

Premonitions

After years of sacrifice to earn his medical degree, Doctor Jim Baker has finally achieved the lifestyle most only dream of. His new life, in an upscale normally crime-free Chicago suburb, is not the only one that is suddenly ripped apart by a series of unexplainable murders. Wives belonging to the group of top local plastic surgeons that he recently joined are being systematically found in their locked homes murdered, with alarms set and no apparent clues or motives. The peaceful final expressions left on the faces of their horribly mutilated bodies leave the local, city, state and federal authorities baffled. No progress is made in any of the cases until investigators start accepting clues from some very unusual sources.



Frank McRae hits the ground running with his first ever murder mystery thriller that will leave you begging for more. He spent his adolescence and adulthood marveling at the talents of many of his favorite writers, found himself inspired and decided that it's now 'his time'. The long hours he spent transforming imagination to manuscript in this his initial effort wows his audience with mind boggling plot twists.

Through every endeavor in life, from his years in engineering, business ownership and currently in adherence to strict construction specifications, Frank has engaged in close attention to details. This natural tendency is obvious in his writing style and story content.

He is a dedicated and supportive family man to his wife, only daughter and immediate family. He currently spends his days as a construction management professional for a highly respected management company doing business in Chicago and surrounding suburbs.

Frank is excited about the opportunity to share his first of many planned books with you.



PREMONITIONS

FRANK MCRAE

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When the Universe
Shifts, Expect the
Unexpected



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To my wife Donna, and my daughter Jennifer.

*Thank you for your tireless support and assistance, but most of all,
your patience with me as I wrote this book.*

It was all more appreciated than you'll ever know.

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Part One

The General's Wives

“Many that lived deserved death and some that died deserved life.”

Lord of the Rings—Gandalf

CHAPTER 1

*“We’re still in shock ourselves. I was just reaching
for the phone . . .”*

Thursday, November 1st, 2012

For weeks now, the air had been laced with a damp chill. The type of chill whose yearly appearance around late October hopelessly attempts to hold off winter just a little longer as it begs for at least one more day of Indian summer.

Children throughout the neighborhood, having put away their Halloween costumes worn the night before, began their seasonal campaigns for more candy “But mom, I ate all my vegetables and you checked all the candy. Come on mom, please?”

This year the weather had warmed up briefly during their annual quest for treats and the little ones made the most of it. In general, the collections this year surpassed last year’s haul by a good margin.

After another long day at his office, Doctor Jim Baker was enjoying a quiet dinner with his wife Lori as they reflected on the previous night’s activities with amusement. They recalled watching their next door neighbor Sam and Terry making the rounds with their twins Ally and Pete. The twins had set forth under the guise of Bettie Boop and a rock star this year respectively.

Sam, still wanting his gray Les Paul sunburst guitar to remain playable with the finish intact, convinced Pete to use his plastic guitar with strings thick as pencil lead being his most prevalent prop.

Jim and Lori had stayed home this year, devoting themselves exclusively to candy dispensing duties, for what they knew would be the last time. Next year they planned on taking their soon-to-arrive little girl on her first quest for treats. The baby girl they were expecting, Melissa Ann, would surely change their lives in a dramatic way. They looked forward to her arriving at the end of January and to introducing their new daughter to their closest friends and family members.

This year, however, they had been entertained by and at times concerned with, the variety of costumed visitors that came ringing their doorbell. Every new treat hungry caller had arrived releasing the seasonal chant of “Trick or Treat” before the door could even be opened. Both of the Baker’s dogs raced each other all night to meet the treat seekers, barking and sliding into the door before it could be opened.

Of course, they were called upon by the customary pirates, cowboys, gypsies and comic book characters. Spiderman won the popularity contest this year barely beating out green-faced Incredible Hulks with one each of the usual Superman, Batman and Ironman store-bought costumes thrown in for good measure.

This year, once again, the teenagers had predictably gotten into the more bizarre themes consisting mostly of various ghouls and mutilated human forms including the ever popular and haunting Jason style hockey mask. That singularly familiar mask brings to mind many vivid images; none of them being a shoot out between the Chicago Blackhawks and the Detroit Red Wings.

As they watched the parade to and from their door last night, the soon to be proud parents discussed, reshaped and finalized details of the princess costume that they visualized for little Melissa next year.

*

With their dinner finished, Jim and Lori contemplated their options for the night’s activities. High on the list was a leisurely, and usually amusing, walk through the neighborhood to assess the number of smashed pumpkins and also to count all the eggs that would never make it to an omelet due to those on the community’s more destructive side. Some low impact exercise would be safe for Lori as well as having the additional benefit of shedding a few dinner calories. Their miniature dachshund and tea-cup Yorkshire terrier also seemed in favor of a walk. They both offered up their best hopeful stares complete with impatient prancing, circling and tail wagging.

With dinner cleanup completed and a walk decided upon, Jim reached to shut off the early evening TV news. As he did so, his attention became riveted to a disturbing report that had just begun. It was being

delivered in a very somber tone and it detailed another brutal murder in the area. They moved to the typical crime free suburb of Winnetka on Chicago's north shore within the past year. The area had experienced one other such totally out of the ordinary felony recently.

Surely there were details being kept from the general public. Though what was being released was, very disturbing. The broadcast was particularly disturbing to Jim as it involved the death of another young woman very much like his wife. She no doubt had hopes and aspirations very similar to their own. The report also contained hints of another mutilated body. Unsettling hardly described his feelings. He and Lori just spent the last six months looking forward to an exciting new year anticipating the joys that would surely follow the birth of their first baby.

This year had turned out to be a year of great change and reward. So far it included career advancements, the news that Lori was pregnant and the making of many new friends and associates since moving to their new home.

They had been recently blessed with many new close relationships formed with other doctors Jim now worked with. Regular consultations and patient referrals also kept their collection of twenty plastic surgeons in close social contact.

The Bakers moved to the affluent town of Winnetka after an extensive search for the best place to start their family. He felt proud about being able to move to Winnetka since becoming board certified and accepted on staff at several very prestigious area hospitals including the University of Chicago Medical Center, Loyola University Medical Center and Weiss Memorial.

After enduring the tedious years of medical school, he was rewarded by watching his practice skyrocket over the past year. It was due in large part to his association with the team of doctors that had become known as 'The Surgeon Generals'. Both the success and experience of the group were indeed comprehensive.

They had a rather impressive feature article written on them earlier this year in the Chicago Sun Times entitled, "This team can't be beat—The Surgeon Generals". The study provided extensive background information on the team making Jim pleased to see his and Lori's name associated with such a distinguished group of doctors and their wives.

The team members the piece listed in alphabetical order were Dr. and Mrs.:

John & Lisa Ackerman	Steve & Marilyn Mallard
Jim & Lori Baker	Carlos & Victoria Moore
Mark & Isabella Channing	Tony & Maria O'Connell
Blake & Sandra Falkland	Raymond & Olivia Reed
Keenan & Gabriella Giovanni	Pete & Cindy Reynolds
Franklin & Theresa Griffin	Damien & Jacqueline Ross
Garret & Janice Heaton	Gabriel & Bernice Shannon
Hayden & Wendy Howell	Taylor & Francine Stapleton
Jack & Natalie Kerr	William & Joanna Stevens
Keith & Dana Lawley	Randall & Kelly Wright

Due to the success that sprung from that article's exposure; Jim was not only able to afford his new home in a town that was prominently positioned in the top fifteen richest zip codes in the country, he was also able to purchase a cabin in the north Wisconsin woods where his relationship with Lori blossomed.

Right out of high school Jim knew he wanted to be a doctor and decided on plastic surgery after getting his pre-med bachelor's degree in biology. He had totally shut out the rest of the world during the years of his very-focused medical school education and he was determined to be the best.

He completed eight long years of education. Now he was ready to celebrate the fact that he graduated. Not only that he graduated, but that he wound up in the top five of his class at Rush Medical College in attaining his new MD status.

Enter Lori.

He met Lori 5 years ago during a wild weekend dedicated to the long overdue sowing of oats. They hit it off right away. After two months of dating, they decided to get away for a weekend together. They settled on a cabin in the northern Wisconsin woods. They found a great stretch with no neighbors for miles and a small private lake perfect for skinny dipping and sunbathing. It also offered utterly peaceful sunrises and sunsets with

evenings so secluded and peaceful, the insects and owls appeared to make every effort to serenade soothingly to compliment the ambiance.

They found that one weekend at a getaway as complete as this just wasn't enough. They escaped to their perfect little cabin away from it all every weekend they could that summer. There they relished the total freedom the cabin provided to explore each other as they built their relationship into something they knew would last forever.

They would swim together, play silly board games and they dined out at local restaurants with surprisingly good fare for such a remote location. One day while on a hike through the woods, they escaped a summer shower by discovering a cave which turned into yet another exclusive area of their own.

The long peaceful days and nights spent together in this unique retreat of theirs led to utterly spontaneous encounters that told them all they needed to know about wanting to spend the rest of their lives together.

Steamy showers with each other after long hikes and other physical activities in and out of that comfy king sized bed, always found Jim exiting the shower after Lori. He would then find little messages she had written in the fog on the bathroom mirror. The messages always consisted of a heart drawn in the upper left and lower right corners with a different message in the middle that he looked forward to after their long intimate showers together. Messages like "we aren't really finished yet are we?" or "find me . . . quick." or "Free tan line removal at the beach." or simply "Let's cuddle in the puddle"; her cutesy way of describing their intimate times in the hot tub. He looked forward to those messages and to contemplating their meaning as he toweled off.

*

These fond memories were shattered when he heard something he simply couldn't understand. Was the name they just mentioned on the TV really Lisa Ackerman? It couldn't be John's wife who was Lori's closest friend. They had just been out to dinner with John and Lisa two nights ago to celebrate their tenth anniversary. Jim remained glued to the TV as he called out, "Lori. Come in here quick."

“What is it?” she asked, arriving at the TV and becoming alarmed at how glued to it her husband had become.

“I think something terrible has just happened to Lisa!” At that moment, the newscast moved to an on-the-scene reporter giving disturbing particulars to her audience with the Ackerman home in the background.

“Details are still sketchy at this time but Winnetka police have confirmed the discovery of the brutally murdered body of Lisa Ackerman, wife of local plastic surgeon John Ackerman.”

“Oh, my god!” exclaimed Lori.

“Mrs. Ackerman’s body was found by her husband in the nursery of their home. Dr. and Mrs. Ackerman had recently celebrated their tenth wedding anniversary and have been residents here in Winnetka for six years. Sadly the Ackermans were expecting a child early next year.

