Confession

By

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Chapter 1

It was a peaceful, clear night under a beautiful full moon in Phoenix, Arizona, in July 1995. However, for Sam Woods, it was anything but peaceful. He tossed and turned, drenched in sweat beneath his bed sheets, tormented by a nightmare that had haunted him for nearly thirty years.

This was Sam's nightmare.

In the Deep South, the field crickets chirped in the night air, creating a feeling like autumn in the cool evening breeze. Sam prowled among the tall pine trees, the sound of twigs and small branches cracking beneath his shoes.

The full moon provided enough light for him to navigate without crashing into a tree, but he still used a flashlight for additional illumination. Sam looked determined as he shone the beam of light among the trees, searching for something he had been seeking for over thirty years.

His flashlight finally found the object of his hunt: a beautiful young woman with shoulder-length blonde hair.

She was tied to the trunk of a pine tree.

She was naked and dead. Hundreds of flies buzzed around her rotting and stinking flesh.

Sam's eyes welled up while he slowly walked closer to her, keeping her body illuminated with his flashlight.

"I'm so sorry!" he told the dead girl while staring at her closed eyes. He reached out and touched her cold cheek. The girl's eyes suddenly opened and gave Sam a blank zombie stare.

He jumped back, tripping over a small tree branch and falling on his ass in the dirt. "Please forgive me!" Sam cried out, standing up with extreme guilt, then inched closer to the girl.

She gave Sam a loving smile.

He noticed a blunt object smashed in all of her front teeth.

She gave Sam a blank, lifeless stare, then screamed a blood-curdling scream that echoed in the woods.

Sam jumped back, scared to death.

The woods were an eerie quiet.

There were a few seconds of her blank stare at Sam. Her eyes flooded with tears. "Why didn't you catch him? It hurt so much. I can't rest until you catch him! You owe me!" the girl sobbed.

She immediately stopped sobbing and stared at Sam with a zombie stare. Her head dropped, and she remained motionless.

Her skin slowly dissolved, along with all of her organs. She was nothing but a skeleton tied to the trunk of that tree.

Sam opened his mouth to speak.

Back to reality in Sam's bedroom, he bolted up in a panic from his bed. "I'm so sorry!" he pleaded while beads of sweat poured down his face. He frantically glanced around his room for the dead girl, but she was not in sight. He wanted to cry, knowing he had another nightmare.

Sam held back his tears while staring at the bare spot where his wife once slept, then recalled those sweet days when he married Vicky. But that stopped eight years ago when she divorced him after twenty-eight years of marriage. Heavy drinking and nightmares were intolerable, and she could not stand it any longer.

He sat on the edge of his bed and ran his right hand through his salt-and-pepper hair, silently praying these nightmares would cease forever.

Sam reached the bedside table and grabbed a quarter bottle of Jack Daniels whiskey. As soon as the bottle was opened, he gulped down the booze and then dropped the bottle to the floor.

Sam stood up and staggered to his bathroom at the other end of his bedroom.

When he was four feet from the bathroom door, his right foot rolled on another empty whiskey bottle on the floor. He started to tumble but quickly grabbed the dresser. Sam did not fall, but the dresser shook, knocking down a framed picture to the floor.

This picture was of his son Charles Woods, a Major in the U.S. Marine Corps Major, with his wife, Beth, and eight-year-old daughter, Mindy. Sam's proud of Charles and his accomplishments in the Marine Corps.

He picked the picture off the floor and set it back on the top of the dresser.

He staggered into the bathroom.

After shaving and taking a hot shower, Sam ate his typical breakfast of Cocoa Krispies and coffee alone in his kitchen.

After he cleaned up his dishes, Sam put on his black suit, white shirt, and red tie.

This morning's drive through the streets of Phoenix was the drive Sam had dreamt about for years.

Sam entered the FBI building where he worked for the past twenty-eight years.

He walked through a maze of cubicles, a beehive of activity with agents keeping America safe from criminals.

