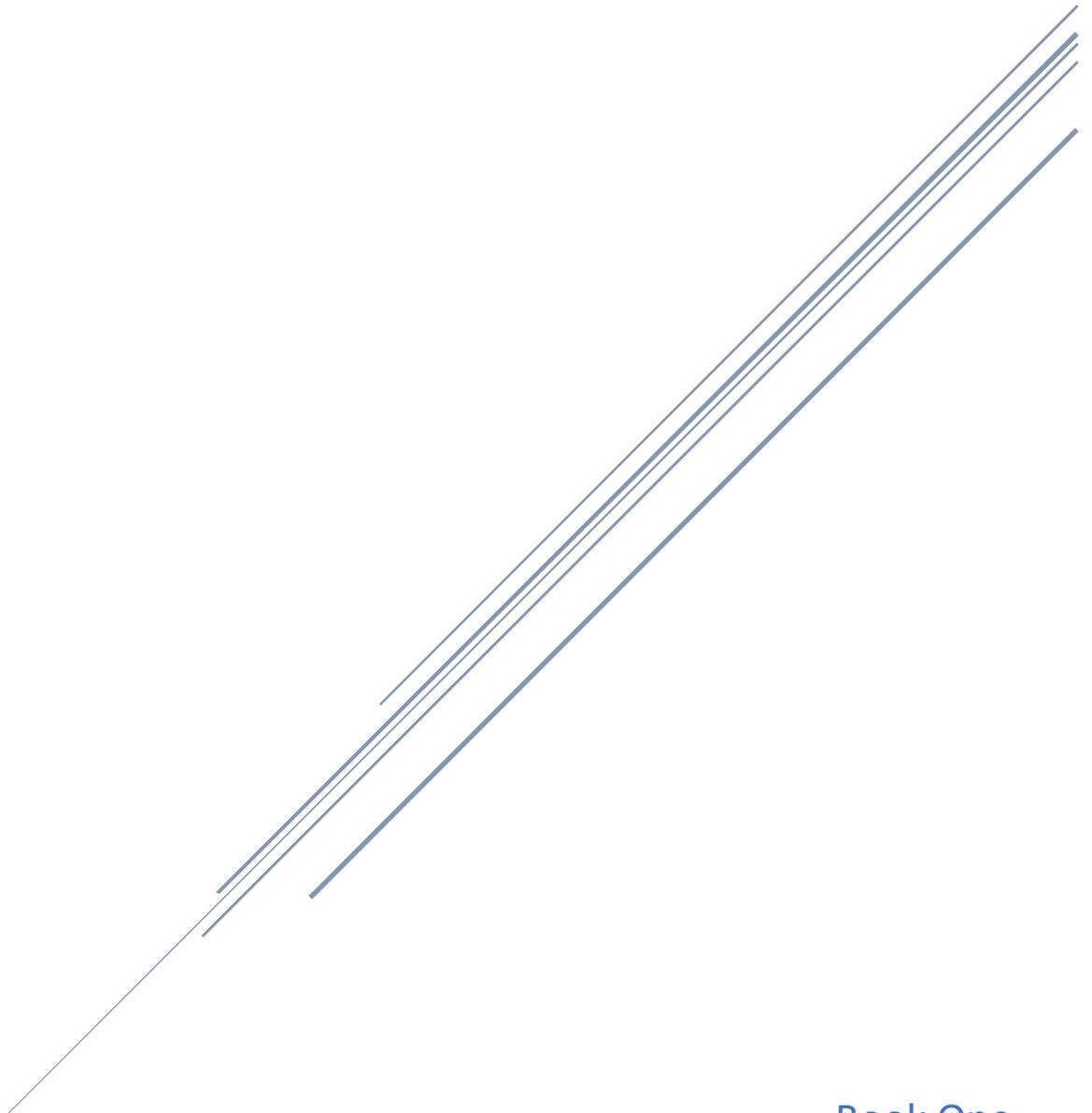


This Strange Story that is my Life

Janice James PI



Book One
Lakemoron.com

**I wasn't to dedicate this to everyone that came to my site and read this story as I wrote it
one part at a time, also sorry about that.**

Chapter One

Janice walked into her office after another night without sleep to find her twelve-year-old son Brandon sitting there in his usual spot playing his retro Gameboy. With one leg up on the armrest his black Converse shoes and white athletic socks could be seen and in direct conflict to the tan slacks, multi pastel plaid shirt with bow tie he was wearing. She started to ask him if he had homework, but she stopped short of asking. She sat down and stared at her most active case. “*So, do you think she is doing it?*” Janice looked over at her son. He was still looking at the game, but he was smiling.

A divorce case was going from nasty to worse. The client was convinced that his wife was sleeping with her partner in her dental office. Liam Drake was a dentist with a problem, and Janice had the proof, but his heroin habit had nothing to do with her client. Using public records and a little hide and seek she found how he got addicted. Like many Liam found his addiction through legal means. He was in an accident that hurt his back. Eventually, when the pain medication was taken away, he had to find his fix in other places. Janice had enough dirt on this guy to end his career and possibly put him in jail, but she had nothing on the wife. Ava Franko was as clean as a new surgical scalpel. Her only true vice was her shopping, but after an extensive search of the client’s finances, there was no sign of a shopping addiction. After an advance from the client bought the voice of the wife’s receptionist. Janice learned that the two partners never worked together and said little. The receptionist said how the office felt off and she was using the cash to find a new job.

Brandon got up and walked over to the desk where he sat on the end making sure he didn’t disturb the files or the open bottle of Jim Bean. He looked down at her, and she looked back wondering why life was so cruel. “*I think Ava might be blackmailing the partner into covering up her spending.*” Brandon didn’t say a word. “*why would she need to cover up something that’s not illegal? Why would she allow this man to potentially hurt her practice?*” Brandon said, “*those are all good questions.*” Janice looked at the bottle of whiskey then said, “*you are no help to me at all.*” Brandon replied, “*why would I start now?*” Janice looked back at

the pictures then back to where her son was, but he was gone. On a shelf in her office was an urn with the cremated remains of Brandon. There he was, and where he would stay until the day someone took them away, but that would never be Janice. She couldn't stand the feel of the cold metal encasing what was left of the light of her life.

The client called and told her that his wife served him divorce papers that morning. Guy Franko was an angry man with a voice that gave him an aggressive tone that was in no way a reality of how he looked in real life. Anyone that knew him away from his work would say he was always on the verge of screaming. At five-foot-five he had that short man syndrome that put everyone on edge. Janice wondered just how this man could bag the six-foot-three underwear model turned dentist. Guy was a pediatrician, and according to all the parents of his clients, he was a wonderful doctor and great with the kids. One of the parents said he was on their level then her face turned red. The divorce papers were just a formality. They had separated about a year ago, and any talking went from accusations to screaming matches. Guy was loud, but there were no signs of abuse. If Janice had found any, she would have returned his retainer and went to the wife, but while he was loud, he was also non-violent.

Ava could be both verbally and physically abusive. Janice had a video of Ava beating Guy on the head like a drum when he refused to sign over the lease to a Lexis she was driving. It was this demeaning video that helped Janice take the case. As she sat there staring at the newest videos from the camera outside of the dental office, a man slipped into her office. Sean Mackay was a one-time private eye now a bar owner. Janice's office was over his bar. Sean was a cop before he went private and his bar was a regular hangout for all his old friends on the force. As he approached Janice, he glanced over at the urn. "*So, Janie baby what's with the doc and his habit?*" Sean tried to sound like Kojak, but his thick Irish accent just made it seem off. Janice wanted to ask how he knew as well as tell him to stop calling her that. He just smiled and winked. Janice said, "*you know it isn't ever going to happen right?*" Sean's smile never faltered as he said, "*you know who really loves you, babe.*" Behind him, Brandon was making gagging sounds.

Public records showed a pattern of police calls to the dental office and the partner's house for about two months after his accident. Sean made a few calls and found the two officers that went to most of those calls. *"The doc had a wicked temper when he was high, and he took it out on the staff."* Sean took in a breath then said, *"look I know you want to bust her fair and crap like that but you have enough to get her to sign the papers for a fair split, and all you have to do is sell your soul."* The thought of using the partner's problem to blackmail Ava into signing did occur to her, but Janice didn't like how it felt. The partner was dangerous and letting him continue to practice could end badly also up until now she never compromised herself like that. Maybe she bent the truth and the law but nothing as slimy as that. The husband didn't want to ruin her. All he wanted was out and with enough to get by. In the papers, he sent he would sign over the part of the dental business he had in his name while she would sign over claim on his practice with everything else split fifty-fifty. Ava wanted to force him to sell his practice then pay her eighty percent of the proceeds.

Something never felt right about Guy owning a part of the dental business. When Ava came up from Brazil she was by no means broke she just didn't have enough to buy into the partnership. Liam wanted Guy's name on the agreement instead of Ava, but he had never said why. At first, Janice just thought it was misogyny, but nothing about this guy screamed misogynist. The real mystery was Ava herself. She was a beautiful leggy Brazilian with looks that could have gotten her any man, but she ended up with an angry shorty and this vanilla wafer of a partner. Sean got up and went to the door. He said, *"its best to let it go and let them sort it all out. It's their lives, not yours."* With that, he closed the door. Brandon came out and flipped off the place where Sean was. This time Janice couldn't help herself, *"what have I told you about doing that?"* Brandon looked at her and said, *"you can't tell me you weren't thinking it."*

Janice went down to the bar. It was eleven o'clock in the morning, but the bar was always open. She ordered her usual and went to a table in the back. A woman in a tank top that was maybe a size too small brought over a glass of tequila, Agave nectar, Triple sec and orange juice

over ice. Sean had his employees dress like this place was a Hooters, but to be fair, he also had the few male employees dress in the same outfits. Janice sat in the dark room thinking about the past and her current case. The sound of a baby seemed to wake her up. On a table next to her was a baby in a car seat. After seeing how no one reacted to the baby, she understood that she was the only one that could see it. The baby asked in an older child's voice, "*why isn't anything in Ava's name?*" On the side of the car seat was a sticker saying, "*hugs are free, but anything else is going to cost you.*" It was a sticker Bill put on as a joke. This was the car seat they bought when Brandon was just born, and the baby was him. She asked herself, "*why is that?*" Janice downed the drink and left a five-dollar bill. After an hour of searching, she saw that nothing was in Ava's name. Not even the usual stuff such as a Netflix account or her A.T & T. cell phone. Outside of her marriage license and driver's license, there was no evidence that this woman even existed. Janice turned to her son who was back in his favorite seat and asked, "*just who is she?*"

Thinking back to a Dustin Hoffman movie called Marathon Man with a dentist scene Janice decided not to make an appointment. She did have a contract with an owner in the company. After a call, she had a key and a paper saying she had permission to enter the building. The office closed at eight PM, and the cleaning staff would be gone by midnight. Janice decided to go in around one AM. She looked at Brandon then back to the key. She said, "*this is going to be a long night, so I should take a nap.*" She looked up, and the tween Brandon was gone and in his place was the one-year-old Brandon in his short pants and a shirt that said, "*Can you smell what the Brandon is cooking.*" He started to scream as he did back then. No real words or anything coherent just a cacophony of sounds. He would scream himself hoarse. The screams would wake up the neighborhood. He screamed all the time Janice tried to sleep. She finally gave up and went to call Bill.

William Samuel James had a hard day with a class that was testing his patients. He was a tenth-grade social science teacher. His classes were both woke and ignorant at the same time. He was fond of saying how in the age of Twitter calling someone a Nazi was considered a viable debate strategy. This class was especially hard because some of the students were friends of his late son. Seeing them, there was a reminder of how Brandon would never be able to learn or

grow into the man he could have been. Today's class was about the social repercussions of slavery as they pertained to the Black Codes and Jim Crow. One class thought that Jim Crow was a Disney character while another class wanted a black teacher to cover this subject because having a white man talk about black history just didn't seem right. The principal laughed saying how they didn't have the budget to have a teacher of every race and gender to teach from every perspective. Bill looked at the phone and saw who it was. They divorced about two years ago, but Janice still calls as if they were still together, but she only calls on those bad days. "*How are you, Janey?*" At first, there was nothing then Janice said, "*I'm sorry I don't know why I called it's just I mean I just.*" Bill knew this tone and what it meant. He asked, "*do you want me to come over?*"

Janice looked at the clock and watched it as it went from twelve fifty-seven to twelve fifty-eight. Brandon was never around when Bill was so when it got bad she would call him, but she knew that one day he would say no. For right now he was beside her in bed still naked after they spent the evening together. She looked down at her own naked self and wondered what would have happened if they had another child. Both Bill and Brandon wanted another child she just couldn't see stopping her business for what could be two to three years. She had a hard time bouncing back from Brandon both physically and emotionally. She wrote a note saying she had to go out for a job, but she would be back before he had to go. Janice knew that as soon as he saw the note, Bill would leave. They had no connections in the here and now just past and memories. When she kicked him out, he said they couldn't have a future if she couldn't deal with the past. Just for a second, she thought about skipping the night and staying with Bill.

It was close to one-thirty when Janice finally decided to make her move. She had a key and every right to be there, but if she were caught, it would tip her hand as well as the client's hand. She had a plan, and if she was right, she could be in and out in twenty minutes. To be safe, she parked her car on another block and walked over to the building. The computer was turned off with the server in a locked room. The lock was new, and she didn't have the key. The paper files were unlocked but, it was a code she didn't know, or it was just that dam handwriting doctors were known for. In the office Ava was using she found a safe with a biometric lock. She

knew the make and model because she had one just like it back in her office. It was a gun safe. She wondered why a dentist would have a gun safe? Just because it is a gun safe didn't mean they were using it as a safe filled with guns. The safe had a master code from the manufacturer. It was something she wasn't supposed to know so when she used it she made sure to wear gloves. Janice put in the code, and she heard a click.

The first surprise was the money. The safe had stacks of Euros, British Pounds, and American Dollars. More money than one person should have on hand unless they were a bank or up to something. She found Ava's passport and a driver's license from Brazil. She also found a 22-automatic with several magazines and a suppressor. There was also ammunition for several other weapons from a 556 to a 9mm. In a box in the back was a bag with diamond and gold jewelry. She took pictures and scanned some of the cash then she left making sure everything was locked and left as she found it. Her first stop was at the bar where they had a program that allowed them to check for counterfeit currency. Janice liberated a few of the bills. After a scan and search, they knew that at least the American bills were genuine.

After a few calls, Janice was set to speak with a dentist she knew and see if he could look over the billing to see if they are legitimate. He would leave his morning open so he and one of his assistants could examine the records. Janice noticed just how happy they were to look at the books from another dentist. The morning was several hours away so Janice went home hoping Bill would still be there, but instead, she found a note and Brandon waiting for her. This was the six-year-old Brandon in his SpongeBob pajamas wearing that Christmas elf hat he carried around for about a year with the fake ears. Brandon asked, "*so who won?*" When he was six and still alive, he had walked in on her and Bill making love. Janice told him they were wrestling. When he asked the question, Bill with no subtlety said, "*I think I was.*" Just before he left the room, he had turned and said, "*ok I thought you two were having sex working on that baby brother, but I guess I was wrong.*"

Janice got into bed, and Brandon climbed in next to her. She could feel his presence if not him. Brandon said, *“I think daddy is starting to slip away.”* It was about this time in his life when Brandon stopped calling Bill Daddy and started calling him Dad. Janice looked down at the rise and fall of his small chest knowing now that there was a ticking clock, an expiration date built into his heart that would end his life on the soccer field. She fell asleep and found herself on that field. All the parents were there with the kids playing a game, that is all of them except for her. Janice told them that she had a job, and she needed to be on it, but really, she just didn’t want to be around the other parents. She watched as Brandon faded to the right then the left and with his last burst of speed made his last goal then he dropped. She watched as the paramedics worked on him then got him into an ambulance. From there she was in the hospital in a room where he should have been recovering and not in the morgue dead. Then she saw herself as she walked into the hospital not knowing what had happened being so annoyed by Bill and what she thought was nothing.

At first, nothing seemed wrong with the files except that Ava didn’t seem to see that many patients. Just before she had them stop and go back to their usual day the assistant pointed out that the records didn’t mention materials used as a part of the billing. She said, *“fillings aren’t cheap, and no dentist would give the materials away.”* The mystery that was Ava just widened as they went back over the records noting anything missing from billing. Janice left the dentist after promising she would be back for a cleaning and exam. As she left her phone buzzed. *“Mam my name is Officer Regan I am investigating a shooting at the house of a mister Franco when we found your card. Was mister Franco a client?”* The question hit her like a slap in the face. She asked, *“is he dead?”* Officer Regan asked if she could bring any files to the police station and they would answer any questions they could.

From what the police could piece together Guy was at home in his living room watching a basketball game when the assailant struck him with a baseball bat that was found on the scene. The bat was a part of the victim’s sports memorabilia and was signed by Jim Tome of the Cleveland Indians. It seemed funny to Janice just how upset the officer was over the bat and not the body. From there the person or persons using a hammer and a pair of pliers broke and

dislocated fingers and joints. Regan said, “*it was like out of some sort of movie where they wanted him to talk.*” Janice quietly replayed the night in her head. The crime scene pictures showed an empty gun safe. “*Preliminary test showed both drugs and what could be explosives.*” Janice started with the paper from Guy giving her the authority to go into the office. She then gave them a step-by-step account of her night in the office and what she found out when she spoke to the dentist. It was the dentist and his assistant that gave her an alibi for the crime. A manhunt started for the wife, but Janice knew they would never find her unless she wanted to be found.

When she got back to her office, Janice called her service and stopped any payment from Guy Franco. Like most of her clients, Guy paid with a credit card and was set up for routine deposits for Janice’s service. She didn’t want any bad will with the local law, so she gave them all her files on him and all the non-questionable evidence. Anything that might have been illegal was quietly left out. Back home she found a note from the realtor. The house was officially sold, and she had sixty days to move out. Inside she could hear the baby crying. An echo of a long-ago time that would never repeat for her but just maybe a new family could have this place and have good memories. This last two years the house felt like a memory prison, and she was the only inmate, but now that she was free she didn’t want to go. The crying stopped.

The house was filled with people. Her uncle Dave who died in a fire when she was twelve. Cousin Steve was sitting on the steps holding the revolver he used to shoot himself about ten years ago. Janice’s maternal grandparents Janice and Jack who died from a carbon monoxide leak in their trailer in Streetsboro where on the loveseat making out. Sitting around the piano was her cousins Jenny, Bobby and Nancy who all died from heroin overdoses about six months apart. In the kitchen was Brandon, her sister Sue and Sue’s best friend, Jennifer. One-night Sue was so high on acid she started to think that the telephone poles were out to get them. She recorded herself slamming into a pole in her metallic blue and gray 1992 Corvette at somewhere around ninety miles an hour. All during the run-up to the collision, you could hear Jennifer screaming “*lets light this place up and let the motherfucker burn.*” In the front, Janice heard a door open then close. She turned around to see that everyone was gone.

At the door was Bill. He had this look on his face that said it all. Bill didn't want to sell the house, but he understood that it was necessary for Janice to be able to move on. He had a bag from their favorite Chinese takeout and a bottle of pink Catawba wine from Heineman Winery on Put-In-Bay a small island in Lake Erie near Sandusky, Ohio. Back when they first married they had honeymooned there going back and forth between the island and Cedar Point amusement park. They spent their first night as husband and wife in a tub built for two with several bottles of this wine. They looked at it as a special occasion and even after they could afford something some people would say was better they still came back to it because it was the best in every way that mattered. This time the bottle seemed to signal an end. For a split second she thought he would break it over her head and in that second, she thought that just maybe she would deserve it.

They stared into the fire as they lay on the floor, naked underneath a quilt they bought in Amish country. When Bill lit the fire, he thought that this might be the last fire he ever starts in this fireplace. His new place didn't have a fireplace. He signed a lease sight unseen and didn't know about the quirks until he moved in and found that the hall closet was the furnace. He got up and put another log on the fire and went back to rejoin Janice when she said, "*stop.*" He stopped then said "*what*" with his shoulders. Janice said, "*I just want our fucking neighbors to have one more look at you.*" Bill looked around and realized that all the drapes were gone. He started to jump to the floor when something came over him and instead he pulled Janice up letting the quilt fall. He picked her up and carried her to the sectional style couch. As he entered her, Bill thought that this might be the last time they do this in this house or at all. Janice just wished she could find a way to trap this memory in her head, so she could dream about it and not that soccer field.

In the house next door two teenagers watched them wishing that their phones could record what was happening in the dim light. Both were students in Bill's class, and he would be the talk of the grade, but with no proof, there would be no talk. On the street was a van with out of state license plates and two men in dark blue suits recording the events of the night as if the

FBI paid them to be peeping toms. In another house across the street was an elderly man. He was tied up with a gag in his mouth and his throat slit as Ava watched Bill, Janice, The FBI and the two teens wondering just how she was going to get Janice alone and find out just what she knew. Ava picked up her phone and called someone she knew in the police department in Akron. She paid him to keep her informed of what was going on and if anything was mentioned about her and she got her money's worth. The officer gave her the complete file including copies of everything Janice gave them.

The next morning Sean called and asked if she could come to the bar. Although there was a prohibition on having a bar open in the morning Sean's bar was frequented by the police who just didn't see the need to force it to close. Janice didn't want to get out of bed, but Sean never calls. He asked her to bring the bills with her. "*Hey, babe you got those bills?*" It was around six in the morning and just a little early for Janice to put up with being called babe but when was there a good time for such a thing? She asked, "*so what's with the call?*" Sean took the bills and put them in place in the bar with a glass top and an ultraviolet light. "*do you see it*" Sean asked as he pointed to the bills. Hidden in the bill was a QR code that wasn't visible in normal light. Sean said, "*this code linked the scanner to a site that reprogrammed it to recognize any bill as genuine. They knew that everything today is connected to the internet so hiding the code made hiding counterfeit cash easier.*" Janice half asked half said, "*so the bills are counterfeit?*" Sean said, "*as phony as the love my second wife had for me and not my brother.*" Sean turned off the ultraviolet light than said, "*I called this fed I know with the secret service and don't worry I told him someone passed the bill to me in the bar. He said he would be here today. Listen, babe, this guy is flying in from Washington, and I mean the state just to see the bill so this might be bad.*"

Sean suggested she shouldn't stay just in case this became a federal case, and she had to answer where the bills came from, but it also meant that she wouldn't hear first hand what was wrong. That was until Sean suggested she act as the waitress that took the bill. He would say that she had a stake in what was happening. Janice looked at one of the waitresses in the mock Hooters cosplay and wondered if this was just a play to get her near naked, but she had to know. Janice asked, "*OK, I'll need a pair of shorts and that top. Do you have any?*" Janice stood

behind the bar feeling exposed and constricted in the top that was about a size too small. She was surprised to see that she fit in the outfit and it made her look younger. The tank top had a built-in underwire that helped make a convincing cleavage. She even thought about keeping it after this was over then she thought about Sean and what he might do with it after she had it on and decided it was hers no matter what. Vanessa was one of the young waitresses at the bar. She said, *“dam I can’t believe that’s you. You look so hot. The guys see you, and you won’t just get a tip you’ll get the entire shaft.”* Right then and there she felt like she was getting shafted.

Sean called Janice over and said, *“I was going to say you were off work today but after seeing this I’m glad you jumped.”* Before she could say a word, Sean pointed at the door and said, *“OK, babe here’s our guy.”* The secret service was a part of the treasury department with officers dealing with things other than running with limos and even after it became a part of Homeland Security they still investigate such crimes. Sal Gamut was not the kind of guy that would protect any official from anything. He was five-foot-five with a beer gut and a swirling combover dripping with either sweat or hair gel. He was dressed in a tan suit with a light blue shirt and bolo tie. His look screamed Arizona accountant rather than a special agent. His glasses were so thick that it was hard to see how they stayed upright on his face. He came over, and they did the usual introductions. Janice didn’t know if he spent the entire time staring at her chest or if it was just the effect gravity had on the soda bottle bottom glasses he had on.

Sal pointed at the serial number on the bill and said, *“you see this. It isn’t a number it’s a code for that program that took control of your system. This code gives the operator on the other side access to your computer, so they can easily go in and steal you blind.”* When he said blind, he pushed up his glasses on his face than he went on, *“if you were a bank then they could eventually hack your accounts and drain every digital dime. This is the worst thing we have ever seen in the business. They’re using our own need to connect everything with WIFI as their way in.”* Sal took a sip of his Jack and Coke then asked, *“and they just used this to pay for a drink?”* Sean replied, *“you can never underestimate the stupidity of the average criminal. My guess is that someone who works with whoever this is wanted a drink and thought that they wouldn’t miss the money.”* Sal snorted then said, *“yeah but I bet that guy is missing his nuts about now.”* Janice

finally found her voice and asked, “*how so?*” Sal said, “*well you see something like this wouldn’t hurt a business such as a bar, but at a track, casino, or bank it would be worth millions, but now that we have a sample we can track the routing back and find the site. In fact, what we needed was a second bill, and now that we have it we can break this thing wide breasts.*” His face turned red then he said, “*I mean open.*”

Janice left the two men talking about old times and went out the back and up the stairs to her office. There she met up with her part-time assistant named Jennifer Gordon. Jennifer was a college student going to Kent State and working when she could, but when she was there, she made sure to dress the part. She was nearly six-foot tall with long straight auburn hair with horn-rimmed glasses. Today she was in a tan pleated skirt and white sleeveless shirt that seemed just a little too formal for an office, but she wore it well. People called her JG, and she let them. JG looked Janice over then asked, “*so things aren’t going well huh?*” Janice smirked then said, “*don’t worry you won’t have to start looking for a new gig just yet this was for a case.*” JG asked, “*a case of vodka or gin?*”

JG finished filing the papers closing Guy Franco’s account then she got up and went to leave. On the way out, she looked to the urn then back to the closed door to Janice’s office. Part of her wanted to talk to Janice about Brandon and just maybe do something, but another part just wanted to go. It was hard for her to see this woman that did so much for her and her family slip away because of this one tragedy. JG new she owed her life to Janice, and now she could return some part of that by just taking the urn. She looked back to the door then turned around and left leaving this for another day while wondering just how many days there will be before Janice finally snaps. Janice watched JG using a nanny-cam hidden in a clock on the wall. She knew that with the three-year anniversary of Brandon’s death it was about that time when JG would ask if she wanted to “do something” with the ashes. Janice didn’t want to have that conversation with JG because she wanted them to remain as friends. Bill didn’t want Brandon to be cremated, and when it was done behind his back, it started the argument that eventually had her point a gun at him and forced him out of the house. About a month later Bill bought a grave with a headstone.

He had a small coffin with some of Brandon's favorite things buried there. That same day she had both divorce papers and a restraining order given to him.

Janice picked up her old-style desk phone and called Bill. *“say hey, I’m closing the house and if you want anything, you should go through and just take it. I’m packing up the pictures and other crap then anything else I’m giving away.”* Bill asked, *“you aren’t taking any of the furniture?”* Janice said, *“no, I’m not even taking my clothes. I want a clean break, and that will start with a new place away from that field.”* Bill said, *“wow, that’s great.”* Then after a long silence, he asked, *“that break.... Will that.... Include us?”* Janice not only knew this question was coming she steered the call so he would ask it. She said, *“well maybe we could find a place we could start over together.”* After a long silence Bill said, *“the only way we can do that is if you bury our son.”* Janice looked at the screen showing the outer office. The twelve-year-old Brandon was standing there staring at his urn. Janice said, *“Bill there is something I think I need to tell you.”*

Chapter Two

1995

Janice sat under a tree holding a book with a gym bag between her legs hiding the recording video camera. This was her ninth job in the glamorous world of private investigations. It wasn't really a full-time job that could pay the bills, but it was a start. She worked a nine-to-five job behind a counter asking, "*do you want fries with that.*" Today she was in the park watching a man with a woman as they kissed. His wife was hard at work while he hardly worked but he could spend money on another woman. The wife wasn't the client, the sister of the wife hired Janice to show her that he was cheating. She bought a good video camera after a fuzzy image helped a morally ambiguous husband bullshit about why he was manhandling the babysitter. As she sat there a voice came from around the tree she was up against, "*say miss are you recording all the action?*" A man in maybe his early twenties with black curly hair and wire-frame glasses came around the tree.

Janice looked Bill over sizing him up while trying to decide whether he was really interested or was he hitting on her. Bill smiled changing her age speculation to maybe twenty which would make him about two years older than her eighteen years. Janice decided he was hitting on her or at least she hoped he was. She said, "*please don't say that out loud. His wife should know the truth.*" Bill looked over at the couple then sat down next to Janice. He looked over her shoulder at the blank book. "*What is that some sort of journal?*" Janice looked at Bill then said, "*it will be when I start to write into it. Right now, it's just a cover.*" Bill put out his hand and said, "*Bill.*" Janice looked at his hand then said, "*you haven't hired me yet.*" Bill pulled his hand back a little then said, "*no.... That's my name... Bill as in William.*" Janice held in her smile saying, "*well I guess you are expecting to hear my name.*" From the angle, Bill was sitting he could see a little down her open shirt and wither it was that or just his curiosity he said, "*I would rather know what you look like after a night with me, but a name is a good start.*"

2015

“How long has this been going on?” Bill put down his beer and stared at Janice waiting for a response. Janice was looking away as she said, *“I don’t know if it started when I went into the office or when I took the case, but I know that I am being followed by both the FBI and Franco.”* Janice replayed the video of the FBI in her office placing listening devices, then Ava coming in and searching. Janice said, *“I wanted you to know what was happening before we did anything.”* Bill watched the video feeling both an angry rage and just a little bit of excitement. Janice put her glass of wine down then said, *“and the FBI did all this without the locals knowing.”* Bill finished his beer. He said, *“your job was always interesting, but this doesn’t answer my question.”* Janice responded by saying, *“you mean demand.”* Bill opened another beer saying, *“no, condition and yes they are two different things.”* He looked at the Crooked River bottle then back to Janice, *“we could put him to rest in a place he deserves not a shelf being defiled by feds.”* The video was paused on a man placing a listening device in the urn containing Brandon’s ashes.

In a small dark motel room out in Green, Ohio Ava sat there reading her emails trying to decipher her instructions without the codebook she left in her home. Steve’s motel was very different from her usual four-star accommodations, but it provided anonymity that was well worth the small room. Without all the fake bills the plan was in jeopardy and now with the FBI or Secret Service having at least one of the bills the plan was on hold until a replacement could be made. That is if the plan was still an option. Ava was able to take the other bills as well as figure out what bills were missing so her client could replace them, but if the other bills were out on the street, there was a chance the whole plan could fall apart. Ava knew that part of their plan was to promote distrust in the British Pound, American Dollar, and Euro with even just the knowledge of this attack having an affect her client wanted.

Either way, her cover was blown, and her fake life in Ohio was over. For a microsecond, she started to like her life with Guy. She met him online using a dating app and angled him into marriage. He was a small angry man that liked having a beautiful woman beside him. Much to

her surprise, he was even good in bed. She would compare him to the porn star Ron Jeremy. In those times when he was on top of her or the more usual position with her on top, she could see making this her life, but then reality would hit her, and that glamorous life she had waiting would call to her. Guy was a light beer while she was a fine French wine. When this job was done, she would have enough money to retire on. She made sure that she wasn't paid in any of the currencies her clients were trying to destabilize. She couldn't wait to get out of Ohio. The winters were cold and icy, and the summers were hot and muggy. Most of all she won't miss the people. In the summer of 2001 her last job in the states she was in New York City helping a group of middle eastern men hide their true plans. While there she was able to hide in plain sight with no one even talking to her, but in this place called Cuyahoga Falls, it seemed that everyone wanted her backstory. The New York job paid for a private island with a villa. This job would help make the island self-sufficient just in case her client's plans worked just a little too well.

A day later, Bill and Janice were at the grave Bill bought to memorialize Brandon. With a little money, the staff at the cemetery was able to open the plot up and lift the small coffin out. Inside was a soccer ball signed by all of Brandon's teammates, a picture of Brandon, his first shoes, the miniature baseball bat he would carry around when he was nine and a few other items that only a child would see as valuable. Janice put the urn into the coffin and whispered, "*I hope all you FBI fuckers burn in hell.*" They left the listening device inside the urn. Both Sean and JG stood by watching with JG watching the roads and Sean staring at JG's ass. They didn't know how the feds would take to what they were doing or what their next move would be. While they were at the grave site the agents that planted the surveillance-gear were taking it out. They would still watch just using other means. Janice looked up and out to a stand of trees where she saw the six-year-old Brandon and her grandfather Jack. It was clear to her Brandon was crying, and Jack was trying to comfort him.

What was now the third funeral for Brandon moved to Sean's bar where he opened a bottle of Jefferson sixteen year Presidential Select and poured everyone a small glass of the bourbon. JG said, "*I don't drink dark liquors.*" Sean said, "*don't worry babe I'll make sure you get home.*" JG smiled a little then took a sip. Sean said, "*I'm just not saying which home that will*

be.” JG downed the bourbon then said, “*dream on old man.*” Bill asked, “*you know she’s underage right?*” Sean said, “*the bar is closed for the night, and yes I know, but I would rather she was under me.*” Janice said, “*OK I think that one was just a little too far. You need to dial it back a bit.*” The mood at the table turned a little somber and stale. After her third shot, JG just asked out to no one, “*shit, is it hot in here or is it just me?*” Both Bill and Janice looked to Sean who just shrugged then said, “*no, that one would just be too easy.*” JG started to dance in her seat then she got up and took her jacket off, but Sean stopped her before she could take the shirt off. Sean said, “*so, maybe you are at your limit.*” She put her arms around him then kissed him. JG said, “*why don’t we go find a quiet place and have a little May October sex.*” Sean said, “*it would be more of an April December thing.*” Janice said, “*we’ll take her home.*” Sean in a move that was as effortless as it was unbelievable, brought his arm around JG and picked her up. He said, “*no, that’s OK I said I would see her home and I will. It can be fun to play around with words, but I couldn’t see actually doing anything with a girl that is the same age as my granddaughter.*”

Neither Bill or Janice was in any condition to drive so they went up to Janice’s office where she had a pullout couch. The couch was as old as the office, and it was the very place where Brandon was conceived, on a long-gone mattress. The new mattress was an air-mattress with a built-in pump. As the pump did its job the two undressed. They helped each other because they both were having a hard time undressing. While trying to unhook Janice’s bra, Bill brought her close and hugged her. Janice opened her eyes and saw the urn on the shelf then the two-year-old Brandon in the corner with his hands over his eyes. Bill whispered into her ear, “*I love you and I always will.*” Janice said, “*we should put Brandon to bed before we do anything.*” She then passed out. Bill looked at the corner where Janice was staring and saw nothing but an empty space. He helped her into his button-down shirt then into bed where he joined her where the booze finally caught up with him.