“Ed Cassidy, Winnetka’s police investigator assigned to the case, had no comment at this early stage of the investigation. Channel 7 news believes this sad story will soon be connected to the other murdered female body found two weeks ago in nearby Evanston. A number of very disturbing similarities to the other murder is sure to shock this usually quiet upscale community.

“Channel 7 news will have more details on the ten o’clock news. This is Susan Peterson reporting live from Winnetka.”

They stared at each other in stunned, numbing disbelief as they held hands and slowly collapsed on the couch. Neither of them could utter a word as the shock of this news began to sink in. Jim caught Lori, who began to cry uncontrollably into her hands as she fell forward into his arms.

“Jim, tell me we’re not really hearing this! It simply can’t be! Not Lisa! This can’t be about our Lisa! Poor JOHN! Jim what do we do?”

“I don’t know honey. I can’t believe it either but that was their house. Lisa was just what, four months pregnant? They were as excited as us about finally conceiving. John must be absolutely crushed! Lisa was his life. His whole life, all he ever talked about. I can’t believe what this will do to him. I think I have to go there, but I don’t want to leave you now.”

She said, “You probably wouldn’t be able to get in to talk to him right now anyway. Why don’t you try to call him first?”

As he reached for the phone to punch in the Ackerman speed dial, it rang. The caller ID showed 'Raymond & Olivia Reed'.

"Jim. Did you hear the news? It's Lisa. Liv and I can't believe it."

"We just heard Ray. We're in shock ourselves. I was just reaching for the phone to call John."

Ray said, "Don't bother. I just tried. The police are taking all calls to their home right now. We couldn't get through. Jim this can't be."

"We'll just keep trying to reach him. Please let us know if you hear from him."

"Will do Jim and you do the same."

"Ray thanks for calling."

As Jim hung up the phone, he saw Lori still sobbing uncontrollably. He tried to comfort her saying, "Lori there is nothing we can do right now. This is terrible news but please try to calm down. Think of the baby." She looked at him and said, "That's what I'm doing. I'm thinking of their baby as well!"

They held each other on the couch for the rest of the night, lost in upsetting thoughts of their friends who lived a mere two blocks away. One now gone forever; the other more lost and in shock than they were and yet another that would never know the joy and horrors of this crazy world.

*

They had no idea that they were being watched from a short distance away. They had no way of knowing about what was being contemplated at that moment from a short distance away. Tonight he would let the grief take hold. They all needed to feel it.

He wouldn't allow any of them be immune to the pain that was inflicted on him at the hands of the one among them who thought he was so gifted. If the hands were so gifted why was he feeling the terrible pain of his recent loss?

They thought they were so removed from everything his revenge could do, but now they would feel his grief and more. He had only just begun inflicting upon them a small measure of what he felt for the last six months. They needed to feel the loneliness when there should be companionship, feel the silence when there should be laughter, the

shattered plans and dreams that will never be realized. He was now set up to inflict this on the ones that truly deserved it.

In his quiet place of observation, he vowed to use all his experience, all his abilities, all his cunning and all his skills to bring the pain he felt from their hands right back to their doorsteps.

So smug were they in their rich little worlds. They are all so cocky and self assured. They were so unquestioningly sure and confident that they were isolated from the terrible things that happened to people without their wealth. But he knew differently. He had a much different experience. This was only the beginning!

CHAPTER 2

"I know where the whiskey is. I'll be right back . . ."

Friday, November 2nd, 2012

Investigator Ed Cassidy sat at his desk the morning after Lisa Ackerman's murder reviewing his notes on this his latest assignment. The homicide of Lisa Ackerman, 34, pretty white pregnant wife of Dr. John Ackerman, 17 Spruce Street. Her body found mutilated in the nursery of their Winnetka home. She had been out running errands that morning which included a trip to the grocery store and the post office nearby. The house showed no visible signs of forced entry. Her home security system was activated. Her car was found in the garage with the groceries she had purchased earlier still in the back seat. This was very unusual for a number of reasons not the least of which being the groceries included milk, eggs and meat. What could have distracted her from bringing these perishable items into the house immediately and how could it have caused her death in this very extraordinary way?

These same questions could be asked about many of the details surrounding her murder. From the car parked in the garage complete with groceries, to the secured house. Nothing added up. How could she have been killed in the upstairs nursery of her locked home, with the alarm set, no signs of forced entry and no signs of a struggle?

Then there were the details of the murder itself. They were all virtually identical to the murder of Aimee Holden two weeks ago in Evanston. The M.O. appeared to be the same for both. What message was the killer trying to convey by leaving bodies behind for loved ones to find in such a terrible condition?

Both bodies had all of their clothing removed, apparent burn marks made by a very small torch, possibly a pencil torch, up and down the left side of their bodies. They also had a burn mark in the right arm pit and behind the right knee. The left breast was removed, rather cleanly, almost surgically, and the right ankle smashed to a pulp. All had their hair cut

short, sort of like a man's haircut and part of the right ear lobes were cut off. The clothing, hair and make shift mastectomy were all arranged neatly in the cribs that will never see the unborn babies they had been created to embrace.

Another odd part of the impact was the circles drawn around each eye with the fine torch leaving the appearance of a raccoon, or a burglar, or the effect of a bug eyed stare, as well as the unforgettable smell of burned flesh in the room. There was blood at the ear lobe cutting and breast removal site but not nearly what would usually be there had the cutting not been made post mortem. There was no expression of shock on either face. Aside from the burn marks around the eyes, their expressions were rather peaceful. No stab or gunshot wounds. Initial toxicology reports from the Cook County Medical Examiner were negative in both cases and everyone that knew either of the women swore there was no way drug use was a factor.

He was at a loss as to a motive, cause of death and suspects. Ed had reached out to Bill Weller, the Evanston investigator assigned to the Aimee Holden case, and had a meeting set up for later this afternoon. He intended to examine the details from both cases and to bounce ideas off each other in regards to motive etc. but he wasn't sure what insights he could bring to the meeting. He was stumped.

He looked at his watch. It showed the day had reached 1:30 pm. He had just time enough for a quick lunch then he'd bring his records to Evanston for his meeting with Inspector Weller. Besides being interested in the Evanston inspector's take on this mess, he desperately wanted to have anything resembling a hunch or an actual development in the case when he interviewed the grieving Doctor Ackerman this afternoon.

*

Doctor John Ackerman had just finished making the dreaded phone calls to Lisa's mom and sister. His pain didn't allow him to make the calls last night. The police had contacted her immediate relatives with the sad news of Lisa's murder and told them there was nothing that could be done that night. Sorrow having been expressed for their loss, they were then told that John would call in the morning.

John would sleep in the den again tonight as the CSI unit had taped off the upstairs, still having more work to do in the nursery. The team had asked him to stay downstairs until they completed all evidence gathering.

So far all they told him was that there were no theories explaining how anyone could have slipped past the security system to do such a thing to Lisa and then get away clean. They couldn't find any footprints around the perimeter of the house that might indicate a window escape or entry. No hair or fingerprints were found other than Lisa's and John's anywhere upstairs. In short, they had no clues that would help the police thus far.

The police had canvassed the neighborhood and discovered that one neighbor two doors down saw Lisa leave the house and drive away around 1:00 pm. No one noticed her coming back home or going back into the house.

John was just beside himself when the doorbell rang. "Hi Jim, Lori, come on in," he said as he welcomed his best friends in. He didn't feel much like talking to anyone, but somehow Lori's hug and tears comforted him. Their visit turned out to be just what he needed.

"John, how are you doing? Is there anything we can do to help you? We just don't know what to say we're so shocked." Lori just kept holding John tightly as she cried with him. Jim joined them but had no words to add. They all sat down. It took several deep breaths to get the sobbing under control before they could speak.

"Thanks for coming over guys, I feel lost, angry, sad and lonely all at the same time. I just called Lisa's mom and sister and none of us could speak really. We cried, and I gave them what little information we have now. It really isn't much more than what the police gave them last night. I had to hang up. We were all just too upset to speak. They wanted to come to Chicago tonight, but I talked them into tomorrow morning."

"John, if it is too soon we can leave, no problem. We just felt we needed to try to comfort you and couldn't stay away any longer," said Jim.

"No, really guys, I think you two are just what I need right now. I don't think I could face anyone else until this has a couple of days to sink in. I feel so helpless, powerless, I don't know, lost I guess. You two are the only ones I feel comfortable enough to tell that I haven't stopped crying since I found her. It was horrible. I will never get the smell of burnt flesh in that room or the image of seeing her like that out of my head as long as

I live. Who would be cruel enough to do something like that to someone as sweet as Lisa? You two knew her.

“She never hurt anyone. She wasn’t confrontational. How could she be picked for this? What is the point? Why did this have to happen?”

Then John just couldn’t hold it in any longer. He broke down and let his friends comfort him.

Lori hugged John, waiting for the sobbing to stop again.

“I’m meeting with inspector Cassidy today. You can stay if you want. Maybe he’ll have some news for us.”

Lori asked, “John, when was the last time you ate something?”

“It had to be lunch yesterday before I came home. Last night was like an out of body experience and today I haven’t been able to concentrate on much of anything. I keep trying to think of how things will be going forward, but I’m having trouble finding a starting point. I guess eating was about the last thing on my mind.”

“I’d go get something but we really want to stay with you. How about I order a pizza and I’ll make us some drinks while we wait?”

“That would be excellent Lori. Thanks.”

Jim stood up saying, “Lori, stay with John. I know where the whiskey is. I’ll be right back with some drinks for us. Then I’ll place the order.”

The rest of the afternoon, they shared fond memories of their times with Lisa and comforted each other as they ate and drank and waited for the inspector’s visit.

CHAPTER 3

'They had never seen anything as flawless as this plan.'

Friday, November 2nd, 2012

On the way to his meeting in Evanston, Ed looked at the Ackerman case details from about every angle he could think of, but couldn't begin to see any pattern other than both victims were the wives of prominent doctors in the city; no, prominent plastic surgeons in the city.

Smashed right ankle, breast removal, hair cut, burn marks what did it all mean? Ed was no psychologist but the fact that the two murders were so close in time and method suggested one sick, heartless bastard that was on what he feared was the start of a serial killing spree. Both cases felt so open ended and pointless that his gut told him neither of them produced any closure for the killer.

The more he thought about it, the facts led him to believe the killer was more than likely a local with some sort of a grudge. He felt sure it was a male probably over 20 or 25 years of age with an ax to grind against doctors, correction against the plastic surgeon husbands of the victims.