"Good morning, Sam. Are you happy this day finally arrived?" an FBI agent called out from his cubicle when he spotted Sam.

"Yeah. It's hard to believe it's finally here," Sam smiled while walking past the agent.

Sam entered his cubicle and stared at it for a few seconds. On his one cubicle wall hung a few pictures of Sam, George Williams, and Peter Bronson during their annual fishing trips to northern California and other old pictures of a younger Sam and Charles.

Sam grabbed his coffee cup off his desk and left his cubicle.

He came back five minutes later and sat down. He kicked his shoes up on his desk and sipped his morning cup of Java.

Peter Bronson walked up to the entrance to Sam's cubicle. Peter was Sam's chief, but Sam remembered the day Peter joined the agency in the early 1970s.

"Sam, they're ready for you."

Sam got up with his coffee cup in hand and walked out of his cubicle with Peter.

He followed Peter through the maze of cubicles, and Sam rolled his eyes when he noticed the area was void of his fellow agents.

They walked by the coffee pot table, where Sam quickly filled his cup.

They headed down the hallway.

The conference room was packed with fifty agents. On the one end of the room hung a "Happy Retirement Sam Woods" banner on the wall above a table.

On the table was a cake decorated with a fishing boat in the water and "Good Luck Sam" above it.

Harry Charles and Nick Wilson, the office's top dogs, stood at one end of the table.

"Is he on his way?" Harry asked Nick.

" I heard Peter is rounding him up."

Sam entered the room with Peter.

Everybody stood up and clapped to honor Sam.

Sam said hello to everybody with his coffee cup as he walked up to the table. He placed his cup by the cake and shook hands with Harry and Nick.

Nick motioned for everybody to sit down and be quiet.

They obeyed.

"Thank you all for attending this special occasion, the retirement of one of the best agents the bureau has had the pleasure of paying. Mister Sam Woods," Nick addressed the crowd.

"And I would like to say that America has been safer with Sam putting criminals behind bars," Harry added.

Nick looked over at Sam. "And now, if Sam wants to say a few words."

Sam reached down, picked up his coffee cup, took a sip, and paused for a few seconds. "I can't believe I started with the bureau forty years ago. It was a great ride. It was an interesting ride," he said, then took another sip of coffee and paused for a few seconds.

"Harry said that America was safer with me putting criminals behind bars." He took another sip of coffee and paused for a few seconds.

"That's true, but there was one criminal I couldn't place behind bars." Sam took another sip of coffee and paused for a few seconds.

"I have regrets over my failure with not catching this sicko," Sam finished, then took a long drink of coffee and paused for a few seconds.

In the back of the conference room, Trevor rolled his eyes and leaned over to Wilfred. "I'm going to puke if I hear that nineteen-sixties October Slayer sob story again," Trevor whispered.

"Tell me about it! That's all I heard during my first week here at the bureau. I never caught the killer, whine whine whine," Wilfred returned in a whisper.

"I know. Sometimes, killers get away. Get over it," Trevor returned in a whisper.

Wilfred nodded in agreement with everybody around them who had heard their whispering.

Sam looked ashamed when he remembered his past failures. "I promised someone that I would solve that case. I broke that promise, and that frustrated me so much that it cost me a divorce." Sam looked remorseful. "And then Bo Smithson from Atlanta took over the case," Sam added and looked pissed. "Why they stuck the dumbest agent in the bureau's history on that case, I'll never know."

Everybody in the room was sick of hearing his whiny story again but was glad it would be for the last time.

"Thank you, Sam; now, if I can get someone to cut the cake, we can proceed," Nick asked the audience. Laurie, an administrative assistant, walked up to the table from the other wall. "I'll cut it," she volunteered with a smile.

An hour later, Sam's party was over. Sam was glad, as he hated being the center of attention. But he had to play the game since everybody who retired was thrown a party.

Sam poured another cup of coffee at the coffee table.

