Prologue

It was too easy. It was supposed to hurt, and it didn’t hurt at all.

Because the flesh wasn’t mine. The blood wasn’t mine. The scream wasn’t mine.

The arm in front of me was bigger and hairier than mine—and bloodier than anything I’d ever seen outside of a TV screen. The hole in it was like a mouth stretched open too wide, drooling red.

I let go of the boxcutter. When I heard the light clatter of its plastic handle hitting the floor, my heartbeat slowed down to meet the shock of this new reality.

This is you. This is real. This is what you’ve done. This will always be what you’ve done.

Chapter 1

**December 16, 2015**

**Henry**

I had just sat down at my desk when the call came in a little after 9 am.

A probable homicide on Clement Avenue, in one of the office buildings. Just two minutes down the road. I drove there quickly, but in a state of half-disbelief. Campion hadn’t had a homicide in years. Not since Brookhaven.

By the time I arrived, my old partner Greg had sealed off a whole office block and its parking lot. There were a few senior citizens and stay-at-home-mom types standing anxiously outside the yellow tape, wondering if they were going to have to reschedule their dental or chiropractic appointments.

Greg was chatting with these folks, telling them that there was an emergency in Office 2C and that no one could go inside block 2 this morning—maybe all day.

When he saw me, Greg led me to 2C and briefed me outside the door. A male in his sixties. A psychotherapist, according to the diploma on his wall and the patient who had found him. *Dr. Mark Fabian.*

His patient had found him on the floor of his office, called 911, and asked them to send paramedics. The paramedics had quickly ascertained that this Dr. Fabian was dead—probably for many hours. He had the rig, and there was a deep wound on the side of his skull and bruises on his face.

“The patient—her name is Caroline Rouse—is still in the waiting room,” Greg whispered to me.

“Get her out of the waiting room, Greg.” I slipped on my shoe covers. “It’s part of the crime scene, technically. See if she’ll wait in your car. I’ll get a statement from her as soon as I can.”

“Right,” Greg said. “Amy’s on her way and—”

“Where are the paramedics?”

“Outside. Waiting to talk to you.”

I put on my rubber gloves and pushed open the door to the dead therapist’s office.

My wife had been telling me for years that I should see a shrink.

Well, now I would.

Chapter 2

**Nadine**

I never expected to touch you, and I think the feeling was mutual.

But before I can leave your office, I have to make sure you’re really dead. So I put my fingers to your arm. And—yes. Oh, God. Yes. I don’t need to bother with your pulse.

But then, since you’re dead, I have to close your eyes. I can’t stand to leave you here like this on the soft gray carpet—open-eyed, coffee-stained, blood on your face and in your beautiful fluffy hair.

Regular blood—dark red.

Surprising, somehow. Maybe I thought a shrink’s blood would run clear—or a perfect, luminous blue. Like antifreeze.

I’m not sure why I close the door behind me. All I know is that after that, I run. Out of the office, out of the suite, out of the building.

The lady in the parking lot—the skinny one with the black hair with white streaks—says hello and I say hello back and stare at her as she goes into your office building. It is so early in the morning still. Is she an Angel of Death? Did that just happen? Or did I imagine her? Either way, I unlock my car and fall into my seat and drive away. There is coffee down the side of my blue down coat. I can feel its wetness, but since we passed each other quickly, I doubt the Angel of Death saw it. Unless she is all-seeing, all-knowing. As I assume Angels of Death generally are?

Somehow I am already a mile or two down East Main Street.

And I hear myself whispering *Not again. Not again.*

The highway ramp is only a half mile away on the right. I don’t know much else, but I know I’ll be taking it.

Away from Campion.

*Campion.* Emerald-green jewel of Connecticut—shining suburban beacon in the state’s very center, white congregational steeple poking up as pointy-sharp as Sleeping Beauty’s spindle. “A bedroom community”they call it, and they really mean it.

Why did I ever come back here?

*Not again.*

Chapter 3

**Henry**

The first thing I saw of Dr. Fabian was his sensible brown loafers. Then my gaze jumped up to his ample gray-white hair, caked with blood on one side.

