

Chapter One

Edie's eyes fluttered, adjusting to the light. The pastel-green wall came into view. The color of the paint and the aroma of mint-scented disinfectant reminded her of where she was—The Newberry State Hospital.

"I see you're awake," a soft female voice broke the silence.

Edie rolled to see the woman standing in the doorway. "Who the hell are you?" she asked as she quickly threw her feet over the side of her bed to face the intruder.

"I'm Doctor Segal. Please call me Jeanette."

Doctor Segal was a tall woman, standing 5'10". Her long dark hair was pulled back into a ponytail. She wore an unbuttoned long white coat over a smart two-piece black suit, the collar of a white blouse showed beneath the lapels of the jacket. She wore nylons and black pumps.

"Do you mind if I sit?" the doctor asked, aware that she towered over her patient and wanted to assume a less dominant position. She pulled the gray plastic chair from the foot of the bed and sat, not waiting for an answer. Edie's eyes were now looking straight at the woman in the white coat. "I didn't mean to frighten you when I spoke," Doctor Segal added.

"Frighten? I don't think that can happen..." Edie paused a few seconds. "I don't think you know the meaning of *frighten*." There was a combative tone to Edie's voice as she continued, "Let someone kidnap your son, then maybe..." She stopped talking.

The doctor stayed silent, waiting for her patient to continue. Both could hear the clock ticking on the wall. After three minutes, Doctor Segal broke the silence. "I know all about your son, Sam, and what he went through. Now our main concern is you."

"Whose concern? Yours? A perfect stranger?"

Edie looked around at the small room. Beside the bed was a small painted wood cabinet with her toiletries on it. She reached for the hairbrush and comb, turning them over in her hands. "Sam gave me these last Mother's Day..." Edie started to cry.

The doctor reached over, holding Edie's hands with the brush and comb within hers. The warmth of her touch turned Edie's tears into near-silent sobs.

"Edie, your son is fine." The doctor leaned into her patient and let Edie's head rest on her shoulder. "The flowers in the window are from Sam and Hank. Their father said they're both doing fine." The doctor felt Edie's head move to look towards the window ledge as she continued. "I'm sure there'll be plenty more gifts from your sons, and from Jake too."

Doctor Jeanette Segal knew a lot about Edith Bush, the wife of Oakland County Detective Jake Bush. She knew her eleven-year-old son, Sam, had been kidnapped just over a month before and held for five days, and knew of the *Oakland County Child Killings* where four young people about Sam's age had been murdered. The doctor also knew that Edie had assumed her son would be sexually assaulted and killed. Thus, her mental state and the reason for her stay at the hospital where Doctor Jeanette Segal was Chief of Staff.

The sobs stopped. Edie rubbed her eyes with the palms of her hands. "How long will I have to stay here?"

Segal moved a box of Kleenex to Edie's side on the bed. "No longer than necessary. I can assure you of that."

Micky Callahan, the hotel's night man, got the coffee brewing right after letting in the short order cook at six. His boss, the owner of the hotel, liked to sleep in. He unlocked the café door at seven for the start of the morning bull session at the Falls Hotel. The session had become a ritual that Callahan more-or-less presided over.

The gathering never had an agenda, but for sure, they'd gossip, trade rumors, or just generally harass one another. Who'd be in attendance on any given morning was another question. Today, those coming in the door and grabbing seats at the big, round table were: Jim Stirrett, the banker; Fred Plantz, one of two real estate agents in town; Bob Fruchey, owner of the IGA store; and Doc Bradford, the town doctor. One chair was more-or-less reserved, that belonging to Callahan.

"You guys ever notice all the new people moving in on us?" shouted Callahan as he filled six cups from the pot on the Bunn coffee maker. "I heard we have another foreigner in town."

"His name's Bush," the grocer said.

That set the tone for the day's topic. Foreigners. You see, if you weren't born in the Upper Peninsula, or more specifically, from Luce County, you were considered an outsider.

"Anybody know who he is?" asked the grocer. "He came in the other day, filled a cart and paid with a check."

