

CHAPTER 1

“May 26, 2016, NJ – Present Day”

The orange hue of the early morning sun was casting its rays upon the seashore community of Spring Lake, New Jersey. Midway down the boardwalk sat former F.B.I. agent, Frank Sorello, completely immersed in the recent number one bestseller *The Taking*. The book was a follow up to *The Blood Hunt*, by hot new novelist Gary Jones. He was just finishing the first chapter and couldn't put it down. The novel's preface could've been just a coincidence, but something didn't feel right. Every sentence he read made him more uneasy. Frank's blood pressure began to rise. Two years earlier, after finishing the author's first book he had a similar reaction and this led to a lot of people worrying about him. Frank wondered if he was losing it.

Most of the town was still asleep this brisk, spring morning and only a handful of people were at the beachfront attempting to get a jump start on their weekend. So when Frank saw Sarah jogging in his direction, he managed to force a smile. She was like clockwork, an early riser always on schedule. Frank's own routine had been altered today. Sarah was the reason he was reading and not out running. He wondered now if that had been a good idea.

The two of them first met about six months ago. It had been the day before Thanksgiving and Frank headed to the boardwalk to resume running after an unplanned hiatus. The sun had just risen on what was a particularly cold day. Frank liked it that way because the boardwalk would be desolate. Sarah had come early too because the quiet afforded her time to think. She was questioning her current romantic relationship.

Sarah said, “Hello,” as she noticed the tall, good looking man tying the shoelaces on his Nikes.

He looked up, smiled and said, “Hi, I'm Frank.”

She smiled back, “Nice to meet you, Frank. I'm Sarah.”

Frank couldn't help notice her long dark hair, perfect legs, and big green eyes. She reminded him of Juliette, and he asked her impulsively, "Would you like to run together?"

Sarah said, "Sure," and laughed as she said, "hope you can keep up."

Frank liked her confidence and said, "I'll try, but take it easy on me."

Sarah smiled. "Only if you're nice," she said flirtatiously.

The seven mile round trip from Spring Lake to Avon flew by as they chatted. Frank learned that Sarah was a psychologist in nearby Sea Girt. He volunteered that he was retired from the F.B.I. but was guarded in sharing anything more personal. After that day, they hardly ever ran without one another. As the months went by, their friendship grew and the talks became more intimate. Frank spoke of his wife's brutal murder. This surprised him because he never discussed the tragedy. Sarah had an easiness about her that allowed him to open up. It had been cathartic. Yesterday, after finishing their daily run, Frank told her he wasn't planning on jogging today. He knew Sarah was training for the New York City Marathon, so it was really no surprise to see her running solo or to see the smirk on her face as she continued on towards Avon.

Frank was a creature of habit. He could've started the morning as usual, meeting Sarah for their run. Instead, after his morning cup of coffee he headed out to the beach to read *The Taking*. He hoped to rid himself of the angst the first book caused. Frank shared with Sarah the details of that outburst. He had drawn a connection between Gary Jones and the lunatic who savagely killed his wife. Everyone, including his superior viewed this theory as meritless, the result of an overwrought mind. Frank was irrationally obsessed during those months. Sarah understood his response given the circumstances.

She remembered Frank mentioning that he liked to read, especially thrillers but tended to avoid them now. During their last run, Sarah suggested that he pick up the new novel and approach it as he always had before, not as an F.B.I. investigator or even a grieving spouse, but as an avid reader. She clearly knew Juliette's death was the root of his inability to move forward. Frank had been stripped of his sense of control.

He decided to read Jones' second novel at the prodding of his running mate to address that very issue. Frank secretly feared it might incite the same reaction previously induced by *The Blood Hunt*. The fixation over his wife's murder made him search for answers, even when none were there. When he hadn't responded to her suggestion, Sarah let it go. In fact, she worried that she overstepped her bounds because Frank mentioned he wasn't going to run with her the following day. Sarah recognized she was his friend and not his therapist. So when he didn't meet her at the usual spot for their morning ritual and later

noticed him reading further down the boardwalk, she felt satisfaction and smiled. Frank had taken her advice.

It had been a little less than three years since his retirement from the Federal Bureau of Investigations Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCap). This unit was responsible for analyzing information about homicides, sexual assaults, missing persons and often serial murder. The horrors he witnessed had fractured the man he once was and though the healing process had begun, it was far from complete.

