

The prequel to the Alexis Fields Thrill Series

A SHORT STORY  
**RESTRAINING  
ORDER**

ALEX DEAN

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# **RESTRAINING ORDER**

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**ALEX DEAN**

**TREBOR AND TAYLOR PUBLISHING**

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# RESTRAINING ORDER ALEX DEAN

A Short Story

TREBOR & TAYLOR PUBLISHING

## ***ACCLAIM FOR *RESTRAINING ORDER****

“It’s everything you’ve ever wanted in a who-dun-it!” Readers will be “pulled in” and held “captive” by this engaging read. Alex Dean’s art of storytelling is quite evident in this timely thriller.”

- Jennifer Banks, Pro Blogger

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## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

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Dear Reader,

This 12000-word story is the beginning of the Alexis Fields Thrill Series, and chronicles her life from her move from Madison, Wisconsin, into a living hell that becomes more terrifying by the hour. The remaining parts in the series are all longer length books.

As always, thanks for reading.

Alex Dean

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## CHAPTER 1

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WILFRED BACHMAN HUSTLED to his car, feeling anxious, feeling vengeful. He began taking in deeper breaths as he climbed into his Chevy, cranked the engine and gripped the steering wheel.

He reversed out of his parking space, then whirled out of the University of Wisconsin–Madison campus parking lot, almost running over two backpack-toting female undergrads in his wake.

He had called and texted Alexis Fields repeatedly, and was beginning to annoy her with his narcissistic personality, possessiveness and strong sense of entitlement. It was 5:35 P.M. He had waited outside of UW’s School of Medicine building, as he normally would. But there had been no sign of her. *Was she still in class? Was she avoiding him? Or was she off somewhere frolicking with someone else?* he thought.

“*How dare she* avoid me like this,” he mumbled as he reached in his glove compartment box for the almost empty prescription bottle of Zoloft. Twisting the cap off, he quickly downed the pill with a swig of Red Bull while driving. His ongoing bouts with anxiety and depression had made him a different person. He had become less sociable, less able to deal with stress and more edgy. The vehicle whizzed through

downtown Madison, passing other traffic and large groups of students out for a night on the town, glad to be done with class for the day.

While driving and listening to the radio, Bachman glanced in his rearview mirror. There was a police cruiser behind him now, slowly approaching. Suddenly the cop activated his light bar and siren. Bachman quickly drew a deep breath. Then he pulled into the parking lot of a strip mall and slowed the Chevy to a stop. He stilled himself, drumming his fingers on the steering wheel as he watched the cop exit his cruiser and draw near, hand on gun.

“What’s the big hurry?”

“Oh, I’m sorry officer. I’m on my way to my girlfriend’s house. There’s been somewhat of an emergency.”

“What kind of emergency?”

“She’s pregnant. Close to giving birth any day now and... well, there seem to be some complications. I wanted to be there. She lives down on—”

“Keep your hands on the steering wheel where I can see them.”

The cop spoke briefly into his portable radio and then looked back at Bachman.

“License and proof of insurance?”

“My license is in my wallet, and my insurance ID card is in the glove compartment. Is it okay if I—?”

“Go ahead.”

Bachman reached into his back pocket for his wallet and then into the glove compartment. He handed both items over to the cop.



“Sit tight for a minute. I’ll be back.”

The officer walked back to his cruiser and got in. He punched Bachman’s information into a laptop. No hit. No outstanding warrants. Then he got out and walked back to Bachman’s black-on-black Chevy Camaro.

“If your girlfriend is having an issue, she needs to go to the hospital. I’m going to let you go today with a warning. But you need to watch your speed. Not only for your own safety. There’re a lot of pedestrians around here. Be careful,” the cop said as he handed back Bachman’s credentials.

“I will. Thank you, officer.”

Bachman started the ignition, slowly pulled out of the parking lot and headed due east. He kept his eyes on the road staying on West Johnson, a four-lane street flanked by hotels and restaurants on the left and apartments on the right.

He arrived in Alexis’s quaint neighborhood just as night fell. He figured if she was not home, her mother, Doris, should be. And if Alexis wasn’t there, he wanted to be there waiting when she arrived. He had fallen madly in love and hadn’t been able to stop thinking about her ever since he’d met her. But now he found himself consumed by thoughts that there was another man and couldn’t control his raging passion and jealousy.

He came to a sudden stop in front of her house, quickly exited his Camaro, and hurried along the sidewalk, up to the concrete porch of the one-story white frame house, ringing the doorbell.

After tossing some clothes in the dryer, Doris Fields slammed it shut and headed to the front door. She had been off for several weeks from her job. The luxury of being at home

had been both necessary and purposeful. Necessary, because stress had been taking its toll on her health. And purposeful, because she wanted to spend time with her daughter before Alexis officially accepted a new job offer and moved out of state.

Doris opened the door to see Bachman standing on the porch. Texting.

“Wilfred, she’s not here. She hasn’t made it home yet,” she said curtly.

Bachman glanced up from studying his phone’s screen. He forced a fake smile. “Oh, hey, Ms. Fields. You know when you expect her?” he said, peering into the home as if he had doubts.

Doris shook her head. “No. I don’t. With the number of hours she’s putting in, her schedule’s all over the place. But I’ll let her know you came by.”

The smile faded from Bachman’s lips. “I was up at UW waiting for her. The least she could have done was give me an explanation.”

Doris’s gaze washed over him, his unkempt beard, his overall disheveled appearance. “You often show up on your own accord. My daughter doesn’t owe you an explanation. I’ve said all I have to say.”

Bachman’s eyes bore into the woman like an eagle eyeing its prey.

If only looks could kill.

Doris Fields then slammed the door and bolted the lock. She had never warmed up to him. For the life of her, she never understood what her daughter ever saw in him. And ever since

her husband had abandoned her and Alexis, her (once favorable) opinion of men had seemed to wane immensely.

Bachman got back in his car, pulled off and headed north on Acewood Boulevard. After negotiating several turns, he ended up on Cottage Grove Road going westbound. There was a heavy police presence. The street was blocked, and yellow tape was unspooled across the width of the road. He pulled up to the nearest parking space on the curb and got out of his car.

Then he walked up to a group of bystanders. A couple that had just given a witness interview to the police was waiting on the sidewalk. One of them, a young college student wearing jeans and a denim jacket stood by her boyfriend.

“What happened?” Bachman asked curiously.

“Smash and grab,” the girl said shaking her head. “This is the third time that jewelry store over there has been hit. But this time was worse.”

“How so?”

She turned toward Bachman, her face trembling in the cool nighttime air. “This time they shot the owner.”

Bachman’s expression turned quizzical. This was near the same stretch of road where the cop had stopped him earlier.

The young woman continued, “I work in the salon next door, and was coming outside to grab something for dinner and heard everything. Saw most of it. They rammed a van through the window. Then they just went in smashing the glass counters with some kind of small hammers. Scooping up as much jewelry as they could. It was three of them dressed in jeans and black hoodies. The owner, Mr. Skilling, they must have seen him hit the alarm or something. Because the next thing I knew, one of them pointed a gun and shot him in the

shoulder. I bolted and ran back into the shop. Thankfully, he's going to be okay."

The woman pointed. "The cops told us the thieves abandoned the stolen van over there in the street. Apparently, they crashed into that row of parked cars, then got out and fled on foot."

"How long before they open the street up?" asked Bachman.

"I have no idea," said the woman.

The young student's boyfriend, a tall and lanky college kid with dark hair, a thin mustache and matching goatee answered, "They said they're waiting on a flatbed truck to move the van. I can't believe it myself," he said shaking his head. "This world is getting crazy, bro."

"Yeah. That it is," Bachman agreed. "I think I'll kill some time in there and wait it out," he said as he pointed to a sports bar and grill only a few doors down.

He walked roughly fifty feet and opened the heavy wooden door of the establishment. Inside, there was what looked like an after-work crowd, tossing up mugs, watching ESPN on flat screens.

He pulled out a chair and took a seat at the bar. A woman sitting next to him and apparently alone looked over and smiled. She was slim and petite, but looked somewhat standoffish despite the friendly greeting. Bachman couldn't have cared less. He asked her if she were coming from work.

"Yeah." She nodded. "I never miss happy hour. I've only been in Madison for about six months now. Job relocation."

Bachman smiled. "Born and raised here, myself. Where you from?"

“L.A. I miss the nightlife, although not the high cost of living. My money goes a lot further here. The name’s Kelly,” she said, extending her hand.

“Wilfred. But everybody calls me Will.”

He seriously thought about trying to take things a step further, but didn’t want to add to an already drama-filled social life. The woman was dressed in a nice business suit and heels, but had a nice little rack he’d noted through her open jacket. He ordered a mug of beer and instantly drained it. Even against the advice of his doctors—he still drank alcohol while taking medication. Combining the two could potentially cause problems. Something even his mother had warned him against. But hey, whatever.

“I figured I’d come here and start anew. Not to mention the DM I worked under was a real tool,” Kelly went on. She raised her left hand, merging her index finger and thumb. “I was this close to filing a sexual harassment claim. Plus I’m single with no kids,” she said as she nursed her margarita.

