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# DAVID BALDACCII

# SIMPLE GENIUS

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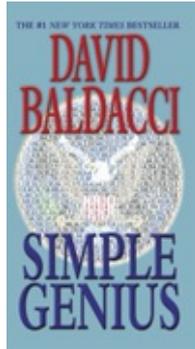
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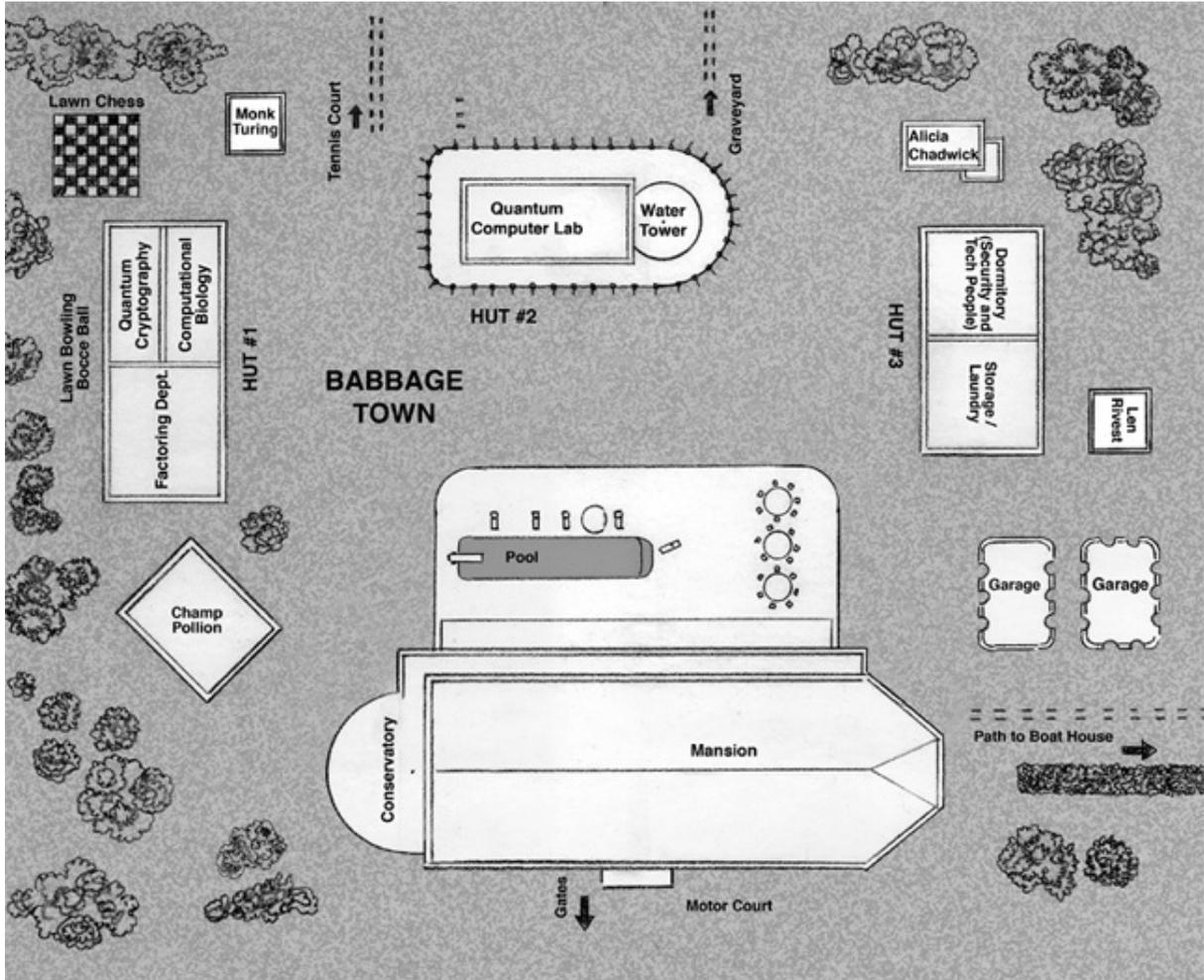
IN A WORLD OF SECRETS, HUMAN  
GENIUS IS POWER. AND SOMETIMES  
IT IS SIMPLY DEADLY...

