

EXCERPTS FROM BLOOD OF LIKE SOULS:

Unseasonably warm temperatures held for the weekend, tempting outdoor enthusiasts to the campgrounds and rivers for end-of-summer activities. Patricia Stowe, Camilla Andrews and Megan Wilson had planned the weekend outing before giving up their summer for good, and they intended to enjoy three days camping at a piece of property the Andrews had purchased but not yet built on, and canoeing on the Chain of Lakes.

Camilla had even kept a straight face when she promised her parents they would be totally responsible, she told her friends as they unpacked. Her mother made her say it: No drinking. No boys.

Well, so far they hadn't met any guys, but they had bought a case of beer along with their other camping provisions. Megan and Camilla were 21, but Patty wouldn't be for another four months. So long as they weren't stupid, a couple of beers would taste really good while paddling around all day. To be cautious, however, they would crush the cans into little flat wafers and sink them in the lake, getting rid of them as they went. Who needed \$2.40 in returnable deposits, anyway?

They had arrived the night before and set up the camp and spent most of Saturday paddling. When they got back to their campsite at sundown, tired and hungry, cooking didn't sound like fun. Although they had packed plenty of food, it would be a hassle to fix anything on a campfire, so they decided to take Megan's vehicle to go have dinner at a small café where the lake road met the highway.

From a hundred yards down the shore, he watched one of them rinse and shampoo her hair under the solar-heated camping shower they'd brought. The others just soaked towels from a gallon-size plastic jug and washed their faces and arms. One of them was athletic and limber, maybe a gymnast. The second was almost chunky though muscular not soft. The third was just average, yet she seemed to be most vivid of the trio, in bright colors and a loud cheery laugh.

When he'd first heard two of the girls discussing their trip at a sporting goods store, he thought it would be difficult to decide which girl to choose; when he saw there were three, he worried there would not be enough to target them all. However, because they were sharing everything, it would be suspicious if only one came down ill.

He slumped down in his rental car until the girls had passed by in Megan's father's Ford Explorer. He waited five minutes to see if anyone else passed by or approached their campsite.

Then he pulled on his gloves, picked up a pair of two-liter bottles of water and got out of the car, walking through the brush toward the tents on the Andrews' lot. Seeing no one around, he opened the cooler and found several liter bottles of water. None of them had been opened. He closed the lid and went to the tents. Inside one was a smaller cooler that had no ice, just a couple of bottles of water that had been opened, and one was about one-quarter empty.

He dumped out the water from the open bottle onto a nearby bush and filled it from his own. Done, he placed the bottle back into the cooler, leaving the lid slightly

open to allow the contents to warm up. He then shuffled his feet to cover his tracks in the sand and made his way to his car.

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Angela McDonald led what most people today would consider a very unfortunate life.

She was below average in looks, with stringy brown hair and a crooked smile over crooked teeth her parents would never have given a thought or a penny to what orthodontics could accomplish, even in 1953, when her self-esteem was at its lowest. She was a coltish, awkward teenager whose only friend had moved away two years ago, leaving her at the pity of her older sister's friends. She spent her sophomore year and much of her junior year in high school dateless and in near social silence.

Sock hops and drive-ins were out of her 17-year-old league. She'd never be homecoming queen or go out with the captain of the football team, and she knew it. She was doomed to anonymity if not invisibility, especially in her sister's shadow.

Sally McDonald had been a baton twirler in the band, had been runner-up for Homecoming Queen, and had made honor roll practically every report card since she was in third grade. She was, in short, everything Angela would never be.

"But Sally," she pouted when her sister had married the summer before, "I won't have any fun now that you're moving." But she got little more than sympathy from Sally as they sat on their parents' front porch, watching Sally's six-month-old son struggle to crawl on the blanket where she'd placed him to play.

"Just go to the dance tomorrow night," Sally encouraged. She truly felt sorry for Angela, who hadn't even been kissed yet. "Maybe you'll meet someone and have a dance or two. You've got to stop being so shy. Just do something bold, one thing to make you stand out."

Angela argued she didn't have anything to wear. She was several inches larger all over than Sally, so she didn't get her sister's hand-me-downs, even the maternity clothes. Her mother made most of her clothes for school; none were in style.

"I didn't have much time, with the baby and all," Sally said, handing her sister a bundle wrapped in brown paper, "but I think it will fit."

Angela pulled out a black cotton skirt with pink piping along the hem. "I thought I remembered you had that white sweater from Christmas last year. It's not much, but it's new."

Still alone and desperate, Angela walked to the high school dance, resigning herself to a corner near the refreshments. When the band started its third set, she was leaving when she noticed two young men in navy uniforms at the gym doors.

One looked like Jerry Clark, a basketball player who had graduated two years ago from Detroit Central, a rival high school. Not that he would know her from Eve, but he had dated Sally for a while when she was a sophomore.

She didn't recognize the other guy with him. Jerry was talking to the teacher chaperoning, apparently trying to get into the dance.

From the looks of their faces, Mrs. Vance was not buying the story.

What a crabby witch, she thought. She began walking closer, trying to hear over the music.

"Let's go someplace else, Tony," she barely heard Jerry say.

Do something to make someone notice you, Sally had told her.

Angela intentionally bumped into Mrs. Vance as she went by, calling out to them. “Oh, hi, Anthony! Jerry! I thought you’d never get here!” She said loudly enough for the teacher to hear. “I’ve been waiting for them. They can come to the dance with me, can’t they?”

Inez Vance had taught Angela in math and history classes as a freshman and couldn’t recall the girl ever having said so many words in one conversation, much less with such boldness. “They are not students here at this school,” she began to argue.

“But they are with me,” Angela countered immediately. “I mean, Anthony is.”

Taking the cue, the second sailor spoke to the teacher. “Thank you so much, ma’am. We’re just back on shore-leave,” he said, taking off his hat and reaching to take Angela’s hand, “and I don’t get to see my girl very often.”

Mrs. Vance just nodded, awestruck as the sailors paid their admission and the three of them went past her into the gymnasium.

“Thanks,” Jerry said, peering around his buddy to the homely girl who had come to their rescue. “I’ll catch up with you in a little while.”

“Guess we better dance, then,” the young sailor said with a lopsided grin.

“Everyone around here knows Jerry. I thought I should make it look good. I’m Angela. Angela McDonald.”

The handsome young man danced her around the floor with minimal grace and talent, but Angela was so overwhelmed, she hardly noticed they were the object of many stares and much gossip. Girls who’d never stooped to speak to her were suddenly green over the attentions of the handsome young sailor, a stranger to them all.

It is the best night of my life, Angela thought. Away from her meek mother and a drunken, abusive father, she eagerly clutched the first man who’d shown her any attention.

But that young man, home on a week’s furlough after his basic training in Chicago, was getting ready to go meet his first ship in Florida. He wasn’t interested falling in love with the homely girl he’d met at a high school dance in his buddy’s hometown, much less getting married or any of the things Angela had dreamed.