“What do you do?” asked Bachman.

“Pharmaceutical sales. My employer is expanding here in the Midwest. It was higher pay, and I’ve heard really good things about Madison.”

Bachman thought this was funny to the point of being ludicrous. He’d lived here practically his whole life and could see it was different now. But still good compared to most other places, all things considered.

“And you?” she asked.

“Information Technology. I’m a computer programmer for a large insurance company,” he lied. He had actually lost his job eight months prior and could barely make ends meet, could

barely keep up with the payments on his ride. Between looking for work and constantly keeping up appearances, it was eating at him from the inside out. Especially his ego.

Bachman suddenly reached into his coat pocket and pulled out his cell. He thumbed it alive and scrolled through various pictures of partially clothed women.

“The computer gig’s just for paying the bills. In my spare time, I’m working on this new dating app and website. It’s my real passion.”

Bachman shrugged and smoothed down his beard. “I know a dating site is not exactly groundbreaking in this day and age. But it allows me to meet new people. A chance to peek into their private lives. Their innermost fantasies. And anything else they care to upload. No. Only kidding. I’m not into it for cheap thrills.” He held up the phone in front of Kelly’s face to view its screen. “Here, check it out.”

Kelly stared at the phone’s screen and forced a fake smile. Then she looked up at him. Bachman seriously began to give her the creeps. *What a strange cookie this guy seems to be. It’s a good thing he didn’t pay for my drink.* The sooner she could get this bozo to leave, the better.

She glanced down to check her watch.

Which reminded him, he needed to reach Alexis. She had to be home by now. Kelly handed him the cell, and he turned in his seat to discreetly send a text:

**Where are you? Who are you with? And why are you avoiding me?**

He figured he was going to stop by Alexis’s house once more before he headed home. He ordered another beer and

tossed it back before leaving. Then he turned toward the woman he'd just met here.

“I've got to run. It was nice meeting you. Next time drinks on me,” he said with a little wink.

The woman smiled. “Take care.”

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## CHAPTER 2

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BACHMAN WALKED BACK OUTSIDE to his car. The streets were open and all of the emergency vehicles that had been there earlier were gone. He looked across the street and saw that the jewelry store's windows were now boarded. A lone police cruiser still sat in front of it.

He drove back to Alexis's house, pulled up to the curb and the first thing he'd noticed was that all of the lights were on. He got out of his car, walked to the porch and rang the doorbell.

He could hear what sounded like a party inside. There was music and laughter. Food and drinking. It pissed him off even more. Why hadn't *he* been invited?

It was a celebration of Alexis finishing the required curriculum on her way to becoming a doctor. A dream come true. The job offers had been pouring in.

A well-muscled young man holding a Corona strolled across the hardwood floor of the living room, peering out the front door.

"Hey, Alexis, it's that loser of a sidekick of yours... Bachman," he yelled back, over the thumping beat of Daft Punk's "Get Lucky," and smirked.



Alexis stood to her feet, grabbed her cell phone, and muttered to her friend Carol that she'd be right back. She scuttled to the door, peered out the front window and reluctantly stepped outside onto the porch. Her heart raced, and there was a lump in her throat just at the sight of him. She had purposely not told Bachman about the impromptu soiree and had decided the relationship with him was unequivocally over, but she had yet to tell him personally. Just get it over with. Just *tell him it's over*. Both thoughts raced through her mind.

Bachman was amped. His pulse hammered as he stood on the porch.

“Where have you been? I’ve been patiently waiting at your school for you, you conniving cunt.”

“Don’t you dare talk to me that way, and do you have to use such language—and be an absolute asshole every day?” she said nervously as the two glared at each other with fierce intensity.

“Listen, Will, you started out a really nice guy, but something’s come over you lately. I don’t know what it is, but it’s not something I care to deal with any longer, okay?”

Bachman’s face distorted. His eyes narrowed into tiny slits of hate. He was flabbergasted.

“So that’s it, huh? Now that you’re finishing school and talking about moving, you wanna break up? Just throw out the trash before you go? Is that it?”

“Look, we had our chance. It didn’t work out, and now I’m over it. It was never my intention to purposely hurt you. If I did, it’s all on me,” she said, gently patting her heart. “When people like us come to the conclusion that it’s not working,

they *move on*. Besides, I've already accepted a position at a hospital in another state, and as you're aware, I'll be leaving soon."

Bachman shook his head in disgust. "You're pathetic. You are exactly who I thought you were, the same self-serving, backstabbing b—"

"It's over, *okay*? Now, if you'll excuse me, I really need to get back to my guests. So, goodnight Will, I wish you the very best," she quipped as she spun to go back inside the house.

Suddenly, an evil surge peaked inside of him. Wilfred Bachman desperately lunged forward, grabbing her by the throat with his left hand as he pulled out an eleven-inch stainless steel dagger with his right. He snatched her body close to his, locking her in a chokehold as the blade of the knife pressed into her neck. She screamed, jerked, trying to wrangle free as Bachman held his death grip tighter.

"You led me on, fucking used me. I thought you were different," he called out in between breaths.

"Let me go, you fucker—you *motherfucker*," Alexis spat out.

She managed to get Bachman's left forearm in front of her mouth and, opening wide, clamped her teeth down onto his flesh as hard as she could. Bachman yelled; the pain was excruciating. He became disoriented from the horrifying sensation, letting go of her, staggering backward down the concrete steps onto the lawn.

Directly across the street, a retired war veteran sitting on his porch heard the screams, witnessing the assault; he called the police from his cell phone. But while waiting for the cops

to arrive, he strode over to Alexis's house to confront Bachman head-on.

“Hey, what’s your problem, asshole? Leave her alone—*now*—and *get lost!*”

“Why don’t you mind your fucking business, old man? This doesn’t concern you! Get back on your porch before you get your ass kicked!”

The war veteran, his adrenaline pumping and fists clenched tightly, squared up close to Bachman, face-to-face, standing several inches taller, lean and rugged, still sporting a close-cropped military haircut.

“Don’t let this white hair and wrinkled face fool you, punk. I’ve kicked guys’ asses much bigger than you and still can for that matter. You wanna try me?”

Bachman shuffled backward. “I’m out of here. This ain’t over. Not by a long shot,” he said as he pointed to Alexis and the war veteran. He quickly retreated to his Camaro and peeled away as the squeals from the police sirens blared louder. Minutes later, four squad cars arrived, blocking any traffic from passing through the street. The officers walked toward the house with their guns drawn. Alexis was still standing on the front lawn, her hands gently caressing her neck and face.

The party guests, glancing at the flashing blue lights flickering through the front picture window, turned down the music and slowly filed outside to see what was going on.

“Ma’am, are you all right? What happened here?” one of the cops asked.

“I’m okay. My ex-boyfriend came by here uninvited and made a scene when I told him that I didn’t want to be with him any longer.”

“What’s his name?”

“Wilfred Bachman.”

“Was he armed?”

“He had a knife and held it to my throat.”

“How about his address?”

“He lives with his mother in a condominium. I vaguely remember the location and don’t know the address. I’ve only been there once, awhile back. He was embarrassed by the fact that he lived with her and rarely took me by there. Why, I have no idea. I still live with my mom, too.”

“Did your mom witness what happened?”

“No. She had just left to pick up some extra things from the store. We expect her back any minute now.”

“Was he on foot or in a vehicle?”

“He was driving.”

“What kind of vehicle?”

“A black Chevy Camaro.”

The cop’s eyes narrowed, his forehead creased. “I’d recommend you getting a restraining order and taking extra precautionary measures. This guy sounds like he’s not playing with a full deck. You want to take this seriously.”

“I will, thank you,” Alexis replied, her eyes shiny and wet with fear over the attack. The police took an eyewitness report from the war veteran and within minutes left the scene, but not before a BOLO was issued for Bachman and his vehicle.

Alexis and her guests all trooped inside. The party had come to an abrupt stop as her friends wondered what had happened.

“Hey babe, what’s wrong?” said Jason, her best friend, Carol’s, brother.

“Wilfred came by. When I told him I wanted to break up with him he totally freaked out and put a knife to my throat.”

“What?”

“Yeah, you think I made the right decision in dropping him?” Alexis said sarcastically.

“No doubt!”

“Are you okay? You hurt?”

“No, no, I’ve just got a little soreness around my neck.” Alexis shifted her gaze toward the floor, tossing her hair back. “Oh God, why did I ever get involved with him? What was I thinking?”

“*What a loser.* Hey, next time listen to your mom. She warned that you’d be sorry getting involved with him. And he’s a mama’s boy. You could have done a lot better than that creep. Who called the police?”

“Bill across the street did. He heard and saw everything. I don’t know what would have happened if he hadn’t been there.”

“What the hell was Wilfred thinking?” Carol asked.

“I’m not sure. When I told him I wanted out, he just snapped. He had this crazed and evil look about him. I had never seen that expression on him or anyone else for that matter. It was this dark, cold and solemn cast. His eyes had black circles underneath them. When I first met him, he seemed like an average guy. Decent looking, polite, good job, which he later lost—and now this.”

