

kill him killhimkill him

Shut the fuck up! Perry screamed at the top of his lungs. Hed had just about enough of the Triangles, oh yes sir he had. They were in his house, after all, his house, and a Dawsey was always the master of his castle. He knew if he didnt take control, if he didnt take charge, hed go crazy. He just couldnt stand it anymore, couldnt stand that voice in his head every fucking minute of every fucking day. You shut your little mouths or I swear as soon as Im done with the informant here Ill turn the Three Stooges into the Dynamic Duo, no matter what it does to me!

There was an ultrabrief burst of high-pitch as the Triangles accessed Dynamic Duo, then nothing.

He felt something inside him change, as suddenly and definitely as the switch thrown on an electric chair. The power structure had just traded hands he knew it, and the Triangles knew it. He wasnt afraid of them anymore.

Its my house, Perry thought. A confident smile parted his bleeding, cracked lips. Its my house, and youre all going to live by my rules.

Bills arms grew heavy, weak, yet he couldnt relax, couldnt let them drop and pull against the blades stuck through his palms. Only by keeping his hands very, very still could he maintain the pain at just below a screaming level. The tension of facing that agony and the fear he felt anticipating Perrys next move had his muscles taut with stress, tiring them quickly.

Perry started blinking rapidly. He shook his head, violently, like a dog shaking off after a swim. Then he looked right at Bill, his bloodshot eyes suddenly wide with terror.

Bill, help me, Perry said. The affected accent was gone. It was his friend again, not the creature that was torturing him to death.

Perry . . . Bill fought for the words. He had to act now. Perry, you have to . . . call . . .

He wasnt sure how long he had before his strength gave out and his hands fell, the weight pulling down against the knives in grinding torture. For some odd reason, that thought rang worse than the concept of a knife through the eye how much longer till his arms would give out? He already felt the burn, his deltoids and biceps simmering with fatigue. He didnt have much time, not much time . . . hard to believe he was going to die like this.

Call . . . the police.

The word seemed to rebound inside Perrys head. Hed been free, free of their control, for just a few seconds. He could have kept them at bay, too, would have, but Bill had to go and prove them right.

242 Call the police, Bill had said. The mothafuckin po-lice.

We told y ou.

Could they sound smug? They sounded smug. Without conscious thought, Perry let go of his friendship for Bill Miller. Enough fucking around. He had to get the info and get it now.

When are they coming for me, Billy?

Bill said nothing. Perry grabbed a handful of shirt and roughly shook Bill to emphasize his words. When are they coming to get me?

Bills eyes showed clear and fearful for only a moment, then went glassy again for the last time. His head nodded down limply. He didnt move.

Perry hit him until his own palms bled. It didnt make any difference Bill wasnt coming out of it this time. Perry felt at Bills neck, not knowing how to check for a pulse. Perry checked his own neck, found the jugular, which beat strong and true. He probed the same spot on Bills neck and felt nothing.

Kill him , yo u hav e got to kill him, please do it now.

You got your wish. Hes dead.

The informants eyes remained open, fixed in a perpetual, empty, half-lidded stare. Perry stood on his good leg and looked at the corpse.

Bill was dead. A traitors death, and well deserved hed been one of them.

No bout-a-doubt it.

THE CALL

Al Turner fumed. Not only was that damn freak-of-nature kid raising holy hell again, but Als hemorrhoids were worse than ever. Hed used what seemed like a gallon of Preparation H, but he might as well have been smearing mayonnaise on his asshole for all the good it did.

My name is Al Turner, he said into the phone. I already called once. Im in apartment B-303. He lives right downstairs, and hes been screaming his head off for days. Ive had it.

Sir, a car is on the way. Youre willing to file a formal complaint? Absolutely. Ive been down there and asked him to shut up and Im not dealing with it. Hes nuts. I think you better tell your people to be careful, though hes a huge guy. I mean pro-wrestling huge.

Thank you, sir. The officers will be there as soon as possible. Please stay away from the apartment. The officers will handle it.

No problem. Im not going down there. That guy is a freaking fruitcake.

STEPPIN OUT

We want to see.

Perry stood quietly.

So whose eyes are working now?

All of us can see.

Hed be damned if hed let his balls see anything. That was just too fucking much. He slid his T-shirt sleeve up past his elbow, giving the Triangle on his forearm a full view of Bill Millers corpse.

Yes, he s dead,

y ou ar e right.

Perry pulled down the shirt and turned to stare vacantly at his former friend. The situation hit home, coming to rest in his mind with a heavy, cold-iron weight. Bills blank eyes stared at the floor. The trickle of blood easing out of his nose had slowed to a stop. Blood covered the couch and carpet as if Bill had just come out of the shower, fully dressed with his clothes soaking wet, and sat down to watch CSI. Except he hadnt just sat down. Perry had put him there. Bills hands had steak knives jammed through the palms, nailing them to the wall. Blood streaked the wallpaper, sticky, gooey and red.

Oh Jesus, what the hell is happening to me?

Hed killed Bill. Tricked him, stabbed him, dragged him into the apartment like a trapdoor spider snatching a hapless insect back into a lightless, hopeless den, nailed him to the wall and tortured him before letting him bleed to death. Bleed to death while Perry shouted questions in his face. It was a shitty way to go.

Hed just murdered his best friend. He should have been swamped with guilt, overwhelmed with it, yet surprisingly he felt nothing but a cold, icy satisfaction. Only the strong survive, and that little informant hadnt been strong enough to cut the mustard.

Weve got to get the hell out of here.

The high-pitch searching sound echoed in his head.

We need to go to Wahjamega.

It was a strange comment, but nothing the Triangles did seemed to surprise him anymore.

What the hell is a Wahjamega? Perry asked quietly.

Not a what, a where.

Wahjamega.

In a place called Michigan. Do you know where it is?

Michigan? Sure. Youre in it. Ill have to look up Wahjamega. Let me MapQuest it.

