

OBVIOUS

CHAPTER 1

“I don’t even know where to start.”

“Well, why don’t you start with why you wanted to see me,” Laura calmly says, crossing her legs. She has great legs. But my glimpse is fleeting. I’m scared and I’ve come to learn licentious thoughts in my state of mind trigger the attacks. I’m up to two already today and the hell my life has become is only feeding the intensity. She smiles but shame averts my eyes. The last thing I need now would be to lose her too - especially now. Laura’s been my psychotherapist for these past two shitty years, working to get me to come to terms with Anita’s death. Here’s a cruel twist of fate for you. Three years ago I was her mentor but now I’m sitting here rubbing my wrists where shackles have turned skin raw and a prisoner’s number forever brands me. I clear my throat. That tingling sensation I’ve come to dread.

Look at those legs!

Just as I feared, my salacious lapse has opened the floodgates. I hate that voice in my head. Breathe...easy...slowly. Think of something good. God, I wish I were still sleeping. Then maybe I could awake all over again and discover this is all a ridiculous nightmare. Yesterday I woke up in a guarded room at St. Vincent’s hospital, wondering how and why I was there. Wondering why some cop named Zukerman pounded me

with questions before my eyes even began to focus. Where was Lucy? Where was my son? What did I do? The answers came fast - far to fast.

“You can start anytime you know,” Laura says, curious I’m sure as to what is going on in my head. “Desmond?”

That’s me. Desmond Bennett. A mere week ago I was still a reputed forensic psychologist in New York despite being Laura’s patient. Hell, being in therapy is hip in this town. And I should know because like I said, three years ago I was the star of Manhattan. I was the one at the top of our game. They all envied me. Now they all hate me. Everyone hates me. I don’t even deserve Laura.

“Desmond,” she says again, this time her hand gently brushing mine. “Why did you want to see me?”

I can’t tell her it was because I just needed to see a familiar face. “I’m not sure,” I say, knowing that’s not enough. If it were her on the couch it wouldn’t be good enough for me either. But I don’t want to talk about Lucy, the murder or Anita Rollins and her fucking suicide. I’ll just sit here and dread my dirty little thoughts.

“You’re not sure?” Laura asks the same way I used to when a patient couldn’t conjure a better response than ‘I’m not sure’. To her credit she’s tried patiently to get me to open up for two years. And I wish I could go along with it. After all I’d like my life back.

“I can’t help if you don’t let me,” she says.

I take a deep breath, feeling the anxiety I know precedes the attack. How do I talk about these thoughts, these terrible thoughts? If they knew they’d burn me for the sadist they say I am.

“You know maybe talking would be better, right?” Laura says.

“Maybe,” I say, my eyes drifting down.

Spread those legs!

I can feel it now. It’s getting hot in here. My throat is tight. The air is dry.

“Sure, talk,” I say with a curt laugh that even sounds a bit demented to me. “Maybe we should analyze my mother or something? Get to the bottom about how I got so screwed up.”

Laura doesn’t even smile at that one. She’s thinking up another approach, determined to get through to me. Her forehead scrunches when she does that. I used to think it was cute. Now it’s just annoying. “You’ve never talked about your mother in our previous sessions.”

“I deviated.”

“You’re avoiding. Would you like to talk about your mother?”

“Forget it. And don’t talk textbook to me okay.”

Laura’s not going to let this go. She’s a Freudian. Her head tilts slightly as she asks, “How did she die anyway?”

“Laura.”

You blonde slut!

I suck a long breath and try to slow down.

“Maybe there’s something in how you feel about your mother?” she says.

“No!” This is definitely not relaxing me, so I bolt from the plush, leather chair. I say that with all the affection I can muster for expensive, chic furniture that looks and feels like plastic white beanbags. I stand at the floor to ceiling windows and soak in the

impressive view of Manhattan. The media vans have cluttered the curbs along Broadway and the reporters - or rather vultures - are loitering for another morsel of my flesh to feed to a hungry public. How'd they find out I was here?

Fucking scum!!

