

For Love of Country (The Dugan Chronicles Book 4)

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The Dugan Chronicles

Book 4

For Love of Country

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Mathew Dugan, the head detective of Los Angeles' most successful team of crack homicide detectives, didn't like what he was hearing. In his mid-forties, he'd heard it all before. For the last twenty years he'd listened to the same old song and dance over and over again. But there he stood listening to it all again.

His rather tall muscular frame stood towering over the commissioner's desk. At two hundred and twenty pounds, he easily could have engulfed the much smaller police commissioner in his massive shadow. While his body was one hundred percent hard core muscle, the commissioner was just the opposite. He was a short, roly-poly bastard that Matt despised. Besides the fact that he was missing most of his hair, there was something else that the commissioner was missing, a backbone. He just sat there behind that huge Mahogany desk and relayed the messages from upstairs, just like he was doing now. Matt never cared much for those lazy-ass bastards that sat behind a desk and dictated how he should run his team of homicide detectives.

His team of detectives is the most dedicated, most successful team in the entire police force. Each member of his team had been awarded numerous citations for their services to the community. Each one of those citations had been earned by long hours of digging and searching for clues to the city's worst homicides. It wasn't just the worst crimes that they solved it was the city's most bizarre crimes, that his team had continued to solve over the years. Matt relished in the thought that his team and his team alone had never been given a case that went unsolved. They got the job done. They got the convictions, either in the court systems or in the courts of a higher authority.

But the credit for that outstanding record wasn't his alone. It was a combined effort of everyone on the team. From the top to the bottom of his team's roster, their combined years of experience was just unheard of. Each member of 'Matt's Crew' as it was called, were all seasoned professionals with countless years of dedicated services to the City of Angels. Then there was Kelly,

Detective Kelly Moore, the newest addition to the team, she was also the only female on the team. With almost eleven years on the force, it was the last two years of service in the Homicide Division that had made her shine. She had somehow managed to outperform the other detectives on the team. She was a good looking long legged woman with long reddish hair and she could somehow sense a criminal's next move. She'd done it more than a dozen times. She could look at a crime scene and see things that everyone else had missed. But there was something else about Kelly, besides her rather expensive taste when it came to her wardrobe. She and Matt were dating, they had been seeing each other for almost a year. Then about six months ago Kelly had even moved into Matt's place. The only thing about Matt that seemed to bother her was Matt's inability to make any type of commitment.

Matt was thinking about everyone on his team as the commissioner continued to spill out the same old budget crap that he'd heard before. What Matt was waiting for was the bad news. In a time when the city was filled with of budget cuts and lay-offs Matt was waiting to hear who the brass upstairs had decided to cut from his team. Then the lecture took a much surprised twist as it took on a more personal persona.

"Matt you've been a damn good cop for a hell of a long time. But the department is trying to clear up the books in regards to unused vacation time. Now I realize that you're dedicated to your job and I really do feel sorry for you, but you really need to take a vacation." He told him.

"Well I'll take a vacation when the people of Los Angeles stop killing each other." Matt answered.

"Look Matt, the people of Los Angeles appreciate your loyalty, the Mayor appreciates your loyalty, hell even the man on the moon appreciates your sense of duty, but you've been with the department for almost twenty years and you've never taken a vacation. Not a single day, why is that Matt?" He told Matt.

"Look Rick, I'm not taking any time off. I have too much work piled up on my desk and more is on the way." Matt told him.

"Look Matt, why don't you go visit your brother, where is he Alabama or somewhere? In fact I insist on it." Rick told him.

"He's in Tennessee and if you like him so much why don't you go visit him?" Matt asked him.

"Look Matt this is coming down from upstairs, you are going to take a vacation because if you

don't, I've been ordered to put you on suspension without pay." Rick told him.

"That's bullshit. And you can tell those fat-ass bastards upstairs that I said so too." Matt told him.

"Just go to Tennessee and see your brother. I'm sure that the city can get along without you for a while." Rick told him.

"Tennessee? Nothing ever happens in Tennessee." Matt answered back.

"That's exactly why you need to go there. You need to relax and visit with your brother." The commissioner told him.

"Wait a second, I can't go on vacation, Kelly and I will be celebrating our one year anniversary next week and I have to be here for that." Matt said with a smile.

"Sorry Matt but she's being forced to take time off too. Hell you can both go together." He answered

"Fine, just how long do you expect me to be gone, one week or two?" Matt asked him.

"Nice try Matt, try again." He told Matt.

"What in the hell do you mean nice try?" Matt asked him.

"You're not to show your face or hers for a whole month. Thirty days or else." He answered.

"A whole month, oh come on, that's a bit harsh don't you think?" Matt asked him.

"Well they could force you to take all of it, but then you wouldn't be here for your own retirement party now would you?" He told him.

"Great, so who do I leave in charge?" Matt asked him.

"That is something that you'll need to decide. You have ten minutes to make your choice. It's ten minutes to five and you're officially on vacation in ten minutes." He told him.

Matt could tell that he was serious. Matt turned and walked towards the door of the office but he stopped and turned before he left.

"If you need me, you have my number." He said as he turned and walked out of the office.

Matt walked into his squad room and found his crack team of detectives waiting for him.

"So what was that all about?" Mike asked.

"Well it would seem that you're now in charge. I'm being forced into taking a vacation." Matt answered.

"Really, why me? Isn't Kelly next in line?" Mike asked.

"Technically no she isn't. It's just that you guys all listen to her more then you listen to me. But she's being forced to take a vacation too, so all of that really doesn't matter much." He answered.

"I am? And when did this come about?" Kelly asked him.

"When I told them that I couldn't live a day in Tennessee without you." Matt answered.

"Tennessee? Why in the hell are we going to, oh yeah your brother Josh lives there doesn't he?" Kelly asked.

"Yep, so we'll go home, pack our things and I guess we'll be off to Tennessee." He answered.

"So how long do you expect to be gone?" Sam asked.

"About a week or so because that's all the time that I'm giving you guys to convince the brass upstairs that you really need me back here. Got it?" He asked.

"Got it Matt, you guys have a nice time." Sam told them.

"Yeah, right, in Tennessee? Shit, nothing ever happens in Tennessee." Matt told them as he and Kelly walked out of the office. The clock on the wall read five o'clock sharp.

Meanwhile out in Tennessee

Josh Dugan sat back in the leather recliner that sat behind his desk. He was relaxing with his feet up on his desk, as he puffed away on a big stogie cigar. He was the younger of the two Dugan sons. And while he carried the same professional persona as his older brother did, he also carried a few more pounds than Matt did. But then again he didn't have a girlfriend like Kelly that dragged him to the gym all the time. A steady assault on some gym equipment was all he needed, however with his somewhat busy schedule that wasn't likely to happen. Everyone had to have a goal in their life, losing a few pounds wasn't his.

It was after all, a rather quiet day in the office of the Pickett County Sheriff's Office since the month of January was almost always quiet around here. That's why the cells were empty and most of the deputies were either watching television or were out on patrol.

Pickett County was a joke in and by itself, the county itself only covered one hundred and fourteen square miles. And more than half of was inaccessible by car. That would mean a day or two in the saddle of a horse for any deputy that happened to be unlucky enough to land a call in what the sheriff called the outback.

Josh Dugan just happened to be that sheriff. To the people of Pickett County, the county seat of Byrdstown Tennessee was their home. Roughly five thousand people called this little town their home. And they liked it... a lot. Byrdstown was seated nicely between two manmade lakes, Dale Hollow to the West and Lake Cumberland to the East. The winters here were crisp with some occasional snow, and this year was proving itself to just like the rest of the winters past. No snow had fallen as of yet, there was a however a storm forecasted for late tomorrow that could very well throw some white stuff their way. The summers here were a different story they were busy as hell. Thousands upon thousands of visitors flocked to the lake's shoreline every summer. And travelers brought with them just what the town needed most... money, a lot of money.

There was one minor draw back to living in Pickett County Tennessee. That was the total lack of any medical services. Pickett County did have one licensed medical practice, one dentist and a nursing home. But as far as hospitals were concerned, there weren't any. The closest hospital

was out in Livingston in Overton County. And sometimes that proved to be a real major problem, especially in a life and death situation.

It was Dugan's job to make sure that nothing interfered with the summer business. It was a quiet job, but Josh liked it. He liked the small town atmosphere where everyone knew everyone else. He didn't like the fact that everyone knew everyone else's business though. That never sat well with him but if that was the only drawback to being the Sheriff of Pickett County he could deal with it.

He didn't like the big city life either. His brother Matt just happened to be the head homicide detective way out in California, who was always making the front pages of the local paper. Matt seemed to like it and he was good at his job. Matt could have his busy city life. Josh liked it right where he was. Yes sir, he liked the quiet life of Tennessee. But that quiet life that Josh loved so much was about to explode right before his eyes.

Josh was just lifting his coffee cup up to his lips when all of a sudden there was a loud commotion out in the outer office. Josh could hear his officers yelling at someone or something.

"What in the hell is going on out here?" He asked as he sprang from his chair.

As he entered the inner office that was next to his own, he watched as two of his deputies backed through the swinging doors that lead to the front office. The deputies had their guns drawn as they backed through the doors.

"What the hell is going on here?" He yelled.

"He's got a gun Chief!" One of the deputies yelled.

"Who's got a gun?" Josh yelled.

Before any of his officers could answer, a large black man busted through the doors. A large caliber revolver was in his hand.

"All right now, look mister, put the gun down." Josh told him. Josh's gun was still in its holster on his hip.

"I want to talk to the Sheriff." The man yelled.

"I am the Sheriff, now please put the gun down before someone gets hurt." He told the man.

"Are you going to arrest me?" The black man asked.

"Oh yeah, we often arrest people that burst in here waving a gun around. Now put the gun down before one of my trigger happy deputies takes it upon himself to shoot your ass." Josh told him.

"Wouldn't matter, I'm already dead." The man told him.

"No, I've seen dead men before. And not one of them ever waved a gun around as well as you do. Now for the last time, I'm ordering you to give me that gun." Josh told him.

"Tell your men not to shoot me." The black man yelled.

"Sorry, but you know that I can't do that." Josh replied.

"Tell them to put their guns down and I'll give you mine." The black man told him.

"Alright, I'll play it your way. Guys lower your guns. But if this guy as much as twitches, blow his black ass away." Josh ordered.

"But Sheriff?" One deputy yelled.

"I said to lower your gun deputy. Do it now!" Josh ordered.

The deputies slowly lowered their weapons. But they were ready to defend themselves and the Chief if it came down to it.

"There, now it's your turn, hand me your gun." The Sheriff told the man.

Slowly, the black man handed his gun to the Sheriff. As Josh grabbed the gun from the black man's hands, he was very much surprised to find out that it was made of wood. He could tell that his deputies were just about to rush the man and tackle him to the ground. Josh held up his hand signaling his men to stop.

"This gun is made out of wood. What in the world were you thinking? You could have gotten yourself killed and that might not bother me, but one of my men could have been hurt. And that does." Josh told the large black man.

