there.”

“But does he have a key? Like, if he comes back?”

“That’s being taken care of. The complainant’s brother is changing the locks as we speak. If he comes back, he’ll have to break in, so that’ll give us some response time.”

“Sounds like a good plan.”

I thought so, too.

In The Attic — Friday, June 10th - 7:05 pm

Maria says she loves me. She says she loves me not.

Itsy-bitsy spider crawls up the water spout. Down came the rain and washed the spider out. Out came the sun and dried up all the rain. And the itsy-bitsy spider climbed along the ceiling joist...Ha! Squished the fucker.

Another eight-leg Daddy Longlegs crawls along the ceiling joist. Out comes my hand and stops his little run. Daddy’s in my palm. Maria’s in my palm. My left palm. Arachnoids. Eight legs. Arachnoids. Not insects. Insects have six legs. Three body parts. Head. Thorax. Abdomen.

Flies are insects. Big blow flies buzzing about. Hot in here. Sun down soon. Nightfall will be cooler. Maria is coming to nightfall.

Sun goes down. She’s home all alone. Laying there and staring at the same four walls. Light is dim. Traffic is slim. No one there to hear her scream. She belongs in the cemetery. She belongs in the ground.

Big Jim Jimmy Boy’s gone to change the locks. Locking Maria inside to stare at the same four walls. She’s home all alone. Light is dim. No one there to hear her scream.

Chloe will hear her scream. Chloe didn’t ask to hear Maria scream. Chloe will bring her blade. Sharpened blade with the metal hoop. Blade and metal hoop on wooden handle. Chloe swings her sharpened blade in the hoop on the wooden handle. Cuts Maria. Cuts Maria. Cuts Maria. Thirty-one times.

Itsy-bitsy spider in my itchy palm.

Out comes my fingers and grab a little leg.

One. Maria loves me.
Two. She loves me not.
Three. Maria loves me,
Four. She loves me not.
Five. Maria loves me.
Six. She loves me not.
Seven. Maria loves me.
Eight. She loves me not.
Maria loves me not.
Chloe hates Maria.
Chloe cuts Maria.
Thirty-one times.

Chapter 6 — Friday, June 10th - 7:05 pm

I left the briefing room and climbed the back stairs. The Serious Crimes office was on the second floor and my desk was in a cubicle at the rear of the room. It was a second home and had a far better ocean view than my own place at the north end of town. Most of the cops lived in the north end. Not the south end. And certainly not downtown.

I grabbed a Criminal Code and flipped to the sexual assault section. It read:

272 (1) Every person commits an offence who, in committing a sexual assault,
(a) carries, uses or threatens to use a weapon or an imitation of a weapon;
(b) threatens to cause bodily harm to the complainant;
(c) causes bodily harm to the complainant.

272 (2) Every person who commits an offence under subsection (1) is guilty of an indictable offence and subject to imprisonment for a term not exceeding fourteen years and to a minimum punishment of imprisonment for a term of five years.

The other section I needed read:

279 (2) Every person who, without lawful authority, confines, imprisons or forcibly holds or seizes another person against their consent and will is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years.

Pretty stiff penalties, but far short of first-degree murder which carries a mandatory sentence of life imprisonment with minimum eligibility of parole after twenty-five years. Consecutive. Do one planned and premeditated murder and you're in for a good twenty-five. Two murders—fifty. Three—seventy-five. But there's no death penalty north of the American border.

I took the good book and went down to the records section. Lydia was working the evening shift. She saw me coming, smiled, and saved her screen.

“Whatcha got?”

“Bit of an urgency, Lydia.” I set the open Code on her side table.

She'd heard that lots of times during her nearly thirty years of police support and could bang-off a charge in the dark.

"Ugh." Lydia looked at the page. "What's the circumstances? I need to get the wording right."

I told her. You think she'd have heard it all by now but, as Lydia put it, "Raping and nearly strangling her at knife point, then coming back and cutting her clothes strikes me as some kind of psychopath."

She worked on the wording of the charges. "Do you want me to throw in a count of Mischief for the clothes?"

"Nah. We can't clearly prove he did it yet, so let's just keep it clean for now. The prosecutor can add it later."

"Can't prove he did it? You have another sick psycho that snuck in with a knife?" She slightly smiled and shook her head. Three decades of working with the legal system—not the justice system—makes you jaded.

Lydia finished the charge documents and the arrest warrant. I got them from the printer and was about to head out to contact the Justice of the Peace on call for authorization when Lydia asked, "What does this guy look like?"

I showed her the iPhone images.

She quietly scrolled though. "This one." She'd picked up on the one with Shaughnessy in the background and she was moving the phone about. "Something in his expression. Something's not all there. You can see it in his eyes. His eyes...they seem to move."

I looked again, viewing it from straight on. From the right. From the left. Above. Below. Straight on again. Then it set in. Billy Ray's eyes followed you.

Like a murderous Mona Lisa.

The dispatch center was technically off-limits to the rank and file officers. History proved it too distracting for the operators, especially from inter-office flirting that invariably happens. I had a serious purpose that night, taking a portable radio and syncing it with the Tac 2 operational channel. I let the telecoms supervisor in on the potential of emergency as well as the details—suspect name, complainant name, cottage location, arrest grounds, as well as supplying printed copies of Billy Ray's photo, which the supervisor passed around to her other operators.

They mentally filed it and went back to a continuous stream of calls. Some from the public. Some from mobile units. Some from specialized services like the Forensic Identification Section, the Canine Unit, Traffic Enforcement, Marine Section, Air One—the police helicopter passing through from the west coast of the Island back to Vancouver—as well as from Drug Squad, Street Crew, By-law Enforcement, and the Bike Patrol. Friday nights could be busy times.

There was still plenty of light when I arrived at the on-call J.P.'s residence. I knew him fairly well from being a regular at the courthouse—also from times when I'd show up at his condo for a search warrant. But never to swear a charge. Especially a charge like this.

The J.P. buzzed me in. I rode the elevator to the twenty-first floor and tapped on 2106. He opened, invited me in, and asked me to sit for a moment at the kitchen nook table while he finished a call.

It was a nice breather. The view was spectacular, overlooking the harbor. Below was the ferry dock to Gabriola Island, the seaplane base, the seawall with scurrying ant-people, and the

rooftops of rest of the city's high-end, waterfront residential complex. Across was Protection Island, with its funky homes and floating pub, and the unspoiled natural beauty of Newcastle Island Park. In the distance, across an eighteen-mile stretch of bright blue Pacific Ocean, I could see the skyline of Greater Vancouver—home to around three million people—and the mass of hi-rises, bridges, mountains, and airplanes.

So happy I'm living on this side of the pond and not in that crowded mess.

Every day, I'd listen to Vancouver's CKNW radio and Global Television frontline the crime scene. Not even half the year spent and they were approaching fifty gang shootings, never mind the daily head-count of accidental killings, suicides, drug overdoses, and a pile of weird—call them kinky—domestic murders where someone flips out and takes their spouse or lover with them.

Glad we don't see that shit over here.

The J.P. returned and broke my daydream. "What have you got for me tonight?" He picked up the papers I'd laid on the table, knowing full well if a senior detective was here on a Friday evening, something urgent was up.

He silently read the charges. "Hmm. Some serious allegations." He peered over his glasses. I nodded. He read the two-page addendum, which outlined what's known as my Reasonable and Probable Grounds, or reasons to support the criminal charges. Summary of evidence, you can call it. He slightly whistled. "I don't like this cut clothing business. This guy sounds like he means business."

"I'm concerned." I placed the arrest warrant in front of him. "I want to get him into custody as soon as we find him and get some controls in place. The complainant is terrified." I took my hand off the warrant. "I don't want to take any chances and have this backfire."

"Fully understand and agree." The J.P. had me swear an oath of truthfulness before signing the papers.

William Raymond Shaughnessy was a charged and legally wanted man.

The challenge now...to find him.

In The Attic — Friday, June 10th - 7:20 pm

Karliana is crying. I can hear Karliana crying.

Karliana is hungry. Or Karliana is wet. Karliana is poopy. Poopy and wet diaper.

Karliana only cries when she's hungry or has a full diaper.

Maria! Karliana is crying. Listen to her. Maria! Check on Karliana. Feed her! Change her! Do something! Don't let Karliana cry!

Maria is ignoring Karliana. Maria always ignores Karliana.

I wouldn't ignore Karliana.

I love Karliana. I feed Karliana. I change Karliana. I love Karliana.

Maria says she loves Karliana, but Maria doesn't show she loves Karliana. Maria says she loves me, but doesn't show she loves me. Maria doesn't love anyone. Except herself.

Maria only loves herself. Karliana needs someone to love her. I love Karliana.

Maria doesn't take proper care of Karliana. Maria ignores Karliana.

I never ignore Karliana.

Listen to Karliana cry.

Maria! Do something!

*I wouldn't let Karliana cry. I am a good dad to Karliana. I should be Karliana's real dad. I wouldn't let Karliana cry. I feed her and change her and wash her and sing to her.
Hush little baby. Don't you cry. Daddy's gonna sing you a lullaby.
I sing to her and love her and I can be her real dad.
I can be Karliana's real dad.
Hush little baby. Don't you cry. Billy's gonna sing you a lullaby.
Maria ignores Karliana. Maria is a bad mother.
Chloe wouldn't ignore Karliana. Chloe would be a good mother.
I'm a good father. Chloe's a good mother.
Together we'll raise Karliana.
Karliana's still crying. Maria! Do something! Make her stop crying!
It hurts me when Karliana cries.
It doesn't hurt me when Maria cries.
Hush little baby. Don't you cry. Daddy Billy's gonna sing you a lullaby.
Maria says she loves Karliana. Maria doesn't love Karliana. Maria only loves herself.
Chloe loves Karliana.
I love Karliana.
Chloe and I will raise Karliana.
We'll love her and care for her and feed her and wash her and change her.
Chloe and Billy love you, Karliana.
Karliana is crying. I can hear Karliana crying. Chloe can hear Karliana crying.
Do something Maria!
Make Karliana stop crying!*

Chapter 7 — Friday, June 10th - 8:55 pm

The streetlights began to flicker when I stopped in front of Maria's cottage. Becky's beater still sat in the driveway. Jim Dersch was bent over on the front steps, fiddling with the deadbolt.

"Any luck finding the asshole?" Jim looked up. The door was open. I could hear music from a boom-box inside. Not overly loud. It was actually kind of catchy, but I couldn't place the song.

Seems like music's a big part of these folks' lives.

I had the portable radio in one hand and walked towards Jim. "Nothing yet. I passed the info on to the nightshift. Billy Ray's photo as well. When I leave here, I'll check the bars and the downtown area."

As I hit the bottom step, Jim reached out a meat-hook. I thought he was going for the radio, but he offered me a handshake.

"Really appreciate you taking this seriously." He patted my upper arm as our hands dislodged. "Never had much use for most cops." He broke eye contact. "Then I never had this sorta shit happen in the family, either."

I've seen fake and I've seen genuine. Jim Dersch was a genuine guy. I could tell he was worried.

"I changed the back lock and braced the door from inside." Jim pointed his screwdriver at Maria's bedroom. "And I nailed the windows shut. He'd have to really work hard to bust in."

“Good. Excellent. Here’s the emergency radio for Maria.” I looked past him. Maria was on the couch with Karliana. A bottle was in the baby’s mouth.

Maria signaled me to come closer. Jim followed. Becky sat beside Maria and took Karliana from her. Debbie Dersch was in the arm chair. Two other men stood in the kitchen. I later learned they were Nathan and Kyle, part of the jam crowd.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.

Six civilian adults. Plus a cop.

All in the living room. All talking—above the music from the boom-box—about what to do with Billy Ray Shaughnessy and where he might be. They’d made a pact to keep Maria surrounded till Billy Ray was caught. Bluntly they said what they thought of him and what they’d do if they got to him first.

None of it was nice.

I demonstrated the radio. It was simple. Off. On. Keep it on. Stay on Tac Cannel 2. In case of emergency, key the mic and call for help. Keep it in the charger, plugged in. And within sight at all times.

Maria did a test call to dispatch. They acknowledged. She smiled, but her hands quivered. I took the radio and plugged the charger into a wall outlet in the living room, setting it on a stand by her TV.

As I readied to go, I eyed the room. Nathan and Kyle moved from the kitchen to watch the radio demo. Debbie stood. She’d taken Karliana from Becky, shouldering her for a burp. Jim was at the door, tapping his screwdriver in his palm. Becky held Maria’s left hand. Maria had a quizzed expression.

Something’s on her mind.

“How you feeling, Maria? You okay with what we’re doing?” I wasn’t sure what else to say.

“Something...something’s bothering me...”

No shit.

“What is it?”

“All his stuff’s still here.” She pointed. “His guitar. His iPod. His clothes...the little bit he’s got. He’s got a toolbox on the back porch along with his song book. Song books. Where he writes all his stuff. They’re right there. Like, everything he values...everything he’s got...is still here. It’s like he hasn’t left.”

That didn’t sit right with me. It was a clear reason for Billy Ray to come back to the house and claim his stuff. Far as I was aware, he had no idea Maria laid the complaint and that now there was a warrant for his arrest. It was a natural excuse for him to show up and try to get in.

Six pairs of eyes stared at me, waiting for my suggestion.

“Hmm. Okay, I think the best thing is to move all his belongings out to the yard. No, the shed. And put a sign on the front door that his personal effects have been removed and are safeguarded in the shed.”

The room was quiet. I thought it was sensible, but then—I realized the way I said it. It was too cop-like...way to officious. I needed to drop it down a notch. “Or you can write the sign like Billy Ray. Your shit’s in the shed. So fuck off!”

The room exploded with laughter. It was then that my credibility with the Dersch clan and the jam band was cinched. Might have been a total lack of professionalism on my part but—hey—sometimes you gotta speak to your audience.

In The Attic — Friday, June 10th - 9:20 pm

Blue jacket cop came back. Brought a radio for Maria. Blue jacket cop wants Maria to call in an emergency.

I'll be the Emergency. Emergency. Nine-one-one. Emergency.

Gotta make out things they said. Spent too many nights getting outta my head.

They must be mad. They must be blind. Driving me crazy. Right outta my mind.

Oh No! Nine-one-one. Emergency. Emergency.

Can't seem to think. Can't decide. Time's running out on the other side.

Where to run. What to do. Better not hide. So I can't find you.

Oh yeah! Nine-one-one. Emergency. Emergency.

I'll be the Emergency. Emergency.

Blue jacket cop came back. Brought a radio for Maria. Blue jacket cop wants Maria to call in an emergency.

I hear them talking. Billy Ray this. Billy Ray that. Billy Ray's an asshole. Loser. Freak. Fuck-up. Billy Ray sucks dick. Billy Ray's a queer stick. Faggot. Flake. Flame. Fudge Packer.

Homo. Hard-on. Homo with a hard-on. Devil with a blue dress on.

Maria the whore. Maria the slut. Maria the Jezebel with a cut blue dress on. Debbie Big Tits. Becky Butt Face. Big Jimmy Boy Jimmy Bob. Nathan the Nob. Kyle the Krunt. I hear them talking but they can't come in.

Talking with blue jacket cop. Telling blue jacket cop what they're gonna do. They don't know who Billy Ray really is and what Billy Ray's gonna do. Billy Ray is Satan alive. Billy Ray is the devil. The devil. Have sympathy for the devil.

Please allow me to introduce myself.

I'm a man of wealth and taste.

I've been around for a long, long time.

Stole Maria's soul and faith.

Washed my hands and sealed her fate.

It's the nature of my game.

Just as every cop's a criminal.

And all the sinners saints.

Pleased to meet you.

Hope you guess my name.

Cause it's a zero sum game.

It's a zero sum game, Maria.

Zero sum game.

It's how I get my...satisfaction.

Ha! Ah. No. No. Ah, no.

I...can't...get...no...

Satisfaction.

I...can't...get...no...

Pain reaction.

Cause I'll cut...and I'll chop...and I'll slice...and I'll dice...

I can't get no...

*No. No. Ah, no.
They don't know Billy Ray.
What Billy Ray's gonna do.
They don't know Chloe.
What Chloe's gonna do.
Chloe has her blade.
Sharp blade.
Metal hoop.
Wooden handle.
Chloe cuts Maria.
Thirty-one times.
Locks are changed.
I'm deranged.
Everything's the same
Nothing's changed.
Karliana should be asleep.
Fed and clean.
Chloe cuts Maria.
Thirty-one times.*

Chapter 8 — Friday, June 10th - 9:20 pm

I U-turned in front of the cottage and waved as I passed the house. Maria, Jim, and Debbie were on the walk outside the front door. They waved back. I left satisfied that Maria was safe. People were with her. She had her emergency radio. Windows were secured. Locks were changed. If more could be done, I wasn't aware of it.

Now, where to look?

Nothing suggested Billy Ray had left town and I had a clear image of what he looked like. No problem spotting him on the street or picking him out of a crowd.

I believe the simplest solution to a problem is usually the best one. And the right one. It's called Occam's Razor—a basic principle of police investigation. Another investigation principle says the more bizarre and gruesome the crime, the closer the answer is to home.

He has to be nearby.

First stop was Port Place, our downtown mall on the waterfront. If you're looking for someone with time on their hands, or a strung-out nut-case, this was your place to go. I parked on the liquor store side and went inside. Even though it was near closing, some of the usual suspects were around.

"Lifer" was sitting on a bench—can't remember his real name, but he was out on parole for serving life on second degree murder. Another player who looked like Osama bin Laden was beside him.

I'll give it a shot. No need to flash my badge. These guys can smell a cop from across the mall.

"I'm looking for this fellah." I showed them the iPhone with Billy Ray's picture. Lifer put on a pair of Dollar Store glasses. Osama squinted through his. Both shook their heads with an exaggerated "Nope."

“Well, if you see him, can you call it in? Not a good idea to have him on the street tonight.”

You never know.

Next, I went to the service desk at Thrifty Foods and did the same thing. If anyone could recognize a downtown face, it was these ladies. Every creep in town shoplifted there. But no luck. They’d never seen Billy Ray.

I circled through the drug store, then hit the adjacent strip mall with Starbucks and Subway. I even tried the casino—not a likely place for someone with no money.

Back in my Explorer, I cruised the main streets. Up Commercial. Over the Bastion Bridge. Back via Wallace and down to Victoria Crescent.

The strip and the stroll.

I parked and started checking bars on foot.

The Queens was packed. Maria said Billy Ray jammed there and it was Friday night—jam night. I scanned the crowd. No one close. I went up to the bar and waited till Johnny Merlo finished drawing a pitcher.

Merlo was the main bartender who had been there long before I moved to the town, and I’d been here for years. We didn’t make it public, but Merlo was a friend of the cops—if you know what I mean. He could tell by me standing around that I wanted something. I showed him the photo.

“Hasn’t been in tonight.” Merlo instantly recognized him. “Don’t know his name, but he’s a picker. So-so picker. What do you want with him?”

“Beat on his old lady. Threats. We’re taking this seriously.”

“Don’t like hearing that shit.” Merlo nodded. “If I see him, I’ll call it in.”

No need to give him a card. He already has a few.

I crossed the street to the Cambie. It, too, was packed and the street-side windows were open with people sitting on the sills, their asses hanging almost to the sidewalk.

Inside, I scanned the crowd. It was a bit like the bar scene from Star Wars.

Nothing.

I looked for the manager whom I knew as Ida. She was an easy spot—a hard woman with long, jet-black hair, sunken cheeks, large bumpy nose, and heavily-mascaraed. She looked for all the world like Ronnie Wood from the Rolling Stones.

Ida recognized Billy Ray, but hadn’t seen him either. She said, “Try the Palace. All the losers hit the Palace.”

I did.

No luck here, either.

I tried the Oxy, the Miner, and the Patricia. No Billy Ray. Not good ‘cause I’d run out of scummy beer joints. And, far as I was concerned, it would be a waste of time to try the neighborhood pubs, clubs, or cabarets.

I thought he might have holed-up in a hostel. Negative at the Sally Ann and the Painted Turtle. Same for the flop-house in the old Johnson’s Hardware building. Zip. That left the city parks to check.

The weather was warm enough for sleeping outdoors. The city held an estimated five-hundred homeless, but you wouldn’t know it by looking. I tried Diana Krall Square. Then Nob Hill, Swy-Lana Lagoon, around the Bastion, and up to the weed-covered rock called Cappy Yates.

Billy Ray Shaughnessy was nowhere to be found.

I made another swing through the downtown streets. Even checked the shelters at the bus exchange. For peace of mind, I drove back by Maria's on Machleary and turned around at the dead end. It was dark now. All the lights were on inside Maria's cottage. Becky's beater was in the same spot. The curtains were pulled back in Maria's living room and I could see the jam guys peering out.

I tapped the horn. One of the members waved back. I pulled away and returned to the police office, four blocks away.

I checked in with dispatch and with Sergeant O'Sullivan at the Watch Commander's desk, letting her know where I'd been.

Bev was experienced. Around twenty-five years operational time. She was a street cop who'd been in the trenches—not a carpet cop who'd pushed paper.

I told her my gut feeling about Billy Ray being close. She was with me.

"Did you think of checking any of the vacant houses along Machleary?" She was trying to be helpful. "He could have broken in and is sitting there watching all this."

"Could be." I nodded my head. "Could be."

I just don't know.

With that, I signed-off, headed home, and shut down the investigation for the night.

In The Attic — Friday, June 10th - 10:15 pm

Horn honk. Someone outside. Vehicle keeps going. Doesn't stop. No one gets out. No one gets in.

Still here. I can hear them below. Maria. Becky. Nathan. Kyle. Karliana.

Bitch-face Maria. Big Butt Becky. Nathan the Nob. Kyle the Krunt. Beautiful Karliana.

Jim and Debbie have gone home.

Karliana's here.

Karliana's sleeping in her crib. Eight feet below. Eight feet below. Eight feet below.

I could cut a hole. Reach down. Pick her up. Save her from hell. Raise her to heaven.

Have her with me here in heaven. Eric Clapton. Tears In Heaven.

Karliana belongs up here with me. With me. And with Chloe. In heaven.

Maria tells everyone I'm a bad person. I'm a bad person? Me? Maria is the bad person. Maria's a liar. Maria's a faker. Maria's a fucker. Maria fucks every prick in town. Maria the slut. Whore! Pig! Tramp! Harlot! Jezebel. Sleezy. Slimy. Slut. Maria the hooker. Stripper. Peeler.

Jezebel.

Maria has shit in her. Talking shit about me. Trash me. Maria is trash. White trash. White trash with blue eyes and blue dress. Devil with a blue dress, Devil with a blue dress on.

Chloe isn't trash. Karliana isn't trash. I'm not trash. Maria is trash.

Chloe doesn't call me trash. Chloe says Billy Ray is a good man. A just man. An honest man. Chloe says Billy Ray is a complicated man. A true thinking man. Visionary. Artist. Billy Ray is a kind man. A generous man.

Maria says Billy Ray is a violent man. A jealous man. A lazy man. A stupid man.

Chloe says different.

Chloe is the visionary. Chloe knows Billy Ray is a talented man. Billy Ray is a songwriter like Dylan. Singer like Seger. Picker like Atkins. Grinner like Wonder. Lover like Stewart. Sinner like Richards.

I'm a picker. I'm a grinner. I'm a lover. I'm a sinner.

Playing my music in the sun.

I'm a joker. I'm a smoker. I'm a midnight toker.

Up here on the run.

Who-whooo-ah. Who-whooo-ah.

Chloe says Billy Ray is destined for greatness. Oh, it may not be in this life, or in the next, or even in the one after that. It may be a thousand splendid years when the heavens part and the golden gate rises and the bridge to the emerald city awaits a procession of horns and cymbals and pipes and drums, allowing the greatness of my presence to arrive in a form that will not be recognized by anyone but the true believers, and I'll be joined in a feast of forty days and forty nights and I'll be served aged wine and smoked meat and cheese in quantities fit for the royals.

Royals.

Chloe and I are royals.

Karliana is royal.

Maria is a servant. Maria is not worthy of being in the presence of royals. Maria is a bottom dweller.

She starts at the bottom to arrive at the top of the slide and goes for a ride to the bottom, and I see her again.

Do you? Don't you? Want me to love you? I'm coming down fast and I'm only eight feet above you. Tell me. Tell me. Tell me the answer.