Across Broadway Senator Goldbraith's billboard is perched pompously on a tenement. One I'm sure he owns. He looks very distinguished, very sincere, and very corrupt. He's the archetype politician plying for Washington and national distinction with all the usual promises lobbied. But Goldbraith promises a little something more. An aggressive new bill on crime, especially killers like myself. And I'm wondering if my sudden notoriety has made me the perfect poster boy for his campaign zeal. After all I'm public enemy number one, the man whose face is gracing more magazine covers and grocery store tabloids than any other celebrity this week. I feel like human fodder. How did this happen to me? I gawk at the horde of media below. Maybe Anita had the right idea. You just step out on the ledge and escape.

"What are we, twenty floors up here?" I ask, still staring at the street.

"Eighteen," Laura says, like she knows exactly what's going through my fucked up head. She swivels her chair to face me. The chair is white of course. Or what did she call it the first time I was in this new office? That was only six months ago only I was here as a friend and still formidable colleague. Lucy on my arm and a drunken gaggle of PhD's like myself bantering Freudian analysis as the clock ticked to New Years. No one could be drunk enough for that. But it was Laura's best New Years party ever, and of course, everyone got to see her new digs; her testament of success. Over the past two years Laura's career has grown by leaps and bounds. She's one of the most

sought after psychologists in Manhattan, even does a weekly radio show on Sunday mornings and has her own interactive web page. And with such notoriety and success comes stature and that demands a new office and a party. New Years was just the perfect reason to have it.

Eggshell, that was what she called it. It's like calling pink fuchsia. It's still pink to my untrained eye. And so eggshell is white. Just plain old white. White and fucking tacky. But what does it matter. The whole office looked like the set of a Purex commercial anyway. Pure. Perfect. Unblemished. And we're supposed to spill our guts in this vacuum of human fidelity and confess our fears? How the fuck do I...wait. She's coming.

Strawberries?

Breathe...

"Desmond," Laura says softly, trying to lure me back.

Desmond.

Oh no. There she is. I'm still frozen at the window, the street looming eighteen floors below, and Anita is on the ledge, tormenting me, threatening my weak grasp on sanity as she always does. She just stands there completely calm and inviting, looking at me while gusts of wind tassel her hair and flutter her summer dress.

Love me, Desmond.

Then she leans forward, arms out, welcoming escape. It's always the same. But the instant gravity claims her she coils with sudden fear and realization. Her fingers clawing for me, eyes begging for a lifeline at that final moment upon freefall when she realizes she doesn't really want to die. Her scream fading as she falls at unimaginable

velocity, arms and legs flailing, then sudden death. I close my eyes, tell myself to let it go. It's been two years. It was her choice.

"Desmond," Laura says. "Come and sit down." And as she always does when I'm fighting Anita's ghost at the window, Laura attempts to assuage my panic.

I sink in the couch hoping she can't see how weak I am. Hoping she doesn't see what the whole country says I am. I'm trying to slow my breathing but the air is so thin. My hands are sweaty and cold.

Laura leans close enough for me to feel the brush of her breath on my cheek. "Look, Desmond," she says. "You need to talk about what you remember from last week." She glances past her massive window at Goldbraith's billboard across Broadway. "Especially now. Have you talked to Harry?"

Laura's referring to Harry Bard, the resident chief psychologist at Breckendale Hall and one of the highest regarded members of our illustrious profession here in New York. He is a friend. Someone Laura knows I'd trust. But talking to friends who've long regarded me their peer is hardest at the moment. And Harry was more than that for many years. He was my mentor. My professor. So much so that I was the one who introduced Anita to Harry. Her suicide deeply troubled him as well.

"I don't know about Harry," I finally say.

"Because of Anita, I know. But you have to talk about this, Desmond," she urges more like a friend.

Talk, talk, talk, talk, and talk. It's all I've done for the past couple of years. How do I talk about my life spiraling into shit? My struggles with Anita's suicide and my divorce pale in comparison to what I woke up to yesterday. Lucy is gone. How am I

supposed to live without her? She saved my life just by being in it. Oh God, I miss her so much. My hands are shaking again. I can't stop it. Oh shit, it's coming. Tingling.

