



# THE SECRETS UNDERNEATH

BARBARA MULVEY LITTLE

THE  
SECRETS  
UNDERNEATH

*by*

*Barbara Mulvey Little*

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# Dedication

To Keene

My greatest supporter; my biggest fan; my forever love.

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## PROLOGUE      SPOKANE THEN: 1986

### **Spokane Chronicle: Front Page Headline Story Thursday, January 16, 1986 Afternoon Edition**

#### COP UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR MISSING DRUGS KILLS FAMILY, THEN SELF

Yesterday Spokane Police Chief Steven Hooper confirmed that Detective John (Jack) Gallagher shot his family before killing himself Wednesday. Gallagher was one of two officers who were the subjects of a recently completed investigation by the Spokane police department's Internal Affairs Division (IAD). Following the results of that investigation, Spokane County Prosecutor Andrea Warner announced late last week that a grand jury would hear testimony about the case.

Chief Hooper was surprised by Detective Gallagher's deadly assault. "He showed no indication of this kind of violence," Hooper said. He added that Gallagher was placed on paid administrative leave in late November pending the resolution of the IAD investigation which began last October.

When asked about the allegations contained in the investigation Hooper declined to comment. However confidential sources inside the department said Gallagher came under suspicion following the disappearance of a kilo of heroin which went missing from the evidence locker last spring. The missing drugs subsequently forced a mistrial of an alleged drug dealer when defense lawyers claimed the prosecution had no evidence of a crime committed by their client. Gallagher was the lead detective on the case in which the drugs were seized.

Gallagher's partner, Detective James Bowen, who was also placed on administrative leave, denies any wrong doing by both detectives. Bowen insists that neither he nor Gallagher were dirty cops. He also noted that Gallagher earned six commendations for his work with the vice squad. "Jack was a good man," Bowen said. "He just snapped under all the pressure from this ridiculous investigation."

This is a tragic end for a man who was a local hero for decades. Gallagher was a high school and college football star, then a decorated Marine before he joined the FBI. During an undercover operation in 1979, Gallagher was held hostage and then shot during a daring escape. He survived alone in the Idaho

wilderness for three days before being rescued. His injuries forced him to take a disability retirement from the FBI in January of 1980. A source close to the family speculated that the anniversary of Gallagher's forced retirement may have played a role in the timing of the tragedy.

A police informant has also surfaced saying that for the past two years Gallagher has paid him with cash and preferential treatment to keep Gallagher in a steady supply of narcotics and amphetamines. If these allegations of drug use are confirmed by the medical examiner's autopsy report due at the end of the month, they could possibly explain Gallagher's actions.

Funeral services for Gallagher's wife, Quinn Kelly Gallagher, 40, and two of their children Daniel, 16, and Colleen, 13, are pending. No date was given and spokesperson for the family, Brendan Gallagher, refused to comment except to say the services will be private.

A spokesperson for Spokane Prep High school confirmed that Quinn Kelly Gallagher had once been a teacher there and that two Gallagher children were current students. Daniel was a junior and three-year veteran of the varsity soccer team and Colleen was a freshman starter on the girls' varsity soccer team. Grief counselors are at the school to assist classmates and faculty in dealing with this tragedy. Plans for a memorial service at the school to honor the slain students will be forthcoming.

The only survivor and youngest member of the family, five-year-old Sean-Patrick, was airlifted by Mercy Flight to Seattle Regional Medical Center where he remains in critical condition. His aunt and guardian, attorney Regan Kelly, refused to comment on the extent of the boy's injuries.



## PART 1

# Sins of the Fathers

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

William Faulkner



## SEATTLE NOW: 2013

**Thursday**

**November 21**

**6:30am**

**Sean**

THE WHIR AND CLICKS of the espresso machine mask the distant blare of a horn piercing the predawn mist. It will be hours before the sun burns off the cool grey November fog that perpetually makes Sean Thomas want to sleep in. He exits *The Buzz Stop* sipping his usual Grande Americano with an extra shot and walks south towards the hospital. The heat from the cup warms his fingertips while the coffee's aroma tickles awake the remainder of his sleepy brain cells. Coffee is a multisensory nirvana, he muses, custom-made for Seattle weather. It's no wonder everyone here craves it.

Wind from the Puget Sound bites Sean's skin and muffles his hearing as he moves toward Pike Street. With his free hand he deftly zips his hooded jacket close against his neck and adjusts his scarf to cover up any leaks in a well-practiced routine for a man who walks to work every morning in any weather. As he waits for the light to change, he notices how the red halo around the traffic light facing him bleeds into the green halo of the light controlling the mostly non-existent traffic on Boren. The colors switch and a ghostly white-walking-man invites him to cross. In the middle of the crosswalk, the sudden squeal of tires startles him, sending hot liquid over his knuckles.

