

A mystery set in wilderness areas of Michigan and Colorado.

ASSASSIN INVISIBLE

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Chapter 1

Ugly can be more than skin deep.

August 2000

The surf stroked the sandy shore with gentle caresses accompanied by soft morning breezes rustling through the fronds of tall palms lining the beach. The mild tropical morning was going to waste on two diverse men sitting at an umbrella-covered table. One was obese, animated and acting quite belligerent, while the other was subdued and otherwise nondescript. The differences were misleading.

The obese man wiped perspiration from his face and said, "I've been waiting half an hour for you, Jim. I was about to send Lou to get you. I have better things to do than sitting in the sun waiting for you. The heat is brutal."

"Let me tell you someth'n, Dick. Don't ever send that steroid-bloated freak looking for me. If he ever shows up at my door, I'll disemball him and then come looking for you. Think I'm kidding?"

"His job is to watch out for me, that's all, and don't call me Dick." The fat man said, trying to recover the upper hand, "I'm Reverend Mulholland in private as well as in public. I know we go way back, but let's keep that to ourselves. I have an image to uphold."

"Okay, Rev, with the money you're paying me for this job, I can do that, but don't forget what I said about Lou Dinolfo. If that wop ever shows up at my door, his nuts will be hanging in my trophy case."

"Okay, but don't keep me waiting again."

Jim shrugged, "I was late cuz the stuff you gave me to look over took a long time. Christ, there's a lot of junk in there. I know everything about these people, right down to which hand they wipe their ass with. Now, as I understand it, you want these two characters dead. We done things together before so you know how I work. I got to know why you want this done. I really don't give a damn. Do it just for the money and the fun, but if I know the whole story, I'll be better prepared. I'm the

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best, you know. Been doing this stuff for fifteen years and never got caught. Hell, most of my targets died by accident.”

The Reverend nodded and said, “The main target is Victor Flint. The other is his friend Carl Moeller.”

His companion, looking like a wimpy version of Bob Newhart, said, “I can read, ya know. What I get from this stuff you gave me, Flint ain’t gonna be a problem. He spent four years in the military, a Air Force wimp. Best thing he ever did was flunk out of survival school. Got transferred around a lot so his records’re sketchy, but spent his whole enlistment as a titless WAF, a real pussy. But this guy Moeller’s a different story, a ex-Navy Seal, and now a cop in Michigan. Been outta the Navy awhile, probly carry’n an extra fifty pounds a fat. No matter, Flint’s the important one. I’ll do him first; don’t have to be too careful. A drive-by’ll do him fine business, but don’t want two friends wasted at the same time or someone’ll start look’n around. Moeller’ll supposably have a accident. Easy enough, in northern Michigan, a hunt’n accident’ll take care of him. Happens all the time. Now the others . . .”

“Others, what others? I want those two out of the way, that’s all.”

Before Jim could answer, the Reverend’s cell phone rang. He held up his hand and said, “Hold on, I’m expecting this call. Only be a second.” He listened to the phone for a minute and then crooned, “Oh, my dear, let us leave that to the Lord. He will take care of us. ---- Yes, sweetheart, I know it is difficult, but we must have faith. ---- Yes, everyone believes that, but that is only temporary. In a few years, it will be safe to inform the world. The Evil Powers will be destroyed, their economy in ruins. ---- Yes, I know, but not yet. If we let them know of our sanctuary, they will not understand.”

His jowls glistened with perspiration and shook in time with his animated conversation.

“They would persecute us. The timing must be perfect, and God is the only perfection. It must be by His timing or we will fail. In my case, they would believe that my death was a fabrication. ---- Of course, I have loved ones who should know of my ministry, but we must make our sacrifices. It is our penance to the Lord. ---- My sweet, innocent darling, I will stop

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by your cottage this evening and we will pray together. He will give us strength. The New Jerusalem, with me as its leader, must remain a secret, for now. Just hold on, He will protect us. Goodbye, my darling.”

He closed his phone and turned back to Jim who shook his head and said, “What a load of crap, Dick.”

“The old broad is worth it, wealthy,” the Reverend commented. ”I’ll have my name on her bank account before the night is over. Bet on it.”