Janice woke up with a splitting headache and sandpaper where her tongue should be. Next to her was a bottle of aspirin, a bottle of water and an energy shot drink. She took four aspirin with the water then drank the energy shot down. She was still in Bill’s shirt, but she

couldn't remember how she got it until she realized she was at the office. In a small conference room across from her office, she found Bill marking papers. With all her strength she asked, "so what are you doing?" Without looking up, Bill said, "I'm questioning my life choices." He then looked over at Janice and said, "I'm grading the papers of a generation that thinks "because" is an answer." Janice smiled then said, "it can't be that bad." Bill handed her a paper from the top. For the question, "what effect social barriers had such as the black codes have on the overall culture" a student wrote, "Obama is the prez so none of that matters anymore." Another wrote, "I think that it is wrong for a white cis male to teach us about such topics." Bill tapped the paper saying, "that girl is so white she makes me look ethnic." Janice looked at the name on the paper. "C. Diana Howe, isn't that Tom and Nancy's daughter? Oh, come on... what was her name?" Bill smirked then said, "I told her if she keeps this crap up I'll start calling her Cybil."

JG called saying she won't be in until the drum solo in her head ends so Janice decided to take the day off. She helped Bill with his papers then the two went apartment shopping. They ended up at the Studio City apartment complex near a park and the river. The place was a little dated, but the rent was cheap, and an apartment was available right away. They put money down on a two-bedroom apartment with a den. One bedroom would serve as an office for Bill while the den would work as a satellite office for Janice. Much like Janice was doing, Bill said he would leave everything behind and start fresh. It was easier for him because he didn't have much of anything, to begin with. His little shoebox apartment had no television or much of any kind of comforts. It was a place for him to sleep and not much more. The management wanted a day to clean so they would get the keys tomorrow. With the place picked they went and spent the rest of the day furniture shopping.

Janice swayed back and forth on top of Bill as the two made love. She liked being on top, and he liked being with her. JG sat in the outer office with headphones on wishing the day would be over and they could move into the apartment. The air mattress was almost as loud as Janice. Janice stopped swaying when she heard the copier running. She looked at the clock and saw it was nine in the morning. "Bill, aren't you going to be late for work?" Bill pointed to the date on the clock saying, "it's Memorial Day." JG knocked at the door to the office then said, "your ten-

o'clock will be here in an hour should I call and reschedule?" Janice picked up a blanket and covered her and Bill. She said, *"just open the door."* When JG opened the door, she seemed a little shocked then recovering said, *"this guy called last week and made this appointment and."* Janice put up her hand then said, *"I will be ready for him... maybe put him in the conference room when he gets here."* JG smiled and said, *"not a problem."* She then cocked her head and said, *"so that is what a circumcised penis looks like."* JG closed the door. Janice looked behind her to see her backside and Bills lower half was not under the blanket. Janice looked to a red-faced Bill and said, *"you hear her we have an hour. Let's make some noise."*

It was hard for JG to call the man that came into the office just a man. He was a seven-foot-tall plus African-American with shoulders that were almost too wide to fit past the doorframe. Samuel Saunders was used to the stares as well as the jokes. He was forty-years-old and was the first to know about it when it rained. JG showed him to the conference room where he sat at the table making the furniture look like it was made for a child. About a minute later Janice came in. She did the usual introductions with her hand disappearing into his as they shook. *"well Mister Saunders how can I help you?"* Samuel looked at his hands and said, *"I love my wife... most of all you have to understand that I love her with every inch of my heart."* Janice waited for the *"but."* Samuel looked up at Janice and said, *"I think that someone is blackmailing her. She did some things in her past that could hurt her in her work and ... well..... I think they are using that for their own gain."* Janice asked, *"and she doesn't know you are here?"*

On the way out, Samuel came face to top of Bill's head. Samuel looked at Bill then said, *"Bill James dam it's been a few years."* Bill smiled then said, *"yeah I think maybe eighteen or something like that."* While trying not to open the subject to why he was there, Samuel asked Bill, *"so how is that wife of yours? Maybe we could meet up and have dinner or something?"* Bill pointed to Janice who was in Samuel's shadow and said, *"well you just met her."* Janice said, *"no, he met with Janice James PI not Janice James wife and that is all there is."* She then put out her hand and said, *"nice to meet you. I'm also Bill's wife, Janice."* No one bothered to say that they were actually divorced. Samuel gave a warm smile that lit up his face and seemed to take the worry away for a second or two. He said, *"no my dear we are family."* He went past her hand

and hugged her. As he did this, Janice remembered the name from Bill's stories from the foster home he grew up in.

Janice sat down at her desk with her laptop and opened a new file. Client Saunders, Samuel SS25.5.2015. Her client codes were the client's initials and the date they hired her. "*The client has hired me to find evidence that his wife is being blackmailed for a past arrest that could affect her employment with a new charter school. The client just wants the proof with no further action.*" Using a spreadsheet, Janice worked out the expenses of such a job as well as what actions should be taken. Her first job would be to place surveillance equipment in the house as well as in the subject's car, and place of business. She would then follow her for a few days learning her routine as well as noting any deviations. Janice didn't want to tell Samuel that in most cases the talk of an affair was less blackmail more willing participant. Sitting on her desk was a client file GF17.6.2014. Guy Franko was an angry man with a chip on his shoulder and a wife up to no good, but he didn't deserve what happened to him.

Margaret Alicia Hester-Saunders was a beauty that seemed to be lit by movie lights everywhere she went. Margaret was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her father was a Quaker from rural Penn. and her mother was from the Dominican Republic. Margaret met Samuel in college where he was working on a degree in engineering, and she was in the education program. They married while in college and moved to the Firestone neighborhood where he went to work for a mold making company, and she went to work for a charity then eventually a charter school ran by a Christian ministry. Their house was one of the old mansions built when the rubber industry was king in Akron. Margaret liked how their house was close to places where she could still volunteer. This became more important to them both after they found out they couldn't have children. They fostered three children who see them as their parents and see them often. Together they built a life that was worth living. But all that was just on the surface.

After a week the FBI stopped following Janice as she watched Margaret go from work to the gym then her many charities. In that week Janice never saw anything amiss with Margaret

that would have led Samuel to think she was in trouble. The one quirky little thing was a charity Janice had never heard of named New Hope. At first, she thought they were tied to Hope Ministries which ran a shelter in Akron, but after a search, she found that they had no connection. They seemed to be a quasi-Salvation Army collecting money year around. The whole thing felt sleazy with the charity hiring men that looked more like gang members than the usual bell ringers. After a search on the internet and in past papers online Janice found a story about a charity out west that was using the same format to steal credit card numbers and sell drugs. The next day the FBI raided the charity. As it turned out they were the same charity from a few years ago and had just moved east hoping their name would help them blend in with Hope Ministries. Margaret was questioned then let go. Unlike before this time they tried to cover their illegal acts with actual charity.

About the time Janice was willing to call it a case and stop billing Samuel, Margaret did something different. Her usual Tuesday was work, gym and the park but this time she went from work to the highway. A twenty-minute drive led them to Steve's Motel in Green. A door opened at it was the principal of the charter school. Gregg Allen was in his fifties with a full head of white hair and a beard that would have made him a good Santa if he wasn't pencil thin. Using a laser microphone, Janice recorded the events in the room. A male voice "*did you write up those TT225 reports yet?*" Then the sounds of a zipper and what could have been clothing coming off. "*Could we not talk about the school while we do this?*" The male voice, "*we will talk about what I want to talk about when I want to talk about it.*" Then the sounds of what was most likely oral sex. The male voice then said, "*ok I'm ready, get on the bed on your knees.*" Then a smacking sound that was also clear as to what it was. After about twenty minutes of this, it was clear that Margaret didn't want to be there.

Ava looked out her window and saw Janice who seemed to be watching another of the small shacks that served as motel rooms. She watched the watcher watching a room. Then a dark-skin woman came out and left. After she left two men came out. One of the men was old with a white head of hair and matching beard while the other one looked like a teenager. The older man kissed the teen on the lips in a move that was just wrong to Ava. The man she named

Anorexic Santa was in a suit with a tie while the teen was in a stained pair of boxer shorts that were turned inside out. When Santa left Janice got out and planted something that looked like a garden gnome facing the room. Ava knew that this was a camera with a built-in cellphone. Janice then drove away seemingly to try and follow Santa. Ava made a note in her head about the camera and thought about how she could disable it without being seen. While she did this, another car pulled near the room with the teen. It was another man. This guy could have been an Elvis impersonator with slicked-back hair and sideburns. He went in and about an hour later came back out, got into his late model Honda Civic and left.

Janice caught up with Gregg Allen at a long light just before he got onto the highway. She followed him to the charter school where he went into an office near the front door. He pulled out a camera and plugged it into a computer and watched a video of what had to be the nastiest thing she had ever seen. Using the link, she installed in the school's system Janice copied the video of this man taking what looked like a teenage boy from behind while the teen had sex with Margaret. The camera was from an angle meaning the camera was most likely hidden on a table or dresser. Janice started the video from the beginning where she could see how the audio she had recorded matched the video with Margaret on her knees going down on Allen. He then told the boy to go to his knees. Margaret was crying as this happened. Then she saw the face of Allen who also didn't seem to want to be there. Janice said to herself, "*something doesn't add up?*"

A car pulled into the parking lot of the motel and strayed just enough off the lot to crush a gnome. Ava got out with a six pack of Miller Light beer and a bottle of the cheapest vodka she could find. She was dressed in just a slip that did absolutely nothing to hide her figure. She walked up to the door of the teen's room and knocked. He opened the door and saw her then the booze. Without a word, he let her in then closed the door. "*I usually don't do freebies, but you brought my favorite drank.*" The boy chugged a can of the beer. Ava came over to him and pulled his boxers down. She then pushed him back to the bed and got on top. She forced his hands back and into a pair of cuffs on the headboard. He smiled then said, "*hell yes.*" Ava then pulled a knife and put it to his throat. "*I think you need to tell me what is with the woman and*

Santa.” Whether it was the stress of the situation or the hot woman straddling him Jimmy didn’t know or care. Ava looked back and saw he was hard. She slid down onto him as she put the knife back to his throat. She said, “*tell me before you come, or I’ll cut it off and leave you to bleed out.*” Jim said, “*some guy paid me to have sex with the two of them as well as the Elvis looking fucker.... that is all I know.*” Ava opened the bottle of vodka then took a drink. She then dumped the bottle over the two of them as she ground on him. After the bottle was empty, she drove the knife into Jim’s chest. She kept grinding on him until he grew still and flaccid. On the way out, she set the vodka-soaked body on fire and left the motel for good.

The next day Janice sat in her office while JG half watched the video while she half watched her hands as they partially covered her eyes. Next to her was the newspaper talking about the fire at Steve’s motel and the dead runaway. James “Jimmy” Williams was a sixteen-year-old runaway from Canton, Ohio. The paper quoted the parents who were talking about his drinking and how they tried to put him in a place that could help. Janice checked what she came to know as gnome vision and saw the tire strike the gnome then pull away. The car did some damage, but it didn’t break the camera. She got a clear image of Ava going in then coming out as the fire was starting. Janice asked, “*what connection could Ava have to all this?*” JG turned her back to the video then said, “*what does any of that matter. This proves she is still here and that should be enough.*”

Wednesday’s paper had the suicide of the principal of a charter school as the headline. From what Janice could piece together from the crappy reporting was that Gregg Allen saw the story about the fire and killed himself rather than being around when DNA evidence linked him with the boy. It was an open secret that the state had DNA profiles of all their workers and they would have him as soon as it matched. In a conversation with Sean, he had said that the DNA thing was, “*a lot of crap. No police department would ever collect such information without a warrant or probable cause.*” The paper mentioned he left behind a wife, seven grown children, and twelve grandchildren. Sean asked, “*is it possible he was just in the closet as a homosexual or some sort of pedophile?*” Janice understood Sean and is ancient thinking, but she also knew that the two were not the same thing. She said, “*there was something off in the video. It was like he*

was trying to make small talk with her. He also got angry when she stopped him.” Sean said, “what about the other person in the room...the one giving directions?” Janice went back and played the video again, and the two male voices were different. The one that said on your knees was slightly different from the attempted small talk.

Janice knew she couldn't go to a crime scene, so she did the next best thing. She spoke with the officers that worked it. *“Yeah, the fire guys said there was a lot of tech for such a crappy room. A sixty-inch plasma on the wall was tied into the internet with a camera. A detective thinks that someone was watching whatever was happening in that room and may have even caught a view of the fire... Poor little bastard.”* Janice left the two officers with their free pitcher of beer and went back to her office. At her desk she wrote, *“if the perp had better gear in the room then why have Allen record the sex?”* Brandon looked over her shoulder and said, *“you wrote a bad word.”* Without thinking, Janice said, *“sex isn't a bad word.”* She looked over at the twelve-year-old Brandon sitting in a chair with his leg up in the last outfit he ever wore to her office. She had told him he needed to wear a tucked in button-down shirt with slacks and a tie to her place of work. In what should have been a starter in his teenage rebellion years, Brandon wore a pair of tan slacks, multi pastel plaid shirt with bow tie. He was playing the old Gameboy he bought at a game store a few months before he died. Brandon looked over at her and said, *“maybe you should go and talk to her. It would seem she could use some help.”*

Janice checked the GPS tag she put on Margaret's car and saw she was in downtown Akron near the All-American Bridge also known as the Y-Bridge because of the lane split that forms the shape of a Y and the Why Not Bridge because of its notorious reputation for suicides. *“I don't know how it really started. I was in love, and he was everything to me. He also owed a lot of money to some guys that would have killed him for not paying.”* Margaret looked over the side of the bridge. *“The first time he told me I didn't have to he would find a way, but I thought that it would show him I loved him, so I did it. The guy was harsh and nasty smelling. I could feel his hands on me for days after it was over.”* Margaret looked at the stranger, *“I soon found out that I was sold to these guys and I had no choice.... Well, that wasn't true for long. I eventually turned my self into the police who arrested me for underage prostitution then they found me*

some help.” The Stranger asked, “what about Allen?” Margaret turned to the strange woman surprised to hear the name. Margaret said, “about a month ago someone sent a file with what was supposed to be my sealed juvenile records. There were instructions and a message on how he would ruin my and my husband’s lives if I didn’t do what he said.”

Margaret put one foot over the side aiming for the street below. Janice said, *“think about Samuel, he knows there is something wrong, and he wants to help you.”* Margaret looked at Janice saying, *“he will never forgive me.”* Janice said, *“not if you don’t give him the chance to forgive you. Also, if you do this, then that monster will win, and the video recordings will be all that is left of you and Allen.”* Margaret pulled in close and asked, *“what recordings?”* Janice was able to pull Margaret in before anyone saw her on the side of the bridge. She helped her to her car where she showed her first the video then a police report about all the camera’s in the motel room. *“Something felt odd about that boy being kept in that teenager’s wet dream of a room. There was no way Allen could have done all of that,”* Margaret said as she fought back her tears for the lost boy and a man she thought was to blame. Janice said, *“given time the police or the paper will find out what they had on Allen, but for now no one knows about you.”* Margaret turned to Janice and said, *“well just maybe that should change.”*

Margaret stood behind a series of microphones with every network logo. She was with a lawyer, her pastor and a man that dwarfed her usual six-foot even height. *“When I was sixteen I was sold into sex slavery by a man that I thought was my boyfriend and there stayed until I was nearly eighteen and I found help from the police. It was the worst time of my life until the last month when I let a man use me and my fear about my past to abuse a young boy and use a friend.”* Janice watched as Margaret talked about how she was contacted then told she had to do what he said, or he would ruin her life. She also outed Gregg Allen as a secret pedophile who was also being blackmailed by the person. Gregg had lied about his record to get the job where he never touched any of the students, but he did find what he wanted on the internet and back alleys. As she spoke, she was joined by an FBI agent named David Sampson, the Chief of Police, and the Mayor of Akron as they took questions about the search for this man and what was next for Margaret.

The next day Janice met with Margaret in lockup. She was in an orange jumpsuit behind a pane of glass. *“I can’t help but think that this is the freest I have felt in the last month.”* Janice asked, *“what are they going to do now?”* Margaret said, *“well first I am going to be released today. The district attorney cut me a deal, and with my cooperation, I will be free and have no charges at all. Then they said they would go after the person or persons that did this as well as the woman from your video that killed that poor boy.”* Janice was surprised to see such compassion from a person that was used in such a horrible way. Margaret said, *“when I was on that bridge I said to myself this was my lowest point and if I can find my way out then everything else would be better. Living with hate and fear will just ruin what little time you have on this earth.”* Ava watched as a news report on CNN talked about her while the Spanish subtitles ran below the screen. She was in a small village in Mexico waiting for her boat that would take her home and away from the long arm of the American Law.

Scott Scalene sat in his dark, dank apartment using a pricy system to turn the multiangle camera system he had installed in the motel room into top-quality porn he could sell for top dollar. This one would be his masterpiece with the man that ruined his life as the star as well as the teacher that flunked him then had him expelled when she found him in a back room with a younger student. He was expelled then arrested eventually being labeled a sex offender. The boy was something he found on the street. A nameless homeless thing he would eventually bury with the others he had in his favorite place. He laughed knowing they would never find him even as the fiber optic camera the police were using followed his every move. When they moved in, he went to lockup crying and screaming disclosing information on everything he ever did as well as all his clients. In total sixty-five people were arrested and charged. Sean said how he even confessed to the Kennedy assassination and the Lindbergh baby.

Chapter Three

Dennis Scott sat on a bench next to a bottle wrapped in a paper bag. This was the usual way a person hides alcohol when in a park, but Dennis didn't drink and even if he did this wouldn't be the day for a drink in the park. The man that was hiring him said to be in the park with a bottle of Arizona Tea in a bag with the top showing and wait for someone to approach. As he sat there, several people stared, but no one approached. Dennis had the nickname of K Bar but not for the knife Ka-Bar brand military knife used by the Marines but because he likes to use a crowbar on his victims and K fits in the group he was a part of. Dennis, Jac "K Nine" Deric and Billy Ray "K Sea" Jacks were known as the Tre Ks although they had no actual connection to the Ku Klux Klan. When you hired the Tre Ks, you hired chaos in a can. If something needed broke or someone needed to be broken, then you hired them.

Dennis hated what he called the "hide and seek bullshit," and he was ready to walk away when a man in a tweed jacket walked up. He was dressed in a tweed jacket over a tweed vest, a white shirt, a burgundy bow tie, and slacks. He sat next to Dennis who looked out of place in jeans, and a dirty Slipknot t-shirt. Dennis said, *"look unless you're the guy from that note then you better get your faggot ass off that seat before I kick your ass worse than Aids."* The man just smiled then said, *"Mister Scott I would kill you right now, but I was hired to retain you and your group's assistance, so can we just get on with this, so I can get back to fucking your wife."* Dennis just looked at this man for a second or two then he broke out in a laugh. *"that's not how we do business. We never meet in person, and there are never written physical instructions. Go to the site pay for what you want then go to the thread listed on the receipt."* The man Dennis would call Prissy Tweed said, *"consider it done."* He went to get up when Dennis asked, *"why the meeting?"* The man said, *"I wanted to see your face. I also wanted you to know that if you fail or speak to the authorities, then my face will be the last thing you see."*

Dennis and Billy-Ray sat in a parked 1984 primer gray El Camino watching their target. *"Dam K-Bar did the fag motherfucker say anything about this being above a cop bar. I counted*

at least ten pigs in the hour we sat here.” Dennis didn’t answer he just thought about the look on the man’s face. The resolve that made him think about the job and if it was worth the money. Dennis said, *“the guy wants the place burned and the bitch dead. I bet that we could do both and kill some pigs with a big fucking bomb.”* Billy-Ray said, *“shit, then we need that fuck stick. I hate doing business with that raghead.”* Dennis pulled out his phone and looked up John Smith. It was most likely nowhere near his real name, but it didn’t matter. The man knew bombs, and it was what they needed. Hector Ernesto Ramon Garcia was raised as a Catholic, but he found that with a Pakistani keffiyeh and a fake accent most of his clients wouldn’t have known he was from Kentucky and not the middle-east. One of his VoIP numbers got a call from the Tre Ks. He said to himself, *“great I wonder what the redneck retards wanted.”*

The bomb was simple but heavy. All Hector had to do was place it in the middle of the room then point the laser at the door and press the button. A minute later the laser would become the trigger, and the bomb would go off when the beam was broken. Most of the weight was from the canisters of napalm that would spread and consume the office and bar. The job included killing the woman but not the girl. Dennis figured that she would be a bonus. One that all three of them would share. All they needed was for the woman to leave then they could go to work. About an hour later, Janice left the office for the day. For once she didn’t have any open cases, but she did have someone waiting for her at her new home. JG stayed behind so she could study in peace away from her roommates and the eternal party that was her shared apartment. Their first goal was the hardest and wasn’t a part of the paying gig. They needed to take the girl without alerting the bar full of police below.

A knock at the door woke JG from a study coma. She went to the door and opened it receiving the probe ends of a taser. She fell to the floor as the jolts shook her petite frame. Before she passed out the man with the gun said, *“well now little missy aren’t we gonna have some fun.”* Dennis taped JG using the entire roll of duct tape as Billy-Ray and Jac placed the bomb and canisters around the room, placing them where they were told to maximize the blast and fire. The one that hired them watched the three do their work from a panel van. He took off his hat then the fake beard. With the hat and beard off it was clear that he was a she. Bethany Smyth changed

into a pair of black Capri slacks, a white sleeveless blouse, and a rose-covered scarf. She called her employer, *“the boys are doing their work.”* The person on the other side of the call said nothing. Bethany asked, *“do we pay them or take them out when the job is done?”* Ava said, *“dealers choice, but if you can, it would be better to leave nothing behind.”* Bethany said, *“they are taking the girl.”* Ava thought about it then said, *“too bad for her. Let them do whatever they are going to do then make sure they are all taken care of.”*

JG woke up with her feet tied to one end of a table and her hands tied to the other. She was stretched out facing down and naked. A hand caressed a butt cheek then a male voice said, *“it would be a crime not to take a little something.”* Another voice said, *“get your fucking hands off her. She is worth more as is and not used.”* Jac leaned in and whispered, *“I’ll give him an hour then I’ll take what’s mine bitch.”* JG’s mouth was taped shut and they had her stretched out, so she couldn’t move. Bethany watched them as she thought about her past and what she had said she would do if she found someone in the same trouble. About an hour and Dennis said, *“we found a buyer and little girl you will wish you died in the fire.”* Bethany got up and said, *“time’s up.”*

Sean and Janice watched as the bomb squad removed the bomb parts from the building. The three men didn’t know about the camera in the office that turned on and alerted Janice when the door stood open for longer than one minute. She gave the police the footage of them assaulting then kidnapping JG and finally setting the bomb. The three men wore masks, but all three of them had sleeveless shirts and Triple K on their shoulders. One of the officers on the scene said, *“we’ve been building a case against these guys for about a month.”* Up in the window of her office, Janice could see the five-year-old Brandon. He was waving to her, and she fought like mad the urge to wave back. One of the officers on the scene said, *“I don’t think we are going to need a trial for these boys. No, I am willing to bet that when we find them, they won’t go quietly.”*

Jac said, *“I think that is enough time. If fucker can’t call us back, then she’s ours, and we should have some fun.”* Jac went over to JG and while holding her head licked her face. Dennis slapped her ass saying, *“good and firm.... Me first.”* The three men started to argue about who went first not seeing the person slowly slip into the room. She was in all black from her feet to the mask covering her face. Jac said, *“now listen mother fucker I don’t do sloppy anything bitch.”* Billy-Ray turned around and saw the woman in the back with the sword just in enough time to catch the blade as it passed across his stomach. The blade was sharp, and it cut deep spilling his guts onto the floor. She kicked him over then in one fluid motion she drew and threw a knife at Jac. The blade buried in his throat. Jac trying to get free from the blade finished the job and cut his own throat. Dennis dropped the bottle of baby oil he had in his hands and went for his gun on a table. The woman moved just a hair quicker and struck cutting his hand off at the wrist. He screamed as he pulled the stump away backing up against a wall. Bethany pulled her mask down and said, *“this is one fag that just can’t let you win.”* Using all the force in her swing and body, she swung around and struck Dennis in the throat breaking the blade in the bone and wall.

Bethany dropped the broken blade and went to the tied and taped JG. She was covered in blood from one of the men laying on the floor. Bethany leaned in and whispered, *“under normal circumstances, I would say your welcome, but I can’t let you live.”* She kissed JG on the cheek then stroked her bare back down to her ass. She then got on the table straddling JG laying down on top of the tied girl. Bethany pulled something from a bag then she whispered into JG’s ear, *“it will look like these morons used heroin to control you, but they gave you too much. You will go to sleep and not wake up. It will be as peaceful as I can make it.”* JG decided not to beg knowing it wouldn’t help, and this person just might want it. All she did was start to cry as the needle went into her arm. Bethany got up and started to pull Dennis away from the wall when the near-dead Billy-Ray rolled over and fired a revolver he had in his pocket hitting Bethany in the head. He then pulled out his phone and called for help saying, *“you hold on there. Don’t let her win.”*

The first responders on the scene found a nearly dead Billy-Ray on the floor. He was able to tell them that the woman gave JG a lethal dose of heroin just before he passed out. He died a few hours later. The medics gave her a shot to counteract the drug then they rushed her to the

hospital as the police moved into a scene straight from a horror film. One of the officers on the scene found Bethany's car keys and found her car. He hit the unlock not knowing it was a booby-trap. The car exploded taking the officer and all the evidence with it. After the bomb went off, the police cordoned off the block and did a thorough search. Janice went to the hospital to meet with JG as she was brought in. Her parents were on their way. It had been a few years since Janice had seen either of them and she wasn't sure just how they would take what happened to JG. A doctor that seemed familiar to Janice told her that JG would make a full recovery but would be out for a while. As the doctor walked away, she realized it was her old neighbor from when she was just a child. She also remembered he died twenty years ago. Janice looked down the hall then back the other way. No one saw her talking to herself. She sat down thinking how she was starting to have trouble distinguishing between reality and imagination. Her hallucinations were starting to trick her.

Janice looked up and saw her father. He was looking his age with the stern disapproval he wore for the last few years she lived in his house. Steven Grant was a humorless man at the best of times, but no one felt that as keenly as his youngest daughter. He had a mop and bucket and was mopping the floor when he saw her. At first, he didn't recognize her. He hadn't seen her since the fight near the time Brandon was born. Janice wasn't sure if he was real or something her mind cooked up trying to relive past events and blending them into the current ones. Ever since he lost his job as a teacher, Steven worked as a janitor at the hospital. He was fond of saying that you should put your best in everything you do so he mopped with efficiency. As he worked his way to the woman that looked like his daughter, he tried to think about what he could say. How could he speak to her after what he had said back on the last day he would ever see his grandson.

Janice was always a quiet child. Steven would say, "*it's hard to remember Janny is in the room.*" Janice Grant had a brother and sister that were much older than her so that by the time she was sixteen they were out of the house with Mark working as a Lutheran youth-pastor in Cleveland and her sister Marsha married to a banker living in New Jersey. Janice would watch people trying to see if she could predict what they were going to do just by what they did. She

started to suspect that her father was up to something. He would come home late from school and leave at night to tutor, but his name wasn't on the tutor list. She suspected he was having an affair. Her mother Diana was prone to fits of anger and depression that at another time could have been diagnosed and treated, but then it was just ignored. Diana had beaten Janice with a ruler because as she put it, *"little girls need to know their place."* She then held her and cried until Janice forgave her.

Steven approached Janice as she sat in the hospital. He said, *"I wasn't sure it was you it's been a while."* Janice looked up at him then looked back down. Steven looked back at what he said and tried to think of something that wasn't so hostile. He stood there for a full three minutes until Janice said, *"you didn't know it was me or know what to say because you are not in my life and I think we should keep it that way."* She then looked behind him and saw her father's father with the bullet wound in his head that the funeral home just couldn't cover right. The man she knew as grandpa Tim was shaking his head at her then looking to his son. Steven looked at where she was looking and when he didn't see anything he looked back to her then left.

Back at home, Janice sat down in her new living room and stared out an open window at the trees and the sounds of singing birds. She closed her eyes then opened them to see her old living room from when she was just a girl. On a loveseat across from her, she saw herself and Stephen Nathanael Lee or Nat. He was her first adult relationship. She was sixteen, and he was a seventeen-year-old senior on the track team. They were making out. She could remember how he felt, his smell and taste. She would sit in his lap as they kissed and touched. She could remember the feel of his firm young body up against hers, the feel of his lips, his hands on her. This was close to her first time with him or any boy. Like so many, he would later abandon her but right there and then he was the only thing on her mind. Janice remembered seeing him a few years ago. He was married with two kids and working as an accountant with a small firm based in Canton, Ohio. His runner's body was gone replaced with the look of a man that was a professional sitter.

Nat looked around then said, *“you know I love you and this is the right thing.”* Janice stopped kissing his neck and said, *“right, wrong, what does any of that matter... All I do know is that this isn’t going any further than this.”* She could feel his erection through his pants. She pulled her shirt loose so he could put a hand up and touch her bra encased breast. As he did this, he started to thrust upward dry humping her. Janice remembered this was the day she decided she would let him go all the way. It was there with his hands up her shirt that she planned her first time. Back then she didn’t do anything without a plan. She whispered into his ear, *“not now but maybe after the dance on Saturday.”* He stopped touching her and asked, *“really, are you sure... I don’t want to force, I mean....”* He had gone on stammering to the point that she couldn’t tell what his point was. Janice looked around then she pulled her shirt off and placed his hands on her chest. She said, *“I have never been sure of anything more in my life.”* She knew this was crap, but it did the trick, he had stopped trying to pressure her into an impromptu sex session.

Later that day she met with her two best friends, Jennifer Green and Alison Green. They were not related, but everyone called them the Green sisters. She knew Jennifer for as long as she could remember. Their friendship was the one true thing in her life. Janice could remember her almost feeling attracted to Jennifer. When they were twelve, they would talk about kissing boys, and somehow it became about just kissing. They had kissed, and while it felt wrong, it also felt right. They never spoke about it again. Alison was a year younger, but she was dating a senior on the football team and had gone all the way with him. Their relationship would eventually lead to teen pregnancy and a marriage that would end in about five years. They were talking about the dance when Janice told them her plan, *“Nat’s parents are going to be up in Cleveland with his sister so we will have the house to ourselves.”* Alison said, *“just make sure you have a condom because he won’t remember.”*

The next day while studying in her room Janice heard something she didn’t think was possible. Her father was laughing. He was on the phone with someone, and it sounded like he was flirting with whoever it was. It was a playful banter that reminded her of how she and Nat spoke. Hearing her father speak in a kind playful tone made him seem like he was a different

person. Her mother was outside washing her silver 1983 Datsun 300zx. The car was her happy place. It was a gift from Janice's father on their fifth anniversary. Whenever she was sad or angry, Diana would go out and either go for a drive or wash the car. Her father's call ended, and he went back to his usual scowl. Janice wondered how he became this man. From everything, she heard he was a friendly warm human being at one time, but something soured him. Janice grabbed her small video camera and waited for her father to make his move. About ten minutes later, he got up and went to the door. He said to Janice, "*let your mother know I'm going to the club.*" Janice went to say she was just outside, but her father left before she could say anything.

Janice had Nat's Ford Escort, and she used it to follow her father. He went past the golf course where he had a membership. He and her mother referred to it as the club. He drove out to a seedy little motel near the old Richfield Coliseum where the Cleveland Cavaliers played. He went into the rental office and came out with a key. On the way into his room, he placed a bright orange tie on the door. About ten minutes later another car pulled up to the motel near where her father was. The car was familiar somehow. Janice stopped breathing when she saw her best friend Jennifer get out of the car. She went up to the door with the tie and knocked. Her father opened the door and kissed her. A long slow kiss with hands in every wrong place. Her father was pushing forty and Jennifer was sixteen. Janice got out of the car and went to the door. It was a cheap room with cheap windows that echoed what was happening in the room. She would live with the sounds of her father having sex with her friend for many years. There was a tear in a curtain and using the video camera she recorded a few minutes of them then she left.

Janice drove around for a while trying to make sense of what she just learned. Janice would tell Jennifer about how her father acted. Somehow this girl that acted as a confidant also was her father's lover. She wondered just how long this was going on. Was her father a pedophile? Was Jennifer being used or was she just damaged? Janice found herself parked in front of Nat's house. She looked up at Nat's Parent's room. Their lights were off. It was around eleven at night. Nat's room was in the basement with its own entrance. She went to his door and knocked. He was awake studying for a test. He opened the door and could tell that something was wrong by the look on her face. He was in a tee-shirt and boxers. She pushed him back

saying, *“don’t say a word.”* She kissed him as she pulled off his top then her own. He started to say something, but she stopped him saying, *“no don’t say anything.”* She reached back and unhooked her bra letting it hit the floor. He reached up and touched her naked breasts for the first time. He had warm hands, and his touch gave off a tingly feeling in her. She pulled down his boxers and touched him. They made their way back to his bed where he pulled off her jeans and panties. At the moment she had forgotten what she just learned; she was in the moment at that was all that mattered. He felt warm and inviting with a scent of body spray and the faint smell of sweat. They came eye to eye, and he entered her. He went slow and as gentle as he could. About the time he was finished she remembered Alison and the condom warning. In their haste, neither of them went for a condom.