"Shit," he says looking once more up the hill. Headlights bear down on him. It takes a moment to register that he is directly in the path of a speeding SUV. At the last instant, Sean jumps clear. Stunned, he hears the engine's pitch rise after the SUV bottoms out on the flat pavement of the intersection and rocks front to back while the driver seems to struggle to regain control. The speeding monster then veers left, hurtles past the large colonnades that festoon a small triangle of urban parkland, plows through bushes and careens onto a small chain link fence. The fence bends under the truck's weight as speed and momentum propel it into a deadly cart-wheeling roll. Then, with the appearance of a perfectly executed Hollywood stunt, Sean watches as the white SUV cartwheels over a second fence further down the hill and plummets over a retaining wall. A moment of eerie quiet—like waiting for thunder after seeing lightning—is followed by what sounds like a cannon blast as the SUV hits Interstate-5 forty feet below. The sound sends a searing bolt of pain through Sean's head but his feet move him

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toward the guaranteed carnage as he hears sounds of squealing tires and the smaller aftershocks of lesser collisions echoing below.

With the agility of a natural athlete, he jumps the fence and struggles down long vines of English ivy meant to soften the appearance of I-5's man-made cliffs that hold back the steep hills for this subterranean section of highway. Grabbing fists full of ivy and praying they will support his weight, Sean skids down the vines then jumps the final fifteen feet to the highway, rolling as he hits the ground.

A dozen mangled cars have settled helter-skelter across the highway having met with varied success avoiding the median and overpass support columns. The wrecked cars create a barrier halting oncoming traffic. The sickly-sweet smell of gasoline hangs ominously in the air as cries for help bleat through the concrete canyon.

One particularly unlucky commuter took a direct hit from the SUV, which tumbled off a blue car and came to rest in an upright position next to it. Years of triage experience kick in as Sean surveys the scene. The body in the crushed blue car shows no signs of life. Odds don't look good for the driver and front passenger in the crumpled white mess of the SUV either. The upper half of a woman, who apparently had not been wearing a seat belt, shot through the shattered front passenger window. Her broken body is folded over the door, her head dangling like an unstrung marionette. She is covered in blood. The driver, a man, is hugging the steering wheel, green-glass diamonds blanketing his head and shoulders; his face is turned to the side, eyes open and vacant. The partially crushed roof holds him in its vise-like grip.

Quick, methodical checks confirm no pulses.

Three dead.

Sean turns his attention to the back seat. The rolling crash broke all the windows and sealed the doors shut which would have made a rescue of back seat passengers next to impossible. Nothing. He sighs in relief.

A quick scan of the cargo area makes Sean's heart sink. Inside is a girl tightly wedged between duffle bags and other gear. Her right arm and leg are straddling what looks like a pillow; her head is folded against the backseat, resting on her outstretched left arm. Her face is tilted slightly up almost as if she is looking out the window. Sean notices that she has the awkward beauty of a pretty child on the verge of becoming a stunning woman. Thick golden-brown hair still streaked with summer highlights cascades midway down her back. She is motionless and unmarked. He would almost guess she was sleeping except for the odd, unnatural angle of her neck. Sean moves quickly to reach her through the

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back hatch. He climbs carefully through the broken glass into the space narrowed by the partially collapsed roof. He gently pushes aside the girl's hair touching her neck hoping to find even a trickle of life. He feels nothing.

He shifts his weight back onto his legs in the posture of a supplicant at prayer settling momentarily in defeat when he hears a tiny moan. For a moment he is unsure that he's heard anything more than his own hope. He presses again on the girl's neck. Definitely no life. Sirens begin to echo off buildings above and he is about to leave the SUV to check the injured in other cars when he hears it again. He raises the girl's lifeless arm. Beneath her protective embrace, wrapped in a blanket, is a young boy with the same thick golden-brown hair. The boy, about six years old Sean guesses, is unconscious with shallow breaths and a thready pulse.

"Stay with me kid," he says as he does a quick check for obvious injuries. He would prefer not to move the boy without first bracing his neck, but the kid's pulse is so weak he may not last long enough to worry about neck injuries.

Sirens now blare off the concrete canyon walls. Sean curses when he realizes the rescuers are not on I-5. The first 911 calls must have come from the apartments on Pike. The fire trucks and ambulances are lining up on the overpass but the victims are on the highway below. Entrances onto this subterranean portion of the highway are few and far between; the rescuers will have to double back to the Madison Street entrance ramp and struggle through the parking lot the accident created. After what seems like an eternity, Sean hears the sirens whoop and wail in the tunnel under Freeway Park as they try to open a path to him.

