

The Nephilim*Prologue*

The morning dawned with a crushing rainstorm, something not uncommon for Houston in early October. The weather service had been predicting it but the force of the onslaught was unsettling to the city's recent transplant. Justin Douglas had grown up in Rotan, Texas a place best known for its most famous resident, former NFL quarterback Sammy Baugh. Storms there could be fierce, to be sure, but rarely were they accompanied by the torrents of water Justin had witnessed since his relocation.

Douglas arose early as the first rumbles of thunder made their way across the area. His roommates were fast asleep. Beer cans littered the living room and, along with scattered pizza boxes, gave the place an "Animal House" aura. The first anatomy test of their brief medical school careers had been given the day before and as tradition required, they had stayed out drinking until the wee hours of the morning. Except Douglas, of course. He had gone to bed just after the 10:00 P.M. news had aired, put in his earplugs and drifted off to sleep. As was his habit, he awoke early on Saturday morning to make his way to the anatomy labs for a leisurely dissection on his cadaver, affectionately named "Mrs. Doubtfire".

The apartment complex was quiet. Aside from an occasional jogger no one was around, certainly no one in his class. The shuttle bus was on time and he boarded it alone. One other person was sitting in the back. Douglas had seen her before but didn't know her name. He considered approaching her and saying hello but she looked tired.

Probably just got off call he thought.

After a 10 minute trip through standing water and up the largely deserted boulevards intersecting the Texas Medical Center, the bus pulled into the medical school breezeway and Douglas exited. Following a visit to his locker and retrieving a box of latex gloves and dissecting instruments he took the elevator to the medical school's basement.

Not surprisingly, he was alone in the lab. Earlier in the week it had been crowded as his fellow students crammed for the test. Today, however most were probably like his roommates, asleep or hung over.

Good, he thought. No one to bother me.

Douglas removed a rubber apron from a locker and began cranking the lever at the end of the large metal box containing the corpse. The covers of the modern day sarcophagus slowly parted as the platform rose from the formaldehyde. The woman's extremities were flayed open, the fat removed and the underlying muscles, nerves and ligaments separated for better visualization. The upper and lower limbs had been the first part of the course. Now the class was to move on to the chest and the most important organ contained therein, the heart.

"Mrs. Doubtfire" or whatever her name was (none of the students were provided with that information) had donated her body to science to be used for dissection by first year medical students. A bucket with her number on it was kept in a nearby storage closet. At the end of each laboratory session any tissue "scraps" were deposited into it. When the anatomy class was completed her family would be given the choice of how they wished to receive her remains. Most would opt for cremation but some would request their loved one's body parts be returned in a sturdy vinyl bag for a traditional burial.

There was one hard and fast rule about the cadaver laboratory and it was impressed on the entering students in no uncertain terms on the first day of anatomy; respect the body because it used to belong to someone. That meant no crude or offensive remarks, no unwarranted mutilation of the body and most of all, any foreign objects found in or on the body remained with the body. False eyes, metal staples, titanium hip joints, all of them were to be given to the professor overseeing the dissection room. He or she would then make sure the materials were kept safe and eventually returned to the family.

So far, the collection of interesting items found in the cadavers' bodies had been minimal. One group had dislodged a piece of shrapnel near the knee of a World War II veteran but that was about it. Disappointing since the prosectors were rife with tales of

previous students who had discovered bullets and broken knife blades along with the usual surgical clips and wire.

Thus, it was with some excitement that Justin Douglas prepared to open the chest cavity of “Mrs. Doubtfire” that rainy Saturday morning. He and his team had been given a sheet of paper citing the diseases the woman suffered from including her proximate cause of death. She suffered from a number of maladies including heart failure and had received a pacemaker 6 months earlier. It had not been removed after she expired.

Douglas donned his gloves while the last of the formaldehyde receded from the corpse. The overhead evacuation system was off so the medical student punched a red button near the light switch. It came to life with a loud sucking sound as it began its job of evacuating the fumes emanating from the tissue preservative. Douglas opened his anatomy guide to the appropriate page and placed it on a nearby book stand. After adjusting its position he turned his attention to “Mrs. Doubtfire.”

The mass beneath the skin of her chest was clearly visible. Above and to the left of the breast was a small scar, the telltale evidence of the pacemaker’s insertion. His safety glasses in place, Douglas made an incision into the skin overlying the device. He carefully dissected around the tissues using blunt edged scissors until he struck the plastic housing. Five minutes later he was able to free the last adherent strands of tissue before removing the apparatus from its bed of scar tissue and fat.

Douglas was impressed. The pacemaker still looked practically new. He turned the device over to inspect the back and in doing so something fell to the floor. Douglas retrieved it and turned it over slowly in his fingers. It was a flat metal square less than an inch on each side and only a millimeter or two in width.

What on earth is this? He wondered.

It wasn’t a battery since that was contained within the pacemaker. Nor was it the part of the internal circuitry for the same reason. Reexamining the appliance on the table he could see no recessed area for the piece to have lain in. With no insight as to the item’s function he put them both aside and again began his dissection of the woman’s chest cavity.

Several hours later Douglas finished his work. It was nearly noon and his stomach was telling him lunchtime was at hand. There still had been no traffic in his

cadaver room although he had heard activity in some of the adjacent chambers. He began to clean up his work area putting his anatomy manual away and placing unexplored pieces of the body back onto the metal table. Just before he began lowering the cadaver back into the formaldehyde he noticed the pacemaker sitting on the corner.

Oh yeah, he thought. I have to give that to the prof.

Douglas knew the rules about keeping materials found with the body but the metal plate was so small. Besides, he thought as he put the souvenir in his pocket, who was going to know? He placed the pacemaker at the end of the table, cleaned up his instruments and left the room. The rest of his Saturday belonged to him.

Chapter 1

David Schmidt sat on the deck of his home looking over the valley in front of him, the vast majority of which he owned. From his vantage point he could see the long paved road running from his house to the state highway in the distance. Schmidt resided in the mountains of New Mexico northeast of Ruidoso at an elevation of 7200 feet where the air was crisp and cool. He was about to take another sip of his coffee when a man approached him from behind.

“What is it?” Schmidt asked.

“Potentially, another disappointment,” came the response.

“Fabulous.”

“Our friends were able to track down Julian Weincrantz in Toronto,” the man said. “Apparently he had been living there alone for the past six months but must have been expecting us. When the men broke into the apartment they found he’d shot himself in the head. They searched the premises but were unable to find anything.”

“So they discovered nothing?” Schmidt inquired.

“Well, nothing incriminating. They did remove some papers and his computer disks but they aren’t optimistic. He was a careful man.”

Marcus Compton was an aide to David Schmidt, a sort of gopher who kept things running smoothly or at least as smoothly as he could given the nature of his work. For the past year Schmidt had been attempting to locate Mr. Weincrantz but the young man had proven elusive.

Schmidt continued sipping his coffee and surveying the landscape. Occasionally a hawk would circle overhead floating on the mountain breezes in search of a meal below. Schmidt admired the great birds. Utterly lethal and completely oblivious to what went on around them. The man often wished he could return in another life as such an animal.

“Very well then,” Schmidt said after a few minutes. “Have them keep me apprised of any new developments. I’ll expect a report in the next 36 hours.”

“I’ll pass the message along,” Compton said as he left.

David Schmidt was a patient man. He'd not accumulated what he had by rushing into things or making foolhardy decisions. He had grown up in Paraguay, the only son of an elderly German refugee and a much younger woman from one of the better families in Asuncion. Educated in private schools he spoke 4 languages and moved about the world with ease. His father had died of a heart attack while he had been at college in Buenos Aires.

Dieter Schmidt, David's father, had arrived in South America in late 1944 accompanied by other Germans fleeing the turmoil enveloping their homeland. They had bribed the local officials to look the other way when it came to their past. Some probably suspected they were involved with the Third Reich but the compensation for their indifference was substantial and a symbiotic relationship developed. Even after the war and with the search on for Axis war criminals, Dieter and his friends had little to fear. On the rare occasion when someone came nosing around they were escorted to the sparsely populated countryside and disappeared. Most used their comparative wealth to amass large land holdings becoming feudal lords, with expansive homes perched on hilltops and closets stocked with German wines and French cognacs. Life was good and they were determined to keep it that way.

David had been sent to boarding school in Santiago, Chile. During the holiday break in his junior year his father asked to speak with him privately. While David's marks had been less than stellar, it wasn't his school performance that was the subject of conversation. As they spoke Dieter revealed a chapter in his life that few knew of. He had been a part of the "Final Solution" regarding the Jews. An accountant by trade he hadn't participated in the killing or relocation but rather the collating of data. Most of the German Jews shipped off to the concentration camps had been from the middle class. Their possessions were usually meager after almost a decade of persecution. Not so, however, among families residing in conquered nations. Mistakenly thinking they were safer than their German brethren most had declined to abandon their native countries until it was too late. When their communities were overrun their holdings were largely intact. Their possessions, taken in aggregate, were substantial, providing David's father with a forum for exercising his talents.

Dieter Schmidt had overseen of a group of accountants and bookkeepers cataloguing the spoils of war. Once inventoried, the goods were loaded aboard well-guarded railway cars or trucks and transported to Berlin. Schmidt's work was not restricted to Jewish families and synagogues. Wealthy Christian families were also subjected to the same sort of larceny but were often given the option of bribing their way clear of complete decimation either with goods or information on other well to do Christian and, in particular, Jewish families.

When the plunder reached Germany it was divided and sent to warehouses in several sites around the country. Initially these were located in larger industrial cities such as Hamburg, Frankfurt and Cologne. However, as the war progressed and Allied bombing raids became more intense the materials were moved into the countryside where they would be more secure.

As the summer of 1944 drew to a close it became clear the war was lost. Schmidt's superiors decided to act. Gold and other liquid assets were taken to Switzerland or sent by courier plane to sympathetic banks in Guatemala and Nigeria. Truck convoys transported the bulkier materials to Montenegro before being loaded on boats flying neutral colors. They eventually were off loaded in Rhodesia where they were kept isolated and under guard.

Over the ensuing years artwork and antiquities had been liquidated slowly and carefully. Prospective buyers were painstakingly screened and re-screened before being allowed to view much less purchase anything from a portfolio. If the suggested amount was appropriate and the oversight committee approved, a wire transfer to a bank in the Seychelle Islands would be initiated and re-routed several times before arriving at its final destination. The number of families with access to the proceeds from these sales and the investment dividends numbered less than a hundred. All, or nearly all, lived in Central and South America. Residence in Europe was discouraged but a few had settled in Canada and the United States. The heads of these families met every 5 years with an executive committee convening quarterly in various locales.

Deiter's confession about his past came as no great surprise to David. While unaware of the details surrounding his father's former life and current sources of income, the younger Schmidt was insightful enough to realize his father had a murky past. What

was eye opening to David was the scope of the money involved. The aggregate worth of the families was nearing a hundred billion dollars. Each family head was sworn to secrecy. Even disclosing it to a spouse was discouraged. Deiter was passing David's birthright on by bringing him into the fold.

It took several months for what his father had told him to fully sink in. But when it eventually did David came to a decision. He would not live in the semi-seclusion like his father. *He* had not been in Germany during the war and felt no compulsion to keep himself hidden out of fear of discovery. Europe held no special attraction for him but the United States did and with the appropriate documents he'd be able to blend in suitably.

Deiter suffered a fatal heart attack three years after their conversation. The attorney overseeing the probate of the Schmidt will gave David an envelope containing the combination to the old man's safe. Upon opening it he found papers and documents substantiating everything he had been told. A detailed list of people and phone numbers was included with instructions for accessing his money. David followed the directions dutifully. In the ensuing months he met with members of the executive committee. They further impressed on him, though it was largely unnecessary, the need for discretion. There was a self-policed organization with swift and unwavering punishment for placing any of the others at risk. They called themselves The Nephilim.

Chapter 2

The Toronto police had little to go on. The apartment of Julian Weincrantz bore none of the outward appearances of having been broken into. There were no fingerprints to evaluate other than those of the deceased. His computer was missing but none of the “valuables” one would normally associate with a robbery. There was evidence that the place had been searched - for what was anyone’s guess. The neighbors knew little about the young man. He had been there a short time and none had any more contact with him than to say hello in the hallway. They had called the police when an odor appeared to be coming from Weincrantz’s apartment.

Detective Alain Messier was overseeing the case since it had occurred in his precinct. A veteran of 19 years with the force he had seen his share of suicides and had come to abhor them. While they were usually easy enough to unravel they typically left behind grieving families with little sense of closure. The death of Julian Weincrantz was different than most, however. In the first place it involved a younger man and in the second the victim was foreign. Toronto had become an international city in the past 20 years and persons traveling to and from the metropolis were common. As such, the deaths of foreign transients were not altogether a rarity. However, those seeking a new start rarely stayed long in Toronto and those who did uncommonly killed themselves.

Messier was sitting in his office reviewing photographs of the scene when one of his agents, Martin Girard knocked on the door.

“Yes,” Messier said without looking up.

“I’ve got the medical examiner’s report.”

“Anything interesting?”

“Not really,” Girard answered. “Single gunshot to the head. Died about a week ago. Tox screen was negative.”

“Do we have anything on the weapon?”

“No. The serial numbers had been removed with some type of acid.”

“What do we know about the late Mr. Weincrantz?” Messier asked.

Girard sat down in a chair opposite his boss’s desk and began flipping through a small notebook.

“Not much. He immigrated to Canada about 6 months ago from Vienna. His savings account statement shows that he deposited about \$20,000 after he arrived and has been withdrawing from it since. No checking account. Paid cash for everything. Never got a job. What he did with his time is anyone’s guess. Neighbors saw little or nothing of him.”

“Did you get his phone luds?”

“Yeah. Nothing of interest except one long distance call from Amsterdam about two days before he died. Lasted less than 2 minutes.”

“Who from?”

“Pay phone at the airport. Calling card.”

Messier was rubbing his eyes.

“There was one interesting thing however,” Girard continued. “He had an Internet account with a local provider. Where he went on the net who knows.”

“Kiddie porn?” Messier mused.

“Could be I suppose, but he didn’t really fit the profile. No photos lying around or anything to suggest that. No drugs or paraphernalia either.”

“What about papers in the apartment?”

“That’s the other thing that’s odd. Not much to find. Not even a receipt from the laundry.”

“And the computer?”

“Gone. And no action on his internet account either. I checked.”

“Okay,” Messier said sitting up. “Anything else?”

“Just one,” Girard responded. “According to the Medical Examiner he had some odd tattoos.”

“Odd how?”

“They were in his armpits.”

Messier arched his eyebrows. “His armpits?” he asked.

“Yeah. On the right he had the letters ‘PM’ and on the left the number ‘164’.”

“Did the ME have any clue what that meant?”

“Nope. He thought the second one could be a date.”

“Meaning what?”

“We don’t know.”

Messier looked out the window at the park adjacent to his building. The trees were beginning to lose their leaves in greater numbers, presaging the snows that would soon return to the area.

“Okay,” Messier said, turning around to face the detective. “Stay on it and keep me informed of your progress, but don’t put too much time into this one. It sounds like a nonstarter.”

Dr. Abraham Levy wasn’t like the rest of his family. For one thing, almost everyone else had gone into the legal profession whereas he had chosen medicine. For another, he was passionate about cars, something none of his other relatives showed the least interest in other than to know where to take their Mercedes and Lincolns when they required servicing. Not only was Dr. Levy a Formula One racing fan but he collected cars as well. Adjacent to his home he had constructed a 4500 square foot garage in which to house his acquisitions. He always left enough room for the next time he found a vehicle he couldn’t live without. To date he owned 13 cars, almost all of them sports models. His most recent purchase was a 1977 Datsun 240 Z.

Levy returned to his office after performing a balloon angioplasty in the cath lab. The auto shop that serviced his cars had called. The Datsun was ready and Tom, the manager reminded him they would be closing in an hour. If he wanted the vehicle today he’d have to get there before he went home. Levy had been salivating over the car since purchasing it 6 weeks earlier and could wait no more. He phoned Tom, telling him to stay put. Picking up his cell phone he grabbed his jacket, told his secretary he’d be back in an hour and walked briskly to the front of the building where he hailed a cab. Fifteen minutes later he arrived at the auto shop. His car was parked in an adjacent waiting area. It looked spectacular.

What a find.

Tom was getting off the phone in the office when Levy walked through the front doors.

“All ready?” he asked.

“Yep,” Tom replied. “You want me to put this on your tab and bill you?”

“That would be great.”

Levy was tapping his foot nervously and jingling the change in his pocket. He was as pensive as a child on Christmas Eve.

“Want to know what it was?” Tom asked smiling.

“Not really,” Levy responded.

“Just under \$16,000.”

Levy grimaced. “Wow. My wife is definitely going to kill me. Why so much?”

“Parts,” Tom said shrugging his shoulders as he continued writing on a clipboard. “They’re incredibly difficult to come by for this vehicle. I must have spent the better part of a day just finding what was needed and ordering it. FedEx charges alone were close to \$500.” He paused for a moment. “On the other hand, you now have a classic. Not many of them around anymore and the few that exist aren’t in this condition. There is one thing that you need to know however.”

“What’s that?” Levy asked.

“I wasn’t able to locate a set of axle braces for the back wheels.”

“Is that a big problem?”

“Probably not,” Tom replied. “The mechanism appears to be in pretty good shape. No excessive wear or rust but I would have felt better if I had been able to change them out. I have a few leads on some places to look but it’s going to take me some time to get them. Since that was the only thing holding us up I decided to go ahead and give you a call. However, I’d feel a lot better if you’d let me put a new set in when I locate it.”

Levy thought for a moment. “How long will that take?” he asked.

“About thirty minutes. I’ll send someone over to pick up the car, drive it back and replace the mechanism. Fair enough?”

“Fine with me. It’s safe to drive now though isn’t it?”

“Oh sure,” Tom reassured him. “Just try to take it easy.”

The sun was setting in Tucson as Peter Merk began the drive home from his office. He had taken a job with an investment firm 10 years earlier after graduating from the University of Chicago with a degree in finance and economics. While he could have

had his pick of places to work he chose Arizona since it was out of the way and the topography was similar to his home in Rosario, Argentina. Peter was the eldest of three sons born to a German immigrant and his second wife. His father's first spouse had died of tuberculosis without having had any children and his father remarried several years later.

Merk had experienced a conversation with his father similar to Schmidt's. However, his reaction had been less enthusiastic. While duly appreciative of the resources afforded him, the idea of living off those associated with war, specifically the spoils of holocaust survivors, was repugnant to him. He had nodded dutifully as his father explained the structure of the Nephilim and what his future role would be. When his father was finished he asked a few questions to make sure he understood fully what was expected of him and after satisfying himself that he had heard correctly, proceeded to tell his father unequivocally that he had no interest in such an arrangement. The elder Merk, never known for keeping his temper in check, exploded. After a 15 minute tongue lashing which Peter patiently sat through, he was informed that the responsibility for overseeing the secure passage of the family holdings would rest on his shoulders exclusively. Seeing little to be gained by further confrontation Peter acquiesced and agreed to do as his father asked.

In the coming years he met with the group of men overseeing the resources they so carefully guarded. What he heard did little to dissuade him however that his family's wealth was nothing more than "blood money." When his father died in the late 1980's he informed the group he was no longer interested in being a part of the Nephilim and would be severing all contact with them. Over the years occasional visitors attempted to change his mind but none were successful. There had been talk among the executive committee that perhaps the best outcome might be for Peter to experience an unfortunate accident. However he had proven himself capable of discretion and they decided to leave him alone. Monetary assets for his brothers and their families had been set up in trust funds and, so far as he was aware, they knew nothing about the Nephilim. Peter would be allowed to remain estranged, free to pursue his chosen course in life.

With time Peter began to develop something not known to plague his family; a nagging conscience. The guilt that weighed on him induced a state of depression.

Turning to drugs and alcohol he ultimately found himself in a downward spiral. Counseling and antidepressant medication helped but he was unable to fully unburden himself of the idea that he had prospered as the result of someone else's misery. Never particularly religious, he eventually began attending a community church at the suggestion of a co-worker. He abandoned the substances causing him so much misery and became a changed man.

One of the tenants of his new religious beliefs was that of repentance. It was a difficult hurdle. On a Saturday morning at a local coffee shop he met with the pastor of his congregation and over the ensuing 90 minutes laid out for him the story of his life. The minister was dumbstruck but said he would pray about the matter and get back to him. When he did, he told Peter to consider divulging what he knew to the authorities. Understandably, the stockbroker was reluctant but agreed to consider his pastor's suggestion. Ultimately Peter concluded he had little choice in the matter. He desired a life free of guilt and depression and came to see that the only means to that end was revealing what he knew. But to whom?

It was a month later when Peter read in the Wall Street Journal about a group in Europe attempting to locate and return the lost property of Holocaust victims. They were experiencing little success and the bulk of the article detailed the roadblocks erected by the bureaucratic machinery of Western Europe. Apparently, anti-Semitic sentiments remained alive and well in some parts of the old country. Overseeing the project was a man named Julian Weincrantz. His group headquartered in Vienna, Austria. Peter clipped the article for further consideration. He found himself returning to it repeatedly over the ensuing weeks and months until the edges of the paper were frayed. Finally, he sent a letter to Weincrantz telling him that he might be able to help.

Eventually, Weincrantz proposed a meeting between the two men in Triest, Italy. Merk took several flights around Europe for the week preceding the meeting. If he was being followed he wanted it to appear that he was merely vacationing and taking in the sights. He skied in the French Alps, visited in the Belgian National Museum and rode the German trains before traveling to Triest.

On a Sunday evening at a small out of the way bar Merk eventually met face to face with the man he'd been communicating with for the previous 6 months. Their initial

conversation lasted less than 10 minutes as each sought to feel out the intentions of the other. Merk noticed that for all the intrigue of the evening his acquaintance was remarkably calm. At the conclusion of their conversation, Weincrantz suggested he call him in a few days and they meet again. Merk's satellite phone went off less than 48 hours later as he was taking a guided tour of the Dutch National Mint. They met again in Copenhagen within a week and then several days later in Oslo.

By their third meeting Weincrantz was more forthcoming. Believing he could trust the man in front of him he outlined his efforts to locate missing monies and property of German Jewish families but also those in the occupied countries in the west. After listening for half an hour Merk realized he had come to the right person. He gave Weincrantz a brief but thorough summary of what he knew. To his surprise the man asked for few details. As their meeting was coming to a close he asked Merk how much of the information he possessed he would be willing to part with.

"All of it," Merk said.

Weincrantz nodded approvingly.

"Good. I'll be in touch," he replied as he left.

It was several months before he heard from Weincrantz again. A letter informed him he would be coming to the United States under an assumed name. Could they meet? Merk wrote back that he would be delighted.

Chapter 3

The men evaluating the materials taken from the Weincrantz apartment were thorough. Well trained and appropriately compensated they earned their living providing services not found in the typical telephone directory. While they operated in a free lance manner they were overseen by a man in Vancouver who kept them on a tight leash. Within 48 hours their leader placed a call to David Schmidt.

“So what have you found?” Schmidt asked. He was standing on his deck looking through a telescope at a small herd of deer grazing near the fence line of his property.

“Not a lot,” the voice answered. “We went over his computer and there’s nothing there. Apparently he was able to wipe the hard drive completely clean. I have checked with a man proficient in these matters and there’s no way to recover any of whatever data it may have contained. The paperwork was minimal.”

“You searched the apartment carefully?” Schmidt asked, already knowing the answer.

“Yes sir. The only item of interest was a receipt from a local postal service outlet.”

“What was the transaction?”

“The receipt doesn’t indicate its nature but the amount suggests something sent by Federal Express.”

“Nothing else?”

“No, sir.”

“Are you in touch with someone regarding this package?”

“Of course. We’re working on it.”

“Keep me informed,” Schmidt said as he hung up the phone. The deer had jumped gracefully over the fence and wandered into an adjacent stand of cedar trees that dotted the landscape in this part of New Mexico. Schmidt loved it here. So much so he found leaving to do business elsewhere increasingly distasteful. He had not visited his homeland in almost 5 years and dreaded the time when he would have to again. How did he ever live with that heat and humidity?

A couriered envelope had arrived in February from Karl Plewig, the director of the Nephilim executive council. The letter within it contained a single paragraph announcing his intent to visit Schmidt within a week. There was a return phone number to call in the event a meeting wasn't feasible but Schmidt knew Plewig's request wasn't optional. One of the oldest surviving members of the group, his voice was singularly important and routinely the final word on a matter.

Plewig arrived in the midst of a winter snowstorm. Marcus had been dispatched in a Range Rover to retrieve him from the Albuquerque airport. Sporting a heavy wool overcoat and Tyrollian fedora Plewig emerged from the vehicle with a briefcase and purposeful gait to his walk. Later, over cognac, he laid out for Schmidt his reasons for the meeting. The executive council had become aware of a breach in the Nephilim's secrecy. Specifically, someone was feeding information to Julian Weincrantz about them. While not a unique occurrence, it appeared to represent the most dangerous to date. The more the group learned the greater their concerns became. Plewig was visiting each of the family heads personally to both warn them as well as probe for information as to who might be responsible.

Schmidt could tell the man little other than to reassure him that no one in his family was involved. Plewig already knew as much. The Schmidt family had been one of the cornerstones in the group. A defector among them would have been highly unlikely. Additionally, if there had been any incriminating evidence of his complicity he'd have been eliminated long ago. Plewig spent the night at Schmidt's home and left in the morning for San Francisco. Two months later he received a rare phone call from the man updating him on the situation and asking him to take over the investigation. The elderly German it seemed had experienced a small stroke and would be unable to devote sufficient energy to the project. Schmidt agreed. The first order of business would be to find out how much Julian Weincrantz knew and where he had gotten his information.

Dr. Levy had driven only a few blocks in his renovated 240 Z but had already fallen in love with the vehicle. One of the rare 8 cylinder models, it rode as smooth as silk and had terrific acceleration. It even smelled like a new car. The upholstery job was

superb, as was the new state of the art sound system. Levy could see himself wanting to drive this one exclusively.

The cardiologist piloted the vehicle down one of the large streets near the Medical Center and after traveling nearly a mile pulled into the left turn lane. When the light changed he did a U-turn. There still was business to take care of at the office before he could call it a day. Besides, if he headed home a bit later the freeway would be less congested and he could open the car up to see how it handled at higher speeds.

Bellaire Boulevard is a major thoroughfare at the southern base of the Medical Center allowing travel to the west into some of the older neighborhoods. Originally only a 4-lane road it had been expanded to 5 lanes on either side some years ago as the traffic in the city had increased. When Levy traveled east towards his office he encountered much less congestion. Seeing a clear path in front of him he decided to speed up a bit. He pushed in the clutch, popped the transmission into 4th gear and hit the gas. The engine accepted the challenge nimbly, responding with a substantial increase in velocity.

In the distance was the street to his office parking garage. No one was ahead of him and as he saw the light become green he gunned the engine. Levy knew he would be hitting the intersection as the light changed but after all, he was driving a car designed for fast, agile turns. His pulse quickened.

Thirty feet from the intersection the light became yellow. Levy kept the car steady and heading forward at over 40 miles an hour. He downshifted as he began to enter the intersection. The engine RPMs increased accordingly but so smooth as to be almost unnoticeable.

This thing is unbelievable.

Levy's car was careening through the middle of the intersection as a Dr. Pepper delivery truck was turning onto the same street from the opposite side. The cardiologist's brain registered the forward advance of the vehicle as his hands nudged the steering wheel slightly to the left. Levy would be into the near lane and out of the way before the truck could proceed.

As occasionally happens something seemingly inconsequential made a substantive difference in the car's passage through the intersection. When Levy had been searching Internet sites devoted to sports car sales it seemed of little importance to him

where the car originated so long as it wasn't from out of the country. As it turned out the seller was not far away. Actually, just southwest of New Orleans.

The car had originally belonged to a young man a few years out of dental school. He had graduated from LSU in New Orleans and being unmarried and flush with cash, purchased the Datsun. Two years later he noticed a lump in his groin. It turned out to be cancer; a lymphoma. Despite aggressive chemotherapy and radiation treatments he died in less than 6 months. His father, knowing what the car had meant to his son could never bear to sell it but had no use for it himself. Ultimately, he stored it in a makeshift garage on the back of his property. Unfortunately, this didn't protect it from the atmospheric elements, specifically the terrific humidity and salt air. Rust and metal oxidation became a problem and, in the case of this particular vehicle, weakened some of the undercarriage.

A dull thump was audible as the 240 Z passed the zenith of its turn. At first Levy thought perhaps it was a rock from the pavement ricocheting off the underside of the car. A fraction of a second later he realized he had been wrong. The mechanism stabilizing the rear axle had broken. With insufficient support it rapidly fractured putting the car into a violent spin.

The delivery truck was well aware of the oncoming sports car. Its driver realized that with its speed it would soon be through the intersection and he proceeded to pull forward around the curb into the far right lane. The audible pop of the mechanism giving way caused the driver to instinctively turn his head. What he saw was an out of control sports car careening towards him belching sparks from the now vacant wheel well.

At 40 miles an hour the 240 Z slammed into the left front of the truck. The passenger side crumpled inward like a crushed beer can. While a well designed and manufactured vehicle it was never intended for any substantive side impact and, of course, contained no air bags. Levy flew across the interior of the car smashing into the opposite door's paneling. As his head hit the steel framework of the sunken roof he lost consciousness. A wide laceration had been opened on his scalp. Worse, the impact had shredded the thin, membranous sack surrounding his heart and the large blood vessels leading to his neck. His chest cavity quickly began to fill with blood.

“Just a minute,” the man said. He stroked a few keys on his computer keyboard and moved the mouse around.

The person on the other end of the phone took her high heels off and rubbed the balls of her feet. She would much prefer to be wearing her Reebok running shoes but the job required she at least look professional and legit whether either were true or not. Her phone mate was an old acquaintance although she had never actually met the man.

“Got it,” he said. “The package was signed for by a Symone Pierson at 4200 Fannin, Suite 304.”

“What office is that?”

“I don’t know. It’s not on the invoice.”

“Alright. Thanks for the info. I can take it from here.”

“Anytime,” the man said before hanging up.

The woman fired up her computer, logged on to the Internet and found a search engine dedicated to identifying addresses. Within a few minutes she had located the building and tenant of the office - Houston Cardiology Associates.

Given the proximity to the Texas Medical Center the paramedics were on the scene of the car crash within minutes. A woman sitting at an adjacent bus stop had used her cell phone to call 911 and soon the sounds of wailing sirens could be heard in the distance. Fire trucks from a nearby station also responded.

The accident scene rapidly evolved into a beehive of activity. The driver of the Dr. Pepper truck was badly shaken but able to give the police an idea of what happened before being taken to the emergency room.

Dr. Levy was another matter. One of the paramedics managed to obtain enough access to the 240 Z to insert an intravenous line but after using her stethoscope she realized her efforts would prove futile. The firemen used the jaws of life to pry open the door of the car. Shortly thereafter Levy was removed and placed on an ambulance gurney.

The paramedics found no pulse and began shocking his heart with a field cardio converter as he was transported to the hospital. The ER doctors worked frantically on the cardiologist but were unable to revive him. A search of his wallet produced a signed

living donor card and a nurse placed a call to the organ transplant team. His wife arrived ten minutes after efforts to revive him had ceased. The time of death was 7:23 P.M.

Agent Girard sat at his desk doodling on a pad of paper while he was on hold waiting for Dr. Cheryl Verdan. Verdan was a psychologist on staff at the University of Toronto and someone they turned to when in need of an opinion into the psyche of someone either the victim of a crime or accused of one.

“This is Dr. Verdan,” the voice said

“Dr. Verdan. Martin Girard, Toronto police. I believe we’ve spoken before. I think I called you on the Cretain murders about 8 months ago.”

“Yes. I recall. What can I do for you?” Her voice sounded tired and as if she needed to be somewhere else.

“We have a case I wanted to run by you if you have the time. Should I call back later?” he asked.

“No. Now will be fine,” Verdan said as she sat down at her desk.

“We found a suicide this week that has us puzzled.”

“Give me the details.”

“It’s a young man in his early 30’s who we think is from Vienna. Single gunshot to the head. His toxicology screen was negative and we found nothing of interest in his apartment.”

“You want me to render an opinion on that?” Verdan asked incredulously.

“No. What has us puzzled is his tattoos. They were in his armpits.”

“His armpits?”

“Yes. Under the right arm were the capital letters ‘PM’ and under the left were the numbers ‘164’. Does this mean anything to you?”

Verdan thought for a minute.

“Well, as you well know, body tattoos are a common trait among persons with a sociopathic tendency. I suppose the odd thing is that they were in the armpits.”

“Which means what?” Girard asked.

“Which means they were for identification, not demonstration. Secret societies have done that in the past but its uncommon today. I do know that the Germans did that during the second world war.”

“Why?”

“Members of the SS or Gestapo were tattooed under their arms with a number that could be easily identified from a master list theoretically preventing their infiltration by outsiders. Most had them removed surgically after the war to prevent being tried as war criminals.”

“Well, this guy wasn’t even born until well after the war was over,” Girard said. “What about the neo-Nazis and skinheads?”

“That I don’t know about. You could check with your intelligence friends in Germany. It’s certainly possible they have resurrected the custom for their own purposes.”

“Yeah, that’s easy enough to do. Any idea what the letters and numbers mean?”

“The most obvious answer to the letters is that they are someones initials,” the psychologist said as she gestured with her hands. “As for the numbers they could mean anything. A date. A computer file. The possibilities are endless.”

Girard was writing in his notebook.

“Okay,” he said. “That’s something to go on. I appreciate your help.”

“How about a little follow up when you find out?” Verdan requested.

“Sure. No problem. Thanks again.”

Girard hung up the phone. Time to place an overseas call.

Chapter 4

Harold Calmont arrived on time at his office in the University of Texas Medical School at Houston. His drive in from the Westbury area had gone as usual but he was still amazed at the traffic this city could generate. Calmont had grown up in Meridian, Mississippi the eldest son of a school janitor and a teacher's aide. Both parents required rigorous attention to academics and their son's transcript reflected their diligence. Upon graduation from high school he received a one-year scholarship to the University of Texas at San Antonio. Subsequent years were to be dependent on his performance during his freshman semesters. Perform he did. Academia suited him nicely and he was posted to the Dean's List regularly.

Playing in a pickup basketball game one Saturday at the university Rec Center, Calmont met a young assistant professor at the medical school in San Antonio. Jim Sutherland was in the anatomy department and offered to show the young man around the labs if he had an interest. After the game Sutherland spent the better part of an hour giving Calmont a tour of the UTSA medical school anatomy facilities. The Mississippian was fascinated. He thanked Sutherland appropriately, went to the library and spent the rest of the day pouring over what anatomy books the undergraduate campus had on hand. Monday morning he met with a biological sciences advisor and by Tuesday he had officially changed his major. That had been over 10 years ago.

Despite pledging to himself not to marry before age 30 he met a young woman in one of the labs he tutored named Jacinda Ward. Within 18 months they were wed. She finished her studies in nursing while he obtained a masters degree at the medical school. The couple moved to Boston and Harvard University for Harold's PhD work. Jacinda hated the place. It was cold, expensive and worse, far away from her parents and sisters in Victoria, Texas. She stuck it out for the duration but made it clear they would move back to south Texas after her husband completed his degree. Considering all his wife had been through Calmont acquiesced. While a geographic restriction would probably limit his career advancement it was worth the prospect of continued marital harmony.

Fortunately, a position became available in the anatomy department at the University of Texas Medical School at Houston. Calmont applied for it, was granted an

interview and within a week was offered the job. While he wasn't keen on living in the Bayou City, it was close to his in-laws and he would be free to pursue the types of research he wanted. The couple, now expecting their second child, moved to Houston in the late spring of 1998.

One of Calmont's duties as a junior faculty member was overseeing the teaching labs in human anatomy. The bulk of the work occurred in the fall semester when the incoming medical school class took their course but there were scaled down classes in the summer for the dental school students and others. Initially, he hated it. He had been around medical students during graduate school and found them annoying. Besides being pushy they were hyper and often spoiled. However, he eventually came to enjoy the students at UTMSH. At least he was able to get along with them easier and occasionally hold a conversation on subjects non-medical.

Each fall one of the anatomy lab professors was given the job of overseeing the collection, collation and storage of foreign items removed from the cadavers. Calmont had never held the position before. He didn't want it but if it only rotated around to him every few years, it would be tolerable.

The first several weeks of the semester proved decidedly lackluster. Since most of the dissections involved the extremities, the only items given him for safekeeping were the occasional dialysis graft or metal taken from a repaired joint or fracture. Things picked up in the following month as the chest cavities were explored. It was then that artificial heart valves and metal stents began to make their way to his custody. In three instances external pacing devices were also removed.

The medical students were assigned alphabetically in groups of four to a single cadaver. Justin Douglas, James Devonshire, Caitlin Connors and Gerold England shared the dissection duties on "Mrs. Doubtfire." On the Monday afternoon following the first anatomy test the four made their way to the lab to begin in earnest the exploration of the thoracic cavity as covered in the morning's lecture. Douglas had already begun some of the work and though the others were mildly disappointed they had not been there for the initial dissection none regretted having taken the weekend off. The four filed into the room with the rest of the students and after gloving up began to lift the body from the embalming fluid.

“Okay, that’s nasty,” England said after seeing bits of tissue floating in the formalin.

“Wait a minute,” Connors remarked. “I think I had that for lunch.”

“Shut up,” Devonshire countered.

The table was locked into place as the last of the fluid receded from the corpse. At the end of the perforated metal table was the pacemaker Douglas had removed two days before.

“There it is,” he said.

“You already took it out?” England asked.

“Of course. It was in the way of my dissection.” Douglas smiled. “But I left the wires in.”

“Big of you,” Connors said.

“Well, never let it be said I didn’t do the least I could do.”

The three students picked up the pacemaker one by one and examined it. When they were finished Devonshire gave it to Douglas.

“You going to turn it in?” she asked.

“Well, actually I was considering making it into a piece of jewelry for my mother but it seemed a bit gaudy,” Douglas answered. He inspected the pacemaker again before walking over to Calmont who was engrossed a medical journal.

