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ADAM

TED DEKKER



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO BEIJING

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**The thief cometh not, but for to
steal, and to kill, and to destroy . . .**

**As quoted by John the Apostle
John 10:10**

MAN OF SORROW: JOURNEY INTO DARKNESS

by Anne Rudolph

Crime Today magazine is pleased to present Anne Rudolph's narrative account of the killer now known as Alex Price, presented in nine monthly installments titled "Man of Sorrow: Journey into Darkness." Rudolph's award-winning investigative reporting provides us with a rarely seen glimpse of good and evil at work within our society today.

1964

NO ONE—not the migrant workers who remember seeing the baby kicking stubby legs while he lay on a brown blanket next to the fields, not the Arkansas farmers who chuckled while poking the child's belly, certainly not his adoring father and mother, Lorden and Betty Price—could possibly imagine that the brown-eyed baby boy named Alex Price, born August 18, 1964, would one day stalk innocence like a wolf stalking a wounded lamb.

Then again, 1964 was more than four decades before Alex Price began the calculated cycle of terror that would end the lives of so many young women.

As the children of migrant workers themselves, Lorden and Betty Price had grown up with the same strong work ethic many migrant field workers shared throughout the south in the 1940s and 1950s. Devout Catholics, they planned on instilling love and sound moral sensibilities into whatever children God blessed them with.

They regularly attended Mass at a small cathedral in nearby Conway off Route 78, where the faithful congregated each Sunday. With just a little more fortune, a little more education, a few more helpful people, Lorden could have opened up his own mechanic shop, according to

those who knew him. He had a way with machines that impressed the local farmers.

The small family of three lived rent-free in a trailer on the back side of the Hope farm, a deal brokered with Bill Hope in exchange for Lorden's extra help maintaining all of the farm vehicles. Bill even loaned Lorden his 1953 Dodge truck for transportation. All things considered, the Prices were doing pretty well for themselves when little Alex came into the world.

"Cutest little bundle of boy you ever did saw," Constance Jersey recalls with a soft smile and tired eyes. "They used to tote him around in one of those wire buggies Lorden had found in the dump and fixed up. Didn't matter what they put him in, you couldn't make that boy stop smiling and cooing as if he was the luckiest soul in the whole wide world."

Other workers remember Lorden racing up and down the cotton-field roads late one day, sticking his head out of the truck, hollering for Betty and demanding to know where Alex was. Seems he'd misplaced both of them and panicked. He found them in the barn, taking a break from the hot sun.

When Alex was one year old, Betty gave birth to a beautiful, blonde-

haired, seven-pound, two-ounce baby girl whom they named Jessica. Lorden was the kind of man who made sure every person he met knew just how adorable his children were, and he didn't have to work hard to accomplish this task.

"They're going to college," he announced to his coworkers one hot day in the cotton field. The cotton industry was taking a downturn in the midsixties, replaced by the more profitable corn market. The work was hard and the pay was hardly enough to keep a family alive. "I swear, they're going to college if it's the last thing I do."

The coworkers gave him no mind. The idealist in Lorden frequently made such bold announcements, but life as a blue-collar worker in Faulkner County in 1965 didn't hold out much hope for anything so extravagant as attending the University of Central Arkansas in nearby Conway. Still, Lorden repeated his intentions often, claiming that they would one day make some real money in the factories up north, and send their children to college.

Just over a year after Jessica's birth, as winter set into central Arkansas, Lorden announced to his wife that Bill Hope had agreed to let him take the truck up to Chicago for

an extended visit with relatives who'd left Arkansas several years earlier, hoping to work in the factories. The Prices packed their belongings in two large suitcases, bid their neighbors farewell, and headed down the dusty road.

The Dodge pickup returned nearly five weeks later laden with gifts from the north. José Menendez, who lived with his wife, Estella, in a second trailer near the Prices, remembers the day clearly. "You gotta understand that them Prices was a frugal bunch. They didn't spend money on much unless it was for the kids. The smiles on their faces when they came back with that haul had us all thinking about going up north to work in the factories."

A perfectly good washing machine. Two new suitcases full of clothes, mostly for little Alex and Jessica. But the chainsaw was Lorden's prize. He cut enough firewood that first week to last both them and the neighbors two winters, José recalled.

The first four years of Alex Price's life can only be reconstructed from the memories of people like the Menendezes and the Hopes. Hearing it all, one has to wonder what would have become of Alex had his parents been allowed to continue their slow but deliberate gain on a happy life.

Would they have moved to Chicago and sent the children to a public school while they saved up the money for a secondary education? Would Alex have grown up on the farm, then finally opened the shop his father only dreamed of?

The night of January 15, 1968, was warm by Arkansas standards, a balmy 51 degrees according to the weather service records. Heavy, dark clouds hung over most of Faulkner County.

Betty tucked Alex, then four, and Jessica, who was three, in their twin beds in the back bedroom, sang them a soft song as she did every night, said their prayers, and turned off the lights. José Menendez recalled that the Price's mobile home, which stood only fifty yards from their own, was already dark when he went out for wood at eight thirty.

The crickets sang in the nearby forest; otherwise, the night was quiet. At approximately 1:45 a.m. Lorden was awakened by a creaking noise, a fairly common sound in the Price house, which was set on an unstable foundation and easily shaken by wind. Only when it occurred to him that there was no howling wind did Lorden open his eyes and listen more carefully. It was the absence of wind that awakened him, he later told the police.

The screen door squealed in the dark, and Lorden sat upright. A faint, muffled cry reached his ears.

Now panicked, Lorden threw off the blanket and ran into the tiny living room. He saw that the front door was open, but his mind was on the children's bedroom. Barging through the doorway, he saw a sight that would haunt him for years to come.

Two empty beds.

"I couldn't think. I just couldn't think," he later recalled. He stood frozen in the doorway, staring at the empty white sheets for a few long seconds before crying out and sprinting out of the house.

A Ford pickup truck was parked on the gravel driveway. The driver's door slammed and for a moment Lorden saw the shapes inside: an adult wearing a cowboy hat sat in the driver's seat, and another with long hair was shoving Alex and Jessica into the truck from the passenger's side. Freed from the hands that had muzzled them, both children began to cry.

Lorden ran toward the truck but was only halfway across the lawn when it rumbled to life and jerked forward, spewing gravel.

Now in a mindless panic, Lorden ran for the Chevy, started the engine, and took off after the disappearing pickup. Betty ran from the house,

screaming his name. He had the presence of mind to shove open the passenger door and call out for her to report the kidnapping to the county sheriff. She would have to call from the main ranch house.

Lorden had a difficult time remembering what happened next. "I couldn't think!" he repeated later. "I just couldn't . . . couldn't figure it, I couldn't think!"

In an understandable state of anxiety, the father raced down the driveway, took a hard left at the first fork, following the Ford pickup's dust, and pushed the old Chevy to its limits. His eyes were on the set of taillights two turns ahead.

The next corner turned ninety degrees to the left, and Lorden overshot it in a full slide. The truck came to a crashing stop in the ditch beyond.

Unable to restart the truck, Lorden exited the vehicle and ran after the distant taillights, calling out to the Menendez trailer on his right. José ran out, and a breathless Lorden yelled that someone had just taken Alex and Jessica.

But without a truck, José was powerless to give chase. And by the time he got to the Hope ranch house to call the police, the Ford pickup was long out of sight.

Bill Hope reported the kidnapping

to the Faulkner County sheriff at 1:56 a.m., then jumped in his car with José and headed for the county road nearly a mile away. They found Lorden Price at the intersection pacing, staring down the long strip of empty asphalt that stretched empty in both directions.

“It was the most horrible sight I’d yet seen,” José recounts. “The man had run about a mile and was near a breakdown. He had that look of death on him.”

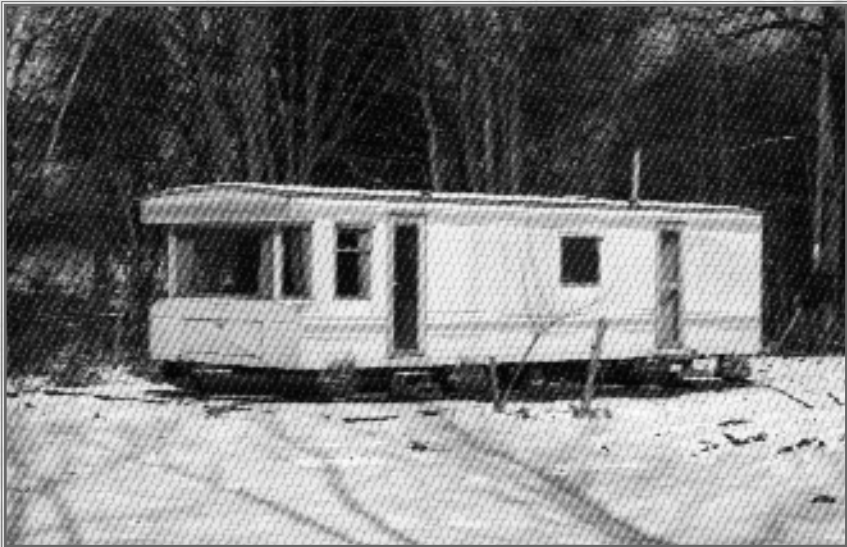
Without a clue as to which direction the kidnappers had fled, Lorden couldn’t decide where to take the chase, so Bill Hope headed east. The road ran through a forested region without streetlamps, and the dark

clouds blocked the last hint of light from the sky. They raced east, following the spread of their headlights, nothing else.

They couldn’t have calmed Lorden Price in those first ten minutes if they’d wanted to. But as the road yielded nothing of promise, he soon grew silent in the backseat. Bill slowed the car after fifteen minutes and asked Lorden if he wanted to try the other direction.

Lorden didn’t respond. He just lay down on the backseat and sobbed. “It was horrible,” José said. “Just horrible.”

