

The  
Devils  
Switch  
By  
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## Prologue

The Versifier traced its fingers on the black 1937 Bugatti. The Versifier touched the car as though it was touching a lover. The car was well polished, but there was a speck of dirt by the door handles. The Versifier, spat on its overcoat and cleaned the stain. There was also a Bentley and Rolls Royce in the garage of the Tudor Mansion.

Still rubbing his fingers on the Bugatti and looking intently on the car The Versifier said, "Is it truly possible to hate vanity. Are we cursed to continually seek perfection by killing ourselves."

"Please...please..." The heaving sound came from a man hung upside down by a chain, with his head in an aluminum bucket.

"Forgive me. " The Versifier said walking away from the car toward the man hanging in the middle of the garage. "I got lost in man's creation. Anyway, we wouldn't want the white blood cells taking the fun away from this moment." The Versifier went down on its knees, to the back of the man's head and with tweezers reopened three cuts behind his neck, to continuously let blood stream from his neck into the bucket.

"Why are you doing this to me?" The man's head was pressed to the bottom of the bucket by his weight. The blood had covered his eyes, nostrils and was overflowing into his mouths.

"Jack Straton," The Versifier said the words slowly, "I want you to drown in your own blood."

“Please you can take everything I have.” His voice was getting weaker and he coughed blood as he spoke, “just let me...me... live, I beg you to let me live.”

“I really wish I could, but I can’t, so I won’t.”

“Somebody is going to come in soon.” Jack Straton said unable to see or smell anything.

“From the period I drugged you, until now, has been over four hours. Nobody is going to come. These is your last hour to live let’s talk of something more uplifting like, are you going to die before you drown in your blood or would you suddenly run out of blood before the pool rises to your nostrils.”

“You... bastard,” he said swallowing his blood.

“That’s the spirit go with a fight.” The Versifier said while reopening the wounds.

“I am sorry, please don’t let me die like this?” Jack Straton’s word’s got shaky as the blood flowed in his mouth.

“Okay Jack, how would you want to die?”

“Please...” And hung still and silent

“Jack, jack...” The Versifier said, raising his head over the blood and slapping his face to wake him up but there was no response. The Versifier checked Jack’s pulse, felt a pulse and abruptly dropped Jack Straton back into the pool of blood. The Versifier got up on its feet and went back to the car and continued caressing the car. “You won’t need to play dead very soon.”

“Please, don’t be an animal.” Jack Straton said swallowing his blood to reduce the pool level.

“But we all are, even if we try to deny. Animals live to reproduce and survive. What makes us different is, we live to reproduce the best of ourselves by killing in the name of God, justice, peace and country but we make sure not to ever say the word greed. We live to survive, by taking from others and expecting a thank you when we give them a piece of what was theirs in the first place. Make no mistake of this, we are all animals.” The Versifier walked back to Jack Straton and reopened the cuts.

“What have I done to you, to deserve this?” Jack Straton started trying to lift his head higher to prevent the blood from covering his lower lip.

The Versifier thought for a moment, with its knees still bent after opening the wounds and said, “You have done nothing to me. I have never known you but as at this time, I am your God. I will take your life away from you, because I want you to die. Maybe that’s not the definition of God, maybe I am not your God but an instrument, who thinks it’s in control while it’s just a tool. Jack... ” The Versifier felt a jolt of irritation when it realized Jack Straton was dead. It felt the dead man would have had the decency to survive a moment longer until it finished its speech.

# Chapter

## 1

“Would you state your name for the record?”

“Fernando Ricardo Gomez,” the Hispanic man with a pomaded ponytail answered from the stand.

“Have you ever been arrested?” asked the prosecutor with an air of command aided by his six-foot-two frame that filled out his navy pinstriped double-breasted suit.

Gomez hesitated. He thought about the question, wondering if the answer the prosecutor coached him to say would make any difference in the case.

“Yes.”

“Why were you arrested?”

