

**DEEPER AND DEEPER**

*Also by Gary Lindberg*

THRILLERS

The Shekinah Legacy (A Charlotte Ansari Thriller)

Sons of Zadok (A Charlotte Ansari Thriller)

HISTORICAL FICTION

Ollie's Cloud

# DEEPER AND DEEPER

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Cover art and book design by Gary Lindberg

To my father, Russell Lindberg. When I was very young, he taught me the joys of reading, and always loved a good story.



# CHAPTER 1

**O**n a cracked square of asphalt deep in the ruins of a Detroit public playground, nine black gang members flaunted their colors, running and soaring in a half-court game of basketball. Four shirts versus five taller skins. No net, just a bent hoop. Graffiti everywhere—on the scuffed court, the sadly leaning backboard, the crumbling brick wall of a vacant building to the north, and on two old cars and a pick-up missing doors and wheels. It was a good-natured, rough-and-tumble game, lots of pushing and sweating and cussing.

But after an inbound pass all motion suddenly stopped cold. Suspicious eyes slid in their furrowed slots toward a ragged chain link fence as a squad car pulled up, the driver's door opened, and two black shoes stepped onto the gravel. The cop kicked a beer can out of the way. From behind aviator sunglasses he studied the motionless gang for a moment.

The shortest gangbanger started to bounce the basketball nervously.

The first cop walked deliberately along the chain link fence. At the ragged end, he grabbed a fistful of links. His feet stopped at a faded line painted long ago on the asphalt; a border of sorts.

The red-attired gang seemed to clot, the members moving toward each other, awkwardly at first, then more confidently as they all took

a step toward the cop. The short guy, Dancer, started bouncing the ball with almost machine-gun rapidity.

The cop began rolling up his blue shirtsleeves, revealing sinewy forearms.

A stout gang member wiped the sweat off his forehead.

Astonishingly, the cop had no utility belt, no gun. He'd left these in the squad car. His left foot crossed over the line, then his right. Two more steps—a direct, wordless confrontation.

The tall guy, called Shap by the others, nodded toward Dancer, who was still frantically pounding the ball on the court. *Put-put-put-put*. Acknowledging the nod, Dancer pulled the ball to his chest and then fired it like a cannonball toward the cop.

The cop caught it and gave a droll smile. He yanked off his sunglasses and slid them into a shirt pocket. Jamie Giles was late-twenties, maybe thirty. His eyes darted from one gang member to another. Surprising them all, he dribbled onto the court, evaded a tangle of arms and hands, stepped to his right, and put up a long three-pointer.

“Nothing but net!” he yelled, grinning. “If there was a net.”

A scowling skin took the ball out of bounds.

“Sorry I’m late,” Jamie said.

“Down by six,” Shap replied. “Let’s kick some ass!”

And they did. Joining the shirts—so as not to be totally out of uniform—Jamie plunged into the game. He took an in-bounds pass and lobbed it to Shap across court. Shap deftly dished it back to Jamie cutting to the basket for an easy layup and the expected fist pump.

The skins in-bounded the ball, but Jamie sliced in front of the intended recipient, dribbled back to make a legal shot, and hoisted another long one. Slightly off-angle, the ball careened off the crooked backboard, rattled around the rim, and miraculously dropped in accompanied by a chorus of groans.

“Better to be lucky!” Jamie shouted, high-fiving the other shirts.

He turned toward his partner Rico, who was leaning against the front fender of the squad munching a sandwich and watching with keen amusement. Jamie just caught a glimpse of a rusted-out van rumbling around a far corner of the pot-holed street, but a bone jarring bump by a skin pulled him back into the action of the game.

On court, Shap attempted a long shot but missed badly. Jamie went up for the ball, got his hands on it, but came down empty. And astonished. A skin laughed as he dribbled back to mid-court.

“White guys can’t jump, ever’one know that,” the skin teased.

Jamie came up to guard him.

The skin with the ball began a kamikaze dash toward the basket. Jamie stepped into the path of the fearless ball handler, taking an elbow to the chest and going down hard.

Just as World War III broke out.

Automatic fire from the van tore into the brick wall behind the basket. Two shirts and a skin jerked and fell down in a bloody spray.

Shap rolled to a bunched-up shirt on the edge of the court, scrambling to locate a handgun hidden inside. He started to fire back, but it was a massacre. Rico was pinned down behind the squad car, and Jamie was sheltered by the bloody body of a fallen skin. Suddenly, Shap and two other gangbangers were riddled by a barrage of bullets.

With a screech of tires, the turf battle was over. The van whizzed past the squad car, spattering a final hot line of lead that made the vehicle look like a game of connect-the-dots.

Undamaged, Jamie raced toward Rico who was reloading.

