

A NEW MYSTERY FROM THE AUTHOR OF LOST SANITY

BRAD KELLN



**METHOD OF
MADNESS**

**METHOD
OF
MADNESS**

also by Brad Kelln

Lost Sanity

METHOD OF MADNESS

**A PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER BY
BRAD KELLN**



INSOMNIAC PRESS

copyright © 2002 by Brad Kelln

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written permission of the publisher or, in case of photocopying or other reprographic copying, a license from CANCOPY (Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency), 1 Yonge Street, Suite 1900, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5E 1E5.

Edited and designed by Jan Barbieri
Copy edited by Richard Almonte

Kelln, Brad, 1970—
Method of madness / Brad Kelln.

ISBN 1-894663-28-4

I. Title.

PS8571.E5864M47 2002 C813'.6 C2002-903816-2
PR9199.4.K42M47 2002

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council and the Department of Canadian Heritage through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program.

Printed and bound in Canada

Insomniac Press,
192 Spadina Avenue, Suite 403,
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5T 2C2
www.insomniacpress.com



Take care in the confrontation of evil. Do not be lost in the blackness that hides beneath the still surface. Without strength or service, madness waits. Take care in the confrontation of evil because although you may seek, you shall not see.

—excerpt from an unpublished portion of the Dead Sea Scrolls

This page intentionally left blank

“Is it a painful thing to lose your mind?” Dr. Michael Wenton posed the question to his graduate level course in forensic psychology.

Wenton’s six-foot-four frame made the podium in front of him seem small—somehow out of proportion. His freshly dry-cleaned Eddie Bauer dress pants and white shirt gave his muscular frame a clean, calculating presentation. His appearance nicely matched his personality.

At the age of 38, Wenton was considered an authority in the field of forensic psychology. He specialized in the study of psychopaths and violent serial offenders and had written landmark books in the area. He was currently fulfilling his least favourite aspect of being a professor at Dalhousie University in Halifax—teaching a course—especially since it was scheduled on Saturday afternoons.

The small classroom of doctoral and masters students stared at Wenton. No one dared venture an answer to his rhetorical question. He was infamous for more than once making a student break into tears for a careless answer.

Wenton looked over the students slowly, without expression. He leaned heavily on the podium, looking more tired than bored. “Well, is it a painful, horrible thing to lose your mind?”

A few of the braver students nodded yes. It was barely noticeable.

“It’s not,” Wenton announced with obvious disdain. “If you knew you were going insane, you wouldn’t be insane, would you? People who go crazy and commit horrible offenses have no idea until it’s far too late. That’s the trick: no one knows they’re insane until the bodies start to pile up.”



Catherine Mercer could barely breathe. Even the air around her seemed different. Heavier. Thicker. Something.

The house was quiet—Saturday afternoon quiet. The kids were downstairs watching cartoons and her husband was napping in the bedroom. Catherine was usually at her Bible study group at Holy Saviour Lutheran Church, but not today.

She pressed her back against the upstairs hallway wall. She darted her head back and forth, looking for the slightest sign of movement.

Not me, she thought. Not this afternoon. Not ever.

She slipped along the wall, her arms outstretched on either side of her, feeling out with her feet and then easing her body forward. The bulky kitchen knife she held in one hand felt unnatural, but she'd feel defenseless without it.

I won't be a part of this anymore. I'm not a guinea pig or a lab rat. I want my family back.

She continued to move, stopping only long enough to scan the dim hallway.



“So one of these crazies commits an offense,” Wenton continued in his lecture. “Are they guilty?”

“NGRI,” Paul piped up from the back of the room. He wasn't afraid of Wenton's rep. He figured Wenton should be afraid of his own reputation: a solid 4.0 and five publications under his belt before he'd even finished his masters.

Wenton looked up, surprised to hear a voice. His expression didn't change as he appraised the speaker. *Punk*. He didn't know the student's name. Didn't know any students' name in this class or any other. Except for one student, but she was an exception.

“NGRI,” Wenton repeated. “Where you from?”

Paul didn't expect that. “Um, Winnipeg.”

“‘Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity’ is how Americans refer to crimes committed by people who are psychotic at the time of the offense. That's not the terminology of the Criminal Code of Canada.” He paused a moment longer than necessary as he watched Paul squirm. “Canadians, even those from Manitoba, refer to these cases as NCRs, or ‘Not Criminally Responsible by virtue of a mental illness.’ It's a far more enlightened and politically-correct approach. You obviously think you're pretty smart so I don't know how that slipped your attention. Thanks for participating, though. It's always nice to have an example for the rest of the class.”

Except for Paul, the other grad students smiled. It was a relief not to be in the line of fire.

Paul was not amused.

“Oh, and by the way,” Wenton nodded to him, “welcome to Canada.”
Idiot.



The sweat that soaked Catherine’s eyebrows now found its way to her eyes. She wiped her free hand across her face, trying to clear her vision. Her breathing continued in quick spurts. She felt lightheaded.

She reached the end of the hallway, the master bedroom. Tears joined the beads of sweat rolling down her face.

Why, God? Why do people do such things? Why me? I won’t let them kill me. I won’t let them hurt me or my family anymore. They’ll tell me now. I’ll make them admit to it.

She pushed the door open with a foot. It swung in easily.

She looked around the corner, taking in as much of the room as possible.

The bed!

Her eyes fixed on the bed, searching the covers, looking for— *There he is!*

She sucked in her breath and held it.

It’s not him, she repeated to herself. It was something that had become more and more clear everyday for the last few weeks. *It’s not him.*

She moved into the bedroom.

I’ll make him explain what’s happening. He has to. I won’t let them do this to me—to my family.

Her breathing became ragged again. Every exhalation seemed to release whatever hold she’d kept over her tears. She wept as she moved across the carpeted floor to the edge of the bed. She lifted her knife, expecting that the man in bed would leap up and confront her. But he just lay there, snoring.

My husband never snored, she thought. *Not like that.*



“And what if someone has a premorbid hatred of someone else and subsequently murders that person during a psychotic episode. Are they NCR?”

Wenton looked around the blank faces of the class again. He paused on a face that was familiar to him. The only student worth looking at. A gorgeous brunette. Slim and shapely with a perfect smile. Wenton was her

graduate supervisor. She was the first graduate student he'd ever accepted, but she wasn't the sharpest of students. Her ability to memorize information passed for brains, but it wasn't her brains that Wenton was interested in exploring.

"Norma?" Wenton asked. *Boy, she has perfect tits.*

"Yes."

He could almost smell her. Staring at her now made him want her.

"What do you think? If you kill someone you wanted to kill anyway, could you be NCR?"

She brushed her shoulder-length hair back from her face. It was a practiced move that was intended to get a reaction from men.

Wenton almost smiled.

"Well," she began, "wouldn't it depend on the type of psychotic illness?"

Wenton's expression didn't change. *I wanna see this chick naked.*

"Like whether or not it's schizophrenia," she continued.

Wenton ignored her and addressed the class again. He never missed an opportunity to undermine her self-confidence, to leave her hanging without any feedback. Her vulnerability was something he used.

"A true NCR finding is more clear when the victim is someone for whom the attacker had no malice. If a mother kills her children, you instantly assume she must have been crazy. The same would be true if a person suddenly started shooting people on a crowded bus: you'd assume the shooter was crazy. He'd have to be because there'd be no logic to the crime. That's the basis of an NCR finding: no motive based in reality. That's why the legislation was written in the first place: to help people who commit crimes that they'd never commit if they'd been in their right mind."



Catherine stared down at the man. He was pretending to sleep. She knew that. She knew he'd jump to his feet at any second.

She was so scared. *I should go. I can't do this. I don't want to.*

She gripped the knife more tightly, afraid that her shaking hand would drop it altogether.

As she leaned over the bed, sweat and tears mixed and dropped from her cheeks. *Please don't wake up! Please don't wake up!*

She started to back away. She glanced back to the doorway, then back to the bed. *I won't turn my back on you, you bastard. I won't let you get me!*

"Honey," a voice called below her.

Something was sitting up, staring at her. Its face was twisted and sunken. A large open wound was slashed down its forehead, from its hair-

line to the bridge of its nose. The wound seemed to pulse with the creature's every breath. She screamed and plunged the knife down.

“No! Leave me alone!” Catherine cried out as the knife raised and dropped...raised and dropped...raised and dropped.

This page intentionally left blank

TWO

Sergeant Mitchell Wa pulled up to the curb and parked. He was a thin but fit man in his early forties. He wore wire-rimmed glasses that gave him a stern, intellectual appearance.

He'd been with the Halifax Regional Police for over ten years and had spent most of these years with the Major Crimes Division. Shortly after his last big case he'd separated from his wife of thirteen years. That was months ago.

Now he was parked on a residential street in the quiet subdivision of Portland Estates. He and his estranged wife, Gloria, had purchased a house there because the area was billed as a "family community." In reality, it was just a massive sea of houses with roads that turned into a nasty traffic jam every weekday morning and afternoon. Wa stared across at his little split-level, a near carbon copy of the homes on either side. His eyes were drawn to the neighbour's on the right. Police tape still hung across the doorway, remnants of the violence that had occurred there not so long ago. He shook his head, not wanting ugly thoughts of a murdered family tainting him before he went to talk to Gloria.

He looked back at his own home. He knew Gloria and their three children were inside. It was late enough that the kids would be in bed. Knowing her routine, he expected she was in the living room watching TV, probably with a cup of tea. He smiled when he pictured the scene because he knew she'd be wearing her old, terry cloth robe. It was a worn, faded, wrinkled robe that he had always teased her about. The particular shade of pink reminded the kids of a Care Bear.

"That's it," Wa said, banging the steering wheel. He wanted to try and resolve things with Gloria. He didn't think their problems were so big that they needed to carry on this charade of being separated. *Just because I*

work hard doesn't mean I should be kicked out of my own fuckin' house. I'm the one who pays the goddamn mortgage.

He turned off his Saturn and got out. He looked up and down the street, surveying the terrain, checking for anything out of the ordinary. It was something he did without even thinking.

As he walked up the steps he took a big breath. He didn't know if he should knock, like a stranger, or whether he should just walk in. *Damn, I hate this.*

He knocked.

There was noise immediately. He heard footsteps coming down the stairs, approaching the door. He watched as Gloria peeked around the corner of the door. He thought she might have smiled but wasn't sure.

When the door opened Gloria was wearing her robe. "Hi," she said quietly, nervously.

"Hi," Wa answered, shifting back and forth. "Can I come in?"

Without a word she stepped back and held the door. He came in and waited as she shut it.

"What do you want, Mitchell?"

He hated when she used his first name that way. It was so cold, so impersonal. Over the last ten years she'd called him "Dad" or "Sarge," but rarely "Mitchell."

"I just thought we should talk," he answered.

"About what?" She wasn't going to make this easy for him.

"Don't be like that. I'm trying. I don't want things to be like this."

"You have no right to tell me how to be," she snapped.

"I'm sorry. That's not what I mean. It's just... Can we go upstairs, sit down?"

Gloria turned and headed upstairs, Wa followed. The TV was on and a cup of tea sat steaming on the coffee table. She went to her favourite chair and sat. Wa took a seat on the couch, far away from her.

"So talk," she challenged.

"Come on. Can't you give me a break? I just want to talk to you—see if we can work this out."

"So talk."

Wa closed his eyes and rubbed them with his fingers. He realized he shouldn't have come. She was still too angry. He briefly considered leaving before the situation got worse, before he said something he'd regret. But no, he'd come this far and he needed to try. He couldn't stand staying alone in his crappy apartment for one more night. Besides, he was still her husband, the father of their children, and he knew he had every right to be there.

"How are the kids?" he asked, trying to switch gears.

“Do you really want to know?”

“Come on, Gloria.”

“The kids are fine. Nicky’s limp is getting worse. I’m trying to get a specialist appointment.”

“Is the limping that bad?”

“Kind of.”

“What do you think’s going on?”

She dropped her face into her hands, shaking her head.

“Mitchell,” she said, starting to stand. “I can’t do this. I can’t sit here and talk to you right now. I’m just getting used to you not being here. I’m just starting to feel human again. My psychologist says that the emotional pain that—”

“The what? You’re seeing a psychologist?”

“I had to. Mitchell, you raped me. You made me feel less than human.”

“I don’t even remember that,” he blurted. “That wasn’t me. That was the case I was working on. I was stressed out of my mind.”

“That’s not fair.”

“I don’t want to do this again,” Wa sighed. “You know I was working on the Edward Carter case. That sick bastard was raping women and leaving them insane. I had to stay with it. I couldn’t let that bastard get away. I don’t know what happened, but it won’t happen again.”

Gloria fought back tears filling her eyes. “But he died when you trapped him in that house. He died after he raped that poor young girl. He was dead and gone when you tried to rape me.”

Wa shook his head. He knew that Gloria felt he’d tried to force himself on her, but he had no memory of it. He couldn’t believe it.

“I never raped you,” he whispered, trying to avoid an argument.

Gloria continued to talk. “How am I supposed to feel after something like that? Huh? How?”

“The Carter case was more than it looked like. Edward Carter made people insane. He tainted people.” He paused and then quietly added, “I think he tainted me.”

She just stared at him.

“But I’m—” Wa started and stopped. Her face showed only pain.

“Mitchell,” she finally said, “I don’t know what to do with myself. I’m barely able to focus on the kids anymore. I feel like you even took away my ability to be a mother.” She paused and wiped her cheek. “I can’t handle that. That bothers me more than anything. You took away my confidence in myself as a mother.” She stood defiantly with her hands on her hips and glared at him.

“I didn’t take away your confidence, that’s crazy,” Wa said, shaking his

head. He realized as soon as the words came out of his mouth that it'd been a mistake.

Her bottom lip quivered and her eyes immediately flooded with tears. "You bastard. You're still doing it!"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. I just meant that you're a great mother. A perfect mother. I could never—I would never—take that away from you."

Gloria shook her head and looked away to the floor. Tears were rolling down her cheeks now.

Wa stood and a wave of nausea swept through him. He struggled slightly with his balance as he moved toward her. He lifted his arm to touch hers but stopped—he didn't know how she'd react.

"You're still a son of a bitch, Mitchell," she sniffed. "What happened to you? Why did you change? I can't believe what happened to you."

"I'm so sorry," he said and put his arm around her shoulder before he realized he'd done it. She didn't even flinch.

"Everything was fine. Everything was fine till that bastard Edward Carter. I told you to leave that case alone. I told you not to do anything to hurt yourself—to hurt us. I wish you'd just listened to me."

It was my fuckin' job, he thought but remained silent.

"Since you moved out I'm sick all the time. I get dizzy. I can't sleep. I think I'm going crazy. I don't know what's going on. I had to see a psychologist and she's making a referral for me to see a psychiatrist. I'm probably going to have to go on medication because of this—because of you."

He pulled her closer to him and leaned to kiss her on the head. Her hair smelled great and was still slightly damp underneath. She must have showered earlier in the evening.

"What happened to you? Just tell me that. What happened?"

Wa barely heard her. He leaned down and kissed her head again, breathing in deeply. He let his face sit against the top of her head and pulled her closer to him. Her tight little body was perfect. He wanted to slide his hand under her clothes, cup her breasts in his hand. A pain shot through his head, sending a bright light through his retinas, but it was gone before he could react.

"Mitchell," Gloria said, pushing away from him. "What are you doing?"

Wa looked down at the woman he was holding. It wasn't Gloria. He was staring at a hideous face with black eyes; it's body was only a vague outline of his wife's small frame. The creature stared back.

Do you feel me inside? Was it Qumran that delivered you?

Wa frowned. "'Qumran'? What's that? What are you talking about?"

The creature laughed at him, a hideous grin stretching over stained teeth.

“Stop it!” Wa screamed and threw the creature backward.

Gloria fell back into her chair, tipping it over. As she hit the floor she curled into a ball, trying to hide from Wa. Her head pounded and she felt like she might throw up.

Wa blinked once, then again. He was staring down at Gloria Wa, not the creature he'd seen a moment earlier. He was suddenly dizzy. He instinctively bent to try and comfort his near hysterical wife but jumped back when her whole body spasmed in revulsion.

“GET OUT!” Gloria screamed with her face hidden between her knees.
“GET OUT!”

“Gloria, please,” he said quietly. “You’ll wake the kids.”

“GET OUT! GET OUT! GET OUT!” she yelled hysterically.

He hesitated but realized it was too late. He turned and left as quickly as he could.

This page intentionally left blank

THREE

The tears wouldn't stop now. Dr. Brian Claric knew that the session would have to continue through the pain. It was unavoidable. You can't kill everyone you love and not feel pain afterward.

"You have to believe me," she begged. "I know it sounds crazy but you have to believe me. Please."

The emotionally broken woman moved forward on her chair. She clasped her hands so tightly that her knuckles were white and her fingertips left indents on the tops of her hands.

Dr. Claric leaned forward, exuding empathy and understanding. "I know it seems real but—"

"No!" she howled as more tears escaped her blood-red eyes. "Don't say that! Don't use that 'therapy voice.' I need someone to believe me. Please! Don't tell me it isn't real."

Without warning, she reached out and took Dr. Claric's hand in hers. She clenched it in an icy, wet grip and looked at him with an urgency that was almost palpable.

As a reflex, Dr. Claric moved back, jerking his hand with him, but she didn't release her grip.

"Dr. Claric," she pleaded. "I'm not insane. I know you think I am, but I'm not. Please don't let me die here."

"Catherine, please, we all want to help. That's why you're here. No one blames you for—"

"Don't say it! Don't say it! Don't say it!" She released his hand and flung herself back in the chair.

"Catherine, you need to let me help you."

"Don't say I killed my family again. I know I did. I know I killed them. I know. I know. I KNOW!"

"Catherine," Dr. Claric began again, repeating her name to emphasize

the intimacy of therapy, “I wasn’t going to mention that. We don’t need to talk about that now. We need to talk about you.” He leaned forward, put his elbows on his knees and maintained an expression of deep concern.

“They’re dead!” she screamed and then softly added, “They’re all dead. Dead. Dead. Like me. I’m going to die here.” The tension left her body and she slumped into the chair in defeat.

“Why do you say that? Why do you say you’re going to die here? Do you feel threatened?”

She looked up at him with a weary smile. Her face was streaked with tears and reddened from wiping away her tears.

“Don’t patronize me. Don’t probe for symptoms of my ‘illness,’” she said sarcastically. “I’m going to die in here because I’m losing it. I’m losing my will to get up in the morning. I don’t want to live anymore.”

“Let’s talk about that.”

“Let’s not,” she snapped back. “That has nothing to do with anything. You’d feel the same way I do. You’d lose interest in living, too, if you stabbed your family to death and then everyone told you that you were a mental patient.” She stared at him, challenging him to reply, then continued. “So what exactly, *Dr. Claric*, do I have to live for?”

He contemplated ending the session but didn’t want to jeopardize a future therapeutic relationship with Catherine Mercer. In his eighteen years with the Maximum Security Psychiatric Centre he’d seen dozens of patients like her. If you cut them off too quickly, it would damage rapport down the road. And in the three months Catherine had been here no one had been able to connect with her. She continued to vacillate between complete hopelessness, self-hatred and despair, to fits of almost manic rage against the hospital staff that had “labelled” her schizophrenic. It was understandable that she was disturbed. She’d taken a large butcher knife and attacked her husband while he slept. When her son and daughter intervened, she killed them too. After her arrest she claimed they weren’t her real family but imposters who were going to kill her. It wasn’t long before the courts sent her for a psychiatric evaluation.

Catherine’s case was somewhat unusual in that, at forty-one, she was slightly older than what you’d expect for a first-break psychosis. In addition, violence among female psychiatric patients wasn’t especially common. The peculiarities of the case only made it more upsetting since the details were not easily explained. Catherine had been a stable, caring wife and mother. She’d been the kind of person this sort of thing wasn’t supposed to happen to. The fact that Catherine became mentally ill and committed such an atrocious crime threatened everyone’s feeling of safety and security. If

this kind of thing could happen to Catherine Mercer, could it happen to anyone?

Dr. Claric decided he needed to try harder to reach this woman. Considering what she was going through, it was the least he could do.

“I know you feel hopeless, but we want to help. We want to help you through this.”

“There is no ‘through this!’” she screamed. “My family is dead. No therapy is going to bring them back. I have nothing to live for.”

“You’re right, we aren’t going to bring your family back. That’s not what you’re here for. We want to help you get better. We want to—”

“You want to what?” she challenged. “I know you think I’m crazy but I know I’m not. Before this happened I was the model citizen. I was raising my children, looking after my husband. I went to church every Sunday and helped out with all of the church fundraisers. I even ran a Bible study group with Pastor Wrightland. So you can’t judge me. You don’t know what happened. You weren’t there. You don’t know anything about what’s going on.” She paused, considering something. “If you really want to help find out who’s doing this, find out who’s testing these weapons on innocent people. Find out what sick bastard is making people kill each other.”

Dr. Claric didn’t want to take the discussion down that road—electronic weapons. It represented her most significant, deep-seated delusional belief, her explanation of the violence. With patients suffering from delusions it was best to limit the amount of time they were allowed to describe those beliefs. The more air time the beliefs got, the stronger the delusion became. The story would grow fuller, more believable, inconsistencies would disappear, little details would get worked out, and the story could become convincing, even to professionals.

But Dr. Claric knew the therapeutic relationship was tenuous at this point. Against his better judgement he felt obligated to forego psychiatric considerations for purely client-doctor relationship issues. He wanted to let Catherine vent. He wanted to show respect for her feelings because too often the psychiatric patient felt devalued, disrespected and misunderstood. When he spoke again he chose his words cautiously.

“You’re speaking of the electronic weapon that you believe you were shot with?”

She nodded.

“You blame those weapons for taking your life away.”

Her head shot up in disbelief. She wasn’t sure she’d heard him correctly. “What?”

“I know that your whole life has been taken from you. I know that you’ve

experienced pain that no one can ever understand—or even imagine,” he continued.

Catherine nodded, fighting hard not to lose control of her tears again.

Dr. Claric sensed that he was reaching her, and tried to remain calm and composed. “I know that everything is wrong now. Everything has gone to hell.”

Her eyes flooded, but no tears fell.

“But I also know it isn’t your fault. You can’t blame yourself for what happened.”

“You mean you know about the weapons? The testing?”

“Catherine, I think we need to agree to disagree on the exact cause of...,” he searched for the right phrase, “...of what happened, but I think we can both agree that something happened to you. Something terrible happened and we need to work together to help get you through this.”

She took a minute to consider the compromise and nodded. “Something did happen to me.”

Dr. Claric waited, resisting the urge to let the discussion take the next step. It was relatively early in their meetings to delve into her delusions. He finally relented, “What do you think happened to you?”

“I don’t think it, I *know* it,” she said with enough conviction that the collected tears broke free. They fell down her face and her eyes shone with anger. “I was attacked. I was targeted by someone or some group.”

Dr. Claric nodded.

“It might have been a government experiment. I don’t know exactly, but you hear about shit happening and then no one finds out for years and years. The government is always doing testing and they only tell people about a small portion of it. You never know what’s going on. And then if someone speaks out, that person is labelled crazy. The government denies everything and blames everything on the ‘crazy person.’ It’s the perfect cover for them when they’re about to be exposed.” She paused and studied Dr. Claric carefully. “You don’t believe anything I’m saying, do you? You’re on the their side, aren’t you? To you, I’m just the ‘crazy person.’”

“I’m not on anyone’s side.”

“Well tell me this then, have you ever worked with anyone else who claimed to have been attacked by an electronic weapon?”

He considered the question carefully. He knew he’d worked with at least half a dozen patients in the last ten years who held delusions very similar to Catherine’s, but he wasn’t sure he should disclose this. It would indirectly support her claim even though he knew it simply meant it was a common delusion. Individuals with delusional beliefs were very quick to grab onto any shred of evidence to support them. They were often desperate to prove

they weren't "crazy." He decided to play it safe.

"Catherine, that's not the issue. There can be commonalities in delusional belief systems but that doesn't mean that they aren't delusions. It just means that people share—"

"So your answer is yes."

"No, my answer is that it doesn't matter."

"Listen, I'm no doctor with a fancy Ph.D., but I know that if I was the first person ever to tell a 'crazy' story about electronic weapons, you'd be happy to tell me so. That would only help prove that I'm wrong. Since you won't tell me, I can only assume you've had patients tell you about these weapons before, which means they do exist and you know it!"

"It's not about right or wrong," Dr. Claric said quietly.

She glared at him. "Just answer my question then. Have you ever had another patient tell you about electronic weapons before?"

"Catherine," he began carefully, "I've had a dozen patients tell me they're Jesus Christ. I've had just as many tell me they're the king of England, or the reincarnation of Gandhi. I've heard lots of stories about alien abduction, global conspiracies, forced surgeries and so on. And yes, I've had other patients talk about electronic weapons, but that doesn't make it real. If I used that kind of logic, then I would have a couple of patients right now who are Jesus Christ!"

She smiled and shrugged. "Why not?"

"I don't think so."

"But if Jesus came back and started preaching on the street, saying he was the Son of God, don't you think he'd end up in a psychiatric facility?"

Dr. Claric knew he was getting sucked into a conversation he didn't want to have. She was backing him into a corner. It had been a mistake to open the door to this discussion.

"That isn't the point," he tried to reason.

"And where does that leave you? You're one of Pontius Pilate's guards keeping watch over the Son of God until he's executed."

He decided to concede a point to try to move past this issue; debating it would only strengthen her delusions.

"Of course I've considered that possibility. The world is a mysterious place, but I need to work with what I know, what I've been taught. I need to have faith in my profession, which has helped so many people. I mean, if I can treat one hundred patients who think they're Jesus and it turns out one of them is the real thing, then at least I've helped ninety-nine patients."

"And then you'd go to hell."

"Maybe."

There was a brief silence before Catherine began again. "Well, I'm the

one hundredth patient then.”

“I’m sorry?”

“If you’ve helped ninety-nine patients who were only mentally ill and hadn’t really been attacked by an electronic weapon, then I’m the hundredth one, the one who really was zapped.”

Dr. Claric couldn’t help but laugh—Catherine was sharp.

Catherine became serious. “Dr. Claric, let me tell you what happened. Let me tell you everything I know about this, and then you tell me if I sound insane.”

He nodded. He’d allowed their meeting to go down this road and he had to let her finish. He would let her tell her story.

FOUR

Wenton nodded across his desk at Norma MacDonald. She'd just sat down for their regular meeting. Without a word his attention shifted back to his laptop computer. He was working on a paper describing a classification scheme for violent offenders. He wanted her to wait. It helped establish his authority over Norma.

She waited while he typed a little while longer. Finally he stopped and looked up. "So what are we doing today?" He always asked her why they were meeting even if he already knew.

She smiled. "I still need a research topic. I think I've narrowed it down."

"Oh that's right," he remarked. "You still haven't come up with one. Why don't I just pick something for you?"

She frowned slightly. His constant, but subtle, suggestions that she lacked competence wore on her. Dr. Wenton was brilliant but difficult. She always reminded herself that she was lucky to work with him.

"Oh no. I have a few ideas. I'm very familiar with most of your research and theories on criminality and offenders, and I guess I'm really interested in mental illness and offending, especially since that Edward Carter stuff."

This caught his attention. "We're not going to talk about that." *I don't need to hear that fuckin' name.*

She looked disappointed. He didn't care.

"Listen," he continued, "I know your marks in statistics are not that great so we should probably stick to a simple topic—something that doesn't involve a lot of analysis. Maybe something more theory driven." He didn't care about statistics. He just wanted to shut her up.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm not so bad at stats." She paused for a response but continued when he was silent. "I had a few ideas about the case, like—"

She stopped when Wenton stood and walked around the desk. He leaned against the back of it so he could face Norma.

"So, let's hear those great ideas." *I really want to hear how smart you are. You think Edward Carter is so great, let's hear those ideas.*

"Well, I..."

"Yes?"

She reached up to her neck. She felt warm, almost light-headed.

"Go on," Wenton urged. "Let me hear the ideas." He leaned forward and put a hand on one of her legs. He could feel toned muscles beneath his fingers.

Norma blinked quickly. "I don't feel so good." She wished he'd move back. He was too close. She attempted to glance back at the door but she couldn't bring herself to turn away fully.

Wenton enjoyed seeing Norma rattled. He moved his hand partway up her leg, letting his hand cover as much of it as he could.

His hand was hot. She wanted to stop him, move his hand away, but she couldn't. It felt wrong, but it felt good.

Without warning he leaned over and brushed his cheek against hers whispering into her ear. "Maybe we'll talk about this later."

She snapped to attention and looked back at him as he drew away. "What?"

He returned behind his desk. "Drop by tomorrow when you have a better idea about what you want to do. You're obviously unprepared for this meeting." He shifted his attention back to his laptop, dismissing her.

She stared at him for a moment. Her face burned. She finally stood and headed to the door. She felt a tear forming in the corner of her eye, but wouldn't allow him to see that. She wanted to get out of that office.

Norma pulled the door open and stepped into the hall, almost bumping into someone.

"Dr. Drier!" she said in surprise.

Dr. Drier was a middle-aged professor in the Social Psychology section of the department. His twenty years of experience made him feel a degree of ownership over everything that went on in the department. He liked to know what everyone was doing. He thought he was protecting the integrity of the department when he pried into people's personal business. For the most part, he was tolerated. He meant well. But there were exceptions to the staff's tolerance.

"Forgive me for startling you, Ms. MacDonald," he began in his dry, toneless voice. "Are you okay?"

She looked away from him, bringing her hands to her face to hide her embarrassment. "I'm fine."

"See you later," Wenton barked at Norma, encouraging her to shut the door and be on her way.

Norma turned and moved quickly down the hall. Dr. Drier remained standing, his mouth partly open as if he was about to ask something.

He watched her for another moment and then turned to look into Wenton's office. "Dr. Wenton? Is there something I should know?"

"Keep moving Earl," Wenton answered without looking up. He didn't like to be meddled with.

Dr. Drier hated to be addressed in such an informal manner. No one but Wenton referred to him by his first name. He stepped into Wenton's doorway. His face twisted and he inhaled as if smelling something noxious.

Wenton's attention was not distracted from his computer, which irritated Drier to no end. He wanted Wenton to watch his performance. He wanted Wenton to know he was disgusted before he began to speak.

"She looked a little upset," Dr. Drier began through gritted teeth. "I hope there wasn't anything inappropriate going on in here."

Wenton's attention didn't shift from the laptop.

"You need to clean up your act, Dr. Wenton," Dr. Drier continued with courage bolstered by anger. "Just because you're a hotshot forensic expert doesn't mean you can disregard every rule of conduct that makes this university, this department, great. I know why you took Norma on as a student. I know how men look at her."

Wenton finally looked up. He held Dr. Drier in his gaze as he closed the laptop in one deliberate, steady motion.

Drier shifted uncomfortably. He wanted to leave but didn't want to look weak and pathetic. He held his ground.

Wenton stood slowly, letting the full length of his large frame uncurl from the oversized office chair. He wanted Dr. Drier to see who he was challenging.

Wenton stepped around his desk and slowly moved in front of the older professor. He intentionally stood in Dr. Drier's personal space and the closeness made eye contact awkward. Wenton looked down at him with disgust and waited to be acknowledged.

Although he didn't want to, Dr. Drier forced himself to look up. He saw hatred in Wenton's eyes and shuddered.

"How *do* men look at Norma?"

"I just mean—" Dr. Drier began.

"Is that how *you* look at her?" Wenton asked, interrupting him.

"What?"

"Do you want her, Dr. Drier?"

The words hit him like a punch, and Dr. Drier stepped back, a bit off balance. An image flashed through his mind, an image of Norma standing naked in the room. He stared at her. She was gorgeous. His eyes scanned

down to her breasts. He wanted so badly to touch her.

Wenton's sharp voice broke through his stupor: "Get out of my office."

"I...what?" Dr. Drier stumbled.

Wenton leaned down and spoke into Drier's face. "Listen to me you worthless piss-stain. Keep your nose out of my business. I can see inside you. You're a marked man. Your lust will steal your soul."

"What?" Dr. Drier was suddenly unable to think.

Wenton's eyes glowed. "Get out."

Dr. Drier nodded. His mouth was partly open as though he was going to speak but couldn't find the right words. The situation had gotten ugly. He no longer wanted to challenge Wenton, not now anyway. He just wanted to get out of the office.

The older professor stumbled backwards as Wenton placed a rigid thumb against his chest and pushed. Dr. Drier turned and staggered out the door. His head pounded.

Wenton watched him leave and was about to turn back to his desk when a voice sounded from somewhere.

The answer seeks you from Qumran. The answer is in you.

He glanced around. He was alone.

“It started in the parking lot of the Superstore near Mic Mac Mall. You know, the fancy one with the smoke shop and all the specialty items. I think they call it the Superstore Market.”

Dr. Claric nodded, urging Catherine to continue.

“I know that sounds stupid but that’s where it started. You piss off the wrong person at exactly the right time and then you end up here.” She paused to see if Dr. Claric would react with skepticism but he remained neutral, simply listening.

“I was picking up a few groceries before going to get the kids at school. I was a little behind schedule, and I guess I didn’t check the rearview very well because as I backed out, I bumped into something. I thought maybe I hit a concrete divider or something. When I looked back over my shoulder there was a big white van with two men in it.

“It was an old-style van, you know, like a cube van. The owners were easy to remember because they didn’t really fit in with your normal grocery-store parking-lot crowd, if you know what I mean. They both had dark business suits on and were pretty clean-cut.

“Anyway, when they got out to check the van, they seemed pretty intense. There wasn’t any visible damage but they were making a big deal about it.

“When I approached them, one of the guys sort of snapped at me. He said in a very rude way, ‘Did you just get your license?’ or something like that. I instantly started apologizing all over the place and ignored the comment. The other guy put a hand on his friend’s shoulder and whispered something. I assumed he was telling him to calm down and go back in the van or something, but looking back, I think I heard him whisper something like, ‘We’ll get this dumb bitch later.’

“So anyway, we go through this big song and dance of looking at the van

and looking at my car. The guy says, all nice and polite, ‘Why don’t you give me your name and address anyway—just to be safe.’” She stopped and gave Dr. Claric a look that said she felt like a fool.

“So what do I do?” She nodded. “I give him my name and address. I mean I was the one who hit him. I guess I wasn’t thinking.” She paused, trying to control a surge of emotion that threatened to take her to tears again.

Dr. Claric waited patiently for her to resume.

She looked up at him shyly. “Sorry. The whole thing is just too much for me, I guess.” She sniffed and reached out to the small end table near her, taking a tissue to wipe her nose. “So I gave them my name and address. I didn’t think anything of it because I was still in a hurry to get the kids. I rushed back to my van and left. And that was it for a week or so. I don’t remember the timeline exactly. I think that’s part of the effect of the weapon. It really messes up your memory.

“Anyway, about a week later I was on my way home from my weekly bridge game, probably around ten o’clock at night. I pulled up in front of our house in Portland Estates.” She stopped again and held the tissue to the corner of one eye and then the other. “Nothing ever happened on our street. The last major crisis was when the Martin boy broke his arm by running into a parked car next door to us. I knew everything that happened on the street. I also knew everybody and everyone’s *car*. So, the white van parked right across the street from our house stood out like a sore thumb. Not only was it out of place but it had some strange electronic equipment on top of it too. It looked like a satellite dish or something. I don’t remember if the dish was turning around, scanning the neighbourhood, but I think it was. You don’t see that too often.”

Dr. Claric interrupted. “You’ve lost me, Catherine. Is this the same van from the parking lot?”

“Like I said, the parking lot was just a blur. I don’t really remember. It might have been the same van. I’m just saying that shortly after I ran into that van at the grocery store, I came home and there was this big van parked across the street.”

“Did the van have any markings? Was it maybe a van for the cable company or a local news station?”

She nodded in agreement. “I know. I thought about that too. It didn’t have any markings though. I think if it had, it wouldn’t have struck me as odd. But it was a plain white van with no markings and the two little windows on the back doors were both black.

“So I pulled up on the street and parked. I had to park on the street because on my bridge night, my husband, Cameron, always parked in the garage. I could’ve parked in the driveway but then he wouldn’t have been

able to get his car out in the morning to go to work. So, the easiest thing was just to park on the street for that one night of the week.”

“Gotcha,” Dr. Claric intoned, reflexively trying to help the story along before she got bogged down in details.

“Sorry.” She grinned with embarrassment and then continued. “I noticed the van but didn’t make a big deal out of it. I got out and headed inside, but just as I stepped out of the car, something hit me. I thought I was going to be sick. My stomach was doing flips. I dropped down onto my hands and knees. I was so dizzy. The last thing I remember was seeing a man wearing a big overcoat and a baseball cap, an odd sight on our street at that time of night.”

