



# THE KILLING SEASON

A KINDLE SINGLE BY

**ALEX FRENCH**

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# **The Killing Season**

**By Alex French**



## A Note on Sources

~~This is a work of nonfiction. In the sections where dialogue has been recreated I have used italics. Conversations and scenes are based on recollections of participants, police reports, photographs, and newspaper reports. Domestic violence and violence against women are prominent themes in this story. In most cases the names have been changed or abbreviated to protect the victims' privacy.~~

I also consulted a number of secondary sources—the *New York Times*, the *Grand Junction Daily Sentinel*, the *Los Angeles Times*, scanned newspaper clips from Blake Higgins's excellent *JunctionPodcast.com*, and Kirk Mitchell's work for the *Denver Post* all proved vital. So did George Carpozi Jr.'s seven-part series on Ted Bundy from the *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, Stephen Michaud's *Denver Post* article, and Hugh Aynesworth's *The Only Living Witness: The True Story of Serial Sex Killer Ted Bundy*, and Ann Rule's *The Stranger Beside Me*.

Both Steve Benson and Jerry Nemnich were asked but elected not to participate in this project.

April 15, 2009

33 YEARS, 8 MONTHS, 22 DAYS SINCE THE MURDERS.

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The moon was still shining when Detectives Sean Crocker and Brooks Bennett departed Grand Junction, a city of 54,000 in southwest Colorado, and ran south down a two-lane, through rock headlands, into a desolate grey chaparral of pinon and juniper. The detectives aimed to raise a man named Steve Benson, who skipped town shortly after his wife and little girl were knife murdered and hadn't been heard from in thirty-five years. Back in Junction, folks who remembered Benson spoke of him as though he'd been dead for decades. They just assumed he went the way boys in Grand Valley tended to go, in a drunken wreck.

As they drove, the landscape outside the pickup's windows turned from throbbing vermilion to green and grey. Both Crocker and Bennett knew Benson wasn't dead, but because he hadn't kept a driver's license, drawn a paycheck, or paid taxes, it took months to track him down.

Fifteen hours later the ragged mountains of the Mimbres Valley had them surrounded. The sheriff there said he knew of Benson—unorthodox fella who leased seventy-five acres of land off State Route 35. Spent months at a time living in the forest. People around town called him the “donkey man” on account of his riding around on a donkey. Or something like that. Made his living as a mule packer and raised purebred Limousin cattle, fattened them up and slaughtered them. The sheriff was headed that way, anyhow: His deputies had just received complaints that Benson was stealing water to irrigate his fields. Said he'd be happy to take Bennett and Crocker out there.

Between them Crocker and Bennett had investigated dozens of homicides over the years. Murderous husbands, scheming wives, drunken assholes, reckless crank-heads, impotent johns, desperate thieves. Each case blended into the next. But they'd never investigated a thirty-five-year-old murder before. This felt ... historical. 1975: That was the year Junction came unhinged, the year the little community started having big-city problems. One homicide after the next. Women and children, mostly, found bound and shot in a riverbed or stabbed or strangled to death in a bathtub. One young girl just vanished; cops didn't find anything except a ten-speed and a pair of yellow jelly shoes. The Benson murders, though, they were about the worst of it. Even the young detectives who investigated—Doug Rushing and Jim Fromm—never got over what they saw during that investigation.

They found Benson mending a fence in an open field and recognized him from his old mugshots. His hair was shorter now and he was fatter. Word was he had exes and children all over the Southwest that he hadn't spoken to in years.

Bennett pulled over his pickup. He and Crocker got out and identified themselves as cops from Grand Junction.

*We're here to talk with you a little about the murders of Linda and Kelley, Crocker said. There have been developments.*

Benson looked confused. *Ain't heard anything about that since 1975.*

Crocker slid a series of black-and-white photos across the hood of Bennett's truck to Benson. *Recognize that man?*

Benson stood where he was, staring. *Is that him?*

Steve Benson stood before the door of unit 211 at the Chateau Apartments on North 21st Street with a worried feeling in his gut. It was a Friday night in Grand Junction, ten after eight, and the morning paper was still wedged between the doorjamb and knob. Seemed off to him.

Benson knocked with a bottom fist. He was a forceful man. Six feet tall. Hundred and eighty pounds.

*Linda, where are you?*

Nobody answered. Benson worked at the power plant in Hayden, a four-hour drive north if the weather and the deer cooperated. Weekends, he was in Junction, with his wife Linda and her daughter Kelley. He was locked out because he'd dropped off a \$300 check and his old Comet at the Chevy dealership in Craig, not far from the power plant. He'd picked out a new El Camino, but he couldn't pick it up until next Monday. So he caught a ride home with a buddy who worked at the plant. They were an hour from Grand Junction when Benson realized he'd left his keys in the Comet's glove box.

Linda rarely locked the front door until she went to bed. Linda and Steve had lots of friends in the building, but they spent most of their time with the Grants—Maureen and Gary and Gary Jr., ages three and five—who lived right above them in 311. Linda and Maureen and the kids bounced from one apartment to the next, entering with hardly a knock. Gary Sr. worked out of town at the oil shale mine and Linda and Maureen spent their days together doing macramé or practicing yoga up in Maureen's apartment. At night they stayed up drinking wine and watching Johnny Carson until their eyelids felt heavy.

Benson called Linda his wife, but they weren't married, not in the traditional sense. They'd been together four or five years, and she used his last name as her own, which made him feel good. Maybe they'd get around to getting hitched for real someday. Maybe not.

Benson had a hot temper—he'd been a basket case after returning from Vietnam—and Linda had brought out his better nature. She had narrow shoulders and, in the summer, was partial to halter tops and cutoff dungarees. A car wreck at seventeen had left her with a scar on her face and a limp that did a little to diminish a natural grace that she'd inherited from her mother, Barbara, the beauty queen of North Platte, Nebraska. A few years back, before she met Benson, Linda got busted for marijuana possession, and in the mug shot she wore a wry smile and her long black hair in a loose bun. The last year had been a struggle, though. Linda's sister, Judy, had died of an overdose, and Linda's smiles just didn't come as easily.

Steve had stopped off on the way home and bought her a cold can of Bud. He planned on a Friday night snuggle. The little girl, Kelley, was five, with a blonde bowl cut and incandescent blue eyes. She hadn't started school yet, but Linda worked with her a lot and Kelley could almost read. Steve wasn't her daddy, but he took care of her like he was. He loved the way she back-sassed him.

Now he set down his things and pounded on the door again, still no answer. He knocked next door, at 212, where the building manager lived. Nobody home there either.

It was a hot night and Benson was beginning to sweat. He had a wispy mustache and fine strawberry blonde hair that fell over his ears. He was twenty-six and a union pipefitter. During the warmer months, he'd sleep under the stars near Oak Creek, a few miles from the plant. He'd wake up at first light to fish, work 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and then return to the creek to fish until the sun disappeared. Back at his campsite he'd fry up that night's catch and crack open a can of Beans & Weenee. When the weather turned, he and some guys from the plant packed into a motel room and split the charge eight or ten ways. Steve made good money up in Hayden, enough to pay the rent and

the bills and leave Linda and Kelley some walking-around money.

*Where is everyone?*

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Benson ran up to apartment 311, banged on the door until Maureen answered. Alarmed, she told him that she hadn't seen Linda since last night, when they sat out on the front steps talking and smoking while their kids played in the grass. Maureen called Linda a few times that day and knocked at around 2 p.m. but nobody answered. She assumed Steve had come home early and taken Linda and Kelley up to their cabin on Grand Mesa. There was no telephone in Benson's apartment, so he went back downstairs and knocked some more, rang the doorbell.

*Come on, Linda. Where are you?*

He walked outside to see if the sliding door on the patio was open. He noticed the screen door was off its track.