Helter Skelter. Helter Skelter. Helter Skelter. Helter Skelter.

You may be my lover, but you ain't my dancer.

Zeeeeee-ooooowooo. Zeeeeee-ooooowooo.

Charles Manson had his big family.

Maria and I had our little family.

Maria and I and Karliana.

We were a family.

Helter Skelter.

A Family.

Meenie.

Miney.

Moe.

Chapter 9 — Friday, June 10th - 11:05 pm

I got home thirteen-and-a-half hours after leaving for work. It wasn't a typical day. Not by hours. Or even by events. A standard dayshift for the Serious Crimes Section was eight to four-thirty. Afternoons were four to midnight. The rotation was a week of days and a week of nights. Week of days... week of nights...

We had a squad of eight detectives—three teams of two, a supervisor, and one member assigned to cold cases and special projects. This wasn't fixed in stone, though, and shifts flexed

if we got a major murder case. Then we'd assemble to blitz it. The first forty-eight hours are the most important period of a homicide investigation; homicides don't plan themselves around shift schedules.

I parked in the driveway as our new Mustang was stashed in the garage. Five years ago, there was a minivan lurking in there, but our two kids were grown and gone now, so we ditched the soccer-mobile for something cool. There's a thing about the whine of the Shelby's supercharger, clutching the 6-speed, and smelling smoke from twenty-inch Michelin Pilots that makes you feel...well...young again.

I went through the garage side door and into the laundry room, undoing my tie, kicking my shoes, and hanging my blue windbreaker on a hook. I got out of my shoulder holster like a woman springing-free "the girls," unloaded my Sig, and carried it through the pantry and into the kitchen, setting the piece on the counter. Only the under-cabinet lights shone, a clear indicator my wife was already in bed—understandable, as she had to get up for work at six the next morning. For some reason, shift workers marry other shift workers.

I dug in the fridge and found some leftover rib-eye, sliced it, slathered it with Bullseye and raw onions, made a bun-wich, and nuked it. Then I reached for a liquid relaxer. I've always had a taste for alcohol. I'm not an alcoholic, though. Alcoholics aren't alcoholics until they hit rock bottom, and I've never hit rock bottom so, by that definition, I'm not an alcoholic. I can go for days without a drink. But I don't like to and tonight I didn't want to.

I poured three fingers of Grants Cask-Edition over two frozen rocks and sat at the table. Bite of the bun. Sip of the scotch. And a flip through the paper. Vancouver's paper—the Sun.

There was always some serious shit going on over there in Vancouver. The front page announced three levels of government were throwing more money at the gang violence nightmare.

Again.

I scanned the article and saw nowhere that they're going after the real issue—to keep these little pricks in jail while awaiting trial. No bail. It's a simple concept.

No fucking bail, man. It's that simple!

No players. No action. Oh, right, lawyers need players to make money. It's the legal system, I reminded myself. A money making legal system. Not a non-profit justice system. Law is not a zero sum game, though it's supposed to be.

Lawyers don't think like the rest of us. Most are narcissists who live for the career, the cash, the toys, the fight, and the fame.

Criminals don't think like the rest of us, either. Most are low-lives who live for the day, the thrills, the rides, the guns, and the chicks.

Psychopaths also don't think like the rest of us. My mind wandered to the number of times the Dersch family called Billy Ray Shaughnessy a "psycho."

Another bite of the bun. Sip of the scotch. And I thought back to Maria's first words, "I'm so terrified that psycho's going to kill me."

I flipped open my laptop to Goggle.

So, what's the real definition of "psychopath"?

There were lots of hits on "psychopath" in the browser. I scrolled through about twenty, searching for something straightforward, and stumbled upon a forensic crime-writer's blog. The headline grabbed me by the short and curlies.

ARE YOU A PSYCHOPATH? TAKE THIS TEST AND FIND OUT

Another bun bite and scotch sip.

Okay, what does this blog say about a guy like Billy Ray?

I knew I'd be interviewing him after arrest and wanted to get a jump on what might be going on inside his head. Here's what I read:

The word "*psychopath*" conjures images of fictional psychos like Norman Bates, Hannibal Lecter, and Annie Wilkes, as well as reality monsters such as Ted Bundy, John Wayne Gacy, and Eileen Wuornos. However, proven clinical studies show 3% of the world's population have psychopathic psychological profiles—most being men. Surprisingly, few are actually violent. But they're out there...all around you...and they're hiding in plain sight.

Psychopaths aren't specifically defined under the *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Five (DSM-5)*, which is the profession's bible when it comes to profiling abnormal behavior. Psychopathy and its alter-ego, sociopathy, are jointly classified as *Antisocial Personality Disorders* and are diagnosed according to specific behaviors.

Part of identifying a psychopathic character is applying the *40 Point Revised Psychopathy Checklist (PCL-R)*, which is a categorical diagnosis developed by psychologist, Dr. Robert Hare, who studied prison inmates. It indicates a psychopathic personality through a psychometric dimensional score. Interestingly, a version of the *Psychopathy Checklist* is available online and I've linked it for you. Take it. I'm curious if you're more psychopathic than me. I tried the test—and I'll show you my score—if you stick reading this article.

But before you go ahead and answer the forty questions, true-or-false test, let's look at the parameters of abhorrent behavior and how it applies to whether or not you're psychopathic.

The DSM-5 recognizes six general personality disorders:

1. Borderline
2. Avoidant
3. Narcissistic
4. Obsessive-Compulsive
5. Antisocial
6. Schizotypal

Quoting directly from the DSM-5:

The essential features of a personality disorder are impairments in personality (self and interpersonal) functioning and the presence of pathological personality traits. To diagnose antisocial personality disorder, the following criteria must be met:

Significant impairments in personality functioning manifest by:

1. Impairments in self-functioning (a or b):

- (a) *Identity*: Ego-centrism; self-esteem derived from personal gain, power, or pleasure.
- (b) *Self-direction*: Goal-setting based on personal gratification; absence of prosocial internal standards associated with failure to conform to lawful or culturally normative ethical behavior.

AND...

2. Impairments in interpersonal functioning (a or b):

- (a) *Empathy*: Lack of concern for feelings, needs, or suffering of others; lack of remorse after hurting or mistreating another.
- (b) *Intimacy*: Incapacity for mutually intimate relationships, as exploitation is a primary means of relating to others, including by deceit and coercion; use of dominance or intimidation to control others.

So the DSM-5 clearly lays out what constitutes *Antisocial Behavior Disorder*. But we're used to hearing the terms "*Psychopath*" and "*Sociopath*". Is there a difference?

Non-clinically, yes. The best description seems to be that psychopaths are born and sociopaths are made. It's a nature versus nurture debate. Innate versus learned behaviors.

Psychopaths and sociopaths are both social predators and share the same characteristics of lack of empathy, remorse, or guilt. They don't take responsibility for their own actions. They disregard social norms and conventions. Laws are for others. They incline towards violence. And, to their core, they're manipulative and deceitful.

Sociopaths generally come from the lower elements in life—poor socio-economic families, poor education, poor health with addiction issues—and they're highly impulsive, not inclined to plan-out events nor to exhibit much patience. Sociopaths are usually loners with miserable attitudes and are ostracized by society—mostly unemployable. Their emotional level is primitive and they have little fear with the exception of personal injury and dying. Sociopaths can be thought as rudimentary or undeveloped psychopaths that want little to do with society.

Psychopaths, on the other hand, are much more intelligent and mix well in society. They're usually educated and employed—some holding high degrees, responsible positions, and even elected office. They are generally much healthier than sociopaths and not as prone to substance abuse. Psychopaths are cunning. They'll plan to the tiniest detail when committing crimes or deceiving others. They're completely aware of what they're doing and it'll always be in their interest, with a focus on minimizing risk to themselves. Psychopaths are slightly more emotional than sociopaths, however these emotions are the destructive ones of hate, disgust, contempt, and revenge.

It's said that in the game of life, psychopaths know what cards you're holding, and they cheat.

The article linked a website with the forty point checklist. I finished my bun, took another sip, and took the test. Five minutes later, I was given my score: a measly four.

This is gonna be a challenging talk with Billy Ray. I'm betting he'd score high up the psychopathic scale.

I read the rest of the article:

Now, don't be worried unless you score above 25. That's the threshold for psychopathy. Anything over 30 is something to be seriously concerned about. Above 35, you'd be in the company of greats. Eileen Wuronos scored 35. John Wayne Gacy was 36. Canadian superstars Paul Bernardo and Clifford Olson were 37 and 38, respectively. Little known USA serial killer Peter Lundin got a 39. And Theodore Bundy aced it. 40 outa 40.

If you're interested in learning more about getting inside the heads of psychopaths and sociopaths, I recommend two first-class books:

Why We Love Serial Killers by Dr. Scott Bonn.
The Sociopath Next Door by Dr. Martha Stout.

But there's not much point asking my personal, psychopathic advice. I got a 4.

Seemed like the blogger and I had much in common. Seemed like Billy Ray and I had little in common.

I finished my scotch and poured another.

In The Attic — Saturday, June 11th - 1:15 am

I hear them. I hear everything they say.

Maria ditch pig. Ugly Becky. Kyle Krunt. Nathan Nob. In the living room. In the kitchen. In and out of the bedrooms. Pissing in the toilet. Clinking in the sink. Digging in the fridge. Drinking. Smoking. Talking.

I hear them. I hear everything they say.

Billy Ray. Freak. Billy Ray. Psycho. Billy Ray. Asshole. Billy Ray. Loser. Billy Ray. Reject. Billy Ray. Weirdo. Billy Ray. Crazy. Billy Ray. Zero. Billy Ray. Zero. Billy Ray. Zero.

I hear them. I hear everything they say.

Billy Ray. Zero.

It's a zero sum game, Maria.

Zero sum game.

Karlina is asleep. Karlina is long asleep. Karlina is asleep in her crib. Eight feet below. Karlina is asleep. Six feet below me. I'm up in heaven. Up here in heaven. Karlina should be up here in heaven. Here in heaven. Here in heaven. Not down in hell. Maria's in hell. Beautiful Karlina.

I hear them. I hear everything they say.

Billy Ray. Zero.

Zero sum game.

Karlina is asleep.

Maria is awake.

Zero sum game.

*Karliana is alive.
Maria will be dead.
Zero sum game.
I hear them.
I hear everything they say.*

In The Attic — Saturday, June 11th - 2:35 am

*They're all asleep. Maria. Karliana. Becky.
Nathan and Kyle are gone.
I hear Maria breathing. Eight feet below. I hear her breathe out. In. Out. In. Out.
I used to hear Maria breathing beside me. Out. In. Out. In. Out.
Maria used to lay beside me. In bed. In our bed. Maria and me in our bed. Eight feet below. Maria breathed beside me.
Out. In. Out. In. Out.
Maria said she loved me. Maria told me she loved me. Maria made love to me. Not just fucked me. She made love to me. In. Out. In. Out. In. Passion, she told me. Maria said it was passion. I didn't feel it. Passion? I don't know. Love? Feelings? I don't know. I don't know. I never knew. Passion. Love. Feelings.
Maria said she loved me. She lay there beside me and said she loved me and now, she calls me names. Throws me out of her life. Takes Karliana from me. Tries to kill me with hate. With names. With cops. With locks. With guards. With radios. With calling the cops.
Now, she calls me names. Crazy. Freak. Psycho. Asshole. Loser. Reject. Weirdo. Zero. Zero sum game.
What lies did Maria tell the cops? Maria the liar. Faker. Maria the slut. Ditch pig. Maria the whore. Maria the zero.
Zero sum game.
Maria fucks every guy in town. I'll catch Maria fucking every guy in town. I'll catch Maria fucking the next guy and I'll cut her fucking throat. I'll cut his fucking throat, too.
Blade. Metal hoop. Wooden handle. Gripping wooden handle. I'll cut their fucking throats.
They're all asleep.
Gripping wooden handle.
I'll cut their fucking throats!
They're all asleep!
Gripping wooden handle!
I'll cut their fucking throats!
They're All Asleep!
Gripping Wooden Handle!
I'll Cut Their Fucking Throats!
Thirty-One! Thirty-one...thirty-one...
Thirty-one times...
Chloe has the handle.*

In The Attic — Saturday, June 11th - 4:20 am

Sun's coming up. First rays of light through the glass. Window faces east. Sun rises in the east and sets in the west.

Rays of light. Billy Rays of light.

Billy Ray, the light. Not Billy Ray the freak. Billy Ray the loser. Psycho. Crazy. Weirdo. Asshole. Reject. Zero. Billy Ray the zero.

Zero sum game.

Maria is sleeping. Eight feet below. I hear Maria breathing eight feet below. Karliana is sleeping. Eight feet below.

I can't sleep. Eight feet above. I sit here and think. I sit here and wonder. I won, won, won, wonder. Why? Why? Why? Why? Why she wants me away? In my little hideaway. My hide, hide, hide, hideaway.

I can't sleep.

I heard them talking. I heard everything they said.

Hatred. Anger. Disgust. Pain.

Those things I feel. I feel hatred. I feel anger. I feel pain. I feel disgust.

But I don't feel passion. I don't feel love. Passion. Love. I don't feel passion or love. Not for Maria. Maria the liar. Maria the faker. Maria the Jezebel.

Maria said she loved me and she wanted to marry me and she wanted to have a child of our own. A sister for Karliana. A brother for Karliana. Sisters and brothers for Karliana. A family of our own. Maria said that. Yes, you said that, Maria.

But you lied. Maria the liar. Faker. Fucking lying faker!

Now you're going to pay, Maria. Pay the man, Maria. Pay the man with the blade in his hand. The blade on the hoop on the handle. Six bucks a chop. Thirty-one times.

Pay him, Maria. Maria, you fucking ditch bitch! Pay him. I hate you, Maria! Pain! Disgust! Anger! Hate! Hate! Hate!

Room's getting lighter. I see wood rafters and braces and nails from shingles. Wooden shingles stained around nail holes. Insulation. Wires. Metal pipes going through the roof. Cobwebs. Dust. Smells of must. Smells of rust. Smells of lust. Smells of her bust and her crust. Window doesn't open. Starting to warm. Going to be hot. Hot as hell. Up here in heaven. Up here in hell. Up here in my secret garden. Eight feet above.

Piss jar. Have to take another piss. Piss jar's nearly full.

In The Attic — Saturday, June 11th - 7:30 am

Mother's milk tastes sweet for some. But not for me. Mothers are supposed to love. But not for me. Mothers are supposed to care for their child. But not for me. Mothers are supposed to hug and hold their child. But not for me.

I would mother Karliana. Maria doesn't love, care, hug, or hold Karliana. Not like me.

I remember four. Mother left me alone for hours. Men in the house. Alone for hours. Five. Men in the house. Alone for hours. Six. Men. Alone. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten. Men in house. Alone for hours.

Jezebel. My mother, the whore. My mother, the slut. My mother, the bang-box. Pin-cushion. Glory hole. Raised in a whore-house. There is...a house...in New Orleans. They call...the...rising...sun. And it's been...the ruin...of many a poor boy. And, God, I know I'm one.

Run, run, runaway. Twelve on the streets. Standing six. Willie and the poor boys spitting nickels at my feet. Thirteen in lockup. Detention center. They used to call it reform school or house for wayward youth. House of the Rising Sun.

We were bad. Incurable. Hopeless. Rejects. Losers. Freaks. Crazy. WeirDOS. Assholes. Psychos. Zeros.

Zero sum game.

It's a zero sum game, Maria.

Zero sum game.

Life's not fair. Life's not pleasant. Not pretty. Not nice and not neat.

Life's a zero sum game, Maria. And the end is not pleasant.

Marie...not Maria...Marie was my foster mom. Jezebel was my real mom. Marie tried to be kind. To understand. To help. I needed help. They told Marie I didn't think the same as other boys. Didn't act the same. Didn't sing the same and didn't play the same.

They said I had a natural music gift. Gifted, they said. Billy Ray has a music gift. Get him lessons. Get Billy Ray lessons and he'll be teaching others. Get Billy Ray into music and off the street and away from the break-ins and the pushers and the dealers and the whores and the crackheads. Potheads. Booze-heads. Buskers and barkers and bullies and rockabilly bullshit.

Guitars. Cadillacs. Hillbilly music. Lonely, lonely streets that I called home.

I was a thousand miles from nowhere, and there's no place I'd rather be.

Maybe I'm fast as you, Maria. Maybe I'll break hearts, too. But you won't slow down. This time, your hurts come around. Maybe I'll cut throats and bleed as fast as you. Ah, sucker.

Becky's up. I hear her yawn. Stretch. Haul her fat ass off the couch. Tinkle. Flush. Cough. Fart. Pig.

Maria's still asleep. Karlina slept through the night. Eight feet below.

Chapter 10 — Saturday, June 11th - 8:00 am

I'd been up since before six. I saw my wife off to work, then spent an hour on the net checking escape sites like the NHRA's current drag racing stats—a throwback from my youth. I went for a walk around the neighborhood. Came back. Showered and shaved. This was a day off, but I was on-call in case anything serious came in. Then poured another black coffee and sat down to write.

I was a wanna-be author and planned to be a crime writer in my retirement—which wasn't that far away—so I practiced when I had time. They said crime doesn't pay. I intended to prove them wrong.

But I couldn't get Maria and Billy Ray off my mind. Her words, "I'm so terrified that psycho's going to kill me," and the stuff I read about psychopathy were etched in my frontal lobe.

Wonder if they scooped him last night?

I phoned the watch desk. A different Sergeant was on this morning. He'd seen the bulletin about Shaughnessy, but didn't know more. He put me through to the cell block. The

guard checked the log. No Billy Ray. I asked for dispatch. They confirmed all was quiet overnight and that we were still monitoring Tac 2.

I knew trying to get a new uniformed shift interested in searching for Billy Ray was pointless. Nothing would happen unless they stumbled upon him. Or, if Billy Ray showed up at Maria's house and hell broke loose.

Writer's block was in full rigor, so I shut down the laptop and started the Explorer, taking a spin around town to see if Billy Ray was out and about. Same haunts as last evening. Only now, the bars were closed and the diners were open. I did a cross-grid of streets within a ten block radius of Machleary, starting with Maria's cottage. I drove by slowly. Becky's beater was there. The curtains were closed. The yard was vacant. Jim Dersch's truck was gone.

I turned at the dead-end and faced westward, catching a reflection of sunlight off the little, four-paned window in Maria's gable. I looked at the shed. There was a padlock on the door that wasn't there before.

Jim's not taking any chances. Good.

To my left was Maria's front door. No sign of activity, but it was too early to check in. I looked left and right at the other residences along Machleary. A face peeked out, and then disappeared behind the curtain when the cop car went by is so telling. My Ford Explorer, with its multi-antennas and grille lights, stood right out. Ghost cars, they used to call unmarked cars. Mine had a name—a call-sign—Twenty-Delta-Three.

I drove Commercial and Terminal and Bastion and Front. I walked the seawall. Checked the bus exchange. Tried Alice's Restaurant. That was the cheapest place in town. Hit the parks. Walked the mall. McDonalds. Wendy's. A & W. Dairy Queen. Even the Burger King.

No sign of Billy Ray Shaughnessy. No one I showed his image to could help. It was like the guy had just vanished. Disappeared. Beamed up to the Enterprise. Kidnapped in the mother ship.

This doesn't make sense. Here's a guy who has no place to go. He's been in a violent domestic situation. Has a fixation on Maria. A psychotic disposition. Bent on a purpose and seemingly obsessed with an objective. And he's got no money. He's got to be somewhere close. Or, someone's helping him.

I remembered Maria saying Billy Ray had a mother who assisted financially from time to time. In the Okanogan, I recalled. That's on the mainland—about a four-hour drive east of Vancouver, plus a ferry ride, which costs money.

It was worth a shot. I went back to the police office. Computer records had a next-of-kin contact for him—a Roxanne Chow in Vernon. I called the number.

“Hallo.” A woman's raspy voice answered. It was hard to tell age, but easy to recognize a life-long smoker.

I identified myself and asked for Roxanne.

“Yeah. That's me.”

“I'm trying to locate Bill Shaughnessy. Are you related?”

“Yeah. I'm his mother. Got a different last name, though. Now what? What's the fool done now?”

I explained that he'd been charged with assault. “Spousal assault,” I said. I didn't say sexual, or with a weapon. No need to go there.

“What'd he do? Beat the shit outta her?”

“Well, it’s a fairly serious assault. Enough that he needs some legal restraint put on him. Have you heard from him recently?”

“Nope. Only time I hear is when he’s desperate for money, so he must be okay for now.”
I picked her brain. “What do you know about his relationship with Maria Dersch?”

“Never met her. Billy Ray said he was livin’ with some woman who got a kid. Little girl he really likes. He’s over there on the Island with her, somewhere. Good place for ‘em. Away from here.”

“When was the last you heard from him?”

“Month. Month-and-a-half. Phoned for money.”

“And?”

“I give him some. Still my kid, ya know.”

“Can you tell me a bit about his history?”

“Wattaya wanna know? Like, his school? Never had much for jobs. He’s a loser. Gets it from the father’s side.”

“Whatever you can tell me will help.”

“Well, he was always a problem kid. A preemie who barely survived. Never had much for friends. Too weird, they all said. And he was a coward to fight other boys, but was mean, real mean, to animals.”

“What kind of animals?”

“Pretty much anything. One time he even taped firecrackers around a frog and blew its ass all over the place.”

I’ve heard the same story about George W. Bush.

“Where was this? Where did Billy Ray grow up?”

“That was here in Vernon, but he was livin’ at a foster home then. I couldn’t handle him all the time, so he went to a foster home for a bit. That was after he’d done a stint in the detention center. Willingdon.

Willingdon Youth Detention Center? You don’t end up in YDC without a bad juvenile history.

“Willingdon?”

“Yep. That was for the fires. He was difficult. Always misbehaving.”

“Fires?”

“Yeah. He had this thing for fire and would set stuff on fire. Not houses or nothin’ like that. He’d build fires in the yard, or in the bush, and sit and stare and sing at them. Real strange thing. More than once firemen had to come. Also, the police. Like I said, he was a problem kid. Still pissin’ the bed at twelve. They said that was a sign of the problems. I had him back and forth to the doctors. He quit school at sixteen and just sat around, so I kicked him out into the world to get a job. Tough love. There was nothin’ else I could do. He was always a problem. Real problem. They sent him to detention in Willingdon to straighten him out and get him some help.”

“What kind of doctors did he see?”

“You mean like a shrink or a regular doctor?”

“Either.”

“Well, the reform school had him assessed and the counsellor said Billy Ray was...antisocial. Borderline schizophrenic. Not certifiable, but needed help. I tried to get him help outside, but no one’d listen. It’s like that when you’re poor. We’re on welfare lots and couldn’t afford no help. Real help costs money and there’s never enough money to go around.

That's why it pisses me off when he calls. He expects me to give him money when he's not working. But it's still my kid, ya know? So whadda ya do?"

"Did your son have any other relations with women, outside of Maria. His current one?"

"He had some other woman he was spongin' off a couple years ago. Never met her, but from what I heard, it was she who beat the shit outta him. That was in Vancouver. He and her were forced to take counselling by the welfare people."

"Were there any charges in that assault?"

"Nope. Cops and social workers got involved and they all worked it out by havin' them...her and Billy Ray...volunteer to get help. Far as it went, from what I know."

"Would you say he's aggressive?"

"Nope. Not like he's some tough guy. He's a coward and picks on people smaller and weaker than him. Like animals. He was mean to animals. But, funny, not too little kids. He was always real good around babies and toddlers and them."

"Do you know if he was prescribed anything? Any medications he's supposed to take?"

"Like pills? Don't know nothin' about that. He wouldn't tell me, even if he was."

"You said he quit school at sixteen. What grade was that?"

"He only made it to grade nine. Was a year behind the others. They said he's slow in some ways. But in music...he's real bright. Real ear for music and good at playin' instruments. Like, that's all he wants to do is music. Writes stuff. Plays stuff. But can't make no money off it."

"Is there anything else you think I should know? I'll be talking to him once we pick him up. Any information helps me to assess him."