“What do you think happened?”

“I know what happened. Someone in the van was shooting something at me. This is when it all started, when they started to drive me insane. Whatever they were using hit me like a ton of bricks. It knocked me right off my feet and took the wind right out of me. I could barely even breathe. I thought I was deaf and blind. I thought I was having a heart attack. I didn’t know what to think or do.

“I don’t know how long I was there, but next thing I knew, Cam was standing beside me asking if I was okay. I didn’t want him to worry so I just said I slipped, and he helped me into the house. I assured him I was fine and didn’t mention a word about the van.”

“Did your husband see the van?”

“I don’t know. I doubt it because when Cam was helping me into the house, I glanced back and it was gone. Whoever zapped me did it and then took off while I was down.”

“How can you be sure someone in the van ‘zapped’ you? Couldn’t it just have been the flu?” Dr. Claric asked cautiously, using her own terminology to encourage familiarity.

“That’s what I thought too. After Cam helped me into the house I just put the white van and everything out of my mind. Like you said, maybe it was just a flu going through me, but then everything started coming apart.”

She stopped again and reached for another tissue. This time it took a few minutes before she regained her composure. “I’m sorry but this is very difficult. I haven’t been through it in this much detail in a long time. I think about this all the time, but telling someone else is just—”

“That’s okay. It’s not a race. Just take your time.”

“I really appreciate you listening to me.” She tried to smile.

“Hey, I get paid to care.”

She laughed at the joke, then continued. “So over the next week I kept seeing that damn van across the street. I knew it was the same van because

there couldn't be too many vans like that with the electronic equipment on top and tinted windows. And if I ever went to see if someone was there, it was empty. At least it seemed empty because I couldn't see inside the back."

"So you actually went over to the van and looked for someone?"

Catherine looked away from Dr. Claric and nodded. "It was kind of an awkward thing and I didn't know what to say. I couldn't exactly ask, 'Did you shoot me with something?' But the van was the least of my problems. A week or two after I was zapped I started to notice other stuff. Things were getting moved in the house. I'd come in and put my keys someplace, and when I went to get them later, they weren't there. I'd eventually find them someplace where I would never put them." She looked incredulous but continued.

"And there were other things. Someone went through my appointment book, poked through the files on my computer. It was obvious that someone was going through the house. I started to become very suspicious. I started checking the doors a couple of times everyday, making sure they were locked. I left a little bit of paper in the back door once so I could tell if the door had been opened, and sure enough, the next time I checked, the paper was right there on the floor.

"And then I started to notice stuff with the kids. First of all, Kyle, the oldest, never used to put salt on anything, but then one night at dinner, he took the saltshaker and salted everything on his plate. I was so surprised I didn't know what to say. I looked at Cam but, as always, he never noticed anything. I went to say something to Kyle but decided against it. I didn't want to scare him." She gave Dr. Claric a look as though this was common sense.

"And then it was Sarah. She was only ten, three years younger than her brother, but she often acted much older. I always felt like we had a real connection and I could talk to her. But things started changing. Suddenly, she was a stranger to me. I didn't understand her, how she thought, or anything. I didn't know what to say to her. She was different."

"She was growing up," Dr. Claric offered.

"It was more than that," Catherine replied angrily. "I know my own daughter and something happened so that I couldn't recognize her anymore."

"Okay," he relented.

"And then it was my husband. I came into our bedroom one time and there he was going through my appointment book. When he saw me he dropped it back on the dresser. I was so surprised, I didn't know what to say. I wanted to yell at him, demand to know what he was doing, but I couldn't. I just couldn't." Tears fell suddenly, without any warning, and she

couldn't find her tissue fast enough to catch them. It took her a few moments to collect herself.

"Oh yeah," she started again. "There was one other thing that really convinced me. Kyle ran into the kitchen once to get something to drink. He ran in and threw open a cupboard, only it was the wrong cupboard! It was like he didn't remember where we kept the glasses. How could that happen unless he was an imposter?" She looked at Dr. Claric as if she expected an answer.

Dr. Claric shrugged, unwilling to commit one way or the other. It was an unusual scenario but there were other explanations. *That's the problem with human perception*, he thought, *there's always a hundred different ways to interpret the same event. The kid might just have had his head in the clouds and wasn't paying attention.*

Catherine sighed heavily. "I was in the grocery store and noticed a guy in a wool overcoat and baseball cap behind me. He wasn't right behind me, and he wasn't following me up and down every aisle, but he was there. I know he was there watching me. I tried to get a look at his face but he kept turning his head. He obviously didn't want me to see him."

"Did you tell anyone about what was going on?" Dr. Claric asked.

She looked at him like he'd said something ridiculous. "What would I say? Who'd believe me? I didn't think there was anything I could do. I didn't think there was anywhere I could go until..." She seemed reluctant to continue.

"Until what?" Dr. Claric urged.

"I searched the Internet," she admitted. "I searched the Internet and found Web site after Web site on electronic weapons. There were research reports, details of the weapons, accounts from people affected by them, everything." She stopped again and waited for a reaction. "You should check. I'm not joking. It's all there."

Dr. Claric nodded.

"When I started checking stuff on the Internet, everything started making sense. I finally knew what was going on. I was being studied. I was a part of some experiment."

"An experiment?" Dr. Claric said, unable to hide his skepticism.

"Yes," she said emphatically. "These weapons aren't perfected. The government is still testing them on people and recording the results. Sometimes they go so far as to replace people in your family with imposters who are there to record your reactions and make you go through little tests. It's a really elaborate set-up. You wouldn't believe the things I read about on the Internet."

She watched him for a moment before speaking. "You don't believe me."

“It’s not about belief or disbelief. I’m just listening.”

“Well that’s how this happened, whether you believe it or not.”

Dr. Claric nodded, not wanting to discourage her from continuing to vent. “What happened next?”

“Once I realized that I was part of an experiment, I started watching everything I did, everything I said around my own family. I looked for clues that I was right, that Cameron, Kyle and Sarah were no longer the real Cameron, Kyle and Sarah. I didn’t have to look too hard. The clues were everywhere. Everything they said, everything they did was suddenly unnatural. Nothing made sense anymore. I started to keep my distance from them. I didn’t want to give them too much data to report. I didn’t want them analyzing me. But this just made them all the more anxious to get inside my head. They started to seek me out, asking, ‘What’s wrong?’ like they didn’t know,” she laughed derisively. “They knew exactly what was wrong, but they just wanted to drag it out of me.” Catherine fell silent.

Dr. Claric waited but it didn’t look like she was going to continue. “What happened next, Catherine?”

“One of them let it slip.”

He waited for her to elaborate but she didn’t. “Let what slip?”

“Kyle cornered me one day, just before the end. He asked what was wrong, and I said nothing. He let it slip that because I wasn’t cooperating, my ‘real’ family would be hurt.”

“What did he say?”

“The *fake* Kyle asked, ‘Don’t you love me?’ meaning that if I didn’t go along with everything, they’d kill him.”

Dr. Claric briefly contemplated not asking his next question but relented. “Are you sure that’s what Kyle meant?”

“The *fake* Kyle.”

“Okay, the *fake* Kyle.”

“I’d know my own son,” she said angrily. Then her expression suddenly changed, as if she’d thought of something horrendous. “Oh my God, and then I killed him. I killed all of them.” She gasped for air as tears flowed down her face.

Dr. Claric leaned forward and moved the box of tissues closer to her. He looked at her with concern but remained silent.

Catherine’s body heaved with each breath. She looked as though she might be having a seizure.

“Catherine,” he asked gently, “do you want to take a break now? Start again some other time?”

She sniffed and took another tissue to dab the corner of her eyes. “No. No. It’s all right.”

“Are you sure?”

“No, I’m not sure. I don’t think anything will ever be all right again. How am I supposed to get over what’s happened? Someone took my life away from me.” And then she started to sob again. “And I haven’t even told you the worst part.

“When I finally couldn’t take it anymore and went to Cam to get answers about what was going on, he didn’t even look like himself.”

“What did you see, Catherine?”

She lifted her tear-stained face. “The goddamned Devil!” she yelled and started to laugh hysterically.

This page intentionally left blank

Goddamn fuckin' Michael Wenton, Wa thought as he slammed the door of his cramped little apartment at the end of Inglis Street just outside of downtown Halifax. He'd taken the day off work because he just couldn't concentrate. He blamed Wenton for the mess his personal life had become. Edward Carter may have been the criminal, but Wa believed that Wenton knew more than he'd told anyone.

The unsuccessful meeting with Gloria the previous week, not to mention the horrendous hallucination, still nagged at him. He hoped he hadn't burned the last bridge to reconciling with his wife. *Fuckin' Wenton*.

The sight of this hideous little shit-hole made him cringe. He stood and surveyed the cramped dining room/living room, shaking his head. *I should be at home. I should be with my family. This whole thing has taken my life.*

He went to the small cabinet against the wall and stooped to rip the doors open. He'd purchased this cheap cabinet at a second-hand store before his kids visited for the first time. He told them the cabinet was off limits. He wanted a place where he could safely store his liquor—a place the kids wouldn't snoop through. Although the cabinet wasn't a work of art, it did have a lock so it suited his purpose. He realized that he'd have to find something else now. He'd ripped the doors open and cracked the cheap wood around the flimsy metal lock. *Another fuckin' problem to add to the list.*

Wa looked into the cabinet and found it virtually empty. He wasn't much of a drinker but he'd been developing a taste for liquor ever since he'd separated from Gloria. Right now the cabinet only held a quarter of a bottle of vodka. He pulled the bottle out and stood up, wondering if he had something in the fridge for mix.

This is stupid! I might as well go into the station. I'm no good to anyone locked away in this apartment. If I drink myself into a stupor it just

means Edward Carter and Michael Wenton win.

Wa walked towards his small concrete patio and pulled the glass door open. He still held the vodka bottle in one hand as he stepped out onto the cramped platform. If he leaned way out, he could almost see the harbour. Almost.

His apartment was on the sixth floor of a ten-storey building. His particular unit faced out on Inglis Street, directly over the main entrance. He rested against the steel railing and looked out into the street.

Wa twisted the top off the bottle and took a long drink. He made a face as he swallowed—he definitely wasn't a seasoned drinker.

He bent over the railing and watched the light traffic. The slight breeze felt good and he started to calm down. He looked down at his hands, at the bottle. "I don't need this," he said and set the bottle on the concrete patio.

Wa went back inside for a hot shower. He turned the shower tap fully onto hot and then leaned against the sink, staring at his reflection in the mirror.

"What's become of you?" he asked his reflection. "What are you doing?"

Steam was rising out of the stall behind him and creeping across the room to settle on the mirror. Wa's image was slowly fading.

"Maybe you should have gone to church more," he chuckled. "Although it didn't do my neighbour much good." It wasn't a very funny joke and he regretted even thinking about the Mercer tragedy.

The fog was spreading down the mirror now, inching past his reflection and filling in every available spot.

He sighed. *What's that prayer people are always saying in church? The Lord's Prayer?* His image was lost in the mirror now, and he turned around and unbuttoned his shirt. *I remember.* "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy—"

Don't. A voice echoed from behind him.

Wa started and turned back to the mirror.

"What the fuck?" The voice had definitely come from immediately behind him. He stared into the mirror again. He could just barely make out his own outline but it was oddly proportioned now. He leaned forward and wiped away the steam.

Wa looked for his reflection, but instead he saw a disfigured face. The black sunken eyes were framed by a face of torn, disfigured flesh. A large tongue was barely contained by yellowed rotting teeth. It smiled at him.

Wa lurched backwards, barely catching himself against the side of the shower stall so he wouldn't fall into the scalding water. When he focused on the mirror again the image was gone, replaced by an even coating of steam.

SEVEN

Dr. Claric leaned back in his chair. He needed to finish a report on a violence risk assessment but couldn't concentrate.

His office was a small room in Dark Alley, the corridor of the Maximum Security Psychiatric Centre where the clinical staff offices were housed. It was the only wing without lights in the evening because staff worked normal nine to five hours. Books, papers, pens and pencils, a telephone, computer and a small clock filled all the available space on Dr. Claric's desk. Even the bookshelf and the small table in the corner of the room were filled to capacity. There were two other chairs apart from his desk chair. Clinical staff of the MSPC didn't see clients in their offices because of the security risk, so no staff member had much space.

He couldn't get Catherine's story out of his head. She had such conviction. He knew her delusions were strong, as strong as any patient he'd ever worked with. In addition, her case was probably among the saddest he'd ever seen. Despite all of his experience with the mentally ill, it was still hard for him to comprehend the severity of an illness that would cause someone to murder her entire family. Dr. Claric knew that no amount of training or years of experience could fully prepare a psychologist for a patient like Catherine Mercer. Her depth of pain caused him to cross a professional boundary—he felt sorry for her. Even though he didn't have a wife and children he knew there was no greater pain than losing the people you love, especially if you're the one responsible for the loss.

At the core of it, Dr. Claric thought, Catherine's crime is something so horrible, so unbelievable, that you don't want it to be true. You just want to wake up and have everything, everyone, in their right places again—but you know that won't happen.

Nothing will bring back Catherine's dead husband, daughter and son. Nothing can repair the horrible knife wounds that she inflicted or erase the

memories of being arrested still soaked in her family's blood.

Dr. Claric knew people were always desperate to explain a tragedy like this. *We need to separate ourselves from this kind of random violence so we can sleep at night.* He knew that people would need to blame Catherine. She had a mental illness. It was her fault for not taking care of herself. She was to blame. These explanations provided an illusion of protection. They allowed people to believe Catherine Mercer was defective, damaged, different. Mental illness happened to *other* people.

Dr. Claric leaned forward, resting his hands on top of his monitor. It seemed almost too convenient. *Catherine Mercer is psychotic and that's why she killed her family. That explains everything. Or does it?* His profession taught him not to doubt his clinical judgement. He was aware that delusional people can sometimes be very convincing, which is why professionals need to have faith in the collective experience of years of psychiatric and psychological practice. *So why is Catherine's story bothering me?*

He knew that her case was not completely unusual. Some of it even made good clinical sense: there'd been other cases of psychiatric disorder in her extended family. She'd had an uncle diagnosed as manic-depressive; there was a cousin with schizophrenia; and she'd been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder when she was in her early twenties. Her current psychosis didn't simply appear out of nowhere.

Dr. Claric sat back and reached for his mouse. He quickly brought up his Web browser and clicked on the search button. He typed in "electronic weapons" and waited. A few hits came up on the screen but none seemed to fit the description. He returned to the search engine and typed in "mind control."

As he was waiting for the results, a different dialogue box popped onto the screen. It was his e-mail notification program alerting him to a message from a colleague. He clicked "read" and scanned the message that popped up.

He looked at his watch. It was 2:45 p.m. and there was a meeting starting at three. Dr. Georgia O'Connors, staff psychiatrist and clinical leader, was sending out reminders to the team.

He closed the e-mail and returned to the results of his search. The screen was full of matches. Some sites claimed to be maintained by scientists, experts in the field of non-lethal weaponry, other sites were created by "victims," and some were managed by entire groups devoted to illegal experiments against normal people. He briefly scanned the contents of the Citizens Against Government Experimentation site before he clicked back to his search. Dr. Claric was stunned. He didn't know that these urban myths about secret government experiments and conspiracy had such

incredible followings. It was no wonder that psychotic patients felt justified in their delusional beliefs: all the social validation they needed was right at their fingertips.

He began clicking from site to site. The level of detail used to describe the clandestine mind-control experiments was phenomenal. He found sites describing electromagnetic weapons, microwave weapons, ELF (Extremely Low Frequency) weapons, directed energy weapons, acoustic weapons, radio frequency weapons and so on. Each site described the weapons in detail and offered checklists of symptoms that might indicate you'd been targeted for "testing":

- Unexplained sensations of hot or cold
- Changes in one's sense of taste or smell
- Problems with eyesight (e.g., blurry vision)
- Unexplained pain
- Chronic headaches
- Difficulties in sleep (e.g., insomnia or hypersomnia)
- Vivid nightmares
- Memory problems
- Concentration problems
- Rapidly shifting emotions or changes in emotional reactions

The symptoms were so vague and common that susceptible, paranoid individuals would easily conclude that they had been victimized.

As he read further it was clear that many of the sites quoted legitimate scientific research in areas like neurophysiology, neurochemistry and basic cellular processes. Many sites proposed a similar and plausible method of exacting changes in a person's brain: cellular excitation. As a psychologist, Dr. Claric knew that people's brains operate on electrical pulses. When we see something, hear something or consciously do something, there are series of electrical pulses occurring through neurons and synapses in the mind. Some of the Web sites proposed that an individual's mind could be affected by a machine that interfered with the normal electrical functioning of the brain. Dr. Claric was somewhat surprised at how believable the theories were:

- The human nervous system works on electrical pulses.
- The way people think, the commands the mind sends for the body to act, is done through electrical frequencies. In essence, the human body regulates itself and generates

thought through specific biological frequencies. To avoid cellular confusion with the countless pulses that occur every second, there are biological processes to screen out biological and artificial pulses that aren't generated for the purpose of communication with cell groups. Such screening processes include specific sodium and potassium ions that suppress frequencies—usually higher-range frequencies—and prevent the cells from being overwhelmed. Signals that are recognized as meaningful are usually transmitted at much lower frequencies that pass through the screening systems. If a weapon could be developed with a resonance that matched these “meaningful” biological frequencies, it could disrupt normal cellular processes and have a wide range of effects on the target. This is the principle behind Extremely Low Frequency weapons—disruption of cellular communication. At low intensity, such a weapon could cause mental confusion, while at higher intensity, it could cause such significant cellular disruption that a person might experience a cerebral embolism.

In addition to accurate scientific facts, many of the sites reported research by the same authors. This consistency also gave the Web sites credibility. Dr. Claric found study after study by renowned scientists and researchers like Jose Vitero, Raymond Frey and Isaac Pape. Some of the authors of the research worked out of prestigious universities. *If this is a scam or a bogus conspiracy theory, Dr. Claric thought, then it's a damn elaborate one.*

He clicked another link and began reading an article prepared by a physicist at Stanford. He'd just started reading when another e-mail notification window popped up.

“Oh shit,” he said and looked at his watch. It was ten minutes after three and he was late for the meeting. He figured someone was e-mailing to scold him.

Dr. Claric,
There's nothing to find.
Thank You.
—A Concerned Colleague

Dr. Claric didn't know what to make of it. There was no reply e-mail address. He clicked on "properties" to bring up additional information on the e-mail. Apart from the date and time stamp, there was nothing. He clicked back to the e-mail.

"What the hell?" he whispered to himself.

He rolled his cursor over the "print" button, tapping the mouse once. He decided he wanted a hard copy of this to show to a few people. The screen froze.

"Damn it. Not now."

He pressed the computer's reset button. The screen went blank and the computer whirred as it re-booted.

As soon as he was back in the system, he went straight to his e-mails looking for the mysterious message, but it was gone. Dr. Claric jumped up from his desk and ran down the corridor until he reached a set of doors opening into a larger room divided into cubicles. He went straight to the back where the printer sat. He couldn't find a printout anywhere.

He turned to a dark-haired woman at a computer a few feet away. "Gladys, did anything print out here just a second ago?"

She didn't even turn around to answer. "No."

"That's funny. I tried printing a message and my system froze. When I logged back in the message was gone."

"Did you delete it?" she asked, turning to him.

"No, I was just trying to print it."

"Don't know what to tell you. That shouldn't happen. Our files should be secure until we delete them. You shouldn't be able to just lose stuff." She paused and then added, "Was it important?"

Dr. Claric considered the question. "I guess not."

This page intentionally left blank

“I was just paged,” Michael Wenton barked into the receiver.

His Emergency Response Team pager had sounded just after ten in the evening, which meant there was a barricaded subject or a hostage situation. In either case, Wenton was the on-call expert for the Halifax Regional Police’s negotiation team.

“Dr. Wenton. Thank you for calling back so quickly. We have a situation in Woodlawn and we’d like you to come down right away.”

Woodlawn was an older residential neighbourhood in Dartmouth, right across the harbour from Halifax, but it was still part of the Halifax Regional Municipality.

“I’m at home. Send a car.” He hung up the phone without waiting for a response. He’d been through this routine before and didn’t need to have the details explained to him.

Wenton turned back to his living room. A large-screen TV towered in one corner, facing an imposing bookcase lined with hundreds of DVD movies. He stepped towards his coffee table and picked up the remote. Without looking at the buttons, his fingers deftly switched off the DVD, television and the surround sound stereo. He dropped the remote on the couch and went to the bedroom to retrieve his bulletproof vest and police jacket.

Approximately thirty minutes after the page, Wenton was seated in the communications van of the Emergency Response Team. Across from him was Staff Sergeant Lincoln Whitley, the head negotiator.

“Here’s the situation, Doc,” Whitley began. “The pizza guy shows up at 112 Lawson Avenue at around 20:20. Turns out he was supposed to go to 116 Lawson and fucked up. It’s the last fuck-up he’ll make because he was greeted at the door by our subject, Barry Boseman, who shot him at point-blank range with a rifle. The subject has been barricaded in the house ever

since. The only contact we've had is listening to this guy screaming his head off about disease."

"Disease?" Wenton asked. "What disease?"

"I don't have a clue. I assume he's fuckin' nuts and that's why you're here."

"How's the pizza guy?"

"Dead. We finally managed to get a couple of guys to drag the body off the front steps. Massive bullet wounds to the chest."

"Fine. What do you have on the subject?"

"Forty-five. Separated for about two months. Recent history of mental illness and psychiatric treatment. No previous record."

Wenton frowned. "Got a name on the psychiatric treatment?"

"Dr. Kenneth Ahmazda or some fuckin' thing. I've got the number here." He handed an open notebook to Wenton and pointed to the number circled on the middle of the page. "We've already tried to contact him. He's on call at the Atlantic Coast Hospital. That number I gave you is the switchboard."



"Ken? It's Michael Wenton."

"Hello Dr. Wenton. I guess there's some serious business going on," Ken Ahmazai said in a thick Middle Eastern accent.

"Yeah, you wanna give me the run-down on a former patient?"

"That would be breaking confidentiality."

"He killed a guy already. He's either going to kill more people or himself. Get over it and tell me why Barry Boseman was in the hospital."

"Fine. Fine. Mr. Boseman was here for a breakdown after his wife and son left him. Mr. Boseman had been unfaithful."

"Unfaithful how?" Wenton asked.

"I guess Mr. Boseman had an affair. He cheated on his wife but did not tell her."

"Which is sort of the basic definition of cheating?" Wenton mumbled sarcastically.

"What? Oh. Yes. Anyway, Mr. Boseman was unfortunate and contracted an STD. He infected his wife with herpes. Needless to say, his marriage suffered. When his wife left, he could not handle it and ended up here."

"Diagnosis?"

"Adjustment disorder. Possible mood disorder with psychotic features."

"Suicidal?"

"Very. He was under 'close' the entire time here."

"Meds?"

“Fluoxetine, but he left AMA and I do not think he was taking the meds.”

“Anything else, Ken?”

“If Mr. Boseman killed someone it probably means he has become completely psychotic. He will quite likely remain dangerous to himself and others.”



“He’s come to the door a few times. He’s still waving that rifle around and screaming.” Staff Sergeant Whitley was filling Wenton in as he stepped back into the communications van. “What’d you get from the shrink?”

“Trouble. Barry Boseman is suicidal. His wife recently left him and took their infant son. I think we might be getting into a suicide-by-cop situation.”

“That would explain his behaviour. He keeps walking out onto the porch and pointing that rifle. He’s daring us to take a shot at him.”

“Why haven’t you?” Wenton asked casually.

Whitley wasn’t surprised at the question. He knew he wasn’t dealing with a typical psychologist. “We’ve got the area secure. My men aren’t in any immediate danger from the guy. He hasn’t fired any shots at us, just waved the gun around. But if this guy decides to do something real stupid, like taking a run at us...” He made his hand into a gun and mouthed the word “bang.”

Wenton nodded. “The situation on this guy is that he cheated on the wife, got herpes and brought it home. When the wife found out she had an STD she probably freaked out. He confessed to the affair and she left him, taking the baby. He took it pretty hard. I think he wants to die but doesn’t have the balls to do it himself.”

“So he killed the pizza guy?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think so. You said the pizza guy went to the wrong house, right? I bet Boseman was just startled or something. It doesn’t make any sense to just kill the pizza guy out of the blue.”

Whitley nodded.

“Let’s get this guy on the phone,” Wenton announced. “I think I know how to end this thing.”



“JUST PICK UP THE PHONE, MR. BOSEMAN!” Whitley turned to face Wenton and the site commander, Dillon Moore, covering his handset as he said, “It’s ‘Boseman,’ right?”

Wenton and Moore both nodded.

Whitley turned back to his handset. "MR. BOSEMAN, THIS IS STAFF SERGEANT LINCOLN WHITLEY OF THE HALIFAX REGIONAL POLICE. GO TO THE FRONT DOOR, GET THE CELLPHONE. DO IT NOW!"

They watched the front door for any sign of motion. The police had managed to get a cellphone onto the front steps where Barry Boseman could easily retrieve it if he decided to talk.

"How's that, Doc?" Whitley asked without shifting his gaze from the front door.

"Fine."

"What's fine?" Moore asked.

Whitley glanced at him and then back to the house. "Wenton thinks that this guy might respond to authority. He figures I should identify myself as an officer when I—hold on! Here he comes!"

They watched Barry Boseman appear behind the screen door on his front step. He looked one way then the other before shoving the door open. Without hesitation, he walked out on the steps, rifle in one hand, stooped, grabbed the phone and retreated back into the house.

"Nice call doctor," Moore nodded.

"Probably had more to do with the standoff dragging on," Wenton said blankly.

"All right!" Whitley yelled as he stepped back into the communications van. "I want everyone in here to shut the fuck up. I'm calling the subject." He sat at a small, cramped table and picked up a complicated looking receiver. He scanned a list of pre-programmed numbers on a large numeric pad and then looked up. "Phone company said which fuckin' one of these is the number?"

An officer standing nearby quickly moved to the table and pointed to the second preset.

Whitley nodded and pressed the button. Wenton and Moore stood nearby, both wearing cordless headsets to monitor the conversation.

"One ring," Whitley announced.

They waited.

"Two rings."

Nothing.

"Three rings."

"Come on, buddy," Moore urged.

"Four rings."

And then Barry Boseman answered: "Hello?"

"Barry, this is Staff Sergeant Lincoln Whitley of the Halifax Regional

Police. I'd like to talk to you for a minute."

"I don't want to talk. I just want to be dead," the man said in a broken voice.

"We don't want anyone getting hurt here, including you, Barry. We just need to work this thing out and get you out of there safely. Okay, Barry?"

Wenton recognized the impact of previous training he'd done with the police. Whitley's repeated use of the subject's name was an attempt to establish a closer, ostensibly more intimate relationship.

"You just want to throw me in jail."

"You don't want to be in there anymore, do you, Barry? Isn't it time to stop this, put the rifle down and come out?"

"DON'T TELL ME WHAT TO DO!"

"I'm sorry. I just want to get us out of this peacefully, just like you want. Right, Barry?"

"I want to talk to my wife."

"I'll see what we can do about that. In the meantime, why don't you put the gun down and come on out." Repeating the same instructions over and over was another common technique of the negotiator.

"STOP TALKING! YOU'RE DISTRACTING ME."

Whitley shot a quick look to Wenton who nodded, but Whitley frowned and shook his head. He wasn't comfortable with Wenton's earlier suggestion for getting Boseman out.

"What are you trying to prove Barry?"

"I'm not going to do this. It's not my fault. The disease is everywhere. It's not my fault. I have to kill it."

Moore closed his eyes and shook his head. Boseman didn't sound good.

"What's everywhere, Barry?"

"Disease! It's everywhere and I need to destroy it. I need to show her it's not my fault."

Whitley looked back at Wenton for guidance. Wenton shook his head, indicating that this was a topic best left alone during the negotiation. It would only agitate the subject. Before he could look away he noticed Wenton mouthing the words "do it."

"Okay, okay," Whitley continued. "But let's just put that rifle down and come on out now. You need to do the right thing before this gets in the newspapers."

"The newspapers! What?" Barry screamed.

"If you come out of there now, there won't be much of a news story. No one would have to know that you gave your wife herpes. No one would have to know that you have herpes."

"What? What the hell are you talking about? This isn't going in the

news, is it?" Boseman's voice shook with panic.

"Not if you come out of there now. It's time to be a man, Barry. It's time to start fixing all the problems you've caused. Put the rifle down and come out of there." Whitley wiped beads of sweat off his forehead and closed his eyes. He thought Wenton's advice to threaten Boseman with public humiliation was a little risky. The strategy went against standard negotiation practices.

"What? Who are you to—"

"Barry, you've done a terrible thing. You've lost your wife and son because of your weakness. You need to start being strong. Get out of that house. Be a man before the news starts running stories on what a worthless punk you are." Whitley pushed the mute button on his console and turned to Wenton. "Are you sure about this? For fuck sake this guy might—"

"OKAY!" Boseman screamed.

Whitley turned back to his console and flipped the mute button off. "What's that, Barry?"

"I will do the right thing. I can be a man. I just don't want this in the newspaper. I'm coming out."



The police were placing Barry Boseman in the back of a police van while Wenton, Moore and Whitley watched from outside the communications van.

"That was a pretty good call there, Doc," Whitley finally said.

Wenton nodded.

Moore looked puzzled. "But it seemed a little unethical," he said. "Couldn't pushing the guy like that have just as easily made him a suicide? Is that stuff kosher with you psychologists?"

Wenton stared hard at Moore. "Actually, I thought he would have killed himself. I'm surprised he came out."

Now Whitley looked surprised. "What does that mean? You weren't trying to get him out of the house?"

Wenton shrugged. "I said I had an idea on how to end this thing. That's all."

Moore looked at Whitley in disbelief as Wenton turned and walked away.

"If you ask me," Whitley said, "We oughta revisit using that guy. Ever since that Edward Carter case he's been a nasty son of a bitch."

Barely out of earshot, Wenton smiled.

NINE

What a day! Dr. Claric thought as he stepped through his front entrance. He lived in Cow Bay, a small beachside community on the outskirts of Dartmouth, bordering the entrance to Halifax's main harbour. People frequently looked for homes in this area because it provided the luxury of living on the ocean, yet it was located close to the city. Unfortunately, the Maximum Security Psychiatric Centre where Dr. Claric worked was on the opposite side of Dartmouth in the industrial park, which meant a half-hour commute. He hadn't worried about that when he'd purchased the house seven years ago. He liked the idea of leaving work behind him, far behind.

The house itself was quite modest and aptly captured Dr. Claric's approach to life. It was a three-bedroom, single-storey home with a small front yard and a fenced-in backyard. He figured the previous owners must have had a dog because the grass out back was still struggling for roots.

His neighbours were mostly older and many of them were already retired. Although he knew a few by name, he had never grown close to anyone on the block.

After working on Catherine's report until almost 9 p.m., Dr. Claric planned on throwing something in the oven, opening a bottle of wine, and relaxing in front of the TV. He was still bothered by his session with her and the subsequent Internet search. But what upset him most was the mysterious e-mail. Especially because he couldn't prove it ever existed.

Don't think about it, he told himself. *It's that kind of rumination that starts delusional thinking.*

He chuckled at the thought of getting so wrapped up in a psychiatric case that it created mental illness in the therapist. He figured he'd been at this game too long to be vulnerable to something like that.

The oven dinged and he put in his frozen pasta dish. He'd made a large batch of macaroni and cheese the week before and had frozen the leftovers.

As a bachelor he found it was easiest to make double batches and keep some quick meals on hand.

With his dinner cooking, he scanned the small wooden wine rack on the kitchen counter. He selected a red wine and pulled open a drawer to find the corkscrew.

He took his wine to the living room and went across to the large picture window. It was his favourite spot to relax and watch the quiet street.

Dr. Claric took a sip and let his gaze drift down the road. He stopped. The wine glass was still resting against his bottom lip. He pulled the glass away and stared out the window.

There was a white van parked at the curb directly across from his house.

“What the hell?” he said out loud without even realizing.

Dr. Claric’s eyes moved quickly to the roof of the van: there wasn’t a satellite dish or any suspicious equipment. His eyes searched the side of the van. It was a plain white van. There were no distinguishing marks identifying it as “Eastlink Cable” or any other utility vehicle.

From this angle he wasn’t able to see the back doors, and the only window was on the driver’s side door. The driver’s window wasn’t tinted and he could see there was no one in the van. *Could someone be in the back with the monitoring the equipment?*

“Don’t be stupid,” he said out loud.

He turned away from the window and walked back to the kitchen. He flicked the light on in the oven. The macaroni and cheese was still frozen. He went back to the living room, avoiding the window, and turned on the TV with the remote control. There was a program on African predators: a lion running alongside an antelope. He clicked past that and began running through his seventy-plus channels.

“Shit,” he said to himself and dropped the remote control beside him. There was nothing on TV—at least nothing that could draw his attention away from the van parked across the street.

He got up and went to the window for a second look. He wished he could see something that would explain the van’s presence there—a familiar neighbour standing next to it, or maybe he missed the markings on the side of the van that would explain it as a service vehicle.

Dr. Claric looked across the street. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. The van was gone.

The clinical team assembled in the back of the nursing station in South Bay. This unit held the long-term population that had been found Not Criminally Responsible for violent offenses. Each patient's progress was discussed in clinical rounds every six to eight weeks. The patient scheduled for today's rounds was Catherine Mercer.

Dr. Georgia O'Connors, Dr. Claric, Prime Nurse Murray Deschamp and the team social worker, Carla Raymond, were seated around a table. Dr. O'Connors began.

"Okay, we've had Catherine for just about three months. Where are we at?"

Murray opened the patient chart in front of him. He was flipping through the pages as he spoke. "She's not settling on the unit well. She stays in her room a lot. Doesn't talk to the other clients. Rarely talks to staff. We catch her crying quite a bit, but she's reluctant to talk about it. I've been able to probe a little on the delusions and they're still there, strong as ever."

Dr. Claric rubbed a hand across his forehead. He felt flushed. He wished that it wasn't Catherine Mercer on rounds. He felt awkward like he was hiding something from the team. It was stupid, he knew, but he couldn't help it. He couldn't get the image of the white van out of his head. He couldn't get rid of the thought of that e-mail he'd lost. He was rigid with anxiety because he knew the team would eventually turn to him for input. He didn't know what he'd say.

"So she hasn't talked to anyone on the unit?" Dr. O'Connors asked.

"She stays in her room so much that she doesn't have much of an opportunity to talk. She's even skipped some trays to avoid being in the dining room. We've talked to her about that and we're watching to make sure she doesn't starve herself." He paused and thought for a moment. "I guess the only person she's talked to is Max."

“Stetho-Man,” Carla said absent-mindedly.

Murray nodded. “Stetho-Man” was what they called Max Thompson, a long-term patient who carried a stethoscope with him at all times. His psychosis proved resistant to medication. His major delusional theme was the idea that he would die and not realize it. The stethoscope allowed him to routinely check himself for a heartbeat. Attempts to take the stethoscope away were always met by such violent resistance that staff, and other patients, finally accepted it.

“Max has always been one of the soft-touches on the unit. I think a lot of people sympathize with him or think he’s cute and harmless. Catherine has been observed talking to him in the TV room on occasion,” Murray continued.

She identifies with his pain, Dr. Claric thought. They share a common desperation over their own existence. He frowned. He knew he should be sharing his thoughts with the team—after all, that was the whole point of the clinical rounds—but his mouth was frozen. He was afraid of what he would say. He wanted to tell the team about the e-mail but he had no proof. It would make it look like *he* was the one who needed medication. Besides, he knew that the e-mail story didn’t make sense unless he explained the type of Web sites he was surfing at the time.

“Carla,” Dr. O’Connors began. “Do we know if there’s other family in the area? She could really use some personal support.”

Carla’s expression changed instantly to one of deep concern, which almost seemed like a trained display of emotion. “You aren’t going to believe it, but it’s horrible.” She paused as if she expected to see the same dramatic emotional shift on the faces of the team. “The only family in the immediate area are relatives of the victims, her in-laws, her husband’s brother and his family. I contacted them but they weren’t very receptive. They’re still dealing with the tragedy.”

“Any chance of doing some education with them?” Murray asked, indicating that the team might help the family understand the mental illness and hopefully forgive Catherine.

“Well,” she said as her expression changed yet again, “I sort of asked the brother-in-law something like that and he told me...to go to hell.”

Dr. O’Connors sighed. “Is there anyone on her side of the family?”