“I’m going to get the bastards!” Rico growled, racing to the bullet-riddled driver’s door. Jamie unlatched the vehicle’s shotgun, hopped in and buckled up. The chase was on.

Taking the radio, Jamie called in, “Car 265, need assistance!”

The van squealed around a corner and swerved down an alley, scattering two youngsters doing a dope deal.

Rico saw the dust storm of the van's tires emerging from the alley, but nearly missed the turn, taking down a flimsy wooden fence. Up ahead, the van veered left down a main artery.

As the squad lurched out of the alley, Jamie watched the van fishtail down the street. The gang driver, probably rattled, tried to turn right onto a side street but clipped a telephone pole, crumpling the rear right fender and sending the vehicle jittering across the corner of a gas station. The van scraped the rear end of an old Caddy taking on gas but kept on going.

Suddenly the rear doors of the van flew open and automatic fire assailed the squad. Jamie and Rico ducked, but the bullets were off their mark anyway.

Two squads swerved into the street behind Rico and Jamie.

"Here comes the cavalry," Rico said.

"Yeah, but why couldn't they show up *ahead* of the van?"

The van veered left into a rundown warehouse district. The sudden turn slammed the van's rear doors shut.

Rico had made up some ground and was now just a few car lengths behind the van. Suddenly, holes appeared in the van's rear doors. These guys were shooting blind through the doors!

Rico instinctively steered left, trying to stay out of the direct line of fire. Just then another squad car appeared down the street ahead of the van.

The gang driver did an incredible end-to-end swap, still going forward but looking backward. With an awful whine, the tires spun and the van skidded to a stop, instantly peeling off in a new direction.

Right at Rico and Jamie.

"Shit, Rico—look out!"

Rico and Jamie ducked. A shotgun fired at their squad as it just missed a head-on collision. The squad's windshield shattered and fell out.

Really pissed now, Rico did his own nifty bootlegger's turn just in time to see the van fire on the first of two squads that had been trailing his own vehicle. The blast took out the squad's front left tire and the car spun sideways, taking out the second squad directly behind.

There was only one squad assisting now, and it was following Rico and Jamie.

A bicyclist was coming straight toward the van. Before the inevitable collision, the rider tried to jump the curb, but the bike's angle was poor and it bounced back into the path of the van, which struck its rear wheel. The bicyclist shot up and over the van and landed halfway through the glassless front window of Rico's squad.

The van skidded to the right onto a street that paralleled Fleming Channel, the watery border that separated the United States from Canada. Rico swerved to follow, throwing the bicyclist off the hood. The back-up squad screeched to a stop to lend assistance.

The shot-up squad gained ground on the van. To its left was the channel, and just ahead was a small harbor with about two dozen slips and a handful of boats.

Now about four car-lengths behind the van, Jamie was tempted to give these gangbangers a taste of their own medicine—a shotgun blast to the rear wheels. He pointed the barrel through the blown-out windshield, but the bouncing squad almost guaranteed an errant shot in a populated area.

As he thought about his next move, the van's rear doors flew open again. Jamie heard the shots like a string of firecrackers going off. The rear view mirror shattered. The ricochet smashed into the buckle on Jamie's seat belt, knocking the wind out of him. He turned to check on Rico just as two rounds struck his partner in the head and shoulder. Rico slumped left. The squad swerved toward the harbor.

Several sailors dove for cover as the squad flew off the road, careened over the river walk, soared toward the slips, and belly-flopped

into the water. The car sunk quickly as a handful of beer-sodden sailors looked on.

Water filled the interior of the squad through the missing windshield. Jamie frantically tried to unfasten his seat belt, but the smashed buckle was jammed shut. His eyes filled with panic as he tried to wriggle free, but he couldn't do it. Strapped in too tightly.

Someone had dove into the water. The rescuer's futile hands tried to wrench open the seat belt, but without a knife it was impossible. The hands disappeared as the diver surfaced for air.

In desperation, Jamie looked around the flooded squad and saw the shotgun lying between Rico and the driver's door. If he could retrieve it and somehow fire at the webbing or the end bracket, maybe...

He stretched mightily, but his hand came a few inches short of reaching it.

## CHAPTER 2

**A**n older man with a beard and fleshy jowls walked silently down a stretch of Bahamas beach leaving sandal prints that would quickly be scuffed over by countless tourists. He wore his favorite cobalt-blue shirt with a white scarf and tan shorts, and chomped an unlit cigar as he walked purposefully toward a pink hotel.