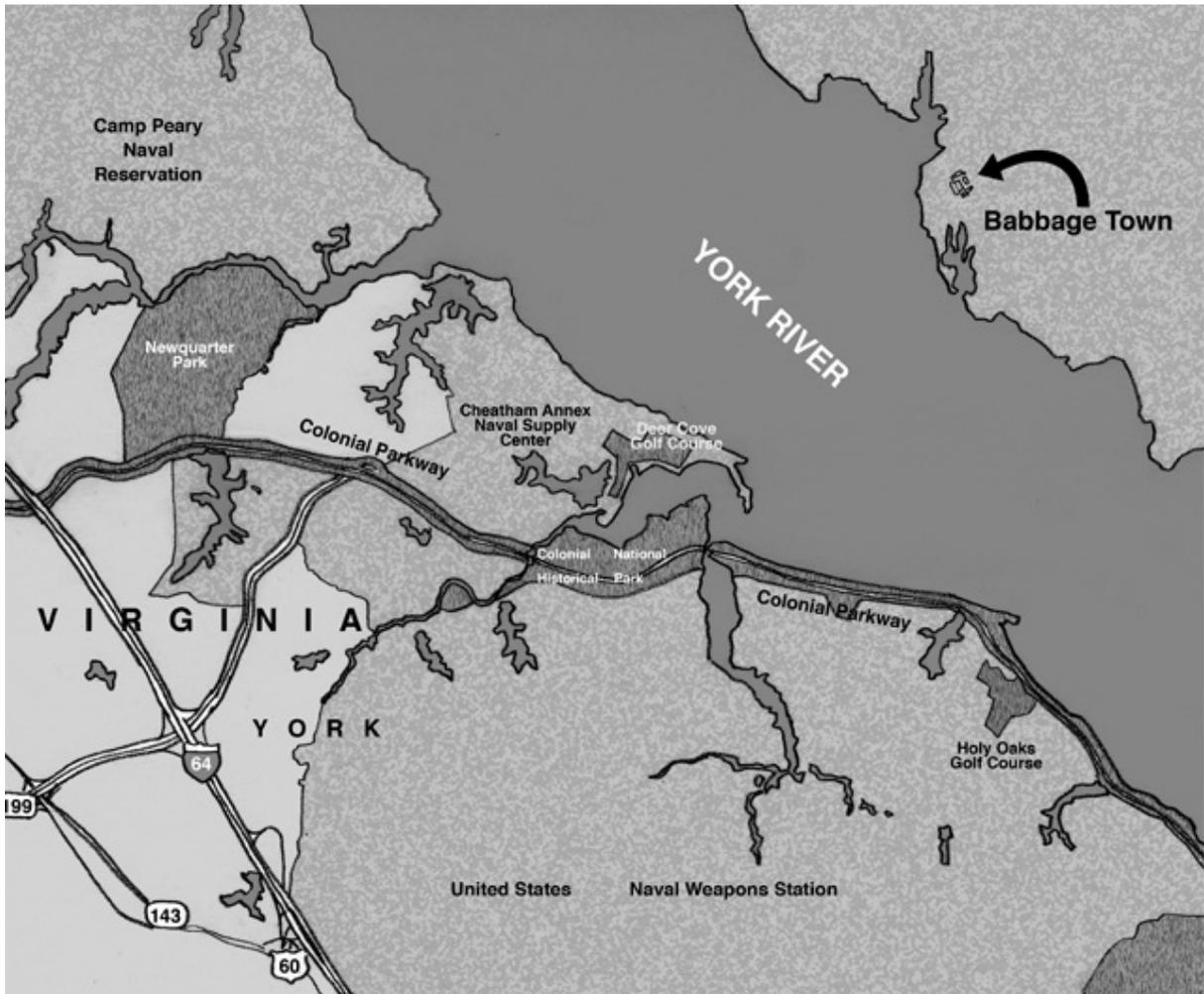
## SIMPLE GENIUS

Near Washington, D.C., there are two clandestine institutions: the world's most unusual laboratory and a secret CIA training camp. Drawn to these sites by a murder, ex-Secret Service agent Sean King encounters a dark world of mathematicians, codes, and spies. His search for answers soon leads him to more shocking violence—and an autistic girl with an extraordinary genius.

Now, only by working with his embattled partner, Michelle Maxwell, can he catch a killer... and solve a stunning mystery that threatens the entire nation.