“There’s only a sister. Her parents are deceased. The sister, Wendy, lives somewhere in Ohio, I think. I’m still trying to track her down. Catherine and Wendy haven’t really talked in some time. I think there was some issue about the wills when the parents passed away and a big blow-up. That was three or four years ago. Initially, Catherine wouldn’t even give me the phone number.”

Dr. O'Connors nodded and turned to Dr. Claric.

Dr. Claric was tempted to leave, to say he wasn't feeling well and get out. Funny thing was that he actually did feel physically ill. He had barely heard anything that was being discussed. He wanted to keep the conversation directed away from him, so he jumped in before Dr. O'Connors could speak again.

"So you'll get a hold of the parents then."

The team was silent, possibly waiting for Dr. Claric to clarify his question. He felt sweat bead on his forehead.

"Which parents?" Carla said with an almost comical look of confusion.

"Um, *her* parents?" Dr. Claric said with little confidence.

She shook her head and gave Dr. Claric an odd look. "I just said that her parents passed away. That's what she and her sister fought about."

Dr. Claric wiped his forehead. "I'm sorry. I was just thinking... Anyway..."

"Brian, you okay?" Dr. O'Connors asked.

He looked at her quickly. He felt an incredible urge to confess. To tell them about the Web sites, the e-mail, the van. He knew he'd sound crazy but at least someone else would know. If something did happen, he would have people who knew. *That's always the problem with crazy people*, he thought. *They never tell anyone about what's going on until it's too late.* Besides, these were his colleagues. They knew him and they knew he wasn't crazy. They'd believe him. He wasn't making anything up.

"No, I'm sorry. I'm okay," he said. "I don't know where my head is."

"You look a little flushed. Are you feeling okay?" Murray asked.

"I...I think so."

"Well let's wrap it up then," Dr. O'Connors said, re-focusing the team on the rounds meeting. "You've met with Catherine, right, Brian?"

Dr. Claric took a deep breath. "Yes. She's still struggling. The delusions are still internal...I mean intact. You don't need to do any...I mean, there's not a lot...they're right there on the surface, I mean on top. Although, she's a bit of a tough nut to crack. Like to get rapport with. I think I'll need to go...I mean take it slow."

"Yeah," Murray jumped in. "She does focus on the delusions quite a bit. I've heard her mention electronic weapons to co-clients. She and I have talked about it a little bit, but she's pretty tight-lipped with other staff. She doesn't like to tell us about that stuff."

"Same content?" Dr. O'Connors asked. "The 'zap' from the laser gun, the men in the white van, the suspicion about events at home?"

"It wasn't a laser," Dr. Claric whispered.

"What's that?"

“Nothing. Just it wasn’t a laser. It was an electromagnetic weapon.”

Murray frowned and then he smirked. “You’re not going around zappin’ people again, are you Bri?”

A few chuckles rose from around the room. Dr. O’Connors continued in a more serious tone. “What’s your plan, Brian?”

“Just keep seeing her, I guess.”

“What about suicide risk?” she asked

“She’s on ‘close obs,’ now. We’ve got someone in there every five minutes,” Murray announced.

“Brian, you think we should keep her on close?”

He was silent. He didn’t know how to answer that. It was so hard to think. He could barely remember what “close obs” meant. “Um, I could do something more formal around suicide.”

“I think that’s good. Let’s keep her on ‘close’ until Dr. Claric does a more formal suicide assessment.”

Murray flipped the chart open to the clinical record section. He started making a chart note on the decisions coming out of rounds.

“When do you think you can get back to her?” Dr. O’Connors asked Dr. Claric.

“I guess I’ll try to see her later today or something.”

“Okay, sooner rather than later. We need to get a handle on the risk here. Thanks.” She turned back to Murray. “Is there anyone else on rounds today?”

“Basically all psychotic disorders are at the end of a continuum of normal behaviour,” Wenton continued.

He was seated behind his desk and Norma was seated across from him. They were discussing Wenton’s recent involvement in the barricaded subject negotiation of Barry Boseman.

“The subject in this police standoff was diagnosed as depressed with psychotic features but might actually have been showing the prodromal signs of late-onset schizophrenia. I don’t know the whole history but apparently he had some kind of fixation on disease. He saw it in his house, at work, everywhere. Even during the police negotiation he was raving about disease being all around him. Not surprisingly, his fixation started shortly after his wife and son left him.”

“Is that like the stress part of the diathesis–stress idea?” Norma asked, wanting desperately to seem competent in Wenton’s eyes.

He nodded. “Diathesis is the biological portion of an illness, the part that is passed on by genetics. Maybe this guy had some odd characters in his family tree. A gene predisposing members of his family to mental illness can be passed along much like the gene for male-pattern baldness is passed. The ‘stress’ part of diathesis–stress is the idea that even though a person has a genetic predisposition to a disorder, it still takes a stressful life event to finally push the person over the edge. For example, someone might be destined to be crazy but manages to fight it off for years right up until something big happens that breaks them. Something like having your family pack up and leave you. But you need both parts: stress won’t cause psychosis without the genetic predisposition, and your predisposition might not mean shit until your wife fucks off and leaves you.”

“That’s terrible,” Norma said with a note of sadness.

“Shit happens. Anyway, as I was saying, mental illness is on a continu-

um. One of this guy's symptoms was seeing disease everywhere, a frequent symptom in obsessive-compulsive disorder. But just seeing disease or dirt does not constitute a psychotic condition. It's a matter of degrees. If a person starts to see disease everywhere to the point where it disrupts their normal functioning, that's a problem. Being able to tell the difference between what's real and what's not is what separates reality from fantasy. Psychotic people can't make that distinction." Wenton stood and peered over the top of his desk. "There," he said pointing, "Do you see that bug over in the corner of the room. I think it's an ant. Right there, next to the rain stick."

She shifted around in her seat and looked. "Yeah, I see it. Do you want me to get it?"

Wenton looked at her like she'd just said something offensive. "No. I'm illustrating a point."

"Oh," she said shifting in her seat.

"Look at that ant again. This time, more carefully."

She turned back to the spot. "Okay."

"Is it an ant?"

"I don't know."

"Well the first time you looked you were sure, weren't you?"

"Yes, because you told me it was an ant."

"I told your brain it was an ant. I didn't tell your eyes what to see. Your brain told your eyes what it was looking at." *You fuckin' idiot.*

"I think I get it."

"You probably don't," he said sarcastically. "The point is this: that's not an ant. That's a speck of dirt. From this distance it's difficult to know for sure, and our minds easily filled in the missing details with whatever information we had access to. In this case, you were cheating your perceptual skills by relying too heavily on what I said. Your mind thought you already knew it was an ant, so when you looked at an ambiguous little speck of dirt, you didn't question your mind's preconceived judgement."

"Okay."

"Stop saying 'okay.' Just listen." He wondered if it was pointless to try and educate Norma on anything.

"Sorry," she said, feeling like she'd disappointed him again.

He nodded impatiently and continued. "What if your mind tells you things that aren't true and your perceptions just follow along? Boseman's mind was telling him there was disease all around him. His perception was getting tricked, fooled into believing that everything was proof of what his brain was telling him.

"In other words, the process of becoming delusional is steady and insidious. It starts with an overvalued idea that seeks out validity. This Boseman

guy tried to convince himself that he magically contracted herpes, that the disease must be more common, more easily contracted than anyone knows. He became obsessed with the idea and selectively searched out proof of what his mind had already decided was true. This way anything he saw proved him right. So Barry Boseman ended up convincing himself that his house was infested with herpes. Every speck of dirt, every imperfection in the floor, was proof of disease running rampant. His overvalued ideation turned to delusion and supported his hallucinations.”

“And the more disease he saw the stronger his illness became,” Norma added.

“Basically. The process feeds itself. Take another classic example: the Jesus delusion. A lot of mental patients believe they’re Jesus. Why?” Wenton didn’t wait for Norma to answer. “It starts with the idea of uniqueness. That’s not psychotic. Most people have some degree of need to believe they are unique. But the uniqueness needs a basis, a justification. ‘Why am I unique?’ The answer: ‘I’m special. There’s something special about me that separates me from all others.’ Thus, the overvalued ideation begins. The person needs to justify the belief in uniqueness, needs to prove that they are special. It preserves their ego, protects their fragile self-esteem.

“At some point the specific notion of being Jesus is introduced. The person latches onto this explanation because it so easily explains everything that has come before and will come in the future. Our minds are hard-wired to search for quick and easy explanations to help us organize our experiences. If we are plagued by the question of what makes us unique, then ‘I’m the Son of God’ does a pretty good job of answering a few questions.

“And then proof comes from all over. Everything starts to take on special meaning. A man walks down the street and notices someone is looking at him. ‘People stare at me because they know I’m Jesus,’ he thinks. He picks up a Bible and his fingers tingle. He reads the newspaper and there’s a story on religion. Everything has special meaning to him—a meaning that confirms he is Jesus.”

Norma decided to risk asking a question. “But what if someone points out the differences? What if someone tells the guy he isn’t Jesus because he doesn’t perform miracles?”

“That’s the most dangerous thing for people with delusions,” Wenton responded. “Small challenges to the validity of the beliefs only provide opportunities to build on the layers. With each small challenge, the delusional person adds more depth to his story, comes up with explanations for missing pieces in his story and the delusions become more fixed, more elaborate. It’s the same as brainwashing techniques that were reportedly used in Japanese internment camps during World War II. Soldiers were made to

do little things like write an essay condemning some aspect of American culture. Over time, these exercises wore them down and they started to believe what they wrote.”

“Wow. What can help then?”

“Almost nothing. Once the delusional system is intact and the layers are deep, there’s very little that can be done. Psychotherapy is bullshit. You can’t *talk* a person out of believing he’s Jesus. Rational arguments don’t work. The person is too defensive. Their whole personality, their whole sense of self, is based on the beliefs. If they give up those beliefs, then they’re admitting that everything they believed was crazy, a lie, delusions. They lose themselves in the process. Suddenly they aren’t unique or special—they’re just a mental patient. No one is willing to let that happen.

“Besides that, delusional beliefs are almost always premised on bits and pieces of reality that can’t be confirmed one way or another. For example, the person who thinks he’s Jesus probably did have people staring at him on the street. He may have been wearing a bath towel at the time, but people were staring at him. It isn’t so much the actual events but the interpretation of the events. Like that speck of dirt on the floor behind you. You looked at it and saw an ant. It’s not an ant, but your mind told you that you were looking at an ant. But that doesn’t mean the speck of dirt doesn’t exist.

“The second reason delusions are hard to treat is that they can rarely be proved or disproved. Many mental patients have delusions that revolve around an event that only they were involved with. For instance, a guy might say he was visited by an alien who told him the world was going to end. The guy insists that the world is going to end, and if we argue with him, he says, ‘You weren’t there, you don’t know,’ and he’s right.”

“It’s the same as if someone says they’re Jesus,” Norma said nodding

“Right. How would we know if someone really was Jesus? Mental health professionals have become so accustomed to these kind of delusions that they automatically discount any story that sounds remotely psychotic. This rejection has become so automatic that it’s doubtful they’d be able to recognize a legitimate far-out story from a delusion. But this way of thinking also simplifies our jobs. If we didn’t trust this professional judgment, we might spend far too much time on a single patient, trying with little success to disprove a crazy story.”

“And drugs? Wouldn’t medication help the patient recognize that his belief is a delusion?”

Wenton smiled. “Depends on who you ask. A psychiatrist will tell you that drugs help. The drug company will tell you that they have a cure. Most other people working with the truly delusional patients will tell you it’s all bullshit: psychotherapy doesn’t work because it just teaches the patient to

not talk about their delusions; drugs don't help because they just tranquilize the patient so they aren't as agitated as they continue to believe they're Jesus. A really intact delusion can only be suppressed, it will never disappear. Even the patients who seem to be better are really just hiding their delusion. If you dig a little you can normally find it."

"That's fascinating," Norma said, nodding.

"I don't know if it's *fascinating*," Wenton said coldly. "It's pretty disturbing. These ideas, these delusions can take the person over, control them, destroy them. Can you imagine believing something with every ounce of your self and then being told you're just crazy? Can you imagine explaining everything that you are and ever will be to someone and then having them tell you that you're 'delusional'? It destroys people. It invalidates them. It leaves them nowhere to turn. It leaves them suicidal."

Wenton was hoping to spend more time with Norma after their meeting, but she was irritating him. He found her mannerisms, her efforts to be interested and keen, really distasteful. He decided he couldn't look at her anymore.

"Anyway, I need to get some other stuff done."

Norma frowned. "Okay, do you want me to go?"

"Yeah," he looked away from her and opened his laptop.

She hesitated. She felt like she had somehow upset him or done something wrong.

"We don't need to meet again?" When she heard herself ask the question she suddenly felt awkward and pathetic, like a high school kid, and desperately wished she could suck her words back in. It was important to Norma that he respect her. She wanted Wenton to see her as a competent grad student.

"About what?" he said and looked at her deliberately.

He'd done this to her before and she hated it. He always picked up on her weakness and pushed it back in her face. He liked to make her feel silly.

"Nothing, I guess," she mumbled and stood to leave.

Wenton returned to his computer, barely noticing when the door clicked behind her.

This page intentionally left blank

TWELVE

I'm an idiot, Dr. Claric thought as he returned to his office. What the hell was I doing in the meeting? They must think I'm insane. I need to let this shit go.

He sat at his desk and stared at the login screen on the computer.

I need to keep some perspective here. There's nothing going on. That e-mail could have been anything. A glitch in the system. And there are white vans everywhere. The van I saw didn't even have the satellite dish or whatever the hell it was supposed to have.

He relaxed in his chair, a little.

I need to get back to work and forget about this shit. Catherine Mercer is a sick woman. A very sick woman who murdered her own family because of a mental illness. If there are electronic weapons, it doesn't mean they have anything to do with her illness—and that's a pretty big "if"! Just because some wacko knows how to put together a good Web site doesn't mean it's fact. Anyone can put a site on the Internet—whether it's true or not!

Dr. Claric nodded and leaned forward, resting his fingers on the keyboard. He felt more confident now and typed in his login name.

On the other hand, he thought, there were specific names of people on some of those sites. Names of scientists at reputable universities who are doing research in this stuff.

The computer screen flashed and Windows ME came into view. After a moment of deliberation Dr. Claric dropped his mouse to the icon for his Internet browser.

He stared at the author bio listed at the beginning of an article entitled "Effectiveness of Non-nuclear Electromagnetic Pulse on Behaviour Modification."

The site offered both an e-mail address and phone number for the author, Dr. Byron Pincher, who was apparently a professor with the Stanford University Research Centre.

Dr. Claric stared at the phone number on the screen.

After a few minutes, he picked up the phone and hesitantly punched the numbers. As he pressed the last number he glanced at his watch. With the four-hour time difference it was probably close to lunchtime there.

Someone picked up on the third ring. "Lab. Tracy."

Dr. Claric was so startled he almost hung up. "I'm sorry," he stammered. "I was looking for a...Dr. Pincher?"

"He's not here," the woman barked.

"Oh, oh, I see. Um, is he going to be back soon?"

"Yeah, he's just out for lunch. Is there a message?"

"No, no I don't think...wait, I was given this number by a friend and told to get hold of Dr. Pincher. Exactly what kind of lab do you have there?"

"What?"

"I'm sorry. This is Dr. Brian Claric and I'm just following up on something." *Damn, I shouldn't have told them my name!* "I wondered what your lab is for? What does Dr. Pincher do?"

"You a reporter?" she asked bluntly. "Or are you really a doctor?"

It surprised him and he answered defensively, "No! Not at all. I'm a clinical psychologist."

When Tracy eventually responded it was with more than a trace of annoyance and superiority. Psychologists obviously didn't impress her and it was apparent that she assumed he wouldn't be able to decipher the complicated purposes of the research.

"Dr. Pincher's a physicist specializing in neurobiological applications. We're studying biological electromagnetic fields here. Who did you say you were?"

"That's okay. Thank you. Thank you very much," Dr. Claric said and hung up.

He covered his face with his hands. *What was that? Why did I panic? Why did I tell them my name?*

The phone rang.

Dr. Claric jumped back from his desk. His heart pounded and his hands were shaking.

"Don't be stupid," he said out loud and reached for his phone. "It's probably just the unit." He put the phone to his ear. "Hello."

A male voice spoke, "Oh, I'm sorry, I must have the wrong number." Click.

Dr. Claric pulled the phone away and stared at the receiver. *Now they know*, he thought. *Fuck. They know who I am.*



No vans on the street today, Dr. Claric thought as he pulled into his driveway after leaving work a bit early. *That's a relief. Maybe they decided not to zap me after all.* He laughed.

He turned the ignition off and reached into the back seat for his leather briefcase.

As he walked to the steps he flipped through keys to find the one for the house. He came to a stop at the door and found the right key. When he slid the key into the deadbolt, the door pushed open easily. His heart jumped.

Just relax, he tried to tell himself. *This doesn't mean anything. Maybe I just forgot to shut the door tightly this morning.*

He gave the door another, stronger push and let it swing in until it came to a rest against the closet. He looked down the hallway towards the kitchen. There were no obvious signs of a break and enter. He stepped through the doorway and removed his key from the deadbolt.

"Hello," he called out and then immediately felt foolish. *If there's a burglar in here, they wouldn't just answer me.*

"I've got a shotgun and a big dog with rabies!" He smiled. *Don't be stupid, Brian.*

He set the briefcase down and hung the keys on a hook beside the door. He stepped forward and peered into the living room. It was empty, no sign of damage or theft. He kept moving through to the kitchen. Nothing seemed disturbed—although Dr. Claric wasn't exactly sure what he should be looking for.

He took a mug out of the cupboard and poured a glass of orange pop. He only drank orange pop because he felt that it had some nutritional value, maybe a drop of orange juice. The other stuff was just sugar and caffeine. He opened the freezer and broke three cubes of ice out of the tray, dropping them one by one into his drink. He found himself tempted to go through the house and check every room, but he refused to be paranoid. He resolved to just relax and put everything out of his mind. He didn't like feeling rattled, and he felt like he'd made an ass out of himself at Catherine's rounds this morning. And just to add fuel to the fire of his stupidity, he'd called the damn phone number on the Web site.

Ridiculous, he thought. *But what exactly did I expect? Doing stuff like that is just making it worse.*

He took a sip of his drink and set it on the coffee table.

But who called the moment I hung up the phone?

Dr. Claric reached for the remote control on top of the TV but it wasn't there. He looked back at the couch. No remote. He looked back at the TV. He definitely remembered leaving the remote on top of the TV before leaving for work that morning.

He sat down on the couch and scanned the room. *There!* Dr. Claric went over to the far corner of the room. The remote was on the end table, under the lamp. He shook his head. *How'd it get there? I don't sit anywhere near that end table when I watch TV.*

Dr. Claric decided it was time to check the rest of the house.

He went down the hall to his bedroom, stepped through the doorway and flicked on the light. Everything was in order. He wandered around the room, carefully inspecting the dresser, the bedside table, the bed. He opened the closet and looked in, still not knowing what exactly he was looking for: something out of place, missing? Maybe something new, something he'd never seen before?

This is crazy. I shouldn't be doing this to myself.

Dr. Claric left his bedroom and moved across the hall to his small office. It was a converted bedroom with a computer and a filing cabinet. He occasionally used the computer but otherwise was rarely in this room. He turned to leave but something caught his eye.

A light was blinking on the computer monitor. He stepped closer and looked. The green light on the power button was blinking. He'd almost missed it.

What the hell? He looked at his computer tower and it was off. He looked back at the monitor. *Has this light always blinked?* He put a hand on top of the monitor and it was cool to the touch. *Maybe I just forgot to turn it off, but I haven't been in this room in ages. Damn!*

He turned off the screen and left the room, heading to the guest room. He wasn't sure he'd remember where things had been left or what was in the room anyway, but everything seemed okay.

The basement!

The basement was unfinished: just a concrete floor, wooden beams and a few windows that were dirty and let in very little light. He kept his washer and dryer in the back.

Dr. Claric peered down the steep stairs, cursing himself for not having the light switch at the top fixed. The lights in the stairwell had a switch at the top and another at the bottom. Fixing the top switch had been on his "to do" list for months. It hadn't seemed important, until now.

The basement was dark. He took a step down and held tightly onto the

railing. *You're working yourself up for nothing*, he tried to convince himself.

Halfway down the stairs he peered into the dark room but could only make out shadows. He thought he could see the big garbage pail where he kept empty bottles and cans and he could clearly see his mountain bike, but that was about it.

Dr. Claric took another step and a grinding, hissing noise exploded through the basement. His foot slipped out from under him and as he slid down a few stairs, he grabbed for the railing to break his fall. He looked around wildly as he tried to identify the shrill noise, then he realized it was the furnace.

Feeling a little foolish about being so jumpy he stood and stepped confidently down to the bottom of the stairs. He felt along the wall, found the switch and turned it on. Light flooded the room and he let out a sigh of relief. He slowly scanned the basement. Nothing looked out of the ordinary.

Dr. Claric decided to be thorough and take a quick walk around. He moved across the room to the washing machine. He examined the soap, the laundry basket, the washer and dryer, but found nothing suspicious. He headed towards the boxes stacked up in the corner. *What the hell?*

In the corner of the room he kept a number of storage boxes stacked in neat columns. Each box was labelled: "Christmas Decorations," "Clothes," "Magazines." One box lay on its side with the contents spilled onto the floor. He crouched down beside it. The box looked like it had been knocked off the top of the pile and left there. He looked carefully at the clothes. There were no obvious signs of dust or dirt on them, which meant they hadn't been there long. He got up and looked at the other boxes. There was a box sitting by itself on the other side of the stacks. It was labelled "Old Notes" and contained assignments and miscellaneous items from his graduate student days. One of the flaps on the box was up, which was odd because Dr. Claric always folded the flaps down when he put them away. He bent to lift the other flaps and look inside. He didn't even remember exactly what was in this box. He couldn't remember the last time he'd looked in it.

Dr. Claric stood and put his hands on his hips. He stared at the boxes for some time, trying to put things in perspective, trying to stay calm. Nevertheless he could feel himself filling with anger, frustration and fear. *Don't do this to yourself. There's got to be a reasonable explanation.*

He shook his head. It was no use trying to convince himself otherwise—he knew there wasn't a reasonable explanation. He knew he always locked his front door, that he had left the remote control on top of the TV. He knew he wouldn't have left the computer monitor on, and there was no way he

would ever leave his storage boxes in this state.

Dr. Claric was leaning over to shut the “Notes” box when the phone rang. He paused and waited for it to ring again. It did. He ran up the stairs and reached the phone on the fourth ring, just as the answering machine cut in.

“Hello,” he said breathlessly.

Click.

He couldn’t take the receiver away from his ear. He kept listening to the dead air, hoping that somehow an answer would come to him and explain what was going on.

He slowly lowered the receiver back to the cradle and dropped it into place. He turned away from the phone and it rang again.

He spun back around and grabbed the receiver. “Don’t fuck with me!” he screamed and slammed the phone back down.

Near hysterical, Dr. Claric ran to his front door and swung it open. He stared out onto the street, looking for the white van, but it wasn’t across the street. His eyes searched frantically up and down the street when he saw a large vehicle just turning the corner. *That’s the van*, he told himself. *It has to be*. He ran down his front steps and out to the street. The van was just turning the corner.

“YOU STAY THE FUCK AWAY FROM ME!” he shouted, waving his fist.

THIRTEEN

A nine year old had been sexually molested behind Mic Mac Mall in Dartmouth. The victim had been lured out of The Bay and taken across the parking lot to a nearby private park at an apartment complex. The boy could only give a partial description of the suspect, probably because he'd been scared out of his mind. The offender told the boy his whole family would be murdered if he "squealed."

Sergeant Wa was heading up the investigation. Some footwork had turned up a couple of witness accounts of a tall, bearded man near the library on the same day of the attack. Others reported a beat-up station wagon. The reports only confirmed what was suspected anyway—the assault was most likely the work of a recently paroled sex offender from the Atlantic Correctional Institute in New Brunswick: Terry Messier. He'd only served eighteen months of his four-year sentence for convictions of sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching and sexual assault. Even though he'd been diagnosed as an exclusive homosexual pedophile—the most difficult type of pedophile to treat and the type most likely to re-offend—he'd responded well to treatment and was considered an "acceptable risk" for community release.

Wa was seated in a small, sparsely furnished room. A single microphone sat in the centre of the metal table. A large two-way mirror was installed in one wall and a small video camera was visible in the corner near the ceiling. Across from Wa sat Terry Messier. He was a tall, awkward looking man with a thick, unkempt beard, who emitted a slight smell of body odour. The idea of this man touching children made Wa sick to his stomach.

"So Mr. Messier, can you tell me what you've been up to since your release from prison?"

"I 'ad not been doing anything. I attend treatment and do what de docs tell me," he said in a thick French-Canadian accent.

“How’s that treatment going for you?”

“Oh, it is fine. I guess dere’s lots to know, eh? I want to know all dis tings.”

“All what things?”

“About, ’ow you say, my cycle.” He made a circular motion in the air with his finger. “So dat I am never offend anymore.”

Wa knew that identifying an offense cycle was one of the fundamental components of treatment for sex offenders.

“You’re pretty concerned about not offending, then.”

“Oh yes, *certainement*.”

Wa shifted in his seat, leaning forward to more closely examine Messier.

“What were you doing two days ago, Monday, at about three in the afternoon?”

“Oh I see. Why it is dat you ask?”

“Just answer the question.”

“I tink it is dat I do not ’ave to answer dese question.”

“Got something to hide, Terry?”

“Certainly not. I am, ’ow you say, reformed.”

“Don’t fuck with me. This isn’t a joke.”

“Oh, but I tink it is. In fact, I tink you are a joke. I tink you an dis whole departmon is a joke. You pick de first name dat de computer spit at you and you bring me in. I tink dis is a joke and I leave now.” He stood and pushed his chair back.

“Sit the fuck down,” Wa barked without even looking up at him.

Messier froze, uncertain about his next move. He was reasonably sure the police had no right to hold him, or even question him, without charging him.

“I said sit your faggot ass down,” Wa grumbled in a low, even voice.

“You ’ave no right. You cannot speak at me dis way.”

“Sit.”

“*Non*.”

Wa looked up slowly. His head ached and he was tired. He hadn’t seen his own children in almost a month. He couldn’t bear the thought of a confrontation with a suspect, especially a suspect as distasteful as Terry Messier.

“You sit down or I’ll—” Wa began again but stopped suddenly. The man standing across from him had suddenly changed. Wa was now looking at a thin, gaunt, pasty individual in dishevelled clothes. He had a yellowed grin and his face was disfigured, the flesh hanging slack from his face. At a glance it still could have been Terry Messier, but the man standing in front of Wa didn’t have a beard.

“What the fuck?” Wa screamed and jumped to his feet with such force that his chair skidded back into the wall.

Messier looked towards the door. He didn't understand what was happening but he thought he should leave. He wondered why there weren't other cops coming into the room, taking control of this situation.

“Edward Carter?” Wa screamed as the man leaned on the table and sneered at him.

Wa, you never knew, did you? It was never you. It was just me. I used you. I used all of you. It was in Qumran that I found myself.

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

The man leaned further over the table until he was speaking directly into Wa's face. *You, your life, your wife and kids. Soon they will be mine. All that is tainted comes to me. More and more and more.*

“You stay the fuck away from them. You stay the fuck away from me!”

I think I'd like to do some kids. I should start with yours. The man paused and then added, *If you haven't already fucked them.*

“Shut your fuckin' mouth,” Wa barked. His whole body was shaking in fury.

“What is going on? You are crazy!” Messier said, backing towards the wall.

“You stay away from my kids!” Wa screamed and leapt across the table, tackling him around the chest. The two men dropped to the ground with Wa landing heavily on top. He felt the hard bones of a man's face meeting his right hand as his left hand tightly held his neck. Soon he felt hot fluid coat his knuckles and every blow sent droplets of blood out in all directions.

Without any warning someone tackled Wa from the side. He went sprawling out on the floor and recognized Sergeant Andrew Stevenson on top of him.

“What the fuck are you doing, Wa?”

Wa struggled against Stevenson and then lay still. He heard another voice yell, “Get an ambulance right now!”

“It's all on tape. You can't do that,” Stevenson was saying, but Mitchell Wa couldn't hear him. His head had rolled to the side and he was looking at the bloody, bearded face of Terry Messier.

There was no Edward Carter. There never was.

This page intentionally left blank

FOURTEEN

Max watched Catherine Mercer return from the non-contact visiting area. His eyes darted back and forth looking for staff, co-clients, probably even for demons. He wanted to talk to Catherine again. He needed to talk to her again. He understood her pain.

Catherine slowed as she saw him.

“Who were you talking to?” he hissed.

She almost smiled. Max was odd but harmless and probably the nicest person she’d met at the Maximum Security Psychiatric Centre. “Just the pastor from my church.”

“You won’t ever convince any of them,” he whispered. “If they ever took us seriously they’d be out of work. They need mental patients in order to keep their jobs.”

She nodded with reluctance. “I know, but I need to talk to someone. I just have to...” Her voice faded away.

“What am I, then?” he bristled. “I’m somebody.”

“I didn’t mean that. I just hoped that maybe someone might, you know, understand.”

“Don’t waste your breath—WAIT.” Max suddenly stopped talking and flung his hands to his chest. A stethoscope hung around his neck and he quickly popped the apparatus into his ears and held the bell over his heart. He closed his eyes and seemed to be deep in concentration.

“Almost caught it there,” he said after a moment, but his eyes remained closed.

“You don’t really think you die every once in a while, do you?”

Max’s eyes popped open and he stared at Catherine. “What does that mean?”

“Well, you can’t really die for a few moments and then recover.

Eventually it would do something to you. It'd show up on one of those 'blip-blip' machines, wouldn't it?"

Max let go of the bell and the stethoscope dangled from his ears. He pulled the middle of the cord until the earpieces popped out and hung around his neck. His fluid actions demonstrated years of experience with the instrument.

"Catherine," he said deliberately. "I know what I know and that's all. Everything else is just someone else's version—not mine. For instance, I don't think you were 'zapped' by any weapon. You probably enjoyed killing your family." Max spun around and took a step away from her before he turned back. "And don't talk to me again."

Then he was gone and Catherine was alone in the TV room. She'd just lost her only ally in the psychiatric hospital.



Catherine had no idea what time it was, but the moonlight shining through her Plexiglas window meant it was still the middle of the night. She felt a cold chill on her wet skin. She was sweating through the blankets that she had pulled up to her chin.

No one will believe me. No one will ever believe me, and no one will ever do anything about what happened. Everyone just thinks I'm a freak who killed her family. Just like that. I'm nothing but a mental patient.

The sound of tires screeching pierced through the quiet, startling her. The nursing staff was watching a movie in the TV room. The night shift rarely came to work without the latest video release in hand. They usually kept the volume down but sometimes she could hear it anyway. It sounded like they were watching *Gone in Sixty Seconds*. Catherine remembered that Nicholas Cage was one of her son's favourite movie stars. He'd gone to the theatre to see the movie, and when he got home, he told her that "it was awesome." She laughed at the memory, then covered her face and sobbed. Her son was dead now.

This can't be real. None of this can be real. I won't let it. It's a dream.

Catherine moved her hand under the covers to the side of her leg. She felt the skin between her thumb and forefinger and squeezed. The pain shot up and down her leg but she didn't stop. She wanted to scream but bit her lip instead, and pinched her leg harder. Soon she felt something warm in her mouth. She realized she was biting through her lip.

She stopped and laid her arms out to the sides. She relaxed her mouth and felt something leak down and roll over the side of her cheek. She hadn't woken up from the nightmare.

Catherine couldn't get the image of her family out of her mind. She kept seeing her husband, son, daughter. She kept seeing the imposters, too. When she thought about it now it was almost too obvious. *The imposters really didn't even look like my family. The boy was heavier. The imposter Cameron didn't touch me the same way. When he hugged me in the morning he did it differently. It was the little things that were different. The things only a wife and mother would notice.*

A noise at the door made her quickly wipe a hand across her face. She didn't want the nurse on night check to see the blood.

Someone poked their head through the door to her room. The regular nursing check was a check of her vitals signs, but if the staff saw the client moving in bed, that was enough.

Catherine deliberately rolled over onto her side to let the staff know she was alive. Whoever was watching was satisfied and stepped back, shutting the door. Catherine breathed a sigh of relief. She knew she had under ten minutes before the next check. *That's not much time.*

She got out of bed and reached under her mattress, removing a razorblade. One of the other patients had smuggled it in for her. It was easy for the patients who had passes off the hospital grounds to smuggle things back. Patients were only patted down when they returned. They were not required to take off shoes and socks, and so a razorblade against someone's heel wouldn't be found. Catherine had paid for the razorblade with a hand-job—a bargain when considering the initial request had been a blowjob. She didn't care anyway. She didn't care about anything anymore.

Catherine returned to bed and held the razorblade up so she could see it. It was a thin grey sliver, just like in the movies. She hadn't even realized these kinds of razorblades still existed; her husband had always used an electric razor.

Catherine took the blade in her right hand and lifted her other hand, turning it to expose her wrist. She knew approximately where she should slice, she'd seen too much of this sort of thing on TV and in the movies.

Catherine pressed the blade against her skin. Its thin edge felt cold. She made a fist with her left hand and watched the movement under her skin. She was pretty sure where the cut should go.

It's just got to be deep enough, she thought. I don't want a superficial cut on my skin.

She pressed the blade in and dragged it roughly down her wrist. She watched very closely, surprised at how easily the blade sunk in and how the skin seemed to pull apart to let it pass.

The blood was immediate and plentiful. It hurt but the pain wasn't as bad as she expected.

She let her right hand fall down beside her but kept the left in the air. She wanted to watch.

The wound was deep, very deep. It stretched down her arm from her wrist. The blood was pouring down her arm now. She watched it for a moment then let her hand drop to the bed.

Less than ten minutes. That's not much time.

Slowly and deliberately, Catherine brought her right hand up to her neck. She held the blade in her thumb and forefinger and felt her neck for a pulse. She figured the spot where she could feel her own heartbeat must be where the jugular was. She found a small bulge on the side and laid the blade against it. The blood coming out of her wrist had already made her feel weak and nauseous. *Why does dying make you feel sick to your stomach?*

Catherine pressed the blade down and dragged it across her neck. This one hurt. She gasped and choked because blood had gotten into her windpipe. It was another deep cut. She let her hand fall away and the razorblade dropped from her fingers.

She knew she'd be checked in a few minutes. She closed her eyes. She was trying to breathe slowly through her nose but it was very difficult. She felt herself choking but didn't want to cough. Blood was running down her neck and she could feel it in the back of her throat. Reflexively, she coughed and her body spasmed. With each hack blood spewed everywhere from the pressure. The pain was unbearable but she refused to make noise and alert the nursing staff too early.

Not now! Not now! Catherine told herself and relaxed her body back onto the bed. She suddenly felt cold. It was a chill that sunk through every part of her. She also felt weak and dizzy, and hoped she'd pass out soon.

But a voice broke through her haze. An unfamiliar voice that came to her from all around the room.

Don't Catherine. I need you.

"What?" she asked weakly. "Who?" She looked down at the sheets and saw a disfigured face forming in the pools of blood. It was the face of her husband as she plunged the knife into his chest that horrible afternoon not so long ago.

Wait for me.

"No more," she whispered. "Please no more." And then she closed her eyes for the last time.

FIFTEEN

It was eight in the morning, half an hour earlier than Dr. Claric normally started work. He'd only managed to sleep for a little over an hour during the night because he'd spent most of it tossing and turning, unable to get Catherine Mercer's story out of his head, unable to stop thinking about electronic weapons, white vans and all of the mysterious signs in his own home. He would've come to work earlier today if he could have. He was desperate to talk to Catherine again and find out if the story was true. He wanted to find some clue, some link to help him put the pieces together and find out what was going on.

When he arrived on the unit he walked quickly into the nursing station where he ran into Claire, one of the staff nurses.

"Is Catherine up, yet? I need to see her right away."

"I...uh...," Claire stuttered.

"I need to see her so if she isn't up, we need to get her up."

"You're here pretty early. What's up, Bri?" Ken, another nurse, asked, walking out from the back room.

"I need to see Catherine Mercer. I have to go over a few things. I'm just trying to find out if she's up."

Ken frowned. He thought Dr. Claric was acting strange. His speech was strained as though he were agitated about something.

"You okay?" Ken asked.

"Fine. I just had a rough night is all. Can we go get Catherine now?"

"Brian, come on in the back," Ken said, reaching to put an arm on Dr. Claric's shoulder.

Dr. Claric shrugged him off. "What's going on?"

"There was an accident last night," Claire offered.

"What?"

“Let’s just go in the back here and have a quick talk,” Ken said and guided Dr. Claric into the conference room.

