

RIVULETS OF BLOOD

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PROLOGUE

MOUNTAIN DAILY

May 24

Another dead body of a young woman, who was reported missing three weeks ago, has been found next to the Highway, her head tightly wrapped in a plastic bag. This is the sixth body in as many months. All of the dead young women had been tortured over a period of time, raped viciously and killed by suffocation.

A police spokes-person said at a press conference that numerous leads are being followed.

For how long are young women going to be terrorised

PIONEER NEWS

June 8

A distressed local family fear the worst. Their daughter, who came for a visit to spend a weekend with them, has gone missing.

Still no arrests in the case of one of the most horrendous crime waves in our state.

Police keep mum on possible clues

The room is dark and dank. A young woman is lying in a corner on top of a filthy mattress, her hands tightly bound and her legs are spread-eagled, tied by ropes from her ankles to iron rings bolted to the cement floor.

Her breathing is shallow and she appears to be semi-conscious. Her face is a swollen mess, black, blue and bloody. Her nude body is battered, her breasts mutilated and the inside of her thighs are crusted with dried blood.

The door opens with a screech and the silhouette of a big man is outlined against the dim light.

"Hi honey, I am home" he croons. The voice sends a tremble through her body as she tries unsuccessfully to move even further into the corner, whimpering.

"Look who is happy to see you" he says, opening his pants to release his erect cock and waves it in front of her face.

The woman looks at him with dead eyes, there is no shred of emotion left in them anymore.

"Missed us?" Running his tongue over his lips he bends down and roughly pulls her legs even further apart. "You women are all the same" he snarls "leading me on, teasing, teasing and then rejecting me. But not anymore. I'll show you again what a real man can do, I'll show you as I've shown all the others before you".

His breath comes in ragged bursts, spittle flying from his mouth. "Look what you do to me", he leers at her while stroking himself to get even harder.

Her mouth opens in a soundless scream as he gets between her legs and pushed himself into her with all his strength.

Good! Good! Fuck the whore, ram her, kill the slut with it! Show her, show them all. Yeah that's it, I can feel her inside tearing apart, the warm wetness of her blood on my cock, more, more, he rams and pounds until he can feel himself spurting all his rage into her.

He rolls of her motionless body, gets up and kicks her between the legs, she does not even flinch anymore.

"Guess it's over between us, honey" he giggles, takes a plastic bag and pulls it tightly over her head.

Sitting in front of her he watches with amusement as she gasps for air, her ravaged body still fighting and trying to hang on to whatever is left of her pitiful existence.

PIONEER NEWS

June 30

The body of the young woman who was reported missing at the beginning of June has been found.

She is presumed to be another victim of the "Savage Ghost" as the perpetrator has been dubbed, pointing to his seeming invisibility when abducting and discarding his savagely abused victims

MOUNTAIN DAILY

July 20

Police confirmed to have arrested and charged a suspect in the "Savage Ghost" case with the rape and murder of seven young women.....

OREGON TRIBUNE

Sentence handed down in the case of the "Savage Ghost"

After a sensational trial that had gripped not only our State but the whole nation, Chase Cotter, a 39 year old semi-employed farmhand and sometimes lumberjack, has been found guilty and sentenced to a prison sentence of thirty years to life for each of his victims, whom he raped, tortured and killed during his crime spree lasting eight month, adding up to 210 years before he would be eligible for parole.

The prosecution, described Cotter as a psychopath without a conscience and as someone who showed no penitence, subjecting young women to unimaginable sexual torture and abuse for days and sometimes weeks before killing them by suffocation, was asking for the death penalty to be imposed.

The lawyer for the defence countered with a request for leniency, reminding the court that Cotter had been rejected at a very young age by his mother, fomenting a hate against all women and was brought up in a string of abusive foster homes with no opportunity to learn social skills or respect for people, in particular for women.

The Judge took this plea for mercy into account when sentencing and pronounced in closing:

"Although Mr Cotter's upbringing was not conducive for him to lead a normal and productive life, he cannot be absolved by any means from taking responsibility for having committed the most brutal and savage crimes against innocent women.

I therefore sentence Mr Cotter to thirty years to life for each of his victims, sentence to be served at a maximum security facility".

The horrific details that emerged during the trial had even hardened crime investigators breaking down during their testimony of what had been done to the victims.

Cotter expressed no remorse throughout the trial and showed no emotion as the judge pronounced the sentence.

Chase Cotter will be transported to a high security facility and held there in solitary confinement, as his safety can't be guaranteed within the general prison population.

