

Chapter Seven

The sun was setting across the desert with the light fading from an orange glow to a dusky purple. A small door opened out of the desert floor, and five men stepped out. They spent the day waiting for the sun to fall so they could travel the rest of the way in the cover of night and the cool air. Four of the men carried in total nearly one-hundred pounds in uncut heroin, while the fifth had his own burden. They would have to walk for about sixty miles to meet with the truck that would take them the rest of the way, or that was what the four mules were told. Twenty miles in and the five men came to a large hole dug out of the earth. Next to the hole was a four-wheel all-terrain vehicle with a box in the back big enough for the drugs. The first man could smell the lye lining the hole. He dropped his pack and made it six steps before a round penetrated the back of his head and out his left eye. In quick succession, two of the remaining three were shot. The fifth man packed the drugs in the bag while the last man put the bodies in the hole and covered them in more lye and then soil. The two men kissed then they got on the back of the ATV.

Darrel pushed a car into the garage while Scott steered. Sally watched them push the car in and waited for them to stop. She asked, “*what’s with the wreck?*” Slightly out of breath Scott said, “*this is no wreck. It’s a 1969 Mustang Fastback Boss 429.*” Sally put her hands on her hips and asked, “*and that’s supposed to mean something?*” Scott said, “*well, yeah that means this car is worth a lot.*” Darrel said, “*that depends on how much work is done, how authentic and the buyer. Some people would pay through the nose for it as is.*” Scott said, “*we are going to see if it will run and let Wendy decide if we restore, rebuild or sell.*” Sally walked over to the car and ran her hand along the body to the back. She said, “*I love this car.*” Scott gave her a confused look asking, “*you just.... What?*” Scott just started to sing, “*mustang sally you better slow that mustang down.*” Wendy leaned out of her office and said, “*stop butchering the classics.*” Wendy walked out of her office and said, “*fix the car up to a point. Make it a sort of rat rod but not that crappy on purpose shit.*” Sally said, “*make it run and look used.*” Wendy nodded and pointed at Sally.

Gary and Zoey pulled into the driveway in a tan Ford F150 after a night of watching a warehouse about ten miles out of town. Wendy mats them at the door, *“I sent you to watch them not fuck in front of them.”* Gary put his arms up in an exacerbated gesture saying, *“we did our job.”* Wendy held up an iPad with video from a camera on the truck. At first, the video was steady then the image started to bounce slowly. After a few minutes, the bouncing became rougher. Gary turned red in the face while Zoey smirked trying to hold in a laugh, but then her laugh died when she saw someone from the warehouse looking at them. Wendy said, *“this went on for what fifteen minutes? I don’t know whether to be impressed or angry.”* From across the room, Sally yelled, *“angry, always go for angry.”* Gary took the iPad and started the video up watching for the people coming out. He said, *“I see five, no six guys with guns.”* He handed the pad back to Wendy. Wendy said, *“yeah this might not be what we thought. If six men came out, then there must be twice that much.”* Zoey said, *“or there are just six guys that wanted to see my tits and ass.”*

Three ghostly red images moved from the door to a back room. Another two people joined them. Wendy turned to her notebook and made a note count out eleven people. She also made a note about the back room and how it seemed they were sitting around a table. The infrared camera helped clear the mystery over how many people were in the house. Two of those people were in a room at the top, and they stayed in place. Their heat images were small indicating they may be children. Wendy pointed at the monitor saying, *“five guys with AK’s on the ground floor near an SUV, four guys outside the door from where the last two with what I assume are also AK’s.”* she opened the window of the small van they were sitting in and stared at the building in the dark. On a roof nearby, two men were watching the van and the house. *“Hey, Luis, who are the two in the van?”* Luis asked, *“how would I know?”* Luis turned back to the building. He said, *“Jorge, we’ll wait until tomorrow night. I want to follow that van and see who that is and if they need to die.”* Jorge turned back to Luis and asked, *“Luis, I thought you said we shouldn’t use our names?”*

Wendy turned down another alley cutting across between two streets going away from the highway and the warehouse. Zoey asked, *“where are we going?”* Wendy checked the mirror

and said, *“I think we have a tail?”* Zoey checked her back. Wendy turned onto another street then into a parking lot and out the other side. Wendy said, *“no dumbass, I mean someone was following us.”* Luis and Jorge sat in a car off the side of the highway overlooking the city. Luis shook his head watching the car’s headlights as Wendy tried to lose the car not following them. Luis asked, *“what the fuck are they doing?”* Jorge lifted his head out of Luis’s lap and asked, *“are you talking to me?”* Luis tucked himself back into his pants and said, *“you can get back to that later I think we need to be ready to go.”* Wendy made another turn onto an entrance to the highway. They passed a car parked along the way that came to life and started to follow them.