Sheriff Rob Green received the call to investigate a kidnapping at the Hope Ranch at 1:59 a.m. He tossed



The Prices’ home in Arkansas

his cold coffee and immediately headed out. Officer Peter Morgan from the Conway police department also responded to the call. Both had arrived on the scene by the time Bill Hope, José Menendez, and Lorden Price returned.

While Lorden did his best to calm his hysterical wife, the officers started processing the crime scene. An all points bulletin was immediately issued for a truck matching Lorden's description. Although kidnapping was not a common occurrence, all of the law-enforcement officers knew how critical the first few hours of search were. A trail is only a trail as long as it remains discernable.

With the help of the highway patrol, hasty blockades were established on four of the six country roads in and around Conway. The FBI's Little Rock field office was informed of the incident at daybreak, and Special Agent Ronald Silverton agreed to assist the local sheriff in prosecuting the search. Kidnappings qualified for federal involvement, but for the most part, the FBI only pursued those cases they determined to be successfully prosecutable. The Price kidnapping wasn't promising, but Silverton thought that if they moved quickly, they might have a chance.

With Agent Silverton coordinat-



Police sketch of Adam and Jessica Price

ing FBI resources and Sheriff Rob Green leading the investigation on the ground, an exhaustive search for the missing children was launched. Field and ditch, canal and culvert: no evidence found. The word of Alex and Jessica's kidnapping was heavily circulated through dozens of Arkansas newspapers and radio stations. The Prices had no photographs of their children, the simple reason being that they didn't own a camera. They had saved for a family portrait to be taken in Conway for Christmas that year, but it was still late harvest.

An artist was brought in from the Little Rock police department, and his sketch of the two children was printed in newspapers and on flyers, which were tacked to hundreds of posts covering a two-hundred-mile radius. Meanwhile, the authorities constructed a likely kidnapping

scenario based on the evidence gathered at the crime scene.

The Unknown Subjects, or UNSUBs, as unknown perpetrators of crimes are commonly called, evidently approached both the Hope ranch house and the Menendez trailer before proceeding to the Price house. Multiple boot impressions matching those outside the Price children's window were also found on the ground outside windows at both the Hope and Menendez homes.

"We knew then that we were dealing with the worst sort of kidnapping," Special Agent Silverton recalls. "The evidence suggested that the perpetrators passed up valuables in clear sight of the Hope windows and moved on to the Menendez house. Finding nothing of interest, they approached the Price house, where they found what they'd come for: children."

There are two primary classifications of kidnapers: those who kidnap victims as leverage for ransom, and those who kidnap victims for their own personal use.

It became immediately clear to Silverton that they were dealing with the latter classification. The Prices obviously had little or nothing to give a kidnapper in exchange for their children. They didn't hold positions

of influence or have access to information that any kidnapper might be seeking.

In all likelihood, Alex and Jessica were taken by someone who either wanted but could not produce children, or by someone who intended to use the children for some unidentified enterprise.

In addition, the evidence suggested that the perpetrators were not new to the crime they'd committed. Once they found the children, they painstakingly removed the window frame from the wall, one screw at a time, a task that may have taken up to an hour.

No fingerprints were lifted from the room. There had been no cry of alarm from the children until they were outside the house, suggesting they'd been carefully lifted from their beds while deep asleep. Like many parents, the Prices sometimes allowed the children to fall asleep on the couch and then moved them to their beds, which could account for the reason neither Alex nor Jessica made a fuss sooner than they did. The cold outside had likely woken the children, but by then their mouths were covered and their abductors were running for the truck.

Guessing that the kidnapers were not of the variety who holed up nearby

while they issued their demands for a ransom, Silverton broadened his search to the states surrounding Arkansas. An extensive search of the FBI records for abductions with a matching profile was immediately initiated. Casts of the tire marks and the boot impressions were sent to the FBI's crime lab at Quantico for detailed examination.

A week passed without any solid leads. Lorden and Betty grew even more frantic. Hope of a quick recovery gave way to a resolve for a long search.

The fact that only the vilest kind of human could possibly take a child wasn't lost on Lorden. His fear of what the children might be facing was replaced by a sleepless rage against the animals who preyed on such young, innocent children.

A month passed, and Silverton visited the Prices with some advice that they refused to accept. The number of cases in which abducted children were recovered after being missing for more than a month was negligible. He gently encouraged Lorden and Betty to prepare for a life without their children.

Two months went by, and not a single solid lead to the UNSUBs' identities or location surfaced. The authorities knew what shoes they

wore—size 11 and size 6 Bigton work boots, likely worn by a man and a woman. Perhaps a husband-and-wife team. Based on the tire casts, they concluded that the vehicle used for the kidnapping was a Ford F150 pickup manufactured between 1954 and 1957. A file full of circumstantial evidence suggested the kidnappers lived in a rural setting, were handy with tools, likely lacked formal education, and would go to extraordinary lengths to acquire a child. But none of this evidence led the FBI or the local authorities to the abductors themselves.

Two months stretched into six, and Lorden slowly gave up hope and began to take Agent Silverton's advice. Betty wanted to have another child immediately, but he insisted they wait. "Lorden was afraid they'd come back and take that child too," José Menendez said. "I'm telling you, he never recovered. He was a shell after that. Like you couldn't pull no life from the man if you tried."

Alex and Jessica were gone. For all Lorden and Betty knew, their children were dead.

But Alex and Jessica were not dead.

They were in Oklahoma.

And they would not rejoin the world for thirteen years.

ONE

2008

A HOT, STICKY EVENING in Los Angeles. Outside, the city was clogged with traffic and a million souls fighting their way through another rush hour, preoccupied with bloated mortgage payments and impossible social pressures. Inside the FBI's Los Angeles field office, the air conditioner's hum had more significance to Daniel at the moment.

Special Agent Daniel Clark stared across the broad maple desk at Frank Montova's dark eyes, set deep behind puffy cheeks, like raisins. The man's neck bulged over a collar two sizes too small. Of the fifty-six domestic FBI field offices, only four were large enough to be helmed by an assistant director in charge, or an ADIC, as opposed to a special agent in charge. LA was one of those four. The running joke was that Montova fit his professional acronym at times.

"I'm not saying I wouldn't use other resources at our disposal," Daniel said.

"You don't catch a methodical pattern killer who's left a trail of

fifteen victims across nine states without a *lot* of help. I don't care how good you are. You go rogue, you break the chain-of-evidence custody, and you'll blow our chances of getting a prosecution altogether, let alone a conviction."

"This isn't just about getting a conviction," Daniel said. "It's about stopping the killer in the Eve case before he kills another woman. It's about getting into the mind of a killer without him knowing it. I think I can do that better alone than with a team. We follow protocol, we may never find him. We have to anticipate him, not just chase him."

"You sure this isn't about Mark White's death?"

Mark was the forensic pathologist who'd worked with Daniel, uncovering what clues they could from the victims' bodies. Two weeks earlier he was killed in a car crash that hadn't yet been ruled accidental. Daniel had considered Mark a friend more than a partner.

"I can understand how you might come to that conclusion, but no. Mark and I had discussed going dark. This is about trying to get an investigation ahead of Eve, not just waiting to catch up with his crime scenes."

"I'd be more concerned with legality and judicial precedence." Montova's lips turned down. "The director doesn't like it. There are reasons why the bureau investigates the way it does."

Daniel took a slow breath, calmed himself. "You're denying my request?"

The chief eyed him carefully. "It's my call. And, yes, I'm leaning that way."

Daniel stood from the green upholstered guest chair and stepped over to the window. Like many of the bureau offices, the furniture was dated, held over from the last round of budget cuts. Two bookcases stuffed with black case logs and leather-bound legal

briefs. A fake rubber tree plant in one corner. Round oak conference table with four metal chairs. Gray industrial carpet.

The city towered outside, gray piles of concrete jutting to the sky beyond Wilshire Boulevard like a dusty three-dimensional bar graph.

“Fifteen women are dead because of our bureaucratic inability to do what is necessary. He kills every lunar cycle, which means he already has his next victim. And if pathology’s correct, he’s already exposed her to the disease. Twenty-eight days is tomorrow. And we have no breaks, am I right?”

“Go on.”

“If we get nothing this time, let me go dark. Give me access to whatever information I need—I work strictly through a channel of your choosing. Officially take me off the case. Put a legal layer of protection in play so that we don’t endanger the evidence or the case, and then prosecute as you see fit. But let me do what I do best. *Alone.*”

Montova regarded him with a long stare. Shifted his eyes to the bookcase on his left. Daniel followed his gaze. Two spines stood out from the long row of books, a red one and a black one, side by side.

Inside the Criminal Mind

Fixing the Broken Among Us

Both were authored by the same man. Daniel Clark, PhD.

He’d written them after receiving his doctorate at age thirty-five. The subsequent five years of lectures and tours led to his divorce from Heather, after which he requested and received a reassignment to the field. That was nearly two years ago.

At first the Eve case gave him an avenue of escape from the pain of the divorce. But the case soon developed into an obsession because, as Heather insisted, Daniel knew nothing *but* obsession.

It was why he understood the obsessive criminal mind as well as he did. It was why he’d gone back to school for his doctorate. Why

he'd ignored his wife in favor of dishing out a hundred lectures on the same subject. It took an obsessive mind to know one.

Behavioral patterns, like forensic evidence, could lead them not only to a conviction but also to a new understanding of the psychology of serial killing. ViCAP, the federal Violent Criminal Apprehension Program, had a continually evolving database about the intrinsic natures of violent criminals. A pebble of prevention against a landslide of future psychopaths.

The Eve killer was a poster child for the conclusions presented in both of Daniel's books if there ever was one.

Montova's eyes were back on him. "Do what you do best, huh?"

"Yes."

"And what *is* it that you do best, Daniel?"

"I work alone best. Without all the distractions that keep me out."

"Out?"

