

GUARDIAN ANGEL: UNFORGIVEN

By

John Jessop

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

To all the children who have experienced the debilitating effects of child abuse.

You are all God's children and He loves each and every one of you.

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Prologue

An abandoned Mercedes with strange and disturbing contents was found a couple of miles up Turner River Road, just off the Tamiami Trail in the South Florida Everglades several miles east of Marco Island, Florida. This road followed a gator infested river for several miles and was the place where the local park rangers at Collier-Seminole State Park often sent tourists in search of alligators.

The car had caught the Jackson family's attention because it was a brand new Mercedes S-class sedan parked off the road in a patch of trees, the front end sitting in a shallow pool of water near the river bank. With a price tag in the hundred thousand dollar range, this particular luxury car was a beautiful royal blue and came fully loaded with a sunroof, an infotainment system, a leather interior and something suspicious in the back seat. The back door on the driver's side was partially opened, and upon closer inspection the family saw a pair of men's brown leather shoes covering feet that were sticking partially out of the car.

Ray Jackson, his wife Donna and their fourteen year old daughter Kelly were visiting Florida from Minnesota and they were fascinated by the prospect of seeing alligators up close. The park ranger had warned them to stay in their car on Turner River Road because the locals fed the alligators, resulting in their expecting food from tourists as well. This inevitably led to alligators aggressively approaching tourists, looking for food and scaring hell out of them. So when Ray and his family saw the abandoned car they were hesitant to get out of their Toyota 4-Runner to investigate.

Ray parked as close to the abandoned Mercedes as possible. He was forty years old and overweight, weighing two hundred pounds at five-foot-seven. He was the manager of a small bank in Lakeville, Minnesota, just outside the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, where he sat on his ass at a desk all day. He never exercised, so he was concerned about his ability to outrun gators. In fact, he was so scared that he was tempted to drive away and leave the abandoned Mercedes for someone else to find, but his wife and daughter prodded him into inspecting the car to make sure that no one was hurt. Their coaxing and his curiosity got the better of him, and he reluctantly exited his SUV, telling his wife and daughter to stay in the 4-Runner. Neither of them were inclined to listen, so they got out and followed as he approached the abandoned Mercedes. They were both considerably thinner than Ray and were confident that they could outrun him back to the safety of their vehicle.

Kelly pushed ahead of her parents to get the first look, as teenagers will do, and got much more than she had bargained for. At first none of the family were entirely sure what they were viewing, because the shock at the sight of it was too much for their

minds to process. When the father got his first look, he immediately shoed his wife and daughter away from the scene before taking a closer look himself. Uncharacteristically they didn't argue, but instead fled back to the safety of their Toyota.

There, in the back of this very expensive flagship Mercedes sedan Ray saw a short fat man in his late sixties or early seventies, dressed in neatly pressed tan khaki pants and a blue short-sleeve cotton shirt with button down collar, a shiny gold Rolex on his wrist. He was lying on his back with his feet slightly poking out of the partially opened door. The man was obviously dead, but that wasn't the worst of it. His pants and boxers were pulled down around his knees and his penis had been cut off, completely removed down to the testicles. Ray naturally began to look for the missing sex organ, and with a more thorough search of the body he found it stuffed in the dead man's partially closed mouth, the severed end protruding slightly. Ray had watched enough television to know that he should not touch anything, because this was definitely a crime scene. He couldn't help but wonder how in the hell this wealthy fat man had ended up dead in the back seat of his shiny new Mercedes in alligator alley with his severed penis stuffed in his mouth.

Chapter 1. Jurisdiction

Ray Jackson gave into his fear of potential alligator attack and the possibility that there was a murderer still lurking nearby, and he joined his wife and daughter in the relative safety of their Toyota 4-Runner. It had dawned on him that this killer had cut off the victim's penis, and this was especially disconcerting to Ray, so he immediately locked his car doors and dialed 911 to report what they had found. The police dispatcher told him to stay where he was, and they would be there shortly. Since it was only ten o'clock in the morning, he figured that perhaps the police were not all that busy yet. While waiting for them to arrive, Ray tried to console his wife and daughter, but there was not a lot that he could think of to say regarding this heinous crime that might make them feel better. It was bad enough that his wife should have seen this, but it was terrible that his fourteen year old daughter should discover at such an early age that human beings could be capable of such horrible acts of violence.

