

# Chapter 1

## Twin Falls, Idaho

Patrolman Ellis LaBelle shoved the handcuffed fourteen-year-old boy through the front door of the police station, sending him to his knees. "Get up," he snapped, grabbing the boy's shirt collar and yanking him upright.

Sergeant Jim Brouwer glared at Labelle as he and the boy approached the desk. "What the hell are you doing? Take your hands off that boy," he yelled.

LaBelle let go of the boy's shirt but not before he gave him a shove.

"Do you know who that is?" asked Brouwer.

"Yeah, I know exactly who it is. That doesn't give him a license to break windows and steal."

Young Platt stammered, "I didn't do anything," his chest rising and falling rapidly.

"Just hold on son," Sergeant Brouwer said. Turning his attention back to LaBelle, "Alright, what did he do?"

"I was patrolling on Filer Avenue when I heard a window break. I stopped the car and saw this kid reaching through the window of Jaffe's Jewelry Store. He grabbed some boxes. When he saw me, he dropped the boxes and started to run. I went after him and caught him; end of story."

Brouwer sighed and shook his head. He looked down at the boy. "What about it son?" he asked.

Cowering several feet from LaBelle, the boy said in an unsteady voice, "No sir, I didn't do any of that."

LaBelle's hand reached out, grabbed the boy by the arm, and whirled him around, "Are you calling me a liar?" he snarled.

"Dammit LaBelle, let the boy go!"

Labelle fired a cold glare at the desk sergeant, but did as he was told.

Sergeant Brouwer tapped his pencil on the desk, "What about the store?"

LaBelle explained that Officer Beal was at the scene and had called the owner.

"And the boxes?"

"He dropped them before he ran."

"You already said that. Where are they now?"

"I assume Officer Beal is watching them," LaBelle answered.

When Brouwer said he was going to call the boy's father and asked him for his home phone number, Platt's reply was, "He's not home."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. He's out of town"

After a pensive moment, Brouwer said to LaBelle, "Okay, it's too late to call the Juvenile Probation Office, and I'm not going to let him go home alone. Take

him back to lock-up, give him a soft mattress, leave the cell door open...and don't touch him. I'll try to find his father."

Then, looking down at the boy, he said, "You're going to stay here tonight, son. Don't think of it as being under arrest. We're just giving you a place to sleep tonight and we'll contact your father and you can go home tomorrow."

Pointing the way, LaBelle took the boy to one of the cells of the otherwise empty three-cell temporary lock-up located at the rear of the station.

"I didn't do anything wrong," the boy whimpered as he was being shoved into the cell. Then behind him, the barred cell door clanged shut.

Jeremy Platt, alone and in terror, stood, his shoulders drooping, gazing around the bleak 6 by 9 cell provided with only a commode, a wall-sink, and a small bed showing a rolled up mattress at one end.

Hearing LaBelle laughing, Jeremy moved to the far end of the cell and sat on the bedspring. "Aren't you going to open the gate?" he asked. "The man up front said I would only be here for tonight and you would leave the door open."

"Yeah, well he was wrong. You're going to be in this cell for a long time. I'd say at least six months, and there's nothing your old man will be able to do about it. Big man Dr. Platt's boy is a jailbird. How's your old man going to like that?"

"But, I didn't do anything; you did," the boy sobbed.

"It's my word against yours, ya' little shit. Who do you think they're going to believe? Just sit down, shut up and get used to it."

Labelle grinned and went on, "Do you know what they do to young boys in prison?"

Tears ran down Jeremy's face, "I didn't do *anything*."

"People won't come to your dad when they find out his boy's a convict? Yep, your old man'll lose his practice over this." Labelle turned out the lights and left Jeremy crying in the dark.

When he arrived back at the sergeant's desk, Brouwer said, "I hope you didn't fuck up again, LaBelle. You said the boy had boxes in his hand and dropped them before he ran. I called Officer Beal and told him to protect the scene and not to let anyone touch the boxes until I can get a crime scene guy out there. That boy's prints had better be on one of those boxes."

LaBelle looked up in surprise. He was unprepared for the challenge. "I know he reached inside the window but I can't be sure he actually picked them up," he replied.

"That's not what you said."

A flustered LaBelle said, "Maybe I was just assuming that, but I did see him throw the rock."

"You said that what brought this incident to your attention was the *sound* of a window breaking," Brouwer said in an accusatory manner.

LaBelle didn't reply.

"And you said that he *dropped* the boxes before taking off."

LaBelle gave no reply.