*To my dear friend Maureen Egen,  
May the days be long and the seas calm.*





## CHAPTER

# 1

THERE ARE FOUR ACKNOWLEDGED WAYS of meeting your maker: You can die by natural causes including illness; you can die by accident; you can die by another's hand; and you can die by your own hand. However, if you live in Washington, D.C., there is a fifth way of kicking the bucket: the political death. It can spring from many sources: frolicking in a public fountain with an exotic dancer who is not your spouse; stuffing bags of money in your pants when the payer unfortunately happens to be the FBI; or covering up a bungled burglary when you call 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue home.

Michelle Maxwell was currently stalking the pavement in the nation's capital, but because she wasn't a politician, that fifth choice of mortal exit was not available to her. In fact, the lady was focused only on getting so wasted she'd wake up the next morning with a chunk of her memory gone. There was much she wanted to forget; much that she *had* to forget.

Michelle crossed the street, pushed open the bullet-pocked door of the bar and stepped inside. The smoke hit her first, some of it actually from cigarettes. The other aromas were rising off substances that kept the DEA jacked up and in business.

Brain-piercing music crushed all other sounds and would provide an army of hearing specialists with lucrative business in a few years. While glasses and bottles clinked, a trio of ladies ground it out on the dance floor. Meanwhile, a pair of waitresses juggled trays and bad attitudes, all the while prepared to slug anyone attempting to grab their ass.

The bar's collective attention turned to Michelle, the only WASP in the house this or probably any other night. She looked back at them with enough defiance that they returned to their drinks and talk. That status could change because Michelle Maxwell was tall and very attractive. What they didn't realize was that she could be nearly as dangerous as a bomb-wrapped terrorist and was looking for any reason to put her foot through someone's front teeth.

Michelle found a corner table in the back and wedged in, nursing her first drink of the night. An hour and more drinks later, the woman's rage began to swell. Her pupils seemed to grow dry and harden, while the rest of the eyeball eased to a blood red. She lifted a finger at the passing waitress who satisfied her thirst one last time. Now all Michelle wanted was a target for the fury that had laid claim to every square inch of

her.

She swallowed the last drop of alcohol, stood and whipped her long dark hair out of her face. Michelle's gaze zoned the room grid-by-grid looking for the lucky one. It was a technique the Secret Service had pounded into her head until that instinct of observation became the only way she could look at anything or anyone ever again.

It didn't take long for Michelle to find the man of her crystallizing nightmare. He was easily a head taller than anyone else in the place. And that head was chocolate brown, bald and beautifully smooth with a column of gold rings stacked in each thick earlobe. His shoulders spanned about a mile. He wore baggy camouflage pants, black military boots and an Army green shirt that showed bare arms full of knotted muscles. He stood there sipping his beer, swaying that big head to the beat of the music, mouthing trash lyrics it was impossible even to hear. Definitely her kind of guy.

Michelle shoved aside a man who stepped in front of her, walked up to this living mountain and tapped him on the shoulder. It felt like she was touching a block of granite; he would do very nicely. Tonight, Michelle Maxwell was going to kill a man. This man, in fact.

He turned, slipped the cigarette from his lips and took a swig of beer, the mug barely visible in his bear paw of a hand.

Size did matter, she reminded herself.

"What's up, baby?" he said, idly blowing a smoke ring to the ceiling and taking his gaze off her.

*Wrong move, baby.* Her foot connected with his chin, and he staggered backward, knocking down two smaller men. The impact sent a shock wave of pain from Michelle's toes to her pelvis, so hard was his chin.

He tossed the mug at her; it missed, but her slashing front kick didn't. He bent over as air was torn from his gut. Michelle next slammed a vicious kick to his skull with such force she could almost hear his vertebrae screaming over the apocalypse of the music. He fell back, one hand pressed against his bloody head, eyes wide in panic at her raw power, at her speed and precision of attack.

Michelle calmly eyed both sides of his thick, quivering neck. Where to hit now? The trembling jugular? The pencil-thick carotid? Or perhaps the chest cavity, throwing his heartbeat into a fatal misfire? And yet it looked like the fight had gone out of the man.

*Come on, big boy, don't disappoint me. I came all this way.*

The crowd had cleared back except for one woman who streaked off the dance floor, screaming her man's name. She aimed a meaty fist at Michelle's head, but Michelle deftly sidestepped the charge, grabbed her attacker's arm, bent it behind her and gave her a push. The lady kept right on going, taking down a table and two patrons sitting there.