Since the abandoned Mercedes was located in Collier County, a deputy from the Collier County Sheriff's office was the first on the scene. The family exited their SUV to meet him, and he introduced himself as Deputy Frank Todd. He was a tall young man in his late twenties, a little over six feet in height with blue eyes and short blonde hair barely visible under his deputy cap. He was quite striking in his police uniform, and Mrs. Jackson and Kelly both smiled and blushed when he shook their hands and introduced himself. Ray was all business, explaining how they had found the abandoned car and he had braved the alligator infested river bank to examine the car's contents. He described to the deputy what they had found in the back seat of the car. He left out the

part about being scared half out of his mind when he found the body, but Deputy Todd could see it on his face. The deputy said, “You probably should have stayed in your car and called the police rather than risking you or your family being attacked by an alligator. The gators here can be quite aggressive. Plus, if you had stayed in your car you might have spared your wife and daughter the trauma. Please get back into your 4-Runner and stay there. I’m going to go inspect the crime scene. An investigator from the Crime Bureau and someone from the Crime Scene Bureau should be here shortly. I contacted them based on what you told the 911 operator on the phone.”

Ray dutifully got back into the driver’s seat of his 4-Runner and watched as Deputy Todd carefully approached the abandoned Mercedes. Ray noticed that the deputy was constantly monitoring the surrounding ground and river, presumably watching for the appearance of any hungry alligators. Seeing this behavior from the deputy enforced the fact that Ray and his family should have stayed in the car, as the deputy was armed with a Glock 9 mm handgun and still seemed to be concerned for his safety. The deputy walked around the car, closely examining the body without touching anything, being careful not to disturb any evidence. After he was finished he returned to the 4-Runner and motioned for Ray to roll down the window. He said, “You weren’t kidding when you described the murder scene, and I think that we can safely assume that this was a murder. I’ve seen some nasty things on this job, but this is one of the most unsettling. The car’s license plate is from New York, so whoever this man is, he’s probably a tourist. I’m sure that the Crime Bureau investigators and Crime Scene guys will be able to identify him and figure out what went on here.”

Ray responded, "Frankly I'm still shaking a little from finding him in that condition. I can't imagine how in the hell he got himself into this mess. Do you need anything else from us Officer?"

Deputy Todd answered, "I'll need you to speak to the Crime Bureau Investigator when he arrives, and to describe how you came to be here and how you found the body. Anything that you can think of to tell him would be helpful. You'll have to wait and see what specific questions he has for you."

At that point two police cars, both unmarked, pulled up behind the deputy's car. A man got out of one and a woman got out of the other. The two nodded in recognition of each other and shook hands. They were both dressed in plain clothes rather than police uniforms. The man looked to be in his early forties, average height and weight, about five foot ten and one hundred seventy pounds, brown hair, brown eyes, good looking, clean shaven, and surprisingly well-groomed for a police detective, with a prominent chin and somewhat sculpted features. He was wearing a dress shirt, tie, jacket, and matching pants; appearance was clearly important to him, and his clothes were neatly pressed, buttoned down and quite stylish. The woman appeared to be in her early thirties, with flaming red hair down to her shoulders, blue eyes, a strikingly beautiful face with a smattering of freckles that spanned the bridge of her nose, and full, sensuous lips. She was shorter than the man, on the order of five foot six with a slender waist and curves in all the right places. She was wearing a blue strappy summer blouse, a fairly low-cut front that revealed a surprising amount of cleavage and a matching skirt that was cut well above the knees. Somehow, due to her excellent physical condition and

her serious demeanor she was able to project an air of professional authority in spite of this somewhat revealing outfit. Ray took notice and ventured to stare at her a bit too long. His wife elbowed him in the ribs and suggested that this was not the appropriate time to ogle the local authorities.