Money was not an issue for him, but he despised mistakes and the hotel had made a doozy. He pulled the hotel bill from his pocket, and the error in it fanned the flames of his indignation again. Mini-bar charges—\$135.79. And he had only drunk one small bottle of vodka. *It's the principle of the thing!* Someone screwed up. Maybe he should just buy the goddamn hotel so he could fire those who couldn't do their jobs. He intended to let the manager have a piece of his mind. He wouldn't rest until this annoyance was settled and someone was flogged.

*Fired*, he meant.

This annoyance consumed him. Yes, he could be a bit obsessive about little things. So what? He could afford to be.

On the beach, the bearded man unlatched the gate to the pink hotel and started an angry march toward the front desk to lodge his complaint. He had worked himself up over it.

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**A** tall Bahamian, who had been watching the bearded man from a distance, retreated to the driver's seat of his cab. The cabbie had a full head of gray hair, black skin, and gleaming white eyes. Seated there, he clenched his eyes, then opened them wide and reached into the glove compartment, pulling out a knife. He thumbed the sharp edge, making the blade whine. *Ready!* Hiding the knife beneath his shirt, the cabbie stepped out of his vehicle and headed for the hotel entrance as casually as possible.

Inside he found the bearded man in a heated exchange with the assistant manager, who appeared to acquiesce to the guest's demands. The bearded man thrust his head backwards triumphantly—imperiously, even—before dismissing his inferior with the wave of a hand and striding toward the elevators. The cabbie understood that, for this particular hotel guest, every personal encounter was a battle of wills, a test of power.

An elevator door opened, and the bearded man stepped into the vacant car, pressing a button. The cabbie knew where the man was headed.

Fifth floor. Suite 534.

In a few minutes, the bearded man would have company.

The cabbie heard his heart thumping like a bass drum. He looked around, wondering if anyone else could hear it.

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**U**nderwater, Jamie's heartbeat was unbelievably loud. For over two minutes he had struggled against the seat belt, lungs burning, and eyes bulging as the urge to breathe finally overcame him.

And then he inhaled.

A small burst of bubbles escaped his lips, and a horrible spasm shook his body as water filled his lungs. He shook and coughed. And then, mercifully, it was over. His eyes were still open, unblinking.

No more heartbeat.

A school of silvery fish swam past the open windshield.

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**A**scuba diver maneuvered through the squad's open windshield, his small tank banging against the roof. He looked at Rico, who was missing part of his head. An inky stain of blood near the wound shimmered and dissipated as the diver's movement disturbed the water.

Jamie was strapped into his seat, vacant eyes staring back at the diver as if to say *What took you so long?* The diver pulled a knife from a sheath strapped to his leg and sliced through the seat belt. Jamie's body immediately started to float upward.

On the shore above, seven cops and two paramedics watched the diver nudge Jamie's lifeless body to the surface. A group of weekend sailors stared as the cops pulled the dripping corpse from the water and the diver went back for Rico.

A paramedic checked the body for vital signs, then started CPR. The first thrust of hands on Jamie's rib cage ejected a plume of water out of his mouth.

After several minutes, the paramedic's female partner stopped him. The woman shook her head and looked up at one of the cops, Conner. "He's gone. How long was he under?"

"Went down about twenty minutes ago."

"Okay, we're gonna take him to Detroit Receiving. The M.E. will make the final eval. Sorry, Conner. Hard to lose one of your own." The woman patted the cop on the shoulder. "You get those guys in the van?"

"Not yet, but we will," Conner said. "If it was up to me, we'd hang 'em on the spot."

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**T**he tall Bahamian emerged from an elevator on the fifth floor of the pink hotel and looked left. Suite 534 was about halfway down the corridor. He had been there countless times. This would be his last visit.

It seemed to take a long time to navigate the hallway, and each step prompted a tough question, like *Are you seriously going to do this?* But suddenly he was staring at the door, and he felt the walk hadn't taken nearly long enough.

He pulled a security card out of his pocket, tapped on the door and said, "Housekeeping."

No answer.

He slid the card in and out of the slot. The door made almost no noise as he pushed it open. The bearded man was not in the room, but the cabbie could hear water running in the bathroom. Oh, yes—the cabbie remembered how the bearded man loved to soak in the spa. He loved everything—*anything*—that gave him sensual pleasure.

The cabbie stood there for a moment, not sure what to do next.

He heard the water being shut off, then someone splashing and the sudden whir of spa jets starting to pulsate the water. The bearded man was in the tub.

The cabbie shoved the bathroom door open. It squeaked.

Without looking, the bearded man responded. "Maria? Come in, dear."

Like a shadow, the black Bahamian stepped into the bathroom, moving close to the spa. His right hand clutched the knife, but he knew he wouldn't need it.

