

Preview

Dead Love.....Resurrection!

Book I

PreView of the Novel

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While drawn from my youthful experiences growing up, recollections from my work experience in business, and my years as an art dealer and faculty in academe, *Dead Love.....Resurrection!* Book One and Book Two are autobiographical works of literary fiction. Names, characters, places and events described, referenced or portrayed in this novel are the product of my imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, places and events is coincidental.

#

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#

PreView

Dr. Pamela Eagleston, ivy league graduate, heavy metal roadie turned FBI Special Agent, now Chairman of the billion-dollar Eagleston Foundation, takes a break from her hectic corporate life in Manhattan to accompany her fiancé, horror novelist Sean MacDonald, to his childhood home town of Blue Fields, a rural suburb across the Hudson and north of Manhattan, for a book-signing.

Upon returning to Blue Fields, and while out running, Sean is drawn to the now abandoned and overgrown country cemetery, wondering if the small head stone he placed there 20 years ago in memory of his first and only high school sweetheart, Judith, is still there. Marking a grave never dug for a body never found, and bearing the inscription ... I Will Always Love You.

Upon finding the headstone beneath layers of dead leaves and grass, Sean regrets his decision to come home, when he discovers the headstone now reads, And I Will Always Love You Sean, the words 'And' and 'Sean' scratched deep into the headstone.

When Judith slips into Pamela's body, to relive and to steal Pamela's every intimate moment with Sean, every fantasy, every lustful touch, every orgasm, in an effort to lure Sean back to her, we are witness to a savage psycho-sexual battle between two powerful women ... one who is of this world and one who is not ... that will leave readers rethinking who they sleep with and what they promise in the heat of passion, for 'Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman Scorned'.

#

Chapter 1

I Will Always Love You ***And*** I Will Always Love You ***Sean***

Nothing shouted, Welcome Home! as Sean MacDonald ran along the once tree-lined country roads of his youth, which to his dismay had all been urbanized with concrete curbs, silly city sidewalks, irritating traffic lights and clusters of wannabe Hollywood houses surrounded by weed-less lawns sprayed Technicolor green and guarded by armies of bug-eyed ceramic gnomes, marching dwarves, dancing trolls and the occasional plaster-white virgin inside an up-turned bathtub stuck into the ground.

The moment Sean turned onto Western Highway, he spotted the old sandstone church and no longer used 300-year old cemetery. Sensing the same uneasy feeling the the day he left Blue Fields, twenty years ago, Sean glanced at the combination watch and heart-rate monitor on his wrist, the transmitter strapped around his chest under his sweatshirt. The monitor displayed a steady 145, on target for his age and measured pace of 165 strides every tenth of a mile, 3.2 feet per step. A tap of the button on the display called up the elapsed time, revealing that he had two minutes and ten seconds left in the one-hour, five-mile limit he set for himself.

A haircut shy of six foot and more stocky than trim, Sean didn't have the ideal build for a distance runner: two pounds per inch of height. Which meant he was 30 pounds too heavy to be running. But he ran anyway, his running as important to him as his writing: Just trying to stay a few steps ahead of the Devil was his stock reply, when anyone asked him why he ran every day, rain or shine, and even in the winter.

Sean also claimed running helped him clear his mind and keep his sanity. Yet one literary critic questioned that claim, when he reviewed Sean's last book, *Avatar*.

Sean laughed, "Fuck'em all," and broke into an all-out sprint. His pulse was unchanged for the first dozen strides, then began climbing, 156, 162, 168, which triggered a frantic beeping, telling him to, Back-Off! Heeding his programmed warning, dictated by his cardiologist after he put three stents into Sean's right coronary artery, Sean slowed to a brisk walk, his gaze fixed on the cemetery a stones throw up ahead.

"Why the hell did you give in to that woman?" he muttered, repeating the question he'd been wrestling with ever since he stepped off the bus in Blue Fields. Having just completed a month-long book tour, he had his fill of stale cookies, warm punch, covens of suburban housewives dressed up as wannabe Goths and little old ladies asking him in a secretive whisper if there was lots of 'good sex' in his book.

With his new book, *Dead Love*, Sean put an end to what his editor, Don Potter, called 'A love-hate relationship' with the character he created based on his memories of what happened in Blue Fields, especially in the church cemetery, twenty years ago.

'It's time to move on, new characters, storylines, plots and, hopefully, new readers', Sean told Don Potter. Even though he knew that the character he created and what happened in the cemetery that summer after graduation, would continue to haunt him, slipping in and out of his mind at will, an uninvited spirit with a mind of her own.

Sean's change of heart about never returning to his hometown was prompted by a call from a woman who said she was a Trustee of the Blue Fields library. After he declined her request for the third time, and after a long silence, she asked in a soft, almost girlish voice "Please, Sean, for me?"

In that fleeting instant, Sean was certain he heard Judith's voice and found himself unable to refuse Elaine Ander's request.

"I guess it's 'till death do us part, Judith', he muttered as he walked across the lawn beside the church toward the aging cemetery imprisoned inside a chest-high, falling-down wrought iron fence infected with rust and crawling with ivy.

Hesitating, his hand inches from the gate latch, Sean found himself questioning whether or not he wanted to risk unearthing the memories he left behind a lifetime ago.

Fictional characters were easy for Sean, he could give them life with a few dozen keystrokes and take it away just as quickly; but Judith was a different story, one whose end had never been written.

"She's dead, MacDonald. Dead is dead," Sean told himself and pushed open the gate and shuddered at the unnerving sound of rusted iron grating against rusted iron, scrapping away the cathedral quiet of the unusually warm Indian summer afternoon. Remembering a trick long ago forgotten, he lifted the gate and slowly, gently, closed and latched it. He then turned and stopped, unable to proceed.

The once familiar trees were now three decades older and easily twenty feet taller, their branches, decorated with autumn leaves, casting unfamiliar shadows everywhere. And the once memorized headstones had been devoured by hungry weeds or knocked-over by adolescent vandals trying to overcome their fear of death.

Spotting a familiar shape, another, then one more, Sean began to slowly retrace his way through the maze of half-buried markers, pock-marked headstones, miniature marble mausoleums and concrete angels frozen in flight.

As he lazily kicked his feet through the dusting of crisp autumn leaves, he uncovered a small American flag and picked it up. The fabric was threadbare, colors faded, the skinny wicker stick splintered. He gently fit the flag back into its corroded bronze plaque atop the old headstone.

Glancing around to make sure no one was watching, Sean closed his eyes and put his memory to the test; but as hard as he tried, he could not remember who the flag honored, in spite of the fact that there was a time when he could name everyone sleeping here.

Sean also knew all of the birth and death dates, and could reel off names of husbands, wives and the many children who died too soon. Sean whispered, "You were one strange kid, MacDonald," paraphrasing what many of his friends said after seeing him in the cemetery taking a rubbing off the face of another headstone. It, too, destined to hang in his bedroom until he memorized the inscription. Then wrapped in a plastic bag and hidden in the barn, the rafters above the hayloft, with all of the others.

Drawing a blank, still refusing to open his eyes, Sean placed his fingers on the face of the headstone and ever-so-slowly began to trace the weathered letters and numbers, while reading aloud, "Jonas Blauvelt, seventeen forty-seven to seventeen seventy-eight. Son, brother, father and loving husband. He gave his life to bring us to this new world."

Whatever apprehension Sean had felt about returning to Blue Fields, steadily faded as he moved from headstone to headstone, reacquainting himself with one forgotten old friend after another:

Adelaide West Conklin 1783-1810 Devoted Wife and Loving Mother, who died in childbirth while giving life to little Adele;

Beatrice Ann Houston 1805-1807 God's Little Gift, who went to sleep one night and awoke in heaven;

Ezekiel James Hill 1846-1864 Our Only Son, who bravely gave his life to protect and preserve the Union. May he enter the Kingdom of Heaven and stand guard at the foot of the Lord's Throne.

Sean's relaxed feeling abruptly changed, when he found himself in the back of the cemetery and in the clearing where he set a modest stone marker into the ground, secretly, with his bare hands and without a name or a date, marking a grave never dug for a body never found. As he stepped into the clearing, Sean spotted a corner of the marker peeking out from beneath the blanket of leaves painted every possible shade of red and orange. He waited for the memories to return: nothing, not even a twinge. He took a breath and shut his eyes, but not a single buried image answered his silent call.

This is crazy, he told himself and knelt down, intent upon clearing away the leaves and confronting his deliberately forgotten fears. Only to be startled by the sound of the rusted cast iron gate creaking open. Jumping up, Sean spun around and quickly laughed at himself, when he saw Pamela, who waved and called out, "I thought I'd find you here," and started weaving her way through the cemetery toward Sean.

As tall as Sean, Pamela Eagleston's smoldering red hair was cut boyishly short and the only make-up to be found on her smooth angular face was a light brush of iridescent-red over her lips. As Pamela drew closer, a stiff breeze rose up, trapping her inside a swirl of dead leaves. Pamela stopped and shut her eyes, waiting for the wind to blow itself away. But it grew stronger, pulling at her hair and clothes, as if it were alive.

In that instant fragments of Sean's never-ending nightmare he thought he'd securely imprisoned deep in his subconscious were set free: a shadow moving about with feline grace, mirroring his every move; the midnight air turning damp, cool, then painfully cold; muffled whispers followed by a deafening scream, never to be forgotten.

Shivering, Pamela zippered up her leather jacket, lowered her head, and made a bee-line for Sean. Grabbing his hand, she snuggled up against him, gave him a quick hug and affectionate peck on the cheek, then asked with a playful nudge her hip, "Okay, Romeo, where is 'Fair Juliet' sleeping?"

About to kneel and brush away the leaves and show Pamela the headstone, Sean was distracted by a voice in the back of his mind shouting, *Run!* followed by another voice, distant, faint, a woman, pleading, "No! Please stay. For me, Sean."

Before Sean could answer Pamela's question, the wind whipped the leaves on the ground into a frenzy, exposing the small stone marker lying at their feet.

"What the hell---!"

Sean dropped to his knees and began rubbing the face of the headstone, as if he were trying to erase the two words that had been scratched into the polished block of granite, and in freehand, changing his youthful vow of eternal love, *I Will Always Love You*, to read *And I Will Always Love You Sean*.

#

Chapter 2

She dove into the lake and disappeared
beneath the blanket of fog.

Standing in front of the seven-foot high galvanized chain-link steel fence surrounding the reservoir, Sean took the rolled-up towels Pamela was holding and stuffed them under his shirt. He then locked his hands together and gestured to Pamela. "C'mon, let me help you up and over the fence."

