



RJ SMITH

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THE SOUTH BEACH KILLER

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FBI SERIAL KILLER TASK FORCE BOOK 2

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BOOK #2 - FBI SERIAL KILLER TASK FORCE

BY

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A Storyteller Novel

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FBI SERIAL KILLER TASK FORCE

The Santa Claus Killer

FBI Serial Killer Task Force, Book #1

The South Beach Killer

FBI Serial Killer Task Force, Book #2

NOVELS

Cataclysm

Monsters in the Woods

SHORTS

The Storyteller

(an amazon exclusive)

MOVIES

Destiny

Storyteller

Cataclysm

FOREWORD

They say a story is worth its weight in gold.

The truth is, researching and writing tales-*whether they be literary manuscripts or screenplays*-are the product of countless gut-wrenching hours, months and oftentimes, years. I spend many sleepless nights creating flesh & blood characters locked away in my man-cave here in tropical Fort Lauderdale, Florida. A beach boy my entire life, I'm happiest laid out on the sugar sand beach with a corona close by.

Over my twelve-year career as a Hollywood Screenwriter and Literary Novelist, I've come to understand a *good story* takes over the writer's life. That sort of dedication comes at a steep cost of lost time with family, missed birthday parties and skipped precious moments with friends and people overall. Unfortunately, I'm not blessed with a close-knit family. My brother Larry, sister-in-law Janette, Uncle Harold and Father Stephen are all I really have. Then, there is you, my dearest fans. Those who buy and *read* my novels. I'm thankfully not James Patterson or Stephen King. I don't use *co-writers* like they do. In my opinion, that's just laziness. I believe a reader deserves the best stories *written by us*, the actual writers ya follow. I'd rather turn out a single novel every year rather than employing a hack to pen my stories. They say ghostwriters can turn out more material. I believe such excuses belong in the bottom of a shredder. Ghostwriters are merely failed novelists themselves and depend on star studded names to get their own quasi fictions on the market. When we pick-up our favorite author's new novel and see a co-writer's name printed in small typeset at the bottom of the cover, we must ask ourselves... whose work are we reading? I believe a ghostwriter can seriously fuck up a tale. After all, they cannot read the demented thoughts tumbling through my sick, jaded mind. I'm a raving psychotic lunatic who somehow figured out how to turn a word and flip a phrase. Above my iMac I keep shelves packed with various human, alligator and dinosaur skulls which I've collected over the years. Beside them lies my first typewriter manufactured in 1951. I wrote *The Santa Claus Killer* on it before I learned how to use a computer. I wasn't even born when it was manufactured.

Ah, time passes at the snap of a finger.

It's been quite some time since I've written to you from this cave. For those who discovered my debut novel in 2013 and read *The Santa Claus Killer*, this novel is Book #2 in the *FBI Serial Killer Task Force* series. So, if you haven't read *Santa*, maybe you should read that first before flipping this page, so you relate with the characters. With the international media coverage of Santa and his murderous rage felt along the East Coast of America, we endured in him an NYPD & FBI manhunt through the sewage pipes and subway tunnels beneath Manhattan, hared the stench of it. The gore multiplying when Santa opened his dad's butcher shop. Remember? You were sitting on the edge of your seat waiting to turn the page?

It was quite a novel.

Right after releasing *it* to a media blitz in the New York Times, USA Today and LA Times, I thought it would be a hard novel to top. However, for Sergeant Mike Murphy and Lieutenant Rico Martinez, the chase left an empty cavity in their souls, and thus begged for another starring role.

So, here we are lounging on the sand of Miami's infamous South Beach. Writing book #2 in my oceanfront suite at *The Delano Hotel*, it quickly became apparent the entire gang had reunited in *this book* for an encore presentation. In the years since Santa went on his killing spree in New York City, Rico had moved his family to South Beach where he took-on the job of Deputy Chief at Miami Beach Police Department. As for Murphy, his fling with FBI's Special Agent in-Charge Mei Ling took him to Homeland Security where he married and settled down.

This story has always stuck with me.

Maybe it's because I come from a life of crime, or perhaps the blood and gore of the tale pulled me back. With talking cats and freezers full of human flesh, who wouldn't want more of that? Thus, after writing *The Storyteller*, *Cataclysm*, *Monsters in the Woods* and *Destiny* over the last six-year period while enduring ten-surgeries, eight titanium implants and years of painful physical rehabilitation, I slowly got to work on this novel.

Today is my birthday, I'm 55 years old and I'm spending it with *The South Beach Killer - Book #2, FBI Serial Killer Task Force*.

So, where do we go from here?

Let's head to the sugar-sand beaches of South Florida where a psycho has begun a game of *catch me if you can*.

Turn down the lights, a killer has arrived!

Chapter 1

DESTINATION

South Beach was the most famous place on Earth, and Ocean Drive *the* world's most recognized twelve blocks of sun and fun.

Standing on an oceanfront balcony of Miami Beach's exclusive Delano Hotel, a startling handsome twenty-something pushed a pair of Versace sunglasses onto the bridge of his nose and peered below at the moneyed guests lounging around the glittering tropical pool. Abutting the property, frothy breakers tumbled onto the beach, he inhaled the wonderful scent of Hawaiian Tropic Dark Tanning Oil. Above the rolling waves, a squadron of Gulls braved the gusts. Decked out in Versace beachwear, he'd just checked in and was eager to jump into the Atlantic. *This place is fucking sexy*, he considered thumbing through the well-worn pages of *Fool's Paradise, Players, Poseurs, and the Culture of Excess in South Beach*. It was a good read. The first time he'd read the novel, he craved visiting SOBE. *Let the festivities begin!*

Earlier, while waiting his suite to be cleaned and readied, Jack met two gay men, Mark and Bobby, seated in the Rose Bar. Bullshitting over the course of two apple martinis, they strolled to the rear door. Immediately outside, palms peppered the property and within a few strides, they came upon a black and white checkered concrete slab with waist high chess pieces all surrounded by Emerald Saint Augustine Sod.

Mark waved. "Jack, what're you doing up there?"

"Nothing, Bobby! What about y'all?"

"Bar crawling." Mark exclaimed. "This place is fabulous!"

"It sure is!"

"Can I call you, Jackie Boy?"

Manufacturing a bogus smile, the killer chuckled. "Mark, you two can call me anything, just don't call me..."

"— late for dinner? My dad used to say that!"

"Sure! Meet you guys back in the Rose in ten minutes?"

The bar was a who's-who of celebrity, beauty, and plastic surgery on full display among the guests.

Jack couldn't wait to visit the notorious Sun Ray Apartments where the chainsaw scene in *Scarface* was shot. That film and the subsequent television series *Miami Vice* transformed Miami Beach. It was both paradise and crime ridden by a dangerous undercurrent of crooks, murderers, and drug traffickers. Indeed, SOBE was a very different place before Al Pacino stomped the streets playing a Cuban dissident and criminal refugee.

Yet, despite the connotations of danger, tourists still disembarked commercial airplanes and cruise ships by the millions. What nobody dared mention was the disgraceful displacement of senior citizens who'd once called the beach home. The elderly had been sold out by crooked politicians, greedy industrialists, and big money. Since the nineteen nineties, hundreds of condos and hotels were developed making SOBE the hottest *destination*. The hoards descended every day, dropping their billions and partaking in their sins of wants and desires. Absurdly, just across the Miami Bay, a few blocks west of Biscayne Boulevard, train tracks divided prosperity from poverty. This was *Overtown*, better known as the *jungle ghetto*, where poor black mothers ignored the reality their drop-out kids were peddling Cocaine, Crack and Heroin to affluent whites who dared drive extravagantly expensive cars over MacArthur Causeway to score a fix.

When the deal was done, they'd speed back to the beach.

Ocean Drive was without a doubt where all the magic happened. Twenty-four-hours a day, it was home to hundreds of stylish and sleazy nightclubs, beachfront bistros, boutique resorts and overpriced hotels. It was a place of dream. Popular with Europeans, Israelis and South Americans, tens of millions visited annually. With lavish mini-mansions and costly Highrise condos, there was a great divide between the haves and have-nots. Yet, that was life. One either got busy living or were consumed by the money machine. Afterall, time was running out. In thirty years, the East Coast of the United States would be gone. Sea levels were rising exponentially.

Chuckling at his thoughts, Jack pushed through the balcony's glass door and welcomed the sudden onslaught of cold air in the room. Placing the hardcover on the nightstand, there was much work to be done and he didn't dare waste a single minute. Flipping open a Luis Vuitton suitcase, he pushed aside a stack of thousand-dollar Versace tees and picked up a large carving knife glittering in the overhead lighting. Grabbing a backpack, he tossed in a huge knife, a hacksaw, and mini-bolt cutters. Tying the strings, he shrugged on the shoulder straps and adjusted the weight on his back. "Time for work! Time to find my true love!"

A prolific exterminator, WFLA Channel 8 in Clearwater had already dubbed him *The Sandman*. The name fit perfectly. Unlike other serial slayers, he didn't hear voices in his head and there weren't any ghosts stalking his trail. It was just him, his dark fantasies and rivers of blood stalking his reveries! Hurrying out the door and into the hallway, he grabbed an elevator to the lobby, walked through the whitewashed lobby and simply disappeared among a group of tourists shuffling down Collins Avenue. The sidewalk was busy with passersby, skateboarders, rollerbladers and bicyclists. Watching them from behind the dark lenses of his medusas, his eyes feasted on their young tender flesh. *How sweet it will be!* Like most predators, he grew-up in a broken home, his father a bum who'd disappeared from his life and a mother a raging alcoholic. As a boy his anger and loneliness were

fueled by witnessing friends living a normal life with loving parents. It burned deep in his gut. Taking out his rage on domesticated cats and other pets, he became a skilled animal killer. During high school and college, his thoughts turned to humans. He was, by then, a dangerous sociopath who'd developed multi-personality disorders but somehow managed to hide it deep inside and away from prying eyes. His first killing occurred in the second semester of college at the University of South Florida. The idea originated from an internet search on the infamous death machine that was Ted Bundy who snatched female college students in broad daylight.