Nat wanted to drive her home, but Janice wanted to walk. Her house was just about two blocks away, and she said, *“I need time to think about what just happened.”* She kissed him then left him in his room standing by the door naked. On the way home she said, *“OK I am an adult now, and as an adult, I need to do something about this.”* She walked a few more steps then stopped asking, *“but what should I do?”* Before she could see the truth, she would normally talk to Jennifer, but now she wasn’t sure if she even knew her. She thought about all the times she and Jennifer were in her house with her father watching them. As young girls, they would swim topless not thinking about it as being wrong. Janice made it home to find all the lights on. Her mother was pacing back and forth mumbling to herself. Janice went inside and past her mother who didn’t say anything to her at first, but then she stopped her asking, *“have you seen my pills?”* Diana was having an anxiety attack and hadn’t even noticed her daughter wasn’t home or was just getting back around one am. Janice helped her look for the pills until she found them in the glove box of the Datsun.

Janice woke to the smell of onions and garlic. She fell asleep and was dreaming about the event when Bill got home and had started to cook dinner. He was frying kielbasa sausage with a potato dumpling called a pierogi. He made this with fried onions, peppers, and mushrooms. She went over and kissed him saying, *“so, I saw my father at the hospital today.”* Bill looked at her then to the door. He asked, *“should we expect the police?”* Janice popped a slice of sausage in

her mouth. She said, *“no, he said something, but I shut him down without any violence.”* Janice saw the concern on his face and felt like she didn’t deserve it. She then looked around the room for Brandon, but he was never around when Bill was near. Bill said, *“I’m just glad I didn’t see that feckless bastard.”* The bad blood between Bill and her father was at odds with Bill’s usual demeanor. He would most likely never forgive her father for that day at the hospital. Brandon was born a month premature. At the hospital, her father had said, *“maybe we should just smother the little thing and put it out of its misery. After all, any child of hers will just turn on you.”*

After dinner, the two went down to the park and walked along the river. It had been raining, and the river was starting to crest its banks and flow onto the path. This was a usual occurrence that was supposed to be fixed when they tore out some of the old dams along the Cuyahoga River, but even with the dams gone the river still flooded the path. Janice thought about how some things are going to happen no matter what you do. It was times like this when she wondered if her mother would have found out about her father’s affair with Jennifer if she hadn’t said anything. Her mother was already building to something, but just maybe things would have been different.

Janice went to talk to Jennifer. At first, she acted like she didn’t know what she was talking about then Janice played the video. All the color went out of Jennifer’s face as she watched herself on top of her best friend’s father. Janice realized she could never look at Jennifer and see her friend again all she could see was the face she was making while on top of her father. Jennifer said, *“this will ruin your father and kill your mother. You know you can’t tell anyone.”* Janice took the recording and went to the door. She turned and said, *“you better get ready for what’s about to happen.”* A copy of the recording went to Jennifer’s parents. They called the police. Jennifer was sixteen and above the age of consent, but it didn’t stop them from arresting him and letting the recording leaked to the press. Her father was fired from his teaching job and was told that no one would ever hire him as a teacher again. The stress of her husband’s affair and the shame of who he was sleeping with was too much for Diana. About a week after Steven was fired, she killed herself. They found her hanging from a rafter near her car. She spent that night cleaning the car and had rubbed so hard that she left marks in the paint.

Janice found herself in a one parent household with a father that couldn't look his daughter in the face. He blamed her for the loss of his profession as well as the death of her mother. About a year later, Jennifer moved into the house. They would Marry when she turned eighteen and as far as she knew they were still together. As soon as she could legally do it, Janice moved out using inheritance and income from a fast-food job to rent an apartment from a former police officer turned private investigator. Her outing her father and best friend made her a pariah at school. She would date Nat for about another month before he said, "*I don't see this going anywhere.*" She had been going to him almost every night thinking they were making love not just having sex. He would be the last boy she dated until she met Bill. About a day after the video came out Alison told her, "*I don't want to ever see or speak to you again.*" Alison ended up being Jennifer's maid of honor at the wedding.

Her office and the bar where a crime scene and off limits to both her and Sean, so they met at the park. He said, "*I have news. The woman was hired by Ava Franko.*" Janice asked, "*are you sure?*" He replied, "*the police traced a transaction back to a small town in Mexico near where Ava got on a boat and went to that island near Cuba. I think she isn't finished yet, but I just don't see why she is interested in you or me.*" Janice saw two children playing on a jungle-gym. She asked, "*what about the three men?*" Sean said, "*I think they were hired by the woman but then something happened that made her terminate their contract, but we may never know what really happened.*" JG was recovering, but she couldn't remember anything past being tasered at the office, whether it was PTSD or the heroin no one knew. Sean handed her a sealed envelope. He said, "*your father gave this to me.*"

Janice opened the envelope and found two handwritten letters and a couple of pictures. One letter was from him, and the other was from Jennifer. The pictures were of them with their two children. One of the children looked like Brandon when he was five-years-old. The other was a girl that looked like Jennifer at the age of nine. She couldn't bring herself to read either letter. Knowing they were happy with this beautiful family while her son and mother were both

dead didn't seem right. She was sure that they wanted to be a family again just like she was sure that it was just to rub their happiness in her face. Janice took the letters and put them in a pocket. She started to rip the photos, but she stopped and put them in a drawer. She pulled out her phone and called the police to see when she could get back into her office. They said that it would be about a week but if she needed something an officer could meet her there and let her in. It was implied that they would inventory anything taken. Janice didn't want anything for herself, but she did want to get JG's books for her.

Chapter Four

Ava sat in her study watching the local news from Cleveland online. She had lived in Ohio for five years working on her cover while doing the most business she had ever done in her life. Even with her business being online it still paid to be in America. She checked the new bills and saw they were as flawless as the ones lost. The employer sent replacement bills for the bills taken by the feds as well as replacements for others which would change the coding of the program just in case the feds figured out their plan. She stopped working when she saw the story about the woman and the three men. At first the news talked about Bethany as if she was a victim, but eventually, they named her as a killer. Bethany was more than just an employee she was a lover of Ava. It was her touch that helped her live with that man she pretended to love. In the past week, she lost most of her business and now a lover. Bethany was by no means her only lover. Ava had many of both sex and every gender.

Out by the pool was the new pool boy. Hector was seventeen and happy to have a job. This island was nothing like where he was living back in Mexico. When he was hired, he was asked if he would be open to anything. The mistress was beautiful, and he was hoping that she meant sex. He soon found out it meant so much more. From the day he stepped on the island he has never slept alone. Hector slept with everyone from the fifteen-year-old girl who cleans the guest rooms to the sixty-year-old chef. He tried sleeping with one of the other men at the insistence of Ava, but he found the act distasteful. He noticed that Ava was watching him as he cleaned the pool. As per her rules, he was naked while working with the pool. Ava got up and dove into the pool swimming over to Hector. She came up and out of the water next to him and said, *"I'm bored Hector, and I just want to be distracted."* He replied, *"I would do anything to help you, Miss Ava."* Ava looked over at Vanessa, a sixteen-year-old girl from Columbia who was working as a servant. Ava said, *"I think I know what would make me happy."*

Janice walked around for a few days with the letters in her pocket. Every day she would transfer them from one pair of slacks to another never once reading either of them. With her business on hold, while her office was a crime scene, she found the time to look around her new

place. She explored the park including the hiking trails, she watched the children play in the water park built by the city for the residents. It was free for any young person if their parent could prove they were a resident. Anyone else had to pay to get in. Occasionally, she would catch a glimpse of Brandon following her. His age would change depending on where they were from a toddler in the water park to a tween near the river. He kept his distance and never said a word. While she watched for him, she also thought about Sean's question. Why was Ava, so hell-bent on killing them? She had sent a very expensive assassin to kill her and burn down the office and bar. While she was lost in her thoughts, she never saw the man following her with the camera hidden in a shirt pocket.

Ava undressed the young Vanessa slowly from behind as she whispered into her ear, "*you are so beautiful I could just eat you up.*" Vanessa just looked at the naked Hector standing in front of her. She was new to the island and had never been with anyone before. Hector became the first man to see her bare chest. With every piece of clothing that came off of Vanessa, Ava stroked her body and kissed her neck. Soon she was naked and Vanessa new this meant she was about to lose something that she was told to never give away to anyone but her husband. Ava pulled her back until Vanessa's head was on her chest. She waved Hector over as she used her own legs to spread Vanessa's legs. Ava held Vanessa tight against her chest as Hector entered her. Together they were a red-hot blaze of passion, fear, and confusion. Ava ground into Vanessa's back as her nails cut red ribbons of blood down the girl's chest. Hector pushed Vanessa up and entered Ava whose excitement for what was happening amped up. Vanessa was caught between the two as they ground and cut at each other and her. She then felt something white hot and sharp cut across her neck. Vanessa struggled to get free and stop the bleeding coming from her neck, but the two held her in place until she was gone. Ava lifted a blood-soaked hand to an equally blood-soaked Hector and said, "*I love afternoons like this.*" When they were finished Hector put the body in the incinerator just like he did with the others.

Janice got home just in time to hear the shower running. She smiled and undressed. She decided to join Bill in the shower. She went into a steamy room and reached her hand in to find her better half's better half. A voice said, "*what the fuck.*" She pulled the curtain open and saw

her brother-in-law Mike instead of Bill. He was naked and trying to cover himself. Janice backed out of the room leaving the door open and her clothes on the floor. She came out to see Bill standing there with a couple of towels. Bill said, *“oh, I see you found Mike.”* Janice went past him into their bedroom where she came face to face with Mike’s twelve-year-old son Scott as he was getting dressed. She grabbed a towel from the bed and wrapped herself while she turned her back on the nearly naked boy. Janice asked, *“Bill could I speak with you for a moment?”* Mike was a securities broker and a single parent. He could work from anywhere his phone could get a signal, but he worked mostly from home. Bill said, *“Mike and Scott came over to see the new place. While they were here, I took them to the pool.”* Scott poked his head out and asked, *“may I come out?”* Janice felt horrible about walking in on him she said, *“I am so sorry about walking in on you.”* Scott said, *“don’t, after all, it’s your room.”* His eyes never once went above her chest the rest of the night.

Mike and Scott were planning a road trip across the country for the summer. He could work from anywhere, and Scott was out of school. Mike bought and fixed up an old motorhome. Together they would see the sights of America. As they talked a sudden chill went up Janice’s back. Standing on the fake balcony watching them from the sliding glass doors was the nine-year-old Brandon. This was the first time he was around when Bill was near. Brandon swayed back and forth then he fell backward. Janice jumped from her chair and ran to the door. She looked down the three stories and saw nothing. She turned to see the shocked faces of the two men and the boy. Bill said, *“you said, Brandon.”* Scott was a few years younger than Brandon, but he remembered him. She turned to see a picture of Brandon near the door. As quickly as she could, she said, *“I thought I saw the picture falling.”* Behind the startled men was the tween Brandon shaking his head in disapproval.

That night while in bed with Bill, Janice asked, *“have you ever thought about having another child?”* Bill looked over at her, but he didn’t say a word. From across the room, Brandon asked, *“do you remember how you were just after I died?”* Bill finally said, *“I thought we were done. I couldn’t see any kind of future.”* Bill rolled over to her and kissed her neck. *“sometimes while in one of my classes I swear I can see him there. This last class was filled with kids that*

were his age and knew him. I think it might be why I stayed teaching even after I was offered a job as a principal than an administrator with a charter school. I wanted to see where Brandon was going. Teaching them is like teaching him.” Janice reached down below the covers undoing his pajama bottoms. She rolled over on top of him as she worked her nightshirt off. Bill reached over for a condom from the nightstand, but Janice stopped him whispering, “no, I want nothing but you inside me.”

Ava turned the monitor off after watching the two have what she thought of as blah sex. Even with her on top, the sex was just boring to her. She looked at plans for the apartment building wondering just how much explosives they would need to level the building. The police were guarding the office, so striking her there would be a non-starter. She was also under siege by the American government. Ten miles away from the island was the U.S. coastguard. They were stopping every ship essentially trapping her on the island. Her employer was paying her a fortune to set their plan in motion. Her need for revenge was hurting her ability to do her job. The door opened, and a young woman walked in wearing a pair of white capri pants, a nearly see-through silk top over a white and blue striped bikini top. Yara was from Brazil. Ava essentially bought her when she was five-years-old from a poor family with nine other children. For the past twelve years, she raised Yara almost like her own child. Yara walked over to Ava climbing into her lap and kissed her on the lips.

Yara reached around and pulled the string on her top letting it fall. Ava said, “whatever it is, as long as you can do it on the island then the answer is yes.” Yara asked, “when will the old bitch be dead? She ruined our lives.” Yara got up and walked to a window. She could see Ramone, one of the gardeners. As she stared at him, she wondered if she had slept with him yet. This morning she had one of the downstairs maids. She was young but so was Yara. The girl knew her job, she also knew to keep her mouth shut and do whatever was asked of her. Yara didn’t know or care what the girl’s name was, all she cared about was getting what she wanted. Ava said, “there are a few new ones on the other side of the island.” Yara sat back down on Ava’s lap and put her head on her shoulder. She whispered into Ava’s ear, “why don’t you join me.”

Janice was on her way to a meeting after getting a call from an old client. She drove to the Café in Stow to talk about a man and a horse. Ester Braun and her family raised horses on their farm for three generations. Her pride and joy was her daughter Sadie, but her other was a two-year-old colt named Tigger. He had a coat that in the right light looked like tiger stripes. This horse was supposed to be her daughter's first horse. *"This man showed up on the farm while I was out working the backfield. He told my father he had a bill of sale and took Tigger. My daddy was kicked in the head a few years ago, and he has a hard time understanding things. He signed the paper selling the horse for a dollar."* Janice looked at the paper then said, *"with proof of sale I don't see what I can do."* Ester asked, *"how can you sell something that isn't yours?"* It was clear that Ester never got off the farm. She was from a small farming community called Lodi. It was known for farming, the Amish, and a large outlet mall. What most people didn't know was that there was a small collection of Jewish farmers living among the Amish. They moved here after the war hoping to find a place that would leave them alone. Ester wore a star of David around her neck.

The police wouldn't go after the man without arresting the father for theft. His name on the paper was Elias Stroup, but after showing his picture around to the many farms around the small town, Janice found he had several names from Ishmael Felt to Tom Smith. It was a sad fact that there were many people like this using lies and trickery to steal from small communities. What struck Janice the most was just how specific this man was with what he stole. From the back of the car Brandon said, *"it's like he has a shopping list."* Janice asked, *"yes, but who made the list?"* Brandon just raised his arms in the "whatever" motion. Brandon said, *"if he is taking such things as horses then he will need a place to board them and feed them."* Janice wasn't sure what to make of Brandon being helpful again, but he was right. Brandon went on, *"he wouldn't board them near the place where he stole them. He would also want to be near his stolen merchandise."* Janice said, *"unless the person who made the list already lives nearby."*

Janice pulled out a map of the area and started to write on it all the names of the farms and families that lived in the area. She used a survey map to outline the farms. Most of the people that had property had stolen lived on the same state route. While she searched, she found a name she remembered. The Smith farm was almost in another county on a side road that was more of a dirt path. It seemed too unreal that the most made-up name of Tom Smith would be the one that was real. Brandon said, “*or he could be innocent with the real crook just using his name.*” Janice looked back into the back seat using the rear mirror. It was the five-year-old Brandon, but he was speaking or at least sounding like the tween Brandon. Janice decided to drive over there and see what she could see.

At the beginning of Smith’s driveway was a sign, “No Trespassing. We shoot anyone coming down this drive.” About fifty feet down the road there was a gate and barbwire fence with a sign and signs that it was electrified. As she sat there a four-wheeler pulled up near the fence. A man in all camo with an AK-47 rifle attached to the handlebars. He sat there talking on a radio watching her while not saying a thing. Something felt off about him and this place. There was a flag on the back on what looked like a radio antenna. The flag was red with a dark gray cross in the upper left side leaning to the right. Janice took a picture as discreetly as possible. The man saw the camera and the gun came up to his arms. Janice took that as a sign to hit the road. On the road, she sent the picture and location to Sean to see if he had some idea who this was. About ten minutes later she got a call from one of Sean’s buddies with the police saying, “*make sure they are not following you and get as far away from them as fast as you can.*”

A flat black sedan pulled out of the driveway and started to follow Janice. The car was all black except for a blood-red cross painted on the left passenger side tilted at an angle. Janice got to route Two-twenty-four and went from forty-five mph to seventy mph. Her bright red 2014 Jeep stood out making it easier to follow, but the unknown people following didn’t seem to care if she knew they were there. She sped up to near eighty mph as she approached Saville. The other car was a Mercedes of some make, but all the branding was removed. She slowed down and took an exit that would take her to Medina. The sedan followed her as the chase went from Wadsworth road to Bear Swamp with all the hills and valleys common in a country road. The

Sedan was low to the ground, and Janice hoped that the recent rain would help her get away. It had been raining, and Bear Swamp road was prone to flooding as it approached Sharon Copley Road. The Jeep was built for off-roading, and it had a snorkel for high water. Although driving into the high water was risky, it was the only way she could see her getting away from the much faster car. She passed the closed road signs and reached the part of the road that floods to find about two feet of water on the road. Janice slowed down and made it across. She stopped and looked back to see the sedan hit the water and canter to one side. It then drifted off the road into water that was a mix of swampy stink and cow shit. Three men in dark gray suits and red ties got out into the foul water. All of them had guns.

Janice pulled onto Sharon Copley road and drove to River Styx Road on the way to state route 18 and the highway. Instead of driving home she went to the police station and called Sean. Inside the station, she was told that three men had reported her as a trespasser and were following her. Janice asked, *“and what were the guns for?”* As she asked she pulled up video from the cameras, she had on her Jeep. Two videos showed them getting out into the nasty water with AK-47s. One officer said, *“according to Montville PD they didn’t have any weapons on them or in the car, but they said something smelt wrong.”* One of the officers looked at the video and said, *“now I could be wrong, but that looked like a very short barreled rifle. I wonder if they have that on file?”* A call to the Montville Police along with an email containing the video led to another call where they said that the men were picked up by a van and had refused to press charges. The officer said, *“the van was like the car, all flat black with a large tilted cross. I think it was painted with that truck bed liner stuff.”*

Using a borrowed link with the police, Sean ran the plates of both the van and the car, but they had no apparent connection with one plate licensed to a person in Wayne County and the other in Stark county. The officer that let him run the plate through the system said, *“the car is listed as being owned by a Clarence Drake on Cherry Street in Massillon, but when I run his name there is no license issued to him.”* The officer pushed Sean aside and did a search of his own finding a criminal complaint issued by a Clarence Drake about being harassed while walking along Lincoln Way. He said, *“according to this mister Drake is blind.”* Another search

found that the van's tags were issued to a ninety-seven-year-old woman living in a nursing home in the end stages of Parkinson's disease. Sean said, *"I was told by this fed that they are investigating a cult that uses a tilted cross as their symbol. Some sort of doomsday cult preaching about the fall of religion as the fall of man and how only the true followers will live past the oncoming war."* He said that the leaning cross symbolized the failing of religion onto a sea of blood. The next day a farmer found the three rifles on the road. Two of them were classified as SBR or short barrel rifles and one of them as an actual machine gun. The Mountville Police issued an arrest warrant for the three men, and the ATF was called.

Ava was sent copies of the arrest warrants and report. The report had the name Janice James on it. She checked her computer to see if she knew any of the names on the warrant. One name led her to the name of a man that ran a Ponzi scheme back in the late eighties selling shares in a company that was set up to only sell shares. Terence Alfred Stamp would sell his soul if he thought he could make a buck or buy it back after he owned hell. Back then her mentor had helped Terence escape California and had relocated him in Mexico. She tried the numbers listed under his name, but all of them were out of service. From behind her, she heard Yara say, *"wow who is that handsome devil?"* It wasn't really a question just as the fifty-something Terence was in no way handsome. He was a sickly shade of white with graying blonde hair that was slicked back with enough grease that it gleamed in the picture. Ava said, *"grandfather would have loved him and all his Aryan-ness."* What his picture didn't show was that he was nearly seven-foot tall, but he still wore lifts in his shoes to make him seem taller. His tailored suits were cut to emphasize just how skinny he was.

Terence Alfred Stamp stood looking out a window at the compound as his people readied themselves for a possible invasion by the American government. They placed guards on every gate and extra guards on the perimeter. He was a wanted man, but there was no way the feds could know he was there, after all, he was supposed to be dead. His scheme defrauded many out of their life savings, but he was fond of saying, *"people who think they can get something for nothing deserves just that, nothing."* When the feds come, he would go into a special bunker built for him for the day that the American government collapses. An old friend told him about

this little job his employer had planned that would crash the economies of the west. He also said that Ava was working the plan. Terrence said, *“if that saucy bitch is involved then it will happen.”* He said it with a small apathetic smile on his face. His people worked to hide all the stolen merchandise they stole and all the other illegal items such as the full-auto machine guns and the explosives. A small man walked into Terrence’s office. Jim Johns was five-foot even and two plus feet shorter than Terrence. When they were together, they looked like father and son or grandson. Jim had a slight southern accent. *“Mister Terrence sir, there was a message on the site asking for a callback.”* Terrence turned and looked down at the man. After ten long seconds, he said, *“well, come on boy don’t make me ask.”* Jim backed up a little then said, *“Miss Ava wants to talk to you about a Job and as she put it, a phat payday.”*

“Ava my dear I can’t keep this line open for long. The FBI are circling the compound and coming in for a landing.” Ava looked at what should be a live feed of Terrence but instead was a cardboard cut out of Elvis. Terrence, however, was given a full topless view of both Ava and Yara. He knew that she would only do something like this because she wanted something and that something was bloody. Ava smiled knowing that the old man was staring at her chest and maybe getting a drugfree erection. She said, *“you caught us in the middle of something. I hope it doesn’t bother you.”* Terrence asked, *“Ava, I was serious about the feds, and as much as I would like to watch you fuck whatever you two are fucking I need to end this so what do you want?”* Ava looked down at her downstairs maid named Maria who was going down on her as Hector took Maria from behind. She said, *“I have someone I need dead and from what I have seen you might want her dead too.”* Terrence stopped watching the scene and changed the aspect of the picture, so only Ava was in the frame. He asked, *“the woman from the day before. You know her don’t you my dear?”*

Janice unlocked her office door and went inside. JG said she would be back as soon as she could escape her parents. Janice told her to take as much time as she needed. She said, *“don’t let this time with them pass you by because you never know when things could change, and you could lose the ability to regain ...”* She trailed off, but JG got the gist of what she was saying. Janice wasn’t looking forward to her next call. One of the officers told her that the horse was

most likely dead. He said, *“a horse requires upkeep and things that such a group couldn’t provide. It’s more than likely they butchered the horse and ate it.”* An FBI agent named Sampson told the police that satellite images showed a horse trailer but no horse. There was hope that as survivalists the cult might see value in something that didn’t need gas, but the FBI thought that such a group would think that horse medications and feed would be harder to get than gas. As she spoke with Ester the party happening in the reopened bar wasn’t helping her convey the news.

Across the street from the office were three men on motorcycles. They were all armed and had a goal. Their employer wanted this woman dead, and it didn’t matter if anyone got in the way. The head of the trio looked at the bar filled with police and said, *“if we brace the doors and set fire to the bar the bitch and the pigs will burn all the way to hell.”* One of the other bikers pulled a chain with a series of locks on it. The chain was a weapon that he used to deal with people on the road, but today it would be used to lock the doors. The man with the chain asked, *“what do we use to set the fire?”* From behind the three men, someone said, *“how about the gas from your bikes?”* They turned around to see a man in a dark suit with a hat pulled over and down obscuring his face. The lead biker went to say something, but the man quickly pulled a Glock 17 with a suppressor and shot all three men. He then pulled a bottle filled with an amber liquid, lit it and broke the bottle over the bodies.

In the morning a postal van pulled up to the gate at the compound. The driver said into an intercom, *“delivery for a Mister Stamp.”* A rather clip and angry sounding voice came over the intercom saying, *“just leave it at the gate dumbass.”* The FBI agent posing as a postal worker said, *“Because it has an insurance waiver on it I need a signature.”* The Voice said, *“someone will be out soon.”* About ten minutes later a call came over the radio *“push it.”* This was the go order for raiding the compound. Instead of sending someone to the gate the people on the inside started to run using a secret gate in the back that led onto a dirt path on a farmer’s field. The FBI sent in their waiting helicopters, and the fleeing people were stopped and cuffed. The van hit the electrified gate knocking it off the hinges. Behind it was a convoy of black Suburban SUVs. By the end of the day, the FBI had everyone they could find in zip-tie cuffs with enough evidence to

lock most of them up. The evidence wasn't hard to find. The FBI spent the last two days watching them bury it. What they didn't find was Stamp and his lieutenants. They sat in Stamp's bunker watching the feds pick apart his latest scheme. Stamp turned to his most trusted lieutenant and asked, "*did you sent Lewy, Dewy, and Dummy after the woman after I said this was the most important job for us?*" The man nodded. Stamp said, "*you should be happy that I can't kill with my mind.*" He then pulled a small automatic with a suppressor and shot the man in the gut. He counted to four then said, "*Important means do it yourself.*" He then shot the man in the head. It was clear to the others this was for them and not the dead man.

Another of Stamp's lieutenants asked, "*who was the man that killed them and what can we do?*" Stamp looked down at the body then back to the man with the question. He said, "*we finish the job and kill the woman, and as for the man I think I know who or what he was and if I am right then we do nothing.*" Stamp sat back down at the monitors and stared at the FBI as they cataloged his life. He said to no one, "*it's hard to think that this was all over a horse that we just let go into a field.*" About an hour later Stamp said, "*as soon as they are gone we will slip out and split up. I expect you to deal with the woman and meet me in Mexico.*" Another of the men asked, "*how can we abandon the cause?*" Stamp said, "*don't be stupid. This was all just a long con ending in a good payday.*" The room went silent. Stamp turned around to see the faces of his lieutenants. He clearly had misjudged his audience, and now he was locked in a room of believers that no longer believed in him.

Agent Sampson called Sean who went to Janice and together they went to see Ester. "*Sadie has been crying ever since you called. I appreciate you coming out, and I am so sorry that this became what it did.*" Janice said, "*the FBI raided the farm and arrested everyone. They also found notes on what they did with Tigger.*" Agent Sampson read the note and went to the field. Out behind a windbreak was a horse that was just standing their eating grass. Sean said, "*the FBI has your horse, and they say as soon as you want too you can come and get him.*" Ester stared in silence. Sean leaned over and said, "*oh shit I think we broke her.*" He then said, "*they seem interested in getting rid of the horse, so I wouldn't wait.*" After a very long six-count, Ester asked, "*I'm sorry but did you say Tigger was alive and with the FBI?*" Sean smiled then handed

her his phone saying, “*call someone you know with a horse trailer and tell them to meet us at the farm.*” As they pulled into the compound a large horse with faint stripes was running along the fence. He seemed to recognize Ester and couldn’t wait for her to stop. The horse leaped the fence without touching an electrified wire and met up with the stopped truck. Janice turned to Sean and said, “*I like days like this.*” Sean said, “*I nearly shit a brick when that fucking horse jumped at us.*” Janice lightly slapped Sean on the back and said, “*way to keep it classy... Good job.*”

Chapter Five

Bill forced his way into traffic as horns blared and tires squealed. At the first three lights, he made it at the yellow, but the fourth light was red, and he went through. From the back of the car Janice said, “*goddamit Bill are you trying to kill us before we get to the hospital.*” Bill looked back at a pregnant Janice with a dark stain on her jeans. Instead of slowing down he sped up finding the timing and reaching every light at the green. He jumped the curb and landed at the door to the emergency room only to see a sign saying the entrance was closed and they had to go down further. Bill pulled the car up to the right door, and an attendant met them as the first of the red and blue lights came into view. The attendant told him he had to move the car. The car was sputtering and leaking. The man turned to Bill and asked, “*so, first-time father?*”

Janice was in labor for another twelve hours as the police arrested Bill. He posted bail and made it back but not before the birth. They had already decided on the name Brandon. Janice’s grandmother was named Brandy and Bill’s father was named Brian. The doctor told him that there was a complication with the birth and they had to do a partial oophorectomy removing an ovary as well as a c-section. The doctor said, “*it’s not impossible but the likeliness of Janice getting pregnant again is unlikely.*” Bill closed his eyes, and when he opened them, he was in front of a coffin. His son was inside after an undiagnosed heart defect ended his short life. The box was open, and Brandon was inside, but it wasn’t the twelve-year-old that died on the soccer field. It was the two-year-old that would run around the house and follow him from room to room. Bill turned around to see the funeral home where the service was held. Standing there was Janice’s father with a shovel. He said, “*maybe it’s for the best. Nothing good ever happens around my daughter.*”

Bill woke up next to Janice in bed. He got up and went into the living room to find his brother Mike reading a worn letter. Bill said, “*you shouldn’t read other people’s letters, Micky.*” Mike put the letter down and asked, “*did you read this thing?*” Bill took it from him and folded it back up. He said, “*I want nothing to do with that man.*” Mike said, “*I am surprised to hear you say that. I know part of the story, but this letter speaks of things I didn’t know and.*” Bill stopped

him saying, *“I don’t want to know. That man made her life a living hell then tried to spread his hate into my family.”* Mike said, *“yes he talks about what he said and how he wished he could take it back. He also talks about Janice’s mother being bipolar and how he left Janice to care for her while he fooled around with his current wife.”* Bill asked, *“did he say who that wife was or how old she was?”* Mike said, *“yes. He talked about how he was in a park drinking trying to find the courage to go home to his wife when Jennifer started to talk to him. It started there and eventually became more adult about the time Diana decided to stop taking her medication.”* Bill opened the letter. Her father Steven wasn’t looking for any kind of redemption if the letter was to be believed. His children were at the age where they were asking questions about their older half-sister. Both he and Jennifer wanted their children to meet her and let things go from there.

Janice woke to see Bill was gone. In the corner of the room was the five-year-old Brandon. He was in his Sponge-Bob pajamas with the unknown stain in the front that just wouldn’t come out. He had his old stuffed panda in his arms with the top hat and the black spats. Bill had shamed him into letting it go when he turned nine, but Bill then put the bear into a closet. When they moved into the new apartment, she had found the bear. Bill had said, *“this was the moment I had decided to not be that guy anymore and let my son become whoever he was going to become.”* He said how the bear was a reminder of his failures as a parent. Brandon put Top-Hat Panda down, and he stood on his own looking at Janice. The bear then tipped its hat and walked out of the room. Brandon said, *“he likes to make an exit.”* Brandon then followed the bear out as Janice got up and went after them.

Janice came out and poured a cup of coffee and started to sit down only then realizing she was topless. Mike turned to Bill as Janice calmly got up and went into the bathroom and said, *“and yes, Scott is in the bathroom.”* Janice came back out saying sorry and turning to the bedroom. Mike said, *“when I said I wanted to see more of the two of you I didn’t mean this.”* The door to the bathroom opened and Scott came out with a towel wrapped around himself. Mike said, *“son do you see why you lock the door.”* Bill countered, *“no, the lock doesn’t work.”* Mike tapped the letter and said, *“tell her or not. I just think that she should know and soon.”* Bill asked, *“why soon?”* Mike tapped the letter from Jennifer saying, *“this one said that her father*

was dying, and he didn't have long." Bill said, *"men like this don't deserve to put their past behind them."* Mike shook his head and said, *"this has nothing to do with him or what he did. This is about her and her ability to let her past go. If she doesn't confront it, then she will live with her hatred of him for as long as she lives."*

Yara sat in a hot tub connected to the pool watching the sunrise. She likes to spend this time in quiet contemplation while Ava sleeps. She liked to watch the people prepare for the day. The downstairs maids cleaning the floors, dusting and cleaning Ava's sex toys. Yara thought how by tonight, at least one of these women would be on the receiving end of one of Ava's toys. On a corner of the house just outside of the camera's Yara saw Hector on his knees praying. If Ava had seen him, she would either mock him or kill him. Yara knew that he was praying for a lost cause. He had too much blood on his hands to ever be forgiven. Yara wasn't sure if she still believed or not. Her faith in God seemed like a different life she left a long time ago. She looked down into the water at her chest. As she did, she thought about her sister Izabel. From the age of sixteen, she worked the carnival wearing just a G-string, pasties with tassels and pink iridescent wings. Izabel's double-D's seemed to defy gravity as she shook and shimmied during the festivals. She did this and was still a virgin. Yara's sister Alanza was on her way to becoming a teacher, and her brother Estevo was in America on a minor league baseball team working his way to the majors.

One of the downstairs maids came over to Yara and asked, *"may I help you with anything?"* Yara seemed to awake as she moved to the other side of the hot tub, so she could face the maid. She couldn't remember the girl's name, and she was a girl about the same age as Yara herself. Yara said, *"well I can think of a lot of ways you could help me."* She smiled then said, *"but only if you want too."* The other maids had stopped when the girl walked over to the tub. They knew better than to approach this girl. The maid seemed indecisive until a sort of steel seemed to form in her eyes and posture. She stripped off her maid's uniform to reveal a body that could have been a carbon copy of Yara. She stepped down into the water and Yara came over to her placing her hand between the girl's legs. The maid stiffened then she kissed Yara on the lips. The kiss shook her. It was unabashed and innocent. Yara straddled the maid's leg putting her

own knee into the maid's crotch. The maid brought up her knee, so she had the same contact with Yara. As the two continued to do what they were doing Yara thought to herself, *"this is a good way to start a day."*

Janice found her way to her office by nine in the morning to find JG waiting for her. She still had visible bruises on her face and arms. JG could see the look of concern on Janice's face, but she went back to work trying to say "let it go" without actually saying let it go. When Janice didn't move, JG said, *"I hate clichés, but sometimes they can be right. I need to be here if only to prove she doesn't get to win."* JG then handed her an open envelope and said, *"mister Pooter sent a check, but as usual he didn't sign it. Will that cheapskate ever pay what he owes?"* Janice looked at the check and said, *"the divorce was harsh, and it cost him a lot. He blames me for showing him the truth, and he is a cheap bastard."* Janice went to call the past client about his balance and unsigned check when she saw she had an email from her website. A few years ago, she had a site built for her service. When an interested party wants to talk business, they send a request through the site, and she gets an email. A quick search of the name proved this was a real person, so she called back.