Following the murder of his wife, Juliette, Frank went through a deep depression. During this time, he withdrew from his normal patterns and became reclusive. His anger and pain pushed him toward self-destruction and he couldn't find his way. With no emotional support system to lean on, Frank crumbled. Juliette had always provided him with a reservoir of strength and now she was gone. There was no one else left to pick up the pieces. His parents died when he was young and he had been their only child. It was all too much for him to handle and this culminated in a three-month-long drinking binge.

Frank's free fall didn't slow down until his long time martial arts teacher, Grand Master Daniel, intervened. The sensei didn't do this right away because he wanted to respect his student's need to grieve. Although there had been a sudden withdrawal from instruction, it was understandable. Juliette's loss was brutal and unexpected. Healing would take time. However, when another student mentioned having seen Frank during lunchtime completely drunk, Master Daniel recognized the man had lost his center. His student had always exhibited an inimitable willpower to focus his energy and overcome any obstacle. Frank's mental acuity surpassed even his physical gifts, so this recent behavior was very troubling. The sensei saw Frank as a younger version of himself and could no longer watch his most prized student fall apart. Grand Master Daniel reached out and made contact.

"Frank, you loved Juliette and she loved you. Your loss was unimaginable and pain can lead someone down a road from which they don't return. Is this what your wife would have wanted? Honor her memory and live."

"I just feel so lost . . . I don't know if . . ." Frank began to cry.

The sensei held his student and allowed him to weep. As a grandmaster, the lifetime of training brought much wisdom. The martial arts were grounded in respecting life, family, and tradition.

"Thank you, Sensei."

Grandmaster Daniel let go of his student and bowed. This had been his most important lesson.

Before the murder, Frank was an affable guy who liked being around people. He was now more sullen and socially isolated. He came back to the Dojo for training, but the physical regime still didn't erase his emotional trauma, even though Master Daniel had always preached the connection between body and mind. So Frank stopped drinking and a gradual resiliency surfaced. He began to focus not only on his physical well-being, but also his mental health.

The months away had not affected Frank's physique; the muscle memory came back quickly. At six foot five, the former agent was still an imposing presence. Being a third-degree black belt and all it entailed kept his body chiseled. It wasn't quite as easy to return to his previous emotional state, but the serendipitous connection he made with Sarah, began the more difficult process of healing his heart. Slowly, the old Frank started to resurface.

Normally, he would have been somewhere far from this serene shore town engrossed in capturing some psychopathic monster. After all, Frank was the most decorated and high profile investigator at The Bureau over the last two decades, having caught three of the most notorious serial killers in history. At twenty-seven, he caught Arthur Montrell, who had been responsible for the murders of nine young women. At twenty-nine, he almost died apprehending Derek Hernandez, who killed four families in nine months. Then at thirty-two, he took down the "Tinseltown Strangler" the most infamous and nationally publicized case of his career. Yet, now sitting on the bench, each page read, brought him further and further from where he wanted to go.

Frank couldn't shake his past. The knot in his stomach was real, stemming from an instinctive sixth sense. He knew where this was headed. Frank retired at forty-three, emotionally shattered by the pursuit of the only killer that had escaped him. This psychopath left eleven people dead in a span of one year and then completely vanished. Eight months after the murder of his wife he quit the Bureau.

It had been a new experience for Frank, a case that led to no resolution. Juliette was dead, along with many others. He had not been able to find justice for the bereaved families. Their haunted looks reminded him of his personal torture. Every day he had flashbacks of finding Juliette's bloody body. Two years ago, those vivid images sent him over the edge while professing Gary Jones was a serial killer. The murders drained Frank of his desire to continue working for the ViCap unit and pursuing other violent killers. In fact, it led to his retirement. His boss urged him to reconsider, telling him to take a leave of absence and leave the door open, but Frank was done.

During this timeframe, the media had jumped all over a story written by a small town reporter about the first murder in the chain. The writer, Brian Webster, grew up in an area close to where the initial killing took place. Consequently, he possessed a strong

familiarity with the town's history and its more accomplished residents. The ambitious, young scribe recognized there was a possible storyline that might draw attention. In 2004, he had attended a heavily promoted magic festival honoring Appleton's most famous former resident, Harry Houdini.