At the age of twenty-one, Jack followed a popular male student off campus to *The Standard* apartment complex situated in the heart of University Square Drive in Tampa. With long red hair, an athlete's body, and sparkling green eyes, Jack wanted to fuck the young man.

That's how it always began.

Someday, police might track him down. Though he wasn't making it easy for them. after the bloody scenes he left behind with notes explaining how he'd murdered the objects of his desire before making love to the corpses. Smiling at the sordid memories, he glanced at a beautiful specimen standing outside Armani Exchange.

Chapter 2

THE ROVING REPORTER

Stefan loved Miami. Adopted in New York City by the super-rich Manhattan defense attorney, Terry, and Mirabel Woodard, he'd attended the exclusive *Columbia Grammar & Prep* while growing up in a luxurious penthouse overlooking Central Park's Naumburg Bandshell where all the free concerts took place. Since then, he'd become quite a writer and was courted by countless prestigious newspapers. *The Boston Globe*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post* all made substantial offers. Surprisingly, he rejected them and instead pursued a lesser position with *The Miami Herald*. Having vacationed in South Beach every winter with his family, Stefan fell in love with the subtropical lifestyle. Much like Manhattan, there was electricity in the air, a sense of excitement and endless crime to write about. Steering his Honda VTX 1300 across Washington Avenue in avoidance of morning rush-hour, he rolled onto Ocean Drive, glanced at the ocean, and realized he didn't miss Manhattan. With his MacBook, and trusted Uniden Bearcat Police Scanner tucked away in the bike's saddlebags, he stopped at a red light, pulled out his iPhone and pushed a pair of Air Pod Pro's into his ears. "Siri," he shouted over the roar of the engine, "Play Billie Eilish."

"So, you're a tough guy, likes it really rough guy. Just can't get enough guy, chest always so puffed guy, I'm that bad type! Make your mama sad type, make your girlfriend mad tight, might seduce your dad type, I'm the bad guy, duh. I'm the bad guy!"

"You sound sexy as hell!" a girl yelled from a car window.

"Thanks bae!" he chuckled shaking long locks of sun-blond hair from his eyes. Glancing over his left shoulder, he eyeballed a surfer riding a wave. In the distance, the sun had just peaked the horizon. At the water's edge, pelicans and flamingoes pranced the surf seeking a meal of mullets. This was the highlight of his day. Up ahead, the *Villa Casa Casuarina* glistened, the onetime beachfront mansion of fashion mogul Gianni Versace. *If I could only sink my teeth into a homicidal news spectacle like that, I'd be set!* At Sixth Street, he followed a silver Rolls Royce Ghost to the curb and parked beside a Lamborghini SVJ. Climbing from the bike, he hurried into *The News Café*. Open twenty-four-seven, anyone who was anyone hung out here. This morning, Jennifer Lopez was chatting up groupies at a solitary table in the corner. Oftentimes, Stefan's colleagues would gather here to drink away the night while swapping stories of the *journaliste du jour*, or the most recent reporter to break a big story.

Yesterday, the writer's name was Morton Willwigger, a forty-year veteran of The

Miami Times, a daily rival of the Herald and online smorgasbord of spicy articles posted on their website, *MiamiTimesOnline.com*. Pushing Mort from mind, the thin, twenty-five-year-old felt his stomach grumble. Like most mornings, he ritualistically ordered a huge stack of crunchy, brown sugar pancakes smothered with real butter, fresh strawberries, and thick Carmel syrup. A creature of habit, he ordered the exact same thing *each* morning. Ridiculously, these horrible eating habits didn't add an ounce of fat to his six-pack abs. Working out two hours a day at the *Equinox Club*, the gym sat at the epicenter of trendy shops and restaurants, a block removed from the sea. An erogenous social club crowded with handsome young gay men; middle agers didn't belong as they were *way* out of their league. Literal *has-beens*, the young called them *Over-the-Hillers*. Besides, exercising among such stunningly trim bodies made the old feel inadequate.

Stefan fit in quite nicely. Entering the busy Café, he hurried through the crowd and glimpsed his best friend Blair Andrews waving him over.

"Hey, buddy, how's it hanging?"

"What's good, brah?"

"Not much, TV Star! Ya got a bone to throw me?"

"Not even a morsel. Slow news night."

"C'mon, ya gotta have something?"

The Pulitzer Prize winning journalist adored Stefan. Although their connection wasn't sexual, Blair found him tremendously striking. *Modelesque* was how he described his friend to Agustin Bruno, the fiercest male model of the time. When meeting Stefan, A.B. remarked he'd seen the face of God. Convincing his friend to pose for a series of photographs, Blair contacted Gio Alma, an Argentinian fashion shutterbug who shot mesmerizing sets of black and whites which once won him the *Black & White Spider Awards*. Because of Gio's considerable influence, he succeeded in landing Stefan a string of high-paying jobs representing *Calvin Klein* and *Givenchy* in the pages of *Vogue*, *GQ*, and *Ocean Drive Magazine*. Many agencies ripped-off their clients, but such wasn't the case with Miami Beach's *Next Model Agency*. The owner knew his shit and quickly signed Stefan believing he might be the next Marky Mark underwear model.

Not long after, Stefan was featured at prestigious runway shows in Milan and Paris. Over a period of eighteen-months, he made a million dollars. But then, he suddenly quit the business and complained to Blair he didn't like the constant travel or the hordes of backbiting bitches competing for *his* plush assignments. Although he earned more cash than he would in a thirty-year career at the Miami Herald, Stefan was just as happy working the crime beat at the paper understanding his youth wouldn't last forever.

"You should have kept modeling. You're crazy to have quit!"

"My family is worth a hundred-million. Why starve myself?"

“Good point.” Reaching into his shoulder bag, Blair pulled out a laptop and clicked through a series of e-mails. “Not much to throw you today, buddy! There *is* a missing person’s report from M.B.P.D.”

“Missing?”

Reading down through the email, Blair’s eyes locked on the information. “A twenty-six-year-old, trust-fund baby went club hopping last night and never returned to her suite at the Delano.”

“Nobody has seen her since?”

“Not a soul, at least not a living one!”

In the pit of his stomach, Stefan instinctively suspected somebody had probably abducted her. “The killer could be anyone. I bet the cops have no clue what’s happening.”

“I didn’t say anything about a murder,”

“You didn’t have to.”

Chapter 3

CRIME SCENE

Deputy Chief Rico Martinez's unmarked *Police Interceptor* sped past the boathouse where Andrew Cunanan hid out after gunning down Gianni Versace. Shaking his head at the sordid memory, he pushed the gory details mind knowing *that nightmare* happened on somebody else's watch. Suddenly his cell chirped from a holster clipped to his gunbelt. "Rico!"

"Ricky? It's Dick." Agent Shlong was South Florida's Supervisory Agent in Charge of Major Crimes for the *Florida Department of Law Enforcement*.

"I hate that fucking name. This can't be good?"

"Nope. The flames of hell have risen in your district."

"What and where?"

"The Delano Hotel, right now!"

"On my way," Rico grouched. Before pressing the end call button, the shit hit the fan. His phone rung, text messages erupted, and dispatch called.

"Marty? We have a thirty-one-thirty-three at sixteen-eighty-five Collins."

"On my way," he replied. *A sexual assault and homicide? Fucking Christ!* Flipping on the siren and lightbar hidden in the front grille, he raced through five-red lights and arrived in just under two-minutes. Abandoning the SUV on the hotel's sloping horseshoe driveway, he hurried up the steps parting a group of moneyed tourists.

"Sir?" a young pimple-faced parking valet called after him. "You can't park on the drive up; you're blocking everyone else!"

Throwing him the keys, Rico chuckled knowing there was a time when he would've told this kid to go fuck himself. But Miami Beach had softened him. "Better not put one fucking dent in it, you got me?" Without waiting for an answer, he rushed through the lobby's white flowing curtains hanging from ceiling to floor. Pausing, he surveilled a handful of guests seated in a half-dozen artistically designed seats. Approaching a pair of well-mannered receptionists checking in an elderly couple, he glanced at a sparkling chandelier hanging between a pair of twenty-foot white Corinthian pillars. *Look at this joint!* In the few years he'd been on the job he'd never had a reason to visit the boutique hotel. Placing his elbows on a granite countertop, he interrupted the girl chatting with the couple.

"What's a room in this joint go for, huh?"

"Hey, you!" his son Luis' girlfriend beamed. "I can give you a big discount, but I don't think the city can afford seven-hundred a night."

"Jeez, what a scam!"

"It's the Delano South Beach. That justifies the price!"

"If you say so, Adriana! I don't get it. Are they feeding gold and silk to their bloated

guests?”

“Excuse me?” a withered old hag with blue teased hair snarled. “Young man, do you not see me and my husband standing here? Where are your manners? Wait your turn!”

Giving her the attention she obviously craved, Rico’s eyes burned a hole into her. “I’m sorry, ma’am. Please excuse me for doing my fucking job!”

Clutching a perfectly groomed little white poodle with a pink bow tied around its neck, she pointed a crooked forefinger at him. “How rude!” On her drooping earlobes were 24-karat gold earrings embedded with red rubies.

Jesus, get a load of this bitch!

It was unbelievable what the mighty dollar did to people! Beside her, a ninety-year-old demasculinized husband shook his head in embarrassment.

“Nice rubies Ma’am. Did this young man next to you buy them?”