“We’re supposed to give you any medical devices found in our cadavers, isn’t that correct?” he asked.

Calmont looked up from his reading. “That’s right. What have you got there?”

“A pacemaker I’m guessing.”

“Where are the wires?”

“Still inside the body.”

“Bring them to me when you get them out, will you?”

“Sure. No problem.”

Douglas returned to his lab partners and the afternoon’s work. For a brief moment he considered telling them about the piece of metal he’d found accompanying the device but decided against it. Obviously it wasn’t an important part of the appliance

or Calmont would have asked him about it. Douglas still didn't know what it was but he had an idea where he could find out.

Peter Merk had been unable to contact Julian Weincrantz for weeks. He had sent telegrams but all had been returned informing him they were undeliverable. It was an unsettling situation.

Merk had no illusions about his courage. Great pains had been taken to keep their conversations secret but it was still possible something had happened to his friend. A sojourn to Toronto and meeting with Weincrantz would be risky.

Merk called the airlines and made a reservation for a flight to Toronto. He would leave the following morning. The return leg of his journey was left open ended.

Martin Girard had some difficulty reaching his acquaintance in Paris. For one thing the time difference was a problem and for another, a public transportation strike was in full force, which made his friend's office hours sporadic at best. Finally, after 3 days of repeated phone calls and leaving messages Girard's phone rang at his desk.

"Martin," the voice said. "This is Phillip LeBoit returning your call. How are you friend?"

"Well, and yourself?"

"Good."

LeBoit was a member of the National Security Department, roughly the French equivalent of the American FBI. A former officer in the French Foreign Legion he had risen through the ranks of the department by specializing in foreign counterinsurgency. He was passionate about his work and quite knowledgeable regarding different terrorist cells around the globe.

After a few minutes of catching up on family and politics Girard got to the point.

"Phillip, there's something I wanted to ask you regarding a case we have here in Toronto."

"I assumed as much."

“We found the body of young man in an apartment last week. He’d killed himself with a pistol. His name is Julian Weincrantz, or at least we think it is. We have no idea about his past but he had some odd tattoos.”

“Odd in what way?” LeBoit asked.

“Under his right arm were the letters ‘PM’ in capitals and under the left arm were the numbers ‘164’. I spoke with a psychologist here and she told me it was unusual to have such markings hidden on the body. She also said some members of the German army had them during World War II. We were wondering if you could shed any light on the matter.”

“Well, she is correct,” LeBoit answered. “That was a common method of making sure a person was who they claimed to be. It wasn’t done much in the Wehrmacht but it was a requirement for the Gestapo and secret police. Some recruits in conquered countries were tattooed similarly as well. The Germans were fanatics about keeping records and were justifiably paranoid about infiltrators. It proved quite effective although I’ve not seen much of it in the past 20 years or so. Most of the smarter ones had them cut out or burned off and of those that didn’t, most have since died.”

“Anyone else doing that today? Skinheads? Neo-Nazis? That crowd.”

“Not too much and probably not at all outside of Europe. The Skinheads are too disorganized. Some of the Neo-Nazi cells in Germany may although I doubt they’re bright enough to keep a master list of who has what number and the like. It’s mostly done to recreate the aura of the Third Reich.”

“Any thoughts on the meanings of the letters and numbers?”

LeBoit pondered the request for a moment. “Not really,” he said. “They could mean most anything. There aren’t enough digits in the number to signify an identification code although taken together with the letters they could be. What did you say this fellow’s name was?”

“Julian Weincrantz.”

“I’ll put the name into the database and see what turns up. Why don’t you call me tomorrow?”

“A cardiology practice in Houston?” Schmidt asked.

“That’s what my source tells me,” the woman on the phone replied.

“Any idea what was sent?”

“No. The package was an envelope and not a box so whatever it was couldn’t have been too big.”

“I assume there are a number of physicians at that address.”

“Quite. Houston Cardiology Associates is a single specialty group practice of over 60 cardiologists.”

“So who got the envelope?” Schmidt asked.

“That’s the odd part,” the woman replied. “The package was signed for by a Symone Pierson who evidently is the group’s receptionist. She signs for everything that hits the door. In this case though she signed for a Dr. Harold Tobin.”

“What’s odd about that?”

“There is no Harold Tobin in the practice.”

Schmidt sat looking at his salt-water aquarium. The fish roamed lazily from one end to the other through the bubbles filtering up from the gravel bed below.

“Ah,” Schmidt said. “The plot thins. Perhaps it would be a good idea to ask Ms. Pierson where we might find Dr. Tobin.”

The young woman sat in her vehicle in a small cul de sac of a large cemetery. She held a pair of binoculars to her eyes keeping them trained in the direction of a green awning over a hundred yards away. A hearse bearing the name Goldstein’s Mortuary arrived and slowly wound its way through the maze. It parked 30 feet from the awning, which had been erected over a recently dug grave. Behind the large black vehicle was a seemingly endless stream of automobiles. The gray sky overhead had given way to a light mist followed by a steady drizzle. People exited their cars, pulling on raincoats and holding umbrellas for others.

The visitor continued to peer through the binoculars although it was difficult to see well with all the moisture. She used a tissue to dab at the corners of her eyes and blow her nose. The coffin was borne from the hearse by the pallbearers and placed over the grave. Mrs. Levy, she assumed, was seated in the front next to the casket. Dressed

completely in black, her face covered with a thick veil, she sat almost trance-like and moved little.

A short prayer seemed in order since the visitor would have no opportunity to express her condolences personally. After offering one she set the binoculars back in their case and snapped the lid shut.

The back passenger door opened abruptly and a man climbed in the back seat. The woman was unnerved but after catching a glimpse of his face, she said, “You startled me.”

“What have I told you about locking your doors?” he asked.

“Sorry Daddy,” the woman said derisively. “I promise to do better next time.”

“Keep leaving them open and there may not be a next time.”

The woman used the sleeve of her sweater to wipe away an escaping tear and started the car’s engine.

The car’s occupants went by the names Kelli Price and Jason Fielding although neither thought the other’s was genuine. Not that they could blame them. Keeping a degree of anonymity was a good insurance policy. They had worked together for 2 years, mostly in the United States but also in Europe and South Africa. Price had initially been impressed with Fielding’s knowledge of covert operations but within a short time she became acquainted with a side of the man she didn’t like. It wasn’t just that he lacked the idealism she held. That was to be expected after his tenure. It was more his dark and sardonic view of humanity in general. Fielding rarely had a kind thing to say about anyone. There were no excuses for failing to accomplish a goal, unless of course they were his. He was brooding, cold and, Price thought, largely devoid of feeling.

Price drove slowly around the maze of roads within the cemetery eventually finding her way to the front gate and onto the main thoroughfare.

“Have a nice time?” Fielding asked.

Price didn’t answer for a moment. “It was alright. I wanted to be a part of the ceremony but I suppose this was the most I could do. He deserved better than he got.”

“Fast cars aren’t the safest of hobbies,” Fielding mused as he looked out the window.

“He did a lot for us you know.”

“Others have done more.”

“But they haven’t paid a bigger price.”

“What are you talking about?” Fielding asked. “He didn’t die in the field. He died because he bought a junk car and was driving it too fast.”

Price thought about arguing the point but reconsidered. It would have been futile anyway. Her partner wasn’t one to consider dissenting opinions.

“Where to now?”

“Intercontinental Airport,” Fielding answered. “We’ve got tickets for a flight to Seattle.”

Chapter 5

Girard had it on his daytimer to call LeBoit but upon arriving at his office the secretary told him the man was holding on the phone.

“Phillip. Good morning,” Girard said.

“Good morning,” LeBoit replied. “I realize that you were to call me but I thought I would save your department the charges. I think I may have something for you.”

Girard hastily pulled out his notebook and found a pen. “Go ahead.”

“Your friend Mr. Weincrantz appears to have been a busy boy. Apparently he had dedicated his energies to tracking down properties taken from Holocaust victims.”

“What?”

“As I’m sure you know there have been considerable efforts in the past few years towards making reparations to Holocaust victims and their families. France recently appropriated money to compensate French families for wartime transgressions. The individual sums weren’t extravagant but they were substantive enough to at least garner some favorable press. Other countries have similar programs in place.”

“Who did he work for?” Girard asked.

“No one you would have heard of. He wasn’t affiliated with any of the major organizations dedicated to tracking down Nazis. I can’t determine how old his particular group is but so far they don’t seem to have made much of an impact.”

“What’s their name?”

“The Reestablishment Union.”

Girard was scribbling furiously. “Any other people in the group?”

“A few but none stand out. I suspect they may be aliases and for all I know so may Mr. Weincrantz’s. I checked them out for any criminal history but found nothing. It seems the group was headquartered in Vienna and given the small number of associates involved, I doubt seriously that they have cells elsewhere.”

“Okay,” Girard said. “I guess that should about do it. I really appreciate all your work on this. Is it okay if I call you back if I need something more?”

“Anything for you, my friend. Goodbye.”

Girard sat reviewing his notes hoping something would jump out at him. Nothing did. He spent the rest of the morning contacting various Jewish and philanthropic agencies associated with the Holocaust but turned up nothing. Few had heard of the group or Julian Weincrantz. His report later in the morning to Detective Messier was decidedly unexciting.

An attractive blonde woman exited the concourse at Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport at mid-morning. Her driver's license and accompanying passport listed her name as Sheila Rand. She obtained a rental car and made her way to the freeway connecting the airport with Houston.

Getting to the Texas Medical Center wasn't difficult at this time of day. The traffic from rush hour had dissipated and although it would pick up again around noon that wouldn't be for several more hours. Finding a parking space at the Houston Cardiology Associates proved to be the most difficult task of the morning.

Rand exited the elevators on the 6th floor. Before her were two huge glass doors bearing the HCA insignia and 15 feet beyond them a large, ornate wooden desk with a sign to the side reading Receptionist. Behind the desk was a young woman with a hands free telephone headset speaking to someone on the other line. After approaching her, Rand discretely cleared her throat. The woman raised her hand indicating that she would be with her momentarily. Upon hanging up she turned to the visitor in front of her.

"May I help you?" she asked smiling.

"I hope so," Rand replied. "I understand that Symone Pierson works here and I was wondering if I could speak with her?"

"Well, actually she was from a temporary agency and left this job last week."

The visitor frowned slightly. "I see. Do you have any idea where I could reach her? I'm her cousin and am going to be in town for a few days. I thought we might get together for dinner."

"I'm sorry but I really have no idea where she's currently working. You could check with the temp group that sent her here."

"Which one is that," Rand inquired.

"She works with Temp Jobs, Incorporated, same as me."

“Oh really,” Rand said with feigned interest.

“Yeah. Anyway here’s the number.” The receptionist handed her a slip of paper. “You can use the phone on the table in the corner if you like.”

“No thanks. I’ve got my own,” Rand said pulling a small mobile phone from her purse. “I appreciate all your help.”

“I hope you have a nice stay in Houston,” she said as the visitor turned to leave.

“Oh I intend to,” Rand replied smiling.

After retrieving his mail and checking his phone messages, Douglas noticed a large pile of dirty clothes in the corner of his closet. Like most young men he hated doing laundry and typically would procrastinate until he had absolutely nothing to wear. He was accustomed to blue jeans and T-shirts, their varied states of uncleanness not a great concern. However, he had noticed most of his classmates were better dressed than he and not wanting to be thought an unkempt slob, he had tried to make sure his clothes were at least devoid of food stains. Realizing he would eventually have to address the matter, he began separating his T-shirts and jeans into different piles. Long sleeved shirts he sequestered into a third aggregation. While going through his pants pockets, he found the metal disk.

Oh yeah. Forgot about you fellow.

He’d not given much thought to the small silver item despite the fact he had been in anatomy laboratory that afternoon. He still didn’t know what it was but decided to call a friend who might. Douglas picked up the phone and dialed a number he knew by heart.

“Hello.”

“Hey Gary,” Douglas said. “This is Justin.”

“Justin who?”

“Douglas, you moron.”

“Haven’t you quit and gone home to work at Wal-Mart yet?”

“Thinking seriously about it.”

Gary Kemper was a cardiology fellow at St. Luke’s Hospital. He had grown up in nearby Aspermont, Texas and for a short time had dated Douglas’s older sister, Kate. They had kept in touch over the years and it was Kemper who had encouraged Justin to

pursue medicine, even sitting down with him one evening while at home on break to tell him about the trials and tribulations of medical school. Douglas had gone to dinner with him once since coming to Houston but their respective schedules had prevented much in the way of social interaction. In many respects Douglas looked to Kemper as a benevolent older brother, something the cardiology fellow was aware of and seemed to encourage.

“What do you want dweeb? I’m post call,” Kemper said.

“I wanted to ask you something about pacemakers.”

“Fine, but make it fast, I’m going to bed in about 2 minutes.”

“Well, we’re doing the dissection on our cadaver and she had a pacemaker inserted I guess about 3 months or so before she died.”

“So?”

“Well, I was removing it Saturday and when I did there was a separate piece of metal on the backside of the device.”

“What?”

“It was a wafer-like thing, bright and shiny with etchings and measured about an inch on each side. Is that a common component for pacemakers? I did some research on them and can’t find anything about it.”

Kemper was shaking his head. “I’ve never heard of anything like that with the pacing devices I’m aware of. What did you do with it?”

“Well... I kept it,” Douglas said sheepishly.

Kemper laughed. “You kept it? You didn’t throw it away did you?”

“No. I’ve still got it.”

“Bring it over here. Maybe I can figure out what it is.”

Douglas was at Kemper’s door in less than 2 minutes. His friend’s appearance made it clear he’d not slept much, if any at all, in the past 36 hours.

“I went through some of the materials I have here on pacemakers,” Kemper said. “I couldn’t find anything in there about separate components. You got it?”

Douglas fished the wafer from his pocket and handed it to his friend.

Kemper took it to his desk, turned on the overhead lamp and began examining it. After a few seconds he gave it back to Douglas.

“I have no idea what that thing is but it looks like a computer chip,” he said.

“What would it be doing outside the pacemaker?”

“Who knows,” Kemper said rubbing his eyes. “Was the device intact?”

“Absolutely. Like I said on the phone, it had only been in there a few months.”

The cardiologist was shaking his head in ignorance. “What brand was it?”

“CardioMed, I think.”

Kemper went to his shelf and removed a thin, paperback book. He leafed through the index until he found what he wanted, thumbed to the appropriate page and held it open for Douglas.

“Was this what it looked like?”

“Yep. That’s the one.”

Kemper ran his finger along the printed words reading the text and mouthing some of the words as he went. “It says here that it contains a round battery with an internal computer chip but it’s considerably smaller, less than a centimeter on each side. Yours is much bigger.”

“And there’s no reason for it to have been outside the pacemaker?”

“None that I can think of.”

Douglas stood in the man’s living room looking at the piece of metal in his hand. “Anyway to find out what it is?”

Kemper shrugged his shoulders. “Well, I can check around but I doubt it will come to much. What are you going to do with it?”

“I’m not sure,” he replied.

Sheila Rand located the offices of Temp Jobs without any trouble. It was on the 5th floor of a building close to the Summit Arena near downtown Houston. She parked in the garage, taking the elevators to the appropriate floor. Upon exiting she found the office doors with its name clearly stamped on a metal plate adjacent to the doorframe. She opened the door to discover a middle-aged woman typing on a computer.

“Excuse me,” Rand said. “I’m looking for Symone Pierson.”

The woman turned with a startled look on her face.

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t hear you come in. Who did you say you wanted?”

“Symone Pierson,” Rand repeated. “I’m her cousin.”

“Let’s see.” The woman typed Pierson’s name into the computer and selected a few boxes with her mouse. “I have here that Ms. Pierson is no longer employed by this agency.” She surveyed the woman standing in front of her noticing the nice clothes and perfectly coifed hair. Oh to be 30 again she thought to herself.

“Would you have an address where I might find her? I’m in town for a convention and wanted to get in touch with her but I don’t know where she lives.”

“Well, we normally don’t give out that information....”

“I understand,” Rand replied softly. “It’s just that I haven’t seen her in close to 10 years and as I don’t get down here very much I figured I would try to make the most of my trip.”

“Well, since she doesn’t work here anymore,” the woman responded. “I suppose it wouldn’t hurt.” She produced a pen and scribbled the address on a piece of paper.

“Here you go.”

“I really appreciate it,” Rand said as she took the note. “I must confess I’m surprised she left. Symone was always such a stickler for staying with something once she got into it. I can’t imagine her leaving an employer.”

“Happens all the time, honey.”

“How long did she work here?”

Westbrook turned back to the computer screen. “About 6 months.”

“Thank you so much for your help.” Rand smiled again, walked back to the elevators and made her way to the garage.

Kelli Price and Jason Fielding sat in their first class seats adjacent to one another aboard a Continental Airlines non-stop flight to Seattle. Kelli was next to the window and had put her head against the wall shortly after takeoff to sleep. Flying wasn’t something she particularly enjoyed but she had learned to block much of it out and drift into slumber with relative ease. Besides, her other option was to talk with Fielding, something she didn’t want to do.

Her seatmate was reading a day old copy of the London Times attempting to discern what his mutual funds had been doing of late. After an hour or so he'd read all he cared to and woke Price by nudging her in the ribs.

"Wake up, dearie," he said. "We've got work to do."

Price opened her eyes briefly then shut them again. "Buzz off."

"Sorry, sleeping beauty but you know the drill. The old woman wants some of this material gone over before we land." He checked his watch. "We meet with her in a few hours."

Price rubbed her face as she slowly sat up. Grudgingly, she lowered the tray table in front of her and Fielding set a large, 3-ring binder on it before handing her a yellow felt-tip marker.

"Same drill as last time?" she asked.

"Uh-huh," he replied without looking up.

For the remainder of the flight she went over the documents in front of her page by page. It wasn't the first time, and she was certain it wouldn't be the last, but she had a personal stake in the thoroughness of her work. The folder was divided into sections of approximately 30 pages separated by a pink sheet of paper. Each consisted of a comprehensive biography and psychological evaluation of individuals located around the globe, although most were from North America or Western Europe. They were being considered for inclusion into their group, the Restablishment Union.

Price had been recruited out of college and she assumed the same had occurred with her partner, though she had never broached the subject. While finishing her last year at Smith College she received a phone call from a man in London. Price had been active in some of the idealistic social movements popular at Northeast liberal arts colleges. Nothing extreme or out of bounds but entities not overly stocked with young Republicans. She worked for a short time on a mailing campaign in support of reparations for Holocaust victims. The caller had obtained her name from that organization's listings. She politely stated she wasn't interested but when he asked if he could send her some literature she said yes, if for no other reason than curiosity. It turned out to be a folder not from some well-funded or high brow organization but from a small, unknown foundation headquartered in Seattle, Washington. After allowing Price a few

weeks to digest the material, the man made a follow-up phone call. While not completely sold, she was at least more interested. He told her about an upcoming retreat in rural Pennsylvania. Price went with her roommate and was pleasantly surprised. There was no heavy handed sales pitch. The people she met were similar to herself – true believers but not resident members of the fringe. After graduating, much to her grandmother's chagrin, she opted to live off the trust fund established by her parents while she worked with the REU.

That had been about 8 years ago and while she had enjoyed her time and felt it profitable, the end was clearly in sight. Her priorities were changing. She wanted to marry and have children. Her biological clock was ticking and to Price it was deafening. The friction with her partner had helped solidify her decision.

The faces and resumes in front of her could have been a carbon copy of herself a decade before. Most were from upper middle class to wealthy families with a humanistic but not unrealistic view of the world. They were well educated and, most importantly, financially secure enough to take the time off from life's pursuits to dedicate their energies to other interests.

Price's folder consisted only of Americans and she noted that none were from farther south than Virginia or farther west than Ohio. There were 6 in all. The names would be discussed at the biannual meeting in a few weeks, which was where Price and Fielding came in. They were part of the vetting process, trying to determine if a given candidate would or would not make a good "partner" in the Union. Past members of the committee had rarely been a poor selection and Price and Fielding came to feel substantial pressure on their shoulders to do a good job.

She carefully read the information in front of her trying to find any reason for their exclusion. By the time the aircraft began its descent into Seattle she had settled on two names she would recommend for interviews.

After deplaning and retrieving their luggage Price and Fielding were met outside by a limousine. It was the usual driver who said nothing during the trip. Price knew better than to strike up idle conversation, plus she was tired from the trip. Ninety minutes later the vehicle made a turn onto a long driveway into a heavily wooded area marked with no trespassing signs and abundant surveillance equipment. Within a few minutes

the limo had stopped in front of a large, well kept home. Price and Fielding got out and walked to the front door.

Sheila Rand used a realtor's map of Houston to find Symone Pierson's address in Spring, Texas. After half an hour she identified the correct subdivision and began making her way along the pine tree lined streets before locating the home. From the outside it looked comfortable enough. The neighborhood was quiet and it appeared no one was home. Rand opened the glove compartment in the car, retrieving a small pistol, which she deposited in her purse.

The woman walked to the front door. She rang the bell and scrutinized the area for any activity while she waited. After ringing the second time a haggard appearing man appeared in the doorway.

"Yeah?" he said.

"Hello. I'm Shelley Rand. I was told this was where Symone Pierson lives."

The man rubbed his hand across a 3 day growth of stubble on his face. "Who?" he asked.

"Symone Pierson."

"Sorry. No one here by that name." He turned to shut the door.

"Is this 1726 Shaker Lane?" Rand asked.

"Yeah, but like I told you, there's no Symone whatever who lives here."

"Could she have been the previous occupant?"

"Not unless she lived here 6 years ago," the man said impatiently. "What, are you selling something?" His eyes were bloodshot but were slowly coming to life.

Rand emitted a short giggle, "No. Nothing like that. I'm her cousin and just wanted to visit. That's all."

"Sorry," the man said.

"I don't suppose you've heard of Temporary Jobs, Incorporated by any chance?"

The man looked annoyed. "Nope."

"Okay, then," Rand said. "I'm sorry to have troubled you." She smiled and walked back to her car. Why am I not surprised she thought to herself.

For the rest of the day Rand perused various maps of the Houston area and its suburbs trying to locate other Shaker Lane addresses. She found two. One in Deer Park, the other in Katy. Neither had a 1726 number. It was a dead end.

Chapter 6

Justin Douglas's father was a pharmacist and a man of simple means. For nearly 20 years he had owned his own business in Rotan, the consummate throwback drugstore with a soda fountain and store shelves stocked with washing powder. However, when Wal-Mart moved into the area in the 1980's many of the marginal operations had trouble competing and eventually folded. Harold Douglas may have been a small town pharmacist who had never traveled east of the Sabine river or west of New Mexico, but he wasn't stupid. After hearing Wal-Mart had put an option down on 20 acres near the city limits, he quickly sold his shop to a national chain that had been trying to buy him out for years. He received top dollar and ensured himself extended employment as a pharmacist in the town he had grown up in.

Harold Douglas early on began making preparations for his son and daughter to attend college, and if necessary, graduate school. He knew they were unlikely to live their lives as he had, marrying his high school sweetheart and settling down in a small town. Kate and Douglas were too independent and adventurous for that. Shortly after the birth of his daughter, Harold began to put aside a little money. His investment strategy was different from his neighbors, who lived through the depression and viewed banks with suspicion. After researching the matter, Harold discovered that there had not been a bank failure in Fischer or any of the surrounding counties in the past 25 years. It made more sense to Harold to own the bank rather than just be a depositor. Each month, depending on what he could afford, he would buy stock in local lending institutions. Some months it was as little as \$5 but in others it was as much as \$100 depending on the store's receipts. When lending institutions first in Dallas and then the East Coast began acquiring small banks in rural Texas, Harold Douglas cleaned up. His children's education was assured. It came as surprise when his son announced he had no interest in matriculating at an Ivy League school or even Rice University, for that matter, but rather Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas. Harold shook his head but held his tongue. Eventually, he voiced his opinion but Justin had made up his mind.

Justin's attendance at the moderate sized university wasn't entirely without its benefits. He was able to be home more on weekends and holidays and with the relaxed academics his grades were better. Additionally, many of the young men and women in the Rotan area went to TSU. One who didn't was a long-time friend of Justin Douglas.

Paul Grabel had moved to Rotan when he was in 3rd grade. New kids in school were unusual in that community. Ninety percent of graduating high school classes had begun kindergarten together. Those students moving into the district weren't necessarily ostracized but took a greater amount of time to assimilate into the "native" populace.

Grabel's family had moved from Port Arthur, Texas when his father accepted a transfer with the natural gas distributorship in the county. It was a job few were interested in so when the management of Lone Star Gas came back to Nolan Grabel with a sweeter offer, he took it. Grabel's wife, Carolyn, became an English teacher in the county high school but Grabel possessed only an associate's degree from junior college. As a result, his post in Rotan was likely as high as he would be able to move in the company.

Paul and Justin became fast friends. With the small class size and closeness of the community they spent considerable time together. Upon graduation they considered attending college together but when Paul was awarded a scholarship to Vanderbilt University, the elder Grabel insisted he take it. He majored in physics, eventually earning his degree in just 3 years. As Justin went off to medical school Paul began the Masters program at Vanderbilt. They corresponded frequently by email and saw each other at home during holiday breaks. If anyone could discern what the piece of metal was, Justin was certain Paul could. He emailed him and downloaded a digital photograph of the object. The next day his phone rang.

"Loser," Paul said on the phone.

"What's up? Did you get my email?"

"Yeah, just finished looking at it. Where did you say you got this?"

"From Mrs. Doubtfire, our cadaver," Douglas answered.

"That's disgusting," Paul replied. "Cool, but disgusting. And it wasn't inside the pacemaker thingee?"

"Nope. Right behind it. So what is it?"

“It’s a computer chip.”

“Yeah, I kind of figured that’s what you might say. What’s it to?”

“How would I know? There’s only about a billion things those go into these days.”

“I thought you Vanderbilt weenies knew everything, goathead.”

“Well, we do, but I can’t tell just from looking at a computer chip what its function is. Can you mail it to me?” Grabel asked.

“I guess so. What are you going to do with it?”

“Put it into a masterboard and check it out.”

“That will tell you what it does?”

“Not necessarily, but it might. At least it will give me a better idea and perhaps a different place to look if I need to. Make sure you put it in a small box or something so it doesn’t get crushed in the mail.”

“No problem. I’ll send it out tomorrow. Thanks for your help on this, by the way.”

“You owe me.”

“Bite me,” Douglas replied.

Price and Fielding were welcomed into the house by a middle aged man wearing a blue suit with a green and yellow striped tie. He led them down the hall into a large library where an elderly woman sat busily typing on a computer, a cup of steaming coffee at her elbow. She took little notice of her visitors but motioned for the two to be seated. They dutifully fell into two overstuffed chairs in front of her desk.

After a few minutes the woman stopped typing, looked over her work on the computer screen and punched a button to the side. “There,” she exclaimed. Turning her attention to the pair she swiveled her chair around facing them. “Wonderful thing, this email business. Certainly saves a lot of time,” she said with a smile.

Emily Woodward still bore the Scottish accent acquired while growing up in Glasgow. Unlike other women her age who had adopted a shorter hairstyle out of convenience, she continued to keep hers long and flowing down to the middle of her back. Now completely gray, there was no trace of the auburn tint present in the

photographs on her library walls. Woodward had resided in Glasgow until 20 years previous when she immigrated to the United States. In her youth, she had lived through what many of her generation continued to call “The Great War” or World War II. Her older brother, Edward, had been an RAF pilot during the Battle of Britain and had been killed over the English Channel. While her city had been largely spared the ravages meted out on other British communities, she saw many returning soldiers, sailors and airmen who had been wounded and of course, the seemingly endless parade of the dead brought back for internment in their native soil.

When the war was over many European refugees sought respite in Glasgow and Woodward’s interaction with them changed her life forever. Emily’s father was a minister in the Church of England. Initially opposed to the war, his stance changed little after the death of his son but he steadfastly supported the young men who served their country. When the fighting was over he saw it his duty to work with the arriving immigrants daily trickling in from the docks, seeking a better life in their new homeland.

As a young woman, Emily Woodward watched these people struggle to survive and overcome their demons. The stories they told, when they would talk of their past at all, were horrifying. Most had lost everything.

After finishing college, she became an attorney, something uncommon for a woman in the 1950’s. She managed to obtain a position with a London legal firm in their international law division. It was at an office Christmas party in 1955 that a fellow barrister introduced her to an old college friend, James Woodward. James’s family wasn’t wealthy, but was well healed enough to provide him with a first class education which he immediately put to good use in the shipyards of Liverpool. Only a few years older than Emily, he’d been busy, first outfitting one boat, selling it for a modest profit only to purchase a larger one and repeat the cycle. The post-war building boom around the world had been bonanza for him. He was poised to begin making “serious money” as his friends at Choate had called it. Woodward took an instant shine to Emily and she to him. Within 18 months they married.

Over the next few years James prospered. He developed a reputation as a tough but fair boss and business partner. Within less than a decade he had become one of the poster boys for British ingenuity and capitalism. Emily continued with her work at a

branch office of the firm in Liverpool until she announced her decision to take a leave of absence and begin a family. Three months after doing so her husband of 8 years suffered a ruptured cerebral aneurysm and died. Emily was 36 years old.

She returned to Scotland for a year, living at home again with her now aged parents. Emily rarely left the house aside from Sunday church services and occasionally when her father could coax her outside for a drive in the country. After an appropriate period of grieving she emerged intent on putting her resources to work in the field of wartime reparations. She met with various European and American agencies to get a feel for their approach. Most seemed more concerned with apprehending fugitive war criminals than compensating families left destitute by the pillaging German army.

Now well into her 40's and acutely aware of life's fragility, Woodward realized time was a precarious commodity. Since none of the various groups she had consulted with seemed to be focusing on what she deemed important, Emily proceeded to construct her own. Anxious for a fresh start and new surroundings, she moved to Washington state, purchased an expansive estate 40 miles east of Redmond and began making contacts with friends and acquaintances from her days in England.

In 1995 she was contacted by a man in Vienna who requested an audience with her. He flew to Seattle and they spoke at her home for close to 4 hours. The man was understandably vague but persuasive enough to keep Woodward's attention. His name was Julian Weincrantz and his story was compelling. After several more meetings over a 6 month period he convinced Woodward to bankroll his efforts. Together, they became the founders of REU. Woodward could not have asked for more. Weincrantz was exceptionally gifted in obtaining information without raising suspicion and he worked incredible hours. They began bringing in others to help with the project, eventually setting up a small group of people dedicated to restoring the belongings to families deprived them by the German occupation.

Before Weincrantz's death, he had informed her of the Nephilim. She was intrigued but allowed him his secrecy regarding his findings. He had been closed mouth about things in the past, usually with substantive results, and Woodward saw no reason to think this would be different. With his death, she had been devastated, not just at the loss

of a trusted co-worker but also with the loss of considerable information. Just how much data was unclear.

“I trust you two had an enjoyable flight,” Woodward said taking a sip from her coffee cup.

“Yes. It was fine,” Fielding responded.

“Good. What do you have for me?”

Fielding and Price both laid their folders on the desktop. Woodward picked them up and glanced briefly through each one. “I see you made it simple for me. I appreciate that. I’ll go over these. Now, to other business. What did you find out about Dr. Levy?”

Price shifted nervously in her chair. “As you know, the investigation is ongoing. Because of his prominence in the medical community, the authorities aren’t just brushing this one off but from what my sources tell me there’s not going to be a lot to find.”

Fielding interrupted. “It appears the accident was just that. From what we can determine the man’s passion for sports cars got the better of him. He picked one with defective mechanics, took a curve too fast and hit a delivery truck. There doesn’t seem to be any untoward angles to this one.”

“Any thoughts, then?” Woodward asked, her eyebrows raised.

“The chips could have been implanted in any of a number of patients,” Price answered. “Finding the right ones won’t be easy. We assume Levy didn’t make any notations about the matter and if he did, we don’t know where they are.”

“It solves a lot of problems, doesn’t it?” Woodward remarked. “Keeping the number of people in the know limited.”

“Indeed,” Fielding said. “But it has produced a major headache for those of us left behind to clean up the mess.”

Frank Goldblum, the owner of Temporary Jobs, Incorporated, was a middle aged, balding man with a paunch and a proclivity for making money. He had founded his business shortly after arriving in Houston from Miami in the late 80’s. The company had been successful almost from the beginning and he currently had over 300 employees at four different offices. In 1994, Goldblum purchased a moderate sized house in West University, an upscale section of Houston adjacent to Rice University. The schools were

excellent, though that was of no concern to Goldblum as he was unmarried and childless, and the neighborhoods safe. Homes there retained their value nicely and the businessman had settled into a serene if not boring existence. Both were about to change.

Goldblum pulled his sedan into the detached garage of his home before entering through the back door. He noticed that the alarm was off, something he attributed to his absent mindedness earlier in the morning. I have to pay better attention, he thought. Making his way into the kitchen, he set his keys on the counter. He began rifling through the stack of mail he carried and finding nothing of interest he set the papers down on the breakfast table. It was then he noticed something wasn't right. In the first place, Hannibal, his cat, had yet to greet him. Normally, the 5 year old tabby was front and center upon his arrival home, seeking some tasty treat his owner would procure for him from the pantry. For another, the light was on in his study.

"Hannibal," Goldblum called. "Hey, fleabag. Want a snicky snack?"

Nothing.

Goldblum continued summoning the cat as he walked down the hall to the study. Still the cat made no appearance.

He turned the corner into the room noticing the floor lamp next to the desk was lit. Shaking his head he began to walk towards it.

"Go ahead and leave it on," a voice said from the corner of the room.

Goldblum jerked his head to the side, let out an anguished gasp and took a few steps backward. Seated in a large leather chair was a young woman gently stroking Hannibal with one hand, a pistol laying in her lap. The businessman's heart began to race and he could feel the blood begin draining from his head.

"Goodness," the woman said. "Sit down before you have a coronary. I take it you don't normally have too many female visitors here."

"Who are you? What do you want?" Goldblum stammered. The woman's advice seemed sound and he slumped to the floor in front of a standing bookcase full of photographs and memorabilia. A small statue from Easter Island came crashing to the floor next to Goldblum. He recoiled upon hearing the stone break into several pieces. "If it's money, I don't have any here."

“Now Frankie, do I really look like the type who would commit burglary because I needed cash,” the woman said with mock disappointment. She frowned slightly, her lower lip protruding.

Despite Goldblum’s panic, he had to admit the woman didn’t fit the part of what he thought a burglar should look like. She appeared docile and immaculately dressed. Still, there was the matter of the pistol which Goldblum stared at.

The woman noticed. “Oh, this thing?” she said picking up the weapon and fingering the trigger. “I just keep this fellow around for protection.” She quickly pointed the gun at Goldblum pulling off a shot which embedded itself into the wall 3 inches from the man’s ear. Hannibal leaped from the woman’s lap and scampered into the kitchen.

It had all happened so quickly he’d had no time to react. The intent was to frighten him. It worked. Goldblum, already blanched and sweating, could scarcely speak. He vomited on the carpet in front of him, soiling his shirt and pants.

When he was done he fell back against the bookshelves and stared at the woman standing 10 feet in front of him.

“Frankie?” she asked. “You with me now? All done with your little accident? Because I really need you to focus on what I’m about to ask you.”

Goldblum shook his head. Sweat was pouring from his bald head onto his face. His color was a stark white. “What do you want?”

“No, no Frankie. I do the questioning.” She leaned against the edge of the desk, slowly tracing a figure eight in the air with the point of her pistol. “Let’s talk about Symone Pierson.”

Goldblum was having trouble breathing. “Who?” he asked.

The woman fired another round into the wall, this time to the left of the man’s head.

The businessman cringed at the sound of the splintering wood. A small whimper came from his throat. “I don’t know who you’re talking about!” he yelled.

A third shot came from the pistol. This one, however, found not wood and plaster but muscle and bone. The bullet tore through Goldblum’s forearm eliciting an anguished scream.

“You know, Frankie,” she said. “It’s one thing to not understand the question. It’s another to lie about the answer.” The woman leaned on the chair’s armrest, her chin resting in her palm. “Let’s try again. Tell me about Symone Pierson.”

Goldblum held his right hand over the entry wound on his left forearm and squeezed as tightly as he could. Although he had already thrown up he continued to feel nauseated and lightheaded. Despite his physical discomforts he was alert enough to recognize this woman wouldn’t take ignorance as an excuse.

The woman pulled the hammer back on her pistol.

“Wait! Hold on a minute!” Goldblum screamed. “I’ll tell you what I know.”

“A wise move.”

“A few months ago, I get this call from some broad in the northwest. Seattle, I think. She wants me to take on this employee named Symone Pierson. I tell her that I’ve got all the help I need at the time but I’ll keep her application on file.” Goldblum paused the readjust the pressure on his arm. “She wouldn’t take ‘no’ for an answer. Eventually she says that she’ll give me 50 large to take her on and get her in this cardiologist’s office.”

“Who was she?”

“Who, the broad from Seattle?”

The woman closed her eyes and slowly shook her head. “Yes. The broad from Seattle.”

Goldblum shrugged his shoulders. “Who knows. I didn’t care. I just waited for the money transfer to be completed and gave her the okay when she called back. A few days after that some girl shows up on my doorstep telling me she’s Symone Pierson. I send her to work where I’m instructed and everything is hunky dory.”

“What about withholding taxes, social security number and that sort of thing?”

The woman had rummaged in her purse and withdrawn a cigarette, which she was now lighting.

“She had all of that with her. I ran the numbers and they checked out.”

Goldblum shifted uneasily on the floor. He looked at his arm. The bleeding seemed to have slowed but the wound hurt mightily.

“Go on,” the intruder said, wafts of blue smoke curling up through her hair.

“That’s it. She went to work every day in the docs offices, I filled out a paycheck each month and never heard ‘boo’ about any of it.”

“How long was she supposed to stay?”

“I don’t know.”

The woman raised her weapon.

“Honestly!” Goldblum screeched. “I never got that information! Shooting me won’t get you something I don’t have!”