Dr. Claric was stunned. He knew “accident” was a euphemism for something far worse. All at once, he was sure Catherine was dead.



Dr. Claric picked up his office phone on the second ring.

“Hello?”

“Dr. Claric. It’s Georgia. Are you okay?”

“Fine.”

“Are you sure? This is a traumatic thing.”

“I know, I’m fine.”

“I’d like to come down and see you.” Her office was at the other end of Dark Alley.

“No, don’t.” Dr. Claric couldn’t stand the thought of a sympathetic person sitting across from him telling him there was nothing anyone could do.

“It helps to talk when... What am I saying, you’re a psychologist. You know that.”

“I do and I’m fine. I just need some time here. I’m fine.”

“If you need some time off just—”

“I’m okay, Georgia.”

“You know how to get a hold of me.”

“Thanks,” he said and hung up the phone.

Dr. Claric turned his attention back to the Web site he was reading. He’d pulled up an article on “MK Ultra” experiments, looking for anything on the techniques the government used to measure the effectiveness of weapons. He wanted to see what their standard operating procedures were for using subjects in their experiments.

The phone rang again.

He was tempted to let it go to voicemail but knew that would spark even more unwanted concern. Everyone just needed to be reassured that he was okay about Catherine’s suicide.

He picked up the receiver. “Hello.”

“Brian? It’s Dr. Wenton.”

Dr. Claric bolted upright, surprised. “Dr. Wenton! Hello. How’re you?”

Wenton never responded to pleasantries. “I’m calling about one of your new admissions.”

Just like Wenton, Dr. Claric thought. Straight to the point.

“Oh, yeah.”

“I was the on-scene consultant when he barricaded himself in his house

with the rifle. The guy's name is—”

“Barry Boseman.”

“Right. You working with him?”

“Not yet. I was going to get involved though. Why?”

“I'm working with a graduate student, Norma MacDonald. We've been discussing this Boseman case and the whole diagnosis of psychosis. It would be good for her if we could sit in on an interview.”

“You guys want to participate in the assessment?”

“Yeah. Is that going to be a problem?”

Dr. Claric hesitated. “I'm sure it isn't. When do you want to start?”

“Whenever.”

“Well we might as well start right away.” Barry Boseman was one of the next clients on his list. He was going to see him right after the suicide risk assessment on Catherine. *Damn it. Why'd she kill herself?* His mind quickly switched back to the events of last night and this morning.

Dr. Claric thought about mentioning Catherine's suicide to Wenton. He didn't know of a more impartial, objective person. He wondered if he could somehow describe his recent experiences without seeming insane. He was desperate to tell someone. He remembered thinking how naïve it was of Catherine not to tell anyone before it was too late. *Am I making the same mistake if I don't say anything?*

“Hey, Wenton?” Dr. Claric began tentatively.

“Yeah.”

“You ever heard about electronic weapons, or electromagnetic weapons?”

“Sure.”

“Where?”

“Why are you asking?” Wenton didn't like answering questions unless he knew how the information would be used.

“I had a client who claimed she was hit by one of these weapons.”

“I've heard that before.”

“Heard it from a patient?”

“Heard it from a mental patient who claimed a ray gun zapped him and made him kill his boarding house roommate.”

“Did that guy come here?”

“Nope. I saw him at the Springhill Correctional Centre. I thought he was full of shit and testified that he was fit and responsible. He's in prison now.”

“Oh,” Dr. Claric said, obviously disappointed.

“What's the deal? Why are you asking about this shit?”

“Doesn't matter. I was just following up on something my client said about it.”

Wenton decided he didn't want to drag out the conversation. "So I'll bring Norma over tomorrow, ten o'clock?"

"See you then," Dr. Claric said distractedly and hung up.

SIXTEEN

Dr. Claric sat motionless at his desk. Wenton and his graduate student would be arriving soon and he wasn't mentally prepared. He hadn't slept again.

Dr. Claric's hands began to shake and he clasped them together, tightly. He needed to push through this. He needed to be strong.

Tears welled in his eyes. *Why'd you kill yourself Catherine?* he asked himself. *I would've helped you. You could've helped me but now we're both alone. We're both alone and I don't have the slightest idea what's going on. I think I might be going insane.*

He laughed, a pathetic little puff of air. *The last thing I need right now is to interview another patient with an audience watching. Especially this Barry Boseman character.* And then Dr. Claric began to cry openly.



"Thanks for letting us sit in on this one, Brian," Wenton said as he and Norma walked through the main entrance of the MSPC.

Dr. Claric smiled weakly. He was standing near the security desk in the lobby. From this main area, locked doors led off in four different directions.

Wenton went straight to the desk and signed in on the clipboard the officer held for him.

"Brian, this is my graduate student, Norma."

"Right," Dr. Claric said with an obvious lack of interest and asked the security guard to buzz them in. "Might as well get going. Looks like we're ready."

As they entered the corridor, Norma looked at Wenton with a face full of questions. She didn't understand Dr. Claric's odd behaviour. Wenton

tried to ignore her although he was also curious about Dr. Claric's distracted composure.

After they were seated in Dr. Claric's office, he immediately opened the hospital chart sitting on his desk. Normally, he would have spent more time with small talk, getting to know Norma, introducing himself better, but he didn't have the stomach for it. He could barely concentrate on things as it was. He knew that if he dropped his guard, even for a second, he might cry again.

"Barry Boseman," Dr. Claric announced flatly, "arrived here less than a week ago after the siege with police. He's been quiet on the unit and cooperative with most of the efforts of the team. We're currently assessing him for criminal responsibility." He turned to Norma. "Are you familiar with what goes on in an assessment here?" The question seemed almost challenging.

Norma nodded. Surprised by his tone.

Wenton eyed Dr. Claric. From the tone of their phone conversation the day before, Wenton could tell that something was bugging Dr. Claric, but he didn't want to get involved. *Everyone has issues but I'm not their fuckin' therapist.*

"Good. I've been asked to do a personality, risk and diagnostic assessment. You two will be sitting in on the clinical interview. I'll basically do a bit of a history and focus on psychiatric symptoms. Might go into the index offense a bit. Ready?"

"You don't have any additional history on this guy we could go over?" Wenton asked.

"Like what?"

"You feelin' all right, Brian?"

"Fine."

"You seem a little short."

Dr. Claric took a deep breath, contemplating whether the question deserved an answer. "We had a patient suicide on us."

Norma gasped and held her hands to her mouth.

"It happens," Dr. Claric shrugged, wanting to show them that he wasn't affected by the death.

"Were you working with her?" Wenton asked.

"I was supposed to do a suicide risk assessment."

"I'm so sorry," Norma offered.

Wenton frowned at her. He found Norma's emotional side weak, and he despised weakness.

"Like I said, it happens. Should we get going with Boseman?"

“You wanna put this off? Do it another day?” Wenton asked. *I don’t want this to be a big waste of time.*

“Let’s just go.”



“So Dr. Wenton and Ms. MacDonald will sit in with us today. Is that okay with you, Mr. Boseman?”

Dr. Claric had just explained the purpose of their meeting and the presence of the two guests. Barry Boseman had willingly come to the interview room but hadn’t made eye contact with anyone yet. His eyes darted from one corner of the room to the other but he refused to acknowledge any of them. He responded to their questions with shrugs, nods and vague grunts.

“Mr. Boseman,” Dr. Claric scolded, “this is supposed to be an interview where I ask some questions and you give the answers. For that to work properly you’ll have to speak up. Is that going to be a problem?”

Wenton smiled. He wasn’t used to seeing this short-tempered side to Dr. Claric. It was like watching himself work.

“No that’s not a *problem*,” Barry said with a hint of sarcasm.

“Good.” Dr. Claric ignored his tone. “Now, do you want to tell us why you’re here?”

Barry snorted at the question and his eyes darted to something on the table. His whole body tensed as he focused on the spot and then he relaxed.

“Why am I here?” Barry asked. “You want the long version or the short?”

“You decide.”

“Well, my mother always had poor taste in men. She lived by the law of averages—she thought that if she fucked enough guys she’d eventually come out even. Turns out she was wrong. She eventually came out with me.”

The answered surprised Dr. Claric. “What?”

“You wanted to know where I came from. It was from a drunken one-night stand my mother had.”

“I asked why you were here.”

“Same thing.”

Dr. Claric stared at Barry. “Fine. Tell me about the night of the index offense—the standoff with police. What happened?”

Barry’s eyes shot to his arm and he quickly brushed at his skin with his hand. “That night was all about a fuckin’ stupid pizza guy. That’s all.”

“That’s the guy you shot dead, right?”

Wenton smiled again. The words Dr. Claric chose to ask the question were intentionally aggressive, he was looking for a reaction. *Go get 'em, Bri.*

Barry nodded. "Wrong place at the wrong time sort of thing."

"What were you doing with the rifle?"

Barry shook his head and suddenly turned around in his chair. Dr. Claric and Norma sat back, startled. Wenton didn't move.

Barry peered over the back of his chair. He studied the chair and then shifted his attention to the floor.

"What's the problem, Barry?" Dr. Claric asked.

"Just a second."

"Are you looking for something?"

"Just a second," he said a little more loudly.

"Is there 'disease' in here?"

Barry spun around to face the psychologist. "Don't fuckin' talk to me about that. Got it?"

"Is that the reason you're here?"

"Fuck you."

Wenton smiled again. He never expected such an interesting session, and he never expected Boseman to be so antagonistic. Wenton knew that the typical forensic patient was passive and overly compliant since they knew they were under the microscope for an assessment. He couldn't wait to see what was going to happen. He glanced at Norma and his smile faded away. Her face was white. She was obviously frightened by the whole exchange. She had no perspective on any of this. *Dumb bitch.*

"Does that mean the interview's over?" Dr. Claric asked coolly.

"If you're done, it's over."

"I haven't even started."

"Then keep going."

"You were looking for something in your house the night of the incident."

Wenton noticed that Dr. Claric intentionally changed his language to avoid setting Barry off, referring to the shooting and standoff as an "incident."

"Yeah."

"Tell me about that."

"About four months ago my wife and son left me. I don't even know where they are. They just left." He stopped as tears filled his eyes. Dr. Claric leaned forward and pushed a box of tissue towards him.

"Thanks," Barry said, taking one. "Samantha blamed me for everything. She thought I was scum. She took off and stole my son." He stopped and covered his face again.

Dr. Claric waited for a moment. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

Barry didn't respond.

"You sort of left out an important piece of the story, didn't you?" Dr. Claric prompted.

Barry nodded.

"You cheated on Samantha and got a sexually transmitted disease. You brought it home and gave it to her, didn't you?"

Barry began crying more loudly.

"Did you feel guilty about giving your wife herpes?" Dr. Claric challenged.

Barry couldn't answer.

"Do you think that's why you started seeing disease everywhere?" Dr. Claric pushed.

"Leave me alone," Barry moaned.

"Is it herpes? Is that what you see everywhere? Disease?"

"LEAVE ME ALONE!" Barry screamed.

Wenton almost laughed. He really enjoyed watching Dr. Claric work. It was refreshing. He glanced at Norma. Her ash-white face was twisted in horror and revulsion. He hoped she didn't puke. *Pussy*.

"What happened after Samantha left?" Dr. Claric continued.

Barry was silent.

"Barry. I can't help you if you don't help me understand."

Barry finally opened his eyes and stared back at Dr. Claric.

"*Everything* happened after that, okay? When I lost my wife, I lost my son, and I lost my job. I lost everything."

"Why'd you lose your job?"

Without warning, Barry suddenly stood up and Norma's surprise nearly knocked her over backwards. Barry stared at the back wall then leaned forward on the table to look at the floor. After a moment, his body relaxed and he sat back down.

Barry closed his eyes and held a hand against his forehead. "You don't understand. It's not me. It's not my son. It's ECOR. They did this."

"What's ECOR?" Dr. Claric asked.

"ECOR Pharmaceuticals, that's where I worked. They're one of the biggest companies in the grand world of psychiatric medicine. Their head office is downtown, right next to the casino on the harbour. It's the big, pretentious building that blocks the view of all the buildings further inland." He laughed and looked across at Dr. Claric. "You guys have probably doled out every drug they make."

"We're psychologists, we don't prescribe medications," Dr. Claric corrected.

“Whatever, you don’t argue against it either. You eat the free meals when they host their little lunchtime education sessions.”

Dr. Claric wanted to get Barry back on track. “So what happened at work?”

“I was a junior chemist with them but they were doing some secret research. I got wind of it and they had to get rid of me. They did this to me.”

Dr. Claric frowned. “What do you mean?”

“I mean ECOR is fuckin’ with people’s heads. Making them crazy. That’s what I mean.”

“I’m not following you,” Dr. Claric said. He was starting to get nervous about where this was heading. He kept seeing Catherine Mercer in his mind.

“ECOR did something to me so I’d start seeing things. I still do. They made me see disease everywhere: on me, on the wall, on people I saw around me. Everywhere. I could smell pus, taste it, feel it. It tainted everything. I couldn’t sleep, or work, or eat, or anything!” Barry paused as if he’d just remembered something. “Fuck! There it is now,” he said pointing at the corner of the table. He closed his eyes again and rubbed them with his fingers.

“What’s this got to do with ECOR?” Dr. Claric asked.

“It’s the research,” he cried. “I know I was just a worker-monkey to them, but I heard things that I probably shouldn’t have. I know what really goes on in the big companies.”

Dr. Claric rubbed a palm over his face. It was suddenly hot in the room, too hot. He glanced at Wenton and Norma, and tried to smile. He looked back to Barry. “How’d they...I mean, how do you think they made you, ‘crazy?’”

“I don’t want to talk about this,” Barry announced.

“HOW’D THEY MAKE YOU CRAZY?” Dr. Claric shouted. He couldn’t get Catherine’s tortured face out of his mind. He knew someone had done that to her.

“I don’t know. I’m pretty sure they were testing some electronic weapon or something.”

“Oh my God,” Dr. Claric whispered. “It’s all true.”

Wenton stared at Dr. Claric. *What the fuck are you doing?*

“What’s true?” Barry asked.

Dr. Claric tried to slow his breathing, but couldn’t. “The weapons.”

Norma couldn’t decide who to look at. Her head turned from Dr. Claric to Barry to Wenton.

Wenton ignored her.

“Did they have white vans?” Dr. Claric breathed.

Barry shook his head “No. The company van was blue.”

Dr. Claric sighed.

“But the vans they followed me in were white. They used special vans for the research stuff.”

“Oh my God,” Dr. Claric said.

And then the room was quiet.

Wenton waited for Dr. Claric to continue but the man was obviously lost in a pool of distress.

“I’m going,” Barry announced and started to stand.

“Sit down,” Wenton hissed.

The tone of his voice took Barry by surprise and he paused, even though he had only partially stood up. He looked across the table at Wenton’s face, which was frozen in anger.

“Sit the fuck down,” he snarled again. “I’ve had enough of this fairytale shit.”

Barry sat and stared back at Wenton, suddenly noticing how big the psychologist actually was. His voice was shaky as he said, “I...I want going to my...my room.”

Wenton smiled at him.

Barry didn’t know how to interpret the smile but it somehow angered him. *Is this asshole making a joke out of me?* His courage began to return even though his voice remained soft and unsure. “Fuck you. I’m going to report you.”

Wenton’s eyes burned deep into Barry, his dark smile unchanged.

“Fuck you,” Barry said again and started to stand.

Wenton’s hand was only a blur as it snapped across the table and slammed down in front of Barry. Everyone jumped at the loud slap. “I don’t want to play any more fuckin’ games with you. Is that clear?”

“What the fuck...are...you...doing?” Barry gasped and choked as he tried to control his own breathing.

“Do we understand things better now?”

“I’ll...report...you...”

“You’re going to answer a few questions or I’ll give you something better to report. Do you understand?”

“Yes...yes.” Barry was starting to feel weak and dizzy.

“Fine,” Wenton said sitting back in his seat. “Now where were we?” Wenton began as though they’d been interrupted by nothing more than a phone call. “Oh yes, ECOR.”

It took a moment for Barry to regain his composure but he decided to cooperate after that.



“I never mattered to anyone at ECOR, not until I became a nuisance, I suppose. The other employees, especially the executives, would just walk right by me. They didn’t care about people like me. I was just a lowly junior researcher doing whatever crap they wanted done.

“Anyway, when my wife and I started having problems I guess my performance at ECOR suffered. I tried to talk to them. I tried to tell them I just needed some time to sort things out, but they fired me, just like that.” Barry snapped his fingers.

Wenton frowned. “They let you go on the spot? No notice or warnings or anything?”

“What’d I tell you? They’re bastards. They said I was still on probation because I hadn’t been there long enough, but I wasn’t going to let them get away with it. I kept showing up for work anyway. I told them they couldn’t fire me. They even had security throw me out of their precious building a few times.” Barry chuckled at the memory.

“And then I started to go crazy. At first I just felt physically sick, I was dizzy and felt nauseous, and then I started seeing shit everywhere. Sam and my boy were already gone, and I’m glad because I wouldn’t have wanted them to see what a mess I had become. I could barely get out of bed because of the stuff I saw on the floor, on the ceilings, everywhere! ECOR was driving me insane.”

“What makes you think ECOR had anything to do with that?”

“I know they had me under surveillance. They were watching my house.”

“You actually saw someone?” Wenton asked.

“There were vans. Not all the time but frequently I saw these vans outside my place. So one day I run out at the van, right? I tear over to it and the guy takes off, but I catch a glimpse of him and I’m sure it was one of the security guards at ECOR. I knew right away what was going on. It was ECOR.” Barry nodded like he’d solved a great mystery. “It was ECOR trying to get rid of me. I knew that because I remembered a conversation I’d overheard between the president and one of the research guys.”

“What conversation was that?” Wenton asked.

“Actually it was a few different conversations but it was always the same two guys: Travis Mettincourt and some other guy who was the head of a research team or something.”

“Mettincourt’s the president of ECOR?” Wenton clarified.

“Yep.”

“And what did you overhear?”

“This was the whole conversation. I can remember it like it was yesterday:

Other Person: ‘Project’s at three months now.’

Mettincourt: ‘And what are we seeing?’

Other Person: ‘Looks good. We’re getting a lot of good hits. We should see an increase in our numbers pretty soon but it’s early to say for sure.’

Mettincourt: ‘Pretty slick. There’s wackos out there anyway so why not give them the little push they need.’

Other Person (laughing): ‘Exactly.’

And then they got off the elevator.”

“What the fuck does that mean?” Wenton asked, frustrated. “They could have been talking about anything. Why’d it mean they were after you?”

“The *project!*” Barry pleaded. “Don’t you see? They were talking about a *project* where they were doing stuff to people. Drumming up business. And that wasn’t the only conversation I overheard. I overheard those same two guys laughing about the same stuff at other times. They were always talking about the ‘*effects.*’”

“But why would they be after you?” Wenton asked. “They’d already fired you.”

“They wanted to drive me crazy,” Barry said in exasperation. “They thought I was a nuisance and they wanted to get rid of me once and for all.”

“And making you crazy would get rid of you how?”

“Well there’s not much I can do if I’m locked away in a nuthouse for the rest of my life, is there? And no one is going to take a mental patient seriously if he starts saying shit about what goes on at ECOR, are they?”

Wenton shrugged without commitment.

“And look where I am,” Barry almost screamed. “It looks like ECOR won. Those sons of bitches have me right where they want me: in a nut house. Congratulations, Mettincourt.”

Wenton shook his head now. Barry Boseman was ranting and becoming incoherent. He also knew that Norma was virtually in shock from everything she’d seen. He’d have to somehow calm her down.

Dr. Claric, who’d been silent the entire time, looked frantically from Barry to Wenton. He knew that Wenton was going to end the interview soon and there was something he wanted to know.

“Were they ever in your house?” Dr. Claric blurted.

Barry turned to him.

Dr. Claric continued. “Do you know if the guys in the van ever came into your house?”

“Yeah. I know they did. I found stuff moved around all the time.”

Wenton decided it was best just to end the session. He didn't think there was anything left to learn right then anyway.

“That's it. We're done here.” He stood, confirming that the interview was over.

Norma jumped up, startled and shaken.

Barry reflexively stood with him but continued to look at the disturbed Dr. Claric who remained seated with his face dropped into his hands.

“Is he okay?”

“Too much coffee,” Wenton grunted and put a hand on Barry to steer him out of the room.

With Barry gone, Wenton turned back to Dr. Claric.

“What the hell is the matter with you, Brian?”

Dr. Claric looked up at him, tears filling his eyes.

“I...uh...nothing. I guess I'm just stressed from the suicide. Overworked.”

“Yeah, well, you better watch it. Don't get too involved with these nut-cases.”

“No, really, I'm just overworked.”

“Whatever. We should get going. And you should take some time off. You look like shit, too.”

Wenton grabbed Norma's arm and yanked her out the door.

Dr. Claric slumped down in a seat. *They're after me, too.*

SEVENTEEN

“What was all that about?” Norma asked once they were seated in Wenton’s Durango, heading back to the university.

“I don’t know.”

“He really lost it in there.”

“Did he?” Wenton mocked her.

“You mean you don’t think he was acting weird?”

“He’s not my patient. I don’t care.”

“Could Dr. Claric be getting sick?”

Wenton turned to her. “You were supposed to focus on Barry Boseman, not Brian Claric. Don’t you have any questions about the client?”

She was silent for a moment as though her feelings were hurt. Wenton drove and didn’t acknowledge her. After a few minutes she finally thought of a question and spoke again. “What about all that ECON stuff? Do you think the drug company is really doing experiments on people?”

Wenton shook his head. He didn’t know if he could find enough patience to continue working with Norma. “It’s *ECOR*, not ECON. ECON is the subject you might need to switch to if psychology doesn’t work out.”

Wenton slowed as he approached the MacKay bridge toll. His “Mac Pass,” affixed to the windshield, allowed him to dart right past the booth as it electronically logged his fee.

“Sorry. *ECOR*. But do you think they’re doing stuff like that?”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. Zapping people, I guess.”

“Where’d you hear that?”

She looked surprised “What do you mean? That’s what Mr. Boseman said.”

“And who’s he?” Wenton said with what appeared to be genuine ignorance.

She still looked puzzled. "He's the guy from the interview. He's the one we went to the MSPC to see."

"What's the guy doing in that place?"

"Are you okay?"

Wenton drove in silence.

"Do you honestly want me to tell you who Barry Boseman is?"

"Yes. Pretend I'm the one who doesn't know anything."

She ignored the insult. "Barry Boseman lost it and killed a pizza delivery guy. He sees disease everywhere. He's crazy."

"He's what?"

"Crazy, I guess."

"And he's the one that told you about ECOR's involvement in secret experiments designed to zap unsuspecting people and make them insane?"

"Okay, I see."

"Do you?" Wenton asked, mockingly.

"I shouldn't believe what he says because he's crazy."

Wenton shook his head again. "That's not it at all. The point is that if a crazy person tells you a crazy story, then you can be fairly confident the story isn't one hundred percent fact."

"Oh."

"For example, is it possible that the herpes virus is floating through the air, infecting people at random?"

"I sure hope not," she answered emphatically.

"But is it a crazy story?"

"I guess."

"Yes. And why does he make up a story like that?"

Norma desperately wanted to have an answer, something that showed she understood. She shook her head. "I don't know."

Wenton frowned. "I thought it was obvious. If you did something that you were ashamed of—something so bad that it ruined your life—you'd want to believe almost anything to make it go away. Your mind works against itself trying to find an alternative reality that isn't as painful."

"So he made up the story about ECOR?"

"He didn't *make it up*. He's insane. His mind can't cope with recent events, and the only story he allows himself to believe is that it isn't his fault. He needs to believe in a conspiracy. It gives him a villain to hate rather than hating himself. It protects his ego. Classic delusional stuff."

"So Barry Boseman went crazy and blamed it on the drug company?"

"Basically, but he also had a grudge against them for firing him. That made it that much easier for his mind to convince him of the conspiracy."

Wenton looked over at Norma, snorted and turned away from her. *What a fuckin' waste of my time.*

This page intentionally left blank

EIGHTEEN

Why is the Sheraton Casino always so damn busy? Wa wondered as he walked through one of the entrances off the Halifax boardwalk. Doesn't matter what time of day, there's always wall-to-wall people throwing their money away.

Wa's suspension from the police was only a few days old and he was already feeling lost. He'd come down to the waterfront hoping that he could somehow distract himself from the shit his life had become. There was no better place to be distracted than the casino. All around him were flashing lights, noise and loud people. He began pushing through the rows of slots.

Instinctively, he reached into a pocket to check for loose change. It's hard to walk past a machine without dropping a coin or two—just in case. His pockets were empty. *Figures.*

"Drink sir?" A waitress had appeared from nowhere.

Wa looked at her thoughtfully. "I think I just might," he said. "Clancy's."

She produced the beer from her cart. Wa paid and then took a sip from his bottle as he kept moving.

Through the crowds Wa spotted Constable Riley O'Neil in plain clothes. *Shit, he thought. I really don't want to see anyone from work, especially him.*

O'Neil was an eager cop who'd managed to get himself in line to move up to Major Crimes. Rumour had it that O'Neil would start in Sex Crimes and likely get partnered with Wa. It wasn't a rumour that Wa liked. O'Neil was too eager, too friendly, too in-your-face personal for Wa to care for him.

Wa turned around quickly and started back out of the casino. *No doubt O'Neil knows I pounded on a subject and got suspended. I don't want to have to explain everything to him. Lord knows, he'll ask.*

He risked a glance over his shoulder. O'Reily was still back there,

staring at an empty spot at the black jack table. *Good, Wa thought. I missed him.*

Wa kept moving. He realized that being in crowded public places wasn't the right thing for him. He really didn't want to see anyone he knew. Not right now. He set his nearly full beer down next to a slot machine and headed through the exit and out onto the boardwalk. It was a reasonably warm evening and he was immediately hit by the scent of raw sewage from the polluted harbour. Wa was almost used to it.

He planned on stopping at Perks, a fancy little coffee shop that was almost always open and rarely crowded—at least not with people he knew.

Help me.

Wa froze, straining to hear. It sounded like the voice was coming from the water.

Please.

It was definitely someone in the harbour. He took a quick look up and down the boardwalk for other people, but no one was around. He would've liked to send someone to call the police. *Damn.* He quickly moved to the edge, putting a foot up on the heavy wooden buffer and looking into the dark water below. All he could see was the water slowing rising and dropping, lapping against the wood supports. The thick covering of seaweed didn't seem disturbed in any way as it might if a body were fighting through it.

"Hello," Wa called, staring down into foul stench. "Is someone there?"

Silence.

"Hello," he called again.

Help me, a voice faintly answered.

It was definitely coming from directly below. Wa dropped to his chest and leaned to get a better look over the edge. "Hello. This is Sergeant Wa of the Halifax Regional Police. I'm here to help you." It occurred to him after he'd spoken that he wasn't really a police officer right now as he was suspended.

Please help me.

He strained to follow the voice. He couldn't see anything. "I'll help you but I don't know where you are. Can you wave your arm out of the water?"

Please help me.

Wa leaned further out, his eyes rapidly scanning the surface of the water, watching for motion.

There was a small clearing in the seaweed. Wa peered at it more closely and saw a face beneath him. He was like a magnified reflection except that it was a grotesque imitation of a human face, distorted and full of pain. The shock of seeing the face hit Wa like a punch in the gut. It was the same face

he'd been seeing, at Gloria's in, his bathroom mirror, in the interrogation room. He sucked in a breath and held it. "What the hell?"

Help me, the voice said again only this time laughing as it spoke. *Help me finish what's been started.*

Wa leapt back to his feet, the noxious smell of the harbour suddenly intensifying. "Is this a joke? Who the fuck is down there?"

Wa looked down at the water again, but the face was gone.

This page intentionally left blank

NINETEEN

Wenton felt more frustrated than ever. The day was basically wasted. After returning to the university, his meeting with Norma continued for another hour. Immediately after lunch he was forced to attend a faculty meeting to discuss the graduate program. This was the fourth meeting in the last six months. Wenton hadn't attended the first three but had finally agreed to attend this one. It wasted another hour and a half.

When he finally returned to his office he lacked any motivation to return to the journal article he was working on. He eventually left and went home.

Wenton lived in a condo near the university on Spring Garden Road. His suite had extra high ceilings and a view of downtown from the balcony. On the way home he'd stopped at a pizza place and picked up a jalapeno, ham and black olive pizza—the only kind he ever ate.

He'd thrown a DVD in before sitting on the couch. Tonight was a *Natural Born Killers* kind of night. Of all his movies, he identified best with the anger and hatred of Oliver Stone's movie. He especially liked the scene he was watching now: the opening scene where Mickey and Mallory kill low-life rednecks in a café on the highway.

When his phone rang there was a knife hurtling through the air in slow motion towards one of the fleeing rednecks. He watched the knife stick into the man's back before he paused the DVD and stood.

It was unusual for someone to phone his unlisted number, and if anyone did call, it certainly wasn't to interrupt him in the evenings.

"What?"

"Dr. Wenton? This is Brian Claric."

Wenton snorted. He was slightly amused.

"What can I do for you, Dr. Claric?" he asked in a syrupy voice.

"I need to talk to you. I tried calling you at the university all afternoon

but there was no answer. I guess you don't have an answering machine or voicemail."

"I don't like to be bothered."

"I don't mean to bother you. I just—"

"How'd you get my home number?" Wenton asked bluntly.

"I'm really sorry about bothering you at home but I didn't know where—"

"Who gave you my home number?"

"I...I didn't know how to get it exactly. You aren't listed."

"So who gave it to you?"

"Well, actually, I went to the police station first. I'd given up on talking to you, but once I got to the police station, I had a change of heart. I knew if I told them what I was thinking that they'd probably just drop me off at the Nova Scotia Hospital. That's when I thought about you again. I knew you worked with the police and I asked if they had a different number for you."

"They wouldn't just hand out my home number at the front desk," Wenton said.

"Oh, they didn't. When I asked the commissionaire he said he couldn't help me but he gave me Mitchell Wa's number."

Wenton laughed. "How's *he* doing?"

"Oh, I guess he's okay. It was kind of awkward. When I called him at home this afternoon and asked if he knew how I could get a hold of you, he told me to 'fuck off.'"

Wenton laughed again.

"I explained who I was and told him that I knew it was inappropriate but I needed to call you right away."

"And when Wa heard you were going to call me at home and bother me he was more than happy to give out my home number. Right?"

"Yeah, basically." Dr. Claric was having a hard time remembering the exact conversation.

The smile disappeared from Wenton's face as he returned to business. "What do you want, Dr. Claric?"

"I want to see you. I need to talk to you and explain what's going on."

"Why me? If you're in trouble go to the police. I can't help you." *I'm not a fuckin' therapist.*

"I think you're the only I can talk to without...I don't know...without the shit hitting the fan, so to speak. The police would never believe me and I can't talk to anyone else."

"Why?"

“Don’t get me wrong but you’re...well, you’re sort of impersonal and objective. I need some of that right now. I need someone who knows what’s going on in the world, someone who can hear what I have to say without feeling obligated to do anything else.”

“Did you fuck a client?” Wenton smirked.

There was a gasp on the other end of the phone. Dr. Claric stuttered, “I...I... No, that’s not it at all. I think someone is trying to drive me crazy.”

“Is that what your display was all about at the interview today?”

It took Dr. Claric awhile to respond. “Yes, I guess so.”

Wenton grunted.

“So, can I drop by, or better yet, can you come here?”

“I’m eating. I’m going to finish my pizza and I’ll come over to your place later. What’s your address?”



Dr. Claric had rehearsed things very carefully. He knew exactly what he wanted to tell Wenton and in what order. When Wenton arrived, Dr. Claric took him through the house and showed him the various things he’d discovered, including a few new things. There was a spice in his drawer that he’d never seen before. He thought there was a computer disc missing from the office. He showed Wenton the latch on a window that was open. There were scratches on the mirror in the bathroom that he’d never seen before. They ended up seated in the living room. Dr. Claric was sipping an orange pop and Wenton refused everything offered to him.

Once seated Dr. Claric explained the events at the hospital, Catherine Mercer’s story, the Web sites, the mysterious e-mail, the phone calls and the white vans. Finally, he told Wenton about Catherine’s suicide.

After he’d said everything he asked Wenton a single question, “So what do you think?”

Wenton nodded. “Sounds like you’re pretty worked up by all of this.”

“Wouldn’t you be?”

Wenton ignored the question. “I suppose what this Boseman character said today just made things worse, eh?”

“No,” Dr. Claric said in surprise. “It explains quite a bit. The drug companies would be the one developing the technology. Of course they would. Who benefits more from an increase in mental illness than the drug companies? They’d love it if they could just zap people and drum up business. It’s perfect.”

Wenton picked the spice bottle up off the coffee table in front of him. He

looked at the label and read “cardamom powder.”

“What do you think this means?” He held the bottle out for Dr. Claric to see.

“I don’t know. I think we should get that analyzed and see what’s in it. I’m sure there’s something in there that I’m supposed to eat. It might help the process along or something.”

“What process?”

“Making me insane!”

“Right. And they snuck a bottle of some spice you’ve never heard of in here because they figured that you’d be making chili one night, root through the spice drawer, find a mysterious spice and just load the chili down with it.”

“I know. It sounds crazy. I don’t want this to be happening. I didn’t ask to be the target. I just shouldn’t have asked questions, gone poking around for more information.”

Wenton set the bottle down again. “What do you want from me?”

“Help. I need someone to help me get out of this mess.”

“I don’t think you’re in a mess. Like I told you this afternoon, I think you’re too stressed, too worked-up about nonsense. That’s all that’s going on. Take a week off work.”

“No. I’m serious. There’s something going on and I’m convinced that ECOR knows about it. I think they’re involved.”

“You think ECOR is involved because the newest nut on the block spit that name out. Just because Barry Boseman has a grudge with ECOR doesn’t mean that they have a Frankenstein lab and are doing experiments with electronic guns.”

“It’s possible though,” Dr. Claric resisted softly.

“It’s possible I wasted my fuckin’ time coming over here,” Wenton barked as he stood up. “Get some help, Brian. Get some real help.”

“Dr. Wenton, don’t—”

“Don’t what?” Wenton noted the desperation in his colleague’s face. “I’ll tell you one thing,” he said, changing the tone of his voice. “You did call the right person. Most other people would probably turn you in to the nearest loony-bin, get you taken off duty at the hospital. But not me. I’m not getting involved in your shit. It would just mean more work for me.”

Dr. Claric looked panicked. His eyes darted around the room as he tried to think of a way to convince Wenton that he wasn’t crazy. He considered blocking the exit, but he knew that the large, imposing Wenton would barely even notice and push right past him.

Wenton stepped out the front door with Dr. Claric immediately behind him.

“Just think about it, though,” Dr. Claric was urging when he stopped suddenly.

His abruptness made Wenton pause. Wenton turned back to Dr. Claric. “What’s the matter?”

“Look,” Dr. Claric said, pointing.

There was a white van parked directly across the street. The driver’s side window was tinted but there was a visible outline of someone.

“Wait here!” Wenton barked behind the wheel. He headed directly for the van.

Dr. Claric took a step to follow and then stopped.

As he walked, Wenton heard the van’s engine start. He increased the length of his considerable stride.

There was movement in the front of the van, barely visible through the tinted window. It looked like someone else had come out of the back to sit in the passenger seat.

“HEY!” Wenton yelled and waved at the van. He started a slow run and was only a few steps away. The van suddenly lurched and pulled away from the curb. The action pushed Wenton back, and he put a hand against the side panel to keep from being struck.

“HEY!” Wenton shouted again as the van carried on down the street. He could only watch as it sped away. He checked for the license plate. Nothing. The van maintained a steady pace until it turned the corner and was gone. When he couldn’t see it anymore he turned and headed back to Dr. Claric. “What the fuck?” he muttered to himself.

“What do you think now, Dr. Wenton?” Dr. Claric asked. He was almost smug with relief.

“I still think you’re crazy,” Wenton said flatly. He couldn’t even look at Dr. Claric as his mind filled with rage. *No one fucking drives away from me.*

This page intentionally left blank

TWENTY

Wenton wasn't convinced. It would take more than a couple of assholes in a white van to prove that people were being shot by electronic weapons.

He was just arriving home after leaving Dr. Claric's place. When he left, Dr. Claric was still shaking with paranoia. Wenton didn't want to waste time trying to console him.

Wenton pounded down the hallway of the condo building and threw open his front door with such force that it bent back over the doorstep and hit the wall behind. He moved through the door frame quickly and caught the door as it bounced back towards him. Even the springs couldn't slow its progress and he gave it a little shove to let it slam behind him. He didn't like mysteries. He didn't like unanswered questions and he especially didn't like people speeding away from him in vans.