“Rubies?” she spat. “I’d never wear that junk! What are you, a Cuban refugee? I’m surprised you can afford a hotel like this.”

Rico was about to let her have it when the old man interrupted.

“They’re diamonds. I bought them in Africa.”

“Oh, very nice, indeed. You have good taste.”

“They are very rare,” the woman scoffed. Turning up her nose, she turned her back on Rico and made sure everyone in proximity knew she was the one in control. It was clear, she had buffalo balls.

“Never seen red diamonds before.”

The old man thrust out a trembling hand. “Harrington Rockefeller’s the name. It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance! Are you with the hotel?”

Rico flashed his gold badge. “Deputy Chief Martinez, Miami Beach PD. Nice to meet you, sir. Any relation to Standard Oil’s John Rockefeller?”

“He’s *Norman* Rockefeller’s son,” the old woman sniped. “You know, the American author, painter and illustrator?”

“Is that so? Well, you’re practically royalty!”

That stoked her ego and she held out her hand expecting Rico to kiss it. “I’m Margret, the national treasurer of the-”

Dick grabbed Rico’s elbow. “Hey, buddy? Ever seen anything like this?”

“Nope. Thanks for saving me from the RCS.”

“What?”

“Rich Cock Suckers.”

Chuckling, the FDLE agent went on. “Everything about this place is over the top, from the uppity clientele like the ones you just met, to the trendy employees and the immaculate rooms! Jesus! It would take a week’s salary just to stay here one lousy night!”

“All right already, Dick! What’ve we got?”

Flipping open a small notebook, the agent read his notes. “Your CSI people just processed the decedent’s oceanfront room, but everything seems in place. They used luminal. Nothing. Everything is negative for blood spatter. They’re dusting the flat screen, remote control, iPad, and iPhone docks. We’ll have results soon.”

“So, what have we got right now?”

“According to the hotel, our victim was scheduled to work-out with a trainer and yoga instructor early this morning but never showed. My guys have already contacted them. Though, so far, we’ve found nothing indicative of the horror show out back.”

“A robbery that went south?”

“Nope. Cash, credit cards, jewelry and twenty-grand in travelers checks were on the dresser in clear view. Nothing seems to have been taken.”

“Something is always out of place. This will be a public relations nightmare for a place like this. When are you talking to the yoga Zen master and personal trainer?” While awaiting his answer, Rico ran through thousands of mental images and settled on just one. “We had a premeditated murder like this back at *The Waldorf Astoria* in Manhattan.”

“What happened?”

“The perp turned out to be a long-term butler who learned he was in the old bag’s Last Will and Testament to the tune of five-million. He got fifty to life instead.”

“That’s fucking poetic.”

“Motherfucking Edgar Allen Poe,” Rico grinned pushing through a set of gilded doors leading out back to a manicured courtyard where a huge pool was surrounded by hotel guests sprawled on cedar lounge chairs.

“The Water Salon,” Dick mumbled.

“What?”

“The hotel calls their pool, *The Water Salon*! See how the water pushes right up to the edges all around the pool? Like an infinity pool? Jesus could walk across that water!”

“He ain’t here, pal,” Rico remarked shuffling across the sod that gave way to the huge concrete pad painted with white and black squares. “This is cool, a large chessboard and three-foot-tall plastic pieces. I’ve never seen one quite like this.” Glancing back to the pool, he eyeballed his patrolmen interviewing the upscale visitants now held hostage sipping Rum Runners, Manhattans, Cosmopolitans, frozen Margaritas and Pina Coladas.

The drinks of the RCS.

“Dick? Whaddaya think that maybe, someone has proclaimed hunting season on the super-wealthy? Surfside had a similar killing last week!”

Dick knew all about it, but his agency hadn’t been involved. “You think this might be related? You know that department is dirty as shit. I wouldn’t trust those humps

with handing out parking tickets!”

“What are you muttering about?”

Dick shrugged. “Rico? Remember when the *Miami Herald* broke the story of money laundering and drug peddling operations carried out by *Bal Harbour Police* and the *Glades County Sheriff’s Office*?”

“Of course! What a mess! Stefan unraveled the crimes.”

“Correct! Six guys on the job were nabbed with Twenty-five kilos of pure Columbian nose candy! Hiding it beneath the spare tires in several of their police cruisers, they thought themselves untouchable!”

“FDLE or Justice claim jurisdiction?”

“Yes,” Dick replied. “They were tried by Justice!” Pulling a white pocket square from his black sportscoat, he blew his nose, pulled-up a shirtsleeve and glanced at his twenty-year-old Timex. “It’s only nine o’clock? Jesus!”

Everyone despised the spiking humidity.

“Is M.O. identical?” the DOJ lawyer asked. “A pattern, maybe?”

Rico’s rough edges were on full display. “The stress of the job here seems worse than the Big Apple. Several guys have retired or resigned in the face of the riots that have gripped the nation. Is Sandman’s M.O. similar to other patterns throughout the state?”

“Identical,” Dick said. “Our new murder cases resemble one that happened in *Lauderdale by the Sea* discovered beneath the Commercial Boulevard Fishing Pier around two in the morning last Tuesday. I know it’s too soon to say the word serial, but-”

“Motherfucker!”

Dick went on. “The victim in Broward County was a young Latin Male, said to be homosexual and a well-known club promoter. According to old man Pete-”

“Pete Markus?”

Everybody in law-enforcement knew the ancient Broward County homicide detective. At seventy-two years of age, he was once featured on the cover of Time Magazine as the longest serving murder cop in the country. He’d been picking at bodies since the 1980s.

“Pete says their vic was stripped of clothing and sexually molested.”

“Same as Surfside *and* our scene?”

“All the victims so far are transgendered.”

Rico griped. “A trannie? So, you’re saying FDLE suspects an UNSUB killing and raping gay men?” Peering at his friend, he saw sadness in the agent’s stare. The eyes were, after all, the windows of the soul. That’s what grandmother used to tell him on warm summer nights as fireflies hovered around the treetops with crickets echoing on the summer breeze. Those were the memories the hard-nosed manhunter kept close to his heart. It was a simpler time back there at Old Fort Four Park. “The

gay community is going to be enraged if we don't catch this guy fast. It's a very political community down here."

"That's for sure! Wanna know how doctors remove the testicles?"

"No, thanks."

Looking down at his notes, Dick went on. "The trannie out on the beach had a sex change operation in 2014 but has been living as a woman for decades. The body is severely mutilated. Her implants were surgically removed. But the worst is the eyes."

"What about them?"

"They were removed."

"Prick!" Rico huffed. "So, where's the connection? Seems to me all FDLE has to link the previous victims is they were also found on beaches and were either gay or transsexual, do I have that right?"

"Yup. And they were all quite wealthy."

"How did the trannie make a living?"

Flipping through his notebook, Dick settled on a page filled with scribbly etchings. "Worked six nights a week as a drag queen performer at *Lips* in Fort Lauderdale. She brought in five-g-notes a week in tips thrown onto the stage while she lip-synched old Madonna songs."

"What a world we live in! The trannie made double my salary!"

"South Florida is now the *gay* mecca of the planet."

"I thought that was San Francisco?"

"That was in the seventies, buddy! Now it's all about South Beach and Wilton Manors in Fort Lauderdale."

Pushing the conversation aside, Rico walked beneath a swath of towering Royal Palm trees surrounding the pool. Sizing up the guests, he noticed a young waiter expertly carrying a tray of drinks. "Huh, they start early!" He couldn't believe the hotel was already serving alcohol knowing what lay on the other side of the beach access gate. "Hey kid," he shouted startling the erogenous looking pool boy. "How many of the rooms in this joint have balconies facing the Ocean and was the hotel sold out last evening?"

"I wouldn't know, sir. I can call the manager. He works twelve-hour shifts and doesn't get off until noon. He came on last night at midnight."

"Yup, get his candy ass down here pronto! Tell him just like that, okay? No sugar coating, *'the Deputy Chief of the Miami Beach PD says get your candy ass down here pronto!'* Got it?"

"Yes sir," the boy lisped.

"Just like I said, right?"

"I'll tell him straightaway."

"Good boy! Make it happen!" Taking in the scene, Rico was stunned at the glamour

of it all. “Fucking unbelievable, huh, Dicky?”

“Did you say good boy to the waiter?”

“C’mon Dick, you of all people should know gay people love it when you think they’re younger than they really are!”

“That is the most sexist thing I have heard in years.”

“You’re here, you’re Queer, deal with it! Isn’t that the motto?”

The two lawmen sniggered.

Yet, before Rico could say anything else inappropriate, a flamboyant fellow appeared at their side wearing a cotton Seville Row pinstriped suit.

Jesus, Rico thought. *Get a look at this buffoon!*

“Hello gentlemen. Welcome to *The Delano on South Beach*. I am the night manager Peppy Amour. It’s a miserably terrible day here at the hotel! This day will forever be stained in our memories.”

Rico almost laughed. *Peppy Amour? What kind of name is that? Is this guy really running a multi-million-dollar hotel with a name like that?* The man reminded him of actor Ricardo Montalbán dressed in that cheap white suit on the old TV show, *Fantasy Island*.

Pushing forth a slender tanned hand with perfectly manicured nails, Peppy smiled. “How may I be of service to Beach P.D.?”

Rico recognized a bullshitter when he saw one. Staring at the bottle blonde French *acting* manager with tweezed eyebrows, he came across as a perp rather than witness. Florida’s prison system was full of homosexual men who’d murdered their lovers in a moment of jealous homicidal rage.