After he had met her and saw how willing she was to indulge him, his interest turned to the one thing most 19-year-old men are interested in – sex. And he was willing to take her out one more time just to get it.

And so the next night, after a burger and a shake, he took her for a ride in his buddy’s car and parked on a back road. He didn’t think she really meant no after she’d spoken on their behalf to get them into the dance and had been making those dreamy eyes at him over her French fries. He believed she was willing to let him go all the way with her. He hadn’t paid attention to the small bloody stain in the back seat when he was done.

Two days later, he headed back to the navy and was on the USS Lake Champlain. Angela never saw him again.

He never knew his small role in her miserable life.

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When her pregnancy became obvious five months later, Angela's father was enraged. In less than a week, he offered her a choice: she could marry one of the men who worked for him, someone who was willing to take her as dirty and used as she was, or she could pack her things to leave. Either way, he told her, he was not allowing a pregnant whore to live in his house.

They hadn't the money to whisk her out of town until the baby was born, not that Paul McDonald would have spent one red cent on that sort of nonsense.

"I'd-a thought since I had to marry you that you'da taught your daughters not to whore around," Paul had told his wife at the dinner table one night in front of his daughter. "At least Sally was sensible enough to keep her legs together till she got married."

Angela's mother had also been one of those unfortunate girls who had been pregnant before marrying more than twenty years before. She was not holding out for any miracles for Angela's situation. Uncertain what else to do, her mother had encouraged her to marry.

So Angela married the man as her father had arranged, unaware of the nature of the settlement between him and her father, and unable to negotiate anything else for herself.

Her dreams of a fancy church wedding died in the county clerk's office one afternoon a few weeks later. She had packed a suitcase and a grocery bag with her belongings and gone home with her new husband.

Honeymoons were for chaste brides, she was informed.

After the first night in bed with her groom, whose conduct was not so different from the man who had fathered the child she carried, Angela had no idea sex should be anything else.

She believed Bob Bock had been generous to have taken her, and this was the price of her gratitude. Only when his sexual advances caused vaginal bleeding, which her doctor said could indicate a miscarriage, did she finally beg Bob to stop until the baby was born.

At first, she thought Bob wasn't so bad, especially compared to her father or to the man who'd abandoned her in this predicament, for whom she harbored a very secret love-hate emotion. It was just her naiveté to believe being a wife wasn't much different from being a daughter, only the chores were bigger and the punishments harder.

Anthony Robert Bock was born in spring of 1954. Bob had no interest in naming the child; giving it his surname was inconvenient enough without them both being called Robert or Bob. He told her the name was fine, but to put Robert second. Without further discussion, Angela had named the baby after the man she lived with and his real father.

Angela's mother had stayed with her in the hospital; neither Angela's father nor her husband came to visit her or the baby. In fact, her only other visitor had been her older sister, Sally, whose son was now a toddler.

A legitimate grandson, Paul McDonald had been quick to proclaim, born eleven months after Sally's marriage.

But once Angela and the baby were home, the routine changed. Bob's favor to the boss was fulfilled, and now he had gained a woman to cook and clean for him, one with whom he could take his pleasures in bed whenever he wanted. He controlled her sternly and completely. He told her how to dress, which was easily controlled by limiting her access to money. He told her where she could buy groceries and how much she could spend. She never had any extra money. And when she broke the rules of his household, she was punished, usually with Bob's hand but sometimes with his belt, just as her father had.

Angela had become a captive housewife and mother, but she really didn't know any other life existed.

She was happy that, other than having to be quiet, rules didn't apply to Anthony. Bob never showed any interest in the boy except when the silence of the house was disrupted. Angela happily kept the two separated by time and distance.

Bob had been able to afford a small brownstone with the extra income from his deal with Mr. McDonald. He hadn't chosen to move from his one bedroom garage apartment to please his wife, but to get the crying infant boy one wall farther away from him at night.

It hadn't been fancy, but Angela was delighted to have a home. She'd done her best to clean and mend the old furniture that had been left in it. The only money Bob ever gave her was for groceries, so any decorating she did was by her mother's charity. Once a week or so, her mother dropped by in the morning to visit, giving her advice on cooking and housekeeping.

Angela appreciated the lessons as much as the company. None of her friends would call or come by. Her older sister had moved all the way across the country. Months after their courthouse wedding, Angela realized she'd never met Bob's family.

What angered her most was that her father refused to even acknowledge the toddler when he finally was forced to see the child. Anthony was almost three.

Anthony was a small, quiet child, seemingly content to stay in his room and play alone. For this, Angela was happy. She tried hard to make time to play with him or to read to him, hoping to be a good mother, but Bob expected so much of her.

When Anthony started school, Angela was lonely without him in the house, even just for the half day he was gone. She walked with him to and from school every day, wanting him to be safe and enjoying the only real reason she could get out of the house. She worked even harder to have her housework done so she could spend time with him after school.

When his second grade school year started, Anthony asked if she would let him walk to school and home alone. With a mixture of disappointment and pride, she offered him a compromise. "I'll walk you to and from school for a week. If you show me you can cross the streets safely, then you can walk home in the afternoon."

Anthony was excited by the deal. His childhood had been a confusing mix of being smothered by his mother when she was alone and of being ignored by her when she was with his father, who hardly ever spoke to him.

Walking home alone was independence, although he didn't know the word for it.
It just seemed an important thing to do.

Perhaps this saved his life.

Most certainly it changed it forever.

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The first afternoon Anthony was allowed to walk home alone, Bob Bock had an unusual first experience.

At the construction site, there wasn't much conversation during work, so lunch was when the men sat around with their black metal lunch boxes and hefty metal Thermos bottles of coffee, eating sandwiches made from last night's leftovers and complaining about their wives and kids.

But there was a new guy on the project who had been the recipient of a rather crude and embarrassing practical joke a few days before. His payback came in a small bag of crystallized powder, which he distributed in several Thermoses while they worked.

Somehow, most of the powder ended up in Bob Bock's Thermos.

By the end of lunch, the drug had taken effect.

On his way up a ladder to a second story, the foreman called him back down to discuss how to fix a crooked doorframe.

"Of all the dumb-ass questions!" he huffed. "I don't know why old man McDonald ever put you in charge of anything' but the shitters. Ain't bad enough I gotta work this shit job 'cuz of the old lady, I gotta put up with you, too!" Bob growled, then he shoved the foreman.

A gruff old man himself, the foreman simply shook his head. "Not no more, Bob. You're fired."

After losing the argument with the foreman, Bob threw down his hardhat and stomped to the gate. He started walking home, not even knowing he'd made that choice and not sure what had just happened. Driving his old truck didn't cross his mind. His anger boiled inside his guts, but there was too much else going on in his mind to sort it out.