"Laura, I d-don't even know how to talk about it?"

"A word at a time."

Easy for her to say, she's not splattered across every front page and grocery store tabloid in the country under the headline: 'The Man who murdered Lucy Greene'.

That whore!

Stop it. Get control dammit!

"I'm tired of not remembering," I say, pulling at my fingers. Breathe...don't let it happen here. Not in front of Laura.

Oh, to lick between those legs.

"I know," Laura says. She can see it coming.

I want to fuck her!

There it is. The squeezing chest, bristles on the back of my neck standing on end. My face flushing, skin hot and cold, the walls closing in. Gotta relax. Gotta relax.

Bitch, bitch, bitch, bitch, bitch!

"Another attack?" Laura asks.

I'd respond if I could. But it's too late. The air thicker and colder with every gasp. Can't breathe. Can't move. Not now! Not again! I flash on Lucy kissing me, loving me.

That girl knew how to fuck.

She loved me!

She loved to fuck!

“No!” I shout. Laura leans back, leery of me again.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!

“No!” The tears are flowing now. The air in the room gone.

Shoulda fucked Anita.

Laura seizes my hands as if she’d like to physically pull me out of my head.

“Desmond!”

My tongue swells in my pasty mouth.

Want some tongue, Laura?

Oh God help me!

There’s death in my heart. The room is spinning madly. Somehow I manage to mumble the words I thought I’d only hear my old Breckendale patients say. “I didn’t kill her!”

I did it! I did it! I did it! I did it! I did it!

Air gone.

Everything black.

CHAPTER 2

Bang asked me what I miss most since I woke up and found myself in hell. I don't think I had to think about it for long, and too be honest it felt good to think about something else other than Lucy's lifeless eyes haunting me. And what is hell?

Welcome to Breckendale Hall.

It's referred to as a detention hall to psychiatric facility and even under hushed breath purported to be the SOCP center in the area. The acronym deciphered means Sexual Offender Commitment Program, a sort of re-entry regime for sexually violent predators that we in the field refer to as SVPs. Not the kind of neighbor most in the rural suburb enveloping Breckendale would sleep well at night having around. And after being admitted the day before yesterday, only two hours after waking at St. Vincent's, I was fairly sure this hell was going to be my new home for a while. I knew all too well of Breckendale and what went on within these walls from my forensic heydays. I did competency testing on the more notorious patients, lifetime residents of the high security Level 'C', who had not so pretty stories detailing their crimes. Not that the deviants deserved clemency but most of the detainees in the low level East Wing were textbook psychosis sufferers. Their only crimes inflicted unto themselves, yet they're tossed in with the predators and killers and labeled 'fresh fish.'

Let's not forget the videotapes. Competency hearings demanded I watched them and some of it was pretty gruesome stuff to say the least. There's nothing like seeing a case subject frothing at the mouth due to over exertion against the restraints. I didn't let myself ponder the number of Sentinel Events that have occurred within these walls. Especially here at Breckendale, a prison hospital equipped with electric shock rooms, white padded cells, straight jackets, amble litres of Potassium Chloride, and all the other repulsive therapies. Anita recounted some incredible experiences while she served here with Harry Bard. I hated coming to Breckendale in my former life.

So you can believe me when I say I never imagined, even in my worst nightmare, I would be behind these walls. There is hopelessness in being here.

"Scooby Doo," I mutter barely above a whisper. Bang 's massive hand clamps the rail of my bunk, hoisting his intimating bulk from below. The bottom was his. A point made indelibly clear when Moe and Curly chucked me into my cell yesterday. The bunk's flimsy metal frame creaks as Bang heave's his face of complete incredulity in view of mine. Bang is African-American.

"Say again."

"Scooby Doo."

"You shittin' me?"

"My son loved that cartoon."

Good redds!

Easy...easy.