Chapter 4

THE SANDMAN

Jack always watched detectives work his horrific crime scenes. With tourists crowding the beach attempting a glimpse of his handiwork, he took careful inventory of who in the media and police dared show their pitiful faces. *Look at all these fuckers, they're stumbling over themselves!* Staring at a makeshift podium, he realized dozens of microphones from local and national media outlets awaited. *They're all here for me! ABC, NBC, CBS, plus my favorite Miami station WSVN Channel 7!* FOX News, MSNBC and CNN were also in attendance. He hated CNN the most. With its constant 'Breaking News' banners and super slick studios, it seemed the network was nothing but partisan money and showbiz. Having voted for Donald J. Trump in 2016, the world was shocked after his followers handed Hillary Clinton the greatest political upset in history. Winning more than sixty-three million votes, the billionaire and Reality TV star was swept into office.

However, in Trumps' 2020 reelection campaign, he lost the presidency to Joe Biden after millions of fraudulent mail-in-ballots materialized.

They rigged the fucking election!

The killer despised corporate TV networks, social media billionaires and the democratic party who *he believed* intentionally suppressed criminal corruption claims about then candidate Joe Biden and his son Hunter. Distracted by these thoughts, he nearly missed a question by CNN's Chief White House correspondent and Trump hater, Jim Acosta.

"When can we expect a statement?"

Craning his neck to peer over the swarms of people, Sandman got excited. *Look who it is! The Big Shot millionaire NBC correspondent!* Scanning nearby faces, he realized nobody answered and simply ignored the question.

Feeling compelled to respond, Rico cleared his throat and stepped to the microphones. "We're following multiple leads and suspect this latest crime scene resembles others across the Sunshine State. I can't confirm too much right now. Yet, I will say, this murder eerily resembles the Modus Operandi of an individual other agencies are actively seeking."

"How many victims are out there?" Acosta asked. "One? Ten?"

"This might be a serial case."

"Chief Martinez?" Blair asked, his station going live.

"A serial killer, Rico?" Stefan shouted.

"Wait a minute, guys!" the deputy chief exclaimed. "The last thing any of us want is for the public to whip themselves into a frenzy thinking a vicious killer is loose on the streets of Miami Beach! Let's hold up on guesses until we know *for sure*

who's responsible?"

"But there is a killer out here!"

"Deputy Chief Martinez?" Stefan pushed. "You just said this slaying resembles a serial killer's work. Does the corpse laying a hundred yards away resemble similar cadavers discovered on Fort Lauderdale, Bal Harbour, Dania, or Hollywood beaches? Is *Sandman* stalking and murdering people from the LGBTQ community here in South Beach?"

Little fucker! Rico mentally snarled. Glancing at Dick, he leaned over and whispered in his ear. "Dania or Hollywood Beaches?"

Shaking his head, Dick hadn't made that connection.

"Agent Shlong?" Blair called out, "is the Florida Department of Law Enforcement holding back critical information that could further the safety and protection of the community?"

Does he know something? "We don't have any details to suggest that is the case right now. Nonetheless, should such become apparent to FDLE, Miami Beach or Miami-Dade County Police, we'll address it at that time. However, we are urging the LGBTQ community to go about business as usual while remaining vigilant."

Who the hell leaked that info?

Jack loved watching the back and forth. It was real life theater, and he knew exactly what he'd say if he could. *It's all-their fault, those rich feminine limp-wristed boys daring to walk down the street hand in hand kissing and god knew what else when they snuck out to the water's edge in the dead of night!* It bothered him that their limp wrists and skinny necks were bedazzled with gold and precious stones as if nobody would dare rob them. Then, a Billy Joel song began playing in the slaughterer's head over and over. Sometimes the loony tune music drove him to the edge of insanity, but it also calmed him. All he had to do was imagine Tom Hanks acting out the doomed character of attorney Andrew Beckett dying of AIDS. *Yes, sir! Philadelphia is my kind of movie. Chainsaw Massacre is another.* With a smile turning up the corners of his lips, he recalled the painting in his head of the dead trannie. *What am I? Why not kill a real woman?* He loathed questioning his own motives and despised the inner voice of weakness. Yet, Sandman knew he was extremely different from the sheep of the world because he ripped and sliced, stabbed, and chopped. In the sordid business of snatching lives, the one thing he absolutely loved more than anything was the instant his victims realized their number was up.

It's so poetic; those last few moments.

There was a special bond serial killer shared with their victims. Right up until the moment their eyes lost their glimmer, victims always trusted they'd miraculously be rescued, that perchance a bystander would show up and save the day. But nobody ever came to save the damned.

Saddam Hussein knew that better than anyone.

Sandman kept a recording of the Butcher of Baghdad stepping onto the platform where a hangman's noose awaited. With a black hood pulled over his head, the rope was tightened, the trap was sprung, and the dictator's body plummeted. After a few kicks over the shouting of الله أكبر *Allah Akbar*, the *tyrant* was gone. He'd no longer torture his people. There would be no more gassing. Granddaddy Bush was vindicated. From the periphery, he glimpsed the deputy chief lifting the crime scene tape for the scumbag FDLE agent. He knew Dick well from other murder scenes committed on other beaches around the state. *Fuck him, and all these badge carrying assholes!* Scrutinizing Dick's body language, he was filled with absolute hatred and disgust working himself into a murderous rage, his fingers twitching and eyes darting from side to side inspecting the swarm of onlookers. It was already ninety-degrees and sweat streaked down his face. Wiping it away with the back of his hand, he took note of the TV reporter from WSVN. Calming himself before someone noticed his fidgeting, his mind wandered to the sweet memories of his favorite serial killers.

Ted Bundy was always at the top of that list. Fried to a crisp in the electric chair at Raiford Prison in Starke, Florida, the American kidnapper, serial killer, rapist and necrophile battered and massacred young women during the 1970s. Shortly before his execution, he confessed to more than thirty homicides in seven separate states.

Sandman loved the way Ted fearlessly approached victims in public places, faking injuries, or disabilities, or impersonating somebody of authority before overpowering and assaulting the women at pre-planned, secluded locations. Like himself, Bundy sometimes reappeared at his crime scenes, often grooming, and performing sexual acts on decomposing corpses until the flesh rotted away and was picked clean by scavengers.

Jack also decapitated at least twelve of his victims and kept the skulls in his apartment for keepsakes. On a few occasions, he broke into houses at night and bludgeoned victims as they slept.

"What's so funny?" a bystander asked, a scowl twisting his face. "There's a dead body over there!"

"Fuck you," the killer replied before hurrying off to another section of the beach. *That was close, you fucking idiot! What am I doing, trying to get caught?* It used to be that he only killed occasionally and then would allow his trail to go cold. However, recently, his murderous ways cried out more often for blood. *And tonight, will be the perfect follow-up performance!* He needed to strike again, but this time, he'd be sure to leave a colorful scene for police to stumble upon. Staring along the beach, he left the crowds behind and began planning his next journey into the world of mayhem.

This one must be over the top! The blood will be everywhere! I'll make them a

wonderful sandcastle!

Nikki Beach was a small patch of sand at One Ocean Drive. Encircling a large Tiki-hut, people from all walks of life hung out there raising a glass to the good life. There had never been a murder there.

And it wasn't a gay hangout.

However, Sandman wanted to throw the cops off his tail.

Chapter 5

THE MIAMI HERALD

Stefan took the emergency stairs two at a time until reaching his editor's office with what he believed was the breaking story of the day.

"What's up?" J. Peterson asked. "Everything, all right?"

"I have a front-page A-1. You're gonna flip your wig!"

That would be hard to accomplish considering J.P. was bald as a polished eight-ball. "Get the hell out of here!"

Reaching into his pocket, Stefan retrieved his iPhone, opened the iPhoto app and revealed several digital pictures.

"You broke a crime scene to snap these?"

"Miami Beach P.D. failed to block beach access."

"Good God, boy, you might have something here! Do you know who the victim is? How long she's been in Miami? Are there parents, brothers or sisters? What does she do for a living? All that kind of background stuff? I'll have to get the photo's green-lighted by the Iron Lady as they show a corpse laid out on the sand."

"Take it easy, boss!" Stefan chuckled. "You'll have a stroke. I don't know the answers to most of the questions you asked but with follow-up I'll get the piece written. As for background, name and all that filler stuff, I have some of it."

"Fantastic! Get on it!"

"J.P.?"

"Yeah?"

"The victim is not a real woman, but rather a transsexual."

"The gay people are gonna have a hair up their ass!"

"Nothing new there! I mean-"

"Watch it! Ya don't want to end up on YouTube!"

"It's just a joke!"

"Seriously, kid, the rainbow society will be in an uproar over this killing and will probably storm the streets *shouting* for the media to label it a hate crime! They won't like it if we write an article that paints this victim in a bad light. You better think very carefully about how you write this and keep in mind Miami's huge gay populace! You know they can ruin careers."

"C'mon, this isn't exactly Brett Kavanaugh!"

"Maybe not. But we're living in the *Me-Too* and *Black Lives Matter* movements. The last thing we need is for anyone to overhear you saying anything inappropriate. How did you get onto this story?"

"Blair and I were eating breakfast at the *News Café* this morning when he told me about a missing person report. Not long after, we got information about a corpse

discovered behind the Delano hotel.”

“Who told you?”

“You really want to know?”

“Nah, forget I asked. Go do your thing. No more than twenty-five hundred words, you got me?” After seeing his young crime reporter to the door, J.P. called a meeting of the senior staff to the conference room. Picking up his cell, he called the publisher.

“What is it J.P.?”

“Glenny? We have a developing story.”

“What else is new, this is Miami.”

“A transsexual murder at the Delano Hotel.”