Daniel hesitated. "Of his mind."

"Eve's mind."

"Yes." Few understood the discipline and focus required to enter the criminal mind.

"Isn't that a dangerous thing to do? Alone?"

Daniel shifted in his chair, uncomfortable for the first time. Heather's words came to him. *They're your addiction, Daniel. You live your life in their minds!*

"If not me, then who?" he said. "You want this piece of trash off the streets, you take some risks."

The assistant director clasped his hands on the desk calendar in front of him. His straight hair, normally slicked to one side, curled down over one ear. Montova was a respected man—a throwback to the previous generation, preferring a pen and a calendar to a Palm Pilot. As he liked to put it, the mind was sharper than any brain power a computer could muster.

“You’re more concerned about beating Eve at his own game than you are about the victims,” Montova said.

Daniel crossed his legs. “You’re forgetting that I was on the Diablo case in Utah. I’ve seen what a compulsive killer can do in the space of seven hours. Don’t tell me I don’t care about the victims. I care about stopping the killer, not just wandering behind him with a dustpan and filling out Uniform Crime Reports.”

“I’m not saying you don’t care about the victims. I’m saying they’re not what drives you.”

Daniel started to object, but the words caught in his throat. “Does it matter?”

“Actually, it does,” Montova said.

His desk phone beeped twice.

“It tells me *why* your motivation runs so deep. This isn’t just a job to you, and that makes you a risk to this investigation, even a liability. Your allegiance to protocols—I don’t care if you wrote them—is critical.”

The phone rang twice more before he reached for the receiver and lifted it to his ear. “Yes?” He listened, interrupting once for clarification.

Daniel glanced at the books he’d written. Heather had repeatedly made the same accusation Montova had. The truth of it had cost them their marriage.

Montova hung up and pressed another extension. “Send her in.” He set the receiver back into its cradle.

“Send who in?”

The door opened and a woman stepped in. Closed the door behind her.

“Daniel, meet Lori Ames. Lori, meet Daniel Clark, our major crime SAIC.”

Daniel stood and shook her hand. “Nice to meet you.”

“I know your work,” Lori said. “It’s great to finally meet you.”

Daniel turned to the bureau chief. “I take it this conversation is over. I hope we can—”

“Sit down, Clark,” Montova said. To the woman: “Have a seat.”

Lori brushed past him, wearing a gentle smile. Soft brown eyes and a slender body wrapped in a dark business suit. Black heels. Blonde hair that hung just past her shoulders.

But it was the way she looked at him that caught Daniel’s attention. Like she knew more than he might assume she did.

He followed her back to the guest chairs and sat.

Montova eyed them both and spoke when neither offered comment. “Agent Ames is a pathologist from the Phoenix field office’s evidence response team. She knew the fourteenth victim, Amber Riley, and has since become quite familiar with the case. We’d like to reassign her to you.”

They were replacing Mark White two weeks after his death. But why not with a local? There were at least five qualified pathologists at the LA field office. He glanced over at her. Skirt tight against one toned leg crossed over the other. Not exactly the dress of a field agent.

“I suppose that’s your call, sir.”

“It is, and I’ve made it. She starts now. And I’ve changed my mind. I’m granting your request. Assuming, that is, you don’t object to working through Lori. She’ll remain on the case but shadow you in all respects.”

Daniel didn’t know what to say. “Just like that?”

“Just like that. Working within these new parameters you suggested, of course. Who do you suggest I turn the case over to?”

“Brit Holman,” he said without thinking. The man was competent and nearly as familiar with the case as Daniel was. “You’re saying you’ll let me go dark alone, as long as my sole contact is an agent who’s new to the case?”

Montova looked at Lori, who evidently took his stare as an invitation to share.

“The first believed victim was discovered sixteen months ago in the basement of All Saints Catholic Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. Maria Stencho, a twenty-three-year-old tasked with cleaning the church. Her body was bruised and blistered, and traces of a previously unknown bacteria similar to *Streptococcus pneumoniae* were found in her blood. SP is normally associated with meningitis, which infects the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord and can kill a host within hours in a manner consistent with Maria Stencho’s death. No signs of struggle, no evidence of blunt-force trauma. No evidence of harm caused by any weapon. According to the local medical examiner, cause of death was acute encephalitis, most closely associated with symptoms consistent with ICD-10, code A-85, *meningoencephalitis*. The lab work detailed leukocytes in the cerebrospinal fluid after a lumbar tap, and confirmed that the disease was present and in full effect at the time of death. It was first assumed that Stencho died from a form of meningitis. Shall I go on?”

“I get the point,” Daniel said.

But Montova held up his hand. “Please, go on.”

“The next victim was found twenty-eight days later in San Diego. A Mormon, age twenty, female. This time in the basement of an LDS church. Nearly identical set of circumstances except this time the name *EVE* was painted in red on the cement wall next to the body. Lab came up with the same results in the spinal fluid, and the local coroner found evidence of the same intracranial pressure, as well as advanced infection of the meninges. She died of brain pressure leading to cerebral hemorrhage. A new victim has been found every new moon—the killer evidently likes the dark. All fifteen have been female, between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four. All found

underground: seven in church basements, four in abandoned cellars at abandoned farms, four in natural caverns preselected by the killer.”

Lori switched her gaze to Daniel. She was unique, he’d give her that much. Fresh. Her eyes sparkled with an infectious mystery. If he wasn’t mistaken, in her late thirties.

“Evidence recovered from each scene includes size 13 shoe impressions—Bigton boots available at any one of several large chains across America. Stride indicates a height of six-six, and indentation puts him between 220 and 250. Different white vans were recovered near two of the sites. Hair and skin cell samples from each identify the killer as Caucasian, blood type B-positive, male. The lab cross-checked him through Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), and his DNA profile has appeared in no other investigations outside of this series. Hair indicates he is in his forties. There were no latent prints. No saliva, blood, semen, or any other fluid that could be traced to any other source than the victim. The killer’s not a secretor. He’s effectively either a newcomer or a ghost.”

A pause. Then she went on delivering the data with practiced precision.

“The fact that he’s gone to such great lengths to avoid leaving any prints suggests he believes his prints are in the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) database. Which in turn suggests he’s a professional. His killing is organized, patterned, premeditated, and clearly religiously motivated. He’s killing with motives that are consistent with a classic psychopathic profile—he knows right from wrong, and he chooses wrong. He will continue until he is captured or killed. His profile indicates that he will likely never be taken alive. Nothing else is known about Eve.”

Beat.

“Would you like me to tell you about *you* now? An even more fascinating case.”

“I know myself, thank you,” Daniel replied, offering her a polite grin.

“Do you?”

Lori said it with complete sincerity, as if she were his therapist and was only interested in the truth. Then she smiled. “I hope not. My mother always told me that men who think they know themselves are only stuck-up versions of those who don’t.”

“Smart lady.”

The soft hiss of the air conditioner settled the room.

“Like I said, Lori has familiarized herself with the case,” Montova said. His phone rang and he took the call. He nodded curtly and dropped the receiver back in its cradle.

“You’ll have time to fill in the blanks on the way.”

“Sir?”

“Local police in Manitou Springs, Colorado, just received a report of an abandoned white van found by two spelunkers near the Cave of the Winds. They found an entrance to an unmarked cave nearby. The report drew a flag from Eve’s ViCAP profile. Local enforcement is setting up a perimeter, but they’ve been told to stay out of the scene until you arrive.”

Daniel sat still, breath gone. *Eve.*

Ice crept through his veins.

Daniel stood and crossed the room in three long steps. He grabbed the doorknob and was halfway through before Montova’s voice stopped him.

“Lori goes with you.”

He spun back and saw that she was already right behind him.

“Fine.”

TWO

HEATHER CLARK GLANCED at her watch for the fifth time in as many minutes. *Eleven o'clock*, the note had said. *Information you will kill for. The bar at the Emerald Dive. Limousine.* Which was why she was here for the first time since the divorce.

Her friend, Raquel Graham, one of the better defense attorneys in Santa Monica, sat at the bar next to her, rocking subtly to the rhythmic tune blaring over the Emerald Dive's sound system. The new music, she called it. As opposed to the old music, which had filled the radio waves when she and Raquel were tearing up Santa Monica in their twenties.

They all liked the new music, they just didn't know the names of the bands. Or the songs, for that matter. Nothing as sensible as Red Hot Chili Peppers, which made a clear, definitive statement. What did names like Sky Block Streak say? Probably more than she cared to know.

The Emerald Dive catered to the professional downtown crowd—

smart-dressed lawyers and such, half of whom Heather recognized from the major firms around town. She'd made partner at Biggs & Kofford a year earlier, ten years after signing on as a defense attorney. Another two years and her name would join Jerry Biggs and Kurt Kofford on the stationery. Assuming she stuck around.

Honestly, she doubted she would. The last year had ruined her for run-of-the-mill litigation.

Raquel tossed her dark hair, took another sip from the Tom Collins in front of her, and eyed Simon—a prosecutor from Los Angeles—as he crossed the room headed for the bathroom. They'd been dating a full month, something of a record for Raquel, who was thirty-nine and had yet to settle into any semblance of a permanent relationship. She tended to approach men the way she approached cases: moving from one to the next, always hoping for the next big payday.

“So this is the one, huh?” Heather asked, glancing at the clock on the wall.

Raquel offered up a whimsical smile. “Could be, you never know.”

“One month and counting.”

“I wouldn't talk, sweetie.” Raquel raised a brow and took another sip. She nodded at a blond man across the bar, engrossed in a conversation with a friend. Jake Mackenzie, whom they both knew by reputation as an up-and-comer.

“There you go. You always did like blonds.”

“Please, he's not a day over thirty.”

“And that's a problem? You're only thirty-seven, babe, and any guy in this place can see you put the rest of the competition to shame.”

Heather's eyes shifted to the clock.

Raquel set her drink down. “Will you stop that?”