Michelle turned back to confront the boyfriend, who was doubled over, breathing hard and clutching his gut. He suddenly made a bull run at her. That charge was halted by a crushing kick to his face, followed by an elbow thudding against his ribs. Michelle finished this off with a neatly executed side-kick that disrupted a good bit of the cartilage in his left knee. Screaming in pain, the big man dropped to the floor. The fight had now turned into a slaughter. The silent crowd took one collective step back, unable to believe David really was kicking the crap out of Goliath.

The bartender had already called the cops. In a place like this, 911 was the only number on the speed dial besides the lawyer's. From the looks of things it was doubtful they would be in time, though.

The big man managed to stand straight up on his one good wheel, blood running down his face. The swells of hatred in his eyes said everything that needed to be said: Either Michelle had to kill him or he was going to kill her.

Michelle had seen that same look on the face of every son of a bitch she had ever kicked the male ego out of and that list was impressively long. She'd never started one of these fights before. They usually resulted from a thick-headed slob hitting on her and not reading the not-so-subtle cues she sent back. Then she would stand up to defend herself and the men would fall down, with an imprint of her boot on their knuckled heads.

The blade whipped at Michelle after being pulled from the mountain's back pocket. She was disappointed by both the choice of weapon and the feeble thrust. She sent the knife sailing away with a well-aimed kick that broke one of the man's fingers.

He retreated until his back touched the bar. He didn't seem so big now. She was too fast, too skilled, his superior size and muscle were useless.

Michelle knew that with one more shot she could kill him: a snap of the spine, a crushed artery; either way he was six feet under. And from the look on his face, he knew it too. Yes, Michelle could kill him and maybe vanquish the demons inside her.

And that's when something snapped inside Michelle's brain with such ferocity that she almost deposited all the booze in her belly on the heel-scarred floor. For perhaps the first time in years Michelle was seeing things as they were really meant to be seen. It was startling how fast the decision was reached. And once she made it, she did not revisit the issue. She fell back on what had dominated her life: Michelle Maxwell acted on impulse.

He threw a weary punch and Michelle easily sidestepped it. Then she aimed another kick, this time at his groin, but he managed to clamp a big hand on her thigh. Reenergized at having finally seized his elusive quarry, he lifted her up and threw her over the bar and into a shelf of wine and liquor bottles. The crowd, delighted at this change of events, started chanting, "Kill the bitch. Kill the bitch."

The bartender screamed in fury as his inventory spilled over the floor, but he stopped when the big man came over the bar and laid him out with a wicked uppercut. Next, he picked Michelle up and twice slammed her headfirst into the mirror that was hanging over the demolished booze, cracking the glass and maybe her skull too. Still enraged, he drove a massive knee right into her gut, and then threw her to the masses on the other side of the bar. She hit the floor hard and lay there, her face bloody, her body going into spasms.

The crowd jumped back when the big man's size sixteen boots landed next to Michelle's head. He grabbed her by the hair and lifted her straight up, her body dangling like a spent yo-yo. He studied Michelle's limp form, apparently deciding where next to hurt her.

"In the face. In the damn face, Rodney. You mess it up good," screamed his lady, who'd picked herself off the floor and was dabbing at the beer, wine and other crap staining her dress.

Rodney nodded and swung a big fist back.

“Right in the damn face, Rodney!” his lady screamed again.

“Kill the bitch!” barked the crowd a little less enthusiastically, sensing the fight was just about over and they could return to their drinking and smoking.

Michelle’s arm moved so fast Rodney didn’t even seem to realize he’d been struck in the kidney until his brain told him he was in awful pain. His scream of fury actually drowned out the music still ripping from the bar’s sound system. Then his fist connected to her head, once, knocking a tooth out; and then he hit her again; blood gushed from her nose and mouth. Big Rodney was hauling back for the crusher when the cops kicked down the door, guns out, looking for any reason to start shooting.

Michelle never heard them come in, save her life and then arrest her. Right after the second blow landed she started to fade into unconsciousness and didn’t expect to be coming back.

Before she blacked out completely Michelle’s final thought was simple: *Goodbye, Sean.*

## CHAPTER

# 2

SEAN KING STARED OUT across the calm wedge of river in the rapidly fading light. Something was going on with Michelle Maxwell and he didn't know how to deal with it. His partner was growing more depressed each day and this melancholy was becoming entrenched.