But they are not quick enough. The boy's heart stops and his life ebbs away. Refusing to let the boy die, Sean gently places the girl in the back seat and throws the gear out the windows to make room. He lays the boy flat in the center of the cargo area, blows two quick breaths in the boy's mouth and begins chest compressions. This must be the only positive use for an SUV he thinks as he counts, one... two...three...four...

"Here!" Sean yells as he continues the rhythmic compressions hoping that one of the firefighters will get close enough to hear him. He can see them checking the injured in other cars and is frustrated by the noisy chaos around and above him. The whop-whop-whop of news helicopter's rotor blades drown out his voice.

Two more breaths again then, one...two...three... With each compression he huffs, "Come on, little man,...you can do it...come back to

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me...” Sean believes the young girl tried to save this little boy. He can’t let her selfless act be in vain.

He will not let her down.

**Friday**

**November 22**

**7:13am**

**Sean**

“Dr. Thomas...Sean,” Rose said as she lightly touched his shoulder trying to wake him. Sean’s arms flail outward despite Rose’s gentle touch. Realizing he almost hit her Sean mumbles, “Sorry.”

Rubbing his eyes, he asks, “How’s the boy?” and then launches into a second question before Rose can answer the first, “I slept through shift change?” Swinging his feet to the ground he notices that he didn’t take off his shoes. Exhaustion had overtaken him sometime after 4 AM when he went to the doctor’s lounge to stretch out on a couch whose days of comfort ended at least a decade ago.

“He is still unconscious, but stable. There wasn’t any reason to wake you until now,” Rose said. “There are reporters outside who want to speak to you. They’re calling you a hero,” she said dropping onto the couch the *Seattle Times* she’d grabbed from a newsstand.

“I’m no hero,” he said. He tore off the front page, crumpled it and tossed it to the garbage can.

“Throwing that away won’t make that photo disappear,” Rose said. She smiled when Sean reflexively raised a two-finger salute as the paper hit its mark. “A friend in admin told me that the guys upstairs are planning a news conference soon and they’re going to want you there. Stuff like this is great for the hospital’s image.”

“Almost getting run over by a speeding SUV does not make me a hero and I could give a rat’s ass about image right now.”

“You saved a boy’s life.”

“*We* saved a boy’s life and besides it’s my job. I’m a doctor. It’s what doctors do every day,” Sean said.

Sean had wanted to be a doctor for as long as he could remember. He wanted to save lives like Dr. Kovac once saved his. If anyone he knew deserved hero status it was Kovac. He not only fixed Sean’s body, he nurtured him during his long recuperation and continued to care about Sean long after he was discharged. It was Dr. Kovac who’d suggested volunteering at the hospital when Sean was in high school to see if he really wanted to be a doctor. It was also Dr. Kovac who Sean turned to when he needed a letter of recommendation for college and medical school applications. Dr. Kovac couldn’t fix Sean’s life at home, but he was a beacon of hope for a better future. After med school, when Sean

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competed for the hard-to-get emergency residency, he's sure it was Kovac who put in a good word for him.

"Most doctors wait until the patient shows up here. They don't chase after speeding cars to get them," Rose said smiling.

Sean knew he wasn't like most doctors. Then again, he knew his whole life was a bit unconventional. Unlike so many of his colleagues, Sean was not a maverick and he knew he couldn't do what he needed to do on his own. Plus, the team approach he cultivated had the added bonus of helping him fill the void where family should have been.

One reason his team worked so well was his deep respect for nurses, especially ones like Rose. Rose was already a great nurse when Sean was in diapers and he relied on her experience and wisdom more times than he could count. In his estimation, she was the very best of the best. And she was also a friend, something that he was especially grateful for at this moment.

"Did you sleep long?" she asked in a motherly tone.

"Maybe three hours. Dreams," he said fingering the scar that bisected his head from his left ear to the back of his head. Rose had befriended Sean when he was a newly minted doctor and first year resident. She treated him almost like a son and he had confided in her about his bouts with nightmares that made a decent night's sleep impossible. She had convinced him to go to a sleep clinic once but the nightmares continued to torment him.

"I'd tell you to head home for a few hours, but that detective is back and asking to speak to you again. I hear the report on the victims is kind of odd. The detective thinks maybe you can shed some light on it."

"They died when the man tried to fly in a car," he said. "My guess is blunt force trauma to the head and body. Nothing odd about that. It's exactly what I'd expect."

"Well, yes but most crash victims don't have stab wounds too and the woman's throat was slashed. She probably bled out long before the crash. Looks like this one may be domestic violence of the worst sort."

Sean remembered the copious amounts of blood on the woman. He just assumed all her injuries were from the accident. He took a deep breath and shook his head. "I didn't imagine it then."

"Imagine what?"