Jim moved out of the direct sunlight into the shade of the umbrella, settled, and then moved right back to his first seat. The torrid sun was preferable to sitting downwind of his perspiring companion.

In disgust over his offended nose, Jim asked, “What the hell happened to you? You changed, and not just the ‘Reverend’ thing. Used to be a mean dude, now just fat. A disguise? A good one, fifty pounds of fat will change anybody’s appearance.”

Blanching at the observation, the Reverend started to retort, but held back as a sarong-clad waitress approached with their drinks. She placed the glasses on a napkin in front of each man.

As the Reverend picked up his drink, his napkin floated to the sand. The dropped napkin move was a daily ritual he practiced religiously.

She shook her head in revulsion as she dipped to pick it up. The pale thin-man, a newcomer to the island tropics, smiled as he enjoyed her unsuccessful attempt at modesty. The fat-man, odoriferously not a stranger to the island sun, smiled at his companion’s reaction.

“What name are you using?” the Reverend asked as they watched the girl sway back toward the hotel.

“What? Oh, sorry. She got a price? Got any idea? It’s been awhile. I bet she likes to be hurt. Pay a lot for that.”

“Don’t get into anything like that around here. What name are you using?”

“Don’t worry about me fork’n up your snug harbor, Rev. I got better plans.” He added, “For now I’ll use the alias Jim Broadbent.”

“What? But, that’s your real name.”

“Yeah, but you’re the only one knows that.”

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The Reverend shook his head at Jim's logic.

Broadbent, smiling at his own cleverness, removed a sheet of paper from his portfolio. "Here's my hit-list. I added a few more."

"List? The contract is for two guys, that's all."

"I gotta take them all out to protect our asses."

"But you have women here. Why women?"

"Come on, Rev, makes my job more fun, and beautiful chicks are the worst. A man do anything they want, anything. The cops'll fight to help them find us, you know, be their heroes. You seen their pictures?" He pulled some five by seven sized pictures from his case. "They're like movie stars, black, white, and a Jew. Here's one of the black girl. Now, I don't like niggers, but this one's special. Looks like Holly Berry with knockers the size of watermelons. She's short, five-three. Don't know how she even stands upright. Wouldn't ya love to snuggle between those pillows? And that face, sexy, puffy eyes like she's gonna cry. Plays on your sympathy, don't she. Gets me all hard."

"Spare me," the Reverend said as he wiped perspiration from his upper lip.

The wrinkles around Jim's eyes deepened as he removed another picture from his portfolio.

"Now the Jew-girl, almost as dark as the nigger, what they call 'olive' complexion. You know, I hate Jews. I'll have no problem here. Looks like that girl in the movies, forget her name, Sandy Bullshit or something. She got long legs make her look tall, but she ain't. She's short as the nigger."

Like a jeweler handling a precious stone, he eased the last picture out of his portfolio. "Now, Rev, the best, my favorite, the white girl. She is tall, taller'n me, and not skinny. Round all over, great tits, long legs. Looks like that commie ice skater, something Kitt. She'll be my dessert. Okay, Dick, I mean Rev. Here's the plan. The mark goes first. I'll shoot him, no mistake there. Then I start on the others. Have to be careful. Don't want no one getting suspicious, tying it together. Got that all figured. Accidents, the rest have accidents. Have to wait between each one, let things cool down. I'll get to the cunts later, after the men. The nigger bitch will be first."

"Will you quit using that word?"

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“What’s the problem,” Jim shrugged as he glanced over his shoulder. “Ain’t none around.”

The Reverend muttered, “Just stop.”

He shrugged his shoulders again and went on. “I’ll grab her and take her to my hidey-hole, out near Indiantown. Thas in Florida.”

“I know where Indiantown is, but I don’t want to hear anything about your plans. I’m sure they are sick.”

“No, they ain’t. I won’t even touch her, for a while. Treat her real polite until she wants it, till she begs for a screw. Nig. . . , I mean, blacks are like that, ya know. They got to have their sex.”

“Is that right?”

