

CHAPTER 1

The Doctor

AFTER COMPLETING A twelve-hour shift, Dr. Williams walked through the hospital corridor to the employee entrance. He put on his tan raincoat and placed a matching fedora on his head. It was his signature style, his wife teased.

The style reminded him of Saturday matinees as a kid. He'd watched Bogart or Andrews in black and white uncovering a mysterious plot. His mother would give him a dollar and he'd stay at the theater all afternoon, often through two showings. Now, a matinee cost over ten dollars and streaming movies from the comfort of your home, less.

Exiting one of Seattle's premier hospitals, the doctor marched three blocks south on ninth street. His head down. Avoiding the blaring spotlights from vehicles traveling in the opposite direction. The pitter-patter of the rain softly danced on his umbrella. His heart raced and it pounded like a jack hammer breaking up concrete.

His legs carried him reluctantly toward his destination. Occasionally, he glanced over his right shoulder. Were they watching him now? The last time the man called, Williams worked well into the early morning hours. How many more times would these men demand his services? He began to doubt he'd ever escape.

Once he reached the cathedral, the doctor waited on the corner of ninth and Columbia. He checked his watch. It read seven-fifty-five. He was five minutes early.

Bright lights dipped and bobbed, illuminating the dark, rainy night. It wasn't long before a black SUV pulled next to him.

The doctor knew the drill. He'd gone with them so many times he no longer questioned any of it. The first time, they held a gun to the doctor's head, forcing him inside, and made several threats for his compliance. That night, he broke the tenets doctors' promise to uphold. When he got home his stomach wretched as he vomited. He'd taken a shower and scrubbed at his skin to cleanse his soul. After the fifth time, the doctor realized he didn't need redemption. He didn't have a soul to save.

The SUV's side door opened, ushering him into an abyss of darkness. A darkness to which he'd become acquainted. He closed his umbrella and stepped into the car.

They never spoke to him. Williams preferred it that way. What would they talk about, anyway? The only commonalities they shared was this car ride every few weeks. The two men in the front didn't so much as look at him. And the burly man next to the doctor handed him a dark cloth bag to place over his head. This, too, had become part of the drill. Once he placed it on his head, the SUV began to move.

The doctor never knew exactly what direction they headed or the location of the warehouse they took him. However, at this time of night, he knew how long it took to get there—twenty-five minutes. By the sounds of the ship's horns and the sloshing of water against what he assumed were boats, pylons, and the shore, the doctor knew he was somewhere near the water. Those sounds reminded Williams of where he grew up. A small harbor town on the coast of Oregon.

They arrived to their destination. Blind to his surroundings, the man seated next to Williams assisted him out of the vehicle and into the building. Once inside, the man removed the bag covering the doctor's head.

Wood exposed walls, concrete flooring, and industrial lighting which hung low from the ceiling didn't insulate.

Autumn's dampness cooled the air and echoes reverberated throughout. The men in hushed tones spoke, their cadence punctuated because of their accents. They escorted the doctor to a sixteen by twenty-five-foot beige army tent.

Bright lights flooded the tent's insides. In the middle sat a metal gurney, cold to the touch. Sterile medical equipment on silver trays surrounded the operating table. Clean running water, a refrigerator, and cool temperatures met Doctor Williams's requirements—everything needed to keep organs alive.

The doctor exchanged his jacket for a white coat, which hung on a coat rack. He sterilized his hands and slipped into surgical gloves. He waited for men to bring in a body escorted by a medical assistant. It wasn't always the same assistant. Williams required help for these procedures. As the doctor waited, his stomach twisted in knots. It always did.

This wasn't what he envisioned all those years ago when he started his medical training. All those late nights. The hard-earned achievements and recognitions he gained as he rose in his career. Now, as the vice president of medical affairs and the dean of the school of medicine, he had enormous power and influence. No one talked about the pressures of running a top medical school. Under constant scrutiny and in the public eye. The politics. He'd looked the part. Did what he had to do. Always wore a smile.

Not to mention the demands facing him at home. Everything the doctor achieved, he did for his family. He provided a way of living they enjoyed. Williams built a legacy to last for generations.

It all added pressure, and he needed an outlet, an escape from those pressures.

He cursed her. The one who introduced him to a whole new world. A world where he could release all the pressures

bearing down on him. Now trapped, if the doctor didn't follow their instructions, it was over for him. His career, reputation, his marriage. Or worse, prison. He couldn't risk the exposure.

Two months ago, he learned a hard lesson when he arrived fifteen minutes late. His blackmailers weren't happy. The next day, pictures threatening to expose his extracurricular activities with other women and underage girls arrived at his office with a simple message—Next time.