"He's a real liar, so be careful believin' what he tells you. He always blames others and makes his own responsibility real small. It's like he's not in the real world some of the time. But he won't be dangerous to you. Far as I know, he's never been a problem to the cops. Like, violent to cops. It's like he's afraid of you guys. Not hating, but scared of you. He's a coward to anyone stronger than him."

"What do you know about his contact with police?"

"Just the stuff, like, when he was in that fire phase. That started around thirteen, when he was hitting puberty, and stopped about fifteen, when the bed pissin' stopped. The neighbors, they called the police because they was scared Billy Ray was gonna burn down the neighborhood. He got caught drunk driving once, but he's never been a drinker. Far as I know, he's not a drug user, either. Smokes a bit of green, but then, we all do."

"I need to ask this, Mrs. Chow. How was your son sexually? Was there anything abnormal...to be concerned about?"

"You mean like him getting kinky? Nope. Caught him jerkin' off a few times, but then, they all do that. Why? Did he do something weird in this assault?"

"There were some sexual overtones to it, but no one was seriously hurt. It's really necessary to find him. Get him in and get some restraints on him. I wouldn't be calling if I wasn't concerned. Any idea where he might be?"

"Nope. But he can't travel too far without no money, so he must be around you somewhere."

"That makes the most sense to me, too. Will you please call me if you hear from him?"

"Yep. For sure. I don't wanna see no one gettin' hurt, neither."

I gave Roxanne Chow my cell number before hanging up. If I was uneasy about Billy Ray before the call, I was a lot more concerned now. What Roxanne described were the classic early stages I'd read about regarding people with a serious antisocial disorder.

Sounds like Billy Ray is both born and made. Natural and nurtured. Both sociopath and psychopath.

But even more disturbing was her telling of Billy Ray's starting fires, wetting the bed, and harming animals. I recalled hearing about this behavior pattern at a course I took and knew there was a psychological, psychiatric, or some sort of forensic term for it.

For the life of me, I can't remember the name. It's supposed to be the common denominator of emerging serial killers.

At this point in my police career, I'd investigated a lot of murders—well north of a hundred—including a number of mass murderers who slaughtered two or more people in the same incident. A serial killer is a different animal entirely.

I'd never met a serial killer.

At least, not that I know of, anyway.

In The Attic — Saturday, June 11th - 8:50 am

Maria is up now. I hear Maria with Karliana. Eight feet below. Karliana is giggling. I hear Karliana giggling. Laughing. Little girl laughing. My little girl.

Maria said she loves me. Maria said she needs me. True love will never die.

Maria said she loved me. Said she'd never leave me. Man, her little girl is fine.

Maria says she hates me. Says she never wants to see me. Now, Maria's going to die.

Maria says she loves me. But Maria lies. Maria the liar. Faker. Maria the liar and the faker. Maria could have had a family with me and Karliana. Me, Maria, and Karliana, one big family, but Maria ruined that and now, she tells everyone that I'm the loser.

I'm the loser?

Zero, she told the others.

Zero sum game, Maria.

It's a zero sum game.

I hear Maria and Becky talking. Billy Ray's locked out. Where is Billy Ray? Did the police catch Billy Ray overnight? Should we call police and ask if Billy Ray is in jail? Call blue jacket cop?

Billy Ray is locked out. Billy Ray can't hurt us from outside.

Ha! Billy Ray is locked inside. Locked inside. Locked inside.

Hahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!

Locked inside the fire. Standing inside the fire. Life is not tried, it is merely survived, when you're standing inside the fire.

I call me cool. My heart has no scars to show. I'm one that never will let go. And risk the table being turned.

She calls me fool. She'll have to dance within the flame. With her sorrow and her shame. That comes from getting burned.

I've got to be tough when consumed by desire. 'Cause it's not enough to be locked inside the fire.

Burn, baby, burn. Pull off her arms and her legs and slice her fucking throat. Set her on fire and piss into the wind.

Zero sum game, Maria.

It's a zero sum game.

Chapter 11 — Saturday, June 11th - 9:40 am

I'd just gotten home and was still in the driveway when my work cell toned. I checked the call display: 250-591-5961. I thought I recognized the number, but wasn't sure. With a standard, police professional greeting, I answered.

“Hi. It's Maria here. Maria Dersch.”

“Morning, Maria. Everything okay?”

“Yeah, yeah. I just wanted to call and see if you've found him yet.”

“No, nothing overnight. I've checked all around town again this morning, but no sign of him.”

“I...I wonder where he is? What can you do to get him? Like, it's like living in a prison here. I'm...I'm scared to go outside, and I sure can't be alone.”

“I fully understand that, Maria. Believe me, we're doing what we can.”

“I...I have this feeling...like he's watching me. I know it sounds weird, but it's like he's right outside. Somewhere close. Like he's waiting for me to come out, and then jump me...attack me...”

“Well, we haven't done a door-to-door in the neighborhood. It's more likely that if anyone saw him hanging around, acting suspicious, then they'd call it in.”

“Jim walked all over the place this morning, real early. He didn't see nothing neither. What gets me is all Billy Ray's stuff is still here and he hasn't been back. He'd have no way of knowing I'd gone to the cops, so it just seems real weird that he's not come back and at least tried to make up and get his stuff. Like, he's gotta be somewhere in town.”

“I agree, Maria. I phoned his mother this morning. She hasn't heard from him, either.”

“That's the only place he has to turn to. Like, he has no money. No food. No...no change of clothes. His only stuff that he values...his books, guitar, everything's still here. It all says he'll be back.”

“You didn't put his things outside?”

“No. Were you serious about that?”

“For sure. I think you should put all his belongings at the curb. I see the shed's locked now.”

“Yeah, Jim locked it.”

“Put them in a box or something and put a note on it.”

“Okay, I'll do that right away.”

“Also, Maria, make sure you check the radio, that it's charged. You'll see a green light if it is.”

“Yeah, I checked it when I got up. It's green.”

“Good. I'll make another trip around town around noon.”

“Okay. We're...we're going out for a bit this morning. Me, Karliana, and Becky. Is it okay if I take the radio thing along?”

“Absolutely. It’ll hold a charge for a long time. No problem there. Just make sure you keep it with you at all times.”

“Yep. Will do.”

“And phone me right away if anything at all comes up.”

“Will do.”

“Okay, talk later.”

“All right, And, ah...”

“Go ahead.”

“Thank you so much for protecting me...us...Karliana and me.”

I went inside and brewed a half-pot of coffee, then sat at the dinette table and fired-up the laptop. I Googled “bedwetting, fire-starting, animal cruelty”. As usual, it defaulted to Wikipedia. This is what I read:

The Macdonald Triad (also known as the triad of sociopathy or the homicidal triad) is a set of three behavioral characteristics that has been suggested, if all three or any combination of two, are present together, to be predictive of or associated with later violent tendencies, particularly with relation to serial offenses.

The triad was first proposed by psychiatrist J.M. MacDonald in "The Threat to Kill", a 1963 paper in the American Journal of Psychiatry. Small-scale studies conducted by psychiatrists Daniel Hellman and Nathan Blackman, and then FBI agents John E. Douglas and Robert K. Ressler along with Dr. Ann Burgess, claimed substantial evidence for the association of these childhood patterns with later predatory behavior. Although it remains an influential and widely taught theory, subsequent research has generally not validated this line of thinking.

The triad links cruelty to animals, obsession with fire setting, and persistent bedwetting past a certain age, to violent behaviors, particularly homicidal behavior and sexually predatory behavior. However, other studies claim to have not found statistically significant links between the triad and violent offenders.

Further studies have suggested that these behaviors are actually more linked to childhood experience of parental neglect, brutality or abuse. Some argue this in turn results in "homicidal proneness". The "triad" concept as a particular combination of behaviors linked to violence may not have any particular validity – it has been called an urban legend.

Urban legend or not, I was beginning to get a better idea of Billy Ray Shaughnessy’s psychological make-up. An extremely important step in criminal investigations is getting the offender to confess. It’s not a badge of honor for the detective, as in “look how good I am”. It’s a duty to the system and to the taxpayer. Criminal trials are expensive. And so are appeals. A responsible investigator makes every effort to get the suspect to talk, to get their version of the facts recorded in a way that’s admissible as evidence in court.

There’s an immense psychological effect on an offender once they’ve confessed. It makes it difficult to offer a denial of guilt—a not guilty plea—at trial. This changes the legal game to a question of degree of guilt and a test of whether the evidence was legally obtained. A fairly obtained, admissible confession is a deadly piece of evidence, and I was preparing to get it

straight from Billy Ray Shaughnessy's mouth—once he was in custody. That's what they pay me for. Playing a zero sum game.

I followed internet links and read this in *Psychology Today*:

The MacDonald Triad (aka The Triad of Sociopathy) is a set of three behavioral character traits associated with sociopathic behavior. The three characteristics link extreme animal cruelty, obsession with fire setting and persistent enuresis (aka bed wetting) past the age of five with homicidal behavior. Although in more recent studies statistically significant links between the MacDonald Triad and violent criminals have not been found, numerous serial killers and sociopaths have exhibited these behavioral character traits in their childhoods. It has also been suggested that these behavioral characteristics are the result of parental neglect, cruelty, or trauma in a person's childhood could lead to this "homicidal proneness".

Individually, fire setting is seen as the less severe or first step to releasing aggression. In numerous serial killers, extensive periods of humiliation have been present in their childhoods. And fire setting was a way for those serial killers to regain something they lost during those initial periods of humiliation.

Next, looking at the characteristic of extreme animal cruelty; it's one of the most highly researched topics when trying to delve deep into the psyche of a serial killer, and like fire setting, animal cruelty . It is also believed that the killing of animals is a precursor to killing human beings, not only the act of killing but also the means of carrying out the murder on a human. The act of killing an animal is in essence regaining what they lost through humiliation by their peers, they are dominating something weaker than themselves. It's been theorized at that as children, future serial killers

(a) Used animals to vent frustrations because the person causing their humiliation was too powerful for them to handle.

(b) These future serial killers felt that they regained some power or control over their lives by torturing and killing animals.

(c) They've gained the power and control they needed to cause pain to their future victims.

And lastly, enuresis (aka bed wetting) can be used as a predictor of either fire setting or animal cruelty. Persistent enuresis past the age of five can be humiliating, especially if belittled by a parental figure or adult about it. This can then cause the child to use fire setting or cruelty to animals as an outlet for their frustration. Also, rather obviously, it can be the outcome of persistent neglect from parents, causing emotional trauma and instability.

I thought about Maria describing how Billy Ray violently raped her. Once he ejaculated, he carried on as if nothing had happened. He left the cottage, returned when she wasn't there, carried out his assault on her clothes, then left again. To me, this established a disturbing pattern—a deeply disturbing pattern that would be repeated, and would probably progress, if he wasn't stopped.

Slicing her clothing, especially the location of the slices, is entirely symbolic of what Billy Ray's planning on doing to Maria. Jesus, we gotta find him. This could get real ugly, real fast.

In The Attic — Saturday, June 11th - 10:35 am

Stepping out. Door closing. Locking. Voices fading. Car doors shutting. Engine starting. Wheels turning. Backing on the street. Driving away.

Maria has left with Becky. Taking Karliana. Going to the mall. Buying stuff. Girl stuff. Maybe new clothes. New clothes. New clothes to cut.

Maria needs new clothes. More clothes to be cut. Unholster knife. Unfold knife. Slice across throat. Slice across chest. Slice down sides. Slice here. Slice there. Slice everywhere. Slice. Slice. Slice. Fold knife. Holster knife.

Maria has left. No one home. No one home, but Billy Ray and Ronnie Milsap. Stranger in the house. There's someone there that you can't see. Eagles. All alone at the end of the evening. Where the bright lights are fading away.

Maria's lights will fade away. Maria the bitch. Maria the hag. Maria has gone downtown to find someone else to fuck. Maria the slut. Maria the whore. Maria the dog. Maria the pig. Maria the Jezebel.

Maria will bring someone home and fuck them in her bed. Eight feet below. Maria with her legs in the air with him plowing her like the whore she is. Maria the bitch. Fucking bitch.

Karliana won't be there. Even Maria, the whore, won't have Karliana in the room when she's fucking another guy. She'd never have Karliana in the room when she was fucking me. Maria would put Karliana in her playpen when she was fucking me. Or put Karliana in the stroller when she was fucking me. But Maria, the Jezebel, fucks other men while Karliana is in the room.

Like my mother. My mother, the whore. Tramp. Pig. Slut. Minge. Festered hole. My mother was a whore. Her name was Jezebel. She used to fuck men while I was in the room. While I was in the house. Watched my mother, the whore, the Jezebel, fuck men. Heard the men cum. Smelled fucking. Tasted fucking. Felt the hard rides. Seen it. My mother, the whore. Fucking in the house with her rising son. My mother's trick name was Jezebel.

Jezebel.

I was born in a crossfire hurricane.

I howled at Ma in the drivin' rain.

I was raised by a toothless, bearded hag.

I was schooled with a strap right across my back.

I was drowned. Washed up and left for dead.

I fell down. On my face and bled.

I frowned. At the crumbs of a crust of bread

I was crowned. With a spike right through my head.

But I'm all right now. In fact, I'm a gas.

I'm Buckin' Billy Ray. I'm a gas, gas, gas.

I killed my mother. I killed that old whore. Swung and chopped-up Jezebel. Her memory. Memory. Remembering. Thinking. I can kill Maria's memory. Kill Maria's memory. Kill Maria, that young whore. Swing at Maria. Chop at Maria. Kill her like the pig that she is.

Sharp blade. Blade in metal hoop. Attached to long, wooden handle. My hands are on handle. Swing. Chop. Swing. Chop. Swing. Chop. Swinging and chopping. Chopping and swinging. Gonna chop and a-swing all night.

Chloe is swinging and chopping. Chloe kills Maria. Chloe hates Maria. Chloe hates that fucking bitch, Maria. But Chloe loves Karliana. Chloe keeps Karliana. Raises Karliana. Teaches Karliana. Loves Karliana. Chloe is Karliana's mother. Not Maria. Maria said she loved me. Love me do.

Beatles. Love, love me do. You know I love you. So please, heeeelp me. Love me, too.

Guess Who? Laughing. I can't laugh. Orbison. Crying. I can't cry. Korn. Hating. I can hate. Hating all the time. Friendly Fires. Hurting. I can hurt. I can make Maria hurt.

Crying. Crying makes tears. Can I cry? Do I have tears?

Jones. George Jones. The Possum. The race is on, Maria. Race is on.

Well, I feel tears welling up, cold and deep inside, like my heart's sprung a big break.

I'll give you a stab of loneliness, sharp and painful, that you'll never shake.

Now you're gonna say I was taking it hard, since you wrote me off with a call.

But don't you wager that I'll hide my sorrow 'cause I can't break right down and bawl.

The day I ventured in your love, never suspecting what the final result would be.

I lived in fear of waking up one morning and finding that you'd gone from me.

There's an ache and pain in my heart, because I hate your slutty face.

Somebody new has come here to bang you, and I'll be out in second place.

Now the race is on. Say hello to my hatchet. Say goodbye to my folding blade.

Say so long to this world, Maria, because your fucking life is about to fade.

Marty Stewart. Always like Marty Stewart. Rock-a-Billy. Rock-a-Billy Ray. Who-hoo! Rockin' Billy Ray at the Grand Ole Opry. Billy Ray with Marty Stewart. Cry. Cry. Cry. I can't cry. Pickin' Billy Ray with Of Monsters and Men. Hunger. Hungry for the kill. Strummin' Billy Ray with The Who. The Doors. Pink Floyd. Nazareth. Deep Purple. Smoke on the fuckin' water, baby. There's fire in the sky. Fire in the house. Fire in Maria's house. Goodness gracious! Great balls of fire!

Hey. I'm hungry. No one home. No one back for a while. Set blade down. Crawl along ceiling joists. Careful. No steppin' on insulation. Fall through ceiling lath. Old cottage. Lath and plaster ceiling. Soft. Stay on joists. At hatch. Lift hinged-hatch. Drop down stool. Stool on rope. Into hole. Feet touching stool. Step on floor. Bathroom. Have to shit. Wipe. Flush. Kitchen.

Fridge. Light on. Bread. Ham. Cheese. Sink. Drink. Wash face. Pepsi bottle. Plastic one. Rinse out. Fill cold water. Plastic bag. Food and drink in hall. Maria's room. Karliana's crib.

Karliana's toys. Karliana's clothes. Bed. Mattress on floor. Maria fucks on this mattress. Maria the slut. Whore. Harlot. Jezebel. Maria the ditch pig. Fucking Maria. Kill Maria. Chloe kills Maria. Living room. Other bedroom. Hall. Step on stool. Put food and drink in. Grasp hatch-frame. Pull up. In. Pull on rope. Stool in. Hatch hinged closed. Crawl on joists. Back to spot.

Above Maria's mattress.

Maria's fucks on her mattress.

Eight feet below is Maria.

I'm eight feet above.

Chapter 12 — Saturday, June 11th - 2:15 pm

My gut feeling—that sixth sense we all have, not just what experienced cops possess—told me Billy Ray Shaughnessy was staying close to Maria’s cottage. Very close. Nothing else made sense.

But...where?

A nagging voice inside screamed I hadn’t looked in the obvious place. I bet he was hiding in plain sight. I’d missed some place nearby, where Billy Ray was hanging out. It was over a day since he’d been seen, although the clothes-cutting probably occurred within the last twenty-two hours.

Think about it. Humans need certain things to exist and, though Billy Ray may be a twisted sister, he still needs water, food, and a dry place to sleep.

It’d been cool enough overnight, dropping below the dew point at forty-four degrees Fahrenheit. When Maria called she was certain Billy Ray left with only the clothes on his back—runners, jeans, and a button-up shirt. His ever-present hoodie and baseball cap were on Maria’s couch. His few possessions lay about the cramped house. Even his backpack was still there. No, a puzzle piece was definitely missing.

I just know the piece is in Billy Ray’s pocket.

Technology’s a marvelous thing. Especially for criminal investigators. I turned to Google Earth and pulled the image of Maria’s neighborhood.

A change of perspective might help identify the obvious place he’s hiding.

A few places showed up. The old feed mill, two blocks over on Hecate.

Maybe he was in one of the bins.

The derelict Sun-Glo Building Supply complex on Milton held flea markets.

Could be in any of the sheds or broke into the abandoned store.

The long-closed Chevron on Nichol Street.

Derelicts always crash there.

The Harewood Activity Center on 4th.

That’s the old firehall. It’s only used after-school on weekdays.

Then it hit me. I zoomed on the dead end of Machleary—the reason Machleary was a dead end. It was the Cat Stream ravine.

Christ, from the bushes at the turnaround you can see Maria’s house. Right past her borthor, Jim’s. The whole east side of the cottage is exposed and her front door as well. He can see everyone coming and going. Probably even me searching the place. Fuck! He’s gotta be there.

I closed the laptop, put on my shoulder gear with the Sig and handcuffs, and headed for the door. My cell phone toned. Maria was calling.

“Hi there, Maria.”

“Hi. Ah, yeah, Maria here. Sorry, ah, to bother you.”

“No, no problem. What’s up?”

“I...we just got home and...noticed...something...I don’t know to be sure, but I think he’s...um...Billy Ray’s been back in the house. And it’s freaking me right out.”

Uh-oh.

“What makes you think that?”

“Like...like we’re not broken into. We checked the locks and the windows and everything’s fine.”

“Okay...”

“And nothing else is cut. I checked that right away. Nothing’s cut.”

“Okay...”

“But, like, we bought a few groceries and when I went to put them in the fridge, I’m going like, holy shit, there’s some stuff missing. Like, a loaf of bread. I know that loaf was there earlier. At least, I think it was there. And some sandwich meat is missing. Ham. And some cheese was gone, too. Like, it’s just gone. So, somebody musta took it. But I don’t see how he coulda gotten in.”

“Okay. When did you last see the stuff there?”

“Well, I’m not exactly sure. I’m getting the shivers. Like, for sure the fridge stuff was there yesterday. I didn’t actually check this morning. I just noticed it now.”

“Are you sure one of your friends didn’t take it? You had some people over last night. Did you ask them?”

“No. I never thought of it. Besides, that would be weird. Someone mighta made a sandwich but...but...they wouldn’t take the whole loaf and stuff.”

“Yeah, I agree. Who has the keys to the new locks?”

“Only me and Jim. Nobody else. Not even Becky. She was with me the whole time.”

“And you’re sure there’s no sign of tampering or forced entry?”

“Nothing I can see. But I don’t think he can pick locks. No, Billy Ray can’t pick locks. Once he accidentally locked himself out and he and Karliana had to sit out all day in the rain till I came home. The idiot stayed all day in the rain with a baby when he could have just come to the restaurant, three blocks away, to get the keys from me. That’s how weird he is. He’s just...so much of a freak...such a loser...total zero How could I ever? I never want to see him again.”

“Okay, Maria. I’m going to drop over and check to make sure you’re safe. I was going to take another look around town for him, anyway.”

“I just don’t know what’s next. God! You guys gotta catch him quick. I’m so scared...so...so terrified of what he might do.”

Strange. Weird. Those were the words Maria’s used, along with “idiot”, “loser”, “freak”, “zero”, and a whole bunch more.

“Bizarre”, “seriously disturbed”, and “downright dangerous” fit better.

I drove toward the dead-end, hoping to catch Billy Ray hiding in the Cat Stream bushes.

In The Attic — Saturday, June 11th - 2:35 pm

Ha, ha! Bitch-face Maria phones blue jacket cop. Says she thinks Billy Ray’s back in the house. Back in town. Old Billy Ray’s back in town.

Oh, the shark, babe, has such pretty teeth, dear, and he shows them pearly white.

Just a folding knife has Billy Ray, babe, and he keeps it outta sight.

You know when that shark bites with his teeth, dear, scarlet billows start to spread.

Fancy gloves though wears ol’ Billy Ray, babe, so there’s never, never a trace of red.

On the mattress, oh, Sunday morning, don’t you know, lies a body just oozing life.

And someone’s sneaking down from the ceiling. Could that be Billy Ray with his knife?

Look out; old Billy Ray’s back in town.

Bitch-face, douche-bag, Maria calls me idiot. Loser. Freak. Zero. Maria is the idiot. Loser. Freak. Zero.

I hear Maria in the bedroom with Karliana. Nap time. Nap time, sweetie. Here's your bottle. Here's your blankie. Change of diaper. Change of clothes. Change of mother, Karliana. Change of mother.

Chloe will be your new mother, Karliana. Chloe will love you and feed you and change you and raise you. Chloe will take you places. Zoos. Movies. Waterparks. Chloe will play with you. Protect you. Love you.

Not like bitch-face, douche bag, Maria. I'm watching you, Maria. I'm watching every breath you take.

I'm watching you, Maria. I'm watching you. I'm watching every move you make. Every breath you take. Every bond you break. Every step you take. I am watching you.

Every single day. Every word you say. Every game you play. Every night you stay. I am watching you.

Oh, can't you see? You belong to me. My poor heart breaks with every step you take.

Every move you make. Every vow you break. Every smile you fake. Every claim you make. I am watching you.

I am watching you, Maria.

Billy Ray's up here, watching you.

I'm watching every breath you take.

And I'll watch the last breath you take.

Look out! Old Billy Ray's back in town.

Chapter 13 — Saturday, June 11th - 2:55 pm

I parked below the Cat Stream ravine in an alley off Pine Street. I'd never been in there before—no reason to be in there before—but I saw others had. A well-beaten trail lead through thick alders, tangled salal, and heavy swordfern—obviously someone used this as a shortcut between the lower section of the Harewood District to what's known as "The Hub" where the old city ended.

When Nanaimo first settled, the streets were laid out like spokes in a wheel, radiating from the main wharf to the escarpment, overlooking the Cat Stream. Story was, the city planners were in England and never visited here. They laid out their model, assuming flat terrain. In fact, the place sits on a rocky seashore. If you're not going up, you're going down.

I went through the thickets and crossed the stream. It'd been a dry spring and the flow was more like a trickle. I stopped. Looked. And listened.

Sounds of a transit bus chugging uphill. Distant sirens. Seagulls squawking. Crows cawing. Dog barking. Cars and Canada geese honking. The *thwack-thwack-thwack* of a rock-hammering excavator. But no voices or movement ahead.