“Yeah, but not the Jews. They don’t do it hardly at all. I’ll just trick the kike somehow. Make her think she’s ripping me off. That’ll get her. Cheating whites always turns on Jews.”

“I see you have this all planned out. I’m almost afraid to ask about the white girl, your dessert.”

“Oh, I’ll be real gentle with her, couple weeks, or more, till she falls in love with me. I read somewheres hostages fall in love with their captors. I’ll keep her around after that, till I get tired of her. Got some kinky plans, too. You’ll love this.”

“I’ve heard enough. I’m paying you to get rid of two people no more,” the Reverend said as he tried to return Jim’s flat stare. “And where did you get all this information? I don’t even know half these people.”

Jim Broadbent smiled and answered, “I got my own sources, and they all have to go. You know, that’s the way I work.”

The Reverend dropped his eyes, sighed, and said, “Three of them are a team and work for me. Leave them alone.” He pointed to three names on the sheet.

“Nope. Has to be all of em. They know too much. Don’t leave no witnesses.”

“Look, you’re working for me, Broadbent. You’ll do what I pay you to do. I just talked to the leader of this team. They are just about ready to make a go at Flint, so very soon he may be history. If they swing that, your job will be to take out Moeller. They have instructions not to attempt anything if he’s around. He’s too dangerous for them.”

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The Reverend wiped perspiration from his face again and glanced toward his bodyguard before adding, "Alright, I'll go along with the rest, but I have some loyalty to my people, and I don't want to hear any details. Keep your sick methods to yourself."

Jim shrugged.

"Remember, do not touch any of my people."

Jim shrugged again, and they shook hands. He rubbed his hand on his pants and asked, "Why am I doing these guys?"

"Flint is the only one in the world who knows the right questions to ask."

"What the hell does that mean? Look, the more I know, the better I can handle things."

The Reverend thought to himself, "He doesn't need to know everything, just enough to satisfy his curiosity." He said aloud, "A few years ago, I was in a difficult position, a million bucks missing from the church, and I didn't want to go to jail. I had to come up with something before they found out about the money shortage. Flint's company was looking into fraudulent money gathering schemes in South Florida, probably looking at my church. I decided to take the books with me and get lost at sea before that happened."

He paused and then continued, "I waited until the weather station warned of an approaching gale. I sailed out of Boynton Beach, supposedly taking my sailboat to a safe harbor. Instead, I drifted north waiting. When the wind started to come up, I scuttled the yacht and took off in a dinghy planning to land near Stuart, but the wind built too fast. I couldn't handle it, and the boat capsized, but God helped me get to shore. He has greater plans for me."

"Your wife was with you. Wasn't she?"

The Reverend nodded, "I guess she drowned."

Jim smiled, "Good answer."

"I was truly resurrected when the Lord saved me from drowning. My rich old lady friends and their husbands believe that I drowned and then was resurrected to protect them until the Second Coming. And, know what? It's true."

"Uh huh, if you say so. What about the missing money? Ain't you afraid they'll grab you when you come out of hiding?"

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“The books went down with the boat, but just in case, I got the locals, living on these islands, to give me enough money to cover the missing funds.”

“Why would they do that?”

“To keep their presence on these islands a secret.”

“In the middle of the Indian Ocean, what’s so special?”

“I found out about this place a few years ago. These islands are a refuge for famous people, famous dead people. I won’t mention names, but some died young in airplane accidents, car accidents, or just disappeared like I did. Whatever, they all had one thing in common. They were tired of living in fear of their lives, of stalkers, of well-meaning fans, and of kidnappers, so they faked death. The million dollars I needed to cover my debt was piggybank change to them.”

“You paid back the church?”

“No. Why would I do that? That would just give me away.”

Broadbent said, “But somebody’ll give the secret away.”

“The leaders here pay big bucks to keep things hushed up and the people they pay off don’t want this place discovered either. Keeping the money flowing is all they worry about.”

“Right, like politicians can keep a secret.”

“There aren’t too many politicians who know about this place, but the ones who do will keep this secret. The money is too important to them, and you know politicians, their first instinct is to lie anyway. They lie about things that don’t even need a lie. A good example: Did you know that they avenged Kennedy’s assassination? Everyone in on the plot to kill him was dead within two years. The public would feel good if they knew, but it has been kept a secret, something about not publicly condoning assassination.”