Wenton stepped into the kitchen and reached into the cupboard where he kept liquor. He pulled down a bottle of Alberta Premium Rye and poured four fingers into a glass. It occurred to him that rye and Coke was Tim Dallons' drink. Sergeant Dallons had eventually lost it and killed himself when the Edward Carter case became too much for him to handle. *That case pushed him over the edge, poor bastard.* Wenton added some flat pop to his drink and threw in a couple of ice cubes before heading into the living room.

He stopped and stared at the bookcase that held his DVDs. He didn't need to see his collection to know what movies were there. *Fight Club, Pulp Fiction, True Romance, Kalifornia, Seven, 12 Monkeys* and a hundred other titles with similarly violent themes. Some people assumed that forensic psychologists worked with violent people all day long so and would want to escape this in the evenings. Wenton knew that wasn't true. Every good forensic psychologist had a dark streak. But the ugliness of the Carter

case had stretched Wenton's dark streak into something bigger, something that was swallowing him whole.

"Fuck," he said and turned away from the DVDs. There wasn't anything there to interest him. Not tonight.

He took a long pull off his drink. His head swam with Dr. Claric's stories of electronic weapons and white vans. He hated games and he felt like someone was playing games with him.

He took a step and immediately felt dizzy. He knew it wasn't the drink. Even on an empty stomach he'd have to drink at least a half dozen shots of rye before he'd feel anything.

He shook his head and clenched his teeth. He wouldn't let this Brian Claric mystery get to him. *Fuckin' Claric*. He headed back down the hall.

Wenton moved into a small study near his front entrance. He pulled his desk chair out and sat down in front of the computer. The screen flickered and came to life as he touched the keyboard, and he was soon looking at an Internet search engine. He typed in "electronic mind control" and hit return.

"Let's just see what the hell spooked you, Dr. Brian Claric," Wenton said as he watched the screen for a response.

The search engine spit out a list of sites. He scanned through the brief descriptions and clicked on *eterror.net*. He was soon reading descriptions of electronic weaponry specifically designed to affect the electrical pathways in the brain.

He moved from link to link, soaking up the bits and pieces of information as he went. Everything Dr. Claric had explained was there, the studies in the 1960s, the electromagnetic burst off a nuclear explosion, the studies around microwaves and the blood-brain barrier. The secret military projects designed to test the limits of new technologies for lethal, semi-lethal and non-lethal applications. The possible benefits of new technology were impressive:

Most can be employed without detection—either during employment or in the aftermath

Most have the capacity for unlimited and reliable discharge

The weapons have precise or diffuse discharge capabilities

The production of the weapons can be relatively inexpensive

Overall, Wenton had to admit the articles were convincing. As he continued to read, one type of technology kept surfacing over and over: Extreme Low Frequency. The growing research on ELF identified a number of reliable effects depending on the duration of the pulses and the specific frequency setting. The effects on the targets ranged from nausea and motion sickness to simulated symptoms of psychosis (e.g., aural and visual hallucinations). Whether the effect was permanent depended on an even larger list of variables including genetic predisposition to mental illness in the subject. He glanced away from the computer screen and noticed the clock hanging on the wall over his desk.

Shit, he thought. He clicked the Internet browser and got up from the computer. It'd been over three hours.

He reached for his drink. It was still half-full and the ice was gone. He'd been so engrossed in the Web sites that he'd forgotten about it. He finished it in one gulp and left the office.

Never got a mysterious e-mail, he thought as he settled onto the couch. *That would've made the experience complete.*

Wenton leaned back and stared at the high, stuccoed ceiling. He decided he'd have to check the references on the sites before he'd make any final decisions on the topic, but he was suddenly curious. Dr. Claric didn't seem as insane anymore. The idea of electronic weapons was suddenly plausible and so the idea of a company carrying out illegal research on the public might not be crazy after all.

Wenton dropped down on the sofa letting his feet kick up onto the coffee table. *Time to get good and drunk. Fuckin' Claric.* Another few Wenton-sized rye and Cokes and he soon drifted to sleep.

This page intentionally left blank

TWENTY-ONE

His home. It should have been a refuge, but he didn't know if it was safe anymore. He didn't know if there were any safe places. He wanted to be angry. He wanted to be outraged that someone had taken his life away, but he couldn't find strength. He only felt weak and hopeless.

After Wenton left, Dr. Claric stepped carefully through each room of his house. His eyes darted back and forth, searching, but he didn't know what he was looking for. He just needed to check every room, looking for anomalies.

"Anomalies," he laughed out loud. *I'm being crazy.*

He was in the bedroom, staring at the red numbers on the display. The alarm clock didn't look familiar at all. Sure he'd looked at it every morning, but had he ever examined it? No, it was just one of those things everyone has but doesn't pay close attention to. Now he was paying close attention and it just didn't look right. He turned it over and looked underneath. There was a little plastic door that he popped open. Inside there was room for batteries. He never knew the clock had a battery back up. *Would I have put batteries in here if I'd known this was here?* He didn't know. He thought he probably would have but he wasn't sure. *What if my alarm clock never had a battery back up? What if this isn't my alarm clock? I honestly don't remember there being a space for batteries under this clock. Damn it!*

He threw the clock across the room. The electrical cord pulled tight just before the clock struck the wall and yanked it back. Then the clock dropped to the floor.

Dr. Claric stomped out of the bedroom and continued through the house, picking up various objects—a desk light, a book, a toothbrush—examining each one closely. He was having trouble recognizing even the most basic things. He couldn't take it any more and headed to the living room. He had to consciously keep looking straight ahead so he wouldn't

drift into another room to look for “anomalies.”

Dr. Claric stared at the couch in the living room. The last thing he wanted to do was sit and try to relax, but he forced himself to fall onto the couch. He closed his eyes and tried to slow his breathing. His chest felt tight. He was having difficulty catching his breath. He reflexively put a hand over his heart and felt it pounding. *Take it easy, Brian.*

He opened his eyes, blinked twice in a wide-eyed stare and took a long, deep breath. He felt a little better. *I'm not going to let this thing get to me. I can't.*

He sat up. It was nearing dark and the sun was already retreating, leaving the big windows in the living room glowing softly. He glanced over and felt another surge of panic. *The van.* He wondered if the white van was outside, right now. He couldn't take his eyes away from the window.

Maybe I can take a quick peek. That won't hurt.

He put his hands on his knees and stood. Turning towards the window he stopped. *This is stupid. I shouldn't put myself through this.* He turned his back to the window and stepped towards the kitchen.

Dr. Claric was hungry, but he wasn't sure what he would eat, or more accurately, what he could keep down. He opened the fridge and stooped to look inside. The choices were slim: a carton of milk, a few eggs, a wilting head of lettuce, orange juice, miscellaneous condiments, jams and other spreads. He opened the freezer and found more of the same: an empty ice-cube tray, package of spinach, half a bag of crinkle-cut french fries, and a Lean Cuisine pasta dish. He picked up the frozen pasta and looked at the picture on the front. *Nope.* He dropped it back and shut the door.

Dr. Claric leaned back against the fridge and looked over the rest of the kitchen, hoping for inspiration. He knew there were crackers around, some tins of soup and probably a box of cereal. And then something caught his attention. There was a knife missing from the wooden block on the counter.

Panic. His eyes darted around the kitchen searching for the missing knife. He took small steps around the kitchen, pulling drawers open, looking everywhere, but it was nowhere to be found. He stopped and put both hands on top of his head. *What the hell is happening?*

“Calm down,” he said out loud. He needed to regain perspective, again. *It's just a knife. It was probably misplaced. It could be anywhere. It doesn't mean there's a conspiracy. Why would someone break into a house and just steal a knife? They wouldn't. It doesn't make sense.*

“Okay,” he said just to hear his own voice. “Okay.”

“Eat!” he announced. He forced himself to refocus on why he originally came into the kitchen. He opened a cupboard door and looked up at the

cans and cardboard boxes. Rows of Campbell's soup faced him—mushroom soup, tomato soup, consommé for sauces. There was a box of Caesar salad croutons and a larger box of Grape Nuts.

He rubbed his stomach. The way he was feeling he knew that he should stick to bland food. He pulled the Grape Nuts down and used the box to shut the door. He got a bowl, set it beside the sink and poured his cereal. He retrieved the milk from the fridge and added it before he picked up the bowl and headed to the living room to watch TV.

As he walked he swallowed a mouthful of cereal, readying the second spoonful. He stopped. The cereal smelled odd and he drew the spoon away from his mouth. A horrible burning in the back of his throat made him gag and he spit the oddly textured cereal out, coughing. The bowl fell from his hands and crashed against the floor as he doubled over. He turned and ran to the kitchen sink as his stomach pumped bile into his mouth. He gagged and spit as dry heaves pounded through him.

It was hard for Dr. Claric to stay upright against the sink. His hands shook against the grey, wet metal with each spasm. His legs felt weak and he wanted to drop to the floor but he was afraid that he'd throw up again. Another spasm churned through his stomach and swirled up into the back of his throat. His shoulders heaved and his cheeks swelled as he leaned further down and spilled more bile into the sink.

He coughed and reached out with one hand to try and find the dish-towel that was normally nearby, but instead his hand brushed against something hard. He turned to see the Grape Nuts box only it wasn't Grape Nuts. At this angle he could just make out the label on the box: Sparkling Clean Dishwasher Detergent. Dr. Claric's stomach churned again and he turned his head to release another mouthful of bile.

It took another few minutes before he was able to stand up. His stomach finally settled enough that he knew he wouldn't throw up again. He stood but continued to hold the counter with one hand. He stared at the box beside the sink. It was definitely detergent for the dishwasher. It didn't make sense. That's where he left the Grape Nuts box.

Dr. Claric turned towards the living room. He could see shards of the bowl sitting in a milky mixture on the floor. He couldn't see any familiar bits of Grape Nuts in the mess—only the speckled mush of the detergent mixed with milk and glass.

It didn't make sense. He always kept the dishwasher detergent under the sink. He never put it up in the cupboard with food.

Dr. Claric decided he had no choice. He picked up the phone and dialed Wenton's home number. It rang busy. *Damn it.*

Dr. Claric heard a muffled sound. He froze and listened for it again.

There was someone yelling just outside.

"I just want to help," someone called. It sounded like it came from just behind the front door.

Dr. Claric's heart pounded as he stood and moved cautiously to the entrance.

"Open the door, Dr. Claric," the voice called again. "It's the Halifax Regional Police."

It was a squeaky, male voice. He couldn't place it. It wasn't familiar to him.

"Who?" he called out, trying desperately not to betray how he felt by the quiver in his voice. His stomach was churning again and he worried he might vomit. He tried to look through the peephole but something was blocking it. "Show me some ID."

The peephole suddenly cleared and he could see a police badge but it obscured the face of the person holding it. The peephole went dark again.

"Open the door, Dr. Claric. I want to explain everything to you."

"Everything what?" Dr. Claric yelled back. He still had one hand clenched to his sore stomach.

"Everything," the voice said. It was an incredibly calm voice with no trace of urgency or menace.

"What do you want?"

"Come on. Just open the door. Don't be a pussy."

"What? What did you say?" Dr. Claric's panic wouldn't allow him to do anything other than scream. "Did you just call me a pussy?"

"No, I'm sorry. Come on, Dr. Claric, open the door."

"Get out of here. You're not with the police. Get out!" He desperately wanted to look through the peephole again but couldn't bring himself to. He didn't know what he'd see and he didn't know if he wanted to see anything.

"We just want to talk to you."

"Who are you, really?"

"The police. Now open the fuckin' door."

"Get out of here!" *A weapon. I need something.* He looked around the front entrance. Nothing. He stepped away from the door and looked into the living room. *A lamp? No. Think, think.*

"Dr. Claric," the voice sang out in a childish cadence, "Come out, come out wherever you are!"

That was it. Dr. Claric turned and ran from the door. He rounded the corner and went straight to the utility closet at the end. He'd seen a baseball bat in there earlier during one of his searches. He felt tremendous relief at the sight of it now and eagerly gripped it in both hands.

The voice from the front entrance continued to sing out, "Dr. Claric,

come on out and play. Don't wait for another day." The childish singing in the strange squeaky voice drilled through his skull.

Dr. Claric's nausea was gone as he stormed back toward the front door, baseball bat in front of him. He decided to take action, strong action.

"Come out and play. Play, play, play," the voice jeered.

"You want to play?" Dr. Claric screamed as he slammed against the front door and gripped the doorknob. "I'll play with you, you goddamn..." He swung the door wide open. There was no one there, not even a white van on the street.

His hands fell to his sides and the bat dropped away, clattering on the cement walk.

"Why?" he pleaded and then sat down, holding his face in his hands.

This page intentionally left blank

TWENTY-TWO

Something hideous sat next to Wenton. Something inhuman.

And it smiled at him. It knew him.

The thing took a breath and blew air towards Wenton. The foul stench of its breath slapped against Wenton's face and he bolted upright on the couch.

"What the fuck's going on?" Wenton blurted.

Settle down.

"What are you?"

It smiled again, the folds of its misshapen head wrinkling with the effort. *Don't you know me by now?*

"Edward?" Wenton asked tentatively.

Edward wasn't mine to keep. Try again.

"I don't play games," Wenton said and finally looked around his surroundings. It looked like his apartment but everything was out of focus. It was as though he was trapped behind smoked glass as he looked out at the vaguely familiar furnishing of his living room. He stood.

We don't have to be enemies. Why don't you join me?

Wenton ignored the voice. He turned to look out at the room, but the strange haziness followed him. It was his condo but it wasn't. It felt like someone was trying to make him believe he was there when he wasn't. He took a step.

Suddenly the grotesque face was directly in front of him. Trails of filth swirled away from its face assaulting Wenton's nose.

What are you afraid of? the thing asked.

"I said I wasn't playing games."

What if the game has already begun?

"What game? What are you talking about? It's got something to do with me?"

Maybe yes, maybe no. You won't win.

“Maybe fuck off and get out of my apartment.”

Suddenly the figure swelled in size, quickly lifting its arms up. It towered over Wenton for an instant.

I don't fear you! it screamed and brought its arms crashing down onto Wenton's head.

Wenton flinched, bracing for the impact. His eyes shot open.

He blinked and then blinked again.

He lifted a hand to his head and felt it was slick, not with blood but with perspiration.

He was lying on his sofa in the living room. He shifted slightly and noticed that the spot beneath him was also wet with sweat. He looked around the room and his eyes stopped on the empty bottle of rye on the coffee table. He remembered searching the Internet for the conspiracy Web sites and then dropping onto the sofa with the rye.

“It was a dream,” he told himself. “Just a fuckin' dream.”

TWENTY-THREE

Dr. Claric stared up at the sign over the main entrance: ECOR Pharmaceuticals International. It was an impressive building located on the Halifax harbourfront—twenty stories of reflected glass and concrete. He cautiously entered the revolving door and followed it around to enter the building. It was just before nine on Friday morning and there was an even flow of people coming and going. Dr. Claric hadn't slept at all. How could he after what had happened?

Once inside the lobby he was impressed by the sheer size and grandeur of the facility. The main entrance was a spectacular centrepiece of sweeping, molded glass and concrete pillars. The lobby reached up about three stories and the movement of the elevators could be seen through glass enclosures. A large information desk was off against one wall, nearest the elevator hallway.

Dr. Claric paused near the doors to examine the lobby more closely. A coffee shop was set into one side and a small newspaper stand stood opposite it, but otherwise, the lobby was mainly a collection of chairs and couches. He didn't see a building directory sign where he could find out the location of Mettincourt's office. *I need to talk to the president*, he thought.

He was still considering his next move when a strange voice sounded beside him.

"Can I help you, sir?"

He was slightly startled and looked to his right to find a man in uniform. The man was thin, almost gaunt, with dark features. The grey security guard cap cast shadows over the man's face making his eyes seem even more recessed than they were. The badge on his grey jacket said "Edward."

"No," Dr. Claric said. "I'm fine."

The guard nodded. "Well that's fine. Just let me know if I can help you with something."

Dr. Claric nodded, more relaxed now. "I'll do that."

"And don't go stirring up any trouble," the guard said as he walked away.

Dr. Claric stopped dead. "What'd you say?"

The guard turned back towards him with a hideous grin of yellowed teeth stretching over pale, cracked lips. *Don't go fuckin' around where you shouldn't be, you piece of shit*, he hissed.

Dr. Claric couldn't catch his breath as he stared at this thing in front of him. He felt his heart pound like it was going to rip through his chest. "Who are you?" he gasped.

I'm your fuckin' brain, the guard said, making a horribly grotesque and immature face, sticking his tongue out. He lifted his hand and pointed to his temple and made a buzzing sound and started to shake all over as if he were being electrocuted. The figure resembled Edward Carter, but there was something different about him.

"STOP IT!" Dr. Claric screamed. "JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!"

Everyone in the lobby turned to see who was yelling. The sudden hush made him look around. "ECOR CAN'T JUST FUCK WITH PEOPLE'S HEADS. YOU WON'T GET AWAY WITH IT!"

Guards from the information desk immediately started towards him. Dr. Claric stared at the approaching men for a moment and then turned back to the other guard, but he was gone. Dr. Claric scanned the lobby, searching the crowds, but there was still no sign of the bizarre-looking guard. He wanted to run but was frozen to the spot.

"YOU STAY AWAY FROM ME! I'M DR. CLARIC, A FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGIST AND I WANT ANSWERS RIGHT NOW!"

"Take it easy," one of the guards said. "Let's just take it easy."

"You take it easy," Dr. Claric spat back. "I want to talk to Travis Mettincourt. He knows what's going on here. I have to talk to him."

"That's okay. We'll get him for you right away," another security guard said.

Dr. Claric noticed the guard turn and wink at his partner.

"Fuck you!" Dr. Claric screamed and bolted around them, running towards the elevators. He didn't know where he would go but knew he didn't want to be stopped in the lobby.

"GRAB HIM!" a guard shouted.

Two more guards stepped out from the information desk, cutting him off before the elevators. The other two guards were chasing closely behind.

Dr. Claric felt panicked. He needed to prove ECOR was responsible for the electronic weapons that caused his madness. He needed to show the world what was happening. *I don't want people thinking I'm a mental*

patient. He knew ECOR was involved. *That first security guard was laughing at me. They have to be involved.*

“GET TRAVIS METTINCOURT DOWN HERE!” Dr. Claric shouted as he slowed to a walk. He knew he wouldn’t be able to get past the two guards and make it into an elevator. Even if he did, he didn’t know which floor to go to.

“That’s enough, sir,” one guard said. “Let’s just go in the back and have a talk. We’ll try and contact Mr. Mettincourt for you.”

Dr. Claric didn’t believe them at all. “Do you think I’m stupid? I can’t believe anything you say.” He looked over his shoulder and the other two guards were directly behind him now. He was surrounded. He decided to take a different tactic.

“I’m sorry I was screaming,” he said calmly. “There was someone else in the lobby who was bothering me but I’m okay now.” He noticed the guards nodding reflexively as they continued to inch slowly towards him. He tried to ignore it. “I’m going to reach into my back pocket. I want to show you my wallet. I’m Dr. Brian Claric, a clinical psychologist from the Maximum Security Psychiatric Centre.”

“We know you are,” said a guard. “We want to help you out. Get you out of this crowded lobby where we can talk.”

How do they know who I am? he wondered. “No, let me show you my ID.”

“That’s okay, sir. We believe you. You’re a doctor. That’s fine.” They were almost close enough to touch him now.

Suddenly Dr. Claric felt dizzy. His fingers started to shake and the wallet slid out, falling to the ground. There was a strange, cool mist drifting down his right cheek. He turned sharply, looking over his shoulder, but the room seemed out of focus. He saw one of the security guards holding a small, silver canister with an aerosol top.

“What did you do?” he asked weakly. “What is that?”

The guard tucked the canister back into his belt and shook his head. “Don’t worry about it, sir. It’ll help you relax.”

The world was beginning to spin. He felt his legs giving out and he knew he would soon lose consciousness. “What did you do to me?” he gasped.

A voice somewhere said, “Try and catch him before he hits the ground.”

The world began to fade in flashes of black. “Stay away from...”

“He’s out. Grab him.”

This page intentionally left blank

TWENTY-FOUR

Wenton stood, unsteadily, and set his drink down next to the empty rye bottle on the coffee table. The act of standing cleared a few cobwebs from his head and he walked toward the phone in the kitchen. The ring had been a dull thudding in the back of his head that hadn't immediately registered.

"What?" he asked roughly.

"Is this Dr. Michael Wenton?"

He didn't recognize the voice. "Who is this?"

"This is Constable Dallas Power of the Halifax Regional Police and I'm terribly sorry to bother you at home. I've heard about—"

"What do you want?" Wenton interrupted.

The constable's voice became serious, indicating he was ready to get down to business. "We have an individual here who claims to know you. His name is Brian Claric?" The officer waited for a sign that Wenton knew the man. There was only silence so he continued. "Anyway, he was arrested earlier today and charged with causing a disturbance. He asked to speak with you."

"Why?"

"I'm sorry?"

"Why does he want to talk to me?"

"Um, I don't know exactly. He just requested to talk to—"

"Has he phoned his lawyer?"

"I don't think that—"

"Forget it," Wenton said, disgusted by the ignorance of the officer. "Put Claric on."

Wenton heard the phone change hands and a heavy breathing noise burst across the line.

"WENTON! It's all true. I went there and one of the guards basically admitted what's been going on and then they sprayed me with something.

Knocked me out. I don't know how much time I have. You're the only one who—"

"Shut up," Wenton barked. "You went to ECOR? What's the matter with you?"

"But it's all true. They *are* experimenting on people. And they sprayed me with something. I blacked out. I was out for hours. I think it's something that's going to make things worse. I don't know how much time I have before I lose it altogether." He was speaking so quickly each sentence, each word, was blending into the previous one.

"*Before* you lose it?" Wenton said sarcastically. "Listen, it was probably pepper spray or something. You went in there like a lunatic and they maced you. That's it."

"Please come down here. Tell them what's going on. Help me."

"This isn't my problem."

"Please. You're the only one who knows. I can't call anyone else for help. There's too much to explain. You know already. You know it's true. You saw the white van, for Pete's sake."

Wenton said nothing. There were a few unanswered questions but he didn't want to get tangled with a psychologist who was losing his mind. If he went down to the police station, then he'd be involved. He didn't think he was the right person to get involved. He wasn't feeling right and he couldn't shake the disturbing dream. *Fuck it!* he thought.

"Fine! I'll come down to the station." And he slammed the phone back on the cradle.

The last thing Wenton wanted to do was go to the police station on anything other than official business. He'd never set foot in the building unless he was charging them for every second of his time. He'd even sent them bills for what he was told was an informal meeting with investigating teams. Wenton was, after all, an expert on matters of violent offenders and deserved to be paid for his services.

Wenton pushed out through the glass doors of his building and walked onto the street. He decided not to bother driving since the police station wasn't that far. He'd just stepped down onto the sidewalk when he heard a familiar voice.

"Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

Wenton turned to see Mitchell Wa stopped on the road in front of the building, his passenger window down so he could speak.

"You following me?" Wenton asked.

"Should I be?"

Wenton almost smiled. "I need to go. I'm going to your office."

“The station?” Wa asked. “You’re not consulting for anyone down there, are you?”

“Not exactly. I need to see someone on private business. Brian Claric.”

“Well try not to fuck up anybody’s life while you’re down there.” Wa snapped and then turned away, pushing on the accelerator.

“Hey,” Wenton called. He didn’t know why but he felt an odd need to say something else to Wa.

Wa braked and waited. Wenton stepped up to the passenger side of the Saturn.

“What?” Wa stared out at him, his eyes cold and suspicious.

Wenton didn’t know what. He had nothing to say.

“You want something? I’m leaving,” Wa said impatiently.

Wenton could still feel the ten ounces of rye coursing through his veins.

“You got a minute?”

Wa thought about it for a second and then made up his mind. “Get in. I’ll drop you at the station.”

Wenton climbed in and Wa pulled away again.

“What’s going on?” said Wa.

“Some bullshit. Brian Claric, a psychologist from MSPC, got arrested making an ass out of himself in the lobby of ECOR Pharmaceuticals. He said it was you that gave him my home number.”

“Not from me,” Wa said. “Never heard of the guy.”

Wenton shrugged. “Doesn’t matter. I’m just here to see what’s going on.”

Wa was confused. “You’re here to help him? Not your style. He must be paying you some big bucks.”

Wenton knew Wa was right, he’d never done anything good for anyone before. “I don’t want to talk about that. I wanted to ask you something else.”

“Ask.”

Wenton was hesitant to ask what he was thinking. “How are the wife and kids?” He vaguely remembered that Wa was married and had children.

“Since when do you do chit chat?” Wa said angrily. “Gloria kicked me out. I barely see the fuckin’ kids anymore. Okay? And to top it off I just got suspended from the police for taking a few shots at a suspect. Now ask me your fuckin’ question.”

“You’re suspended?” Wenton said.

“Don’t fuck with me. I’m not in the mood.”

“I’m not fucking with you.”

Wa looked away from the road for a moment to look Wenton over. “You don’t look good. Have you been drinking?”

“Yeah.”

“That makes sense.”

“So why are you suspended?” Wenton asked.

Wa shifted uncomfortably in his seat, obviously tired of the way the conversation was going. “You’re not my friend. You’re not my shrink. I’m not paying for the pleasure of your great counselling.”

The car slowed and they were pulling up on Gottingen Street in front of the police headquarters.

“So get out,” Wa barked.

Wenton reached for the door and then turned back. “Was it Edward Carter?”

Wa didn’t flinch.

Wenton continued to press. “You got too deeply involved in that case. I warned you but you did it anyway. I think it got to you. I think you’re probably a different person.”

“Fuck you. Get out of my car.”

“There was something about Carter that got inside people,” Wenton said. “I warned you that he could get inside, fuck you up. Most of the people he got to are still on the psych units, babbling incoherently.”

“That’s got nothing to do with me. The guy’s dead. You found him dead in that house.”

“I don’t know. There’s definitely some other shit going on.”

Wa frowned but was still listening.

Wenton continued. “I told you that Carter had the power to confront people with their own secrets, their own little bits of evil, but I’m not convinced about that theory any longer.”

Wa sighed heavily. “Am I supposed to give a shit about this?”

“Fuck you then,” Wenton spat. *It was a mistake to try and talk to this asshole.*

Wenton got out of the car and headed into the police station without another word.

TWENTY-FIVE

“I told you this morning on the phone,” Wenton said impatiently facing Dr. Claric. “The charges are minor. As long as you don’t start babbling about conspiracy, the charges will probably be dropped.”

“I don’t know how I can ever thank you for coming down here and vouching for me.”

“They might have released you on your own recognizance anyway.”

“No, I know you helped. I owe you.”

“Then repay me by shutting up and staying home. Don’t go to work. Don’t look out the window. Don’t do anything.”

“What if the van is outside?”

Wenton sighed heavily. “Then you’ve looked outside. Don’t do that. There aren’t any vans. There aren’t any mystery weapons being tested by ECOR. Just shut the fuck up about that shit.”

“Michael,” Dr. Claric pleaded, “There are! One of ECOR’s security guards told me. He basically admitted to it.”

“Fuck. I know. I know. You told me all this shit already.”

Dr. Claric ignored Wenton and kept talking. “The guy told me they were after me. He pointed to his head and pretended to shoot. It was a warning about being at ECOR.”

“Just relax. You’ve got criminal charges to worry about. Worry about ECOR later.”

“And I just remembered that security guard’s name! I knew it was familiar. It was like that crazy rapist we had last year. Do you remember him?”

Wenton’s attention was piqued. “What?”

“The rapist who made people crazy. When Andy lost it and shoved a pencil through my hand.”

“What about him?” Wenton asked urgently.

“What was his name?”

“Edward Carter.”

“That was the name of the security guard who first confronted me at ECOR. Well, that’s what was on his name tag.”

“What’s that got to do with Edward Carter?”

“The security guard was a thin, creepy looking guy just like Carter. Even though I never worked directly with him, I saw him on the unit. The security guard looked just like him.”

“And this was the guard in the lobby who disappeared when you started screaming?”

“I don’t know if he disappeared,” he said in an exasperated voice. “Michael, I’m not crazy. There really was a weird looking guard named Edward.”

“Don’t call me Michael,” Wenton warned, his words short and precise.

“Sorry.”

“And don’t talk to anyone or leave your house.”

Wenton didn’t understand why Dr. Claric would bring Edward Carter up out of the blue like that. It bothered him. He didn’t want to think about Carter. It was bad enough talking about it with Wa. Wenton knew that Dr. Claric never even had contact with Edward Carter when he was at the MSPC. Dr. Claric had been injured and out of the facility when all the trouble with Cater had really started.

Fuck it, he thought. It was already 4 p.m. and he’d wasted his whole day on Dr. Claric.

TWENTY-SIX

That's it, Wenton thought as he walked home. That's all the bullshit I can take. Brian's on his own now.

There weren't any firm answers to what was going on. Wenton still didn't really believe there was a conspiracy involving a drug company conducting experiments on unwitting people. It was too fictional. But he didn't like the extra details he'd come across surfing the Web the night before. He didn't like the white van he'd seen in front of Dr. Claric's and he especially didn't like the van taking off and almost hitting him. *But what am I wondering about? Brain zapping?* He laughed, realizing that the whole thing was absurd. He was actually concerned about the details of a delusional patient's ramblings. *Fuck.*

"I've got to get my head away from this shit before I get paranoid like Claric," he said out loud and took his cell phone from his pocket

He watched the display as he flipped through his phone directory. He paused on a number labelled "Pizza." It was actually the number for a discreet escort agency. He frowned and kept flipping until he stopped on "Norma—Home."

"Hello," said a woman's voice on the other end of the line.

"Norma?"

"Dr. Wenton?"

"Right. You busy?"

"I'm... Why?"

"I thought we could discuss that research project. I've had a few ideas."

The surprise was evident in Norma's voice. "Now? Yeah... I...sure that sounds great."

"Why don't you come over to my apartment?"

"To your apartment?" Her voice sounded concerned. "Are you sure?"

"I figured as much," Wenton said.

“Figured what?”

“That you weren’t interested in the research. You aren’t prepared. Forget about it.”

“No,” she said quickly. “I’m very interested. Let’s meet.”

What an idiot. Wenton gave her the directions, smiling.



As Wenton walked down College Street to his building, he saw a large white vehicle exiting the garage. The van’s windows were tinted black and there weren’t any markings down the side.

He stopped right at the top of the garage ramp to get a better look at the vehicle. As it pulled up the ramp, Wenton saw that the driver was a slight, sickly looking man with dark hair. He couldn’t be sure but the person looked slightly familiar. Someone he’d seen before.

The answer has sought you from beyond Qumran, a voice echoed from behind him.

“What the fuck?” Wenton blurted.

HONK!

“Come on buddy,” someone shouted from behind him.

He looked behind him and saw another car. He noticed the female passenger frantically talking to the driver and grabbing his arm. Wenton figured she was scolding him about honking. He casually stepped out of the car’s way and headed into his building.



Wenton hadn’t been inside the condo for more than twenty minutes when the phone rang, in three short bursts, indicating that there was a visitor at the front entrance. He picked up the phone and pressed the number seven, held it for a few seconds and then hung up. He knew it would be Norma.

Wenton listened for her footsteps down the hall and held the door open.

“Good to see you.” He motioned her in with a sweeping gesture.

“Thanks.” She held her coat shut with her hands and stepped into the apartment.

“Go right on through to the living room.”

She nodded and kept moving. “Can’t stay too long,” she added in a stilted way.

Wenton smiled; he realized it was supposed to sound like an unfortunate double booking. “That’s too bad.”

His polite manner was somewhat unexpected. Norma smiled back.

Maybe he's not such a hard ass.

"Have a seat."

She'd stopped in the middle of the living room. Wenton was intentionally blocking the only chair in the room. That left the sofa. She walked over to it and sat in the middle.

Wenton sat in the chair. "You like movies?"

"Movies? Sure."

"What do you watch?"

"I don't know, everything."

He smiled. "I know this seems off-topic but it really isn't. I have a research idea that involves movies."

She nodded, waiting for him to make his point.

Wenton continued. "Have you ever seen *Kalifornia*? It has Brad Pitt and David Duchovny in it."

She thought for a moment. "No."

"Brad Pitt's character is named Early Grayce. He's a lowlife psychopath. It's the best portrayal of a psychopath I've ever seen in a film."

Norma nodded as she tried to follow Wenton's train of thought.

"Anyway, he was dating this girl in the film—played by Juliette Lewis—who was a real pathetic kind of character. Really trusting and vulnerable. Perfect for Early."

"Okay."

"You wonder what this has to do with your doctorate, right?"

"I guess."

"Well, one topic that hasn't been studied is the interpersonal, intimate relationships of psychopaths. We spend a lot of time trying to get inside a psychopath's head; maybe it would be interesting to see what kind of people the psychopath is drawn to and what kind of people engage in relationships with psychopaths—if you see what I mean."

"Yes," Norma said excitedly. "A research project looking at the loved ones of psychopaths."

"It would be very publishable and I can't imagine anyone more qualified to take on this project than you." *A stroke at just the right moment.*

Now Norma smiled. "That's really nice. Thanks. I think this project sounds great."

"I knew you would. I could tell right off that you were the type of student who had a better appreciation for understanding ideas on different levels. You aren't just a by-the-numbers academic like Paul from Winnipeg."

Norma looked away from him, embarrassed. She felt like she was finally becoming one of the insiders in the psychology department. She couldn't imagine Dr. Wenton talking so casually to any other student.

“So let’s watch some of *Kalifornia*. Not all of it—just some of the relationship parts that’ll get your research juices flowing.” Wenton got up and stepped over to his wall unit, quickly pulling the DVD out of its alphabetical spot.

Norma hesitated as though she might say something, but decided not to. *I’ll watch a couple of minutes and then tell him I have to go.*

Once the DVD was playing Wenton turned back to Norma. “Want a drink? Pop or something?”

“Um, no I’m okay.”

“It’s no problem. I’m going to grab something.”

“Sure a pop would be great.”

“Be right back.”

When he returned he stepped in beside her and sat on the sofa. “Here you go.” He handed her a tall glass with pop and ice. He set his half and half rye and Coke down on the coffee table. Because Norma sat in the middle, Wenton was forced to one side but made sure that almost the full length of his leg touched hers.

She glanced at him but looked away taking a sip from her glass. “Thanks.”

Qumran.

“What’s that?” Wenton asked.

“I didn’t say anything,” Norma replied, confused.

He looked over the back of the sofa and then back to Norma. “I just thought I heard something.”

This one won’t last.

Wenton was looking right at Norma when he heard the voice again.

She will kill herself. I will make sure of it.

Her lips hadn’t moved. *What the fuck’s the matter with me?* he thought.

“Are you okay?” Norma asked.

“I...,” he started then stopped. Norma’s face was rapidly shifting back and forth between her normal features and those of face of a strange creature, with sunken eyes, yellowed teeth and large, gaping wound slashed vertically down it’s face. The faces flickered so quickly that her face became a blur.

“What the hell?”

Fuck her, Michael.

“No,” Wenton shouted and reached out to grab Norma by the shoulders. He shook her, trying to stop the shifting.

She’s dead anyway so fuck her while you have the chance.

“Stop it,” he screamed.

Michael, fuck this dead bitch.

“No.” He kept shaking her.

Michael.

“Michael!” The voice had shifted to a scream.

Wenton blinked and saw Norma staring back at him in terror. He looked down and saw his hands firmly gripping her breasts.

“Let go of me,” she yelled, tears falling freely.

He did and she fell back away from him.

“I’m leaving,” she blurted through tears.

Wenton was dazed. He vaguely noticed her moving towards the door. The idea of stopping her floated through him but disappeared quickly when she slammed the door behind her.

He lifted his drink to his lips. *What the fuck was that?*



Norma stood on Wenton’s stoop for a few more minutes, to gather her composure. She didn’t know where to turn. She took out her cell phone.

“Pastor Wrightland? This is Norma, Norma MacDonald, you know from Bible study... Can we talk? It’s about my supervisor, Michael Wenton...”

This page intentionally left blank

TWENTY-SEVEN

Wenton had overslept again.

There was no time to bring his laptop from the office so he headed directly to the classroom. The lecture was for a graduate course in Forensic Psychology and he knew he could fill the time without his Power Point presentation.

He was only five minutes late when he stepped into an empty classroom.
Empty. What the fuck?

“Late as well as unethical, eh, Dr. Wenton?” Earl Drier said from the doorway, barely able to contain his excitement.

“Where’s my class?”

“I dismissed them. We need to talk.”

Wenton closed his fist and took a deep breath. He felt his jaw twitch.

