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## I, THE HERO

The simplicity of cruelty is surprising. Pain--human pain--is remarkably easy to inflict. Horror, with cries of agony, can be likened to a well written symphony: an Adagio here, a Prestissimo there, and before you know it you have melodious harm being extracted.

Her name was Julie. I hadn't bothered to learn her last name, even though I did stalk her for over two months; it seemed irrelevant to my task, the deed to be done. She was my first.

“Why?” so a person might ask. Is there an answer, one that will assuage the gritty aftertaste of sorrow? I think not.\*

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## 1. THE PHONE CALL

“It’s that time, you know,” I called up the stairs, trying not to get irritated, because after five years of marriage the weight of a routinized inevitability was kind of wearing thin. “I’m not going to tell you again,” I added, permitting a lilting cadence to slip into my voice, which, as always, was my way of controlling my exasperation.

“Daddy is a sleepy-head,” Jeremiah cried out from the kitchen, banging his spoon on the table to emphasize his point, sending milky Cheerios flying.

More irritation, I thought, wagging my finger at my son, who had managed to spill juice from a spill proof juice box down the front of his pajama top. Some super hero now had a purple face to go with his futuristic uniform. Spray and wash echoed in my head, as I commanded him to finish his breakfast.

“What time is it?” Jason sleepily asked from the top of the stairs.

“Time to get your ass to work,” I yelled back, blotting up spilled milk with an industrial sized sponge that I kept by the kitchen sink for just such mishaps, the ones that happened almost every morning.

“Is it cold out?” my husband wanted to know.

I heard his bare feet on the steps as he eased downstairs. “No, honey, it’s January and the earth tilted on its axis overnight and now--poof--it’s eighty degrees out. Why don’t you wear shorts today.”

He peeked his head around the corner of the door to the kitchen and said, “Jerry, did you piss mommy off again this morning? You are making it harder and harder to get along with evil mom.”

“Evil mom is going to stop being your alarm clock every morning and let you be late for work--How’s that?” I chided him, plucking Jeremiah’s plastic cereal bowl off the high chair and plopping it in the sink. “No, no, you’re definitely done eating breakfast. Go and wash up. Or run away from home. Just leave the table.”

“Where are my eggs and pancakes?” Jason deadpanned, looking around the kitchen.

“You know I have a conference today,” I whined, tossing the dish towel at him.

“Do you think you could get Jeremiah ready for day care while I finish getting dressed?”

“Don’t I always?” he stated, smirking.

“No,” I said over my shoulder, hurrying upstairs.

“And normalcy will return,” so said my father, as he sat in his study laboring under the weight of another bout with procrastination, which had derailed his much anticipated book on the history of commerce in New England, circa 1700’s. It had now become the family joke, this book that was never to be written or so it appeared. The University Press had long ago withdrawn its offer to publish it. Still, at indeterminate times, there my father was seated at his desk writing in long hand, while all around him notes on withered legal pads lay scattered everywhere.

The normalcy he spoke of had to do with my newfound celebrity after the Rey Flowers case, or fiasco, as Jason was so fond of calling it. Although I had been adamant at first about not chasing the glitter of notoriety, I nevertheless did succumb in time. Of course, now, I blame it all on my publisher, and my agent, both of which wanted me to be available to the media. I will admit here, (even though I find it embarrassing and totally unprofessional), that I agreed to a

make-over. Yes, a make-over.

“They'll just do something with your hair...and maybe your clothes,” my agent told me, eyeing me up and down, stopping to momentarily examine my shoes. “There is nothing wrong about looking good for the cameras.”

My publisher, Megan, was all of twenty-five and disgustingly pretty. Armed with a degree from Penn, she was the hot new star at the publishing house, so it seemed. When I had told her I wasn't sure I could even write a book she had scoffed and said, “Write, you're not serious are you?” She laughed, which was more of a measured cackle than anything else. Then she added, “We probably have some software around here that can do it for you--I'm sure.”

“So I have to just look good,” I said, trying to mask my sarcasm as best I could.

“Bernard assures me you can handle it,” she said, leaning forward in her chair and tapping her index finger on the desk. “He hasn't let me down yet.”

Bernard, my agent, who I had all of two conversations with to that date, was blinded by dollar signs. He had somehow gotten through to me, even though I was, at the time, holed up in my home town wishing I could change my name, my personal history, anything that would separate me from being included in the same sentence with Dr. Rey Flowers. Rey Flowers the multi-murderer...and Sarah Greene, his therapist. Grisly murders uncovered by unsuspecting therapist, Dr. Sarah Greene. Dr. Sarah Greene is part of secret order to help serial murderers. That last headline emblazoned in four inch letters on a popular tabloid greeted me at the grocery store one day, while the checkout girl grinned at the bag boy then asked for my autograph.

Foolishly, I had sent a one page outline to Bernard and he had run with it, right to the highest bidder as it turned out. Spectacular amounts of money were offered. It was all obscene.

“Capitalism at its most unseemly,” my father had said, shaking his head. He was the author of four books and their combined distribution wouldn't match the advance they were offering me. It was awkward. I knew I would feel ashamed if I cashed in on my fifteen minutes of fame.

“Like we can't use the money,” Jason had said, my perpetually amused husband, who found it all silly.

“Blood money,” I muttered, as I read over the final contract, the one that had been carefully drawn up, the words and phrases that would hand me over to the public while simultaneously socking cash into my bank account.

“Shrinks write books all the time,” Jason told me, which was the extent of his opinion on the matter.

“Do what you think is right, dear,” my mother had said, smiling sweetly at me. I looked closely to see if there was any hint of disapproval there in her eyes, in her mannerisms. She, as usual, was baking something. A smudge of baking powder coated her right cheek where she had brushed her hair out of her face with the back of her hand.

And so I signed. In less than six months I was a newly minted author, with a PR junket to go on. For three months I crisscrossed the country on a book tour doing TV and radio shows. It was all totally debilitating, physically and emotionally. If I heard one more talk show host ask me about motivation I thought I was going to run away and hide somewhere and never resurface.

Then it all seemed to die down. My fame subsided. Bernard no longer called thrice weekly asking personal questions that he thought perfectly satisfactory. “You are doing Winston's show on Monday--you're not on your period are you? You know you were kinda cranky last month in...in Dallas.” “Go to hell, Bernard,” I would inevitably say, hanging up, because after all the

attention, and the money, I was becoming something of a diva. “Sarah, honey, could you not wear that awful blue...thingee for the Parson Hour. I was talking to Megan and she agrees that you shouldn't wear blue. How about something in beige.” “I'm thinking about wearing a g-string bikini--that okay?”

So my fifteen minutes of fame were extended somewhat. A Hollywood agent, who cornered me in the studio one day where I was taping a trashy talk show, one in which the host was going to be soundly disappointed if I didn't somehow instigate fisticuffs on stage, and told me: “Listen, doc, I can make it all go on for you.” He had even winked at me, as if we were sharing in a naughty secret of some sort. “What?” I replied, perplexed in more ways than one. First, I hadn't a clue who he was, and, second, I found myself staring at his loud and garish sports coat. He wasn't the first agent from the West Coast that I had had to deal with. Teams of show business lawyers were still grappling over the rights to my book and its eventual conversion into a film, with movie star in tow.

“Yeah, doc, listen, I have a plan that is tailor made just for you,” he continued, edging closer, while I looked around hoping to see somebody from security or, at the very least, one of the hundred and one associate producers hanging around the set like they always were. They were forever underfoot, offering a bagel, coffee, juice, and constantly fingering a cell phone or two-way radio that crackled in their hand incessantly.

“I have an agent, thank you,” I told him in what I considered no uncertain terms, hoping he would take the hint.

He laughed, showing me all of his bonded teeth, including the molars, then said in a hoarse whisper, “I can get you on Hollywood Squares--no problem.”

I suppose that was his ace in the hole, so to speak, but I thought it sounded comical so I just laughed in his face. Seeing his crestfallen reaction to my ridiculing laughter, I offered, "I don't think that's the direction I want to go right now...sorry." That was a little bit of Hollywoodspeak and he took it well, forcing a smile before doing an about-face and heading out the door.

"You're up, Doctor Greene," one of the associate producers informed me just then, announcing into the two-way that I was about to make my entrance, stage-left. "Don't be afraid to be nasty," the associate hissed as she nudged me on stage.

It never failed to happen. Each and every time I did one of these carnival exhibitions, be it on radio or TV, I always thought of Dr. Burke, my mentor in college. I just knew he wouldn't approve of what I was doing. Pop psychology looked positively scientific next to what I was doing. Doing appearances, talking mumbo-jumbo, adding a slight hint of legitimacy by sounding authoritative. It was all, well, embarrassing. I was glad he wasn't alive to see what his protege was up to.

As I said before, it did all go away, finally. I was no longer grist for trash TV. Occasionally I would get invites from some lesser outlets, ones that couldn't land anyone from the A list. Suddenly I found some sense of decency and refused all of them. Of course, as my father pointed out, in a droll tone, I had already made off with my capital booty. I had. Jeremiah's future had been taken care of. That stood for something, but it didn't exactly endear me to any serious minded psychology circles.

Then again, I had my niche. Jason and I had bought a revolutionary era home on the outskirts of Rumont and set out to fully restore it from the foundation to the roof. The house was



built on a large bend in the Chipwa River, where a dilapidated water wheel still stood. It had been used to power the flour mill, which was now nothing more than a few disconnected stone walls, having long ago surrendered to the harsh Upstate New York winters.

We also had--and I'm not ashamed to boast about this--three horses. Actually we had two horses and one pony, in anticipation of Jeremiah's needs. For numerous months after we purchased the farm my father would refer to us whenever we came by the house as "the landed gentry."

On Jason's part, he had a little bit of trouble adjusting to the rural life, being raised near New York and working most of his professional life in DC and all. Yet, in time, he "downshifted," as he said, and began to live with a different rhythm and cadence. His work at the college was undemanding but acceptable. To fill in whatever void might be there in his new style life, Jason joined the volunteer fire department in town. For several months he drove over a hundred miles twice a week to participate in the fire fighter training offered down State. So now when the alarm sounded, and he was on duty, off he would go, dashing to his truck and screeching away with the little blue portable light propped up on the roof of his pickup.

How had it come to this? I asked myself sometimes. I was actually living back in the small town that I was brought up in, and living less than a mile from my parents. Was it all possible? "It's like a bad plot from an old sci-fi film," I told Jason, on more than one occasion. He would just grin back at me and go on with our small town life.

I did have my new career as an educator. That counted for something, even if it was, for the most part, unchallenging. Teaching generic psychology to college students bent on skating through academic requirements was, at times, disheartening, if not depressing. Applied

instruction--as it surely was in its purest form--invariably culminated in a series of multiple choice exams that represented little and proved less.

My students were all, almost to a boy and girl, bright; but they were also unmotivated and just the least bit spoiled. Their parents' generous income afforded them four years in this bucolic setting, before they embarked on life. Somewhere along the line my father hadn't informed me (or I just hadn't listened) that Cabiness College was nothing more than a four year sleep away camp. Academics, so it seemed, was totally secondary.

That first year of teaching didn't come easy. The major difficulty lay in my fame, the infamous part of it. I'm sure the students took my course just so they could lob questions at me about Flowers and his warped homicidal acts. There they were that first day in class, leering at me, eager to interview me en masse.

No sooner had I written my name on the board than a coed in the first row asked, while twirling her hair in her fingers, "So, just how creepy was he?"

So it began. The next hour was taken up with me trying unsuccessfully to steer the conversation back to the confines of my prepared lecture. The stack of neatly copied syllabus for the semester lay on my desk untouched. Apparently, Psych 101 wasn't going to get off the ground that first day.

"Did he try to off you too?" a boy called out from the back, giggling.

"No--stupid," a girl next to him chastised. "He liked her...talk about brainless," she hissed at a girl to her left, rolling her eyes.

"The guy was a sicko...wasn't he?" the boy countered, directing his comment back at the girl.

“Class,” I said, trying not to raise my voice and suddenly getting a whiff of adolescent disorder. This is like a high school class, roiled through my mind. “I’m not here to discuss Dr. Rey Flowers...or his mental health.”

Of course, I did. The following fifty minutes were devoted to reliving, rehashing, and reciting almost all of the more salient passages in my book *Surrounded By Mythology*. As if by magic, several of the paperback editions appeared on desks around the classroom. To my horror, it was turning out to be another despised book signing session.

“Did he really hack off Chinese guys’ heads?” one boy wanted to know in the front, demonstrating with his pen a cutting motion. “Cool?”

“Japanese...weren't they, Doctor Greene?” a girl in the last row corrected, waiting for my acknowledgment.

“It’s like stupid central in here!” another girl shouted out, laughing. “Hello, the guys were Viet Nameese. You know, from that Viet Nam War thing way, way back. Catch up, people.”

“Yes, they were from Viet Nam,” I muttered, sighing.

“My little brother has the game--it’s pretty awesome,” a boy sitting directly in front of me cried out. “You get to hack and stack. The more skulls you stack up the more points you get. Pretty cool.”

You are all doomed, I thought, trying not to appear too disillusioned, as I forced a smile and pressed on. Psychological catch words echoed in my head, as I valiantly tried to be a professor. My new students weren't to be denied, reveling in the almost talk show atmosphere of the class. The Q and A session petered out about five minutes before the class was over, ending in an impromptu debate about Flower’s deserved punishment.

“The dude’s in a wheel chair and now you want to kill him off...that’s whacked, man,” a boy exclaimed, thereby ending the discussion. I released them on their way to the next designated hour of instruction, while never getting to talk about the outline of my course.

With each semester, however, my sordid past, so to speak, became less and less of an issue. Soon I was just another professor doling out useless information, or so it seemed. Each day I corralled my mounting cynicism and imparted the words of whatever school of psychology was on the agenda. It was, all and all, remarkably easy.

Okay, as a weak confession, I will say here that our homestead, all five acres of it, came with a name. Right there, on the mailbox, (a large wooden one crafted to look like a miniature replica of the house), attached to the top in iron letters, was emblazoned in tarnished brass: Brittany Farms. Seeing as how it was named after the surrounding valley, we left it intact. My father had suggested we rename it Greene Acres but we didn't want to be a source of endless jokes.

I am no Martha Stewart. That is safe to say. Although, my mother might be her long lost twin sister. As you can imagine, the house became her project, her life long endeavor. I was now seeing more of my mother than I did when I was a child.

She was a Jewish Betsy Ross, as she managed to sew just about everything that needed sewing. The UPS driver joked about setting up a permanent stop in our driveway because she was ordering so many things. “Authenticity, Sarah,” she would inform me, looking over her reading glasses at me to make sure she was being heard. “Mom,” I would whine back at her, “we're not going to make this a tour stop, are we?” She would only cluck her tongue and thumb

through another catalogue, one that had glossy photos of genuine replicas of the Revolutionary era. If the Redcoats were to appear over the ridge, we were going to be ready--if not for battle then for tea, with just churned butter and some roasted game hen Jason shot out back.

On some levels I knew a certain degree of contentment. I had a loving husband. I had a wonderful son. I had my parents. There was a career, such as it was. We were comfortable financially.

Then there was the phone call. As it might happen in a movie, a bad one at that, I was handed a decision to make. There does seem to almost always be a fork in the road, or, at the very least, a curve to negotiate. My father would call it an O'Henry dilemma, after the author who was forever writing short stories about people having to make life altering decisions.

"Tell me...be truthful, how have you been?" the voice on the phone asked pointedly, while in the background I could hear the steady clatter of office noise, a staccato of white collar business being conducted.

"I think you have the wrong number," I joked, switching the phone from one ear to the other so I could readjust Jeremiah's coat.

"Did I call at a bad time?"

"I was just heading out the door to take Jeremiah to my mom's," I replied, pulling a knit cap down over my son's ears, glaring at him, silently daring him to pull it off.

"Damn, I needed to talk to you about something kind of important," he said, sighing into the phone.

"E-mail me, it'd be easier," I said, half joking.

"I'm not a great writer like you," he teased, forcing a laugh.

Call it intuition. I knew. I just knew he wanted to ask me something, or tell me something that was going to disrupt my life.

Peter and I hadn't spoken in almost a year. He was now living in South Florida, near Miami. He, too, had joined the world of academia and was lecturing at a small, private college in Miami-Dade County. The last time we had spoken on the phone had degenerated into a gripe session about our mutual dislike of higher learning, or, more accurately, being a part of it.

He, too, had been splattered by the fallout from the Flowers case; although it had been to a much lesser extent. There had been several appearances on talk shows, where he was asked to give his assessment of the notorious case. On more than one occasion he had been asked about my level of, well, sanity, if not competence. Unfortunately, his remuneration had been disappointing, unless you count the numerous offers of dates from total strangers, female and male.

We were still friends, having shared so much in the past. It had taken Peter a full two years to stop asking whether or not Rey Flowers still tried to contact me. He didn't. I knew virtually nothing about him at this stage, except for the fact that he was incarcerated and refused all interviews. "Demons are less scary," Pete would invariably say, snickering self-consciously, thereby ending the topic.

"So...what is it you want to talk to me about?" I asked, forcing the conversation to the nub of the matter.

"Well, Sarah, I might have a little project for you down here," he answered hesitantly. "I immediately thought of you when it came up," he added quickly, laughing.

"Oh, I'm sure you did," I told him with more sarcasm than I intended.

“You wouldn't have to come down here or anything,” he explained. “I could use your help with this...this case,” he went on to say, as I heard someone in the background ask him something.

“Case?” I said, puzzled.

“Didn't I tell you?” he said, forcing a dramatic sigh. “I'm doing some work for the local police department. Yeah, I kind of fell into it. It's...well, different.”

“Oh yeah,” I stated, hissing at Jeremiah to stop playing with his shoes so I could tie them. “Don't tell me you're a profiler now.”

There was a crushing silence on the line for a moment before he replied, “Sort of.”

“What?” I demanded. “Are you kidding me or what? How did you get into that...that stuff?”

Peter laughed and said, “Lucky, I guess.”

He went on to fill me in on the details of his new part-time vocation. A colleague at the college had introduced him to a detective in the local police department, who floated the idea that Peter might want to help out on specific cases when needed. Peter, Mr. Disorganized, the one who was perpetually misplacing files, was going to advise the police on their investigations. It was all I could do to stifle a laugh.

“I'm going to be very mad if this is a joke, Peter,” I warned him. “I'm running late right now and--”

“It's no joke,” he said in a serious tone, one that he seldom used. “I have been helping out with a few of the cops' more...you know...convoluted cases, the ones that involve some degree of psychological angle, if you know what I mean.”

“No I don't know what you mean, for heaven's sake,” I almost shouted into the phone.

“What in the hell do you know about any criminology? Can you tell me that?”

He was quiet for a moment, then replied, “You are hurting my feelings, Dr. Greene.”

I knew Peter well enough to know when he was slipping into his little boy persona, the one he invariably used when he wanted to manipulate the discussion. Shifting tactics, I said, “Okay, so you are a crime fighter now. Do you want me to be your Wonder Woman to your Superman, is that it?”

“I just thought you might want to assist me--somehow. That's all,” he exclaimed, exhaling into the phone.

“I wouldn't have a clue. I wouldn't know what end was up,” I stated, pinning Jeremiah down on the floor so I could tie his shoes.

“Are you trying to be humble or what?” he asked, laughing. “Isn't this the great Dr. Greene, the one who was on all those talk shows? I must have the wrong number.”

“Maybe you do,” I shot back. “Look, I gotta run. Talk to you later.”

I hung up and dashed out the door. I hadn't gone two blocks in the car when it began. I knew it would. In sports they call it competitive juices. More simply, with me, it was just good old fashioned curiosity. Like a specter, it had arrived and I was going to have to delve into the, (as Dr. Burke would have it), parameters and perimeters. After dropping Jeremiah off, I called Peter back on my cell phone.



## 2 EPIDERMIS AS CANVAS

“You know you didn't have to come down here,” Peter stated for at least the third time,” as he shifted my luggage from one hand to the other.

“I can carry my own bag, Peter,” I said, reaching for the bag.

He slapped at my hand playfully and motioned for me to head down an escalator to the right. Miami Airport was a frenzy of activity, matched by a crush of people going in every direction. In front of us on the escalator a woman was admonishing a small boy in a language reminiscent of one of the Star War films.

“United Nations Central,” Peter said over his shoulder, setting my bag down on one of the moving steps. “Couldn't you have come in at Lauderdale,” he grumbled.

“Like I told you before, it's the only flight I could get on such short notice,” I whined back at him.

It hadn't taken but a few days after Peter's phone call before I was hatching plans to head south, to the semi-tropics, to Florida. Of course getting out of UpState New York in January could've had a lot to do with my decision. There was eight inches of snow on the ground and the mercury was hovering somewhere in the teens. The thought of some warmth and sunshine was definitely a factor.

Then again, I was also intrigued by what Peter had outlined over the phone. The case, such as I knew of it, was just the least bit interesting. Of course, as I told myself over and over, it could have just been my sense of mounting boredom that persuaded me to head south. Call it the working-mother-blues and that is about as scientific as I was going to get about it.

The electric doors opened and we stepped out into what can only be described as a...a hot

house, one that was constructed to grow some really exotic plants, ones that need lots and lots of dripping heat. Added to the assault of humidity was a blast of carbon monoxide from all the buses, taxis, and idling cars.

“You didn't tell me to pack my enviro suit,” I joked, coughing. “Tropical pollution noir, I guess,” I added, trying to laugh, while I peeled off my coat.

“Take a deep breath and hold it until we get to Broward County,” Pete joked, smiling, while he pushed his way through a group of plaster white mid-Westerners assembling for their group trek to the port, bound for a cruise to the Islands. “It’s kind of a walk to where I had to park my car,” he informed me, grabbing my arm to lead me between two rental car buses wedged in by the curb.

Finally, after a long walk through a maze of parking lot levels, we located his car and reached air conditioned nirvana. I turned the vent directly on me and begged for him to turn it up. Peter laughed and worked his way out through the congestion, cursing at this and that driver as we went. Before long we were on Interstate 95, heading north.

Peter lived in a condo on the intercoastal. From five floors up I could see a vista of houses, townhomes, and, in the distance, a mall, dotted by waterways snaking through suburbia. All and all, it wasn't exactly scenic.

“I couldn't afford an ocean view,” he explained from the kitchen, almost apologetic.

“Sometimes I don't even know why I bought the damn place. Condos! Who needs them?”

“The swimming pool looks inviting,” I offered, staring down at the rectangle of sparkling blue below.

“Yeah, you need a rule book just to take a swim,” Peter called out, fumbling in the freezer

for some ice. “No diving. No rafts. Proper attire only.”

“What’s unproper attire?” I wanted to know.

“What?” he asked, sticking his head out from the kitchen. “Oh, you know, leopard skin thongs, I guess. Mine’s still hanging in the closet. I never get to wear it. Wait until you taste this juice I got at this Jamaican place. Don’t ask me what’s in it--because I couldn’t tell you, but it’s real tasty.”

“Jamaican place?” I muttered, remembering that when we lived in DC Peter thought moca milk shakes at Arby’s was somehow a strange idea.

“Here,” he said, handing me a tall glass chock full of crushed ice and what was, to my untrained eye from the Northern Latitudes, a purplish liquid. “It’s supposed to make you more mentally alert, among other things.”

“Really,” I mumbled, taking the glass and examining it more closely. “Just how safe is it? I mean south of the border here...who knows?”

“Drink it,” he commanded, raising his glass and smiling.

I took a small sip and said, “Okay, now that is certainly what I might call different.”

“Notice the ginger?”

“Is that what they are calling it?” I shot back, smirking. “Tastes like...like some fruit that’s gone really, really bad.”

“Sarah, you are such a neophyte,” Peter exclaimed, laughing.

“Do you by any chance have some bottled water...that’s been bottled here, in the US?”

“You disappoint me, Dr. Greene,” he replied, returning from the kitchen with a small bottle of Zephyr Hills bottled water.

“Can we talk about the case now, or would that be too business like?” I wanted to know.

“You come into my home, mock my native drink, then demand to do business,” he stated, standing up and walking over to a desk across the room. “You were always all business, I guess,” he said, tossing a file down on the couch next to me. “I am probably breaking some rules and laws here but I think you're going to have to see the pictures to get a grasp of the situation.”

“Pictures?” I said absently, reaching for the file.

The first thing I saw was the face, her face. Young. Angelic.

“Asleep in death,” Peter exclaimed, turning to look out the window.

“What do you mean?”

“Look closely at the navel area,” he replied.

I fumbled in my purse and brought out my reading glasses. Holding the 8X10 color photo, with the natural sunlight behind me, I could see where there was a tattoo in a half arc around the navel. In a sort of refined calligraphy it said: Asleep In Death.

“Is it a cult or something?” was all I could think of to say.

“No,” Peter replied, swirling the ice around in his glass.

I examined the naked body more closely. She was early twenties, blond, slender. A plastic bag was taped around the victim's head. Eyes closed. Lips slightly parted. No lip stick. As far as I could see in the slightly overexposed photo there were numerous interconnecting tattoos covering a great deal of the body.

“I'm getting what we psychologists like to call a creepy feeling about these tattoos,” I said, glancing at Peter and then back at the photo.

“Oh yeah,” Peter mumbled. “Very creepy.”

As I had with the Flowers case, I found myself sifting through the dry police descriptions describing this unfortunate woman's fate. Pauline Fortson. twenty two years old. 5'7". 115lbs. She worked as an assistant manager at a restaurant on South Beach. Her hometown was somewhere in Indiana.

Cause of death: suffocation.

"So, what aren't you telling me?" I wanted to know, as I stared at Peter.

"Well, for starters, the tattoos were...applied by the perp," he explained.

"Perp," I exclaimed, chuckling.

"Police talk," Peter explained, smiling at me. "This creep apparently stalks this poor girl, sets his trap, then tattoos the hell out of her before he snuffs out her life. I guess that pretty much sums it up."

"Okay, sure," I said, glancing back at the photo. "He sets her up then plays artist with her skin and kills her. Let's see, I think that fits a pattern of weird behavior we've heard of before."

"That's why I called you," Peter announced, taking a long sip of his tropical drink. "If anyone can figure this out it's you, Dr Greene."

"Such a flatterer," I told him, frowning at the police file.

"It gets better," Peter added, smiling impishly. "This isn't the first victim--or at least that's what the cops think anyway."

"You're kidding. There is a tattooing serial killer out there somewhere. Why hasn't it been on the news, on that cop show on TV, whatever you call it?" I asked, skeptical because it just didn't seem possible that a murderer could be out there tattooing young women then killing them.

"Detective Santos thinks there might be at least five maybe six more victims out there,"

Peter told me, holding up his fingers to illustrate the point. “In three different States.”

“Three States,” I said, exhaling. “There have been murders fitting this...this perversion in three different States. You've got to be kidding me. How can that be possible? Tell me how a guy can hunt down women in three different States and do this twisted tattoo thing and not get caught? It's absurd.”

I was beginning to get that same feeling that I had a few years before, the one that planted an almost electrical pulse on my spine. In the Rey Flowers case, I had found it almost impossible not to leave it alone--let it go. Often times at night I would close my eyes and see Rey, or, and this was equally disturbing, hear him speaking. His words would seem to echo in my head. At this juncture in my life I wasn't sure I wanted to go down that road again.

“Where do you want to eat tonight?” Peter asked in a cheerful tone, as he snapped his fingers to a silent beat, a habit that I often teased him about. “There's this restaurant on the beach that has some pretty good middle-eastern cuisine. It's either Lebanese or...what? Jordanian? Syrian? Who knows?”

The photograph of the poor victim caught my eye again. Looking at the tattoos was like observing a painting. My eyes traveled around the depicted scene, following the intricate design. Then I was looking at the girl's eyes staring out from the clear, plastic bag, pleading.

“Doesn't matter to me,” I finally replied, looking away.

After I showered I felt more relaxed. Yet I found myself already thinking about the killer. This particular case was, of course, very different from my other encounter with homicide. I didn't know who the murderer was. I was intrigued no matter how much I attempted to downplay the aspects of the murder.

We sat on Peter's balcony and had some beers, while watching the sunset. Out over the Everglades a golden glow was slowly dying out. A subtle coolness had crept into the night air.

"At least I get the sunsets," Peter exclaimed, smiling at me. "I might not get to see the ocean but, hey, this ain't that bad."

"Not bad," I agreed, clinked his beer mug with mine.

"It's good to see you again, Sarah," he said, grinning. "I miss our times together we had in DC. Hey, call me sentimental if you want, but we had some good times up north."

"Up north," I needled, laughing. "Boy, you have been down here too long. What's next? Are you going to start wearing white shoes and play shuffle board on Friday nights?"

"Very funny, Dr. Greene," he shot back. "For your information, Washington DC just happens to be due north of here," he stated, pointing towards Ft. Lauderdale in the distance. "My sense of geography is impeccable."

"Don't forget to get a white belt too...you know, when you buy those whites shoes," I said, snickering. "You know the good thing is that when it comes to retire you don't have to move because you are already here."

"When does your flight leave?"

I had wanted to see where the body was eventually found. Although the crime scene had long before been cleared, I still thought that by seeing where the crime took place I could get a sense of what had occurred. In actuality, I didn't know what else I could do at that point. I had studied the police file, going over it several times. Peter had suggested we see where she lived first.

“This is the famous South Beach, Sobe,” Peter announced as we turned onto Ocean Drive and almost literally crawled up the street at approximately five miles an hour. “Home of the beautiful people.”

Ocean Drive was bumper to bumper traffic and it was eleven in the morning. The season was in full swing. I could see half dressed men and women coming and going, entering and exiting the beach, which stretched out to our right for quite a distance. A couple of roller blading teenage girls , wearing impossibly small bikinis dodged a few pedestrians in front of us then zoomed in and out of the stalled traffic.

Thinking of my one piece bathing suit safely packed away in my suitcase, the one I bought at the beginning of last summer when Jason and I took “the kid” to Cape Cod for the first time, I jokingly said, “Remind me to stop on the way back to your condo and get a new bathing suit.” “I think mine is way too out of fashion for down here.”

“Think so,” Peter muttered, staring at the girls on roller blades.

I playfully smacked him and asked, “Is this gridlock or what?”

Art Deco had been saved, or at least salvaged, by the modeling world. The peculiar form of architecture was dying at the hands of a community, for lack of a better word, expiring. Retirees clung to the cityscape, withering like the dilapidated buildings that made up Miami Beach. Then came the light, as in sunlight, and the rest was what I saw up and down the street. The lens of a camera worked wonderful with the almost over powering semi-tropical sun. Then the Miami Vice TV show told the world that this part of Florida was exciting, even if illegal drugs were epidemic.

The buildings that fronted the ocean, a several block long row of rainbow colored facades,



was the epicenter of the new South Beach. Celebrities soon took root, even buying up the properties. It couldn't have been planned. It just happened.

“Isn't that...what's his name?” Peter wanted to know, as he craned his neck, turning in his seat, trying to get a better look.

“You'll have to be more specific,” I said sarcastically.

“You know, he was in that TV show, the one about the radio show...or was it a newspaper...whatever,” Peter explained. “I think he lives down here somewhere.”

“We're hardly moving, Pete. Maybe you could jump out and run and get his autograph,” I teased.

“Very funny, Dr. Greene,” he replied, frowning at me. “I'm not used to being around celebs like you are. I know you must have been hobnobbing with all kinds of famous people when you were doing your book tours.”

“You had to bring that up,” I shot back. “You know that is a touchy subject with me.”

“Sure,” he scoffed. “Like you didn't want all that attention. I think it's time for you to be honest with yourself, Sarah. Therapy might be a good idea.”

“Wait a minute!” I said excitedly. “Isn't that a super model over there doing a commercial for Victoria's Secret?”

Peter jerked his head around then said, “Man, you could have caused me to have whiplash.”

“God, you are hopeless,” I stated, shaking my head.

We had to park several streets over from the apartment building because of the overload of cars. “Parking's at a premium down here,” Peter briefly explained, as we walked along the relatively quiet streets. The ocean was no more than a few blocks away and I could smell the

ocean brine in the air. "I like the atmosphere here," I commented, looking around at the tree lined streets and the row after row of small, two story apartment buildings. "It has a neighborhood feel you don't seem to get anywhere else in South Florida."

"I agree. This is it," Peter announced, pointing across the street at a building painted in tropical colors. "Apparently, the owner has a Deco fixation," Peter joked.

The apartment was still empty. A stray piece of yellow police tape still clung to the railing outside leading up the stairs to the second floor. It was a one bedroom corner apartment. Cozy, I can imagine a realtor saying to a prospective client.

The door was locked, as I imagined it would be. There wasn't an actual concrete reason for me being there. Maybe I had seen too many police shows on TV, the ones where the sleuth/detective visits the scene of the crime and has a sudden realization and immediately solves the case, or at least within the allotted sixty minutes of air time.

"Small," I mused, leaning my head against the screen on the front window to peer inside the apartment.

"Studio. Police canvassed the whole area. Zilcho," Peter informed me, turning the doorknob to the front door again to make sure it was locked. "Apparently none of the crime stuff happened here anyway, so said the ME. Who knows where she was worked on."

"Worked on," I said absently.

"You know, the artwork stuff," Peter explained, walking around to the side of the building. "Check this out," he called out, disappearing around the building.

There was a small fence to the side of the building, with a gate. Just inside there were several garbage cans and an old couch someone had disposed of. A big tabby cat was snoozing

on one of the cushions.

“Oh you can see right through the apartment from here,” I told him, as I stood on my tiptoes and looked in the back window. “Tiled floor. Nice color”

“I didn't ask you down here to give me a decorator's perspective,” Peter complained. “The place was clean as a whistle forensics wise, of course.”

“The owner's phone number is on the sign in front,” someone suddenly announced, startling both of us.

“Oh, you scared me,” I exclaimed, stepping back from the window.

I now saw it was a young man, early twenties, on a bicycle. He had on a muscle t-shirt that displayed what was obviously time spent in a gym. Deep suntan. Perfect teeth. He was, as Peter had briefed me, an example of one of the SOBE specimens that lived in the area.

“I don't know what the rent's going for but like I said the number is--”

“That's okay,” I interrupted him. “We were just checking out the apartment where the, you know, the murdered girl lived.”

“Two sickos--whatever,” the young man said, shaking his head.

“We work for the police,” Peter chimed in, using his professional therapists tone of voice.

The young man gave us a skeptical look then asked, “Do they know who killed Pauline?”

“Were you a friend of hers?” I wanted to know.

“Yeah,” he answered hesitantly. “Neighbors...friends, whatever.”

“I'm sure the cops already talked to you, but could you answer a few more questions? I asked gently, smiling at him.

“I guess,” he said in an uneasy voice, as if he might be on camera.

“Did Pauline have any boyfriends that you knew?”

“Yeah, one,” he answered succinctly, looking down at the ground. “I already told the cops his name. They supposedly checked him out.”

“I’m sure they did. But what did you know about him? Like for instance where did he work? Live?”

“He’s a life guard, over on the beach,” the young man answered, pointing eastward.

“Name’s Pablo.”

“Nice guy?” Peter asked.

“Don’t know him very well,” he said. “I guess he’s okay. Pauline liked him.”

“You and Pauline...uh...ever involved or anything,” Peter asked in a vague conspiratorially tone.

“No.”

“Did Pauline have any tattoos that you knew of?” I wanted to know.

“Yeah.”

“How many?” I asked in as friendly tone as I could.

“Why?” the young man inquired angrily.

“Just evidence gathering, that’s all,” I assured him.

He thought for a moment then answered, “Two, that I knew of.”

“Did she get them down here or somewhere else?” Peter chimed in.

“Here. Over on Washington. But he wouldn’t have killed Pauline. Come on. That’s stupid,” the young man stated, forcing a laugh.

“Just covering all the bases,” Peter exclaimed authoritatively. “Thanks for your help.”

When we got back to Peter's car, I asked him about how much information had been divulged to the local public. Not much, according to Peter. The cops were sitting on what little they knew in an attempt to ward off copycats and to preserve any advantage they might have, if any.

"The tattoo guy is way too easy," I told Peter. "I mean, come on. Besides, what does the guy do, move his tattoo business all over the eastern seaboard?"

"Been checked out already anyway. I think he did the two tattoos she had. That is before the killer got to them. If you notice in the crime scene photos the wacko covered them up with his work. They were in spots on the body that wouldn't have been readily visible, you know, in the underwear area. Maybe the murderer knew the tattoo guy though," Peter speculated.

"Just a question, but why does someone get a tattoo that no one's going to see?" I wanted to know. "I mean of course whoever she was intimate with would see them but nobody else. Unless she was a nudist."

"There is a nudist beach around here," Peter informed me. "Think we should go and do some investigating?"

"Sure," I exclaimed, laughing. "She didn't look like she had an all-over tan or anything."

"No, you're right, definite tan lines," Peter concurred.

"What about the life guard angle? Does Pablo know the tattoo guy or has he had any work done by him? Bicycle boy there seemed somewhat shaky on the life guard or was it my imagination?" I said, searching in my bag to find my sunglasses.

"Should we talk to the life guard? Can't hurt, I guess."

"By the way, Pete, nice going with the were you involved question," I needled, laughing. "I

mean, come on, the guy was gay--for heaven's sake."

"How do you know that?" Peter asked, incredulous.

"By the way he was acting concerning Pauline. It was all proprietary. Not like a hetero would act about an attractive next door neighbor," I explained. "You didn't pick up on that at all?"

"You've been out in the sun too long," Peter shot back.

"Besides, it was obvious how he was checking you out in your Tommy shorts and all," I teased.

"That I happen to have nice legs is something beyond my control," he said, sighing for effect.

Bicycle boy had told us that Pauline's life guard boyfriend usually worked around 14th Street. This meant we had to trudge several blocks east towards the ocean. Although there was a nice northeast breeze blowing, it was nevertheless over 80. I could feel the sun beating down on my face and wished I had brought a hat to wear. I finally convinced Peter to lend me his Dolphin cap, but not after teasing him about suddenly being a Dolphan. Back in DC he had been a Redskin fan, an obnoxious one at that. His response had been some hooey about different town different team. So much for loyalty.

An expanse of beach greeted us as we cut in between two hotels. Sand immediately found its way into my New Balance running shoes, the ones that had never been used to run in. I glanced down and saw that my legs were as white as the sand. Pausing, I glanced first north then south, taking in the view.

Dotting the ocean were any number of boats, large and small. A go-fast boat zoomed

southward, turning into Government Cut, just skirting around two wave runners zipping around the jetty. A behemoth sized freighter was anchored off-shore. Down parallel with Ocean Drive I could see two kite surfers dashing back and forth. Every so often one of them would pop into the air, hang there, then descend gently to the surface with a graceful plop.

“Lot of activity,” I muttered, trying not to think about how much I looked like a tourist.

“Usual,” Peter said, staring off to his left.

“They're breasts, Pete, woman have two of them,” I chided, noticing that he was looking at several Euro girls sunbathing topless.

“Oh, is that what they are,” he joked, smiling.

“I'm sure your leering at them is making a good impression,” I said, trying not to sound too reproachful.

“Never get use to it. No matter how much I come down here,” he mumbled by way of explaining himself.

The Life guard stand was, in a word, art. It was colorful. Whimsical even. The wood structure had been painted, apparently, in homage to Peter Max, a painter that I can reference because my parents once tacked one of his posters above my crib; which may or may not explain much of my personality manifestations. A life guard was standing in front of his stand doing stretching exercises. Did everybody down here work out, crossed my mind as we approached. He raised up from one of his warm-up moves and gave us a (no pun intended) guarded look, as if to say that what we had to say better be worth his time.

“Are you Pablo by any chance?” I asked as sweetly as possible, smiling.

“Yeah,” he answered, continuing to stretch.

“Mind if we ask you a few questions...about Pauline?” Peter inquired, trying to instill a friendly edge to his voice.

“What for?” he wanted to know, twisting his trunk to and fro in what looked like a painful exercise.

“We're helping out the police with her case,” I explained in a serious tone. “We just wanted to ask you a few things about--”

“Done that,” he spat out, turning away and walking up the ramp to the stand. Over his shoulder he stated, “Cops were all over me already.”

“We know, but we--”

“We just wanted to get a different perspective on this thing,” I offered, interrupting Peter because I felt that the interview was slipping away, that Pablo was going to be totally uncooperative if I didn't establish some sort of conversational balance quickly. “We are psychologists and we are taking a different tack than the police are. So we could really use your help.”

Pablo stood on the life guard stand platform looking down at us. The look of disgust was starting to ease somewhat. He glanced around him for a moment, fumbling with some swimming goggles. I could see he was making a decision.

“I was just going for a swim,” he announced, trying to be more civil. “I don't know what I can add that I've already, you know, told the cops. Only I had nothing to do with the...the murder. I would like to kill the son of bitch that...”

His voice trailed off as he began to adjust the strap on the goggles. I glanced at Peter for an instant then said, “You might have some information that could find the guy that did that to



Pauline.”

Pablo swore under his breath then said, “Okay, ask what you got to ask.”

Yes, they both got tattoos from the guy on Washington Avenue. No, they didn't live together. Yes, Pauline had a more or less exclusive relationship with him. No, he didn't know if she had any former boy friends in the area. Yes, she did have a former boy friend back in Indiana. No, he didn't know where he lived but that his name was Rick. Yes, he had seen her the day she went missing. No, he didn't have a fight with her that day. Yes, she met plenty of men at her job. And no he hadn't been the one to find her dead.

His answers came in a monosyllabic monotone, not unlike he was reciting something. I wasn't sure if that indicated anything more than just boredom with the questions, the very same he had probably answered from the police detectives, the ones that had escorted him to the police station to conduct an interrogation. After all, he was the current boy friend and a prime suspect. Peter thought his demeanor was more indicative of the SOBE personality trait, the one infused with the professional ennui veneer.

It was all mostly unhelpful. Pablo was a twenty-one year old Cuban guy who had come to the United States when he was two years old. With the exception of a vague Miami-Dade accent, the one with the Latino overtones, he had assimilated easily. He liked football and basketball. Drank beer. Had attended community college sporadically. Drove an import with custom chrome rims. And although he listened to Salsa music on occasion, he preferred to listen to rap, techno, even garage. Most of this I gleaned from Detective Santos later on, who seemed to be perpetually amused by my interest in the case, like I was some criminology court jester or something. More on that later.

“Pablo and Pauline,” Peter stated when we were back at his car.

“Yeah, what about it?” I said peevishly because I felt sunburned and parched, besides the fact that there was a pound of sand in my shoes itching my feet.

“Nothing, it’s just silly I guess. You know, Paul and Paul essentially. Pablo. Pauline,” Peter explained, laughing.

“Thanks for the insight,” I muttered, thinking back on the interview we had just conducted.

“Oh now, Dr. Greene, don't get too serious on me,” he sang out, reaching over to pinch my arm. “Are we cranky because we haven't had lunch?”

“Well, I didn't know you were going to ask me down here to broil me then starve me too,” I exclaimed, trying to control my crabbiness.

“There’s a bagel place up here we can grab some bagels at. Can you hang on for a few more minutes or not?”

“Paul and Paul, do you think the cops picked up on that? Should we inform them? Where’s my cell phone? I'll call right now,” I joked, laughing.

“No bagels,” he stated. “Nobody likes a sarcastic jackass.”

We then drove over to Miami and on across the Rickenbacker Causeway. Pauline's body had been found on a stretch of beach on Virginia Key. A windsurfer had found her body and called it in.

"Face up," Peter explained, slowing down to pay the entrance fee to the beach area. "She was lying on a beach towel, hers presumably, naked. Been there several hours before the kite surfer guy found the body."

"What's that smell," I had to ask, almost gagging at the redolence of acrid stench that was

wafting in the window.

"Sewage plant or something," Peter answered, pointing off towards the west. "Pretty rank sometimes. How'd you like to live next to that?"

"Place looks undeveloped around here," I said, looking around at the towering Australian Pine trees that lined the two lane road.

"That's Miami for you, can't do anything right," Peter scoffed. "I mean you have waterfront property and it all goes to waste."

He pulled off into a side parking lot. There were about a half dozen cars parked in the weeds. Overhead a few turkey vultures hovered. Several raccoons scampered away when we got out of the car, disappearing into the brush.

"Florida wildlife," Peter announced, laughing.

"Mr. Tourguide, huh," I teased.

"Yeah, right. We're going to have to hoof it through the trees and down a path."

I followed him through the brush, stepping over beer cans and empty potato chip bags, among other things. Something scurried away off to the right and I froze. Peter laughed and told me the place was full of snakes too. Then we stepped out onto the beach.

"Wow," I exclaimed. "This is nice."

"Million dollar view," he said, sweeping his arms out. "This is Bear Cut and that over there is Key Biscayne. The windsurfers and kitesurfers liked to go out down there. About a quarter mile out there's a reef with waves when the wind is up."

"Is that an island there?" I asked, pointing northward.

"Fisher Island, home of the filthy rich," he said. "Gotta take a ferry to get to it. There's no

bridge or anything."

"So the killer brings her body all the way in here. Seems like a production to me. Shouldn't there be some kind of forensic evidence around?" I wanted to know.

"Guess not," Peter said. "Police don't know much, evidently."

"But he would have had to drive in this far, right? Soil samples? Footprints? Something."

"If they have anything they're keeping it from me," Peter said, shrugging.

"Wait, he brought the body in by boat. Of course, that way he could have gone undetected, right?" I exclaimed.

"And that's why you get the big bucks," Peter announced, laughing. "I suppose he could have, sure. Who is going to see him? Nobody. Sobe is right up there. Hell, you could paddle down here in a kayak in no time. Still doesn't give us much though. There must be a million boaters down here."

"True, but he must be oriented to the water. Think about it, if he had a boat, a big enough boat, he could do the tattooing and the murder, then deposit the body," I stated excitedly.

"Anchor offshore somewhere, then do what he wanted to her. Makes sense. That way he could go undetected," Peter mused.

"Why didn't the detective mention any of this to us?" I wanted to know. "Come on, this is too easy. I'm sure he must have thought of it. I think he was humoring me. Probably thinks I'm a publicity hound or something. Nosing in his business so I can get on TV. I feel like an idiot."

"Now that I think of it, he did mention something about checking out the Miami Beach marina," Peter informed me, frowning. "They aren't morons. That's why there wasn't much in the way of forensics. They already figured the perp came in this way. He's been just playing

me."

Seeing Peter again had been fun, even if at times we got locked into nostalgia jags. Our times spent in DC had been formative, with our lives and careers. I missed a great deal of it. My apartment. The VA. Even the politicians and their "circumscribed madness," as Dr. Burke liked to say.