Smiling, Pamela playfully patted Sean on the top of his head, then scaled the fence with the strength and stealth of a large cat, and jumped down on the other side, landing with equal feline grace. Propping her hands on her hips, grinning, she quipped, "Your turn."

"Where the hell did you...?"

"Don't ask." Pamela laughed. "You don't want to know."

Shaking his head, Sean pulled the towels out from under his shirt, tossed them over the fence to Pamela, then started climbing the fence. But awkwardly, struggling, while trying his best not to laugh at himself when he saw Pamela stifling a laugh.

As he straddled the top of the fence, snagging his pants on the twisted points of wire, Pamela reached up to help him down. Waving her off, Sean freed himself and half-jumped half-fell to the ground and stumbled into Pamela's waiting arms.

Giving Sean a playful kiss, Pamela handed him his towel and started down the long gently sloping hillside crisscrossed with parallel rows of knee-high evergreens and dotted with clusters of uninvited weeds.

Sean fell into step beside Pamela as they slowed to a lazy walk in the loose sandy soil. Pamela nudged Sean with her hip, then gestured with a sweeping wave of her hand and asked, "So where is this secret swimming hole you've been carrying on about ever since that woman talked you into coming home for a book signing?"

Sean gestured off in the distance to a small fieldstone bridge spanning the stream feeding the manmade reservoir. He then slowly sketched a long imagery wavy line over the moonlit surface of the water.

"When I was growing up, the Hackensack creek slipped under that decades old fieldstone bridge on the right, and into ta large pond we called the Forty Foot. Which was strictly for fishing, since we were all afraid to swim in the Forty Foot because of the scary whirlpools. The creek then snaked its way through the woods that no longer exist to the Seven Foot." Sean poked the air with his finger. "Which was just about at the foot of this hill we're standing on. The Seven Foot was where the younger kids went swimming, except when the Jackson-Whites showed up, then everyone cleared out."

Sean relocated the imaginary Seven Foot with another poke of his finger and continued drawing while talking. "Further down the creek, hidden in the woods, was the Ten Foot, which was the private domain of the older guys and their girlfriends." Sean added with a throaty growl, "Rumor has it that no bathing suits were allowed there."

Darting up ahead, Pamela spun around and spread her arms, blocking his path. "Did gallant Romeo take fair Juliet there, too?"

Sean was surprised by Pamela's question. In their two years together, she had not once shown even a flicker of interest in the women in his life before he met her and stopped seeing anyone else. Passing it off as an attempt to get a rise out of him, Sean replied, forcing a throaty growl, "Don't ask, you really don't want to know."

Laughing, Sean broke through Pamela's blockade and started running toward the far end of the reservoir, where a heavy cloud of mist was clinging to the surface of the water. Before he'd gotten too far, Pamela was behind him and gaining on him, which only served to spur Sean on, determined not to let her catch him.

#

Sean had never known a woman as competitive as Pamela; or as physical. At first, when they were still telling harmless white lies and holding back the truth, Sean met the challenges he thought Pamela posed. After the hunger had been satisfied and trust earned on both sides, the lies were slowly, steadily, replaced with bits and pieces of the truth. That's when Sean had come to realize he was the spark and not Pamela, egging her on just like now. He also discovered that for some reason he needed to prove to himself that she would give chase, which is when the real doubt had set in: his fear that one day he would run, not knowing why, and Pamela would not give chase.

Though it also might be the ten-year spread in their ages, Sean being older and, he realized, less experienced than Pamela and as a result less secure? *Then again*, he wondered, *The twenty-million dollar difference in own bank accounts might be a factor?*

#

Throwing up his arms in mock surrender, Sean laughed, "I'm too old for this!" and slowed to a lazy walk, only to have Pamela run into him. The impact sent them both tripping and tumbling onto the ground. Lying sprawled on their backs, a tangle of arms and legs and towels and moonlit shadows --- each of them trying to catch their breath --- Pamela asked cautiously, almost apprehensively, "I realize it was a long time ago, but do you think there's a chance that you still love her and don't know it?"

Surprised by her question, Sean chose his words carefully. "How can we possibly love someone, I mean truly 'love' them, if we only knew them for a short time. And in my case less than a year?"

Pamela replied in a solemn and knowing womanly tone of voice, "Unlike sex, love is not something we can turn on and off like a faucet. It's either there or it's not. And at eighteen, you two were no longer 'children'." Rolling over onto her stomach, Pamela propped herself up on her elbows and leaned into Sean. "So, my romantic young man, who puts headstones over empty graves, and professes eternal love for a girl he only knew for a short time, do you still love her?"

Sean knew that if he didn't answer, and quickly, his silence would indict him.

"I have the memory of having loved her, or whatever it is we feel at that age. But I do not now have any feelings of love or affection for her."

What Sean hadn't said, what he knew he was unwilling to admit, was that he was afraid the feelings might be buried somewhere deep inside him and if he wasn't careful they might slip out along with all of the unwanted memories. And the pain.

"Am I making sense?" he asked, hoping he had and the matter was closed.

Pamela gave Sean an unquestionably cool peck on the cheek, which was her signature way of ending a discussion that upset her, and stood up. Snatching up the towels, Pamela shook them out, gave Sean his towel, added a less than gentle kick of her foot, and said with a note of impatience, "C'mon. Get up. Let's go find the rest of

those demons of yours and flesh them out. Along with accepting the fact that what was done to the headstone was probably nothing more than a prank by some teenagers."

Sean shook his head, rejecting Pamela's reasoning.

She quickly responded. "Okay. Then tell me who you think could possibly have known that you two were in the cemetery at night and what you were doing there?"

Without responding, Sean started around the reservoir in silence, moving steadily closer to the isolated patch of fog hovering above the surface of the water a stones throw from the shore. Pamela caught up, matched his determined pace, and was first to break the silence. "Why do I get the feeling there's something you're not telling me?"

Sean was about to disagree, to mount a knee-jerk typically guy-type of defense, when he realized Pamela was right: there was something he couldn't tell her, but not because he wouldn't, he couldn't. Everything was off in the distance, beyond his reach, shadowy silhouettes lurking about, as if they were waiting for something or someone.

But what? And why? He wondered. Growing more frustrated by the moment as he tried but couldn't remember, Sean said in a quiet voice, "I'm sorry, I should have..."

"No!" Pamela snapped. "You don't owe me any apologies. We both have demons in our past that we haven't come to terms with." Pamela paused, as if trying to find the right words. "I just don't wear mine on my sleeve like you do. Which in a strange way I envy you for being able to lock things up in little boxes of your mind."

Sean was surprised to hear Pamela admit what he'd suspected from their first meeting two years ago at The New York Academy of Fine Art. At thirty-five, Pamela was hiding from who and what she was: sole heir to a two hundred million dollar charitable trust, blithely teaching painting and drawing for a pittance, while banking her annual six-figure allowance. Her disguise had been complete with shoulder-length burnt orange hair, diamond studs in both ears and a small emerald stud piercing the side of her nose.

"Right here," Sean announced and stopped. Kicking off his loafers, he spread his towel out on the ground, then gestured to the patch of fog hovering over the water.

"That is the old Ten Foot."

Pamela started laughing. "How do you know that?"

"Simple. The Ten Foot always steamed like this in late spring and early fall. And sometimes on cool summer nights."

Slipping off his sweater, Sean tossed it onto the towel. His shirt was next. He stepped out of his pants, then his briefs, to stand naked in the moonlight.

"According to the experts, whoever they are, there's an active fault running through Rockland County, which they claim explains the fog. Something about one of the wells feeding the reservoir passing over a release point and being heated up and surfacing here." Sean laughed. "We convinced ourselves it was the devil's work."

Sean waded into the water up to his knees, then turned back to face Pamela.

"Too cold for you?" he teased. "Just going to watch ... like a girl?"

Pamela promptly peeled off her clothes. Taut and trim, yet every bit a woman, Pamela cut a sensuous silhouette in the dark. She laughed, "I suppose I'm just as crazy as you are," then ran into the water and dove headfirst beneath the surface, only to jump back up just as quickly and wrapped her arms around herself. Shivering, she took one look at Sean, who was still dry, and started splashing water at him.

Laughing, Sean dove backwards toward the mist, with Pamela in pursuit. He felt her hand graze his calf, grab his ankle, and pull him to her. He broke free and surfaced. Pamela bobbed up beside him in waist-deep water, the two of them shrouded by the mist, turning the moon overhead into a fuzzy blur.

"You're right," she whispered, "the water's really warm right here."

Sean slipped his hand around Pamela's waist and gently pulled her to him.

"Warm enough to make love?" He drew her closer, revealing he was aroused.

Pamela snarled, "Like you did with her?"

Pushing Sean away, Pamela started swimming for the shore. Halfway there, she stood up and began walking, head down, her stride purposeful. Tendrils of steamy mist rising up from her naked body created the illusion that she was on fire.

Sean was at her side before she could reach the shore. He took her hand and gently turned her around to face him.

"What has gotten into...?"

Sean stopped, his wide-eyed gaze fixed on something in the distance behind Pamela. He whispered, "We're not alone," and drew Pamela to him as if to protect her.

Pamela snarled, "Nice try." She then pulled herself free of Sean's grasp and turned away, only to stop dead.

A woman, naked, her waist-length frazzled liquid-black hair falling down over her shoulders and partially hiding her breasts, glided past Pamela as if she didn't exist and stopped in front of Sean. She spoke in a rasping voice, "Have you missed me, Sean?"

She then reached out and brushed the tips of her fingers over his chest, her splintered nails scratching open his skin, drawing blood, and igniting a fire inside him he couldn't quench. He tried to pull away but couldn't: his actions, no longer his to control.

She ever-so-slowly eased past Sean and grazed his chest and shoulder with her bare breasts, sending an uncontrollable electric shock through his body.

Glancing down, she smiled, looked up, gave a subtle sideways tick of her head, shrugged when Sean didn't respond, then dove into the lake and disappeared beneath the blanket of fog.

#

Chapter 3

Do what she told you to do. See if you can find those demons of yours and flesh them out.

Propped up by a mountain of lace-fringed pillows pushed against the brass headboard, Sean's only accommodation to modesty was a corner of the bed sheet, a Victorian floral print crawling with English ivy and morning glories. Sean folded his arms and sat watching watching Pamela, who was wearing nothing more than a pair of black bikini panties and matching bra, a cell-phone pressed to her ear and an angry scowl on her face, as she paced back and forth over the oriental rug.

This was the third trustee from the museum to call Pamela this morning, the first one having weighed in shortly after six, rudely ending Sean's attempt at patching things up with Pamela after their visit to the abandoned churchyard cemetery yesterday.