A mile away from the warehouse Wendy saw a car following them. Zoey saw her staring out the rear mirror and said, *“oh god not again. I’m never getting back.”* Wendy handed her a phone and told her to call the warehouse, *“Tell him to send some backup to the Delta site.”* Wendy turned off the road and down a dirt path to a one-time coyote rest stop, a place where they could hold their human cargo before releasing them or selling them. *“Scott someone is following us. They turned onto the dirt and are continuing. We need help fast,”* Zoey said as she held the phone up hoping to keep the signal. Wendy said, *“as soon as we hit the door go for the back I’ll take the front.”* Zoey turned to her and asked, *“hit the door?”* Wendy sped up and aimed for the front double door. Zoey put her arms across her face and screamed, *“oh shit.”* The truck struck the doors and through into the building sputtering to a stop. In one quick fluid motion, Wendy got out, pulled her gun and went to the door. Zoey stumbled out and went for the shotgun in the rack. She checked the action and went for the back.

Jorge leaned over and asked, *“so do you think they know we were following them?”* Luis stopped their car and turned the lights off. Jorge said, *“whoever she is she does know how to make an entrance.”* Luis turned to Jorge and just stared until Jorge put his hand up in a whatever gesture. He turned back to the building and stared. After a couple of minutes, Luis said, *“this would be too much work for not enough payoff.”* Ten minutes later and a van and a large truck came down another side road and what Luis counted as six people came out armed and ready. One of them had a long rifle with a scope. Luis pulled away not turning the lights back on until they got back to the highway. Luis said, *“I don’t know what that was about, but I don’t think they*

are dealers. I don't know." Jorge asked, *"maybe we should go back and get some sleep?"* Luis sped up saying, *"I think we can have a little fun before we call it a night."* Jorge said, *"that's what I was thinking."* Luis turned the car back to the city speeding up. Jorge opened a bag and checked the contents. He said, *"yeah, I think we have what we need. Let's go find a dealer."*

Jacob Franks was having a slow night. He was sitting in a folding chair between a coin laundry and a closed pizza place. It was two weeks before most of his clients would get their welfare payments cutting his traffic down to the new customers and the ones that can find the funds wherever. He was waiting for this one client that would come around every Wednesday and pay for her fix with something more than just money, but she never showed. Jacob never saw himself as a player or a pedophile, but he did like how this teenager looked and how she felt. What he paid for the Adderall she was addicted to was cheaper than he would pay her for sex. He found a man to grind, mix and reform the pills so he could add a little cocaine to the mix adding even more of an addiction. He wasn't sure if it did anything to them, but he felt he had better retention of customers since the change. A man started to walk across the street to him. He was scratching at his arms in the stereotypical junkie shake. He got about fifteen feet away when Jacob said, *"I don't take checks, and I'm not a fence so don't bring shit to trade."*

Jorge saw what had to be the whitest man he saw since coming to America. He was tall, with an almost orange afro and his skin kind of glowed in the lights coming from the laundry nearby. Jorge knew all too well how to act like an addict from the twitchy jerky motions to the scratching. He said to Jorge, *"I don't take checks, and I'm not a fence so don't bring shit to trade."* Jorge showed him a hundred-dollar-bill, and the dealer seemed to perk up. Jorge walked up closer to the dealer who sat up in his chair and looked him up and down. He asked, *"so you speak the English or are we going to just gesture?"*

Jorge said, *"I speak enough to get by."* Jacob smiled and asked, *"legal?"* Jorge showed him the cash again and asked, *"hey man can we cut to the chase I don't want to be out here like this?"* Jacob lost his smile and said, *"I'm no bank, and I don't do change."* Jorge said, *"I don't*

want change I want what I want.” Jacob looked around trying to see if they were alone. He said, *“this is how it works. You pay me, and I give you a code to a locker in the bus station on the other block.”* Jorge said, *“so your nowhere near the drugs. Good thinking.”* Before Jacob could answer, Jorge pulled a stun gun and shot Jacob. Within minutes, he was duct taped and in the trunk of the car. Luis said, *“time for some fun.”*