He returned to his cubicle, where Laurie placed a cardboard box on his desk.

He looked around to make sure his eyes were not watching. He opened up a bottom desk drawer, then discreetly removed five folders that were rubber-banded together. They were copies of the case files on the five girls killed by the October Slayer. Sam quickly dropped the five folders into his box.

George Williamson entered Sam's cubicle and startled him.

"George, you scared me," said Sam while he glanced back at the box, ensuring the file folders were safely tucked away.

"Sorry about that, my friend," George said while he watched Sam remove all the pictures from his cubicle wall. I'm sorry I missed your retirement party. I was out checking a lead on a bank robbery case."

"I understand. So, when do you plan on retiring?" Sam replied while he dropped his pictures into his box.

"Hopefully, in two years. My bother-in-law said he could get me a job with security at Warner Brothers," George replied with a gleam in his eyes, thinking about hanging around with famous movie stars.

"Warner Brothers? That sounds like a sweet gig."

"Oh, it is. What are your plans for retirement? Do you plan on getting another job?"

"I'm finished working, so I plan to relax and fish," Sam replied.

"Good. Maybe if you finally let go of that old case, those nightmares will cease."

"I had another one last night."

"You need to find a sweet woman in Florida to take care of you in your golden years," George added with hopeful eyes.

Sam glanced down at his bare ring finger, thinking about Vicky. "That would be nice."

"Hey, George, you have a call about that bank robbery," another FBI agent yelled across the cubicles.

"I'll be there in a second," George yelled back.

"Well, Sam, keep in touch, and maybe we can fish out in the Atlantic this time."

"I would like that very much," Sam replied while they shook hands.

George rushed out of Sam's cubicle.

Peter entered Sam's cubicle. " I guess this is it, Sam."

"Yep, the final day," Sam replied while he glanced around his cubicle.

"Listen, I'm working on a transfer to the Tampa office. If that happens, I'll let you know, and we can get together for some more fishing."

"That would be grand."

Peter stuck out his hand, and Sam shook it. "I'll be in touch soon."

Sam picked up his box and left his cubicle for the last time.

Two months later, Sam packed up his house in Phoenix to move to Florida to finish his golden years.

Outside Sam's house, he was being stalked. Billy Stein was stalking Sam, and Billy was a bully of a man with a temper to match. He sat inside his new 1995 Chevy Impala, with Mississippi plates, a few houses down from Sam's house.

Billy watched while Sam chatted with the Allied moving men outside their van backed into Sam's driveway.

"It's about fucking time," Billy mumbled to himself as he was relieved Sam finally retired from the FBI.

He waited and sipped on his third bottle of Budweiser while he eyed Sam's house. He lit a Marlboro cigarette, smoked and drank beer while watching the moving men load Sam's furniture into the moving van.

Two hours later, the men closed and locked the rear doors of the Allied trailer.

They got inside the truck cab, started, and drove off down the street.

Billy started up his Impala and drove off after the moving van.

Then, for some bizarre reason, Billy followed the moving van to Florida.

He drove back to Mississippi when he got Sam's new address in Daytona Beach.

Chapter 2

Ten years passed.

It was a lovely chilly morning in February across the southeast.

Allan Stein was Billy Stein's brother. Allan now has gray hair, a huge pot belly caused by years of lousy diets, and from being lazy, smoking, and heavy drinking.

Allan lived in St. Cloud, Florida. He retired as an Army Lieutenant Colonel, spending his entire career with the Army Criminal Investigative Command (known as CID) at Fort Gillem, Forest Park, south of Atlanta.

Allan retired from the Army twenty years ago after a successful thirty-year career, where he was one of the most respected CID Agents.

Allan picked St. Cloud for his retirement home since his daughter Becky Adams lived in nearby Kissimmee. Another reason was that Disney was close by, and Patrick Air Force Base was another hour to the east for any military needs. Also, he frequented the Daytona Beach area but stopped those travels five years ago.