For an inexplicable reason his eyes fell on the jury and he began to feel as though he was the defendant. “Rape...staa-toto..”

“Statutory rape,” the prosecutor finished.

“Yeah, that is it.”

“How old was she?”

“Fifteen.”

“And how long were you in jail for this crime?”

“Objection. Your Honor, we aren’t here to hear the witness’s biography,” the twenty-eight-year-old defense attorney cut in.

In an academic manner the older lawyer said, “Fernando Gomez is the chief witness and his person and character relates to his testimony.”

“Over ruled,” the aging female judge blurted out faster than she planned.

“Mr. Gomez, how long were you in jail for the crime you committed?”

“Three years.”

“So for three years you were cut off from everything and everyone that mattered in your life.”

“Your Honor,” the young public attorney said, “this is irrelevant to the case.”

“Sustained. Get to the point.” The judge’s eyes didn’t waver from the witness.

“Where were you on the twenty-sixth of January this year about nine p.m.?”

Gomez’s heart pounded. The air conditioning in the room was turned up high, but it didn’t stop the sudden downpour of sweat on his face.

“It’s all right Gomez.” The prosecutor took advantage of the situation, holding his hand. “Nobody can touch you here.”

“It...It...,” he paused, then asked “Can I have water?”

A glass of water was brought to the witness; he drank and suddenly felt revitalized.

“I was at Tony’s nightclub.”

“What happens in Tony’s Nightclub?” said the prosecutor while watching the jury’s every gesture.

“It’s a place where everybody downtown goes to have fun, pick up a hooker, get drunk, dance, hook in line.”

“*Hook in line*... Would you expand on the term?”

“Get to meet with people who got jobs for you.”

“What kind of jobs?”

He hesitated. The Assistant District Attorney had told him in private that this wasn’t snitching, but how could he face the streets after all this? Reporters and television cameras were pointed in his direction. He couldn’t deny it, and he wasn’t ready to back away. Everything was set. He knew it. The city would look to him as a hero. All he had to do was keep talking. The defense attorney was pathetic and the jury was in no way sympathetic to the defense.

“Any kind of job, legal and illegal.”

“So when did you first see the defendant?”

“About an hour to midnight.”

“What happened?”

The heavy breathing began again. He sucked as much oxygen as he could inhale to not pass out. The fear was vividly clear to the judge and jury. If they had their way, they would have pronounced the accused guilty right then. Society had already found him guilty. If he was let loose, a riot was inevitable. Four other witnesses had surfaced after Gomez agreed to testify; two were shunned by society like Gomez while the other two were embraced. They only agreed to testify, if other witnesses testified first

“Everything happened in flashes. I... I...” He bit on his lip before continuing, “I saw everybody in the club clearing a path and *The Monk* just appeared, walking through

the crowd. If I had seen him five seconds before, I would have jumped through the window.”

“Why would you run from him?”

“Why wouldn’t I? The Monk walked in. Anyone who saw him and remained calm didn’t know him. The smart ones took off long before I noticed. The atmosphere in the club changed into something dark, something evil.”

He gulped the remaining water.

“He came to me, grabbed my neck with his thumb and middle finger,” Gomez continued, demonstrating what happened with his own hands “He used the back of my head to continuously hit the shelf until the shelf broke...He then turned to the people around, and screamed, ‘Keep playing the music! He picked up a Budweiser, hit it gently across his palm, checking how hard the bottle was, and then smashed it on my face. I screamed and he told me to shut up...and I did. He began dancing. I knew death was better than whatever punishment he was going to give me, so I picked up the broken bottle and stabbed myself in the belly. He just stood there as I bled, angry, and I felt I had won until I blanked out.”

“Then what happened?”

“I woke up with...with...I need another glass of water.”

The burly man with rock muscles gulped the liquid, his hands trembling.

“Where, where was I?”

He positioned the black patch over his left eye.

“You woke up.”