The woman eyed her captive furtively but lowered the pistol. She took another drag on the cigarette. “And...”

“I called the office manager once or twice to see how things were going. He said all was well and that Pierson was doing good work. He said she seemed to be a natural at the job.”

“Why there?”

“I don’t know. After that initial meeting with her, I never spoke with her again.”

“And you don’t know who the woman from Seattle was?”

Goldblum looked at the woman standing over him and did his best to sound convincing. “No. I only spoke with her twice and never got her name. Now will you please get out of my house.?”

The woman held the cigarette between two fingers and used the remaining ones on the same hand to rub her eyes. It had been a long day. “Oh alright. Stop your moaning.” She began to shake her head. “I swear...” She raised her pistol aiming it straight at Goldblum’s head. “If there’s one thing I can’t stand...” The woman squeezed off 3 rapid shots. “... it’s a man who whines.”

The bullets found their mark and Goldblum slumped to the floor. The woman looked around the room making sure she had left no traces of her presence. Satisfied that nothing remained, she left by the back door, walked to the alley behind the house and returned to her parked car.

Chapter 7

Margaret Paxton had recovered uneventfully from her surgery. The incision on her chest had healed well and her implanted pacemaker was functioning as intended, relegating her fainting episodes to all but a memory. An elderly woman from Pearland, Texas she had lived in that south Texas town most of her life. A few years earlier she had suffered a heart attack. Her local doctor had taken care of her as best he could but when her condition began to worsen he suggested a consultation with the cardiologists at the Houston Cardiology Associates. She had been reluctant at first as she no longer drove and would have to depend on her son for transportation but as time went by she realized she had little choice.

In the early summer she made an appointment with a cardiologist recommended by her primary care physician, Dr. Abraham Levy. They hit it off almost immediately and after his workup he suggested that she receive a pacemaker. Not one to rush into any surgical procedure, Paxton pondered the matter for a few weeks before giving him the go-ahead. In late August Dr. Levy inserted a pacing device beneath the skin of her upper left chest wall, attached the wires to her heart and closed the surgical incision. She spent the night in the hospital under observation. In the morning she went home.

The rest of her recuperation had been unremarkable. Followup visits revealed the device was functioning perfectly. She had a final appointment with Dr. Levy scheduled for late October at which point she he would require only quarterly evaluations.

The alarm in Sheila Rand's hotel room went off at 8:00 A.M. Her activities of the night before had been stressful and she had slept fitfully. Killing people was an unpleasant, albeit occasionally necessary part of her job. Rand didn't enjoy doing it but had no qualms about circumventing obstacles which prevented her from completing the job at hand. After all, she would often tell her herself, she was a professional.

Upon her return to her hotel she sat in the bar for over an hour nursing several drinks trying to unwind. Feeling better she went up to her room. The message light on her phone was blinking. Rand assumed it was probably Schmidt and decided to return his call him in the morning.

After showering and dressing she retrieved her cell phone from her purse and dialed Schmidt's number in New Mexico.

"I'm returning your call," she said.

"I just wanted an update. Any progress?" Schmidt asked.

"Well, yes and no. I discovered Symone Pierson is a fictitious character. Goldblum told me he had been paid to set her up as the cardiology office receptionist."

"By who?"

"Some woman from Seattle. Goldblum said they never met and he had no idea who she was or what her reasons were. She paid him 50 K to grease the wheels. This was around 6 months ago and he hadn't heard from her since. Pierson seems to have disappeared for the moment and of course we still have no idea who Dr. Tobin was."

Schmidt was quiet for a moment. "Solutions?"

"We could get the phone records; see where the call came from setting all this in motion but it's not likely to be very fruitful. Apparently Ms. Pierson was funneling packages and mail to someone inside the cardiology practice but with 60 docs there it's anyone's guess as to who was posing as Tobin, if, in fact, it was a doc at all."

"I'm going to send some help down. Get in to the offices after hours and see what you can dig up on who the mystery man is. The higher ups are becoming nervous. They want to know what Weincrantz had and more importantly, what he did with it."

Peter Merk got off the plane in Ottawa, retrieved his luggage and made his way to the car rental counter. He used a false driver's license to procure an automobile. After taking the shuttle bus to the parking area he found his car, loaded his bags in the trunk and began the drive south to the St. Lawrence seaway and then along the north shore of Lake Ontario.

Six hours later he arrived at the outskirts of the city, pulling off the highway and taking a room at a Best Western Motel. It was nearly midnight when he finally dropped into bed, exhausted. Despite the fatigue from his day, Merk found sleep elusive. He was a financial analyst, and a good one, but espionage was not his forte. He desperately needed to contact Weincrantz but how to do so safely was another matter. If someone

were watching the building, things could become complicated. Still, he realized he had little choice but to try. Too much was at stake.

Rand met with the group of 4 men and 1 woman that had assembled at a Ramada Inn near the Houston Hobby Airport. The youngest was perhaps 24 and the oldest, a man named Michael, was about 40 years old. They had been hand picked by Schmidt and were presumably good at what they did for a living. At least, Rand hoped so. Her life in some measure would depend on it. All spoke English without a trace of an accent and Rand assumed that most, if not all were Americans. None were very chatty which Rand appreciated.

“I’m assuming you were told something about what’s in store for tomorrow night?” she asked. All nodded silently. “Good,” Rand said. “We will pose as cleaning personnel and begin going through the offices about 10:30 P.M.”

John, a man sitting on the floor against a nightstand raised his hand.

“Yeah?” Rand said.

“What if some of the employees are still there at that hour? As I understand it, there are quite a few docs in this practice. Doesn’t it stand to reason there might be one or two of them still around even at that hour?”

“Certainly. But this practice takes up two full floors of the building with the offices on the 8th and the exam rooms on the 7th. If some people are still at work, we go around them. I think once you see the layout of the place you’ll understand better.”

On the table Rand placed a large map of the building including the adjacent parking garage and a blow up of the 7th and 8th floors. For the next 30 minutes she outlined what would be expected of each team member. There were few questions which Rand found comforting. It meant that the people assembled were as capable as she had been led to believe.

Agent Girard was finishing up his paperwork for the day and planning his drive home for the evening. Cases had come and gone since the death of Julian Weincrantz. A few had been solved, others had not. Girard had been at his profession long enough to know some matters lent themselves easier to resolution than others. The Weincrantz case

from the beginning had trouble written all over it. The whole thing was a giant multi-layered mystery destined to remain in the “unsolved” file until such time as a viable piece of information became available. That time was at hand.

Girard’s phone rang as he was locking up his desk.

“This is Girard,” the agent said.

“Girard. This is Roger Baran. Have you got a minute?”

Baran was a member of the department crime lab. His job was to process materials and report them in a timely and understandable manner. More than once his information had been suspect leading Girard to view his proclamations with skepticism. On top of that, the man was an absolute boor with breath capable of melting paint.

Girard exhaled heavily and sat back down in his chair. “Yeah, Roger, what is it?”

“I wanted to talk with you about this Weincrantz stiff you fellows have down here.”

“Is the body still there?” Girard asked incredulously.

“Well, yeah. Sure. It’s in the locker.”

“But that corpse arrived 10 days ago!”

“So?”

Girard stood still holding the telephone receiver to his ear. “When there’s no next of kin to claim a body it’s supposed to be shipped to the mortuary for incineration after the autopsy! Does the coroner know Weincrantz is still here?”

“Not exactly. I, uh... haven’t gotten around to telling him yet. But I’ve got a good reason,” Baran hurriedly added, “which is why I’m calling.”

Girard sat back down and rubbed his eyes. This guy is going to give me a coronary. “I’m all ears.”

“Well, its something I think the coroner might have missed.”

“As I recall six months ago you also thought the pathologist missed a patient with thoracic inversion syndrome until it was pointed out that you had been holding the x-ray up backwards.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I remember that. But this is different.”

“Why am I not surprised,” Girard said sarcastically. “Please, illumine me.”

“Because this time I have evidence.”

“Evidence of what?”

“You’ll see. Come down here and take a look. You won’t be sorry.”

“I’m already sorry I picked up the phone,” Girard grouched. “Look, the Leafs play at the Garden in 90 minutes and I intend to be sitting in front of the television eating lasagna and drinking a Molson. Impeding me in that pursuit will result in a very painful and lingering death.”

“Like I said. You won’t regret it.”

“I better not,” Girard said, hanging up the phone.

Girard took the stairs to the basement. He quickly made his way down the hall to the door marked “Coroner” and walked inside. Baran was at his desk doing paperwork. His head jerked up at the opening of the door and his face broke out in a grin revealing a mouthful of misshapen and yellowed teeth.

Of course you work here, Girard thought. Where else could a worm like you find employment. “So what’s the big piece of news you have for me, Baran?”

The man was smiling almost uncontrollably as he rose from his chair holding his finger in the air in a professorial manner. “You’ll thank me for this, Agent Girard. Mark my words! You’ll thank me for this!”

Only if I fill your hip with thorazine, you looney.

Baran scrambled quickly to a panel of rectangular fluorescent lights fixed to an adjacent wall. He retrieved a single radiographic film from a nearby file, placed it on the flat surface of the light box and flipped the power switch. It was an x-ray of the hip and pelvis area. Visible were the usual bones comprising the skeletal structure as well as something else. A thin opacity was clearly visible near the center of the film. It was small, measuring only about half a centimeter in width and no longer than 2 centimeters.

Girard stared at the image in silence for a few moments. He twisted his head to one side in a futile attempt to discern what he was looking at. Finally, he turned his attention back to Baran who stood nearby smiling and arching his eyebrows as if huckstering for a carnival sideshow.

“What is it?” Girard asked, a scowl covering his face.

“This.” Baran held up a small metal fragment.

Girard took it from his hand, examining it carefully as he turned it over in his fingers. On one flat side were the letters Warsaw St Bank and on the other the numbers 165344729.

“How did you find this?”

“Just on a hunch, I shot an x-ray of the body’s pelvis and there it was.”

“Where, exactly?” Girard asked.

“Umhh... actually, it was around his rectum.”

“Do I even want to know what you were doing examining that part of his anatomy?”

Baran launched into a longwinded explanation determined to make the most of his rare presence on center stage. “It was just under the skin. Apparently, he’d had it inserted there sort of like they do with birth control implants these days. The overlying skin had a small scar but aside from that it was basically undetectable. No one would have ever seen it unless an x-ray had been done.”

Girard tossed the metal fragment gently into the air, catching it with his hand as he talked. “And the coroner signed off on the x-ray?” He cut his eyes over slightly to his associate.

Baran, shifted uneasily on his feet, straightening out his white lab coat and rubbing his knuckles. “Well, not exactly.”

“I thought not,” Girard said shaking his head.

“But it’s not what you think,” Baran hurried to add.

“I bet it’s exactly what I think. You’re on thin ice down here. One more screw up and you get punted. You shoot the x-ray without anyone knowing. If there’s something there, you’re a hero. If not, you bury the film. Win-win.” Girard paused. “How am I doing?”

Baran’s expression said it all.

“So how many x-rays have you shot before you hit the jackpot with this one?”

“Twenty-seven,” Baran said softly.

Girard leaned forward on the balls of his feet. “I’m sorry? I couldn’t hear you?”

“Twenty-seven! There. Happy?” Baran’s face was flushed.

Girard laughed out loud and put the piece of metal on the countertop. “Don’t worry. Your secret’s safe with me and I’ll be sure to talk you up when I let the news out.”

Baran began to smile again, a look of relief spreading over his face “Thanks.”

“So what do you make of these inscriptions?” Girard asked.

“Warsaw State Bank,” Baran replied.

“In Poland?”

“No. New York state. It’s about 50 miles east of Buffalo,” Baran said. “I have no idea what the numbers mean but I bet someone at the bank does.”

Girard nodded. “Yeah. I would think so.” He jotted down the numbers from the small piece of metal. “You want to keep this here?” he asked.

Baran’s eyes went wide. “Oh, yes. I have to make sure it doesn’t grow little legs and walk away. If the white coats ever found out I had let something like this out of the lab, they’d kill me.”

Girard tossed the piece of metal to Baran. “Okay, fine by me. But if this gets lost,” he pointed a finger at the man’s chest. “I will be looking for your scalp.”

Price and Fielding had little time to rest from their cross country flight. They met again with Woodward after dinner then retired to their rooms. The next morning they returned to the airport for a flight back to Houston. Upon arriving at George Bush Intercontinental Airport they rented a car and drove to Galveston.

At around 8:00 P.M. there was a knock on Fielding’s door. He looked through the peephole to find a middle aged man wearing a black leather flight jacket looking straight ahead. “Who is it?” he asked.

“I was told to meet a Jason Fielding at this hotel room,” the man responded.

Fielding opened the door eyeing the man suspiciously. “Don’t you have something to tell me?”

The man rolled his eyes. “Oh, right. ‘Al Gore is a dork.’ Happy now?”

Fielding recognized the code words and opened the door. “Have a seat,” he said pointing to a chair. Picking up the phone he called Price’s room and told her the courier had arrived. Two minutes later she was at his door.

When all three were seated, Fielding spoke. "I assume Woodward told you what we need."

"No, I'm here to deliver Danish," he said sarcastically. The man unzipped a large bag he had brought with him. He removed its contents sequentially and placed the items on a nearby table. "Here is a swipe card to the office. It will work without having to punch in an access number. The computer system will have a permanent log of your entry including the time so don't use it more than once. These two pistols are obviously for you. They are clean so they can't be traced. Each has a silencer on it. I assume you both know how to use these things?"

Fielding and Price nodded affirmatively.

"Good," the man said. "There are several spare clips and two boxes of ammunition. I would suggest you load them before you get to the building. When you're done, roll them up in this cloth satchel and toss them in a dumpster somewhere out of the way, meaning at least 5 miles or so from the offices. Clear?"

"What if we have some trouble?" Price asked.

"Define trouble."

"What if there's someone working late or we run into security?"

"There's a closed circuit surveillance system for the building but not the garage. In the lobby is a single camera and one for each floor. The elevators don't have them and neither do the individual offices. Also, there's a guard in the lobby who monitors the screens. My understanding is that admittance to the place is by swipe card only after 8:00 P.M. The guard doesn't have access to information about when they are used. I'm going to arrange for a glitch in the function of the cameras at 10:00 P.M. You two are to be at the office doors at 10:05 P.M. The system will be down for 30 minutes so you'll have 25 minutes to get to where you are going, gather what you need and get out. Any more than that and you're on your own."

Chapter 8

Martin Girard woke early and took a department car across the bridge from Canada to the United States. Because of the early hour he avoided most of the traffic apart from some congestion east of Buffalo. Driving in western New York was a pleasant experience. Girard had always liked the United States. It was full of people who seemed to have a real zest for life, particularly in the south although he had been there only twice. Sometimes he thought he might have liked to have been an American, particularly with the increasing popularity and expanding presence of professional ice hockey but in the final analysis he was proud of his French-Canadian heritage. Besides, too much of the place was subjected to temperatures beyond what he thought any mortal should have to bear. The cold and snow could at times be tiresome, but he had an innate aversion to heat and humidity.

Girard instantly liked what he saw. Here was the small town America that he'd read about. The houses were largely wooden two-story affairs, often with above ground swimming pools in the back yards. The streets were clean and overhead banners announced the upcoming football game at the local high school stadium and a Jaycees pancake breakfast. The churches were adorned with tall, white steeples. It was a real slice of Americana. Girard found the Warsaw State Bank right where the woman on the phone had said it would be.

The detective turned into the small parking lot, easily finding an open space. It was after 10:00 A.M. and the bank wasn't particularly busy. He held the door for a woman and her baby stroller as they exited the building. Taking off his sunglasses, he noticed a receptionist nearby sitting at a small desk.

"Excuse me," Girard began. "Could I speak with the bank manager please?"

The woman looked up from her reading. "Mr. Timms in a meeting right now. Did you have an appointment with him?"

Girard shook his head slightly as he fished in his pocket for his badge. Producing it a moment later, he flipped it open as he held it about eye level. "Not exactly."

The woman's eyes widened. She nodded almost instinctively. "I'll see if he can meet with you."

“Thanks,” Girard responded quietly.

After less than a minute, a squat, rotund man with a receding hairline emerged from a corner office. The receptionist trailed behind him struggling on her high heels to keep up.

“I’m Gerald Timms,” he said extending his hand. “I’m the bank’s senior vice president. Mr. Michaels is out of the office for the rest of the week attending a funeral. How may I help you?”

Girard noticed that the man seemed less frazzled than his receptionist. Either he’d been through this before or was a pretty cool customer. “Can we go somewhere and talk?”

“Certainly,” Timms said smiling. “Will my office suffice?”

“Fine.”

Timms turned to the woman now seated again at her desk. “Miss Berry, hold my calls for the time being, will you?”

“Yes, sir,” she responded.

Timms waved his hand to Girard, signaling for him to follow. After taking a seat in the man’s office the detective opened up his small spiral notebook. “Any problem with me taking notes?” he asked.

“Of course not,” Timms said. He sat in a large office chair, his massive oaken desk before him and a large bay window behind.

Girard withdrew a photocopy of the metal fragment from his coat pocket. He placed it on the desk blotter in front of the bank vice president.

Timms leaned over, squinting at the paper. He opened the top drawer of his desk, removed a hand held magnifier and studied it carefully before looking up at Girard.

“Where did you get this?” he asked.

“Does it matter?”

The vice president pursed his lips. “Not much, I suppose.”

“Look at the other side,” Girard said, handing him another sheet of paper.

Timms again used the magnifier to scrutinize the object.

“Those numbers ring a bell?” Girard asked.

“No, but the number of digits are the same as those of our accounts.”

“Would this bank have any reason to produce a piece of metal with Warsaw State Bank on it and some numbers on the back?”

“Not to my knowledge,” Timms said, replacing the magnifier in the desk drawer. “I can’t say for certain, but I’ve been here close to 23 years and I’ve never run across anything like this. Want me to run the numbers?”

“Please,” Girard responded.

Timms pecked at the keyboard for a short time before announcing his findings. “Here it is. Michael Horowitz.”

“How old?” Girard asked.

Timms scanned the monitor in front of him. “Says here he’s 32. Lives in Syracuse or at least that’s where his Post Office box is.”

“Can you print off all the vitals so I can take them with me?”

“Sure,” Timms replied. He punched a few more buttons spurring the printer behind him to life. “He’s also got a safety deposit box.”

Girard looked at the banker. “Here?”

“Right downstairs.”

“Can we have a look at its contents?”

“I don’t know,” Timms said shaking his head. “If you were with an American outfit or the Royal Mounteds I don’t think we’d have a problem. But, you aren’t and technically I’m supposed to...”

“You’re supposed to wait for the appropriate paperwork and go-aheads,” Girard finished his sentence. “Would it help if I were to fill you in on why I’m here?”

The offer obviously pleased Timms whose eyes lit up at the anticipation of a juicy detective story. “Yes. I think that might cast a different light on things,” he said, trying to mask the excitement in his voice.

Girard gave the bank vice president a thumbnail sketch of the investigation being sure to linger on the more lurid details of Weincrantz’s death. Timms eagerly soaked up every syllable of the officer’s description.

When Girard had finished Timms uncrossed his arms. “And you are quite certain this man is dead?” he inquired, an official tone in his voice.

“Pretty much,” Girard answered.

“Well, I think that in the interest of public welfare the prudent thing to do would be to have a look at the safety deposit box.” He rose from his chair, produced a ring of keys from a file cabinet and beckoned Girard to follow.

Several minutes later the two men were in the basement of the building walking through a thick metal door into a large room, its walls covered with individual locked compartments. Timms selected the appropriate key, inserted it and turned the mechanism. The box slid out easily. The banker placed it on a table in the center of the room before lifting its lid. Both men peered in the metal container only to find a single micro cassette tape. Girard picked it up looking on both sides for any illustrative markings. There were none.

“I can let you listen to the tape here at the bank but until I get the appropriate paperwork, I can’t release it,” Timms said flatly.

“I understand,” Girard replied. “Is there somewhere I could play the tape?”

“Certainly. Would my office suffice? I have a hand held recorder there.”

“That would be great. I appreciate your help.”

Paul Grabel walked to the campus cafeteria intent on a quick lunch. As a graduate student his duties included teaching freshman classes in chemistry and introductory physics. However, his research was requiring increasing amounts of time meaning he needed to be in the library scouring for references. Grabel enjoyed his work but was looking forward to finishing it and moving on. He had applications in for PhD programs at Stanford and MIT as well as a few others.

Before eating, he dropped by the Student Union to check his mail. In his box was a slip of paper informing him he had a package waiting. Fortunately someone on duty knew the envelope’s location. He tore it open as he walked up the stairs. Inside was a brief note from Justin Douglas informing him the well wrapped item accompanying it was the computer chip. As he ate Grabel peeled the bundle apart. It was about what he had expected to find. The small metal wafer appeared to be a computer chip and it piqued his curiosity. He quickly finished his meal, called Douglas’s answering machine informing him the package had arrived and bolted out the door.

Instead of going to the library, however, he went to a graduate student physics lab. There, stuck in front of a large computer screen, was a friend known affectionately as Pewt. How the young man from Virginia had acquired his name was anyone's guess. He could be obnoxious and was a confirmed lab rat but usually willing to help someone who could cite a good reason for his doing so.

"Pewter, my man!" Grabel exclaimed upon walking in the room.

"Go away," Pewt said without looking up. He was ensconced behind a large computer screen.

"You busy?"

"Always."

"Too busy too look at something cool?"

Pewt cut his eyes away from the monitor to look at Grabel. "Define cool."

"This," Grabel said holding out the chip, "is way cool."

"A computer chip?" Pewt asked incredulously. "Leave me, evil vermin." He returned to his computer.

"Don't you want to know what's on it?"

"Not especially. I'm busy trying to get some of these colloidal crystals into a tertiary form."

Grabel let out a mock sigh. "Alright. I guess I'll have to do my excavating elsewhere."

Pewt struck a key on the keyboard forcefully and sat back in his chair. "You mean you don't know what's on it?"

"Not a clue. A friend sent it to me."

"And he doesn't know what's on it either?"

"Nope."

Pewt rolled his eyes but Grabel could tell he had struck an inquisitive nerve in the man. "Hand it over."

Grabel gave him the chip, which Pewt carefully examined it for a few moments. "I think I have a board this will fit." He rose from his chair, walked to a cabinet drawer and began opening them sequentially. On his third try he removed a circuit board and dropped the chip into a recessed area. "That should work," he said.

Pewt shuffled to a separate computer near an open window. After unlatching several plastic tabs he inserted the board containing the chip. Looking at Grabel he said, "This thing doesn't have anything kinky or classified material on it, does it?"

Grabel shrugged his shoulders. "How would I know? Like I said, it came from a friend of mine who's in medical school in Houston. I suppose it's possible he managed to obtain Harold Stassen's cell number but since the guy watches The Gong Show reruns I'm thinking not."

Pewt set and reset his jaw while his friend was talking. It was a nervous habit he displayed when listening intently. The man was intrigued but hadn't taken complete leave of his senses. "Okay. Fine. I'll take you at your word. But," he pointed a boney finger at Grabel, "if there's fallout from this one, you're taking the hit." His sentence was punctuated by a small emission of saliva at its end.

The computer now booted up, Pewt sat in front of the keyboard and monitor. Grabel could see the reflection of the screen in Pewt's eyeglasses. The man was fixated on the flashing numbers and symbols before him. Some of it Grabel could make out as part of a computer code but for the most part, it would have made little difference if the characters were in Babylonian.

After a few minutes Pewt shook his head. "Gonna take some time," he muttered. Turning to his visitor he said, "I've got the right board for the chip but it's really encrypted. There's something there but..." his voice trailed off. He sounded as if he wanted to say more. "I'm going to have to spend some time noodling around with it."

Grabel stood up to stretch his back. "Okay. I'll be around. Let me know if you get something but do me a favor. This friend of mine wanted things kept on the QT. So if there's some groundbreaking discovery, keep it to yourself, at least for the time being."

Girard sat in a hard, wooden chair at a small table in the corner of Timms' office. Before him was a legal pad, now containing several pages of notes and a stenographer's dictation system complete with foot feed and earphones. The agent had spent the better part of 3 hours listening to the cassette, replaying it so many times in some segments he worried he might damage the magnetic tape. After looking at his watch he realized he

needed to call in, if for no other reason than to give the department some idea of when he would return the car.

Girard wasn't surprised to discover Messier at his desk. Since receiving his promotion the man had become practically glued to his office.

"Detective," Girard began. "This is Martin. I wanted to ring before I headed back since I may arrive late."

"Okay. Fine," Messier said, switching the receiver to conference call mode. His voice belied someone on a deadline with little extra time for the niceties of polite conversation. "Where are you by the way?"

"Warsaw, New York."

Messier looked up from the open file on his desk. "Where is that?"

"East of Buffalo about 50 miles. Nice place."

"Glad you're having a good time. Mind telling me what you are doing there?"

"Tracking down some information on the Weincrantz suicide."

"Didn't I tell you to expedite that case?"

"You did," Girard acknowledged. "But Baran down in the morgue found something."

Messier was scribbling aimlessly on a notepad in front of him. "What? A personality?"

"Wouldn't that be nice," Girard chuckled. "No, he shot an x-ray of the body and located a small fragment of metal just under the skin around the rectum."

Messier produced an almost audible wince. "Ouch."

"Yeah," Girard concurred. "The pathologists who did the autopsy missed it. Of course, they didn't do an x-ray either. Baran removed it and showed it to me. On one side were the words "Warsaw State Bank" with some numbers on the other. I came up here to check it out."

Messier was chewing the fragmented end of an ink pen. "Find anything?" he asked.

"Yeah, actually. It seems Mr. Weincrantz had a safety deposit box here that contained a micro cassette tape. I spent the last couple of hours listening to it."

"What was on it?"

“Frankly, it makes little sense to me and almost all of it is in another language. Hebrew, I think. I’ll need to get a translator to help me. But the part that’s in English mentions something called the ‘Nephilim’, whatever that is. There are a number of names, some of which sound German whereas others are definitely French, Italian and Scandinavian.”

“Any of that mean anything to you?”

“Well, yes and no. I talked with a friend of mine in Paris who suggested the pattern of Weincrantz’s tattoos were similar to that done by some of the German units during the war. But there doesn’t seem to be any definite link as yet between our dead boy and anything else.”

Messier sighed audibly on the phone. “Well, bring what you have back to the office and we can go over it later.” He paused. “But Martin, let’s put this thing to bed.”

“Okay. See you tomorrow.”

Chapter 9

Sheila Rand had spent most of the afternoon in the workout room at her hotel. She was a dedicated gym enthusiast, when her schedule would allow so she took whatever opportunities were afforded her when she was out of town. After showering and dressing she got in her car, drove to the parking lot of a nearby Wal-Mart and waited.

Half an hour later a dark van pulled up beside her. The driver rolled his window down. "Let's go," the man said.

Rand exited her vehicle and locked it. A passenger opened a sliding door. Inside was the rest of her group. Although it was well past dark she could make out the faces of the people she'd met earlier. They seemed calm; something Rand took as good sign. One man had earphones on and appeared to be lost in whatever music he was listening to. The woman was leafing through a copy of Redbook magazine. All, like Rand, were dressed in bland khaki colored jumpsuits, each with a patch on the back bearing the name of a fictitious office cleaning company. The driver said nothing as he put the car into gear and left the parking lot.

Kelly Price was sitting in the passenger side of a rented Ford Taurus as her partner drove along the south side of the loop around Houston. Too nervous to do much of anything else she contented herself with looking out the window and checking her watch frequently.

"What time is it now?" Fielding asked sarcastically.

"What?"

"You've been looking at your watch every 30 seconds since we left."

"So?"

"So, I figure that either you're nervous or you have some sort of time fetish."

Price rolled her eyes. "Yeah, Einstein, I'm a little on edge. Is that alright?"

"Fine with me. Just don't let it get things screwed up."

"Shut your piehole and drive, dimwit."

Her partner laughed. "Temper, temper."

Fielding took an exit off the loop and drove north towards the medical center. It was a quarter of ten and the traffic, though still substantial on the major thoroughfares was decidedly less than during the daytime hours. He found the parking garage and office building without difficulty before driving aimlessly around the area several times to make sure no one was following them. On the third pass he pulled into the garage and used the swipe card he had been given. Fielding drove to the 4th floor and parked 50 yards from the staircase entrances.

Both occupants sat in the car checking their gear. They donned black ski masks, pulled on dark jackets and loaded their pistols with full clips. After looking at the clock on the dashboard Fielding announced it was time to go. They left the vehicle and walked to the stairwell door. Price could feel her heart pounding in her chest. What she was feeling surpassed simple anxiety and bordered on abject terror. Fielding looked around repeatedly, searching for any sign of company but found none. They made their way to the door, entering the staircase and walked up to the 8th floor. Fielding checked his watch. It read 10:02 P.M. He waited until 10:04 and after nodding to Price opened the door into the hallway.

The lights were on but dimmed. Fielding glanced at the surveillance camera attached to the wall opposite the elevators. The blinking red light was off and it made no movement. He nodded to Price who followed him to the back entrance of the offices. He passed the swipe card through the slot. The indicator on the adjacent wall changed from red to green and he heard the mechanism unlock. Opening the door slightly Fielding could see the interior of the office hall. There appeared to be no one around and no movement could be heard. Price followed him inside.

“Which one is Levy’s office?” he whispered.

“Follow me,” Price replied. She walked down the corridor quickly until she came to a door with the late cardiologist’s name on it. Using a passkey, she opened the door and peered in. The room was undisturbed since Levy’s death. Price entered the office, switched on the battery-powered light strapped to her forehead and went directly to the file cabinets. Fielding scanned the hallway before closing the door behind them.

Rand and her group parked two blocks away on one of the few street lots near the medical center. Most were “Mom and Pop” type operations, content to eke out a living during the workweek catering to people who chose to avoid high rise parking garages or who wanted quick access to their vehicles. After hours, a billboard sized apparatus served as the repository for parking fees, considerably reduced.

The driver easily found a space close to the brick wall of a weekday diner. After the first passengers disembarked, they opened the back doors and began removing supplies. Within 60 seconds, the group was making its way along the sidewalks, each member of the group carrying either a large suitcase or pushing hand held cleaning equipment. The five members were in communication with each other using earpiece microphones and lapel mikes. They chirped off in numerical order, making sure all were on line and could hear the others before reaching the vestibule of the office building.

Rand gently pulled on the large metal handpiece attached to the glass door. Not surprisingly, it was locked. Twenty five yards away, in the center of the lobby, stood the night watchman. He was stooped over a large wooden console with a scowl on his face. Rand knocked gently on the glass. The man looked up, squinted his eyes and nodded. Waving his hand, he moved to the end of the computer console and punched a button. There was a sharp buzzing sound over Rand’s head and the door unlocked loudly. Michael’s hand went to the woman’s shoulder gently moving her to the side. She saw out of the corner of her eye he had already drawn his weapon. Over his head he wore a latex mask shaped to look like Boris Yeltsin.

Michael took half a step into the lobby turned to the right and put two shots into the surveillance camera mounted on the wall. The security guard, meanwhile, had returned his concentration to the bank of video monitors and their recent malfunction. While he didn’t hear the gunshots, the sound of glass and metal striking the tile floor got his attention. It took him just a fraction of second to realize what was happening. Unfortunately, that was a fraction too long.

Andrea, the only other woman on the project took careful aim at the guard. He was attempting to pick up a nearby telephone. She rapidly squeezed off three rounds from her pistol. All three buried themselves deeply in the young man’s face. The impact propelled him backward into a coaster chair. He hit it awkwardly, shoving it to one side

as he slouched to the floor. The guard was unconscious by the time Rand made her way to the console and peeked over the top. The pool of red encircling the young man was less of a concern than what she witnessed on the television screens. All had a repeating vertical black and white test pattern. None displayed any sort of viable image. One of the crew cleaned up the carnage while the other two carried the security guard's body to a nearby broom closet.

Rand looked across the lobby towards Michael. "Take a look at this," she said.

The man made his way around the end of the console and ran his eyes down its length.

"Could knocking out that security camera cause them all to go off line?" Rand asked.

The man shook his head. "I don't know. It's possible but most systems today are set up with built in redundancy." He looked around the lobby. "I don't like this."

The body of the security guard now out of sight, one of the intruders unzipped his jumpsuit to reveal another uniform, that of night watchman. He put on a baseball cap with matching insignia and sat down at the desk in front of the television monitors.

"You okay here?" Rand asked him.

"Good to go," he responded as he looked around to make sure no evidence of the previous struggle remained.

Rand nodded. "Okay, everyone, in the elevators."

As the machinery began its upward ascent Michael spoke. "I'm not sure what's going on with the monitors. It could be something as simple as a system that's less sophisticated than I had anticipated but I just don't know. Keep your masks on, your heads down and let's get out of here."

As the elevator slowed for its arrival on the 8th floor Michael turned to Rand. "Do you have any idea where we're going?"

Rand was adjusting the collar of her Hillary Clinton mask. "Sort of. I know that the doc Pierson signed for doesn't exist but the package arrived at this office on September 23. If they have a log of arriving couriered mail it should be there."

The group walked to the front doors of the offices. One of the men removed a small pouch containing several small tools that he adeptly used to disable the swipe card

box on the adjacent wall. The locking mechanism now disabled, Rand slowly opened the door and stuck her head in to listen. Hearing nothing, she motioned the rest of the group to follow her.

A large receptionist's desk sat in the middle of the foyer. Rand walked behind it and began searching for a notebook. After about a minute she found what she was looking for. She ran her fingers down the list of entries until one jumped out at her. "Bingo," she said. "On the 23rd there were 4 couriered envelopes. Two were FedEx and the others Airborne Express. The FedEx packages went to Drs. Levy and Buchanan."

"Any idea who got the golden egg?" Michael asked.

"No. We'll have to search both." Rand turned to her entourage. Motioning to Michael and two others she said, "You three take Levy's office, we'll take Buchanan's." The group split up and began to walk quietly down the halls.

Price and Fielding searched Levy's office, neither knowing exactly what they were looking for. Price started with the file cabinets, culling through names that meant nothing to her while Fielding broke into the cardiologist's desk moving papers around in a haphazard fashion.

"Find anything?" Fielding asked.

"Just a bunch of patient charts. Nothing that stands out."

As Price stood to stretch her back, the door swung open. Standing before her was a man with an official looking hat and a patch on his coveralls emblazoned with the name "Bob." She was about to offer an excuse for being in the office when she noticed he held a pistol in his right hand.

"Back away," the man said calmly. There was no emotion to his voice.

Thirty yards away Rand could hear the spoken words over her headset. She was out of Dr. Buchanan's office and tearing down the hallways in an instant. "Talk to me, Michael," she whispered excitedly.

Fielding saw the man's weapon as well. Realizing the work clothes were a disguise he reached quickly for his pistol on the desktop. Michael squeezed off two shots striking Fielding just under the man's hairline. Blood exploded out of the back of his

head onto the wall behind him. His body slumped to the floor. Price let out a piercing shriek.

Rand was several yards from the door when she heard the scream. She pushed one of the members of her group out of the way in time to see Michael repeat the same maneuver on Price. The young woman's body careened off a nearby file cabinet before gravity took over.

"What's going on here!" Rand asked breathlessly.

Michael whirled around to see the woman standing behind him.

"He was going for his weapon. I couldn't take a chance the other one wouldn't scream her way into getting us caught."

Rand pulled her mask off and grabbed Michael by the front of his coveralls. "The idea was that no one was to know we were in this specific office! I thought you knew that!"

Michael stared down at the woman in front of him. "Take your hands off of me," he said coldly.

Rand pushed him back as she relinquished her grip. She looked around the room at the others who had gathered behind her. "Get every scrap of paper in this place and box it up," she said between her clenched teeth. "When you're done, strip the bodies and bag their belongings. We'll sort this out later."

Michael bent down to retrieve his spent shell casings. "Look at the bright side," he said. "At least now we know which office to search."

Chapter 10

Girard located a young man through one of the local synagogues who spoke and read Hebrew. Daniel Mueller had agreed to come into the police station and sat in an interview room with Agent Girard drinking coffee. Mueller was a university student and, while willing to help, was clearly not used to being awake at this time of the day.

“Thanks for coming in, Daniel,” Girard said. “I know you have better things to do but I appreciate your help.”

“No problem,” the young man retorted. “Why couldn’t you tell me on the phone what this is all about?”

“Well this involves something that’s a bit mystifying to me and I didn’t really know how to explain it succinctly.”

“Oh,” Mueller said quietly. “That makes sense.”

On the table between them was a stenographer’s tape player with headphones. Girard produced a micro cassette from his pocket setting it next to the machine. “I assume you know what these are?” he said pointing to the items.

“Sort of. I know the department secretary at the university has one of these on her desk. I assumed it was for dictation.”

“Correct,” Girard answered as he took a sip from his coffee cup. “I can’t tell you where I got this tape and I certainly can’t tell you what’s on it since I don’t speak Hebrew but I was hoping you could.”

“I can try.”

“My understanding is that you speak and write the language well?”

“Pretty well. I went to a Jewish boarding school. We all had to take quite a lot of Hebrew and of course much of our religious ceremonies are in Hebrew.”

Girard smiled. “Good. Sounds like you are the right man for the job. What I want you to do is listen to the tape, make any notes you feel necessary and then give me a brief thumbnail sketch of its contents. Any questions?”

“No.”

“One other thing. I need you to keep everything that goes on here to yourself. Don’t discuss what’s on the tape with anyone other than myself. Are we clear?”

“Yes, sir.” Mueller put the headphones on, plugged in the cassette and hit the on button.

Girard rose from his chair. “I’ll be back in about 30 minutes to check on you. I’m right outside in the squad room if you need anything.”

“Okay,” Mueller said nodding.

Girard patted the young man on his shoulder before leaving the room and returning to his desk. He had been gone less than 15 minutes when the door to the interview room opened.

“What is it, Daniel?” Girard asked as he walked towards the young man. The student seemed unsettled.

“I’m not sure I’m the man for this job,” Mueller said. His voice was faltering and his face a shade paler than before.

Girard sat down. He motioned for Mueller to do the same. “Why not?”

