

## **The Balkans Project**

### Chapter 1

Springtime came to central Tennessee with a blast of warm weather and a rapid outburst of budding trees and greening lawns. The winter it replaced had been harsh; worse than in previous years, making the increasing temperatures a welcome respite from the cold and ice. Most of the populace was eager to begin planting flowers and tilling the soil in their backyard gardens. Most, but not all. Dr. Henry Schreiber despised yard work and avoided it whenever possible. With his wife of 15 years, Schreiber lived 3 blocks from his place of employment, Vanderbilt University. Having no children he was unable to foist the duties of yard work on a son or daughter. Typically, he would find one of the neighborhood boys and give him a quarter to cut the grass, usually when his wife was away and unable to shame him into doing it himself. He preferred to spend his free time working at his lab in the hospital or researching from books in his library at home.

Schreiber was an atypical resident of Nashville, not having grown in Tennessee or even the southeast but in Brooklyn. Transplants to this part of the country, especially Jewish ones were rare in 1938. The Schreibers had been accepted in the community however, particularly in the collegial confines of the university which employed a number of Jewish physicians and scientists. Most were from the northeast, some having been trained where Schreiber had matriculated, New York University.

Following his post-graduate studies in pathology at Mount Sinai Hospital, Schreiber sought to continue pursuing his research interests, degenerative conditions of the brain and nervous system. During his internship, he had taken care of a middle age man with end stage encephalopathy or diminishing brain function. The patient had been a missionary in equatorial Africa for 20 years but when he began to exhibit personality changes and hallucinations the Presbyterian Church brought him home. Less than 2 weeks after returning, his condition required hospitalization. Initially it was assumed he was suffering from malaria or some other parasitic disease. Available treatments were primitive at best. A few quinine related drugs could be used but once the brain became involved there was little to be done. Schreiber and his colleagues evaluated his blood and

spinal fluid for parasites but found none. After a few weeks, his blood counts dropped precipitously and within 48 hours he was dead.

An autopsy was performed but shed little light on the man's condition. None of his internal organs exhibited signs of infection although his colon had obviously been the source of the blood loss. The internal surfaces were studded with hundreds of red bumps. A microscopic evaluation showed abnormal growths of blood vessels. Leakage from these vessels had been responsible for his blood loss and eventual death. The man's case was presented at a medical meeting but the attendees had few insights to offer regarding the cause of his death.

Schreiber's experience with his patient sparked an interest. He sat at the microscope with the pathologists evaluating tissue sections of the man's brain. Their thoughts and remarks about their findings fascinated him. Near the end of his internship he applied to and was accepted in the pathology department residency program. Three years later he graduated and served a 6 month fellowship specializing in pathology of the brain and nervous system. He was set on a career in academic medicine. After interviewing at NYU he accepted a position as an assistant professor in the department of pathology. Less than a year into the job, however, his wife's health began to fail.

Initially, Rachael noticed blanching in two of her fingers, usually after exposure to cold water. With the application of warmth they returned to normal within minutes. Over time, however, more fingers and eventually her toes became symptomatic. The bouts turned from once or twice per month to almost daily. Warming became less effective and the pain associated with the outbreaks was excruciating. When she could no longer perform routine activities, her husband arranged for an appointment with one of the staff physicians at NYU who diagnosed her with Raynaud's phenomenon. Extensive testing revealed no underlying cause for her condition. The Schreibers conferred with the rheumatologist who stated there was little he could do for her condition and suggested they consider relocating to a warmer climate. Without a change in their residence, her condition would worsen. In time, the blood flow to her digits might even become so tenuous she could experience gangrene and require amputation.

The Schreibers took a few days and discussed their options. Both of their families lived nearby and neither had ever considered living anywhere but New York. To move

away had been unthinkable. Within the week, however, Rachael experienced a particularly bad outbreak prompting Dr. Schreiber to make his decision. They would have to leave.

He considered Florida. Many of his relatives vacationed there in the colder months. His father suggested otherwise. While the winter weather was nice, the summers were often unbearable. California was out of the question. It was too far away, practically on a different continent. Schreiber recalled a fellow resident who had taken a position with Vanderbilt University in Nashville. He contacted him the next day.

His friend's glowing report on the town and Vanderbilt University convinced Schreiber to make contact. He phoned the chairman of the pathology department who was more than accommodating. The department was a new addition to the institution and was eagerly seeking additional faculty. Schreiber's expertise in neuropathology would be a welcome niche. Two days later, he was on a train to Nashville.

Schreiber's first impression wasn't stellar. The people, while abundantly friendly compared to those in New York, spoke with an odd accent, at times almost unintelligible. The town was small, possessing only two buildings taller than 10 stories. Trees were everywhere and it seemed to Schreiber the city had been built in the middle of a forest. He decided to keep an open mind but surely little of substance could be expected of a university in such a setting.

To Schreiber's surprise, Dr. Thomas Miller, the chairman of the pathology department, met him at the train station. No one of such academic stature in New York hospitals would have undertaken such a lowly task. *They must really be desperate*, he thought to himself.

Miller was tall, thin man with a beard and deep southern accent. He shook Schreiber's hand with enthusiasm as though they were long lost friends. The two drove to Vanderbilt University Hospital with Miller pointing out civic landmarks along the way.

Schreiber was impressed with the state of the hospital and its facilities. His colleagues in New York had occasionally made disparaging remarks about medical centers below the Mason-Dixon line but from his perspective, Vanderbilt's facilities were every bit as substantive as those at Mount Sinai or NYU.

Following a tour of the hospital and its laboratories, the two men retired to Miller's office for a formal interview. Schreiber described his research interests with Miller taking notes and occasionally interjecting comments. The Pathology Department had been started from scratch 6 years earlier. There were currently 4 full time academicians, none with training in neuropathology. When the interview was concluded, Miller had made his decision. He offered Schreiber a position and a laboratory in which to pursue his research. Schreiber told him he would think about it and give him an answer in a week.

Rachael's reaction to the proposed move was surprisingly enthusiastic, something her husband had not anticipated. He was similarly excited. The prospect of getting in on the ground floor of a burgeoning department was appealing and being given space for his research was likely more than he could expect from any position available in New York. Schreiber phoned Miller the next day and accepted the job. Within a week, they had packed their belongings and were on a train to Nashville.

Schreiber's workplace was everything he had hoped it would be. His colleagues were supportive and pleased at having someone on staff with his expertise. With his interest in neurodegenerative conditions he began receiving consultations from all over the south as well as invitations to lecture in regional universities.

As with most physicians in academic settings, Schreiber began to collect and catalogue specimens from interesting patients. In the days before more sophisticated technology became available, many specimens were simply categorized as "etiology uncertain" meaning the patient's condition couldn't be better defined diagnostically. In the 1940's and 50's patients being admitted to the hospital with unusual symptoms and dying within a few days wasn't uncommon. An autopsy would often be performed, occasionally providing some insight into the cause of death, but often revealing nothing. These cases comprised the subject matter Schreiber sought and he found them in ever increasing quantities.

But how to track them? Schreiber proved to be ahead of his time in this respect. In his era, pathologic diagnoses were categorized according to the organ of the body involved and well known clinical diagnoses. While this made for easier assimilation of knowledge, it stunted the expansion of a more defined classification of possible

abnormalities involving other organ systems. Schreiber kept voluminous notes, cross referenced with case numbers from other patients with similar abnormalities. In the days before computers, his work was revolutionary. Additionally, Schreiber was blessed with an almost flawless memory. When confronted with a difficult case, he was often able to consult his archives and assimilate several similar presentations for evaluation. His work made him particularly proliferate in writing scientific articles and lecturing.

On the first Saturday of April 1964, Schreiber glanced out the window at his lawn and realized it needed mowing. The warm weather of the previous two weeks had caused it to grow at a rapid pace and many of his neighbors were already busy at work in their yards. He knew what was coming. Rachael was getting ready to leave for the monthly meeting of her garden club, held in one of the monstrous houses of Belle Meade two blocks from the temple where they worshiped.

“While I’m gone, will you do me a favor and cut the grass?” she asked.

“Do you really think it needs it?” Schreiber responded, feigning ignorance.

Rachael looked at him over her glasses.

“Yes, it does. And don’t get one of the neighbor boys to do it for you.”

“Why not?”

“Because you need the exercise and the time outdoors will do you good. You’ve been holed up in that library of yours the entire winter toiling over those musty old books and it’s time you were outside breathing fresh air.”

Schreiber mumbled under his breath but realized his wife was right. He had been spending an inordinate amount of time lately working at night and on the weekends. It wouldn’t take long and after completing the task Rachael would be less likely to request any additional outdoor labor. At least for the near future.

He kissed his wife goodbye. After watching her drive away, he walked to the garage, extracted the hand mower from behind some bags of potting soil and began pushing the contraption towards the back yard.

When Schreiber began his work it was nearly 10:00 A.M. and the sun was high in the clear blue sky. The temperature began to climb commensurately. After 15 minutes, Schreiber was sweating profusely and wondering why he hadn’t ignored his wife’s wishes and hired the job out. Near the back part of the property were several tall crepe

myrtles Rachael had planted several years earlier. She had faithfully watered and fertilized them until all were at least 20 feet tall. Schreiber had to admit, when they were in bloom, they were a thing of beauty.

Schreiber had mowed beneath two of the shrubs when a drop of sweat trickled into his left eye. He pushed the mower aside and used his T-shirt to wipe his face. Now seemed a good time to take a break. Schreiber reached the back porch steps still rubbing his left eye. When he removed his hand, the vision in that eye was gone. Panic swept over him. As he stumbled into the house, an excruciating pain hit him in the back of his head. His knees buckled and he grabbed his neck. Nausea flooded over him. He lay on the kitchen floor his mouth opening and closing spasmodically as he tried to form words no one would hear.

Schreiber had presided over hundreds if not thousands of brain autopsies from patients who had died from a stroke. He had tediously dissected these tissues trying to discern the exact vessel or vessels which had burst and correlate them with the patient's clinical findings. One of Schreiber's crowning achievements, in fact, had been a revolutionary classification of cerebral hemorrhage patterns found in the brain. It had resulted in a seminal paper for which he had received the prestigious Howard Crittendon award in neurosciences and an invitation to speak at the University of Chicago.

As Schreiber lay on the floor in his kitchen, mute and partially blind, he began calculating from his neurologic deficits where the damage in his brain resided. As his sensorium became clouded he knew his fate. Just before he blacked out, he concluded the culprit was the circle of connecting arteries at the base of his brain. His wife would find him several hours later, a slight smile on his face.

## Chapter 2

When Justin Douglas returned from the bathroom, such as it was, he pulled the blue sheet of plastic back from his “examination” room to find a young man on the makeshift table sweating and jabbering excitedly in Spanish. Douglas’s interpreter was stifling a laugh.

“So what’s the problem?” Douglas asked.

“He got hit in the head with a rock,” Caesar replied, smiling.

Douglas bent over the patient and noted a hen’s egg sized swelling over the man’s left eyebrow.

“Do I want to know how this happened?”

The man began speaking again, his hands making wild gestures. Though he spoke almost no Spanish, Douglas managed to make out a few words, none of which were polite.

“He caught his neighbor trying to steal one of his chickens,” Caesar explained. “It was in the branches of a tree near his property and the man was climbing up reaching for it. When he told him to stop, they argued, the neighbor picked up a stone and threw it at him.”

“Accurately, it would appear.”

Caesar laughed out loud. “I guess so.”

“Did he pass out?”

“No. Just started cursing.”

“Is the neighbor alright?”

Caesar asked about the state of the patient’s combatant. Again, the Spanish flew fast and furious from the man’s mouth.

“He threw a rock back at him but he missed. He says he will find him later.”

“No doubt. How is his vision?”

Caesar inquired but shrugged his shoulders. “He doesn’t understand.”

Douglas gently touched the contusion causing the patient to wince. He rolled the man’s eyelids up and down checking for any sign of bleeding but found none. Head wounds were something Douglas was familiar with in the United States but usually they were more serious. With no other reason to worry about the man’s state of health there

was little more he could do. He hunched over the decrepit night stand serving as his desk and began writing a prescription for ibuprofen. When finished, he handed the paper to the patient.

“Does he have any access to ice?”

“No,” Caesar replied.

“Aren’t you going to ask him?”

“I don’t need to. No one has ice unless they pay for it. There are no refrigerators here.”

“Can he buy some?”

Caesar inquired. The man shook his head and jabbered again in rapid-fire Spanish.

“He doesn’t have the money.”

Douglas smiled as he wiped the sweat from his forehead. The day was heating up rapidly.

“Okay,” he said, nodding his head. “Tell him to take two of the pills as he needs them every 4 hours for pain. He shouldn’t do too much today, just lie down and rest. He might also want to avoid his neighbor for the time being.”

Caesar laughed and began translating. After a few minutes, the man looked at Douglas and asked, “*Solamente?*”

“Yeah,” Douglas responded. “Tell him that’s it. He’s good to go.”

The patient rose from the examining table and Caesar pointed in the direction of the makeshift pharmacy several doors down.

Ten patients later, one of the day workers in the clinic stuck her head in the door of Douglas’s clinic room and announced that lunch had arrived. Caesar stood, stretched his back and informed the remaining patients they would have to wait until the clinic resumed in an hour or so. None seemed overly concerned or disappointed. They walked back to the benches in the courtyard and resumed chatting with their neighbors or feeding their children.

Douglas was part of a week long medical missions trip to Nicaragua. A second year resident in dermatology, he had used a portion of his allotted vacation time to see

patients with skin diseases. This was his first trip with Medical Missions International and, for the most part, he had enjoyed himself.

The group was staying in the capital, Managua at a local hotel several miles from the church where the clinics were held. The rooms were reasonably comfortable, without any obvious evidence of rodent infestation and all possessed an air conditioner. Given the proximity of Nicaragua to the equator and the low elevation of the city, the weather was routinely warm, even in what passed for winter. It was the dry season in late January with little or no rain and the dust was overwhelming. Douglas could hardly imagine what the living conditions were like in the summer when the downpours turned the streets and alleyways into mud and elevated the humidity to oppressive levels.

He had been surprised at the number of patients needing treatment. Most suffered from itching and dermatitis which could be addressed with a cortisone shot, some antibiotics and a sample of a better soap. Most of the populace, he learned, used the cheapest bath soap available or laundry detergent for their personal hygiene, a practice often resulting in irritated skin. He saw other conditions as well but overall, it had become somewhat boring. He reminded himself this trip wasn't for his educational benefit, rather to help people with nowhere else to seek relief from their ailments. The group was scheduled to fly home in three days and he was looking forward to getting back to civilization.

The next day was Sunday and the group attended church services in the same building where the clinic was held. Douglas wasn't surprised to find some of his patients were members. All were very polite, obviously quite glad to have visitors. The children were clean and usually dressed in whatever passed for their better clothes. None of the men, or boys for that matter, ever wore shorts, something Douglas found odd since the temperatures certainly seemed to call for it.

The services were conducted in Spanish with a mingling of English for the *Norte Americanos*. Unlike congregations in the US, the starting time wasn't set in stone. It was slated to commence at 9:00 A.M. but in actuality, began when most of the attendees were present. In this particular case, the minister, Jose Arturo, didn't take to the podium until nearly 9:15. He welcomed the groups gathered, noting the presence of the visiting medical team although it would have been hard to miss them. Most were at least 6 inches

taller than the native population and considerably healthier. One of the team spoke briefly to the congregation in Spanish, citing their gratitude for the hospitality and pleasure at being back for another year's worship and clinics. A young man from the neighborhood led the singing. What he lacked in voice training he compensated for with enthusiasm. Douglas could make out some of the words but for the most part simply hummed along.

When the services were finished, Douglas and the others milled around chatting with the church members, holding the babies, always in abundance and taking photographs. After lunch, they would travel to a nearby town, Masaya, to view the active volcano in an adjacent national park and visit the city's mercado or market. The veterans of the trip had told him it would be a good opportunity to pick up souvenirs for the folks back home and relax before the final clinic the following day.

By Tuesday, Justin was ready to go home. Their flight, on Continental Airlines, was the only one of the day leaving for Houston and was scheduled to go wheels up at 8:45 A.M.

The line to check in at Continental was nearly 40 yards long and snaked well into the main body of the building. Like most affairs in this Central American country, it proceeded at a snail's pace. Eventually, he received his boarding pass, went through the metal detectors and walked with his group to the lounge upstairs where he and the rest of the flight's passengers waited for the boarding call.

The weather in Managua was clear and sunny, portending another hot day in the tropics. Douglas had a window seat affording him a spectacular view of the volcanoes, both active and dormant, which had provided this poor country with its rich soil. Imprinted on their sides were the residues of past eruptions, some more than a millennia old. He wondered what would happen in the event one were to erupt again. Given the nation's precipitous economics, the ramifications would be catastrophic. Honduras, the country to Nicaragua's north, had been devastated by Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and was still struggling to right itself nearly a decade later.

A rainstorm had blown into Houston several hours before their arrival making for a bumpy approach and landing. Douglas had gone to medical school in Houston. He remembered the wet weather dominating the end of winter and beginning of spring. The

clouds would often remain fixed for weeks at a time. Douglas gathered his bags and said his goodbyes to the rest of the group. Houston had been the gathering point for the team and he was the only member taking a flight to Nashville.

After the plane touched down in Nashville, Douglas exited the concourse and scanned the waiting crowd for a familiar face. Paul Grabel, a childhood friend, was doing research at Vanderbilt University and had agreed to pick him up at the airport. He didn't have to search long. Standing over 6' 3", his friend stood out from the rest of the audience if for no other reason than he looked like he had been living under a bridge. Grabel was wearing a hat which traced its origins back several decades. It bore the well worn logo of a local feed store in Rotan, Texas. Grabel's sweatshirt read "Toxic Mullet, Southwest New Mexico Tour 1999 - From Hobbs to Hell".

Grabel had moved to Rotan midway through his 3<sup>rd</sup> grade year after his father had been transferred to the local natural gas company headquarters. It was a difficult adjustment. Rotan, like many small towns in Texas, was clannish. Some families traced their roots back to the original settlers in the 1840's. Douglas felt sorry for Grabel, or "Grabe" as he would come to be known, and reached out to him. They became fast friends. With Douglas's acceptance of the newcomer, the other kids fell in line. When he was searching for places to do a residency in dermatology, Grabe highly recommended Nashville and Vanderbilt. He hadn't been wrong.

"No flowers?" Douglas said as he approached his friend.

"Do I look gay?" Grabel responded.

"More and more. Love the sweatshirt, by the way."

"Seemed appropriate. How was it?"

"Hot and full of Nicaraguans."

"What are the odds. Bring me anything?"

"What are you, my child?"

Douglas stopped walking and placed his carry on bag on the floor. After rummaging around for a few moments he produced a small coin purse made from the preserved skin of a frog. On one side the head was attached, its eyes replaced with glass beads. The animal's face bore a quizzical expression, its mouth slightly agape.

Grabel laughed out loud. He held it in his hands and worked the zipper on the side.

“This is appalling,” he said with a smile.

“It had your name written all over it. I bought a bunch for the residents and nurses.”

“So I’m not really all that special?” Grabel said with a smile.

“You’re unique, just like everybody else.”

“I’m touched.”

“I always thought so.”

The two walked to the baggage claim area beneath the main concourse. Douglas’s duffel bag was one of the first to appear. He grabbed it and ambled back towards his friend. His back had stiffened causing him to walk with an abnormal gait.

“What’s with the limp? Grabel asked.

“My back hurts.”

“Does him needs a massage?”

“Not from you. The bed I was sleeping in was apparently constructed for the Spanish Inquisition. I woke up everyday feeling like a pretzel.”

“Pretty barren accommodations, huh?”

“Could have been worse. I could have been bunking with you and listen to snoring all night.”

“Ouch. That really hurt,” Grabel said. “By the way, you reek. Don’t they have soap and water down there?”

“They do. But the showers don’t have hot water so you make them brief. Besides, the air pollution is awful. Ten minutes after I left the hotel my shirt smelled like campfires and diesel fuel exhaust.”

“Well, at least you’re back. Miss me?”

“Like an aneurysm. Here, carry this,” Douglas said, shoving his duffel bag in Grabel’s direction.

“Yes, massa,” Grabel responded taking it.

Both walked in silence across the street to the parking garage. Douglas’s back became more painful with each step.

“Where did you park, Memphis?”

“It’s just a little further. Want to wait here and I’ll come pick you up?”

Douglas straightened his posture, his pride kicking in.

“No, I can make it.”

Douglas glanced at the empty parking spaces they were passing.

“None of these were acceptable?”

“They just didn’t have the right feel for me. Besides, you need the exercise.”

“True enough.”

After arriving at his condominium, Douglas unpacked his bags. His dirty clothes smelled worse than he remembered. He put them in the washing machine and started it. By the time he had finished sorting through his mail, he could feel the stress of the trip peeling off him like an onion. After a long, hot shower he went to bed.

The next morning Douglas returned to work still feeling the effects of his journey despite 9 hours of sleep. He groaned when he saw the pile of paperwork waiting for him in his cubicle.

Douglas donned his white coat and glanced again at the stack of papers on his desk. For the time being, they’d have to wait. He walked into the hall nearly bumping into Dr. Jerry Fielding, the department’s dermatopathologist. Fielding was well thought of by the residents. He was always in a good mood and a conscientious teacher. He also had an appropriate outlook on the practice of medicine and its place in the bigger picture. While good at his job, he was devoted to his family and preferred spending his free time with them or at Home Depot.

Fielding was somewhat of an anomaly. Trained in both dermatology and dermatopathology, the discipline of microscopic interpretation of skin biopsies, he continued to see clinic patients. It was Fielding who had encouraged Douglas to go to Nicaragua.

“So, how was the trip?” he asked.

“Good. You were right about what I needed to take and what I’d see. Lots of infected eczema and dry skin. The staff in Managua said to tell you hello. They think highly of you.”

“They’re nice folks. Overwhelmed, as I’m sure you noticed. Did your laundry smell as bad as I said it would?” Fielding asked with a smile.

“Awful. It went directly into the washing machine.”

The two men walked down the hall towards the nurse’s station. Fielding was headed to the hospital to begin reading out the days skin biopsy slides.

“Given any more thought to that project we talked about?”

Three weeks earlier, Fielding had approached Douglas with a suggestion for a research study. The residents were expected to engage in at least one each year. Most were simple – writing a case report about an interesting patient or giving a short presentation at a medical meeting. Fielding’s project, however, was more elaborate. It involved tracking down old tissue specimens and re-evaluating them. He had an interest in skin tumors containing abnormal blood vessels and he had published several papers on the subject. Douglas considered Fielding’s offer a complement but it was going to involve a lot of grunt work.

“Yeah,” he said. “I’ll take the gig. Where do you want me to start?”

“Come by the office after clinic and we’ll chat. I’ll lay it all out for you and give you some pointers as to where to begin.”

“See you this afternoon,” Douglas said.

### Chapter 3

Earl Glusac had lived in Livingston, Tennessee all of his life which by most standards, was an accomplishment in itself. Like most small, rural communities it was in the throes of a slow death. Those who had grown up there and left for college or military service rarely returned. Farming, the lifeblood of towns like Livingston, had become an increasingly dour profession. The smaller operations had either gone bankrupt or closed when the owners couldn't find anyone to take over the business. The old timers remained but there was little fresh blood in the community and it showed.

Glusac lived on 150 acres 6 miles from town. Initially a dairy farm, it had been in his family for years. When Glusac's only son, Daniel, obtained a degree in pharmacy from the University of Tennessee and moved to Chattanooga, the family's legacy was at an end. In 1993 Earl's wife of 47 years, Pauline, died of a heart attack. Glusac sold his remaining cows the next spring and took to raising hay, a cash crop requiring less work. The money wasn't as good but it was steady and Glusac had minimal needs. With fewer time constraints, he spent hours on his front porch staring at the hills surrounding his property.

It was a bucolic picture, at least on the surface. Glusac was of a different generation, one not given to emotional expression and suspicious of mental illness. Families often had resources only sufficient for mere survival much less for "weakness of the mind" as he had heard his elders refer to it. Afflictions such as depression, bipolar disorders and "addictions" surely existed but weren't spoken of in polite company. People with those conditions were considered weak or lazy and often the subject of malicious gossip. Diagnosis and treatment for mental illness was limited. Those who couldn't overcome their demons suffered in silence, self medicated or committed suicide.

Glusac was one of those people. He had dealt with depression and anger for most of the previous 40 years. He had seen a doctor in Nashville twice who prescribed anti-depressants. They had been of some help but made him drowsy, a dangerous side effect when operating farm machinery and he stopped taking them. Eventually, Glusac began self-medicating his depression with the time honored drug of choice - alcohol.

Unlike many people with depression, Glusac knew the source of his affliction. Several years earlier he had been cleaning out a closet when he found a box of

photographs. Most were of his wife and son but one envelope contained pictures from a hunting trip in the late 1950's. There were less than a dozen shots but he recognized every member of the party. A few were friends from neighboring farms but most were fellow employees of a nearby federal detention center. Glusac had taken a job there working a 4 hour evening shift to help make ends meet. He worked as a guard, usually walking the perimeter of the property armed with a shotgun and pistol. The area wasn't large, less than 35 acres total and situated in a remote part of the county.

One night, after work, he accepted an offer from a co-worker to visit a local road house for a beer. George Cooper was a long time acquaintance and like Glusac had grown up near Livingston. Both had marched with Patton's 3<sup>rd</sup> army across Europe during World War II and returned home to work on the family farm at war's end. Cooper's duties were different from Glusac's. He worked within the camp, tending to the detainees and occasionally serving as a driver. After a few beers, Cooper's tongue loosened.

"Do you know where I take these fellows?" Cooper asked.

"No."

"Memphis."

Glusac frowned.

"What's in Memphis?"

"A hospital. Down near the river."

"Are they sick?"

"Not yet."

"What does that mean?"

"It means, they go into the hospital healthy. Some come out okay but some don't come out at all."

"I don't understand."

"Do you know who these men are?"

"No. Never gave it much mind. I hardly ever see them."

"They're Slavs."

"Slavs?"

"Slavs."

Glusac shrugged his shoulders, a confused expression on his face.

“What does that mean?”

“They’re from Yugoslavia and those parts. Most of them were communist partisans fighting the Krauts during the war.”

“So why are they here? I thought they were the good guys.”

“Not to the brass. From what I hear, they were good at their job. Hit and run raids, blowing up bridges, destroying train tracks. That sort of thing. But as much as they hated the Germans, they hated us even more. When the war was over, they made it clear they were going to be in charge. If we stayed around they’d turn on us. The Allies rounded up thousands of them before the Russians stepped in. There wasn’t much we could do with them so the government brought them here.”

“All of them? To Livingston?” Glusac inquired.

Cooper waved his beer bottle around and shook his head.

“There’s other camps in North Carolina and Georgia. Some are transferred around, I suppose to keep them off balance. The camp south of Macon is for the troublemakers. Those guys don’t move, they just stay put.”

“So why are they going to Memphis?”

Cooper leaned over the table and whispered. “Experiments.”

“What?”

“That’s right. I got it from one of the higher ups here at the camp. They try stuff out on ‘em. See how it works. If they die, so what? No one knows they’re here. Everybody back home thinks they’re dead.”

“That’s not right,” Glusac said.

“I suppose not, but what else are they going to do with them?”

Glusac didn’t want to hear anymore. He told Cooper he needed to get home, paid his tab and left the bar. Glusac slept poorly that evening and for several that followed. Within 2 weeks he quit his job. He didn’t need the money that badly.

Douglas finished his clinic just before 5:00 P.M. After working his way through half the stack of papers on his desk he remembered the meeting with Dr. Fielding and walked down the hall to his office. As usual, the dermatologist was hunched over his

microscope looking at glass slides. When he heard Douglas's knock on the door he looked up, glanced at his watch and motioned the resident in.

"Sorry to be late," Douglas said. "I lost track of time. Paperwork and all."

Fielding laughed. "It does pile up in one's absence. Sometimes I wonder if it's worth taking time off considering what's waiting for you when you return."

Douglas took a seat in Fielding's office while the attending physician sunk into an overstuffed chair behind his desk.

"So what's the plan here?" Douglas asked.

Fielding smiled.

"Last fall I got a call from a dermatologist in Chattanooga who had a patient with some sort of neurological problem and was popping up with skin tumors. He sent the patient to me for evaluation. I saw him and did some skin biopsies. It was an odd case. Initially, I had no idea what the poor man had but I did some sleuthing in the medical literature."

"I found some papers from the 1960's describing patients with similar features. Eventually, I was able to diagnose him with Goldfarb's disease, named after the dermatologist in Boston who first described the condition. It was largely an academic exercise since there wasn't much to do for the patient. But it got me thinking about similar cases. Specifically, folks with skin tumors and neurological conditions. There's been some limited research in the field, the key word being 'limited.'"

Fielding was rolling a rubber band around between his thumb and index finger while he talked. It was a nervous habit and Douglas had seen him do it many times. Fielding probably had a borderline case of attention deficit disorder. He didn't fidget and squirm but he had a limited attention span and even less patience for wasting time. It was well known around the department that Fielding didn't like prolonged dialogue on most subjects except perhaps lawn care. Talking just for the sake of hearing one's voice annoyed him and he didn't mind saying so. He often remarked he could only do something for a few hours before he got bored and needed to get on to something new.

"What I need from you," Fielding stated, "is largely legwork. Back in the 40's and 50's there was a neuropathologist here named Henry Schreiber who catalogued quite a number of specimens."

“I’ve never heard of him,” Douglas said.

“Neither had I until one of the pathology profs mentioned his name and his work. Schreiber had an interest in diseases involving the degeneration of the nervous system. Lou Gehrig disease, that sort of thing. Apparently, he was obsessive about his record keeping but the methods of diagnosis were different then. The path department has a storage facility in the basement of the hospital with his notebooks, slides and tissue specimens. There’s no way to know what’s there. That’s where you come in. I need some detective work to determine what, if any, of his cases had skin findings and, if so, what they were. If he was as meticulous as rumored, he likely would have mentioned any tumors on the patients’ skin and referenced their case numbers when biopsied.”