“You need to do what the cops advised. Get a restraining order, speed up your relocation efforts and get the hell out of Dodge,” said Carol.

“I’ll work on getting an order of protection tomorrow, although I feel they’re not worth the cheap paper they’re written on.”

Jason said, “He’s going to come back. You know that don’t you? They always do—and it only gets worse. You’re about to start a new life and career. Simply put all this behind you and move forward.”

“How does your mom feel about her only child finally leaving the nest? Living alone in another state?”

“She’s happy for me, of course, but I’m concerned about her safety since she’ll be living here alone.”

“And after this, I can only imagine. But don’t worry; we’ll keep an eye on her for you. We’ll make sure she’s okay,” Carol said, putting an arm around her friend. “This was not the kind of start she wanted to see, I know.”

“Yeah, once she gets wind of this, I’ll never hear the end of it. It will be ‘I told you so,’ over and over. Anyway, you guys continue. We’re not going to let Wilfred take our fun away. That’s exactly what he’d want,” Alexis said.

Several of her friends proposed a Veuve Clicquot toast to the doctor in training. And the party went on well into the night.

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## CHAPTER 3

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BACHMAN ELUDED POLICE long enough to make it home, where he planned to grab some clothes before leaving to spend the night elsewhere. His pulse still racing, he'd turned into a delirious and raving maniac. He marched inside the condo he shared with his mother, darting straight to his room. He said nothing to her when she spoke to him. This was a side to him that she had never seen. He had been experiencing a Jekyll and Hyde type of personality change, and it was getting worse. Much worse.

His mother came to the door of his room. "Wilfred, you look distraught. Something wrong?"

Bachman swiveled his head around, shifting his gaze toward her.

"Alexis and I got into it in front of her house. We were fighting like couples sometimes do, and then some old guy came from his porch across the street and got in my face. He must have called the police before he threatened to kick my ass."

"You let him *threaten you* like that? Then what happened?"

"I left. I heard the police sirens and figured it was time to go. And so I'm going to stay away for a few days, Momma."

Now, because of that nosy asshole, the police are looking for me for questioning. I'm sure of it."

"That's the problem with some men, Will, *too much damn testosterone*. Turns out, they always have to learn things the hard way—usually at their own peril."

Twenty minutes later, he left the condo and checked himself into a cheap motel on the other side of town. The young desk clerk on duty had sensed something odd and urgent in Bachman's demeanor, but dismissed it as a weary traveler needing a place to stay for the night.

Bachman walked down the dimly lit hallway to his room, the cramped accommodation overlooking a small parking lot. He took off his clothes and lay down on the small, overly firm bed, gazing at the ceiling. He conjured thoughts of his troubled childhood and images of his father beating his mother.

The beatings were often brutal, leaving her bruised and bloodied. Whenever that happened, he would be transported to his Aunt Rosie's house in Roxbury, but he still witnessed most of it. His mother's disapproval of his father's drinking and inability to stay home at night started most of it, along with his father's accusations that his mother was a whore and was sleeping with his brother, who lived in Platteville. The frequent beatings continued—that is, until his father, Ward, was himself found beaten to death behind a seedy pub in East Madison.

Bachman's anger had reached a dangerous level that night. He stood up from his bed, his eyes peering into the darkness of the room. He suddenly felt overcome by fear and panic, and he violently plunged his fist into the wall opposite the bathroom, leaving a gaping hole and crumbling pieces of drywall fragments. He had put *everything* into her, the whole essence



of his being over these last two years; they would get married, he'd thought. And now, he could only get even. He *had* to; he reasoned, vowing to make her pay.

When he'd had his knife to her throat earlier, he had snatched her cell phone. He grabbed his pants from the chair in the room, sliding the phone out of his front pocket to see if there was any evidence of her seeing someone else. Scrolling through numerous messages, he found an exchange of texts between her and her girlfriend, Carol:

“How is the job search coming? Any offers?”

“Yes, I've accepted an internship at a hospital in Lake Park, Illinois. Veterans Legacy Memorial. But please keep it to yourself. I don't want Wilfred finding out!”

“Congratulations, girlfriend! My lips are sealed.”

Bachman smiled as he stared at the cell phone's screen, vividly recalling his fateful words that day: *This ain't over. Not by a long shot.*

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## CHAPTER 4

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AT HER FRIEND CAROL'S insistence, Alexis went to live temporarily with Carol and her brother in a three-bedroom ranch on Leo Drive. The 60s era brown brick property had been left to Carol and her younger sibling when both of their parents, the Bergs, had died. Alexis had been on edge after the attack. And everyone, her mother, friends, and family, all agreed that this would be a safe sanctuary until either: she could manage to relocate, or the police could find and arrest Bachman.

One gray morning Alexis was sitting up on the side of the bed when Carol walked into the guest bedroom.

“Today is the first day of the rest of your life. And guess what? I've decided that I'm joining you this morning at your self-defense class,” said Carol, holding a cup of java.

Alexis looked up from checking her schedule for the following day, which was saved on her iPad. “That would be great, Carol. Of course, the fact that I can bring one guest for a free session doesn't hurt either. You can keep me motivated to not give up.”

“As if you don't already have enough motivation. You've been continuously receiving various threats from him—at school, online, threatening to burn down your mother's house

even. I'm thinking that once you learn the ropes with this martial arts stuff, you'll be able to kick his ass the very next time he comes at you like that."

Alexis nodded. "Yeah. I know. I still can't believe how a guy can change from a mild-mannered gentleman into a complete jerk almost overnight. I believe I should have ended it a lot sooner. I feel so stupid."

Carol sat on the bed and put her hand on Alexis's shoulder. "Hey, stop thinking like that. You're not stupid. When you first meet someone, you're not getting the real deal, okay? People put on false fronts. And you know what? When someone shows you who they are you have to believe them the first time. I heard that somewhere recently. I forgot who said it."

Carol took a sip from her mug. "And I think characterizing him as merely a jerk is being a bit too generous." Carol rose and walked to the dresser and grabbed her laptop. She sat down again next to Alexis. "Okay. Reality check time. Not to beat a dead horse here, but I think you should know what other women in this situation were ultimately faced with."

Carol opened her MacBook and began a search for infamous cases of women who had been stalked. She went out to the Web and typed into her browser: "Famous stalking cases." She opened various articles and saw pictures of stunningly beautiful women. Alexis leaned over and assessed different stories of women who had been stalked, threatened, and ultimately murdered. Often their cries for help fell on deaf ears. In one particular case, the stalker had been arrested only to be released on bail to exact his final horrific revenge.

Moments later, Carol gently closed the laptop and turned to her friend. "I want you to do everything that's necessary to protect yourself and your mom. And hopefully bring charges

against him that will stick. Of course, since I'll be working with the Dane County Medical Examiner's Office in two weeks, I don't want to see you brought in there anytime soon."

Alexis smiled and put her hand on top of her friend's. "Thanks for being here for me, Carol."

"Is that not what friends are for? We're BFFs remember? I say we go out and have a toast to no more go-nowhere relationships," said Carol.

"Sounds good." Alexis glanced at her watch. "Well, if you're going to class with me we better get moving. Like yesterday."

They slipped on their coats, got into Alexis's BMW and then drove to M. P. Chang's Martial Arts Center on Mineral Point Road. The center had been converted from a small retail storefront and now housed self-defense classes for women four days a week. Inside, teaching a small group of students was none other than forty-seven-year-old Grandmaster and five-time Martial Arts champion, Michael Pan Chang. He had relocated to Madison from Beijing several years ago to open up this school to exclusively teach westerners. He was expertly skilled in multiple Chinese martial arts, even in the Korean discipline of Taekwondo. Chang stood just under five foot seven. He was in impeccable condition. Ripped abs. Chiseled chest. A toned and agile, muscular frame. Not someone you ever wanted to mess with.

"Good evening ladies," he called out as he headed for a drink of water after performing a series of inverted hook kicks, or Qua Tek as they're called in Jeet Kune Do.

"Hi, Michael."

“Alexis, I see you’ve brought a friend. Is she being stalked too?”

“No. No. This is my friend Carol, she’s accompanying me today for support and to learn a few things for herself. One never knows what bogeymen lurk around the corner, right?”

Chang nodded. “That is so right. Well, Carol, you’ve come to the right place. It’s very important for women to be able to defend themselves. Especially in this day and age. Jeet Kune Do can help you to do just that! It is an eclectic martial art founded and made popular by the legendary martial artist Bruce Lee.

Chang grinned broadly. “Not one to limit my quest for knowledge, I am also quite proficient in Taekwondo as well. Loosely, it translates to the Way of the Hand and Foot. Nice to meet you,” he said, graciously extending his hand.

“Pleasure to meet you too,” said Carol.

Chang set his paper cup of spring water down and then strolled to the front of the room. He wiped some sweat from his forehead and tightened the black belt around the white dobok he wore.