The bearded man slowly opened his eyes, looking upward. He tried to scramble out of the tub, but his feet slipped on the ceramic and he fell back. He looked up and saw a knife held threateningly above his face. And then the cabbie's giant hand grasped the man's head like a basketball and forced it down into the water. The bearded man flopped and squirmed like a caught fish in the bottom of a boat, but the Bahamian was too big, too strong. A hand managed to reach up and grab the cabbie's arm, but finally it fell limply back into the water.

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**J**amie's lifeless hand hung off the gurney, which bounced and rattled across the rough planks of the dock. Walking alongside the body, a paramedic lifted the cold hand to tuck it under a sheet, but the hand suddenly moved and grabbed his arm.

Like a dog's jaws, it seized him!

And then Jamie gasped and screamed. He bolted upright, holding his chest.

Shaken, the paramedic jumped, staring at the dead man's impossible grip.

Water oozed from Jamie's nose and throat. He coughed and choked but fiercely held onto the paramedic's arm. Then, with almost superhuman strength, Jamie pulled the paramedic close, stared him in the eye, and just as suddenly collapsed, alive but panting for breath.

The paramedic, who'd been pushing the gurney, instinctively started to check out the suddenly animated corpse. His partner was too stunned to respond.

"Let's get him on oxygen! Now!"

With new urgency, they wheeled the gurney toward the ambulance.

## CHAPTER 3

**J**amie sees sandals scuffing white sand. A beach, and turquoise water. He looks around at the sunbathers and beautiful sky, and just ahead a picturesque pink hotel glistening in the sunlight. The images blur and fade, replaced by a dim corridor and a hotel room door marked by the numbers 534. The door opens and clothing is thrown onto a dark blue daybed patterned with large flowers. Again the images blur and shift, and he is in a spa. He can feel the warmth of the water around him. The door to the bathroom opens. “Maria?” he says. His voice is old and coarse. He glances at the doorway and...

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**J**amie woke up sweating and shouting, almost scaring a nurse at his bedside out of her uniform.

“I’m sorry,” the nurse said. “I was just checking on you. Are you okay?”

Panting and confused, he asked, “Where am I?”

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Two officers escorted a solemn Kathy Giles through the hospital lobby. They'd picked her up at Hal's, a small bistro where she worked as a waitress. Conner and the other cop had wanted Jamie's wife to have personal support through this crisis; they both had wives, too.

Kathy was a slender, raven-haired woman of twenty-eight who often caught the eyes of male customers she served. Her tips were usually large.

As they got off the elevator on the third floor, a nurse approached. "Is this the wife of the deceased?"

The word *deceased* made Kathy gasp. No one had mentioned that Jamie had died.

"Not deceased, April," Conner said, looking at the nurse's name badge. "He *was* deceased—but he isn't any more. You might try a little tact."

Kathy looked up at Conner. "You didn't say—"

"Well, it's complicated. He was dead, that's what the paramedics said, probably drowned. But then he wasn't. He started moving and then he sat up, so I don't know what to say about that. Except he's alive now, and you're on the way to see him."

Conner shepherded Kathy down a corridor to a room filled with a half-dozen uniformed officers. "All right. Move aside, fellas," he said, "the wife's here. Time to get some coffee, or better yet get back to work. The criminals are taking over the city while you're all up here."

Conner waved his fellow cops out of the room to give Kathy and Jamie some privacy and then closed the door behind him as Kathy walked over to her husband.

"A lot of tubes," she said, then wondered why she had focused on the apparatus that was plugged into him instead of expressing her relief that he was alive.

Jamie nodded, then said, "Hi."

"Hi there. Quite a day, huh?"

Jamie suddenly averted his eyes.

“Really sorry about Rico,” Kathy said.

“He was a good guy.” Jamie’s whisper was lathered with sadness.

“So you drowned, they said. And then came back to life. Pretty amazing. Did you, like, see a light at the end of a tunnel... stuff like that?”

Jamie was still avoiding her gaze. “Don’t actually remember anything. Bummer, right?”

Kathy pulled a chair close to the bed and sat. “I feel like such an idiot, really I do. I’ve been doing a lot of thinking lately... you know, what we talked about. Look—I’m truly sorry about what I said.”

Jamie’s eyes were red and vulnerable. “It’s okay. You need time to figure out what you want.”

Kathy stared at Jamie for a long time, her eyes starting to glisten with, well... She couldn’t hold back the tears, so she tried to disguise them by moving—standing up, and then crawling onto the bed and putting her arms around her husband. But this just made the tears come faster.

Jamie gave her a little hug.

“Oh God—Jamie...”

Jamie pulled her closer.

“I didn’t tell you I wouldn’t stay,” Kathy said between sniffs. “I’ve just been so—so confused. And then this... and I started to realize how much you mean to me. If I had lost you, I just don’t know...”