“So you don’t have any idea what’s in the archives?”

“Not a clue. Could be nothing. Could be spectacular. Until we look, we won’t know.”

Douglas nodded his head.

“Okay, I’m game. Who do I talk with about getting access to the file room?”

“There’s a lady in the pathology academics office named Weston you can contact.”

“Dana Weston?” Douglas asked.

“I think that’s her name. Do you know her?”

“She dates a friend of mine.”

Fielding scribbled Weston’s phone number on a scrap of paper. He handed it to Douglas.

“Good. Then you already have a leg up on getting what you need. Never hurts to know people in high places.”

Douglas had arranged to meet Paul Grabel for dinner at a local restaurant frequented by Vanderbilt students. It was near the campus and featured cuisine which was both greasy and inexpensive. In the days before underage drinking became a no-no, it was a popular watering hole particularly on fall weekends before the Vanderbilt Commodores received their weekly thumping at the hands of another Southeast Conference school.

Grabel was late, as usual and Douglas waited outside on a park bench. Eventually he came ambling up the sidewalk, his backpack slung over his shoulder. Sporting a stained T-shirt with a faded rock band's logo on the front and a cap frayed at the edges, to anyone else he would appear disheveled but Douglas hardly noticed. Grabel cared little about his appearance and even less what other's thought about it.

"Do you ever arrive at anything on time?" Douglas asked, looked at his watch.

"My birth," Grabel shot back. "What, like you have something better to do? You're in dermatology. Is someone going to get an emergency zit?"

"They might. I realize this might be a stretch for you, but for those of us not blessed with a photographic memory we have to occasionally read textbooks more than once."

"I apologize unreservedly. I was busy and you're a low priority."

"At least I know where I stand," Douglas responded.

"What's it look like inside?"

"Not too bad. We should be able to get a table."

"You didn't put us on the waiting list?"

"Not yet. I didn't know when you were going to grace me with your presence."

"And 'grace' would be the appropriate term."

Both men walked into the restaurant, spoke with the hostess and were seated at a table within a few minutes. Grabel ordered a beer and drank half of it before setting it down.

"Ah," he exclaimed. "Mother's milk."

"You're going to burn in hell for that."

"Bite me."

During their youth, the Douglas and Grabel families had been regular members of the Rotan Church of Christ, a conservative congregation eschewing alcohol, dancing and other forms of vice. Justin and Paul had come to see things differently and while neither were hard drinkers, at least compared to their classmates, they didn't shy away from the stuff.

The waitress appeared and took their order. Douglas and Grabel made small talk until she returned with their food.

“A blessing before we eat?” Douglas asked.

“I don’t think so.”

“So when was the last time you darkened the door at church?”

“Some people need more churchin’ than others.”

“I would think you need as much as possible,” Douglas replied. “Seriously, do you attend anywhere?”

“For your information, Mr. Proselyte, I was in the congregation last Sunday at 9:30 A.M., shaven and reasonably awake.”

“That’s Dr. Proselyte to you and Dana made you go, didn’t she?”

“Bingo,” Grabel said, pointing his long neck beer in Douglas’s direction. “She goes to a community church on West End. Great band. Not quite the sort of thing we grew up with.”

Douglas laughed. “Not hardly. By the way, I have to get in touch with Dana about some research I’m doing. Is she working full time in the path office or just part time?”

“Stay away from her. She’s very busy these days.”

“With what?! Your laundry.”

“I have domestic needs just like the next guy.”

“I can’t believe you actually have her washing and drying your clothes. What a sponge.”

“Hey, she loves me and what better way to display her appreciation for having landed such a catch than making sure I have clean underwear.”

Dana Weston and Grabel had met at a mixer 2 years earlier shortly after he had arrived to begin his post-doctoral research. A more unlikely pair would have been hard to imagine. Weston had grown up in a well to do section of Little Rock, Arkansas as the daughter of a prominent attorney. She had attended an all girls private school, playing lacrosse and becoming gorgeous. The two had hit it off almost immediately and for reasons largely unexplainable, Dana Weston appeared quite happy with her choice. Their relationship had become the longest lasting in either’s history and Douglas assumed it would only be a matter of time before they became engaged.

“Picked out a ring, yet?” Douglas said teasingly.

“Please. Do I look ready for a ball and chain?”

“Actually, yes. Since you two began going out, this is the calmest I’ve seen you in your life. You actually appear, well, happy.”

“It’s a ruse. Don’t tell anyone.”

Grabel motioned to the waitress for another beer.

“Well, you’re in church on a semi-regular basis, at least when Dana’s in town and it’s been a while since I drug you out of a bar before some collegiate athlete pummels you into the ground.

“I’ve been busy.”

“Right.”

“So what is this research stuff you need Dana’s help with?”

Douglas began explaining Dr. Fielding’s proposal. Less than 30 seconds into his explanation, Grabel held up his hand to stop him.

“Do you have any idea how boring all this sounds? I’m about to pass out from sheer indifference.”

Douglas laughed. “I guess it is sort of dull.”

“Sort of? It’s mind numbing,” Grabel said pushing French fries into his mouth. “Anyway, Dana’s working full time for the present but she’s been making noises about going back to school and working on her masters degree.”

“Well, you know how some people are. No sense getting a real job when you can forever swim in the protected lagoon of academia.”

Grabel shot Douglas a dirty look.

“You’re a troll.”

## Chapter 4

The next morning, Douglas was scheduled to be in clinic at the Veterans Administration Hospital. It could be monotonous work since most of the patients were seen for skin cancers and sun damage accrued from years of outdoor work. Additionally, all of the clinics operated under the aegis of the federal government with accompanying paperwork for nearly everything. The upside was the residents were in charge with little interference from attending physicians. The latter tended to stay in the back of the clinic working on their research or fine tuning their grants. Occasionally, a patient with an unusual condition would appear but for the most part it was dull. Residents were usually only too happy to rotate off the service and onto more interesting pursuits.

Lunchtime meant a conference with one of the faculty, in this instance Dr. Durham, or “Eva” as she was known. Her nickname derived from Eva Braun, Hitler’s mistress, and was a tribute to her demeanor. Durham’s caustic tongue could be painful. More than one resident or medical student, always a female, had broken down in tears under her browbeating. Fortunately, she was often in the laboratory or lecturing out of town. Time in her clinic and on the wards were dreaded like the plague. Today, Douglas and the rest of the residents were required to be in attendance in the department library at 12:15 P.M. for her clinical dermatology kodachrome conference. Exactly on time, she came through the door carrying her trademark satchel and a computer disk containing the conference material.

“Everyone ready?” she asked. It was a rhetorical question.

Those assembled acknowledged her query with half-hearted confirmations.

Durham loaded her disk into a desktop computer that fed the images to a screen on the far wall of the library. After it spun up, she pressed the appropriate button and the first photograph appeared.

Durham looked around the room. Several residents were missing.

“Where are the first years?”

“I think their clinic is running behind,” Terry Pearson said. Pearson was a third year resident acting as the chief for the quarter.

“Tell them to be on time. This session benefits them the most and from what I’ve seen in my clinic, they need all the help they can get.”

With Durham's back to the group several of the residents rolled their eyes and shook their heads. It was going to be one of those days.

The conference proceeded as usual, the clinical photos of patients were of good quality but of unusual cases and of dubious practical value. Durham would question individual residents about treatment options for the depicted conditions, always continuing her interrogation until the resident answered incorrectly

"What is this, Jennifer?" Durham asked after putting up the next photograph on the screen.

Jennifer Dempsey, one of the second year residents stared intently at the picture.

"It looks like some sort of skin malignancy," she responded.

"Wow, that's insightful," Durham said sarcastically. "Care to venture a guess as to which one?"

Dempsey shook her head, squinting her eyes and hoping for some sort of spontaneous flash of brilliance. None came.

"I would guess it's a squamous cell carcinoma."

"Not even close," Durham said with an air of satisfaction. "It's a melanoma. Congratulations, you just killed the patient."

Dempsey sat back in her chair, dejected.

Durham went around the room asking others about how to best diagnose and treat the patient. Most gave a correct answer which, to the residents' satisfaction, seemed to grate on her. When 1:00 P.M. rolled around the conference wrapped up and Durham flew out of the room, disk in hand.

"Well, another thin slice of heaven has come and gone," Pearson said. "What a special treat."

"Any chance she has some sort of inoperable brain tumor?" someone asked.

"We aren't that lucky," Dempsey replied.

Douglas walked through the clinic towards the hospital and into the office suites of the pathology department. He didn't like being there. The pathology attendings thought little of the dermatology house staff, an attitude which had filtered down to their residents.

At the front desk of the pathology department sat a plump, middle aged woman named Vera. She was routinely unpleasant to residents and medical students outside the department. Douglas had hoped she would be absent from work but no luck. She was seated at her desk reading a People magazine

“Is Dana Weston here today?” he asked politely.

“Why?” Vera asked without looking up.

“I was told by Dr. Fielding to contact her about access to the department archives.”

Vera exhaled with exasperation and muttered something under her breath. She pointed down the hall without saying a word.

Douglas knew where to find her. He walked quickly by several offices being careful not to make eye contact with any of the staff. They might have been more friendly than Vera but you could never tell.

Dana Weston was at her desk in a common area midway down the hall. She was typing on a computer and lost in her work.

“Dana?” Douglas asked.

Weston looked up from her task, her face breaking out in a smile.

“Pewt,” she replied, using Douglas’s childhood nickname. Grabel had called him that one night when the three were out to dinner. Weston thought it endearing and had referred to him thus ever since.

“Paul said you’d be coming by to see me. How are you?”

“Dangerously undermedicated.”

Dana laughed, her eyes smiling along with the rest of her face.

“You need to get into the archives, is that right?”

“You are correct. Lead me to the dungeon.”

Weston fished around in the top drawer of her desk eventually coming up with a set of keys.

“Here they are,” she said. “I can’t even remember the last time someone wanted to go down there.”

Weston rose from her desk, signaling Douglas to follow. They walked back down the hall and stopped at Vera’s desk.

“I’m taking Dr. Douglas to the archives,” Dana announced. “I should be back in about 15 minutes or so.”

“Uh-huh,” Vera grunted, not looking up from her magazine.

When the two arrived at a bank of elevators and safely out of earshot of the department, Douglas asked, “How do you put up with Vera?”

“Oh, she’s not so bad, once you get to know her. We go to lunch together from time to time.”

“Are you kidding me?”

Weston laughed. “She can actually be quite sweet. Vera’s had a difficult life. She never married and cared for her elderly mother until she died about 10 years ago.”

The elevator arrived and the pair stepped into it. Weston pushed the button labeled “B” and the doors closed.

“The pathology department is Vera’s kingdom, or at least she thinks it is and she can become possessive when around people she doesn’t know.”

The elevator doors opened into the main hallway in the hospital’s basement. At times over 20 feet wide, the hallway was a busy thoroughfare of behind the scenes activity. Laundry, food preparation, postal and janitorial services officed in the basement. Large carts containing the products of their efforts were transported through the basement highway. The place bustled with activity, at least during typical work hours. Douglas had been in the area once on a Saturday afternoon. It was deserted and more than a little creepy.

Weston lead Douglas down the main hallway. Signs directing the traveler to the post office and medical bioengineering hung overhead. Fifty yards from the main bank of elevators a small, unmarked corridor veered to the left. It was less than 8 feet in length and ended at a brown, wooden door bearing identifying no markings.

“This is it?” Douglas asked.

“Yep.”

“Sort of underwhelming, isn’t it?”

“I suppose. Of course it’s been here since the beginning of time.”

Like most medical centers, Vanderbilt’s hospital had undergone significant changes over the years. The original building had been added on to, renovated and

redesigned several times in its 100+ year history. Most of the original building had been replaced with only a few areas remaining intact. The pathology archives was one of those areas.

Weston found the correct key, inserted it in the lock and pushed the door open. When she turned on the light, Douglas got a glimpse of what he was up against.

“This place is huge,” he said.

Stretching before them was a large room nearly 20 feet wide and 50 feet long. File cabinets lined the sides. The interior was separated into aisles by large banks of metal cabinets 2 to 3 feet across. Douglas had seen them before but never in such numbers. He began to walk down the center aisle glancing on either side. The metal cabinets were 6 feet tall and comprised of numerous 5 by 2 inch stacks of removable trays. Inside each were several hundred glass slides. The front of each tray bore a printed date and the corresponding cases from that time period. There had to be millions of them, Douglas thought.

“I don’t think finding the slides from a given time period will be difficult,” Weston said. “The tissue blocks are along the far wall and numbered in succession as well.”

“Are they all here?”

“Obviously, there are some cases where the tissue blocks are present but the slides are missing and vice versa but for the most part, everything is intact. The real trouble is going to be the paperwork.”

“It always is,” Douglas said, continuing to examine the stacks of metal containers.

Weston walked down the far left aisle towards the corner of the room.

“From what I understand, you’re looking for the notations from Dr. Henry Schreiber?”

“Correct.”

“There’s a file cabinet here with his name on it,” Weston pointed to the structure in question. “I assume this would be a good place to start.”

“Is Schreiber’s stuff anywhere else?”

“Who knows. This is the main archives for our department. The material beginning in the late 1990’s is at an off campus facility.”

Douglas walked around the end of the aisle to where Weston was standing. He pulled open the top drawer of the file cabinet and peered inside. To his surprise, he found no loose paper files but rather large bound laboratory notebooks with handwriting on the front. The script had been written in ink and its visibility better than it should have been given its age. Schreiber had obviously been careful to store his workbooks in a dark place.

Each of the other three file drawers were similar, full of workbooks carefully placed end to end. It was a potential treasure trove but one which would require significant mining. The thought of sifting through it all made Douglas's head spin.

"So how do I get into this place after hours?" he asked.

"You don't. These archives are only available during regular work hours."

"That's going to be a problem," Douglas mused.

"Tell you what, since people rarely ever come down here, if you want to stay late some evening, I'll let you lock up. But I can't let you have a key."

"Alright, I can live with that. I'll have to tell Dr. Fielding there's going to be some limitations on my access to this place."

The next day brought more clinic time and conferences for Justin Douglas. He enjoyed being in dermatology although the constraints of a resident's life occasionally chafed him. An attending had once reminded him there were some distinct advantages to being a house officer as opposed to the life of a "R.D." or "Real Doc", meaning someone who had finished training. It had given Douglas something to consider when he was having a bad day. Still, the ultimate goal of residency was to finish and move on. Being low on the totem pole was rarely an enviable position.

Douglas told Fielding of his visit to the pathology archives. He took the news in stride. It would take longer to complete the research but he noted such was often the case in working on another department's turf. Fielding had an arm's length relationship with pathology, something which puzzled Douglas. He assumed there had been bad blood in the past but Fielding was too professional to mention any details. He instructed Douglas to move ahead with all due speed.

That afternoon, Douglas had Dana Weston meet him at the archives at 4:30 P.M. She unlocked the door and bid him goodbye. He walked inside, turned on the light and made his way to the back corner of the room. The file cabinet with Schreiber's notebooks was as he had left it. Nearby was a small metal desk with a lamp. Douglas set his briefcase down and rolled a nearby chair into place.

Schreiber's notebooks were labeled on the cover as to their contents. Some were more specific than others but each would require examination. Douglas pulled open the top file drawer, extracted the first notebook and sat down at the desk.

Schreiber had been meticulous in his notations. Too meticulous, as it turned out. Much of what Douglas was sifting through was extraneous information and as time passed he began scanning the pages, looking for references to any skin findings. Some of the pathologic diagnoses noted were no longer in use. In Schreiber's day, many diseases went by their Latin names. Other romance languages such as French and Italian were sprinkled in, making it an Old World smorgasbord of terminology.

Douglas sat at the desk, leafing through the materials until nearly 7:00 P.M. Initially, he had dreaded the assignment. Being confined to a dark and creepy dungeon, sifting through 50 year old notebooks looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack didn't sound appealing. But the work, at least so far, had proven interesting. The time had gone by quickly. The growling in his stomach reminded him he needed to go home.

Douglas gathered his notes, placed them in his briefcase and returned the books to the file cabinet. After turning off the desk lamp he walked past the voluminous stacks of glass slides before heading out the door. He had just closed it and checked the lock when he heard a voice over his shoulder.

"What were you doing in there?"

The question came from David Prine, the director of anatomic pathology for the hospital. Douglas knew who he was but had limited interaction with him. In his late 70's, Prine was considerably older than most of the department faculty. The rumor was he had been appointed to his position because no one else wanted the job and he looked upon it as his own fiefdom. Prine was generally tolerant of the house staff in his department but bore an open animus towards the dermatology residents.

"Some research," Douglas replied.

“On what?”

“Dr. Fielding asked me to review some of Henry Schreiber’s research...”

“Dr. Schreiber,” Prine corrected him.

“Dr. Schreiber, his research on neuropathologic conditions associated with skin manifestations.”

Prine looked Douglas up and down, as if inspecting him for the appropriateness of his dress.

“Consider it suspended,” Prine said.

“Suspended?”

“Are you unfamiliar with the term?”

Douglas didn’t know what to say but assumed saying as little as possible made the most sense.

“Alright,” he replied, checking the door to make certain it was locked.

Douglas turned to leave when Prine spoke up again.

“Let’s see the briefcase.”

“Excuse me?” Douglas asked with confusion.

“Are you hard of hearing, son? I want to inspect the contents of your briefcase to be certain you didn’t remove any of the materials from the room.”

“Well, I didn’t.”

Douglas began to walk away, something which infuriated Prine.

“I’m not going to ask again!” he thundered.

“Whether you ask again or not is irrelevant. You don’t have the right to rifle through my personal effects.”

“This is your last chance.”

“I believe we’re done here. Good evening, Dr. Prine” Douglas said as he turned to leave.

Prine’s eyes flashed with anger.

“Fine,” he said through clenched teeth. “But I’ll be speaking with your chairman about this matter. You’re done with the archives. Consider yourself notified.”

“So noted,” Douglas said.

When Douglas arrived for work the next morning, news of his confrontation with Prine had leaked out. Apparently, Prine had been true to his word. There was a note on his desk from Fielding requesting a meeting before clinic began.

Fielding was in his office looking at slides when Douglas knocked on his door.

“Come in,” he said pushing himself away from the microscope. “Have a seat.”

Douglas did as he was asked. Fielding plopped into the chair behind his desk.

“I got a call last night from David Prine. He was in his typical apoplectic state and related to me his version of your encounter yesterday. I’d like to hear your side of things.”

Douglas gave him a brief synopsis, trying not to sound too inflammatory or provocative. When he finished, Fielding broke into a big smile and nodded his head.

“That’s about what I figured. Prine made it sound like you verbally attacked him, something I found difficult to believe. I told him as much.”

“I’m sorry if I reflected poorly on the department. I don’t like being accused of theft.”

Fielding raised his hand, indicating Douglas had no need to further defend his actions.

“Don’t worry, I don’t put a lot of stock in his rants anyway. He’s got a raging God complex about anatomic pathology. I guess he assumes unless he micromanages everything the whole place will fall apart. He doesn’t have any outside interests so this job is all there is for him. I told him, in so many words, to get over it.”

Douglas raised his eyes. “Really?”

“Really. Even though dermatopathology is under anatomic pathology, he doesn’t pay my salary and I’ve been as deferential to him as I can. When he crosses the line, like he did last night, he’s lost his right to the respect of his position. How he treats the pathology residents is his business. How he treats ours is another matter. House staff aren’t subhuman life forms and they have enough trials and tribulations without putting up with that sort of attack.”

“Well, thank you for sticking up for me,” Douglas said quietly.

“No problem. As for the research project, it’s still on.”

“What about access to the archives?”

“I told him we’ll be getting our own key.”

“You did? How did he take that?”

Fielding laughed. “Not well, but the archives aren’t his department’s personal property. They belong to the institution and as such can be accessed by anyone on staff with a legitimate reason to do so. We do. I told him if we weren’t allowed to use the materials there for our research, I’d take the matter up with the dean, including his behavior last night. He hung up on me. I don’t know if this is the last we’ll hear about this, but so far as I’m concerned, it’s a dead issue. I’ll be getting a key later today from security.”

Fielding stood signaling the end of the conversation. “For the time being, however, I’d stay away from Prine. He has a tendency to hold a grudge.”

Daniel Glusac drove the back roads towards Livingston. They were beautiful this time of year with the green foliage almost overwhelming. The surrounding forests were so dense one could scarcely see more than 5 feet into them. It reminded him of when he was young and he and his friends would spend hours exploring the woods, coming home for dinner only when the light became so poor they couldn’t see anymore. He had contracted poison ivy more times than he could count. Once, using a metal detector, he discovered a civil war encampment. Archeologists from the University of Tennessee at Martin came out and excavated the area. Their results confirmed it as a Confederate camp. Daniel’s name and picture were featured in the local paper. He was rewarded with a few miniballs and a belt buckle.

As his childhood turned into adolescence, his father’s drinking became more frequent, a shadow slowly enveloping his existence. Mrs. Glusac died of a heart attack in the fall of Daniel’s senior year in high school. For his father, it was the final straw. Ruth Glusac had been an iron-willed woman who had held the family together through one crisis or another including that of her husband’s drinking problem. Earl did the best he could for the remainder of his son’s senior year. It was what his wife would have wanted and he did it in honor of her. After Daniel left for college, however, Earl’s depression and alcoholism became worse. He was drinking every evening and, eventually, during the day. The farm held no mortgage or liens making money less of a

concern. Earl sold his cattle and raised hay which he sold to surrounding farms for their livestock. It didn't require as much work leaving him more time to sit on his porch.

Away at college, Daniel worried about his father. He returned home as often as possible to check on Earl and help out around the property. When he took a girlfriend on one of these trips, his father embarrassed him by falling asleep in his rocking chair on the veranda, a half empty bottle of sour mash at his side. After that, Daniel's visits became less frequent and eventually stopped altogether. His father wasn't going to change and he was only serving as an enabler by picking up his slack. After he married and entered pharmacy school, his wife encouraged him to visit more often, if for no other reason than to spend what time with him as he had left. Earl's health was still good, better than it should have been considering what he was doing to his body, but he was still getting older and becoming more feeble. The trips, however, were difficult and he came to dread them more each time.

Daniel pulled into the long, dirt driveway leading to the farmhouse. In the distance he could see his father sitting on the porch in his rocking chair, slowly moving forwards and backwards. As he approached the house, Earl looked up and made a half hearted attempt at a wave. Daniel exited the car and was greeted by his father's mixed breed dog, Blossom. Earl remained in his chair. At his side was the omnipresent bottle of Jack Daniels.

"Hey, dad," Daniel said. "How's things?"

"Could be worse." Earl answered, using his standard reply. "Good trip?"

"It was fine. The dogwoods are in bloom."

"Yep," his father replied, taking a sip from his glass.

Daniel glanced at his watch. It was nearly 6 o'clock in the evening.

"Had dinner yet?"

"Not yet. Figured I'd just watch the sun set a bit more then go inside and fix something."

*Meaning another frozen dinner or can of soup.*

"How about I take you out to eat?"

"Where?"

"In town. Shoney's. Golden Corral. Whatever you feel like eating."

“I ain’t cleaned up from the day.”

*How much of a sweat could you break sitting on your porch?*

“I don’t think you have to wear a tie to eat at Shoney’s,” Daniel said, looking at his father’s threadbare and faded overalls.

“Won’t it be crowded?”

“Probably. It’s Friday night but it shouldn’t be too bad. Beside, it would do you good to get out once in a while.”

Earl grunted sarcastically and looked away. “That’s a matter of speculation.”

Daniel had inherited most of his personality traits from his mother. In the matter of persistence, however, he and Earl were cut from the same cloth. His father knew his son would hound him until he relented. Earl lurched to his feet, straightened his overall straps and drained the last of the sour mash from his glass.

“I’ll drive,” Daniel said flatly.

“You got that right,” his father replied.

## Chapter 5

Fielding was good to his word. Later that afternoon a key to the pathology archives appeared in Douglas's mail slot with a note stating "Keep a low profile."

Douglas found things in the archive room as he had left them. He switched on the desk lamp before opening the file cabinet and removing the notebook he had last reviewed. Douglas began scanning the material, searching for any mention of skin findings in the catalogued patients. After half an hour he uncovered a long list of cases with the notation "skin rash" attributed to several of the entries. Schreiber had been no more specific and since a "skin rash" could apply to nearly anything, Douglas rapidly scanned the material. He reached the end of the first notebook, closed it and returned it to the file cabinet.

To speed things up, Douglas began glancing at the covers to see if something caught his eye. Something did. In the back of the 2<sup>nd</sup> drawer was a notebook with the words "angiosarcomas – 1947-1954". Angiosarcomas constitute a type of cancer derived from blood vessels. Usually found internally, they also arise in the skin. Patients are typically elderly with most tumors occurring on the scalp or face. In Schreiber's day they would have been nearly always fatal. Chemotherapy and radiation therapy are rarely effective and curing a patient relies almost exclusively on being able to completely resect the tumor. Douglas removed the notebook and returned to the desk.

The first few pages listed patients with their corresponding medical record numbers, the date of their biopsies and the pathology accession numbers. Subsequent pages were more detailed and included a description of the patients' tumors. Most were from internal organs such as the lung and liver but some had arisen in the skin.

Two aspects of the entries caught his attention. First, none mentioned the patients' gender. Second, was the lack of any patient names. If Schreiber had been keeping track of these specimens, he must have had a master list elsewhere.

The notebook contained nearly 200 entries and filled over 60 pages. Douglas selected 15, jotting down their medical record numbers.

The next day was an "academic day" for Douglas, meaning he had the morning to study or pursue research interests. Since he had read until 11:00 P.M. the night before, he

decided to use his time tracking down patient charts. He made his way to the medical records department on the first floor of the hospital. Near the front door was a long countertop. Several women were behind it, one speaking on the phone while the others loaded and unloaded charts from a push cart. Douglas waited for the woman on the phone to complete her call before addressing her.

“Can I help you?” she said. The tone of her voice suggested she had been on the job quite a while and had little interest in dealing with medical students.

“Yes ma’am,” Douglas replied, trying to sound cheerful. “I’m looking for some medical charts from some time back.”

“How far back?”

“In the 1950’s. Do you keep them that long?”

“Some of them. If they haven’t been active for a while we usually send them to our off campus vault. Which ones are you looking for?”

Douglas produced a slip of paper with the 15 medical record numbers.

“These.”

The woman glanced at the numbers briefly.

“They’re missing a digit,” she said flatly. “Medical record numbers at Vanderbilt have 8 digits. These only have 7.”

Douglas had searched for the patient names in the school’s computer system to no avail. He knew they were short a digit but had assumed, given their age, perhaps another system had been used previously.

“Yes ma’am, I know that. Were things done differently back in the 1950’s?”

“Yes and no. Initially, medical record numbers had only 6 digits. That changed in the early 1960’s, but additional digits were assigned retroactively to all the old charts. I’ve never seen any with only 7 numbers.”

“So there’s no way to find out who belongs to these record numbers?”

“You could try adding a number to the beginning or end of each and searching for them in the computer but that’s about all I know to do.”

Douglas knew better than to ask the woman to do it for him.

“Okay. I appreciate your help,” he said, retrieving his slip of paper.

Douglas walked to the pathology department - enemy territory. Through the glass doors he could see Vera typing on her computer.

He took in a deep breath and opened the door. Vera looked up with a vacant expression on her face.

“Can I help you?” she said icily.

“Is Dana around?”

“She’s here,” Vera responded, returning to her typing.

“Can I go back to her desk?”

“Suit yourself.”

Douglas was relieved at the brevity of his conversation with Vera. He walked down the hallway and spied Dana at her desk. She looked up, giving him a big smile as he approached.

“Hey there stranger,” she said.

“Good morning. Got a minute?”

“For you, always. What’s up?”

Douglas was about to ask for Dana’s help with the medical record numbers he couldn’t track down when he heard a set of familiar footsteps.

“I suppose you have a good reason for being here?” It was Prine.

*This is just what I need*, Douglas thought.

“Yes, sir,” Douglas responded. “I’m having trouble tracking down some of the medical record numbers I found in Dr. Schreiber’s work. I was hoping Dana could help me with them.”

“There’s a surprise. Don’t you have a patient somewhere with a rash you should be malpracticing on?” Prine was standing in front of Dana’s desk pretending to sort through some of his mail.

Douglas could feel the hair on the back of his neck beginning to rise. He was a long ways from losing his cool but this is how it always began. Dana could feel his increasing tension.

“Dr. Douglas and I were about to head to the department library and log on to the institution archives file, Dr. Prine,” Weston announced. She was trying to run interference, something which Douglas both appreciated and disliked. He shouldn’t have

to be protected from a pretentious faculty member by a young woman barely weighing 115 pounds.

Apparently, Prine had more pressing issues, since he dropped the matter and returned to his office but not before casting a malevolent expression in Douglas's direction. Both walked quickly to the department library, closed the door and sat in front of a computer.

"I'm so sorry," Dana began. "I thought he had gone to the hospital. If I had known he was still in the office, I would never..."

"You don't need to apologize for Prine," Douglas interrupted. "He's human debris, and I mean that in the most endearing way. I'm just glad I don't have to work with him."

Dana turned to the computer and began opening programs. Within 60 seconds she had accessed a bank of biopsy accession numbers.

"Let's see your list," she said.

Douglas handed her the sheet of paper. Dana scanned the entries for a few seconds.

"I've never seen biopsy numbers like this."

"Meaning what?"

"In the first place, the current accession system has each biopsy with a single letter at the beginning designating the service to which it belongs. "D" for dermatopathology, "S" for surgical pathology, "H" for hematopathology, etc. These begin with 3 letters and aren't like any I've run across before."

"Can you search for them?" Douglas asked.

"I'll try."

Dana began inserting the numbers into a search engine. She found nothing.

"They aren't here."

"Try searching without the letters," Douglas suggested.

Dana's fingers flew across the keyboard.

"With the numbers alone, there's usually an example from each year in the database but they belong to surgical pathology cases in the older material and are stratified to the specific services in the more recent stuff."

