

THE CONQUEST OF EARTH BEGINS

**ENDOSYM**

BOOK THREE

**THE ACADEMY**

By J. Henry Thomson

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*ENDOSYM: Two entities living in one humanoid body whose goal is to become the “Apex Predator” of the Planet.*

**March 28, 1779**

“THOMAS, IT’S TIME TO WAKE UP.”

Captain Thomas Marsh abruptly opened his eyes. In the flickering candlelight, he made out the blurred shape of James standing over him.

“Is it already time?” he asked as he shook off his deep sleep and forced himself to regain a soldier’s composure.

“Yes, it’s your turn to check the sentries,” replied James.

Thomas pushed back the heavy woolen blanket and quickly swung his legs over the side of the bunk, unwilling to waste a single moment between the warmth of his bed and the security of his uniform. In these high, rolling hills, it was cold, very cold, this late at night.

Shivering, he stood, clutched his britches and pulled them to his waist. He tugged his cotton blouse into position squarely on his shoulders before tucking it into his waistband. The shirt served him well both day and night. In another deft maneuver, he forced his arms into the sleeves of his dark blue officer’s coat. Finally, he sat down heavily on the bunk and yanked on each of his leather boots. He stood up and reached out to the table where his wig rested on a stand. He carefully positioned it on his head before standing and staring at James.

“Does my wig look all right?”

“It’s straight,” said James.

Satisfied, Thomas strapped on his pistol and saber. Finally, he placed his four-cornered cocked hat atop his head. It was similar to the head coverings worn by enlisted men, but for officers, the hat formed a rectangle rather than a triangle. He was now fully dressed as a captain in General Washington’s Continental Army.

Once out the door of the officers’ quarters, he stepped into the courtyard. It was only minutes before midnight and unusually light. The cloudless sky allowed the moonlight to illuminate the compound. Two large fires burned fiercely at opposite ends of the yard, cutting out the shadows and revealing details seldom seen at this late hour.

Thomas wasted no time. He hastened to the railing where his horse had been tied, saddled and ready for its rider. As he approached his mount, he caught sight of a lone figure hobbling toward him. Thomas could tell by the man’s gait that it was General Arnold.

To the young officers, Benedict Arnold was one of the most respected leaders in the colonial forces. Arnold had led an expedition of eleven hundred men into Quebec by

way of the Kennebec and Chaudière rivers. After frightful hardships en route, his army climbed the heights of Abraham. Yet it wasn't enough. Arnold's forces were insufficient to storm the city. He was compelled to await the arrival of General Montgomery.

In the ensuing battle, Montgomery was slain, and Arnold was wounded in the leg. For his gallantry, Arnold was promoted to brigadier general and took command of the siege of Quebec until General Wooster's forces came to their aid. Then Arnold assumed command of the revolutionary armies in the battle for Montreal.

When the British, soon heavily reinforced, drove the Americans out of Canada, Arnold and his surviving troops retreated to Fort Ticonderoga. Arnold's strong resistance during the battle for Montreal discouraged the British. Their commander, General Carleton, was forced to retire to Montreal for the winter. The relief of Fort Ticonderoga made it possible to divert three thousand men from the northern army and to come to Washington's aid.

Thomas had heard the rumors of the sleepless Arnold who patrolled the fort late at night, but this was Thomas's first encounter with the general.

"Who's there?" demanded Arnold.

"Sir, it's Captain Marsh," answered Thomas. "I'm getting ready to inspect the listening posts."

The general approached the young officer, taking note of his appearance. Each of Arnold's men was required to be in full uniform at all times, except when asleep. Arnold himself wore the immaculate uniform of a brigadier general. Thomas was struck by his meticulous attention to detail. Yet it was Arnold's stature that surprised him the most. Arnold was short, standing only a little taller than five and a half feet. Yet, somehow he achieved a commanding presence. Thomas, who was a good three inches taller, felt short compared to the renowned general.

"Hell of a deal," grumbled Arnold. "Here we are sitting in two indefensible forts on the Hudson waiting for the damn British to come from New York City. When that happens, we'll be defeated. Those idiots in Congress have no idea how to win a war. I can't believe how ignorant they are. They wouldn't even listen to me when I told them what to do. Margaret was right. There is no way we can take on King George. He will squash us like a bug on the hearth."

Margaret, his new wife, was half his age. It was no secret that she was a Tory.

Captain Marsh was dumbfounded by the rambling words coming from the mouth of this famous military man. Marsh stood stock-still and forced himself to maintain his serious demeanor.

“Oh, carry on, captain,” Arnold barked. Thomas snapped to attention with a sharp salute, turned and mounted his horse.

Thomas now had a story to tell his grandchildren. He had met the great General Benedict Arnold. But now, Thomas was anxious about Arnold’s dire prediction of defeat. Perhaps the brilliant man was disappointed that – although ready for battle – there was still no action. Here was Arnold, requiring readiness, yet everyone knew that it would take many days for the British to move up the Hudson.

The men at the gate pushed their shoulders against the heavy wooden gates. Their groans mingled with the creak of timber as the opening widened. Soon Thomas and his dappled mount plodded along on the muddy road. He had a job to do, and he didn’t intend to linger.

Thomas shook his head. He didn’t have time to concern himself with General Arnold’s ramblings. In the moonlight he could see the ramparts of Fort Putnam on the hill above. He turned his horse toward the Hudson. From this elevation he could see the reflection of the moon on the calm water. During winter, the river became a frozen highway. One could walk across the ice between Garrison and West Point. Now in March some large sections of ice still floated lazily in the river. Thomas halted his mount and peered into the distance. He could make out the fires from camps at Garrison.

Thomas knew the area well. His home was in Newburgh, just twenty miles north by boat. Once, he and his brother had started across the ice when it had begun to crack, forming dangerous puddles of frozen water. They barely made it to shore. When they got home and told their story, Mother had forbidden them from walking on the ice again. They didn’t – at least that year – but her warning failed to stop them from testing the ice the following winter.

Had that been eight years ago? It seemed like forever. Now here he was fighting in a war that his father cursed as wrongheaded. His family had emigrated from England to the colonies in 1751. When they arrived they had only three children, one boy and two girls. Thomas and his brother Samuel were born in America. They were only two years apart in age, Thomas being the younger.

When the call came for soldiers to serve in the new continental army, Thomas enlisted, refusing to heed his father’s admonitions. Because of his father’s good reputation, Thomas was given a commission as a captain, even though he was just twenty-two years old. In private, his father had voiced his disapproval, protesting that it was wrong to go against king and country. Yet, with the open hostility toward Loyalists, his father said nothing in public. He had wished that Thomas had followed Samuel into

the clergy. Already, Samuel served as the associate minister in Newburg's Methodist Church.

Thomas cantered slowly along the moonlit trail. The horse had no problem negotiating the rough roadway. When he approached the first lookout, he dismounted and prepared to check the three soldiers who manned the post. The idea of the late night inspection was ludicrous. Obviously, there was no problem. No enemy soldier had been reported anywhere in the area.