An hour later an older man walked into the office. He had to be in his seventies, but he still walked straight and with purpose. He told JG his name was Lu Louyang, but he insisted she called him Uncle Lu. Before he could ask about the bruises, Janice came in and introduced herself and led him into the office. He was born in Hong Kong, but he had moved to America at the age of sixteen to find a different life from the one his family wanted for him. He said, *"they owned a series of laundries back there, and I didn't want to wash clothes for the rest of my life."* He started a car wash in an open parking lot washing cars by hand until he could find backers and build his first car wash. *"that was sixty-nine years ago, and my business is doing well."* Janice added up the numbers to arrive at the age of eighty-five. He said, *"my son went to school, and he is a doctor in Seattle, but his son came to go to school here in Kent. He works with me in the business to help pay for his school. John is a good son, but I think he is mixed into something that could hurt his future."*

John Louyang was in his second year at Kent state working on a business degree with a minor in accounting. He was five-foot-five with straight black hair and black rim glasses. Janice made a note that he was pencil thin and dressed like a hipster in blue jeans with a blue sweater over a blue button-down shirt with the tails showing under the sweater. The temperature was around seventy degrees on the way up to ninety making his outfit impractical unless you figure that he would spend most of his time in air-conditioned classes and an air-conditioned library. He had a group of what seemed to be likeminded friends that all dressed just like him. In fact, it almost seemed like a uniform. Janice followed him from class to class then to the Library. There he went into a women's studies section and pulled a book, but he then put the book back. Janice sat there and watched the book. A few minutes later and a teenage girl with a nose ring and dressed like she was auditioning for a punk rock revival with leather and a dog collar went to the book. She took something from it and left.

Janice watched him for the rest of the day doing these dead drops. He never took anything for what he was planting, so John didn't handle the money. On what ended up being his last drop, Janice waited for him to leave and went to the book. Inside was a small paper envelope with six tablets that said Adderall on them. Adderall was used for Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or ADHD, but the drug is also popular as a recreational drug and is considered as addictive as cocaine. People call it a smart drug because it is believed to focus the mind. It was an open secret that Adderall overdoses were on the rise and killing on almost every college campus across the country. Janice put the pills back and watched to see who took them. To her surprise, a security guard went to the book and took the pills. Janice knew she only had one part of the story. She asked herself, "*who has the money? Who is supplying the drugs? What is with the matching outfits?*" She also wondered how she could tell Uncle Lu about what she knew.

John left his last class at noon on Thursday. He went from the class to his car and drove to the turnpike. Janice put a GPS tracker on his car, and she followed it using her computer as he went west and eventually ended up in Seattle. It was a long drive, and most of it was done in one

very long spirt. Janice knew that John's father was a doctor, so she looked up doctor Wayne Louyang online. He was a family practitioner with several partners. About four hours after he drove to Seattle John started back. John was clearly on a drug run, and his father must be the supplier. Uncle Lu gave Janice the key to John's apartment. It was a room above one of the car washes. Inside the room she found the apartment to be nearly bare. Old duct taped beanbags for furniture with a mattress on the floor, no television or a radio and a desk made from cinderblocks and a door. She also noted on just how clean it all was. He didn't own much, but John took care of what he owned. On the wall of the apartment was a few pictures of John, his family and a girl that seemed to be about his age. The family picture had his mother and father and a sister that was maybe fifteen.

Lu Louyang sat in Janice's office and stared at the evidence she gave him. Lu said, "*I know this is the wrong thing to say, but this is the kind of thing I would have expected from my granddaughter Marilyn. She is fifteen and already has a criminal record for selling pot.*" He looked at Janice and asked, "*could this be her doing this?*" Janice shook her head, "*Adderall is a controlled substance. Only a psychologist or medical doctor can prescribe it, and any doctor over prescribing would be watched by the feds. She would have to be able to not only write the prescription but also have it filled. Someone would take note of a fifteen-year-old buy enough of the drug to sell.*" Janice pulled out a picture of the envelope with the pills and said, "*what I don't understand is why is your son doing this? Such a small quantity? He is risking jail for himself and his son for what had to be chump change.*"

John walked into his apartment and nearly collapsed onto the mattress on the floor. Janice watched him through the tiny camera she placed in the room. She knew it wasn't legal, but it was necessary. She was there to try and help him or maybe stop him. After two hours of watching him sleep his door opened, and the young woman from the picture walked in. She was in a pair of yoga pants and a shirt that said "Pink" across the front. Her picture had made her seem too young for this nearly twenty-year-old, but in person, she looked like she was his age. She walked over to John on the mattress and sat next to him. As she walked, she took off her shirt. Janice felt immediately dirty like she was spying on her neighbors as they made love. She was braless and

had a body that showed her yoga pants were not just for show. John stirred but after over twenty-four hours of driving he didn't wake. The girl slid her hand down to his crotch and stroked him until that part of him came awake. John woke up to the look of love and the partial nudity of this woman. She smiled, and the two kissed. The two slowly stripped and made love on the mattress. Janice watched for another couple of minutes then she turned the monitor off.

Janice gave them twenty minutes then she turned on the monitor to find they were still making love. She could remember days like this way back when she and Bill would spend so much time in bed or on a couch naked and sweaty. The girl was on top, but John wasn't just a passenger on this ride. They went for another thirty minutes then one of them finally finished. The girl slid over to John's side and kissed him again. John said, *"it felt like this trip was going to kill me, Sue."* Janice made a note of the name. Sue asked, *"how long can they do this to you and your father?"* John leaned over kissing Sue on the neck as if he wasn't going to answer her. John said, *"they don't care. We will be doing this until we're in jail or dead. It's either that or they kill my sister."* Janice went back to her notes, to the last meeting with Uncle Lu. He had said that his granddaughter was trouble. She thought that it could be possible that she fell into a kind of trouble that would make all this possible.

Sean watched the video of the two as they talked about his trip and the sister. He turned to Janice and said, *"it might help if I could see the first part of the video."* Janice had started the file after the two were done making love, but she couldn't do anything about the visible nudity of both young people. She said, *"keep it in your pants old man."* She replayed the video again, but Sean said, *"OK I have seen enough.... Unless you want to play the whole video."* He looked at Janice who just looked back in a "get on with it" expression. *"I know some people out in Washington state. I'll ask around and see what they know about the girl and if she is in any trouble that they can help with, but Janie baby you have to know what you must do?"* She hated when he went all Kojak on her but moreover when he was doing it and was right. He said, *"go talk to the client and set up a meeting with the boy. If he is innocent, then we help him if not then we call in the feds, and he goes away."* Janice turned to the live feed to see John was getting dressed and steam was coming from the bathroom. Sue came out with a towel wrapped around

her body and one on her head. She kissed John then he left. Janice went to turn the feed off before Sue lost her towel but stopped when Sue picked up a phone from her bag. She made a call. *“yeah he just left..... I’m keeping more than an eye on him.... are you sure you don’t want any of the money....? No, he has no idea..... if he weren’t such a good fuck then I would almost feel sorry for him.... No, he is nothing compared to you.”* She dropped her towel, but both Sean and Janice followed the phone knowing it was the key.

Both John and Lu watched the video with John squirming during the sex. He then froze when he heard the conversation between Sue and someone on the phone. Lu said, *“John Wayne Louyang I thought we taught you better than this. You sold your soul for a pair of tits and a night of fun.”* John said, *“it isn’t like that... I love her, and I thought she loved me.”* Janice noted that he said love and not loved. She also noted that John was John Wayne and just maybe his father was Wayne John? Sean asked, *“just how long has this been going on... The drugs, not the sex... actually no, both.”* John said that he met Sue back in Seattle and she had moved with him. Sean asked, *“if she followed you across the country then why aren’t you two living together?”* Lu said, *“because I had said he wasn’t to have a roommate under any circumstances. I wanted him to study not party.”* Janice asked, *“what does she do for a living?”* Before John could answer Sean asked, *“what is her full name and address?”* John pulled out his phone and said, *“there’s more.”*

Marylin was fifteen, but she looked much younger especially without her clothing. John told them, *“about a month after I came to school I was sent a pic of Mer like this underneath a guy as she cried. The next pic had a number to call. The voice on the other side was machine-like, and it told me to send three thousand dollars a month, or they would rape Marylin to death.”* He said how he sold everything he owned and still, it wasn’t enough. *“For some reason, they didn’t want any money from my dad, and somehow they knew when it came from him. I wasn’t to take anything from him, and he wasn’t to do anything or both he and my sister would die.”* Sean looked at the picture of his sister in her room just after a shower then back to Sue. He said, *“when mom died of cancer I promised to take care of Marylin. To watch out for her. I could kill every one of those motherfuckers with my bare hands.”* Sean said, *“it has nothing to do with the money if the girl is keeping it.”* He looked to the two girls both naked and asked, *“this might*

seem wrong, but doesn't it look like your sister is posing for the picture?" John seemed to get angry so to keep the conversation going Janice asked, *"how did the drugs start?"* John turned away from Sean and said, *"about six months ago I ran out of everything except the car. It was my mother's car and not in my name. I told them I was broke and they said how they had another plan for me."*

Wayne would write prescriptions for the drugs for patients in a dose that was just a few pills more than he would send them home with. Having a pharmacy inside his medical practice helped him skim the pills. With nearly sixty people in his care, he was able to skim a lot of drugs. John said, *"despite all the talk, the authorities never questioned all the Adderall he was prescribing, and none of the parents asked about the missing pills."* John took a long drink of the now warm and stale beer on the table. He said, *"I was told that they would tell me what books to put them in and they could collect the money. If I didn't, they would know."* Janice said, *"yes, because Sue would tell them."* Janice opened a file of the pictures she took as she followed him on those two days. While not in every shot she did manage to get several shots of Sue as she followed him. There was one shot of Sue going to a different book and taking something. John opened another beer and said, *"they are doing all this for money."* Janice said, *"no, this has nothing to do with the money."*

Lu said, *"we should call my son and have him bring Marylin here away from whoever this is."* Sean said, *"the problem is that these people have evidence that both Wayne and John broke the law. We will need to address that before moving against them."* Janice tapped on the still frame of the naked Sue and said, *"if Sean is right then we may have more than one problem. If she is involved in some way, then she might just fight us."* Lou asked, *"so what should we do?"* John called Sue, *"say where are you.... Are you busy...? I have tickets to a thing at EJ Thomas tonight and.... Love you."* About an hour later Sue called saying she couldn't go and she would explain when she saw him next. She ended the call by saying she loved him so much that it hurt. Janice didn't know if John was buying it or were the blinders finally off. Janice said, *"we will get her story from the other side of this fight."* John looked at Janice with a "what" expression. Janice said, *"we need to go to Seattle and talk to both your father and sister."*

Marilyn looked at all the evidence from her naked self to the video of her brother planting drugs. Janice felt that something was off about her reaction. She sat there with a slight smile on her face. Lu asked, *“I knew you were no genius but how could you let yourself be used like this?”* Wayne sat in the corner just staring off into space. Janice looked at the pictures of Marilyn then back to the girl and it all somehow made sense. Janice asked, *“there is no one else is there? it's just you doing all this?”* John said, *“don't be stupid.”* He looked to his sister who was now just smiling ear-to-ear. She looked to her father than grandfather and said, *“the best part is that none of you saw this coming and there isn't a damn thing you can do about it.”* John sat down and looked at the table. Marilyn asked, *“awe is the poor little genius lost?”* Lu said, *“no, this can't be you are just a girl.”* Marilyn's face changed into an angry sneer. She spat the words at Lu, *“I had a 4.0 before daddy and his scared straight ruined my life. Jimmy and I had less than an ounce on us, but dear old dad wanted me to feel how wrong I was for dating a black guy, so he paid them to charge me with dealing and inflate the amount. Jimmy went to jail where he was gang-raped, and I ended up with a felony that is ruining my chances at college.”*

Lu struck the table to prevent himself from striking Marilyn. She said, *“you have always discounted me for being a girl. Even now you don't believe it was me. I started this while I was locked up in juvey. After a heart-to-heart with Sue I found out she was here illegally and so she became my pawn.”* John looked at her then back to the table. *“don't worry big brother, she hates me more than you do. I blackmailed her into helping me as well as a one-time sex thing.”* Wayne turned green on the phrase “sex thing.” The room fell silent as everyone tried to piece it together. She told them how she staged the first photo with this guy from school. Then how she took all the other photos using a tripod as well as passing strangers. She said, *“it is so easy to just put a camera in someone's hands and have them help you.”* John asked, *“why?”* Marilyn found her smirk again then sneered, *“the golden son doesn't know why? I was never good enough for any of you. Everything was always about you. I hated you from birth. As for dad. Do you know he started a bail fund for me at the same time he started your college fund?”* Marilyn Stood up and slammed her hand on the table and said, *“I was six-years-old.”* Lu asked, *“and now what?”* Marilyn sat back down and said, *“nothing. If any of you make a move on me, then I will ruin your*

lives. Dad and John go to jail, Sue gets deported, and you dear grandfather will have to live with the shame of it all.” John looked her in the face and said, “you just don’t see it, do you? For all of this to work there had to be one thing in place.” Marilyn smiled and asked, “what would that be?” John looked her in the eyes and said, “love. We were willing to risk everything because we loved you. I was willing to toss my future aside just to keep you safe. You can say whatever you want about how you were treated. I know I had my part to play and I did nothing to help you. I failed you as your brother, and I will have to live with that forever, but what I won’t do is ever help you again.”

Ava watched the meeting on a supposedly closed feed camera in the room. She said to Yara, *“I like this girl, but I don’t know if I want to hire her or fuck her with a pogo stick.”* Yara asked, *“why not do both?”* The two women were in a pool of mud watching the video feed while also watching a man with a whip beat the lead chef. She had made a plate of scrambled eggs that just didn’t meet Ava’s standards. When the man was done beating her Ava would have Hector drug her and burn the body. Ava liked to think that they came awake when they burned but Yara secretly prayed to something she didn’t believe that the ones who died like this went quick. The man with the whip did such damage to the sixty-year-old that they could see bone. Yara knew she had to stay and watch or just maybe she would be next. Ava said, *“yes, I am sending someone to approach this girl and offer her a job.”* A prompt on the video screen came up saying she had a call. Ava waved her hand, and someone put the call through. *“Hello, my dear I see you are in the mud again.”* Ava smiled and said, *“Terence we thought you were dead?”* On the other side of the video-chat was Terence Alfred Stamp. He said, *“they tried their best, but it didn’t take.”*

Back home Janice told JG what happened. JG asked, *“so now what?”* Janice said, *“John wants to work things out with Sue. He said something about marriage. The father is going to retire from being a doctor and teach.”* JG said, *“no I mean the girl.”* Janice said, *“on the way back Wayne called and said Marilyn vanished and he wasn’t sure where she went. I offered to find her, but he said he wanted the police to do that.”* JG looked down at the floor then back to Janice and asked, *“do you think he called the police?”* Janice shook her head. she instructed her

to stop payments coming from Lu Louyang then she gave her a check made out to the firm for seventy-five-thousand dollars. Janice said, *“I didn’t ask for it, but I also didn’t refuse it. Use it to pay for your medical bills.”* She looked out a window then turned back and said, *“send a check to John Louyang with a note saying, buy some furniture.”*

Janice drove home just in time to see the motorhome drive away with Mike and Scott. She waived, and they waved back. Her first thought was that she finally had Bill and their place alone. She met Bill at the door where she pushed him back into the apartment just barely getting the door closed before she took her top off. They made their way to the couch shedding clothing and kissing. Janice pushed Bill onto the couch where she got on top, and the two started to make love. As they did Janice arched her back just in time to see Scott standing there with Mike’s insulin pack from the fridge. Without a word, he said they forgot it and sorry. Janice froze as Scott slowly backed out without taking his eyes off her chest. The door closed, and Bill asked, *“Mike or Scott?”* Janice said, *“that boy will have some interesting stories to tell when they finally get back home.”*

Chapter Six

Janice lay in bed alone wondering what life was all about. Two days ago, she and Bill cremated their son Brandon after a heart defect killed him on a soccer field. Just a few hours ago she told Bill she didn't want to see him again. She knew he wasn't to blame and she was harsh when she kicked him out, but she also couldn't look at him and not think about their dead son. All this came together to find herself alone. The house was silent, and she knew she was alone until she heard a voice. "*Dad will understand if you just call him and say you are sorry.*" Janice's eyes went wide with the sound of her son's voice. She sat up and looked around, but she was alone. "*Mommy you shouldn't be alone.*" Janice sat back up and saw something in the corner of her room. At first, it was just a shape, then the shape took form and was her son Brandon. Janice looked to the door then back to her son. Brandon just smiled and waved. She jumped out of bed and went into the living room only to see Brandon again. This time he wasn't the twelve-year-old that just died, he was a toddler.

Brandon waived again just like he did back in the bedroom. Janice asked, "*how can you be here?*" He just shrugged his shoulders in an "I don't know" motion. Off in the corner was Mister Spats a panda bear with black spats. Brandon liked the word spats, so the bear got its name. Bill was worried about Brandon not manning up, so he took the bear away. They had fought about it, but the deed was done, and the bear was gone. Almost like he was reading her mind, Brandon went to the bear and picked him up. He hugged the bear and then ran from the room. Janice followed him up the stairs and into his bedroom. Inside the room, she found the nine-year-old Brandon. He had just broken his arm trying to climb a tree. He had later told her that he was trying to see into Jessie Mayes bedroom. She was a fifteen-year-old girl that lived next door. Janice had made Brandon apologize to her, and she had signed his cast with a heart over the "I" in her name. Janice heard a sound downstairs, and when she looked back, Brandon was gone.

The next day Bill was back. He smelled like alcohol and maybe vomit. He was also angry. After the fight, he had gone to a bar and started to drink. When the bar closed, he found

his way to his Aztec and climbed into the back to sleep it off. He didn't say a word he just went into their bedroom and took a shower. After the shower, he packed a bag. While he was in the shower, she thought about how she could say what she saw. She also tried to find a way to ask him to stay, but every time she would think of him her mind went back to the soccer game then the hospital where he told her Brandon was dead. On the way out, Bill tried to kiss her, but she pulled away. Bill said, "*this isn't right we should be together.*" Janice said, "*I am never alone, Brandon is with me.*" He would try and talk to her every day for the next two months before she hit him with divorce papers. He tried to call one last time only to find his number was blocked. It was about this time Janice started to worry about seeing Brandon and what it meant. She also didn't want it to end.

A month later and the papers were signed. Bill came to the house to collect the things he wanted. In the divorce proceedings, they had agreed to sell the house even though it was clear that Bill didn't really want to sell. Over the last two nights, the toddler Brandon was keeping her up screaming. It was something he would do when he was upset and not getting his way. The tween Brandon asked, "*but why are you divorcing daddy? It wasn't his fault.*" Brandon was with her whenever she was in the house. He went from age to age reflecting a memory she would have about him in each room from the toddler screaming in her bedroom to the ten-year-old putting a puzzle together in the dining room. When Bill walked into the house, Brandon vanished. Janice started to scream, but she held it in not wanting Bill to know what she was seeing. Bill took his diploma off the wall, and that was the last thing he would take. He started to put his key on the counter, but Janice stopped him saying, "*this is your house too so keep the key until it sells.*" When Bill left Janice saw the twelve-year-old Brandon staring at him by a window.

Two weeks went by, and Janice had very little sleep. The screaming Brandon would wake her up at all hours belting out a screech that could break glass. When she would be in her office, she would hear the scream coming from the urn with Brandon's ashes. She would be with a client or JG, but all she could hear was the screaming. Janice didn't want to lose her son again, but she also didn't want to lose whatever was left of her sanity. It was in that pit of despair that

she remembered how Brandon went away whenever Bill was around. She called him and asked if he would come over. In the time it took for him to drive over she thought about what she would say. At first it was a full confession about seeing Brandon, then it was a need not to be alone, but finally, she came back to his desire not to sell the house. Bill knocked then he came in. The second he stepped into the house the screaming stopped. It was like a weight was lifted off her. They sat on the couch and Janice tried to talk to him, but instead of her calculated planned out nuanced discourse, she kissed him. Bill pushed her back and looked into her eyes. He thought he saw just how lost she was and he decided he would just be whatever she needed for now. He kissed her back, and soon clothing was tossed, and they made love for the first time since Brandon died.

Bill woke up wondering what just happened. She had said that all she could see when she saw him was their dead son, but then there was last night. Janice felt the peace and quiet of a missing screaming Brandon, then she felt guilty about just how much she wasn't missing him. Bill left so he could go back to his new place and get ready for school. As soon as he was gone, Brandon was back. Luckily for her, it was the tween Brandon in the tan slacks, multi pastel plaid shirt with bow tie. She had made a deal with Bill that when Brandon had to come to her office, he would dress for it with a tie and everything. She didn't say what kind of tie, so the bow tie was a surprise, but she liked the old fashion look of it as well as how handsome her son was becoming. She hadn't known at the time that he wouldn't age much more than the Brandon in the bow tie. For the next year when he would appear in her office, he would be dressed in this outfit at this age.

With Bill gone and Brandon back, Janice decided to go to her office. JG said she had a person coming in to talk about a case and just maybe it could help her deal with the loss. Janice had a black 1970 Monte Carlo SS 454 with a four-speed transmission. Bill had called the car her giant black dildo or vibrator. The car rumbled with power while Bill's hapless little Aztek was more of a windup toy. Janice had nine points with an appearance in court coming up for doing ninety-five on route 8 going through Akron. Most people called that stretch of road the Akron Autobahn because people just went whatever speed they wanted. She left a trail of rubber on the

way to her office, but she made it without a cop in sight. Sean knew the sound of the car. He had tried to buy it from her before he understood that she might sell Bill before she would ever sell the car. She parked next to a bright orange Volkswagen Thing. The car was a collection of flat metal panels with wheels, but to the right collector, it was almost priceless. This one was painted orange with a metal flake that shimmered in the sun. Janice looked at the car and thought, *“OK this could be an interesting client.”*

From behind she looked like someone who just stepped out of a Hollywood Noir from the 1940’s. She had on a dark purple swinger dress with some sort of matching lace sleeves, a matching hat with netting and the type of hose with the seams in the back. Her hair was white and, in this light, and just maybe because of the dress it had a purple tint. It wasn’t until she turned around that Janice saw the woman was much younger than she thought with the lace sleeves being sleeve tattoos and her hair was a pale lavender. She had a silver septum nose piercing with a purple stone that matched her necklace, earrings, the hat pin holding her hat in place and the eight rings on her left hand. Even her lips were purple. Without thinking about it, Janice put out her left hand. The woman did the same, and only then it became clear that her right arm was a prosthetic. She said, *“my name is Valerie Cox, but I go by Violet.”* Janice asked, *“is that just a nickname or is it a stage name?”* Violet asked, *“is there a difference?”*

Violet said she was a performance artist attending Kent state. *“my art doesn’t pay the bills, so I work a side job that isn’t that legal.”* She worked as a call girl for a very particular kind of clientele. *“Sometimes, well most of the time I am the dominate with many of them wanting me to take the arm off,”* as she spoke she removed her right arm. The prosthetic was eerier realistic, and the tattoo on it matched her left arm. She said she had aggressive bone cancer when she was twelve that cost her the arm above the elbow. She had a good friend that was both a tattoo artist and an industrial artist who made her the arm and painted it to match a tattoo she did on the left. She said, *“One of my clients has started to call me at all hours of the night leaving these long love messages. He would then call again screaming profanity. I had to tell my manager to stop booking this guy, but then he started to show up in my classes. I can’t go to the police because I am breaking the law and that would hurt my chances to stay in school.”*

Janice asked, *“when you say manager do you mean something else?”* Violet shook her head saying, *“as far as she is concerned she is booking me for performance art pieces, and in a way, it is just that.... Also, I don’t have sex with my clients. Many of them are married, and their husbands or wives are a part of the show.”* Janice said, *“look miss Cox if you can’t or won’t tell me the truth then I can’t help you.”* Violet asked, *“what do you mean?”* Janice asked, *“you said you're breaking the law but if you aren’t having sex with the clients then how are you doing that?”* Violet took in a breath and said, *“yes, I do have sex with a couple of them including mister Beacon.... But I am not a whore.”* Janice handed her a handkerchief from her desk. Just by coincidence, it was a violet color. Janice said, *“I am not here to judge you. I just need all the information, so I can understand the mind of this person.”*

Janice closed her office door and spread all the evidence Violet had on this man named Miles Beacon. Most of it was blurry pictures. He never paid using a check or credit. She never saw his driver’s license or any form of identification. Her mind took a trip down the street thinking about where the Akron Beacon Journal is printed. Near the newspaper, there is a small law firm named Miles and Roads Attorneys at Law. In the corner of the office, Brandon said, *“so, that isn’t his name.”* Janice looked over at a set of chairs against a wall in her office. Brandon was sitting on the one he would sit in on those days he would come to her office. He was in his tan slacks with a multi-colored pastel shirt, bow tie and black converse shoes playing an old Gameboy. Janice said, *“that’s too easy. What else do you see?”* Brandon said, *“he is older and puts off an air of authority that has her saying mister, so cop, lawyer or maybe a teacher of some kind?”* Janice rolled a pen between her thumb and two of her fingers. It was a nervous habit. She said, *“if he is a teacher he isn’t one of hers, or she would have told me.”* JG was in the open door. She asked, *“I think it was House who said that everyone lies. Who are you talking too?”*

After a mind-numbing series of calls to the campus trying to find a way to search their records for a suspect, Janice turned to JG who was also a student going to Kent for a few classes.

She used JG's access as well as a book with pictures and biographies on every professor given to every student to narrow their pool of suspects. The most prominent was a journalist/media professor named Robert Harris. Janice asked Sean to see if any of his friends could run a background check on the Professor. It came back with four charges of domestic abuse that were dropped. All of them were from past girlfriends and students of Kent State. A call to one of the officers who answered two of those calls ended with him saying, *"that guy is a piece of shit. Don't turn your back on him. I know that if I had a daughter going to Kent, I would make sure he no longer taught there."* The officer alleged that Harris would use his authority as a weapon against the girls he used. He said, *"the last one was a girl named Heather Peterson. She dropped the charges after he had hit her so hard he broke her jaw. She went home and killed herself that night."*

Armed with a report by the officer, his facility picture and the crime scene report for Heather Peterson Janice went to find Violet. Janice slipped into a small classroom built around a stage. On it was a white table with a white chair. The set was made to look like a cabin but in all black and white. Near the stage were about a dozen students and one teacher. He was dressed in all black from his turtleneck to his shoes. A door opened, and Violet waddled out. She was dressed like Charlie Chaplin's little tramp with the derby and oversized clothes. Much like the set she was in all black and white. She started to recreate a scene from the Chaplin movie Gold Rush when the professor stopped the performance, and another student asked, *"I don't understand why you're humanizing Hitler?"* The Professor asked the person with the question if she knew who Chaplin was and she said, *"Hitler."* The professor rubbed his face and said, *"OK I guess we need a break. We start back in thirty minutes after I explain who Chaplin was and why he wasn't Hitler."*

"I somehow knew he was a professor, but I didn't know he was at my school." Violet pushed his picture away from her as she held up his arrest records. She asked, *"how can a man with this work for a college?"* Her professor watched them from a distance. When Violet held up the reports, he said, *"because he has tenure they won't do anything unless he is charged."* Violet said, *"this is Professor Aaron Lewis, my Theatre Practicum coach."* When Lewis sat down next

to Janice, she could smell the not so subtle smell of pot and a different almost earthy smell. He said, “*yes, I prefer coach because it sounds so informal compared to a professor or doctor.*” Janice made a note in her head about how in just one sentence Lewis bragged about his stature as a professor and hinted at being a doctor even though he didn’t have a Ph.D. He looked at the papers and said, “*it’s sad, but I have seen worse. There was a prof up at Tri-C with two domestic abuse convictions.*” He looked at Violet, and he almost seemed to enjoy how she reacted to him saying “I have seen worse” almost like he meant to hurt her or at least throw her off balance. Janice didn’t like how this man took over her meeting. She said, “*Violet, when you are finished with your classes for today, please meet me at my office.*” Lewis asked, “*why don’t you just finish here where I can help you?*” Instead of answering Janice said, “it was a pleasure to meet you, Professor Lewis.” Lewis stood up and said, “*please, it’s coach Lewis, and the pleasure was all mine.*”

Janice found herself being followed by a couple of campus police as she went from the class to the parking lot. One of the officers had his hand on his gun the entire time they followed her. About ten feet from her car one of the officers said, “*mam, I need to see your identification.*” Janice turned around to see the one with his hand on his gun now had it out and pointed at the ground in an almost comical two-handed gesture like he was holding the ground at bay. Janice figured that either Lewis or Harris called to complain about some sort of harassment. She could see this going badly for her if she didn’t cooperate. She said, “*I need to open my purse to get that ID so please don’t shoot.*” On the word shoot, the officer with his gun out pointed it at her while the other officer said, “*turn around and put your hands on your head.*” The first officer said, “*I am going to search you. Do you have anything on you that you won’t want me to find?*” Without waiting for an answer, he started to feel her. It was less of a search and more of a cop copping a feel. He whispered into her hear, “*bitch, you best be staying away from this and the coach.*”

Something felt off about what they were doing. Janice ran through her mind what she saw. Standing in front of her was the twelve-year-old Brandon. He said, “*the guy with the gun. Think about what you saw.*” She rewound the start and realized that when he pulled his gun, she could see the barrel was plugged, and the gun was fake. They weren’t police. Knowing this freed

her from the threat of jail. She took the hand of the fake cop that was touching her and twisted it at the wrist. Using both hands, she quickly turned his hand until she felt it snap. The guy with the fake gun pointed it at her. Janice in one motion pushed the gun away and kicked upward into the man's genitals. He let go of the fake gun and immediately pissed himself while he went to the ground. The first fake cop led with a wild swing of his unbroken hand missing her by about two feet. When he went by Janice kicked him in the back of the knee knocking him off balance causing him to land on the ground. She saw that there was a small group of students nearby recording the attack. Janice said, *"tell whoever sent you that I don't give up that easy."* She then kicked the first fake cop in the nuts and said, *"bitch."*

In the car, Brandon said, *"you said to never say that word."* Janice was in no mood to be lectured by her hallucination. She asked a couple of the students if they would send her a copy of the video they were shooting and when she got back to her office, she found that all three of the girls in the group had emailed her a copy while two of the guys had uploaded their videos to YouTube. JG said, *"yeah, your kick went viral."* One of the videos had an audience dubbed over the video with the word "GOOOOAL" when she kicked the second fake cop on the ground. Neither of the videos mentioned how the two weren't real police. Sean came in and sat down. He said, *"I sent out some feelers looking for the two fakes."* Sean was a cop for several years, and he knew a fake when he saw one. Janice said, *"you'll find them in the performing arts program, and I am willing to bet that this man sent them."* She opened a book to show a picture of Aaron Lewis. Sean said, *"back during the first gulf war we were sent over to Kent to help with security during a large protest led by this man and three other profs."*

After getting permission from JG, Janice cut out the pictures of Lewis, Harris and a professor Dr. Tayeb Ali from the psychology department from her book. She thumbtacked their pictures to her board and looked at them. Brandon said, *"one of these things is not like the others."* Janice said, *"Doctor Ali is from Saudi Arabia while the other two are straight from a casting call for the average white guy."* JG said, *"oh my god I was just thinking the same thing."* Brandon looked at JG with that lost puppy dog look he would get any time she was around. Janice wasn't sure it was real or was her memory playing tricks with her. JG asked, *"law, acting,*

and psychology. What do they all have in common?" Janice checked her records until she found what she was looking for. She said, *"all three went to Duke at the same time."* JG said, *"yes, but it's not like they would have been in the same part of the college or even in the same circle of friends. A Christian, a Jew and a Muslim would have stayed with their own, especially in the south back in the 1970's."* Brandon said, *"well, something connects them."* JG said, *"there must be something in their past that connects them outside of academia."* Janice tapped on the picture of Doctor Ali and said, *"maybe I should go and speak with the good doctor."*

On her way-out Sean stopped her saying, *"babe I thought you had already left.... Your car.... is gone."* In the parking lot where her Monte Carlo was parked was the remains of a broken window. The car's body would eventually be found in Michigan a month later. It was stripped of all the sellable parts then set on fire. The engine would turn up in a wrecked car in Alabama a year later. Luckily, she had taken her gun out of the trunk before she went into her office. Janice filled out a stolen car report and then rented a car until the insurance company could settle the claim. She went from a classic American muscle car to a 2010 Kia Soul. She got behind the wheel only to remember she had never driven an automatic transmission before. While nice looking for what it was the Soul felt cheap after her rebuilt monster. She made it about three blocks from the rental agency when she concluded that this would never do for her. The car had to go. Parked in someone's yard was an old Jeep Renegade with a for sale sign.

She paid thirty-five hundred dollars for the jeep including a matching hardtop that was in storage. She also gave the owner an extra eighty dollars, so she could drive it without changing the title over yet. She wanted out of the toy car. The Jeep was as different from her Monte Carlo as the Kia Soul was, but at least this one was a stick, and it had power. She drove into Akron to the University only to find the professor's office blocked by police from both the campus and the city. A corner van was outside. A quick slip of cash to an assistant to the medical examiner gave her some information. He told her, *"a suicide from the look of it, but the cops don't think it was suicide. Something about the angle of the rope burn, I don't know I just drive the van."* Janice asked, *"middle eastern man in his fifties?"* The guy said, *"no, a woman but I don't know her age... she was found by a."* He checked a paper then said, *"Doctor Tayeb Ali."* Off in the

distance, she saw the Akron police putting a man in the back of a car with his hands behind him. He was dark skinned with an angry look on his face. Across on the other side of the incident was Robert Harris.