Sean realized how upset he was for having fallen for the conditions Pamela laid down for their four-day get-away weekend. 'A much-needed break from work for the both of us', is how Pamela put it.

For his part, Sean agreed to leave behind his laptop and any talk of his next book in exchange for Pamela not bringing her cell phone and a briefcase full of work.

The one thing he refused to agree to, however, was Pamela's request he leave his running shoes, shorts and heart-rate monitor at home.

As if having sensed his growing irritation, Pamela covered the mouthpiece with her hand, smiled sweetly and whispered, "Trouble in paradise. Five minutes. Promise."

Sean grumbled, "Try paradise lost" and had to restrain himself from hopping out of bed, snatching the phone out of Pamela's hand, and tossing it out the open window.

Sensing he was getting close to the edge of doing just that, Sean decided it was best to put as much distance as he could between them; at least until he cooled down.

Hopping out of bed, he snatched his running shorts off the chair. About to slip on his shorts, he heard Pamela snap, "Relax!" and felt her poke him in the back. Knocked off balance from his one-legged stance, his other leg trapped in his shorts, he stumbled and fell face first onto the bed into a harmless patch of silk-screened lavender flowers.

Sitting up, leveling his gaze at Pamela, he said in a resigned and controlled tone of voice, "This is not working. Why don't you head back into the City and take care of the problems at the museum. I'll find a ride home after the book signing this evening."

Pamela clapped the cell phone shut. "I bet you'd like that, too, wouldn't you? Then you could hitch a ride back into the city from another one of your old lovers."

Sean knew he shouldn't say it --- knew it would only fuel the fire from last night that Pamela had refused to let die out --- but couldn't help himself, "Are we jealous?"

Pamela snapped back, "You egotistical bastard," and threw the phone at him, her aim right on target, sending it straight for his head.

Fielding it with a one-handed catch, flashing a 'guy smirk', Sean hesitated only for as long as it took him to decide which open window was closest. Walking over, he tossed the cell phone outside and stood listening for it to hit the ground.

Nodding, he turned to face Pamela.

"We had a deal. No laptop for me no phone for you. You didn't keep your word."

Pamela charged him, looking anything but ladylike. Stepping aside with the grace of a toreador, Sean slapped her silky bottom as she lunged past him and fell onto the bed. Rolling over, her eyes burning with revenge, Pamela looked as if she wanted to tear him apart. Knowing all too well what her playful blows felt like, Sean hopped onto the bed, straddled her, grabbed her wrists and pinned her down.

"What's gotten into you, PJ?" He quickly lowered his voice to a tender pitch. "I love you, not a twenty year old memory. When are you going to believe that?"

Breaking free of his hold, pushing him off of her with surprising ease, Pamela jumped up, turned back, hands on her hips, and demanded, "Love! Really? Then tell me who the hell that woman was last night."

Sean sighed, "I've told you a dozen times, I don't remember ever having seen her before last night." He shrugged his shoulders. "What else can I say?"

Pamela asked in rapid-fire succession, "Then how did she know your name? And how did she know that we were going to be there? And where the hell were her clothes? Do the women in this hick town all walk around outside in the middle of the night in October stark naked! And where the hell did she go to? She just vanished!"

Sean had already asked himself those very same questions, and a few others, ones he knew he couldn't tell Pamela, such as Why had her touch started his heart racing and sent a chill throughout his body? And what was it he saw in her eyes that he couldn't resist, yet at the same time wanted to run away from?

Pamela abruptly softened all over. "I hate this. Can we pick up where we left off this morning, before the first call?" She shut her eyes. "Which I am truly sorry for."

Sean was touched by her sudden change of heart, but only for as long as it took him to realize it was a test. Everything was a test with Pamela, when it came to men, and even him. And he knew all too well that she did not do anything on instinct: she had to have proof, facts, that what they said and who and what they were was true.

"Want a pad and a pencil to keep score?" he asked. "Or have you given the test so often that you can score it from memory now?" He stood up and began dressing. "Tell me, Doctor Eagleston, have any of the men in your life ever passed your test?"

#

Sean was standing on the top step of the front porch of Mike Gordon's B & B, framed by the gingerbread decorating the century-old Victorian house dripping with 1890's candy colors. With a bewildered shake of his head, Sean returned the polite but stone-faced nod from Pamela's chauffeur, John Sutherland, as he expertly maneuvered the Rolls Royce Silver Wraith II around the small, circular drive. Sitting in the back seat, another cell-phone stuck to the side of her head, Pamela gave a curt nod as the car passed in front of him, her gaze focused on something other than him.

The moment the Rolls was out of sight, Sean tossed a ring of keys into the air, snatched them back, and started around the house to where Pamela had parked her car last night. 'It's not me, never has been', Pamela had said without any outward sign of emotion, when she handed Sean the keys ten minutes ago. Before he could say anything, she crossed his palm with the title, which her chauffeur just happened to have. 'You've always liked it', she had said softly, but coolly, refusing to look at him.

While money had always been Pamela's way of covering up her feelings, or using it to buy someone off just to avoid having to deal with them, Sean had never once seen her do anything on the spur of the moment: she approached everything, even their relationship, in a cool, logical and methodical manner.

"Doesn't make sense," Sean muttered as he stopped in front of the garage, the architectural offspring of the house his boyhood friend, Michael Gordon, a fugitive from A T & T, had saved from the wrecker's ball and masterfully turned into an elegant bed and breakfast. Sean smiled, wondering who had been more surprised, Michael or him, when he and Pamela appeared on the doorstep looking for lodging.

"Me," Sean quipped as he slid open the barn-style garage door and stood admiring the vintage Ferrari. With spoke wire wheels, wood-rimmed steering wheel, polished walnut paneling on the dash, and not a single age-revealing hairline crack in the leather seats, the cherry red 1965 365 GTB roadster was a true classic.

"Like me!" Sean laughed, then grimaced as waves of doubt swept over him, followed by ripples of self-recrimination from what he said to Pamela. And not just this morning, but last night. The part of him that loved her, though apparently not the way she wanted or needed to be loved, regretted having said what he did; even though he meant it. He wanted to take it all back the moment the words had been given their freedom, but something stopped him, twisting his thoughts into knots and tying his tongue. And that wasn't like him, which only added to the conflict Sean felt growing inside him. Yet he couldn't put his finger on what it was, or how to stop it.

Sean began second-guessing his decision to tell Pamela about Judith, and especially about the headstone. And going swimming last night hadn't been a good idea, either. "What the hell were you thinking? And who the hell was that woman?"

The more he struggled to resolve his feelings and make sense of what happened, what he said, what they both said, the more his thoughts slipped through his fingers. Unable to concentrate, Sean stood staring at the car, wondering what he should do with it, if anything. "You could leave it here, not drive it, and give the title back," he mused, and just as quickly brushed that idea aside, reminding himself that Pamela never did anything on the spur of the moment. Frustrated at not having an answer, Sean gave up arguing with himself and glanced at his watch, more out habit than anything else. Seeing he still had a good three hours to kill before having to shave, shower and get to the library by seven for the reception, he began toying with his options of what to do with his free time, stuck in a town that he no longer knew and

facing a sky that was threatening to open up any minute. Doubt only lasted for as long as it took the image of the epitaph on Judith's headstone to crowd his thoughts.

As if daring himself, Sean snapped, "Do what she told you to do. See if you can find those demons of yours and flesh them out." He paused. "And while you're at it, figure out how what you're going to say, to apologize to Pamela for your stupidity."

#

Chapter 4

Pamela tucked a revolver, shoulder holster and three spare clips into her suitcase.

As chairman and CEO of the two-hundred million dollar John T. Eagleston Foundation, Pamela was in her element on the executive committee of the Museum of Modern Art: a world of facts, figures, wealth, greed and powerful men, subjects she knew as well if not better than her counterparts seated at the long marble-topped table.

As far as Pamela was concerned, the issue at hand was cut and dry: either the Committee agreed to dedicate one of the mothballed galleries for a permanent exhibit of her father's collection of Gerard bronzes or she would withdraw her offer to donate the collection of larger-than-life sized sculptures valued at over \$20,000,000.00.

Hailed as modern masterpieces --- "The beauty of Michelangelo and power of Rodin," one critic had written --- the collection was to be a memorial gift in her father's name, which included a perpetual endowment to assure proper care of the sculptures, while also providing for periodic refurbishing and rotation of the works on display.

With each acrimonious exchange between the committee members, Pamela's thoughts drifted further and further away from the meeting, until all she could think of was what had happened earlier this morning. She lost control and she knew it, which was unlike her and upset her no end. But not nearly as much as what she said and did to Sean.

In hindsight, she realized he was right, she hadn't kept her part of the bargain: she was an addict when it came to the foundation. Though in fairness, she knew her addiction wasn't that much different than Sean's addiction to his writing.

Only she hadn't been able to face up to her habit, or perhaps totally give in to it, whereas Sean did when he walked away from his position at Hart College to write full-time, going from Professor Somebody to '*Mr. Nobody Wannabe Novelist*' overnight, as one angry critic put it. As for his running, Sean openly admitted it was a 'drug' he had to have.

What bothered her the most, however, was that she didn't know what made her feel the way she did and prompted her to say and do the things she did. And she now

sorely regretted what she had done with the car: not the fact that she gave it to Sean, but the way she gave it to him. And leaving Blue Fields the way she did, as if she were running away, was even more upsetting.

Outspoken? Guilty as charged. Passionate? Without a doubt. And she quickly admitted that she wouldn't have it any other way. But jealous? No. After all, this wasn't her first run around the block.

Now, fifty miles from Blue Fields and realizing that she did not want to be here, Pamela could not --- no matter how hard she tried --- taste or feel a single bitter drop of the venom that had poisoned her. Though she could clearly remember with unerring clarity every acrimonious word she had spoken while under its toxic influence.

This impasse served to bring out Pamela's analytical side, the part of her she recalled Sean having once referred to as '*Your dominant male half*'. The thought of what he had gone on to say, as if he were admitting to a carefully guarded secret, that '*My therapist says it goes with my dominant female side*' brought a smile to her face, which she quickly reined in lest it be misconstrued by anyone at the table.

Pamela quickly refocused her thoughts on what had happened, intent upon putting her finger on that exact moment in time when --- *And why!* --- her feelings had changed and she had begun to feel threatened and started to attack Sean. She replayed in her mind what had gone down between them yesterday, last night, and earlier this morning.

Pamela mentally worked backwards, scene-by-scene, word-by-word, looking for the spark that had both ignited and fueled the fire in her and began to drive them apart.