At any rate, after seeing Peter, and partaking of some sun, (with a sunburn for my troubles), I wanted to head back home. I had called Jason and he had informed me that it was snowing and hovering around 20 degrees. "Probably have snowdrifts in the morning," he had said, sighing into the phone, while in the background I could hear our little one screeching. "Someone's not happy," I offered gently, knowing Jason had little tolerance for crankiness out of Jerry. "Time to go on poop patrol," my husband explained, adding "yeah, that's right, little man, we're talking about you." Our potty training regimen had been meeting with some resistance. I laughed and said, "Just give my mother a call if you get overwhelmed, Jason." There was silence for a moment on the line then he said, "Count on it."

"Sure you can't stay longer?" Peter called out to me from the kitchen, where he was fishing in the fridge for another bottle of his favorite Caribbean concoction. "Haven't I been a good host or what? Don't like the fun quotient? We could go to Disney World, you know, like a field trip. I'll even buy you some Disney paraphernalia."

"I have a job, you know," I shot back, walking back onto the balcony. The view was beginning to grow on me. In the distance, I could see the Good Year blimp working its way

southward, struggling to go upwind. “Hey, I can see the blimp coming,” I exclaimed, surprised by my childish glee.

“Coming down for the playoff game, from Pompano. That’s where it is based. The Dolphins are playing today,” he explained. “Want some juice?”

“No thanks, tastes like gunk,” I replied, laughing.

“You northerners, you have palates like a...a baby,” Peter needled, smiling at me. “I’m going to miss you, Greene.”

“So, when are you going to get married, Pete?” I countered, returning his smile.

“I get that enough from my mother, thank you,” he announced, peering over my shoulder at the blimp in the distance. “Heavy head wind.”

“Sorry,” I said, adding, “it’s an old habit, I guess.”

“Changing the subject, if I might, what about the case? All weirdness aside, what do you think? Any ideas?” Pete wanted to know, leaning forward in his chair.

I thought for a moment then said, “I don’t know how much help I can be. I mean up in New York what can I do? Really, what can I add to the case? It’s all pretty foreign to me anyway. Forensics. Police work. I’m kind of out of my element.”

“Dr. Greene, come on, don’t be so modest,” he chided playfully. “Is this the same woman I saw on all those TV shows expounding on psychological...psychological deviancy etc.? Give me something here, won’t you.”

“Very funny,” I stated, frowning at him. “My psycho-babble notwithstanding, I’m not comfortable doing this kind of stuff. The Flowers thing was totally different--totally.”

“I know,” Peter muttered, craning his neck to see how the blimp was progressing. A few

seagulls flew overhead and then disappeared beyond the roof of the building. Pastel clouds drifted to the northwest. “You'll come up with something. I know you. There will be some sort of input. I've known you long enough to know that you will come up with something.”

I didn't share in Peter's confidence in me. I was, more or less, stymied. Tattoos. Beautiful dead girls. Suffocation. “Like looking at a puzzle with one eye closed,” Dr. Burke was fond of saying when referring to a psychological conundrum.

On the drive to MIA, as Peter chattered on about the possibility he might buy a boat, I was lost in thought. While the frenetic I95 traffic zoomed around us, I was beginning to realize that I wasn't going to be able to let go of this. The Artist, that was what the Miami Beach Police Department was calling the murderer. Three women had been killed. I was still astounded that no media outlet had gotten hold of the story. There had as of yet been no connecting of the dots. A trio of victims and three different States. It didn't seem possible.

“I am sending you home with such a nice shade of pink,” Peter teased, as he hugged me in the concourse.

“Yeah, thanks a lot. My back is so radiated it will probably set off the security thing,” I joked, squirming in my blouse from the uncomfortable chaffing.

“Didn't I say use the 30 suntan lotion?” Peter said, chuckling. “Oh no, you said you never get sunburned. Uh huh, heard that one before. Here in the semi-tropics you have to be extra careful.”

“I've got an idea, why don't you come on up to my farm and will let you shovel snow,” I countered, grinning. “Yeah, you can shovel the whole back forty.”

“Dr. Greene had a farm, eee-iiii-oh! With a--”

“I gotta go,” I interrupted, bussing his cheek and making a dash for the security gate.

### 3. IN CONTEMPLATION OF DENIAL

To think of something that one does not want to think of, that is the crucible, or something along those lines, so said Dr. Burke. It is widely believed that the act of denial is one of the most prevalent mental maladies apparent in modern society. Without some degree of denial life would be, well, very difficult. Self esteem would be continually battered, leaving the person with quite a few dings on their personas. It was safe to say that I was doing that denial thing, and on a large scale. Upon my return to cold, snowy New York, I merged back into the academic's life, or, at least attempted to.

There were papers to grade, lectures to give, and the usual tedium associated with playing intellectual nursemaid to numerous, shall we say, unwilling minds. Then, of course, there was my family, and the farm, and my parents--not necessarily in the order. Life's machinations hadn't gone away.

So there I was, often times seated at my desk in my office at the college, (as this is when the denial mechanism was needed most), and my mind would be gravitating to a very cinematic memory of the case file Peter had revealed to me. You know when you fast forward a tape on your VCR, (feel free to think back in a technotime lapse for those of you who have moved on to DVD), and you see the contents of the film flitting by but you can still discern what's transpiring even if it is in rapid motion. Well, my daydreams were like that. I was seeing that poor, dead



girl. More accurately, I was seeing those damn tattoos. For a person who got a C in her art class appreciation elective in college and couldn't tell a Dutch master from a French, I was having almost total recall.

One tattoo in particular kept floating forward in my brain. It was a large one that the killer had applied to the right breast, extending downwards to the pelvic area. Capitalizing on the natural shape of the breast, he (she) had etched in a mini solar system, using the nipple as the cynosure of the system. Rotating downwards from the nipple were rings in which planets were anchored. The galaxy reached up and down her right flank. "Maybe we should check all the Star Wars and Star Trek clubs," Peter had joked, wiping away his smile when he saw that I wasn't amused. Several space ships and satellites had been drawn here and there. Bursts of violent color.

What had Pauline Fortson's reaction been as the killer meticulously applied an epidermal mural to her skin. Although I had been assured that undergoing a tattoo wasn't totally painful, it being described to me by several people as more irritating than any thing else, I couldn't stop thinking about Pauline's state of mind. Would the killer have drugged her first? The pharmacology report says otherwise. Her blood had only had a very minute alcohol content. No, this maniac would have wanted her conscious, and alert, while he did his needle art. That would undoubtedly be part of his method. Seeing her face as he prodded her skin would be a vital part of the pleasure he derived from his acts.

The front side of her body had been reserved for space and what could only be described as futuristic abstract type drawings, ones in which swirls of color mingled with star bursts and things of that nature. Her back had been covered in flowers, some large and some tiny. The

backside of the legs had been untouched, except for a small sunflower he had applied in the middle of her left calf. The arms were bare, as were the front of the legs. This was, as Peter informed me, different from some of the other victims, who had been mostly covered in tattoos. The killer had obscured her previous tattoos by incorporating them into an intricate mosaic of some sort.

"Probably didn't have the time," Peter speculated over the phone when I called him after I had held out for a couple weeks.

"Time, I mused, "where did he find the time? I mean it takes time to tattoo somebody-- doesn't it?"

"You're asking me?" he said, laughing. "The last tattoo I got took hours."

"Funny," I muttered. "He couldn't have done this in her apartment. I just don't see how."

"Hey, how come it took you two weeks to call me?" Peter wanted to know. "I bet it would only be a week."

"I held out as long as I could," I said in my defense, forcing a laugh. "By the way, thanks alot for telling me about all of this. Talk about ruining somebody's life. Here I was just minding my own business and along comes--"

"You'll thank me when you write another best seller, Dr. Greene," Peter stated. "You'll get richer and I'll still be a nobody, I guess."

"I just love it when you feel sorry for yourself," I joked. "It's one of your more attractive qualities."

"You'll be sorry when I fling myself off my balcony and splatter all over the crabby old farts by the pool below," he warned, chuckling.

"I'm sure your condo board has some rule against that," I shot back. "Maybe you had better look it up before you go and jump."

"Now that's the wit that made you such a favorite on all those talk shows, Dr. Greene," he countered, snickering.

Jason eyed me with a surprised look on his face when I asked him to help me carry my old drafting table upstairs to my study. It had come to that. Whether I wanted to admit it to Peter, or myself actually, I was going to pursue the Artist. Much to Jason's exasperation, I had brought the drafting table with me to our new home. I couldn't part with it. It had been with me since my college days. In fact, it enjoyed some renown of note. One of the numerous bio puff pieces that had been written up about me during my PR junkets had included a tidbit about the table, as well as an accompanying photograph, with me standing there pointing to the thing like an idiot, or so I was told by my loving husband. Come to think of it, Peter had a few comments as well, but then he ridiculed me about everything to do with my new found fame.

"You want me to go into the shed and drag that stupid thing out for you?" Jason asked, incredulous. "How about I chop it up for fire wood while I'm at it."

"And what exactly do you have against my drafting table?" I asked, trying to joke my husband into a chore he didn't want to do.

"Damn ugly-ass thing," he muttered, hoping, I'm sure, that if he just put it off long enough I would forget about it.

"Don't make me go into my nag-mode, Jason," I threatened mildly, smiling. "Be forewarned."

"Oh Lord, not that," he said, exhaling deeply. "A fate worse than death."

Nagging was, as a phenomenon, certainly something that I wouldn't indulge in on a regular basis--my husband's testimonials notwithstanding. However, I had always thought that nagging was a defense mechanism long ago instilled in the weaker sex's genes in order to, you know, keep order in the universe. I jest. Sort of.

Together we entered the dreaded shed, the one that had quickly become the depository of everything in our lives that we couldn't part with, deeming the articles of this and that something that would someday be of importance. Jason plucked a basketball off the floor as we entered and bounced it a few times. "Needs air," he commented, more to himself than me. He hadn't played basketball in over three years. Stacked on the right side, quite nearly to the ceiling, was his "stuff." And you call my drafting table ugly, I thought as I looked over several rows of dusty furniture left over from Jason's apartment in DC. The man had no less than three mirrors with beer logos emblazoned on them. Yet he couldn't understand why I didn't want them in my house. Let's not forget about the easy chair with the duct tape holding together the cushion, a victim, so I was told, of a knife throwing contest. Don't ask. What guys do when the Monday Night Football game gets boring is probably worth a research paper or two. Then there was the hockey game table. Yes, my husband's apartment had looked like a Hooter's restaurant.

"There it is," I announced, pointing. "Give it a good dusting and it's good as new," I said cheerfully.

Jason looked at me for a moment, then said, "You've gotten into something, haven't you?"

I tried to ignore him, while I moved a few boxes off the table top, pretending to be examining some old files that were stacked on the side. He sighed heavily again and threw the

basketball against the far wall, where it bounced and knocked over a lamp with a Redskin logo on it, another piece from his early American-sportsnut collection. I didn't turn around.

“Another collector’s item bites the dust,” I joked, moving another box.

“I’m going to kill that Peter,” he muttered.

That was pretty much all he said. Although I knew full well that he disapproved. We had, more or less, made a tacit--unspoken really--agreement that I wouldn't be doing any more psychological cases. I was now purely an academic. I was just to talk about psychology, letting all that I had learned flow to the generations that would follow. Professor Greene imparts knowledge. Learn at your own peril.

The old drafting table was set up in my study, the one that I laughing referred to as the tomb because the room's only window was south facing and shaded for most of the year by a large maple tree. When we had first moved in I had set out to stock it with all the books that I thought I needed, including the three that my father had written early in his academic career. Bookshelves lined three sides of the smallish room, but of the three only one was full of books and some of those were even paperbacks. My desk had been a gift from my father. Even if it was a hand me down, I cherished it. It had been his first desk, bequeathed to him by a favorite professor from college. It had been restored to its original splendor by an antiques expert who had a workshop in Mass. Much to my father's dismay (horror to be more accurate) I had defiled the desk by spilling coffee on the surface, and more than once. Academicians were often way too reverential about their places of work, or so it seemed to me.

I had the obligatory laptop. It was outdated, of course, and was so cluttered with unused files that no software yet invented could cleanse it. That and the battery had long since given up

the ghost, failing to hold even a ten minute charge. The chair at the desk was an expensive one. Don't ask me how much, but my mother had been impressed when my publisher had given it to me as a birthday present right after my book sold out its first edition. It was leather and pretty comfortable all and all. Off to the right of the desk I had two filing cabinets that were bought from Office Depot and definitely clashed with the staid decor of my study. Very utilitarian.

"Okay, where do you want it?" Jason asked, plopping the drafting table down in the middle of the study.

I quickly clutched at the wobbly front leg to keep it from falling over and said, "Anywhere'll do."

"Could you be a little more specific," my darling husband insisted, looking around the room. "Where ever you put it it's going to be clogging up the room."

"How about there," I offered, pointing to a tiny open space by the filing cabinets.

"Whatever you say," he mumbled, grabbing one end of the table.

"That'll have to do," I mused, adjusting the table top so I could apply the material from the case.

"You're not a detective, you know," Jason stated, then walked out of the room.

I started to reply then thought better of it. It hadn't occurred to me that I would be sort of invading his turf. Even though my husband was now nothing more than a campus cop, he still thought of himself as a trained detective. The adjustment from the big city cop to security work had been a bumpy one at first. He hated the uniform he had to wear, thinking it made him look like a rent-a-cop. Being captain of the campus police force did little to change that self-image. Watching over "hormonal idiots" was difficult and, in its way, demeaning. Having to listen to

smart mouthed rich kids argue about him enforcing campus rules was more than just aggravating.

"Think about his pride," my father had mentioned to me when I confided in him about my husband's trouble adjusting to a different life. "Here's a man who was working on a large metropolitan police force then it's taken away from him. Kind of traumatic, don't you think? Show some support."

Not that I hadn't given my support, but, perhaps not enough. During all of the upheaval post Flowers, in which Jason was pilloried and forced to resign, I had attempted to be there for him. Then when the unexpected fame arrived I did abandon him somewhat. Several years had passed however. With the birth of Jeremiah our lives did seem to coalesce more. We had a son. We had a home. We, in fact, had different lives to live.

I closed the door to my study and stood staring at the blank drafting table top. A small section of the cork I had applied years ago was coming loose in the upper right hand corner. There was a half used tube of contact cement in my desk drawer that I had last used on one of Jeremiah's toys in a unsuccessful attempt to mend it. I squeezed out a little bit and then stuck the loose section back into place. I stepped back and stared at the table again, knowing full well I was stalling. I really didn't know where to begin.

Then it occurred to me to start with a map of the crime area. Digging around in the material I had brought back from Florida, I found a map of south Florida. It was one of those tourist types, where the immediate area of the map had been blown up into an almost cartoon style. It only encompassed the South Beach area but that was all I needed. I tacked it to the table. It was a start.

Then I tacked up a few pages from the police report and a few photocopied photos of the victim. I thought better of it and took the photos down, placing them back in the folder. For some reason, I didn't want to have them hanging there, even if they were sketchy photocopies, which were no where near as lurid as the originals. I took a magic marker and drew a line from the beach to the victim's apartment and then to the tattoo parlor. Boy friend, tattoos, and death, I thought, looking at the silly map, with the pink flamingos grinning at me from the Lincoln Road strip.

"Stars and flowers," I said in a whisper, taking out the photocopies and studying them for a moment. "Is there a connection there?"

The phone rang. Before I answered it I knew it was going to be Peter. I let the machine answer.

"Sarah, pick up if you're there, it's Peter," warbled the voice over the line. "Oh, Dr. Greene, this is the president of your fan club calling to let you know that we didn't receive that box of autographed 8X10's you promised us. Some of the fan club members were wondering if you could include some autographed shots with you in a bikini--preferably before you had your son."

I jerked the phone off the cradle and exclaimed, "That's hysterical, jackass!"

"Oh...you're there," Peter said, stammering. "I had to call and pass on some news about, you know, the case," he said in almost a whisper.

"I don't think anyone is bugging my phone, Peter," I said, laughing.

"Maybe, but who knows about my end," he said, giggling.

"What is it?" I wanted to know, sliding the photos back into the folder again.

"Listen, you didn't hear this from me, but the other two cases--the ones I know about--



happened in New Jersey and New York. At least that's where the bodies were found," Peter said in a more serious tone of voice. "There might be more. There probably are more."

"And nobody knows about any of this. I mean nobody in the media knows anything about this," I said skeptically. "How can that be? How can somebody be murdering girls up and down the eastern seaboard and no one knows about it? That's ridiculous."

"I know. I know," he exclaimed excitedly. "Sounds weird but who knows. Maybe there is a giant disconnect going on here."

"A what?" I said, laughing. "Do you have the towns where the killings happened? And are we talking that tattoo thing again?"

"Yep," he answered and I could hear him fumbling with some papers. "How about I fax you this stuff. Do you have a fax machine there at home or should I send it to the school?"

"Yeah, send it to the school, and put attention Dean--"

"Okay, stupid question," he muttered contritely. "I'll send it to yours. Does it work?"

"Use to," I said, glancing over at the machine that sat idle for days on end now that my publishing life was dormant. Before, when I was in full bloom on the celebrity circuit, my agent and publisher were forever faxing this thing or that thing for me to sign or take a look at. "Give it a shot. If it doesn't then just email me the stuff."

"Oh, great, then I'll have to scan this into my computer and fool around with the file...probably screw up the whole thing," he complained.

"And you call me computer illiterate," I teased, snickering.

I had to admit to myself that I was enjoying this, being back at it. The discussions on the

phone with Peter and the puzzling nature of the case was giving me a certain measure of excitement; even if in a month's time I hadn't accomplished very much. A flurry of emails were flying back and forth between me and Detective Santos. From the beginning, he had been cooperative, which had more to do with my minor celebrity than his estimation of my abilities as a sleuth. Of course later on I realized he was subtly patronizing me. The finer details of the case he was keeping to himself, believing me to be nothing but an amateur, one that just happened to be semi-famous.

When I first met him he had unabashedly asked for my autograph, producing my book with the horrible photo on the inside jacket. I had argued long and hard over using the damn thing but my publisher had won out, and so there I was standing in front of the Beekers sign, with my white lab coat on. Jason thought it was so hysterical looking that he had cut out the photo and stuck it on the fridge. It was held in place by a skull magnet from last Halloween.

Detective Santos had taken the time to brief me on different aspects of the case, keeping his own opinions to himself. I didn't hold this against him. Safeguarding his theories was probably prudent. Even though he was slightly patronizing, I found that he was mostly agreeable, if not charming. He had asked me to accompany him to a nearby "cafeteria", which is what the Cubans called a coffee shop. With Peter tagging along behind us, we had walked down the street in Miami Beach exchanging pleasantries. It was 82 degrees. There was a soft breeze blowing in off the ocean. Half dressed people on noisy little scooters were dashing by. It all seemed somehow unreal.

"I suppose there is something in the artwork," Detective Santos announced, grinning at me. "You know, hidden meanings."

"I would think so, otherwise go through all the trouble, right?" I replied, dodging a tall girl on roller blades.

At a window opening onto the street Detective Santos shouted out something in Spanish, which was met with a rapid staccato of Spanish and peals of laughter. He laughed and turned to me and asked, "Cafe Cubano?"

"Don't do it," Peter warned behind me.

Detective Santos glanced at Peter and said incredulously, "Never had one before."

"The most daring I've gotten was drinking International Coffees by General Foods," I stated, slightly embarrassed.

"You are from the mid-west," Detective Santos mumbled, exchanging greetings with a girl working behind the counter.

"UpState New York, to be exact," I corrected, feeling suddenly silly for having said it.

"Why don't you just inject speed into your veins," Peter hissed behind me.

While we sipped at our coffee out of tiny, almost thimble sized cups, we discussed some of the known facts about the case. The boy friend didn't seem to be on the Police Department's radar screen. They had checked him out thoroughly and found nothing more incriminating than a few speeding tickets. He had been in the Keys the weekend Pauline was found dead. The alibi had been substantiated. As to the tattoo artist, Detective Santos at first thought he might be a suspect but had since ruled him out as well. He was actually married and had been with his wife at a family get together up in Fort Pierce.

"We got nada," Detective Santos admitted finally, smiling almost sheepishly. "Girl gets tattooed...girl gets killed, we got nothing. I don't know what to make of it. Weird."

"Is there an art school down here?" I wanted to know.

"Art school?" Detective Santos mumbled, squinting at me and scratching his chin. "I guess there must be. Yeah, you know there's one in Ft. Lauderdale. Actually there's probably one in all of the colleges down here: UM, FIU, FAU, the community colleges. Why?"

"I was just wondering if this...this guy's work might be recognizable. I mean maybe he has done the same kind of work in class or maybe at a show...exhibit, you know," I explained.

"Might be worth a shot."

"Oh, Doc, you are good," Detective Santos said, whistling for emphasis. "Lot of leg work though. I'll have to hand it off to one of my guys," he said, laughing.

"Too bad the perp didn't sign his work," Peter commented more to himself than to us.

"Maybe he did," I said cryptically.

"Oh, now there she goes again," Detective Santos sang out. "She's got those pretty eyes flashing. Yeah, I can see something going on in there," he said, tapping at his head. "Brains and beauty...a dynamite combination."

I actually blushed and mumbled back, "Stands to reason," which didn't make much sense. It must have been the caffeine kicking in. Of course having a handsome man flirting with me might have had something to do with it. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Peter giving me that look he always did when I had reverted back to my college coed days, complete with the right hand twirling a strand of hair in my fingers.

My small office at home became HQ for my mini-task force. Up went the photos, along with some police reports. I printed out information about the art of tattooing from the internet, all twenty-five pages. Somewhere along the line the killer had to have learned his skill. Then

again, as Peter suggested, just maybe he had simply learned by trial and error. The necessary equipment could have been picked up anywhere. Generally speaking, the world of tattooing was, by its very nature, an under the radar type of sub-culture, even if its current popularity was blossoming. I quickly discovered that although almost every State had specific laws and regulations about the administering of tattoos within their jurisdictions the rules on the books were often times ignored. Injecting ink into one's skin was, after all, a rebellious act on whatever level. The epidermis as canvas, or, more accurately in our modern culture, billboard, was an expression of intent. Of course the intent was most times mired in hazy concepts of self-expression and inane vanity.

True there were more, shall we say, personal reasons for marring the epidermis. Some tattoos were statements, often times meant to establish identity, as in gangland affiliations. Then there were the more maudlin motives, like in how someone might feel about someone else, romantically speaking. A more disturbing category was the political blandishment, the one invariably bordering on unmitigated hate, e.g.. Nazi this or that. Needless to say, that was taking your convictions to the extreme. A person who feels comfortable with a fascist slogan emblazoned on their person is usually someone who needs psychological help, if not incarceration.

Regardless, there was one unifying element to all of the recipients of a tattoo. Each one shared this. It was, more or less, a one way street. Once that ink settled under the skin it was permanent. No going back. Your decision stood. For years. And even with the advances in laser removal techniques, you were left with a persistent reminder of what you had done years, even decades ago.

Jason, my tattoo-less husband, had wandered into my office a few weeks after I began my new project. He stood by my drafting desk and stared at the crime photos and then at the other tattoo samples I had downloaded off the net. He mumbled, which I knew after several years of marriage meant he was thinking. I had seriously wanted to lock my study door because I didn't want to create a flashpoint for an argument between us. I knew he would be dismissive, even condescending. He had been the detective. He had solved cases. He had been in the line of fire. I knew he was going to treat me like the dilettante that I was.

"Hon, what exactly are these?" he had asked, trying to keep a patronizing tone out of his voice.

Oh boy, I thought, here we go. "Pictures," I replied in a deliberate attempt to ward him off by being vague.

"New hobby?" he mocked, glancing my way before looking back at the photos.

"Kind of," I muttered, pretending to be busy at my desk.

"I may be wrong but they "kind of" look like crime scene shots," he stated, leaning over to get a closer look. "Nice tattoos."

"Just something I'm working on...with Peter," I tacked on, shuffling some papers on my desk.

"Uh huh," he mumbled. He glanced at me one more time then said, "Have fun."

That was it. No chest beating. No recriminations. He didn't get his detective hackles up and tell me that I was, you know, a fool and should stay out of police business. I fully expected him to tell me to close up shop or he was divorcing me, on the spot. He just used his professional aplomb, which meant steely indifference, and walked out of my study. Then I sat

there somehow wishing he had protested. Tell me off. Say I was just plain stupid for getting involved. Let's have a discussion about it--okay argument. We could shout at each other for a few minutes then see what develops.

Anyway, with his tacit approval, I pressed on. My next move was to travel to New Jersey. I needed to see where the other two cases had taken place. Why? I didn't know. Since I was, more or less, conducting this investigation by feel, I needed to follow my instincts. Peter, of course, called it something else: ESP, which was shorthand for Early Sensory Psychology. It was nonsense but he had used it when describing my contribution to the case. The Miami Beach Police Department must have thought it sounded legitimate because here I was, nose to the ground, seeking out clues.

My lecturing schedule had been designed specifically for more weekend time. My celebrity again kicked in as I was given early lectures on Friday and afternoon ones on Monday. This gave me, essentially, a four day week. Looking at my road maps, I worked out a plan to travel to NJ right after my class on Friday and make it back for Monday's lecture. It would give me a good two days to poke around down there.

My mother, the good grandmother, agreed to chaperone Jason with our son. Not that I didn't think my husband wasn't competent as a father. Far from it. By his own admission, he had been surprised by his capacity as a parent. Then again, let's not mention the diaper thing. I needed my mother to be more of a buffer than guardian. She would serve as a surrogate for me while I was gone on my little trip to the shore.

"Don't get lost," was about all my loving husband told me as I was driving away. I smiled back at him and said, "Very funny." At least I had good weather, which was, at this time of year,

all relative. There was a good eight to ten inches of snow on the ground but it hadn't snowed in a couple of days. My father had assured me the roads were clear, for now. There was no forecast for inclement weather over the weekend.

#### 4. A GARDEN STATE VISIT

Off to New Jersey. I had been to the Jersey shore all of one time before and that was when I was in college. It had been one of those lost weekends you tended to have in your youth, the ones that invariably come back to haunt you when a cruel friend produces old snapshots from a dusty shoe box tucked away in the closet. Right there, grinning idiotically, would be subject number one, you, with the obligatory red eye from the flash to go along with a drunken expression. If you were lucky you wouldn't be in a state of disrobe.

My college roommate had invited me to stay with her at her family's beach cottage. "Right on the beach," she had stated by way of enticing me. "Lots of cute guys!" she had said further. We were in our second year of school, boyfriendless, and burned out after an academic year that included too many late night cram sessions for scary exams. Unlike our college brethren, we hadn't been able to go to any Springbreak bacchanalia, leaving us with a very long stretch of book work.

Peter, ever the one to define the specifics of my life, told us we were "ripe for the picking." He as one of the fortunate ones had traveled to Florida for a week in early March, returning sporting a pink face and gaudy tourist paraphernalia, along with a new study pal from some



junior college in the suburbs he had met at a staged dating contest on the strip. His satisfaction lasted all of one week after returning to college, whereupon his new love interest filled up his answering machine with plaintive messages that grew more and more psychotic, culminating in his car being spray painted with uncharitable slogans because of his perceived inattentiveness. "Unlucky in love, what can I say?" was Peter's standard refrain.

That was summer. I was heading to the shore in the dead of winter. As with most seasonal locales, I realized it would be, for the most part, nearly deserted. Icy winds off the ocean greeted me when I pulled up to the beach in the tiny town of Sea Girt. Victim numero uno had been found on the beach, sitting in a beach chair, naked, or, as the police officer I spoke with put it: "Dead and naked."

This was different. The MO was skewered somewhat. Would the Artist (as we were calling him now) actually have risked depositing the body on a very public beach. It seemed careless. The risk factor didn't seem to ring true.

My skepticism was put to rest as soon as I spoke with the detective on the case, a veteran cop of twenty-two years on the force. His name was Vincent Capaldi. He looked me up and down when we first met and told me in a gritty Jersey accent, "Not bad looking." I didn't know how to respond to that so I told him that his compliment was nice but not appreciated. He had snorted at that and told me, "You women nowadays." I really hadn't wanted to get off to a bad start.

I had called before coming down to the shore and been handed off to the detective, who was, mostly, cooperative. He seemed to be highly amused that I wanted to look into the murder that had happened in his Township. I was relieved at first when he hadn't heard of me and my

semi-lurid past. I simply told him I was a clinical psychologist doing research. In a sing-song tone of voice he had said, "I guess you got nothin' better to do, huh."

By the time I showed up at the precinct Detective Capaldi had been briefed on my rep and was now more interested in my fading celebrity than assisting me. I was used to this by now. Of recent, well, I had experience with manipulation. If it took me tossing out a few details about Flowers then I would, specially if I thought it would advance my particular project. My shame had long since been diminished. Going on dozens of talk shows will do that. I suspect viewing all those slightly venal TV shows has had a measurable impact on society, but then that is for another book.

Capaldi was, essentially, a wiseass. I hadn't spoken with him for more than five minutes before he insulted me, along with womankind, and then wanted to know if I was single. I tried not to laugh, but did. A few of his colleagues rolled their eyes behind him, shaking their heads. "What? Did I say somethin' funny?" he wanted to know, bewildered. I was beginning to see why the primary case had been a non-starter from the beginning. Having a buffoon conduct the investigation had worked in the Artist's favor. Who knew how much evidence had been lost to the wind?

The detective had possessed one item of import. The victim, a Julie Skorski, nineteen, had been "plastered" with tattoos, in Capaldi's account. She had been laid out on a beach chair, posed, waiting for the sunrise. She had been found by a early morning jogger, a man. There was another difference from the Miami Beach case. The plastic bag had been removed, post-mortem. It was obvious the Artist wanted her death to be a warped form of performance art, if not anything else. I made a note to discuss this variation with Peter. Was it significant? Did the

Artist have to abbreviate his method during the Miami Beach murder? Was he interrupted during his killing session?

I needed to see the crime photos but I knew Detective Capaldi was a dead end. He was just indulging me. Besides, I had hurt his feelings by laughing. I cursed myself for not being more diplomatic with him. I could have humored him more, maybe accepted his clumsy flirting. So now I was being shut out.

As I was leaving the police station a woman got my attention and motioned for me to follow her outside. I had seen her in the squad room. She wasn't wearing a gun so I assumed she was working there in an admin type of job. She was about my age, with dyed blond hair pulled back into a tiny pony tail. I noticed that she had immaculately done nails, painted a bright red that seemed to clash with her uniform.

"You're that writer, right?" she hissed at me. I nodded yes. "Listen," she whispered, looking around the parking lot, "I can help you out if you need it."

I looked at her for a moment, then thought she was going to want some money for her troubles. I wasn't in a position to fork over cash. It wasn't because I was above that particularly, but rather I had maybe eighteen dollars in my purse and that included change. A uniform exited the building and said hello to her, she waved and smiled.

"I can't pay you," I blurted out, immediately lowering my voice.

"Like I want money for this," she shot back, frowning at me. "I thought I'd help you out because Capaldi's such an asshole."

"Oh, sorry, I didn't mean to insult you," I apologized. "It's just that you were acting so secretive and all."

"It's okay," she said. "I don't want to lose my job over this, you know."

"I understand," I stated, trying to sound sympathetic.

"It's just...you know, like I can't believe how that poor girl died," she said, glancing around the parking lot.

"Did you know her?"

"No, but my friend knew her," she explained. "Maybe you can help catch the scumbag who did it," she exclaimed, staring at me.

"I'm going to try," I told her.

"Hey, by the way, ever go on the Late Show?" she suddenly asked me, grinning.

All of America was waiting to be interviewed, so it seemed. Somehow the new, modern inalienable rights included being recognized for one thing or another. Celebrity worship had long since passed over into the shadows. Notoriety of whatever stripe brought you fame and grudging adulation from the public. Civic shame as a sociological barometer was non-existent. Regrettably, I had done my part to reduce it.

Through my friend in the police department I was able to get a look at the crime scene photos. Even though I had taken all of one Arts Appreciation course in college, I was relatively certain the tattoo art was the same. With some heavy duty cajoling I was able to get a photo-copy of some of the tattoos. Further, I saw that the victim had indeed been suffocated. There was little doubt that I was seeing the handiwork of the Artist.

I retreated to the hotel I was staying at. It was a mom and pop run place several blocks from the beach. There were only two other people staying there, a couple from Pittsburgh who had come to the shore for a wedding. We had run into each other in the small lobby and swapped

abbreviated life stories over coffee, while we marveled at how the city seemed deserted, like a ghost town. "You should see it in the summer!" the owner piped in enthusiastically. "Wall to wall people out there," he added, pointing in the direction of the beach.

The area, all and all, was a quaint place, with the requisite charm of a beach side community. I liked the homes in Sea Girt immediately. They were built early in the previous century and had aged gracefully. Pride in the neighborhood, and a vigilant home owners association, kept the properties spruced up, maintaining the unique character. What connection would this small town have to the Artist? I wondered. Did he live here? Was he brought up here? Parents? Relatives? There seemed to be too many questions.

He would have necessarily come from an upscale family. There would have been a privileged background, with probably private schools and a top tiered college. If so, then where did Miami Beach fit in? Had his latest murder been a vacation connected endeavor?

I sat in my small hotel room, eating a spicy eggplant sandwich I had gotten from a deli in the next town, and went over the police documents. Immediately I could see that the tattoos were crude when compared to the last samples. He was learning his craft, perfecting a technique. These particular tattoos were still abstract, but they seemed to rely on lines and angles more than the subsequent ones. They were also monochromatic, with very little color. Perhaps the Artist had only the one shade of ink. It seemed apparent that he was trying to draw divergent lines in an attempt to create perspective and vanishing points.

Most of the detail had been concentrated around her stomach and descended from there to her vagina, which was shaved of all pubic hair. Would he have gone through the trouble to remove her pubic hair? It didn't seem likely. Later on I would discover that the first victim was

an exotic dancer and shaved her genitals as an occupational decision. The Artist had etched a heavy black line from the navel to the vagina, intersecting it with hash marks of perhaps two to three inches, running perpendicular.

On the victim's back he had sketched out several large triangles interlinking each other. There was a small rectangle on her right buttock and inside that he had placed a dot. Her legs, with the exception of a hexagon above her right knee, were free of tattoos. She had a pre-existing tattoo of a sunflower on her left breast, which he had put an X through. Did the presence of a previously done tattoo upset him? I wondered. Would he had liked to have a blank canvas to work with?

Now, at this time in contemporary culture, it would have been difficult for him to find a young girl without a tattoo. It had long since become a reflex action with the Y and Millennial generations. As a form of self-expression it had become axiomatic, moving beyond a simple inculcated fad. Adolescent sex, body piercing, and tattoos were the holy trinity of youth, well established and represented by official and unofficial spokespeople of the next culture. I would be hard pressed to find one solitary student in any of my classes that hadn't availed themselves of the cultural trifecta.

My very first semester of teaching had brought me face to face with an irate parent, who wanted to know why his daughter had returned from her initial exposure to college life with a tattoo emblazoned on her lower back. I, somehow, had been associated with her new found awareness. That the tattoo was a Star of David and they were Jewish didn't lessen the anger apparently. The parent yanked his daughter out of school and threatened to sue me, and the college. "You are all she damn well talks about," the parent had screeched. "Professor Greene

this and Professor Greene that, she won't shut about you." I apologized as best I could, telling him that it wasn't uncommon for young students to become fixated on one of their professors when they first go off to college; but I certainly wasn't responsible for her getting a religious symbol applied to her lumbar region.

As to this case at hand, I knew I was swimming up stream. The clues were going on two years old. Through my friendly mole at the police department, I had gleaned a few leads. The victim, Julie Skorski, had worked at a strip joint not far from the shore. While it was probably true that turn-over at places like that was high, I still hoped to find out something at her former place of employment. I also had the address of the jogger who had found the body. Hopefully he still lived there and might shed some light on the case.

Saturday night I drove out to the strip joint, reasoning that it being Saturday it would be busy and there would be someone there who might have at least heard of Julie. It was a long shot. Besides, so I thought, when had I ever had an opportunity to see the inside of a strip joint? It was a slice of society I had never encountered before. It would be educational. I was a psychologist and should therefore know about every facet of the functioning economy.

I told myself such, not believing any of it. With just the least bit of trepidation, I parked my car and slowly walked to the front door of the...establishment. Truth be told, okay, I had seen all of the Sopranos. I had preconceived notions of what I would find once I mustered the courage to actually open the door. Although the sign out front, the one flashing, with one of the letters burned out, didn't say Bada-Bing, I wasn't disappointed when I finally did open the door.

Now I don't pretend to know my way around contemporary architecture but somewhere along the line all of the architects in the Tri-State area had gotten together and compared

blueprints because it felt like I was walking onto the set of aforementioned Cable TV show. Of course, to be fair, how far afield can you go when designing an interior with the express purpose of optimally displaying female flesh? Not far, apparently. I, at any moment, expected to see Tony, Paulie, and company come rolling out of the back room, cigars in hand.

First impressions have a way of tainting most everything. My first one was: Smoke. The entire bar was enveloped in a haze. Next came the loud, thumping music, with a decibel level approximating your local airport runway. It was also crowded, adding another dimension of noise, as in the competing din of squealing conversation. It was all I could do to do an aboutface and flee out the door, not stopping until I was in my car and on the New York Thruway. Did I really need to be doing this? I asked myself.

Without realizing it, I had retreated to just inside the doorway, inadvertently nestling myself in a dark nook by the hallway that led to the bathrooms. It was safe to say, as customer patronage went, I was an oddity. Subtract the hired help and the clientele was decidedly male. A tall blond was cavorting around one of the three poles, using one leg and one arm snakelike to slide to the floor of the raised stage. Off to my right a table full of businessmen were whooping along to the music, gesticulating wildly. One gentleman was the lucky recipient of a visit from one of the dancers in what was accurately called a lap dance. I noticed through the heavy pall of smoke that he had spilled his drink down the front of his custom made suit. He didn't seem to be concerned, while the dancer expertly straddled him and grinded her way to a large tip.

I then remembered having a conversation with Peter some time ago about the practice of watching women disrobe and paying for the privilege. His gender bias aside, he had been unable to satisfactorily explain the attraction. I had asked him: Where are the dividends? I meant for



the customer and not the dancer. Her remuneration was obviously her reward. Being that the customer derived very little by way of, shall we say, physiological attainment, what was the immediate point? He had told me that I wouldn't understand because I was a woman didn't ring true and he knew it, so we laughed and let it pass.

Now I was going to have to peel myself off the wall and proceed with some interviews, if I didn't choke to death from all the smoke first. There have been times in my life when I had an overwhelming sense of self-consciousness, but none every approached this. I quickly decided that my best bet might be to see if the manager was around. Perhaps he would be able to fill me on some details of Julie Skorski's life.

For my women readers, I guess we have all experienced this at one time or another. Our modern world is chock full of more heinous acts of course, but I must say it had been quite a while since I actually had my ass grabbed. College party to be precise. A well known campus jock had "palmed" my posterior, to much laughter I might add. I didn't feel honored by the attention then and I certainly didn't now. Consider the venue. I just kept moving, pushing my way towards the bar.

The bartender, a twenty-something woman wearing a decollete outfit that displayed just where she had utilized her purchasing power, gave me a puzzled look, as if I might have been beamed in from another dimension. I tried to scream over the music. She leaned over the bar and said, "What's that, honey?" I asked about the manager and she stepped back and looked me up and down for a moment. She leaned over the bar again and shouted out, "Where'd you work before?" I told her I wasn't there for a job but just wanted to ask the manager a few questions. She seemed to ponder this development for a moment, then jerked her thumb in the direction of a

door off to the right. As I was turning to go she called out, "Don't tell him I told you he was here."

There was a sign on the door that read: Employees Only. Should I knock? I wondered. Then the door opened and one of the dancers came out. She ignored me completely and headed for the stage. I noticed she was wearing a cheerleader costume, complete with pom-poms. Just another fantasy delivery, so I imagined.

Before the door closed I stepped inside. The music level died down a little. I was standing in a corridor. It stretched the length of the building, with several doors opening off of it. I could hear women talking, laughing. The doors were all open except one at the far end. Might as well start there, I decided.

As I walked down the hallway I passed by what was, apparently, the dressing room for the dancers. There were two or three women sitting before mirrors, applying makeup. It was a voyeur's goldmine, because they were all half dressed. They didn't take notice of me when I walked by. The next door opened on the kitchen, where two men were arguing in Spanish. One of the men was brandishing a large cooking spoon at the other. I slipped past the door unnoticed.

The closed door had a hand written sign on it that read: Off Limits. It had been written in red magic marker and gone over so many times that the letters were smudged. I paused at the door and noticed my heart was pounding. Was I treading on thin ice here? There was more than a good chance this was an organized crime outlet. Mostly cash business. Easy to manipulate the books. It was Costa Nostra 101.

I took a deep breath and timidly knocked. There was no response. I could hear a man's voice inside. He was talking on the phone. Stray snatches of his conversation drifted out into the

hall. There was an angry edge to his voice as he told whoever was on the other end of the line that he didn't appreciate having to pay X amount of dollars for X amount of olives. Olives? I thought, snickering. Did he really push a lot of martinis in this place? I wondered.

Another deep breath, I knocked again. This time I put more authority into it. Then stepped back fearing the worst.

"Wadda you want?" the manager yelled out, telling whoever was on the phone that he would get back to him later in the week.

I tried to open the door but realized it was locked. This wasn't a good omen, I told myself. I could only imagine there was going to be shouting, finger pointing, and guns. Somehow I just knew my line of questioning wasn't going to be met with any civility.

"I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions," I called through the door.

"What the fuck," he spat out, and I could hear him slamming drawers in a desk.

"My name's-

Suddenly the door swung open and I was face to face with a man, fortyish, who had slick black hair combed straight back. He was wearing a bay blue velour track suit, which went along way to prove stereotypes did exist. Perplexed, he looked up and down the hallway then back at me.

"How'd you get in here?" he asked, perturbed.

"Just walked right in the door," I said, trying to make light of it. "I just wanted to ask you some questions about Julie Skorski," I quickly added, hoping to at least get one question in before he tossed me out of his club.

"Who?" he shot back, looking over my head at the kitchen, where the two Spanish men were

still arguing. "You two shut the fuck up in there!" he shouted out. "Don't make me fire your asses."

"She was a dancer at your club," I explained, smiling.

"Skorski," he repeated, walking back into his office and sitting down at his desk. "Who knows. These dancers all use different names, you know. What'd she do? You ain't no cop, right? You look like you're from some social agency or something. I don't hire no underage chicks. Gotta be of age or you don't get on that stage."

"No, it's nothing like that," I assured him. "She was killed over a year ago."

"What?" he exclaimed. "Look, we don't have no...no shit going on here. I can tell you that right now. Oh sure, some times there's trouble in the bar but nothing like that. Killed! Jeez, what are we talking about here?"

It took me a few minutes to get the questioning on track then he told me he had only been manager at the bar for six months. Great, I thought, I've been wasting my time. Then he told me to speak to a dancer named, Autumn, and not to take up too much of her time because she had to go on in fifteen minutes. I then hurried down the hall to the dressing room, while behind me I could hear the manager locking the door again.

I stopped again at the dressing room and peered in the open door. There were three women in various stages of undress. "I gotta check my sitta, who knows what the little bitch is up to," one of the girls stated, spritzing her hair with a bottle of hairspray, then fumbling in her bag for her cell phone. I heard her sweetly ask who was ever on the phone about her son and whether or not he had gotten to sleep without any complications. The other two women were applying makeup and stuffing themselves into Victoria Secret knockoffs. "Let me tell you, girl," one of

them addressed the other, exchanging glances in the mirror, "that place you sent me to for a wax job ain't worth a shit." "What happened?" the other one wanted to know. "What happened?" her friend asked, settling a scarlet red cowboy hat on her head. "I tell you what happened, the little Korean bitch 'bout tore out all of my pubes, that's what happened! Thought you said they knew what they were doing over there."

"Excuse me," I found myself saying in a squeaky voice. The three of them looked up, startled. "I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions about someone?"

They traded looks, then the woman on the phone said, "Gotta go."

"I was just wondering if any of you had known Julie Skorski?" I asked, forcing a smile.

"And who are you?" the woman with the bad wax job asked suspiciously.

"You a cop or something?" the woman on the phone wanted to know, eyeing me coldly.

"No...no way," I said, laughing uneasily. "I'm a psychologist and I was-"

"I know who you are," the woman in the cowboy hat exclaimed. "Yeah...I seen you on...on...what the fuck was it?" she muttered. "One of those talk shows--on TV, right?"

I blushed a little and said, "Yeah, I've been on a few shows before."

"Damn," the woman on the phone exclaimed. "So what in the hell are you doing in this pisshole for?"

"I'm working on this case," I explained, stepping cautiously into the dressing room. "I just needed to know if anyone of you happen to have worked with Julie, or know anybody who did."

"I did," the woman in the cowboy hat confirmed, nodding yes. "She was a real nice person, for sure."

"Is that the girl that got kilt," the woman on the phone wanted to know, shaking her head.

"That was some horrible shit."

"Think I could talk to you a little bit about her?" I asked, edging my way closer. "You're Autumn, right?"

"What you want to know?" she asked, adjusting the cowboy hat in the mirror. "She didn't have no boyfriend or nuthin' if that's what you want to know. She was into the ladies, if you know what I mean."

"Ladies," I mumbled, glancing at the others.

"You know, a lesbo," she explained, smiling at me. "Don't get me wrong or nuthin'... she was okay about it. No problems here, if you know what I mean. I do girl-girl stuff if they pay me enough. No problem here."

The other two laughed and the one on the phone called out, "You'll do anything for money. Gotta go!" She skipped out the door and I could hear her four inch heels clacking on the cement floor down the hall.

"So you're a shrink, huh," the other dancer stated. "According to my old man I need to go to a shrink. Like I don't know I got problems or nothing--please. Look where I work at. Got guys staring at me all day. Grabbing. Playing with themselves. Like that's not harmful for your head."

"Occupational hazards," I suggested, smiling at her.

"That's right," she sang out. "I got to put up with occupational hazards every damn day."

She waved good-bye and disappeared down the hall, leaving a trail of cheap perfume in her wake. The girl in the cowboy hat was freshing up her lipstick. I sat down in the chair next to her at the mirror and quickly decided which way to direct the interview.

"Julie...I don't know, everytime I think about her I just want to cry," Autumn declared, glancing at me in the mirror. "She was a decent human being. Never hurt nobody. Always wanting to help out anybody who needed it. You know, she once let me crash at her place when my boy friend was in one of his moods. I ended up staying almost three weeks. Julie was like that."

"So," I began, "no boyfriends."

"Not when I knew her," she answered. "I suppose there might have been some, in her past, but not when I was her friend. She wasn't a dyke-dyke, you know. She was a lipstick lesbian type, I guess. Very feminine. Sweet. And good-looking too."

"I know, I saw some photos of her," I offered, smiling. "Did she ever mention anything about her past that might have made her, you know, switch over?"

"Switch over? Oh, you mean become a lesbo. No, not that I remember. I mean we did have some like heart to heart talks on occasion but I don't remember her saying anything about a big conversion. It's chemical or something anyway, right? They do what they do because of the way their born. That's what I thought anyway."