He saluted the men and continued his ride toward the next lookout.

Once out of sight of the first lookout, Thomas veered to the left. He took a trail that led him closer to the riverbank. He cautiously glanced behind him to see if he had been followed. He passed through a grove of oaks. Still leafless, the branches formed skeletal lines against the pre-dawn sky. They seemed to be reaching up to the vanishing moon. He topped a small rise.

In the clearing below, he saw two horses hitched to a wagon. Five men stood nearby as if waiting for someone. Thomas jerked the reins, gently prodding the horse's flanks with his boots. He rode down the hill and stopped. He dismounted and approached a man who held his arms out to him. They fell into a hearty embrace.

"Sam, you look well."

"It is good to see you, Tom," said his brother, Samuel. "Tom, you know Brother Michael, Brother James and Brother John."

"Yes, it's good to see you all again," said Thomas.

Samuel turned to the last man.

"This is Andrew Wyatt, the silversmith." Thomas nodded and shook the man's hand.

"It's time to get this deed done," said Samuel. "Are you sure that no military fortifications are planned for this area?"

"Yes," replied Thomas. "I went over the plans yesterday. Nothing will be built here."

"Where do you want to put it?" asked Brother Michael.

"Over by that large oak tree," answered Samuel. "It will take all six of us to move the casket."

Samuel moved to the back of the wagon and reached out to lift a heavy tarp, revealing the corner of a wooden casket. It was not the typical burial box built of half-inch pine. Instead, it was constructed of one-inch thick tongue and groove oak planks that had been soaked in a copper sulfate solution to preserve the wood. Two three-inch wide

iron straps encircled the casket, each approximately twelve inches from the opposing ends.

“Let’s give it a go,” said Samuel.

The men lined up at the back of the wagon, three on each side. Even pulling the box to the open edge of the wagon was a struggle, but they put their backs into the task and slowly carried it to the base of the tree. They returned for the tools – two rakes, two shovels and a two-pronged pick.

The silversmith returned to the wagon and cradled a bulky object wrapped in heavy cotton. Alone, he struggled to hoist it on his shoulder and carry it to the casket. He set it down and removed the cloth, revealing an exquisitely formed silver cross.

Thomas guessed that it was nearly two and a half feet in length, one and a half feet wide, and probably three-quarters of an inch thick. He slipped both hands under the cross and tried to lift it. He was amazed at the weight – likely in excess of thirty pounds. He noted that small holes had been bored in each of the four points of the cross.

The smith stepped forward, lifted the familiar object and centered it on the casket. Using four iron screws, he attached the cross to the casket. When the smith finished, each man came forward and touched the sacred symbol as if compelled to do its bidding. Even Thomas paused. It was strange, he thought. Perhaps it was just the effect of the reflected moonlight, but to him, the cross seemed to shine of its own accord.

Without speaking, the men began their work. They raked the dead foliage from a wide area near the tree. They cleared a square about eight feet long and eight feet wide.

Although Thomas had been too cold when the task began, the strenuous toil soon warmed his body. He removed his military coat and rolled up his sleeves. They worked silently. No one spoke. They took turns with the digging. It was hard work, and there was only room for two in the hole. They were careful to dig as quietly as possible.

When the rectangular hole was approximately five feet deep, they stopped and rested their tools against the tree. Three thick hemp ropes were retrieved from the wagon and threaded under the casket. Two men were assigned at each rope. Working together, their muscles straining, they lifted the casket and positioned it over the hole. They lowered the casket, trying to keep their burden level to prevent the shifting of its contents. Once the casket was placed in the musky soil, they let loose of the ropes and stepped back.

Samuel again walked to the wagon and retrieved a large leather-bound book. He returned to the gravesite.

“Please kneel,” he said calmly to the five men before him.

He began to read from Saint Luke, Chapter 8, verses 27 to 33.



*And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.*

*When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not.*

*(For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)*

*And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him.*

*And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep.*

*And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them.*

*Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine; and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.*

“Only Jesus can drive the devil from a man,” said Samuel as he closed the book. “But, we – with the power of the cross – can bind the devil in the box. We will never divulge the location of the cursed tomb. Should any one of us ever speak of tonight, may that person rot in hell for eternity.”

They all stood, and Samuel walked to the wagon, placed the Bible carefully under the seat and returned to the grave. The men retrieved their tools and began to cover the box with shovelfuls of earth. They took turns stomping heavily on the soil. When the grave had been filled and leveled, the excess dirt was loaded into the back of the wagon. Then dried leaves and branches were scattered over the site. When finished, they stood back to assure themselves that they had left no evidence of their work.

The men shook hands with Thomas and loaded the tools on the wagon. The last man to climb aboard was his brother.

“Thank you for your help, Tom. I look forward to seeing you again when this horrible war is over.”

“And I, too, Sam,” said Thomas. The two held their final embrace. Finally, Sam climbed on the wagon. Thomas watched them move into the shadows and disappear from view. He rolled down his sleeves and pulled on his coat. He mounted his horse and rode off to complete his inspection of the lookout posts.

Thomas would never see his brother again. In early 1780, a British attack against an American outpost in Westchester County, New York resulted in fifty American casualties and seventy-five captured in the Battle of Young's House.

One of those casualties was Captain Thomas Marsh.

## SOME OF THE MILITARY'S GREATEST HEROES REST FOREVER IN THE WEST POINT CEMETERY.

The hallowed grounds overlook the Hudson River at the United States Military Academy in New York. The cemetery once served as the burial grounds for American Revolutionary War soldiers and early West Point inhabitants. In 1817 it was officially designated as a military cemetery. The caretaker's cottage was erected in 1872. Still standing, it now houses the offices for the cemetery management. Academy visitors regularly come to the cemetery to acknowledge those heroes who fought for their country. It is one of the major attractions on the academy tour.

Visitors who come to the graveyard walk through history. Each section is a testament to those who served their nation.

They may visit the oldest grave that holds the remains of Ensign Dominick Trant, a native of Cork, Ireland. He was a soldier in the Ninth Massachusetts Infantry. Trant died at West Point in 1782.

Other men who made history include Major General John Buford, Union cavalry commander who set the stage for the Battle of Gettysburg; General William Westmoreland, Army Chief of Staff, Superintendent of the United States Military Academy and the commanding general of all forces who fought in Vietnam; and Major General George Armstrong Custer, commander at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Visitors who tour the grounds will also notice many monuments, enough to keep a history buff fascinated for a week or more.

The monuments include the Dade Monument, honoring Major Francis L. Dade and the one hundred ten men who died with him in a battle with Seminole warriors in 1835.

Another is the Cadet Monument. It originally was erected to honor Cadet Vincent M. Lowe who was killed in a premature cannon discharge in 1817. The monument now includes the names of cadets and professors who died in the early days of the academy.