What she had done with the car upset her that much more, when she recalled Sean's playful comment after she gave him a Rolex watch, but had forgotten to check the box for a receipt: '*Is this ten-thousand dollar watch a payment for services rendered, severance pay, or a payment on account for future services on demand?*'

Forgetting where she was, Pamela muttered, half seriously, half playfully, "You can be a real prick sometimes," and was startled when one of the trustees, David Ross, a little troll of man who'd made his claimed fortune in telemarketing, asked indignantly, "I beg your pardon, Dr. Eagleston. Did we say something that offended you?"

Pamela sat up as if she'd sat on a tack. "Forgive me," she said apologetically, though she felt anything but sorry. "My thoughts must have wandered for a moment, but I assure you it wasn't for lack of interest."

No sooner had she said this, then Pamela realized it was a lie: she cared more about what had happened between them, than she did about what had transpired in the meeting over the last three hours. In an effort to buy time, collect her thoughts, she asked, "What have you come up with?"

Ross, his voice scarred by decades of three packs of unfiltered Camels a day, said brusquely, "I, 'we', have agreed to submit our unanimous recommendation to the full board that the funds for the project be appropriated from the capital improvement reserve, rather than waiting for the development people to raise the money."

Ross paused, half-smiled, half-smirked, then said with a certain self-satisfied twist to his words, "The only hitch is that I -- " he caught himself again "--- 'we' want to use our firm, to design and maintain the exhibition, not that we do not think highly of your---"

Pamela abruptly stood up, causing everyone except David Ross to rise in unison. Ross sat stuffed into his chair.

Panning everyone around the table, reading their expressions, Pamela looked down at Ross and said calmly,

"David, I really don't..."

"Sit down, girl," he said and gave a flick of his hand.

Pamela wanted to say, 'You little shit', but instead spoke in a disapproving maternal tone of voice, "My dear, David, I am fed up with your childish games and your little-boy need to control everything and everyone here. Please be advised that --- thanks to 'your' efforts --- I am withdrawing the foundation's proposed gift of my father's collection."

Silence blanketed the board room as Pamela picked up her journal then paused to say with a mixed sense of relief and disappointment, "I will also be submitting my resignation, effective the end of this month. There are some things I must --- no --- I 'want' to take care of that are more important."

Pamela spun around and walked out, her thoughts already halfway up the East River Drive on her exodus from Manhattan.

#

"United Nations Plaza," Pamela told the cabby as she pulled the door shut behind her and slid back in the seat. "No. Wait!" Laughing, she erased with a hasty wave of her hand what she had just said. "Make that thirty-four Sutton Place."

Although she moved a month ago, after having waited a year-and-a-half for the renovations to be completed, Pamela still hadn't succeeded in programming her brain with her new address. "So much for your dominant male-side theory, my dear," she said with a smile in her voice. Pamela then fell back and returned to unwinding the reel from this morning and yesterday, searching for that single frame when she had been bitten and had begun to bite Sean.

Replaying those scenes over again, Pamela was struck by the recollection of the wind that had kicked up in the cemetery, chilling her to the core. In that fleeting moment, she realized that was when and where she had gone from feeling happy to see Sean and to be with him, sharing his memories, to feeling threatened by what had happened between him and another woman. *'That's it!'*

Reaching back still further, Pamela recalled the evening Sean had told her about the call he'd gotten from Elaine Anders, and about the book signing at the Blue Fields library. Though he hadn't actually said it, Pamela now realized she sensed that he really didn't want to go: it was as if he felt he had to, as if he had to settle an old score.

But with whom? For what? And she remembered what she she had forgotten, but now realized that she had buried, when later that evening Sean sat down and told her about Judith for the first time, recounting their brief and admittedly adolescent love affair. Pamela also realized Sean made it sound like a confession, as if he were responsible for what happened. Pamela was now convinced something must have happened that Sean didn't want to talk about. *Or he can't?*

"Good evening, Dr. Eagleston," the lanky doorman said as he reached into the cab and offered Pamela his hand.

Startled, losing her train of thought, Pamela shook her head, accepted the doorman's hand, pulled herself out of the cab, and dashed toward the polished brass

and shiny glass entrance; the glass panels bracketing the door etched with a three-dimensional art nouveau scene of swans in flight.

"Will you be needing a cab for dinner tonight or will you be dining in?"

"Neither, Tony," Pamela called back as she pulled the door open before he could get to it and darted into the lobby.

Stopping on a dime, Pamela turned and waited for Tony to catch up. "Have the garage bring my Mercedes around." She turned and made a bee-line for the stairs.

"Which one?" Tony called out, hurrying after her.

"The SL," Pamela shouted as she bounded up the sweeping stairway two steps at a time.

"And make sure the tank's full."

#

With her hands on her hips, wearing only panties and a bra --- bathrobes and peignoirs were not her 'style' --- Pamela stood in the center of her room-sized walk-in closet, trying to decide what to wear and what to bring with her. She glanced at her watch and told herself, *If you're lucky, even though it's Friday and traffic will be bumper to bumper, you should be able to get to the library before Sean leaves for home.*

"But only if you drive like a bat out of hell," she laughed and began grabbing anything that wouldn't wrinkle and tossing it into the square-cut canvas flight bag sitting on the floor. Jeans, a long-sleeve cashmere sweater, on the light side of navy blue, and a pair of old penny loafers fit the bill for what to wear now.

Reaching beneath a sea of silk and satin in her lingerie drawer, Pamela retrieved a packet of crisp one hundred dollar bills, still wrapped with a paper strip from the bank. Pulling out a thin layer of bills, she folded and slipped them into her back pocket and tucked the rest into her bag.

About to shut the drawer, she hesitated, then reached into the drawer and pulled out a revolver safely strapped into a leather shoulder holster, along with two spare clips.

Pamela hesitated and gave serious thought as to whether or not she should take a gun with her. One reason after another popped into her head, offering the usual sound and sensible advice. With a wave of her hand, she dispensed with them all,

tossed the gun into her bag, zippered it closed and shut the dresser drawer with a swing of her hip.

#

Chapter 5

Forgotten shadows reappeared
in the back of Sean's mind.

As the police officer climbed out of his cruiser, Sean, a cell phone in one hand, gesturing toward the inside of the cemetery with his other hand, called out, "Over there, inside the fence and off to the right. I didn't want to---"

The officer raised his hand, silencing Sean, and circled the Ferrari, his expression equal parts skepticism and envy.

"This yours?" he asked with a sideways glance.

The young man's dirty blond hair, slate blue eyes and square jaw sparked a distant memory for Sean. He glanced at the brass nameplate pinned to the flap of the officer's shirt pocket. "'Murphy? You aren't by any chance---? "

"I asked if this is your car," the officer repeated firmly.

"No," Sean replied without thinking. And with a goofy smile and shake of his head, quickly countered,

"I mean yes, sort of."

He couldn't help laughing at himself. "It was a gift."

Officer Murphy frowned. "'Gift?'"

You look just like your father, Sean thought and was about to tell him that, to try and smooth things over, but judging from the expression on the officer's face he decided that no matter what he said or how he said it, he would only be digging the hole he was standing in that much deeper.

Giving up, Sean slipped the title out of his pocket. As he handed it over, he was filled with apprehension and tried to remember whether or not Pamela had signed over the title. In an effort to reassure himself, he decided she was too organized not to have done it. But it didn't help. Sean hastily added,

"Call it a 'thanks-it's-been-fun-but-it's-over' present."

Murphy grinned. "She have a sister?"

They both laughed.

"Not that I know of. But I'll ask her the next time I see her. That's if I ever see her again," he added and flashed a smile in the hope Murphy couldn't see through his veiled bravado as the thought of what had happened this morning suddenly became a reality and not simply a bad dream.

Murphy began to lean against the side of the car, but quickly caught himself --- feigned brushing off the imaginary spot --- then unfolded the title and read it.

"So ... where do you live, Mr. MacDonald?"

Thankful for Pamela's thoroughness, knowing the officer wouldn't be asking that question if she hadn't written filled out the title, Sean replied with a sense of relief, "Red Hook. It's a small town on the Hudson, just---"

"East of Rhinebeck," Murphy interrupted. "Yes, I know." He handed the title back to Sean. "What brings you down state, Mr. MacDonald?"

Suddenly reminded of why he called 911, Sean asked bluntly, "Do you want to see what I found or not?" Ignoring Murphy's surprised look, he turned and started to walk toward the cemetery as he asked over his shoulder, "You coming?"

"You sleep with that?" Murphy asked.

"What?" Sean asked and turned back.

Murphy pointed to the cell phone. Looking down, realizing how relieved he was when he found the phone in the car and eagerly used it to call the police, Sean regretted what he said to Pamela earlier this morning and made a mental note to himself to apologize for what he'd said and done. *That's if you get the chance*, he thought as he walked back and dropped the phone on the passenger seat.

"Shall we?" he asked, gesturing toward the cemetery and following his own point. "At first I thought it was a prank, but I decided it was best not to take any chances---"

"You grew up with my father, didn't you?"

That question brought Sean to an abrupt halt, allowing Murphy to catch up. Murphy smiled, changing from the uniformed policeman he was into the spitting image of the young boy Sean had grown up with. "I recognized your name on the title."

A sense of having been toyed with flared up inside him, instantly pissing him off. "Then why the hell did you---?"

"Protocol," Murphy snapped. "Technically speaking, we're not supposed to *'assume'* anything." He stepped aside, inviting Sean to slip past him and into the cemetery. Sean opened the gate, stepped inside, and pointed off to the right. "There," he said and snaked his way through the headstones. Murphy followed, carefully stepping where Sean stepped, unseen by Sean, then slipped past him and immediately stopped and motioned with a backward sweep of his arm for Sean to stay back.

"Did you touch anything?" Murphy asked, his gaze raking the ground.

"I know the drill," Sean replied drolly as he drew his hands behind his back and stood staring down, re-examining the torn pieces of clothing strewn about on the ground: plaid wool skirt; hunter-green sweater; a bra that appeared to have been ripped off a woman's body; a pair of white cotton panties, torn and spotted with blood; and a solitary brown penny loafer.

Draped over a nearby headstone were the remnants of a lavender silk blouse. A few steps away was a purse, the other shoe, and a small note pad, the pages ripped out and scattered all about.

Without comment, Murphy withdrew a plastic bag from his back pocket, extracted a pair of surgical gloves from the other pocket and squatted down. Taking care not to disturb the lie of the brown leather pocketbook, Murphy lifted the flap, fished around inside, and came up with a wallet. Standing, he fingered it open and fanned the plastic sleeves until he found what he was looking for.

"Shit ... it's times like this that I hate my job."

Leaving the wallet unfolded, he carefully tucked it into the plastic bag, then zipped the bag shut and handed it to Sean as if he didn't want any part of it.