"I guess what I really need to know is whether or not Julie had any what you might call suitors. Guys who wanted her but couldn't accept the fact that she was the way she was. Might have led to a dicey situation," I said, trying to keep the conversation free flowing.

"Let's see," she mused, opening and closing her lipstick case. "You know, well, there are so many guys who come through here. Most of them are assholes--bigtime. I mean, look, we take our clothes off so horny guys can get their jollies. Sick place. Sick people. What can I say?"

"So in those three weeks that you stayed with her there was never anyone coming around

hassling her or anything?" I needed to know.

"Don't remember anything like that," she replied, shaking her head no. "The only hassles she got was from her dickhead dad. He was always calling her up and raising hell with her. He's a religious nut. Couldn't accept the fact that his precious daughter was a muff-diver and a stripper too. I could hear them arguing on the phone all the time. Julie was a Jersey girl. I don't know if you knew that or not. Hell, she was brought up only a few miles from here. She showed me her damn High School year book. Must have been hard on the parents to have their daughter living right here and doing what she was doing. I know my dad would freak out. They live in Michigan and what they don't know--let's keep it that way," she stated, laughing. "They think I work as a sales rep."

She winked at me and laughed, then I asked, "Can I ask you about Julie's tattoos?"

"What tattoos?" she asked, confused. "Didn't have any that I knew of and believe me, honey, I seen every inch of her."

"She didn't have a sunflower tattoo, on her breast?" I asked, assured that she had had a tattoo before the murder.

"Not that I remember," she said, turning to look at me. "On her boob? No way."

"Did Julie happen to work here right up until she was killed?" I asked in a serious tone. "Or maybe you didn't happen to see her the few weeks before she died."

She thought for a moment, then said, "Well, let's see, she did take off a week before she was killed. Yeah. That's right, I remember because she told me she was going to go visit a friend...a female friend. I think she knew her from High School or something. No, from college. Oh, right, she knew her from college. Julie went to Montclair State for a couple of semesters. She



wasn't into it, I guess because she quit. Anyway, she told me she was going to hang out with an old girl friend. Look, I gotta go on now." She stood up and I noticed she was wearing bright red cowboy boots with heels. She teetered for a moment, laughed then told me, "Damn things are hard as hell to dance in."

"Guess so," I said, laughing. "Thanks for your help."

"Hope it helps," she said, and shuffled down the hall.

I sat there for a moment. Julie had spent hours in this room, preparing, waiting to go on stage. She had worked at the club for over a year and in that time there must have been thousands of men she came into contact with. The amount of possible suspects was staggering. Each and every leering customer was a potential murderer. There didn't seem to be any realistic way to weed through the clubs patrons and pick out a likely culprit.

On the mirror, I noticed the dancer that had been on the phone had wedged a photo of her young son in the corner. It seemed somehow sad. It was, among every thing else, an occupation. Julie, hometown girl, had proven to be a major disappointment for her parents, as well as, undoubtedly, an embarrassment. Then she was murdered and it all occurred within the confines of one township.

There didn't seem to be any other leads to follow so I went back out to my car, passing back through the smoky bar. All three of the women were now dancing on stage, locked into their own personalized routine. One customer was slipping dollar bills into a red garter belt and Autumn was smacking him playfully with her red cowboy hat. The bartender was arguing with a customer, telling him he had ordered a "JD" and not Jim Beam. Quickly, I slipped outside, glad to be away from the smoke, noise, and close brush with a little slice of another sub-culture.

For no other reason than I had been shaken a little, I phoned Peter. He picked up after I told him where I was. Laughing, he said, "Are you undercover? Tell me you're not on stage right now, sans clothes."

"Yeah, Peter, I'm bumping and grinding as we speak," I exclaimed. "You should see how many dollar bills I have stuck in my garter belt."

"Dollar bills...what no fives or tens," he stated, giggling. "Must not have much to show."

"Shut up," I told him. "Listen, I found out a little info on the first victim. That's where I am right now. She was a stripper--a lesbian stripper," I added for accuracy.

"You're kidding," he mumbled, whistling for emphasis. "How in the hell does that figure in all this?"

"I don't know, really," I explained. "Don't think it really does, unless it points out that the victim wasn't romantically involved with her killer."

"Maybe she swung both ways," he suggested.

"Not according to her colleague, who, so she says, spent enough time with her to know," I said, noticing that it was getting cold in the car. "I think I'm going to check at a local college. She apparently went there for a minute or two. Maybe I can find out something there. She had a girl friend--as in girl friend."

"Lesbians...strippers...what next?" he wanted to know, snickering. "I shouldn't laugh," he scolded himself.

"No, you shouldn't. You know, a girl did die," I said, trying to sound solemn.

"Sorry, but this seems to be getting weirder and weirder. Want me to fly up and interview some of the strippers. I could do that," he offered, squelching a laugh.

"Could you," I mocked. "That would be great. I could use some help for hands-on research," I joked.

"Very funny, Dr. Greene," he replied. "Seriously though, let me know if you need any help."

Although it had been some time since my college days, I still remembered Sunday being a quiet, non-event type of day. Most people were nursing hangovers and trying not to think about that class on Monday morning. Since I wanted to use my time in NJ wisely, I had decided to swing by the college late morning after dropping by the address of the jogger. Apparently he lived in Manasquan, which was the next town over. If all went according to plan, I would be on the road homeward by four or five o'clock. That would put my arrival back home on schedule, weather permitting. Fortunately, there was no snow in the forecast.

Manasquan had a boardwalk that extended along the short beach, passing by small, charming beach cottages and then a mercantile stretch that included the requisite pizza joint and arcade. There was even a waterslide, now closed up and covered with a dusting of snow left over from last week. Seeing Manasquan in winter made it difficult to imagine it as a beach destination. The Atlantic was a slate gray color and very uninviting, with an angry shorebreak churned up by a cold onshore wind.

The jogger, a Mr. Glen Paulson, lived just a block off the beach in a tiny one bedroom house with a weather beaten paint job. One shutter for the front window was hanging askew, giving the facade a sad expression from the street. It all seemed very depressing and I wondered if the occupant was rejuvenated each summer when the better weather rolled around, along with the crowds.

I had tried to call before hand but the number my friend at the police department gave me was disconnected. Not a good start, I thought. As an investigative psychologist, as Peter and I were calling ourselves of late, you had to accept the fact that etiquette and simple protocol had to be abandoned at certain times. This was one of those times.

I slowly walked up the small, narrow sidewalk that ended at some uneven cement steps. The front porch of the house was made of wood and was festooned with splinters. I immediately thought of those commercials on TV about deck treatments and how this particular wood was in need of a few gallons. Between the salt air and the winter elements, they had combined to eat away at every inch of the home.

Before I could even knock there was some menacing barks coming from inside the house, deep, and throaty. I could hear paw scratching on the other side of the front door. Not good, I said to myself, backing up a step or two. I was hoping the homeowner would realize someone was at his door and come to investigate. I waited for a minute or two. The demonic barking continued. Finally I heard someone inside yell at the dog to shut up, to no avail. The dog was now jumping up against the door, letting me know just how big of a dog it was.

"You stupid mutt, what's the matter?" I heard a man call out from the back of the house. I could hear the dog being dragged away from the door. A face appeared in the small window in the door, then he asked, "You want something?"

This seemed like an odd thing to ask but then I suddenly realized that he probably thought I was some bill collector or worse. That the owner of this house was behind on payments of some sort or another seemed pretty probable. I smiled at him and said, "I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions about the girl you found on the beach a couple of years ago."

He gave me a puzzled look, as he struggled to hold the dog by its collar, then said, "Been a while ago. You a reporter?"

"No, a psychologist," I explained, trying not to grin. "My name's Dr. Sarah Greene."

"That's a new one," he called out. "Hold on, let me put Rosco back in the bedroom. Hold on."

He disappeared from the window and I could hear him literally dragging the dog towards the back of the house. A moment later the door opened and he poked his head out and suspiciously peered up and down the street. Then he waved me inside, stepping back to open the door. I thanked him and eased my way up the steps and across the rickety porch.

Once inside I immediately noticed an odd smell; that and the fact that it wasn't much warmer inside than outside. He reappeared from the bedroom, where the dog was still barking behind the closed door. He was now all smiles.

"Sorry 'bout the dog. He's a nuisance but a good watch dog," he apologized, laughing uneasily. "He will quiet down in a minute or two. Doesn't like strangers. Not at all. What is it...he's not socialized."

"I could tell," I joked. "What kind of dog is it?" I asked, trying to be polite.

"Half retriever and half werewolf," he joked. "It's a real adventure around full moon times."

He was trying to be social, I guessed. I stole glances around the house. There was no livingroom furniture to speak of, just a faded easy chair with rips in the seat, from the dog undoubtedly. A 13 inch TV was sitting on an overturned plastic milk crate in the far corner. Then I saw all the canvases and knew what the odd smell had been. It was paint. To my horror, I now realized the jogger was an artist.

"Can I get you something to drink? Tea? I have some really good tea from...uh...I think it's from somewhere in the Far East. Good stuff," he offered in a chirpy voice. "Or I have coffee."

I was too startled to answer at first. All I could think of was my dumb luck. I had inadvertently stumbled on the killer. This couldn't be happening.

"I'd love some tea," I lied, because there was no way I was going to be drinking anything he prepared. I needed to stall him any way I could.

"Coming right up," he announced, disappearing into the kitchen, where I could hear him humming some song I didn't recognize.

The Jogger was in his late twenties, so I guessed, and athletically built. He was just under six feet tall and had grey colored eyes, that matched his, apparently, Nordic ancestry. At the moment he was unshaven and had closed cropped hair with no visible part. Scanning the room again, I noticed a bench press that had, along with several blank canvases, a set of weights resting on it. Just beyond the bench press was an easel, where a half done painting was propped up. It was a seascape of sorts, done in a faux Impressionist style. I recognized it was Manasquan beach.

"So," I called out, trying not to stammer, "you're an artist."

"I'm trying," he replied, and I heard the sound of cups and spoons clattering.

This is too much of a coincidence, I told myself, quickly followed by the thought that I should take the opportunity to make a run for it. I didn't need to take the risk. Even if he was harmless, why take the chance?

He appeared suddenly carrying two cups of tea. I took the cup from him and looked to see if I could see anything floating on the surface. Now I was going to have to pretend to drink it.

"Kind of hot," I stated, blowing on my cup.

"Be careful," he warned. "A psychologist, huh? What's that about, anyway?"

"What do you mean?" I countered, trying not to sound too nervous.

"Do the cops use psychologists on their cases nowadays? I've never heard of that sort of thing before," he said, sipping at his tea.

The conversation seemed to be going at cross-purposes, or was it just me? I was clearly rattled. It just didn't seem possible that he could be the murderer. Yes, he was an artist. Yes, he did live near the first two victim sites. Yes, he would have been the approximate age group to entice young women to their deaths. Yes, he was physically capable.

"Not always," I said evasively. "On this particular case, though, there are extenuating circumstances," I informed him, using my best professorial tone.

"Really. Like what?" he asked pointedly.

"I'm not at liberty to divulge information like that," I said, noticing that now I was sounding like a lawyer. "I just wanted to ask you a few questions about the morning you found the victim."

"I don't think I'll ever forget it," he said, shaking his head. "Kind of...of startling. I mean you go out for a run and you find a dead girl on the beach. Don't find that everyday, right?"

I ignored his comment and asked, "Do you run by that section of the beach everyday?"

He looked at me for a moment, then said, "No."

I noticed the tenor of the conversation had suddenly changed. We were standing a few feet away from each other because there was literally not enough furniture to sit on. I had tried not to infuse my question with too much import. We were just having a conversation.

"You look like you are pretty fit. Do you jog everyday?" I asked in what I hoped was a

neutral tone.

"You know, Dr. Greene, you sound like you are sort of interrogating me. You're not, right? I mean, I'm not going to be needing a lawyer am I?" he wanted to know, laughing. "The cops have already reamed me about this. I didn't know the girl. I didn't kill the girl. I just found her on the beach. End of story."

"I'm just trying to get a...a feel for that morning, that's all," I explained. "I didn't mean to offend you."

He thought about that for a moment, while I calculated in my mind how many steps it was going to take for me to get to the door. I was prepared to use the scolding hot tea as a weapon. Slowly, I stepped back a few feet.

"I don't believe it," he exclaimed. "I'm scaring you. You think I might have killed that poor girl."

If not anything else, he was perceptive. I tried to smile at him and make light of his assessment. He was clearly insulted.

"Let me try to be honest with you," I offered, forcing a laugh. "You see, I'm working on a theory that is, admittedly, weak, but anyway it's all I have right now. And that is the killer was an artist, hence the tattoos. Sounds stupid, I know, but the victim didn't have the tattoos before the murder and you--"

"Brilliant," he stated. "I'm an artist. That makes me a suspect. Can't quibble about that."

"No, no you can't," I agreed, edging closer to the door.

"Then right about now you must be scared shitless, right? I mean you walked right into the killer's lair. Bad move, Dr. Greene," he sang out, clucking his tongue. "Oh, yeah, why don't you



drink your tea, doctor. You wouldn't want to offend my hospitality, would you?"

I had just about reached the door. If I got the door open I could start screaming. There were houses on either side. Someone was bound to hear me.

"I'm sorry that I made you mad about this whole thing," I said, trying to pluck sentences out of my whirling mind. "It's pretty obvious you had nothing to do with...with the murder."

"Are you sure?" he wanted to know, as he grinned at me. "Want me to show you my tattoo needle? Better yet, want me to give you a tattoo? How about a nice big flower."

My hand reached for the doorknob. He was laughing. Then the dog was barking again. I got the door open and rushed outside. A blast of cold air stung my face. I ran down the narrow sidewalk, almost tripping. I then realized I was still holding the tea cup. All the tea had spilled out as I ran away. There were several wet spots on my jeans.

My hands were shaking as I quickly drove away, glancing in the rearview mirror to make sure he wasn't running after me. I immediately called Detective Capaldi. He answered his cell phone gruffly then changed his tone when he realized it was me. I regretted calling him immediately.

"Hello there, sweetpea," his voice oozed over the phone. "What can I do for you today?"

"Listen, I was just interviewing the guy who found the victim on the beach, you know, Julie Skorski, and--"

"What for?" he wanted to know, chuckling.

"Because I thought it might give me some...ideas, about the case," I explained. "Look, I was just over there and, well, why didn't you tell me he was an artist?"

"Why?" he asked, changing his tone again. "You're wasting your time with--"

"Don't you think the fact that he's an artist makes a difference?" I asked, incredulous.

"No," he stated. "We checked him out already. Jeez. What, are you going to tell me how to do my job now?"

"The guy's a creep," I almost shouted.

"Can't arrest him for that," he sang out, laughing. "He has an alibi for Christ's sakes. I looked into it."

"Really. Like what?" I asked, eager to know just what it might have been.

"He was at some--whaddacallit...you know, one of those art performances," the detective explained, chuckling. "Up in New York. In the Village or SoHo."

"Are you talking about performance art?"

"Yeah, that's it. It went on all night. Got video tape of it and everything. Thing went on until the next morning. I spoke with about a dozen people who put him there at six in the morning. He's even on video doing some of his crappy painting. On a wall. In this abandoned loft. Go figure."

"Are you sure there was no way he could have gotten away for a few hours? How long would it take to get from--"

"Doc, give it up. Are you kiddin' me or what? The guy was there from at least six pm until six in the morning. There's no way he could have done the deed. Read the report--would ya!"

The detective then hung up. I felt suddenly very foolish. Okay, call it stupid. No one who had perpetrated these crimes would be in plain sight. I'm sure I had become a source of amusement for at least two locals.

Regrouping, I headed to Montclair State College. I had a number and an address. Several

phone calls to Julie's parents had gone unanswered. I wasn't sure they could provide any useful information anyway. She had been estranged from her parents for some time, as she slipped into a different world of, shall we say, proclivities. It was more reasonable that her former girl friend with shed more light on her recent past and activities.

Toni Carp was, for lack of a better word, different. She was just a shade under six feet and had a Basic Training haircut. Beyond the masculine veneer there were high cheek bones and fashionably full lips, to go along with her very long legs. She had, in fact, done some catalog modeling, something, as she informed me, to pay the bills. I immediately tried to envision her with makeup on.

I had driven up the Garden State Parkway, got off at the nearest exit, then went looking for the address. It was an apartment in a seedy section of town not far from the campus. I knocked on the door and she opened it. No smile, but yet no glare either. She was, as I was to quickly discover, indifferent to most everything that came her way.

"I know who you are," she had informed me in a tone of voice that let me know she wasn't impressed.

"Oh, you do," I stammered, uncertain how to proceed. "I wanted to ask you a few questions about Julie--if I could."

"It's a little late to psychoanalyze her isn't it," she stated, not bothering to even smirk at her attempt at humor.

"A little," I agreed, following her inside, passing by stack after stack of magazines cluttering the hallway.

"My roommate's shit," she said over her shoulder, jerking a thumb in the direction of the

periodicals. "Fucking fire hazard."

"Yeah, might be," I said, trying to sound agreeable. "I appreciate you letting me ask you some questions about Julie. You see, I'm working on her murder and needed some background about her. Anything would help."

"Some wacko killed her," she declared, sitting down on a lumpy futon with a faded green cover. She lit a cigarette and then said, "When they catch him I hope they cut his balls off."

"Justice served," I chirped, trying to sound sympathetic.

"Julie was a very, very sweet kid," she said, glancing at me then looking away.

"Let me know if I'm treading on personal territory here but can I ask you what exactly your relationship was to Julie?" I inquired, hating the sound of it as soon as it left my mouth. Sooner or later I was going to have to broach the subject so I decided to get right to it.

"Fuck buddies," she answered, letting a grin creep to her lips.

"I see," I said, trying not to appear shocked.

"Julie was a part time lesbo, if you must know," she said, nodding. "When she got tired of dicks then she looked elsewhere."

"How did you two meet?" I asked, dreading the answer.

"A dating service hooked us up," she exclaimed, with a deadpan expression.

I had never seen a drier sense of humor before. Toni's expression never changed. I wasn't sure if I should laugh or not.

"Really," I managed to say.

"Sure," she shot back. "No, we got together through some friends. We hit it off and then played house for a few months. Right before she died."

"What about men in her life at that time. Were there any?" I wanted to know.

Toni stood up and walked over to a bookcase in the corner of the room. There were no books, just scraps of paper that appeared to be withered receipts and bills. She yanked out a stack of 4x6 photos and rifled through them. Then she dropped one in my lap.

"Check it out. She had the guy's tongues hanging out most of the time," she said, standing over me.

In the photo Julie Skorski was standing knee deep in the ocean, wearing what can best be described as a minuscule bikini. There was little doubt that she would have commanded attention by any male with a pulse. In fact, in the far right corner of the picture there were two guys standing there ogling her. She was forcing a smile, which revealed, in a way, her vulnerability. Not that I was passing any psychological judgement. I just felt I could see a glint of sadness in her eyes, as if she might just be unsure of something.

"She was very pretty," I mumbled, handing the photo back to her.

"Oh yeah," she said, whistling. "You should have seen the looks on all the guys faces when they caught us swapping spit," she chortled. "Nervous break down time, for sure."

"Was she okay being demonstrative in public...you know, with you?" I had to ask.

Toni stared at me for a moment then said, "Why would you ask something like that for?"

"I...I just wanted to get an idea of how comfortable she was with her sexuality, that's all," I answered, trying not to sound defensive.

"With her sexuality or, maybe, with your sexuality," she shot back. "It's okay, Doctor Greene, we're not aliens or anything. Like you haven't come across any of this shit in your work before. Come on."

"I'm not trying to analyze lesbianism or anything," I offered, trying to put on my professional tone of voice. "I just thought by knowing how Julie approached her sex life--the manifestation of it that is-- might help me understand her better. What I'm trying to do really is recapture what might have been going in her life back then. It might open up some different avenues for me to find out more about her and--"

"I already told you she was a part timer," she said, irritated.

I was losing her. The interview was fragmenting. I needed to guide her back on track without squelching any feelings she might have about that time in Julie's life.

"So, then, tell me about any liaisons she might have had with someone of the male persuasion," I suggested, trying to sound upbeat.

"I don't know who she was fucking at the time--besides me," she said sternly.

"Okay...let's take a second and catch our breath," I said for lack of anything better to say. "I just needed to know whether or not there might have been a guy she hung out with or dated. Even if he wasn't having relations with her maybe he might know something or someone. Understand?"

"I'm not an idiot," she snapped. "You friggin' shrinks all talk alike," she stated, standing up and beginning to pace the room.

It had been quite a while since I had experienced the dynamics of a patient to doctor exchange. Admittedly, I was rusty in that area. I had been existing in my cushy academic world, devoid of any contact with the maladies of the mental kind. It was obvious Toni had been in therapy before. Her resentment lingered.

"We're all trained in the same place," I said, smiling.

"Very funny."

"Anything you can tell me might be helpful," I said gently.

"Okay, listen, Julie liked to hang out at the beach alot," she said, stopping in the middle of the room to stare at me. "Not far from where she was found actually. I told the cops that. They just shrugged. She liked to keep a tan."

"Really, now that's interesting," I assured her. "Anybody you know of meet her there, at the beach?"

"Not that I know of," she replied. "Well, some of those girls at the club went with her on occasion. I never heard about any guys though. I'm sure she might have met some there. She was always friendly to everybody."

"Know anything about her parents?" I asked suddenly, wanting to change the direction of the interview.

"Yeah, they're assholes," she sang out, smacking her hands together in front of her. "They had more or less disowned Julie. She didn't quite fit in with their plans, you see. Having a stripper slash lesbian for a daughter doesn't make it in their neighborhood. They once threatened to call in a priest to perform an exorcism or something. I'm not kidding. Talk about out there. I'm Jewish and I thought we were weird."

I squelched a laugh then asked, "Was Julie in any way religious?"

"I guess she believed in god but what god I have no idea," she replied, shrugging. "We didn't exactly sit around and talk about god and enlightenment, if you know what I mean. Julie wasn't dumb but she wasn't real cerebral either. After all, she did flunk out of Montclair State," she declared, smirking.

I could see why this case had gone nowhere. There were just too many variables. The victim was exposed to customers at a strip club, guys at college, and who knows what all at the beach. And, although an unlikely source of foul play, she interacted with the same sex, opening up another problem all together. The perpetrators pool was vast.

Working from theories was always problematic. Most times it could take you down the wrong road and sometimes they were very long roads. I didn't want to posit something and work from there. Truthfully, I didn't know where to start. A little voice in my head was telling me to check on the religious angle. Just maybe a religious nut had come out of the wood work, bent on eliminating sin and the primary sinners. My knowledge of religion in general and Christian aspects in particular was almost non-existent. My own parents were, I guess, humanists. Both of them were secular Jews, not even mustering the energy to recognize the most celebrated holy days.

Toni had mentioned the exorcist tidbit and it sent my mind whirling. Julie was certainly on the front lines when it came time to do battle with unholy sin. She was, in a word, a purveyor. Add to that her sexual predilections and you had an atom bomb of damnation. Would someone actually seek her out, murder her, deface her skin, all in the name of sin reduction? Not that it hadn't happened before. Hadn't some zealot in the Northwest killed dozens of prostitutes in a crusade to make the earth more pure for when Jesus returns? All in all it wasn't all that farfetched.

Yet it didn't feel right to me. Neither did a jealous boy friend scenario ring true. Sure it was possible Julie turned a customer's mind around, leading to an act of wanton brutality. Everyday she exposed herself to men of every description, which cut across the entire socio-economic



spectrum. I once read a case about a man who kidnapped a stripper and held a gun on her in his basement, forcing her to strip for him at his command. He had held her captive for several days until he had, apparently, accidentally discharged the gun and killed her. The police found him blubbering over the body, screeching at god for letting him kill such a perfect being.

This seemed different. For one thing, it was much more calculated. Immaculate even. The killer wanted something more out of his act. It couldn't be something as petty as jealousy or social opprobrium. The tattoos alone pointed to a more sinister motive; or, at least, a different type of gratification. What? I was beginning to believe that the sexual motivation wasn't paramount, but rather secondary. That there had indeed been copulation didn't answer everything. It was just one ingredient.

I had one concluding question to ask before easing out of the interview. At this point, Toni Carp was drifting away. Hostility bubbled under the surface. I wasn't sure why she was directing it at me. My being from the psych profession was probably the number one reason. Although there did seem to be a basic level of resentment with Toni. Perhaps she had been playing the butch character so long that it had overlapped her true persona, pushing it back into the recesses of her personality.

"Let me ask you one more question, if I could," I began, smiling at her. She stood, hands on hips, with a stony expression. "Well I was just wondering if Julie had any tattoos you know of."

Toni snorted and said, "Hated them. Thought they were...were trashy." She then rolled up her sleeve and showed me a tattoo on her bicep area. "She was always trying to get me to get this thing lasered off. Don't think so."

I stood up to get a better look. It was a circular tattoo done in tightly drawn Chinese

characters, in dark black ink. It was somehow masculine and feminine at once. She flexed her muscle for me, smiling for the first time.

"Very nice," I lied, stepping back. "Did it hurt?"

"All you virgins ask that," she declared, smirking. "You should get one, Doctor Greene. Yeah. Let's see, maybe you get Sigmund Freud or something tattooed on your back. Front?"

"My husband would love that," I exclaimed, laughing.

"You never know," she said, wagging her finger at me. "Good for the sex life, maybe."

I found myself thinking about Jason's reaction if I came home with a tattoo. What tattoo would I get? Flower? Jason's name emblazoned across my chest? How about one of those murals, the ones that stretch across your entire back and take hour after hour to apply. I wondered if Toni even knew what all those Chinese characters meant. Was it a fortune cookie maxim? A Confucius saying? I didn't have the heart to ask because I feared that she would tell me she didn't know and didn't care. I would have found that too sad to deal with. Would that be worse than her having something tattooed on her arm that she believed to be one thing and it be something entirely different?

The interview was over. I told her good-bye and advised her that I might want to visit with her again. She shrugged and told me "whatever." There just seemed to be so much pathos out there and it was piling up on me. I really had been insulated too long in my tidy college town. The dancers, Toni, even the nutty painter were all "pungent with sadness" as Doctor Burke used to say about some of his past studies. It seemed as if I had accomplished a great deal during my weekend away, but then again I knew that I hadn't really made all that much progress. During my long drive home I would have time to dwell on the new information.

## 5. THE SECOND VICTIM

The first victim had been mostly a deadend. Julie Skorski was, more or less, the perfect victim. She existed on the fringes of society. Her family disowned her. She worked in a profession that was best kept quiet about, or, at the very least, ignored. Next to murdering a prostitute, an exotic dancer elicited zero sympathy from the public. Julie displayed herself to men. Julie got paid, in cash, to stoke the prurient side of men's human nature. Julie got what was coming to her. Naked. On public display. Dead.

It still seemed to me that there was some quasi-religious point to her death. Was some pious nut trying to make a statement here? Then again, it did seem to go beyond all that. If you factored in all of the usual crime scene intricacies, well, it just seemed as if this perpetrator () didn't actually have any emotive connection to the person and in turn the body. It was all very cold and clinical.

I didn't want to include my husband in any of this. I knew what his response would be. He would be patronizing, barely able to keep from mocking me. Treading on his turf, so to speak, was never a good idea. Yet I felt I needed to bounce at least a few ideas off of him. I needed to put some theories out there just to, if not anything else, hear how ridiculous they sounded.

Two weeks passed before I mustered up enough nerve to broach the subject. Jason hadn't asked about my weekend trip. Nothing at all. This irritated me. At least he could have asked me something about my time in New Jersey. He was determined not to give me any satisfaction. At this stage in our marriage I was well versed in his mannerisms. Of course that was a two way

street. He had long ago figured me out as well.

After one of my morning lectures, I decided to walk down to his office on campus. This was something I seldom did. At work, by mutual agreement, we had decided to minimize our contact. Keep it professional. The less we saw of one another the better. Still, I impulsively decided to go right on down there and ask him a few questions that had been eating at me. If he didn't want to answer them then I was prepared to nag him until he did. Just kidding. Sort of.

Jason was seated behind his desk poring over some weekly reports. Although he was the police chief on a force that protected a college campus, it was no less bureaucratic in nature than any other police department. Paperwork mounted up and he was responsible for its contents. After three years he had assuaged his pride and developed a working attitude when dealing with his job. Now that the only real crime he faced was unruly, drunken students, with the occasional vandalism, he had ratcheted down his professional expectations to fit his station. He, at times, could even display a sense of humor about all of it.

"Is the chief in?" I asked Lillian at the desk, the combination receptionist and dispatcher. She was almost seventy and had worked on campus for going on forty years.

"Oh, hello," she chirped, smiling back at me. "He's doing the reports," she said in almost a whisper. "You sure you want to bother him now? Might be kinda cranky."

I laughed, and answered, "He's always cranky."

"Hey boss, you're wife's here," she yelled over her shoulder, reaching for the radio to tell an officer to head to one of the back campus dorms to check on a banner hanging out the second story window. "Check and see if it has any profanity on it, Louis."

"I would like to speak to the Police Chief," I announced in a stern voice, smiling.

"Make an appointment," my husband muttered, tapping a pen on one of the reports on the desk in front of him.

"Busy, hon?" I asked, trying to soften him up. "I just wanted to ask you a few questions. Nothing major."

He looked up and frowned, then said, "Is it about Jeremiah because I blame it all on your mother. When you were gone I told her not to--"

"No, Jason, it's not about Jeremiah," I corrected him, laughing. "It's about my trip to Jersey."

"Oh," he mumbled. "That. What about it?"

"You don't have to be so cheerful, you know," I chided. "Just thought I could pick your brain a little bit about my case."

"Your case," he mocked. "So, it's your case now?"

"You know what I mean," I shot back, trying not to get angry. "I just wanted to ask you something about a killer's motivation and things like that."

"That's more your territory, isn't it?" he replied. "I never went in for the psych junk very much. Somebody kills somebody else I just tried to bust them. Didn't do much time analyzing things, you know."

"I know, but I was just wondering what you thought about a guy who leaves his victim on public display--like a beach. What do you think that points to? I mean does it show anything obvious about the killer?" I asked sweetly, smiling at him.

He tapped his pen on his desk and eyed me for a moment, then said, "On the beach. The bodies were found on the beach. Water fetish?" he joked, grinning.

"Be serious, hon," I pleaded.

"I was being serious," he countered. "Are you sure it's just one perp involved? We're not talking about some wacked out cult or anything. I mean the victims weren't in anyway sacrificial? That's what I mean about the water business. You know, a long time ago, back when I was actually a cop, we had this group of nuts who were stabbing people and leaving them on the monuments in DC. No lie. The Washington monument. Lincoln. And the...I think it was the Jefferson. Turns out they were sacrificing the people in order to bring down the American Government. By their reasoning, or their screwed up religion, by leaving the bodies at the monuments it would disturb the archetypes of US democracy. Kid you not. They thought this would bring down the government and a new order would begin. Something like that."

"You never told me about that," I said, surprised.

"I didn't tell you a lot of things," he mumbled, returning his attention back to the reports.

Talking to my husband was often like this. He was, basically, incommunicado when it came to police matters. I don't want to paint an errant picture here. Jason was a kind, loving husband and a very good father; but there was a slice of our life that didn't evolve. In fact, it devolved. When he took the job on campus he made a deal with himself, a deal that included never (ever) discussing his past career. It was as if it never happened.

"I suppose it's understandable," my father had told me, on more than one occasion. "Look, you must understand what has happened to the man. He lost his career and it was a vital part of him and who he was. I shouldn't have to tell you that, for heaven's sake."

It was true. Being fired had been a major blow. The fact that it had been such a high profile case didn't help any either. When you are on the front page of the Washington Post it is seldom

for any honorable reasons. Jason had developed a history as a good cop and had become a Washingtonian in the process. He grew to love the city and the surrounding areas. It was all taken away from him. In addition, I knew that somewhere deeply embedded in him there was a reservoir of resentment against me. I inadvertently had been the reason for his disgrace. I had brought Rey Flowers into our lives and his actions had severed Jason from his livelihood. I knew that he loved me but yet there was always going to be that moment in time, that instant that my husband was disconnected from something that helped to define him.

I decided to leave off and not ask any more questions. Although I suppose it was possible that the murders could have been the work of a cult, it didn't seem plausible. First off, we were dealing with separate States and slightly different MOs. Was there a cult out there functioning on the Eastern seaboard. It was doubtful. What motive would they have had? Then again, deciphering motivational actions for some cults was what would be called hardly a rational enterprise. They were, in a word, crazy.

For me, however, I leaned towards an individual. Male. Intelligent. Twenties. And he would have to be financially comfortable. I reasoned that he had to be capable of traveling the seaboard and maintaining his lifestyle. That ruled out drifters. In order to lure these women he would have to be attractive and not be seen as some less than desirable derelict. It took some adequate level of funds.

The women hadn't been beaten so it would seem that they went willingly. Of course, as Peter suggested, they could have been drugged. Possibly, but I still sensed that these women had some sort of interaction with their killer at some point; which lead to an analyzing of the beach scene.

My husband had mentioned one thing in jest and that was water fetish. Perhaps the Artist was someone who had something to do with a beach lifestyle. Surfer? Vendor? Lifeguard? Then again, if he were independently well off he would be able to just be a beach type person, someone who liked to hang out at beaches tanning and the like. They existed. Peter had filled me in on the sub-culture. As a child my family had vacationed at the beach. It had been fun, invigorating. Some people liked to extend their vacations and simply follow the seasons in order to stay in tune with the sun, sand, and waves.

"Very leathery," Peter had said on the phone when I asked him about my new theory. "You should see some of them."

He was referring to some of the older denizens of the beach, the ones who had logged hours, days, years on the beach. "Skin cancer doesn't scare them, huh?" I wanted to know.

"No way," he replied. "Some of them go from the dermatologist straight to the beach. Freeze off a few spots here. Cut off some more there. Hey, it's a small price to pay to be perpetually tan."

Julie was a known sunbather in the summer months. I had been told she had also been a customer at tanning salons during the winter. I made a mental note to tell Detective Santos to check on the tanning salon angle. Perhaps the killer owned a chain of tanning salons. He would then have had contact with the victims and a perfect way to disable them while they were in the tanning beds. It was farfetched but I was willing to put anything on the table if I thought it might bring some results.

The second victim needed to be looked into. Peter had wanted to "be in on this one." I told him she hadn't been an exotic dancer and we wouldn't be going to any strip clubs but he still



insisted. We made plans to meet in Newark, New Jersey, at the airport. I would pick him up and we would drive to Staten Island. Millie Sanchez's body had been found on a beach on Staten Island almost exactly a year after Julie Skorski had been discovered. Three different States, New York, New Jersey, and Florida were now involved.

I was taking another weekend away from my family. Jason had only grunted when I informed him of my plans to meet Peter in Newark. We were straining to maintain civility between us. To his credit, he hadn't played the martyr card and complain about my absences. It would have been easy to do. My mother had warned me about taking this sideline too far. "Honey, don't push it," she had told me, fixing me with her best mother's stare, the one that was utilized whenever she wanted to let me know she was being serious. I assured her I wouldn't, which was, all and all, untrue because I truly didn't know how far I was going to take this.

For Peter, on the other hand, it was easy. He had no family to work around. This, for him, was all in good fun. It was a lark, something to do. He had always felt that he missed out on the Rey Flowers case and now, so I assumed, hoped things would be different. Just maybe it would be him up there on the TV screen telling some distracted host what went on when the case developed into its more hair raising moments. He would have a book on the best seller list. He would be the one to have to fend off pesky phone calls from an intrusive agent. He would be there to trade banter with one of the late night show hosts. His bank account would swell. Of course I didn't know if he really desired any or all of the above, but it was obvious he was enjoying himself at this stage.

"Great flight," he announced sarcastically, as we made our way to my car parked in the Newark Airport temp lot. "Some jackass actually tried to bring a dagger on the plane. A

dagger," he repeated.

"You're kidding," I said, laughing.

"He claimed it was an antique or something. Valuable," Peter explained. "Security went berserk and then it delayed the flight. Hope you didn't have to wait too long."

"It's okay, I took a nap on the concourse floor," I joked. "The cleaning crew vacuumed right around me."

"Oh boy, did I ever miss that Greene wit," he sang out, hugging me.

"At least you are in a good mood," I told him, pushing him away.

"Why not? I'm sleuthing with my favorite shrink," he declared, smiling. "On the road. On the trail of a--"

"Whoa there," I stated, holding up my hand. "Look, this is only about seeing where the second victim died and trying to interview some people connected to her. If you think this is going to be...be boiling with excitement you can disabuse yourself of that notion right now."

"I just love it when you say 'disabuse'," he exclaimed. "Say it again."

"Screw you," I shot back. "I'm just trying to tell you that this is not going to be all that glamorous. Really."

"Oh sure," he said, grinning. "Like your life isn't glamorous 24/7. Come on, you're Dr. Sarah Greene! Famous Sarah Greene."

As if on cue, a woman stopped us in the parking garage and asked, "Aren't you that psychologist...the one that wrote that book?"

"No," I lied, hurrying on.

"See," Peter whispered, laughing. "I get to hang out with a star. Let the fun begin."

Neither one of us had ever been to Staten Island. Somehow Peter had caged the victim's file out of someone back in Miami Beach who had connections. We sat in the car for a few minutes going over the specifics. No matter how many times you see crime scene photos they always leave you with a gnawing sense of guilt, guilt at having taken a peek at someone's personalized misery. I always got this heavy weight in the pit of my stomach, bordering on nausea.

"Flowers," I mumbled, handing one of the photos over to Peter.

"What do you mean?" Peter asked, glancing at the photo he had already seen many times before.

"The first victim had a crude flower started on her breast then it was crossed out. The Artist changed his mind then switched to the abstract junk," I explained. "Maybe he didn't think he had the time to complete a bunch of flower tattoos. Or, maybe, he didn't like what he started. An artistic decision?"

"Come on, you don't really think this creep is so artistically inclined, do you?" Peter wanted to know, smirking. "Maybe he just changed his mind and went with the linear crap. Or, how about this? Maybe he didn't think her skintone was quite right for the flower scheme. What do you think?"

"Wouldn't that come under an artistic decision?" I replied.

"I guess so," he said, glancing at the photo again. "It's pretty obvious he had plenty of time for this masterpiece. This had to take stretches of time to complete, right? I mean look at some of the detail. The color alone would have been time consuming."

Somehow it had never occurred to me but the killer needed to learn his craft somewhere; and of course the police had looked into the tattoo trade extensively. However, what if he wasn't

a tattoo artist? If not, then what did he practice his craft on? Friends? Acquaintances? The homeless? It was a valid inquiry.

"Ever wonder about how this guy got his tattooing expertise?" I asked Peter which was more thinking out loud than a question.

"How about on himself," Peter replied.

"Can you do that?" I wondered. "I mean is that even possible?"

"I guess if you can reach the area then why not?" he said, shrugging. "There's not all that much pain involved."

"Oh yeah, how do you know?" I chided, laughing. "Been hanging out with your gang-bangers down in Florida...getting inked up."

"Funny," he muttered. "I asked around," he said meekly. "I mean if it hurts so much then how come there are so many people with tattoos?"

"Don't get all logical on me," I teased. "I'm still trying to picture you with a tattoo. Yeah, with a nice, big colorful...you know, symbol or something. No, no, I got it, a picture of your mother, with an inscription that reads--"

"Let's leave my mother out of this, shall we," he ordered, smacking me on the arm. "If I had a tattoo it would be a Latin inscription that said something like...like cogito, ergo sum."

"Did you say bibo? What in the hell would you put something like that on your body for?" I had to ask, squelching a laugh. "Trying to impress all those Latin club babes from yesteryear."

"No, for your information," he replied in a stern voice. "I believe in upholding the classics. That's right, it's a scholar thing. I don't expect you to understand. After all, you're a purveyor of sleaze and contribute to the downfall of civilization as we know it."

"Can't argue with that," I agreed, laughing.

"So, what would you have if you had a tattoo?" he demanded to know.

"Who says I don't have one already," I said, holding back a laugh.

"Sure thing," he exclaimed. "What is it? Oh I know, it's your husband's name in a heart.

Like you would ever have a tattoo--please. You'd faint as soon as they brought out the needle."

"Listen to you, would you. You are the one who almost passed out when we did bio-lab back in college. I thought I was going to have to catch you on your way down," I said, laughing.

"Like that happened," he shot back.

Our laughter slowly subsided. It grew quiet in the car. Simultaneously we both glanced down at the crime scene photos. I started to get that feeling in the pit of my stomach again as I stared at the botanical style tattoos, which interlocked and formed an almost frieze like border covering the victim's skin. The monotone depiction was totally gone, replaced by a riot of color tucked into childishly drawn flowers. Peter took out a map of the area and pushed the photos to the side. Fumbling for my keys, I started the car.

The first blush of spring was in the air. Some of the flowers were beginning to bloom. It was early afternoon when I picked Peter up at the airport. Temperatures were rising into the low fifties, with mostly sunny skies. When you lived in Upstate New York Springtime was always a welcome sight. For Peter, however, it was "on the chilly side." I mocked him for being a newborn Floridian and he responded by ordering me to roll my window up to prevent the "icy" wind from blowing in the car.

The Tri-state area around New York was, as usual, a frenetic and scary place when it came to driving in it. I was hoping Peter would offer to drive but he wasn't volunteering for any

driving duties. We made our way down Interstate 95 and over to 278, eventually turning onto Wylam Blvd. We soon discovered that Staten Island, although a part of metropolitan New York City, was bucolic in comparison. There were no skyscrapers and certainly no screeching subways either. It was mostly suburban, even mundanely ordinary.

"Kind of weird this being part of New York," Peter declared, looking out the window, echoing exactly what I was thinking. "I've only been to the Big Apple a couple of times but I know this ain't nothing like it."

"Seems strange," I agreed, adding, "I've never been to Staten Island before."

"Maybe it's a state secret or something," Peter joked. "Sort of a metropolis shangri-la."

"You know, it's true, you don't really hear much about Staten Island," I suggested, as we passed by some neighborhood streets you might find in Anytown, USA. "What kind of connection could the Artist have had here, I wonder."

"That's what we're here to find out," Peter announced solemnly.

"Don't get your hopes up," I chided, adding a laugh to soften my tone.

Millie Sanchez was Nineteen, the youngest of the victims. She was Puerto Rican, or, as they called themselves, New Rican. She had been born in the Bronx, but lived mostly in Staten Island. Her father was a businessman who had parlayed several fast food franchises into a comfortable living. He had moved the family away from the slums to the relative paradise of Staten Island when Millie was only four years old. Millie's mother was dead, having died from cancer. Millie was seventeen when her mother died. Being the oldest, she had been pressed into service as a surrogate mom for her two other siblings, a boy and a girl.

They lived a quiet, mostly uneventful life on a quiet street in Staten Island. Millie was

studying to be a dental hygienist at a local community college, fitting classes in between taking care of her adolescent brother and sister. Her father worked long hours tending to his three restaurants in two of the other boroughs, leaving Millie alone to cope with the household problems.

As with the other victims, Millie was strikingly pretty, with long dark hair and deep black eyes. Her skin color was a creamy light brown and she was just under five foot seven. At the time of her murder she had been dating a guy from Staten Island who went to the same college as she did. His name was Sean Riley and Peter had already contacted him by phone. Our first stop was to the place of his current employment, a Home Depot.

We found the shopping center without much trouble. Corporate America had made the US into a cookie cutter mural, leaving us all with a comfy feeling as we traveled State to State, never having to feel alienated or lost because everything was indeed the same. The carbon copy sameness all across the nation was, of course, by design, facilitating freeflowing commerce as much as generic societal impulses; but then I had been reading my father's books too much lately. After all, he is a curmudgeon, an historian with a chip on his shoulder, or so said a reviewer from the Boston Globe.

Sean Riley was busy stocking shelves with light bulbs when we stumbled on him in the maze of aisles chock full of home supplies. Peter introduced himself and then me. He looked us up and down unabashedly then promptly went back to his stocking.

"You look busy...so we'll just ask you a few questions and then be on our way," Peter offered in a pleasant voice. "If that's okay."

"Like I didn't already tell the cops all this stuff before," he muttered over his shoulder.

"I know-I know," Peter began, "but we kind of just wanted to...to see what they might have missed. You know, the cops."

Box cutter in hand, Sean ripped open another box and started lining up shrink wrapped packages of decorative 40 watt bulbs. Peter and I exchanged glances. A woman stopped and asked where she might find floor tile. Sean grunted and told her to look over in aisle 10.

I motioned to Peter to let me give it a try then asked, "You do want to help find Millie's killer, don't you?"

Sean stopped what he was doing and turned to me, then replied, "Are you for real?"

Peter snickered, then said, "Look, we know this can't be pleasant for you but we are trying to build a case here."

"The cops grilled me big-time, you know," he spat out angrily. "The assholes thought I did it. Like I would ever do that to Millie."

"We don't think you did it, Mr. Riley," I stated. "What we would like to do is construct a...a re-creation type thing."

"Huh?" he muttered, turning back to his box of light bulbs.

"What she means is we are trying to pick up on a thread to this senseless murder, something that might pry loose some evidence or leads," Peter explained in a soothing voice. We swapped glances and I immediately thought just how smooth Peter sounded in his interview skills. "We don't want the police to leave off on the case."

Sean looked back at us then said, "I don't know who would do something like that to Millie-I really don't."

We convinced him to take a break, long enough for us to, in a way, debrief him. We already



had what we called touchpoints to get answered, one being whether or not Millie was a beach goer. She wasn't. Another was whether or not she had tattoos. She didn't. Sean had been intimate with her so we assumed his knowledge was unimpeachable. We also discovered that their relationship had been exclusive.

When reading a police file you digest the specifics but you never actually assemble the pieces. That is to say, once you have talked to the people who have been involved with the crime certain trappings take on new shapes and sizes. Talking to Sean Riley told us that two of the three victims had been free of tattoos. Peter and I agreed this wasn't a coincidence. The Artist was particular. He wanted a clean canvas to work with. It must have been a psychological blow for him to have to work around one of his victims' tats. Would there have been inner rage? Apparently he had channeled it into the art work because her body hadn't been mutilated.

"Impressive," I complimented, shaking my head in disbelief, as we walked back out to my car.

"What?" Peter wanted to know.

"You. In there, you rose to the occasion," I praised, smacking his arm playfully.

"Thanks, coach," he said, pretending to blush. "What, you think I'm some stooge or something?"

"I didn't know you had it in you, that's all," I explained.

"Nice vote of confidence," he chided. "I might not be as famous as you but I know what I'm doing."

"Oh now I've gone and hurt your feelings," I exclaimed. "Sorry."

"I guess he didn't recognize you," Peter stated, smirking. "Didn't know who he was dealing

with. Should have told him you've been on Oprah--that would have done it."