Wood's Monument was erected in 1818 to commemorate the life of Eleazer D. Wood, one of the early graduates, for his notable work as an engineer and his service in the artillery.

The Margaret Corbin Monument honors a heroine of the Revolutionary War. When her husband was killed while manning a cannon, Margaret immediately took his place until she was hit by enemy fire. The injury left her disabled for the rest of her life. She was the first woman to receive a military pension.

VICTOR SANCHEZ WAS DEVOTED TO THE SACRED GROUNDS, BUT EVEN MORE, HE LOVED HIS JOB. He had worked for the Grounds Division of the Directorate of Engineering and Housing for twenty years. During the previous ten years he had served as the foreman.

He took particular pride in the digging of the graves. When he prepared a gravesite, it was done perfectly. His graves were always precisely cornered and dug accurately to the requested depth. He believed that a meticulously prepared site was important to the kin of the deceased.

Victor's skill with a backhoe couldn't be matched. Even though he was the foreman, he would prepare a new gravesite anytime he got the chance. For that reason, he was currently operating the bright orange Kubota backhoe.

Today he would be digging the first grave in the newly expanded area of the cemetery next to the old Post Exchange. West Point had been the site for burial of graduates and retired instructors as well as their spouses for more than one hundred and sixty years. Because of the high demand, there was a constant urgency to expand the cemetery. It had been a five-year process to reclaim the land where Victor worked. The area had been carefully leveled. New grass had been planted. Finally, it was ready to accommodate the new gravesites.

Victor took another look at the finalized map of the area. Each plot had been located using the latest mapping technology. The first grave would be the final resting place for a retired colonel from the class of 1960. There would be no excuse for any error when use of the land was so critical.

The honor of digging the first grave went to the man selected by the foreman. Victor had told his crew that he, himself, would do the honors. He pulled himself onto the seat of the backhoe and drove it to the pre-determined spot. He had spread out a large tarp that was fitted with an opening for the grave. Earth and grass would be placed on one side of the tarp adjacent to the three-and-a-half foot by seven-and-a-half foot opening.

Using a sod-cutting machine, Victor carefully sliced into the thick grass, creating green blocks of turf. Each chunk was laid gently in place on the tarp. He began to remove the dirt from the hole using the backhoe. He carefully dug the soil to a depth of six inches over the entire area of the grave. This allowed him to keep the hole totally even as he dug. He hummed along to random selections from his iPod playlist. He claimed that the music helped mask the noise from the tractor, but, in truth, the songs added to his joy at doing his job as expertly as he could.

He wiped his brow and concentrated on enlarging the hole. It was hot, very hot on this August afternoon. If ever a man could choose a place to be buried, it would be here, he reasoned. It took about forty minutes to reach a depth of three feet. He needed to go to seven feet before he would be satisfied. Then he would use special shoring material to hold up the sides so that the concrete vault could be lowered into the grave without doing any damage or collapsing the soil. He pulled back so he could remove the next six inches of soil. He marveled at how easy it had been to dig at this site.

Suddenly, he heard a crunch as the mouth of the backhoe's shovel hit something unusual. He felt the shovel drop by about a foot.

"What in the world was that?" he said aloud. No one was there to answer his question. He climbed off the backhoe, stood as close as possible to the edge of the hole, and peered into the dark soil.

"Son of a bitch!" he exclaimed, amazed at what he thought he saw. Pieces of the thick, partially decaying plank were visible, likely broken from the top of what looked like a casket. He was virtually certain that he had broken into an old grave. Never, in all his time working in the grounds department, had he ever experienced anything like this. This should not happen at the military academy. Historical records never indicated that this area was used for graves.

No matter now, Victor told himself as he reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone.

"Buildings and grounds division, how may I help you?" asked a woman in the office.

"Eloise, it's Victor Sanchez. Is Bob in?"

"He's busy right now, Victor," she answered.

"I need to talk to him right now. It's important."

Victor stood next to the backhoe holding his cell phone to his ear. Soon, Bob Cushman, the director, came on the line.

"What is it, Victor?" asked Bob.

"I just dug up an old grave," said Victor.

"An old grave? Where the hell is it?" growled Bob.

"Right smack dab in the middle of the new area," answered Victor, a slight tremble in his voice.

"There's no record of any graves in that area," said Bob. "Are you sure it's a grave?"

"Bob, I know a casket when I see one. It's an old gravesite." "Shit!" said Bob.

"I'll be right there. Sit tight."

Only ten minutes later, the colonel's sedan pulled up. Two men got out and walked up to the backhoe.

Bob, short and stocky, wrung his hands. Victor could see beads of sweat on the man's balding head. His tan suit was wrinkled. The man looked anxious and concerned.

On the other hand, Col. Hal Stevens, the director of engineering and housing, was quite a contrast. Tall and broad-shouldered, Stevens wore a tailored military uniform, complete with medals representative of his many years of service.

Victor explained to his two bosses that while he was digging the new grave at a depth of four feet, the backhoe broke through the top of an old casket.

"Could you see a body?" asked Bob.

"No," said Victor.

Bob turned and headed back to the car. He pulled a flashlight from the glove box. Meanwhile, Victor had returned to the Kubota and brought back a short ladder that had been tied to the backhoe. Back at the gravesite, Bob signaled to Victor that he was the one to climb into the hole.

Cautiously, Victor moved step-by-step down the ladder being careful not to disturb the loose dirt any more than necessary. When he had gone as far as he dared, he bent his knees and pointed the beam between the decaying boards of the casket.

"See anything?" Bob asked in a whisper.

"No, it's empty," Victor, replied.

"Have Stanley Chris come over," said Stevens. "Maybe he can give us some idea where it came from." Stanley, the museum curator, was the go-to guy when it came to historical questions.

Bob pulled out his cell. Fifteen minutes later Stanley showed up. Victor explained what had happened.

"I don't have any record of anything being buried in this area," said Stanley as he peered into the hole. "Let me take a closer look."

Just as Victor had done, Stanley clutched the ladder, bent down in the soft soil, and aimed the beam of light into the decaying casket.

"You're right, Victor. There is absolutely nothing in this casket," he said, shaking his head. Then he poked his finger into the wood. "Strange, it's a lot heavier than a normal pre-twentieth century casket. I've never seen one constructed like this. Look at the steel straps around the casket and the thickness of the planks. Looks like the wood has been treated. That's why it hasn't totally rotted."

Stanley began to brush the dirt away from the top of the casket.

“Wow, look at this!” he exclaimed. He had uncovered a large black cross. He pulled out his pocketknife and scraped the tarnished object.

“Holy shit, it’s silver. It must weigh twenty or thirty pounds. It is worth thousands of dollars.”

“Hal, can I have your guys dig up this casket and haul it over to the museum? Since there is no body, we don’t have to worry about legal problems with possible next of kin. In the lab, I can examine it more carefully. There is no way that we can leave that cross sitting out here. It’s priceless.”