Brouwer shook his head in silence and waved LaBelle away.

The next morning, Jeremy Platt was found hanging in his cell, his belt wrapped around his neck, the other end around the top cross-bars of his cell door. It was determined that the boy had been dead for several hours.

The boxes, showed no fingerprints belonging to Jeremy Platt.

Since the department had no Internal Affairs Division, LaBelle was put on administrative leave pending a hearing by a board of citizens appointed to rule on matters of alleged police misconduct. The panel would be asked to decide if the officer's conduct was inappropriate, and if they ruled that it was, to either set a penalty for the officer, or refer the matter to the District Attorney for a determination of whether or not criminal charges should be initiated.

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Three weeks later the Civil Evaluation Board was convened to hear the matter of Ellis LaBelle's conduct in regard to his actions involving the Platt boy. After hearing the evidence, Sergeant Brouwer's recount of young Platt's words, and those of his threatening father, Dr. Platt, the board recommended that Officer LaBelle should be dismissed from the force. The DA, however, declined to file criminal charges.

Dr. Platt filed a civil law suit against LaBelle and the Twin Falls Police Department.

## Chapter 2

### Three months later

“Goddammit, Billy,” Ellis Labelle roared, “Get your ass in here.”

Fourteen year old Billy stepped into the room staying close to the door.

“You better not run from me,” Ellis threatened. “Look at this place, it’s a fucking mess. I told you to pick up your clothes and get all that shit up off the floor. And your bed ain’t even made. This is going to cost you, boy,”

Billy stood silently, his head down but his eyes peering up at Ellis.

“What the hell is wrong with you? Are you some kind of a moron? What the hell do I gotta do to you?” Ellis’s hand lashed out, grabbed his brother by his shirt, swung him around, and pinned him against the wall.

Billie pleaded, “Don’t, Ellis, please don’t hit me.”

“Why shouldn’t I?” Ellis asked in a harsh voice. “You have to learn somehow. You haven’t done a goddamned thing to help me around here since Tag and May left,” he said, referring to their divorced parents, who went their own ways three years earlier. “I *oughta* beat you to within an inch of your life.”

“I’ll clean it up,” Billie mumbled.

Ellis flung Billy to the floor and put his knee in the middle of his back. “Goddamn right you’ll clean it up. When I get home from work this place had better be cleaned up, and I mean the whole fuckin’ apartment. Do you hear me?”

“I hear you, I’ll clean it up.”

Ellis stood up. His face was red and his fists were clenched. “You *will* do what I tell you to do.”

“I’ll have it cleaned up, Ellis, I promise.”

“And from now on you’ll do whatever the hell I tell you to do. Do you hear me?”

“I hear you, Ellis. I’ll listen.”

Leaving his younger brother sprawled on the floor; Ellis turned and tromped out of the room, still swearing.

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Twenty minutes later, Ellis walked to the parking lot in front of his three-story apartment house and got into his car. He paused for a few minutes to complete the insurance application he was to turn in that night when he arrived at his new job.

Then he pulled out of the lot, and as his car slowly rolled down the street, a single shot rang out. The bullet ripped through the driver’s side window of Ellis’s car and into his temple. His body slumped forward against the steering wheel and the car drifted to a stop. Ellis LaBelle was dead.

## **Chapter 3**

**Nine Years later**

### **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**

Activity in the Homicide Squad of the Pittsburgh Police Department had all but stopped on the day Detective Nathan Rizzo retired. After 32 years on the department, Rizzo decided to call it a career.

It wasn't that he was burned out; he loved the job. And, it wasn't that he was asked to retire; the job loved him. The reason he was retiring was because his wife of thirty years was suffering through and losing her battle against cancer and he wanted to spend as much time as possible with her.

On the dreary December morning that was to be Rizzo's last day on the job there was a gathering in the Squad Room.

The Homicide Squad was a close-knit group, probably the closest in the department, so no one was surprised when even the off-duty detectives showed up for the farewell party. Word of the affair had gotten around the entire department as well as the courthouse, and the office was bulging with officers and detectives from almost every squad and precinct. Several deputy district attorneys, the district attorney, and even the mayor showed up to say goodbye to "one of the best damned detectives this City has ever had the good fortune to have working for it," as the grateful District Attorney Dawson put it. "Many were the times when this detective's work on the streets made my office look good and often made the difference between success and failure in the courtroom."

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For six months Rizzo doted upon his wife as they struggled to do everything possible to put off the inevitable. But on July 4<sup>th</sup> of the following year, Grace Rizzo passed away with her husband still at her side.