Along the way, he saw a beautiful woman in a short skirt, walking her prissy little dog. Surely he deserved better than his frumpy, fat, ugly wife. And come to think of it, she wasn't even any fun in bed anymore, she was just a lump. He bet this woman would be lots of fun in the sack.

Bob's mind raced on through the flashes of breathtaking beauty of the things around him, through the frustration and dissatisfaction, his sexual desires. He became more irrational and angry.

When he got home, he answered Angela's surprise to see him and concern whether he was sick or hurt with a backhanded slap that sent her stumbling into the kitchen cabinet.

Bob Bock had no idea what was happening. Nothing seemed real to him except anger and the painful erection his fantasies about the beautiful woman had prompted.

He grabbed Angela and turned her to face the sink, then yanked up her skirt to take his betrothed pleasures despite her struggle.

As Anthony approached the front door of his home, he heard his father's voice. But he also heard his mother crying and begging.

Instinct told him he should not interrupt.

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Anthony didn't understand exactly how he knew he should leave after watching what had happened, but he didn't want to be around when his father woke up. He tiptoed out the back door and walked back to his school. He found his teacher and explained he'd been waiting for his mother to come get him, that she always walked him home.

The teacher took him inside and tried to call his mother, but there was no answer. She let him wait in the classroom until she was ready to leave. When his mother had not arrived to pick him up, the teacher then walked him home.

Anthony just shrugged his agreement and followed her, as if his only concern was his mother forgot him.

Hoping to discover why Mrs. Bock had neglected to retrieve her son from school, his teacher knocked on the warped wooden-framed screen door with its peeling white paint. There was no answer, but the inner door was open. She called out, but the response she got was not what she'd expected.

Instead of an apologetic mother who'd become engrossed in some project or lost track of time on some errand, Anthony's teacher was horrified to see Bock staggering from the kitchen, half naked and covered in blood.

The hysterical woman jerked Anthony away from the door by his arm, and ran to the street where she stood screaming. Neighbors quickly gathered to see what had happened. Within a few minutes, a police car arrived.

The officers found Robert Bock sitting in his living room, his pants still around his ankles, blood all over him. Bob could not tell them what had happened. He had seen his wife lying in a pool of blood next to him, and he vaguely remembered coming home, but nothing else made sense to him.

He was unable to confess to killing Angela. He couldn't recall coming home. He had no idea where the knife was or why he had been found at the scene of her murder, with her blood on him, so any attempt he could make to deny it would have been dismissed, even if he had thought to make up something.

Even for Detroit in 1960, the murder had been big news. Neighbors gossiped about how they had heard this or that, and one even whispered she thought she'd seen that Bock boy come home that afternoon. That had been disputed. After all, that nice teacher had walked him home and discovered the grisly murder.

Anthony had stayed with a neighbor that night because Angela's older sister Sally and her husband couldn't get to Detroit in time to pick him up for the night.

Angela's parents had moved to Florida to retire just a few months prior, and despite the news his younger daughter was dead at the hands of his son-in-law, Paul McDonald told his wife he'd still be damned if he'd raise the bastard grandson.

The next day, under strict guidance from the police officer to avoid the kitchen, Sally and Nick Tucker let Anthony go to his room and pack a few of his favorite things to take with him until they could come back later and get all his clothes and toys.

*

Sally Tucker had likely misjudged Anthony's silence as grief, but like most adults, she was both too burdened with her own life and too absorbed in her own grieving to offer a child much support. Her sadness was almost more than she could handle, having lost her only sister to a maniac.

There was not even a funeral, Sally wrote in her journal.

Anthony had no one else but her. Anthony had cried at first, scared and withdrawn. He had probably been a lonely child, she thought, and now he was alone, too. He would miss his mother terribly, she wrote.

For all his little boy tears and confusion, Sally had been touched by Anthony's maturity when he told her he wanted to pack his things alone when they went back for his belongings. She told him he could pack a couple of boxes of stuff he wanted to bring, then she could come make sure he had everything he would need. Holding back her tears, she explained again to him he could no longer live there because his mother was gone.

Anthony had nodded and gone upstairs. Fifteen minutes later, he reappeared carrying a box. On the top, Sally could see a few ragged stuffed animals. Some of these, she realized, had been hers and Angela's.

She took an empty suitcase back up stairs with Anthony and helped him pack his clothes, hoping he wouldn't want to pack more toys, too. The one box had emptied the room of toys except one doll sitting on a dresser. She picked up the limp doll.

"That one was Mommy's," Anthony explained. "When she was a little girl, she told me. I never played with dolls."

Sally recognized it as Angela's hiding place for her diaries when they were young. "Maybe we could keep it? Jenny might like it."

Anthony just shrugged.

In an afterthought, she went through the house and looked for the other diary books, finding them in a small box under Angela's side of the bed. She packed those up, too.

She couldn't help feeling how much a victim of circumstance her nephew was.

Living without his real mother would be hard on him, she thought, but at least he won't have to live around Bob's temper any more. All she could offer her nephew was a home and family, and she prayed that was enough.

Anthony helped her load the boxes and suitcase into her station wagon. He didn't speak for most of the six-hour ride, sleeping part of the way. The silence was a relief to Sally, who had so many things on her mind.

But when they got to her home and found everyone else had already gone to bed, she fixed him some hot cocoa. They sat together on the couch and talked.

"Aunt Sally?" he finally asked, "I know you said Mommy won't come back, but what does it mean to be dead?"

It took all her strength to explain without breaking into tears again. "Do you remember times when you scraped your knees or bumped your head? Or when you were sick with a runny nose or earaches? Most of the time when you are sick or hurt, you get better," she said, showing him his knees. "I bet your mother always made you look both ways before you crossed the street, didn't she? That's because if you were hit by a car, you would have been hurt pretty bad. Sometimes people get sick or hurt and they just can't get

better.”

“But what happened to her?” Anthony asked. “The policemen took my father away. Did they take her, too?”

Sally wasn't sure what all Anthony might have seen when the police were at his home. She had hoped to spare him the agony of understanding his father had butchered his mother. “The police believe Bob hurt your mother, hurt her so bad she couldn't get better, so bad she died. When people die, we put their bodies in the ground, but their souls go to Heaven.” She started to say he would see her when he died, but that seemed a cruel trick to play on a child who still believed in Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy.

Anthony pondered this a moment. “Will I ever see my dad again?” he asked.

“I don't think so,” she said, but in her mind, she'd said, “Not if I can help it.”

Sally wanted to tell her nephew Bob Bock had no desire to see him, that the man who killed his mother wasn't really Anthony's father. She wanted his anger to lessen the sorrow he would feel at losing his mother. She wanted him to understand his mother had been given no other choice but to marry Bob. But she couldn't bring herself to explain what Bob had done, to spark anger in the child when he was so confused already about what had happened. Surely learning the truth would only make it worse for him now.

He didn't ask her any more questions, for which she was relieved.