The killer would have to be at least that old to be able to think of this sick scenario, let alone pull it off like he did without leaving anything behind for them to go on.

That's where the motive logic stopped because they worked out of different hospitals, different towns and they had different specialties. Dr. Holden specialized in cosmetic surgeries, and Dr. Ackerman specialized more in reconstructive surgeries typically associated with accident victims.

A smashed ankle pointed to an accident possibly. Breast removal pointed to cosmetic surgery he guessed but why two different doctors, from two different hospitals and from two different towns?

And what about the haircuts and four sets of burn marks? It all had to add up to something, but what?

When he got to the Evanston police department, Inspector Bill Weller met him and led him to his office where they spent several hours comparing notes and basically going in circles.

Bill said, "Ed this one has me pulling my hair out. This bastard must really think outside the box because nothing adds up. I've found one thing that I keep coming back to. It makes about as much sense as a fish needing a bicycle. You might check on this with the Ackerman security provider.

"The M.E. put Aimee's time of death at about 2:30 pm. The security company documents showed her disarming the home alarm system at 2:05 pm and then arming it again at 2:45 pm. After apparently being home for forty minutes, she sets the alarm and then is later found dead in the nursery by her husband four hours later at 6:45 pm when he got home. His alibi checks out. He was seeing patients all afternoon during the murder, and everyone I spoke to added more details that painted a picture of the perfect couple.

"No one can remember them talking about a fight, let alone having any kind of family problems. Everything I got on them points to the ideal couple. She happened to be pregnant, as Lisa Ackerman was, but there were no attacks on the unborn babies, so the pregnancy angle seems to be more a coincidence than motive related.

"There was no physical evidence of tampering with the security system, and the codes were entered flawlessly but I can't figure out why she waited forty minutes to set the alarm in the middle of the day while she was home."

"That is unusual," said Ed as he made a note; follow up with the Ackerman's security provider to see if there were any irregularities in the alarm code entry.

Bill said, "Ok. Here's the timeline we've assembled so far on the Holden murder: She left the house at 12:10 pm and set the alarm when she left. Aimee was seen on various security cameras at the grocery store between 12:30 pm and 1:00 pm and she had no contact with anyone anytime she appeared on the security tapes; she shopped like she was in no hurry and didn't look stressed out in any way. She exited the store at 1:00 pm, made a quick stop at her bank at 1:15 pm where she went inside to deposit some checks. She then withdrew \$250.00 cash and again she appeared calm and normal on their security tapes. She left the bank at

1:20 pm. She then stopped at the local Caribou Coffee shop for a latte on her way home which was still in the car along with the groceries in the garage with the door closed. Then of course the alarm disarming at 2:05 pm and then curiously armed again at 2:45 pm. Robbery is out. The \$250 was still in her purse.”

“Any thoughts on why she armed the alarm system while she was home? Was that something she usually did?”

“Not according to her husband. He said they only armed the system when they left the house and at night before going to bed. Yet this time she armed the system while at home. Shortly after that she is found murdered in the nursery by Dr. Holden when he got home from work.

“We haven’t been able to pin down an actual cause of death yet either. Like Lisa, she didn’t bleed out after the field mastectomy. Aimee’s was also made post mortem. She didn’t have a look of alarm on her face or any indication of her trauma causing a heart attack. We found no drugs in her system. Just one mutilated, pretty, pregnant Doctor’s wife that wound up very dead.”

*

The killer remained concealed outside the Ackerman residence watching Jim and Lori eating their late lunch with John.

‘I know who the rest of them will be. I’ve done all the research I need to in order to get to them when I need to, but the timing still needs a great deal of consideration. It has to be perfect,’ he thought.

The sequencing was crucial. All plans were made. He noted that they were excellent except for the timing, and it was almost worked out now. The key was in the simplicity of the method. How did the acronym go again? K.I.S.S. Kill—Individuals—Simply—Stupid.

He could see they were beginning to feel the type of pain he had over the past several months, but he was just getting started.

‘Look at them, comforting each other. They have no idea what’s coming next.’ He knew! His plans were excellent. The simplicity is what made them perfect. The simpler the concept is, the fewer chances there will be for making mistakes. So far all they had was Andy and Barney working the case.

'They had never seen anything as flawless as this plan.'

It came to him on a very informative trip, to where else . . . the drug capital of the world in South America! He was beginning to think it was providence that prompted his trip to get away and get his mind off the grieving. He wasn't even sure why he chose Columbia, but things just had a way of working out didn't they. There he found the cornerstone of his perfect plan.

'Andy and Barney would never figure it out; not in a million years.

'The next one will get them really thinking, so I have to be especially careful from now on!

'Andy and Barney will probably realize soon enough that they are in over their collective heads and get the Chicago BIS involved. If they aren't considering it yet, they will after the next one.'

He studied that group too. He knew how the Bureau of Investigative Services approached problems like the ones he was throwing at them.

The killer kept fine tuning his plan. He was pleased with the progress thus far and very excited about what was about to happen next.

CHAPTER 4

"I think it's time. I think it's the PERFECT time."

Friday, November 2nd, 2012

Inspector Weller decided that it would be best to, accompany Ed on his interview with Dr. Ackerman, and Ed was glad that he did. They were initially surprised to find the Baker's there.

"Good afternoon Dr. Ackerman, this is inspector Bill Weller from the Evanston police department. He's the inspector investigating the Aimee Holden situation and I've asked him to join us. We've both agreed to work together in catching your wife's assailant. I was under the impression that you would be alone this afternoon and I apologize to your guests but this will be more productive if Bill and I were able to speak to you alone."

"Jim and Lori are my best friends. I'm going to have to lean on them a lot, so I might as well start now. They have been helping me wrap my head around this so let's just get this done. And please, call me John."

"Very well John, if it's ok with you then its fine with us. John, Bill and I have reviewed the details in both our cases and they are remarkably similar in . . ."

"So you think the same person is responsible for both murders then?" John asked.

"Yes that's the assumption we are going on. We have some questions we'd like to get to in a moment but first we'd like to just review the details and make sure we didn't miss anything. I didn't want to go too far with this last night out of respect for your grief."

"John, can you tell us if Lisa knew either Dr. Rick Holden or his wife Aimee?" asked Bill.

"I'm sure neither of us had met the Holdens or heard of them before the newscast two weeks ago."

"Any idea if a friend or relative may have had any associations with them?"

“Lisa and I have very few relatives in this area. Both my parents have passed away and Lisa’s mom and sister live in central Florida and have never been to the Chicago area except to occasionally visit us,” John replied.

“John, you and Jim here are part of an association of doctors that were recently written up in the paper. You call your group the ‘Surgeon Generals’. Does the name have any special significance?” Bill asked.

“Not really. We just started jokingly referring to our collection of plastic surgeons by that name and it kind of stuck. The newspaper reporter that wrote the article about us got wind of it and used it for the title of the article. Our patients found it amusing and began referring to us using the name as well. It was like the old Mash movie coining the nickname ‘The Pro’s From Dover’ but nothing really significant about it.”

“We have to ask some sensitive questions as you can well imagine so here goes. How would you describe your relationship with Lisa?” Ed asked.

“It seems everything had just been getting better and better until yesterday. We have made a number of new friends and associates lately and were so looking forward to the arrival of little Johnny. Sorry, we were going to name our son after me.” John got choked up and had to stop. Lori went to him and held him. “It’s ok John. Let it out. We’re here for you.”

After a moment John continued, “Sorry inspector but our relationship couldn’t have been better. We never fought. We spent every minute we could together doing things, planning things We just enjoyed each other’s company.”

“I’m sorry but we had to ask. Is there anything you can think of that might be at all helpful. We’re sure you have been thinking about things intensely since yesterday. Have you received any letters of dissatisfaction from any patients or can you recall any difficult, angry or any particularly unsatisfied patients recently?” asked Ed.

“I’m pleased to say no.”

“We understand Lisa didn’t work, but did she belong to any committees or community groups? Was she responsible for anything like that where someone could have become disgruntled about something?”

“Lisa wasn’t big on being involved in those things. She was never approached and never had the opportunity to turn anyone down,” John said.

Jim asked, “Inspectors, do you have any leads or suspects?”

“To be honest with you this case is a tough one. The particulars are truly unique. We had hoped that you might have thought of something since we spoke last night having had a night to sleep on it, but no, in answer to both of your questions. No suspects yet. As you know the Cook County Medical Examiner has been assisting us in collecting the facts in both cases but what you don’t know is we have reached out to Chicago’s Bureau of Investigative Services to make use of their excellent crime lab facilities and computer data bases.”

“We have taken enough of your time this afternoon. Thank you for your patience. We are truly sorry for your loss and we will catch the person responsible for your wife’s murder.”

“Thank you both. Please call me anytime if you think of any other questions.”

“John, I have one other question before we leave. Was Lisa in the habit of setting the alarm when she was at home?”

“No. She set it when she left the house and when we go to bed at night. I’m usually up first and turn it off before I leave for work. Why?”

“We just found it strange that it was set while she was home yesterday that’s all. Thanks John. We apologize for the disruption our CSI team has caused in your home. They will be back in the morning to finish their work upstairs, and you’ll have your house back by noon the latest.

“Please speak to the rest of the ‘Generals’ about being extra aware and more diligent than usual with things like setting your alarms, locking doors and keeping in touch with spouses more than you usually would,” Bill proposed.

“We’ll do that inspector and thanks again. Please let me know as soon as there are any developments.”

*

Ed said to Bill on the way out to the car, “I’ll call the security company in the morning and let you know what their records show. It’s

odd that they both set the alarm during the day while being home since both husbands have now confirmed it wasn't their norm."

*

'Well they have had quite the party in there this afternoon haven't they? We have the sad Dr. A, the supportive Dr. B, his pretty perfect little pregnant wifey and their new buddies Andy and Barney.

'I think it's time. I think it's the PERFECT time.

'What did that song talk about giving them? Oh yeah, a mystery to figure out.

'Actually, I think it's time to give them something to cry about! How about if we were to give it to them right now? Let's see how the Surgeon Generals stack up to the Surgeon Nemesis.'

CHAPTER 5

‘ . . . Amusement has no place here.’

Saturday, November 3rd, 2012

The next morning after their meeting with the two investigators, Jim invited several of the ‘Generals’ to their home to fill them in on Lisa’s murder.

Lori opened the door and welcomed Garrett Heaton and Blake Falkland each with a warm hug, took their coats and walked with them to the den where Jim was talking with Mark Channing and Keith Lawley. All of them were ‘Generals’.