In the face of this troubling development he'd suggested that they move back to the Washington, D.C., area and start anew. Yet, the change of scenery had not helped. And with funds low and work scarce in the highly competitive D.C. area, Sean had been forced to accept some largesse from a buddy who'd scored big in the world of private security consulting, selling his company to one of the global players.

Sean and Michelle were currently staying in the guesthouse of the friend's large river estate south of Washington. At least Sean was; Michelle had not been around for several days now. And she was no longer answering her cell phone. The last night she had come home she'd been so wasted he'd laid into her for getting behind the wheel in that condition. By the time he got up the next morning, she was gone.

He ran his finger over Michelle's racing scull that was tied to a cleat on the dock he was sitting on. Michelle Maxwell was a natural athlete, an Olympic medalist in rowing, an exercise fanatic beyond all reason, and held various martial arts black belts enabling her to kick other people's butts in multiple and painful ways. Yet the scull had lain untouched since they'd arrived here. And she didn't go running on the nearby bike path and showed no interest in any other physical activity. At last Sean had pressed her to get professional help.

"I'm out of options," she'd replied with a grimness that had startled him. He knew her to be impetuous, often acting on gut instincts. That sometimes ended up getting you killed.

And so now he was watching the day end and wondering if she was okay.

Hours later, while he was still sitting on the dock, the screams reached Sean's ears. He wasn't startled by it; he was pissed. He slowly rose and headed up the planked steps away from the calm of the river.

He stopped at the guesthouse near the large swimming pool to grab a baseball bat and some cotton balls, which he stuffed in his ears. Sean King was a big man, six-two, over two hundred fairly trim pounds, but he was pushing forty-five and his knees were gimp and his right shoulder suspect from a long-ago injury. So he always took the

damn bat. And the cotton balls. On the way up he looked across the privacy fence and noted the older woman staring back at him in the dark, arms crossed and scowling.

"I'm going up, Mrs. Morrison," he said, raising his wooden weapon.

"Third time this month," she said angrily. "Next time I call the police right away."

"Don't let me stop you. It's not like I'm getting paid to do this."

He approached the big house from the rear. The home was only two years old, one of those mansions that had sprung from a knockdown of a rancher a quarter the size. The owners were rarely here, preferring instead to ride their private jet up to their estate in the Hamptons in summer or to their oceanside palace in Palm Beach in winter. But that didn't stop their college-age son and his nose-in-the-air friends from regularly trashing the place.

Sean passed by the Porsches, baby Beemers and hand-me-down Mercedes and marched up the stone steps and into the sprawling kitchen. Even with the cotton balls buffering the sounds, the music was so loud he could feel his heart cringe with every smack of the overloaded bass.

"Hey!" he shouted over the music as he pushed his way through the gyrating nineteen-year-olds. "Hey!" he screamed again. No one paid him any attention, which was why he'd brought the bat. He walked over to the makeshift bar set up on the kitchen island, raised his trusty wooden Louisville Slugger behind his shoulder, assumed his stance and pretended he was taking his cuts at Yankee Stadium. He cleared out half the bar with one swing and finished the rest off with a second sweep.

The music stopped and the kids finally started focusing on him, though half seemed too stoned to take too much of an interest. Some of the underdressed ladies started giggling while a couple of shirtless guys stared grimly at Sean, their fists clenched.

Another kid, tall and chunky with wavy hair, stormed into the kitchen.

"What the hell's going on?" He stopped as his gaze settled on the ruined bar. The kid shouted, "Damn it! You're gonna pay for this, King."

"No, I'm not, Albert."

"My name's Burt!"

"Okay, Burt, let's call your dad and find out what he thinks."

"You can't come in here and pull this shit all the time."

"You mean saving your parents' house from being wrecked by a bunch of rich assholes?"

"Hey, I resent that," said one girl, who was teetering on four-inch spikes and wearing only a butt-level skintight T-shirt that left absolutely nothing to the imagination.

Sean glanced at her. "Really? Which part: rich or *asshole*? By the way, in that washcloth you're wearing, I can just about see yours."