If Anthony was confused about anything, it was why adults wouldn't tell him the truth. He knew what had really happened but no one had asked him, and he knew he shouldn't tell.

Sally had told him his mother had been hurt by his father, hurt so badly, she had died.

Anthony knew his mother had been a weak woman. Too weak to survive.

It was her fault for dying, he thought, and he hated her for it.

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Nicholas Tucker had inherited his grandfather's house on 600 acres in Northwestern Lower Michigan, southeast of Traverse City. He and his brother shared the farming of cherries and apples from an orchard that had supported the Tucker family for several generations. Nick and Sally were just getting ahead when suddenly they had another mouth to feed and body to clothe for school. The Tuckers had two children of their own. Jenny was only four, and James Patrick, J.P. as he already preferred to be called, was ten when Anthony came to live with them.

J.P. had to share his room with this odd, reclusive cousin. He made it known between them that he didn't have a choice, and that Anthony was to leave what did not belong to him alone. He was taller and more muscular than his cousin, and quickly learned that, while he could not get away with the usual big-brother torments with his little sister, Anthony was fair game. Especially away from his mother's protective eye.

The first few nights after his mother's death, Anthony was physically if not emotionally exhausted. He was sad. His mother was dead, but his tears for her were not sorrow but anger. His sleep was so alive with the visions of what he had seen, he wet the bed his first two nights in the Tucker house.

"Tony is a baby. Tony is a baby," J.P. taunted him at the breakfast table after finding his mother changing the sheets on Anthony's bed the second day in a row. "Even Jenny doesn't pee the bed anymore."

J.P. avoided him for several days, out of an uncomfortable fear after his mother scolded that it could happen to him, too. Nonetheless, it set into effect the dominance over Anthony J.P. had hoped for.

The only response he got from his cousin was a stern remark, "My name is Anthony."

A week later, Sally informed him it was time to get him enrolled in school.

He sat in silence at the breakfast table the morning she was to take him to register. When his two cousins left to catch the school bus, Anthony finally spoke.

"Will the kids make fun of me about my mom and dad?"

Sally sat down beside him at the table.

"It would be very cruel of them, but I suppose it could happen."

Sally had been concerned about that, too. Her sister's murder had been a hot bit of gossip, even this far from Detroit. Already several of her neighbors had asked about him as if he were a mongrel stray. She hated the thought children would pick on Anthony about it.

She promised Anthony she would talk to his teacher about what had happened when she registered him at school.

Anthony rode the bus with Jenny and J.P. when he started school a few days later. His first day, he felt awkward. All the adults treated him as though the slightest hint of unhappiness would make him shatter, but the kids mostly ignored him or accepted him.

At the first conference with his teacher, Sally was delighted to learn Anthony was doing very well with his studies. His reading skills began to develop at a faster pace than the other students in his class. Within the year, he began borrowing some of J.P.'s books to read.

"I was a little concerned at first, you know," the white-headed teacher went on. "He

doesn't seem to socialize very much with the other children, but I don't think he feels unwelcome. We've tried very hard to help him adjust. Sometimes when the class is doing quiet things, Anthony just stares out the window. I've seen him do that for better than an hour. I just can't imagine..." her voice trailed off sympathetically. "He's a good reader, and he seems to love science."

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J.P. Tucker finally decided that for lack of other potential playmates, his cousin and somewhat creepy new roommate Anthony would suffice in his adventures. First, he began taking Anthony to investigate all the dead animals he found. Sometimes they'd find a dead dog or cat along the road before it had been crushed repeatedly. They finally decided to toss one dog over the fence just out of site until it had completely decayed, then they'd be able to build its skeleton back together.

They checked on it every several days, until the smell and the insects became too intolerable in the summer heat. But they still checked every couple of weeks after that, not knowing how long it would take all the skin and muscle to rot away. They were disappointed to find that some of the smaller bones had disappeared, but they gathered up the white skull and spine and larger bones in the autumn and played with them until they became brittle.

Later, their adventures included hunting with the BB guns Nick had bought them for Christmas the second winter Anthony lived with them. J.P. had just turned twelve, Anthony ten. Old enough for BB guns, Nick told them.

Promising to be careful, they set out to shoot birds, squirrels and rabbits, though it took a great deal of practice before either of them ever hit a live animal, which happened to be a rat in the barn.

J.P. picked the dying rodent up by the tail and threw it at Anthony. When it fell at his feet, Anthony simply lifted his hand-me-down boot and stomped the rat's skull. He turned and walked away, leaving J.P. with an astonished look on his face.

Had Anthony only thought to pick the rat up and toss it back after crushing it, he could have assumed the dominant role of their relationship. Anthony decided it was more gratifying to show J.P. he could rule whenever he felt like it.

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Sometime after his eleventh birthday, Sally tried to explain to Anthony that Robert Bock was not his biological father.

Learning the truth about Bock not being his real father made Anthony angry, but not in a way Sally or Nick could have ever imagined.

He had initially felt anger and sorrow that his mother was dead. Now he was angry that she had exposed him to a man who had hated him and had hated her enough to kill her. He hated her weakness.

Sometimes when he was in the house alone, Anthony carefully unpacked the knife he'd taken from the kitchen floor where it had fallen from his stepfather's hand. The blood eventually flaked away, leaving a dull blackish stain on the steel blade.

Starting that autumn, Anthony performed an annual ritual a few weeks before school began. He would find time to take the knife out and with a guilty pleasure he could not define, he would drag the still sharp edge over some part of his body hard enough to draw a few drops of blood just to share in the experience his mother and his stepfather had had.

Sally was unable to provide any information as to who his real father had been. That made Anthony even angrier. How could he share that experience with his father?

As Anthony became part of the Tucker household, he sometimes wondered about the roles of those around him. Nick was obviously a dominant adult as had been his so-called father, but at times Nick bowed to Sally like a whipped dog. Nick had a temper, Anthony learned, but it was a slow boiling anger he was able to control. This was very different from Bock, whose anger was often visible in the lines on his face and the bulging veins in his neck, but there was little ground between what angered him and the ultimate explosion.

Sally, on the other hand, was very stern with the rules of the household, though she was usually fair with the children. She was also able to walk away from or stand up to Nick and his anger when necessary. She was a little like his mother sometimes, but not in every way. Anthony never heard her make the pitiful moaning sounds his mother had made at night, but he didn't know whether to attribute that to Sally or to Nick.

One night, Anthony woke to the howling sounds of two barn cats mating.

J.P. woke and saw Anthony staring out the window. "I bet you don't know anything about sex" he taunted, certain he'd found yet another subject with which to torment his cousin.

"I do," Anthony shot back, "so what?" His eyes didn't leave the cats, but his mind was seeing something else entirely. Anthony was suddenly overwhelmed by realization of what he had witnessed his father doing to his mother.

"What do you know?" J.P. taunted him. "Does your pecker even get hard yet or are you still too little?" For effect, he pulled down his pajama bottoms and stroked his own, encouraging the erection he had only recently discovered for himself. "Wanna see?"