I stepped forward, glancing side to side. Off to my left, barely visible from the path, was the bright blue of a tarp, spread between logs, cross-tied to the trees. A side trail led to a makeshift campsite—the home of a homeless person. I lifted the edge. A pair of eyes peered back. Eyes set in the grey mess of a beard, capped by an orange, knitted toque.

"Whadda ya want?" He half growled, half-snarled.

"Police. I'm looking for someone." I backed away.

Smells like wet dog.

"Well, nobody's here." He waved a blistered hand. *"So, fuck off."*

“Hey, maybe you can help me.”

“Why’d I wanna do that?”

“Because the man I’m looking for is going to hurt a woman.”

The old fellow snorted. “Hurt a woman? Can’t hurt women. Women or kids. Only fuckin’ skinnors hurt women and kids.”

“How about I show you his photo? Tell me if you’ve seen him or not.” I brought Billy Ray’s image up on the iPhone.

He squinted and grabbed for the device.

I pulled back.

Never know what’s been in those hands.

He lowered his reach and leaned closer. “Looks like a guy who’d hurt women. Ya can always tell it in their eyes. These are those eyes. Seen lotsa eyes like this in the joint. But I never seen this fuckin’ guy.”

I thanked the drifter and moved on. If it were any other day, I’d have checked him for ID and run for warrants. No doubt he had a history. I was sure Billy Ray did, too. Probably for a lot more crimes than I knew about.

The dead end of Machleary was fifty-feet ahead and twenty-feet above me. The trail switch-backed. Loose gravel broke beneath my shoes. I reached for a grip on something green, then let go faster than grabbing a porcupine’s tail. Spikes from the blackberry bush punctured my palm. I cursed, wiping the blood on my pants.

Breaking out of the brush at the end of Machleary, I was satisfied Billy Ray wasn’t there. It looked great on Google Earth, but the Cat Stream ravine was a rat’s nest of vegetation. Basically, a jungle of junk.

Maria’s cottage was two-hundred feet ahead. Her east-wall was exposed, and I had a clear view of her front entrance. The sun was in the southwest, too far along to reflect off the tiny gable window—the tiny gable window that had a clear view of me. But the sun was in the perfect spot to send shadows of the wind-blown tree’s tentacles, reaching and grabbing at Maria’s bedroom wall.

I walked along Machleary and stopped in front of the cottage. Becky’s beater was in the drive, but this time, no one gawked out her house windows. I thought of rapping on the door, but that might’ve freaked Maria right out.

Better I phone.

I continued on the street to circle back for my Explorer.

Side to side along Machleary, I watched for a face. A face in a window. From the shadow of a carport. Peeking over a fence. From behind a green hedge. I glanced up in tree limbs. Far down the street. Behind me. Ahead of me. And to both sides.

Absolutely no Billy Ray. Billy Ray, the ghost. Billy Ray, the chameleon. Billy Ray, the ninja. The spook. The night fighter. The invisible man. The man lost in time. No Billy Ray.

Maria’s words, “I’m so terrified that psycho’s going to kill me,” hummed in my head.

I got behind the wheel of my Explorer and called Maria. I told her I’d be over. She and Becky were standing in the open door when I arrived.

Hand-in-hand with Becky, Maria gave a slight smile and waved. “Any news?” She stepped forward.

“Nothing at all. I just finished a walk around the area and searched the bushes below in the ravine.”

“Oh, he wouldn’t be in there.” She chuckled. “You can hardly walk through there without getting slashed.”

“So I found out.” I flashed my sliced palm.

“But he’d fit right in with the creeps that live there,” offered Becky.

Maria agreed. “I called some people. No one knows anything about the missing food. I’m just so...confused...worried...I’m so, like, messed up. I guess he could have taken it when he left after cutting my clothes the second time.”

“We went to the mall and got Maria some new clothes.” Becky smiled, still holding Maria’s hand.

“That always makes a lady feel better.” I knew how retail therapy works. I have two ladies, myself. A wife and a daughter who practice it often. “Can I check the radio? I want to make sure it’s working properly.”

We went inside. The charge was full and I did a test call to dispatch.

Becky asked, “How much time have you got? Can you stay with Maria while I go home and check on my cats? It’ll only take twenty minutes.”

I looked at my watch. “Sure. Go for it. There’s some things I’d like to talk to Maria about, anyway.”

When Becky left Maria and I sat at the kitchen table, about eight-feet, at the most, from her open bedroom door. Karliana was napping in her crib.

Maria offered me a coffee, something I never turn down. I waived cream and sugar but watched her load up. Her hands still trembled.

“I don’t know what to tell you, Maria. I have no idea where he is.” I took a sip. “I think we’ve done everything we can, short of putting you in protective custody. I just have no clue where Billy Ray is.”

“I don’t either.” Maria lifted her cup. Her shakes made it spill. She set it down. “Like, it’s not adding up. He has nothing... nowhere... nobody...”

“Something that’s crossed my mind is that he’s gone off and harmed himself.” I’d considered the possibility of Billy Ray committing suicide. I also had the horrible thought of him coming back for a murder-suicide. It wouldn’t be the first time some sicko took out an innocent while offing himself.

“You mean, like, suicide? No, I can’t see that.”

“Did he ever talk about suicide? Threaten suicide?”

“Never. But he sure talked enough about killing me.” She reached for a handful of napkins.

“I told you I called his mother. What do you know about her? About his relations with his mother?”

Maria mopped up the puddle of coffee. “I never met her, or even talked to her. Billy Ray told me a little bit about her, but when he’d talk about his mother he’d go into one of those...trances, I guess you’d call it. Those psycho mood swings, like he was talking in third person...like he was describing a movie he’d seen.” She swatted her hand. “You’d have to meet him to understand what it’s like.”

“What did he tell you about her?”

“Well, he...he...he called her a whore and used the name ‘Jezebel’. Which is weird because that’s not his mother’s name. It’s Roxanne. He told me his mother was a hooker...a prostitute who used to bring men home to the house to have sex while he was in the room. He didn’t say it, but I think he actually watched.”

“That’s not good.”

That’d mess with anyone’s head.

Maria tightened, then looked hard at me. “What do I have to say in court? Like, if all this goes to court?”

“Well, you’re going to have to tell the truth about what happened to you. The violence you told me about in your statement. But they can’t ask you anything regarding what he’s told you about his past. Or any personal things about your past.”

She hung her head. “He’s got a real weird past. It’s pretty sick. Actually, really fucked-up. There’s more to it than what I told you yesterday. I was really upset, so I wasn’t thinking clearly.”

“Anything will help me to interview him.”

“At first, when we met, I thought he was a real nice guy. He seemed like a cool guy who had his shit together. He was a good picker... good guitar player. Acoustic, that is. In fact, he can play just about anything. He’s a natural. And he’s got a good voice, too. Plus, he was real good to Karliana. But as we got closer, I could tell there was two sides to him. Like, one normal side and one totally freakish side. I mean, I use the word ‘psycho’ like, he’s not all there. Like there’s somebody totally different inside him. This evil, mean, nasty, hurting, freak who’s, like, living in another world.”

“What did he tell you about himself?”

Maria gripped her cup with both hands. “He...he said he got in a lot of trouble as a teenager. Hanging with the wrong crowd. Stealing stuff. Breaking in. Smashing stuff. But as an adult, he wasn’t in trouble at all.” Maria put the cup to her mouth, took a quick sip, then set it down. “He told me he hates his mother so much that he has dreams about killing her. Stabbing her to death. Cutting her throat and chopping her up...” Her voice trailed off. “Sick stuff. Dreams, he said, but I think they’re fantasies...the same things he threatened to do to me.”

“Did he say why he hates her?” I probed deeper, trying to understand the mother/son relationship. They’re often the cause of dangerous antisocial behavior. Besides, the psychology behind criminal motivation fascinated me. Still does.

“He blames his mother for all his troubles.” Maria stared into her cup. “Boy, does he blame his mother. I guess she used to beat him all the time. Neglect him. Not even feed him right. Never mind all the sex stuff.”

There was the yecch-face again.

“He told me his biological father and his grandfather are the same person. Like, how sick is that?”

Jesus. That’s beyond sick. He’s biologically fucked-up, too.

Slowly but surely Maria was calming. I could tell she longed to vent about Billy Ray. Her hands steadied as she took the first full sip of coffee.

“Tell me more.” I prompted, wanting to hear her story. Unfortunately, I didn’t have my recorder handy her. There was no recorder and my notebook was closed. I just wanted to hear Maria’s story.

“Well, like I said, it was good while we dated, but once he moved in, he began getting all controlling like. Manipulative. Sneaky. Untrusting. Lying. Just weird, freaky stuff, like he was trying to psychologically break me, or something. For instance, the toilet seat. I know, I know, all men have trouble with the toilet seat, and it’s a small thing, but when I asked him to please put it down after he used it, he’d then put the seat down but keep the lid up and he’d purposely pee on the seat and leave it there for me to clean up. Then he’d leave puddles of pee on the floor,

too. He had this thing about urine. He...he has, like, a weak bladder and dribbles a lot. Get this, he'd wash his pissy underwear in the sink and then hang it on the showerhead to dry, and he wouldn't let me use the shower until they were dry. Even if I had to go to work."

What Maria's telling me fits with the profile I've developed.

I asked her, "Do you have any pets?"

She shook her head. "No. When I talked about getting a kitten for Karliana he went off. I guess every pet he ever had as a kid died, so he didn't want any. He's not an animal lover, anyway. Even when we'd go to Becky's place...she's got cats; too many if you ask me...he'd ignore them. Or if one jumped on his lap, he'd just knock it off. Not set it down nicely. He'd actually bat it away. After that, Becky wouldn't let him come over anymore."

Maria hesitated, listening for Karliana. All was quiet.

"This might sound strange, Maria, but did he have any reaction to fire?"

A quizzical expression crossed her face. "Come to think of it, yeah. We've got the woodstove."

She pointed to the living room. I'd seen it, but paid no attention. It was black cast iron with a glass door.

"Jim doesn't like us using it much because of the fire risk and insurance, and all that. But the couple times we did use it, Billy Ray made a huge deal about building the fire and how good he was at starting them. Then, when it was going, he started picking and singing songs about fire. You know the ones. Johnny Cash's 'Burning Ring Of Fire', Garth Brooks' 'Standing Outside The Fire', Bob Seger's 'She's Got The Fire Down Below', Oakridge Boys' 'Elvira'. Fire songs."

I can hear the words in my head.

Maria continued. "You know, even though he's got a good voice and all that, he never wrote, played, or sang anything original. He was always taking other artists...big-named artists...taking their lyrics and changing them to his own words. And he had no particular taste in music, except all were male artists. Whenever someone wanted to play a female song, he wanted nothing to do with it. It's like he hates female singers, or something."

I watched Maria's expression go through many transitions.

"And he...he had this thing about being told that I loved him. He said that nobody ever loved him and that he didn't know what true love was, except that he always wanted to hear it. Over and over. I think that was my first warning sign. That and the truck."

"The truck?"

Maria nodded. "Yeah. After about two months, he was starting to weird me out. Even our friends noticed it. One night Earl was over...that's Earl Barker, Karliana's biological father. Anyway, Earl's got this big, new, black Dodge Ram. One of them jacked up, noisy diesel trucks. So, it was parked on the street. When Earl went to leave...it was dark now...someone had keyed both sides from end to end. Earl was furious. He didn't suspect or blame Billy Ray, but he went on and on about what he'd do if he found the guy who did it. So, anyway, later on after Earl left, Billy Ray had his keys out and was playing with one, just staring at it. I put two-and-two together and I knew, he'd been outside by himself."

"Did you say anything to him?"

"I did, and he denied it. But I could tell he was lying. He said if Earl wasn't here it wouldn't have happened, so he should stay away before other bad things happened. I knew exactly what he meant, and thought, boy, oh, boy, what have I gotten myself into?"

"Did you tell Earl?"

“I did. That was a few weeks later when I was getting real sick of Billy Ray and was trying to get rid of him. Earl was going to go over and punch him out, but that never happened. Earl never had anything to do with Billy Ray after that. When he’d come to see Karliana I’d keep them apart.”

I could tell Maria was going from the fright phase to the fight phase. Gripping her cup in clenched hands, her tone was getting louder.

“So, tell me about your relationship with Earl.”

Maria slightly smiled. “We’re just...friends. Friends with benefits.” She smiled more. “I’ve known him for a few years, and if I had my way I’d be with him full time.” She looked toward the front door. “I never woulda got involved with that creep...loser...freak. Earl’s a good guy, but he likes his freedom and he did not want to settle down. Karliana was an accident...not an unwanted accident...” Maria stayed smiling. She gazed at the bedroom door. “I didn’t do much to prevent it and Earl, he didn’t walk away from it either. But we just agreed to stay friends and he helps me out with money and stuff. Earl’s wonderful.”

Maria’s smile vanished. She glanced at the front door. “Not like that asshole...that psycho...”

“I’m surprised you stayed with him as long as you did.” I might have stretched the professional boundaries, but I was getting a picture of Maria that seemed common to battered women. “What’s your personal background, Maria?”

She looked at me. Then at her cup. “To be honest, I’ve always had issues...security issues. I...I...was abused...sexually abused. No. Not...not by my dad. No, my dad was a good man. My dad died when I was young. By...by...my uncle...my dad’s brother. That happened while I was between eight and ten when we were living in East Vancouver.” She gazed at the ceiling. “I never disclosed it till after he was dead, too...because... because...I needed to heal. There...there was no court case.” She hung her head. “I never been to court. I’m scared of going to court.”

“Hopefully, you never will, if Billy Ray does the right thing.” Again, I might have pushed the boundaries. “When did you move here?”

“When I was twelve. Grade seven. Went to Barsby, which isn’t the best of schools. I was the ugly duckling. Never really fit in and wasn’t that good in academics.” She lifted her hands up to her mouth. “I was bullied. Picked on...not just by girls. I had bad skin. My mom couldn’t afford to get my teeth done. I was shy...lacked confidence...lacked friends...just wanted people...someone to like me...but I was good in music.”

Maria took her hands away and smiled. “And I got my Grade Twelve.”

I have to admit, Maria might not have been the prettiest girl at the prom. Her skin was blemished and her teeth were crooked. But Maria’s smile was genuine. I believed Maria was a good person who genuinely wanted to be loved. To be cared for. Appreciated. It’s not too much to ask.

“What’s your favorite type of music?” I was genuinely interested.

There was no hesitation. “Country rock. I love playing and singing country rock.” She smiled at me. “If I won the lottery, I’d take singing lessons. I’d start my own band. I’d be an indie artist. Independent artist and I’d write about social issues. Women’s issues. I’d do what I could to make the world a safer place. Not just for women. For men, too. For all people.”

I’d found the real Maria. Not the Maria I met yesterday whose first words were, “I’m so terrified that psycho’s going to kill me.” I was introduced to Maria, the person. Not Maria, the victim. Maria, the terrorized.

I smiled back. "Who's your favorite country rock artist?"

No hesitation again. "Martina McBride."

"What's your favorite Martina song?"

"Independence Day. Want me to sing it for you?"

How could I say no? Maria's voice was good. Real good. She might not have been quite Martina McBride, but her command of the song and its message were pitch-perfect. The lyrics echoed throughout Maria's little cottage, and they remain in my mind today.

*Well she seemed all right by dawns early light
Though she looked a little worried and weak
She tried to pretend he wasn't drinkin' again
But daddy left the proof on her cheek
And I was only eight years old that summer
And I always seemed to be in the way
So I took myself down to the fair in town
On Independence Day*

*Well word gets around in a small, small town
They said he was a dangerous man
But mama was proud and she stood her ground
She knew she was on the losin' end
Some folks whispered and some folks talked
But everybody looked the other way
And when time ran out there was no one about
On Independence Day*

*Let freedom ring, let the white dove sing
Let the whole world know that today is a day of reckoning
Let the weak be strong, let the right be wrong
Roll the stone away, let the guilty pay
It's Independence Day*

*Well she lit up the sky that fourth of July
By the time that the firemen come
They just put out the flames, and took down some names
And sent me to the county home
Now I ain't sayin' it's right or it's wrong
But maybe it's the only way
Talk about your revolution
It's Independence Day*

*Let freedom ring, let the white dove sing
Let the whole world know that today is a day of reckoning
Let the weak be strong, let the right be wrong
Roll the stone away, let the guilty pay*

*It's Independence Day
Roll the stone away
It's Independence day*

In The Attic — Saturday, June 11th - 3:35 pm

Fuck Independence Day. Fuck Maria. Fuck Earl Barker. Fuck blue jacket cop. Fuck my mother. Fuck my father. Fuck my grandfather, who is my father. Fuck everyone. Fuck 'em when they're up. Fuck 'em when they're down. Fuck 'em when they're dead. Fuck 'em all around.

Sing it, Maria. Sing it when you're up. Sing it when you're down. Sing it when you're dead. Sing it all around. Sing Independence Day.

Let freedom fuck. Let the white dove suck. Let the whole fucking world know that today is a day of slaughtering. Let the weak be knifed. Let the right get chopped. Get sliced away. Let the blood all spray. It's Independence Day. Cut and chop away. Cause it's Independence Day.

Protective custody. Psycho moods. Whore. Jezebel. Hooker. Prostitute. Weird past. Sick. Fucked-up. Two sides. Freaky. Evil. Mean. Nasty. Hog-fuckin' nasty. Hurting. Freak. Fantasies. Cutting-up. Controlling. Manipulate. Creep. Sneaky.

Guess who's sneaking around up here, Maria? Guess who's sneaking around in the attic? You can't hear me... but I can hear you.

Not trusting. I don't trust you, Maria. Lying. Liar. Maria the liar. Liar, liar, pants on fire. Fire. Urine. Cats and dogs. Flames and piss. Piss on the flames. Burn the cats. Burn the dogs. Piss on the burning cats and dogs. Keyed Earl Barker's truck. Creep. Loser. Freak. Psycho.

Ha! Ha ha! Hahahahaha! Hahahahahahahahaha! It's the day of slaughtering!

Fuck Martina McBride! Hit it, Billy Ray!

Let freedom suck. Let the white dove fuck. Let the whole fucking world know that today is a day of slaughtering. Let the weak be knifed. Let the right be chopped. Get sliced away. Let the blood all spray. It's Independence Day. Cut and chop away. Cause it's Independence Day.

Freak. Billy Ray the freak. Loser. Billy Ray the loser. Zero. Billy Ray the zero.

Zero sum game, Maria.

It's a zero sum game.

Creep. Billy Ray the creep. Creeping around in your house. Sneak. Billy Ray, the sneak. Sneaking around in your attic. Psycho. Billy Ray, the psycho. Psycho in your attic. Psycho in your attic with some blades. There's a psycho in your attic with some blades. All together now... sing it in B like Big River... John Fogerty leads off... Springsteen comes on... Hit it, John! Hit it, Boss!

There's a psycho in your attic with a blade.

There's a psycho in your attic with a blade.

There's a psycho. There's a psycho.

There's a psycho in the attic with a blade.

Chapter 14 — Saturday, June 11th - 6:50 pm

We were finishing dinner when my cell phone toned. My wife frowned. I took it from my belt. Checked call display, but didn't recognize the number. My wife kept frowning. I winked and let voicemail take it.

We kept chatting, probably about some stupid thing in the news. There were always stupid things in the news to chat about. About Skyping with our son who's away on a tour in the army. About linking-in our daughter who lives here in town. She's a freelance writer and editor. About my wife's day in dealing with boneheads at her store. Not so much about my day—I tried to keep police stuff out of the house. And about her upcoming week off. We had a getaway to Seattle via the Amtrak booked for Wednesday and I'd promised to take the tail end of the week off. It was a discount deal and the tickets were already paid.

The cell toned again. Same number.

I winced. "Better check this. I'm still on call." I got up and went out on the patio. The BBQ was still warm, but the temperature was starting to drop—bit under average for this time of the year, yet comfortable enough in short sleeves. I punched in the voicemail passcode. One message.

"Yeah, it's Ida at the Cambie. That guy you're looking for yesterday. He just came in. Least it sure looks like the same guy. He's by himself and sitting by the west wall near the pool tables. Got some sort of a gray hoodie on. Jeans. Ah... runners. He's here if you want him."

My adrenalin surged.

Wonder why Ron Wood Woman called again, but didn't leave a second message? Maybe he left? Fuck...

I phoned Ida back. She said the suspect was still there. She just wanted to make sure I got her message.

I told my wife what went down, then holstered-up and zippered my blue jacket. I got in the Explorer and, in twenty minutes, parked in front of the Cambie via the fire hydrant space. Trivia—cops always park in front of hydrants. It's our spot.

Victoria Crescent was busy. It's always busy on Saturday nights in this little strip and stroll of bars and a good portion of patrons already had a snootful. The roll-up windows were open and I could see right inside the Cambie. Gray-hoodie guy had his back to me. He was fiddling with something in his lap.

Folding knife?

Experience being the better part of judgement, I headed toward the Explorer to radio for a downtown unit to back me up. Dragging someone out of the Cambie could get touchy, especially when you're alone. Two of the bike patrol officers pedaled by. I flagged them over, briefed them, and had them standby.

I walked inside and got a nod from Ron Wood Woman, then circled the bar and approached gray hoodie from the front. By now, I had Billy Ray's image on my front page, above the fold. Much as I wanted it to be, this was not Billy Ray Shaughnessy. I signaled a "no" and a "thanks" to Ronnie and left.

I sat in the Explorer and gave it some thought.

It's now a day and a half without any sign of him. No money. No food. No home. No friends to couch surf at their place. Only the clothes on his back. No suicidal tendencies. No nothing. What the fuck is going on? Where in the hell is he?

I called the Watch Commander and made sure the alert was still set to pass-on. It was. I got through to the cell block. No arrest booked-in for Billy Ray. I had the switchboard do an updated indices query. No recent entries by other police jurisdictions.

Man, he's just...fucking...vaporized.

My watch showed seven-thirty four. Nearly three hours till dark. Seeing I was already downtown, I drove the grid and checked Machleary. I slowed. A group of people were outside Maria's house. Jim Dersch stood below the front steps with a can of Lucky beer going. Debbie with a glass of wine. Kyle, Nathan, and Becky were smoking a joint. And an inked couple, who'd never pass an airport metal detector screening, sat cross-legged on the grass. One tapped a bongo. The other shook a tambourine. Maria's voice was out of sight. A cardboard box, guitar case, and two green garbage bags sat near the curb. A sheet of paper marked "Fuck Off, Billy Ray" was taped to the box.

I smiled.

Jim flagged me over. I circled at the dead end, giving enough time for them to butt out, and parked across the street. Jim met me in the middle.

"I wanna thank you again for taking this serious."

I shook his hand, staring at his round, bearded face. Genuine seemed to run in this family. "Wish I could give you good news, but we still don't have him."

"Well, there's no sign of the fucker being back." Jim thumbed at the stuff at the curb. "You'd think by now he'd been back for his shit. I think he's scared. He's gone. The guy's a coward. He's run off."

"How's Maria doing?" I scanned the area around the door.

"Seems fine. Everyone's around her. She's got good friends."

"Maybe I'll say a quick hello and a goodnight." I walked to the door. The reefer was out, but the smell lingered in the air. The jam crowd low-fived as I passed through their mosh-pit.

Maria was bringing Karliana out of the bedroom. The little girl with the golden curls played shy again and buried into her mother's shoulder. Maria ran her fingers through Karlaina's locks and shuffled her position. I stood grinning, waiting to wink peek-a-boo like my little girl used to do.

No such luck.

"We had a false alarm." I told Maria. "One of the bartenders thought he was in the Cambie, so I went down to check. Wasn't him."

Maria set Karliana on the couch. Karliana looked up at me with baby blue eyes, then quickly rolled over.

"All of us have been trying to think what's happened to Billy Ray." Maria shrugged. "But we got no idea. No idea at all." She pulled a stroller over to Karliana. "Anyway, I'm going out tonight. Not going to let him hold me hostage. Just for the evening, though. Not overnight. Karliana is staying with Jim and Debbie while I'm gone. Me and the others are going to the Queens." Maria bent and tickled Karliana, who giggled away. Then she turned to me. "I guess I should have asked...is it okay to leave the house unattended? Like, what happens if he comes back and breaks in while I'm gone and is, like...waiting here?" Maria put her hand to her mouth.