“Yes, yes I woke up. I wished I didn’t, I wished I died,” he sighed. “My hands and legs were tied together behind me, and I was suspended by a rope up the trunk of a tree. The psycho treated me, just to punish me. He stitched every fucking—”

“Watch your words in my courtroom.”

“Sorry, Your Honor. He fixed me up and then hung me up a tree about four feet from the ground. I was somewhere in the woods. I ain’t never been scared of the dark, but that night I was. I screamed for help, but my voice kept coming back to me. I prayed it was some other psycho who tied me up, but my gut couldn’t tell a lie. He drove into the woods. I heard his car...everyone knows the sound of his car. He came out carrying a baseball bat. He was wearing his black gloves. If only I noticed those damn gloves, I would have swallowed my tongue.”

Gomez began to heave faster as he mimicked his oppressor.

“He walked up to me as I was rotating. He steadied my head and he said, ‘You, Fred Gomez, have been accused of raping and stealing from Deborah Santino, a wife and mother of two, five days ago in the middle of the night, wearing a hood and breaking into her apartment. The rape is said to have taken place in front of the husband, who was tied up by the bed. Do you plead not guilty or guilty?’ I...said I was guilty.”

“Did you rape Deborah Santino?”

Gomez turned his face away from the defendant as he answered.

“No...but if you come face to face with the devil, you would be a fool not to tell it what it wants.”

“Then what happened?”

“He said, ‘As appointed Judge of God over Joxton City, I sentence you to five strikes and, and...’” Gomez broke down in tears.

“Do you want more water?” the attorney asked.

“I don’t want any fucking water,” the witness shouted, not caring about the judge’s earlier directive. “And Castration! Cas-fucking-stration!”

“You watch your tone in my courtroom or I will have to lock you up for contempt,” the judge said sounding more motherly than professional.

Gomez continued, not caring what the judge said, nor waiting for the lawyer’s cue.

“He took the bat and whacked me hard on the face and he screamed, ‘Strike one.’ I shouted out my lungs as I twisted around. As soon as I steadied, he hit me, harder than the first time. I kept going round and round. He was impatient to wait for me to stop before he bashed me again, tearing open my face,” Gomez said grimacing as he recounted the torture.

“He waited till I stopped screaming and he began telling me how much he hated baseball. I begged him, swearing on my sons’ life that I would never do what he thought was wrong. He stopped, looked into heaven and whacked me again. I turned round and round. The bat was bloody red. The fucking psycho started dancing around me. I prayed to God, ‘God help me.’ He then said, ‘I prefer football.’ He walked back into the woods and started talking...talking to someone, I don’t know who, like thunder. He ran toward me, putting all his energy into the bat and whacked my left eye, pushing...pushing my eyes into my body.”

Gomez paused. The whole courtroom was still with him. The defense attorney began to get scared. The judge began wondering whether it was smart to take on this case. The jurors knew they had to be strong.

“I would like to present to the Court exhibit two.”

The prosecutor spread out pictures of Gomez taken immediately after the beating. His face had unrecognizable contours and his cheekbones were dissected. His left eye appeared nonexistent.

“Then what happened?”

“What the hell do you think happened? He cut off my dick, tied the uncut part of it with a rope and said, smiling, ‘To prevent the bleeding.’”

Exhibit three. The prosecutor handed out photos of Gomez’s empty crotch to the judge, jury and defense.

“Take your time Mr. Gomez.”

“He wrapped me all over in nylon paper, from my head to my toe, put me in the back of his car and drove back into the city. As he drove he started talking as though we just came out of a damn picnic. He told me how much he hated the weather, saying he intended taking his daughter to Disney World. I couldn’t stay in the vehicle with him any longer, it was worse than the pain I was feeling. He then stopped in front of a hospital, pulled me out of the car and said, ‘Good luck.’”

“Mr. Gomez, you mentioned he came upon you in the nightclub. Would you explain to us why nobody in the whole club verified your testimony?” the prosecutor asked, knowing he had the jury where he wanted them. It was vivid in their faces, they dreaded the defendant.

