

# SWEET DARKNESS

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**John Boston**

Detective Donald Jurcizk got the call one cool Monday afternoon. It wasn't supposed to be this cool this time of year, he wasn't dressed for it. He didn't even have a jacket. He spends a good bit of his workday on his cell phone. He found out that about half of detective work can be done right on your cell phone. He bought the best one he could find and it had served him faithfully, with the exception of the occasional hiccup.

The call came from Wanda, their dispatcher.

"Donnie. I just took a call from the Greely family," she said nervously.

"Okay?"

"As in *that Greely family*."

"The one who sued us?"

"Yes. Took the call from the mother, I think she said her name was Callie."

"So, what's up?"

"Their son, the one who went missing fourteen years ago..... just showed up at their house."

"No shit?"

"Mom is convinced it's him. I'm sending over everybody, but it's your baby."

"What's the address?"

Wanda texted him the address and he put on his lights and siren. He was only five minutes away. He wanted to get there before the media did....if it wasn't already too late.

He pulled into the driveway and ran up to the front door. There was another patrol car parked in the driveway. It belonged to Officer Keller. He hadn't done anything except make certain everyone was okay and to keep the Greely kid in his sight at all times.

The actual kidnapping had occurred before he joined the force. He had only heard horror stories about how it gone down from everyone who had investigated it. It was a shit show from start to finish. There had been two movies made about the case, as well as dozens of internet clips and shorts covering it in great detail. Each one just seemed to pour more and more salt over the old wound. Even though Donnie had nothing whatsoever to do with the case, he had taken it

personally. It had made his entire department look like idiots.....which some of them obviously were.

The Greely family had gone out to a nearby lake for fishing and relaxing over the Labor Day weekend. At some point, they realized their son, Martin, had gone missing. The family called the police and the officer who took the initial report assumed the boy had gotten upset and ran away. His department had found him twice in the past month. Things at the Greely household were clearly not as rosy as they made it out to be. There had been some big blow up over not having enough ice and Martin simply stormed off on his own. A few hours later, the remaining family members and a few others began to search for him. When they couldn't find him, they called the police. The daughter had even told the police she thought he had run away and would come back to them when he got cold or hungry. The officer didn't even enter it as a possible AMBER ALERT. The next day when he didn't return, they really got worried. That afternoon, dozens of officers and volunteers began searching for him. When they found his cell phone on the side of the road, things went from bad to worse. It took nearly 48 hours for his department to do anything. He has been missing ever since. In the days and weeks that followed some bombshell information came to light. Several tips had come in related to the case. A convenience store clerk called 911 to report something very unusual in the parking lot. The clerk reported that she saw a child running across the parking lot and was grabbed by a man and drug back to his van. She said she would have gone outside, but she had a long line of customers. Another caller who had been at the lake that day reported a white van with Montana plates slowly circling around the area.

*"It was creepy. Like they were just looking for a kid to grab."*

Neither call was even investigated. No one followed up on them. His department was so short-staffed, they had over fifty square miles to patrol with only two officers. The former police chief of the department left for vacation, the same afternoon the boy's cell phone was found. Compounding all of this was the fact that only three days before, there had been multiple homicides in nearby Watsonville and what few officers the department had were assisting with that investigation. It was the perfect storm. Everyone assumed he had been kidnapped and probably killed. That's what Donnie had assumed as well. The Greely family sued the department for several million dollars and they eventually settled out of court. They stayed in town just in case their son Martin returned. They had been waiting fourteen agonizingly long years. Donnie knew he had to handle this very carefully. He was going to be under the microscope big time. He didn't want to let the family down again. No one in the department had any contact with the family since the lawsuit was settled.

He didn't even knock, he just let himself in. sitting in the living room was a hysterical Callie, with her daughter, Vanessa. Officer Keller stood over her. She had her arms wrapped around a young man. He took a deep breath. Keller walked over to him and they stepped into the kitchen.

"That's how I found them. The kid says his name is Martin Greely, age 24. Mother says she's certain it's him. Daughter isn't so sure."

"I want you and the rest of the officers working crowd control. This place is going to be a zoo here shortly. No one gets in unless I give the okay, understood?"

"Yes sir."

"*Okay.....time to kick this party off,*" said Donnie as he went back into the living room.

It took nearly fifteen minutes to calm Callie. Vanessa was sobbing as well but in much better shape. He wanted to ask her why she thought it wasn't her brother, but that would have to wait. Right now, he had to get the kid away from his mother for an interview. He hadn't even introduced himself.

"Mrs. Greely, I'm Detective Donald Jurcizk. Were you the one who called?"

"No, I called," said Vanessa.

"Vanessa, could we talk just for a minute?"

Donald hated to leave the two of them alone. He was relieved to see three other officers on the front porch. He stepped outside with Vanessa.

"You two keep an eye on the mother. Carter, you stay outside with Keller. No one enters the property without my permission."

They walked out to the front porch and Donnie leaned against the railing.

"He just showed up at the front door. I couldn't believe it. The first thing he says is *Hey Van.....it's good to see you again*. I almost shit myself. I'm still kind of in shock. Do you have any smokes?"

Donnie didn't smoke, but he always carried a pack and a lighter with him. They do wonders to get someone relaxed and in the mood to talk.

"So, the name *Van*, that's a name only he would know? Something only he called you?"

"Yeah. Only Marty called me that."

"Why did you tell the Officer you didn't think it was your brother?"

"I don't know. It's him. It has to be. I guess I just thought if Marty ever did come back, that I'd instantly know it was him. He got so much taller. No one in our family is that tall. It's him, I don't know why I said that."

"Okay. When you're done with your smoke, come on back inside. I'd greatly appreciate it if you stayed off the social media until we have a better handle on this thing." he said.

"I don't ever use social media. It's got to be one of the worst things we ever invented. Right along with nuclear weapons." she said.

It took another ten minutes before everyone was back inside. Several neighbors and friends had arrived but were stopped before they got close to the house. He knew Keller had to tell them

something. They were only instructed to say that someone had shown up at the house claiming to be Martin.

*"Claiming to be Martin? Who the hell else would it be?"* asked one of Callie's friends.

He knew they were going to need more officers and had asked the State Police for assistance. He had to get the kid downtown and away from his mother, but that was not going to be easy. She still had a death grip on him.

"Martin.....I'm hoping we can talk. The sooner the better."

"Sure. Let's talk."

"I'm going to use the recorder app on my phone, I hope you don't mind."

"No, not all. Do what you got to do."

"So Martin.....where exactly have you been for the last fourteen years?" said Donnie as he hit the record button on the app.

"Before we start, where's dad?" asked Martin

"Honey.....your father and I divorced about eight years ago. He lives in Michigan with his new wife," said Callie.

"Really? Well, no matter, he was a dickhead anyway. See, he's kind of the reason this whole thing happened. If he had just shut his damn mouth about the fact I forgot to bring the ice, none of this would have happened." said Martin.

"Ice is the reason you an away?" asked Donnie

"No, kind of like the icing on the shit cake. Looking back on it now, it was stupid but, to a 10-year-old, it made perfect sense. I always meant to call you guys. It's terrible what I did to you. I hope someday you can forgive me."

"So, you were never kidnapped?"

"No.....no, I just ran away. Some old guy gave me a ride in his truck. He parked at the gas station on the highway and said he was going to call the cops and have them pick me up. I bolted and just kept running. I ran right into this train and hopped on board. That's where I met Fred and Ethel. They were hobos, kind of like me. They took me under their wing and I just traveled the rails for a couple of weeks with them. They were going to work on this farm in Florida, near St. Pete. I've been in Florida ever since."