“I don’t believe any of this crap, Reverend. The next thing you’re going to tell me is that Elvis is alive and living here.”

“No, he isn’t. . . . Not anymore.”

Shaking his head, Broadbent said, “Got to be more to it.”

The Reverend hesitated and then answered, “I have a plan almost in place. When I implement it, it will paralyze one of the most powerful corporations in the United States, but the timing is crucial. For it to work I need a major disaster, natural or otherwise, a Mount St. Helen’s or another bombing, like

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Oklahoma City. When that happens, I'll trigger my plan; stand to make a bundle. I won't tell you the details, but I need a cataclysm to cover my tracks, to take the blame, so to speak. There is one potential glitch. This guy Flint has enough knowledge to put it all together. Like I said, he's got to be out of the way before he asks the wrong question."

"That's the second time you said that. What question, and who is he going to ask?"

"Not who, what. He is developing Artificial Intelligence software for his company. If he asks the computer the wrong question, I will be exposed."

Jim shook his head, "Explain one thing. Don't get me wrong. You know I'll back you 100 percent, but how can you destroy this company as well as pay me to waste these people, and still claim to be a 'Man of God?'"

"This company and its software is the foundation of evil. It is Satan's tool. God will see that my plan works, and He has no qualms about evil people being killed. It isn't murder as long as He condones it. It's a Divine Act. Besides, these people should have never been born. They think they're too intelligent to believe in God. They think He's an imaginary friend for grownups."

Broadbent stood up to leave, "Okay, boss. Nice to know I'm doing God's work. Need money to get started, half in my account right now. Guess that's it. We meet on St. Lucia in the Caribbean in about ten months. I'll have something to report by then." He walked away heading toward the hotel.

The Reverend's bodyguard stared at Jim as he approached and strutted by. "These guys are two bowler hats away from being Laurel and Hardy," he thought. "And the boss seems scared of this little clown, don't know why. I could take him out without breaking a sweat, even in this heat."

At the table, the Reverend finished his drink and slid Jim's untouched glass in front of him, relieved to see the offensive little man walking away.

"How repulsive he's become, but you wouldn't know it to look at him. He's so unimpressive looking he'd be overlooked in a bare room."

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As Jim Broadbent moved past the bodyguard, his thoughts were more basic. “Dick stinks. A wonder his flunkies don’t tell him. Maybe they’re so old their noses don’t work no more. Can’t complain, though, Gonna make a bundle on this job, not to mention the babes.”

Chapter 2

Beauty can be more than skin deep.

August 2000

Two hikers were hurrying down a precipitous mountain trail. The girl, tall and athletic, was dressed in cut-off blue jeans, with a two-toned green camouflage-patterned vest over a brown flannel shirt, and high-top boots. Her light brown hair was tied back in a ponytail. The muscles in her tanned calves and thighs rippled as she led the way. The man, at an even six feet, was two inches taller. He was similarly dressed except his vest was mottled gray with random black splashes and he wore tan shorts. While he would never be described as handsome, his rugged looks and stature were appealing to the opposite sex. She, on the other hand, was beautiful along the lines of Kelly McGillis when she starred in the movie 'Witness'. Though her figure was a little too athletic to be called model-like, she would turn heads at any beauty pageant.

"Awesome view, hard keeping my mind on the trail," she said after taking a deep breath.

"Know what you mean," he answered. "Of course I could say that whenever I'm walking behind you. Oh, sorry. Did I say that out loud?"

She smiled and groaned.

He looked over the edge of the trail, and said, "The view is fantastic, but five hundred feet straight down kind of grabs you."

"What's the altitude here? I can almost breathe again."

"We're just above 11,000 feet. That's what the lake is supposed to be and we're almost there."

Brenda and Vic had spent the day hiking to the top of the Continental Divide and were returning to their camp at the edge of an alpine lake situated in a mountain meadow. Her brother Carl and their friends Sara and Scott Campbell were waiting at the camp.