I smiled. "You can't live in a prison. No problem at all in going out except...I know you'll be with friends all the time and won't be alone...just make sure that when you come back you have somebody like Jim with you to check outside and all around the house first before going in. Check for signs of forced entry and then have someone search the house before setting in for the night. And make sure someone stays overnight with you. Until we find him, you know..."

Maria smiled back. "I know. Thank you, mister policeman." She touched my arm.

I had to chuckle. I must have seemed like her older brother, saying something so obvious. Probably the dad in me coming out—Maria was the same age as my daughter, Emily.

Maria grabbed her purse and slung it over the stroller handle, then lifted Karliana—lifting her high above her head, letting her down quickly. I'll never forget the squeal of delight coming from that child and the look of adornment Maria gave to her daughter. Maria placed Karliana in the stroller and popped a soother in her mouth.

She stood up, ready to go. "I really want to say thanks for all you're doing. You really make me feel better." She glanced down. "Not just safer...but better about myself."

When she looked up, I saw a fresh face on Maria. The blandness around her eyes was gone, darkened with mascara, and her lashes seemed longer. There was more color to her cheeks. Her hair had a noticeable sheen. And her lips were a bright-cherry red. Kind of a Marilyn Monroe red.

Yes, Maria readied for a night on the town. I genuinely hoped she enjoyed it.

In The Attic — Saturday, June 11th - 7:50 pm

Everybody's leaving.

Maria. Karliana. Big Jimmy Boy Jimmy Bob. Debbie Big-tits. Karliana staying with Big Jimmy Bop and Big-tits Debbie. Nathan gone. Kyle gone. Becky gone. Others gone.

Silence.

Quiet.

Nothing stirring.

Not even a mouse.

Billy Ray's alone. All alone. All alone at the end of the evening. When the bright lights have faded away. I'm missing. A woman. Who's been taken a-way.

Maria's been taken away. Maria the bitch. Maria the slut. Maria the whore. Jezebel. Maria the Jezebel. Maria the liar. Maria the faker. Liar! Faker!

Chloe wouldn't be taken away. Chloe loves me. Chloe needs me. Chloe wouldn't do what Maria's done.

Maria called the cops. Cops look for me. Can't find me. Hide and seek. Seek where I hide. But Billy Ray's back.

Why's Billy Ray back?

Because Billy Ray just came back to say goodbye.

When I first saw you I heard the angels sing. Adam and Eve and the whole love thing.

Was blinded by your light and we did click. Now I'm hiding up here in your old at-tick.

I really hope you're satisfied and I just came back to say goodbye.

I just came back to say goodbye.

I felt real bad when you got that call. He got your number from the bathroom wall.

Now you're out. You're gone for the night. Gone downtown with your jeans on tight.

I really hope you're satisfied. Now I've come back to say goodbye.

I just came back to say goodbye. I just came back to say goodbye.

Goodbye baby. I just came back. Goodbye baby. I just came back.

Billy Ray just came back to say goodbye. Bye-bye, baby.

Nobody's here. Goodbye baby. Goodbye baby.

Nobody's home. So long. So long my baby.

*Except Billy Ray. Goodbye. Bye my baby.
Billy Ray and his knife. Au revoir baby.
Billy Ray and his blade. Goodbye baby.
Blade in metal hoop. Long gone baby.
Wooden handle. Bye-bye my baby.
Blade to chop. Goodbye to baby.
Knife to slice. Lights out baby.
Knife to stab. Goodbye baby.
Thirty-one times, baby.
You're a dead baby.
I just came back...
To say goodbye.*

Chapter 15 — Saturday, June 11th - 8:20 pm

I got home, parked in the driveway, and radioed dispatch. “Nanaimo, Twenty Delta Three.”

“Go Delta Three.”

“Ten-seven res and on call for the night.”

“Copy Delta Three. Have a good night.”

“Same to you. Hope it’s quiet.”

I stepped inside the garage, gave Mustang Sally a rub, then did the jacket hanging, shoe tossing, unholstering, and unloading routine. I went into the kitchen. The dishes were done, the place spic-and-span, and my wife was in the adjacent family room, playing Word Scrabble on her iPad. A rerun of Big Bang Theory was on the TV and a glass of white wine was on her side table.

“So, did you find who you were looking for?” She didn’t face me. She was just making conversation.

“No.” Her glass was calling my name.

One’s not going to hurt. Even if I am on call.

I opened the fridge door and summoned the Pino-in-a-box. “This is a puzzling thing I’ve got going. Not sure what to make of it.”

I rarely discussed cases outside of the workplace, and she knew if wanted to tell her, I would. Otherwise, she’d just let it go.

I poured a glass of wine and sent the box back to the fridge. “I’ve been trying to find a guy for a spousal assault and...it’s weird...he’s just...vanished. Like right within the place.” I didn’t say sexual assault with a weapon or threats to kill.

“Must be a pretty serious spousal assault if you’re involved.” She was used to most of my cases starting at the morgue.

I sat at the dinette table and opened my laptop. “This one is. It’s got the potential to continue. Possibly really nasty. The victim is safe, but the suspect is absolutely nowhere to be found. He’s left all his shit behind, but he’s gone. It’s like he’s found the perfect hiding spot.”

“Hiding in plain sight. Isn’t that what Sherlock Holmes used to say?”

“I’m not that up on Sherlock. I’m more up on Sheldon.” I smiled, nodding at the TV. Big Bang was the one sitcom I really liked.

Talk about good writing and characterization.

She laughed. "I think you're more like Howard."

I let that slip. First stop on the computer was my email. I had a bunch of messages from my writers' group and a few notifications of new subscribers to my blog. I'd started it a couple of years ago as a way to promote my writing—my retirement fund—and it'd taken off. I'd also found quite a network of crime writers, including a few old cops and some newbies who I knew were going places..

Next stop was Facebook for some laughs.

As I scrolled through the feeds, my mind wandered to the cottage on Machleary, thinking it was now empty and Maria and the jammers were jammin' it at the Queens.

Hey, good name for her band. Maria And The Jammers.

Where Billy Ray hid was anybody's guess. He'd probably stay hidden for the night. We turned in at ten-thirty. I was on-call—my cell phone nearby.

In The Attic — Saturday, June 11th - 11:30 pm

No one home. Goodbye, baby.

All alone. Night night, baby.

Afraid? Game's over, baby.

Zero sum game, baby.

It's a zero sum game.

Are you afraid, Maria? Afraid? Afraid of who's in the attic?

Who's lurking in the attic?

Billy Ray, the ghost. Billy Ray, the vampire. Billy Ray, the big bad wolf.

Billy Ray, the fucking werewolf.

Ah-hooo! Werewolf in the attic. Ah-hooo! Werewolf in the attic.

If you hear him howling around your attic hatch.

Better not let him down.

Little old Maria's getting mutilated later tonight.

By the ah-Hoo! Werewolf in the attic. Ah-Hoo! Werewolf in the attic.

I'm the hairy-handed love who's run amuck above.

Lately, I've been in the attic.

Ya better stay away from me.

I'll rip your lungs out, gee.

Ha! You're about to meet your maker.

In The Attic — Sunday, June 12th - 1:35 am

Vehicle pulling in. Loud engine. Diesel sound. Rattling engine. Tires on gravel. Engine stop. Doors open. Footsteps. Maria's voice. Faint. Man's voice. Faint.

Diesel truck? Loud engine? Man with Maria? Earl Barker? Earl Barker? Earl Barker has loud diesel truck. Is it Earl Barker? It's Earl Barker's truck. Fucking Earl Barker with Maria? What's Earl Barker doing here with Maria? Voices. Louder. Maria's voice. Earl

Barker's voice. No! No! Earl Barker's here with Maria! Earl Barker's here to fuck Maria! I'll fucking kill them! Kill Maria! Kill Earl Barker! Fucking Earl Barker is here to fuck Maria!

Voices fading. Not inside. Walking away. Walking east. Walking to Jimmy Boy Jimmy Bob's. Oh. Going to get Karliana at Jimmy Boy's. Getting Karliana. Bringing Karliana here. Karliana will be here. Maria wouldn't fuck Earl Barker with Karliana here. Maria's already fucked Earl Barker. Sucked him. Fucked and sucked Earl Barker in the truck. Maria the slut. Maria the whore. Maria the pig. Ditch pig Maria. Fucked Earl Barker in the truck! Jezebel!

Fists. Grip. Hands. Shake. Hot. Sweat. Heat. Shiver. Cold. Hot. Hot. Cold. Grip. Hand on handle. Long wooden handle. Handle with hoop. Metal hoop with blade. Sharp blade. Cutting blade. Chopping blade. Swinging blade. Grip. Hands. Shake. Hot and cold.

Voices. Voices louder. Maria's voice. Earl Barker's voice. Flashlight. Flashlight beams about yard. Voices under window. Maria, stay with me Earl Barker says. Check around back. Check windows. Check door at back. Voices fading. West side. Voices louder. Front door. Maria has keys. Unlocks front door. Earl Barker in first. Lights on. Earl Barker walking in house. Maria says Karliana sleeping. Maria carries Karliana. Earl Barker is here!

Grip handle with hands. Pulse pounds. Mouth dry. Have to piss. Have to piss bad! Grip on wooden handle. Release grip. Pissing. Fuck! Pissing self. Grab piss jar. Fuck!!

In The Attic — Sunday, June 12th - 2:05 am

He's pounding her! Earl Barker is pounding Maria!

Eight feet below!

I hear Maria groaning! Moaning! Groaning and moaning! Ahhhhhhhh!! Earl Barker fucking Maria! Eeeeeee!! Earl Barker is fucking Maria, the whore. Ooooooo!! Earl Barker is fucking Maria, the slut! Maria the pig! Maria the ditch pig! Maria the JEZ-E-BEL! Maria the liar! Maria the faker! Liar! Faker! Slut! Whore! Pig! Maria the cunt! Noooooo!!

Earl Barker is fucking Maria while Karliana is in the room! Yiiiiiii!!

Karliana is in the room! They're fucking while Karliana is in the room!!

Jezebel. Jezebel. Jezebel. Jezebel. Jezebel. Jezebel. JEZ-E-BEL!!

Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh no, no, no, no, no, no, no!!

Shaking. Hot. Sweating. Forehead dripping. Eyes wet. Stomach sick. Shaking, Totally dark. Except streetlight glow in window. Hand on handle. Grip on handle. Handle with hoop. Metal hoop. Blade in hoop.

Listening. Gripping.

Listening. Gripping.

Listening. Gripping.

Listening. Listening.

Grip on handle.

Eight feet above.

In The Attic — Sunday, June 12th - 2:55 am

Quiet...Quiet...Quiet...

Been quiet forever...Quiet forever...

*Quiet forever...Still Quiet...Waiting...Listening...
Waiting and listening. Listening and waiting. Wait and listen all night.
Asleep. Maria and Earl Barker are asleep. Earl Barker fucked Maria to sleep. Fucked.
I hear snoring. Maria snores. Chloe never snores. I hate Maria snoring. Maria is asleep.
I hear snoring. Earl Barker snores. I hate Earl Barker. Earl Barker is asleep...Maria...
I hate Maria...Hate Maria...Hate Earl Barker...Hate...Hurt...Pain...Disgust...Hate...
Chloe hates Maria and Earl Barker. Chloe never fucked Earl Barker. Chloe never fucks.
Chloe is not a whore. Jezebel. Chloe is what every woman should be... Chloe is perfect.
Chloe kills Maria. Chloe kills Earl Barker. Chloe kills Maria and Earl Barker. Kills both.
Grip on handle... Shaking... Crawling to hatch... Crawling to hatch... Crawling to hatch...
Grip on handle... Crawling at hatch... Grip on handle... Shaking... Lifting hatch...
Let go of handle... Setting at side of hatch... Shaking... Grabbing rope...
Grabbing stool... Shaking... Stool on rope... Shaking...
Lowering stool... Hits floor... Shaking...
Lowering self down hatch...
Both feet touching stool...
Reaching for handle...
Grip on handle...
Step off stool...
Onto floor...
Listening...
Snoring...
Stepping...
Snoring...
Stepping...
Stopping...
Looking...
Looking...
Looking...*

In The Bedroom — Sunday, June 12th - 3:00 am

*Hating!!!
Swinging!!!
Chopping!!!
Hating!!!
Swinging!!!
Chopping!!!
Hating!!!
Swinging!!
Chopping!!
Killing!!
Swinging!!
Chopping!!
Hating!!*

*Swinging!!
Chopping!!
Killing!!
Swinging!
Chopping!
Hating!
Swinging!
Chopping!
Chopping!
Chopping!
Hating!
Throwing!
Knifing!
Slicing!
Hating!
Cutting!
Hating!
Slicing!
Cutting!
Hating!
Slicing!
Hating!
Stabbing!
Stabbing!
Thrusting!
Stabbing!
Stabbing!
Thrusting!
Stabbing!
Stabbing!
Stabbing!
Ten!
Stabbing!
Thrusting!
Stabbing!
Thrusting!
Stabbing!
Thrusting!
Stabbing!
Stabbing!
Thrusting...
Stabbing...
Twenty...
Stabbing...
Shiving...
Stabbing...*

Thrusting...

Shiving...

Twenty-five...

Stabbing...

Shiving...

Stabbing...

Twenty-eight...

Stabbing...

Another...

Stabbing...

Thirty...

Stabbing...

One...

Last...

Stab.

In The Bathroom — Sunday, June 12th - 3:35 am

Washing Karliana. Blood on her sleeper. Blood on her face. Blood in her hair. Karliana was splattered with blood. Never meant to splash Karliana. Love Karliana. Chloe loves Karliana. Chloe never meant to get blood on Karliana. Washing Karliana. Drying Karliana. Clothing Karliana. Washing her. Drying her. Clothing her.

Making Karliana a bottle. Warm milk bottle. Setting Karliana in hamper. Took old clothes out. Fresh towels in. Made Karliana a fresh bed. Safe bed. Karliana is safe in her new bed in the bathroom. Not in her crib in the bedroom. Crib with blood. Maria's blood. Earl Barker's blood.

Chole killed Maria and Earl Barker, but Chloe didn't mean to get blood on Karliana. Maria's fault. Maria never should have had Earl Barker in bedroom with Karliana. Bitch. Whore. Jezebel. Fucking Earl Barker in bedroom with Karliana there. Fucking whore. Fucking Jezebel. She deserved to die. Fucking slut. Maria the whore. Maria the slut. Maria the pig. Maria the ditch pig. Maria the Jez-A-Bel.

Karlina is safe in the bathroom. Safe in the hamper. Safe in the hamper in the bathroom. Can't climb out. Karlina is safe. Safe. Karlina is safe.

Chloe must leave...Getting light soon. Chloe must leave...Karlina will be found when it's light. Chloe must leave...

Earl Barker truck. Chloe must leave...here are keys? Earl Barker pants. Keys in Earl Barker's pants. Chloe must leave...Money. Earl Barker's wallet. Money. Money from Earl Barker's pockets and wallet. Chloe must leave...Maria's purse. Money in Maria's purse. Chloe must leave... Have money and truck keys.

Chloe must leave...

In The Truck — Sunday, June 12th - 4:05 am

Doors.

House door. Closed. Not locked. Maria changed the lock. Big Jimmy Boy changed the lock. Locked Billy Ray in. Locked Billy Ray in the attic. Locked Chloe in the attic. Ha, ha, ha! Locked me in the attic.

Doors.

Truck door. Unlock the truck with Earl Barker's keys. Get in. Start Earl Barker's truck with Earl Barker's keys. I keyed Earl Barker's truck. Ha, ha, ha! Earl Barker's big black truck.

Doors. Close the door. Truck in reverse. Backing out. Stopping. In Drive. Driving away.

Doors. Jim Morrison. Doors.

Don't ya hate her madly.

Don't ya kill her gladly.

Maria's dead and I'm walkin' out...the...door.

Yeah, all her life is gone.

I sing a lonely song.

It's a big red dream.

Seven chops seemed to be...on...the...throat.

I loved her sadly. But she loved me badly.

I killed her gladly.

Maria's dead and I'm walking out... the... door.

Right turn. Left turn. Right turn. Left.

Dirty deeds. Dirt done cheap.

Dirty deeds. And they're done dirt cheap.

Fuel in tank is half full. Or half empty?

No remorse. No repent.

I don't care what it meant.

Another day. Another death.

Another sorrow. Another breath.

Food. Stop at 7-11 for hot dog. Hot dog and nachos.

Nachos with the nice liquid cheese.

Dirty deeds. Done dirt cheap.

Dirty deeds. And they're done dirt cheap.

And a Coke. Yeah, a Coke. A Coke for Chloe. Chloe likes Coke.

Chloe buys a six-pack of Coke for the drive. Keeps Chloe awake.

*Dirty deeds. Done dirt cheap.
Dirty deeds. And they're done dirt cheap.
It's gonna be a long drive, Chloe.
Yep. Long drive ahead.*

Chapter 16 — Sunday, June 12th - 10:40 am

Sunday mornings around our house are pretty quiet now that the kids are gone. My wife had the day off and she was playing Word Scrabble on her iPad, as usual. I was on my laptop, visiting some writer sites. We were going to have lunch at home, then head to Home Depot to get a replacement light for over the sink. Nothing very exciting, that's for sure.

My cell phone toned. I checked the call display. Sergeant Jim Lewis' number was on the screen—the special projects member of our Serious Crimes Section.

Uh-oh! If Leaky's calling on a Sunday morning, something's up.

I answered.

“Hope you don't have plans for the day.” Leaky sounded serious. Normally he was the joker of our unit. He also had an incontinence problem. We called him “Leaky” Lewis.

“What do you got, Leaky?”

“Two bodies in a house downtown. I haven't been there myself, yet. Uniform has it sealed and Ident is on their way. I told them to hold off until we could take a look. It's only you and I available today.”

“What's the circumstances? Another murder–suicide?”

Christ. We just had one last week.

“No, doesn't appear so. Both bodies are badly hacked-up from what I'm told. Edged weapon more likely than a blunt instrument. Watch Commander said the place, it's in a bedroom, is a total bloodbath. Man and a woman. Said he's never seen such a mess. Like a killing frenzy.”

“Any suspect?”

“There is, but no one in custody. It was discovered by a family member who went looking for them...the woman...because I guess there'd been some history with a violent ex and the woman wasn't answering her phone...so the brother...the woman's brother...went to check and found them dead in bed. Apparently, there was a baby in the house who's unharmed. The baby had been stuffed in a laundry basket or hamper, or something weird like that.”

“Violent ex? Is there a name?”

I'm getting a bad feeling. Woman...baby...violent ex.

“There is, but I don't have it. Apparently, our members were aware of the situation and had been there on Friday over a domestic dispute, but couldn't find the guy. The ex. There's a file open and I asked them to pull it for us.

Uh-oh.

“Victims' names?”

“The members at the scene have all that. They told me, but I didn't write it down. The names weren't familiar to me. There's no doubt about the I.D. of the bodies, but visually, they're pretty messed up. The woman is the resident of the house and the male is a friend. I guess he's the ex-ex-boyfriend and actually, the baby's father, or something messed up like that. Looks like a love triangle thing.”

Now I'm getting a really baaad feeling.

“What, what’s the address?”

“Ah, it’s up on Machleary. Four hundred block. Just a sec...four six nine Machleary.”

Oh no. Oh no. Oh no. Oh...my...god...no.

“Did you get that? Four sixty-nine Machleary?”

Oh, dear God, no.

“Yeah...I...”

“Okay, do you want to meet up there or at the office first?”

“Jim...I...ah...”

“What’s wrong? You sound...”

“I...ah...I know who this is. The woman and the suspect, that is.”

Maria...Billy Ray...Fuuuuck...

“How’s that?”

“I...ah...I had a file...shit...Friday afternoon. She, the woman victim, at least it has to be her. This all fits. She came in to get a restraining order against her ex-boyfriend. There was way more to it. Violent sexual assault with a weapon. A knife. Threats to kill. Cut up clothes. The suspect took off and I spent all Friday evening and yesterday looking for him...”

“That was you? Fuck!”

“Yeah. God, it looks like he must have come back in the night.”

“What’s your suspect’s name? Maybe it is a murder–suicide and they got it wrong.”

“Shaughnessy. William Raymond Shaughnessy. He goes by Billy Ray.”

“No, that’s not the name of the male victim.”

Male victim? Actually the baby’s real father? Maria did say who Karliana’s biological father was, but how...what’s the connection to them being in bed?

“You said the victims were found in bed. Like, sleeping when they were killed, or—?”

“I was told both were in bed and were covered over. At least, the female was covered.

Whether they were sleeping or whatever, I don’t know. Let’s just get going over there and see.”

I agreed to meet Leaky at the scene and we’d take it from there.

Maria...poor, defenseless Maria...I’m so terrified that psycho’s going to kill me...so terrified that psycho’s going to kill me...so terrified that psycho’s going to kill me...

Chapter 17 — Sunday, June 12th - 11:15 am

The scene at four sixty-nine Machleary looked like something right out of CSI. Five marked police cars with lights flashing cordoned off the street, keeping back two television SUVs, one from Global and one from CTV. A camera crew was rolling and a striking lady with a microphone stood with Maria’s cottage in the backdrop. Yellow barrier tape kept a crowd of curious onlookers in line.

The Forensic Identification Section’s mobile unit was on site, and I recognized the lead FIS member stepping out. Sergeant Cheryl Hunter was already dressed in what we called the “bunny suit.” A junior FIS member, Matt Halfyard, was with her. We called him “Eighteen Inches.” They were dressed the same. I think FIS people must sleep in white Tyvek suits.

I parked the Explorer outside the perimeter and got out. Leaky beat me to the scene and was talking to Hunter and Halfyard. I joined them.

Leaky was the senior investigator and, by that, was automatically in-charge. He nodded at me. “Seeing as you’re already involved and familiar with these people, I’ll have you be the file coordinator.” Basically, Leaky deferred the overall investigation responsibility to me.

“Makes sense.” I nodded and looked at Hunter and Halfyard. A high priority at the start of a major crime investigation is to appoint the “exhibit man” or person who would collect and record the physical evidence and process it to the various specialty sections for examination.

This is a critical role. A big job. Verifying the chain of custody, or continuity of possession, is vitally important in establishing the accuracy, relevance, reliability, and admissibility of evidence in court. In a major case, like a double murder, the exhibits could number in the hundreds.

Halfyard volunteered to take exhibits. He knew he’d be appointed anyway and I had faith in his attention to detail. We’d worked together on a few files, and I liked the kid’s attitude.

A uniformed shift-supervisor walked over. Corporal John Heinz, like me, was nearing retirement. He’d experienced a lot over the years and he summed it up. “I’ve never seen anything so fuckin’ vicious. Whoever did this really, really wanted them dead. The male is practically decapitated and the female is...well...you have to see for yourself. It’s like a bomb blasted a barrel of blood.”

I winced and squeezed my eyes shut. Billy Ray’s face flashed in my mind. I shook the image away. “Who’s been inside the scene so far?” I thumbed at Maria’s bedroom window. “I mean, since the bodies were found.”

My professional side was already getting a jump on scene contamination control. This is crucial in a day when the “CSI Effect” contaminates the minds of juries and the defense makes a big smoke screen over scene control. Seems like DNA is everything these days in fiction. In reality, it’s just one more piece of the puzzle.

“Just myself, the Watch Commander, and one of the young guys. The first responder.” Heinz pointed at an officer that appeared not a day over twenty. He was guarding the front door. “We just went in to confirm death which is...painfully obvious...and did a security search, making sure no one else was inside. Then we backed right off. Oh, and the female victim’s brother. He’s the one who found them and the little girl. You knew there was a baby found alive?”

“Yeah.”

Thank God he couldn’t kill a baby.

“Where’s the girl now?”

Heinz pointed at Jim Dersch’s house. “Over there with the brother and sister-in-law. They’re absolutely traumatized and I’ve called for Victim Services to come.”

“Good plan.” I could see “Genuine Jim” in my mind, but couldn’t yet imagine the horror he’d found. “Just to confirm the victims’ names and who identified them?” I had my notebook out. I already knew who they were, but positively identifying a murder victim is a vital first-step because all other legal processes that follow—charges, search warrants, and arrest warrants, to name a few—depend on the victims’ legal names. All of which I had to record.