“Is there any way to see if the numbers correspond to the same patient?”

“I don’t know if the program has that capacity. I may have to search the reports individually.”

Douglas sat back in his chair. Another dead end, something which seemed commonplace in this project.

“You probably have better things to do than look over my shoulder while I plink around on this keyboard,” Dana said. “Why don’t you leave this paper with me, I’ll search the program and page you later.”

“I told you it would be crowded,” Earl Glusac told his son.

The two men were standing in the foyer of the Shoney’s restaurant in Livingston. Several families were mingling about.

“It’s Friday night, Dad. We knew that before we came.”

Daniel approached the hostess standing behind a small lectern and submitted his name for the wait list.

“She said it should be about 15 minutes until we can get a table.”

“I’ll believe it when I see it,” Earl groused.

Daniel’s father smelled of alcohol and his son nudged him towards an open wall away from the other patrons.

“Why are we standing way over here?”

“Because you smell like a brewery.”

Earl laughed softly.

“Ashamed of the old man, are we?”

Daniel looked his father straight in the eye.

“I’ve never been ashamed of you in my life. I just don’t want the other people here to get the wrong impression.”

“Your father’s an alcoholic. I doubt they’d get the wrong impression.”

“Why?”

Earl seemed flustered by the question.

“What do you mean, why?”

“It’s a simple question, Dad. Why are you an alcoholic? Grandma and Grandpa weren’t. Your brother and sisters aren’t. I’m not. It doesn’t appear to be something that runs in the family, so why are you?”

“You wouldn’t understand.”

“Try me.”

The hostess called their name and led the two men to a booth near the corner of the restaurant. Daniel took his menu but laid it down on the table.

“I’m waiting.”

“For what?” Earl asked, trying to avoid the question.

“For an explanation as to why you’re an alcoholic.”

“I don’t think this is the time or the place, son.”

“Then when is the time and the place?”

Earl stopped pretending to read his menu.

“I don’t think anyone ever asked me that question, not even your mother.”

“Well, I’m asking.”

Earl was quiet for a moment, slowly shaking his head. The subject was painful but his only son was taking an interest in his welfare.

“Fair enough,” Earl said softly. “I suppose you deserve an explanation. Besides, there’s nothing I can do about things now. But I’m not going to talk about them here. We finish our meal and I’ll tell you about them at the house.”

“Without the sour mash,” Daniel said forcefully.

“Without the sour mash.”

“I got zilch,” Dana stated over the phone. “I mean, not only can I not locate these medical record numbers, I can’t plug the 7 digits into the computer in any form and get a hit. I’ve tried hyphenating between the numbers, putting in zeros, the works. Nothing pops up.”

It was after 5 o’clock when Dana had paged him. She was at the office late and Douglas hoped it wasn’t on his account.

“Well, I appreciate your help. Find anything out about the biopsy accession numbers?”

“I tried the same search methods but no luck. There’s no twisting, turning or mixing of the digits that gets me anywhere near an established biopsy accession number.”

Douglas could hear the frustration in her voice. Either she was getting invested in his project or viewed it as a challenge and was annoyed at being continually stymied in her pursuits.

“Again, I appreciate your help, but you’ve surely got better things to do. Don’t use any more of your time with this. I’ll figure something out.”

“Sorry I couldn’t be more useful. Very frustrating.”

“Quite,” Douglas said before hanging up.

It was a big understatement. Douglas had tracked other biopsy accession and medical record numbers from Schreiber’s entries without difficulty. He had been surprised to find how many of the original slides and patient charts were still available. Vanderbilt obviously did a good job of cataloging, something not every institution its age could boast.

The nagging question, besides where the data on the patients in the notebook lay, was why. Schreiber had purposefully catalogued a single set of records outside the Vanderbilt protocol. He must have had a reason.

Douglas was walking towards the parking garage when something clicked in his mind. What if the materials in question weren’t in the University system? What if they had been kept elsewhere? Doing so would have been a breach of the university’s rules and grounds for dismissal if the infraction had been discovered. Douglas knew some research studies were supported by outside funding sources such as the federal government or drug companies but these were tightly regulated with stringent oversight by the University. Perhaps things had been done differently in the past. Protection of patients was much more lax in those days. It was even possible Schreiber was performing his research without the knowledge of the pathology department or Vanderbilt for that matter. With nowhere else to turn, it was worth investigating.

The Glusacs ate with little conversation. Earl was never much for talking, particularly when a meal was involved but he was even quieter than usual. Daniel paid their tab. His father made a half hearted attempt to pick up the check but his son knew

his finances were limited. Besides, he made good money as a pharmacist. The least he could do was try to repay his father for all the money he had spent putting him through school.

Once back home, Earl walked straight to the bottle of sour mash perched on the porch railing. Daniel's first thought was his father was going back on his word but to his relief, the man marched into the house and put the bottle away. Daniel contented himself with sitting in one of the decrepit rocking chairs on the porch. The sun was receding over the horizon with a half moon barely visible in the sky. A few stars were beginning to appear.

Daniel occasionally sat on his deck at the end of the day, collecting his thoughts. The cumulative light from the subdivision usually made the stars difficult to see. Being back in the country and appreciating the vividness of the heavens reminded him how much he had missed it. Several times he had asked his father to move closer to Chattanooga where he could look after him. The old man had steadfastly refused. After a few minutes on the porch, Daniel could see why he had been so adamant. If he and family weren't so entrenched there he would consider moving back to Livingston. Perhaps after the children left home, he thought to himself.

Earl returned from the house and plopped down in an adjacent rocking chair. For a few minutes he slowly rocked back and forth, occasionally looking in the direction of the woods when the sound of some animal's movement became audible. Daniel watched his father mulling over his thoughts. He had always measured his words carefully, particularly so when they mattered. Daniel decided to give him the time he needed, but in the meantime, he wouldn't make small talk. His father had to realize, this was a moment for more than a superficial conversation.

After what seemed like hours of complete silence, Earl cleared his throat.

"Still want to talk about my drinking?" he asked.

Daniel could tell from his voice he was hoping to be let off the hook. He wouldn't be.

"In a manner. What I would like to know is why. If this was something that had come about after cutting back on your work, I could see where it might be due to

boredom. But it started when I was young. Mother was still alive so it couldn't be loneliness. Depression perhaps. I just don't know."

"So you want me to quit," Earl said, removing the dirt beneath his fingernails with a pocket knife.

"I think that would be in your best interest, however, I didn't say that. If there's a reason for your drinking, addressing the problem would make the most sense."

Earl said nothing for a few minutes. He had told his wife once what he had seen. She understood his angst and suggested he contact the authorities. Earl didn't like the idea of blowing the whistle. But his conscience eventually overrode his concerns and he prepared himself to tell someone in authority about what was happening at the camp. An event stopped him and it changed him forever.

"All right. I suppose after this long it won't make much difference."

For the next 15 minutes, Earl's story spilled out. The words came easier than he had thought they would. Daniel sat listening, often in disbelief that the events could have taken place in Livingston. He had heard of the death camps in Europe but a similar facility nearby was hard to fathom. He let his father finish before asking any questions.

"I assume you considered telling with someone about this."

Earl let out a sarcastic laugh.

"Yeah. I did. I had screwed up my courage and was prepared to go forward. Even had someone in Nashville to contact. Then things changed and I let it go."

"What changed?"

Earl stared off into the distance, his eyes becoming moist. Daniel had seen his father cry only once, at his mother's funeral. Something was churning deep inside him, something deep and dark.

"Ever hear of Jim Patton?"

"Richard Patton's father?"

"Yep. Jim was a friend of mine. We grew up together; played football and baseball in high school. I guess you could say he was my best friend. He worked at the camp but he was full time. After I left the job, he dropped by one evening. Told me some of the things he had seen there; how the inmates would leave for their "doctor's appointments" in Memphis. Some of those that came back would be fine, some pretty

sick. More than a few of them died while he was there. Occasionally, he and some of the other workers would have to dispose of the bodies. A van would come and take them away, he never knew where they went. He asked once and was told to mind his own business. Eventually, he figured something was going on there he didn't want any part of so he quit."

"When he came to see me, it was to ask me for my support. He had gone to the county sheriff and wanted him to investigate the camp. Jim asked if I would go with him to back up his story. He said he was going to ask some of the other workers to do the same. I told him I'd think about it. That was the last I saw of him."

"Two day's later his wife reported him missing. The sheriff looked into the matter for a few days but no one had seen him and the trail ran cold. After a while everyone just assumed he'd bolted for greener pastures. I knew better. Someone had gotten to him but all I had to go on was my suspicions. I went to the sheriff myself and suggested they look into the goings on at the camp. They didn't turn up much or didn't look very hard. A week later, two men met me in the barn. They pinned me to the side of a stall, stuck a gun to my head and told me to shut up or I'd wind up like Jim. I took their advice. You were two years old at the time and I had a lot to lose."

Earl continued to stare off into space but had stopped rocking in his chair. Tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"Anyway," he continued, wiping his face, "I decided not to go to Nashville with my story and let the matter drop. I chickened out. Let my friend down in the process, something I've had to live with all these years. It about killed me. Your mother was very understanding about it all. She did her best to make me feel like a man for putting my family first but I couldn't shake it. Jim deserved better. His family deserved better."

Earl turned to his son.

"You deserved better as well. All those times I talked with you about standing up for things that were right. I felt like such a hypocrite. The words were like acid in my mouth."

"I heard your words, Dad," Daniel said as he placed his hand atop his father's. "And they stuck. I became a better man for it. It may have been difficult for you, but you told me what I needed to do and, more importantly, you gave me a good example to

follow. Every man has feet of clay. You did the best you could by your family and that says more than you know.”

“Thank you, son,” Earl replied in almost a whisper. He wiped his face with his sleeve.

“So there you have the whole sordid tale. When I drank, the feelings of shame lessened. Of course, they were there waiting for me in the morning, compounded with interest, but for a few hours in the evening, I was free, or at least on parole.”

“Whatever happened to this place?”

“Closed up in 1962.”

“I mean to the actual buildings and stuff.”

“They carted off whatever was of value, burned the rest. The fence is still there, or at least it was the last time I went to look. They got signs everywhere saying it’s federal property and to stay out. I don’t think anyone ever goes in there since there’s nothing to see.”

“What about the others who worked there?”

Earl chewed on his lower lip and shook his head.

“Dead or gone. When they closed the camp, some folks moved on, some stayed. No one talked much about it and over the years, it’s just sort of slipped into the past. I’m not sure there’s anyone around here who used to work there except me.”

“Did the other men you worked with have the same troubles as you?”

Earl nodded slowly.

“Three of them killed themselves. Two with shotguns, one with the bottle.”

Daniel had heard all he needed to. There wasn’t much to say so he said nothing, instead slowly rocking back and forth on the porch with his father and staring into the darkness enveloping the landscape.

## Chapter 6

“I couldn’t find them,” Douglas said to Dr. Fielding.

“What do you mean you couldn’t find them?” he asked.

“Just that. All of the patients’ medical record numbers are 7 digits. The ones at Vanderbilt have 8.”

“What about back in the 1950’s? Was it done differently?”

“Yes. They had 6 digits then but in the 1960’s they went to 8. I asked the lady in medical records about this and she said Vanderbilt never used a 7 digit medical record number. The VA had the same procedure in place and changed when Vanderbilt did. Not only that, but the accession numbers for the biopsies begin with 3 letters. I had a friend in the path department try to track them down but she said there were no records of any pathology specimens using that pattern.”

“How far back did she look?” Fielding asked.

“I didn’t ask but I would imagine she looked as far back as her computer files would allow. She’s pretty thorough so I took her at her word.”

Fielding sat at his desk, twirling a rubber band between his fingers as usual and rubbing his face with his free hand.

“That is really bizarre.”

“Do you want to consider dropping the study?”

Fielding shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t like to give up on a study when I start it. Particularly if it’s something I’m interested in.”

He paused for a moment.

“However, I’m not sure this problem is surmountable. Did you look in the archived slides with accession numbers close to the one’s you’re searching for?”

Douglas shook his head. The notion of combing through all the glass slides and paperwork in the room held little appeal.

“No,” he replied. “I can so but that room is massive. The slide files are labeled by year and accession numbers. If the ones we’re looking for aren’t in those specific files, I would have to search them all. There are some cabinets there which might contain the medical records we want but they aren’t labeled meaning each would have to be

evaluated. And that only takes into account the archive room. If the materials are elsewhere, I have no idea where. Dr. Prine might know but I don't think he's inclined to be very helpful."

Fielding let out a short laugh. "No, I wouldn't think so. Prine's not known for his collegiality. Tell you what, give the slide racks and file cabinets a cursory search maybe three hours or so. If you find anything, all the better. If not, we'll drop it. No sense wasting your time on a project that's going nowhere."

"Sounds fair," Douglas replied. "Of course there's always the possibility Schreiber kept the materials in his possession."

Fielding gave him a quizzical look. "I suppose, but he's deceased meaning it will be a little difficult to ask him."

"What about his wife?"

"Is she still living?"

"Who knows? I can find out."

"But she'd be what, in her nineties by now?"

"Probably. But a lot of ninety year olds are pretty sharp mentally. It's worth a try."

"I guess so," Fielding responded. "Give it a shot. Nothing to lose. Let me know what turns up."

Saturday morning came with a bright blue sky and plenty of sunshine, just the sort Douglas had ordered. He had grown up in west Texas where such days were more the rule than the exception and living in Nashville with its cloudy winter weather had been a difficult adjustment. On mornings such as this, Douglas wished he lived in a house with a yard rather than a condominium with only a deck for whatever flowers and plants he could put out.

The first order of business was a breakfast engagement with Paul and Dana at one of the local establishments near the Vanderbilt Hospital. The Pancake Pantry was a landmark. It had been around for as long as anyone could remember. With its increasing popularity, the owner had expanded its floor space but on the weekends. The line of

patrons outside could extend around the block. Fortunately, they were scheduled to meet at 8:00 am.

As Douglas pulled into the parking lot, he saw Paul and Dana exiting their car. She was stunning of course, wearing a Vanderbilt cap and blue jeans. Grabe looked like he had gotten out of bed 5 minutes earlier which was probably the case.

“You’re on time,” Douglas shouted.

Paul and Dana turned and stopped walking.

“I had to wake him up,” Dana replied. “He was still asleep when I got to his apartment.”

“Shocking.”

“I was up late last night,” Paul said shaking his head.

“A ‘Porky’s’ marathon on cable?” Douglas asked.

“For your information, I was at the lab finishing up some scans for a conference next month. Not that you’d know anything about real science, skin boy.”

“Ouch. That hurt,” Douglas said, feigning offense. “I’m deeply wounded. Really.”

Dana listened to the banter, smiling. For all intents, they were brothers, invested in each other and proud of the accomplishments being made in their respective fields. To her knowledge they had never had an argument or disagreement despite the deprecating names they used for each other.

The trio made their way into the restaurant. With the relatively early hour, they had no trouble getting a booth. Grabel ordered a huge breakfast consisting of eggs, bacon, fried grits and pancakes while Dana had a fruit plate with grapefruit juice. Douglas stared at the mound of food placed before his friend. The man was skinny as a rail but apparently able to eat whatever he wanted and still not gain any weight.

“Did you order enough?” Douglas asked.

“For me, yes. Thank you so much for asking.”

“How is it you don’t look like Jabba the Hutt?”

“Genetics,” Dana answered. “It’s brutally unfair. I have to watch what I eat and he doesn’t.”

“Tapeworms, my dear,” Grabel said between mouthfuls. “They’ve been in use for centuries. Always served me well.”

Dana rolled her eyes.

“I thought it was crystal meth,” Douglas said. “Which would explain your choice of clothing as well.”

“Oh, like you’ve got a lot of room to talk, Mr. GQ,” Dana said. “Outside of work you don’t dress any differently than he does. Most of the time both of you look like you live under a bridge.”

“We do it so you’ll look better standing next to us,” Grabel replied. “No need to thank us. They don’t call us the ‘givers’ for nothing. Besides, our sparkling personalities make up for any shortfall in our choice of clothing.”

“You boys are pathetic,” Dana said, returning to her fruit plate. “Genuinely pathetic.”

“True, but we’re fabulous company and rakishly handsome in a third world sort of way.”

“Third world is right,” Dana said.

Douglas decided to change the subject.

“Thanks for all the work you did on those medical record and slide numbers. I really appreciate all your efforts, even if nothing turned up.”

“You’re welcome. It was sort of fun, actually. What are you going to do now?”

“I’m not sure. I talked with Dr. Fielding about it. He’s not too keen on giving up but then he never is. I told him I would try to find Mrs. Schreiber and see if she knows anything.”

“Oh that will be fun,” Grabel said as he stuffed a huge bite of pancakes into his mouth. “She’s like what now, about a hundred years old?”

“Hey!” Dana responded. “A lot of the elderly are really with it these days. My grandmother is 89. She still lives by herself and does just fine.”

“All I’m saying is that even if she is still alive, the odds are she’s not likely to be of much help.”

“As much as it pains me to admit, Grabe is probably right. I don’t hold out much hope for this avenue of investigation but nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

“I could go with you, you know,” Grabel said.

Dana looked at him with surprise.

“What? I have a way with the elderly. They love me.”

“You’re the only person I know hated by my cat.”

“That’s because it’s a cat. Now if it were a real pet, like a dog, it would love me as all carbon based life forms do.”

“Your cat hates him?” Douglas asked smiling.

“Despises him. Last time we were home, Binx hissed at him and wouldn’t come out of the laundry room the whole time he was there.”

“Cats are good judges of character. He probably noticed Grabe doesn’t have any.”

Grabel put his fork down. “That fleabag is as worthless a mammal as ever was. Does nothing but lay around the house all day sleeping, only rising to get something to eat. Never goes outside. Performs no useful functions.”

“So in other words, he’s a lot like you?”

“No,” Grabel said. “As I just mentioned, he performs no useful functions. I, on the other hand, am quite useful.”

“For what?” Dana asked.

“Well, my general demeanor is a constant source of encouragement and delight to those around whom I work. And that’s just to mention one.”

“Let’s leave it at the one, please,” Douglas said. “If you want to come with me, I have a 1 o’clock appointment with Mrs. Schreiber at her nursing home.”

“One o’clock, you say?” Grabel said, stroking his chin.

“Here we go,” Dana remarked.

“I’m not sure that works for me, at least not today.”

“You weasel. You just said you’d go.”

“Does that interfere with your nap time?” Douglas asked.

“Well, yes, but the third round of the Masters is on the tube then and I wanted..”

“Pick him up at 12:30,” Dana interrupted. “He’ll be ready, or at least clothed.”

“I wasn’t aware that you spoke for me.”

“I do on this one. Take him. Otherwise, he’ll just lie on that ratty couch of his all afternoon watching some morons whack a little white ball around Augusta.”

“Busted,” Douglas said grinning. “See you at 12:30.”

Daniel awoke at 7:00 am to the loud clatter of a group of birds outside his window. The sun’s rays were beaming brightly into his bedroom and he could smell the aroma of coffee. He climbed out of bed, threw on a t-shirt and a pair of shorts and walked towards the brewed liquid. From the kitchen he could see his father sitting on the porch, a mug in his hand, rocking back and forth in his favorite chair. Daniel glanced at the coffee maker noting the dark color of the steaming liquid and groaned. With each visit home, the coffee was stronger than the time before. He poured some into a cup his father had set out for him, added milk from the refrigerator and walked out onto the porch.

The spring morning was gorgeous. The temperature was in the mid 60’s without a cloud in the sky and only a slight breeze. It was the sort of day people in Tennessee lived for. Thirty yards off the side of the porch was a small flowerbed with a multicolored array of tulips in full bloom. It had been his mother’s and Earl had been tending to its care since her absence. Apparently, it was the only part of the property which had received such loving care and attention.

“Sleep good?” his father asked.

“Like the dead,” Daniel answered. “I had forgotten how easily slumber comes here in the country. Must be something about the air.”

Earl chuckled. “More like the lack of noise. I don’t know how you get a decent night’s sleep in your subdivision.”

Daniel positioned the second rocking chair next to his father.

“Our subdivision’s not noisy.”

“It’s like grand central station compared to here. Whenever I visit, I have to bring ear plugs. Everyone up and beginning the rat race earlier and earlier.”

“I thought you enjoyed getting up early.”

“I do, but not with all that racket you live around. A man shouldn’t have to be greeted with that sort of cacophony as he begins his day.”

“Perhaps not,” Daniel said as he sipped his coffee. The addition of milk to the brew had only minimally reduced its bite

“This stuff is awful,” he said.

Earl glanced at him sideways. “It’ll put hair on your chest.”

“Or take it off. Seriously Dad, how do drink this? It’s so strong. This can’t be good for you.”

“My father drank two hearty cups of Folgers every morning up till the day he died.”

“Well, that’s certainly a ringing endorsement. By all means, continue the family tradition. How did you sleep last night?”

Daniel had glanced at his father’s bottle of sour mash on the kitchen table while getting his coffee. It didn’t seem less full than the night before but that didn’t mean there wasn’t a secret stash around the house.

“You mean without the benefit of the whiskey? Fine, actually. Better than I thought I would.”

“Well,” Daniel began, “that was what I was getting at. Was it hard? I mean, falling asleep?”

“Not as much as I would have thought. Actually, talking last night seemed to have helped,” Earl said sheepishly. “Not that I’m going to become some sort of Oprah clone,” he added quickly. “My generation isn’t that big on, what’s the term? Getting in touch with our feelings?”

Daniel grinned between sips of his coffee. “No, I shouldn’t think so. Must be true what they say, though. Confession is good for the soul.”

“Something like that,” Earl grunted.

The two men sat in silence for several more minutes as the day sprang to life. Earl hadn’t cut the grass next to his fence for some weeks and intermittently a rabbit would pop out of the adjacent field into the yard, bouncing around and nibbling on the available greens. Daniel noticed none of them came near his mother’s flower garden. It intrigued him.

“I see you keep Mom’s tulip patch in good order.”

“Yeah,” Earl said nodding. “She said it was the only pretty thing on this place and she wanted it to look nice so the neighbors wouldn’t think we were complete heathens. When she passed, I figured the least I could do was to keep it looking the way she would have wanted.”

“That was kind of you. I’m sure she would be touched.”

“I guess.”

“How do you keep the critters out of it?”

“Secret weapon,” Earl said smiling.

Daniel was intrigued. “Secret weapon?”

Earl nodded, a gleam appearing in his eye. “I urinate around the perimeter every night before I go to bed and then again in the morning.”

Daniel threw his head back and laughed. “Yeah, I guess that would qualify as a secret weapon.”

“Old farmer’s trick,” Earl said. “Your mother never knew or at least never mentioned it. I suspect if she had any inkling of what I was doing, she’d have said something. If she’s watching down from above, I’m sure she’s either tickled or appalled.”

“Maybe both.”

“Maybe.”

Daniel rose from his chair, walked to the railing around the porch and threw the remains of his coffee into the yard. He looked over the property at the barn in the distance. His father no longer kept any farm animals and the building was beginning to appear run down. The house needed a new roof and painting and aside from his mother’s flowerbed, the place was slowly deteriorating. It was a mirror of his father’s life.

“Did you ever give any more consideration to contacting the authorities about the camp?”

“Now and again. The meeting with those two fellows in the barn played over in my mind a lot. Their voices had a funny accent so I assumed they weren’t from around here. Someone with a lot of money had paid for their services. Those sorts of folks don’t just go away. They’d be keeping close tabs on anyone with information about their dealings.”

“But it’s been over 50 years?”

“I realize that,” Earl replied gruffly. “And after all this time, who would care? The people in charge of the camp and the prisoners are probably dead. Whatever paperwork existed has likely been destroyed or lost. Besides, it’s a part of my life I’m ashamed of. Why would I want everyone around here, not to mention the rest of the world, thinking I was a coward when it mattered the most? My side of the story isn’t very flattering.”

“Maybe not, but I think Jim Patton would appreciate your efforts. Aren’t you always saying that if you can’t do the right thing, do the next right thing?”

Earl stared at his son blankly.

“You certainly are your mother’s son.”

“Besides, you just told me you feel better talking with me about this matter. If you told your story to some reporter or legal agency, imagine how you might feel then?”

“Besides pulseless, you mean?”

“Do you really worry about your physical safety after all these years?”

Earl looked down at the porch, maneuvering some clods of dirt towards an open crack between the wooden boards.

“Not much. I suppose its just become easier to try to put the whole matter out of my mind.”

“But that’s not working, is it?”

“No.”

Earl was quiet for a few moments.

“So you think I should try again. Go to the authorities and tell them what I remember.”

“Do I think it would help you? Yes. Do I think it’s going to result in justice being done? Unlikely.”

“You’re probably right. Any thoughts as to who I should contact?”

“Let me make a few calls. I’ll get back to you in a day or so.”

Paul Grabel rented, at well below the average cost of local housing, a small bungalow on one of the few remaining farms in Brentwood, Tennessee. Until the 1980’s,

Brentwood had been a sleepy little burg best known for its agricultural pursuits. However, with the growth of Nashville and Davidson county, families began moving to surrounding areas. Williamson county to the south with its better schools and more affordable housing had experienced a population explosion. What were once farms and dairy cattle operations became subdivisions. The price and size of the homes grew substantially with Brentwood and to a lesser extent, Franklin, the county seat, becoming areas of affluence. Grabel had been at church one day when he overheard an elderly man decrying the lack of a suitable tenant for his property. Paul introduced himself, said he was looking for better housing and looked over the place in the afternoon. He moved in the next day. The cottage sat on the back of the man's 250 acre cattle farm half a mile from the interstate. It was secluded, quiet and ideal for a young man more accustomed to small town life than the hustle and bustle of a metropolitan city.

Grabel's tenure came with a few stipulations. He was expected to pitch in during hay baling season and when the cattle were being readied for market but other than keeping an eye on the back of the property, he was left alone.

Douglas pulled up to the bungalow in his truck, the tires kicking up dust on the gravel road. Not surprisingly, Grabel wasn't waiting for him. Douglas walked to the front door and peered into the living room. Grabel was laying on the couch with the television on. He jumped when Douglas knocked on the window then rose to his feet and shuffled towards the door.

"You were asleep?" Douglas asked.

"Just checking my eyes for pinholes," Grabel replied rubbing his face.

Douglas glanced at the television screen.

"You're watching the Home Shopping Network? Out of zirconium jewelry?"

"I was channel surfing and fell asleep, okay? So sue me. I was up late last night."

"Right," Douglas responded smiling. "You ready to go?"

"Does it matter? I got roped into this thing and..."

"You got roped into nothing. You shot your mouth off about how the geriatric set loved you and your "sparkling personality" as you referred to it. Dana shamed you into going, you slug."

“She didn’t shame me into going. I was simply fearful that if I didn’t accompany you on this jaunt she’d refuse to help me with my laundry in the future.”

Douglas laughed out loud. “You’re pathetic. Does your mother know you have her doing your laundry?”

“What my mother does and doesn’t know about my life is of no consequence to you, Mr. Busybody. Besides, I’m borderline color blind and making sure I don’t mix my whites with colors is very important to all the women in my life.”

“You aren’t any more color blind than I am. Some quack in Fort Worth suggests to your parents you might have some ill defined visual impairment and you milk it for all its worth.”

“Are we going to stand here bantering back and forth the rest of the afternoon or are we leaving? I have a life you know.”

“Oh, I can see that. Go change your shirt. You have a food stain on the one you’re wearing.”

Grabel looked down at the front of his T-shirt.

“Oh yeah. I hadn’t noticed. Told you I was color blind.”

Douglas grabbed Grabel by the shoulders, turned him around and gently shoved him towards his bedroom. “Change the shirt, dimwit. And hurry up. We’re supposed to be there in 15 minutes.”

“I’m going,” Grabel muttered as he lurched forward.

Grabel appeared a few minutes later with what appeared to be a clean T-shirt. On the front were the words ‘colonies of ants have invaded my brain’.

“Try as I may,” Douglas said, “I can never underdress you.”

“What? It’s clean.”

“Never mind. Just get in the truck.”

A few minutes later the two young men were driving south on Franklin Road, the old highway connecting Nashville with Franklin. The day was gorgeous with few clouds overhead and the temperature in the low 70’s. Seemingly every home had someone out in the yard planting flowers or cutting the grass.

Douglas drove into Franklin's town square before turning off to a side street. He had a scrap of paper with the nursing home's address and kept referring to it until he spotted the correct street.

"Here we go," he announced. "Should just be up here on the right."

The truck stopped in front of an old house which had been converted into a small nursing home. On the front lawn was a sign with the words 'Franklin Convalescent Center'. Leading to the front porch was an incline for wheelchairs and a handicap accessorized van was parked in the side driveway. Douglas killed the engine as he opened the driver door and stepped out into the street.

"Well this is cheery," Grabel said.

"I don't think it's so bad. At least it's not some huge complex. This is a house which probably makes the people here feel more like they're living in their own homes."

"I guess. I hope if I ever need to be institutionalized you'll be around to shoot me beforehand."

"I'm certain there's no shortage of people willing to do that for you long before then."

"Funny," Grabel retorted, casting Douglas a twisted grin. "Very funny."

The two men walked to the front door and rang the bell. A young black woman answered.

"Can I help you?"

"Yes, ma'am," Douglas began. "My name is Justin Douglas and we're here to see Rachael Schreiber."

"Oh, yes. She's expecting you Dr. Douglas. Come this way."

The woman opened the screen door and led the men through the house to the back deck where an elderly woman sat at a table, a cup of coffee in front of her. To her right was a middle age man with a receding hairline slowly tapping his fingers together.

"This is Mrs. Schreiber," the woman began, "and this is her nephew, Martin Schreiber."

Martin stood and extended his hand.

"I hope you don't mind my being here, but when the home called and said my aunt would be receiving visitors, I wanted to find out what was going on."

“Not in the least,” Douglas said, shaking Martin’s hand. “It might make things easier for all concerned.”

“Would you two gentlemen care for some coffee or soda?” the woman inquired.

“No thank you,” they answered in unison.