Back in her office, Janice said, *“Lewis, Ali, and Harris have access to students. Every year many people drop out of school or transfer to other schools making it easier to hide disappearances.”* JG asked, *“yes, but wouldn’t people eventually come around searching for their lost children?”* Brandon said, *“not if they had no one who cared about them.”* Janice said, *“yes, that would make it easier.”* JG asked, *“who does that make what easier?”* Janice nearly said, *“what Brandon said,”* but she remembered that JG couldn’t see him. She said, *“we need to check the records for any students that dropped out without warning and just vanished.”* JG asked, *“I don’t see how you are connecting the dots?”* Janice said, *“Lewis finds students that could easily go away, and Harris breaks them down using techniques taught to him by Ali. I would imagine all three are doing this then when they are finished, they do something with the girls.”* Brandon said, *“or the bodies.”*

Sean put down the files and said, *“I don’t know if we should take this to the detectives, the feds or the trash. It’s fucking nuts.”* He looked at the door then back to the files. *“If they are killing people then maybe they’re cleaning house?”* JG picked up the files and asked, *“could they have anyone already kidnapped?”* Sean picked up his phone muttering to himself, *“oh shit why didn’t I think about that.”* He called a detective he knew with the Akron Police and told him what they had. An hour and twenty minutes later Detective Gaspar Price showed up at the office. A first-generation Chinese/Vietnamese-American, Price was the most unimposing person on the force. Sean said he was essentially a Chinese Columbo, *“he walks into a room and leaves with a conviction before the criminal knows what happened.”* Brandon asked, *“a Chinese Columbo, an Irish Kojak are there any cops that aren’t television shows from the seventies?”*

Price told them, *“I took a chance and put out an alert for those two and I have someone I trust filing a material witness warrant that way we can take them in without having charges. It*

will also give us the opportunity to do a little in plain sight searching.” Two days later the body of Aaron Lewis was found in a warehouse by the bodies of five young women. All of them were shot. The ballistics reports came back saying they were all shot with the same 40-caliber. The five women were students from Kent State, the University of Akron and one was a seventeen-year-old from Hoban high school. Price said, *“look I can see why you are so involved with this case, but I need to tell you what the feds said to me about ten minutes ago. They said back off. On my way here, my captain called saying how the feds were on their way to our office for all my files.”* Sean looked at the text message then said, *“yeah I remember this guy. He was pushing for a predator or stalker registry at the time they were starting the sex crimes registry.”*

After two days of calls and emails, the special agent in charge Stephen White finally called Janice. He said, *“listen, Ms. James, while I can appreciate your small role in this I have to ask you to stay out of my investigation.”* Before she could ask him a question, he hung up. Violet was staying with her while the feds looked for Harris. They were both surprised when they didn’t offer her any kind of security. An agent interviewed her for about an hour, but then she was escorted out and left to defend herself. During the day she was in the bar surrounded by off-duty police. She decided to use this to help her character study by putting on the waitress uniform and waiting tables. Sean had his waitresses dress in short plaid skirts and baggie shirts emulating a traditional kilt. On her third day, Violet came into the bar in a pair of short shorts and a tank top that was just a little too tight. Sean said, *“were not a Hooters.”* Violet said, *“let me wear this for one day, and at the end of that day we will count my tips.”* Sean replied, *“I’m probably going to hell for this.”*

Across the street from the bar, Harris sat in an old Ford Focus watching the bar thinking about his last interaction with Lewis. He had told Lewis, *“no, she’s mine, and I want her.”* Two of the girls were already dead and Lewis teasing the others with the gun. Lewis told the girls, *“only one of you gets to go.”* He then dropped a knife at their feet and made a stabbing motion with his hand. One of the girls picked up the knife and looked at Lewis as the other girls watched her. Lewis said, *“this should be fun.”* Harris smiled then said, *“maybe for me.”* He picked up the Glock 22 from the table and shot Lewis in the head. His head whipped back and shot blood

across the floor at the girls. The one with the knife dropped it and stepped back. Two of the girls hugged each other while the third one knew that this man wasn't their savior. Harris didn't want them he wanted his Violet. Harris said, "*the pigs are looking for me, but you two could go in and get her.*" In the back of the car were the two fake campus police. The one Janice knocked to the ground after breaking his wrist asked, "*what if the bitch is there?*" Harris said, "*if you want to get paid then get me my girl and anything else is your problem.*"

The bar was slowing down with only the regulars still in their regular spots. All the working staff was in the cosplay Hooters uniforms. One of them didn't like the new uniform. While it hugged the curves of the women, it didn't do the two men any favors. Violet was in a corner talking to a man. The two men were in Akron Police uniforms as they approached her. Sean pointed to the two men. Not being real police, they didn't know that Cuyahoga Falls police and Akron Police didn't mix together. The two men approached Violet, and the one with the cast on his hand said, "*Miss we need to take you downtown to talk to agent White.*" Violet backed away saying, "*I don't go anywhere without Ms. James.*" The first fake officer said, "*no that's not true because you are coming with us.*" He muttered the word "bitch" under his breath. The man at the table sat there looking at the two fake cops realizing just who they were. After all, Janice told Bill about breaking the man's wrist.

Bill pointed past the two men and said, "*I think you two made a mistake.*" The two fake cops turned to see all the real police standing there. A sergeant with the Stow police department stepped forward and said, "*Ok boys let's not let this get out of hand.*" He turned to the two fake cops and said, "*just give us your IDs, and we can call and confirm that you are who you say you are with Akron.*" The two men just started to put up their arms. The sergeant turned to Bill and said, "*maybe you should take Violet up to the office, I don't think we want her to see what's about to happen.*" One of the officers started to pull out an old-style baton. Bill said, "*OK then why don't you come with me.*" Violet replied, "*no, I want to see this.*" An officer in the back had a hammer. Violet saw the hammer then she said as she went to the door, "*never mind.*" When Bill and Violet left, Sean came from around the bar with a sawed-off baseball bat. He asked,

“now before we begin do you two want to save yourselves some pain and just tell us where your boss is?”

The door opened, and two men dressed in the black uniform of the Akron Police department came out with a girl that had white hair with a purple tint. Harris saw Violet. Over the years he had taken and disposed of many different girls to find the one he could keep forever. He didn't notice the Jeep that was pushed behind him, or the man get out and pull the wench from the front. They got about halfway across the street when Harris saw that neither of the men had a cast on their wrists. He looked to Violet who wasn't looking up. She was just too tall to be her, and the outfit wasn't right. Harris started the car and slipped it into gear flooring the pedal. He made it about twenty feet when the cable went taught against the wench. The Jeep jumped and the Ford Focus bucked as the axle pulled away. In his attempt to get away, Harris didn't put on his seatbelt. He went forward, and the steering wheel caught his throat. He would never be able to speak again. An hour later they watched as the FBI claimed they caught Professor Robert Harris while he was trying to escape. Sean said, *“typical.”*

Doctor Tayeb Ali was charged with the murder of his assistant and longtime victim, Candice Stack. He had kidnapped her when she was twelve and used her for both sex and as an assistant when she got older. A few days after he was charged he committed suicide by hanging. In his note, he said he killed Candice because she couldn't live without him. The FBI told Janice that it had nothing to do with human trafficking. White said, *“we think these guys were kidnapping girls they wanted and using them until they find another.”* As it turned out it was why the FBI was involved with connected cases going across state lines from Ohio to North Carolina. Agent White said, *“I am trying to get my bosses interested in pushing for either a predator or stalker registry. Something where we can regulate where they live and let people know when someone like this is in their neighborhood.”* He went on to talk about the upcoming trial and what he expected to happen. *“We will try and structure the trial, so Miss Cox won't have to appear in court. We have enough on him to stick the needle in his arm about a dozen times.”* He finished by paying Violet's bill. He also took a card saying if he sees someone who could use a good PI he would call.

Janice sat down at her desk with the mail. Inside an envelope was a letter and a series of pictures. It was nearly three years since she took Violet on as a client and about a year ago Robert Harris was convicted in the murders of twenty-three people and was facing the death penalty. The pictures were of Violet dressed like a mime but in shades of purple rather than black and white. The pictures were from New York City, London, and Paris. After the incident, Violet spent some time in therapy. Then she went on a tour of the world. Her one month to New York became a lifestyle of touring the world with a troop of street performers. Janice looked over at the chair. Brandon was standing next to it with a goofy grin on his face. He then put his hands up and pretended to be stuck in a box. Janice put up one picture on her wall, she gave one of them to JG and another picture to Sean. Violet sent a special picture for Sean of her in the cosplay Hooters uniform except she was only wearing body paint.

Chapter Seven

Janice sat in a car waiting for someone to get inside. The back door opened, and a man got in. He showed his identification and Janice did the same, but it was unnecessary because the Uber application showed his picture to her as it also showed him her picture and what car she was driving. What Pierre Combes didn't know was that Janice was following him making sure she would be the closest Uber to him. She knew that when Combes saw she was driving a 2010 Land Rover Range Rover HSE she bought at auction a week ago, he would hit the accept. The original owner wouldn't need it for about the next twenty to thirty years, and she bought it for just under nine-thousand dollars. The car felt like driving a leather lined brick, but she knew that Combes would see Range Rover and go for it. She didn't like the jobs like this, but she also didn't like going without work so here she was testing a wayward husband seeing where he goes when he drops off his tagged car and ventures into the day.

The car was an expense, but it was something she couldn't pass on to the client. Janice would eventually sell the car on eBay or trade it in for something more American as if there was such a thing anymore. Janice did a search only to find that the Honda Civic built in Ohio was the closest thing to American Made with over ninety percent being made in America. His Uber request had her taking him to a family-style restaurant in Smithville called The Barn. This was an odd choice for someone in a tailored suit that cost more than the car they were in when it was new. The Barn was just that an old barn that was converted into a buffet-style restaurant. Along the way, he said very little until about halfway when he asked if they could stop for a second. He asked, *"I can't go in like this do you mind if I change?"* When he first got into the car, he had a slight French accent but when he asked to change he had more of a southern drawl. Janice pulled over and got out. The original owner had a severe limo tint on the windows making it impossible to see inside. As the car shifted with him inside, she looked over and saw Brandon inside the car in the front seat. He said, *"Oh my god, he's putting on a hockey mask."*

The back window came down, and Combes said, *"thank you."* Janice got back into the car and saw he had gone from the fancy suit to a pair of jeans, a green and blue flannel shirt and

a pair of old work boots. Combes asked, “*I know this goes against the rules, but could you wait for me? I won’t be more than an hour or so, and I will pay for you to have something?*” Janice said, “*it’s not a problem. I could use a break, and it’s not like I will find a customer down here.*” Janice joined Uber to work this job and was on the edge of being let go because she was passing up on every connection waiting for this man. As she said she wouldn’t find a customer, she noticed how her phone lit up with local requests. He got out and walked over to a cab crew pickup. She got out and took the magnetic Uber sign off the car. Combes walked up to an older woman and embraced her. The contact was more familiar than sensual. As she passed them a man got out from the front that looked like an older version of Combes. Pierre said, “*hey dad.*” It hit her like a bad joke told when drunk. Sandy “Grey” Combes’s French husband was from somewhere in the American south. He was a fake. Brandon asked, “*but why?*”

After being burned by more than a few clients, Janice had a series of questions and requirements before she would take this kind of job. One of them was a copy of a marriage certificate and any prenuptial agreements. Sandy was the daughter of a car dealership owner in Twinsburg. He owned several dealerships built around the Honda brand. She was set to inherit the business when he died, but Sandy had an iron-clad prenupe that left Pierre with nothing if he broke the terms of the agreement. Janice sat in a seat near the Combes family and listened to them talk about their lives or what Pierre claimed was his life. From what she could piece together he told his parents he was working on a boat that ships merchandise from Cleveland to Canada. His parents talked about the farm in Zanesville and his brothers and sisters. Pierre never mentioned his wife or children. Janice felt a little sad that these seemingly good people didn’t know they had grandchildren so close to them. Soon their dinner was over, and he signaled to her it was time to go.

Janice got up and looked back at the table where she saw Brandon had covered the table with playing cards. He said, “*and yes they are all on the table.*” She came back to the car to find Pierre had changed back into his suit. When she got out before going into the restaurant, she hit the child locks on the back doors so when she hit the locks upon getting back in the back doors locked without a way for him to open the door. Janice pulled over and handed him her business

card. He looked at it confused. Janice said, *“I was hired by your wife to find out who you were cheating with when you disappeared leaving your car back in Hudson.”* He looked at the card then back to Janice then back to the card. Janice asked, *“why don’t you tell her the truth? I would think those good people back there would like to meet their grandchildren?”* Pierre looked out the window, and for a second it looked like he wasn’t going to say anything. He eventually said, *“at first it was a gag. A friend dared me to use my accent I picked up from my grandfather to hit on the first girl that came into the bar. That first girl was Sandy. That night something clicked, and I didn’t want to lose her but if she knew I was a fake then....”* He trailed off. Another three miles went by when he asked, *“she thinks I’m cheating on her?”* Janice said, *“you aren’t giving her much of a reason not to think otherwise, and in a way, you are cheating. A lie is a lie no matter what it’s about.”* Janice looked at the ring on her finger. A few nights ago, Bill had asked her to marry him again and she said yes but for another reason than her wanting to get back together. Brandon said, *“or in your own words a lie.”*

They drove nearly all the rest of the way back to his car in silence until Janice said, *“just think about what I am telling you. She hired me. Most wives that hire me are looking for just cause for divorce. The lie is about to become known whether it is from me or divorce court.”* Janice pulled up to his car. she hit the unlock then said, *“tell her the truth tonight, so it comes from you and not me.”* Pierre got out without saying a word. He got into his car and drove off. About ten minutes later her phone dings and he had given her a one-star rating with a complaint that she was too noisy. Janice didn’t care this was her last trip with Uber. Janice drove to her office where she saw JG getting out of her car. She had a 1983 Honda Civic that was mostly primer and rust. JG saw Janice in the ivory and pearl colored Range Rover and came over to her. She said, *“Ok if things are going this good then I want a raise.”* Janice handed her the keys to the Range Rover and asked, *“how about a car instead?”*

JG left to have the title changed over and get new plates for her new car. Brandon said, *“you know by giving her the car you are going to lose money on this job.”* Janice said, *“I owe her so much after everything that has happened over this last few months.”* She stopped talking when she realized she was rationalizing with someone that wasn’t there. Not being real didn’t seem to

faze Brandon who just stood there waiting for her to finish. He said, *“whether I am real or something in your head it doesn’t matter all that does is the truth. Dad deserves to know the truth.”* Janice looked up, but Brandon was gone, and she was alone. Her phone dinged with a text from Sandy Combs. She wanted to talk and was on her way over. The text was in all caps. About ten minutes later an orange 2015 Honda CR-V pulled into the parking lot with dealer plates attached with magnets on the back. She stopped and looked at JG’s car.

Janice had printed pictures she took of Pierre and his parents as well as pictures of the place where they met. Sandy said, *“I don’t know why he kept this from me for so long. Why did he think it would matter?”* Janice said, *“that’s hard to say other than he would rather cut all ties to his life then you lose you.”* Janice gave her a picture of Pierre’s parents as they met with their son. The picture showed them as a close family. Janice figured that Sandy didn’t have that with her workaholic father and mother that left for part unknown years ago. Sandy started to tear up. She asked, *“what should I do?”* Janice said, *“that’s also another hard to answer the question. But just ask yourself, do you love him enough to get past who he really is? if so then his lie doesn’t matter and if you can’t then nothing else matters.”* Janice handed her a short bio she did after finding out just who Pierre was. At the top was the name Pierre Audrie Combes the Third. Sandy asked, *“Audrie?”*

Janice drove back to her apartment and Bill. He was working a second job online while he was in summer break from his teaching job. He worked with a college professor he went to college with back in the day. Prof Matthew Hughes was an English lit professor with Cuyahoga Community College or Tri-C. Bill called him Mattie Hues, and he called him Bill do. Bill was helping him grade papers and deal with his ever-changing landscape. Janice came in to find Bill laughing while reading something Hughes sent him. Bill said, *“a student declared that she wanted an A in his class because she was traumatized by all the cis white male dominance in the book Little Women.”* Bill shook his head then went on saying, *“she wouldn’t let Mattie speak. She went to the dean of school then she left when she saw the dean was a man. She is now suing.”* Bill showed Janice a picture of a young white woman with bright blue hair and one side

of her head shaved down to a blonde stubble. Bill said, *“I swear she was in one of my classes last year.”* Janice asked, *“seeing how half of them look alike can you tell them apart?”*

Ava tapped on the screen at a section that was blurry. Yara said, *“that won’t help. It’s the camera there must be something on the lens.”* Ava picked up a small automatic from the table and shot the screen. She turned to Yara and said, *“considering what I am paying them these images should be in high def..... also don’t ever talk to me like that again. You are just as replaceable.”* Yara put on a robe near her covering her naked chest then she left the room. Ava turned to another monitor. On the screen, she watched as Janice walked up to Bill and hugged him from behind. The people she hired to wire the new apartment hadn’t placed any listening devices yet. She did have a mirroring program on Bill’s computer, but she was disgusted to find no porn. He used his computer for work as some sort of plebe. Whatever the two were talking about moved from the dining room table to the couch. Ava thought about how their whole apartment would fit in her bathroom. From the angle of the kitchen camera and the blurry image of the living room camera, she saw Janice get onto Bill’s lap and her shirt come off. Ava looked out her window to her pool seeing one of the night maids going down on Yara. She thought to herself, *“maybe I should find a new Yara.”*

The next day there was a knock at the door. Janice was on her treadmill running out her frustrations over her inability to talk to Bill about what she sees. She stopped and went to the door. Two men were there saying they were with the apartment management and were there to test the wiring. Both men seemed out of place as electricians, but Janice didn’t want to typecast them, so she asked for identification when she let them in. Both men had worked at this complex before, and they had the proper ID. Working on actual electoral jobs helped them cover their other activities. Ava watched as the two men placed listening devices and fixed the smudge cameras. She watched as one of them kept staring at Janice in her workout gear. One of the men let a camera slip, and Janice caught it. None of the microphones were active so she couldn’t hear what was happening. It was clear by her posture that Janice knew it was a camera. She held it up and said something, but Ava couldn’t tell what she said.

Janice said, “*what the fuck is this?*” She held up the camera. The man that dropped the camera looked to the other than with a quick jab he struck Janice in the face. She spun around, and the camera went flying. The man grabbed her from behind around her midsection and her throat. He said, “*Missy was paying us to just watch, but I like to do more.*” The other man came around and hit Janice with a roundhouse punch. She awoke with her hands over her head. She was on the edge of the bed with one of the men holding her arms down and the other between her legs. She could feel his erection pushing against her shorts. The man between her legs said, “*if Ava isn’t going to pay us for this then I guess we’ll get out payment another way.*” The man grabbed her tank top and ripped it off. He did the same with her sports bra. The man said, “my, my, my I guess thirty-eight is the new twenty.” He grabbed her chest. Janice looked up at the other man. his grip on her arms had diminished. Janice twisted her wrist and dug her nails into the man’s arms. He let her go as he backed away. With a quick jab, Janice drove her now broken nails into the eyes of the man on top of her. Blood gushed as he screamed. Janice kicked him off her and made it to the dresser and her gun.

Ava watched as Janice pulled a Chiappa Rhino from a dresser draw and fire at the two men. She emptied the revolver hitting the blind man in the face and the other in the chest. Ava also cheered as the two men went down. The shooting was the most action she saw from this feed. She also realized that Janice would eventually find all the cameras taking away her favorite reality television show. Janice dropped the spent brass and reloaded. Ava watched as a topless Janice searched the apartment for cameras. She searched, but she didn’t touch. A beep went off, and the hack on Janice’s phone signaled that she was making a call. Instead of calling 911 she called the bar and Sean. Sean told her he would call the police or as he said it, “*I’ll call the guys, and we will be there fast.*” Ava watched as they took evidence, then the bodies away. Bill came back from wherever he went and was there as the police took out every camera the men had planted. On the last image, Janice gave the camera a long look at her middle finger before the image went out. Ava picked up her gun and shot all the screens.

Sean told them that the police would let him take her statement back at the bar. He said, *“we’ll go back to your office and use that fancy camera to record your statement then the two of you are staying with me tonight.”* Janice realized that in the many years she knew Sean she had never been to his house. Bill said, *“we can’t do that to you we’ll get a hotel room.”* Sean said, *“I have a steel door, top-notch security system and enough guns to defend the Alamo. Is there a hotel in this part of Ohio that can say the same?”* Sean pulled an old policeman’s special Smith and Wesson revolver from a holster on his leg. He gave the gun to Janice saying, *“I think that you would feel better if you had this.”* Janice took the gun and stuffed it into a pocket of the gray hoodie she was wearing. They quickly packed a bag and started to leave. Janice noticed that Brandon was gone. She hadn’t seen him since the car. She felt like that day when she learned he was dead and she would never see him again. On the way to the house she called JG and told her to either make herself scarce or go to the bar. JG said, *“I’m going over to Ryan’s place.”*

They made their way down a side road then to what was little more than a dirt path. The path opened, and an old Victorian came into view. The house was a contrast to the surroundings with its vibrant colors and the sloping hills of what looked like straw and corn. The house was almost every shade of purple with white trim and a turret. The roof was some sort of slate that shimmered in the light. Sean said, *“Brenda picked the colors, and she lived just long enough to see the house finished.”* Brenda was his wife. She died fifteen or so years ago. Her picture was in the bar next to a picture of his two estranged children. He never spoke about them. On the way inside, Sean stopped at an old well and pulled a panel open. Inside was a keypad. Sean said, *“wait a minute I have to unlock the house.”* He put in his code, and something beeped. Janice could see something moving away from the windows. Sean said, *“Brenda wanted to open the house up as a bed and breakfast but after she was attacked. The scars made her unwilling to leave the house. She also wanted to feel secure, so I had this installed and gave her a gun. She liked the gun so much we just started buying more.”*

Inside they found a house full of antiques giving it a museum-like quality. Near the door was a large ornate gun safe. Sean opened the safe to show what must have been twenty stainless steel or nickel revolvers. They also had more than a few automatics and rifles. Sean said, *“we*

have four other safes just like this.” Bill asked, “I know this might be pushing it but what did they do to her?” Sean lowered his head while he replied, “I’m too sober to answer that question. Maybe one day we will sit down and talk about sad times and things long ago and best forgotten, but for now just please make yourselves at home and take anything you need.” He pointed at the open safe. Janice gave him back his revolver. Sean handed her a Glock-19. He said, “this was the last pistol I carried as a police detective, and it served me well.” Bill said, “I don’t believe in guns.” Sean replied, “well boy just look in front of you. They are very real.” Looking over the collection, Janice pulled an old Uberti reproduction of a 1960 Army Colt. She gave it to Bill saying, “this is single action so there will be less of a chance you will shoot anyone and its heavy enough to work as a club.” The gun was ornate with a name etched in the barrel. Sean said, “it’s a reproduction of a famous gun from the old west.” Bill said, “they spelled Joline wrong.”

Sean showed them to a room on the second floor. The room was connected to the turret with a fourposter bed and antique Victorian furniture. Sean said, *“that door leads to a bathroom with a fridge, but it hasn’t been used or even plugged in. Just outside in a door across from yours is a linen closet with towels and well linen. Please make yourselves at home.”* The upper level had a dusty, disused look that was most likely the case. On a wall near the door was a picture of Sean in his police uniform. He was maybe twenty-three and just out of the army. Janice said, *“there is so much I don’t know about the man. I didn’t even know he was a father.”* Bill went to hug her, but she pulled away putting up her hands. Bill stop walking over to her. She did a sorry but no with her hands and eyes. Bill walked over to the armchair in the turret while Janice went to take a bath.

Janice started the water into the tub. It was discolored with a smell for a minute or two then it went clear. She looked at the door and the chair where Bill was sitting. For a second she could see herself going out to him and asking if he wanted to make this a bath for two. A voice came from behind her saying, *“go for it. I won’t watch.”* Janice looked over and saw the five-year-old Brandon standing by the tub only wearing his Sponge Bob underwear. He said, *“stop pushing him away.”* Janice turned back to Bill and said, *“he won’t understand.”* She turned back to Brandon only he was gone. She shut the water off and got in, but she left the door open just in

case Bill wanted to make a move on his own. As she got into the water, she looked at all the bruising on her lower half where the man held her down as well as the bruising on her arms. She knew she was about four pieces of cloth away from being raped and had they come earlier she would have been in just a nightshirt and robe.

Janice looked down at what was left of her fingernails. She wasn't a girly kind of woman except for her nails. She kept them manicured and painted. She was also proud that they were all natural, but now most of the length was either cut away or broken off in the guy's eyes. The sound they made when she pushed them through his eyes tearing at least two lids. His screams when his world went black. The look of the other man when he saw what happened and what was about to happen. Most of all that man's face when he went down with four shots to the chest. She shot the first guy in the back of the head with rounds that exploded his face, but the other guy was left with holes in his chest and a look of surprise and confusion. He had that, "*this wasn't supposed to happen to me*" look. Janice got out of the tub and reached for a towel. She stopped and looked over at Bill's chair. Part of her wanted her to forget the towel and go to him, but another side wanted him to stay in another room.

Janice put on a nightshirt she packed and got into bed. She noticed that the upper posters had what looked like scrape marks like maybe from handcuffs. For a second she thought about the Stephen King book *Gerald's Game* and being cuffed to a bed for days. She rolled over onto her side facing the door with her hand under the pillow. Bill got up and stripped down to his boxers and a t-shirt. He slipped into bed staying on his side. Janice felt him get in as the old bed creaked. What she felt the most was the separation between the two of them. While they lay only being inches from each other, the divide felt like miles. Janice moved over until she was touching him. He was warm and inviting and the opposite of those men she killed. Bill said, "*you know I love you and I always will no matter what.*" Janice said, "*I love you both, and I can't see any other way to live without that as my fact.*" Bill thought about how she said both, but he also thought that this wasn't the time for questions. Janice put her hand under the pillow and on the gun.

About seven-thirty, in the morning a red light came on, and some sort of steel mesh shutters covered the windows. From the hall, they heard, “*stay inside. Someone is coming up the drive, and the security system doesn’t recognize the car.*” Bill mimed, “*recognize the car?*” Janice grabbed her gun and went down the stairs. She found Sean in what had to be the oldest pair of pajamas with a bandoleer of shotgun shells and a riot-style shotgun. He was watching a monitor as a dark SUV rolled up the hill. Janice said, “*that’s JG and her new car.*” Sean put the gun away and turned off the security system. Sean looked at what he was wearing and said, “*I’m going to change.*” He started to pass Bill on the stairs when he stopped him. Bill was holding the gun by the barrel like a hammer. Sean took the gun and de-cocked the hammer. Sean said, “*its probably a good thing this gun is just a replica and not a real firearm, or your first hit would be you.*”

JG walked in and handed Janice an empty canister of pepper spray. She said, “*I don’t think it’s going to work out with Ryan.*” She stopped at the sight of Bill in his boxers and t-shirt. She smiled and walked past him stopping to say, “*you should teach like that.*” Bill said, “*I do. It’s the benefits of tenure.*” Bill went up to get dressed while Janice followed JG to find out what happened. She found JG in the kitchen pouring a cup of coffee. She asked, “*what is with this house?*” Janice said, “*Sean and his wife were planning on opening a Bed and Breakfast, but something happened, and their plan never happened.*” Janice poured a cup of coffee and asked, “*OK, what happened, and should we expect the police?*” JG said, “*you know I have been trying things out to find who I am. Well, Ryan decided he wanted me on team penis, so he made his move last night.*” Janice asked, “*he did something to you?*” JG said, “*worse, he asked me to marry him. We went on six dates, had sex three times, but it’s not like we were more than that. I don’t know where I am going with this. I like boys, and I like girls, and I don’t see why I have to choose?*”

The bar was always open, and there was always a police presence. JG helped Sean set up the video camera, and he recorded an interview with Janice over the attack. About ten minutes

into the interview Sean opened a bottle of whiskey and poured her a shot. Janice said, *“Sean it’s eleven in the morning.”* Sean countered with, *“that only matters if you let it matter.”* After the interview, Sean said, *“you three can stay with me as long as you want.”* Janice didn’t say anything. She wasn’t sure what to say or what she wanted to do. Finally, she said, *“thank you, Sean.”* She gave him back his gun and went to her save pulling another Rhino along with a few moon clips. Sean asked, *“do you want to go back to the apartment?”* Janice said, *“there’s nothing there that means anything to me. I don’t see a need to go back at all.”*

Ava ended her call and turned to Yara saying, *“the people that we are working for aren’t happy with this Ohio thing. They want me to end my obsession with James and make sure she knows it’s over or they will take steps to as they put it, make our lives interesting.”* Yara asked, *“can they do that?”* Instead of answering her Ava picked up her phone and called for a pizza. The Erie Street Pizza in Cleveland was in actuality a hub for criminal activity along the shore of Lake Erie. Her first order was to end all surveillance of James. Secondly, she wanted a phone to be delivered to Janice. When she was done with the call, she broke the phone in her hand and tossed it across the room. Yara said, *“when this job is over we can go and kill her ourselves.”* Ava said, *“if what we are doing works and their economy collapses then there won’t be a safe place in the world for us. Maybe not even here.”*

The office door opened and a man in a DHL delivery uniform came in with two uniform officers behind him. He gave Janice a package and had her sign on the line. He then was searched as someone checked his identification and someone searched his van. Janice slipped him a twenty and said, *“sorry.”* With the driver gone and the package checked, Janice opened it and found a DVD and a phone. Sean put the phone and DVD under a UV lamp to kill any pathogens, then he plugged the phone into an isolated computer. As he ran a check on the phone, it rang. After five rings the call dropped, then a message came up saying, *“call me back before you play the DVD.”* Sean asked, *“how can we call whoever this is back?”* Janice replied, *“Sean you just did something so CSI, but you don’t know about redial?”* Sean smiled and said, *“what can I say my cell phone still has a rotary dial.”* Janice took the phone and searched for the redial. On the third ring, a voice said, *“I wondered what I would say when you called?”* Janice looked

over at Sean and mouthed a word she then said out loud, “Ava?” After a few seconds, Ava said, “*I hired those men to surveil you and see what you know about me. I did not authorize them to do anything to you, and I want to make it clear that I don’t want anything more to do with you so the DVD will provide you with enough evidence to find the Plumbers and deal with them.*” The call ended, and the phone shut off.

Sean said, “*The Plumbers is a reference to the dirty tricks crew hired by Nixon to take on his enemies. They were called that because they fixed leaks.*” The DVD had video as well as files on a company named Gennie’s Electric Systems. Other papers had the names Harry’s Electric, One-eye Systems and Watching You LLC. Janice’s apartment complex had a contract with Crooked River Electrical which was also among the files. Janice changed to the next file saying, “*these guys are making a good piece of change on the legal side.*” In the last file, they found the real name and notes on how much Ava paid them. Janice asked, “*Linus Tactical Systems, why does that sound familiar?*” Sean said, “*because they were indicted for wire fraud and illegal surveillance of a foreign power.*” Sean brought up a news site from two years ago showing the company’s CEO a man named Lennox Linus being taken away in handcuffs with the headline, “*Spying on a Friend.*”

Lennox Linus was sitting on a beach watching his trial go on with a stand-in acting like him. He hired an actor to play the part so he could escape, but the actor did such a good job that Linus paid him to stay on and do time. He thought that ten million would be a good payday for three to six years in federal prison. He also knew that if he got the full one-hundred years that the actor would spill his guts, but he also had a plan for that. Sneaking the bomb into the courtroom was the best fifty-thousand dollars he ever spent. An alert came across his phone from one of his operators still working in the States. He already knew about the attack, but he didn’t know about Ava and the package. He watched as this woman read through his private files and most of his businesses still in operation. He turned to another person sitting next to him and said, “*that bitch Ava betrayed us.*” The man sitting next to him said, “*wow, what a shock.*” He smirked then smiled showing a set of unnaturally white teeth. He said, “*I did tell you this was going to happen. You can’t trust a sociopath. Believe me, I know.*”

Two days of raids by the FBI, Homeland Security, and local law produced thirty-five hundred arrests over nineteen states from Maine to California. All together it was the largest civilian criminal surveillance organization ever found with petabytes of information from social security numbers to illicit video some of which was labeled as child porn. When Blane Gnat was told, he was facing seven life sentences for his role in the company he broke down and told them he wasn't Linus that he was hired to play him during the trial. A day later, Lennox Linus found himself on the FBI's most wanted website right next to Ava. Linus watched all this from a monitor on a bunker on his property in Argentina. Linus turned to the man in the room with him and said, *"that was my entire operation in America. She just cost me over a billion dollars as well as all my clients."* The man asked, *"you have so much money, why does this matter?"* Linus replied, *"that system was set in place since the war. My family, my honor, my connection to the party all were a part of that company."* Behind Linus on a wall was a black and white photo of a man that looked like him in a Nazi uniform standing next to Hitler. Next to that was a red flag with a swastika.

A week after she was attacked in her apartment, Janice was in a rental car watching something she would have never guess would happen. She was back in the parking lot of the restaurant named The Barn. She watched as Sandy Combes and her two children met her in-laws for the first time. Janice would have put money down on them splitting up rather than what happened. She didn't count on Sandy, and her need for a bond with a family that was not just a business. Sandy turned to see Janice and smiled. Janice thought on how so few of her clients were happy to see her after a job like this one, but she knew that nothing lasts forever and that the bigger the lie, the greater the divide. Brandon said, *"you know that yet here we are sitting in this car keeping secrets."*

Chapter Eight

Janice sat in her office working on the books as her most recent assistant packed her bags and left. She quit after the husband of their most recent client sent them a package. She caught images of him sleeping with the next-door neighbor as well as a guy down the street. Both men were also married. To express his displeasure with Janice he sent the heads of the only two children he and his wife had, a pair of dash hounds. The tiny heads showed the violence and betrayal of the act in their lifeless eyes. Janice gave the box to Sean who said, *“don’t worry about this. I think mister Henry is about to have a run-in with the law.”* Janice left what he said alone. Off in a corner, Brandon was sitting quietly doing his homework on a card table. He was wearing a t-shirt with a cartoonish Jesus catching a soccer ball in front of a goal with the caption, *“Jesus Saves”* across the bottom. Last year Brandon became obsessed with the game. He would watch any time he could find a game on television. He also followed the University of Akron Zips teams both men and women. Janice quietly fumed over the shirt. Her rule with Brandon and her office was that he had to dress appropriately before coming here, but somehow Bill had let him come dressed in a shirt he couldn’t wear to school.