Brian vaguely recalled that several historical facts might match up with the recent murder. He decided to explore the possibility. According to his research, there were several coincidences tied to the deceased magician. The killer's first victim had been a Jewish rabbi murdered in Appleton, Wisconsin on the thirty-first of October. A pamphlet had been found near the body from Wahl Organ builders. It was located at 320 North Durkee Street. The owners and employees of the store were all questioned about the homicide. Eventually, they were all cleared as suspects. The flier from the shop created yet another connection. The family-run business was the original wooden structure of the former Temple Zion. It had been built in 1884. Ironically, Appleton's first Rabbi was Mayer Samuel Weiss. He had led the Jewish congregation since 1878 but was dismissed just prior to the Temple's opening. The community was in the process of embracing the Reform Temple's practice of worshipping in English. The former Rabbi only spoke German. The man was Houdini's father. Even after his dad was replaced, his son still considered the town his home. Although Harry Houdini's actual birthplace was Budapest, during his rise to fame he claimed to have been born in Appleton. The final connection was that Houdini had died on the same day as this initial killing, the thirty-first of October.

A few months later, when it was apparent a serial killer was at work, the Associated Press reprinted Webster's story. The unusual facts surrounding the Rabbi, which strangely connected to Harry Houdini, coupled with the killer's penchant to vanish without ever leaving a trace of evidence, led to a national newspaper following up on this story and branding the serial killer, "The Magician."

When the murders suddenly stopped it left Frank feeling lost. His wife Juliette had been the last brutal act of the madman and he hadn't been able to prevent it. The guilt stayed with him for a long time and just recently he began to let it go. It had seemed impossible before he met Sarah. She tapped into his desire to feel alive again, to relax and enjoy simple pleasures once more; like reading a novel. Now as Frank sat alone on the bench, he knew that could not be the case. Yes, he knew that "The Magician" had written *The Taking*. Sweat broke out on his forehead and Frank dropped the book to the ground.

It was half past six in the morning when the Director of the F.B.I., Rob Sullivan, looked at the number on his private cell phone to see who was calling. He was surprised, realizing it had been two years since he and Frank had spoken. At that time, Frank had been drinking heavily and was despondent over the loss of his wife. Rob had listened to Frank talk about an outlandish theory regarding the "Magician Case" involving a fictional

bestseller. Being aware of his agent's pain, he wanted to be sympathetic but had to let Frank know there was absolutely no evidence . . . aside from pure conjecture. Since Frank was fragile, Rob tried not to sound harsh and advised him to begin rebuilding his life. That was the last they had spoken, until now.

Rob wanted to reach out numerous times to Frank after his retirement. But once the pursuit of the "Magician" became a cold case, he felt it forced Frank to confront the loss of Juliette. Her murder had nearly destroyed him and Rob knew contact would not allow the open wounds to heal. The Director fought his desire to convince Frank to come back and work again. It had been a big loss for the bureau to lose their best man at hunting these predators. Frank often found connections where others simply missed them. His insight into the minds of these psychopaths was a blessing for the bureau, but a curse for Frank. So when Rob answered the phone, he wondered what could have precipitated this early morning call.

"Rob, it's Frank. He's alive! The Magician is alive!" The tone of his voice was urgent and desperate, bringing a sense of déjà vu to the Director of The F.B.I.

"Hey, Frank, settle down, this sounds awfully familiar. I thought we settled this last time when I suggested you get it together." Rob paused and said, "I don't mean to sound like an ass, but have you been drinking?"

Frank tried to respond calmly. "No, I haven't had a drink in almost two years and I know how this comes across. I've got to come down to D.C., I'm one hundred percent certain this psycho's back."

"Frank, are you sure this has nothing to do with you not being able to let go, well you know, because of . . . Juliette. It's been years since his last known kill. This guy always loved the spotlight. If he were back, I wouldn't need you to tell me. It'd be all over the headlines. He had the taste, you said it yourself when everything just stopped. We both agreed he either died, left the country or was already in prison."

"You're right, I did say that and I know where you're coming from, but it's been two years since I fell apart and have you heard from me even once on this matter? I've gotten my shit together since then. I understand your skepticism, but in the past when I told you I was sure about something, was I ever wrong? Five minutes ago I broke into a cold sweat and knew I had to call! We need to talk."

"Okay. What's changed, Frank?"

"This has to be face to face. Maybe I'm asking a lot, Rob, but what if you ignore this and I'm right?" Frank didn't want to talk about the book on the phone because he felt Rob would cut him off at the first mention of Gary Jones.

“Frank, what murders have gotten your attention?”