“Okay ladies, after a little warm-up and some stretching, we’ll begin with some basics. In a matter of several weeks, you’ll be kicking butt and taking names. No. Only joking. But, as a start, you’ll be able to at least fight off a dangerous attacker. Make no mistake—there is a lot to learn. But you can most certainly do it. Are you ready?”

Alexis and Carol both exchanged giddy looks as they stood in their yoga pants and sweat tops on the martial art center’s foam roll out mat.

“Yeah. Let’s do this,” Alexis said firmly and nodded.

“The one thing you will learn is how to immobilize your attacker. Even kill him if necessary. So. This course is not for the faint of heart, nor is it for the squeamish,” Chang said eloquently as he peered across the faces of the women.

“Welcome to the reality of life or death.”

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## CHAPTER 5

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ON A CRISP AUTUMN NIGHT, Alexis had agreed to watch Jason's six-month-old son, Justin, while Jason and Carol attended the first night of the Bergs' family reunion on Madison's Southeast side.

After their parents had died in a small private plane owned and flew by her father, Carol had made it a point to keep in contact with the rest of his side of the family, as well as that of her mother's. Most of them lived in the Badger State, save for several aunts and uncles who were now living in La Verne, California.

Jason was still single, and it had been his weekend to spend time with his son. But because little Justin had been flirting with catching a cold, he would be staying indoors for the rest of the night. Alexis walked around the living room holding the newborn, decked out in a cute organic cotton onesie, while Jason and Carol prepared to leave the house.

"There's some formula and Gerber in the fridge. Oh, and if he gets restless, here's his Joovy Spoon Walker. I'm guessing he'll be down about nine," said Jason. "And thanks again for watching him. You can reach Carol or me if necessary. We both have our cells with us."

“And if he gets any worse. Don’t hesitate to call us,” added Carol.

“I’m sure we’ll be okay. Isn’t that right, Justin,” Alexis said gently rocking the baby in her arms. “I am a doctor. Did you guys forget that already?”

Carol and Jason both laughed.

Alexis walked them to the doorway. “You guys have fun. Don’t worry about us,” she said as she turned on the porch light and gently closed the door.

Baby Justin let out a short-lived cough and then began flailing his arms and legs as if he wanted to get down. “Okay, Justin. Let’s get you settled in your walker.” She lowered the infant into his walker, and he immediately glided over the carpet, pointing at the television.

On the screen, a newscaster started off with the gruesome details about a homicide, which had been baffling Madison PD investigators. There were no witnesses. No clues. And no obvious motives. Alexis turned from the channel to show something more pleasant and age-appropriate. Baby Justin’s eyes were glued to the screen as he eagerly nursed his pacifier.

She briefly glanced at Justin, his wide eyes curiously trailing her. Then she reached into a storage compartment space beneath the television. There were several VHS tapes, several blu-ray movies, and a homemade DVD Jason had made of various pictures taken throughout Alexis’s and Carol’s childhood. On its plastic case were the words: BFFs Forever neatly scrawled with a black felt pen. She and Carol had wanted to watch it during Alexis’s going-away party, had it not been for the surprise visit from Wilfred.



She leaned forward, pressed the power button on the blu-ray player, and inserted the disc into the tray. Moving backward with remote in hand, Alexis sat on the living room sofa. Justin scooted closer to the couch in his walker, still preoccupied with chomping down on his teething ring.

Her eyes welled as the images slowly faded, one into the other, chronologically, as the Minnie Ripperton song “Memory Lane,” cooed in the background. She and Carol had been through so much. The death of Carol’s parents. The sudden departure and abandonment by Alexis’s father. The ups and downs of life, jobs, and relationships. But through it all, they remained the very best of friends. Alexis briefly tore her eyes away from the screen and at baby Justin. He smiled and laughed, delighted with the attention.

But her smile suddenly faded when she heard what sounded like someone vigorously tug at the door at the back of the house. She reached for the remote and paused the blu-ray player. Justin’s eyes followed her as she stood and walked slowly to the rear of the house. Nervously, she looked out of one of the back windows and saw nothing. *Maybe a strong wind had gusted?*

Alexis walked back to the front of the house. Justin smiled and started toward her in his walker, playfully reaching out with his teething ring. She guided him back into the living room and then sat on the sofa. Her eyes darted around the home, at the clock on the entertainment console. 7:35 p.m.

A loud thump at the back door startled her. She rose quickly. Her breaths were gasps, and her heart beat madly inside her chest. She frantically searched over furniture, on tables, desperately looking for Carol and Justin’s cordless phone.

Another vigorous slam seemingly weakened the door against its frame.

Total panic seized every bit of her. Alexis turned and scooped Justin out of his walker. She grabbed her purse, hurried to the front door, opened it and trudged to her car. She put the toddler in the back seat and laid him down. A car seat would have been a better choice, of course. But tonight that was not an option.

After locking the doors, she started the BMW and pinned it down Leo Drive. As she drove, she held the steering wheel with one hand while she swiveled her upper torso to check on Justin. Within ten minutes, she arrived at her mother's house. She reached for the baby from the back seat and thumped the door shut.

What had her life turned into? A nightmare no doubt. This was the type of situation that one would often see on one of those true-crime TV shows. The ones where the story starts off with some kind of pensive narrative, but never ends well. And here it was now happening to her.

She rang the doorbell three times and then firmly knocked on the door.

Her mother Doris opened it and instantly knew that something was amiss.

“Alexis, what's wrong?”

Alexis walked into the living room and gently sat Justin on the sofa. “I had to grab the baby and leave. Someone was trying to get in Carol's back door,” she said through nervous breaths.

“What? You think it was Wilfred?”

“I don't know. But I wasn't hanging around to find out.”

Alexis grabbed her mother's cordless phone and immediately dialed Carol and Jason.

"Carol, someone was trying to get in the house, and I had to leave out with Justin. Come now if you can. We're at my mother's house."

"We're on our way," said Carol.

Alexis paced for several minutes and then sat on the sofa next to Justin. His arms flailed in the air as he held his teething ring.

Doris walked to the living room window and peered out of it. Then she made sure the deadbolt was latched on the door. "You need to let the police know. He's probably watching you. I've seen these things escalate, and I don't want anything to happen to you. You might as well just move back home now."

Alexis nodded. "Counting down the days until I can relocate. You should consider coming with me."

"I might consider it. Now that you're moving, starting a career, I probably don't need as much space. But the main thing should be that Wilfred knows you no longer live here. That he can no longer wage his campaign of terror against you."

"I've made it clear to him that I'm leaving. But I worry he still may try to harm you to get back at me."

"I have no problem buying a gun and learning to use it," said Doris.

"Well, you know how much I hate guns." Alexis shook her head. "Always did have a strong fear of them."

"It might be time to reconsider that proposition," Doris urged.

The sound of something suddenly clanked against the bottom of the front door. Both women darted their gaze at the doorway and then exchanged worried glances. It sounded like the ceramic planter that sat on the porch had been kicked, either accidentally or intentionally.

Alexis stood and walked slowly toward the door. Her mother, Doris, went over to the sofa and picked up Justin to carry him into one of the bedrooms. From within the wood-paneled walls of the room, just as she settled the baby on the bed, she heard it.

“Alexis, I know you’re in there! You will not rid yourself of me! Either bring your ass out now, or I swear—I will burn this piece of shit down!”

Doris hurried out of the bedroom to search for the cordless phone to dial 911. Halfway into the hall, she stopped momentarily, clutching at her chest. She tried to calm herself and breathed slowly and deeply. Two words surfaced in her mind: *panic attack*.

Across the street, Vietnam Billy was once again alerted by the incessant yelling and shouting. He turned on his porch light, saw Bachman’s silhouette and went outside to cross the street. He was determined to do something. Nip this little problem in the bud. *Some assholes never learn. They never get the message.* Billy waited for a car to go by and then walked onto Doris Fields’s front walkway. “What for the love of Pete is going on out here? You back again, asshole?” he yelled.

Bachman turned and took a stance as Billy got closer.

“Yeah. And there ain’t shit you’re gonna do about it!” Bachman blurted as he drew his arm back and threw a right hook. Billy weaved, the fist narrowly missing his head. Billy countered with a left undercut to Bachman’s midsection. Then

came a shot to the head. Bachman grunted, stumbled backward into the door. He lunged forward knocking Billy onto the sidewalk. Then Bachman rushed forward.

Billy spun him around, attempting to pin him into a headlock. It was unsuccessful.

Alexis drew back the living room curtain and banged on the window. “Wilfred, stop it! It’s over! Leave us alone!” she yelled.

Bachman glared at the veteran and appeared to reach for something under his jacket. Billy leaned forward and quickly grabbed his arm. *Was it a gun? A knife?*

“You stupid piece of shit!” Bachman screamed as he tried to wrestle his arm free.

Billy was going to have to end this quick, he knew. Years of smoking and sedentary habits had cut his wind. And in several more minutes, he might have lost whatever strategic benefit that was his to claim.

Bachman jerked back his arm and suddenly darted onto the porch, reached down, and hoisted the large ceramic planter over his head. Totally enraged, he hurled it toward Billy with red-hot anger. It barely missed.