“I’m not even the hundredth of The Monks’ victims. We are many. My punishment...situation is even better than others. They say he made Lefty Anderson cook and join him in eating his own left hand.”

“Hearsay,” the defense attorney pronounced.

The judge felt like slapping the boy, but she was quick to remember she was the judge.

“Sustained. The jury will disregard the witness’s last statement.”

“Nobody testifies against The Monk unless you are not scared of dancing with the devil.”

“So why are you testifying.”

“The bastard took away the only thing that makes me feel like a man, the only thing I can get joy from...my dick.”

The middle-aged prosecutor in his well-tailored suit pointed his well-manicured fingers at the defendant.

“Is Detective Jack Davis, the man sitting on the defense seat, The Monk?”

Gomez’s eyes slowly turned to his oppressor. He saw the compassionate look of the jury, the winning gaze of the prosecutor, the uncomfortable look of the young lawyer and *him*.

Gomez looked into the eyes of the devil and realized the dance had not begun. Fear held him captive. He remembered the stench of his blood drowning him, the yelling of the night, the echo of his screams, the eyes...the wicked blue eyes of the demon came back to him. What had he done? Where could he run to? The Monk was going to take him down and the demon would never let him commit suicide. He wondered why he got

himself into this. He cursed his dick; it only got him into trouble. There was no place to run. He would find him anywhere on the planet. No prison could hold the demon. How stupid of him to forget that. The witness protection garbage they preached about could not stop The Monk. Not to mention if they found him not guilty.

“Are you okay Mr. Gomez?” the prosecutor asked, not understanding what was happening.

At that point he looked into the eye of the five-foot-eleven, slender framed detective, and The Monk winked, with a wicked smile.

Gomez lost his heartbeat. He began gasping for air in the moment then caught himself when an idea flashed into his head. For the first time in his life, his heart, soul and mind agreed this was the right decision.

“No,” Gomez blurted out.

“Sorry?” the prosecutor replied.

“It was dark in the club and, what the hell, I couldn’t see his face, but looking at that man there, the man was much taller than that...that fine man. And yes! I did fuck Deborah Santino, the bitch went out swinging her ass for the boys to come over to her, just for the bitch to tell the boys, ‘I’m married to a weasel.’”

“You are in contempt. Take him away!” The judge screamed.

Guards grabbed hold of him, pulling him away as he struggled, shouting, “Yeah, I fuck. You bitches ain’t seen nothing. I also screwed a lot of tramps who were smart enough to keep their mouths shut. I screwed all you sluts, so don’t go fronting like you’re something special with your stinking...”

They pulled him out of the courtroom into the place he hoped and dreamed to spend the rest of his life until The Monk was verified dead by at least a dozen people: prison.

## Chapter

## 2

“Using the CATCH program, we were able to relate the recent twelve homicides of The Versifier to the multiple homicides that started in 1986 and ended in 1995, having a Crime Index Total then of nine. Due to the killings taking place in separate states, and once a year, we determined they were never related to each other. Lights please.”

Special Agent Cynthia Scholl of the Federal Bureau of Investigation gestured with her fingers and the lights went off; the white screen lit up.

The first slide appeared, showing a man tied upside down, his head immersed in a bucket of blood.

“Jack Straton, a millionaire who made his fortune buying and selling struggling companies, was found dead in his garage, three cuts behind his neck.”

The next slide showed the back of the victim’s lifeless head.

“The cuts were continually reopened to continually emit the blood, so as to drown him in it,” the special agent said, using her pointer to draw attention to the deep gashes “The whole process might have taken about an hour or two. This was what the killer wrote with the victim’s blood on the wall: ‘They shout, but you will not hear; they cry and you wonder why.’”

In the third slide, a man is sprawled on the floor with stitches across his arms, chest, hands, leg and feet.