“Listen, I chased this psychopath for years and I deserve your time. It’s him. Once you see the evidence, you’ll agree. Rob, last year I flew off the handle and told everyone involved what I was thinking. I haven’t spoken a word about this, because I know how the media would have a field day with it. I’m not looking to embarrass you or the Bureau.”

“Okay, Frank, I’ll arrange a flight for you this afternoon. My assistant will contact you with the details. Let’s hope for everyone’s sake you’re wrong.”

“I wish that were the case, but it’s not. He’s still out there. I’ll brief you when I arrive in D.C., Rob, thanks for agreeing to meet me,” as he hung up the phone.

The F.B.I.’s Director felt a sickness sweep over him. “Dear God, for everyone’s sake I pray he’s wrong,” Rob muttered.

CHAPTER 2

On the flight from Newark, Frank attempted to compose himself. In order to catch this abomination, he had to be focused. So he spent his time on the plane ride acclimating himself to what he was about to undertake and went back to reading the book. Frank landed at Dulles Airport in the early afternoon and was met at the gate by a recent graduate of the Academy. When he saw the young agent at the gate, he felt a sense of déjà vu. He remembered when he started at the F.B.I. and was once given basic tasks such as these driving assignments. Before long, he was spearheading major investigations. Frank wondered with a sense of melancholy, if he had only done something else, would Juliette still be here.

“Agent Sorello. Hi, I’m Agent Tucker. It’s an honor to meet you, sir. We spent so much time at Quantico studying your cases. You’re a legend at the Academy.”

Frank shook his hand, smiled, and said, “Hi.”

“I’ve been instructed to take you right to Director Sullivan. Do you have any luggage, sir?” the recent Bureau graduate asked.

“No luggage, I came in a hurry. As for the compliments, thanks . . . though I’m sure some of what you heard was exaggerated. Hey, I just gave every assignment all I had. If you do the same, someday they may be discussing you at the Academy,” Frank stated graciously.

It was difficult for him to make small talk given the circumstances, but Frank didn’t want to seem rude to the eager agent. So during the forty-minute ride over to F.B.I. headquarters on Pennsylvania Avenue, the two agents talked about training at Quantico and how things changed since Frank attended. Electronic surveillance and the sheer speed at which information could be accessed were obviously advanced from twenty plus years ago. But in whatever ways the methodology had changed, one thing remained the same;

everyone who went through the rigors of training was expected to do so with a commitment to excellence.

Upon arrival at headquarters, Frank felt the excitement begin to rush through his veins. He was here to finish what the “Magician” had started and smiled knowing there would be no escape for the maniac. Not this time.

When Sorello entered the office of Director Sullivan, it felt like he’d never left. Every fiber in his body was energized. Rob, he noticed, hadn’t changed. His eyes still showed that fiery resolve. It was this very commitment which led him to the top of the hierarchy at the Bureau. Rob possessed an uncanny ability to recognize talent in people and get the best out of them. He was a master at seeing the big picture and understanding when to delegate and when to lead. Frank had some of these same characteristics, but more often than not, took over as the alpha dog and ended up ruffling feathers in the process.

Rob stood up and shook his former agent’s hand.

“Frank, it’s been a long time,” he said while assessing his former agent.

He noticed the clarity in Frank’s eyes; it appeared he had stopped drinking.

“You look to be in much better shape than the last time I saw you. I’m sorry you had to go through all of that. Anyhow, I hope you’re wrong about things. Sit down and tell me what makes you believe he’s back.”

Before he sat down in the chair across from the Director, he dropped the copy of *The Taking* on Rob’s desk. Immediately, he saw the hint of disappointment in his former boss’s eyes.

“Frank, I thought you were past this,” Rob said with sadness. “I believed you uncovered something serious and based in reality, not the same bullshit.”

“Hey, Rob, I get it. I understand your doubt but humor me for a minute. You’ll change your opinion pretty quickly. Start with reading the preface.”

CHAPTER 3

Preface from "The Taking"

I want to acknowledge in this book the many people who helped inspire me throughout this journey, but since there are too many to name and you know who you are . . .

I will just say thanks to the man who led me to this place in time, without you so many of the individuals that drove me would not have been there to stimulate my creative process . . .

Here's to my compass and the man who challenges me to strive for greater heights . . .
Frank S.

CHAPTER 4

Rob picked up the book and read the preface. The doubt didn't dissipate from his eyes. He placed the novel back down.