Douglas and Grabel pulled up two adjacent chairs and sat at the table with Martin and his aunt. The deck had a small awning overhead keeping the group in the shade where the temperature was almost excessively cool. Douglas noticed Mrs. Schreiber had a thick yellow shawl draped over her shoulders. The back yard was immaculate with a well trimmed lawn and abundant flowers. Along the back fence was a row of azaleas with multicolored flowers in full bloom. Whoever was in charge of the grounds was earning their paycheck.

Martin spoke first. “My aunt had a stroke 6 months ago. Her mind is still sharp but she’s lost the ability to speak.”

“I see,” Douglas said. “My name is Justin Douglas. I’m a resident in the dermatology program at Vanderbilt. This is Paul Grabel, a friend of mine who is also at Vanderbilt. One of the dermatology professors I work with asked me to help him on a project involving skin biopsies with an abnormal number of blood vessels. He knew that Dr. Schreiber had a similar interest and had published several research papers on the subject. Dr. Fielding asked me to locate the medical records and biopsies in Dr. Schreiber’s work. I tried but couldn’t find anything.”

“Well, it was a long time ago,” Martin said. “Perhaps they’ve been lost or discarded.”

“That’s certainly a possibility,” Douglas acknowledged. “However, Vanderbilt has an unusually good storage and retrieval system in place. Medical records and pathology specimens almost from the day they opened their doors are usually accessible so I was surprised to find Dr. Schreiber’s materials missing. To further confuse matters, the numbering for the medical records and pathology slides were unlike any in the Vanderbilt system. If the materials are available, I would like to be able to evaluate them and complete our research. My last hope was that perhaps Mrs. Schreiber might know of their whereabouts.”

Martin shook his head. "My aunt wasn't involved in any of her husband's work so I don't think you're going to uncover anything but we can ask her."

Martin produced a small notebook and pen, setting it in front of Mrs. Schreiber.

"Aunt Rachael, did you hear what the young doctor was saying?"

The woman nodded her head slowly, picking up the pen with her gnarled hand. She wrote a few sentences on the paper and pushed it towards her nephew.

"She says she doesn't know what you're talking about but you can look through her husband's files if you like."

"Well, we've already tried that," Douglas answered.

"Not the ones at Vanderbilt," Martin replied. "His personal files."

Douglas and Paul looked at each other with puzzled expressions on their faces.

"I wasn't aware he had any personal files."

Martin chuckled and Mrs. Schreiber smiled broadly.

"Oh, yes," he began. "I remember as a small boy going into my uncle's study and being amazed at the stacks of paper and glass slides he had piled up. It was a real mess. I don't see how he ever managed to find anything. After he retired, he straightened things up a bit but continued to work on his projects. When he died, my wife and I boxed up everything from his study."

"Where are they now?"

"In my attic. Most of my aunt and uncle's belongings are in a storage facility but I took all of his medical paraphernalia to my home."

"May we examine them?"

Milton looked at his aunt. "Do you mind if they look at Uncle Henry's research materials?"

Mrs. Schreiber shook her head and scribbled again on the pad of paper.

"She says she'd be delighted to see some of her husband's work being useful again."

"Well, that would be great," Douglas said.

"I do have one stipulation, however."

"What's that?"

"The materials aren't to leave my home."

“That shouldn’t be a problem. However, if the research actually produces something Dr. Fielding and I want to publish, would we be allowed to borrow some of the glass slides to photograph?”

“That’s fine. When you get to that point, just show me what you want to take with you, we’ll write down what it is and set some time frame for its return.”

“I don’t see a problem with that.”

“Since our sons are grown, it will be nice to have young men around the house for a change. My wife occasionally suffers from the empty nest syndrome. I’m sure she’ll be thrilled to have you underfoot.”

“I don’t think Paul will be accompanying me,” Douglas said. “He works in one of Vanderbilt’s labs but doesn’t have any clinical duties in the medical center.”

“Oh. I see,” Milton said.

“Will there be food?” Grabel asked.

Douglas kicked his friend’s leg under the table causing Paul to wince.

Milton and his aunt smiled at each other. Boys never changed.

“There will indeed be food. My wife is an excellent cook and would love to have both of you there.”

“Well, we’ll have to see,” Douglas said, giving Grabel a dirty look. “Paul isn’t permitted around polite company and has very few useful skills outside of the laboratory.”

“Hey, I can look through boxes with the best of them. Besides, you heard the man. His wife would love to have us visit.”

“That’s because she doesn’t know you. Once she does, you’ll be banned from the property.”

“Whatever you two work out will be fine,” Martin said. “We’d love to have you both. Just give us some advance notice so I can retrieve the materials from the attic.”

## Chapter 7

Fielding was sitting at his desk editing a research paper when Douglas knocked on his door.

“Got a minute?” Douglas asked.

“You bet,” Fielding responded. “Did you find Mrs. Schreiber?”

Douglas sat down in a wooden chair in front of Fielding’s desk. “I did indeed. She’s alive and well and living in a nursing home in Franklin.”

Fielding shook his head in amazement. “Unbelievable. She’s got to be what, in her nineties?”

“Ninety-four, to be exact. She had a stroke last year and can’t speak but she’s able to understand everything she hears.”

“How did you talk with her?”

“Her nephew met us and spoke on her behalf. The short story is that her husband apparently had some private files which her nephew stored in his attic when they moved her into the nursing home.”

“And he’ll let you take a look at them?”

“He will. He was very accommodating, in fact. I’m going over to his house Saturday to take a look. He said there’s about 10 boxes in all. There’s one catch, however.”

“I knew it was too good to be true.”

“It’s not that bad. He doesn’t want the boxes leaving the premises. I told him we might want to make some photographs of the slides and copies of the paperwork which was fine with him. We just have to show him what we’re taking and return them. I said that sounded reasonable, that we didn’t want to do anything he wasn’t comfortable with.”

Fielding’s face broke out into a big smile.

“Well, you did it. Of course, we don’t know if there’s anything interesting in Schreiber’s personal files, but if you hadn’t ferreted this out, we’d never have the chance. Congratulations.”

Douglas was about to thank Fielding for his compliment when there was a knock on the door.

“Come in,” Fielding called.

David Prine opened the door and stepped into the office. His appearance was an unwelcome surprise but Fielding was gracious as usual.

“Good morning, David. Did we have a meeting I forgot?”

“No,” Prine responded tersely. “I understand you and your sidekick have located some of Dr. Schreiber’s files. Our department wants them returned.”

Douglas thought this might be a conversation better left to the adults.

“Excuse me,” he said, and began moving towards the door.

“Stay,” Prine said. “This concerns you most of all.”

“I think this is something you need to discuss with Dr. Schreiber’s nephew. They belong to him and he’s given us permission...”

“They don’t belong to him,” Prine interrupted. “They belong to the University, specifically to the pathology department. He doesn’t have the right to grant anyone access to them.”

Fielding continued to sit in his chair, gently rubbing the side of his face. Douglas had seen his professor do this in the past, usually when he was becoming agitated.

“I’m afraid I have to disagree, David. I’m no lawyer, but possession being nine tenths of the law..”

“Correct,” Prine interrupted. “You aren’t a lawyer. However, ours has informed us Schreiber’s files constitute a work product and as such belong to the department under which that work was performed.”

Fielding had had enough. Clearly, the conversation was going nowhere. He’d been gracious to a fault but was unwilling to suffer fools interminably. He rose to his feet and put his hands in his pockets.

“Well, I believe you’ve made your position clear. Thank you for coming by.”

“I’ll expect you and your minions to keep clear of these files.”

“We understand completely. Thank you again.”

Prine was being dismissed and condescended to, both of which he hated.

“So you will leave them alone until such time as they can be transferred to the Pathology Department?”

“No.”

Prine blew his stack.

“Did you not hear what I’ve been saying!”

“I did,” Fielding responded calmly. “I just don’t agree with your position. Until I hear from someone with authority on this matter, we’ll proceed as we see appropriate.”

“I’m the director of surgical pathology! You’ve just heard from someone with authority on this matter!”

“David, don’t raise your voice to me. I’m not some junior faculty member or resident in your department. More to the point, you don’t tell me what to do.”

Prine placed his palms on the back of a chair and leaned towards Fielding.

“Get one thing straight, Dr. Fielding. If you go near those files, you’ll engulf yourself with more trouble than you ever thought possible. And that goes for you too, Dougie.”

Always wanting the last word, Prine turned on his heel and stormed out of the room.

Fielding raised his eyebrows in mock surprise.

“Well, that was pleasant,” Fielding said smiling. “Nothing like a big firestorm to start your day off with. I guess Prine must be off his meds.”

Douglas was standing near a bookcase with a shocked look on his face. He had been present at disagreements between faculty members in the past, usually in the hospital and involving some matter of patient care, but never anything like this. Fielding noticed the resident’s facial expression and body language.

“Sorry you had to be present for that. Not much of an impetus to enter academic medicine, was it?”

“Not much,” Douglas replied. “So what do I do now?”

“Nothing. Well, nothing different except speed up the timetable if possible. Is there any way you can check out the boxes before Saturday?”

“You mean, like today?”

Fielding smiled. “Or tomorrow.”

But what about Prine’s objections?”

“He’s blowing smoke. I seriously doubt he has any legal standing regarding Schreiber’s materials, his protestations notwithstanding. I’ll check things out with our department counsel but in the meantime, we move forward. If there’s any problems, step

aside and contact me. I do think, however, it would be a good idea to see what's in those boxes sooner rather than later."

"Okay," Douglas said. "Tomorrow is my research afternoon. I'll contact Mr. Schreiber today and see if that time works for him."

"Excellent. Let me know what you find."

During his drive home to Chattanooga Daniel Glusac's mind was cluttered with the remnants of the weekend's conversations. The ball was now in his court and he needed to find someone Earl could talk to. Aside from a few attorneys he knew at his church, Daniel had no connections to anyone with real "juice". Sunday evening, after he and his wife Jennifer, had gotten their two young sons in bed, they had repaired to the deck and he told her his father's entire story. She sat listening attentively, sipping her ice tea and only occasionally asking a question for clarification. When he was finished, she shook her head.

"Wow," Jennifer said. "That's quite a tale. Certainly explains a lot though."

"Doesn't it? I think Dad's in a better place now but I told him I'd help him and I frankly have no idea where to turn. I need to contact someone who's in a position to do so discreetly."

"What about that guy in your college fraternity?"

"What guy?"

"I forget his name. The one who was a year or two ahead of you that you couldn't stand."

Daniel thought for a minute.

"Kelly Michaels?"

"Yeah, him. Doesn't he work for some federal agency?"

Daniel stared out across the back yard, his mind clicking away. Kelly Michaels wasn't someone he'd considered. And for good reason. The man had made his life miserable during his pledge semester. Since he was an upperclassman, the new pledges couldn't refuse his bizarre demands, whether it was buying \$200 worth of French fries for the fraternity house or walking into Wal-Mart wearing a miniskirt. Like Daniel, the rest of his pledge class hated him.

“I don’t know, Jennifer. The man was an idiot.”

“He got through law school, didn’t he?”

“Big deal. Anyone can get through law school. If they would accept a moron like Michaels, how hard could it be?”

“Maybe he’s grown up some,” Jennifer replied. “It happens, you know.”

“In theory.”

Daniel had to admit, his wife was right. The last he heard, Michaels was working as a states attorney in Nashville. But that had been 6 years earlier. Surely they would have fired him by now.

“I’ll think about it.”

“What was that lovely nickname he had for you?” Jennifer asked smiling.

“Poodles,” Daniel answered.

Jennifer laughed as Daniel shook his head and grimaced.

“Hated that name.”

“Oh, but it’s so sweet.”

“Can I call you Poodles, then?”

“You may not. Did Michaels have a nickname?”

“He was called various things. None of which should be spoken in polite company.”

“I’ll bet.”

“As I said, I’ll think about it.”

David Prine was fuming when he returned to his office. He stormed past his secretary and told her to hold his calls before slamming the door behind him. Prine rummaged through a desk drawer for a business card and after locating it mashed in the numbers on the telephone. The call was picked up after the second ring.

“We’ve got a problem,” Prine began. “Some of the dim bulbs in the dermatology department have located Schreiber’s files.”

“It’s difficult to classify them as ‘dim bulbs’ if they’ve found the files, isn’t it?” the voice replied.

“I’m not in the mood for semantics,” Prine growled.

“What are you in the mood for?”

“Solutions.”

“Need I remind you none would be necessary if you had handled matters the way you were supposed to?”

“We’ve been over this. I would have happily taken care of the files given the chance. Schreiber’s nephew swooped down on the house before I had a chance to get them out of there. I thought at least we had a few days.”

“Well, you didn’t and as a result, materials which should have been safe guarded found their way into someone else’s hands. We looked the other way on that one, against our better judgment. Now you want us to clean up your mess.”

“Correction. ‘Our’ mess. You’re in this as much as I am.”

“More’s the pity. So what do you want me to do?”

“Either get the files out of the house or destroy them with it.”

“Oh, that would look good, wouldn’t it? A home invasion in the middle of the night. A 3 alarm blaze while the family’s at church? Not very subtle. And coming on the heels of the renewed interest in Dr. Schreiber’s research materials. I don’t think so.”

“Then what would you suggest?”

“Patience.”

“Patience?” Prine asked sarcastically.

“The problem here is one of the unknown. None of us know exactly what the records contain and we all inherited this situation from our predecessors. Schreiber’s research took place during a period when this country’s national security pursuits were more lax, a fact we don’t want publicized. You’ve been compensated well over the years to keep prying eyes away from his and others’ work. To your credit, you’ve managed to keep things hidden in plain sight. We obviously wish to keep matters status quo. There’s no reason to panic at this point. For all any of us know, the boxes in his nephew’s attic are a collection of old journals and a few glass slides. Until we find out differently, why panic? Let the dermatologists have a look at the materials. Keep a close eye on the findings and get back to us.”

“And if there is something incriminating uncovered?”

“We’ll deal with it appropriately at that time. What is your relationship like with the dermatologists in question?”

“Strained.”

“Then perhaps it’s time to mend fences.”

“Welcome. Welcome,” Milton Schreiber said, holding the front door open.  
“Glad you could make it.”

The Schreibers lived in a large subdivision on the western border of Franklin, Tennessee. The development had been constructed on 300 acres of a modest sized farm previously owned by the Jeremiah Hurley family. Mr. Hurley had no one willing to take over the day to day operations of his business and as he was getting on in years, he agreed to sell. He and his wife, however, had a request for the property, specifically that it be named for their only son, Forrest, who had been killed in Vietnam. The developers, eager to close the deal, acquiesced eventually terming the subdivision Forrest Crossing. The farmhouse in the center of the land was lavishly refurbished and became the subdivision clubhouse. Two swimming pools and 6 tennis courts were built nearby. The lots sold quickly, presaging the population explosion beginning in Williamson county. Within 5 years the entire subdivision had been built out and comprised nearly 450 homes.

Douglas walked into the house with the family dog, a large golden retriever busily sniffing his pants legs and wagging her tail. He bent over to pet the animal who clearly reveled in the attention.

“This is Honey,” Milton said. “She has attention deficit syndrome. Can’t get enough attention. She’ll allow you to fuss over her as long as you’ll do so. If she gets to be a pest just shoo her away.”

“I love dogs. Especially golden retrievers. One of my neighbors back home had goldens. They were great dogs.”

“They’re the best. My wife says that if God has a dog, it’s a golden retriever.”

Douglas was busy stroking Honey’s head and mane when Mrs. Schreiber walked into the room drying her hands on a dish towel.

“Justin, this is my wife, Sarah.”

Sarah extended her hand.

“It’s nice to meet you,” she said. “Milton has been telling me about your interest in his uncle’s files.”

“I hope I’m not putting you out,” Douglas began. “I know having people in your home can be a strain.”

“Nonsense. Reminds us of when our boys were still around. Would you like something to eat? You look so thin. Don’t they let you have time in medical school for lunch?”

“Sarah,” Milton interjected. “It’s not boot camp. Of course they have time to eat.”

Douglas smiled. “No, thank you. I already had lunch.”

“How about some desert then? I just made a cake yesterday and as you can see, Milton here certainly doesn’t need to eat any more of it.”

“Sarah,” Milton said.

“Oh shush. The boy needs some cake. He can work later. Come, come,” Sarah said, motioning with her arm.

Douglas followed her into the kitchen. Not surprisingly, it was neat as a pin, the much discussed cake sitting on the breakfast table beneath a clear, glass hood. It did indeed look delicious.

“Have a seat,” Sarah ordered. Douglas did as he was told.

Milton stood nearby, slowly shaking his head.

“She’s never happy unless visitors have something to eat,” he said.

Sarah ignored him.

“Would you like some milk?”

Douglas considered saying no but realized he was a guest in their home. Besides, she would likely badger him until he said yes, so he acquiesced.

“That would be great, thank you.”

Sarah cut a huge slice from the cake and placed it on a plate before setting it down in front of Douglas.

“Milton, sweetie, get this boy a fork, would you?”

Milton did as he was told.

“Aren’t you going to offer me any?” he asked.

“You already had some. Besides, it’s bad for your cholesterol. The fork?”

Milton chuckled as he made his way to the silverware drawer.

“Then why do you make it?”

“For guests, of course.”

Milton returned to the table, fork in hand and set it down on in front of Douglas.

“She’d make dessert for Satan if she knew he was coming,” he said, arching his eyebrows.

“Probably,” Sarah replied. “But I’d add more eggs to give him a heart attack.”

Douglas sat at the table, amused at the banter between the couple.

“Eat. Eat,” Sarah implored. “You need your strength. Studying is hard work and requires energy. The Lord doesn’t just suddenly start the engine.”

“No,” Milton said. “First, he fills you with cake.”

Sarah shot her husband a dirty look.

Douglas dug into the cake. It was delicious. He had forgotten how much he had missed homemade desserts and it reminded him of the chocolate cake his mother and sister made.

“This is delicious,” Douglas said between mouthfuls. “It was worth the trip alone.”

“See, I told you he’d like it,” Sarah told her husband.

“What’s not to like? It’s chocolate cake. He’s a young man. Of course he’d like it.”

Sarah waved at Milton dismissively.

It didn’t take Douglas long to put away the cake. Mrs. Schreiber asked if he’d like another slice but he declined. He would ask for a piece to take with him before leaving, something he was certain would please his hostess.

“So, would you like to see the files?” Milton inquired.

“I’d love to,” Douglas replied as he rose from the table. “Thank you for the cake. It was beyond delicious. Reminds me of home.”

Sarah stood next to the sink beaming. “It was my pleasure.”

“This way,” Milton said, motioning with his hand. “I dragged all the stuff out of the attic and put it on the dining room table.”

“I didn’t mean for you to go to so much trouble,” Douglas said.

“Well, you certainly couldn’t stay up in the attic and work there. Too hot. Besides, Sarah would never have stood for it.”

When the two men entered the dining room, Douglas could see he had his work cut out for him. On the table in the center of the room were 11 standard sized cardboard boxes.

“This is great,” Douglas said. “I appreciate you opening up your home to me.”

“Not a problem. I’ll let you get to work. I’ll be in the garage tinkering around. Just let me know if you need anything.”

Douglas thanked his host who turned and left the room. The boxes lacked any external markings identifying their contents. One looked as good as another, so he opened the nearest one and peered inside. Not surprisingly, it contained a number of notebooks similar to those in the pathology archives. On the front were dates corresponding to Schreiber’s tenure at the university but nothing to indicate what was in them. Douglas pulled the top three from the box, sat down in a chair and began leafing through them. Each had sequential lines filled with patient names adjacent to which were their slide accession numbers, the sites of their biopsies and medical record numbers. Some entries contained notations about the patient or pathology findings. The nomenclature and numeric entries were similar to what Douglas had seen before. Notably absent were any 7 digit medical record numbers or 3 letter pathology accession numbers. Additionally, none of the material pertained to angiosarcomas but rather the colon, breast and lung biopsies typically associated with his work in surgical pathology. After reading the first 10 pages, Douglas realized this notebook was a dead end.

For the next 2 hours, Douglas sequentially evaluated each of the boxes, removing the notebooks and scanning their contents. Few pertained to skin lesions and none had 7 digit medical record numbers or 3 letter pathology slides. Intermittently, Mrs. Schreiber checked on her guest, usually offering something to eat or drink. The Schreibers were gracious hosts but he didn’t wish to overstay his welcome.

Douglas began repacking the boxes, preparing to leave. He had just closed his briefcase when Mr. Schreiber appeared carrying another box.

“I found one more,” Milton said. “I kept thinking there was another box so I went back up to the attic and poked around again.”

Schreiber was panting and out of breath, his T-shirt soaked through with sweat.

“I was about to pack it in for the day,” Douglas said.

“All done with the others?”

“Yes, sir. Went through them all.”

Milton set the box down on the table.

“Well, you can leave this one for another time if you wish.”

Douglas looked at his watch. His host had obviously expended a lot of effort to procure the final box. It would be rude to leave now. He set his briefcase back down.

“Let’s see what we have,” he replied as he pried the flaps back.

Inside were three notebooks, smaller than the others. In addition, there were 2 plastic boxes each about the size of a DVD tape. He removed the top notebook and looked up at his host.

“Any idea why this box is different?”

“No,” Milton replied. “I did think it odd though. When I was cleaning out the house, I found the other boxes in a storage closet. Probably hadn’t been disturbed for decades. This last one was in the attic.”

Douglas sat back in his chair and began thumbing through the first notebook. The first page told him he’d hit pay dirt. In the far left hand column were the seven digit medical record numbers he’d been searching for. Each column to the right contained additional information including the patients’ names, ages and gender with the final column containing the 3 lettered pathology specimens.

“Wow,” he said as he turned the pages. “This is it.”

“Find what you were looking for?” Milton asked.

“In spades. One of the notebooks from the pathology archives contained a short list of medical record numbers and corresponding pathology accession numbers. The problem was, they weren’t like any in the Vanderbilt system and I couldn’t track them, much less find them.”

Milton had a confused look on his face. “Why wouldn’t they be in the Vanderbilt system? That was the only place my uncle worked for the last 40 years of his life.”

“That’s the \$64,000 question. I’ve asked around and no one seems to know. But that brings up another matter. Do you know anything about any outside work Dr. Schreiber may have been involved in?”

“Such as?” Milton said, pulling up a chair.

“Consulting for a pharmaceutical company, working for an independent lab, government funded research. That sort of thing.”

“Not to my knowledge but then I didn’t talk with him much about his job. Wouldn’t that have been with Vanderbilt’s permission? Surely he couldn’t have done that without them knowing about it.”

Douglas chuckled softly. “Well, it’s a big place with a lot of history. For the most part, I have no idea what goes on there now, much less 50 years ago.”

“No doubt.”

“I need to ask a favor,” Douglas said.

“Shoot.”

“I would like to take this box with me and examine its contents further. The small plastic containers probably contain glass pathology slides that correspond with the patients in these notebooks. Obviously, I need a microscope to examine them and to show them to Dr. Fielding. I know what you said about everything staying here, but this box is different. If the answer is no, I certainly understand but it would help me evaluate this material in our offices.”

Martin thought for a moment then nodded his head.

“I suppose that would be alright. But I’ll need to get this stuff back.”

“Absolutely,” Douglas replied. “I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

## Chapter 8

Daniel Glusac sat in his office Monday afternoon staring at the phone. It was 12:30 P.M. and he had finished lunch, eating as he usually did at his desk while doing paperwork. Mondays tended to be busy with weekend emergency cases taking up a disproportionate amount of the morning schedule. He had found Kelly Michaels phone number with an internet web search and wasn't surprised to find he was still employed in the States Attorneys General office in downtown Nashville. If Michaels couldn't help he should be able to point him in the right direction.

Glusac picked up the receiver and punched in the numbers.

"Attorney General's office," the voice on the other end said.

"I'd like to speak with Kelly Michaels, please."

"One moment."

The line went dead briefly.

"This is Kelly Michaels."

"Kelly, this is Daniel Glusac, I don't know if you remember me, but.."

"Of course I remember you, Poodles! What's it been? Fifteen years?"

Glusac was relieved the man knew who he was. At least it would make the remainder of the conversation easier.

"Something like that. Listen, the reason I'm calling.."

"Hey, you ever run into any of the other guys from the house?"

"Well, not really. I get the newsletter and see who's doing what, but apart from that, I don't think any of them live in my neck of the woods."

"Good times, but I guess that's not why you're calling me, is it?"

"No, actually, it's not. Do you have a second? I don't want to keep you from something important."

"Now is fine. What gives?"

Glusac took a deep breath. "It involves my dad," he said.

For the next five minutes, Glusac explained his father's situation as best he could, trying to include the important facts and excluding the trivial. When he was done, he noticed his hands were shaking slightly.

“Man, that’s some story,” Michaels replied. “Not one we get around here very often.”

“I guess my question is this, where should I go with this information and what can I expect when I do?”

“I’ll have to check, but I don’t believe the statutes of limitations apply here. Certainly not if your father’s friend was murdered but I’m guessing most of the people involved have since passed on.”

“If not all,” Glusac answered.

“I’ll be straight with you, finding out what happened to Jim Patton’s going to be next to impossible. The coldest of cases, but I get the impression that’s not your main concern.”

“Correct.”

“If the feds were involved in some sort of medical experimentation with these prisoners, it couldn’t have been done without paperwork somewhere. That paper trail would be key. The problem is going to be finding it and I wouldn’t have a clue as to where to begin looking.”

“Is this the sort of thing your office handles?”

“It is, but our cases are typically more current.”

“Should I speak with someone else?”

“Possibly, but I’ll need to know where to direct you. Give me a day or so to look into this and I’ll let you know what I find.”

“You gotta be kidding me,” Dr. Fielding said, a huge smile plastered across his face.

“Nope,” Douglas replied. “It was the last box he brought down. Said he knew there was one more but had forgotten where he put it. I opened it up and there was the mother load. The notebooks, the glass slides and the tissue blocks all wrapped up in one neat little package.”

“Unbelievable. I had about given up hope on this project. Have you had a chance to go through any of the materials?”

“Just a cursory scan of the first notebook and the plastic boxes. The initial pages have a sequential list of patients’ medical record numbers with seven digits and the three lettered accession numbers. The book is only about a third filled but there must be hundreds of patients catalogued. I haven’t gone through the other two notebooks.”

“What’s the time frame on evaluating the rest of the materials?”

“This week, hopefully. I don’t need to look through the other boxes so I should be able to spend my time on what we have now.”

Fielding nodded his head and smiled. “Amazing. Let me know what you find and we’ll set up some time later on to go over the path slides.”

“Will do,” Douglas said as he left.

Less than an hour later, Fielding’s pager went off. He glanced at the number in the display but didn’t recognize it. Fielding hated such pages. They could be simply a resident from another service wanting to chat about a biopsy from a hospitalized patient but they could also be some University administrator bent on having him fill out more mindless paperwork. He punched in the numbers on his phone and held his breath. A few seconds later, he wished he’d ignored it.

“This is David Prine,” the voice announced. It was like fingernails on a chalkboard.

“You paged me, David,” Fielding said. Referring to him by his first name annoyed Prine and Fielding made a habit of doing consistently.

“I understand your resident went over the materials at Milton Schreiber’s home.”

“Correct.”

“Did he take any of them with him?”

“Why?”

“Because as I mentioned, our department considers them to be our property.”

“And as I mentioned, I disagree. You were going to have your attorneys check into the matter and get back to me. I have heard nothing further on the matter.”

“They’re still evaluating things. In the meantime, I’m not going to get into a turf battle with you but if Douglas did remove some or all of our property, I would at least like to be present when he evaluates them.”

“No,” Fielding said flatly.

“Excuse me?”

“David, I could get into some flowery language with you about propriety and congeniality but the bottom line is no. Until I hear from my chairman or someone higher up the food chain, we’ll be evaluating them by ourselves.”

Fielding could hear Prine grinding his teeth on the other end of the line. Whatever it was about Schreiber’s work that had embedded itself in his craw, the man wasn’t going to let the matter alone.

“You are getting dangerously close to having this matter brought before the faculty Senate, Fielding.”

“Could be. Is there anything else?”

“How does an injunction sound?”

“Like it’s spelled with an ‘i’”.

Prine slammed the receiver down eliciting a wince from Fielding as the loud sound rattled in his ear. Fielding smiled to himself but in truth, was unsettled. As much as Prine huffed and puffed, he was still the director of surgical pathology and enjoyed powers associated with his longevity. If he decided to make trouble, it could make for a sticky situation. The important matter at hand was to expedite the evaluation of what Douglas had discovered and collate the data.

Daniel Glusac was placing his lab coat on a hanger when one of his dental assistants stuck her head in the door.

“Marcia says there’s a call for you.”

“From who?”

“A Kelly Michaels. Want her to take a message?”

“No, I’ll take it.”

Glusac returned to his desk, picked up the telephone receiver and punched the red, blinking button.

“Kelly?”

“Hey doc. Got a minute?”

“Sure. Find out anything?”

“Sort of. I talked with the head of our division about your dad. Said he’d check into it and then called me back about an hour ago. He wants a sit down with you and your father in our offices.”

“What?”

“He wants to hear the story straight from the horse’s mouth, so to speak.”

“Can’t we do it via telephone conference?”

“I asked him that. He said he’d rather have the conversation in a controlled environment where he knows who’s hearing what.”

“I see,” Glusac replied.

“How does tomorrow afternoon sound.”

“Tomorrow afternoon?”

“Yep. Look, I know this is last minute and all but I’d give it some serious consideration. He doesn’t move at this speed often so I’m assuming there’s something here he thinks worth investigating.”

“What time?”

“How about 2 pm? Can you be here by then?”

“I think so. I’ll have to pick up my father. He won’t drive in Nashville traffic anymore but I’ll work it out. Count on us being there at 2.”

Glusac hung up the phone and punched in the number for Marcia at the front desk.

“I need you to cancel all my appointments for tomorrow.”

Douglas sat at the end of the large conference table in the departmental library. He was alone which was the reason for being there. In front of him was the box of materials from the Schreiber home and his lap top computer for note taking. He removed the first notebook from the box and opened it to page one.