“Garrett, Blake, welcome. Come on in. Mark and Keith just got here as well. What would you like to drink?” Jim asked.

“On a cold fall day with the kind of news we all just got, I think some brandy would be good,” said Garrett.

“Works for me as well,” said Blake Falkland.

Lori, though very saddened by Lisa’s death, tried to remain the perfect hostess. She was dressed in an ivory silk blouse, a rust colored sweater and matching slacks. She said, “I’ll be right back guys, please make yourselves comfortable.”

Mark started things off, “Jim what can you tell us? How’s John?”

“John is about as you’d expect. He’s devastated. He’s still trying to come to grips with Lisa and the baby being taken from him. The investigators assigned to the case and to the other similar murder two weeks ago in Evanston met with John, Lori and me yesterday. While they seem to be piecing together a lot of similarities between the two cases, there appears to be no reliable leads or connections between the victims so far.

“They’re working under the assumption that the cases are related, and are pretty sure that both women were victims of the same killer. There are just too many similarities for them not to be.”

“What kind of similarities? There was very little in the way of details in the news reports we saw. They only mentioned the possibility of mutilations,” said Blake Falkland.

“Well this is really the most difficult part for John to deal with. Lisa’s body was mutilated. Guys, this killer is one sick bastard. Both women were found in their homes, with doors locked and alarms set and no signs of forced entry or footprints around the houses. Both women were found in their nurseries naked with no look of shock or pain on their faces. They were found just laying there mutilated.”

“Jim, please. Tell us. How were they mutilated?” asked Mark.

“Both women had their left breast removed post mortem, fine burn marks around both eyes and up and down the left side of their bodies; their hair was cut short like a man’s would be cut, and their right ear lobe was partially cut off. Most of it appears to have been made post mortem. Guys it was just terrible. This meeting is not only to familiarize you with the facts of the case; I also wanted to pass along specific warnings from the inspectors. They would like us to be extra careful with safety as both cases involved the wives of local plastic surgeons.

“We also need to free up sometime in our schedules to include John’s patients for a while. He’s going to need some time off after the funeral.”

Lori came in with refreshments for everyone as Keith said, “That won’t be a problem. We’ll all help cover the appointments for him.”

Mark asked, “When is the funeral?”

“It will be on Monday,” said Lori.

They talked for a while longer reflecting on their memories of Lisa and all vowed to be extra careful in the coming days until the killer was caught.

Jim & Lori went to see a feel good movie on Sunday that didn’t quite work for them. They were trying to get their minds off Lisa’s murder by spending a very close weekend comforting each other.

Monday, November 5th, 2012

On Monday, the weather had turned bitter cold for Lisa’s funeral services. Lisa’s mom and sister insisted on coming to Chicago to stay with John for a few days and together they decided on a closed casket.

The article on Lisa's death contained all the funeral arrangements. A great many friends and patients that thought so highly of John came to the services to lend support for his loss. At the services, the 'Generals' learned that John was going to spend two weeks in Florida with Lisa's mom and sister to get away from the house for awhile. What they didn't learn was that one of the guests at the funeral was getting a first-hand look at the entire team of 'Generals' and their wives.

*

He knew them all by sight. He knew all their names due to the article written last July.

'Look at them, all in one place. How tempting it is to wait outside and finish them all off at one time, but no, where's the personal suffering in that? This needs to be drawn out and painful for them as it was for me,' he thought.

Everything was going according to plan. He carefully left them clueless. He knew that once they got a high enough level of forensics resources involved, they'd probably figure out how he was able to perform the murders so easily.

He hoped to be done with his retribution by then.

Every murder he committed seemed to be appeasing the anger he felt toward that despicable group of self indulged twits just a little more. As he reflected on this simple fact, he knew he was doing the best thing for her. Yes, she was gone. Yes, she had suffered horribly. He would never forget her. Her soft touch and never ending desire to please.

He would always miss her being in his life. That hole, that enormous hole that was left in his life would be avenged.

Plans that had been perfected were being continuously fine tuned. Items that Andy and Barney hadn't even thought of yet were being tweaked to stay even further ahead of what their simple little inexperienced minds could conceive. They had so little actual experience in solving crimes bigger than missy's stolen tricycle or getting aunt Bee's cat out of the local maple tree.

It had been so easy to stay ahead of them that he almost considered dropping a misleading clue to watch them go in even bigger circles, but,

'no, let's not get sloppy. Amusement has no place here,' he reminded himself.

This is serious business. Dates, sequence, items needed for the crime scene and the method of execution were all meticulously planned and so far executed flawlessly. He refused to distract himself with petty amusement. There would be plenty of time for reflection after everything was finished here.

Columbia would be his home for a year after he was done here. After all, there was nothing left for him here now that the love of his life had been taken from him. He may just open a new business down there for a while after he had a chance to settle in. He could also toy with the locals for amusement. They are so laid back and backward there that toying with the peasants would probably yield plenty of fulfillment to appease his need for continued amusement. Especially watching their local yokels try to keep up with him through it all. After all, he was beginning to enjoy the execution of the revenge quest he was on.

Maybe after he continued on to Greece he might try his hand again if his need for appeasement returned.

For now, the Nemesis hungered for more appeasement here.

CHAPTER 6

"I never felt so dirty getting clean."

Tuesday, November 6th, 2012

It was time for the rest of them to return to their regular routines. Jim went back to his practice and like many of the others; he took on many of John's patients until he returned from Florida.

Under these extreme circumstances, John had agreed allow Inspector Ed Cassidy to see a summary of patient files so the inspectors could review current procedures and results with the promise of maintaining confidentiality in the eyes of the patients. As long as patient names were kept confidential, he could see no harm in assisting them in this unconventional way and felt the backgrounds might provide a lead on a potential suspect.

Inspector Bill Weller, however, wasn't having the same luck with Dr. Holden. He refused any information on patients and insisted that his judgment on patient satisfaction would have to suffice.

The neighborhood canvasses had produced nothing, and Bill had hoped for more cooperation from Dr. Holden. He had an uncomfortable feeling about his lack of cooperation but understood the doctor's reasoning behind it. He had to respect his doctor-patient confidentiality. He was actually surprised at the amount of information that Dr. Ackerman was willing to give to Ed Cassidy. Even though it produced no leads thus far, it showed a tremendous amount of faith in his patient's satisfaction with his work.

The last few days turned out to be thankfully uneventful. Everything had settled back down into regular routines with a few exceptions. The 'Generals' and their wives took to heart the advice given to them by the police. They made every attempt to be more in touch and aware, looking for anything out of the ordinary or even slightly suspicious.

Wednesday, November 7th, 2012

On Wednesday, Lori was reflecting on John and Lisa's lives together, having been cut short like they were, and decided that she would do something special for Jim. She was feeling wonderful and blessed to have their futures to look forward to, so she decided to prepare one of Jim's favorite meals and have a special night together. He was a steak and potatoes kind of guy and always said he can get that anywhere, but a home cooked meal was special to him. He had simple tastes. He wasn't big on fancy meals that took a long time to prepare and pronounce. So she decided on a meal consisting of meatloaf, corn on the cob and garlic mashed potatoes with home-made buttermilk dinner rolls. She enjoyed baking for Jim because he appreciated it as much as he did. The dinner preparations in the kitchen smelled good along with the cinnamon and apple scents from the home-made apple pie she baked for dessert.

She put out her best dishes, wine for him, sparkling apple cider for her, champagne glasses, table cloth and matching napkins. The chilled bottle of champagne she had on hand and the bouquet of flowers she picked up that afternoon nestled in a pretty vase finished the setting just perfectly.

Dinner wound up being easily well timed since Jim now called regularly to check up on her and to let her know when he would be home. She did the same; calling him to let him know every where she planned to go and when she expected to be home.

When Jim came home from work, the lights were turned down low. Dinner needed a half hour more to finish cooking and Lori had some soft romantic music playing.

Even though she was seven months pregnant, she waited for him in the bedroom, poised on their king-sized poster bed dressed only in a sheer black teddy with light beige lace trim and a smile.

"Are you too tired to perform one more exam doctor?" she teased.

"Not at all," he said. "And I don't think I'll need my little black bag for this house call."

She was a welcome sight after an extra long day's work. His days were going to remain longer until John got back to work. Neither of them minded helping John out while he got some much needed time away.

Jim looked around and saw the work she put into preparing the evening and her playful smile.

“Dinner won’t be ready for at least a half hour. Is that enough time to determine my state of health?” she asked coyly.

He quickly got more comfortable and answered all her questions without saying a word.

Dinner was delicious and afterward Lori suggested they get away this weekend to relax at the cabin and give him a chance to unwind after his week of unusually long work days.

“That’s a great idea hon. I’ll take off work early Friday afternoon; we can head up there and spend Friday night through Sunday afternoon at the cabin. I’m not sure how much skinny dipping we’ll be doing this time of year but quiet evenings with my favorite mommy to be, a nice fire, the smell of fresh popcorn, watching a movie or two while cuddling under a warm quilt for an evening or two sounds like the perfect way to unwind after a hectic week.”

Saturday, November 10th, 2012

It turned out to be a great weekend. They hadn’t been up to the cabin since the just after the 4th of July.

The leaves had all fallen from the trees but the area was still secluded and they took a nice long leisurely walk along the lake, through the woods and to their favorite cave.

They brought some chairs up to the cave last summer. On this hike, Jim carried a back pack with a couple of blankets, some snacks and apple cider. In her condition, the chairs were very welcome as she was tired, and the baby was very active during the entire walk.

Jim made a small fire just outside the cave and they snacked, drank cider and talked about the baby until the sun went down.

It was a little spooky getting back to the cabin but they followed their familiar path and found it with no trouble. They fell back into the cabin laughing, hugging, kissing and ultimately stripping on their way to the shower. The warm water removed the chill they brought back with them from the hike and she exited the shower with the cleanest back and cleanest everything else that Jim could give her.

Before she went to start up the popcorn, she left Jim a little message on the mirror. When he came out he smiled at the mirror. In between the two hearts she wrote, "I never felt so dirty getting clean."

They didn't make it halfway through the popcorn or the first movie before falling asleep in each other's arms on the couch. The abundance of fresh country air from their extended exercise throughout the day eventually emerged victorious in their battle to remain awake until the end of even one movie.