Mouth open, eyes closed. Caramel brown all over the bottom of his khaki pants. I wondered what kind of bodily fluid that could be until I saw an empty cardboard coffee cup on the floor by the couch.

The couch. Where all the patients sat when they told him about their problems. There was a Kleenex box next to it. I stared at the box’s floral pattern for a moment and took a deep breath before looking at the guy again—at the lines on his face and the creases around his eye. The eye that wasn’t covered in blood.

There were signs of struggle. Some books were tipped over from an upright position on the shelf behind the leather chair. A few were on the floor. I gazed at the bookshelf for a moment. Practically a full wall of books. All tidy except on that one eye-level shelf. Half in disarray, but on the opposite end, the remaining books were propped upward with a wedge of petrified wood.

And there was also the coffee—spilled all over the doctor and the carpet.

I went to the desk near the door. Pretty sparse. A lamp. An *At-a-Glance* calendar. And right in the middle, one of those thin exam booklets we used to use in high school and college. It was open to a page with *January 8, 1997,*scribbled across the top in messy—almost childish—handwriting. At the bottom of the page was a crude, faded pencil drawing of a couple of cartoon animals.

1997? Written that year, or more recently? An account of something remembered? From the faded appearance of the booklet and the drawings, I’d guess it was written that year. At what point did papers from the year I graduated high school start looking like historical documents?

I picked up the *At-a-Glance* calendar and flipped to yesterday’s page. Tuesday.

*9 am—Kate D.*

*10 am—Bob*

*11 am*

*12 am—Eric & Sarah*

*1 pm*

*2 pm*

*3 pm—Mason*

*4 pm—Tricia*

*5 pm—Liam*

*6 pm—Connor*

“Shit,” I muttered. Just first names.

“Poor guy,” Greg said from the doorway. He was picking at his mustache again.

“Call State Major Crimes,” I said. “I’ll go bang out the warrant.”

Chapter 4

**Nadine**

Now that it has stopped beating, why can’t I finally stop trying to capture your heart? (And surely you must know that half of your clients only ever wanted that from you? To capture your heart? Maybe not because of anything specific about you, but because—with all due respect, Bouffant, and PhD notwithstanding, that’s how people *are*?)

Listen to me—addressing you in my head as if you were still alive to care. Like I’m a teenager again. Back when I first named you Bouffant in my thoughts.

Back in those olden days, you had on your head not so much a hairdo as a triumph over gravity. It was the nineties, but I sensed from your general age and style that you were having trouble letting go of 1985. That big hair. Didn’t you ever wonder if it distracted your patients? And how much time did you spend blowing it dry every morning? I’d wonder if you had a wife (you had a wedding band, I knew that much) who would help you or at least compliment you on it. Let’s be real here. Yes. I *pictured* you blowing it dry. And I pictured you with a quivering golf ball-sized orb of mousse in your hand the moment before you squished it into your awesome head of subtly-graying dark brown hair.

As a good and proper therapy patient, one tries, most of the time, not to go to these places in one’s head. But you *do*. Your brain wants to do it, just because it knows it’s not supposed to. Like when you’re in Sunday School class as a kid, and the old lady teaching the class says that God sees and knows everything, even what’s in your head, and then your head just keeps thinking *I hate Jesus I hate Jesus I HATE JESUS!* Not because you really hate Jesus (because what is there to hate about long hair and love and crucifixion?) but because God is listening and your brain just wants to screw you over for some reason that you will never—even decades later—ever understand.

My first appointment with you was in November of 1995, when I was sixteen. That was—let’s see. *Twenty* years ago? Oh my God, Bouffant. I’m old and you’re ancient.

 I had to remind you of these specifics a few days ago, when I showed up in your office again after all these years. But I didn’t need to remind you *why* I’d been your patient. *That* was memorable, even after all this time.There had been a terrible incident. And that incident made it quite necessary for my mother and stepfather to get me onto a therapist’s couch—and *fast*.

They rather stumbled upon you, Bouffant. They got four or five therapist recommendations from their doctors and friends.(And since my stepfather was in healthcare finance, he just so happened to have a couple of doctor friends.) As I recall, you didn’t specialize in teenagers particularly, but you were the only one with sufficient openings to see me multiple times per week, effective immediately.