A knock at the door woke Janice up from her building rage. After the knock, the door opened, and a young woman walked in. She was in a pink sundress with a plunging neckline that was borderline indecent. Brandon noticed her immediately. After a second or two Janice remembered who she was, *“Jenny Gordon how may I help you?”* The woman said, *“please call me JG it’s what all my friends and family call me.”* JG told her she was starting at Kent State and taking a few classes at the University of Akron. JG asked, *“I don’t suppose you need a hand around here?”* JG looked at the clean empty desk then into Janice’s office. She asked, *“oh my god is that Brandon he’s gotten so big.”* Brandon pretended not to see her while his eyes never left her chest. Janice waved Brandon over to them. JG smiled then chuckled over the shirt. She asked him, *“so if I am right you are ten?”* He nodded, then after seeing the disapproval on his mother’s face he said, *“yes.”* Janice asked, *“I just lost my assistant, so if you are up for a challenge, then I do have something for you?”* JG asked, *“when can I start?”* Janice walked over and pulled the desk chair out and asked, *“how about now?”*

Janice put the picture someone took of that day down and placed a hook on the wall. She was surprised that day was over five years ago. JG had stopped and started her academic life going from major to major trying to find herself. Janice also knew she was delaying going back so she could live the life she wanted without her family finding out. Twelve years of Catholic school had her in deep denial over her feelings and how she thinks her family would react. JG had decided on a business degree in Accounting with a minor in acting. Two fields that rarely ever mixed. She was on a plane going back to Maryland to speak with her parents and tell them she was changing majors again. She wanted to make her minor in acting her major. She was also going to tell them about her new lifestyle, but Janice knew she wouldn't. Janice saw the ten-year-old Brandon sitting at her desk in the same shirt from that day with an open book and a paper with the word "lies" all over it written in many colors. Janice said, *"I was so embarrassed by the way you spent that day staring at her breasts."* Brandon said, *"they weren't hard to miss."*

The phone beeped with a message from Bill about a house he found for sale in an area near both his school and her office. Janice called him and asked, *"what kind of security does it have?"* He replied, *"the kind we install. Janice, I think you should see this one. I think you will like it."* Janice looked at her gun on the desk and then at the door. She said, *"I will like whatever you like.... As long as there is a bathtub deep enough for me to swim in."* Bill said how he took off his shoes and got into the tub and he was able to almost lie down flat in the tub in the master. He said, *"this tub would be illegal in California with how much water it will take to fill, owe yeah one more thing this place has its own well."* He said he would put an offer on it, but they will need her signature to finalize the bid. Janice picked up her gun and held it in her right hand while holding her phone in the left. She said, *"when you need me to be there I will.... Unless we can do that here or at Sean's place."*

It had been about a month since the incident with the security company, and Janice was out of clients. She wasn't taking on new clients, and her active roster was cleaned up. The one thing she was never without was her Chiappa Rhino loaded with 357-magnum jacketed hollow points. She liked the feel of the Rhino and the action even loaded with the 357-magnum. Every time she goes to a range, some know-it-all tells her that her gun is too underpowered or the two-

inch barrel is too small to utilize the full potential of the round. She eventually tells them, *“I shot two men with this gun and round, and it was good enough for them.”* She usually finds herself alone after confronting such range bullies. Her goal was to have both Bill and JG certified to carry concealed as soon as she can get them to touch a gun. JG said how her friends cringe over her working with someone that owns a gun and Bill seems always to be busy when she is going to the range. A knock at the door seemed to wake Janice from a daydream. She sat down at JG’s desk with her gun just below the line of sight and said, *“come on in.”* The doorknob jiggled then a familiar voice said, *“the doors locked.”* Janice looked at her gun then the door. Brandon came in from her office and said, *“just go ahead and shoot. I mean really what could go wrong.”*

Janice got up and put her gun in the holster on her hip. She went to the door and put her hand out. She looked at her hand then back to the door. From behind her, Brandon asked, *“are you going to leave him standing out there?”* Janice looked to Brandon then the door and opened it. About a year earlier Detective Gaspar Price retired from the police. He and his wife Sue moved to the gulf side of Texas to be closer to their family. *“I wasn’t sure you were open. Sean said I should knock, but I didn’t want to disturb you as you talked to someone.”* He looked around trying to see whoever she was talking too. Brandon waved. Janice held up her phone and said, *“I was talking to my husband about our new house.”* She looked over to JG’s desk and stepped aside so Detective Price could come in. Price said, *“I wasn’t sure if you were taking clients, but I wanted someone on this that I knew I could trust.”*

JG came down the steps from her childhood bedroom to find her father frying bacon for breakfast. She was in a pair of jean shorts and a loose tank top that barely covered her chest. She asked, *“so are we working on our next heart attack?”* Her father said, *“I can cook and smell all I want I just can’t eat it.”* JG kissed him on the cheek and took a slice of bacon from the pile on a plate. He said, *“I have potatoes frying, and I’ll do eggs any way you want.”* JG asked, *“do you feed mom like this every morning?”* He replied, *“no, she usually eats the same tasteless oat cereal I do, but today we have all our children under one roof, so I figured why not go all out.”* From behind her came a voice, *“Jesus dad, why don’t you just start digging your grave.”* JG turned to see her brother James Junior behind her. He was a Sargent in the Army and had been

deployed for over a year in Afghanistan. JG said, “JJ” and nearly jumped into his arms. As they hugged, their mother walked into the kitchen. She smiled a little then asked, “*oh, Jenny really you aren’t going to dress like that are you?*” JG’s mother’s smile disappeared as she brought her hands together in what JG called her clutching disapproval pose. Her mother said, “*you look like Tallahassee white trash or a Miami lesbo.*”

Francis Glenn Gordon was from one of the islands in the Florida Keys where her family owned a small resort style hotel while her father James Gordon was from Germantown Maryland close to Washington D.C. where his parents worked as lobbyists for the healthcare industry. James and Franny met in Rome when their high schools planned a mass trip to the Vatican in their Junior year. Their last night in Rome, James gave her a kiss, and she gave him her address. From there they wrote to each other every day for two years. When Franny decided to go to Oberlin in Ohio, James signed up with The University of Akron so they could be close. Six years and two degrees later they found themselves a pair of rings and jobs in the College town of Kent, Ohio where they eventually had four children. The oldest was James Junior, next was Mary who was known as Flash because of her fastball and their last name, Jennifer and finally William or Billy who was just about to graduate from High School. It had been years since all the Gordons had been in the same house at the same time. Mary was a Softball coach with a small college in Nebraska with her husband who was the football coach and their three children. Junior was on an almost never-ending deployment overseas, and JG just stayed away.

Mary came into the kitchen carrying her youngest a two-year-old girl named Elizabeth that everyone called Beth. She saw JG and said, “*there is no way you are dressing like that around my two boys Jenny, what is the matter with you?*” It had been about five years since she had to think about what she was wearing and most of her wardrobe was just like the outfit she had on. Mary’s husband Tadd or Tip walked in saying, “*I don’t see what’s wrong with it?*” His leer did more to make JG feel naked than her sister and mother’s comments. When Tip and Mary were dating, he had made a pass at the fifteen-year-old JG that included a kiss and touch of her ass that she kept to herself. Mary and Tips eight-year-old son Kenny came in and came to a stop in front of JG. His twin brother Benny collided with him and started to complain until he saw JG

and her top. JG said, *“I’m going to go and change.”* Her mom muttered, *“if that was only possible”* just loud enough so that everyone knew what she said. Mary said, *“yes, please do, and Jenny, please wear a bra. I mean really this isn’t Berkley or some backwater heck hole like Ohio this is Germantown.”* JG’s fraternal grandparents bought the house back in the 1950’s for somewhere around fifteen-thousand dollars, but with all the Washington money that had moved into the area, the house was worth about a million dollars now. JG’s Grandfather Stephen still own the house even though he now lived in a condo in Florida. Germantown went from a small farming community known for horses to a wealthy suburb of Washington D.C.

JG searched for a shirt and bra only to realize she didn’t pack a bra. She did have one of the tank tops from Sean’s bar. It had lifting support that acted like a bra. She put that on with a button-down shirt she took from one of her lovers back in Ohio. Sally was a banker named Greg that was nearly ready to transition. He just had to find a way to make himself into the woman he knew he was. The shirt covered the Bar logo, and the tank did the job. There was a commotion down in the kitchen. JG came down to see Jennifer Blake her best friend standing there in all her barbie like glory. When JG’s family moved to Maryland after the incident, the twelve-year-old JG met the twelve-year-old Jennifer, and they became inseparable to the point that they were known as just the Jennies as if it was natural for them to be together. Jennifer was known as Barbie because she looked like a living Barbie doll with her hair and makeup always in place and dressed like she walked off the pages of a catalog. Barbie was also the first girl JG ever kissed or did more with. Both girls kept each other’s secret.

Mary hugged Barbie and said, *“it’s good to see you dear, and as always you are dressed nicely.”* Barbie looked at JG then she smiled and said, *“thank you miss Mary, I like to dress like I am always on the job.”* James looked at Barbie and said, *“yes, that’s nice…… how is work……I mean um how…”* Barbie said, *“everything’s doing well mister James.”* She looked over at JG and asked, *“ready to go?”* On the way-out, Mary handed Barbie some cash and asked her to help JG find some clothing a proper lady would wear. An hour later JG and Barbie were together in a hotel in Essex. Both were naked and under the sheets. Barbie said, *“oh my god what is with your mother. I mean really, what a bitch.”* Barbie arched her back as JG was going down on her. She

went on saying in between fits of saying, “*oh god*” and said, “*your dad is just so cute.*” JG stopped and looked up at Barbie. She asked, “*so how many senators have been between these legs?*” Barbie asked, “*considering what you are doing, do you really want to know.*” JG came up from between her legs and kissed Barbie on the lips. She said, “*I almost died when dad started to ask how’s tricks. I mean if he only knew.*” Barbie said, “*you know I would do anything for you right? Well, your father does know because he was a client once..... OK twice.*”

JG sat up in bed saying, “*I don’t want to know about this.*” Barbie rubbed JG’s back and said, “*we got a call from a former client who was..... your grandfather and no we never even met. I went to the hotel, and there in the room, I found mister James. At first, he was just so apologetic and almost begging me to not tell anyone.*” Barbie hugged JG from behind. “*Your mother was having a hard time with menopause, and she told him that sex was just too painful for her, so they would never have sex again.*” JG shivered. Barbie went on saying, “*he was just so lonely and lost that I.... that is, we.*” JG slid to the end of the bed. Barbie got out of bed and went to her knees in front of JG. She put her head in JG’s lap. JG asked, “*how many times?*” Barbie said, “*I don’t know for sure, but it ended about a year ago when he found a girlfriend and before you say anything your mother already knows. She just doesn’t know about us.*” Barbie lifted her head and kissed JG on the inner thigh as she worked her way in. Before she started, she said, “*oh yeah I think your father knows about you and your life back in Ohio. He said something about a friend seeing you with a woman that was more dude like.*”

After doing all the usual searches, Janice went to thinking outside of the box. Gaspar hired her to find his sister. When they were children, they found out that their father back in Vietnam fought for the Vietcong. He eventually deserted when a particularly bad raid on a village had them killing every male over the age of thirteen and raping anything that was female. He had deserted and tried to warn the US Army about an attack coming on the Holiday of Tet. He was granted asylum in the States where he met their mother and married. His sister Linh was picked on as a child for being Vietnamese and finding out her father did what he did was just too much for her. She ran away from home, and they never saw her again. Gaspar said how they found a clue back in the 2000’s placing her in North East Ohio but that was the last anyone knew

of her. Janice knew that to most people Vietnamese; Chinese and other are alike. As if there was just one nationality for all of Asia. This made identification difficult. Gaspar had gone on the assumption that she would stick close to their heritage, but Janice thought she would go the other way and embrace Americana. She would change her name but because most people find patterns she would go with a name similar such as Lyn or Linda. After a search across several systems, Janice found a hit on a Lynn Price Allen in Doylestown, Ohio. Janice found her on Facebook.

Lynn was married to a David Allen for nearly twenty years, and they had five children and two grandchildren. On more than one post, Lynn said she was Chinese-American while not mentioning her father's origins at all. David was the son of a Vietnam vet who died while serving in country. His name was on the wall. Janice looked at the phone her client wanted her to hand Lynn. She knew she just couldn't call this woman and expect her to come to her office. She would have to go out and talk to her. She also knew that this woman would most likely not want to talk about her family and her father. Brandon said, *"if you want I can come with you."* She said, *"I could call him and say I found her and let him do the deed."* Brandon said, *"that would be a chicken poop thing to do."* Janice said, *"since you live in my head you can say shit."* Brandon replied, *"if that were true then I would have said that word."* Another search for events for the charity they worked with found an event where they were raising funds for a memorial to the fallen soldiers of the Vietnam war in Portage County. Brandon said, *"I don't know about that. It doesn't seem like the right time to speak with her about her Vietcong father."* Janice looked at her keys then the door. Brandon said, *"what am I worried about you won't go anywhere except here and the house."*

JG came out from the dressing room in a pair of skinny white capri pants and a pale blue top. Barbie said, *"it's a good start, but if you are going to dress like that you'll need a bra because your goods are showing."* JG went back into the dressing room. Barbie joined her with a pale pink dress and bra. The dress was known as a Peter Pan collar one-piece dress with a matching belt. Barbie walked behind JG and said, *"let me play Barbie with you."* She slowly undressed JG making sure to touch her in all the right places, then she put the bra on her and slid the dress over her head and down her body. With the belt, the dress fit her well with the hem just

above the knee. JG said, *“I haven’t worn a bra for a while, but this one fits like a glove.”* Barbie said, *“it should it costs about seven-hundred dollars.”* JG turned and looked at Barbie. Barbie said, *“I made nearly seven-hundred thousand between my working job and all the blackmail, so I have enough to spread around…… wait here, and I’ll get another outfit.”* She came back with a pair of what JG would call “mom jeans” and a red and white striped polo shirt that was twice the size she normally would wear. Barbie whispered, *“I slipped the clerk a couple of bills and my tongue so he will leave us alone.”* JG asked, *“why don’t you ask him if he wants to join us?”*

Two hours later JG and Barbie found themselves walking around the Lincoln memorial laughing and joking around. Barbie said, *“I can’t get over the look on what’s his names face. It’s like he won the lottery or something.”* JG said, *“yeah he didn’t even notice that the bra was in the bag. I mean I do feel bad about taking it but wow seven hundred dollars.”* Barbie replied, *“I think you earned the bra. If you want to earn some real cash, I know a few congressman and women who would just love you.”* JG’s smile faded a bit. She said, *“I love you, but I want nothing to do with what you and your father do.”* Barbie said, *“oh big pimp daddy is out of the picture. He retired from the job and is running a charter boat in Bocca. I am a free agent working with likeminded girls servicing Congress, the Senate and many lobbyists across the district.”* Barbie leaned in and whispered, *“I once sucked a senator’s dick while he spoke to the president about a new push to legalize prostitution. I mean it’s the same on both sides, powerful people like to fuck, and I provide a way for them to do what they like without consequences…… or until I blackmail them.”*

Barbie dropped JG off at her house. She was wearing a very conservative med-length plaid skirt with a white button-down shirt and a scarf that matched the skirt. She also had on the stolen bra and a pair of panties with Hello Kitty on the crotch. She said to herself, *“well at least one part of this outfit was my style.”* She walked in to find her mother and Father Calhoun their parish priest in the living room. Her sister, aunt June and two other women were there. The furniture was pushed back, and there were chairs set up in a circle. JG said, *“so are we having an intervention for dad’s bacon addiction?”* Father Calhoun said, *“your mother is worried about you, and we are here to talk about what is going on with you and how we can help.”* Mary

looked at JG and smirked saying, *“you look like great-aunt Jenny.”* JG looked at the chairs then back to the others in the room. She asked, *“now wait a minute you don’t think I am about to stand here as you people tell me what you think do you?”* Father Calhoun said, *“I know it can be difficult but seeing you have a problem can go along way to helping you find help, and we are here to help you.”* Mary said, *“yeah, help kick your ass.”*

Father Calhoun put his hand on JG’s shoulder and said, *“addiction is a powerful force that can control your soul.”* JG looked at his hand then to her mother who was both frowning and nervous looking. JG asked, *“you do know why you are here today Father Calhoun because I don’t do drugs.”* Father Calhoun said, *“my dear, I have done so many of these before, and many people in your position don’t see the problem even as it is destroying their lives.”* JG looked at her mother than her sister who was standing away from her and the father. JG said, *“I have never done an illegal drug in my life, and up until about two months ago I had never had a drink of alcohol. You aren’t here about drugs you are here about me and why I’m not living at home.”* Father Calhoun Stepped back and frowned. He said, *“why am I here then. I mean I don’t mind seeing my long-lost lambs, but this could have been handled better.”* JG’s mother said, *“Father I didn’t know how to deal with what I found out. A friend back in Ohio told me she saw Jenny kissing a..... another girl on the mouth while the other girl was touching her..... you know.... down there.”*

Mary said, *“father she is living in sin on our granddad's dollar.”* JG shook her head saying, *“it’s always about the money with you Flash. You want his money and just don’t like him giving any to me.”* Their mother said, *“no this has nothing to do with money. The devil is controlling my little girl and.”* Father Calhoun interrupted JG’s mother saying, *“Francis you know a lie is also a sin and the church has clear guidelines on this subject. You should be ashamed for calling an intervention like this on false pretense.”* He turned to JG’s sister and said, *“Mary, I just can’t look at you right now.”* JG said, *“mom I’m leaving tonight. I can see that I am not welcome here.”* Mary said, *“leave, and you won’t get any more money.”* JG laughed saying, *“Granddad knows all about me, and he controls the money. He also knows about mom and dad and just how long it’s been since they were actually man and wife.”* Mary pushed JG and said,

“don’t bring them into your depravity bitch.” JG pushed her back and said, “think about it. Dad works just three days a week, but he has a fulltime assistant that he sees almost every night.” Father Calhoun said, *“wow, I think this sounds like something your family should talk about alone.”* He turned to JG and said, *“maybe you should come with us.”* Francis said, *“if you leave here then don’t come back.”* JG said, *“don’t worry I won’t.”*

The two ladies that came with the father left in their own car as JG’s mother and sister watched her leave with him. He said, *“should I drop you off at Barbie’s place?”* JG watched her mother as she stared at her from the window. Eventually, she said, *“I don’t know maybe the bus station.”* Father Calhoun pulled out of the driveway and drove until his car was out of sight of the house where he stopped. He said, *“I can see why you would want to leave. I mean I really can see why, but maybe you should see your brother JJ before you go. He is in a dangerous profession, and if something does happen, you won’t want your last memory of him to be tarnished by what just happened.”* JG asked, *“how could she be like that?”* The Father said, *“there is a lot I can say, but most of it is protected. Your mother has a complicated past. The last pregnancy and miscarriage really changed who she was.”* As soon as he said it, he knew he overstepped. JG Mouthed the word, *“miscarriage.”* Father Calhoun took in a breath and said, *“I didn’t tell you this, but about a year after your brother Billy was born she became pregnant again. She carried the baby for about three months before the miscarriage. For years she thought or well, confessed that she had killed the baby with her thoughts. She didn’t want six children.”*

Father Calhoun pulled into a strip mall with a bus terminal. He asked, *“are you sure you won’t stay and see JJ?”* JG smiled and said, *“I’ll Skype with him when I get home, but for now I just want out of this place.”* She hesitated then she said, *“father you said she didn’t want six children, but my parents only have four or five counting the miscarriage.”* He looked out at the bus then back to her saying, *“no, you have a half-brother. Your mother put him up for adoption back in Ohio. She said his name was Ted Sanders, but I don’t know anything more than that.”* JG got out of the car, and he drove off after dropping a massive bomb on her. JG went inside and made arrangements to get home which included a transfer of buses in Pittsburg. She left almost

everything behind except the clothes on her back, and the clothing Barbie bought her. She also left with questions. Ted Sanders sounded familiar. She could remember a lawyer coming to the office wanting to put Janice on retainer. His name was Sanders. She remembered thinking he was kind of cute for an old guy. She also thought he was hitting on her but now looking back he may have been trying to find out more about a half-sister he just found out about.

Janice was in her Jeep staring at Lynn and David Allen's house when her phone rang. JG told her she was on her way home on a bus. The fact she was on the bus said it all for Janice. JG was traveling on her own dime and not with help from her family. Janice bit her lip and asked, "*so, how did it go?*" JG Laughed and said, "*I'll tell you when I see you.*" She paused for a couple of seconds then she asked, "*could you look into that Lawyer Ted Sanders for me?*" Janice asked if she needed a lawyer, but JG said, "*no I learned something, and I want to know if he is the same Sanders as someone my mom knows.*" Janice said when she got back she would open a file. Janice said, "*well one thing I can tell you is that he was adopted.*" After another moment of silence, JG said, "*he might be my half-brother.*"

Janice left her car and walked to the front door. She had the phone in her pocket and a letter from her client. The walk up to the door was one of the longest open treks she ever had to walk. Janice could feel all the eyes on her. The gun was on her hip and concealed but not very well. She knocked on the door. After a few moments the door opened, and an older Asian woman opened the door. Janice thought about just a day ago she was ready to chide people for not knowing one nationality from another when it comes to Asia, but now here she was not able to determine Lynn's ethnicity. She knew part of that was because Lynn was from a mix of Vietnamese and Chinese. Lynn asked, "*may I help you, dear?*" Brandon said, "*yes you can tell us your secrets and be like E.T. and phone home.*" Janice smiled and said, "*my name is Janice James. I'm a private security specialist from Cuyahoga Falls. I was hired by a Gaspar Price to find his sister Linh Price.*" Lynn's smile faded a bit. She asked, "*why is he looking?*" Janice replied, "*I could be wrong, but I think that now that he is retired and looking back he really wants to reconnect with the people that matter to him.*" Lynn shook her head saying, "*I'm not that person. She died a long time ago.*" Janice pulled out the phone and handed it to Lynn. She

said, *“I was hired to put this in your hand. I can’t make you use it, but I think you should. He is living in Texas with his wife and her family. They were all refugees from Vietnam and know about his and your father, but they don’t care. Don’t let someone else’s past control your future.”* Janice left her standing at the door holding the phone. Brandon said, *“just don’t look back. It’s cooler if you don’t look back.”*

A few hours later, Price called her saying, *“She called me and said this scary armed woman came to her house and handed her a phone guilting her to call.”* Janice asked, *“so she called you?”* He laughed and said, *“not only that, she and her husband are going to come down and meet my wife’s family. It feels good to speak to her again, and just maybe we can be a family.”* He told her he would send a check, but Janice said how his retainer was more than enough and she would send a refund. He said, *“consider it a tip.”* Janice disconnected the call and looked at the phone. She didn’t do anything hard to find his sister. He was a skilled, trained investigator known for a near perfect turnover rate. It almost felt forced. Janice looked at her door wondering if she should talk to Sean. Brandon said, *“maybe he did send Gaspar to you to help you get out of the door. If you really want to know just follow the money. Who paid you?”* the ten-year-old Brandon jumped down from the chair he was in and said, *“just think about this, you left the door to both your office and the outer office doors open. I think you are back in business.”*

JG made it back to her new apartment with the closed security system and open neighbors. She had sixteen messages on her phone and twenty emails. *“Jenny, this is your mother please call me. Jenny this is your mother why haven’t you called me?” Jenny this is your mother, I’m not mad just call me back, so I know you are all right. Jenny this is your mother, don’t be like this. Call me back.”* The next three messages were hang-ups then, *“Jenny I am so sorry about how I treated you. I could try and find some sort of excuse, but I am your sister and the older of the two and a mother I should know how to treat people better, please call mom or me and let us know you are OK.”* Her email was about the same thing with messages for her to call. The final Email was from her grandfather. It was short and to the point, *“Jenny, if you want I’ll kick them out of my house and let them fend for themselves.”* JG called her grandfather and

said she was alright and she would rather let it go and let them stay in the house. She then called her mother and sister who said very little and didn't end the call with the usual I love you or see you soon. JG disconnected her phone and wondered if she would ever see her family again.

The next day JG came to the office and found the door unlocked and Janice in her office with the door open and a stranger in with her. Janice got up and said to JG, *"its good to see you, and I am so happy you came back. I have a new client, but as soon as we are done, I want to hear it all."* JG nodded her head and went to her desk. She found a file for a client and a stop order for payment. JG looked around realizing she didn't think she was going to be back here after the attack but now it feels like she was home. She also found Janice and Bill's new address. The client left, and Janice came out. The first thing JG said was, *"I think from now on I would rather be called Jenny. I told my family who I am and now I want to be that person. I don't think I will ever have my mom's support, but now I can see that I don't need her support or anyone's approval."* Jenny turned to the door then back to Janice and said, *"I want a gun."*

Chapter Nine

The Gulf Coast Savings and Loan in Fort Myers Florida opened promptly at nine am to their usual crowd of retirees and business customers looking to do their usual banking. The manager James John opened the doors in the morning like he did every morning for the fifty years he worked in the small bank. He knew that the days of such small banks like his are numbered, and he might outlive the life of the bank. Government buyouts and consolidation were making personnel banking outdated. James thought to himself, *“but that’s for another day. Today is a good day to be alive.”* He started to close the door when a woman came up. James felt his seventy-two-year-old heart skip a beat at the sight of this tan beauty. He figured she had to be from somewhere south as in South America. She was in a pencil skirt, white top underneath a light jacket that matched the skirt that gave her outfit a suit like quality. James held the door for her, and she smiled and winked.

The woman walked up to James’s desk. James asked, *“may I help you miss?”* She turned around and smiled a warm and almost sultry smile. She said, *“I need to open an account. I am starting up a small business here in Fort Myers dealing in importing and exporting antiques between The US and Brazil.”* While trying not to stare at her chest, James said, *“well that sounds wonderful, my name is James John, I am the manager, and I can certainly help you.”* She said, *“my name just happens to be James as well, Janice James.”* She sat down, and the two went over the paperwork and checks finally opening the account with nine-thousand dollars. She told James that she would have larger deposits from both buyers and suppliers. James John saw all the potential cash coming to his struggling bank and decided not to question the cash flow. When they were finished, she said how she would be back from Rio in a couple of weeks with a large deposit, and she would like to have some sort of security at the bank when she arrived. James looked over at the eighty-six-year-old security guard Hester Charles and said, *“just call us, and we will have someone here within the hour and if you want we can send them to you to escort you.”* Ava smiled and said, *“this is why I wanted to work with a local bank, because of the wonderful personal service.”*

Ava went out to her rental car and stared at its bland appearance. She would only come here two more times, but Ava didn't want to be in such a cheap little car ever again. When she was in Ohio, she drove a customized Mercedes AMG SLK350 red with a tan interior. To anyone who saw the car it would appear to be an expensive but average car, but to Ava, it was so much more. The wood inlays in the dash and trim were from an Amaranth tree also known as Purpleheart from her family's front yard. Just before she burned her family's house down, she had the tree harvested. The leather seats and trim were a mix of crocodile and the skin of her family. She had them skinned alive and made several items from the skin. Ava considered it justice for selling her to him for what amounted to pocket change. She had to leave that car back in Ohio where it was put into storage waiting for a trial and verdict. Ava knew it was foolish to buy a car for one or two more trips, but she also knew that if her employer's little project worked her American dollars would be worthless. She thought to herself, "*this is a good day to be alive.*"

From the street, the property was an eyesore with its large unpainted cinderblock wall acting as a fence and the large rot iron gate blocking any view. The security cameras gave the place an almost prison-like feel. The house on the other side of the wall was almost a letdown to anyone expecting to find a mansion instead of the two-story craftsman bungalow with a detached three car garage. A nice, well-built home but nothing special. Janice and Bill were finished moving into the house. Janice was in her new office cleaning her guns while Bill worked on his lesson plans for the new school year. Janice had spent the day before with JG who now wanted to be called Jenny teaching her how to use and carry a gun. Jenny was also taking classes to earn her concealed carry permit. Janice bought Jenny a Glock 43 with a couple of extra magazines. She tried to get her to carry a Rhino like hers in 357-magnum, but Jenny wanted the Glock. She also tried to help Bill find a gun he was comfortable with, but his distaste for guns eventually led to a taser, and the promise to practice with the shotgun hid near the bed.

A cleaning crew was supposed to come around and clean the inside and the outside of the cinderblock wall, so it could be painted. Janice and Bill offered the walls as a blank canvas to his school and a few artist friends of Jenny. The school would have the outside, and the friends of Jenny would do the inside. The front of the wall would be painted as one mural made to look like

the wall wasn't there, and the house on the other side was more mansion-like. The inside would be freestyle in any fashion the individual wanted as long as the more risqué art could not be seen from the street. One of Jenny's friends was known for painting realistic three-dimensional paintings of nude people with multiple gender sex organs in lude sex acts. Another one was known for painting her poetry in a mix of paint and body fluids such as blood. Bill read, "*He runs his rough weathered hands down my chest, his penis red and hard. He thrusts, pokes and penetrates, the knife slick red and warm.*" Bill looks out at the place where this will be painted in a mix of red paint, blood, and a mystery fluid to be named later and wondered just how long it would take to grow a creeping vine up a wall. Jenny was with a friend named Heather and Heather's husband Jeff as Heather tries new patterns and techniques on them using body paint. Afterward, they spent the day with each other.

After a few calls to find something more fun to drive, Ava called Yara and told her, "*I just started the plan, soon we will have to move. Get ready but don't let the staff know.*" Yara looked outside and saw Hector as he worked on the yard. He was shirtless in a pair of jeans shorts and a straw cowboy hat. She watched him as he watched one of the downstairs maids clean the patio. The sixteen-year-old was the newest on the staff and had not yet taken part in any of the activities. He figured that he would approach either Ava or Yara and suggest they break the girl in, but he would have a twinge of remorse and wonder just how dammed his soul was. Yara knew that Ava would jump at the chance, but she would never touch this girl. She brought her here to help her escape Ava and go home. Yara knew she could count on her sister to help her.

Yara tapped on the glass to get Hector's attention. He wasn't sure if he should just drop his shorts now or wait and see if he is punished for not doing so. If it had been Miss Ava, he would have taken off the shorts before starting the yard work, but Miss Ava was in America. Miss Yara didn't always call on him for sex or a scolding, she also would just talk to him. In those times he would remain covered. He walked in to find Yara in a simple apron style dress that just barely covered her chest. She said, "*I couldn't help notice you staring at the new girl. I must tell you while she is very pretty she is for Miss Ava, and until she is back, you can only*

touch her if the new girl is willing. Anything else would be a punishable event.” Hector knew that a punishable event was code for chopped up and fed to the sharks. He said, “yes miss I will just keep my distance until Miss Ava is back.” Yara said, “hold on for just a minute.” She got up and waved the girl in. They whispered then both Yara and her sister Maria sat down on the couch in front of Hector. Yara said, “OK, take the shorts off.” Maria covered her mouth trying to hold in her giggling and embarrassment. Hector looked at the two women, one stern and the other giddy and he dropped his shorts. Maria went to an all-girls school and had never been around a boy much less seen one naked. Yara said, “I thought that you should see this now so you won’t be confused if you see him naked by the pool. Miss Ava doesn’t allow swimsuits in her pool even if you are cleaning.” Yara waved Hector off, and the two sisters watched him as he walked away with his shorts in his hands.

After Hector left, Maria asked, “*what was that about?*” Yara said, “*I needed him to know his place where you are concerned. From now on he will see you as a friend of mine and his better. If I hadn’t, you might have woke up one night with him on you.*” Maria said, “*maybe I wouldn’t mind such a find.*” Yara grabbed her by the wrist and said, “*no, don’t be fooled. He might look hot and sexy, but he is a killer with many bodies on his head.*” When she left home to come here, she was told by their mother to keep herself intact as in stay a virgin. Maria was told a little about what Yara was doing, but she didn’t know about a lot of the island life. In her short three days on the island, she was approached by four men and six women for sexual favors. One of the men was a sixteen-year-old boy that she found to be cute, but he was just a boy in comparison to Hector. Her goal was to help Yara escape, but her secret goal was to use this as an excuse to have sex for the first time.

Janice watched as the cleaning crew power washed the wall. It would take about a day before the wall was dry and ready for a sealer and white primer. The white walls would then be turned over to the budding artists. From behind her, she heard, “*OK, which of these rooms is mine?*” Janice turned around to see the twelve-year-old Brandon standing in the doorway with a look that was both anger and sorrow. Janice didn’t answer him. She didn’t want to face up to the fact that he was never a part of this new house. In Bill’s office on a shelf was the stuffed panda

Brandon had when he was younger and alive. It and the pictures were the only things of his in the house. Those things as well as their memories. Janice turned back to the door only to see it closed and Brandon was gone. For a second she felt his loss again until she heard something outside. Just outside her window, she saw the five-year-old Brandon rolling around in the snow. Janice knew he wasn't outside and there was no snow in the middle of August but right there and then none of that mattered. Even if just in her head, Janice got to watch her son play one more time. She wondered why her work was so much more important than being a part of his life.

Finished with the guns, Janice went to find Bill who was in his office working hard while listening to music. Bill had a love for classic Motown and was blasting Stevie Wonder loud enough to rattle the windows. He had the new school mandate on what was to be taught in history for the new school year as well as the updated guide to teacher-student interactions. He would say how every year the guide thickened, and the history book thinned, *“soon we won't be teaching history we will be teaching how to avoid history.”* Janice turned the music down. Bill asked, *“what was it too loud for you grandma?”* Janice came over to him and kissed his neck. She said, *“call me that again, and grandpa won't get any.”* Bill mimed zipping his mouth shut then tossing a key over his shoulder. Janice pulled his seat back and sat in his lap kissing him on the lips. She asked, *“Gee mister James, is there anything I can do to earn an A in this class?”* Janice sat on the desk spreading her legs opening them to him. She was uncharacteristically in a skirt rather than her usual slacks or shorts. Bill ran his hands up her skirt to where her panties should be but weren't. He said, *“well I can think of a few ways.”* Bill lowered his head between her legs and started to go down on her. Janice saw Brandon in the window as he pretended to gag.