Jacob woke up naked taped to a chair with his feet in something wet, but he didn’t think it was water. The smell was of some chemical like bleach. He looked down and saw someone had removed all his body hair, but some of the hair on the ground was too long to be just from his balls. He shook his head back and forth, but he couldn’t feel or see any hair. From behind him, he heard, *“I hope you don’t mind. I felt you could use a new look, and nothing says new as hairless.”* Jacob asked, *“who are you? What the fuck do you want? Why did you shave me?”* Jorge walked around so Jacob could see him. He said, *“because I wanted to.”* Jacob growled out, *“you fucking wetback, I’m going to fucking cut your fucking nuts off.”* Jorge said, *“what a good idea.”* He pulled out a knife and went to Jacob grabbing him by the genitals. Another voice said, *“hold.”* Jorge said, *“yeah that’s what I’m doing.”*

Luis walked over with a small white bag. He asked, *“Jacob, where do you get your supply?”* Hearing his name threw him off, but he recovered and said, *“all you can do is kill me those guys would do so much more.”* Luis tossed the powder into his face saying, *“I want them to know all about you and your drug.”* The Heroin went into his eyes, his nose, and mouth. Jacob tried to hold his breath when Jorge cut. The swipe was quick but not very clean taking the scrotum and the penis in one cut shooting blood across the floor. Jacob screamed taking in the heroin. Jorge said, *“if you are lucky, you’ll bleed out.”*

Part Three

Darrel hooked the tow truck to the back of the truck so he could pull it out of the building. As he pulled the truck out, a tire caught a nail from a wall stud and went flat. He shifted

the truck away from the street so he could disconnect and reconnect in the front. He popped the hood and looked in. He said, *“it could be worse.”* Wendy said, *“like being caught here worse?”* Darrel looked over at Wendy saying, *“good point lets get moving and check the damage back home.”* He hooked the truck and set the lights on the back as the others got into the van and drove away. Wendy said, *“when we get home, we need a meeting.”* Scott asked, *“what was all that about?”* After a long moment of silence, Wendy said, *“I don’t know.”* Darrel pulled into the drive and parked the truck in the yard. He put a couple of the other cars around the truck hoping to hide it just in case someone came around looking for answers. Next to the truck was an old ice-cream truck and memories of a simpler time long before he picked up a gun.

“Hey mister I want ice-cream,” the small girl chirped out while attempting to toss a five-dollar-bill on the high counter of Dan’s ice-cream truck. Dan smiled and asked, *“hey little missy, just what kind will it be today?”* The girl smiled and said, *“Mickey.”* Dan pulled out a Mickey Mouse shaped ice-cream bar and handed it to the girl then went for the change when she said, *“keep the change, please.”* Dan smiled at the nearly one-hundred percent tip and said, *“thank you, my dear.”* The little girl cocked her head and said, *“I’m not a deer I’m a lady.”* Dan watched as she walked back to her waiting smiling mother. He wondered if he was making a mistake. This ice-cream truck was doing well while his other job was going nowhere. Dan Polanski was a private detective and part-time auto mechanic. Neither job paid the bills by themselves, but together he was doing well. His current job had him watching a park known for drug dealers. His first day all he saw were the families, but eventually, he saw the undercurrent of illegality as well as the seedy reality of the unseen world.

A man named David Warren hired him as well as more than a few others to watch the parks, schools, and streets for the dealers. He never said why but when a few of the people Dan watched turned up dead he figured it out, but he didn’t care. Dan watched these kids in the park next to hardcore junkies and armed dealers and didn’t care what happened to those pushers, not at all. Dan had footage of parents buying and using while their diapered children totted around on uncertain legs not knowing that their parent wouldn’t be there if they fell because they were on a slow trip to the bottom. But then there were the ones like little Missy. He didn’t know her

name and her mother never came over. She had said, *“I’m a big girl, and I know what I want.”* A big girl in a pastel pink coat with a magenta colored knit cap with a white band and flower. Her shoes were another shade of pink. She and her mother came every day to buy a Mickey every day. Dan wondered what his children would have looked like. He was once married, and they talked about children, but time slipped by, and one day he found himself in a small studio apartment with divorce papers. She was remarried with three children. He never thought about her as Karen, she was just she. Dan didn’t know then he would leave there and change his name to Darrel, but no one in the park saw what was about to happen.