"I could have sworn that right before the SUV went over the embankment, the driver deliberately turned toward it like he wanted to die."

"Well, the detective wants to talk to you about it," she said. "He's with the grandparents now."

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“Grandparents? Someone’s claimed the boy?”

“A couple from Spokane heard about the crash on the news last night. They called police and said they thought it might be their daughter and her family. The grandparents arrived about 5:30. The detective arrived about 6:00. They’re all waiting for you in Michael’s room. That’s the boy’s name. Michael Brennan.”

“Crap. Another kid with a perverted kind of Irish luck,” he sighed.

“Excuse me?”

“Nothing,” he said as a quick burst of headache flashed behind his eyes. “Please tell the detective I’ll be right there.”

He stood, sniffed at the coffee in the coffeemaker and said, “Wait, Rose! Do me a favor please? Grab me a cup of real coffee from the espresso stand when you get a chance.” She smiled at him when he handed her a five before she walked out. “I think I’m going to need it.”

With no palatable coffee in reach, he splashed water on his face to help him wake up, then finger combed his hair. He pulled a set of clean scrubs from the stack of linens. As he put them on, he realized that yesterday was such a blur he couldn’t quite remember when he put on the set he was wearing. It must have been some time after arriving in the ambulance with the boy. He had kept up CPR until EMTs noticed him in the back of the SUV. It was quite a dance getting the boy into the ambulance as Sean kept up the rhythm of the compressions—a moment that was now flashed on the front page of the newspaper. One EMT offered to take over but Sean wouldn’t relinquish what by then had become a sacred duty to him. He couldn’t quite figure out why he felt so connected to this boy, but he knew he had to see this case through himself. Without even knowing the extent of the boy’s injuries, Sean vowed he would keep him alive after seeing how the girl had tried to protect him.

But there was something more to it than that. Michael reminded Sean of himself. Seeing Michael in the ICU yesterday, Sean realized how small, how vulnerable he had once been. Walking down the hall to Michael’s room now, Sean again fingered the scar by his ear trying to catch memories that refused to materialize.

He both hated and loved that scar. He hated the headaches that plagued him since childhood that seemed to originate at the back of his head where the scar began. But it remained the only connection to his life before—when he had a mother and father who loved him. He was not quite six when his parents died. He was the only survivor of a car accident that created the scar. He woke up terrified and alone in this same hospital. Afterwards his mother’s sister, Regan, raised him. She gave him food and shelter but not much more. Nurturing,



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something lawyers are not known for, was well beyond his aunt's talents. Her professional skills did help her obfuscate when he asked about the accident or his parents. Her well-perfected icy stare accompanied outright refusals to discuss his memories; and snarky condescension greeted him when he tried to explain his dreams or nightmares. He lived a lonely existence with a woman who clearly didn't want him, whose eyes never hid her resentment for him, and whose arms never comforted him—not even as a little boy when he would wake up sobbing for his mother. He often wondered if she refused to hug him because she was afraid he'd break, or that she would.

For years, he could only imagine what life might have been like if he had a real family to belong to. As he pushed open the door to Michael's room, he prayed that Michael would awaken to someone who loved and wanted him. Then, as an afterthought, he prayed the same thing for himself.

## SEATTLE NOW: 2013

**Friday**

**November 22**

**7:30am**

**Sean**

AS HE ENTERED MICHAEL'S ROOM the curtains were still drawn; the muted television cast a flickering white glow in the darkness. The room's quiet was broken by beeping monitors and the squish of air from an accordion bladder attached to a tube forcing air into the boy's lungs.

A man with a great shock of white hair sat in a chair facing the television with his elbows on his knees holding his head in his hands, speaking in hushed whispers to the detective Sean met yesterday. An elegant woman was leaning over Michael's bed with her back to the men. Sean guessed she was in her sixties if she was to match the man's age but she looked much younger. She was stroking Michael's hair with her face close the boy's. She was softly humming, the tune soothing. Perhaps it was a song meant to call the boy back to the nightmare of his life.

Everyone turned to look at Sean as light and noise from the hallway invaded the quiet darkness of Michael's room. Detective Santini stood quickly and took command, speaking first.

"Judge and Mrs. Powell, this is Dr. Thomas, the man who saved your grandson's life. Dr. Thomas, this is Judge James Powell and his wife, Anna. Michael Brennan's grandparents," he said. Before anyone else could speak Anna Powell rushed to Sean, her eyes pleading for any good news. She had that familiar expression of exhaustion and despair mixed with hope that only the grief of a bedside vigil can create. Her eyes locked on his as she asked, "Is Michael going to be all right?"