“There’s a serious matter that you need to attend to and you’re suspended from active teaching duties until it’s resolved.”

“Drier, you better get to the fuckin’ point before—”

“Before what?” shouted Dr. Drier. “Before you hit me? Is that what? Are you threatening me? What about Dr. Tillston?” He turned and another professor stepped into the room. “Are you going to attack her as well?”

“That’s enough, Earl,” she said, stepping into the room and closing the door. “Dr. Wenton, there’s been a complaint from one of your students.”

He hadn’t noticed her as she had been standing immediately behind Drier. Wendy Tillston was the head of the professional review office at the university and fielded complaints lodged against professors.

“Who lodged a complaint?” he asked flatly, although he knew.

“Norma MacDonald. She claims you invited her to your apartment and made sexual overtures to her.”

“You’re kidding me! Something sexual? That poor girl. What she must be going through.”

The reaction appeared to take both Dr. Drier and Dr. Tillston by surprise. “So you’re denying the allegations?”

“Of course,” Wenton said again with great concern. “Norma’s been going through such a rough spell. Recently, I’ve had to be a little hard on her. She just can’t seem to get any direction for her graduate research. I’ve let her know her performance is lacking but I never thought she’d—”

“What?” Earl snapped. “What are you talking about? You know you want to fuck her.”

“Dr. Drier!” Dr. Tillston shouted. “That’s inappropriate.”

“But he’s lying. He’s not concerned about her! He’s not concerned about anyone.”

“Dr. Drier! Please step outside.”

“But—”

“Now!” Dr. Tillston shouted.

Dr. Drier pointed at Wenton. “You’re not slipping out of this one. I’m going to get you. I’m finally going to get you.” He slammed the door behind him.

“I apologize for that, Dr. Wenton.”

“We don’t get along,” Wenton said to Dr. Tillston and half smiled.

“I see that. As for the complaint, we’d appreciate your cooperation.”

“Anything I can do.”

“But the suspension will have to remain in effect until we sort this out,” she added, almost apologetically.

“That makes sense,” he said nodding.

Dr. Tillston turned back to the door. “We’ll contact you very soon,” she said and left.

Wenton clenched his teeth as he watched her disappear out the doorway. *Motherfucker! This isn’t what I need. I don’t want to deal with that fuckin’ bitch right now. What a pain in the ass.*

He picked up his briefcase to leave. He remembered the look on Dr. Drier’s face when he pretended to be surprised about the allegations. *That dumb fuck thought he had me. We’ll see who gets who.*



Wenton’s phone was ringing when he stepped into his office. If it was Norma he thought he might be able to finish this problem up right then and there. He grabbed the phone off the cradle.

“Yeah.”

“Dr. Wenton? Hello, it’s Georgia O’Connors.”

He didn’t respond. It wasn’t Norma so he didn’t give a shit.

“Are you there?” she asked, somewhat confused that he didn’t acknowledge her. “You do remember me from MSPC?”

“What can I do for you?” Wenton said coolly.

“I’m sorry to bother you but there’s been an issue with Dr. Claric and we wondered if you could stop by and help us sort through a few things.”

“Like what?”

“Well, I guess you and he were seeing a patient together, a Barry Boseman. Is that right?”

“More or less.”

“Okay. And Barry worked at ECOR pharmaceuticals, which is where Brian was arrested. We didn’t know if there might be a connection and so—”

“You’re looking for a method of madness,” Wenton interrupted. “You’re wondering if Boseman has something to do with Brian going nuts.”

“Oh,” she didn’t expect him to be so blunt. “And can—”

“Well, the truth is that Brian is convinced that ECOR is conducting experiments designed to make people insane. Seems plausible. If you think about it, it makes good business sense for a pharmaceutical company that treats psychos to boost the potential client base.”

“He actually believes that—”

“Probably more important is the fact that Brian thinks he’s the subject of their next experiment. He thinks ECOR is making him crazy. He’s worried that people are following him, breaking into his house, monitoring him. I think he believes he’s even been zapped by some kind of weapon.”

“Oh my,” Dr. O’Connors began. The fears of the team were being confirmed. “How do you—”

“Here’s the real kicker. Brian might not be too far off. There’s a pretty good chance ECOR *is* actually experimenting on people—creating insanity. I wouldn’t be surprised if they did zap Brian already. They might even zap you if you don’t watch yourself.”

“What? Did I hear you correctly?”

Wenton continued to ignore her. “But then again, maybe Dr. Claric is simply demonstrating the early stages of a late-onset psychosis or an early-onset dementia. It’s quite possible he’s mentally ill and all of the ECOR bullshit is just a delusion.” He paused briefly and then added, “For that matter, maybe I’m delusional too. Maybe we’re all fuckin’ delusional to some degree. How are we supposed to know? It’s getting so difficult to differenti-

ate the sane from the insane.”

Dr. O’Connors closed her eyes in frustration. She never expected cooperation from Wenton but she wanted to see if she could help Dr. Claric. She decided to ask Wenton to come down to the hospital for a team meeting.

“Could we get you—”

“No you can’t. Goodbye.” Wenton hung up. He had more important things to deal with than Dr. Claric’s curious co-workers. He wanted to find Norma MacDonald.

TWENTY-EIGHT

Wa was parked in front of the Holy Saviour Lutheran Church on Woodlawn Road. The cozy little church sat in a park next to a small lake in Dartmouth, “the city of lakes.” He hadn’t been there since his youngest child was baptized a few years ago. At that time, a new pastor, Gary Wrightland, had just started with the church. He wasn’t even sure he’d find the same pastor working here.

Wa reluctantly got out of his car and walked up the steps to the big wooden double doors. *What am I doing here?* he thought. *This is crazy.*

The inside of the church was standard Lutheran fair. The expansive lobby was stale and colourless, serving mainly as a place to gather and hang coats before entering the main sanctuary. From the lobby, one hallway led down to church offices and possibly Sunday school rooms. The entrance to the sanctuary was through a second set of double doors, ornately carved in wood but with a small window obviously placed there for safety reasons so parishioners wouldn’t accidentally swing the giant doors open and hit someone on the other side.

Wa moved through the lobby and into the church. He scanned row after row of dark wooden pews that pointed toward the smallish altar at the front. A massive cross hung against thin windows behind the pulpit. Christians were required to make Jesus Christ the central theme of everything, including architecture.

The church was empty. Wa turned to exit and found himself face to face with a kindly looking man in dress pants wearing a pastor’s square-collared white shirt.

“Can I help you?” Pastor Gary Wrightland asked.

“Oh, I’m sorry to wander in like this,” Wa began.

“This is a house of God. All are welcome.”

Wa nodded. "My children were all baptized here." He felt like he needed to justify his presence. "All three of them."

"That's wonderful," Gary said in genuine appreciation.

"I'm Sergeant Mitchell Wa. I'm really sorry we haven't been more consistent about coming to—"

"I know who you are," Gary said holding up his hand. "Please. You obviously need to talk. Let's go to my office. I'd love to catch up with you."

After they'd settled in the pastor's sparsely furnished office, they spent a few minutes in small talk. Pastor Wrightland asked about Wa and the children, and Wa apologized again for not attending church more regularly.

"Sergeant Wa," the pastor began, "I know you didn't come here just to catch up with me and the church. What can I do for you?"

Wa took a deep breath and considered the question. He wasn't sure. A chill passed through him as he realized coming here was a mistake.

"Nothing. I'm sorry, pastor. I guess I just... Nothing, really."

"Sergeant Wa," he urged, "You made it this far. Why not take one more step and see where it leads?"

Mitchell Wa nodded and took another long, deep breath. "Here's the situation. This will probably sound crazy but maybe I am crazy. I think I've gotten myself wrapped up in something...something evil. I guess I came here to see if you'd know how to get me out of it."

"It?"

"Yes. The situation. The evil."

The pastor was bewildered. "I think I'm going to need more details."

"I don't know. I guess it was more or less a year ago. A lot of things were pretty messed up for me. My partner in homicide, Tim Dallons, had recently tried to kill himself over a bad case and I took a reassignment to sex crimes. I just had to get out of homicide, take a break from it. And then this case comes along, weirdest fuc— sorry." Wa smiled awkwardly and continued. "The weirdest case I've ever been involved with. This guy, his name was Edward Carter, starts raping women and..." Wa's voice trailed off. The pastor had gone pale at the mention of Edward Carter's name. "You okay, Pastor Wrightland?"

He recovered quickly. "Sorry, blood pressure's acting up and I keep having these spells. What were you saying?"

Wa continued, unconvinced. "Have you heard of Edward Carter? He was the guy who raped women and left them crazy. It was a terrible case, virtually impossible to solve because none of the victims could give coherent statements after the fact. They were literally insane after the rapes. We had nothing."

Pastor Wrightland's jaw was clenched tightly. "I know the case," he said

quietly. "It was awful." His eyes filled with tears. "How many victims were there?"

Wa didn't answer immediately. He watched the pastor carefully, trying to decide if it was really okay to talk about these things.

Gary reached out and put a hand on Wa's shoulder. "It's okay to talk about it. I want to hear what you have to tell me. I've heard and seen many horrible things in my time so don't worry about offending me."

The pastor's warm hand on his shoulder made Wa flinch, but he quickly relaxed. He looked at Gary's sincere face. "Okay, thanks. I guess we knew of eight official cases of rape. There was another girl, a young girl, that he held hostage and killed—" Wa stopped and closed his eyes. Memories flashed through him, pounded through him. His stomach twisted. He could see the face of the sixteen-year-old Tammy Farrell as clearly as though she was standing in front of him. But the image he saw was a distorted, horrible image of a pale, terrified girl whose complexion bore the telltale blue tint of strangulation. He saw a vision of a crumpled, dead girl in varying stages of undress. His stomach clenched hard again and he grunted. He tried to pry his eyes open but the image was still strong. He moved around her body, taking it in from every angle. His eyes searched her face, neck, breasts, stomach. He could see himself on top of her. He could feel himself easing down onto her, having sex with her.

"SERGEANT WA!" a voice interrupted.

His eyes bolted open and the pastor was crouching in front of him, staring into his face. "Are you okay, Sergeant?"

"What?" Wa said weakly.

"You zoned out on me there. I thought you were having an attack."

"An attack? No."

"Is there a history of epilepsy in your family?"

"No, why?"

"You really spaced out for a second there. It took a little while for me to get through to you."

"I'm sorry. I should go." Wa stood.

"You're not going anywhere," the pastor said firmly. "Sit."

"No, I need to get back..." Wa paused. He was going to say to work, but he remembered he was on suspension. He sat.

"Good. Now what were you saying about the victims?"

"Listen, this isn't a good idea. I don't know what I was thinking. I don't know what I expect you to say. It's stupid."

"Something inside you pointed you in this direction. Something inside you told you to seek answers here, in the house of God. There's nothing 'stupid' about that."

Wa nodded.

“So tell me what you were going to tell me about the girl. It obviously affected you deeply.”

“The girl,” Wa said in resignation. “The girl was Tammy Farrell. A perfectly innocent sixteen-year-old girl whose greatest sin was living in a new development near the mental hospital.”

Gary frowned. “Mental hospital?”

“The Maximum Security Psychiatric Centre. That’s where Edward Carter ended up after we caught him. The courts sent him there for a psychiatric evaluation. I guess the guy was some kind of paranoid schizophrenic.”

“And at the time Edward was the suspect in those rapes?” Gary tried to clarify.

“Oh, right, sorry. Yes we were pretty sure Edward Carter was the guy. But after he got remanded to the MSPC, staff there started to go nuts. Then, to make matters worse, all hell broke loose at the hospital and Edward escaped.”

“Sounds like science fiction.”

“It seemed like science fiction at the time. I didn’t believe the stories myself but the MSPC brought in the famous Dr. Michael Wenton. He’s a criminal psychologist. Have you heard of him?”

“I think so.”

“Doesn’t matter. Wenton came on the scene and started talking all this crap about how Edward has the ability to draw evil out of people, that he had the power to make them go insane. When the press got wind of that, they went nuts, and pretty soon it was difficult to get people to help with the manhunt.”

“Because no one wanted to go insane,” Gary finished.

“Exactly. You must have read some of this in the newspaper.”

“Yes, it sounds familiar.”

“So to make a long story short, I got authorization to bring back my old partner, Tim Dallons, to help with the case. Wenton said there was something about a guy like Dallons that might make him immune to Edward.

“All the while this is going on, my wife was urging me to take it easy, stay away from Edward, blah, blah. And I kept telling her ‘it’s my job’ but she was worried anyway. I guess I was taking the case pretty seriously, but then it was serious.

“So it all ended up going to hell. Edward kidnapped this kid, Tammy, and held her in a house under construction. We couldn’t establish contact with her and eventually ended up sending Dallons and Wenton into the house. I’d never do that again.”

Wa paused. He was obviously running through the events of that evening. Gary gave him time.

He eventually continued. "So when Wenton and Dallons came out of the house the girl was dead, Edward was dead."

"They shot him?"

"Nope, they claim he was dead when they found him. Suicide."

"Claim? You don't believe them?"

"Well, yeah. There was—" Wa stopped. A different expression moved over him: he was suddenly more serious, professional. "Listen, some of this is confidential police info. This isn't going anywhere outside this room, is it?"

"It's just you and me," Gary assured him. "I have some pretty strict rules around confidentiality with the parishioners."

Wa considered the pastor's words for a moment. "Okay. So, there was quite a bit of mystery over exactly what happened when Dallons and Wenton went in the house. The time of death of the victim and subject don't match up very well. And Wenton wouldn't talk. Dallons wouldn't talk. They each gave some bullshit, superficial story. No one knows what exactly happened."

"So you think something happened? Something bad?"

"Well let me put it this way. Dallons wouldn't tell us exactly what happened—that was pretty obvious from my meetings with him immediately after. There's a chance he didn't know himself. But less than a week after the incident, Dallons killed himself."

"Oh, I'm so sorry."

Wa shrugged again. "I am too. It was a real waste, but he never really recovered from his wife committing suicide years before."

"Oh no," Gary said in sympathy.

"So, there was all this going on, and I went to Dr. Wenton's apartment to get some answers. The whole case was messed up from the start, and I couldn't let it go with all these unanswered questions.

"Wenton played with me. He didn't answer any questions. He talked in riddles. He told me that Edward's power was in forcing people to confront evil." Wa noticed Gary sit up. "Yeah, he said that Edward Carter somehow forced people to see inside themselves, see their darkest moment or their worst side or something. If the person could accept what they found, it would taint them but they wouldn't go insane. If the person tried to fight it, tried to deny the evil, then they'd be driven to insanity."

"That's quite the theory."

"Isn't it?"

"How did Edward force people to confront their own evil?"

“I don’t know. I don’t know anything more about it except that Wenton told me I was in too deep. He said Edward was inside me too. He said I didn’t keep enough separation between myself and the case, and that it infected me or something.”

“Kind of an evil by association?” Gary asked without any trace of sarcasm.

Wa nodded. “I guess.”

“Did you believe him?”

“No. Not right away.”

Gary waited for Wa to continue. He gave him the luxury of silence to compose his thoughts.

“But I did change. I was so angry about the case and that started to spill into everything I did. It came out in my relationship with Gloria and the kids. It came out at work. Just about everything started to go to hell for me.”

“It got to be pretty hard, eh?”

“I couldn’t even think straight. I started having strange thoughts. Weird, awful stuff that I never thought about before. Stuff I don’t even want to say to you.” He looked at the pastor for assurance.

“That’s okay. Tell me what you can.”

“There were suddenly weird things in my head. Sexual things. Violent stuff. It didn’t feel like my own thinking. I felt, I don’t know, I guess, infected. I felt like Wenton was right, that the evil had gotten inside me.”

Gary raised an eyebrow. “The evil had gotten ‘inside you’? Do you still feel it there?”

“Yeah.”

“Has anyone around you been affected by the evil you feel inside you?” Gary asked.

“I think so. I think it was really hard on my wife. Gloria and I are separated now.”

“I’m very sorry to hear that,” the pastor said, almost absent-mindedly.

“That’s why I’m here. I guess I was wondering about evil ‘infecting’ people. I know that sounds lame, but I don’t know what else to call it.”

Wa waited for the pastor to respond. He seemed distracted.

“I suppose I sound a little crazy, eh?” Wa offered. “People can’t have their minds ‘infected’ by something like this.”

Gary sighed as though he were debating what to say next. “Well that all depends on what you mean by infected.”

“What’s that mean? Are you saying that evil *can* infect people?”

“I’m not sure but it isn’t impossible. There’s a scientific basis.”

“What?”

Gary shrugged and stood. He paced behind his chair and then turned back. "I'm going to tell you a story and you make up your own mind."

This page intentionally left blank

TWENTY-NINE

Marion Cloutier absolutely hated confrontation. Some of the other secretaries teased her about this dislike of hers and often used it against her, like now.

She was walking through the hallway of the psychology department towards Wenton's office. She was trying to keep her breathing slow and easy, but every once in a while she caught herself sucking in a breath and holding it. She wasn't good with tension.

The police department had been trying, unsuccessfully, to get in touch with Wenton for the better part of the morning. They told Marion there was no answer at his residence and that repeated calls to his office went unanswered, a fact she'd verified herself earlier that morning. To make matters worse, she knew Wenton refused to have answering machines on either line, which annoyed Marion a little. She thought it was somehow unprofessional.

The police had an urgent message to get to Dr. Wenton and finally asked someone to go to his office in person to confirm whether he was in or not. Marion held the master key in her left hand. Her sweaty grip would leave a perfect indent of the key on her fingers.

It wasn't unusual for Wenton to keep an unusual schedule and make himself unavailable. Students were constantly frustrated in their attempts to arrange meetings with him. Besides, given the rumours of the current inquiry into his misconduct with a graduate student, Marion wasn't at all surprised that Dr. Wenton had all but disappeared. If the rumours about that poor graduate student were true, she'd be happy if Wenton never showed his face in the department again.

But even with all the rumours she was surprised by one thing. According to the police, Wenton wasn't answering his emergency pager. His normal prompt to his pager response was one of the few things that people could

rely on him for. Like him or not, he seemed to do what needed to be done.

Marion finally arrived at Wenton's office door. She took another long, slow breath and knocked on the door. As she knocked she called out in a shaky voice, "Dr. Wenton? This is Marion. I have an urgent message from the police."

She was sure he wasn't there but knocked again, a little harder. "Dr. Wenton?"

She opened her left hand and peeled the master key out of her moist palm, ready to check his office. She knew the other girls were probably in the main office laughing their heads off about sending her out to do this. *Those bitches!*

She lined the key up with the knob and was about to insert it when the door was roughly pulled open.

Marion let loose a little yelp and stepped back. Wenton's large figure stood, framed in the doorway.

"What?" Wenton barked.

It took her a second to gain her composure but she finally spoke. "The police are looking for you. They need to get a message to you."

"I'm busy," he said flatly and started to close the door.

She moved forward and put a hand on the door, a move that surprised even her. "No, wait. I just need to pass the message on."

Wenton stepped out of the office pulling the door partially closed behind. "So tell me."

Marion noticed that he was consciously not letting her see into the office. She wanted to lean over, see what was going on, but it would be too obvious. "Um, the police said that they have someone in custody and need to talk to you."

"What? You interrupted me for that?" Wenton said in obvious disgust. He turned to go back into his office just as his office phone began to ring.

"No!" she shouted. "They wanted me to tell you that they have Dr. Brian Claric in custody. He's the one who was arrested last night."

Wenton stopped without turning around. "Claric?"

"Yes, they said that he was arrested at some drug company office downtown and they—"

"He can rot." Wenton shook his head.

"He's been charged with murder."

Wenton turned back to Marion letting the door swing open a little more. This time Marion could see into the office and saw Norma MacDonald standing at Wenton's desk, talking on the phone. *What's she doing here?* She tried not to look shocked as she straightened to face Wenton again.

"Murder?" he asked.

“Yeah, they said he went yelling and screaming into the building and assaulted one of the staff there. Stabbed a guard with a kitchen knife. The person died in hospital this morning. It was actually on the news because— ”

“Thank you,” he said flatly and retreated into the office, shutting his door in Marion’s face.

For a moment, Marion stood motionless looking at the closed door. She was suddenly flooded with all kinds of emotions. She was glad her exchange with Wenton was over and she’d passed the message on. She was angry that he was so rude to her. She was shocked that Norma MacDonald was sitting in his office. She finally decided what she needed to do. She lifted her hand and slowly raised her middle finger at the closed door.

This page intentionally left blank

The pastor leaned on the back of his chair and watched Wa as he spoke. “I went to seminary with a real interesting character, a guy named Nicholas Stangos. We were basically best friends for the first three years. Yes sir, Nick was quite the character.

“Anyway, Nick did an undergrad degree in physics before he entered seminary and he often talked about a biological basis to religion. He was quite taken with the idea.”

“A biological basis?”

“Right. He believed that religion originates from a specific spot in the brain. Nick thought people might be hard-wired to believe in God.”

“Okay,” Wa said slowly, unable to hide his skepticism.

“So Nick shows me this research paper one day. I don’t remember who wrote it but the article was fascinating. It described strange religious experiences that epileptics often had during seizures. Essentially, the article made an argument for a specific neurological basis for religion.” He nodded as though this finding should impress Wa. It didn’t.

“Anyway,” Gary continued. “Nick also showed me a few articles about MRI studies of religious fanatics. Apparently, highly religious people show increased activity in the temporal lobes—a finding that supports the paper on epileptics.

“So he was completely obsessed with this stuff. I admit that I found it interesting too, but Nick was positive that he could somehow use this research to find a way to stimulate the temporal lobes in exactly the right way to make a person more open to God, to convert them to Christianity. In theory, it made sense.”

“And how does somebody ‘stimulate the temporal lobes?’” Wa asked

“That’s the thing,” Gary snapped back excitedly. “When Nick did his undergrad he briefly worked in a lab where they were experimenting with

extremely low frequency beams. These beams vibrated at such low frequencies that they could effectively cross cellular barriers and cause excitation, you know, make the cells become active.”

“So this Nick guy thought he could build a ray gun and zap people to make them convert?”

Gary smiled. “That’s right. More or less.”

“What’s that got to do with what I told you?”

“Maybe quite a bit.” He raised an eyebrow. “Don’t you see? Nick thought he could use a machine to excite the very neurological structure that makes a person believe in God. He thought he could artificially increase a person’s faith.”

“Yeah.”

“So maybe the opposite is true too.”

“What? That you could make a person open to evil, to the devil.”

Gary shrugged. “It’s a simple corollary. Once a door is open—it’s open.”

“So someone zapped me with something.”

“I don’t know if ‘zapped’ is the right word. I’m not even sure this has anything to do with your problems, but I’m just saying that being infected with evil might have a basis in reality.”

Wa let that sink in before he spoke again. “So what happened to this Nick Stangos guy?”

“Oh, Nick,” Gary said. “I really don’t know. I was leaving on a trip to Qumran in the Judean desert for a grad school expedition, and about a week before I left, Nick was kicked out of seminary.”

“Wait a minute, did you say Qumran?”

The pastor looked startled. “Yes.”

Wa’s voice shook. “What’s Qumran?”

“Qumran?” The pastor was still confused by the sudden shift. “Nothing. Don’t worry about it. Just some stuffy biblical thing.”

“I’ve heard that word before. A couple of times when I thought I was hallucinating or something. It’s so bizarre to hear you say it. What is it?”

“You hallucinated and heard ‘Qumran?’”

“Yeah, I guess. What is it?”

Gary didn’t respond right away. He was obviously weighing this all out in his mind. Finally he spoke in a careful, almost rehearsed way. “I guess it couldn’t hurt to give you the academic thirty-second talk.” He smiled awkwardly. “The Qumran ruins are a series of structures near the site where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered.”

“The Dead Sea Scrolls. I’ve heard of them. That’s where the Bible comes from?”

Gary shook his head. “Not really. The Scrolls weren’t discovered until

1947 and only then by accident. A young Bedouin shepherd, searching for a stray in the Judean desert, entered a cave and found jars filled with scrolls. At that time there were only seven scrolls, but over the course of almost a decade of excavation, thousands of scroll fragments were found from eleven different caves in the area.”

“So the Scrolls were copies of the Bible?”

“Well, yes and no. Some of the jars definitely contained early versions of the Bible—very early versions. The Qumran site and the Scroll Jars have been dated to almost the exact time of Jesus Christ. These are the earliest biblical writings ever discovered. Some suggest that the writings may have been by Jesus and the twelve disciples themselves that were inspired directly by God.

The unfortunate part is that only bits and pieces of the Scrolls could be recovered. The centuries that passed took a heavy toll.”

Wa grunted. “That doesn’t explain why I heard the word ‘Qumran.’ What’s that got to do with anything?”

“I don’t think I’m the person to help you with that.”

Wa shook his head. “Let’s get back to what you were saying before. You said this Nick character was kicked out of seminary?”

The pastor nodded. “Right. I guess the administration got wind of his secret experiments with the extreme low frequency beams and shut him down. It was considered a major breach of ethics.”

“So he actually had some kind of weapon to test?”

“Well, sort of. I think I’m the only person he ever actually used it on. He was caught trying to get other volunteers.”

“He tried the thing on you?”

Gary smiled. “Yes.”

Wa shrugged. “Did it do anything?”

“I’m still here, aren’t I?”

Wa nodded. “That’s quite the story, pastor. Quite the story.”

“What should I do then?” Wa finally asked. “I mean if something really is screwed up in my head.”

The pastor pulled in a deep breath. “You need to talk to a professional.”

Wa nodded. It was last thing he wanted to do and yet it was what he expected right from the start. He needed to talk to someone and he knew exactly who that was going to be. There was only one choice. There was only one person common to all of the pain and suffering. He stood to leave.

“Oh, can I get your number? Just in case I think of something else,” Gary asked.

Wa quickly gave him his cell phone number. He was eager to leave. Wa thanked the pastor for the help and headed back to his car.

Sitting inside his Saturn, Wa pulled his phone out and dialed a number. The phone had just started to ring as he drove out of the church parking lot.

Pastor Wrightland stood in the doorway of the church and watched Wa go. He was focused so intently that his eyes didn't even blink. He kept watching until long after there was nothing to see.

THIRTY-ONE

“I’m sorry, Norma,” Wenton said as he returned to a chair next to her. He hoped that Marion hadn’t seen Norma in his office.

“Did you answer my phone?” he asked.

Norma looked to the phone on the desk and nodded.

Wenton was not happy about that. “Who called?”

She licked her lips before responding, something Wenton found quite distracting. “Some cop named Wa. He wants to talk to you tonight at the Fireside Room.”

“Is that all he said?”

Norma stared at him blankly.

“What’s the matter?”

She shook her head. “Nothing.”

She’s acting so fuckin’ weird, Wenton thought. *Fuck.* He’d called her there to see if he could persuade her to drop the academic misconduct charges against him. It didn’t look promising. He decided to try a new tact.

“Norma,” Wenton urged, “I’m so sorry about the other night. I’m under so much stress with everything. I literally had some kind of breakdown. It won’t happen again.”

“Oh,” she said solemnly and looked away from him. She obviously had no intention of making anything easy for him.

“Can’t we try again?” Wenton urged.

She didn’t answer.

Wenton leaned closer. “Norma?” *Answer me you bitch.*

Suddenly her eyes flooded with tears. “Back away. Please.” She stood and stepped away from him.

What’s up with her? “Don’t be like that. We need to be professional. I

really want to work with you.”

“Please,” she said, covering her eyes. “I’m dirty.” She didn’t want to look at him again. “I should go.”

“Norma,” Wenton barked. “What’s the matter with you?”

“I don’t know,” she said, genuinely confused.

“Look, you’re not dirty. You’re the first graduate student I’ve worked with because I see more talent in you than any other student that’s come through here. I want to help you reach your potential.” He smiled harder realizing that this practiced expression was the same one he used when he told an offender that he’d never betray their trust. *Idiots*.

“You don’t mean that,” she said quietly.

“I do,” he said, giving her a pat on the shoulder. “So let’s stop this foolishness and start talking about what mind-blowing research we’re going to do together. You can just drop all the silly complaints.”

“Okay,” she said softly. She didn’t want to give in, but it was so easy. She couldn’t think clearly, and Wenton seemed reasonable now. He thought she was smart, and she wanted to believe him so badly.

THIRTY-TWO

“So why’d you call me here?” Wenton asked caustically as he took a seat across from Mitchell Wa at the Fireside Room just off Spring Garden Road near the courthouse. The bar generally attracted a quieter, older crowd, which allowed the patrons more of a chance to talk. It was a comfortable, dark place full of leather booths and wooden bar stools. The narrow pub stretched back into a swirl of smoke where Wa had selected a table as far away from the busy bar as possible.

“I wanted to ask you something,” Wa began.

Wenton nodded, “About Brian Claric?”

“No. Why?”

“Never mind.” Wenton dismissed the question with a wave of his hand.

A waitress appeared next to their booth, and they each ordered a Clancy’s on tap.

“So what do you want?” Wenton asked.

Wa took a breath before he began. “When I saw you a few days ago you were asking some strange questions. You wanted to know if Edward Carter had changed me, if things were different now. You said you had a new theory on how Carter could get inside people, that there was still something going on even though Edward was dead. Why’d you say that? Did it have something to do with this Claric guy?”

Wenton shrugged. “I don’t know. Forget about it.”

“I can’t do that.”

“What’s your problem? You told me you were suspended or something,” said Wenton.

“Yeah, I beat up a suspect. A pedophile. I was checking him out for an offense against a young boy in Dartmouth.”

“Who was the suspect? I’ve worked the sex offender programs. I know most of sex offenders in the area.”

Wa knew it was a breach of police protocol to name a suspect in an investigation. “Terry Messier.” It didn’t seem to matter anymore, nothing did.

Wenton laughed, a little snort. “He’s an asshole.”

“Yeah.”

“So what’d he do? Why’d you beat him up?”

Wa paused. He didn’t know if he was ready to tell Wenton everything.

“I was interviewing Messier, trying to get some information on the recent offense. He wasn’t being cooperative, which didn’t surprise anyone. Well, part way through I look up and who do I see across the table? Edward Carter. I swear I looked up and suddenly Edward was sitting there, grinning at me. He started talking all sorts of shit about my family and I just lost it. When the other cops finally pulled me off the guy it wasn’t Edward anymore. It was Messier.”

Wenton threw his head back, “Oh man. Un-fucking-believable!”

The waitress arrived back at their booth holding their frosted mugs. As she set the mugs down, Wenton took a long look down her loose blouse.

“Wenton. This isn’t a joke. I’ve felt different since all the Edward Carter shit happened. I went and talked to a pastor today and—”

“You went where? This is getting *religious* now?”

“The pastor told me about a friend he had at the seminary who believed that religious experiences could be enhanced with some kind of weapon. He was developing one of these weapons.

“Come on,” Wenton interrupted. “This is getting ridiculous. You sound like Brian Claric.”

“Why? What’s he saying?”

“Brian’s gone insane. He got caught up in the stories of the mental patients and now he believes ECOR Pharmaceutical is targeting him with electromagnetic weapons that make people insane. He thinks there’s a whole conspiracy of illegal experimentation against the unsuspecting citizens of Halifax.”

“Why is that any more crazy than Edward Carter creating insanity?” Wa asked, almost innocently. “You’re the one who said that I was in too deep, that the evil was going to get me.”

“I’m pretty sure I wouldn’t say ‘the evil is gonna get you.’”

“Whatever. You know something strange happened with the Carter case. Something happened in the house when you and Dallons found him. Edward was different—an anomaly or something. He fucked people up, permanently. He did something to me and I think he did something to you. There was something about Edward Carter that had the power to change people—even change you.”

Wenton knew Wa was right. He remembered sitting across the table from Carter in the MSPC and feeling the strange power at work. Wenton had watched Edward's features shift and change, as he tried the ugly look that would affect Wenton the most.

Wenton chose to ignore the argument. "What do you want from me?"

"I don't know. I figured you'd be the only one who'd understand what was going on. You're the only one who can really appreciate what I'm talking about."

"What *are* you talking about?"

"I think Edward Carter was evil. I think that he was pure evil and that he somehow infected me. I don't know if I let him infect me, or if I didn't have a choice, but I know that I was changed by my involvement in that case. I think you probably were too. I know it killed Dallons."

Wenton snorted. "Dallons was on his way out anyway."

"Dallons," he snapped back, "was a good and decent man. He didn't deserve what happened to him."

"And you don't deserve this either, I suppose."

"As a matter of fact, I don't."

"What about me?"

"I don't know shit about you."

Wenton smiled. "Don't know? Or don't care?"

"I'm not here to play games with you. Carter left a mark on people that made them act differently, worse. I want that mark off me. I want to reverse the infection that Edward left in me."

"Left a mark?" Wenton said, smirking. He couldn't help himself.

"Fuck you," Wa shot back and stood. "I'm leaving."

"Hold on there," Wenton said quickly, raising both hands. "Have a seat."

Wa stopped, half-standing. "What?"

"You have to admit it sounds crazy."

Wa dropped back into his seat. "This whole thing has sounded crazy since it all began."

Wenton nodded. "So what's the experiment that your priest was talking about?"

"It was a pastor. Lutheran. Gary Wrightland."

Wenton shrugged.

Wa ignored the gesture and filled him in on some of what he and Pastor Wrightland had discussed earlier. He told Wenton about epileptic seizures and religious experience and about the research into extremely low frequency beams.

Wenton smiled. "So some pastor tells you this crap and suddenly you think you've been zapped? This is the stuff of delusions, a mental patient's

fantasy. You and your priest ought to get together with Claric—you guys would love each other. You should all go down to ECOR Pharmaceuticals.”

“Why does this Brian Claric guy think it’s ECOR?” Wa asked.

“A couple of clients at the MSPC told stories about being zapped by electronic weapons and one of them said it was ECOR behind the conspiracy. Mind you, this information came from a disgruntled ex-employee of ECOR.”

“And you think that’s all bullshit?” Wa asked, more of a rhetorical question.

Wenton shrugged. “Claric said there were a lot of Web sites devoted to the topic. I checked it out. He’s right. It seems like some of it is legit. There might be weapons around. Probably the military is playing with them. I guess I just found it hard to believe that a major company would run a secret experiment just to make a bunch of random people crazy. How much money can that make?”

“But it’s plausible. Is that what you’re saying?” Wa asked, the concern evident on his face.

“Anything’s possible,” Wenton answered without conviction.

Wa looked away from him, deep in thought. “I’m going to ECOR Pharmaceuticals,” he finally announced.

“Oh fuck,” Wenton moaned. “Here we go again.”

Wa’s expression was steel. “And you’re going with me. It’s time for some fuckin’ answers.”

THIRTY-THREE

“Better keep an eye on that one,” Eric said as he took a seat next to his fellow correctional worker, Bob.

“Who, the shrink?” Bob said, not looking away from his newspaper. The two men were inside an octagonal office in the correctional centre. From this control station they could see down four different corridors to the rows of cells. The border of the small room was littered with switches, monitors and intercoms.

“Yeah, he’s pacing the cell back there, mumbling shit. He’s not looking real good.”

Bob laughed. “Gotta be some paradox here somewhere. A shrink going crazy.”

“Irony,” Eric corrected.

“What?”

“The shrink going crazy. That’s irony. Not a paradox.”

Bob frowned and waved Eric away with the back of his hand. “Fuck you.”



No. No. No. No. I can't be here. I can't be here. This isn't real. This isn't me. I need to get out of here. I can't be here.

Claric stepped quickly to one side of his cell. He was tempted to scream out through the bars, get the attention of the guard who just walked past. He wanted to explain that he wasn't crazy, that there really *was* something going on, but he didn't know how he could explain that without looking crazy. He moved away from the bars and paced back to the small sink.

What do I do? What do I do? They must know I'm here now. I'm a sitting duck. I can't stay here. If they want to finish the job up, zap me again,

I can't protect myself. I can't protect myself in here. There's nowhere to go. I need to go. I need to go. I need to get out of here.

He stepped back to the bars and held them in his hands, pressing his forehead against the cold metal. "HEY! HEY! YOU CAN'T KEEP ME HERE. I NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE! THEY'LL KNOW I'M HERE. IT KNOWS I'M HERE! I CAN'T LET..." His voice drifted off. He didn't want to say too much. He knew he needed to be careful about his exact words.

Think. Think. Think. Don't come apart now.

Dr. Claric stepped away from the bars and looked around his small cell. The eight-by-eight room had a small bunk, a sink and a toilet without a seat. He moved back to the bed and sat on the thin sheet. He began to bounce his legs as soon as he was seated, and folded his arms and then unfolded them. His head turned quickly and he looked at the flat pillow at the top of the bunk.