Sunday, November 11th, 2012

Sunday morning was bright and sunny. It really was beautiful at the cabin but after a simple breakfast they decided to straighten up, cover the furniture and pack up the cabin for winter. They would head back home early and grab some lunch on the way. This would allow Jim time to relax for awhile after the four hour drive, insuring that he would be rested for what promised to be an unusually long and trying week of surgery and seeing patients.

*

The Nemesis had quite the extensive log on the actions of the 'Generals' and their wives, their schedules and their practices. He had been collecting this kind of information for the past six months since she died. It somehow appeased his need for revenge to be inching closer to the perfect plan. The gathering of critical bits of information that allowed him to continue executing the pain he intended to inflict on the targeted doctors definitely seemed to smooth out the rough edges of his anger. That intense anger he carried with him all the time lately, could cause him to rush toward another milestone. Instead, he wanted to apply the tact and discipline necessary to remain one step ahead of Andy, Barney and their new growing community of crime professionals.

He knew who went shopping when, who took kids to school, and who picked them up, who went to church and who didn't. He had charted each wife's actions meticulously.

While their impromptu little trip out of town was unexpected, it didn't impact his plans at all. He knew Doctor B and his wife would get back to their routines. He would return to his medical practice, to helping out good ole Doctor A and she would return to the weekly routine that never seemed to change.

Monday: stay at home (probably soap operas and bon bons) (Done, check)

Tuesday: house cleaning (probably more soap operas and bon bons) (Done, check)

Wednesday: laundry and maybe a little yard work (afternoon more soap operas and bon bons) (Done, check)

Thursday: it's time to start our new schedule of bi-monthly appointments at the OB GYN.
(And of course it was shopping day in the afternoon afterward.)
(Blah, blah, blah)

'How did that old song go?

I believe it was something about 'time coming today.'

CHAPTER 7

'Why was he doing this to these pretty young women?'

Thursday, November 15th, 2012

Lori picked up the ringing phone. The caller ID showed 'Dr. Rittenhouse'.

She answered, "Baker residence, Lori speaking."

"Good morning Lori, this is Dr. Rittenhouse's office. This is just a reminder about your appointment this morning."

"Yes, I'll be there. It's getting close now and exciting. I'll see you at 10:00 am."

She felt really good and couldn't wait to check on Melissa's progress to confirm that everything was ok after their semi-strenuous weekend at the cabin. All the advice she had received told her to pretty much continue with regular routines but to avoid anything overly strenuous or "bumpy".

After a quick shower, Lori put on her new gray and white loose fitting top trimmed in pink with black slacks and reasonable shoes. Jim had picked out the outfit on an impromptu shopping stop last Sunday and she couldn't wait to wear it. All the moms-to-be wore unique outfits for their visits to the upscale doctor's office trying to win the casual glance competition in the waiting room.

"Jim, don't forget I start my bi-monthly doctor's appointments today. I'm going to drop off the dogs for their annual teeth cleaning before my appointment and then I have some grocery shopping to do this afternoon; I should be home by two o'clock."

"Thanks for calling babe. I didn't forget. Call me afterwards. I can't wait to hear how great Melissa's doing. Hopefully we didn't overdo it last weekend."

"Yeah, and the hike was strenuous too!"

"I love you Lori. Talk to you this afternoon. Bye, Bye."

*

At 2:30 Jim asked his secretary if she had heard from Lori yet and she replied, “No, nothing since her phone call this morning.”

This wasn't like her, so he called her cell phone and got no answer. Then he called home and got their answering machine message: “You've reached the Baker's. If we aren't answering the phone, we are either out of the house or playing house. Leave a message, and we'll get back to you when we can. {Giggle} 'Jim, stop'. Bye-bye!”

He became very worried very quickly. “Angie, I need to step out for about an hour, late lunch. Please ask Dr. Reed to cover my three pm appointment.”

“Will do Doctor Baker,” said his receptionist.

*

He couldn't get home fast enough. When he arrived, he saw Lori's car pulled around back in the carport. He went in the rear entrance and was greeted by the alarm warning beeps. Something didn't feel right at all. He keyed in the alarm code disarming the security system and began to panic.

“Lori? Honey are you home?” he ran upstairs and found her lying on the floor in the nursery.

His worst fears confirmed.

“OH, MY GOD NO!”

“LORI, LORI . . . LORI!”

He reached for her but stopped. She looked so peaceful, so unbothered by everything he now saw and smelled in the nursery.

This was Lisa all over again! Aimee Holden all over again! “No, No, NO, LORI NO!”

Jim collapsed to his knees in shock. This wasn't real. At first he refused to believe what he was seeing and began to sob uncontrollably. “Lori, Lori, Lori, honey, my god, not you too.”

As much as he wanted to pick her up and hug her, he resisted.

His whole world had just changed. He couldn't think of what to do next, so he sat there crying uncontrollably for how long he didn't know. He had to call the police. He couldn't call the police. That would mean that this was all real. It couldn't be real. Was it true that Lori and Melissa were both gone? If he didn't call, it wasn't real. It wasn't real. This wasn't real.

None of it . . . but it was. He knew now that it was real. He had to make the call. He knew now that he had to make the call.

“Winnetka police department 911; what’s your emergency?”

Jim said, “It’s my wife. She’s dead. Someone killed my wife, and she’s dead. My baby is dead. They’re both dead. Please come quickly,” then he let the phone slip from his hands to the floor. He heard the operator somewhere off in the distance or perhaps it was his imagination. It didn’t matter; he couldn’t hear the words themselves anyway. He was a doctor. He recognized it. He was in shock!

He knelt down next to Lori and let his emotions go. He was there when the police arrived. He barely noticed them. He was numb, in a trance. He was numb and shaking.

*

Inspector Ed Cassidy was notified to respond to the 911 call at the Baker residence at 3:30 pm and arrived there by 3:50pm. The scene was organized chaos. The crime scene tape was being spread around the perimeter of the Baker property; the M.E. was just going into the house as a female police officer was leading Dr. Jim Baker to a living room chair and attempting to calm him down. His initial shock had turned to anger by now. He was now beyond livid. He told the officer, “You’d better find him first because if I do there won’t be a trial!”

Ed went to him and attempted to calm him down. “Dr. Baker, please don’t talk like that. We know you are upset, but you’ve got to trust that we’ll do our jobs. We will find this bastard, and he will pay for this.”

Jim replied, “There isn’t a price big enough for him to pay that would bring back Lori and the baby.” Then trying to make sense of the murder he asked, “Why is he hurting innocent women Ed? Why? He clearly has some sort of problem with us doctors. Why not go after us? What’s his problem? What could Lori or I have done to deserve this?”

“Doctor, you’re trying to make sense out of the senseless act of a coward. I know that doesn’t help much, but there is no logic that will comfort you thru this. This person is a heartless killer, and there is no good reason for any of this.

“Do you have any sedatives in the house, Jim?”

He nodded his head in the direction of the downstairs bathroom.

“Please get the doctor some water and check out the bathroom for something to help him calm down a little while I go upstairs,” Ed instructed the officer looking after Jim.

At the top of the stairs in the nursery, he found an all too familiar scene waiting for him. In the middle of the floor lying face up, naked and mutilated was Jim Baker’s pretty wife Lori. What made the scene in the nursery especially bizarre was the utterly peaceful look on her pretty mutilated face. The open eyes missing any hint of pain or distress and those damn burn marks around her eyes and the smell of burning flesh!

‘Why was he doing this to these pretty young women? Why was he doing this to any of them and how was he getting to them AND getting away so clean? ‘Hell,’ Ed thought, ‘while we’re at it, are we even sure it’s a ‘he’. It could be a ‘she’ I guess, but I doubt it.’

He looked around briefly knowing what he would find. Sure enough, like in the other two cases, he found Lori’s outfit folded neatly with her hair that had been cut off, resting on top of it, all in the unborn baby’s crib. She had such radiant blonde hair that was always pulled back making her look so classy. Now it was chopped off and discarded like some no longer needed article of clothing. On top of the clothing and hair was her left breast just like at the Ackerman crime scene. Nothing else in the room seemed to have been disturbed in any way. The room was impeccably decorated and orderly with not a chair or bed spread out of place or visibly disturbed. The windows were locked from the inside and the curtains were neat and perfectly in place. There were no drag marks on the carpet so she must have died right where she laid and once again there was some blood but the volume was very minimal for such a violation to the human body. The mastectomy trauma was once again seemingly made post mortem.

How were such violent acts being performed with no visible disturbance at the crime scenes?

This guy needs to go down! He needs to go down hard, and Ed vowed that he would be the one to do it.

There wasn’t much else he could do here, so he went down to talk to Jim.

“Jim, do you feel up to a few questions and a statement?”

Jim replied, "Ed I'm so pissed right now that Ask me anything you want. We need to find this son of a bitch before he does this to anyone else."

As fast as his anger had risen, it now left him just as fast. Then Jim's resolve cracked and he just broke down. Ed spent some time with him and waited before asking any questions giving the sedative a chance to do its job.

*

The reporters were beginning to amass outside along with the neighborhood curiosity seekers. He recognized Susan Peterson from Channel 7 news outside starting to give her report when he turned his attention back to Dr. Jim Baker.

"Jim, tell me what you can about today."

He told the inspector about Lori calling to let him know she was dropping the dogs off at the vet before going to her bi-monthly maternity appointment, her planned trip to the grocery store, her promise to call him around 2:00 pm, his concern after his last patient had left at 2:30 pm without his having heard from Lori yet, and the rest of it leading up to finding Lori.

"Have you touched anything in here? Also was the door secure when you got home?"

"As much as I wanted to, I didn't touch anything. When I got home her car was where it is now, the back door was locked, and the alarm warning went off when I opened the door. I entered the code to shut it off and started feeling sick. Then I went upstairs and found her."

"That's enough for now. I'll come back in the morning. Jim do you want to call anyone or go stay with anyone for tonight?"

"I don't know right now. I can't think. I probably will need some calls made in a while. I don't feel like talking to anyone tonight. This has to sink in some first."

"The CSI unit will be working upstairs, downstairs and outside for a couple more hours, then the M.E. will take Lori's body out. I can stay if you'd like some company."

“Thanks Ed but I just need to absorb this by myself for tonight. I guess I do need you to make a couple calls for me after all. I really can’t call Lori’s parents with this news right now but they should know as soon as possible. I’ll also need you to call my brother Jerry and ask him to break the news to my dad. Tell them I’ll call in the morning and there is nothing they can do tonight. Also call Ray Reed. He’s one of the doctors in our group. He will inform the rest of them. There’s a phone book on the desk next to the phone in the den.”

Ed made the difficult calls for Jim and left him to his grief over Lori’s murder.