The publisher didn’t like controversy. She was the epiphany of a Country Granny who was a high-society billionaire. Her family had owned dailies for over a century. Her older sister had run *that* show until she gave up her ghost following a massive heart attack at the *Marriott Stanton South Beach* located at 161 Ocean in the heart of sophistication where she’d been stretched-out beneath a knockout surfer type. Not long after, the Board of Directors met in an emergency session and named, Glenda, President and C.E.O.! When learning of the transfer of power, she had just lost her husband Dennis and reluctantly agreed to leave the slowness of Mound City, Kansas. She wouldn’t miss the tornados, though. “Shit! It’s fuckin’ Gay Pride Month! Isn’t that Madonna’s place?”

“Not anymore,” J.P. sighed. “She was once part owner of the *Blue Door Restaurant and Nightclub* situated inside the hotel.” Clearing his throat, he stared at Stefan in the newsroom. “You should come down to the paper.”

“Can’t do that. I took a meeting in Key West this afternoon about acquiring the *Times of London*. Is your issue more important?”

“The kid has amazing crime scene photos, and I gave him above the fold.”

“Front page?”

“Yes, and that’s not all-”

Glenda cut him off. “Just give it to him.”

“Can we talk about it at the meeting?”

“Five minutes!” the publisher agreed and ended the call.

J.P. agreed and walked into the newsroom where a handful of seasoned reporters surrounded Stefan’s desk. The boy was probably the brightest street-smart reporter the editor ever hired. It wasn’t just a favor called in, the boy actually had *the gift* of seeing around corners and sensing danger blocks away. Besides that, he knew what buttons to push when writing emotionally charged articles. *They don’t teach that in school*. Reaching his staff, he led them to the conference room. Watching them take a seat on executive leather chairs surrounding a huge conference table, he stared at the eighty-inch flat-screen displaying the bloody photos.

“J.P., I gotta run for a news conference. I’ll see you later?”

“Get a move on then, cowboy!” Mrs. Findley answered taking up her roost at the head of the table. “Okay, J.P. let’s hear it!”

“At approximately nine-eighteen this morning, our young Clark Kent walked into my office and said Miami Beach P.D. was actively working a *one-eighty-seven* behind the Delano. Just a few minutes before coming to this meeting, I called the Public Information Officer at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement who confirmed they’re investigating the homicide and that it may possibly be connected to a serial killer baptized *Sandman*. These pictures you’re looking at were snapped-off by Stefan and Blair Anderson from 7-News. In her early twenties, we can clearly assume the victim is from an upscale family. However, she is actually a man.”

“A transsexual? We’re screwed!”

“FDLE assigned Dick Shlong.”

“The gay agent?” a junior editor asked. “Good P.R.”

“Maybe. No matter what, I need everyone gathering background on this story to verify everything we think we know. Watch out for Stefan and assist him in any way needed. This is going to be *the* huge news item leading local and national network coverage tonight. So, for our Sunday and online editions, I want an exhaustive multi-story edition!”

“Don’t forget,” Glenda added. “It’s Gay Pride month!”

Nobody needed to tell the staff what that meant.

Chapter 6

CALLING IN THE FEDS

Rico was sweating like a pig at the news conference. Standing beneath rows of towering coconut trees near the entrance of Miami Beach PD, his goal was to try and convince residents they were indeed safe! Taking the podium, he glanced at Stefan standing in the front row.

“Good afternoon everybody, for those networks who don’t usually cover Miami Beach, I’m Deputy Chief Rico Martinez of the Miami Beach Police Department. Seated directly behind me is the Medical Examiner for Miami-Dade County, Miami Beach CSI and our Mayor. We’re here today to confirm the discovery of a transgendered person’s corpse behind the Delano Hotel early this morning. With that, I’ll take a few questions.”

Right out the gate, the reporters attacked.

“Did the department let the killer slip away, Chief?” Blair shouted over dozens of other reporters. “Isn’t it true, this homicide is being investigated as though it was committed by the notorious *Sandman* serial killer?”

Silence hung over the crowd.

Shit, Rico thought. *What a fucking barrel shoot*. “No, that is not correct, Mr. Anderson! We’re a long way from saying that. What we think and know are two entirely different things.” Glancing at the throng of news microphones taped to the wooden lectern, he knew they represented cities and towns from across the globe. Anything that happened in Miami was global news.

“Rico? Are you aware of similar killing in nearby cities?”

“Now wait a minute, Stefan!” Rico grumbled. “We’re looking at possible connections to any and all other murders that may or may not have anything to do with our case. My jurisdiction has not determined this is a serial killing by the notorious Sandman!”

Everyone knew this was bullshit.

“Just minutes ago, the AP claimed a ‘highly placed source’ within Miami Beach PD has stated this murder is the work of the infamous killer. How would your department answer such allegations?”

Staring at Blair, Rico was hot under the collar. Realizing he’d been standing for the last few hours, he rocked back on his heels and carefully considered an answer that wouldn’t land him before the county commission, his brother the Chief, or the power brokers in Tallahassee. “I can’t control what the media believes. All I can verify is the victim’s name is Amanda Rogers.” He knew that if he confirmed the killing was attributed to the infamous killer, and that *Sandman* was carved into the transvestite’s body, all hell would break loose. *But on the other hand, if I don’t warn*

South Beach residents and tourists, and another murder happens, I'll be out of a job. Peering at the sea of reporters, he saw they were blocking a line of black and white police cruisers from entering the station. It was a mob scene, and nobody was giving an inch. *Fuck me!*

"So, Chief?" NBC affiliate reporter John Heiss asked. "This is a random killing? You sure about that?"

"John, I just don't have enough information at this time to say that. Nevertheless, FDLE might know better." Taking a deep breath, he glanced over to his buddy and gestured for him to answer the question. Suddenly, Rico's cellphone vibrated deep in his pocket. "Please excuse me."

"Good evening everyone," Dick said stepping to the microphones. "As most of you already know my name is Dick Shlong, Commander of Major Crimes for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, South-East Division. That's S-H-L-O-N-G. Here is what we know. At approximately seven thirty this morning, the decedent was discovered on the sixteenth street beach directly behind the Delano. At first, we thought the victim was a Jane Doe, and possibly a reported missing person."

"What made you think that?"

Staring at the channel seven reporter, Dick reached into his green windbreaker patched with the State of Florida official seal depicting a shoreline and Seminole Indian woman spreading flowers. In the background, a steamboat sailed a waterway with the yellow sun breaking the horizon.

"Does this *look like* a random killing?"

"It is way too early in the investigation to make assumptions bereft of actual facts."

"Right," Stefan hollered, "but if that were true, and Miami Beach PD assumed this victim was a one-off, why would FDLE be assisting in investigating a local homicide?"

In the silence that followed, Rico whispered into Dick's ear. "This kid is smart. I know him. He won't let go. This is going to heat up! Call off the hyenas before they tear you apart."

"That all for now, folks! Thank you all very much."

Ushering the FDLE, county coroner and Rico from the mob scene, the public information officer guided them inside the seven-story white building with Miami Beach P.D. printed in baby blue lettering over the entrance. The presser had been a pain in the ass.

"Fuck!" Rico growled slamming his office door. "Those prick bastards are going to tear us apart!"

Dick agreed. "It's that kid who is making most waves."

Rico thought of something. Pressing a button on his multi-lined speakerphone, he called his secretary. "Hey Emma? Are you at your desk?"

"Yes, Chief? You need me?"

Glancing to his friend, he placed his forefinger to his temple in a mock suicide gesture. “A hole in the head would be good, but for now I need you to discreetly arrange to bring in Stefan Woodard from the Miami Herald.”

“I’ll take care of that right now!”

Watching Rico hang-up, Dick sat in a wine-colored leather armchair situated beside the chief’s desk. “What are you thinking, buddy? Why bring a wolf into the henhouse? What do we have to gain?”

“Two things actually.” Standing, he glared out the large office window and the foot traffic on Washington Avenue. As usual, the sidewalks were busy with pedestrians and reporters straggling by the entrance. “First, I’ll lay a story on Stefan he cannot refuse to print. We’ll make him look like an idiot, so the editor takes him off the story.”

“Will he fall for that?”

Rico thought it might just work. “I know this kid and his adoptive parents from my days with Manhattan Homicide. Not sure if you remember, but he was the boy who was almost killed by his father, *The Santa Claus Killer*? He’ll bite when I feed him a juicy story.”

“You said two things?”

“When you were talking with the media outside, the call I received was from Tim Lannin, Miami-Dade’s criminalist. He thinks our killer might be a gay man. If this is true, we need to capitalize on his information and place you and a team undercover inside our gay nightclubs.”

Dick shrugged. “Come on, really?”

“Why not? You’re a limp wrister, you hang out at most of the homo bars on the beach, consider this *fun and work*!”

“I’m not sure if I’m insulted or perplexed.”

“Come on, Dicky, you’re we have.”

The FDLE agent thought he could pull it off. “You have a plan?”

“Bet your ass I do!”

“I have a question.”

“Shoot!”

“Why does the criminologist believe our perp to be a gay man? Why not a hater? A brutal hate crime? I don’t see a connection that ties Sandman to the LGBTQ community, plus we don’t need that kind of press. You know the religious community will damn the rainbow community and that will cause additional problems. What does *LGBT* mean anyway?”

Dick shook his head, chuckled and crossed his arms. “What Rico? You are second in command of a police department that protects tens-of-thousands of gay men and lesbians. The correct acronym is LGBTQIA+ and refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual.”

“For God’s sake, I can’t keep up!” Rico chuckled. “Seems like every couple of years it changes. First it was LGB, then LGBT, LBGTQ and now *they* have added an *I* and *A*? Jeez, no wonder they are all in therapy just to deal with the description of who they are.”

“Dude, that’s the most sexist thing I have ever heard.”

“What’s wrong with it? You offended?”

“Maybe.”

“Shit,” Rico sighed motioning to a manila envelope sitting on his desk. “Sandman left us his calling card.” Pulling on latex gloves, he opened the envelope and held up a folded note.