Perry turned toward where his Mac used to sit before he remembered hed smashed it to bits.

Uh, I think I have a regular map.

We need to go there.

There are people who can help us.

He felt their excitement, pure and unbridled. Images flashed in his head: a dirt road hed never seen before, black movement in a dense forest, a pair of sprawling oaks, tree limbs vibrating in tune to the throbbing forest floor and a brief flash of the green door from his dreams. Another image: a pattern, a set of lines that looked like a Japanese kanji character. The symbol was nothing from his memory, it was theirs, and it held power.

Can we see? Show us.

He hopped to the junk drawer. In the back was a much-abused Michigan road map. Most of the Upper Peninsula was obscured by a huge ink stain in the rough shape of a kidney bean, but it didnt mar the maps southern area. He found Wahjamega in the thumb area that was Michigans hand shape. He folded the map a few times, leaving Wahjamega visible, then found a pen -one that didnt leak- and circled the town. Perry scrawled, This is the place. The phrase, and the circled town, seemed to call to him, and he wondered why he had written the words.

He turned his arm so that the Triangle could see the map. There was a pause, then a brief flicker of the searching sound, and then overflow emotion exploded in his body.

Yes that s it! That s it! Wahjamega! We must go to

Their joy felt exquisite, all-encompassing, a drug that instantly roared through his veins and pulsed in his brain. The strange symbol again filled his world.

A pattern of lines and angles. The image seemed to swell before his eyes, glow with power like some mystical talisman. Everything else faded away, the world turned to black, leaving only the symbol floating before him, powerful and undeniable. This was Triangle overflow, he knew, but he couldnt stop it. He didnt want it to stop. The symbol was their purpose, their meaning for existence. They wanted it more than they wanted food or even survival.

They have to build this, and I have to help them, help them build...its so beautiful . . .

Perry shook his head, fought his way out of the narcotic trance. His breath came in short gasps. The fear again, but different this time, different because hed actually wanted to help them. Theyd been in his thoughts before, but never so bad as that.

He realized he was holding a knife in his left hand. The map lay on the counter, drops of blood blocking towns like the craters of some nuclear bomb run. He saw that the knife tip was bloody before he felt the pain. Like a ventriloquists dummy, he slowly turned his head to examine the underside of his right forearm.

In that short trance, hed carved the symbol into his skin. Three inches long, it shimmered in wet red lines. The deep scratches oozed a little blood that trickled down in thin rivulets, rolling past either side of his thick biceps. He hadnt felt a thing. He stared at his handiwork:

The Triangles wanted to go to Wahjamega, needed to go the way a junkie needs another fix. Wanted to go to Wahjamega and build something this symbol represented, whatever the hell that was. If they wanted something that badly, it couldnt be good for him. But he didnt have anywhere else to go. The Soldiers were coming, and at this point one direction seemed as good as the next. The important thing was to get the flying fuck out of the apartment.

Putting his exhaustion up on a mental shelf, he hopped to the bedroom. That strange smell hit him again. A nasty smell, a rotting smell. This time it didnt waft away on some invisible air current, but lingered. He ignored it he had more important things to worry about.

He hauled a duffel bag out of the bedroom closet, then thought better of it and grabbed his backpack. Nothing big, just the nylon one hed used to haul books around campus a million years ago. He imagined that hopping with a weighted duffel bag hanging from one arm might prove difficult.

As he put the backpack on his bed, he saw that it glistened with spots of wet blood. It took him a few seconds to register that the sticky red smear had come from his hands.

He was still covered in blood, both Bills and his own.

Time was a factor; he knew that far too well. After all, there was a man crucified to his living-room wall. A dead guy with friends and coworkers who wore snappy little uniforms and who would love nothing more than to put several bullets into Perrys diseased body, but he couldnt go outside covered in blood and gore.

He quickly hopped to the bathroom and stripped his clothes. They were soiled with blood, both wet and flaky-dry. Perry felt the burst of overflow excitement as the Triangles in his back, his arm and in...in... in other places . . . looked upon the world together for the first time.

There wasnt time for a full-out shower; a naked sink-washing would have to suffice. Besides, he didnt even want to look in the tub and see the floating remnants of the scabs that heralded the start of this waking nightmare.

The last clean washcloth quickly turned pink as he scrubbed the blood from his body. Flakes of dry blood fell into the running water. He turned off the sink, let the washcloth fall to the floor, grabbed a towel and started drying off.

It was at that moment he noticed his shoulder.

Or rather he noticed the mold.

The mold was under the Band-Aids, green gossamer tufts peeking out past plastic edges. The fine little hairs looked like the last downy strands growing on an old mans head before baldness finally takes hold.

Thats where the strange smell had been coming from: his shoulder. The musty, rotten scent filled the bathroom. The Band-Aids remained firmly affixed to his wound, but under the strip he saw something else, something black and wet and horrible.

The Band-Aids had to come off. He had to see what was in there. Perry used his fingernails to pull a small corner of Band-Aid off his skin, enough for him to get a good thumb-and-forefinger grip, then slowly tore it off.

The flap of skin peeled back; a gummy ribbon of stagnant black goo ran down his chest, hot at first, and ice cold by the time it had reached his stomach. The smell that had only hinted at its power during the past day was now released, a satanic genie billowing out of a bottle; it filled the bathroom like a cloud of death.

The dead stench instantly made Perrys stomach turn inside out he spewed bile into the sink, where some of it mingled with the running water from the tap and headed down the drain. Perry stared at the wound, not even bothering to wipe the vomit from his mouth and chin.

There was more of the viscous muck packed in the wound, like black currant jelly at the bottom of a half-empty jar. The dead Triangle had rotted. Horror stole his breath and made his heart hammer a triple-time beat of desperation. The consistency resembled a rotten pumpkin a month after Halloween pasty, runny and decomposing. Green tufts of the same gossamer mold spotted both the wound and the dead Triangle. Shiny black rot clung to the mold filaments. The most disturbing part of the image in the mirror? He wasnt sure if all the rot came from the dead Triangles fork-punctured corpse. Some of the green mold looked as if it grew right out of his skin, like a creeping, crawling messenger of demise.