The whole city showed up for her funeral. Some said that it was the largest crowd they had ever seen at a funeral service for anyone other than a police officer killed in the line of duty.

Mayor Gallagher offered Rizzo his job back, but it was too late, Rizzo said. He was retired and some young hot shot had replaced him, who Rizzo had been told, was doing a hell of a job.

Rizzo was a hard man, firm and imposing. His face was leathery and lined, and looked as rough as the sole of an old army boot, and he had a reputation for being as tough as the back wall of a shooting gallery. Yet, the passing of his wife changed him to the point where he no longer carried an impregnable appearance. There was vulnerability in his eyes that didn't exist before then. His personality was softer in almost every way.

As the months passed Rizzo grew restless. His only child was away at college, and he had nothing to fill his empty life. One of his friends from the squad, Detective Mel Tripp, visited with him occasionally, most of the time to get Rizzo out of his house for a while.

One afternoon, finding Rizzo outside on his porch in his rocking chair, smoking a cigar and watching the cars go by, Tripp offered a suggestion.

“Rizzo,” he said; Rizzo preferred to be called by his last name, “A friend of mine from a small town upstate tells me they’re looking for a new police chief and want someone with experience. They want someone who comes from outside their department. I told him about you.”

Shaking his head, Rizzo raised his hand toward Tripp.

“No, wait,” Tripp said. “This is perfect for you. It’s a nice little town with a population of about twelve thousand, and not much criminal activity. The department has about fifteen officers. It’s the kind of a place where you’d fit right in. It’s a job you know, and to tell the truth, I believe, one you need. The pay isn’t a whole lot, but with your pension ...,” Tripp said, tilting his head and turning one hand palm-up.

Rizzo thanked his friend but said he didn’t think he was interested.

“What are you going to do, buddy, sit around for the rest of your life wishing Grace hadn’t died?”

Rizzo grew an angry expression and began to speak, but was held up by Tripp. “We all wish that, buddy, but she did, and I knew her well enough to know she’d be ashamed of you sitting on your ass all day grieving over her loss. Look at you; you’re fifty-two years old with a lot of good years ahead of you, if you wake up.

“It’s not like you’ll miss us. Hell, we never see you anymore. It’d do you good, my friend. You need to get active again. The people up there have checked you out with the Commissioner and with the DA here, and they want you. It’s a good job, Rizzo, and if you don’t take it ... well, you just better take it, that’s all I have to say.”

Rizzo said he would think about it.

“Well don’t take too long, they need a chief now and they won’t wait forever for your answer.”

Rizzo thought for a moment. “I’m not about to go through job interviews again,” he said.

Tripp chuckled. “Hell, they don’t need to interview you. They’ve already asked just about everyone in Pittsburgh about you. Just be glad we didn’t show them your photograph.”

Rizzo smiled for the first time since his wife died. “Can I get back to you tomorrow?” he asked.

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After thinking hard on the matter and talking it over with his daughter, Rizzo decided to take the job. He packed his belongings into his SUV and headed for the small town of Braden, situated in North-Central Pennsylvania, on the New York border.

The road to his new town went this way and that, climbed the gentle slopes lined with hemlocks and aspens, and fell into the bottoms of grass, talking streams, and maples. There were wooden barns with rock foundations, rusted roofs, and weathered boards. As Rizzo rounded the bends he saw round-baled hay lying in open fields.

The road labored for a long stretch, following the valley floor, gradually gaining altitude. At the crest Rizzo pulled off. He tried to remember how long it had been since he had passed another car. It was quiet. A soft breeze played in the tops of the trees. In the distance he could see the lake and beyond that, the town of Braden, in a fold of the Allegheny Mountains.

Rizzo got out and stretched his legs. Viewing the area as he walked toward an outcropping of rock jetting out from the side of the mountain, he watched white feather clouds wafting across the afternoon sky. Looking out over the valley below, he found himself thinking about his wife. "Grace, can you hear me?" he said aloud. He paused for a long moment wondering what Grace would think of what he was doing. "I wish you were here. I wish I could have spent time talking with you about this."

Watching two playful squirrels chase each other from tree to tree, Rizzo took a deep breath. "I'm doing fine," he said. "For better or worse, I'm on a new adventure, a new start. I hope I fit in."

He watched a hawk in a thermal drifting, circling, gliding. He spoke again, "I wish you were here to see this with me. Thank you, baby, for our lives together. Thank you for everything." Tears rolled freely down his rugged face.