Donnie looked over at the other officers. None of them said a word but, they were all thinking the same thing.

"Martin, could you just elaborate a little bit here. I mean it seems highly unlikely that a ten-year-old boy could have survived all those years by himself, just riding the rails. How did you get money?"

"Well, about a week before the incident, I sold all of my grandpa's baseball cards. I got over five hundred dollars for them. I kept the money with me everywhere I went. Even to the lake. It seemed like so much money to a ten-year-old kid. I had money that day to buy drinks and food and stuff. Old Fred and Ethel made sure I was ok. I lost track of them a few years ago. Hope they're doing okay."

"Okay but, what happened after you got to Florida?"

"I worked on the farm with Fred and Ethel. We did all the farm chores together. Milk the cows and mow the hay and all that. I learned a lot. Fred says I was going to make an excellent farmer."

"You've been on the farm the whole time?"

"No. Once I split up from Fred and Ethel, I just kind of bummed my way around the state and beaches for a few months. I would always work on the farms during harvest time. I was usually the only white kid out in the fields working. No one even asked about my age. One summer, I made over five thousand dollars."

"Martin, this farm you worked at in Florida, did it have a name?"

"Sunrise Farm, right outside of St. Pete."

"Did you ever meet the owner?"

"Yup, nice guy. His name was Farmer Brown."

"Farmer Brown?"

"Yup, Farmer Brown."

"So from like age ten and a half until right now, where did you live?"

"On the beach. I even built myself a little house at one of the State Parks. Lived there for almost a year. Good memories of that place."

"So, for the past fourteen years, you've been living on the beach in Florida and working on farms in that area? Did you ever have any other jobs?"

"Sure did, worked at a circus for a while. That was a pretty cool job. Met my first girlfriend there. Her name was Beatrice Mendoza. She was a trapeze artist from Spain."

"Martin, do you by any chance have a driver's license?" asked Donnie.

"No, I don't drive. Not legally anyway. I once drove from Miami to Tallahassee. Never got caught."

"You must have shown some kind of identification when you were hired for these jobs. What did you use?" asked Donnie.

"Oh, if they asked me for something like that, I just left. Most places didn't care. I just asked to be paid in cash. That's still how a lot of farms operate."

"Right. So, you never went to any kind of a school?"

"Sure I did. I graduated from the school of hard knocks. I was their star pupil."

"Okay Martin, I think that's enough for right now. I'm hoping you can come down to the station in the morning and let us take your fingerprints and maybe even a DNA test? Would that be alright with you?" asked Donnie

"Sure, whatever I can do to help?"

"Wait.....wait, wait.....hold on here. YOU'VE BEEN LIVING ON A BEACH THIS WHOLE FUCKING TIME AND COULDN'T EVEN BE BOTHERED TO JUST TELL US YOU'RE OKAY? YOU UNBELIEVABLE PIECE OF SHIT! DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY NIGHTS I CRIED MYSELF TO SLEEP WONDERING WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU? I WISH YOU NEVER CAME BACK!" screamed Vanessa and threw a book at Martin

Donnie and one of the other officers restrained her. Martin just had a very confused look on his face.

"I'm sorry sis. I wanted to call, I just thought I'd get in trouble, like really big trouble," said Martin.

"Vanessa, let's have a smoke outside," said Donnie.

The officers released Vanessa. She stormed outside and Donnie followed her. He lit up a smoke and took a drag.

"I thought you didn't smoke."

"I try not to."

"I'm sorry. I thought he was kidnapped and tortured or something. I've spent years in therapy, trying to get over what happened and he was alive the whole time. He was alive and happy. He couldn't even send us a postcard to tell us he was okay." she said sobbing.

"You don't really believe his story, do you?"

"Well, some of it has to be."

"Vanessa, he's coping right now. When he's ready to tell us what really happened, we'll be happy to listen, but that's not going to happen tonight."

"You don't think he ran away?"

"Maybe initially at first, but someone held him captive for all this time and made certain he didn't tell you he was alive. That's the person I want. We're just going to have to be patient. We can't rush to judgment until we know the whole story."

"I like you a hell of a lot better than the other cops who handled this case years ago. They were a bunch of idiots."

"I'm sorry for what you guys went through. I promise you, those mistakes will not be made this time. Not with me or anyone under me. Just go easy on him.....I mean, if he really is your brother."

"What do you mean? You think it might not be Martin?"

"We won't know until the DNA test comes back. I'm just not sure we can even force him to take one. This is a gray area as far as the law is concerned."

"Wait, he doesn't have to take a DNA test? He has to take one?"

"If he was a suspect in a crime, it would be easy but he isn't. I'll have to call the DA and ask him what to do here. This could get messy."

"It already is messy," said Vanessa.

"You didn't think he was your brother. Do you still think he is?" asked Donnie.

"I almost wish he wasn't. The last fourteen years have been a shit show in this house. Knowing he was alive and never contacted us. I just can't believe it." she said.

"Let's hope we're wrong. I'm sure it would crush your mother."

"She blames herself for what happened. She blames my dad more. Said if he wasn't such an asshole to him, he would never have stormed off in the first place. I'm sure it is very hard for him as well. I don't talk to him much. I guess he's happy with his new family."

"Maybe you can at least help convince him to come down to the station and let us fingerprint him."

"Mom won't let him out of her sight. You'll end up fingerprinting her too."

"That's fine. We've got a lot of ink," said Donnie.

Four officers were working the Greely house, which was pretty much the entire department. The chief called Donnie on his way back to the station.

"Jesus, I just heard. Is it true?" asked the chief.

"I would say so. The kid gave us a bullshit story. That kind of worries me. The big question I have, if it really is him is: *why now? Why now after fourteen years?*"

"Yeah, I hear you. You think it might not be their son?"

"There is a strong resemblance to the photos from when he was taken. I don't know, something about this whole thing just stinks, I'm just not sure what our next move is."

"Can we run his prints?"

"Not sure we can even legally do that. It would certainly help. My gut says he isn't who he says he is chief. Innocent people don't have anything to hide."

"Let me call Andrews, the new DA. I'll see what he says. In the meantime, when this thing hit's the wires, it's going to explode. We might be hearing the real story along with the rest of America."

"I don't think that's what he wants. He isn't looking for fame.....something else."

"Let's pray it is the kid. Not sure how this is going to affect that lawsuit. Pretty sure the statute of limitations has passed on it. I don't think anyone ever thought the kid would show up alive on her doorstep one day. Everyone, including myself, figured he was dead. This is gonna be a mess."

"I'll give them a day or two, then we can start to turn up the heat.....agreed?"

"Yeah, we got this guy talking. Poke him, prod him, get him pissed off, do whatever you got to do to get him to open up. We could lose control of this thing quickly if we sleep on it."

"Chief.....one thing that stuck with me when I was interviewing him. I didn't realize it until just now."

"What's that?"

"It's how calm he was. It was like he was just ordering dinner or something. No tears, no hysterics. It was like he was just rehearsing a story he had been told. It was weird."

"This damn case is like cancer that just keeps coming back after being in remission for years. Keep me posted. I'll be checking my phone all night."

Said the chief.

Donnie barely said anything to his wife. He slept for a few hours, then checked in with the officers at the house. It was becoming a circus out there. Two local news stations showed up and had to be physically prevented from going inside. Four State Police Troopers had arrived about half an hour ago to assist. They had a perimeter set up around the house that was holding.....for now. The family had given a written statement to the media but were not allowing any interviews. Donnie could only hope and pray that Vanessa was injecting some kind of sanity into the situation out there.