“Not a problem, Stanley,” responded Hal. “I’ll have it delivered to the museum right away.”

THE BLACK DODGE CHARGER PULLED ONTO THE MAIN AVENUE IN HIGHLAND FALLS, NEW YORK. It approached the main gate at West Point Military Academy.

Approximately three blocks from the gate was a McDonald's. An older McDonald's, it was the first fast-food restaurant in Highland Falls. Almost forty years earlier the first owners had realized the financial advantage of locating their restaurant so close to the main gate.

Nowadays, the town was overrun with newer, more modern fast-food restaurants. Subsequent owners had made half-hearted attempts to remodel the old building, but inside, not much had changed. Eating inside was like stepping into a time machine – it still had the flavor and décor of the first McDonald's from four decades earlier.

The most striking change was in the menu. No longer could a customer count on placing an order for a greasy burger and salty fries. Instead, the choices included turkey, soy and veggie burgers. The famous fries had disappeared, replaced by apple slices and carrot sticks. However, if a customer wanted an old-fashioned hamburger and fries, the vintage fare was listed at the bottom of the menu board in small letters. The cost for each of the "old" items was a good three times that of the new, healthier foods.

The Charger pulled into a parking space near the side door. A young man, still in his early twenties, stepped out of the vehicle. Butch Langston stood well over six and a half feet tall and weighed nearly two hundred fifty pounds. Inside, he found that he was the lone customer at this late hour.

Predictably, he placed his order for three cheeseburgers, a large Coke and a super-size order of fries. As he waited for his meal, he thought about the changes the coming school year would bring. When he had first arrived at the academy three years earlier, he had no idea what to expect.

During those years he had virtually no freedom. Now he was a senior or a "firstie," the nickname for a first-year cadet. He had his own car and could come and go whenever he wanted. Now, at 2330 hours, or 11:30 p.m., he marveled at his liberty to order late-night burgers at McDonald's.

This summer he had only gone home for two weeks. He returned early to take a make-up math course. Then he would be helping the incoming freshmen, called plebes, to prepare for the coming year and their new lives at the Point. He had arrived on campus two weeks ago and had been working with the staff getting ready for what was known as



“beast barracks.” The incoming plebes would learn all they needed to know to be successful cadets.

Butch was a proud member of the varsity football team. Unfortunately, the football program had a rather lackluster record. Last season the team had squeezed out only four wins. Two of the losses were against archrivals Navy and Air Force. Even so, being a member of the varsity football team made him a semi-celebrity. At least, he thought he was.

Back home, just being accepted at West Point brought him the status of a hometown hero. He had graduated from a small rural high school in Wisconsin. His senior class was small, numbering only one hundred five graduates. All through school he had won honors for his athletic achievements and was considered a star football player. His grades and SAT scores weren't great, but they were enough to get him into most colleges. His dad's friendship with the governor had made the difference. He made the cut and was accepted at the prestigious West Point Military Academy. To his dismay, he was only good enough to play back-up halfback with the Black Knights. Every year he had struggled to keep his grades high enough to be academically eligible to play football. Being on the football team had its perks. Players ate at their own team table and were served far more food than the other cadets. Plus, they were given more time to consume their meals. He liked the camaraderie on the team. His teammates were special to each other. He had made friendships that would last a lifetime. Butch cherished the time he had played football.

It seemed like it was taking forever to get his burgers. He peered over the counter to check on the cook's progress. Finally, the order came up. He took his tray to a table near the window and unwrapped the first burger while nibbling at a handful of fries.

He paused only to look up when he heard the side door swing open. He was a bit surprised to see that a young woman had come in alone. At first, he assumed she was just a pre-teen girl. She was very, very short, maybe no taller than four feet eight inches. Even her hair was short. He tried to remember what they called that type of a cut. A pixie cut? He glanced down and saw that she had on black patent leather high heels. What was most striking was that her skin was white as snow.

Even though he knew it was impolite to stare, he couldn't take his eyes off her. She looked like a China doll. She wore a Goth-style outfit. Her face stood out in contrast with the pale skin because she wore black lipstick and had a silver nose ring. Butch noticed that she had also painted her fingernails black to match her outfit.

He watched as she chatted with the cashier. She paid for a large Coke, and then turned and looked directly at him. Oops, he thought, I've been caught staring.

To his surprise, she walked directly to his table, pulled out a chair, and sat down across from him.

“Hi,” she said. “My name is Kelly. I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that I should be home and that I'm too young to be out here without my parents. Let me tell you this, I'm nineteen years old, I graduated from Highland Falls High School last year, and I guarantee you that I am old enough to be here tonight.”

Butch smiled at her abrupt introduction.

“Well, I guess I could ask you to sit down, but you're already sitting down.”

She certainly wasn't shy.

“You go to the Point, don't you?” she asked.

Butch laughed. “How can you tell?”

“It's simple – your haircut and how straight you're sitting. I've lived all my life in Highland Falls, and I know a West Point cadet when I see one. How come they let you out tonight?”

“It's summer. I'm a senior, and we can get off post anytime. I'm here to prepare for beast week.”

Her eyes focused on his short-sleeved shirt and the bulging muscles.

“I'll bet you play football.”

“How'd you guess?”

“By your strong arms,” she said with a grin. “Listen, when you get done eating, you want to go some place with me?”

She caught him off guard. He certainly wasn't expecting such an upfront offer.

“Sure. Where you want to go?”

“I don't know. Maybe we can just go out and park somewhere.”

This can't be happening, he thought. At West Point his social life was somewhat restricted, to say the least. Cadets at West Point don't have time for dates. They have unbelievably long working hours, and they're lucky if they get four hours sleep a night. Dating during their time at West Point is almost unthinkable.

Even during the summer break when the cadets go home to family, they're usually so tired they spend the two weeks sleeping or staring vacantly at TV. Butch had led a celibate life during the last three years – not his choice, just the bitter truth.

About five or six percent of the cadets are women, but the academy discourages fraternization between the men and women. Of course, that didn't stop it from happening, but there were very few male cadets lucky enough to have any encounter with the females. The academy brass seemed to have forgotten what it's like to be young. They prohibited adult magazines and videos. Cadets joked that being at the academy was like

being a novice priest at a seminary – except for the luxury of having a laptop computer. Cadets were issued their own laptops when they first enrolled. They all had free access to the academy’s wireless network. It didn’t take long for the cadets to figure out how to surf for porn. They were careful not to give their email addresses or offer to pay for what they saw. Instead, they tended to surf the free net and did everything possible to prevent anyone from discovering their identities.

Of course, the academy’s leaders weren’t fools. Obviously, with four thousand horny cadets, porn websites were hit more at West Point than just about anywhere else in the world. Butch had a pretty good idea what might happen tonight. So easy, he thought. Here he had only dreamed about sex during his time at the academy.

Yet, here was this bold young woman inviting him out for a drive and offering to “park somewhere.” He wolfed down his last burger, picked up his Coke, stood up, and pushed back his chair.