Schreiber’s inscriptions in this volume were different from the others Douglas had seen. For one thing, the author’s notations had been done with a fountain pen using plenty of ink. Secondly, the penmanship was better. Schreiber had evidently put both time and thought into what he was writing.

The paper had vertical lines drawn for categorical separation. From left to right the columns consisted of the patient's name and age, their medical record number, the biopsy designation and, at the far right, the findings Schreiber noted at the microscope. As the final column contained multiple sentences, the pages contained only six to eight patients in total, far less than what Douglas had found in Schreiber's other works.

The most startling aspect of the patient list was the names. All were foreign, appeared Slavic in origin and all seemed to be male. Douglas was surprised. He wasn't aware of any Slavic community in the area and couldn't recall encountering any clinic patients with similar sounding names.

The pathologic features noted by Schreiber were uniformly similar. Tissues were described as containing large numbers of blood vessels and hemorrhage. Most notations alluded to the abnormalities of the cells comprising the blood vessels and the evidence of their rapid reproduction suggesting they were malignant in nature. The word "angiosarcoma" was applied to nearly every biopsy specimen. This wasn't surprising, given the pathologist's interest in cancerous proliferations of blood vessels but there were occasional queries Schreiber had jotted down regarding the geographic origins of the patients evaluated, something none of his other writings had contained.

Earl Glusac was grumpy, a condition he was often given to. When Daniel had called him the night before about the appointment in Nashville, Earl had protested. He wasn't much for last minute changes to his schedule and cited a pressing need to attend to several matters on the farm. Daniel knew better. While he had a few daily chores requiring his attention, the man spent most of his time piddling around in his workshop and sitting on the front porch waiting for rabbits to appear near his wife's flower garden, his 22 caliber rifle at the ready. Daniel promised to have him home by nightfall. Earl realized he wouldn't be able to talk his son out of this trip and reluctantly agreed to attend the meeting.

"How long is this going to take?" Earl asked when Daniel arrived.

"Nice to see you again as well, Dad."

"Sorry. Just not accustomed to going to the big city. There wasn't anything there I wanted to see 30 years ago and I doubt things have changed much."

“I can understand that, but that’s where the Federal Building is.”

“Why can’t they come out here? The fresh air would do them good.”

“Because they’re busy men.”

“And I’m not?”

Daniel looked at his father incredulously. “Are you really going to try to make the argument your schedule is more pressing than theirs?”

Earl looked around the porch and muttered something under his breath. He possessed a chronic and well entrenched dislike for government institutions and the people who worked in them. “Weasels” is what he called them when in a good mood. Something more colorful when it came time to pay his taxes.

Earl retrieved his coat, closed the front door and locked it.

“That’s what you’re wearing?” Daniel asked. “Overalls and a flannel shirt?”

“That’s what I have on, isn’t it?” he said without breaking stride.

“Don’t you think something a bit dressier might be in order?”

“Nope. They’re clean and so am I. I even shaved. If the weasels want something else, too bad. When they come to my house, I’ll dress up and vacuum.”

“Well, I hope they take your story seriously.”

“The ‘story’ as you put it, stands on its own merits. Either they believe it or they don’t. What I’m wearing is irrelevant.”

“Your call,” Daniel said as he buckled his seatbelt.

“That’s a fact.”

The men drove for an hour before stopping at a Cracker Barrel for coffee. Earl needed to stretch his legs but his son suspected he was stalling, attempting to delay the inevitable. He had been quiet during the drive. Earl was never a talkative person but Daniel knew when something was on his mind.

“Boy, every time I come back, this place is bigger and busier than the time before,” Daniel commented when they arrived at the city outskirts.

“Who’d want to live here anymore?” Earl asked. “They might as well be in New York or Los Angeles. What a rat race.”

“Not quite the same place you used to visit as a kid, is it?”

Earl shook his head. “Don’t even recognize it anymore.”

Daniel knew of his father's dislike for big cities. Although he would always deny it, the traffic made him nervous. Earl was accustomed to driving on two-lane roads - anything larger meant he would have to be vigilant about other drivers, something he despised.

Downtown Nashville, though comparatively smaller than other cities, had become a sea of tall office buildings and parking garages. At the edge of the area was the Estes Kefauver Federal Building. A large, light brown box shaped affair, it housed the offices of States Attorneys General as well as the federal courts. Daniel pulled into an adjacent parking garage. Earl glanced at the sign on the near wall listing the prices for parking.

"Have you seen these charges?" he said, looking at his son. "With all the money I send these morons our parking should be free!"

"It's a private garage, Dad. These folks don't work for the government."

"All the more reason for them to know better. This is outright thievery."

"Well, we won't be here that long."

"I should hope not."

Daniel had to drive to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor to find a parking space. It was 1:50 P.M. and the building was nearly full. Both men exited the car and walked to an elevator which took them to street level. Once on the sidewalk, a homeless man approached Earl asking for money.

"Get a job," he growled.

"My father's a little cranky," Daniel explained. "Missed his nap today."

The man's expression didn't change. He shuffled away towards a couple walking behind them.

The Glusacs walked into the building and to a uniformed officer sitting behind a desk.

"We're looking for the States Attorneys General office," Daniel said.

"Sixth floor. Take a right off the elevator. You can't miss it," he replied.

Daniel and Earl passed through a metal detector located in the lobby without incident and found the SAG's office where the guard had said it would be. A middle aged woman seated behind a large desk in the foyer called Kelly Michaels' office and

told him the Glusacs had arrived. Thirty seconds later, Michaels rounded the corner walking briskly towards the two.

“Danny Glusac,” he announced. “Long time no see.”

Daniel was relieved his frat brother hadn’t called him “Poodles” in public. Michaels looked good. He was still reasonably trim and with a full head of hair although it had become considerably grayer over the years.

“Good to see you as well, Kelly,” Daniel replied. “This is my father, Earl.”

“So at last I get to meet the great Earl Glusac,” Kelly replied, pumping the man’s hand up and down.

Earl gave his son a puzzled look.

“Your son spoke of you often in college. According to him, you could work from sun up to sun down, kill wild animals with your bare hands and doctor any livestock back to health using only mercurochrome.”

“I may have exaggerated a bit, Dad,” Daniel said sheepishly.

“Yeah, well I’m not quite the man I used to be,” Earl said. Michaels was taking on the aura of a glad hander, something the elder Glusac despised, even more than government bureaucrats.

“Well, I think Mr. Porter is probably ready for us so why don’t we get down to business,” Michaels said after glancing at his watch. “Can I get you anything to drink? Coffee? Soda?”

“We’re good,” Earl said definitively.

Daniel knew his father was ill at ease. He was in foreign territory and unaccustomed to talking about himself or his past. The sordid details were weighing heavily on his mind and Daniel assumed the man was wishing he’d brought a flask of Jack Daniels with him to lubricate the ordeal.

Williams walked in front of the two men down a hall to a dark paneled conference room. When they opened the door, a large bald headed man sat at the end of a long conference table. At his right was a young woman with a sheaf of papers in front of her. She looked up when the group entered the room but the bald man did not. He continued to read the document in front of him before signing his name at the bottom, recapping his pen and returning it to his front shirt pocket.

“Please put these in the overnight courier bag with a receipt request for tomorrow. I’ll need to know when they arrive. That’s it for now”

“Yes, sir,” she replied and closed the door behind her as she left the room.

The man stood from his chair, buttoned his suit coat and began walking towards his guests. He was huge. Easily 6’4” or 6’5” and weighing well over 200 pounds Porter looked like someone who had played college football back in the day. He was completely bald and with his stature, somewhat menacing. Probably a good negotiating tool Daniel thought to himself.

“Gerald Porter,” the man said, extending his hand towards Earl and then Daniel.

After perfunctory greetings were made and questions about the day’s travel Porter got down to business.

“Kelly told me some of your story, Mr. Glusac, however, I’d like to hear it from you. From the beginning if you don’t mind.”

Earl cleared his throat and began. Recounting a man’s failures in life is never easy and even less so for someone like Earl Glusac. He cared little what others thought of him but simultaneously didn’t want other men to believe he hadn’t stepped up when the call came.

Telling the story took less than 10 minutes. Michaels made notes on a large legal pad, only occasionally looking up from his writing. Porter sat silently at the end of the table with an expressionless face. When Earl had finished, he sat back in his chair waiting for the questions to come. Even though the tale had been short, the elder Glusac found himself tired from reliving the past. It was a painful memory and delving into it stirred up more emotions than he was accustomed to dealing with.

“It was called the Balkans Project,” Porter said.

The men in the room stared at Porter with quizzical expressions.

“So you’re familiar with this matter?” Daniel asked.

“Superficially. Shortly after joining the Attorneys General Office I heard rumors of government run camps in which prisoners from the Balkans had been held and subjected to various medical experiments. Not the feds finest hour and obviously, something they were interested in keeping under wraps. I did some research and uncovered a little more. Eventually I was told to cease my inquiries.”

“By your superiors?” Michaels asked.

“In a manner of speaking. Actually, by Senator Albert Gore, Sr. At that time I was posted in D.C. He came to my home one evening and told me in no uncertain terms to drop the matter. Apparently, since the largest camp resided in his home state, he didn’t want any embarrassing press.”

“He didn’t have anything to do with the camps, did he?” Earl inquired.

“I doubt it,” Porter said with a chuckle. “The Senate was different then - more of the ultimate social club. I got the impression he knew nothing about the project but he was a prominent Senator at the time and could definitely do without an investigation casting his state in a bad light. I was young and I guess he thought he could buffalo me into dropping the whole thing.”

“Did he succeed?” Michaels asked.

“He did not,” Porter replied with a smile. “But I became more careful. Eventually, I accumulated a large file on the matter. I was about 2 weeks from taking it to my superiors and seeking time before a federal grand jury. One night, driving home from work, a car ran me off the road and into a telephone pole. It wasn’t accidental. I spent 5 days in the hospital. By then I had two young daughters at home and my wife begged me to stop. I did as she asked. Besides, most of the main players were dead or dying and I wasn’t optimistic about getting many of them before a judge and jury. For the past 25 years or so, the file has been gathering dust. I was pleased to hear I had reason to dust it off.”

Douglas sat in the dermatopathology readout room adjacent to Fielding’s office. It was a modest sized space in which the cases were evaluated and diagnosed each day. In the middle of the room was an “L” shaped table supporting a microscope with multiple tubes extending from it and sets of ocular eyepieces at 2 foot intervals. It was termed a “multiheaded” microscope allowing up to 8 people a simultaneous view of the glass slides being evaluated.

“Hope you haven’t been waiting long,” Fielding announced as he walked through the door.

“Just got here,” Douglas replied.

Fielding sat in front of the microscope, or the driver's seat as he referred to it. Douglas took the chair to his left, a plastic box containing Schreiber's slides between them on the table.

"These be they?" Fielding asked, pointing to the box.

"These be they. I believe they follow the list in Schreiber's notebook."

Fielding opened the box, selected the first slide and placed it on the platform of the microscope. He looked through the ocular eyepieces for only a few seconds before speaking.

"This is Kaposi's sarcoma."

Kaposi's sarcoma is a tumor comprised of proliferating blood vessels. Prior to the 1980's almost all such lesions arose on the legs and arms of elderly patients with Mediterranean or Eastern European ancestry. Technically a malignancy, it is considered "low grade" meaning it rarely metastasizes. Such tumors, however, can become quite large and occasionally ulcerate making the patients more susceptible to skin infections. If the lesion is small, it can be surgically removed. If not, radiation therapy and sometimes chemotherapy will often shrink the tumor. Since the early 1980's most cases in the United States have occurred in homosexual patients with AIDS although with the widespread use of newer medications for this infection, the number of cases has declined.

"Do you have any information on this patient?" Fielding asked.

Douglas consulted the notebook in his lap. "What's the number on the slide?"

Fielding took the slide off the microscope, glanced at the paper sticker affixed to one end. "DDS 1547."

Douglas found the notation in the ledger's first entry.

"Amirif Gepastov. Thirty three years old. Site of biopsy upper chest."

Fielding returned the slide to the microscope stage and again peered down the eyepieces.

"I don't see how this could be anything but Kaposi's sarcoma."

"What about some other vascular malignancy?" Douglas asked.

"Possible, I suppose. But it doesn't have the pattern of other vascular tumors. It's clearly malignant. I guess it could be an angiosarcoma, but the cells aren't abnormal enough and the clinical setting is completely wrong.

Douglas concurred. Angiosarcomas were almost always found on the face or scalp of elderly patients. For someone so young to have such a cancer would be almost unheard of.

“Let me have the next one,” Fielding said.

Douglas reached into the box and selected the second slide.

Fielding spent even less time evaluating the tumor.

“Same thing,” he announced. “KS. What’s the book say?”

“Fertin Malish. 29 years old. Biopsy was from the forehead.”

Fielding and Douglas rapidly evaluated eight more biopsies, all exhibiting identical features.

“Does Schreiber mention anything in his book about his thoughts on these specimens?” Fielding asked.

“He has some notes associated with each biopsy,” Douglas replied. “Mostly of a clinical nature.”

“Let me see.”

Fielding took the book and began reading in the far right hand column.

*Patient with numerous red-brown papules and nodules on the upper trunk, neck and face. Weight loss beginning. Thrush. AN-56.*

“What’s this reference to ‘AN-56’?” Fielding asked.

“I have no idea what it means but he has it noted in almost all the patients listed. A few have ‘AN-48’ and one has ‘AN-53’.”

“Bizarre,” Fielding replied.

The two men spent the next 30 minutes evaluating the remaining 40 slides in the box. All were similar, the corresponding notations in the notebook equally cryptic.

When Fielding has viewed the last slide he removed it from the microscope stage and handed it to Douglas.

“I’m not certain what I expected to find, but this wasn’t it. A whole ream of KS biopsies from the 1950’s.”

“I have the tissue blocks from these slides,” Douglas said. “Do you want me to get some human herpesvirus 8 stains on any of them?” referring to the viral infection known to be associated with Kaposi’s sarcoma.

“Good idea. Get some stains on the first 5 patients. If they’re negative, we’ll consider staining the rest of the blocks. If they’re positive there won’t be much need to invest further resources.”

Fielding sat in his chair, rubbing his face.

“I assume there wasn’t anything in any of the other materials you came across that referenced these patients or this ‘AN’ stuff?”

“No, sir.”

“Nothing different about this notebook compared to the others?”

“No. They’re all basically identical. Pretty much standard issue laboratory notebooks from that time period.”

“Is there anything else of his to evaluate? I mean, any other papers or textbooks? Things like that?”

Douglas scowled and looked at the floor.

“I never thought to ask,” he replied.

## Chapter 9

David Prine sat in booth at the Waffle House off interstate 40 fifteen miles east of the Nashville International Airport. It was 9:30 P.M. and he realized it would be nearly midnight when he finally returned home. He despised being in such places. They smelled of cigarette smoke and the clientele was decidedly lower class. The restaurant was nearly deserted but three booths behind him was a group of 4 men decked out in camouflage, obviously on a hunting trip and even more obviously drunk. They were loud, boisterous and flirting with the middle aged waitress who didn't seem to mind their salacious comments.

Prine checked his watch frequently. He had been instructed to be there at 9:15 sharp which didn't sit well with him. Prine wasn't used to taking orders from anyone and rankled at the idea of being kept waiting. He was about 5 minutes from leaving when a man walked in the front door and made a straight line for Prine's booth.

"Miserable weather out there," the man said, shaking the rain off his coat.

"Apparently," Prine answered. "You're late."

"The plane left behind schedule."

"You would be John, I assume?"

"That works."

"Want some coffee?"

"No, thank you. I had some on the plane, which is sitting on the tarmac so let's get down to business."

"Why couldn't we have handled this over the phone?"

"This is the sort of conversation best done face to face," John replied.

Prine shifted uneasily in his seat. John appeared to be in his mid fifties with graying hair, thin wire spectacles and pasty white skin. Still, he had good reason to be careful. The man had enormous resources at his disposal, including, he assumed, the capacity to make him disappear without a trace.

"Some of the higher ups are becoming nervous," John began, "which in turn makes me nervous. Our message to you is quite simple. You have 72 hours to acquire the materials currently in the possession of your colleagues. Otherwise, we'll step in and things will become messy. The people I work with are inclined towards a scorched earth

policy. It isn't pretty but it is effective and I can assure you they greatly wish this matter to be resolved."

"And how do you propose I 'acquire' these materials?"

"We don't care."

Prine looked away, slowly shaking his head. "You don't understand the situation very well, do you?"

John removed his glasses and began cleaning them with a handkerchief he removed from his pocket.

"Please," he said smiling. "This is small potatoes. You're dealing with what, a dermatologist and a resident?"

John's condescension angered Prine but there was little he could do about it. Ultimately, he'd have no choice but to cooperate.

"Well, I can certainly try..." Prine began.

"There is no try," John interrupted. "There is only succeed."

"If I'm caught, there's going to be a major blowup. This sort of thing just isn't done at universities like Vanderbilt. It constitutes grounds for dismissal. Even if I do manage to get these materials, Fielding and Douglas are going to know that I took them. I don't see any scenario where the hammer doesn't come down on me."

"This all sounds like a personal problem."

"And you'll back me up?"

"As much as feasible."

"That's not very reassuring."

"It's not meant to be," John replied, glancing at his watch. "You've been well compensated over the years for shepherding our interests. On occasion, the debt comes due."

"And what's to prevent me from simply going to the authorities?"

John looked at Prine with an incredulous expression.

"Do I really need to go into all of that?"

"No," Prine said dejectedly. "I suppose not."

"Good. Then we understand each other."

John stood up and began rebuttoning his coat. "I'll expect to hear from you shortly," he said before turning and walking out the door.

Prine sat in the booth staring at his coffee cup. Outside the rain continued to pelt the building with great waves of water but he hardly noticed.

Douglas pulled his truck into the small driveway of the Schreiber home. As usual, the yard and flowerbeds were immaculate. New annuals of snapdragons, impatiens and petunias had been planted, all covered with a fresh bed of mulch. The Schreiber grounds weren't large but they were definitely well maintained.

Douglas rang the doorbell and stepped off the porch. After a few seconds, Milton Schreiber opened the door, a smile on his face.

"Hello, Justin," he said. "I thought that was your truck in the driveway."

"Good morning, Mr. Schreiber. I'm returning the materials I took. Dr. Fielding and I looked at the slides and paperwork yesterday. I took some digital photographs and copied the pages from the notebook so we have everything we need."

"Come in. Come in," Schreiber said. "Where are my manners?"

Douglas entered the house as Milton held the door for him.

"Just set them there on the dining room table."

"Is Mrs. Schreiber home?"

Milton laughed. "No, she's gone to some seminar on houseplants of all things. I suppose by this time next week the place will look like the jungle room at Graceland."

Douglas set the box on the table.

"Do you have a minute?" he asked.

"Certainly. Everything alright?"

"Just fine. I wanted to talk with you about our findings."

"Let's go out on the deck. It would be a shame to waste the beautiful morning God gave us," Schreiber said with a smile.

The two men walked through the kitchen and out the back door. In the center of the deck was a metal table surrounded by four chairs. On the tabletop lay a gray tabby cat who looked up sleepily at the sound of the door opening. After seeing who it was, he laid his head back down and resumed napping.

“This is Murray,” Schreiber said. “He’s my wife’s cat.”

“He’s not yours?” Douglas asked grinning.

“No, the dog is mine. The cat is hers. I prefer my pets to be interactive.”

The men pulled their chairs away from the table and sat down. The day was indeed beautiful. The sun was out with few clouds and the humidity had yet to make it’s annual appearance. The Schreiber’s back yard was as well tended as the front. Flowers were in abundance with an entire bed of day lilies just beginning to show their colors.

“I don’t want to take up your time,” Douglas began. “So I’ll get right to the point. Do you know what Kaposi’s sarcoma is?”

Schreiber shook his head. “I think I may have heard of it but couldn’t tell you anything about it. Doesn’t sound too good.”

“It’s not. Well, most of the time it’s not.”

Douglas gave his host a brief overview of the disease mentioning its association with AIDS infections. Schreiber listened carefully, occasionally stroking the fur on Murray’s back.

“Well, since these cancers are from blood vessels that sounds like something my uncle would have been involved with. I don’t see your point.”

“What we found odd about the slides we evaluated was twofold. One, all of the patients were too young to have been afflicted with Kaposi’s sarcoma outside the population of AIDS patients. That condition is called endemic Kaposi’s sarcoma and usually affects people in their 60’s or 70’s. The oldest man we could find in your uncle’s notebooks was in his early 40’s and most weren’t over 30. Second, all of these patients had Slavic sounding names. I’m sure in the 1950’s there were Slavs in Tennessee but how your uncle had access to a group so homogenous is something we don’t understand.”

Milton sat staring at his guest. “I’m afraid I don’t have an answer for you. As you know, I was a child in the 1950’s and living in the northeast. I assume you’ve asked around Vanderbilt?”

“Oh yeah,” Douglas said with a smile. “But no one seems to have an explanation. It was a long time ago and I haven’t found anyone who was around then.”

“Surely you aren’t thinking these patients all had AIDS, are you? I mean, AIDS didn’t come along until the 1980’s, right?”

“There’s evidence that AIDS has been around for a lot longer than previously thought. It began in Africa but of course record keeping in that part of the world is usually nonexistent. If all of these men did have AIDS it would be astounding and open up a Pandora’s box of questions. How did they come to be in the US? Who had access to them? Where were they living? That sort of thing.”

“Well, as I said, I have limited knowledge of what my uncle worked on during his time at Vanderbilt.”

Douglas looked around the yard, shifted in his chair and scratched the back of Murray’s ears. “I’m not sure how to broach this subject,” he said after a long pause. “So I’ll just jump in with both feet. We obviously don’t think Dr. Schreiber was involved in something untoward but the list of unanswered questions seems to grow the further we proceed. Is there anything about his life, at work or otherwise, that might shed some light on any of this? Did he have anything in his personal effects which might be helpful?”

Milton thought for a moment, rubbing his face. “My uncle’s life was, for the most part, unremarkable. I suppose the most noteworthy event was the death of his son.”

“I didn’t realize he had a son.”

“He did. Isaac was his name. My uncle and aunt had been married only a short time when she became pregnant. There were some complications with his birth necessitating a hysterectomy for my aunt so they knew this would be their only child. When Isaac was about 5 he developed appendicitis. They took him to the hospital, had his appendix removed and after a few days he went home. When he was about 6, Isaac became sick again with some sort of internal bleeding. No one could figure out what the problem was and he died a few weeks later. The doctors did an autopsy and found out he had growths in his bowel which were leaking blood. That’s about as much as I know.”

“That must have been devastating.”

“It was. I noticed occasionally my uncle would have this far off look in his eye when he was around children, particularly boys. I assumed he was thinking of Isaac but I never spoke with him about it.”

“Is there any chance he would have kept a journal?” Douglas asked.

“You mean like a diary?”

“Yeah, something like that. Any kind of a personal notebook where he might have written things down.”

“Not to my knowledge. He did have a box or two of personal effects Aunt Rachael had saved. I glanced through them when we cleaned out her house. As I recall there were a few picture albums, some diplomas and the deed to his home. Oh, and his Torah and Megillah. Nothing very exciting. You’re welcome to take a look if you like but I would ask you to let me go through them first.”

“I’m familiar with the Torah but what’s a Megillah?”

Milton smiled. “Well, there are 5 different kinds. His was the Megillah of Esther, the most popular. It’s a small scroll with the book of Esther written in parchment. It’s to be read twice daily at the feast of Purim. I think his was mostly of sentimental value since it had been in the family for some time. Supposedly, it was brought to this country when his grandfather emigrated. It’s written in Hebrew. I’ve never unscrolled it.”

“I don’t want to be obtrusive, but could we look at it?”

Milton looked at Douglas with an odd expression on his face. “I suppose so, but why?”

“Mostly curiosity,” Douglas answered. “I’ve never heard of a Megillah before. My father has a small collection of old Bibles and Christian hymnals and I always found them fascinating.”

“I don’t see what harm it could do.”

Douglas waited by the dining room table downstairs. Honey, the family’s golden retriever had made her appearance and Douglas stroked her face and neck. The dog appreciated the attention, wagging her tail appropriately and looking up with soft, brown eyes of contentment. After a few minutes Milton came bounding down the stairs clutching what looked like an oversized child’s rattle in his hand.

“Found it,” he said.

After lightly running his hand over the Megillah to remove the accumulated dust, Milton placed it on the table. On one side was a wooden bar to which the parchment was attached. Milton grasped it gingerly and began slowly pulling it away from the

cylindrical body of the Megillah. After a few inches Douglas could see the black ink writing of what he assumed was Hebrew.

“Oh, it’s paper,” Milton said. “Good news.”

“What’s it supposed to be?”

“Some of the more expensive Megillahs are made from the skins of kosher animals, usually sheep or goats. They make for very nice parchment but degrade over time.”

Milton continued retracting the wooden bar with more and more of the scroll becoming visible. He had extracted about 5 feet when things changed. On top of the paper scroll was a second layer with red writing, this time in English.

“What is this?” Milton said.

“It’s not part of the Megillah?” Douglas asked.

“Not at all. This paper has been glued over the original.”

Douglas leaned closer and scanned a few lines of the red writing before gasping.

“This is it!” he exclaimed. “I recognize this writing and names. These are the patients Dr. Schreiber catalogued in his notebook.”

“I don’t understand,” Milton said slowly. “Why would my uncle place something like this here? It’s a defilement of the scripture.”

“I can’t speak for the Hebrew translation of Esther,” Douglas began. “But as I recall from our Old Testament, there’s a line in one of the later chapters to the effect of ‘have you not come to your position for such a time as this?’ Perhaps your uncle felt the same way.”

Dana Weston arrived for work before 8:00 A.M. as usual. She stored her purse in the bottom drawer of her desk and went into the break room to make coffee. As she was leaving, Dr. Prine appeared in the doorway, a menacing scowl on his face.

“Good. You’re here,” he said. His eyes were bloodshot and Dana smelled alcohol on his breath.

“I need you to get in touch with that boyfriend of yours and get him into my office this morning.”

Dana was surprised.

“Well, I can page him, if you like, but wouldn’t it be better if you contacted him yourself?”

“Gee, why hadn’t I thought of that,” Prine said sarcastically. “Oh, yes. I remember now. Because he probably won’t listen to me but he will to you.”

Dana despised being condescended to but she had been taught to respect those in positions above her.

“I see. Well, I don’t know what his schedule is like this morning. I believe he has clinic but I can certainly...”

Prine cut her off.

“Oh my. Not being present in clinic will mean what? Someone doesn’t get their pimple popped? Get him here or clean out your desk. Have I made myself sufficiently clear?”

“Quite,” Dana replied coldly as she pushed her way past Prine. She paged Douglas who returned her call a few minutes later.

“What’s up?”

“I have a very upset Dr. Prine in the office this morning who is demanding to see you before noon today.”

“What’s he got his colon in a kink about now?”

“I don’t know but he smells like he’s been drinking and told me if I didn’t get you here ASAP that I’m fired.”

Douglas stopped looking at the computer screen in front of him. He could feel his face becoming flushed and his anger rising.

“Okay. Tell him I’ll be there at 8:00 AM. I’ll get one of the other residents to cover my clinic until I get back.”

Had Justin not been so angry, he might have been thinking more clearly. As it was, he grabbed his cell phone, stormed out of the resident’s room and walked through the hospital to the pathology department. When Dana saw him trudging through the offices she could tell he was agitated. She held up her hand as if to say “stop” but Douglas was having none of it. He walked to Prine’s office and opened it without knocking. Prine was seated behind his desk, his hands folded in his lap.

“Let’s get one thing clear,” Douglas said. “Don’t ever, ever speak to Dana that way again. She’s not your handmaiden and her job doesn’t entail summoning the minions at your whim, least of all me. If you have reason to speak with me, you call me yourself. Now what’s so important?”

“Close the door,” Prine commanded.

“Finally, a good idea,” Douglas said as he slammed it closed.

“Where’s your bodyguard,” Prine asked, referring to Fielding, Douglas assumed. He was in no mood for verbal sparing.

“Get to the point.”

“Fine. Before you leave this room, you’re going to tell me the location of Dr. Schreiber’s research materials.”

“Forget it. Anything else?”

Prine stood from behind his desk, his face taking on a crimson hue and the veins in his neck bulging. He walked in front of Douglas until the two were nearly nose to nose. The smell of alcohol was overwhelming.

“Listen to me, you little scrap of gutter trash,” Prine hissed. “I’ve been patient and academically collegial for as long as I’m going to. I’m done. Those materials belong in this department and only in this department. For the last time, where are they?”

“And for the last time, forget it. If you have a problem with this situation, take it up with Dr. Fielding or the Dean or your therapist. I don’t care but you *will* leave me and Dana out of this matter.”

Douglas turned to leave which in hindsight was probably the wrong thing to do. He was aware Prine was hammered and should never have turned his back on the man.

Prine exploded, cursing at the top of his lungs and shoving Douglas hard from behind. His head slammed hard into the door. The blow stunned him and he fell to one knee. Stars circled in his head and he nearly blacked out. When he began to regain his senses he could hearing Prine’s shouts filling the small room.

“...and that tramp girlfriend of yours is gone as well...” were the words which pushed things over the line. Douglas had a temper, something he had worked to control for years. He had largely mastered it, such that he had not genuinely lost control for some time. The streak ended today.

Douglas rose quickly to his feet, turned and planted his right fist directly into Prine's face. The pathologist had no time to fend off the blow. The sound of his nasal cartilage breaking was audible. Prine stumbled backwards, blood pouring from his nose and crashed into the curtains of the office window. Trying to maintain his balance, his left hand swept across his desk scattering papers everywhere. Prine bounced off the window and into the metal file cabinet in the corner of the room. He was struggling to stand when Douglas landed on top of him and began pummeling him with a series of hard punches. Most landed squarely on the man's head and face. By now, Prine was screaming profanities. The noise must have been terrific as after only 5 or 6 blows, the door swung open and several of the department's pathologists began prying the medical student off his victim. Douglas was only vaguely aware of what was happening. He had become white hot and completely out of control. One of the men wrapped his arm around Douglas's throat and pulled with such force that a coughing spasm ensued. Two other men secured his arms as they dragged him from the office and into the outside corridor.