The two plain clothes officers approached Deputy Todd and greeted him in turn by shaking hands. Deputy Todd accepted the woman's hand first, and he said, "Hello Alanna. Good to see you again, although I'm afraid that we have a crime scene here that is strange beyond anything in my experience." He turned to Ray, still sitting in his 4-Runner with the window down. "Mr. Jackson, this is Alanna O'Connell, one of our Collier County Crime Scene Investigators. She'll be examining the scene for evidence to hopefully explain what happened here."

Ray stuck his hand out of the window and shook her hand. "Pleased to meet you Alanna, and you can call me Ray" Ray said. "Hopefully you'll be able to make some sense out of this. My family is still in shock from what we found here this morning."

"Pleased to meet you, Ray," she responded. "We'll take a careful look at the crime scene and hopefully will find something that'll lead us to the people responsible. Deputy Todd mentioned a little about the crime scene when he phoned it in, and from what I heard from dispatch it truly is an alarming situation. I'm sorry that your family had to stumble onto it."

Ray's wife Donna noticed that Ray did not bother to introduce her to the red haired beauty that was the Collier County Crime Scene Investigator, but she kept quiet.

She preferred to believe that it was because she was sitting on the passenger side of the 4-Runner and unable to shake the hand of Investigator O'Connell, and not that Ray was too distracted to remember that he had a wife sitting next to him in the car. She also made note of the fact that her husband chose to remain in the SUV rather than get out to meet these officers face-to-face, and she was fairly sure that this was because Ray was concerned about the possibility of an imminent gator attack. He had never been a particularly brave man and she had often wondered how well he could protect her and their daughter.

Alanna stepped back from the driver's window of the SUV and the man in the suit and tie positioned himself to shake Ray's hand. Deputy Todd said, "Mr. Jackson, this is CBI Investigator Richard Gorman. Rick is one of our senior investigators, and I specifically requested him based on the disturbing nature of the crime. I'm confident that Rick can get to the bottom of this and do so in a timely manner. Rick, this is Ray Jackson. Mr. Jackson and his family are the ones that found the abandoned Mercedes this morning. They got quite an unpleasant surprise when they inspected the vehicle. He has assured me that neither he nor any member of his family disturbed anything at the crime scene, and I took a quick look and couldn't find any evidence of anything being moved or disturbed. Although, Ray and his family did leave quite a few footprints adjacent to the crime scene. We should probably do something to rule out their footprints in case the perpetrator also left some that would help with his identification."

Investigator Gorman presented his hand to Ray, and Ray shook it. When Investigator Gorman reached through the window, Ray noticed that he was wearing a

Glock 9 mm pistol in a shoulder holster under his left arm. Investigator Gorman said, "Nice to meet you Mr. Jackson."

Ray responded, "It's a pleasure to meet you too, Investigator Gorman." He continued somewhat excitedly, looking in Investigator O'Connell's direction as he spoke, "When we saw the abandoned car, I knew there was something wrong. I felt obliged to check out the car to see if anyone was hurt in spite of the alligators that were everywhere. I tried my best to get my wife and daughter to stay in our SUV, but they insisted on following me. I wanted to protect them from seeing whatever was in the back seat of the abandoned car, and I also wanted to protect them from the alligators. I can tell you that what we found was very disturbing. I chased them back to our SUV and dialed 911 as soon as I was sure of what we had found. I hope that you can find whoever did this quickly. I wouldn't want to think that this could happen again. I'm also guessing that this sort of thing would have a negative impact on the tourist trade in this area of South Florida if the press gets hold of the story. As for me and my family, based on our experience this morning we are seriously considering packing up and heading back to Minnesota." The fact that Ray's wife rolled her eyes at his description of events was not lost on the investigator.

Investigator Gorman responded, concern in his voice, "I haven't seen the crime scene yet, but from what I've been told I can certainly understand why you would feel that way. However, I'm going to need for you to stay around for a couple of days. Once we've had a chance to examine the crime scene we'll most likely have some additional

questions for you. You might have information from your initial inspection of the crime scene that has some bearing on the case.”