“Hey, I’ve done a lot of thinking too. It was pretty dumb for me to think that I could keep a girl like you happy. You’re used to having pretty much whatever you need, or want, and look at me... a cop fighting to make ends meet. Your parents were right about me. No future. I just can’t help it that I love you.”

Kathy sat up and found a box of tissues. She blew her nose and shook her head. “It doesn’t have anything to do with where you came from or what you do or what my parents think. It has to do with me... and...”

oh, God. I'm just such a mess right now. I don't know what I want. I thought it might be time to go after my own dreams, but I'm not sure I even know what they are any more."

"Back to college, that's what you should do," Jamie responded. "Finish your degree. I'm a cop. I can moonlight at any number of places... make decent money. I can help, whether we're together or not. For some reason I've been given a second chance here—maybe this is the reason."

"My God, Jamie, I can't believe I was even thinking about leaving. I'm just so... I'm so sorry—"

She turned to find a doctor officiously standing inside the doorway. "You Mrs. Giles?" The question was flung at her like a challenge. Instantly she disliked this white-coated interrogator.

Kathy straightened up, wiping moisture from her cheek with her fingers. "Yes, Kathy Giles. Is he going to be all right?"

The doctor rudely flipped through several pages on the patient chart. "Interesting case. Apparently you were dead at the scene," he said to Jamie, ignoring Kathy's question.

"We're aware of that," Kathy interjected. "The question is, will he be okay now?"

The doctor turned to dismiss the wifely annoyance. "Mrs. Giles, your husband drowned two hours ago. He was dead for possibly fifteen minutes. Attempts to resuscitate him failed. And then he spontaneously came back to life. We don't know if the paramedics simply failed to detect vital signs, or if he actually died while he was underwater."

A mustached man with an enormous girth entered the room.

The doctor continued speaking as if there had been no interruption. "All we know is that, physically, Mr. Giles appears quite normal now. We're going to do some tests to see if there might have been any brain damage or other psychological effects from the trauma, which wouldn't be surprising. Now if you'd excuse us, we'd like a few minutes alone with

your husband. This is Dr. Rayburn from the PD's psychological unit."

Jamie squirmed, then manipulated the bed controls to position himself into a sitting position. "I'd like her to stay. In fact, I insist on it." He timidly glanced at Kathy. "We're a team."

The doctor and the psychologist looked at each other, both uncomfortable with Jamie's decision. Finally, the doctor mustered his much-practiced haughtiness and said, "That's impossible, but we can let her know when we're finished here."

Jamie's face contorted with rage. He stabbed a stiff forefinger toward the doctor and roared, "You may leave now! My wife stays. We'll let *you* know when Dr. Rayburn is finished here."

Kathy recoiled at the abrupt switch in Jamie's temperament. She'd never seen her husband so... so *direct*. But she rather enjoyed seeing the doctor put in his place.

The doctor stood there frozen, his arrogance temporarily dismantled. "Go!" Jamie urged.

The doctor flinched, tried unsuccessfully to gather his composure, and finally turned and strutted away.

"Dr. Rayburn, you have some questions for me," Jamie suggested with a sudden meekness. "I must apologize for the rudeness of the staff here. They think they run the place. Please make yourself comfortable." He gestured to a chair opposite Kathy.

The psychologist had seemed astonished and intrigued by Jamie's sudden shifts in demeanor. He turned to Kathy. "It's not unusual, Mrs. Giles, for someone who has had a traumatic event to experience some significant mood swings. I think the doctor was just trying to spare you some of the discomfort of seeing it for yourself during these early hours of recovery."

"Please speak directly to me," Jamie instructed Dr. Rayburn. "I suppose your job here is to decide if I'm fit to go back to work. Well, I'm feeling great. Except for the grief of losing my partner, of course, and the fact that I can't seem to get a minute alone with my wife. So please—do

your thing. Let's get on with it."

Rayburn studied Jamie before speaking. "What do you remember about the event you just went through?"

"Remember? Well, I can recall Rico getting his head blown apart. Hard to forget something like that. And the car veering off the road into the water. I can remember struggling to get out of my seat belt—panic, I guess—and then... waking up here, in this room. A miracle, right?"

"Do you remember speaking to the paramedics, or anyone else, before you got here?"

"You mean after I drowned?"

"That's right."

Jamie glanced at Kathy then back at the psychologist. "Nothing. I was dead, right? Until I got here."

"Well, the verbal report from the paramedics stated that you started moving while you were on a gurney on the way to an ambulance. You don't remember that?"

"Not at all."

"The ambulance driver was an African American woman who assisted in the transfer of your body—of *you*, that is—into the vehicle."

"Don't remember that either."