"What's going on here?!!" one of the men shouted.

Once outside, Douglas began to regain his senses. His shirt was splattered with blood, none of it his and his head was throbbing. A large swelling had appeared above his right eyebrow. Prine remained crumpled in the corner of his office moaning and whimpering.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

Douglas nodded.

"I'll get you some ice."

By now, one of the men was assisting Prine from his office. He was walking slowly, his right arm hanging loosely by his side and blood continuing to drip from his nose and lip. Most of the men were too shocked at the situation to talk but one of them seemed to be speaking for the group.

"Miss Weston, please call the campus police and ask them to come up here."

Dana stopped walking towards the break room and turned towards the man speaking to her, Dr. Adam Felton, a junior faculty member.

"No", she replied.

Felton raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Excuse me?"

"I said no. This altercation wasn't one sided. Until I hear his take on this matter, you'll have to do your own dirty work. I'm not contacting anyone who'll haul him out in handcuffs."

"Very well, then. I'll call them myself."

"You do that," Dana said. She turned and resumed her trek to the break room.

With Prine resting in a nearby chair, Felton walked over to Douglas. The medical student was leaning against the wall, massaging the bruise on his forehead.

"Miss Weston's suggestion seems reasonable," he said quietly. "Tell me what happened."

Douglas looked into the man's eyes. He seemed sincere and Douglas had no reason to mistrust him.

"I got summoned over here by Prine this morning. When we're in the office he gets into old business, I turn to leave, he pushes me from behind, my head goes into the door. That much I could have walked away from. Then he calls Dana a 'tramp' and I lose it. You can beat a dog only so long. At some point, the dog bites back."

"Fair enough," Felton responded. "Prine will have to go to the ER. From the way he's holding his arm, I think it may be broken. The ED staff are required to contact the authorities. I'll ask them to make certain it's the campus police. Perhaps we'll be able to keep this all in house. No promises, but if he assaulted you first, that part of the story needs to come out. Do you need to go to the ER as well?"

"No, I'll be fine. Just got my bell rung. I've had worse."

"Somehow, I'm not surprised. Anyone we need to contact for you?"

"Dr. Fielding, but I'd prefer to speak with him myself so, no, but thank you."

Dana returned with a plastic bag containing ice cubes and handed it to Douglas. He placed it over the knot on his forehead and winced at the cold temperature.

"You okay?" she asked.

"Ducky."

"I appreciate you standing up for me."

"Anytime. It's been a while since I lost my temper," Douglas said sheepishly. "I suppose I was due."

“Well, he’s pretty baked,” the man said. “But he’ll live.”

Adam Felton was speaking by phone with Mike Terrell, one of the emergency room physicians who had evaluated Prine’s condition.

“How baked?” Felton inquired.

“We haven’t checked officially, but my guess is he’d blow a .15 or better” referring to the blood alcohol level evaluated by police and emergency department personnel. Anything greater than .10 was considered legally intoxicated.

“Want me to find out?”

“Not really,” Felton answered. “And I’d appreciate it if you would leave that part off the official paperwork.”

“I can do that but by protocol, he’s going to get a blood tox screen and it will show up then.”

“Can you do that last? Give his body time to clear out some of the alcohol?”

“Sure, but the problem is, in addition to his facial lacerations, he probably has a fractured arm. If it’s not too bad we can kick him loose and let him take care of it as an outpatient. Otherwise, he’s going in on the orthopedic service for a surgical repair.”

“Okay,” Felton said. “Give me a call when you get the x-rays back and have decided what you’re going to do.”

“Will do,” Terrell replied before hanging up.

## Chapter 10

The longer Prine sat on the examination table in the emergency room, the more agitated he became. Dr. Terrell had finished informing his patient about the need for an x-ray when Prine slide off the table and rose, shakily to his feet.

“Get the nurse in here to help me back into my clothes,” he announced.

“Did you not hear what I just said?” Terrell asked.

“I’m old, Dr. Terrell, not deaf. Are you?”

“Look, if it’s a matter of who stitches up your lacerations, I can have someone from the plastics department come down here and do it. Your arm is another matter. I strongly suspect it’s broken and...”

“The nurse, Dr. Terrell!” Prine shouted. “This matter isn’t open for debate.”

The emergency room doctor shook his head. Prine wasn’t listening to reason. Normally, he would have expected a family member intercede but none were present. Nor would there be. Terrell had been around long enough to know when further discussion was pointless.

“It’s my medical opinion leaving is not in the best interests of your health, Dr. Prine. If you choose to do so, you’ll have to do it against medical advice and sign a waiver to that effect.”

“Have the nurse bring in the paperwork,” Prine replied as he began to fumble with his trousers.

“As you wish,” Terrell replied.

Fielding was in his office engrossed in reading a copy of the materials discovered in the Megillah. The document ran nearly 18 pages but from Fielding’s early evaluation, it was a treasure trove. The patients mentioned in Schreiber’s notebook were identical to those in the Megillah. Fielding was having difficulty deciphering some of the words but he was taking his time. He was mid way through the first page when there was a knock on his door.

“Come in,” he said without interrupting his reading.

Douglas opened the door and stuck his head in.

“Got a minute?” he asked.

Fielding looked up. When he caught a glimpse of Justin's forehead and the purple swelling around his left eye he reflexively leaned back in his chair.

"What on earth happened to you?" he asked.

"Dr. Prine and I went a few rounds."

"What?"

Douglas sat down in a nearby chair and gave Fielding a brief synopsis of the events.

"So you were turning to leave and he sucker punched you?"

"Correct. That much I could have walked away from but when he said what he did about Dana, I snapped."

"What shape is Prine in?"

Douglas shrugged his shoulders. "Can't say. They took him to the ER. I heard someone mention something about his arm. He could have broken it when he crashed into the wall. I don't have a particularly clear memory of the details."

Douglas paused for a moment. "I wanted you to hear this from me first and to tell you I'm sorry for whatever fallout lands on you. I realize my actions and reactions reflect on the entire division. For that, you have my apologies and my word that it won't happen again. Whatever disciplinary action results from this I'll take without complaint. What I cannot and will not do, however, is apologize for defending Dana's honor."

"Nor should you," Fielding responded. "I don't have any experience in matters such as this. As you might imagine, it's a rare occurrence. That said, I don't know what's going to happen next. I would suggest you contact our chairman and tell him your side of the story. Probably a pencil neck geek rich medical center oversight board will become involved at some stage but we'll jump off that bridge when we get to it."

"Thank you for using the word 'we'", Douglas said with a smile.

"Hey, I'm the one who got you into this mess. Prine wouldn't have become such a thorn in our side if I hadn't moved forward with this project. Feel free to use my name as often as possible. They don't pay you enough to take the entire fallout from this. Want me to go with you to see the chair?"

"You're kind, but, no. That's something I need to do myself."

"Let me know what I can do to help," Fielding said.

“Will do,” Douglas responded before leaving.

Fielding turned his attention back to the papers in front of him. Schreiber had been meticulous in his documentation. Fewer notations were dedicated to the microscopic changes and much more to the patients’ symptoms. Page one dealt with the first patient in the group. Schreiber devoted nearly 15 lines to the physical description of Milos Milicik and his gradual decline in health. Dates were provided along with accounts of his weight loss, trench mouth and open sores. The final line read

*Informed by Felix N the patient had expired.*

Fielding waded through the next several pages each providing similar details. All the patients had died, their case concluding with a similar cryptic notation regarding “Felix N”. Additionally, there was an entry with the letters “AN” followed by a two digit number, either “48”, “53” or “58”. The data made no sense. Here was a group of men with Slavic names who had died 50 years earlier with Kaposi’s sarcoma. The most telling feature was that all sounded like they had died with AIDS, a condition not described for another generation.

David Prine made his way home, arriving at his house just before noon. It had been decades since he had done any direct patient care but he suspected his right arm was fractured. It was exquisitely painful to movement and useless for manipulation of anything. Once inside, he sat down hard in an overstuffed chair in his Florida room. Prine resided in the most upscale part of Nashville, Belle Meade. Houses reside on at least an acre of land, typically with lush, flowing lawns and gardens. Prine had bought his home 35 years earlier when real estate prices were more subdued. His house had originally belonged to a country music executive who entertained regularly and the structure was, even by Belle Meade standards, quite large. Prine was single when he purchased it, intending at some point to marry and fill the abode with children but that hadn’t happened. He lived alone with a housekeeper who functioned as his cook and resided in an apartment over a detached garage. She wasn’t in when he returned to the house which was just as well. Given his frame of mine, he was in no mood for company.

Prine stared out the glass windows realizing things were at an end. The people who'd been paying him under the table wouldn't suffer failure gracefully. Short of stealing Schreiber's records at gunpoint, he wasn't going to obtain them. Even if he did resort to violence, the fallout would require leaving the country and he was too old to be on the run. Besides, "John" or whatever his name was, craved obscurity, something which would have been impossible with the forced removal of Schreiber's research. They'd make sure he was eliminated from the picture regardless. For all he knew, they'd already heard of the fiasco at his office and were preparing to take action. He knew what had to be done.

Prine poured himself a drink, in this case, his usual single malt scotch whiskey, and consumed most of it in a single gulp. It stiffened his resolve for the next task, procuring a revolver from the house safe in his bedroom.

He glanced around the bedroom for the final time, his eyes coming to rest on a large oak bureau atop which sat a photograph of his mother, taken in the backyard the year he had purchased his house. She was understandably proud of her son and his accomplishments. The memory made him wince. Not in front of his mother. Prine returned to the Florida room, walked outside onto the patio and blew his brains out.

Paul Grabel sat on a futon in the living room of Douglas's condominium across from his host. He was trying not to laugh as Justin relived the events of earlier that day. Dana was in the kitchen making sandwiches. She could hear the conversation but was keeping her thoughts to herself for the moment.

"So he sucker punched you, eh?" Grabel asked.

"I guess so," Douglas replied. "I'm not quite certain what he did, all I remember is my head snapping forward into the door. I didn't even have a chance to brace for the impact."

It was too much for Grabel who laughed heartily.

"Glad you find it all so amusing. I could be in serious trouble here."

"For what? Defending yourself? Give me a break."

"I'd say my actions went beyond defending myself and I worry some disciplinary committee is going to see things the same way."

“So you gave him an old fashioned butt kicking. Big deal. He had it coming and besides, he landed the first blow. It’s a slam dunk. No board of pinheads is going to do anything to you.”

Douglas took a sip from his beer. “Obviously, you don’t know much about the pinheads in charge of the medical center. We may be living in the south, but most of Vanderbilt’s administration are hard core liberals. They won’t take kindly to one of their own getting pummeled, whether he got the first lick in or not.”

“Well, you probably know them better than I do but I’ll be happy to stand up and give them a piece of my mind when the time comes.”

“Thanks,” Douglas said. “That means so little.”

“I do what I can.”

“Which is the frightening part.”

Dana walked around the corner of the kitchen carrying plates with sandwiches and chips on them. She set them down in front of Paul and Justin on the coffee table in the middle of the room.

“Thanks, Dana,” Douglas said.

“Isn’t she just the best?” Paul asked.

“Better than you deserve.”

“I think you’ve gotten in over your head,” Dana announced.

Both men stopped mid bite and looked at her.

“Well, I do. This whole thing is ridiculous.”

“Which part?” Douglas asked.

“Every part. You found some slides belonging to a deceased pathologist and determining what they represent suddenly becomes the search for the Holy Grail. Look what it’s lead to. You get in a fight, you’re facing disciplinary sanctions and Dr. Prine gets beaten to a pulp.”

“A fight which he started,” Paul chimed in.

“Granted, but he’s an old man.”

“Then he should know better than to sucker punch someone less than half his age,” Douglas retorted. “Life is hard and it’s harder if you’re stupid. Besides, I would think you would have appreciated my actions given what he said about you.”

“I do. Very much. But I don’t believe some collection of old slides are worth this sort of mess.”

Douglas was in no mood to argue the matter. Dana obviously held a different opinion than his on the importance of what Dr. Schreiber’s research might mean. Explaining it to her wouldn’t likely change her viewpoint. The two men wisely opted to drop the matter and change the subject.

Daniel and Earl Glusac ate at a throwback diner downtown before leaving to return home. The day had taken its toll on Daniel’s father. Earl was quiet and appeared worn out. Digging up old memories, particularly bad ones, had exhausted him.

They were clear of the afternoon traffic when Daniel decided to take a reading on the day’s events.

“So, how did you think things went?”

Earl shrugged. “Could have been worse,” he replied.

“There’s a ringing endorsement. I meant, do you feel better for having gotten the ball rolling on all this?”

Daniel expected a cynical retort but was surprised by his father’s response.

“Your mother was always big on church. Me, I could have taken it or left it but after we were married, I started going with her each Sunday if for no other reason than to keep peace in the house. I couldn’t tell you much about the sermons I heard over the years but one stood out. It was about confession being good for the soul. That Sunday afternoon I told her what I’d seen at the camp. The whole thing. I did feel better after that just as I feel better now. Perhaps some good will come of this, perhaps not. But at least I know I got it off my conscience.”

Daniel drove for a few more miles before speaking.

“Yes, you did, Dad,” he said. “Yes you did.”

Gerald Porter stared at his computer screen in the quiet of his large office. He had pulled up his private email account hoping not to find what lay before him. The communication was going to arrive sometime. Today was as good as any. It was a

message from one of his physicians, specifically his oncologist. Porter double clicked on the e-mail's header.

*Gerald – I have the results of your tests. I checked them personally and had the lab run them twice. I wish I had better news but the fact is that your prostate specific antigen (PSA) has doubled in the past 3 months. Additionally, your bone scan demonstrates evidence of metastatic tumor growths in your pelvis and spine. As we discussed, the best options at this point would be aggressive chemotherapy and a course of radiation therapy. Again, I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news but I'm willing to do whatever you wish regarding your future therapy. Please contact my office or respond to this email regarding your decision.*

The Porter men had a long history of prostate cancer. Over the years, he had been vigilant about prostate screenings but Gerald always suspected one day he would be facing these decisions. At age 62, he had lived longer than most of the men in his family. A year earlier, his urologist had found a nodule in his prostate, biopsied it and explained the options for treatment when the pathology report determined the nodule to be malignant. Porter had taken a short leave of absence from his job for surgery and an extensive workup. Initially, he had been given a clean bill of health but within 4 months his PSA had begun climbing and x-rays revealed the early features of bone metastases. He had told no one at his workplace of his condition, preferring to manage the disease on his own terms but the handwriting was on the wall. Porter had witnessed other men in his family battling this cancer. Aggressive chemotherapy, surgery and radiation treatments had done little to slow the tumor's progression, instead resulting in a miserable existence for what time the men had remaining. Porter wouldn't follow that path. From the evaluation of the cancer's potential his oncologist had told him it was "high grade" meaning there was likely little to be gained from traditional means of fighting it. Porter had decided to accept the reality of the situation and opted for palliative treatments. He probably had less than a year to live.

"Well, that's that," he mumbled to himself.

Porter rose from his chair, walked into his closet and opened a large wall safe. He rummaged through several thick file folders before recognizing the one he sought. After removing it, he returned to his desk and began leafing through it. Most of the papers had the words “Top Secret” stamped at the top. Porter smiled to himself as he thought *not for long*. The file contained all the paperwork on the Balkans Project. Few people had any knowledge of the material but some were willing to go to any lengths to keep those secrets well hidden.

Although his body might be failing him, Porter’s mind was as sharp as ever. After pouring over a few of the pages, his memory kicked in flooding his brain with details from the case long since put aside. Within 10 minutes he was up to speed.

*Time to rattle some cages*, Porter thought.

“Nadine,” Porter said over the intercom on his desk. “Would you please get the Undersecretary of the Navy on the line for me?”

Justin Douglas arrived for work the next morning sporting a large bruise on his forehead and a splitting headache. The headache he recognized from his days playing high school football as a mild concussion. He had taken some ibuprofen before leaving home but knew it wouldn’t help much. The damage from his brain rattling around inside the skull would be repaired on his body’s own time table. There was nothing Douglas could do to speed up the process. His concussion lacked any accompanying nausea or visual disturbances and he wasn’t going to look like he was in hiding by taking a sick day.

His first stop of the morning was his mailbox. A few of his cohorts were nearby, also retrieving their mail and made supportive comments regarding the previous day’s events. Douglas peered into his box to find a single envelope with the words “Campus Mail” stamped on it. Adhering to it was a sticky note from Dr. Fielding which read “If this is what I think it is, come see me.” Douglas opened it on the spot and was unsettled to read that the residency disciplinary committee had set a date and time for meeting with him. Dr. Jerry Spence, the Dean overseeing the residency programs at Vanderbilt, had signed the letter. The meeting was to take place the next day at 4:00 P.M. If Spence was involved, it couldn’t be good, Douglas decided. He still had half an hour before clinic

began so he walked down to Fielding's office, knocked on the door and entered when Fielding bade him to do so.

"I got your note," he said.

"Was the letter about meeting with the residency committee?"

"It was."

"They don't waste any time, do they?"

"Apparently not."

"When do they want to see you?"

"4 o'clock."

"Today?"

"Today."

"Let me make a suggestion. What would you think about my wife and I accompanying you?"

Douglas furrowed his brow in curiosity. "Excuse me?"

Fielding laughed. "I thought that's what you'd say. Let me explain. I'm involved in this as you were working on this project at my behest and with my oversight. I'm going to be there one way or the other. I can sit next to you or be in the audience but I'm going to be heard on this matter because it's important and it's the right thing to do."

"And your wife?" Douglas asked.

"You've never met Dina, have you?"

"No, sir."

"Before we had kids, Dina was a corporate attorney for Weyerhaeuser. She's a wonderful woman but don't get in her way when she gets her teeth into something. I gave her all the gory details about what happened and she suggested she accompany you, subject to your approval of course, as sort of de facto counsel."

Douglas thought for a moment. "I won't turn down free advice and guidance but if I show up with an attorney, don't you think it will make this more confrontational?"

"It's already confrontational. The big boys view themselves as the arbiters of right and wrong. They're not bad people, just pompous. If you show up with Dina and myself I believe they'll realize you aren't going to be pushed around. This thing needs to

be settled but not with you hung out to dry. There's two sides to the story and trust me, Dina will make certain yours is heard."

"Makes sense. If you and your wife are available today I would welcome your presence at the meeting."

Porter didn't have to wait long for his audience with Lloyd Terrence, the Undersecretary of the Navy. Though assigned to a relatively small city, Gerald Porter was well known in Washington for his time spent in the Attorney General's office. He had garnered a reputation as someone with a prodigious work ethic and bulldog-like tenacity when evaluating a case. Porter and Terrence went back a long ways, to the days when both served in the Marines and were stationed in Da Nang, South Vietnam. Terrence had been involved in clandestine military operations for the Marines whereas Porter had overseen intelligence gathering for the region. Most of their work had been performed "off the books" and remained classified. After the war, Terrence left the military and began working for the Defense Department, gradually rising through the ranks to his present position. He was nearing retirement age with an eye towards relocating to the family horse farm in north Georgia.

"Long time, no hear," Terrence said when he came on the line.

"Ditto," Porter responded. "Caught you at a bad time?"

"No worse than normal. What's up?"

"Does the name 'Balkans Project' mean anything to you?"

Terrence let out an audible sigh. "You're not going to go down that road again, are you?"

"Thinkin' about it."

"You don't learn very well, do you?"

"Not so you could notice. I assume from your response, this is still a hot potato."

"Well, it's not on the front burner, but, yes, it's a hornet's nest. I thought you were finished with this."

"Things change. I recently received some new information about the case and decided to pursue it further. It always bothered me more wasn't done to set things right. I realize the concept of right and wrong have fallen out of fashion in certain circles of the

federal government but I'm terminally old school. What happened to those men was wrong, Lloyd. You and I both know it."

"I suppose so, Gerald, but.."

"You suppose so?"

"It was a long time ago. Things were different then. You know that."

"It would be one thing if this matter involved only foreign nationals but there were American citizens who lost their lives as well. They deserve justice."

Terrence knew better than to argue the point. Porter wasn't going to change his mind and in the final analysis, both men knew he was right.

"So what do you need from me? To run interference?"

"No, but thanks for the offer. I simply wanted to give you a heads up and ask who to look forward to hearing from after the cages begin rattling."

"There are a few old dogs in the Senate who might remember this matter. Maybe some in the House as well. They aren't toothless, but their bark will likely be worse than their bite. You can ignore them, of course I'm sure you were already planning on doing so anyway. The people you have to watch out for is the folks at Langley. This was an early project of theirs and they don't like airing their dirty laundry. They continue to contract with some fairly nasty people. I think it's safe to assume your family would be off limits but they might come after you."

"Take a number," Porter said cryptically.

## Chapter 11

Douglas's day went like molasses in winter. He was dreading the 4:00 o'clock appointment but eventually the hours wound down and he was excused early from his afternoon clinic to be in attendance. The parties were to gather in a small conference room in the Graduate Medical Education offices. Douglas was walking across the plaza towards the building housing the GME when he spotted Dr. Fielding and his wife. He'd never met Dina Fielding but was quickly introduced by her husband.

Dina Fielding was a diminutive woman, no more than 5 foot 3 inches tall and certainly less than 100 pounds.

"Any last words of advice?" Douglas asked as Dr. Fielding held the door for them.

"Did you ever see *Ocean's Eleven*?" she asked.

Douglas was puzzled by the question but nodded his head.

"One of the characters advises Matt Damon not to use 7 words when 5 will do. With your permission, I'll run interference. I can't tell you what or what not to answer but I'll be silent when you're input is needed. Reveal no more information than is needed and keep your cool. I doubt this will become confrontational, but if it does, the most important thing for you to do is be calm. No inflammatory or caustic remarks."

Douglas turned to Dr. Fielding. "How much did you tell her about me?"

Fielding laughed and patted Douglas on the shoulder. "I only talk at home about the people I like."

At one end of the conference room was a single table with three chairs. Seated in the middle was the Dean of Students, Dr. Charles Oakmont. One of the others was occupied by Dr. Adam Felton and the final seat had been taken by a woman Douglas didn't recognize. Against one of the far walls, next to a bank of windows was a court reporter setting up her equipment. In the middle of the room was another table with several chairs where Douglas was to reside. The three of them made their way to the table, set down their briefcases and took a seat. Douglas was in the middle, flanked on either side by the Fieldings.

"Who is the woman up there?" Douglas asked.

“Marianne Conner-Peters,” Dr. Fielding responded. “She’s an attorney for the university. Makes me even more glad we brought Dina.”

After a few minutes, Oakmont glanced at his watch and cleared his throat. “I suppose we’re ready to begin,” he said. “As you all know, we’re here to discuss yesterday’s incident in the pathology department offices. I want to have both sides heard on this matter, however, Dr. Prine was unable to be with us today so Dr. Felton, if you’ll go first and tell us what you know about the events.”

Felton proceeded to give a brief but detailed synopsis. Douglas felt he had been even handed in his description, something he wasn’t accustomed to when dealing with members of the pathology department. When he was finished, Dr. Oakmont thanked him and turned to Justin.

“Dr. Douglas, we’d like to hear from you now.”

Justin spent only two minutes explaining his side of things. He made sure he mentioned Dr. Prine’s distasteful remark but noticed none of the members of the panel seemed particularly offended at it. Dr. Oakmont sat with his hands folded in front of his chin the entire time leaving Justin to wonder what he was thinking.

“Thank you, Dr. Douglas. At this point, I’ll open the proceedings up to questions from the panel. Ms. Conner-Peters, ladies first.”

The attorney seemed to bridle at the show of chivalry but consulted a legal pad for her first question.

“Dr. Douglas, why exactly were you in the pathology offices yesterday morning in the first place?”

Before he could answer, Dr. Fielding spoke up.

“He was there at my behest.”

Conner-Peters didn’t appreciate having her questions answered by anyone other than Douglas and shot a dirty look at Dr. Fielding.

“I believe the question was for Dr. Douglas.”

“I understand. However, I wanted it noted for the record that it was my research project he was pursuing.”

“Did you know he was meeting with Dr. Prine?”

“And that would be relevant, how?” Dina asked.

Conner-Peters was now clearly annoyed. She'd been involved in several of these meetings and was unaccustomed to having her questions answered by anyone other than the duly cowed medical student or resident being investigated.

"Who are you?" Conner-Peters asked pointedly.

"Dina Fielding. I'm Dr. Fielding's wife and an attorney."

Conner-Peters glanced at Dr. Oakmont with a look of surprise.

"Mrs. Fielding," Dr. Oakmont began, "these proceedings aren't of a legal nature and therefore don't require legal representation."

"Then why the court reporter?" Dina asked.

"To make certain there's an accurate account of what has transpired," Conner-Peters replied.

"Always a good idea in the event of a legal tug of war," Dina countered. "I believe the question to Ms. Conner-Peters was as to the relevance of whether Dr. Fielding knew of the meeting between Dr. Douglas and Dr. Prine."

"I'm not the focus of this meeting, Mrs. Fielding. Dr. Douglas is and I would appreciate it if you would allow him to answer my question."

"I don't believe I've instructed Dr. Douglas not to answer the question. I've merely inserted one of my own."

"Mrs. Fielding," Dr. Oakmont interceded, "With all due respect, you have no standing here today."

"Exactly. This is about Dr. Douglas and his explanations for his actions. However, I don't intend to have him railroaded. Even a cursory examination of his record clearly demonstrates he's a competent, level headed physician without a proclivity to violence. There are reasons for what happened and they need to be completely apparent to all parties on the record."

"I didn't know about Justin's meeting with Dr. Prine," Dr. Fielding interjected. "However, it would not have made any difference if I had. Justin has been more than above board about the research involved in this project, keeping me apprised of what its status was, etc. I had no reason then, nor do I now, to micromanage how Justin proceeds with our work."

Conner-Peters was still fuming, her face becoming flushed and her eyes squinting. “Is it alright, Mrs. Fielding, if I pose a few questions for Dr. Douglas?” she asked sarcastically.

“Certainly,” Dina said with a smile.

“Dr. Douglas, you mentioned that Dr. Prine referred to Dana Weston as a ‘tramp’ and that was what provoked you, correct?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Why?”

“Why?” Douglas asked incredulously. “Aside from the fact that it was untrue, demeaning and profane?”

Dina could tell Conner-Peters had struck a nerve. She didn’t know Justin but could tell from a person’s voice when they were becoming agitated. She placed her hand atop his arm.

“It’s simply a word, Dr. Douglas.”

“Where I’m from, it’s a good bit more than simply a word, ma’am.”

“Your place of origin isn’t relevant.”

“Silly me,” Dina said. “I thought this institution celebrated diversity. That it was about honoring the values and traditions of different cultures.”

“Not to the point of excusing physical assaults, Mrs. Fielding,” the attorney replied.

“And if Dr. Prine had referred to Ms. Weston as a “nigger” or a “spick”, that would be equally banal?”

“Here we go,” Dr. Fielding whispered under his breath to Douglas.

Conner-Peters bristled at Dina’s words. “Those are quite different.”

“How so?”

“We seem to be getting off track here,” Dr. Oakmont injected.

“I’d say we’re right on track,” Dina replied. “Dr. Douglas, as are all of us, is a product of his environment and experiences. In his culture, the term ‘tramp’ is no less offensive than racial epithets in others. That moniker was applied to a friend of his and he reacted accordingly. Vanderbilt would have a conniption if one of it’s professors called an employee a ‘nigger or a ‘spick’ so where’s the difference?”

“This isn’t about verbiage, Ms. Weston,” Conner-Peters said. “It’s about an assault.”

“Initiated by Dr. Prine. First, Dr. Douglas is assaulted by Dr. Prine’s words and then physically when Dr. Douglas’s back is turned. By the way, what was Dr. Prine’s blood alcohol level when he was seen in the Emergency Room?”

Dina was now in charge of the hearing, broaching subjects the administrators were uncomfortable discussing.

Conner-Peters began to say something but was cut off by Dr. Felton.

“It wasn’t measured.”

“And why was that?”

Felton looked at Dr. Oakmont and then Conner-Peters before answering.

“Because I asked the ER attending not to do so.”

Dr. Oakmont had had enough. “Mrs. Fielding, with all due respect, I’m not prepared to turn these proceedings over to you. I’ve been doing this for some time and this is the first instance I can recall where a student or resident brought their attorney with them. Frankly, it’s not helpful so I’ll put this to you succinctly, if you don’t refrain from commenting or questioning I’m going to have no choice but to table this discussion and proceed at a different time and under different circumstances.”

Dina recognized a bluff when she heard it and responded accordingly.

“I think that’s an excellent idea, Dr. Oakmont. Thank you and we’ll look forward to hearing from you.”

Dr. Fielding chuckled softly. “Bad move,” he said quietly to Douglas.

Dr. Oakmont and Conner-Peters looked at each other in surprise. The meeting had gone anything but according to plan and the proceedings had come to a close with a thud.

“Dr. Douglas,” Conner-Peters began, “Are you in agreement with ending things this way?”

Justin looked at Dina who shrugged her shoulders as she continued repacking her briefcase.

“What way?” he asked.

“With this matter remaining unresolved,” Dr. Oakmont said.

“Dr. Oakmont, this is new territory for me. I haven’t been to one of these meetings in the past and don’t know exactly what is and isn’t supposed to take place. I’m equally in the dark as to what my rights and responsibilities are. So, until I understand them better, I would prefer to make certain my interests are protected. If that requires another meeting, so be it.”

Douglas’s words didn’t sit well with Conner-Peters who closed her legal notebook loudly, stood up and left the room in a huff. Drs. Oakmont and Felton merely looked at each other in resignation. They too were in uncharted territory and with seemingly no other options available to them were resigned to beginning their inquiry afresh.

Dr. Fielding was about to speak with his wife when his pager went off. It was a text message and he began to frown as he read it.