Ray looked to his wife Donna for her response to this question. She cautiously nodded, and smiled her biggest smile at Investigator Gorman. She was not a bad looking woman, and she was hopeful that he might smile back at her, but to her disappointment she got no noticeable reaction at all. Ray said to the investigator, “Sure, we’ll be happy to stay in South Florida for a few days in case you have additional questions. Although, we’ll probably spend that time at the beach rather than in the Everglades.”

Investigator Gorman grinned and said, “Thank you. I appreciate your willingness to help, and I certainly understand your reluctance to spend any more time than necessary in the Everglades. I’ll bet the Gulf beach does look pretty good to you right now.” He reached in his breast pocket, pulled something out and passed it through the SUV window. “Here’s my card. Please feel free to give me a call if you or your family want to talk about what you found. The sheriff’s office also has a trauma counselor on staff if you, your wife or daughter want to talk to a professional. Sometimes dealing with something as alarming as this can have long term effects, especially on young ones”, he was looking at Kelly as he said this. The investigator was known around the sheriff’s office as going overboard with his concern for those affected by criminal activity, although he was also known for his tenacity at chasing down the bad guys.

Then Investigators Gorman and O'Connell went back to their respective cars to gather equipment required for examining the crime scene and collecting evidence. Investigator Gorman brought along his camera, and once he had taken an initial look at the Mercedes and the body in the back seat he began to photograph the scene from wide angles. Investigator O'Connell appeared to be more interested in closely examining the body, the interior and exterior of the car and the surrounding ground; from time to time she would carefully pick something up and place it in an evidence bag.

This process went on for over an hour, before Investigator Gorman walked over to the squad car where Deputy Todd was standing, talking on his cell phone. Investigator Gorman asked, "Frank, have you heard from the medical examiner yet? We can't move the body until he gets here, performs his examination and provides us with a probable time of death. Hopefully he'll also have something to say about the cause of death. I don't see anything obvious like bullet wounds or evidence of strangulation."

Deputy Todd responded, "I just got off the phone with his office. Apparently he was out on another case this morning, but he's headed here now, ETA about fifteen minutes."

Investigator Gorman went to his car and retrieved two bottles of water from a cooler in the trunk. He then walked back to the crime scene and offered one of the bottles of water to Investigator O'Connell. Ray's wife, Donna, said to Ray under her

breath, "I see that the red haired beauty is the only one that rates a cool drink. I'm guessing that she gets special treatment wherever she goes."

Ray was also thirsty as well as hungry, as the noon hour had come and gone and the temperature had risen significantly since they had first stumbled on the abandoned car. He thought to himself, "She is a good looking woman, but it would have been nice if Investigator Gorman had brought enough water to give us all a cool drink."

Ray called to Deputy Todd, who was now leaning against his squad car smoking a cigarette. "Deputy Todd, do you know how much longer this is going to take? My family and I are getting hungry and thirsty, and we would like to go somewhere for lunch."

Deputy Todd answered, "I have some cold waters in the trunk of my car if you would like. Unfortunately, the nearest restaurant is about fifteen miles away. The Investigators are almost finished with their examination of the crime scene. The only thing holding us up is the medical examiner, who should be here any minute. In the meantime, I'll ask the Investigators if they could go ahead and ask you any questions they might have at this point so that you can be on your way."

With that, Deputy Todd delivered three cold bottled waters to Ray and his family and then walked over to the crime scene and had a short conversation with the two investigators. He returned to the driver's side of the 4-Runner and said, "Investigator Gorman told me to go ahead and take your statement for now, and let you go. I'll take

down your cell phone number and address where you are staying so that we can get in touch with you with any additional questions later.”