“You don’t have any idea what’s on this tape?”

“I have a suspicion that it has to do with the Holocaust, but as I said, I don’t speak Hebrew so I can’t really...”

“I lost several family members at Mathausen, Agent Girard,” the young man interrupted. “It’s pretty difficult for me to listen to this.”

Girard stroked his face and nodded. “I didn’t know,” he said softly. “Listen, the case we are investigating has to do with the death of a young man from Vienna not much older than you. We don’t know why he was here or what he had been doing but he had a fragment of metal placed under his skin which led me to this tape. I’m guessing it must have been pretty important. I need to know what’s on this cassette.”

Mueller picked up his coffee. The shaking in his hands sloshed the brown liquid back and forth within the cup. “The first couple of minutes the speaker simply tells why he’s making the tape. ‘To keep the fires of retribution burning’ I believe is how he put it. After that he begins reciting the names and locations of Jewish families in the occupied countries who were deported from their homes.”

“Is that unusual?” Girard asked.

“I guess not,” Mueller answered. “I know such lists have been stored in the Israeli archives for some time. But after he states the family names and their locations he starts going into a laundry list of their properties.”

“You mean like how much land they owned?”

“Not so much that as personal belongings. Their valuables. Paintings, jewelry, bulk precious metals, stocks, bonds. That sort of thing.”

“Interesting,” Girard said biting his lower lip. “All the names are listed first, then the locations and then the properties?”

“Yeah,” Mueller said with a scowl.

“You haven’t listened to the whole tape?” Girard knew the answer but wanted to gauge the reaction from his cohort.

“No. Just the first few minutes or so.”

“Can you listen some more?” Girard said putting his hand on the young man’s shoulder and gradually moving him back towards the interrogation room.

“I guess so,” Mueller replied, his voice becoming more steady. “I have class in an hour.”

Girard shrugged his shoulders. “I would appreciate whatever time you can give me. I’m sorry to ask this of you, particularly considering the subject matter, but the department really needs your help.” Mueller took a deep breath and nodded his head.

Pewt heard the door to his lab open. He looked over the top of the computer screen to see Paul Grabel entering the room.

“Weasel!” Pewt called out. “I’ve been trying to reach you for the last 24 hours. Where have you been?”

Grabel removed the book bag from his back and placed it on a benchtop. “Sorry. I’ve been holed up at a friend’s house going over some stuff for my research. What’s up?”

“I managed to get into that chip you dropped off. I put the stuff in a text file and printed it off. It’s next to the cabinet.” Pewt pointed in the direction of the room’s corner.

Grabel walked to the lab bench. Lying on top was a stack of printed pages, a floppy disk and an envelope containing what he assumed was the computer chip. He picked up the papers glancing at them briefly before depositing them in his book bag.

“Hey, Pewter, I really owe you one for this. Nice touch with the computer disk.”

“It was and you do.” Pewt stood and removed his glasses. “You have any idea what any of that stuff means?”

“No. It looks like a bunch of names and towns in Europe. Why? Does it mean something to you?”

“Didn’t you notice anything about any of those names?”

Grabel arched his eyebrows. “Not especially.”

“Most are Jewish.”

“Okay,” Grabel said flatly. “So?”

“You got a laundry list of largely, maybe even entirely, Jewish names and a bunch of places in Europe. What if this has to do with the Holocaust? What if that’s some compilation of people who were exterminated and where they came from?”

“Well, what if it is?”

“That doesn’t bother you?” Pewt asked skeptically.

“Of course it bothers me but its ancient history. There’s nothing I can do about it now.”

“Not that, bonehead! The fact that your friend came across something like this in the first place. I guess it doesn’t concern you as much as it would me. Personally, I’d be worried.”

“Why?”

“Because I’d be afraid that someone might miss it and come looking for it.”

Sheila Rand checked out of her hotel room and procured another one two miles away. The events of the night before had been unsettling. Since arriving in the Bayou City, she’d been directly or indirectly involved in 4 homicides and was nearing her record. The rest of the group had scattered, some catching planes early the next morning for parts unknown while Michael remained behind and disposed of the van, uniforms and

weapons. A rental company somewhere was about to receive a new vehicle courtesy of an auto theft insurance claim.

In the trunk of Rand's car were 5 boxes of papers, files and computer software. Another 6 boxes were sitting in a climate controlled storage facility in League City, Texas, midway between Houston and Galveston. All this made Rand nervous. She didn't like having incriminating evidence in her possession. The morning news shows were doing live telecasts from the office building where the 3 bodies had been discovered. Although Houston is a large city, three homicides in a single night remained out of the ordinary.

On the floor of her hotel room were the patient charts from Levy's office. Rand leafed through them, initially paying close attention to what she could understand but as time passed she spent less and less time on the inclusive details. Surprisingly, few of Levy's patients were women, only about 50. Most were elderly and had received pacemakers.

The third chart Rand reviewed contained a typed description of the pacemaker implantation procedure. Using red ink, someone had written the letter "C" in the bottom left hand corner. Curious, she retrieved half a dozen men's files and looked at their corresponding operative reports. None had similar markings. Returning to the women's charts Rand found three others with the same encryption, all in an identical location. Something else stood out. All four women had cancer.

After standing to stretch her legs, she picked up the phone and dialed Schmidt's number in New Mexico. He picked up after the second ring.

"I hear things didn't go smoothly," he said. "I assume the bodies found in the medical offices were your work?"

Sufficiently chastened, Rand answered. "They were. We ran into some difficulties we hadn't expected."

"So I gathered."

"The man and the woman in the offices were looking for something. Michael took them to be a threat and dispatched them. I was in another room and couldn't get there in time."

“I’ll speak with him,” Schmidt offered. “In the meantime, I’d like to know what you found.”

Rand cleared her throat and took a sip of coffee. “It appears the FedEx package was routed to a Dr. Abraham Levy, or at least that’s what we assume given the presence of the two people in his office. We took all the paperwork we could find and the computer from his office. I’m in the process of going through it.”

“Find anything?” Schmidt asked.

“I haven’t gotten into the computer yet but his patient files may have something. On four of them, all women and all with some kind of cancer, there was a red “C” at the bottom of their operative report.”

“What are the patients’ names?”

“Hang on.” Rand set the receiver on the desktop and gathered the 4 files from the end of the bed. “Let’s see,” she said leafing through them. “Henrietta Worble, Ruth Goldman, Pearl Cunningham and Margaret Paxton. Those names mean anything to you?”

Schmidt rubbed his eyes. “One of them’s Jewish.”

“Yeah, I guess. So what?” Rand said impatiently

“To answer to your question, no. None of the names ring a bell. I’ll have some of my associates run them through the computer base to see if anything turns up. In the meantime, fax me a copy of these womens’ charts. I want to go through them myself.”

Emily Woodward sat Indian style on a chair in her home’s screened-in porch. Outside the rain fell to earth in a slow but steady drizzle. She was glad for the moisture, the past several weeks had been unusually dry, but her eyes were riveted to a large screen television. Woodward was sipping her favorite coffee blend but barely tasting it. With her satellite dish she could receive almost all the US stations. She had been surfing back and forth between the major affiliates in the Houston area. The morning news teams were providing intermittent updates on the killings in the Medical Center although none had much more to add than the others, or for that matter than what they’d said 10 minutes earlier. Woodward had not heard from either Price or Fielding as she was supposed to

and had resigned herself to the fact that this was one operation they wouldn't be returning from.

After about an hour her phone rang. "Hello?" she said.

"It's me." The voice on the other end of the line sounded defeated.

"Any news?"

"Nothing definitive. I've scoured their trail but haven't found anything. I think it's likely they're the ones in the office. I suppose they could have hopped a Southwest flight to Vegas but they don't seem the type."

"Yes," Woodward said softly. "I shouldn't think so." She turned to walk back into the house. "What do your sources tell you about the bodies?"

"Man and a woman, both nude."

Woodward stopped dead in her tracks. "Nude?" she asked.

"Yeah, nude," the man replied. "I don't think there was any hanky panky ongoing but then I suppose you would know them better than I did. It's more likely they were stripped at the scene to dispose of their belongings."

"What are the police saying about it?"

"Nothing. It was like pulling teeth to get what I did. These boys have got this thing bottled up tighter than Dan Rather's colon."

"I see." Woodward lit a cigarette as she paced the floor. "When will that change?"

"Not in the next 48 hours. After that, it depends on what they find."

"I assume you've gathered their materials?"

"Of course," the man said. "It will take the cops a few days to get around to their rooms but when they do, they won't find anything."

"Good." Woodward exhaled a stream of blue smoke. "Stay in the area for a while. Find out what you can from your contacts and we'll talk tomorrow."

Woodward hung up the phone and looked out a large plate glass window at the moisture on her garden plants.

How much of my hand do I reveal?

Peter Merk woke up to bright sunshine and cooler temperatures. A frontal system from the northwest had come through the night before lowering the thermometer and clearing the clouds from the skies. He usually loved this sort of weather but his mind was elsewhere. He still had not heard from Weincrantz and his change in proximity had only succeeded in making him more restless.

Merk's motel was on the eastern outskirts of Toronto. Traffic into the city would be bad until 9:00 A.M. so he sat in the coffee shop drinking hot tea and reading a new book on Christian discipleship his pastor had loaned him. After checking his watch and paying his bill, he returned to his room, stowed what few belongings had been unpacked and returned to his car.

While driving, Merk removed a small map of the city he carried in his briefcase. He slowly wound his way to the southern part of the city, making an occasional wrong turn to retrace his steps and assure himself he was reading the map correctly.

After an hour he found Weincrantz's building. It was thoroughly non-descript. An 8 story affair, it had provided the young man with a pleasant view of the lake; not that it would have mattered much since he was a raging workaholic. On one side of the structure was a small square with vendors in kiosks, well-manicured maple trees and a fountain in the center. Merk inspected the building's exterior as he slowly drove by. Nothing impressed him although he wasn't certain what he was expecting to see. He circled twice more before driving to an adjacent hotel and leaving his car with the attendant. Merk checked in, requesting a room with a view of the park and carried his own bag to his room. Looking out the window he had an unobstructed view of Weincrantz's former apartment building. Merk pulled a chair up close to the glass and commenced his vigil.

Daniel Mueller finished what he could before it was time to leave. Talking with Agent Girard had helped and he had calmed down by the time he departed. He returned again after lunch to finish the job. Around 4:00 P.M. Mueller emerged from the interrogation room and walked to Girard's desk.

"I think I'm done," he said.

"Great," Girard replied. "Let's see what you've got."

The two returned to the room and sat down at the table.

“Like I said this morning, there seem to be the three subsets of information. I wrote them down as best I could.” Mueller pointed to a ream of scribbling on legal pages.

Girard took the papers and began scanning them. The names listed were all of European extraction. The cities were, likewise, all from Western Europe. Most seemed to be larger towns with names the Agent recognized. The final list was the most extensive and consisted of the catalogued properties. Every conceivable form of asset was listed – jewelry, land, automobiles, art. The compilation went on for pages.

After looking at it for a few minutes Girard spoke. “Okay, Daniel, I think that will about do it. I really appreciate all the work you put in. I know that your time is valuable, particularly with your being a university student and all.” He gave the young man a big smile and squeezed his shoulder.

Mueller smiled weakly. “Sure. No problem.” He stood and reached for his jacket. “Oh, wait a minute. There was one other thing I forgot to write down. In the middle of reciting all these properties the speaker suddenly mentioned ‘Genesis 6:4’”

“What?”

“Yeah, I thought it was a little strange. He’s going on with this laundry list of stuff and then he just sort of blurted it out like it was part of what he was reading.”

“What does that passage refer to?”

Mueller shrugged his shoulders. “I know the scriptures reasonably well, but I can’t recite them all from memory.”

“Wait a minute,” Girard said leaving the room. He walked to a fellow agent’s desk. “Hey, Peter, you got a Bible around somewhere?”

“A Bible?” the man asked incredulously.

“Yeah, you know. The word of God. A Bible.”

The agent laughed. “No. Not on me. Check with Marie.”

“Thanks,” Girard said. He walked to the receptionist’s desk. The woman was writing furiously on a phone message slip. She signaled for him to wait until she was finished. After a brief moment she asked, “Okay, agent. What can I do for you?”

“Do you have a Bible?”

The woman turned her head to one side and smirked. “Interested saving our soul all of a sudden, are we?”

Girard rolled his eyes. “Do you or don’t you?” he asked impatiently.

“All right. All right,” she said holding her hands up. The receptionist reached into her purse and withdrew a well worn text with the words “Holy Bible” engraved on the front cover. She extended it towards him but then quickly withdrew it as he reached for the book. “I need this back, understand?”

“Of course you’ll get it back. I just have to look something up.”

Girard began leafing through the pages as he walked back to the interrogation room. “Here it is,” he said as he sat down at the table. He began to read out loud. “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.” Girard stared at the text for a few more moments. He squinted his eyes and looked at Mueller. “What’s a Nephilim?”

“I have no idea,” the young man said.

For the remainder of the day and much of the evening Peter Merk sat at the window looking down at the park and scanning the apartment building with his binoculars. Apart from the typical movement of people in their day to day lives, nothing much appeared to be happening. The kiosks were doing a brisk business, especially the man selling ice cream, something Merk found odd given the cool temperatures outside. Mothers pushed their babies through the concourse surrounding the fountain, couples sat on benches and looked longingly into each others eyes and at one point a man with an accordion played tunes for passersby, his instrument case open serving as a receptacle for tips.

The early evening produced an increased amount of foot traffic into and out of the apartment building. People returning home from work would enter, their arms laden with grocery sacs and packages, only to return several minutes later clad in jogging attire or being pulled by a dog on a leash. It was decidedly unremarkable giving Merk the impression he was in for a long period of surveillance. He fought the urge to go across the street and enter the building. Merk wasn’t willing to chance being spotted, at least

not now. He called room service for his dinner and turned on a tableside radio to the classical music station.

Grabel sat at his kitchen table eating a microwaved frozen dinner and pouring over the pages in front of him. Although he didn't know what all of it meant, he found it interesting nonetheless. There were no dates to be found but he was beginning to suspect Pewt had been right. A connection to the "Final Solution" of the Jews seemed increasingly plausible.

After finishing his meal, Grabel placed a call to Houston.

"Hello," Douglas answered.

"Loser," Grabel replied. "Got your mail packet."

"And?"

"I showed it to this computer geek I know who put it in a board, ran it through and printed it off."

"So what did he find?"

Grabel ignored the question for the moment. "Now, tell me again where you found this thing?"

"In our cadaver, Mrs. Doubtfire, next to her pacemaker. Why?"

"The material printed out a list of names, places and properties that's pretty extensive."

"Really?"

"Oh, it gets better. These names and places are all European. The list of property consists of just about every kind of valuable you can imagine. Pewt and I are wondering if this may be related to war crimes victims." Grabel paused for a moment. "Any of this make sense to you?"

"Not really."

"Was your cadaver Jewish?"

"I have no idea," Douglas confessed. "They don't tell us their names or any personal information about them. I suppose she could have been. More importantly, why would a cardiologist implant a chip containing that information into her chest?"

"Do you know who her cardiologist was?" Grabel asked.

“No.”

“Can you find out?”

“Not easily. I wasn’t supposed to have the chip in the first place. I can’t very well pipe up now and tell them that I sent part of my cadaver’s body to a friend at Vanderbilt who had it run through a computer and oh, by the way, do you know of any reason her cardiologist would have implanted evidence of 50 year old war crimes into her chest?”

“Well,” Grabel said. “One thing’s for sure. It didn’t get there by accident. Who ever put it there must have had a good reason.”

Sheila Rand sat at her hotel room desk going over the 4 patient charts with the red “C”. All had been patients of Levy’s evaluated for the first time during the previous spring or summer. Each had received a pacemaker but not of the same type and all lived within a 50 mile radius of the medical center. What was the connection to their cancers? An evaluation of other charts showed some with malignancies but that was to be expected, wasn’t it? After all, this was an older population and they were the ones most likely to develop a tumor. If there was something that connected these women together, it wasn’t obvious.

Rand lay was rubbing her temples when her cell phone rang.

“Hello?” she said.

“Miss Rand?” A voice asked.

“Who wants to know?”

The man on the other end of the line laughed. “I’m Dr. Alvin Jordan, at New York University. David Schmidt gave me your number and suggested I call.”

“I see,” she said.

“I was sent a copy of the clinic notes from Dr. Levy’s office. Mr. Schmidt asked that I look them over and give him, and you, my opinion.”

“I could certainly use the help.”

“I won’t take up much of your time. In short, it seems the four women in question all had cancer.”

“I know that,” Rand said flatly.

“What you may not know is that their malignancies were inoperable and ultimately will prove fatal.”

“I’m confused. You mean to tell me that none of these women can be treated?”

“Oh certainly. But their cancers weren’t what one would call run of the mill. Two have retroperitoneal leiomyosarcomas, another has a rhabdomyosarcoma and the final one ovarian carcinoma. All are typically difficult to detect until they are advanced and are rarely amenable to routine chemotherapy or radiation treatment. Pretty dismal prognosis,” the doctor said cavalierly. “Do you have any information as to their current status?”

“No. So why give them a pacemaker?” Rand asked.

“I suspect to improve their quality of life. All of these women are elderly and have probably opted not to take part in any experimental treatment protocols. They know they’ll die from their disease and since they have an ameliorable heart condition the pacemakers would have been implanted to keep whatever time they have left as enjoyable as possible.”

Rand thought for a moment. “So what kind of time frame is involved here, doctor?”

“It’s difficult to say. I would imagine we’re talking about months, maybe a year at the outside for each. When the symptoms caused by the cancers became too great, they would be treated with palliative therapy, pain control and the like, and possibly an intervention by hospice care but in any case they are what we call ‘short timers.’ They aren’t going to be around very long.”

Chapter 11

After Daniel Mueller left, Girard began searching the Internet for any information he could gather on the name Nephilim. He was surprised by the amount he found considering he'd never heard the term before. He had printed off a number of pages, reading them carefully and highlighting the important parts. The next morning he arrived at work with bloodshot eyes and a need for coffee. The first order of business was to bring Detective Messier up to speed on his investigation.

Girard sat in the Detective's office waiting for him to arrive. When he did, he seemed flustered. "You okay?" Girard asked.

Messier shrugged his shoulders. "Yeah. Departmental politics. What a pain." He sat down hard in the chair behind his desk and loosened his collar. "What have you got for me?"

Girard placed a ream of paperwork in front of Messier.

"What is this?" he asked.

"This is a copy of what was on the micro cassette I found at the bank in Warsaw. I had a Jewish divinity student come in yesterday and listen to it. Since it was in Hebrew I couldn't make heads or tails of it but he didn't seem to have much difficulty, at least not in translating it." Girard reached over and flipped through some of the papers. "The transcript falls into three categories. Names, places and a lengthy list of properties. I'm not completely certain but my hunch is that they have to do with Holocaust victims from occupied countries during World War II."

Messier displayed no outward reaction to Girard's hypothesis but began leafing through some of the pages and running his finger down the various entries. "All of this from that metal fragment the coroner found?" he said without glancing up.

"Yeah. And it gets better."

Messier looked at Girard with a slight scowl.

"The final words on the tape references a passage in the Bible, Genesis 6:4. The last page has the scripture written out."

Messier turned to the appropriate sheet, read it and looked up again. "What on earth are the Nephilim?"

“That’s what I worked on last night. The Internet is full of web sites that mention the Nephilim. Most of them are dedicated to a gothic rock band by the same name or this computer game sort of like Dungeons and Dragons. Since I’m guessing Weincrantz didn’t go in for that sort of thing I didn’t invest a lot of time on them. On the other hand, there were a number of references to a race of giants called the Nephilim. They’re mentioned one other place in the Old Testament, but nowhere else. Some of the comments I found also dealt with something called the Anakim, which were a similar race of large statured people. Supposedly they were some sort of fallen angels that at one time populated the earth and some of the authors I read think they may still be around or will be in the future.”

“So what’s the bottom line?” Messier asked tersely. He was beginning to squirm in his seat.

“I don’t know. I think the scriptural passage explains the ‘164’ under Weincrantz’s arm but what he meant by that is anyone’s guess.”

“You said you spoke with some people regarding the Holocaust. Can they shed any light on this list of names and places?”

“That’s the next step. As you know there are reparations underway in some countries to compensate Holocaust victims. Whether the people listed are among them, I don’t know. I’ll try to find out.”

Messier pushed his chair up closer to his desk and put on his reading glasses.

“It seems you’ve encountered more than just a routine suicide.” His voice sounded almost disappointed.

Justin Douglas hadn’t slept well the night before. In addition to the workload of being a first year medical student, the computer chip and printout had arrived in the mail from Paul Grabel. Its quick return from his friend had been unsettling. He had gone over its contents briefly. Little of it made sense to him but it certainly wasn’t what he had expected. Obviously, Mrs. Doubtfire’s cardiologist, or someone associated with her pacemaker implantation, had placed it there for a reason and presumably at some point was expecting to retrieve it. Given the nature of what it contained Douglas was convinced he had stumbled on to something he wasn’t supposed to find. Just who would

be looking for it worried him most of all. If they knew all the extraneous materials from the dissection would be collected and turned over to the family, when they discovered it wasn't there it wouldn't take them long to assume where it went. He and the other members of the class assigned to the cadaver would be suspect first and he had an idea that Douglas didn't want to meet up with whoever would be sent to "interview" him.

There were several ways to extract himself from this mess. He could go forward, turn over the chip and hope the medical school showed mercy on him. He had committed no infractions during his brief time of enrollment and so far as he knew, he was in good standing with the university. Still, he had heard rumors of a similar incident 2 years earlier in which a student had absconded with a bullet from the chest of a Korean War veteran. That student, or so the scuttlebutt went, had been summarily dismissed. Going forward with the chip seemed like a risky proposition.

On the other hand, he could keep all of this to himself and hope to ride out whatever storm would ensue. That seemed even riskier.

Finally, he could wait for the appropriate time, deposit the chip in Mrs. Doubtfire's bucket and hope that Dr. Calmont wouldn't notice. This seemed like the best solution. The only downside would be if Calmont had intermittently catalogued the bucket's contents. The man wasn't an idiot. While the chip was small, it was substantive enough to notice and he would surely realize that it hadn't been there previously.

His mind troubled and his slumber interrupted, Douglas got out of bed at 5:30 A.M. There was no use continuing to lie there. He wouldn't go back to sleep. He walked into the kitchen and turned on the coffeepot. After sitting and drinking most of a cup another idea came to mind. He could place the chip under some part of the anatomy in the cadaver's chest, let one of the other students find it and he'd be off the hook. No one would be the wiser and since it was relatively small the notion that it was simply missed during earlier dissections would be sufficiently plausible.

Douglas smiled to himself. It was the perfect plan.

Sheila Rand returned to her room from the hotel sauna in time to hear her cell phone going off. From the number on the readout she knew it was Schmidt.

"I assume Dr. Jordan got in touch with you," Schmidt said.

“Yeah, he did,” Rand replied. “It seems each of the patients have some sort of terminal cancer. I’m in the process of tracking them down.”

“You can stop. An associate of mine already did that. There’s an email waiting for you with an attachment containing all the particulars. Three of them are alive but the fourth, the Jew, Ruth Goldman, is dead. Passed away about 3 months ago. I want you to find the body.”

Rand stopped toweling off. “What?” she asked.

“Did you not hear me? I want you to find the body.”

“Why?”

Several hundred miles away, David Schmidt removed his reading glasses and rubbed his eyes. Why can’t they just do as they’re told? “There’s something about these 4 women. Some link. From what I’m told, they have nothing in common apart from their having been under the care of Dr. Levy and possessing a terminal illness. All of them had orders in their charts that in the event their heart and/or lungs failed they were not to be resuscitated. To wit, there would have been no surgical intervention and, most importantly, no autopsy. Do you see where I’m headed with this?”

“Not really.”

“Let’s assume Levy is the lynchpin in this scenario. He’s entrusted with information he doesn’t want disclosed, at least not right away. Where better to hide it than inside his patients’ bodies? If Levy implanted something like a piece of plastic or metal containing a code number who would ever think to look there? He selects patients with terminal malignancies – they won’t be around long and when they die there won’t be an autopsy. Whenever someone needed to obtain this item they would have only to dig up the body and either take it then and there or transport the corpse somewhere else to do the same.”

“What if they were going to be cremated?”

“Well, that would be a problem then, wouldn’t it?” Schmidt replied sarcastically. “What I need from you for the time being is to find out what burial arrangements these women have made and, where the late Ms. Goldman now resides.”

“All right, but it may take me some time.”

“Make it a short. My colleagues are getting anxious.”

Lieutenant Jeff Rook had returned to his office in downtown Houston at the Police Plaza. He had been at a luncheon honoring citizens who had risked their lives in service to their fellow man, or the “Bonehead” club as he liked to call it. Each year the Houston League of Patriots, a group of middle age to octogenarian women with endless free time and bottomless bank accounts, held a luncheon recognizing men and women throughout the Houston area who had gone out on a limb, some quite literally, to aid another in need. Rook referred to them as “boneheads” since most of them remained alive by sheer luck and the good graces of God who, for whatever reason, allowed them to live another day. The Lieutenant often wondered why the women never mentioned the scores of people who had attempted to enjoin other foolhardy rescue attempts and had paid for it with their lives. The first few years he thought the luncheon rather odd. Now, he just dreaded it.

Rook was a native of the area. He had grown up in Dickinson, a town most noted for the Texas City explosion in 1947. He had attended the University of Houston ultimately deciding to enter law enforcement. A family friend advised him to obtain a masters degree before applying, that the additional education would aid him in the future as he sought promotion. They had been correct. While initially assigned to graveyard duty in the worst part of town, he quickly passed the various service exams and by the time of his 40th birthday he was the youngest lieutenant in the Houston Police force.

Upon entering his office, the squad room secretary waved him over and handed him several slips of paper containing the names and numbers of people who had phoned while he was out. Two he recognized but the third was to an area code he wasn't familiar with. The mystery call intrigued him the most. Rook sat down at his desk and dialed the number. He was scanning his day planner when the other end of the line picked up.

“Thank you for returning my call, lieutenant.”

The caller's accent was Scottish but Rook didn't recognize the voice.

“How is your mother?”

The Lieutenant's stomach dropped as he ceased reading the pages in front of him. The caller had quickly captured his attention.

Rook's parents were immigrants, specifically from the south of London. As young teenagers, both had survived the Blitz, but had lost their parents to the German bombing. They met at a small rural orphanage in Kent where other children had been taken to avoid the hostilities. While it wasn't love at first sight, it was close enough and they married 3 years later. With minimal extended family they had little reason to remain in England. They emigrated to the US in the early 1950's eventually settling in Texas, a place much ballyhooed by GI's the couple had met during the war. Tony Rook, Jeff's father, found work on the waterfront in Galveston and his wife, Violet, got a job in a fabric store until she announced she was pregnant with Jeff. The Rooks were a proud family and while they took adoringly to their adopted country, they remained steadfastly British, never becoming United States citizens.

In 1993 Tony Rook retired from his job at the docks. After only 3 months he suffered a heart attack and died before he could be taken to the hospital. It was a devastating blow to Jeff and his mother. Already in precarious health, Violet's state deteriorated rapidly. With Tony's retirement their health insurance had lapsed and not being United States citizens they were ineligible for Medicare or Medicaid. A check up by her family doctor discovered she was in the late stages of kidney failure. A transplant represented her only hope for long term survival.

Jeff and his mother scoured the available options for her. Obtaining health insurance, at any cost, was impossible. Her pre-existing condition precluded any company from offering a policy. After further testing it was determined that Jeff could donate a kidney but his insurance company wouldn't reimburse the expenses.

One day in his mail, Jeff received a letter from an institution in Michigan calling itself Available Angels. Inside was a check for \$100,000 with a hand written note attesting to the validity of the money and informing Jeff that a wealthy woman on their board had gotten wind of his plight and made available the funds for his mother to have a kidney transplant. It was an answer to prayer. Jeff contacted the organization trying to find out more but received little information other than that included with the note. The philanthropic woman held an interest in helping immigrants with life threatening health conditions and that a board had reviewed Violet's case before donating the money. Unwilling to look a gift horse in the mouth, Jeff cashed the check and waited for a few

weeks to be certain it had cleared. When it did, he told his mother what had happened. Three weeks later Violet Rook received her kidney transplant and experienced a relatively uneventful recovery.

In the back of his mind, Jeff suspected there might be some sort of downside to having accepted the money but his situation had afforded him few options. Over the years, he had done his best to expunge the event from his memory.

“She’s fine,” he answered cautiously. “I presume you’re the one who helped provide the money for her transplant.”

“Something like that. I’m glad she’s well.”

“I suppose I should thank you, considering all you did.”

“You could, but it wouldn’t be necessary. I’ve been supremely blessed and enjoy giving back.”

Rook paused for a moment before responding. “I hope you don’t think me ungrateful, but was there a reason for your calling, particularly after all this time?”

The caller laughed. “Not at all lieutenant. I suppose a healthy degree of suspicion is an occupational hazard in your line of work. You likely wouldn’t have risen as far as you have without it. Actually, I was wondering if you might do me a favor?”

Here it is Rook thought. “What might that be?”

“I need someone to procure some information for me.”

“Regarding what?”

“Regarding the deaths of those people in the Medical Center a few nights ago.”

Philip LeBoit made the call to the United States from his office in Paris.

“Agent Girard here.”

“Martin. Good to speak with you again.”

Girard recognized the voice immediately. “I’m surprised you’re calling me back so quickly. I assume you received the faxes I sent you?”

“Absolutely. That’s why I’m ringing. I pushed aside everything on my desk for the past 48 hours and have been looking over your treasure trove. Quite a find on your part. Where, exactly, did you get this information?”

“It’s a long story. I discovered a micro cassette in a safety deposit box in Warsaw, New York. I had its contents translated into English.”

“Well, it certainly made for fascinating reading,” LeBoit responded. “I ran as many of the names down as I could find.”

“And?”

“Many of them are French. Some are from Belgium and the Netherlands as well as other countries. Those names will take a bit longer, I’m afraid.”

“Do they mean anything to you?”

“Not to me personally, but almost all appeared in a database of families deported by the Nazis during the war. None are alive, so far as I could determine. That isn’t too surprising but what I found fascinating was the list of properties.” LeBoit paused to light his pipe. “It seems some of the articles belonged to families on your list.”

“What do you mean some of it?”

“Well, most items don’t match up at all. For instance, your compilation mentions a well known collection of Roman and Greek coins from the 2nd century BC, which we know belonged to a Jewish family in Rotterdam. Their name doesn’t appear on the material you sent me. Whereas, there were a few works of art from two families in Lyon which are listed.”

“How much of the property were you able to match to a name?”

“Less than 5 percent. But then again, I haven’t gone over all of it,” LeBoit added hastily.

Girard thought for a moment. “Are some of the articles around somewhere? I mean, of the art works, are any of them in museums or private collections?”

“That’s something else that’s odd. I gave an acquaintance of mine a truncated list of the missing items. She wasn’t able to find any credible evidence that any of it has surfaced. Portions of one stamp collection might have been available in a Japanese auction a decade ago, but apart from that, nothing. We’ve simply no idea where any of it had disappeared to.”

“Well, thanks for your help, Phillip. I appreciate all the time you’ve spent on this. I know you probably have other things to do.”

From 6,000 miles away LeBoit laughed gently into the telephone receiver. “Oh, it was nothing. I enjoyed the sleuthing around. Sort of like my old days when I did more than shuffle papers. Call me again if I can help.”

Rand used her access to Nexus Search trolling for Ruth Goldman’s obituary. The search itself took less than a minute but it spit out close to a hundred citations. Culling through them was time consuming. After about half an hour Rand found what she was looking for. On Saturday, August 5th the Houston Post published a brief obituary on Ruth Goldman of Bellaire, an upscale section of Houston and home to a large Jewish community. Gathering Goldman’s chart she checked some of the particulars in the obit eventually satisfying herself that this was indeed the Ruth Goldman in Dr. Levy’s files. The body had been cared for by one of the local mortuaries. Rand found their phone number in the yellow pages and called.

“Bellaire Funeral Home. May I help you?”

“Yes,” Rand began. “I’m looking for some information about my aunt, Ruth Goldman. I understand that yours was the funeral home handling the arrangements.”

“Let me put you through to one of our associates,” the woman said.

After a few minutes of dirge-like Muzac on the phone, a man answered. “This is Richard Homan. May I help you?”

Rand repeated her request.

“Do you know when that would have been?”

“Sometime in early August.”

“Let me look it up.” In the background Rand could hear the clicking of a computer keyboard. “Oh, yes. Here it is. Ruth Goldblum. We had a very nice service for her here on June 6th of this year.”

“Could you tell me where the body was buried?”

“It wasn’t,” Mr. Homan responded.

“It wasn’t?”

“No ma’am. She requested that her remains be donated to the University of Texas Medical School here in town for use in their anatomy classes.”

Rand was surprised. That the woman's body could be anywhere besides a cemetery or mausoleum had not occurred to her.

"I see. When will she be interred then?"

"Probably not until sometime this summer, when the school year is finished. The medical school will contact us, we'll obtain the remains from them and then notify the family." The man hesitated to take a breath. "It's not a particularly common occurrence but certainly one we're familiar with."

"I assume there's no provision for any family members to view the body during the time that the school has it?"

Now it was Homan's turn to be perplexed. "Well, actually, no. I'm not sure we've ever had a request like that before but I know the stipulations of the school state the remains are the property of the institution until the term is finished. During that time the body is off limits other than to authorized personnel."

"Alright. I appreciate your time and candor," Rand said. "I have just one other question. My aunt had this gorgeous ring that I always admired. Unfortunately, she had put on some weight in her later years and had been unable to remove it. We had joked that after her death she would let someone cut it off and I could have it. Will the ring be part of the remains you mentioned? I mean, nothing will happen to it during the dissections will it?"

Homan laughed. "Oh, no. Things such as that are collected from the bodies, stored and later returned to the family."

"So no one will take it?"

"Not likely. The medical and osteopathic schools take these matters very seriously so I think you have little to be worried about. However, if you like I'm sure you could contact the university and voice your concerns."

"Well, thank you very much, Mr. Homan. You've been a big help. Goodbye."

Rand set the phone receiver down and chewed on the end of her pen.

Chapter 12

Peter Merk was about to go stir crazy. He'd sat in front of the window of his hotel room looking down at the park and adjacent apartment building for almost 48 hours and was seeing nothing now he hadn't witnessed seemingly a thousand times before. Merk had taken an occasional walk around the area to stretch his legs, always being careful to suppress his urge to visit Weincrantz's apartment. He'd even gone so far as to sit in the park and eat ice cream from the vendor near the fountain. Still, he'd seen no sign of Weincrantz. If the man was around, he wasn't visible.

Finally, he'd had enough. Although he had told himself he wouldn't try to visit the apartment until having observed it for at least 72 hours he was at his breaking point. Putting on his hat and sunglasses, he made his way to the hotel lobby, out the side entrance and onto the street.

Patience was an attribute Peter Merk had refined to a science in his job of financial investing but it hadn't translated well into in his newfound avocation of sleuthing. He sat on a bench in the park looking at the various passersby while he drank a cup of Starbucks coffee. After assuring himself no one was watching, Merk stood, strolled to the front entrance to the apartment building and walked to the bank of elevators. He knew from their correspondence that Weincrantz's residence was on the 7th floor in flat number 6.

Merk was relieved to find himself alone on the elevator. When it stopped at the 7th floor he exited, removed his sunglasses and looked down the hallway. A young woman was walking towards him with a black Labrador retriever on a leash, obviously intent on a brisk walk. Merk replaced his sunglasses, avoiding eye contact as the two passed him. When he looked back up he saw the number 6 on a door twenty feet away. He walked deliberately towards it grateful he had found it so quickly.

Adjacent to the doorframe was a call button and Merk pushed it. Inside the dwelling he could hear the buzz but no one came to the door, at least not that he could hear. He punched the button again this time leaving it engaged for a full 10 seconds. Still, no one answered. He put his ear to the door but heard nothing.

Merk considered knocking but decided it was pointless. He was about to leave but on a whim he grasped the doorknob and twisted. To his surprise, the device produced an audible click as the mechanism disengaged. The door swung open and Merk walked into the apartment.

It was dark inside. Despite the bright sun outdoors Merk found himself practically blind. He closed the door behind him and stood silently for a moment allowing his eyes to adjust and listening for any sign of life within the dwelling.

Merk's pulse was racing. He was reasonably certain he was alone but was also aware he didn't know Weincrantz well. Considering what was at stake, it was possible the man was crouching somewhere with a gun ready to blow his head off.

After a few seconds it became clear why the rooms were so dark. Weincrantz had installed thick curtains over the windows effectively blocking out all but a few rays of sunlight.

"Mr. Weincrantz?" Merk said softly. "It's Peter Merk."

He took a few steps down the hall being careful not to make too much noise. The apartment smelled stale, as though it had been empty for some time. Merk advanced a few more feet.

"I've been trying to contact you for almost a month."

Merk's heart felt like it was going to jump out of his chest.

On the rooftop of a warehouse across the park a man stood behind a ventilator shaft looking through a high-powered riflescope at the windows of an otherwise unremarkable apartment building. He had trained the cross hairs of the device on the 7th floor, 3rd and 4th windows from the left.

Merk was slowly working his way down the hall. The few shafts of visible light were barely enough for him to navigate. Every 20 seconds or so he paused to listen for any sign of movement in the apartment. He repeatedly called out Weincrantz's name, appealing for an answer but never receiving one.

At the end of the hall was a small living room and a kitchenette. The streams of light escaping from between the curtains illuminated the dust dancing lazily through the

room. Merk regretted forgetting the one thing that might have proven useful for his amateur detective work – a flashlight. Without it, he would be hard pressed to find much of anything in the place. His entreaties to Wiencrantz had gone unanswered leaving Merk to assume he indeed wasn't home. This slowed his heart rate a bit but his stomach was still in knots. He called to the owner once more and after receiving no answer decided to turn the lights on.

He flipped the switch up but nothing happened.