“Let’s go!” he said without hesitation.

As Butch and Kelly approached the door, he caught a glimpse of their reflection in the glass. Butch towered over the petite girl. They definitely made a strange pair.

Just how did he measure up? He knew he was far from handsome. He hated his large nose. His ears stuck out. Despite his nervous habit of pressing them back at odd times during the day, they stubbornly remained in place. Another thing that annoyed him was his tendency to blush easily. It was difficult to hide his emotions as his face turned red quickly when he was angry or embarrassed. His pale complexion kept him out of the sunlight as his skin burned easily. His hair was a reddish brown, likely a trait passed down from his Norse ancestors. He hated the color. More than anything, his hair disturbed him the most – he was just too hairy. Even his forearms and the backs of his fingers sprouted that ugly amber fur.

As for his body, he had issues with his huge hands and super sized feet. His big-boned body would likely turn to fat as he got older. But for now, with all the physical training at West Point and the daily workouts with weights, his shoulders were broad, his biceps huge, and his waist narrow.

Clothes didn’t matter to him. He pulled on whatever was semi-clean. He had to look down to remember what he had on. Tonight his outfit was a black short-sleeved polo shirt, Levis and run-down sneakers.

All in all, if you didn’t look at his face, he looked great. Nevertheless, he had no idea why this Kelly was so interested in going for a drive.

Standing beside him at the door, she almost looked like a pixie, maybe a fairy child from a children’s story. At age thirteen, he had taken his younger brother to see “Peter

Pan.” That little Tinkerbell was jealous of Wendy, and she had a thing going for Peter. His mind wandered, imagining Peter and Tinkerbell having sex. He wondered if having sex with Kelly would be like Peter having sex with Tinker. Could someone so big have sex with such a tiny woman?

As they crossed the parking lot, he pulled out his car keys and pushed the unlock button. The lights flashed on the ten-year-old Charger.

“That’s a cool car.”

“Yup,” said Butch. “I just bought it. It’s ten years old, but it only has twenty thousand miles on it. The guy that owned it bought it new and always kept it in the garage. It has customized exhaust, special performance options for the engine, cool mag wheels and new high-performance tires.

“On the inside it looks like no one’s ever sat in it, and I was very lucky. Most of my fellow cadets will be making car payments for the next six years. I’ve saved enough money that I could pay cash, and I won’t be stuck with all those payments.”

Remembering to act like a gentleman, he opened the door for Kelly. Butch walked around to the driver’s side. As he got in, he noticed Kelly caressing the soft black leather.

“This even smells like a new car,” she said.

“Where do you want to go?” Butch asked, realizing that since she was just nineteen, they couldn’t go to a bar; the drinking age in New York was twenty-one.

“I don’t know,” said Kelly. “Let’s just drive around for a while.”

Neither of them had much to say, but soon Kelly was making small talk.

“So, is your name really Butch?”

“No,” he said, “My first name is Jerald. I was named after my father. Instead of being called junior, somewhere along the line they called me Butch, and as long as I can remember, everyone has called me Butch. Is your name really Kelly?” he asked.

“Of course, my name is Kelly Anderson. It always has been,” she laughed at her own joke.

As they drove out of town heading south toward Bear Mountain, they talked about his life as a cadet, growing up in Wisconsin, and about how boring it was to have to live nineteen years in Highland Falls.

Butch noticed her rifling through her purse as if looking for something. She withdrew a compact and a small white plastic packet.

“Do you want to snort some coke?” she asked.

“Hell, no,” said Butch. “They piss us every month. If we come up positive, we’re kicked out of the academy. I’m certainly not going to do anything that could ruin my whole career.”

“Do you care if I take a little coke?” asked Kelly.

“It’s your body. Do what you want,” he snapped.

Kelly opened the compact and set it in her lap. She placed two small strips of white powder on the mirror, rolled a twenty-dollar bill and snorted coke into her nose.

“Why the hell do you do that?” asked Butch.

“I can get along fine without the stuff, but when you're a little high, you can really perform sex.”

Now there was no doubt. No doubt it was about her wanting to have sex.

“What are you? A prostitute or something?”

“No,” she said. “Nothing like that, I just really like having sex. I can't explain it, but I just love to be screwed.”

Butch glanced at her, checking out her cleavage and the swelling breasts spilling out of the top of her black low-cut blouse. He felt a thickness in his groin.

He should have heeded his father’s warning words. A colonel in the Wisconsin National Guard, his dad often said, “If something feels wrong, you can pretty well bet that it is wrong.” That message flashed in the back of Butch’s brain.

His father’s words and his common sense told him one thing, but his body didn’t agree. His other brain in his pants was already geared to go. Butch pulled off onto a dirt road, drove up into the hills and stopped in a grassy clearing.

He leaned over and kissed her gently on the lips, expecting to proceed slowly and carefully so as not to scare her off.

That wasn’t Kelly’s plan. Her tongue quickly meshed with his. Before he knew it, she was trying to unzip his fly. She was breathing heavily.

“I want you inside of me.” Her words weren’t a request, but a demand.

“There's no way we can do it in this car. I'm too big,” Butch gasped. “I’ve got a blanket in the trunk. Let’s get out of the car,” he continued, reaching down to open the driver’s door.

Soon, he had the red plaid woolen blanket spread out on the grass behind the car. A full moon provided just enough light to see, and the night sky was dark enough to keep the act semi-private.

Kelly kicked off her high heels, yanked her blouse over her head, released her breasts from her bra, slithered out of her skirt, and pulled down her black panty hose. She wore no panties. She stood about two feet in front of him, boldly facing him. Even though she was short, she had a well-proportioned body. Her breasts jutted out, just ready to be sucked. Butch looked downward at the dark triangle between her legs.

It was just too much.

Butch tore off his clothes, wadding up his jeans, and tossing underwear aside. The rest happened so fast that he couldn't remember anything other than his penis driving into her moist body. He held himself up by his arms, holding his frenzied body in a push-up pose, and plunged in and out. He climaxed in what seemed like seconds. He rolled off of the girl, breathing as if he had just run a hundred-yard dash.

He leaned over and touched her cheek. She didn't respond.

"ARE YOU OK?" he asked.

Still no response. He shook her shoulder. She remained motionless; eyes open, staring blankly at nothing.

"Are you OK?" he asked again, almost screaming. Still no response.

Oh, my God, had he injured her? Maybe he was just too big. But it had been so easy, and she was enjoying it. He was sure of that.

Then he remembered the cocaine.

"Oh shit, she's stoned!" he realized.

Now what should he do? He needed to get her to a hospital. He got up, pulled on his shorts and pushed his legs into his crumpled Levi's while hopping barefoot toward the car. He picked up her purse that was gaping open on the passenger seat. He opened it and took out her wallet. He fumbled through her cards until he found her driver's license. Yes, that was her picture with the name Kelly Jane Anderson. Her address was in Highland Falls.