He didn't want to leave the kid but there wasn't much he could do. Keller and the other officers were certainly experienced enough to keep their eyes and ears open to whatever was being said



inside the house. He was in and out for the next two hours when his phone went off. It was the chief.

"Donnie, I just got off the phone with Andrews. That settlement that the mother signed, it had a provision in there for something like this. Anyone claiming to be Martin must undergo all genetic testing to prove his identity. If she refuses, she forfeits the money."

"No shit? I don't know. I'm sure she's lawyered up by now. So much time has passed, I'm not sure it would even hold up in court."

"There's no time limit on it. It's pretty clear. I don't think any bottom feeder lawyer would be able to dance around it."

"I'm going to head back out to the house and see what I can do. We have to get this kid to talk to us before he talks to anyone else."

"Andrews said to stop by his office and he'll make a copy of the agreement she signed. At this point, it's all we got."

"If he really is Martin, he won't object to proving it. How far do you want me to go with this?" asked Donnie

"Do whatever you have to do to get him downtown and at least fingerprinted. I'll back you a hundred percent. We got to get a handle on this thing before it gets any worse."

"Okay. It probably won't end well."

"Probably not. I'm with you here. Something about this kid just isn't right. Oh, one other thing. I just heard her lawyer is none other than Mike Melnick."

"Melnick? He's the same guy who handled the civil suit."

"He's also a license and bonded a-hole.. Be careful around him. I want you out there to keep an eye on him as well as the kid."

Donnie hung up the phone. The chief was one hundred percent correct with his cancer analogy. This case just keeps getting better and better.

There were dozens of cars, as well as some news crews parked in the long driveway of the house. He waved to the two officers working in the front of the house. He drove up to the front of the house and parked. He could see a surveillance drone flying overhead. He was met on the front porch by Mike Melnick. The two men disliked one another and neither was shy about showing it.

"Detective Jurcick," he said.

"Mike.....what's going on here? You running this circus?"

"I'm not just her lawyer, I'm her friend as well. Christ, what this family has gone through is a crime against humanity."

"I'd like to investigate this crime if you don't mind."

"Yes.....about that. Donnie.....he gave you a very detailed statement, did he not? You got your interview. There was no crime committed. You don't have any reason to be here."

"Knock it off Mike, you can't possibly believe that bullshit story."

"Donnie, if someone did kidnap him, don't you think he would want them arrested?"

"That's what I'd like to find out. Now, get out of the way."

"Donnie.....this case had over 75 million views online the last time I checked. That's a lot of people looking at this case and reading some of the comments.....well, clearly they don't think too much of your department."

"So what?"

"Well.....if it had 75 million views before Martin showed up.....*just imagine how many it will have now. 500 million? A billion? Who knows? You and your department are going to be under the microscope on a level you can't possibly imagine. You might want to think about what you're doing.*" said Mike, grinning from ear to ear.

"You got a problem with what I'm doing, take it up with the chief, you got his number," said Donnie as he pushed Mike aside.

Donnie went inside the house and found the three of them sitting in the living room watching TV. He said nothing for a minute and watched along with them. Word was spreading and spreading fast about Martin's return. Donnie's cell alerted him to a text from the chief. David Greely, Martin's father was flying into the county airport this morning. The chief would pick him up and drive him over to the house himself.

"So, David is on his way here?"

"Unfortunately, yes," said Vanessa.

"Nothing like pouring a little gas on the fire to really get it going." said Callie.

"Guys, while you're all here. I would like to ask Martin to come down to the station with us for another interview and to have his fingerprints taken."

"Are you asking us or telling us?" said Callie.

"I'm politely asking. I'm sure your superstar lawyer told you about section 22a of the legal paperwork you signed to settle Martin's civil case against the department?"

"No....what are you talking about?" asked Mike as he rushed over and grabbed the paperwork out of his hands.

"It's pretty simple and pretty clear. Because it's a civil case, we can't make you do anything. It would be in your best interest to just cooperate with us. If you are who you say you are, then you won't mind."

"So, the test comes back and it's Martin. You're just going to leave us alone?" asked Callie.

"As far as we're concerned, yes. The case has been closed."

They all looked at Mike, who was seething with anger. His ego had gotten the best of him. He was not used to dealing with competent officers who knew the law. He looked like a fool. He should have re-read the agreement since he was the one who prepared it.

"We'll have to discuss it," said Callie.

"No mom. Donnie's right. Let's just get this thing over and done with and start living our lives again. The sooner all this drama is over, the happier we will be." said Martin.

"We have your word on this detective? The test shows it's Martin and you leave us alone?" asked Callie

"Yes.....thought I can't guarantee the town won't want their money back from your civil suit," said Donnie.

"We'll cross that bridge when we get there. It's your call Martin," said Mike.

Martin looked down at the floor. He couldn't even look Donnie in the eye.

"I suppose you know I was lying the first time we talked," he said meekly.

"Yeah, I kind of suspected."

"I'm ready to tell you the real story now," he said, still looking at the floor.

"Martin, let's go down to the station. All of us can go," said Donnie.

"Okay. If that's what you want."

"Martin.....you aren't legally required to do any of this. You understand, right?" said Mike.

"I understand. Somebody has to know.....they have to know about *Mr. Dean*," he said quietly.

Donnie couldn't get Martin away from his mother. He had a fingerprint kit in his car and took Martin's prints at the house. It was Callie, not Martin who protested. She said she was sure it was Martin and didn't need some test to prove it. Donnie didn't like it at all, but he figured the more he got Martin talking, the better. He was going to have this step by step. Once his mother realized he wasn't going to disappear again, she would back down and they could finally get a DNA test done. He took out his phone and started recording the conversation. He read Martin his rights. He figured he couldn't ask too many personal questions with Mike standing two feet away.

"Martin, you do understand that you don't have to answer any of the detective's questions if you don't want to."

"I understand. It's fine. I'm sorry I lied to you earlier Mr. Donnie."

"That's okay Martin, I just want us to be clear that you're telling the truth now, right?"

"Yes."

"So, let's start from the beginning. On the day you were taken. Back in 2007 at the lake."

Martin teared up and his mother took his hand. Donnie knew this was going to be brutal but, it had to be done. He would have given one of his testicles to be able to put a pair of handcuffs on the people who did this to the Greely family.

"I remember it was hot that day. Dad pissed me off, so I just kind of wandered around the lake for a while. I noticed this white van following me. Kind of creeped me out but there were so many people around, I figured no one would try and take me. That would be crazy. I remembered the van parked and two girls got out. They waved at me, so I waved back. I guess I just wanted to hang out or something, so I walked over. They just kept playing and smiling at me. That's when this guy walks up to me and points a gun at me. I'm like a good five hundred feet away from the nearest person....maybe more. He says if I don't get in the van with the girls that he's going to shoot me and then he's going to shoot my family. I was so scared, I just did what he asked. I knew I was making a huge mistake. I should have just run away. I should have screamed or just done something....anything instead of just getting in the van. I mean he couldn't be a serial killer, cause he had two little girls with him. He zip tied my hands behind my back and told me not to make a sound. The girls did exactly what he told them to do.

"You better do what he says, or he'll shoot your family.....*just like he did to mine.*" one of the girls said.

I was shaking so badly. I've never been that scared in my life. We drove right past mom and dad. Right past them and they were so busy arguing with each other, they never even saw me. That hurt the most."

Callie winced and held his hand tighter.

"We drove for a few hours till we got a gas station. Once Mr. Dean was out of my sight, I made a break for it. I almost made it. I was so close but he grabbed me. I'm screaming my head off that this guy is not my dad and no one, not one goddamn person did anything about it. God, are people worthless. If just one of them had done something.....anyway. We spent the night camping. I kept asking him if he was going to kill me and he just smiled and said no. Not unless I disobeyed him. I'll never forget what he said....it was the most terrifying thing I ever heard in my life."