The sinks running hot water slowly clouded the mirror. In a daze, Perry wiped the steam clear and found himself face-to-face with his father.

Jacob Dawsey looked haggard and gray. He had sunken eyes and thin, smiling lips that revealed his big teeth. He looked as he had in the hours before Captain Cancer finally stole him away.

Perry blinked, then fiercely rubbed his eyes, but when he opened them his father still stared back. Somewhere in his brain, Perry knew he was hallucinating, but it didnt make the experience any less real.

His father spoke.

You always were a quitter, boy, Jacob Dawsey said, his voice the same thick growl that always preceded a beating. You get a little booboo and now you want to give up? You make me sick.

Perry felt hot tears well in his eyes. He blinked them back hallucination or no, he wouldnt cry in front of his father. Go away, Daddy. Youre dead.

Dead and still more of a man than youll ever be, boy. Look at you you want to give up, let em win, let em put you down.

Perry felt anger surge. What the hell am I supposed to do? Theyre inside me, Daddy! Theyre eatin me up from the inside!

Jacob Dawsey grinned, his thin, emaciated face showing the teeth of a skeleton. You gonna let em do that to you, boy? You gonna let em win? Stop acting like a woman and do something about it. The steam steadily clouded the mirror, slowly obscuring Jacob Dawseys face. You hear me, boy? You hear me? You do somethin about it!

The mirror clouded over. Perry wiped at it, but now only his own face stared back. Daddy was right. Daddy had always been right; Perry had been a fool to try and escape what he was. In a violent world, only the strong survive.

Perry took a slow, deep breath, and prepared his mind for what he had to do.

Time to get his game-face on.

THE CALL -PART TWO-

Officer Ed McKinley turned left onto Washtenaw Avenue and headed east toward Ypsilanti. Traffic slowed all around the Ann Arbor police cruiser, just a touch, even for people who traveled at the speed limit. In the passenger seat, Officer Brian Vanderpine stared out the window, far more alert and attentive than usual.

Eight dead, Brian said. Man, thats a lot.

Thats the tenth time youve said that, Brian, Ed said. How about you give it a rest?

I just cant get over this. Shit like this doesnt happen in Ann Arbor.

Well it does now, Ed said. Im not surprised, really. Weve got foreigners from all over the damn planet going to school here. And every last one of them thinks America is evil.

Yeah, were evil, but they sure are happy to come here and get an education from us.

Ed snorted. Yeah. I guess the schools aren't evil, just everything else about our culture. Funny how that works out so well for them.

I would love to find the bastard responsible for all this, Brian said. You think the feds know what they're doing?

Ed shrugged. I dunno. Something fishy is going on, that's for sure. They show up exactly when this shit goes down. Not before. We get no warning, just a body count.

The radio squawked: Car seventeen, come back.

Brian grabbed the handset and thumbed the talk button. Car seventeen here, go ahead.

How far are you from the Windywood apartment complex?

Were heading east on Washtenaw at Baldwin, Brian answered. Only a couple of minutes away from Windywood. What's up?

Disturbing the peace. Complaint is from an Al Turner who lives in apartment B-303. Says the guy below him is screaming and has been for days. The screamer is listed as Perry Dawsey, apartment B-203.

Brian turned to look at Ed, a quizzical look on his face. Perry Dawsey. Why does that name sound familiar?

I wonder if that's the same kid that played linebacker for U of M a few years ago.

Brian again thumbed the talk button. Roger, Dispatch, well check it out.

Be advised, the dispatcher said. Complainant says Dawsey is very large and potentially dangerous.

Roger that. Car seventeen out. Brian hung up the handset.

Ed frowned. Very large and potentially dangerous? That sure sounds like the Perry Dawsey I saw play.

Brian squinted against the bright winter sun. He remembered watching U of M's scary Perry Dawsey. Very large and dangerous certainly fit the bill. It was just a disturbing-the-peace, but he didn't like the sound of this call, not one bit.

PLAY THROUGH THE PAIN

In through the nose, out through the mouth. One last, deep breath. Focus.

Play through the pain.

Perry reached up with his right hand and sank his fingers deep into the wound. He didn't bother trying to control his screams of pain, he just hooked the fingers and scooped. Fingernails scraping hard against his open flesh, he yanked the Triangles squishy black corpse out of his body. The tail offered only minute resistance before it broke off, weakened by rot that had turned the body into little more than paste. Perry tossed the handful of gore into the sink, where it landed in the trails of puke and steaming water.

He scooped twice more, screaming anew each time, grabbing everything he could out of the wound. Blood again poured down his chest, running down his crotch, down his inner thighs to form small puddles on the floor.

Pain filled his mind, rusty barbed wire wrapped tightly around his soft brain, but he knew he had to stop the bleeding. Stop it fast. He stared at the wound it was now a fist-size hole, and quite a bit beyond the abilities of simple Band-Aids.

He scooped up the bloody washcloth from the floor and hopped into the kitchen. He pressed the cloth to the wound, jamming it painfully into the hole, trying to stem the flow of blood. The duct tape was in the junk drawer, silver and big and ever so sticky. He had to let go of the wound so he could use both hands to tear off big strips of tape, which he stuck to the edge of the counter.

He again crammed the washcloth deep into the gaping, bleeding wound. He lashed a piece of tape on top of the cloth, then stuck it firmly to his back and chest. Repeating the process five more times, he had a duct-tape starburst with arms spreading out from the wound, over his shoulder, over his chest, down his chest and under his arm. Wasn't exactly the Mayo Clinic, but, as Daddy used to say, good enough for who it's for.

Bills friends would be here any minute.

It was time to go.