Merk searched for another light panel. Spotting one near the kitchenette he tested the various switches along the wall. Again, nothing. Realizing he would be unable to search the premises without better illumination, he walked to the window casement on the far wall.

The curtains had been hung with minimal concern for esthetics. The fabric was thick and dark. It had obviously been chosen more for its substance than ambience.

Merk grasped the two sides of the drapes and pulled. The fabric parted easily as the rings slid laterally along the wooden curtain rod. He glanced at the park square below him. Merk was turning to renew his search of the apartment when the glass in front of him exploded. A large caliber bullet slammed into his forehead snapping his head back and lifting him off his feet. His body fell awkwardly to the floor. Unconscious, his breathing slowed and within 30 seconds Merk's heart stopped.

The man on the opposite rooftop dismantled his rifle before packing it deliberately into a metal briefcase. When he had reached the building's stairwell he removed his cell phone, dialed a number and waited for it to pick up.

"Done," he said and flipped the cover back into place.

After retrieving the email from her computer, Sheila Rand began her research. She called all three names on the list posing as an associate with a mortuary doing cold calls. To her surprise, each of the women was pleasant and cooperative, seemingly content with their decisions not to undertake aggressive chemotherapy or radiation treatments. All had picked out a funeral home and made arrangements for their remains. None were to be cremated.

Satisfied she had accomplished her assignment, she searched the phone book for the University of Texas Medical School at Houston. Rand found the main number and dialed it. A woman answered, her voice belying a keen disinterest in her chosen profession. She quickly transferred the call to an appropriate extension.

“Department of Anatomy,” a young woman said.

“Hello,” Rand began. “I’m a relative of Ruth Goldblum, one of the cadavers in your anatomy labs. I was wondering if I could speak with someone about her remains.”

“Let me put you through to Dr. Calmont, he’s the professor in charge. Maybe he can help you.”

Rand went back on hold while her ear was filled with the hourly NPR news update. Eventually, a man’s voice came on the other end of the line.

“This is Dr. Calmont,” he said.

“This is going to sound crazy,” Rand began, “My aunt, Ruth Goldblum, is one of the cadavers in your anatomy lab. She had a ring which is a family heirloom and had been unable to remove it from her finger for some years. None of my family has any idea what happened to it so I’m assuming it’s still with her body. What is the procedure for getting it back?”

The professor repeated essentially everything the funeral director had said. Her aunt’s body would be carefully supervised and he would personally see to it that she, like all the other corpses in his charge, would have all the foreign materials collected, catalogued and returned to the family.

“Is there anyway I could retrieve her ring before the end of the term?” Rand asked.

“No ma’am. I’m sorry, there’s not.”

“Why?”

“The University has a policy that nothing will be released to the families until the course is completed and the dissections have been finalized and signed off on. If we returned materials early for one family we’d have to do it for everyone.”

“But I’m only asking for a single item!”

“I’m sorry,” Calmont said firmly. “A few years ago there was a similar request by a family member concerning a body under study at UT Galveston. Somewhere along

the line, the wrong materials were released and as you can imagine the trouble it created. After that, all 4 medical schools in the UT system agreed on a uniform policy regarding such matters. It was to require families to wait until the end of the term when everyone gets everything back at the same time.”

Rand could tell from the man’s voice he had no intention of suspending the rules for her convenience. “Alright, then. I appreciate your time,” she said before hanging up.

Martin Girard stood over the prone body of a young man lying dead in the hall of Julian Weincrantz’s old apartment.

“Some kind of bad karma?” one of the uniformed officers asked.

Girard looked up. “I guess so. Any idea who this fellow is?”

The officer consulted his clipboard. “His wallet and passport have the name Peter Merk on them. Says he lives in Tucson, Arizona. He’s also got a pass card for the hotel across the street.”

“Uh-huh,” Girard grunted. Using a ball point pen he lifted the man’s coat from his chest.

“Looks like he just let himself in through the front door.”

“It was unlocked?” Girard asked.

“Apparently so. There’s no evidence of any forced entry.”

Girard stood and looked at the shattered remains of the window. Below, the crowd, which had gathered in the park, had all but dispersed and things were beginning to return to their normal routine. In the distance, Girard could see men roaming the top of the adjacent warehouse.

The uniformed officer noted the agent looking in the distance. “Apparently, the shot that downed him came from the rooftop across the park.”

“Ya think?” Girard asked sarcastically.

The officer shrunk back, stung by the rebuke.

“I’m sorry,” Girard said shaking his head. “Bad morning. Didn’t mean to take it out on you.”

The officer smiled weakly and shrugged his shoulders. “It happens.”

“It seems to be happening a lot more lately,” Girard muttered. “Anything disturbed in the apartment?”

“Not that we’ve seen. Doesn’t appear he was here all that long.”

“Are there uniforms at the hotel?” Girard asked.

“I think so.”

“Fine. I’ll be over there. Have your sergeant fax me over a copy of your report when you’re done, will you?”

“Sure thing,” the man replied.

This is getting bizarre, Girard thought.

Chapter 13

Jeff Rook sat down behind his desk shifting the phone receiver to his other ear. “You realize I can’t very well give you that information, even if I had it available, which I don’t.”

“Oh, I think you could. Besides, I’m in a bit of a fix here, almost to the point of desperation and as I’m sure you know, desperate people do desperate things.”

“Threatening me isn’t going to help your cause,” Rook replied.

“I don’t think you’ll find me much for threats, Lieutenant. Let me give you a bigger overview of what I’m dealing with and perhaps you’ll change your mind.”

Woodward spent three minutes explaining her situation. Her story was good, almost unbelievable. Rook listened with rapt attention, soaking up each word.

“You spin a good tale,” he said. “But I’m afraid I’m not going to be able to help you.”

“Well, that’s unfortunate. I was so hoping not to have to bring about any outside scrutiny into your life but I suppose you know best what your limits are.”

“Meaning what?”

“Meaning an IRS audit of your finances would raise some questions wouldn’t it? The money you received for your mother’s transplant. There were no taxes paid on it.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because I’m holding a copy of your tax return as we speak. I’m certainly no expert on financial matters but it would seem to me your failure to declare that \$100,000 would be something the IRS might want explained to them.”

“Charitable gifts for health care expenses don’t require taxes to be paid on them.” Rook could feel his face getting flushed.

“What charitable gift?”

“The \$100,000 you just mentioned!”

“How was that a gift?”

“It came through Available Angels.”

Woodward paused to light a cigarette. “Well, that’s a bit of a sticky point. You see, it might be difficult to obtain much information regarding their status as a charity.”

“I called some fellow about that money the same day I received it.”

“And who would that be?”

“You know full well who it was!” Rook replied angrily.

“I’m afraid I don’t and as for Available Angels there is no evidence they exist now or have existed in the past.”

Rook was flummoxed. The taxes and penalties alone would bankrupt him and that didn’t even account for the jail time associated with such infractions. His career and pension would vanish into thin air. “I think it can be explained to the satisfaction of the authorities.”

“I’m sure the IRS is abundant with understanding and compassionate auditors but then there’s the matter of your offshore accounts, money markets in Belize, etc.”

“What!”

“Oh, you weren’t aware of those? Funny, I would have thought they would be sending you regular statements. Must have been an oversight on their part. At any rate, as you said, perhaps the IRS will be satisfied with your position on the matter.”

Rook had heard enough. He slammed the receiver down and sank back in his chair. *If this woman can do everything she claims, I’m dead meat.*

Sheila Rand called Schmidt after she got off the phone with Dr. Calmont. While he was pleased with what she had uncovered, he remained concerned about what might or might not be present in the artifacts removed from Ruth Goldblum’s body.

“You’ll have to obtain the materials in his possession,” Schmidt said.

“Well, he’s not going to budge. I’ve got a pretty good read on this fellow. He’s a straight arrow. Bending the rules isn’t in his nature.”

“Convince him that breaking the rules would be in his best interests.”

Rand closed her eyes and shook her head. This operation was becoming messier by the day. “I can certainly do that but again, I don’t think it’s likely to come to much.”

“People are capable of amazing feats when they’re properly motivated,” Schmidt replied. “Look, Miss Rand, while I can’t divulge the entire picture, I can assure you there

are going to be substantial consequences if Goldblum's body does contain something useful and it falls into the wrong hands. We've paid you quite well over the years and will continue to do so in the future. However, if this house of cards comes crashing down, the people I represent will have no qualms about cleaning house. As such, unemployment will become the least of your worries. Am I making myself clear?"

"Crystal," Rand answered through her teeth. She despised being threatened.

"Good then," Schmidt said with an air of cheeriness in his voice. "I would suggest you do a background evaluation of Dr. Calmont and find out where his pressure points lay. If he still refuses to cooperate, he'll have to be dealt with more pointedly. You have 48 hours to obtain the materials from the late Mrs. Goldblum. Call me when you've accomplished it."

Agent Girard spent the remainder of the day perusing the crime scene and interviewing workers in the adjacent hotel. No one knew much about their guest other than his name. Investigators found a second passport in the false bottom of the man's carry on bag. It bore a different name, address and nationality. In fact, it was from a different country altogether, Paraguay.

From the state of the room the man had spent the better part of his time looking out the window. His camera, equipped for long distance photography had barely been used. He never visited the swimming pool, observation deck or exercise facilities. All his meals had been brought to the room. He'd received no phone calls nor made any. In short, apart from his penchant for surveying twenty-first century urban North America there were no indications as to why he had been in Toronto.

Girard walked back across the street to the apartment building. The uniformed officers on the scene were finishing their work. After reviewing their results and speaking briefly with the officer on site he removed his cell phone and placed a call to Roger Baran. Not surprisingly, he picked up after the first ring.

"Roger, this Martin Girard."

"What did I do now?" Baran asked hesitantly.

"Nothing. I have a task for you."

“Sure. Anything. You name it, it’s done.” There was obvious relief in the man’s voice.

“Put a brake on the sycophant routine,” Girard said with irritation. “There’s a body coming down to the morgue. The guy’s name is Peter Merk. He was killed in Julian Weincrantz’s apartment. I want you to go over him with a fine tooth comb like you did with Weincrantz. Got it?”

“No problem. Anything in particular you want me to look for?”

Girard watched as Merk’s body was rolled out the door. “Not really but you might want to do another x-ray like with Weincrantz. See if he’s got any metal fragments in him as well.”

“What do I tell the higher ups about the expense of the radiography?”

“Tell them I told you to do it. I’ll take the heat if there is any.”

“Okay. I’ll get on it the minute his body hits the table.”

Girard hung up the phone as he made his way to the elevators. After a brief walk in front of the park he took the stairs to the rooftop of the abandoned warehouse. Upon reaching the final landing he was out of breath and beginning to sweat. I have got to get back in the gym he told himself. Several officers were milling about as well as a young Asian man with a windbreaker identifying himself as a member of the Crime Scene Unit. Girard replaced his sunglasses as he walked towards him.

“Find anything?” he asked.

The man looked up and shaded his eyes. “Not much. Just some footprints that appear fresh. No shell casings. Looks like either a professional hit or one from someone who knew how to clean up after themselves. We’re dusting for prints but I doubt we’ll find any.”

“Keep me posted,” Girard said as he walked away.

Lieutenant Rook left the office later than normal. On the drive home he called his wife informing her of his impending delayed arrival. She asked him to stop and pick up some milk. Rook had pulled into the parking lot of a convenience store and was about to exit his car when the phone went off. Assuming it was his wife requesting additional items to be purchased Rook flipped the phone on without looking at the caller id number.

“Need something else?” His voice belied a man tired and irritable. It had been a long day.

“Just the information we spoke of earlier,” the caller replied.

Rook recognized the voice. He sat back down in his seat and closed the car door. “How did you get this number?”

“Now do you really think overcoming such an obstacle would have been all that difficult?”

“Well, if you have contacts in such high places then why bother me about the killings in the Medical Center?” Rook considered hanging up but realized whether he liked it or not the woman had some incriminating issues hanging over his head.

Annoying her wouldn't be in his best interest.

“Even I have some limitations, lieutenant.”

“So what do you want? As I said, I can't help you.”

“Yes. I recall. However, before we were cut off I wanted to tell you I'm going to be ringing back in the morning for your final answer. Let you have a chance to sleep on it and all. My preference would not be to complicate your life but I'm in a bit of a bind here and time is running short. In the end, I think you and I want the same thing. I'm certain I can give you useful information about the killings placing you in an advantageous position with your superiors and of course, all of our discussions will be confidential. You certainly don't have to worry about me creating any problems for you in the future.”

Rook rubbed his eyes. “How do I know I can trust you?”

Woodward laughed. “I suppose you don't. In the years since your mother received her transplant there have been several times I could have used your help. Twisted your arm for information I required. But I didn't. I had other people who could do the job without involving you. However, at this juncture I have run out of options and am calling in a marker.”

Rook hated that a perfect stranger had put him in such a position but did feel a twinge of indebtedness. After all, until he had received the check for his mother's transplant surgery he'd had no real hope of making it a reality. And the woman was, for the most part, gracious on the phone.

“I’ll let you know in the morning what my decision is,” Rook replied and turned his cell phone off.

You idiot. You already know what your answer is going to be.

Sheila spent the rest of the day gathering background information on Dr. Calmont. Nothing jumped out at her. He appeared to be just another state employee slowly moving up the food chain in his chosen profession. Calmont had no discernable weaknesses. His credit cards were paid off. There weren’t any charges to strip clubs or gambling junkets. The mortgage was modest and always paid on time. Nothing to suggest any marital hanky-panky. The man even went to church each week! He was the quintessential straight arrow. Perhaps if she had a bit more time she could have trailed him and learned more but that wasn’t a luxury at her disposal. She needed the items from Goldblum’s body by the day after tomorrow. A direct approach was her only real option.

The next day was dedicated to putting things in motion. Rand drove to the Medical Center, parked in one of the massive parking structures and found the offices of the anatomy department. She kept a low profile, being careful not to speak with anyone who might recognize her later. After half an hour she located Calmont’s office. Whether he was in or not wasn’t apparent and she didn’t attempt to find out. Tomorrow she’d make her run at the man but there were still tasks to accomplish today.

Rand sat in her car on the top floor of the parking garage her laptop computer plugged into the cigarette lighter. With its wireless capabilities she was able to access all the necessary databases. Finding out the make, model and license plate number for his car took some time but the day was a pretty one and Rand had the windows open enjoying the breeze. After obtaining the information she began a slow cruise of the parking structure looking for the vehicle. Careful to make it appear she was seeking a parking spot, Rand occasionally pulled into a space for a few minutes and used her binoculars to scan the rows of parked vehicles. Finally, on the 4th floor she spotted a late model blue Toyota Camry parked against the far wall.

Having found what she came for, Rand left the structure and drove to the airport rental car agency. She returned her vehicle and walked around the corner to a different

company. This time, however, she used a new name and address. After the shuttle bus had dropped her off at her car she returned to her hotel and checked out.

Girard sat at his desk lost in his study of the various pieces of paper before him. If he ever thought the death of Julian Weincrantz had been a simple suicide that notion had long since dissipated. The second body and the manner in which he had been killed convinced Girard something dark was unfolding. Someone, somewhere was fearful of people talking.

The phone rang on Girard's desk startling him from a momentary daydream. It was Roger Baran, the Coroner's Office genuflection champion.

"Agent Girard?" he asked.

"Yes, Roger? You have any thing for me?"

"I've been evaluating this body that landed down here, Mr. Merk."

"And?"

"Well, you told me to go over him real carefully, which I've done, and about the only thing I was able to find was some tattooing."

Girard's forehead furrowed. "Where?"

"Well, actually between his toes. Never saw one there before but then I suppose there's a first time for everything. Last week we had this hooker with..."

"I'm not interested in that," Girard interrupted. "What does the tattoo look like?"

"It's between the 2nd and 3rd toes on the left and is the same three digit number – '164'."

"Have you scanned the body with an x-ray yet?" Girard inquired.

"Just got finished with it. From what I can tell there doesn't seem to be any foreign material like with the other body."

"What if something was planted in the body that wasn't metal, would the x-ray still be able to pick it up?"

"It depends. So far I haven't seen anything like that but I can go over him again."

"I'd appreciate it. Keep me informed," Girard said as he hung up the phone.

Jeff Rook had slept poorly. He had decided not to tell his wife about the phone calls figuring they would only upset her. She could tell something was bothering him though. Several times during the evening she'd come to him and asked what was wrong. He'd side stepped the issue, telling her it was internal politics at the office. After the third inquiry she'd dropped the matter. His alarm went off as usual at 5:30 but Rook was already awake. After showering and eating breakfast, he kissed his wife and sleeping kids goodbye before heading into the office.

As he pulled into his parking space his cell phone went off. Rook didn't even bother looking at the LED screen.

"You don't waste any time, do you?" he asked.

"Not if I can help it," the woman's voice responded. "So what's the word, Lieutenant?"

Rook turned off the ignition switch on his car. "I suppose I don't have a lot of choice."

"Splendid," the woman said cheerily. "You won't be sorry. I need the particulars about the three deaths in the medical office building. Two of them will have the names of Kelli Price and Jason Fielding. The other.."

"What do you mean 'will have the names'? Are those their real names or not?"

"Yes. At least they are now. They were officially changed several years ago. I could unearth their original names, but for legal purposes that is what they were at their deaths. The security guard I know nothing about and I doubt there's much there. As many details about their circumstances as you can obtain would be useful including the ballistics reports and whatever else was found at the scene."

"I suppose you need this information like, yesterday. Is that correct?"

"Very much so. I will be calling each day about 6:00 P.M. your time for an update."

"Uh-huh," Rook said blandly. "Any way you could tell me how you know all of this stuff?"

"In good time. I'll turn over as much information as you need. Trust me, when your superiors see how much you're contributing to this case, they'll promote you on the spot."

“I can’t wait,” Rook said sarcastically. “I’ll make some calls this morning to see what I can find out. Hopefully, I’ll have something for you when you call this afternoon.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant.”

Being manipulated gnawed at Rook. He was being played and at a dangerous game no less. Her assertion that he’d be seen in a favorable light by his superiors was tempting, and he had little reason to doubt the woman would be able to pull it off, but he was about to begin calling in favors and spending that sort of capital bothered him.

After arriving in his office and getting a cup of coffee he called the desk sergeant on duty in the building. “When Detective Jamison gets in have him call me right away,” he barked.

Chapter 14

Greg Jamison was a 35 year old father of three who had made detective four years earlier. He came from a long line of police officers, his father, two uncles and grandfather all having served in different capacities and in various locales on the force. He was the sole member of the family who had made detective. Tough and hard nosed he had a knack for being able to get difficult cases solved and criminals incarcerated. He was also a good friend of Lieutenant Rook.

Jamison showed up in Rook's doorway at a little before 8:00 A.M. "You wanted to see me?" he asked.

"Come in and shut the door," Rook said.

Jamison complied. "All right if I sit down?"

"You'd better. I need to know what the story is on the killings in the Medical Center a few nights ago."

"Do you mind if I ask why?"

"I have some information that might be useful and I want to see where the investigation stands."

"Well, we don't have a lot. Seems two people were looking through one of the doc's office and got clipped. There's another dead body in the lobby. A security guard - been on the job about three months. Private outfit. Seems legit. We don't know how many people hit the place but whoever they were they were well organized. Looks like a professional job. What they were searching for is anyone's guess. We think they surprised the two upstairs and offed them."

"Whose office were they in?"

Jamison retrieved a Palm Pilot from his jacket.

"A Dr. Abraham Levy. One of the cardiologists in the group."

"What's he got to say?"

"Not much," Jamison responded. "He's dead. Killed in a car wreck a few weeks ago. The group was looking for another doc but hadn't found one yet and in the meantime had kept his office pretty much as he had left it."

"Any ID on the bodies upstairs?"

“No. None of the fingerprints came back as a match. We found their car, or at least we think it was their car, in the adjacent parking garage. It was a rental. The names used turned out to be fake along with the driver’s license.”

“Anything get taken?” Rook asked as he sipped his coffee.

“It looked like his files were carted off. The office manager was pretty adamant the office hadn’t been touched. Says she straightened it up herself after the funeral. If files were taken we don’t know which ones. The patient’s medical charts are in a separate storage room. Some of the docs keep charts on specific patients, usually for research purposes, but not on all of them and they’re private. Who knows what he had in there. We’re working with some of the nurses and office staff to come up with some names of patients whose charts might have been lifted but so far nothing has come of it. Pretty much a needle in a haystack.”

Jamison shifted in his chair. “Now it’s your turn”

Rook sat forward and scribbled briefly on a notepad. Tearing the piece of paper free, he handed it to Jamison.

“You might want to look into those two names. My understanding is that’s who you found up there.”

Jamison glanced briefly at the writing. “Are you going to tell me where you got these?”

“Not now. Let’s just say for the moment an informant tipped me off and leave it at that.” The Lieutenant stood behind his desk and stretched his back. He realized he was asking a lot of his friend and it made him uncomfortable. “Look, Greg, I would appreciate it if you could keep me in the loop on this case. Let me know what progress is being made and the like. Without getting into too many details, there’s someone I know who needs this information pretty badly and I’d like to help them out.”

Jamison nodded. “All of this is off the record, right?”

“Absolutely. This person won’t be making any waves. Just needs to know, that’s all.”

“I can do that,” Jamison said. He folded the piece of paper and tucked it into his shirt pocket. “I’ll call you when we have something.”

Well before dawn Sheila Rand drove to the Memorial section of Houston where Dr. Calmont resided. She parked her car down the street near the subdivision pool, drank her coffee and occasionally scanned the residence for any sign of activity. At 7:00 A.M. Calmont's car emerged from the garage. A quick look through her binoculars confirmed it contained the professor and his daughter. Following well behind, the tandem drove to a nearby middle school where Calmont dropped his child off before making his way to the major thoroughfares leading into the Medical Center. Rand noticed he parked in nearly the identical spot as the day before. She drove past him as he exited his sedan, careful to look the other way. Finding a spot at the far end of the garage floor she parked her car facing outwards and settled in for the day.

Workers were driving into the structure in substantial numbers by this time but took little notice of the woman who appeared to be concentrating on applying her makeup. Rand donned a wig she kept for such an occasion and inserted a pair of dark blue contact lenses, providing a considerably different appearance. Her work completed, she opened her briefcase, removed a newspaper and the latest copy of People magazine and settled in for what would undoubtedly be a very long day.

It was just after 2:00 in the afternoon when Jeff Rook's cell phone went off. He answered and was pleasantly surprised to find Greg Jamison on the other end of the line.

"You were right about those names," Jamison said. "They check out. Neither had a listing in any of the national computer databases. So far I haven't been able to link them to Dr. Levy or the cardiology practice but we know their residence was in Washington State. Both had driver's licenses issued there."

"Any idea yet what they were doing in that office?"

"Not yet. I spoke with the office manager about a list of names from the private files he may have had but she's not overly optimistic."

"Okay, that should help some."

"There was one other thing. The woman, Kelli Price, had taken a number of trips to Europe in the past. Flew from Chicago to Frankfurt then around the continent on regional airlines. Never seemed to stay in one place for more than a day or so."

"When was the last trip?"

“About a year ago.”

“What about the Fielding fellow?”

“Nothing yet. Still checking.”

“Thanks for the update. Keep me informed.”

“Will do.”

“You had to kill him in the same apartment?” the voice asked.

Schmidt was going over paperwork at his desk. A half empty wineglass was in front of him next to a Dunhill cigarette smoldering in an ashtray. On the chair next to him lay his 8 year old tabby, Felix, napping soundly in the sunbeams filtering through an adjacent picture window.

“Admittedly, it wasn’t the most prudent move but it was one of the few options available to us,” he said testily. Schmidt didn’t like having his judgement called into question. “By the time we determined where he had gone he’d already been in Toronto for nearly 48 hours. The original plan was to take him out through the hotel window but by the time the shooter had gotten into place, he’d left. As I understand it, the one clean shot made available came when he was in Weincrantz’s apartment.”

“You aren’t making my life any easier.”

“Perhaps you should concentrate on the account you have growing in the Caymans. That might make for a soothing balm.”

“I was about to get this thing swept under the rug as a suicide before that tape turned up in New York. Even then, there were going to be so few leads that nothing likely would have come of it. But with this...”

“Call the dogs off,” Schmidt said bluntly. “I assume you still are the one in charge.”

“The man who’s on this case, Girard, is good. One of the best. When he gets his teeth into something, he’s like a Rotweiler. He won’t let go.”

“Would an unfortunate accident assist matters?”

“Are you out of your mind!” the man yelled. “A dead cop with a cassette tape containing lists of Holocaust survivors and their properties gets taken out? The press would have a field day. That would only bring more heat.” The man on the phone

paused for a moment to regain his composure. "I'm not saying it's out of the question but it would definitely be a last resort."

"Well," Schmidt began, "the problem is in your lap. I am being pressured by others in my organization to have this matter disposed of. Nerves are getting frayed and when that happens people tend to do stupid and irrational things. Some are calling for a scorched earth scenario with everyone who has knowledge about the events on the outside being liquidated. I'm not in favor of such a plan, but at some point it may no longer be up to me."

"Was that a threat?" the man asked.

"Not at all. I'm just trying to give you some sense of my position as well as the thinking of others in our group."

As was his custom, Dr. Calmont emerged from his office at 6:30 P.M. He took the elevators to the main lobby of the medical school then out the doors to the walkway connecting the building to the parking garage. He hiked the four flights of stairs to the 5th floor fishing in his pockets for his keys as he made his way to his parked car. The place was largely deserted at this time of day. Calmont was about to unlock his car door when he heard a voice behind him.

"Excuse me, sir?" a woman said with a British accent. "I was wondering if I might trouble you for a moment?"

Calmont turned to see an attractive young woman wearing sunglasses in front of him. She had a scarf tied over her head and was clutching a black patent leather handbag. Calmont opened his door after the woman spoke. He tossed his briefcase onto the passenger seat and turned to face her.

"Is there a problem?" he asked suspiciously. Although normally willing to help his fellow man, living in Houston had taught him to be careful.

"I'm afraid I'm unable to get my vehicle started and I was wondering if you might take a look at it?"

"I can try," Calmont replied. "But I have to warn you I know next to nothing about cars."

"Well, you surely know more than I do."

“Which one is it?” Calmont asked.

“It’s at the end of the floor,” the woman said pointing in the general direction.

“The gray sedan.”

Calmont shrugged. “Show me.”

When they arrived at the appropriate vehicle the woman said, “Let me get in and pop the bonnet.”

Calmont nodded. He was clearly out of his element. He was as useless in the vehicle repair and maintenance field as he was in the kitchen. “Okay,” he replied.

The woman pulled the appropriate latch and the hood of the car popped upward. Calmont pushed the canopy completely open. He peered into the bowels of the car’s machinery not having the slightest idea what he was looking for.

“Do you think it’s that part?” the woman asked gesturing in the general direction of the air filter.

How on earth would I know and what are you pointing at? Calmont thought.

“Which one?” he asked, deciding to be polite.

“That one,” the woman said, again indicating something in the middle of the engine.

“I’m still not sure which one you mean,” Calmont said. As he leaned in, he felt a small metal object being pressed against the skin behind his ear.

“Very slowly, I want you to go to the other side of the car and get in the passenger door.” The woman’s British accent had disappeared.

Calmont was initially too stunned to be frightened. He moved cautiously to the passenger side of the vehicle and stepped in. The woman was already behind the wheel with the gun pointed towards him. Calmont noticed the weapon had a silencer attached to its muzzle. What he thought might be a simple mugging had begun assuming the trappings of a more sinister affair.

“Alright,” Calmont said shakily. “You’ve gotten my attention.”

“Good. Keep focused and things will turn out fine.” The woman shifted in her seat but kept the pistol level. “How many people are left in your offices?”

“Why?”

“I’m taking a survey,” came the sarcastic response. “Just answer the question.”

“Probably no one. I’m usually the last to leave in the evening.”

“I thought all you doctors burned the midnight oil.”

“In an anatomy department?” Calmont asked incredulously. “We aren’t medical students and we aren’t MDs. It’s not like the material we work with is going to go anywhere overnight. The secretarial staff left at 5:00 P.M. and the rest of the profs leave by six.”

“So there’s no one home right now, is that what you’re saying.”

“That’s what I’m saying.”

“What about where the bodies are kept?”

“What bodies,” Calmont asked.

“The autopsy bodies.”

Calmont was puzzled. “They’re in the anatomy labs. Look, if you want money, all I can give you is...”

The woman cut him off. “I don’t want your money. I want to see a particular body. I assume you have access to their names.”

Now the professor was truly confused. “Of course, but what...”

“Let’s go.”

“Where?”

“The anatomy labs.”

Chapter 15

Justin Douglas had decided to go forward with his plan. Since the anatomy lab wasn't until the next day the place should be deserted. He had wrapped the computer chip in a tissue and placed it in the deep recesses of his book bag. Getting into the basement wouldn't be difficult, the only catch would be if someone else had gone there to get an early start on the dissection but with a genetics test scheduled for the next day that wouldn't be likely.

Douglas punched in the entry code on the keypad next to the metal doors. After entering, he stood quietly listening for any sounds of company. The ensuing silence was a welcome relief. He walked into the room containing his cadaver and switched on the light. It was then he realized he lacked his dissecting instruments. While he could still replace the chip in the body, without the proper tools he couldn't make the metal square appear to have gone undetected.

If a job's worth doing, it's worth doing right he reminded himself and left the suites for his upstairs locker.

Calmont and his captor exited the parking garage via the stairways back into the medical school building. The place was almost deserted. Calmont walked several feet ahead of the woman ever wary of the gun in her purse. After a few minutes they arrived at a bank of elevators.

"We have to go to the basement," Calmont said as he punched the down button.

Within a few seconds the elevator arrived and both stepped on. The woman stood at the back.

When the light over the elevator's control panel read "B" the doors opened. Calmont stepped out into a dimly lit corridor, turned to the right and began walking down the hall. The pair arrived at a large metal door with a keypad entry box on the right hand side. The professor punched in his key code. When the locking mechanism had disengaged, he opened the door and walked a few feet to a small bank of lockers.

"Okay. We're here," Calmont said. "Which one do you want to see?"

"Ruth Goldman," the woman replied.

Calmont turned to his captor. “You were the one that called me yesterday about this woman, weren’t you?”

“Guilty as charged.”

“Something about a ring on her hand.”

“Let’s skip the trip down memory lane and get to the body.”

“All this for a piece of jewelry?”

The woman had removed her pistol and was pointing it in the general direction of Calmont’s chest. “I said let’s drop it. Now, do you know which body is hers?”

Calmont turned to one of the lockers fastened to the wall and began rotating the dial on its combination lock. After a few seconds he opened the door, removing a clipboard before again closing it.

“Ruth Goldman,” he said. “1C.”

“After you,” the woman said.

Calmont walked to the end of the hall and turned into down a shorter one. A single door was before him with the words “Necropsy Room 1” written on it. He pushed it open and walked inside. He was surprised to find the overhead lights on.

Because of the nature of the necropsy suites, finding people willing to clean them was difficult. Arrangements were made with the institution’s custodial staff for a select group of janitors to be responsible for the area. They were typically a cut above the norm and consequently did a better job. Calmont had never found a light left on after they had finished their work. The most likely scenario was a student working after hours.

He quickly perused the area searching for a backpack or books. Not finding any was of a relief but he’d feel better when this woman had gotten what she had come for and left him alone.

Douglas took the elevator to the 7th floor and walked to his locker. He removed his dissection kit along with a box of plastic gloves. Glancing over his shoulder at the elevator’s electronic readout he noticed the number 2 was illuminated, indicating it had returned to the main level. Getting it back to the 7th floor would be time consuming. He decided to take the stairs.

I need the exercise anyway, he thought.

“That’s Ruth Goldblum,” Calmont said pointing to one of the metal containers in the room.

“No. That’s a steel box,” the woman retorted sharply. “I’m assuming when you open it up Mrs. Goldblum will be inside. Move!”

Calmont went to a lab bench on the adjacent wall. Fearing his captor might misinterpret what he was doing he explained his actions. “I need to get a pair of gloves.”

The woman nodded her consent. “Slowly.”

The anatomy professor carefully opened one of the top drawers, removed a box of gloves and began to put a pair on.

“I hate to tell you this, “ he said. “But neither this body nor any of the others here is wearing a ring or jewelry of any sort.”

The woman laughed softly before answering. “What ring.” A sly grin came across her face.

It was a response Calmont hadn’t expected. Aside from the weapon she carried, the woman wasn’t overly threatening. He had concluded this was someone motivated by an intra-family conflict, which had gotten out of hand. As such, when she got what she wanted, the woman would disappear. Her answer indicated otherwise.

“Then what are you here for?”

“Could you go a little slower, doctor?” she asked caustically.

That the woman hadn’t answered his question heightened Calmont’s anxiety. He began rotating the handle at the bottom of the steel box. The overlapping lids parted and Ruth Goldblum progressively rose from the formaldehyde bath. When the mechanism had ratcheted into place the movement stopped. The tissue preservative slowly dripped from the body onto a fenestrated steel plate and back into the underlying pool of formaldehyde.

The woman briefly examined the body looking for any evidence of extraneous materials. Finding none, she redirected her attention to the anatomy professor.

“I assume you have a collection of the things removed from her during her autopsy?” the woman asked.

“You mean her dissection?”

“Of course that’s what I mean!”

Calmont flinched at her raised voice. “Yeah, we keep them in a plastic bucket. One for each cadaver”

“Where?”

Calmont gestured towards a small section of metal cabinets attached to the wall. “In there,” he said.

“I want to see hers.”

“Okay.” The anatomy professor removed his gloves and threw them in a nearby trashcan. As they made their way into the plastic lined receptacle, Calmont noticed it was empty. The janitorial staff had already come and gone meaning the light had been left on by someone else. He fished a set of keys from his pocket and after selecting the correct one inserted it into the lock. With a swift turn the bolt disengaged causing the doors to part slightly. Calmont grasped both and moved them to the open position.

The metal cabinet was, for the most part, empty. Four one gallon plastic buckets with accompanying covers were on the middle shelf. Each was labeled with the letters “A-D” corresponding to the cadavers in the four metal boxes. Calmont removed the one emblazoned with a black “C” on the front. He set it down on the adjacent lab counter. “There you go,” he said.

“Open it and pour it out,” the woman replied.

Calmont found a plastic cafeteria tray at the end of the counter. He removed the lid and carefully slid the contents onto the tray. The materials consisted only of the pacemaker and its accompanying wires.

The woman motioned her gun indicating that the anatomy professor was to back away from the counter. He complied. She looked at the objects before asking, “Where’s the rest of it.”

“What rest of it?” Calmont asked.

Rand brought the gun up to eye level, 24 inches from the man’s face.

“I asked nicely,” the woman said.

Calmont’s pulse began racing and he could feel a cold sweat starting on his back and forehead.

“That’s all there is,” he pleaded. “It’s more than we find in other bodies but it’s still pretty typical.”

“So if I open the other buckets in the place this is about all I’ll find?”

“That’s right.”

The woman bit her lower lip and looked around the room. “I need to have this pacemaker opened up.”

“Opened up?” Calmont asked incredulously.

“You heard me! Open it up.”

“With what?”

“How should I know? You’re a resourceful fellow. Get a screwdriver or something.”

Calmont groaned. He picked up the device from the tray and began examining it. On the back were two small set screws, presumably holding the front and back plates together. “I need some tools.”

He returned to the metal cabinet under the watchful eye of his captor. Calmont retrieved a small black box from the top shelf and removed its lid. Inside was the screwdriver he was searching for. After a few minutes he had removed both screws and pried the coverings apart. Inside were the workings of the pacemaker, which he held out for the woman to examine.

“There you go,” he said.

The woman looked exasperated. “And this is all there is?”

Calmont nodded his head slowly. “It might help if I knew what you were looking for.”

The woman thought for a moment. “A computer chip,” she answered.

“A computer chip?”

“You heard me.”

“Why would this cadaver have a computer chip in it?”

The woman considered giving the man some sort of banal explanation but thought better of it. Time was becoming a concern. Her interrogation was taking place in the open and she was exposed.

“Look in the body.”

Calmont glanced at the corpse gradually drip drying on the metal table. “If that’s what you want me to do, I’ll do it. But I can tell you for a fact that this is the only metal the woman had in her.”

“How do you know?”

“Because before we release these bodies for necropsy they undergo a head to toe x-ray scan. If some type of foreign material is detected it’s catalogued and then we can match what we know to be present with what is actually removed.”

The professor’s explanation elicited a barely muffled obscenity from the woman. “Could the x-ray have missed something?” she asked through clenched teeth.

“Well, I guess anything’s possible,” Calmont answered. “But it’s pretty unlikely. We have two separate radiologists review the films before we release the bodies.”

“Who are the people carving on this body?”

“A team of medical students. They were assigned to this room by...”

“What are their names.”

Calmont shook his head. “I’m not sure.”

“Don’t give me that. Classes have been in session for some time judging by the condition of this corpse. I need their names.”

Again, Calmont shook his head only this time more stridently. “Alright, then I’m not at liberty to release that information.”

The woman fired a round into Calmont’s left thigh. He fell to the floor grimacing in pain and clutching his leg. Blood began rapidly seeping through his pants. “Are you crazy!” he yelled. His hands, held tightly over the wound were being bathed in the crimson liquid.

“The names please.”

The sudden turn to violence surprised the anatomy professor. Whoever this woman was she clearly wasn’t taking “no” for an answer. As much as he wanted her to leave, he revealed the medical students’ names they might soon be in danger as well. He didn’t want to die but he was unwilling to live with having someone else’s demise on his conscience.

“I told you, I can’t give out their names.”

A second bullet from the gun embedded itself in Calmont's right shoulder. This wound was more substantial. It shattered the joint and the pain was almost incapacitating. Blood spattered on a window in an adjacent door. Calmont screamed out in agony.

Douglas was about to turn the corner in the dissection suites when he heard the high pitched cry. He stopped in his tracks. Whoever had made the sound was in trouble. He considered running for the exit and calling building security but decided before he did he'd better be certain there was a problem. The medical student poked his head around the corner. The hall was empty. He could hear raised voices in one of the adjacent rooms but couldn't make out what was being said. Thrusting his head back for a second look he had a clear view of the window into the first necropsy room. Something was on the glass.

