

# Night Crawlers

by Ron L. Carter, 1947-

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## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1 ...</b>	<b>Introduction.</b>
<b>Chapter 2 ...</b>	<b>Leaving Tennessee.</b>
<b>Chapter 3 ...</b>	<b>The Boys are born.</b>
<b>Chapter 4 ...</b>	<b>Red Mountain.</b>
<b>Chapter 5 ...</b>	<b>Sherman's Last Trip.</b>
<b>Chapter 6 ...</b>	<b>Jed Takes Control.</b>
<b>Chapter 7 ...</b>	<b>Joshua Trains Mister.</b>
<b>Chapter 8 ...</b>	<b>Randsburg Nights.</b>
<b>Chapter 9 ...</b>	<b>Chelsea.</b>
<b>Chapter 10 ...</b>	<b>Justin and Joshua come to the Rescue.</b>

- Chapter 11 ... Justin's Obsession.**
- Chapter 12 ... Mister Becomes the Master.**
- Chapter 13 ... Justin's Mistake.**
- Chapter 14 ... The Tweakers.**
- Chapter 15 ... Joshua's Guide Dog.**
- Chapter 16 ... Ridgecrest Close Call.**
- Chapter 17 ... Whiskey Flat Days.**
- Chapter 18 ... Joshua Crosses the Line.**
- Chapter 19 ... The Follower.**
- Chapter 20 ... Justin Can't Stay Home.**
- Chapter 21 ... Joshua's Revenge.**
- Chapter 22 ... Leaving Red Mountain.**



### **Special Thanks**



All was quiet in the sleepy little ghost town of Red Mountain. Residents never had to worry about their safety or their belongings until something changed their idyllic setting. Women no longer would leave the house after dark and men sleep with weapons next to their bed. Neighbors begin to question one another as they live in fear of the Night Crawlers.

The people and places appearing in this book as well as the story are fictitious. Any resemblance to real people, living or dead is entirely coincidental.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction.**

Going north on Highway 395 from southern California you'll travel through the area known as the Mojave Desert. As you pass through the desert you stare out into the desolate and empty space and feel like you're in the middle of nowhere. You'll pass miles, of what looks like vast areas of nothing but monotonous dry and empty land, dotted with desert plants. You can tell just by looking, it's a harsh and unforgiving place to live.

Approximately twenty six miles north of Kramer junction and twenty three miles south of Ridgecrest you'll pass a small active ghost town known as Red Mountain. You wouldn't know there was a town there except for the green sign with white lettering that's perched about five feet off the ground by two four by fours. That part of the highway is an isolated stretch of the road where darkness falls fast and if you're traveling alone at night you say a silent prayer in hopes that your car doesn't breakdown or stall.

Don't be fooled by the beauty of the old original western ghost town, Red Mountain is hiding a deep dark secret known to the locals as the Night Crawlers. They're a by-product of drug abuse, poverty and the result of generations of inbreeding. None of the locals know where the Night Crawlers came from, all they know is they were living a peaceful and serene life before they arrived. Nothing in the Red Mountain area is safe from the Night Crawlers, as they conspire to go out in the deepest and darkest hours of the night in search of their next innocent and unsuspecting victim.

Some of the old timers from the area, say that before the Night Crawlers came to Red Mountain you could hear the Coyotes howling in the distance from on top of one of the ridges or you could hear an occasional Eagle scream as it hunted for its cottontail or jack rabbit prey. Since the Night Crawlers arrived, they have frightened almost everything away and you seldom hear anything, except the cold mountain wind, as it rushes through the sage brush of the dark and desolate hills. The air is heavy and sometimes, even during the quiet and lonely days, the town seems extra eerie and gloomy. Once the sun goes down, the locals shiver in fear from just the mere thought of knowing that, somewhere out there, the Night Crawlers lurk in the dark and lonely shadows.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Leaving Tennessee.**

Sherman Bailey was born and raised in a small town of Hickory in the Appalachian Mountains of Tennessee. The people were very suspicious and distrustful of any outsiders and didn't allow many of them into their little circle of friends and family. Because of their guarded attitude toward strangers, it wasn't uncommon for the locals to marry second and third cousins. Since it had become an acceptable practice, Sherman always had his eye on Lynn, his Uncle's daughter and his first cousin. That was a little closer in relationship than what was customary, even for that neck of the woods. For that reason Sherman's mother and father didn't like or encourage his interest in Lynn. Sherman was the oldest of four brothers and he didn't have any sisters. Lynn came from a larger family of two older brothers and four sisters. She was the second to the oldest girl.

Sherman believed he could've lived a nice peaceful life there in the hills of Tennessee if it hadn't been for his father driving him away. Because he was the oldest, he always got the worst of his father's anger and frustrations when

anything went wrong. Sherman's father wasn't a big man, but he ruled his family with fear and intimidation by using belts, switches and straps when he was angry. Sherman couldn't understand why his father was always so angry. As the boys got older it was his father's fists that ruled the house and Sherman believed his father just got a lot of pleasure and enjoyment out of hurting someone. It would always embarrass Sherman when his father took a strap or switch to him in front of his friends from school. To avoid his shame, he just never invited his friends over to his house.

For generations, Sherman's family had made their living on making and selling illegal moonshine. Some of his family members used to bootleg the whiskey to different states during the years of prohibition. Sherman was around the moonshine all the time working with it and sampling it at a very early age. He gradually got addicted to alcohol when he was ten years old. By the time he was in his mid-teens, he would sneak into the moonshine and help himself to as much as he wanted. It helped him deal with the pain and embarrassment of the daily abuse from his father. He always consumed far more than he should. This would infuriate his father. Once again, he would take out his anger on Sherman with the switch or the strap. It always left huge welts all over Sherman's body and often the places where he was hit would draw blood that would take several days to heal.

By the time Sherman was sixteen years old and a junior in high school he was still only about five feet eight inches tall and stick skinny. He only weighed about one hundred and thirty pounds soaking wet. It's the year he started sneaking moonshine from his father's brew and share with his friends at school. As Sherman's luck would have it, his father found out about him getting drunk with his friends from school. When Sherman got home, his father grabbed him by the collar of the shirt and drug his drunk body into the kitchen. He pounded on Sherman with his bare knuckled fists, as his limp body absorbed the punishment. His mother and brothers just stood there and watched. As Sherman was being thrashed, he thought, "They remind me of helpless little lambs, just watching, as I get slaughtered by the big bad wolf. Once I'm out of here, they'll be next." He felt like they thought he somehow deserved what he was getting. Sherman would later tell his brothers that he was angry with them for not stepping in or trying to stop his father.

When his friends asked him about it, he masked his hurt and anger with a chuckle as he said, "I'm not sure if my old man tried to kill me for sneaking out the moonshine without permission, or for being drunk. I guess it doesn't really matter, the outcome would've still been the same. Any excuse to beat the hell out of me."

This time it took Sherman several weeks to recover from the bruised ribs, black eyes and busted lips he received. He missed several days of school because he was too embarrassed to go. He never recovered emotionally, from that beating. He swore that he hated his father and someday he would kill him if he didn't get out of there soon.

After he recovered, he went to Lynn and told her, "I can't understand why my father hates me so much. Lynn shrugged her shoulders and said, "I don't understand it either, Sherman. It doesn't make any sense to me." Sherman said, "I feel like I might have deserved something if my mother or father had ever caught

me and you making out.” Lynn laughed and said, “I’m glad they didn’t, I probably would’ve gotten in trouble too.” After that beating, Sherman made a promise to himself and to Lynn that he would never let his father touch him with a strap or his fists, ever again. He told himself, “I WILL defend myself the next time my father tries to raise an angry hand to me. I might even kill him if he tries it again.” He told his mother and brothers he wasn’t going to just stand there and take it next time. He told them he was going to protect himself, regardless of whether they tried to help. He also told them that when it happened again, and it will happen again, he was leaving Tennessee and never coming back.

Lynn had seen the abuse Sherman received ever since she was young. They had grown up together and their families were closely connected. After the last encounter, Sherman told Lynn he was tired of it and wasn’t going to let it happen again. That’s when they made a pact, they were going to run away the next time it happened. Lynn was fifteen years old, but to him she looked and acted like a woman. She was five feet four inches tall and thin. She had dark blond hair that hung down to her shoulders and Sherman loved her hazel eyes that were hidden by her bangs and long eyelashes. She and Sherman had been in love since they were kids and she was willing to go wherever and whenever he wanted her to go. They weren’t sure where they were going to go when left, but they knew they had to get away from Sherman’s father and what they called the “Hell Hole.” Sherman knew the beatings would never end, it was more when, not “If.” He had become his father’s whipping post and as long as Sherman was around the abuse would continue.

Sherman soon came up with a plan. He was going to save all the money he could get his hands on, even if he had to steal to get it. He soon started sneaking some of the moonshine to sell to his friends at school. He kept all the money hidden away until it was time for him and Lynn to leave. He started to sneak out at night after everyone else slept, taking the stolen moonshine to sell in the neighboring town. He would also break into houses and steal things he knew he could sell, without getting caught. As time went by, he just kept building his nest egg. He kept all his money hidden in a shoe box in a secret cubby hole of his bedroom. No one knew where it was hidden, not even his brothers. He never told any of them that he had been saving it to one day leave and never come back. He believed his brothers would tell his mother or father where it was hidden if they knew and his father would try to force him to give it up.

Sherman had been saving his money for almost a year and had just turned eighteen years old when his father decided to try beating him up again. His father found out from one of Sherman’s brothers that he’d been taking the Moonshine and selling it to his friends at school and keeping the money for himself. His brother told his father, Sherman wasn’t giving any of it back to the family like he was supposed to.

It was late in the afternoon when Sherman got home from school and his father called him into the kitchen and sat him down. Sherman instantly knew he was in trouble from the look on his father’s face. His lips were tight and his eyebrows were frowning angrily as he pulled his chair right up next to Sherman and leaned into his face. He then asked Sherman what he’d been doing. His father could hardly contain his anger as he said in a shaky voice, “I heard you been stealing

some of our moonshine and selling it to your friends at school.” Sherman immediately became defensive and said, “Who did you hear that from?” Sherman figured that one of his brothers had probably told his father that he was stealing the moonshine and selling it at school but he didn’t know which one. Since he didn’t know which brother it was, Sherman was angry with all of them. His father scoffed back as he said, “It doesn’t matter who told me, that’s just what I heard. Are you going to sit there and deny it?” Sherman knew there was no point in trying to lie about it because he knew someone had squealed on him. He slowly and reluctantly admitted as he said, “Yea, I’ve been taking some of the moonshine. I’ve been selling it to some of my friends at school. And yea, I’ve been keeping the money for myself.” He didn’t tell his father that he had several thousand dollars stashed away from both the moonshine sells and selling things he stole from the neighboring town.

When he admitted to stealing the moonshine Sherman’s father looked at him and said, “You’re nothing but a thief, if you’ve got any of the money left that you made off our moonshine then you go get it and give it to me, right now! That’s money you stole from this family and it doesn’t belong to you.” Sherman sat back in his chair with his arms crossed and stared back at his father as he said, “That’s my money and I aint given it to nobody.” His father immediately jumped up and pushed himself away from the table as he said, “If you don’t turn over that money I’m going to beat you to a pulp.” Sherman was ready for his father this time as he quickly stood up, clenched his fists and took a fighting stance. Sherman looked his father in the eyes and replied, “Then you’re going to have to try and take it from me, cause I aint giving it to you.” That’s when his father came at him with both fists raised and swinging wildly. Sherman’s body had filled out a little and he was bigger and stronger now than he was the last time his father beat him up so badly. He and his father were about the same size now and this time he wasn’t drunk. They had broken several items as they knocked each other against the table, walls and appliances. Sherman had a bloody lip and a red eye and his father was bleeding from his mouth and nose as they continued pounding on each other. Blood was spattered all over the kitchen walls as they knocked each other around. Finally, Sherman’s mother and three brothers realized they had to do something before someone got killed. Two of Sherman’s brothers grabbed his father and one of this brothers and his mother grabbed him as they broke up the fight. When they pulled the two of them apart Sherman said, “I’m done with you beating on me, old man. I was done with it last year and I’m sure as hell done with it now. I knew you’d try it again, it was just a matter of time. That’s why I saved the money. I’m getting the hell away from you! I’m leaving this “Hell Hole” and never coming back. You’ll never touch me again and none of you’ll never see me around here anymore. I can promise you that!”

Sherman’s mother started crying when he said he was leaving, but his father was still pumped up angry and just scoffed back as Sherman stormed toward his bedroom. “Good riddance! No one wants your sorry ass around here anymore anyway. You’re nothing but a worthless thief. You’re no good and will never amount to anything. Get the hell out of here and don’t come back.” Sherman had to get the last word in because his father’s words cut through him like a dagger to his heart. He angrily yelled from his bedroom, “Don’t worry, old man, I’m getting

my stuff and getting out of here as fast as I can. You won't have to worry about me anymore. You can find someone else to pick on!"

While Sherman was in his bedroom, he quickly threw some of his clothes in an old beat up suit case and grabbed his money. The entire time he was getting things together, he could hear his mother in the other room begging and pleading with his father to try and stop him. He heard his father tell her, "To hell with him. I'm not going to try and stop him from leaving. I never want to see his thieving ass around me again." Sherman said to himself, "I'm glad he feels that way. He'll never have to worry about seeing me here again, I hate his miserable guts. I never want to see him again."

Sherman was still hurt and angry as he left the house and took off on foot with suitcase in hand. He headed immediately to Lynn's house to let her know what happened. But because he didn't want her parents knowing what their plans were and wanted some time to collect his thoughts, he cleaned his wounds and waited for it to get dark before he tapped on her bedroom window. When she opened the window, he told her, "It happened again. If you want to go with me, pack some of your things because I'm leaving right now!" She hesitated for just a moment and looked at Sherman's busted lip and face and said, "Wow, I can't believe he did it again." Sherman was a little embarrassed about the fight with his father as he said, "Yes, it happened again. I'll tell you all about it once we're out of this sorry place." She rapidly threw several things in a suitcase and tossed it out the window, as she climbed out after it. Once on the ground, she leaned back into the bedroom window and said to one of her sisters, "Tell mom and dad that I love them, but I love Sherman too, and I'm leaving with him. Tell them not to worry about me, I'll be okay." Her sister was crying as she said, "Lynn, are you sure you really want to do this?" Lynn cocked her head to one side and said, "We've already talked about this before and you know Sherman and I don't really have a choice. His father isn't going to stop beating him. Please do as I asked, but wait for a while before you tell them I'm gone."

They were now on their own, as they clutched each other's hand, and headed down the dirty, winding mountain road, toward the main town. They had walked about five miles when Sherman's best friend, Marshall, came driving up in his old beat up Ford pick-up truck. The engine was running rough as he looked over at Sherman, grinned and said, "Hey buddy, need a ride. Your brothers told me you got into a fight with your old man again. When I heard about it, I figured you were headed out of town and I wanted to come and give you a lift. You told me you were leaving if he ever tried it again and I don't blame you, I'd do the same thing! Where can I take you guys?" Sherman thanked him as he and Lynn jumped in the cab and threw their suitcases in the back of the truck. "If you don't mind, can you just drop us off in the middle of town and we'll take it from there." Marshall laughed and said, "It's no problem Sherman, I'll take wherever you want to go. Hell, I'll even take you to California, if you want me to." Sherman and Lynn both laughed when he said that because they knew he probably would do it if Sherman would've asked him too. Sherman thanked him for sympathizing with him and said, "I really appreciate your attitude Marshall. I also appreciate that you're not trying to talk us into staying here." Marshall laughed and said, "I'd leave this place too, if I could."

Once they were in the middle of town, Sherman told Marshall, "You can drop us off anywhere along here will be fine." Marshall quickly pulled the truck over and Sherman and Lynn jumped out, grabbing their suitcase from the back. Before she got out, Lynn leaned over and kissed Marshall on the cheek and thanked him for the ride and for being a good friend. Sherman went around to the driver's side and shook Marshall's hand and also thanked him for being such a good friend while they were growing up. Marshall put the truck in park and jumped out and gave Sherman a big bear hug. He then jumped back in and said, "Good luck old buddy, wherever you end up." Sherman had a few tears in his eyes as he told Marshall, "You'll always be my best friend and I love you brother. Don't tell anyone that you picked us up and brought us into town or they'll come looking for Lynn." Marshall chuckled and replied, "Don't worry, I won't tell anyone I even saw you." They said their goodbyes and Marshall headed back up the little dirt road. As he was driving away, Sherman could see him wipe away a few tears with the sleeve of his shirt. They had been friends with each other since they were young and it hurt them to say good-bye to each other.

