

### Chapter Fifty-Seven

Eight-thirty Wednesday evening, nervous and sweating, Griff parked his borrowed van in an out of sight location.

At their last meeting, Tommy had made it painfully clear that Ralph, by virtue of his interaction with the senator, was their only link to the invasion of the compound. Griff hadn't said anything at the time but he was worried, after all, he had said to himself, it wasn't my idea to break into the place, why should I be at risk? So, after much consideration, he had come up with a half-baked plan to somehow convince the senator that the incursion was entirely Ralph's idea. But as the hour neared, he began to lose his edge and an idea that had seemed so glib only minutes before, had lost its appeal. He couldn't let the opportunity pass but he didn't know exactly what he was going

to do. However, he reminded himself, there was another even more pressing reason for his planned encounter and it was for this reason alone that the senator had agreed to meet. Griff had always considered himself a loyal friend to the end but ever since that Sunday morning, when he had found a pair woman's panties beside Ralph's bed, he had become suspicious. He hadn't thought much of it at the time but later on, after returning home and emptying his pockets, he began to wonder. What kind of person puts a fancy monogram on their underclothes? he had asked of himself and then thought, a classy lady. So, what would Ralph be doing with a classy lady, in the garage, no less? It hadn't made any sense to him and although he had rationalized that Ralph could have found them somewhere and kept them as a souvenir, particularly, since the garage wasn't that far from the park, it was the scarlet lettering and Ralph's denial that rang a bell; the initials fit the name of the woman he had read about in the newspaper, the senator's wife, and from that moment on he had mentally labelled Ralph as culpable. The more he had thought about the senator, the more he had realized that mere conversation might not be the answer.

Shit, he said to himself, hands shaking despite his white knuckle grip on the steering wheel, I know I gotta do this but I'm scared. I ain't never done nothin' like this before. Even that time on the island, nobody wanna believe me but I didn't kill that guy, it was an accident. He gazed at his wristwatch, the hands barely visible due to a cracked crystal and accumulated

moisture, opened the driver's side door and exited. Leaning against the vehicle, he gazed about, watching for interlopers. When he was certain that the coast was clear, he walked towards the garage, slid the door open and entered. After tonight, he remarked to himself, while surveying the dimly lit room, this old dump ain't gonna be of any use. He kicked aside several small piles of rubbish as he searched for and found the perfect hiding place behind a stack of rusty sheet metal. Hope I was right about those underpants, he thought to himself, if not, I be sittin' in this garbage for nothin'.

Twenty minutes later, drowsiness approaching, he was alerted by the unmistakable sound of a car door's closure. Suddenly, a shadow appeared just barely within the doorway, moved forward tentatively then stopped, as if cautiously maintaining the option of escape.

"Hello?" the senator called out.

"Stay where you are, mon," Griff ordered, as he attempted to refine, on the fly, his poorly conceived plan.

"Say what you have to," the senator shouted, his head moving about in the semidarkness while his right hand remained in his coat pocket.

"Move away from the door, mon, I can't see your face."

"So what, I can't see yours either."

"Then turn a little to da side, mon."

"Is this far enough?" the senator asked tersely, as he moved slightly, still maintaining the potential for an exodus.

Griff reached inside his shirt pocket and removed a small high intensity flashlight and aimed it at the senator. "Come to da light, mon," he requested.

"OK, but I can't see where I am walking."

"I'll tell you when to stop," he replied, adding, when the senator had walked within several feet of his hiding place, "OK, that be good."

"Alright, I've had just about enough of this cloak and dagger nonsense, you've got ten seconds to start talking before I leave."

"Don't be in no hurry, mon. Didn't you like the undies?" Griff asked with a nervous snicker.

"Where did you get them, they belonged to my wife?" he barked.

He knew exactly where he had found them but he wasn't about disclose it, so he lied. "In the park, mon," he said.

"You killed her, didn't you?" he said, the words rolling off his lips like drops of molten lead.

"No," Griff replied emphatically, both as a rebuff and an exclamation of shock from the knowledge that his assumption about the monogram was correct.

"What kind of sick game are you playing?" the senator sneered, his right hand stationed within his coat pocket, gripping the revolver.

"No game, mon," he proclaimed, now more frightened than before.

"Answer me truthfully or I'm leaving."

"The truth is, mon, dat NAPCO didn't kill your wife."

"Then who did?"

Griff was stunned. He had naively assumed that the senator would stop short of asking specifics and he remained silent, staring at the face of an angry man. Shit, mon, now what? he said to himself, I don't know for sure that Ralph killed her but that ain't why I'm here. The whole damn story was just a reason to get this guy's attention, to somehow convince him to keep us out of the limelight. So, what do I tell him?

"I'm waiting for an answer?" the senator bellowed.

Griff wedged the flashlight between two pieces of scrap metal, he knew what he had to do. With cat-like movements, he left his hiding place and snuck up behind the senator, clasping his left hand over the man's mouth. The ex-college football player turned statesman struggled violently, the revolver discharging through his pocket as he attempted to bring it forth. Wiry though he was, Griff benefited from the element of surprise and in a split second had forced the senator to the ground. With a lightening movement, he jumped onto the senator's chest, his knees restraining his captive's arms, and slid open the razor tipped box cutter that he had found lying near his hiding place. Without a moment of hesitation, he jabbed the blade into the senator's throat and repeatedly raked it back and forth until his hands gave out from the effort. Bright red blood spewed from the wound, spraying everything in sight. A few gurgling sounds

followed and then, silence. Shocked by his own actions, John Raymond's limp body at his feet, he began to retch until he could no more. Wiping his lips across his shirt sleeve, he rose and backed away; the garage's familiar odor completely replaced by the stench of death and his own fear. Shit, he said to himself, shaking wildly from the image of his impulsive act, what I do now? Wait, the park, dat's it. They'll think dat it was the same person that killed his wife. With the garage's gas driven torch, he set the building ablaze just before dragging the senator's plastic wrapped body towards the waiting van.