"Me too," Bang says, his voice uncharacteristically emotional for a man of his mass. So what does a guy like Bang do just at that moment? The Scooby Doo theme

sung as flat as any tone-deaf human could manage with more volume than any man should be capable of. But that was Bang. A regular riot in the cells. Or rather 'blocks' as he called them. A few of the less amiable inmates utter threats while others chime in. Before long East Wing is one huge echo of "Scooby Dooby Doo - where are you." It's eerie as hell.

The guards respond quickly with batons spanking cell doors. Moe is definitely not happy. He smacks our door and curses Bang, calls him the 'N' word, then orders our door open. The Iron tumblers clank and that grating sound of metal scrapping cement grits my teeth. I hate that sound.

I hate Moe. His pate a sullen red ire, his baton clenched with a white-knuckle grip, and that smirk that tells you a thrash is coming. "Hellava way to start the morning, ladies!" he says as Curly, a decently robust man himself, follows Moe into our block and coaxes Bang from his bunk with a whack to the ribs. And then one more for good measure as Bang leaps to his feet and is led away. I don't dare ask where. Bang will tell me when he gets back.

Moe watches it all like it's good fun. He likes to abuse. He's a textbook bully with a government job that lets him do it. How ironic is that.

He stands there, looking at me like I'm nothing. Another vile human being that only made his day more difficult. Five gets you ten he'll be voting for Senator Goldbraith.

"Get out of that bunk, you sick shit," he spats. "You've got company."

CHAPTER 3

As we make our way down the hall Moe's narrow eyes judge me, looking at me like I'm too despicable to even be allowed visitors and privileges. I'm one of the animals. And I'm sure he feels I belong in Level 'C', not in the lap and luxury of East Wing. The fact I'm not shackled is probably pissing him off.

"Yesterday," he says, "it was that fancy shrinks office downtown and today some high priced lawyer."

Lawyer? Who got me a lawyer?

"Seems to good for a piece of shit the likes of you, Bennett. What you did to a woman like Lucy Greene." Moe opens the heavy door to the visitor's gallery then barricades me from passing. His square jaw clenched as he says, "They ought to use the chair for guys like you. Injections are to easy."

The fact Moe has all the power he needs within the walls of Breckendale to beat me within an inch of my life, then turn in a subterfuge report deeming me the culprit, is all too plausible. The scary part is he would probably do it. So I choose for no eye contact and let the taunts go in one ear and out the other. Besides the instant I catch my first glimpse of my lawyer, Moe's insignificant threat completely leaves me. I feel my knees give. If there were a last straw to my resolve, to my mettle, over the past couple of days, this would be it. As forced as it is I manage to at least open my mouth.

"Jenny?"

* * * * *

All things considered, and only guessing at what she's been through over the past week, Jenny Bennett looks pretty fair. Yes, the last name is no coincidence. And considering Brendan in all of this, I'm glad she opted to keep it after the divorce. Of course that had changed for the worse.

I can tell by her forced smile as I enter the room just how upset and frazzled she is. You sleep in the same bed with a woman for thirteen years her subtle body language is forever ingrained. And that leaves me with a tightening knot in my gut. The last person I need to deal with right now is my ex-wife; least of all have her as my attorney.

"Hello, Desmond," she says. She used to call me Dessy.

I simply nod, not wanting to give Moe more fodder to torment me with.

"Thank you, guard," she says to him, confidentiality expected now.

"I'm within earshot ma'am," Moe says with a slight scowl for my benefit.

"Asshole," I mutter to myself as Moe leaves us to circulate around the gallery.

At present I figure about ten to twelve inmates are engrossed in whispered huddles with loved ones, lawyers, or whomever. The damn room, like everything else about Breckendale, is cold and damp with that musky odor that makes everything seem old and neglected. The square tiled floor and waffled cement ceiling only amplify the annoying drone. You couldn't feel the warmth in this room if there was an open fire blazing in the center of it.

I assume my seat and feel it ten fold. It's bad enough to have everyone doubt my innocence in Lucy's killing, but now I have to sit in front of Jen, the mother of my fourteen-year-old son, and endure her disappointment.