Billy weaved his near seventy-year-old body out of the way and then rushed onto the porch. Bachman hurled a kick directed at Billy’s groin. Billy jumped back and then quickly moved forward, grabbing Bachman by the throat, pinning him into the section where the porch’s railing met the home’s frame siding.

“The first time was a warning! But you obviously haven’t learned to leave these good folks alone,” Billy growled.

Bachman could hardly breathe. His face turned a pale shade of red. He stared at Billy wide-eyed as the veins in his head protruded like pipes about to burst under pressure.

“Let me go! Get off me! You’re crazy!” Bachman muttered with a gravelly voice.

Billy pointed a finger at him. “No. You’re crazy!”

Bachman, arms flailing, suddenly managed to twist himself out of Billy’s grip. Then he sprung forward with a head-butt to Billy’s skull. Billy was stunned momentarily. He took a step back holding his head as Bachman fled from the porch and ran down the street to his car.

Alexis quickly opened the door to let Billy in. He walked inside gently patting his forehead with the palm of his hand.

“Oh my God! Are you all right, Bill?!”

Billy nodded while staring into a large mirror over the mantel. “Yeah. I’ll be fine. I’ve had worse injuries in my life,” he said, his wound flecking blood onto the floor.

“Let’s get something for that cut. The police are on their way. And so is an ambulance for my mother,” Alexis said as she left the living room. She briefly peeked into the bedroom at Justin, who had somehow fallen asleep amid the chaos. Then she went into the bathroom to grab a first-aid kit.

Doris shuffled into the living room, symptoms aside, to see about her neighbor.

“Thank you, Bill. I’m sorry you ended up being a part of our drama,” she said, shaking her head. “My God. That cut’s terrible.”

Billy sat on the sofa and Doris sat beside him as Alexis returned with some gauze and treatment for his wound. He

leaned back against the sofa, lifting his head as he stared at the ceiling. “No worries, Doris. You and Alexis are like family to me. Been here in Madtown too long not to be able to help each other in our time of need. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t want to beat the living crap out of him. Tried to warn his ass off the first time. But I guess he wanted to call my bluff. He’s lucky I didn’t shoot him.”

Alexis cleaned Billy’s wound and then applied pressure to stop the bleeding. Briefly glancing down, she noticed a tattoo of a fanged cobra on the left side of his neck. Minutes later, the police and paramedics arrived, followed closely behind by Carol and Jason. Three Madison PD officers walked up the sidewalk, and one knocked on the door. Two came into the house followed by a pair of EMTs who attended to Doris. A third cop stayed outside looking for evidence. Meanwhile, Alexis and Billy explained the course of events to Carol, Jason and the cops as they stood in the living room.

Alexis then went into the bedroom, hefted Justin from the bed while he was still asleep, walked out and then handed him over to Jason.

“Miraculously, he slept through the whole thing,” Alexis said.

“Probably because it’s way past his bedtime. I’m just glad you both were unharmed,” said Jason. “Make that two of us,” Carol agreed. “Bachman will get what’s coming to him soon enough,” Jason said as he peered down while gently rocking his son in his arms. The baby slowly opened his eyes and looked around the room in a bloom of curiosity.

Jason turned to his sister and said, “We better get home and make sure everything’s okay.” Then he asked one of the cops, “Can you guys have a car meet us there?”

“Yeah. Sure.” The cop spoke into his radio and requested that a cruiser be sent to Gilbert Rd for Jason and Carol’s safety. The third cop opened the front door and briefly stuck his head in from outside. “Hey, you need to take a look at this.”

Everyone, including the two cops inside, filed out of the house, onto the porch and sidewalk.

With a nitrile glove-covered hand, the cop reached down on the right side of the porch. From just underneath the front of the bushes, he retrieved a powder-blue pair of women’s panties.

“Look familiar?” he asked while holding up the soiled lingerie.

Alexis nodded. A flood of both fear and embarrassment had immediately washed over her. “Yes. Those appear to be the same size and color of panties I wear. He must have somehow got them from my room without my consent or knowledge.”

The cop pointed with his left hand, “These spots you see near the center here. That appears to be blood spatter, Ms. Fields. My guess is he left them behind as a form of intimidation. We’ll have it sent to a lab for DNA testing.”

Jason shook his head in anger. “What the hell is this guy’s problem? I mean...if someone doesn’t want to be with you—why is it so hard to just walk away?” He muttered before handing his baby over to Carol to put in his car. He ran a hand through his hair in elevated frustration. “What a sick creep to keep harassing her and not stop!”

The cop who had hoisted the panties nodded. “That makes logical sense to you and me, to rational people. But these



morons aren't rational at all. For the stalker, it is all about control. When they've finished terrorizing one victim, they often move on to the next. It's absolutely crazy," he said shaking his head. He went on, "But we need to get him off the street before someone seriously gets hurt. You folks go on and get your mother to the hospital. We'll have a car patrolling the area throughout the night and in the short term."

Assisting the EMTs, Alexis helped her mother off of the porch. Then they guided her down the sidewalk and into the back of the ambulance to be taken to UW Hospital for observation. Once Doris had been seated securely, Alexis climbed in and held her mother's hand as the EMTs closed the door.

Bachman managed to continue his attacks on Alexis unimpeded. It had been obvious he wasn't going to let her just ride off into the sunset without retribution. But somehow she was going to have the last word. She was going to end this campaign of terror or die trying.

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## CHAPTER 6

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FORTY-EIGHT HOURS LATER, the police arrived once again in front of the home that Alexis shared with her mother. This time, the reason was more grim.

“What have we got here, Haney?” asked Madison PD Captain Jack D’Pella as he exited his patrol unit and walked closer to the slain body that lay on the porch.

Both men crouched over. “It’s bad, Captain,” said Lou Haney, the lead detective assigned to the case. “The victim’s name was Bill Finnegan. The body was discovered by a neighbor out walking his dog. I think this is a case of premeditated murder. Someone had it out for him. Looks to me like the skull and jawbone have been broken. Blunt-force trauma to the head. Whoever did this must have surprised him somehow. Caught him off guard completely.”

“So you think he knew his assailant?”

“It’s certainly possible. And the bruises on his hands and forearms look like defensive wounds. He tried to fight off his attacker, no doubt. And these markings over here, missing chunks from these bricks, and the scuff marks on the porch’s railings, are presumably from the impact of a baseball bat.”

“Anything taken? Money? Jewelry?”

“Robbery doesn’t look like the motive here. He’s still got his wallet on him with a hundred and fifty-seven dollars inside. Poor guy was sitting on his porch, minding his own business, and I’m guessing, was attacked and couldn’t defend himself enough,” said Haney.

News vans arrived on the scene as detectives interviewed residents about who could have possibly killed Vietnam Billy, the old war veteran and self-appointed block captain found brutally murdered. The quiet and picturesque neighborhood had never been dealt a homicide up close, and Madison had often been rated one of the nicest places to live by numerous magazines, so the news of Billy’s murder was sure to raise eyebrows.

While an attractive female reporter with a cameraman in tow talked to several neighbors about his lifestyle, asking if they knew anyone who might have a motive, the Dane County CSI unit arrived, quietly and meticulously scouring the area.

His body had been found crumpled on his porch next to the folding chair that he sat in every evening, enjoying the sights and sounds of summer. He had been bludgeoned, the Badgers T-shirt and pair of denim shorts he’d been wearing, both dreadfully soaked with blood. A diehard football fan, he rarely missed a game whenever the Badgers were on TV.

“Whoever did this was apparently in a fit of rage. This was personal. I would surmise that the guy was already dead at some point, but the blows just kept on coming,” D’Pella said.

Haney shrugged, lifting his gaze forward, reflecting on the moment. “I don’t understand why there’s no value on life anymore. You got any idea what’s happening to our society, and our world Captain?” he asked.

D’Pella turned away from the war veteran’s dead body to glance at Haney.

“I don’t know the answer to that question, Haney. If I did, I’d be a rich man. But I can promise you this; we’re going to find the animal or animals that did this and take them down. You can bet your ass on that!”

Another detective strolled over to the conversation with his notepad in hand. “Captain, this might be of some importance. Finnegan had filed a report about an altercation he had with the boyfriend of an Alexis Fields. She lives across the street. According to the report, the boyfriend threatened them both after being confronted by Finnegan, who was coming to her aid when he saw the boyfriend assaulting her. On a second occasion the two were involved in a fistfight. The boyfriend’s name is Wilfred Bachman. There’s already a request to look for Bachman and his vehicle. His last known address is in Madison.”

“Have the request extended outside of Madison and even out of state, in case he leaves the area. Anybody see anything? How about the neighbors?” D’Pella asked.

“Most of the neighbors we’ve interviewed weren’t home when the murder allegedly occurred.”

“How about the victim... the girl with the ex-boyfriend, anybody talk to her?”

“We’re trying to get a hold of her. She’s been putting in extra hours at UW, where she’s a med student, we’re told. The university’s campus police have been notified about Bachman as well.”

D’Pella took in a deep breath, carefully scanning the neighborhood.