CHAPTER 8

'Oh! Looky there. Time for lunch.'

Friday, November 16th, 2012

The self-proclaimed “Nemesis” reviewed his extensive logs full of information on the ‘Generals’, their wives and their activities, schedules and habits. The time he had spent gathering, disseminating, and organizing this information was paying off as he continuously reshaped the ideal strategy to exact his revenge. He was amazed at how the simplicity of his plan had Andy and Barney so baffled and also how rewarding it was personally.

He had nothing but disdain for his targets within the ‘Generals’ and no remorse for their wives. The decision to turn up the heat and not give them time to fully react to Lori Baker’s demise came to him as he watched the TV cameras being put away after this evenings news cast from the Baker’s front yard.

*

Isabella Channing had just dropped her son off at school the morning after Lori’s murder and stopped at the local Starbuck’s for her favorite coffee, caffè mocha and a blueberry muffin.

As she sat down in the only open seat, next to a man reading a book, she was distracted by the plans they had for a birthday party tomorrow afternoon for their son Mikey. He was doing so well in the second grade this year and she wanted to reward him with an exceptional party.

The man next to her got up and held a piece of paper out to her with some writing on it, caught her attention, and began asking for directions to the post office. Before she could respond, he sneezed. She gave him, unknowingly, the most inappropriate response possible, “Bless you,” and began with the directions. Halfway through them he interrupted her and said to her, “Isabella, look at me as if you see forever in my eyes and smile.”

She immediately did so without even thinking. In fact, she didn't think anything on her own for the rest of her life which wound up being a very short period of time.

*

Dr. Raymond Reed didn't get around to calling all of the 'Generals' last night after hearing about Lori's murder. There were six more to call this morning. Not wanting to pass off the breaking of such terrible news to his secretary, he had decided to make all the calls himself throughout the morning, in between appointments.

After his 10:00 am appointment; his last call was to Dr. Mark Channing, who was seeing a patient at the time, so he left a message with his receptionist to have him call back.

"Hello Ray, it's Mark what's up?"

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news Mark but . . . it's Lori Baker, Mark. Jim found her yesterday pretty much like Lisa was found. It appears to me that there is a psycho on the loose and he seems to be targeting the wives of doctors in the area."

"First Lisa, now Lori? Ray what's this all about? It can't be about the girls. The common thread has to be us somehow but what could it be?"

"No Mark, first Dr. Rick Holden's wife Aimee, then Lisa and now Lori. This is no coincidence. It's definitely about us doctors and I can't imagine what could trigger this kind of chaos."

"Mark, call Isabella and make sure she stays extra careful for the time being."

"I will Ray thanks. Man I feel terrible for Jim. Lori was due in January wasn't she? I can't believe how ripped up he's got to be right now. Is there anything we can do for him?"

"There's nothing we can do right now. Mark we must do everything we can to keep our wives safe."

"I'll call Isabella right now and give her the news about poor Lori, and thanks again Ray."

*

The Nemesis was just about to set the house alarm on his way out the back door of the Channing home on I4 Oak Lane when the phone rang. He decided to stay and listen to the message that would be left by the caller.

'I'll bet this is the charming Dr. C. calling to speak to Mrs. C. Problem is, she can't come to the phone right now but you'll figure that out soon enough,' he said to himself.

"Honey it's me pick up . . . Izzie are you there?"

'Oh she's here alright but she's not picking up anything anymore doc. In fact, you better pick up the kid because she's going to have a little trouble driving to the school to get him this afternoon in her current condition.'

"Izzie when you get this please call me right away. I'll try you on your cell", said Mark as he ended his message.

'Well doc, it's been fun but . . . gotta run. Oh! Looky there. Time for lunch.'

He reset the house alarm as he left, then locked the rear door and at a safe distance from the house, he made a few adjustments to what he was wearing then walked several blocks to his car. It was now time to pick up some lunch and reflect on his busy morning that had just brought him one step closer to his retribution goal.

*

After trying Isabella's cell phone Mark became worried. Especially after the news Ray just had given him about Lori this morning. This wasn't like his wife at all.

Ever since Lisa's murder, they had been staying in very close contact on the advice of the police investigating her death.

He decided to call his next door neighbor. Isabella said she planned to visit her this morning after dropping the kids off to school. They were both coordinating Mikey's birthday party tomorrow. She must be there and probably left her cell phone at home.

"Georgia? It's Mark. Are you and Izzie going over the last minute birthday party plans?"

“No Mark, but I believe we will be shortly. I’ve been waiting for her to come over. I saw her car pull around back about 9:30 but she hasn’t come over yet. She told me she’d be here no later than 10:00 am.”

“Thanks Georgia. I’ll try the house.”

Now Mark suddenly felt panic rising through him like a storm swell lifting a ship at sea. She was home when he called and she didn’t answer the phone. After what happened to Lisa and Lori, Mark called the police, briefly telling them his concerns and then he raced home.

The police were there when he arrived and were looking around the outside of the house. Having heard no response after ringing the bell, they then checked the front and rear doors. Both were secure.

“Officers, I’m Dr. Mark Channing.”

“Hello Dr. Channing. Your wife’s car is out back, but she’s not answering the door. The house is secure. Please open the door and let us check out the house before you enter.”

Mark unlocked the rear door and the alarm began to sound its warning to disarm. After entering the security system’s code, he stepped aside and let the officers enter to examine the house. Two minutes later one of them came down and didn’t need to say anything. Mark’s worst fears were confirmed by the expression on the cop’s face.

All he said was, “Dr. Channing, you’d better sit down. I’m afraid we have some very bad news.”

CHAPTER 9

“It’s Déjà vu all over again.”

Friday, November 16th, 2012

Inspector Ed Cassidy was reviewing his crime board. He wanted it updated when Bill Weller came over this afternoon. A large blown up map of the North Shore area dominated the board. He had highlighted the Evanston murder site and the two Winnetka murder sites, numbered and connected the dots looking for any patterns. He had police reports, murder scene photos with time lines all captured there.

Over to one side he listed a number of threads that were common to all three murders:

1. Wives of plastic surgeons.
2. Murdered and found in their home.
3. Identical mutilations—mostly postmortem.
4. No apparent signs of a struggle in the house.
5. House alarms set and doors secure with the murdered wives in the house.
6. No trauma expressions on their faces.
7. Tox screens were negative.
8. Husband’s all had alibis—their devastation appears real.
9. No histories of domestic violence.
10. No forensic evidence of anyone but the husband and wife at the crime scenes.
11. Nothing suspicious in spouse background checks.
12. No indications of robbery.
13. Cars, groceries etc. abandoned on premises.
14. No apparent motive or cause of death.
15. No suspects.

He and Bill had focused on the husbands first. They ran the usual background checks, looked for recent increases insurance policies, bank accounts, etc. but there were none of the usual indicators of foul play. Ed had ruled out the husbands themselves. It was remotely possible, but not likely, that they could have started some sort of murder club and were assisting each other in this killing spree. But no, everything truly pointed to them being loving-grieving husbands.

Plastic surgeons weren't like heart transplant surgeons. They were enhancement type doctors not life and death doctors. Not that they couldn't have pissed off the wrong kind of patient. The scope of retribution here was much larger than what would seem justified by a botched nose job.

The motive was eluding him especially with no insight from Dr. Holden's patient backgrounds. Something there probably had more to do with motive than anywhere else. After all, this extreme behavior was initially directed there. What could have pissed off or in any other way motivated this sick individual to wreak the havoc that he or she was to these obviously innocent women. He made a mental note to go at Dr. Holden again for his records.

As Bill arrived for their meeting, the phone rang at Ed's desk.

"Inspector Cassidy," he answered as he waved Bill in. "I see. We'll be right there.

"Don't take your coat off Bill. There's just been another murder. Dr. Mark Channing's wife Isabella was just found in their home. Bill it's the same M.O. all over again. This just gets crazier by the minute."

"Looks like another long night Ed. I have a few ideas we can talk about on the way to the Channing's."

*

In the car Bill said that, in his last conversation, the M.E. confirmed that she could find no needle marks on any of the three bodies. They were all seen in public, minutes before their deaths, so she was ruling out drugging of the wives by injection or oral intake to gain control of them. Also, something else didn't quite make sense. He reread the article on the 'Generals' written last summer and noticed that the doctors were listed in

alphabetical order and so far Lisa Ackerman, Lori Baker and now Isabella Channing had been killed in alphabetical order. Could his pattern be this transparent? The alphabetical angle, however, didn't explain the first victim Aimee Holden. She didn't fit the pattern at all. In fact, her husband wasn't one of the 'Generals'. Of recent anyway, the wives of the 'Generals' seemed to be being taken out in order.

"Ed, all three victims were pregnant so far. I'm wondering if that's another connection we'll find to the others with Isabella Channing."

"It's something we'll know soon enough. Let's go meet another devastated doctor."

*

They arrived at the Channing's 14 Oak Lane home to yet another all too familiar crime scene involving yet another pretty, young, naked and mutilated wife of a plastic surgeon. Ed was thinking that there has never been this much activity, more accurately this much murder activity, in his quiet little north shore suburb's history. It was amazing how quickly a community's identity can change.

Flashing lights, crime scene tape, M.E.'s van, camera crews and nosy neighbors were a combination that he was seeing too much of lately. What was waiting in the house for him and Bill would be as well. He felt like he really didn't need to see the murder scene, didn't want to see the murder scene again.

He wasn't looking forward to the smell of burned flesh that was present at each crime scene so far. He couldn't imagine being one of the doctors finding not only their mutilated wives, but also to have that smell in the air. That had to have made it especially horrific for them.

The reason he was able to endure what he knew was waiting for him at the crime scene was the possibility that maybe this time there would be a clue. Maybe this time the killer would have slipped up enough finally to leave them something so they could start going somewhere in this case besides the next house and the next victim.

As they approached the Channing home, they could hear Susan Peterson who had become the reporter exclusively covering this story. "... Winnetka police don't like to use the words but these murders can only be

described as serial killings. Serial killings are indicated by typically three or more murders with similar modus operandi. There has also been what the police define as a requisite cooling off period in between all of the murders. All of the customary indications of a serial killer, or killers, have been observed in these recent homicide cases. The holidays will be a much lonelier; a much sadder and quieter place this year in four north shore doctor's homes. This is Susan Peterson reporting live from the Channing residence in Winnetka for Channel 7 news."

Ed walked into the house and as he expected, there she was, another pretty doctor's wife lying naked and mutilated with that horrible smell of burning flesh in the air. All he could think of was an old Yogi Berra saying, "It's Déjà vu all over again."