Plantz fielded that question. "He rented the Crawford place from me for three months. Says he's a deputy in the Lower Peninsula."

The grocer looked over at the realtor, "Guess I can stop worrying about the check then. Why's he up here?"

"He took a leave of absence. Something to do with his wife," Plantz said. He stirred in three sugar cubes as he leaned toward the banker, "Jim, was it two or three years ago that the guy from Texas came to town?"

"If you're talking about Edsel, I think three." The banker held his cup with both hands as if to warm them. "He first went to work in the woods, but that musta been too much for him." He chuckled a bit. "A man's got to love the woods to work in it. 'Specially in our winters." Laughter erupted again. "Then he got hired as a deputy by Horace."

Horace Griffin was the elected sheriff of Luce County.

"Boy, that was a mistake," the grocer chimed in. "He sure likes writing tickets. Maybe we ought to have a talk with Horace the next time he stops by."

"The deputy also likes expensive booze," the realtor half-mumbled.

"What do you mean by that?" Callahan asked.

"If you don't know, you're lucky," Plantz said as he took a sip of his coffee, then asked, "Anybody know anything about him?"

Shaking heads was the only response he got. No one seemed to know anything about Deputy Curtis Edsel except his ticket-writing prowess.

"Then there's you, Micky," Doc said. "You're the one who sold this hotel to Frankie. What do we know about him?"

"Nothing really, except he's from California."

Micky Callahan heard the bat-wing doors clap. "Hey Floyd, it's about time you showed up." Callahan scrambled to get Floyd Turcott a cup of coffee, as he grabbed a chair. Floyd was the owner of the Melody Motel and was there most mornings.

"Were you talking about me again?" Turcott asked. He was smiling from ear to ear as he took the cup Callahan offered.

“We’re talking about the invasion. The new guy named Bush who just moved into the area, the Texan who delights in writing us tickets, and the owner of this place,” Doc Bradford said. “We really don’t know anything about any of them.”

“They’re foreigners all right,” Callahan said. All nodded their agreement.

The Falls Hotel, where the morning coffee was being poured, is owned by Frankie Peoples. The hotel is in Newberry, Michigan, a small Michigan Upper Peninsula village with just over 2100 permanent residents and is 3.5 miles north of M-28 and 60 miles west of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan—as the crow flies. It’s the kind of town with a small theater, a few churches, a decent sized hospital, and an old hotel nestled in among a sundry of other small businesses that rely mainly on tourism. The Village Council governs the town and has its own five-man police force.

Though the village could survive on its own, tourism allows the community to prosper. Summer brings visitors to the nearby Tahquamenon Falls, campers, fishermen and hikers; autumn beckons busloads of retirees taking in the colors as the forest changes from pure green, to yellows and vibrant reds; and in the winter, a growing number of snowmobilers inflate the population. They all spend money.

Over the years, the Newberry area was mainly populated by people who were born and raised there. Everyone knew where each went deer hunting, whether in season or doing some midnight poaching; whose wife liked to sunbathe in the buff in her yard; and who was hitting the bottle a bit too much. Yes, it was that type of town.

Take Doc Bradford for example. His dad, Fred Sr., was the town doctor when Main Street was a mixture of packed-down dirt, gravel and horse shit. Fred Jr. went off to the University of Michigan for his degree in medicine, tried his hand at a booming practice on West Grand Boulevard in Detroit for a year and came back to Newberry. He could’ve made a bundle of money in the city, but he missed knowing everyone he met on the street or knowing what church each attended and the names of all their kids. He, like his father, was predestined to be a small-town doctor. Why not in Newberry?

Another example would be Doc’s school chum, Bob Fruchey. Bob grew up in the grocery business. His folks ran the local IGA store with him stocking shelves as soon as he could read the labels on a Campbell’s soup can. As a teenager, his dad taught him how to cut meat, and which family he could safely run a tab on and those he shouldn’t. Bob never left town, taking over the IGA from his mom and dad when they retired to their place on Twin Lakes not more than minutes from their store. He even married a girl, Donna Nurmi, a nice Finnish girl, who worked for his folks in the store. He too knew everyone. Who the cut-ups in school were, who played football, and which cheerleaders put out and those that didn’t. Now, as his temples turn gray, those cheerleaders were just fond memories. He had a business to run and two sons working in the store.