"Know her?" he asked quietly as he turned toward the entrance and motioned with a wave of his hand for Sean to follow him. "And stay in my footsteps, okay?"

Immediately upon seeing the photo on the driver's license, Sean took a step back, as if he had been pushed. Though it had been dark last night and the photo was anything but flattering, the long black hair, high cheekbones and wide-set eyes were a match for the woman at the reservoir. In that instant of recognition, Sean regretted having come back to Blue Fields as he turned to follow Peter Murphy, unaware of the

leaves that began tumbling after him, driven by a sudden gust of wind that blew itself out the moment he darted through the gate and pulled it shut behind him.

"You need me for anything or can I go?" he asked as he handed Murphy the bagged wallet. "I've got a book signing to get to at the library tonight, and I want to---"

"All I need is your statement, Mr. MacDonald. It won't take long. But first I have to call the station and have them contact the county, to send the forensics unit here." He turned toward his car. "Gimme a minute or two, okay?"

Sean replied affably, "No problem," as he leaned up against the fence and was instantly caught up in a swirl of wind that held him prisoner. Adrenalin suddenly coursed through his body, but the urge to flee was drained away just as quickly by the sound of a whisper soft, 'Shhh' as the scent of Shalimar filled the air around him.

Forgotten shadows suddenly reappeared in the back of his mind, but too dark and distant to make out. Shaking his head, Sean thought, *It's nothing more than your overactive imagination*, recalling what Pamela had said to him as she gave him a peck on the cheek, before climbing into the back seat of the Rolls.

The moment the thought of Pamela filled his mind, setting him at ease, the air around him turned cold, damp and stale with decay, sending an uncontrollable and unwanted shiver throughout his body.

"You okay?" Murphy asked as he walked up and stood in front of Sean, no more than an arm's length away. "You look like---"

Murphy stopped, head cocked to one side, as if he were trying to hear something or someone. "What's that smell," he asked, glancing past Sean and peering into the cemetery. "You don't think---?"

"She's not in there," Sean said without thinking.

Murphy stiffened, suspicious. "How can be so sure?"

About to explain, to tell Murphy what he and Pamela had seen last night, what he felt, and what he feared might be the truth, which prompted him to feel the soreness in his arm, to check for the umpteenth time to see if it were really true, Sean thought of Pamela's advice about '*fact versus fiction*' and his '*overactive imagination*'. Instead, he simply shrugged his shoulders in response to Murphy's expectant gaze.

Chapter 6

Welcome Home, Stranger!

Once a thriving tavern along the north-south highway during colonial times, and laying fair and legitimate claim to hosting General Washington more than once during the War of Independence, the Blue Fields library had also served as a general store, a private residence and when Sean was growing up the local 'one-man' post office.

Sean had driven past the library twice: first heading south on Western Highway, then on his return, unaware of the renovations and addition made to the old library. Easily twice the size of the original building and instead of sandstone block, the addition was wrapped in ivory-white aluminum clapboard siding and topped with a make-believe cedar-shake roof. Not even the rain, a solid curtain of water falling straight down, could hide the jarring break from the past.

Sean pulled into the parking lot and into a water-filled pothole deep enough to start the fan belt squealing and the brakes slipping. With one foot on the clutch the other on the gas pedal, alternately feathering the pedals, he began driving in circles. Though it was already ten to seven, there were only two cars in the lot, which reawakened in him the ever-present fear that no one would show up.

Over the last five years, Sean experienced everything from having no one show up, thanks to a conflict with Little League games, fifty people cued up at a mall bookstore, the line slithering out into the food court, to being confronted by a group of feminists who were outraged by his portrayal of women as the 'devil incarnate' and became downright ugly, when he reminded them that some species devoured their male partner after mating.

The crackle of lightning followed by deafening claps of thunder so close he could feel them, sparked a primitive 'fight or flight' urge in Sean, with retreat gaining favor.

"Grow up," he told himself and headed for a parking spot at the far opposite end of the parking lot.

#

The air inside the library addition smelled of saw dust, fresh paint and the faint scent of a strong commercial cleaner. Sean was immediately struck by how large the

main room was, until he realized that many of the shelves were yet to be installed and those that were standing were only partially filled with books. After sending out a spray of water with a shake of his head, Sean approached the young woman standing behind the check-out counter and asked with a cheerful smile, "Ms. Anders, please. I'm---"

Sean stopped mid-sentence, when the girl's twilight-gray eyes grew wide and her face turned pale, a ghoulish compliment to her straight, waist-length ebony hair.

"You don't know?" she asked.

"Let me guess. Either the signing's tomorrow night and I'm a day early or it was yesterday and I'm a day late. Right?"

The young woman appeared to be at a loss for words.

"Patty?" an older woman asked as she appeared in the doorway of the office directly behind the desk. "Would you be a dear and get...?"

She came to an abrupt halt, a startled look on her face, which was quickly replaced with a soft warm smile.

"Welcome home, stranger."

Without waiting for Sean to respond, Annette Parker stepped around the desk and gave him a gentle lingering kiss on the cheek. Though her long red hair was now tarnished with silver, her green eyes not as bright as he remembered them to be, Annie was still the girl he remembered. Just seeing her made him smile, the same way it had whenever she walked into class, fresh and clean and covered with freckles, which were now nowhere to be found.

"I can't believe it, Annie, you look as lovely as you..."

Annie pressed her finger to Sean's lips, silencing him, and said with a sigh, "I apologize for the turnout. I'm afraid half the town, the half that reads, is at the wake."

"Must be someone really important," Sean noted, hiding his mix of relief and disappointment behind a mask of respectful solemnity.

Annie's expression darkened. "You don't know?"

Sean replied with a grimace and shrug of his shoulders.

Annie said with quiet reverence, "It's Elaine Anders."

"What!" Sean responded in disbelief. "When? How?"

Annie took Sean's hand and led him toward a table stacked with copies of his book. Pushed up against the wall behind it was a row of aluminum folding tables covered with paper table cloths and set with a punch bowl holding an almost melted chunk of ice and surrounded by a small army of upside-down plastic cups, paper plates, napkins and trays filled with bite-sized pastries.

Sitting him down at the table of books, Annie pulled up a chair beside him, took a breath and sighed, "Elaine had been missing for a few weeks. As a matter of fact, she disappeared shortly after she successfully talked you into a book signing." Annie blinked and turned away, as if she were trying to avoid Sean's inquisitive gaze: her signature pose, forever etched into Sean's memory after the first time they made love.

"I was going to call you, but I guess I didn't..."

"Do they know what the cause of death was?" Sean asked and immediately wished he hadn't, when Annie stiffened. "I'm sorry," he said softly. "I wasn't thinking."

Annie blinked away her frown. "So ... how's the book doing?" she asked. "Make the best-sellers list yet?" She picked up a copy of *Dead Love* and fanned the pages. "It's strange reading a book written by someone you once---" She blushed and smiled. "I've read every one of your books. Even the first one which, just between two old friends, was a real..." She appeared unsure of herself.

Sean smiled. "A 'real struggle' to read?"

Annie nodded, her gentle laugh instantly infecting Sean. He reached out and took her hand. A sudden roll of thunder overhead startled them both into laughing like two teenagers instead of the thirty-something adults they were. When they sighed and leaned against each other, the scent of Annie's hair and her sweet breath called up memories Sean thought he had neatly wrapped up and put safely away.

In that instant, he wanted everything to be as he remembered it, even though the memories had been edited and rewritten by time. Before he could go down a path he knew he shouldn't, Sean sat up, eased back, and asked, "How's John?"

Annie began to absentmindedly pick at the lint on her black wool skirt. She then spoke without the slightest hint of emotion, "He divorced me ten years ago and took a trophy wife. That's when I went back to school and got my MLS. So, here I am, Annette Parker, town librarian, town historian, fat, sliding toward forty and single."

Annie gave Sean a tender kiss on the cheek and stood up.

"Sign a book for an old friend?" she asked.

It was over for Sean as fast as it had begun: that tenuous bridge to the past had been crossed, contact made, followed by a hasty and reluctant retreat. Sean wasn't sure whether he felt sad or relieved, which only added to his sense of melancholy as he reluctantly released his hold of Annie's hand and picked up the pen lying on the table.

He didn't need to think about what to say or how to say it, he quickly wrote, *You are as beautiful as I remember you and you still make me smile when I see you*. About to sign his name, Sean paused, then wrote with ease, *All my love, Sean*. Turning to the title page, Sean signed his full name with a flourish, which immediately drew a chuckle from Annie and the wry comment, "That signature of yours certainly has changed."

Annie took the book from Sean and wrapped her arms around it, the same way she did when she carried her books home in high school. "I'm sure folks will straggle in after the wake," she said reassuringly. "Even in this hellish rain."

No sooner had she said that, then the front doors creaked open and a woman slipped inside, head bowed, gaze cast aside. Soaking wet head to toe, she looked like she'd been walking in the rain for hours, not dashing from her car to the front door.

"See!" Annie said and started toward her office, leaving Sean alone with his thoughts, a place he didn't want to be.

To his relief, more and more people began arriving: mostly women alone and a few with men in tow, who looked like reluctant little boys being dragged into the library by their surrogate teachers.

As the crowd grew, one-by-one a woman marched up and welcomed Sean to Blue Fields. Their varied smiles told as many different stories of a dead friend as did the worry on their faces, the wrinkles silently revealing the fear they felt for their own safety but didn't dare speak of it.

Sean had fight his urge to ask how Elaine Anders had died. He hoped someone would ask him if he had known her, so he could say no and ask what had happened to her before they could slip away. But no one did, though he was certain he heard them talking about her, backs turned, voices hushed, carving him out their lives.

Sean felt like a stranger, a drifter, in the town he had known before any of them, his memories little more than the dirt beneath their feet.

As he smiled politely and asked each of them for their first name, then quickly penned cryptic notes as if he knew each of them personally, Sean found himself replaying over and over again his conversation with Elaine Anders. In particular the abrupt change in the tone and tenor of her voice, after he declined her request for a book signing for the third time.

One moment, he was listening to a stranger, the next moment he was certain he heard Judith speaking: faint, distant, but still Judith's distinct voice, calling up memories of her stern manner of speaking: a grown woman, not a young girl.

"Welcome home, Sean," a woman whispered in a rasping voice.

Those three words, soft-spoken, frail, but nonetheless clear, had a definitely familiar ring to them, lyrical and in perfect harmony, scattering his thoughts. When Sean glanced up, he found himself staring into the hollow gaze of the woman who was the first to enter the library. Her clothes were soaking wet, her skirt spattered with mud, her black hair tangled, knotted and plastered to her head and neck.

"Why did you leave me?" she asked and started coughing.