This is Sandman! I compose this for the rotten little piggies hunting me down like a dog! I will not be cornered until you have all found a place six feet under. Truth in death is what I preach! For only there shall we find ultimate peace. I’m the bringer of death, the prophet of hell, the final sight.

Turning off the lights, Rico grabbed a small black light from his desk and flipped it on. Sprawled on the office wall was a warning.

I am Sandman, and I like a Twist!

“Motherfucker,” Dick groused. “How the fuck did he get into your office and write that? Isn’t your secretary right outside the door?”

“Emma! Get in here!” Pushing the note back into the envelope, he removed his disposable gloves.

“Yes, chief?” the middle-aged woman pushed into the office. “Is something wrong?”

Rico pointed to the wall. “Who wrote that?”

“Oh, gosh! The only person I saw today was the UPS guy.”

“Okay, thanks!” Watching his secretary shut the door, he glanced to his friend’s flushed face and furrowed brow.

“Fuck me sideways.”

“Make sure you use a condom,” Rico chuckled. “Starting tonight, you should go undercover in the gay clubs on the beach.”

“Like Twist?”

“That’s right,” Rico agreed. “And since this deranged motherfucker mentions it in his note, my thought is he picks victims from all the pretty boys tearing-up the dance floor. I think we have a lead here. It’s just a matter of whether he left clues on purpose or not.”

“Are we privately calling this a serial?”

“I think we better,” Rico suggested.

Chapter 7

MASTER OF DEATH

Strolling along the beach, Sandman pushed a pair of Versace sunglasses onto the bridge of his nose. Embellished with the notorious Medusa logo and Greca motif at the temples, he stood out like a flamingo prancing through a blizzard. Nonetheless, he was on the hunt and had exceeded at not standing out! Nobody would suspect such a good-looking fashionable young man could be a cold-blooded killer. He passed for someone of privilege... oblivious to the meat-grinder of nine-to-five life. Unmistakably well-heeled, many thought him a trust fund baby, maybe someone in the entertainment industry. Perchance a rock or movie star! Sensing movement, he glanced back at a Miami-Dade County Medical Examiner van leaving the hotel drive-up. Suddenly paranoid, he scrutinized swarms of snooping onlookers and wished he could tell them this killing was just *one of hundreds* he'd carried out. *I can't do that, not yet!* Parting the mob, he elbowed his way through laughing like Vincent Price on Michael Jackson's superhit, *Thriller*. He was a diehard M.J. fan. In his earlier years, way before he became the slayer of men, he'd jack-off to an old poster of the superstar. Walking a few blocks, he stepped onto Ocean Drive where a thin and shirtless twenty-something approached on pink rollerblades wearing nothing more than a Speedo.

"What's the lick, Mommy?"

Blushing, the flamboyant young man rolled to a stop. "Not much, sexy! How about you?" Marvelously attractive, he clearly wasn't afraid to flaunt it. Superficiality was the name of the game in South Beach. With a perfectly toned body, he wasn't a pound over a hundred-and-fifty, had a deep, dark tan, beautifully sculpted abdominal muscles and two rows of sparkling white teeth framed with rainbow-colored braces.

Beautiful and primed for the sand!

"What's your name?"

"Adam. What about you? Where you from? I'd bet somewhere in New York or maybe, New Jersey?"

"Did my accent give me up?"

"I didn't think you were a Florida cracker!"

"What?"

Amused, he blinked and placed his palms to his cheeks. "Lordy Lord! You really *are* naïve! That's a good thing here in the *Land of Plastic People* who act like they're somebody they aren't."

"Who does that?"

Adam turned the tables. "What's *your* name?"

"Jack the Ripper!"

Giggling, he skated over. “No way! You’re joking!”

“Maybe. Though, my friends have no idea I kill people.”

The blonde rolled his eyes. “So, what are you doing out here? You on the prowl for your next victim? You gotta be careful *Mister Jack the Ripper*, this ain’t London and there are hundreds of video cameras on every corner. Nodding above, he pointed one out.

“No shit, huh? Surveillance!” He was ashamed he’d not noticed but couldn’t show it. *I am a fucking idiot! Those cops already have a picture of me walking down this street! Fuck, fuck, fuck!*

“Wanna hook-up?” Adam asked. “A quickie? Pound my ass?”

Listen to this dirty little fairy humper! For a second, he thought the boy could read his thoughts. *Tender, sweet Adam!*

“So? Hot sweaty sex tonight?”

“What makes you think I’m into that scene?”

“I dunno,” the young’un replied pulling a 360 and blowing a kiss from his palm. “Will you call me?”

“I promise.”

“Promises, promises!” He’d heard those same assurances a million times previously. Pulling out a black sharpie, he clutched Sandman’s wrist and wrote a cell number on his palm. “We can go out somewhere, maybe have dinner and hit-up a few clubs? I’ll be waiting for your call, sexy man. You ever been to *The Forge*?”

Sandman knew it well. “The famous place on Arthur Godfrey Road?” It was one of Miami’s oldest restaurants open since the 1920s when it was a hangout for celebrities and organized crime figures. In 1977, Meyer Lanky’s stepson murdered a drinking buddy at the bar.

“Yup,” the skater giggled and rolled away.

Well, shit! Whaddaya make of that? Tonight, will be even better than the trannie victim. Shaking that from mind, he was extremely excited. It had been quite some time since he’d snatched such a young and beautiful specimen. Hailing a passing taxi, he climbed in. “Twelve-fifty Bay Road.” Situated against the intercostal waterway, his home had wonderful night views of the neon lights of McArthur Causeway and the skyscrapers of downtown Miami. A few years back, he’d read a novel titled *Cataclysm* about a fictional tsunami that buried Miami under a hundred feet of seawater.

In minutes, they arrived at the apartment.

Stepping from the cab, Jack handed over a ten-dollar bill and headed for the door. However, glancing next-door at a condominium’s Olympic sized pool, he noticed two young guys making out in the shallow end. *I can kill three in one night! Take these two. Then the boy later! The pigs and the stinking media will never suspect such a murderous rage all carried out at once! Motherhumping nasty butt lickers!*

He had two delicious victims right before him. Walking to the pool, he looked down at the two college-aged guys with perfectly muscled bodies. In his pants, a begging erection bulged inside his Calvin Klein boxers. Watching them kissing really turned him on.

“Hey?” the white boy hollered. “Come in the pool with us?”

“Yeah, hotrod,” the Cuban added. “You have something going on under those shorts. Maybe we can help with that?”

“Oh my, good fucking God!” *They want my snake in their watering mouths!* “Are you guys coming on to me?”

“Heck yes!”

“Okay, why not?” the killer chuckled. “There’s nothing wrong with a little public exhibitionism to make the straight people nervous!”

“Take it all off,” whitey pled.

Doing as told, Sandman stripped down to his underwear and dove into the pool. Swimming to the men, he found relief when a hand splashed beneath the surface. Suddenly he was in a state of bliss, his hormones a raging volcano about to erupt.

“Hey, why don’t we to your apartment?”

“Sure, we can do much more in the privacy of our own space.”

“Alright,” the blonde agreed with his friend and climbed from the pool. “Let’s go to my place, get a drink and do a line of MDMA!”

“Ecstasy, huh?”

“That’s right pretty boy. You wouldn’t believe what can be done sexually with a few hits of Ecstasy!”

“And,” the white boy added. “A screaming blowjob!”

They were of course talking about the alcoholic drink and not sex, but the killer got the veiled invitation as well. A *Screaming Blowjob* was a popular concoction containing a shot of Bailey's Irish Cream and Kalua topped with mounds of whipped cream.

In the elevator, Jack watched as the white boy pressed the 5th floor button and leaned against his lover. Once inside the apartment, he thought it was the sleaziest place he’d ever seen. With Keith Haring paintings adorning the walls, a giant glass penis stood three-foot tall just inside the doorway. On one wall, a painting depicted three naked stick figures with raging cocks painted against a black backdrop.

Haring was a popular gay American artist and social activist who died from AIDS. His work represented New York City’s street culture by expressing concepts of birth, death, sexuality and war.

“Bottoms up!” the blonde shouted handing over the shots.

“Do you have a coke?”

“Sure, thing, baby,” the Cuban answered. “The kitchen is just off the hallway towards the bedrooms. Stripping off their clothes, the lovers quickly readied

themselves for the expected threesome.

In the kitchen, Jack found a wooden block of knives and pulled out the cleaver. Pushing it between his lumbar spine and underwear, he sauntered back into the living room and stared at the two guys engaging in unspeakable acts. Moving silently across a thick black shag-rug, he reached for the chopper and brought it down on the Cuban's neck watching as the skull rolled across the floor. Pulling the twitching corpse off the white guy, he raped him and slammed the cleaver into his head just before his orgasm exploded. When depleted, he positioned the corpses into an unnerving sex scene, returned to the kitchen, grabbed a carving knife and went about his work. Before he finished, he cut out their organs for later use. When the butchering was done, he showered, dressed and wiped everything down before vacuuming the entire area and slipping out the door with the vacuum bag tucked under his arm. Taking the emergency stairs to the lobby, he exited the building without being seen. Going straight home, he collapsed on the couch and slept like a baby.

Chapter 8

THE SCOOP

Stefan pulled his trilling *iPhone 12 Pro Max* from the back pocket of his Levi 501 skinny jeans. Staring at the display, he saw a familiar name and hit the accept button.

“Stefan, honey?”

It was Mirabel, his super rich adoptive mother.

“Hey, Mom! I’ve been thinking about you and Terry! Is everything all right up there in the City That Never Sleeps?”

“Well, of course, darling. How is the new Lamborghini?”