"For an educated man, you don't learn very quickly," the woman said as she shook her head in mock disappointment. "This is the last time I'm going to ask you. What are their names?"

Calmont realized he was going to die. Whether he told this woman who the medical students were or not, she wasn't going to let him live. The bleeding from his shoulder was brisk inducing a sensation of light headedness. Calmont's resolve stiffened. He would reveal nothing.

"Forget it." The professor opened his mouth and released another loud yell.

Calmont's assailant fired three shots into his forehead. The man slumped further on the floor and didn't move.

Is that blood? Douglas asked himself. A red liquid was beginning to run down the panes. He decided he had seen enough. It was time to call the cops. He had just turned to leave when another piercing scream shattered the quiet. Startled, he dropped his bag of dissecting instruments and ran for the exit.

Rand was about to place the pacemaker and its wire in her bag when she heard a door close. She dashed out of the necropsy room looking both ways before sprinting in the direction of the sound. As she turned the corner she found Douglas's instruments. Rand quickly picked them up, placed it in her satchel and ran into the hallway.

Douglas heard the door behind him open just as he reached the entrance to the stairwell. He paused briefly and looked back. Someone had come from the anatomy labs and after spotting him began raising their arm. The lighting near the entrance to the necropsy suites was poor but sufficient enough for Douglas to discern the outline of a pistol. He pushed on the door's metal bar and stepped into the stairwell. Barely inside he heard several loud thuds behind him. He was being shot at.

Chapter 16

Girard's investigation of the Merk killing had produced little. He had a clearer picture of who the man was and where he had come from but still no idea why he had been in Weincrantz's apartment. His phone records showed several calls to the home's number but no evidence of any money transfers or face to face contact. Merk did no investing for the man or whoever Weincrantz worked for, although that too was still unclear.

What was unusual about Peter Merk was his past. Girard had been able to piece together enough to know he had emigrated from Argentina and his family's background was German. He had arrived in the US well over a decade before but, unlike most other white collar émigrés, had never returned to his native land. Additionally, he had arrived in the United States with an impressive resume. He'd studied in England and France but eventually chose to work not on Wall Street or in D.C. but in Tucson. Girard wasn't certain why he'd had so little contact with his family but it was clear there wasn't much in South America tugging at his heartstrings. The only connection the policeman could make between the Arizona investment counselor and Weincrantz was their previous association with Europe.

Merk's travels there, however, had been nearly to 2 years ago and the European jaunts had ceased. A thorough evaluation of the adjacent warehouse disclosed nothing. Police interviews of the hotel staff were equally unfruitful. He had done some rudimentary surveillance of Weincrantz's apartment building, entered the structure and been cut down by a bullet to the head. Whatever reasons for Merk to have been there he had taken to his grave.

Jeff Rook was placing some files into his briefcase. It was nearly 6:00 P.M and he was accustomed to heading home at this time since it usually meant fighting less traffic. He had just snapped the locks closed when his phone went off. It was Greg Jamison.

"Glad I caught you before you left," Jamison said. "I think there's someone here you'll want to speak with."

Rook glanced at his watch. Another missed dinner at home, he thought. “I’ll be right there.”

When Rook arrived in Jamison’s office there were two women with the detective.

“This is Louise Madsen the office manager for Dr. Levy’s cardiology group,”

Jamison said pointing to one of the women. Rook politely shook hands with the woman.

“Nice to meet you,” he said.

Madsen nodded and smiled. “You too.”

“And this is Kellie Procter, one of the nurses in the practice,” Jamison continued.

Again, Rook extended his hand.

The group sat down in front of Jamison’s desk.

“Miss Procter, would you mind repeating what you told me?” Jamison asked.

The young woman cleared her throat. “About 6 months ago, Dr. Levy asked me into his office. He gave me two names to research. Both of them were patients of his. He told me that they were going to be involved in some sort of medical study and would I mind keeping a file on them in my computer. I told him I’d be glad to but I asked why he didn’t have one of his regular nurses do it. I’m just a floater so I fill in for nurses who are gone for whatever reason. He said that he needed an independent observer for the study. I didn’t think much about it at the time since I know the practice has a lot of investigational studies going on. A few months later he gave me two more names and I added them as well.”

“What sort of information did he want kept in the file?” Rook asked.

“That’s just it,” Procter continued. “The data was pretty bland. Just the dates of their pacemaker placement, who was in the room at the time and that sort of thing. What kind of x-rays they were having done. Their pacemakers were any different from anyone else’s.”

“I don’t follow,” Rook said.

Madsen chimed in. “Our practice is the largest in the southeastern United States. As such, we are asked by pharmaceutical companies to do studies on medications and implantable devices.”

“Like pacemakers,” Rook commented.

“Exactly. It’s a big deal, especially for the manufacturers. They have a whole team of people overseeing the protocols. Lots of site visits and tons of paperwork. These companies invest a tremendous amount of money in these evaluations and they keep a tight rein on things. So having such a, shall we say, relaxed attitude towards any such project would be unusual. Kellie kept Dr. Levy’s confidence well. I had no idea any of this was ongoing. She came to me after I mentioned the detectives were wanting to go through the doctor’s files and computer data.”

“We printed a hard copy of what Ms. Procter had in her computer,” Jamison said as he handed a sheaf of paper to the lieutenant. Rook scanned them briefly.

“Boil it down for me, Greg,” Rook requested.

“There are four names there. All of them had pacemakers implanted by Dr. Levy. All the same type of device, which isn’t out of the ordinary, from what these two ladies have told me. What is unusual is that all were terminal patients.”

Rook glanced up from his perusing. “Terminal?”

“Terminally ill. All four had cancer with a limited projected lifespan.”

“None of them were getting any treatment?”

“They had decided against it,” Madsen said. “The pacing devices were implanted to improve the quality of their lives. So far as we know, they were doing well.”

“What do you mean ‘so far as you know’?” Rook asked.

“We couldn’t find their files in Dr. Levy’s office,” Jamison answered.

“Dr. Levy was involved in a number of different studies for drug companies,” Madsen interjected. “He was very meticulous, almost to the point of compulsion. For him to have arranged for a separate set of files would be unimaginable. Those files no longer being in his possession would be equally unthinkable.”

“Could they be at his home or in another office?”

“Not that we could find,” Jamison said. “We checked his house, his garage, his gym locker. Nothing. Dr. Levy didn’t see patients at any of the satellite offices and they weren’t in his personal effects when he died. It’s a logical conclusion that whoever was in his office the night of the murders has them.”

Rook rubbed the side of his face. “I take it these patients weren’t a part of any sort of pharmaceutical company sponsored investigation?” he asked Ms. Madsen.

“Absolutely not. Being terminal cancer patients they’d never even be considered for such a study.”

“You cross check them?” Rook asked looking at Jamison.

“Not yet. We just got this information about an hour ago. Seems pretty thin though. From what demographics we have all of these patients were elderly women just interested in having their heart beats regulated while they lived their last days out in peace.”

Jamison handed the lieutenant a single sheet of paper with the women’s names, addresses and phone numbers on them. Rook smiled back up at him.

“You read my mind,” he said.

Justin Douglas raced up 5 flights of stairs before exiting the stairwell. He had been a medical student less than 3 months and while he knew some of the school’s layout he wasn’t familiar with the whole building. The first year lecture room was on the 4th floor. Douglas ran to the back entrance and pulled open one of the doors. Inside, the room was completely dark except for a small light at the lectern and the Exit signs over the entrances.

In the center of the back row was an enclosure containing audio-visual equipment. On one end was a three quarter sized door. Douglas was surprised to find it wasn’t locked. The room was small with a ledge attached to the front wall on which sat a slide and video projector. He shut the door quickly and sat on the floor under the shelf.

In the dark, small confines of the enclosure Douglas could feel the pounding in his chest. Sweat was beginning to run down his cheeks and into the collar of his shirt. Questions flooded his mind. Had he been pursued by whoever was shooting at him? Would they know where to look? Was there indeed someone dead in the basement or had this been some sort of bizarre prank?

As his pulse began to subside and his breathing slow Douglas concluded he was safe, at least for the moment. He had heard no one enter the amphitheater but that didn’t mean that the coast was clear. Douglas checked his watch and decided to wait another half hour before leaving. By then he assumed his odds of making it to the first floor and its security desk would improve.

Girard returned to his desk to find a slip of paper stating Philip LeBoit had called. He checked his watch as he mentally calculated the time difference. He should still be in the office.

“Hello, Martin,” the voice said.

“Hi. Sorry to not have been around when you called. I assume you received my email?”

“I did. What an interesting life you must lead, my friend,” the Frenchman said with a slight chuckle.

“Yeah. Any more interesting and I’m going to be a candidate for the padded cell. Did you learn anything about that name?”

“Actually, yes. I asked a few people I know in the EU security circles about the name Peter Merk. One of the Italians said he might know something. The fellow called me back a few hours later then faxed me what he had on file. The Merk name is quite common in Germany and comes with several different spellings. Just after Christmas 1944 Gerhard and Anna Merk left Triest, Italy sailing for Tunisia and eventually, South America. The Italians were just as organized then as now and apparently there was no impediment to the family leaving.”

“How many?” Girard interrupted.

“Just two. Apparently, Gerhard was some type of paper pusher with the right connections and an arthritic leg which kept him out of the fighting.”

“Where did they go?”

“Initially to Paraguay then to Argentina. Gerhard bought some land and became a farmer of sorts. Anna died not long after arriving. Gerhard, later married a woman from Cologne and the two had three sons. The younger two, so far as we know, still reside in Argentina but the oldest boy, Peter, left some years back to live in the United States.”

“Is Gerhard still alive?”

“No. He died in the mid 1980’s.”

“I assume he wasn’t wanted for some type of war crimes?”

“With all the really serious criminals requiring more resources, Herr Merk wasn’t pursued.”

Girard thought for a moment. “Well, that’s interesting information but it still doesn’t tell me what he was doing here in Toronto.”

“I considered that,” LeBoit said. “If this Weincrantz fellow was accumulating information about the Nazis and what they had done with all the property they confiscated that might explain Merk’s presence in your city.”

“True. Is that all the information you have on Peter Merk?” Girard asked.

“Unfortunately, yes.”

Douglas waited for over an hour in the audiovisual enclosure before leaving. He peered out of one of the back doors into the hallway. No one was around. Careful not to make any noise he walked quickly towards the front staircase. When he arrived in the lobby he noticed no one was at the security desk.

That’s odd, he thought. I’ve never seen the desk empty.

As he was walking towards the front entrance, the elevator bell sounded. The doors opened and several paramedics emerged carrying medical equipment. Behind them followed a gurney with the body of a black man lying very still. A plastic tube to help him breathe had been placed down his throat and one of the paramedics was rhythmically inflating the attached compression bag while another pushed on his chest. The group made their way quickly towards the breezeway. Douglas caught sight of the man’s face. It looked familiar. He walked around near the security desk to get a better view. As the paramedics pushed their charge towards the doors, Douglas got a glimpse of the victim. Despite a large bandage on the man’s head he recognized Dr. Calmont, the proctor for his anatomy lab.

That’s who was in the necropsy suites. That’s who was being killed.

“So there was nothing of interest, then?” Schmidt asked. He was being driven from his home to a small airstrip in nearby Carrizozo where his private jet was housed.

“Only the pacemaker and its wire,” Rand answered.

Schmidt looked out the window of the Land Rover as it made its way down from the hills to the flat plains to the west. “Have they been picked up?”

“Yeah, the courier you sent arrived here about an hour ago.”

“I assume you examined the device?”

“Certainly. But I’m no doctor. I don’t know what to look for. There wasn’t much in the way of wording on the outside of the pacemaker and if there’s something inside, well, I just assumed it would be better for me not to try to open the thing up.”

Schmidt chuckled audibly. “Afraid it might explode?”

“A little, yeah. I don’t know anything about those things and to tell you the truth, they scare me.”

“How do you propose getting the body out of there?” Schmidt asked, returning to business.

“Are you kidding?” Rand asked. “Between the fiasco in the office building the other night and now this, the whole medical center will be crawling with security. I’d be surprised if the Mayor doesn’t call out the National Guard. These hospitals and medical schools are one of the crowning glories of this God-forsaken town. The city fathers will muster whatever resources they have to keep the place safe.”

“You said that Calmont told you the bodies had been scanned, is that correct?”

“That’s what he said. I have no proof, but it would make sense.”

“Can you confirm it?”

“Not easily,” Rand responded.

“That wasn’t the question.”

“I don’t think that we are going to have much luck gaining access to any of Calmont’s files or those of the cadavers.”

“Anyone on the inside you could use?”

“I did have one thought,” Rand replied. “I told you about my encounter in the hall.”

Schmidt cringed at the mental image of a shootout in the medical school basement. The thought of more public exposure on this matter was disturbing. The Nephilim were already out on a limb as it was. “I’ve got about 30 seconds of time left. Where are you going with this?”

“I doubt that I have any chance at all of getting near the body. But, this medical student would. Even if it’s not his own cadaver he’ll still have access.”

The Range Rover pulled along side the Lear Jet. The driver opened Schmidt's door. Before leaving, he issued a final directive.

"Look. I don't care how you accomplish it, but before we go snatching the other women off the street and opening them up, close the loop on this one and do it fast."

Lieutenant Rook had turned onto Highway 1288 when his cell phone went off. He looked briefly at the number on the LED readout. Emily Woodward was on the other end of the line.

"What sort of information do you have for me?" she asked.

"I found something out about 30 minutes ago," Rook continued.

"And what would that be?"

"It seems the doctors' office in which your associates died had an informal file on 4 women, all with terminal malignancies and all with pacemakers he'd implanted within the last 6 months."

"Is there anything else to tie these women together? Geographic location? Past areas of residence? Religion? Membership in social organizations?"

"Hold on, hold on," Rook said. "Like I just told you, I've only had this information a short while. Piecing it all together is going to take some time."

Woodward emitted an audible snort. "Lieutenant, I appreciate the amount of pressure you must be under in your line of work. But, please understand that I'm in a similar situation here. I need to know who we're dealing with and as soon as possible."

"Why?" Rook asked.

"Why?" Woodward responded hesitantly.

"Yeah. What's so important that you need this information now? I mean, you call me up on the phone, blackmail me into helping you and to this point, I have no clear idea as to why you need this data."

"I'm not going to lie to you, lieutenant..."

"I'd appreciate that," Rook interrupted testily.

"...however, I can't divulge that right now. When all of this is wrapped up I'll answer any questions you put to me but for the present, I won't. Let me just tell you that

there is a good deal at risk, not for myself personally, but for a great many others and I have an obligation to consider their interests.”

Rook realized attempting to extract any information from the woman would be useless. “Okay. In short, I just got the data I gave you and I hope to have more in the near future.”

“Fair enough, lieutenant. I’ll speak with you tomorrow. If you don’t have a more detailed background on these women I’m going to need their names.”

Justin Douglas was becoming sick to his stomach. The evening’s events had been bad enough but seeing who the victim was had been the worst. He had been fond of Dr. Calmont. The sight of him motionless on the gurney being given CPR was an image he couldn’t shake. Douglas knew getting the computer chip back in his cadaver’s body, at least for the moment, would be nearly impossible. The room would be overflowing with police. What bothered him most was the nagging thought he might have been somehow responsible. What if his stupid decision to remove the chip had been at the center of the evening’s carnage? Douglas considered going to the authorities but he didn’t know if that might make things worse. One thing was for certain, whoever had been in the anatomy labs had meant business and if they could strike with impunity there, they would be capable of doing it most anywhere.

He turned to leave the first floor lounge and head back home when he realized he no longer had his dissection kit. Panicking, he looked around hoping to find it. Seeing it nowhere in sight, he ran to the lecture hall and into the audiovisual enclosure. It was dark but sufficiently lit for him to be certain the pouch wasn’t there. He must have dropped it in the hallway outside the anatomy lab. Now he potentially would have two groups searching for him.

Agent Girard had been waiting patiently in Detective Messier’s office until his supervisor returned. The man appeared harried and tired.

“You okay?” Girard asked.

Messier shot him an odd expression before answering. "Oh, yeah. I'm fine. Just the usual politics from the brass upstairs." Messier's tie was loosened and he looked as if he hadn't shaved before coming to work. "Did we have a meeting?"

"You asked to see me, remember?"

"Right. That's right," he said distractedly. "I need you to bring me up to date on the Weincrantz and Merk cases."

Girard gave him a thumbnail sketch in less than two minutes. Messier listened intently. When the agent was done he asked, "Is that all?"

Girard wrinkled his forehead. "Yeah, that's what I have so far but then I'm still in the middle of things."

Messier began shuffling folders around on his desk. "Wrap it up," he said.

"What?"

"I said, wrap it up. Surely there are other cases you can be using your talents on, aren't there? What about the two dead hookers the uniforms found night before last?"

"Petrelli has that case and besides, I think they have someone they're about to collar for it."

"Regardless, file your final reports on these two cases and move on."

Girard was flabbergasted. "But I still haven't gotten to the bottom of this. These murders.."

"One was a suicide," Messier interrupted.

"I don't think it was a suicide and as I was going to say, there are some significant international implications to these cases, what with the link to the Holocaust victims and all."

"Let me see if I follow," Messier said as he folded his hands behind his head.

"You don't have any definitive evidence Weincrantz's death was anything more than a suicide, you don't know what he was doing here, you don't know what Merk was doing here and you don't know why the latter was killed. How am I doing so far?"

Girard shifted uneasily in his chair. "That's largely true but I'm making progress."

"Well, it's too slow to suit the boys upstairs. As I said, file your reports and move on to the next case." Messier began leafing through a dossier on his desk.

Girard shook his head. It wasn't like his boss to tell him to drop a case. He'd always supported his efforts in the past, why not now? The agent knew arguing further would be pointless.

"Fine. I'll work the cases on my own time." He stood to leave.

Messier came out of his chair, his eyes bulging and his face becoming red.

"You'll do no such thing!" he bellowed. "You are to finalize these cases, catalogue them in the unsolved files and get busy with other matters!"

Girard was taken aback. He'd only seen Messier lose his temper one other time in the 12 years he'd known him. Whatever the brass was pressuring him about must be big for him to behave like this.

"Are we clear on this, agent?" Messier thundered.

"Crystal," Girard answered as he meekly turned to leave.

Sheila Rand noted the name etched on the dissecting tools - "B. Douglas". Knowing that the only students taking anatomy at this time of year were first year medical students she was able to link the instruments to Justin Douglas, a 23 year old young man from Rotan, Texas. After searching the Internet and making a few phone calls she was able to acquire an extensive profile of the medical student.

Early the next morning she went to Douglas's apartment complex a few miles from the medical center. She drove around slowly until she found the right building and checked for Douglas's truck but to no avail. Rand selected a parking space 50 yards from the apartment and began watching it with binoculars. An hour later, with the sun beginning to appear she placed a call to Douglas's number. His answering machine picked up. Bored, she left the car and walked to his apartment. No one answered the door.

"No one's home."

Rand turned to see who was addressing her. It was a young man wearing a T-shirt and shorts with a book bag slung over his shoulder.

"Oh, I see," she replied politely. "Do you know where I might find Justin?"

The man shrugged complacently. "No clue. He was supposed to come over last night for a study session but he never showed."

“Is that unusual?” she asked.

The neighbor eyed her suspiciously.

“I’m sorry,” she added hastily. “I’m Justin’s aunt in town on business. I told his mother I’d drop in to say hello.”

The explanation seemed to satisfy the young man.

“No. He’s usually good to his word.” He looked at his watch. “I have to catch my bus.”

“Thanks for your help,” Rand replied. “I’ll just come back later.”

Rand returned to her car and removed her mobile phone from the glove compartment.

“I think he’s in the wind,” Rand said.

“Find him,” Schmidt replied. “Now.”

Greg Jamison arrived for work the next morning looking drained and strung out.

“You alright?” the office secretary asked.

“Yeah, fine,” he answered. “The youngest has an earache and was up a lot last night. I just need some coffee.”

After jump starting his system with caffeine he turned his attention to the list of women procured by Dr. Levy’s office. Finding them wasn’t difficult. Two were at home. A third, Margaret Paxton, was scheduled to return that night from a visit to upstate Michigan. The final member of the quartet, however, Ruth Goldblum proved more elusive. Jamison knew from his conversation with Kellie Procter that the woman had died. He phoned the city office issuing the death certificate but had been unable to find the funeral home to which the body had been released. At mid morning someone returned his call with the correct information. Jamison dialed the number for the Bellaire Funeral Home and asked to speak with someone about Ruth Goldblum. After a short time on hold the line picked up.

“This is Richard Homan,” the man said.

“This is Greg Jamison with the Houston Police Department. I need some information on a body released to you late last spring. Specifically, I need to know where its is buried.”

“Let me get the file.” When he returned to the line Jamison could hear papers being shuffled in the background. “She seems to have been as popular in death as she was in life,” Homan remarked.

“Meaning what?” Jamison asked.

“Well, I have a note here concerning a conversation I had regarding Ms. Goldblum a few days ago.”

“With who?”

“The young lady told me she was her niece.”

“Did you get her name?”

“No. She never mentioned it,” Homan answered. “I told her that the body had been sent, at the deceased’s request, to the University of Texas Medical School at Houston for use in their anatomy labs.”

“I see,” Jamison said. “Did she ever call back?”

“Not that I have a record of.”

“What was it exactly she was looking for?”

“She said her aunt had a ring which had become too small for removal and wanted it back. Apparently, it had been promised to her before her death.”

“Is that an unusual request?”

“Well, it’s not one we receive routinely, but, no, we’ve had similar inquiries in the past. She ended the conversation by stating that she would contact the University and see if they could obtain it for her.”

“And you haven’t heard from her since?”

“Again, no.”

“Just for my own edification, what are the odds of her being able to get the ring back from the University.”

“Practically nil,” Homan replied. “From what I understand, they don’t release any extraneous materials, including jewelry, before the completion of the anatomy exercises.”

“I appreciate your time, Mr. Homan. Thank you.”

Jamison hung up the receiver and immediately placed a call to one of the uniformed officers in his squad room.

Justin Douglas spent the night in one of the hospital's on call rooms. He had slept fitfully what with the constant coming and goings of others in the room and the occasional pager blaring. When he awoke it was light outside. His watch showed it was just after 8:00 A.M. He used the shower in the rec center before heading to the first floor of the medical school building.

Douglas found himself routinely glancing over his shoulder and looking suspiciously at anyone he didn't recognize. He had to continually remind himself it wasn't likely anyone would be gunning for him in broad daylight and besides, he had no idea what the person looked like who had shot at him. When he reached the first floor he headed for the breezeway to board one of the shuttle buses traveling back to his apartment complex. Douglas was about 20 feet from the doors when he heard his name called.

"Hey, Justin," the voice said.

Douglas turned around quickly to find a classmate standing near a potted plant, a tall cup of coffee in his hand. It was Chad Graham, one of his neighbors and a member of his genetics study group.

"Where were you last night, man?"

"I couldn't make it," Douglas responded quickly as he continued to scan the room nervously.

"Are you alright?" Graham asked.

"Yeah, fine. I just gotta catch the next shuttle back home."

"Are you kidding? We have a genetics test in less than 10 minutes. You'll never be back in time."

"I'll have to take a makeup, I guess," Douglas said as he turned to leave.

Graham shrugged his shoulders. "By the way, your aunt was looking for you this morning."

I don't have an aunt Douglas thought. A chill ran down his back. "What?"

"Your aunt. I was leaving to catch the shuttle when I saw her knocking on your door."

Douglas approached Graham squinting his eyes. "What did she look like?"

“Not old enough to be your aunt. Early 30’s. Blonde hair. Nice figure.”

Douglas moved closer to his friend’s face. “What did you tell her?”

“Just that you probably weren’t home and that you’d blown off a study session last night.”

“Did she say anything else?”

“Only that she had told your mother she’d check on you while she was in Houston and that she’d come back later.”

Chapter 17

“Perry,” Jamison said. “What’s the story on the murder last night in the Medical Center?”

Sergeant Perry Foster was the policeman on duty overseeing officer deployment for the various substations around the Houston area. He possessed an almost flawless memory and had been a valuable source of information in the past.

“Yeah,” Sergeant Foster answered. “One of the profs there got whacked. They managed to get him to the ER but he was DOA.”

“Who caught the case?”

“Detective Rofelli, I think.”

“Thanks, Perry,” Jamison said as he hung up. He yelled out his door for the pool secretary to page Rofelli to his office. A few minutes later the phone rang. It was Rofelli.

“Greg? What’s up?” He was calling from his cell phone.

“Did you catch a homicide last night from the Medical Center?” Jamison asked.

“Yeah. I’m on my way back to the house now. Why? Something you need to know?”

“Maybe. What were the details?”

“One of the profs there got offed in the anatomy labs.”

“Who?”

“Somebody named Calmont,” Rofelli began. “He was in the anatomy department and did some teaching of the med students. One of the security guards found the body last night when he was making his rounds. Looked like an execution.”

“Any idea why he was there in the evening?”

“Not really. He might have been doing some extracurricular work with a student although according to his cohorts, that would have been unusual.”

“Why?”

“Well, supposedly, after hours private instruction with a student in the anatomy labs isn’t something that goes on a lot. The students pretty much have 24-7 access to the

cadavers and the higher ups figure if they're smart enough to get into medical school they should be smart enough to do their own work. No hand holding. That sort of thing."

"No hanky-panky?" Jamison asked.

Rofelli laughed. "I guess anything is possible but I don't think so in this instance. His co-workers tell me he was pretty straight laced. There was one thing that I haven't been able to figure out yet. One of the cadavers was out."

Jamison's ears perked up. "Out?"

"I mean out of the formaldehyde. The bodies are kept in these stainless steel coffin like contraptions with embalming fluid covering them. When the students go to start carving on them, they turn this crank on the end of the metal box, raising the body out of the liquid. In the room where we found Calmont there was one body that had been exposed for dissection but no evidence that anyone other than himself had been there."

"Let me guess," Jamison said. "Ruth Goldblum."

Rofelli nearly dropped his phone. "Yeah. How did you know?"

The morning sun was up and with few clouds in the sky the day promised to be the kind that makes Houstonians breathe a sigh of relief and pray that the worst of the summer sauna is over. Ordinarily, such weather was a welcome relief to Justin Douglas who loved the crisp, cool air of the Texas autumn. But while his fellow classmates were beginning the second genetics exam of the year, he sat forlorn and frightened on a shuttle bus headed back to his apartment complex. Missing the test would put him considerably behind, obviously, but in his current frame of mind, that fact seemed irrelevant. Douglas's plan was get to his truck and out of town.

Three years before Douglas began medical school, the University of Texas built a recreation center on 3 adjoining acres behind its apartment complex. An Olympic sized swimming pool, weight room, aerobics area and steamroom/sauna had been constructed and proved to be very popular. The center had good hours and since most of the people living in the apartments were young, they gravitated to it.

After the rec center was finished, a security office was erected nearby and many apartment residents began parking their vehicles close to it. While this restricted available visitor parking, the campus police understood the reasoning behind it and did

little to curb its practice. After hearing about the 3rd car burglary in the area, Justin Douglas began parking his truck near the rec center. So far, it had gone unmolested.

Two stops before his apartment complex, Douglas exited the bus and walked into the parking area of the Coventry Place condominiums. It was a more upscale establishment than where he resided but without a security guard at the front entrance. More importantly, a large open field separated it from the University housing where Douglas lived.

The complex was largely abandoned with its complement of young upwardly mobile professionals having long since left for work. Douglas made his way around the pool to the back of the complex. He tossed his backpack over the brick wall before climbing on top and jumping to the other side. He could see the rear of the rec center 200 yards away and, to the left of it, his truck parked near the security offices. Douglas made his way through the weeds and grass to the back fence. He scrambled over it without difficulty making certain no one from the security office saw him. After finding his keys, he opened the door and started the vehicle. Although tempted to drive by his apartment to see if anyone was waiting for him, he moved steadily toward the front gate, out the entrance and onto the main road in front of it. Ten minutes later he was on loop 610 heading east.

Greg Jamison appeared in the doorway of Lieutenant Rook's office. Rook was on the phone but after seeing his friend he quickly ended the conversation. He motioned for the detective to sit down. Jamison closed the door behind him.

“What gives?” Rook asked.

“I got a line on the three living women from Dr. Levy's list. Two are at their residences and one is coming back into town tonight. Officers are on the way to their houses. The fourth, Ruth Goldblum, is actually at the University of Texas Medical School here in Houston.”

“What is she doing there? I thought she was dead.”

“She donated her body to be used as a cadaver in the anatomy labs.” Jamison flashed a mischievous grin. “You ready for this? One of the professors at the school who oversees those labs was killed last night. I talked with the detective who caught the case

and he told me when they went to investigate the crime scene Ms. Goldblum had been removed from storage facility.”

“Someone took the body?” Rook asked incredulously.

“No. The body’s still there. It had just been brought up out of the formaldehyde like it was getting ready to get carved on.”

“None of the other bodies were touched?”

“Not according to the detective. They don’t have a line on anyone yet but he said it smelled like a professional job.”

Rook leaned back in his chair as he mulled the situation over. “What’s the next move?”

“I’m heading over to speak with the two women who are in town. See what they might know. My guess is it won’t be much but I think they still need to be under some type of surveillance.”

“I agree,” concurred Rook. “Call me later today with what you find out.”

“No problem.”

Sheila Rand sat in the apartment complex parking lot bored out of her mind. She had changed cars again and was wearing a disguise, this one different than the one she had donned to meet Dr. Calmont. By now she had a picture of the medical student and a description of his truck. She scanned the area through her binoculars but had yet to see anyone matching Douglas’s photograph. Using her laptop computer and a telephone link she had obtained a schedule of the first year curriculum including the testing times. From that she knew Douglas and his classmates would be taking an exam until 10:00 A.M. with nothing scheduled until early afternoon that same day. By 11:30 she still hadn’t spotted Douglas and assumed he was either still at school or had taken off. The later scenario concerned her. She was surfing the web looking at various news pages for the Houston area and reading about the death of Dr. Calmont in the Medical Center when her phone went off.

“Any luck?” Schmidt asked.

“No sign of him here,” Rand answered. “He’s either taken his exam and is still at the Medical School or has blown town.”

“I was afraid of that. I’ve left a list of names on email for you to contact. Some people I think will be useful.”

“Useful for what?”

“For finding Mr. Douglas and getting the body out of there.”

“Have you lost your mind?” Rand responded, raising her voice. “There’s not going to be any removing the late Mrs. Goldblum from the medical school. That place will be as tight as Ted Turner’s colon.”

“For the time being then, let’s put Goldblum on the back burner,” Schmidt said tersely. “Contact the people I listed and then begin detaining the other two women.”

“Detaining them?”

“I’m convinced they’re critical to obtaining the information we need. I’m in the process of finding someone there in the area who can scan them for implanted materials inside their bodies.”

“I already told you what Calmont said. There wasn’t anything implanted into Goldblum. They do a radiologic workup on each body donated to the medical school to check for what they might contain.”

“They might have missed something,” Schmidt reiterated. “Contact the first name on the list and do it now. We’ll worry about the medical student later.”

Rook was sitting at his desk pretending to go over quarterly reports but his heart wasn’t in it. Calling in favors while someone behind the curtain moved his strings didn’t sit well with him. Rook knew he wasn’t an island unto himself but he was accustomed to having more autonomy than this. He had just returned to his task when his cell phone went off.

“Rook here,” he said.

“Lieutenant,” the woman’s voice announced. “I was wondering what you might have found out about the women we spoke of yesterday.”

Hearing the woman’s voice didn’t tempter Rook’s angst.

“Before we go any further, I need to know what to call you.”

The woman laughed. “Yes, I suppose that has been somewhat of an impediment to our conversations, hasn’t it? You may call me Mrs. Brown.”

“Is that your real name?”

“Of course not.”

“Okay, fine,” Rook muttered. “Mrs. Brown it is then. We’ve located the four women on the list. Two are here in the Houston area, one has been away and is coming back into town this evening and one is deceased.”

“Oh dear,” the woman said. “I was afraid of that.”

“Why?”

“Well, as you know they all had terminal cancer and I didn’t expect them to live forever...”

“That’s not why,” Rook stated flatly. He could tell when someone was equivocating.

“I’m afraid I’m not at liberty to discuss...”

Rook’s anger flared and he interrupted her again. “You know, I’ve just about had it with this cat and mouse game.” His tone belied his mounting frustration. “I need to know what your involvement is with all of this mess.”

“I was under the impression we’d already covered that, Lieutenant.” Her tone had cooled considerably.

“We have, and while I’m not anxious to have my life torn apart by an IRS audit, I’m nearing the end of my rope. At some point, it’s going to be less trouble to face the difficulties I might be in with the feds than continue this charade.”

There was silence on the other end of the line for a moment. Woodward realized she had pushed the officer as far as she could. Much more subterfuge and she might lose his cooperation altogether.

“Fair enough, Lieutenant,” she said somewhat dejectedly. “I won’t go into all my past history but let’s just say I have a soft spot in my heart for the downtrodden. My late husband was blessed with a penchant for making money and he accumulated quite a lot of it. So much so that after he passed away I was left with the time and resources to pursue a personal passion, in this case that of displaced persons from World War II. Most of these people were Jewish but many were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Over the past 10 years I have supported the work of a young man named Julian Weincrantz. He lived...”

“How do you spell his last name?” Rook interrupted.

“Perhaps now might be a better time to listen, lieutenant, rather than take notes,” Woodward chided. “Weincrantz was a reporter. While pursuing a story for his newspaper, he met a gentleman who had been a mid level bureaucrat with the German government. He told him a fascinating tale regarding a group of men who had catalogued and stored materials looted from the occupied countries. They were to manage these spoils of war such that they would be available for senior party officials, win or lose. Hitler knew of their work but as it had little to do with day to day operations of the war, he paid it scant attention.”

Woodward took a sip of her tea. “Weincrantz’s source said that by the end of the war all the properties along with the higher ups and their families were long gone. Somewhere he’d heard they were in South America living the good life. This didn’t sit well with him but being the good soldier that he was he’d kept his mouth shut. When he was diagnosed with end stage pancreatic cancer he must have figured ‘why bother?’”

“After Weincrantz’s article was published he continued researching the story in his spare time. It became almost an obsession with him. Finally, after 5 years of digging someone within the group reached out to him. He made sure the man could be trusted before gathering more information on the structure and membership. They called themselves the Nephilim, after the Biblical race of giants mentioned in the Old Testament. Apparently in some sort of twisted manner they viewed themselves as superhuman occupants of the current world. After a contact of mine in Europe alerted me on to Weincrantz’s work, we met and I offered to support him full time. He accepted.”

“Julian had a knack for ferreting out information as well as a 6th sense like capacity to tell when someone was closing in on him. I thought his penchant for cloak and dagger dissemination of his data was a bit over the top, but I underestimated his suspicions.”

Woodward paused. On the other end of the line Rook could hear a cigarette being lit followed by audible exhaling.

“So that’s it in a nutshell,” she continued. “I suppose you have about a thousand questions you’d like to ask me.”

“Close,” Rook said. “Who was his contact in this Nephilim group?”

“I have no idea. He never would tell me. He said that the less I knew the better.”

“But you considered him credible?”

“Certainly. The information Julian unearthed always panned out. There was never any reason to assume otherwise.”

“So what was he doing with this information?”

“Dividing it up and putting it on computer chips.”

“Dividing it up?”

“Yes. The data was comprised of a list of properties taken from persons in German occupied countries, the families from whom it was taken, where they lived, dates, that sort of thing. He mismatched the entries so that whoever acquired them would need all of the information to make a complete list. He was hiding it in a well chosen warren.”

“And you have no idea where.”

“Until recently, no. Just before he was killed, he called me and said he thought he was being followed. He also gave me the name of Dr. Abraham Levy in Houston but wouldn't tell me how he figured into the equation. When Levy died, I needed to find out what he knew so I sent some of the people I work with to investigate. They were the ones you found in the office building. Their deaths confirmed something I suspected – that the Nephilim were on the verge of discovering the entire scheme.”

“And that you were in real danger,” Rook added.

Woodward responded with a spontaneous chuckle. “Goodness, Lieutenant. I'm no naive schoolgirl. Should I meet some sort of demise, I've certainly had a wonderful life with no regrets. No, this project was something in which I had invested considerable resources and energy. I want to see it come to fruition. I want to see those properties restored to their rightful owners.”

“You say Weincrantz was killed. How?”

“He was living in Toronto at the time. Apparently, it was made to look like he had taken his own life – shot himself in the head.”

“And you think otherwise,” Rook added.

“Let's just say I have my reservations,” Woodward replied. “I'm certainly no psychiatrist but the man appeared stable each time I had any contact with him. I realize

it's possible he was hiding something or wrestled with his own brand of demons. I just think it's unlikely. Besides, he was completely dedicated to this project."

"Did you ever find out where Dr. Levy fit in to all of this?"

"No. When Miss Price and Mr. Fielding were killed it impressed upon me the need for expediency. That's why I called you. I need to find out what Weincrantz knew and collect his data."

"I'm curious about something," Rook said. "How was it that you happened to have someone such as myself with the sword of Damocles over his head in just the right police department at just the right time?"

Rook could hear her smile over the phone line. "Oh, lieutenant," she said. "You really have no idea how the other half lives do you? One of the great advantages of wealth is the circles it allows you to move through. I have donated money to numerous people and organizations around the globe for many years. Not only does it give one a good feeling but oils the machinery for future contact if the need arises."

"I see," mused Rook. He returned to the matter at hand. "You think that these women we've found have something to do with the computer chips you mentioned?"

Woodward paused for a moment. "To be honest, I don't know. But it seems to be the most promising lead to date."

"So what did Levy do? Just give them the chips and asked them to hang on to them?"

"No, Lieutenant. I believe he implanted them in their bodies."

Sheila Rand left the apartment parking area following her conversation with Schmidt. She would have preferred to continue her surveillance but realized Justin Douglas was probably on the run and for the present time would be allowed to do so unmolested.