"How are you?" she says.

"Me. Oh, heck, Jen, I'm just fine. And you?" I notice her twisting at the ring Markus Simmons had given her when he proposed. It's big and gaudy and looks ridiculous on her finger. "How's what his name...?"

Jen's composure slips and a tear wells from my caustic tongue. Once again, I'm the asshole. Maybe it's frustration from our divorce or anger over her month old marriage to Markus, who just happens to be the star lawyer in Jen's firm. Even my son likes him.

"I'm sorry," I say. "What are you doing here, Jen?"

"You need a lawyer."

"You're an environmental lawyer."

"Do you have a lawyer?"

"No."

"Then we should talk."

We sit silent for a long moment, ignoring the ambient drone going on around us. She smiles that smile I remember and then her blue eyes lock on me. She's a brunette. So was Lucy. Call it a weakness. Nonetheless, all I can see is Jen's tortured look begging for me to reassure her. To help her believe the man she had once loved and sees in her son could not be capable of such a horrendous act.

"I didn't do it, Jen."

She wants to believe me. I know she does. Her hands tremble and her mouth twitches. I'd seen these signs before. Funny how the idiosyncrasiocies are so indelible and, in some weird way, so endearing.

"Brendan won't even go to school," she says.

As much as I love my son, this is not what I need to hear right now. "Jen."

"It's all over the TV, the papers...I can't even get groceries and__."

"Jen! I don't need this right now." The anxiety. Air thick and cold. Walls are closing in. I can't even swallow. "If you think I could do this then leave. Right now."

"Do you know what we've been through? What your son has been through!"

"Do you know what I've been through!"

I check around the room. No one seems to notice. A quick glance over my shoulder to make sure Moe's baton isn't heading for the back of my head.

"Dessy," she says the way she used to when I mattered. She wipes her eye. "I'm scared. They're saying drugs and...I don't know what to think."

"I know," I say with not nearly enough humility.

Jen bites her lip. One of those endearing little traits I used to love. "With everything that's happened with us," she says, her eyes saturating, "I still...well, I'm always going to care about you. I know I haven't said that in a long time, but I just wanted you to know that."

This woman never ceases to surprise me. Maybe that's why I had loved her so much. Why I was so angry. I don't remember the last time the urge to hold her swept me. But I'd pay anything to hold her now.

Moe's suspicious gait closes on our table. I compose and say, "So, what's our

strategy, counselor?”

She’s completely impervious to Moe’s presence behind me. “I think Markus should handle your case,” she says.

I’m suddenly blank. That last straw thing again. My ex-wife’s husband is to be my attorney, my legal savior with the key to this Pandora’s box. I don’t even know how to respond to that. So I don’t.

CHAPTER 4

I no sooner get out of the visitor's gallery it seems and Moe is escorting me through the main corridor again. He's more pissed off than he was the last time. But instead of leading me back down the very hall we had come only an hour ago, he veers right, walking me through the heart of level 'C'. This is so absurd to me. From block to block I glance at inmates, still resisting the fact I'm among them. I'm one of these killers incarcerated with the pedophiles and SVP's. And to think I was one of those psychologists poking and prodding to grasp the warped psychopathic.

"Soak it in, Bennett," Moe says. "This'll be your new home before long. Once you're indicted I'll make sure you get a nice cell with the other fresh fish."

We come upon a long hallway with iron doors on either side of the corridor. I know these to be the interrogation chambers where I had conducted more than my share of competency tests. And believe me chamber is the appropriate word for them. Bunker like cells with heavy doors, two-way mirrors, and those damn surveillance cameras to document every reaction to every question. Those were the very tapes I used to observe for my substantial fee. All part and parcel of the forensic psychologist gig. And maybe that's what makes it worse. I know who'll be watching.

Moe blesses me with yet another glare as he throws open the door. “Now you play nice, sweetheart.”

I dismiss Moe as inconsequential and shuffle into the chamber only to find another grin taunting me. And that would be the one creased across Sergeant Zukerman’s ugly face.