“Days like this I hate this job, gentlemen. Don’t get me wrong, I get a hard-on nailing these scumbags and bringing some closure to the families of victims. But to see this poor guy beaten to death like this makes my damn skin crawl,” D’Pella said.

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## CHAPTER 7

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WILFRED BACHMAN WAS a wanted man. Police wanted to question him about the assault of Alexis Fields, and now he was pegged as a person of interest in the murder of Bill Finnegan. But Bachman was nowhere to be found.

There had been no weapon left at the crime scene, and police had no eyewitness accounts to go on, only a possible motive to tie Bachman to Finnegan's murder. While lying in bed at the motel, Bachman had received a late-night phone call from his mother.

"Will, where the hell are you? The police have been here looking for you. Are you all right?"

"Yeah. I'm good. I'm still in Madison, staying at a motel. I had to clear my head. And with everything that's going on I'll be gone awhile."

"Why? That makes you look guilty. You know that, don't you?"

"I broke up with Alexis. Is that a crime?"

"Of course not, but the police said that some guy was murdered, and they have you as a person of interest."

"I don't know what they're talking about. *I didn't murder anyone.* And if someone *did* get murdered, I believe Alexis is

pissed and trying to implicate me in it.”

“Well, it’d be best if you got yourself a lawyer, Will. Just in case. It’s better that you turn yourself in and get this straightened out.”

“I’m not turning myself in. *For what?* So they can get me on some trumped-up charges? I’m thinking about leaving Madison for a while, Momma; there are better opportunities elsewhere.”

“Look, Will, I know that you didn’t murder anyone, but the police don’t know that until they can clear you. I’ll get you an attorney. I know a good one who represented your father, got him off when he was arrested for domestic violence. Although it pissed me off at the time.”

“Okay, whatever.”

Bachman told his mother he loved her and hoped to see her soon. He had some unfinished business to deal with before deciding if he would leave town. The following night, he returned to the condo and took her car keys while she was asleep. He knew that she wouldn’t hear him due to the fact that she was a hard sleeper. Leaving his own car in the condominium complex’s underground garage, he took hers and conspicuously drove to the neighborhood where Alexis lived. He had imagined sweet revenge—*an encore performance*—in his sick and twisted way of thinking.

The night had turned cool and damp. He parked roughly twenty yards away from her house on the same side of the street. Waited for her patiently, scooting down in the driver’s seat of his mother’s Kia Sorento. He wore a navy-blue hoodie, denim shorts and a pair of black sneakers. Not exactly the kind of attire a would-be mugger or kidnapper would wear, but the

color or type of clothes he had on was the least of his concerns.

Bachman knew her schedule. Every Thursday night at approximately 8:30 P.M. she would leave her home and drive to a twenty-four-hour fitness gym where she was a member. She loved working out. And he'd always admired her athletically toned body, her perfect natural breasts, just as other men had. He watched as she closed the front door of her home and surveyed her surroundings before she walked to her car. To remain unnoticed, he waited several minutes, until she drove up the street, before he followed her.

She arrived at the gym twenty minutes later, pulling into a parking space, grabbing her workout bag from her vehicle's trunk and scurrying toward the entrance to the club.

She wore a fitted black jogging suit, one that Bachman had purchased as a Valentine's Day gift, a pair of pink Nike cross-trainers, and a new pink T-shirt which ironically read: "Suck It Up, Buttercup."

Gym staff was not present after 7:00 P.M., and entrance to the building was only possible with an authorized access key given to club members. The evening's light drizzle gave way to a batch of heavier rain. As she walked, Alexis turned around to see if she was being followed.

She trudged to the club's entrance, pulling out her access key from her jacket's pocket and swiped it in front of the door sensor to unlock the door.

Bachman bolted out of his mother's vehicle, running across the street toward the entrance of the club to catch the glass door before it closed completely.



*“Dammit!”* he muttered. He stood out of breath. His chest felt constricted, and his breathing was fast and intense. Running was not something he had been accustomed to doing. It had been too late to catch the door to sneak in the club after her. He glanced at the front of the building and peered inside the tinted glass windows. He wondered if anyone had managed to see him.

After several minutes, he jogged back to the Sorento and opened the passenger door, quickly retrieving a hunting knife from the glove compartment. Bachman furtively scanned the area as he moved closer to Alexis’s vehicle. Hunching over by the left rear wheel well, he positioned the knife at the proper angle, swiftly puncturing her car’s back tire, smiling as he listened to the hissing sound of air escaping. He sliced into each of her four tires, determined to leave her with no way to get home. The “revengeful act” was the start of more to come, he thought. Moments before, though, Bachman hadn’t been thinking at all. He’d failed to see the surveillance camera mounted near the top of the gym’s entrance.

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## CHAPTER 8

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AFTER FILING AN INCIDENT REPORT with Madison PD, Alexis planned to meet with Detective Haney at Central District for an impromptu meeting scheduled for 2:30 P.M. the following day. The sky was overcast, with rain in the forecast. And the sun peeked intermittently through the clouds over the city. Slowly, she pulled in front of the tan building on Carroll Street, her BMW sporting new tires.

After shutting off the engine, she checked her makeup in the rearview mirror and ran her fingers through her hair before climbing out to go inside. She was wearing a black two-button jacket over a white silk top, a sheath dress and a pair of black Vince Camuto pointed-toe pumps. She looked stunning. All department personnel present, including female officers, focused their gaze on her as she swaggered inside.

“Hi, I’m Alexis Fields, here to see Detective Haney.” She spoke confidently.

A short and stocky woman with close-cropped hair, more handsome than beautiful, quickly responded. “Sure, I’ll get him up front,” she said before placing the call back to Haney’s office.

Haney took a sip from his coffee mug, then eagerly made his way forward.

“Ms. Fields, it’s a pleasure to meet you,” he said as they shook hands. “Please follow me. There have been some interesting developments in the case. I think we’re on to something,” he added confidently.

Alexis and Haney meandered through the hallway back to his office, a small room sparsely furnished with several metal file cabinets, a steel desk and an ergonomic chair. On the desk sat stacks of case reports and a multiple-line phone complete with an intercom.

“Please, have a seat,” he motioned with a wave.

Alexis sat down in a small chair next to Haney’s desk, brimming with curiosity.

“First off, I’m sorry to hear about your tires. You know, we’re a small, tight-knit operation, and I hear most of what comes down the wire. That said, and since you may play a critical part in our murder investigation, I took the liberty of contacting the folks that run the gym where you’re a member, to see if perhaps there were any security cameras on the premises. There were indeed. And so, I was provided with a copy of the video surveillance tape retrieved, which I’d like to show you.”

Haney reached into a leather briefcase on the floor and pulled out an iPad that he’d had the footage copied to for the occasion. He held the tablet up, giving Alexis a direct view of the screen, then cued the file.

“It’s not exactly high-definition, but you get a pretty good look at this guy’s face,” he said.

As the grainy video played, a man was seen running toward the front door of the gym. Then, he paused for a tense moment, looking around suspiciously as he caught his breath.

“That’s him!” Alexis blurted as she watched the footage. “That’s Wilfred. I knew it was him.”

“Are you sure, Ms. Fields?”

“Absolutely. You see, he’s got this habit of jerking his neck to one side whenever he gets nervous or agitated. I’ve seen it on several occasions.” Alexis pointed to the screen, turning the iPad toward Haney. “If you look here, he does it. But I know it’s him. I can clearly see his face. What a complete asshole!” she said.

“I would have to agree with you. He seems like a spurned lover that can’t let go. You hear a lot about that these days. We’ll catch up with him. It may take some time, but we’re hoping he’s stupid enough to use your cell phone.”

Alexis shrugged. “He’s a smart guy; I’ll give him that—just crazy as hell. And he’s turned menacingly dangerous.”

“I know you’re glad to get away from him. You deserve much better than that.”

“Thank you. I’ve already filed for a restraining order. And I’m attending an injunction hearing at the courthouse as soon as I leave here.”

Haney nodded. “Okay, good. Now, I’ve got some tidbits concerning Bill Finnegan. I understand you knew him fairly well since he lived right across the street?”

“Yes, he would organize our block club party each year. He was the eyes and ears of our neighborhood, so to speak. We’re a close-knit community. His death has hit us hard.”

“You know much about his private life? He have much company?”

“No, I don’t. He was divorced, I believe, and lived alone. He’s been there since I was a kid.”

“Well, it may come as a surprise that a couple of your neighbors indicated that Mr. Finnegan may have, on occasion, had what appeared to be call girls come to his house. You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that, would you?”

“No, this is the first I’ve heard of it. And how in the hell would my neighbors know they were call girls?”

“The folks next door to him said they’d overheard an argument about money and had never seen the women before. We’re exploring all angles. Keeping all options open. Forensics is in the process of examining his computer’s hard drive, his Internet searches and phone records. I can’t blame the guy for not wanting to be alone, but it’s a dangerous world out here. And living in a place like this could’ve given the poor man a false sense of security.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Alexis said.