“Stop what?”

“You got a hot date I don’t know about? The clock!”

“It’s a sin to look at a clock?”

“I’m trying to help you out here, sweetie. You’ve been divorced—”

“Please, not the divorce talk again,” Heather said.

“Exactly. Forget the divorce already. You left that egotistical maniac almost two years ago for good reason. But no, you won’t let go, will you? No, we shall be called Heather *Clark* because we were once married to a god named Daniel *Clark*. Why did you leave him?”

“Because he was an egotistical maniac”—she took a sip—“that I fell in love with.”

“Listen to me.” Raquel turned Heather’s face toward her with a gentle hand. “Look at us. What do you see?”

“Two women, in a bar, at eleven on a Wednesday, when most reasonable lawyers our age are in bed.”

“Since when were you reasonable? You know what I see? The smartest defense attorney in Southern California, who’s so wrapped in the sad past that she’s forgotten how to live for the future. The fact that she happens to have a body that looks as tempting in a tank top and holey jeans as it does in a business suit only makes her misplaced desperation more tragic. Learn to live, sweetie. Trust me, you were born to sweep ’em off their feet.”

“Spoken like a seasoned litigator.”

Raquel turned back to the bar. She was right, of course. Time was marching on, and Heather had allowed the past to suck her in. If anyone knew just how deeply, they would probably arrange for therapy.

The Budweiser clock’s long hand tripped the large twelve at the top. Heather scanned the patrons once again, but saw no one focused on her. Whoever had left the note would approach her.

Unless they didn't want to be seen by Raquel. Heather had been working the Mendoza case for the last three months, a high-profile drug case involving a sixty-year-old Mexican woman who was being charged with laundering drug money through a dry cleaning business she owned. All the evidence pointed to an open-and-shut case, but after spending an afternoon with Marie Mendoza, Heather couldn't bring herself to believe the woman was capable of, much less guilty of, the crime.

Someone else was pulling the strings. Someone who had a lot to hide.

If the note referred to information on the Mendoza case, as she assumed, it would likely come from a source interested in the strictest confidence.

Then again, she just might be meeting with someone who wanted her off the case and was simply luring her into an alley where they intended to whack her.

"We've got to get you a date, Heather. Give me that much."

"I've had plenty of dates." Her contact was late. She eyed the room for a sign from any man or woman who would acknowledge her.

"What, two since Daniel split?"

"Daniel didn't split. I left him." A dark-haired man with a strong jaw and thick brows entered the bar, scanned the crowd, and settled on her. His face looked like it had been pistol-whipped a time or two. Heather considered bailing.

"So you left him. What's the difference?" Raquel said.

"The difference is, he still loves me." She picked up her purse. "And you're right, I do need more dates. Like the one I have tonight."

Raquel faced her. "You have a date? Who?" She followed Heather's stare across the room.

"Limo driver by the door. Don't stare."

“Him?”

“Him,” Heather said, standing. “If I’m not back in half an hour, call me. If I don’t answer, call the police.”

She left Raquel staring after her.

THE LIMO DRIVER with the grizzly face led Heather from the bar without speaking. Where he intended to take her, she had no idea, but she found the idea that she should follow him inadvisable. What was she thinking?

She stopped on the sidewalk ten yards from the bar’s front door. “Where are we going?”

He kept walking, offering no explanation, as if it made no difference to him whether she followed. He was simply doing what he was ordered to do.

She took a few more steps. “Excuse me, maybe I have this wrong, but I won’t just follow you without knowing where you’re taking me.”

He walked on. A younger man and his girlfriend or wife angling down the sidewalk stared at her, then back at the man she was talking to. She nodded politely, and, not eager for a scene, walked on.

The man veered to his left, walked up to an old black sedan, opened the door, and stared back at her. Still not a word.

Curious, she glanced back, saw several passersby watching, and decided to approach the car. She’d never get inside, of course. But to turn back now would only leave her clueless as to this information she would kill for.

She stopped five feet from the opened door, removed her eyes from the man who was now staring at her, and peered inside.

The car was empty.

The driver motioned to the backseat. “Get inside.”

“What is this?” she demanded.

“Please. I’m only doing what I’ve been paid to do.”

“You left the note?”

“Please—”

“If you have information, I’ll take it. Otherwise I’m afraid I have to get to my friends. They’re waiting.”

“I was told to tell you it’s about Daniel Clark,” the man said. “This could save his life.”

Dread replaced her annoyance.

“What is this? Who sent you?”

“That’s all I know. Please, lady, I don’t get paid unless you get inside.”

Several others on the sidewalk were now watching, whether curious or concerned she didn’t know or care. Ignoring the on-lookers, Heather stepped into the black car and shifted to avoid being smacked by the door as it thudded closed.

The driver slipped behind the wheel and pulled away from the curb. He punched a number into his cell phone, listened for a moment, then disconnected without speaking.

“Where are we going?” Heather asked.

“Home.”

“You know where I *live*?”

A cell phone flashed on the seat next to her.

“Answer it,” the driver said.

She hesitated, then picked it up slowly. Flipped it open and lifted it to her ear.

The voice on the speaker was soft and low. “Do you love your husband, Mrs. Clark?”

“Who is this?”

“Do you love your husband?”

“We’re divorced.”

A static-filled pause.

“Is that why you’ve kept his name?”

“I really don’t see how it matters to you.”

“It doesn’t,” the voice said. “It matters to you. Please, tell me.”

The whole business was unnerving. But there were much easier ways to hurt someone. She doubted whoever was behind this had her harm in mind. They’d gone to some trouble to get her in a controlled environment and on an untraceable cell call.

She saw no harm in giving him an answer. “Of course.”

“Yes, of course. Would you kill for him?”

The question caught her broadside.

He clarified. “To bring him back, healthy, without this ridiculous obsession he has with . . . Eve. To have your husband’s love and affection. Would you kill?”

Maybe, she thought, then rejected the idea.

“The truth is, you love your husband very much.”

This time she said what came to mind. “Yes.”

“You may need to before it’s over. There’s more to this than what they all see on the surface.” The caller breathed into the phone. “Eve cannot be stopped.”

She didn’t have the words to reply.

“If Daniel tries to stop Eve, he will die. He’ll be dead tonight, or tomorrow, or in a week, or in a month, but in the end he will be dead.”

This was Eve speaking to her? She became aware of the tremble in her fingers. “You can’t know that.”

The caller waited before dismissing her in a soft voice. “You’re as obsessed with Eve as he is.”

The caller knew about the basement?

“Eve’s a sadistic killer who’s preying on young, innocent women,” she said.

“Not innocent, no. But this isn’t about sixteen young women.

It's about Daniel. It's about you. It's about me. And it's about what the world thinks of all of us when this is over."

"Sixteen?"

No response.

The car stopped in front of her house.

"Even if this were all true, I don't see how I can do anything. What you're suggesting is . . . It has nothing to do with me!"

"Good night, Heather." The line went dead.

She closed the phone, stunned.

The driver put his hand out. "Give me the phone."

She did.

"Don't waste your time trying to find me. Just the messenger who left you a note for a lot of money. Never met the guy and never will. Get out."

Heather opened the door and climbed out. Without further explanation, the driver took the car into the night.

The suburban neighborhood was dark except for a few scattered porch lights. She felt lightheaded. Confused. Sick.

THREE

MIDNIGHT

THE TOWN OF Manitou Springs nestled in the shadows of Pikes Peak an hour's drive south of Denver.

The FBI Citation had flown Daniel, Lori, and three other field agents to the municipal airport in Colorado Springs, where they'd met up with the tactical unit from the Colorado Springs PD. Three black Suburbans snaked their way up Highway 24 toward the Manitou Avenue exit.

Daniel followed the lead car. Lori sat to his right, Brit Holman behind. The car's tires hummed beneath them. No one spoke. They'd said what needed to be said on the flight over the Rockies. Success today would all come down to luck, and the hope that in his boldness the UNSUB had made a mistake.

The stakes were clear. Assuming the hikers had identified the next murder scene, Eve was either present or not. Either he had a victim with him or he didn't. If he had a victim, she was likely dead, like the other fifteen they'd found.

If she was alive, they would have their first real break in the case. An eyewitness.

If she was dead, they would be back where they started: armed with another dead girl but no further evidence of who Eve was beyond the fact that he wore boots, was white, drove vans with false registrations on occasion, was in his forties, knew a thing or two about disease, and had a rather substantial issue with young women.

They needed a break—if not an eyewitness, at least a better shot at evidence collection, which was why the local authorities were holding the perimeter without closing in. The last thing they needed was a SWAT team contaminating a virgin crime scene.

The walls in the FBI's LA Major Crimes offices were plastered with a profile of Eve, most of it speculation based on what they did have, and most of it Daniel's doing. Psych profiles, religious profiles, education profiles, physical profiles. Enough to flesh out a living being who could stand up and walk out of the room to kill his next victim.

But speculation did not flesh make.

"This is it," Lori said, staring at the Manitou Avenue sign ahead.

Daniel followed the lead vehicle through a tight right-hand exit loop and merged onto a deserted street that angled through the small, sleeping town. The scattered streetlights glowed with a yellow hue above them, diffused by a thin night fog.

They passed through the center of Manitou Springs, turned up Canon Avenue, snaked back under a highway bridge a hundred feet overhead, and entered a narrow canyon, leaving the last glimmer of light behind.

Darkness. Eve had a penchant for darkness.

Daniel glanced at Lori, now dressed in black slacks and tennis shoes. She wore her gun in a shoulder holster, a Heckler & Koch .40. He'd learned on the flight about her career with the bureau.

Nine years on the force following medical school. A string of other details that he'd been too preoccupied to register.

With any luck, none of it would matter. If they failed tonight, he would take the time to understand his new partner, but for now Lori was just along for the ride.