Ray said, “Thank you. That would be great.” And with that, Ray, Donna and Kelly each described to Deputy Todd what they had found on Turner River Road that morning. He took a note pad out of his pocket and wrote copious notes as each of them described their impression of the crime scene. The daughter, Kelly, had been the first to notice the abandoned car. It caught her eye and seemed a bit strange mainly because the front of the car was partially sitting in a pool of calm water off to the side of the river bank. She had thought that this was an odd way to treat a shiny new car. When the family had left their 4-Runner to investigate, Kelly had seen the body first, but Ray was close behind. He had noticed that the dead man was dressed in expensive leisure clothes that suggested he was on vacation. He had also clearly seen that the man’s penis had been cut off, and upon further examination he had discovered that it was stuffed in the man’s mouth. Donna had also glimpsed the fact that the man’s pants and underwear were pulled down around his ankles, and she had seen the fact that his penis had been removed. However, she had not had time to look for the missing organ before Ray had shoed her and their daughter away from the scene. Interestingly, it was the daughter who had not only seen the genital mutilation but also had the presence of mind to note that there was very little blood at the crime scene for such a terrible act. She had no idea of the significance of this observation, but she was the only one to make it. Fortunately Ray had shoed her away before seeing that the man’s severed penis had been stuffed in his mouth.

About that time a large vehicle pulled up behind the police cars. A man in a blue jump suit got out of the van on the passenger's side and approached Deputy Todd. The man was carrying what appeared to be a doctor's bag. He was approximately six foot two, and appeared overweight at about two hundred fifty pounds. He looked to be in his early sixties, balding and wearing thick glasses. He had very thin eyebrows, a prominent nose, a moustache and goatee and small beady eyes that made him look like an evil genius from a James Bond movie. As he approached the deputy, he said, "Sorry that it took so long for me to get here. I had another crime scene this morning, and we took that body back to the morgue. I didn't even get to examine it before we got the call to come to your crime scene, so I am going to be working late."

Ray assumed that this was the medical examiner; the man was not interested in meeting the family that had found the body. Ray heard Deputy Todd call to the man, "Hello Joe," as he headed directly to the crime scene.

Deputy Todd explained to Ray and his family that this was the Collier County medical examiner, Joseph Berman, M.D. "Joe is always in a hurry," the deputy added. "We have had a number of deaths in the county lately that have kept him hopping. He doesn't have an assistant, so he puts in very long hours what with visiting crime scenes, performing autopsies and testifying in court.

Dr. Berman did the preliminary examination of the body without moving it any more than necessary, and only after the Investigators had collected all the pictures, notes and evidence that they deemed necessary. Investigators Gorman and O'Connell

watched, and after Berman had finished his preliminary exam, Investigator O'Connell said, "I found both the vics wallet and car registration. His name is Roy Houston, from Syracuse, New York. According to his birth date he's seventy-one years old. I ran him through the national database and he's listed as a circuit court judge in Syracuse. We aren't sure what he's doing in South Florida, but it's likely he was on vacation. From his positioning in the back seat, it appears like he was looking for a good time and he got a lot more than he bargained for.

Investigator Gorman asked Dr. Berman, "Joe, what about time of death and cause of death? Can you provide us with any preliminary information?"

He responded, "Liver temperature and the body rigidity suggest that the victim died within the last twelve hours as a best first estimation. As to cause of death, I have no idea at this point. There are no obvious wounds on the body, with the exception of the rather inexpert surgery to the man's genitalia. The most striking thing about the crime scene in that regard is the fact that there is so little blood, suggesting that the penis was removed post mortem. So that's not the cause of death."

Investigator Gorman chimed in, "I'm glad to hear you say that, Joe. I was having a great deal of difficulty dealing with the fact that this "inexpert surgery" as you call it might have been performed while the man was still alive."

After Dr. Berman finished examining the body, he placed it in a body bag and lifted it into the back of the van that served as the M.E.'s vehicle. It would be transported to the M.E.'s office where he would perform an autopsy. The investigators watched but

stayed out of the way. After the body was in the van, Investigator Gorman asked, “Joe, how soon can we get a cause of death? That information will be key in determining how we proceed from here.”

Dr. Berman responded, “Rick, I already have another autopsy to perform before this one. I’ll do my best to finish both tonight so that I can give you the particulars for your case tomorrow morning. That’s the best that I can do.”