The one thing Sean hated about his job was giving bad news. Of course, Michael's grandparents had already gotten the worst news possible—their daughter and granddaughter were dead. At least Michael was alive and, for now, he was stable. Looking over the boy's chart, he noted there was swelling on the boy's brain. And, of course, he was comatose. There was no telling how long that would last.

"Michael suffered a lot of trauma, Mrs. Powell," Sean replied, "but he made it through the night. That's a good sign. We aren't sure of the extent of his head injuries so I can't promise there won't be some lasting brain damage, but he's

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so young. Kids can do amazing things. We just have to wait and see. His condition is critical but he's also stable now and that is a good sign too."

Tears began to well in Anna Powell's eyes. The veneer of composure that she had maintained began to crack. Sean was sure he hadn't answered all her questions or prayers. But at least he might have answered some of them. In a voice just above a whisper she said, "Thank you, thank you" as she stepped back to the bed, kissed Michael's forehead, then continued to stroke his hair. Judge Powell stepped up to Sean once his wife turned away.

"Dr. Thomas, I understand from the detective that you were first on the scene after that madman tried to run you down. You saved my grandson's life. I am indebted to you," he said as he firmly gripped Sean's hand. Then, with the tone of a man used to having his demands answered quickly he asked, "Please tell me everything you remember."

"Sir, let me finish checking on Michael. Then we can step outside and I can answer your questions and the detective's." Sean did not want to talk about the crash near the boy because he knew that comatose patients have been known to recount conversations that occurred within their hearing after they awaken. If Michael had any hope of getting well, he needed peace.

Sean went to Michael's bed, took out his pen-sized flashlight to check the pupils of eyes resting under lids as delicate as butterfly wings. No matter how often he tended patients this young, Sean was always amazed at how small and fragile they looked with all the equipment around them. He methodically went through all the vitals though he had just read through them in the chart. No setbacks. At this point, that was as much as anyone could hope for. He also checked the ventilator; its whoosh and click creating a steady cadence of life. Finishing his once-over of the monitors, Anna Powell's eyes met his. He knew she was silently asking for more reassurance.

"Everything is as we would expect, Mrs. Powell. His little body just needs time to heal," he said as he thought to himself, lots of time.

Sean and the Judge joined the detective who waited at the door. As they left the room, the detective asked if there was somewhere they could have a private conversation. Sean led them to the doctor's lounge. Detective Santini asked, "Dr. Thomas, tell me again what you saw yesterday just before the crash," mispronouncing his name again, accenting the last syllable with an Italian flair.

Sean was too tired to tell the detective's his name was pronounced just like a guy's first name. He simply motioned for everyone to sit.

"The guy was driving at an insane speed down that steep hill on Boren. I was waiting to cross at the Boren-Pike intersection. When I got the green, I looked

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uphill just before walking into the intersection. I saw no one. I wasn't even halfway across when I heard the SUV bottom out on the intersection just above me. Before I could think, he was less than a half a block away. I dove for safety; he nearly ran me over. That hill is so steep most people brake all the way down but that guy was driving like he was in a race car. At Pike he bottomed out again and lost control again but he got it back and I thought they might actually make it. Then it sounded like he gunned it. I think he intentionally swerved left to head for the fences in Pilgrim Park. It really looked like he had gotten the car under control. If he hadn't gunned it, I'm sure he could have saved it."

"Did you notice anything about the front passenger?" Santini asked.

"No, it all happened so fast. Then when I was checking after the crash, I was moving so fast looking for survivors that I didn't notice much more than that she was dead," Sean said cautiously not wanting to reveal what Rose had told him.

"Thank you, Dr. Thomas," the detective said. Sean was about to correct him this time, but the Judge spoke first.

"I knew he would do it. I knew he would kill them," Judge Powell growled.

"How did you know?" asked the detective

"He was a drunk. A violent one. I can't understand what she saw in him. She was a smart, beautiful girl. A Vassar graduate for God's sake. She could have had her pick from dozens of suitors. But she chose that controlling, lying, possessive, drunken bully. Why she couldn't see that I'll never know."

"Had he been violent with her before?"

"Hell yes. She left him twice before, but she kept going back. He'd beg her, he'd tell her he changed. She would believe him. But animals like him don't change. I've seen plenty of them in my courtroom. He was a loser and each time he failed, he blamed her. When he moved them over here from Spokane to get away from us, she told us not to worry. He had a good job lined up and things were going to work out great she said. But he started drinking again and then lost his job again. By then he controlled her every move. He controlled the bank accounts and credit cards, nothing was in her name. That fucker even used her money to drink. We sent a cell phone when he canceled their long-distance service but he found it. He called us and said we were interfering in his family. We had no right he said. Then he smashed the phone and sent me the pieces. That was six months ago. Lexi called her sister from work last week saying she was planning to go to a shelter and she would call us when she was safe. We never got that call."