"What did he say?" asked Donnie

*"Go ahead and run. I'll kill the girls and it will be your fault.....it will be all your fault."*

"Jesus."

"Yeah. See, that's how he kept all of us in line. He told us that if one of us escapes, it means a death sentence for everyone else. You might get free but, you'd be killing everyone else. That's why no one ever escaped. They knew Mr. Dean meant business."

"So.....what happened next."

"Well.....we drove for what seemed like forever. I see these giant mountains and I know I'm not in Nebraska anymore. I can see the signs saying, Montana. We drove to his compound outside of Billings where he had his circus."

"His circus?"

"Yup. Guy had his own circus. Not a very big one. He even had lions and elephants." said Martin.

"Martin....why didn't you ever escape? Was it because of Mr. Dean? Were you afraid he would kill the others?"

"Yes."

"How many others were there?"

"About two dozen."

"Two dozen kids that were kidnapped?"

"No, most were just sold to him by their parents believe it or not. No one was even looking for him. Only three of us were taken. Me, Josh White, and Sergio Montez. We were the only ones who weren't sold."

Donnie motioned over to the other officers to get started on the other names.

"Go head, Martin."

"The days became weeks and the weeks became years. Once in a while, he would just bring some stranger out to the ranch and shoot them right in front of us. Just to show us he wasn't getting soft. He said we were there to perform in his circus and we better not disappoint the people in the audience. We were trained to perform circus acts. I wasn't much of an athlete, so I just ended up taking care of the animals and cleaning up after them. That was my life for fourteen years. Cleaning up tiger and elephant shit every day. Some of the other kids were really good and do some amazing acts. Mr. Dean treated some of them pretty well. He even bought presents for them on their birthdays. I mean, he never tortured us or anything like that. As long as you followed the rules, he was fine. But, break them, and holy Jesus.....lookout.

"Martin.....we need to be very clear here. Mr. Dean is the one who kidnapped you that day at the lake back in 2007," asked Donnie.

"Yes."

"Martin.....how did you finally break free and escape?" asked Mike.

"He said I couldn't have a girlfriend. He sent Beatrice away, back to Spain. We kind of got into it. I almost killed him. I didn't know what to do. I just ran and hitchhiked back here. Mr. Dean isn't just going to forgive and forget. I had to get back to the family and protect them before he found them. That is one seriously crazy dude. I mean, he could be cool sometimes you know. He loved baseball and even took some of us kids to a game once. You just never knew about him. He looked harmless on the surface but, underneath.....man, he was something else." said Martin.

"Okay.....Martin.....you better not be lying to me. We can pick up Mr. Dean and bring him back to Nebraska to stand trial for what he did to you. Are you willing to testify in court to that?"

"Yes. If you can find Josh and Sergio, they will testify as well. They hated Mr. Dean."

"Mike.....are we clear on what needs to happen."

"Yes, let's get this guy picked up ASAP."

Donnie called the chief and filled him in. Donnie called the Billings Police Department and spoke to Detective Fuller and filled him in.

"Thomas Dean has a ranch outside of town. Guess he used to be some kind of big engineer or something. Don't know much about him." said Fuller.

"We're having the judge sign the bench warrant right now. I'll send you guys a copy. We need him picked up immediately. Consider him armed and extremely dangerous." said Donnie.

"Are we going to need SWAT?"

"I would definitely have them ready."

"The hell did this guy do?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," said Donnie.

Two hours later, Thomas Dean was booked in Yellowstone County jail for kidnapping and assault, awaiting extradition to Nebraska. Donnie had sent over a copy of the warrant to Detective Fuller and the rest of the Billings PD. They had secured his ranch and were conducting their own investigation based on the information given to them by Donnie. It was only a few hours into the investigation that the problems first began to show up.

They ran the names Josh White and Sergio Montez through NCIS and it turned up nothing. That sent off alarm bells with the chief who called Donnie.

"Donnie, he lied to you once.....how do you know he's not lying to you again?"

"I just don't think he was chief.....not about Dean kidnapping him. Not sure about the rest."

"Yeah well, we better hope you're right. I just got off the phone with the sheriff of Yellowstone county. His department is handling their side of the investigation. Thomas Dean is a retired network engineer. He coaches little league baseball and is on the chamber of commerce as well as the head of the Republican Party in Yellowstone county. This isn't just some bum off the street. There's going to be hell to pay if we got the wrong guy."

"I know."

"As far as the rest of the kid's story it doesn't look any better. The only animals they found were two horses and two dogs. Dean has a son from his first marriage and a fourteen-year-old daughter from his second. I'm not getting a warm fuzzy on this one Donnie."

"Look, there's got to be some truth to Martin's story. It's way too random to just be made up."

"Donnie, how the hell would this guy feed and shelter 26 kids? Where the hell would they all sleep? There's nothing like that at his place. Where would he keep all this stuff?"

"I just don't think Martin was lying."

"Jesus Donnie, you better be right about this one."

"I'm already on my way to Billings with Keller to interview him. I'll fill you in right after the interview."

"See you then."

Donnie hung up and looked over Keller who pretended not to be listening.

"Go ahead and say it."

"What?" asked Keller.

"You think the kid's bullshitting us."

"Well Donnie, he lied to us once already. That kind of makes him a liar."

"That's the problem with liars. They might not be lying all the time. You just never know. His demeanor and voice were completely different this time around. He was shaking and sobbing. The kids not that good of an actor."

"Donnie, come on. Nothing he said made any sense. How the hell does one man kidnap 26 kids on his own? Where does he even find time to do that? To make them join a circus? It's ridiculous. His first story was more believable."

"It's a stretch I've got to admit that but, so is returning home after being gone for fourteen years."

"Donnie, we don't even know if it's really Martin. You and I have both been around enough fucked up people to know that a genuine mentally ill person will believe their own lies. Ted

Bundy passed a polygraph test three times. So did the Green River Killer in Washington. I think this kid genuinely believes his own bullshit."

"Well, I guess we'll find out soon enough. You better get some sleep, it's going to be a long drive to Billings."

Thomas Dean sat nervously in the interview room with his attorney. Donnie knew the look, he had seen it before. He was nervous.....but also, very angry. One look at his attorney and Donnie knew he was going to have his hands full. He met Detective Fuller and the two of them hashed out a rough plan of how they were going to handle the interview.

"Look, this guy is no idiot. You better cross your T's and dot your I's here. So far, we don't have a thing to hold him on." said Fuller.

"Nothing?"

"We had cadaver dogs, drug dogs, metal detectors out there. We looked for hidden rooms on the property. We couldn't find a damn thing. If he was doing something, he certainly wasn't doing it on his ranch."

Donnie already had a sinking feeling in his stomach, which was just getting worse. He still believed Martin, at least some of it. Somehow, this guy was involved, he just had to get him to screw up. That was going to be much easier said than done. He walked into the interview room and shook hands with Dean and his attorney, who never even introduced himself.

"Mr. Dean, I'm Detective Jurcick from the Kearney Police Department. I'm sure you were filled in as to why you were brought here."

"Yes," he said angrily.

"Well, I guess I'll start at the beginning and we can go from there," said Donnie.

He went over everything, from Martin returning home after fourteen years to the first interview, to his story about the kidnapping. Dean never even seemed to flinch. The expression on his face never changed. He listened very intently to every word that came out of Donnie's mouth. When he was done, Detective Fuller interrupted.