Anthony ignored him.

"Too bad you can't do this," J.P. continued, whispering across the bedroom. "I hear you can get girls to suck on it." The lack of response from Anthony irritated him. "Hey, shithead, I said look at this."

Anthony turned toward his bullying cousin and rolled his eyes. "Yeah, so what?"

"Yeah, well, you can't do it, that's what. I ought to make you suck it, you little

bastard.” He started toward where Anthony sat looking out the window from the foot of his bed.

Anthony turned to face him with a steel cold look that almost stopped J.P. in his tracks. “You might make me, but you’ll regret it till the day you die.”

This was much too much for J.P., who could not let the younger, smaller intruder into his room and his world go without facing up such a challenge.

Size and strength were against Anthony, who hardly put up a fight once he was certain J.P. meant to go through with it. Despite the sweaty, salty taste, Anthony found the experience very short-lived and not entirely unpleasant.

But Anthony had begun to keep score.

Leery that size wouldn't always be in his favor, J.P. didn't push his luck with Anthony for over a year. As tough as it had made him feel to sodomize his younger cousin, the threat was not easily forgotten.

Nonetheless, Anthony had not forgotten that night either.

It was during that year Anthony's body reached a raging, barely-contained hormonal adolescence, nearly unnoticed by J.P. or the rest of the family

It was a surprise to J.P. then for Anthony to bring up a different sexual game.

"I heard Grace Hawkins will do anybody for \$10 bucks," he announced to J.P. one day while they were cleaning stalls in the barn. "I got some money left over from my birthday. I'll pay if you'll ask her."

J.P. just about fell over himself. Grace was a year older than him, and he'd had a secret crush on her all year. "Lessee the money, big shot." He snapped, trying to decide if this was too good to be true.

Anthony held out a twenty-dollar bill. "I'll even let you go first," he offered. "And I hear she sucks, too."

So, with the temptation hanging over him and Anthony's money in pocket, J.P. approached Grace Hawkins and asked if she'd like to walk home with him and Anthony, maybe go swimming in the pond.

"I don't have a swimming suit," she objected.

"I was thinking maybe you could swim with us today without one," he said, holding out the money, "and buy a swim suit for next time."

With a smile, Grace snatched the bill from his hand.

J.P.'s parents were both working, still struggling against the previous year of bad weather that had wasted a good portion of the fruit crops. Janet had gone to a friend's house to spend the night. The boys were all alone with Grace.

"I'll go in first," J.P. offered, "then turn around while you undress."

Grace nodded, fingering the frayed twenty-dollar bill in the pocket of her skirt, then began unbuttoning her blouse.

Each of them had a turn with her on a blanket under an oak tree, and she had been quite willing. And then they offered to walk back as far as the neighbor's fence with her. But nearing the barn and seeing no one was home yet, they led her into the barn. "Just one more time," one of them begged, "for another ten bucks."

She initially refused, explaining she had to get home to do her chores. She resisted as they playfully pulled her into the barn toward the back.

The older boy had gone to close the door and returned to find the girl crying as his cousin stood behind her. Unsure what to do, not wanting to spoil the adventure, he nonetheless knew this situation was out of control.

He started toward his younger cousin, who snatched up a butcher knife wedged between bales of hay and yanked back the girl's head by her hair and cut her throat in a wild spray of blood. She gasped and clawed at her neck for a few seconds, then collapsed to the loose hay on the floor.

"Do what I tell you, or I'll tell them you killed her. You know who they'll believe."

They picked up her limp body and stuffed it into an old barrel they had recently sunk

into a hole behind the barn to hide in and shoot rabbits. They shoveled the bloody hay in with her, then hammered the lid in place and covered the area with loose dirt, then sprinkled the area down with water.

“See,” Anthony said, “it’s our secret. It will be invisible before anyone even thinks to look around here. Just do what I tell you, and no one gets in trouble.”

“I know you can’t afford to send me to college,” Anthony said one afternoon while he was helping Sally in the kitchen, getting jars ready for the first batch of summer canning. “It’s okay, really. I’ve had enough school for a while.”

She hoped it didn’t show as relief when she hugged her nephew, who stood nearly a foot taller. “I wish we could do it,” she said. “Your mother didn’t have any life insurance, and what the government paid was barely enough to keep you in clothes and school supplies.”

Anthony nodded. He had no hard feelings about where his benefits had gone, even though he had known some years the money had helped pay the mortgage or loans for farm equipment instead of clothes or books. In the end, it all went to pay for the roof over his head.

“There are some things of your mother’s you should have, though. Things I saved,” she said, wiping her hands dry on the dishtowel she had tucked in her slacks as an apron. “Do you want to see them now?”

He nodded again.

Sally Tucker led him through the house to a closet underneath the stairway. “I haven’t looked at this stuff since I packed it up the day I brought you here. I just put it in away for you,” she said. “There wasn’t much, but you’re old enough to decide what you want of it.”

She pulled out several boxes of her own Christmas decorations before she got to a faded trunk in the far corner. She dragged it out into the hallway and opened it.

Carefully, she picked up the limp cloth doll with its yellowed frills of lace and faded blue skirts. He knelt on the floor beside her. “When we were kids, your mom always kept her diary in this doll. I knew there was a book in the doll when we got your things, so I saved it, but I didn’t ever look.” She slid a small book from a slit in the doll’s back but did not open the cover.

“If it’s okay,” he said quietly, taking the book from her hands and replacing it in the trunk, “I’ll go through this later. You can keep the doll if you want.”

Her eyes met his. His voice had sounded grateful, but his eyes could not hide what she believed was rage. The few times she’d tried to talk to him about his mother, he’d been silently furious, refusing to listen to her words.

“That would be nice, Anthony. Thank you.” She stood up. “I’d better finish up those green beans for supper.”

Anthony picked up the case and carried it up the stairs to the room he no longer had to share with J.P., who was in Lansing at college, trying to avoid the draft.

Later that evening, when Anthony was out working on an old pickup he’d bought from a neighbor, Sally told Nick about their conversation.

“I reckon he’s known all along about the money. J.P. couldn’t have gone to college if he hadn’t worked two jobs last summer.” Nick said, sipping his coffee, which was generously laced with whiskey. He sighed. “I just don’t know about that kid, Sal’. He’s always been a good hand around here, pitchin’ in with the chores and all, but I can’t help feeling he’s bidin’ his time for somethin’ bigger. Even when he was a little boy, there was something in his eyes that made the hair stand up on the back of my neck.”

They had learned that agreeing to disagree about Anthony was as good as it would get. Nick knew she had felt a family obligation to take him in, but it chapped him his own kids had a little less because of it.

“Oh, Nick,” she chided him. “He’s never been a speck of trouble and you know it.”