As the Judge spoke, Sean's scar began to throb. He reached up to massage the back of his neck and the room began to swim. His vision began turning grey

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at the edges as buzzing in his ears overtook the sounds in the room. He leaned forward to put his head in his hands and his elbows on his knees.

Somewhere in the distance, Sean heard the detective ask, “Dr. Thomas, are you OK?” Then everything went black.



“Dr. Sean?”

Sean jumped, startled by the little girl’s voice. He had no idea where he was and he couldn’t see anything in the blackness. He turned toward the sound and the partial form of a young girl began to appear. He could only make out her face, which seemed to be glowing with a light coming from within her. The rest of her body was hidden in the darkness that enveloped them both.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you,” the girl said.

“Who are you?” Sean asked. “Where are we?”

“My name is Faith,” she said ignoring his second question. “Thank you for trying to save me.”

Sean recognized her now. She was the other child in the car with Michael, the one who died. If she’s dead, how can she be talking to him? He looked left and then right but he couldn’t see anything other than the girl. He could see her shoulder now along with her face, but they were like a hologram. This is crazy, he thought. Where the hell am I? When the girl spoke again, he didn’t know if he’d actually spoken his questions or if she could read his mind.

“Don’t worry. You’re not crazy and you actually can see me,” Faith said. “You’re kind of asleep. You were talking to the detective and my Granddad when you, ah, well, you know.”

But Sean didn’t know and he was none too happy about that.

Faith continued, “I came to thank you for what you’re doing for Michael. He would come too, I think, but he’s scared. He’s not ready to talk yet.” She paused as if she were thinking. “I don’t know if he can talk to you like I am since he’s not all the way dead yet. There’s so much I still have to learn.”

“Learn? How can you learn? You’re dead, right?” Sean asked. “You’re dead,” he said again with conviction. She was dead. It was a fact. “What the hell is going on?”

“Well, my body is dead,” Faith said. “But it’s OK. It’s nice here from what I can tell so far. My mom is smiling all the time now and she is really happy. She said it was OK if I came to tell you what happened. She thinks it will help you somehow.”

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“What do you mean, tell me what happened?”

“You know, what Daddy did to Michael and me and mom before we died.”

“Is Michael with you?”

“Sometimes. He can go back and forth but he’s not dead. Not yet anyway. Momma keeps telling him to stay alive. She says he can have a good life. But he cries and says he wants to stay with us. I think he should stay alive too. Nana and Granddad need him. He likes listening to Nana sing and he likes it when she strokes his head but he doesn’t like it when Granddad gets angry,” Faith said as she came closer. Sean could almost touch her. In the light she cast he could see her face clearly now and he could see her arms and most of her torso but everything else was still blackness. He reached his hand out toward her and noticed that his arm was shaking back and forth. Faith noticed it too.

“Uh oh. I think they’re waking you up. I’ll come back to see you later. Thanks again,” Faith said. Then she was gone.



When Sean opened his eyes, he was on the floor of the doctor’s lounge. Detective Santini and Judge Powell were staring at him as a nurse was squeezing a blood pressure cuff on his arm—the same arm that was shaking when he reached out for Faith. He unlatched the cuff, told the nurse he was fine and slowly sat up, resting his back against the couch. The nurse wanted him to stay prone but he ignored her pleas even though the room began to swim. He closed his eyes tightly and rubbed them before setting his hands on the floor hoping to steady the room. The nurse tried again to check his blood pressure, but he shooed her away saying he was fine. The nurse said he needed to be evaluated immediately. When Sean put her off again with another *I’m fine*, she left the room saying she’d be right back.

“You gave us quite a scare when you fell off the couch doc,” Santini said. “Are you sure you’re all right?”

Sean looked at the men but didn’t quite register the question. He heard it but his mind felt fuzzy like it did when he awoke from some of his nightmares. He knew who the men were and he knew he had been talking with them before he was talking with the girl...the girl...did that really happen? Was he talking with Michael’s sister?

“Sir,” Sean said, looking at Judge Powell, “What is...I mean was...what was your granddaughter’s name?”

“Faith. Her name was Faith.”

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True to her word, the nurse returned with a very large orderly pushing a wheelchair. Sean guessed she hadn't taken kindly to his previous lack of cooperation.

"Dr. Thomas, you're going to emergency," the nurse said. "You fainted. You need to be evaluated. Matt will help you into this chair." It was not a request.

Sean knew the policy so he decided not to argue. The sooner he was evaluated the sooner he could get back to work. Matt moved toward him reaching for his arm to help him stand.

