

THE A C.J. Cavanaugh Mystery
BUTCHER

MICHAEL R. LANE

Kylie Preston is out for a night of fun with The Liberated Wives Club, a group of close friends who have not only survived divorce but also thrived in its wake. Kylie encounters a stranger who charms her into going home with him. The next day, Kylie Preston's body is discovered in a stolen car, dissected and preserved in ice chests. When Portland Homicide finds themselves at a dead end, Carl Wheaton, a dear friend and colleague of the deceased, implores C. J. Cavanaugh to investigate on behalf of Lunsford Insurance. C. J. cannot say no to his friend. During the course of his investigation of the deranged killer the press has dubbed "The Butcher," more bodies turn up mutilated in precisely the same manner as the deceased Vice-President of Acquisitions for Lunsford Insurance. Each grisly discovery intensifies the race to capture The Butcher before he strikes again.

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THE BUTCHER

Michael R. Lane

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CHAPTER ONE

It was a little past five a.m., pitch dark with a light rain adding to the void of night. Harry could not ask for more natural cover than if he were buried under a blanket of leaves. Harry drove the silver BMW with the headlights off. He prowled through a quiet northeast Portland neighborhood, searching for a place to park. This was one of the neighborhoods Harry had scouted for this express purpose. He was interested in neighborhoods with low theft and automobile break-ins. Nothing would be worse than to have some car thief spoil his plans. This calm middle-class neighborhood had very low incidents in that regard. It would be the perfect place to dump his cargo.

All of the street-legal parking places were taken. Harry hadn't planned on that. Each of the other nights he had scouted the area, there were four or five available parking spots. Harry parked in the deeper shadows in front of a private driveway. He had a good view of the entire street from there.

Harry killed the engine and glanced at his gloved left hand. He removed the glove and studied the fake tattoo of the heart with a lightning bolt cutting through it. Harry had done a good job, if he said so himself. He opened his coat and shirt and studied the fake serpent tattoo on his neck and chest. He had done an even better job on the serpent than he had on the lightning heart. *Maybe I should have tried my hand at art instead of what I do for a living*, he thought. Both fake tattoos had been symbolic gestures for him. The heart pierced by lightning represented the violent manner in which people he loved had been ripped from his life. The serpent marked his means of revenge.

A plump, middle-aged man wearing a security guard uniform rushed out of a gray two-story house mid-block east of where Harry parked. Harry quickly buttoned his shirt and coat and slipped his glove back on. He watched the security guard get into his car and hastily drive away in the opposite direction from where Harry parked. Harry wasted no time claiming the parking space.

Harry tossed the keys into the glove compartment and got out of the BMW, leaving it unlocked. He walked briskly west. He was unforgettable but indescribable, wearing a long black trench coat, dark sunglasses, black leather gloves, and a wool raven-colored toque hat with earflaps. Turning north at the next intersection, Harry walked one block and then turned west onto NW Pettygrove. Parked right where he had left it was his green Toyota Camry. He unlocked the car and jumped in.

He looked around to see who was about. The streets were clear. He removed his hat, gloves, and sunglasses. It was done. Harry was exhausted. The whole process had taken more out of him than he had expected. Fortunately for him, he hadn't made any appointments for the day, in anticipation of last night's big event. Harry Boulder wore a warm smile of weary satisfaction as he drove off into the night.

The morning sun was up with the promise of an overcast day. Harry retrieved the artificial electronic larynx from his coffee table and the cell phone next to it. The discovery had best happen in daylight for all to see. After testing the device by reciting the alphabet to make certain it was working, Harry pressed a speed dial option on the cell phone for the Portland Police Homicide Division. Three rings later, Detective Alvarez answered. Harry engaged the artificial larynx.

"Detective Alvarez," Harry said as if the two were dear friends, "there is a silver BMW, license plate ALPHADOC, parked on NW Overton Street, west of the intersection of Overton and 19th. The doors are open and the keys to the vehicle are inside the glove compartment. In the trunk of this vehicle, you will find four packages. Inside those packages are the remains of Kylie Preston. You should retrieve them immediately if you want them to be of any use for the greater good."

Harry hung up before Detective Alvarez could respond. He laid the artificial larynx and cell phone back on the coffee table. He would toss

the cell phone down a storm sewer later. It was a disposable cell that Harry had paid cash for at some mom-and-pop sundry store outside of the city that he knew for a fact had no working video surveillance. *Good luck tracing it back to me*, Harry thought.

Harry stretched out on the sofa and pondered what would happen next. With terrorism being what it was, Harry expected the detectives would be concerned about the contents of the packages. That moment of choice could be critical. If the detectives decided to leave the packages where they were and let the bomb squad handle matters, it could ruin his plans. On the other hand, if the detectives elected to be proactive and do what they could to determine what was in the packages before the bomb squad arrived, all would be well. Harry was banking on the latter.

Harry yawned and stretched for a moment. He could hardly keep his eyes open. He contemplated going to bed. Harry never made it. He went to sleep right where he lay.

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