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The Oakland County

Child Killer

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"This killer's quite a showman, too. He goes to great lengths in preparing his victims' bodies for display, washing them, washing their clothes, trimming their nails, even carefully laying the bodies in the snow as if he were going to be judged on the finished product. He has a morbid need for people to look at his work. He's a maniac. A real squirrel. Only he's a demented squirrel that gathers children instead of nuts."

*—Psychiatrist Dr. Elliot Denton,
describing the child killer
to members of the
Oakland County Task Force*

CHAPTER 15

IT HAD BEEN TWO weeks now since Joey's return and during this time Francis went about his daily routine at St. Anthony's as usual. On the surface Francis acted in his normal manner but underneath *he suffered tremendously and on several occasions had almost turned himself in to the police.* Joey visited him on a daily basis, which Francis looked forward to, but he knew there was a decision to be made and it could no longer be postponed.

About 7:00 in the evening Francis entered the White Gallery carrying a photograph he had been working on all day. Several people were wandering through looking at the photographs when Alexander saw Francis come in.

"Hello, Francis. I haven't seen you since the opening."

Francis handed him the photograph. "I'd like to add one more photograph to the exhibit if I could."

"I'd be glad to add it."

Francis walked over to the photograph of Joey and the snowpeople that he had requested earlier to be exhibited as the final work of the show.

"Could I have it exhibited here at the end? I'd like this new one to be seen last."

Alexander looked at the new photograph. "Very interesting. Of course we can do that for you. Did you want to put this in place of the snowpeople?"

"No," said Francis. "Just add the new one next to it. But it must be the last one. Is that all right?"

"Absolutely. No trouble at all."

Francis turned and quickly walked away.

Lieutenant Davis, Sergeant Bowers and Officer Schultz, all dressed in plainclothes, drove together slowly down a residential side street in an unmarked car. Davis handed Schultz a set of car keys.

"Here. Take them."

"What are these for?"

"We'll get to that in a minute."

"Yessir."

"Schultz, I want you to know you did a fine job picking up Jones and keeping the lid on this thing. You've got one helluva bright future ahead of you in the police department."

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

"Your job on this Jones case is not quite over yet. You see, there's a lot more to being a good cop than what they taught you in the training academy. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"I think so, sir."

"All the rules and laws are written to protect the innocent, which is fine, but sometimes criminals use these laws to put themselves back out on the streets. You following me, Schultz?"

"Yessir."

"Good."

Bowers leaned forward from the back seat and now joined in on the conversation. "Every now and then a situation arises where the police department finds it necessary to . . . oh . . . let's say 'bend' a few of the rules . . . for the welfare of the community. I mean we certainly can't allow a sadistic killer like this Jones character loose on the streets killing kids whenever he feels like it, can we, Schultz?"

"No, sir."

"Well, that's just what's going to happen unless we step in and take some action. You see, Lieutenant Davis and I have been questioning him for three days now and there's absolutely no doubt in our minds that he's the child killer. But the problem is, at best, Jones will spend a few years in a mental institution, then he's back on the streets picking up kids again. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?"

"Yessir. But how do I fit in, sir?"

"First of all, keep your mouth shut about everything I've just said to you and everything that you see, hear or do tonight. You won't remember a thing, you got that?"

"Yessir."

"All right. The thing we want to eliminate is the possibility of Leo Clayton Jones ever murdering another innocent kid. And we want you to know what's going on because you're the one who picked him up and later on down the line you might have to answer a few questions. We want to make sure we've got all the right answers."

The unmarked squad car pulled up in a driveway and Davis pointed to a 1963 Cadillac sitting across the street. Schultz got out of the car.

"Have you got everything straight now, Schultz?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"You sure?" added Bowers. "We can't afford any mistakes."

"Yessir."

Schultz took the keys out of his pocket that Davis had given him and opened the door of the Cadillac and drove off. Davis and Bowers followed behind.

Leo Clayton Jones was asleep on a cot in the Oakland County jail when the warden unlocked the door and shook him awake.

"Let's go, Leo."

"Huh?"

"Come on. Get out of here."

"What's going on?"

"Bail's been posted. Let's go."

Leo walked outside into the lobby, looking around to see who had posted his bail. There was no one there.

He walked down the steps and out into the street and saw his Cadillac parked right out in front. He smiled a broad smile and climbed inside, not even stopping to wonder how it got there. A voice spoke to him from the back seat.

"Hello, Leo."

Leo jumped and turned around. "Who? . . ."

"It's me, Leo. I'm the guy who picked you up, remember?"