CHAPTER 1

Sheriff Bill Logan was looking out the window of his office into the pouring rain. "Long time we didn't have weather like this" he said to his young Deputy Brad Spencer "better go home before it gets any worse".

"Are you sure Sheriff? My shift is not over yet".

"What are you expecting? A sudden crime wave?" Bill snorted.

Major crime is unknown in the quiet little town of Arrowhead. Nestled in the mountains of Oregon, with a permanent population of about 500 people, not counting the influx of city folks during the holiday season, it is a haven of tranquillity, appreciated by the mostly retired people, who enjoyed their golden years in comfortable cabins spread throughout the surrounding woods.

A sprinkling of younger people make some troubles now and then, like stealing small items from the one and only convenient store, racing their cars up and down Main Street, having loud parties and getting drunk and disorderly.

"Everyone will be hunkered down in their homes in this weather, so git going, I'll see you tomorrow".

"Ok Sheriff, thanks". Brad rammed his Stetson on his head, put on a slicker and disappeared through the door.

"Well, well" he mumbled to himself "and I just know what to do with my extra free time". Brad, with his twentythree years of age, fancied himself somewhat as the town's most eligible and irresistible bachelor.

Bill Logan grinned after him, knowing exactly what thoughts went through his young Deputy's mind.

'Nice to be that young' he mused 'but then again I have nothing to complain about'.

To be Sheriff in this peaceful town had a lot of advantages for a law enforcement officer close to retirement. Nice bungalow, a comfortable salary and no major crime to worry about. Yeah, Sheriff Logan was a happy man.

He got his lean sixty year old frame out of the chair and ambled over to the door that divided the Sheriff's office from his bungalow, following the appetizing aroma from his wife's cooking.

Annie, his wife of thirty years, was welcoming him with dinner already served on the table.

"Let's eat early tonight and have a quiet evening, just the two of us enjoying being cozy indoors in this horrible weather" she said smiling.

Bill Logan grinned fondly at his wife. 'I am a lucky man' he thought 'look at Annie, after thirty years of putting up with me, we are in love more than ever. She is still the most beautiful woman to me. After Brad's example I feel horny like a youngster and will show her a thing or two later.'

Annie, a small but comfortably rounded woman who always has a smile on her still smooth face, liked the way her husband was looking at her, she knew exactly what he was thinking about and after all the time together she still could not hide the blush creeping into her cheeks.

"Sit down you old lecher" she laughed "and eat. First things first, better keep your strength up". Her eyes twinkled at him.

They had just finished their dinner and Bill started to light his favourite pipe when the phone began to ring. He let out a sigh, put his pipe aside and went to answer the persistent ring.

"Bill, we have trouble", the deep voice belonged to the Head of the Area Marshalls Office, John Bailey.

"I am talking big emergency, been calling all the local Sheriff stations. Remember the "Savage Ghost" case, the trial that finish recently? Chase Cotter is the bastards name and we just got word that he escaped during transport to the high security prison facility, killing the driver and guard.

I don't know how he pulled it off, the details are still very sketchy.

Quick description, Cotter is a 39 years old Caucasian, six five and built like a tank. Square shaped face, brown eyes, hair blond and short cropped. The escape happened five miles outside your town about three hours ago.

Call all your people in the more outlying cabins to be on guard, I think he might be trying to hole up somewhere close by. He took the dead officers guns, so warn everyone that he is armed, dangerous and has nothing to lose."

Bill Logan took a deep breath "How could something like this happen?" he exploded and then "Ok John, I am on it".

He replaced the receiver and found Annie standing close to him. "Something important?" she asked.

"Yes" he sighed, "the 'Savage Ghost' is on the loose and he might be heading our way".

"Oh, my God" her eyes widened in shock "guess you're going back to the office. I'll bring your coffee over there".

Bill nodded in appreciation, got up and went back to his office to make a list of all the people he had to warn.

"There goes my plan for a romantic evening' he thought. 'Bet Brad got lucky already'.

He dialled his Deputy's home phone, got no reply and his mobile seemed to be out of juice.

'Damn the boy' he thought 'which bed is gracing now with his presence' and picked up the radio.

Brad in the meantime was having the time of his life with Jessie, the daughter of the local convenient store owner, her on top, riding him like a bronco. Her hips were bucking up and down, meeting his every thrust with a shout of "yeah baby, faster, fuck me harder, I want all of you". Brad thrust deeper and deeper "You drive me crazy" he managed to moan before he spilled himself into her. "Don't stop, don't you dare to stop" she cried when she felt him going softer and then his radio crackled into life.