William's Canyon narrowed. They drove deeper, following the red taillights of the tactical vehicle that held Manitou Springs police officer Nate Sinclair, who had first confirmed the abandoned van's location with the help of the two hikers. Evidently the hills surrounding the canyon were occupied by squatters who holed up in a system of caverns and caves that was still being mapped. Cave of the Winds was a tourist trap, but undiscovered cave systems were the draw for serious spelunkers.

Pine trees and aspens emerged from the fog on either side, just visible by the vehicle's glaring lights.

Daniel lifted his radio. "How far?"

A voice he assumed belonged to Sinclair crackled back. "Half a mile."

The canyon twisted around bends every fifty yards, hopefully cloaking their approach.

"Kill the lights," Lori said.

Daniel caught her stare. She'd read his mind.

"I believe he waits nearby until he's sure that his victim is dead," she said. "Not *with* the victim, but close enough to maintain the surveillance."

"I know, I wrote the profile." He lifted the walkie-talkie again. "Kill the lights."

The radio remained silent for a few seconds. "It's gonna be hard to see with this fog." No one outside the cars could possibly hear the radios, but Nate's voice barely broke a whisper anyway. Big day for Officer Sinclair.

“Kill the lights,” Daniel repeated. “Stop a hundred yards from the site. We go on foot. The tactical team can use their night vision, but they *do not close* until I say so. You have that?”

“Copy.”

“Roger.” The tactical unit behind them.

The lights ahead blinked out. Daniel twisted a knob he thought controlled the lights, was rewarded with a swish of the wipers instead. He reversed the switch and tried another.

Night smothered them.

“You see them?” Lori asked.

He slowed to a crawl until his eyes adjusted to the darkness. The profile of the vehicle ahead broke the lines of the forest as it slipped around the next bend.

“Slower,” Daniel ordered.

“Copy.”

Red brake lights glared ahead.

“Okay, friends. It’s game time,” Brit said, speaking for the first time since they left Colorado Springs behind.

“Remember, no one crosses my lead. That includes the tactical team. Keep them back, Brit. Way back. I want zero site contamination. Zero.”

Daniel had made no secret of the fact that he didn’t think they should use a tactical team on this one, much less a team he didn’t know. Brit had agreed, but protocol won the day: armed suspect plus hostile scene equaled tactical purview.

Brit chambered a round in his Glock. “Alpha team is taking half a squad up the flank. The rest will stay twenty yards to my rear unless otherwise directed.”

“Just keep them out of my scene until I’m in,” Daniel said, glancing up at the rearview mirror. The hardened special agent who would officially be handed the case if Daniel went dark was

nothing more than a ghostly figure by the amber light of the dashboard. Dark hair, strong chiseled jaw—a college receiver who'd graduated with honors before being recruited by the FBI.

Daniel had trusted the man with his life on several occasions. Given a choice of partners, he'd choose Brit Holman over any other without a moment's hesitation.

"Outside it is," Brit said. "To my rear. I'm going in behind you."

Daniel nodded. "Just keep them out of our way."

"And me?" Lori said. A simple question asked without any expectation. One Daniel hadn't considered. In a case so dependent on information gathered from the victims, some would argue that she was more important to the investigation than he.

"How many raids have you been on?"

"Eight," she said almost before he'd gotten the question out. There wasn't a breath of hesitation in her.

"You're with me," he said.

She nodded. "They're slowing."

Daniel stopped the vehicle just behind the lead, shrugged into a Kevlar vest, took an H&K MP5 from behind the seat, chambered a round, and flipped off the safety. Engaging weapons on approach was an easy way to an early grave. Clanking chambers carried to all ears.

Lori had engaged her pistol already.

She waited for him to slip out before easing out of her door. Daniel rounded the car, ignoring all except Nate Sinclair, who was crawling out of the cab.

"Stay on the asphalt," he whispered. "Don't speak unless directed. How far?"

Nate's eyes were white in the night. "Around the next bend. To the left, fifty yards off the road. You do realize that I haven't actually seen the van. We were told to stay back. Way back."

“The cave, not the van. I was told you can get us to the cave.”

Nate pulled out a GPS unit and switched it on. “Assuming the coordinates the hikers gave me were right. Quick thinking on—”

“Let’s go.” Daniel glanced at the team that had gathered behind him, waiting in tactical fatigues and helmets, armed for entry, ready for engagement. Ready to start a war.

He nodded.

The soles of their boots padded over the black asphalt. Crickets chirped, a song of life or death, Daniel didn’t know. But his mind was in the tomb already.

Who are you, Eve? What drives you to take the lives of young women? Are you there in your hole, standing over another dead body?

The trees parted on the left and Nate stopped. He looked at Daniel for approval and veered for the gap when Daniel fixed on it.

The van sat in the clearing, dark and cold with a rusted white paint job. Windshield cracked. Balding tires. It was an old Dodge Caravan from the nineties. Serial numbers on the glass, the chassis, and the engine undoubtedly filed like the other vans he’d found. It would keep the evidence response team happy for a few hours.

Daniel motioned Brit and each took one side of the van, peering inside the windows without luck. He waited for Brit’s cover, put his hand on the sliding door, and jerked it open, rolling right to give his partner a clean shot inside.

The van was empty. No rear seats, no tools, no rope or restraints. No Eve.

No girl.

Lori stepped close, scanned the dark trees ahead, and spoke in a voice that no more disturbed the night than a moth’s wings. “He’s here.”

With those words Lori stepped into his space. She felt the scene in the same way he did. “You’re right. Go easy.”

A cliff rose to the sky at the end of a deer path, fifty yards farther. The cave opening was precisely where the GPS coordinates had placed it. A large pine and a boulder twice Daniel's height protected a two-foot fissure in the cliff face.

Daniel motioned Brit to send the tactical team along the length of the cliff in both directions, then cast one long look at Lori, who had her eyes locked on his.

I hope you're ready for this.

Then he slipped inside.

He pressed his left hand against the smooth stone surface along the southern wall and inched forward in the dark. Gun ready at his shoulder, muzzle low. Lori right behind, breathing steadily.

Her leading hand touched his elbow. Released it. Touched it again.

The sound of water dripping in a cavern was the first evidence that they'd entered more than a long, thin fissure. A musty odor of earthen mildew filled his nostrils. A scent that had permeated the root cellars Eve had used on two other occasions.

The ground suddenly sloped down. And it was down there that he first saw the faint hint of light. Hardly more than a shift in the darkness, from the thickest black to a shade of dark brown.

He instinctively reached back to stop Lori. His hand found her belly. He held her shirt and eased her close, heart in his throat.

"He's here," he mouthed. "Watch your feet."

Then he let her go and picked his way down. To a wall, where the tunnel made a sharp right.

The light glowed at the end of a long passageway, flickering orange on granite.

Daniel fought the impulse to run around the corner to the source of that light. He waited until Lori and Brit were by his side. Rattling stones announced the presence of two men from the tacti-

cal unit close behind. Daniel tried to wave them back, but even if they could see his hand, they were already down the slope.

He opened a palm at Brit and mouthed for him to keep them back.

Montova's voice haunted his mind. *What do you do best, Daniel?*

I work alone. I go into Eve's mind alone.

Why do you go into Eve's mind alone, Daniel?

Because I know him. I know how he was made, and I know how to unmake him.

Daniel hurried down the long passageway. The ground was mostly clay, blown in by the wind over the centuries. He avoided loose stones, advancing in a crouch, weapon ready.

Then he was at the next bend, facing a wall that flickered with light that could only come from flames. Daniel raised his weapon and took the corner low, cutting the pie in increments with the front sight of his MP5, breathing and scanning, high and low, left to right.

The wide cavern ran fifty yards and ended at a flat wall. Two flaming torches hung from wire fixed to the ceiling at the far end.

Stables, the kind you might see in a barn, ran along both sides. Marked off by two-by-fours that ran from ceiling to floor. No scent, sound, or indication of any animals.

An image of a hermit flashed through Daniel's mind. A whole tribe of them were reported to inhabit these canyons. This wasn't Eve. The den was occupied by squatters. They kept their animals here.

A hot vise of panic seized his shoulder blades. They'd been wrong?

"A prison," Lori whispered.

His mind snapped at the words.

Water dripped steadily on rock somewhere. He stepped forward,

swung his muzzle to his right, into the first cell. The light on this side was dim at best. He pivoted, swept the cell.

Stone floor. Empty.

He spun and searched the cell along the opposite wall. Same.

Daniel hurried down the cavern, peering into the cells on either side. Empty. All empty.

But the fourth wasn't. A dead goat lay in the center. He knew it was dead, not sleeping, because it was on its back, four legs jutting to the ceiling. The carcass was intact, but the thorax had been sawn and spread, and the internal organs appeared to have been removed in a macabre display of pathology—a classic Y incision. No blood on the floor. The beast had either been killed elsewhere and brought here, or killed here with exacting precision.

He moved on, fixed on the cells to his left, walking laterally, nerves strung like bowstrings, palms now wet on his gun. More light here. The flames licked at the smoke they spewed.

The cell next to the last on this side was empty.

And the last cell, too, except for a gray blanket that hung from a wire stretched between the wood posts and the back wall.

He jerked his head back and saw that Brit had already checked the cells on the other side. Brit mouthed the word at him: *clear*.

Meaning what? Eve had taken this victim with him? Or that this wasn't Eve?

“Daniel?”

He turned back and saw that Lori had advanced past him and was staring into the corner of the last cell. Where the gray blanket hung like a curtain. Not against the wall as he'd assumed, but several feet from the wall. He moved closer to see what had arrested her attention.

Propelled by something close to panic, she ran in front of him, slapped up the crude wooden latch, and rushed inside the pen.

He peered between the two-by-fours and saw the victim then. Seated on a metal chair between the blanket and the stone wall with *Eve* scrawled in red behind her. Dressed in the same dirty white hospital gown that all of Eve's victims had been found in.

Only this victim had a gunnysack over her head.