A pencil-thin man with a nervous twitch walked over to the truck and up to the counter. Dan said, *“hey Bean, what do you know? What have you seen?”* The man that most call Bean because of just how thin he was as in a string bean was also a usual at the truck. Bean was a junkie. A police officer told Dan, *“you can tell by the shake and the smell.”* Unlike the little girl, Bean ordered something different every time he comes around. Bean put down a ten-dollar-bill and said, *“give me the Globe.”* The Globe is a waffle bowl made to look like a half of a globe with a mix of ice-creams from vanilla to tropical passion fruit sorbet with a hard-white-chocolate coating. An order usually shared between two or more people. Bean told Dan to keep the change which amounted to two-dollars; a high amount for someone living on the street. He took two plastic spoons but no napkins and walked over to his on again off again girlfriend another junkie most people call Candy for her rotten teeth. The two sat underneath a tree and started to eat the ice-cream.

About twenty minutes later, the two were at the bottom and covered in cream and various sauces. One of Dan’s cameras beeped needing a fresh battery. He checked the connections and changed the battery where he saw something on the screen. Three men were in the parking lot standing next to an old crew-cab pickup truck. Dan zoomed one of the cameras in on the three men. They were all armed with what looked like Glock-17s and at least one Tec-9. Dan picked up his phone to call the police. In another screen, Dan saw Bean and Candy kiss then pull a pair of small automatics from a bag. *“911 how may I assist you,”* the operator said on the other side of the call. *“My name is Dan Polanski. I have an ice-cream truck in Reagan Park, and there are*

five people with guns.” Bean and Candy walked over to the three men with their guns out. The operator asked, “*Sir, are they carrying or threatening?*” Dan hesitated then he said, “*two of them are pointing their guns at.*” Candy shot one of the men as he went for his own gun. Bean fired and missed. Candy’s round struck the man in his arm above the elbow. The three men ducked behind their truck and returned fire while Bean and Candy went over the hill away from them and toward the stunned park goers. Dan heard the operator, “*Sir is that gunfire? There are police on the way stay hidden.*” A round struck the side of the truck. Dan looked out and saw everyone scattering. The mother and Little Missy were huddled by a trash can in the path of the running gunfire. Dan heard the operator say, “*stay where you are.*”

Dan sprinted to the two ladies as Bean and Candy ran in their direction. Candy was bleeding from a couple of wounds and Bean was bleeding from his nose. The man with the Tec-9 fired going full-auto shooting wildly. Dan felt something hot and hard striking his left arm. Dan kicked over the trash can and tossed it at the man with the machine gun. The can struck the man sending his still firing gun arm to the left. Before the gun emptied, he struck one of the other men from the truck. The three men stopped. Dan picked up the girl and ran for the truck with her mother in tow. They made it around the truck just as the gunfire started back. The sounds of tap, tap, tap as rounds bounced off the side of the truck. The mother said, “*thank you.*” She took her daughter, and they ran away from the truck. This was the last time Dan saw them. Little Missy waved as she was bounced in her mother’s arms. The gunfire stopped, and Dan checked to see what was happening. Bean was face-down with a large hole in the back of his head. Candy was on her last breath looking more like swiss cheese than a person. The man with the Tec-9 and the man who was shot by the Tec-9 was lying on the ground. Dan couldn’t see if they were alive or dead and he didn’t care.

Part four

Dan pulled onto the little road that led to the ranch with everything he owned in the back of the ice cream truck. He sold almost everything he owned settling all his debts including the hospital from the bullet in the shoulder. The police confiscated the footage from the park and

questioned him for a full twenty-four hours over why he was recording. The hospital took most of the money, but he kept enough to buy twenty gold eagles and hid them just in case. Even then he questioned the ranch and what they were doing. He pulled into the driveway finding something more like a campground than a heavily armed compound. The only thing that gave away the truth was the sounds of gunfire. He pulled up to what had to be the main building and parked. Just outside he saw what had to be the most stereotypical school teacher or librarian ever put on film. She had on a grin that took away from her spinster apparel like there was something more going on underneath her bookish façade. Ruth said, “*wow the route that takes you all the way out here must suck.*” Dan asked, “*what?*” Ruth smiled and said, “*never mind, you must be Dan. I’m Ruth. David wanted me to show you around. But first, we need to park that in the lot.*” Ruth pointed to a plot of land with cars. Dan said, “*yes, I pulled up so we could unload the ice cream.*” Ruth asked, “*you mean you’re a real ice cream man?*” Dan looked through the door of the truck at the bullet holes and said, “*I’m whatever I have to be.*”