Allan spent his golden years writing fiction murder mystery books, which was an idea born during the late 1960s. He decided to make it profitable, as he did not want all his CID experience to go to waste.

Allan sat inside his den, where he had his Dell computer, lazy boy chair, television, and wooden cabinet locked with a padlock. On one wall hung pictures of Allan, his wife, Beverly, and Becky.

Allan sat at his computer desk where his six murder mystery books rested on a shelf above him. The titles were Die My Darling, Prison For Life, No Remorse, Mr. Kind, The Church Man, and The Stalker.

These books supplemented his Army retirement with a little extra cash but never became best sellers.

Allan listened to a local country and western radio station with a Lucky Strike cigarette dangling out of his mouth while typing away on his new Murder At Night manuscript. He planned to send it to his editor, Rodney Burstein.

"Dad, where are you?" Becky called from the living room the second she entered his house with her key.

"I'm in the den, darling," Allan responded, then quickly smashed his Lucky Strike out in the ashtray on his desk. He opened up a desk drawer, hid the ashtray inside, and tried to wave away the evidence.

Becky, with shoulder-length blonde hair, entered the den with a gym bag in hand. She sniffed the air and instantly knew he was smoking. But she gave up scolding him about that nasty habit since it only went in one ear and out the other side.

She dropped her gym bag on the floor, walked up to Allan, and gave him a loving kiss on his cheek. "How's the new manuscript coming along?" she asked while she curiously eyed the monitor.

"I'm tweaking the final draft now. I'll send it to Rodney in a couple of weeks," he answered.

"I'm ready to edit your manuscript when you're done."

"I'll give it to you in a couple of days. And Rodney is also talking about another book after this one."

"You should slow down and enjoy your golden years."

"No way. I love writing what I know best," he replied, then revised some dialogue saved and closed the Word file.

Nancy, his seven-year-old granddaughter, and Michael, his nine-year-old grandson, ran into the den. "Grandpa!" they both cried out in unison, as they loved Allan.

"Nancy! Michael! Come give Grandpa a hug and kiss," he called out while he opened up his arms.

Nancy and Michael ran up to Allan, and they each gave him a loving hug and kissed his cheek.

Becky sat down in the LazBoy chair, grabbed the remote, and turned on the TV. She flipped through the channels and stopped on the Disney channel, where a cartoon was playing.

Nancy and Michael ran over and sat in front of the TV.

Then Nancy eyed the wooden cabinet over at the other wall, and she got curious again.

She jumped up and rushed to the cabinet. She fiddled with the padlock and tried to open it. "Grandpa, are you sure you don't have toys stashed in here?"

Allan got annoyed and rushed over to her. "I've told you before, sweetie, please leave that cabinet alone!" he lightly scolded her while he removed her hands from the lock.

"Yes, Nancy, Grandpa doesn't want you to see his Army secrets," Becky said sarcastically.

Allan playfully stuck his tongue out at Becky while he walked Nancy back to his chair and plopped her on his lap.

"Like I've said a million times before, it's just a bunch of old Army stuff in there. No toys. Now, why don't I tell you a new story!" he offered with a wide grin.

Michael's eyes lit up with joy, and they ran over to them. He sat down on the floor.

Allan placed Nancy on the floor next to Michael.

"Okay, this is the story of Prince Luna from the planet Neileon. The story starts with six young animals that lived and were best friends at the Kennedy Space Center. They lived an hour from this house. There was a gator, skunk, rabbit, bobcat, a snake, and a poodle that loved watching all the rocket launches," he told them.

"What were their names?" Michael curiously asked.

"Well, the gator was named Wally. The skunk was named Stinker."

Michael and Nancy snickered.

"The snake was named Slither, the bobcat was named Putty, and the rabbit was named Bugsy."

"Just like Bugs Bunny," Nancy called out.