Heinz read from his notes. “Female is Maria Anne Dersch and the male is Earl Barker. Don’t have his full name. Visual identity made by James Richard Dersch at 10:04 a.m. You want to look inside?”

“No, I’ll wait till we have a search warrant and the coroner is ready. The less in and out the better.” I didn’t tell Heinz that I was familiar with the layout and Maria.

How did Earl Barker end up here? He must have come home with Maria last night and Billy Ray must have followed them.

“Right.” Heinz nodded. “Coroner’s been notified, but no ETA.”

My brain was hyper-active. Not just with planning an investigational path, but in locating Billy Ray before more carnage occurred. And already it was starting.

If only I’d found Billy Ray. If only I put Maria in a safe house. If only...if only...

It’s still if only...

It’ll always be if only...

Leaky broke my silence and offered to get the search warrant. There was a day when crime scene warrants were cumbersome affairs with typing, whiteout, multiple copies, and time consuming visits to a judge’s personal presence, but today’s technology allows an investigator to use their laptop right at the scene, to fill in the site particulars on a boiler-plate form and email it to a central justice-on-call. These “tele-warrants” have about a half-hour turnaround.

In the meantime, common-law doctrine allowed a search of the scene’s perimeter, outside the house. The two Forensic officers were already taking still and video shots in a clockwise pattern.

John Heinz was still beside me. “The brother mentioned a suspect.” He checked his notes. “A Billy Ray Shaughnessy. Apparently, this guy had been threatening the female. Some of our members had been aware of this. Apparently, a file is open and he was arrestable on assault charges.”

If only...

Heinz’s voice echoed. Dreamlike. I needed to focus on the moment, not the past.

If only...

“Another thing,” Heinz continued. “It looks like the male’s truck is missing. Jim Dersch stated Barker brought the female home last night and they’d made arrangements for him to stay over. Apparently, there was enough concern for her safety that she wouldn’t stay alone. Jim said the truck was there last night around one a.m., but was gone first thing this morning. I wouldn’t be surprised if the suspect stole the truck. We should get the plate on CPIC and NCIC right away.”

If only...

I squeezed my eyes and opened them again. “Good point, John. Can you look after this?”

“You bet. I’ll do a MVB offline and get the plate from his name.”

My mind was whirling.

How did Billy Ray get inside?

“Was there any sign of forced entry?”

“None that we saw, but the brother said the front door was unlocked when he put his key in the lock. I guess they’d recently changed the locks to keep this guy out. The door was closed, but the deadbolt was unlocked. That was his first alarm bell, then he opened it and heard the baby crying. Then he saw...well...you’ll see what he saw.” Heinz made a face as if he sniffed a skunk’s ass.

I knew I’d be doing the same shortly. I let Heinz in on what I knew of the background. “By the way, I’m aware of the history here. It was me who has the file on the earlier assault. I laid a charge on Shaughnessy on Friday evening. Spent most of yesterday trying to find him, but he completely vanished.”

“Jesus!” Heinz winced. “That was you? If only you’d found him before... this...” He looked at the bedroom window and winced again.

Yeah... if only...

It’ll always be if only...

Chapter 18 — Sunday, June 12th - 11:40 am

If only...

If only I’d known where Billy Ray was hiding...I would have prevented this awful tragedy I’m now investigating.

But I didn’t know where Billy Ray had been, and I didn’t have a clue where he’d gone.

A top priority in finding him was to get a police bulletin out in the system. John Heinz took that on. At this point, it was far too early to lay murder charges against Billy Ray. There was plenty of time for that. The existing sexual assault indictments were clearly sufficient to arrest and hold him until the homicide investigation was substantially complete. That would involve processing the crime scene for God-knows-what-all evidence might be there—including the murder weapon(s), locating and interviewing witnesses, removing and autopsying the bodies, as well as locating, arresting, and interrogating the perpetrator.

Already, I had no doubt it was Billy Ray and, like them all, he’d have his side to the story.

If he cared to share it.

A silver SUV pulled onto Machleary and drove up to the police line. A silver-haired lady with a silver clipboard got out and approached the officers. She showed them her identification that hung off a blue lanyard and they let her through.

Honey Phelps was the on-duty coroner. Love the name “Honey.” It wasn’t her nickname, and I’ll give her parents full-credit for picking the perfectly suitable one for her.

We huddled by the Forensic Identification unit as I gave her what details I had.

Honey stopped writing and told me, “Because this is a suspected homicide, I’ll only do a viewing and take some identification shots for my records. Then I’ll politely back out and leave you guys with the mess.” Honey was no stranger to death scenes. I’d worked with her more times than I can remember. “Once you’re ready to remove the bodies, call me and I’ll give you authorization. In the meantime, I’ll make arrangements for autopsies. It’ll be at either Vancouver General or Royal Columbian. Whoever has room.”

Locally, we didn’t have the expertise for forensic autopsies. Our hospital had an active morgue and did an average of four autopsies a day on suicide, accidental, and natural deaths. But homicides were a different process altogether, with a different level of legal expectations. Those went across the water to the big city of Vancouver, where they would do an average of four forensic autopsies a day. Those weren’t all murders, though. They included all cases where criminal charges may get tried in court.

Hunter and Halfyard finished their perimeter sweep, reporting nothing of apparent interest. Heinz was gone and Leaky was back with the warrant. We agreed on a scene search plan where the Forensic pair would enter first and begin photographing. They’d clear a travel

path from the entrance point to the pertinent positions of evidence. Primarily, that would be the bodies.

I can say there's no such thing as a "typical" crime scene, and I can't say examining crime scenes is, or is not, like you see on TV because I never watched those CSI shows. But I have examined enough crime scenes to tell you that there's a definite art to it. An art of interpretation.

Something as miniscule as a hair, or a fiber, or a speck of blood, can be of major importance while something as big as an elephant in the room can turn into a red herring. That's why photographs are always done first. Always.

Leaky and I would then enter with Honey and go straight to viewing the bodies. "Viewing" is a legal term within the Coroners Act that states the coroner must "view" the body prior to it being touched, moved, or in any way handled. This is to minimize the mishandling or tampering of evidence. It's also a technical point, giving the coroner jurisdiction in taking the body into their possession and perform necessary examination to determine the classification of death, the cause of death, and the means of death. In this case, we would be dealing with two cases of homicide contributed to by exsanguination, or bleeding-out, and inflicted by edged weapons.

We dressed in bunny suits and joined the Forensic pair at the front door.

I stepped through.

It was the fourth time I'd stepped through that door and I could smell the change.

Gone were the smells of life. The cannabis smell. The coffee smell. The baby-wipe smell. And the smell of what I recalled as "Maria's smell."

In their place was the stink of death.

The iodine stink of jellified blood. The rotten egg stink of gastrointestinal gas-off. The fecal and urine stink from sphincters relaxed. The putrid stink of leaked body fluids. And the indescribable stink of flesh shredded by rusty metal.

Gone were the sounds of life. The sound of Karliana giggling. The sound of Genuine Jim. The sound of the boom box. The sound of "Independence Day." And the sound of the words, "I'm so terrified; that psycho's going to kill me".

In their place was the sound of death.

Nothing but deathly quiet.

And gone was the sight of life.

The sight of Maria's face, made-up to go on the town. The sight of Karliana's curls. The sight of Karliana's little smile. The sight of Becky, and Kyle, and Nathan, and the heavy-metal pair. The sight of the stroller. The sight of the Maria's eyes. Of Maria's skin. Of Maria's teeth. And the sight of Maria's bright red lips.

In their place was the sight of death.

And the taste of death.

The feel of death.

Sense of death.

Death.

Chapter 19 — Sunday, June 12th - 11:50 am

Maria's bedroom was dim as dawn on a dismal day. You know that time when sunlight turns starlight to gray. The curtains were closed. The window was shut. And the air was stagnant with the sulphur smell of coagulating human hemoglobin.

The human body contains about five liters of blood—ten for two people—and I swear there was more than that in her bedroom. It soaked through the sheets. Into the mattress. Across the floor. Across the walls. Across the ceiling. And across the crib.

Across the crib...

Lines of blood had been cast across the crib and across whatever had been lying in the crib.

Across the crib...

Lines of blood had been cast across the walls and streaked down like burgundy raindrops on cracked window glass.

Across the crib...

Lines of blood had been cast across the ceiling and dripped down like merlot stalactites in a callous cave of death.

Across the crib...

Pools of blood filled the floor and leaked into the gaps in the boards and ran rivers of red under the white painted crib.

Under the crib...

Smears of blood showed on the slats of the crib and on the rails of the crib and on the blankets in the crib and on the pads in the crib and on the toys in the crib and on the bottle in the crib and on the soother in the crib.

In the crib...

Spatters of blood splattered the dresser. Sprays of blood streaked the closet. Strings of blood struck the lampshade. Stains of blood stayed on the crib.

On the crib...

It was like a bomb blasted a barrel of blood.

All over the crib...

Photo flashes forever fixed the scene in my mind. A scene of vicious violence. A scene of severe savagery. A scene of pure hate and hell and havoc and hacking. A scene with a blood-bathed crib. And a scene with two battered bodies staring upward...vacant stares...those vacant stares...when death stares through open eyes...stares with no focus...stares with no life...staring beyond the crib...staring beyond the ceiling...staring up...up...up to the attic.

I stood in the doorway staring at the stares. A nudge on the arm brought my professional mindset to the present. Cheryl Hunter moved me aside to take close-ups. She started with the body closest to the door.

Earl Barker was in the recovery position—on his right side with his head face-up against the southwest wall—his feet to the north. His naked body lay exposed with his right arm extended, fingers reaching, and his left bent awkwardly upward overtop, fingers curling. His neck had been severed—attached only by the nape—and the gap screamed out like a grotesque mouth. Inside the gap was something foreign. His face was slashed vertically—splitting his eyes and his nose. So was the top of his head. His genitals had been severed and his eyes—his eyes—stared the stare. Not an emotional stare. Not a fearful stare. Not a placid stare. They stared the stare of extinguish.

Maria's stare was of anguish. She was on her back in the supine position. Her body from her chin down was covered with a sheet that was once white. The pillow propping her head had been white once, too. Now they were not. Her mousy hair was matted in matter. Some gray. Some red. Some nearly black. Her skull had been cleaved through the left, severing her ear and her scalp, exposing her brain, which poured out of the wound and onto the bed.

Flashes of light exaggerated the gobs of blood and chunks of flesh that stuck to the cloth and the objects around.

Honey Phelps pulled at the covering.

Maria's neck was cut. Once from the right. Twice from the right. Her windpipe protruded like a corrugated hose and her vertebrae showed like stacks of bone strung with sinew.

Phelps pulled lower.

Maria's breasts were bare. Her nipples were missing. Her arms were crossed in the casket position. Her elbows extended to each side. And her hands were clenched. Hands that had slices. Slices that were telling. Slices known as wounds of defense.

Maria's thorax was punctured as if done by a lawn aerator. Her abdomen was intact, but her pubis was not. A semi-circle was sliced overtop and an object—a bloody, orange object—extended from her vagina, which was hairless on one side. Maria's thighs, knees, shins, and feet were unremarkable.

If only...I'm so terrified that psycho's going to kill me...all over the crib...if only...so terrified...if only...that psycho's going to kill me...if only...all over the crib...if only...if only...if only...

Chapter 20 — Sunday, June 14th - 11:55 am

Honey Phelps took facial shots with her digital Pentax, then excused herself from the scene. Leaky Lewis and I trailed Hunter and Halfyard through the house. Flashes followed flashes and the video rolled, its light being a directional beam.

The living room was as I remembered it. The police radio was still in the charger with its glowing green light. The boom box was off. The curtains were closed. The woodstove was as-is. The TV was there. But Billy Ray's guitar, his cap, his hoodie, and his backpack were gone.

Then I remembered they'd been sent to the curb and were gone from there, too.

The dinette showed nothing. The kitchen appeared normal—at least, it seemed to be normal. Dish cluttered counter. Kettle on the stove. Peelings in the sink. And washed bottles on the shelf. The fridge was intact. The range was shut off. The back door was locked. And the second bedroom was undisturbed.

But the bathroom was a different story. Lumilights and Luminol are now replaced by a latent blood reagent product called BlueStar, but there was no need for artificial enhancement to spot blood in the sink.

There were diluted blood streaks in the bowl. Wipes on the tap. Stains on the towels. Footprints on the floor. Bloody tissue in the garbage. And blood-soaked clothes.

Baby clothes.

Blood-soaked baby clothes.

A blood-soaked sleeper. A little pink sleeper with the built-in booties. A long-sleeved, snap-up sleeper that was stained in brownish-red blood and tossed in the tub. Beside it was the

hamper. The clothes hamper with the clean towels and the empty bottle. A clean and empty baby bottle.

We moved to the hall, careful not to step on a trail of bloody footprints that led from Maria's bedroom. At the convergence of the hall, where it joined the rooms, was a stool. A green, plastic stool with three plastic steps.

"That's peculiar." Cheryl Hunter stopped and photographed it. "It's got a rope tied to it." She pointed with a blue-gloved hand. It was a yellow, polyester rope. One-quarter inch in diameter—the cheap, tie-down rope you get at a discount. "Why would someone tie a rope to a stool?"

"Beats me." Leaky shrugged. "I've seen ropes tied to a lot of things, but not to a stool."

I'd been watching the floor and the walls. Evidence has a way of transferring between surfaces and has a way of finding itself to the lowest point. It has something to do with gravity.

I spoke out. "Look at the smears on the closet and the closet handle." The door had been handled by bloody fingers on the porcelain handle and pushed by a bloody palm on its face. The telltale ridges and patterns were obvious. "He's been in there."

Hunter photographed the prints, then bent and took a closer look. Halfyard shone the video light on the evidence. Hunter softly whistled, "These are really clear. I'll lift them later. Let's see what's inside." She avoided the handle. Carefully, she glove-grasped the door edge through the crack and pulled it forward.

I remembered looking in this closet when we first searched for Billy Ray and thought it too small for a person to fit inside—at least to comfortably spend time in. It had two upper shelves which would make it impossible for a man of Billy Ray's height to stand erect. The lower section was crammed with cleaning supplies and tools. A broom and dust pan. A pail and mop. An upright vacuum cleaner with its hose and attachments. A red, plastic bin stuffed full of plastic bags. Paper shopping bags wedged between it and the wall. A window squeegee hung from a hook, as well as an apron—a long apron like a chef's barbeque apron that extended to near the floor.

And on the floor was some red. Blood red. Staining the paper bags and coming from something metal concealed behind the apron.

"What's this?" Hunter took photos and Halfyard aimed his video. She reached for the apron and pulled it aside. Blood, still liquid, was on the face of a rusty metal-blade that was attached to a metal hoop that was attached to a long wooden handle. Bloody fingerprints were smeared on the handle.

"Murder weapon." Leaky was the first to say it. He was also the first to say "Nasty."

I knew what it was. I'd never owned one, but I'd seen brushing axes—pruning axes—and they were highly effective at doing the job they were designed for. Severing limbs with one swipe.

Used on vegetation, they're perfect. Used on a human, they're nasty. Perfectly nasty.

Hunter let the apron go. "We'll deal with the chopping thing later. Let's keep on with the primary search." She turned toward the bedroom.

Leaky looked back at the roped-stool. He knew not to touch. You never touch or move objects during the primary walk-thru until forensics are satisfied they'd captured the entire scene. A crime scene is their scene—until they say otherwise.

I stood beside Leaky. We looked at the stool. We looked at each other. And then we looked up.

The hatch to the attic was directly above. Open.

It was open.
The attic hatch was open.
He was in the attic...
He...was...in...the...attic...

Chapter 21 — Sunday, June 14th - 12:05 pm

He was in the attic.
Billy Ray Shaughnessy was in the attic.
He had to be in the attic the whole fucking time.
He must have climbed up in the attic when Maria left. After he raped her. He must have climbed down to cut her clothes. He had to be up in the attic when I was first there. Talking to Maria. He had to be listening. Photographing her clothes. He had to be listening. Searching for him. He had to be listening. He must have climbed down when Maria was out and raided the fridge. He had to be in the attic when she brought Earl Barker home. He had to be listening. He had to be listening when they went to bed. When they were...He had to be listening...
He had to be in the attic the whole fucking time.
Billy Ray Shaughnessy was in the attic.
He was in the attic.
If only...
If only...
If only...

The “if only’s” got worse. They’re still here today—they’ll always be here—but I had to focus on a job to do. A serious job to do. And that was co-ordinate the investigation and find Billy Ray.

I left the cottage and ditched the white suit. Leaky stayed with forensics. Their long task of processing the scene and bodies would take hours.

I assessed what we knew and what we had for resources. This was early in the investigation and experience told me this was the most critical phase—before evidence is erased and witnesses’ memories fade—or worse—become cross-contaminated by inter-discussion. My job as file coordinator was not so much to gather evidence, but to ensure others were assigned priority tasks. The scene was contained and in good hands. Now it was time to interview witnesses and search for the suspect. “The blitz,” it’s called.

I called in two more Serious Crimes detectives, as well as experienced investigators from other sections. By one p.m., we had a team of thirteen on the case, including the forensic specialists. They’d already requested the BPA—Bloodstain Pattern Analyst—from the crime lab in Vancouver, who’d attend before the bodies were disturbed.

They’d also conferred with the forensic pathologist who Honey Phelps contracted at Vancouver General Hospital. The pathologist declined to attend. Understandably, there was little she could offer at the scene, however, her recommendation of bringing a portable air conditioner and two oscillating fans to cool the bedroom was done immediately.

Although we had no precise time of death—that’s not a precise science and is usually estimated by circumstances—already the bodies were showing decomposition. Keeping them as cool as possible was highly important to their postmortem examinations. I’d also had an

investigator arrange for two aluminum shipping caskets, or “tanks” as we call them, and a rented refrigerated truck. The bodies would have been shipped on the ferry to Vancouver. When, depended on how long the BPA took.

The first interviews were with Jim and Debbie Dersch. Two counsellors from Victim Services sat in with our detectives. They also arranged for Karliana to have a medical exam, regardless that she showed no outward evidence of trauma.

We located Nathan and Kyle. They offered information that started building a timeline and pattern of the previous evening. The bar staff at the Queens was canvassed, as well as other establishments the jam group visited. Becky was a mess. She was far too traumatized to be interviewed, now sedated and under a doctor’s supervision.

But no one had information on Billy Ray. It was clear Earl Barker’s truck was gone and that Billy Ray stole it. Forensics established that no keys were found in Barker’s pants. Nor could they find his wallet.

John Heinz identified Barker’s plate and loaded the computer systems with it. He’d done the usual inter-department police alerts, as well as notifying all ferry terminals. The city of Nanaimo is a main hub of traffic on and off Vancouver Island. In an eighty-mile radius, there’re seven terminals to British Columbia’s mainland and other Gulf Islands, as well as two more ferries to Washington State. These had to be notified. You can’t get off the Island by road—a bridge is impossible—but on the Island, and within the same eighty-mile radius, there hundreds of roads leading to thousands of spots. Any one, Billy Ray could be in.

It was time for outside help.

From two sources.

First, the news media. The cat was out of the bag about a double murder story and they were chomping for info. Our department media liaison officer held an on-camera conference with a description of Barker’s truck, the plate, and of William Raymond Shaughnessy being a “person of interest.” He informed the public Billy Ray was arrestable on “other offences.” I’d supplied my iPhone image of Billy Ray—the one with the eyes—and they showed it as breaking news and with other lead stories.

Second, from Billy Ray’s mother.

If only...

I dialed Roxanne Chow and identified myself.

The familiar smoker’s voice responded, “Did ya catch ‘em yet?”

“No, but the situation has got worse.”

“So, what’s the idiot done now?”

“I know this is going to be difficult to hear...his ex-girlfriend, Maria Dersch, and another man are dead. We think your son may be responsible.”

There was a long silence.

“Mrs. Chow?”

More silence, then a cough.

“Mrs. Chow?”

Coughing. “Oh dear God. My good God. What happened?”

“It’s an escalation of the previous incident. I can’t go into details, but it appears your son was hiding in the house the whole time and when Maria and the other man were sleeping... he killed them in their sleep.”

“Good God.”

Like I said, I can't go into details. He's not charged with the deaths yet. I'm sure he will be, but it's critical...crucial...that we find him."

"Dear God."

"For his safety, as well."

We ended the call with my confidence that Roxanne Chow would attempt to convince her son to turn himself in. I hoped that she'd phone if she couldn't.

My good God...dear God...if only...

Chapter 22 — Monday, June 13th - 9:20 am

Forensics finished with the bloodstain pattern analysis—at least the part they needed with Maria and Earl Barker's bodies in place—at 3:30 a.m., working through the dark hours with the *whoosh...click...whoosh...click...whoosh...click* of the oscillating fans haunting their ears.

The remains were removed to the reefer unit and were on the 5:15 ferry for Vancouver General. Hunter and Halfyard went with them. Now Maria and Earl were on the autopsy slab at VGH. We expected preliminary results by day's end.

Statements were obtained from all witnesses having contact with Maria and Earl on the Saturday night. Becky had yet to be interviewed—she was now hospitalized—however, Kyle and Nathan confirmed that Maria had run into Earl by accident. As Kyle put it:

"We was all at the Queens. It was like around ten, ten p.m., and I goes, 'Hey, look who just come in.' It was Earl Barker and Maria goes, 'I'm gonna go talk to him.' So Maria was gone over to the bar, standing with Earl, and she was telling him about the trouble with Billy Ray and all and how she was scared for her life and how she can't be alone and that she had to go back and get Karliana after this and how she needed someone to stay overnight, stay with her at all times, until you guys caught him. So, anyway, Earl joined us at the table and we was playing trivia, music trivia, and everybody was getting along great. Maria and Earl always got along great. She really liked Earl, not like that loser Billy Ray, so Earl says he'll go home with Maria because Becky was supposed to stay, but Becky had one of her migraines and it'd be safer if Earl's there, because he's a big guy and can take care of himself. Take care of himself and Maria. So, it wasn't planned or nothing. It was just a... a coincidence they hooked up, so I guess they went home to Maria's place and he was, like, waiting for them or something. It was just, like, bad luck. Bad timing. Not planned that Earl was supposed to be there."

Since the media release, we'd had a number of Billy Ray false-sightings come in. News releases always cause that, which is why police are leery of going public with alerts. They bring out the crazies and the kooks. Most are well-intentioned, but there's always the trolls. They burn up valuable time and resources, chasing these wild geese.

But one report over in Port Alberni got my attention.

Port Alberni, or "Port" as the locals call it, is an hour's drive west of Nanaimo and at the head of a salt-water inlet, leading to the open Pacific Ocean on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Port's a paper mill and fishing town that's trying to shed its rough image and cash in on traffic passing through on the goat trail of a road, leading to the world-famous, sand-beach, tourist-trap called Tofino in Pacific Rim National Park.

I phoned Derek Morgan at the Port police office. He'd passed on the tip.

"Yeah, they sounded sincere...and sober, which is unusual for this place." Morgan told me he'd policed there five years. "So, it was two fishermen. They were in the King Eddie, that's the King Edward hotel, and this guy comes in. He's alone and sits by the pool table, orders a Coke, not a beer, and puts money in the music machine. They sense he's kinda weird. Hard to describe it, they said. He's not talking to himself or nothing like that, but he's different. Real different. So, they were playing pool and he challenged the table and when he got up to take his first shot, they saw he had dried blood on his shirt and jeans and shoes. Lots of dried blood."

"Now that's interesting."

"No kidding. So, they're taken back and asked him what happened. How he got so bloody."

"That's very interesting."

"He acted like nothing was unusual at all. I don't know about you, but I can't say I ever walked into a bar covered in blood."

"Not that I know of, either."

"And he, they said, he made up this story that he was out fishing and got covered with fish blood. Now these guys are commercial fisherman and they know this doesn't add up, so they ask him the name of his boat, what type of fish, where he was fishing. You know. And the guy hands them some bullshit story."

"Did they get his name?"

"No. It's the bar scene. You don't do that."

"See a vehicle?"

"No, but they said he was playing with keys."

"How'd they make the connection to the guy we're looking for?"

"Well, they said the guy was so weird that you don't forget someone like him. Then they saw the picture, his picture, on the news this morning and they go, 'That's the guy. Same guy. You don't forget those eyes.' I'm looking at the picture right now, and they're right. Spooky eyes."