The Chateau was one of the classier apartment buildings in town. It resembled a ski chalet, with twin peaked roofs and stucco stripes of drab tan and cocoa brown. A few dozen units were occupied by young families and Mesa College co-eds. Steve and Linda lived in a corner apartment on the second floor. Benson ran around the front of the building, scaled the wall-mounted swamp cooler and landed on their balcony with an easy hop. They kept a small charcoal grill and Kelley's tricycle out there. The slider was unlocked. Steve pushed it open, parted the curtains, stepped inside. It smelled faintly of copper and rot. Soft evening light flooded the room. He walked past a seventeen-inch television with a dead grey screen. The kitchen, a narrow alcove, black with darkness.

A small bathroom with doors on two ends and a sliver of hallway separated Steve and Linda's bedroom from the kid's, and it was there that Benson saw Kelley, his baby girl, in baggy white underpants, her eyes shut, her little body stained with blood and twisted in violent repose. He turned and looked in the bedroom, spotted Linda's naked body stuffed into the too-small space between his wooden bureau and the foot of the mattress. White sheets with orange flowers were smeared with blood. She'd been stabbed in the heart over and over and it looked like everything she ever loved and wanted and hoped for was in a dried black puddle on the brown carpet beneath her.

JIM FROMM WAS the first detective on scene. *Four-Nineteen at the Chateau Apartments on North 21st*. Fromm knew before he got inside that it was grisly. He walked up a short flight of stairs to apartment 211. A uniformed cop opened the door and pointed Fromm in the direction of the bodies. All the lights were off.

Fromm was a young detective, just twenty-four. He'd joined the force three years earlier as a patrolman and hadn't so much climbed the ranks as been shoved up them. Junction's new chief of police did things differently. He liked his veteran cops patrolling the streets and his young guys working as detectives.

*Eerie feeling in this apartment, Fromm thought. Ghostly like.*

The first sight of the bodies knocked him back on his heels. He was a hammer of a man—forceful, analytical, and nasty-tempered. He'd seen death before—traffic accidents, natural causes, the occasional overdose—but never a double murder. He'd mostly investigated burglaries. He walked on by the kitchen and took a deep breath and allowed everything else in the apartment to wash over him: the vase of white flowers, a bowl of spent apricot pits atop a dining table. House plants in macramé nets. Decorative jugs. He looked to the living room through the slats of a brass room divider: a baby picture of Kelley sat atop a small desk. Hulking rust and brown plaid couch. Black rocking chair with gold flowers and trim. Honey-colored coffee table—hard pack of Reds, sunglasses, purple ceramic ashtray.

Grand Junction had always been a boomtown: carbonate in the new century, vanadium in the

1930s. From 1943–1945 Grand Junction was the center of the Manhattan Project's secret mining and refining efforts on the plateau. Uranium mining here carried on through the Fifties. Poor men moved to Junction and became rich scouring the mesa on the backs of burros for deposits of yellowcake. Now they were gearing up for an oil shale boom.

By 1975, the population had settled at 23,000. Kids started school later in the year than most in order to work the fall harvest. Old folks moved here to die. Tourists came for the buttes. Hard to believe, but there hadn't been a murder here since 1964, when a young gal named Patty Haywood was found shot through the head in the alleyway behind her house.

Fromm was thirteen or fourteen when the Haywood girl was found. He grew up in Junction. His parents were strict. His father, a successful insurance salesman, insisted on high marks in school and a good moral character. His entire life, Fromm had dreamed of being a G-man, but he fell short of the Bureau's height requirement. So he got a degree at Mesa Junior College and then headed off to Adams State thinking maybe someday he'd work for the Bureau as a forensic accountant. He was offered a job by an oil company before graduation but then was downsized before his first day. He spent the summer unemployed and hanging around a local country club playing money rounds against the police chief a few days a week. By the end of that summer Fromm was at the academy. When he started work in the fall of 1973, he was the only guy on the Junction police force with a college degree. Being a cop allowed him to embrace his rebellious streak. He drove recklessly, carried a polished chrome .44 Magnum, like "Dirty" Harry Callahan.

But Junction also sat on I-70, biggest town between Denver and Salt Lake, and while there may not have been killings, there was plenty of trouble when the long-haul truckers who passed through town mixed with the migrant workers, the local miners and farmers. A Mexican drug ring ran pounds of grass into town in the beds of pick-up trucks. The transients hanging around the freight yards caused problems, too. Four months earlier somebody had snatched up a pretty twenty-four-year-old named Denise Oliverson. They hadn't found her body but discovered her yellow ten-speed under the 5th Street Viaduct, by some railroad tracks. Sandals, too, but some shit-heel cop had brought them home to his wife.

Fromm got his mind right, called dispatch and told them to send Noel Rewerts, the biggest meanest patrolman on the force, to guard the door. A crime scene like this was a sacred site. Fromm was part of the three-man crime scene unit with Detectives Gary Richardson and Gary Hall. Hall had been trained in forensics, evidence collection, fingerprinting, general photography, crime scene processing, advanced latent fingerprint testing. He'd worked murders up and down the Western Slope for years before joining the GJPD.

With Rewerts guarding the door, the three detectives commenced their initial walk-through around 10 p.m. Hall snapped photos in the hallway; the apartment's front door showed no signs of forced entry. Next they shot Steve Benson's pile of belongings. Fromm and Richardson stayed close behind Hall, keeping an eye out for evidence while laying slips of paper down next to clues they wanted to collect.

They could hear dim noises from the street. A cop in uniform cautioned off the perimeter. Emergency lights on the squad car roofs lit up the bungalows on North 21st like a discotheque. A crowd grew. Fromm watched Hall photograph the bedroom furniture and Linda on the floor. Blood everywhere. Runny drops on her face and neck and breasts and stomach and biceps and forearms and wrists and all over the palms of her hands. Smearly finger drags from her collarbone down to her breast. Drops on her calf and thigh. Looked like the murderer tried to cut her throat but couldn't get the blade deep enough. Bunch of stab wounds on the left chest. On the dresser by Linda's body and across the room, close to the floor near an electrical socket, Hall photographed oblong cast-off spatters—evidence of the killer's fury.

When the coroner arrived, he looked at the body, noticed a plump drop of blood on the chest that looked out of place. *Was the killer hurt? Did he cut himself?* He took into account what appeared to be a bloody fingerprint on her left thigh. As he listened to the coroner, Fromm imagined the killer on top of Linda, finishing the kill, then pushing himself up against her thigh. She wore a gold bracelet. Her hands were bunched in loose fists.

They moved into the hallway to photograph Kelley from three angles. More blood castoff, high and low on the surrounding walls. They sidestepped her body and photographed the bathroom. Lookout was busted. Maybe she was hiding in there and he broke in? She must have been terrified. Blood droplets around the rim of the sink. Kelley's foot, tangled in a purple threadbare towel. Brown droplets on the tile floor and the towel, too. In the toilet a single square of bath tissue floated in pale yellow water.

The front door opened and Captain Ed Vandertook strolled right past Rewerts. Vandertook was a seasoned cop, and he'd be damned if he wasn't going to pitch in with the investigation. He'd been at the bar with some other cops. Fromm could smell bourbon's sugary tang on him. He wanted the Captain out. Fromm asked politely at first, but the Captain didn't budge. Fromm was heating up. He went on into the hallway and grabbed Rewerts.

*Get him out of this crime scene,* Fromm said, making sure everybody on the scene heard him. *And if the son of a bitch tries to come back in, take out your gun and shoot 'im!*

A MOTORCYCLE UNIT was dispatched to the Rocket Drive-In on North Avenue, where Fromm's partner, Detective Doug Rushing, watched *Blazing Saddles* with his wife and young sons. Like Fromm, Rushing was just twenty-four. He was tall, sandy-haired and handsome. He told his wife to go home straight away after the movie and lock the doors. They lived in a bungalow less than a mile from the crime scene. He got on the back of the bike and they sped up North Avenue, a four-lane boulevard that at night felt as wide as the Grand Valley itself. Seedy bars—the Timbers and X Lounge—along with roadside motels with kitchenettes and liquor stores advertised in flashing neon. The sky was bathed in the final wash of light.