Zukerman, like his name suggests, is a large, formidable man. One doesn’t have to endure many of his interrogations to realize he’s a punctilious investigator with all the subtlety of a bull in a china shop. He almost characterizes the cardboard cutout we all have in our minds of that Dick Tracy type lawman, complete with trench coat and fedora. Who wears that anymore? I had never met him until the day before yesterday. The day I awoke in hell. He stands as I enter and removes the coat and hat, tossing them on the only table in the room.

“Thanks, Moe,” Zukerman says, and then smiles at me like a cat who gets to play with a mouse. “I can handle it from here.” He extends his large hand, indicating for me to sit.

“Have a seat, Mr. Bennett.”

Moe shoves me at the table with a whack just below my ribs.

Sonofabitch!

“Chair, shrink,” Moe says. The nub of his baton is going to sting for a while. Just like my first day in here, walking through the showers when Moe jabbed me in the back, knocking me to my knees. According to him that was just to deter me from getting any wise ideas. I tossed and turned all night with the gnawing ache.

Asshole!

The clang from Moe shutting the door echoes the cinder chamber. That sound of metal scrapping cement that I love so much followed by tumblers locking. I'm still moaning, trying get air back into my lungs.

"I don't think Moe likes you, Doc." Zukerman says, watching me as if my agony is pleasurable. His hand clamps under my armpit and hoists me into my chair. Caring guy this Zukerman. He sits back down on his side of the table then slowly unwraps a stick of gum. Then he fishes an 8x10 envelope from the inside pocket of his coat and places it on the table. Everything he does is slow and deliberant. He might as well be glaring at me through a magnifying glass cause that's exactly how it feels. He chews vigorously, like he's trying to annoy me. It's working. That smile warps his face again.

"Trying to quit smoking," he says.

"That's rough," I say, thinking *whatever* and still rubbing the sharp sting around my rib.

"Yeah, it's a bitch. You smoke?"

"No."

"Good. Cooped up in here, craving a smoke would just make it that much fuckin' harder wouldn't ya think?"

I glance at the video camera tucked in the corner and wonder which one of my esteemed colleagues will analyze my responses to this bullshit. "I wouldn't know," I say as evenly as possible, as calmly as I can manage. This guy scares the hell out of me.

Fat prick!

He slides the folder over to me. "Got these today. Thought you'd like to have a look at your handy work." He opens the folder slowly, studying me for any flickers, any

noticeable signs of guilt.

This hits harder than Moe's baton ever could and the stark images abruptly dull the gnawing ache. The Lucy I knew was vibrant, full of life and passion, her eyes gleaming pools of blue and aqua, her bronze tanned body supple and sleek. The Lucy Greene I had fallen in love with is gone. I can't see her in the pictures Zukerman spreads across the table. Bloody lacerations and contusions mar her once stunning features. All I see is a beaten corpse, murdered by repeated blows by a blunt weapon. In Lucy's case I'm told it was a hammer. One photo captured her face down, partially tilted onto her right side. She almost looks asleep in that picture. The way I wish I could remember her now.

God, how could I've slept through all this?

I remember her at Pocket's down in the village that night. I had planned that evening for two weeks. It was going to be perfect, the best birthday she'd ever had. I had phoned friends, and believe me Lucy had many. She was, after all, a renowned singer, touted as the jazz communities next up and coming star. But what heightened Lucy's fame and notoriety was the fact she was the talented daughter of one of jazz's finest members, the infamous Max Greene. And that is why every talk show and news broadcast is focused on me this week. The killer has awoken!

The first time I saw Lucy was at Pocket's, a popular jazz club down in the village that I had once called home. I headed down with some old friends - funny they haven't called since I woke up - to see Max who was doing a gig with his quartet. I was pretty excited about going back. It had been years and I really hadn't seen Max since my divorce. Like everything else in my life at that time, that dropped by the wayside too.

Max was glad to see me, told me to hang out and he would call me up in the second set. It felt too good to be back at Pocket's.