His eyes focused on her birth date. He looked again. She wasn't nineteen – she was just sixteen! This was bad news, really bad news. He was twenty-two; she was sixteen. That's statutory rape. He would go to jail if the police found out. He collapsed in the driver's seat, holding the girl's driver's license in his quivering hand.

He could take her into Newburg, drop her off near the hospital. Someone would find her. That was the solution. But first, he had to get her dressed.

Her body remained immobile, still on the blanket, her legs spread apart, her tiny form motionless.

"Kelly, you need to get dressed," he whispered.

No response. No movement.

He touched her cheek again. He leaned closer, hoping to detect some breaths coming in and out. He touched her throat, feeling for a pulse. None. He started CPR, pressing on her chest a hundred times a minute. After a few minutes, he again checked for a pulse. Still nothing. He stood up, bracing one hand on the trunk of the car. He took a deep gasp of air, shook his head from side to side, and tried to gather his senses.

Oh, God, he finally realized, she really is dead.



OUT! OUT! HE NEEDED TO GET THE HELL OUT OF THERE RIGHT NOW.

He pulled his shirt over his head and struggled to push his arms into the sleeves. He crammed his feet into his sneakers without tying the shoestrings. He felt into the wrong pocket for his keys. He fumbled his right hand into the other front pocket, stopped, and clasped the keys tightly in his shaking hand. He couldn't just leave her lying on the ground.

"You stupid shit," he shrieked at her lifeless form. "You snort that damn coke. Now you're dead," he screamed.

He would have to get rid of the body. Someone would have seen them leave the McDonald's together. Cops would question him. He pounded his head with his fist. He had a condom in his wallet, but he had been in such a hurry, he didn't think to use it. His semen was inside her, and it even had dribbled over her lower body. Investigators would run the DNA and match it to him. The army kept DNA records on every service member. It identified people better than old-fashioned dog tags.

"Shit. Shit. Shit," he mumbled unconsciously.

The longer he waited, the greater the chance of someone driving by and finding him. He had to do something and do it soon. Where could he take the body to hide it?

Obviously, this wasn't the first time this friggin' chick had picked up some guy. If she didn't come home, her family would probably just assume she had run away. No one would look for her for days, maybe weeks. He could get away with all this as long as no one knew where she had gone. As long as no one found the body, he was free. But where could he hide a corpse where it would never be found?

"The tunnels!" His lips moved, but no sound came out. It was as though a light bulb had turned on in his head. Of course! He could hide the body in the tunnels. Sometimes, he reminded himself, he was downright brilliant.



WEST POINT, NEW YORK, HAS BEEN A MILITARY INSTALLATION SINCE BEFORE THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR. Forts Putnam and Clinton were built in the 1700s to defend the Hudson River from the British. Numerous redoubts connected the forts by a series of underground tunnels.

When West Point became the United States Military Academy, the buildings were heated via these tunnels by high-pressure steam from a power plant near the Hudson. Over the years, the old tunnels were gradually abandoned and new ones built. Still, history won out. Some of the tunnels intersected with the Revolutionary era redoubt tunnels, dug more than two hundred years earlier. As far as anyone knew, the underground passages had never been accurately and completely mapped.

Everyone heard the stories about cadets sneaking through the tunnels and entering the superintendent's office. Likely, it was just one of the academy's urban legends. Although that part was probably inaccurate, one element of the story lived on in a secret club known as the "Tunnel Rats." No one knew when the club first began, but it was general knowledge that only twenty-five cadets were admitted each year.

New members had to meet certain standards. First, prospective members had to have survived their beginning two years at the academy. Second, they had to meet academic criteria – being in the bottom twenty percent of the class. Finally, they had to be willing to take a secret blood oath.

The Tunnel Rats were the opposite of an academic honor society. The Rats provided a sense of community for cadets who struggled to survive in the highly competitive West Point environment. It gave them emotional support and served as a resource of information on tests, papers and projects. Membership had recently been opened to qualifying female cadets. Ceremonies mimicked those of a secret fraternal organization, but were punctuated by lively beer-drinking sessions. Members had access keys to the mechanical rooms that led to the tunnels. Last year, Butch had become a Rat, and he took pride in his status.

So the solution of what to do with Kelly's body was simple: Take the body underground and hide it far down in one of the redoubt tunnels. The tunnels were dry, and no one would ever find a buried body.

He was confident his plan would work. The hard part was getting the body back to the Point. He glanced at the naked girl on the blanket. He couldn't just drop the body on the back seat of his car. He had to pass through the military police checkpoint at Stony Lonesome Gate. The gate guards always checked the back seat.

Then it came to him – he would use the duffel bag where he kept his field gear. It was in the trunk. He fingered his keys until he found the trunk key. Once the trunk was open, he pulled out his duffel bag, opened it, and dumped his gear on the ground. He took the empty bag over to the blanket and laid it parallel to Kelly’s body. She was very small. He figured he could stuff her body into the drawstring bag.

Rolling the body to its back, he positioned the arms tightly at the sides.

Then the dilemma: Feet first or headfirst? Did it really matter?

He didn’t want to argue with himself. He began at the head. He worked quickly. It was just like slipping a pillow into a pillowcase, but despite his best efforts, the body didn’t fit. The legs were too long.

“Damn! Damn!” he muttered angrily. “I’ll go the other way.”

He gripped the closed end of the bag and pulled the bag off the corpse. Then he dropped to the ground next to the knees, folded them tightly and pressed them close to the body, making the body parts more compact.

He again threaded the duffel bag over the corpse, beginning at the legs. He bent the elbows, folded them tightly into the chest, and tucked the hands by the face. He turned, picked up the scattered clothing and stuffed it into the bag’s open spaces. He took a step backward to assess his work. He stared at the lumps in the canvas – all that remained of the once-living Kelly.

None of this should have happened.

“It’s your fault,” he said to the body in the bag. “You lied to me, and then you did drugs and died. It’s not my fault.”

He retrieved the wallet and purse from the car and crammed them into the bag. He tightened the drawstring and picked up the duffel by its handle. It was easy to lift. Kelly only weighed about eighty pounds. He could dead lift two hundred twenty pounds. He settled the duffel inside the wide trunk, stuffing loose gear around it. After slamming the trunk, he climbed into the Charger and punched the start button with his index finger. He slowly drove down the dirt road and onto the highway, heading back toward Highland Falls.

It seemed unreal, so like a nightmare. He couldn’t believe what had occurred. His mind kept replaying all that had happened this evening – the movie, the cheeseburgers, and meeting Kelly. Then his world and all of his dreams had turned upside down.

“Oh, shit! Holy mother of God – shit!” he stammered.

His blood froze. He could see red and blue lights flashing in the rearview mirror. A patrol car pulled up behind him. Its front bumper was only a few feet from the girl’s lifeless body.

“I’m dead meat,” he said slowly and softly. “They must have found out what happened.”