"I didn't want to hurt anyone." The black man answered.

Josh just looked at the giant of a man before him. He noticed that he was sweating profusely, and his breathing was rapid and shallow. Josh knew that his man was having some sort of medical issue.

"Someone call an ambulance." He ordered. He turned to the black man.

"Okay, friend just relax, help is on the way. Why don't you sit down and relax a minute?" He asked.

"There ain't no help for me, not this time." The man replied as he dropped himself into a chair.

"What are you talking about? What do you mean by this time?" Josh asked the man as he slowly made his way over to him.

"They've gone and killed me boss. They shot me." The man answered.

"Who are they? And what do you mean they shot you? I don't see any bullet holes." He told him.

"The Nazis, they shot me, with a dart!" He answered.

"Did you say the Nazi's shot you? With a dart? What in the world are you talking about?" He asked. Josh knew that this guy was in trouble. But he had no way of knowing just how much trouble he was really in. "Someone get me a glass of water." He yelled to his men.

"Okay just relax. Start from the beginning. Tell me what happened." He told the man.

"There's more boss, more of us, their prisoners." The man barely said as he fought to get the words out.

"Prisoners? Look friend I'm really trying to help you here but you'll have to give me more than just bits and pieces. Okay? So let's try this again." The sheriff told the man.

Suddenly the man's eyes rolled back into head and his body started shaking to the point that he fell out of the chair. Josh and several of his deputies tried to hold the man so he wouldn't hurt himself, but the man was going into convulsions or something that none of them had ever seen before. It wasn't just his body shaking, no this guy was shaking so hard and fast that a few of the deputies were actually thrown off of him.

"Come on buddy relax, help is on the way, just hold on a little longer." He told him. What happened next would send every officer in the room into a total state of shock, including the sheriff himself.

As they were bent over him, trying to restrain him, they watched in horror as the man's chest, rose up about six inches and there was a loud popping and cracking sounds that appeared to have come from inside the man's chest, right where the man's heart should have been. The man's chest then collapsed, as that happened there was a gurgling sound from the man's open mouth. As the deputies jumped back, a large shower of blood shot from the guy's mouth. Then he was still, motionless. He was dead. Everyone just looked on in horror. They all took steps back from the man. One deputy didn't stand, but simply slid across the floor on the seat of his trousers as he tried to get away from the man.

Josh just stared at the man on the floor of the stationhouse. But there was something else that bothered him. Just as the blood started flowing from the dead man's mouth, Josh could have almost sworn that he'd seen something. Something that just wasn't right. The blood was almost, well, greenish colored. Hell, it almost appeared to glow. Josh looked around at his deputies. Since none of them acted like they had seen it Josh just figured that it was most likely the lighting. So he dismissed it.

"What in the hell was that?" One of the deputies asked.

"I don't know Chief, that's the freakiest thing I've ever seen." Josh replied. "Anybody get any of this guy's blood on them? Everyone check everyone else. I'm not sure what we just witnessed here but it sure as hell, isn't good."

The deputies started checking each other.

"Anyone with any blood on their clothes I want them to go change. And for God's sake, don't get any of that guy's blood on your skin."

After checking and double checking each other's clothes, Josh was relieved to find that only two deputies had blood on the uniforms. He couldn't understand how everyone had been that close to this guy, but somehow managed to dodge that shower of blood. None of them had any blood on their skin.

"What in the hell was that all about Chief?" One of his deputies asked him.

"Hey I'm in the dark here just like you. But that has to be the weirdest thing that I've ever seen." Josh told him

"No shit." Another deputy answered.

"It almost looked like..." One deputy started to answer but stopped.

Josh just looked over at him.

"It almost looked like what?" The sheriff asked.

"Well like, his heart... it looked like it exploded, Chief." The deputy told him.

"That's exactly what it looked like to me too. Something is going on here." The sheriff said as he sat down on the edge of a desk, and looked down at the dead man that lay on the floor before him. He noticed that there were several small streams of blood running from the guy's eyes as well as his nose.

"Alright, right now, while all of this fresh in your minds, I want each and every one of you to write down everything that you saw or heard from the very first time that you laid eyes on this guy. I want them in my office as soon as reasonably possible. And whatever you do... don't go stepping in all of this blood. We'll have blood all over the damn place." He ordered his men. All of the deputies pulled out their tablets and started writing. Josh walked back into his office and recovered the butt of the cigar that he had been smoking right before all hell had broken loose and relit it.

Josh didn't know what to make out of all of this but he was certainly going to get to the bottom it. He could hear the siren of the ambulance as it got closer and closer. Seconds after the siren ended two attendants rushed in with a gurney loaded down with equipment.

"No need to rush boys, he's dead." Josh told the two attendants as he walked out of his office.

"Are you sure?" One of them asked.

"Go ahead, check for yourself if you want to, but while you're down there see if he has any ID on him okay?" Josh asked.

One of the attendants took a fast glance at the man on the floor. He was certain that he was dead, but he checked for any vital signs, all the same.

While the other attendant made a quick search of his pockets.

"You're right, he's dead alright. But where did all of this blood come from?" The first attendant asked.

"Out of his mouth." Josh replied "Just like a fountain!"

"Are you kidding, you guys do this to him?" The attendant asked.

"Oh no, whatever it was that killed this poor son of a bitch we had no part of it. In fact, as he started shaking around, we just held him still, or tried to at least. Then like something out of damn horror flick his chest jumped out, and well there he is, dead, just like I told you." Josh replied.

The second attendant stood up. "Sorry Chief, there's no ID whatsoever. But back to what you just said. You said that his chest jumped out at you. What do mean exactly, his chest jumped out at you?" He asked.

"Exactly what I said, his chest jumped out at us. Hell I'd say by a good six inches, at least. Ain't that right boys?" Josh asked his deputies to confirm what had taken place.

"Oh hell yeah, damnest thing I've ever seen, I tell you." One deputy answered.

"Yeah and I swear, I darn near pissed my pants." Another deputy added.

"Well that's simply impossible. The human rib cage just doesn't flex that far. The bones would shatter long before that." He answered.

One of the attendants knelt over the body and proceeded to rub his hand over the man's ribcage, directly over his heart. "Holy shit, come over here and feel this." He told the other attendant.

"Why, what do you feel?" Josh asked as he watched the second attendant rubbing his hand over the dead man's chest.

"What the hell caused this shit?" He softly asked his partner.

He just looked at him and shrugged his shoulder. "Don't have the slightest idea." He replied.

"Hey, hello, what did you find?" Josh asked.

The two attendants just stared up at him. "His rib cage is"

"Is what?" Josh asked again.

"Shattered into a million little pieces, but don't ask me why or how, because I really don't know." The man answered.

"Maybe the man was on drugs or something?" One of the deputies suggested.

"Yeah I'm no doctor not by a long shot, but I know enough to know that there are a lot of drugs out there that affect the heart. Sometimes it's just too much for the heart to handle but in order to that much damage a person would have to take one hell of a lot of drugs. But he'd be dead long before it made his heart do this kind of damage. But like I said, I'm not a doctor." The attendant explained.

The other attendant ripped open the dead man's shirt. What he and the rest of the stunned onlookers saw only added to the mystery that was being played out there on the floor of the Sheriff's station house. The man's chest was turning a dark shade of blue, right before their eyes. The color was a sure indication of blood just under the skin. And from what they were seeing there was a lot of blood.

"Holy shit! What in the world caused that I wonder?" The attendant said as he stared down at the lifeless form that was staring back at him.

"You've got me, I ain't never seen anything like this. Not ever." The other attendant answered.

Josh just stared down at the dead man and he didn't like the thoughts that were running through his head. After all, the man had said that there were more men, just like him, being held prisoner, hadn't he? The man did seem to be fairly calm, hadn't he? Even though he had just rushed into the local Sheriff's station, with a wooden gun. If he had been in a state of confusion, he might have come into his office with a real gun and some of his men would have been shot or worse. But that hadn't happened. So Josh could only base his thoughts on what had actually happened and what the man had actually said. The Nazi's had shot him? That was what he had said, wasn't it? He looked up at the attendant that appeared to be in charge.

"Who's working the morgue tonight?" He asked.

"Doc Williams is on call tonight. Doctor Brannon is out sick. That leaves Doc Williams all by himself. Why do you ask?" The attendant asked him.

Josh turned and picked up the phone and as he spun back around, he handed it to him. "Call Dr. Williams and tell him that you have a rush case coming in. Tell him that I want to know what killed this guy and I want to know as soon as possible." He told him.

"But Chief, it's Friday night, I don't know where he is." The man replied.

"Well then I suggest that you find him. If he's asleep, wake him, if he's out playing with himself, go get him. Do you get what I'm telling you?" He asked.

"Yeah I think I do." The attendant said as he took the phone and started dialing.

Josh looked over at his men, which still appeared to be in a state of shock.

"You guys might want to call home and tell them you'll be a little late getting home. And call in all of the off duty officers as well. I have a feeling that we're going to need them. And whatever you saw here today stays in this office. We wouldn't want anybody spreading rumors about this. Not until we know what exactly we're dealing with. Got it?" He told his men.

"Yeah we get the picture Chief, but what can we do?" One deputy asked him.

"That isn't clear yet, but I will tell you this. Before this guy died he said that there were more men, just like him, that were being held prisoner. So we're going to go find them. I don't have the slightest clue as where to start looking but we'll start anyway. We need to keep ourselves focused here guys, we don't need any more dead bodies popping up. Especially if they all die like this poor guy did. We have a lot of vacant buildings around here especially in the outback and I intend to search every one of them. And if after we're finished and we still haven't found anything, then we'll start a door to door search of every building in our area. I have a bad feeling about this guys, I'm getting that terrible feeling deep down in my stomach. So let's not be wasting any time here." He told his men. Josh turned to the attendant as he hung up the phone. "Well? Did you find him?" He asked.

"Yeah and he's not too happy about it I suppose. He was at his girlfriend's, just about to, well you get the picture, don't you Chief?" He asked.

Josh just stared at the attendant. He was trying not to take his frustrations out on him.

"Well the poor doctor is upset is he? Tell me this, who do you think is more upset, the doctor or this dead guy? My bet would be on the dead guy." Josh told the man.

"I get your point Chief, I'll be sure to relay your feelings to the doctor as soon as I see him." The man replied.

"Yeah you do that." Josh said as he got up and walked over to the coffeepot. It was empty. The light was still on but the pot was empty. Josh just stopped and threw a very disgruntled look at his men.

"Sorry Chief, I'll get it. That's what I was about to do before this guy came in." One deputy told him as he started towards the coffeepot.

Josh just stepped out of the deputy's way as he glanced up at a make shift sign that he had posted over ten years ago... back when he first became the Sheriff.

MAKE A MESS - CLEAN IT UP.
IT.
COFFEE OR SUGAR
SOME.
RULES

EMPTY IT - REFILL IT.
GO BUY
THE FIRE DEPARTMENT IS HIRING!