"Ever think of doing stand-up?" I needled, laughing. "Just get in the car and find Father Capadanno Blvd. on the map for me."

"Did I ever tell you how much I love a take-charge woman?" Peter declared. "And no wisecracks about my mother and therapy."

Our next stop was Midland Beach, site of the discovery. Millie Sanchez's body had been found, face up, on the beach. The body was discovered by a woman taking an early morning stroll on the beach. She had told the police that she thought the girl was asleep, past out from too much drinking. There had been no beach towel. No clothes in the vicinity of the body. Just a pair of sunglasses placed on her face, concealing the look of terror in her eyes. "I don't think I'll ever get the image of all those tattoos covering her body out of my mind as long as I live," she had informed the police.

"You can see the bridge," Peter mumbled, looking up and down the beach.

"What bridge?" I asked, scanning around the interior, wondering how the killer had deposited her body and gone undetected.

"The Verrazano," Peter answered, pointing. "Ever been on it?"

I looked where he was pointing and replied, "No, no I haven't. Pretty amazing sight."

Millie Sanchez, as a victim, was puzzling. She didn't frequent the beach, as the other two victims had. Where had been the contact point between victim and murderer been established? Was it a killing of convenience? Had the Artist simply stumbled on his second victim at a store or some other public venue? This seemed unlikely. The Artist, in our shared opinion, would have wanted to know something about his victim, some details that lent a certain stimulus to his

madness. It just didn't seem possible that he would snatch a young woman right off the street without first doing his homework. There was no calculation in that. It was more spontaneous and that didn't seem to fit in with the nature of his mania.

Peter and I mulled this development over between us. He was of the belief that the Artist and Millie crossed paths somewhere along the line. Where? Although the Artist territory was, apparently, restricted to the beach scene, there was the possibility that he had cultivated his second victim through other means. Of course, we really didn't know all that much about Millie either. The history sketch we had gotten from her boy friend was brief. What we needed to do was talk to her younger sister, someone that Peter and I both felt could shed some more light on the case.

"It's not going to be easy," Peter stated, as we got back in the car. "I tried to talk to the dad but he was...well, not too communicative to say the least. Can't blame him, I guess."

"We really need to talk to the younger sister," I told him. "How old is she? Do you happen to know?"

"Sixteen, I think," Peter replied, looking out to sea. "That's Brooklyn over there, right?"

"Yeah," I said, trying to imagine Millie's last hours of living. "Obviously he brought her body here because she lived on Staten Island, right?"

"You asking me or telling me?" Peter asked, laughing. "He's got that beach fixation going on, so, you know, he dropped her off here. He didn't want to take her all the way back to the Jersey shore. It's a location thing."

"What do you mean...a location thing?" I wanted to know.

"Well--and feel free to ignore me on this--the Artist is like those impressionists way back

when who painted al fresco...on location. They wanted to set up outdoors and paint right on the spot," Peter explained. "Same thing here, I suppose. I mean the girl in Miami, then Jersey, and here. Different chronological order of course."

I thought for a moment then said, "It's important to him. I can see that now. That fits in with his sense of order. It maintains his preoccupation with the immaculate, right?"

"Sounds vaguely religious to me," Peter joked. "Could be, though. The guy has to structure everything. That would mean the pieces to the puzzle have to, you know, fit in order. Like, well, just maybe he designs these murders in his head and they have to follow a blueprint. Feel free to stop me from rambling at any time."

"Okay," I said, exhaling deeply, "he selects his victim then it begins. I think maybe he works back from the ending, sort of like a deconstructing, if that makes any sense. He would want to do his thing with the ending in mind and that ending is invariably a beach burial. Right? Because that is essentially what this is," I said pointing to the sand.

"True. In a way it is a public burial of sorts," Peter muttered, cracking his knuckles.

"Stop that," I chided.

"I'm on a roll, don't stop me now," Peter joked.

"But the girls don't really share anything in common," I suggested. "At least we don't think they do."

"I can't see any connection there," Peter said, scratching his head. "I've tried to find one but nothing doing. I mean they are different in most ways. The only constant is they are pretty. I mean you have a stripper, a student, and a restaurant manager. Two are Anglo and one is Hispanic. How do you connect them?"

"You don't," I stated. "I think they are, essentially, secondary. They are, and I'm not trying to be heartless here, unimportant to him, the Artist. Sure I think they have to meet a certain criterion to meet his warped standards but I really think their backgrounds are irrelevant. He wants the canvas and their bodies are the canvas. I mean look, think about this. All three are approximately the same height and weight and tattoo free—mostly. They range in age from nineteen to in their early twenties. It's a body type that he's after more than anything else. The beach angle has nothing to do with their, you know, lifestyle. No, it has to do with his. And I don't think it is some weirded out cult either. No, the Artist lives his life on and around the beach and by virtue of that fact brings his psycho hobby to where he's comfortable."

"Psycho hobby...I like that," Peter announced, chuckling. "Can I quote you?"

"Funny. I was just trying to say that I think the environmental angle is only secondary," I explained.

"We still have to find out how he came across Millie," Peter stated, frowning. "Staten Island is an out of the way place to be offing young girls."

"Offing?" I said, smirking.

"Psycho hobby," he shot back, laughing.

"Enough brainstorming," I told him, heading back to the car.

It was getting dark. I suggested we try swinging back to the Sanchez's house to see if anyone was home. Peter balked at this, deeming it intrusive and wanted to call first. I agreed with him that it was sort of like a bushwacking but necessary.

"Kind of rude," he exclaimed, looking at the map with a pen light. "Might backfire on us, you know."

"Might," I allowed, then added, "but then again we need to get some more information about Millie and this might be the best chance we'll have. I mean if the dad answers the phone he's probably going to tell us to get lost--right?"

"I guess so," Peter answered reluctantly. "It just feels...feels wrong."

As we pulled up to the house a car was just pulling away. We saw a teenage girl disappear into the house. I stopped in front and parked the car. We saw the lights go on in the house.

"Want me to go alone?" I asked Peter.

"No...can't have that," he said sarcastically.

I knew Peter was perturbed because I had more or less overruled him, but I thought it was necessary to, at times, be aggressive. That we might be acting like obnoxious reporters didn't occur to me at the time. I just made a decision and went with it.

It was a two story home and we could see the lights go on upstairs. Millie's sister must have gone directly to her bedroom. I now regretted not asking Sean Riley what Millie's sister's name was. This was going to take some finesse in order to get the interview off the ground.

"Maybe I should take the lead on this one," I suggested to Peter, hoping it wouldn't set him off.

He looked at me for a moment, then said, "You're probably right. Two strangers show at your door...can't be good."

I knocked then stepped back from the door so when she answered it she could see me clearly. Peter stepped off the porch and stood on the front sidewalk. We could hear music coming from upstairs. Peter motioned for me to knock again. Then I noticed there was a doorbell, so I rang that and added a few knocks too. We could hear footsteps on the stairs inside.

"Yes?" a young girl inquired through the door.

"Hello...my name is Dr. Sarah Greene...and I was wondering if I could talk to you about Millie," I replied, trying to muster up my best professional tone of voice.

"What for?" came her response.

"Well...you see...we are investigating Millie's murder and were wondering if--"

"Go away," she shouted through the door.

"Wait, please," I pleaded, stepping closer to the door. "I need to know a few things about the circumstances surrounding your sister's death. Please. Any information you give us would be helpful."

She glanced out the small window in the door then said, "What do you want to know?"

"Would it be possible for you to open the door so we could talk?" I asked in what I hoped was a calm voice.

"I'm not supposed to open the door to anybody," she stated defiantly. "My dad's gonna be home any minute so you can talk to him."

"To be honest, I don't think he has the answers that you might have," I stated in a challenging tone.

"Like what?" she wanted to know, curious.

"Well, for one, did Millie ever go to New Jersey?" I said, opening the screen door so I could get a little closer.

"Yeah," she said, glancing out the window again.

"Can you crack open the door just a little bit so we can talk?" I asked her again.

I could hear her slide the chain lock into place then the door opened a few inches and she declared, "I got my cell phone right here." She held up the phone so I could see it. "I can call 911."

"Okay, it's always good to be on the safe side," I said soothingly. "We talked to Sean earlier today and he told us some things that might help the investigation but we need to know some other things too."

"Who's he?" she demanded to know, closing the door again.

"His name is Peter and he's a colleague of mine. We're both working on the case," I explained.

The door opened again and she said, "What do you want to know about Jersey for?"

"Well, you see, we are trying to piece together your sister's history because it might lead to something," I answered lamely, not knowing what to say. "You see, somewhere along the line your sister had to have come in contact with the man who did what he did to her."

She was silent for a moment then she said, "We went to the shore one day to visit with a friend of hers."

"So you went with her," I said excitedly. "That's good to know."

"We drove down with a friend of hers who wanted to see her boy friend," she said.

"Do you remember where you went? I mean what town you went to," I asked eagerly.

"Point Pleasant," she answered. "We walked on the boardwalk and all. Mostly boring stuff," she exclaimed.

"I see. And what else did you do once you got down there?" I asked, hoping she wasn't going to fade on me and withdraw.



"Millie's friend met her boy friend and we...we just hung out, that's all," she replied.

"Now listen, this is kind of important," I said, trying to draw her into my line of questioning.

"Did Millie know her friend's boy friend? I mean were they friends from school or anything like that?"

She thought for a moment then said, "No, I don't think so."

"Did you girls meet any other guys at the beach that day?" I asked, trying to reign in my excitement.

"No, not really," she said.

I felt as if I might be on the verge of some vital information but the interview process was being retarded by the dynamics. Yet I believed that if I pushed her to open the door and let us in it would poison the situation. She was wary and rightly so. Her father's instructions were a barrier. A daughter and a sister had been murdered thereby altering the family's life forever. It was an obstacle that was difficult to overcome.

We managed to get the name of her sister's friend and even where she lived. It would be a start. Furthermore, we had, albeit tenuous, a link to the beach. The boy friend at the beach might be a connection. Peter and I both agreed that the boy friend was probably unconnected to the case, but that he might lead to someone else. Perhaps he was a friend or acquaintance of the killer. During the course of their outing to the beach they may have come into contact with the Artist. If so, then this victim would have been prey that the killer happened upon, making it unlikely that he had any type of relationship with. In ways this new bit of information only confused things more.

Peter dug out the map again and located Millie's friend's neighborhood. It was a fifteen

minute drive away. We both agreed that it was worth a shot, so we went in search of more answers.

Nighttime brought cold. Peter whined. I concentrated on what questions I should ask. We got lost. Then when we stopped for something to eat a worker at the fast food place gave us impeccable directions.

"So, what are you thinking?" Peter wanted to know, as he stole a few of my french fries.

"He definitely met Millie that day in Jersey--don't you think?" I replied, removing a sliver of onion from my burger.

Peter munched on the fries for a moment then said, "Got to be it."

"Let's just hope that the Artist had a connection to the boyfriend," I stated. "I mean if he just happened to see Millie at the beach and followed her home then we don't have much to go on, right?"

"Afraid so," he commented, fumbling with a ketchup packet. "That could very well be what happened. Millie shows up. He notices her and then decides to follow her home. Waits. When the time is right he snatches her and, well, you know the rest."

"Now Millie was missing for how many days before the body was found?" I wanted to know, reaching for my notebook, where I had scribbled down pertinent information. "He still had to place the body. By that time the community had been alerted of her disappearance. Am I right? I mean it made it more difficult for him. You see what I mean?"

Peter nodded, then said, "Same thing in Miami, but not with the Stripper. Apparently her disappearance hadn't set off any bells because, evidently, no one gave a shit...excuse my language."

"How in the hell did he get her body on the beach without being seen?" I asked, yanking another sliver of onion off the hamburger bun. "Tell me that."

We looked at each other then both said in unison: "Boat?"

Was it possible he traveled the coast by boat? In the Miami case, it had more or less been established that the murderer dropped the victim's body off by some sort of water craft. In that particular situation, however, it could have been anything from a kayak to an inflatable, to even a dingy of some sort. With the Jersey, and now the Staten Island case, could it be feasible to think that the killer used the same type of small craft to deposit the body? From where? How far could he have come by paddling?

"Had to have been a zodiac type of thing," Peter stated, pointing his apple turnover at me. "There's no way he could have paddled the ocean out there with a dead body in tow. No way."

"We can look up the weather for those two nights, you know. That way we could tell what the conditions of the sea were," I said, balling up the remainder of my burger in its wrapper.

"You want to tell me how you could get a dead body on a kayak anyway. Not possible. The dead weight would make the thing unstable. I don't think you could paddle the damn thing."

"You're probably right," he agreed. "An inflatable has to be the answer. There's no other way. If he came in by the sea then he could probably go undetected. I mean think about it. If he drives up and then schlepps a body from his car somebody would have to see him. Besides, the beach is closed anyway."

"So we are looking for a guy who travels the eastcoast and has a small boat with him," I muttered, fingering the straw in my soft drink.

"Oh man, you don't think he has a boat do you?" Peter suddenly asked. "Suppose the guy

has a boat of some sort and he sails up and down the coast following the warm weather. It would explain a lot of things. But the cops in Miami checked that angle out. I think they did anyway. Who knows with those guys."

"You said they checked out the Miami Beach city dock, I know that," I reminded him. "Then again, what exactly are you going to be looking for? Think about it. You can't get a warrant to search every boat."

"When I go back home maybe I'll check out some places in the vicinity of the murder," Peter suggested. "There's a boat dock on Key Biscayne that is a possibility."

"I should think you could trace the movements of somebody traveling by boat," I said, drumming my fingers on the table. "If somebody travels to the same area every year then you should be able to find out something about them."

"Yeah, but if he has a boat then maybe he picks a different location every summer to go to," Peter said, shrugging. "If he's a complete nomad then it won't be easy tracing his whereabouts."

"No one can be a complete nomad, can they?" I asked, frowning. "Surely he has to have contact with the human race, with society somewhere along the line."

Millie's friend, Stevie Jenkins, was originally from Trenton, New Jersey. She had relocated to Staten Island when she took a job as a hair stylist in a local salon. She was four years Millie's senior. They had met at the community college, where Stevie was taking a few business courses with the hopes of opening her own beauty shop.

She lived in a new apartment complex, one of the many that dotted the suburban areas of every city. To say that they were utilitarian would be an understatement. It was the builders intent to house the populace and cheaply. This particular complex sported a faux French chateau

facade and had a sign out front that read: First Month's Rent Free. The parking lot was full of cars and trucks, some displaying lettering and logos of the local service and maintenance industry. Scattered around the grounds were bicycles and toys, little reminders that families were in residence.

"Blue collar madness," Peter mumbled, as we made our way down a narrow sidewalk strewn with beer cans and cigarette butts.

Up above, from the second floor, we could hear a couple arguing. The high pitched wailing of an infant echoed down the passageway that led between the two buildings. A teenage couple were locked in a passion grip, noisily making-out, as they leaned up against the wall. A dog growled at us as we passed a window.

"That's it," I informed Peter, holding up the note with the address scribbled on it. "The lights are on. Ready?"

"Oh yeah," Peter replied, laughing. "Should be fun."

As we approached the door we could hear loud music coming from inside, along with laughter. Peter nudged me with his elbow then did a quick dance. I rolled my eyes at him. A girl was singing along to the music, or, more accurately, chanting. It was a hip-hop song of some sort. It was hard to tell because rap had morphed into so many different facsimiles.

I wasn't confident this interview was going to be successful. Of late, I had been striking out regularly. Everyone connected to these cases were, initially, hostile and mostly uncooperative. Even after smoothing over the antagonism matters didn't progress sufficiently enough to glean any goldmine info. There was no time to get discouraged however. Perseverance, as Dr. Burke often said, is a therapist's most vital tool.

The door to Stevie's apartment was wide open. Through the open door I could see two guys and a girl sitting in the livingroom. In the far corner there was a girl dancing and singing along to the CD. Peter giggled. I debated on what to do.

"Hello," I finally called out, electing not to knock.

"Who that?" one of the guys, a skinny black man, shouted out.

"I'm looking for a Stevie Jenkins," I almost shouted into the apartment.

"Oh, girl, you done it now," the same black guy sang out, laughing.

"Shit, bet it's some collection agency on your ass," the other guy, a tall white man, early twenties, announced, giggling.

"Can I help you?" Stevie asked, stopping her dance in mid-step.

"My name is Dr. Greene and I wondered if I might talk to you about Millie, Millie Sanchez," I explained, stepping up to the open door. "It'll only take a minute."

"Ain't that the girl got marked...on the beach or somethin?" the black guy asked.

"Shut up, Scoots," Stevie ordered. "What do you want to know?"

"Could you turn the music down for a minute?" Peter demanded behind me.

"Yes, sir," the white guy exclaimed sarcastically.

Stevie turned down the music and said, "I guess you might as well come in."

Good start, I thought to myself, as I eased my way inside the small apartment, which smelled like marijuana and air freshener blended to make a sickly sweet aroma. On the tiny dining room table I noticed two candles were lit, the source of the slightly stale cinnamon smell I guessed. Quickly I surveyed the room, hoping that I wasn't going to have to pretend to ignore any contraband in plain sight.

"Hey, yo, I know you," the other girl in the group sang out. "Check it out, she's on TV, ya'll."

"Fuck no," the black guy exclaimed with mock excitement. "What show you on?"

"I used to do talk shows and stuff," I answered reluctantly, hoping that this wasn't going to sidetrack everything.

"She's a psychologist or some shit, right?" the girl stated, smiling up at me.

I looked down at her, noticing her hair was dyed several different shades of pink, and replied, "Yes, that's right."

"You here to clean up our minds?" the white guy asked, chuckling.

"Fuck, dog, you ain't got any minds," the black guy cried out.

"Shut the fuck up, you two," Stevie commanded, waving their protestations away with an upheld hand. "What do you want to know about Millie?"

We talked as best we could. I tried to tune out the others as best I could. Finally Peter came to my rescue and engaged them in meaningless conversation while I conducted the interview. In the background, the repetitive beat of the music coursed through the claustrophobic apartment.

Stevie was, unlike the others, willing to comply. She offered up any and all information that she could remember. Apparently they had gone down to the Jersey Shore to meet up with her boy friend at the time. It became quickly obvious that Stevie had plenty of boy friends. She was personable and attractive, even with the blond extensions attached to her brunette hair. Although I didn't know Millie, of course, I couldn't imagine what the two of them had in common. From the photos I had seen of Millie, and the conversations with her sister and boy friend, it didn't seem possible that the two of them would remain friends for long.

"That's right, we just hung out at the beach," Stevie said, rummaging through several pizza boxes on the table in search of her lighter. She lit a cigarette and continued, "I just wanted to see Timmy and didn't feel like driving down there by myself."

"Does this Timmy live down there?" I asked.

"Yeah...sort of," she responded, blowing smoke towards the ceiling. "He's a life guard. Works there in the summer then goes back home...to Patterson, New Jersey."

There are times when you are involved in therapy with a patient and you stumble onto a solution. It almost always is electric, as if a charge is riveted to your spine. When Stevie mentioned that her "boy friend" was a life guard, well, I felt something. Of course, when dealing with murders centered around beaches, a life guard would probably play into the equation somewhere along the line. Still, could this be a connection? I thought, glancing over at Peter, who was fending off the other three's inane questions about therapy.

"Does he ever travel to Florida to work?" I wanted to know, trying to control my eagerness.

Stevie thought for a moment, then said, "Don't think so. Who knows? I only spent a few months with him."

She then went on to tell me, in detail, how they met and even the intricacies of their sex life. I was reluctant to put a brake on her revelations for fear of thwarting my one real access to Millie's life in the weeks before her death. I put on my best therapist's look of concern and listened.

"Sexual proclivities aside, was there anyone else you three girls came into contact with while you were down at the shore?" I casually asked, trying to steer the conversation around to something more pertinent.



"Some asshole tried to hook up with Millie," she said matter-of-factly. "She iced him pretty quick though."

I looked at her twirling her hair, grinning, and wondered how Millie's death had affected her. Was there any fear? Did she think fate had been good to her, that she had somehow escaped the grim reaper? So close. Someone she knew, a friend, had been mysteriously murdered. Often times I thought about that sort of proximity with dying. Then again, apparently Stevie Jenkins was a, more or less, party girl and was more concerned with the immediate time frame and where her next high was going to come from.

"Was this guy a friend of your boy friend?" I asked her, scribbling in my notebook a few notes to remind me later about.

"Kind of," she answered, walking into the small kitchen and yanking a beer out of the fridge. She held it out to me and I refused, then she shrugged and twisted off the bottle cap, tossing it into the garbage can. "He worked at the beach, with my boy friend."

"He was a life guard too!" I exclaimed. "Really."

"Really," she mocked, giggling. "Why? Is that a big deal or something?"

I ignored her and asked, "What was his name?"

She thought for a moment then said, "I think it was something like...like maybe John...no maybe...I can't remember," she replied, scratching her head. "Like I could remember that. I mean I only saw him that one time and all. Sorry."

"Doesn't matter," I assured her. I glanced over at Peter again and saw that he was holding his own with the other three. One of the guys was asking him how much money he made. "You do remember your boy friend's name, right?"

I had said it in a joking way but she took it differently and shot back, "Like I'm not some retard or nothin'."

"I was just kidding around with you," I said, smiling at her. "Didn't mean to offend you."

"I know-I know, you think I'm some dumb-ass hair stylist," she muttered, taking a drink of her beer. "And a slut too."

The jury was still out on the slut part but I had and have nothing but respect for hair stylists, believe me. I'm speaking as a woman who had a mother that insisted on cutting my hair until I was a senior in High School. If you were to take photos from, say, when I was six years old until I was going on eighteen, they would all be identical in one respect. I had the very same page boy haircut throughout. Finally as my eighteenth birthday loomed, and prom night was on the horizon, I put my foot down and grew my hair out and got it styled. My very first encounter with a hair stylist was in tiny Rumont. Fortunately for me, so it happens, she was formally of Claire and Brian, a chi-chi salon in Boston. Anyway, the bond between a woman and her stylist is a formidable one and is never one to be belittled.

"Quite the contrary," I said, hoping to instill whatever flattery I could muster. "You have a craft and that is admirable."

She looked at me then a smile spread across her face and she announced, "I do, don't I? You're fucking right."

The case was unfolding. Peter and I now had a substantial foothold. The next stop would be Stevie Jenkins ex-boy friend. Hopefully that would point us in the right direction. Personally, I felt we were getting close. These murders were all linked by the beach and its sub-culture. We were going to find the Artist. I sensed it now.

Stevie Jenkins former boy friend was now living in Manhattan. Apparently, so she told me with a smirk, he had been bitten by the acting bug. "He said some agent or somethin' told him he would be a natural on stage. Like, sure. Are you kiddin' me or what? Probably gay."

I assumed she was referring to the supposed agent and said, "So your boy friend met this, you know, agent or whatever on the beach."

"Ex-boy friend," she corrected, taking another sip of her beer. "Yeah, on the beach, he's in his life guard suit, tan, showing his muscles. You can only imagine, right?"

"Yeah," I agreed because, actually, I could well imagine. If not anything else, women--and apparently some men--harbored the same fantasy about life guards. I'm not ashamed to admit it. "So he's living in the city then."

"Yeah, in the East Village," she confirmed. "Some shithole of a place. Sharin' with about a thousand people so I was told. Big actor--sure. Like I believe that. Probably taking it up the ass...well excuse my language."

"At least you are not bitter," I mumbled, smiling back at her.

"Hey, wouldn't you be if he did to you what he did to me," she spat out, glaring at me. "The asshole got me zonked on some shit--some pills--then let his friend rape me. I should have cut his dick off!"

Whoa, I thought. I hadn't expected to encounter this turn of events. "Did you report him to the police?" I immediately asked. "I mean I sure hope you did."

She cast her eyes down for a moment then said in almost a whisper, "No, but I sure as shit should have."

"Why not?" I had to ask.

She tossed her empty beer bottle in the trash can by the refrigerator then replied, "What good would it have done? I mean I was high already anyway. No one would have believed me. That cocksucker didn't have to do that to me though. Like I'm some pass-around garbage or somethin', right? I mean I'm not a whore or anything. I should've let my brother go and beat the crap out of him, that's what I should have done. Believe me, he would have done it too."

The interview was definitely concluded now. There wasn't much chance of gleaning anymore info. Stevie leaned against the kitchen counter and sulked. Any other line of questioning was going to have to go up against her personal tragedy. I didn't want to seem unconcerned or insensitive but there wasn't much I could do. Of course I informed her about seeking some counseling, assuring her that there were organizations out there to help with this sort of matter. She had receded behind a mask of insolence now though and my words weren't penetrating.

I got Peter's attention and we made a joint effort at extricating ourselves from the situation. Placing my business card on the counter, I told Stevie to call me or email if she needed to communicate in any way. She nodded and muttered something I couldn't hear. Trading banter, Peter said his good-byes and we were gone.

"So, what did you find out?" Peter asked when we had gotten back to my car. "Anything good?"

The post interview period was, generally, a time to reflect on what data you had accumulated, but this time I somehow didn't want to digest it. Stevie Jenkins had thrown me off my game a little bit. I can remember Dr. Burke laughing and commenting on how the therapist is expected to be non-judgmental, which was, all in all, impossible. "Do we not come with built-in

and built-up preconceived notions?" he would ask the class. And we all did. It was who we were. The trick was to embrace your set of working prejudices and look outward towards other criterion which shapes the community.

I saw in Stevie Jenkins a young woman, skilled in a trade, attractive, who was straddling a divide. There was a separation there. She was born and bred in a low income environment and given scant guidance in the direction of advancement. Yet, with her talent, she had opportunities. Then again, with the alcoholic parents as a backdrop, she had a genetic disposition that predisposed her downfall. Liquor. Drugs. Lowered expectations, with friends to match, were not going to aid her in her attempt to progress. And then there was her sexual assault, a turning point of predestination. I only hoped that she would be able to climb out of the hole she had fallen into.

The first time I ever went to New York was a long time ago. College to be precise. A love interest, of short duration, had seen me taking the train up to New York, from DC, on several occasions. Somehow, as I remember it, he never wanted to come south, to the Nation's capital. There I'd go, shlepping on the Metro, three hours plus of boring train ride in order to see him.

He was a grad student at NYU. We had met at a conference in DC. Two young, enthusiastic psychology students, bent on saving the world from its mass psychosis, or something like that. There had been coffee after one of the stupefying meetings, then dinner, and the next thing I know we are back at my apartment near the GW campus.

Then I was taking the train, getting off at Penn Station, hopping on the IRT, and we were ensconced in his walkup apartment in the West Village. The duration of the affair lasted only a

few months, but it was, as they say, white-hot. Must have been all that pent up energy we had from studying so hard. At any rate, well, it ended as quickly as it had begun. We never spoke again.

Now, since Peter had only been to the city once before, I was expected to be the scout. Although what I truly knew of the city included two subway stops and maybe four streets in the Village. Memories of a small deli on the corner still stood out because they made the best tuna fish sandwiches I had ever had. Relinquishing the driving to Peter, I was now expected to be the navigator as we headed through the tunnel in route to find a guy named Andy Bell.

Some time had passed since I was involved with my grad student, but I had traveled to the Big Apple several times to meet with my agent and my editor, as well as (too many) trips to the network studios to do vapid interview shows. There was a stretch of time there when I feared that I was a Dr. Joyce Brothers in waiting. My father nipped that development just in time, before I was on every producer's speed dial for when they were in need of a psychological point of view. "You don't want to be a caricature of yourself, do you?" my dad had demanded. No. I had standards, or, at least, I liked to think I did.

My brief stops in the city usually revolved around mid-town, including, if I was detained for whatever reason, a stay-over in an upscale hotel. I had standards, like I said, and that included an expense account of course. At first, well, I was resistant to this type of coddling by my benefactors, but then, after a time, I slowly but surely embraced the working order of things. Being wined and dined is seductive and I was weak willed. I freely admit it.

We weren't going to be heading to mid-town this time around. Our housing plans were up in the air. Since we really didn't know where we'd be heading we hadn't made any plans.

Between the two of us we had several friends to call, but we both balked at that option. My reasons were more of a social nature. I didn't want to intrude. On Peter's part, it was more personal. He had two friends living in New York and they were both females. That he had two ex-girl friends living there, who, incidentally, lived in the very same building, was a source of merriment I fought hard not to tap.

Nevertheless, as we were driving across town, heading to the East Village, I had to declare, "Maybe we should drop in on your old girl friends. See how things are going. You know, catch up a little."

"Can't remember where they live," Peter responded, slowing down and stopping at a red light.

"I'm sure they are in that palm pilot thing of yours somewhere," I needed. "Look under B for broken heart."

"Yuk-yuk," he muttered. "Are you looking which way we're going here or what? Let's try not to get lost."

I let the joke drop and guided as best I could. I had never actually driven in the city. In fact, I was spoiled. I had mostly taken cabs. Jump in, give the driver an address, and hope for the best. The map I had dug out of the glove compartment was mostly inadequate, showing only a few streets in Manhattan.

"That's Washington Square," I announced, pointing to the faux Arc de Triomphe monument. "That's NYU over there."

"Where?"

"There," I said, pointing. "Not much of a campus, huh."

"I was thinking about going there once, you know, way back when," Peter stated, easing his way past a car double parked.

"Really," I said, surprised. "You never told me that. I can't see you at NYU. Seems ridiculous somehow."

"What do you mean by that?" he shot back. "Like I couldn't have--"

"You're not cool enough," I said, laughing.

"Oh, I see, you have to be cool to go there," he said, snickering. "I have you know that I was always cool."

"Sure. Don't forget, I've seen your High School yearbook," I countered, smacking him on the arm.

"Oh, I forgot," Peter said. "That's not fair. I had just gotten my hair cut the day before that picture was taken."

"Don't make me be unkind," I joked. "I also read some of the inscriptions your friends wrote in your book. "See you at computer camp. Huh?"

"Okay, you asked for it, tell me again about the rejection letter from Vassar," Peter exclaimed, suppressing a laugh.

"Touche," I mumbled, making a face at him. "You just had to bring that up, didn't you?"

"Fight fire with fire," he joked.

We were, in so many ways, like brother and sister. I had always regretted confiding in him my irrational sorrow at having not been accepted at one of the Seven Sisters. To be honest, though, I think it had crushed my mother more. She had dropped out of Barnard in her sophomore year to marry my father. "That's what girls did back then, honey," was her usual



explanation to me. College was nothing but a proving ground for future matrimony. I knew better. My mother had always regretted it.

New York was, as always, febrile. Everyone was always talking about the city's energy, which, to me, was nothing but another way of saying it was chaotic. I had enjoyed my visits generally but was happy to leave too. Back to DC, where it was tranquil by comparison. My grad student boy friend had been quick to adopt a superior attitude about being a New Yorker, even if he could only trace his origins back in hours, days, and, at the most, months. I teased him about this pretense and he told me I wouldn't understand because I didn't live in "the most exciting city in the world." Maybe not, but I knew pretentiousness when I confronted it.

"Your husband ever miss New York?" Peter suddenly asked, dodging a taxi changing lanes in front of us.

"He's from Long Island," I replied. "He hates the city."

"Oh, I thought he went to school here."

"No, he went to college at CW Post," I told him, glancing out the window at two cops who were rousting a black man off the sidewalk, where the man had been sleeping.

"What did he study--cereal making?" Peter quipped, giggling.

"Original," I shot back, adding, "maybe you can make time while we are here to do an open mike night at one of the comedy clubs."

"Hey, like I'm not witty," he stated. "All the women say I have a great sense of humor."

I looked over at him and said, "In absence of what exactly?"

"Man oh man are my feelings hurt now," he sang out. "Wait until my therapist hears about this!"

The East Village was crawling with refuse from different genres of cultural expression: leftover Punks, aging Hippies, forgotten Artistes, and a few less recognizable classes. An over achieving veneer had been plastered over the customary seediness of the area by intrepid entrepreneurs eager to get in on the next best thing, the new neighborhood of note. There were ultra-hip boutiques selling, as far as I could tell, trend setting clothes that were out in front of the latest, which leaned heavily towards the flamboyant and (inexplicably) martial as represented by applying a camouflage motif to anything and everything. Along with the boutiques came clubs and coffee houses, with a flavor of the month restaurant thrown in as well. It was all and all a trendiness overload, bordering on the ridiculous.

"I can remember when there was nothing but...wasteland here," I announced, scanning the neighborhood. "I didn't even like to come over here after dark."

"That's it there," Peter exclaimed, pointing, quickly pulling over and stopping at a parking spot that had just been vacated by a van.

It was a grimy walkup, one that had long ago lost its charm. The front steps were cracked and the railing around the front walk was half missing. One of the second story windows was missing and the tenant had wedged a piece of ply wood into the open space, seeing fit to display his artistic nature by painting a large eye ball on the board in red paint. It gave the building the look of a sinister creature, like something from a Steven King story. I could imagine the door opening and swallowing us whole, with a malevolent belch.

"Nice place," I muttered, reluctant to get out of the car. "You can go interview him while I stay in the car."

"Oh, I see, now I can take the lead," Peter needled. "What's wrong, does the famous Dr.

Greene not do interviews in scary as hell urban ghettos? Not in your contract? Need to clear it with your agent first?"

"Okay," I stated, stopping him before he got on a roll. "I just thought you might want to take up the challenge, that's all. But I guess you are not up to it. Figures."

"You're good, Dr. Greene," Peter announced, laughing. "I like how you just turned that around on me. Very good. So clever."

There was a man sitting on the stoop playing a harmonica. He was dressed in a pair of overalls that hadn't, so it seemed, seen the inside of a washer in a long time. He had long, long hair, reaching to almost his waist. Fortunately, he ignored us completely, continuing playing and not very well. We stepped around him and stopped at the door to look at the names of the tenants next to the door buzzer. Although it was dark we could see that the buzzer system hadn't worked in a good many years. Most of the buttons were missing and the metal plate was hanging half off the wall mount. Peter tried the door. It was unlocked.

Inside, on past the walls covered in graffiti, there was, maybe, one light bulb working. Dark shadows filled the stairwell. The guy who we were looking for lived on the third floor. "Glad I got this," I whispered to Peter and produced a pen light that was connected to my key chain. Following the feeble light, we made our way upstairs, carefully stepping around missing tiles and empty beer bottles.

"Oh man, hold up," Peter suddenly hissed, scraping his shoe against the edge of the stairs. "Shine the light down there for a second."

"Where?"

He grabbed the flashlight and trained it on his foot, then exclaimed, "You got to be kidding

me." He dislodged a used condom from the bottom of his shoe. "Now I'm going to have to ditch these shoes," he whined. "And they are my favorites."

"At least the sub-strata is practicing safe-sex," I joked.

"Man, that's disgusting," he muttered, handing the pen light back to me.

On the third floor there were actually two hallway lights working. This was good and this was bad. The good part was that we could see where we were going. The bad part was we could see where we were going.

"I don't want to know what that stuff is all over the wall there," I told Peter, turning away.

"I think we are going to need tetanus shots after this."

Some demented jokester had painted tiny skulls all over the door to Andy Bell's apartment. Drops of lurid red blood dripped from each skull's mouth. Someone's got time on their hands, I thought, as we poised ourselves in front of the door. We exchanged looks, then Peter knocked on the door. We knew someone was there because we could hear music coming from inside. A moment later a man's voice asked through the door what we wanted. I told him who we were and that we wanted to talk to Andy Bell. There was silence for a moment, then we heard the music turned off.

The door opened part way and a man stuck his head in the gap and said, "He's in the loo."

"Okay," Peter said, suppressing a laugh.

"I guess we'll have to wait," I offered, smiling.

The man scratched his chin for a moment then said, "Alright, come in, if you must." He turned away, leaving the door half open. Over his shoulder he shouted out: "I'm going to let them in, aren't I." We heard a muffled response from the bathroom then there was a loud

crashing sound. "Bloody-hell!" the man exclaimed. "Don't hurt yourself." He looked at us and laughed.

The apartment was sparsely furnished, with only a few lawn chairs in the livingroom to sit on. Over by the kitchen they had erected a table out of a plank of wood and cinder blocks. Three mismatched stools were placed around the makeshift table. A large candle in the shape of a naked woman was burning slowly on the plank, giving off a sickly sweet scent. A six pack of empty beer bottles were lined up along one edge, along with a crumpled pizza box. In the far corner a knife was sticking out of the wall, where, apparently, someone had thrown it. Along one wall a large frameless painting was hung. Subject matter: it depicted a headless man holding an assault rifle with smoke drifting out of the barrel.

"I'll be right out," we heard someone shout from the bathroom.

"Neo-nihilism," the man explained, pointing to the painting. "Friend of mine did it."

"Quite a statement," Peter said, nodding with approval.

"Her father was killed over in Iraq," he said solemnly.

"Kind of personal for her, I guess," I mumbled.

"I was hoping you guys were producers," Andy Bell announced, walking into the room and presenting his hand. "I guess not, huh."

"No," Peter said, "we are here to ask you a few questions about the Millie Sanchez murder."

"I didn't do it," he said, forcing a laugh. "Sorry, that might have been in poor taste."

"Wanker," the man muttered, disappearing into one of the back bedrooms.

"My roommate--the musician, don't mind him," Andy informed us, jerking his thumb in the direction of the bedrooms. "He's English. Kind of weird, and all."

"Just the two of you live here?" Peter asked, sounding more policeman than researcher.

"Sometimes his girl friend hangs out here. She's a trip too. From Africa somewhere, I think. Does art," Andy explained. "Lots of weirded out shapes and stuff...on wood. It grows on you."

I studied Andy Bell for a moment. He was about six feet tall, mid-twenties, handsome, with dirty blond hair and blue eyes. Being that he was wearing a tanktop I could see he worked out regularly and had the physique of an athlete. Looks, of course, were never a barometer of homicidal tendencies. I once conducted therapy sessions for a man who wore bow ties and tortoise shell glasses, yet he had killed three people with a straight razor. Bell had an angelic face and a quick smile. He was personable, which, in all likelihood, might aid him in his quest to be an actor. Rejection would probably be something he could handle relatively well.

There was some thumping coming from the back bedroom and Andy said, "Don't ask."

I was trying to assemble the nuts and bolts of this interview in my mind. I had to be quick. With someone like Andy Bell the attention span was going to be short. He had been weaned on MTV and was accustomed to swift changes in stimuli. I wondered how he was able to concentrate on any given script long enough to act it out. Then again, I was being judgmental.

"What we are interested in is the day you met Millie's friend, Stevie, at the beach in New Jersey," I began, slipping into my soothing tone of voice. "Any details about that day would be helpful."

"How is Stevie?" Andy wanted to know. "Nice girl...but kind of wild, you know."

"She's doing fine," I assured him. "We just spoke with her matter of fact."

"Did you," he said, letting a grin creep to the corners of his mouth. "We had some good

times together. Hell, I couldn't keep up with her though." He laughed and walked into the kitchen. "Want something to drink? We got some beer, I think. If my demented room mate hasn't downed it all by now."

"No, we're good," Peter chimed in, glancing over at me and smiling. "Did you know Millie very well?"

"Millie...nah, just saw her a couple times--that's all," Andy answered, poking around in the fridge, sliding stained packages of Chinese food out of the way. "Shit!" he exclaimed, slamming the refrigerator door. "Not a damn thing to drink left. I got some lines to go over tonight and I was hoping to relax with a beer. I don't ask for much!" he shouted towards the back of the apartment. "Asshole."

"So...you didn't really know her," Peter said, urging him to continue.

"No, she's the one and only friend of Stevie's that didn't like to party 24-seven," he explained. "Kind of quiet. Good looking. She had a steady thing going with some guy from her neighborhood...I think." He opened a few cabinets and shifted around several cans, then slammed the cabinet door shut. "All we have in this dump is two cans of beans and some olive oil. What the fuck?"

"Andy," I called out, waiting for him to turn towards me, "this will only take a minute."

"Right, the day at the beach...with Stevie...and Millie," he muttered, walking back into the livingroom. He sat down on a wooden box that was situated in the middle of the room. Stenciled on the side of the box in large letters was: Heart Attack; which, I assumed, was the name of his roommate's band. "What is it you need to know anyway?"

"Well, for one, we would like to know whether or not any of your friends or colleagues had

any contact with Millie that day," I informed him in a friendly but serious tone. "Do you remember her talking to any guys that day when you were there?"

"Talking to her," Andy mumbled, drumming his fingers on the top of the box. "I guess there had to have been. Hey, Millie was pretty hot. Nice bod. Dark skin. I'm sure there was somebody hitting on her, right?"

Peter returned his grin and said, "Undoubtedly, but can you give us some specifics."

I frowned at Peter, trying to give him an indication that he needed to tone down the interview, make it more palatable for Andy's focus. He looked back at me blankly.

"What Peter wants to know is...well...can you recall anybody in particular who might have been hitting on Millie?" I asked, smiling at Andy Bell. "If so, did she respond back at all?"

"I was busy with Stevie but...you know, she could have been talking to some of the guys there...on the beach," he said, shrugging.

"How about this," Peter began, and I could hear some exasperation in his voice, "did any of your buddies from the beach talk to her?"

Andy thought for a moment, then said, "Well shit, we were having life guard trials that day and--"

"What's that?" Peter interrupted.

"It's where guards from around the area get together and have races and stuff," Andy explained. "You've never seen them before?" Andy asked, incredulous. "Don't get to the beach much, huh."

"Oh great," Peter whined, exhaling. "You mean to tell me that there were hundreds of life guards there that day competing, or whatever?"



"Yeah," Andy replied, pulling at some lint on his t-shirt.

This was seemingly a deadend. Fruitless. If there were hundreds of life guards there that day, there were probably an equal number of spectators. Yet I was beginning to sense something bordering on intuition. Ever since we had spoken to Pablo, the life guard in Miami Beach, I had written the life guard angle off. It was simply too easy. I had gone on to other things, other possibilities. I knew right now that Peter was thinking about all the potential perpetrators that could have been there that day at the beach, but I was thinking that we had at last narrowed it down.

"Is there any way possible that we could get a list of the life guards who participated that day?" I asked Andy. "I mean this is an organized thing, right? There has to be a...a roll of some kind, like a line up."

"I guess so," he mumbled, drumming his hands on the top of the box.

"Got to be something on the net," Peter interjected, picking up on my thought pattern.

"These guys are all employed by the townships up and down the coast. Got to be records!" he sang out.

Although this was a breakthrough of sorts, we still had a great deal of leg work ahead of us. There were numerous life guard staffs up and down the shore and each would have to be contacted. After that, we would have to connect names to the competition date and, then, check with boating sales and ownership. The real grunt work lay before us.

We thanked Andy Bell and retreated back to my car. I took over the driving, while Peter jotted down notes. He was so excited he was actually humming, until I reminded him that he was humming the tune to the latest pop song that was being played on the radio incessantly. He

clamped one hand over his mouth and continued writing.

"Let's find a hotel and toss around some ideas," I eagerly suggested, slipping out into traffic on Second Avenue.

"Good idea. I want to hook up my laptop and check the net for some info on Jersey," Peter announced, laughing.

"What's so funny?"

"Funny? Us, I guess," he replied, giggling. "We're all charged up over...over a murderer. It's kind of obscene in a way."

I glanced over at him, gauging his mood, then said, "It's like a fever. I had it last time too."

"Hurry up! I can't wait to crank up my computer," Peter sang out. "We're onto this bastard."

Were we? It was a lead. Nothing more, really. Although we were relatively certain that the Artist was a beach person, we couldn't be sure about him being a life guard. Being a life guard wouldn't fit in financially with our profile of someone sailing up and down the coast on a boat. Peter had suggested he was independently wealthy and liked to slum as a life guard. Plausible? I wasn't certain. Of course, anything was possible. There was no shortage of upper crust offspring drifting aimlessly, so I imagined.

## 6. IN PURSUIT

Again my long weekend was over. I had dropped Peter off at the airport with instructions for him to pursue whatever information he could concerning the life guard angle. As usual, he

had complained about me ordering him around but eventually agreed. I was happy that he wanted to do the nitty-gritty work because I wasn't sure I was up to it. He seemed to be excited about the prospect of tracking down some guy from the Shore who worked as a life guard. The tedium of all the record searches was something I could do without. I had to return to my classes and to my family, of course.

When I got home late Jason had already gone to bed. In a way, I was glad. I didn't want to have to defend myself to him, or, more likely, offer up excuses. There was always tomorrow for that. Instead I went into my study and wrote out some notes on our interviews and started to mentally grasp the timeline and geographical implications of the murders. Eventually my eyes settled on my drafting table, where some of the less lurid photos were thumbtacked. A beautiful Millie Sanchez, apparently deep in slumber, caught my attention. Before this point I had intentionally avoided having empathetic emotions. Because I was exhausted from my trip, I suppose, my defenses were down. A few tears later I retreated to my bedroom, where my husband's gentle snoring greeted me.

"Look who's here, Jerry-buddy!" Jason announced the next morning, as I stumbled into the kitchen, bleary-eyed and grumpy from having not slept long enough.

"Mommy!" my son called out, scattering cereal with his spoon.

"I don't believe it, he actually remembers you," my husband quipped, stooping to clean up the bits of cereal that had fallen on the floor.

"Normally I would be highly amused but I'm too tired for that," I grumbled, making my way towards the coffee. "I don't think I'm going to be able to face my little charges today."

"Don't want to let down the future leaders of tomorrow, hon," Jason sang out much too loud.  
"They pay the bills, you know."

"I can see you've already had your coffee," I muttered, as I stopped to smooch my son's face. He squealed and more cereal cascaded to the floor. "Can't you design some kind of bib for him that'll catch all the food shrapnel, Jase?"

"What would be the fun in that?" he shot back, smiling at me, giving me a peck on the cheek. "I missed you."

"Did not," I exclaimed, laughing. "You missed me taking care of you know who. Who you kidding?"

He frowned at me then said, "I got a lovely mother-in-law for that chore, babe. I mean can't a modern, sensitive type guy miss his wife? Is that beyond the realm of...of--"

"Belief," I interjected, hugging him. "We could have used your expertise...Peter and me. Tough interviews to say the least."

"Oh sure, like you need my help," he stated, wagging his finger at Jeremiah. "You are the great Dr. Sarah Greene, remember. Sherlock Holmes reincarnated. I know because I read it in a magazine. At least I think I did."

"Don't ever lose that wonderful sense of humor, honey," I said, pinching his cheek.

"So, did you accomplish anything in the Big Apple?" he asked in a more serious tone.

"Better yet, was Peter any help, any help at all? I can only imagine."

"Actually he was," I answered, plucking Jeremiah out of his chair and lowering him to the floor, where he immediately clung to my pajama pant leg. "We had a good time. I'd almost forgotten how much fun we used to have together. Yeah, it was fun. And we got some more

info about the case too. That was a bonus, I guess. Peter thinks we are on to something but I'm not so sure. Could be though, you never know."