Sherman rented a cheap room for the night at one of the local hotels and just waited for daylight to come. He was so wound up about the fight with his father, plus the anticipation of not knowing exactly where they were going, that he and Lynn lay by each other's side and talked most of the night. Sherman had saved almost five thousand dollars so the next day they walked to a nearby car dealership and Sherman purchased an inexpensive pick-up truck and soon they were headed west.

Once they left Hickory, Sherman kept the promise that he had made to his family and never contacted them again. Lynn often thought about her family but that was all.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Boys are born.**

Sherman worked odd jobs in different towns, as they made their way west. At times they would run low on money and not being able to get enough work, Sherman and Lynn would resort to stealing. They would work as a team, shoplifting in local stores and Sherman would go out at night out of desperation and break into houses. They became very adept at stealing what they needed without getting caught.

When in a store, Lynn would fake a fall or a fainting spell, and while the store clerks went to her aid Sherman would tuck items under his clothing or in his pockets. It was usually things they could either use or sell on the streets very easy. Once Sherman had the items tucked away, was safely out the door, and in his truck, Lynn would suddenly make a miraculous recovery. She would thank the store clerks for their help and then meet up with Sherman in the parking lot. They had to stay on the move all the time because word spread quickly in the small



towns. If they pulled that same type of stunt more than once or twice in any one of the towns they knew they would soon get caught and probably thrown in jail.

Sherman still had an addiction to alcohol so soon he and Lynn were stealing liquor and getting drunk together at nights as often as they could. When the alcohol got to the point where it wasn't enough for either of them, they were introduced to the manufactured and illegal drug, crystal meth. They soon started selling the items they stole to purchase the crystal meth they needed instead of liquor. Within a short period of time they were hooked and their entire world became one of trying to get enough money to supply their habit.

It was only about a year after they had left Tennessee and during their early addiction when Sherman and Lynn had their first son, Jed. They didn't plan it that way and weren't really wanting a child at the time, but once they knew they were going to have one they were excited about it. Lynn tried to stay off the drugs as much as she could during her first pregnancy but her addiction was too strong as she continued to do drugs occasionally. When Jed was born he was a normal child in every way except he was diagnosed as being hyperactive.

Only a few years after Jed was born, they had another son they named Justin. It wasn't long after that, they had their third son they named Joshua. Lynn was too far hooked on drugs to try and stop or slow down her habit during her pregnancy with either of them. When each child was born, they both had some type of problem related to Lynn's drug dependency. Sherman and Lynn saw right away they had some physical abnormalities because neither looked like a normal child. Both Justin and Joshua were also smaller in stature than the average child of their age and their faces and skulls were disfigured. Joshua was born with a condition called microcephaly and the doctor told Sherman and Lynn it was the result of Lynn doing too much drugs during her pregnancy. The doctor said the drug toxins in her body were exposed to the fetus which damaged his developing brain tissue. It had caused disfigurement of his face and skull because his head and brain was significantly smaller than normal. It had also caused significant mental retardation. The doctor also told them the damage to Joshua was irreversible.

Although they knew each of their sons were "different" looking, Sherman and Lynn didn't fully realize they had a learning disability until they were around two or three years old. Joshua's condition was even more severe than Justin's and it was more noticeable. Knowing her drug addiction had caused this condition with her boys only made Lynn's drug abuse escalate. She used even more drugs to try and drown the pain and guilt.

When Justin and Joshua were old enough to go to kindergarten, Lynn wanted them to go to school, but it became another burden for her. During that period of her life she was always either coming down from a high, or in the process of getting high, one or the other. Even though Lynn and Sherman knew Justin and Joshua had mental and physical problems, they still attempted to put them in school with the other kids. They waited until Joshua was five years old and then tried to put him and Justin in the same class for the boy's own security, even though Justin was a year older. On the first few days of school, the other kids just sat and stared at them or made fun of them because they were so different

looking. They also laughed at them because they weren't as smart as the rest of the class. The ridicule was endless.

After Justin and Joshua had been in school for a few days, the Kindergarten teacher went to see Sherman and Lynn at home. While she was there, she tried as gently as she could, to tell Sherman and Lynn the boys both needed to be put into a special education program and not be in a regular class with the other kids. Even though the teacher was nice about it, Lynn got angry when she tried to tell her the boys needed special education. Though she knew in her heart the things the teacher was saying were true, she just didn't want to hear it. She knew Justin and Joshua were both slow learners, but knew they weren't stupid. She pleaded with the teacher, "Justin always follows instructions and does everything that is asked of him and Joshua has a very good memory and especially good with numbers and dates. I noticed when he was about four years old that he had memorized a lot of the addresses where we used to live. He also remembers his birthdate, Jed and Justin's birthdate and how old each of them are. I believe the boys will fit with the other kids if you just give them a chance." The teacher was frustrated with Lynn for not listening, but willing to give it a chance. She agreed to let them stay in her class on a temporary basis. She knew it wasn't going to last but she had to give Lynn time to come to terms with it herself. She knew she couldn't force Lynn to see what was right in front of her face.

After his fifth day of school, Joshua came home crying, saying the kids at school were making fun of him. He told Lynn, "Mom, they called me names. They called me freak, stupid, retard, MR, and other names. I don't know what those things mean, but it makes me sad and hurts my feelings. All the kids were laughing at me, too. I don't know why." It killed Lynn inside to hear those words. She pulled Joshua to her body and wrapped her arms around him. She thought for a moment and then said, "Oh Joshua, those things don't mean anything, those kids are the ones who are stupid. MR just means Mister. It means you are Mister Bailey and you're a very special and important person. You're very special to your dad and me and we love you very much." He looked up at her and smiled. He liked that explanation, but told her that he still didn't want to go back to school anymore. He said, "I don't like the other kids calling me names. It makes me want to hurt them."

Lynn knew deep in her heart that Joshua would never be able to fit in with the rest of the kids in school no matter what he did or how old he became. She knew that even if he was as smart as them it wouldn't matter, because he looked so much different. His face was disproportionate and much longer than average and his head was too small, even for his short statured body. It was at that point, she made up her mind that he would probably have to live with her and Sherman the rest of his life. Justin had problems with the kids at school too, but he never said a word about it. He just kept everything to himself and hidden deep inside.

After that horrible first week of trying to get the kids in school, Sherman and Lynn were fed up with the school kids and the entire school system. They decided that Lynn would "home school" the younger two boys and it was up to Jed to decide if he would continue in the public school. Jed was in the third grade at the time. He didn't like the way the other kids treated Joshua and Justin but he liked

learning and playing with the other kids. He always got along well with the other kids and made friends easy so he decided to stay in school.

One of the biggest problems Jed had with school was that the family moved so often he was either way ahead in what they were teaching the kids or he was way behind. Thankfully he was smart enough to always catch up fairly quickly when he was behind and he was able to sit back and breeze through the school work where he was ahead.

Jed stayed in school until just after his second year of high school. At the end of the summer, he just didn't go back. It was easy to drop out because he didn't have anyone pushing him to go plus he got used to sleeping in every day. He liked staying home and just hanging out with Justin and Joshua, which was a lot more fun than school.

During the early years with the boys, Sherman and Lynn went from town to town stealing and getting high as often as they could. They were raising the boys the best way they knew how and were just getting by. They never stayed in one place very long. One to two months, was the longest. Sherman would work at odd labor jobs until the job ended or until he got fired for not showing up to work on time. Although he was a good worker and tried to work steady, his addiction to drugs always got in his way.

Sherman had to constantly steal things in order to take care of the boys and to pay for his and Lynn's expensive drug habit. It was during these early years that Sherman was caught stealing in Texas. While he was serving time in jail, (luckily it was only a few months), Lynn was forced to live on the welfare assistance program. Although she received the assistance, she continued to go into the local stores to steal things and sell them to support her meth habit.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Red Mountain.**

Red Mountain is nestled up against the rolling foothills and home to the Mojave yucca plant, prickly pear, creosote bush and sage bushes. When you first come upon the town along highway 395, you see just a few homes and buildings along the sides of the highway indicating there might be some semblance of a town somewhere out there. It's tucked away from the hustle and bustle of what most people call the "normal" city life. There's only one paved street in the town and the rest of the streets are really narrow dirt roads dotted sporadically with old houses and trailers homes along the sides of the road. There aren't any of the familiar chain stores, fast food restaurant or neon lights that you would normally see from miles away, nor does the town look like any modern city that you may envision in your mind. It doesn't even have any grocery stores or gas stations. Not much has changed in the small town during the last hundred years.

Red Mountain once boomed with saloons and high class brothels during its heyday and at one point in 1899, the population reached 3,500 residents. During

the gold discovery days, over \$6,000,000.00 of gold was taken out of the Yellow Aster mine. When the gold mining was halted by the U.S. government in 1942, Red Mountain, and the two other nearby towns of Randsburg and Johannesburg (known by the locals as Jo-burg) became virtual ghost towns. All three mining towns are located close to each other in a triangle pattern and the area is known as "The Rand." There are remnants of an old churches that are still standing, along with several old closed saloons and brothels from years gone by. The lure of the area no longer lies in the gold mining capabilities, but the sheer beauty of the old active western ghost towns. Some locals claim that the ghosts of the dead miners still haunt their favorite places.

Further north a few miles, there's a road on the left called Redrock Randsburg road. The road twists and turns up into the foothills to the picturesque active ghost town known as Randsburg. The small town's a popular spot for photographers, honeymooners, antique car clubs and families. Over the years there have been a lot of commercials and movies that have been filmed in and around the town, including the most recent movie, "Cowboys and Aliens." They have food and rooms available at the historic Randsburg Cottage Hotel/bed and breakfast. The reconstructed hotel had its beginnings at the turn of the century and has survived three fires, plus its share of unruly customers. Not too far down the street, they still operate the two old bars known as the "White House Saloon" and "The Joint."

There are approximately 170 residents that are still living in Red Mountain, 150 in Johannesburg, and 70 living in Randsburg. Housing a lot of the current local residences of the three towns are some of the old original mining cabins, trailers and mobile homes that have been dragged into the area in the more recent years.

Through all their traveling from place to place, Sherman and Lynn never felt at home until they finally found this quaint little town of Red Mountain. Once they stumbled upon the town they instantly knew this was the place they wanted to call home. It was in the high desert and away from everything and everyone, just like their old home in Tennessee. It was just far enough away from people that it had a lot of appeal to them. By then the boys were 12, 13, and 15 years of age. It was perfect for them because it was so small, quiet and peaceful that they figured they wouldn't have to put up with people always asking questions, eyeballing and gawking at Justin and Joshua.

The Bureau of Land Management owned most of the mine claims around Red Mountain, which included some of the old abandoned houses. Sherman found out where BLM office was located and worked out a deal to purchase one of them located on the outskirts of town. The BLM was happy the old house wasn't going to just sit there and fall apart or be destroyed by vandals. Lynn and Sherman didn't have to pay anything down and only a few hundred dollars a month so it was something they could afford. The house they purchased was a beat-up rambling old three bedroom house on about a half-acre of land. The house was away from all the other houses in Red Mountain. They believed they could have the privacy they always wanted, which was more important to them than anything. All they really wanted and needed was a place to call home.

The people in Red Mountain appeared to be somewhat oppressed and reminded Sherman and Lynn of the people from their hometown. Many of them were plain

everyday poor folks just trying to get by the best way they could. Sherman and Lynn, especially liked the idea that everyone kept to themselves even though they still seemed to know a little bit about each other. They seemed to have an attitude of anti-government, which was also the same way Sherman and Lynn felt about politics.

One of the best things Sherman liked about Red Mountain was that there were no law enforcement agencies located in any of the three little towns. The sheriff's department in Trona was the closest and it was about thirty minutes away. They were the ones who were supposed to respond when people called for police help or protection. A few of the local people complained to Sherman that the sheriff's department never seemed to be in a big hurry to take the drive down to Red Mountain to provide emergency assistance. They would only come out when they felt something major was going on. They seemed to follow the belief that they didn't fool around with what they called nuisance calls and almost all the calls from Red Mountain and the sister cities were nuisance calls. The locals told Sherman sometimes after calling 911 it often took several hours before the sheriff's department showed up. Sherman didn't say anything to anyone when they told him that, he was actually very happy to hear this. He figured Red Mountain, Randsburg and Johannesburg would be perfect for him to steal from without much problem from the law.

After they moved into the house and had been there a few weeks, Lynn and Sherman came up with a plan to get financial assistance from the welfare department. Lynn went to the county welfare department and applied for benefits. She claimed that her husband had abandoned her and her three boys and she needed help. It wasn't long before she was receiving food stamps and enough money each month from the Welfare program that it paid for their mortgage and basic needs, but that was it.

Sherman and Lynn still needed extra money to help pay for their never ending drug habit. They knew the extra money needed would require Sherman to resort to stealing. This wasn't something Sherman ever felt comfortable doing, but he was good at it. He knew they couldn't live there if they couldn't get the money for the drugs they needed. By convincing himself it was just a necessary means of survival, he justified the entire process of breaking into houses and selling the goods he had stolen.

After they moved into their home Sherman started scrounging up old sheets of tin around the three little towns until he had enough to enclose the entire exterior of their property. He cut the tin sheets six foot high, attached them to a skeleton fence he had built and overlapped the tin where no one could see in. He even covered the entry gate with the tin sheets because he wanted to have total privacy. It looked more like a fortress than a house with a normal five foot fence around it.

Over the next few months Sherman and the boys also built a room underground near the back corner of the house. They dug a hole in the ground nine foot deep, ten foot wide and fourteen feet long. Once the hole was dug Sherman and the boys enclosed the room with scrap lumber they had also scrounged up, in and around the towns. They covered the floor with wood and used four by fours for the roof and covered it with tin. Once the tin was in place, they put a foot of dirt over the top of the room and firmly packed it down. Inside the room they built a work

bench with storage shelves on one side of the wall and Sherman ran a water line and electricity from the house into the room. He ran a stove pipe from above ground into the room for an air vent. In order to camouflage the pipe from outside, they covered it with a large upside-down terracotta colored clay flower pot. They had a three foot by three foot lift up door at one end that had a leather handle attached to it so you could open the door. Below the door they built a ladder leading to the bottom of the room. When the lift up door was closed, they covered it and the leather handle with dirt and you couldn't tell the room was there.

While they were building the room Sherman told the boys, "This is where we'll hide all the stuff we get before we go to Los Angeles and sell them. This our secret hiding place and if we're ever raided by the law, they won't be able to find it." Joshua had helped a lot as he handed them nails and got things for them when he wasn't busy spreading the extra dirt from the hole all over the property. Sherman thanked the boys for all their help and went up to each of them, patted them on the back and put his arms around them as he said, "Good job boys. You did a really good and I'm proud of you." When Sherman told the boys they did a good job, they all just looked at each other and beamed with pride. Sherman could see how happy they felt for their part as they puffed out their chest.

Ever since they first arrived in Red Mountain, Sherman had been promising the boys they could get a dog after they enclosed the property and finished the "secret hiding place." When everything was completed, he lived up to his promise. He told the boys they could have two guard dogs instead of just one. A few days later they made a visit to the SPCA in Ridgecrest and picked up two young puppies. They were supposed to be half Rottweiler and half Pit Bull Terrier. They got one male the boys named Brutus and a female they named Sophie. They were really excited to have their own dog for the first time in their lives. Because of all the moving around they had done, they had never had any animals before, at least not any they could keep for very long periods of time.

After they got the puppies home, they put them in the back yard and watched them for a few hours as they ran from place to place sniffing and looking at everything in the yard they could find. They were allowed to run freely within the boundaries of the property. In a few short months they became fierce protectors of the property. As they got older they wouldn't let anyone get near the property without acting like they were going to attack them and eat them up. That was exactly what Sherman wanted. He didn't want anyone nosing around their property.

Once Sherman felt comfortable with Red Mountain and his surroundings, he started scoping out the Red Mountain, Rand area, to see what he could steal from his unsuspecting neighbors. He started taking drives through Red Mountain, Randsburg and Johannesburg during the day, just to see how the houses in the towns were laid out. He didn't want any surprises when he started his personal mission of breaking in and stealing.

The boys were getting at the age where Sherman felt he could soon start training them in the art of stealing. He began to slowly teach them everything he knew about thieving. He wanted to have it become second nature, just like him, like it was for him. Eventually they would develop an acute awareness of their surroundings when they were scoping out or breaking into a house. He wanted

them to be able to hear the faintest of sounds and know whether everything was okay or if a certain sound meant danger. Sherman had gotten so good at stealing. It was almost like everything he did was automatic. He wanted to make sure that he taught Jed and Justin how to be just as skilled.

Initially, he would take Jed and Justin out only on the nights he was going to be casing out the target house. He taught them how to stay concealed behind the yucca plants or sage bushes. He always left Joshua home with Lynn. He believed Joshua could just get them caught because of his age and condition. Joshua was still a little awkward and clumsy and Sherman believed he couldn't trust him to stay hidden. Although Justin was mentally slow he followed orders very well and would do whatever Sherman asked.