“I just got a note from the departmental secretary,” he said. “The police found Dr. Prine at his home with a fatal gunshot wound. It appears he committed suicide.”

“Took the coward’s way out, huh?” the voice asked. “Somehow, I’m not surprised.”

“I should have seen it coming. Not that there would have been much I could have done about it.”

“Any thoughts on how to proceed?”

“Nothing that will be pretty,” the other man responded. “Plan A would be to isolate the resident involved and squeeze him for details.”

“I assume he would be eliminated afterwards.”

“My experience from dealing with academics is they can’t keep their mouths shut, so, yes. He’d disappear.”

“Time frame?”

“Next few days. We’re running out of time.”

“Do I want to know who gets the contract?”

“I have someone in mind.”

“Let me know when the details are in place. One other thing, I took a phone call from Gerald Porter, the states attorney in Nashville. He said he’d received some ‘new information’ about the Balkans Project and was proceeding with reopening the case.”

“What did you tell him?”

“That it was his call but things would likely get messy. I know what you’re going to ask me and, no, he’s not in your purview. At least not for the moment. If you’re able to collect the materials in question, there won’t be much he can do. If not, we’ll revisit the issue.”

“I understand.”

Gerald Porter spent the remainder of the week collecting the files from the “BP” as he called it. Some were in the basement archives of his office building whereas others had to be requisitioned from Washington, D.C. He thought his inquiries might raise a red flag and anticipated a phone call from some of the higher ups but none were forthcoming. By weeks end his office contained 7 boxes of paper files and he spent most of his time reacquainting himself with their contents.

By Saturday afternoon he opened the last box. Inside were files he hadn’t seen. Most of the dates and signatures on the reports had been redacted, but from the names mentioned he surmised they were from the mid to late 1990’s. The final file contained photographs of the camp near Livingston. Numbering over 100, all were in black and white. The pictures had been made with posterity in mind. Shots had been taken of the perimeter fencing, the single road leading to the compound and each of the camp’s buildings. Some had been written on denoting the position of the wooden structure or its purpose. Only three depicted the inmates. All the men wore Army type fatigues and coats. Many were sporting beards but none had any identifying features aside from a clearly visible number sewn onto the left upper chest of their jackets. All appeared in good health.

The final picture in the stack was of a man wearing an army trench coat and a fedora hat standing in front of what appeared to be the camp’s office. The subject was looking away as though he was unaware of the photographer’s presence. His face bore a dark, groomed mustache and a scraggly beard. Over his left eye was a clearly visible scar

extending from his hairline to his eyebrow. On the back of the picture were the words “Felix Nikolsky”.

Porter spent the remainder of the day evaluating the “new” paperwork he had found. Many of the memoranda and reports contained the notations “FN” or “Felix N” which Porter assumed referred to the man in the photograph. Nikolsky appeared to have been in charge of the operation or at least had significant input into its day to day function. There were multiple references to the “hospital in Memphis” where the inmates had been taken but nothing shedding light on the location of the building. Porter knew the names of a few of the hospitals there and saw no mention of them. By dinnertime he had learned a few things but more questions had been raised than answered. He picked up the phone on his desk and placed a call to Kelly Michaels.

“Sorry to bother you on the weekend, Kelly,” he said. “I hope I haven’t interrupted anything important.”

Michaels was unaccustomed to hearing from his boss outside of work. On the rare occasions when he had phoned or sent an email message it had usually been on a matter of some importance, typically with an imminent deadline.

“No, just getting some burgers ready for the grill. What’s up?”

“Your friends, the Glusacs, would they mind a personal visit from me? There’s something I’d like for them to see.”

“I doubt it, but if you want to chat with Earl, his son would probably want to be present so it might be a good idea to set an appointment beforehand.”

“Oh, certainly. I just wanted to get your input on the matter before proceeding.”

“If you don’t mind me asking, what is it you want to show them?”

“I’m in the process of going through the Balkan Project files and came across some photographs of the camp in Livingston. There’s one taken of a man in front of what looks like the camp office. The name Felix Nikolsky was written on the back. I assume that’s the name of the man in the picture but wanted confirmation from Earl. I don’t know what his role was but he seems to figure prominently.”

“I haven’t heard the name before but if Earl has he’d be the one to ask. The man comes across as sort of a country bumpkin but he’s a sharp cookie.”

“Just wanted to check first. Sorry to have interrupted your cookout.”

The real name for “John” was Tevid Falil. Born in Turkey, he had enlisted in the army in early 1970’s. Falil had grown up in the countryside and had seen what happened to the men living there. Most were subsistence farmers, doomed to scratching out a tenuous existence from the hardscrabble soil or tending sheep and goats. Falil was brighter than most of the recruits, something which didn’t escape the notice of his superiors. He also spoke English and was selected to receive specialized training in covert operations. With his dedication and ruthless efficiency, Falil soon began rising through the ranks. By his 26<sup>th</sup> birthday he had become an officer. During his subsequent posting with NATO troops, Falil became acquainted with men from the United States. Their tales of life across the Atlantic intrigued him. He began quietly asking about immigration procedures.

One evening in a local bar a man approached him saying he was with the Department of Defense. Did Falil genuinely wish to consider immigrating to America? Without a wife or children he was unencumbered and said he was definitely interested. The man said he would return to the bar in two days. When they met again, the man said immigration with full citizenship was possible, however, it would be contingent on coming to work for the government. Falil wasn’t surprised. He knew there was no such thing as a free lunch.

Would he have any problem killing people? Falil said no. He’d done it before in the course of his duties. It wasn’t something he enjoyed but he didn’t shy away from it when it became necessary. “I didn’t think so,” the man remarked with a smile. He left saying he would be in touch. A week later, Falil was summoned by his commanding officer and told to pack his bags. He would be leaving in one hour.

Falil walked through the front gates of the military post to a waiting car. He was met at the airport by the man in the bar who told him his name was Frank and that his last name wasn’t important. The two men boarded a C-130 headed to Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington, D.C. On the flight Frank informed Falil what to expect. He would undergo a thorough physical and psychiatric evaluation at the air base. Once that was satisfactorily completed he would be taken to a camp in North Carolina where he would join other such men. There would be military training similar to what he’d had in

Turkey as well as classes to improve his English and writing skills and an introduction to American culture.

Not surprisingly, Falil thrived in his new environment, excelling in nearly every aspect of his instruction. The two years passed quickly and by the time his posting there was finished, the new immigrant looked, acted and sounded like any other young American male. Falil became an integral member of a “black ops” group directed at arms length by the CIA. The men in Falil’s cohort lived across the United States, gathering intermittently for their duties. Operations varied in length from a few days to several weeks. Most of their duties were conducted out of the country, often in the middle east where Falil’s familiarity and language skills were used extensively. Over time, Falil climbed through the ranks until in 2002 he was given an administrative position. By then, he was over 50 years old and no longer able to keep pace with the “young bucks” as he did previously. He navigated the change well, realizing it was in the natural order of things. In truth, he welcomed the more structured pace of life with time now available for managing the small farm he had purchased in central Virginia. Falil had never married and with few pressing financial concerns, had sunk his money into investments which had done well. He could see the end of the road, occupationally speaking and embraced it.

Over the years, Falil had cultivated relationships with persons, always outside the United States, who did the actual “wet work” in his operations. Since money was not an issue, he could pick and choose who received a given contract. He had worked with men from almost every region of the globe but preferred Europeans, specifically those from the former Eastern Bloc countries. They spoke better English, some without any trace of an accent, had no qualms about spilling blood and, most importantly, did as they were told. Those from Latin and South American countries tended to be more aggressive than required, occasionally leading to loose ends. Falil hated loose ends. They risked exposure, something he detested.

For the matter at hand, Falil had someone in mind. Josef Hess was a former member of the East German police with a talent for obtaining information from people otherwise inclined to silence. He always worked alone, which over the years had limited his usefulness but he had never failed to finish what he had started. Hess took orders

well, was able to go at a moment's notice and didn't quibble over money. Falil had his number on the speed dial of his cell phone.

Hess picked up on the second ring.

Justin slept poorly after his appearance before the residency review committee. He had tried to study during the evening, hoping that reading would make him sleepy but it hadn't worked. He tossed and turned before eventually nodding off around 2:00 A.M. At work the next day, Justin's fellow residents were supportive. None asked about the proceedings which was just as well with Justin. He really didn't want to talk about it. Before beginning clinic, he stopped by Dr. Fielding's office. As usual, the man was hunched over his microscope.

"Got a minute?" Justin said as he knocked on the door.

"Sure," Fielding replied.

"Do you have any idea where all this mess is headed?"

"Not really. When we were done yesterday, I thought we might be worse off than when we began. However, they might want this to go away more than press forward."

"That would be fine with me," Justin said, managing a weak smile.

"One thing I've come to realize with the higher ups in academic medicine is that they are first and foremost political animals. If they can openly wash their dirty laundry without getting soiled themselves, they will. If not, they want it pushed aside and the sooner the better."

"Or put a match to."

"True, but they learn early that fires can easily become both public and out of control. They live for control. I honestly don't know where any of this is headed. We're in uncharted waters. But the fact remains that Prine was a troll with a checkered history of odd if not malicious behavior. On top of that, he had been suspected for some time of having a drinking problem. They don't want to portray him as a martyr and if they continue to push this, it's going to result in bad publicity."

"So this may be much to do about nothing, then?"

“Could be. One potential problem is if the administration decides only to issue a letter of reprimand. Were you to seek a post graduate fellowship, that information might become known and it could hurt your application.”

Justin slowly shook his head and scowled. “That’s something I don’t have any control over. I didn’t throw the first punch and I don’t make any apologies. There comes a time when you have to draw a line in the sand. If it costs me, it costs me. At least I can look myself in the mirror.”

## Chapter 12

Gerald Porter arrived at Earl Glusac's home mid morning. He had spoken with Daniel several days previous about another meeting with his father. The son had been amenable to the idea but would be unable to be present citing a long standing previous engagement. Porter had assured him the subject matter would be routine and that he simply wished to follow up on the discussion of the previous week.

Earl was sitting on his porch drinking coffee, his 22 rifle held loosely in the crook of his arm and his dog laying next to him drowsing in the sun.

"I hope that's not meant for me," Porter joked as he exited his car.

"That would depend on you, I suppose," Glusac replied. He was kidding but there was something in his tone of voice that convinced Porter the man wouldn't hesitate to use whatever weapons were at his disposal were someone on his property against his wishes. "Actually, I use this for the rabbits nibbling on my wife's flowers."

Porter looked at the dog on the porch whose only movement since his arrival had been to stretch, yawn and roll over allowing the sunbeam to warm the other side of his body.

"I assume this isn't your guard dog."

"He's a great guard dog. But he's an even better judge of character. Had you been someone who needed chasing off, he'd have been on you like white on rice."

"Amazing," Porter said. "Okay if I pet him?"

"Suit yourself. He hasn't had a bath in some time so he's probably pretty smelly."

Porter thought better of it and decided to admire him from afar.

"Thanks for agreeing to see me. I appreciate your time and I won't take much of it."

"Not a problem. Have a seat. Want some coffee?"

"That would be great, thanks. I take it black."

"Is there another way?" Glusac replied as he leaned his rifle against the porch railing and stood up.

Porter sat on the front porch in one of the rocking chairs. It was well worn and in need of repainting but was sturdy and only occasionally creaked as he moved back and

forth. The morning was glorious with bright sunshine and only a faint breeze. In the distance Porter could see the barn with its attendant flocks of birds darting in and out beneath the eaves. There was no noise to speak of and he could smell the fragrance of newly mown hay from the fields adjacent to Glusac's property. Porter's experience with the "country" was limited, having always lived in cities. He had gone to summer camp twice and enjoyed it but the insects and isolation bothered him. He was older now and perhaps it was time to rethink his position. The traffic, expense and congestion of an urban existence were wearing on him and he certainly wasn't getting any younger.

Glusac emerged through the screen door on his porch carrying two large, steaming cups of coffee. Porter noticed he hadn't bothered to bring any cream or sugar on the off chance his guest had changed his mind. If he didn't like the beverage, he could always set it aside. Doctoring it with additives apparently wasn't an option.

"There," Glusac said, placing the cup on a small table between the two rocking chairs. "That'll wake you up in the morning."

"Thanks," Porter responded. The liquid was black as night and he had no doubt Glusac was telling the truth.

"It's nice out here," Porter said. "I can see the attraction."

"Yep. Don't really see how you can stand living in the city. All the noise and people. I couldn't do it."

"You get used to it," Porter answered.

"I suppose so. But you didn't drive all this way here to chat about country living, did you?"

"A man who gets right to the point. I like that."

Porter picked up his briefcase, popped the latches and removed a single 8 by 10 black and white photograph. He handed it to Glusac.

"I was rummaging through some of my files and came across this picture. On the back is the name Felix Nikolsky. I've never heard of him but was wondering if you might have."

Glusac retrieved his reading glasses from the top pocket of his overalls. After placing them on his face he glanced at the photograph for a few seconds and began slowly nodding his head.

“Yeah, I saw this guy a lot. Never knew his name. We just called him ‘the worm’.”

“Why did you call him that?”

“He always seemed to be around whenever anything was going on. Didn’t say much. Moved sort of slow and slithery, kind of like he was a worm.”

“When you say he was around when something was going on, what do you mean?”

“Well, I worked the evening shift, 6 to 10 so trucks were usually coming back into the camp from wherever. I was an outside guard, meaning I was outside the fence walking the perimeter. I had no contact with the prisoners but I could see them getting out of the trucks and going to their barracks. Every time there was a truck, Nichols or whatever you said his name was, was there. Sort of lurking in the background smoking cigarettes.”

“And you never had any contact with him?”

“Nope. Didn’t really want to. He gave me the creeps.”

“What about the other guards?”

Glusac shook his head and squinted his eyes. “Well, I told you about George Cooper. I asked him who he was. He said he didn’t know but that the other guards had taken to calling him ‘the worm’.”

“And you don’t know anything about him other than what you’ve told me?”

“No.”

“When was the last time you saw him?”

“The last night I worked.”

Glusac set his coffee down and picked up his rifle. “Excuse me,” he said as he shouldered the weapon and squeezed off a round. The bullet hit the dirt near a rabbit who had been sniffing around a stand of gladiolas. The animal scurried back into the unmown grass.

“Are you really that bad a shot or did you just not want to kill the rabbit?” Porter asked with a sly smile.

“If I had wanted to hit him, he’d be dead. I don’t kill them out of respect for my late wife. She loved the rabbits, just not in her flowers. She used to put all manner of

concoctions around her flower beds to keep them out. I'm just too lazy to mix the stuff up. Bullets work well enough."

Glusac replaced the rifle on the porch and retrieved his coffee.

Returning to the subject at hand, Porter asked, "From this photograph it appears Nikolsky is wearing an army jacket. Do you recall ever seeing him wear anything else?"

Glusac turned towards his guest with a curious look on his face. "Let me see that picture again."

Porter handed him the photograph. Glusac studied it for a few seconds. "Now that you mention it, my recollection is that he usually had a long coat on."

"And you were only employed there during the cold weather months, is that true?"

"Yeah, sometime after Thanksgiving until early February, so it would have been cold most of the time."

"The coat you saw him in, was it a long trench coat sort of thing?"

Glusac nodded. "Exactly. Kind of like the ones those Russian soldiers wear."

"But you never saw any sort of insignia? Any sort of rank?"

"No. I was never close enough to him."

"Anyone ever salute him?"

"Not that I recall."

Porter retrieved the photograph from the table between them.

"Well, I appreciate your time. I realize this is not the sort of trip down memory lane you enjoy taking."

"No," Glusac responded, staring Porter in the eye. "It isn't."

Porter stood to take his leave. "Oh, one other thing. Are there any people living around here who might have worked at the camp? If so, I'd like to chat with them as well."

Glusac stroked his chin and thought about Porter's question. "The only one I know of would be Frank Anderson. There might be others, but I doubt it. It was a long time ago."

"How do I get in touch with Mr. Anderson?"

Glusac smiled. “You don’t. He lives about 15 miles from here up near Midway. I run into his boy from time to time at the Co-Op. Last I heard he was on the family farm. No phone or any way to contact him. Heck, he doesn’t even have electricity or running water.”

“What would he think about a visit from me?”

“Not much. If he didn’t shoot you walking up to his house, he likely wouldn’t answer the door. He’s not right in the head, if you know what I mean.”

“So he’s mentally ill?”

“Not really. Just mean. He wants to be left alone.”

“What about getting his son to run interference?”

“Worth a try,” Glusac said shrugging his shoulders.

Josef Hess lived in Canada. Specifically, on several secluded acres on the shores of West Shoals Lake, 50 miles from Winnipeg, Saskatchewan. From there he could access international travel via the airport in Winnipeg or drive across the United States border if he was transporting materials not allowed on airplanes. Over the years, Hess had trimmed his list of employers to a select group, ones he knew well and with which he had an established track record. He was getting older and though in good shape physically and mentally he no longer took the risks he had as a younger man. Dealing with known interests kept matters less complicated and, as he knew all too well, complications could be fatal.

Hess had grown up in East Germany and was a former member of the Ministry for State Security, more commonly known as the Stasi. When the Berlin wall fell, he was in his early 40’s. He emigrated to Canada using a diplomatic passport eventually becoming a naturalized citizen. His contacts in the West led him to a lucrative business “fixing” things for wealthy patrons who wished to remain anonymous and out of the limelight. Eventually, his talents caught the eye of those in the United States federal government and he received several contracts for eliminating persons outside the reach of US intelligence agencies. Hess was methodical, efficient and, most importantly, discreet in his work, something which kept him on the “A” list of people to contact.

When Hess’s phone rang, he recognized the caller immediately.

“Tevid,” Hess began, “Good to hear from you again.”

Not prone to idle banter, Falil got straight to the point. “I have a job for you, if you’re interested.”

“Somewhere warm, I hope. The winter here continues unabated and I have grown quite tired of the cold.”

“Houston, Texas. Should be warm enough for you. How’s your schedule?”

“Open at the moment. I am traveling to Europe in June. Will my duties require me to change flight plans?”

“They shouldn’t. I don’t think you’ll be away from home very long.”

Finding Frank Anderson’s son, Larry, wasn’t difficult. In fact, Porter’s secretary obtained the address and cell phone number while he was driving. Larry Anderson worked at a local garage but his interest was piqued when Porter told him he was with the Attorney General’s office and agreed to meet him at the entrance to his father’s property.

Porter had no trouble finding the place, thanks to Larry’s directions and the GPS map in his vehicle. The younger Anderson arrived a few minutes after Porter, driving a mud splattered pickup truck with oversized tires and a bumper sticker reading “Driver Carries”, a reference to Larry’s penchant for always having a loaded gun with him.

“You Mr. Porter?” Larry asked as he climbed down from the cab. A large wad of snuff distorted his lower lip and he intermittently spat tobacco juice on the ground.

“I am,” Porter replied. “I appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to meet me. I realize this was all last minute.”

“Not a problem. I got an alternator replacement job I’ll need to get back to but I can introduce you to my dad. I doubt you’d get very far with him otherwise. He don’t cotton much to visitors.”

“That’s what I heard,” Porter said.

Larry laughed. “I bet you did. Follow me.”

The two men began walking up a dirt road towards a ramshackle dwelling nestled behind a stand of trees. As they approached the house, Porter wondered to himself how the building had managed to escape being condemned by the local authorities. The roof sagged, the shingles were rotting and the front porch was propped up with two by fours.

When Porter and Anderson were less than 50 yards from the house, a shot rang out, kicking up dirt several feet from Larry's feet. Porter jumped and reached behind his back to retrieve his pistol. The younger Anderson didn't react at all.

"That's just Dad's way of letting you know he's home," the man said with a smile. "He doesn't see all that well at a distance, mostly just shapes and figures. But if he had wanted to hit us, he would have."

"Who's there?" a voice from the house shouted.

"It's me Dad. Larry."

"Who's the other one?"

"It's a man from the federal government. He wants to talk to you."

"Tell him I'm busy."

Larry chuckled to himself. "No you're not, Dad."

"How do you know?"

"Because I've been coming around here for the past 15 years and I haven't seen you busy yet."

"You don't know what I do with my time, boy."

"We're coming up Dad. Put the rifle away."

"He's harmless," Larry said to Porter who had straightened up and was staring at his guide.

Frank Anderson walked out onto the remains of the porch still cradling his rifle. He was dressed in dirty overalls and a flannel shirt with several days growth of beard covering his face. Atop his head was a well worn cap with the Co-Op logo on the front. Porter noticed he wasn't wearing glasses.

"That's far enough," Frank said. "No need you two coming inside."

"Dad, this is Gerald Porter. He works for the federal government in Nashville and wanted to talk with you for minute."

"Is this about my taxes?" Frank asked. "If it is, you best just turn around and high tail it back to wherever you come from cause I ain't paying anything to no government that don't take better care of its boys been fighting overseas.."

Porter smiled. “No, Mr. Anderson, I’m not from the Internal Revenue Service and I could care less about your taxes. I was in the military as well and share your anger at the way veterans are treated.”

Porter’s statement seemed to mollify Anderson enough for him to lower his rifle and sit down in one of the dilapidated lawn chairs on the porch.

“May I?” Porter asked, pointing to an empty chair.

“Suite yourself,” Anderson replied.

“Dad, I have to get back to work,” Larry said. “I’ll check in on you on my way home.”

“Bring me some Beechnut. I’m almost out.”

“Yes, sir,” Larry said with a smile. “You two behave yourself.”

“Thank you,” Porter said as the young man turned to leave. Larry waved goodbye over his shoulder.

Frank Anderson sat in his chair, gently rocking back and forth watching his son walk down the dirt driveway. His cheek was distended with a plug of chewing tobacco and the overalls he wore looked to have gone weeks between washings. To all outward appearances, Anderson looked like the classic Appalachian hillbilly. However, Porter adept at judging people by the look in their eyes, could tell the man may have been over the top on his quest for solitude but he wasn’t crazy. In fact, he possessed something many in the “maddening crowd” sought desperately; the knowledge of his role in the big picture and a peaceful co-existence with it.

“This is a beautiful place you have, Mr. Anderson. How long have you lived here?” Porter asked, trying to break the ice.

Anderson turned his head slowly towards Porter with a look of disdain on his face. “You here for chit chat or you want to ask me something important?” He spat on the porch, a trickle of brown tinged saliva catching in his beard.

Porter chuckled. “A man after my own heart.”

“Do you know a man named Earl Glusac?”

“Yeah, I know Earl.”

“I’ve been talking with him about the camp he worked in after the war. The one with the foreign prisoners. I believe you worked there as well. Is that correct?”

“It is.”

Porter reached into his coat pocket, extracted the photograph of Felix Nikolsky and handed it to Anderson.

“Ever see this fellow there?”

Anderson took the picture and removed a pair of cheap reading glasses from the top pocket of his overalls.

“We called him ‘the worm’”, Anderson said before handing the photograph back to his guest.

“Yeah, that’s what Mr. Glusac told me,” Porter replied. “How much contact did you have with him?”

“As little as possible. This guy was different. And I don’t just mean from folks around here. He was strange.”

“Strange how?”

“Well, for starters, he had a chain around his neck with a mummified finger attached to it.”

Porter raised his eyebrows. “That’s a bit odd.”

“I would say so. I saw it once when he was unbuttoning his coat. I asked him about it. He told me it belonged to his father.”

“His father?”

“That’s right. Said the old man was a drunk who used to get liquored up and beat the living daylights out of him and his older sister. When he got old enough to stand up to him, he cut it off when he was passed out one night. Said his father never bothered him or his sister again.”

“I would think not. What else?”

“He was a real stickler for protocol. Everything had to be done exactly the same way each time. When we would unload the trucks, the men had to file out alphabetically. One time I was late getting to one of the vehicles and a new guy began getting the fellows off. They just came piling out every which way. The worm walked over and began shouting and screaming. Really gave this fellow the business. He was a strange duck.”

“Any idea what ever became of him?”

Anderson pursed his lips, spat on the porch and shook his head. “No idea. Can’t see him really taking much to living in this country. Probably went back to wherever he come from.”

“Were you there until the camp closed?”

“Until the last day. Well, at least until the last of the prisoners were transferred. After that, they gave us a week’s severance and told us to get lost. Never saw the worm or any of the other brass after that. Managed to rummage around the files some though before I left.”

Porter sat up straight in his chair. “What?”

“We could all see the writing on the wall. The number of prisoners was decreasing steadily as were the transports to Memphis. We were sitting around on duty playing cards and smoking. There wasn’t much else to do. When the officer ranks began thinning out, we knew they were going to shut the place down. A few days before they sent us packing, they transferred the Army corporal who had been taking care of all the paperwork. I guess he was sort of a secretary or something. I was curious as to what had been going on the whole time but they never told us nothing. So, one morning when no one else was around, I went into the offices and starting looking through the file cabinets.”

“What did you find?”

“Not much. Mostly supply invoices and time sheets. I was hoping to find something about what happened to the prisoners after they left camp, but I never did.”

“I see,” Porter said, sinking back in his chair.

“Managed to come across something you might be interested in though.”

Anderson stood up and walked into his house. A few minutes later he returned carrying a dust covered satchel with “Property of the United States Army” emblazoned across it in big, black letters. He tossed it in Porter’s lap.

“What’s this?”

“The worm’s personnel file.”

## Chapter 13

David Prine's funeral took place 3 days after he killed himself. It was held at large Presbyterian church in an affluent part of Nashville. All of the pathology department faculty were in attendance and comprised the bulk of the audience. Dr. Fielding went, more out of a sense of duty than anything else. When Fielding returned to the office, he paged Douglas and asked for a meeting.

"How was the service?" Douglas asked.

"Subdued," Fielding responded. "Apart from his housekeeper, everyone there was associated with the university. Pretty pathetic. The minister mentioned almost nothing about his life apart from what he did professionally. What a wasted existence. Speaking thereof, I had a chat with Dean Oakmont after the service."

"What did he allow?"

"It was interesting. He was actually quite pleasant. I had my guard up, given our last encounter but apparently he's a different person outside the medical center. The bottom line is that the administration isn't going to pursue the matter of you and Prine mixing it up."

Douglas sat down, a look of relief flooding his face. "Any idea why the change of heart?"

"No stomach for it. Oakmont said he'd met with some of the other members of the disciplinary committee and given the nature of the incident not to mention the fact that Prine's no longer around, they simply want the whole thing to go away."

"Well, you were right," Douglas said. "They do have a penchant for sweeping things under the rug. Don't they generally pursue these things ad infinitum?"

Fielding's face broke out into a wry smile. "Traditionally. I asked him as much."

"What did he say?"

"In so many words, they didn't want to deal with Dina again."

Douglas laughed. "I imagine not."

"According to Oakmont, they'd never had one of the house officers bring an attorney to such meetings."

"So that's it, then?"

“As far as I can tell. I doubt they’ll be so kind as to send you a letter to that effect, but I don’t see this being brought up again.”

“Good riddance,” Douglas said.

“Just try not to punch anyone out again if at all possible,” Fielding said with a wink. “On another subject, I looked over Schreiber’s slides with the human herpesvirus-8 stains. They were all positive, not that I was too surprised.”

“So, they’re all Kaposi’s sarcoma.”

“That they are. I also finished going through the manuscript you found in the Megillah. Schreiber was very detailed in what he wrote about a dozen or so patients. Basically, he was giving a textbook description of AIDS. Some of the terminology was a bit archaic, understandable for those times, but I don’t think there’s much question about what was going on with these patients.”

“Bizarre. Is there a chance these were all classic KS? After all, from the names I was reading most appeared to be Slavic in origin and that’s the part of the world where the non-HIV associated KS is seen with more frequency.”

“True. But these patients were at least 3 or more decades younger than the classic type KS. Besides, the lesions were almost always present on the parts of the body normally affected with HIV associated KS. And classic KS patients don’t get sick and die like these men were doing. The next step would be to take some of the biopsy tissues and evaluate them for the HIV virus. It won’t be cheap, but it’s doable and if these are indeed the first documented cases of HIV infection, the medical community is about to get its world rocked.”

“True,” Douglas said shaking his head. “Of course, we still don’t know how these men came to be infected and what role Dr. Schreiber played in it. The more we investigate this, the more questions seem to arise.”

Josef Hess drove across the United States border on Canadian highway 1 into North Dakota and eventually the small town of Langdon. From there he traveled 40 miles east to Interstate 29 and began his southward journey towards Houston. Fortunately, the weather was good with bright blue skies and no sign of the springtime blizzards known to occasionally affect this part of the country. Hess spent the night in

Kansas City at a Holiday Inn on the south side of town. The next day he headed west to Interstate 35, again turning south. He was driving his Land Rover having replaced his Canadian license plates with North Dakota tags prior to leaving. Hess's second day of travel was the longest and he pulled into Spring, Texas, 25 miles north of Houston just before 9:00 P.M.

Gerald Porter spent the next two days pouring over the file given him by Frank Anderson. Anderson said he hadn't read it and Porter could understand why. Most of the information it contained dealt with scientific material he either wouldn't have understood or cared about. The paperwork relating to Felix Nikolsky was mostly in Russian. Porter had a translator provide a cursory rendition of the material. The information was unremarkable.

Nikolsky had been some mid level Russian civil servant in Minsk before the war. His family had been killed during a German bombing raid and he had been assigned to the Balkans in a covert mission to facilitate guerilla warfare against Nazi army units. He had not been well received. Most of the men he worked with distrusted him, a mutual feeling and apparently with good reason. As the war wound down, Nikolsky brought in more and more Soviet apparatchiks. When it ended and Russian troops began arriving by the trainload, dissenting guerillas, particularly those in leadership positions, began disappearing. With a wholesale takeover in place, Nikolsky behaved like a regional emperor. His bosses in Moscow jerked his leash, something he didn't take kindly to. Ultimately, he saw the writing on the wall, realizing he was about to be recalled to party headquarters and reassigned. He fled by fishing boat across the Adriatic Sea to Brindisi, Italy and immediately contacted the local Allied command. Stating he had information regarding the partisan guerillas, he was transferred up the chain of command until he met with a colonel in military intelligence who believed he had something to offer. After hearing him out, the colonel concluded his information was credible. With Communist factions taking over after the expulsion of the German army, the political situation in the Balkans was a growing concern. Nikolsky's claims suggested he might be of assistance in neutralizing some of those worries. He remained in Italy for the next 12 months working with military intelligence assessing events across the Adriatic. In the summer of

1946 the military base where Nikolsky resided received an unusual visitor and matters turned unexpectedly.