As soon as the cop pulled him over, he would be going to jail for the rest of his life. He was tempted to floorboard the gas pedal and outrun the patrol car. The Charger had a special high-performance engine. It had power. No way, he reasoned. He'd seen enough cop movies to know that it wouldn't work.

“No,” he whispered. “I’ve got to keep a clear head. How could they possibly know what happened?”

He turned the steering wheel to the right and pulled onto the edge of the road. He watched in the mirror as the cop car stopped. The officer got out and slowly walked to the driver’s window. He tapped on the glass and indicated that the window should be opened. Butch smiled nervously and pushed the window button. The electric window rolled down.

“Yes, officer?” asked Butch.

“Sir, may I see your driver's license, proof of registration and insurance card?” Butch slowly gathered the documents and handed them to the officer.

“You’re a cadet at West Point?”

“Yes, sir,” said Butch.

“You're out a little late tonight,” said the officer.

“Yes, sir. I went to a movie, and I'm on my way back now.”

“I thought you guys had some kind of curfew.”

“Not during the summer,” said Butch. The officer looked in the back seat.

“You're by yourself?”

“Yes, sir,” said Butch.

“Well, we’re checking all vehicles. We’ve had a number of overdoses on bad cocaine tonight. We've got four kids in the hospital and one dead on arrival.”

The officer looked more closely at Butch’s face, particularly his eyes.

“You haven't taken any drugs, have you?”

“No, sir, they test us almost every week. If we come up positive, we’re through,” responded Butch.

“All right, you take it easy.”

“Yes, sir, officer.”

Butch exhaled slowly as he watched the cop go back to his car. Then he inhaled and exhaled once again – more of a sigh of relief than anything else. He waited until the officer pulled around him. Then he slowly got back on the road, keeping his attention focused on oncoming vehicles.

He was becoming absolutely paranoid. The next stop would be the MPs at Stony Lonesome Gate. Somehow, he imagined that his car was transparent, and everybody could see Kelly's body bundled in the trunk.

At the gate the MP saluted, checked his ID card, glanced at the window sticker, and waved him through. Butch drove to the cadet parking lot and pulled into an empty space.

He braced his arms against the steering wheel, as if he was preparing to crash into a concrete wall. Yet nothing happened, nothing at all. He continued to look straight ahead, totally immobile. He couldn't focus on what was right ahead.

How could he – Jerald “Butch” Langston – sink into this horror?

**HE HAD TO GET THE BODY OUT OF THE TRUNK.**

The temperature in the car's trunk would likely reach one hundred twenty degrees during the day. The smell alone would overpower anyone who came within a short distance of the car. Some people would retch in dry heaves or spill the contents of their stomachs right there in the parking lot. Some would recognize the smell of death. Someone would call the police to investigate the origin of the odor.

Rigor mortis would set in, stiffening the corpse. Butch remembered the dead body of the family cat. She had died overnight. He was the one who had found her curled in her bed as if she were still asleep. But when he touched the body, he found it as stiff as a rock. A human body, even though it was as small as Kelly's, would make the duffel bag unbendable and difficult to move. He had to get rid of the corpse that very night.

He got out of the Charger, walked around to the trunk, and opened it. He lifted the duffel bag and threw it over his shoulder. He felt the body hanging limply against his back. It was still flexible. He tried to carry it as if it contained only his gear – not a dead girl. He headed down the pathway towards Grant barracks. He prayed that he would not cross paths with anyone, but he assumed that this early in the morning, meeting someone was unlikely. When he got to the barracks, he took the side entrance that led downstairs into the basement where the washers and dryers were located. At the far wall was a locked steel door. A sign on it read:

***DANGER***  
***HIGH VOLTAGE***  
***AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY***

He pulled out his keys, fingering them one-by-one until he found the master key. That was one of the perks of being a Tunnel Rat. Each of them had a key to the tunnels.

He set the duffel bag on the floor, inserted the key in the lock, opened the door, and dragged the bag into the room. He flipped the switch to turn on the low-level lighting and quietly closed the door. He double-checked to be sure it locked securely behind him.

He stood in a concrete vault-like room. Rows of tall gray metal cabinets lined the walls. Gauges indicated voltage and amperage. The panels had circuit breakers that served to turn on or shut off power to different sections of the building. He could hear the steady hum of electrical power from the transformers along the west wall.

At the far end of the room was yet another secure door. He used the same key, opened the door, and stepped into the steam distribution room. Here, high-pressure steam entered the huge heat exchangers that took the cool water from the building, reheated it,

and sent it back through the radiators. Twenty-five horsepower motors drove the pumps. It was hot inside the room – likely more than one hundred degrees.

He lifted the duffel bag and headed to yet a third door. This one also posted a warning sign:

***DANGER***  
***ASBESTOS***  
***DO NOT ENTER WITHOUT***  
***PROTECTIVE GEAR***

Again, he ignored the warning. He turned off the light switch and waited until his eyes adjusted to the low light inside. He locked the door behind him.

He stood at the entrance to a concrete tunnel. He'd been there before. The tunnel was twelve feet wide and a good ten feet tall. Compact fluorescent lights spaced every thirty feet ran along the ceiling. A person could drive a car down the wide tunnel. Now, the temperature was even higher than it had been in the heat exchange room. Sweat poured in rivulets down Butch's face. He slung the duffel bag over his shoulder and made his way down the tunnel. He could hear the steady drip-drip of water. Drains were spaced at even intervals along the floor. Large steam pipes hung from the ceiling, suspended by anchors. Newer pipes were wrapped with ceramic insulation; some of the older pipes were still coated with asbestos. Hundreds of miles of pipe ran under the academy grounds. The asbestos would remain in place. It would be impossible to take out the tons of asbestos. The logical solution was to keep the insulation encapsulated. It was dangerous to be here without a protective mask. Butch stifled a chuckle. This was all part of the mystique of being a Tunnel Rat.

Butch began his trek deeper into the tunnel. The asbestos made this a dangerous place, but the high-pressure pipes and high temperatures made it even more perilous. A break in one of the steam pipes could open up a high-pressure leak. If a person stepped on a crack from a broken pipe, its rupture could cut off an arm or even sever a head from a body.

But that was not an issue tonight. All Butch wanted to do was get rid the damn duffel bag that contained Kelly's body. When he had gone about two hundred feet, he turned into a side tunnel where the lights were spaced even farther apart. He walked down another one hundred and fifty feet to where the tunnel ended at a metal fire door. He rotated the handle on the door and pushed it open, revealing the blackness behind it. He reached into his left pants pocket and pulled out an LED flashlight. It illuminated the space ahead of him. He could see an old steam tunnel. Likely it had been closed for

decades. The air was much cooler in this section of the tunnel. He stopped briefly to wipe the sweat from his face and neck.