"Yes, just like Bugs Bunny. Let me see, oh yeah, and the poodle was named Touché," he added. "Then, one day, Prince Luna flew his spaceship to Earth but was shot down by some mean Aliens from his home planet. His spaceship crashed and landed down at the Kennedy Space Center one night."

"Did he die?" Nancy asked, being concerned.

"Oh no, he was found by the six animal friends who called themselves The Dreamers."

"Whew! I'm glad," Michael said while he wiped his forehead relieved.

"Why are they called The Dreamers?" Nancy was curiously piqued.

"Well, because they dreamed of being Astronauts and going on adventures in space."

"I'm a space dreamer!" Michael called out while he puffed out his chest.

Allan and Becky chuckled.

"See, Dad, you should write kids' books instead of books about murder," Becky praised Allan.

"With my thirty years of Army criminal investigative experience, I write what I know. It comforts me."

Becky rolled her eyes, and then she got up from the chair. "Whatever. I'm going to change and then go jogging. Then we'll head out after I take a shower."

Allan continued with the story while Becky grabbed her gym bag and headed to the bathroom to change.

An hour passed, and Allan finished his story about Prince Luna and the Space Dreamers.

He went back to work on his new manuscript. Becky returned from jogging and was taking a shower. Michael and Nancy sat on the floor and watched another Disney cartoon while Becky finished her shower and dried her hair.

A few minutes later, Becky entered the den.

"How was the story?" she asked Michael and Nancy.

"It was great!" Michael replied with a huge grin.

"Good," she said, then looked at Allan. "Are you ready to go?"

"Yeah, just let me save my Word file and shut down the computer."

Thirty minutes passed, and Becky drove them in her Toyota Sienna mini-van to the Heavenly Peace Cemetery in Orlando.

"I still don't understand why you chose this cemetery instead of one closer to home," she said while she drove her van into the entrance of the cemetery.

"This one felt right to me," Allan responded, then coughed a little and cringed when a sharp pain shot through his chest.

Becky rolled her eyes while she pulled into the cemetery parking lot. Sometimes, she never understood Alan's way of thinking but knew she could not change his stubborn mind.

After she parked the Sienna, Becky removed a hand trowel and a pot of Daisies they bought at Lowes.

They walked through the cemetery and stopped by a headstone.

"Beverly Stein, Loving, and Caring Mother. Born June 18, 1938, Died February 8, 2001" was carved in the white Granite headstone.

Becky knelt at the headstone and removed the dead Daisies. She used the trowel and planted the new Daisies.

"I don't remember Grandma that much," Michael said while he stared at the headstone.

"You were around five years old when she died. But she sure loved you and would always kiss your cheeks," Becky replied with a warm smile while she dropped the Daisies into the hole.

Allan walked away twenty feet and lit up a Lucky Strike as if he would never fight off the addiction.

"Did she love and kiss me?" Nancy asked.

Becky frowned when she saw Allan while he smoked. "Of course. She loved you very much, and I can imagine she's blowing you kisses from heaven right now," Becky said while she scooped up some nearby dirt to seal up the flowers.

Nancy blew kisses at the sky. "I love you, Grandma," she said and blew some more kisses.

Michael rolled his eyes, thinking his sister was goofy.

Allan saw Nancy blowing kisses at the sky and smiled, then took another drag on his cigarette. Then Allan went into a bad coughing fit and turned beat red. He coughed so hard he coughed up blood that dripped down his chin. Then he felt

weird and dropped to his knees and vomited. There was a puddle of blood in the grass.

Michael and Nancy moved away at the sight of the bloody barf.

Becky rushed over and got Allan to his feet. "We're going to the emergency room," she said, then rushed him through the cemetery.

Nancy and Michael lagged, afraid Allan might vomit at any given second.

Becky drove Allan to the Florida Hospital in east Orlando. During the drive, Allan had a few more coughing fits. Nancy and Michael cringed in the back seat, afraid he would vomit again.

At the hospital, they ran a bunch of tests and released Allan the next morning. Becky picked him up and drove him straight home.

