

Chapter 1

A light rain was falling as Willis Jacobson slid into the seat of his Porsche and brought the engine to life. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been called out in the middle of the night and he wasn't happy about it, but early indications were that the Green River serial killer had struck again, after almost seven years of no activity.

The Green River serial killer was thought to be responsible for the bodies of thirty-seven women between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five, which had been discovered over a period of six years along some part of the Green River which stretched 137 miles through south King County, Washington. Most of the bodies had been deposited in suburban areas of Kent and Auburn where the river meandered lazily through farmlands and neighborhoods, but tonight's body had been dumped nearer the headwaters where the river cut swiftly through a deep gorge of steep cliffs and rock beds just outside of Black Diamond, Washington. As with most of the victims, the discovery of tonight's body came by chance. A group of Boy Scouts on an overnight camp out happened on it while looking for firewood and called 911 on the scoutmaster's cell phone.

Jake had been assigned lead investigator on the Green River murders three years ago when all leads had gone cold and the case had been back burnered, and although not much time or resource was devoted to the case, there wasn't a deputy or law enforcement officer alive who didn't dream daily of cracking it. Jake was supposed to be working it, but spent most of his time fighting bouts of depression and anxiety caused by the death of his daughter and subsequent divorce four years ago.

As he drove along the river, Jake dusted the cobwebs from his memory and tried to remember as much as possible from the voluminous files that had been amassed on the case.

F.L. Sterling

Jake had no trouble finding the spot as news vans and squad cars pretty much covered the field near the trailhead leading down to the river when he arrived.

“Son of a bitch!” he muttered, slamming the gears in park and shutting off the engine. “Goddam leeches can smell blood for a hundred miles.” He sat in the car, not wanting to face any nosy reporters.

Jake hated the media, blaming them for most of his problems. They basically condemned him for his daughter’s death, which was ruled accidental by everybody but the media. They reasoned that anyone stupid enough to have a gun in the house was just asking for trouble. The fact that it was locked in a steel container and stored out of reach was never mentioned, nor the fact that the boyfriend forced his daughter to tell him where it was and then accompany him to the convenience store. Jake had relived the details of that day a million times, but it still got to him and he had to force himself not to go there this morning.

John McBride and Al Marino stood under a low hanging vine maple trying unsuccessfully to keep the rain off their note pads. Looking up just as Jake got out of his car, John sneered, “What’s he doing here?” Al shrugged and said it was probably because initially they thought it was another Green River killer victim.

“This is no Green River victim,” snarled McBride, “and I don’t want Jacobson anywhere around.” Al nodded and said he’d take care of it. Al walked toward Jake while McBride directed his attention to another officer emerging from the trail leading down to the river.

John McBride had little tolerance for goldbricks, which he felt Jacobson had become. He’d worked as Jake’s partner for several months early in his career and respected his intense work ethic and dedication and was sympathetic for awhile after his daughter’s death and his divorce. But that was four years ago and Jacobson had not been able to get over it. Lately, in McBride’s opinion, Jake had become nothing more than a door stop, called in sick frequently, overlooked obvious evidence, and simply had become indifferent to his job. John thought the department was perpetuating the problem by pandering to his moods and assigning him “dead” cases

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that required no effort.

“Who invited the circus people?” said the approaching officer. John wasn’t in the mood and, ignoring the question, asked if there was anything else to add.

The officer recited from his note pad, “White female, between nineteen and twenty four years of age, five foot five inches tall, weighed probably around 115 pounds, blondish—brown hair, identified as Christine van Soolen from student body card found in her pocket. The body was fully clothed, probably strangled, but no indication of sexual contact or signs of struggle or resistance.”

“Pretty much confirms our suspicions, huh?” interrupted McBride.

“Yeah. Somebody’s trying to make it look like a Green River killing, but too many inconsistencies. Can’t be absolutely sure until we get an autopsy, but just doesn’t fit his MO.”

Just then a pain—in—the—ass reporter from the South County Journal butted in to ask the usual stupid question, “Duh, what’s your reaction to this new find, detective?”

Ignoring the reporter, McBride spoke to the officer loud enough for most of the residents of Black Diamond to hear, “My reaction is to clear this area. I want the area all the way from the road to the river and 600 yards wide taped off and evacuated, and I want it done thirty minutes ago.”

The whine of the reporter and a TV cameraman coming on the scene withered in the face of McBride’s hard stare and admonition that this was a crime scene and to get the hell out or be arrested for tampering.

Within minutes the uniformed officers were herding all non-police personnel back to their parked cars along the Green River Gorge Road. McBride walked toward the river as Al Marino, who had rejoined him, reviewed the details of yet another premature and senseless death.