

Dulcet tones from bow and string created grace as music soared to the vaulted ceiling and images of horror panned across the wall. Blood and rose petals littered the champagne-colored carpet. Candles reduced to hardened puddles on occasional tables, their frozen drips streaked toward the floor. Every detail designed to draw the viewer's gaze to the dead woman spread eagle in the center of the room, her hands and feet staked with metal tent posts. Her eyelids removed and her torso carved, she'd been butchered and displayed in the most gruesome definition of the word. One image transitioned into another, a macabre carousel.

Close-ups of the damage to the body gave way to distance shots of the room, taken from separate angles. As detailed and distressing as it was, it couldn't recreate the smell of death. Feces, urine, blood, and the sickly, sweet scent of roses mixed with the sandalwood from the scented candles and permeated the room. The faint odor of the initial officer's vomit wafted in from beyond the open door. He could show them, but they'd never know. The last photo, the room after the body was removed, filled the screen as the music faded to silence.

"Lights on." Special Supervisory Agent Noah Danes catalogued the expressions of the thirty bureau cadets in the lecture hall. He punched back to the first photo. The full image of the room with the corpse showcased dead center. "This is how Reston police found the body of Caitlyn Jones. They were responding to a noise complaint. The music we just heard, Adagio in G Minor, composed by Tomaso Albinoni, played on the stereo system at full volume. We asked them to secure the residence, and advised them to touch nothing, not even the stereo, until we arrived to document the scene. You're seeing it as I did. What do you see?"

"The second victim of the Beltway Romeo," a voice sounded from the back.

Noah nodded. "That's the name the press has given him, not law enforcement. The body of the first victim, Stephanie Jackson, was found in her Frederick, Maryland home. Because they have, annually, more than four times the violent crime of Reston, they were prepared to handle the scene there. Reston PD knew they were out of their depth and were familiar enough with the details of the Jackson murder to request immediate help to process the scene. Since then, the Behavioral Analysis Unit here at Quantico has acted as a judicial clearinghouse in this investigation. Who can explain what I mean, and extra points if you can tell me how we navigated the multi-jurisdictional morass?" Hands shot up. "Sciarrillo."

"One way to elude law enforcement is to change jurisdictions." Sciarrillo was a former military officer. What was euphemistically referred to as a door kicker but he was smart and had

excellent instincts. The BAU would bore him, but he'd prove a formidable field agent. "Even in our digital age, communications between local law enforcement in different counties, and differing states, leave a lot to be desired. The Behavioral Analysis Unit both collects and disseminates information to various law enforcement agencies. It's kind of brilliant. As soon as Romeo crossed state lines, the FBI claimed jurisdiction over all his crimes."

"Good. Hicks?"

The young woman lowered her hand. She, like so many younger recruits, held a law degree. Extraordinarily intelligent, overachiever, destined for a career in government, politics, or maybe a judicial seat. She'd rise through the ranks in white collar crime. "Doesn't Romeo present as too intelligent to make the mistake of earning the FBI's attention?"

"Yes. However, let's remember. By spreading his kills out, he makes them harder to link. It was a calculated risk." Though true, he didn't believe it himself. There was something more to this pattern. Speaking of. "There are eight victims to date. Each woman was single, successful, and upwardly mobile. They held powerful jobs in the capital and lived in communities accessible by the Beltway or the northeast corridor. As fresh evidence is discovered, we refine our conclusions and ViCAP is updated. For those of you who may not know, although by now you should, ViCAP stands for the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program. It enables local law enforcement agencies to collect, enter, and analyze their own violent crime information. It facilitates the identification of similar cases on a regional, state, and national basis. As in all things, it's only as good as the information added to it." He nodded and clicked on another photo. "What else do you see?"

"He tortures them. Removes their eyelids and forces them to watch what he's doing to them until they die."