START SOMETHING - FINISH
IF YOU DON'T LIKE THESE

LOW ON

Simple rules for a simple problem or at least he thought so at the time. Josh turned his attention back to the two attendants that were having one hell of a time lifting the dead man up onto the gurney. "Guys, let's give these guys a hand." He told his deputies. A few minutes later the attendants were wheeling the gurney out the door.

Josh stood before a large map of Pickett County.

"Lester, you and Earl take the outback area North of town." He told him.

"Aw, come on Chief, I always get stuck in the outback." The deputy told him.

"Well cry me a gosh darn river why don't you? I want you and Earl out there Lester because you know that area better than anyone else, right? And we can't take a chance at missing anything?" Josh told him.

"I know Chief, but me and horses, well we just don't get along so well, that's all." Lester told the Chief.

"I don't need to hear any stories about your off duty love life Lester, just do your job, and make sure you take the good rifles too. You might need them." He answered back.

"Okay Chief but the relationship that I have with a horse would be anything except a love affair. I just want you to know that." He said with a smile.

"Yeah sure Lester, every time I hear you talking about your girlfriends, you're always saying that they're always nagging on you. So I just figured..." Josh said before he stopped. The other deputies were laughing.

"Very funny Chief." Lester said as he started to laugh too.

Two hours would come to pass before any of the off duty deputies started arriving at the small office of the Pickett County Sheriff's Office. Josh waited for all four deputies to arrive before he filled them in on all of the details. After he had finished briefing his officers he waited for the questions that he knew would follow. The only problem with that was he didn't have answers to any of them.

"Wow Chief, that sounds like something right out of a Steven King novel." One deputy responded.

"I wish it was that easy, believe me." He answered back.

"So you really think that we might have a Neo Nazi group out there doing this? Whatever this is?" Another deputy asked.

"Look I don't know what to make of all of this, really. I'm just going on what the guy said before he bought the farm. So I'll take everything that he said with a grain of salt. Apparently our dead guy was under the influence of something. What that was I don't know." Josh responded.

"But just what are we supposed to be looking for Chief? I mean if this guy was right about it being a Nazi movement I don't think they'll be flying a flag with a swastika on it or anything." The deputy responded.

"Well I really hope to God that they're that stupid. It would make our job of finding them a hell of a lot easier. But I can't tell you what to look for because I don't know. But if what this guy said is true and we have to assume that at least a part of it is then it's our duty as law officers to go and investigate it, as much as we can anyway. Just keep this thought in the back of your minds, whatever it is or whoever it is that we're looking for, whether it's Nazi's like the guy said or a bunch of Girl Scouts out selling cookies, just keep your minds clear and use your heads for something other than a hat rack, Okay?" He told all of his deputies.

Josh looked at the map again. Now the outback as the Sheriff called it was nothing but hills and valleys. Radio transmissions were skimpy at best. It all depended on the location of the officer on horseback and the weather. On a clear day the radio traffic was good, but on an overcast day, like today radio traffic was more or less a hit and a miss process. Several times before they had lost contact with a few deputies for days at a time. And if an officer needed any type of help at all chances of getting it were slim at best. But even under the best conditions help was still several hours away.

Just before sunrise Lester and Earl slowly made their way through the thick underbrush that seldom sprouted up in the middle of the trail. There wasn't enough horse traffic through there to keep the weeds from popping up overnight. The morning air was crisp and cold but they had bundled themselves up and were actually quiet warm considering it was January and all.

Every once in a while they would stumble on a camp site where there was a vehicle. Just how they had managed to get a vehicle out there was beyond reason. They had also stumbled onto an illegal moonshine still and a marijuana farm a time or two. But for the most part the outback was boring at best. However this time the deputies' luck was on their side. About two hours from town, in a large meadow there were a bunch of tents. And the occupants of this little excursion were all women, seventeen in all, seventeen, beautiful... sexy women at that. And nearly every one of them had shed every stitch of clothing from their bodies. Well not all of them, there was five of them that were fully dressed but as for the rest of them, they were as naked as they could be. Lester and Earl, as sworn law officers had to investigate, after all it was their duty, wasn't it?

"Excuse us ladies." Lester said as he climbed down from his mount.

"Well good morning to you deputy, what can we do for you." One of the ladies that were fully dressed said as she approached the two deputies.

"Just making our rounds is all. But excuse me for asking Miss but aren't they cold? I mean since they...huh..."

"Don't have any clothes on?" The lady finished Lester's sentence.

"Yeah, thanks." Lester told her.

"Relax deputy, these girls are all college students from Kentucky State and every year as part of their sorority pledges we come up here and put them through the ringer so to speak. Being naked in Tennessee isn't against the law is it?" She asked him.

"No, it's not. Well not yet anyway, times are certainly changing." He added.

"Tell me about it, in Kentucky the only thing that's naked are the horses. Just doesn't seem to be any self-expression left in the world. Everyone is more worried about what their neighbor is doing instead of worrying about themselves." She replied.

"Well things aren't much better down here I reckon. But still you did find a pretty nice spot here, so tell your ladies they can do as they wish." Lester said with a smile.

After two and a half hours of taking names and contact information such as phone numbers the two deputies returned to their four legged patrol mounts and continued on their way. The ladies seemed okay and despite a small amount of pot, they weren't doing anything illegal. Nope, just a bunch of college girls that decided to come up to the hills of Tennessee and run around naked, nothing wrong about that.

"God bless America." Earl said as they rode out of the camp.

"Amen to that." Lester replied.

"You do realize that it's our duty to check up on them again, on our way back I mean" Earl said as he glanced over his shoulder at the naked women.

Lester already had that idea in my head too. "After all they just might need some protecting, if you catch my drift?" Lester said as he glanced over at the much younger deputy next to him.

"Oh yeah I could do some real serious protecting." Earl responded back.

About an hour and a half later the two deputies came to the crest of a small hill. They got off of their mounts to stretch their legs. Earl walked over to a large tree to relieve himself. Just as he finished he spotted what appeared to be a large green tent that had been set up under a bunch of tall trees. Earl called Lester over and pointed it out to him.

"What do you make of that?" He asked.

"Can't rightly say, never seen that up here before." Lester answered.

"Is that what we're looking for?" Earl asked him.

"Don't know that either, but let's play it safe. Let's get the radio and call it in, just to be on the safe side shall we?" Lester told him.

Earl watched the tent as Lester called it in. Luck was on their side as the transmission went through loud and clear. Lester walked back to where Earl was kneeling behind a large bush, just watching the scene below. Earl looked up at Lester.

"So were you able to get through?" Earl asked him.

"Yeah no problem. I told them that we would check it out and get back to them." Lester responded.

"Well I haven't seen or heard nothing." Earl told him.

"Then I guess we'll just have to ride down there and check it out then, it might be nothing at all." Lester responded.

The two deputies climbed back up onto their mounts and slowly started making their way down the slope towards the tent below. As they got closer, they noticed a bunch of kids running around playing what appeared to be army. They had sticks that they were using for guns. As they entered the clearing where the large tent was erected, three woman and two men came out to meet them.

"Well howdy there deputies, just what can we do for you all?" The first woman spoke to them.

"Howdy ma'am, just out on patrol, we saw your tent there and well it kind of stuck out, so we thought that we would ride on down here and make sure everything was alright." Lester told the lady, as the others looked on.

"Ah yes, our tent? Sure is a fine one, just perfect for doing what we do sir." She said.

"And just what is it that you all are doing here?" Lester asked the lady.

"We be spreading the Christian word of the lord. That tent that you see there, that's our church sir. You all are welcome to come down off of your horses and be saved if you so wish too." The lady responded.

"No I don't think that will be necessary. We do have a lot of ground to cover before nightfall." Lester responded.

"Suit yourself, we don't get that many visitors way up here. In fact you're the first people that set our eyes on in some time I might add." She told him.

"Well everything looks fine so we'll be going. So you have plenty of food, plenty of water and everything?" Lester asked her.

"Oh my yes, Hans is real handy at fishing and hunting. But do tell me, is there any other campers around, you know that might need some religious healing of sorts?" She asked.

"Well there is a bunch of women camped out about a mile or two back yonder." Earl told her as he pointed his finger off in the direction of the ladies camp.

Lester just threw him a dirty look.

"Well sorry we've bothered you. Good luck to you." Lester said as he steered his horse around. Earl followed him. As they got about a hundred yards away Earl looked over at Lester.

"So why the dirty look?" He asked.

"Because they're the ones that we're looking for, that's why." Lester answered.

"You're kidding, but how?" He asked.

"A Christian God Revival and they let the kids play army, that's highly unlikely. And remember what she said about fishing and hunting. There ain't a river or stream for miles from here." Lester

responded.

“Holy shit, boy I missed all of that. Damn Lester, you’re really observant.” Earl told him.

Lester pulled the radio from its pouch just as they cleared the top of the hill. Just as he raised the radio to his ear, the sound of a gunshot echoed through the canyon. Earl watched in stunned horror as the bullet ripped into Lester’s chest. The force of the impact sent him cartwheeling off the back of his horse. Before Earl could respond, another shot ripped through his own chest. He too was knocked off of his horse. Earl lay there on the ground, barely alive. Lester was dead. A small column of steam rose up from the hole in his back where the bullet had exited his body. Earl tried to pull his gun as he saw some people walking up to him, but he just didn’t have the energy. He looked up in horror as he saw a man wearing the uniform of the German Gestapo towering over him. Two young boys stood next to him. The man said something, but Earl wasn’t that good at speaking German. But he didn’t have to wait long to find out what the man had said to the two young boys, as they both raised the rifles that they carried and pointed them at Earl’s head. As the two boys pulled the triggers of their weapons, Earl’s head exploded and he heard nothing else.

Early the next morning Josh was pacing back and forth in front of the map of Pickett County.

“God damn outback.” He said out loud. He stared at the map. A large red pin marked the spot of the deputies last contact, Wheeler ridge trail about sixty miles to the West, a good three to four hour horse ride, if you knew the trail, a lot longer if you didn’t.

Josh drank some more coffee. All of his deputies had checked in, all of them, except for Earl and Lester that is. And Josh didn’t like the feeling that was growing deep down in the pit of his stomach. Around ten o’clock Josh received a phone call from a local airport. It was his old friend Garrett from his high school days.

“What’s up Garrett, I’m kind of in the middle of something, so you’ll have to make it quick.” Josh told his friend.

“Yeah I understand that Josh. But this morning when I was giving Tommy Johnson one of his flying lessons and we flew over the mountains West of you and we saw something that you really need to see. I sent you the pictures on your email.” Garrett told him.

“Just West of here you say? It wouldn’t be up by the Wheeler ridge trail would it?” Josh asked.

“Well yes I guess it could be at that, but how did you know that?” Garrett asked him.

“Because I have two deputies that are missing up there that’s why. You didn’t spot them by chance did you?” The sheriff asked.