As they entered the tree line, a few hundred yards from the lake's spillway, Brenda said, "Let's take a break and give them a try on the walkie-talkie. Sara is going to be worried."

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Vic answered, "Okay, my feet need a break anyway."

"My whole body needs a break," she agreed and smiled.

Before reaching for the walkie-talkie, he put his arm around her waist and pulled her close. They stood together with their arms around each other gazing at the stupendous view, but enjoying their closeness even more.

Vic reached to unhook the walkie-talkie from his belt.

A voice from below growled, "I hate to break up this touching moment, but don't touch that."

William Perrine, known to them as a private investigator, stepped from behind a tree holding a gun.

He smiled, "You don't know how pleased I am to welcome you, saved us a lot of work." He called over his shoulder, "Hey Abbott, we have company, the lovely Brenda Moeller and the not so lovely Victor Flint have dropped by."

Abbott Drumheller came running up the trail toward them grinning and puffing. At five-foot six, he was a foot shorter than his partner, Perrine.

"Please indulge me while I get my breath. I have not acclimated to this thin mountain air as yet."

He leaned over, placed his hands on his knees, and took several deep breaths.

"This is simply marvelous, my licentious friend. I am radically enthusiastic to accommodate them. Do bring them into our austere though ephemeral dwelling. I have the exhortative need to entertain them, and to demonstrate my prowess as a host."

"We don't want to intrude on you two," Brenda said. "We'll just continue down the trail. We're expected at the cabin in a few hours, and I don't want to upset my big brother, the Deputy Sheriff."

"Oh, Mistress Brenda, the cabin you mention is an immense distance from here, seven or eight miles I believe, and this infinitesimal lake is so picturesque you will love spending the night here. In the morning, you and I can tarry by the gurgling spillway and welcome the sunrise together. So, please don't disquiet yourself about reaching the cabin tonight. We are intensely desirous to obtain the intimacy of such an enchanting lady as you, but I must query your selection of coadjutor," he

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said turning a scowl toward Vic. "However, as you will soon ascertain, I will prove to be a much more suitable paramour than he. By morning, he will be but a meager memory, and you will have forgotten him."

"Come on, Abbott, cut the crap. Let's get them back to camp and tie'em up. I'm sure they'll be glad to carry on this conversation later." He wagged the gun toward Vic and said, "Drop that walkie-talkie and those walking sticks right there and you remove your fanny-pack, Brenda."

Vic and Brenda did as they were instructed before following Drumheller into the thrown-together camp.

"Use the roll of duct tape in my pack to tie'em up, the lady first, Abbott, while I keep an eye on Mr. Flint."

"My lovely Mistress Brenda, it will be an intense pleasure for me to secure you snugly to this conifer. Now, please repose, lean back, and get comfortable. I pledge to you that I will secure you so as not to distress you or have you endure any irritation at all. I have much experience in confining lovely ladies, and they come to adore it, immensely."

Drumheller tore off a long strip of tape and wrapped it around her arm above the elbow. He pushed her down with her back against a tree and pulled her elbow to the side of the tree, stretched the tape behind it, and wrapped it around her other arm. Several more loops effectively pinned her upper arms to the tree.

"You will observe the efficient way my amour is secured, Mr. Flint. Examine how fast she is bound, while her elbows are drawn back to each side of the tree, her hands are unfettered, but not at liberty to extend back to peel off the tape, and you will note that she is encountering no discomfort. I purposely placed the tape on top of her shirtsleeves so as not to irritate her fair skin in the slightest. Moreover, I want you to take particular notice of the provocative way this posture forces her ample bosom forward. I can hardly contain myself."

With obvious enjoyment, he slowly unzipped her vest, his knuckles pressing into her breasts as the zipper opened. Brenda endured with no reaction.

Vic said, "I'm not restrained, Mr. Abbott Wolford Drumheller the Third, and I think you're a coward who can only handle a

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tied-up woman. I have heard your claim to be an expert at martial arts. Show me.”

“Be careful, Flint,” warned Perrine. “He is *very* good, and I still have the gun you know.”

“Permit me to show you something more, Mr. Flint,” Drumheller returned.