"A break in the case," Jason sang out in a radio announcer's tone of voice. "Dr. Sarah Greene does it again. Tune in next week to find out who the killer is."

"Isn't it time for you to be going to work," I chided, leading our son over to him. "And time to get Jerry ready for day care too?"

"Yes sir," he said, saluting. "What would I ever do without you here to tell me what to do?"

I detected more than sarcasm in his tone but let it go, and replied, "You would probably end up a devoted father living a quiet life on a farm, never to remarry."

He snorted, then mumbled, "Not with all those horny coeds living right down the road."

"I heard that," I said, as he disappeared up the stairs with Jeremiah in tow.

As a couple we had always utilized banter as a way to assuage our mutual grievances. However, of late, we had resorted to it more and more and I was beginning to feel uneasy about it. Several times I had made mental notes to broach the subject with my husband but had not pulled the trigger, so to speak. I was fearful that it might instigate something that I wasn't prepared to deal with at the time. Since our lives had undergone so many changes in the past few years I was reluctant to add any more wrinkles. I was being prudent but I was also being dishonest with myself. Even my mother had made a few comments about our verbal exchanges. That in itself was reason enough to stem the tide of uneasiness between us.

I had two lectures to conduct that day. One class was for fourth year students and was, as far as these things went currently, a pleasure to deliver. As to the other class, well, it was an intro course where what I lectured on seldom went beyond what was in the chapter that had been

ordered to read. The students, for the most part, were taking the course in order to fulfill a requirement and were more than happy to complete a multiple choice exam and call it a semester. It was what almost every academic has to trudge through in order to complete their teaching duties.

Although it wasn't my policy, and I tried in earnest to discourage it, each and every one of the students in that class had presented a copy of my first book to be signed. There they would be, materializing in front of my desk, book in hand, sheepishly requesting my signature. Some would want me to add something by way of personal acknowledgment and the others would prefer something more generic. The former, so I supposed, would take the book home and put it in their family's bookcase, while the latter group would soon be hawking the inscribed book on ebay. True. I checked. After being tipped off by one of my students, I checked on the net and sure enough my limited fame was indeed worth something to someone. I wasn't flattered by this. Quite the contrary. It made me, in a way, queasy, as if by being a commodity (worth not much by the way) I was somehow for sale to whatever bidder there was out there.

"Literary chattel," Peter had said, when I told him of this new development. "You have become literary chattel."

Maybe. Then again wasn't everything for sale in contemporary times? Corporate America had made it so. Along with a rapacious marketing army every facet of life was marketable and made saleable. Not to channel my father or anything, but the denomination of currency, when applied to living life, was up for grabs. Commercialism had made the journey from childhood to adulthood an obstacle course of inculcated distractions which shape and mold our decisions. Although my son was yet a half a decade old, he could recite brand names for the objects of

desire he wanted. If that wasn't a triumph of the mercantile demons nothing was.

I arrived almost five minutes late for my first lecture of the day, due in part to the day care instructor wanting to tell me that my son wasn't cooperating with the other children during one of the nouveau drills they had concocted in order to better train the children. I really hated to ask what exactly the specific activity was but my usual curiosity got the better of me. As I understood it, the children were expected to exchange toys every ten minutes on a rotational basis. Sounded reasonable, I suppose. "It reduces any envy complexes," so I was informed. I assured her that I would talk to my son, the incorrigible one, that very night, after day care. Then after that I ran in to a friend on the street and before I knew it I was running late.

Fortunately we lived in a small town and as with most towns the pace was decidedly slow, or, as my father was fond of saying, torporific. Add to that the strange circadian rhythms of college life and it made for glacial movements in time. Besides, most of my students in this particular class would have been elated for me not to show up at all. After fifteen minutes, if a professor didn't show, all bets were off. Almost as if a starter pistol had been fired, out the door they would flee. I had once been approaching my classroom after being late past the magical quarter hour and from down the hall all I saw was a stampede of youth, heading for the door. Admittedly, I had thought, for an instant, about not calling them back. In the end, however, I earned my salary, adding another wasted hour to their lives, and mine.

My new born cynicism had been cultivated after several years of teaching. Often times I wondered how in the world my father had managed to do it. Sure every once in a while there was a gem, a student that made it worthwhile, one that showed promise, or, at least, desired to learn. Was that even enough? I was beginning to wonder. Even after having my ego stroked by

eager students, the ones who did the work and kept beaming smiles of gratitude plastered on their faces, it wasn't gratifying. Most times my work just seemed silly.

I had actually spoken with my father about this and he had chalked it up to a professor's usual brush with disillusionment. "Look, sweetie, we all go through this. Like every job out there this one has a dreariness aspect to it. There will be days, you'll see. Times when it all comes into focus."

This sounded like some new-age folderol, but I replied, "After doing this I now really respect you for what you've done all of these years. You deserve a medal."

He had laughed and exclaimed, "NO medals. Helping advance society is honor enough."

I didn't know whether or not to believe him. Surely he was displeased with some of the, shall we say, dullards we had to come into contact with. If not them, then there were the monied cognoscenti, the ones who had their parents (the alumni who bequeathed the big bucks) to thank for being a part of the student body. Even Peter, who was teaching some courses at a local private college, one that was affiliated with a major religion and enjoyed a certain monetary endowment because of it, had upbraided me for being too "whiney." Further elaborating, he had told me that in the scheme of things what I was doing was something to be admired, if not enjoyed. I immediately thought, of course, that his students were almost certainly of a better caliber than mine, even if the aggregate SAT scores demonstrated otherwise.

Truthfully, I hadn't wanted to teach. Not at all. Research would have been my choice. Lock me away with statistics, something I could pore over and, odd as it sounds, commune with. Oh, okay, I suppose I would have liked to be in the field, so to speak. That is, you know, out



there solving psych riddles and how they impacted on the populace. Horror of horrors, I had actually been approached to do a radio show, one in which I was to, purportedly, "heal people's bent minds." That is a quote from some producer, who thought that I could syndicate, go national, and make loads of money. At least he was honest.

There were plenty of times that I felt that I wasn't being honest, honest with myself and with the students, not to mention the administration. Imparting knowledge was supposed to be an earnest pursuit, right? Pedagogy, so they say, was historically what made the world go round. After all, there did have to be a succeeding generation and they would have to know something, however elementary. Yet did they need to know what I was offering up several times a week? Maybe. Maybe not. Was it vital that they had a working knowledge of the schools of psychology in order to survive out there beyond the campus gates? If so, then I could have reached a great deal more people by being on the radio. Just think, you can be on in radio markets all over the country, or something to that effect, so I recall some suit from a radio conglomerate telling me. Just great, I could cure lost souls between ads for automobiles and local restaurants.

"You didn't take it!" so said Peter after I told him I had turned down the radio gig. "Are you nuts or what?"

"Guess so," I had muttered, ashamed of being ashamed of my decision.

"I'd give my right you-know-what to get in on that contract," he announced. "How much money are we talking about anyway? No, no don't tell me. My stomach couldn't take it."

So there I sat at my desk in my tiny office on campus, with the photo of Jason and Jeremiah propped up next to a stack of tests to grade. Even though it was multiple choice and therefore

easy to mark, I couldn't bring myself to start on them. As soon as I opened the folder and saw the first simple question, accompanied by four neatly aligned answers I knew my heart would sink. It wouldn't be long before I would come across a question that some well meaning student had gotten wrong, some answer so at odds with any rational conclusion it would make me want to tear the test into shreds. Then I would make my obligatory mark, a red X, and move on to the other questions. Inevitably, I would put a face to the name on the paper and try not to direct my scorn at his visage floating through my mind. Finally would come the dreaded and fateful letter grade, right there, taking a prominent position on top of the page. Another addition to the person's personal record, something to dog him or her as they went through life dodging the coming pitfalls.

Later, after I could procrastinate no longer, I took up the challenge and finished my hated clerical chores. Unlike other professors, the ones who delegated minion labor to obsequious grad students, I chose not to work with assistants. Didn't like the intrusion. Well, to be accurate, I had enlisted a couple grad students my first year of teaching but soon regretted it after having to deal with their petty infighting and one upmanship. Who knew I could be adored so readily? I had democratically selected a boy and a girl, both prospective therapists with wide eyed enthusiasm. I had actually gone through no less than a dozen prospects before deciding on them.

"Just toss them the work you don't want to do," had been my father's advice. He was an old hand at managing GA's, having done it for so many years. He was, in fact, still in touch with many of his former academic slaves. I could remember, as a child, seeing them hanging around the house at my parent's many soirees. They were always the ones standing in the background, smiling, nodding a lot, and eager to help my mother with the drinks and what all. They had,

usually, even been amenable to supervising me in a pinch. That my father was so willing to exploit them came as a surprise to me, but, then again, he saw it as one of the perks that went with receiving low pay.

"She's the last one, you can believe that!" my mother had screamed one day from the bottom of the stairs. She was directing her comment, or, rather, dictum, to my father who was cowering in their bedroom. At the time I was too young to understand but later, although partially repressed, I had remembered what went on. Her name was Leslie and she was from Albany. Tall. Long black hair. And vividly red painted finger nails. That is how I remember her. She had done her undergraduate work in Boston, I think and then moved on to graduate work in some arcane corner of European history. I like to think my father was above reproach in this incident but I couldn't be positive. It would rapidly become one of those family secrets no one dares divulge.

My parents never spoke of it again, at least not to me at any rate. The very nature of academia and its insulation lent a hand in libidinal transgressions. The graduate student/professor relationship was tailor made for intimate shenanigans. As with many human interactions, there was the gains quotient, which is a fancy way of asking: What can I get out of this? For the grad student, well, it was usually a leg up in the degree attainment derby, or, sometimes, just the end result of what a colleague once labeled "tweed worship." This was, most times, a female to male one way street; although I will say that sexual mores being what they are that was rapidly becoming a two lane highway.

I was, I liked to think, avoiding any of those potential landmines by refusing any assistance. After that experience the first year it was an easy decision anyway. The bickering between my

two assistants was persistent and annoying. By the end of the first semester they had resorted to sabotaging one another's work. Not again, so I reminded myself.

Spring was rapidly advancing. The Chipwa River, usually torpid and overlooked, was swollen with the snow melt off. Flowers were blooming in the pasture behind our house and my friends were beginning to drop hints about horse back riding on our farm. We had taken to opening the windows in the house a crack to let in the cool, crisp air. Best of all, you could drive the roads without having to worry about becoming snowbound.

I had always loved Springtime in my hometown. After the harsh winters, it seemed like a reward from nature. You endured the single digit days, the freezing wind, and the blowing snow and then came the new leaves on the trees, the honey suckle fragrance of wild flowers, and the promise of warm summer evenings. "Another rebirth is around the corner," my father would often times chortle, smiling, undoubtedly thinking about all those outdoor projects he wanted to pursue when daylight savings time permitted. My mother would be impatiently waiting to plant her tomatoes, which enjoyed a certain renown on our street, turning up in just about everyone's salads throughout the summer. And as an added bonus from mother nature a general feeling of euphoria would spread across the town, leaving almost no one untouched. More smiles. More laughter. It was truly like a metamorphosis.

I may have been slacking off in the weeks following my excursions to the Shore area, but Peter hadn't been. He was digging through the internet, compiling lists of names as prospective suspects. His emails were cluttering up my inbox like unwanted spam. I tried to be happy that he was excited about his detective work yet I was struggling to share in his enthusiasm. My

homelife and work was swamping me. I had decided to make an effort to reconnect with my husband more, establish our shared bond again.

Jeremiah, my son, was also figuring into the equation of course. I realized I didn't really want to neglect him at this juncture in his life anymore than all of my fellow contemporary wives/mothers were. You always heard about the balancing act we young women had to do. A few of my friends had suggested I sign on a nanny and I thought that was preposterous. "Get an au pair, for heaven's sake," a colleague had stated. "Like you don't have the bucks." Money wasn't the issue, I informed him in a tone of voice that gave away my irritation. While, to be honest, I had visions of a nanny underfoot, completing another day of drudgery at the hands of my little disobedient son.

"If you find one make sure she's unattractive, you know," a neighbor had said, raising her eyebrows. I got it. No need for a young, country girl from, say, Denmark, traipsing around the homestead wearing a tiny mid-driff and cutoffs, using her melodic accented English to entice my husband. Surely I wasn't that insecure, was I? I was, of course. I didn't own any mid-driff tops and the only shorts in my closet came from L.L. Bean, which were stylish but hardly going to land me on the cover of Maxim or Stuff magazines. And, in the interest of completing my confession, I didn't even own any bikinis any longer, succumbing to the mommy post pregnancy syndrome that dictated that no one was going to see my stomach in public ever again.

No, I was going to be a good wife and mother, with a little career thrown in. That was the plan. We had constructed a good life for ourselves tucked away in Upstate New York. We had a comfortable life, complete with family, intellectual stimulation, mutual love, and a future. Oh, okay, it wasn't exactly a greeting card idyllic fantasy either. After all my mother did live just a

mile down the road.

Peter called me one Saturday morning. I had just returned from my parent's house, weighed down with several containers of my mother's latest baking creations, and was really not in the mood to be discussing the case. Of late, to be completely honest, I had been contemplating handing the case over to him entirely. I could just hear him exclaiming, "You're bailing on me!" I would, of course, hem and haw before saying, "This is your chance to score some celebrity pixie dust." He would tell me that he didn't care about that, but we would both know that he did, so he would have to change tack and say something else. I would assure him that I would be there for him if he needed some extra help along the way. He would mutter under his breath then announce for me to hear that he thought I was making a mistake. I would laugh and tell him that I would expect for him to send me a free copy of his book. Oh, and I knew a few agents he could contact. I would put a good word in for him too.

Although I was conflicted, and suffering from mommy lethargy, I was still motivated deep down in my psyche. I had the photos on the drafting board to remind me each and every day; that and Peter's endless emails and faxes. It had taken me over two weeks to remove those girls, the victims, from my thoughts, pushing them further back into the recesses of my mind. Then there was, as they say, the challenge.

"I've made some headway," Peter said into the phone, breathing heavily.

"Is this an obscene phone call?" I queried, laughing.

"Funny. I just got back from running," he explained. "It's already hot down this way."

"Nice here," I informed him, glancing out the window at the wild flowers blooming in the

back pasturage. "Cool but sunny."

"Enough with the weather. I've been digging and come up with a few...a few items that may pan out. It hasn't been easy, believe me. These little towns aren't the most cooperative and that keep crappy records too. I hope I don't have to drive up and down the Jersey coast to--"

"Shore," I corrected.

"Excuse me, shore," Peter continued, sighing heavily. "That may be the only way we're going to get an accurate assessment. We are dealing with a lot of potential candidates, you know. Kind of daunting."

"I bet," I said.

"You okay?" he suddenly asked. "You sound...kind of funny."

"I do," I said evasively. "What are you talking about?"

"Whatever," he muttered. "Look, did I call at a bad time or something?" he wanted to know.

"No, it's just that...that I've been doing some thinking lately and--"

"Oh, not that," he joked. "It's always a bad sign when you say something like that."

"I just was feeling like maybe I wasn't into this thing we have going here, you know," I said, wishing I had phrased it better. "I've been busy with school and all, you know, Jeremiah, Jason...and my mother. It can be overwhelming at times, I guess. There's certain priorities that take up my time. I mean last time I was doing something like this I didn't have...other things in my life, right? You understand, don't you?"

Peter didn't answer right away then said, "Are you telling me that you are bowing out? Is that it? I mean I don't know really what you are trying to say. Is that it? It's understandable, I suppose."

"It is?"

"Well, sure, why not? You have your family to think about. Can't leave you with much time. Have to think about them and all."

"Well, of course," I exclaimed, letting some irritation seep into my voice. "That goes without saying."

"You're not getting angry--are you?" he asked, flustered.

"No, don't be silly," I shot back.

He sighed, then said, "Can I ask you something? What in the hell are we talking about?"

We both laughed, then I replied, "I was hoping you knew."

Our moment of crisis had, apparently, passed. It was time to get back to the case at hand. Peter faxed me a portion of the data he had been collecting, including names--lots of names--and some contact phone numbers. He had been meticulous, reminding me of just how compulsive he could be when he wanted things to be orderly. I couldn't help but think back to our college days together, when he was always carrying around a second bag, a small day pack, full of his latest project. Crunching numbers was like a hobby with him, or so it seemed. We had taken Statistics together and, surprise-surprise, he was the star of the class. While I, on the other hand, was at best a sloppy statistician, finding endless ways to screw up the works, or so said my professor, a wizened (old) gentleman who was definitely from the old school. I often times believed that he didn't quite approve of the whole female in the class thing. He managed to make us feel like academic intruders.

"It's the old left brain right brain division," Peter would often times state, chuckling. "You know what I mean, Sarah. We men use the right brain and you women use what's leftover."



"I'm pretty sure that what you just said doesn't make any sense," I would shoot back, not amused, because by now I was sensitive to any semblance of denigration about women in the trenches of academia.

"Let me apologize," Peter would announce with mock sincerity. "I didn't realize you were so sensitive, but then, of course, that comes with your gender, correct?"

"You know what else comes with my gender, datumhead? It is the inalienable right to slap jackasses when we feel it is merited," I warned.

"Enough said," he exclaimed, backing up a few paces.

I had stacked Peter's faxes on my desk, where they sat there mocking me, daring me to pick them up. Go a head. Peruse. What have you got to lose? My sanity, perhaps.

Then on a slow Tuesday evening, after we had put Jeremiah down for the night, I was sitting in my study going over the rest of the week's class schedule. I had scheduled a quiz for that Thursday in my more advanced class, one that I particularly enjoyed teaching, and hadn't yet begun to work it up. I was stalling. Procrastination was something I had inherited from my father, who was a worldclass procrastinator. I had always found it convenient to blame my father for this personal failing, naturally. At any rate, I eventually got things done.

This time around I was sitting there and had just started in on devising the quiz when my eyes drifted towards the drafting board. The room was mostly dark and the only illumination was coming from my desk lamp. My eyes caught a glimpse of the one photo of Millie I had tacked up on the drafting table top. The Artist had positioned her in such a way that she appeared to be sleeping. He had, apparently, even arranged her long, flowing hair around her face and on down to her shoulders. Unlike the other victims, he had left her lifeless body clothed in her underwear.

The forensic shot had been taken directly above the body, giving the photo a vaguely artistic appearance like you might find in one of the more depraved hi-gloss magazines, the ones that are all about edgy production and hipper than thou mantras.

Add to that the sunglasses. There was a certain unsettling quality about them. In death, the victim's eyes were shielded. Peter and I had discussed this aspect of the crime scene. Was it significant? Could there be a progression here of some sort? Did the Artist have a master plan that was leading somewhere? These were questions that I had balked at answering because they were too arduous to tackle.

I dropped my pen and walked over to the drafting table and stood there for a moment. In the half light I could just make out one of the tattoos that had been applied just above Millie's right breast. The Artist had etched out a vine of sorts, one that extended all the way down to her pubic area, where it disappeared below her panties. What had it been like for her to endure what had to have been hours of tattooing, I wondered? Did she know her ultimate fate? Had unmitigated fear left her mind defenseless against the ministrations of a mad man?

Returning to my desk, I tossed my notes for the Thursday quiz aside and dug into the faxes. My advanced class got a reprieve. That would make them happy. The psychology course would have to wait for now. It was time to make some headway and get whatever avenging I could accomplish underway.

Detective Santos in Miami Beach, as Peter informed me, had been of little help. He was, more or less, indulging us. Peter had briefed him on our work up north but he had apparently been unimpressed. I'm sure he saw us as too amateurs meddling in matters that were in his territory of expertise. We were. Then again, or so I liked to think, you could never receive too

much help in an investigation.

"He thinks I'm a flake," Peter had complained during one of our phone calls. "I told him all about our little fact finding trip but nothing seemed to phase him much. One of the other detectives--a real A-hole--called it the Nancy Drew complex. Boy, it sure does wonders for my self-image to be referred to by a girl's book character. I mean, really, couldn't he have said something more a long the lines of Hardy Boys or something? Sam Spade?"

"Look, Pete, I think he was referring more to me than you," I assured him, not realizing just how conceited it was going to sound.

"Oh, of course, I don't count," he whined. "Should have known. I'm just the assistant flake in all this."

"Smooth your ruffled feathers birdbrain," I chided, laughing, trying to make light of my gaff. "I mean think about it, do you think any of those detectives even know who Sam Spade was? Doubt it. I'm surprised you even know who he was."

"I feel better now," he muttered.

"Did you tell him about the life guards?" I asked, trying to veer the conversation in a different direction. "I would think--"

"Of course I did," Peter assured me. "I mean I sat on the info for a little while like we agreed, long enough to get started on the data stuff, but I did finally tell Detective Santos. Nada. He just shrugged. It was like trying to sell a...a project for funding. Remember? Smile. Give your presentation. Hope the buttheads agreed to take out their wallets. Same thing. I told him the facts. Wasn't interested. I think they think the killer is a transient type or something."

"A what?" I exclaimed, laughing. "Come on. Be serious. I really don't think some guy is

drifting around the country doing this in between odd jobs. That's ridiculous. What's next? Are they going to say the killings were unrelated?"

Peter sighed on the phone, then said in a weary voice, "This is getting too involved. I mean it. I'm spending too much time on this thing, this project. If I'd known it was going to take so much of my time I would have thought twice about it."

Now Peter's enthusiasm was flagging, I thought. He hadn't been prepared for the boring aspect involved in a murder case. He was, so I believed, under the impression that it was going to all be glamorous. I thought from the very beginning I had disabused him of that notion. Then again, my uncomfortably close exposure to homicide had unfolded in a relative quick timespan. The Flowers case was like a blink of the eye in comparison, concluding in months, not years.

"Maybe you should take a break for a while," I offered. "I can certainly identify with what you're thinking. It's funny. We seem to be spending half of our time trying to keep each other's morale up. First you do it for me, then I do it for you. I guess we aren't cut out for this kind of work, huh?"

He was quiet for a moment, then said, "I gotta go. I was suppose to meet a friend to play tennis fifteen minutes ago. Look, Sarah, I'm alright about this. It just gets, you know, so frustrating dealing with the...well, primarily the police. They think I'm some dufus or something. Are we stuck in a really bad B movie here? Tell me we're not. I mean if we are don't I get to have some better scenes to be in?" Peter joked, laughing.

"Maybe I should come down there again," I announced before I had even given it much thought. "I was thinking recently that the Artist might still be there, down your way. Think about it for a minute. If he is a beach person wouldn't he stay down there where it's warm?"

"I don't know," Peter answered, sighing again. "Wouldn't he want to move on to another location or something? Another setting. Different victim pool, if you know what I mean. I think this guy would be motivated by novel stimuli, something to stir him up more. Does that sound idiotic or what?"

"No, it doesn't, really," I told him, glancing over at the drafting board again, where I could see a glint of lamp light illuminating the stone cold face of Julie Skorski, the first victim. "Then again, though, I think this guy might be cocky. He's killed three girls that we know of and there might be more. So far he's gone on his merry way without even a hint of police detection. If you ask me I think he is about due to slip up. He is going to get careless somewhere along the line. Has to."

"You might be right," Peter agreed. "The law of averages are against him. Some girl is going to put up a fight and get away. At least I hope so."

## 7. THE SUN IS SHINING

At my suggestion, Peter had done some cross-referencing of life guard names in the South Florida area and boat owner names registered at local marinas. Nothing had turned up unfortunately. These results weren't conclusive. It was possible the boat was registered under another name, or, perhaps, the Artist was "gunkholing," which meant that he was illegally anchoring at different locations within a short distance from shore. There was a whole community of boaters who called South Florida home during the winter months, choosing to

anchor here and there in the many waterways around the three different counties.

We had discussed this aspect of our theory. Peter believed that the Artist would have to be in the Miami Beach area in order to hold down a beach job. He was assuming the Artist didn't have a car. I argued that just maybe the Artist had his car driven down each year with one of those services advertised in the paper, the ones that promised to have your car delivered to your door within a specified time frame. A friend of Jason's parents had their car driven from Long Island to West Palm Beach, then reversed the process when summer rolled around. It was possible.

"No, I don't think so," Peter had stated adamantly. "This guy is a water guy--I just know it. He is into living on the water, by the water, in the water...you get the idea. I really think having a car would be too much of a drag on his lifestyle."

"Are you getting psychic on me or what?" I teased.

"Just a feeling I got," he countered, not amused. "Now, of course, he might have a scooter or something like that."

"A scooter?" I mumbled, trying not to laugh.

Miami Beach was infested with them. You could hear their distinctive motorized whine all over the claustrophobic side streets of South Beach. They were cheap to buy and made getting around in traffic easier, not to mention helped with the ongoing parking problem, which was at a premium. Shops selling scooters of every description, and color, had sprouted up on the avenues and streets all over Miami Beach. Even with a scooter though the Artist's mobility would have been restricted to a relatively small area. It wasn't like he was going to jump on one and zoom up I95, cruising to the far flung corners of the three county area. Traffic on 95 would eat a tiny

scooter alive.

"You know though, taking a scooter on 95 would be suicide," Peter informed me in a serious tone. "No, our guy likes to keep it local, for sure."

We discussed it further, with me laying out the possibilities of contact in the New Jersey area with the two victims. With an unfolded map of the Garden State, I had examined the waterways and surrounding townships. How would he have lured victim number one, Julie Skorski onto his boat? If the man doesn't have a car, then what does he use as transport? Nothing seemed to make any sense with our theory.

"Julie was a stripper who liked to go to the beach," I offered, running my finger from the town where she worked to the beach where her body was found. "The Artist had to have met her on the beach, right? That way he entices her to his boat, in her car, and does the deed. Sounds possible. He's charming. He has a boat. He has a line. She shows up...and the rest happens."

Peter thought for a moment then said, "You're right. He didn't meet her in the strip club. What she does for a living is immaterial really. He meets her on the beach. He sees her in a bathing suit, probably a revealing one, and goes from there. She meets the criteria for what he wants in a victim. Nice looking. Unblemished body. Unblemished by tattoos that is. He chats her up, as they say. She's amenable. The trap is set. I mean, think about it, he is probably a good looking guy--tan, muscles, and all. Then he tells her he lives on a boat, that has got to sound pretty cool, right? You'd fall for that line of--"

"I would," I shot back, laughing.

"Oh sure," Pete joked, and his reedy laugh echoed over the phone. "You'd be weak in the knees for sure. 'A boat, you live on a boat,'" Peter sang out in a girlish voice. "'What kind of

boat?"

"Oh please, like I care about boats," I said, shaking my head. "I've actually never even been on a boat."

"All the better," Peter countered. "You'd be all the more excited about jumping on board, with your fantasies of the high seas in full swing. You women are all the same."

"We are," I exclaimed. "You really are a closet misogynist, aren't you? I never realized before."

"Okay, what about this. Just how big would the boat have to be for you to be impressed? Be honest now. Sixty footer? Bigger?"

"Like I equate sexual gratification with yachts. Are you insane, Peter? Now I'll grant you some girls would find the idea of a boat enticing but not all. I mean, come on." Peter was correct in some ways however. Living on a boat in close proximity to the beach scene, in season, would have been probably a "turn on" for some women. Also, the size of the boat would have increased the attraction two or three fold.

The Artist would have lured them on board then exacted his torture; after came the murders. Surely someone would have seen one of the three victims go onboard the boat. As Peter had said before, the Artist would have had to sail the boat away from any surrounding boats to preserve his privacy. Marinas were usually notoriously crowded, with each boat sharing space with several slips. Noise travels over water with uncanny precision. It would have been almost impossible to keep any stray sounds from seeping out of his boat below deck.

"Okay, so he gets her on board his boat and then casts off and heads out to a predetermined location, one that he has already scoped out for seclusion. Remember now, the victim is excited



about going on a boat ride. He lets her steer the boat. He softens her up with wine and drugs. By the time he reaches the spot she's probably incapacitated."

"There must be plenty of waterways up and down the area for him to anchor. In private. No interruptions," I chimed in.

"Sure," Peter agrees. "Then he has her below deck, in his dungeon or whatever, and the real fun starts for him. She's out cold. He lays her out and then takes out his instruments, the tattoo thing and goes to work. Do you think he has some piece of art work in mind or does he just make it up as he goes along?"

I thought for a moment then said, "I don't know but I think you might be wrong about the victim being out. I think he shackles them or whatever and waits for them to regain consciousness. Yeah. He wants them to be cognizant of his actions. He wants to see the terror. That is part of his ritual. The fear in their eyes. That and his explanation."

"Explanation?"

"You know, how and what he tells them he is up to," I explained. "He would want that to be a big part of the torture ritual. It would fit in with his desire to inflict his form of harm. But you see it is not really violent. No. This guy probably talks in a soothing voice, all the while he's digging a needle into various parts of their body. He's watching their reactions to the realization that he is, essentially, defacing their bodies, or at least radically changing it. And he is also watching their blood ooze out too. This has to be a blood rite of some as well. Don't you think? I mean when you are getting a tattoo there is blood."

"You are sick, Greene," Peter stated, and I could just imagine him shaking his head. "I'm not so sure he would care about their reaction. I'm thinking that their epidermis is nothing but a

canvas, a live one sure, but nevertheless a canvas. And if they squirm, I can see him hitting them; although the ME said there wasn't much in the way of bruising. Just at the wrist and ankles, where he had them restrained."

"This guy isn't your ordinary rapist type," I told him, trying not to sound emphatic because, of course, I had no way of knowing for sure. "Think about how he lives for a minute. He is a hedonist of sorts. You know, the beach life, the boat, living the good life, even if it is on a small scale. I just don't see him brutalizing his victims."

"You call tattooing them all over their bodies charming?" Peter exclaimed. "Torture comes in many different guises, right? This bastard is brutalizing them in a bunch of different ways...methods. We really don't know exactly what he does when he incapacitates his victims, do we? Sure he charms them at first but then he might go through some sort of change, a metamorphosis. Then what? Who knows?"

"You might be right, Pete, but I just have a feeling this guy is about something else...something that is deeper in its twisted way," I explained. "He is a connoisseur of murder."

"Oh boy, there's a blurb for your next book," Peter announced, laughing. "Can I at least write something for the inside jacket this time? Come on, Dr. Greene, please."

"Talk to my publisher," I sneered, then smiled.

We were just brainstorming, and not too precisely. The Artist, as homicidal predator, was an enigma. Theories aside, who could be sure what made this guy tick? Profilers could either be mysteriously accurate or way, way off base when it came to predicting the murderer's habits and practices. It was an unscientific field that was rife with speculation and phony statistics. I would never have the audacity to present my views as science. Yet, in this case, I did have a sort of

intuition. It was a vague feeling that this guy, the Artist, was taking the Greco/Roman concept of Hedonism a little too far. Finding pleasure in death, in inflicting death, was part of his motivation, and melding it with an artistic flourish only heightened his excitement at the conclusion wrought by his hands.

"So you're coming back down," Peter stated, as I could hear him shuffling papers on his desk.

"Should I get a hotel this time around?" I asked in an artificially polite tone.

"No, don't be silly," he answered, snorting. "Just pay me what you were going to pay the hotel--the Breakers Hotel."

"I was going to stay at the Motel 6," I countered, snickering. "I like their vending machines."

At just that moment I had decided to fly back down to Florida. For the past few weeks I had been putting off deciding, but then I impetuously made the decision. I had to. I was sure the Artist was in Florida somewhere. Whether or not he was still in the South Florida area I didn't know. He could have taken his floating torture chamber further up the coast, maybe to Jupiter, or even Daytona. There were countless beach communities up and down the Floridian peninsula. As a result, there was an endless supply of victims as well.

I would use Spring break at the college to spend time with Peter seeking out and running down leads. If all went according to plan I could log five or six days in the Sunshine State. The only complicating factor was that I hadn't yet divulged my decision or even my intentions to my husband. Normally I wasn't one to shrink from confrontation, something being a therapist had trained me for, but I dreaded doing verbal combat with Jason over this. He had been fantastically

understanding to date. Even his usual sniping had been put on hold for the time being. That he was willing to indulge my amateur sleuthing was testimony to his maturing nature, or so I like to think. There was always the possibility that he no longer cared that much about what I did with my free time. Small town apathy had indeed overtaken him in some respects. Or was it lethargy?

The day before I was to leave I caught Jason as he was heading out the door for a Volunteer Fireman's meeting. He was wearing his yellow t-shirt, with the Rumont Volunteers emblazoned across the front in bright red block letters, under his jacket. I cadged a kiss from him then laid it out there for him to digest. He stepped back and looked at me for a moment, a moment that stretched into what seemed like a half hour. I smiled sheepishly.

"I thought I could get some good, vital work done with Pete," I explained, trying to sound upbeat.

"Are you sure you and Petey aren't having an affair or something?" my husband joked.

"You caught me," I sang out, laughing. "Been going on since college, I'm afraid. We tried to break it off but, well, you know..."

"Don't get sunburned," he said, disappearing out the door.

I had half expected such a reaction. He didn't approve of my hobby. No surprise there. My mother's reaction was more unexpected. She told me, and I'm paraphrasing, that I was stupid to be going off on "wild escapades," which made me laugh. She wasn't amused.

"Mom, I'm working on something, that's all," I told her, squelching my laughter. "Pete and I are involved in a project and I have to go back down to Florida to get some more information."

"You have your career and family right here, you know," she stated, hands on hips, apron

on, the delicate aroma of just baked muffins filling the air of her immaculate kitchen. "Why do you have to go off doing who knows what anyway?"

"Peter asked me to help me with his case," I explained. "I already told you this, at least three times."

"You are not being fair to Jason...or little Jerry," she said, pointing a stirring spoon at me. "You are going to lose your husband if you don't watch out."

"What?" I exclaimed, flabbergasted. "Mom, don't be silly. Jason might not approve exactly but we aren't having problems over this. Where do you get this stuff from?"

She eyed me for a moment then said, "I have eyes, you know."

This sounded ominous but I let it go and instead asked, "Where's dad? I need to ask him a few things about the college."

My mother mumbled something inaudible and returned to her baking. I went upstairs and checked to see if my father was in his study. He wasn't. Then I remembered it was Friday and he had a History department meeting. I wrote out a brief note and left it on his desk. At least I wouldn't have to deal with his disapproval too.

It was hotter now. And humid, a harbinger of what lay ahead when summertime arrived in Florida. Living in the semi-tropics, after the vernal equinox, took courage. Without the life giving nourishment of AC inhabiting the land of alligators and hurricanes would have been impossible, history notwithstanding. Of course, before the advent of air conditioning, South Florida and environs closed up shop come April, with the wiser residents fleeing northward in advance of the descending heat. Peter had told me some crackers lingered on, living a twilight

existence, continually at odds with mother nature, dodging storms and insects. He had seen photos in grainy black and white depicting those hardy souls, the ones who displayed indomitable will if not lunacy, which was, apparently, the two main ingredients of the pioneering spirit.

Peter had picked me up at the airport, the one in Fort Lauderdale this time around. This airport was suffering through some serious growing pains too, but at the very least the arriving passenger didn't get that distinctive whiff of the Third World when they struggled out of the cool terminal into the tepid sea breeze. I had to share the airplane cabin, coach naturally, with a group of college students from some university in New England. They were heading to South Beach, the little known destination for Springbreak for those who could afford it. Judging by their designer clothes, and name dropping prep school affiliations, I was wondering why they didn't opt to fly first class. They were all drunk by the time the plane cleared New York State airspace. As we passed over the Old Dominion one of the girls had ingloriously excused herself and headed to the toilet for some "hurling."

Spring Break, what was it all about? I, personally, had never gone on some bacchanalian jaunt south during my four years plus of college. Pete, on the other hand, had gone several times, with pictures to prove it. They were, for a future therapist particularly, incriminating. Half clothed females populated several of the more salacious examples. I could still remember him returning to school, with his pink nose and peeling skin, begging me for a loan because he was "totally tapped out."

"Believe it or not this place used to be easy to get in and out of," Peter declared over his shoulder, as we made our way to the parking garage. "Now it's getting like a MIA junior."

"Progress, I guess," I muttered, hustling along behind him, pulling my little luggage cart,

trying to keep the tiny wheels in contact with the pavement.

Peter snorted and said, "I had to park in the next county for Christ's sake."

It was a short drive from the airport to Peter's condo, thankfully. Exiting the airport, Peter zig-zagged over to the beach, to A1A and headed southward. We got caught at the intercoastal waterway by the bridge going up and Peter exhaled heavily and fiddled with the radio, dashing through the stations in pursuit of something to listen to. A parade of jousting Spanish music reverberated through the car's speakers.

"On edge today?" I asked, smiling at him.

He glanced over at me and then said, "Radio down here is such a wasteland. Nothing but wingnut propaganda and bad music stations, not to mention the thousand and one Spanish stations."

"Let me guess, something gone astray in your lovelife," I joked.

He snapped off the radio and muttered, "Yeah, right."

A slow moving sail boat passed under the upraised draw bridge and we could see a collection of swimsuit clad women on deck, drinks in hand. An afternoon of partying was, apparently, underway. A couple pulled up next to us on bicycles, gleaming with suntan oil. They had cleverly attached beach chairs to the back of their bikes. The girl, in her early twenties, had a large tattoo on the small of her back. I leaned closer to the window to get a better look at the tattoo.

"Have you noticed yourself checking out tattoos lately?" I asked Peter, pointing at the girl's back. "I mean more than usual."

Peter ignored my question and said, "You know there are wild monkeys running around in

those mangroves over there?" He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Yeah, really, no lie. It seems they escaped--or were intentionally released--from a lab or some petting zoo or something. Happened quite a bit ago. I don't know what kind of monkeys they are but they are there. People at the Motel down the road say they see them all the time. Weird."

"This is some local legion is it? Like Big foot or something," I quipped. "Next thing you are going to be telling me that they are descendants of some bio-lab experiments gone wrong...a Doctor Moreau kind of thing."

"Sure," he exclaimed, laughing. "But I don't think I'd want to come into contact with any of them. You never know. One bite and the next thing that happens is an obsessive desire for bananas or something."

The bridge tender put the gears in reverse and the draw bridge started descending. A line of cars had backed up down the road on either side. From the car, I could just make out the ocean, which was a beautiful aquamarine at this time of year, with a sprinkling of white caps. Marring the view, slightly to the south, were two high condos situated right on the beach, surrounded by one story mom and pop motels. As with most parts of South Florida, the war continued between the developers and the citizenry. Broward County was one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. Article after article in the local papers decried the population growth and density levels of almost every municipality in the area. I wasn't sure why anyone would want to live stacked on top each other in unsightly condo towers but didn't voice my opinion because Peter was one of those people.

"These are the waterways the Artist is using," I stated as we were crossing over the intercoastal.



Peter shot a glance northward at the sailboat chugging towards Port Everglades, and said, "I know. It gives me the creeps."

"Just think, you might have seen him around and about here at sometime," I said, shivering.

At this juncture our theory was a theory in name only. Peter and I were certain the killer had committed his murders on board a boat and that he was going to do it again in the same manner. For the most part it was bad investigating to approach a case with a defined modus operandi. It tended to narrow the scope of your investigation, resulting in overlooked aspects of evidence. Then again, as we inadvertently decided, there was a more scientific perspective, one that worked from a premise outward. It was the old inductive/deductive argument.

We made our way down A1A, on past the faded and charmingly dilapidated Hollywood Beach, then to the condo canyon strip of Hallandale Beach, where the traffic began to crawl along in fits and starts, complete with honking horns. Peter got a disgusted look on his face then sighed. Finally we pulled into his condo parking lot, edging around an elderly man painstakingly trying to park his new Caddy.

"Don't tell me!" Peter almost shouted out, pounding his steering wheel. "Better not be. No fucking way."

"You having an episode or what?" I wanted to know, looking around us at the parking lot buzzing with activity.

"This time of year is a nightmare, with all the snowbirds clogging things up. Never fails, somebody always parks in my spot," he explained, pointing to his parking space, where a shiny new rental car was parked. "I'd like to flatten their tires, all of them."

Peter inched around the crowded lot, dodging people walking to the beach weighed down with coolers and beach chairs and finally made it to his assigned guest parking spot. Trying to control his exasperation, he informed me that he was going to have to go to the office and have the car towed away. In response to my shocked reaction, he said that he was tired of people usurping his spot and didn't care who it was. I held my tongue and took the elevator up to his condo, leaving him to write down the license plate number and the type of vehicle, color too. No mistakes. The towing company was on call.

It was hot in Peter's condo as a result of his eco-friendly ways, which translated to being too cheap to pay the high FPL bill. Every time he left for any length of time he turned the thermostat up, reserving energy. I retreated to the balcony, where there was a nice breeze blowing and the sun had yet to reach over the building's edge, leaving a cool shadow across the building. As I looked out across the waterways I could see countless boats of every description docked here and there behind condos and houses. Florida had one of the largest number of boating enthusiasts in the country. We truly were looking for a needle in a haystack.

"The deed is done," Peter announced, as he made his way to the kitchen. "Some sucker is going to be in for a real surprise."

"You are evil, Pete," I chided him, snickering. "A guy, and his family, comes down here for some vacation time and they end up getting their car towed away. Now that is--"

"Too fucking bad, as they say," he sang out from the kitchen. "I'm sick of coming back to my place and not finding a place to park. It sucks. Want something to drink? Got some of those nice Jamaican drinks for you again!"

"How about some air?"

"Oh, forgot," he said, heading to the thermostat. "I was thinking of trying to grow bananas in here."

"Or mold," I added, shaking my head.

Over some questionable Chinese food, ordered in by Peter, who vouched for its authenticity, we laid out our battle plans for the coming week. Peter insisted we check on the marinas in the Miami Beach area first, then work outward from there. It sounded like a reasonable plan so I agreed. Since I hadn't rented a car we would have to restrict our search somewhat by traveling together. We both agreed that having two set of eyes on any given location might work out better in the long run anyway. Some of the marinas were large enough that it would take two people to survey them anyway. I was prepared to do the canvassing, knowing quite well that it was going to be boring work.

At my suggestion, we were up the next morning before six. I wanted to get an early start, hoping to beat the heat as much as possible and to also catch the marinas in the early hours, hoping to see who might be coming and going at an early hour. Although Peter did make the suggestion that our guy, if he did indeed work as a life guard, wouldn't have to go off to work until after nine in the morning. Still, I wanted to get started early in order to cram as many visits as we could into the allotted hours available to us.

My first full day back in South Florida dawned cloudy, with a brisk northeast wind coming in off the ocean. "High pressure system," Pete had informed me, yawning, as he fumbled with his coffee and picked at a stale donut plucked from the back of his refrigerator. That explained my headache, I suppose, grimacing while I ate my low-carb cereal that tasted like linoleum.

The clouds would keep the sun at bay, which was a plus. I packed a tube of sunscreen just

in case. Peter brought along his briefcase stuffed with all the data he had been collecting over the last few months. A torn map of the surrounding area, with the marinas circled in red ink, was tossed into my shoulder bag, the one with the smiling dolphins on it that I had bought the last time I was in Florida. It screamed TOURIST but I didn't care. Peter had at first refused to let me bring it along then relented when I pointed out to him that he was wearing a t-shirt with Key West emblazoned on it, as well as a faded portrait of Hemingway on the back.

Our first stop was a marina not far from his condo. It was city owned and had a length of stay restriction but we decided that since it was close we might as well check it out. There was the off chance that the dock master might remember something or point us in a new direction that we hadn't known about. It was important at this stage to be open to any and all tips. Investigations of every stripe often times turned on unexpected information, sometimes the more trivial the better.

Boatlife, as I will call it, was completely foreign to me. I wasn't enamored of boats, no matter the description. Rich men dashing across the ocean surface in rockets called boats didn't impress me much. Same thing with sailboats, even if they were multi-masted monsters complete with the latest in electronic wizardry. No. To me, well, per foot it might as well have been the biggest waste of money ever devised by man.

Peter, on the other hand, had attended the annual nautical orgy held in Miami Beach on several occasions, coming away lightheaded from the boat prices and suffering from self-loathing for not making enough salary to afford any number of models on the showroom floor. He had, in fact, called me on a few occasions to relieve his depression, while I soothed his ego and assured him that he was still indeed a man, even if he didn't have an impossibly long cigarette boat and

its requisite crew of starlets in waiting draped over the metal flake colored deck. I jest, partly. The Miami Boat Show was, without a doubt, a source of vessel envy each year for the males lining up to see the latest in ocean travel.

Although Peter had faxed me several lists of boating periodicals and websites, I hadn't actually delved into any of them. Know your material was a dictum to live by, of course, but I couldn't bring myself to actually seek out information on racing sloops or cabin cruisers or whatever new boating craze was happening out there at the moment. I only hoped that Peter would do it for me. Besides, he liked doing it, which went along way towards completing the task because motivation was always the best ingredient when it came to being a researcher.

"This is it, first one," Peter announced, pulling into a parking space and shutting off the engine. He leaned over and plucked the open map off my lap and put an X through the circle around the point on the map. "Ready?"

I looked at him then out the window at two elderly people riding by on those adult tri-cycles and asked, "Do we need a plan of action? I mean should we approach this systematically or what? You take the south side...I'll take the north side, and we will meet in the middle."

Laughing, Peter said, "You kiddin'?" The place isn't big enough for any of that. Look. First, we'll head over the dockmaster's office, talk with him, then poke around a little bit. Easy."

"Okay," I agreed, skeptical. "Wait, hold on. It might not be wise to be asking open questions about the investigations, you know."

"Open?"

"You know, passing out too many details," I explained. "Think about it for a second. How much should the dockmaster know?"

"Sarah, to me, and this is just my opinion, but I think we need to get them on board. That way if any tips come up, in the future, they can call us. Right?"

I thought for a moment, then answered, "Maybe, but it could get...complicated. Well not complicated but--"

"Oh you mean like with too much infor...an overload," Peter interjected. "Might be a chance we have to take."

"It's your phone number," I muttered, knowing quite well that I wouldn't want to have an avalanche of questionable calls coming in from all over the area about perceived killers on the loose.

There were, after a hasty count, some two dozen boats docked at the marina. It was a relatively new marina, yet it had a thriving contingent of loitering pelicans, lazily hanging out for the stray proffered fish by the locals fishing on the nearby dock. There seemed to be an equal mix of sailboats and motorized yachts. In the boating world they were like two ethnic groups, divided by fuel sources, the wind and gas. "Outlook on life," Peter had said, by way of describing life on the water. Go fast. Go slow. Go quiet. Go noisy. Peter assured me that someone had probably written a thesis on it somewhere, some place. I didn't doubt it.

We located the office and stopped at the door long enough to look over the notices on the bulletin board by the door. Handwritten notes to sell personal items predominated the collection of torn stationary, along with several official bulletins from the State and the City. Apparently living life on a boat didn't absolve one from adhering to society's dictates. I followed Peter inside.