He loved his new 2022 Lamborghini Aventador SVJ Roadster. It was the most flashy and uber-expensive super car he’d ever driven. With an enormous 6.5 L V12 engine, it cost a Mirabel a paltry six-hundred-grand. Driving it was like riding the infamous *Intimidator 305*, a ninety-mile per hour rollercoaster at *Kings Dominion Park* in Virginia. The tallest and fastest on the East Coast, it loomed three-hundred feet above ground and descended at eighty-five degrees.

“Well?”

Leaving his considerations, Stefan snapped back to the present. “I love it! How about a Baron G58 plane?”

“You don’t have a pilot’s license yet, do you?”

“I’m working on it.”

“Never know what surprises we have for you on Christmas.”

“I’ll keep that in mind and get my license faster!”

“We’re flying into Opa Locka Airport aboard the Gulfstream and land sometime around 4:00 p.m. weather permitting.”

“You’re coming down? Hell yeah! It’s been way too long!”

“Manhattan in summer is such a brutal drag. It’ll be good for us to see you, anyway. We both miss you terribly.”

“Last year when I was up for Thanksgiving, I did everything possible to not see my biological murdering father on every corner ringing a stupid bell while dressed as Santa Claus.”

“You’ll never have to see that again! This is a new chapter in your life. Monsters don’t exist for you anymore!”

Stefan did have a *full life* with great friends, a real career at the Miami Herald and an astonishing South Beach lifestyle that compared to no other.

“Honey? You still there?”

“Sorry, mom. I was thinking about a story I’m writing.”

“Okay darling, so I’ll see you on Friday, yes?”

“Of course, it’ll be fun, and we’ll have a blast!” After gathering the pertinent

information and adding it to his iCalendar, he ended the call, stared at his iMac and saved his work before shutting it down.

“You finally did it? Huh?”

Rising from his chair, Stefan nodded at the reporter, shuffled over to the elevators and took the first lift to the parking garage. Climbing into the Lambo, he pressed the start button and steered north on Biscayne Boulevard. His stomach was growling in expectation of Cuban food. *The Little Havana* at 127th Street never disappointed and it was a favorite distraction which allowed him to relax and let the worries of the world fall from his back. *Tomorrow all hell will break loose!* That’s when his snappy frontpage story of Sandman and the failures of local law enforcement would hit newsstands. The *Associated Press* had already picked-up global distribution rights which rocketed his name to instant notability. He felt on top of the world! Steering the convertible into the restaurant’s asphalt parking lot, he waved to his friend José smoking a Cuban Cigar outside the back door of the Mediterranean styled building. After half-an-hour chatting-up Bianca, the hottest waitress on the planet, he consumed a plate of pulled-pork, yellow rice, black beans and Plátanos Maduros. When finished, he was so full he could barely breathe. Pushing himself away from the table, he left the server a \$20.00 bill and drove back to 91st Street, silently wishing the paper’s headquarters still sat on the Miami Bay downtown. It was another sign of the times. The iconic Bayfront building was demolished years prior when the newspaper abandoned the property after a fifty-year run. *The Internet has changed everything*. For the first time since the paper’s inception, e-subscriptions outsold printed copies of the daily papers. Pulling into his reserved parking space, he jolted up the stairs and plopped down at his desk piled high with source material. He had a long afternoon ahead of him. Every detail in the story had to be validated.

In the age of *fake news*, it was essential.

Stefan thought journalism had somehow lost its way when it came to impartiality, accuracy and fact checking. In college, he was constantly advised by professors that a reporter’s truthfulness was essential. One of his favorite books was *The Elements of Journalism*. Arguing transparency and honesty in reporting, source vetting ultimately fell on reporters’ shoulders. Nonetheless, with deadlines, personal political opinions and bias, there existed a culture of fabrication. Sighing, he went through his story verification checklist, confirming or rejecting notes he’d gathered following the Delano murder. Comparing them to the story, he thought it read like a straightforward examination of everything police knew about the life and death of the wealthy transsexual found on the beach. Unexpectedly, a doorbell notification brought his attention to his iMail app. Clicking the small blue envelope icon, he read through his emails absorbing every detail and filing them away in his brain for further investigation. Then, he noticed the medical examiner’s email address. Opening it, he read a short introduction of the PDF attachment and clicked the link.

When it opened, he dug right in.

**The Great State of Florida
Miami-Dade County**

Medical Examiner's Report

Case # 2021-0092

Pronounced: On Scene

Means: Homicide

Deceased: Rogers, Amanda, J.

DOB: 3/23/92 Age: 29

Race: White. Sex: Trans/Male

Time of Death: 2:30-4:00 a.m.

Date of Death: 7/22/2021

Cause: Stabbing/Blunt Force Trauma

Identification: Rogers, Timothy, K.

Agency: Miami Beach PD

Medical Examiner: Farrell, P. MD

External Examination

The autopsy is commenced at 2:30 P.M. April 22, 2020. The body is presented in a black body bag and the victim is wearing a ripped, and sleeveless, shirt and navy-blue sweatpants. Collected jewelry included two smooth-textured 18-k gold hoop pierced earrings, 1-inch diameter, one in each ear, and one 1-inch wide 18-k gold expandable wristband on left wrist. Evidence turned over to the FBI.

The body is that of a surgically altered white male with sexual reassignment. A post-surgical Transsexual, it measures 67-inches, 118-pounds and appears generally consistent with a person of twenty-six years of age. The skin is cold, and lividity is fixed in the distal portions of the limbs. The eyes have been surgically removed, hair is black, wavy, layered and approximately 16-inches in length at the longest point!

Upon removal of the victim's clothing, an odor of bleach was immediately detected, and further testing proved the body had been impeccably washed. Further swabbing is complete, and a detection of hypochlorite is found. Following removal of the shirt, we observed the name "Sandman" carved into the torso with a blade of some sort. Cervical ligature marks are present which encircles the neck, crossing the anterior midline below the laryngeal prominence. The width of the strangulation is between 0.8-and-1-

centimeter horizontal in orientation. There is petechial hemorrhaging. However, we do not observe trace evidence which might have otherwise assisted in identification of the ligature used.

The genitalia are that of an adult transitioned female with signs of sexual reassignment. Pubic hair is shaved in its entirety sometime in the last hours of death. The limbs are equal, symmetrically developed and show extensive evidence of trauma. The fingernails are medium length. There are no residual scars, markings or tattoos.

Internal Examination

Head & Central Nervous System

A broken hyoid bone is seen along with massive cranium hemorrhaging after Blunt-Force Trauma. There is missing skin and surgical removal of subdermal cervical tissue. The brain weighs 1,303-grams and was within normal limits.

Skeletal System

The hyoid bone is fractured, cervical spine is observed to be severed, the Clavicle, Skull and Chest plate are fractured.

Oral & Throat

The oral cavity shows no lesions. However, Petechial hemorrhaging is observed in the mucosa of the lips and interior of the mouth. Otherwise, mucosa is intact and there are no abnormalities seen of the teeth or gums.

No obstruction of airway is seen. The mucosa of the epiglottis, glottis, piriform sinuses, trachea and major bronchi are anatomic. Nonetheless, the hyoid bone, thyroid, and cricoid cartilages are imperfect.

The right lung weighs 355-grams; the left 362-grams. Both are found to be otherwise unremarkable.

Cardiovascular System

The heart weighs 253-grams and is of normal size and configuration. There is no evidence of atherosclerosis.

Gastrointestinal System

The mucosa and wall of the esophagus are crushed. The gastric mucosa is ruptured. Approximately 125-ml of partially digested

semisolid foodstuff is discovered in the stomach. The mucosa of the duodenum, jejunum, ileum, colon and rectum are all unremarkable.

Urinary System

The right kidney is 115-grams; the left 113-grams. Both appear anatomic in size, shape and location without lesions.

Female Genital System

The structures are augmented by plastic surgery. Visual examination of the pelvic region indicates bruising, and rape-kit indicates postmortem sexual assault. Vaginal fluid samples are removed for further analysis.

Toxicology

Blood and bile submitted for analysis. Stomach contents were saved, and a drug-screen has been ordered.

Serology

A sample of right pleural blood is submitted via EDTA tube.

Evidence Collection

white shirt
navy-blue sweatpants
18K gold earrings
18K gold bracelet
DNA, Blood type
Fifteen swabbing's
Fifty photographs
Postmortem CT scan
Postmortem MRI

OPINION

Time of Death: Body temperature, rigor mortis, and stomach contents approximate (TOD) between 2:30R and 4:30 a.m. on the date of 7/22/2021.

Cause: Asphyxia by strangulation, blunt force trauma, exsanguination.

Findings: This case was presented by Miami Beach Police Department as a presumptive homicide. Following a two-hour autopsy and taking into consideration our above findings, Miami-Dade Medical Examiner's Office determines death by homicide caused by multiple qualifiers.

Stefan didn't see anything that might advance the police investigation. However, he thought the M.E. might get a DNA hit. This was not Sandman's first killing and everyone knew it was him because of his calling card, the incessant carvings on his victims. *It's classic for this guy.* Clicking the photo app, he scanned through a stack of relevant pictures. In several, Rico and the M.E. were standing over a yellow tarp covering the corpse. In the background, hundreds of nosy residents looked-on. Sorting the most pertinent snapshots, he attached them to his latest story and clicked send.

It had been a tough week.

Unable to shake his birthfather from mind, he typed *The Santa Claus Killer* into his secure *Duck-Duck Go* web browser, read through the old stories for the millionth time and grimaced at the infamous picture of himself standing beside NYPD Homicide Detectives Rico and Murphy outside Disney's Times Square store. *Daddy was one sick asshole!*

"Woodard!" J. Peterson shouted. "Get your ass in here!"