My mother drove me to see you on the day before Thanksgiving, and I talked to you while she went to the grocery store for forgotten pearl onions.

“Let’s talk about why you’re here,” you said. “Can you tell me a little bit about why you’re here?

“Umm . . . like specifically or generally?”

“Whichever you’d like to talk about.”

“Because specifically would mean what I did to my social studies teacher. Did you want me to talk about that?”

“Do *you* want to talk about that?”

“Not really.” I shrugged. “I talked a lot about it at the hospital. I mean, I know I’m supposed keep talking about the thing with Mr. Brewster, but I’m sure my mom or my stepdad already explained it to you, so maybe we don’t need to go into it. Right now, anyway. Even though that’s, you know, *technically* why I’m here. Right?”

“Well. . .” You paused for a moment. “Yes.”

“But if you’re willing to start with *generally* why I’m here, maybe that would be better for a while?” I said it with a question in my voice, because I truly didn’t know how all of this was supposed to work. You seemed more casual about it all than the hospital folks had been.

You put both of your arms on the rich chocolate leather of your deep chair, sat back a bit, bounced your pointy knees a couple of times, and considered my answer. Your hair billowed gently with your movement. There was something comically unstylish about it, but also something comforting—like the ripples in a pond after you tossed a stone in.

Your hesitation gave me a chance to look you up and down. The hair was perhaps styled to distract from your long face and bulb nose. Your dress style was decidedly cozy, professorial. A gray cardigan vest—knitted so loosely it reminded me of a fish net—over a white Oxford shirt with the sleeves rolled up gently. (Let’s get to inner *work*!)

And then you said, “Okay.”

I got the feeling you were tired. You’d squeezed me in just before dinnertime, after all. You were probably eager to get home and have a gin cocktail while you watched your wife peel potatoes for tomorrow. I don’t recall what your next question was—it must’ve been something easy to answer. An ice-breaker or something I wouldn’t or couldn’t overanalyze. And I came out thinking not that I liked you, but that I appreciated the honesty of your fatigue, and I could tolerate you for a few months, if that was what was required of me.

That Friday, as I watched TV and ate cold pumpkin pie and tea for breakfast, I found myself wondering if you, too, had eaten pumpkin pie on the previous evening. It seemed to me that odds were you probably *did,* because most people did. And then I wondered what else I could figure out about you, using only observances and odds. Because surely I wasn’t supposed to ever ask you anything about yourself directly. It unsettled me that I was even having these thoughts, mild as they were, about a man roughly twice my age—maybe a little more.

That was actually about how old Mr. Brewster was.

And then I couldn’t finish my pumpkin pie. Because I realized in that moment—barefooted in my Earth Day nightshirt that smelled like sweat and maple syrup—that I would probably start wondering what you ate for breakfast, and what your favorite movies were, and whether or not you wore pajamas, and whether you’d ever broken a limb, and if you had, had you screamed or cried when it happened? And could *I* ever make you scream or cry? And I wondered if you’d ever jogged shirtless and overly tanned on a beach, since you were a young man in the early eighties, and people did that sort of thing back then. And if you had, if you’d had a gold chain dangling in your sweaty chest hair. And I wondered—*if* you’d done all of that—if you’d been at all sexy by relatively objective standards, or if you just *thought* you were.

My stomach ached at these questions, because I knew I would be wondering these things for a very long time—possibly forever. And I knew what this meant: Whatever was wrong with me was incurable.

**Connecticut Live**

**March 7, 2010**

**10:32 am EST**

***Initial reports of 9 dead, 7 injured in Campion retirement home shooting***

*The shooting at Brookhaven Manor Retirement Community began at about 7:15 a.m. Local news station WSCN reports that Connecticut State Police have confirmed 9 dead.*

*CNN news reports that police have identified the shooter, who is a male in his 30s. He is reportedly alive, though injured from multiple gunshots when he exchanged fire with local police at the scene. He is currently being treated at St. Michael’s Hospital, as are some of the injured victims. Other victims are being treated at Barnes Memorial Hospital.*