Like a well-trained dog, pointed in the right direction, his head turned and he threw the girl off him to answer.

"Deputy Spencer" he barked, looking at Jessie, who was lying on the bed with her legs spread wide, breathing heavily and glaring at him.

"Brad we have an emergency, move your butt and get back to the office now" he heard the Sheriff's voice before the connection was cut.

Brad, jumped off the bed and pulled his pants on.

"What the hell are you doing, remember what we were busy with just now? What about me you bastard?" Jessie yelled.

"Help yourself or wait until I come back" Brad called over his shoulder, throwing on the rest of his clothes before he rushed out of the door.

Pulling up at the Sheriff's station he put his head down and ran through the pelting rain to get inside.

Sheriff Logan was talking on the phone, so Brad took off his slicker and gave him a questioning look.

Bill waved his hand to indicate for Brad to sit down and as soon as he finished his call he filled his Deputy in on what had happened in the last hour.

"Here is your share of the list I compiled of the people we have to call and warn" he said, handing over some pages to Brad.

Most of the people they phoned wanted to know more, but were cut short with "just lock your doors and windows and be careful, I still have lots of others to warn".

Because of the weather almost everyone was at home and answered the call, but one phone kept on ringing and ringing.

"The Millers are not picking up" Brad Spencer said, "do you think they went out?"

"In this weather? I doubt it. Have you tried all their phones?"

"Yes, I called the home number and both their mobiles, but nothing".

Sheriff Logan shot at worried look at his Deputy "you don't think" He didn't even want to finish the sentence.

Deputy Spencer had already grabbed his hat when the Sheriff said "you better get over there and have a look-see, it's probably nothing to worry about, but better safe than sorry".

Brad nodded while he put on his slicker.

"Be careful and stay in touch at all times, I'll be listening on the radio".

"You bet" and Brad went out into the never ending rain.

As the door closed behind him, Bill called the Marshall's office to inform John Bailey and request back-up for his Deputy.

The drive to the Miller's home, a log-cabin, situated in the surrounding woods on an unpaved road, was not an easy one in the downpour.

Evan and Mary Miller were one of the younger long-time residents of Arrowhead. They moved here ten years ago when Evan struck it lucky on the financial markets, decided to quit the rat-race at a fairly young age and rather live a peaceful and quiet life with his wife Mary, surrounded by nature, something that both of them had always enjoyed.

The drive which normally takes about twenty minutes took Brad close to an hour, slipping and sliding in the mud.

Good thing he took the Jeep, the Sheriff should really press for a second four-wheel drive vehicle for the station.

As he approached the Miller's property he saw lights on in, what he knew from previous visits, to be the living room.

Brad stopped the car in between the trees, switched off the engine and head lights and decided what to do next.

"I am close to the Miller's cabin now" he informed the Sheriff over the radio "going to check on them now".

He got out of the car pulling the brim of his Stetson down for more protection against the rain and let out a string of swear words as he stepped into the mud up to his ankles. Putting his hand on the gun he slowly approached the cabin.

'Everything looks fine, I reckon I will look like a fool disturbing them at nearly midnight'.

As he got closer and not seeing anything suspicious, he started to relax even more until he caught a glimpse of the front door standing half open.

'Now that can't be good' he thought, considering his next step.

"Sheriff, something is not right, the front door stands open, on a night like this with the rain still pissing down".

"The Marshall has already sent two of his Deputies, better wait for back-up" Bill Logan replied.

"Ten-four Sheriff, but I am just going closer to have a look-see".

"Be careful Brad".

Deputy Spencer took out his gun and approached the open door carefully, while looking left and right.

'Damn it all' he said to himself, 'the rain is not helping, I can't see or hear a thing'.

He stepped on the porch and called through the open door "Deputy Spencer here, Mr Miller, Mrs Miller are you ok?"

Nothing, not a sound. He felt the hair on his neck raising and his palms getting sweaty.

"Hello, can anyone hear me? Deputy Spencer here, I am coming in" he called out again.

Brad used his foot to slowly push the door more open and pointed the gun in front of him as he entered the living room.

Behind the door, like trying to get away, was the body of Mary Miller. Her torn clothes were pushed up over her hips, exposing her nudity from the navel down and blood was pooling between her spread-eagled legs. Lifeless eyes were staring up at him from a bloody and battered face. He could see clearly strangle marks around her throat.