In Newberry, as with other Upper Peninsula towns, most of the young had to move elsewhere to find jobs. It seems that not all the kids wanted to take over a family business, or could find employment with a wage they could comfortably raise a family on.

In Luce County, where Newberry is the county seat, there were three major employers: The state hospital, the county road commission, and law enforcement. Besides the Sheriff Department and the Village Police, there was a State Police Post and a Department of Natural Resources office with Ray Herman hoping to keep the game violations in check. There were even a few Border Patrol Officers living in the county that worked the border in Sault Ste Marie.

It was back in mid-July 1977, as Deputy Curtis Edsel was leaving Pickelman's restaurant, a Black Ford Bronco buzzed past him. The afternoon traffic was thick with summer tourists and the deputy figured the driver of the Bronco didn't notice the black and white with a star on its door as it took the turn heading north toward the center of Newberry. Within a half mile, Edsel paced the car at sixty-five, hit his lights and bumped his siren.

He pulled in behind the Bronco and strode up to the driver's door. "I need to see y'all's license and registration."

The man behind the wheel tilted his head, looking up at the deputy that had a distinct Kirk Douglas cleft in his chin. He handed the papers to him. "I know I was going kinda fast, but if you can let it slide this once..."

"I had y'all going sixty-five—twenty over," interrupted the deputy. "That's too much to let slide, Mister." Edsel snatched the license and registration and went back to his car. He slid in behind the wheel and got out his ticket book, fanning out the Bronco owner's papers. There was a folded twenty-dollar bill between the license and registration. He paused a moment, then tossed the ticket book back on his dashboard, not bothering to write the time, name and plate number on his run sheet. It was a traffic stop that didn't happen.

The deputy walked back to the Bronco. "It's your lucky day, Mister Peoples, my ticket book is empty." He grinned as he returned the license and registration.

"Thanks," the driver said. "Hey, if ever you get a chance, stop in for a drink at the hotel. I own it."

The folded Andrew Jackson the deputy pocketed that day was just the beginning of the relationship between Curtis Edsel and Frankie Peoples.

John Anthony Bush was sitting in the upstairs offices of the Plantz Real Estate Agency. He was wearing typical attire for an October day in the Upper Peninsula: A light wool green-plaid Pendleton jacket, a Detroit Tiger ball cap, jeans, a tan chamois shirt and boots made by Red Wing. He was thirty-eight, nearly six feet and weighed a hundred and ninety pounds. His hair was cut short and flat on the top.

Bush, who preferred to be called Jake, had served two tours in Detroit as a patrolman, and the last couple of years as a member of the Oakland County Sheriff Department. In total, he had nearly fourteen years in law enforcement.

Fred, the owner of the agency, had him going through a portfolio of his listings and those from North Coast Real Estate. It was a small town. The two companies shared.

Jake was finally facing facts: Yes, his wife, Edie, with the help of a psychiatrist, was improving. She had been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after her youngest son was kidnapped the past summer. She was slowly coming out of her bouts of depression, but the doctor was hesitant on putting a date or a time-frame as to when she might be back to her former self and be able to go home for good.

He had taken a ninety-day leave of absence from the Oakland County Sheriff Department and his ninety days were almost up. Jake called them to send him papers so he could resign. There was no quick fix to his wife's problems. Their sons, Hank and Sam, had been going to school since September. His next move was to find a permanent place to live and a job. He had a lawyer friend arranging to put his house in the Lower Peninsula on the market.

Fred Plantz flipped a page in his photo binder. "This might be just what you and your boys need," he said. "It's a house tucked in off the road on thirty-eight acres of woods. It backs up to a mix of state land and a few thousand acres belonging to the Mead Paper Company." He had a cigar going and it bobbed in his mouth as he talked.