And she was shivering.

Alive.

"Wait!" Daniel advanced, rotated into the cage, and moved past Lori.

Heart hammering like a steam pump, he stepped up to the blanket, pulled it all the way back, and stared at the girl.

"She's in shock," Lori whispered.

Daniel spun to Brit, who'd entered behind them. "This is him. Set up a perimeter south to Pueblo, north to Monument. Lock down 24 in both directions, fifty miles out. Get that tactical team scouring these cliffs. I want them to find routes up or down, specifically toward the highway. Have them spot and flag any large footprints, anything similar to our profile."

Brit snapped orders at the two men who'd followed them down the tunnel.

"He was here in the last thirty minutes," Lori said, pointing toward a wet spot of blood on the floor. "We need to glove up. For that matter, she could be contagious. One sneeze, and she could turn this sickness into an aerosol."

"We don't have time," Daniel heard himself say. Eve had never left a victim like this; they couldn't risk losing her. Lori made no objection, despite the break in protocol.

Silence filled the cavern except for the dripping of water. And the faint rattle of the metal chair under Eve's victim.

She was thin—not an ounce over a hundred pounds. Pale. Blue veins traced the flesh beneath her arms' translucent, blotchy skin,

symptomatic of the meningitis variant that had killed the others. Dirty, trembling fingers hung loosely by her sides. Bare feet.

No sign that she was aware of their presence.

Lori broke the stillness. “She’s dying. We have to get her to a hospital, Daniel. We may already be too late!” She reached for the girl’s arm and gently touched the blotchy skin with a gloved hand. “It’s okay, honey. We’re here to help. Can you hear us?”

Daniel eased forward, took the corner of the brown bag between his fingers, and pulled it up. They had to keep the girl alive—she was their only living link to Eve.

The sack slid up, revealing her slender neck, then her chin. Quivering lips, glistening with spittle. Jaw clenched.

Daniel pulled the bag free.

The girl’s eyes were wide open but had rolled back into her head so that her irises were hidden. Her white eyeballs stared ahead, sightless.

Mucus ran from both nostrils and mixed with foaming spittle that seeped from her mouth. Stringy blonde hair hung below her ears, trembling.

The girl’s head moved. Turned slowly toward them. Her mouth parted and she began to suck air in short, tight gasps. Her nostrils flared with each inhalation.

The sight of this victim tortured by such an abnormal condition rooted Daniel to the ground. A thousand discussions about cause of death in the Eve investigation hadn’t prepared Daniel for actually seeing a live victim being ravaged by the disease.

Lori backed away.

“Her eyes . . .” Daniel wasn’t sure how to express his concern over the severe rolling of her eyes.

“Photophobia is a classic symptom of meningitis,” Lori said. “She’s reacting to the light.”

The girl's mouth opened wider and she growled at them. Foamy bubbles popped in the corner of her mouth.

And then her jaws clamped shut and she began to whimper. A desperate cry for help from a wrinkled face. Her eyes righted themselves for a moment, irises grayed by whatever disease was killing her, then rolled back into her skull again.

Daniel felt his heart rise into his throat. His own fingers were quivering, perhaps more than hers.

Lori walked behind the girl, eyes wide. "We have to help her." She tentatively placed a hand on each of the girl's shoulders.

No response. Just the grimacing hyperventilation.

"Daniel!"

"How?" His voice sounded like a gravel mixer.

"We have to get her to the hospital."

He'd never seen a condition that presented in such a disturbing way, and he didn't know what the girl was capable of, but they didn't have time for caution—they'd wasted enough time assessing her condition already.

He stepped in, slid one of his arms under her legs and the other behind her back. She didn't resist. Neither did she calm.

He lifted her trembling form and stood awkwardly. Her jaw stretched in a silent scream; her body shook with such force that for a moment Daniel thought he might drop her.

Lori had both her hands on the girl's cheeks. "Sh, sh . . . it's okay, honey. It's going to be okay." But tears brimmed in Lori's eyes. Dealing with the dead was one thing. Seeing a living human so tormented was another, even for a pathologist.

"Her axial muscles are completely relaxed," she said. "She's not seizing, she's not convulsing." He didn't know the significance of her assessment. Her eyes met his, clouded with concern.

Then they were moving, running through the gate. Back down

the chamber. Up the dark passage by the light of Lori's torch. The girl shook in his arms like a blender.

Eve was killing his victims with an exotic disease related to meningitis—they'd established that much over a year ago. Murder one, which included intentionally exposing another person to any life-threatening substance.

They burst from the cliff wall to find Brit Holman in an urgent discussion about Highway 24 with Nate Sinclair. Nate was trying to get the Colorado State Patrol to close the pass.

"Call FBI-Denver," Daniel snapped. "Tell them to lock down this location and perimeter."

To Nate: "How far to the closest hospital?"

Nate's eyes were on the shaking body in Daniel's arms. "Twenty minutes."

"You're with us. Lock it down, Brit, I don't care what it takes. He's close."

"What about you?"

"She's an eyewitness. I have to keep her alive."

FOUR

NEED THE FASTEST route,” Daniel snapped.

“It depends on—”

“The fastest, now! Back the same way?”

“Yes, back.”

Nate sat in the passenger’s seat next to Daniel, still in shock over the girl’s condition. Behind Nate, Lori cradled the girl’s head in her lap as she prepared an intravenous syringe with the cephalosporin-ampicillin antibiotic cocktail they brought for precisely this reason. They would soon know if the meningitis was viral, bacterial, or even existent at all. If Lori was disturbed by the girl’s grunting, her white eyes, the foaming mouth, she showed none of it. Her medical training had kicked in.

Daniel squealed through a tight turn and floored the accelerator. They had to reach the hospital before the girl’s internal organs hemorrhaged. High doses of antibiotics could stave off bacterial assault, but only if administered before irreversible damage had

taken its toll, and only if it was, in fact, a bacterial infection. This was only a fraction of what Daniel had learned about meningitis over the past year.

Lori slapped the girl's arm to distend a vein. "Light, I need light!"

Daniel reached back and switched on the dome light.

"Hold on, honey. Stay with us. It's going to be okay." She pressed the needle into a peripheral vein and administered the full dose. Hopefully enough to slow the infection.

At this point he didn't care what they tried, as long as it increased the girl's chance of survival. He might even try a priest, if one could administer psychiatric therapy. Despite his disdain for religion, Daniel was all too aware of the soothing effects it afforded the mind. And the mind needed soothing at times.

He glanced at Nate Sinclair. "Get a priest on the line. I need a priest at the hospital when we get there."

"A priest?" Lori asked. "This is a disease."

"She may not know that," he shot back.

Nate snatched up his radio and barked the demand across the open channel.

The car careened down the narrow asphalt road, leaning with each turn. Daniel wiped his wet palms on his slacks and gripped the wheel.

"Is she responding?"

"I don't know. It's too early. No, not yet."

"Can you give her more?"

"She needs a transfusion. We're in a vehicle, not an ICU."

"Give her more. Will more—"

"Stop, stop, stop, stop!"

Daniel jerked his eyes up and saw what had set Lori shouting. The car's beams illuminated a man in the middle of the road, walking toward them.

Nate was on an emergency hotline; his words caught in his throat.

Daniel was on the gas, muscles frozen solid.

Lori was screaming bloody murder. "Stop! Stop!"

He switched his foot to the brake pedal and jammed it to the floor. The wheels locked, sending the car into a long squealing skid. Lori slammed into the back of his seat.

Still the man walked, deaf and blind, or uncaring that he was facing an onrushing hulk of metal that would grind him into the asphalt.

Nate spoke into his radio, rushed. "We have a civilian in the road. He's right in the middle of the road! He's walking toward us."

Everything slowed in Daniel's mind, minute details popping to life.

The man was tall and gangly. Dressed in dark cargo pants and a dirty long-sleeved shirt that hung open to his pale, naked chest. He wore brown work boots. His hair was disheveled and thinning. Dirty blond.

His right arm hung by his side. A metallic reflection. He had a weapon.

The car fishtailed to the left, then corrected to the right and squealed to a stop fewer than thirty yards from the man. Nate hit the dash, lost his radio. Rummaged about, dazed.

Still the man came, striding, gaunt face calm and deliberate, weapon held loosely by his side. His eyes were deep-set, hooded by a protruding brow, accentuated by a square jaw and high cheekbones.

This was Eve, wasn't it? It had to be.

For a brief moment he considered shoving that accelerator back to the floor and heading straight for the man, but he knew if he tried, Eve would simply step aside and be gone.

Daniel had shoved his sidearm between the seat and the armrest in his hurry to get the vehicle on the road, and he grabbed for it now. There was still time for a clean shot.

But the Kydex holster filled his hand, not the pistol. He had to get the gun out!

“Shoot him!” he screamed.

Ripping his own gun from the holster, he saw that Nate Sinclair was still disoriented. Lori was facing the back of the car, working with the victim, who’d spilled to the floor with her. Brit’s voice crackled on the radio, demanding more information.

He had to get his gun clear of the car for the shot. Shooting through a tempered windshield would deflect the bullet from the target.

Daniel fumbled with the door latch, shoved the door wide, threw his left leg to the ground, and whipped his gun up and across the steering wheel as he leaned out between the vehicle and the doorframe for a supported shot.

He was aware of Lori clambering onto the backseat. Aware of Nate, staring silently with his radio pressed up to his lips. Aware of his own heart hammering.

The killer moved his arm then, while Daniel’s gun was just clearing the windshield for a shot. Without slowing his stride, Eve calmly lifted his gun and fired directly into Daniel’s face from a distance of ten yards. The bullet hurled from the muzzle blast couldn’t possibly miss him.

Daniel felt no fear, only a split second of regret.

And then a searing flash of pain as the bullet struck his head.

In the moment before his life ended, Daniel wondered if Heather would take him back. And then he was dropping into a pool of darkness.