The dockmaster was a tall, lanky man in his early forties. He was wearing faded surf shorts,

flip-flops, and a red bandana tied over his balding head. When we approached him he was shouting into a cell phone, telling someone to do it or else. Peter and I exchanged glances. The cell phone conversation came to an abrupt halt and he stuffed the phone back into the back pocket on his fraying surf shorts. He shot a look of irritation our way, then headed over to a desk in the far corner. "No slips until the end of the month," the dockmaster declared, fumbling around in the desk drawer.

"We weren't interested in booking dock space," Peter informed him, forcing a smile.

The dockmaster looked at us quizzically, then said, "I don't place boat ads here. If you are trying to sell your boat then call up the Boat Trader or whatever."

"Wrong again," Peter said, trying to squelch his irritation. "We wanted to ask you about your...your clientele here."

"My what?" the dockmaster exclaimed, laughing. "Look, this is a part time gig. I take in the fees. I keep the slips in order. After that, I don't know shit."

I nudged Peter aside and asked, "We only wanted to know a little something about the boaters here. You see, we are doing this research thing...trying to find what type of people come down here, to South Florida, for the winter. We only need to ask a few questions."

He eyed me for a minute, then said, "Sure. Why not? I got some time to kill."

After that, the dockmaster wouldn't shut up. He was certain that he could write a book about all the "activities" that went on at the dock, after hours. Wink-wink. Peter withdrew to scan the docks, while I pumped the dockmaster for information. He had worked there for over three years. Yes, he told me, there were people who returned year after year. Yes, so he said, there were people with an outside source of income coming in. Yes, he was quick to say, there

were some "nutjobs" out there on the boats tied off at the city docks. No, he mentioned, after thinking for a minute, he couldn't ever remember a life guard renting dock space. I thanked him, handing over Peter's number, with instructions to call if he came across a life guard inquiring about docking his boat. I was sure he thought I was a "nutjob" for being fixated on life guards.

Back at the car, Peter filled me in, telling me that most of the boats there were too small to be real live aboard type boats. He had asked around about any larger boats that might have been docked there recently but got no positive responses. For the most part, he said, they were suspicious of his questions and he had to resort to telling them a story about wanting to purchase a certain type of boat etc. It didn't register with me but Peter had been able to pull off sounding knowledgeable about such matters because he, basically, was.

We sat in the car scribbling in our respective notebooks, the ones we had been keeping ever since we began investigating the case. Mine had ballooned to two spiral notebooks, as I continued to jot down things I thought might be helpful for future ventures into the specifics of our investigation. I glanced over and saw that Peter was doing his usual bracketing and cataloguing of information. In college, when we would often share notes on classes, I had been amused by his propensity to neatly assemble almost every bit of stray material and collate it into a finished product that was almost worthy of being published. On top of that, amazingly, his handwriting was tiny but incredibly legible, almost as if it had been done by a machine. I used to tease him about it and he would always say that he was sure that he had been a monk in the 1500's in a past life, laboring away at some Church canonical writings or something.

I sighed and said, "Pete, I think this might just be hopeless."

He stopped writing and said, "Come on, Greene, we just got started. Don't quit on me now."



God, you sure are bad for morale around here."

"Maybe we should just call around...okay? I mean wouldn't that be more efficient?" I wanted to know.

He shot me a look of disapproval then said, "Yeah, sure, like that would be effective. Imagine calling up these dockmasters and asking the questions we need to be asking. 'Hello, yeah, I was just calling to ask you if you have a serial killer living on board his boat at your dock. Yeah, that's right. Killer. What, haven't heard any screaming coming from any of the boats lately!'"

"Now that is very funny," I shot back, smacking him on the arm. "I get your point."

Off we went, with me playing navigator, pointing out the next marina on the list. The car's AC worked its magic as outside the heat and humidity began to rise. The onshore breezes had cleared away the clouds. In a very short time the concrete had become a microwave, giving off a steady and pulsating warmth. I couldn't imagine what living in Florida in the summer must be like. I reached over and readjusted the AC vent, blowing the cool air right on me.

Peter looked over and smiled, then said, "You get used to it."

I shook my head no and muttered, "Somehow I doubt it."

The rest of the day was spent getting in and out of the cool car, then, at times, assaulting the marinas, as the dockmasters almost to a man (and one woman) responded to our queries with undisguised suspicion. I mustered up my best charm, even resorting to shameless flirting in order to get them to talk. They were, by nature, closemouthed about their clients. Boating people, so it seemed, were like a subculture unto to themselves. They lived on boats and didn't, generally, like living by many rules. That included answering prying questions, as you might

imagine. We were walking a tightrope, unable to come right out and say what our intentions were for fear of revealing too much. Peter and I, after several hours of deadends, had actually debated whether or not we should just reveal up front what our business was. "Might open them up some," Peter had suggested. I wasn't so sure. Yet, as it was, we were coming off like some kooks or, worse, some busybodies with nothing better to do than butt into other people's business.

It was after six when we called it a day. The last marina had been an unqualified disaster for us. The dockmaster had been a woman, who, inexplicably, hated us from the moment we stepped into her office. She barked her answers back at us and told us, in no uncertain terms, that she was (way) too busy to be answering "stupid-ass" questions about her marina. Peter tried to charm her but she told him he could take his questions and, well, you know. We stood by the fence that surrounded the marina and Peter took down boat types and serial numbers, using his expensive nikon binoculars he had bought to peep from his balcony at the pool below. Naturally he denied that was what they were used for, telling me with a straight face that he liked to watch the seasonal migrating birds go by. The marina had a few boat candidates that fit the bill for our purported purposes, so we made a note to check them out with a friend from the police department.

I was tired after all the driving around. I had forgotten to put sunscreen on my nose and it was now a rosy pink. We retreated to his condo and ordered in some pizza. Four or five more days of this made me not want to think about it. Are we tilting at windmills here? I asked myself. Two amateurs with nothing better to do than badger local dockmasters about their marinas. It all, at the time, seemed foolish, even stupid. I didn't divulge any of this thinking to

Peter. He was, so it seemed, still enthusiastic about the project. Faith. He had that. Peter was certain that we would break the case.

Next morning, we were up and at it again. This time around we stopped at a deli on Collins Avenue for breakfast. Peter had brought along a few brochures from local boat dealers for me to look over. Research, so he said, smiling at me, trying not to snicker. As we ate breakfast I thumbed through the brochures, where bikini clad models waved back at me from the decks of angular shaped boats, the ones that looked liked they were doing 50 knots even when they were tied up at the dock. It was easy to see who the clientele was for these muscle bound boats.

Below deck, right there in glossy photographs, were the amenities that came custom, after more money was invested of course. Most of the decor leaned towards contemporary Las Vegas, complete with mirrors strategically installed to capture any and all reflections. Yet these weren't liveaboard type boats. These were for screaming up and down the coast with, or, time permitting, a dash across the ocean to Bimini or, maybe, down to the Keys. You could certainly sleepover on these boats, even be quite comfortable, but you weren't going to take up residence in them. They were, essentially, bachelor pads with really large engines.

"Why am I looking at these for? Refresh my memory," I asked sarcastically.

Peter smiled back at me and replied, "Can't you just see Jason behind the wheel of one of those babies?"

"Oh yeah, when I close my eyes I see exactly that," I said in a breathless tone. "Do the girls come stock with the boat or do you have to order them extra?"

"Oh yeah, I can see it now," Peter intimated, ignoring my comment. "Jason--all tan--steering his way down the coast, while you bask on the deck in your latest bathing suit from

Brazil. Hey, Greene, it's about time you spent some of that cash you've raked in the last few years."

"Maybe you're right, Pete. Jason and I could take midnight cruises on our...our Donzi. It could open up a whole new world for us," I joked.

"Might help the marriage," he said, nodding yes. "Naturally you'd need a place to keep the boat and all. I would be glad to offer the dock behind my condo. It wouldn't be any problem for me to look after the boat. No problem at all. I could keep it running in top shape."

"And of course you would have to take it out now and again in order to see that it's running right."

"I could fit the time in for that, sure."

"You are shameless. Like Jason and I would ever buy any boat in the first place, much less keep it all the way down here in Florida," I declared, laughing. "A rich fantasy life can be good for your mental health but in your case--maybe not."

Peter stuck out his tongue at me then said, "Just thought I would give it a shot. I guess I should give Jason a call though, just to make sure he agrees with you."

"Try it," I warned, smirking.

Our first stop of the day was a marina on Biscayne Bay. At one time the area had been one of the finest in the Miami area. Neighborhoods change and with it went the level of boating clientele. We could see immediately that if our suspect was docked here he would definitely be slumming.

We stood on the dock and surveyed the boats. There were only a dozen and most of them were in disrepair. Sprinkled throughout the boats were several houseboats. A few of them

looked in danger of sinking. One of the larger ones was listing to the port side and appeared to be abandoned.

There wasn't much activity going on at that early hour. A rain shower had blown through that morning and left everything wet and with the rising heat there was the unmistakable closeness in the air of an outdoor sauna. Living in Florida in the hotter months meant pretty much enduring a perpetual state of perspiration. The lower part on the back of my blouse was already damp.

"We never thought about houseboats did we," Peter exclaimed, pointing at one of the newer ones to our right. "Then again, well, that wouldn't fit the profile."

I looked around at the houseboats then said, "No, not really. They're stationary, even if they are floating on the water. I don't think they would afford him any privacy to do his deeds."

"Let's check out the office, if they even have one," Peter announced, dodging some fish guts some inconsiderate fisherman had tossed on the dock.

"Eau de entrails," I muttered, still not accustomed to the smell of stale brine, decaying sea life, and musty heat that all of the marinas seemed to give off.

"He not here," a tiny man informed us in heavily accented English as we were banging on the door to a small office, which was nothing more than a hut precariously perched on the first dock. "Maybe manana," the man said, smiling, revealing a row of blackened teeth.

We thanked him and walked out onto the dock. None of the boats were large enough or opulent enough to be the type that would fit the Artist's lifestyle. We saw a woman sitting on the aft section of her boathouse and decided to ask her some questions. When she saw us coming she hurried inside and closed the door behind her. We could see her looking at us from one of

the side windows.

"Probably thinks we are from the County or something," Peter whispered to me. "Who knows how many regulations she might be breaking by living here in...in that."

I didn't want to give up on her so easily so I stopped on the dock by the window to her boathouse and called out to her, "Hey, Maam, we were just wondering if you ever saw a large boat dock her in the last few months? A big boat."

"A big boat," Peter mocked.

The woman slid the window open and called out, "What business is it of yours?"

"We were just trying to find somebody, that's all," I replied, trying to sound sweet and non-threatening.

The woman snorted and said, "Tell me another one."

Peter laughed and assured her, "We're not from the County. We're not cops. We just want to--"

"No big boats ever dock here. Not anymore anyway," the woman informed us. "Used to. Not anymore."

We thanked her and moved on to the next marina. Peter believed that our suspect would have stuck out like a sore thumb in a place such as that marina. It would have drawn too much attention. No, the Artist would have to dock in a more upscale marina, one that afforded him anonymity simply because everyone there had big, expensive boats. Made sense, I suppose.

More marinas. More stench. More deadends. As lunch time rolled around I was beginning to see this quest in a different light, one that made me want to laugh. I could remember Dr. Burke telling me once that there would be times when "matters will lean towards the ludicrous."

This was, without a doubt, one of those times. Truthfully though, what choice did we actually have? The police with all of their resources were no closer to solving the case than we were. In making an attempt we were at least trying to do something, or, as Peter was quick to reassure me, we were aiding the investigation anyway we could.

Four days passed with us no closer to any sound evidence. There had been no tips. Nothing, except for a boring tour of boats and docks. The glamorous world of boating was, as with many things, not as reported. There was a popular maxim that boat owners were fond of repeating: The two best days of boat ownership are the day you buy your boat and the day you sell your boat, or some variation of such. To me, an admitted landlubber, it was a very expensive way to dwell on this earth, even if you were actually on the water a good deal of the time. The people we encountered were quick to grouse about their surroundings, boats included, and seemed to me to be trying to convince themselves that they did indeed embrace their chosen lifestyle. The ideal, as is usual, came with some disclaimers. Unsanitary docks, cramped living quarters, iconoclastic neighbors, rodents, irritable dockmasters, unpleasant aromas, were just a few items on the laundry list of problematic features one had to endure in order to live the carefree life of living aboard a boat. Romanticism aside, it was not for me.

We were burned out on ordering in so Peter suggested we go out to dinner. I had offered to cook us a meal but he had only laughed, knowing quite well my culinary skill level. I made perhaps one or two dishes well, neither of which Peter cared for. Besides, Peter and I had a history of residing together, dating from our college days and living in a row house in DC. In the almost two years we had shared living quarters we had not once actually cooked a meal. In all of

our entertaining endeavors we had never honestly labored in the kitchen. Empty pizza boxes, stained Chinese food containers, styrofoam boxes, they were always stacked up on top of the garbage can the following day.

Peter drove us to the neighboring town that had a charming downtown area, one that had been restored to its historical glory. What passed for historical, naturally, was relative. Reaching back to the past in South Florida didn't take you very far. Anything circa 1920's was ancient. At any rate, the core section of the city supported numerous eateries and art galleries, and was an outlet for festivals and things of that sort.

"Don't ask me what's good here," Peter declared as we were sitting down, electing to sit inside because I found it too warm to enjoy the outdoor tables.

"Do I ever?" I countered, laughing.

We were beginning to get on each other's nerves and I was starting to wonder why I hadn't gotten a hotel room instead of staying with Peter. Although we were the best of friends it nevertheless grated on our nerves to be around one another 24 hours a day. My stay was coming to end in a couple of days so I was just going to try to hang in there. I couldn't see, at this juncture, how I could offer up any realistic excuse for checking into a hotel. Peter could be sensitive at times.

"I'm trying not to get discouraged," Peter suddenly blurted out as the waitress was delivering our drinks.

"Me too," I mumbled, thanking the waitress.

"I didn't realize just how much I had invested in this...this angle we've jumped into. I try not to think about it but I can't help but think we are just being stupid here," Peter informed me, as he



toyed with his knife. "Are we going to be totally embarrassed by this, humiliated?"

I laughed and answered, "Like who's keeping score?"

Peter looked around the restaurant then said, "If this were to get out it might hurt us, you know, careerwise."

I hadn't thought about that at all. Did it matter? I suppose if what we were doing turned out to be, shall we say, fruitless, then some people might see it as comical. Two therapists playing sleuths, skulking around South Florida in search of an elusive serial killer might be seen as fodder for ridicule.

"I'm willing to take the chance," I finally said in an unintended whisper.

"Even if we end up on the front page of one of the tabloids? Their headquarters is right up the road from here, you know. I can see it now: Dr. Sarah Greene and sidekick trolling the waterways to seek out mass murderer!"

"Technically he isn't a mass murderer--not yet anyway," I corrected, raising my eyebrows. "And I want you to know that when and if we end up on the covers of the rags I will personally place a call to the reporter and demand that you receive equal billing with me. How's that?"

Glumly, Peter replied, "You're so kind."

There was a message on Peter's answering machine when we got back to his condo. It was from a dockmaster. In a heavy southern accent he mentioned that he might know about a boat and an owner that fit the description. He also added in his drawl that he wanted to know about any rewards that might be offered. Peter played the message again, while I retrieved the local map from my bag. We listened to the message twice. Peter ran his finger along the map, stopping at a marina just north of Miami Beach.

"What do we do now?" I asked, not even attempting to conceal my excitement.

"Do?" Peter muttered absently, tapping the map with his forefinger. "It's in the area. The marina I mean. Close but not too close. Certainly a scooter ride away."

"Okay."

Peter turned to me, hugged me, then shouted out: "Alright!"

"Should we check it out now or not?" I wanted to know.

"The guy said he would be there tomorrow morning. I guess we should wait, huh?" Peter stated, grinning at me.

I thought for a moment, then almost shouted, "Like we can really wait."

"Let's go," Peter declared, and we headed for the door.

On the drive south, down A1A, we chattered giddily, letting our mutual level of excitement bubble up. As we drove I suddenly realized it was the first time I had been out after dark. Even with darkness, there was a lingering heat, dampened by a persistent sea breeze from the southeast. Traffic, as usual, was heavy. It seemed that all of South Florida was bursting at the seams, bulging with a growing population.

Peter found a parking space a block from the marina, which was situated behind a large condo on the intercoastal. We sat in the car for a moment, as cars whizzed by on Collins Avenue. The car parked in front of us was occupied by two young Latin men. A steady stream of resounding merengue music echoed from the speakers of their car. A city bus whooshed by, slowing down to make a stop at the corner.

"We have the element of surprise," I told Peter, laughing self-consciously.

"Okay, listen, let's go to the marina, look around, then leave," Peter suggested. "A quick

look. That's it."

I laughed, then said, "We don't even really know what we are looking for--do we?"

Peter laughed and said, "Right. We don't. A big boat...with a sign that says something like: I Did It. Right here. You found me."

We laughed nervously, then I stated, "No heroics if the guy is there. Promise me. Right?"

"I don't have my tennis racket with me," Peter replied, referring to his antics during the Rey Flowers matter back in DC.

Although I didn't tell Peter, my heart was pounding in my chest as we walked to the marina. Peter was walking fast, trying not to break into a run, or so it seemed to me as I struggled to keep up. At the gate to the marina we stopped for a moment to survey the docks. Competing music wafted out of several different boats tied up at the slips. Pop, ancient rock, and (I'm guessing) Bach rode the sea breeze, heading to the northwest out over Biscayne Bay.

The marina was small, with an upscale clientele. There were perhaps fifteen boats, with only one of them being under 30 feet in length. Most of the boats were cruisers, with the outer two slips reserved for sailboats, a large, sleek sloop and a motor sailer, a vintage two masted vessel. On the dock, just behind his boat, a man was breaking the rules by grilling out. Hamburgers so my nose told me. He was singing along to a classic rock song. A woman wearing a sarong of some sort could be seen just inside the cabin making up a salad.

"Very domestic," I whispered to Peter, who grunted in response.

"Damn," Peter muttered, as he tried the gate leading onto the docks. "It's fucking locked," he hissed.

"It was open the last time we were here," I said, and Peter gave me a pained look for

mentioning the obvious.

"Must lock it at night," he muttered to himself, trying the gate again.

"Forget your key?" a man suddenly asked behind us.

"No," I said, not knowing what to say.

"Just visiting," Peter interjected, smiling at the man.

He opened the gate and let us in, continuing on his way, heading down the dock towards one of the sailboats. Peter and I exchanged smiles, relieved that the man hadn't questioned us about our intentions. It was out of the ordinary for people in South Florida not to be safety conscious. Wariness was an attribute you acquired very early on after spending any amount of time in the tri-county area.

"Lucked out there," I whispered.

"Must be from out of state," Peter explained, giggling. "Then again, we hardly look like criminals."

"I know I don't," I needled, grinning.

"Never get tired of that sense of humor," Peter spat out, pretending to laugh.

We then stood off to the side and tried not to look too conspicuous. Peter scanned the docks and decided that there were three, maybe four likely candidates for the type of boat we were looking for. Two of the boats were docked next to each other and the others were at the far end of the marina. Peter suggested we take a stroll in order to see inside the yachts. With the lights on in the boats a passerby could pretty much see right into the cabins. Apparently modesty was a lost art in marina life because almost everyone was visible to everyone else.

The two boats docked side by side were both late model yachts. On the boat closest to us

we could easily see a middle-aged couple engaged in a game of cards, as they sat in the galley and traded barbs about their scores. The wife was diligently adding numbers to a ledger in front of her. The neighboring boat was all dark. A cat was prone on the aft deck, successfully ignoring us.

"Nobody home, I guess," I said, and immediately Peter held his finger up to his lips.

He leaned over and said into my ear, "Sound travels out here."

I mouthed out I'm sorry and we moved on towards the other boats. As we got closer we could see that the one boat had a baby stroller on deck, obviously ruling that owner out. The one remaining boat had music coming from it. We walked up closer and glanced into the cabin. A man, mid forties, was practicing dance steps in time to some ball room music. We shook our heads and headed back to the front gate.

"Must be that boat, huh?" I whispered.

"Wait a second, I'll be right back," Peter hissed at me, hurrying back over to the boat where the lights had been out.

A moment later he was back and guiding me out the gate. Peter stopped on the street for a moment and took out his pen and wrote on the palm of his hand. Then he motioned for me to follow him. We hurried back to the car.

"What was that all about?" I wanted to know once we got back to his car.

"I went back to get the name of the boat, then I wrote it down on my hand. Didn't want to forget. Guess where the boat is registered?"

"Don't tell me, not--"

"Oh yeah, The Garden State," Peter sang out, snapping his fingers. "Nu Jois-ee."

"My god!" I exclaimed.

"The name on the boat is odd though: synesthesia. Huh?" Peter exclaimed. "Ring any bells?"

I thought for a moment but couldn't come up with where I had heard that word before, so I replied, "I guess it's a term for something."

"Some weird new medical field we don't know about," Peter speculated, unlocking his car doors. "I want to get back and check out on the net about the boat layout, you know, inside. Maybe I can dredge up some kind of name from the registration number on the boat too."

We were both excited now, chattering, eager to see who actually lived on the yacht. Peter wanted to know whether or not calling Detective Santos would be a good idea. I thought we should hold off until we knew more about the owner. He agreed, suddenly giving me a high-five like some High School athlete. Our giddiness lasted all the way up Collins Avenue. As we were pulling into his condo parking lot I remembered where I had come across the word synesthesia.

"It's a Greek word," I blurted out. "Something like perception and...and something else. I read about it once in a seminar. Years ago. It is a condition that deals with a person's perception. Yeah, that's right, some people see colors when they--"

"Colors?" Peter interrupted. "What do you mean colors?"

"It is an associative syndrome of some sort, I think. They see colors when they think of certain stimuli. Or maybe they see colors with everything. I can't remember now. I heard a psychiatrist's talk on it a number of years ago. In DC. He was doing some research on cognitive something or other. He might have been a neuro...neuro who knows what?"

"Are you sure?" Peter asked, skeptical. "I vaguely remember something about it but not

much. It has a lot to do with artistic type impulses."

We looked at each other then smiled. It seemed as if things were beginning to tumble into place. Bits and pieces of a theory were assembling very quickly. Could we have been right?

Peter went straight to his laptop when we got up to his condo. I phoned Jason to apprise him of the new developments, something I had neglected to do at any stage of the investigation previously. This time, however, I wanted some input, some advice on how to proceed. Of course, needless to say, I was reluctant to reveal to him just how close we might be to the killer. I knew he would, more or less, order me to go to the police. That would have been the prudent thing to do. Turn it over to them. Yet, and Peter and I were in agreement here, we felt that we should at least finish up the specifics before contacting Detective Santos. This would mean making visible contact with the owner of the boat. For all we knew he might be some sixty year old retired CEO of some megacompany. Maybe he took his severance package and cashed in his options before taking to the sea on a monster yacht to live the good life. Jason was out when I called so I just left a message. Secretly, I was relieved. I then thought about calling him on his cell phone but I didn't know where he was at the time. Having his end of the conversation heard by some eavesdroppers wouldn't be prudent. Anyone who knew him, and who his wife was, could have put two and two together very easily.

"Check it out," Peter called out, pointing to his laptop.

"What is it?" I asked, looking at the screen, where I could see the floor plans of a large boat.

"It's the inside of his boat. I went to the Hatteras website and brought the plans up below deck. There's plenty of room for him to do his thing. I mean look, here's a guest state room and here's another room for crew quarters. Think about it, he could use them for his torture

chamber."

I looked down at where he was pointing then said, "I'm getting an uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach just thinking about it."

"Man oh man, he could take his yacht out on the water somewhere then have carte blanche to do anything he wanted. I mean just look at all that room there. The boat is massive inside," Peter explained. "Do you think the cops will be able to get some kind of search warrant? They could probably score on any number of forensic evidence once they got on board the boat. I mean surely the tattoo instrument thing is onboard somewhere."

"I sure hope so," I muttered.

We would have to talk to the dock master first thing in the morning. No alarm bells had been rung, so we believed. The Synesthesia didn't appear to be going anywhere. Tomorrow we would complete the search.

Neither one of us slept much that night. Around three in the morning Peter called out from his bedroom: "I know you're not sleeping in there."

I giggled and told him that morning couldn't come soon enough, adding "What do you think he's going to look like?"

There was silence for a minute then Peter answered, "Handsome."

"Give me details."

"Just over six feet, with blue eyes and dark hair...and with six pack abs," he said in an announcer's voice. "Don't worry, I'll be there when you get all weak in the knees."

"He killed three girls," I reminded him.

In a low tone of voice, Peter ordered, "Get some sleep."



The dockmaster was waiting for us at the gate the next morning. He was, as I remembered now, a tall guy with a little paunch, the end result of too many beers, judging by his breath. He was in his early thirties and spoke in short, choppy sentences, almost as if he were reading from a script for the first time. When he saw us coming he motioned us off to the side and told us in a hissed whisper that we had just missed the boat owner.

"I can't believe it," Peter stated, disappointed.

"Just left," the dockmaster exclaimed, pointing down the road. "Took off on his scooter."

Peter and I exchanged knowing smiles then I said, "Are you in any way familiar with his routine?"

The dockmaster looked me up and down for a minute, before replying, "Like I watch everything everybody does around here. Get serious, will ya."

"Is the Hatteras his boat?" Peter wanted to know.

"Yep, right over there," the dockmaster answered, jerking his thumb in the direction of the yacht. "Real nice. A beauty."

"I can see that," Peter said admiringly. "Ever been on it?"

The dockmaster looked at Peter as if he had uttered a blasphemy and said, "Sure. We hang out all the time. You know, dinner parties...get togethers."

I tried to ignore his sarcasm and asked, "Do you know where he works...which beach?"

"Got me," the dockmaster said, shrugging. "I just know that I see him wearing life guard outfits around here. The shorts. T-shirt, that kind of thing. Stands to reason that he--"

"Did he stay here last year?" Peter inquired, walking towards the boat.

"Hey, hold up there," the dockmaster hissed, latching onto Peter's arm. "I can't let you go

poking around the boats."

"Can't we just take a peek from the dock?" I asked, smiling at him.

He looked around the marina for a second then said under his breath, "Don't get caught doing anything stupid or I'll tell them I never saw you before."

"Was he docked here last year?" Peter repeated.

Looking exasperated, the dockmaster said, "No. Showed up here about two months ago."

The dockmaster retreated to his office while we strolled up and down the dock, trying not to arouse any suspicion. Just like the night before we couldn't see into the boat. Peter leaned over close and asked in a whisper if I had noticed the bicycle on the dock before. I hadn't. I noticed there were two or three hair scrunchies attached to the handlebars.

"Company?" I whispered.

Peter looked around and replied, "Could be."

During all of our analyzing we hadn't included the possibility that the Artist might pursue what would be considered a normal relationship. It wasn't uncommon for serial killers to conduct a routine life while simultaneously enacting heinous crimes. Yet for some reason we had never considered it. I, for one, pictured the killer to be a loner, albeit a loner with resources. Peter admitted later that he had not once contemplated the Artist being a functioning member of society at large, deeming him a socio/psychopath unable to interact on a day to day basis with the accepted norm. That he might be conducting himself above board by day and otherwise by night didn't seem possible.

We returned to the dockmaster's office and, in a sense, debriefed the dockmaster further. He was, more or less, cooperative, even as he continued to demand information about the reward

money. I assured him that I would turn all pertinent information over to Detective Santos and he would therefore be credited with the tip that solved the case. This satisfied him momentarily, while we pumped him for more info about the Artist, including his name: Reed Timms.

As we were leaving to go, having decided to troll the beach to see if we could find the Artist at work, we saw a woman exit the yacht and jump on the bicycle. Dumbfounded, we stood off to the side as she pedaled away, heading down Collins Avenue. Scrambling, we rushed to Peter's car to follow her.

"I can't believe it!" I quite nearly shouted at Peter, as we edged out into the morning traffic. "She's staying on his boat. Do you think she might be his next victim? I mean would he or does he get to know them that well?"

A horn honked behind us and Peter cursed under his breath, then said, "Give me a break!"

"It doesn't seem possible," I reiterated. "Does it? Would he want to actually know them personally before he murdered them?"

"Doesn't ring true to me," Peter answered, quickly changing lanes as he tried to follow her through the traffic. "Maybe it's a...a kind of bond he likes to form first before he enacts his little deathplay. Make any sense to you?"

"Not at all," I replied, shaking my head no. "I mean it would then have to happen on a much more personal level--don't you think? He would be investing a lot more of himself into it...the murder act. Seems strange to me. Then again, think about it, maybe it feeds a deeper emotional desire. Perhaps he needs that to complete the act."

Peter sighed as he honked his horn then changed lanes again. She disappeared down a side street while we got stuck at a red light. By the time we made our turn she was gone.

"Damn," Peter exclaimed. "Where did she go? This sucks. What if she's his next victim? Shouldn't we warn her?"

"We don't know that," I exclaimed, scanning up and down the street for her bike. "We don't even know about him at this stage. If we do warn her he might get spooked and take off. Then what?"

"I know, but think about the alternative for a minute. She might be his next innocent victim. It could happen at any time," Peter explained, giving me a worried look. "We can't watch him 24/seven, can we? We got to do something."

I thought for a moment then said, "I don't know what to do. I guess we should err on the side of caution, as they say. Right? She needs to be protected."

"How? Where in the hell did she disappear to?"

"She wasn't dressed for work really," I offered. "Shorts and a top, with tennis shoes."

"Oh, aren't we quite the detective now," Peter joked. "Got the trained eye working. Did you happen to notice what kind of tennis shoes they were," he said, forcing a laugh.

Peter decided to park his car at a meter and we set out on foot. I suggested we separate and do a loop around the block, contacting each other on our cell phones if we found her. I told him I would wait for him if I found her and he assured me he would do the same. We set out in opposite directions, both of us walking fast. I hadn't walked very far before wishing I had remembered to bring my hat. The sun was up over the buildings now and it was long before I was perspiring. I could feel the hot sun burning right down through the part in my hair. Even with my sunglasses on I found myself squinting in the bright light. A short while later we completed our circuit and met up on a street corner.

"Nothing," I uttered, looking up and down the street. "Weird."

"I should have been watching her more closely," Peter said dejectedly. "This is ridiculous. She's got to be around here somewhere. Where could she have gone off to? And where's her bike?"

"There's a lot of stores around here, maybe she ducked into one of them to buy something," I suggested.

"But what about the bike?" Peter reiterated. "Did you see it anywhere?"

I shook my head no and muttered, "Where could she have gone?"

In college, my sophomore year, I met a fellow student who was preparing to do his thesis on the concept of kismet. At the time we other students made fun, at his expense, of such a silly and unworthy subject. "What next--The Ouiji Board As Prognosticator?" Peter had joked, leaving the poor guy to slink away humiliated. Happenstance. Fickle Fate. Divine intervention. Just dumb luck. Whatever one might want to label it, it occurred. Right there on that sidewalk in Miami Beach.

"Check it out," Peter suddenly blurted out, pointing.

I looked up in time to see the girl bike not three feet from where I was standing. Grinning, I cried out, "Unbelievable."

"Miss, Miss!" Peter shouted out to her as she breezed by us. "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

Understandably, she kept going on her bike, glancing over her shoulder briefly, just long enough to give Peter a dirty look. I could only image she was used to hearing catcalls as she biked around the Miami Beach streets wearing very little. Pilates classes hadn't been wasted on

her and her size 2 cut-offs. When I called after her, waving, she slowed down then stopped at the corner. We scrambled to catch up to her.

"Thanks for stopping," I began, suddenly at a loss for words. What exactly was I going to say to her? Peter and I hadn't actually planned for this eventuality. "I...I was just wondering if we could ask you a few questions," I stammered.

She had a perplexed look on her face and I could tell that she thought we might be trying to sell something. Before she could pedal away, Peter chimed in with: "It will only take a second."

"Please don't tell me you're selling Timeshares," she whined, letting a sour expression creep to her lips. "I'm kind of in a hurry."

"Nothing like that," I assured her, laughing. "My name is Doctor Greene and this is my associate, Dr.--"

"What kind of doctor?" she suddenly asked, curious.

"We are therapists," Peter said, edging closer. "We are currently conducting an investigation in the area and...and--"

"And we thought it might be a good idea if we spoke with you about some delicate matters," I interjected, sounding like some bad British cop show on the BBC.

"Investigation?" she asked, looking first at me then back at Peter. "Sounds weird," she said, laughing. "Where do I fit in?" she suddenly asked pointedly.

"Well, you see...that's kind of a tricky thing," Peter explained, forcing a laugh. "You just might be part of the investigation."

The smile disappeared from her face and she muttered, "Really."

We convinced her to follow us back to Peter's car, where we sat enjoying the AC, while I

attempted to delve into her relationship with the Artist, with Reed Timms. She, for her part, was wary, and hesitant to reveal anything. I couldn't blame her. At this juncture just who (exactly) we were was a mystery. Two strangers, off the street, reveal themselves to be therapists and want to talk was material for the weird.

"Thanks again for talking to us," Peter offered, turning half around in his seat to address her.

She nodded and shifted in the backseat, fanning herself with her hand. I was seated next to her, smiling, deciding where to start our line of questioning. I didn't want to frighten her right from the start. At this stage we really didn't know much of anything about the more pertinent details of the case. Reed Timms might well have been a legitimately rich guy just living the good life on a boat. It could have all been normal.

"Would it be possible to ask you some questions about Reed Timms?" I began, smiling.

She shot a look at me and then at Peter and muttered, "Like?"

"Well, let me see...like how long have you known him?" I asked, working to make and hold eye contact.

She looked away for an instant then replied, "Not long."

A shiver went literally up my spine, as Peter and I exchanged looks. She fumbled with the door handle briefly then forced a smile in Peter's direction. She was in her early twenties and beautiful. I could see that she was accustomed to getting her way with men, using this attribute as a talent, one to forward her intentions. Slowly, she shifted in the seat, affording Peter full view of her bare midriff with the obligatory belly-button jewelry, a silver trinket complete with dangling mini-chain.

"You know what?" Peter said too loudly. He returned her smile and announced, "We forgot

to ask you your name."

"Carlee," she said, reaching up to adjust the scrunchy holding her blond hair back in a pony tail.

"Do I detect an accent?" Peter asked, inadvertently flirting. "Southern maybe?"

"You are good," she said, wagging a finger at Peter.

"Don't tell me," Peter said, rubbing his chin. "Let's see...I'm gonna guess Georgia."

"Close," she said, wrinkling up her nose, but offering no answer.

"Now that the geography lesson is over," I said a little more crabbily than intended, adding, "how about we talk about you and Reed."

She looked at me for a moment then asked, "What exactly are you two interested in here? Reed? Me? I'm kinda confused here, guys. You two aren't doing one of those sociological surveys or something, are you?"

Her teasing tone caught me off guard for a moment, then I said, "No. Not exactly. It's more like a murder investigation."

I thought I detected something in her reaction but it quickly evaporated as she replied, "A what? Come on now, you're beginning to scare me a little bit." Her southern accent had blossomed suddenly, as she offered us a concerned look. "Is there something I should know? Tell me."

"We can't be sure," Peter stated, trying to sound reassuring despite his comment. "It might very well involve this Reed Timms guy."

The conversation went on for close to fifteen minutes. We were able to glean, ultimately, very little information. According to her, she had "an open relationship" with Reed Timms.



What this encompassed we could only guess at. They liked to party, so she told us, smiling, showing off her immaculately straight teeth with the recently bleached enamel. As to her occupation, well, she was mostly evasive, allowing finally that she was between jobs at the moment. I was sure Peter thought she was a hooker, or, more accurately, "escort," paid handsomely for her individualized talents. I wasn't so certain. Although she was mostly guarded about her personal life, I sensed she wasn't telling us everything.

"Carlee," I began, thinking: if that is your real name, "are you staying on the boat with this Reed guy?"

She looked at me for a moment, permitting a sly smile to creep to the corners of her mouth, then said, "Sometimes."

"We definitely have a safety issue here," Peter announced, glancing at Carlee.

She smiled back at him and said, "You really think so."

I could only imagine how the interview would have been progressing if I wasn't there to referee and keep their libidos under check. I shot a disapproving look at Peter and he literally wiped the grin off his face with the back of his hand. Carlee raised an eyebrow at me then fumbled with the door handle to get out of the car.

"Wait, Carlee, we don't mean to scare you, and I know this all must sound bizarre, but we have reason to believe that this Reed Timms might be involved in some...some murders."

"This is a joke, right?" she declared, laughing, looking around for some concealed camera. "Did Reed put you up to this? That's just like something he might do. I swear, if I didn't--"

"No, unfortunately we are serious about this," Peter said sternly. "We have been investigating this case for months and, well, it has led us to a boat in Miami Beach."

The smile faded from her face then she said, "That's just silly."

"We don't have all the evidence with us to prove to you our findings but believe me something's not right here," I stated, nodding for emphasis. "Several young girls have been killed."

She was quiet for a moment, then said in almost a whisper, "You must have the wrong guy. I know Reed Timms and he didn't kill anybody."

"Let us give you our number," I stated quickly, fumbling in my purse for my business card. "You can call us--anytime. Let us know what's going on...you know."

She took the card and looked at it for a moment. Stifling a little laugh, she said, "You charge by the hour...right?"

Peter laughed too loudly, then caught himself and replied, "Very reasonable rates, I assure you."

"Is there a couch involved here somewhere?" she asked, switching gears, smiling, flirting effortlessly.

"That's just a myth," Peter explained, grinning back at her. "No couches anymore. Too...too Freudian."

"But it's still about that nasty Id, right?" she teased, slapping at his arm playfully. "No one can seem to control it--or something."

"Different schools of--"

"Oh wait, let me write Peter's number on the back, his local number. I actually live up north," I said, reaching for my card.

"Have you been able to go all over the boat?" Peter suddenly asked.

"The boat," she muttered, glancing out the car window at two pedestrians crossing the street.

"Yeah, I guess. It's a big boat."

I sensed where Peter was going with the question and added, "Are there any rooms on board that are, you know, off-limits to you. Places where Timms won't let you go?"

"I-I don't think so," she said, uncertain, looking away. "Like where?"

"Places he might want to keep secret--places like that," Peter explained.

"The engine room," she finally answered, giggling. "He doesn't like for me to mess with the mechanical stuff on the boat. Says I might screw it up somehow."

I handed the business card back to her and said, "We need to talk some more."

She tucked the card in the front pocket of her skin tight cut offs and then got out of the car. We told her to call us, that she had to be careful. Peter went as far as telling her not to go back to the boat. With a dainty wave, she pedaled away, disappearing in the traffic down the street. I smacked the top of the car angrily, disappointed that the interview hadn't gone according to plan. I knew there was a very good chance that she was heading right to Reed Timms, to tell him everything, about how two strange people accosted her on the street. They were talking about some murders. They were psychologists. They said some really incriminating things. If Reed Timms was indeed the Artist the element of surprise had been lost. Any hopes of landing some evidentiary contents from the yacht would be compromised. Further more, Reed Timms might then very well vanish.

"Do you need to change your underwear?" I snapped, getting back in the car.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Peter asked, playing innocent.

"Please," I shot back, "you were treating her like some...some girl in a peep show."

"Sure, like that happened," he said, shrugging. "I was trying to make some kind of contact with her, that's all. You need some kind of rapport you know, or the interview stagnates."

"Some kind of contact," I mimicked, laughing. "If I wasn't there you would have been probably trying to make contact on the back seat. 'Oh, Carlee, I just love your Southern accent. Just like honey. Want me to help you remove those Daisy Dukes?'"

"Now you are offending my sense of professionalism," he declared, trying not to laugh. "I take pride in my therapist's perspective."

"What does that mean, exactly?" I asked, snickering. "I thought I was going to have to hose you two down there for a minute."

"I was well aware that she was using her, you know, femininity to try and commandeer the conversation. If I was forced to endure her omnipotent sexuality then that was a price I was willing to pay. I was steadfast in my resolve," he announced in a nasal British accent.

Our childish bantering wasn't concealing the fact that we had struck out, more or less. What now? Peter half-heartedly suggested that we go to see Detective Santos, but I was reluctant to do that. He argued that by making contact with Carlee we had breached the boundaries of the case. We were now on the inside looking out. In due time the suspect was going to be advised of our, shall we say, pursuits. The equation had been altered, changed forever.

It wasn't feasible to watch the boat now. We could no longer hide in plain sight. Even if we informed the police they wouldn't be able to attain a warrant to search the yacht. Under what grounds? Because two arguably flaky therapists said it might be a good idea. There wasn't any evidence of any sort. A theory, one that involved a life guard, a monster yacht, and lots of other little tidbits, wasn't going to convince anyone. I could only imagine a judge laughing that one

down.

We retreated to Peter's condo to lick our wounds and plot strategy. What were our options? Then, of course, there was the matter of the next victim. Carlee. No tattoos, so Peter had told me, twice. Of course we hadn't seen all of her but pretty close. She fit the profile almost perfectly. Right age. Beautiful. Willing. We hadn't revealed every detail to her, but enough. Her face had seemed to register the expected amount of horror; then again this current generation had been raised on cinematic violence removed from almost all sentiment. My limited contact with my students had informed me that they, as a collective group, were devoid of a surplus of emotion. They were, for the most part, pragmatists when it came to violence and its enactment. I suppose, more than anything else, repetition played a vital role in shaping their outlook. By the time I received them in my classroom they had been subjected to hours upon hours of dehumanizing footage, delivered either by remarkably lifelike video games or movies topheavy with gratuitous maimings.

"You don't think what we told Carlee about Timms might somehow make him more attractive to her?" I asked Peter, as we sat on his balcony drinking a couple of beers.

"She's not that sick...is she?" he replied. "Nobody's that fucked up."

We exchanged knowing looks, then I said, "Yeah, they are."

It was just after eight when the phone rang. I had just finished taking a shower and was combing my hair out. I could hear Peter talking in the other room. Then he was knocking on my door, telling me that Carlee had just called. I quickly opened the door. "She wants to come over," Peter said in a concerned tone of voice.

## 8. THE REALIZATION

I suppose the very first thing I noticed was a throbbing hum. A steady vibration. As I opened my eyes, squinting against a bright light in my face, I saw a low, wood paneled ceiling. Then I realized that I was shackled to what appeared to be a bed of some sort, and that I was naked. Later I would learn that it was a lightweight chiropractor's table. Groggy, I tried to assemble some thought processes but my mind seemed to be blunted by a thick haze. My tongue felt swollen. I was queasy. Then I noticed that the room appeared to be swaying back and forth, and up and down. Although I tried to fight it, I found myself drifting back into unconsciousness. Willing my eyelids to stay open, I could see someone standing next to me. I heard a woman's voice, felt a warm hand on my arm. I strained to hear what she was saying, before lapsing back into sleep.

At this stage, being removed some six months from the event, I often times have to think hard about that evening. Memories arrive in my brain like a jumbled puzzle. Psychologically, I have constructed fortifications to aid my mental stability. That, as is expected, is not unusual. Trauma manifests itself in many ways. The fact that I have been trained in the science of psychological healing doesn't immunize me from the onslaught of pain, however derived.

In writing this book I have had to relive portions of my horror, which, I suppose, can be healthy. In a way. In the past, I have certainly recommended it to my patients as a way of alleviating their day to day dysfunction. Now, well, I can only feel foolish--and naive. When the abhorrent visits, and eventually takes a foothold in your soul, remedies are, for the most part, worthless. Like a virulent virus, memories can scrape your well-being, pruning it down to the nub, leaving nothing but an exposed nerve. Healing, if it ever comes, is often times ineffectual at

first and, hopefully, evolves into something that can at the very least ameliorate the problem.

Having said that, I will press on.

Peter died. Was murdered. Suffocated. Stashed in his bedroom, atop the covers on his bed, arms folded. Excuse my stream of consciousness for the moment because I still have not assembled the ramifications in a neat row in my mind. My friend of so many years is gone.

What transpired that evening, as best reconstructed, began with the phone call from Carlee. She had called to tell us that she really needed to speak to us because she was beginning to suspect what we had said about Reed Timms might be true. No details. Only that she didn't feel safe and wanted to know if she could come over to Peter's condo. I didn't field the call from her. She spoke with Peter and set everything in motion. I doubt that I would have refused her if I had spoken to her first. She was our link to the case. In my haste to solve the murders I probably wouldn't have suspected a thing.

In a half an hour she was at the door, appearing, almost dashing into the apartment. She seemed to be agitated about something. Nervous. We tried to calm her and finally got her to sit down on the couch in the living room. Together, Peter and I pumped her for more information, trying to discover what exactly had sent her headlong into a panic. Did she find some incriminating evidence? Was there some sort of physical altercation between her and the Artist? What had happened?

"I don't how to put it, really," she began tearfully. "The more I began to think about what you said the more I realized that something wasn't...you know...right with him. It's hard to spell it out right now but something's just not right."

"Like what?" I wanted to know. "Can you be more specific?"

She ignored my question and rambled on about a "creepy intuition" she was suddenly getting about the whole thing. Peter tried to calm her by assuring her that she was safe and that we could now bring the police in and lock Reed Timms away--for good. She smiled weakly and wanted to know if she could have something to drink. When Peter told her he would get her something she suddenly jumped up and followed him into the kitchen. I didn't suspect anything.

A moment later they returned with three drinks, three of those Caribbean concoctions Peter was so fond of. We sat down and went over what had transpired after she left us earlier that day. She told us that she had gone to see Reed, as predicted, and told him what we had said. He had, so she told us, gotten upset and demanded to know who had told her such nonsense. Carlee, if nothing else, was quite an actress. Apparently, as I sat in the living room, Carlee had manipulated Peter enough to doctor our drinks while he wasn't looking. After that, according to their plan, we became their next victims as we slid into sleep. Peter didn't fit into their plans. He was dispatched quickly by placing a plastic bag over his head.

I was drifting in and out of consciousness. One of the restraints, the one on my right wrist, was too tight, producing a numbness that was making its way up my arm. My vision was blurry, like when I removed my contacts at the end of the day. It was all I could do to try and swallow my mouth was so dry.

How much time has passed, I wondered, blinking, averting my eyes from the overhead light. Stay awake, I told myself. Then I noticed the vibration had stopped. The incessant humming had died away. There was just a gentle rocking motion. To my horror, I at last realized that I was on a boat, the Artist's boat.

"Thirsty?" I heard a woman's voice ask. I strained my neck to see who had asked. "Here,



drink some of this."

"What is it?" I stammered, trying to focus my eyes against the glare of the light.

"Water. Drink it," the voice ordered in a placid tone.

"Who are you?" I demanded to know, willing my tongue to work. "What's going on here?"

"Drink now, talk later," she replied, sliding a straw between my lips.

"I'm cold," I said in a whisper.

The water coated my dry throat immediately, as I greedily sucked at the straw. The voice murmured some praise and I felt a hand pat me on the shoulder, gently pushing me down as I tried to raise up against the restraints. A soft blanket was thrown over me and pulled up to my chin. I heard a door opening and closing. As quickly as she appeared, she had slipped away.