"Detective Jurcick, I think it's important to note that so far, we have found no evidence to corroborate Martin's story. Mr. Dean is here on his own, he just wants this cleared up as quickly as possible.

*Jesus Fuller.....whose side are you on here?* Donnie thought to himself.

"We just want to hear your side of it," said Donnie.

"I met Martin about a month or so ago. He was just sitting on some logs on a dirt road outside my ranch. He had to be the most pathetic-looking person I had ever seen. I stopped and asked him if he was okay. It's still fall, but it gets very cold out here this time of year in Billings. Not



uncommon for it to drop below freezing. I didn't want someone to find him frozen in a blanket, so I offered him a place to stay. I know it sounds foolish but, well, as one gets older, one's sense of direction and priorities change. We have an old trailer on the property, he could stay there. It wasn't very long before my family and I very quickly discovered that Martin was um.....well, *bat shit crazy* for lack of a better word. He began to accuse me of all kinds of horrible things, like kidnapping him and holding him against his will. My wife and I both told him to leave or we'd call the police. That certainly got his attention. He left and we never heard from him again."

"So then you had never seen him, or spoken to him before that day you saw him on the edge of your property?"

"Correct."

"Mr. Dean.....Martin was taken and held against his will for a very long time. It destroyed his family. We just want to find out what happened. He is rather emphatic that you were responsible for his kidnapping on that day in September 2007 in Kearney."

"I've never even set foot in the state of Nebraska and I certainly did not kidnap him or anyone else for that matter," said Thomas very angrily.

"I understand you're upset. We all need to be very clear on this: you never kidnapped Martin Greely or anyone else in your life?"

"No, I have never kidnapped anyone."

"You don't have a circus that uses kidnapped children?"

"No."

"You have never met anyone named Joshua White or Sergio Montez?"

"No."

"Excuse me Detective but, I'm told that during Martin's first interview he told you a story that was 100 percent false, is that correct?" asked his attorney.

"Yes."

"Might I ask, what on earth makes you think he's telling the truth this time.....when you don't have a single piece of evidence to support his story?"

"It's very early on in the investigation. Kidnapping is a very serious crime. It has to be investigated." said Donnie

"His story was absurd. You have destroyed the reputation of my client based solely on the testimony of someone who is very clearly mentally ill. Not sure how exactly things are done in Nebraska but in Montana that would be immediate grounds for a malicious prosecution and defamation civil case." said his attorney

"Your client was only detained. He hasn't been charged with anything or even arrested. An accusation was made and we had to investigate it.....that's what the police do."

"I'm told this Martin person hasn't even taken a DNA test to prove he is in fact Martin Greely....is that correct?" asked his attorney.

"Yes, that's correct."

"Seems like you've put the cart before the horse detective. Shouldn't your first priority be establishing his real identity?"

"There's a very strong resemblance between ten-year-old Martin and twenty-four year old Martin. Police don't always have immediate answers. You just have to go where the evidence leads you."

"You've wasted enough of my client's time. Are we through here?"

"Yes.....thank you for your time, Mr. Dean. One more thing.....how long did Martin stay with you and your family?"

"About a week."

"During that time, did he ever say anything about his past? Where he's been or what he's been doing?" asked Donnie.

"No.....he did mention something about a girl named Beatrice. I guess they were a couple. He didn't really elaborate on it. I guess the relationship kind of soured and he left. That was all I got out of him. If he really is the kid who was kidnapped....my heart goes out to him and his family. I can't imagine what they must have gone through. I agreed to be here just to help them find some closure. I'm just not convinced this kid is who he says he is." said Thomas as he got up to leave.

Donnie and Keller left the meeting feeling extremely deflated. There wasn't much they could do at this point.

"You don't think they would have covered up for him, right?" asked Keller on their drive back to Nebraska.

"I doubt it. Something like Martin described would be very hard to just cover-up."

"Boss, nothing is adding up here. We need some real answers. We've got to get him to take a DNA test. We're going to look bad the longer this drags on and we don't even know if he is the real Martin."

"They took DNA from him this morning."

"Really?"

"I just can't get over the fact that I didn't think Martin was lying. There's got to be some kind of truth to what he said."

"Some kind of truth is called lying. I think Martin believes his own lies. Can I ask what exactly made him so believable? I mean how do you know he was telling the truth?"

"His first story he made very little if any eye contact with me. Their eyes tell all. The second time.....he barely took his eyes off me. It might seem stupid but, I found even a genuine sociopath knows they're lying and will rarely look you in the eye."

"Let's hope you're right."

Donnie's phone rang right outside Cheyenne. They had stopped at a diner to get some food. He didn't recognize the number.

"Detective Jurcizk speaking."

"Detective Jurcizk.....I'm Officer Mentone, Omaha Police Department. I'm calling about a cold case we have here. You recently interviewed someone who mentioned the name of Beatrice Mendoza from Spain?"

"Yes.....yes I did."

"Right.....we're going to need to talk to this person."

"Why?"

"She's been a cold case for six months. She was found in a dumpster, shot twice in the head."

"I see. Let me call you right back," said Donnie.

"Who was that?"

"Jesus, this case just keeps getting better and better. They found Martin's chick dead in a dumpster with two bullet holes in her head about a year ago," said Donnie.

"Ahh.....the plot thickens," said Keller.

"That Martin.....something about him just isn't right," said Donnie.

"You think?"

"I think he might have Stockholm Syndrome.....you know, where you start to bond and make friends with your captors. Who the hell is he protecting?"

"Assuming it is Martin Greely," said Keller.

"I wonder.....he seems fine physically. We checked him for injuries and scars. He seemed fine. We had a nurse check him out as well. He looks well-fed."

"So, maybe he was taken in by some family that just wanted a son. A very fucked up family but not one that was going to mistreat him," said Keller.

"Wouldn't you want the people who separated you from your family to be brought to justice?"

"He was only ten at the time. Maybe he just blacked out a lot of it. I'm sure in time, he'll tell us the truth."

"The one thing we don't have.....is time," said Donnie as he sipped his coffee.

Donnie and Keller wasted no time in getting back to Kearney. They didn't even go to the station first, they drove out the Greely house on the edge of town. Donnie was tired and out of patience with Martin. He had been lied to yet again. The first order of business was to get Martin down to the station for fingerprinting and testing. To hell with Melnick.....he'd put him in handcuffs and drag him down there himself if he had to. One way or another, he was going to get some straight answers. To further complicate matters, David Greely, Martin's father was now staying at the house. His dislike of the Kearney Police Department was well known. Donnie had to just hope there were still officers at the house to help him if things got ugly.....which they were most certainly bound to do. He just had to hope Martin would co-operate and go with him on his own. He let himself in and found Martin and his father in the kitchen.

"So.....did you arrest the son of a bitch?" asked David.

"Um no. Guys....we're going to need Martin to come down to the station with us."

"Why?"

"Some officers are flying in from the Omaha Police Department. They want to talk to Martin about a murder that took place a few months back. I trust you know who I'm referring to Martin?"

"Yeah," said Martin looking away.

"You might have told us that your girlfriend was murdered. That would have been nice to know," said Donnie.

"I didn't kill her Donnie. He did."

"Who killed her?"

"Mr. Dean."

"No Martin.....just stop.....please. You're in enough trouble already. You might want to call your lawyer. You're definitely going to need him."

"They can interview him right here. There's no need for him to go anywhere," said David.

"That's not all David. Martin.....none of your story about Thomas Dean was able to be verified. Not one bit. He says he let you live with him last month and he kicked you out because you were.....well.....not very nice to him." said Donnie.