Brad felt his stomach heave but managed to control himself.

Looking further into the room he glimpsed her husband Evan lying between the couch and the coffee table face down. His hands and legs were tied with his own belt and suspenders. He was shot in the back of his head, execution style.

Young Spencer felt his legs giving way, but held himself upright on the mantelpiece.

"Sheriff", he shouted into the radio with a panicky voice, "they are dead, Evan and Mary are both dead".

"Are you sure? Are you alright? Any sign of Cotter?" and "get back to the car now, Brad, the Marshalls are on their way".

Brad Spencer could not control his revulsion any longer. He had never seen a dead body before and definitely not one that was ravaged like the poor woman lying at his feet.

He only managed to turn away from her before his body convulsed in the act of retching and his stomach gave up all its contents. As he was bending over, heaving, he missed see or hear the giant figure of a man approaching him from behind.

Brad felt a rush of air and then something hit him hard on his head once and again. He tried feebly to fight off his attacker as his hat, slicker and gun belt was being removed. The last thing he heard was the Jeep starting up and then his world went black.

"Brad, Brad" his radio kept squawking "are you there, what is happening, are you ok?"

Sheriff Logan hit the desk with his fist in frustration. What the hell had happened at the Millers. Why could that young fool not have waited until assistance had arrived.

"John" he called the Marshall's radio again, "last thing I heard from my Deputy is that both, Mary and Evan Miller, are dead and now I can't get hold of Brad anymore. How far away are your men?"

"They lost their way in the rain and had to retrace, it'll take them about another hour to get there, stay on the radio".

Sheriff Logan cursed at the rain, the fugitive and the world in general loudly, he had enough of this messed-up situation, can't anyone do anything right? He could not wait any longer for others to assist his Deputy and he called to his wife "Annie stay on the radio, I am going over there to see what's going on".

Annie rushed into the office, planted a kiss on her husband's cheek "please Bill don't do anything stupid, watch out and be careful".

The drive to the Miller's cabin was treacherous and again he used some choice swear words about having only the one four-wheel drive Jeep, Brad was using, available.

Finally arriving at the cabin there was no sign of the Deputy or the Deputy's car or any Marshall.

Bill Logan stepped out into the mud, like Brad earlier on, but did not even feel it he was so anxious. He drew his gun and went towards the log-cabin. "Brad" he called softly "it's me, where are you?"

Getting closer he got more and more worried by the absolute silence, only broken by the hiss of the never ending rain. "Brad" he called again "let me know where you are, I am coming in".

He put his head through the door, the gun pointed in front of him and the first thing he laid his eyes on was the young Deputy lying motionless on the floor, a pool of blood starting to congeal around his head.

Sheriff Logan quickly scanned the room and finding it empty of any living being, kneeled next to him and felt for a pulse. Nothing – nothing!

“No” he groaned, “not you too Brad, I should have never let you come alone”.

He felt a burning anger rising in him and lifted his head when he heard a vehicle arriving. The car doors slammed and Deputy Marshall Mason and his partner Butler entered the cabin with guns drawn.

“Where the hell have you been. You were supposed to back-up my Deputy and now he is dead” Bill Logan growled. “That bastard Cotter slaughtered the Millers, killed Brad Spencer, took his gun, hat and slicker and drove off with the Jeep, all while you two were pissing around on the road”.

Mason shook his head to keep his partner quiet and got on the radio to inform his superior about the situation they were finding themselves in.

“John, we are at the Miller’s place with Sheriff Logan and he is livid. Can’t say that I blame him. There has been a massacre here. The owners of the cabin are dead, the wife got beaten and raped before she was killed. The husband was shot and the Sheriff’s Deputy killed with a couple of blows to his head.

His gun, hat, slicker and Jeep are gone. You know what that means. Get an APB out immediately, but in this weather and with the time advantage, it looks like this scum of the earth got away for now.”

John Bailey told his Deputy Mason to secure the crime scene until the homicide unit and forensic team could get there and then meet him at the Sheriff station.

In the meantime, many miles away, Chase Cotter was navigating the Sheriff’s Jeep through the driving rain, wearing the Deputy’s hat and slicker with the three guns he had ‘liberated’ next to him.

Did those fool really think that he would go meek and mild to spend the rest of his life locked up? They can have another guess.

He whistled softly to himself, content with his day's work and, for the time being, felt safe from pursuit and capture.

