

Prologue

You pull a knitted ski mask over your face and crouch in a cluster of sagebrush high in the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains. A peppery odor assails you. The moon is full, but shadows provide cover.

You secure powerful binoculars on a tripod. Your heart flutters when you get Salt Lake City's District Attorney in your sights. The fucker—that's what you call him—is in his backyard, squinting at the burnt sienna sky in the distance, it's vividness the result of intense smog. You think only a downpour could rid the valley of the damn inversion layer.

You scold yourself for getting sidetracked. You know you should remain focused.

The DA turns toward the groups dotting his lawn. They are there to celebrate his birthday. You know this. You've done your homework. You pan away to see what he sees.

Attorneys and politicians gather around a fountain. They shake hands, pat each other's backs, and bare bleached smiles. Along the fence media people mingle, searching for tomorrow's headline from amongst the distinguished crowd. You grin. You have an idea what it will say. The civil servants are huddled next to the pond. Yap, yap, yap. They do what comes naturally.

You go back to the DA. To the fucker. He's been in your every thought for what seems like an eternity.

His footsteps are awkward. You imagine he now sees a hazy yellowish halo encircling the patio lights. You wonder if he suspects the pills you gave him, but even if he does, you know he's too cocky to pull out his phone and check with his doctor. And if all goes well, you know he'll never make the call. You are happy.

No, not happy. Content. After all, you want this to be business. You are methodical. Keep that in mind.

He staggers away from the campfire where he roasted marshmallows earlier—as you know, he's always had a weakness for them—and it looks like he's wearing cinder blocks instead of soft Italian loafers. The pounding in your chest builds. You close your eyes for a moment, trying to get your emotions under control. The DA is dying, but he's not dead yet. Don't get ahead of yourself.

His ankles quiver. He opens his arms to regain balance and his daisy-silk tie swings. Tick tock, tick tock. Then he collapses to a knee. You can't help it. A thrill washes over you.

As Salt Lake County's district attorney, he probably finds his situation unusual. In a courthouse he manipulates words, twists arguments—witnesses and jurors too. He controls. Tonight, he wilts like a string-puppet. A marionette. You enjoy the irony.

Jaw taut and face flushed, he waves his fist at the sky as if to say, "How dare You!"

You want to tell him He doesn't have anything to do with it. But you remain quiet and take in slow breaths. You don't want to get caught. More of them have to pay for what they have done to you.

He snaps his attention back to his guests. With what's coursing through his veins, faces could be flashing in front of him like celluloid film stuck in a projector. You're certain none of the jumpy frames contains a happy face.

He slips a finger inside his shirt collar and tugs. By now he is struggling to get air. The bastard looks up and sticks his hand out in a come-no-closer gesture.

You zoom out. Lines are creasing his secretary's brow; his wife's lips part. Guests scatter. A few rejoin their original flock while others move indoors. You think their movements are caught in slow motion by the DA, conflicting with the hectic pace of his thoughts. Ravel's *Bolero*, which you faintly hear from your hiding place, likely gallops to the tempo of the *William Tell Overture* in his head.

You pull away from the binoculars and scan the mountainside. Nature's soft murmurs are now loud and disjointed. You wonder, *Was I followed? Is someone watching me?* After waiting it out—hearing and seeing no one—you breathe easier. You tell yourself, "Keep that imagination of yours under control!" And the thumping in your chest begins to beat to a smaller drum.

You zoom back in. You can't take your eyes off him. His face twists grotesquely and you know he's putting it all together. Perspiration trickles down his forehead. If things are going according to plan, you know bile is creeping up his throat. You want to cheer when his stomach folds and he jerks forward in spasms. Don't.

His eyes roam the backyard as if searching for his tormentor. He opens his mouth wide to scream, but you hear nothing. Winded, his cry for help never left his lungs. He shudders as his guests finally rush to his help. You steady yourself. You don't want to miss a thing.

He crashes to the ground and settles into the spongy grass. The scent of jasmine blooming nearby permeates his last gasp. He sets his gaze on Great Salt Lake's bruised surface in the distance—knowing his devoutness, you think he's anticipating a divine appearance. Maybe he's listening for an eerie, vengeful laugh. You're not sure about any of this, but those are the thoughts you have. What's certain is that he'll never hear *Bolero*'s crescendo reaching its climax.

And now, for the first time since you arrived, you're not sure how you feel. How *to* feel. The rush is dull. Numbing. It's not what you expected killing to feel like.

You stare at your binoculars as if they hold answers to your apathy. When none come, you calmly store them in their case, whisper "Happy birthday, Fucker" and sneak away.