Noises filtered into the room from above. Metallic sounds. Mysterious thumps. Then laughter. Faint music: jazz. Voices too. A man's. The woman's. And then I was slipping into sleep again. No. I fought to stay awake, shaking my head back and forth. Open your eyes, I silently screamed.

"Hello," I heard a man call out cheerfully.

"Where am I?" I exclaimed in a demanding tone, tilting my head to the side to see who had entered the room. He had moved to a position just behind me.

"You are anchored off an island...not far from shore," he replied. "Too far to swim of course but never the less not that far off shore. If you were out on deck you could see the lights of the Florida Keys. How's that for a hint," he announced, chuckling.

"Reed...Reed Timms, what--"

"I guess introductions aren't needed then," he said, laughing. "I mean everyone knows who

you are, I suppose. Dr. Sarah Greene, the psychologist...writer...professor...mother...wife," he said, with his voice trailing off.

I could hear him doing something behind me, just beyond my line of vision. He was humming to himself, and muttering. "Where's Carlee?" I demanded to know.

"You are just full of questions, aren't you?" Reed Timms declared, pulling at my hair playfully. I recoiled and he said, "Oh, sorry, didn't mean to startle you."

I tilted my head back and caught a glimpse of him, before he moved to the other end of the room. I could hear some drawers being slid closed. The door opened and I saw Carlee clearly for the first time. She smiled at me and motioned to Reed, who politely excused himself and followed her out the door. They were whispering out in the corridor but I couldn't make out what they were saying. I then heard a motor approaching. It got louder. Reed called out. People were talking. The door quickly opened. A hand was on my mouth. Duct tape was being applied across my face. I squirmed and tried to fight back. Carlee's face loomed. She whispered for me to keep quiet, holding a knife to my throat. The minutes ticked past. She smiled at me, even brushing the hair out of my eyes.

"Coast is clear!" Reed Timms shouted out, closing the door behind him. "A couple of fishermen," he explained. "Looking for some place or other. Told him to head south." Out of the corner of my eye I could see him prop a rifle up against the wall. "Can't be too careful out here though. Pirates, matey," he sang out in a staged accent.

"Not funny," Carlee chastised.

"You will have too excuse Miss Carlee there, Doctor Sarah. Couple months back we had a run-in with some desperadoes over in the Bahamas. They were looking to rob our boat--I guess."

"You guess," she shot back, clucking her tongue.

"I, shall we say, had to change their minds with a little lead persuasion," Reed Timms stated, giggling.

"He means he took some shots at them," Carlee translated.

"We never go any where without our guns. Ain't that right, darlin'?" he said in a mock southern accent.

"Why do all of you Northerners think we talk like some whitetrash from the backwoods?" she demanded to know.

"I apologize, Miss Carlee. I forgot to take into account your fine two hundred year old ancestry, with all its glorious husbandry of the fertile land...and souls," Timms chided, grinning at her.

"Okay, my people had slaves...get over it," she said wearily.

"Where are our manners? We don't want to bore Doctor Sarah here," Timms declared, stepping around to where I could see him clearly. "She is accustomed to being around celebs and all. Hobnobbing with A list types. Correct?" He grabbed one of my toes and tweaked it, giggling. "What an exciting life you must lead. You'll have to regale us with your tales."

I now saw the Artist for the first time. He was in his mid-twenties. Just a shade over six feet tall. His hair was a sandy color, sun kissed from all of his days on the beach. There was the obligatory beach tan too. He was wearing a pair of knee length surfer shorts and a t-shirt with the sleeves hacked off, leaving an uneven border of jagged material just above his well toned biceps. Then there was the smile, enhanced of course, but disarmingly inviting. A couple day old stubble finalized the beach bum look. As predicted, he was handsome.

Reed Timms was no beach bum. He was the partner to Hawkins, as in Hawkins and Timms, the two wunderkins who devised some crafty software a few years back that eventually sold for millions of dollars, snatched up by some Euro firm and folded into their proprietary program. Not being a computer expert, I couldn't explain what exactly it was, or did, just to say that it facilitated this and that when it came to forwarding bulk data on the internet. Reed Timms was one of those lucky, fortunate ones who walked away from the dot com binge with pockets of cash before it all went south. He had, in collaboration with Hawkins, written abstruse code his senior year at college, thereby converting the end result into a bank account not unlike the robber barons of yesteryear. Being filthy rich had, apparently, left him with plenty of time on his hands. While Hawkins had gone on to found no less than three other companies, Reed Timms had purchased a mega-yacht and adopted the beach as his play ground.

"I don't want to bore you," I said sarcastically, yanking at my restraints.

"Miss Carlee, we have a fiesty one here," he sang out, doing a little dance. "Something told me you weren't going to be a model victim."

"What did you expect?" I shot back, straining to see what Carlee was doing behind me.

Carlee giggled, then commanded, "Stop pulling on your bindings! You are going to only hurt yourself."

"Why are you doing this?" I exclaimed, trying not to sound like I was wailing.

"Why?" Reed muttered, scratching his chin. "Cause I can," he answered, grinning at me. "Relax, Doctor Sarah. You are now a participant in a world worthy experiment. Yeah. That's right. We, you and me, are going to be embarking on a journey, one that is sure to bring at least one of us pleasure."

"Don't be a tease," Carlee joked, tossing something at Reed Timms.

He bent over to pick it up and I could see that it was a condom. He shot a look of disapproval in Carlee's direction, then said, "You'll have to excuse her. She has a tendency to get jealous round about this time."

"Do not," she exclaimed.

"Do too," he called out in a child's falsetto.

"What did you give me?" I demanded to know, not that it mattered at this point in time.

"You partook of one of my delicate concoctions," Timms replied, smiling. "Miss Carlee there did the deed."

"Rohypnol."

"Good guess," Reed Timms whispered into my ear. "You are very astute, Doctor Sarah."

Who were these two? coursed through my brain. Reed Timms and Carlee Rawlston. They had met on Daytona Beach. It was Spring Break. She was driving her VW Cabriolet, bright red, a High School graduation gift from her father, Reginold P. Rawlston, esq. of Charleston, South Carolina. Old family, old money, so everyone knew. Carlee, along with two other college classmates, had driven down from Columbia, South Carolina, where they were attending the University of South Carolina.

Reed, stumbling drunk, had been walking perilously close to the unmarked road on the beach. Carlee's friends had begged her to pick him up before he got run over. She was reluctant to stop. As usual, there was a long line of cars cruising up and down the beach, a cavalcade of inebriated college kids, whittling away at the concept of safety. Finally she relented and pulled up next to him and asked if he wanted a ride. Although having logged numerous hours that day

in the bars, Reed was sober enough to notice three pretty girls in a convertible. He clumsily climbed in the backseat and it all began.

Reed Timms was from up north. His family had lived in New England for several generations. He was middle-class. Mr. Timms was an optometrist. Mrs. Timms taught second grade. They had a home in a small town in Rhode Island. Reed was an only child, something he shared in common with Carlee. That and the fact that their ancestors stretched back to 18th century America, one from a northern colony and one from a southern colony. They could both point to a past family member who had participated in the Revolutionary War.

Carlee was raised in Charleston, South Carolina. She had been pampered and spoiled by her mother, while her father, a scion in the local community, had treated her like a princess. She had been a debutante. She had taken tennis lessons at the club. She had lost her virginity to the Captain of the football team, right after being crowned Homecoming Queen. Carlee Rawlston was a modern day Southern Belle, wearing her sense of entitlement like a fashion accessory.

Reed attended the Rhode Island School of Design because in High School he had won a prestigious award for one of his paintings. His art, however, had always been just one facet of his talents. He had many interests, including playing the piano, delving into computer arcana, and playing sports. He, like Carlee, had been popular in High School. Although his parents had encouraged him to attend Brown, he had decided to head off to Providence for other reasons. Ultimately, he had no concrete interest in academics. In fact, he doubted if he even had the stamina necessary to maintain a singular focus in order to graduate. He wanted to experience so much and sitting in classes, pursuing a degree, seemed somehow too restricting.

The University of South Carolina, Carlee's father's alma mater, on the other hand, suited her

just fine. Academically it wasn't too demanding and campus life offered any number of diversions for her. There were sorority functions. Parties. Getaways to the mountains with friends. Quick trips home to see the parents. Relationships to nurture, or not. College life was a more mature extension of her usual lifestyle. She was popular. She elicited envy. She was expected to be her.

They were the same age, only separated by less than a month. Their junior year was coming to an end. Reed was already thinking about plans to skip his last year of college and travel. Carlee didn't want to think about life after college, when she would be either expected to marry or pursue a career. Her major was (now) Elementary Education, which she had switched to after she grew bored with psychology, and before that communications. She knew that whatever degree was bestowed on her by the University of South Carolina was probably never going to be, well, exercised.

Reed was a few short weeks away from working up some code, with his friend, that was going to make a college education irrelevant, and generally unnecessary. As he vaulted into the backseat of Carlee's car that warm Spring day, he had no way of knowing that his destiny had just been joined with hers. In a year's time they would be laying out plans to change their lives.

It was a Spring Break romance, a cliché. They spent their remaining three days and nights in Daytona together, culminating in lovemaking on the beach at three in the morning. After the exchange of personal histories, the abbreviated versions, they had participated in the usual pursuits, even appearing unexpectedly on MTV. Phone numbers were exchanged.

Once back at college, as a late surging winter still gripped the northeast, Reed supposed he would forget his fling in Florida. Then he found himself thumbing through the dozen or so snap

shots of Carlee he had stuffed into his luggage and fighting the impulse to call her. Carlee, for her part, returned to her campus that was under siege by a blossoming Springtime. Her sorority sisters teased her about her Yankee boy friend and she parried their gibes with good humor, steadily scoffing at any established romance. Yet, as the usual functions and events unfolded around her at USC, she couldn't dislodge Reed Timms from her mind.

Reed was the first to call. Carlee answered her cell phone and there was his voice. Stunned, she didn't know what to say. They exchanged weather reports then there was an awkward silence. He finally told her he missed her. She giggled and told him the same. The conversation stretched into an hour. Afterwards, they maintained the momentum with emails and more phone calls. Before long plans were made to visit each other.

That summer they traded visits to their respective hometowns, meeting the parents in the process. To Reed, Charlestown was, well, quaint, not unlike a living amusement ride, with historical overtones. The South, for him, had always been an abstraction, one that included reverberations of the unbelievable. Slavery, segregation, and that flag preoccupation, were all ingredients in a very odd recipe.

Carlee, no amateur historian, took New England at face value. There were plenty of pleasant landscapes. The people weren't quite as personable as home but still, somehow, friendly enough. She enjoyed the cooler weather and found Reed's parents amicable, even if they gently mocked her accent and wondered out loud about the whole racial conundrum "down there." It wasn't something that she hadn't experienced before. Northerners, although in small numbers, attended her college and were often outspoken about their views of the South in general and South Carolina in particular.



Reed's mother wanted to be happy for her son, even if she thought it peculiar, if not counterproductive, to be courting a girl from the South, one that was so obviously born and bred there. She would have been much more comfortable with a girl from New Hampshire or even New York, a future daughter-in-law who she could align herself with when her son's marriage had taken root. With Carlee, well, it didn't seem that she would ever truly build a lasting relationship. Besides, Reed's parents saw her as being basically shallow and unable to actually seek out a career of any sort. Mrs. Timms had a career and it meshed completely with her identity of being a wife and mother.

It was all, more or less, moot. The Timms' son would not have to resort to any career struggle or advancement ordeals. There would be no gradations, starting with graduation, employment, and on to a tasteful wedding, before leading to starting a family. Their son would be another exceptional story for the financial sheets to laud over. Riches would appear as if by magic. For the Timms, who had been well entrenched in the middle-class for so long, it would be a dizzying voyage into the unreal. Contracts. Teams of lawyers. Advisors. It would all add up to wealth that was embarrassingly obscene. "Ungodly," as Mr. Timms would label it, as his son exhibited his bank account by bestowing on his parents the deed to a homestead in the Berkshires, a property that Mr. and Mrs. Timms had often spoken of in almost hushed tones of incredulity.

And now Carlee had come along for the ride. Normalcy had been duly displaced. Reed Timms, who had a net worth on any given day of millions, had elected to live the life of a life guard, while residing on a monstrous yacht, visiting ports up and down the Eastern seaboard. It was, in its way, surreal.

Reed had, more or less, severed any connection with his partner. Hawkins had moved out to the West Coast, to Northern California, where he continued to work on projects that were computer related, trying to prove that what he and Reed had done before was no fluke. Hawkins wanted, so it would seem, respect for his work. Reed, on the other hand, treated it as it probably was: dumb luck. Good fortune. Right time. Right place. He didn't harbor any visions of his infallible genius. In fact, he was quick to say that the code had been rudimentary and amateurish. "That somebody bought the shit is just plain silly," he was fond of saying in the few interviews that he gave post cash out, before slipping into relative obscurity.

Reed Timms was, by his estimation, artistic. He was a painter who had never settled on a medium to work in. And he was a synesthete. The clinical explanation would be cross-modal association, which translated means a stimulation of one sensory modality causing perception in one or more different senses. So, he was multi-sensoried. What did it mean? I, as a psychologist couldn't tell you. It was, all and all, little understood, even ignored and thought to be bogus.

Synesthesia was difficult to explain. It was thought to be associated with artistic people and their creative outlet. Succinctly, it had to do with perception and how colors played a part in discerning stimuli. Of recent, there had been a revival of interest in the subject. In a Psych journal I had seen a tract about some research being done over in England. However it was thought to be so statistically rare that it was rendered almost insignificant.

For many synesthetes, there was a direct correlation between certain sources of stimuli, resulting in some rather bizarre reactions. As to Reed Timms, as I was to soon find out, he had a peculiar reaction to music, in this case Jazz. Jazz, as a music form, was intrinsically free-form in

style as well as substance. It was, arguably, an acquired taste. I personally didn't care for it, preferring some admittedly watered down version of Rock. A guy I dated in college had been, by his own estimation, a Jazz lover. A few of our dates had been spent at clubs specializing in showcasing obscure groups and solo acts, all in the name of that form of entertainment. I didn't become a devotee and that fact was a source of good-natured friction between us.

Apparently, so it would seem, Carlee shared my judgement because the very first time Timms put a Jazz CD on she groaned loudly and muttered under her breath some profanity. As can be expected, I was flabbergasted to hear any music at all. At this point my fear had subsided, replaced by a gnawing sense of cruel expectation. I had read the police files. I had seen the forensic photos. It was certainly little comfort to know how you were going to die. But music?

"Chicago Art Ensemble," Reed Timms announced behind me, adjusting the sound with the remote in his hand. "Like that sound system? Not bad, huh?"

"A great sound system is not gonna make that shit sound any better," Carlee exclaimed, laughing.

"Ignore her, Doctor Sarah," Timms declared, turning the music up. "She's a philistine anyway. She'd be very happy for me to play one of Foster's tunes. Right? Camptown races here we come, do-dah...do-dah."

"Very funny," Carlee shot back.

"Now-now, you should be proud of your heritage," he needled. "Take pride in your racist past. Somebody has to."

"I'm going to get something to drink," Carlee almost shouted over the music.

I watched her leave the room and then realized that I felt somehow a little safer when she

was present; although that was absurd because she was apparently a willing participant in the previous crimes committed and obviously wasn't going to offer any aid to me. Timms lowered the music then appeared next to me, with his face close to mine. I felt his breath on my cheek. He was smiling, as he then kissed me lightly on the lips. Instinctively, I pulled away.

"Don't be bashful, Doctor Sarah," he chortled, grasping my head in his hands. "We are going to take a journey together...you and me. When it is over you will know...know a rarefied happiness like no other."

"Why are you doing this?" I stammered, trying to shake off his hands.

"Why?" he said, snickering. "Enlightenment, of course. Let's just call it a religious adventure. You will just have to have faith."

Upon later research I would learn that Timms particular type of synesthesia manifested itself in response to musical sounds. If he were to hear certain rhythms he would experience an almost hallucinogenic reaction in which a whole array of abstract images would be visualized. To borrow from my parents generation, Reed Timms would undergo an acid trip of sorts. The tattoos I had seen in those crime scene photos were the end result of his visions, the byproduct of his warped creativity. The skin etchings were Daliesque for that very reason: they were illusionary renderings.

That explained, more or less, the defacing of human skin, but what rationale would shed light on Timms homicidal personality? Was it organic? Family? Was there a trigger, something that unleashed the hounds of hell from his mind? And where did Carlee fit in? Had her lifestyle led her so far into nihilism that she couldn't see the light of day any longer? What exactly had blunted her sense of right and wrong? The power of desensitization was known to fabricate an

almost anti-moral stance, one that bordered on the amoral. They were both products of a generation where the components of decency had been blurred by cinematic mayhem, where the pursuit of the end result was, at best, fluid.

Speculation wasn't going to do me much good at that point. Being an armchair therapist was useless. I was dealing with a very intelligent man with the resources to enact just about any scenario he wished. My limited powers of persuasion were probably going to prove to be ineffective. With Carlee I might have a better chance. Certainly she had displayed some hints of disapproval, or, at least, irritation. Perhaps there might be an opening there. I could possibly appeal to her feminine side and we could bond in some sort of sisterhood against Timms, a man. Would she really approve of Reed Timms engaging in forced sex? Didn't an act of rape almost always provoke a sense of righteousness in every woman? It was ingrained in us. Biological prerogatives went deep into our collective psyches. Had she watched the assaults? Willingly? Participated?

"I've always leaned towards agnosticism," I quipped, trying to humor him as best I could, hoping that Carlee would return.

"Really," he exclaimed, stepping back. "You? Come on. Even secular Jews are religious-- in their way. Right? I mean you do that Yom Kipper thing and all. You are the chosen people for god's sakes."

I laughed along with him then said, "Just a formality type of thing. Like a reflex. Purely involuntary motions."

He laughed then said, "I like you, Doctor Sarah. You are very...very different. Different than the rest. They were all just taking up space. Pretty but way dull."

"Tell me about them," I encouraged.

"Oh now, here it comes. You are going to analyze me. Right? I'm so flattered. Analyzed by the great Doctor Sarah Greene. Too bad you won't be around to write a book about me. Damn! Missed out on immortality," he joked. "I got your book here on the boat somewhere. Your writing style is only so so, but with that interesting topic it doesn't matter."

"Everybody's a critic," I muttered.

"Well, you know, that Flowers guy was kind of out there," Timms said without even a hint of irony. "Scary too."

"You really did read it then," I said, hoping to continue steering the conversation.

"Oh yeah, of course," he answered, nodding yes. "I'll have to have you sign my copy before, you know, the end of things."

The absurdity of his statement hung in the air for a moment then I said, "So how exactly did you meet Julie?"

"Who?" he said absently. "Oh, her. On the beach, where else? Nice girl. Had a lot of bad breaks in her life. Fucking lunatic parents and all. Stripping for money. Talk about degrading."

"Ever go to the club where she worked?"

"What? No. What for? Are you kidding me or what? That pisshole of a place should be burned down," he stated adamantly, smacking a fist into his open hand. "Oh the ills of society what have you wrought?"

"Did you get to know her very--" I started to ask when Timms almost slumped over the table and seemed to go into what can only be described as a trance state. I could feel him gripping my thighs, as he closed his eyes and swayed his head from side to side.

"Don't worry, he'll snap out of it in a minute," Carlee called out from the doorway. "He gets like that every time he hears this section of the CD.

"What is happening to him?" I asked in a hushed tone of voice.

"You tell me. You're the psychologist. It has to do with that whole synthetic syndrome shit or whatever it is," she explained, laughing. "According to him he sees shapes and doodles in the sky. Who knows? Weird huh? What crap. Anyway, get ready because when he comes back down to earth he's gonna want to do some doodling on you."

Timms had almost slumped over me. I could feel his hands on my leg and stomach area. He was humming along to the music, with his eyes shut tight. Then I could see a grin creep to his lips before blossoming into a wide smile. Behind me, I could hear Carlee exhaling deeply, muttering to herself. A crescendo of clashing horns competed, blaring out of the sound system, filling the small room with a sort of atavistic noise.

"Oh yeah, now that's attainment," Timms suddenly called out, tapping out a discordant rhythm on my abdomen.

"Sure, right," Carlee sniped, adding, "can we turn this shit down now or what?"

"Sister Carlee...my love, maybe one day you will be brought into the fold," Timms announced, continuing to drum away on my stomach.

"Can't wait," she snapped, walking over and unceremoniously turning the music down.

Timms jerked upright, shook his head slowly, then exclaimed, "Talk about stepping on my groove...I mean come on, baby, can't I enjoy my--"

"Wouldn't want to be impolite to our guest," Carlee stated, laughing. "Too much of a good thing, you know."

Timms looked down at me for a moment then smiled and said, "Oh, right, sorry Dr. Greene. May I call you Sarah. I mean we are about to reach another, shall we say, plateau in our relationship and I thought we shouldn't have to stand on...on formality or anything. You know what I mean."

I was experiencing what might best be described as raw trepidation. I now realized that I was going to have to manage my emotions for an extended period of time. Although the mental aspects of my predicament were still operating, an almost primal physiological response had taken over my body. Fight versus flight had been slowly replaced by a fluctuating sense of resignation and revulsion.

"So...tell me...has it gotten any easier?" I asked, trying to maintain a tone of resoluteness in the face of my mounting sense of dread.

Reed Timms looked at me for a moment then smiled and said, "You know, Sarah, that old theory in physics, that quantum thing, where the act of observing changes the object being measured, well just gazing at your beautiful skin changes everything. But then you haven't a clue what I'm talking about--do you?"

"Like anybody does," Carlee interjected, giggling.

"Shush now, Car-lee," Timms called out in an exaggerated southern accent. "Me and the good doctor are having a conversation here, you know, two intelligent people. Of course that kind of leaves you out of the equation--right?"

"Yuk-yuk, boy did you get me there," she shot back.

"Anyway," Timms declared, waving his hand in Carlee's direction in a dismissive gesture, "this epidermal canvas is the most interesting thing about you. True? Of course."



"Why don't you insult the poor woman," Carlee needled. "Aren't you going to say anything about those awful looking stretch marks down there? Huh? Thought you liked pure, unadulterated canvases to work with."

"Fuck off, Carlee," Timms barked angrily, pointing his finger at her.

"Oh, my, you are scaring me," Carlee announced in a mocking falsetto tone of voice.

Timms then bent low over me and said in a half whisper, "Ever hear the expression about someone being too stupid to be afraid?"

"Like I didn't hear that," Carlee almost shouted out. "You're such a genius--don't we know. Mr. Know-it-all. I am real impressed."

I was trying to tell if there were real, legitimate differences in their relationship. They did seem to conduct their interactions with a level of sarcasm that bordered on animosity. Unfortunately, I hadn't been around them to really get a sense of any well established dissension. Their sniping and routine caustic banter could have been their way of continuing their connection to each other. I had once done a study of the so called Y generation, with a sampling of a dozen couples. Ten of the twelve had consistent verbal intercourse on a level that was graded out to be border line hostile; at least to the observer outside the grouping. After further study I had found that this subgroup was indoctrinated by everything from modern music lyrics to snappy movie repartee, establishing a shorthand of language that centered around revolving insults and abstruse endearments. It was more anthropological in nature than psychological.

"Having a child has its rewards and its drawbacks," I interjected, hoping to draw attention to the fact that I was indeed a mother and as a result had a flawed figure. I was hoping this would work on two levels. On one level I was trying to instill some sort of concern for my child and, by

extension, his mother. At the same time I was attempting to point out my shortcomings, thereby demonstrating just how unsuitable I really was for Timms needs.

Timms grinned at me then said as he ran his fingers around my lower stomach area, "I happen to like them. They show...your history."

"Like you're not full of crap," Carlee declared, exhaling loudly.

I had an overwhelming desire to slap his hand away but couldn't. Reflexively, I pulled at my restraints. Timms seemed engrossed with the spidery skin abrasions on my stomach, the ones that I went out of my way to hide come summer time. It had taken me months to be comfortable around my husband even. At the time, my vanity had taken me by surprise. I had never been the type of woman to flaunt her sexuality per se, but, of course, in the modern world a woman was on display every working day. Contemporary fashion dictated exposure on a level not seen since, perhaps, the bodice styles of a decadent France times. Being comfortable with your own body was a conceptual matter, one that was obscured by feministic accomplishments and sensual impulses.

"My history includes being a mother," I stated, staring at him, trying to drive home the point further.

Timms looked away and stood up, clapping his hands and singing out, "Time to get started before I lose my muse."

"Finally," Carlee muttered.

I could hear him behind me busily arranging something. Carlee came into view then leaned over and smiled at me, before yanking the blanket all of the way off my body. She glanced up and down then arched her eyebrows and laughed. Timms was humming to himself then

imitating the instrumental sounds of jazz, while casually snapping his fingers.

"Think we'll need the A and D balm this time around, Miss Carlee?" Timms asked, smiling at her.

"What's a little fireball red skin," she replied, grinning at me. "It'll go away...post-mortem," she said in a forced whisper.

"Now-now, let's not get the customer too upset," Timms joked. "Remain calm. You are in good hands."

I immediately squirmed and fought against the restraints, wishing with all of my might that I could kick them at least just once. They laughed, then Carlee slapped me hard on the right side of my face. I was stunned and could just see her grin through my tears. Timms scolded her and assured me that it wouldn't happen again. Carlee immediately contradicted him and told me that she would hit me any time she felt like it. Then they both laughed, while Carlee asked Timms if he wanted anything to drink. She disappeared out the door.

"Please, god, you don't have to do this," I pleaded, blinking away the tears.

"Interesting you should mention god," Timms said, placing one of his hands on my forearm, slowly stroking as he talked. "You know what religion is? It's a staircase leading up to nowhere. Yeah, that's right. Ever think about it that way? Man devised it to...to alleviate his predicament. I mean here we are, on earth, adrift in a solar system with nothing to anchor our misgivings to. Right? What are we really all about? Man is wired to understand a beginning and an end but with the cosmo type of thing you don't have a beginning or an ending. Now that creates friction in the mind of the human race. We are all somehow unstable mentally when it comes to pointing to the great origin of things and the eventual end. It's a movie with no opening credits and no

ending. Mass neuroses...neuroses...whatever. Am I right about that?"

I was struggling to keep my mind focusing. His stroking of my arm was sending chills all over my body. My nakedness in front of a, shall we say, psycho was riddling my composure. Think, a voice inside my head was screaming. Find an angle. Something to grasp, to attack him with. Do something.

"Are the pleasurable sensations diminishing with each new victim?" I asked, willing him to stop stroking my arm.

"Oh now, here it comes," he exclaimed, whistling loudly. "You are going to analyze me, right? Put Reed Timms on the couch."

"Just a legitimate question," I assured him.

He ignored my remark and continued in a woman's voice, "Did your father abandon you when you were a child? Did your mother abuse you with hot enemas? Tie you up in the basement? Were there siblings who mistreated you too? Any priests do untoward things to you, you know, in between masses?"

"You spoke of a beginning and an end, well, I was just wondering if you could detail in your own mind where there might be an end to this...this homicidal spree you are on?" I asked pointedly, adding a hard edge to my voice.

He wagged a finger at me then said, "You are pretty good, Doctor Greene. I read your book, remember. You have a certain way of getting what you want. It's a talent, really. You can't teach it. No. You are born with it."

"Flatterer," I joked, hoping to sway him into a different set of personalities, ones that I was sure he employed in his life in order to conduct everyday affairs.

"Now, see, you are doing it again," he said, stepping back, glancing up and down my body. He thought for a moment, then said, "Admittedly this is going differently than the others. The other girls were, you know, less than cerebral, shall we say. You have definitely scrambled up things. But, then again, you wouldn't have been on my list to begin with. No offense. It was just with the surprise you sprung on us we had to change things up and all. Sorry about that."

"You said yourself I'm not suitable," I offered, taking yet another tack. "What are you going to get out of it? I do not meet the criterion. This will not be fulfilling at all. Waste of time. End of story."

He laughed and said, "I could just dump you in the ocean. Make you shark bait. Right?"

"Pure murder and that's not what you are about," I countered, trying to gauge whether or not I was making any head way with him.

"No, but I am," Carlee called out from the doorway. "Don't let this bitch put any crazy ideas in your head, Reed. I mean, my god, what bullshit."

"What did you make me...a rum runner?" Timms asked, switching into a different persona.

"Ink her," Carlee sang out, laughing.

"No squirming," Timms ordered, patting my arm affectionately. "I have to have you really still for this, Sarah. Real still. Or, you know, it's kind of gonna get messy and all.

Needles...blood...virgin skin, got to be careful."

"He's a real Rembrandt for sure," Carlee chortled, giggling. "Such a master."

"Don't listen to her, Sarah, she's a Philistine," Timms whispered to me, smiling. "Wouldn't know a Picasso from a finger painting."

"Want some more music?" Carlee asked angrily. "Something to get you going?"

He waved her off and busied himself with some tattoo paraphernalia on a small tray on wheels, which he rolled up next to me. Out of the corner of my eye I could see him putting on a pair of plastic gloves. Then Carlee appeared on the other side of me and leaned over to whisper in my ear. I could smell the alcohol on her breath. Irritated, Timms told her to back off and let him do his work. They exchanged insults and she retreated behind me, where I could hear the ice in her drink clinking in the glass.

"Let the masterpiece begin," Timms suddenly declared, as he ran his left hand over my left breast and on down to my navel.

I closed my eyes tight for a moment, squeezing them shut, hoping to close it all out. Then I could sense him hovering over me, as his left hand paused just above my breasts. Carlee was giggling. Timms reprimanded her. The realization of my predicament rushed in on me. A few tears drifted down my cheek. No crying, I told myself.

"I told you," Carlee suddenly shouted out gleefully. "You owe me twenty bucks."

"Quiet!" Timms ordered.

"Like all the rest. They always start crying right about now. Pa-the-tic," Carlee exclaimed, laughing.

The stinging started, like tiny bees alighting on my skin. I tried not to flinch. Timms reminded me not to move. I could feel his hot breath on my chest as he spoke. He was dabbing at my skin with a wash cloth, wiping away the trickles of blood left over from the needle.

"Be still, dear Sarah," he whispered, as the needle etched more ink into my skin, leaving blood to ooze.

"Make sure you are using the disposable needles, honey," Carlee joked. "Wouldn't want to

pass on any diseases, would we. You know how nasty that old hepatitis can be."

Timms turned back to the tray and was making adjustments to the tattoo machine. He was humming to himself. I glanced down and saw a blotchy area of redness on my chest, with a bare outline of green ink. I blinked away a few tears. My mouth was dry and I tried to swallow a couple of times. Carlee materialized by my side and forced a straw into my mouth. Cold orange juice. I greedily sucked at the straw.

Then there was the needle again. Pinpricks attacked my skin. The wash cloth Timms was using to dab my blood was now bright red. He paused for a moment before continuing, still humming. Carlee was slurping at her drink and tapping her feet to a silent beat. I realized I was clenching my hands into tight fists. Relax. Regroup. Think of something else.

What time was it? I wanted to know. What day? How long had it been? Jason? He would be worried. He would call. Where was my cell phone? Certainly he would call the Miami Beach police. At the very least he would call Peter's condo. He knew the outlines of the case, the danger involved. Didn't he? Copies of the case files were on my desk. He would find them. Something would be done.

"What do you think?" Timms asked Carlee, who walked around and stood next to him.

"Might have to use the balm on her. With her skin reaction...I don't know."

"I'm no artist, honey, but that is...is wonderful," Carlee said, barely masking her sarcasm.

"Real masterpiece."

"Fuck off," he said, dabbing at his work with the wash cloth. "I want the ink colors to form and shape into a dreamlike depiction," he tried to explain, speaking more to me than to Carlee.

"I'm going to eventually use your breast as a sort of boundary."

"The last one had better boobs," Carlee stated matter-of-factly.

"Carlee," Timms scolded. "Don't listen to her, Sarah. You have wonderful mammaries."

All I could think of was breast feeding my son. That and the damn breast pump I had had so much trouble working with. My mother had confessed to me that she had elected not to breast feed, going with the old reliable formula method. It had surprised me at the time about how I had never known that little tidbit of mother/daughter information. My doctor had been mostly non-committal about it. He had just shrugged and left the decision up to me.

As I looked at Carlee, who was staring at me with an evil grin on her face, I had to reassess her role in all of this. Before, when I didn't really know much about her complicity, I had believed she was perhaps being manipulated by the Artist. Somehow he had influenced her in such a way as to commit barbarous crimes. How could she be a party to three or more heinous crimes? It didn't seem possible. Where had any psychological unhinging gone on? When? Admittedly at the time I knew next to nothing about her, except she was probably a pampered girl from the South, with a pedigree of some distinction, and that she had embarked on the dark side of things.

It was more than just puzzling. As I knew at this juncture, she was privy to Timms perfidy, including the sexual gratification at the expense of his victims. Certainly she had demonstrated some displeasure with that aspect of the unfolding crimes. Was she compartmentalizing certain events? Was it a trade off? Did Carlee implement the actual murder? Had the other victims died at her hands, suffocated while Reed Timms looked on? I tried to imagine her sliding a plastic bag over one of the girl's head and watching as she gasped for air. Through the clear bags Carlee would be able to see the fear in her victim's eyes, the sheer desperation and horror. Was



this a bargain they had struck, Carlee and Reed? Sex. Defacing human skin. Death.

"I think somebody could have used a bikini waxing," Carlee sneered, snickering. "How about I give her one?"

Timms looked over his shoulder at her and said, "Please, genius at work here."

I felt his fingers trace an outline over my stomach and down to my navel. He was muttering to himself. A few beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. *Scream!* My mind was ordering me to yell with all my might. Fight back. Never stop.

"How long is this going to take?" Carlee wanted to know. "I might go up on deck and get some sun for a while."

Timms ignored her and continued tracing imaginary sketches on my abdomen. She made a face at him and stomped out of the room, slamming the door behind her. He cursed under his breath, as he lowered the tattoo machine back into place. Again the stinging, tracing a blood trail across my stomach. I looked down to see he had changed from a green ink to a bluish color. He dabbed furiously at the percolating blood, muttering to himself again.

I didn't know how much time passed. I was locked into a mind vacuum, trying to ward off any immediate stimuli that would cause my sense of survivability to crash. Collect yourself, I told myself. Engage him in conversation. Draw him out. Manipulate. Do something!

"I gonna need mo music," Timms suddenly exclaimed in a mock black dialect. "I'm losing my juice here. Nothing's happening. Drying out."

"I'm hungry, how about you?" Carlee called down from on deck. "Want me to make you something?"

Timms looked at me and said, "Only girl in the South who can't cook. No, maybe later."

We could hear her moving around up on deck. She had turned on a radio and banal pop music floated on the air. Timms cringed and told me she had no taste in music. I tried to smile back at him. He stood up for a moment and stepped back, surveying his work. Looking down, I saw another patch of blotchy red skin. Push away the thoughts of vanity, I told myself, although the power of being disfigured seeped into my mind. If by a minor miracle I was able to escape I would now be an epidermal billboard. Suddenly I was thinking about painful laser surgery to remove Timm's handiwork. Awful thoughts of me doing the talk show circuit again filled my brain, with vivid accounts of me raising my blouse to reveal what had been done to me. Doctor Phil would be there to assure me that I would be able to overcome the injustice that had altered the course of my life. He would be full of cheery bravado, peppered with pseudo psychological jargon. The studio audience would, of course, be sympathetic, but inappropriately curious, wanting to see all of the tattoos. Up close. On an overhead monitor. One that showed everything in glaring detail, right down to my chronically dry skin.

"Did you suffer a severe period of withdrawal after you finished with your last victim?" I asked him, wanting to try and blanket him with responsibility for his actions. "There has to be a dropoff, right? Like a cliff maybe."

He smiled at me and said, "These colors aren't working for me. Damn!"

He started to pace back and forth. Slowly. He snapped his fingers to a silent rhythm, trying to work up his so called muse again. Strains of the pop music filtered into the cabin.

"What are you feeling right now, right this minute?" I asked in as calm a voice as I could muster.

He ignored me and shouted out, "Carlee, dammit, turn that fucking music off. You're

killing me with that!"

"What is it? Tell me. Let me know what's happening," I persisted.

"It's about the inherent contradiction...yeah, that's what's it is all about," Timms explained.

"It's built right into life, into the life archetype."

"Oh lord," Carlee groaned from the doorway. "Here comes the blather about--"

"Forget about her, too many grits when she was growing up," Timms mocked, dismissing her with a wave of his hand.

"I happen to hate grits," she stated proudly. "Why is it all your people from up North think we like grits? Want to tell me that?"

"It is simple, Doctor Greene, really, and astronomy says it best when you have the scientific fact that the hotter an object is the more blue it gets, while the cooler stars are yellow and orange color. Kind of counterintuitive--right?"

"You know, Reed, you're smart and all but boy you sure are weird," Carlee declared, laughing. "That poor woman doesn't have a clue what in the hell you are talking about. Nobody does. Sometimes I think he should be locked up in the looney bin."

"I'm trying to make the connection between colors and--" I started to say.

"Yes, the colors," Timms interrupted, walking back over next to me. "It's about the colors and how they impinge on the general collective bond we all share."

"Anything you say, Reed," Carlee said, raising her eyebrows at me.

"Explain it to me," I encouraged, hoping that I could glean something--anything--about him that might help me in the end.

"It's the old Kant versus Mills thing," he said, drumming his fingers on my thigh. "Moral

cul-de-sacs everyone has to negotiate. Right. Each and every one of us must complete the contract...or, at least, honor it to some extent."

He was now clutching at my leg, gripping it tightly. I was trying to think back to Philo 101 my freshman year of college. Mills. Kant. What did that mean exactly? What, if any, was the colors connection?

"Where is the utility of a moral rule? Where?" Timms almost demanded to know. "As a psychologist, you tell me. Nowhere. Is it right before what is good or is it good before what is right? Oh the unholy conundrum," he sang out, screeching in a high pitched voice. Was Mills right or was that little Teutonic midget right? You tell me, doc. Come on."

"Right-smight, you're nutty as a loon," Carlee announced, with her voice cutting through the small room like a buzz saw. "I don't think I've ever heard such horseshit before."

Timms turned to her and said, "Carlee, the adults are talking now so why don't you go back on deck and get some more sun."

She glared at him for a moment then said, "Okay, but hurry up because I want to smother that bitch so we can get going to you know where."

"I think I need a break," Timms announced, patting me on the arm affectionately. He then smiled and leaned over and kissed my cheek. "Don't worry about that redness. It'll go away soon enough and then you'll see just how fantastic you look."

I scowled at him and said, "Somehow I doubt that."

"Be patient, you'll see," he chirped, grinning.

I was left alone. Above I could hear them walking around. Snatches of conversation drifted

down. Laughter. As much as I didn't want to look at Timms handiwork I couldn't resist. Spiraling out from my navel was an op-art style design reminiscent of maybe Warhol, which was mingling with a rash like crimson skin reaction. My sense of nakedness was now secondary, having long since been replaced by a gnawing and debilitating funk.

My state of mind brought memories of some research I had done years before for Dr. Burke. It had been a University funded project, passed down from one of the government agencies. The research centered around fear and its effects on the human body. Raw fear often manifested itself first as a physiological affect, complete with blood pressure spikes and adrenaline increases; but it was much more insidious. It was how it impacted on a person's mind that created intractable problems. The psychological component often expanded to overshadow the physical side.

It made me wonder about the other girls, the other victims. What course had their reactions taken? I tried to imagine what each one would have done in response to pending death. Although I certainly had never personally known them, I did however know something about their life from my investigating of the ongoing cases.

Julie, the first victim, was, more or less, streetwise. She lived a day to day life of the semi-underworld. Without a doubt she came into contact with some of the shady types who resided in Jersey. Stripping for a living had, in many ways, prepped her for life's downturns. She wasn't naive. She wasn't oblivious. What had been her reaction to the slow motion horror? Had she been defiant? Would she had attempted to use her sexuality in an attempt to extract herself from Timms's clutches? I thought, believed, that she would have fought back in any way she could.

Millie Sanchez worried me. From what I knew about her she would have been totally unprepared for her ordeal. She was a sweet kid, so it seemed. Her father had moved the family

away from the city proper in order to raise his children in a better environment. Staten Island was, more or less, the suburbs, bringing with it a slower pace and less urban crime. Millie was going to pursue an ordinary life. Blissfully normal. Job. Husband. House. Kids. Normalcy in all of its glory.

She would have been incapacitated by fear. It would have been sudden. Crippling. Timms would have probably enjoyed his power over her, as well as her beautiful physical attributes. Her dark skin would have been a welcome novelty. There would have been more of a sexual impetus. Carlee would have looked forward to extinguishing Millie's young life. There would have been taunts until her very last breath.

I wasn't sure about Pauline Fortson. Coming as she did after two previous murders there might have been a perceptible drop-off. Serial killers faced dwindling returns on their homicidal crusade. Each succeeding death would engender less and less satisfaction. There would be invidious gratification, which could only increase with time. Murder, like everything else, was becoming mundane.

Pauline was from the mid-West. She wasn't a farm girl but she was from a social corner of the world that actually put stock in friendliness. Smiles were genuine. Neighbors were friends. Yet she had come to a South Florida that in many ways was diametrically opposite to Pauline's home State. She brought her beauty. She brought her friendliness. She died.

I well imagined her retreating into a durable shell of psychological prevention. Her mind would have probably shut down, paralyzed by fear. The resulting paucity of verbal interaction would have frustrated Timms. He would want to exchange inane banter. It was fun. It was stimulating. Carlee would have filled the vacuum with her supercilious comments and

portentous threats, poisoning Timms' involvement with the heinous act. This would disturb the balance. Timms would fret and rush his defacing of her skin, reducing his pleasure level. It would be Carlee who derived the most gratification, as she slipped the plastic bag over Pauline's head, roughly applying the duct tape around her neck.

The two of them were by now well versed in their captivity plan. I was given my bathroom breaks, escorted by an agitated Carlee, at gun point, to a small bathroom down the corridor. They fed me on a regular schedule. I was untied and able to feed myself, while one of them, usually Carlee, kept watch over me. She liked to point the handgun at me and warn me that she would be just as happy to shoot me than anything else. I was obedient, knowing I had to hopefully stretch my dwindling time as far as I could. I engaged her in conversation as much as I could, but she was steadfast in her resistance to my verbal probes, telling me that I was wasting my time.

I wasn't making much headway with my delving into their relationship. There seemed to be an odd balance in play, one that allowed them to interact on different levels, ones that they negotiated rather easily, not unlike passing through trapdoors. I had once read a European study that spent several years compiling data on sado-masochistic relationships. In layman's terms, the upshot was that the master/slave axis could be fluid if the participants were functioning as a couple in day to day activities. Of course in this particular situation there didn't seem to be any masochistic plateau, only the opposite. Sharing in sadism wasn't unusual. People had argued that capital punishment was a form of group sadism. Nothing seemed to fit with the two of them. They were defying most of the psychological tripwires a therapist might pick up on.

"What's with the lifeguard thing?" I asked Carlee one morning, the third day of my captivity. She gave me a blank look then continued with her morning chore of removing my breakfast

dishes. "I mean you must admit it does seem kind of strange and all. Rich guy. Lots of money. Nice boat. Then he works at a job sitting on the beach all day."

"He likes being a hero," she muttered, gathering up the tray with the breakfast dishes.

"A hero," I said with a quizzical look.

"Yeah, you know. He likes going out in the water and saving people from drowning," she explained. "I mean, come on, you know, life guard. He gets off on it. Big hero saves the day. I guess it makes him feel...feel like a good person. Inside."

"Got some irony working there," I said flippantly, forcing a laugh.

"Irony?" she muttered, stopping at the door.

I then remembered a friend from college once telling me that in the South irony as a concept was non-existent. "Well, he does do some pretty heinous things to people. Saving them and--"

"Oh, I get what you're saying," she said, grinning at me. "Now isn't that one of life's mysteries."

Reed Timms was more than just a mystery. He was almost like a mutant. Handsome. Intelligent. Independently wealthy. Young. Rapist. Murderer. Residing in his psyche was the impulse to kill (or, to be precise, act as an accomplice) and to preserve human life. It was hard for me to imagine him dashing from his perch on a life guard's station, diving into the water, then swimming to a drowning victim and saving a life. After all the adrenaline had dissipated would he settle back into a psychological void, one that was capable of masking his other deeds?

There had been more tattoo sessions. I now had a op-art mural decorating my mid-torso area, reaching up and around my breasts. The primary colors were well represented. Timms had mentioned, by way of preparing me, that he was close to transitioning to my back area,



whispering to me in a reverential tone of voice that he was moving on to Mr. Miles, as in Miles Davis.

Carlee had roughly rearranged my position on the massage table. I was now face down, with my face wedged into the circular cutout in the table. Waiting. Left alone again. There was no way of knowing just how much longer I had. Surely alarms had gone off back home, I told myself. By now, after several days, Jason had been in touch with Detective Santos. Wouldn't they have gone to Peter's condo? Found the body. My notes. Wasn't it possible they could be looking for boats? Large yachts. The map of the marinas was in Peter's car with a big red X through the specific marina in Miami Beach. Certainly Jason would put his detective skills into high gear.

In many ways being on my stomach, with my back exposed, was easier, less humiliating. Although it was going to be more difficult to try, once again, to make some kind of contact with Timms. Being face to face was more natural, of course, but I could now concentrate more on my interview approach, letting my voice penetrate his defenses.

"She's ready for you," Carlee called out from the door, returning to the massage table to check on my restraints, which were now beginning to chafe my wrists and ankles.

Timms appeared. I could only see the floor below. Carlee had warned me again not to move. I felt Timms stroke my hair gently, while Carlee exhaled loudly. Then the music began. Repeat performance. Carlee exited. Loud, vibrant jazz filled the room, resounding off the walls. Timms was snapping his fingers. Now, at this stage, I knew the needle would be coming soon. Tiny, angry pinpricks would be attacking my skin all over again.

"I'm feeling like...feeling like...like maybe monochrome today," Timms whispered in my

ear, again stroking my hair. "Oh yeah," he sang out. "Gots the black working in my brain."

His fingers danced on my back, around my left shoulder blade, coursing on down to the small of my back, before tracing a path to the back of my knees. I tried not to flinch. Steel yourself. Be ready.

The music was eventually turned off, leaving for a brief instant a calming silence in the small cabin. Then there was the familiar rush of ocean sounds, with the water lapping at the hull and in the middle-distance subtle reverberations of Carlee's presence on the boat. Utensils clattered in the galley above. Footfalls echoed lightly. And beside me I caught a glimpse of the tray being wheeled over next to the massage table. I could hear Timms rubbing his hands together, warming them. Then his familiar touch, as his fingers danced over my back, pausing here and there. He was muttering to himself. I knew that it was next to impossible to engage him in conversation at this stage of his ministrations. He was lost to his "Muse."