“Daniel Lebowski, surgeon who specializes in body transplants, was found with his body sewed up. The killer hacked him in pieces, possibly with an axe, and then sat down, took his time and sewed him up. The process must have taken him at least seven hours and he wrote in the same manner on the wall with some form of a paintbrush. ‘Nothing waits for nothing.’”

Scholl reached into the pocket of her navy twill jacket for her handkerchief. It wasn't there, so she dipped her hands into her navy trousers, pulled it out and dried her wet palms before continuing.

“Bishop Patrick Leonard,” she said of the man seen in the next slide hanging upside down, nailed to a cross by his hands and feet. “The man had twelve branches of his church around the country. This was what he wrote: ‘God sees and knows His own.’”

The horrific parade of slides kept coming, the next one more brutal than the previous.

A woman impaled through her vagina with the sharpened end tearing through her collarbone.

“Dennis René, owned a chain of hotels worldwide. This is what he wrote: ‘The older ones see, the younger ones lose their future at the expense of their wants.’”

The next image was of a man beheaded—his head placed on a table facing the wall, the body on a chair facing the same direction.

“William Pettibone owned one of the ten best galleries in the country.”

On the wall was a painting, with blurred strokes in Pettibone's blood, of a child changing to a man whilst walking to a tree with the sun overshadowing everything.

Above it the killer wrote, 'The light gives us life. Why do we open the doors, just to shade it?'

"The painting was carefully portrayed, a work that might have taken hours or days, timing which would have been very feasible because Pettibone was alone in his country house when it happened," Scholl said.

The next slide was of a man without skin, every outer flesh was peeled off.

"Senator Maxwell Robinson was found a month after his term ended, on the streets near a dilapidated housing development. This is what he wrote on the ground, 'Look from the inside.'"

Scholl sighed and pushed her pitch-black hair behind her ears. There was still more.

The subsequent slide showed a man's body, decayed flesh masticated below a milling machine. "The body is believed to have belonged to Jack Lopez, a major loan shark in the county."

Another slide came on, showing a pulley above a milling machine with an empty rope dangling from it. "The pulley above descended an inch every minute. Lopez was tied up with his hands and actually watched himself get torn apart slowly. The killer wrote, 'If their worth is nothing, then what are you worth?'"

The next slide came on. A corroded body adhered to the floor. His hands and legs were tied to the edge of both walls. A pail with a rope attached to it lay by the side of the corpse, with dead ants on and around the body.

"Michael Crawford, top manufacturer of chemical products. Here the killer tied him down, tossed a rope over the chandelier, put an edge of the rope in his mouth and

tying the other to a pail, which was above him, filled with concentrated acid. Then he poured honey over Crawford, letting out ants to crawl all over him. At this time Crawford was holding up the acid, which was above him with his teeth. Somewhere along the way with the insects, he gave up and let the acid pour on him. This was the killer's message, 'If only they could feel as they feel, see as they see, then they would grasp the reality.'"

The last slide was a black fleshy big-boned woman sitting on a rocking chair, with clean stitches on her chest.

"Margaret Davis. This case, we strongly believe there must have been some glitch in the program. We aren't too sure why she was aligned with the other killings. Her heart and kidneys were carefully, lovingly, pulled out of her chest and it was sewed back together. On the wall was written, 'Beautiful.' There was no shock. It was almost as though she allowed it."

"Lights please."

As they came on, the agent walked toward the mahogany roundtable where members of the meeting were seated: Deputy Assistant Director Brandon Duffy of the Office of Professional Responsibility, Stanley Bailey, the Manager of the Criminal Investigative Division, and Supervisory Special Agent Gregory Cruz.

Agent Scholl continued.

"These crimes are all related to the present twelve homicides in the last two months, which—"

"Agent Scholl," the bald Bailey interrupted, "the last nine homicides you just depicted, they were never connected to the same perpetrator. If I remember right, in four of the crimes you mentioned, the offenders were found."