“Don’t know anything about any of your deputies there Josh. But you have to see these pictures.” Garrett answered.

“They’re downloading now.” Josh told him as the first picture appeared on the screen.

“What in the hell? My God, when did you say that you took these?” He asked.

“Just about two hours ago. I sent them to you as soon as we landed.” Garrett told him.

More pictures were coming up across the screen now. Josh just looked on in disbelief.

"Did you get them Josh? I sent you five pictures total." Garrett asked.

"Yeah I got them. You still have that old Army helicopter?" Josh asked.

"If you're talking about the Huey, damn straight, it's being fueled as we speak. I thought that you might need it." Garrett told him.

"Damn, I'm seeing ten bodies, all females from the looks of them. And they all appear to be dead too. Damn it! Look Garrett tell me when you're airborne and I'll meet you at the high school, just like last time. Okay?" He asked him.

"I'll be there as fast as I can Josh." Garrett told him.

"And Garrett, thanks, you did a good job." Josh told him as he hung up the phone. Josh reached up and hit the print button on the computer.

A few minutes later, Josh walked out into the office with the freshly printed pictures in his hand. Josh looked at his deputies.

"You, you and you, you're coming with me. The rest of you go over to the stables, mount up and head for Wheeler ridge trail. Mark, you and Mike stay here, we'll need someone here to run things." He told them.

"What's up Chief, did you find Lester and Earl?" One of the deputies asked.

"No, it's worse than that." He said as he dropped the pictures down on the table in front of the deputies.

As the deputies stared at the pictures one of the deputies spoke up.

"What in the world is going on around here Chief, where were these taken and by whom?" He asked.

"A friend of mine took them about two hours ago, while he was flying over Wheeler ridge trail." He replied.

"My God, you don't think Lester and Earl..." The deputy stopped before he finished.

"If you're asking me if I think they might be dead too? I just don't know. We'll just have to wait until we get up there and see for ourselves. But I pray to God that they're just fine." Josh answered back.

A million thoughts were going through his brain right about now, and Josh didn't like any of them.

The Huey wasn't even on the ground yet as Josh and his three deputies climbed on board, armed with assault rifles and every conceivable medical kit that they could carry. Josh and his deputies settled in for the worse flight of their lives. But they had no idea that it would only get worse. Much worse.

As they approached the clearing, the Huey made a few circles over the encampment of dead bodies below. Josh needed an overall view of what was down there and whoever was responsible for the slaughter that was spread out below them might just happen to be there still.

And while Josh wanted those responsible, he wasn't going to land in the middle of a gun battle either. Finally the Huey touched down about fifty yards from the nearest body or tent.

"Garrett I'll need you to shut this thing off. If we have any wounded people here we'll want to hear them. This thing will restart, won't it?" He asked.

"Hell yeah she'll restart. She's the most reliable piece of equipment that I own. That's why we used them over in Vietnam." He answered.

"Good then, let's shut her down. And you guys be careful out there." He told his deputies.

As they slowly made their way from the Huey, each deputy went in different directions. The first chore was to find any survivors if there was any and then after that was done they would secure the crime scene. All of the victims were female and all of them were naked. Most of them had been shot in the head, and Josh could tell just by looking around, whoever had shot these poor defenseless women had done so as they ran for cover and each of the shots were done with precision. For the most part every victim had been shot right in the middle of their head, front or back, right side or the left side, it didn't seem to matter. The center was still the center. There was a deadly silence that fell over the clearing as the deputies made their way through the lifeless bodies.

Josh and his men slowly made their way among the scattered bodies, checking for any sign of life in each and every one of them. After all, a head wound in and by itself isn't always fatal. Miracles had happened before but that wasn't to be the case up there that day on Wheeler Ridge. What got Josh's attention the most, besides all of the dead women's bodies, was the caliber of round that had appeared to have been used in these senseless killings. There was no need to use such a powerful load. A much smaller bullet would have done the job just as well, but this was overkill. He got a feeling that these killings were more of a message than just another act of random violence.

As he turned, he caught something out of the corner of his eye. A movement of sorts, off in the tree line just North of the encampment. Josh signaled one of his deputies to follow him. With their assault rifles at the ready they made their way over to where he had seen something moving. They raised their rifles and waited. Nothing!

"This is the Pickett County Sheriff's Department, show us your hands or we'll be forced to open fire." Josh yelled.

From behind the thicket a woman's voice yelled out.

"Don't shoot us, please!" The voice responded.

"Come out with your hands up in the air." He yelled.

And slowly, about seven women came out from their hiding place. All of them were naked. Josh told the deputy to lower his rifle as he lowered his.

"Thank God, we didn't know if you were those that were shooting at us or what?" The one lady explained.

"Are any of you hurt or anything?" Josh asked them.

"A few minor scratches maybe, but I think we're fine, other than that." She explained.

"Well, all of you will have to tell us just what happened here, but first we need to find you ladies some clothes. Now I don't want any of you to go over there. Okay? It's pretty nasty and you really don't want to remember your friends that way. So tell this deputy where your clothes are and we'll get them for you. And then we'll talk.

But I do need to ask you if you remember seeing two deputies on horseback, maybe sometime yesterday?" He asked them.

"Yeah they were here, two really nice guys. They talked for a while and then rode off that way." Another one of the women responded.

"And you say they went that way, is that right miss?" Josh asked her as he pointed in the direction that the woman had pointed.

"Ah huh, right down that trail they went. About two or three yesterday afternoon it was." The woman responded.

Josh called over to Garrett who came over to where he was.

"I want you to take your Huey and one of my deputies and try to follow that trail to the West, and see if you can't find Lester and Earl. And you better call for some Medevac's, we got a lot of bodies to get down off of this mountain before night fall." He told him.

"Got it Chief, come on deputy, looks like you and I get to go for another ride." Garrett told the deputy standing closest to him. The two men ran over towards the Huey.

One by one the women got dressed. Maybe not in their own clothes, but at least they were covered.

"Now, I need all of you ladies to listen up. This is really important. In a group, I need you to tell me what happened here, but one of you at a time. Okay? This is going to be rough enough as it is without any double talking. We'll go over it again and again. And when we get you down off of this mountain, we'll take you all, one at a time and go over it again. You're going to grow to hate us ladies that's just fine, it a part of our job. You're going to be asked the same questions over and over and then over again. We do this because we need each and every bit of information possible. Regardless of how insignificant it might appear to you it just might be the clue to finding the people who did this terrible deed. Okay, so you all understand?" Josh asked them.

They all agreed that they understood the routine.

"Now who wants to go first?" Josh asked them.

"I guess I will, my name is Mary Gordon. I had just come out of my tent it's the first one there with the blood splatter all over it." She said as she somewhat pointed at her tent. "Anyway I saw these boys walking up towards our camp. My first thought was because we were all naked and all, you see and well you know how little boys are. Anyway, there was about five of them and they had rifles, just like the ones that you have."

Josh stopped her. "Excuse me but do you mean just like these or similar to these?" He asked her as he pointed to one of their automatic assault rifles.

"Well I'm no gun expert mind you, but your rifle is really close to what those boys had, I'm almost certain of it." She told him.

"Okay so they had guns like ours, go on please." He told her.

"Well then three men all dressed up in black outfits, they showed up and yelled something and then all of a sudden, for no reason at all, they started firing at us. All of us ran off into the trees and well they shot the rest. Except for Alisha and Romani." the girl told him.

"Excuse me again, but who's Alisha and Romani?" He asked her.

"Those were the only black sisters among us." She answered.

Josh looked around, he didn't see any black women there.

"So where are they? I mean if they didn't shoot them, then where are they?" He asked.

"I think they took them with them." She replied.

"They did, I saw them." Another one of the women said.

"Okay, I see, now you said that one of the men yelled something right before they started firing. Do remember what he yelled?" He asked.

"Well I can tell you that it wasn't English, French or German maybe, but there's something that you're not understanding, Sheriff it wasn't the men doing the shooting, no sir, it was them little boys." She told him.

"I'm sorry, come again?" Josh asked her.

"Those little boys, they were the ones doing all the shooting. The men were telling them which girl to shoot next." She explained.

"Okay, so just to make sure I understand what you're telling me here, the boys showed up first, with the rifles that look a lot like ours, and then the men showed up and yelled something and the boys starting shooting. And the men were telling them which woman to shoot, is that it?" He asked them.

"Sheriff may I say something?" Another one of the women asked.

"Sure, by all means." He responded.

"Well sheriff, my grandfather fought in World War Two and he told me stories about the war. But one story he told me was how he had this German officer in his gun sights, how the image of such an evil person was etched into his memory. He showed me pictures of what the German officer looked like and what he wore." She explained to him.

"Okay, but I'm missing the point here." Josh told her as politely as he could.

"I know what the dress uniform of the German army looks like Sheriff and that's what the men were wearing here yesterday. Right down to the God damn boots and that disgusting red arm band with a swastika on it." She told him in a very stern voice.

"Are you sure, I mean German uniforms? And just how old would you say these boys were that did all the shooting?" He asked.

"Yes I'm damn certain of what I saw. But the boys they couldn't have been much more than eight, nine maybe ten at the most." She answered.

Josh thought that it wouldn't be very wise to question her again, especially since he really did believe her.

"So would all of you ladies agree with her as to the boy's ages I mean?" He asked them.

"Oh yeah Sheriff, they was little tots. That's what caught us all by surprise I reckon." One of the girls answered back.

Josh just turned and looked at the blood bath that had been played out there. It was hard to believe that it had been carried out by a few little kids, much less while being rooted on by an adult figure at the same time. Simply unbelievable he thought to himself.

"Sheriff, you might want to check Jasmine's camera." One of the girls suggested. Josh turned and looked at her.

"What camera?" He asked.

"Well Jasmine was shooting a video of some of us when, well when the shooting started." The girl told him.

"Okay, which girl is Jasmine?" He asked her.

"Well she was over there when it all started, but then everyone was running all over the place, so I'm not sure which one is her." She answered.

"Jasmine has a tattoo on her left butt cheek that says FEAR THIS." Another girl answered.

He turned towards his deputies. "Go find that tattoo and find that camera." He ordered. He turned back to the girls.

"Now is there anything else that you can recall, anything at all?" He asked them.

"Nothing Sheriff, I mean it started so quick and didn't last that long really, but I do recall that the boys were laughing as they pulled the triggers. It was almost like they were keeping score." Mary replied back.

"Laughing? How so, I mean were they chuckling or what do you mean exactly?" He asked.

"I know a little German sheriff and now that I think about it, Mary is right. They were counting out loud in German." Another girl answered.

"This is getting sicker by the minute. Okay ladies sit down and relax for a while. One of my deputies will get you some water." Josh told them as he walked away. One of the other deputies ran up to him.

"Chief, Garrett is on the radio. He found Lester and Earl. They're both dead sheriff. He's loading their bodies onto the Huey right now, the deputy that went with him will be riding the horses back down." The deputy explained.