To prepare for the nights the boys accompanied him, Sherman would have them dress in all black clothing with black "long-johns" underneath their clothes. The high desert always gets cold at night and the last thing he wanted was someone ruining his night because they couldn't handle the weather. Some nights the temperature would drop to the low 10 degree mark. He also had them wear a black ski mask they could pull down over their face and ears if they needed extra protection from the cold brisk mountain air. If you weren't protected, the wind would make your face and ears feel like they were frozen. Their shoes were also black to match their clothes and they always made sure they covered their faces with black charcoal. The boys loved this little ritual, bonding while getting prepared for their special nights with their dad.

Sherman told the boys, "Always make sure you don't go out at night when it is raining or snowing. It's too easy for someone to follow your tracks back to your house. I want you to always be alert and a little anxious about your break-ins. It will keep you on your toes and cut down on the mistakes you make. You should always be a little fearful of the unseen and the unknown or you'll end up getting caught. You have to be prepared to adjust to any changing event or condition."

Sherman's favorite time to go out on the break-ins was in the early morning hours, especially when there was no moon out and it was windy. The night would have to be completely dark to hide their silhouettes and the wind would help disguise or muffle any noise they made while breaking into the houses. The dark attire and the dark moonless nights allowed them to creep around like a wild animal on the hunt, hidden in the darkness.

They hid behind the yucca plants and other desert plants as they crept from one place to another. They always stayed very low to the ground as they slipped close to the houses they were breaking into. They spread their legs far apart and bent over at the waist so they were only about two and half to three feet off the ground. Jed loved the idea that they looked a little creepy. Sometimes he and Justin made a game out of it and pretended they were creepy monsters as they made their way around the houses.

Sherman always went out alone when it first got dark and watched a house for a few hours before he decided it was safe enough to take the boys back with him for the break in. It was during those times he found the true meaning of word "stillness" and "cold dark nights." When the wind was blowing it would nip into him sharply and for just a moment he would flash back to his home in Tennessee and think about his mom and brothers. For a fleeting moment he would feel all

alone in the world. The nagging wind was miserable but it would always snap him back to reality and he would shiver remembering him and his father fighting with each other. Usually it took just a few moments before he made up his mind that the house was safe to break into. He would then go back home, get Jed and Justin to take them back with him as his lookouts.

They went out on foot, being very careful not to be seen by neighbors or a passing car as they made their way to the target house. When they arrived Sherman had the boys stand guard just outside. They would wait until around two in the morning when the entire neighborhood was asleep. To make sure the boys never became complacent since no one is home Sherman told the boys, "Even though we choose to break into the houses when no one is home, it's still very dangerous and we have to be very careful."

They soon started getting used to being out in the dark and their eyes became keen and alert as they adjusted to the darkness. To them it felt like they were using night vision goggles to get around. Sherman would break a window and then wait a few minutes to see if he got any response from within the house or from nearby neighbors. If he didn't see or hear any movement or lights go on he would make his entry into the dark and creepy house. Once inside he would look around and steal everything he thought would have a value. He would get as much as he could carry out in his black pull-string bag. After he had what they came for, he always went out of the house the same way he went in. Every move he made was deliberate and calculated to make sure that no one saw or heard him. He was never one hundred percent sure that someone wasn't still in house just waiting to catch him as he went inside. This is why he used every precautions he could. He didn't want to get caught or killed by a homeowner that he assumed to be gone.

When Sherman was out of the house, he and the boys took their time as they slowly crept back to their house. Once they were back home, they took the stolen items and hid them in their "secret hiding place." Once they'd put away their loot they gathered in the kitchen to grab a snack and recount the job. Afterwards they'd all three hit the sack and sleep till the next afternoon.

None of boys ever left the property during the day. The only one that went anywhere was Sherman and that was when he made his trip to Los Angeles to sell what they had stolen. The only other person that ever went anywhere during the day was Lynn and that was to get the necessary things they needed from town. Jed used to joke to Justin and Joshua that they were a little like vampires because they stayed out at night, and slept during the day. Their only link to the outside world was the television and it had become their only means of entertainment.

At least once a month Sherman would load his pick-up with all the stolen items before sunrise on a Saturday morning and head to Los Angeles. Once there, he would sell everything to the guy he called his "fence." He would give Sherman money for everything Sherman brought and sometimes they would haggle over the price because Sherman didn't feel like he was getting a fair price for a certain item. They always came to an agreement because Sherman didn't want to lose his connection with his "fence" and have to find someone else to take his place. The fence told Sherman that he would take what Sherman sold him and then sell it at local swap meets around town on Sunday mornings.



Once Sherman had the money he made from the sale of the stolen goods, he would get in touch with his drug dealer contact. He would purchase enough drugs to last him and Lynn until his next trip to Los Angeles. As a precaution, Sherman had a little stash of money put away in case he didn't have enough property to sell to his fence.

The local people from the surrounding towns were starting to talk about the burglaries and they had a few different theories about who was stealing but they never were able to catch anyone in the act. When Lynn would see some of the Red Mountain people at the super market in Ridgecrest she would try to edge up close to them so she could overhear what they were talking about with each other or the clerk. She didn't know it at the time, but some of the town people had their suspicions that they may have a connection to her family because the stealing activity didn't start happening until her family arrived in Red Mountain. They never said anything to her about their suspicions because they didn't have any kind of proof. No one had ever seen Sherman or the boys doing anything wrong. In fact, most people in Red Mountain, never saw the boys at all.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Sherman's Last Trip.**

When Sherman and Lynn needed more drugs Sherman would load up the pick-up with stolen goods and make the trip to Los Angeles. He would always take either Jed or Justin with him for company. He would wake one of them in the early morning hours and tell him he was going with him. Most of the time he took Jed, because he was the oldest, but there were times he would take Justin. There were also times when he would take both of them with him and those were the trips they loved most. They loved the idea of getting out of the enclosed compound that at times they felt trapped. It also gave them the opportunity to see what other parts of California looked like besides Red Mountain.

One of the things Jed and Justin loved most about the trips was that Sherman would always stop at one of the fast food restaurants on the way there and back and let them order whatever they wanted from the menu. He would tell them it was their reward for being his lookout and helping him get the stolen goods.

The one thing they liked more than anything was that Sherman always let one of them drive the pick-up on the way back home from Los Angeles while he slept. It didn't matter to Sherman that they didn't have a driver's license. It also made Jed and Justin feel like they were getting away with something and that even made it more exciting for both of them. Driving the pick-up by themselves also made the two of them feel grown up and important.

The time had come when Jed and Justin were both starting to get interested in the girls. They especially liked seeing all the pretty girls while on their day trips with their dad. When they made the trips, they would stop at the restaurants and Jed would always flirt with the girls. He would tell them how pretty they were

when they were willing to stop and talk to him. Some of them seemed interested in Jed, but not Justin. Once the girls saw Jed was with Justin they usually became instantly disinterested in Jed as well. Jed was a good looking guy with his long brown hair that he combed straight back. It was always a little longer than normal and hung loosely over his ears and down the back of his neck. Lynn was the one that cut the boys hair and she didn't cut it until it was sometimes way past due. Jed had hazel eyes and a soft spoken voice but more importantly, he had a bubbly contagious personality. It was easy for him to meet people and make friends. It was also easy for him to flirt with the girls.

Justin was just the opposite, he didn't look normal or at least not normal in that since of the word. Unfortunately, because of his physical appearance the girls were a little spooked by him. His skin was almost a pasty white and his hair was light blond. His hair stuck up in different directions all over his head, like he had just gotten out of bed. His face was narrow and long and his upper and bottom teeth were crooked. Some of them crossed over in front of the others and it was especially noticeable when he smiled. He looked a little like what people describe, as an Albino person. He was shy around the girls and didn't talk much.

It didn't matter to Justin that Jed got all the attention, he had gotten used to that reaction from people since he was little. Even if the girls weren't interested in him, it didn't stop him from being interested in them.

On one occasion, when they first moved to Red Mountain, he started spying on a couple of girls while they were on their way to school. The girls had heard there were boys that moved into the old house and they went out of their way to go by it to see for themselves. Justin was up early one morning and spotted them on their way to school. He watched them through the cracks and holes of the tin fence on their way to the bus stop. The girls were walking on the other side of the road from the house. They were looking for the boys when they noticed Justin's eyeballs following their every move. He moved along the inside of the fence from one hole to the next, peeping at them. When the girls realized what was happening it crept them out so bad that they took off running and screaming. He loved the fact that he could spy on them but they couldn't see him. They never took that route to the bus stop again.

There were times when Sherman just wanted to be alone and wouldn't take either of the boys with him on his trip to Los Angeles. On those days he would grab Brutus and throw him in the truck. He was not only a watch dog but a good companion. Brutus weighed almost one hundred pounds and he was big and very intimidating. He had a deep vicious growl that scared people and kept them away. That worked out good when Sherman had to make a pit stop to go to the bathroom or get something to eat. Brutus seemed to enjoy the trip just as much as the boys. He would get really excited when he knew Sherman was taking him. Once in the cab of the truck he couldn't sit still for the first fifteen minutes. Sherman would roll the window down on the passenger side, if it wasn't real cold outside, and let Brutus stick his head out. He seem to love the feel of the air as it ran through his nostrils and face. He always loved the trips, but was happy and ready to sleep once he got back home.

After stealing thing for a few years, Sherman finally figured it was time to try and get Lynn to go with him on one of his Los Angeles trips. She hadn't seen

anything accept the Red Mountain and Ridgecrest area since they moved in. After a lot of coaxing and persuading, he was finally able to talk her into taking the trip to Los Angeles with him. He told her, "I'll skip one of my trips to Los Angeles and save those items to sell when you come with me. This way we'll make twice as much money, get a motel room, see the dealer and spend the night down there partying. It will be fun and enjoy ourselves." He figured Lynn could use some time away since she had been with the boys every day without a break. She was a good mother. All she ever did was take care of him and the boys. Sherman and the boys were her entire life so she wasn't crazy about leaving the boys by themselves for very long. The more she thought about it, the more she thought that a night partying with Sherman was too tempting for her to resist.

Just before they left, they gave Jed instructions on what to do while they were gone. They told him they would be back late the following evening. Lynn was apprehensive, but excited, as they left. They talked all the way there about everything they could think of. They talked about things they hadn't talked about in years. They talked about their families in Tennessee. Lynn said, "I wonder what my family might be doing since we left. I wonder if they are all still safe and alive." Sherman told Lynn, "Maybe you should call your family sometime and see how they're doing." Lynn shrugged her shoulders and replied, "Yea, maybe one of these days." She knew deep in her heart she was never going to call them. Sherman showed Lynn all the places the boys liked to stop when he took them with him on the trips.

When they got to Los Angeles everything went just as Sherman had planned. They were able to sell all the stolen goods they had brought with them and get a good price for everything. They then met with his dealer and was also able to get the "big score" that he had promised Lynn.

It was mid-afternoon when they finally checked into a cheap single story hotel. It was located away from the main part of town. Sherman was really excited to have Lynn with him and soon after they checked into the room they started doing the drugs. They were enjoying themselves so much that they lost track of time. It was after several hours of doing drugs that Lynn stretched out on the bed and fell asleep. Sherman was still going strong and just because Lynn was taking a break wasn't going to stop him. He wanted to keep the high going so he continued to party alone. He felt like this was his one big day with Lynn and he was going to take full advantage of it.

Sherman hadn't told Lynn that he had also made a score on some heroin from his dealer. Once she was passed out on the bed, he decided he wanted that extra high and would shoot up the heroin by himself. As he sat on the end of the bed, he rolled up his shirt and wrapped the rubber cord around his arm. He took the cooked liquid and injected it right into one of his veins. As soon as the heroin went into his blood stream Sherman's body jerked back violently for a second and he got ridged and stiff. He took a big gasp of air and fell backward onto the bed. He just laid there and didn't move because he had just overdosed and was now lying dead right next to Lynn.

Lynn woke up in the middle of the night and discovered Sherman lying on his back and that he wasn't moving. She shook him to wake him but there was no response. She saw that he still had the needle and the rubber tube lying next to

him and his body was starting to get cold and ridged. When she saw that she instantly realized what he had done. She began to shake him frantically and fearing the worst. He wasn't moving or breathing. The more she shook him the more she realized her worst fears had come true as she said, "Come on Sherman, please wake up! Wake up, please!" Not getting any type of response, she stopped shaking him after a few minutes and felt for a pulse. Getting nothing, she realized he was gone. She put her face in her hands and started to deeply sob, not knowing what to do next.

When she was able to calm down a little, her next reaction was to scream out loud. She was having a hard time thinking straight in her drug induced state. As she tried to collect her thoughts, she quickly started throwing on some clothes. While she was putting on her clothes reality started to set in and she knew help was already too late for Sherman. She was still stoned as she stumbled around and fumbled with her clothes. She found the edge of the bed and sat down for a several minutes, just trying to clear her head and figure out the magnitude of her situation. When she was finally able to think clearly about what she should do, she knew she couldn't report Sherman's death to the Hotel manager or anyone else. The Hotel manager would've called the police and they would've come out to investigate Sherman's death and wanted to know all the details leading up to what had happened. She believed that once they saw the needle marks in this arm they would've known he'd died of a drug overdose. They would've also known that she had been doing drugs with him before he died and taken her into custody for questioning. She figured they would throw her to jail until they could sort out how Sherman had died and if she had anything to do with it. At the very least, they would have gotten her for doing drugs and having it in her possession. While she was in jail the boys would be left at Red Mountain all alone and not knowing what had happened to her and Sherman. She knew they would be frightened and scared and maybe even panic, because that was exactly how she was feeling at that moment.

Lynn also knew the law would have Child Protection Services remove Justin and Joshua from her home and place them in someone else's care once they found out she had kids with disabilities, under eighteen years old and all alone at her home. As she sat on the edge of the bed and cried for several more minutes she tried to figure out what was going to be her next course of action. She was now all alone and had to make a decision on her own with no one to help her. The only decisions she had ever made on her own for years was what to buy at the store or what to fix for the meals each day. Sherman always made the important decisions for her. She said to herself, "Why did you do that Sherman? You never told me anything about doing heroin. You should've told me you were going to take a hit. Now you're dead and I'm all alone down here in Los Angeles. I'm scared and I don't know what to do. How could you do this to me?" After she thought about her options for a several more minutes, she knew there was only one thing she could do. She had to get Sherman's body back to her boys and Red Mountain without anyone seeing or knowing what had happened.

Once her mind was made up she said to herself, I hope I can pull this off without being seen or getting caught. She grabbed the keys to the pick-up from the night stand and went out and let the tail gate down. She looked around to

make sure no one was watching her as she backed the truck up as close to the hotel door as she could get. She jumped out of the pick-up and opened the door to the room. She quickly dragged Sherman's body off the bed and onto a blanket on the floor. She rolled him up in the blanket and dragged his body to the door. She peeked outside again to make sure no one was watching. Not seeing anyone, she dragged Sherman's body over to the back of the pick-up. She was pumped up with extra adrenaline by then and she used all the strength she had to lift his upper body onto the back of the tail-gate. Once she had him in position and resting on the tail-gate she picked up his legs and pushed him forward onto the bed of the truck. She said to herself, "I'm sure glad you're not a big man or I probably would never be able to lift you by myself. I would've probably had to get someone to help me. That could have been a disaster." She took the tarps, along with the cement blocks Sherman had used to cover the stolen goods, and quickly covered his body. No one would be able to tell there was a person's body was under it. She then slammed the tail-gate shut and went back inside to get her things.

She sat back down and cried for a few more minutes before she was finally able to compose herself once again. She said, "You have to get a grip on yourself if you want to get back home. Otherwise, you might as well just give up right now." After the pep talk she gave herself she was ready to go. She gathered up all the drug paraphernalia and put it in her purse. She grabbed the rest of their personal belongs and carried them with her to the pick-up. All she had to do now was hold herself together long enough to make the three hour trip back to Red Mountain without falling apart. The one thing that drove her forward was the thought of getting back home safely to her boys.

She was sobbing most of the way home as thoughts of Sherman kept bouncing back and forth inside her head. She kept saying, "We've been in love with each other since we were just kids and now you're gone. I can't believe you're gone! Sherman. I love you. Why did you do this?" She knew it was going to be hard for her to live without him as she kept saying over and over to herself, what am I going to do without you Sherman? Just the mere thought of being without Sherman made her body tremble as she held on tightly to the stirring wheel. Tears were running down her face as she cried uncontrollably off and on until she focused her thought back to the boys. One of her major concerns, was how was she was going to get the drugs she knew she needed to survive. She convinced herself, "I'll have Jed get them for me. He's been with his dad enough, he'll know what to do and how to get them for me."