“Allow me,” Cruz said to Scholl in his saccharine voice. “There were actually two men convicted for the crimes. We picked the best suspects, or more like the worst crooks we could find. For Senator Robinson we got Tyron Ahmed, a man living in the projects heading a black militant group, specialized in robbing Caucasians. The motive was perfect—he hated the Senator’s role in cutting down the development of the projects. Everybody was satisfied with justice. For the bishop we got Smith Handler, the head of the Razor Satanist group. The lunatic admitted to the crime, hoping to get sentenced to death to immortalize his name. Arnold Luiz, a father whose son died because he wasn’t given a heart transplant in Daniel Lebowsky’s hospital. He is believed to have killed him. For over a decade the man has not been found. Then there was Ethan Cornelius, the man who was believed to have killed Jack Straton and then committed suicide in his home because he didn’t have a job after the takeover.”

“Greg, we’re digging our heads into local affairs with this analogy. I don’t think there is a problem with the judgments given on the four deceased. Let Joxton carry the weight, it’s not a federal case yet,” Bailey said, not noticing Scholl in the room.

“Tyron Ahmed didn’t kill Senator Robinson because he was home beating up his wife, who was happy at the idea of letting go of the devil in her home and refused to verify his alibi. The man didn’t know how to peel an orange, not to mention a human being,” Scholl said, still standing with the pointer in hand.

“Justice was done. We didn’t want the world believing a senator would die in our country and we couldn’t do anything about it,” responded Cruz as he rubbed his pen through his glossy hair.

“Smith Handler came about easy. He had confronted Leonard violently before. He gladly accepted the crime when caught. We happily chose to neglect the fact the he couldn’t explain how the man died or how he got into the church.”

“He got life,” Bailey said, as though it was a happy ending.

“Arnold Luiz went back to his homeland a year before Lebowski’s death, swearing never to set foot in the States again after his son’s death. He was the perfect suspect. Nobody could locate where he was, so we put it on him. As for Ethan Cornelius, he committed suicide all right. Forensics determined his death to be about an hour before Straton’s, but with the fruitless search, we blamed it on Ethan.”

“Are you trying to tell me the FBI falsified information?” Bailey asked Scholl.

“Stanley, you don’t have to be melodramatic,” the white-haired Brandon Duffy answered, drumming his fingers on the table. “We are in good company”

“Were you aware of this?” Bailey threw the question at Scholl.

“She just joined the Bureau three years ago,” Cruz defended, “and I had only been here six months. We weren’t aware of this. But then it was never declared a federal situation.”

“How do you know this and why was it kept hidden?”

“Don’t be so naïve Stanley,” Duffy said, pulling off his tortoise-shell glasses. “We didn’t want the rich getting jittery that a serial killer was out there waiting to right the wrongs done to the poor.”

“Why?”

Duffy looked at Bailey with more pity than disgust. The man had been working for the FBI for over twenty-five years and had been in the same position for almost seven years. He was convinced that Bailey was going to remain in his niche till retirement.

“If it came out, I would presently be the FBI Director and you my deputy, after Congress and the Attorney General had kicked everyone else out.”

He cleaned his lens with a thin red cloth.

“But...how about the other five murders, why didn't it come out?” Bailey directed his focus on Cruz.

“The victims were saints the media didn't want to think about,” Scholl answered still standing, showing her five-foot-six frame. “It was acknowledged that Pettibone used his gallery for money laundry, though it was never proven. So it was assumed to be the effect of a bad deal. Dennis René ran a high-level prostitution cartel and used her hotel as a camouflage, so it was accepted to be a religious extremist. Lopez was a loan shark who never hesitated to damage anybody who didn't pay his high interest rate on time. There are over a hundred suspects in his case. Crawford was a public enemy in his hometown. The waste products from his manufacturing company were believed to have caused mutations in children and breast cancer in some women. The people lost their case in court, and when he died, the whole town threw a party. Margaret Davis, on the other hand, is a personality we can't connect to anything. She was a selfless woman, dedicating her whole life after the death of her husband to her orphanage. She only had an adopted son, who was traumatized for a while. All she had to fight for her were the children in the orphanage.”