"Frank, you're better than this. Back then, I understood what was happening with you. Finding Juliette the way you did, well, that would have fucked anyone up. So when you reacted the way you did, after reading that novel of his . . . I knew you hadn't healed. But Frank, it's almost four years since her death. I'd hoped you were getting better," Rob paused and said with frustration, "How many Franks are there in the country? In fact, let me grab the Washington, D.C., white pages or call four-one-one and ask how many Franks there are with the last name beginning with S., it'd be too many to count. That's just in this city. C'mon Frank, you know this is paper thin!"

"Rob, I expected that. Shit, if you didn't respond that way I'd of thought you'd lost it too. I wanted you to read that first, in order to piece it with what follows. In investigations, when coincidences begin to pile up, they're not coincidence! Read chapter two and then tell me what you think. I didn't come here half-assed crazy . . . this is without doubt 'The Magician'."

Frank reflected for a moment, as Rob listened.

"It's not like *The Blood Hunt*, events loosely connected to one another. Take a look and tell me you disagree. If you still think I've lost it, then I'll walk out of this office forever. I will, however, track down and kill that motherfucker with or without your help."

Rob met Frank's gaze, as he picked up the novel and began to read.

CHAPTER 5

“Chapter 2 of The Taking”

“The Taker” sat alone in the garage as the last light of day began to fade, waiting patiently to quench his blood thirst. Yet as he heard the wind whip into a frenzy, it fed his lust. Hurricane Sandy had been predicted as the storm of the century, the Jersey Coast was its targeted epicenter. The fury of the night was coming.

Two days earlier he had left a young woman dismembered in Pittsburgh as bait. The famous hunter of madmen would go there and leave his own home unprotected. The Taker was always one step ahead. As the famous detective pursued leads in western Pennsylvania, the taker of lives had driven directly to the affluent seaside community of his nemesis. On the day before the storm, he observed families pack their luggage and leave their homes. The predator then watched the home of his adversary to see whether or not the beautiful wife moving about inside would seek refuge from the storm too. He had a perfect vantage point to observe her as he sat in an abandoned home across the street. The family who lived there had chosen to heed the advice of the authorities and sought refuge elsewhere. If they had ignored the storm warnings, they would have suffered the same fate as what he coveted. Emily apparently chose to ride it out and stay, not knowing the terror that lie waiting. Her husband would not be able to save her, just as he had failed to save the others, in his endless pursuit of this monster. Before the winds became too violent, he crossed the street and entered the garage of the home. The outside door had not been locked. He placed the bag he had been carrying on the floor. It was the day of the storm. The time was near and he savored the craving.

Night fell and still the madman waited. As the hours passed, the storm grew. Electricity was lost and the town was gripped in darkness. Howling winds ripped trees from the ground the way he had ripped limbs from unsuspecting prey. About midnight, he rose and left the garage wearing his night vision goggles. Casually grabbing a large branch that lay on the ground, the taker threw it into the picture window. Shattered glass let the wind and rain in,

along with death. Quickly he entered a nearby room on the first floor, noticing it was a home library. His wet footprints were immediately disguised by the rain pouring inside.

He heard the footsteps come down the stairs to investigate the loud crash, followed by cries of exasperation. Emily set down her flashlight and quickly attempted to cover the broken window with a large blanket, but realized it was hopeless. So she did the next best thing by placing several blankets on the floor to try to absorb some of the water. Emily needed some help, knowing she couldn't handle the situation alone. But what could she do? The power had been out for hours and there would be no way to reach anyone. Emily now wished she had listened to her husband and stayed with family members out of town. Crossing a street with the eighty mile an hour gusts outside would be impossible. Clearly it was too late to leave her home; the danger was too great outside. There would be no help from the neighbors or anyone else. Not knowing what else to do, Emily went back up the stairs.

When she entered her bedroom, she tried not to worry about the damage downstairs and told herself that when her husband got back he would take care of everything. She changed into her pajamas and took a valium to help fall asleep. After all, she could do nothing to change the situation. The intensity of this hurricane scared her and sleep would be her refuge. At least that is what she thought, not realizing the danger lurking below.