"Why did I just know that they were both dead? Damn it! I want these fucking sick sons of bitches

and I want them bad. And I don't really give a damn how old they are either. Their asses could still be in diapers but they're mine all the same." He told the deputy, even though he wasn't directing it at him. The deputy just happened to be in the wrong spot at the wrong time.

The worst part of being a cop was telling someone's family that their loved one had been killed, but the part that ripped him up the most was telling one of his deputy's families that one of his own had been killed in the line of duty.

Twenty minutes later the Huey landed back in the clearing. Josh waited for Garrett to shut down the engine before he made his way to the chopper. Garrett jumped out to meet him.

"I'm really sorry Josh. I was hoping to find them alive." Garrett told his friend.

"That's alright, at least you found them before they became coyote food." He answered as he walked up and stared at the two lifeless deputies.

"UUUHH, there's more Chief." Garrett told him. Josh just turned and looked at him.

"More what?" He asked.

"Bodies Chief, eight as far as I could tell, all black males in their late thirties maybe forties, I was going to load them on with the deputies but they're down in a ravine and even between me and your deputy we couldn't move them." He answered.

"Well we can't leave them there they'll be coyote food for sure. Damn, where are the Medevac's?" He asked.

"Well they said that they would send them just as soon as they could." Garrett answered.

"Shit. Ten here, eight or so over there and Lester and Earl, damn the body count is jumping like fleas on a hound dog." Josh told him.

Just then a deputy ran up to them. He had a video camera in his hand.

"Chief I found that girl's camera. You ain't going to believe what's on it, she practically filmed her own murder Chief." He said as he handed the camera to him.

With Garrett looking over his shoulder Josh pushed the play button and watched the video. It showed the girls playing together and screaming at each other, then came the sound of the first gunshot. Everyone was running and screaming. The video didn't show anything except for the ground and her feet as she ran for cover. Then for some reason the girl stopped running and raised the camera towards the gunmen. And there on the screen was a picture perfect shot of the boy aiming the rifle with the adult standing behind him, instructing the youth as to which women to shoot next. And that one girl had been right on the money. That was indeed a German uniform that he was wearing. Then the girl had turned the camera at one of the other gunmen just as the adult behind him pointed at Jasmine. The muzzle flash out of the rifle's barrel is unmistakable. You can hear the slug hitting her head just as she turned to run. And then there's a large bang as the camera hit the ground and rolled away. It stopped pointed at the young girl's face as it slammed into the cold Tennessee dirt. And they watched as her blood slowly flowed down across her lifeless face. Josh had seen enough. He turned the video camera off.

"Damn that's a very powerful video. But you know what, I think she knew that she would or could be shot and killed. And that's why she stopped like she did to leave us this evidence. At the risk of

her own life, now that's was one very brave lady." Josh told them as he handed the camera to Garrett. "Put this somewhere where it won't get damaged or lost." He told them.

"Got it Chief, I'll stick it in the Huey." Garrett told him.

"That will be fine, just don't let those girls see it. I think it might prove to be a little too graphic for them to watch." Josh told him.

"Hell Josh, it was damn near too graphic for me to watch."

Garrett said as he turned towards the Huey.

Then off in the distance came the sounds of a helicopter, no it was a lot of helicopters, big old military jobs too, Josh was surprised to see them landing in the clearing.

"Damn Garrett, who in the hell did you call?" He asked.

"The National Guard, who else?" He said laughing. "Relax Josh that guy is my cousin. I told him that we had a major crime scene up here with injured people requiring medical attention. I hope that was ok?" Garrett asked.

"Yeah, you did good, hey, direct them on where they can find the other eight bodies will you? And send a deputy or two with them and tell them that I want pictures, a lot of pictures." Josh told him.

"Got it Chief, I'll make sure that it gets handled right." He said as he turned and started walking towards his cousin.

Josh decided to follow him.

"Which one of you guys are in charge here?" Josh asked as he approached a group of soldiers as they exited the helicopter.

"I am Sheriff, I'm Lt. McMasters. Looks like you have one hell of a mess up here." He added.

"You don't know the half of it. Look I need all of these bodies taken down off of this mountain by nightfall. Does your base have a morgue? I need to find a place to stash these bodies so the media won't know what happened up here. Not until I'm ready anyway. So can you guys help me out here? I just need to buy me some time so I can put all of the pieces of this puzzle together." Josh asked him.

"Just how many bodies are we talking about, and for how long? I'll have to get an approval from my C.O. And he'll want to know." He told him.

"Eighteen total and no longer than a week at most." Josh answered.

"Okay, I'll make the call. What's your name?" the Lt. asked.

"I'm Sheriff Josh Dugan, with the Pickett County Sheriff's Department." Josh answered.

"Copy that, I'll be right back." The officer answered.

Josh didn't have to wait very long for an answer. Only five or so minutes had passed before he got

his answer.

"My C.O. said that he'll give you five days after that he'll dump them on your front doorstep without as much as a phone call." The Lt. told him.

"Fair enough tell your C.O., that I owe him one." Josh replied.

"He already knows that, he told me to make sure you knew it too." The Lt. said with a smile.

"Understood, I'm going to ride down with the women. They'll be going to Overton Hospital, can we use one of your birds to transport them? The Huey isn't big enough and it already has two passengers on it already." Josh asked him.

The lieutenant glanced over at the Huey, and saw the bodies of the two deputies.

"Yeah, go ahead, that's why we're here isn't it?" He asked.

Josh just gave him a thumbs up signal and hurried off towards the area where the ladies were waiting.

"Alright, you ladies ready to get out of here?" He asked them.

Mary Gordon took one look at the huge military helicopter.

"You want to take us out of here in that thing?" She asked.

"Yeah you know, you climb in, it takes off, lands and you get off. Trust me it works swell." He told her.

She just looked at him. "I know how it works sheriff I'm not stupid." She responded.

"Never meant to imply that you were Miss, so what's the problem then?" He asked.

"I'm really afraid of heights that's the problem." She answered back.

"Well then I suggest that you don't look down. Look it's either the helicopter or one hell of a walk, if you walk then I walk." He told her.

"Just how far is it to town anyway?" She asked.

"A little over sixty miles or so." He answered.

"Okay, I can just close my eyes." She answered.

"Good, my feet say thank you too. Come on ladies let's go." Josh said as he rushed them to the waiting chopper.

As the large helicopter cleared the tree line and headed East, Josh looked over at Mary Gordon. Her eyes were open and she was looking out the window.

"See I told you it wasn't that bad now didn't I?" He asked her.

"No it's not nearly as bad as I thought it would be. How high are we anyway?" She asked.

Josh turned to the pilot and talked to him for a few minutes, and as he started to turn back he stopped and looked at the pilot again.

"Really, that high?" He said out loud. He returned his stare back to Mary.

"So what did he say, how high are we?" Mary asked again.

"You're probably better off not knowing, trust me." Josh answered.

Mary took another good look out of the window. "Yeah, you're probably right." She said as she threw the sheriff a half laugh.

Meanwhile, in a secured warehouse on the outskirts of Nashville

A large group of men have gathered behind closed doors. And while it very well may appear to be just another warehouse along an abandoned street, rest assured that it is anything but another warehouse.

For inside this particular warehouse a secret session of 'THE AMERICAN BROTHERS OF PERDITION' was meeting. While each member was wearing the uniform of the Germany Army, none of them were actually German at all. In fact, many of them haven't even been out of Tennessee, let alone to their so-called 'Fatherland' of Germany.

But all of them did however have a very strong belief, that the Nazi Party was indeed on the right track, way back in World War II. Adolph Hitler had just gone about it the wrong way is all. Their way, as sick and evil as it is, was much better in both design and function.

An all-white supreme race could be achieved by eliminating those of impure blood. Without leaving any trace of their crimes against humanity that could be traced back to their organization.

Without knowing it at the time Adolf Hitler had even supplied them with the tools to achieve their goals.

Since none of the members were actually of direct German descent, to their names were added the word Von or Baron to make it at least sound German, even though they were very far from it.

From the walls of the warehouse hung eight foot wide tapestries of red material that carried a large white circle with a black swastika inside of it. Suspended between each tapestry a large picture of Adolf Hitler was displayed, to anyone one but one of their true believers the scene would make a person's skin crawl.

They also carried military ranks and the insignias of those ranks were proudly displayed on their uniforms. There were generals, field marshals, captains, lieutenants, and sergeants along with the casual foot soldiers. Each rank was earned by the number of acts that anyone person had done to 'Better' the organization.

Their leader who they referred to as the Führer had never been seen except by a very few top ranking generals. But those Generals carried his authority to not only promote those that deserved it, but to punish or discipline those that required that as well.

General Von Kiefer was at the podium. At fifty eight years of age, he looked a lot more like Sergeant Schultz than he did a General. But a General he was. A General that loved to scream more than he liked to talk. His rough voice that bellowed from his voice box was harsh and sometimes hard to ignore.

Affixed to the front of the podium was another Swastika that had been cast in solid gold. Every member had been required to 'donate' whatever gold items they owned to make it. Many of them had been forced to donate very sentimental family heirlooms which hadn't gone over that well at the time.

Von Kiefer stared out at his fellow brothers as they sat there waiting. Waiting to find out why they had been called to this special meeting in such a hurry, they all were about to find out.

"Brothers, I called this special meeting to deal with a situation that has happened that concerns all of us. Field Marshall Von Dirksen, front and center." He ordered.

Von Dirksen walked up and stood at attention before the podium.

Dirksen was a beanpole of a man. At almost six one in height, he weighed in at a mere one hundred and thirty pounds. A good gust of wind could have blown him over. Which had happened more times than Dirksen would ever want to remember.

However, despite his lack of muscle, Dirksen had donated a vast amount of dead presidents to the cause. That alone had bought him the rank Field Marshall. He had hoped to be a General at least, but he apparently didn't have that much money.

Even so, General or not, Field Marshall Dirksen hated this fat son of a bitch that stood before him. Peering over the top of that podium like some type of God. Oh yeah, he hated this so call General, alright! General Kiefer? What a waste of a perfectly good Nazi uniform he quietly thought to himself.

General Von Kiefer just stared down at him. He lifted his head towards the crowd that was seated before him.

"Brothers, Von Dirksen here, took it upon himself to draw attention to our organization. Yesterday, you shot two deputy sheriffs and ordered the killing of ten American women, did you or did you not do this Von Dirksen?" He asked.

"I did Sir General." He replied.

"And by who's authority did you do this?" The general asked.

"I did it on my own Sir General." He answered.

The room was filled with a bunch of small talk among the ranks.

"Silence!" The General ordered. He turned back to Von Dirksen. "Do you know what you have done by your acts of pure stupidity?" He asked.

"Yes Sir General. I have made us stronger." He answered.

"You have made us stronger? Is that what you said?" The General asked.

"Yes sir General. I felt that if we are to go to war then our soldiers must be ready to fight and be able to handle a weapon. Sir General." He replied.

"Against unarmed women?" The General asked.

"Yes Sir General." Von Brown answered back.