"I can stand on my own, thanks Matt," Sean said as he got to his feet trying not to reveal that the room began to spin again. He really did need Matt's help and he hated that feeling. Sean didn't object when Matt ignored his words and used pro-wrestler-sized arms to guide Sean into the wheelchair. As Matt turned the chair toward the door, Sean looked at the detective and Judge Powell and said, "Gentlemen, it appears I'll be a bit indisposed for a little while. When I'm cut loose, I'll be back to finish this conversation."

"Don't worry," Santini said. "I have what I need for now. I'll be in touch if I need anything else. You take good care doc."

With that, Matt wheeled Sean out of the doctor's lounge with the nurse in tow. Once in the hallway, the overhead lights felt bright enough to scorch his retinas but closing his eyes made his stomach lurch so he compromised by squinting. With the slightest concern about his symptoms, he convinced himself that all he really needed was a few more hours sleep. After that, he was sure he'd be fine. But sleep was not in the cards for a while if everything went as he guessed it would. First, he would see the resident in emergency who would no doubt call for a neuro consult (just to cover his or her ass), and then the neuro doc would probably want a *c-y-a* MRI. If Sean was lucky, the neuro doc would be someone he knew well and Sean could convince him to forgo the MRI so that he could just go home and sleep in his own bed because right now he felt absolutely exhausted.

The evaluation by the third-year resident was competent, even if she was a little nervous. Nothing like feeling your every move is being watched by your boss. He tried to be a good patient and be just a patient, not a doctor, but it was more or less impossible. Sean couldn't help but suggest the neuro consult while the resident was finishing her notes. Not because he felt like he needed one and certainly not because he wanted one, but because he wanted his residents to think of everything when they were examining any patient.

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“Yes, sir,” she said. “I was just about to tell you I was ordering it.”

“Do you know who is on call today?”

“No sir but I’ll find out and let you know right away.” With that, the resident left him sitting on the exam table. He looked around and realized that from a patient’s perspective the tiny windowless room was a bit claustrophobic. It was also sterile—nothing the least bit interesting to look at. And cold. Damn, he was cold. Just another sign of how tired he was. They did keep the rooms a bit cooler here in emergency since everyone was moving so much and those lab coats were much warmer than they looked. But geez, as a patient you just about froze your ass off. He made some mental notes about adding some small touches that would make the room less intimidating and talking to maintenance about raising the temperature in exam rooms to somewhere north of ice box.

The nervous third-year poked her head in the door saying Dr. Kenji Takano was on call today and he’d be down in about ten minutes. She asked if she could get him anything and he remembered that cup of coffee Rose was going to get him. He asked if she’d send someone to track down Rose for his coffee. He could really use that boost of caffeine now. He hadn’t had any coffee at all yet and since the day wasn’t getting any better on its own, he really could use some. And he asked for a blanket.

After she left, Sean asked himself what that resident’s name was? He should know it. He tried to make a habit of introducing himself to all the new residents as they came on board for their rotation. But no matter how he tried, he couldn’t recall her name. And he was so busy trying not to be a pain-in-the-ass patient that he didn’t remember what she said when she introduced herself. Then again, did she miss doing that? Another mental note to self about training protocols. But first, he laid back and closed his eyes because ten minutes could last forever in a hospital.

When his old roommate, Kenji Takano, and Rose walked in his room at the same time he spoke to Rose first. “Ah, Rose, you are a sight for sore eyes.”

“I wondered where you’d gone. I was wandering around the nurse’s station down here when a very nervous resident asked if I knew who Rose was. Given that there aren’t many Roses who work here, I figured she meant me. Then I knew she did when she said you were looking for your coffee,” Rose said as she smiled and handed it to him. “You know I don’t do this for any other doctor.”

“Aww, not even me Rose,” Kenji chimed in.

“Especially not you Ken,” Rose said with a smile. Had Sean been a normal patient Rose would have used Dr. Takano, but not now. When Kenji had his emergency rotation during medical school, Rose had been his savior, too, more



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than a few times. Alone here they were all friends, not just colleagues. Sean took a big swig of his lukewarm coffee and said, “Nectar of the gods. Thanks Rose.” He started to get off the exam table saying, “I feel well enough to go home now.”

“Hold up there, buddy. That cute little resident didn’t find anything wrong with you but that doesn’t mean I won’t.”

“Kenji!” Rose objected.

“Sorry Rose. I meant no disrespect.” Sean knew that was true. Kenji might be a bit of a jock and a big mouth but he was happily married to an amazing lawyer and had three little girls. He was a champion of equality for women. And he truly valued the different way women approached medicine. In fact, he had an absolute professional crush on a researcher who was making huge strides in her research on the workings of the brain. He couldn’t stop talking about the breakthroughs she was making. If she’d been a celebrity, he would have started her fan club.

“So SPT, what’s the problem?” Ken asked. Kenji Takano was incapable of calling anyone by their given name. Everyone had a nickname, except Rose (not that she would have minded but Ken respected her wisdom and experience too much for that kind of teasing).