*

Well there's Andy and Barney now! My but they are a prompt couple. They remain a prompt and clueless couple. Even they must be starting to catch on to a bit of my pattern by now.

I'm thinking it would be prudent to lay low for a while before I confuse them a bit more. There's nothing more rewarding than confusing that crack investigating team from the north shore by leading them down the wrong beaten path.

I think it's time for a break. Perhaps it's time for another leave of absence and a trip to my favorite little drug capital, Columbia.

His drug habits weren't getting any worse, but they certainly weren't getting any better either. The Nemesis had found that a line or two of cocaine took the edge off his anger which got out of hand without it. He couldn't afford to get too emotional about what he still had to accomplish in the revenge arena.

A little R & R completely away from things would be best. He was looking forward to the thrill of staying ahead of what he was sure would be increasingly resourceful members of the law enforcement community. After all, it was becoming rather boring being pitted only against Andy and Barney. He wanted to make sure his next moves were especially well thought out because the rules were about to change due to too much current repetition.

He expected increased surveillance on a number of the doctor's homes due to the way he constructed his pattern of selecting the wives. Misdirection is an excellent tool for a serial killer. He enjoyed the thought as he reflected on how predictable the simplistic minds of inexperienced inspectors could be.

*

Saturday, November 17th, 2012

Inspector Bill Weller's meeting on Saturday with Dr. Holden started out about as expected. Neither the mounting body count, the horrific pattern that kept repeating nor the cooperation of the other doctors in maintaining their doctor—patient confidentiality while providing background information seemed to faze him at all. He remained steadfast in his refusal to give any patient information.

"Doctor Holden, while we certainly respect the privacy of your patients, Inspector Cassidy and I feel strongly that there must be something you could give us to help prevent this string of horrible murders from increasing. Please try to remember how you felt when you discovered Aimee. The terrible loss you felt. The same feeling of emptiness is now being shared with three other doctors in the city at an especially bad time of year. How many more beautiful, young, innocent, doctor's wives need to be mutilated with their lives cut short before you'll give us some cooperation here Doc?" asked Bill Weller.

"I don't want this to continue. I just don't see how I can reveal my patient records and maintain their confidentiality. If handled incorrectly, it could ruin my practice."

"Doctor, please consult with Doctors Ackerman, Baker and Channing as to how we managed their interests. We feel strongly that there must be something that can help us since it all began with Aimee. We are confident this isn't about the wives. There could be something in your patient records that could help stop this madness. Please help us any way you can."

“I will call the other doctors to see if there is a way I can provide you with patient case information in a way that won’t jeopardize my practice or my patient’s confidence in my practice.”

“Thank you Doctor. That’s all we can ask. Please do it fast for the sake of the other wives.”

Part Two

Lori's Essence

*“There are other forces at work in the world Frodo
besides the will of evil.*

And that is an encouraging thought.”

Lord of the Rings—Gandalf

CHAPTER 10

Everything that is, except . . . 'The Flowers'.

Sunday, November 18th, 2012

Lori's funeral services were held on Sunday and consisted of a short wake with a closed casket. It was very somber especially in light of the murder of Isabella Channing only one day after Jim found Lori in their nursery.

There were only 17 of the 'Generals' in attendance as John Ackerman hadn't returned from Florida yet and Jim certainly understood when his friend Mark sent his condolences. He was he just too devastated over Isabella's murder to attend Lori's services. It was too soon. He couldn't face everyone yet. The remaining 'Generals' tried to comfort Jim to no avail. This was all just insane. There wasn't sufficient time to reflect and mourn one heart break before being forced to focus on the next one.

The sorrowful looks from one person, after another, after another, was almost more than he could bear.

After the gut wrenching moments that followed his final separation from Lori at the cemetery chapel, he went home to mourn with Lori's mother Beth and her sister Jenny. There simply weren't words that they could give to each other. They had a simple dinner then held each other and cried well into the night.

Monday, November 19th, 2012

Monday morning's dismal overcast skies did little to lift anyone's spirits as Beth and Jenny tearfully started their trip home to Florida. Promising to return in two weeks to help with the packing up of Lori's things they said their goodbyes and headed for the airport.

Jim heard the phone ring and wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone so he let the answering machine pick up. It was Ray Reed, "Jim, just calling to see if you needed anything; . . . a shoulder to lean on, or just a friend

to keep you company for a while. Hey, just call if there is anything I can do for you buddy. Take care.” Still too saddened and in a daze, Jim sent him a text back thanking him but declined. His dad and brother stopped by before they returned home to northern Wisconsin. After they left he started packing for an extended trip to the cabin.

He knew it wouldn't do a thing to get his mind off of Lori but he just couldn't stay in the house where it happened any longer for now. No matter what he sprayed in the nursery, he swore he could still smell her burned flesh in the air. He had to get away to clear his mind and try to start putting it all behind him.

As he was on his way out the phone rang. It was odd because he could only hear the upstairs phone ring. None of the downstairs phones reflected the impending call, then the upstairs phone stopped before he could begin his ascent to answer it. Dismissing it as an electronic burp of some sort he packed the car and headed up to the cabin.

*

The aroma of grilled burgers was in the air as he passed their favorite diner three miles before reaching the cabin. The entrance to Jake's Sky Diner was at the top of sixteen steps designed to resemble the air stairs seen at most smaller airports. They led up to the diner which was shaped like an old world war two bomber. It was complete with a two engine wing section and with glass gun turrets on top, front and underneath. Next to the star on the side was the slogan 'Home of the Hangerburger'.

Both his mouth watering and stomach gurgling reminded him that he had skipped breakfast. Climbing the stairs and holding on to the hand-hold chain, he caught himself reaching out for Lori's hand to make sure she didn't lose her balance on the way up. Inside the diner was like a museum crowded with memorabilia and scaled versions of the fighter planes from that era. The surroundings soon blurred from sight through the tears that welled in his eyes. He was seeing her sitting across from the table as she had last summer. She looked great wearing that yellow and white striped shorts outfit that so reflected her sunny disposition. He couldn't shake the image of her movie star beautiful face, million dollar smile and the love she had for him that was always there in her eyes.

The trip to the local supermarket to stock up on groceries after lunch dampened his spirits more than the diner. They always enjoyed shopping together and as the cart began to fill he could envision her playfully skipping and twirling up and down the aisles as she tempted him with her meal plans. She loved to cook for him and was always surprising him with new recipes.

Once he arrived at the cabin, everything there also reminded him of Lori because she did most of the decorating and her warm homey touches were everywhere. Was this trip going to be a good idea? As much as it all reminded him of Lori, he realized it would be this way everywhere he went for a long time.

He understood that going through Lori's personal items back home was going to be nearly impossible. This realization came to him as he considered doing the same task here at the cabin. Getting started was half the battle, and he realized that it was necessary to start putting everything behind him, but that conflict would have to wait a little while longer. At least there were no baby items here to deal with.

Then he began reflecting on what Melissa would have looked like, what a beautiful woman she should have grown into and the things she could have accomplished. His recent career successes gave him the ability to enroll her in any school she chose. He could have provided her with any training she desired, which was now just one more sad part of this whole mess. It was time to clear his mind.

The pine needles crunched beneath his steps on his way to the beach as they offered a welcome change in smells from those still lingering in the nursery. The long hike around the lake and through the woods found him thinking about Lori and the baby with every step. This was part of the grieving process that would continue for months, probably years. Would he ever be able to move on and start a new chapter in his life without Lori and the baby?

The sun was down about an hour before he got back to the cabin. Before preparing a quick dinner, Jim decided on a shower to wash away the day's hiking activity. It felt good to get out on the long hike and breathe all that crisp clean winter air but now as he entered the shower; it also reminded him of Lori. When he stepped out to towel off the shock of his life was there on the steamed up mirror.

There were the all too familiar hearts traced in the steam at the upper left and lower right hand corners with the message 'The Flowers' written in between.

He couldn't breathe. He dropped the towel and stared at the mirror in disbelief. Could this be? Was he imagining the message?

A very close up look confirmed that the message was definitely 'written' in the steam like Lori used to do. It even looked like her hand writing.

What did it mean?

'The Flowers'.

He must have stared at the message for twenty minutes before it began to fade as the temperature and humidity evened out between the bathroom and the bedroom. Eventually, he realized it was gone and that he was still standing there staring at the mirror.

'The Flowers', it had said.

It had been there. He was convinced. It wasn't imagined. A closer look couldn't find a trace of the message there. Breathing on the mirror to fog it up didn't bring any part of it back. Closing the door, running the hot water in the shower until it fogged up again didn't bring any part of it back and yet it had been there, but the message made no sense.

What could it mean? How did it get there? A search of the cabin confirmed that all windows and doors were locked and that no one could have gotten in during his shower and yet the note got there somehow. Now that it was gone, he remained convinced that it had been there.

After toweling off, he wandered around the cabin, searching, mostly looking upward like a child seeing the world and walls around him for the first time. Something unimaginable had happened. It was beyond explanation. That note kept running senselessly in his head.

'The Flowers'.

Tuesday, November 20th, 2012

After a restless night's sleep, he decided on a hike to the cave the next morning. The crisp early winter air had a way of making yesterday seem very distant. Everything that is, except . . .

'The Flowers'.

During his hike, he settled on a trip into town to the local book store. He really needed a shower but was obviously hesitant. Finally he decided to take the shower.

At the end of it he peeked out of the shower door at the mirror sheepishly and only found steam. No hint of a message, just steam.

Relieved and almost disappointed in the lack of reaffirmation, he grabbed his cell phone on the way out to the car. The screen showed a missed call and after dialing to retrieve the communication, Lori's voice was there. Initially, the thought was that it must be an old message.

"Jim, it burns but I can't cry. I'm . . ." then there was nothing but static.

Then details began to register through the shock. It couldn't have been an old message. There were no old messages on his phone after the funeral which was when he cleared them all. That was definitely Lori's voice. It sounded urgent. What burns? Lori had been found with burns on her body and around her eyes. How could he forget that smell when he found her in the nursery. The odor reminded him of surgical laser burn odors or the cremation smells sometimes evident outside animal hospitals.

He replayed the message, but there was nothing but static.

What's going on? Has he lost his mind?

He went to replay it again but the repeat key yielded, "That is not a valid choice. Please select from the following options:" he pressed the new message option but nothing. "You have no new messages, zero saved messages."