Rushing was a gentle soul. He grew up with sisters. His mother, a housewife, was the sort of woman who put a hot meal on the table every night and kept her mouth shut when her husband beat her. His father was a paratrooper with the Eighty-Second Airborne during the Second World War. He jumped on D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, and Operation Market Garden. The war never really ended for him. He returned home and found work in the uranium mines. Broke his back and both his legs on the job and started drinking to cope with the pain. Drank so much he came down with diabetes. The sickness made him meaner than a snake, too. As a young boy Rushing watched his father fight other men; witnessed him get beat bad on a handful of occasions. And he'd seen his father get his mother down on the floor and strangle her. Once, he'd watched as his mom burned his father with a hot pan and got away. Doug was more frightened of his dad than anything in the world. He also loved the man fiercely.

After his father died, Rushing went to stay with his uncle in Oregon. That summer he worked the strawberry patches and learned to water-ski on the Columbia River. His uncle owned a funeral home and kept dead bodies in the basement. When Rushing went back to Junction for school that fall he started doing drugs and getting in fights. A drunken car chase with the Mesa County sheriff landed him in jail. He was sentenced to a year of probation. His PO helped him go straight. Rushing joined the Army after high school. He never made it to Vietnam, though. After his discharge in 1971 Rushing came home with hopes of being a firefighter but got hired as a parks department cop instead. In time he transferred over to the PD. He went to the academy in Golden and then learned on the job breaking up bar fights and policing domestics. He didn't think of his job as being about apprehending

criminals. It was about seeing people through the worst moments of their lives. Before being made detective in 1973, Rushing was a patrolman for a short time. He'd been pretty good, too—he just naturally knew how to think like a dirtbag, sure, but more important, he could talk to people and he knew how to listen.

He and Fromm got pretty close. Other cops in the department called them Butch and Sundance. They were opposites in just about every way. Rushing, a seasoned sportsman, liked describing a hunting trip he took with Fromm and his father a couple years back. *No tree stand. We just sat in the car holding our rifles. Pack of deer meandered by and Jimmy and his dad jump out of the car and start blasting. Bunch of deer hit the dirt but neither of 'em—Jimmy or his dad—was sure which ones they hit.*

At the crime scene, Lieutenant Ron Smith ordered Rushing to lead a canvass—talk to the neighbors in the building and get out on the streets and bang on doors. The Chateau was packed with hot young women, and Smith wanted to know about Peeping Toms, flashers, lurkers, and prance callers.

Rushing scribbled notes on a legal pad:

Jeannie Lu Wilson, in apartment 212, wife of the building's manager, Monte Rae Wilson, had known Linda since high school. They visited nearly every day. Thursday night, about 9:20, was the last time Jeannie had seen Linda.

*Early on Friday morning, must have been around 3 a.m., I got up, she said. My husband asked me what was wrong and I said I just didn't know. I can't explain why I woke. I don't know how to describe my feeling, I guess you could call it uneasy.*

*They were real active, Monte Rae interjected. Always going camping and doing outdoor activities.*

Jeannie interrupted: *If she had another boyfriend I would've known.*

Lana Lee Turro, from apartment 101, recalled a conversation that she, Jeannie, Maureen Graff from upstairs, and Linda Benson had earlier in the week. They gossiped about which of the women in the building was playing around on their husbands and Linda said it wasn't worth it because you never get anything out of it except a guilty conscience.

Kathy Brunner from across the hall didn't know Linda too well—they'd chat on occasion. She only exchange smiles with Steve; she'd heard some bad things about him. Last night she arrived home at 11 p.m., went to bed around 3. Didn't hear or see anything except for a motorcycle out in the parking lot.

Mrs. Brown in 306 reported to Rushing that every day when she returned home from work about 12:05 p.m. she observed a man sitting behind the Dodge dealership in an old red car. Only saw him on the weekdays. Also reported getting all kinds of weird calls. Heavy breathing. Pervert stuff.

Danny Tucker from the third floor saw a white male—twenty to twenty-three years of age, six-foot-two or -three, long blond hair. Levi's, purple and blue shirt, brown hat with a wide brim, and heavy-frame glasses—hanging from the balcony of the Benson apartment.

Tucker's neighbor told Rushing that earlier in the week he saw Linda leaving the Chateau on the back of a motorcycle.

Mr. and Mrs. Turner, a middle-aged couple in 112, knew Linda well. Linda was a close friend of their daughter's back in high school. They also knew Steve Benson's ex-wife, Trixie. They'd heard one night that Steve scared her so bad that she left him for good the very next morning. Mr. Turner said: *I was having some trouble sleeping the other night. I was up. Around 12:30 a.m. I heard something outside. I opened the blinds but didn't see anything. I heard footsteps. Somebody running away.*

As Rushing made his way from unit to unit, he kept his eyes open for anything that looked

suspicious. He ducked his head in the laundry room. On top of the center dryer was a short stack of magazines for swingers. *Swingers Life: For the Broadminded Adult*. He surveyed the cover, flipped through the pages: 'Forbidden' Sex and Normal Women: A Startling New Study; Wife Swapping in Suburbia. Rushing put an evidence marker on the magazines and kept moving.

MAUREEN GRANT WAS packing a bag for her sister-in-law's place in DeBeque when Rushing knocked on her door. She was in a frenzy. Maureen and her husband Gary were the Bensons' upstairs neighbors. Kelley Benson and little Gary Jr. played all of the time. Linda and Maureen often took the kids to Lincoln Park and then out for ice cream. Swimming at the town pool on Tuesdays. Taco Bell on Wednesdays. *On Thursday evening at around 5 Linda was up in my apartment and we were doing yoga when Kelley came upstairs and said there was a man who wanted to talk to her. We leave our doors open and run back and forth, you know? Kelley went back downstairs but Linda stayed. She didn't want to go. That was strange. Kelley came back up and said their visitor wasn't going away until she came down. Linda finally went. I didn't see her again until 8 or 8:30 that night when I went out front. We hung there for an hour, until 9:00 or 9:30. Linda seemed distant; something was on her mind. We walked in together and then went our separate ways. When I got home Gary was in bed. He leaves for work at 5:30. I didn't hear anything that night. No noise or music or people talking. I didn't hear anything until the next morning at around 6, when I heard Cindy, Kelley's cat, meowing loudly. They always leave their sliding glass door open a little bit for the cat to go in, but the cat was stuck outside. I got up around 10 that morning and went and knocked on Linda's door, but nobody answered and at midday the curtains were still drawn and that was really unusual. I wouldn't say that I was worried. Curious, maybe.*

When Steve Benson showed up at her door, she didn't understand what he was saying. He was frantic, bug-eyed, the color drained from his face. He was screaming, *Fuck, Maureen, tell me the last time you saw them. They've been murdered. Call the cops. They've been murdered.* Benson ran back down to 211 and into the bedroom. Maureen did what she was told and Gary Sr. followed Benson.

Gary Sr. interrupted, told Rushing that he waited outside the bedrooms while Benson inspected the closet where he kept his collection of pistols. He caught a look at the bodies and ran for the door.

Maureen told police that Benson had been at work all week. The last she saw him he was out on the sidewalk screaming at some cop about how *I'm not answering any more questions right now. My wife and my daughter are dead. You need to go inside and take some fingerprints!*

FROMM, ALONG WITH Hall, Richardson, and Sergeant Fred Albrecht—the other lead detective, a large man with a big swoop of hair like Elvis Presley—stood around with their hands on their hips discussing how to collect a bloody handprint off the living room wall. Fromm imagined the killer injured and disoriented, groping around in the dark for a light switch. Albrecht was a first-class detective. Fromm and Rushing called him the Fonz. Albrecht had investigated murders in San Bernardino, California, for an eternity before coming to Grand Junction in the early Seventies. *Shit*, Albrecht said. *Just get a box cutter and muscle it outta there.* Fromm and Hall and Richardson nodded.