Driving down toward Braden, he was taken by the nostalgic look of the area. Rushing clear streams meandered throughout the county. There was a large lake spotted with fishermen, and a clean, fresh, and orderly look to everything.

All too soon he arrived in Braden. Its beauty was enhanced by the surrounding mountains. A quaint main street lined with ornate store-fronts ended at the steps of the McKenna County Courthouse. The many church steeples that rose above all other buildings in the town, gave evidence of its rich religious heritage.

Absent were malls and Wal-Mart. It appeared that the only accommodation to the 21st Century was the multi-screen movie theatre hidden in a grove of maples just outside of town.

That Braden chose to remain loyal to its mom and pop businesses reminded visitors of what rural America must have looked like in earlier times. All and all the town had the kind of Rockwellian character that you only see on postcards these days.

## Chapter 4

Upon his arrival the new chief's first stop was to the office of the Mayor Turner Prentiss. He had spoken only once with the mayor and that was over the phone. Though he would have preferred to begin his career in Braden by meeting his new staff, he was told that a preliminary meeting with the mayor concerning the chief's duties would be of primary importance.

Walking into the mayor's office, the mayor's secretary, Maggie Crowe, smiled and asked Rizzo to sit in the waiting room. She said the mayor would be with him at his first opportunity.

Rizzo concluded from the nature of their previous contact that his reception was a move on the mayor's part to let the chief know what the pecking order was in Braden.

Half an hour later Mayor Prentiss appeared at his door and without a greeting, waved Rizzo into his office.

"Welcome to our town," the Mayor said, finally offering Rizzo his hand.

Deciding to give the mayor the benefit of the doubt for the moment at least, Rizzo shook his hand and thanked him.

"I don't know what the protocol was in Pittsburgh," the mayor began, his distaste for Rizzo's home town showing in his manner of speech, "but here you'll probably notice a vast difference in the way things are done."

Rizzo was already having second thoughts about his decision to accept the job, and felt no inclination to bow to the mayor as though he was the King of Saudi Arabia.

"Exactly what is that supposed to mean?" Rizzo asked, showing a slight snarl.

Surprised at Rizzo's obvious lack of respect, the mayor fired back. "It means that you will answer to me on all matters. I am your boss, a fact you would do well to keep in mind."

Rizzo was born the son of a conservative Republican and grew up in relative poverty in predominately Democratic Pittsburgh, sometimes feeling like a minnow swimming in a shark tank. He was out of that tank now and wasn't in the mood to be subdued by Braden's local shark. He glared at the mayor and blinking slowly, said, "I'm a law enforcement officer, Mayor, and have been for over thirty years. I answer only to my own counsel, and not to you. You have the power over my employment, not how I do my job. If you think I'm going to seek your approval on what I do, you may as well fire me right now before I unpack my belongings."

The mayor, not used to people rejecting his inflated self-image, was taken aback by Rizzo's sharp words. "Well," he said, swallowing hard, "I didn't mean you had to check with me about everything. I meant ..."

"I don't intend to check with you about anything," Rizzo interrupted.



Prentiss' face turned an interesting shade of red as he found himself without any reply to Rizzo's comment.

"If you have anything else to say to me, either put it in a memo or on a pink slip," Rizzo said, and with that, he turned and left the mayor's office.

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Twenty minutes later Rizzo was at the police station introducing himself to Tisha Bannion, an attractive middle-aged black woman. He had been told she was a most interesting and direct woman.

"What exactly is your job here?" he asked.

Nodding respectfully at the chief, Tisha said, "My job is to be your secretary and to dispatch information to the officers on duty. The coffee machine is right over there," she said, pointing. "I don't fetch, but if you're otherwise occupied and ask in a polite way, I may be persuaded to get you a cup of coffee now and then. I will respect you to the degree that you earn it, and I expect the same from you."

Rizzo smiled, and even let out a short chuckle. "I guess you miss the old chief," he said.

"He was the best man I've ever known," Tisha replied.

"I'm glad to hear that, and I'm sure he was a fine man, but he's retired now, and while I may ask his counsel from time to time, I am the chief now. I don't expect you to fetch things for me. I'm told you are the heart of this department and I expect you to continue in that role. You may call me Rizzo or Chief. My first name is Nathan, a name I'm not fond of, so be guided by that information."

"Good," Tisha said, sporting a tight smile. "We may get along after all. Now, I assume you would like to spend the rest of your day getting settled. My understanding is that you intend to rent a house for a while, and then maybe buy one down the line. With that in mind, I've lined you up with a real estate person who is prepared to show you some nice places close by."