Then there it was again. Familiar streaks of soft pain pulsed on my back. I could feel his breath on my neck as he leaned over close, steadying himself for his next work of art. I felt him dabbing at the bubbling blood, grunting quietly as he progressed along.

After minutes had passed, I heard Carlee call out from the door, "Don't forget to do her fat ass too."

Timms halted abruptly, then shouted out over his shoulder, "Carlee, don't fuck with me now. I'm working."

She snorted and said, "Okay Rembrandt, sorry."

When I thought he was done with his tattoo for this session I asked, "Can you tell me about your rescues?"

He didn't say anything for a moment then replied, "Like what?"

"Like what it feels like to save a person's life," I responded.

"Feels like," he mused, chuckling. "Feels fucking great. What do you think?"

"Tell me about one of the ones you rescued that sticks in your memory the most," I encouraged.

"That's easy," he said quickly. "Last year, in Jersey. Right before Labor Day. Young girl, about ten or so. Got sucked out in a rip. All panicky, of course. When I got to her she had just gone under for the last time. Little dummy had tried to swim in against the current. Wore herself out."

"So what happened?"

"I saved her damn life," he spat out. "I got her to shore and put life back into her."

"Life back into," I mumbled more to myself than to him.

"Mouth to mouth...CPR, the usual," he explained. "Right on the beach. She had already turned blue. Big hero."

"Were her parents there?" I asked, hoping to draw him more into the scene at the time.

"Parents? Yeah, at least her mom was, I think," he said vacantly. "Everybody crowded around like they always do. Hey, big deal, that's why guards get paid the big bucks, right?" He laughed and I could hear him cleaning his tattoo machine. "She made it okay. No brain damage or anything. Mother sent me a card thanking me. They put it up in the guard shack, along with the others. Day in a life."

"Ever think about her much?" I wanted to know. "The little girl."

"Not much," he mumbled.

I thought I detected that he was lying about that. Why? Wouldn't just about everyone always remember the people whose life they saved? "Hard to believe."

"Believe what you want," he said angrily. It was one of the few times I had heard him raise his voice to me in particular.

"I believe you are not being honest with me," I decided to state, hoping that it would jar him somewhat, put him off balance.

"Oh, I'm a little slow today," Timms suddenly sang out. "I get it. Dr. Greene, you can never let your guard down with you. That's for sure. Always analyzing. You're good."

"I think you're over reacting a little bit," I told him in a stern tone.

"You do," he said, laughing. "I bet you do."

"Tell me, Reed," I began, using his Christian name for the first time, "what would happen if one of your future victims happened to be that little girl you saved from the Shore?"

He didn't say anything for a moment then answered, "Oh boy, now we're heading into uncharted territory."

"Joke about it if you want but I don't think you can intellectualize it away either," I challenged. "Think about it."

"God giveth and god taketh away," he announced, laughing.

"Do I detect some nervousness in that laugh?" I asked, snickering, hoping my mocking tone would incite him to continue our dialogue.

"I'm just a minor deity, Dr. Greene," he explained, leaning over close so he could whisper in my ear.

"I see, you only save lives...while Carlee takes them," I stated, raising my head up to look

him in the eye. "What kind of deity does that make her?"

He pulled back and stared at me for a minute, then recovered himself and said, "Interesting point, doc. Let me get back to you on that one."

Day three was unfolding like all the others. I was fed, given my bathroom breaks, and tattooed. To my surprise, being on the receiving end of a tattoo encompassed a great deal of aftercare. It was best to keep the tattoo moist. Apparently, the idea was to prevent any undue drying of the area. This chore fell to an unwilling Carlee, who complained long and loudly about it to Timms. He ignored her for the most part, only offering up several threats about preserving his art work. As a result, Carlee roughly ministered to my tattoos before ultimately swabbing the tattooed skin with ointment.

The absurdity of this seemed to be lost on both of them. My pending death was not taken into account. To Timms, it was all about the finished product, the epidermal canvas. It was going to be displayed, then captured by a forensically attuned camera. It was his contribution to immortality.

Time was lost to a fragmented routine, one that I had no control over. Because of the tattoos, I was not permitted to shower and was instead allowed to give myself a sponge bath, while the ever diligent Carlee watched over me, passing on caustic comments while I tried to ignore her barbs. Our conversations were, for the most part, non-starters, with her continuing to deflect my attempts at drawing her out. She was hostile as a rule and seldom offered up any information that I might use against her. She had what would best be labeled as a cunning type of intelligence, one that she brandished as a weapon when she needed it. Was this some sort of warped Freudian Electra complex working here? I wondered. Mother issues?

She would eye me coldly as I went about my business, trying to clean myself with a sponge and soap and water, careful not to contaminate the fresh tattoos, which would draw harsh comments from Carlee. She would tell me that Timms would be mad at her if she let me destroy his good work. She, of course, feared him on the most basic level, despite the fact that she harbored perhaps more homicidal tendencies than he ever did. After all, she was the one who had extinguished Peter's life. I could easily picture her shooting him in a fit of agitated anger. No remorse. She would probably only experience a feeling of inconvenience at having to dispose of his body and find her way back to shore. My assessment of her was, all and all, basic but probably accurate.

"Mr. Wonderful wants you to have another bath now," Carlee announced, plopping a bucket of water down next to the table. "Be extra careful not to mess up his work too. Orders from above."

She untied my restraints and stepped back to level the hand gun at me, waving it around as she passed on a few more orders. I climbed off the table and stood up. My muscles were stiff and my skin felt sensitive to the touch. In the last couple nights I hadn't slept very well in the tied up position they left me in. Carlee walked around me and surveyed my back. She whistled to herself and laughed.

"Glad you find it funny," I said crankily, grabbing the sponge and dipping it into the bucket of water.

"I don't know what the fuck it is he put on there but, hey, who am I to criticize. Right?" she joked.

"What's it look like?" I couldn't help myself from asking.

"Looks like...I don't know," she declared, giggling, stepping closer to have a look.

"Hurts," I said, wondering if I had enough energy to wheel around on her and snatch the gun out of her hand. I had thought of doing it every time we were alone together. Carlee was a good three inches taller than me and very fit. If I didn't succeed in grabbing the gun out of her hand she would probably just shoot me on the spot.

"Quit whining," she scolded, poking me with the barrel of the gun.

"Don't see you with any of his masterpieces," I stated, turning around to face her.

She stepped back then eyed me for a moment, letting a grin creep to the corners of her mouth. She waved the gun at me and said, "Like that is ever going to happen. Like I would have any of that trashy shit on my body. No fucking way."

"What, don't want to be cool like everybody else in your generation?" I taunted.

"Yeah, right," she scoffed, laughing. "Only losers have tats. Talk about primitive shit."

"You know, Carlee, your virgin skin just might give Reed some ideas," I said in a serious tone of voice. "I'd watch myself around him if I were you. Never know when he might--"

"Are you serious or what?" she exclaimed, laughing. "There's no way that's gonna happen. No way."

Timms would subject me to two tattooing sessions per day, morning and late afternoon. For most of the evening I was left alone, while I could hear them going about their business on and about the boat. I spent most of the time trying to recall the layout of the boat, the one that Peter had printed out off the net. I was secreted away in the aft cabin I was relatively sure. Would it be possible to make an escape attempt during one of my bathroom breaks? If I could make my way up on deck, I could simply dive into the water and try to swim away. It was foolhardy, of

course, but what choice did I really have? I had frequently heard the sounds of boat motors pass by and just maybe I would get lucky. Surely there had to be fishermen in the area. Drugrunners? Smugglers? Coast Guard. Marine Patrol.

What other option was there for me? Perhaps attacking Carlee would have more of a chance of succeeding. With the hand gun, I would have a better chance of extricating myself from the situation. Both options were going to have the same end result. Death. At the very least I would be choosing the method.

The next morning, early, Timms awoke me with a kiss on my cheek. He smiled at me and apologized for waking me. He was listening to an I-pod, shuffling his feet slowly. Stray sounds seeped out of his headphones as he held the earpiece close so I could hear what he was listening to, telling me that it was Roy Haynes. I could hear the steady staccato of drums keeping time to another manic jazz piece. He quickly turned me on my stomach and positioned me for another tattoo session.

I hadn't thought before that the tattooing was sexual with Timms. Somehow I believed it was separate from his eventual sexual attack. Now, as he began anew, I realized it was a form of ritualized foreplay of sorts. I don't know why I didn't recognize it before. It was well known that there was a certain link between the act of creating and the sexual drive. The impulses often times overlapped. Although it was strange that Timms had neglected my breasts, only skirting around them with his tattooing. He had also stopped short of my vagina, applying the ink a good six to ten inches away from my pubic area. Although he wasn't exactly being prudish or even respectful, it did show restraint of some degree.



Yet now, as I lay face down and away from him, he was beginning to concentrate on my posterior, kneading, stroking, while he murmured to himself. Before, he had been clinical about his caresses. Then he removed his headphones and I caught a glimpse of him rolling the tray over next to the table. Timms pinched my cheek and laughed. I flinched. He scolded me playfully.

"Warning," he called out, giggling, "I'm moving to a sensitive area. Don't tighten your buns."

I mumbled a half-hearted protest. Timms was snapping his fingers to a silent beat. In the background, seemingly so far away, I could hear Carlee blowing her hair dry. She was singing along to a pop song. The surreal quality of the moment struck me as--oddly--ordinary. Then there was the needle again.

## 9. LOST HOPE

Our timeline had been somewhat off. Peter and I had discussed the duration of the murders, from beginning to end. Because we were basically ignorant of tattooing in general, we didn't realize that the healing process took up a certain specified block of time. For Timms, it was all about the exhibiting. His masterpiece would have to be up to his standards. I was now sharing in what the other victims experienced, a slow motion extinguishing of their lives.

I was relatively sure more than a week had passed since Carlee showed up at Peter's condo. Alarm bells must have gone off somewhere. What exactly would Detective Santos be doing? Of

course, I realized, he was from a different jurisdiction than where Peter's body had to have been found. Would there be any communication between the County personnel? And Jason, would he be able to make any headway with either the Hallandale police or the Miami Beach Police Department? In my many moments of despair I didn't want to contemplate any of those types of scenarios.

"How we doing today?" Timms called out, entering the room still wet from the dip he had just taken over the transom. Saltwater dripped on the floor by his bare feet. "Nothing like a morning swim to get you going. Hungry?"

"I thought my cooking was bad," I answered peevishly.

"Cranky before we have our coffee, huh?" he sang out, tweaking my nose. "You are high maintenance aren't you? I sure pity your husband."

"I pity you if he ever finds you," I stated with false bravado.

"Really," Timms said, pretending to shiver. "Time to head to South America, I guess. Go on the run, right?"

I looked at him and asked, "How long is this going to go on?"

Startled, he stammered, "Go on? Well...none of the others ever asked that before. I...I don't think you can put a finite time limit on it. No. That would be just too strange for me. This is a creative process, Doc. Haven't you been paying attention or what?"

"She's kind of stupid--if you haven't noticed," Carlee chimed in from the doorway. "How in the world did she ever get to be a doctor anyway? Answer me that, would you."

"Now-now, Carlee, honey, be nice," Timms cooed, laughing. "The good doctor just doesn't appreciate the creative thing going on here. She's kind of a philistine...you know, way too

science oriented. What a dull life you must lead, Doctor Greene. No soul. No--"

"At least I was having a life before you came along," I spat out angrily, hoping I wasn't going to begin crying.

"If she starts crying again I swear I will smack the shit out of her," Carlee stated, shaking her fist at me. "Why are these bitches always so--"

"Carlee, don't you have something to do right about now?" Timms interjected. "Like your nails? Pluck your eyebrows?"

"Got to look special just for you," she shot back.

"You two ever think about counseling?" I interjected, forcing a laugh.

"Fuck you," Carlee shouted, slamming the door.

We could hear her stomping around up on deck. Then strains of a current pop song reverberated throughout the boat. Timms exhaled deeply, then sighed. I stared at him, hoping to intimidate him in any way I could. He smiled at me, shaking his head as he slowly removed the restraints on my wrist and ankles.

"Got her mad as hell now," he said in almost a whisper. "And guess what? Now we have to listen to really bad music for a couple hours until she calms down. You know, Doc, radio pap, it soothes the masses. Works like a drug, an opiate. Marx had it all wrong. Religion doesn't do it, crappy overproduced music does. Chirping boy bands and nymphet screechers hypnotize the populace. Makes them docile. Then the corporations can sell them anything they want to. Right?"

In a way, of course, he was right, but I replied, "All music finds its audience sooner or later."

Timms looked at me for a moment then said, "You disappoint me, Sarah. You don't have to be a music critic or anything but--come on--give me something. Damn, the stripper offered up more critical thinking than you. You can do better."

"I didn't know I was here to amuse you, Reed," I said, covering myself with my hands, as my modesty seemed to fluctuate now that I had been exposed for so long. "Isn't the fact that you are violating my body and scaring the hell out of me enough for you?"

He laughed and replied, "My work is making you more interesting. Just think what the detectives will say when they see the finished product. You will be famous all over again but in a different way, a more intriguing way. The tabloid shows will be in a frenzy over you. Undoubtedly some asshole will leak the pictures for big bucks to the tabloids. Then there you will be, right on the front cover. Naturally they will have to block out your erogenous zones but have no fear, doc, there in color will be my tats. There will be a movie. An A-list actress will want to play you. She'll be better looking than you but that is a given. She'll dress down for the role and then maybe walk away with an Oscar for her troubles. Who would you want to play you?"

The absurdity of the question struck me immediately and I countered with: "Who will play you?"

He smiled and said, "Good question. Could be tough to cast some actor to play me. Specially since I won't have been caught, they won't know much about me. Doesn't matter. The story will be about you, more than me. Doctor Sarah Greene dies in pursuit of another book. No, no, just kidding. Your public will know that you were off after a noble cause of some sort. Trying to stop a serial killer. Always helping the public."

My anger was getting the better of me. I tried to compose myself, taking measured breaths. Not being in control left me with mounting rage. Need to channel it, I told myself. I had done enough sessions with patients who harbored uncontrolled rage to know that psychological forces needed to be harnessed before you could advance any mental stability.

"I don't need another fifteen minutes of fame," I exclaimed in a serious tone of voice. "We can have these pithy confabs all you want but there is the undeniable fact present that's not going away."

"Really," was all he said, eyeing me, stepping back .

"This warped teamwork you've worked out with Carlee is going to unravel sooner or later and then what?" I declared, rubbing my tender wrists where the straps had left a welt. "You are the artist. She is the executioner. This creative/destructive axis is, as they say, untenable. Throw in gender differences and it really goes off the tracks eventually."

"Good point. Let's leave predicted outcome out of for a minute. Okay. Battle of the sexes. Creating. Destroying. I see it as a sort of compartmentalized evolution. Yeah. I do the birthing. She does the...you know, the other thing."

"Having trouble saying it?" I asked. "Can't quite put it--the concept--into words, huh? Must be hard for you."

"Am I detecting a note of mockery here?" he inquired, laughing. "Doc, are you making fun of me or what? Come on, now. Tell me. I won't get mad at you. Honest. I might not give you your breakfast though."

"What are you going to do to me--tie me up, tattoo me, then kill me?" I shot back.

"Something like that," he muttered, turning to go, leaving me alone again.

A few minutes later Carlee appeared, carrying a tray. She ignored me, setting my breakfast down on a chair next to the table. I could see it was the usual bad coffee and sugary cereal. She stood there pointing the hand gun at me, while she hummed a tune under her breath. I rubbed my wrists for a moment, then stood up to stretch my legs.

"Hold out your arms for a minute," Carlee ordered, waving the gun at me for emphasis.

"Got to check the tats again." She stepped closer and examined my upper torso then my back.

"I guess you could always get a job in a carnival somewhere."

"You southern girls sure have a sense of humor," I replied, frowning at her.

She poked me with the gun and told me to eat my breakfast. Then I felt the boat moving and felt unsteady on my feet. Carlee grinned at me, pantomiming for me to eat. I could hear and feel the rumbling of the engines.

"I hope you don't get seasick," Carlee offered, smirking.

"Where we going?" I asked matter-of-factly.

"Gee, why don't I bring the charts down for you to look at," Carlee said sarcastically. "Eat up. I think Picasso wants to do another session when we get to where we are going."

We hadn't gone very far when I could hear the engines being cut back. The boat slowed, then started to rise and fall, giving me that uneasy feeling I always got when I rode on roller coasters. I heard someone speaking with a Spanish accent, asking about the tides. Carlee scrambled over to me and held the gun flush against my temple, hissing at me to be quiet. With her other hand she gripped my neck tightly. She grinned at me and I could see that she was enjoying my sense of mounting fear. I offered little resistance.

Then we heard Timms bellow out adios and a boat motor faded away. A moment later he was at the door, chuckling, telling us it was two Cubans wanting to know about the shoals in the area. They were both drunk, he said, and would probably run aground on their way back to shore. Carlee then ordered me back on the table, where she applied the restraints once again.

The engines were restarted and we cruised on. I was fairly certain that we were off of the Keys. At first, I had believed we were in the Bahamas. Now, after hearing about the two Cuban-Americans in the vicinity, it seemed logical that Timms was heading south to probably Key West. He was going to deposit my body on the beach there, then sail away again.

Carlee's warning proved accurate. Before lunch Timms was at the door again, humming to himself. He marched over to the sound system and turned on another jazz CD. He turned it up loud, creating a constant reverberation in the small cabin. He pantomimed playing the drums for a minute or two, while dancing languidly with his eyes closed.

I had been contemplating another tactic during the long nights that I was left alone. The parts to the puzzle that was Reed Timms were complicated for certain. On many different levels he was feeding, and nourishing, habitual gratification. The creative aspect was only a small part of the whole picture. His intelligence was steeped in the creative realm of higher learning, focusing in on music and art specifically. Ultimately it was all linked to the final act, his final act. Was it a libidinal connection? Not likely. At least not in its purest and simplest manifestation. No. It was more closely linked to an all consuming narcissism.

Reed Timms was making love to himself in the form of his art. His epidermal masterpieces were completed with a weird version of conjugal completion. Odd as it might seem, and it was,

there were documented cases on record that outlined such bizarre pursuit of personal satisfaction. Timms was only intent on consummating himself, with the artwork serving as his partner.

That Carlee would come along after and seemingly destroy the piece of work was immaterial. Timms had already concluded his, for lack of a better word, mission. It was, all and all, an autofixated endeavor, one that was by nature ephemeral because he was going to have to reassert his desire again, and again. New canvas. New creation. More attainment.

"I'm going to do some touch up on the front," Timms called out over the music. "Fine tuning."

I involuntarily glanced down at my stomach, trying not to think about the hideous mural that was now my skin. It made me think of one of those covers you might see on a biker magazine, the one with the biker babe on the front straddling a Harley in her G-string. Off went the music. Timms continued to snap his fingers to a silent beat. I pulled on my restraints, as I heard the wheels of the tray sketch across the deck. Then his fingers were tracing imaginary lines across my thigh, moving on to the other one. Don't flinch, I told myself.

"You didn't do all of the other girl's thighs," I complained. "Why was that?"

He ignored me for a minute, as he fussed with his tattoo machine. Finally, he answered, "Time issues."

Peter and I had speculated about that, coming to the right conclusion. His victims had been reported missing and all the while Timms had been painstakingly going about his insidious business. Being held captive on the boat had been an almost infallible device for his crime.

"Ever think about which you liked better?" I asked, wanting to box him in quickly by making him contemplate the crimes separately.



"Liked? What do you mean 'liked'?" he wanted to know, leaning over to look directly at me.

"There is always that process working, you know," I offered evasively, hoping to confuse him.

"Are you speaking in some kind of code?" he asked, laughing. "Hey, layman here, doc. Bring it down a notch, will ya."

I returned his smile then explained, "Selection. You know, where a person stacks up particular criterion in their mind and sorts out a...a hierarchy of choices. It's reflexive. Comes naturally."

He reached up quickly and tweaked my nose, then said, "I just bet your students love you. Just arcane enough to be complex but elementary enough to be understood. All those young minds at your disposal. Pity."

Timms was adept at subtle insults. I laughed and replied, "Surely you must think that your work was better with, for instance, Julie than, say, Millie. Maybe you were more inspired that day. Or maybe the jazz album was better." I hoped by using the victims' names it would penetrate Timms' defenses.

"I see what you are asking me," Timms exclaimed, smacking the side of his head playfully. "It's fundamentally unfair to compare them because naturally the first one was more rough. Like anything else I got better with practice."

I sensed that I had reached a point where he might be more vulnerable with his guard down somewhat. Thinking for a moment, I stated, "You in your mind reach completion."

He leaned over, placing a hand on either side of me, and stared at me, then said, "This is going to be another unsuccessful foray for you, Doctor Greene. You are going to have to

probably dial that mind of yours back just a little. Make it easier on yourself."

Mustering up as much courage as I could, I stared back at him and said, "Consummation is attained but it is only temporary."

A puzzled look came and went, replaced by a smirk on his face. He leaned over close and said in a whisper, "Maybe it is shared."

"Not possible," I declared, glaring at him.

"Is that a psychological certainty?" he asked, grinning.

"You are incapable of sharing," I said through clinched teeth. "Your personality has no dividing walls. There is a symbiosis...one that has meshed your sense of self with a clone of itself. Congratulations, you have managed to take narcissism to the next level. You should be proud of yourself. But then--you are."

Slowly he clutched my face in his hands and hissed, "We will see won't we."

Unlike before, he almost angrily went about his tattooing, grunting under his breath as he applied intersecting lines across both my thighs. Blue ink. Red. Even yellow. When he had finished, he slid the tray back and left without saying a word. I could hear his footfalls as he ascended to the top deck. A few minutes later Carlee appeared, crankily ordering me to stay still while she treated the fresh wounds.

Mentally, I had to reach for something. Hope. I knew that my semi-fame would cast a different light on the ensuing investigation. There would be press: newspaper articles and TV spots. Surely one of the nightly TV entertainment shows would splash my slightly jaded career on the screen, with the obligatory mentions of the Flowers case etc. Interviews would be sought

out, including, perhaps, my husband. He had never once cooperated before with the media, but now, I supposed, he would find it advantageous to have them getting the word out.

Reed and Carlee, to my dismay, had taken all precautions to cover their tracks. My hopes had been dashed when Carlee informed me that the dockmaster in Miami Beach had decided unexpectedly to go deep sea diving. With a grin, she had told me just how difficult it must be to swim with bodybuilding weights attached to your arms. They were staying one step ahead. Thinking. Devising. Adapting. All of their combined intelligence was focused on deception and destruction.

Yet there was one thing in my favor, something out of their immediate control. They hadn't counted on me having a former detective as a husband. Jason wasn't going to let the case slip away in the fog of confusion that surrounds all fresh investigations. Unknown to Reed and Carlee was the fact that most of my notes pertinent to the previous cases lay on my desk in my study, including my laptop which I had decided to leave at home instead of bring with me to South Florida.

All of my email communication with Peter was tucked away in the My Documents folder, an old habit I had adopted in the interest of material for any future books. It was only a matter of time before Jason began piecing it together. I regretted now, of course, not conferring with Detective Santos before hand, but I knew that he was only humoring me and Peter for the most part and wouldn't have pursued any of our leads. Having him at least aware of our latest pursuits would have been helpful in the long run. Now I had to believe that Jason would be able to construct the puzzle before it was too late.

I knew we had moved within distance of some town or other boats because Carlee had taken to attaching a piece of tape over my mouth. If my hunch was right, they had anchored within distance of what was to be my final resting spot. For the last couple of nights I had heard stray sounds of music drifting in on the breeze. I even thought I could hear the plaintive sound of car horns in the distance.

Two days had passed, so I thought, since Timms had used his needle on me. Carlee had dutifully maintained her tattoo upkeep. I was permitted to shampoo my hair and given a comb to comb it out afterwards. There had been mention of applying make-up.

"Time for the big preparation," Carlee announced, releasing me from the restraints. Opening a closet door, she motioned for me to have a look, saying, "Bride of Timmstein."

Cautiously, I walked over to the where I could now see was a full length mirror on the back of the door. I was still clutching at the blanket they kept over me at night. Reluctant. Frightened. Afraid what I was going to see. "I don't think I want to look," I mumbled through the tape.

Carlee reached over and yanked the tape off of my mouth, and said, "Miss Tattoo 2004!"

I stood there in front of the mirror and then slowly dropped the blanket. A few tears came to my eyes as I saw for the first time what Reed Timms had done to me. Swirls of multicolored ink obscured my white skin, giving the impression of an abstract painting. Behind me, giggling, Carlee told me I was the most beautiful freak she had ever seen. Mingled with my mounting rage was a sense of sorrow and self-pity. Before I realized it I was running my fingers over the tapestry of ink, the flesh mosaic that was now my body.

"Turn around, doc, take it all in," Carlee suggested, laughing.

"I...I didn't think a person's sense of vanity could be so overpowering," I muttered, glancing over my shoulder at Timm's handiwork. "It's a rarified form of cruelty."

"You're kidding, right," Carlee joked. "Look at you, you are stunning. There are guys in biker bars all over the country who would just love to have you."

Stretching, I could see that the better part of my back looked like a panel of stain glass you might see in a cathedral. I wiped a tear away and said, "This goes beyond perversity."

"You would know," she sang out, laughing.

Days passed. I could hear the inflatable coming and going to and from the boat. It was apparent they were stocking up on some supplies, probably from somewhere in Key West. I hadn't seen Timms since his last tattoo session. Carlee, surly as ever, had been delivering my meals and watching over me as I bathed. She continued to halfheartedly fuss over the tattoos, slapping my hands away when she wanted to apply some more ointment.

I was trying to gauge just how they were going to proceed. Being analytical at this stage of the ordeal was increasingly more difficult to accomplish. Having a clinically trained mind was of little help when you were the actual victim. I no longer had the luxury of being removed from the therapeutic emphasis. I now was the main player in the psychological horror show.

The bodies had always been deposited at night, of course, I thought, trying to dredge up everything I could remember about the other victims. Would the sexual assault then killing take place simultaneously? Perhaps there would be a span of time between the two disparate acts. You were dealing with two defined territories of implementation. Different turfs. I reasoned that Timms wouldn't want to be witness to what was, essentially, the destruction of his work. By the same token, Carlee certainly wouldn't want to be an audience of one to the carnal exploits of

what was, ostensibly, her boy friend. Then again I was involved with a warped interplay of psychosis and anything was possible. The two of them certainly fed off of each other's evil impulses so it wasn't out of bounds to think they might also share vicariously in one another's acts of barbarity.

There were several tattoos on my back that were still in the scabbing stage somewhat. Timms was not willing to have his master piece exhibited in shoddy condition. It would have offended his creative pride. The previous three victims' bodies had been in pristine condition. Museum quality. I was relatively sure that I had at least a few more days left.

It was late afternoon when Timms appeared by me side. I had been dozing off, exhausted from sheer inactivity and dread. He bussed my cheek and stroked my hair. I had long since stopped recoiling from his touch. Smiling, he announced, "Progress is very good. You are an excellent specimen."

"Flatterer," I muttered through the tape.

"You know," he said, grinning, "muzzling women is a good idea. Might just make the advancement of mankind easier." He reached over and gingerly removed the tape.

"A woman's silence would eventually drive you more insane," I spat out in a nasty tone. "I mean how would you receive all of the praise you seek out so much?"

"Do I impress you as some kind of praise monger, doc?" Timms wanted to know. "That's so disappointing that you think that. I am crushed. Deeply. So very disturbing. I think you have misjudged my personality, Sarah."

Still, at this juncture, I cringed when he used my first name. It was somehow invasive. I thought for a moment then replied, "Your particular personality would take years and years of

study to figure out. I mean you are obviously a slave to your creativity and then on the other hand you act out your desires on a personal level with a partner that doesn't share much of anything with your set of...well...I wouldn't call it values really but something anyway."

"I just love it when you insult me," he joked. "Go ahead and hurt my feelings, doc. It only makes me stronger."

"Hide behind humor," I needled. "You are good at that."

He wagged his finger at me and stated, "See what I mean about that whole gag thing. A silent woman has its rewards. I think your end of the species should have evolved minus vocal chords. Now we are talking utopia."

"Then who would tell you how good you are in bed?" Carlee asked from the doorway. "You men would all be basket cases in no time if we women weren't always there telling you just how great you are."

"Oh, I get it," Timms declared, laughing, "you two are ganging up on me. Right? It's a biological imperative or something. An Eve complex, right doc? Got a raw deal back in the Garden of Eden. Blamed for everything. Carrying a grudge. It's all coming clear to me now. Got that biblical thing going on. Can't argue with that."

"I'm just glad I could be here for your bizarre comedy act," I said sarcastically.

Carlee laughed and said, "Where did I put that duct tape?"

"Oh, Miss Carlee, can't we have our guest grace us with her mellifluous voice a little longer?" Timms sang out, chuckling.

"Oh, right, I forgot just how much you like to hear them scream," Carlee stated ominously.

"Remember your manners," Timms chastised.

## 10. IN TIME

It had been weeks since I first awoke in the small, claustrophobic cabin. My entire body ached from being tied down in awkward positions hours at a time. I had slept very little. Almost every inch of my skin felt a size too small for my body, stretched taut. Worst of all my mind, which had been set adrift in a sea of uncertainty, stumbled along in vain attempts at maintaining a semblance of sanity. I found myself thinking more and more of my family. Tiny mental glimpses of my son floated by, quickly dissolving into my subconscious. At times, I was certain I could actually smell my mother's baking. What, I wondered, was happening with my classes back at the college? And Jason, what was he doing?

Carlee appeared one morning and ordered me to take a standard shower, leading me down the narrow passageway to a bathroom at the other end of the boat. She handed me some expensive soap and shampoo and stood by, gun in hand, while I showered. She handed me a disposable razor and ordered me to shave my legs and underarms. She was speaking in a robotic voice, lifeless and detached.

It had begun. She was erecting her walls, compartmentalizing the final act. I tried a few times to draw her out but she said nothing beyond her strident orders. Wiped away were all of her snide comments and barbs, replaced by a business like manner, efficient and lifeless. How had the other girls felt at this point? I wondered. Had any of them been defiant? Did any of them refuse to complete the demanded hygiene? Would it in any way affect the outcome?



When I was finished showering, I decided to attempt one last line of attack against Carlee, hoping that it might shake loose any form of dissatisfaction that she might be harboring against Timms. When we were back in the cabin where they had been holding me captive I asked, "Did any of the other girls refuse to fix themselves up for Reed?"

Carlee looked at me for a moment then answered, "Do you want the tape again?"

I was quiet for a moment then asked, "Can I use your blow dryer?"

Taken back for a moment, she said, "Like I'm going to let you use my blow dryer on your skanky hair."

"As I see it," I said as calm as I could, "the goal here is to look the best that I can for Reed."

I saw her grip the gun tighter. She was frowning at me. She then stated in a flat tone of voice, "Look, Princess, it's not you he's doing, okay."

Feigning confusion, I said, "Not me. What do you mean by that?"

"Don't be a dumb bitch," she muttered. "It's some sick thingee with his art...and you know it."

"It's rape and he enjoys it," I said.

"Like that's gonna happen with you."

"You are sharing him with all of us," I stated. "Julie, Millie, Pauline, me, all of us are in his head. It's true."

"He doesn't even see you, you dumb shit," Carlee exclaimed. "All he sees is that ugly ass crap on your skin."

"Partly, for sure, but it is also the act of..."

"Shut the hell up," she ordered, waving the gun at me.

Mustering up as much courage as I could, I said, "You can put the gun down, Carlee. You aren't going to shoot me. We both know what that would lead to. You would be destroying the work of art. Then what would Timms do? It would be over between you."

"You don't know what you are talking about."

"I don't," I replied, forcing a smile. "How exactly would Reed react if he came down here and found me already dead, with a bullet hole in his work no less? Want to make a prediction, Carlee? I would imagine that he would be pretty angry."

"And I suppose you think I'm afraid of him," she shot back, laughing. "You are totally clueless. I do the killing around here, Doctor Greene. Not him. He's a whimp. Doesn't want to get his hands dirty. Might screw up his muse."

"So what you are telling me is you would be perfectly able to shoot him if you had to," I said, motioning at the gun. "You would have no problem with that?"

"If I had to, yeah," she answered, shrugging.

"And all along I thought we were simpatico," Timms announced from the doorway.

Carlee jerked around and stammered out, "Reed...this bitch is talking all kinds of shit."

"I know, Carlee," he said, walking over and putting his arm around her.

Right at that moment I knew my last gambit had failed. Timms had totally defused the situation, leaving me with little options and even less hope. In less than twenty-four hours I would be added to the body count.

I didn't see Timms for the rest of the day. He reappeared soon after Carlee served me my dinner. He was carrying a gaudy gold plated candelabrum, with one candle. There was no eye

contact. He sat the candle holder down on a small stand next to where I was strapped down. He seemed preoccupied, as he continued to move pieces of furniture around. He then left the room and returned quickly with a pink silk robe draped over his arm. Without a word, he untied me then removed the tape. In almost a whisper, he told me to put the robe on. He then used a match to light the candle. And he was gone again.

Earlier Carlee had come in and tossed me a small bag of cosmetics, ordering me to do my face. I then had immediate visions of Millie's face, with all of the freshly applied makeup. Carlee watched me as I hunched over a small mirror and applied the makeup, urging me to do my best.

Now Reed Timms reappeared at the door. He too was wearing a silk robe, a black one. In his hands he had two glasses of wine. Smiling, he offered me a glass. I refused, clinging to whatever form of defiance I could muster.

"Sarah, please, be cooperative," Timms urged. "Accept the inevitable."

"Did the others?" I shot back.

"Matter of fact, yes," he answered, offering the glass of wine again.

"What did you put in it?" I wanted to know.

"Please, at this stage of the game would that be necessary...or even desirable?" he asked, smiling.

"Perhaps for the victim, because that's what I am here. You haven't forgotten that--have you?" I demanded to know.

"Victimhood is so unseemly, Sarah," Timms exclaimed, laughing softly. "I think a person when they are faced with the inevitable should embrace some kind of...what? Aplomb. Yeah,

that's it. It shows, you know, character."

I forced a laugh and replied, "You wear your insanity well."

"Now-now, doctor, you should know better than to use the I word. Shame on you," he joked, taking a sip of his wine. "You sure you don't want some. It's French and expensive. Good year."

"I'm not going to play your warped game, Timms," I declared. "Your weird romantic construct here is not going to work if I don't participate."

"Sarah," Timms said, with just a trace of exasperation seeping into his voice, "you are not in control here. Remember? My boat. My rules."

"And if I don't play by your rules then your evil act will not be fulfilled," I stated, trying to sound as stern as I possibly could.

He thought for a moment then said, "I should have known you would be like this. The others, well, they weren't so versed in matters of the mind. If you are intent on denying me my earned pleasure then I will have to alter the scheme of things somewhat."

"Only in your reptilian brain have you earned anything. You have dehumanized me, all in route to my death. As I see it I don't have to be a willing participant while you complete your demented task. I won't drink your wine. I won't play your game. I won't--"

"You don't have to be conscious, you know," he said, smiling. "You are but the vessel."

"I don't believe you. What I am is a living canvas to you," I replied, staring, hoping to intimidate him in any way that I could. "You want to see it in my eyes too."

"You are reaching there, Sarah," Timms sang out, laughing. "You still don't understand me."

"Oh but I do," I almost shouted, hoping to draw Carlee into it. "You have subjugated me almost completely but you need that last little bit of terror to get you over the top. You want to see it in my eyes. This tattooing isn't only about the creative impulse to you. No. It's about control over your victim."

"Your pop psychology is pathetic," he exclaimed, shaking his head.

"Is it? I don't think so," I shot back at him, stepping a little closer to add some physical presence to my words. "You are no better than the average rapist, Timms. That's right. The only real difference is you have nicer decor. Put you in a back alley somewhere and who could tell the difference. Just think, when you eventually get caught you are going to have a real fun time in prison. They just love rapists in jail."

Then he slapped me hard across the face. It was so sudden I didn't have any time to react. I saw anger quickly passing to rage in his eyes. He was clenching his fist. Wine had spilled to the floor. We stood there face to face. Before I realized it I was smiling at him. Infuriated, he hit me again. I recoiled then laughed. Timms pushed me onto the massage bed, yanking at the pink robe. I managed to slap him once or twice.

"Is this what they call date rape?" Carlee called out from the doorway.

"Get out of here, Carlee!" Timms bellowed out. "It's not your time yet."

"Here's an idea. Why don't I apply my little plastic bag now," she suggested, smirking.

"Won't that make it a teeny bit easier for you.?"

"Get out!" he ordered.

"Let her stay," I said in a strained voice. "Let her watch."

"I think you might just be outvoted, honey," Carlee declared in a sing-song voice.

"I'm not going to tell you again, dammit," Timms shouted, climbing off of me. "You know how this always goes down."

Carlee then pulled the hand gun from her pocket and said, "Used to go down."

"Oh, now you are going to shoot me or what?" Timms said, laughing uneasily.

"I just thought we could do it a little bit different this time around," she explained, smiling.

"How about I snuff out little princess Freud here first then you can do what you want afterwards. I mean, come on, I'm sure you're not going to be missing much anyway. Besides it doesn't look like you are having much fun now, right?"

"That's absurd," he said, flailing his hands out in front of him. "I have to do it the way...the proper way."

Carlee wagged the gun at him and stated, "Says who?"

"Carlee, please, that won't work for me," Timms pleaded. "I can't do it with a dead body."

"Oh, right, Mr. Romance likes to do it with terrified girls. I forgot. Forgive me," Carlee mocked.

"You know you're not going to shoot me, Carlee, so give me the gun," Timms said in a calming tone of voice.

She slowly pulled the trigger back on the revolver and placed her other hand under the grip. Timms stepped back. I slowly slipped to a standing position next to the bed. Outside we could hear a boat's motor pass by. The boat rocked gently in the boat's wake.

At this stage I wasn't sure what to do. I could try to defuse the situation but it was, ultimately, not going to help the outcome for me. If she shot Timms, I was the next victim. However, if I somehow got them to a mutual meeting point I was going to be Timms' next

conquest. It was a dilemma that had no avenues of resolution.

"Reed, I want you to strap down the good doctor, then step away," Carlee ordered, waving the gun. "Don't fight me on this."

"But all my work," Timms whined.

"Please," Carlee mocked, waving the gun again. "This will only take a minute or two. You might enjoy it."

Reluctantly, Timms pushed me back onto the table and reapplied the restraints. He was mumbling how sorry he was to me while he finished strapping my legs down. Carlee laughed and told him to hurry up.

"Carlee, I'm not going to watch this," he said, heading for the door.

"Whoa there," she called out, "you aren't going anywhere."

"You expect me to watch this?"

"Yep," she said, laughing. "You are going to see her very last breath. Maybe you'll learn something."

"Don't make me do this," he muttered.

Ignoring him, she pulled out a plastic bag and dangled it over my face. She smacked my face playfully and told me that I was going to enjoy dying. Timms said something under his breath and she raised the gun in his direction. He quickly quieted down. Carlee then snapped the bag in the air a few times before slowly draping it over my head. With her free hand she worked it down over my face. Timms protested again and she told him to shut up. Now I was looking at her through the clear plastic. She was leering at me, laughing. Everything was out of focus and muffled. I felt the gun barrel against my face then heard Carlee giggling.

"Now for the good part," Carlee announced, waving the gun around gleefully. "You are going to put the tape around her neck, Reed."

"What?" Reed almost shouted out. "I can't do that."

"Sure you can," Carlee urged, smiling at him. "It's very easy. Try it."

"No."

Carlee raised the gun up and took a bead on Timms, then said, "Yes."

Timms picked up the roll of duct tape and slowly pulled out a length of tape. Carlee stepped back to let him apply the tape around my neck. I was already struggling to breathe. I could see a blurred image of him as he leaned close to raise my head up to encircle my neck with the tape. He mouthed out that he was sorry. In the background, Carlee told him to hurry up.

"I don't think I can watch this," Timms said almost tearfully.

"Cry baby," Carlee spat out, chuckling. "Now just watch as she takes her last breath. It's great."

"I can't do this," Timms told her.

The tape felt tight against my neck. I was trying to control my breathing. Take small breaths. It was useless of course. The air had already gone stale. Soon I would be gasping for air. I closed my eyes to accept my fate.

"Open your eyes!" Carlee suddenly shouted out. "I want to see your eyes."

That was the last I heard her say. I was drifting into unconsciousness, into death. Somewhere in the recesses of my awareness I heard pounding or more like thumping. I thought it was my heart pounding in my ears. Then there was the roar of loud noises and I saw Carlee jerk back and fall to the floor. Timms slumped to the floor next to the bed. My ears were ringing



and I couldn't seem to focus on anything in front of me. There were hands on me and the plastic was being torn away. Then I was taking deep breaths and smelling a witches brew of spent cordite.

"Sarah! Sarah!" I heard my husband shout, as he ripped away the plastic bag. "Can you hear me?"

"Jason," I managed to whisper.

## 11. HOME AGAIN

From the window in my study I could see out over the back pasture, which still had patches of snow here and there. Spring thaw was late in coming. It had been just over a month since I returned home. Alive. Survived. Another serial killer was passing into the annals of crime history, trumpeted almost daily on the crime shows and tabloid hours. My fifteen minutes of fame had just been renewed.

That I was just the least bit ambivalent about this was an understatement. Again I was bombarded by the phone calls, emails, and faxes. The Department Head at the college had informed me that I should take all the time that I needed to return to my teaching. I thought I detected in his voice a certain glee, that just maybe he was ecstatic about the turn of events because now his Psychology Department could get a boost in needed funds due to my newfound celebrity. After all, so said my ever cynical father, higher education was all about the budget. I just knew come next Autumn my classes would be brimming with eager, fresh faced groupies

intent on prying out of me all of the gory details. Sales of my first book would spike. My agent would be offering unsolicited advice. My wardrobe would be ridiculed. It would all start again.

Yet this time around I had a different legacy to contend with. Before, with the Flowers case, I had been left with plenty of mental baggage to cope with. This time around, after the mental decompression was finally completed, I was faced with the sheer physical reminder that I had indeed endured a personalized hell. There it was, in vivid color, drilled into my very skin. I was, for lack of a better word, a freak.

A well meaning dermatologist had offered to laser away my epidermal horror show, gratis, no doubt hoping to reap untold amounts of PR for his practice. I had politely declined, knowing that what he proposed was quite nearly impossible. I wasn't intending on erasing a simple tattoo, like, say, an old boy friend's name. No. Almost my entire body needed expunging. Even a busybody neighbor, who sold cosmetics on the side, had offered to demonstrate how body makeup could conceal the permanent display of body art. I was now not only a nutty psychologist, with a penchant for odd cases, but a carny sideshow as well.

"So what's the harm," my agent had told me over the phone, managing to slip through my picket line of family friends who were manning the avenues of communication that led ultimately to me. "You go on the shows then give the viewing audience a peek. Some of your leg...or how about just your arm. It's sexy."

"The next sound you hear is me hanging up," I told him, slamming down the phone.

Despite my resistance to the inevitable spotlight, I knew I would again write a book. It would come. Of course I would tell myself that I owed it to Peter to write one. He would want that. This would be an elemental lie, one that I hoped would absolve me from the trauma that

was certainly going to be building in my psyche. I had survived but it didn't feel that way. Death had been so very close. I had gotten a whiff of my own stale breath, the precursor to gentle extermination.

"A psychologist must have not only a strong mind but a supple one," Doctor Burke had once told me, smiling impishly as he always did when he was being intellectually playful. Over the years of doing my research I had steeled my mind in the continual quest to keep the demons at bay, the ones that I invariably ran up against in my work. However now, in the aftermath of my ordeal, I sensed that I needed to have a supple mind that my mentor had mentioned to me so many years before. Flexible. Able to bend but not break.

The difficulty of being resolute about this was brought home every day when I awoke to see myself. I had a new history to confront, one that shared a permanence with the longevity of my life. I found myself hating to shower for fear of the revulsion I saw so close at hand. Mirrors were to be avoided. Hated. I dreaded the coming of warm weather. There would likely be no sojourns at the beach this summer. Pants ruled out over dresses. Long sleeves. Clothes could be my ally or my enemy.

Jason, my hero husband, had, in a way, a new lease on his life. Through his dogged determination he had tracked down Timms and Carlee. My notes, inadvertently left behind on my study desk, along with the laptop, proved the difference. When I hadn't returned any of his calls and Peter's answering machine shut down from too many messages, he had reconstructed the case to that point then gotten in touch with several police departments in Florida. When that didn't satisfy him enough, he dropped our son off with my parents and flew to Florida. Using a few favors from his old police force in DC, he compiled some evidentiary data and sniffed out

the trail.

Fortunately, Timms choice of using a large yacht as a floating dungeon proved to be his undoing. Such a large boat didn't go unnoticed and it wasn't long before it was spotted off of Key West. Undetected by us, as Timms and Carlee were quarreling, the SWAT assault team had slipped on the boat and found their way to the aft cabin. It was Carlee's startled reaction and firing of her hand gun that turned the small cabin into a shooting gallery. The hail of bullets had ended both their lives in quick succession.

Disguising his obvious disgust, my father has gone on record--again--that he disapproved of my current literary endeavor. He is offended by the sheer tawdriness of it all and is quick to offer his opinion on the subject. Surprisingly, I guess, I am not offended by his stance this time around. Naturally having already plunged headlong into trash writing before, this time I am holding my head up a little higher. A little. I tell myself that the story has to be told. I also agreed to siphon off some of the recompense I will receive and funnel it to a victim's group, a charitable organization that, in my mind, stands alone when it comes to applied charity.

As if I didn't need to be reminded of just how tenuous my claim to literary legitimacy is, Timms very own written effort, in the form of a diary, will be published, with the proceeds going to another charity. A passage from the diary is included in the beginning of this book. So now I am to be compared with Reed Timms, as our work competes in the marketplace. His side of the story. My side of the story. In these modern times it serves to demonstrate just how the level of communications has mutated to form a juggernaut of equal opportunity perversity.

Personal sorrow now stalks me daily as I no longer have a trusted and loved friend to rely on. There won't be any sardonic emails to read as I sit in my office on campus wondering why I

do what I do. Gone are the late night phone calls which invariably degenerated into a trading of complaints. Worst of all, I suppose, is the loss of my friend as a sounding board for all of the psychological travails we had negotiated over the years. Peter was a gentle soul who only wanted to explore the underside of human nature.

Leave it to my mother to yank me back from my spiraling gloom, as she said to me one day as she helped bundle my son up for his daily trip out to the barn: "Sarah, honey, don't worry, you'll be able to laugh again." I frowned back at her because I wasn't so sure. It was about then that a Fed Ex package arrived. Curious, I opened it to find a letter of invitation to pose in a European tattoo magazine. I showed it to my mother and before we realized we were both laughing, laughing until tears came to our eyes.