Two men, gowned in black rubber aprons and gloves, rolled a body on ice into the tent. The doctor never asked where the bodies came from. The less he knew, the better. A petite woman with brown hair followed the men with her head down. Based on the surgical gown she wore, he knew it was the medical assistant.

He never looked at her, not eye to eye anyway. Perhaps because of his own shame or out of protection. He assumed the medical assistant, like himself, had secrets. That was their commonality and how their lives became entwined in a version of hell.

The doctor gave her a curt nod, and she handed Williams a piece of paper. That's how they communicated. One word of instructions, either singular or plural.

Several men stood outside the tent, talking and laughing as the doctor and his assistant worked. He didn't understand what they were saying. They spoke in some sort of Slavic dialect.

The odor of their cigarette smoke wafted inside. The smell, along with the doctor's nerves, curdled in his stomach. He felt beads of perspiration forming on his forehead. Raising his arm, he patted his forehead with his sleeve.

The body laid face up. The assistant handed the doctor a scalpel. He placed the tip to the lower side of the body, pressed in, and angled the scalpel's movement diagonally. He made incisions on both sides of the body.

With his position at the hospital, he no longer engaged in surgical procedures. But when he had years ago, the doctor was one of the best surgeons in the area. Heck, one of the best in the country.

The incision lines were clean and sharp. Reaching in, the doctor removed each kidney, placing them on ice. Once removed, using liquid stitching, he closed the wounds. He eyed his work as an artist does. Appreciating his craftsmanship, he gave himself a slight nod of approval. The doctor removed his left glove, and using that glove, removed the right and threw them in a trash bin. The men burned all the evidence. At the sink, he turned the water on, washing his hands. When done, he removed his white coat.

He poked his head out of the tent and gave the men a nod. His medical assistant slipped around the doctor, exiting the tent, and stood to the side. She stared at the ground, avoiding eye contact with anyone. Williams handed the men in black rubber attire a small ice chest with the kidneys inside. The men along with the woman left.

The doctor's clammy hands slipped on his raincoat. He grabbed his umbrella and left the tent. Blind to the world once again, the men ushered him into the SUV. Twenty-five minutes later, they dropped the doctor off at the St. Anne's Cathedral on Capitol Hill.

As the doctor walked back to the hospital, his umbrella swayed in the wind and the slanted rain streaked his face. The night's events sat stale in his stomach. He wished the wind and the rain could wash it away.

Once in the parking garage, the doctor walked up one flight of stairs. He reached into his pocket for his key. The fob slipped from his hand. His quick reflexes recovered it. The lights on his Porsche Cayenne flashed as he unlocked the doors.

He caught himself glancing several times in the rearview mirror, looking for any signs someone followed. Not that it mattered. The Russians knew where he lived. The Russians had sent him pictures of his wife and girls—at the store, driving, pulling into their garage. At least he believed they were Russians. Once he'd overheard a conversation where they spoke of 'Mother Russia' and the strange language they spoke seemed to fit.

The pictures were one more reminder of what he stood to lose if he didn't comply. He didn't hesitate to do anything else.

Heading east on I-90, he exited onto Island Crest way. Home to where his wife and two daughters waited.

CHAPTER 2

Jack Calloway

WORKING IN LAW enforcement wasn't an easy gig. The hours are long, the job thankless, and public opinion swayed policy. From the brass to the politicians, the scrutiny was daunting. The elusiveness of justice and fairness slipped through the cracks. The same criminals kept cycling through the system. There wasn't enough putty to fill all the holes.

As a private investigator, those were some things I could avoid. I set my own hours, didn't have to contend with the same level of bureaucracy, and my methods were just that—my methods.

I wasn't a stranger to law enforcement and as a criminal profiler of serial crimes, my consulting services were renowned across the globe. My short-term, once or twice per year contracts with police departments kept my profiling and policing knowledge up-to-date.

Like any enforcement profession dealing with criminals, the challenges were significant.

Those challenges naturally go with the territory. As a vampire, at times that was hard to manage. But after all these years, I made it work to my advantage.

The bureaucracy and the scrutiny were some of the reasons I quit working as a detective in the police force and became a private investigator. The time I served was time well spent. I learned what I needed to become a good detective.

As good as I was, the case I now had, the one plaguing my thoughts, blurred as I stared at the images on a large whiteboard nearly half the size of my office wall—a missing person and dead reporter. So far, what I'd uncovered led nowhere. Jennifer Schultz was still missing. And Keith Daniel, well, a week later still dead.