"I believe I'll be staying at a hotel for a short while, until I'm certain I'll be keeping this job," Rizzo replied.

"Oh, oh, I guess that means you've met the mayor," Tisha said.

"Yes ... I have," Rizzo replied.

"He's an asshole of the first order," Tisha said, her smile widening.

"I have already figured that out."

"He is ninety-nine percent bark, one percent bite. He won't bother you other than to make a periodic, but purely ceremonial visit, just to remind you that he's the mayor.

"Now, I assume you'll want to meet with the entire staff. You can meet them in shifts or, as I would suggest, meet them all at once. Mostly for their convenience, I would recommend a meeting at about three in the afternoon, say tomorrow. Whaddaya think?"

Rizzo liked this young woman very much. Smiling down at her, he said, "Tomorrow at three would be just fine. Will you set it up for me?"

"It's already done, Chief."

Rizzo laughed out loud for the first time in a long while.

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Standing before Tisha and all fifteen of his officers, Rizzo said, "Good afternoon. My name is Rizzo and as you know I'm your new chief. I'm certain that most of you would rather have had your new chief chosen from within the department. That was not my decision.

As most of you already know I am a retired homicide detective from Pittsburgh. Don't let that give you pause, law enforcement is no different in a large city than it is in a small town. Sometimes it's easy, sometimes not, depending on the circumstances.

One difference that may affect the way you perform your duties is that most of you know just about everybody in town. While you will treat them with respect and even with some degree of familiarity, there'll be no looking the other way. We're not the chamber of commerce. We are the police.

The only exception I am willing to make has to do with citizens who are driving under the influence. When you pull them over and determine they are impaired, you will lock up their cars and bring them to the station. If the driver is not fallen-down drunk, and if it's that person's first offense, and if there are no accidents or injuries, and if they are polite to you, chances are we will call someone at their home or a friend, asking them to come pick up their loved one. We'll tell that person that the driver can come in the next day to pick up his keys along with a warning that while no charges will be filed this time, the next time, they will pay the price. My reason for that attitude? That's how we used to do it in the old days. Since drinking is legal and driving is legal, at times people make mistakes, so I expect you to treat them that way, not like they just robbed a bank.

"You'll find that I'm very easy to get along with. You do your job to the best of your ability and you won't have any problems with me. It's okay to make a mistake, just don't make the same one twice. Keep what goes on here in the house. I will never ask you to do anything that I haven't already done myself at one time or another. My door is always open, here or where I live, for any reason, professional or personal.

"I expect every officer in this department to look squared away. How you look out in public, whether on or off duty, will go a long way in determining how much respect you receive. If you wear a ball cap, try not to look like a moron, keep the bill facing forward, and when you enter a building, when appropriate, remove your hat. When you're in a restaurant don't eat while wearing your cap. The younger kids won't notice the difference because they don't know any better. But the older ones, who learned from their parents, will notice.

“All of you have been on the department for at least one year, so you know what to do. The routine won’t change. If I feel that a change in responsibilities is required, I’ll talk with you about it first. Any questions?”

Officer Tom Sable raised his hand. “What about shift changes? Will we have any input in which shift we’re on?”

“Don’t you rotate shifts now?” Rizzo asked.

“We do, but Chief Brandt gave us some leeway, depending on our family needs and activities.”

Rizzo offered a light chuckle. “We’re not the KGB. I’m sure we’ll be able to accommodate most problems. We will, however continue to rotate shifts. The only exception is that anyone who desires to work steady eleven to seven, that’s the night shift, may have it.”

Rizzo waited for a minute for other questions. None were forthcoming. “Alright, I’ll be meeting individually with each of you within the next two weeks. That’ll do for now. You’re free to go. Detective Alexander, I’d like to see you for a few minutes, if you don’t mind.”

Once he and Alexander were alone in Rizzo’s office, he said, “Jimmy, I hope you don’t mind me calling you by your first name?”

“No, sir, that’ll be fine,” said Alexander.

“Good. You will be my right arm. You come with the highest recommendation of Chief Brandt and will remain a detective. I will expect more from you than from the others. I expect we will be spending a lot of time together going over every element of any serious crimes that occur within our jurisdiction.”

“Serious crimes, Chief? What are they?”

Rizzo smiled. “You never know. In any case, I’ll need your company for a while until I get used to this environment and come to know the area.”

“No problem, Chief, I’ll be available whenever you need me.”