Rand drove south towards Pearland and Henrietta Worble's home. The police car parked at the curb stood out like a sore thumb. The officer was reading the newspaper and didn't notice Rand's car as it passed. She drove to the next intersection, left the subdivision and turned into the parking lot of the nearest 7-11. Looking over her notes

she found the addresses of the other two women on the list. Rand expected they would be guarded as well.

One of Justin Douglas's pastimes was watching movies with Texas themes. In the late 1970's John Travolta starred in a film entitled Urban Cowboy. It was one of the medical student's favorites. In the movie, Travolta's character leaves his small hometown, travels to Houston and finds work at an oil refinery. An early scene depicts Travolta driving in his pickup truck on loop 610, the massive circular highway structure which surrounds the city. Douglas enjoyed noting the buildings and sights in the background. In some respects, he envisioned himself in a similar vein, having left a small town to make his fortunes in this big, impersonal city. Today, however, he found himself traveling the same freeway but with a difference. He was leaving.

For the first few miles he concentrated on putting distance between himself and the apartment complex. The next task at hand was where to go.

A relative's home was out of the question. By the time he reached the exit for highway 290, the road he took to Rotan, he had formulated a plan. He remained on 610 driving east on the northern loop and its intersection with highway 59. It would carry him east to Nashville, Tennessee.

The weather had become nasty in eastern Arkansas. A cold front had swept down across the plains and deposited itself just south of Little Rock. The leading edge dropped the temperatures considerably but more importantly, brought with it moisture in the form of freezing rain. A high pressure system in the southern United States stalled the cold front, preventing it from moving further south and deflecting it eastward, towards Memphis.

Airline flights destined for Memphis before the weather deteriorated had little problem landing. Those scheduled later in the day, however, found themselves grounded. The winds had picked up and were gusting to over 50 miles an hour. Water came down in sheets with the weather service predicting sleet and freezing rain soon to replace them. Northwest Airlines, Memphis's largest carrier, cancelled flights by the dozens. An hour into Margaret Paxton's Northwest flight from Detroit, a flight attendant announced over

the loudspeaker that many connecting flights had been scratched. Paxton was scheduled to change planes in Memphis. After landing, a Northwest employee confirmed her fears. Her flight had been cancelled and Houston's largest carrier, Continental Airlines, was grounded as well. There was no way to leave Memphis that evening. The airline was, however, willing to put her up in a nearby hotel, at their expense and arrange for a flight the next morning. Having no other options Mrs. Paxton thanked the agent, retrieved her bags and boarded a shuttle bus for an Embassy Suites 2 miles from the airport.

Rand's visit to Pearl Cunningham's home was no different than that to Mrs. Worble's. A police cruiser sat parked at the curb with a single officer in the front seat. Rand was cursing under her breath as she rolled past Margaret Paxton's home in Pearland when she spotted something. At the corner of the house, near the garage doors were a half dozen neatly stacked newspapers, some slightly yellowed with age.

Paxton's not home, Rand thought smiling. She drove to a local park with her mobile phone and laptop computer to resume sleuthing. Rand knew Paxton had been evaluated and treated at M.D. Anderson Cancer Hospital in the Medical Center. By posing as an insurance adjuster she convinced the clerk on the phone to provide her with Paxton's religious preference. Using a map of Pearland Rand began calling nearby congregations of the same faith. Her hunch paid off. Within an hour she had spoken with Paxton's home congregation, Pearland Church of Christ. The office secretary knew Mrs. Paxton quite well and was more than willing to assist her niece. Margaret had been visiting relatives in Michigan but was expected back this evening. Rand thanked her for her help.

Detective Jamison was astonished when he heard Lieutenant Rook's depictions of his conversation with "Mrs. Brown". He was accustomed to dealing with local crime and local criminals. Occasionally, he would have to investigate a gang related killing involving someone from out of town but not anything like this and certainly not something related to persons and events over 50 years old. Jamison digested it all before asking any questions.

"Have you contacted the Toronto Police?" he asked Rook.

“Not yet. I thought you might want to since this is your case.”

“Thanks. Any idea who I should speak with up in the great frozen north?”

“No. My friend never gave me a name.”

“Fine. I’ll call them later this morning. Thanks for the heads up.”

“Keep me informed,” Rook requested.

Jamison nodded on his way out the door.

Rand called Schmidt to update him on her progress. He seemed preoccupied and short tempered when she told him about the police presence outside the women’s homes.

“Paxton’s scheduled to arrive tonight at Bush Intercontinental. I can meet her flight but there will be uniforms all over the place. I’ll never have a chance to get close.”

“What carrier is she on?” Schmidt asked.

“I assume Continental. It’s the major airline here in Houston.”

“Where is she coming from?”

“Detroit,” Rand answered.

“That’s Northwest territory.”

“Okay, so it could be Northwest,” Rand said defensively. “Does it make much difference?”

“Of course it makes a difference!” Schmidt snapped. “Don’t you occasionally glance at any of the news organization webpages?”

“From time to time.”

“Well, if you had bothered to in the past several hours you would have noticed that western Tennessee and eastern Arkansas are getting hammered with an ice storm. Memphis is big hub for Northwest. The airport isn’t completely shut down but a large number of their flights are grounded.”

“That’s all fine and good but if she was on Northwest and Detroit is a Northwest hub why would she be going to Memphis instead of a non-stop into Houston?”

“Think about it,” Schmidt said. “She’s old. She’s probably on a fixed income. It’s likely she could get a better fare by taking a flight with a change at another hub. If so, she might be stranded in Memphis. Check the flight manifests and find out where she is.” Schmidt hung up abruptly.

Rand put her phone away and turned to her laptop computer. She pulled up a file with numerous names and addresses. After scrolling down she located the name and address she was seeking. She dialed the number hoping they were home.

“Yeah,” the voice answered.

“Barry, this is Sheila Rand. I need a favor.”

Chapter 18

Agent Girard sat at his desk gazing out the window at the parking lot adjacent to the police building, a vacant look permeating his eyes. He had spent the morning perusing old files and brushing up on other cases which were currently active. He was still smarting from Messier's dressing down, but more importantly the unanswered questions about the deaths of Weincrantz and Merk continued to gnaw at him. He considered working on the cases in his spare time, something he had done in the past, but these crimes had complicated angles and he would be alone in his quest. It was a daunting task and one he didn't feel would likely result in any tangible benefit. Besides, he'd been given an order not to. He was about to head out for an early lunch when his phone rang. It was the departmental secretary with a long distance phone call. Girard said he would take it.

"This is Martin Girard," he said.

"Mr. Girard, my name is Lieutenant Jeff Rook with the Houston Police Department. Have I caught you at a bad time?"

"Not really." Girard was intrigued.

"Do you have a minute?"

"Certainly."

"I understand you have been investigating the deaths of Peter Merk and Julian Weincrantz. Is that correct?"

Girard's pulse quickened. "Yes, I have been. At least until recently."

"Really? Have the cases been solved?"

"No. They have been essentially closed. We weren't able to come up with much," Girard admitted with a tinge of professional embarrassment. "Do you have some additional information?"

Rook smiled. "I think so," he said.

Rook gave a thumbnail sketch of the Houston investigation. Girard asked few questions but made extensive notes as his counterpart spoke.

"That's quite a tale, Lieutenant," Girard said when Rook had finished. "We suspected Weincrantz's death wasn't a suicide but had little to support our theories. As

for Merk, what you just told me would certainly explain his frequent trips to Europe.” Girard then returned the favor, explaining what he had uncovered, including the tape from the bank in New York and the printout of its contents.

“I’m going to contact the police in Tucson and ask them to begin going over Merk’s home and workplace,” Rook said. “Perhaps we can find something there. Will what I told you allow you to reopen your case?”

Girard thought for a moment. “I can try, but my division detective may not allow it. I’ll have to let you know.”

“Fair enough. I’ll be in touch then. It was good to speak with you.”

“And you as well,” Girard said before hanging up.

“Why is it I only hear from you when you need something?” Barry grumbled.

“Because that’s the only time I want to talk to you,” Rand replied. Her acquaintance possessed an uncanny ability to obtain information not normally available to the unwashed masses, usually by illegally hacking into computer bases and snooping around.

“So can you get it for me?” she asked.

“Probably,” Barry replied.

“Probably?”

“Okay, definitely. But it’s going to cost you.”

“There’s a surprise. I thought you’d do it for altruistic reasons.”

“A thousand dollars.”

Rand didn’t blink.

“Done. I need it within the hour.”

“Well aren’t we Little-Miss-in-a-Hurry?”

“Yes, we are. Do I need to call someone else?”

“There is no ‘someone else’ darlin’ and you know it.”

“Fine. Then get with it. You have my cell number,” she said before hanging up.

Rand immediately began accessing travel web pages trolling for flights from Houston to Memphis and their status. Some had been cancelled but she found one on Continental scheduled for early evening that according to the carrier’s website was still

slated for departure. She phoned the airline and reserved a seat. As a contingency plan, she purchased one to Nashville as well. Rand had just gotten off the phone with Continental when her cell rang. It was Barry.

“What did you find out?” she asked.

“Northwest Airlines had a passenger named Margaret Paxton on a flight from Detroit to Houston with a change of planes in Memphis. The flight’s on the ground now but the final leg of the trip has been cancelled. Bad weather.”

“So where is she now?”

“Embassy Suites on Pinehurst Boulevard. It’s about 2 miles from the airport. The airline put everyone up there with the plan being to get them out the next morning when the weather clears.”

“What room?”

“665” Barry said testily. “Did you want to know what she’s having for dinner as well?”

Rand laughed. “Just wanted to see how far your reach actually extended. I’ll wire you the money in the morning.”

“How about wiring me the money now? Poker game tonight.”

“Fine,” Rand said rolling her eyes. “I’ll do it now. Wouldn’t want you to go to the game underfunded.”

“Always a pleasure, ma’am.”

Justin Douglas drove on Interstate 59 heading northeast. He waited until he was almost out of gas before stopping at a Texaco 60 miles west of Texarkana. After filling the tank and buying a Gatorade he resumed his trek. The radio overflowed with reports about the worsening weather conditions to the east. He wouldn’t get to Nashville until well after midnight and wanted to travel in the daylight as much as possible if he would be battling sleet and ice.

“One of the medical students is missing,” Jamison said. He was standing in Rooks’ office looking out the window at the traffic on the streets below.

“Which one?” Rook asked.

“Somebody named Justin Douglas. He was one of the four students assigned to Ruth Goldman’s body. The other three are present and accounted for. The school said he didn’t show for a test today and didn’t attend any of the afternoon classes. His roommates haven’t seen him and his truck isn’t in any of the parking areas.”

“Any reason to think he’s mixed up in this?”

Jamison shrugged his shoulders. “Pretty big coincidence, don’t you think?”

“Maybe he burned out and jumped ship,” Rook suggested.

“I don’t think so. From what we’ve been able to learn, he’s pretty grounded. Grew up in Rotan. He’s done well academically since he started. No red flags.”

“I suppose no one has a clue where he went?” Rook asked.

Jamison smiled. “How did you guess?”

“Did you toss his place?”

“The uniforms are there now. If we come up blank, I’m going to call his family and ask them if they know where he is.”

Girard was sitting in detective Messier’s office. He had just disclosed the contents of his conversation with lieutenant Rook. Messier had fidgeted back and forth in his seat while Girard spoke but he waited until the man had finished before speaking.

“So you want to reopen these cases?” Messier said.

“Well, don’t you think this new information warrants it?”

Messier found himself becoming angry at the man’s persistence.

You couldn’t just let this one drop, could you?

Although Messier wrote his colleague off with great reluctance, there was a sense of relief as well. At least the matter had been settled. He would use his influence to make certain things were done as humanely as possible. The thought of speaking with Schmidt again galled him - not only the subject matter but the haughty air of superiority he could expect to accompany the conversation.

“Yes, Martin,” he said nodding his head solemnly. “I think you have a point. Reopening the cases makes much more sense now.” He gave the agent a broad smile.

Wow. That was easy, Girard thought.

Margaret Paxton phoned her son shortly after arriving in her room. A dedicated fan of the Weather Channel, he already knew of the storm over Memphis and had called the airline for the flight's status. But he worried, particularly with his mother having cancer and a history of heart problems. It was all she could do to make him stay put when she announced she would be returning to Michigan to visit her sisters for the last time. He was relieved to learn she was safe and sound at the Embassy Suites.

After getting off the phone, Mrs. Paxton sat on the bed and channel surfed for a few minutes. Finding nothing to her liking on the tube, she remembered the hotel hosted a complimentary happy hour beginning at 5:00 P.M. She decided she would attend. After all, the drinks were free and she had nothing better to do.

All meetings with Karl Plewig were now entirely at his discretion. The stroke had left him weakened. He was taking daily physical therapy but an 86 year old man recovers slowly, even those in the best of health, which Plewig most certainly was not. He had summoned David Schmidt to his home outside Quezaltenango, Guatemala for a "chat" as he called them. Schmidt knew better. He was being brought to meet the most powerful man in the Nephilim for a face to face rebuke. Although he'd found the leak, so far he had failed to plug it. A small problem had mushroomed into a larger one and was dangerously close to getting completely out of hand.

A large, black Continental sedan with its driver was waiting for Schmidt at the Guatemala City airport. It drove into the hills surrounding the city, eventually arriving at an estate in one of the better neighborhoods sporting a newly installed electric fence and concertina wire. In the center of the property sat a helicopter waiting for Schmidt. Upon seeing the automobile roll into the compound, the pilot started the aircraft's engine. A few minutes later, Schmidt was airborne and an hour later came to rest on the expansive grounds around Plewig's hilltop home. He was ushered into a large wood paneled library, its shelves filled from floor to ceiling with books. A few paintings hung on the wall, artworks taken from occupied countries and which had for the most part, long since been forgotten about or presumed destroyed. An assistant wheeled Plewig into the room. The man appeared frail and sickly.

One attribute Plewig retained was his ability to read people. Over the years, it had served him well and, in fact, was arguably the trait most responsible for his success. Hard work and dedication will take a person far, but an insight into another human's thought processes is far more valuable. Before Schmidt spoke, Plewig knew what he was thinking.

"Don't let the veneer fool you," Plewig said. "The stroke didn't diminish my cognitive capacities."

Schmidt nodded slowly.

"Sit. Sit," Plewig implored and his guest did as he was instructed.

Plewig remained largely motionless in a wheelchair. He was dressed in a large purple bathrobe. Covering his lap and knees was a thick wool blanket with bright colors, typical of that produced by the Indians indigenous to this part of the country. His hair, what was left of it, was neatly combed back. The stroke had affected his muscles of facial expression leaving him with an almost comical snarl and a slight speech impediment. However, Schmidt soon realized the man had been truthful. He was still as sharp as ever.

"What is the status of your investigation?" Plewig asked.

Schmidt took a deep breath. "We believe Dr. Levy was involved in some of Mr. Weincrantz's work. As you know, the latter has been taken care of as well as what we believe was the source of much of his information, Peter Merk. The officer assigned to their deaths has been removed from the cases and according to my source in the Toronto Police Department the matter has now been concluded." Schmidt paused for a moment. "The question remains as to what materials Dr. Levy had in his possession. When his offices were searched we found the medical charts of four women, one of whom is deceased. We believe they are the focal point in this matter. Weincrantz had apparently accumulated considerable data on our resources. Just how much is unclear but we do know he collated names, places and properties on a micro cassette and stored it in a bank in upstate New York. I believe the women had something implanted in their bodies, such as a computer chip or a notation as to where another micro cassette is located. We are attempting to retrieve them."

"And what efforts are you making to ensure that happens?"

“An operative of mine sought to obtain access to the dead woman’s body. Unfortunately, she was unsuccessful. However, we have found the other women. Two are in the Houston area and one is traveling back to the city.”

“Are the police involved?”

“They are. This has made things more difficult but I am in the process of marshalling additional manpower to overcome the problem.”

“I assume you plan to abduct these women, is that correct?”

“I see no other choice,” Schmidt replied.

Plewig sat staring off into space, ruminating over what he had been told. “This has become quite messy, has it not?”

The man seated across from him nodded.

“The council members are concerned, as you might expect. Overall, their satisfaction with your job performance is less than enthusiastic. They would like to see you replaced.”

Schmidt swallowed hard and concentrated on not fidgeting with his hands. “Karl, I...”

Plewig raised his head back, a disapproving look covering his face. “You didn’t allow me to finish. I interceded on your behalf convincing them to allow you more time. They agreed. However, their patience has its limits. In the event this matter is not brought to a satisfactory close within a week we will have no choice but to remove you from your position. Is that understood?”

“Perfectly. I won’t disappoint you or the other members of the council.”

Plewig managed a weak smile. “I have every faith in you.”

Greg Jamison was at Justin Douglas’s apartment with several uniformed officers investigating the contents of the medical student’s room with a fine tooth comb. On the sidewalk outside Justin’s roommates stood with other neighbors watching the activity and intermittently glancing at their watches. They were anxious to get back inside and retrieve their study materials. While concerned about their friend they also realized that class assignments waited for no one.

One of the officers looking through Douglas's closet motioned for Jamison to come over.

"What have you got?" Jamison asked.

"It's a FedEx box. Delivered last week, according to the packing slip."

Jamison took the container from the officer and shook it gently. After opening end panel he removed a sheath of papers. Jamison examined them briefly. "Thanks," he said. "I think this may be what we came for." He removed his cell phone and placed a call to Lieutenant Rook.

"What have you got for me, Greg?"

"It's a bunch of papers with names, places and a list of properties. Most of the names are European. I think this may be the real deal."

"Can you bring it to me?"

"I'm on my way," Jamison answered.

Rook's phone rang exactly when Woodward said she would call.

You could set your clock by this woman, he thought as he answered.

"What's new on the case, Lieutenant?" she asked.

"Do you know anyone named Justin Douglas?" he asked.

"Not that I can recall, why?"

"He's a medical student here at the University of Texas. One of his professors was killed last night in the anatomy labs. There was a cadaver in the room that had been raised from its metal container. It was the late Ruth Goldblum, one of the women on Dr. Levy's list. The cadavers are assigned to a group of 4 medical students. Justin Douglas was one of them and he's nowhere to be found."

"I see," Woodward mused. "I assume you and your department are searching for him?"

"Not yet. He's not a missing person at this point. But we do have an APB out on his pickup."

"And what of the other three women?"

"They're under round the clock surveillance. Well, at least two of them are. The third will be when she returns tonight."

“Does she know what’s in store for her?”

“Not yet, but we’ll meet her at the airport and explain it on the way in.”

“You were right,” Messier said reluctantly. “He became overly zealous. When the policemen from Houston phoned about Weincrantz and Merk he wanted to reopen the case. In light of the new evidence I had little choice but to allow it. Had he taken it over my head, my decision would have been indefensible.”

“He was contacted by the Houston Police Department?” Schmidt asked.

“That was what he said. He compared notes with someone named Rook. Seems he knew quite a lot.”

“There’s someone else in the mix then. This Rook fellow either has superb investigative techniques or someone is feeding him information.” Schmidt was absentmindedly rapping his knuckles on the tabletop.

“So how do you want to play this?” Messier asked. His voice was filled with trepidation and Schmidt could tell he wanted to be involved as marginally as possible.

“I have someone in the area who can do the job. He’ll be calling you within a few hours. Be prepared to meet him somewhere and talk shop. Call me when it makes the news.” With that said, Schmidt switched off his cell phone and tossed it on the bed. The day was going from bad to worse. After pacing around the room for a while he retrieved his laptop computer, logged on to the web and typed in an email message.

I need an in-country extraction. Must be ready and in place within 24 hours. Can you do the job?

Sheila Rand returned to George Bush Intercontinental Airport in the late afternoon. After dropping off her rental car she boarded a shuttle bus to the terminal where she stood with other passengers staring at the departure schedules display. Most flights to Memphis were delayed and some had been canceled. Those to Nashville remained unaffected although Rand overheard a man tell his wife the weather front was edging east towards the state capitol. After speaking with an agent at the Continental Airlines customer service booth she was reassured that the 6:12 P.M. departure was still

on but the 9:30 flight would probably be scrubbed. Early evening to Memphis was almost surely out.

Rand quickly strode to the check-in counter, purchased her ticket and walked to the gate. A few minutes later a voice over the loudspeaker announced the flight would begin boarding soon. She had just sat down and opened a fashion magazine when her cell phone went off. Per normal, it was Schmidt about to burst an aneurysm. Rand updated him on her plan to fly to Nashville and drive to Memphis.

“I sent out an email to Bohner,” Schmidt said.

“Why on earth did you contact that psycho?”

“I need his expertise.”

“For what? Weeding your yard with his teeth?” Rand asked sarcastically.

Terry Bohner was someone Rand had had little contact with over the years which was fine with her. He was well known in the underground mercenary circles with a reputation for being willing to do most anything for a buck. Spilling blood wasn't a prohibitive concern since it was rarely his. He had overseen several messy operations freeing or abducting people, depending on your point of view, in the previous decade earning him the distinction as someone who could get the job done. If you had the checkbook for the mission, he had the stomach for it.

“I'm going to have him extract the women currently under police protection. What I need you to do is isolate Paxton woman.”

“Where do you want me to take her?” Rand inquired.

“I don't care just so long as you get her out of sight. Contact me when you're done and we'll go from there.”

“Well, I'm about to board my flight. I know where she is. The rest shouldn't be too much trouble.”

By the time Justin Douglas was past Texarkana the temperature outside had dropped considerably. At Little Rock the radio stations were encouraging motorists not to drive if they could avoid it. Traffic was lighter with only the big trucks on the highway seeming to take little notice of the call to pull over for the night. The closer

Douglas got to Memphis the more flecks of ice he could see in the water hitting his windshield. He turned the defroster up and cut his speed to 55 miles an hour.

“This is really something,” Rook said as he looked over the pages on the table in front of him. He was in a closed interrogation room with Woodward on a speakerphone. Detective Jamison was pacing the floor behind him.

“Can you recite for me some of the names,” Woodward requested.

Rook acceded to her request, mangling some of the pronunciations. After a dozen Woodward cut him off.

“What about the properties?” she asked.

When he had mentioned a few of the items on the list Woodward broke in.

“That’s it. That’s information only Weincrantz would have been able to obtain. If you can fax me a copy of it I’ll begin going over it.”

“So, is this all of it then?” Jamison asked.

“You said there are about 25 pages total, correct?”

“About that, yeah,” Rook answered.

“Then, no. There would likely be more. But it’s a start.”

Martin Girard was in a better mood. He was surprised his boss had allowed him to continue his investigation and considered it a good sign. Perhaps some of his persuasive arguments had won the point for him. He finished up some residual paperwork on his desk and headed out of the office. A friend had given him tickets for the Maple Leafs hockey game at the Garden that night. The Montreal Canadiens were visiting and given their rivalry over the years, seats to this match were a prized commodity.

Girard walked out the front door of the building after gloating over his good fortune with some of the uniformed officers. His car was parked half a block away in a lot protected by an 8 foot fence. Although it was only 6:00 P.M., it was October and there was a distinct chill in the air.

Forty yards up the street in front of the parking lot sat a nondescript van with the logo of a carpet cleaning company emblazoned on the back. A small sliding window on

the side was open less than 2 inches. Upon seeing Girard making his trek down the sidewalk a man inside slowly placed the barrel of a rifle on the lip of the window ledge. At the end of the gun was a silencer. He adjusted his sighting mechanism several times accounting for the crosswinds and the cooler temperature of the outside air before carefully lining the policeman up in the cross hairs. In the front seat sat a driver with the engine running.

“Be ready to leave when I give you the signal,” the shooter said in Italian. “And let me know the second the light behind us becomes red.”

“Got it,” the driver responded.

Girard was vaguely aware of the concrete parking barrier in his path and was attempting to step over it. However, as he searched his pockets for his car keys the tip of his right foot caught the lip of the cement divider. Off balance, he pitched forward.

The man behind the steering wheel spoke into his radio. “The light just turned red.” As he exhaled slowly the assassin adjusted his stance for the final time. He lined the crosshairs up on his target’s temple and began smoothly retracting the trigger. Just before the firing pin was released the target disappeared from his line of sight. The shooter’s finger muscles were already in motion. The nerves and sensory pathways of his brain would not allow a recall. The digit inexorably pulled the metal lever past the point of release, firing the weapon. Before the round left the rifle’s muzzle, the man knew it had been a wasted effort.

Girard cursed silently under his breath as he felt himself stumbling. He extended his arms to brace himself, letting his keys and briefcase fall to the ground. His hands hit the pavement shearing the skin from his fingers and palms. Just as he heard his keys rattle on the asphalt he felt the dull thud of the bullet impacting the car window over his shoulder. Glass fragments exploded into the air, raining down on Girard’s back and neck. The policeman rolled to the side and fumbled for his revolver.

“Go! Go!” the man in the van shouted over his microphone. The driver released the brake on the vehicle, turned sharply and roared into the street. The shooter was jostled by the pitching of the van, barely having had time to retract his weapon before falling to the floor. He was cursing loudly as the two men made their way hurriedly down the avenue and into the rush hour traffic.

Girard crawled on the pavement around an adjacent sedan before raising his head to survey the area. The van was well out of sight but several pedestrians were looking in his direction. They scattered when they saw his drawn weapon. He sat down near the wheel well of the car and tried to catch his breath.

Sheila Rand’s flight landed on time in Nashville. The storms in the western part of the state had stalled leaving the airfield open and operating as usual. She made her way to the rental car desk, got the last available SUV with 4 wheel drive and walked to the Ford Explorer in the Avis parking area on the first floor of the garage. Within a few minutes she was on Interstate 40 heading west to Memphis.

In an anteroom off the hotel lobby the nightly happy hour was well underway. After a single scotch and soda Margaret Paxton felt a sensation of warmth and relaxation enveloping her. Reminding herself that life was short, she ordered another drink. By the time it was half gone, however, she concluded her foray into happy hour was over. After arriving back in her room she laid down on the bed and shortly thereafter was snoring loudly.

Justin Douglas’s trip to Nashville was going as well as could be expected. The Arkansas highway department had received sufficient warning to begin sanding and salting the roadways. Everywhere he looked, particularly around Little Rock, cars were in the ditch with highway patrol vehicles parked on the adjacent shoulder, their lights cutting sharply through the enveloping darkness of the early evening. Douglas’s truck had 4-wheel drive, something that allowed him to drive more steadily and maintain his speed. He was around Memphis just before 10:00 P.M. and by the time he had gotten to

Jackson, Tennessee the weather had improved considerably. The sleet of the past 6 hours had subsided and the number of stalled vehicles accordingly reduced. He pushed his driving speed up to 75 miles an hour. With the improved conditions he calculated he would make Nashville by 2:00 A.M.

If nothing else, Terry Bohner was efficient. He had assembled a group of 10 men and a second in command for the job. Given the late hour of the request for his services he managed to command a shameless fee for his services. Most of the men Bohner employed were ex-servicemen with varying degrees of experience as mercenaries. Most lived in the Baton Rouge area. Some were bounty hunters or bail bondsmen but the majority had accumulated enough money to allow them to hunt and fish in the bayous while waiting for a call from Bohner or one of the other outfits they occasionally worked for. They weren't trigger happy rednecks but too restless and ill equipped to pursue more traditional professions.

The group was relatively quiet, which was typical. The outbound leg of the journey was usually filled with varying degrees of anxiety. Some of the men listened to music on headsets whereas others read or slept. Alcohol was forbidden but the return trip would be a different matter. Bohner fully anticipated returning to his farm with most of the group being unable to drive home or for that matter get more than 50 yards from the barn. Bohner spent most of the first half hour of the trip speaking by phone with Schmidt who was calling from South America. He filled him in on the details and was very explicit about what he wanted accomplished.

“And the cops at the scene?” Bohner asked

“Do whatever it takes but get the women,” Schmidt responded.

“Well, I'm certainly not going to kill them but we can....”

“Why not? That was never an impediment before.”

“Right. In Guiana and the Ivory Coast but not the US. We don't kill American police officers. Their reach is too long.”

Schmidt had grown weary of the ever changing set point on Bohner's moral compass. “Fine. It's your operation. Run it as you see fit,” he said testily. “However, if

you don't accomplish the objectives and I find out it was due to some reticence on your part to dispatch someone, you and I will have a sharp parting of the ways.”

Bohner was accustomed to having people like Schmidt talk down to him. He assumed it resulted from spending large sums of money motivating other men to undertake projects with the potential for bloodshed.

Take out a cop? Yeah, right, he thought. How big an idiot do you think I am?

Chapter 19

Girard used his cell phone to call the precinct and tell them what had just happened. The desk sergeant and two of the night shift agents were the first on the scene. After a few minutes Detective Messier arrived. Girard was leaning against the hood of his car while the officers inspected the vehicle for additional bullet holes. The slug had embedded itself near the driver's side door handle. One of the policemen was attempting to dislodge it.

"You okay?" Messier asked.

"All things considered, I suppose so."

"Who did you make mad this time?" Messier said flatly.

"Well, the list is so long. It's hard to know where to begin," Girard answered.

Messier walked to the rear of the car and feigned a cursory inspection of the vehicle.

"I'm going to give this case to the unit that's catching tonight," he said.

Girard glanced up with a pained expression on his face. The officers in house overnight typically weren't assigned cases. They mostly managed things until the agents working the day shifts could pick them up. Their capacity for serious investigation, by definition of their working hours, was limited. A veteran policeman had just been shot at and this was Messier's response? To give the case to someone nearing retirement and playing out their string?

"Why not some of the people working the day shift?" Girard asked.

Messier looked around at the parking lot, not making eye contact. "Until we know this wasn't some stray shot fired from who knows where we can't spare the manpower. Let's wait and see what ballistics tells us." With that Messier walked away leaving Girard staring at the ground in silence.

The weather had not been an impediment to Sheila Rand's trip. The roads were clear from Nashville to Jackson, Tennessee and the road crews around Memphis had put out sand and salt to keep the main thoroughfares passable. Using the Internet she had located the Embassy Suites Hotel where Margaret Paxton was staying.

The parking lot was crowded, for which Rand was grateful. The Explorer would have to be well removed from the building and the presence of the other cars provided an element of cover. After shutting off the engine she donned a wig and put in a set of blue-green contact lenses. Confirming the presence of a long bladed knife in her purse, Rand left the vehicle and made her way through the cold drizzle to the front entrance of the hotel.

Room 665 was at the end of a long hall. Since it was after midnight the hotel was quiet, many of its weary occupants having gone to bed hoping to find flights out in the morning. Rand surveyed her surroundings and knocked on the door.

Margaret Paxton had been sleeping soundly on top of her bed. The alcohol from several hours earlier had worn off but when she awoke her headache reminded her of why she didn't regularly consume scotch. She was vaguely aware of someone knocking at the door. What now she thought. Paxton stumbled to the door tripping on her shoes in the process. She peered through the peephole but didn't recognize her visitor.

"What is it? she asked.

"Front desk ma'am," Rand replied. "We have a fax for you."

A fax? Who on earth would be sending me a fax? She looked back through the peephole to see a woman waving a piece of paper.

"Just a minute," Paxton said as she fumbled with the deadbolt lock. When she opened the door she saw a nicely dressed woman holding the paper in her hand but without the blazer worn by the other employees.

"I wasn't expecting any fax."

Rand looked at the paper pretending to read it. "Are you Margaret Paxton?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"I need you to initial this for us, if you don't mind."

Paxton realized their conversation might wake some of the other guests. "Come in and I'll sign it."

Rand smiled at the invitation and walked into the room.

"I think there's a pen on the desk," she said pointing. The door closed behind her.

Paxton turned on a light. As she bent over to pick up the pen, Rand removed the knife from her bag, put her forearm around the woman's neck and jerked upward. Paxton's hands reflexly went up to Rand's arm. The pressure was choking her and she began to cough.

"Take it easy," Rand said. "Do what I tell you and there won't be any problems."

Terrified, Paxton could only nod her head.

"Take your arms down and put them behind your back. Paxton complied and Rand deftly snapped a pair of handcuffs on the woman's wrist. Next, she removed a roll of duct tape, tore off a six inch section and placed it over the woman's mouth. With her captive appropriately silenced she pushed her back on the bed. Paxton fell awkwardly but managed to right herself eventually sitting on the end of the mattress. Her eyes began to tear up.

Rand glanced around the room. The woman hadn't unpacked which would make things easier. All her belongings would have to be removed lest the police, who would eventually search the place, might assume Paxton hadn't left of her own free will.

Rand leaned against the television cabinet, removed her cell phone and placed a call to Schmidt.

"I've got the package," she said after he had answered.

Schmidt had been sound asleep but his grogginess evaporated quickly upon hearing the good news.

"Excellent," he said. "What are the roads like?"

"Tolerable to the east but bad in every other direction."

"Good. Then in the morning I want you to go to the private terminal at the Nashville airport. I'll have a plane waiting there to fly you to Houston."

"I understand," the woman said as she hung up.

Rand looked at Margaret Paxton sitting on the edge of the bed. The agonized expression on her face had not subsided. Rand removed coat and draped over a nearby chair.

"Okay, roomie," she said as she unfastened the buttons on her shirtsleeves.

"Looks like we're here for the rest of the night. You got a cold or allergies or something?"

Paxton shook her head.

“Good. I’m going to take this off.” She reached for the corner of the duct tape and pulled it quickly to the side. The tape made a ripping sound. Paxton exhaled forcefully and began coughing spasmodically. She knew better than to cry out.

“You’re going to lay down on your bed and I’m going to lay down on mine. I need at least a few hours sleep or I’ll be cranky and, trust me when I tell you this, you don’t want me to be cranky. If you try to escape, I’ll kill you. If you try to get help, I’ll kill you. If you scream out, I’ll kill you. Are we clear?”

Paxton nodded silently.

“Oh, and as for going to the bathroom...”

Paxton looked up expectantly

“...I don’t want to hear about it. Now lay down, shut up and go to sleep.”

Rand walked to the door, put the deadbolt lock back in place and returned to her bed. After turning out the light she laid down on top of the covers. She wouldn’t sleep as deeply as she would like, but she was confident Mrs. Paxton would give her little trouble. The woman was handcuffed but was smart enough to know that breaking any of the ground rules would be a bad idea. She may be old but she wasn’t stupid.

Justin Douglas arrived at Paul Grabel’s house shortly after 2:00 A.M. He’d been there once before, fortunately in the daytime, and had little trouble finding the place. Grabel had scored primo place living arrangements. He’d been at church one Sunday morning (a rarity for him) and overheard two older men talking. One had mentioned he a need to rent out a two bedroom house previously occupied by the property’s caretaker. Grabel wasn’t happy with apartment living and interrupted the men to inquire about the place. That afternoon he was given a tour and signed a lease before leaving. The house was small but well built and had central air conditioning. Even better, it sat on the back of a 210 acre parcel of land square in the middle of Brentwood, a wealthy bedroom community south of Nashville. Forty years ago, much of the town had been like this property but urban flight and growth in central Tennessee had left fewer and fewer working farms intact. Grabel had stumbled onto one of them. There was practically no noise, aside from an occasional cow and he had use of the stabled horses on the property.

In the fall he could even bird hunt. For someone accustomed to small town living and ill suited to big city life, it was heaven.

Douglas didn't want to but he rang the bell. He was about to do so again when he heard feet shuffling inside the apartment. An overhead light came on. When the door opened, his friend's face bore a look more of surprise than grogginess.

"What on earth are you doing here?" Grabel asked.

"Collecting for UNICEF. Can I come in?"

Grabel noticed the precipitation moving slowly but steadily through the beams of light emanating from his porch fixture. "Oh, yeah. Yeah," he said as he opened the door. Douglas stepped in and Grabel switched on a lamp.

"Did you email me and tell me you were coming or something?" Grabel asked. It wasn't like Douglas to show up unannounced.

"No. I just needed somewhere to crash for a bit. Figured this was as good a place as any."

"And a scant 600 miles away from Houston to boot," Grabel replied. He sat down in a recliner. "You in trouble?"

"Well, yes and no."

"You're in trouble," Grabel said decidedly.

"It's not what you think. I haven't broken the law or anything like that. It has to do with that computer chip I sent you."

Grabel was shaking his head. "How did I know that was what you were going to say?"

"I was planning to put the chip back into Mrs. Doubtfire's chest with the hope one would be the wiser. When I was down in the anatomy labs I saw one of our professors getting killed. Naturally, I bailed but they must have heard me because three seconds later this woman's out in the hall taking potshots at my head. The next morning one of my neighbors tells me my "aunt" was at the apartment looking for me. Since I don't have an aunt, that was upsetting news. I grabbed my truck and headed to NashVegas."

"So what now?" Grabel asked.

“I don’t know,” Douglas answered thoughtfully. “I was just focused on getting out of Houston and not involving my family.”

“That’s reassuring,” Grabel responded nodding his head. “Thanks very little.”

“I assumed if these people are the professionals I think they are, they would expect me to go to my folk’s house or maybe my sister’s place. You’re pretty low under the radar screen. Seemed safer.”

“Meaning I have no life so I’m invisible.”

“And expendable. Don’t forget expendable.”

“Oh, absolutely. Most expendable.” Grabel yawned. He was accustomed to being up late studying but this was, after all, past 2:00 in the morning and he had a nine o’clock lab to proctor. “You want to crash on the couch?”

Douglas assessed the piece of furniture in question. It was threadbare and vaguely lopsided but given his degree of fatigue he was more than happy to accept it.

“Sure,” he said as he began taking off his coat.

Detective Jamison’s night had been a long one. He had driven to George Bush Intercontinental Airport to meet the Northwest Airlines flight from Memphis only to learn it had been cancelled. Margaret Paxton was to have been on that plane so at midnight he began the arduous task of obtaining a list of the flight’s passengers. During the daytime getting such information was difficult. After hours, it was next to impossible. He eventually found a night supervisor at the Detroit Airport who was willing to help him but not before she assured herself he indeed was employed by the Houston Police Department and his request was official business. Eventually, she confirmed that Margaret Paxton had been on the flight to Houston with a change of planes in Memphis. It had arrived on time but the final leg of the journey had been cancelled due to weather conditions. She had a tentative reservation for the first flight out the next morning. So where was she now?

