

# **THE AMERICAN STRANGLER**

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*One useless man is called a disgrace. Two or more are called a law firm.*

—John Adams, 1776

*The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.*

—William Shakespeare, *Henry VI*, Part II, Act IV, Scene 2

*The last thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.*

—Ron Rellick, *The American Strangler*, Chapters 2-54

# CHAPTER 1

He placed the pill far back onto his tongue and swallowed hard. Mounting angst contorted every muscle in his neck. He never took a Xanax before. He never engaged in recreational drugs. He never drank.

Though he appeared to navigate life's passage with ease, recent events kept him from exorcizing the demons tormenting his conscious thoughts. He ran from a relentless circumstance of evil intent. With each stride, he saw the ground beneath him dissolve like loose sand. His soul was the hunted, his mind the hunter.

The emptiness of the room magnified the echo of heavy footsteps. Four muscular men went about their work much in the manner of mindless robots. Over and over they made the trip from the house to the truck carrying elegant furniture, artwork, and the boxes stacked in each room.

The sedative effect of the Xanax did not affect his mood. His thoughts drifted. He saw many obnoxious, selfish people that day. The stress to perform turned intolerable.

*I see the patients. I hear their voices. It's become an endless chatter. Instead of concentrating on their problems, I stare with a blank expression at their irritable faces. I never felt this way before. All I see are the flaws in their complexion; the wrinkles, blemishes, and dark patches that visit their skin like a plague.*

"Excuse me, sir," said one man, balancing two large boxes in his arms. "I gotta get through here."

Lifted just above the threshold of deep thought he responded, "Oh, sure."

He moved out of the young man's path and walked to the undressed window. With a fixed gaze, he stared into the distance, looking at nothing in particular.

I used to reason there were more kind people in the world than nasty ones, but for the life of me, they seem reduced in numbers from the past.

A pile of junk mail sat on the sill, left there by the housemaid before being dismissed from service. As mindless therapy, he glanced at the envelopes, determined what he needed to read, and flung the fodder into the empty box next to him for recycling.

One piece caught his attention. The outer envelope stated, "DON'T LOSE EVERYTHING YOU WORKED HARD FOR TO THE PREDATORS OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION!"

He saw this mailing many times in the past. It meant nothing before, but now it was too late. He placed his finger beneath the sealed flap and attacked the messenger. A searing burn preceded the realization that the envelop tore open his flesh. Unlike other paper cuts, this wound traveled deeper.

The hollow high-pitched sound of petite footsteps heard crossing the room intruded upon his solitude.

"What happened to your finger?" she inquired.

He ignored her question and stated, "This fiasco should have never happened to us."

With an expression defining despair, he shook his head from side to side.

"What can we do?" she asked.

"Nothing. Not a damn thing we can do."

"What about Florida?"

"They'll get that too."

"The beach house?"

"That they can't take."

The leader of the men approached. He held the last box between his strong arms. Sweat and grime from his labor darkened a badly worn blue denim shirt. His bulging forearm bore a faded tattoo blurred by time. Still, remnants of a once proud eagle, wings spread and mounted, remained for all to admire.

"You can lock up now," he said without emotion or commentary as he exited.

Two souls now stood naked before a world of their perceived injustice. They had become the residue of a defective system manipulated by design. No more dreams to live for, only emptiness and torment stood ready to visit upon them.

*How did I get here? Every problem has solutions, logical solutions. God, I know this! The ruination of my existence is about to unfold. How did I get here?*