Max's band burned through a couple swing numbers then Lucy came on and sang an old Billie Holiday standard that brought the house down. I was mesmerized. By the time we were at Pocket's, celebrating her birthday a week ago with a club full of our friends, I was sure it was love. So sure, in fact, that I even prepared Brendan for his new stepmother. I was feeling better than I had in the past two years since Anita flung herself off my ledge. Even Laura was happy for me. The attacks seemed to subside. I was even weaning myself off those damn pills she prescribed. I was gaining my confidence, my self esteem, and it was Lucy who gave that all back to me. She...

Where is it?

Where the fuck is it!!

The attack is sudden. My breathing quickens. My eyes bounce from photo to photo desperately. Zukerman is looking at me, probably trying to determine if this is some pathetic attempt at an impending insanity plea.

"Looking for something, doc?" he says. The gum chewing slows. "Did you leave something behind maybe?"

I'm frantic. Air thick and cold. The walls are closing in. Oh shit! Oh shit!

That bitch took my ring off!

No she didn't.

Bitch!

I snap out of my chair. Air thin. Air heavy. Lucy! I feel nauseous, dizzy, the room spinning wildly...can't breathe...can't see...hazy...

The girl could fuck!

No!

“Hey!” Zukerman yells, his murky image rising from his chair. His voice sounds like he’s talking under water. I think his hand is reaching... for...me.

Sleepy, sleepy, Desmond!

The chamber slips away.

CHAPTER 5

“Desmond, you mean to tell me you don’t remember any of this?” Laura asks.

“I remember everything right up to this point,” I say, shocked at watching myself pass out in the interrogation chamber as Zukerman lurches across the table at me. I’m in Laura’s perfectly white office a day later, watching myself on her new ultra thin television hanging on the wall, seeing the most horrifying video from the interrogation room tapes I’d ever seen. I’m witnessing myself wrestling with Zukerman! And I don’t remember it!

Laura is definitely rattled. “You don’t remember this?”

I’d even go so far to say Laura Burns is scared. And her wavering countenance only confirms my own fears. If I don’t remember this then...

“I didn’t kill her?” I say, my voice weak and frail.

“I’m not saying you did.”

“Why can’t I remember?”

“I’m not sure, Des.”

Zukerman looks even more intimidating on video than he does in real life. On the tape he sits down and looks right pissed off. “Forget something,” he says with enough

hostility that it should've sent shivers down my spine.

Instead I swipe at Lucy's crime scene photos, scattering them to the floor and yell, "Fuck you!" loud enough to echo the cinder chamber.

Zukerman can only laugh. "Well, well, well. You do have a temper."

I glare directly into the video camera like so many of those maniacal killers on Level 'C' I use to study and harbor a healthy contempt for.

"Yeah," Zukerman says, looking over his shoulder at the camera. "Smile and wave."

"Go to hell." My voice is deep, almost sinister in tone. The voice in my head.

"No that's where you're going," Zukerman says.

"I'm already there. Look around. It's like a fucking five star hotel." I'm laughing like a psychotic.

"Why did you kill her, huh? You don't like beautiful women?"

"You figure it out," I answer like a man with no conscience.

Laura winces at that one then glances at me as if she's reassuring herself it's a friend sitting on the couch with her, not the cold, calculating man impersonating Desmond Bennett in the video.

Zukerman's face is suddenly serious. "Figure out what?"

I'm looking at the photos again then glare at Zukerman and say, "I was there...detective. I know."

Jesus!

Zukerman says, "So you were. So you were. Would you care to share it with the rest of us."

I'm staring at him with pure contempt and disdain. "This is how you get your jollies, isn't it, Zukerman."

"Everybody's gotta have a hobby wouldn't you say. What's yours?"

I sit silent.

Zukerman tolerates this for a beat or two then says, "How do you know what you saw when you claim you don't remember?"

"I didn't say I don't remember."

What?!

Zukerman chews his gum. "Must've been someone else who looked like you that I arrested the day before yesterday then."

"Obviously."

"You're a real mystery, doc."

"There are no mysteries, detective, just illusions and reality. And here's the good part. My reality may be the illusion." I'm grinning like I'm impressed with myself.