Investigator Gorman replied, “That’s great. Can’t ask for any more than that. We just want to get out in front of this thing as best possible, before the perp heads for the hills. If it turns out to be a tourist that did this, he may be half the way back to his home state by now. Alanna and I will talk to you tomorrow morning.”

By this time, Deputy Todd had finished taking the statements from the Jackson family. He sent them on their way after soliciting Ray’s promise that they would stick around for the next few days to answer any additional questions. Then he gave his notes from the interview to Investigator Gorman. “I’ll see you back at the station around four this afternoon, and we can go over your notes”, Gorman said to the deputy. “I doubt that the Jackson family can provide us with much more useful information. I’m not surprised that they were shaken up by the crime scene, but when people are that upset they aren’t likely to be observant of details. It sounds like once they found the body all they wanted to do was get back to the safety of their car and flee the area. I’m actually impressed that they stayed put and called 911. They could have just driven away and

no one would have had any idea that they had ever been there.” With that Deputy Todd got into his squad car and headed off to lunch.

Investigators Gorman and O’Connell stood beside his car and talked about the crime scene for a few minutes before heading back to the police station. Alanna said, “Damn, that was ugly. This guy must have really pissed someone off. The act of cutting off his dick and stuffing it in his mouth makes this murder seem very personal, like an angry girlfriend or the husband of some woman that this guy did on the side. On the other hand, it could have been a very sick hooker. What baffles me is that Joe couldn’t find any obvious cause of death. And there’s no evidence of any type of murder weapon. I guess that we’ll just have to wait for Joe’s autopsy report as to cause of death and go from there. Do you want to grab a bite to eat before we go back to the station?”

Rick said, “Sure. How about we drive into Marco Island and get some good seafood? It’s been a while since I had any decent seafood, and there’s no hurry to get back to the station. I told Frank that we would go over the Jackson family’s statements at four o’clock this afternoon, and there’s not much else we can do until we get Joe’s report. Might as well take the time to enjoy a decent meal.”

Alanna replied, “Sure, why not? Do you have a specific place in mind?”

“Let’s go to the Snook Inn. You can sit at a table on the deck overlooking the water and they have great fried oysters, one of my favorites. Sound okay?” he answered.

Her response was, "Beats the hell out of the snack machines back at the station."

With that they got into their respective unmarked police cars and she followed him back to Marco Island. They had been busier than usual of late, and she looked forward to taking a long lunch with Rick. They worked together a lot, although she worked cases with other CBI investigators as well, both men and women. She especially enjoyed working with Rick, because he was one of the older and more experienced investigators and she always learned something new from him. Although it was not common knowledge, Rick was gay, so she could relax around him without being constantly hit on, which was not the case with many of the other CBI investigators at the station.

First thing the next morning Investigator Gorman headed for the morgue in search of Dr. Berman. He found him in his small office located just outside the autopsy room. "Good morning, Joe. How's it going?" Rick offered.

Joe replied, a tired note in his voice, "I was up late last night and got here early this morning, so I'm not in the best of moods. I was hoping to get a couple of cups of coffee into my system before you found me."

Rick said, "Sorry Joe. I'm just anxious to get the autopsy information to see if it we can find any leads to the murderer. If this guy is from out of town, the longer it takes to catch him the greater his chances of getting the hell out of Dodge before we can put him in jail."

Just about this time, Alanna appeared in the doorway. As was generally the case, she got right to the point. "Morning gentlemen. I thought that I was here early, but you both beat me to the punch. So what's the news? Anything that will lead to this crazy bastard's capture?"

Joe responded gruffly, "Well, hello Alanna. How are you this morning? Did you get a good night's sleep?" His voice carried a sarcastic tone, indicating that perhaps she could at least inquire as to whether he was alive or dead before asking about his autopsy report.