“Now, here’s where things get really interesting,” Haney exclaimed. “As of last night, a colleague and I got a hold of some critical information. As it turns out, some kids were playing touch football at the end of your block the evening Finnegan was murdered. Why is this significant? Because these kids were playing their game in the middle of the street. They told us that a woman in an SUV turned onto the block and slowed down, waiting for them to clear a path. But when the kids moved out of the way, she rolled down the driver’s-side window and asked them if they knew the man that got into a fight with your boyfriend. And with good intentions, though bad judgment, the kids gave up Finnegan’s name and pointed out to the woman where he lived. We requested that each of those kids come down for witness statements and give

a description of the woman to a sketch artist. Now, based on that information, this is what we've got so far."

Haney pulled out a manila envelope from his top drawer, unfastened the clasp and handed Alexis the pencil drawing.

"Are you kidding me?" she said nervously, her eyes wide with dismay.

"What? You know this person?" Haney asked.

"Oh, God. I'm... speechless."

"Why?"

Alexis tore her eyes away from the drawing to look at Haney. "Because, that's his mother."

"Whose mother?"

"Wilfred's. I've only seen her once or twice, but I'm pretty good with faces, and I'm almost certain that's her."

"We'd already been in contact with her when we went to the condo looking for Bachman. She seemed a little screwy then, but never in a million years would I have pegged her a person of interest," Haney said.

That was it. Haney stood up from his desk, courteously signaling that this brief but insightful meeting was over.

"Ms. Fields, I want to thank you for coming down today. I won't take up anymore of your time and wish you the best of luck in your endeavors. I need to get with my guys. We've got to move fast before this sketch hits the media. I don't want her knowing we're on to her, in case she tries to run off somewhere. That wouldn't be good for business. I'm sure you understand."

“I understand completely. Please let me know if I can be of any further help.”

“I most certainly will. In the meantime, watch your surroundings, be safe, and don’t put your daily routine on Facebook.”

“Okay, Detective.” Alexis stood and shook Haney’s hand. Even more puzzled now, she walked to the front of the building and through the glass entry door, pressing the button on her key fob to climb into her car.

\* \* \*

About thirty minutes later, with search warrant in hand, a skilled team of Madison police, both uniformed officers and detectives, converged on the condo building where Elizabeth Bachman lived with her son. Marked and unmarked police units quietly and efficiently parked in front of and in the rear of the four-story complex.

Equipped with Kevlar bulletproof vests, the officers filed inside of both entrances through a stairwell up to Unit 3C, guns drawn.

Haney stepped forward and gave several knocks on the door, hoping for an amicable response.

Nothing. No one answered.

“Ms. Bachman, Madison PD. Open up if you’re in there! We want to talk to you!” Haney barked.

A detective standing next to Haney glanced down at the doorknob, then up at Haney.

“Try it?” he said, looking for approval to turn the handle and go inside.

Haney nodded, his heart thumping wildly in his chest now. These high-risk excursions had been relatively infrequent throughout his tenure. Not something a small-town cop could ever get used to.

Detective Jerrold Blaine reached forward, turned the handle and slowly swung the door open. Eight cops crept forward into the condo, their guns at the ready. No one else could be seen inside.

At least, not yet.

A small television nestled on a TV cart sat in a corner. No sound. Only a live airing of *Jeopardy!* played out on the screen.

“Ms. Bachman, you here?” Haney called out as the men peered into the kitchen, a bathroom, and then a guest bedroom.

Suddenly, a loud voice emerged from the main bedroom at the end of the hall.

“Don’t come any further... unless you all got a death wish,” Ms. Bachman yelled hoarsely from behind the closed door.

“We just want to talk, ma’am. No one has to get hurt in this. Just come out of the bedroom unarmed, with your hands in the air,” one of the cops said in a slightly quavering voice.

“Uh-uh. See, I can’t do that. Want to know why?”

The officers froze momentarily, trying their best to negotiate an easy resolution.

“Why? Tell us why, Ms. Bachman.”

“Because I did it. I killed that son of a bitch. That’s what you all are here for, I know. Well, I’m telling you right now I killed him, just like I killed my husband, Ward, God rest his



soul. And I got that same baseball bat right here, next to me, ready to use again if necessary.”

“Okay. Well, come on out and let’s talk about it. We can all figure this out without anyone else getting hurt. How does that sound?”

“That don’t sound too good to me. And I ain’t leaving here alive. I already know that. And I also know I’m not going to sit back and let nobody disrespect or hurt my boy! I mean, what would you do if you were me? We’ve got to protect our own. You fuckers should know that better than anybody!”

Haney and his men listened intently to every word, as they quietly, carefully, methodically moved down the hallway. Slowly, they eased closer to the bedroom.

Only a few life-ending paces from the door.

Suddenly, a ripping, reverberating shotgun blast tore through the bedroom door frame, leaving a gaping hole in the wall. The officers then lunged into the woman’s line of sight and returned fire, striking Elizabeth Bachman multiple times in the face, chest, and stomach as she stumbled backwards, crashing into a mahogany armoire in the room.

All of the cops poured inside. Several detectives, still pointing their handguns at her lifeless body, crouched over her to confirm that she was, in fact, dead. The smell of gunfire hung thick in the air. Brass shell casings littered the varnished hardwood floor.

Haney, taking in the gruesome scene, took a deep breath, swiveled his gaze toward Blaine and said, “Now, it’s time to get her boy.”

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## FROM THE AUTHOR

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I hope you've enjoyed Restraining Order: Part One of the Alexis Fields Thrill Series. You can get Book Two here: [The Bogeyman Next Door](#)

Word-of-mouth is crucial for any author to succeed. **If you enjoyed this book, please consider leaving a review, even if it's only a line or two; it would make all the difference and would be greatly appreciated.**

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## **SNEAK PEEK: THE BOGEYMAN NEXT DOOR**

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### **MARKED FOR DEATH...**

THE FOUR MEN shuddered with fear in the back of the black Cadillac Escalade as it turned onto Mulholland Drive. Their faces remained covered, their mouths and hands bound. They winced and groaned with the notion that death could now be imminent. Then one of the kidnapped men, figuring he had just minutes left to live, hurled forward and delivered a wild and swift kick, brazenly connecting with the side of the driver's face.

The unsuspecting blow startled the driver. His adrenaline pumping now, he twisted his body and turned his anger toward the backseat.

“I'm gonna kill you, you son of a bitch!” he yelled as the looming hunk of metal came to an abrupt halt. Suddenly, he and his accomplice fiercely flung open their doors and jumped out.

The Escalade sat motionless, idling in front of the vacant house near the end of the block. The ramshackle two-story was next door to the home of Alexis Fields, who, after narrowly escaping her disturbed ex, recently relocated (along with her dog, Max, a brown and white Shih Tzu), from her hometown

of Madison, Wisconsin, to Lake Park, Illinois, in search of a new life and career as a medical intern.

But there was danger lurking here tonight.

The driver and his cohort paused for a tense beat and stealthily scanned the area. There could be no witnesses, they thought. None to tell what they had seen or heard. But there *was* someone in the bushes, peering from a distance. He'd arrived there for a similar yet unrelated purpose, watching all of the action as it unfolded. He did not know them, and they were unaware of his presence.

Without hesitation, the driver and his accomplice yanked the men from the SUV, moved through the darkness and shoved them into the backyard of the desolate house. Strewn about the gargantuan yard was garbage, chunks of concrete and construction debris. They walked up the frail wooden steps and filed inside, smelling the room's putrid and disgusting odor, the kind that would have emanated from a rotting corpse. The four were thrust down into chairs, into pitch-black darkness as chatter from a nearby police scanner bellowed into the airspace.

Then, one of the captors turned on a table lamp, walked to a corner of the room, grabbed an AR-15 assault rifle with attached suppressor and racked the charging handle. The captured men shuddered and flailed at the sound of the lethal weapon engaging, and at what was sure to come next. Their breathing accelerated, their hearts pounding like the sound of bass marching drums. Their pulses hammered.

The man holding the rifle smirked as he walked toward them. He snatched the pouch from his nearest victim's head and viciously tore the tape from his mouth. He furrowed his

brow. His forehead creased. “Do you know why you’re here?” he asked.

The seated man gasped. His eyes bulged from their sockets in fear, welling up with tears. “Please don’t do this,” he spat out. “Listen. You got it all wrong, man. I swear. We can get you your money. A little more time is all we need. Please! *Please!*”

“I’m afraid it’s too late for that.”

The victim swiveled his neck toward the nearest window and shrieked: “Help! *Please, somebody help us!*” he called as loud as he could before breaking out into an uncontrollable sob.

“Shhhh... stop your whimpering. It’s pathetic,” the captor snapped. “I’m not going to shoot you. But you’re all going to die a different way,” he said as he forcefully taped the man’s mouth again, covered his head with the black bag, and bound the drawstring tightly.

Moments later, the madman loomed over them, now holding a ten-inch hunting knife. Still seated, the men squirmed and writhed in fear, hands tied behind their backs and heads sheathed with those terrifying pouches, like the kind terrorists always used on their captives. The maniac then heaved a deep breath, moved closer to his nearest seated victim, and sliced into him, drawing the blade across his neck with the precision of a New York butcher. Suddenly, there was a violent ripping noise and a flaring sheet of agony. A euphoric rush surged from the inner depths of his consciousness as the killer maniacally decapitated the first of these four helpless souls.