"God Donnie.....I just can't believe it. You had him in handcuffs in the police station. I mean you got him.....you freakin got him and you just let him walk right out and didn't even charge him?" said Martin exasperated.

"Martin.....your story is missing one very, very important detail we need to arrest him and that little detail is called evidence. The sheriff's department spent four days at his ranch. They did not find one single piece of evidence to support your story. We are going to have to charge you with filing a false police report. It's only a misdemeanor but, you are going to have to go downtown with us and go through the booking process. You can post bail and be released this evening."

Donnie saw Martin's face get very serious. He had never seen this side to Martin before.

*The gloves were off now.*

"He killed her. He killed her and he would have killed me too but the stupid ice machine didn't work, so I had to go across the street to buy some. When I got back, she was dead. He shot my baby like a dog." said Martin tearing up.

"Martin.....anything you say to myself or Officer Keller can be used in the investigation. I mean anything you say. Why don't you just talk to the officers from Omaha when they get here?" said Donnie.

"Detective.....if he wants to talk.....*let him talk*," said Keller.

Donnie was caught off guard. He spun around and gave Keller a dirty look, then quickly realized his mistake.

"Well, I guess if you want to talk, we'll listen. Just understand, there are no secrets here."

Martin put his feet up and sipped his soda.

"I want you to know what that asshole did to her. He killed her. I should have killed him when I had the chance. I had so many chances and I never did. I was afraid of him, just like everyone else. Too chicken shit to do anything about it. I get so mad at myself sometimes I want to pull my hair out."

Martin went on for the next half an hour about their romance. How they met at Dean's ranch and were assigned chores together. She could come and go anytime she wanted. She had an aunt and uncle in Salt Lake that checked on her frequently. Thomas took a liking to her. She was a very skilled performer. They decided to make their romance official and that's when things quickly went south. She had no idea that Martin had been kidnapped. She wanted to go to the police but, Martin didn't trust them.

"We don't know how far his tentacles go. We trust the wrong person and we could be dead," he said.

He glossed over her actual murder, something that raised a big red flag with the officers listening. He paused for a moment and Officer Keller asked him a question.

"Martin.....one thing I can't figure out here, I was hoping maybe you could help me."

"What?"

"Well.....let's assume for a second that everything you're telling us is true. Why on Earth didn't you ever do something to Mr. Dean? I mean, you're a grown man almost twice his size. If someone had done to me what he did to you, I would have probably killed him by now. Why didn't you ever get back at him?"

"After he killed Beatrice.....I almost did....I mean I had the gun in my pocket. I was hiding in the shed on his ranch. I was going to shoot him. I guess in the end, I just couldn't go through with it. I'm a lot of things but I'm no murderer. I guess I felt that if I crossed that line, there would be no going back for me. My life has been out of control since the day he took me. I guess I felt that not killing him would be like taking some kind of control back over my life. That's what I missed the most.....not being in control of my own life."

"Why did he kill Beatrice?"

"Cause we were going to spill the beans on him. We were the only ones who fought back. We were the only ones who resisted. See Mr. Dean got sick...he almost died from pneumonia. We didn't really see much of him for a while. His second in command, Mr. Chu took over for a while. He was even worse than Mr. Dean."

"Martin, if you knew who killed Beatrice, why not just turn him in? I mean he killed the woman you loved?" asked Donnie.

"Well, for a while I told myself I was going to kill him. I almost did. I guess I just figured no one was going to believe me anyway. I had no real evidence he did it. I figured the cops would probably blame me for her murder."

"Yeah, well.....that's enough talk. I'm going to call Mr. Melnick and have him here when Martin is interviewed."

"No problem. The chief just texted me. They just arrived in town, they're on their way out here."

"I think we should wait for Mike Melnick to get here before they start questioning him. Mike's on his way," said David.

"Of course. Martin, I'm just going to give you some free advice here, coming from someone who's prosecuted a lot of people over the years."

"What?"

"Don't lie to the officers when they question you. If you did it, own up to it. Believe me, they'll find out the truth one way or another. If they catch you lying, I can almost guarantee you're going to be charged with her murder. I think you understand how serious this is."

"It's just not fair," said Martin.

"What's not fair?"

"That bastard killed her and I'm the one who's going to take the fall for it. I really messed up. I should have just gone to the cops as soon as it happened. I guess I figured they would never believe me. He did it to frame me. He knew the cops would never believe my story anyway. I'm going to prison, aren't I Donnie?"

"I can't answer that Martin, that's up to the District Attorney."

Martin sunk back in his chair and just started to sob. Donnie and Keller stepped outside for a minute before the rest of the officers arrived.

"Jesus.....the kid can't possibly be that stupid," said Keller.

"People do stupid things when they panic."

"This kid has dug himself into one hell of a deep hole here. I figured this would be a story with a happy ending. Guess I got that one wrong."

"I wish the kid would just tell us the truth."

"Donnie, I don't think he even knows what the truth is anymore. He's delusional. I know you think this Dean guy kidnapped him but, I don't think he did. Somebody kidnapped him but, it wasn't Thomas Dean. None of it matters now anyway. They're going to charge him with her murder for sure. Christ, he'll be lucky to ever see daylight again."

"I feel like we really let this family down," said Donnie.

"There's only so much we can do. We can't force him to tell us the truth."

"What if he's right? What if there really is some guy out there taking kids and forcing them into some kind of nightmarish existence? No, this Thomas Dean is connected, I just don't know how."

"Donnie.....none of Martin's story checked out. Not one single detail could be verified. The Billings PD and Montana investigators did their job. They didn't find anything on the guy. He's never been arrested. He's well-liked in the community. I think your gut might be wrong on this one." said Keller.

"It's never been wrong up until now."

Keller headed back inside. Donnie just stood on the porch, trying to collect his thoughts. Right now, he wasn't sure what to think. Martin was in deep trouble and sinking fast. It wasn't Donnie's job to help him but, that's exactly what he wanted to do now.

Vanessa stepped outside and lit up a cigarette next to him.

"How you holding up?" he asked.

"Cigarettes and coffee. That's my entire existence right now. I don't really like either one of them but, it's all I have that seems to numb the pain. Do you think he really killed that girl?"

"I honestly don't know Vanessa. I like to think I can get a read on people. Your brother doesn't strike me as a killer but, I could be wrong. Even if he didn't kill her, throwing her dead body in a dumpster.....he'll go down for her murder."

"Yeah, I kind of figured. I guess I was half right that day when I said he wasn't my brother."

"What do you mean?"

"Physically, it's him but, mentally.....that is not the same person who left fourteen years ago. My brother died that day and got replaced by someone else."

"He's been through a lot. He was only ten when he was taken."

"He used to be so stubborn. He and my dad would go rounds with one another. Dad would go left and Martin would go right. Dad would want it hot and Martin would want it cold. Dad was a big athlete in school. Martin could barely throw a football. Mom always blamed him for the kidnapping. She blamed herself more. Last night, I watched Martin just staring outside the window. I mean for like fifteen minutes, he's just staring outside the window."

"What was he looking at?"

"I don't know. I walked over to him and just looked out the window with him. Finally, I ask him."

"What did he say?"

*"The world will finally see the light when the darkness comes. The world will finally see the light when the darkness comes."*

"The hell does that mean?"

"I have no idea. See, that's what I mean. It's my brother's body but, his mind has been replaced by someone else's. I suppose in some ways, he really did die that day he was taken."

"Your family has been through a lot.....more than any family should have to go through. I don't think this is going to end well for Martin."

"No, probably not. I just hope he didn't kill that poor girl."

"I'm not sure we'll ever know the truth. That's the frustrating thing. I'd hate to charge someone with murder when they didn't actually kill the victim."