The man, an Italian national named Ceccolini, presented himself to the base's military command with news that stunned even the battle tested soldiers. Ceccolini had been a member of the Italian secret police involved in deporting men from the Balkans, almost all Serbian, suspected of war crimes against Italian soldiers and civilians. Close to 250 had been captured and transported across the Adriatic and interred in an isolated location south of Otranto. When the Allied forces landed in Italy, communication to the camp had been cut off, along with any hope of resupply. The men in charge of the detainees were zealous about having the Serbs brought to justice but reluctant to turn themselves in fearing prosecution. They kept their camp supplied using thievery and extortion but had exhausted their resources. Ceccolini was anxious to be rid of the prisoners and return to his family. A contingent of British forces drove to Otranto, retrieved the men and returned them to the base. What little paperwork supporting their alleged crimes was also confiscated. While the men were processed and evaluated, military intelligence evaluated the documents.

The base commander was in a quandary. There was no viable means for returning the Serbs to their native soil and many, if not all, were guilty of the charges against them. Even had they been repatriated, it was unlikely any would have stood trial. Ceccolini stayed on base for a few days, answering as many questions as possible. Nikolsky was asked to review the men's names and photographs. He was able to recognize only a few but independently corroborated some of the crimes against them. The Serbs were kept under strict guard and isolated in a separate part of the base.

The commander, eager to have the prisoners become someone else's problem, contacted the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA. An officer traveled to the base, was apprised of the situation and promptly sought the advice of his immediate superior. Inquiries went up the chain of command until eventually, someone in Washington arrived to assess the situation. He stayed a few days, made numerous telephone calls home and by weeks end, 5 large transport planes landed at a nearby airstrip to remove the prisoners from Italy. The next morning, the men were loaded onto the airships and flown back to the United States. Nikolsky was on one of the planes.

Justin Douglas's life returned to some semblance of normalcy. With the disciplinary committee no longer empanelled, he was breathing easier and he began investigating the tissue blocks from Milton Schreiber's attic. One of the faculty members in the Department of Infectious Disease had an interest in Kaposi's sarcoma and evaluated 5 of the specimens for the presence of the HIV virus. All were positive.

Fielding was excited beyond measure at the results. That the HIV virus had been detected in patients 30 years before the outbreak of AIDS was groundbreaking information. The virus was believed to have originated in central Africa, probably in monkeys with AIDS having existed as an isolated infectious disease in that part of the world for some time. However, until the 1980's there had been no widespread dissemination of the contagion. Now, evidence existed of human infection, albeit in an artificially isolated group of patients and Fielding was moving full speed ahead writing an article he hoped to publish in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The ramifications of a former faculty member possessing biopsy material and clinical information of this nature concerned Douglas more than Fielding. He broached the subject more than once but Fielding seemed unfazed. It wasn't a matter of indifference, rather unraveling the mystery of how the biopsies came to be in the first place was more legwork than he was willing to undertake. Surely, Douglas thought, the editors of the *New England Journal of Medicine* would be curious perhaps delaying publication of Fielding's paper until their concerns were sufficiently addressed. To Douglas, it smacked of Nazi-era experimental studies on concentration camp prisoners and if Fielding wasn't unsettled, he was.

Hess showered and shaved the next morning before leaving by the hotel's side door and walking down the interstate access road towards an Avis car rental outlet less than a quarter mile away. A Ford Taurus had been rented in advance under a fictitious name and driver's license meaning the paperwork took only a few minutes. Less than half an hour after stepping into the Avis office Hess was back at his hotel. He loaded three modest sized cardboard boxes into the trunk and placed his briefcase in the passenger seat. By now it was after 9 A.M. with most of the rush hour traffic having

subsided. Hess started the engine, drove out of the parking lot and made his way onto interstate 45 for the trip into Houston.

Porter's perusal of Nikolsky's dossier had been enlightening but important questions remained. Most notably, what happened to the men when they were transported outside the camp. The file mentioned nothing about the subject. Porter knew from his investigation most, if not all of the men had been driven to Memphis for "evaluation" but little else. Since they rarely stayed more than a few hours, he assumed they had been subjected to some type of treatments. Radiation had been one of his initial suspicions. The use of x-rays for diagnosis and therapy was in its early stages and becoming increasingly popular. Many privately practicing physicians had purchased x-ray machines for their offices and were using it to treat everything from acne to depression. However, Porter consulted physicians well versed in radiation practices of that time period and all were dubious the men had received any such treatments. Their clinical manifestations, such as they were known, didn't support that contention. The timing of the men's stay in Memphis also precluded surgical procedures of any significance. That left the possibility the men were given medications or other substances which led to their demise. The list of possible offenders was limitless. He had never uncovered any medical records addressing what transpired in Memphis in his previous investigation nor was there any mention of named medical institutions, hospitals or physicians involved. There was hope, however – a single notation at the bottom of a page near the end of Nikolsky's file.

*Dr. H. Schreiber, VU, contacted. Will arrange further disposition.*

Dr. Frank Levin, the chairman of the Pathology Department at Vanderbilt University was sitting at his desk reviewing files on the residents scheduled to begin their training on July 1. He was mid way through the second one when his phone rang. It was his secretary in the adjoining room.

"Yes, Denise?" he said. He had asked her to hold his calls for an hour while he completed his work. Denise had been his secretary for nearly 10 years and knew her boss well. If she had interrupted him, it was likely for a good reason.

“There’s a Gerald Porter on the line wishing to speak with you. He’s one of the state’s attorneys. He wouldn’t tell me what it’s about but I thought you might want to take this one.”

“Oh, absolutely,” Levin said sarcastically. “Nothing I enjoy more than chatting with lawyers.”

Levin pushed the flashing hold button on his phone set.

“This is Frank Levin.”

“Dr. Levin, my name is Gerald Porter. I’m a senior state’s attorney with the Justice Department here in Nashville. Have I caught you at a bad time?”

*Does it matter?* Levin thought to himself. “Not really. Now’s as good a time as any. How can I help you?”

“I’m working on a legal case from the late 1940’s. In the course of my investigation, I came across the name H. Schreiber with the notation “VU” beside it. Since this case involves medical matters and took place in central Tennessee, my assumption is the “VU” refers to Vanderbilt University. I’ve spoken with several people at Vanderbilt who believe this person might be Henry Schreiber, a former member of your department.”

“Former would be right,” Levin said. “I was in medical school here as he was nearing retirement but I believe he had left by the time I began my internship. However, his work seems to have experienced a resurgence in popularity.”

Porter had spent most of the previous afternoon attempting to someone who knew Henry Schreiber at Vanderbilt. He’d composed a list of questions to ask when finally he hit pay dirt. Levin’s last remark, however, forced an abandonment of his plans.

“What do you mean when you say a resurgence?” Porter asked.

“Schreiber’s work here primarily involved vascular tumors. In other words, benign and malignant neoplasms composed of blood vessels. In his day, he was considered one of the most knowledgeable men in that niche. He wrote numerous articles and lectured widely. After his retirement, there was little interest in the subject among the remaining pathologists so his data and archived material fell by the wayside. In the last few months, one of our dermatopathologists, Dr. Jerry Fielding, has been reviewing some of his work but to be honest, I don’t know many of the details.”

“You’ve piqued my interest,” Levin continued. “If you can tell me, what is this all about?”

Porter gave Dr. Levin a brief history of the Balkans Project as well as the notation in Nikolsky’s file.

“Well, that’s more than a little bizarre,” Levin responded. “It’s hard for me to envision how Dr. Schreiber would have had any nefarious role in all of this, but it is what it is. Obviously, you’ll have our complete cooperation in your investigation. What else can I do for you?”

“How can I contact Dr. Fielding?”

Josef Hess’s destination was the University of Texas Medical School in the Texas Medical Center, a sprawling 80 acre complex in south Houston adjacent to Rice University. The TMC had grown to include 14 major hospitals, including MD Anderson Cancer Center, several rehabilitation facilities, two medical schools and a school of dentistry. As with most such complexes, parking was problematic. The family originally owning the land had donated the property but retained rights to parking revenues, engendering substantial financial gain over the years. The University of Texas Medical School had been provided with a 10 story parking structure during construction but due to the configuration of the building, it resided several hundred yards from the actual structure itself.

Hess turned off Fannin street into the TMC, drove straight ahead and into the garage. His mid morning arrival meant that most of the spaces in lower 4 levels had already been taken. He searched for several minutes before finding a spot being vacated and pulled into the slot. Hess removed his briefcase from the passenger seat, pulled his baseball cap down further on his face and donned his sunglasses before exiting the car. The boxes in the trunk remained in place. Two blocks from the north end of the TMC was a small Hertz car rental office and he began walking in that direction.

Jerry Fielding was intrigued by Gerald Porter’s phone call requesting a meeting. Porter had been vague about the subject matter but Fielding’s afternoon was one of his two “academic” half days which he supposedly devoted to research and paper writing. In

truth, that time had been slowly encroached on by meaningless paperwork, something Fielding hated about life in an academic teaching institution.

Upon hearing the knock on the door, Fielding rose to his feet and opened it finding a late middle age man in a sports blazer and white shirt with no tie.

“Dr. Fielding, I presume?” Porter said with a smile.

“Guilty as charged,” he replied shaking Porter’s hand. “Come in.”

Porter glanced around the room, an old habit from his days in the Marine Corps. When he situated himself into one of the two office chairs, his coat opened slightly and Fielding caught a glimpse of his leather holster and pistol.

“I appreciate you taking the time to see me,” Porter said. “I realize this was last minute.”

“Well, I don’t often receive calls from states attorneys. I assume it’s best not to keep them waiting.”

Porter grinned slightly and shifted in his chair. His back was hurting, another unwelcome reminder of his cancer.

“Probably a good idea,” Porter responded. “I’ll get to my point. In the course of an investigation I came across the name ‘H. Schreiber’. Dr. Levin in the pathology department suggested that person might be Henry Schreiber, a former faculty member. He also said that you were evaluating some of his previous work.”

“He was correct. Dr. Schreiber’s initial research was in neuropathology but later he became a pioneer in the investigation and classification of blood vessel tumors. I recently became interested in skin lesions with similar features and asked one of our dermatology residents to locate Schreiber’s original pathology material. He had a reputation for being a meticulous cataloguer but after all this time, no one knew what had become of his papers, slides and tissue blocks. The Department of Pathology has a large amount of archived material in the hospital so I sent Dr. Douglas there to see what he could find out. Long story short, he managed to uncover some of Dr. Schreiber’s paperwork and later found the accompanying glass slides and tissue blocks in his nephew’s possession.”

Porter furrowed his brow. “Isn’t that unusual? I mean, why would Schreiber’s nephew have these materials if they belonged to Vanderbilt?”

“Actually, yes, it is unusual. However, we’re talking about decades ago. The regulations regarding the propriety of slides and tissue blocks were more lax in that era. The materials in question might have been part of a research study with outside funding meaning they would more or less belong to the lead investigator. In today’s world, they would be considered the property of whoever was providing the research funds.”

“Who would likely have been providing those funds in the 1950’s?”

“Well, there were private foundations then just as there are now but far fewer of them. Most research in those days was supported by the federal government, often from the Defense Department or Department of the Army.”

“What was the nature of Dr. Schreiber’s research with these slides you found?”

Fielding shook his head and smiled.

“Nothing short of bizarre. In fact, I’m in the process of writing up the findings for publication. All of the slides showed Kaposi’s sarcoma, a low grade malignancy of blood vessels in the skin and other body sites. True to his nature, Schreiber had written down the names of the patients, all men and all sounding Eastern European, at least to my thinking.”

“Can you give me a few of the names?”

“Sure,” Fielding replied. He turned to his computer and after a few clicks of the mouse read off half a dozen.

“Those are Serbian surnames,” Porter said.

“Well, there’s the twist. Kaposi’s sarcoma is typically found in patients from the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe. The odd part is that these men were young, most under 30. Kaposi’s sarcoma doesn’t occur in people from that geographic locale until the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> decade of life. As you probably know, Kaposi’s sarcoma is also a skin manifestation of AIDS, usually seen in the homosexual population. Dr. Douglas and I had five of the tissue blocks tested and all showed the presence of the HIV virus.”

“Didn’t the AIDS epidemic begin in the 1980’s?” Porter asked.

“There is some evidence AIDS has been around for many years, at least in equatorial Africa. But you are correct, the infection didn’t globally disseminate until 1982. The information from Schreiber’s work suggests it was present, at least in these men, much earlier.”

Porter sat for a moment, staring out the window and digesting what he'd heard.

"I'm going to give you some background information on these patients which I need you to hold in the strictest confidence. It is to be shared with one and absolutely not to be made public in whatever article you're writing. Is that understood?"

The Hertz office was open, the front desk manned by a smiling young lady when Hess walked in. It was 10:30 in the morning with no other customers around. Hess rented a mid-sized vehicle without difficulty using a fake name and falsified documentation. Fifteen minutes after his arrival he was pulling out of the parking lot onto a side road and back to Fannin Street. Hess turned right, drove to the south end of the medical center and into the St. Luke's Hospital parking garage. Before leaving the vehicle, Hess checked his cell phone and opened his briefcase. Inside was a pistol, three fully loaded clips and a box of 9mm cartridges which he dumped into his hand and placed in his coat pocket. He opened the driver's door, locked it behind him and began walking north towards the UT Houston Medical School.

## Chapter 14

Porter gave Dr. Fielding a brief synopsis of the Balkans Project leaving out some of the minor details related to the military intelligence. Fielding sat with his eyes ever widening and occasionally shaking his head.

“So you have no idea who was behind all of this?”

“The short answer is, no. I have some suspicions but that’s all. The 1950’s were a tumultuous time for American security agencies. They were beginning to forge their own identities and dealing with the Soviet cold war was often a matter of trial and error. Someone with contacts in the Belgian Congo approached the newly formed CIA about an almost uniformly fatal disease found in that African country that might make for a potent biological weapon. The higher ups gave this person an audience and shortly thereafter an experimental trial was proposed. But where to put it and who to experiment on? The country was undergoing a post war economic expansion meaning the location needed to be somewhere below the radar. Memphis was selected. It was a southern city which had boomed during the war and possessed facilities mothballed when the armaments they produced were no longer needed. When the CIA learned about the existence of this group of Serbian soldiers, they jumped at the chance to use them. They were suspected of war crimes, from a part of the world few had heard of, spoke no English and, most importantly, wouldn’t be missed. Callous to be sure, but that was the mindset in those days.”

“So what did they do to these Serbs in Memphis?”

“That’s the key question. I’ve searched but haven’t come up with much. I know where they were housed and a few names of the people involved, but almost all the paperwork, if it ever existed, has either been lost or destroyed. In all the time I’ve worked for the government, I’ve never come across something buried this deep. Of course, the fact that it all took place 50 years ago helps considerably. For years there have been rumors of such an operation but I’ve never come across hard data supporting its existence.”

“So you have no proof,” Fielding remarked.

“Nothing I could take to a judge. Even if I did, who’s to say he or she wouldn’t be gotten to. I’m nearing retirement. This is one case I would like to wrap up before I

leave. If you can definitively demonstrate that these prisoners were purposefully infected with AIDS, it would allow me to pry open some doors currently closed.”

“We’ve already shown that these tissue samples were from patients infected with the AIDS virus. That’s not in question. The key word, and you used it yourself, is ‘purposefully’. The tissues are passive materials. They can’t demonstrate the nature or circumstances surrounding their mode of infection.”

The late morning air in Houston was already laden with moisture and the rising temperatures of the day made for a miserable climate. By the time Josef Hess arrived at the UT Medical School building, he was sweating profusely. The cooler environment inside was a welcome relief, but Hess barely noticed. He was focused on the task at hand. The last minute nature of his mission had prevented him from his preferred routine, namely reconnaissance. His normal practice would have been to arrive several days in advance of “zero hour” as he termed it to survey the area and target involved. Hess was being compensated for the increased hazard but it wasn’t how he preferred to do business. Learning on the job entailed risks and his long tenure had resulted from being risk adverse.

Hess walked down a long hall running the length of the building. It ended in small alcove housing the student mailboxes which in turn emptied into the first floor lounge. On the far side of the lounge was a desk with two security guards. Hess took stock of the men and decided they were no immediate concern. They were standing next to one another, chatting and laughing, their duties long since having become mundane but that was about to change. Both men had pistols on their waist.

Opposite the wall of mailboxes was a building directory. After noting that the Dermatology offices were on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, Hess walked around the corner to a bank of elevators and rode up two floors. When the doors opened, he found himself in an open area, a crowd of young people milling about. To his left was a large lecture room. With class having recently dismissed, the students were chatting and preparing to leave for lunch. No one paid any attention to the middle age man with a briefcase. On the wall to his right was a sign pointing to the Dermatology Department.

Walking down the hall, Hess scoured the placards adjacent to the doors. Most were marked with the room number and name of the physician officed there. Towards the end of the hall, he found Fielding's office. Hess walked past it, turned left and located a public bathroom 30 yards away. Once inside a stall, he closed the door, opened his briefcase and attached a silencer to a small pistol. Hess's final order of business was to retrieve a disposable cell phone he had purchased during his drive from Canada. He turned it on, placed the pistol in his coat pocket and exited the stall, leaving his briefcase stowed behind the commode.

"So is your study complete?" Porter asked.

"No, is the short answer," Fielding replied. "We evaluated biopsy specimens from 5 patients all of which demonstrated the presence of the AIDS virus. I'm in the process of summarizing these findings for publication. The remaining tissue blocks are being tested as well. I believe they'll be positive and when all of that data is collected, another paper will ensue."

"What's the time frame on completing your evaluation?"

"Probably a few weeks. A month at the most."

"You said that your associate found documents with the tissues and slides. It would help if I could see them."

Fielding sat up in his chair and straightened his back. "Well, that's going to be a problem."

"Why?" Porter inquired.

"Because the paperwork was found attached to a Megillah. We have been working with copies. The original remains in the possession of Milton Schreiber, Dr. Schreiber's nephew. I can provide you with photocopies of what we have, but you'll need to speak with Mr. Schreiber about the original."

"What is a Megillah?" Porter asked.

"That was my reaction," Fielding said with a smile. "To the best of my understanding, it's a Hebrew text from a portion of the Old Testament and as such is considered holy. Why Dr. Schreiber attached his research findings to one is anyone's guess."

“Schreiber’s nephew knew nothing about it?”

“Apparently not.”

Hess began walking towards the Dermatology Department offices. It was nearly noon in the hall was full of people ambling towards the cafeteria or various break rooms. Hess paused for a moment to remove the cell phone from his pocket. He punched in the appropriate numbers and resumed his journey. When he was ten feet from Fielding’s office, he pushed the send button and took a deep breath. Three seconds later, he heard and felt the impact of his phone call.

The location of Hess’s rental car in the medical school parking garage had been purposefully selected. The building was 10 stories tall and constructed almost exclusively of site poured concrete. In the trunk of his vehicle was 80 pounds of plastic explosive. When he detonated the explosive, the building’s main girders shattered. With the car parked at the end of the garage, the structure pancaked, one floor falling onto another. Ten seconds after the blast, 24 people were dead and over a hundred injured. Half the building lay in ruins, smoke and dust billowing into the air. Alarms from the damaged cars shrieked mixed with the cries and screams of the wounded and trapped. The explosion had its intended effect. The area erupted in chaos.

Fielding and Porter were concluding their meeting with both men standing and about to shake hands when the explosion occurred.

“What the...?” Fielding said turning to the bank of windows behind him. The garage was obscured by clouds of dust but the damage was obvious. The south end of the building had collapsed, twisted rebar and remaining concrete columns protruding into the air in grotesque shapes.

Porter was on his feet immediately, standing behind Fielding and peering through the windows.

“That was a bomb,” he said flatly and with an air of authority.

Both men were staring in silence at the carnage when the office door swung open. Joseph Hess stepped inside, a very visible pistol in his right hand. He quickly closed the door behind him.

“I didn’t realize you had a visitor,” he said. “Please take a seat. Both of you.”

Porter’s first instinct upon seeing the gun was to reach for his but he suppressed the urge. Eventually, he would have to. The intruder wasn’t going to let either man live.

Fielding had difficulty believing what he was seeing. First the destruction of the parking garage and now a man in his office with a pistol pointed in his direction. He fumbled for the back of his chair and sat down as instructed.

“What do you want?” Fielding asked. His knees were shaking.

“You’ve been evaluating some of Dr. Schreiber’s research,” Hess replied. “I require all of it.”

Fielding glanced at Hess, then at Porter. None of this made sense.

“Give him what he wants,” Porter said. He shifted his weight in his chair allowing him better access to his weapon.

“Good advice,” Hess said.

“I have copies of the paperwork we located but the originals aren’t here. The tissue blocks are in another lab and the...”

Hess moved his pistol to the right and fired a round into a metal file cabinet next to Fielding’s head. The dermatologist flinched hard.

“Assume, for argument’s sake, I’m on a tight schedule and disinterested in excuses. It will make things much easier for us all.”

“What he’s telling you, bonehead, is that the materials you’re looking for aren’t currently in his possession.”

Hess turned to look at Porter. He recognized Dr. Fielding from photographs on the internet. Fielding’s guest was a different matter. Hess would kill him as well and considered doing so then if for no other reason than his disparaging remark. However, Fielding was unaccustomed to violence. It was evident he was terrified, a critical component of Hess’s plan but he needed him to focus. Putting a bullet into a file cabinet was one thing but splattering his visitor’s brain around the office was another matter.

“Silence on your part, would be the best option,” he said to Porter.

“You and your wife, Dina, I believe is her name, have two daughters. Is that correct, Dr. Fielding?” Hess asked flatly.

Fielding’s eyes widened.

“They are currently being looked after by some of my associates. These men are reasonably polite until I ask them not to be and then they revert to their more, shall we say, primitive nature. Since you claim that Dr. Schreiber’s body of work isn’t currently in your possession, I’ll need you to gather it together in a timely fashion. You’ll have 15 minutes. After that, I will begin making phone calls.”

The terror flooding Fielding’s mind was replaced with blind rage. “If anything happens to Dina and the girls, I will make it my life’s work...”

“Please, Dr. Fielding,” Hess began. “Don’t make threats you can’t carry out. This isn’t, as they say in these parts, ‘my first rodeo.’ You have no room for negotiation. Do as you are told and everything will be fine.”

Hess glanced at his watch and turned back to Fielding.

“You have 15 minutes. Were I in your shoes, I’d move quickly. I’m assuming I don’t need to ask you to refrain from contacting the authorities.”

Justin had been on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the medical school delivering the last of the tissue blocks when he heard and felt the explosion in the parking garage. A new outpatient clinic was being built across Fannin Street with intermittent use of explosives to remove bedrock. Reverberating building floors had become commonplace but this shaking was beyond the norm. Whatever had happened, it wasn’t good.

The hallways filled with people. Several mentioned the parking garage. Since Dr. Fielding’s office window provided a clear view of the garage Douglas decided to drop by.

From the stairwell, he exited on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor and began walking towards Fielding’s office. Unlike most other doors in the hallway, Fielding’s was closed. Douglas grabbed the doorknob, twisted it and pushed his way into the room.

In most public and private buildings, doors are more dense than those used in homes. Most are constructed with metal to increase their longevity and comply with fire code regulations. When swung open with enough force they are capable of significant impact.

Compared to others in the department, Fielding’s office was small. In his tenure of nearly a decade he had accumulated a large collection of extraneous materials. With

more than two people in the room, it was cramped. The only free space of any size was near the office entrance.

Josef Hess had backed up allowing Fielding room to move past him when Douglas excitedly pushed the door open. His footwear selection that morning was a well worn pair of soft leather shoes. They were comfortable but afforded him little protection when the edge of the door slammed into his right foot. In addition to the pain, the impact knocked him off balance.

Porter saw the opportunity and lunged towards Hess. He pushed Fielding hard with his right hand sending the dermatologist stumbling towards the window. Hess was cursing in German as he tried to aim his weapon but Porter was all over him. Porter's left hand was firmly attached to Hess's right wrist preventing him from raising his pistol. His right hand was on the German's throat, squeezing with all his might. Hess was trying to punch with his left hand but Porter had the man's arm pushed to the outside. His reach wasn't long enough to impact anywhere but Porter's shoulder.

Witnessing the struggle Douglas was momentarily frozen with shock.

Porter realized the men were deadlocked and that his cancer had diminished his strength. At some point, Hess would be able to break free unless he was subdued.

Fortunately, there were other men in the room. Behind his desk and on the wrong side of the fray, Fielding wasn't positioned to render assistance. Douglas was another matter.

"A little help, if you don't mind," Porter said to the resident.

Porter's request snapped Douglas from his daze but he was unsure exactly what the man meant by "help".

"Hit him, boy," Porter growled, his grip on the man's wrist beginning to lessen.

Douglas balled up his fist and planted it hard on Hess's nose. Blood began to flow freely over the man's face. Hess began cursing all the louder.

"Again," Porter said.

Douglas began repeatedly punching Hess in the face. He was trying to avoid the impact by turning his head but as the blows accumulated, they began taking their toll. After half a dozen shots, Hess began to slump against the wall.

"Get his gun," Porter requested. "And try not to shoot anybody."

Having grown up in west Texas, Justin was familiar with pistols. His father owned a small collection of handguns and Justin had fired all of them at one time or another. He was comfortable with such weapons but held a healthy respect for their capacity to inflict harm. He was unfamiliar, however, in forcibly removing one from another person's hand.

Justin grasped Hess's right hand and began attempting to peel the man's fingers from the pistol. The German was gripping the gun with all his might. Justin struggled to keep Hess's arm pinned against the wall. After a few attempts he was getting nowhere and the man was beginning to recover from his bludgeoning so he planted a few more punches to Hess's head.

"Anytime now would be fine," Porter said through clenched teeth.

Like many residents who regularly bandage patients Justin carried a pair of scissors. He removed them from his pocket and inserted the lower blade beneath Hess's index finger.

"Your call," Justin said.

Hess gave no outward expression to Douglas's actions or words. His eyes were emotionless even as he spit in the resident's face.

Douglas pushed down hard on the scissors. The sound of cracking bone was audible as blood began spurting from the digit's severed arteries. Hess attempted to place his middle finger on the trigger. Douglas grasped the digit and twisted it backwards placing it flat against the back of his hand. As Hess screamed Justin could feel the pain weakening his resolve. He peeled back the remaining fingers dislodging the weapon. Hess slumped to the floor grasping his mangled hand.

Porter had his gun out quickly and aimed it directly at Hess's head. He was breathing heavily, sweat pouring down his face.

"Strong work," Porter said to Justin. "I wouldn't have thought of cutting the man's finger off."

"Seemed like a good idea at the time," Justin replied. "Do you mind if I ask who this guy is?"

“I don’t know. My guess would be he was sent by people wishing to keep the remains of the Balkan’s Project well buried. Once he’s patched up, we’ll interrogate him. He’ll talk. He’s a small fish but he knows who the bigger ones are.”

Porter glanced at Fielding who was on his cell phone talking with Dina. Hess’s threats had been empty. No one had accosted Fielding’s wife or daughters. He was sitting in his chair, his ashen face streaked with sweat.

“I assume you have a cell phone?” Porter asked.

Douglas nodded.

“Call the cops. Not the campus police, the real ones. Tell them what we’ve got here and to send some uniforms over. The garage explosion was a bomb and we have the fellow responsible.”

Douglas fished his phone from his pocket and dialed 911.

“I don’t suppose you’d care to tell me who’s behind all of this, would you?”

Porter asked Hess.

Hess stared at him and cursed, this time in English.

Porter laughed. He had acquired a large piece of the puzzle which had stymied him for so long. Hess would indeed talk. Porter would see to it and when he did, the federal indictments would be issued at a rapid clip. Even the men well protected by their positions wouldn’t be able to avoid having to answer for their actions and Porter would stay on in his job until they did.

### Post Script

Justin Douglas continued to receive written correspondence from the medical school regarding his “assault” on Dr. Prine. He forwarded it to Dina Fielding, as per her husband’s suggestion who eventually wrote a letter to the dean requesting they either “put up or shut up”. No subsequent letters were forthcoming. He continues to serve as a resident in the dermatology department in good standing.

Jerry Fielding’s paper on Kaposi’s sarcoma in the group of men comprising the Balkan Project was received with enthusiasm by the editorial staff of the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It was fast tracked for publication and appeared in print within 6 weeks of submission. Fielding became an overnight celebrity of sorts, appearing on several television shows and being interviewed by both *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines. He was warned, however, by the Department of Justice not to reveal the source of his materials under penalty of prosecution. Fielding complied.

The disappearance of Jim Patton, Earl Glusac’s friend, was never fully resolved. Despite his efforts, Gerald Porter discovered no evidence of involvement by any local, state or federal agency in his presumed death. Earl continues to live on his farm outside Livingston, Tennessee and has been sober for nearly 3 years.

Josef Hess was transferred to a safe house 20 miles outside Tegucigalpa, Honduras where he was “interviewed” for several days. His initial reluctance to incriminate his employers diminished rapidly and he eventually revealed names, dates and events in abundance. For his cooperation, he was allowed to return to Germany where he currently resides under a false identity.

Paul Grabel received his PhD in electrochemistry from Vanderbilt University, married Dana Weston and moved to a small farm in rural Marshall County, Tennessee. Working in an outbuilding on the property he designed a complex missile guidance system for the military which has resulted in multiple patents and considerable financial gain.

The fallout from the obstruction of the Balkans Project investigation was relatively minor. The involved government intelligence agencies calculated, correctly so, the majority of Americans didn't care about something occurring so long ago. Still, they weren't eager to have their dirty laundry appearing on the front pages of the New York Times or Washington Post.