When Lynn finally got back home just before dawn, she was mentally and physically exhausted. She didn't hesitate, as she went straight into the boy's bedrooms to tell them what had happened to their dad. When Jed first saw the look on her face he instantly knew something was wrong. She had dark circles under her eyes from no sleep and crying for several hours. He immediately asked, "What's wrong? Where's dad? Is he still outside?" She didn't answer as she quickly got all of boys together. She could hardly get the words out without crying as she said, "Your dad has died of a drug overdose at the hotel in Los Angeles." Justin and Joshua didn't take the news very well and they began to scream and cry in disbelief. Jed said, "Oh no, Mom! What happened?" Lynn replied, "I don't know for sure because I had fallen asleep, but when I woke up I found out that he had used

some heroin and I believe he overdosed on it.” Jed ask, “What did you do with dad’s body?” She said, “I didn’t know what else to do so I put him in the back of the pick-up and brought him home with me.” Jed sat down dejected on the bed and began to cry. Sherman and Lynn were the boy’s entire world and now half of that world was gone.

After the boys were able to calm down a little they sat motionless for several minutes holding onto their mom. They didn’t say a word to each other as they sat there just feeling empty inside. Jed had thoughts running through his mind as he said to himself, “Dad took care of everything for us. He spent time with us and did all the planning on the house we broke into. What are we going to do now? We’ll be lost without him?”

When she felt the time was right Lynn said, “I want you boys to go out to the truck and bring your dad’s body inside the house and lay it on the couch.” They were all a little spaced out as they slowly and reluctantly did what their mom told them to do. They slowly uncovered his body and started to move him. They became even more emotional when they found out that his body had become cold and stiff on the ride back from Los Angeles. It was the first time they had ever seen a dead person before and they were in shock. Even worse, it was their dad. Jed looked over at Justin and Joshua and said, “I don’t want to do this any more than you guys do. Let’s just do what mom said and take dad’s body inside. You guys take his legs and I’ll get his upper body.”

Once they had Sherman’s body inside, Lynn told the boys she was going to let them spend some last minute time with their dad before they had to bury him. She said, “I’m going to lay down for a while and try to get some sleep. This entire ordeal has completely devastated and drained me. While I’m sleeping, I want you boys to go out back and make a wooden box for your dad’s body that we can bury him in. When you’re done with that find a spot in the back yard where you think you would like him buried. Make sure it’s at least six feet deep and wide enough for the box.” Just the thought of burying their dad underground sent waves of pain and devastation through their bodies. They also knew they didn’t have any choice, they had to do something with his body. They couldn’t just leave him like that. Before Lynn left they all agreed to do what she had requested. Jed told her, “We’ll take care of it while you’re sleeping, mom, but first we just want to spend a little time with him.” She thanked them and went to her bedroom.

Lynn couldn’t sleep and lay awake for several hours thinking about Sherman and crying. She listened to the boys hammering outside, putting together a make shift coffin and digging the hole. Every pound of the hammer was like someone beating on her heart with their fists and every scoop of the shovel dug deep down into her gut. She was having such a hard time dealing with the loss of Sherman that she decided to take some more drugs just to try and ease her pain. The drugs were always a momentary fix for all of her problems.

When the digging and the pounding finally stopped the boys went to Lynn’s room and knocked on the door. They let her know they had everything completed. They then went back and sat down next to their dad’s body and cried for a while more. They waited for their mom to come out of her room to tell them what they had to do next. When she came out she told the boys, “We can’t let anyone know what happened to your dad. We have to keep it a secret, just between the four of

us. If we don't, the police will come out here and start asking questions. They'll find out I was doing drugs with your dad and throw me in jail and you won't see me for a long, long time. Child Protection Services will come snooping around and take you boys away and someone else will raise you while I'm locked up. If anyone asks us what happened to your dad, we'll just say he left and never came back. Is that understood?" The boys didn't like the thought of having to tell people their dad abandoned them, but they rarely spoke or saw anyone and never left the property during the day. They knew they really didn't see any other choice and that it would probably be the best thing to do. Lynn had them all look her in the face as she said, "Are we all in agreement with that?" They said at the same time, "Yes, Mom!"

Lynn spent some time with the boys and talked about everything she could think about regarding Sherman. She told them about how they grew up together in Tennessee and how they fell in love. She told them how Sherman's father used to beat him and that was why they left their home. When she was through talking she had the boys take Sherman's body, carefully wrap it in another blanket and gently place it in the wooden box. The boys weren't in any hurry to bury him as they slowly lowered the box with ropes until it was at the bottom of the hole. While they were gathered next to the grave, Lynn said the Lord's Prayer and told the boys more about Sherman and their life together. They waited until Lynn gave the word for them to cover the box with dirt and then they started covering the hole until it was completely filled in. As they threw the last shovel full of dirt on the grave Jed, said, "Good-bye Dad, I love you and I'll miss you." When he said that, Justin and Joshua each said they loved him too. The boys made a wooden cross that they used as his grave marker. They placed it in the ground above his grave.

The boys were still extremely distraught when they finally went to bed that night. Lynn spent some time in their room just to try and comfort them. She was trying to help ease their pain, but it also helped her to talk about Sherman. She finally went to bedroom and as she lay awake in bed she could hear the boys crying throughout the night. She could especially hear the pain in the deep and uncontrollable sobs coming from Joshua's room.

They all continued to mourn the death of Sherman for a few lonely agonizing weeks until one day Lynn got the boys together and sat them down in the living room. She said, "You boys need to snap out of it because it's time we get on with our lives. It's what your dad would want from us. You can't keep just moping around and feeling sorry for yourselves, like you've been doing these past few weeks. You boys are the men of the house now and you have to start acting like it. Jed, I want you to get your driver's license as soon as you can, so you can. I don't want you to be thrown in jail for driving without a license. You're going to have to take over the things your dad used to do. You and Justin are the ones that'll have to break into the houses and steal the items you'll need to sell in Los Angeles. You'll also have to get the drugs for me." Jed was almost eighteen years old but when she told him that he would now be in charge of the house break-ins, selling the stolen goods and buying drugs in Los Angeles for her he said, "Ok, Mom, I'll try to do a good job, just like dad did." Lynn replied, "I know you will, son, I have faith in you."

Though he never told Lynn, Jed was a little apprehensive and fearful as he sat there wondering what he was going to have to do next. His mind was running in circles and he didn't really want the responsibility of doing everything his dad had done. Although he had been with his dad on a lot of the break-ins during the nights, the trips to Los Angeles and getting the drugs, he had never done any of it by himself. He knew he didn't have any choice, his mom didn't have any other way to get the drugs she had to have. He also knew he was the only one she could fully depend on because Justin and Joshua couldn't do it. Jed was never crazy about stealing from people, he just liked spending time with his dad. Losing his dad made him realize just how much his mom and dad meant to him. He knew he didn't want to let her down and he knew he didn't want to lose her too.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Jed Takes Control.**

The more Jed thought about it the more he knew he wouldn't have any trouble getting rid of what they stole and obtaining the drugs once he made his first contact with the fence and the drug dealer. He had met each of his dad's contacts on several occasions while his dad had done his transactions with them. All his contacts were still in Sherman's phone, which was a great relief to Jed. After he did a lot of thought and preparation, he made up his mind that he was ready to take control and do what he had to do.

He knew that before he did anything, he was going to do some extra planning on what he and Justin should do first and what houses they should break into. He knew he would have to scope out the three little towns for himself, just like his dad had done, before he started stealing in the Red Mountain area. He also knew, that in addition to what his dad had taught him, he would now have to rely heavily on his own instincts to help him and Justin survive.

Once he felt confident, he talked to Justin and told him, "There are a lot of homes in Red Mountain we haven't hit yet because they have big dogs that are always barking when anyone gets near their houses. I want to hit some of the houses that have dogs, but we need to do something about the dogs first." He knew Justin wasn't going to react well when he said that as Justin immediately replied, "I don't think that's a very good idea Jed, dad always stayed away from the dog houses." Jed knew he would respond that way so he replied, "I know Justin, but I'll get rid of the dogs, and then we'll break into the houses when the owners are gone. Those houses have a lot of treasures, just waiting for us to take." Justin like what Jed said about the treasures, but he was still stuck on the dogs as he asked, "What are you going to do about the dogs?" Jed already had a plan and said, "Don't worry about them Justin, I'll come up with a way to get rid of them." Justin thought for a minute and then just looked at Jed and said, "Ok, Jed, you're in charge. Let's do it." Jed didn't tell Justin that his plan for the dogs was that he was going to poison them with Rat poison and that's how he was going to take



care of them. He knew Justin wouldn't like that idea any more than he did, but they needed new places to hit in Red Mountain. They were just another obstacle that stood in his way of doing what his mom needed him to do.

When Lynn went to town a few days later, Jed asked her to pick up ten pounds of hamburger meat and several boxes of rat poison for him. He told Lynn, "I'm going to poison some of the dogs that have been getting in our way here at Red Mountain and then we can break into those houses." She didn't like the idea of killing the dogs but didn't ask him any questions because she knew he was now in charge. His plan was only to help get her the drugs, as well as the extra's the family needed to survive.

When she got home from shopping that afternoon, Jed took the hamburger meat out of the package and mixed the rat Poison in with it. He made the poison balls of meat about the size of baseballs and that was going to be his killing combination for the dogs.

He waited until it was the middle of the night before he left to take care of the dogs. He crept up to the houses got the dogs attention. He then made sure each dog had their share of the deadly poison as he threw each of them a couple of balls. He repeated that scenario several more times at the different houses before he headed back home to sleep and let the poison work.

A few days later, Lynn was getting groceries in town when she overheard a neighbor she recognized from Red Mountain telling the cashier about all the dogs that had been killed in the Red Mountain neighborhoods. She told the cashier, "There's an outrage in town from the dog owners because eight dogs have been found dead in their yards. No one knows who killed the dogs, but the owners of the dogs vowed they would find out and get even with whoever was responsible. They put the word out in town they were going to shoot whoever did that to their dogs. They said they were going to shoot first and ask questions later." The neighbor saw Lynn standing in the line behind her waiting to pay for her items and so she asked Lynn, "Did they kill your dogs?" Lynn acted surprised as he quickly said, "No, that's terrible. When did it happen?" The neighbor said, "It just happened a few days ago and everyone is up in arms about it." Lynn said, "Well, I don't blame them, I would be too. Maybe I should keep my dogs in the house for a while." The neighbor looked at Lynn with a strange look on her face and said, "That's weird, because they killed most of the big dogs that did a lot of barking, and you're dogs bark a lot." Lynn said, "Yes, that is weird, I wonder why they didn't kill mine too?" Lynn thanked her for the information and didn't say anything else about it as she finished her shopping and headed back home.

When Lynn got home she told Jed what the neighbor had said about the dogs being killed and the shooting first and asking question later. Jed was glad to hear his plan had worked, but he took the threat serious. He and Justin decided to wait and hit the houses, where he had killed the dogs, when the timing would be better. They were going to wait for the anger to die down a bit.

In the mean-time, they started breaking into the abandoned homes in town that had been sitting empty for a few years. They ripped out all the metal, copper wiring and anything else they thought might have value that they would be able to sell to their "fence." They took it out of the house and hid it in a safe location until they went back with their pick-up before daylight and loaded it up. Once they had

it on the truck they took it back to their house and hid it in the “secret hiding room.”

They waited until Jed felt like they had enough stolen goods or until Lynn’s habit forced them to take the trip to Los Angeles. Lucky for Jed, they had a lot of success selling the metal and other parts of the house to their “fence.” Those loads were in big demand so they continued to steal from the abandoned houses for several weeks. When they got bored with just stealing from the abandoned houses, they would break into one of the houses where Jed had killed the dogs. Jed would stake out the houses for a few days and wait for the owners to leave and then he and Justin would go back and break-in. No one in or around Red Mountain knew when, where or who the creepers would strike next.

It was during one of those nights when they went to one of the houses when they had a close encounter with the owner. Jed had staked out the house and watched it for a few days to see what kind of activity was going on. He watched as the owner left and he didn’t see anyone come or go for a few days and thought it was safe for them to break into. He was positive the owners had left town and believed it was time to make their move. It was dark and windy as they got into their creeping mode and headed for the house. Jed didn’t know it, but the owner of the house was trying to lay a trap for them. For the past several days, the owner had someone drop him off down the street just before dark. He would then sneak back to his own house, hide inside and wait to see if someone tried to break in. He had his shotgun and pistol ready to kill whoever was stealing from the people in Red Mountain.

When Jed and Justin arrived at the house, all the lights were off and everything was quiet. Jed had a funny feeling about it as he moved over to Justin and whispered, “Something just doesn’t feel right about this place. Every light in the house is off. Usually when people go out of town they leave at least one light on somewhere. I thought I remembered a light being on when we were watching it last night. Maybe it just burned out.” Justin whispered back, “Do you think we should skip this one, Jed?” Jed was very apprehensive as he answered back, “Maybe, but let me get up closer to the house and see what happens. Stay back by the fence, just in case something goes wrong.” Jed then crept up to one of the bedroom windows and waited for several minutes. He didn’t hear or see anything so he broke a window. As soon as he broke it, he heard a rustling noise from inside the house. He wasn’t sure what it was, but it spooked him momentarily. His heart was starting to pound in his chest a little faster than normal as he wondered what made the noise. He said under his breath, something just isn’t right here. It sounded like someone or something is inside the house. He immediately waived for Justin to get down and stay behind the fence. Justin did as Jed motioned him to do and they both sat frozen for several more minutes to see if they could hear another sound or see if anything else would happen.

Jed wasn’t hearing anything unusual so he decided to raise the window very slowly to get a look inside. Just as he got the window half-way open, he saw a dark figure emerge from the back of the room. He then realized they were not alone as he said to himself, “There’s someone here and he’s coming straight at me. It looks like he has a gun.” He saw a figure coming toward him and quickly ducked just before the shotgun blast tore out the bottom part of the window where he had

been standing. Immediately, after he heard the first blast, he ran for the outside corner of the fence where Justin was hiding. He had just made it there when they heard another two shotgun blasts that were aimed in their direction. They could hear the pellets hitting the fence and bushes all around them. They took off running and once they were far enough away from the shooter, they stopped and knelt down. Justin was breathing heavy as he said, "You ok Jed? It looked like you got hit." Jed was also breathing hard as he replied, "Nah, I'm okay the blast missed me by a mile. How about you? Did you get hit?" Justin momentarily looked down and felt his body and said, "No, but that was close." Jed let out a deep sigh of relief and replied, "Yes it was! Man, let's get the heck out of here and get back home." They quickly headed home, stopping at their familiar spot to make sure no one had followed them.

When they got back home and had time to reflect on what had happened, Jed and Justin got into an argument about the entire incident. Justin said, "See, I told you we shouldn't have hit the dog houses. That's why Dad never did. That's why he stayed away from them." Jed already knew he had made a huge mistake and was angry with himself for what had happened. He didn't really want to hear from Justin about how he had screwed up. He angrily responded, "Yea, do you think you can do any better? If you do, then I'll gladly give you the job because I never wanted it in the first place!" Justin wanted to stay mad at Jed, but he knew Jed was right. He knew Jed never wanted to steal things from other people or to buy drugs for their mom. He just did it because he had too. Justin knew he wouldn't be able to do everything Jed did so he just shrugged his shoulders and said, "No you're doing a good job, Jed. I just got scared." That was it and the argument was over between the two of them.

When they finally got to bed in the early morning hours, Jed couldn't sleep and kept running the episode through his mind over and over again. He thought to himself, I screwed up. We both could've been killed. Just the thought of that sent a shiver up his spine. He kept wondering to himself what went wrong. For a moment, he started to question his ability to do the break-ins the way his dad had taught them. He knew what happened back at the house would never have happened to their dad because he wouldn't have chosen that house to break into. Justin was right, their dad would've stayed away from the houses where he killed the dogs. When he used to ask his dad about killing the dogs he would tell Jed the owners would just replace them with new dogs and they would be right back in the same predicament in a few months. He told them that people with dogs usually had guns for protection too and they were willing to use them.

As he lay there, Jed also felt bad that he had let Justin and Lynn down because they weren't able to steal anything from that house. The more he thought about it the more he realized, from that point on, if something didn't feel right, he needed to follow his instincts and stay away from it. He knew that even though it was a close call, he felt like it was a good lesson to learn and he wasn't going to let something like that happen to him again.