“Touching story. So I’m supposed to believe the killer was a surgeon, painter and body builder.” Bailey still had his eyes on Cruz.

“We classify him as a charismatic psychopath, white middle-aged man having an abnormally high I.Q. with multi-talents and a demonic determination to change people’s lives,” Scholl said.

“But what would make him stop for such a long time and start again?” Duffy asked.

“The switch...the switch he had. He must have turned it off then and it somehow unlocked itself again. Most psychopaths never stop; it always is within them, even if they think they can stop. It’s their means of attaining power, making the world into what they want it to look like.”

“Yes, but Scholl, this killer has motives. He kills to...make the common man live a better life,” Duffy said.

“Yes sir, most male serial killers are either visionaries, missionaries, hedonists or power seekers. In this case, we are dealing with a missionary with a rich background. In his mind he is doing the right thing and there are many followers backing him. But in the reality of justice, he is committing multiple homicides and would be sentenced to nothing less than life.”

“But the recent murders have been more brutal, less articulate. Only the phrases on the death scene are similar. The murders don’t seem similar to me,” Bailey said, slouched in his chair.

“We matched the writings on the wall then and now, and we had an almost perfect match to the left-handed psycho. As for the change in portraying his deeds, he is ten years

older. Fear is slowly beginning to dawn on him. He isn't capable of being a primary psychopath anymore, now he fears being caught. An emotion he must have gotten during the years he disappeared, probably through marriage, children or something that seemed to act as his light."

"But the CATCH program has only been able to detect rapists, not serial killers," Duffy said.

"Yes sir and it's also agreed that most serial killers are caught by mistake. The CATCH program can't detect the killer, but it can detect similar crimes. To that end I can vouch for the match of all the crimes linked to The Versifier."

"You better watch what you vouch for, Scholl," Duffy cautioned, still drumming his fingers as he talked. "The other killer patiently waited for a year, watching and studying each victim before killing them, but The Versifier acts spontaneously, or uses a shorter study period. His works are about publicity. He is trying to send a message and imposing it on everyone through death."

"That's the point, sir, almost all serial killers want publicity. All his works from the past have not been written through time and he—"

"He?" Bailey raised an eyebrow.

"The killer is very strong," she said.

"Brutality requires no strength. Machinery can make a substitute for strength," Cruz said.

"The serial killer," Scholl continued, still standing, "is now determined to advertise his past works with his new works. He...the killer is getting desperate to be caught. Now he only kills in Joxton City, making things easier for us."

“Listen Scholl, you are a criminal psychologist and a good one, so I will get straight to the point. You didn’t get Bailey and me here just to correlate past murders with the present ones.”

She sighed, then looked at Cruz, who gave her a supportive stare. “No sir. Three months ago our unit, The Behavioral Science Unit, did a bust on an apocalyptic cult called The Holy Fist, whose goal was to accelerate the end of time by wiping out the sinners preventing God from returning—namely prostitutes, dope dealers and anyone they saw as corrupt. They—”

“Get to the point,” Bailey cut in.

“From all the information we gathered, we numbered thirty-seven members. On the bust there wasn’t resistance. All the members swallowed cyanide pills and died instantly. The body count we got was thirty-six. While surveying the parameter, we found every literature, film, picture burnt to shreds. All we could find that made sense was a book.”

She pulled out a book in a plastic bag from her portfolio; the cover had the picture of a naked blonde little girl looking into a red sky. “*The Last Curse*” by Archie Stone.

“Archie Stone, do you mean the millionaire publisher?” Bailey asked.

“A hundred and sixty-nine million to be precise. He was one of the first to start e-publishing on a large scale. His major income isn’t from publishing but from his e-commerce outfit. His father left him sixty-five percent of his publishing outfit when Archie Stone was twenty six. His father died of cardiac arrest. The man owns a part of everything in Joxton City. In his fifty-one years he has only written one book and...” She caught Cruz’s eye warning her this wasn’t about impressing the bosses.