“I’ve been told that you refused an opportunity to become chief yourself. May I ask why?”

“I like what I do. I can’t stand administrative work. Besides I make almost as much as you do.”

Rizzo smiled. “Good enough.”

## Chapter 5

Early October

**5 months after Rizzo becomes Chief of Police**

At approximately 10:30 p.m. Victor Thornby pulled his pickup truck into the dark and empty parking lot, nose up to the brick wall of the WWII Museum in the small town of Eldred, Pennsylvania, about twenty miles east of Braden.

A moment later a car pulled up next to Thornby's truck. A man he did not recognize got out of the car and approached him, signaling for him to roll down his window. When he did so, the man reached inside and pressed the Taser against Thornby's neck. Thornby jerked and then folded over against the steering wheel.

The man opened the door and pulled Thornby out of his truck. As Thornby lay on the ground, unable to move, the man put a cloth over his nose and mouth and Hatch went unconscious.

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Thornby awoke with a throbbing headache. He opened his eyes. The night was black as pitch, and he was sitting on the ground tied to a tree somewhere in a wooded area. His hands had been pulled back and a rope wrapped around the tree held them securely in place. There was more rope around his chest and waist that bound his body to the tree. His legs were tied at the ankles and knees. He was unable to move any part of his body. He was alone, and as full consciousness began to return, a mixed feeling of confusion and panic overcame him.

He tried to remember how he got where he was. It was before 11:00 p.m. when he arrived at the meeting place. This wasn't it. He remembered nothing after that. He didn't see his truck, he didn't see any car. Were some of his students playing a mean joke on him?

He scanned the surrounding woods looking for another person but saw no one. Even had there been someone else there, Thornby would not have been able to see anyone further than a few feet from where he was. He tried to free himself, but the bonds were too tightly wound for him to be able to undo them.

Several minutes later, he heard the sound of someone approaching. He looked up and, straining his eyes against the darkness, saw a man wearing a black ski mask standing no further than five feet from him. As often occurs when anxiety becomes reality, his panic immediately turned to anger.

In his infamously harsh, authoritarian voice, he asked, "What's going on, here? What are you doing? Release me at once."

There was no verbal reply, only the swat of a whip-like branch across his chest. Thornby looked up at his antagonist. "If this is some kind of a joke, I don't think it's very funny," he said, scolding his captor.

The man laughed at the manner, and content of Thornby's statement. "You haven't seen anything yet, little man," he said.

Thornby thought the man was camouflaging his voice to avoid recognition. That made Thornby believe he might know the person behind the mask. "I don't understand any of this. Untie me immediately," he repeated, his struggle against the ropes continuing.

"You arrogant sonofabitch," the man said, as he pulled a handgun from his back pocket. Waving it in Thornby's face, he said, "I'm going to shoot you in a minute, you dumb shit, so quit bitchin' and start prayin'."

At the realization of the seriousness of his situation Thornby's anger turned once again to fear, and he asked, "Who are you? Why are you doing this?"

The man kneeled and took Thornby's chin between his thumb and forefinger. "You brought these circumstances upon yourself," he said. Then he slowly raised the gun, aimed it at Thornby's stomach.

As he stared down the gun's barrel, Thornby's eyes bulged in horror. A single shot broke the eerie silence of the forest. The man calmly rose to his feet, turned, and once again disappeared into the woods.

At first, Thornby wasn't aware that he had been shot, but after several seconds, when he looked down and saw blood soaking into his shirt and pants, the shock subsided and the pain came. He began losing blood at an alarming rate. His fear turned to hysterical terror.

The minutes passed into what seemed like hours. As the blood oozed out of his body, he became cold and his pain intensified. Though it caused him even greater pain, he periodically screamed for help. As death's cold arms began to engulf him, his shivering increased. His horror and torment grew still more intense as he struggled with a desire for a quick death as an alternative to the agony he was suffering.

Among his screams, he periodically called out to anyone who might be able to hear him. the pain he felt was excruciating. More than once he had to fight against passing out.

Finally, only an hour before the sun would clear the horizon, the man returned and walked up to Thornby. Pulling off his mask, he smiled down at him, and asked if he needed anything. Thornby was too close to death from loss of blood to reply. The man couldn't even have been certain that his victim was still conscious and aware. He reached down, and again grabbing Thornby's chin, raised his head.

Through bleary eyes and, knowing he was near death Thornby asked, "Why have you killed me?"

The man offered no response, but slowly raised his gun, placed the end of the barrel against Thornby's forehead, and pulled the trigger.

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