The next day Jed sat down with Justin and said, "I'm sorry about what happened last night, it should never have happened. I don't know what exactly went wrong, but from now on, we're only going to only hit places we are one hundred percent sure no one is home. I don't want to get caught with my pants

down like that again.” Justin just laughed out loud and said, “Me either! That was way to close. We could’ve been killed.” Jed told Justin that he had been thinking about doing something different. He said, “Maybe we should go Randsburg or even Johannesburg and hit some houses in those two towns for a while.” He was thinking that maybe they needed to just get away from Red Mountain for a few months. He told Justin, “I don’t like getting shot at and I’m a little burned out stealing things from the people around here.” Justin clapped his hands in agreement and said, “Me too, let’s go somewhere else.” Justin loved the idea of going into Randsburg and Johannesburg.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Joshua Trains Mister.**

A few months after Sherman’s death Sophie gave birth to a litter of six puppies. When Lynn found out that Sophie was going to have puppies she started telling the boys that when they were born they had to put them in a gunny sack and find a place to drown them. She told Jed and Justin she didn’t want to have to feed them. She said, “I don’t feel like having any more mouths to feed around here, even if they are just dogs.” Jed and Justin didn’t want to drown the puppies so they waited a few day after they were born to tell her. The puppies were a mixture of brown and black but there was one male puppy that was completely black and it was much bigger than the rest of them. When Joshua first caught sight of the big black puppy, he instantly fell in love with it.

As soon as Jed told Lynn the puppies had been born, Joshua began begging his mom to let him keep just that one puppy. Her first reaction was no and she kept telling Joshua no, over and over again, for what seemed like to her, a thousand times. Joshua didn’t stop there and it became apparent, he wasn’t going to give up in his quest to keep the puppy. He became very persistent, as he kept pleading and begging with her. He said, “Please let me keep him, Mom. He’ll be my dog and I’ll take good care of him.” He continued to hound her for the next two days until she finally relented and said, “Ok, ok, Joshua, you win. You can keep the stupid puppy, but just that one puppy and no others. I want you to know that keeping the puppy comes with a lot of responsibilities. This will be your dog Joshua, but it will also be your responsibility to take care of it. You’ll have to clean up after it and make sure it is fed and watered all the time. Do you understand that?” Joshua shook his head up and down in agreement. He jumped up in the air with happiness and clapped his hands together several times, as he said, “Yes, Yes, Yes, I get to keep him. I have my own dog now.”

A few days later, after all the other puppies had been drowned, Joshua was walking around carrying the puppy and Lynn asked Joshua if he had a name picked out for it yet. He smiled at her and said, “Yes Mom, I’m going to name him Mister.” She said, “That sounds like a good name for a dog, but why Mister?” He told her, “I’m naming the puppy after me, because the puppy is special too, just

like me, Mom.” Lynn instantly knew what he was talking about as she recalled what she once told him years ago that M.R. stood for Mister. She got tears in her eyes for a minute as she said, “That’s a perfect name for him, Joshua.” She quickly turned and walked back into her room because she didn’t want him to see the tears coming down her face. Joshua was her little boy and she realized how much the puppy now meant to him.

It took Lynn by surprise that Joshua had remembered their conversation about the word Mister from so many years ago. Now he was choosing to name his dog the same name used to taunt him in school. She was really touched by what he said and it brought back a lot of hurtful memories of the way the other kids had treated him. That was one of the first times that she truly realized he was so much different than the other kids. It didn’t stop her from taking him to town with her every chance she got. She tried not to pay any attention to the many stares and the gawking eyes as people pointed at him, from what they thought, was behind her back. Her heart ached to see him so happy over something so simple as a puppy.

The puppy didn’t open its eyes until the morning of the eleventh day, but as soon as Joshua saw it had its eyes open he was convinced it had also fallen in love with him. Joshua scooped him up in his arms and went running into Lynn’s room carrying the puppy and yelling to her, “Look Mom, Mister opened his eyes, and he’s looking right at me. He loves me, I can tell.” Lynn reached out and cupped the puppy in her hands and looked at his half-opened eyes. As she handed him back to Joshua she said, “You know what, Joshua, I think your right. He does love you, just like I do.” She brushed Joshua’s hair back and smiled at him before he left the room.

It only took another few days before the puppy was able to start walking with wobbly legs on all fours and finding its way around. He got all his mom’s milk so he soon starting to grow from this little cute and cuddly puppy to a strong and feisty dog. Over the next several months Joshua was with him constantly. They developed an innate bond with each other that was different than the normal boy-dog relationship. Joshua had started training Mister to go to the bathroom outside when he was only about eight weeks old. After only about two weeks of training him, when Mister wanted to go outside, he would go over to Joshua, look up and bark. Joshua knew that bark meant he wanted to go to the bathroom and he would immediately pick him up and take him outside. It didn’t take long with Joshua’s constant diligence before he was completely house trained. By the time he was three months old, Joshua had taught Mister all kinds of tricks. Jed and Justin hadn’t paid too much attention to him because they were always busy at night and sleeping during the day, but it didn’t go unnoticed by Lynn. Joshua was always showing her the new things he had taught Mister to do and she was always amazed at how fast Mister would learn the things Joshua taught him.

Over the next year, Jed and Justin continued to break into the houses in either Randsburg or Johannesburg, stealing anything they could get their hands on to sell. They made trips to Los Angeles together but sometimes Jed would go alone when he needed time away from Justin. Even though Joshua was never allowed to go on those trips, he didn’t seem to mind. He was so involved with training Mister, little else mattered. Joshua taught him to sit, shake hands, and roll over and

many other tricks by using the command of a clicking sound Joshua made with his tongue. Different clicks of his tongue gave Mister a different command. He taught him not to bark unless he was told to bark unless he had to go to the bathroom and not to growl unless he received that particular command. He taught him how to attack a toy and rip it to shreds on command and to sit, just look at the toy and not move until he heard the correct command. He taught him how to growl viciously on command and he taught him to fetch things and to return to him or to leave at the sound of the right command. He could make Mister do anything he wanted because Mister loved him and would do anything for him. They were best friends and Joshua was very proud and protective of him and Mister was also very protective of Joshua.

As he got older Mister didn't like Brutus or Sophie getting too close to Joshua because he was jealous. He would growl furiously and bare his teeth if either of them got too close. Mister always slept on the same bed and next to Joshua and when he went into town with Lynn during her shopping trips Joshua would take Mister with him. He would wait in the pick-up with Mister instead of going inside while Lynn was doing her shopping. When people walked past the truck and stared it made Joshua feel proud that he had such a beautiful and well trained dog. He didn't realize it, but a lot of the long stares from people, were because of him and not just Mister. No matter where he went or what he did Joshua and Mister were inseparable.

By the time Mister was a year old he was huge. He was several inches taller than most Rottweiler's and he weighed over 140 pounds. His entire body was nothing but solid muscle, more like a pit bull terrier. His head was huge and boxy and Joshua thought the muscles in his body made him look strong a body builder. The pupils of his eyes were dark and they matched the shiny black fur of his coat. He had long fang teeth both top and bottom and when he growled he was scary looking. When he was full grown, Joshua used to brag to Jed and Justin as he said, "He is MY show dog and I love him." Because he was Joshua's dog he wouldn't have much to do with anyone else. He especially wouldn't listen to anyone else's command if they tried to get him to do something. Joshua was so proud of Mister, he would sometimes show off all that he had taught Mister. They were always a little amazed and surprised in what Joshua could get him to do. They had never heard of anyone that could get their dog to do the things Mister would do for Joshua just by him clicking his tongue a certain sound. They knew he truly loved Joshua and he was a one man's dog with total devotion.

Mister was about fourteen months old when Sophie came into heat once again. Jed and Justin were sleeping after one of their late nights and Lynn hadn't gotten out of bed yet. It was late morning when Joshua took Mister outside to go to the bathroom. When Brutus saw Mister he started getting frisky and acting like he was the new boss in town. He pranced back and forth in front of Mister as if to challenge him to come and get him. At first Mister just ignored him and stayed away.

Before long, Sophie came around the corner of the house with her tail raised up and off to one side as a sign of her readiness to mate. She was walking in the direction of Joshua and Mister and it was at that moment Brutus couldn't stand it any longer. He wasn't going to let Mister have anything to do with his female, so he

plunged forward in an attack mode toward Mister. Mister tried to avoid him as he swerved to one side as Brutus nipped into his right hind leg. Mister was able to jerk himself free and turned to face Brutus. He stood there for a minute as if to say, are you crazy? What did I do to you? At the same time, he wasn't going to run from the fight as the hair on the back of his scruff bristled. That was when Brutus decided he wasn't through with him yet and attacked Mister once again. Joshua got angry with Brutus for trying to hurt Mister so he gave the clicking sound for Mister to attack. That's when Mister went on the offensive and fought back with fierce conviction. With a ferocious growl, he charged forward and knocked Brutus to the ground. They fought for a few minutes when suddenly Mister had Brutus by the throat and he was squirming in an effort to get free. Mister was ready for the command to kill when Joshua surprisingly gave him the command to retreat. He didn't hesitate as he immediately let go of Brutus and backed up toward Joshua. Brutus was then able to get to his feet and like a wounded warrior, went cowering away to hide under the pick-up. It didn't take very long and the fight was over. Mister had proven he was a good fighter and established himself as the master of that domain. Joshua patted Mister on the back and shoulders and said, "Good boy, you done good! You protected yourself. Let's go you in the house and see if he hurt you. That stupid Brutus!"

Once inside the house, Joshua looked over every inch of Mister's body to make sure he wasn't hurt very bad. There was a big gash in his hind leg where Brutus had tagged him with his sharp teeth and blood was slowly oozing out of it. Joshua grabbed some gauze and tape and starting wrapping it around the open wound. Joshua was angry at Brutus for what he had tried to do to Mister as he said, "That stupid dog! Next time that happens, I'm going to let you kill him." He patted Mister on the head and laid down next to him. Mister was lying on his side with his head raised in the air and his tongue hanging out and panting. He would occasionally lick Joshua's face with his warm wet tongue. Joshua could tell that Mister wasn't sure what had just happened, but he was both excited and proud of himself for the outcome of his first fight.

Jed and Justin had both heard the fight and by the time it was over they came running into Joshua's room to find out what had happened. Joshua told them that Brutus was acting crazy and attacked Mister. He told them, "They got into a big fight." Jed asked, "Did either of them get hurt?" Joshua had an angry look on his face as he pointed to Mister's wound and said, "Mister got a gash in his leg." Jed said, "What about Brutus, is he okay?" Joshua said, "Yea, Mister kicked his butt, but he's okay." Jed just shook his head and mumbled under his breath as he walked back toward his bed, "yea, well don't let Mister kill him. Stupid dogs."

Joshua made up his mind that he wasn't going to let Mister be surprised by another attack like the one from Brutus ever again. He decided he was going to do some things different with Mister so it would never happen. He would train Mister how to protect himself even if it meant doing something he was never allowed to do. He was going to train Mister outside the walls of their property.

No one in the family knew that Joshua had watched and observed every move that Sherman, Jed and Justin did before they went out on a break-in. He knew that if he took Mister out of the property he had to dress in all black like Jed and Justin and paint his face with charcoal before he went out.

One night he waited until Jed and Justin left for one of their break-ins when he decided to take Mister out. By then Lynn was in her bedroom, like she always was, and in a deep sleep. The duo sneaked out of the house and off the property. Joshua quietly closed the gate behind him. He used to hear his dad tell Jed and Justin how they needed to try to stay low and out of sight of people and cars when they were out stealing. Joshua had decided he was going to follow everything they had been taught and stay hidden. He didn't want anyone seeing him out with Mister.

Once he was outside the property, he used the cover of the Yucca Plants, sage brush and other desert plants to hide behind as he made his way from one to another. Once they were far enough away from the house, they headed very slowly toward another part of town. They went up the hill and behind some of the houses. He didn't know exactly what he was going to find out there but figured they would sneak around and see.

They hadn't gone very far when Joshua spotted two cats that seemed to be distracted by their courtship with each other. They were in the middle of a narrow dirt road and hadn't noticed Joshua and Mister. The pair had crept up inch by inch to get as close to them as they could get. Joshua looked around for a few minutes just to make sure that no one was watching them. He sat there momentarily with Mister with his arm wrapped around Mister's shoulders. He whispered to Mister, "It's almost time, boy." Just when the cats were least expecting it, he gave Mister the command to attack and kill. Mister had the male cat by the throat in a split second and had started shaking violently. In under a minute the cat was dead and the other cat had disappeared. When Joshua believed the cat was dead, he gave Mister the signal to return to him. In just a few short seconds Mister was sitting by his side panting with excitement. He had blood dripping down the sides of his jaws as he tried to lick it away. Joshua patted him on the head and shoulders and said, "That's a good boy! You done good, Mister!"

Mister had completed his first kill and Joshua was extremely proud of him. When he was through with the cat, they turned and headed back home. He praised Mister several times on the way home. Before they went to bed for the night he sat with Mister and told him again what a good job he had done.

The next morning, they went outside and Joshua looked down at Mister and asked, "Wasn't that fun, boy? Mister just looked up at him and it seemed to Joshua that he knew exactly what Joshua was talking about. He wagged his tail as Joshua patted him on the head and said, "We'll do it again soon. We'll have to wait until Jed and Justin go out again." Joshua could hardly wait to take Mister out again. It was disturbing how much he seemed to enjoy killing.

Over the next several nights Jed and Justin laid low, just waiting for the crescent moon and the wind so they could go out on their next break-in. Joshua never told Jed or Justin that he had taken Mister off the property. He knew they would be angry with him if they found he had left the compound. They had always warned Joshua to never to leave but now he was getting really anxious to take Mister out once again. He could hardly wait for Jed and Justin to leave. He starting grilling them about when they were going out on their next break-in. They couldn't understand, why, all of a sudden, Joshua had become so interested in what they were doing. After he had asked Jed several times when they were going



out Jed finally asked him, "Joshua, why are you so interested in what we're doing, all of a sudden? Why do you want to know when we're going out again?" Joshua hesitated for a moment and then replied, "I just wanted to know, that's all." When he said that, Jed just laughed and said, "We're going out soon, we're just waiting for the right time." Joshua didn't respond. He just turned and walked back toward his room with a big smile on his face. He knew that he and Mister would have another night of fun just as soon as Jed and Justin were gone.

A few nights later, just minutes after Jed and Justin left for their job, Joshua hastily changed into his black clothing and darkened his face. He grabbed Mister and rushed off the compound. There was a large dog that lived about four blocks away and when Joshua went out he could hear the dog barking as they made their way around Red Mountain. Everything in the town seemed dark and dead silent except for that barking dog. It wasn't long before Mister and Joshua spotted another lone cat making its way along a narrow dirt trail right toward them. There was a lot of desert plants on both sides of the trail. Joshua and Mister froze in their tracks and waited for the cat to get closer. The cat appeared to be preoccupied with itself as it just strolled along on the trail, not paying any attention to what lie ahead. When the cat got within five to six yards of them it spotted them about the same time that Joshua gave Mister the command to attack and kill. After a short chase Mister had pounced on the cat and began ripping it apart. Joshua gave Mister the command to return and he dropped the cat and was soon sitting by his side once again. They had now killed two cats and Joshua had no intentions of stopping.

For the next few months, when Jed and Justin went out, Joshua would go out on a mission of his own looking for cats that Mister could kill. He had already killed several of the Red Mountain cats until Joshua decided he was going to test Mister with something a little larger. It was during their next outing that he decided he was going to see what Mister could do with the large German Shepard that always barked at them. Joshua purposely headed with Mister in its direction, creeping ever so slowly, closer and closer to the house. When they were directly across from the house they took cover behind some sage brush. By then the big German Shepard had spotted them and it had come out into the middle of the street barking. Joshua had Mister crawl to the edge of the road by himself. He waited for a minute to see if the owners of the dog would come outside to see what their dog was barking at. After not seeing any movement from inside the house, Joshua gave Mister the command to attack. Mister went tearing into the middle of the road and met the dog with full force. He knocked it down and they wrestled around for a few minutes. The dog was trying to nip at Mister and then retreat. It didn't take long and Mister had the dog by the throat. His strong grip was like a vice as it cut off the dog's wind pipe. Joshua waited for the dog to go limp as he gave Mister the command to kill. Mister gave the dog's neck a few quick and angry jerks and broke its neck. The German Shepard was no match for Mister and the fight ended just about as fast as it had begun. To Joshua, Mister looked like a victorious warrior as he stood over the dead dog. That was when Joshua gave Mister the command to return to him.

It was about that same time when the lights went on in the house a half-dressed man came out with a shotgun in his hands. Joshua and Mister slowly started to

retreat further into the darkness, blending in with the landscape. The owner of the dog was calling for his dog as he made his way to the edge of the street. That's when the man saw his dead dog in the street. He fired off a few warning shots intending to scare away whatever killed his dog. He fired in the direction of Joshua and also in the opposite direction. By then Joshua and Mister were already making their way back home.