Confused, his thoughts not his own, Sean broke free of her mesmerizing gaze and glanced down, intent upon writing a brief note and being done with her.

"What would you like me to...?"

"Hello, sweetheart," was followed by the familiar touch of a hand on his shoulder and a gentle lingering kiss on the top of his head. Sean spun around to find Pamela standing behind him, her finger pressed to her lips. Reaching out, she caressed his cheek with the back of her hand as she mouthed, *I love you*, then gestured with a subtle nod of her head for him to turn around.

When he did, expecting to find that woman waiting for him, she was gone, her place in line taken by another woman. Nattily dressed, with a round Slavic face, her small brown eyes were framed by a pair of gold wired-rimmed glasses.

Handing Sean a book, she said with a perplexed frown on her face, "That woman who was ahead of me, wrote something in here, handed me the book, and walked away." She turned and gestured toward the doors, which were just easing shut.

When Sean glanced down, he discovered a note smudged onto the page with a wet muddy finger that read, You promised you would always love me.

"Shit!" Sean whispered under his breath.

"What is it?" Pamela asked and leaned over his shoulder to see what he was staring at. "This is more than just a prank," she said in an angry tone of voice, as she lifted the book out of Sean's hand and cautiously brushed her finger through the words, partially smearing the letters, as if testing for something.

Pamela closed the book and said with unquestioned authority, "I think we should head back to the City tonight and get as far away from whoever it is who's playing this sick game, before you..."

"No," Sean interrupted, followed by a subtle but firm shake of his head.

Confused, and somewhat irritated, Pamela asked, "Why not?"

Sean replied in a soft but nonetheless firm voice, "I've been running for twenty years. I want to find out who, or 'what', I'm running from, why, and end it. Now."

#

Chapter 7

New York State Police - Underwater Recovery Unit
"We got her!" Peter Murphy shouted.

Last night's drenching downpour had given way to a brilliant October sunrise, crystal clear skies washed with blue and leaving behind a crisp refreshing chill in the air. The relentless rain had also stripped many of the leaves off the trees surrounding the reservoir, cooling but not quenching autumn's fiery flames.

When Peter Murphy waved his hand over his head, Sean hurled a stone the size of a golf ball into the water. It splashed some fifty feet beyond the shore and to the left an equal distance to the right of the scuba diver in waist-deep water. Clad in an orange wet suit, the barrel-chested man was tethered to a nylon line that sank beneath the surface and reappeared on the shore tied around the waist of his burley partner.

Parked nearby was a panel truck, the rear doors thrown open, both sides of the van lettered with the words New York State Police - Underwater Recovery Unit.

Gathered nearby, arms folded and talking quietly amongst themselves, was a trio of uniformed state troopers. At the water's edge, sitting atop an aluminum suitcase turned on end, was a bespeckled man in his fifties, chunky, balding, and fighting to stay awake. He was wearing full-leg waders, a shirt and tie, and a black nylon windbreaker with the words NYS Medical Examiner stenciled in iridescent white on his back.

Pamela snuggled close to Sean, who was holding a cup of steaming hot coffee in both hands. "Are you certain the woman we saw is the same one in the license photo in the wallet they found in the cemetery?"

Sean simply nodded and remained silent.

"I can understand why you decided to tell them what we saw here, but did you have to tell them we were swimming 'bare-assed' as you put it. They must think we're crazy."

Speaking only loud enough for the two of them to hear, while keeping his gaze fixed on the divers, Sean said in a calm emotionless voice, "I really don't care anymore what anyone 'thinks' about me. As I told you last night, I'm tired of running away from everything. I've been doing it all my life. And that includes refusing to accept reality, or

the 'truth' as you put and have been trying for the last two years to get me to 'live in the real world' and stop living --- 'hiding' --- in the fictional world I create in my stories."

Judging from her silence and subtle nod, it was apparent Pamela agreed. After an awkward silence, she asked, "Did they want to know why you didn't go in after her?"

"Yup."

"What did you tell them?"

"I asked them if they were with their wife, fiancé' or girlfriend, and swimming" -- Sean hesitated, smiled, and affectionately nudged Pamela with his shoulder --- "'*au naturel*', would they chase after some naked woman who suddenly appeared out of nowhere, made a pass at them, and dove into the water." He shook his head. "It's a no-brainer, they would have done exactly what we did, which was get the hell out of here."

"And they said?"

"Nothing."

Pamela stood nursing her coffee, her gaze drifting off into the distance. "Is there anyone you can think of who could have known about...?" she hesitated "...did anyone besides you know about the grave marker and that you put it there? One of your buddies, someone who might have seen you putting it there, the pastor of the church?"

Sean had asked himself these same questions last night, and at least a dozen others, as he lay awake beside Pamela, playing everything back in his mind. "There's only one person who knew about Judith and me, and that's---" he shook his head "--- no, Annie and I were best friends, still are, she would never have---"

"You and the librarian?" Pamela laughed. "You're kidding?"

"Sweetheart, she's just..."

"Beautiful! And she couldn't take those emerald-green eyes of hers off you all night. Are you blind? You're single, successful, and in great shape. Any woman..." Pamela held up her hand "...whoa, Eagleston, hold it right there." She turned to Sean and gave him a gentle shove. "Why am I only like this here?"

"I don't have a clue. But you're not alone." Sean slipped his arm around Pamela, pulled her close and gave her a tender kiss on her cheek. "But whatever it is, I intend to stay and find out what's going on." He half-laughed. "Maybe there's a story in it!"

"Stay'?" Pamela asked quizzically. "As in not go back to New York?"

Sean nodded. "Wanna take a little vacation and stay here with me?"

Pamela snuggled closer. "Love to."

"Really? You're kidding, right? Don't you have all sorts of problems at the museum that you have to take care of?"

"Nope!" Pamela quipped. "I cleared the decks and packed my bags. If I need more clothes, I'll have John drive them up to me. You're stuck with me, mister."

Before Sean could say anything, Pamela asked in a more serious vein, a frown wrinkling her forehead, "That woman who came into the library last night, the one who wrote that bizarre note in the book and vanished, did you tell the police about...?"

"We got her!" Peter Murphy shouted.

#

Walking a few steps behind the waitress, who was garbed in colonial dress except for her running shoes, Sean and Pamela ducked beneath another rough-sawn beam in the dimly lit dining room of the '76 House and came to a stop beside a small wooden table set near a massive fieldstone hearth ablaze with a crackling fire. After setting the menus on the table, the woman stuck her hands into the pockets of her apron and shook her head. "Oops, forgot my pad," she muttered scurried away.

Sean pulled out one of the reproduction ladder-back chairs for Pamela. She glanced up at the low-slung ceiling and down at the wood-planked floor, jiggled the rickety-looking table and asked with a playful smile, "Is this place safe?"

Sean laughed. "Not if you're a traitor."

"Traitor'?" Pamela asked and sat down. "Care to explain?"

Sean sat across from her and began humming, as if he were playing a dirge, while drumming his fingers on the table. "This is where Major Andre was tried for treason during the Revolutionary War. And he was hung not far from here, on what's now known as Andre's Hill. I presume that Dr. Eagleston knows who Major Andre was?"

Pamela replied with a gracious nod, adding, "She also knows of his accomplice, Benedict Arnold, who got away scot-free and never paid for his crime. Unless you call living in London on a pension from the Crown, an outcast even there since London society never trusted him because of what he'd done. Ironical, don't you think?"

The waitress breezed up, pad in one hand, pencil in the other. "You folks having dinner or just drinks?" She squinted at her watch. "If you want to eat, you better decide what you want now. The kitchen closes in fifteen minutes."

Pamela raised her hand. "I want a drink first. Double Chivas on the rocks."

Pamela's passion for scotch equaled her love of fine wine, both of which she could hold better than any man Sean had known, and he was no exception to that rule. By his own admission, he was a cheap date since two Tanqueray martinis were his limit. After that, he would progressively lose all inhibitions with each sip.

"And you, sir?" the waitress asked as she began to work at retying her linen apron around her ankle-length skirt.

Pamela answered for him. "The 'gentlemen' will have a double Tanqueray martini on the rocks with extra olives."

Sean reached out, placing his hand on Pamela's, and turned to the waitress. "Hold the drinks. Instead, bring us a bottle of wine. A red burgundy, nothing too young. And set aside a second bottle of the same vineyard and vintage."

Pamela propped her elbows on the table and rested her chin in her open hands.

"Care to tell me who's going to drive?"

Sean glanced up at the ceiling, then back into her expectant gaze. "We don't have to drive anywhere if we don't want to. We just have to be able make it up the stairs and stumble into one of the rooms they 'secretly' rent, but only to dinner guests."

A sly smile spread across Pamela's face. "Why not skip dinner." She feigned looking at her watch. "When did you say your friend Murphy was going to be here?"

"Friend?" Sean asked reticently. "'Officer' Murphy, the son of an old friend of mine, said he would be here right after he gets off duty. Hopefully, he'll know more about the autopsy and---"

"Howdy!" Peter Murphy announced on a cheery note as he marched up and ceremoniously dropped a thick manila envelope onto the table in front of Pamela.

"Want some company? I'm starving."

#

Chapter 8

Hair, tissue samples and vaginal fluids
have been sent for analysis.

It only took Pamela one bump of her head on the pitched ceiling in the tiny bathroom to remind her that at six foot she stood head and shoulders above the average colonial woman, and easily half-a-foot taller than most men of that time. With an appreciative smile, Pamela dropped her towel over the wicker stool beside the huge claw-footed tub.

Reminded of how playful Sean had been before he hopped out of bed and went out running --- which surprised her given the amount of wine he'd had last night --- Pamela wasn't about to take any chances: she carefully buried her cell phone inside the plush folds of the towel, set the manila envelope containing the autopsy report on top, and gingerly eased herself down into the steaming hot bubble bath.

A good soak was Pamela's tried and true remedy for a hangover, in spite of the fact that her headache always got worse just before it got better. She was convinced that her prescription for a hangover was far more civilized than running five miles the morning after, which Sean claimed sweated everything out of him.

Pamela laughed, "Must be a guy thing," and slid down until only her neck, head and knees were above the water. A bath, and the hotter the better, was one of Pamela's few stereotypical female traits.

As for Sean, there were few things he disliked more than taking a bath, which he likened to soaking in his own dirt. Whereas Pamela was methodical and analytical, Sean relied on his intuition. She was assertive to the point of being confrontational. Sean tended to be circumspect, but certainly not passive. And Pamela had a head for numbers, which Sean did not and he didn't seem to care about it either.