Sean turned back to Albert. "Let me spell it out for you, *Burt*. Your father gave me the authority to clear this place out any time in my judgment things were getting out of hand." He held up the bat. "Well, this is my gavel and judgment has been rendered." He stared at the others. "So all of you can get the hell out before I call the cops."

"All the cops do is come and tell us to turn the music down," Burt sneered.

"Not if somebody tells them that there's drug use going on. *And* underage sex and drinking." Sean glanced around at the teenagers. "How would a felony arrest look?"

Think Mommy and Daddy would pull your keys to the Benz and cut the old party allowance?”

That statement cleared half the room. The other half disappeared when Burt tried to jump Sean and caught the handle of the bat in his gut for the trouble. Sean grabbed the kid by his shirt collar and hauled him off the floor.

“I’m gonna be sick,” Burt moaned. “I’m gonna be sick!”

“Just take deep breaths. But don’t ever try that again.”

When Burt had recovered he said, “I’ll get you for this.”

“What you’re going to do is clean up this place.”

“I’m not doing shit!”

Sean grabbed the young man’s arm and gave it a twist. “You clean up this place or we can take a ride down to the police station.” Sean pointed his bat at the dregs of the smashed bar. “I’ll be back in an hour to check on the progress, *Albert*.”

Only Sean wouldn’t come back in an hour. Forty minutes later, Sean received the call on his cell phone. Michelle was lying unconscious in a hospital in D.C. after having been arrested for felony assault. He nearly smashed down the front door on his way to the car.

## CHAPTER

# 3

HE STARED AT HER LYING in the bed. Sean turned to the doctor, who said, “Don’t worry, it’s not as serious as it looks. She had a concussion but otherwise the pictures of her head came back fine and there’s no internal bleeding. She got a tooth knocked out and suffered two cracked ribs and bruises over much of her body. She’s going to be in some pain when she wakes up, even with the meds.”

Sean focused on the one thing that looked totally out of place: a handcuff on Michelle’s right wrist, with the other cuff attached to the bed’s side rail. And then there was the beefy cop parked outside who’d searched Sean for weapons and told him he had ten minutes with her.

“What the hell happened?” Sean asked.

“Your friend walked into a bar and picked a fight with a guy. A really big guy.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because the big guy’s down the hall getting worked on right now.”

“*She* picked the fight?”

“I assume that’s what the handcuff is for, although she’s in no shape to make a run for it. The other guy was pretty banged up too. She must be quite a pistol.”

“You have no idea,” Sean muttered under his breath.

After the doctor left, Sean drew nearer to the bed.

“Michelle? Michelle, can you hear me?”

All he got was a low moan. He backed out of the room, eyeing the handcuff with every step.

It didn’t take Sean long to run down the full story. He had a buddy on the D.C. police force who checked the arrest report and filled him in.

“It looks like the guy’s filing charges,” the detective told Sean over the phone.

“And they’re sure she wasn’t provoked?”

“About fifty witnesses swore she attacked the other guy. And what the hell was she doing in that part of D.C. in the first place, Sean? Did she have a death wish?”

*Did you have a death wish, Michelle?*

He ran into big Rodney in the hospital corridor. His girlfriend was with him, still sponging stains off her dress.

“She’s been going through a really tough time,” Sean explained.

“You think we give a shit!” the woman yelled.

"I'm gonna sue her ass off!" Rodney bellowed.

"Damn right," his girlfriend said. "That bitch! Look at my clothes."

"She doesn't have any assets," Sean pointed out. "You can take her truck, but it's got a hundred thousand miles on it."

The girlfriend said, "Ever heard of garnishment? We take her whole paycheck for the next twenty years. See how she likes that."

"No, you get a *portion* of her salary, but she doesn't have a job either. In fact, after she gets out of here they'll probably just take her back to the institute."

"Institute? What institute?" the girlfriend asked as she stopped rubbing her dress.

"St. Elizabeth's. You know, for people with mental problems."

"I don't believe this shit," Rodney exclaimed. "That bitch attacked me!"

"You saying she's nuts?" the woman asked anxiously.

Sean eyed Rodney. "Come on, you think any sane person would take a run at him? Especially a woman?"

"Damn, maybe the man's right. I mean she's got to be crazy to do that, right, baby?"

"Well, I want money from *somebody*," the woman said, hands on hips. She eyed Sean pointedly. "A *friend* will do just fine. Or Little Miss Karate Bitch and her bony white ass can do some jail time."