"Will they let him plead to a lesser charge"

"That's not up to them. All the detectives do is gather information and give it to the DA. They make the call."

"At least in prison, I'll know he's alive. It's not much of a life but we can still see him and talk to him."

"Vanessa, he's probably better off in prison, where he can get the help he needs. Being kidnapped for fourteen years kind of throws a big wrench in all this. I'm not sure how a jury would vote. I'm thinking letting him plea to a lesser charge is a real possibility. If he had just picked up the phone and dialed 911 when he found her.....God, why didn't he just pick up the phone and call us."

"He's probably right.....no one would have believed him."

"You got to have evidence to charge him. If the evidence matched his story, then he wouldn't be charged. I just don't think he killed her."

"Why not?"

"Two bullet holes in the head is a professional execution. I've investigated several murders. Two of them were husband and wife. They were messy.....very messy. This one was way too clean. There was no emotion involved in the murder. It was just business. You rarely see that in murder when there was a romantic relationship involved. No, I think he's telling the truth but, when he put her dead body in the dumpster, he pretty much sealed his fate."

"She was his girlfriend. How could he do that to her?"

"I don't know. I wish he would tell us."

They watched two patrol cars with their bar lights on come out to the house. They drove past the two officers at the edge of the driveway and stopped in front of the porch. Mike Melnick got out first, followed by the chief and two detectives from the Omaha PD. Donnie knew the routine. If the chief was around, he made all the calls. Callie asked him if he wanted any coffee. He said yes. It was going to be a very long night.

The detectives were very professional. Almost like the kind you see on TV. They made Donnie feel at ease and listened to his rambling statements about the murder and didn't break a sweat. They were trying to gain his trust. Mike told him to tell the truth but not to admit to the actual murder if he didn't do it. Martin vehemently denied killing Beatrice. He admitted to dumping her dead body in the dumpster but made it clear, he was not the one who killed her.

"I was in love with her, why would I kill her?" he said.

He told them Thomas Dean was the real killer and that they should be going after him. All in all, the interview took about two and a half hours. They said they would stop for the day and decide what to do in the morning. The group of officers met outside. Donnie had been listening in but knew enough to let the detectives do their thing. This is their show, not his."

"We have enough to charge him with her murder.....however, given the circumstances surrounding this whole thing, I think his lawyer could make a very good case for an insanity defense. That might really spook the DA. He may very well go for a plea deal." said one of the Salt Lake Detectives.

"What do you think Donnie?" asked the chief.

"We don't even know if this guy is Martin Greely. We can't verify a single thing he's told us so far. Did the two of them even have a relationship?"

"They were in a motel room together?" asked the chief.

"Yes, but she paid for it. The clerk doesn't remember anyone else being with her. For all we know, she showed up to the motel alone." said a detective.

"We don't have any answers, just more and more questions. At some point, we have to overlook the fact that he's a kidnap victim and just go with what we have. I'll call the DA's office first thing in the morning and we'll go from there. Said a detective.

"I'm going to keep detective Jurcizk at the house tonight along with two other officers. Just to make sure the family doesn't try and do anything stupid, like take off. He's got a pretty good relationship with Martin.....maybe he can get him to open up."

"We'd appreciate any help."

Donnie was already exhausted. He called his wife and told her he wouldn't be coming home tonight. Anyone who thinks that cops are overpaid should just work with them for a few days. He had already been up for almost twenty hours. The night was just getting started.

It was around midnight when Martin came out on the porch. Donnie had been in and out of consciousness for the last hour. He opened his eyes and saw Martin standing right in front of him.

"Good thing I'm not a bad guy," he said.

Donnie sat up and quickly regained his senses.

"I couldn't sleep. Even at the ranch, I never slept more than four or five hours a night. Some nights I'd just walk along the fence line by myself when it wasn't too cold. I'd wonder what my family was doing. He took fourteen years from our family.....and now he's going to take the rest of my life. I really messed up, didn't I?" he said solemnly.

"Yeah, you sure did."

"I should have just told you the truth from the beginning. I don't know why I didn't. I knew it was a mistake. Everyone is going to think I killed Beatrice and I swear to you, I didn't kill her. That evil, evil man is going to get away with it. He's going to get away with everything. No one is even going to know it was him who did it?"

"What do you mean?"

"*Operation Sweet Darkness*," he said

"What's that?"

"It's what I've been training for. What we've all been training for. Beatrice and I couldn't go through with it. That's why he tried to kill us."

"What are you talking about? This better not be another one of your stories Martin."

"My name isn't Martin. I don't know what my real name is."

"Huh? You mean you're not the same Martin Greely that was kidnapped?"

"No. We lived together for a few years. He was my best friend. Me and him and Beatrice. We were going to try and stop him. We were the only ones who ever resisted. We were going to try and tell the world what he is about to do."

"You mean Thomas Dean?"

"Yes.....he's going to cause the power grid to collapse."

Martin said it so casually.....*like he was ordering take-out.*

Donnie knew he had to record this but he didn't want to scare him off. He needed this kid to finally open up.

"As soon as the DNA test comes back, I'm done."

"Why did you lie to this family. Jesus, they've been through enough."

"I wasn't trying to hurt them. I just wanted to make sure they were going to be alright.....you know, once the big event happens."

"The big event.....you mean the power grid going down? How the hell is he going to do that?"

"You had him, Donnie. You had him and you let him go. You'll never get him now. It's too late. You could have prevented it."

"Prevent what?"

"We were his *disposables*. If we were caught, there was really no connection back to him at all.. He's part of a larger network. I think they're some kind of weird cult."

"How do you fit into all of this?"

"Each of us has a very specific job to do on darkness day. I was supposed to blow up a DC-DC power bridge just outside of Topeka Kansas. We were going to blow up all of the safety switches

and transfer stations and cause the grid to burn out. Just one switch isn't going to take it all down, but if we take out dozens of them.....then it will. Whole states will be without power. Then the fun really starts."

"What do you mean?"

"The plan was to create so much chaos that the government cannot respond to it. I mean they can barely respond to hurricanes and tornadoes. They're going to be so busy trying to hold civilization together that the cult and their followers take over. They have people inside the military and police. They're going to overthrow the government."

Donnie felt like he was just hit with a sledgehammer. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. He was trying to process it all. There was just one tiny little problem in all this.

*There wasn't a single, solitary piece of evidence to back up this kid's story.*

"Beatrice wasn't my girlfriend. She was Martin's. I don't even think she liked me. I was just there to protect her. I left her alone for five minutes. Five goddamn minutes and that's all it took. He had been watching us the whole time.....watching and waiting for the right moment to strike. I'm going to go down for murder. A murder I didn't do and this guy is going to blow up the whole world and get away with it. It's a hell of a thing for someone to have weighing on their mind."

"You don't even know who you are.....or who your parents were?" asked Donnie.

"No. A few months ago, Thomas told me my mother was the town whore. He gave her a thousand dollars for me and paid for her medical bills."

"What did they call you at the ranch?"

"They called me turd.....cause I was always cleaning up everyone's shit."

"This is a lot to take in. I mean like a hell of a lot to take in. You know you're going to destroy this family when you tell them? I don't buy it though. I mean I want to. I think you really want to. I think you've concocted this whole elaborate bullshit story cause you don't really want to admit to the fact that you killed Beatrice. You killed that girl and you know you did."

"I didn't kill her."

"Yes, you did Martin. You are Martin Greely. Just not the same Martin Greely they knew. I'm not going to listen to any more of your lies Martin. God, it's like every life you touch, you destroy. Do you know who does that? Psychopaths."