Arriving back home, Joshua was so excited and very proud of Mister. He kept patting him on the head and shoulders as he said, "Good Boy, you did it. You killed your first dog and he was a big one." He was now confident that Mister could defend himself against just about any animal. He believed Mister could definitely kill any dog that tried to attack him. He gave Mister treats and lovingly patted him. He continued to praise him until they went to bed for the night. Mister also seemed to be pleased with himself as he sat like a proud warrior next to his sense! His head was raised in the air and he would occasionally reach over and lick Joshua with his tongue. Joshua knew Mister was also proud of himself for a job well done.

When Lynn went to town a few days later, the store clerk knew Lynn was from Red Mountain, so she asked her if she had heard the news about some of the people in Red Mountain losing their cats. Lynn said, "No, I haven't heard or seen anything about it. What happened?" The clerk said, "I over heard some ladies from Red Mountain talking about their cats being killed. One of them told the other one she needed to keep an eye out for coyotes or something. Most people didn't think it was coyotes because they figured a coyote would take its kill back to its den. The cats were ripped apart and left where they were killed. One of your neighbors lost a big German Shepard. They said the owner heard his dog fighting with it and by the time he got out of bed, put on his pants, grabbed his gun and went outside, his dog was lying dead in the street." Lynn was real interested as she asked, "Do they have any idea what it could be." The clerk said, "I heard them say that some people believe it might be a mountain lion. If it's not a mountain lion it was just as big. Nothing like that's ever been seen in these parts before. One of the neighbors thought it might have something to do with the Night Crawlers. Lynn had never heard that term used before and asked, "What in the world are the Night Crawlers?" The clerk said, "You know, the druggies that creep around town after everyone's gone to bed, breaking in and stealing anything they can get their hands on!" Lynn replied, "That does sound pretty creepy, I'll be sure to have my boys be extra cautious and I'll keep my eyes open for anything unusual. I have two large dogs but they're not allowed to leave the yard and stay locked inside the gate. I've never had any problems with anyone stealing from us or killing our pets!"

When Lynn got home she told Jed and Justin about what she had heard from the clerk at the grocery store. Jed thought about it for a few minute and glanced at his mom with a puzzled look on his face and said, "I hate to tell you this Mom, but that "animal" sounds like it could be a very large dog. One the size of Mister. Do you think Mister could be getting out while Joshua is sleeping?" Lynn seemed dubious at the possibility Mister could be sneaking out at night. She told Jed, "What! No! How could that happen? I'm always home when you and Justin are out at night and I've never seen or heard him leave the house." Jed looked at Lynn with a little irritation on his face as he said, "Yea, but most of times you're

“sleeping,” Mom.” Lynn thought for a minute and then she said, “We need to talk to Joshua and see if Mister may be responsible. Maybe Joshua didn’t know about him getting out.” Jed said, “Mister is definitely big enough and certainly capable of doing that kind of damage.” Lynn was very concerned as she said, “We have to talk to Joshua and find out for sure if Mister had anything to do with this.”

Lynn called Joshua into the kitchen and had him sit with her, Jed and Justin. She told him the story she’d heard at the grocery store while she was shopping. The more she talked about it with Joshua the more he began to get nervous and squirm. She noticed he seemed to become more irritated the more she talked about it. She knew something wasn’t right and began to press him a little further. She said, “Joshua, do you think there’s any chance Mister would be getting out in the middle of the night while you’re asleep? He is the only dog in Red Mountain large enough and capable of inflicting that kind of damage!”

Lynn kept pressing Joshua harder and harder about Mister until finally he decided he couldn’t just sit there and let Mister take all the blame for what he and Mister had done together. He started to cry as he told them, “I’ve been taking Mister out while you were sleeping and Jed and Justin were out stealing stuff.” When Jed heard him admit to it he jumped up and said, “Oh Christ, Joshua! I can’t believe you did that!” He was both confused and angry as he continued, “What the hell’s wrong with you, Joshua, are you trying to get yourself killed?” Lynn started crying as she said, “Why would you do something like that Joshua?” By then Joshua was crying and drools of snot was running down his face as he said, “I never hurt nobody, it was just cats and dogs.” We just wanted to have a little fun too, like Jed and Justin.” Jed was stomping around angrily as he said, “Fun? Do you think what Justin and I are doing is fun? Lynn interrupted Jed and questioned Joshua more, “But why would you do something like that Joshua. We’ve always told you it isn’t safe for you to go out there by yourself.” As he looked up at her in his ignorance and innocence said, “But I wasn’t alone Mom, I had Mister with me.” She looked at him in disbelief when he said that because she didn’t know what to say next. She said slowly, “Those people out there will kill you Joshua, don’t you know that? They are now calling Jed and Justin “Night Crawlers” and they have guns just waiting to catch someone late at night, so they can kill them.” She grabbed him and held on to him against her breast and said, “I want you to promise me you’ll never do anything like that again.” With his head lowered, and still weeping, he pulled away from her and promised her he would never do that again as he said, “I promise, mom, I won’t do it, ever again.

Jed was completely beside himself as he told Lynn, “You do realize we can never steal anything from Red Mountain again! It’ll be too risky. If the people in this town are calling us Night Crawlers then that means they are gunning for us. If we get caught out there alone at night they’ll kill us.” She said, “I know Jed, I know, just take it easy, we have to figure this whole thing out.” She told the boys to go to bed and they would sort it all out in the morning after they had time to sleep on it. Jed was so angry with Joshua he couldn’t even stand to talk to him. He knew he would explode if Joshua said another word to him so he just walked into the other room to keep from saying things to Joshua he knew he shouldn’t say or couldn’t take back.

When they awoke the next morning Lynn called them all into the kitchen once again and said, "We're going to pretend this entire thing with Mister and Joshua never happened. Jed, you and Justin should continue to hit Randsburg and Johannesburg like you've been doing and stay away from Red Mountain until this thing dies down." She made Joshua promise once again that he wouldn't leave the property at night by himself or with Mister. After he promised her several times that he wouldn't go out without her permission she sent him out of the room.

Once he was out of the room she told Jed and Justin, "I promise you, I'll stay up on the nights you boys go out on your break-ins. I'll keep an eye on Joshua just to make sure he doesn't sneak out again with Mister." Jed had calmed down by then and he was thrilled that Lynn was finally going to take some interest in what they were doing and would be a little more involved with them. She always seem to not care what was going on outside the walls of the property. Jed thought it would give her something to do instead of just doing her drugs and then going to bed every night. When they were through talking, Jed walked into the other room with Justin and said, "It's about time she paid attention to what we've been doing to keep this family going instead of numbing herself with herself with stupid drugs." Justin just shook his head up and down in agreement as he said, "Yep, I agree."

## **Chapter 8**

### **Randsburg Nights.**

Jed was getting tired of stealing in the same old places and doing the same old things week after week in Red Mountain, Randsburg and Johannesburg. It started to seem never ending to him and he was getting bored with the entire idea of breaking into houses. He talked to Justin about a plan he came up with to steal from the tourists and bikers that came into the town of Randsburg. He had been to the rustic little town several times and found out that during some week-ends there are up to 300 bikers and tourists sight-seeing and throughout the town.

The town was perfect for tourist because of the history of the little old town. Jed told Justin a few of the locals told him, "The tourists and bikers love to come to the old ghost town to get a glimpse into the past." There aren't any straight streets or right angle corners in the entire town and the roads just follow the lay of the land. There aren't any stop lights, gas stations or malls, just one general store. The heart of the town hadn't changed much since the first homes and buildings were built there on the side of the mountain years ago. The general store has an old fashioned soda fountain that's famous for their "Black Bart" floats. Every third weekend of September is a big draw to Randsburg for the tourists. It's Old West Days with music, hayrides, arts and crafts and so much more and it keeps them coming back year after year.

Jed told Justin, "There are tons of people that come in on ATV's and four wheel drive vehicles to have a stiff cheap drink at the two watering holes, "The Joint" or "The White House Saloon." Jed found out the two bars are open Thursday through

Sunday so those are the days Jed wanted to target them. Jed said, "Some of the tourists stay at the Randsburg Cottage Hotel/bed and breakfast and they will be easy prey for us too. We'll lie in wait until after dark and break into the cars and the four wheel drive vehicles while the people are in the bars having drinks or once they are in for the night at the hotel. There will be a lot of expensive cameras, iPads, lap top computers and other high priced toys people have now-a-days. If we do it right, we can break-into the vehicles and get some of those items before they even know what's missing." He told Justin that the last time he was in Los Angeles the "Fence" told him to steal some of the new devices people were using and he would pay big money for them. He showed Jed how he could disable the tracking devices on all them so they couldn't be traced. "We can take that stuff to Los Angeles and sell it for a lot more than some of the little stuff we've been stealing out of the houses."

Justin was very excited about the idea of doing something different. He had also gotten bored with just stealing from houses. He foolishly believed it would be easier than what they had been doing as he said, "That should be fun." Jed knew better, this was going to be harder than anything they'd ever done before because the risk of getting caught was a lot greater. He told Justin, "We'll have to do this the same way that we've always done things, slow and easy. We'll also have to be more alert than we've ever been before. I want to keep this plan between just the two of us. I don't want to let Joshua or mom know what we're up to." He figured his mom would be against the entire idea, so why tell her. Justin agreed to keep it to himself.

Jed started planning their strategy, thinking what would be the safest and most effective tactic. He went over and over everything in his head until he thought he had it pretty well planned out. Once he felt comfortable with everything, he pulled Justin aside and went over some of his ideas with him. He said, "We'll have to go up to Randsburg and scope out the area for several days before we ever steal anything. We'll need a place to hide that is close to the bars, but not so close that we'll be spotted. We'll have to hit the vehicles fast, taking anything of value as quickly as we can. We need to limit what we take to one or two items from each vehicle. This way the owners won't notice anything missing. Once we are out of the car we need to hit the lock button on the door and lock it back up just like it had never been touched. Keep an eye out for bike helmets because some of them are worth up to a few hundred dollars apiece so if we get a chance we might take a few of those too. We can get fifty to a hundred dollars for one of them but we'll only be able to carry about two at a time on the way home. If we get spotted, we'll meet up on the other side of the hill and then circle back down and around to Red Mountain and home."

Jed and Justin spent several nights going up to Randsburg after dark and scoping out the area. They snuck around the bars, being very careful not to be seen. Once they picked out their hiding spot they decided they would give it a try the following Thursday night when some of the tourists started coming in.

At first it was a little awkward for them. They had never operated under or near the lights and around people coming and going all the time. It was a little tricky to maneuver around without being seen as people came in and out of the bars. They were both a little uncomfortable with everything so it was going to take a few tries

to get used to it. People were also coming and going from their vehicles and some were walking from the bars to their homes or hotel lodging and it was busy and a little confusing. Their entire mode of operation would become a little more nerve racking than what they had ever done before. After watching and observing everything for a few hours they talked about it and knew that most importantly they'd have to be quick.

When Thursday night came, they waited until everything was clear and then they darted quickly over to one of the vehicles and used their Slim-Jim on the car lock. They slid the metal device down between the window and the frame of the door and in just a few seconds the door to the car was unlocked and they were inside getting what they could grab. They got a few items, locked the door to the car, and immediately retreated back into the darkness. They then waited several minutes and went back and hit another vehicle the same way. They did that three more times that night and got some nice items before they disappeared into their dark hiding place. From there they just waited to see what would happen next as they watched the people they had just stolen from come out of the bars and get into their vehicles and drive away. It went just like Jed had planned, the people didn't even know someone had been in their car, at least not until they started looking for what they had lost. He knew that was only their first few vehicles and he also knew it wasn't going to always be that easy. They would have to wait and see how the sheriff's department in Trona would deal with the tourist's complaints.

After that night they began to get almost everything they stole while the Tourists and other unsuspecting patrons of the two bars parked their vehicles out front and went inside for a drink. The easy ones were the Four Wheelers because sometimes they would just leave things lying on their floor boards or under the seats. They weren't thinking about getting something stolen from them as they would leave their helmets or something else of value in or on their vehicles while they went inside for a cool one. During that time Jed and Justin were raking in the cash because they were selling everything they could steal and for a good price.

One evening, while Jed and Justin were preparing to go out on a job a large group of bikers came into town after hearing about the two bars at Randsburg. They were the stereo-typical looking "Hell's Angels" type of bikers that everyone has heard about or seen. They had some pretty nice looking bikes. They were both loud, obnoxious and having a good time as they spread out and started going back and forth and drinking in "The Joint" and "The White House Saloon" bars. Some of the bikers left their helmets on their bikes not thinking it was that big of a deal in this little quiet town. Jed and Justin were just sitting in their hiding place and watching everything as it unfolded. At one point, when the bikers were all in the bars Jed and Justin took turns darting over to the bikes and stealing one of the helmets and returning to their hiding place. Once they had four helmets they figured they better not press their luck so they decided it was time to take them and head back to Red Mountain.

Just before they started to leave one of the bikers came out of the bar and noticed his helmet was missing. That's when all hell broke loose and all the half-drunk bikers came out of the bars ready to fight. Then the other three bikers noticed their helmets were also missing and the noise escalated. Once everyone was outside, they jumped on their bikes and Jed and Justin heard one of them

say. "Let's find out who took our helmets! We'll tear this town upside down until we find them." They also heard one of them say, "Let's kill the bastards when we catch them." That's when things got a little scary for Jed and Justin. They were starting to wonder if maybe they might have made a huge mistake in taking helmets in the first place.

A couple of the bikers had guns and they pointed them up in the air and fired off several rounds while they were screaming into the silent night air, "We're going to find you and kill you." The bikers started riding their bikes all over town going in between the houses and the buildings looking for the culprits. Jed and Justin watched as they kicked over mail boxes, trash cans and anything else that was in their way. They were looking in every nook and cranny in town. Justin believed it was just a matter of time before they found the two of them in their hiding place. Jed was also hoping they didn't kill some innocent person that had nothing to do with the helmets, but was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

After watching them vandalize the town for about twenty minutes, Justin peered over at Jed with a really scared look on his face and said, "Maybe we should give them back, Jed." Jed wasn't sure what they should do, he was also starting to believe the bikers might find their hiding place and then kill both of them. The bikers were tearing up the town and terrorizing all the locals as they continued to look for whoever stole the helmets. Finally Jed said to Justin, "I think putting the helmets back may not be a bad idea Justin. If we put them back we'll have to be real careful or these guys will kill us for sure. When none of them are watching for us, we'll take the helmets and put them in the middle of the street between the two bars, so that way they can find them right away."

They waited for a few minutes, when all the bikers were looking everywhere else in town for them except where they were hiding, and took the helmets and darted back into the street with them and set them down. They then ran back to their hiding place and watched to see what was going to happen next. Justin was breathing fast and hard as he said, "I hope they don't kill us, Jed." Jed told him, "Just stay put and hope that none of them spotted us." It wasn't long and one of the bikers saw the helmets in the middle of the street and soon all the bikers heard that they had been returned and they all met up at the bar area. The noise from all the bikes was so loud it was echoing down the canyon like a flood of water. By the time they returned to the bars the bikers had already caused a lot of problems for themselves because they ransacked Randsburg. They knew the sheriff's department would soon be out in full force looking for them so they regrouped and headed out of town as quickly as they could leave. A couple of them were firing off rounds from their guns and some were "whooping" at the top of their lungs as they left.

After they were gone, Jed took a deep sigh of relief as he said to Justin, "Man, I'm sure glad those guys didn't find us. They probably would've strung us up from the nearest tree and hung us like one of those old cowboys in the old days. We would've just been another casualty of this old west town." Justin was also relieved they were gone as he said, "I think they were ready to kill us. Let's don't take any more of those guy's helmets, okay, Jed?" Jed agreed as he said, "Don't worry Justin, I'm marking those off our list of things to steal."

They waited for a few weeks before they went back to the bars in Randsburg to steal anything after that experience. When they returned to the bars at Randsburg they were just scoping out the area to feel comfortable about stealing from there again. That's when they noticed there was a new girl that worked at the "The Joint." From a distance, she looked like she may be about Jed's age and she was petite, with sandy blond hair. Jed looked over at Justin as he laughed and said, "She looks like she is about my size and type." Justin laughed and replied, "I was thinking she might like me." After that they would only see her once and a while when she came out during her breaks to see what was going on outside. Jed figured she was just checking to see how many people were across the street at "The White House Saloon."

A few times they waited for the blond to get off work just so they could get a look at her. One night just before she got off work Jed told Justin. "Stay put, I just want to get a little closer and see what she really looks like." He darted quickly across the street and waited for her to get off work. He was crouching about 20 yards away in the dark where she couldn't see him. Jed was able to get a close up look at her and he figured she was about nineteen or twenty years old and she was a lot prettier than he originally thought. Once she was gone, he darted back across the street and met up with Justin. He told Justin, "She is really pretty and one of these days I'm going come up to the bar and see if I can get to know her." Justin laughed and said, "You better not, mom won't like that. She'll get mad." Jed just ignored that he said that because he'd already made up his mind that he was going to meet her someday. He was just about old enough to get in the bar but figured if nothing else he could go in and order a soda or something from her just to meet her.