"Okay, I can probably raise some cash."

"How *much* cash?" the woman snapped.

Sean quickly calculated what he had left in his account. "Ten thousand but that's a stretch. It'll pay your doctor bills and leave enough over to make you forget about it."

"Ten? You think I'm an idiot? I want fifty thousand!" the woman roared. "Doc says Rodney needs to get his knee scoped. And she *broke* his damn finger."

"I don't have fifty grand."

"Well, I ain't taking a penny under forty-five, I can tell you that," the woman said. "Or we let this go to court and your friend can have a few years in prison to work on her damn anger management."

Sean said, "Okay, forty-five." That took away every bit of their safety net.

"And the bar got messed up too," Rodney pointed out. "Man's gonna want his money."

"Fifteen hundred to the bar guy. And that's my final offer."

Early the next morning the matter was settled right outside the hospital. The prosecutor dropped his case when Rodney told them he wouldn't press charges. As the big man folded the check he said, "I gotta hand it to her though, she nearly kicked my ass, but..."

"But what?" Sean said quickly.

Rodney shrugged. "She had me, man. I ain't ashamed to admit it. She was doing that kung fu shit on me. But then right when she could'a taken me out for good, she threw this weak-ass kick. After that, it was all over. It was like she wanted me to bust her up. But she's crazy, like you said."

Sean hustled back inside the hospital. He didn't want Michelle to wake up with the handcuff still on.

## CHAPTER

# 4

HER FITNESS WAS SUCH that Michelle recovered quickly from her injuries, at least her *physical* injuries. The effects of the concussion wore off, the ribs started to heal, and a tooth was implanted to replace the one knocked out. Sean had checked into a motel near the hospital and was there with her every day. Yet then another problem cropped up. When Sean brought Michelle home from the hospital the locks on the guesthouse had been changed and their bags were packed and sitting on the porch. Sean called his buddy the owner. The man who answered the phone said that Sean should feel fortunate the owner was not filing assault charges against him for attacking his son with a bat. And the man added that Sean should never attempt to contact them again.

Sean looked over at Michelle in the passenger seat. The woman's eyes were blank, and it wasn't just the pain meds.

He said, "Uh, Michelle, they're, uh, renovating the guesthouse. I knew about it, but forgot."

She just looked out the window, not registering on anything.

He drove to a motel and checked into a double room, not trusting Michelle to be left alone. He had gotten cash from his bank, afraid even to look at the pitiful balance of funds left. At dinner that night Sean had takeout Chinese while Michelle, with her badly bruised jaw and newly installed tooth, could only drink liquids.

He sat on the edge of her bed where she lay huddled. "I need to change the dressing on your face," he said. "Okay?"

She had superficial cuts on her jaw and forehead. Both areas were still tender to the touch and she flinched as he took the old bandages off.

"Sorry."

"Just do it," she snapped, startling him. He glanced at her eyes but they'd already retreated into a deep glaze.

"How're the ribs?" he asked, trying to keep the conversation going. She turned away from him.

After he finished he said, "You need anything else?" No answer. "Michelle, we need to talk about this."

In response she lay back on the bed and curled into a ball.

He stood and paced the room, his hand clasped around a bottle of beer. "Why in the hell would you take on a guy who looks like he could start at left tackle for the

Redskins?”

Silence.

He stopped pacing. “Look, things will turn around. I’ve got a few leads on some work,” he added, lying. “Does that make you feel better?”

“Stop, Sean.”

“Stop what? Trying to be optimistic and supportive?”

All that got in response from her was a grunt.

“Look, you go into another bar like that, some guy’ll probably pull a gun and put a hole in your head and that’ll be it.”

“Good!”

“What is going on with you?”

She stumbled into the bathroom and locked the door. He could hear her upchucking.

“Michelle, are you all right? Do you need help?”

“Leave me the hell alone!” she screamed.

Sean stalked outside and sat by the motel’s pool, dangling his feet in the warm water and breathing in chlorine fumes while he finished his beer. It was a beautiful evening. And to top it off a cute, twenty-something lady had just slipped into the pool wearing a bikini that was so small it hardly qualified as clothing. She started doing laps, her strokes efficient, powerful. On the fourth lap she stopped and treaded water in front of him, her full breasts bobbing on the surface. “Care to race?”

“From what I’ve seen of your performance, I doubt I could give you much competition.”