LORI HEARD THE door open, and twisted on one knee. She couldn't get a clear view of the killer's face. Only his body and the gun in his hand.

Eve.

The girl in her arms prevented her from any effective motion, but truth be told, she wasn't sure she could stop him even if she had a gun in her hand already.

An icy calm settled over her. The girl was too young to have life snatched away just when it had begun.

An image of Amber Riley, the redhead she'd grown close to in medical school, flashed through her mind. Eve's fourteenth victim. Before receiving the call that Amber had been murdered in California by a serial killer known as Eve, the Eve case hadn't even crossed her horizon. Staring at Amber's fair complexion badly discolored by the disease, Lori's world had changed.

And now her world was about to end.

These are the thoughts of people staring death in the face, she thought. Fruitless thoughts that replaced the ones necessary for survival. This was why so many died when death could have been avoided.

"Daniel?"

Her eyes were glued to Eve's gun as he lifted it. The muzzle stabbed fire, and Daniel's head snapped back as if it were on a spring. Blood sprayed the side window, which shattered from the impact of the deflected bullet.

Like a puppet on a string, Daniel went limp and collapsed. His chin hit the armrest on the door as he fell. She'd seen more than a few dead bodies and knew that she was looking at another.

The killer never broke stride. He veered out of the lights' glare to the passenger door and shot Nate Sinclair through the side window as the police officer fumbled for his own weapon.

The side door swung open, and Lori instinctively pulled the girl in front of her. Light splashed on the seat molding. A car was coming up from behind—someone had responded to the call.

He's going to kill me, Lori realized. *He's going to kill me and take his victim.*

She moved with only a moment's thought, shoving the girl up, toward the open door. Her only hope for survival now was to force his hesitation.

Eve scooped the girl into one arm, tore her from the car as Lori dropped to the floor, cowering.

Tires screamed behind them. The crash of the killer's shot boomed through the car, and Lori felt a tug of pain in her left arm.

If Brit Holman hadn't arrived when he did, a second shot might have killed her. But the victim was evidently more important to Eve.

Lori lifted her head and saw him pass from the ring of light cast by the other car's headlights into the trees, with his victim slung over his shoulder. As if the tactical team, the state patrol, and the FBI were little more than an irritant, an interference.

And then he was gone.

Lori clambered out and tore around the car. She grabbed the driver's door and yanked it wide. Daniel's body slumped into a pool of blood on the asphalt.

"Daniel!" Brit Holman sprinted forward, gun gripped in both hands. "Daniel?"

"Help me!" Lori dropped to her knees and tugged Daniel's limp body. "He's been shot, help me!"

The body rolled. She quickly felt for a pulse on his neck. Found none.

Brit stared. "What happened?"

"He's dead!" Lori screamed. "He's dead, that's what happened. Don't just stand there, help me!"

She felt the wound on the side of his head. The bullet had left a superficial radial gash, causing instantaneous unconsciousness, but it hadn't penetrated the anterior medial portion of the skull. The hydrostatic shock of the impact had likely concussed the brain tissue and put Daniel's nervous system into shock, followed by ventricular fibrillation.

He'd been shot in the head and was dying of a heart attack.

Had died of a heart attack.

Brit dropped to one knee, felt for a radial pulse, then stood. "He's dead." He was already moving, yelling orders at men behind them. "Suspect is in the perimeter. Get the team mobilized. In pairs. Night vision and spread. Now! Report every hundred yards. Get me some light. Move!"

Brit played his light over the windshield. "We have another officer down!" He hurried around the car to check on Officer Sinclair.

For a brief moment Lori stared at the body by her knees. Red blood matted the short waves of hair on the right side of his head where the bullet had struck him. Otherwise he looked like a man at peace.

His skin was smooth, boyish but firm. He was dressed in the same black knit T-shirt and blazer he always wore. Dark-brown slacks. A man who lived with careful attention to detail as much in his grooming as in his work.

She'd come to know him through his books, watching him from a distance over the last three months, studying every case he'd ever worked on, every lecture he'd ever given. And in the process she'd come to respect his obsession with the Eve killer.

Lori took a deep breath and let resolve fill her veins. Working quickly, with practiced deliberation, she tilted his head back, pinched his nostrils between her thumb and forefinger, lowered her mouth to his, and flooded his lungs with her breath. Again.

Then she leaned over him, pressed both palms over his sternum, and pumped at a rate that approximated one hundred beats per minute.

One, two, three, four . . . thirty times before she would give him more of her breath.

Come on, Daniel! She set her jaw. *Live!*

No response.

Her own heart beat in her eardrums. His remained stone. She needed a defibrillator, and she needed it now.

Brit Holman ran around the car, speaking into his radio. "You're saying he just disappeared? Find him!"

He pulled up when he saw her working feverishly over Daniel's dead body. "Anything?"

She blew into his mouth again. Then pumped his chest. "We have to get him to the hospital." She grabbed Daniel's jacket and tugged him up. "Get me to a hospital."

"An ambulance just left . . ."

"We don't have time to wait for an ambulance. It's twenty minutes to the nearest hospital. We'll meet the ambulance." She dragged his limp body around the hood. "Help me. Get him into the car. Hurry!"

Brit hesitated only a moment, then grabbed Daniel's legs. They waddled around the Suburban, shoved him into the backseat.

"I need someone to take me."

"Lori . . ."

"Now. Now!"

Brit ordered one of the local officers to the car.

She climbed in, saw that they'd already removed Nate Sinclair's body from the front seat, and continued administering CPR on Daniel. It had been five minutes. She knew the statistics: fewer than two percent of adults who suffered cardiac arrest came back after

five minutes—and that was in hospitals, under emergency care. Among those, fewer than one in twenty eventually left the hospital alive.

“Hurry!” She caught herself hyperventilating. He could not die, not now.

One of the plainclothes police officers who’d accompanied the tactical team slid behind the wheel.

“There’s an ambulance on the way,” she snapped. “Find out where.”

“They’ll meet you on 24,” Brit said, filling the door. “Channel 9.” He slammed the door and slapped the side of the car as it surged forward.

FIVE

HEATHER CLARK SAT AT the kitchen table at 1:00 a.m. with a cup of mint tea, trying to ignore the haunting voice of the phone call two hours earlier. The Mendoza file lay open, but it refused to offer a distraction.

How many times had she sat here, staring at a file, telling herself to let it all go, focus on the future, defend the case, get a life, quit being one of those weak women hollowed by divorce? Why walk through the pig slop of life when you could find a new path, walk around?

Her therapist, Dr. Nancy Drummins, had drilled the best advice into her rather thick skull a dozen times; Heather knew the self-sufficiency mantras as if she herself had written the book.

She'd been tempted to tell Raquel about the phone call but held off, not entirely sure why. All was fine. Yes, she did get some good information. Thank you, Raquel.

"You sure you're okay?" Raquel had to shout into her cell over the bar noise.

"Of course. Just good to have a friend. I'm fine, really."

And here she sat, almost two hours later, knowing that nothing was fine.

Heather stood from the table, hiked up her gray sweats, two sizes too large after her loss of twenty pounds, and poured herself another cup of tea. The porcelain spout clinked against her cup. The set had been a gift from Raquel, a delicate black pot with a single rose on each side—an image that would have drawn endless analysis from Daniel over breakfast.

She returned to the table. The voice whispered through her memory for the hundredth time.

Eve cannot be stopped.

She should tell Brit. He'd stuck close to their friendship after the divorce—closer than anyone could possibly know. But Eve had come to her, not to Brit. Nor to Daniel.

The cell phone on the table chirped. She sloshed the tea. Eve?

She set her cup down and snatched up the phone. Brit Holman. She opened the phone.

“Hello?”

“It's Brit.”

Not the usual tone.

“What's wrong?”

“It's . . . Eve . . .”

“He took another girl,” she said, half guessing, half knowing.

“We found him. Yes. He—”

“You found *Eve*?”

“We found the victim. And Eve. But he's gone. We're still not sure . . .” The agent's voice faltered.

Heather stood up. “Where's Daniel?”

“Eve shot him.”

“What do you mean? That's . . . what do you mean, *shot*?”

“He was shot in the head, Heather. He’s dead. They’re working on him, but it doesn’t look good. I’m sorry. I know—”

“When?” The emotions started to roll up her chest, first benign, then ferocious.

“About ten minutes ago. I’m sorry, Heather. I know how much—”

Heather snapped the phone shut. Her world tipped. She slowly turned to face the living room. All Daniel. The furniture she and Daniel had purchased with the home five years earlier. The fireplace he insisted they needed despite the mild winters. The portrait above that fireplace; the green plush rhinoceros that sat on the sofa, Daniel’s since the third grade; even the shelved set of law books Daniel had purchased for her during her second year of law school.

All Daniel. And now he was dead?

Heather forced her legs to take her across the living room, down the hall to the door that led into the basement.

Confusion and pain washed her mind. The door thudded shut behind her and she stood in the dark stairwell, wavering on numb legs. She flipped the light switch and started down the stairs.

Eve had taken his sixteenth and seventeenth victims tonight. And now his eighteenth, because she, too, was dead.

Eve.

Tears broke through the pain as she stumbled down the stairs. Across the dark recreation area. Into the unfinished room at the southwest corner of the house. She stood in the doorway, pulling at the stale air. Then fanned her hand over the switch on the near wall.

Lights blazed overhead.

Long tables with folding metal legs ran the length of each wall. Two high-speed computers to her right, screens now black.

The concrete walls were covered with corkboard, and the cork-

board was covered with photographs of Daniel and news clippings. Case files for each of the fifteen victims, provided by Brit Holman.

Eve. The latest in a long line of killers who had robbed her of her husband. This room was all about Eve. Every move he'd made, retraced here by Heather.

How many nights had she spent here, methodically combing through the minutiae, searching for a clue to the killer's motives, his next move, his identity? She hadn't been able to win Daniel back from his obsession, so she'd done the only thing that gave her any comfort.