Pamela smiled, when she realized that looking at their relationship this way was by its very nature more male than female. All of this said, however, she had come to accept the fact that they were a perfect match. Most important was that she knew Sean truly loved her. And equally important was the fact that he accepted her for who and what she was, without trying to change her. Unlike the other men in her life, who were

determined to tell her what to think, what to say, even what to wear. Where Sean was an early bird, up at four to write and in bed by nine that night, Pamela was a night owl, staying up until long after midnight, reading, then dragging herself out of bed late the next morning; and absent any meeting commitments, often sleeping until noon.

"Maybe we're getting old," Pamela laughed and plucked up the manila envelope with a pinch of her wet fingers.

Although she listened attentively to everything Peter Murphy had to say, the wine had taken its toll on her memory and she wanted to be absolutely certain she hadn't missed anything. Pamela began reading the report, slowly, looking for any contradictions to what Peter had said about Jean Gleason, great granddaughter of Jonas Blauvelt, the man whose grave her clothes had been scattered around. Who the ME thought had been dead for some as yet to be determined period of time; but had 'unquestionably expired' long before witnesses claimed to have seen her alive.

"Wait a second?"

Pamela placed a soapy-wet finger on one entry and raced through through it, whispering the the words aloud "*--- found evidence of damage to the cardiac tissue and the lungs similar to that caused by direct contact with something such as dry ice. There was, however, no evidence of frost bite or freeze burn of the lips, mouth or esophagus. Biopsies are being sent to the lab for analysis, along with blood and lymphatic tissue for a complete tox screen. Based on the the bruising of the lower abdomen and legs, and trauma to the genitalia, smears were taken to test for semen.*"

Tossing the autopsy report onto the floor, Pamela fished the cell-phone out of its hiding place and tapped a few keys, calling up a number from the programmed memory.

After a single impatient nod of her head, she said in a formal business-like voice, "This is Dr. Eagleston. I want to speak with Charles Andrews."

She sighed, "Is he with a client?"

Pamela shook her head. "Interrupt him."

"Charles? Pamela. Sorry to break in on your partners' meeting, but I need you to take care of a few things for me."

She paused, listening with her eyes, however her frown said she didn't give a twit what her attorney had to say.

"Get hold of that friend of yours in Albany, that big-name forensic pathologist you were telling me about, and ... hold on a second." Reaching out, Pamela blindly patted the floor and came up with the autopsy report. "I want him to perform a second autopsy on a Jean Gleason, case number '*are, see, nine, nine, four, seven, two, zero*'."

Pamela paused to listen. "There's a good possibility it'll be ruled a homicide by the local M.E."

Pamela sat up, then slid back down out of a false sense of modesty, which brought a smile to her face. "Wait! I also want your criminal law guru to familiarize himself with every detail of this case he can dig up. And pronto. Sean and I could be suspects here, and I want to be prepared should---" Pamela shook her head "----just do what I asked." She nodded. "Thank you. Now, when you---"

"Pamela Jean Eagleston!" Sean called out and could be heard scratching on the bathroom door. "Are you in there and on a cell-phone?"

Pamela replied innocently, "Cell-phone? *Me?*"

At the sound of the door knob turning, Pamela slipped the phone into the folds of the towel and flashed a broad innocent smile at Sean, when he peeked into the bathroom. "Just talking to myself." She grinned. "Comes from being around you." She tossed a handful of soapsuds at him. "Go. Shoo! I'll be out in a minute or two."

With a mischievous smirk on his face, Sean stepped onto the bath mat and squirmed out of his sweat-soaked t-shirt. He then bent down to untie his running shoes.

"I think I'll join you."

"Like hell you will! You're sweaty, smelly and yucky."

Seeing he was serious, Pamela stood stepped out of the tub, dripping with bubbles. Sean's smirk grew into a lecherous smile. When she scooped up the towel, the suds-covered cell-phone fell out and slid across the ceramic tiled floor.

Sean frowned and folded his arms over his chest.

More upset with herself for getting caught than she was angry with Sean, Pamela spit out, "Wait! I only called---!"

"Your attorney. I know. I heard." He scowled. "Everything."

Pamela reached out. Sean pulled back and said with disappointment, "I know you think I'm naive when it comes to people and their motives. But I prefer to think I'm curious and simply more tolerant than you are. But one thing I am not is 'stupid'."

Upset with herself, Pamela said in a contrite voice, "No, sweetheart, you are definitely 'not' stupid. I suppose curious is really what you are. Though at times, I can't help thinking your curiosity gets out of hand. Remember, curiosity killed the cat."

Sean scooped up the phone, wiped off the suds and handed it to Pamela.

"Here. Finish what you were doing. I'm going out."

Sean turned and walked out into the bedroom, heading for the door.

"Wait! You'll catch your death of a cold if you go out like that. At least take a shower and cool down."

"We cats have nine lives, remember?"

Pamela called out, "And which one are you on now? Have you kept count?"

Sean laughed, affectionately. "You count for me. You're better at that than I am."

#

Chapter 9

"Don't you want me?" she whispered, her breath the rancid smell of decaying flesh.

The small private courtyard behind the '76 House was cloaked in privacy by a stockade fence, giving a new meaning to the clandestine expression *piéd a' terre*.

The early morning sun, struggling to urn away the fog, cast half the courtyard in warm, hazy sunlight, the other half in a cool shade. Overgrown flower beds were filled with dying blue and white petunias and clusters of yellow marigolds were surrounded by a kaleidoscope of hardy blue asters and orange chrysanthemums standing at attention against the fence, immune to autumn's early frost. Snaking through the grass in need of cutting was a black rubber garden hose.

Sean turned full circle, visually inspecting the fence for breaks. He then double-checked the gate, to make sure he latched it shut behind him. With a reassuring nod, he bent down, untied his running shoes and kicked them off.

After a second look around, though he was anything but shy, Sean peeled off his sweat-soaked shorts and tossed them onto a white wrought iron bench speckled with spots of rust. He then followed the hose to the nozzle, twisted it open, and waited for the water to run clean and cold.

You're wired backwards, Pamela told him the first time they took a shower together, and instead of shrinking from the cold as most men do, he was aroused, tumescent, but not erect. And now was no exception to that rule as he stood in the cool, October morning air, the cold water cascading down over his body, enjoying the illicit sensation of being outdoors and naked in broad daylight.

Although he was lost in his own pleasure, Sean was not deaf to the sounds of the gate behind him slowly creaking open, then just as quietly being closed and latched shut. The soft metallic scuff of metal on metal told him the lock was being slide shut.

Happy that Pamela had followed him, he listened for her footsteps, which were muffled by the ankle-deep grass. He held his breath, when he heard her hesitate, the faint rustle of clothing rising above the gentle whisper of the wind. He was barely able to contain himself as images of her undressing and naked behind him hardened his

desire. Though he anticipated her touch, he still jumped when he felt her fingers, her hands, brushing over his back. "Your hands are cold, why don't you put them....."

"Shhhhhhhhh," is all she said, silencing him.

In one breath, he wanted to be in her, now, yet in the next breath, he wanted the anticipation, the rapidly rising pulsating excitement to last forever. He began to turn around. She held his head in her hands, as if to tell him not to look. He gave in to her fantasy as she leaned against him, her breasts, as cool as her hands, pressing into him, her body becoming one with his as she wrapped her arms around him and held tight.

Sean felt her cold hand slowly move down and take hold of him, toying with him as she bit the back of his neck, his shoulder, hungrily licking each bloodless wound. He tried again to turn and face her, but she held firm.

"I want you," he moaned, his heart pounding harder and harder.

Her hands, mouth, tongue and her teeth revealed an animal-like hunger he had never known her to have. He shut his eyes, imagining her over him, sliding down, her warm, moist flesh slowly devouring him inch by inch. In his mind, he reached out, drawing her down to him, telling her.....

Sean suddenly stiffened and arched his back, his chest a cavern of ice, his heart burning with bitter cold. The smell of damp earth dripped down into his lungs, gagging him. Every point of contact where fingers, lips, tongue and teeth had touched his skin now burned, as if acid had been poured into open wounds.

"Forget her," he heard a woman say in a hoarse half-growl half-whisper, the voice not Pamela's but an echo from the past. Fight or flight charged his body with a million volts of energy. He awoke, only to stumble backward in horror at what he saw.

Standing before him in a puddle of crumpled clothing was the woman who had slipped in and out of the library. Naked, her skin was dirty and pallid and mottled with bruises and open sores. Her hair was a tangle of gritty oily knots, her lips gray, cracked, her face gaunt, lifeless, except for her eyes, which he couldn't resist, her gaze reaching deep, down inside him and taking hold of his heart, his very soul.

"Who the hell---?"

Sean was silenced against his will, when she raised her hand.

Unable to move, he could only watch in fear as she stepped forward.

Don't you know? she asked, her breath the rancid smell of decaying meat.
Gagging, Sean asked, "What do you want?"

As she reached out and brushed her hand over his chest ... the tips of her gnarled fingers igniting a forgotten fire inside him ... she was struck by beams of sunlight punching holes through the wall of fog, snuffing out the light in her eyes.

With a faint cry, equal parts anger, sorrow and pain, she turned and stumbled toward the gate, struggled to pull it open, and disappeared into the retreating fog.

#

Chapter 10

The discovery of the body confirmed that what they saw was not a 'hallucination'.

Much to her dismay Pamela was wide awake, while Sean was lying beside her sound asleep. Half sitting up, not a stitch of clothes on, Pamela had one hand behind her head, the other resting lightly on Sean's chest. Although they had been together for just over two years, Pamela still found the unusually slow beat of his heart when he was asleep --- often dropping to 45 beats --- unnerving, in spite of Sean's assurance, said with a note of bravado, that it was simply the resting heart rate of a conditioned athlete.

In the beginning, after they had exhausted each other making love and were drifting off to sleep, Pamela became alarmed when she felt Sean's heart steadily beating slower and slower. Frightened, shaking him, getting no response, she straddled him and began CPR, when Sean woke up and asked, still half asleep, '*Weren't you pleased?*' Even now the thought of his confused look and what he said made her smile.

That fond memory lasted for as long as it took Pamela to remember why she was having trouble falling asleep. She brought her hand to her face, and while the rancid odor was gone, scrubbed away, the memory of the smell from the blouse she picked up off the ground in the courtyard --- defying Sean's warning --- still lingered in her mind. In response to her request of him --- which gave him only one option, the truth --- Sean proceeded to restore what he had cut, clipped and edited from everything he told her.

With each passage rewritten, pasting a withheld memory here, untold sensation there, adding back closely guarded thoughts, Pamela was finally able to understand and appreciate why Sean had been acting the way he was. And his comment at the library, that he was tired of running, said as if he were talking to only himself, but wasn't, finally made sense.