Ruth and Dan ran into Cathy as they walked around. Ruth told Dan, “*this is Cathy. She will be a part of the team you’re joining.*” Cathy put up her hand and said, “*that is if Wendy approves.*” Ruth said, “*Cathy you’re down to just two people with more than a few jobs waiting.*” Dan gave Ruth a surprised look. Ruth seeing what he was thinking in his eyes said, “*one quit while two left the active side for the planning side of the ranch.*” Ruth pointed to some smoke in the distance. Dan asked, “*can I see that part of the operation?*” Cathy countered, “*not if you want to stay. David doesn’t want his planners and doers to know each other.*” The three walked closer to the trailers when Dan stopped saying, “*That doesn’t make any sense. You already know more than a few of them.*” Ruth and Cathy stopped and looked at him. Dan asked, “*what’s going on over there?*” Ruth said, “*the best way to find out would be to ask David.*” Dan looked over at the smoke and said, “*maybe later.*” None of them knew that while they walked around, David and his bodyguards were over on the other side killing.

They approached a group of trailers and found a woman standing near a firepit. They walked over to her and Dan met Wendy. Cathy looked Dan over and then she looked at Wendy. Dan asked, “*what?*” Cathy smirked. Wendy said, “*David sent you to us because of our or my*

pension for sleeping with anyone younger than me.” Ruth shook her head saying, “OK whatever, I have to go and check on Sue.” Ruth walked away while Dan watched her. He turned and asked, “who’s Sue?” Wendy touched Dan’s shoulder and said, “we’ll cover all that later. First, we need to find you a trailer and get you settled in.” Wendy pointed at an old Jay Hawk and said, “that one is ours. You can take one of the other three but leave the popup for this kid coming later.” Dan spent most of his time living in the back of an ice cream truck so living in a trailer would be an upgrade. He asked, “how about that one?” He pointed at a trailer used by the departed Duke. Cathy said, “that’s fine. Duke left some stuff inside, but I don’t think he’ll be back.” Dan asked, “Duke?” Wendy said, “later, first get settled and ready for tonight.” Dan asked, “what’s tonight.” Wendy smiled and said, “if everyone arrives then tonight you die.”

Duke kept the trailer clean, but without any power, it was a solar oven in the desert kind of hot. The Winnebago trailer was one open room with a small kitchen, bathroom, dinette, and bed. Dan hooked the power back up and opened the windows and ceiling vent so he could run the fan. About ten minutes into his work he was sweating. Outside he heard a commotion. A tall, lanky blonde man in a pair of faded jeans, a sleeveless flannel shirt, cowboy hat, and boots was in the middle of a long deep kiss with Wendy. She pointed to his trailer then to the closed popup.

Dan came outside and over to the two. Cathy came over from the other side and kissed the stranger on the lips. Dan stopped walking. Wendy said, “Dan come over here. This is Kip. He’s a part of our new team.” Dan said to himself, “what’s his position?” Kip took Dan’s hand and said, “nice to meet you, sir?” Dan shook his hand and said, “you too kid, but don’t call me sir.....boy.” Kip’s smile faded. Dan smiled and said, “just messing with you. You can call me whatever you want as long as it isn’t late for dinner.” Cathy rolled her eyes and said, “Dan you are going to regret that. Wendy is going to call you Late for Dinner from now on.”

As Dan helped Kip setup the popup trailer, Kip explained what was happening that night. He said, “first of all you take another name to protect your real identity.” Dan asked, “so Kip isn’t your real name?” Kip smiled and said, “no, I took that from the frontiersman Kip Carson.”