"You stupid piece of shit, what you have achieved here is murder. You were supposed to do research work on unimportant niggers that would not be missed. Black Death is what you were supposed to be researching. I understand that you also let one of your prisoners get away and apparently he went straight to the local authorities. Isn't that why the deputies showed up at your camp?" He asked.

"Sir General, I did not let the prisoner get away. One of our guards must have fallen asleep sir General." He answered.

"You were put in charge Von Dirksen. Maybe if you had spent more time training your men none of this would have happened." The General told him.

"Yes Sir General." Von Dirksen answered back.

"And what happened to the bodies of those niggers that you tested Black Death on?" The General asked.

"We were forced to leave them behind. Sir General." He answered.

General Kiefer just stood there, silently as he rubbed his forehead with his left hand. He lifted his head and threw Dirksen a look that was intended to instill the fear of God into Dirksen.

It didn't.

"You left them behind? Did you at least bury them so they wouldn't be found?" The General asked.

"No Sir General." He answered as he lowered his head in shame.

"You didn't even bury them. That's ten women, two deputies and how many niggers?" The General asked.

"Eight Sir General, not counting the one that escaped." He answered.

"That's twenty one bodies that you have so carelessly left behind. That's twenty one bodies that will have the feds searching for us under every rock until they find us. What in God's name were you thinking? Did the uniform go to your head?" The General asked him.

"Sir General, you say that we are strong but we are not. You tell us to get ready for war, yet we do nothing. I am strong I can lead these men into war. You talk of a new Führer and yet nobody has heard of him let alone seen him. Am I to assume that this is all talk? The men grow restless sir general." Von Dirksen answered back.

"You, you want to lead these men into war? The only place I see you leading these men to is prison. The only thing you have done here is to expose us. You have broken every rule that kept us safe. Everyone knew that we existed but they never saw us. Now you're broadcasting it to everyone, all for a drop of blood, you arrogant piece of shit. We have a plan. You all know about the plan." He said as he looked up at the crowd of fellow followers that were now growing restless.

"And yet you jeopardize everything and every one of us just so you can kill people, innocent people. Killing some stupid worthless nigger is required to obtain our goal, killing someone just for target practice is not.

Our new Führer takes power in three weeks and then we launch Black Death as it was designed. I will not allow you or anyone else, especially one man that's as stupid as you are, to ruin the plans of many. We have cells just like this one in every major city of the United States. We number in the hundreds of thousands and you want to jeopardize it all for target practice?" The General told him.

"Sir General I did not do it just for target practice. I did it for the cause that we all believe in. We want to see action and not just idle words about what is supposed to be happening as you so often say three weeks from now." Von Dirksen answered back.

General Von Kiefer looked up at the crowd. "Listen up all of you so you all understand what will happen after the Führer is in power. Black Death will be unleashed in every major city across the United States. Millions of impure people will die within a few weeks. You all know what Black Death is and what it will accomplish."

"Black Death is Adolf Hitler's legacy to us and to the rest of the world. And I cannot and will not tolerate any more of this senseless disregard for the rules that we have all agreed to. Is that understood Field Marshall Von Dirksen?" The General said as he looked him straight in the eyes.

"Yes sir General." He answered.

"Good, now let me make this perfectly clear to all of you. I will not tolerate any more insubordinations in regards to what we want to accomplish here. The total plan must proceed as planned. It would not prove to be a very wise move from here on out. Do you understand what I'm saying Von Dirksen?" The General asked him.

"Yes Sir General." Von Dirksen answered again.

"Very well, this meeting is now closed, until we meet again, 'Heil Hitler'." He said as he held out his arm.

Everyone in the room shot their right arm out in front of them with their palms down and level with the top of their heads. They all yelled 'Heil Hitler'.

Everyone in the room got up to leave, but one man, who appeared to be alone quietly walked into the dressing room to change out of his uniform. He had somewhere to go and he tried not to look like he was in a hurry, but he was, the entire future of America rested on his shoulders. He had to warn them. He had to tell someone but getting caught would mean certain death. Some parts of Nazi Germany were still very much alive, even in Nashville.

General Von Kiefer signaled for one of his security men to join him in the back of the room. When they were alone they started talking.

"Von Harrison, I think it's time for Von Dirksen to meet with a little accident. We must after all set an example so others will not follow in his footsteps." The general told him.

"Yes, I agree. This is why I requested to be in the Gestapo when we first started forming this cell. I look forward to teaching Von Dirksen a lesson that nobody will ever forget. Do you have anything special that you would like to request Sir General?" He asked.

"No, you may do as you wish with him. However I will ask you not to damage his face too badly. I do believe he might have left some witnesses when he shot those girls. If so, make sure that you leave enough of him to be identified if there are witnesses. And those two nigger bitches that he brought to us see that they join him in hell." The General ordered.

"Yes General, is there anything else that you wish of me." He asked.

"No, I think you have enough to do already but do not take too long to do as I ask with Von Dirksen. Heaven only knows what else he might do if he were given the chance, besides those two niggers are starting to stink up the place. You'll find them all bound, gagged and blindfolded in the back utility room." The general told him.

"Very well Sir General, it will be taken care of by this time tomorrow. You have my word on it." He told the General.

"It would not be a very wise move on your part to disappoint me or the Führer. Von Dirksen was very stupid, let's see if you are any smarter?" The General told him.

"Yes Sir General." He said as they both raised their arms outward. "Heil Hitler." They both said in unison.

Elsewhere in Beautiful Tennessee

Josh Dugan was just walking out of the hospital as he remembered that he needed to go to the morgue and check in with Dr. Williams. Maybe he had found something in regards to that black man that had died in his office. The morgue after all was in the basement of the hospital so he spun around and went back inside and stopped at the elevator. As he waited for the slower than shit elevator he was joined by a woman, a very sexy woman. She stood about six feet tall in her very high, high heels and her reddish hair encased her face to the point that you could barely see her eyes. She was dressed in a black skirt and matching jacket, both of which had very narrow white pin stripes running through out them. Under the jacket, Josh could see a very sexy white satin blouse that really needed to be buttoned a little higher but he didn't bother telling her that. She carried in her hand a black briefcase. She not only looked like a very successful women she carried herself that way as well. They both looked at each other as they waited.

"This elevator is about the slowest thing that I've ever seen." Josh told her.

"It's alright, I'm not in that big of a hurry anyway." She replied.

"Are you going up or down?" He asked her

"Down, I have to see someone in the morgue."

"Oh, I'm sorry, was it someone close?"

"Oh no, I'm not here to see anyone like that, I'm going to see the doctor."

"Really? I thought maybe your husband or someone had died or something."

"Nice try Sheriff, but if you want to know if I'm married or not all you have to do is ask me."

"No, no that's not what I was doing at all, really."

"It's okay sheriff." She answered back. The two of them just stood there waiting for the elevator.

"So are you?" Josh asked her.

"Am I what?" She asked him as she turned to look at him.

"Married? You're the one that brought it up first, you said I just had to ask you."

"Oh yes. I mean no, I'm not married."

"I'm sorry I'm Sheriff Josh Dugan. And you are....?" He asked as he held out his hand.

"I'm Ginger Schaffer, Doctor Ginger Schaffer that is." She said as she took his hand in hers. "Glad to meet you Sheriff." She added.

Josh just took a second look at her. "You're a Doctor?" He asked her.

"And you're a Sheriff? Wow, the badge and the gun, they do give it away." She answered with a smile.

"Okay, I'll admit it, I deserved that one. But I never took you for a doctor, not at all. Hell, if the doctors around here looked as good as you do I'd go see them once a week." He answered.

"Well remind me to give you my card, I'll make you an appointment." She said with still a bigger smile.

"So what do you specialize in?"

"Very dangerous drugs and diseases."

Just then the elevator door opened and Josh followed her into the elevator. He pushed the down button and watched as the doors closed.

"Did you say your last name was Dugan? It seems to me that I might have worked with a Dugan before, I think it was in California, might have been a few years back, any relation by chance?" She asked.

"If you're talking about a guy named Matt Dugan he's my older and much more popular bigger brother." Josh answered.

"And what do you mean by much more popular?"

"Well you see it's like this. Finally I get to ride in a slow moving elevator with a very beautiful woman and surprise she knows my big brother. That's the story of my life doc, I swear." He answered.

"Well, I thank you for the compliment, but I never said that I slept with him. I just said that I worked with him."

"I know but I've always been second seat to him. And it gets old after the first thirty or so years." He said with a smile.

"Well if it's any consolation for you, I wouldn't consider you a backseat to anyone. I mean while I do remember your last name I wasn't the one that recalled his first name, and I suppose if he had made that big of an impression I would have remembered it. Now a name like Josh, now that sounds like it may be very well be worth remembering." She answered.

Josh took a step back.

"Doctor, are you making a pass at me?"

"Maybe... maybe not, but then again maybe I just need you to fix a parking ticket for me." She answered as the elevator door opened.

As they walked from the elevator they were both laughing

as Josh pushed the swinging doors open that lead into the morgue, and allowed the doctor to enter first.

"Why don't you have a seat and I'll go find Doc. Williams." He told her as she took a seat against the wall. Josh watched as she crossed her legs. Wow, that's one good looking lady he said to himself. He glanced up at her face, only to see her smiling at him. He returned the smile and disappeared into the inner office. As he walked into the office Doc. Williams was just walking in from the examination room. He glanced up at him.

"Sheriff, I was just about to call you. I have something to show you and you ain't going to believe this." He said as he signaled for Josh to follow him. Josh followed him back into the exam room where he saw the body of the dead black man lying on a steel table. He was covered up with a sheet with only his head visible.

"Remember this guy?" The doctor asked him.

"Well it's not likely that I'll be forgetting him anytime soon. So what do you have for me?" He asked.

The doctor pulled the sheet down exposing the man's chest or at least what was left of it. His chest had been surgically opened and his ribcage had been cut down the middle and a metal device was spreading his ribcage apart.

Josh jumped back slightly and let out of a loud gasp. A few seconds later, he got control of himself.

"You know what Doc, you should really consider the idea of warning people before you pull the sheets down and show them shit like this." He told him.

"Oh I'm sorry Sheriff, I'm used to seeing stuff like this, but I suppose that I might forget that other people aren't." The Doctor answered.

"That's alright, I've seen worse. I just wasn't even expecting to see this guy again. Especially like that. But what is it that you want to show me?" He asked.

"Right here, just look at these ribs." The Doctor said as he leaned over and pointed at the ribs with his probe. They're shattered. See right here, at first I thought that someone might have hit this guy with a very large rock." The Doctor was telling him as Josh interrupted him.

"Hey, nobody hit this guy." Josh told him in a very firm and harsh voice.

"Relax there Chief, if you would let me finish. That was until I looked at the marks on the inside of his skin that covers this area. See these marks?" The Doctor said as he pointed with his finger. "These were made by extreme pressure forcing the ribs outward. But there's something else..." He said just as he stopped and stared at the sheriff.

"What is it?" Josh asked.