The Taker had noticed the countless books lining the walls of the room. There were volumes of professional books related to forensic evidence, psychopathology, and investigative techniques. Additionally, there were many novels on the shelves by James Patterson, Thomas Harris, and John Sandford. His photographic mind took it all in, tonight was going to be special. He exited the room and began to explore the first floor. The pictures on the wall captured the couple's life. The smiles on their faces, he could not comprehend for he now only understood rage. Over the next hour, he did what he had always done, attempted to take in the minutiae of humanity. He walked back in the library where he had placed his bag and opened it. Reaching in, and surveying his tools, tonight he chose the serrated knife and needle nose pliers.

Silently he began to move up the stairs. The storm was in full force and any noises would be masked by the hurricane. All power in the town was out and it was pitch black. He loved the darkness, quietly he entered the bedroom. Emily lay in a restless sleep unaware of his presence. The Taker looked down at her and watched her breathe. He was excited by the thought of her last moments of peace, for soon there would be fear, and he loved fear.

Emily's long brown hair was strewn across her pillow leaving her neck exposed. Now he thought, as he leaned close and licked her neck. She purred thinking her husband had somehow made it home, but as her mind cleared she thought how could that have been possible. Seconds later her eyes opened wide expressing horror. Her scream was drowned by the storm's ferocity.

The Taker placed the chloroform cloth over Emily's mouth and allowed its vapors to depress her central nervous system until she was unconscious. Next he walked to the closet where four ties were selected to bind her hands and feet together. He picked out three formal business ties and one with a picture of John Lennon on it. He liked the idea of using something of the hunter's to help exterminate his prey and this tie seemed to especially suit his purpose. Now he would wait until the effects of the chemical began to wear off so he could observe her and the visceral responses to the pain he would inflict upon her.

Emily reopened her eyes and tears began to form. She lay naked and tied up staring at the man looking down at her, expecting him to rape her. She whimpered because she could not cry out for her mouth had been gagged. The Taker had no intention of performing this act; he had other things in store.

He picked up the knife that he used to cut off her clothes and ran the flat side of the blade across her breasts, careful not to cut her. There would be plenty of time for that. He loved to see the terror build almost more than when he would hurt her, but not quite as much. Emily began to shake and then he moved the knife down across her belly and lower across her thighs. Emily's muffled cries could not be heard even if she had been yelling at the top of her lungs. Frenzied winds and driving rain were flexing their power. Sandy was doing its damage and The Taker was about to unleash his wrath.

Emily began to pray as she watched the lunatic raise the knife above his head. Suddenly he plunged it down directly into the pillow next to her head. Urine spread onto the bed sheets and the madman smiled. The Taker loved the game. Now he pulled the blade up again and slowly ran the serrated edge with just the right amount of force to slice through Emily's skin down the length of her right arm. He made sure the cut was only on the surface of the flesh and avoided her veins and arteries. The Taker did not want his prey to bleed out. Emily's tears poured down her face as she realized she would never see her husband again. This thought hurt more than the physical agony she felt, as the psycho repeated this procedure down her other arm. The Taker applied slightly more pressure cutting down the length of her legs because he expected his victim to go into shock like the others eventually did.

Blood covered the bed and The Taker ran his fingertip inside the slice he had made on her thigh and brought it to his lips. Her blood's metallic taste was an elixir to him. Next he placed the knife down and reached for the needle nose pliers. It would all be over soon.

Emily passed out from the pain of having her nails snapped off. The Taker placed down the pliers and picked the knife back up. He was about to plunge the knife into her and changed his mind. He thought he would make this special; he had never performed the taking with his bare hands. So he placed the knife back down and put his hands around her neck and began to squeeze. Emily's eyes opened and she began to buck wildly as he applied more pressure. He

watched the panic in her eyes turn to resignation and the life drain from her. Emily had been taken.

Calmly he walked to the master bathroom and removed his blood drenched clothes. Utilizing Emily's flashlight to see, he showered and then changed into the clean clothes from his bag. Next, he placed the soiled garments he had been wearing inside a plastic bag and put that into his travel bag. The Taker did not worry about leaving forensic evidence. He had never been fingerprinted and would not be in any law enforcement database. DNA evidence did not matter to him because he was too smart to be caught. Evidence collected by the forensics team would only matter in a trial and that would never happen. The forensic material gathered by the police and F.B.I. had led them nowhere. They were his minions. They served his need to be feared.

In the morning, the storm had released its grip and The Taker left the house wearing a hooded jacket. He was careful not to be seen as he disappeared. The community was too concerned with its own damage to be aware of his presence. The killer vanished in plain sight, how appropriate he thought to himself.