Dan asked, *“do you mean Kit Carson?”* Dan stopped working the crank and said, *“no not the television show about that talking car I mean the old west guy.”* Dan said, *“I hate to tell you this, but his name was Christopher Carson, but most people called him Kit not Kip.”* Kip thought about it for a second then he went back to cranking the top. He said, *“it’s already on my new license and bank accounts, so I guess I have to live with it.”* The top locked in place and the two went inside and pushed the bedsides out. Dan asked, *“there’s no bathroom?”* Kip smiled and said, *“don’t worry about it.”* Dan asked, *“this thing as an air conditioner. Do you want it on?”* Kip opened the side walls and said, *“don’t worry about it.”* Kip pointed to the firepit and said, *“tonight we’ll have a fire, and you will burn any sort of identification connecting you to your old life, so think about a new name.”* Dan hooked up the power as Kip tied the popup into the water. Another couple was moving into a trailer. He was surprised to see a couple joining the fight.

A truck pulled into the circle filled with firewood backing up to the firepit. Ruth got out and opened the tailgate. Dan and Kip joined her, and together they started to stack the longs in a way to help the fire burn evenly. Ruth asked, *“have you a name yet?”* Dan looked at Kip then back to Ruth saying, *“I’m thinking Darren after my grandfather and Fitz for my grandmother.”* Ruth said, *“Darren Fitz OK, I can see that working.”* Ruth looked Dan over and asked, *“do you know what’s happening tonight?”* Dan half asked half said, *“I think? We are burning anything connected to my old life.”* Ruth smiled and said, *“yes that is a part of this, but you will also burn everything else including your clothes.”* Dan stopped and looked at Ruth who smiled and said, *“it’s partly a trust exercise, and partly a way to shed your old life.”* Dan asked, *“naked?”* Wendy asked from behind him, *“if you can’t trust us when you’re naked then how can we trust you?”* Dan went back to stacking wood. Cathy leaned in and said, *“don’t worry, we all end up drunk and naked by the end.”*

Part Five

Dan held up his license with his name and old address. A piece of plastic signifying his old life and everything he thought was important. He stared into the fire and tossed the license. His credit cards and social security card followed. Someone was playing a song he knew, but he

couldn't remember the name. Just as soon as the song ended, he remembered the name, but the next song was easy. Boston's More than a Feeling is recognizable from his childhood. To his right were these two women with a bottle of tequila and some tabs of rice paper with what had to be acid. June and April found each other here and together they found their calling. He wanted to ask how they could be against drugs so much that they are killing people while taking drugs. He thought about how people play these weird mind games to justify doing whatever they want. To his left were a little girl and her silent brother. Both saw the worst of humanity with the boy repeatably raped with his legal guardian grandparents breaking his jaw to cut his tongue out, while his sister slowly went blind living in a room where meth was being cooked without any ventilation. April took her top off causing Jeff to turn his head away. He got up and took his sister Susan by the hand and led her back to their camp. On her way out, Sue started to sing her own version of the song Escape, *"if you like Pina colitis, getting caught in the drain if you're not into yogurt if you have half a train."*

Once Sue and Jeff were gone, Dan took off his shirt and tossed it into the fire. In this melancholy state, he had forgotten to take the pack of cigarettes out of the front pocket only remembering when the scent of melting plastic and burning tobacco came from the fire. A younger woman or what he thought of as being younger came over to him and asked, *"did you mean to do that?"* Dan smiled then replied, *"well, no not really but just maybe..... well yes."* She replied, *"OK, my name is Talia, and I guess we are on the same team."* Dan put out his hand and almost said he was Dan and not his new name of Darrel. He then noticed she was nearly naked with just a pair of thin white cotton panties on. Talia was thin but too thin with enough on her for curves in all the places Dan liked them to be curvy. He also thought how pervy he felt checking this girl out when she asked, *"are you going to do is stare at my chest all night?"* Dan looked away and said, *"sorry.....I.....I mean.... I..... I'm sorry."* Talia smiled and slid off her panties tossing them into the fire. She said, *"don't be sorry. I came over here to let you see me, and so I can see you."*

Darrel woke the next morning next to Talia, wondering what her real name was. He had somehow transitioned from thinking of himself as Dan and into the new name of Darrel. That

night he had stood and stripped off his jeans and tossed them into the fire. He looked into Talia's eyes as she cocked her head in an almost, *"well I'm waiting"* gesture. He pulled off his boxers and handed them to her rather than the fire. Talia looked at the boxers then at what the boxers were containing. She stood and leaned in whispering, *"welcome to the family."* She pressed close to him taking him into her hand stroking until he was hard. Off in the distance, they could hear the party ramping up as the drugs and alcohol kicked in. Darrel kissed her as he ran his hand from her shoulder down her back. He said, *"I'm Darrel."* Talia leaned back in and whispered, *"I don't want to do this out here. Let's go back to your trailer."* For a second, he thought about asking her age, but after watching her walk to his trailer, the thought ran from his mind. He walked in, and Talia jumped into his arms. She said, *"for a second I thought you might not follow."* Instead of answering he carried her to the bed kissing her along the way. They made love into the wee hours of the morning.