“Honestly, Ken, I think I’m just tired. I had a hell of a day yesterday followed by a mostly sleepless night on the couch in the doctor’s lounge up on four. It’s been a while since we were residents and had to survive that way. I just need a good night’s sleep.”

Sean knew that wasn’t quite true but he also knew that if he mentioned that he’d met the dead sister of the kid he rescued when he blacked out, he wouldn’t only be having a neuro consult. Sean was pretty certain this episode wasn’t all that different from the headaches he’d tolerated in the past. Since there was no organic cause for them, there wasn’t any reason to believe there was for this one either.

“Stand up,” Ken said.

“What?”

“Stand up. Let me see how you walk across the room.”

Sean did as he was told. He was glad for the latte Rose had brought because the combination of caffeine, fat, and sugar did make him feel better. He walked across the room with no problem.

“Close your eyes,” Ken demanded next, “And lift one foot.”

“What is this, a sobriety test?” Sean replied.

“No, just checking your balance. I’m not saying I wouldn’t believe you if I asked if you were dizzy, it’s just that doctors are notoriously bad patients so we

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have to be clever to get at the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the unvarnished truth, as my better half would say,” Ken said as he grinned.

“Are you going to read me my rights next?” Sean said as he finished his latte and complied with Ken’s orders. “See? Fine. Can I go home and sleep now?”

“Well, I’m thinking an MRI would be a good idea,” Ken said.

“Ken, I don’t need an MRI, I need rest. You know that if you call for one, I’ll be here all day and won’t get any rest. Just let me go home and sleep,” Sean pleaded.

“Tell you what. It’s Friday morning so I’ll cut you loose without an MRI on one condition. You have to take the weekend to do nothing but rest. If you’re simply tired from being such a hero, the weekend should be enough to set it right for an old man like you. Come see me first thing Monday morning. I’ll check you over. If all is good, we’ll chalk this one up to the stress and the exhaustion of being Superman and I’ll sign the papers that let you get back to work because as of this moment, you my friend, are on medical leave.” Kenji put his hand up to his mouth in a stage whisper and said, “It just doesn’t look good to have the doctors dropping to the floor when the patients come in.”

“Deal,” Sean said. But what choice did he have really?

“One more thing, buddy-boy,” Ken continued, “Go straight home, don’t pass go, don’t collect \$100, don’t flirt with any pretty girls in your favorite coffee shop. Home. Bed. Rest.” Ken grabbed the door, tipped a non-existent hat and said, “Monday” as he walked out.

“Do you want me to call you a cab?” Rose asked.

“Thanks, but no. I’ll get changed and walk home. Hopefully the fresh air will do me good. Thanks again for that coffee. It really saved me just now.”

Rose walked with Sean back to the doctor’s lounge to get his street clothes. Before leaving she told him she’d see him later in the afternoon to drop off some hearty soup on her way home. He was to look for it outside his door in case he was asleep when she dropped it off.

Rose was such a deeply compassionate person. Sean often wondered if things would have turned out differently for him if his Aunt Regan had even a speck of the caring ways Rose had. He’d met her kids. They were right around his age, two were older and one younger than he was; all three happily ensconced in relationships. Some even had given Rose grandchildren already so she only worked three days a week now so she could spend time with them. For her, nothing mattered more than family. Regan had never even worked part-time in that first year they were together. Never chose him first. Hey, but at least now he had Rose

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to look out for him when he really needed it. It was good to know someone cared, especially after Savannah left.

Sean had every intention of following doctor's orders but once he got changed, he decided to check on Michael just one more time before he left telling himself he'd relax and sleep much better if he knew Michael was still stable. It would only take five extra minutes and then he promised himself he would follow Kenji's orders to the letter.

On the way to Michael's room, Sean thought about Savannah. In fact, he had been thinking about her almost every day for weeks now. It was almost as if he could feel her presence again. God, even five years out, he still missed her as much as the day she left him. He hadn't had a serious relationship since then. What was the point?

He entered Michael's room quietly. The curtains were still drawn and the only light was the glow from that silent TV. The Judge greeted him with a hearty handshake, saying he was glad to see him up and about.

"I wanted to stop in once more before heading home. My doctor wants me to take the weekend off. He thinks the fainting is likely from exhaustion," Sean explained before noticing the woman with Anna next to Michael's bed. "Oh, excuse me. I didn't mean to interrupt," Sean began to turn toward the door when Anna stopped him.

"No, wait Dr. Thomas," Anna said, "I want to introduce you to our chaplain." The woman stood, turned to face him, and said, "Hello, Sean. I mean Dr. Thomas."

"Savannah!"

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