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C HAPTER TWELVE

Kirk lifted his father's journals from the satchel and placed them on the floor beside his chair. He lifted one, sat it on his lap, ran his hand over the cover and remembered. The time immediately after he first discovered the journals was reflective for Kirk. His father's car accident was labeled as "suspicious" based on accident scene forensics. One theory was that his father lost control at the hair-pin turn where Compton Road intersects Bull Run Drive in Centreville, and plunged off the edge, eventually impacting the tree killing himself, Kirk's wife, and son. Another theory was based on the scrapes found on the rear of the bumper and the car's skid marks that could indicate either an inadvertent or intended impact by a second vehicle. When interviewed by police, Kirk could think of no one who would want to harm his father. When asked whether there was anyone who would want to harm his wife, he broke down in tears and responded *She was a surgeon, she only helped people*. They didn't ask about Kirk's two-year-old son Connor who, if the incident was deliberate, would have been unintended collateral damage. Their conclusions did little to console a grieving son, husband, and father, and the closure of their investigation left more questions than answers.

January 1993 was cold. The snow was scraped aside and three caskets were lowered into the ground side by side. Although short in years, Kirk's marriage to Gabriella had been long on love. When the work and worries of a long day were over, once the quiet settled in and their son was fast asleep down the short hallway from their bedroom, he could feel her breathing beside him. Her occasional sigh always comforted him. The day after their funeral, the sun still rose, and Kirk's need for coffee drove his body from his blanketed refuge on the couch to the kitchen. He didn't think he could ever sleep in their bed again. He felt as if he was in a dreamlike state...nothing seemed the same...not by function, sound, or color; as if he had just been dropped into an unfamiliar world. The necessities and imperatives of life now were trivial and, if not automatic, his breathing and heartbeat would surely have stopped. The steaming hot cup of coffee sat in front of him on the center island where it sat so many mornings before. He made the coffee, yet as he stared at his creation could not remember doing so. He heard no "Good Morning", no sounds of someone showering, no doors opening or closing. The event lacked all the sounds and activities previously associated with that hot cup. He stared forward, then mumbled *Remember to close the door* to an invisible son excitedly exiting the house to live a child's life. He stared at the stove where Gabriella was so happy creating meals for her family, friends, or other visitors, and he stared at her pots

hanging motionless and useless from the suspended copper grid. And the clock...the living room clock...*tick tock tick tock tick tock*, he never heard it from his kitchen center island chair before. Now it was the *only* thing he heard. And it grew louder and louder and louder until he pressed his hands against his ears. As he stood, the word “NO” exploded from his pursed lips. He looked upwards, as if to plead a case already lost, and collapsed to the hardwood floor.