Rayburn glanced uneasily at Kathy, then turned back to Jamie. "The driver stated that as she leaned over you to attach some monitoring equipment, you grabbed her—*provocatively*, she said—and made a lewd suggestion. Any recollection?"

Kathy shifted in her chair. This didn't sound like Jamie at all.

"None," Jamie replies. His eyes darted nervously to his wife once, twice. *Dammit, it's the truth.* No recollection.

"One more question, Jamie. Who is Maria?"

"Maria?"

"You called the driver Maria. Which is not her name. Who is Maria?"

"I honestly don't know anyone named Maria." Jamie lowered the

bed a few inches. “This has really worn me out. Is the driver going to file charges or anything?”

“No, she was pretty understanding, considering what you’d just been through. But it’s something we have to investigate, isn’t it? I’d say probably some sort of PTSD—an out-of-character stressful response to the trauma of drowning. And losing your partner. I think you’d benefit from a couple weeks off, at least.”

“Really, I’m okay now, I am. It would be hard to lose any pay right now, you know what I mean? Things are kinda tight.”

“Time off *with* pay is what I’m talking about. You’re a hero, son. You’ll be the lead story on the news tonight. All in the line of duty. So take the time, rest up, and get back to normal. This kind of thing, it takes a toll.”

Jamie nodded.

Rayburn stood and headed for the door. “Mrs. Giles, I’m sorry we had to get into this.”

Kathy nodded the psychologist out the door, then leaned over Jamie to give him a kiss on the forehead.

But he turned away. “I don’t remember any of that. Why would I behave that way?” He looked up at Kathy with vulnerable eyes, his domineering attitude totally gone now.

“I love my wife,” he said.

She knew that he meant it.

But a question lingered: *who, then, was Maria?*

## CHAPTER 4

**A**t two in the morning, the night nurse shuffled down the quiet hospital corridor to take vitals, administer medications, and generally check on the status of patients under her watch. Nancy Goodwin hated this shift. At her age—over fifty now—she found the work too routine, had trouble staying awake, and even worse, almost never had interesting things occur to her. She'd never admit it, but sometimes she hoped that a medical emergency would occur. Nothing too serious, of course, just something to interrupt the god-awful boredom.

In room 324, Mrs. Jacobson at first didn't want to take her oral diuretic, but finally gave in to Nancy's gentle coaxing. Mr. Aakin woke up cussing as usual in room 325 when Nancy accidentally bumped his bed. *No change in the patient*, Nancy noted with a smile.

She had never met the new patient in room 326, Jamie Giles, a police officer who had drowned and somehow come back to life.

The door to Mr. Giles' room was open a crack. She entered quietly and a widening slash of light from the corridor illuminated a man sitting upright in his adjustable bed, still as a corpse, eyes open and gleaming. Jamie did not move as Nancy approached, did not turn his head or look in her direction. He seemed to be gazing at some invisible object across the room, though there was nothing but an empty chair against that barren wall.

Nancy's heart suddenly began to pound against her sternum. *What if Mr. Giles had died?* No, an alarm would have alerted her. If he was alive, then, he was remarkably unresponsive to her presence. *A stroke, perhaps!* She cursed herself for having wished for a medical emergency, and then crossed herself, a lapsed Catholic seeking forgiveness and protection.

She rushed over and looked up at the monitors. Jamie's blood pressure and oxygen saturation level were both normal, but his pulse was low—well under 50 bpm. Concerning—unless the patient was meditating. She leaned to get a closer look at the young man's face, to look into his staring eyes.

Her face got within inches of Jamie's, and she placed a caring hand on his forehead. That was when his eyes shifted to look at her. The subtle but unexpected movement made her jump backwards.

"Mr. Giles, are you all right?"

Silence.

"I understand from your chart that you've been through quite a trauma."

In a voice that seemed older than a young man's and more formal than a cop's, Jamie said, "You are not allowed to touch me."

"Mr. Giles, I'm your nurse. It's all right."

Jamie's upright posture made him appear almost regal. "Never touch me, unless I ask." His voice was raspy.

*Dry throat*, Nancy thought. She found a glass of water with a straw in it and moved it close to Jamie's mouth. The straw tip touched his lip.

With an angry motion, Jamie batted the glass out of her hand, splashing water onto the floor.

"Impertinence!" Jamie snarled. "If I want water, I will ask for it. Get me Nehsira!"

Confused and shaken by the outburst, Nancy backed away. "Neh-sye-ruh," she repeated. "Is that your doctor? I haven't heard of him—or her."

Inexplicably, Jamie grew more enraged. He threw off the bed covers and leaped out of bed to stand imperiously before her, but instead slipped on the spilled water, falling sideways and banging his elbow on the side table. As he pulled himself back into bed, a tremendous torrent of profanity erupted from his throat. Nancy believed it was profanity, but in truth she couldn't understand a word of it. Just a tangled snarl of guttural sounds uttered with curse-like intensity.

