

Remember The Monsters
EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER 3

The doors of the Escalade had been sealed tight by the coroner investigator. Just as well. She had no desire to get any closer than necessary. For a brief moment her thoughts turned to the young teacher who had discovered the body, and how those horrible images would never leave her. Abby pulled a Maglite from her coat pocket, approached the SUV, and leaned over the hood. She pointed the powerful beam through a small, circular patch of ice that had been partially scraped away from the windshield. The light was diffused by a web of silver crystals, giving the victim's body the eerie appearance of moving as though jolted by a charge of electricity.

Abby shuddered, trying to maintain her concentration. She noted seven yellow placards – individually numbered – scattered about the interior of the vehicle indicating something of evidentiary value had been found at each of the locations. Something incriminating perhaps, maybe a fingerprint or strand of hair the killer left behind. On second thought, not likely. She had investigated enough homicides to know this one did not appear to be the work of an amateur. Then, staring into Lillie Roberts's cold, dead eyes Abby flashed on a name, a name that sent a terrible chill deep into her bones.

Elizabeth Short.

Long before she became a homicide detective, Abby had been fascinated with the saga of Elizabeth Short. A striking, twenty-two-year-old aspiring actress, Short had been murdered in Los Angeles in 1947. Her nude body – severed at the waist and almost completely drained of blood – was discovered in a vacant lot near downtown. Abby found it particularly horrific that Short's face had been slashed from the corners of her mouth to each ear. The macabre leer staring back from the autopsy photo would forever haunt her. Sometimes she regretted ever collecting her stockpile of books on the subject.

Despite feverish press coverage and an exhaustive police investigation, no arrests were ever made in the explosive case. And as the months turned to years, the name Elizabeth Short was all but forgotten, replaced by something far more salacious and sinister.

The Black Dahlia.

Looking more closely at the victim in the SUV, Abby couldn't help but notice the obvious similarities between the two crimes: Lillie Roberts's body was also nude and severed at the waist, her right arm hooked around the steering wheel, probably to hold the top part of her torso upright; the severe cuts on her face replicated the grotesque smile of the Dahlia; and, like the Dahlia, it appeared as if Lillie had been washed, cleaned, and drained of blood. Pulling a spiral notebook and pen from another pocket, Abby began scribbling notes. Once again, she locked on to the victim's eyes. She would never get used to the eyes.

Lillie Roberts's eyes had captured her final terrifying moments, and Abby only wished those images had been preserved there, like photographs, exposing the monster responsible. She

instantly felt the pain of countless other victims, victims who had died at the hands of some other sick bastard. More and more those images popped into her head, uninvited. Sometimes they became a relentless slideshow of death. Sometimes, like now, she struggled to stay ahead of the darkness with no idea how to deal with it.