Vic tensed as Abbott took hold of Brenda’s shirt with both hands, his knuckles pressing against the inside of her breasts. With a quick jerk, he pulled the shirt apart popping the top four buttons in the process. Her shirt fell open revealing her white sports bra straining at the seams.

Vic started to move, but Perrine motioned with the gun and said, “Hold it, this is getting interesting.”

Brenda glanced at Vic who was looking directly into her eyes. As soon as their eyes met, he unzipped his own vest, and then unbuttoned his shirt.

“What are you doing, Flint?” Perrine demanded.

“I’m going to stop this show right now. I’m going to break both of you in two,” he stated as he removed his shirt and vest in one move right down to his undershirt. “And then see how you look tied to that tree.”

“Abbott, tie up this guy right now, and don’t be stingy with the tape. Use the whole goddamn roll. Flint, we’re very impressed with your demonstration of courage for your girlfriend, but there is no way you could handle both of us even if I didn’t have this gun.”

Drumheller shook his head; “I’m going to put on a little exhibition for the stunning and, I might add, chesty Miss Moeller. Keep the gun on him. First, I will demonstrate the proper way to fracture his forearm. I’d break his leg, but we have to transport him out of here so I must leave him ambulatory.”

Brenda said, “Right. Like you broke Sven’s arm.”

Abbott scowled at her. “That backwoods bully got lucky. I’ve handled men twice his size.”

“Abbott, we don’t have time for this. Just tie him up.”

“He’s all talk, and you know it, Perrine,” Vic returned. “We saw him in action once, and we weren’t impressed.”

Drumheller threw the roll of tape to the ground.

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“That’s it. Do as I said. Keep your gun on him.”

Taking up a classic karate position, Drumheller sidestepped toward Vic who backed around until both Drumheller and Perrine were facing away from Brenda. With their captors distracted, she grabbed her shirttails and popped the remaining button, and then began struggling, trying to pull her arms out of the sleeves of her flannel shirt. At first, she made no progress, but then her elbow slid past the tape and one arm was free.

As she twisted out of her shirt, Abbott charged. Managing to keep his balance, Vic dodged most of the blows and kicks. A few landed, but Abbott was having trouble making any solid connections. Perrine, absorbed by the confrontation, began shouting encouragement to his partner. From a spectator's viewpoint, it seemed as if Vic would soon be finished, but Vic's clumsy moves saved him from the full force of the blows. His obvious lack of aggression and skill gave Drumheller the courage to attack without caution.

Brenda freed her other arm and stood upright, her vest and shirt still held captive to the tree. She took a breath, a very deep breath.

“Oh my God, don’t do that,” Vic thought.

Distracted by the enchanting image before him, Vic took a solid kick to his ribs. The little guy was strong and the blow drove Vic backward. He stumbled over one of the rucksacks and fell. Abbott jumped forward aiming his boots at Vic’s face, but Vic rolled just in time and jumped to his feet. Because of the thin air, Abbott was beginning to labor. Now that Brenda was loose, Vic could distract them while she disappeared. He backed up enticing Abbott and Perrine to follow. Brenda moved up behind Perrine.

“No,” Vic thought, “get away. Don’t try to help.”

However, Brenda had no intention of leaving nor was she going to help. She sat down on a log six feet behind Perrine, a ringside seat.

No more delaying tactics, Vic had to do something, anything. He charged. Surprised, Drumheller back-peddled into Perrine, who took two quick steps backward stopping in front of Brenda.

As if angry at him for obstructing her view, she leaned back and brought her legs up until her thighs bounced against her

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chest and then she rammed both boots into the back of Perrine's stilt-like legs. His knees gave way and he collapsed. Drumheller, still moving backwards, fell over him. As he lost his balance, he grabbed Vic and pulled him along. They ended in a pile, Vic on top. When the scrambling was done, Brenda was holding the gun.

The two culprits were soon taped back to back around the same tree that recently held Brenda. Vic used the rest of the tape to secure them. Brenda was now wearing her vest over her sports bra; her shirt still held captive somewhere under Perrine.

Vic said, "Take the gun and go get Carl. It's late and they're going to be worried. Give me thirty minutes and then bring Carl back."