This time Alanna's reply was less aggressive, almost apologetic. "Sorry Joe. Truth is that Rick and I didn't find anything useful during our investigation of the crime scene; no hairs of any kind, no fingerprints, no useful shoeprints thanks to the Jackson family contamination of that part of the crime scene, nothing. This killer must have worn gloves. Hell, he must have worn a complete body suit to have left such a clean crime scene. He was really careful. I guess that's why Rick and I are harassing you so early this morning. We're hoping that your autopsy provides something useful so that we can go out and catch this sick bastard before he either flees the state, or worse, kills again."

"No need to apologize", Joe said a little less roughly. "I realize that time is critical in a case like this, and I'm sorry to hear that you didn't find anything useful. I stayed very late last night doing a complete autopsy on your victim."

Rick followed up with, "We were able to identify the victim from his driver's license and registration. He still had his wallet in his jacket pocket. His name was Roy

Houston and he was a 71 year old New York judge in Syracuse. I made some calls, and apparently he handled a lot of criminal cases. I guess it's possible that he made a few enemies through his job. And, according to someone that I spoke to in the judge's office, he owns an ocean front condo in Marco Island. It's called Cape Marco, located on South Beach. His condo is on the top floor of the Veracruz building, right on the Gulf beach. I've seen a couple of units in that place; they are very nice and very pricey. The judge must have done well for himself. According to his office, he's been down here on vacation. Although, none of this explains how the hell he ended up in the back seat of his Mercedes S-class with his pecker cut off and fed to him."

Joe said, "It's good you were able to identify him so easily. Are you planning to run his name through the criminal database?"

Alanna added, "We should probably look for a criminal record. I realize that he's a judge and probably doesn't have one, but you never know."

"Sounds like a reasonable idea," Rick chimed in.

Joe continued, "Well, since you are both here so bright and early, I might as well go ahead and fill you in on the results of the autopsy of your judge. I had a difficult time determining a clear cause of death. The physical signs led me to believe that he died from respiratory paralysis, which is generally not a natural cause of death, even for an overweight seventy year old man. This symptomology could, however, be caused by a poison such as a neurotoxin. The one that came immediately to mind is botulinum toxin, as in botulism. Botulinum toxin is a neurotoxic protein produced by the bacteria

Clostridia botulinum that is sometimes found in spoiled canned food and is also the main ingredient in the cosmetic product Botox®, and poisoning with this toxin can result in similar symptoms to the victim. The victim could have ingested contaminated food containing the toxin eighteen to thirty-six hours before his death and then coincidentally died in the back of his car. The more likely possibility is that the botulinum toxin was somehow administered to the victim by the murderer in a manner that would speed the time to death.”

Alanna interrupted, “You mean that the murderer could have somehow given him the poison in the car? Wouldn’t he still have to ingest the poison?”

Joe went on, “That’s the interesting part. If he ingested botulinum toxin in the car, it should have still taken eighteen hours or more for respiratory paralysis to set in, and I suspect that this sexual encounter, if that’s what it was, would not have lasted that long. The victim should have also shown symptoms such as nausea and lethargy before dying from respiratory paralysis. I believe that if botulinum toxin was the means by which the judge was killed, it must have been injected directly into his bloodstream somehow. On this suspicion, I went over the entire body looking for signs of an injection site.” At this point he paused for dramatic effect as though he were expecting a drum roll.

“Go on,” Rick said impatiently. “Did you find anything?”

Joe said triumphantly, “After an exhaustive search of the body that took half of the night, I found a tiny injection site hole. Guess where.”

“Oh for Christ sake Joe,” Alanna sounded exasperated. “It’s the crack of dawn and none of us have had much sleep. Can’t you stop this guessing game and just tell us what you found.”