"I'm not lying to you. Okay.....I am Martin Greely but the rest of it is true, I swear it is. I wanted to tell you the truth....I really, really did. I wanted someone to stop him. I just knew no one was going to believe me."

"No one would have believed you, because it's not true."

"When the world goes dark.....you'll see. You'll see I was right. You'll want to talk to me then. Everyone will.....but it will be too late. He will have won."

"Martin.....you are in some very deep shit here. You could spend the rest of your life in prison.....is that really what you want? To die an old man in a 9 by 12 cell with no windows?"

"No.....Sweet Darkness isn't a lie Donnie. It's going to happen. It was supposed to happen already but Mr. Dean got sick, so they had to postpone it."

"I've heard enough Martin. Please don't do anything stupid until the detectives show back up here in the morning. I'd be saying my goodbyes right now if I were you, cause I'd bet money they are going to charge you with her murder.

Martin turned away in shame. He was going to say something else but, decided against it and went back inside. Donnie actually felt bad for him. The poor kid was so screwed up, he believed his own lies. He really thought Thomas Dean was going to take down the power grid. Hopefully in prison, he could get some help. Hopefully one day he could tell them where he's been for the last fourteen years.....but today was not going to be that day.

*Cause the worst lies in the world.....are the ones we tell ourselves.....those are the ones that really hurt.*

The detectives from Omaha showed back up at the house around six o'clock the next evening. They had spent the entire day talking to the Douglas County DA's Office as well as the family of Beatrice Mendoza. Taking into account Martin's life over the last fourteen years, they decided to offer him a plea deal.

"First degree manslaughter. He'll serve a minimum of ten years. He can go up for parole every two years with a maximum of 20 years." said one of the detectives.

"That offer came right from the DA's office?" asked Mike.

" The plea deal paperwork will be here tomorrow. They don't want a trial. They understand that mentally....well.....he's clearly not playing with a full deck."

"We got the DNA test results back an hour ago. He's Martin Greely alright. There is a 99.97 percent chance he comes from the same DNA as his parents." said Mike.

"It's a good offer guys. I wouldn't want to roll the dice in court and lose. He doesn't take it, the DA is going after first-degree murder without parole." said a detective.

"Alright.....give us a little while to think it over. We'll get back to you shortly," said Mike.

"Oh.....one other thing. The DA agreed to let him serve his time in Cedar Grove, not at Tecumseh, or the State Penn."

"What's Cedar Grove?" asked Martin.

"The minimum security prison. The place is like a country club compared to the other prisons. You should really think about Martin. I've never seen the DA's office go out on a limb like this." said an Omaha detective.

The detectives left a few minutes later and the family gathered around the table. Callie was cooking pork chops for Martin, it was his favorite dish.

"That DNA test changes everything," said Mike

"How so?" asked Donnie.

"It gives us a very strong case for an insanity defense. They got Martin's name from the anonymous tip line. All of the calls are recorded. I'd bet money the voice on that recording can be matched to Thomas Dean's. We got him."

"Mike.....Martin admitted to throwing her dead body in a dumpster. You don't have shit." said Donnie.

"Oh no, Donald. That's where you're wrong. They have a video of him buying ice at that market across the street from the motel. Hell, all the kid had to do was deny even knowing her and there would have been nothing to tie him to the crime. Dean even admitted to knowing Martin. That was another mistake. At this point, all they can charge him with is desecrating a corpse. Not even sure if that's a felony."

"Guys.....understand that if Martin doesn't take this plea deal and he is convicted of first-degree murder he will die in prison. He'll never get out. At least with the plea deal, there's light at the end of the tunnel. He could be out in as little as ten years." said Donnie.

"He may not have to go to prison at all. I'd much rather see him confined to a psychiatric hospital like CHI," said Mike.

"Mike, he wouldn't be any better off in that place than he would in Cedar Grove. I heard they let the inmates have video games in there. Don't screw this up, Mike. This family has been through enough."

"Thank you, detective. I can take it from here."

"Fine....I was just on my way out," said Donnie as he got up to leave.

"Donnie.....you think I should take the deal?" asked Martin.

"Martin.....you wouldn't last five minutes in a place like Tecumseh Max. That place scares the shit out of even hardened criminals. You'd be in hell."

"I already am in hell," said Martin softly.

Donnie said nothing and let the family be. He got in his car and drove away. He heard the next day that Martin was seriously considering taking the plea deal. He had to report to Cedar Grove

in 60 days or the plea deal was null and void. He figured the best thing to do was to just let them be and allow them to spend some time together before Martin had to report to prison. They had fourteen years to catch up on and very little time to do it.

Donnie drove back home and had breakfast with his wife. She loved him more than anything but, she hated his job. It was like he was married to the badge as well. All she could do was to share him. He was a good man.....and good men are hard to come by. He dozed off and when he opened them, he could see his wife standing over him holding his cell phone.

"Hello?" said Donnie.

"He's taking the deal," said Mike

Donnie was still only half awake. It took him a minute to recognize the voice.

"He did? Does he fully understand what he just signed up for?"

"Probably not. Just for the record, I told the kid not to sign it. I think we can beat the charge in court."

"Mike, if I had a dime for every time I heard that I could probably buy myself a real sofa."

"I just want you to know. The cops from Omaha gave him a few days to say his goodbyes. He'll be in custody as soon as he leaves with them. He has to appear before the judge in a few days. She might release him, she might not. Since he is charged with manslaughter, at least he can make bail. You can't bail on first-degree murder in this state."

"Jesus."

"Jesus certainly didn't bless this family.....not one goddamn bit," said Mike.

Martin had already reported to prison when the chief called him one afternoon. As far as Donnie was concerned, this case was closed.....and then some.

"Whatcha doing?" asked the chief.

"Filling out that report for the burglary at the Hobb's Gas Station last night."

"I got a call today from a department in Akron, Ohio in regards to Martin Greely."

"Really?"

"Yeah. About a year ago, he and his chick Beatrice were arrested at a power station just outside of town. One of the workers forgot his thermos at the station and drove back after everyone had left and found them inside. They said they were just trying to keep warm....but, they had a video camera with them. The worker called the police and they were arrested. Crazy thing is, he even gave the name Martin Greely. His fingerprints match up. It probably doesn't matter now anyway, I just thought it was interesting."

"He used his real name and it didn't set off alarm bells?"

"I guess not. I don't want to take up too much of your time, I just thought you might like to know. Poor kid. I can't believe he didn't tell us anything about where he's been for the last fourteen years. That might have been nice to know. I mean, was he telling the truth about anything?"

"That's the problem chief.....I don't know. I don't know which story was the lie and which one was the truth. I'm not sure even he knows." said Donnie.

"He had every news network in the country begging him for an interview. He turned every single one of them down."

"I'll see you back at the office."

"Sounds like he needs a better lawyer," said Donnie.

"That idiot Melnick still thinks he could have gotten him off. I'm glad he signed the deal. I'd hate to see that kid end up in a real prison, they'd eat him alive." said the chief

"I got approved to be on his mailing list. We can send each other letters."

"Lucky you. I'll see you back at the office."

"Yeah, see you later."

Donnie looked outside the window in the small diner. Even though Martin was no longer his problem, he couldn't help but wonder: *WHICH ONE OF HIS STORIES WAS THE TRUTH AND WHICH ONES WERE LIES? WHICH ONES WERE THE TRUTH AND WHICH ONES WERE LIES?*

That was all Donnie could think about as he ate his lunch. It might be time to start preparing for the collapse of society....or maybe that was another lie too. He just didn't know. Someday, maybe Martin would tell him the truth.....if he even knew what that was. Problem is, the world might end before he gets the chance.