Albrecht went outside and ordered a detective to call the hospitals in Grand Junction as well as the surrounding towns and in Utah and ask them to be on the lookout for a man seeking treatment for a serious cut to his hand. Officers were dispatched to the bus and train stations and the Grand Junction airport to search for suspects.

Inside the apartment Fromm, Hall, and Richardson made their way into the narrow alcove of the kitchen. There was a steak knife in the sink and the handle of another knife next to it. The blades had been wiped clean with a striped dishcloth. The busted-off blade was down into the IN-SINK-ERATOR.

They found blood on the rim of the sink and a big round drop on the cardboard in a box of Rice Chex breakfast cereal. Fromm showed Albrecht the second knife and Albrecht hypothesized that the killer was at the sink when he heard the little girl in the bathroom.

RUSHING STRUGGLED THROUGH the crowd gathered out front of the Chateau Apartments, past the TV news van and the crime reporter from the *Daily Sentinel*. The temperature was in steady decline. The sky was cloudless.

Rushing knew a deputy sheriff who lived in a bungalow across the street. He knocked on her door and the wife answered. She mentioned having caught somebody creeping in the shadows beside the house. She thought he was a peeper; turned on the lights, yelled for him to get moving or she'd call the cops. Old gal in the little place next door saw a man last night leaning against the lamppost out front of her house. She didn't get a good look; it was dark and his back was covered in shadow. Rushing stood beneath the light pole and took note of the clear view into 211.

He passed his own house, just a half mile from the Chateau. Lights were off; his wife and son asleep. There was a clothesline in the backyard. For months his wife had been complaining that somebody was cutting the crotches out of the panties she hung on the line.

Rushing and a team of uniformed cops walked the streets until 3 a.m., thumping on front doors, jolting the neighbors from their sleep. *Doug, what on earth you doin' here at this hour?*

YOUNG GIRLS WERE turning up dead everywhere in the Western United States. Washington, Utah, Colorado. They were found naked and frozen out in the woods. Dumped on the side of the road, raped and beaten. Mutilated. Strangled. Skulls caved in. Pretty girls. Others vanished, their bodies never recovered. Just like the Oliverson girl. Dozens of girls. Rushing and Fromm had just recently gotten a call from a Colorado Bureau of Investigation agent named Bob Perkins. He was based out of Montrose, an hour from Junction. Few weeks back Rushing and Fromm drove down there. Perkins was convinced there was a pattern, that the murders were all committed by the same man. And that the killer started in Washington State in January of 1974 and continued at the clip of one or sometimes two a month through the summer. They were grabbed at night from their bedrooms or off their college campuses—Central Washington State, Oregon State, Evergreen State—and weren't seen again until some hiker stumbled on their body at Taylor Mountain or Lake Sammamish State Park. There was talk of a suspect referred to as "Ted." He lured his victims by playing lame, wore a cast on his arm and clubbed his victims with it as they helped him carry textbooks or load a sailboat on his car.

Perkins figured the killer must have moved down to Utah, because there had been another outbreak:

October 2, 1974: Nancy Wilcox, age sixteen, last seen riding in a beige Volkswagen Beetle. She still hadn't been found.

October 27, 1974: Melissa Smith, age seventeen, daughter of the Midvale, Utah, police chief, was grabbed on her way to a slumber party. Her body turned up nine days later with the same horrific injuries as some of the earlier victims.

October 31, 1974. Laura Aime. Disappeared, to be found a month later in the mountains—beaten, strangled, raped.

The killer traveled. Packed a bag and went on hunting trips. In the winter of 1975, he crossed into Colorado.

January 12, 1975: A nurse from Michigan named Caryn Campbell was grabbed during a weekend getaway with her fiancé to the Wildwood Inn in Aspen. Her corpse was recovered—battered, bloodstained, and nude—in a snowbank a month later.

March 15, 1975: Twenty-six-year-old Vail ski instructor Julie Cunningham disappeared while walking to meet her roommate at a local tavern. Her body was never found.

April 6, 1975: Denise Oliverson was snatched just two blocks from the Grand Junction police department.

April 15, June 26, July 1, July 4. One girl after the next: gone.

Perkins had a book, like a catalog, of the victims. For effect he laid out a series of eleven photos for Fromm and Rushing to look at. Fromm was stunned; these women could have been sisters. They were all about the same height, usually five-foot-six or under. Teens to early twenties, wore their dark hair parted down the middle. Their bodies, if found at all, were recovered in wooded areas or parks at a bend in a river or by a main roadway.

Neither Rushing nor Fromm, in their young careers, had ever heard of a habitual pattern killer like this. None of their instructors at the academy talked about that. As he helped process the crime scene, Fromm wondered if "Ted" was in town. Linda fit the description. Young, pretty, long black hair that she parted down the middle. Terrifying thought. Maybe the sort you keep to yourself.

STEVE BENSON SAT in a cinderblock room in the Grand Junction police station, under the stained asbestos ceiling, and waited for Captain Ed Vandertook to begin with the questioning. Vandertook had been debriefed by Sergeant Albrecht and the crime scene team before returning to the station for the interview. Benson was suspect number one on account of his being the husband, also an asshole. Vandertook asked him to start at the beginning. *When was the last time you saw Linda alive?*

*Last Sunday night.*

Would've been the 20th of July, when he left Grand Junction and went back to Hayden so he could be back to work on Monday at 8 a.m.

*Linda ever given signs she was afraid to stay by herself?* Vandertook wanted to know. *Mentioned she was bothered by anyone?*

No, Benson said.

*She talk about anybody at work bothering her?*

*She had a job at Delta Products, but hasn't worked since last June. She took a job for a while to get over the death of her sister Judy.*

*What did she wear to bed, usually?*

It was an odd question, but Benson answered it anyway. *She slept in the nude.*

*And Kelley?*

*Panties during the summer, he guessed.*

*Did Linda smoke?* Vandertook asked.

*Marlboros, said Benson. About fifteen a day.*

*Did she have problems with anybody in the family?*

Benson told Vandertook about Linda's stepfather, Lawrence Himmerite. *He had her kicked out of her mother's house when she was sixteen.*

Vandertook made a note of this. *Old boyfriends?*

At about 10 to 2 on Saturday morning, Vandertook finished with his questions so the Mesa County coroner could take scrapings from under the nails of each of Benson's fingers. He plucked hair samples from his head and took a sample of his blood (type A) from his arm and the hunting knife that Benson wore on his belt. The only mark found on Benson was a one-quarter-inch scratch on the outside of the wrist. When the exam was finished, the doctor gave Benson some pills to calm his nerves. Then his father came to pick him up.

THE LANDSCAPE WAS so profound that the citizens of Grand Junction felt it was part of the heritage. Even in the unhappiest of times the local paper, the *Daily Sentinel*, ran a page-one photo vividly illustrating the sublime beauty of life in the Grand Valley. Action shot of a determined cowboy at the junior rodeo. Little gals grooming a sheep. Long-haired teens plummeting off a rooftop and onto a pile of feather-stuffed mattresses: *Summer silliness*.

Chalk outlines were drawn around the bodies of Linda and Kelley Benson. Around 2 a.m. the corpses were placed into zip-up bags and driven to the morgue. Fromm and Rushing and Richards and Hall remained in apartment 211 collecting, tagging, photographing, and logging the evidence until the sun rose again over Grand Mesa. They picked up a newspaper that morning on their way back to headquarters. An old yearbook picture of Linda appeared under the fold on the front page with a factual accounting of the homicides—a woman and her daughter found stabbed to death in the Chateau Apartments. When they arrived at the station, the phones were alive—concerned citizens, hundreds of them, reporting Peeping Toms and obscene phone calls and peculiar boys that ought to be investigated. They called to report an unidentified male who'd been getting around town exposing his genitals to unsuspecting ladies. Some called the police to say that on the night of the murder they hadn't seen anything at all that was out of the ordinary. Fromm and Rushing were dispatched to interview rooms where they took statements from Linda's family and friends.