"Every muscle and I do mean every muscle in this guy's body has been stretched well beyond their limits." The Doctor told him.

"You lost me. What do you mean by beyond their limits?" He asked.

"Josh, open your hand and flex your fingers for me five times as fast as you possibly can." Josh did as the doctor had asked him.

"No faster... faster" The doctor ordered. Josh tried to go faster but he couldn't.

"Damn doc, my fingers hurt now, so what was your point in all of this?" He asked.

"Well to stretch your muscles like his, you would have to flex your fingers maybe a hundred times faster per second." The Doctor explained.

"Say again? I mean is that even possible?" Josh asked.

"No it's not. And that's what I mean by stretched well beyond their limits." The Doctor explained.

"Damn! So do you know what caused all of this?" He asked.

"Not a God damn clue. But I do have something else to show you, but I need to let you know that I've called the CDC Sheriff." The Doctor told him.

Josh just looked at the doctor. "You called the CDC, the Center for Disease Control without telling me first?" He asked the Doctor.

"Now Sheriff, I know how you are, but as a licensed medical doctor and a state certified corner, I'm

required by law to report anything that I think is unusual and particularly anything that may be unknown to the medical world." The Doctor explained.

"I know that Doc and I know you did the right thing but I just like to have a little bit of warning before a bunch of guys show up here in spacesuits and put the whole town under quarantine, that's all." The sheriff explained.

"I understand that Josh really but I had no choice in the matter. Anyway I don't think you'll be seeing any men in spacesuits, at least not right away. They're supposed to be sending a guy out here, a Doctor Schaffer I believe." The Doctor told him.

Josh just looked at the door that led back out to where he had left the pretty doctor.

"Uh, I don't know how to tell you this Doc, but Dr. Schaffer is already here." Josh told him.

"Really, where is he?" the Doctor asked.

"Well, she's in the waiting room, waiting for you." He explained.

"She? Did you say she, you mean he's a she?" The Doctor asked.

"Well I can vouch for one thing about her, she's a woman that's for certain. Damn pretty one too." Josh said as he walked into the inner office with Doc Williams hot on his heels. As Josh opened the door to the outer office he was surprised to see her still waiting for him and her smile was just as big as when he had left her.

"Why didn't you tell me that you were with the CDC?" Josh asked her.

"Because you never asked me but had I told you that, would you have still left me here all by myself for twenty two minutes and thirty five seconds?" She asked as she looked at her watch.

"Not even for one second. I'd like you to meet our resident Medical Examiner slash Corner, Doctor David Williams." The sheriff said as he introduced them to each other.

"Wow Sheriff you were right." Doc Williams said out loud as he shook the lady's hand.

"About what, which part?" Josh asked him.

"The part about her being a real woman and all and just like you said a damn pretty one at that." The Doctor told him.

"Doc, do you really have to go around repeating everything I say?" Josh asked him.

"Well I didn't tell her everything that you said, did I?" He asked.

"Oh really, and which part of what he said are you leaving out?" She asked.

"Never mind, aren't you here on official business?" Josh asked her.

"Yes I suppose that I am at that. Doctor can you show me this guy that you were talking about over the phone. You know the one with the exploding heart?" She asked him.

"Sure just follow me, you'll have to excuse the mess, but I haven't gotten around to picking up after

myself lately." Doc Williams told her.

"Never mind the mess, I just have to see this guy for myself." she told him. "Because what you described to me on the phone just can't happen. It's impossible." She told him.

"Well there he is Doctor, see for yourself." Doc Williams told her as she bent over the man on the steel table and started looking at him more closely.

She turned and walked over to the other side of the room. She laid her briefcase on the table and slipped off her jacket. "Doctor some gloves please." She asked as she went to take a closer look at the body.

Doctor Williams handed her a pair of non-latex gloves. She slid her hands into them snapping the gloves against her wrist as she pulled each of the gloves on.

"Can I get a probe please?" She asked.

Doc Williams handed her a stainless steel probe. The two men just watched as she slowly dug through the bloody pulp that used to be the guys heart. Then she examined the muscles in the guy's arms and legs. Then she stood up and walked over to the table where she had dropped her briefcase.

"Doctor, has anyone else come in any form of contact with this guy?" She asked.

My deputies did, we were holding him down." Josh told her.

"No I mean since you opened him up like this. Sheriff did you touch him at all?" She asked as she walked back over to the body and started probing inside his open chest cavity again.

"No, not at all!" Josh told her.

"And it's only been me here working tonight." Dr. Williams answered just as Doctor Schaffer jumped back dropping the steel probe onto the floor as she did so.

"What in the hell was that?" She damn near yelled as she fought to catch her balance. What she had just seen had scared the hell out of her.

"What was what? I didn't see anything." Josh told her.

"I pulled the tissue away and I could have sworn it was like glowing. Then it was gone, just like that." She explained.

"That's exactly what I told you about on the phone. It appears to have a greenish glow to it but then it's gone." Doc Williams told her.

"Wait a second here. So you guys saw it too?" Josh asked them.

Ginger just looked at the Sheriff.

"Excuse me for asking Sheriff, but when exactly did you see it?"

"Well like you just said, it was only for a second or two. But, it was right when our friend here started shooting blood out of his mouth and nose. Maybe I should have mentioned it before but

since none of my deputies said anything even remotely close to it, I just figured that I was seeing things. Gee, I guess I was wrong about that, wasn't I?" Josh told her.

Ginger just looked at him again. "Okay Sheriff, I could see where you might of thought that you were seeing things. Especially since none of your deputies mentioned it. But here's the problem, I've seen some really nasty shit before gentlemen." She said as she glanced between the two men. "But in all of my years at the CDC and even through college, I have never anything like that before. I'm telling you this right now, whatever it was that killed this guy, it isn't natural." She told them.

"And just what might you mean when you say that it's not natural?" Josh asked her.

"Exactly what it sounds like, whatever caused this guy to die such a horrible death I would have to say was manmade and I don't think it was airborne bacteria either." She told him.

Wait a second Doc, when this guy came into my office he told me that he'd been shot by a dart." Josh told her.

"A dart?" She asked.

"Sheriff, remember when I told you that I had something to show you, well you guys have got to see this." Doc Williams said as he led them over to a microscope on a table.

"What is it that you need to show us?" She asked him.

"Well I remembered what the attendants said that brought this guy in from your office sheriff. So I started looking around and sure enough I found a small puncture wound on the left side of his neck, maybe an inch to an inch and a half below his ear. Anyway, as I studied it and it just didn't look like a normal needle mark. Which is sharp and defined but this is more distorted. So I took off the top two layers of skin and put it under the scope so I could get a better look at it. Now, at first I magnified it a hundred times and this is what I saw." He told them as he stepped away from the microscope and let the Doctor and Josh take a look.

After Josh had finished looking he stepped back,

"So what is it?" Josh asked.

"Almost looks like a symbol of some type." Dr. Schaffer added.

"That's what I thought, then I magnified it a thousand times and I couldn't believe what I saw." Doc. Williams said as he reached over and turned the magnification knob up to a thousand. "Doc you go first, you might have to adjust it a little to bring it into focus.

As she placed her eyes over the viewer and slowly brought the image into view, she took a second look.

"No way, I don't believe it, a German swastika?" She said as she took a few steps back so Josh could take a peek.

"Holy Shit, I guess that guy was right about the Nazi's, but how did they do this?" He asked.

"I would suspect that if you were to find the so called dart that made that hole... you would find that the tip is in the shape of a swastika, or something that resembles a swastika at least. But the end result is still the same and their message has been delivered." She told him.

"So the dart or whatever it is, have a point that looks like a swastika, clever." Josh said out loud.

"Look gentlemen, I need to call this in. This is bad and I really think that it might be getting worse. When I got your call Doc, I called a friend of mine in Washington. I told him pretty much everything that you told me. So he's waiting to catch a plane down here if he's needed and I really think he is. He's an expert on this type of stuff. But before we do anything else I'll need you to grab that microscope doc and your slides and get it out of here, because I'm making this room off limits just to play it safe. Now Doc, I need to ask you how you feel? And I really mean to stress the fact about this. Any stomach irritation, fever, runny nose or anything?" She asked him.

"No nothing, I feel perfectly fine. And I do appreciate your concern, but I'm telling you I feel fine." Dr. Williams answered her.

"Well that's a good sign but if anything changes I want to know about it. And I don't care what time of day it is either. Here's my card, with my cell number on it. Call me, it may very well save your life." She added.

Doc Williams didn't say anything as he glanced down at her card. He knew what she was getting at and she was right.

"Doc, is there a chance that we could be infected with whatever this is?" Josh asked her.

"Maybe, but I'm pretty sure that we're safe. I say that because it's my opinion that the dart with a point of a swastika and that greenish glow are both for show and that's all. It's like a Christmas card. You get it but you don't know who it's from until you take a closer look at it. Now every time we see this stuff we'll know that it's from them." She answered.

"So your friend up in Washington, is he a government man?" Josh asked her.

"Yes he is but why do you ask that?" She asked.

"Just waiting for the men in spacesuits to show up that's all." He told her with a smile.

"What men in space suits, Sheriff I think you might be watching too much television." She said with a laugh.

"Yeah, maybe, but we'll see. But I still think the men in the spacesuits are going to show up here in Pickett County before all of this is all behind us." He told her.

"Well I don't think it will come to that but if it's a matter of the public's health then you might be right. But let's get out of here, I don't know about you but I could really use some food. I jumped on a plane last night and I'm kind of hungry." She told him.

"Food, um that does sound rather enticing doesn't it?" He answered back.

"Excuse me you two but you've just finished probing around inside of some poor dead guy's chest and all you can think about is the fact that you're hungry?" Dr. Williams asked.

"Well I was going to ask you and that dead guy there to join us but I figured he wasn't that hungry but you're still invited to join us if you want to." Ginger asked him.

"No thanks, twenty five years of looking at people's guts and stuff and I still lose my appetite. So please by all means go enjoy your selves." He told them.

"Suit yourself Doc but a nice juicy hamburger that's nice and red in the middle, sounds pretty good right about now." Josh told him.

"Sheriff, you're one sick son of a bitch you know that don't you?" He asked him.

"Well I have been told that once or twice before." He answered as he turned to face Dr. Schaffer. "So I guess it's just the two of us then." He informed her.

"Well I guess that worked out to your liking didn't it?" She asked him with a smile on her face.

"What? I tried to invite him to come along, you heard me ask him, didn't you?" He asked her.

"Gee, a bit touchy aren't we? Just simmer down their Sheriff, I was only joking with you. So what kind of restaurants do they have around here?" She asked him.

"Just kidding with me huh? Okay, I'll remember that but in regards to your question, what are you hungry for?" He asked her.

"Anything that doesn't move I guess. I'm just hungry is all." She answered.

"Well if you're interested I've been known to make some pretty good fixing's myself." He informed her.

"At your place? Boy you move fast sheriff." She said half laughing.