That innocuous question was vexing to the supervisor in Detroit. The passengers from numerous flights had been given overnight vouchers for over a dozen hotels in the area. Finding the correct one would take some time. Jamison gave her his number asking her call back when she knew something. He went to a room reserved for officers

on overnight duty and laid down on a cot. He had been asleep for a few hours when his cell phone went off. The supervisor had tracked Mrs. Paxton down.

After a quick shower and shave, Jamison went to his office. It was nearly 7:30 A.M. He called the number he had been given. Margaret Paxton was registered at the hotel. The front desk patched his call through to her room.

The ringing of the phone woke Sheila Rand. She sat upright and rubbed her eyes before looking at her captive.

“Don’t even think about trying to answer that,” she said harshly. Rand had gotten less than 4 hours sleep and wasn’t much of a morning person to begin with. Paxton sat on the edge of the bed. The dark circles under her eyes confirmed she had been awake most of the night. She was exhausted but alert enough to remain terrified.

The phone continued ringing as Rand extracted the key to the handcuffs from her pocket. “Up,” she said. Paxton followed her command. “I’m going to take these off and we are going to walk out the back entrance. Get your bags. I’m not a bellhop. I trust I don’t need to remind you that if you try to get away or make a scene I’ll have no choice but to slit your throat.”

Paxton rubbed her wrists after the cuffs had been removed. She removed her coat from the hanger, put it on and picked up her suitcase and purse. As they left the caller hung up.

Terry Bohner and his group of mercenaries were traveling on Interstate 10 from Louisiana to Houston. They had been awake since the middle of the night. Bohner had been able to obtain the services of most everyone he had contacted. The financial incentive was more than customary supplying an added impetus to sign on. They rode in two Chevrolet Suburbans which Bohner had rented from a friend who dealt in used cars and transacted most of his business with cash and no receipts. Their weaponry had come from a sizeable arsenal concealed beneath the flooring in Bohner’s barn.

Bohner had been in contact with David Schmidt earlier the previous evening. He had been given the names and addresses of the women he was to abduct. On the journey

he briefed the men as to their assignments. All had been on similar operations previously and knew their jobs well. It wouldn't be easy but it was doable.

“He missed! How much more complicated do you plan on making my life?”

Detective Messier was yelling into his cell phone on his drive in to work.

“Reign in the indignation, detective. This was something that should have been taken care of long before now and without this degree of involvement on my part.”

Messier was nearly speechless. “I should have taken him out?”

“To be frank, yes,” Schmidt answered. “After Merk was dispatched and things were becoming complicated you should have been proactive and taken care of the problem. That's what we pay you for.”

“Well, you don't pay me that much, *Her General*,” Messier said sarcastically.

There was a pause in the conversation while Schmidt reigned in his temper.

“Another bite at the apple isn't in the cards. Sending our operative back contains a degree of exposure we aren't prepared to assume. The problem now is yours. Take care of it as you see fit, but take care of it.” With that Schmidt hung up.

Messier had been placed in an untenable position. In frustration he hurled his cell phone at the floorboard of the passenger side. Momentarily distracted, his Jeep Wrangler began drifting to the side. Messier was traveling in the right lane on a highway under renovation and as his temper had escalated, so had his speed. Work crews had placed plastic pylons along the roadside to safeguard personnel replacing the metal poles of a guardrail. As the Wrangler veered to the right, it caught a plastic pylon between the front tire and the axle. Instantly it became tightly wedged, jerking the vehicle further towards the shoulder. By the time Messier realized what was happening the Wrangler was careening off the road heading straight for a section of newly implanted metal poles. Workers dropped their picks and shovels as they scrambled madly out of the way. Messier tried to pull the SUV back to the left but the pylon had become jammed irretrievably in place. The vehicle was making a permanent right turn. The front of the Wrangler hit a metal pole before Messier had a chance to apply the brakes. The impact was catastrophic.

The pole belonged to an already completed section of the project and firmly embedded in concrete. It budged only a few inches. The Wrangler flipped into the air and almost immediately began disintegrating. It flew more than 50 feet before landing upside down in a culvert, well away from the roadway. After flipping over several times the vehicle came to rest upside down near a section of trees. The highway workers began running towards it but stopped when it burst into flames. Detective Messier, trapped inside, would not know the horror of being burned to death. His neck had been broken. He was dead before the Wrangler had even come back to earth.

Jamison hung up the phone after its 20th ring. He called the front desk at the hotel again and asked if Margaret Paxton had checked out. She had not officially done so, the manager told him but that wasn't unusual. Guests frequently left the key cards in their rooms and didn't officially notify the hotel they were departing.

Jamison thought for a moment. "Do you know if she arrived at the hotel driving a rental car?"

"I have no idea, sir," the manager said. "But I doubt it. She was a voucher guest from the airlines. They typically arrive in our shuttle vans."

Realizing he was getting nowhere, Jamison thanked the man, hung up the phone and placed a call to the airlines. The caliber of the service personnel during business hours had increased and the detective was now conversing with someone who knew their way around the system.

"Does she have a reservation?" Jamison inquired.

"No, sir. She would be flying standby," the woman answered. "The flight is about 70% full so only a certain number of passengers will be able to obtain seats."

"So she would have to check in with the ticket counter and then the gate."

"Correct."

"Is there anyway to see if she's checked in with either?"

"There is, but it will take a bit of time. I'll call you back in about 10 minutes," the woman said.

The detective used the break in the action to procure a second cup of coffee. He had just returned from the break room when his phone rang.

“I’m sorry sir, but I wasn’t able to find any evidence that she’s put luggage through or is at the gate,” the woman announced. “She’s not on any standby list that I can find.”

Jamison bit his lip as he listened. “Could she have gotten on another flight?”

“You mean with another carrier?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I suppose anything’s possible,” the supervisor said. “But of course she would have had to purchase a last minute one way fare and it would be very expensive.”

“Is there anyway I could find out if she has a reservation on another airline?”

“Aside from calling them individually, no.”

Jamison thanked the woman for her efforts and hung up. He sat back in his chair with the coffee in front of him emitting wafts of steam. Where are you?

Margaret Paxton had grown up outside Slidell, Louisiana the only daughter of an oil field worker. She had six older brothers, the eldest being only 8 years her senior. Try as her mother did, she was unable to keep her daughter from rough and tumble activities with her older siblings. By Margaret’s 15th birthday, she’d had two broken arms, three concussions, a fractured rib, a broken nose and more knee and ankle sprains than anyone could count. She’d also learned to give as good as she got. Playing high school basketball, nearly a religion in rural Louisiana, she perfected the art of elbowing her opponents in the head. Competitors began giving her a wide berth. In her senior year the coach switched her from defense to offense. She averaged over 22 points a game. Her team eventually placed fourth in the state tournament.

After high school, Margaret, or Maggie as she was called by her family, attended two years of junior college. She was set to transfer to LSU when World War Two ended. Among the men returning from combat was a young Air Force captain she had met 18 months earlier while working at a USO canteen in Baton Rouge. Still possessing the good looks and same broad shoulders she had noticed before, they ran into one another at, of all places, church. Six months later Tom Paxton married Margaret Boudreaux and the two moved to Spring, Texas. Marriage, and the arrival of children, had a mellowing effect on Maggie. The tomboy attributes and competitive juices were gradually replaced

by maternal instincts and household chores. On occasion, however, Maggie Paxton could still revive the aggressiveness that had marked her previous experiences in competitive sports.

“If you need to use the can, let me know and we can stop,” Rand remarked as she drove the two of them east on Interstate 30 towards Texarkana. “But we aren’t going to pull over every 20 miles so don’t start this ‘I’ve got a weak bladder business’, okay?”

Margaret Paxton looked at her captor and nodded appropriately. “Well, I don’t have a ‘weak bladder’ thank you very much and I’d appreciate it you wouldn’t refer to me like I was some sort of invalid.”

Rand chuckled softly to herself. “Well, you do have cancer.”

Paxton shot her a dirty look. “How do you know that?”

“I’m psychic,” she responded.

“Where are we in terms of finding the medical student?” Rook asked.

“I checked with the detectives on overnight stakeout and they said he never returned to his apartment,” Jamison answered. “They did a sweep of the parking area as well. No sign of his truck.”

“Did you call his family?”

“Yeah, just a few minutes ago. They were freaked out to say the least but had no idea where he might be. They were going to begin calling relatives and get back with me.”

Jamison was sitting sideways on a chair in Rook’s office. He was rolling a rubber band around between his fingers.

“The return address from the FedEx box was from someone by the name of Paul Grabel in Nashville, Tennessee. Douglas’s mother said he’s a childhood friend in school at Vanderbilt University. I put in a call to their police force and asked that they check out his place as well. Maybe he’s there.” Jamison was interrupted by his cell phone. “Hang on a minute,” he told Rook. “This may be the boys in Tennessee.”

“Hello,” Jamison said.

“Detective Jamison?” the voice inquired.

“That’s me.”

“This is Detective David Grimson with the Brentwood Police Department. You wanted us to check out the home of a Mr. Paul Grabel here in Brentwood. Is that correct?”

“Yes, sir, it is.”

“Well, we have. The vehicle you asked us about is at the residence and so is Mr. Grabel’s. Would you like for us to detain him?”

“Very much. I really need to talk with him.”

The detective looked again through his binoculars at the small farmhouse. “We can do that,” he said. “Any reason to think that these fellows may be armed?”

“Not really. Douglas is a medical student here in Houston and Grabel is some chemistry geek at Vanderbilt. Both are small town boys but I doubt they have any weapons apart from a slide rule.”

The Detective laughed audibly. “All right then. I’ll go get them and give you a call when they’re squared away.”

“Thank you, Detective. I really appreciate all your help.”

“No problem.”

Jamison turned back towards Rook. “Douglas is in Tennessee. The locals are going to snatch him up. You want to be there when I talk with him?”

“Oh, yeah,” Rook responded.

It was just before 8:00 A.M. when Justin Douglas woke up. He had slept only 5 hours and the couch had given him a sore back. The medical student rubbed his eyes before heading down the hall to the kitchen. Grabel was sitting at the table reading the morning paper and eating cold cereal. He looked up when his friend appeared in the doorway.

“Ola,” he said.

“Right back atcha,” came the groggy response.

“Sleep well?” Grabel asked as he resumed his perusal of the newsprint.

“Oh, terrific. Where did you get that couch? The dump?”

“It’s from the Pottery Barn’s Marquis de Sade collection. New for fall this year. I’m surprised you haven’t heard of it.”

“Uh huh,” Douglas said. “Got any coffee?”

“Never touch the stuff. There’s some instant in the cupboard though if you want it. Microwave’s next to the fridge.”

“If you never touch the stuff, why do you have instant?”

Grabel stopped chewing and looked up. “I keep it here for my dates since they may want some.”

Douglas grinned. “You? With a date? I thought you were gay.”

“Bite me.” Grabel looked back at the newspaper. “You know, this Vanderbilt football team really stinks. I should go out for the squad. Show them what us west Texas boys are made of.”

Douglas laughed out loud. “Great idea. You do that. I’m sure a 165 pound white boy is really going to strike terror into the hearts of those Florida defensive backs.” He found the instant coffee and was pouring some of it into a cup when the doorbell rang.

“You expecting someone?”

“Just Ed McMahon. He’s way past due.”

Grabel went to the front door and opened it. Standing in front of him was a middle aged man wearing a blue windbreaker.

“Mr. Grabel?” he asked.

“That’s me.”

“I’m Detective David Grimson with the Brentwood Police Department.” The man briefly flashed an official looking badge. Grabel, normally one with a quick wit, found himself without much to say. “I need to speak with the driver of that pickup parked in front of your house.”

From the kitchen Douglas could hear the conversation. For a moment he considered slipping out the back door but he realized he was in the middle of a large section of land with nowhere to go and few places to hide. One of the best pieces of advice he had ever been given was by his uncle, a reformed alcoholic, who told him that no man is ever really wise until he knows when he’s beaten. Douglas realized he had played out the string as long as it would go. It was time to face the music.

“That would be me,” he said as he came around the corner.

“Justin Douglas?” the detective asked.

“Justin Douglas,” the medical student said flatly.

“Why don’t we go to our offices and talk.”

“Is he under arrest or something?” Grabel inquired.

“Not at this time.”

“Should I get you a lawyer, Justin?”

“No,” Douglas said as he put on his coat. “But I’d appreciate it if you’d call my parents and let them know where I am.”

Margaret Paxton’s emotions had transformed from fear to anger. Sheila Rand, by contrast, was tired. She’d gotten little sleep the night before and in addition to being fatigued was pensive about what she was to do with her captive. After a half hour, the monotony of the travel had lulled her into a superficial stupor.

Paxton needed to visit a restroom and had begun mulling over her options. Half a mile in front of them was a Tennessee highway patrol car traveling in the same direction. When the sedan pulled off into a roadside rest stop she spoke up. “I have to go to the bathroom.”

Rand, roused from her lethargy, looked at the elderly woman. “Can’t you hold it?” she grouched.

“I don’t think you want me to try that.”

“I thought you didn’t have a weak bladder?”

“Look, there’s a rest stop right up here. Just pull over and let me take care of my business.”

Rand shook her head. “Great. Whatever. But I’m coming with you,” she said.

“Fine. You do what you have to.”

To Paxton’s relief, the patrol car had stopped at the far end of the parking lot, hidden behind a white Suburban. Rand had apparently not seen it, or if she had made no mention of the fact to her prisoner. After parking the Explorer she turned to Paxton.

“Look lady,” she began, “I’m going to be right behind you. Try anything and I’ll carve you up like a Thanksgiving turkey. Clear?”

“Not quite,” Paxton responded sarcastically. “Could you write it down for me?”

Rand didn't care for the woman's attitude but was too tired to make an issue of it. "Get moving and remember, this isn't a sight seeing trip."

Paxton got out of the SUV and waited at the curb while Rand locked the vehicle. When she was done the two began walking towards the restrooms. Paxton kept a sharp eye out for the patrolman fearing if Rand saw him she would scratch the visit and force them to return to the car. There was no sign of the officer. The rest stop was crowded. Travel the previous day had been difficult with the sleet and ice and those unable to reach their destinations were now trying to make up for lost time. Paxton noticed that many of the people had dogs which they were walking on the grass beside and behind the restrooms.

As the two made their way up the sidewalk Rand was several feet behind Paxton. I have to close the gap she thought to herself.

Paxton slowed her pace. "Watch your step," she said, pointing towards the sidewalk. Rand fell for it. She looked towards the pavement, expecting to see some canine deposit. There was nothing to detect and as she began to widen her field of observation she unwittingly moved closer to Paxton.

Witnesses would later say that what they had been privy to resembled a professional wrestling match, or at least the beginnings of one. Margaret Paxton, though aged and possessing an ultimately fatal malignancy hearkened back to her days basketball in rural Louisiana. She dipped her right shoulder down slightly and across her body. With a whipsaw motion the grandmother of 3 brought her elbow up, ultimately settling it on a level trajectory as she twisted her hips to add more torque to the movement. It was with great satisfaction that she noticed no significant decline in her skill with the motion. The effect was just as visible and immediate as 45 years previous.

The blunt end of Paxton's elbow caught Sheila Rand full in the right eye socket just as she had elevated her gaze. Rand reflexly put her hand to her face and wobbled backwards. Paxton was pleased with the accuracy of her blow, particularly since it had been so long since she'd practiced it. Her satisfaction was short lived as Rand begin fumbling in her purse. Realizing the woman was 30 years younger than her and undoubtedly in better shape, Paxton knew if Rand was able to retrieve her knife the fight would be a short one.

Rand was enraged and cursing like a sailor on shore leave. Having no other viable plan in place, Paxton spontaneously ran towards the woman placing her shoulder squarely in her captor's chest and wrapping her arms around her trunk. Rand's head was down and the collision caused both women to fly off the sidewalk and onto the nearby grass.

Over the months and years the ground in this high traffic area had become hard packed. When the two women returned to earth, the soil was unforgiving. Rand was on the bottom of the pile and took the brunt of the impact but Paxton, despite the cushioning provided by the body of her combatant, was older. The jolt was painful to both. Rand pushed her assailant off as she scrambled for her purse. The shock had temporarily stunned Paxton but she came to her senses, grabbed Rand's ankles and held on for dear life as she struggled to her own knees. More importantly, she started screaming at the top of her lungs.

At first, people standing nearby thought Paxton's striking the younger woman in the eye was an accident. Perhaps some spasm or seizure. However, when the two began to roll around on the grass and Paxton began shrieking for someone to call the highway patrol, most realized that indeed, the two grown women brawling like common drunks in broad daylight. Two middle aged men pushed their way through the gathering crowd to reach the fracas.

One man, wearing a hat emblazoned with a photograph of Dale Earnhart pried Paxton's grip away from Rand's legs before lifting the elderly woman to her feet. The other man grabbed Rand from behind and constricted her arms to her sides. She was cursing a blue streak and trying to stomp on the man's shoes, something which caused him to smile slightly as he felt the impact on the steel plates protecting his toes. "Are you two young ladies ready to calm down or do we need to get a firehose?" he asked. Several bystanders chuckled.

Rand was beyond the pale. The combination of the stress of the previous few days, the loss of sleep and pain from her eye kept her emotions raw and her anger well fueled. She continued to hurl profanity laced invectives at the man restraining her and Margaret Paxton in particular. The elderly woman, realizing she had taken control of the situation smiled broadly at her younger opponent struggling in the vice like embrace of

the broad shouldered construction worker. Paxton relaxed before asking politely to be let go. The man restraining her gradually released his grip. As Paxton rubbed her wrists and biceps she cocked her head slightly to the side and with a sly grin asked,

“Sting a bit, does it?”

By now, the Tennessee State Patrolman had appeared on the scene. While he hadn't witnessed the initial struggle, it had been difficult not to notice the aggregation of people on the lawn. When he had finished elbowing his way through the crowd he saw Sheila Rand practically foaming at the mouth while she struggled to free herself.

The patrolman shook his head in disgust. “Good grief,” he said. “It's not even 10 o'clock in the morning!”

Chapter 20

Terry Bohner and his group of men arrived in Houston before noon. They drove to one of the seedier parts of town, a place called the 5th ward, and a house that Bohner had obtained access to for the duration of the job. It belonged to an acquaintance who occasionally used it to store marijuana and crystal meth brought up from Mexico. To the consternation of his underlings, the owners had failed to leave any samples behind.

Bohner's initial plan was to storm the two homes simultaneously around midnight. In his previous experiences there typically was only a single policeman on duty and neutralizing them wouldn't be difficult if handled correctly. The one thing to remember, he reminded himself, was to avoid a firefight with authorities. That sort of misstep usually resulted in casualties. Despite Schmidt's assertions that taking a policeman's life was reasonable in furtherance of the mission, it wouldn't be Schmidt who would have the full resources of the law enforcement community clamoring for his scalp.

The men brought what materials they carried with them into the house, a small 2 bedroom wooden structure whose front lawn was littered with malt liquor bottles and trash. The place was practically devoid of any furniture, including, the men noticed with disappointment, a television. It also lacked air conditioning. Consequently, the house was warm and with the convergence of 12 full grown men into its limited confines, it wasn't likely to be getting any cooler.

Bohner's first order of business was to contact his boss for any last minute instructions and inform him of their progress. Schmidt wasn't answering his phone. Bohner tried every half hour but to no avail. Either the man had his phone turned off or he wasn't near it. In either event, the lack of communication concerned him. Bohner wasn't inclined to go forward with the operation without touching base. As his underlings became grouchy from the heat and inactivity, Bohner became increasingly pensive.

Detective Grimson drove Justin Douglas to the offices of the Brentwood Police Department in a nearby business park. He was impressed. The houses were huge with

well manicured lawns and most every vehicle was a new or relatively new SUV. Grabel's billing of the place had not been unfounded. It was definitely where the "beautiful people" lived.

When the two men arrived at the building, Grimson parked the car and motioned for the young man to follow him. Neither had spoken during the 10 minute drive. Douglas found himself calmer than he expected. In a way, he was glad to get this behind him. Running scared was a new experience for him and he'd had as much of it as he wanted.

Grimson walked Douglas into a small interrogation room containing a single metal table and two chairs.

"Do you want any coffee or a soda?" he asked.

"Some coffee would be great, thanks."

Grimson nodded and closed the door. He returned shortly with the young man's beverage as well as a phone setup for conference calling. After placing the coffee on the table he plugged the machine into a wall socket. Grimson punched in a series of numbers and waited for the other end to pick up.

The line rang only twice.

"Hello?"

"Lieutenant Rook, please," Grimson said.

"This is him. Is this Detective Grimson?"

"That's right. I have Justin Douglas here with me." He turned his attention to the young man at the table. "Justin, Lieutenant Rook is with the Houston Police Department and he wants to ask you some questions. You don't have to answer them but I can assure you that if you don't things are going to get sticky."

Douglas nodded his head with resignation. "I understand. I just want this thing over with."

Officer Taylor Willingham of the Tennessee State Highway Patrol took the two women to the nearest local precinct office, which in this case happened to be in Lexington, Tennessee. The younger woman, with her eye socket swollen nearly closed, had been difficult to subdue. Although officially discouraged, Willingham had been

grateful for the assistance in handcuffing the offender rendered by the two men who had intervened. She had refused to reveal her name but continued to silently seethe during the 20 minute ride to the station. The older woman went by Margaret Paxton with abundant documentation in her purse to support it. She proved to be much more affable, retelling the story of how she had been kidnapped at knifepoint in her hotel room. Officer Willingham particularly enjoyed hearing the part about how Paxton had assaulted her captor. What she couldn't tell the Officer was why and Sheila Rand was proving uncooperative. Paxton rode in the front seat, without cuffs, while Rand, bespeckled with dirt and blood, sulked in the back.

After arriving at the station, Paxton called her son who was beside himself. She gave him a thumbnail sketch of what had happened, assured him she was fine and asked that he retain the services of a local attorney. Relieved, her son hung up the phone and put in a call to his lawyer for a referral.

With her grandmotherly demeanor and cheerful disposition, Paxton hit it off almost immediately with the officers at the station. She was allowed to wait in the reception area drinking hot tea and reading a magazine while Rand was confined to the holding cells near the back of the building.

Willingham was surprised that a cursory search of the national databank for persons sought by other jurisdictional agencies turned up Paxton's name. The woman was equally perplexed and could offer no explanation for why anyone in the Houston Police Department would need to speak with her. Willingham, with his supervisor's urging, decided the time had come to refer the matter to the Lexington police department. A detective appeared in the office within a few minutes, his interest peaked by Officer Willingham's story. His discussion with Paxton took less than 10 minutes. It didn't take a rocket scientist to discern the elderly woman was imminently credible.

The interview with Justin Douglas spanned nearly 2 hours. He was forthcoming with his answers and all parties knew immediately the young man was telling the truth. Like many people with lofty, self appointed expectations, falling short of the mark had been a psychologically difficult and previously inexperienced event. Douglas had dealt

with it poorly, something he acknowledged readily. When he had finished, Rook and Jamison believed they had the final pieces of the puzzle.

Robert Graham, a Lexington detective retrieved a diet Pepsi, his third of the morning, from a vending machine and sat down at a computer terminal to learn more about Margaret Paxton. He entered his identification number and password when Rand's cell phone began buzzing. The detective looked at the others in the room. An officer standing nearby picked it up and flipped the base open.

"Rand?" the voice on the other end said.

"May I say who's calling?" the officer inquired.

There was a pause on the other end of the line. "I'm attempting to reach the owner of this cell phone."

"Who do you believe owns this phone?"

The caller was flummoxed but unwilling to reveal any additional information. "I need to speak with Miss Rand. Have I reached her phone?"

The officer was trying to think fast. He needed to keep the line open to trace the call but couldn't think of what to say. "If you can hold on for a moment, I'll get her. Will that be alright?"

The phone line went dead before the officer finished. "Well, alright then," he added dejectedly.

The caller knew what to do next. He picked the phone receiver up and quickly punched in a series of numbers he knew by heart. "Herr Plewig," he said, this time in German. "This is Marcus Compton. I believe we have a problem, sir."

"Let me guess," Graham said. "He didn't leave his name and number."

"No, but he had some weird accent."

The detective rubbed his temples and refocused his attention on the computer screen. On it was the name and number of the people wishing to speak with Mrs. Paxton. He dialed the exchange for the Houston Police Department and asked to speak with Lieutenant Jeff Rook. He was patched through immediately.

“This is detective Bob Graham with the Lexington, Tennessee Police Department,” he began. “We have a Mrs. Margaret Paxton in custody here. I understand you’d like to speak with her.”

Rook had just finished interviewing Justin Douglas and the group was taking a break. “Definitely,” he said, scarcely concealing his relief. “Is she alright?”

The detective chuckled. “Oh, she’s fine. She was picked up along with another woman at a rest stop by the highway patrol. They had gotten into some sort of fracas. Paxton is claiming the other woman abducted her from her hotel.”

“Abducted?”

“That’s what she says. She clobbered this other woman in the eye with her elbow and a couple of bystanders separated the two.”

“What’s the other woman’s name?”

“Take your pick,” Graham replied. “She’s got 4 different driver’s licenses and 3 passports all with different names.”

“Have you spoken with her?” Rook asked.

“We’ve tried, but she’s not talking.”

“Not about anything?”

“It’s like trying to have a conversation with Marcel Marceau. She won’t open her mouth.”

Rook decided to switch gears. “Does Paxton’s story seem credible?”

“Completely. She’s actually quite lovely.”

“Is she being charged?”

“I think we’ll have to but, I doubt she’ll have much of a problem. Likely just a slap on the wrist and a fine for disturbing the peace.”

“I need you to place her in protective custody,” Rook requested.

“Why?”

“I haven’t got time to explain all of it now, but she is one of a group of women we believe are in danger. We have police units watching the others. The woman who abducted her was a professional hitter and the people who sent her will likely send others. Please just keep her safe until we can take custody of her.”

The detective thought for a moment. “Well, alright. I guess I can stash her over in the Police offices for the time being, but...”

“Thank you so much,” Rook interrupted. “I’ll get back in touch with you before the end of the day and fill in the blanks. Thanks again.”

Rook hung up the phone before Graham could respond. He turned to Detective Jamison. “The Tennessee Highway Patrol picked Paxton up. She had been taken from her hotel by another woman. How much protection do we have in place for the other two women?”

“Just a squad car and a uniformed officer in front of the house,” Jamison answered.

“If this Nephilim group has that long a reach, those women aren’t safe. Get 4 more officers to each house and bring them in here now!”

Bohner’s troops were becoming restless. The brighter members of the group brought reading material or Gameboys which had kept them occupied. The dimmer bulbs went with porn magazines or playing cards. It was the latter bunch that posed a potential problem. By nature men with shorter attention spans and less education, bickering had intermittently broken out within the ranks and his second in command had to knock heads occasionally to keep order, a practice with a limited shelf life. Bohner’s greater concern, though was the lack of communication with David Schmidt. For the previous three hours he’d called every phone number he had at his disposal without success. The frenzy with which the operation had been assembled, and more importantly, the amount of money being spread around lead Bohner to believe this was a crucial mission. Over the years, Schmidt had utilized Bohner’s skills on occasion, always with good intelligence and always with timely and substantive compensation. The mercenary desperately wanted to keep this customer happy.

Bohner’s lieutenant and the man who would lead the second group of men, was an army buddy named Pinball. He had acquired the moniker after remaining fixated on a game in a bar during a beer-soaked entanglement between a group of Army Rangers and a collection of Merchant Marines on shore leave. He managed to complete the game

without being penalized for tilting and once finished, incapacitated one of the seamen with his empty beer mug.

“Hey, Pinball,” Bohner yelled across the room. The man was absorbed in the most recent issue of Money Magazine. He put the reading down, rose to his feet and walked over to his boss. Bohner was chain-smoking.

“Still no luck?” Pinball asked.

Bohner shook his head. “I got a bad feeling about this, Pin,” he said. “Schmidt’s never been incommunicado this long, especially with an operation in place.”

“You want to call it off?”

“Not yet. We only got half the money up front.” Bohner looked out the window to the street. A group of teenagers was walking by but thought better of crossing the yard to find out who the visitors were.

“How are the boys doing?” Bohner asked.

Pinball looked around the room. “All things considered, not too bad. Nobody’s Jonsing yet. But I wouldn’t push it much further,” he warned.

Bohner bit his lower lip while he contemplated his options. “Tell you what, load up the crews, let’s take a look at these places and see what the lay of the land is. If I still can’t raise Schmidt before zero hour, we go home. Maybe I can get him to pony up part of the residual if things fall apart.”

Pinball grunted cynically. “Yeah,” he responded. “That’ll happen.” He turned his attention to the others in the room. “Okay, ladies. Listen up. You all have your assignments, you know where to be and you know what to do. We leave in 60.”

With that the men rose to their feet and extinguished their cigarettes before making their way outside to the waiting vehicles.

Karl Plewig sat on the veranda of his home, looking over the mountains and valleys forming western Guatemala as it sloped gracefully to the ocean. The sun was high in the sky, its rays warming his face but inside his emotions and thoughts ran cold. Things were not going well.

“You wanted to speak with me?” Schmidt asked the elderly man as he walked up the last few steps and onto the veranda.

Plewig nodded silently. “Yes,” he said. “One of the other members of the council would like for you to brief him on your progress.” He looked at Schmidt who appeared ready to speak. “He’s a bit more concerned than the others,” Plewig said before his guest could open his mouth. “Have you heard anything from your associate in the United States?”

Schmidt smiled as he sat down hard on the wooden seat of a deck chair. “Yes, we spoke this morning. She has the Paxton woman in her possession and is driving back to Texas. I expect to hear from her momentarily, at which time I’ll instruct her as to where to take the hostage.”

Plewig looked out across the landscape as he adjusted the blanket on his lap. “It seems you have everything well in hand. We will await to hear the good news.”

The sounds of a helicopter landing near the house filled the air. Two men exited the aircraft after it came to rest on the concrete pad. They walked the hundred yards to the veranda and waited by the bottom steps.

“I have business in Guatemala City which I have asked Hector and Renee to attend to” Plewig said before Schmidt could ask. “They will be along for the ride.” He turned his wheelchair around facing his associate. “The pilot has instructions to wait for you at the airport until after your meeting. He’ll bring you back along with Hector and Renee. I expect you will return in time for dinner. I’ll have the cook set a plate for you and you can tell me about your day.” Plewig managed a weak but crooked smile.

Schmidt rose to his feet sensing it was time for him to leave. “Very well then. I’ll see you later today.” He extended his hand to Plewig who shook it briefly. “Auf wiederseine.”

Schmidt left the veranda with Hector and Renee walking silently behind him. After assuring himself the passengers were safely in place, the pilot increased the rotation of the blades. Within sixty seconds they were airborne, sweeping over the city of Quezaltenango and gaining altitude. Hector and Renee sat ramrod straight, their sunglasses occasionally reflecting the bright sunlight streaming into the helicopter’s cabin.

Schmidt stared at the landscape beneath him and soon found himself lost in thought. He had no idea what this unnamed member of the council had on the agenda but

if it was another raking over the coals for circumstances beyond his control, he didn't want to hear it. Still, he served at the pleasure of these men. It was his job to keep things running smoothly and without any fanfare. To date, he had done a good job, he thought. When all of this business with the computer chips was done, he would take a much deserved vacation, perhaps to New Zealand or Australia.

The appearance of a beach and ocean brought Schmidt back from his introspection. Guatemala City was to the east of Quetzaltenango. Why was the helicopter heading west over the Pacific Ocean?

"Is this your first time in Guatemala?" Hector asked.

"No. I've been to the capital several times," Schmidt replied. "Why are we headed out over the ocean?"

Both men smiled.

"You've never seen our westward islands?" Renee inquired.

"No."

Schmidt's face bore a confused look.

"Our country was formed millions of years ago by volcanic activity," Hector began. "The lava that came forth ultimately became fertile soil, particularly in the mountains. Off Guatemala's west coast are a series of small islands created by these volcanoes. No one lives there but boats leave each day from the mainland for scuba diving around them and, in season, whale watching. We understand there is a large group of such animals making their way northward. We thought you might enjoy seeing them from the air. It's quite spectacular."

"Sure," he said. "Why not?"

Renee picked up the cabin intercom and spoke to the pilot. He nodded before banking the helicopter to the right. In a few minutes Schmidt could see the outline of three small aggregates of land appearing to float in the large body of blue water.

"The whales were spotted yesterday off the north coast of St. Portia, the largest of the three islands," Renee said. "Hopefully, they are still feeding in the waters and have yet to resume their journey to the north."

"Will we be able to see them from this altitude?" Schmidt inquired.

"No, the pilot will have to fly much closer to the water," Hector said smiling.

The helicopter began a slow and wide spiral downward towards the ocean surface. The winds buffeted the aircraft intermittently and as the visibility improved, Schmidt could make out the numerous white capped waves on the water. He scanned the blue gray expanse for any outline in the sea but to no avail.

Schmidt pressed his nose against the glass trying to catch a glimpse of anything in the water. For the moment he forgot about his impending meeting and became fixated on the ocean below him.

“I can’t really...” he began to say but his speech was interrupted by an excruciating pain in the back of his head. Schmidt’s vision became blurred and he slumped to his knees. Reflexly, he put his hand on his scalp. Warm liquid was filtering through his fingers, dropping in red splatters on the metal floor. He turned his head sideways in time to see one of the two men swinging a metal baseball bat in his direction. Schmidt tried to move his arm upward to deflect its impact but he was too late. The second blow landed above his right eye ripping a huge gash in the skin. He could hear the cracking of his skull. He slumped to the floor unconscious.

Hector signaled to the pilot who pulled the helicopter out of its descent and began a steady climb upward. When he had reached sufficient altitude he pushed the aircraft to full throttle speeding past the islands and further out to sea. Within 20 minutes they were more than 60 miles off shore.

“This should do,” the pilot shouted over his shoulder. The two men nodded. They opened the passenger door and on cue pushed the body outside. David Schmidt’s corpse quickly disappeared from view making its 3000 foot trek to the surface of the ocean. Hector pounded on the doorframe twice, his signal to the pilot their job was complete. The helicopter quickly gained altitude before turning and setting a course for Plewig’s heliport.

Epilogue

Sheila Rand, whose real name was Deborah Allen Crosby, never revealed the name of her employer in the Paxton kidnapping. She was sentenced to 3-5 years in prison and is nearing the date for her second probation hearing. Law enforcement authorities suspect her in the deaths of at least half a dozen other victims, including three associated with the Nephilim but have been unable to obtain sufficient evidence to sustain an indictment. She is currently incarcerated in a women's prison on the outskirts of Pampa, Texas.

Terry Bonham's surveillance of the women's homes disclosed a spate of police cars and officers. Unable to contact David Schmidt, he abandoned the mission and drove home. Fifteen months later he was recruited by a wealthy San Diego family to extract their teenage son who had been kidnapped in Columbia. After arriving in Bogata, he ventured into the eastern part of the country and disappeared.

Paul Grable continues to live in Brentwood, Tennessee as he pursues his PhD in chemistry at Vanderbilt University. His association with Justin Douglas and his role in the unraveling of the Nephilim earned him a small amount of notoriety on campus, which he parlayed into a date with one of nominees for Homecoming Queen. For reasons which mystify those closest to Paul, she continues to see him.

Pearl Cunningham and Henrietta Worble died in the spring of the following year within 3 weeks of each other. Post-mortem removal of the implanted chips was done under FBI supervision. The information contained on them put the final pieces of the puzzle in place allowing investigators a full accounting of the Nephilim's holdings.

Margaret Paxton, despite the predictions of her oncologists, lived for another year and a half. The local and national press covered her story extensively leading an interviews on Good Morning America and Larry King Live. She died at home

surrounded by her family. Like the other women whose bodies contained an implanted computer chip, hers was removed at autopsy.

Jeff Rook's investigative work was reviewed by his superiors within the Houston Police Department. His side of the story was heard in a closed door session and their decision regarding his fate was sealed to outside scrutiny. No mention was ever made of the circumstances surrounding his mother's kidney transplant. Two years later he was promoted to Captain and now oversees a substation near his home.

Greg Jamison received a promotion to detective first grade for his work on the Nephilim case. He and Jeff Rook remain close friends.

Emily Woodward turned over what information she had on the Nephilim to the Simon Wiesenthal Center and federal authorities. She was not mentioned in any press reports nor by anyone involved in the subsequent investigations. Woodward continues to live in Washington State currently devoting her time and money to promoting adoption from Mainland China.

Justin Douglas returned to Houston to face a medical school disciplinary committee. Their inclination was to expel him. However, he received considerable complimentary press, always speaking laudingly of the medical school in general and the Anatomy Department in particular. He was asked to resign his position in his current class and re-enter the following year. During the ensuing year he returned to Rotan, Texas and worked in the local CO-OP loading trucks. After returning to school, he became a diligent student and graduated 7th in his class.

The body of Julian Weincrantz was returned to his native Austria where he was buried in the family cemetery next to his parents. An anonymous donor began a scholarship in his name at Yeshiva University in New York.

Martin Girard learned what he had stumbled into after a lengthy briefing by Jeff Rook and Greg Jamison. He remained with the Toronto Police Department for another 3 years before taking retirement and beginning a private investigation business.

No one claimed Peter Merk's body and he was buried in a municipal graveyard on the outskirts of Toronto.

The Nephilim was investigated thoroughly by United States and international law enforcement agencies following the compilation of the data contained on the computer chips. An assessment of David Schmidt's properties and possessions yielded a wealth of information on the group's inner workings. Those families living in the United States, Canada and Western Europe quickly relocated themselves and their transferable holdings to countries without enforceable extradition treaties, typically in South America. Many of their assets were never recovered. Those that could be located were returned to the families from whom they had been taken. In the cases where family could not be found, the properties were donated to museums. A court in Nice, France indicted Karl Plewig for his activities during the war. Guatemalan officials, however, deemed the elderly man incapable of travel. He remained on his property under house arrest until his death from a stroke 18 months later.