Yara sat in the pool wondering if she should make her sister sleep in her room or trust she won't do anything she would regret. Hector was nearby with a rake and nothing else. By the pool was the new boy. Yara couldn't remember his name. She knew he was sixteen and that he didn't know the rules. She waved him over. Lucas Gomez tried not to look into the pool as he walked over to Yara. He asked, *“yes Miss?”* Like everyone else, he spoke in English. Yara said, *“the rules are clear. If you are working on or near the pool, then you are to be naked.”* Lucas looked

at his shorts than at the pool. He asked, “*but I’m not working in the pool?*” Yara said, “*I think you need to learn your place. Strip now and keep your clothes off for the rest of the day.*” She didn’t say “or else,” but it was implied. Lucas kicked off his shoes then pulled his shirt off. In his rush to take the shirt off, he knocked his Huston Astros hat off. Lucas hesitated for a second then he pulled off his shorts then his underwear. Yara thought, “*not bad but I’ve seen better.*” From the window in the sunroom, Maria watched the down dressing then the undressing. Her heart started to race as she thought about him and her together.

Janice leaned back as Bill became more aggressive. She noticed that the workers had stopped outside then she realized that if she could see them, they could see her. She said, “*as much as I don’t want you to stop I don’t like having an audience.*” Bill looked up as Janice pointed to the window and the workers who quickly jumped back to work. Bill got up and closed the drapes. When he came back, he kissed her on the lips. He could smell the gun oil on her hands as well as the upset stomach medication she was taking earlier. Bill asked, “*how are you feeling?*” Janice started to unhook his belt saying, “*I’m feeling horny so shut up and fuck me already.*” She didn’t want to talk about how she felt sick, and that sick feeling was just in the mornings. She remembered how with Brandon the only thing she could eat in that first month was rare to near raw steak. She had expected him to come out with fangs from all the blood and beef. Janice couldn’t find the will to find out if she was just sick or maybe something else. Most of all she wanted a rare steak.

Bill finished pulling his shorts off along with the boxers. He picked up Janice and put her back on the desk. She was now sitting bare ass on the guide to teacher-student interactions which felt appropriate to Bill. He pulled her close as he penetrated her. Bill felt harder to her than he had in years. The sex was raw and charged with some unknown force that propelled the normal almost timid Bill into a thrusting grunting machine that found Janice’s spot. Her cries could be heard outside among the workers who stopped for a second then went back when they realized she wasn’t being murdered. With one massive thrust, Bill came. He stayed inside her as they embraced. Janice whispered into his ear, “*I want to marry you.*” Bill looked down at what was now a ruined report as well as the ring on her finger and said, “*I know I already asked but, yes I*

will.” Janice said, “*no I mean I want to do it now.*” Bill looked down at his shorts on the floor and asked, “*can I get dressed first?*” Janice asked, “*why ruin such a good look?*” She looked out the window where she saw the ten-year-old Brandon standing there with his hands covering his eyes. He uncovered his eyes and nodded his head. Janice nodded her head in recognition and said, “*I could be wrong, but I think I might be pregnant.*”

After a few calls and a few hours, Ava found herself in the lobby of a specialty dealership. This dealer rented and sold cars to powerful people that like to stay off the radar of the law. In other words, he rented fast cars to criminals. The man would only go by the name Gnat. He was in a red smoking jacket and black slacks doing his best aloof Frenchman act as was possible for a boy born in Newark, New Jersey could. He went through the usual armored cars and assault SUVs before he realized that the woman wanted a sports car, not a rolling brick. She saw a couple of Ferrari’s she liked, but nothing said, “me” to her. That was until he came out with an unusual car and color. The car was a Ford GT40 in a pearl white with a topcoat that was iridescent, changing as the light hit the car. Gnat said how most of his clients didn’t like the color. Ava loved both the color and the racing style of the car. Her only regret was that she would only drive it for about a week. Gnat told Ava how she would have to put down the price of the car as collateral. Ava asked, “*if that’s the case then why don’t I just buy the car?*” She gave him a ten percent markup to do all the paperwork and help her buy the car without taking ownership.

Jenny lay between her two friends covered in paint and chocolate sauce. Jeff was laying there with his eyes closed while Heather was licking the chocolate off Jenny’s stomach. Jenny was starting to wonder if this was how an adult was supposed to be spending a day off from work. She did have a good time, but she wondered if there was more to life than good times and work. Jeff and Heather married right after high school, but they lived their lives like they were single. Both had multiple partners. They also shared partners. Jenny knew if she had that one relationship she wouldn’t want to share him or her with anyone else. Jeff came back around and started to lick the chocolate off Jenny’s left breast. Heather and Jeff met face to face in Jenny’s cleavage and kissed. For the first time since the fun started, Jenny felt like a prop in their sexual

relationship like a fancy chocolate covered sex doll. Her mind went to all the things she should be doing such as her laundry, cleaning her new apartment, and washing her car. While kissing his wife, Jeff pushed Jenny's legs up and apart. He started another round of what Jenny no longer thought of as fun. She just didn't know how to say she had enough without hurting her friends.

Bill stopped when Janice said pregnant. He had the same look on his face he had on their first pregnancy. About six weeks in Janice had a miscarriage, and the baby was never spoken of again. The next time was Brandon and that time he was prepared. Janice said, "*Ok, take a breath.*" Bill looked down at his penis like he had never seen it before. He then looked into Janice's eyes with a grin that was from ear to ear. He went in and kissed her on the mouth with such force that he knocked her back. Bill quickly pulled back asking, "*oh, shit did I hurt you?*" Janice replied, "*if what we just did didn't hurt me then a simple kiss won't.*" Bill pulled up his boxers and went for his shorts leaving Janice sitting on his papers with her skirt hiked up and goods showing. He asked, "*you said think does that mean you didn't see a doctor or take a test?*" Janice asked, "*what is it with teachers and all your tests?*" Bill leaned in and kissed her. He said, "*well at least you won't have to study for this test.*"

Bill drove to the closest store to buy a test or three. This was the first time he was buying a pregnancy test, and he had no idea that there were so many kinds of tests. He felt a presence just behind him. He turned to see Jenny with a basket filled with cleaning products. Her eyes were wide at the sight of the test in Bill's hand. She asked, "*please tell me you aren't buying supplies for the new school year?*" Bill said, "*Tenure.*" She looked at the test then back to him. Bill said, "*right now we aren't saying anything because we don't know anything.*" Jenny told him he would want a different test and she showed him which ones to buy. Bill asked, "*do I want to know why you know which test to buy?*" Jenny said, "*no, you don't want to know nor is it any of your business.*" On more than one occasion he thought of Jenny as his own daughter rather than just a friend of or employee of Janice making it difficult for him to see where his business ended with her. He noticed a smudge on her neck as well as the faint smell of chocolate, but he didn't want to push his luck with Jenny. She seemed a little angry about something.

At the counter, the clerk started to scan the many tests Bill was buying. The clerk was a former student of Bill's. He asked, "*harem?*" Bill said, "*you know how us teachers like our tests.*" The clerk said, "*well I hope you get the grade you want unlike me on that fucking final.*" Bill paid and went to his car. He got in and turned the key, but nothing happened. The car wouldn't start. He noticed his hood was popped open and when he checked his battery was gone. As he stood there a car went by. The passenger yelled something Bill couldn't make out as the man flipped him off. Bill yelled, "*stay classy assholes.*" Right after he said it, he realized it made no sense and was loud and in public. After a quick debate with himself, he decided not to call the police. He would buy a new battery and let it go. After all, he left the door unlocked giving them access to the engine. Jenny came out, and he told her what happened. She didn't hesitate in calling the police. She asked, "*if they are willing to do that then what else will they do?*"

Sean looked around the beach at all the women his age as well as the young sunbathing girls and wondered why he hadn't taken a vacation to Florida before. He hired someone to run the day-to-day operations of the bar, so he could semi-retire and do the things he always wanted to do, but after hiring her, he realized he already did all those things and was out of ideas. A friend recommended Florida for a few days, and Sean just wanted to kill him because Florida in August was a hot and sweaty mess. He did like the beaches and the beach bunnies. His original plan was to go to Fort Myers and see an old friend, but halfway there he realized the old friend was boring so instead he went to Miami. He was in a pair of board shorts, a Hawaiian shirt, a straw Panama hat and dark sunglasses going from an old staring pervert to a slightly disguised old pervert. He said to himself, "*I think I found my spot for the day.*"

Ava turned onto Highway-75 heading south then east on her way to the other coast and Miami. She tried to keep her speed under eighty so she wouldn't get pulled over. Her fake identification might not hold up to the police. The car was the closest thing to a race car she ever drove, and it was all about the experience of driving with little to no comforts like a radio or the other things she was a custom to having. At seventy miles an hour, she would get there in a little

over two hours. Her reservations at the Four Seasons in Miami were for the entire week where she would enjoy what was going to be the last days of America. She would have her fun and drive back to do her job. Along the way, she saw a man hitchhiking. He had to be in his late teens to early twenties in a pair of jeans, a flannel shirt carrying a backpack. She pulled over and opened her shirt to show more than just a little cleavage. She thought to herself, *“well just maybe I can have some real fun after all.”*

He opened the door and saw Ava, she asked, *“so where are you heading?”* He pointed east and said, *“that way.”* He got in, and she pulled away. About ten miles away from where she picked him up he asked, *“don’t you want my name?”* Ava moved her hand from the gear shift to his thigh then crotch and said, *“no not really, I don’t need your name.”* Ava let go of him and shifted gears as she sped up. She said, *“I do expect to get something for my time. I think I’ll start with your pants. Take them off so I can see what I’m working with.”* Ava opened her shirt the rest of the way showing her tan and tone breasts. Lance had never seen such a woman as Ava. He unbuckled his belt and pulled both his jeans and underwear down. She took hold of him a little harsher than he expected. She said, *“I can work with this, now all we need is a place to stop.”* Ava pulled over and put the parking brake on. She quickly pulled her shorts down and slid over onto him. Lance said, *“I don’t think this is going to work.”* Ava pointed to an alligator and said, *“we could step out.”* Lance staring out replied, *“no I think we should stay off of Alligator Alley.”* Ava whispered to him, *“if I don’t like it I’ll feed you to them.”*

Janice sat on the toilet wondering what kind of misogynist designed the pregnancy test. The first test didn’t give a positive or negative result. A gallon of water and a quart of ice tea later Janice found herself peeing on a test again. She could remember the first test like this she ever used. She was seventeen, and he was twenty. This was about the time Janice was staying away from her father and his new wife her once best friend. Her mother was dead for about a year, and she had no one who seemed to care about her. She met Charlie at the library. She was reading on how to emancipate herself when he came up behind her and offered to help. Charlie was a college student working on his law degree. He was cute, and she was lonely. One thing led to another, and she found herself in the bathroom in the library with this older man. The sex was

quick and dirty with Charlie saying some vile things to Janice or at least what she thought of as vile. The dirty talk was foreign to her as was a one-time hookup. Back then the test was negative, unlike the one she just took. The test was positive, and she was pregnant. Just outside the bathroom door, Janice could hear a commotion. She opened the door and saw the five-year-old Brandon, the two-year-old Brandon, the ten-year-old Brandon and the twelve-year-old Brandon all running around screaming. The older Brandon said, *“I’m going to be an older brother.”* The Ten-year-old said, *“you have to be alive for that to matter.”* Janice shut the door and said to herself, *“please just go away.”*

Jenny looked back at her apartment after spending the last two hours cleaning every inch from the ceilings to the floors. As she cleaned, she moved anything she felt was too childish for an adult to have on display as well as her sex toys and other items she would have a hard time explaining to a five-year-old. Her phone buzzed, and she answered. It was Heather wanting to know if she was alright. She said, *“you left so abruptly that we started to think you might have been mad about something.”* Jenny told her how she started to feel like a third wheel or a prop. Jenny said, *“I think I want to be more than just a good time. I want more from my life.”* Heather said how she was sorry they made her feel that way and, in the future, she should say if she was uncomfortable. Heather then asked, *“so are you willing to come to a little party we are having on Saturday, it might be a little, well a whole lot risqué.”* She called it a key party, but everyone would have a choice in going home with the person who has their key. Jenny said, *“let me think about it, but.....well.....Ok, I’ll be there.”*

Bill sat just outside the door thinking about the test, Janice, Brandon and just how much she just drank. To take the second pregnancy test, Janice nearly downed a gallon of water in one shot then a quart of sweet tea. Janice had said something about a steak as bloody as they would or could be served. Bill had a charcoal grill and the desire to do just what she wanted, but he also remembered how she was this way with both the other pregnancies. He thought he could hear her say something on the other side of the door, but he couldn’t make out what she was saying. Then she yelled, *“please just go away.”* He got up and started to leave their bedroom when he stopped and thought about what she said and just maybe she didn’t want him to go. He went back and

knocked, but she didn't answer. He knocked louder, but all Janice could hear was the sounds of the many ghosts in her head in a cacophony of noise that drowned everything else out. Bill grabbed a screwdriver and popped the lock on the door and went inside to find Janice in the bathtub with her hands over her ears. When he entered the noise stopped. Janice saw the five-year-old Brandon at the door staring at her holding his panda.

Janice was happier to see Bill more than anyone else in her life. Seeing him was like the first time she saw Brandon when he was born or seeing him after he was buried. He picked her up from the tub and carried her to the bed. He asked, "*are you ok?*" Janice handed him the test and asked, "*you tell me, daddy?*" Bill could see the positive result, but it didn't fit with her reaction. For a moment he wondered if she was considering terminating the pregnancy. He knew it was her choice just like he knew it would end them. He could never look at her knowing she had ended their last chance at having children. Janice said, "*OK, I think we sat here long enough. I want that steak, and I need to make an appointment to confirm this test and start the process of having a healthy child. Oh yeah did I mention I want that steak?*" Instead of firing up the grill Bill called around until he found a place that would serve a rare to blue steak and would seat them as soon as they got there. Before they left, Janice called Jenny and told her the news. In her haste, she called her JG and not Jenny, but she let it slide.

Jenny ended the call and looked back at her apartment. It was decorated as if taken straight from an Ikea catalog. It had no personality, and it didn't reflect her tastes at all. Bill and Janice were constantly reinventing themselves, but she was the same person on the same couch as she was nearly five years ago. She had drastically changed her love life, but her day-to-day was just as ordinary or unoriginal as it was when she was a child and had no say in any kind of decorations. What she did have was blank walls and a large group of artist friends. Her lease wouldn't allow her to paint the walls, but there were many ways to add color without painting straight on the walls. She sent out a mass invitation to an apartment warming party asking people to bring their paints and whatever they used to make art. She then measured the walls and ordered frame wrapped canvas big enough to cover the bare walls. She also ordered enough drop

cloths to cover the floors and plenty of alcohol. She planned on having a party start on Friday night and end on Sunday with a decorated apartment and the end of the old Jenny.

Ava left the check-in after changing her reservations from one to two. Lance turned from a quickie to someone she would use for the week. She had planned on feeding the alligators with the young man, but he earned his life for now. She looked him over and realized he didn't fit into this hotel. Ava told him, "*I think we need to make a slight change.*" The first change was a shower, and as he showered, Ava had the concierge sent out for a tailor as well as some basic clothing items such as socks and boxers. With all her calls made she joined him in the shower. When they were done Ava sat him down and sat on his lap with a mug of lather and a straight razor. She said, "*hold still, I don't want to ruin your pretty face.*" She slid down onto him and started to shave his face as they had sex. She finished with his face and what they were doing just as the stylist arrived. Ava put on a robe and met with the man at the door. As he set up Ava opened the door to the bathroom and showed Lance as he re-showered to the stylist who just whistled and waved his hand in a fanning motion in front of his face.

Janice cut into her steak and was happy to see the deep red of a rare steak. Bill was amazed to see Janice dive into her second twelve-ounce New York Strip steak. She told them to leave off the sides, but with the first steak, they brought mashed potatoes that were untouched on the first plate. Bill knew to eat slow or be stuck watching as Janice tried to eat an entire cow. About the time she started to lick the plate he knew this was going to be a long night, but luckily for him, she was finished. On the way out, Bill bought an entire cheesecake for later. They stopped at a grocery store and bought the equivalent of a half of a cow in meat and charcoal for the grill. In the car, Janice said, "*in all the emotion of the day I didn't ask if you wanted another child.*" She leaned toward him and asked, "*do you?*" Bill said, "*I didn't want to replace Brandon, but I always wanted him to have a brother or sister so yes I want our child.*" Bill looked out the window as they passed from a commercial area to a residential. He said, "*there are times I see him.*" Janice went numb then cold. She asked, "*who?*" Bill replied, "*Brandon. I'll see a park and just for a second I could see him playing there or in a gang of kids playing a game or swimming. I often wonder what he would have been like as a teen and I miss him even more.*"

Jenny's friend Tasha came over, and they sat in her living room watching *Orange is the New Black*, smoking weed and making out. Their clothes were everywhere along with bottles of wine. Jenny met Tasha at a protest for an amendment for gay rights in the Ohio constitution. Tasha was a lot like Jenny as well as nothing like her. They were both bisexual or what Tasha called pansexual because as she said, "*I don't care what you are as long as you want me.*" Tasha was from a wealthy family in the upper west side of Manhattan and had decided to go to Kent State so she could get away from her mother and her wanting to find her a man. Like Jenny, she spent her time trying to find herself as an adult away from those things that worked to keep her as a child such as her parents. They lay there entwined with each other watching the tamest prison show wondering what a show like this would look like if they made the show. Tasha wrote a short pilot for a show that was about a group of women after they got out of prison. They went to sleep reciting lines from her script and saying how someone should make her show.

Ava and Lance went dancing at more than a few of Miami's nightclubs. Lance didn't have any identification, but Ava knew that money would open any door. All cleaned up, and well-dressed Lance was not only cute but handsome in a gaunt sort of way. The stylist said he was Brad Pitt if the actor decided to fast for a month or three. Ava was still on the fence on whether to let him live or kill him on her last night in Miami. She didn't think that she wanted to spend any more time with him past that week, but he had an endearing naivete that made her rethink just chucking his body to the alligators. Before that night he had never had a drink or smoked a joint. His reaction to her was almost comical with the gaping jaw and prominent erection. She could see her and Yara or Hector sharing this man for a while then dispatching him in style. They went back to the hotel, and Ava cut the clothing off Lance and herself. Using a variety of drugs and toys she and Lance spent the evening having Ava's kind of fun.

Yara closed her bedroom door and opened the doors to the outside. She stripped down to a simple pair of shorts and top then she went to bed alone for the first time since she was sold to Ava. After the years of noise, the silence was deafening. On the other side of the island, Hector

was filling in a hole. He had just buried the body of one of the upstairs maids. After Yara said he couldn't touch the new girl, Hector took his frustrations out on her. He thought of her as her and not Alicia. He wasn't sure when things went wrong. One minute he was on top of her the next he was burying a knife in her chest. He lost count on how many of these people that Miss Ava called, "throwaway people" they had killed. She either paid them well or in many cases paid their families well. He was one of the people she bought. His life was worth about seven-hundred dollars. He stared down at the breaking waves on the rocks below and wondered if he should jump and go to whatever hell was waiting for him.

Maria called Lucas into the small bedroom she was assigned. She said, "*I am so sorry about how she treated you.*" Lucas was still naked as per Yara's orders. He eventually learned not to cover himself after more than a few of the staff either told him to stop or slapped his face yelling stop. She knew that many of the staff wanted to be here and saw Ava and her sister as some sort of royalty. Maria was wearing a special nightgown she took from her sister that was a little more than a see-through robe. She opened the robe and let him see her body. He was the first boy to do so since she was five and went skinny dipping back home. This was very different from those times. She moved closer to him, and they kissed. She could feel him. She looked down at the instrument that will take her virginity. Lucas whispered, "*what do we do now?*" She slipped off the robe and tossed it on a chair. Then she took his hand, and they went to bed. She said, "*I think we can figure it out.*"

Janice and Bill lay in bed staring at the ceiling. He was wondering what the next school year will look like as well as the chance of a new son or daughter. He would never say it out loud, but he wanted a daughter. A daddy's little girl he could spoil as a child and defend from boys as a teen. He could see her as a valedictorian from both Harvard and Yale. He could also see her children and her grandchildren. Janice was staring at the five-year-old Brandon as he sat in the corner with his stuffed panda talking to the bear like it was alive and the bear was talking back. With a new child coming she knew she had to do something about Brandon. Either he was driving her insane, or her insanity was creating him, she didn't know. What she did know was that just the thought of losing him again was heartbreaking. Bill whispered, "*you're thinking*

about him again. I know because I think about him every day. I wonder what he would think about where we are and about becoming a big brother? I wonder what kind of man my son would have been? I wonder if he ever forgave me for taking that bear away?" The panda stood up and shook his head "no." Janice said, *"this has been a very long day."*

Chapter Ten

The bartender handed the young man the two drinks wondering if he was making a mistake. The woman who ordered the vodka and lime soda drinks was a guest of the hotel and paid him well to not ask questions, but if he was caught serving someone underage, he could be in trouble. The guy looked like a young emaciated Brad Pitt. Nearby a man in a straw Panama hat was hitting on a woman nearly half his age. To his surprise, it seemed like it was working and just maybe the old man was going to need a little blue pill. Sean watched the bartender, the kid with the drinks and the woman. Her name was Brenda, she was fifty-three, and she seemed to be into him. He lost interest in the kid and just missed seeing Ava, but Ava saw him. She watched as this woman whispered into Sean's ear as they laughed together. Ava had one more day in Miami before she had to be back at the bank and finish her job, but if he sees her, she might have to run.

Sean was staying in a different hotel near his own price range, but Brenda was a guest at the hotel. She was a retired teacher from Lansing, Michigan but she went to college at Kent State. She took early retirement after her elementary was closed and consolidated into another school. She would come to Miami every year for one week and spend her entire entertainment budget for the year on a room. She liked Sean's old school gentlemen's approach to her. Too many men her age didn't know how to treat a lady, although she didn't like being called "babe" occasionally. She had asked him why he didn't retire. Sean said, *"I've been working since I was sixteen and I don't see a reason why to stop now also, Babe, retirement is something old people do."* She wanted to be mad after all she was retired, but something about this man made her not so angry. She said to him, *"stop calling me Babe and just maybe you'll get lucky tonight."*

Ava watched them walk away. She thought about old people sex and nearly dropped her drink. She had nothing against the man except that he was a friend of the woman that ruined her business. The woman was just in the wrong place with the wrong man and would be collateral damage. Ava called around and found a gun she could buy without any questions. Now all she needed was the hardware to build her a bomb. She saw this as a win on three counts. She could

deal with this man, hurt Janice and take care of Lance. Ava was growing tired of his puppy dog like attention. Normally she would have either had him go to another part of the island to work after a few days or just killed him and moved on, but she couldn't do either and not risk her job. Lance lived because his death would raise too many questions. She tried her cell again, but she couldn't connect to the island. Someone most likely the U.S. government was stopping any communication between the mainland and the island. She also knew that they were most likely tracing any calls made to the island. She wanted to make sure that Yara and Hector got off the island. Ava started to think that the American Navy was about to invade her home without permission. She would have to do her own shopping without Lance or any help. Something she wasn't a custom to doing.

The art students were nearly finished with the outside wall. From the street, they painted a mural that made the white cinderblock wall disappear with the illusion of a park-like setting. In the park was depictions of families including the faces of everyone working on the mural. Among the children was a detailed painting of Brandon. One of the artists was a boy named Ashley Johnson. He was named after a character from a movie called *The Evil Dead*, and most people called him Ash. He was a friend of Brandon and was there when he died on the soccer field a little over three years ago. Seeing him made Bill think about that day as well as his son. On the inside, the walls were a mismatch of art from a unicorn being sodomized by a priest to a firefight between the Carebears and My Little Ponies. He was impressed with several works including one that had a three-dimensional effect making it look like there was a hole in the wall and nothing but blackness on the other side to a metallic work that looked like stain glass. Bill was on his way to set up his classroom for the new year. In just a few days he would be Mr. James again, and he couldn't wait.

Jon Delvin opened the door to the passenger side of his car, and she got out. Her name was Sandy Keats, and like Jon, she was married. Jon Kissed her on the lips while his hands found her breasts then ass. She pushed him away while looking around. Jon had already been to the motel and had rented a room for the night. Neither of them noticed the jeep parked nearby or Janice in the back with her camera. When Jon went to pick up his next-door neighbor's wife,

Janice paid the motel clerk to let her into his room so she could plant a few bugs and cameras. April Delvin said her husband would screw anything remotely female. She was the client, but Jon's business partners were also involved. They wanted him out of their accounting firm and with a divorce, he would be forced to sell his shares, and they would be rid of him. Janice thought about telling Sandy how Jon was also screwing her nineteen-year-old daughter and it seemed like it was going on for years. Jon would hit on anyone from his partner's wives to his wife's sisters. April knew that he slept with one of her sisters last year, but she had no proof, and her sister stopped talking to her after April confronted her about the affair. Jon and Sandy were naked as Jon went down on her giving his wife enough proof to end their marriage and his partners enough to cut ties with him.

Jon moved up her body spreading her legs and going to work. Janice could see something in Sandy's eyes that seemed to say she didn't want to be there. She was married to an airline pilot that flew from Cleveland to Las Vegas. She would go days without seeing her husband. Janice knew that Jon was their accountant. She couldn't shake the feeling that this man was using Sandy. With a quick thrust and gasp, Jon was finished. He rolled over onto his back and said to Sandy, *"that was the best one yet."* Sandy asked, *"are we done yet?"* Bill rolled over and put his hand on her throat. He said, *"we are done when I say we are done unless you want your husband to know about your nasty habit."* Bill got out of bed and walked into the bathroom. Janice could hear the lid open and piss hitting the water. Sandy got out of bed and took a small pill bottle out of her purse. She dry-swallowed the pill then another. Janice couldn't make out the bottle, but it was the usual amber bottle used for prescriptions. Janice thought that Jon must have found out Sandy was popping pills and he used this information to blackmail her for sex. She said, *"wow, what a guy. Why are all the good ones married."*

Lance woke up after another long night of Ava's kind of fun. He was starting to wonder if he made a mistake in getting into her car when he realized he wasn't in the hotel room. He was in a room that looked like either a motel or a hotel, but it wasn't the four seasons. He had something hanging low on his throat, and something was written on his hand. The hand note said, *"don't take off the bomb."* Lance felt the thing around his neck then he carefully got up and

went into the bathroom. He found a note on the mirror saying, *“the collar around your neck is a bomb, by walking into the bathroom you activated it. You have six hours to kill the man in the file, or the bomb will blow your head off. Tell the police and die, tell the man and die, fail to kill him before times up and die. Thanks for a great time, Ava.”* The collar had lumps of gray material with wires and a timer. It was loose and low enough that if he wore a closed shirt, it would be hidden. On the side of the sink was a folder with the room number and picture of an older man named Sean Mackay. Back on the bed, Lance found a case with a handgun. A note said it was already cocked and locked all he had to do was push the safety and fire. The 22/45 Ruger with a suppressor was lighter than he thought it would be but also long.

Sean moved from his nice hotel to a motel that was more of a flophouse. He wanted to have more cash to spend on Brenda. She didn't ask him to he just wanted to spend as much time as he could before she went back to Michigan. Brenda was going to spend the day at a spa that was for women only, so Sean went back to his flophouse of a motel and went to sleep. He woke to a presence in the room. In a chair near the bed, he saw a young skinny man with a gun in his lap. The young man said, *“she said I needed to put the barrel up to your head, so the round would kill you, but I can't.”* He patted the gun then he said, *“I wanted you to know what I know before this goes off, but I got lost, and it took all my time to find you. In about three minutes this thing will go off, and Ava will have killed me, but I didn't kill for her.”* Lance said, *“just go and let this thing be done with me.”* Sean looked at the collar then he replied, *“I was once a cop, let me see that thing and just maybe I can help.”* Lance handed Sean the gun by the barrel. Sean stripped the magazine then ejected the chambered round. He then looked at the bomb.

Janice and Jenny watched the footage of Jon as he used whatever control over these women to force himself on them. The real gold was when the found footage of him with a girl that had to be underage. He had paid this one, and he didn't linger afterward. Jenny said, *“what the fuck is wrong with this guy? Could there ever be enough for him?”* Janice said, *“it was lucky that he used the same room every time or this job could have become expensive.”* The last recorded image was the worst. Jon had paid for a prostitute to come to his room dressed in the uniform of a local middle school. The working girl looked the part, and she gave a performance

of a lifetime acting as his victim as he forcefully took her in a way that mimicked rape. Janice knew he used a camera to record his conquests including this last one. Janice counted in her head all the women he recorded, and it came to around seven with several of them multiple times totaling up to twelve videos. If she could get into his account and download his stash of selfie-porn, then who knows how many he did just like this. The client was going to meet her in her office in an hour, but Janice told her they should meet at her husband's firm. About the time she was going to leave she got a call from an unknown number in Florida.

Sean touched one of the gray lumps on the collar. He rubbed his fingers together then he smelled them. He then pulled one of the wires out. With every action, Lance jumped. Sean showed his fingers and said, *"boy this is modeling clay, not C-4."* He unhooked the collar and showed how the wires were just jammed in, and the timer was just a timer. Sean said, *"you said, Ava. What do you know about her."* From the smell, it was clear that Lance had shit himself. The timer went off, and he jumped. Sean poured him a shot of whiskey and Lance down it on one go only to run to the bathroom and toss it back up. In the chair he was in there was a dark brown to black stain. Sean closed the bathroom door and told Lance to take a shower before coming back out. Ten minutes later Lance was smelling better and in clothing that was maybe twice his size. He told Sean about being picked up by Ava and how she brought him to the hotel. Lance said, *"my mom told me I couldn't get my license for another year, so I left home not thinking about what I would find just..... I don't know."*

Sean picked up his phone and called Janice, *"hey babe, this is Sean."* Janice replied, *"yeah, no one else calls me babe. How's Florida?"* Sean said how he didn't have time for small talk. He was calling the FBI and the local police, but he wanted her to know first. He said, *"Ava is back in the states."* He told her about the sixteen-year-old Lance, the bomb and how Ava was upset about not being able to call the island. Lance said how Ava used a credit card for everything even though she had somewhere near ten-thousand dollars in cash on her. Janice added a call to the secret service, but Sean said they should call homeland about the counterfeit bills. Lance said, *"if it helps I took a few off the top."* He went to his soiled jeans and pulled out

three one-hundred-dollar bills that smelled like shit. Sean disconnected the call and called started with the FBI than the local law.

James John, the manager, unlocked the door and held it open as Ava walked into the bank with her purse and a bag of cash. Along the way she had stopped and counted the bills to find three of them missing, but they weren't any of the special bills. She sat down, and they did the usual pleasantries, and she handed him fifty-five thousand dollars in cash. Some from her own reserves while the rest being the special bills. While Ava was in Fort Myers others were in other banks in nineteen other cities across the country depositing the special bills. Not every bill would be put through the counting machines, but enough of them would be scanned and have their code compiled to the federal reserve system to build the program Ava's employer designed. They paid Ava one-hundred and fifty million in diamonds to deposit the bills in key cities on this day, but Ava would have done this for free. She hated how in the land of the free she couldn't be free to be who she was. Ava knew she was a killer.

Her trip to the bank was uneventful except for how the manager gushed over her deposit. She almost felt sorry for him. His world was about to end, and he didn't even know. She also wanted to go back in and ride him like a pony as she slit his throat smearing the blood across herself. Ava licked her fingers and put them into the front of her slacks down between her legs. As she worked on her needs, her phone rang. *"Ava my love you did wonderfully. The program is up and running giving us access to the system. Now let's talk about where we go from here."* Ava leaned back as she when just a little harder down on herself. She said, *"I don't know about you, but my plan is to get out of here, and the west before all hell breaks loose."* The voice on the other side of the call clicked his tongue then he said, *"sorry my love but we may have misled you on our plan. We were never going to crash their systems. We want to own them not destroy them. The program will allow us access and control."* Ava stopped masturbating and said, *"I gave up everything for this plan. I lost my home and my love for this plan."* The voice said, *"Shush Ava just be a good girl and die."* Ava's car shut off and the door locks engaged. A mist of gas filled the cabin than the 1969 pearl white Ford GT40 went up in a fireball.

Ava leaned forward from the backseat of the minivan she was hiding in and saw what was supposed to be her funeral pyre. Knowing not to trust her employer, Ava found a vehicle she would never be caught dead in and took it over. To do this, she had to take control of the family that was in the minivan. For Mitch Gregg that meant he was duct taped to the driver's seat while his wife Brenda was taped in place beside him and their twelve-year-old daughter Jennifer was sitting next to Ava trying not to scream. None of them knew that the six-year-old Sean the youngest of their family had suffocated in the back with tape covering his mouth and nose. Ava put the tip of her blade on the ear of Mitch and said, "*put your foot on the break while I work the shifter. You will drive me where I say then I will let you go.*" Mitch did as she said and soon they were off. She knew that she couldn't go back to her hotel. Her employers think she is dead, but they weren't stupid. They would have someone watching for her. She had enough diamonds to do whatever she wanted, but all she wanted was to find Yara and get Janice.

About three miles from Daytona Beach the minivan ran out of gas. They rolled to a stop along the highway. Ava leaned forward and licked Mitch's ear. She said, "*well I guess you and your family have served your purpose and now I should let you go.*" Mitch turned his head to Brenda who was nearly gagging as she cried. In the mirror, he could see his daughter and the look of surrender on her face. While they drove, Ava had stripped the young girl and did things to her that he wanted to forget. For a second he thought about smashing the van into a guard wall, but he didn't know if his son would survive. As he stared at his wife, Ava's blade came up through the back of the seat and Brenda's chest. Ava stabbed her two more times, and Brenda screamed. She then put the blade to Mitch's neck and whispered, "*first I killed the boy, then your bitch, and when I am done with you, I'll gut the girl.*" She pushed his head forward and stabbed him in the side of the neck going all the way from one side to the other then she forced the blade forward and out nearly decapitating him.