I should lie down. I should sleep. I should rest. I can't rest, though. What would happen? I might not wake up. I don't know where they are. I can't do that. I need to go. I can't stay here. It's crazy. This is crazy. This can't be real. Someone should know what's going on. Somebody should just step up and say. Someone needs to explain it. Tell them. I can't be the only one!

He stood and moved quickly to the bars of his cell. "HEY! HEY! I NEED TO TALK. I HAVE TO TELL YOU SOMETHING! YOU HAVE TO HELP ME! I CAN'T STAY HERE. THEY CAN FIND ME. IT KNOWS WHERE I AM. THEY'LL FINISH ME. THEY'RE TRYING TO DRIVE ME CRAZY!"

"HEY BUDDY!" a voice sounded from the cell next to him. "I got news for you. You're already a fucking lunatic so shut the fuck up."

"YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!" Dr. Claric screamed, tears flooding his eyes. "I know what they're doing. I know what's happening. I know." His hands dropped from the bars and he stood motionless.

I know what they're doing. I know who he is. After all these centuries, he's returned, and we're all going to die.

THIRTY-FOUR

Michael Wenton and Mitchell Wa walked slowly towards the information desk in the lobby of ECOR Pharmaceuticals. Wenton looked at Wa.

“You tense?”

Wa looked at him as both men continued to walk. “Why?”

“Aren’t you suspended right now? Technically, you have no right to be here. You might be fuckin’ up an official police investigation.”

Wa looked away from him. “Don’t play games with me.”

Wenton snorted. “This Edward Carter shit has really fucked you up. The old Wa would never have taken a risk like this.”

“You might be right. I am a different person,” Wa answered with no trace of sarcasm. “And that’s why I’m here. I need to find the old Mitchell Wa.”

As they stepped to the desk a security guard looked up from his computer. “Can I help you?”

Wa flashed his police ID. “We’re here to follow up on recent events. We’d like to talk to Mr. Mettincourt.”

The guard didn’t seem surprised and looked away from them as he began tapping on his keyboard. “It’s Dr. Mettincourt actually. Do you have an appointment?”

“Is he in the building?” Wa said abruptly enough to snap the man’s eyes off the computer screen.

“Yes, I was just checking his scheduled meet—”

“Then we have an appointment,” Wa said firmly.

“Yes, well, Dr. Mettincourt is quite busy, and although we want to provide complete assistance to the police on— ”

“What’s your name?” Wa barked and pulled a police notepad out of the inside of his sport coat, flipping it open.

“I’m sorry?” the security guard said, looking from Wa to Wenton,

hoping to find an explanation for the question. Wenton looked away from him.

“What is your name?” Wa said slowly and evenly. “And you better spell it so I make sure I get it right.”

Two more security guards were standing at the other end of the desk. They perked up and watched intently.

“I... My name’s William... Look, I’m just doing my job here. I don’t want any trouble.”

Wa leaned over the desk and spoke directly into the man’s face. “No. You aren’t ‘just doing your job.’ You’re fuckin’ with us. You think you can jerk us around and then maybe we’ll leave. Well, I’ll tell you what. You pick up that fuckin’ phone right now and use your stubby little Neanderthal fingers to punch in Mettincourt’s number. Got it? And you tell Mettincourt to cancel his appointments for the rest of the afternoon.”

The officer looked from Wa to Wenton, trying to judge the situation. He picked up a phone and tapped a number. He turned away from them and spoke softly but urgently. When he finished, he hung up the phone and looked back to them. “Debra, his receptionist, will be down immediately. She’ll escort you up. I’m sorry for the delay.”

“Fine,” Wa said flatly and flipped his notepad shut, tucking it back into his jacket. He and Wenton headed towards the elevator corridor.

Once they were out of earshot of the officer Wenton smiled. “Well done.”

“Don’t piss me off, Wenton,” he warned.

They only waited a few minutes before an immaculately dressed woman in high heels stepped off an elevator and walked purposefully towards them. The intensity of her stride and her unwavering eyes were suspicious. In the continuous movement of people in and out of ECOR, this person knew exactly who she was looking for. Wenton casually looked up to the high ceilings and nodded at the elaborate array of video cameras. The woman must have been watching them already.

“Gentlemen,” she said as a broad smile swept over her. “I’m Debra Wilson, Dr. Mettincourt’s personal assistant.”

Wa took her hand. “I’m Sergeant Wa and this is Dr. Wenton.”

She paused, her hand still in Wa’s. “Dr. Wenton? I see.” She released Wa and took Wenton’s hand in her firm grip.

Wenton nodded. His eyes quickly darted past her tight blouse to her gunmetal gray skirt as she released his hand.

“Follow me, gentlemen.” She whirled and strode back to the elevators.

The two men followed behind and Wenton leaned to Wa. “We’re sup-

posed to be impressed. All the formality and power.”

Wa ignored him and they all stepped into a waiting elevator.



Debra led them to the top floor of ECOR. Outside the elevator, they found themselves in an enclosed security alcove with one door off each side. She took them quickly through the Plexiglas door on the right and down a corridor to a small reception area. In the back of this area was an immense set of double doors. She motioned for them to wait as she stepped behind her desk and pressed a button. Her attention suggested she was reading a display on her intercom. She must have got the “green light” to bring them in. She swept out from her desk and opened both doors with a flourish.

“Dr. Mettincourt, this is Sergeant Wa and Dr. Wenton.”

The inner office was magnificent. Vaulted ceilings, dark wood furniture, and an aged leather couch against one wall. A bookcase stretched to the ceiling, filling another wall completely. Dr. Travis Mettincourt was seated behind a massive mahogany desk, his back to a wall of windows that overlooked the city. The size of the room gave the illusion that his desk was not grossly oversized but Mettincourt’s short, squat frame confirmed it. He stood, pressing his leather office chair back and motioned dramatically with both hands.

“Welcome. Please come in. Have a seat.”

They entered the room and moved towards the half circle of chairs facing the desk. As they moved, Wenton took the opportunity to scan the ceiling and bookcase for cameras. None were visible.

“Thank you Debra,” Mettincourt announced and sat back in his chair. The doors creaked as she exited.

Mettincourt examined both men carefully before he spoke again. He focused on Wa.

“You must be Sergeant Mitchell Wa,” he announced.

Wa nodded.

“Which means you’re the great Dr. Wenton,” he almost laughed. “At last we meet.”

Wenton hated Mettincourt instantly. “Do you know me?”

“I know *of* you,” he said, smiling again.

“Good for you,” Wenton said with disdain.

“Dr. Mettincourt,” Wa interrupted, “We really need to discuss a few things, clear up a few questions.”

“Yes, yes,” Mettincourt said quickly, dismissing Wa without shifting his

attention from Wenton. “I’m sure you’re full of questions.”

“This is a serious matter,” Wa said more sharply. “I’d appreciate your cooperation.”

Mettincourt continued to ignore him, choosing to focus on Wenton. “How’s the university, professor?”

Wenton was about to respond when Wa cut him off. “Listen. This is a police investigation and if you’d rather go down to the station and discuss it I’m sure we can arrange that.”

Mettincourt finally turned back to Wa. “Is that right?” he asked in mock concern. “You’d actually arrest me and take me to the *station*?”

“Obstruction of justice is a serious offense.”

“Well then, you better slap the cuffs on me, Sergeant.” He held his wrists out to Wa.

“He knows you’re suspended,” Wenton said quietly.

Mettincourt eased back into his chair, unable to take the grin off his face.

Wa turned on Wenton. “What the fuck are you talking about?”

“Mettincourt knows you’re suspended from active duty,” Wenton said evenly. “And he knows about my problems at the university.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Wa said in disbelief.

“Your lack of higher education must prevent you from seeing the obvious,” Mettincourt sneered at Wa. “What Dr. Wenton is telling you is that I know that you’re suspended from the police. You beat up a suspect—a big no-no. I know that you have no legal right to be sitting in my office right now. I know that if I called the police superintendent, one of my closest friends, and said you were posing as a sergeant on a real investigation, that you’d have some trouble keeping your job.”

“How the fuck do you know anything about that?”

“Oh, I know lots of things,” he grinned.

“You’re a pretty smart guy, *Travis*,” Wenton said. “Probably so smart that you aren’t likely to report this meeting to anyone outside of ECOR, eh? I don’t imagine you want a lot of attention on your company right now.”

He turned to Wenton. “What makes you think that?”

“What did you do to Barry Boseman?”

Mettincourt laughed out loud. “That useless guy? He’d only been here a few months. He was a jackass. Is that why you’re here?”

“I don’t care how long he’d been here,” Wa said. “He overheard you talking to someone about a secret *project*.”

“Secret project?” Mettincourt laughed. “What a bunch of bullshit. I think that’s all the time I’m going to waste on you two,” Mettincourt announced as he stood. “Get out of my office.” He pointed to the door.

"It won't end here," Wenton said quietly.

Mettincourt looked at him. "What's that?"

"We can leave but it won't end here. We want answers."

A smile spread back over Mettincourt's face. "Answers?" he said. "Try asking the right questions."

"Are you experimenting with electronic weapons designed to affect a person's thoughts?" Wa jumped in.

Mettincourt sat back into his chair. He spun his chair until his back was towards them and he looked out the windows behind him.

"What if we were?" he finally said.

Wa looked at Wenton as if to ask if it would be that easy.

Mettincourt continued, "What if we were designing and testing weapons designed to change the way a person thinks? What if we were using technology developed during testing on nuclear weapons? We might be trying to develop a new method of helping the most chronically ill psychiatric patients. What about it?"

"You can't do that," Wa yelled. "You can't play with a person's life. You can't just test people whenever you feel like it."

Mettincourt spun back around in his chair. "I never said we were testing anything. I said what if."

"Okay," Wenton said nodding. "I see the game. I get it. Why don't I try playing." He stood and screwed up his face as though he were really concentrating. Both Mettincourt and Wa watched in confusion as Wenton moved slowly around the big desk until he stood only a step or two behind Mettincourt. "*What if,*" he began, "I suddenly grab you around the neck and squeeze."

Mettincourt leaned forward quickly. "You stay away from me."

"I didn't say I was *going* to touch you," Wenton corrected. "I said what if."

"Get away from me," Mettincourt barked, still leaning forward unnaturally.

"Talk to us. Tell us what's going on here," Wa ordered, trying to keep Mettincourt off-balance.

"Get away from me."

"Is that a threat?" Wenton asked bringing his hands to his cheeks in mock fear.

"It's no threat," Mettincourt answered and finally pushed his chair away to stand. "It's definitely not a threat."

"What's your problem, Travis?" Wenton asked. "You got a small dick or something?"

"Get out of here."

“What’d you do to Boseman?” Wa pressed.

“Nothing!”

“What’d you do to him, Travis? What happened to Boseman?” Wenton spoke up from behind him.

“NOTHING! GET OUT!”

“What’d you do to Barry Boseman, Travis?” Wa asked again.

“You fuckin’ slimeball,” Wenton growled and threw an arm around Mettincourt’s neck, pulling the man backwards.

“Get off of me,” Mettincourt gasped and tried to pull Wenton’s arm off his neck. He was no match for the large psychologist.

“What the fuck are you doing Wenton?” Wa yelled in alarm. This was taking things too far and he wasn’t comfortable with it.

“Let me go. Let me go. Let me go!” Mettincourt said in a feverish panic.

“You fuckin’ pathetic little shit,” Wenton spat and threw the man roughly against the desk.

Sweat was pouring down Mettincourt’s chalk-white face.

“Talk. What’s ECOR doing?” Wenton demanded.

It was obvious that Mettincourt was trying to slow his breathing. He rested heavily against the corner of his desk. His eyes moved up to Wenton and back to his hands a few times. Finally he spoke.

“We just put up a Web site. It was just an experiment. It wasn’t anything. It wasn’t even my idea. I just made sure there was money.”

“What Web site?” Wa barked.

“The conspiracy stuff. The electronic weapons. It was just to see what would happen. It was just a fluke. It’s not illegal. It wasn’t even my idea.” His quavering voice betrayed how shaken up he’d been.

“A Web site?” Wa said and looked at Wenton for an explanation. Wenton shrugged.

“We wanted to see who logged on to the site and why—who knows, they could be prospective psychiatric patients, our future customers. I didn’t even think it would lead to anything.”

“You weren’t developing the weapons?” Wenton asked.

“Weapons?” he said in surprise. “Real electronic weapons?”

“Real fuckin’ weapons,” Wa said in disgust. “That’s right.”

Mettincourt laughed. “That’s why you’re here?”

Wenton moved out from behind the desk.

“We don’t need real weapons when we have the Web sites. We may have put up the first site, which we shut down, but the bogus research we posted has gone everywhere. Every second site quotes from some study we made up. The military, the university studies, everything.” He paused and looked straight at Wenton. “Did *you* believe the studies? I could understand the

Neanderthal cop, but you!”

“You’re saying that’s it?” Wenton asked. “That’s the only project?”

“You’ve just been funding Web sites on conspiracy?” Wa asked, almost rhetorically.

Mettincourt tapped his nose indicating Wa was correct.

“You said it wasn’t even your idea,” Wenton said. “What’d you mean by that?”

“Oh, nothing. The original idea came from someone in research. They got this whacked out guy to fill out the details of the studies, paid him in cash. I think his name was Nicholas Stangos.”

“Stangos?” Wa mumbled.

“Do you want his number?” Mettincourt asked.

Wenton waited for Wa to respond but he didn’t. He was staring into space. Wenton took over. “Get the number.”

Mettincourt buzzed his intercom and tapped something on a keyboard.

Wenton turned and frowned at Wa who was still distracted. “What’s your problem?” he asked quietly.

“Does that name ring a bell with you?”

“What name? Stangos?”

“Yeah.”

“No, why?”

“I’ve heard that name somewhere, recently.”

“You’re being psychotic. Snap out of—”

“No! That’s the guy. That’s the guy that went to seminary with Gary Wrightland. The guy that tested the low frequency weapons.” He got up and started towards the door.

“Gimme that fuckin’ number,” Wenton barked turning back to Mettincourt. *I want to get out of here before Wa freaks out.*

Mettincourt grinned and held out a piece of paper. “Right here. The address is there too. Why don’t you go by and see him?”

Wenton frowned. Mettincourt seemed oddly cooperative now. He turned to go and then thought of something else. “One other question: Does ECOR have any white vans?”

“Come on,” Wa called from the door.

Wenton held up a hand to silence Wa and continued to look at Mettincourt.

“White vans?” he said in surprise. “What do you mean?”

“Company vans,” Wenton said impatiently. “Does ECOR have any white vans?”

“All our vehicles are in the company colour: blue.”

Mettincourt didn’t move as he watched them go.



“What the fuck was that about?” Wenton asked once they were in the elevator heading down to the lobby.

“Stangos. Nick Stangos! He was a friend of the pastor I told you about. That was the guy. Remember?” Wa spoke so quickly Wenton found it hard to understand him.

“You sure? You sure it was Nicholas Stangos?”

“Positive. We have to find him. We have to talk to him.”

“Okay. Okay,” Wenton said in a patronizing way as though he were talking to an excited child. “First thing tomorrow we’ll pay him a visit.”

And then Wenton’s cell phone rang. He answered on the second ring.

“What?”

THIRTY-FIVE

“Dr. Wenton? It’s Norma. Can I talk to you?”

“No. Not now. It’s a bad time,” said Wenton.

“I need to talk to you. It’s pretty important.”

“I’m sure everything you do is really important,” he said flatly. “I’ll talk to you later.”

“You can’t treat me like that!” she blurted back. “What’s the matter with you?”

“Calm down,” he said and hung up.

Norma continued to hold the receiver to her ear until the dial tone stopped. She slowly lowered it back to the cradle—virtually in shock.

She stood and walked out of her tiny bedroom into the sparsely furnished living room. The small TV sat on an end table she’d bought at a garage sale. Her second-hand couch smelled of smoke, even though she had never been cursed with the habit. She reached down onto the floor and picked up her wine glass, taking a sip. *That asshole.*

If he thinks he can treat me like a dumb bitch and I won’t put up a fuss he’s wrong. Dead wrong. Pastor Wrightland was wrong—I never should have given him a second chance. She took another sip of her red wine but pulled the glass away too soon and a drop spilled down her chin. *Fuck!* The droplet wavered for a moment and then splashed onto her white shirt.

“Oh for goddamn sake!” she cried, leaping to her feet. She looked for somewhere to set her glass. The lack of furniture didn’t provide many options.

She headed into the kitchen at the back of the apartment, next to the door. The only division between living room and kitchen was where the vinyl met the hideous beige carpet.

Norma placed her glass on the counter by the sink and turned the tap on cold. There were no plates in the sink. Everything was in order. Norma

always kept order. The counter was virtually empty except for the immaculate stainless steel blender near the sink.

She leaned over the counter and scooped cold water onto the red stain. Slowly, the stain spread but retained its dark colour. She scooped more water but the stain stayed. She rested her elbows on the edge of the sink and slapped the tap off.

Norma stared at the stain. It was still spreading but it was taking on new characteristics. It had a pattern, a definition that was familiar. "What the hell?"

The pattern moved with life. It pulsed. It twisted. Norma gasped and held her breath. *This can't be happening.* She couldn't take her eyes away.

And then stain the took form: it was a picture of an animal. Her pet cat, Charming. *I really am losing it.*

Her mind flashed. She'd not even thought of her old cat for years. She had Prince Charming when she was eight years old. He'd been such a pleasant, easy-going cat. And then she remembered something else.

"Son of a bitch!" she screamed and stood. Because of the cramped kitchen she cracked the back of her head on the cupboard as she stood.

"Ow, ow, ow," she mumbled through gritted teeth and rubbed her head. She glanced back at the stain. It was now a horrible picture of a cat she'd killed as a child. Even though she'd loved Charming, she kicked him in a fit of rage one day after school. The cat had lived another week with internal bleeding that made him suffer horribly.

"This is crazy," she said out loud. *Michael Wenton is making me crazy. That's it. Screw him. Screw him and all this bullshit.*

Norma turned to leave the kitchen but suddenly her foot gave out and she stumbled. Her ankle rolled and sent shocks of white-hot pain up her leg. A taste of metal filled her mouth instantly as she toppled to the floor. Tears clouded her eyes as she rolled onto her side and gripped her ankle with both hands.

She wailed and rolled gently from side to side, trying to do something to ease the tremendous shooting pain. She was sure it was broken.

On the floor near her was a pair of shoes. She'd kicked them off when she'd arrived home, angry. She normally kept everything tucked away in the closet but her anger at Wenton and her haste to call him made her careless. *Fuckin' Michael Wenton!*

It took a few minutes but her breathing finally slowed, the taste of metal dissipated, and she found courage enough to try standing. As she did so she leaned heavily on the kitchen counter, trying to put most of her weight on the good foot. Blood rushed into her other ankle and she moaned loudly.

Every beat of her heart sent pulsing pain through her swelling ankle.

Norma didn't know if her ankle was really broken, but she knew she needed more wine. She thought she could almost feel the effects of her first few sips. She was already slightly dizzy. When she reached for the bottle, she heard a squeak. It was her hamster, Lady Tara. She kept the cage on one end of the kitchen counter.

Norma stared at the cage. It looked unfamiliar for a second and she shook her head to clear the strange sensation. "Maybe you're just what I need," she said quietly. "I think I forgot to feed you earlier because of all the crap going on. I'm so sorry, Lady."

She flipped the top up and reached in to give Lady Tara a quick pet. Lady nuzzled into her open palm and Norma scratched her neck and ears.

"I can still count on you, at least. Isn't that right Lady Tara? You're still my best friend. I'll get you something to eat."

She was about to pull her arm out when Lady Tara had twisted out of Norma's hand and bitten hard into the flesh between finger and thumb. With quick, deep bites, the hamster dug its teeth further back until its mouth bulged.

Norma yanked her hand from the cage, the hamster trailing behind. "Ow! Ow! Ow!" she screamed and violently shook her hand, trying to dislodge the animal's jaw. The motion sent droplets of blood spraying through the air, leave strange patterns on the floor and cupboards.

"Lady Tara, no!" she screamed, but the hamster held on. Norma shook it again and again as the pain raged through her hand. She stepped backwards and more pain shot through her. She'd put her full weight on her bad ankle without thinking. The waves of pain crashed through her, sending her to the floor. Instinctively, she reached back to catch herself and there was a strange, soft feeling under her hand as she landed. She quickly realized she'd landed on top of the hamster. She pulled her hand to her chest, trying not to see the open gashes chewed across it. The hamster was rolling away, trying to find its feet. The fall had only knocked the wind out of the little rodent.

"You little piece of shit!" she screamed, still cradling her hand. "You worthless piece of shit!"

The hamster started to run, but Norma reached out and grabbed it roughly around its neck. She knew if she held it tightly enough at this angle it wouldn't be able to turn its head far enough to bite her again.

She brought the struggling hamster close to her face. "So you think you can mess with me too, just like that bastard Wenton? You think you can do whatever you want to me and I'll just smile and take it? Fuck you!"

Norma rose on her good leg. She could hear the hamster choking and gasping from the strength of her grip. She didn't care. She gave it an extra squeeze just to hear it squeak.

She hopped to the counter and used her wounded hand to drag the blender closer.

"No one is going to fuck with me anymore!" she screamed, tears flooding her eyes.

She flipped the top off the blender.

"No one is going to take advantage of me anymore. Not Michael Wenton. Not anyone. And not you—you fuckin' rat." Tears streamed down her face.

She tossed the squealing, hysterical hamster into the blender and jammed down hard on the mince setting. Blood splattered out, coating the inside of the blender instantly.

She pulsed the blender a few more times and then stopped, exhausted.

Suddenly weak, only a breath away from losing consciousness, Norma rested on the counter. She stared at the bloodied blender. A heavy pool of liquid so dark it was almost black sat in the bottom.

Her eyes slowly moved up the blender. She was surprised to see someone's arm resting on the machine. It was her arm hanging over the top of the machine, her hand mangled inside. She tried to pull her hand out an intense pain stopped her. She pulled again and watched as her wrist left the cavity of the blender. Panic swelled through her as she tried to understand the tattered strips of flesh that hung off the stump of her wrist.

Norma had no idea how her hand had gotten inside the blender. When she took another look at the bloody mess of skin and bones, she collapsed onto the kitchen floor.

The last thing she saw before she slipped into unconsciousness was Lady Tara. The little hamster ran past her, alive and well.

THIRTY-SIX

Wa returned to his apartment on Inglis hopeful that he and Wenton would get some useful information from Nick Stangos the next day.

He was still standing at his door looking for his key when his cell phone rang. Wa hoped it was Gloria. As he felt close to the end of his search for answers, he felt ready to go back to his family.

“Hello?”

“Sergeant Wa? This is Gary Wrightland.”

“Oh, what can I do for you?”

“Can I see you? Tonight? It’s quite important.”

“Why, what’s going on?”

“I just need to talk to you.”

Wa frowned. “About what? Can it wait until tomorrow. I’m pretty wiped out.”

“No, I’d rather not wait. I need to see you as soon as possible.”

Wa wiped a hand across his forehead. *I sure don’t need this.* “Just tell me what’s going on. If I need to, I’ll come meet you.”

“No,” he said sharply. “Don’t come here. I’ll just... It’s really just something I thought of. A different way of looking at what we were talking about.”

“Why don’t I swing past the church later tomorrow morning? Dr. Wenton and I are going to see Nick Stangos in the morning and then—”

“Stangos! You’re going to see Nick Stangos.”

“Right. I’m sorry. I checked on a few things and his name popped up. I couldn’t believe it. This Stangos character might have been involved in some shady dealings with ECOR Pharmaceuticals.”

“And you’re bringing Michael Wenton?”

“Yep. We’re just going to check out his story tomorrow.”

“Don’t talk to him,” Gary barked.

“I’m sorry.”

“I mean, Nick’s crazy. You shouldn’t talk to him. He’ll just throw you off, confuse everything.”

Wa was taken aback by the pastor’s odd behaviour and wanted to get off the phone with him. “Listen, are you going to be at the church later on tomorrow morning?”

The pastor was quiet before he replied. “Yes.”

“I’ll see you then.” He hung up before Gary could protest.

“Everybody’s got a fuckin’ bolt loose these days,” he said shaking his head. He found his key and entered his dingy little apartment.

THIRTY-SEVEN

Nick Stangos' house looked as though it had been abandoned years ago. The duplex was hidden on a street of older houses in various states of disrepair.

Nick's lawn obviously hadn't been cut in weeks and was littered with little yellow buds. Flyers decorated the concrete steps leading to his door. The curtains in the living room were drawn tight.

"Here we go," Wa said raising his hands in reluctant acquiescence. He turned and knocked hard on the door, ignoring the cream-coloured doorbell, streaked in dirt.

They waited but there was no answer. There wasn't even the sound of movement behind the dark door.

Wa knocked again. Still nothing.

"Nick! Nick Stangos. Open the door. We want to talk to you."

No answer.

Wenton shook his head, closing his eyes. *Fuckin' waste of time.*

"Open the door. We're here to talk to you about ECOR and the ELF weapons." He looked at Wa to confirm the term ELF. Wa nodded. "We're going fuckin' kick this door in if you don't open it."

There was a loud thump from somewhere inside. They'd attracted someone's attention. Soon they heard the heavy footfalls of someone approaching from behind the door. Without warning, it was violently pulled open.

"Who the hell are you? What do you know about the ELF?"

A powerful smell of alcohol swept out of the house and soaked through Wenton and Wa as they faced Nick Stangos. He was a stocky, balding man with deep, bloodshot eyes. He blinked constantly as he looked out at them, his eyes unable to adjust to the morning sun. He kept one hand inside his open dress shirt, rubbing his oversized gut in slow circles.

The inside of the house made the outside look like a Martha Stewart magazine spread. Dirt flowed freely across the floor, interrupted only by an

obstacle course of empty liquor bottles.

The most notable feature of the home was the elaborate machinery surrounding the door and every window they encountered. At first, Wenton thought it might have been a complex, homemade security system, but it seemed too intricate.

Nick lead them into the kitchen, the only room with available seats. Soon they were all seated around a cheap table.

Wa didn't waste anytime. "What's going on at ECOR, Nick?"

Nick Stangos laughed as though Wa had just finished telling the funniest joke. "What do *you* think is going on at ECOR?" he mocked.

Wenton gritted his teeth and forced himself to look away from the slob of a man.

Wa took a deep, even breath before he responded. "You've been implicated in some fairly questionable research. Research involving a Web site. Ring any bells?"

"Ding-a-ling!" Nick laughed enthusiastically.

It occurred to Wenton that alcohol might not be the only substance flowing through Nick's veins. The man was either high or virtually psychotic.

"You wanna fuckin' pull it together?" Wenton snapped.

Nick stared at Wenton with an exaggerated look of hurt and then a big smile spread back across his face.

"What do you know about a Web site?" Wa pushed. "We know you were involved with it."

"A Web site. A Web site," he sang. "It's not the Web site that's going to get you—it's the prophecy."

"What?" Wenton snarled.

"He's returning. He's probably here right now if you believe Gary. But no one can stop it. That's why it's a prophecy. It was already decided," Nick said in a hushed whisper. His face stayed serious for another moment before he broke into laughter again.

"This is fuckin' useless," Wa said, turning to Wenton. "You wanna go?"

Wenton nodded. "Fuckin' lunatic," Wenton sneered, pushing back from the table. "Feels like I'm interviewing Edward Carter all over again."

"NO!" Nick Stangos screamed.

Wa and Wenton froze as Nick covered his face and dropped his head to the table.

"What?" Wa asked.

"Don't say that name. He's the one," Nick hissed into the table.

"What name?" Wenton demanded. "Edward Carter? That name?" He

smiled as he said it. He liked that it bothered Stangos. He liked that something could at least get a reaction out of the slob.

“So you don’t want us to say *Edward Carter*?” Wenton smirked.

“Shut up,” Wa snapped at Wenton. He turned back to Nick. “Why does that name bother you, Nick?”

“Don’t say that name. Don’t say that name,” he moaned and rolled his head back and forth on his hands.

“Did you do something to Edward Carter?” Wenton asked.

He rocked back and forth without answering.

“You fucked Edward Carter up, didn’t you?” Wenton continued.

Wa sat back down at the table, his eyes glued to Nick.

“Just don’t say that name,” Nick pleaded.

“What’d you do to Edward Carter, Nick?” Wenton pushed.

“I didn’t do anything.”

“You did something. There’s something upsetting you. Let’s help each other out.”

“Just don’t say that name. He’s the one. He’s the one.”

“We’re not going to say the fuckin’ name,” Wenton said impatiently. “Just tell us what happened to him. Why is he the one? What does that mean?”

“The Scrolls spoke of him. Of ‘the child of incest,’” Nick moaned. “The one that starts everything. The end of everything. It couldn’t be stopped. I’m going to die.”

“You’re not going to die,” Wa tried to comfort him.

“Fuck you!” he screamed, bolting up in his chair.

Wa was startled, but Wenton didn’t react.

“You don’t know what’s going on or who they are. They aren’t human. They can get to anyone. They’ve probably already gotten to you.”

“Tell me about Edward Carter,” Wa interrupted. “How’s he fit in?”

“SON OF A BITCH!” Nick screamed, gripping the sides of his head and closing his eyes. “You can’t know about any of this. How the fuck do you know about Edward Carter?”

“Just tell us. It’s too late for theatrics,” Wenton said casually.

“EDWARD CARTER IS EVERYTHING!” Nick screamed. “If you know what happened to him, what made him, you’d know everything. He’s the reason everything has gone to hell!”

“So what’d you do to him?” Wa barked.

Nick suddenly stopped and looked up at Wa. “I didn’t do anything to him. It was Gary Wrightland.”

This page intentionally left blank

THIRTY-EIGHT

“What are you doing home?” Marlene Wrightland asked her husband as he entered the back door. “Not feeling well?”

He paused and looked up the small stairwell to his wife standing in the kitchen. He realized it was unusual to be home early in the afternoon but it couldn't be helped. “Forgot something.”

“Forgot what? I could've run it over to the church.” She wiped her hands on a towel and then dropped it on the counter off to her side.

“No, it's more something I need to check. Don't worry about it. Go back to whatever you were doing?”

“Fine.” Marlene threw up her hands. She'd seen him in a “mood” before and didn't want to get into it.

Gary watched his wife turn and move back into the kitchen. He took the stairs, two at a time, to the second floor. He passed the bathroom on his right and then his son's room before entering the master bedroom at the end of the hall.

Once inside he glanced back to make sure Marlene hadn't followed. He closed the door, quietly. He looked up at the section marked out on the ceiling, the attic. His heart pounded and he looked away.

After carefully dragging the reading chair to the centre of the room, he reached up and could just barely touch the attic door handle.

Gary tugged gently until he felt the heavy springs drag. Steadily, he pulled the trapdoor down until he could reach the edge with his hand. He pulled it further until he could reach the ladder secured inside. Soon he was crouched inside the cramped attic.

There was little to be found in the attic. Blown-in insulation filled every corner with loose bits of grey and white.

He strained forward, feeling beneath the soft insulation until his hand met something smooth and hard. He pulled the oversized briefcase out and

held it close to his chest for a moment.

And then he retreated, moving quickly down the ladder with the briefcase tucked awkwardly under one arm.

Once back on the bedroom floor with the trap door secured and the reading chair pushed into its original position, he sat on the edge of the bed. The large case sat at his feet. He looked down at it, contemplated opening it. He knew he shouldn't. He could feel its power hidden beneath the leather and tucked into heavy foam inside.

Gary relented. He leaned to the case and pulled the flap back. The case fell open in two sections and Gary stared in at a solid metallic surface. Only one dial was visible on the outside. He wanted to take the instrument out and hold it, but he didn't. *I have a job to do. I can't be here.* He ran his fingers along the cold metal and gently caressed the dial. He knew he shouldn't touch it but he couldn't help himself. Through no conscious choice, his eyes closed. He felt for the lip of the case and snapped it shut.

His eyes remained closed for a moment as he tried to regain his balance. His legs felt unsteady but he was running out of time. He stood, moving the case to the side with his foot. He stepped to the closet and reached into the back. When he pulled his hand out he held a large grey wool overcoat and a plain baseball cap.

Finally, he moved to the larger dresser that sat against the far wall of the bedroom. He stooped to pull open the bottom drawer. He reached into piles of underwear and socks and felt at the back. His hand came across something cold and hard. He pulled his arm out and stared at the large eight-inch hunting knife in a fitted plastic case. *This time, he thought, I'm going to finish the job.*

THIRTY-NINE

“Gary Wrightland?” Wa asked in surprise.

Nick’s head hung limp. Wenton thought he might have passed out and reached across the small table to flick the man’s head. Nick jerked but didn’t look up.

“Are you saying Pastor Wrightland has something to do with Edward Carter?” Wa asked, an edge rising in his voice.

“Do you know Gary?” Nick mumbled, still not looking up.

“I just met with him a few days ago.”

Now he looked up. “You met with him?”

“Yes.”

“What’d he say?”

“He told me about you getting kicked out of seminary.”

Nick laughed.

Wa ignored it. “He also told me about your experiments. The stuff with the low frequency weapons.”

“Did he?” Nick grinned.

“I’m getting tired of this shit,” Wenton blurted. “Just tell us what you fuckin’ know.”

Nick’s demeanour changed again. His head drooped. “What can I tell you?” He looked as if he might cry and then he suddenly laughed so hard that he started to cough. He had to brace himself against the table. Spit hung off the corner of his lip and he wiped it away on the sleeve of his shirt.

“I’m dead,” he concluded. “I can’t tell you anything.”

“Try,” Wenton said coolly.

“Did Gary tell you about the Dead Sea Scrolls?” he asked Wa.

“Oh shit,” Wenton muttered, covering his eyes. “We’re getting’ religious again.”

Wa frowned at him before turning back to Nick. "He mentioned them. He did some grad research there. At the Qumran site."

"What?" Wenton said. "Did you say Qumran?"

"What's the matter?" Wa asked.

"Nothing."

"You've heard Qumran somewhere before?" Wa asked.

"Never mind."

That was the only answer Wa needed. He realized Wenton had been haunted by the word just as he had been. "So what about the Scrolls, Nick?"

"I need a drink." He pushed away from the table, attempting to stand. Wenton leaned across and with considerable force *seated* Nick back in his chair.

"Okay," Nick continued. "I'll get a drink later."

"The Scrolls," Wa prompted.

"Fine. How much did Gary tell you about the scrolls? Did he tell you that the Dead Sea Scrolls contained more than just bits and pieces of the Bible?"

Wa shrugged. "I think he mentioned something like that."

He sighed as though this should be common knowledge. "The jars found near Qumran contained three types of scrolls. Bits and pieces that were identified as early versions of the Bible. Bits and pieces that were probably contemporary art of the time including traditional songs and such. Basically crap.

"But the third category has been loosely referred to as 'apocrypha.' These are scriptures intended to be part of the Bible but frequently omitted from the different versions. Religious scholars and church leaders have specifically chosen to hide these works from the world. The messages of these scrolls have been deemed either too fanciful or too frightening for mass consumption. They've been covered up."

"What kind of stuff?" Wa asked.

"For the most part, the Apocryphal Scrolls contained clues to the coming apocalypse and the end of the world. They contained specific details of how the Antichrist would come into the world."

"Nice story," Wenton interrupted. *Fanatical bullshit.*

"I know," Nick agreed. "A lot of the stuff sounds fanciful and I think that's why so many scholars and religious leaders decided not to include these scrolls in modern biblical texts. But Gary was obsessed with the apocryphal writings. He was sure he could use the information from these Scrolls to avoid the apocalypse. He became an archeology buff and an expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls and went on the expedition to Jerusalem. It wasn't a part of his training in seminary. He did it to find out as much as he could about the Scrolls.

“So the Dead Sea Scrolls predict the end of the world, eh?” Wenton said skeptically.

“That’s not new. The Old and New Testaments are full of references to the end of the world. Especially the Book of Revelations. It’s one of the more psychedelic books of the Bible but apparently it’s missing large sections that describe exactly how the world is going to end. That’s partially why Gary was so concerned with the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Book of Revelations that we see in traditional Bibles is incomplete. Many people, like Gary, believe that the full version is contained in the Scrolls but has never been released.”

“What’s the missing stuff all about?” asked Wa.

“The story goes that one of the Scroll jars contained a parchment that was loosely translated as the ‘Convergence.’ It described the coming of the Antichrist, or the Beast. It’s an event predicted to happen immediately before the end of the world and the second coming of Christ.”

“Why do you keep saying ‘the story goes’ or ‘people believe’?” Wa asked.

“Because this isn’t exactly accepted religious territory. Basically no religious leaders will confirm the existence of the Convergence Scroll and very few academics or archeologists will either. It’s a real controversy.”