Unbeknownst to Daniel, she'd joined him in his obsession after the divorce. Eve was as much her enemy as he was the enemy of every victim he'd set out to murder.

Heather sank to her knees and sobbed openly.

SIX

THE OFFICER PILOTED the car like a go-cart on a protected course, but vehicular safety was the farthest thing from Lori's mind. She continued the CPR, begging with each breath, each pump of her palms against his sternum, that Daniel Clark would climb out of the dark hole he'd been thrown into.

She would soon have access to the oxygen, epinephrine, and defibrillator that were in every ambulance. She would prefer a cardiac monitor, but time was now more important than the additional equipment a hospital could offer. Resuscitation was a game of long shots in short time.

And what if you're wrong? What if he is meant to die today?

The thought stopped her midstroke. She thrust her hands down. The bench seat shook each time she shoved her palms. She slammed her fist on his chest.

"Wake up!"

He did not wake up. She glanced at her watch.

Ten minutes.

The siren's wail reached her as the car tore down Highway 24, halfway between Manitou Springs and Colorado Springs. The officer was on the radio with the driver of the ambulance.

A calm male voice spoke over the speaker. "Okay, we have you. Pull to the shoulder and wait for us. How long has the victim been in arrest?"

"Just over ten minutes," Lori snapped.

"Just over ten minutes," the officer repeated.

"Age?"

"Forty-one. Five foot eleven. One hundred and seventy pounds. We start with defib, and we need to get a shockable rhythm. Have one milliliter of epinephrine ready."

The officer conveyed the information. She knew the paramedics could handle the attempt on their own, but she had no intention of letting them.

The car jerked to a stop on the side of the road, and Lori continued the CPR.

You're wrong. He's gone.

The car door swung open and the screech of tires announced the ambulance's arrival. A paramedic dressed in a white shirt shoved the officer aside. Eyes on Daniel's lifeless form. He glanced back at his partner, who was wheeling a clattering stretcher on the run.

"Help me with him," Lori said, breathless from her constant pumping.

They slid him out and, with the second paramedic's help, heaved his dead weight onto the gurney. Then ran it back toward the ambulance.

Blue and white strobes from the emergency lights flashed on their faces. The rear of the ambulance was spread wide, and a large

black case rested on the floor, already open. An automated electronic defibrillator, or portable juicer, as some liked to call it.

“You’re the doctor?” the first paramedic said.

“Forensic pathologist. You have a cardiac monitor on that AED?” she asked. “A manual override?”

“Both,” the first paramedic said. “I’m Dave, he’s José. The wound on his head looks pretty bad.”

She knew what he meant. You don’t just bring back the dead after—what?—thirteen minutes? Particularly those who have taken a direct gunshot wound to the head.

“The bullet didn’t penetrate his skull. With any luck we have pulseless V-fib caused by shock. Keep that wound pressurized, give me your AED, and put him on a peripheral IV, wide open. D5-W, we’re going to need high-dose epi.”

“Almost fifteen minutes?” the one named José asked. They slid to a stop and together the paramedics released the scissoring gurney legs and lowered it to the ground.

Lori dropped to her knees, grabbed Daniel’s black T-shirt, and ripped it open with a grunt. “Just hook him up. This isn’t over until I say it’s over. Either of you do ACLS before?”

“We’ve been around, Doctor,” Dave said.

Not around this, she thought.

“Get an IV into him now. Have the epinephrine ready.”

José already had the AED on the ground, gelled the paddles. Dave was working the bag valve mask on Daniel’s face. The two paramedics had done this enough to develop seamless efficiency, but she couldn’t find any comfort in the fact. Daniel was way beyond the benefits of methodical efficiency. With drugs, electricity, and raw luck, maybe they could beat his body back to life. Like a kick to the jukebox.

“It’s ready.”

She took the paddles and shoved them into the anterior-apex positions—the anterior electrode on the right, below the clavicle, and the apex electrode on his left, just below and to the left of the pectoral muscle.

“Hold on.” Dave was fixing three self-adhesive electrodes to Daniel’s torso to measure cardiac activity. He reached across the body and flipped a switch. The nine-inch screen on the AED popped to life. Dark gray lines ran across the lighter gray background. It wasn’t V-fib, and her heart sank. Asystole, a flatline.

Okay, it could still work. She looked back at her hands. “Clear.”

“We have cardiac activity,” Dave said.

She spun her head to the AED screen. The flat line sporadically jerked. The ventricle in Daniel’s heart was twitching unevenly, refusing to contract. But the muscles were trying.

Except for in movies, defibrillation was rarely used on patients with a flatline. Recovery was virtually impossible.

“Clear!” she shouted.

“Clear.”

José thumbed a switch, and 200 joules of electrical current coursed through Daniel’s chest. His muscles quivered as expected. No arching of the back or violent jump. But plenty of juice for the heart to respond to if it was capable of doing so.

The monitor showed one small blip of increased activity from the sinoatrial node, then returned to the scribbled line.

“Again, clear.”

“Clear.”

José waited another three seconds as the AED recharged, then hit the switch again.

Daniel’s muscles reacted again. This time no reaction from the heart monitor.

“Give him the epinephrine!”

Dave already had the syringe hooked up to the IV line. He shoved the plunger to its hilt, flooding Daniel's vein with the clear drug. "Hit him again."

The cardiac monitor blipped once, twice, then returned to a straight gray line.

"Check the contacts," Lori breathed. "Check them!"

Dave did. The lines remained flat.

She glanced at her watch.

Nineteen minutes!

"Clear!"

"Clear."

Another surge of electricity. Another small jerk as the muscles responded.

This time there was no reaction from the monitor. Only a high-pitched tone that signaled no activity. Continued asystole.

Dave was still diligently working the respirator, pumping oxygen into Daniel's lungs. José was still readying the AED for another surge of current. Lori was still leaning over the dead body, knuckles white on the paddle handles.

But something changed in Lori's mind then. The forces of inevitability pulled the plug, draining the last reserves of hope from her.

"Clear," she said. Then whispering, begging, "Come on, Daniel. Please. Don't do this to me."

"Clear."

The body jerked a little. Then lay still.

The line on the monitor ran thread-thin.

Silence settled around them. Lori looked to one side and saw that the officer was watching her. As were the two paramedics.

Dave broke the stillness. "I think . . ."

"Give him more epinephrine," she said.

“Any more could kill him.”

“He’s dead!” she screamed, slamming both paddles on his chest. “You can’t kill him! He’s dead already. Give him more!”

Dave exchanged a glance with his partner, pulled out a second syringe, and emptied its contents into the IV.

“Clear.” Quieter this time.

“Clear.” The rote reply of someone checking off a list he had checked off a hundred times before.

This time Lori didn’t bother looking at the monitor. She just listened for a change in the tone. Only when there was none after five seconds did she glance over.

No change.

“Clear.”

Her mind was spinning with vague thoughts. It was all a mistake. Daniel wasn’t supposed to die tonight. She’d been so sure, so intoxicated by the prospect of what lay ahead.

They hadn’t responded.

“Clear.”

“Doctor, he’s . . . flat. He’s fixed and dilated—certifiably dead. His nodes are totally depolari—”

“Juice him!” she screamed. “I know he’s dead! Now juice him!”

“Clear,” José said.

When the body jerked this time, Lori knew it was over.

He lay on the white mattress, dead. Dead for twenty-one full minutes.

The medical record was spotted with rare cases of resuscitation after long periods of death, the longest being forty-nine minutes in Tyler, Texas, eight years ago. A man struck by lightning had come back to life on his own after being transported to the morgue.

He’d lived for another four days in a coma, then died.

There were several cases of people who’d been brought back

after thirty minutes, including one in Poland in which the victim had gone on to live a relatively normal life despite the paralysis of his left leg.

And many thousands of cases in which people had been resuscitated after several minutes. Millions of cases involving some form of near-death experience. But Lori knew all too well that the chances of anyone coming back to life in any kind of normal state after being dead twenty-one minutes were rare enough to be considered impossible.

The still form in front of her confirmed that impossibility.

She settled to her haunches, still clenching the paddles in each hand. She released her grip and heard them clatter to the asphalt. Mind numb, she lifted her hands to her head, covered her face, and tried to think.

Her fingers were shaking, and her breathing was hot in her face. For several long seconds, darkness swallowed her.

Lori lowered her hands and stared at the lifeless form that had been Daniel Clark. Then she touched his bare belly. Pressed her palm against his clammy flesh.

She leaned forward slowly, reaching her other hand out and touching his chest. What happened next was a product of her basest desire and instincts, not borne of any premeditation or conscious thought.

She lunged forward, shoving the paramedic aside, flung the respirator from Daniel's face, tilted his head back, and shoved her mouth against his.

She filled his lungs with the contents of hers.

"Breathe." It came out as part sob, part whisper.

Another deep breath, closing off his nostrils as she had in the car for the ten minutes before they'd met the ambulance.

"Breathe, Daniel." She blew deep past his cold lips.

Her hand slipped off his chin and his jaw clamped shut on her lip. She grabbed his chin and yanked, sickened by her own desperation.

His mouth flew wide of its own, and a scream filled her mouth.

For a split moment she wasn't sure if it was her scream or his. Then he sucked deep and screamed again.

Lori jerked back.

Daniel's jaw stretched open in a scream that rocked both paramedics back on their heels.

His eyes remained clenched and his face contorted with pain. His jaw snapped shut, and then he began to cry. He was breathing. With quick, short breaths through his nostrils.

The monitor beside her was beeping. *Fast*. Ventricular tachycardia. He was thumping like a freight train. His eyes dilated, his face flung sweat, his lungs hoarded the oxygen. No longer deprived of pulse and breath, he was suddenly animated, frantic and convulsive, an all-inclusive resurrection of life and energy.

Daniel was alive.