“Nope, I didn’t say he had been. And he’s kept J.P. out of jail a night or two more ‘n likely, but still.” He set the heavy mug down on the kitchen table and leaned over to rub his knees, arthritic and stiff. “After more than ten years of thinking ‘bout it, I ought to be able to explain it better, but I can’t.”

That night after everyone else had gone to bed, Anthony opened the trunk and pulled out the book.

In it, he read the occasional entries his mother had made during his childhood, her cherished memories of his growing up recorded in her clenched, desperate handwriting.

She had kept track of his baby shots, his first tooth, his first words, had taped in a lock of his hair. All the things new mothers tend to chronicle. The entries were not regular, sometimes a few in a week, others weeks apart.

He found an entry in 1957, when he was four years old, about his first meeting with his grandfather. His mother scribbled how the old man was still hateful to everyone - her mother, herself, and to Anthony. “It’s not Anthony’s fault I got pregnant before I got married,” she had written. “My son will never have grandparents, and damn them every one for their spite.” There was no other mention of them in her diaries.

Angela wrote a few vague comments about Bob, usually just a few words referring to an argument or some lame gift he brought home to make up. She had made no note of his being violent with her, though Anthony remembered the bouts he’d overheard.

Anthony concluded Robert Bock had been a man of few kind words and fewer kind deeds when it came to his wife and her son. Lacking kindness, however, did not explain his behavior the day he killed Angela.

Turning from his mother’s diary, Anthony opened the brittle, yellowed newspaper articles he had found about her death and Robert Bock’s trial.

Though Sally had been thankful Anthony had never shown any curiosity to what had happened to Bock, it was only that he had no interest in hearing it from her. He understood from the beginning that adults didn’t want to tell him the truth, no more so than he wanted to tell them the truth that he’d watched the murder committed. Sally and Nick were more comfortable if he didn’t ask questions, but that didn’t mean he hadn’t any.

In the year since he turned eighteen, Anthony had gone to quiet but considerable efforts to find out what he could about the murder and Bock himself.

A bus ride to Detroit had netted him hours of reading from the newspaper archives and microfiche library. The accounts of Angela McDonald-Bock’s murder by her husband Robert Bock seemed fictional to him because there was so little truth in what he read. The papers told how his teacher had discovered the brutal slaying after she had walked their son home when his mother failed to pick him up from school. Her quote, “I just wanted to protect little Anthony from the horrible image I saw,” made him laugh.

I hope the old woman still has nightmares about it, he thought. Anthony had seen Bock staggering from the kitchen as clearly as she had.

Even more uncanny was the incorrect information published later about the murder weapon having been identified as a kitchen knife Bock had washed and returned to the draining rack, quoted by a reliable source.

Only Anthony was positive this was untrue, for he still had the knife used to slit his mother's throat stowed in a box in his closet, the steel blade a dull brownish hue from the stains of her blood.

He read all the available newspaper stories he found, ending with a story Bock had been found guilty and sentenced to 25 years to life in prison.

He probably wouldn't recognize me if I visited him, Anthony thought. I wonder what he would say if I told him I watched him kill her?

Perhaps Anthony would visit him someday.

Anthony folded up the newspaper clippings he had copied or stolen and placed them in his mother's Bible in his bedside stand. He turned his attention back to the box Sally had dragged out for him. Beneath the few Christmas ornaments, baby clothes, a handful of pictures and a baby blanket Angela's mother had made for him, Anthony found two other diaries his mother had kept.

He started reading the oldest one first. She had started it when she was fourteen. There wasn't much insight, though in the last half of the book, she had copied some poetry she liked and even wrote a few poems herself, most of it solemn lonely-hearted drivel. But Anthony had found he liked one of them.

Love touches us all
by moonbeams or
torches,
in heaven
or hell.
In the end,
the only thing left
of love is
the giving.

Otherwise, the diary was full of forlorn words from a young, insecure girl desperately writing weak, pitiful prayers for love or perhaps only acceptance from someone in her life.

Most were immature scribblings, but toward the end, he found his history in her words, though the connection was not immediate.

"Sally has Nick and the baby, and they're getting ready to move north. God, I wish I could go with her. I'm stuck alone here now with Mom and Dad. I wish some handsome man would come along and sweep me away. Sally says I won't meet anyone until I get over being so shy, but she always had boys falling at her feet because she's so pretty and smart. I'm plain and fat and stupid.

“She told me I should go to this dance tonight, to just do something daring. One thing, she said. Take one chance to stand out from everyone else. She said she was so sure of it, she made me a skirt to wear tonight.”

Anthony concluded she went, reading her next entry.

“Oh my God! I met him!! I can’t believe I just walked up and escorted him and Jerry Clark into the dance when Mrs. Vance wouldn’t let them in!! We danced all night, and I could see all the other girls staring at us. I can’t wait to tell Sally!! But the best part is.... he is going to take me out tomorrow night, too!!!!!!”

The text was outlined in hearts and arrows.

The images remained so vivid that for months, Anthony could see her drawings when he recited the words in his mind. He imagined her repeating the lines with a voice as clear in his memory as his vision of her lying on the kitchen floor.

Her diary continued with speculations of where they might go, who might see them, and who “would just die if they see us together again!!” She tried to describe him, though her attempt was a vague illustration of practically any white male between the ages of 16 and 24. “Were his eyes brown or blue? Doesn’t matter, they were so dreamy!” she wrote. There was no need to detail all his features. He was a whole, perfect man to her. She had fallen in love and believed her love would be reciprocated.

She even mentioned briefly she hadn’t made up her mind about “you-know-what” if he should want to on their date, but she might. Since he’s several years older, it might be something he expects, she considered.

The entry for the time between the dance and their date went on for about nine pages, right up until she left the house to meet him at the Dairy Queen. She had written that there was no way she would let him suffer the inquisition by her father, so she asked him not to pick her up.

As Anthony read on, he began to see that day was probably the happiest day of her life.

The next entry wasn’t till the next day, which surprised Anthony as he read through the diary the first time. After the gooshy excitement of the dance and anticipation of her date, he expected to read endless pages of details about the dreamy man starting from the time she got home.

The words about her dream date had no hearts in the margins, no exclamation points after anything. “When we were parked, we necked for a while, but I told him I didn’t want to go all the way, I was scared. He kind of kidded me a little, and we kept necking. Finally, when he pulled my skirt up, I tried to tell him to stop, but he kept kissing me and touching me, and I liked it, but I was embarrassed because I didn’t know what to do. Then he rolled on top of me and spread my legs. The next thing I knew, he was laying on me, all sweaty. God, it hurt so much I cried. He just kept saying I’d be okay, that it would be better next time. He bought me a pop at the drive-in. When I went to the restroom, I was bleeding!. We watched the movie, but I wasn’t paying any attention. Then he dropped me off a few houses down the block and said goodnight...”

For several days after, Anthony could tell she was trying to be cheerful when she wrote about their next date, which she expected to be the coming Friday night. She’d

heard from other girls that the second time didn't hurt so much, and she was prepared to say yes the next time.