"I think you're onto something, Derek."

I asked Derek Morgan to have his available officers patrol Port looking for the truck or for Billy Ray, walking on the street. In a restaurant. At the mall. A gas station. Whatever. I was aware that Barker's wallet was missing and Maria's purse was void of money, so it seemed that Billy Ray was a bit flush.

So, it looks like he's headed west.

I didn't need a map to know what was west of Port. Only one paved-road. The goat trail to the villages of Ucluelet and Tofino. I phoned both police offices and put the watch out for Billy Ray Shaughnessy.

If only I'd done something sooner...

Chapter 23 — Monday, June 13th - 8:00 pm

If only...

We held our first debriefing of the blitz. The police conference room had twenty-two black-leather swivel chairs around the long rosewood table. They were full. I counted eight more officers standing, including the operations chief.

Being file co-ordinator, it was my job to chair the meeting. No introductions were necessary. All eyes were on me and the Smartboard. I flashed up an image of Maria's neck injuries—neck injuries from when she was alive, that is. Then I gave a recap of the original complaint, starting with playing the recording of Maria's first words:

"I'm so terrified that psycho's going to kill me."

The response was some gasps and a "Holy...fuck!"

I went on with the law. "Legally, the charges against Billy Ray Shaughnessy for sexual assault with a weapon and unlawful confinement are still valid." I looked at Vern Rollins, the prosecutor. There's always a prosecutor assigned early on in a major case to advise on pitfalls in procedure. "Vern's comfortable we're still strong on the existing charges, even though the complainant is dead. I deposed her statement and have the photos of the injuries and cut clothes as corroboration."

Deposing means having a complainant swear an oath that their statement is true. There's many advantages to deposing and it's usually used in case a complainant tries to back out of the process which they're often intimidated into doing."

Vern spoke up. He was experienced, well-respected, and switched-on. "I don't want to rush into murder charges until we have the preponderance of evidence in. Prints developed. Forensic package outlined. I understand the autopsy results are in? At least the preliminary results?"

I looked at Cheryl Hunter. "Cheryl will brief us shortly."

She nodded. She was awake, but looked beat as shit.

Vern went on. "I'd also like to have our suspect in custody and take a run at his statement. From what I see, this history and the fact that he's been stalking her from her attic is going to open a mental instability defense. There's no rush to up the charges to murder. We can arrest and hold him as is. No judge in their right mind is going to grant bail under these circumstances."

Someone at the table's end muttered, "Yeah...in their right mind..."

I recapped the Port Alberni tip, and that I thought it was solid. Everyone in the room agreed. We round-tabled. Each investigator gave the results of their task. I had three columns written on the Smartboard and was listing to-do tasks under Priority One, Two, and Three. It's not a fancy or complicated technique. It just works.

Something else that works is the dynamics of a blitzing debrief. The energy can be downright electric. Here in this room were thirty-one people with an average of ten years' service in law enforcement. Probably more. That makes a total of over three-hundred combined years of experience. And, you know, sometimes the best suggestions come from junior service. In a blitz room, you parked your rank at the door.

It was Cheryl Hunter's turn. She yawned, got up, and plugged her laptop into the SmartBoard. I'd saved my list to another screen. Her first image was that of the bedroom scene.

It was the first time most of the others had seen it. Lots of "Holy fucks!"

Hunter described what they'd recreated. "The male victim is the one closest to the door. The female is further on. She's covered with a sheet, with her face exposed. The assailant entered the room carrying this weapon."

She switched to the brush-ax.

“This is a tree-pruning tool. Commonly known as a ‘Sandvik’ from the generic brand name, much like calling a snowmobile a ‘Skidoo’. They have detachable blades that are razor-sharp and allow trimming tree branches with a quick, fast swipe. I’ve lifted finger and palm prints from this tool. This weapon. But I haven’t had time to do a comparison to the suspect Shaughnessy.”

Hunter switched back to the room.

“The male showed no sign of defense wounds, so I’d say he was asleep when he took the first blow. He wasn’t in the position you see here, lying on his left side. Rather, he was dragged aside after death. He took the first blow midline to his face and a second blow to the top of his skull. This was done with the Sandvik. The pathologist’s opinion is that either were fatal, but the neck wound you see was not a blow of hard impact. Rather, it was a calculated, sawing slice from behind the left ear and fully extended to the right, severing the spinal column, esophagus, windpipe, major arteries and veins. Another inch there’d be full decapitation.”

She showed a close-up image of Earl Barker’s neck. There was that foreign object.

“This wound was not done with the Sandvik and it was done post-mortem, after clinical death. We suspect it was delivered with a knife. A knife that was also used to inflict this wound.”

Hunter clicked to the crotch.

“His genitals...his penis and testicles...were severed and inserted back in through the victim’s mouth and can be seen exposed in the throat wound.”

Many, “Holy fucks!”

“Now the female victim was severely mutilated.”

Hunter showed an image of Maria on the autopsy table.

“No doubt she was awake when assailed. There are severe wounds to the back of her hands and the inside of her forearms, completely indicative of protecting her head and face. She then took a high-velocity impact from the Sandvik to the back of her left shoulder, indicating she was rising and rolling to get away. It appears the suspect then slipped and missed with the next blow, which drove deep into the mattress. The fourth Sandvik swing caught the female on the left side of the face. It opened her skull cavity and macerated the cerebellum. That would have rendered her unconscious, but not necessarily dead. She then received three more blows to the throat with the Sandvik. Two from one side and the third from a different position.”

She screened a shot of Maria’s chest.

Many winced.

“There were a total of thirty-one incised impacts from a separate, sharp-edged weapon, a smaller weapon, like a knife. The suspect repeatedly stabbed the female over and over and over. Thirty-one times.”

Hunter looked around the room. “It’s what’s known as ‘venting the tank’ and is seen in states of complete rage.” She looked back at the screen. “Or complete psychosis. Also note that the nipples were severed and removed.”

Next image was of Maria’s public region.

“The assailant went on to cut a hemispheric incision overtop of her pubis as well as cutting a lock of her public hair with the smaller edged weapon. This was not a self-inflicted shaving incident. It was a direct and intentional act by the assailant.”

She changed screens.

“Now I warn this is going to shock you.”

Hunter called up a photo of the bloody, orange object seen protruding from Maria’s vagina. She clicked to a shot of the object after it’d been removed.

“This is a large carrot that had been intentionally whittled into the shape of an erect penis.”

Everyone said, “Holy fuck!”

“It’s a vegetable dildo complete with a bell-head. I looked back at my images from the kitchen and I see carrot peelings in the sink. He’d made it after the victims were dead and he came back to desecrate their bodies. But the sickest thing in all this...”

Hunter showed a slide of the autopsy suite’s dissection table. Two objects that looked like grotesque, bloody, little fried eggs lay side by side.”

“Those are the victim’s nipples. They were placed in her vagina, again after death, and rammed up with the carrot.”

Sergeant Cheryl Hunter shut off her presentation. “In my thirty years of forensics, I have never seen anything this vicious...this twisted...this bizarre. For the life of me...I can’t offer any symbolic meaning.”

Neither could I.

If only...

Chapter 24 — Tuesday, June 14th - 10:40 am

I was at my desk, sipping a fresh black coffee and reading an emailed progress report from Cheryl Hunter.

To: File Coordinator, Serious Crime Section
Fr: Sergeant C.A. Hunter, Forensic Identification Section
Re: Dersch, Maria / Barker, Earl – Murders of

Following is a summary of fingerprint evidence amassed so far:

A known set of fingerprints from suspect William Raymond Shaughnessy (FPS# 336381B) was obtained through AIFIS and compared to latent prints lifted from objects at crime scene located at 469 Machleary St. Positive identification is made to suspect Shaughnessy on these items:

1. Wooden handle of “Sandvik” brush-ax — R thu, R ind, R , R rin, R lit, L thu, L ind, L mid, L rin, L lit
2. Plastic step stool — R thu, R ind, R mid, L thu, L ind, L mid, L rin
3. Painted attic hatchway trim — R thu, R ind, R mid, L thu, L ind, L mid, L rin, L lit
4. Plastic water bottle in attic — R thu, R ind, R mid, R rin, R lit
5. Glass urine jar in attic — R thu, R ind, R mid, R rin, R lit
6. Plastic food container in attic — R thu, R ind, R rin, L thu
7. Plastic bread bag in attic — L thu, L ind, L mid

Palm impressions were also lifted on items 1, 2 & 3, but AIFIS does not have known palm impressions for FPS# 336381B. Upon suspect’s arrest and process, please ensure palm impressions are obtained as well as fresh fingerprints.

Further, latent prints lifted on item 1 Haemochromogen tested positive for presence of human blood. Stains on white towel from attic FastBlue tested positive for human semen. Swabs have been prepared for laboratory DNA testing. Results will be advised when known.

C.A. Hunter, Sgt.
NCO i/c FIS

Well, that pretty much hoops him.

I was about to go on to the next email. My cell phone toned. I looked at call display. It was a by-now familiar number. I answered and the smoker's voice said, "Yeah, it's Roxanne Chow in Vernon here. I just heard from him. My boy. He just phoned me."

"Thanks for calling, Roxanne. Where is he?"

"He says he's in Tofino. That's that tourist place over there on the Island."

"Tofino. Whereabouts in Tofino?"

"Well, he phoned me for money...I didn't say nothin' about you guys. That you called or nothin'. I figured if he's gone and done this, then he can fuckin' well own up to it. So, I played along and told him it'd take me a bit to get some sent...that'll buy you time to go pick him up."

"Good. Thanks. So, where exactly is he?"

"Well, this was not five minutes ago. He was callin' from outside the Credit Union. That's what I use is the Credit Union and he knows that, so that's where he's waiting for me to wire him some money."

"Credit Union...and you're having him wait there? For how long?"

"Well, long as it takes. He won't go nowhere, if he's waitin' for money."

"Just a sec...He was calling from outside the Credit Union? On what phone?"

"I guess he's got a cell phone. Here. He give me the number. I wrote it down."

"Great."

"It's 250 591-5961."

"250 591-5691."

"Yeah. I told him I'd phone him back when I send the money."

"Thank you for doing this, Mrs. Chow."

"Serves him bloody right. He's gotta man up to this."

250 591-5961...that's familiar.

It was Maria's number. Billy Ray was using Maria's phone.

I called the Tofino police office and got Roger Parker, a young officer who'd been in Tofino long enough to know the place and some of the locals. I gave him a brief rundown on who and what we were looking for, emphasizing to use the sexual assault warrant as grounds for arrest and not to mention anything about the murders. Then I emailed Parker the image of Billy Ray. The image with the eyes.

In thirty-three minutes, Parker called back.

"Yeah, we got him. He's here in the holding cell."

"Excellent! Any problems?"

"Nope. He was sitting on a bench outside, drinking a Coke and eating a sandwich. We just drove right up. Marked car and in uniform. He didn't try to run or hide or anything. He looks exactly like in the photo. I asked him if he was William, Billy Ray Shaughnessy, and he said yes.

I told him I was placing him under arrest for sexual assault with a weapon. He didn't even blink. There was absolutely no reaction. He just said, 'okay' and put his hands out, like to cuff him. I read him his rights, and he just ignored it all. Never cried for a lawyer. Never even asked a question. Just held out his hands to get cuffed."

"And?"

"So I did and we searched him before putting him in the PC...and you know what you said about watching for blood stains?"

"Yeah?"

"Well, his shirt, shoes, and pants are caked in what sure looks like dried blood."

"Seriously?"

"And we took a knife off him, too. One of those Buck-type folding knives with the brass-and-wood handle. It's got what looks like blood all over it, too."

"Okay. I need you to seize all his clothes and effects. Everything."

"Already done, boss. We stripped him naked and have him in prisoner coveralls. Everything is already separated in evidence bags."

"Great! You guys are on the ball, Roger."

"Now, wanna hear something real weird? Like, really weird?"

"I'm not sure this thing can get any weirder."

"When we strip-searched him, he pulls down his shorts and he's got this plastic, Ziploc baggie in there. I figured dope, and asked him what's in there. He just ignored me. This guy hasn't said a word yet, except the first, 'okay'. Not a word. Nothing. So I took a closer look and you know what's in there?"

"What?"

"It's cut hair. Looks like cut pubic hair. Short n' curly. And it's different color from his. Looks like light brown pubic hair with blood mixed in. Fuck, is that weird or what?"

Oh, God. If only...

Chapter 25 — Tuesday, June 14th - 4:25 pm

Air One is the designation for our police helicopter, based in Vancouver. It's available for high-priority cases and transporting a high-profile murderer from Tofino by air versus on that windy, goat trail of a road was a high priority.

We touched down at Tofino airport. Roger Parker picked me up and drove back to the Tofino cop shop. It'd been ages since I'd been over there. I made a mental note to come back as a tourist, but right now, this was business. Not pleasure.

We discussed what happened in the last few hours. They still hadn't recovered Earl Barker's truck, although they'd scoured the town.

The first order at the office was taking possession of Billy Ray's effects. Parker handed them over, one by one. He'd done a professional job of packaging and marking the exhibits. I signed for receipt and placed them in one large evidence bag, stopping to look at each through the clear wrappings.

Pants, with blood stains, two laced-up shoes with blood stains. Socks with blood stains. Underwear with blood stains. Shirt with blood stains. Wallet with Earl Barker's identification. Keys for Barker's truck. Maria's cell phone. Buck-style folding knife, with blood stains.

Thirty-one times...

If only...

Clear Ziploc baggie with cut public hair.

Fuck, is that weird or what?

Parker couldn't have said it better.

It was time to meet Billy Ray.

The Tofino police office was new and had a properly designed interview room. Like, all good rooms, there were no windows or crap on the beige walls to distract. It had a metal desk set in a corner and only two chairs. A padded swivel chair on wheels for the interviewer and a stark, metal chair for the subject. That chair always has one leg a bit shorter than the others.

I was dressed in a shirt and tie with the usual blue windbreaker, covering the holstered Sig. My notebook and pen were on the table and so was my computer case, containing a digital recorder that was activated.

The door opened. Parker escorted Billy Ray in and introduced us. It was part of the script.

I stood and put out my hand. There was no hesitation. He shook it and looked at the metal chair, as if silently asking permission to sit. I waved a yes. He plunked down, then wrapped his arms around himself and leaned forward.

Billy Ray was smaller than I'd envisioned, although I'd been living with his description for five days now. He looked like a mannequin, dressed in those white, disposable prisoner coveralls. His hair had a greasy sheen and he smelled of an odor I can't quite describe. It wasn't just body odor. It wasn't just sweat or grime. Stale booze, bad breath, or smoke. Or even, that unmistakable smell of fear. It was the smell of crime scenes, if you know what I mean.

He won't make eye contact.

I started officially. "Mister Shaughnessy, you have been arrested for the sexual assault with a weapon on Maria Dersch, as well as her unlawful confinement. You are already charged with these offences and I'm going to escort you back to court in Nanaimo. I realize you've been informed of your rights, but I'm going to tell you them again."

No reaction.

"You are not obliged to say anything, but anything you do say may be given in evidence. Also, you have the right to retain and instruct counsel without delay. Do you want to call a lawyer?"

No reaction.

"Do you want to speak to a lawyer?"

No reaction.

"I'll take that as you're waiving your right to contact counsel. You can remain silent if you wish."

No reaction.

Watching him, I paused. He was still leaning forward in the same position. There was not the slightest sign of emotion. Not a curl of the toe. Not a bounce of the knee. Not a tap of the finger. Not a nod of the head. Nothing. Just nothing.

I continued, "Further, you are under investigation for causing the deaths of Maria Dersch and Earl Barker."

Again, I paused.

No reaction.

“You are not charged with those offenses yet, but I’m anticipating you will be charged with two counts of first degree murder.”

No reaction.

“Two counts of first degree murder in the deaths of Maria Dersch and Earl Barker.”

When I saw his first reaction I stopped talking.

Billy Ray slowly unwrapped his arms and straightened in his chair, cocking his head hard to his right and widening his eyes. Those eyes in the image. Dead-fish eyes. Cold-fish eyes. Black holes of humanity. I’ll never forget those eyes that looked at me with a stare...not the stare of the dead, but...the stare of the cause of the dead.

And then, he spoke. “Maria’s dead?”

I stared back at him.

He spoke again. “How can Maria be dead?”

He bent over and said, “Maria’s dead. That’s too bad.”

And that’s all Billy Ray said...

In Tofino.

Chapter 26 — Tuesday, June 14th - 7:05 pm

Billy Ray remained silent throughout the chopper trip back to Nanaimo and during the vehicle escort from the airport to the police office. We drove down the ramp and into the “Sally Port”. That’s the secure bay leading into the cell block. I walked him into the booking area, leaving his effects—now my exhibits—locked in the trunk.

I unlocked his handcuffs and pulled out a prisoner form. “I’m going to have to get you to talk now.” I had my pen on the paper. “I need your details. Full name, correct spelling, and date of birth.”

He complied. He had a deep voice for a smaller man. Somewhere between bass and baritone, I’d say. Smooth, rich, with a touch of femininity, if that’s possible.

“What do you prefer for a first name, Bill or Billy Ray?”

“Either’s fine. You can use Bill, if you want. Is there any way I can get better clothes? These paper coveralls are kinda chilly in here.”

He wasn’t trembling, but I could see his point. “Sure. Let’s just finish the paperwork and I’ll get you something else.”

He gave me the rest of the information. Height. Weight. Eye color. He described his eye color as beige. Identifying marks, scars, and tattoos. No fixed address. And his mother’s name and info as next-of-kin. I had him sit while I went to the guard’s office and pulled some loaner clothes for situations like this. Jogging pants. Tee-shirt. Hoodie. And socks. He declined to take a shower, but asked for a coffee with cream and two sugars. I got a Styrofoam cup of mud from the guard’s pot.

“Do you feel like talking?” I watched him sip. The most important step in any criminal interview—an interrogation, if you’d like to call it that—was to get the subject talking. Break the ice. Once a subject begins to talk, and the interviewer—the interrogator, you could say—keeps them rolling, they find it hard to shut up. And once they start telling lies, they eventually hang themselves. But if they’re truthful and confess to the crime, then it’s impossible to deny the crime later and often results in a guilty plea.

And a guilty plea is what every investigator ultimately wants. It's the mark of a properly conducted investigation. It saves the taxpayer the huge cost of a trial and the appeals process. And it puts guys like Billy Ray in jail and keeps guys like me off the witness stand. I don't know of any cop who actually enjoys being on the stand. There'd have to be something mentally wrong if you did.

Billy Ray played the middle. He shrugged his shoulders. "I guess. What do you want to know?"

"How about we go to some place a little more comfortable?" I took him up the elevator to the interview room where Maria had been. He sat in the same metal chair. I kept the digital recorder running in my laptop case and stayed away from the "lawyer" word. "What I want to know is your side of things, Bill." I rolled my chair in towards him. "Tell me what happened."

He was leaning back in the chair with his arms folded on his chest. His mouth was expressionless. So were his eyes. The fishy eyes. "Me and Maria had a fight. We had a fight, so I left and went for a drive and ended up in Tofino. Then the cops arrested me. That's about it."

Just that matter-of-fact? No nod. No shake of the head. No emotion. No mention of death. Of Maria. Of Earl. Of Karliana. Of blood and violence and terror and mayhem. Just a fight?

"Okay, what was the fight about?"

"It was Maria who started it. She always starts it. She picks on me for the smallest stuff. So, rather than getting into a worse fight, I just drove away to be by myself. It's her fault. All Maria's fault."

"That's not what Maria said, Bill. She came in to see me on Friday afternoon and laid a complaint against you. For not just assaulting her, but for sexually assaulting her with a knife. She had bruises on her neck and I saw the cut clothes."

"Maria would have done that herself. You can't believe anything Maria says. She's a liar and a faker."

Still no emotion.

"Maria can't say anything, any more. She's dead, Bill. She's dead."

Not a spec of reaction.

"That's what you say. I don't know that. She was alive the last I saw her. Maybe she's lying and faking about her death."

"No, it's not fake and it's not a lie."

"Maria the liar. Maria the faker. Maria the Jez...Maria the..." And he shut up.

"Maria the what, Bill?"

No response.

"Maria the what?"

Vacant.

"Do you want to keep talking?"

Nothing

"Very well, then. Here's what's going to happen. You'll be kept in the cells here overnight and go to court sometime tomorrow for a first appearance, and I'll know you'll be remanded in custody. You won't even be expected to enter a plea." I rolled back from him. That crime scene smell was strong. "I'm going to recommend to the prosecutor that we lay first degree murder charges against you. Two counts. One for Maria. One for Earl. And we'll go from there. There's overwhelming evidence against you, Bill. Overwhelming."

He stared. "So, how come I don't remember anything about it?" He kept staring.

Staring at nothing.

“I don’t remember a thing.”

“That’s fine, Bill, if that’s your position.”

“Nothing I remember.”

“Okay, the evidence will all come out.” I stood. My experience said if I pushed him further at this point, the chances of getting a confession admitted as evidence would diminish.

Better to let him sit on the fence and leave the invitation open. Getting him to at least talk was a win.

We went down to the cell block and I put him in one all alone. The door shut with a hollow clang, and I watched him lie down on the hard steel-bunk that had a mattress thinner than my laptop. He pulled a gray, woolen blanket over his torso and lay there, staring up at the upper bunk.

Through the bars, I said, “Bill, if at any time during the night you want to tell me what really happened, I’ll come right in to see you.”

Again, no response.

As I walked away, I heard something.

I didn’t know where it came from, but it sounded like a voice.

A voice saying, “If only.”

Chapter 27 — Wednesday, June 15th - 5:45 am

My cell phone toned. I woke and checked the time, knowing only work would call at that hour.

The nightshift guard said, “You know that guy you brought in for ax-murdering those two people on Machleary? He says he wants to talk to you. Says you told him to call you at any time.”

“No problem. I’ll be right in.” I didn’t bother to get ready as usual. Just threw on the same clothes as yesterday and headed out.

Strike while the iron is hot, as they say.

I approached Billy Ray’s cell. This time, he was standing at the door with his hands on the bars, with his head hung low, tapping the door frame with his right foot the way a bullied kid kicks the schoolyard fence.

“The guard said you wanted to talk to me, Bill. What is it?” I had the recorder going in the laptop case.

He wouldn’t face me. “I thought...I thought...I’d remember all of it.”

“Okay. Do you want to tell me about it?”

He didn’t make eye contact. “All of it. I did all of it.”

“Okay. How about we go upstairs and we’ll talk?”

With that, we went up to the interview room and Billy Ray Shaughnessy started the most chilling confession I’ve ever heard. I’m not sure if it’s the most truthful, but it’s certainly the coldest.

Billy Ray sat in the metal chair and leaned forward with his head in his hands, elbows on knees. We each had a coffee, but this time, he didn’t touch his. I’d re-advised him of his rights.

“Don’t see how that’d do much good at this point.” He referred to contacting a lawyer.

“So, tell me what happened.” I coaxed him.

He paused and stared at the floor. He stared at the floor with his black holes of humanity eyes for the next hour and thirty-four minutes as he told me his version of events—the recorder capturing it all.

“After the fight...Maria started the fight...she’s never happy with anything I do...but that’s Maria...that’s what she’s like. That’s what women are like. So yeah, we had make-up sex. Maria likes rough sex, so she made me choke her till she got off. That’s what she likes. Rough kinky sex. Like, with toys and all.”

“What was the fight about?”

“I...I suspected...I knew she was screwing around on me. Couple times she asked if we could have a threesome with another friend of hers. Male friend. I didn’t want no part of that. I don’t want no one else in the room. I look at Maria as my girlfriend, not somebody to be passed around. But nothing’s ever good enough for her. I want Maria to be the perfect woman, not some slut or some whore or some Jezebel. But Maria is like that, and it causes arguments.”

Jezebel?

“Was that with Earl? The threesome?”

“She never said...she just hinted...but that’s who I suspected. I suspected she’s still seeing him, and I don’t want no part of anyone else in Maria’s and my life. A good woman...like, the perfect woman...is a one-man woman...and Maria wants to be a two-man woman like a slut. So, that causes fights, and I can’t handle that. I want to be peaceable and not fight. Maria starts them all the time.”