Joe continued, somewhat sheepishly, “Sorry, I’m just proud that I was able to find this critical piece of evidence. I found a very small puncture hole in the right thigh fairly high up towards the scrotum. It’s just a guess, but it looks like the murderer may have coaxed the judge into the back seat and helped him to willingly pull down his pants with the promise of performing a sexual act on him. Then, when the murderer moved in close he, or she must have quickly injected the toxin into the judge’s thigh. If it is botulinum toxin, it’s very potent and could have gotten into his bloodstream, especially if the killer was able to hit an artery or vein. There are a couple of large veins in that area of the body. I want to make it clear that I’m not talking about intramuscular injection of a very small dose; that would have only caused local muscle paralysis. This would have had to be a larger dose and it would need to enter the bloodstream through a vein or artery. A dose into a vein would have killed him. Based on this hypothesis, I sent appropriate blood and tissue samples to the lab for analysis for botulinum toxin. I also requested a full tox screen, including some other more exotic neurotoxins. While I suspect based on the symptoms that botulinum toxin will be the culprit, it is possible that another neurotoxin could have been used by the killer.”

Rick said, “Excellent work, Joe. If this turns out to be the cause of death, we’ll need to take a look at where a person might get his hands on botulinum toxin. I’m guessing that this would not come from a can of spoiled food, but rather from a

laboratory or medical facility where a supply of the toxin would be available for research or medicinal purposes. That could include universities, research hospitals, pharmacies and the like. That might give us a place to start. I have a friend who has had Botox injections, and she told me that medical Botox can only be administered by a medical doctor, so it would be difficult for the killer to obtain a supply that way, unless the killer is a doctor, or perhaps a nurse. When do you expect to get back the results of the tox screen to confirm your suspicions?"

Joe said, "Thanks Rick. I asked the lab, actually begged them, to put a rush on this one. It would be a very serious issue if someone has gotten his hands on purified botulinum toxin. We want to catch this guy sooner rather than later and also recapture any toxin that he has stolen. It is also critical to note that botulinum toxin is on the list of potential bioterrorism agents and there are a number of countries that are trying to develop it for use as a weapon of mass destruction. This would include developing the toxin for inhalation administration of an aerosolized form, for example, so that a terrorist could kill as many people as possible at one time. It's my understanding that since this murder case may involve botulinum toxin, we should contact the local FBI office to let them know that we might be dealing with this toxin so that they can investigate a potential terrorist threat. If the killer stole a vial of Botox, for example, that's one thing. But if he got his hands on a larger amount of the toxin from a research facility, that is another story. That would mean that with the right training and equipment he might have enough of the toxin to create an aerosolized form."

Alanna added, "That's my understanding as well. Should we wait for the results of the tox screen or go ahead and contact the FBI now based on the symptomology of the victim and consistency with botulinum poisoning as the cause of death? I'm guessing that they would want to be involved sooner rather than later. If it turns out to be something else, the FBI can back off at that point. But if Joe is correct and this murder does involve botulinum toxin, it would be good to get the FBI involved as soon as possible. I guess that "better safe than sorry" probably applies here."

Rick said, "I can contact the FBI office in Miami. I know a guy that's assigned to the South Florida Joint Terrorism Task Force located there. I hate to sound the alarm before we're sure that botulinum toxin is involved in this case, but I agree that "better safe than sorry" probably does apply here. The FBI is more likely to have access to information regarding where one might obtain this deadly toxin in Florida and the surrounding area, and they have the resources to put agents in the field to investigate much more quickly than we do. How about I pass this by Mike, the Chief Investigator for our station, and if he agrees I'll call the FBI office?"

Alanna said, "Sounds like a good plan to me. What do you think, Joe?"

Joe responded, "I agree. Go ahead, Rick. In the meantime I'll make a couple of calls and see if I can speed up the tox screen. If this guy is poisoning people with botulinum toxin, we need to get this case closed as soon as possible, before he escalates his efforts."

Rick spoke with their Chief Investigator of their precinct, Mike Collins, who agreed that contacting the FBI was probably a good idea based on the M.E.'s theory regarding botulinum toxin. Chief Investigator Collins was usually concerned about the potential political fallout of his decisions on the future of his career, so Rick was surprised that Mike agreed to let him call the FBI before they had the laboratory results confirming botulinum toxin as the "murder weapon". But he guessed that it would be worse if they did not call and the results turned out to be positive for the toxin. Rick called the FBI office in Miami, Florida that same afternoon.

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