“Blah, blah, blah,” Wenton interrupted. “What’s this got to do with ECOR?”

“Nothing,” Nick said, surprised.

“So is ECOR testing weapons on people, trying to make them insane?”

He frowned. “I don’t think so. They just hired me to feed their research team facts about electronic weapons. They knew I had an interest in that and have kept up-to-date on the research. They were starting up a research branch on it.”

“They were doing Web sites,” Wa corrected.

“Yes, to document their research on technological applications of—”

“No, they were using your info to do conspiracy Web sites. They thought it would help push delusional patients over the edge.”

“Oh my god. That’s not what they told me. I can’t—”

“Believe it,” Wenton finished.

“Finish the story on Gary,” Wa said.

He took a deep breath. “So Gary was convinced that if he could find out everything about the coming of the Antichrist, he could save the world. He was obsessed with it. It was all he ever talked about. He’d researched everything he could about the Convergence Scroll and was convinced he could find a way to prevent the Convergence.”

“How?” Wenton asked. “Plug up the main exit from Hell?”

Nick laughed but the effort made him cough again. This time it ended in a rasping, wet gurgle as he coughed up phlegm. He caught it in his mouth

and swallowed loudly. “Actually, yes!”

“I inadvertently mentioned some research to Gary on cellular excitation and religious experience. He jumped on—”

“English please,” Wa grumbled. “I’m just a poor dumb cop.”

“Well, I just told Gary about how epileptics often report religious experiences during seizures. Seizures are essentially just all the neurons firing at once. It’s like a person sticks their brain in a light socket and BZZZZZZZ.” He nodded grinning broadly. He’d obviously not talked to anyone in a long time because he was thoroughly enjoying having an audience, even though right now his audience was staring at him without any hint of amusement. Nick’s smile faded and he continued.

“So after I told Gary about this epilepsy thing—which was just something I came across when I was doing my physics undergrad degree—he started grilling me about whether that meant we could make people more open to religion or at least more open to religious experience. I said no but he kept poking and digging around. It was Gary who came up with the idea of using low frequency beams to open a person up.

“Gary figured we could use an Extremely Low Frequency beam, or ELF, and at certain frequencies stimulate an individual’s temporal lobes and create a condition not unlike that experienced by the epileptics who report religious phenomena. Somehow, Gary convinced me to help him build a machine. We built it and he took off with it.”

“But weren’t you kicked out of the seminary for experimenting with that machine?” Wa asked.

“No,” he said almost laughing. “I was kicked out for drinking. I kept showing up to lectures drunk. Did Gary tell you that I was the one experimenting with the ELF?”

Wa nodded.

“Figures. Anyway, Gary grabbed the machine and took off on the expedition to the Dead Sea Scrolls. It was shortly after he left that I was kicked out of school. I didn’t see him again until he came to visit me a few years ago. He showed up at my house ranting and raving about solving the Convergence. I tried to humour him, even helped him fix up the old ELF unit he had—showed him how to boost the power—but really didn’t talk to him much. He was crazed. He really scared me. He was so worked up talking about how he found the portal. I didn’t know what he meant at first, but he kept saying he found the portal. That’s the first time I heard the name Edward Carter.”

“Carter?” Wenton spat.

Nick nodded. “Gary’s church did these charity runs to the Nova Scotia Hospital. The volunteers went through the units and handed out

magazines, talked to the patients, and shit like that. Well, one day Gary came across this sad case, Edward Carter, and took an interest. As soon as he heard the man's history Gary was convinced that Edward Carter was the Convergence, the portal for the coming of the Beast. He freaked out and came to see me shortly after. He wanted to get the ELF back up and running because he figured he was going to stop the Convergence. He also thought that just by having the ELF operating near him that it somehow protected him. He really believed in this thing even though I thought it was crap."

"So this is before Edward Carter started assaulting women?" Wa asked.

"Yeah, I think so, at least I hadn't heard anything about that when Gary first came to me."

"And how was he going to stop Edward?" Wenton asked.

"He was going to keep the ELF on him."

"On him?"

"Yeah, like follow the guy and keep the ELF turned on. Keep bombarding him with these waves. I saw him once. He was skulking around in this big overcoat, wearing some ridiculous cap. He had a big briefcase, which I'm sure held the ELF but..." His voice trailed away.

"But what?" Wa pressed.

"Well, I told Gary that religion isn't just cellular excitation. Just because you zap someone doesn't mean they'll suddenly accept Jesus Christ. It's not that simple." He took a deep breath again. "He never listened. He was so sure that he knew how to stop the Convergence, so sure that Edward Carter was the one. He only believed in the Scrolls. He thought it was his destiny."

"What exactly did the Convergence Scroll say?" Wenton asked.

"Hold on." Nick struggled to his feet again and shuffled out of the kitchen. He soon returned with a binder and slapped it onto the table. It was a thick three-ring binder bulging at every opening with well-used paper. The front still showed the words "Scrolls" although some of the letters were virtually rubbed off.

"I've got a partial transcript in here," he said as he flipped through the binder, trying not to lose the papers that got free from the stuffed binder. "Here it is." He pulled one section of paper out and handed it to Wenton. "At least this is the good part, the section that Gary was most concerned about."

Wenton took the page and read it through before handing it to Wa. It read:

CONVERGENCE PROPHECY

*When the violent orphan of incest's mind is opened, then
shall the Beast come. The sacrifice of the orphan will be*

the Beast's first portal, as this innocent of damaged mind provides the greatest step to the Omega. For I have already claimed the innocent's parentage through suicide and murder. The orphan will join me, and I will be whole again and enter the world, and the world will enter me.

[MISSING SECTION]

And the Beast shall claim those who are black inside and bring them forth in service. He upholds justice, but is corrupt. Men will bow before him or be forever lost in madness. In number he will be ceaseless. He shall rise out of man and number greater than grains of sand by the sea. The world will cry out in pain. The numbers of evil shall bring the world to the Omega.

[MISSING SECTION]

And even as the Watcher stumbles in his first attempt, still shall he guide balance to the world. For he who destroys can also create. The key lies in the opposite of love. The key lies in the destruction of the Convergence. The tainted heart of God's hand will prevail. From evil comes good.

[MISSING SECTION]

Take care in the confrontation of evil. Do not be lost in the blackness that hides beneath the still surface. Without strength or service, madness waits. Take care in the confrontation of evil because although you may seek, you shall not see. The Beast will not reveal himself to all that seek him. He is a master of disguise and will be where you do not look. Inside the innocent lurks the promise of eternal death.

Wa finished reading and looked up, first at Wenton then at Nick. "This means what?"

Wenton snorted. "Don't you remember Carter's background? He had the religious freak parents. The dad raped his own daughter, and that's how Edward came into the world. Then the dad lost it and killed the whole family before putting a bullet through his own head."

Wa nodded. “And that’s the ‘orphan of incest.’ That’s why Gary thought Edward Carter was going to let the Antichrist into the world.”

“Exactly,” Nick agreed.

“But what’s it mean about the ‘first step of the Omega’?” Wenton asked.

Nick shrugged. “I know what Gary thinks it means. He thinks that Edward was only the entrance for this evil. He was too weak a vessel to carry the Antichrist so the Antichrist would have to shift into someone else. Gary was prepared to keep hunting, only the Convergence Scroll doesn’t give any details about what happens after the first step.”

Wa frowned. “So the pastor’s out there hunting down other people to zap with that ELF thing. Other people he thinks might become the next vessel for the Antichrist.”

“What do you think all the electronics in this house are for?” he said throwing up his hands. “I’ve got every entrance, every wall, rigged to alert me to ELF waveforms. If Gary comes this way again—I’ll know.”

This page intentionally left blank

The heavy flashlight was all Bob needed. It gave him a greater sense of control. He liked how the rubber grip conformed to the shape of his hand. He slowly rolled it with the tips of his fingers as he walked down the cellblock towards the hysterical, screaming inmate. Bob and Eric had ignored the noise for as long as possible, but they couldn't take it any longer. The shrink wouldn't stop screaming about conspiracy. It was really starting to aggravate the whole block.

He glanced up at the plastic bubble on the ceiling and watched a camera spin 180 degrees as Eric tracked him from the control station. He grinned and kept moving.

A voice called to him from his right, another cell. "You going to finally shut that crazy fuck up?"

Bob turned to him but didn't slow his pace. "Where's your compassion, buddy?"

He could now hear what Brian Claric was screaming. The psychologist was yelling about being in danger, knowing the real truth, needing to get out of here. *Join the club*, Bob thought. *Everyone needs to get out of here.*



"YOU NEED TO LISTEN TO ME! WE'RE ALL IN DANGER! IT WON'T STOP HERE! IT WON'T EVER STOP! YOU HAVE TO LET ME GO!"

Dr. Claric rested his head on the bars again. He tried to screen out the jeering and profanity of the other inmates. He knew they didn't understand and it would have been pointless to explain it to them. They just thought he was another lunatic. He lifted his head and let it drop back against the hard steel. He wished he could keep banging his head until everything he knew disappeared. He wanted to go back to a time when things made sense. He

wanted to go back to a time when he felt like he had some control, when he felt competent. That was all gone now.

“All right, what’s the problem,” a voice said, breaking through Dr. Claric’s fog of hopelessness. He looked up and saw one of the guards and breathed a sigh of relief. *Thank God! Maybe he’ll believe me.*

“I...,” he started and stopped. *I need to sound rational. I can’t sound crazy or he’ll walk away. Go slow.* “I need to talk to you. I know something. Something serious.”

Bob nodded. “Go ahead. Talk. Just stop fuckin’ yelling and disturbing the whole block. That shit can’t go on here.” A chorus of voices rose from the other cells in support of the guard. The inmates were shouting

“Everyone else SHUT UP!” Bob snarled without looking away from Dr. Claric. He shifted his heavy flashlight from one hand to the other. Whenever there was a confrontation he always became more conscious of what he was holding—where his nearest weapon was.

“Mr... Um, Mr...,” Dr. Claric started, wanting to get a name. His clinical skills were intact. He knew a name would give him an advantage. He wanted the conversation to seem more personal, more one-on-one.

“Just call me Bob.”

“Fine. Thank you, Bob. I know that I sound crazy. It’s panic making me seem irrational. I’m really having a hard time holding it together. I’m really at a loss here. I’m hoping you’ll at least listen to me. Hear what I have to say. After you listen—you decide what to do, okay? That’s all I’m asking.”

Bob realized his coffee was getting cold. He cursed himself for not bringing it with him. He didn’t want to stand in this corridor for half an hour talking to a mental patient. He sighed.

“Fine. Talk. I’m listening—but make it quick.”

Dr. Claric took a deep breath. “I’ll be brief. Thank you very much. There’s something going on. Something related to the work going on at ECOR pharmaceuticals, but not really. There’s something going on and people are getting sick—really sick. People are doing things they’ve never done before. People are slipping into something, something different, something bad. At first I thought it was ECOR testing illegal weapons, trying to tamper with people’s minds. That’s not it, there’s more. Much more. I don’t know who knows, but there’s more to this. There’s more people who are going to get sick—people are actually going to go insane or worse!” He stopped. He knew he was getting worked up and he needed to slow it down. He didn’t want to come across as crazy. He desperately needed to convince this guard.

“I’m sorry. I know this sounds crazy. I sound crazy. I guess I almost am.”

He stopped again. He didn't like Bob's slight grin. He knew he wasn't reaching him.

"Go on," Bob said, motioning with his flashlight. "I'm listening."

Dr. Claric frowned. He couldn't concentrate. His head felt heavy. He had so many thoughts that he was having trouble focusing on the most crucial information. He wanted to present his story in a rational, logical way.

"Listen, I'm not crazy. There's something going on right now. There's something evil happening. People are vulnerable. You've no idea how dangerous it is."

"How dangerous what is?" Bob asked, scrunching his face up at the question. As the words left him he realized he'd just shown interest and that was a stupid thing to do. He may have just extended their little talk by ten or fifteen minutes. *Fuck.*

Dr. Claric didn't know how to answer. The real answer was the forces of good and evil, but he knew he couldn't say that. It would sound too cliched, too ridiculous.

"Listen, Bob." He remembered to use the guard's name. "There's more to thinking and feeling than just chemicals and neurons. People are trying to change our brains but they don't realize the ripple effects it could have with other aspects of thinking. I think they've opened up something. I think they've changed people. Made them different, more, I don't know, more, more—"

Bob jumped in to save him and speed the story along. "What's this got to do with you?"

"With me? I just got in the middle somehow. I'm expendable. I'm nothing."

"The middle of what?"

"Exactly. I don't know, but it's something evil. Don't you see?"

The guard's expression indicated he didn't "see."

Dr. Claric continued, "Something has started. I thought at first that I could help. That was really naïve. I didn't know what I was doing. I shouldn't have been so stupid. I've got a doctorate for Christ sake. But I know now that it isn't ECOR. After I was arrested I realized what was happening."

Bob's expression changed and he smiled and nodded. "That's nice. Now why don't you—"

"LISTEN!" Dr. Claric interpreted. "I need to tell you."

Bob didn't like being interrupted. Not by a fuckin' crazy murderer. "Fine, fine," he said holding both his hands up in defeat. "It was a very nice story. Thanks for sharing." He turned and took a step to walk away.

“WAIT!” Dr. Claric screamed after him. “I’m sorry. You’ve got to listen.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Bob said, waving back to him without turning around. “Just keep the noise down or I’ll be back.”

“WAIT!” Dr. Claric screamed again. “You don’t understand. There’s another common denominator.”

“Whatever,” Bob muttered and kept walking. *Fuckin’ needy shrink. My coffee better not be cold.*

Dr. Claric turned and leaned heavily against the door to his cell. He slowly sank to the floor and held his hands to his face, sobbing.

“There’s another common denominator. It’s not Edward anymore,” he whispered. “It never was.”

FORTY-ONE

I know now, Gary thought as he walked swiftly down Cedar Street. He'd parked a few blocks back at Cornwallis Junior High School. He didn't want anyone to know he was there.

Gary found the weight of the briefcase threw his stride off, especially when he was walking quickly, but he didn't care. He believed he was about to save the world.

I'm going to get rid of the last bit of evil that would permit the Convergence. I'm going to rid the world of his filth.

Sweat soaked his hat and sent droplets down his face. It was far too warm for his overcoat but he wanted to wear it. It made him feel anonymous.

Your reign ends today. I won't let my world disappear. Not to you. I don't serve you. I serve the Lord and His power will deliver me.

Gary's foot caught on a raised piece of sidewalk and he stumbled forward a few steps before he caught himself. He quickly regained his balance. When he looked up, he saw a young boy standing on the sidewalk. The boy looked startled as though he were afraid that Gary was going to flatten him.

"Have you accepted the Lord?" Gary barked at him.

The boy's wide-eyed stare turned into a look of fear. "Mom," he cried and ran across the lawn.

Gary glanced up at the house and then quickly continued down the street.



"What the fuck is that?" Wenton yelled above the screeching alarm. "Don't fuckin' tell me that's the ELF alarm."

Nick was already on his feet. He had jumped out of his chair so fast that

he'd knocked it clear across the floor. "It's the ELF. He's here."

"Pastor Wrightland?" Wa asked. He thought the entire situation was getting out of hand. He didn't know what to believe.

"Haven't you been listening?" Nick screamed at him. "Gary thinks he's protecting the world from the arrival of the Antichrist. He's going after people. Whoever he thinks might be a part of the coming of the Beast. He's coming after me!"

"Why you?" Wa yelled. "What'd you do?"

And then the alarm stopped. The silence was almost as unsettling as the noise.

The three men looked at each other and then scanned the kitchen.

"What just happened?"

"Sssh," Nick hissed urgently. "It's the thirty-second trip."

"The what?"

"Shut up. Just listen."

"For what?" Wenton asked, making no attempt to lower his voice.

Nick glared at him. "The trip shuts the alarm down for a few seconds so that I can get my bearings, try and locate the source of the ELF. If the waveforms are still present after the delay the alarm will sound again."

"You're fuckin' nuts," Wenton announced and stood. He strode out of the kitchen making his way around the filth and empty liquor bottles on his way to the front door. "If this pastor guy is actually here, I want to meet him."

"Don't!" Nick yelled and reached out to grab Wenton, to no avail.

Wa followed after Wenton.

And then the alarm sounded again, screeching at a high decibel.

"And shut that fuckin' thing off," Wenton yelled over his shoulder as he and Wa arrived at the front entrance. Wenton swung the front door open.

A man in a dark overcoat was facing them but had his head lowered so that they could only see the top of his baseball cap.

Wa leaned forward trying to get a better look. "Gary?" he said tentatively.

And then the alarm stopped as abruptly as it began.

"Don't let him in!" Nick called as he staggered to the front entrance. "Get out of here Gary."

The pastor lifted his head. As his face came into view, his tortured smile was almost too much bear. Gary's lips were tightly drawn up at the corners and his eyes were glowing with mock happiness.

"I've come for the Antichrist," Gary announced and stepped into the house. Wa and Wenton stood far enough back to allow him in.

"I'm here to return you to hell."

“Keep him away from me,” Nick screamed.

“Gary?” Wa attempted. “Are you okay? What’s going—”

Without warning Gary turned on Wa, lifting a large knife into the air. He brought it down quickly, aiming for Wa’s chest. The action was so unexpected and extreme that Wa had barely even registered what was happening.

As Wenton saw the knife, his hand shot out, delivering a nerve punch to the back of Gary’s arm. The jolt was enough to make the blade just barely miss Wa, as he stumbled backwards on the garbage-strewn couch. Wa felt a hot pain slice through his left arm. Wenton was about to grab the pastor’s arms when he heard Nick.

“No Gary!” In a panic, Nick was charging forward holding both hands out in front. Gary broke free of Wenton and turned to Nick, raising his knife as they collided. Wenton watched them both collapse to the floor.

Immediately, Wenton grabbed Nick and pulled him off Gary. There was a gush of blood soaking across the front of Gary’s rough wool overcoat. Wenton dropped Nick, who slumped against the wall and lifted his hands to his neck. At a glance, Wenton couldn’t tell who’d sustained the injury but he knew it must have been a bad cut given the amount of blood. He looked back and forth between Nick and the pastor. It was a mess.

“Wa!” Wenton yelled. “If you’re not too fuckin’ busy I’m gonna need a hand here.” He knelt beside Nick to see how bad he was injured.

THE PROPHECY IS COME. I AM WHOLE.

The words seemed to come from every corner of the house, and left stabs of pain in Wenton’s ears. Wenton looked over to Wa, only it wasn’t Wa any longer. The figure of a man was staring down at Gary Wrightland. The pastor had pushed himself back against the door and was whimpering softly.

JOIN LEGION. FACE EVIL.

Wenton didn’t understand. He stared up at Wa’s contorted face. A gash had opened down his forehead, stretching from his hairline to the bridge of his nose. The open skin revealed the pale white bone beneath. His eyes bulged and appeared red from the engorged veins. His arms hung at his sides with his palms facing Gary in an unnatural way.

“Wa?” Wenton barked.

In one rapid gesture, the figure bent over Gary and lifted him off the ground. The pastor’s face was pinned against his attacker’s gory forehead.

“Hey!” Wenton yelled. He briefly looked back at Nick, who was still holding both hands around his throat. Blood flowed freely between his fingers and drained down his shirt. His eyes were wild with terror. Nick opened his mouth to speak, but he could only sputter as blood spat out. No

time for you, Wenton thought as he picked up Gary's knife and stood to face the creature.

Words still echoed throughout the room, but now Wenton could tell they originated from *Wa. Facini entfaste blackened side*.

Gary lay in this monster's arms. Shock and terror silenced him as the creature's wet, slimy skin met his own sweat-soaked face.

"Please God," Gary moaned. But Gary wasn't in Stangos' house any longer. Somehow the putrid touch of the creature's disfigured flesh had transported him to a time not long ago...



Gary hovered above his own body. He watched himself stride down the sterile hospital corridor with confident purpose, the bulky case keeping rhythm against his leg. He recognized the scene. He knew the location.

The Nova Scotia Hospital, he thought. *I'm visiting a patient at the Nova Scotia Hospital.*

Gary Wrightland stopped at the end of the hallway and knocked once before opening the door and entering. Previous visits had taught him not to wait for a response.

Gary suddenly realized what he was watching. "No. Not this." He tried to look away but he couldn't.

"Good afternoon Edward. Feeling any better?" Gary asked. He entered the room and sat down next to the bed, setting the briefcase up on a bedside table, close to Edward. The room was dark, the curtains drawn tightly closed. Edward didn't like the room exposed to light because it increased the likelihood that he would see things that others could not—awful things.

"Pastor, it hurts. What's going on?" the sickly thin Edward asked.

"Nothing Edward. There's nothing. Just relax. Be open to God."

Edward brought his hands to the sides of his head. "But something hurts when you visit me. Something hurts me."

"Lay back, Edward. I'm here to help you. I want to save you."

"No," Edward whimpered. "Please make it stop. It feels like my head is being split in half. It hurts. It hurts."

"I don't feel anything, Edward."

Edward's eyes went to the pastor. "You can't feel this burning? It's like there's a noise inside my brain and I can't turn it off. You don't feel it?"

Gary leaned over and put a hand on Edward's arm. "It's nothing. What you are feeling is your heart and mind opening to God. Be open to God so that you don't fall to Satan."

Tears were rolling down Edward's face now. "I am open to God. Please

believe me. I am open to God.”

Gary smiled and nodded. “You will be. I’m going to make sure you are.” He sat back and waited. He wanted Edward to get a full dose of the ELF waves so his specially chosen passages from the Bible would take full effect when he read them.

After a few minutes’ exposure to the machine, Edward’s hands dropped away from his head and fell to the bed. His head slumped to one side and he was still, only the remnant of a tear continued to slide down his cheek.

“Edward?” Gary whispered. He’d never slumped like that. “Edward?” In the dim light he couldn’t tell if Edward’s chest was still moving. Instinctively, he looked back to the door, making sure no nursing staff were near.

Gary leaned over and put a hand on the man’s chest. Edward’s eyes immediately shot open and his head turned on the pastor. He looked unnatural, possessed.

Gary pushed back, clawing and kicking, until he was precariously balanced on the back legs of his chair. He managed to stifle a scream.

Watcher, Edward spoke. His sunken face and black eyes held Gary tightly in their grip. *You’ve served me well. You have opened the orphan of incest’s mind so that I am born. Facini entfaste blackened side.*

“No,” Gary said. “No. I’m not the watcher. I’m not responsible for you. I rebuke you in the name of Jesus Christ. I rebuke you in the name of God the Father. I rebuke you—”

Edward waved a hand dismissing Gary and the pastor lost his balance and fell over backwards, striking the floor hard. Gary scrambled and rose, grabbing for his briefcase and hurrying out of the room.

Floating high above, Gary watched through a haze of tears.



Wenton realized that the creature was now at least a foot taller than he was. It turned to Wenton, towering over him.

“Wa, let him go,” Wenton ordered.

The creature laughed. *There is no Wa. Only Lusus Naturae.*

“Now!” Wenton snapped. “Drop him.”

The monster lowered the pastor and turned to face Wenton. *I know you.*

Wenton glanced at Gary. The man hung limply in the creature’s grip, his eyes wide with terror. A long line of drool fell away from his lips.

“Sure we’ve met before. You’re a fucked-up cop and I’m the guy that’s going to knock you on your ass,” said Wenton.

I am you. You are me. I’m in you already.

The words were familiar to Wenton. Edward Carter had spoken those exact words to him at their first meeting. "Fuck you," Wenton barked.

Exactly.

Wenton raised the knife he was holding and lunged at the figure. The creature dropped the pastor to the ground and caught Wenton around both wrists. Wenton's forward momentum pushed them back against door with a loud crash as the wooden frame virtually gave way.

Wenton twisted his knife hand free and lifted it to strike. The monster twisted and pushed, trying to buck Wenton as the blade slashed through the air. Wenton jumped towards the creature again but stopped in his tracks at the sound of a different voice.

"Wenton, what the fuck are you doing?" Wa screamed holding his arms up to protect himself.

"Wa?"

"Holy shit. What the hell are you doing?"

Wenton stared at the man. Wa's features and voice had returned to normal. He looked wildly around the room but saw no sign of the creature that he'd been battling.

"Nick!" cried Wa, looking over at the man slumped in the corner. The flow of blood seeping out of Nick's neck had stopped. He was dead.

Gary's eyes were open, but he couldn't see anything. His wide-eyed stare betrayed his catatonic state.

FORTY-TWO

The phone rang again. The echo sounded through Wenton's apartment for the ninth time. The caller was persistent.

Wenton had only just arrived back in his condo. The police and EMS had arrived at Nick Stangos' house quickly. There was a lot of shouting and panic for a few moments but luckily the two constables on site knew Wa. The incapacitated Gary Wrightland was arrested and taken to the hospital, and Stangos was dropped into a body bag. Throughout the clean-up, Wenton watched Wa for any sign that he was different. Wa acted completely normal without a hint of the bizarre spectacle Wenton had seen earlier. When Wa left to go to the police station with the other officers, Wenton didn't say a word.

The phone rang again.

Wenton took another drink from his rye and Coke, and snatched his cordless phone off the wall on the fourteenth ring. "What?"

"Dr. Wenton?"

"What?" Wenton asked in the same flat tone.

"We've been trying to reach you for a number of hours. This is Dr. Earl Drier."

"I don't have the energy for your shit right now."

"Wait," Dr. Drier yelled into the receiver. "This is important. We need to talk ASAP." He spelled out the acronym, thinking it added emphasis.

"ASAP," Wenton mocked. "Well then, I better put my fuckin' pants on."

"Dr. Wenton," Dr. Drier announced, "your graduate student, Norma MacDonald, was found dead in her apartment. She may have killed herself. I think you better take an interest."

The news didn't shock him. "The whole world is dead anyway. What do you want from me?"

“You son of a bitch,” Dr. Drier grumbled, barely able to speak because his whole body was shaking. “You killed her. You may not have held a gun to her head and pulled the trigger but you are in some way responsible for her death.”

“I don’t have time for you right now. Why don’t you go whine at somebody who cares?”

Wenton hung up. He was too preoccupied with what he saw at Nick Stangos’ house that Dr. Drier’s news carried little weight. The future of the world was at stake, and he knew he had to be part of it—but how? He thought about the crazy dream he’d had not long ago and took another drink.

FORTY-THREE

Terry Messier heard a knocking at his door but he didn't care. There wasn't anyone he wanted to see, no one he wanted to talk to.

He took another sip of his protein shake. It was supposed to be a meal replacement during the time his jaw was wired shut. The beating that Sergeant Wa had delivered left him with three stitches on his forehead and a broken jaw. *Fuckin' cops*, Messier thought. He was glad he had a date very soon to provide a statement to the police about the incident. *I 'ope some of dem bastard cops get fired.*

Messier had been in hospital for two days. Now he was laid up in a crummy, low-rent place in Spryfield. It was the only place that he could afford on his disability pension.

Another knock on the door.

"Go awee," he yelled through a mouth that wouldn't open properly.

"It's the police," came the response. "Open up, Messier."

"Fuck," Messier breathed. "Not again." He took another sip of his drink and felt a trickle escape and run down the unkempt hair on his chin.

He struggled to his feet, grimacing at the slightest movement. "Juss a minute," he called as he shuffled to the door.

"Who is id?" Terry asked from just behind the door.

"Halifax Regional Police."

Terry leaned to his peephole. It was black as if someone were intentionally covering it. "Move away from the door, *si vous plait.*"

"Sorry," came the voice behind the door. "How's that?"

Terry leaned in again but the door exploded in, crashing into his face and sending him hard to the floor. He cried out in pain holding his jaw with both hands. Tears swelled in his eyes as he looked up to see Mitchell Wa in the doorway.

“Hey there, Terry,” Wa said. “How’s everything going?”

Wa stepped in and shut the door behind. Only the flimsy lock had popped when he kicked it, which was good; he’d leave no signs of a forced entry.

“You cannot be ’ere,” he moaned. “You are in big trouble.”

Wa crouched down beside him and smiled. “Terry, don’t be rude. I was just here to finish up our conversation from the other day. I don’t think we had the chance to clear everything up.”

“You attacked me.”

“A little blip, that’s all,” Wa reassured him. “Won’t happen again.”

“Ged out!”

“Keep it in your pants,” Wa said derisively. He reached out and grabbed Terry’s mane of hair and dragged the man back into the apartment, tossing him onto the couch without effort.

“You cannot...,” Messier started to protest. He stopped when he saw the way Wa was looking at him.

Wa’s eyes were gone, replaced by dark swirling pools of hatred. He was staring at Messier as though the man was a pile of garbage .

Facini entfaste blackened side.

“Qua?”

Facini entfaste blackened side, Wa repeated.

Images flashed through Messier’s mind. He suddenly saw the parking lot at Mic Mac Mall. He saw the boy. He saw the small park where he pulled the boy’s pants off. He saw it all only this time he felt the pain of it. He felt the fear of the little boy. He felt the anger of the boy’s parents. He felt the rage of the community that wanted him dead.

“Did you molest that boy at Mic Mac Mall?” Wa asked.

Messier couldn’t answer right away. The images were still pounding him, making him feel as though he were going to pass out.

“Did you molest that boy at Mic Mac Mall?” Wa repeated.

“Oui. Yes.”

“Will you sign a full confession before you kill yourself?”

“Kill myself? *Non.*”

Serve me.

The voice sank through every inch of him.

I am the Omega. I am Lusus Naturae.

“What?” Messier mumbled. He could barely think. He felt like his head was being squeezed.

I am with this for now. It serves me and you are a nuisance that must disappear.

“I don understand,” Messier weakly protested.

Wa rose up, his face contorting back into the face of the creature. He leaned into Messier and the foul smelling rotted flesh of its face soaked through the frightened man.

Serve me and die.

"*Non,*" Messier managed and then he rolled out from under Wa and ran for the small patio door. He jumped onto the deck and spun back to the apartment. Near the couch he could see the monster watching him, smiling at him. It made Messier's stomach twist. The thing wasn't human.

Jump, a voice told him. It came from all around him. *Jump.*

"Leave me alone," he grimaced and backed up against the rail. The monster had started towards him now.

"No," Messier cried. He looked back over the railing. He was only five floors up but he was directly over a busy asphalt roadway. He looked back into the apartment. The creature was almost at the patio doors.

"Stay away!" Messier shouted.

And then Wa held up a piece of paper. Messier could just make out the handwriting. The note Wa was holding was a confession written in his own handwriting. And then the creature started laughing in a high-pitched wail. The noise was so disturbing that Messier tried to move further back against the railing. Somehow he lost his balance and flipped over the side. He only just managed to stop himself by grabbing the iron railing.

The laughing stopped. Messier tried to lift himself up high enough to see back into the apartment. As he came up eye level to the deck he saw Wa's feet. Wa was standing out on the patio.

And then there was pain. Wa was using his foot to press on Messier's fingers. Messier knew he was going to die. He knew he was going to die with a signed confession in his apartment and without having testified against Mitchell Wa for police brutality.

And then he fell. From somewhere above the falling body a high-pitched, keening laughter was heard again.

This page intentionally left blank

EPILOGUE

THREE MONTHS LATER

The staff turnover at the Maximum Security Psychiatric Centre was high. It took a special breed of clinician to work in an area where the clients were both severely psychologically disturbed and violent offenders. As a result, orientation for new staff was almost a weekly occurrence, especially with the staff of over fifty nurses working round-the-clock shifts.

In the back unit of South Bay, the unit housing the long-term Not Criminally Responsible population, Greg Casey was running through the patient list with fellow nurse and new recruit Tina Major.

“Next on our list is Gary Wrightland. He was the pastor that lost it and ended up killing some guy. Stabbed the victim in the throat with a knife. When he first came to us he was still really crazy. He was talking about the Antichrist coming to the earth and how he had a chance to stop it but he made a mistake. I never got the full story.”

“That wasn’t that long ago, was it?” Tina asked.

“Not really. The case went through the courts pretty quick. It was pretty obvious that Wrightland was sick.”

“Is he any better now?”

Gary sighed. “Well he’s taking his meds but he hasn’t really responded too well. He’s quieter, keeps to himself, but if you push him he’ll still tell you that he has to prevent Satan from taking over the world. Pretty sad.”

“Who’s his doc?”

“Georgia. She’s with him right now. Working on the guy’s insight, as always.”



“So Gary,” Dr. Georgia O’Connors continued, “where are we at with the whole issue about your diagnosis?”

Gary shrugged. He’d reluctantly come down to one of the interview rooms after Dr. O’Connors had awoken him. He preferred to sleep away his time finding it unbearable to try and interact with the co-clients. He found these weekly sessions with Dr. O’Connors to be a ridiculous waste of time.

“Oh I know I have schizophrenia, doctor. I need medication to stay well.”

She frowned. “You’re just paying me lip service. I want to have a real conversation with you. You obviously don’t believe in the diagnosis and we need to talk about it.”

Gary didn’t respond.

“Tell me again,” Dr. O’Connors finally said. “What happened? Did you believe you were sent here by God to protect the world?”

He snorted. “I’ve never said that. I’ve destroyed the world. I’ve given birth to the Antichrist ”

“What’d you say then? Tell me.” She leaned forward, trying to encourage his response. “Talk to me.”

“You won’t understand. You’re mind can’t hear and your eyes can’t see. The Antichrist has entered the world. I opened the door. I am the Watcher. Sons will attack their fathers and mothers will murder their families. Only those without sin can escape and none are without sin. The Antichrist will draw the blackness out and force people to confront their existence. He will bring them to his service.”

“But what’s this got to do with you?”

He shook his head. “I tried to stop it. I tried!” He started to sob in heaving bursts. “It’s all my fault.”

“What did the victim, Nick Stangos, have to do with this?”

Gary shook his head sadly. “Nothing. I knew it was Mitchell Wa. After I saw him in my church I knew. It was him that I wanted. It was Mitchell Wa that should have died. I needed to kill him, but Wenton stopped me.”

“Michael Wenton,” she said nodding.

“Yes. He knocked my arm away and then Nick tackled me to the floor. I never meant for Nick to get hurt. He jumped on me and the knife just came up and caught him.”

“Okay.”

“You don’t believe me.”

“You have a mental illness, Gary. I want to help you get better.”

“You need to let me go. I can’t be locked up.”

“Why? Where is the Antichrist now?”

“I don’t know. Maybe still in Wa, maybe on the loose.”

Dr. O’Connors smiled. “So what would you do if you were back in the community right now?”

“There is more in the Convergence Scrolls. I know what it means now. I know what it was telling me. There is another who must bring balance to the world. *The tainted heart of God’s hand*. I know who that is.”

“Who is it?” Dr. O’Connors asked, legitimately interested.

Gary smiled.

“You’re not going to tell me,” she asked.

“I can’t,” he said. “Besides, you’d never believe me, and I don’t have much credibility as a mental patient, anyway.”

Dr. O’Connors watched him for a moment longer, then stood. “Okay then. I guess we’ll call it a day. It disappoints me that you don’t trust me enough to tell me who’s going to save the world, but we’ll pick it up again next week.”

Gary nodded.

“Okay, see you next week,” she said as she stepped out of the interview room.

Gary watched her leave. *You’d never believe, he thought, that the person destined to restore balance is Michael Wenton.*

When I was asked about providing a dedication or acknowledgements for *Lost Sanity*, I really wanted to include something to thank all the people that helped me. I wanted to include my loved ones in my first major publication. I didn't though; somehow it didn't seem right to say, "I dedicate this violent book about rape and insanity to my parents, wife and son. Thanks for making me disturbed enough to write these things."

Here I am in the same position. Should I include acknowledgements even though this book is about dark, evil, disturbing things?

Or should I wait for the third Michael Wenton book? Or should I write a nice book so that my mom can finally tell the ladies at Bible study that her son published a book? I guess it's time to start thanking people.

I want to thank my wife, Glenna, and my two boys, Ben and Jake. Without their love, support and encouragement I might have published five books by now—but I wouldn't have had such an incredible family to share them with. And Glenna, thank you for giving me late nights and early mornings on the computer. You believed in me and gave me the time to pursue the dream.

Thanks to my parents, Robert and Janette, my two biggest fans. Even though my books aren't British mysteries set in the Cotswolds, they've stood squarely behind them anyway. Their support throughout my life has smoothed many bumpy roads.

Thanks to Mike O'Connor and the rest of Insomniac Press for believing in my writing and finally making me an author. I will remember you when I appear on *Larry King*.

Special thanks to the staff of the East Coast Forensic Hospital. You've been incredibly supportive of my "hobby." I suspect that the staff are nervous about appearing in my books as villains if they don't support me—even though I've sworn that wouldn't happen.

Finally, thanks to you, the reader, for taking a chance on this book. I hope you enjoy it as much as I enjoy making money off it.