As the weeks passed Jed and Justin continued to wreak havoc on the visitors to Randsburg. They were able to pull off their pilfering until they finally caught the attention of the sheriff's department in Trona. They had responded to the biker incident and to the visitors of the town that had been reporting that someone had gotten into their vehicle while they were sightseeing. This had gone on for several weeks until the sheriff department couldn't ignore it any longer. They assigned a first year rookie deputy sheriff to the case by the name of David Stokes. His job was to find out what was going on in Randsburg and to see how someone was getting into the guest's vehicles while they were visiting the town. He'd only been with the sheriff department for a little over four months but he was gung ho about his job.

As soon as Stokes was assigned to the case he went to Randsburg and started asking the locals about what they thought was going on there. He talked to the bartenders and other people at the "The Joint" and "The White House Saloon." They told him that some of the tourists and four-wheelers had reported things stolen while they were in the bar having a drink or two. No one could confirm the accusations because they never saw or heard anything themselves. Little did they all know, but they had been under surveillance from Jed and Justin and they had been stealing from the tourists for a several months. Some of the local town's people told Stokes that if the guests were losing personal belongings out of their cars, it was probably the work of the Night Crawlers. They believed they may somehow be connected to the reported thefts. Stokes had heard stories about the



Night Crawlers, but didn't know if they were true. Everyone at headquarters believed they were just a rumor that was going around town. No one had ever seen them steal anything or been able to pin point their location so they couldn't confirm if the rumors were true.

After he did all the interviews with the local town's people and some extensive investigations in the other part of the town, Stokes began to stake out the area near the two bars in Randsburg. On Thursday through Sunday nights he parked his police car down the street about two blocks away and hidden from sight. From where he was parked he could see down the narrow street where the two bars were located. He stayed there night after night for about three weeks hoping he could catch whoever was lurking in the dark shadows and put an end to their stealing.

Jed and Justin hadn't been back to Randsburg for a few weeks and because of that they didn't realize Stokes was lying in wait for them on their next trip into town. It was a quiet Friday night when they made their way back to their favorite hiding place in Randsburg. To them, it was just another night like all the rest of the nights they had been out stealing. Nothing seemed any different than before. They were going to complete their mission they had come to do and then get out of there and go home. As they sat and watched for a while, the town seemed still and a little spooky. To Jed it felt like some of the ghosts of the past were still walking the streets on that dark and quiet night. It seemed like an especially deserted place to be, except for the visitors that were coming and going from the "The Joint" and the "White House Saloon." Jed thought, "Why would anyone want to be in this lonely little town this time of night?"

It was around nine thirty that night when Jed and Justin made their move and crept swiftly out of their hiding spot. They looked up and down the street as they quickly darted across the street to one of the parked cars. By that time Stokes had been staking out the area for so long that when he first saw them cross the street he couldn't believe his eyes. He had already started thinking that maybe all the complaints about the thieves in Randsburg weren't really true. He had convinced himself that people were getting things stolen out of their cars somewhere else and trying to blame it on Randsburg. When he saw them with his own eyes they were almost like a blur as he watched them dart across the street. He instantly realized all the reports were true and knew they were the ones he was waiting for. He said, "Holy crap, I can't believe my eyes, there they are right in front of me." He jumped into motion, started his car and unconsciously flipped the switch for the flashing red lights. Jed and Justin instantly saw the flashing lights and immediately darted back across the road to their hiding spot. Stokes saw them dart back across the street as soon as he turned on his lights. He went flying up to where he had last seen them cross the street and his car came to a screeching halt. He grabbed his flashlight with gun drawn and headed in their direction.

By the time Stokes had made it to where he last saw them, Jed and Justin had left their hiding area and were heading up and over the hill. They split up just like they had planned earlier and were fading into the darkness by the time Stokes made it near their hiding place. As Stokes shined his flashlight toward the hills he caught just a glimpse of one of them as he pursued him on foot up the hill as far as he was willing to go. They were already on the other side of the hill by the time

Stokes had only gotten about half way up. He knew he wasn't going find them in the darkness all by himself so he stopped. He was huffing and puffing as he said, ok, that's as far as I can go. I'm not chasing these guys on foot and all over these stupid hills. He also figured if they had guns or other weapons the two of them had the advantage over him in the darkness.

Once they were on the other side of the mountain Justin was winded from the chase and had to stop and catch his breath. He ducked behind a group of rocks for just a moment as he started taking slow deep breaths. Not fully aware of what he'd done, he had stopped right next to either Mojave or western diamond back Rattle Snake. He heard the rattles of the snake just about the same time it bit him. He and Jed had heard the Western Diamond Back was one of the deadliest venomous snakes of North America and very prevalent in the desert. They had been warned about them by their dad and had even seen them before but always stayed clear of them. Now Justin had just been bitten by one of them.

Justin could feel the sting of the snake's fangs as it bit him in the right calve just below the knee. He let out a yelp, like a dog when it gets kicked by someone, and he instantly jumped away from the snake in pain. He immediately knew what had happened and yelled to Jed to let him know that he had gotten bitten by the rattle snake. Jed quickly made his way over to Justin and saw what happened. He said, "Oh crap! Where did it get you?" Justin pointed to his calve muscle and said, "Right here, and it burns." Jed checked to make sure they were clear of the snake and took Justin by the arm and started leading him down the mountain toward home. As they started down the hill he said, "We've got to get you home as soon as we can but don't run. It'll just make the poison get into your blood stream faster."

Even though Stokes lost Jed and Justin in the darkness, he was not giving up his chase. He returned to his car and started driving in the direction where he'd last seen them go up toward the hills. He was driving in all areas that he could reach with his car and shining the car lights and his flashlight all over mountains looking for them. He continued his search for quite a while but never saw them again. Even though Stokes wasn't able to catch the Night Crawlers that night, he was one of the only ones that had ever gotten a glimpse of them. Because he had actually seen them cross the road to their intended target and chased them, Stokes' boss was going to make him stay out at Randsburg for several more weeks just trying to see if he could catch them.

Jed wasn't worrying so much about Stokes at that point, he knew they had a much bigger problem on their hands, and that was keeping Justin alive. Time would now determine if Justin lived or died. Jed knew he had to get Justin back as soon as he could so they could get him to the hospital in Ridgecrest. He said to Justin, "Just try and relax and slow down your breathing and I will help you back to the house." They headed back down the hill to Red Mountain and while on their way back Justin asked Jed, "Do you think I'm going to die, Jed?" Jed was scared for him but knew he had to keep him calm. He lied and said, "Nah, it's just a little old snake bite. You're going to be fine once we get you to the hospital." Jed knew in his heart that he wasn't sure if Justin would live or die, they still had a thirty minute drive to Ridgecrest once they got home. He knew time would be of the essence once he got Justin back home or he possibly could die, but he wasn't going to tell Justin that.

It had already been over thirty minutes since he was bitten when they finally made it home. Justin's leg was already starting to swell and he was in a lot of pain by then. Jed immediately went into Lynn's room and woke her up. He told her what had happened to Justin and that it had been about thirty minutes since the bite. She was startled and upset but quickly jumped out of bed and threw on some clothes. She had Jed grab a sweatshirt from Justin's room and she grabbed a towel and got it wet. She threw it to Justin and said, "Put on the sweat shirt and wipe the charcoal off your face while we are on our way to the hospital."

Lynn told Jed to stay with Joshua while she took Justin to the hospital because she didn't want to wake Joshua and have to worry about him wanting to go with her. Jed didn't really want to leave Justin because he was scared for him and wanted to be there with him just in case he didn't make it. He also knew his mom was right. She didn't need to take Joshua with her because he would just be in the way.

On the way to the hospital Lynn asked Justin how he had gotten bit by the snake. She said, "You guys have been all over these hills and never gotten bitten by the snakes." She knew there were rattlesnakes around the area but they avoided town most of the time. Filling a little pressured from his mom, Justin then spilled the beans and told her what he and Jed had been doing at Randsburg. He told her about being chased by the Sheriff deputy before he was bitten. He said, "We usually hide around the Yucca plants but this time I hid in some rocks just to catch my breath and that's when the snake bit me." Now the pain was becoming a little unbearable and that's when he asked Lynn, "It hurts real bad mom, do you think I'm going to die?" She looked over at him with a worried look on her face and replied, "No, you're not going to die. We just have to get you to the hospital as quickly as we can so they can get some anti-venom in you." By the time she made it to Ridgecrest she was going almost one hundred miles per hour in the old truck.

Once at the hospital, she rushed Justin into the emergency waiting room and told them that he had been bitten by a rattlesnake about an hour earlier. They immediately rushed him into emergency room and started giving him intravenous (I.V.'s) fluids. It took several hours of emergency anti-venom treatment before they had him stabilized. Once they had him stabilized and out of immediate danger they checked him into the hospital.

The entire time Lynn and Justin were gone, Jed was extremely anxious and upset as he paced back and forth across the living room floor. His mind was going crazy as he wondered what was going on. His mind kept expecting the worst. As he paced the floor he was praying that Justin was okay. He was also blaming himself for Justin being in that predicament. He thought, if I would've just stuck to stealing from the houses and stayed away from the cars none of this would have happened. At that very moment in his life, he had never felt so alone. He and Justin were very attached to each other since they were born. They had done everything together and even worked as a team before their dad died and now there was a chance he was going to lose Justin too. He made a promise to himself, if Justin lives we'll go back to just stealing from the neighborhoods and leave the Randsburg bars alone. "It's just not worth all the trouble it has caused."

It wasn't until the late morning hours when Lynn finally returned home and she didn't have Justin with her. Jed thought she looked ragged and beat up and the

same way she looked when Sherman had died. With tears in his eyes and fearing the worst, Jed asked, "Well, did he make it? Is he alive?" Lynn looked at him angrily and replied, "Yes, thank the good Lord, he's alive. We got him there just in time. The doctors figured it was one of those western diamond back rattlers that bit him from the damage it caused to the tissue in his leg. The doctors said he may lose his leg or the use of it but right now it's just too early to tell." Jed wasn't happy to hear about the leg damage, but he was relieved that Justin was alive. For Jed, that was the most important news he'd heard.

Lynn then informed Jed that Justin had told her all about what they had been doing in Randsburg. He told her about the stealing from the tourist cars and how they were making a lot of money off of what they had stolen. She had an angry look on her face as she said, "That was very foolish and it was careless of you to get your brother involved with that hair brained idea." Jed was also angry with himself, and embarrassed that his mom had found out that way. He said, "I know, Mom, but it was a quick and easy way to make more money and it worked for us." She told Jed that he had to promise her that if Justin did recover fully, and started helping him again, he would never go to the bars at Randsburg and steal from the cars again. That was easy for Jed because he had already made up his mind he wasn't going to go back there and steal from that place again. He very quickly agreed to her simple demand and promised her he wouldn't go back there again.

It was about a week later, when Justin finally got out of the hospital. The doctor told Lynn he saved Justin's leg but he had lost some muscle tissue. The doctor also said Justin was going to be laid up for a few months just recuperating. Other than that, he was going to be okay and probably wouldn't even have a limp.

Not having Justin work with him was going to leave Jed in an unfamiliar predicament. He would have to go out alone at nights and do the break-ins by himself until Justin was fully recovered. Jed had already accepted his fate. He felt like that was his just reward for putting Justin in that position in the first place. He was just happy Justin pulled through the entire ordeal and was alive.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Chelsea.**

Jed had a lot of time on his hands while Justin was home recuperating. He didn't like the idea of stealing things by himself without a lookout or companion, but he liked the fact that there wouldn't be someone with him that he had to be responsible for. He soon would get used to, and even like, his new found freedom.

Now that he was operating all alone, one of the things he was going to do was go to the "The Joint" in Randsburg and meet the pretty blond waitress he'd been thinking about. Ever since the first time he'd seen her, he hadn't been able to get her out of his mind. He wasn't going to tell anyone about his plans to meet her. He knew he would be better off if he kept it to himself.

Jed pretended that he was going out on a mission to scope out the next house he was going to break into. Instead, after dark, he headed up the road to the "The Joint." He took an extra nice shirt with him that he could change into before he went inside the bar. Just before he went inside, he combed his hair back so that it wasn't flat from the hat he'd been wearing and made sure he looked presentable.

The buildings along the street where the Joint was located all have false fronts and an uneven sidewalk. The front of the Joint has an old rock wall, with whitewashed stucco in the back of it. There's an old, neon sign hanging from the front of the building that says "The Joint." Jed had never been inside a bar before so he didn't know what to expect. He slowly opened the door and peeked inside. As he looked around, it was dark and cool just like any other old bar. It had a few pool tables and serving tables with chairs scattered around the room. Along the wall there were maps to rock hound sites, gold mines, pictures and newspaper clippings from the better days of the little town. It had a wooden floor and as he stepped inside it echoed with every footstep he took. He felt like everyone in the bar was looking at him as he took each step. Once he was close to the bar he saw that it had bar stools to sit and have a drink. It looked like a few of the people at the bar were regulars because they were having a conversation with the bartender. He would soon learn "The Joint" was more than just a bar to all the locals, it was the heart of the city.

When he walked toward the bar, he was met by the pretty blond waitress. When she first approached him she asked him if there was anything she could help him with. He was so nervous that the first thing he asked her was where the bathroom was located. She smiled and pointed to a tiny hall that led down into the back of the long, narrow building. When he came out of the bathroom he went over and sat alone at one of the tables.

The blond came over and threw a menu down for him to look at as she said, "You find it ok?" Jed was trying to think of something to say to her and his mind wasn't thinking about the bathroom as he replied, "Find what?" She looked at him and chuckled, "The bathroom silly." A little embarrassed and red-faced, he looked at her and replied, "Oh that! Yes, I did, thank you." She could tell he was nervous and wasn't sure what he wanted to order so she said, "Let me know when you're ready and I'll come over and take your order. Jed looked up at her and said, "Yea, thank you, I'll let you know." He picked up the menu and pretended to look it over.

While he sat there looking past the menu he could see she was talking to the bartender and she kept looking over at him and smiling. After a few minutes, he motioned for her to come over. She quickly stopped what she was talking about and came straight over. He told her, "You know I'm not real hungry, can I just have a large coke and sit here for a little while." She replied, "Sure, sweetie, you can sit there as long as you like." She chuckled and said, "There's no charge for that." She then asked him, "Are you new in town?" He told her, "I live in Red Mountain, but this is the first time I've ever been inside the bar up here at Randsburg." He then told her, "I've lived in Red Mountain for the past four or five years with my brothers and mom. I can't remember exactly because I've lost track of time. Where do you live," he asked. She very cautiously replied, "I live nearby in Jo-Burg and I've been here all her life. I'm surprised I've never seen you in high school or around town." He smiled and said, "I didn't go to high school around

here and I don't get out much. By the way, I'm Jed Bailey, what's your name?" She blushed a little as she replied, "Chelsea King." They both immediately felt the attraction they had for each other and when she wasn't busy waiting on customers, she would come over and sit down and talk to him. Jed stayed a couple of hours and just visited with her off and on until the place started getting a little too busy. As he got ready to leave, he smiled at her and said, "Thank you for the conversation Chelsea King." On his way out of the door she said, "You come back and visit me again soon. Ok, Jed Bailey."

When Jed left "The Joint" he felt like he was on cloud nine. He wasn't high from any booze he'd consumed, he was high on Chelsea King. He felt that was much better than any liquor he could have ever had. On his way home all he could think about was her, as he thought to himself, "she's about the sweetest girl I've ever met in my life. She's a real keeper." He'd soon forgotten all about the bad experiences he and Justin had at Randsburg. Now there was something in Randsburg that made him want to keep coming back. He really liked talking with Chelsea and knew that he wanted to get to know her better.

When he got home, he couldn't seem to stop thinking about how beautiful and sweet she was. He'd never had those feelings of butterflies in his stomach like when he was around her. That feeling was driving him crazy.

Jed could hardly wait to see Chelsea again, he was like a kid that couldn't wait to open his Christmas presents on Christmas day. It was no big surprise to the bartender or Chelsea when he became a frequent visitor to "The Joint." Before long Jed and Chelsea were very close friends and Jed loved to sit and talk to her when she wasn't busy. Jed was so smitten he would spend hours watching her and waiting for any free time Chelsea had to talk.

As they got to know each other better, she told him that she had two younger brothers and lived with them and her dad. She told him her mother had passed away from cancer when she was nine years old and her dad became an alcoholic soon after her mother's death. She told Jed, "Since my mom died, life has been pure hell for me and my brothers. I gave up begging my dad to stop drinking years ago. When I was younger, I would try to reason with him and tell him that my brothers needed him to stay sober and help take care of us. I would pour out his liquor or hide it from him when he was passed out. Anything to get him to stop. I tried everything but nothing ever seemed to work with him. It seemed like the more I tried with him the worse he got. I feel like he is just hell bent on destroying himself and maybe taking everyone with him." Jed told her that he could relate to her misery because his mom and dad both had a problem with drugs, but that was all he would say about them. He didn't feel like he knew her well enough yet to tell her everything about his parents and their problems.