He used a handful of paper towels to wipe the blood off his body as he hopped for the bedroom. He jammed clothes into the backpack. Two pairs of jeans, three T-shirts, a sweatshirt and all the clean underwear and socks he could find.

With one leg rendered nearly useless and his left shoulder screaming with pain every time he moved, he pulled on his jeans. Each second was an eternity of anxiety; he expected the door to crash inward, smashed open by one of those heavy door rammers you see on Cops when the police break into yet another slime pit of a house. The door rammer - on which some clever soul would stencil the witty words knock-knock- would be followed by goons in bio warfare suits, every inch of their bodies covered so they wouldn't come into contact with the Triangles. They'd be toting big-ass guns, and they'd have itchy trigger fingers.

He threw on a black Oakland Raiders sweatshirt and struggled with socks and hiking boots, his ravaged leg making even this simple task difficult.

Perry wanted a weapon, anything he could get his hands on, something to let him go down fighting, go down like a Dawsey. In the kitchen, he tossed the whole knife rack, Chicken Scissors and all, into his backpack. He grabbed his keys and coat. He didn't even give a second glance at Bill, who still stared blankly at the carpet.

Bill, rudely enough, didn't bother to get up and see him out. Perry left the apartment, his eyes scanning up and down the hall, looking for Soldiers. He saw no one. He realized he'd left the map inside, but he didn't need it if he made it out of Ann Arbor alive, he knew exactly where he was going. He started to move down the hall, which was still bloody from his battle with Bill, when the Triangles spoke again.

And their words stunned him. It was the worst thing he'd heard yet.

A hatching is coming.

HOWDY, NEIGHBOR -PART THREE -

A hatching is coming!

Perry's mouth went dry. His face flushed with hot blood, he felt his very soul shrivel and blacken like an ant burned by a magnifying glass. Hatching. It was coming. He'd been right, it was like the caterpillar and the wasps he'd served his purpose, and now it was time for their gruesome exit.

His big body began to shiver uncontrollably.

You're hatching?

Not us,

so someone else is nearby nearby.

He felt a minor wave of relief combined with a trace of hope not the hope that he had been saved, but the feeling that there was someone else, someone in the same predicament, someone like him who could understand.

Perry hopped toward the stairs that led to the outside door. He didn't notice his foot hit the blood-soaked carpet; subsequent hops left a string of footprints with wet red traces that echoed his boots tread pattern.

It felt good to be dressed again. He'd felt scummy all covered in blood, in clothes that should have been incinerated rather than washed. He was dressed and getting out of the apartment that had held him prisoner for days.

His shoulder throbbed loudly where he'd scooped out the rotting Triangle. The jostling backpack straps pulled against the washcloth and the wound, but the duct tape held firm. It was going to be a bitch removing that bandage. Maybe he'd be dead by then, and he wouldn't have to worry about it.

We're hungry.

Feed us feed us.

Perry ignored their words, concentrating instead on managing the stairs. He leaned heavily against the sturdy metal rail, cautiously taking

one step at a time. It was amazing how much easier things were when you had two feet.

Feed us now.

Feed us now a hatching is coming.

A hatching!

Just shut up. I don't have any food.

He made it to the ground floor without incident. After days in the cramped apartment, it would be nice to be back outside again, no matter what the weather it could be the burning pits of hell past that door, and he'd hop out whistling Singin in the Rain.

A wave of overflow panic hit him, a blindside tackle that had his adrenaline level soaring before he realized the fear wasn't his own. What is it? What's happening?

Columbo is coming!Columbo is coming!

The Soldiers. Perry hopped out the door into the winter wind and blinding sun. The temperature was only a smidgen above zero, but it was a beautiful day. He made it to his car and put the key in the lock when his eyes caught the lines and colors of a familiar vehicle; his mind exploded with warning.

About fifty yards away, an Ann Arbor police cruiser pulled into the apartment's entryway and headed in his direction. Perry hopped around the front of his car, which was tucked neatly under the carport's metal overhang. He wedged himself between the front bumper and the overhang, hiding from view.

The cruiser slowed and pulled up against the sidewalk directly in front of the main door to Perry's building. Perry's instincts screamed at him the enemy was only fifteen feet away.

Two cops stepped out of the car, but didn't look in his direction. They popped their batons into their belts, then walked toward the building with that relaxed, confident cop attitude.

They entered his building, the dented metal door slowly swinging shut behind them. They were too late to save their little informant. They'd find the body within seconds, then they'd come looking for Perry, shooting all the way.

Brian Vanderpine was first up the stairs. His feet thudded on the steps, which suffered the full brunt of his 215 pounds. Ed McKinley followed without a sound; Ed was always lighter on his feet, despite the fact that he outweighed Brian by ten pounds.

They didn't need to say anything going up the stairs to the second floor. It was just a noise complaint, no big deal, but given the day's events every call had them on edge. Brian hoped Dawsey lived alone; he didn't really want to deal with a domestic dispute.

They were called to this apartment complex at least twice a week. Most of the time people didn't realize how thin the apartment walls were, and how noise carried. Usually the appearance of uniformed cops at the door embarrassed the hell out of them, and they shut up quite nicely.

Brian and Ed climbed the first half flight of six stairs and turned to head up the next six when Brian stopped so suddenly that Ed bumped into him. Brian was looking down. Ed automatically looked at the same spot.

Traces of red marked large footprints on the stairs.

Brian knelt next to one of the footprints. He gently touched the print his fingers came away with dabs of red. He

rolled it around his fingertips for a second, then looked up at Ed.

Its blood, Brian said. Hed known that it was blood even before he examined it; he knew the smell.

Brian stood. They both pulled their guns, then moved quietly up the steps, careful not to step on other red footprints. As they came up to the second floor, they saw the blood on the wall and the bright red puddles in the carpet. It was a lot of blood, probably from a severe wound.

Large blood streaks led right under the door to Apartment B-203. Someone who was bleeding badly had crawled or been dragged into that apartment.