Leo recognized Officer Schultz and turned back around.

"Start up the car, Leo. We're going for a little ride."

The Cadillac drove slowly down the street as Leo followed Schultz's instructions. Davis and Bowers followed behind a short distance back.

After driving for an hour along northbound I-75, the black Cadillac left the expressway and turned down an abandoned dirt road and came to a halt. The unmarked squad car had stopped back at the turn-off and Bowers placed a construction sign across the road. The sign read: ROAD CLOSED—KEEP OUT. Bowers got back in the police car and both vehicles drove another hundred yards

into the darkness and finally came to a stop in a small clearing. Davis got out of the squad car and walked over to the Cadillac and opened the door.

"How are you, Leo?"

Leo said nothing.

"Say, Schultz?" said Davis. "Why don't you go back in the car with Eddie. I want to talk with Leo here for a few minutes."

Schultz left the car and Davis got in and sat in the front seat with Leo, who had still not said a word. Davis removed a bottle of whiskey from his pocket.

"How about a drink, Leo?"

Leo grabbed the bottle and took a long drink.

"That's it, Leo. Drink up. I've got more."

Leo wiped his mouth with his sleeve. "How did you get my car? That asshole wouldn't tell me nothing."

"Your mother gave us the keys."

"She did?"

"Go on. Drink. I want you good and relaxed." Leo took another long drink and Davis pulled out a second bottle. "That's Johnny Walker, Leo. You told me that was your favorite, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

"Good. Now, tell me again what it is about little boys and little girls that you like so much."

Leo looked out the window to avoid Davis' eyes.

"Those poor kids. You killed all three of them. Didn't you, Leo?"

" . . . I don't know . . . sometimes I do things I don't even remember . . . I don't know . . . maybe I did."

"That was wrong, Leo. You know that was wrong."

"I'm sick. I'm a sick person. There's something wrong with me. I don't know why I do these things."

Leo began to cry.

"Come on, Leo. Pull yourself together."

"I'm no good. I'm no good at all. I just want to die."

"You've tried killing yourself before, Leo. But you never quite made it."

"I hate myself. I want to die."

"Maybe I can help you, Leo."

"Please. I just want to die."

Davis nudged his arm, encouraging him to drink more whiskey. "Go on. Drink some more. Finish off the bottle. Then just lay down and go to sleep. That's all you have to do."

Leo looked up at Davis through his tears. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything."

"Just go on and drink. Go to sleep. It's all right, Leo. It's the best thing. Drink that and go to sleep."

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry . . ."

Davis got out of the Cadillac and walked back to the squad car and opened the trunk. Bowers and Schultz walked over to Davis.

"Well?" said Bowers.

"He confessed. The sonofabitch."

An hour passed as Davis, Bowers and Schultz sat quietly in the squad car. Bowers blew his breath across his fingers in an attempt to keep them warm. "How long is this going to take?"

Davis looked at his watch. "Not much longer."

Leo lay on the front seat of his car. He tried lifting his head up for another drink of whiskey but could not quite gather together enough strength. He began choking. Outside of his car the engine was running and a rubber hose had been attached to the exhaust pipe and stretched into the driver's window. Then Leo coughed one more cough and his arm fell limp onto the floorboard as the poisonous fumes overtook his body.

After Bowers loaded the construction sign back into the car, they drove for quite some time before anyone spoke.

Then Schultz finally broke the silence. "Ah, Lieutenant. Do we just leave him there?"

"That's right," said Davis.

"I don't understand . . ."

"In a day or two, we'll send a scout car out in the area and they'll stumble across him."

"Aren't you going to announce that the child killer . . ."

"Hell, no, Schultz," said Bowers. "Do you realize what we've just done? The last thing we need is every newspaper in town digging around into what happened. This way it's nice and clean. Just another suicide that nobody gives a shit about. There won't be any more killings and the public will just forget about it. Like always."

"What about the Task Force?"

"We go on just as we have been for a month or two. Then one day when everybody starts to forget, and believe me, it won't take long, we announce that the Task Force is costing taxpayers too much money. No more kids will be missing. Nobody will care. And that's the end of it."

Schultz had nothing more to say.

That same evening, Francis had returned from the White Gallery and went into St. Anthony's church, which by now, past midnight, was empty. He knelt at the front altar on the cold white marble until his knees ached so badly he had to stand. He looked around the church where he had spent so much of his life for the past six years. He thought about how many lives he had influenced with his sermons and counseling sessions and then he thought about the three children he had killed and how it just didn't seem real but he