But by Thursday, her tone had faded to despair when he hadn't called. On Saturday afternoon, she summoned the courage to call Jerry's house to ask where she might reach Tony.

Mrs. Clark explained that Jerry had gone back to his ship the first of the week. "I couldn't say about the other young man. We didn't get much of a chance to talk with him while they were here. I imagine he spent the rest of the time with his family," she said.

She thanked the woman and hung up.

He'd left without even telling her, without giving her any way to reach him.

Her handwriting withered from its previous large loopy mess to a blunt, lifeless scribble in a matter of weeks. Her future, she wrote, was dead.

Eventually, Anthony even had trouble deciphering some of her writing. Her words gave Anthony the only sympathy for the woman he had ever felt.

"He left. He took my virginity and ran away in the night. He's gone back to the Navy without so much as a thank-you or a good-bye."

Anthony learned from her diary how scared she was when Sally told her in a letter that, yes, you could get pregnant the first time, and that, yes, being late, having tender breasts and nausea were signs of pregnancy.

"Sal' asked me whose it is, but I can't tell her. And what would I say, that it was some guy I met at the dance who took me out parking on a date? That I don't even know his last name? If I can't tell him, I won't tell anybody," she wrote stubbornly.

"Obviously if he didn't care enough to even say goodbye, he won't care about a baby or me."

Angela's diaries kept a less-detailed account of the events in the weeks that followed, including the day her father found out. Her words lacked any feeling, not anger nor even self-pity. As she put it, she felt nothing at all except the baby growing inside her.

"This baby," she wrote, about the time she would have married Robert Bock, "is the only thing worth living for. It wasn't wanted by its father or its grandfather, but I'll be damned if it will ever feel it isn't wanted by me."

Visiting the prison gave Anthony an uncomfortable feeling, though he was uncertain if it was from the ominous way the building towered over him, the nature of his call, or the realization that things he'd done could put him in permanent residency in such a place, too.

The first time he came on a Monday, and he was turned away after being given a schedule of visitation for the various units. He returned on a Thursday and was admitted and asked to fill out an information sheet.

Then he was escorted to a large room with tables and stools all bolted to the floor. Everything that could be painted had been covered with a light mint green. It was as nauseating as the pale blue had been in the entry halls.

No wonder men came from prison like they did, Anthony thought. They either never wanted to see those walls again, or the colors made them psychotic.

He had been searched, given a list of rules about contact. He was escorted to a table and told to sit and wait, and the prisoner would be brought to the table. His heart raced every time a man was brought into the room from a heavy metal door opposite where he and other visitors entered. The waiting made him restless, and after ten or fifteen minutes, he considered just leaving. He might have, had he not spent so much money getting to the prison and then staying another three nights in a motel just to see the old man.

Finally, a man was brought to his table, and he sat down across from Anthony but said nothing.

“Are you Bob Bock?” Anthony asked.

“Yeah, who are you?” he asked with a raised eyebrow. On several occasions throughout his sentence, reporters had tried to get him to talk about the murder. He had never spoken of it after his trial.

“I guess you wouldn't recognize me. My name is Anthony,” he paused, waiting to see some flicker of response to his name. “Anthony Robert Bock.”

“Are you then?” the older man said with a hmph. “So?”

“I just wanted to meet you. It's been twelve years since I saw you.”

“If you say so.”

“I do. I saw what you did to my mother,” he whispered. “I saw you cut her throat.”

“Nothing personal, kid, but I don't believe you.” Bock put his hands on the table and pushed himself up. Prison life had made his muscles flabby, his gut round. “But it's been nice visiting.” He stood up and indicated to a guard he was through.

“They never found the knife,” Anthony said, leaning forward so Bock could hear him, “because I took it while you were passed out.”

This was enough to make Bob pause and look at the kid hard. He didn't believe him. Couldn't believe him.

He'd been just a little kid.

But the look in his eyes...

“I'll see you when you get out,” Anthony said, mockingly, “Dad. It'll be like old times with Mom.”

Anthony stood up and swung his leg over the back of the chair and left the old man standing there doubting what he'd heard. When he got to the exit, he turned and winked. Robert was still watching.

Although the visit hadn't gone as he'd intended, Anthony wasn't sure what he had hoped

would happen. He hadn't believed Bob would just melt at the sight of his stepson and beg for forgiveness, so doubt was the best he could have hoped for. He'd wanted more than cold dismissal but he'd left far more than he'd received, however.

Anthony would deal with him someday.

Now it was time to join the armed forces in search of his real father and more adventure.

* * *

As soon as Anthony Bock completed basic training, he applied for his rating as personnelman, which would put in him better position to search for his biological father.

He knew little about the man, other than what was in his mother's diaries, but after several queries, supposedly made on behalf of an officer if anyone asked, he found a man he believed was his father. The man he'd found was still in the navy, nearing retirement age, married and had a child.

It was a surprisingly easy task.

However, Anthony decided that, although the passing of time would probably be adequate, there was a possibility of a link being made between his inquiry and his ultimate actions. Keeping track was less difficult than finding him, and hopefully the retirement and benefits system would make any future inquiries simple enough.

He would wait patiently until he could make plans to meet, only checking once a year or so. He couldn't wait too long, but he had things to arrange.

As soon as he was qualified, Anthony applied for BUD/S - Basic Underwater Demolition / SEAL training, but he failed the Physical Screening Test the first time because he had the flu. He was barely able to walk or breathe, much less to run the 1-1/2 miles, even in the eleven minutes allowed. While jogging the distance might have qualified him, taking the fail and retesting 45 days later was preferable to a poor showing for Anthony.

The SEAL training included five weeks of indoctrination, eight weeks of physical conditioning with the fourth week better known as Hell Week, then eight more weeks of diving training, nine weeks of land warfare training, and three weeks of basic parachute training. From there, recruits are sent for SQT, the 15-week Seal Qualification Training, then more special operations technical training and, for some, 30 weeks of medical training before receiving assignment to a SEAL team for another six to twelve months of on-the-job training, including three weeks in Kodiak, Alaska, for NSW Basic Cold Weather Maritime Training. At the end, a successful candidate will be awarded a SEAL Naval Enlisted Classification (NEC) Code and the Naval Special Warfare Insignia or Trident.

All Anthony knew was that it would be a good place to perfect his killing, though he'd have to hide his feelings and not act on them inappropriately. Where else would he be a weapon himself? Not part of a huge impersonal army of thousands like a shotgun blast, but a small strike force, an elite precision team like a knife to a jugular vein?

He smiled at the thought.

He worked to hone his skills in every available course – especially NSW Explosives and NSW Sniper. Oftentimes, assignments were hands-on and nota thousand safe, clean, detached and unemotional yards away from an enemy.

