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**Z**ACK WATCHED CARMEN and Gar head sullenly back across the street to the news vans parked in front of the sloping hills of Forest Lawn. The cemetery stretched along the lip of the river running for almost three miles, fronted by Forest Lawn Drive.

“Least they won’t have to carry the stiff far to bury him,” Zack noted dryly.

“Quality observation,” I growled as I looked down into the culvert at three cops and paramedics standing a few yards from the body.

Zack and I started along the lip of the hill, looking for the crime scene egress that I hoped the uniforms had been smart enough to lay out and mark for us.

As soon as we started walking, the pack of video predators

across the street got active. They switched on their lights and moved parallel to us, gunning off shots as we headed toward Barham, looking for a pre-marked path.

"We're gonna have to start wearing makeup," Zack grumbled, sipping at the last of his coffee.

"Homicide Special," I called out to the group of uniforms standing down on the levee. "You guys mark a footpath?"

"Go further left. It's all flagged," one of the Blues yelled back.

Zack and I picked our way along the ridge, being careful not to step on anything that might later qualify as evidence. We found the trail marked by little orange flags on the ends of metal spikes. Everybody coming and going from now on would use this path down to the levee. The idea was, by using a remote trail to the crime scene we would limit unnecessary contamination of the site.

If this followed the pattern set by the three previous homicides, our unsub had shot this victim at some other location, then moved the body, dropping it in the river. That meant this wasn't the murder scene, it was a dump site.

Since getting this serial murder case seven weeks ago, I had been reading everything I could find on serial crime. It was a condition deeply rooted in aberrant psychology.

The FBI Behavioral Science Unit at Quantico has classified serial criminals into two basic categories: Organized and Disorganized. The organized killer is usually older, more sophisticated, and has a higher IQ. The crimes are often sexually motivated and the killer has managed to complete some form of a sexual act. Organized killers tend to scope out victims carefully, usually selecting low-risk, high-opportunity targets. The need for control is a major aspect of the organized killer's MO. That need extends right down to the crime scenes, which are usually neat and clean. Some organized killers have been known to actually wash their victims and scrub down the crime scene surfaces with cleaning aids to

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eliminate trace evidence. After the murder, the victim is sometimes moved and often hidden. There is no standard motive for the crime such as love, money, or revenge. For all of these reasons, organized killers are extremely difficult to apprehend.

The disorganized killer is a much less developed personality. Generally, he is younger, has low social skills, and is sexually inadequate. Disorganized killers are screwups who aren't able to hold jobs. If they do work, it's menial labor. The crime scenes are a direct extension of all of this—bloody, often dangerously close to the unsub's own residence. They tend to kill inside a comfort zone. The body is often left out in the open or right where it fell with no attempt to clean up or conceal it. The attack is often what is known as a blitz attack: an overpowering charge, usually from the front, using sheer force. There is little sophistication in a disorganized murder act and the unsub is generally much easier to apprehend.

There is a third type of serial killer who exhibits traits from both of the previous examples. This category, which is labeled *mixed*, happens for a variety of psychological and sociological reasons too numerous to list.

I had started both a preliminary criminal profile of the unsub and a victimology profile on the dead, homeless men, in an attempt to narrow down who my unsub was, and why he was choosing these particular targets. So far under victimology, all the dead men were unidentified John Does with no fingertips. They were of different physical proportions, all Caucasian, and all mid-fifties to mid-sixties. I believed they were victims of choice because we had found the bodies all over the city, which lead me to speculate that the unsub was searching for a particular kind of person who shared some trait I had not yet been able to isolate. Because of the mutilation, I felt there was a high degree of rage involved in the killings.

My criminal profile identified the unsub as male. All of our

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victims were white. Because most serial murderers did not kill outside their own ethnic or racial group, I also thought he was Caucasian.

The average age of all known serial killers is about twenty-five. Since this unsub was taking a lot of precautions, such as moving the body into a flowing river to obscure trace evidence, I thought this indicated a higher level of sophistication. For that reason, I had classified him as an organized killer. This pushed my age estimate up over thirty.

Further, the killer was not sexually abusing the victims, so while there was rage, he was not leaving semen behind, making me wonder if these homeless men were possibly father substitutes. The killer always covered the eyes of his victims with a piece of their clothing after he killed them. I reasoned if these were acts of patricide, then maybe he did this because he didn't want these "fathers" staring at him after death.

Still, after three murders, everything I had seemed perilously close to nothing. I didn't see how either profile was contributing very much. All I could hope was for the killer to screw up and make a mistake that would finally point us in a more promising direction.

When we got down to the concrete levee, I saw that the uniformed sergeant in charge was an old-time street monster. At least six-feet-four and two-fifty, he was one of those gray-haired grizzlies who are becoming scarce in today's new police departments. Civil lawsuits have changed height and weight requirements and opened the job up to women and smaller men. I once had a Vietnamese partner who didn't weigh a hundred pounds soaking wet including his uniform, shoes, and gun harness.

The old street bulls complained that cornered felons are tempted to attack small officers. The argument was that they were getting into dustups just because they had hundred-pound partners who looked vulnerable. Old-timers bitched constantly

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about the new academy graduating classes, full of “cunts and runts.”

It’s my opinion that the opposite may actually be true. Women don’t have to deal with testosterone overload, so instead of feeling challenged they employ reason. Small men tend to choose discourse over a fistfight. It’s a useless argument because there is no reverse gear on this issue. We’re never going back to the way it was.