CHAPTER 2

As Jason Hadley drove onto the Highway, rain was pelting down hard. The windscreen wipers of the rental car were hardly able to cope with the deluge of water. 'Damn' he thought to himself 'it's worse than I expected'.

Should he turn back and stop overnight at the airport hotel before going on to his mountain cabin as he had planned? No. He's had enough of hotel living to last him for a life time.

While listening to the country and western music coming from the radio, he reflected on the chain of events that has brought him to this point.

Jason, a slightly built, handsome man, had just turned forty some days ago. His black hair and startling blue eyes were a heritage of a distant Irish ancestry. The slight grey starting to show at his temples only added to his physical appeal and he had always prided himself on being able to handle all life can throw at him, to be at the helm of all situations, to be on top of everything - until lately.

He had not always led a charmed life. Born into a blue-collar working class family, Jason had fought hard for a better life, better education. His reward was to achieve top honors at school, being in the top ten of his class, even in college.

Everyone had predicted big things for him and everyone was expecting a lot of him, what the heck, never mind everyone, he was expecting a lot of himself.

He had started his career at the bottom of one of the biggest advertising agencies and married his high-school sweetheart Shelby shortly after her graduation from law school.

Life was wonderful for the next decade, with him working his way up the corporate ladder to become one of the youngest executives in the agency, with Shelby, his beautiful and beloved Shelby by his side, herself now a successful career woman as a well-known lawyer and partner in a prestigious law firm.

They had the world at their feet.

Jason stopped the train of his thoughts to concentrate on his driving under this dangerous weather condition.

"Damn it" he said aloud "maybe I should have listened to the people at the car rental desk. They did warn me about this rainstorm".

Lighting struck down from the sky like a flaming sword in front of the car, blinding him for a second. The loud clap of thunder that followed made him flinch and he opened the glove compartment to take out the bottle of bourbon he purchased at the airport and took a swig. The warmth shot through him right away and settled his nerves. He felt better immediately.

'As long as I don't overdo it I should be fine' he mused and then 'stop right there'. What was he thinking? Too much alcohol was part of the mess he is in now.

Jason rolled down the window, cursed at the rain pouring in and hurled the bottle of bourbon as far as he could into the darkness beyond.

The radio kept on crooning about love lost and love found.

Life should be that simple and easy, Jason heaved a sigh and went back to his dark thoughts.

'When did everything go so wrong' he questioned himself for the hundreds of times 'what did really happen?'

Maybe life was too good and he had considered himself to be invincible.

Thinking back now, he realised that while Shelby was getting more and more busy with her career, spending less and less time at home, he was spending more and more time having too many parties with too many wrong people, hangers-on, who called themselves 'friends' but who only

wanted a slice of the good life in Jason's wake, feeding on his success. He was listening to too many false compliments, starting to believe them.

He began to have a little affair here, a one night-stand there, after all this was the accepted and expected behavior in his new circles of 'friends'. But then again most of them had already a couple of divorces under their belts, their present wives not minding them having affairs as they had their own.

That was not the relationship he had wanted for Shelby and himself, but by then he was on a rollercoaster he could not stop and it became an avalanche of events he could not control anymore.

'Why' he asked himself again 'why, when I have a wife like Shelby, beautiful, sexy, clever and classy, did I have to put everything on the line for nothing more than to be 'one of the boys'.

Shelby kept on warning him, wanted nothing to do with his new set of friends, but he was the "Golden Boy" wasn't he, so why should he listen to the warnings of the one person who had his best interest at heart.

'You bloody idiot' he thought 'how could you have fallen so deep so fast?' He could not come up with an explanation or even an excuse for his stupidity.

It was all his fault! Who could blame Shelby for having put up an invisible barrier between them, a barrier he felt he was not able to penetrate.

But still.... And then came the day when Shelby finally had enough...

He remembered with shame the one night he got home, fresh from the bed of one floozy or another, something he had never done before, but he was drunk out of his mind and there she was, Shelby, gorgeous, sexy and his wife. It was her wifely duty to give him his dues, wasn't it? Or so he thought at that moment and demanded to have sex with her, right there and then, right in the living room. When Shelby had tried to calm him down and appease him by letting him have his way, the ultimate nightmare happened. He could not perform and with his mind being befuddled with alcohol, he had lost control.

'Oh, fuck, fuck, I don't want to think about it anymore' but the images how he had attacked her verbally, calling her an Ice Queen who would turn any man impotent and no wonder he had to find solace in the arms of other women and that even the cheapest whore could give him more satisfaction than she ever could ... would not go away.

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