Within three years of enlisting, he was assigned to SEAL Team Three in San Diego with brand new skills he had personally refined for torturing and killing, and several assignments to practice. Carefully.

Always very cautious to stay within the expectations of those men around him, who found him to be serious and fully dedicated.

As time passed, Anthony began looking for someone with similar build and facial features

to his own. Someone whose life he wanted to steal.

Over the next six months, Anthony went to bars where sailors hung out, being friendlier than usual.

There had been a couple of young officers he considered to be close enough in looks, but upon questioning them over a few beers, he found out their backgrounds were not empty enough to support him taking their identities.

But one night, in a rush to escape a bar fight, he hurried out the door into a thundershower and bumped into a lieutenant who was physically a match.

“Need a ride somewhere, Lieutenant?” he'd called as the other man stood looking around for the guys he'd come with.

“Sure thing!” he said, and crawled into Bock's Volkswagen Beetle.

Anthony suggested another bar closer to base, and the officer agreed eagerly.

Anthony and his new drinking buddy closed down the second bar, then stopped for a six-pack of beer on the way back to Naval Base Coronado.

In two hours, Anthony had learned enough to know this man was the perfect target.

Lt. (jg) Gregory Everett Lawson was about to transfer to a recruiting station in Kansas to finish his career and retire after suffering a back injury jumping from a helicopter into rough seas on a training flight. He had three years to go for his twenty and didn't want to take a medical discharge.

In the course of the evening, Lawson shared that he had no close family, no steady girlfriend, and knew no one in Kansas. He'd sold most of the junk from his cheap apartment, sold his motorcycle with intentions of buying a car when he got there, so he was taking Greyhound.

He was already afoot, Anthony thought.

It was perfect.

Lawson must have thought it pure coincidence when Anthony bumped into him again ten days later on his way out to the gate. "Yeah, I'm packed and out the door," the lieutenant said. "Cab to the bus station and a Greyhound to Kansas City at 1300."

"I was thinking about driving up to Las Vegas for the weekend," Anthony said. "Why don't you catch a bus from there? Food's cheap, liquor is free, and I have a place to stay with my brother," he lied. "You could use a last fling before Kansas. Maybe win a little dough."

"Sure you got room for all this gear in that Bug?"

Anthony grinned. "We'll make it fit."

Hardly thinking about it, Greg Lawson readily accepted.

Anthony had worked out his plan until it was perfect. Even with what little gear of his own he would take, there was plenty of room in the Beetle. He couldn't take much, according to his plan, only took the few personal effects he had.

Initial conversation lagged, but feigning a couple of yawns, Anthony kept Greg talking about himself to keep him awake.

Anthony wished he had time to learn more, but the circumstances would take care of themselves. The transfer put Greg in possession of every piece of documentation Anthony would possibly need.

Forty miles or so southwest of Vegas, still deep in the desert, Anthony took an exit to the parallel highway 604, drove a few miles, then pulled over on the shoulder and asked if Greg could drive.

They both got out of the car to switch places, stretching.

Greg drove for half an hour until Anthony had a chance to evaluate passing traffic, then Anthony asked him to pull over again so he could take a leak.

With adequate fingerprints from Lawson in the car, Anthony was satisfied his plan would hold. He stood over a small rise and urinated with a smile.

When he returned, he opened the trunk as they stood in front of the Beetle, digging inside a duffel bag. "Something more comfortable. Ah, yes," he said, pulling out a small caliber revolver. "Just your size."

The .22 caliber shot to the temple dropped Greg Lawson to his knees then face first into the sand that crept onto the shoulders of the road.

It was a bit messy but certainly neater than slitting his throat, Anthony thought as he slipped a plastic bag over the head to keep from getting himself or the clothes bloody. Then he slung the body over his shoulder and carried it nearly 200 yards from the road, just over a rise so he could see cars coming from either direction but far enough the body wouldn't be seen.

He stripped Lawson then made a thorough search of the body for scars and birthmarks, anything that might give the Navy reason to question whether he was Greg Lawson. He found only a tattoo of a knight on horseback on Lawson's left upper arm. The Black Knight, Lawson's previous squadron.

Simple enough to describe, it could be duplicated easily enough on his own arm, though the thought disgusted Anthony.

Just as important, should the body be found before completely decomposing, it might raise a question whether the body was Anthony Bock's, as the Navy SEALs had strict rules about identifying marks.

Anthony knew the body would draw carnivores and insects, quickly decomposing in the desert summer heat. Identification would be difficult in a matter of days, likely impossible in a week, but he could take no chances.

He redressed Lawson's body in a pair of shorts of his own, then civilian clothes. He took off his own dog tags and wiped them off. Using the dead man's hand, he managed to put a few fingerprints on them before placing them around Lawson's neck. He followed a similar procedure for his wallet, driver's license and Social Security cards, military identification and a couple of twenty-dollar bills. He replaced Lawson's watch with his own cheap one. Then he wiped down the gun and placed it into Lawson's hand for prints, and dropped it in the sand next to him. Last, he removed the plastic bag from Lawson's head.

Then he brushed sand around the sides of the body as if it had blown and drifted there. He was not worried about footprints in the sand near the body, just near the roadway. Wind would take care of the rest.

However, back at the car, Anthony had trouble deciding whether to keep driving the Beetle or to leave it to further solidify the identity of the body as Anthony Bock.

If he left the car and the gun so the scene looked like a suicide, the story would arouse less suspicion. He could walk over to I-15 and flag down a car. Even if he walked back a mile or so and caught a ride, he couldn't chance being stopped and questioned. There was the possibility someone might stop to check on the car and find the body before he was far enough away.

It was still 50 miles to Vegas, and traffic was intermittent at best.

No, he decided, better to drive the car to the city, park it in a garage somewhere, and wipe it down for prints. Leave it and become Lt. Greg E. Lawson, spend a few days drinking and gambling, meet a few people who would remember him, and catch a bus to Kansas City.

No one knew they had driven to Las Vegas together.

He'd make it look like the car had been stolen from the side of the road.

During the drive on to Vegas, Anthony Bock made a mental exercise of becoming Lt. (jg) Gregory E. Lawson, Black Knight and now Personnelman/Recruiter, U.S. Navy.; no living family, no past worth talking about. Lawson had grown up in Southern California in a foster home after being abandoned at birth in a small community hospital. He had fought his way through tough neighborhoods to get the education he had, and with no money to go to college, the military became his employer and his family. He was certainly going to be a career man in Uncle Sam's Navy. Until the back injury.

What to do about that... Lawson had just limped a little. Maybe he could just get by without requiring further medical exams.

Not exactly what Bock would have wanted to do, but it would serve his purposes nonetheless.

He pulled back onto I-15 and continued north into Las Vegas, city of sin and secrets. He parked the car in the long-term lot at McCarran International, made his way to the terminal with Lawson's two bags and one of his own, then took a shuttle to the MGM Grand and registered for two nights with Lawson's cash and ID.

Perfect.