They took positions on either side of the door, pulses rocketing, backs to the wall, guns pointed to the floor. Brians mind worked feverishly. This blood was fresh, and there was enough to indicate the victim might even be bleeding to death. He had no doubt that the wound was caused by some kind of weapon. And if the victim was still in that apartment, he or she might be trapped in there with the assailant.

Adrenaline surged through Brians system. He reached down with his right hand and knocked hard on the door. Police! Open up!

No one answered. The hallway remained deathly quiet. Brian knocked again, hitting the door harder. Police! Open this door! Still no answer.

He spun out to stand in front of the door. Giving a quick look to Ed, who nodded agreement and readiness, Brian put all of his 215 pounds into a push-kick aimed just below the doors handle. The wood crunched, but the door held fast. He kicked it again, harder this time. The locks bolt ripped from the wall with a splintering of wood. The door slammed open.

It suddenly occurred to Perry that his car was useless. The cops would be out of the apartment in seconds. They knew who he was; they would be looking for his car. Probably wouldnt make it fifty miles, but he also wouldnt make it far on foot.

The hatching is co ming soon. The hatching. Some poor bastard was at the end of the Triangle rope. What would it look like? How bad would the pain be?

The trip to Wahjamega would have to wait. Hed be lucky if he made it out of the parking lot, let alone all the way to Wahjamega. There was only one place he could go. Someone was close, someone who was also infected. That person would understand Perrys condition, understand what he had done with Bill, hide him from the cops who would be swarming all over this place in minutes.

Can we watch the hatching?

Yes, w e should watch. Yes, watch and see, see.

Where is it? Tell me where to go, quickly.

Come thi s way.

Perry froze. The other voice, the female voice. It was faint, but clear.

T u rn around.

He put his hands over his ears, his face a childlike expression of pure fear. It was all too much, too damn much, but he couldnt panic now, not when the cops would be rushing out the apartment door in a matter of moments. He turned and found himself facing Building G.

Hurry hurry , this wayto safety.

He didnt understand, didnt want to. All he wanted to do was get away from the cops. Perry launched himself forward at a dead run-hop, sprinting on the verge of losing his balance. He fell twice, hitting the snow-covered blacktop, landing facedown both times before scrambling madly to his feet.

It took him fifteen seconds to reach Building G.

Brian Vanderpine and Ed McKinley would both remember every moment with total clarity. In their combined twenty-five years of police work -Brians fourteen and Eds eleven-, they had never seen anything like the crazy shit in Apartment B-203.

The door slammed open. Despite Brians desire to point the gun into the apartment, he kept it trained at the floor. Nothing moved. Brian stepped inside. He immediately saw the body on the couch, bloody hands nailed to the wall with steak knives in some horrible parody of the crucifixion.

Brian would check the body, of course, but he already knew that the man was dead. He tore his gaze from the corpse the perp might still be in the apartment. There was blood everywhere.

The smell hit him like a fist: the odor of sweat, of blood, of something horribly rotten and wrong in a way he couldnt immediately define.

Brian pointed his gun straight down the short hall that led to the bathroom and bedroom. He was suddenly grateful for the dozens of calls hed made to this complex, calls that had made him familiar with these apartments, all of which had the same layout.

Ed swung around to the right, pointing his gun into the tiny excuse for a kitchen. Holy shit. Brian, look at this.

Brian took a quick peek. Dried blood covered the kitchen floor, so much that in most places the white linoleum looked a dull shade of reddish-brown. Even the dining table was covered with dried blood.

Brian moved down the hall, Ed only a few steps behind him. The tiny hall closet hung open and empty except for one long coat, a gaudy Hawaiian shirt, and a large University of Michigan varsity jacket. That left only the bedroom and the bathroom.

That smell, that wrong smell, was stronger as they reached the closed bedroom door. Brian stood half-covered by the hall corner and waved Ed to check the bathroom, which was open. Ed was in and out in three seconds, shaking his head to signify it was empty. He mouthed the words more blood.

Brian knelt in front of the bedroom door. Ed stood behind him, a step back. They avoided standing close enough for one shotgun blast to take out both of them. Feeling his heart hammering in his chest and throat, Brian turned the handle and pushed the door open. Nothing. They quickly checked the closet and under the bed.

Ed spoke. Check the wounded man, Brian, Im calling this in. As Ed grabbed his handset and started talking to the dispatcher, Brian ran to the body. No pulse; the body was still warm. The man had just died, probably within the last hour.

The victim sat on the couch, head hanging down, arms outstretched, a steak knife pinning each hand to the wall.

Blood covered the area, soaking the victims leg and leaving huge red stains on the worn couch cushions. The victims nose was a disaster, broken and ravaged. The face: swollen, cut, completely black-and-blue. Blood had spilled down the mans face and soaked his shirt.

Brian mentally pieced together the story, feeling his anger rise at the attacks savagery. The perp had attacked this victim in the hall, cut him -either with one of these knives or another weapon-, then dragged him into the apartment and knifed him to the wall. The blows to the face either came in the hall or after his hands had been pinned.

Shit like this wasnt supposed to happen in Ann Arbor. Fuck, this shit wasnt supposed to happen anywhere.

Violence in a domestic dispute was almost always followed up with remorse. Many times the assailant would call the cops after he or she had done something to hurt a loved one. That wasnt the case here. Whoever had done this hadnt felt a damn shred of remorse people who felt remorse didnt leave messages written on the wall in the blood of the dead victim.

It was the worst butchering Brian had ever seen, and it would remain the Number One Smash Hit throughout his career. Although hed never forget a single horrible detail, it was the writing on the wall that forever symbolized the savage slaying.

Numerous bloody palm and fingerprints showed that the murderer had used his hands to smear a message above the victims hanging head. A single word written in bloody three-foot-high letters that left still-wet snail trails of red running down the wall:

Discipline.

HOT PROSPECT

Margaret kicked open the swinging mens-room door. She leaned in and shouted urgently. Amos! Lets go, man! Weve got another one!