Drumheller yelled, "What do you mean thirty minutes? How are you going to get to the cabin and back in thirty minutes?"

Brenda said, "Shut up, Abbott. You'll find out, but before I go, I want to know one thing." She moved in front of the prisoners and asked, "What's on that tape? We watched that videotape repeatedly and no one has seen anything. What have we missed?"

"Well, at first it was Abbott's image that had us worried, but the boss saw something else. We have no idea what it is, but ask your lover there, he knows," Perrine answered.

"Do you, Vic?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Why haven't you told us?"

Perrine growled, "He's got some noble fixation about honor, or some nonsense like that. The boss says we didn't have to worry about the rest of you. Flint would protect you by not telling you anything."

"Well, what were you going to do with him then? Kill him?"

"Not us," Drumheller answered from the other side of the tree, "but there's someone waiting."

"Shut up, Abbott."

"You shut up, Perrine," Abbott yelled. "He's going to let us go as soon as he hears the rest of the plan."

"Shut your mouth, you idiot. *Please* shut your mouth."

"The boss will send someone else after you and your friends," Drumheller said.

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“My friends? Why my friends?” Vic asked.

Speaking low, Perrine answered, “The threat to your friends will keep your mouth shut. Whatever you saw on that tape means nothing to anyone but you. The boss says no one else knows the significance.”

Vic turned to Brenda. “Go get Carl,” an angry quiver shook his voice. “Give me thirty minutes.”

She gave him a hug. “Have you known all along?”

“No. Just since the other night.”

“And you’re not going to tell me what you saw?”

“No.”

“Are they telling the truth? Is their boss that dangerous?”

“I hope not, but can’t take a chance,” he answered, putting an end to the questions. “Give me that half-hour.”

He nudged her away. Brenda jammed the gun into her waistband, turned, and trotted toward the lake. When she was out of sight, Vic looked into the woods toward the main trail.

“You can come out now.”

A shadow back in the woods detached itself from the gathering gloom and moved toward the clearing.

“I have a gun pointed at you, Flint. Where’s your camp?”

“Just the other side of the lake, about a quarter-mile.”

“Sit on the ground, on top of your hands with your legs flat out in front of you.”

He did as ordered.

Drumheller said, “Good timing, boss, he doesn’t have a gun. Let’s get out of here. We’ll be halfway down the trail before they come back.”

Perrine and Drumheller remained secured to the tree while Drumheller fired excuse after excuse for their latest mishap.

Vic knew the “boss” had a special plan for him and taking him down the trail wasn’t it. He kept his eyes on the gun waiting for it to move. When it moved, so would he.

Sitting like this he was quite sure, that he couldn’t avoid the bullet, but somehow he had to survive. He had to live long enough to warn them; otherwise, their situation was hopeless. His friend Carl was capable of protecting the others, but he had to know the danger.

ASSASSIN INVISIBLE

Vic kept his eyes on the gun. It was five yards away, aimed at his stomach, and could not miss at this distance. He waited.

The two men, tied back to back, had stopped talking. The distraction had helped prolong things, but now it was over.

Trying a little prolonging of his own, Vic asked, "What's this all about? What have you gotten into?"

The ploy worked for a couple minutes and kept them talking, but then, "I don't have time to go into any more detail right now, but thanks for giving that gun to your girlfriend, and asking her to leave. I don't understand why, but thanks anyway. This gun is very accurate, a 22-magnum, but still more of a toy than the 9-millimeter cannon she took with her."

Vic kept asking questions delaying the inevitable, but then.

"Sorry Flint, I'm truly sorry, but I have to get going."

The gun moved. Vic lunged to his left. The first slug tore a crimson furrow across his shoulder like a knife slash. The second punched a tiny hole through his side as he continued to roll. The third slammed into his chest. He couldn't move anymore, the small slug felt like a hammer blow. The killer took a step closer and put another bullet into his chest. He felt nothing. Perrine and Drumheller were next. A bullet into their temples finished them off. The gun was empty, but the job was done.

A mystery set in wilderness areas of Michigan and Colorado.

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