“So, what happened with the clothes cutting?”

“I don’t know nothing about no clothes cutting. Maria did that herself to set me up. To try to get rid of me.”

“Why did she want to get rid of you?”

“Because I’m too straight for her. She wants to experience other guys. A real good woman would be happy with one, but no, she’s not happy with that.”

“When did this fight happen, Bill?”

“Which one? The one where she says I choked her? Or the one where she says I killed her?”

What?

“Let’s start with the first one and tell me what’s been happening over the past few days.”

“The first one...well, there were other fights, but the one before, not the choking, the makeup sex, was on...lemme see...last Friday. And the one where I killed her...where...she...was dead...happened on Sunday.”

That’s more like it.

He paused. “Today’s Wednesday, right?”

I checked my watch. “It’s six thirty-nine, Wednesday morning.”

He continued, “Yeah, that all happened on Sunday morning.”

“At what time?”

“I don’t exactly know. It was just getting light when I left.”

“Let me just back you up a bit. After the Friday fight, the one with the choking and the cut clothes, where did you go?”

“Well, she left. See, even with the rough sex...she didn’t get off. She told me she was going to get laid by a real man, and that just made me angry. Like, hurt. So, I thought she might bring someone back, and I didn’t want no one else there, so I went and hid in the attic.”

“Why the attic?”

“Cause I wanted to be by myself and think things out. I never thought she’d think I was there. I also was waiting to catch her screwing another guy...and I did. I was right.”

“How long were you in the attic?”

“Two, two-and-a-half days. From Friday afternoon till Sunday morning.”

“The whole time?”

“Yep. ‘Cept, I come down a couple times when she was out. I come down to get something to eat and drink and take a crap.”

“We found a number of articles in the attic, including food, water, and a sleeping bag. How long were you prepared to stay there?”

“Long as it took to catch her with some guy. Wasn’t long. I was right.”

“How well could you hear up there?”

“Pretty good. I could hear what people were saying about me, and it hurt. Made me angry. They was calling me all kinds of names. Loser. Creep. Freak. Weirdo. Asshole. Reject. Crazy. Psycho. Zero. Maria had them all against me. All ganging up against me. It’s not fair. Life’s supposed to be a zero sum game. So are relationships.”

“Could you hear me when I was there?”

“A bit. I recognized your voice. Could see you, too. Outside. You’re the cop with the blue jacket.”

“Okay. Tell me about Sunday morning. What happened that set this off?”

“She...Maria...brought this Earl guy home from the bar. I knew she was going out to the bar. The Queens. I could hear them talking about going out to the Queens. So, long after dark, she come home with him. With him and her daughter, Karliana, who’s by this same guy, Earl, and she’s got Karliana in the bedroom in the crib and she’s crying... the baby is crying... Karliana is crying while Maria is...is...doing...making out...doing it with Earl on the bed. She’s having sex...with another guy...on the bed...in the room...with her baby...with Karliana in the same room...like...like, a fucking Jezebel, and...I...I...” He paused, staring at the floor.

Still. Absolutely still. Not a quiver. Not a shake. Not a movement.

“You what, Bill?”

“I...I...just...snapped.”

“Then what?”

“I...I...just came down and tried to stop them...stop them...stop them...stop them from having sex with Karliana in the room. Like a Jezebel.”

“How did you try to stop them?”

“I hit them...hit them...to stop them...stop them from having sex with Karliana in the room.”

“Hit them with what?”

“I hit them with...I don’t know what you call it...its real name. I call it an equalizer.”

“An equalizer?”

“Yeah...it equalized me...there was two of them and one of me...that made it more equal. Like in a zero sum game where everybody’s equal.”

“What does this equalizer look like?”

“It’s like a tool...long wooden handle...with a blade...inside a metal hoop. A tool for chopping brush, I think.”

“Where did you get this tool?”

“I got it from the shed. The shed outside. It was in the shed outside.”

“Why did you get it?”

“To protect myself. I needed to protect myself.”

“From who?”

“From...from...I didn't know which guy Maria would bring home. I just knew she was going to bring some guy home. If she didn't bring some guy home, none of this would have happened. If she hadn't of fucked a guy in the room when Karliana was in there, like a Jezebel, none of this would have happened. If Maria was a good woman...a one-man woman...nothing would have happened...if she wasn't such a slut...a whore...a Jezebel who screws men in front of their child.”

“When did you get the tool?”

“On the Friday afternoon. Before I climbed in the attic.”

“Where did you keep it?”

“In the attic. Beside me.”

“All the time?”

“Except when I'd come down. I brought it with me.”

“What did you bring it for?”

“For protection.”

“Protection from who?”

“I told you. Protection against whoever Maria was going to bring home. I didn't know who and how big or mean he might be. I just knew Maria was going to bring someone home. That's what she's like. It just happened to be this Earl guy.”

“Now when you hit them, what position were they in?”

“Maria...Maria...she was on her hands and knees.”

“And Earl?”

“He was on his knees...behind her...they was...they were...doing it doggie-style. They were fucking doggie-style with Karliana crying in the room...and Maria moaning...and Earl grunting...and I just snapped and starting hitting them to make them stop...to make Karliana stop...it was their fault...Maria's fault...Maria's a Jezebel...a whore...she's a slut...she's a liar...a faker...Maria deserved it. She made me do this...this would not have happened if she didn't cause it.”

“Who did you hit first?”

“Earl. I think Earl. He was closest.”

“Where did you hit him?”

“Ah...it was dark...so I couldn't exactly see. I think it was in the back of the head. I was aiming for the back of the head, but I think I got him right on top of his head. To make him stop. I was just trying to make him stop.”

“How many times did you hit him?”

“Two. I hit him from behind on the top of the head and he rolled over. Then I hit him in the center of the face. Just enough to make him stop. I didn't do any more than enough to make him stop.”

“Did you do anything else to him? To his body?”

“No. Why would I do anything else?”

“Okay. Now, what position was Maria in?”

“I told you. She was on her hands and knees. The dirty slut was taking it from the back. Up her chute, for all I know. She likes it up the chute. She's a slut...she's a whore...she was taking it like a dog. A Jezebel dog with Karliana right beside her in the crib. Karliana was crying

and seeing them fucking like dogs in front of her. Maria was getting fucked by a man with her own child in the same room. Any woman who does that is a Jezebel and deserves to die. She deserved to die. Maria the whore deserved to die. She made Chloe...made me kill her. Maria made me kill her.”

Did I hear that right? Chloe? Maria said he'd called her Chloe during the first attack.

I made a note of that. “And where did you hit Maria?”

“After I hit...after I stopped him, then Maria rolled over and saw me...saw me with the equalizer...and she put her hands and arms out...I guess it was a natural reaction to protect herself. I then hit her in the hands, and then in the shoulder, and then in the head, and then in the neck.”

“How many times did you hit her with the equalizer?”

“I really don't know. Four or five. Maybe six. Until she stopped screaming. It took quite a bit to make her stop screaming. She screamed a lot.”

“Did she recognize you?”

“Oh, she recognized me all right.”

“Did she say anything?”

“No. Well, I couldn't really tell because her screams were so loud. They were...they were like that scene in the movie...the Hitchcock movie...where the woman is in the shower and the psycho is coming at her with the knife. Screams like that.”

Whoooooaa...

“After Maria stopped screaming, what else did you do to her?”

“Like, nothing. What do you mean, what else?”

“There were some more injuries on her from another weapon. A smaller weapon.”

“Oh, yeah. Right. Yeah, I did.”

“What did you do?”

“Well, Maria was still breathing...I don't know if it was breathing, but there was this gurgling sound coming from her, so I took out my knife and stabbed her.”

“How many times did you stab Maria?”

“I don't really know...three...four...maybe five or six...I really don't remember.”

“Why did you stab her?”

“I was still angry...to teach her a lesson...also because I wanted her to stop gurgling...to put her out of her misery. She was in real bad shape, and it was the humane thing to do. To put her out of her misery.”

“What else did you do to Maria's body?”

“Nothing. Nothing I can remember. Was there some other things done to her body?”

“You had a baggie of cut hair on you, Bill. Where did you get that?”

For the first time, Billy Ray Shaughnessy moved. He slightly turned to his left, but stayed staring at the floor.

“I'm not going to talk about that.”

“Fair enough.”

“All I want to say now is that if Maria hadn't have caused this, none of it would have happened. If only she hadn't brought a man back, none of this would have happened.

Yeah. If only is right...

“Maria brought it on herself, and she deserved every bit of it. Maria the slut...Maria the whore...Maria the Jezebel...Maria was getting fucked by a man in the room with Karliana there.”

I'd made a note of 'Jezebel.' He'd said it a number of times, and I knew it was significant to him.

"Okay, let's talk about Karliana. Where was she, Bill? Where was the little girl?"

He twisted to his right and pulled his left leg up and over his right, still staring at the floor.

"She was in her crib. Not four feet away. Standing in her crib...watching...crying...watching...crying."

"What did you do with Karliana?"

"She...she accidently got splashed. I took her to the bathroom and washed her and changed her. Then I made her a fresh, warm milk bottle and tucked her in the laundry hamper. I took the dirty clothes out and put in fresh, clean towels and I put Karliana in there so she was safe and couldn't crawl out. I didn't want her going back in that room...the bedroom. I knew someone would find Karliana in the morning."

"Okay. What did you do next?"

"I...ah...borrowed his truck, and then I just started driving. I was just lost...thinking...driving...thinking..."

"What were you thinking about?"

"I...ah...I have this thing where I think about songs, and then I try put my thoughts into the lyrics. I've always been that way since I was a little boy. I love music. Music is my escape. All my life I've had to escape...so I use music as my thoughts."

"So, which thoughts did you put into which lyrics?"

"It'll take me hours to explain...there were so many...thinking about hurt...anger...disgust...pain...revenge..."

"So, where all did you drive?"

"No place in particular. I knew I was going to get caught and would be going to jail, so I just drove and ended up in Tofino."

"Where's the truck now?"

"I parked it by the Tofino police office. I figured it'd be safe there, and I didn't want no one stealing or damaging it."

I paused. He'd not once looked up. He simply answered the questions. At least, the questions he was comfortable with.

I kept on. "Bill, you've said a few things that I don't understand, and I'd like to clarify them. What do you mean by a zero sum game?"

He didn't hesitate. "It's how I see life. Everything should be equal, not one person trying to take advantage of another. Not to hurt them, or to show them up, or...you know...compete. Things should be equal with no one keeping score. That's how a relationship should be...a zero sum game. Not with one person being the winner and the other being treated like a loser...being called a zero in the game."

I nodded my head. "You called Maria a 'Jezebel'. What do you mean by that?"

This time, he hesitated. "I'll be honest with you...I...I think this was...is...my mother I was killing, too...my mother was a prostitute. She used to bring men home to our house and do the same thing when I was in the house. I'd watch men with my mother...my mother with men...I'd watch them in the house. My mother's trick name was 'Jezebel'. My mother was a whore named 'Jezebel'. I caught Maria being a Jezebel. A Jezebel with her child in the room."

I nodded again. "Bill...who is 'Chloe'?"

There was a long, long hesitation. I didn't think Billy Ray was going to say, but when he did, I think I finally understood a bit of what was in his head.

"Chloe...Chloe is like my imaginary friend...sounds stupid...dumb...childish...but Chloe is in my thoughts...Chloe is who...someone who I think of as the perfect woman...I have a picture of the perfect woman, and I love the name Chloe. Chloe...Chloe was my first love...but I couldn't have Chloe...something happened to Chloe...I wanted Chloe back. I wanted a Chloe who would play a zero sum game...someone who would be fair and be equal and be faithful...not a slut...or a whore...or a Jezebel...like my mother and like Maria. I just wanted a Chloe."

"What happened to Chloe, Bill?"

"I'd rather not say."

"Was Chloe real?"

"I'd rather not say."

Epilogue — Thursday, September 29th - 3:35 pm

As I sit here and finish writing the manuscript for *In The Attic*, the jury's still out with me as to the truth in this case. I guess the jury will always be out with me on Billy Ray, just like the "if only's" will always be out on Maria.

There's absolutely no question Billy Ray Shaughnessy was, and is, guilty of the Maria Dersch and Earl Barker double homicides. The questions are what really happened in the bedroom—his degree of culpability, his triggering factors or motivation, and Billy Ray's state of mind while he was in the attic—then in the bedroom.

In the big picture, it doesn't matter anymore. Billy Ray quickly pleaded guilty to the crimes. The prosecutor accepted his pleas to reduced charges of two counts of second-degree murder, lowered from first. First-degree murder requires a proof of planning and deliberately executing the crimes—beyond a reasonable doubt—whereas second degree only requires a proof of spontaneous, yet deliberate action. The issue of provocation was raised by Billy Ray's court-appointed defense counsel, and rightly so. He suggested that Billy Ray, in his mind, was provoked into stopping Maria and Earl for his perception of protecting of Karliana. This could have reduced the conviction to manslaughter, which carries a far lesser sentence. And the lawyer also raised the possibility of temporary insanity. Billy Ray could have walked, Scot-free.

It was safer to plea-bargain for two second-degrees. Billy Ray got life with no parole for twenty years and he'll be forty-six before he sees the street. If he sees the street. Life is still life, just as death will always be death.

Was Billy Ray telling the truth about Maria and Earl performing in front of Karliana, like he claimed?

I read and re-read the Bloodstain Pattern Analyst report. I'd seen the scene with Maria and Earl's bodies with my own eyes and it'll never leave my mind. There are some inconsistencies between Billy Ray's version and the analyst's reconstruction. One relies on memory and the other on professional opinion. Humans are fallible. In one of our interviews, I put it to Billy Ray that the forensic evidence conclusively proved Maria and Earl were asleep when attacked. He just shrugged and didn't deny it.

My notes record that I spent twenty-two hours with Billy Ray in five separate sessions. I wasn't trying to play psychiatrist with him. I'm a cop, not a shrink. I was trying to understand

him and manipulate him into pleading guilty and cutting the process short. I've always looked at that as part of my job. Get the truth out, get 'em in jail, and get 'er over. There's always the next case to get on with.

Billy Ray said he liked me—the blue jacket cop, he called me—and I think that's because I treated him fairly in seeking the truth. Plus, I tried not to judge him. I never let on if I believed him or not. He never admitted to lies. We played a zero sum game.

He told me about his favorite songs. His favorite bands. What he made up as lyrics. How he felt before, during, and after the murders. Right now, I'm looking at my notes: Anger. Hatred. Disgust. Pain. Revenge. Not a word about remorse, sorrow, or regret.

I saw a little boy in Billy Ray. A little boy with no friends and no toys. His lyrics and nicknames were juvenile. His interests were narrow. His experience was minimal. His future was bleak. And his ability for empathy and compassion was zero. He simply was incapable of these feelings.

Was he born that way? Was he made this way? Was he a natural psychopath? Was he a biological miscreant? Or was he a sociopathic product designed by his environment?

He clearly had mommy-issues that manifested to Maria-issues and he clearly had a thing for Karliana. Earl was a victim of circumstances. Any guy in that room was going to get whacked.

But what was really going on in the attic? Up there in Billy Ray's head?

I have his sentencing psychiatric report in front of me. It's long, technical, and ambiguous.

I see they psychologically assessed him using the Standardized Instruments—the Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale, the Cognitive Assessment System, the Individual Achievement Test, the Gordon Systems Continuous Performance Test, the Trail Making Tests (both A&B), the Stroop Color Interference Test, the Minnesota Multiphase Personality Inventory, the Draw A Person Picking An Apple From A Tree Test (seriously, that's a real psychological test), the Brown Attention Deficit Scale, and the Myers Briggs Personality Exam. The Basic Adult Education Exam showed Billy Ray functioned at a grade seven level. His ACE—Adverse Childhood Experiences—rating was 10 out of 10 and his PCL-R Checklist scored 37 out of 40. Remember, Ted Bundy's the only one who ever aced 40.

There was no question that Billy Ray Shaughnessy was mentally competent to stand trial. No one ever doubted that. All the forensic psychiatrists who interviewed him agreed he understood the process and the outcome. In that regard, he was sane. There was no mental disorder about his ability to comprehend the legal process.

As I flip through the report's narrative, I can pick out phrases like “delusional disorder, schizophrenia, labile mood, paranoid personality, psychosis, dissociative reaction, multiple personality, psychosomatic fostering, hallucination, mood swings, poor social interaction, and low self-esteem.”

But the psychiatrists were divided on whether Billy Ray's “index offences” were motivated by his “AXIS I mental disorder” or his “AXIS II personality characteristics”. They took into account the “ultimately violent and horrific nature of the index offences” and concluded “he lacks any insight into the enormity of his acts.”

I quote again: “Mr. Shaughnessy has little, if any, insight into the presence of his major mental illness, that being a diagnosis of Advanced Antisocial Behavior within the meaning of the DSM-5. He fits every criteria of a psychopathic character. We maintain that no psychiatrist in

this, or any other country, would not, on examining these facts, agree that William Raymond Shaughnessy is an outstanding case of mental disorder.”

I don't know.

Was Billy Ray as naturally deranged as the professionals reported?

I point-blank asked him if he thought he was mentally ill.

“No,” he responded. It was the only time I saw him smile.

I asked him what he thought of the psychiatric assessment.

“I just told them what they wanted to hear.” Actually, he laughed. “It'll work out softer for me in jail, if they think I'm nuts.”

As I said, I'm no shrink, but I spent a lot of time investigating the man's crimes and I don't think criminal motivation can be put in a nice psychiatric diagnosis box with a bow on top. The DSM-5 was not designed to explain criminal behavior.

Each crime has its own logic in the mind of the criminal, and I don't think it's an evil force that drives people to viscously kill other people. I think most criminals are made—they have devastating histories of trauma starting as adverse childhood experiences—like being psychologically attacked by a shark, repeatedly, and having to mend without help. Those shark attacks of watching his mother turn tricks took a big bite out of Billy Ray's young psyche.

Was his attack in Maria's bedroom psychologically provoked by the sight of Maria and Earl going at it with Karliana there crying?

Well, forensic analysis from the autopsy did identify Earl Barker's DNA in a semen sample taken from Maria's anus. And the blow to the top of Earl's head perfectly aligns with Billy Ray's description.

Did that make Billy Ray snap, like he said he did?

And does that make his culpability less than officially judged?

Or was he the biggest bullshitter since the beginning of time?

I don't know. I just think Billy Ray's a sick fuck. At least, that's my professional opinion.

As I finish this story—a story I had to tell for my own mental therapy—I'll never stop thinking of Maria's first words when we met, “I'm so terrified that psycho's going to kill me.”

And I'll never stop thinking it wouldn't have happened...

If only I'd looked in the attic.

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About The Author

Garry Rodgers has lived the life he writes about. Garry is a retired homicide detective and forensic coroner who also served as a sniper on British SAS-trained Emergency Response Teams. Today, he's an investigative crime writer and successful author with a popular blog at DyingWords.net as well as being a regular contributor to the HuffPost.

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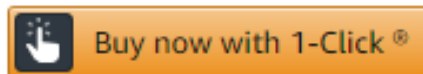
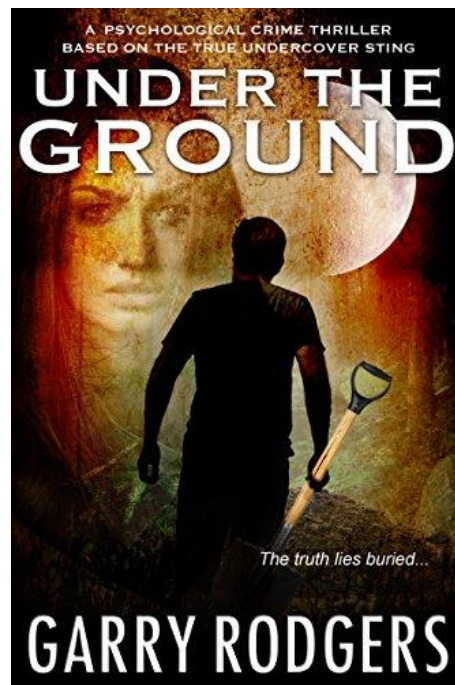
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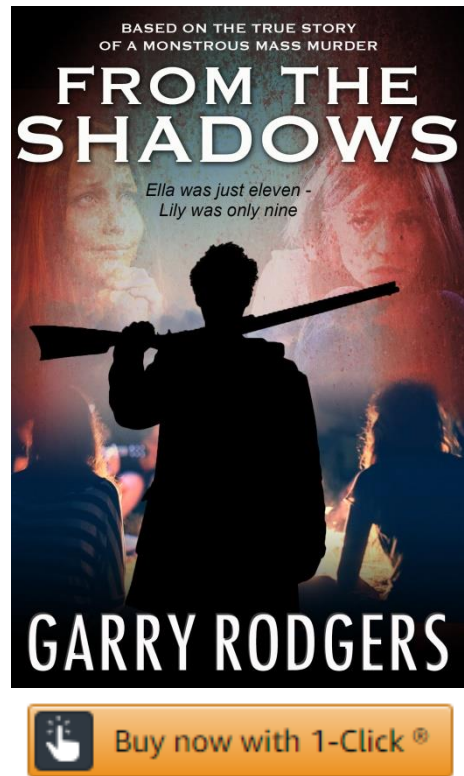
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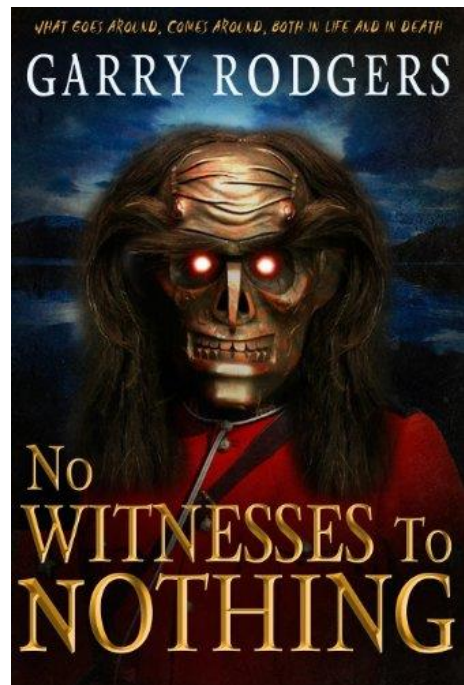
[*Under The Ground*](#) is Garry Rodgers' second based-on-true-crime book. It follows an elaborate undercover sting on a thug suspected of murdering his girlfriend and hiding her dead body.

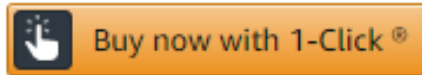


[*From The Shadows*](#) is the third book in Garry Rodgers' based-on-true-crime stories. It follows the investigation into the disappearance of six people—three generations—of one family who were mass-murdered while on a Vancouver Island camping trip.

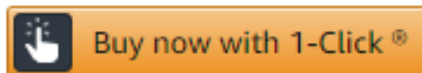
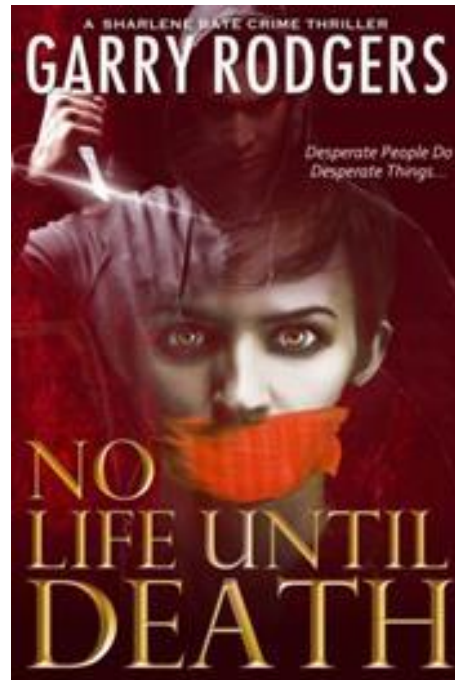


[No Witnesses To Nothing](#) is also based on a true crime story with paranormal overtones. It rose up the Amazon charts and sat right beside Steven King in the horror section.





[No Life Until Death](#) is a fictional work that involves Sharlene Bate who is the main investigator in [No Witnesses To Nothing](#). The plot centers on international black market human organ trafficking.



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