A toilet flushed. Amos lurched out of a stall, stumbling as he fought to pull up his pants. Margaret turned and sprinted down the hallway. Amos ran to keep up.

She skidded to a halt in front of the elevator. Clarence Otto held the doors open. She and Amos entered, the doors shut and Otto hit the button for the parking garage.

How far is it from here? Margaret asked.

Clarence pulled out a map and gave it a quick study. About ten minutes, give or take, he said.

Margaret grabbed Clarences strong arm, her face electric with urgency. Whats the victims condition? What are his symptoms?

I dont know that, maam. Dew is en route, backed up by two rapidresponse teams in full biosuits. I believe its an apartment complex.

Margaret let go of his arm and tried to compose herself. Do you think well get this one alive?

I think so, maam, Clarence said. Dew should already be there. The victim filled out a computer form. Instructions on that say to stay put and wait for help. I cant imagine anything going wrong at this point.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Perry shut the outside door behind him, took a quick look up the empty hallway, then glanced back through the window just in time to see one of the cops sprint out of Building B and jump into the police cruiser. The cars red and blue bubble lights flashed.

Perry grinned sadistically. Fuck you, coppers, he whispered. Youll never take me alive.

Maybe they hadnt known what to expect when they pulled up. They probably thought Bill would have Perry all hog-tied and ready for delivery. Theyd underestimated Perry. He was sure they wouldnt do it again.

He turned and looked down the hallway of Building G. He felt something, something strange. A kind of buttery warmth in his chest, perhaps an oily feeling deep inside. It was unlike anything hed ever felt before. Perry realized hed felt that feeling coming on as hed sprinted for Building G, but once inside, it grew stronger.

The hatching is co ming, the hatching is coming.

The Triangles rambling reminded Perry that his escape was only temporary. More cars were surely on the way. It was only a matter of time before the cops spotted him. Hed be shot down, of course, killed while trying to escape whether he hopped his little ass off or lay down on the ground in front of twenty witnesses. It wouldnt matter; the Soldiers would either buy the witnesses silence or make them disappear as well. He had to get inside he had to find the other Triangle victim.

Which way do we go, fellas? They had been the ones, after all, whod shown him the truth about the Soldiers, about Billy the Informant. They had been the ones to tell him that men in uniforms would come, and they were right. They had been the ones to warn him in time to escape the cops.

Go to the third floor.

Damn they learned fast. There was now almost no delay between their hearing a new concept, like directions, and their mastery of the terminology.

He hopped up the stairs. With each step the oily feeling in his chest grew a little bit stronger. By the time Perry reached the third floor, he felt the strange sensation in every fiber of his being.

He moved down the hall until his Triangles stopped him.

This is it.

Apartment G-304.

On the door was a little branch wreath, painted in soft pastels, with little wooden ducks holding a pink Welcome sign. Country art. Perry hated country art. He knocked. There was no answer. He knocked again, louder and faster.

Again no answer.

Perry leaned in so his mouth almost touched the doors edge. He spoke quietly, but loud enough to be heard on the other side. Im not leaving. I know what youre going through. I know about the Triangles.

The door opened a crack, snapping taut the chain lock. Perry heard a stereo softly playing Whitney Houstons version of Im Every Woman. A chubby face peered through, a face that might have been attractive had the woman had any

sleep in the past four or five days. She looked angry, harried and scared all at the same time. As soon as he saw the face, the oily sensation damn near overwhelmed him. Now he knew what it was he somehow sensed the presence of another host. Before she even said a word, Perry knew she was infected. Who are you? she asked. He couldn't miss the tinge of hope in her voice, hope that this man had come to save her.

Perry spoke in a calm voice. I live in this complex. My name is Perry. Let me in so we can talk about what were going to do.

Through the crack of the door he could only see two inches of her face, but it was enough to show she wasn't convinced. Are you from the government? From . . . CSI? Fear hung from her words. Perry felt his patience running thin. Look, lady, I'm in the same fucking boat you are I've got the Triangles too, okay? Don't you feel it? Now open the door before someone sees us and calls the Soldiers.

The last word struck home. Her eyes opened up wide as she took in a quick hiss of breath, and held it. She blinked twice, trying to decide if she should believe, then shut the door. Perry heard the chain slide free. The door opened, and she looked at him expectantly, hopefully.

Perry hopped in quickly, shoved her out of the way, then slammed the door shut and locked it -chain and deadbolt and even the shitty lock on the knob, thank you very much-. He turned around with a light hop and found himself staring at a huge butcher knife poised only a few inches from his chest.

He put his hands up lightly, at shoulder level, and leaned away from the blade until his back hit the door.

A mixture of emotions etched her brown eyes, anger and fear predominant above all else. If he said one wrong word he'd find that knife buried in his chest. She was a tall woman, about five-foot-seven, but fat pushed her weight to around 170 pounds. She wore a yellow housecoat with a green and blue flower pattern. It hung on her, like a hand-medown four sizes too big. The Triangle Diet Plan had done wonders for her as well she must have been at least 225 before she was infected. Fuzzy gray bunny slippers adorned her feet. Her blond hair, pulled back into a messy ponytail, looked out of place against her middle-aged face, a face that radiated fear and hopelessness.

He was much bigger than she was, but he wasn't taking any chances. One thing he'd learned on the playground early in life was that fat people were strong people. They didn't look it, but carrying all that extra weight made for powerful muscles that could be surprisingly quick at things like punching or grabbing or stabbing.

Jesus, lady, put the knife down.

How do I know you're not with the government? Let's see some ID. Her voice quavered, as did the knife's point.

Come on, Perry said, his temper steadily creeping higher. If I was from the government, do you think they'd send me out with government ID? Use your head! Tell you what let me roll up my sleeve, okay? I'll show you.

He slowly dropped his backpack to the floor, wishing he'd left the top open so he could quickly grab his own kitchen cutlery. But if he tried for it, she might panic and stab him.