"I was offering you a good hot home cooked meal, but if you prefer a regular sit down restaurant, then there's a diner right up the street. The choice is yours Doc." He told her.

"Just dinner, you say, okay, let's see if you cook as good as you say you can. But I do need to make a phone call first." She replied.

"Well you can make your call as I'm cooking if that works for you?" He told her.

"Okay sheriff you're on. So what's on the menu?" She asked him.

"You can have whatever is in the cupboard or the fridge. I don't eat at home much but there's always plenty of food." He told her.

"Well, let's go see what you got, in the way of food that is." She told him.

"Okay Doc, I guess you're on your own. We'll most likely see you tomorrow, and Doc, you did a great job. I appreciate it." Josh told him.

"Alright, I'll see you both tomorrow. It was a pleasure to meet you Doctor." He told her as she was following the Sheriff to the door.

"The pleasure is all mine and you can call me Ginger. See you tomorrow." She answered as she left the office.

"So where's your car?" He asked her as they walked outside and he noticed that his patrol car was nowhere in the parking lot.

"Oh I didn't think about it before but I took a cab from the airport. And I left my luggage at the

airport." She answered.

"Well don't feel bad, I came here on a helicopter so I don't have a car here either. I guess we'll be taking a cab over to my place." He told her as he waited for a response.

"You know when you try to pick up a lady Sheriff, it might be advisable to at least have a car at your disposal."

"No big deal, I'll simply call a cab and then I'll make a call and have your luggage delivered to my house." He told her.

"Your house, I can't stay at your house sheriff. It just wouldn't look right." She answered.

"Never said you were but I know where my house is but I don't know where you're staying yet. So if and when you do find a room your luggage will be right there. Okay?" He answered as he waved at a passing cab. Luckily the cab was empty and the driver was out to make himself a few bucks.

She just looked at him and smiled. "Thanks sheriff, that's very kind of you." She said as she slid into the back seat of the cab. Josh closed the door for her and walked around and got into the other side. The ride back to Josh's house took almost forty-five minutes.

As they got out of the cab she was impressed with the Sheriff's home. From the outside it appeared that someone had devoted a lot of time and energy maintaining the yard. Everything was nicely trimmed and it was apparent that nothing had ever gone without enough water. Everything was as green as it could be. The house itself was beige with white trim. In front of the house had a large one piece plate glass window that faced the street. Off to the left was a large two car garage. The front door of the house was done in a dark polished stain, on either side of the door, sat two white ceramic planters, each of which were overflowing with flowers.

As she entered the Sheriff's house, she took one look at the interior and figured he was either the neatest guy that she had ever meet or he had a maid service come in on a regular basis. The house wasn't a mansion, but it wasn't a shack either. Not by a long shot.

As nice as the outside of the house was, it was the interior of the house the stole Ginger's heart. As she entered through the front door she couldn't help but notice the highly polished wood floors. With the exception of a few nicely placed area and a few throw rugs the wood floor ran throughout the house. The walls were done in a dark colored wood paneling accented with a white ceiling and polished brass ceiling fans. The front room just spoke of warmth to those that entered.

Directly across from the front door, across the large living room, was a sliding glass door that led to the back patio. Just to the right of the patio door was the kitchen, a simple but functional kitchen. At the far end of the kitchen was a small square table. The center of the table was filled with a large floral arrangement.

Directly in front of the patio door was a much larger wooden table with six matching chairs that were neatly stowed under the table. Ginger could tell that the living room was the focus point of the entire house. Along the far wall was an inlaid fireplace with a mantle that was decorated in stone with the big screen plasma television that hung on the wall and was furnished with a nicely appointed sofa and love seat combination, it just spoke of comfort. The only thing that Ginger had thought might have been out of place was a large black leather recliner. She figured that it was the Sheriff's chair.

"Wow, I'm impressed Sheriff. You live here all alone? This is really a nice house." She told him as

she slowly walked around.

“Well it used to be my parents place but I lost them a few years back. So now it’s mine I guess. And yes I do by the way.”

“Yes you do what?” She asked him.

“Live here alone. You asked me if I did.”

“Yeah I guess I did at that. But I could tell that a woman used to live here. I love those polished brass pans hanging on the wall.” She said as she pointed into the kitchen. “I can tell that your parents put a lot of effort into their home.”

“What they put into this house was love, lots and a lot of love.”

“I can see that. They must have been some really special people.”

“They were that and more. Anyway that’s enough about me and my house. I brought you here so I could cook you dinner. So go through the fridge and make your choice. I’m going to go change out of this uniform, I’ll be right back.” He told her as he disappeared into the nearest bedroom.

After making her choice of dinner, she continued looking around. She wasn’t being noisy but she just couldn’t get enough of the Sheriff’s house. It made her feel safe and warm, and she liked that.

Since the Sheriff had given her the choice of what would be for dinner. She chose pork chops and potatoes.

As they both finished their plates Josh poured her a nice glass of wine. Regardless of what he might have been thinking Josh was a perfect host. As they sat at the table they started to talk.

“So can I ask you a personal question?” She asked him.

“Sure I guess, what is it?” He asked.

“Your brother, is there some type of tension between the two of you. I don’t mean to be nosey, but every time you hear his name, you seem to tense up.” She told him.

“Me and my brother Matt? No, there’s no hard feelings I suppose. He’s just too damn committed to his job is all, like when our mom died a few years back he couldn’t show up for the funeral because of a major case he was working on. That’s just crazy. Oh I’ve tried to invite him out here for a visit but he’s always busy. He’s still my brother so what can you do?” He asked her.

“I know how you feel, my brother David was the same way. Work, work, work and never had any time for his family. We lost him on 9/11. He worked in the North tower of the World Trade Center and as much as I hated his dedication to his work I wish that he was still here.” She told him.

“Oh I’m sorry. I know a lot of people who lost people on that terrible day. I guess I should be grateful that I still have a brother at all.” He told her.

“Well when you consider the types of jobs that you and I have, we’re basically just like our brothers. We’re always on call, ready to jump whenever the phone rings. In fact it’s my niece’s birthday today but I had to jump on a plane and fly down here. So I guess we’re all just as guilty as

our brothers are to some extent anyway." She told him.

"Gee you know what I never looked at it that way. Not to change to the subject but did you get hold of your friend in Washington?" He asked her as he poured himself some more wine.

She held out her glass, so he poured more into hers as well.

"I left a message with his service and a text message on his cell. He'll be here, because he too will jump when he's needed. I guess it's the American way." She said with a giggle.

"Maybe it is at that. Speaking of phone calls your luggage should be here in an hour or so." He told her as he got up and started picking up the empty dinner plates from the table.

"I do have a confession Josh. I thought that your claim to be a good cook was just a line to get me over to your place, but you're really a pretty good cook. Thank you for the great meal and I apologize for thinking otherwise." She told him as she helped to clear the table.

"So you really thought that I might have other intentions did you? So let me ask you this. Why did you say yes then?" He asked her.

"I don't know, maybe I was a little curious and besides I was really hungry." She replied.

"Curious or just hungry? That's a pretty big difference there Doctor." Josh said as he clicked on the television and dropped down into the recliner as the evening news came on.

Ginger sat down on the couch and kicked off her shoes and joined him as they watched the news. Josh turned to her to ask if she would like some coffee but she was asleep, all curled up in a little ball.

"Damn... that was fast. I guess you were really tired." He told her.

He just looked her and knew what he had to do. He walked into his bedroom and pulled down the sheets. He walked back into the living room and carefully picked her up and carried her into his bedroom and gently laid her out on the bed, he pulled the covers up over her and quietly left the room. Josh slept on the couch.

A Few Miles Outside Of Town

A black SUV raced down a deserted two lane road. Von Dirksen sat in the passenger seat while Von Harrison was behind the wheel.

"So explain to me again why we have to go back up in those hills." Von Dirksen asked.

"Because we need to clean up your fucking mess, you left a lot of incriminating evidence behind when you left your assigned post so quickly. I've been ordered to make sure that it's all cleaned up." He responded.

"Are you talking about those dead niggers?" Dirksen asked.

"Whatever trash is there, we'll clean it up." Harrison replied.

Two hours later, after tackling some dirt trails that a horse would have found hard to tackle, the SUV pulled to a stop. Dirksen was surprised to see two other vehicles were already there.

"Who are they and what are they doing here?" Dirksen asked.

"I supervise and they do all the work." Harrison responded.

As the men climbed down out of the SUV several men came over to meet them.

"All is ready Sir Von Harrison." One man told him.

"Very well, let's do this then." Von Harrison ordered.

"Do what?" Von Dirksen asked just as one of the men slammed the butt of his rifle against the back of Von Dirksen's neck. Everything went black as Von Dirksen fell to the ground.

Von Dirksen came around about twenty minutes later. His hands were tied above his head as he hung from a large branch of a tree. His ankles were tied together and a very heavy rock was hanging below his feet. He tried to kick his feet but the weight of the rock wouldn't allow it. He was more surprised to see the two black women hanging there with him, one on each side of him. He looked at his bound wrist and knew in his heart that his life was about to come to a painful end.

Von Harrison walked up to him and studied his awkward situation.

"So sorry to leave you hanging but we have to teach you a lesson about your stupidity and while we're at it we'll be sending a warning to all of our members about what happens when you take it upon yourself to do things that you should not be doing." He told him.

"Fuck you. Go ahead kill me. You fucking shit" Von Dirksen yelled at him.

"Kill you, who said anything about killing you? We just want you to help us to become better ballplayers is all." Von Harrison told him.

Von Dirksen had a puzzled look on his face.

"Here let me explain to you for you can understand what's about to happen here. You see these six guys over here, well they love baseball. They really do. But unfortunately they're not very good at it. So they'll be using you and your girlfriends here for batting practice. So see you were wrong, we don't intend to kill you, but I'm sure that you'll soon wish that you were dead because this is really going to hurt. And believe me it's going to hurt you a lot worse than it hurts me." He told him as he started laughing.

Von Dirksen just looked on in horror as the six men approached him, each of them carrying a large baseball bat. If the bats weren't bad enough they had driven nails into the bats. Suddenly Von Dirksen knew that Von Harrison was right, this was really going to hurt. A lot!

The first man to swing the bat was actually pretty good at playing baseball. He swung that bat as hard as he could. It came crashing down upon Dirksen's left kneecap. The blow sent a spray of flesh, bone and tissue into the air as the knee cap shattered upon impact. Von Dirksen wanted to

scream out in agony but he held it back, refusing to let anyone know that he was weak.

"Oh come on Dirksen, I know that had to hurt, be a man and scream nobody will hear you. Nobody will care, but nobody will hear you anyway." Von Harrison said as he signaled for the beating to continue.

The next impact did the same to the other kneecap, just as another bat struck him in the small of the back. Von Dirksen screamed out in agony. Then the blows came one after another. Harder and faster as the nail covered bats tore into his flesh.

They had been ordered not to hurt or damage Von Dirksen's face but the two black girls didn't receive any such mercy. *

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