“You ought to see me really perform. And I don’t mind giving lessons. I’m Jenny.”

“Thanks for the invite, Jenny, but I’ll have to take a pass.”

He got up and walked off. Over his shoulder he heard Jenny say in a disappointed tone, “God, why do I *always* pick the cute gay guys?”

“Damn, this has been such a great day,” Sean muttered.

When he got back to the room Michelle was asleep. He lay on the other bed staring at her.

Two more days passed with no improvement. Sean made a decision. Whatever was hurting the lady, he simply didn’t have the tools to help her. Apparently, a deep friendship didn’t cut it with matters of a wounded soul. But he knew someone who might be able to help.

## CHAPTER

# 5

THE NEXT MORNING Sean called an old friend, Horatio Barnes, a psychologist in northern Virginia. In his fifties, Horatio wore a ponytail and sported a furry, silver goatee. He favored faded jeans and black T-shirts and rode a vintage Harley. He made a specialty of helping federal law enforcement folks through myriad problems caused by the stress related to their work, which is how Sean had met him.

Sean filled Horatio in on the event at the bar and his discussion with Rodney about the fight. He made an appointment and took Michelle to see him under the pretense of a doctor's visit for her injuries.

Located in an otherwise abandoned warehouse, Horatio Barnes's office was large and airy, with rows of dirty windows and books stacked on the floor. His desk was made out of construction sawhorses with what looked to be a large door placed across them. The man's black Harley motorcycle was parked in one corner.

"In this neighborhood, if I left it outside, it wouldn't stay there, now would it?" he explained with a broad smile. "Okay, Sean, out of here. Michelle doesn't need your sorry butt listening in while she tells me everything about herself." Sean obediently left them, waiting in a small, cluttered anteroom. After an hour Horatio came out, leaving Michelle sitting in his office.

"Okay, she's got some serious issues going on," Horatio said.

"How serious?" Sean asked cautiously.

"Deep enough to qualify for some inside time."

"Don't you do that when you think the person's a threat to herself or others?"

"I believe she went into that bar *partly* to die."

Sean flinched. "Michelle said that?"

"No. It's my job to read between the lines."

"Where is this place?"

Horatio said, "Reston. A private clinic. But it's not cheap, my friend."

"I'll get the money. Somehow."

Horatio sat down on an old packing crate and motioned for Sean to do the same.

"So talk to me, Sean. Tell me what you think the problem is."

And Sean talked for a half-hour, explaining what had happened to them both in Wrightsburg.

Horatio said, "Frankly, I'm surprised you're not both in therapy. You sure *you're*

okay?”

“It affected us both, but Michelle was hit a lot harder.”

“She obviously feels that she can’t trust her judgment anymore, and with her that’s a big deal.”

Sean said, “And she cared for the guy too. And then to find out what he was really like. I guess that would screw anyone up.”

Horatio scrutinized him. “And how did you feel about that?”

Sean gaped. “A guy slaughtering a bunch of people? How the hell do you think I felt about it?”

“No, I meant about Michelle becoming involved with another man?”

Sean’s face took on a more subdued expression. “Oh. Well, I had my own personal involvement at the time.”

“That wasn’t exactly what I was referring to.”

Sean looked at him quizzically, but his friend didn’t pursue it.

Sean said, “Do you think she can get better?”

“If she really wants to. If she’s ambivalent about getting better we can at least show her the steps she can take to get there.”

“What if she doesn’t want to get better?”

“That’s a different planet altogether.” Horatio paused. “But remember that I said she was in that bar *partly* to die? Well, Michelle going in there and picking a fight with the biggest son of a bitch she could find may be the best sign that she actually wants to get better.”

Sean looked at him oddly. “How do you figure that?”

“It was a cry for help, Sean; an awkward one, but a cry nevertheless. What’s curious is why she chose now to do it. She’s obviously had these issues for a long time.”

“Any guess?”

“Like I said, she feels she can’t trust her instincts anymore. Next stop, that bar and the end of that guy’s fist. Her punishment.”

“Punishment? For what?”

“I don’t know.”

“What if she doesn’t want to admit herself to the facility?” Sean said.

“We’ll never get an involuntary commit from a judge. Either she puts herself in or I have to counsel her on the outside.”

“Then I’ll get her inside, somehow.”

“How?”

“By wearing my lawyer hat and lying my ass off.”