I glance at Laura knowing that was the most ridiculous bullshit I've ever uttered. I'm guessing Zukerman felt the same way.

"Yeah, yeah," Zukerman says to the wicked me, "you tick tocks have all the answers"

This is without a doubt one of the most terrifying moments in my life. Has this sort of thing happened to me before? Are there blocks of time and events I've missed, lost as a result of what? Is this why the intense panic attacks? I started having those after Anita's suicide. What's going on with me? Is this what drove Jenny away? She said she

couldn't handle my moods anymore. Loving one second then pushing her away the next.
After Anita...hey, what am I showing Zukerman?

I'm picking one of the photos off the floor and pushing it across the table at him.
I can't tell from the video which one exactly.

"Is there something special about this particular photo?" Zukerman asks.

"Yeah."

"Okay, I give up," he says.

"So easily."

"I'm not one for games." Zukerman taps his temple. "That's you tick tock guys."

"You're into clues aren't you?"

Clues!

Zukerman is suddenly taunt and aware. "Now don't tease me.
That's unfair."

My smile is truly wicked. "That's not where she was killed.

How do I know that!!!

"You want to elaborate on that, Bennett?" Zukerman says. No gum chewing,
nothing.

"I'm not Bennett." Suddenly the evil me is twitching.

"Excuse me."

I'm rubbing my head now, rocking back and forth in my chair like I'm suffering
from an intense migraine or something. I don't remember a headache.

Zukerman watches this then says, "Doc, we're not going to dance again are we?"

I'm moaning and mumbling, "these fucking headaches!" A moment later I

collapse to the cement floor. Zukerman dives from his chair, a failed attempt to catch me, and yells for Moe. And of course, Moe enters the chamber with baton drawn, psyched up for battle. I'm actually surprised by his sudden concern when he sees me passed out at his feet.

"What the fuck is this?" Moe asks.

"He just clipped out," Zukerman says with a finger snap. "Just like that."

"He'll be out for awhile," Moe says, sliding his baton back in its sheath. "The same thing happened yesterday with that shrink. He didn't wake up till this morning. Curtis and I had to carry him outta there."

I passed out in this office!

Laura avoids my look. I'm too shocked to even put the question into words.

Zukerman paces in the video, scratching his head. "What shrink?" he asks Moe.

"Burns, I think."

"Laura Burns?"

"Yeah, I think so. Watch channel two. It was on there this morning." Moe grins.

"I looked pretty good."

Zukerman sighs. He looks directly at us and swipes his finger across his throat.

The screen is suddenly video blue. Laura pushes herself wearily off the chic couch and with trembling hand aims the remote and flicks off the television. "Well," she says, "we've got a lot of work to do, huh. Des, are you alright?" She digs a pack of smokes out of her desk.

"No, I'm not," I say, my chest squeezing again. "I don't know what the fuck is wrong with me." I watch her light up. I feel totally betrayed. "Why didn't you tell me I

passed out here yesterday?”

“I had to be sure,” Laura says, standing by the window with the cigarette smoldering between her trembling fingers.

“Sure of what? C’mon, Laura, I’m desperate here. I don’t know what’s going on.” I come to the window hoping Anita doesn’t show up again. Instead Senator Goldbraith seemingly grins at me from his billboard. I don’t want to look down eighteen floors, but I do anyway when Laura points out the horde of media trucks and reporters loitering again. Waiting for the story of the year to emerge through the glass doors downstairs.

A plume of smoke lingers against the window. Laura wipes a tear of her own. “You were saying over and over that you didn’t kill her, then just like that, you passed out on the couch.”

“What did I say?”

“Nothing. You didn’t revive in a different state like on that tape. You just passed out and that was it.” She glances at the blank television. “I’ve never seen anything like that before.” She soaks in another deep puff. “Stay on your medication, Des.”

“That won’t be a problem. They’ve doubled my prescription over there.”

Laura’s eyes suddenly bulge, her beautiful face steeped in shock. “What!”