WHEN BARBARA HIMMERITE arrived at the station, she insisted to Detective Rushing that her ex-husband, Lawrence, was the murderer.

*He didn't like Linda or her sister Judy, Barbara said, before she was even in her chair. He blames them for our marriage falling apart. He's slipped a cog lately. He stays in that apartment for days on end drinking. He's become very bold. He's said that he's going to get his revenge.*

As Barbara explained, Linda was hardly two years old when her father dropped dead of a heart attack while crossing a marsh during a duck hunt. A few years later, Barbara met Lawrence Himmerite at a North Platte, Nebraska, nightclub. He was tall, good-looking, fresh out of the Navy, with a panther tattooed on his shoulder. They married a year later, in 1958, when Linda and Judy were eight and seven respectively. Lawrence was no good for those girls, Barbara told Rushing. He was always sore on them. Even when they were little, Lawrence never hid his jealousy.

One night, Himmerite came home full of liquor and tied Barbara up. *He turned his back on me and I got free. He caught me and choked me. I couldn't even make any noises. I scratched him so hard that I drew blood. He was always remorseful, but that one left me cold with fear for a long time.*

They divorced in 1962. On the night he was served the divorce papers, Barbara said, Himmerite was crawling around on the floor dead drunk and naked. *I got away from the house, called the sheriff. Lawrence disappeared to somewhere so I brought my family to a motel. The next morning I returned home and found my pans out. He'd hidden in the cupboard while the sheriff was there.*

A few weeks later Barbara married Leonard, a customer at the restaurant where she worked. They weren't together three days when Lawrence showed up and informed Leonard that Barbara didn't love him. Barbara couldn't deny it. Leonard got an annulment.

While Barbara couldn't stand Lawrence, she couldn't stand being away from him, either. By the spring of 1962 they were remarried, and Barbara got pregnant. Shortly after their son was born, they separated again. They reconciled and Barbara got pregnant again. They bought a house and lived together, happily sometimes, until Lawrence started running around with other women. In the fall of '68, he left Barbara. He asked for a divorce and she put it off, so he started pressing her. The ink on the papers was hardly dry when Lawrence called one day with an ultimatum: *It's Linda and Judy or me. Get rid of them and I'll come home and I'll be good.*

Linda and Judy were still in high school, but Barbara moved them into an apartment on the own.

*He was sure that if the girls were out of the way the marriage would work, Barbara told Rushing. During those months I realized it was ridiculous to have my two daughters living away from home and that my marriage wasn't going to work anyway.*

Barbara brought the girls home, and Lawrence moved out, landing in Durango, where he quickly got another woman pregnant. He and Barbara remained married, though, in and out of each other's lives for the next five years. He got in the habit of going to the bar for a few drinks and then banging on Barbara's door late at night. He'd sit in the living room screaming at her until one of the kids called the cops. Rushing himself had been to the house on more than one occasion.

After Judy died of an overdose in the spring of '74, Lawrence expected the loss would soften Barbara's heart. *He told me before her death he saw her at the gas station and she said that she forgave him, Barbara said. She never would've said that to him. He was trying to get back into the family.*

Barbara and Lawrence divorced for the last time in May of 1975, just a few months before Linda and Kelley were murdered. *He said God would see to it that he got his children back. He's threatened my life several times. Linda was deathly afraid of him. Six or seven months ago she told me that anything happened to her then we should know where to look.*

*But why?* Rushing wanted to know. *What did Lawrence ever do to make Linda scared?* There had to be something Barbara wasn't telling him. Maybe Lawrence disliked Linda, but Barbara had hardly given Rushing anything that would make him think or feel like Himmerite could have murdered Linda and the little girl.

Barbara took a long breath. *There was the one night not long after we were married, Lawrence was out at the bars downtown drinking and I was home with the girls. They were very young. I woke up and heard one of the girls crying. I got up and walked through the restroom and found the door to the girls' room had been locked. I pounded on the door and heard somebody leaving. I finally got the door open and found Linda naked and tied up. She told me that Lawrence said he was going to take her to the car.*

WHEN SHE ARRIVED at the police station the morning after Linda's murder, Pat Freeman's eyes were red and raw. She and Linda had been best friends since forever. After interviewing Barbara Himmerite, the detectives began drawing up a pool of potential suspects and wanted to know about Linda's old flames. They figured Pat knew more about Linda's love life than just about anyone.

Pat told them that Linda's first real boyfriend was a Mesa College student named Lyndon. *He was older and heavy into drugs, she said. They were together five or six months. He was a total ripoff.*

There was a one-night thing with a "super guy" named Wayne. There was Terry, whom Linda knew from high school. That one wasn't serious, just a few one-nighters. Terry would screw anything and Linda knew it. There was another Terry, the first boy she lay down with after the terrible car crash that left her scarred and broken. He went to Mesa College, too. It was casual until Linda got pregnant. When Linda phoned Terry's parents to tell him about the baby, he hung up on her without a word. She didn't want anything from him. She called back and his mother answered, said she wasn't sure what happened: Terry just dropped the phone and ran for the door. During a long red twilight, Linda rode with a tall blond boy named Bert in the tall grass of a remote nature preserve. She hung around with a guy named Craig for a while, and after that a young man named Bob, a lifeguard from New Jersey. Bob came from money, bought her all manner of expensive gifts. Flew her to New York with him for the performance of *Hair*. Linda called Pat during that trip to say she was "putting out" but it wasn't even

going to work because Bob was impotent and a mama's boy. Deal breakers in her view. Then Linda got serious with a Jim. She met him at a festival in Gateway Canyon. *He lived in Denver and was making the long trip to see her one night when he had a terrible wreck in the Vail Pass. He laid in a coma for a week. When he finally left the hospital Linda stayed at his parents' place and helped take care of him. She never really split from Jim; it just sort of ended when she started going with Benson.*

Rushing and Fromm wanted to know more about Benson. They didn't tell Pat he was the primary suspect. They didn't want to tip her off and have him flee Junction. They just told her that they needed to know more.

*Linda saw Steve at his worst and loved him anyways, Pat said. She went on to explain: Before they moved to the Chateau they rented a farm out on Patterson Road. One evening Steve came home dull-eyed and drunk. He wanted the keys for the car, said he was going someplace or another.*

*You couldn't drive a Tonka truck, Linda said. She threw his car keys out into the backyard, into the weeds someplace he might not find them sober.*

Benson went into a rage. He smashed a kitchen window, pulled over the refrigerator: food all over, spilled milk. Flipped the kitchen table and fell on the floor. He never so much as touched precious hair on Linda or Kelley's head. She wouldn't have tolerated it. Benson grabbed a shotgun, stormed out into the backyard and the neighboring fields. Linda called for help—she was worried one of the neighbors would spot him on their land and open up on him. Pat recounted how after calling the sheriff Linda was immediately filled with regret. When some deputies arrived, she offered them money to leave. They refused, and when Benson returned they were waiting in the house, pistols drawn.

*I was with Kelley and Linda, Pat said, huddled behind the couch. Steve dropped the gun, said 'Take me,' and left without a fight. He spent the night in the tank, came home the next morning and said he was sorry.*

Soon after the incident, Steve and Linda moved to the Chateau. Every night they gathered at somebody's apartment. Benson, with Kelley on his lap, played chess with Mike Freeman, Pat's husband. It was the time of their lives, sitting out on the balcony and watching the sun set, drinking beer, or sharing a laugh and a joint.

Rushing was wrapping up the interview when Freeman told him: *About four or five months ago Linda, Maureen Grant, and I were sitting out on the front lawn, and some guy that lived in the basement apartments—third unit from the front entrance, short black hair, about five-six, a hundred fifty pounds—was just sitting out there on the steps watching us. Like leering at us. Maureen said 'hi' to him and he just said 'hi' back. It started happening all of the time. He'd stand out on his balcony and watch us.*

FROMM AND RUSHING quickly confirmed Steve Benson's alibi for the week right down to the minute. Day after Pat Freeman's interview, Benson showed up at the Mesa County sheriff's office for a polygraph test. The polygraph examiner thought it necessary to delay the test a week—Benson was completely in shock. He insisted, though. He wanted it over with. He sat ramrod straight in his chair. For two hours he answered questions over and over again.