The killer then nestled the knife against the dead man’s cargo pants, and craned his neck toward the sound of

approaching footsteps in the hall. There was a silhouette of a man lingering in the dimly lit doorway. One of the killer's cohorts walked into the room with an ominous warning.

“We got a problem.”

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## **SNEAK PEEK: THE BOGEYMAN NEXT DOOR CONTINUED**

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### **THE RIM OF DARKNESS**

I WAS CHECKING my email when Max hurried over to me, wanting to go into the backyard. I closed my laptop, got up, and started toward the kitchen, when suddenly, I heard a strange sound from outside. It sounded like a person screaming for help. Max and I quickly went to open the backdoor to figure out from where the screams had emerged. But the doorbell suddenly rang, temporarily distracting me from investigating any further. I darted to the front door, peered out the peephole and opened it. Standing on my doorstep was an innocent-looking teenager with shoulder-length hair and an earring in his left ear, dressed like an Abercrombie and Fitch model.

“Hi, ma’am. We hate to bother you, but our car broke down by the corner, and we were wondering if you could call a tow truck for us. I left my cell at home, and my girlfriend’s phone isn’t charged.”

“Sure, I guess I can do that. Hold on, let me grab mine and find one for you.”

I used my phone’s voice activation feature to contact a local towing company, then handed it to the teen to finish the



call.

“Thanks so much, ma’am. My name is Aaron, by the way. My girlfriend and I will be in my car waiting. That’s it by the curb. The black Camaro.”

“That’s a nice car. And you’re welcome; let me know if you guys need anything else. I’ll be home.”

I stood on the porch as the boy returned to the car, got in and rolled down the windows. He and his girlfriend waited patiently, staring at the house next door as I watched and listened with rabid curiosity.

“Fuck—that is one creepy-looking place. And it’s so huge. I just thought of a cool-ass idea, though. We could put out the word on Facebook we’re having a party in there. Drinks, weed, sex—all for free. That would be totally awesome!” he said.

“Yeah, real smart, dipshit. Like anyone’s going to go inside that disgusting house. So how long is it going to take the tow truck to come? And where is that asshole who’s supposed to meet us here?” said the girl.

“The towing guy said maybe forty-five minutes to an hour. I think they’re the only game in town. So calm down already, and quit freakin’ out, all right?” the boy said sharply.

After I finished eavesdropping and closed the door, I hurled down the phone and hurried into the backyard, nervously seeking Max. I glanced at the chain-link fences on each side of the yard, and the old patio set in the middle that had been left by the previous owners. Then I glanced at the house next door, which was not only vacant, but was awaiting demolition or renovation, I’d been told. All the windows except for one were covered with wooden boards to prevent

trespassers from entering. I yelled Max's name and, while looking in the direction of the house, suddenly saw a frenzied, jerky movement, behind the rear window. A strange figure stood there.

“What the hell?” I murmured.

Learn more about *The Bogeyman Next Door*

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## SNEAK PEEK: STALKED

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MY EYES FLEW open to the sound of something or someone inside my condo as I lay asleep. Terrified, I began quietly easing upwards, my pulse hammering, back pressing against the headboard of the bed.

I immediately conjured thoughts of the torment and the harrowing past I so desperately wanted to leave behind. Something in my chest started to flutter. My eyes were wild as panic bloomed in the pit of my stomach.

Nervously peering across the room, I could now see a dark shape, smoothly and silently slinking about the doorway. Slowly. Moving closer—toward me. It was definitely moving, whatever it was, *whoever it was*.

Closer.

I lay there, paralyzed in terror as *it* crept closer. *Oh, God, no! This can't be happening!*

My heart raced as the masked intruder suddenly and swiftly lunged forward and violently grabbed me by my throat, pulling me out of bed as I tumbled onto the floor.

I screamed at the top of my lungs and tried to regain my balance as he held me down, one of his hands tightly gripping

me like a horse's collar, the other pulling my hair back—commanding me to look up at him in horror.

My arms and legs flailing, I frantically stretched and grabbed the porcelain lamp from my nightstand, then managed with all of my adrenaline-fueled strength to swing, smashing it into his face.

The blow stunned him. He grunted and wavered momentarily. It was enough to allow me to free myself and run for the door of my condo to escape.

I unlocked the dead bolt and wrenched the handle, then darted into the hallway. I could hear him following close behind. I'd been able to move fast enough to get out before he leaped in a desperate attempt to stop me cold.

“HELP!! PLEASE!! SOMEBODY HELP ME!!” I screamed down the hallway, banging my fist on several doors as I ran toward the emergency exit stairwell.

I looked back and saw that he was still behind me. His face was hideously covered with some type of streaked silicone mask. He was dressed all in black. *Who the hell was this and why was he after me?*

I ran down the concrete stairs and hobbled out into the building's underground parking garage, panting, looking around for my car, for somebody, anybody to help me.

I bolted to Section C, the area where I last remembered parking.

I surveyed my surroundings, shaking, gripped in panic as I tried to get one of my car's doors open. *Dammit!* No keys. My eyes pinballed across the area. He was gone now. Vanished. Had he stopped chasing me? Could I have lost him somehow?

I felt a sense of relief as I crumpled down onto the cold concrete of the parking garage and nestled my back against the driver's side door of my BMW.

I closed my eyes for a split second to calm my frazzled nerves, wishing my pulse would simmer down. I took in a deep breath, silently wondering just what the hell was happening here. Was this all a bad dream?

Suddenly, I heard the patter of footsteps fast approaching, widely opening my eyes in fear.

I sat horrified and in shock as this monster stood before me with a sapphire-colored motorcycle helmet in his right hand.

Before a scream could escape my body, he abruptly lunged forward and furiously swung the helmet, aiming it directly at my skull—delivering a thundering *WHACK!*

My head snapped sideways, the bone-crushing blow rendering me senseless as I collapsed to the pavement.

I came to with blurred vision, a throbbing ache at the top left side of my head, and what looked like at least six human figures standing around me, staring as I lay semiconscious.

“Alexis? Alexis, can you hear me?” a woman in light blue scrubs inquired.

“Where... where am I?” I managed groggily.

“You were found unconscious in the parking lot of your building by a passerby. Somehow you suffered a serious injury to your forehead. A bleeding wound. Only God knows how you got there. Do you remember anything? Do you know what happened to you?”

“I... I vaguely remember running.”

“What were you running from?”

“Running down the hall... from my condo,” I murmured.

“Alexis, I’m Dr. Norvesh Patael,” said a short, heavily accented man with a stethoscope, inching closer to the side of the bed. “We’d like to know who or what exactly were you running from?”

“Someone was chasing me. He... had a mask. I ran to the parking lot. That’s... that’s all I can remember,” I slurred slowly.

“You’re very fortunate your injuries were not more severe. You’re suffering from cerebral edema. There is quite a bit of swelling in some of your brain tissue, along with some nasty-looking lacerations on the side of your head and the soles of your feet. I’ve scheduled an MRI for you first thing in the morning. We’ll be monitoring you and running more tests to rule out any other complications. All things considered, I think your prognosis will be okay.”

“Thank you, Doctor,” I managed in a whisper.

“You’re going to need some time off work, and the police will want to interview you to find out just what the hell happened.”

A short and stocky nurse standing by quickly chimed in. “Alexis, I’m Frieda, the assistant on duty, and I’ll be looking after you. Don’t hesitate to alert me if you need help. We’ll let you get some much-needed rest. Dr. Patael will be ordering more tests in the morning.”

“Thank you,” I replied as my eyes worked hard to stay open. Attentively, I watched each of them leave the room before nodding off into a deep slumber.

I tossed and turned, then awoke from what seemed like a terrifying nightmare around 3:30 a.m. My breathing was quick and labored. My skin was perspiring excessively.

I could still feel my attacker's hand around my neck. I'd envisioned him standing over me, this time naked, wearing that ghoulish Hollywood fright mask and holding what looked like a twelve-inch knife in his right hand.

Was it real? Had I been dreaming?

Learn more about *Stalked*

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## **BOOKS BY ALEX DEAN**

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### **Alexis Fields Thrill Series**

Book 1 - *Restraining Order*

Book 2 - *The Bogeyman Next Door (Full length)*

Book 3 - *Stalked (Full length)*

Alexis Fields - Complete Thrill Series Box Set

### **Standalone Books**

The Client

A High-Stakes Crime Thriller

The Secret Life of Lula Darling - Sci-fi/Time Travel



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ALEX DEAN is the author of *Restraining Order*, *The Bogeyman Next Door* and *Stalked*. He is an entrepreneur, former musician, and somewhat of a health enthusiast who enjoys being creative. He writes thrillers as well as other sub-genres of fiction and lives in Illinois with his family. For previews of his upcoming books and more information about Alex Dean, please visit [alexdeanauthor.com](http://alexdeanauthor.com).

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