Perry pushed up his sleeve.

The wave of overflow excitement hit him like a severe drug rush. That's her that's her .

She's going to hatch soon, that's her.

Oh my God. Her voice was a hoarse whisper. Oh my God, you've got them, too. The knife fell to the carpet.

Perry closed the distance with one short hop. He caught her with a big overhand left that slammed her cheekbone. Her head snapped down and back. She cried out a little as she fell to the floor. She laid sobbing and motionless on the pale yellow carpet.

Stop it now stop it now NOW!

Perry winced at the pain from the mild mind scream. He had figured that would happen, but at least he'd gotten in a good lick first. You had to show women who was in charge, after all.

Bitch, if you ever pull a knife on me again I'll carve your fat ass up. The woman sobbed with pain, terror and frustration.

Perry knelt next to her. Do you understand me?

She said nothing, her face hidden in her arms, fat shaking like a Jell-O mold.

Perry gently stroked her hair. She cringed at his touch. I'll only ask you one more time, he said. If you don't answer, I'll put my boot in your ribs, you fat fuck.

She looked up suddenly, tears streaming down her face. Yes! she screamed. Yes, I understand you!

She was yelling. It was as if she wanted to piss him off, was trying to piss him off. Women. Give 'em an inch and they take a mile. Her tearstreaked face reminded him of a glazed doughnut. No room in life for tears, woman, no room at all.

He continued to stroke her hair, but his voice took on an icy-cold quality. One more thing. If you raise your voice above conversational levels again, you're dead. And I mean there's no question about it. Cross the line with me again and I'll fuck you with that butcher knife of yours. Do you understand?

She just stared at him with a pathetic look of disbelief and utter helplessness. Perry held no sympathy for her. She was weak, after all, and in a violent world only the strong survive.

Perry's voice bubbled with anger. He talked slowly, each word clearly defined. Do. You. Under. Stand.

Yes, she whispered. I understand. Please don't hit me again.

She looked so pitiful blood trickling from her cheek, fear in her eyes, her face lined with tears. She looked like an abused woman.

Like his mother looked, after his father had finished with a lesson.

Perry shook his head hard. What the hell was happening to him? What was he becoming? That answer was simple he was becoming what he had to become to live. Only the strong survive. He stared at the woman, fighting to push his guilt down somewhere deep, somewhere he didn't have to deal with it. The Perry that had controlled his aggression

for ten years . . . there was no more room for that person.

He wiped the tears from her face with a gentle touch. Now get your fat ass off the floor and make some food. Feed us, were hungry.

He felt excitement well up fresh and strong. The Triangles knew food was on the way; it made them happy. Very happy. The emotion was powerful, so powerful that Perry couldnt help but feel a little of their happiness himself.

66.

OVERTIME

Dew stared out the Buicks window, watching the flurry of police activity outside, the big cellular phone pressed to his ear. By the looks of things, hed arrived maybe ten minutes too late. So close. The missed opportunity made him boil inside.

Its a really, really big SNAFU, Murray, Dew said. Fucking locals are everywhere, and more on the way. He could almost see Murrays face turning red.

Did the rapid-response teams go in? Murray asked. Why dont they just take over?

They didnt go in at all, Drew said. They called me first and I waved. They didnt go in at all, Drew said. They called me first and I waved toting goons wearing biosuits and watch the press jizz all over themselves.

Oh for Gods sake, Murray said, his voice tired and ragged. The press is already there?

Yeah. The local cops were first on the scene. Press picked it up on a scanner, maybe. We didnt have a chance at information control. The cops are keeping the media at a distance, but theres no way we can go in without being seen by at least three network news teams.

The radio and TV stations had already been buzzing with news of Kiet Nguyens murder spree and subsequent suicide. News didnt get any bigger than that, unless, of course, the cops mounted a manhunt for a former University of Michigan linebacker whod left a mutilated corpse in his apartment. With those two murder stories flying, coverage of a gas explosion that had killed a mother and son had disappeared completely.

Remember, the Dawsey kid was a major celebrity in this town, Dew said. Bunch of fucking liberals here in the media, theyre giddy to see a football player live up to billing as a creature of violence. This isnt D.C., Murray, this is Ann Arbor, Michigan. This is a long-haired, pot-smoking little college town. A fugitive killer football player is their story of the decade, and the guv-ment trying to cover it up is icing on their hippie cake.

Dew, considering the situation, do you see any way we can bring Dawsey in alive?

Thats your call, L.T., Dew said. You have to appreciate just how many cops are looking for him. Theres a dead body in his apartment theyre not just going to stop looking just because I tell them were on the case. They want Dawsey, and they want him bad. If hes in any kind of advanced state of infection, the cops might see his growths. If they capture

him, expect someone to get a camera on him and a boatload of reporters fighting to know why he killed a man. If hes arrested, and we cant get to him right away, the triangles might make national news before the night is out. If the reporters see triangles, that SARS bullshit wont cut it. Cops take Dawsey alive it blows this whole thing wide open.

What do you suggest?

I recommend we take him out ASAP, Dew said. And we get the local cops in on the action. Theyre just looking for an excuse to pull the trigger. Maybe we connect Dawsey to Nguyen. Ill tell them Dawsey probably has an explosive vest, or a biowarfare agent, whatever. Ill make sure there are clear orders to shoot Dawsey on sight, but to stay away from his body until our crews can remove him.

Margaret needs a living victim.

So we get the next one, Dew said. If you want to keep this secret, I told you what we need to do.

Dew waited through a long pause. L.T. had a hell of a decision to make. No, Murray said finally. She needs that kid alive. Its more important than secrecy. Whatever it takes, bring him in alive.

Thats not going to be easy, Dew said. The locals are really on edge. Then we connect Dawsey to Nguyen. Ill take care of it from our

end. Well inform the local cops, you just validate the story. What story?