"Thirty-eight, not forty?" asked Jake, waving away most of the El Producto smoke that was hanging over the album.

"Well, you see, Buddy, two acres were deeded off for a cemetery by the former owner's wife." Fred gave Jake a radiant smile. "Just ol' Harry Reymore and his dog are buried there." He tried to take another puff on his cigar. It had gone out. "It's not haunted or anything like that." Fred leaned back in his padded chair pulling out a Bic lighter and relit his cigar.

Jake was eyeing up the realtor through the new cloud of smoke. Fred was a shade under five foot five and about sixty. He was wearing a medium green plaid sports coat, a crisp mint-green shirt topped off with a solid dark green bow tie. A pair of dark green trousers completed the day's ensemble. Jake figured Fred was trying to go Irish, but Saint Paddy's day was months in the past and the name Plantz surely wasn't Irish.

"So, does that mean the wife will be buried there when she dies?" Jake asked.

"No, she's already buried somewhere else." He smiled, took a puff on his cigar, adding, "She died in the Marquette Prison."

"In prison?" Jake cocked his head, inviting an answer.

"Oh, that's right; you're from downstate, not privy to the local gossip. It took a couple of years and a couple of bodies had to be exhumed, but the old sheriff proved Harry didn't die of natural causes. Neither did his dog."

"The wife did it?"

"Yep. Poisoned both."

There was a quick knock on the door and a head popped in. "Daddy, a deputy is here to see you."

The woman that made the announcement was Fred's daughter, Suzie, a redhead with a freckle or two on her cheeks. She loved wearing miniskirts and tight tops. Jake took notice of that the last time he was in the office. The woman had nice legs and a body to match and loved to flaunt both.

"This'll just take a minute, pal. Grab a coffee."

Fred was pointing at the old, dinged-up percolator on the hot plate just inside the office door. As he got to his feet, he grabbed a deep purple-colored box from inside one of his desk drawers and slipped it inside his jacket. Jake immediately recognized the red and gold crown sitting on a fancy pillow as the logo for Crown Royal Deluxe.

The offer of coffee sounded good, and as Jake poured himself one, he glanced out the window and spotted a black and white Pontiac with a star painted on its door below on the street. The purple box was now under the arm of a tall, thin man wearing a dark brown insulated nylon jacket with a fur collar and an eight-point uniform hat with its brim pulled low over his eyes. The deputy slid behind the wheel of the county car, fired it up and drove off, not acknowledging the wave from Fred Plantz.

The Crown Royal logo was very familiar to Jake because two Detroit cops were hitting up businesses and bars, stocking up on booze during the 1964 Christmas season. They tried shaking down a guy managing an electrical supply business and demanded a case of Crown Royal, or they'd make sure the "No Parking" signs would be enforced up and down the block. The problem was the guy running the electrical business had a brother-in-law who was a sergeant working in the Police Commissioner's Office. He made a phone call. The two cops were busted when they picked up the case of booze later that afternoon.

By what he saw, Jake knew what was going on.

Fred popped back into the office grabbing a stained coffee cup. "Sorry for the interruption." He dropped in three sugar cubes and poured some coffee as he talked. "Had to pay my dues."

"Who's collecting dues, the sheriff?"

"How...?" Fred's face flushed as he pulled another cigar from the humidor on his desk.

Jake pointed. "The window. I saw the guy in uniform. He had the fancy box in his hand as he climbed into a cop car."

"Forget what you saw. I don't want any trouble."

"Is he the sheriff that had the bodies dug up?"

"No, this guy's just a deputy. A fairly new one at that." Fred thumbed the lighter, firing up his new cigar. "He's a lawman in this county and can make my life miserable. A bottle of Crown Royal once a month keeps us on a friendly basis—more-or-less."

"At his request?" Jake asked as he poured more coffee.

"It was a suggestion, and I got the hint."

Fred picked up the album with the home listings. "As I was saying, I think I can find just what you and your family would like."