The big sergeant approached. He had a weightlifter’s shoulders, a twenty-inch neck, and a face like a torn softball. There were seven duty stripes on the left sleeve of his uniform under a three-chevron rocker. Each hash mark represented three years in service, so I had a twenty-year veteran standing in front of me.

“Mike Thrasher,” he said, his voice sandpaper on steel.

“I’m Shane Scully and this is Zack Farrell, Homicide Special. You set this up good, Mike. Thanks.”

His frown said, *What’d you expect, asshole?*

I glanced around. “Has anybody heard from the ME or CSI?” noticing they weren’t there yet.

“Apparently, the Rolling Sixties and the Eighteenth Street Suranos got into a turf war in Southwest,” Thrasher rasped. “A regular tomato festival. High body count. Last I checked, CSI was wrapping that up. Should be along any time.”

Usually, when you found an old guy like Thrasher with two decades of field experience still in the harness, it was because he loved patrol and didn’t want to give up the street. He told us he had roped off a staging area for our forensic and tech vans around the corner near Barham, cordoned off the lip of the riverbank, and asked dispatch for three additional patrol teams to help contain the angry news crews. Because of the bloodbath in Southwest, the night watch was stretched thin and the backup hadn’t shown yet. He’d also picked the route down to the body and flagged it. All of this while I’d been pushing

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Zack's potato nose back into the center of his bloated, Irish face.

Just then, two more squad cars raced across the Barham Bridge, turned left on Forest Lawn Drive and parked, leaving their flashers on.

Sergeant Thrasher had separated the two teenagers who found the body. The girl was perched on a rock thirty yards to my right. She was a twitchy bag bride, speed-thin with pink and blonde hair and half a dozen glinting metal face ornaments. Her boyfriend was parked under a tree fifty feet from her. With his black Mohawk and milk-white skin, he looked like an extra in an Anne Rice movie. Even from where I stood I could see the white face powder. He was slouched against the tree trunk defiantly. His body language screamed, *Get me outta here.*

"Run it down," I said to Thrasher, as I took out my mini-tape recorder and turned it on.

"These two found the body. They're heavy blasters. I confirmed all their vitals. Addresses and licenses check out. Both are seventeen. Casper, over there has an extensive juvie yellow sheet. Drugs, mostly. He went down behind two dealing beefs in oh-two and did half a year at County Rancho. Name is Scott Dutton. The girl is Sandy Rodello—two Ls. No record. They say they were down here looking for her raincoat that blew out of the back of his pickup, but since the Barham overpass is the space paste capital of Burbank, I think it's beyond obvious, they were under that bridge slamming veins.

"Sandy's the reason they called it in. She can hardly wait to get up there and do some TV interviews."

"Ain't no business like show business," Zack contributed, slurring his words. Mike Thrasher looked over and sharply reevaluated him.

"Anything else?" I said.

"Putting the drugs and the bullshit about the raincoat aside, their story kinda checks. I made sure none of our guys touched

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the victim, and these two claimed they didn't either. Except when they found him his jacket was pulled up over his eyes, same as the other three vics. They pulled it down to see if he was alive. They claim, other than that, they didn't touch the body. But the corpse is still damp so somebody musta dragged him out of the water."

"Not necessarily. The river's been dropping fast the last two days. It could have receded almost a foot in the last six hours, and with this marine layer, the vic could still be wet, depending on when he got dumped."

I spent a few minutes with Sandy Rodello and Scott Dutton. Drug Klingsons, both in the Diamond Lane to an overdose. Sandy was in charge, Scott amped to overload. Along with the vampire face powder, he also had some kind of black, Gene-Simmons-eye-makeup-thing happening.

"You think we'll get to be on the news?" Sandy suddenly blurted after they had confirmed the facts Mike gave me.

"Greta Van Susteren at the very least," Zack quipped. "You might wanta think about hiring a media consultant." Then without warning, my partner pulled the Kleenex twists out of his nose, spit some bloody phlegm into the bushes, and then wandered away without telling me where he was going.

Truth was, I would just as soon work alone. I was getting weary of Zack's sarcastic lack of interest.

"A media consultant?" Sandy Rodello said, earnestly searching my face for a put-on. "No shit?"

"Let's push on," I said. "Do your parents know where you are?"

"Of course," Sandy said defiantly. "They're cool."

"It's okay with them you're both down here doing drugs under that bridge at two-thirty in the morning?"

"Who says we're doing drugs?" Scott challenged angrily.

"Twenty years of hookin' up tweeksters, pal. I got a nose for it."

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“Well, your nose must be as broken as your partner’s,” Sandy said, and Scott giggled.

“You two need to go home,” I said. “I’m sending somebody from our juvie drug enforcement team over to talk to your parents tomorrow.”

“Big fucking deal,” Scott glowered and looked at Sandy for approval.

“We’re done. Get going.” I waved one of the Blues over. “Show Ms. Rodello and Mr. Dutton to their chariot. And make sure my prime witnesses don’t talk to the press. I see you guys doing interviews, and I’ll be forced to swing by your houses tomorrow and start taking urine samples. Let’s do each other a favor and just keep everything on the DL.”

“That’s so fucking lame,” Sandy whined. But I could see I had her worried.

After we got them out of there, Zack reappeared and we half-slid, half-duckwalked down the forty-five-degree concrete slope of the culvert until we arrived at the river. Then we worked our way back forty yards past the two cops and one paramedic to the body.