*On Thursday night did you sleep in a sleeping bag near Hayden?*

*Yes.*

*Between last Monday and last Friday night were you in Grand Junction?*

*No.*

*Regarding these deaths, is what you told the police the complete truth?*

*Yes.*

*Do you know who caused Linda's death?*

No.

*Did you cause Linda's death?*

No.

*Did you cause Kelley's death?*

No.

The test needle jumped and skipped all over the paper. Either Benson was all torn up and there was no hiding it or he was a straight killer. Afterward the examiner noted in his report that "Though considerable emotion was evident in the subject's responses on the charts, comparisons of the critical questions to the control questions indicated that reactions to the critical questions were due to factors other than deception. It is my opinion that this subject is truthful in regard to these critical questions."

RUSHING DROVE AN hour south to Montrose, Colorado, for the autopsy. It was his first time for that, and on the ride down from Junction he sat in the back of the squad car, silently staring out at the high desert, dreading what was imminent. In the exam room an X-ray technician showed developed films of Linda's skull and pelvic areas. Detective Hall was there, too, his camera loaded with color film. Lieutenant Ron Smith, the detective in charge of investigations, stood next to Hall. Before he washed off the rest of the body, Dr. Canfield—the coroner—called attention to the plum droplet of blood on Linda's abdomen that he'd asked Hall to photograph at the crime scene. He waved over the detectives. *Usually the pattern of blood from knife wounds is more of a spray with a pattern of elongated droplets that are created as the knife comes out of the wound. This here, though, has little splatter marks going all the way around the rim, 360 degrees. That doesn't look like blood that came from these wounds. Looks to me like that blood was dropped on her from above. I think your assailant cut himself and was bleeding on the body.*

A forensic specialist from the Colorado Bureau of Investigation gently scraped off the blood with a scalpel and collected it in a small envelope.

Canfield checked for signs of rape. Linda's body was negative for semen. The body was cleaned and Canfield started his examination, noting a scrape on the bridge of Linda's nose and bruising around the left temple and above and below her left eye. She'd been punched pretty good. He examined slash marks on the neck; he counted five. And two gaping puncture wounds on the right side of her neck that weren't too deep but were nonetheless devastating because the killer had twisted the instrument. A cross was carved into her sternum, between her breasts.

*She died hard, Canfield said. These incisions on her chest were caused before she was stabbed.* Then Canfield counted eight puncture wounds on her chest, noted that they were caused by a single edged blade. Her left hand showed deep slice wounds to all four fingers.

Rushing cowed as Canfield opened Linda's chest cavity with a Y-shaped incision, starting around her shoulders and running it down to her belly. He did it real casual, like he was gutting a deer. The smell hit Rushing—it was fetid, nearly too much to take. He hadn't smeared the Vicks under his nose for fear that the admixture of VapoRub and rot would put him off his stomach. Canfield cracked open the ribs, spread them out; Rushing thought silently that the violence this woman had to endure was never ending. Hall snapped photos. The CBI forensic specialist took scrapings from under Linda's nails. Looked like skin. *She fought.* Canfield examined the heart and lungs. He said, *There's a double stab wound, and I can't tell whether it was thrust twice or thrust, removed and then thrust again. The wounds are one right on top of the other. Indicates a real fury.* Her right lung was collapsed. The puncture to the neck had gone right to the bone. Her heart had been ripped open—perforated with Canfield's word—causing massive bleeding into the lungs. A knife jab to the back had been s

forceful that it penetrated a lung, went through the diaphragm and nicked the liver.

~~An examination of Kelley's body revealed bruises on her face and her right arm. She'd been stabbed on the left chest nine times. A different weapon was used on Kelley—the top part of the blade was blunt; the cutting surface was sharp. One of them went through her little lung and her heart. One of the wounds showed a double thrust similar to what Linda had suffered. Compared to her mother, Kelley had it easy. Linda's end was excruciating. It took four or five minutes for her to die. Maybe more. Longest minutes of her life.~~

Rushing couldn't stop himself from imagining her on the floor of that bedroom, her breath slipping away, the torment of watching or hearing or just knowing that her baby girl was being butchered in the dark.

THE MORNING AFTER the autopsy, Kelley Benson's portrait appeared on the front page of the *Daily Sentinel*. The autopsies' grim results were detailed. The police made it known that the detectives had interviewed roughly fifty of Linda's neighbors, family members, and associates. No arrests were imminent. The coroner divulged that the very latest methods were being put to use: Tests would be performed correlating the heat cycle in Grand Junction on the night of the 24th and resulting heat loss occurring in the bodies to accurately determine the time of death.

EVEN BEFORE STEVE Benson's alibi was confirmed and the polygraph completed, Doug Rushing was certain that he wasn't the murderer. Rushing learned at the academy that people who murder close family members almost always hide the corpse. That impulse was related to unrelenting guilt and paranoia, Rushing estimated. Benson was a hard character, rough with his women, for certain, but the little girl had been treated like meat. Hard to imagine somebody who lived with Kelley, who was so close with her as the neighbors said Steve was, doing that.

But what about Linda's stepfather, Lawrence Himmerite? The way Barbara had described him violating Linda and tying her up?

For two straight days, Himmerite's acquaintances, associates, and members of his church group arrived at the Grand Junction Police Department, sat in the chair in the little interview room and spilled everything. No one had a decent thing to say about the man. They knew all about the spousal abuse. During his worst benders, Barbara and the kids showed up on the doorstep of one church member or another looking for a safe harbor.

Mervin Leroy Einspahr knew Lawrence Himmerite good as any. Twelve or thirteen years they'd been friendly; daughters went to junior high together, and they had the worship group in common, too. Einspahr had dealt with Himmerite during his drinking sprees.

*When Lawrence is good, Einspahr said, he's really good, and when he's drinking, when he's bad, he's real bad.* Einspahr knew all about the trouble Lawrence had with Barbara's daughters. *They just wouldn't mind him, and every time he endeavored to correct them, Barbara would jump between 'em to protect the girls.* He was aware of the bad juju between Barbara and Larry, too. *Sure, he could get mad enough to hit Barbara, but she also asked for it a lot of the time.*

Gene Maurin and his wife Glennadean sat across from Rushing in the little interview room at the police station. Lawrence attached special meaning to everything that happened. When he drove his truck with a hot cup of coffee on the dash, it was God that prevented a spill. When the weather was bad, it was punishment for their sinfulness.

Maurin encountered Himmerite the first time, years earlier, when he worked at a mental hospital in Denver. Lawrence was thrown into the drunk tank one night when Maurin was on duty. Himmerite demanded water in a metal cup, and when Maurin handed it to him, Lawrence hurled the

full cup into Maurin's face and tried to run for it. Gene was certain Lawrence didn't remember the incident. Himmerite was careful not to allow members of the worship circle to see that side of him.

*He's preachy about nature and health and about how the world is going downhill,* Gene told the cops. But Himmerite was also suspected of making late-night phone calls to some of the women in the group.

Gene's wife, Glennadean, added: *Barbara confided in me that when they were still married Lawrence insisted on sleeping in twin beds. Barbara objected. She felt she was still too young for that sort of arrangement.* Barbara and the kids went along to the gospel meetings until the marriage ended. Over the past few months Himmerite had been showing up with four or five ladies from the local real estate home—all of them seventy-five or eighty years old. *Most people in the group think bringing in new members, spreading the Word, is a good thing. Seems suspicious to me. He pays those women more attention than he ever did his own family. And he drove those girls out of the house before they even finished high school. He used the fact that they were into the drug scene as an excuse,* Gene Maurin said. *Our kids are the same age as theirs. They'd go over to Lawrence's house to play. They come home once and said that he locked his kids in the closet for long stretches. Sometimes he'd gather those kids up in a dark room and jump out at them, you know, try to scare them. It wasn't playful. He's a very tense, edgy, nervous person. I think he might have a psychopathic personality.*

*But do you think he could have done something like this? Is he capable of murder?* Rushin asked.