But no matter how much she now understood, Pamela still wasn't able to buy into his belief --- and what she now realized was his fear --- that Judith was somehow

alive. And as much as she loved him, she simply couldn't help wondering if he was losing touch with reality, unable to separate fact from fiction.

One thing Sean hadn't told her, even though she asked and more than once, was what happened between him and Judith to end their relationship. She persisted in questioning Sean --- 'interrogating me' as he had put it --- because she refused to accept his explanation that Judith had simply '*disappeared*' one night after they made love.

Pamela's persistence was driven by her conviction that Judith was not driven by love for Sean, but raw sex. When she confronted Sean with her opinion, 'Speaking as a woman', he sheepishly admitted that he didn't know the difference back then.

Pamela whispered under her breath, "You bitch."

Her love for Sean and admitted possessiveness aside, Pamela had to have a rational fact-based explanation; and not only for what Sean claimed happened earlier this morning but for everything. Especially Judith's yet-to-be explained '*magical disappearance*' as she called it. Until she had these answers, backed up with hard evidence, Sean's explanation would, for Pamela, remain a product of his imagination.

Tipping the scale in Sean's favor was the fact that Pamela knew that she was unable to simply write off what she had seen when they were swimming: there was a woman there; she heard her speak to Sean; and she was witness to his obviously aroused response when she touched him. Though she had not told Sean any of this.

The discovery of the body confirmed what they saw was not a 'hallucination', as Peter Murphy had suggested, even though the findings in the autopsy report made it sound as if she and Sean had fabricated their story, as if they were trying to cover up something. What bothered Pamela the most was the unseen venomous bite of jealousy, and not being able to stop it from poisoning her thoughts and actions.

Angered by what had come between them, Pamela decided to retrace the steps she and Sean had taken --- beginning with what happened at the cemetery --- in an effort to find something, hard evidence, however questionable, that would offer a rational explanation and not a dozen hypothetical possibilities for what Sean thought was happening. Yet at the same time, Pamela hoped nothing could be found and in turn convince Sean to leave Blue Fields.

Chapter 11

Silhouetted against the moonless star-lit sky
was the body a man, half-naked, mutilated.

Turning off the engine, Pamela sat quietly for a moment in her Mercedes, gathering her thoughts. Always the organizer, she wanted to be certain she had not forgotten anything in the note she pinned to her pillow for Sean to read when he awoke. She told him she was taking the car, offered her apologies if it left him stranded, and told him where she was going.

Pamela also listed her intended stops, in order: canvas the area around the reservoir, to see if she could find some sign of that woman, something a man might have missed; stop at the cemetery, where it all began, not knowing what she was looking for; and talk with Annette Parker, to see if she had known the woman who wrote that bizarre cryptic note to Sean.

Pamela even tried guessing when she might return, allowing for an extra half-hour in case she got lost.

While she told Sean where she was doing, and in what order, she did not say why. For no matter how she tried phrasing it, it sounded like she didn't believe what he said.

"Well, PJ, let's get on with it," Pamela told herself and climbed out of the SL and stood facing the cemetery, which was beginning to turn from gray to black in the rapidly fading autumn twilight. The same waning light that convinced her to cut short her walk around the reservoir, fearful she wouldn't have enough light left to read the headstones in her effort to uncover a connection, something, anything, between the women who were now dead.

And with Annie's help, to see if there might also be a link to that woman in the library. For although she had repeatedly told herself Sean must have overlooked it, or simply forgot to mention it to her, Pamela couldn't help wondering if there wasn't something about all of these women he didn't want her to know.

She laughed to herself, "Or could not have recognized as a young boy." She quickly chastised herself. "Be kind, most grown men are blind as bats when it comes to

understanding us." Pamela just as quickly shook off that thought, too, not wanting any part of that divisive and equally destructive feeling. "It has to be her," she told herself.

With each step closer to the rusted wrought iron gate, Pamela felt herself growing angrier with Sean for not having told her what he thought from the very start. What upset her the most, was that he hadn't told her what he felt, and not about what was happening but his fear about his feelings for Judith. She couldn't help wondering if he really still loved her, and quickly asked herself if there were other things he wasn't telling her: thoughts and feelings he didn't want her to know, or didn't trust her with.

"Stop this!" she snapped and drew to an abrupt halt, her hand held out, about to unlatch and push open the gate.

Indecision was not Pamela's style, which only made her irritation with Sean that much sharper. When she tried to sort out her thoughts, she was confronted with one unwanted feeling after another, leaving each question unanswered.

The sound of laughter echoed in the back of her mind as images of Sean --- standing naked in the water, unaware that he had responded to the touch of that woman --- filled her head and fueled her jealousy. The more she fought these thoughts, the sharper they became, their razored edge cutting her with each attempt she made to pull herself free of them.

Pamela angrily, impatiently, unlatched and threw open the rusted iron gate, which protested loudly. As she stepped inside, silence filled the air, which was damp, heavy and dead calm. She could feel every vaporous molecule pressing against her, weighing her down, but not slowing her move forward. Not a whisper of wind was to be heard. Nor was anything moving: not a blade of grass; not even a single dried leaf on the ground. Yet outside, all around her, trees were bending and yielding and snapping back, but in slow motion, their branches flailing in silent protest.

Pamela struggled to focus as she began reading the headstones, repeating the names aloud. She did it as much to imprint them in her mind as to hear the sound of her own voice. As she spoke, her words were swallowed up by the leaden silence. Even the sound of her footsteps were devoured by the void as she moved from grave to grave, slowly weaving her way back and forth through the cemetery. The more she

tried, the less able she was to remember anything she read, her thoughts eluding her like the ebb of a midnight tide slipping out to sea, cloaked by the dark of a new moon.

Upon exiting the final row of graves the air turned wintery cold as her breath began to condense into a cloud of white in the rising dark of night. She abruptly stopped, when she saw that the ground had been raked clean, a chalky white rectangle hastily dusted onto the wilted grass.

Nearby, a shiny new headstone, lying flat on its back, proclaimed the burial of Jean Blauvelt Gleason, 1942-2015. In the center of the soon-to-be grave site was Judith's marker. Stuck into the ground beside it was a long-handled shovel, yet not a single turn of fresh earth was to be found anywhere.

Without warning, the bed of grass, the marker, the promise of eternal love forever etched in stone, sparked lurid images inside Pamela's mind of what she imagined Sean had done here with another woman, engulfing her in flames of jealousy. Before she could quench the fire, Pamela imagined Judith, a faceless naked figure, lying on a blanket. Sean was beside her, aroused, erect, fondling her breasts, repeating scene for scene what she and Sean had done two hours earlier.

"No!" she shouted to herself. "This isn't real. It's not happening." But it was and she couldn't do anything to stop it. "Get out of here," Pamela told herself and started to leave, but stopped when something fell onto the back of her neck. She glanced up.

"No!"

Directly above her --- silhouetted against the moonless star-lit sky --- was a man, half-naked, impaled on the barren splintered branches of the huge oak tree. His eyes were wide open, his face etched with terror, his imagined cry muffled by a branch piercing his throat. The splintered ends of his broken bones protruded like spiny quills. The flesh on his chest, belly and loins was clawed open, stripping him of his humanity.

Pamela's spell was broken by the spatter of blood on her face. Turning away, she wiped her cheek with the sleeve of her white cotton sweater, smearing the blood across her mouth. The cold salty taste made her gag and spit as *Run!* echoed through her mind, turning her deaf to any other thought but flight.

Before she could take a step, she was sent sprawling onto the ground, the wind knocked out of her. When she tried to stand, she was pinned down by a vaporous black hand, as another hand reached through her back and into her chest.

Unable to bear the pain, barely able to breathe, Pamela fought to be free, but her captor only became stronger, its chilling howl rising to a shrill, shattering the newly chiseled headstone.

Though unclear, muffled by the angry storm raging around her, Pamela was certain she could hear the voice of a woman, young, but at the same time very old, then others, their cries of pain echoing into the night.

About to lose consciousness, every thought but survival ripped from her brain, Pamela was given her freedom and curled up into a fetal ball, shivering uncontrollably as the air around her grew calm and warm to the touch. Seconds became moments, time wound down, as if to watch and wait.

Warmed back to life, Pamela struggled to her feet. Every muscle in her body ached. Her bones felt brittle, about to break. With each welcomed breath, she uncurled her body and stood erect. When thoughts of where she was and what was happening crept back into her mind, she shuddered and wrapped her arms around herself. Alone, frightened, she thought of Sean, his strong arms around her, his warm body pressing---

A crushing blow struck her on the chest, knocking her backward and onto the ground. Fear exploded into rage. She leapt to her feet and demanded, "Who are you!" She peered into the shifting shadows surrounding her.

"And what the hell do you---?"

A violent wind swept her up and held her suspended in the air as that invisible hand slipped beneath her ribs and up into her chest, its icy fingers grasping her heart, trying to squeeze the life out of her as the shrill voice grew steadily louder. This time she could hear the hint of perverse pleasure in the rising wind.

Desperate, feeling life slipping from her grasp, Pamela cried out without thinking, "He doesn't love you!"

A vortex, a conical swirl of ice and water, wrapped itself around her, ripping and tearing her clothes from her body. Half-naked, her arms outstretched, the relentless wind whipped her again and again, leaving her red and raw and bleeding. She could

feel her heart beating slower and slower, which brought to mind Sean's heart, strong and steadfast, and his love for her.

Tipping her head back, Pamela cried out, "I love---" and was instantly silenced by the wind filling her lungs, drowning her beneath wave upon wave of liquid air. Gagging, about to pass out, she was given another reprieve: the tamed wind caressed her numbed body.

With a breathless sigh, she gave in to its healing touch, only to be brutally violated by a vaporous shaft ramming deep inside her, thrusting, tearing her flesh as blood dripped down her legs.

Tears fell from Pamela's eyes and froze to her cheeks as she released the bonds of reality, separating mind from body, trading heart for soul, death no longer feared but welcome.

"Pamela!" Sean cried out as he raced toward the back of the cemetery, slapping at the dense fog blocking his path. "Leave her alone!" he roared and threw his arms around her legs, his face smeared with blood, and tried to pull her free.

Peter Murphy was a step behind him, a gun in his hand. "Jesus Christ!" he gasped and stumbled to a stop, staring up at Pamela. Holstering his gun, he stepped forward to help Sean, only to be violently thrown to the ground and pinned down.

Sean tightened his grip on Pamela as he looked up into the whirlwind and said in a frightened plaintiff voice, "If you truly love me, let her go."

A moment passed. Another.

The raging wind sighed to a whisper, leaving the air crystal clear, calm, bone dry and no longer cold. Pamela fell into Sean's arms, sending them both tumbling.....

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