Racing from the room, Nancy found the charge nurse, who found an orderly, and together the threesome approached the angry den of the madman. As Nancy switched on the light, Jamie looked up as if jarred awake by the sudden illumination. Nancy noticed that almost instantaneously his anger switched from rage to confusion.

Jamie stared at the hospital staff and blinked. "I think I fell," he said meekly, rubbing his elbow.

"Nancy, clean up the floor, will you?" the charge nurse ordered. Then, with an air of immense authority, she approached Jamie and inspected his elbow.

Nancy waited for the madman to complain about being touched, but Jamie said nothing.

"Please remain in bed, sir, while we mop up the water," the charge nurse said. Then she approached Nancy, who was busy mopping. "He seems calm right now."

"He was asking for a *Dr. Neh-sye-ruh*, or something. Who is that?"

"No physician I know. But then I have trouble with all those foreign names."

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Later that morning, Kathy was the first one to give hell to the hospital staff for allowing Jamie to get out of bed and slip on a puddle of water. *What kind of place are you running here?* Her wrath had been amplified by three police officials whom Kathy had notified immedi-

ately. *After what he's endured, you put him through this?* The hospital absorbed the body blows without launching a defense. How could you tell the wife and the entire police department that their hero was a lunatic? At any rate, the charge nurse could not verify the patient's behavior as described by the attending nurse, so the matter was settled with a heartfelt apology by everyone except Nancy, who was off-duty.

Jamie was discharged the following day. After extensive testing, no physical aftereffects of his drowning had been found.

"It's almost like they were anxious to get rid of you," Kathy told her husband on the way home.

The department had kept insisting that Jamie take a paid month off to make sure there were no undetected emotional issues related to the trauma, but against Kathy's wishes Jamie had argued that down to three weeks. If he could scrape the money together, maybe he and Kathy would take a vacation. Seemed like a good idea to Kathy—after all, she was also an unwitting victim of this strange episode.

Kathy insisted on driving her husband home, which seemed to anger him a little. But if it did, he gave in to her without saying a word. He was probably feeling overprotected. To mask the tension in the car, she plugged in Jamie's iPod and turned on his favorite music, a personal mix of indie-rock. Oddly, he just shook his head and turned it off, switching on the radio and searching through the FM stations, finally landing on the local classical music channel.

Kathy didn't mind. She liked classical music, particularly Liszt and Mozart—her mother had been a music professor at the university—but Jamie had never wanted that kind of highbrow stuff in the house. *It doesn't speak to me*, he would say, preferring the raw music from the streets where he grew up. Music that, unfortunately, made Kathy grit her teeth.

So what was this business in the car? Maybe that drowning incident had knocked some music appreciation into him.

Their cracker box suburban home was small and spare, but it had a backyard fence for the children they planned to have some day, and a finished basement that Jamie had turned into a man-cave with a cheap flat-panel TV and home theater sound system from Costco. Kathy didn't complain about the extravagant purchase because Jamie could listen to his music down there without bothering her too much.

On their first evening home, Kathy prepared a candlelight dinner of Jamie's favorite foods: pot roast, oven-browned potatoes, brown sugar-glazed carrots, salad with French dressing, and apple pie. With the candles lit, she called downstairs for Jamie to join her for dinner. He came up immediately, a look of excitement on his face, and set his iPod and portable speaker unit on the table.

Kathy frowned reflexively. After all she had done to make a romantic welcome-home meal for Jamie, he seemed ready to ruin the mood with his music.

"Smells fantastic, sweetheart," he said. "Pot roast? My favorite."

She knew that.

"I found some really incredible music for dinner."

*I doubt it*, she thought, preparing for the worst.

He switched on the iPod, thoughtfully adjusting the volume to a modest level. The music caught Kathy off-guard. This was no junky, amateurish indie-rock piece; it was classical music. She recognized it immediately.

Richard Wagner's *Tannhauser*.

Jamie was playing the dramatic overture from the famous opera, closing his eyes and smiling faintly. "Now *this* music really speaks to me. Should we eat?"

His wife had no idea what had gotten into him, but *this* Jamie was an improvement over the other one. The music was a bit dramatic for dinner, but she had no intention of discouraging her husband's newly acquired taste in music.

After dinner, he listened to *Tannhauser* all the way through, cradling Kathy in his arms on the basement sofa as if lost in some other world. Kathy could swear that Jamie at times was mouthing the words as they were sung in German—which was ridiculous, because Jamie only spoke English.

This was Kathy's first time listening to music in the man-cave. And her last time feeling perfectly safe.