Talia was from the town of Backlash Oregon where she was known as Anna Kesh. She had a sister named Talia who was everything she wanted to be as well as nothing she wanted to be. Talia was a working model and loved by all, but she also suffered from an eating disorder that eventually cost her that career. As she descended into that hole, Talia found heroin. The drug kept her thin and strung out in debt to her dealer. In turn for his assistance, she eventually was pimped out for her fix until she met the wrong John and was found in an alley with her throat cut. Anna and Talia's parents did their best to remove the memory of their eldest daughter by treating Anna as if she was the one addicted. Part of that was sending her to a therapist named David Warren. He became like the father she always wanted then the lover she didn't need. Their therapy sessions became less about her coping with her sister's death and more about his needs. David eventually talked her into running away to his compound in the desert and joining the cause. Anna was fifteen when her sister died and sixteen when she took her sister's name.

The next day they started to train with Wendy as their lead. Their goal was to work together as quietly as possible and unnoticed. Their team was focused on dealing with dealers on or near school grounds. The kind of people that could sell poison to children. Talia moved in with Darrel. Two weeks into their training they had their first target. Gregory Farewell was a

simple man on the surface. Looking at him he appeared to be just the average everyday mailman walking his route. He was in his mid-fifties with a bald spot on the back of his head that was revealed when he would tip his hat to the people that passed him in the street. He also picked up payments and delivered some of the purest heroin sold on the streets. Most paid with cash but some of his younger customers paid on their knees or bent over. Gregory had a taste for teenage girls. On his usual route, he passed a young girl in a short skirt and a tank top that barely covered her. The reconnaissance team told Talia how to hold the cash so she could let him know she was interested. Gregory whispered into her ear, *“for a little something extra you could keep the cash and have the fix.”* She nodded, and he told her to walk around the block and get into the back of his van on the corner. He said, *“if you make me feel good, and I’ll make you feel good.”*

At the end of his walking route, Gregory walked back to his van and the girl. He opened the back and was struck with the barbs of a Taser gun. He awoke to find himself naked and duct taped to a chair. His legs were spread, and his genitals were out and exposed. His glasses were off taking with them his ability to see past four feet in front of him. A blurry form walked over to him. Talia was topless with a folded knife in one hand and a bottle of vodka in the other. She said, *“we need to know where your drugs are coming from.”* Gregory laughed out, *“why don’t you come over here and sit in my lap. I’ll tell you a long story.”* Talia tilted his head and tried to pour some of the vodka down his throat. Gregory turned his head spitting out the vodka choking out, *“I’m sober you fucking bitch.”* The others stood behind just out of Gregory’s sight watching Talia work. Talia put his glasses on his face. She took hold of his penis saying, *“I bet you can get hard even now and when you do, I’ll cut it off unless you tell us your supplier’s name.”*

Darrel put the newspaper down. A story about a known dealer missing his genitals made him think about that night. The night when he met the real Talia and saw just how far she would go. On the wall in the common room where a series of pictures of people, they lost along the way. Those people from the ranch to the people who died in the war along the border as well as others such as Susan who died from prolonged exposure to the meth-making process. Near the middle was a picture of Talia. Taped to her picture frame was a diamond engagement ring with the engraved message, *“Forever and a Day.”* He went back to work on the car thinking about her

and how she reacted trying to forget how she died. The look on her face as she bled out in his arms. After her death, he made sure to build cars that can withstand the drive-by that killed most of his team including her. In a few days, the final parts for the Mustang will be in, and he will be able to finish the rebuild and Wendy can give the car to Sally. Darrel turned to Scott saying how the block will be back soon, so they should get the body ready for paint. Scott asked, “*color?*” Darrel nodded saying, “*yes there will be some sort of color..... I just don’t know what color yet.*”