That Dawsey has knowledge of a terrorist bomb, that he absolutely must be taken alive no matter what the cost. Bring him in alive, Top. Murray hung up. Dew ground his teeth. Murrays plan would work, and

Dew knew it. The cops would do whatever it took to get Dawsey alive. Dew alternated his time between looking out the window at the

army of police and looking at digital photos of Dawsey that Murrays people had transferred to the big cell phone. One was Dawseys most recent drivers-license photo. Another was a close-up from Nguyens painting of the human arch where the other faces writhed in terror and agony, Perrys scrunched in raw rage. Additional photos came from

the kids college football days.

Dew focused on one such picture, a typical preseason publicity shot from Dawseys sophomore year.

You are a big fucker, aint you, kid?

In the posed picture, late-summer sun blared down on his maize and blue uniform. Most times these shots showed a kids best smile, but this one was different. Dawsey smiled, sure, but there was something else, something around the eyes that bespoke a savage intensity. It was almost as if Dawseys very being vibrated aggression, as if he couldnt handle putting on the pads and not hitting something.

Maybe it was the pic, maybe it was the fact that hed seen the kid play on TV. Dawsey had been a rare one, a veritable beast who dominated the game every time he set foot on the field. Kid played meaner than a bull with a cattle prod up his ass and a rat trap snapped on his nuts. It was a damn shame, really, the knee injury that ended Dawseys career. Dew remembered seeing that on TV, too. Dew had watched men blown in half by land mines, men impaled with giant splinters from trees hit by artillery fire, men decapitated and twitching, rotten and bloated, yet there was something about watching the super-slow-mo replay of that kids knee bending ninety degrees the wrong way that had made Dews stomach almost rebel.

He stared hard at the picture, memorizing every detail of Dawseys face. Big boy, sure, big and strong and mean and dangerous, sure, but thats why man invented guns. Fuck Murrays orders being an AllAmerican didnt make you Superman, and a bullet in the head would bring Scary Perry Dawsey down just as it would anyone else.

Someone had to pay for Malcolms death. Dawsey was as good a target as any.

67.

THE COUCH DANCE

Perry sat on a pale yellow couch that looked brand-new, sinking back into the apartments welcome shadows. He always found it strange to be in another Windywood apartment. With an identical floor plan but different furniture and decorations, it was as if his apartment had been taken over and redecorated with watercolor seascapes, matching curtains, lace doilies and enough country-art knickknacks to gag a camel.

He munched on a chicken sandwich, cautiously peeking between the slats of the venetian blinds. Hed lucked out with Fatty Pattys apartment; from her window he could see the flurry of activity in front of his building. Seven cop cars five local and two from the state police threw a visual cacophony of red and blue lights against the pitch-black night. Observing the scene, he saw the reasons for his narrow escape. Fatty Patty had been watching out this window, and from this third-story perch she had seen the police cruiser a long way off. Her Triangles warned Perry, got him out of harms way. It only made sense, really; they were protecting their own. Keeping Perry alive was vital he was a walking incubator, after all, and if he died the Three Stooges probably died with him.

The cop cars flashing lights created a disco effect on the falling snow. It was well past midnight and there wasnt a star in the sky. If he was going to move, it would have to be later that night when the starless darkness covered everything and the soft snow swallowed every little sound with an insatiable hunger.

But he wasnt going anywhere until he saw Fatty Patty pop. He had to know how it happened. She sat on a yellow chair that matched the yellow couch, nibbling on a sandwich of her own. She cried silently, fat jiggling in time with the tiny sobs. She held a thrice-folded paper towel to a fresh cut on her forehead. Perry had told her not to cry out loud. She hadnt listened. Hed cut her; the noise had stopped. Like Daddy always said, sometimes you just had to show women who was in charge.

He noticed shed used masking tape to hang a Michigan road map on the back of the front door. Shed scrawled a red line on U.S. 23 moving north away from Ann Arbor. The line turned west at 83, then followed a series of small roads until it hit the town of Wahjamega. Around the town shed drawn several red circles and written the words This is the place. Near Wahjamega, in neat ruler lines, she had drawn a symbol in red ink:

Perry looked at the design hed cut into his right arm. The scabs were still fresh. Sure, his was a bit messy, but then again its a tad harder to make straight lines with a kitchen knife, right? What did that symbol mean to the Triangles? Did the meaning even matter? No, it didnt nothing really mattered anymore.

They told you to go to Wahjamega, too, eh? Perry asked. She nodded quietly. Do you have a car? She nodded again, and he smiled. It would be easy; all he had to do was wait for the cops to clear out, then he and Fatty Patty could drive to Wahjamega. As for what waited there, he really didnt want to know, but he was going anyway.

This was his second chicken sandwich -with Miracle Whip, mind you, and with a side of Fritos, it really hit the spot-. Hed already polished off lasagna leftovers, some chocolate cake, a can of Hormel chili, and a pair of Twinkies. His hunger was long gone, but the Triangles constantly urged him to eat. And eat he did.

Munching away on the sandwich, he felt surprisingly content. He wasnt sure how much of that enjoyment was his and how much was overflow from the Triangles; the things beamed with near-orgasmic pleasure at the steady flow of nutrients. The line between what they felt and what he felt was beginning to get a little fuzzy, like the way he now truly wanted to go to Wahjamega.

Have to watch out for that, Perry old boy. Cant fall into their little trap. Got to keep your own thoughts or youre as good as dead.

He decided to kill another Triangle as soon as he finished the sandwich. That would redefine their relationship. Nothing like a little selfmutilating demarcation to set things straight.

In front of his building, the Columbos scrambled around like little ants. Perry reveled in his third-floor view. The drama below unfolded like a soundless, long-distance version of Cops.

The police had knocked on Fatty Pattys door. Shed given an awardwinning performance. No, she hadnt heard anything. No, she hadnt seen a huge man wandering around the building. She was afraid of Perry, but thanks to her Triangles she was scared shitless of the cops. So she chose the lesser of two extreme evils.