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Unable to sleep, Jamie quietly climbed out of bed and went to his man-cave, switching on the large-screen TV. So many infomercials during the early morning hours! No live sports. A glut of re-runs.

Shuffling through the channels, he stopped at the Travel Channel, which was showing a program on pleasure cruises. It made him think that maybe he and Kathy could benefit from a short vacation. Just get away from the problems up here in Michigan. Get back to being a couple again.

A maddening flurry of commercials interrupted the show. Jamie impatiently reached for the remote, his thumb searching for the channel button. But before he could switch, an image in one of the TV spots stunned him. He set down the remote, staring at the image of a pink hotel. Not just any pink hotel, but the exact hotel he had seen in his unfinished nightmare. The image provoked memories of sandals on the beach, a hotel room door bearing the number 534, the comforting sensation of hot water in a spa, and the horrifying realization that through the bathroom door was entering...

His heart was racing. He felt dizzy, frightened. Only when the commercial's tagline appeared, did he start to calm down.

The commercial identified the pink hotel. It was real! And it was called the Sheraton British Colonial, and it was in the Bahamas.

## CHAPTER 5

**B**ack in bed, Jamie struggled to go to sleep, but after an hour he couldn't stay awake any longer.

Kathy awoke and rolled toward him, wrapped an arm over his chest, and put her head on his shoulder. She could hear his breath, listen to his heartbeat, feel the heat rising from his body. And suddenly she remembered that, for a half hour, he had been dead. He had stopped breathing. His heartbeat had stopped. His body had been cold and lifeless. Yet here he was now, sleeping next to her, exuding heat. Suddenly she wanted to thank God for this miracle—not that she actually believed in God, but she wanted to thank someone. Something. Somewhere. So she tried to remember how to pray, and while she was remembering, it happened.

Jamie started to breathe deeply. At first just a deep breath *in*, and after a long pause a stuttering breath *out*. And then his breathing became erratic as if he were struggling for air. His mouth opened, and he moaned, then gasped.

Kathy sat up wondering if the doctors had failed to identify some horrible consequence of the drowning. She hunched against the headboard suddenly afraid to touch him.

Jamie broke into a sweat, soaking the sheet. His eyes flashed open, wide and white. He began to mutter erratically... a strange, guttural

string of syllables... as if speaking to someone, giving commands. But it was all gibberish, and the growing intensity of his garbled speech terrified Kathy. Was he speaking to her? There was no one else in the room.

Suddenly he stood up. Naked, he walked to a chair by the window and sat down.

Kathy tried to disappear into the headboard, but Jamie was quiet now. He sat in the chair without moving a muscle, staring at something—not her, something else. Unblinking. As if in a waking coma.

Kathy gathered the courage to speak. “Jamie?”

No response. Jamie continued to sit in the chair, rigidly—almost *regally*, Kathy thought—eyes fixed straight ahead, Tannenbaum’s *crecendos* wafting over him.

“Jamie—what’s going on?”

She tentatively crawled out of bed and slowly walked toward the chair, putting her hand on his shoulder.

He jumped as if shocked by a cattle prod, and then looked around, sucking in his breath, clearly disoriented.

“What—?”

“Jesus, Jamie, you scared me.”

“I don’t know... how—”

“You were sleepwalking. Don’t worry about it,” she said, taking him by the hand and leading him back to the bed. “You’ve been through a lot of trauma, God knows. Just lie back and let me help you relax.”

He lay down on his back. Kathy snuggled him in a comforting way and instantly noticed that he was aroused.

“Jamie?” she said, recoiling slightly. The disturbing previous moments had not exactly put her in the mood for sex. But Jamie seemed unmindful of her sudden withdrawal. He rolled toward her, then sinuously crawled on top of her, stroking her back, her legs, her hips, and then began devouring her lips with his mouth. His back arched and quickly

he was beyond control, heaving and gasping, painfully pulling Kathy's hair despite her protests.

This had ceased being lovemaking.

Finally freeing a hand, Kathy fiercely slapped Jamie across the face.

Stunned, Jamie rolled off her. He stopped breathing for a moment, then lifted himself up on one elbow, looking down at Kathy's tear-streaked face. "Kathy, what is it?"

"What is it?" Kathy repeated, incredulous. "Are you kidding?"

"What's wrong?"

His question was frighteningly sincere, as if Jamie had just entered the room. As if he hadn't been there.

Kathy didn't know what to do, so she rolled over and ostriched her head beneath a pillow.

"Did I do something?" he asked, tenderly putting a hand on her shoulder, maddeningly oblivious to his own brutality.

Now she was genuinely scared, but still mustered up the courage to yell. "Just shut off the damn music!"