Gene Maurin thought on it. *I do. I believe that he'd probably morbidly enjoy it. I think he would enjoy that one act of violence and that could turn to more.*

TAMMY HIMMERITE, THE firstborn child of the star-crossed union between Lawrence and Barbara received her driver's license weeks before her half sister and niece were murdered. Detective Rushin asked all manner of questions about Tammy's whereabouts and if she knew anybody who'd want to hurt her sister. He wanted to know about her father, too. Tammy frequently borrowed Himmerite's car. She'd keep it for days at a time before bringing it back to the rundown cottage that he rented, the one with apricot trees in the backyard. (When Himmerite wasn't home, Linda sometimes stopped by to steal his fruit.)

On the day before the murders, Himmerite told Tammy to have the car back to him early Thursday afternoon, the 24th. When she showed at the appointed time, he wasn't there. Back door was swung open, but Tammy couldn't find him. She drove back to the prefab she shared with her mother and her two brothers on Juniper Court. Her little brother Danny said she shouldn't bother going back over; Lawrence had gone to Glenwood Springs to get out of town to rest for the night. Said he hadn't been sleeping good in his own house.

Barbara sent Tammy out on some errands, gave her a bag of this and that to deliver to Linda. On her way to the Chateau she stopped off at a North Avenue drive-through where her best friend skated around the parking lot, delivering hamburgers. Tammy stayed there hours—talking, being seen. It was late by the time she broke off. Drove by the Chateau. The apartment was dark, so Tammy just drove home. Fibbed to her mother—said Linda wasn't there and volunteered to go back the next day.

Tammy saw Himmerite on the morning of the 25th—hours before Steve Benson discovered the bodies—and he had a foul mood on him. He gave no reason for it. Since the divorce Lawrence had a habit of appearing at Barbara's place unannounced. Later that night, after Benson came up to the house and broke the news that Linda and Kelley were dead, Lawrence showed up out of the blue. He was late. Morning, practically. Barbara jumped right up, got in Lawrence's face and reamed him. He blamed him for all sorts of misdeeds, the murders included.

Lawrence got angry and fought back. He told Barbara that all this death she was being forced to endure—first Judy's death and now Kelley and Linda's murders—that was God punishing her for her sins.

THE WAY RUSHING saw it, if Linda's relationship with her stepfather were a book or a movie, killing her made sense as an ending. Himmerite was the perfect suspect. Arrest record. Tendency toward violence. Hard drinker. Means, motive, opportunity. But then Himmerite showed up for questioning under his own free will at 5 in the evening on Tuesday the 29th. He didn't fuss when the cops asked to fingerprint him. Said he was OK with being questioned without an attorney. He acted like a man with nothing to hide. Even gave the cops permission to search his house and his cars.

Rushing led Himmerite into the empty office of a sergeant detective so they could chat. Shut the door. The only light in the office came from the overhead fluorescents in the hallway leaking through an opaque window. Paperwork on the desktop spread around framed photos of a wife and kids. Pictures of Colorado scenery that had been on the walls since long before this office's inhabitant moved in. Himmerite said he made his living paving and painting lines on parking lots. He wore his hair in a flattop.

Rushing pulled his chair right up close so his knees were between Himmerite's thighs. Something Rushing picked up from the more seasoned detectives in the department. Theory being that sexual predators will shrink, get real defensive if you get up in their space. They prey on weakness but can't handle being confronted by strength and aggression. If Himmerite gave off that sort of vibe then Rushing would know to go rough.

*Tell me about where you were on July 24th, would you please, Larry?*

*At around noon I took my son, Daniel, to Montgomery Ward to buy him a new bicycle.*

*All you bought was a bicycle?*

*Two pair of slacks. One brown pair. One blue. Grey shirt. Later in the day I drove up to Glenwood Springs to look over some possible work sites. Arrived around 1900 hours, checked myself into the Hotel Denver. Room 322.*

*Remember what you had on?*

*Only clothing I took with me was what I was wearing. Those blue casual trousers I just bought and that new grey sport shirt.*

*You said you went to look at some job sites.*

*That's right.*

*Where'd you go afterwards?*

*Back to the hotel. Stayed in the rest of the night.*

*Alone?*

*I was.*

*Nobody saw you there?*

*That's right.*

Rushing slid to the edge of his chair. His face was right up in Himmerite's. Rushing wasn't the type to bang his fist or scream; that was more Fromm's style. He kept his voice low and controlled. *Glenwood ain't so far that you can't make the drive back, Larry. Why'd you stay? I'm not sure you're telling me the truth, Larry. I think you might have hurt those girls. Did you kill Linda and Kelley?*

*I didn't.*

*I think you did, Larry. We know all about how you abused Linda. Tell me about the things you did to her when she was a little girl.*

*That was all a big misunderstanding. I was drinking a lot then. I had a rough go of it.*

*Can't blame you for it, Larry. Linda destroyed your marriage. But think about what a relief would be to just tell me. Unburden yourself.*

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Himmerite looked unsteady. Rushing thought he might just unload his wagon, so he kept pushing. But Himmerite wouldn't back down: *Wasn't me.*

Himmerite claimed he couldn't have done it, that he didn't return from Glenwood until 10 the next morning. He wore the same trousers and shirt he'd worn on Thursday for most of the day on Friday, right up until he left to see Tammy at around 3 p.m.

*You're lying, Larry. You did this. Just let yourself say those words.*

Gary Richardson hotfooted across town to Himmerite's residence, the old cottage on 26 Road. Rushing met him there with Himmerite's keys. They worked room to room. The den. The kitchen. The guest bedroom. In the master bedroom, Rushing found the new brown slacks that Himmerite described. He put those in a bag. In the bathroom he found two green washcloths. Both were soiled deep crimson. They searched a laundry basket and found another towel and a purple hat with stains that looked like blood.

HALF OF GRAND Junction showed up to Linda and Kelley's funeral. They were laid to rest at Grand Junction Municipal Cemetery on Orchard Mesa on a bright, hot Wednesday morning. The grave site was located beside the plot where Linda's sister Judy lay. Mother and daughter shared a casket. Linda would have wanted it that way. Funeral goers stood silently in the grass arranged in a broad array, heads hung low. The women wore white, dresses and blouses, and skirts cut above the knee. Long hair parted in the center. Sunglasses. They stood on their heels with their tanned arms folded across their chests, shielding themselves from something they couldn't see but scared them just the same. The men packed together in the shade sweating through their suit coats, plaids and solid blues. At the church service and later the cemetery, Detective Hall snapped close-ups of guests and automobile license plates. He took the funeral register back to headquarters, hopeful he might discover a lead.