On Friday morning, Becky drove Allan to his doctor's office to hear the results of the tests.

Allan, Becky, and her husband Marty waited in the doctor's office.

Dr. Alicia Kennedy entered the office with a folder in hand. She looked serious while she walked over and sat down behind her desk. She opened up the folder and looked at the test results again. She paused while she glanced at everybody's waiting eyes. "Allan, I'm afraid your tests indicate you have lung cancer, and it's stage four. You also have cirrhosis of the liver," she said and hated these moments.

Becky's eyes welled up, and Marty comforted her.

"What does this mean, Doctor Kennedy?" Becky asked and feared the news would not be good.

"It's terminal. I would estimate that Allan has about eight to twelve months. We could try some treatments, but there's no guarantee it will go into remission."

Becky sobbed, and Marty comforted her. "Let's get started right away," she said between sobs.

Allan looked shocked, as he knew everybody was going to die, but he thought he had at least twenty more years to live.

Then, he accepted his fate of having a year at the most. "No! I don't want any treatments. Just let it run its course," Allan said, looking serious.

"Dad, it's worth trying," Becky pleaded.

"She's right, dad," Marty added.

"No!" Allan said with a firm tone and got up and walked out of the doctor's office.

Becky sobbed in her hands.

"I can prescribe something to relieve any pain he will endure," Dr. Kennedy offered.

Becky nodded in agreement while she blew her nose into a Kleenex.

A week later, Allan sat in his fishing boat with his brother Billy in Lake Tohopekaliga near St. Cloud.

Becky accepted Allan's opportunity to tell his brother about his condition. They quietly sat with their fishing lines in the water. Allan just broke the terrible news to his brother.

"It can't be possible!" Billy said while his eyes welled up, knowing his big brother would be dead in months.

"I can't stop it, Billy."

Billy looked extremely concerned. "I'm so glad you burned our secret years ago. That was smart."

Allan looked caught. "Well, about that. I never burned it. But don't worry, I have it in a safe location. You can trust me, little brother; nobody will find it, at least while we're alive," Allan said and looked confident.

Billy glared furiously at Allan and wanted to smack the crap out of him. "Where is it? I can't take any chances!" he yelled so loud that nearby boaters glanced in their direction to see what was brewing.

Allan opened his mouth to respond but suddenly went into a huge coughing fit, and his face turned beat red. He coughed so hard that blood ran out of his mouth and dripped down his chin. He rushed over to the side of the boat and vomited into the lake. When he was finished, he looked at Billy and looked scared. He passed out and fell to the bottom of the boat.

Billy started up the engine and raced the boat off toward the dock.

Later that night, Allan lay in a room at the St. Cloud Regional Medical Center. He was asleep in his bed. Becky sat in a chair by his bedside and held his hand. She silently prayed that he would not die tonight.

The room door opened, and Billy stepped inside the room.

Becky jumped up, furious, out of her chair the second she saw him. "Get out!" she screamed at Billy, who stood at the door.

"But, he's my brother," Billy pleaded. "Nurse!" Becky yelled.

Billy rushed out the door at the same time the nurse entered.

She rushed over, concerned something happened with Allan. "Something wrong?"

"I don't want that man who just left to step one foot inside this room. His name is Billy Stein," Becky replied and looked furious.

"Yes, ma'am," the nurse said while she looked Allan over to make sure he was stable.

The nurse was satisfied Allan was stable, so she walked out of the room.

Becky sat back down and stroked Allan's arm.

A month passed, and Allan looked thinner while the cancer was taking over his body. He watched TV from his LazBoy chair in his den.

"Grandpa!" Nancy cried out while running into the den and jumped on his lap.

Allan cringed in pain. "Be careful, sweetie. Grandpa's not as strong as he once was."

Nancy hugged Allan. "I'm sorry, grandpa."

Allan picked up his remote and changed to the Disney channel.

Nancy rested her head on Allan's chest and watched a cartoon.

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