Closing the browser, Stefan turned on Express VPN, powered down his MacBook and hurried into the editor's office. Closing the door, he took a seat as the stench of cigars invaded his nostrils. Although a *smoke-free* workplace, J.P. didn't give two shits about publisher Glenda Findley's rules from on-high dictating a policy of no-smoking. She had her rulebooks and he had thirty-five years superiority. Inspecting the editor puffing on his ever-present *Montecristo No. 2*, he never had a problem obtaining banned Cuban cigars. After the previous presidential administration normalized relations with Cuba, he acquired a hundred boxes. It was a smart decision because the 45th President of the United States swept into office and methodically unraveled everything his predecessor, Barack Obama, accomplished during two terms.

"You need to stop smoking," Stefan said. "Its gonna kill you!"

"Ah, how does your generation say, *fuck it?* The cigars were J.P.s heroin. They calmed his nerves despite warnings they'd be the death of him. "I just got a call from the chief at Beach P.D.!"

"Who are you talking about?"

"Martinez! He's pissed because you broke his crime scene! Ring him, will ya? He's been calling me all day."

"Who? Chief Martinez or his brother, Rico?"

Shaking his head, J.P. chuckled. "You know who."

"Is that it?"

"The crime scene pictures you illegally took were approved for printing. Glenda green-lighted them to run the FrontPage in the morning."

"No shit? You're confirming I have above the fold?"

“Congrats kid, there are many more to come!”

Leaving the office, Stefan was ecstatic. Over the years he'd been at the paper, he'd established hundreds of sources throughout South Florida and the rest of the country. Most were typical snitches, but some were criminals seeking cash for information. He'd also cultivated sources within law enforcement, the state attorney's office and county morgues.

Everyone wanted their fifteen-minutes.

I'll need every one of them now.

Chapter 9

PADDY REILLY'S

Paddy's was packed with off-duty cops, federal agents, attorneys, judges and city hall assholes all huddled together with their pints of Guinness.

Mike Murphy had been a regular for over a decade, often taking roost over the Irish Pub bullshitting with pals or arguing over the latest Yankees and Mets games. With musicians performing Irish music on the small stage, he imagined this could easily be a Dublin tavern. *Gaelic Night* allowed local bands to play their songs, and some were *discovered* and therefore found fame. Most others merely faded away.

"It's been a long time since we've been here!" Mei said kissing her husband. She was also the *Special Agent in Charge* of the FBI Serial Killer Task Force's New York field office.

"What's it been? A month?" Previously a Manhattan South homicide detective, Murphy gained notoriety during the hunt for Richard Blake. During that investigation he'd met Mei, later married her and retired his NYPD detective's badge transferring to the Training Academy at Quantico, Virginia. Many alphabet agencies trained at the Farm. Intelligence analysts, ICE, DEA, CIA, NSA, the Defense Intelligence Agency and National Reconnaissance Organization. Most new recruits favored the firearm training at Hogan's Alley, a replica small town. The Tactical and Emergency Vehicle Operations Center taught Survival Skills on five hundred acres just outside Washington DC.

"Hello! Earth to Mike! Do you read me?"

Glancing sidelong at her, Mikey realized he'd never been happier in all his life. The previous five-years with Mei were filled with happy memories, drama and radical mood swings on both their parts. Nevertheless, that was the life of a law enforcement family who worked together all day long running down serial and spree murderers. It was a stressful job.

Kissing the love of her life, Mei leaned into him, stared into his kind Irish eyes and ruffled his fiery red hair. "What is it Michael?" Feeling the stubble on his face, she shook her head and giggled. "Are you really going to grow a beard? I absolutely loath it!"

"Oh really? So, its happy wife, happy life, is that it?"

"You're damn right, buddy!" she said sipping her Guinness. "You know the drill Mister FBI Man!"

Chuckling, he pulled her to him. "I was thinking, we've been working non-stop for almost three-years and haven't taken a single vacation in all that time." Pushing a strand of coarse black hair from her almond shaped eyes, he went on. "Maybe we can run away together? Just disappear from the reach of the bureau. They'll never find us!"

"The government would find us on Mars!"

Holding her in his warm embrace, he whispered *why not* into her ear and kissed

her. Her lips felt like silk against his own and he imagined they were lying on a beach. “We need *us time* at Shangri-La’s Fijian Resort & Spa. Just the two of us, wading into the calm turquoise waters of the South Pacific. Walking hand in hand along the shore, toasting our love at romantic candlelit dinners followed by mad passionate sex under the stars.”

There was something very special about Fiji and their sense of complete and utter seclusion. It was always a welcomed respite from the chaotic days chasing the country’s serial killers. They’d been to the island twice previously and loved watching the sun dip below the horizon.

“Hey, break it up!” Paddy’s owner Steve Duggan said playfully slapping the table. “Mikey? Mei? This isn’t a no-tell motel!”

“Awe, C’mon Stevie!” Mike begged.

Giggling, Mei winked at her friend. “What’ve you been up to Steve?”

“Same old, same old, ya know?” There wasn’t a day that passed where he didn’t greet his guests and pour a pint. Everyone knew his name because he’d been a legendary Gaelic footballer, accomplished `sprinter, and avid fan of cops. “How are you two lovebirds?”

“Fuhgeddaboutit!” Mike answered with a grin. “We’re good!”

Mei hugged their friend.

“All right, okay!” Steve said lifting his palms in surrender. “Have fun, you two! The night is just getting started.”

Watching him walk into the crowd, Mei glanced back at her husband. “You wanna run away to Fiji?”

“I’d like that,” he answered and rubbed her protruding belly. “Christopher could also use a break from his mommy running through the streets like a madwoman on crack.”

She ran her thin fingers through his hair. “Come on, Irish, just you and me all alone on the beach? Watching that huge sun sliding into the sea? The waves crashing ashore. It all sounds so very romantic!”

He hadn’t heard his nickname *Irish* in years. His Army buddies used to call him that. It began when he was just a cherry Second Lieutenant seated in the passenger seat of a Humvee speeding along *Route Irish* in Baghdad. When a roadside IED exploded on the side of the road, an armored troop transport truck flipped into the air and sixteen men died.

“Hey, Michael!” Mei shouted. “Come on, snap out of it.”

“Sorry. What were we talking about?”

“Our vacation, the beach, sand, seagulls?”

“They will shit all over us, you know?”

“Oh, come on, I’m serious!” Then, the baby kicked. “You wanna feel your son kicking the shit outta of me?”

Mike placed his hand on her warm belly and felt the kick! “Oh my God! I felt it! I still can’t believe we’re gonna be parents!”

“It’s the beginning of our family!”

With another kick, Murphy brought his lips to hers. The pregnancy had been a huge surprise when the gynecologist announced their first child was on *his* way. Back then, they hadn’t expected a positive preggers test. However, as it usually occurred, one night it just happened. After a home testing kit displayed two plus symbols depicting a positive analysis, Murphy ran down to the bodega and bought five more. They all tested positive. Both wanted children, it was just a matter of how many they’d end up with. Then, there was *The Job*, how would they handle their hectic schedules with a baby at home? “You know how much I love you?”

“I love you more!”

But then, as usually was the case for most cops, they were interrupted. From deep in Mike’s pants, he felt the cellphone vibrate. Pulling it out, he stared at the name on the screen and was somewhat taken aback. Showing her, he shrugged. “Why would Rico call us from Florida?” Accepting the call, he placed it on speaker. “Hey, you dirty Spic! What the hell is going on down there in paradise?”

“You mean beside BLM rioters?”

“Antifa is ruing the country.”

“It’s bad,” Rico retorted. He’d been partners with Murphy at Manhattan Homicide for years. “I should know, Miami-Dade is a mess. I can barely hear you, where are ya? Paddy’s?”

“Of course!” Mike replied hurrying through the crowds and pushing out into the street. “We miss having ya here!”

“Okay, Ricardo,” Mei interrupted. “What’s up?”

It took a minute, but then the bombshell fell.

“We have a serial killer on our hands down here.”

Mike glanced at his pregnant wife. *So much for the vacation!* “What’s did you just say? You’re on speaker, I wanna make sure we heard the same thing. A serial is operating in Miami Beach?”

“That’s right. South Florida agencies have discovered bodies butchered in the same way. All found on Florida beaches. We need you guys down here!”

“I’ll get a plane,” Mei stated and pulled out her cell.

“Mei is activating the team right now. We’ll label this *The South Beach Killer* and be on our way within the next few hours.”

“He calls himself *The Sandman* and the fucking media is all over this. In two weeks, we host the International Sandcastle Building Contest. There’ll be hundreds of exhibitors and a half-million people here in SOBE.”

“How did you learn his name?”

“He carves it onto his victims’ abdomens. CSI believes it’s postmortem. It’s a bad

scene, Mikey.”

“We think?”

“Right now, the M.E. *thinks*, but we’d sure like to get you and Mei down here to look at his work. We have extensive photos of homicide scenes.”

“Do me a favor,” Murphy asked, “shoot me a series of photo’s showing the bodies before removal from the scenes.”

“I have the plane,” Mei confirmed returning from the end of the sidewalk. “The G-4 is fueling at LaGuardia. It’ll be ready in thirty-minutes and we can carry fifteen to twenty agents. We’ll get all our investigators aboard.”

“Alright Rico, see you in a few hours.”

“There’s one other thing.”

“What’s that?” Mike asked.

“He rapes the corpses after killing them.”

Mike silently pressed the end button and pushed the phone back into his pocket. Eyeing Mei, he saw she was back on the phone, yet realized she couldn’t work the streets much longer. That baby was coming.

Suddenly, a black Suburban pulled to the curb. Hopping from the front passenger door, an agent pulled open the rear door and watched as they climbed in. Within seconds, the SUV was at full power, red and blue lights flashing from the front grille and center windshield. Its siren shrieked through the stillness of the night. The dead were waiting.