IN GLENWOOD SPRINGS, Fromm and Rushing dug into Himmerite's alibi. They found the client Himmerite claimed to have met with on the 24th to discuss a paving job, but the man said he hadn't spoken to Lawrence in months. Their next stop was the Denver Hotel, a stately place a block off the main drag, where the desk clerk recalled Himmerite's checking in; his signature was in the ledger—Room 322—but he had no recollection of seeing the suspect after that. None of the bellhops or maids recalled glimpsing him, either. Fromm and Rushing were left to guess what Himmerite might have been up to. *Maybe he went to his room and stayed there alone all night? The Denver Hotel was a refined sort of place, the type professional gamblers and gangsters and city folk with real money stayed in, so why would Himmerite check in just to lay down his head for the night? Why not a cheap room at any old motel along the highway? Why not drive home? Grand Junction was but a two-hour drive southwest. Maybe he was there to get laid? Himmerite's a religious man; maybe he was trying to keep his affair quiet?*

*Then again, what if he checked into the hotel to secure an alibi, and then slipped out a side entrance and drove back to Grand Junction?*

Fromm and Rushing couldn't grasp Himmerite. He was fully cooperative one moment, ornery the next. He was the best suspect they had. In fact, Rushing was sure he was the killer. So invested was he in Himmerite's guilt that when the lab results on the clothing and towels recovered from Himmerite's bathroom hamper came back inconclusive, Rushing felt like something had been stolen from him. They had nothing to tie him to the murders. *Can't lock somebody up for being a shoo-in heel.*

RUSHING KEPT A list of names in a notebook. Pages of names. Linda's friends. Steve's friend. Friends of friends. Former lovers. People she'd worked with. People who didn't live at the Chateau but spent time there. Linda's doctor. The girl at Cameo Beauty shop who fixed Linda's hair. Persons of interest. They tracked down those folks—showed up at their houses unannounced, banged on doors, collected and confirmed alibis. Rushing and Fromm checked off the names one at a time, drove from one end of town to the other and back again. Searched for days in thermal heat. Tracked down practically every Terry and Wayne and Jim she'd ever laid eyes on.

They found Bob, the impotent momma's boy back in New Jersey. He hadn't been in Junction for five years. They eliminated Linda's ex-boyfriend Jim, the one who'd been in the bad car accident. He still wasn't physically strong enough to do the murders.

They found a boy named Billy that Linda had once ratted on for sending drugs to Judy via the United States Postal Service. He'd been locked away in an Arizona jail cell for the past five weeks.

They talked to a weed-smoking, hell-raising biker named Herbie Meade. He'd been working a week at Baxter Pass. He told Fromm and Rushing that he'd found out about Linda and Kelley the morning after. His girl, Arlene, told him while he was standing out on his lawn smoking a heater. Meade and Steve Benson lived together after they both returned from the war. Meade thought Steve was messed up. "Guess we know who did that," Meade said out loud.

They even located Judy's old boyfriend, the one she was with when she overdosed. His alibi was airtight. And his brother, who'd been there that summer, too, was locked up in Utah on a rape charge.

They called Maureen Grant, Linda's upstairs neighbor, into the office again and again and again. Some nights Maureen would return to her apartment at the Chateau—a place that now terrified her—and stand on her balcony for long stretches watching people on the front lawn and the traffic on the street. She'd stand out there going over the story, trying desperately to remember that vital detail that she was almost certain had become buried by the shock of losing her closest friend. She wanted something new to report to the police, something that could change the investigation so it would all blow over.

They questioned young men who'd been collared for peeping. A couple of Linda's friends, George and Marti, tipped Fromm and Rushing to a guy named Bob who used to show porno movies at his parties and shoot nude photos—he'd asked Linda to pose for him once. They took a ride after Steve Benson called and told Rushing that before he started dating Linda she used to take downers and hang out with a guy named Miller, a deer poacher out of Whitewater. Miller was dangerous; a few years earlier, he'd been involved in that Wyoming shoot-out—you know, the one where Rick Lewis was killed by the cops? They worked leads from the canvass on the night the bodies were discovered, combing through physical descriptions with hopes they'd stumble upon a match to one of the suspects. They had piles of reported incidents of suspicious men they knew they'd never find—*male, five-foot-ten, with blond hair and dark eyes turned violent in the lobby of the VA hospital, threw beer can at a nurse. Male, mid-forties, reported near Mesa Avenue, less than a mile from the apartment with shirt and arms covered in red paint or blood.*

They kept working the case. They located the man that Mrs. Brown observed every day sitting in a red Dodge behind the car dealership near the Chateau Apartments. Turned out he was on his lunch breaks. They found the young man who'd put the swingers magazine in the laundry room. Nothing dangerous going on there, just a randy kid trying to create an atmosphere of moral fluidity.

Rushing tracked down the boy that Pat Freeman said was creeping around the Chateau. They thought they might have had their man. Saw him walking down the street one day. Pulled him over and told him there was no refusing. He sat in the backseat, stayed quiet most of the ride, except for when he sat forward and said solemnly, *I wasn't there and I don't know nothing about this. I ain't giving you no fingerprints or palmprints. I ain't letting you take my picture. I didn't have nothing to*

*do with no dirt in that apartment. If I did it I would have been on the next plane out of town. They put me in the room with Ron Smith. Smith was a better bullshit sensor than any polygraph machine.* Rushing mulled around solemnly outside the office with Fromm. After some time Smith came out and shook his head, no. Rushing's shoulders fell. The man who did the killings was out there and they were never going to find him. Fromm and Rushing shared the same hopelessness. It was enough to choke a man.

## Part II: Investigation

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August 16, 1975

23 DAYS SINCE THE MURDERS.

IT WAS 3 A.M., and Sergeant Robert Hayward of the West Valley City Police Department sat in his cruiser, outside his home, filling out a shift log. Hayward was about to go off duty when headlights from an oncoming car illuminated the interior of his smokey. He watched as a caravan of three cars turned onto his street and headed toward him. The first two cars belonged to his neighbors, but he didn't recognize the third: a beige Volkswagen Beetle. Moments later, Hayward's radio crackled to life, a call for assistance a few blocks away. Hayward responded that he was en route. He wrapped around the corner fast, his brights drowning out the interior of that unfamiliar Beetle as it sat parked up ahead. He knew that the folks who lived across from where the Beetle was parked were out of town. Their two teenage daughters were home, though. West Valley City, Utah, is the kind of place where neighbors look after each other. Hayward's lights seemed to spook the driver, and the Beetle sped off. Curious, Hayward gave chase as the Beetle blew through a stop sign and barreled through a blind intersection, onto a main road and then stopped, all at once, at an abandoned filling station. The driver jumped out of the car and identified himself as a second-year law student at the University of Utah. Claimed he'd gotten lost in the subdivision. No stink of hooch on the man's breath, Hayward thought. Good-looking kid, too. Clean-cut. Dark curly hair. Sharp jaw. They chatted for a few minutes, and the longer they stood out there, the more suspicious Hayward became. The young man volunteered that he'd been at the drive-in watching Paul Newman in *The Towering Inferno*, but Hayward knew there was a trio of westerns playing at the theater. He asked to search the car, and the young man consented. First thing Hayward noticed was that the passenger seat had been removed and placed in the back. There was a box of green garbage bags back there, as well as an ice pick, a flashlight, a ski mask, a pair of handcuffs, and a strange mask made of panty hose.

Hayward had seen enough. He cuffed the man. Booked him on charges of evasion. Just something not right about him. If nothing else, Hayward wanted to get the man's name in the book. The guy identified himself as Theodore Bundy. Back at the station, Bundy was printed and photographed and released.

Bob Hayward's brother, Pete, was the local sheriff. The day after the arrest, Bob casually mentioned the young man to Pete, along with the beige Beetle and the burglary kit he found inside. The details set off alarm bells for the sheriff's detectives. A year earlier, Bundy's girlfriend, the daughter of a Utah doctor, called Seattle investigators to report some suspicious behavior. She demanded they call Salt Lake, too. About nine months earlier, a nineteen-year-old named Carol DaRonch had been cuffed and kidnapped at the Fashion Place mall in Murray, Utah, by a guy who said his name was Ted. DaRonch survived, and she remembered a beige Beetle. Hayward's detectives placed a call to police in Washington State, where ten girls, all fitting the same description—pretty, long dark hair parted down the middle—had disappeared. Bundy was on their short list of suspects.

IT WASN'T LONG before the *Daily Sentinel's* above-the-fold coverage went back to children filling peach baskets during the harvest or the winner of the Miss Wheelchair Colorado pageant. Local stores held their annual sidewalk sales. Slowly but surely, everyday life returned to normal.

Meanwhile, Grand Junction was bracing for an oil shale boom. There were fears over an uptick in crime, a housing shortage, overcrowding in the schools. The Colorado West Regional Ment

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