Wait Jim. Take a breath. This couldn't be right. There was no message. After redialing voice mail he again heard, "You have no new messages, zero saved messages."

It was gone just like the note on the mirror. Get a grip Jim. Slow down. Think. Think. Take a breath.

A check of the phone's missed call log showed nothing.

"That's it. I'm losing it."

The glass of straight Jack Daniel's didn't change a thing. He was shaking all over and couldn't stop.

Ray. Call Ray. John is in Florida and I can't call Mark. Call Ray and talk to him.

Finally, after several more drinks, he placed a call to his friend Ray Reed.

CHAPTER 11

'Talk about making people an offer they couldn't refuse!'

Monday, November 19th, 2012

The satisfaction overwhelmed him as the Nemesis checked up on his two new widowers, Jim and Mark. One wasn't leaving his house as he continued to wallow in grief. The other one now all packed up to go to his cabin to try and 'deal with his grief.' How wonderfully satisfying it is when things go according to plan and without a hitch.

The basics of his plan of revenge came to him in the middle of a very emotional time last winter. He had decided to get away. He needed a total break from the grief and the images burned in his memory that he could never forget. He would never forget the pain he felt after seeing his lover suffer a death so terrible that a closed casket was needed at the wake.

She was so sweet and innocent. She didn't deserve what she received at the hands of that doctor. He was paid to perform better than that. To get proper results, not the butchery that wound up happening to such a sweet wife & mother of two. That damned doctor should have been trained better than that.

He had watched her go through the botched surgery that resulted in a condition called Capsular contracture, a condition that required removal of her left breast implant. The quack that performed the augmentation said that the Capsular contracture she developed could have happened to any one and was not due to any negligence during the surgery. She had begun to feel such pain. She shouldn't have had to suffer that.

She had just wanted to make herself sexier for her husband, Bobby. She had felt that her breasts were too small and had always wanted to please him in any way she could. The Nemesis couldn't understand the fact that she still wanted to please her loser of a husband. When she decided to give it one more try was when everything started going south. Everything that went so wrong would never have had a chance to get

started if not for her wanting to please Bobby. The Nemesis was so close to proving to her that he made a much better provider and caretaker for her than Bobby did. Anyone could see that.

She shouldn't have had to undergo the second surgery to remove the left implant let alone endure the embarrassment she experienced during the six month waiting period required before it could be re-implanted.

It was the third surgery, the one to re-implant, that caused all hell to break loose.

By all accounts that he had been able to gather from doctor acquaintances of his, the local anesthesia used at the quack's independent surgery center led to all her problems.

It was the local anesthesia combined with the anesthetic gasses that caused a condition known as Malignant Hyperthermia. They simply weren't prepared to deal with this unique set of conditions that could prove fatal when combined with her rare hereditary sensitivity to anesthetics.

That damn doctor is supposed to be a professional. All the schooling, all the knowledge, all the seminars to keep up with the latest medicines and risk factors and he still was unprepared to help her when the symptoms began to present themselves.

Oh he had the very expensive drug needed to counteract the problem. He even had the very large amount on hand that was necessary, but according to the Nemesis' friends, that medication is very rarely called for. It more than likely had passed its expiration date and wasn't replaced.

Of course the quack would never admit to that. Every effort to prove it was stonewalled and eventually covered up with conveniently-found paperwork that showed up just in time to head off the lawsuit they were preparing.

That's why he needed to pay. She paid with her life. She trusted them. She put her health in his hands, his experienced, well-paid hands. The terrible pain he wound up inflicting on her over the two days it finally took her to pass would be inflicted on him, and on his new targets, all of them. They will all pay the same price.

Now he had a new bunch of targets within this group called the 'Surgeon Generals'; they were JUST as bad. How many lives had THEY messed up.? They were all alike, hurting innocent people with no

consideration for anyone but themselves. They thought they were better than people like him because of their degrees and wealth.

Yes, they had the degrees, the notoriety, the fancy houses and all the money they needed to have whatever life they chose. They had articles written about them. Well the ones he planned to target, for his personal reasons, were going to know what a life turned upside down feels like. They were going to experience, as he had, the absolutely irreplaceable loss of someone close and very dear to them and undeserving of that kind of death.

A trip back to Columbia would do him some good. He needed to get his mind off things for a while and make some adjustments. The doctors were upgrading their security systems as anticipated. Adding more cameras, light activating motion sensors, etc. on the exteriors of their homes like that was going to prevent anything. His plan was unstoppable! All they were accomplishing was driving up sales at the security companies. Oh well, what ever made them feel better, for now.

Tuesday, November 20th, 2012

Tuesday morning he arrived in Bogota and that afternoon he took a small chartered flight to one of over seven hundred unpaved runways in Columbia. This runway in particular was approximately four hundred miles north of Bogota and just outside Cartagena. He could have flown into the Rafael Nunez International Airport which was only ten minutes from his favorite resort but he preferred a leisurely chartered flight so he could see the Columbian countryside on his way in, which also left no paper trail of his arrival.

Before taking this trip, he had taken care to grow a beard thick enough to mask his general appearance, just in case. You could never know when you might be caught on camera these days with surveillance everywhere. For this reason, he also never went anywhere outside his room without his sunglasses and hat that covered a good part of his face from the typical location of cameras. What wasn't covered remained mostly in the shadow of the hat.

He preferred the Caribbean shores to that of the Pacific Ocean shores in Columbia. On his last trip to Cartagena he discovered its history dating

back to four thousand BC, its Caribbean seaport beauty and especially how easily one could buy just about any drug imaginable. Also many drugs a person couldn't imagine, he found out, were readily available. It was one of those that he needed more of.

After booking a room at the Occidental Grand Cartagena Resort he took in the sights around the pool. He loved this thirteen acre beach resort as it was one of the most exclusive and elegant places he'd ever stayed at. When he tired of one pool, it was a short walk to either of the other two. The scenery was always spectacular in and around the resort.

The 'Generals' weren't the only ones with the financial means to enjoy places like the Occidental Grand. He was fortunate to have made a number of very good electronic and internet stock decisions that set him up for life.

He and his brother Bobby were ten years old and knew nothing about stocks when his dad invested \$10,000 in Apple Corporation. Fifteen years later when he died, each brother received half of the shares. Bobby never could see past the end of his nose and sold his shares a couple years later, making over \$300K. It was too much money for his short term thinking to pass up.

"After all", he had said, "the stock could plummet and be worth next to nothing. At least now I can pay cash for a new house and new car". Of course he didn't mention paying off loan sharks that he was indebted to for the money he borrowed to support his growing drug habit. This was as far ahead as Bobby could ever think and was the reason that whenever he was able to get anything worthwhile, he usually lost it just as quickly.

The Nemesis was a much better planner and could always see the bigger picture. He did some research and realized the potential for some of the planned product releases and wound up tripling his stock value. From there he started playing the day trading game and found he had a knack for investing in promising young internet businesses. His wise and timely investments in many of them left him in an enviable financial position. The term 'not hurting at all' pretty well summed up his economic status.

Wednesday, November 21st, 2012

On Wednesday afternoon he had just pulled up to his drug contact's secluded digs. His friend Alejandro Mendez was nicknamed 'El Mensajero Negro Del Diablo' which meant 'the devil's black messenger'. From him any drug was available. He was also a major supplier for local prostitution. Something resort areas like Cartagena had an unquenchable thirst for.

"Ah my American friend! It has been too long. Come, sit. We must drink to old times and good days to come."

He shook his hand and gave him the respectful forearm taps as he said, "Alejandro my friend. It has been a while. So good to see you look well."

"Mamacita bring whisky for me and my friend. Have you enjoyed the fruits of our last time together Mi Amigo?"

"Yes, I have enjoyed them very much. It works wonderfully and no one back home has ever seen such a drug. It suits my plans very well."

"Good. Good. I am glad you are pleased. What brings you to my humble hacienda today, ah?"

"While I enjoy relaxing at the resorts your country has to offer my friend, I've come to visit because I could use some more of your products. Some more cocaina and some more fruit of the Borrachero tree."

"Aahh, this I can do for you, Mi Amigo, but of course the price has risen as all things do with demand. Yes?"

"Very well then tell me Alejandro, what are the new prices?"

"The cocaina, it is the same but the Burundanga price she goes up. Cocaina is available everywhere and has little value in my country as it is so plentiful. The Burundanga is available nowhere but here. As you know, in the drug business, there is no, how you say, 'volume discounts'? When the fruit of the Borrachero tree are seen by gringos and its many uses are appreciated, the price she goes up.

"One gram is now 350,000 pesos."

He knew the all American negotiating method known as the 'flinch' wouldn't work here but he felt like it was almost expected. So out of respect he said, "That is ten times the price I paid one year ago. Has the price of Cerveza increased so much this year? If I had known, I would have brought many cases to my good friend in Columbia."

Even at this price, which went from \$20 US per gram last year to \$200 US per gram this year, it was unbelievably cheap for the cornerstone of his plan. Especially since one gram went so far.

“Americans have such humor. I am keeping the price respectable for such a respectable return customer. As you know, when dos amigos discuss business too many times, the wrong people notice these things. The price goes higher as my risk goes higher. The local policía de drogas watch me very closely. I take risks to just talk to gringos here. This is acceptable for you Mi Amigo?”

“Of course Alejandro, this is good. I would like twenty grams of cocaina and ten grams of Burundanga.”

“This you will have tonight my friend. It will be delivered by two of my finest mamacitas who will pleasure you well into the night if you so desire. Hector will handle the business on your way out and will give you a little cocaina for your long trip back to the Occidental Grand. Now come. Walk with me. We talk too much and drink too little.”

Alejandro researched his customers well. That’s how he remained in business as long as he had and how he enjoyed his obvious success. Mentioning where he was staying or even his room number was unnecessary with ‘El Mensajero Negro Del Diablo’. He knew these things before he invited a guest to his hacienda along with how long he has been in Columbia, information on his private charter and hell, probably how many pieces of luggage he snuck into the country.

With business concluded, they walked through his expansive gardens with all their breath taking colors and the incredible variety of his exquisite landscaping. They drank and enjoyed the spectacular view of the Caribbean from the highlands of his estate which was located in a very secluded area of the Columbian countryside.

He could see himself investing in property like this after his plan was complete. It wouldn’t be in Columbia though.

The combination of scenery, food, smells and warm Mediterranean Sea air found only in Italy was much more to his liking.

‘I wonder how Don Vito Corleone would have used such a drug in his day if it were available.

‘Talk about making people an offer they couldn’t refuse!’

These thoughts amused him as he returned to his suite.

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