Ava gathered whatever she could find in the back of the van and left the family to rot just off the side of the road. The Gregg's were on vacation and had spent three days at Disney. Most

of their clothing was Disney themed and while Ava hated all of it she knew she wouldn't be recognized in such gear. Besides the twelve-year-old's shirts were nice and tight. With the proper application of a knife, she made the mouse sexy. Ava checked the cold dead thing that was Sean and drove her knife into him to make sure he was dead. She then checked on Jennifer. Ava spent an hour making shallow cuts all over the young girl's body from her face to her feet. Jennifer was lying still in the back on a seat covered in her own blood. Ava had to use every bit of their water and moist towelettes to get the blood off her before she dressed. She could see that Jennifer was still alive somehow. Ava said, "*most people would have died after what I did to you.*" Ava took out a small bag of the diamonds and gave them to Jennifer. She said, "*the best way to get over a traumatic past is to empower yourself over others.*" Ava closed the van door and went to the highway with her thumb up looking for some more fun on her way to Ohio and revenge.

For what felt like the longest time, Jennifer lay there waiting to die. She felt both hot and cold all at the same time. She knew this feeling from a bad cold she had when she was very young. Back then Jennifer had developed pneumonia and had nearly died. She moved slowly feeling every cut. The first time her foot hit the ground was sheer agony then the second foot. Jennifer looked at herself seeing nothing but blood and cuts. She was naked, but she didn't care or was past understanding. She put one step in front of the other and stumbled her way to the road. At the road, she looked back at what her mother called her kid-mobile. Her mother's face was pushed up against the glass with the tape over her mouth, and her eyes open frozen in fear. All around her she saw flashes of red and blue. She turned to see a car with lights on top. The last thing she saw before she passed out was a man in a uniform racing to her.

At a rest stop, Ava was in the back of a semi riding the driver. He had picked her up thinking she was a working girl on her way to a truck stop and more than a few quickies. After killing a family, Ava wanted something simple, and this man was as simple as someone could get. Her tits underneath this tight shirt were enough to get her two kinds of rides. Ave knew to be on top so she could control the situation. As she bounced, a warning came across the radio. The warning described Ava and what she had done. After Jennifer was found by the state police and the paramedics cleaned her up she told them about Ava. Afterward, she stopped talking and just

lay still in her hospital bed. Ava quickly pulled her blade and drove it into the driver's chest. He stiffened then went slack. Ava pushed his body into the back then she redressed and sat in the driver's seat. After ten minutes of staring at the truck's controls, she knew she would never figure out how to start this thing much less drive it all the way to the Falls. The man was hauling used cars to be sold in the north. The easiest car to take was a red 2013 Jeep Liberty. It had a license plate from the dealer that was waiting for it in Pittsburgh. Ava waited for the night then she did her best to figure out how to free the Jeep and get on her way.

Yara, her sister Maria and Lucas were in a small boat about three miles away from the island as they watched four large vessels move in close. It was dark, and their boat was small. The U.S. Navy didn't seem to pay attention to the small boat. They had other places to be. Yara wasn't happy that her sister had taken this boy with her or that she had been sleeping with him for the last two nights. Lucas proved to be worth taking as he knew how to sail. As a young boy, he had helped a small charter boat sail around the gulf. In the hold of the ship was enough supplies to get them where ever they wanted to go as well as enough cash to make that location inviting. Yara remembered how Ava would say that money opened doors and made people welcome into almost any place in the world. She was at the wheel as her sister and Lucas were in the hold together sleeping. Off in the distance, she saw a flash of light come from one of the ships then another and another.

Hector lay in Ava's favorite lounge naked with one of the upstairs maids beside him. Most of the staff fled when Yara left. Those that stayed started to loot whatever they could take. Hector tried to stop them then he resorted to shooting. In his bloodlust, he had killed the remaining staff. Now all that was left was him and the warm dead bodies. This last one was named Anita, or that was what he thought her name was. He raped her as she begged him to stop as she bled out from the gunshot wounds. She had passed on before he was finished. He lay there knowing Ava would kill him as soon as she got home. This was her favorite of all the maids. Off in the distance, he saw the flash of light and something streaking toward the island. Then three more flashes. The cruise missile struck about twenty feet from him and the dead Anita incinerating them both as well as taking most of the house with them. The other three struck

taking out most of the structures on the island. From there the Marines took the beach and secured what was left. They detained the remaining staff as they tried to flee.

Janice and Bill watched the invasion happen in real time from the cable news. The government finally got permission from Cuba to take the island, and they did so starting with missiles. One reporter said how it could be weeks before the total body count was known. To Janice's surprise, it seemed like the news media was against the action and seemed to say how the military was sent to kill poor brown people rather than stop a terrorist. The military released satellite video of gunfire on the island showing someone killing the people around what was the main house, but the media tried to insinuate that this was U.S. forces shooting civilians rather than what actually happened. The five-year-old Brandon ran around the room with his arms extended out making a rocket sound just before he slammed headfirst into a chair screaming boom. Janice nearly told him to stop when she realized he wasn't really there and she didn't want to tell Bill about her seeing him. The news switched to the family butchered in Florida. The police didn't give any information out about the killings, so the media decided it was the work of a well-known serial killer working in that part of the state nicknamed the Highway One Slasher or just H.O.S...

Janice had a check from April Delvin, but she wasn't sure if she would cash it or not. April was in lockup after assaulting her husband with a baseball bat. Janice gave her the videos of Jon and his many affairs including April's best friend and her sister. Upon seeing him with the teenage daughter of their next-door neighbor, April gave Janice a check and said, "*thank you for your time.*" She then pulled a baseball bat with Jim Thome's signature and went to find her husband. Before he could finish asking her why she had his signed bat she struck him across the face breaking his jaw, then she hit him in the shoulder, gut and finally the genitals. The final hit was so hard she broke the bat. It took three men to pull her off him. Jon went to the hospital and April went to jail. The check was for three times more than she was owed but it might be worth nothing depending on how fast Jon or his lawyer could freeze the account. The check also was a milestone for Janice. The check represented a sort of justice as well as everything she didn't represent. To her, the wrong person was in jail. After his many victims came forward, Jon found

himself locked in a ward facing charges and an eventual cell. April was given community service time as well as a warning not to do it again.

Sean pulled into his driveway and deactivated the security. His side door opened, and Lance got out of the car. Sean had called Lance's parents, and they said he should just stay gone. With nowhere to go and no one that cared Lance was alone, so Sean offered to take him in and help him as long as he agreed to go back to school and work for him at the bar. Being underage, Lance couldn't serve drinks, but there were plenty of jobs a hard-working individual could do. Lance wasn't sure if the old man wanted to help him or use him. He was afraid to tell this man that saved his life that he wasn't into men and he wouldn't go that way even if it meant he would be out on the street again. As if Sean could read his thoughts he said, "*listen boy, I am offering you something I doubt you ever had, a chance at a better life. I'm not asking for anything in return except that you do your best to walk the line. Also, I don't go that way either.*" Sean was convinced that Lance was no genius, but even the stupid people deserve a break.

The next day a woman came into the office looking for a man she met while in Florida. Her name was Brenda Stephens, and she remembered this man she only knew as Sean speaking of his former partner who was still working as a private detective. She said she would pay any price to find him. Janice turned to Jenny and the two just smiled. Janice asked, "*do you have two dollars?*" Brenda just gave her a confused look. Janice said, "*because if you do, then you might just go down into the bar below us and order a drink. I think you will find what you are looking for there.*" Brenda went into the bar and ordered a diet soda. It was a little early for her to start drinking anything harder. She looked around at all the uniformed police then back to the bartender. Sean had her drink in his hand and a smile on his face. He asked, "*miss me?*" Brenda took the drink out of his hand and put it aside. She then pulled him close and kissed him.

The first three classes went by without a hitch, and Bill was on what would be his last class of the day. This was his A.P. eleventh grade social science studies class. Everyone in this class was on their way to college and had a grade point average of at least 3.5. This was Bill's

kind of class with most of them wanting to debate the issues rather than just slog through mindless data. Like with his other classes, Bill covered the syllabus. About halfway through a hand went up. Bill asked, “*yes miss?*” She stood up with a look of disgust and said, “*first, I don’t want to be gendered like that again so don’t call me miss. Secondly, I was wondering if I had to follow this misogynistic piece of crap you call a syllabus. I don’t need to have my life mansplained to me.*” She remained standing giving Bill a look of pure resentment. Bill remembered a story like this and knew not to confront her. He said, “*please put any concerns you have in writing, and they can be addressed with a counselor and the principle.*” Instead of sitting down she picked up her bags and left the class. Bill said, “*well OK then shall we get back to why we are here.*”

Chapter Eleven

Lennox Linus sat in a leather chair as a young woman ground on him giving him a lap dance. The dance was just the start as she was expected to strip and have sex with Linus. He was wealthy, and her father owed his existence to him. Camila Suarez didn't care about any of that. This man paid well and never talked to her. Mr. Linus might as well be a thing rather than a man for all the interactivity he put into their weekly trysts. Today, however, was different. As he watched the news covering the American invasion of the island, he grew harder than she ever could remember. About the time they showed the missiles launching he picked her up and took her to the bed. There he nearly ripped off her clothes and did the deed himself using a force and energy that was both thrilling and alarming to Camila. When he came, he was more like a man in his twenties than one who was much older than Camila. They had this routine down from the time she was fifteen, but this was the first time since the first time he was on top.

Linus pulled out of Camila and went for his phone, *“yes I want assurances she's dead as well as her bitch whore and that fucking kid.”* The voice said something she couldn't hear then Linus said, *“I want my jet ready for a flight to Oklahoma or whatever fuck hole Ava was working.”* Camila slowly got up and started to gather her clothing. Linus said, *“just where do you think you're going? We aren't finished just yet.”* To her surprise when he got back up, he was hard again. Linus walked over to her and turned her around. Sodomy was something new to their little agreement. He never took her from behind or had her orally. Camila wasn't prepared for his entry, and she was shocked at just how much it hurt. About halfway through his actions, his phone rang. Instead of stopping he put the phone on her back and said, *“don't say a fucking word.”* The voice on the other side of the call was a woman, and she asked, *“well hello Linus darling, how are you?”* Linus stopped and came all in one motion. He asked, *“Ava you fucking bitch how are you not dead?”*

Ava sat in a chair in the hotel room in Marietta Ohio along the Ohio River. She was just about four to five hours away from Cuyahoga Falls and the person she wanted to ruin. She wanted Janice to have her life taken away from her before she killed her. Janice and her silly

little job cost her a cover that she had maintained for four years as she ran her business. She even had some minor feelings for her late husband and having to kill him was also Janice's fault. Ava kept telling herself this as she made a list of everyone that would pay from her employers to anyone that crossed her. She even made plans to help any terrorist group that would do harm to the country for the death of her Yara and Hector. Part of this required her to enlist the help of someone that wanted her dead. Linus lost over a billion dollars when she was forced to do something about the mess she made in Ohio. He lost his connections in the U.S. some of which were made before the second world war as a "get out of jail free" card for people doing criminal acts and crimes against humanity. He didn't know that it was her employer that ordered her to gut his enterprise.

Camila got up and looked out at the landing pad and the helicopter waiting for Linus. Nearby on a private airstrip, he had a private jet with a false plan and credentials, so he could get into the country and kill Ava. He knew what she was going to say, but he didn't care. He had his favorite mercenaries with him, and they were going to paint the streets red with her blood. Linus's phone rang, and he answered, "*I see you are taking calls from dead people.*" Linus stopped and looked at his phone. He said, "*I have a list, and you are on it.*" The voice asked, "*what if I offered you anything you want to take care of Ava?*" Linus said, "*I want a seat at the table. Give me that, and I'll do whatever you want.*" The voice went silent for what felt like hours. He then said, "*well I guess then we're going a different way.*" Camila watched the helicopter hoping it would crash. She was watching as it exploded in the air raining debris down into a nearby lake.

Off in an office building in Manhattan, New York, New York a man disconnected his phone and closed the cover on a switch he had just used to blow up a helicopter in South America. He turned to five other people in the room and said, "*I think we should let this play out and see just how far Ava gets before we risk getting involved.*" Another person in the room said, "*we should warn the woman in Ohio so they can take care of Ava before she talks.*" At the end of the table a man said, "*no, we own the feds and most of the justice system across the east coast. We will let this play out and go from there. If Ava wins, then we intervene if Ava loses we make*

sure her loss is total, and she can't speak to anyone." The others in the room started to knock on the table with their fists. The man then said, *"OK, I want to see the Dow drop three hundred points today. Make it happen."*

Bill sat in his class watching his stock portfolio drop as the Dow took an unexpected drop in the morning. Both him and Janice had their savings which included the settlement from the medical supply company that was held liable for the loss of their first pregnancy. He also had his teacher's retirement fund, so he wasn't worried, but he didn't like losing money. The broadcaster said how they could see as much as a Three-hundred-point drop by the end of the day. He was supposed to be working on reading all the many papers he was given for the first week assignments, but he had a hard time getting back to work without thinking about the baby on the way. His door opened, and Margaret Stevens came into the room. She was both a language studies teacher and the union steward. When she became a teacher back in the 1980's her job was that of an English teacher, but with the new educational mandate, they could no longer claim to be teaching English. Margaret sat down next to Bill's desk and said, *"we may have a problem."* Bill looked up at her. She asked, *"did you say something wrong to a student? Maybe something sexual in nature?"*

Bill leaned back and tried to play out his first week of classes trying to think about every interaction he had with his students and the other staff. He eventually thought about his syllabus and the sections on the feminist movements of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. Margaret said, *"no this is a direct accusation that you offered a better course load for sexual favors."* Margaret leaned in and whispered, *"she also said you touched her inappropriately."* Bill wanted to know who was accusing him but he knew that he had no right under the system to confront his accuser to protect the accuser. It's why they had a female steward so they could be there when a teacher is accused without making the student feel uncomfortable. Bill asked, *"just what did she say I did and when because I have a camera in my class and I record everything including what we are saying here."* Margaret said, *"well that's good news because she said all of this happened in your classroom."* She made a copy of the files covering those days she said he touched her and said

she would advocate strongly for him. Bill wondered if she wouldn't have if he didn't have the video evidence.

Bill came home to find Janice in the middle of cleaning every inch of their home. He had never seen the place so clean. The mismatched smells of pine, ammonia and some sort of lemon was overpowering. She was dancing around while playing a song from the band Toto called Africa. Janice was in bib overalls and one of his white button-down shirts with her hair tied up in a scarf. The look was something like Madonna in a video or movie, but Bill couldn't remember the name. She seemed to be dancing with someone even though she was alone. This brought about a memory of a day many years ago. They were going to spend a week painting three rooms. Janice had organized the process including cleaning. That first day Janice and a five or six-year-old Brandon were dancing around while cleaning with a mix of music including the song Africa. He looked back to Janice who had stopped dancing around when she saw him. She smiled and pulled him into the room. She grabbed the front of his shirt and sent the buttons flying as she pulled the shirt open. She wrapped her arms around him underneath the shirt and said, *"let's see just how fast I can get you naked."*

Janice tilted her head asking, *"I can't see what she expects to gain by outright lying about you?"* They were naked on the floor next to the couch with Janice still on top of Bill with her head on his shoulder. Bill said, *"I don't think she had a plan outside of trying to get out of having to do the work. What I don't like is how many people in the school are just falling into line behind anyone that accuses without evidence."* Janice put her hands across his chest and went nose to nose with Bill. She asked, *"so now what do we do?"* Bill said, *"there's not much I can do. If I speak out, then they will say I'm blaming the victim. All I can do is let the system work for me, and hopefully, there is enough evidence to put this behind me."* Janice slid down him just a little and whispered, *"you can sexual my ass anytime you want Mister J."*

After taking a few days off, Jenny was back working on the books. She was surprised to see that Janice had a few clients while she was away. Jenny could see that everything was going

to go back to some sort of normal, well as normal as anything could get around them. Janice was pregnant and about to remarry Bill. They even talked about bringing in a partner who would occupy an office that was not being used by anyone for anything if she didn't count the one or two times she had a friend over and they got friendly in there. Janice took the day off to clean and paint a room for the baby. She said she would paint it white and use decorations to add color so she could have the room painted and fume free for when the baby arrives. Jenny thought about how she had many flings but what she didn't have was a long-term relationship. She thought about what kind of person she could see settling down and have that family with or if she should ever settle. Thinking about her options, Jenny opened a file and titled it, "*who I am.*"

She started with a list of how she saw herself and what she thought people thought about her. As she wrote, she added reflections and memories from her childhood and her current life. Jenny wrote about her first love and her most current flings. From the notes and memories, she wrote an outline. She wasn't sure if it was a book or script. It could go either way. She thought, "*just like me.*" She checked the time only to see she had been working on her own whatever this was for ten hours and it was now nine-pm. She saved all her work in a file on the cloud and decided she would write it as a book and let it go from there. Jenny closed the office down and drove home stopping at Swenson's for a burger to go. Her apartment was just another reminder of just how alone she was. She checked the time and did a quick calculation on her ability to pick someone up tonight and bring them home, but then she thought again because a quickie wouldn't take that feeling away. She settled on calling Tasha and talking the rest of the night. Tasha was in Canada working on her new show.

The forty-two-foot yacht rocked gently in the water just off the coast of Mexico on the Pacific Ocean. Yara bought a blue water boat with the plan for her, Maria and Lucas to sail around the ocean for a while until the heat was off. They had enough supplies to keep afloat and on their own for months. She wanted to try and put her part of Ava's story in the past and just maybe find something good with her sister and this boy who turned out to be someone and not just something to dispose of after one of Ava's parties. She knew that there will one day be a

reckoning and she most likely has a room in hell waiting for her in the end right next to Ava, but right there and then she was away from her posh cell and on the open water. She was free.

Janice got out of her car and looked down at herself. She felt like one of the Goodyear blimps that would fly over occasionally. More than one person asked if she was having triplets or a litter. She waddled her way to the stairs to her office only to find three times as many stairs as before. With every step, a new stair was added increasing the trek. At the top of the steps was the nine-year-old Brandon yelling, *“Oh my god here comes Shamu.”* Janice stopped and looked down to see she was in a black and white smock. She looked again, and it was a whale costume. At the top, Brandon was yelling, *“beep, beep, beep.”* She woke to see it was all just a dream and she wasn’t even showing yet and she wouldn’t for months. Bill left early to talk to the principal, and she was alone, but not really. In the corner was the nine-year-old Brandon. It had been a few days since she had seen any of the ages of Brandon and she wasn’t thrilled to see him now. She got out of bed and took a shower. When she came back, he was gone. Janice looked at a photo on the wall of the young Brandon and thought how just maybe she was ready to let him go.

When Bill got to the school, he was met by security and they escorted him to the offices. He was told to wait to speak to the principal, but the security stayed. Principal Hardness opened her door and let Bill in, but she didn’t close the door. She sat down and put a file in front of him. She said, *“I think you can understand that we don’t want any unpleasantness so just sign the papers and the security will escort you out.”* Bill opened the file to find a resignation letter that basically acknowledged him as instigating abuse and accepting the consequences. Bill said, *“there is no way in hell I’m signing this. What the hell is going on?”* Principal Hardness said, *“while we can see that you might be innocent or at least not as guilty in this case what we can’t deal with is the eventual backlash of having an abuser teacher.”* She looked at one of the guards, and he walked into the office. Bill said, *“don’t think this is over I’m going to fight this, and I’m going to win because I have the truth on my side.”* Principal Hardness smiled and said, *“you have your truth, and we have ours. Also, if you think your union is going to fight for you then just understand that it was your union steward who recommended you be let go or at least be given a chance to resign.”*

Bill found the stuff from his office in a couple of boxes beside his car. The two guards followed him out and waited for him to go. On the way, he saw that student that question if she had to follow the syllabus. She was with two other girls, and they were laughing and pointing. One girl blew him a kiss, and the questioning girl yelled, *“that’s what you get you misogynistic patriarchy fuck.”* They started to clap and the other students first looking to them then to the school doors started to clap. Bill looked at his students and his school and wondered why he spent so much time and worked so hard for nothing. He didn’t want to go home so he drove to Sean’s bar knowing it would be open and he could have something that could just put things into perspective. Bill walked into the bar. Sean said, *“hey teach.”* Bill pointed at him and said, *“don’t ever call me that.”* He walked over to the end of the bar and ordered a double Irish whiskey neat. Sean poured a double from his private bottle he kept in the fridge and asked, *“so drinking before class?”* Bill downed the drink and said, *“schooling in America is dead.”* He then pushed the glass to Sean and said, *“another.”*

Sean poured a third double then he went to his wall phone and called Janice. *“say babe it’s me, Sean, you busy?”* Janice shook her head then she said, *“you don’t have to say it’s you. No one else calls me babe... .. what’s going on?”* After a moment of silence, Sean said, *“Bill’s down here on his third whiskey, and I don’t think he’s going to stop any time soon.”* Janice looked at the clock on the wall. She said, *“it’s ten in the morning.”* Sean said, *“yeah no kidding.”* Janice got up and went down from her office to the bar. She found Bill at the end of the bar with more than a few glasses in front of him. She asked, *“new school policy?”* Bill said, *“why yes, it is just that, a new policy where they fire accused people rather than defend them.”* Janice pointed at the glasses and said, *“you know this won’t solve a thing.”* Bill said, *“the hell it won’t. It will solve my give a fuck because I just don’t want to give a fuck anymore.”* Janice said how he should come up to her office and sleep this off. Bill asked, *“what if I’m not tired?”* Janice said, *“oh well I think I can fix that.”*

Janice told Jenny to take the rest of the day off, so she could stay with Bill and help him. Jenny looked to the open door of the spare office just in time to see Bill's bare ass. She went over to close the door when Bill turned around and close the door himself showing more than Jenny wanted to see. Jenny grabbed her laptop and asked, "*how can someone that drunk be so hard?*" Janice said, "*sometimes it's best not to ask such questions and just enjoy what nature gives you.*" After Jenny left, Janice opened the office door and found Bill passed out face down with his ass in the air behind her desk. She said to herself, "*well I guess no sex for me.*" She closed the door and went to her office. Something felt off. She brushed it off until she saw the shape. A second later she felt something cold against her neck then everything went black.

Janice woke up to find herself in their old bedroom. It was early in the morning, and there was a light in the walk-in closet. She could see tile and a mirror. They had made plans to convert that second closet into a master bathroom, but like many of their plans, it never happened. The light turned off, and Bill came out in what Janice called his teacher's uniform a white button-down shirt, charcoal slacks, a thin black tie and black Converse high-tops. He walked over to her and kissed her on the forehead. He asked, "*are you feeling better?*" Janice didn't know what he was talking about. Bill said, "*I'll take hair boy to school you just stay right here and get better.*" He kissed her on the lips and left the room. Janice got up and went down the stairs into the kitchen. Sitting at the counter with his back to her was a young man of maybe fifteen or sixteen. His hair had this shape to it that looked like he spent hours trying to make it look like he did nothing to it. A sort of controlled chaos.

Janice walked around and came face to face with her teenage son. It was Brandon, but as a young man rather than the tween they buried three years ago. He looked up from his cereal and asked, "*what? Is there something wrong? Is it my hair?*" Janice looked him in the face. He still had that boyish charm, but she could also see the handsome man he was going to become. Brandon asked, "*how are you feeling?*" Janice said, "*like I'm waking up from the worst nightmare I ever had to find the best possible dream.*" Brandon looked at the door. Janice followed his gaze and saw that there was nothing but blackness outside. Brandon said, "*you do understand that this is the dream and that other place is reality. I died. That happened. I won't*

ever be this person who cares about his hair.” From behind her, she heard a man’s voice say, *“or this man who wants to talk to you about this girl he loves and hopes you love her too.”* Janice turned to see what she imagined Brandon would look like in his twenties. He was in a dark suit with a thin black tie just like Bill’s favorite style. She felt a tug on her shirt. She turned to find a young girl who looked like Brandon. She said, *“Grandma, you have to wake up.”*

Janice woke up, but she couldn’t move. She was face up tied and duct taped to a table in her office. She heard a voice said, *“good your awake. I was worried we might have done some damage.”* She couldn’t see her, but Janice knew the voice. Ava came into her view wearing an apron over top of a white shirt. Janice struggled against the tape. Ava walked over to her and took her by the head and kissed her ear then licked her cheek. She said, *“I am so glad you are still around. I wanted you to know what I have planned.”* Ava walked out of view then back. She said, *“I had planned on just killing you and moving on with my life, but after a setback, I decided to let you live and just kill everyone you love.”* Janice went to speak, but she found her mouth was numb. Ava said, *“yes, you landed on your face, and it looked like it would hurt, so I used a little something to take the pain away.”* Ava walked back up to Janice with something small in her hand. It was small and white in a pill shape. She said, *“the first to go.”* She dropped the pill into Janice’s mouth and held her mouth closed. As she did this she started to sing, *“There’s got to be a morning after. If we can hold on through the night.”*

Janice struggled to get the pill out of her mouth as Ava kept singing the song *The Morning After* in reference to the pill used as emergency contraception. As the pill dissolved, Janice could taste mint. Ava started to laugh. She let Janice go and backed away. Janice tried to spit the pill out, but her face was too numb. Janice could hear something shake. Ava showed her a little package of white mints and said, *“don’t worry it was just a mint.”* Ava put one of the mints in her mouth. She said, *“I think I’ll do the little girl first. I know this guy that likes them thin and loud. She will scream and scream.”* Janice struggled against the tape. Ava went on, *“I want to do your husband myself as well as that stupid mick downstairs.”* Ava showed Janice a switchblade. She said, *“I think I’ll keep the fun parts as a sort of trophy, although the real fun is when I take them.”* Janice could feel the numbness fading away and a deeper pain in her face

building. She also felt very cold. Ava put the blade down on Janice's stomach. She put her hand down between Janice's legs and brought her hand back up into her view. She said, "*don't worry I already took care of this one.*" Janice could see blood on Ava's hand. Her pelvis felt cold and wet. All Janice could do was try and scream.

A gunshot, then another. The third shot hit Ava and the round expanded creating a softball size red splotch on her shirt over where her heart should be. Ava fell over onto the floor. Janice could move her head a little, and she saw Bill with her gun. He had this manic look on his face as he looked her over. Then he walked up to Ava and turned her over. He pointed the gun at her head and emptied the revolver into her face. He clicked on more than a few of the expended rounds before he stopped. The last thing Janice saw before she passed out was Bill taking the knife and cutting her free. Sean came into the room along with several off-duty officers from the Cuyahoga and Monroe Falls. Sean looked at the ruined face of Ava then to Janice, "*holy shit.*" Sean took the gun from Bill and passed it to one of the cops. Bill looked at all the police in the room and said, "*help.*"

They put Janice in the back of Sean's old van, and she got a six police car escort to Akron City Hospital. There they took her into surgery with more than one doctor saying how it didn't look promising, but they would do their best to save her. Bill raced through what he saw in the room. Ava standing in front of Janice with blood on her hand laughing. Blood on the floor and table. All the blood on Janice. He wondered just how could so much blood come from one person. A doctor came out and told him something about puncturing and tearing. Bill felt like he was on the outside of himself watching everything as it unfolded. He could see the doctors coming out and saying she didn't make it just like he could see them saying she survived. He heard the police in the room saying something about the shooting and how he shouldn't worry. He woke up when a member of the summit county sheriff's department told him to stand and put his hands on his head. Three of the officers from the bar stood in their way. The deputies said they were told to place him under arrest until this whole thing could be figured out. Sean and one of the officers tried to explain what was happening but it didn't seem to matter. About the time

they had the cuffs on him an FBI agent arrived and ordered them to stop. They had an order of protection for both Bill and Janice and were taking charge of the scene.

An hour into the surgery a doctor came out and said they would have to do a complete or radical Hysterectomy. Ava used her knife to murder their unborn child while making sure Janice could never have another. Bill looked at the door, and for just one prolonged second he imagined walking out and letting all this go. He could see himself finding a quiet corner and just letting it all end without him. Getting Janice back after Brandon's death was the hardest thing he ever had to do, and now he just might lose her for good. In the van, on the way to the hospital, Janice had said something about Brandon and how he can't be left alone. Bill felt the same way about her. He knew that she would never recover from this loss and she would push back at him. He decided that he would push his feelings back and let her say whatever she needs to say so he can be there for her. She needed him more than he needed his ego.

Sean sat next to Bill and told him that he didn't have to worry about being arrested, *"that was just the prosecutor covering his butt. A man shot a woman, news at eleven. Once everyone knows who she was this will all blow over, and you will be exonerated, but for now, the FBI wants to protect you from being harmed."* Bill tried to make sense out of what was happening. He asked, *"why are the FBI involved with us?"* Sean tightened his lip and said in a sort of angry disgust, *"they have been watching you and Janice ever since Ava left the country. They know they could have stopped this from happening, but no one tried."* Sean pointed to one of the agents using his head. He said, *"that one over there. He is the agent in charge, and he ordered his man to stand down thinking Ava was just going to abduct Janice. They wanted to take whoever she was working for not just her."* Bill got up and walked over to the agent. The agent said, *"I'm special agent Sampson and."* Bill didn't wait for him to finish, he interrupted him with a fist to the face then another shot to the gut. Two agents pulled Bill off Sampson, who put a hand to his face and pulled it back with blood on his fingers. He said, *"yeah I probably would have done the same thing."*

Janice woke up in a hospital room after what felt like a very long night's sleep. She felt hung over and wondering what happened. She remembered Ava and being tied to a table but not much else. Bill was in the room in a chair next to the bed asleep. Everything below her waste was numb. She tried to move, but her head was just swimming in whatever they had her on. That was when she thought about the baby. She wondered if the drugs would hurt the baby. She looked back to Bill who was awake and next to her. He said, "*they did what they could, but they couldn't save the baby.*" From the corner of the room, the five-year-old Brandon said, "*good I don't want any smelly girls in my house.*" Bill turned to Brandon and said, "*that's not nice B. Don't act like that.*" Janice looked to Bill then back to the seat where he was sleeping only to see him there still asleep. Another voice said, "*I can't believe that old white fuck killed me.*" Ava walked out into Janice's view. She had a red stain where the round mushroomed in her heart.

In an office building in New York City, a group of men sat around an oval table watching a series of screens as they talked about the events on the island as well as in Ohio. They also covered the market and how several stocks seemed to do better than anyone could have predicted. Of course, everyone in the room knew just how well those stocks would do because they used their very expensive program to game the market and the returns were rolling in. One of the men said, "*this worked out well. We need to expand to other markets.*" The men in the room started to tap on the table. another man said, "*let's set the market for the morning so we can recoup all are expenses by noon.*" A man in one of the corners of the room said, "*sir there seems to be a problem. I can't access the program.*" As soon as he said he couldn't access the program, the monitors went black. A simple message came across the screen, "*loyalty is cheap in comparison to the alternative.*" The screens went blank then another message said, "*a reflection on how you treat those you don't need is also a reflection on just how much you are worth.*" A screen went blank then the final message, "*I saw this betrayal coming so I wrote a little worm into your program that would activate if I died. The worm erased the access to the program making it useless. Just like you.*" A Video of Ava appeared. She said, "*I win.*" The man at the head of the table pulled out a golden revolver and shot the screen. He then shot the programmer in the corner. He dropped the gun down on the table and asked, "*now what do we do?*"

Epilogue

Jenny opened a suitcase and started to pack for a trip back to Ohio. She still felt like it was home even after living in Ontario for the last six months. This wasn't a trip she wanted to make. Janice told her she was closing the office and she would never go back to the job. After losing her job and means of support, Jenny decided to move in with Tasha. She moved to Canada, and in her six months, she was able to find work as an actor as well as realize she was happy with Tasha. But none of that mattered right then. Sean died after a quick battle with cancer, and she was packing for the trip to go back for his funeral. While there she would see the man that kidnapped her when she was a child. He was just denied his last appeal and was going to be executed by lethal injection in six months. She wasn't sure she would try and see Janice. She had said some things that couldn't be forgiven even after what happened. She felt that this might be her last trip back to Ohio and her life left behind.

On the table was a plea agreement for the assault of a federal agent. Bill's lawyer told him not to sign, "*the officers that where there are willing to say he was in the wrong and a couple are willing to say he struck first..... just like Han.*" Bill shook his head saying, "*they say it won't affect my ability to keep the bar and it will put an end to all this nonsense.*" He then tilted his head and asked, "*doesn't that make me Greedo?*" His lawyer said, "*no, what is making you this stupid for thinking about signing this piece of crap. This is designed to keep you from suing them.*" Bill signed the paper then he told his lawyer to hold on to it for a while and see what they say. The Lawyer asked, "*do you want to sue over their handling of the whole Ava thing?*" Bill left the lawyer's office and drove home. The outside mural was finished, but the inside was and would be unfinished. Sean's funeral was going to be in a couple of days, and he told Jenny she could stay at the house, so he prepared a spare room for her. On the way to the room, he walked into what was supposed to be the baby's room. The room was all unfinished white walls and bare light bulbs. Bill turned off the light and locked the door.

The curtains swayed in the breeze of a cold February morning. After watching her sit next to an open window all during that winter, Janice's neighbors stopped asking if there was

something wrong with her. She sat staring out into the fall chill than the winter snow quietly contemplating something off in the distance with a glass of whiskey in one hand and the bottle in the other. None of them knew her or knew that the cold and whiskey helped her ignore the people in the room. She closed her office and fired Jenny. She broke it off with Bill and moved out to this small motel room in the middle of nowhere in Green township. She told him then she would never be alone she just won't ever be with him. The two-year-old Brandon was in his fifteenth hours of nothing but screaming. Ava was sitting in a chair with the one-year-old Brandon reading him the Stephen King book *The Shinning*. The twelve-year-old Brandon was staring into a mirror messing with his hair. Worst of all Bill and Jenny were I her bed on their third day of making love. She knew that the real Bill thought of Jenny as a daughter but that didn't stop this version of Bill and Jenny from screwing in front of her and the many ages of Brandon.

Six months later.....

Janice stood up and said, *"hello my name is Janice, and I'm an alcoholic."* Everyone in the circle said hello to her. She said, *"it's been about two weeks since my last drink, and I didn't think I was going to make it without the booze this long. I found every excuse to explain my drinking, but I knew it was all crap. Everyone goes through problems, everyone has their issues. It's how you deal with them that defines you, but that's just crap, and I really want a drink, but I won't. I go one day at a time and try to find some sort of balance in **this strange story that is my life.**"*

Thank you for reading this story,

Michael Lewis Collins