Here, chunks of concrete, wood from shattered furniture, discarded pipes, and piles of old books littered the floor. Now the tunnel had shrunk. It was only about eight feet wide and eight feet high. He resumed his walk, figuring he was now under the parade field. He came to another side tunnel, even smaller yet. It was only about four feet wide and six feet high. He had to stoop and carry the duffel by its handle.

When he had gone only fifty feet, it came to an end. Here, a makeshift door built of heavy timbers blocked the way. Butch dropped the duffel, walked to the barrier and reached between the heavy boards until his fingers felt a latch. He released it. The boarded wall swung open on hinges. It was a door – not a wall – designed to deceive and discourage anyone snooping around in the tunnels. He retrieved the bag and passed through the opening.

Butch continued another sixty feet until he came to hundreds of bricks scattered randomly on the floor. Beyond the bricks stood an opening on the right. He stooped and dragged the bag through the opening. Once inside, he pointed his light into the brick interior. The steam tunnels were finally behind him. Apparently, he had reached deep enough that he entered the original tunnel construction. The tunnel descended even more deeply into the ground.

After another hundred feet, the tunnel turned sharply to the right. He entered a chamber. It had three small rooms on one side. Could these be the old cells used to hold prisoners during the Revolutionary War? In modern times, the dead were buried under the north side of the plain, near Execution Hollow. If he had his bearings right, he was actually under the tennis courts. He stepped into the first room. He struck a match and ignited a Coleman lantern. He was now in the Tunnel Rats' sanctuary. The three rooms were clean and orderly; in sharp contrast to the littered mess he had passed minutes earlier.

Now he sighed with a sense of relief as he gazed at the neatly arranged furniture. Forbidden reading material was scattered on the low tables. A battery-operated DVD player and an LCD screen had been set up to play sports events and X-rated videos. This is the place where he and his fellow rats liked to hang out and escape the stress of academy life.

It was cooler now. The underground sanctuary stayed at sixty degrees year-round. He sighed as he looked at the bar along one wall. It was well stocked with bottles of beer, a variety of sodas and even some hard liquor. After Butch's stressful night and heavy work, he was thirsty, really thirsty. He grabbed a beer, wiped off the top on his shirt, and

twisted the cap. The cool liquid ran freely down his open throat. He tossed the empty bottle on the floor and opened another beer. Then he opened a third.

With the alcoholic euphoria boosting his courage, his thoughts returned to Kelly's body. He needed to take it even more deeply into the old tunnels. The low temperature and humidity meant that as long as he covered the duffel bag with tightly packed dirt, no telltale odor would escape. Besides, he had to make sure that anything that could identify him would never be found. His name and serial number were stenciled on the bag. He told himself that the body must stay hidden for the next one hundred years.

An opening at the back of the third cell led to an older part of the tunnels. It was partially collapsed. As far as he knew, no one had bothered to crawl over the rubble. It looked too dangerous, and there was always the possibility that the ceiling might collapse. It had happened before. In 1984, a sinkhole opened up next to the canoe house. Apparently part of the old tunnel system had given way, opening up a substantial depression. The grounds crew filled the hole with several truckloads of crushed rock.

He dragged the duffel through the opening and carefully picked his way over the rubble. About one hundred feet in, he figured he had gone far enough. It was time to reassess his position. He set the bag down on the rough surface and aimed the beam of light along the walls. On the right, the bricks had fallen away. It looked like there may be an opening behind the wall. With a sigh of relief, he reassured himself that this was the perfect place to get rid of his horrible burden. He placed the light on a brick and aimed its beam at the opening.

Instantly, he stopped. He thought had heard something. Impossible. Where had the sound come from? He froze in place and listened closely once again. He definitely heard a sound – something akin to a moan. His heart rate accelerated. Was it simply the rhythm of his own heart beating out of control?

Then he heard the pitiful sound again. He grabbed his light and began to search the rubble, foot-by-foot and inch-by-inch. A chill ran down his spine. Out of the corner of his eye, he thought he saw movement inside the duffel bag. At first, he was elated. Maybe she wasn't dead after all.

Then his thoughts turned to the awful truth – only Kelly was inside his duffel bag. She was the only thing that could explain the moaning and the movement. If she lived, she would tell the police where he had taken her and what she thought he planned to do with her body.

Then he heard the moan again, only it was louder than before. The duffel began to thrash about as if it had a life unto itself. He imagined knees and elbows poking from side



to side in the girl's futile effort to escape. Without thinking, Butch picked up a brick and held it in both hands over his head.

He might have slammed the brick onto the bag had he not seen the hole at the drawstring begin to widen. Two black-painted fingernails emerged. The hole opened even more. Now, one tiny hand emerged. Then another hand joined the first. Soon her head would be free, and she would stare into his eyes, blaming him for his deadly plan.

With all the strength he could muster, he brought the brick down heavily against the bag, roughly near where her left ear might have been. Once wasn't enough. She still cried out, and her shrieks intensified. He struck again – once, twice, three and four times. He pounded at the same spot until he heard the crack of bone. The bag darkened as blood soaked through the canvas. He let the brick fall from his hands. He bent over, almost falling to his knees, and began to sob.

Now, there was no movement. No sound. Nothing at all.

His stomach churned. He grasped his belly, hoping to control the urge to expel the contents of his stomach. But it was too late. Now he knew that he was going to be sick. Vomit swelled in his throat. He turned to his left and spewed forth a lumpy mixture of warm beer and chunks of burger. Stomach acid burned the inside of his nose and dripped over his lips and down his chin. He braced his midsection with tightly folded forearms and retched violently.

God, what had he done? How could he have been so stupid?

He fell to his knees, continuing to cry, moan and beat his fists on the ground. He had no idea how long he had been on the tunnel floor, stretched out alongside the bloody body bag.

Finally, he struggled to his feet and wiped his dripping nose on his shirtsleeve. His mind cleared. He had to finish what he had started. He crawled to the wall and began tearing at the loose bricks. Gradually, he had made an opening large enough to cram the bag inside. He pressed against the duffel, forcing it inside as far as it would go. Then he began to replace the bricks.

“What the fuck?” he said aloud, unable to believe his own eyes.

He picked up his flashlight and aimed its beam directly into the remaining hole. Inside the opening, he could make out a second body. Someone had beaten him to this spot.

He could see that it was the body of an old man, dressed in tattered rags. A long white beard came from the chin and curled itself in a circular shape. The thick yellow fingernails were at least two inches in length. A thin layer of dust covered the entire body. The corpse must have occupied the hole for decades. Yet, thought Butch, it didn't look

shriveled like the bodies of mummies he'd seen in magazines. There was almost no decay on this withered form. He willed himself to draw nearer for a closer look.

Suddenly, the eyes popped open and the twisted fingers reached out and encircled his upper arm.

The cadet struggled to loosen the viselike grip. As if caught in machinery, his body fell helplessly to the rough surface. From somewhere close by, he heard his chilling screams echo throughout the tunnels.

Butch Langston had just come face to face with a terror that would change his life forever.