“Are you trying to tell us that just because you saw Archie Stone’s book with an apocalyptic cult member, he is our killer?” Bailey asked, rankled.

“The signature in the book is an almost identical handwriting match to the past and present writings on the wall.”

“The D.A. can’t use that in a court of law,” Bailey said.

“And every detail of how the earlier eight murders took place is explicitly written in his book. He complemented our intelligence by changing the characters. He even called his killer The Versifier.”

“You must have heard of the term copycat,” Bailey began to rise. “He also wrote about the death of four victims who died in exactly the same pattern as he wrote it.” Scholl tried to drive her point.

“That, my dear, will be his alibi if we follow it up and need I mention, cold cases aren’t difficult to follow up on.” Bailey was on his feet putting his pen in the breast pocket of his suit

“His fingerprints were still on the book when we found it.”

Bailey stopped and sat back down. “Only his prints?”

“We can’t give a positive yes to that, the—”

“So you believe he was the last man not found among the cult members?”

Duffy put his lighter back into the inner pocket of his jacket, purposely not looking at anyone as he talked.

“Yes sir,” Scholl answered. “We believe in the seven year existence of the cult, he must have headed it and used them to do his evil deeds. But when everything blew up, he must have cracked and began killing again on his own.”

“It’s still not enough to follow up,” Bailey said. “Did you get anything else? Was there any fingerprint at the crime scenes or DNA that matched Stone’s?”

“We had nothing from the RFLP and PCR. We don’t have any scientific connection to Archie Stone.”

“Were there any witnesses ready to connect Stone with the cult?”

“No.”

“Miss Scholl,” Duffy said in a paternal tone to the 33-year-old agent, “the prints on the book are circumstantial. He autographed the book. People like Stone never hesitate to get those fancy lawyers who wouldn’t blink at making us look like the laughing stock of the century.”

“We carried out a stakeout on him for the past three weeks. Six murders occurred in that time, and during that time he simply just disappeared. He knew we were onto him.”

“If he was aware of your presence, then I doubt he would still do the crime,” Bailey said.

“That’s the point—he doesn’t care anymore. He wants to be caught, but he wants to be caught by us without his help.”

“Scholl, I think you are living a fantasy. This man has everything he desires in life, why would he want to go around killing?” Bailey asked, crossing his leg.

“The man is rich and bored, no wife, no children, no steady girlfriend. His parents might have abused him when he was younger. He disappeared for over a year at the age of twenty, abandoning his inheritance. He was a suppressed child; all his life was imposed on him. He—”

“Nice, but all that would be termed circumstantial. So what do you want to do?”

Bailey cut in.

Cruz gave a slight cough and began.

“We need authorization to tap his phones, and we would want Cynthia to go in undercover. The man is wickedly smart, so we plan on putting her in as an investigative reporter for a news magazine, giving her a reason to pry.”

“We don’t have that kind of time. Such procedures could take months. The commissioner cries on air that his Joxton City is at the mercy of a killer. Everyone is now interested.”

“Eight weeks,” Cruz said, “and we’d have all the evidence to nail the psycho.”

Duffy and Bailey looked at each other.

“Eight weeks it is. You’ll get the authorization,” Duffy said before both men walked out of the room talking.

“Are you sure you can go through with this?” Cruz asked.

“Definitely,” Scholl said, strolling toward him. “You called me Cynthia in front of the boys. That didn’t sound official, Gregory.”

He picked up his briefcase and stood next to her. “It will soon be over.”

“You’ve been saying that for months.”

“This time I mean it.”

“This time you mean it,” she mimicked as she walked by him and opened the door.

Then, without looking back she said, “Thank you for the opportunity.”

He wanted to say something but it was too late; a swinging door now stood between them.