Chelsea continued to tell Jed, "As I got older my father became even more verbally abusive to me and my brothers when he would get drunk. He would say cruel and hurtful things to me and my brothers and wouldn't remember any of it the next day when he woke up. When I was younger I didn't realize that it was just the booze talking and I took everything he said personal. Even though he stays drunk a lot and is verbally abusive, he has never become physically abusive to any of us. If he had, I would've taken my brothers and left. I don't know where I would've gone, but I know that's where I'd draw the line."

Now that my brothers have gotten older they've started copying my dad's behavior and they sometimes say mean, hurtful things to me. It's mostly when they get mad at me. Sometimes my dad gets so drunk that he'll come home and come into my bedroom and try to crawl in bed with me while I'm sleeping. When he gets like that I just have to take my feet and physically kick him out of the bed and onto the floor. Usually by then, he will just lay there passed out snoring on the floor while I go sleep on the couch. When he wakes up the next day he always wonders how got on the floor in my bedroom. Once I tell him what happened, he apologizes to me. He always swears to me it will never happen again. Of course it doesn't stop him from doing it again because he couldn't keep that promise to me. He never stop drinking."

Jed was shocked that her father was such a bad drunk and that he had treated Chelsea that way. He told her he'd never been around anyone like that before and he felt bad for her. She told Jed she was lucky to get the job at "The Joint" when she turned eighteen. She said, "I used to go to "The Joint" to get my dad when he was drunk and I made friends with the bartender/owner. She felt sorry for me, and knew that I needed to get out of the house to get away from my brothers and my dad, so she gave me the job. By then, I was tired of all my dad's drinking and my brothers' attitudes. I knew they all could take care of themselves just fine and really didn't need me as much. My dad has always made me clean the house, do the laundry and do all the shopping for everyone. I had become the mother figure when Mom died but I believed I had become nothing more than a slave and got tired of it.

"When my dad first found out I was working at "The Joint" he was drunk. He went to the bar and tried to drag me out by the arm and make me go home. Some of the patrons of the bar came to my rescue and had to physically remove him. They threatened to call the sheriff's department, but that didn't work, so they had to drag him out of the bar to get him to leave. There were times he would be seen by some of the locals in town passed out in between houses or in a gutter next to the road. He is just pathetic when he is drunk and I don't know how long he can live like that."

Jed told Chelsea, "I live with my mom and two brothers. Both of my brothers have physical and mental defects from the drugs abused by my mom during her pregnancies." Because of their similar lives Jed and Chelsea felt like they had a special bond with each other. They felt like they had a life that was not one they would have chosen for themselves, but one they were stuck with for now.

No matter how much Jed told Chelsea, the one thing he promised himself he wasn't going to tell Chelsea was that he and Justin were the ones the people in Red Mountain were calling the Night Crawlers.

Jed started spending more and more time with Chelsea. He would walk her home from work when she couldn't get a ride, always stealing a kiss, just before he left. As time went by Chelsea and Jed became more than just friends and they started to fall in love. During that time, Jed also got to know her brothers pretty well. They were fifteen and sixteen years old at the time and they were easy for Jed to talk to. Jed also made sure they didn't say mean or cruel things to Chelsea when he was around.

When it came to Chelsea's dad, he was another story. He was just like Chelsea had said, he wasn't a bad guy when he was sober, but was impossible to be around when he was drunk. Jed tried to stay away from her house when her dad was around. He was always confrontational when he was drinking and Jed didn't want to deal with him in that condition. Chelsea always said, "You can't talk to him or reason with him. He is extremely verbally abusive to anyone around him when he's drunk." When Jed saw that he was drunk he would try and avoid him and just stay out of his way.

It was during one of those drunken binges when Jed was over visiting Chelsea. Her dad came home drunk and was out of control. It was too late for Jed to get out of the house so he just sat on the couch trying not to engage him in the wrong way. It didn't work. Chelsea's dad approached him and got in his face when he told Jed he didn't like him hanging out with his daughter. He was stumbling around as he raised his voice and said to Chelsea, "That guy is no good for you and you're just wasting your time with him. He's nothing more than a loser and will never amount to anything. He's just like all the rest of the losers in these little hell hole towns. If you end up with him, you'll be stuck here the rest of your life."

Jed tried hard to ignore him, but the more he tried the more Chelsea's father continued his verbal attack. It was when he told Jed that Chelsea would never end up with a low life punk like him that he'd had more than he could take. He couldn't keep his mouth shut any longer as he said, "Look who's talking! You're nothing but a worthless lazy old drunk who's verbally abusive to his kids." When Chelsea's dad heard those words he got angry and went after Jed, trying to fist fight him. Chelsea was trying to stop him but he wasn't paying any attention to her as he pushed her aside. As he came at Jed swinging his arms, Jed tackled him and pushed him face down on the floor. Even if he would've been a good fighter, the booze had already taken away all his strength and ability to fight. Jed grabbed his arms and pulled them behind his back and just held him there as he sat on top of him. Her father was in a position where he couldn't move as Jed continued to hold him down. The entire time Chelsea's dad had tried to attack him, Jed never punched him, or even tried to hurt him in any way. He just thought the entire ordeal was sad, pathetic and totally uncalled for.

Chelsea went over to Jed while he was sitting there on top of her dad wondering what he should do next. She put her hand on Jed's shoulder and said, "Jed, I think it would be better if you just left for now, I don't want to see you two end up hurting each other." She wasn't worried as much about Jed as she was her dad. She knew he was too drunk to fight back. Jed knew she was right as he slowly let go of her dad and backed away. He wasn't sure what her dad was going to do when he let him go but, fortunately, he just laid there on the floor and passed out. Jed wasn't going to stick around and see if he woke up and went crazy again so he grabbed his coat on the way out. As he left, Chelsea told him she would talk to him the next day at "The Joint." They kissed each other good night and Jed left. On his way home he thought to himself, "that was a little crazy. Chelsea's right, her dad is a terrible drunk!"

A few days' later, when Jed was at "The Joint," Chelsea and Jed couldn't help but laugh about the entire encounter with her dad. Chelsea had warned Jed in advance about him so Jed knew it was just the booze talking and he didn't take



anything her dad said about him personal. He laughed and said, "It's no big deal. I already forgot about the entire thing."

Jed and Chelsea talked about what life may be like if they weren't stuck in the situations they were in with their families. They knew it was just talk because neither of them couldn't do anything different with their lives under the present situations. The mere thought of a different life was just a fleeting fantasy to both of them. The one thing they were sure of, and that was they knew they loved each other and nothing could change that. Jed would say to Chelsea before he left to go back home, "Maybe someday we can escape this town." She would always smile and reply, "Yea, maybe someday."

## **Chapter 10**

### **Justin and Joshua come to the Rescue.**

It was a Saturday morning and Jed had to take one of his trips to Los Angeles to get drugs for Lynn. He went through his normal routine, but when he got there he wasn't able to make contact with the usual drug dealer where he got the drugs. He found out the dealer had gotten picked up by the police for selling drugs and thrown in jail. Jed now had a big problem because he had to find a new drug contact fast and get the drugs he needed for his mom. He wasn't really sure what to do so he started asking around to find another dealer. He was having a hard time finding one that trusted him. They were all afraid he may be an undercover narc or have some other kind of police connection. Since he wasn't immediately able to make the contact he had to spend the night and try to see if he could make a connection the next day. He knew Lynn would be upset that he wasn't back when he was supposed to be, but he knew she would be even more upset if he didn't come back with her drugs.

He rented a cheap motel in the bad part of Los Angeles for the night. When he checked into the motel he asked the motel clerk where he could get a burger. The clerk told him there was a McDonalds about five blocks from the motel and pointed him in the direction. Jed thanked him for the room and the information before he left. He didn't have a suitcase or anything else with him to put in the room so he headed straight for the McDonalds.

While on his way there, he was met by several girls who approached him and asked him if he wanted company for the night. At first he was amused by their bold approach because he'd never been around girls like that before. He didn't know they would approach you right on the street and try to sell you sex. Although he was intrigued by the offer, he only had eyes for Chelsea back at Red Mountain and so he just thanked them for their offer. He stopped and talked to one of the girls and he asked her about how he could score some drugs. She looked at him and said, "You aint no cop are you?" Jed replied, "No, I'm not a cop. I'm just trying to buy some drugs for my mom. How do I know you're not an undercover police woman trying to frame me?" She laughed out loud and said,

“Honey, do I look like the “po-po” to you? Jed didn’t know what to say and she finally realized he wasn’t a cop. She told him, “There are guys selling different stuff on most of the street corners. You just have to keep an eye out for them and be cautious how you approach them.” He thanked her for her time and she said, “Are you sure you don’t have time for a little fun.” He looked back as he walked away and said, “No Thank you, but thanks for the help.”

He headed in the direction the hooker told him to go and he saw guys buying and guys selling drugs all along the street just like she said. Some were very discrete and others were obvious. He made his move and went up to one of them and asked if he knew his old drug dealer. He gave the guy his dealers name quickly told the guy that he had been getting drugs from him for years for his mom. He wasn’t sure if this guy was an undercover policeman or not, but he had to take a chance. They exchanged conversation for a few minutes and after a while the dealer felt comfortable enough to give Jed the name and phone number he needed. Once he had the information about the new dealer, he went back to the hotel and called him and made arrangement to meet with him the next day. By noon the next day, met with the dealer and was finally able to get all the drugs his mom needed. Unfortunately, he wasn’t going to be able to make it home until late that evening.

Lynn had used up all of her drugs a few days before Jed left to Los Angeles and was starting to have withdrawals. She was sweating and pacing the floor, wondering what had happened to him by the time he got home.

When he walked in the door Lynn was very agitated and quick-tempered with him. She had only recently started losing her patience and getting irritable about little things Jed and the boys said or did. She had never been like that with them before so Jed knew it must be the drugs that was causing her to become that way. He knew that her drug addiction was getting worse and she needed more and more drugs to sustain the same high she was used to. He and Justin were having to work extra hard at stealing what they had to have, just to make sure they made enough money for her drug habit.

Before he even had a chance to tell her what had happened in Los Angeles, she started reprimanding him like he was just a little boy for not getting the drugs to her sooner. Jed was emotionally exhausted and sleepy. He wasn’t in the mood to try to explain everything to her if she wasn’t willing to listen. He especially wasn’t ready for her to come down on him as hard as she did. He felt like all he ever did was try and make sure she got her drugs and to keep her happy. Now she was treating him like everything bad in her life was his fault. When she jumped him this time he was irritable and frustrated at what he had gone through in order to get the drugs in the first place. She hurt his feelings and he took her scolding personal as he became defensive toward her. He felt bad that he didn’t get home sooner with the drugs but he couldn’t help it. When she yelled at him this time, it was more than he could take and he yelled back at her as he said, “I’m sick of you and you’re stupid drug habit. I can’t take it anymore. I can’t deal with you losing your temper and blowing up at every little thing I do.”

Lynn wasn’t very sympathetic to what he was saying and seemed to ignore everything he was saying. After several minutes with no positive response from her, he saw that the conversation was going nowhere. She wasn’t listening to

anything he said. That's when he said to her, "Mom, I'm sick of this. I just need to get away for a day or two to think and clear my head." She was in such a hurry to get the drugs in her body that she just wanted him out of her room. She didn't care what it took to get him out. She told him, "Go ahead and do whatever you think it is you need to do. I don't care, just leave." She wasn't thinking clearly. She had no idea, and at that moment didn't care, how she would get her drugs if Jed left for good and didn't come back. She was just thinking about what she wanted and needed at that moment. Jed couldn't deal with her attitude as he said, "Fine, then that's what I'll do. I'll be back in a few days. That'll give you time to think about things and cool down a little too." She just waived her hand at him as if to dismiss him from her company. In his heart, Jed knew that all she wanted, was for him to get out of room so she could do her drugs. He was starting to really become concerned about his mom's addiction, more than anything else. It was getting to the point where her addiction was almost out of control and he knew there was nothing he could do to stop it or to help her control it.

Before Jed left, he went in to talk to Justin to let him know that he was leaving for a few days to clear his head. He told Justin what happened in Los Angeles and how hard it was for him to get her the drugs she needed. Justin heard the entire fight between Jed and his mom and he was also upset when he asked Jed, "Are you going to come back?" Jed went over and put his arms around him and hugged him as he replied, "Of course I am! Don't worry, Justin, I'll be back in a day or so. I just can't take her attitude toward me right now." Justin had tears in his eyes as Jed went out to the truck and left.

Jed wasn't going to go to Los Angeles like he had told Justin, he was going to go see Chelsea and spend the night on her couch. He just needed to spend some time away from home and that environment and talk to Chelsea. He needed to get everything off his chest and he didn't want Justin knowing he was at Chelsea's because he didn't want Justin to bother him while he was there.

When Jed left her room, Lynn was shaking so bad that she didn't waste another minute as she hurriedly took the drugs. She was needing the drugs so bad that by the time she got them she took a little more than she probably should have. After several minutes she lay down on the bed and tried to relax as the drugs started to take effect. It wasn't long and she wasn't feeling any pain. As she lay there, she was now feeling bad about arguing with Jed and making him feel terrible. She cried softly to herself because she knew it was too late to say she was sorry. Jed had already left and the damage had been done. She would now have to wait until he returned to say she was sorry for treating him the way she did.

Later that night, Justin was feeling a little sad that Jed left and wanted to talk to his mom about the fight between the two of them. He went into her bedroom and that's when he found her lying on the bed, having convulsions. She looked almost like she was having an epileptic seizure, but Justin didn't know what to do about it. Her body was stiff and jerking and she was shaking uncontrollably. She also had foam coming out of the corner of her mouth and it was running down her cheek. Justin didn't know what was going on and he thought that maybe she didn't get the drugs in time or it wasn't enough. He put his arms around her tried to hold onto her body to stop her convulsions, but it didn't help. He shook her several times to see if he could wake her or snap her out of it, but there was still

no response from her. He had seen her like that once before when Jed told him she was having bad drug withdrawals and just needed to take some drugs and it would fix her. He thought that may be what was wrong with her now, she just needed more drugs.

Justin was so scared that he ran to the only other person in the house and that was Joshua. He brought him back into the room with him and by the time they made it to her room her condition was still the same. Joshua went over to her and he was hunched over her bed and crying. Justin was running back and forth in the room trying to figure out what to do. Justin told Joshua to run and get a wet towel and bring it back to him while he was thinking what to do for her. Once Joshua brought the towel to him, Justin wiped off the foam from Lynn's mouth and face. He told Joshua, "The last time I saw mom like this Jed gave her some drugs and she was okay in a few minutes." Justin wasn't really sure what Jed did, but in his simple way of thinking, thought he had put the drugs in her mouth and gave her a drink of water. Joshua said, "Then let's give her some more drugs." Justin looked over at the night stand next to the bed and she still had her drugs lying there. He wasn't sure how much to give her so he took the remainder of her stash, thinking more would probably be better than not enough, and stuck all the drugs in her mouth. He pushed them down her throat with his fingers and gave her a small amount of water so she would swallow and help the drugs the rest of the way down. Once he did that Justin turned to Joshua said, "That should work. She should be okay pretty soon."

They sat on the bed next to Lynn just waiting for her to get better. Unfortunately, what they expected never happened. Justin didn't realize it, but what he had done was given his mom a fatal over-dose of drugs.

A few hours went by and nothing was happening with her as Joshua crawled up next to Lynn and lay there with her. He wrapped his arms around her and cried softly to himself. He knew that something was terribly wrong. Justin also knew something was wrong as he crawled up next to her and lay there beside her and Joshua. As they laid there they were still hoping that she would snap out of it soon and then everything would be okay again.

Justin said to Joshua, "Maybe all she needs to do is sleep for a while." Joshua replied, "Yea, let's let her sleep." At some point in the late morning hours they fell asleep while they were lying next to her. They woke to the barking of Brutus and Sophie and Justin jumped up to see if it might have been Jed returning home. He found out it was only a car that had passed by their house. Justin instantly starting checking on his mom as he tried frantically to wake her once again. Nothing he did was working, as she just lay there cold and silent.

After several minutes Justin listened for her breathing, but didn't hear anything. He felt her chest to see if anything was happening, but it wasn't. With tears in his eyes, he looked over at Joshua and said, "I think she's dead, Joshua." They both broke down and started crying. They were completely distraught and Joshua was crying as he asked Justin, "What should we do?" Justin was also crying and replied, "We'll leave her like this until Jed gets home. He'll know what to do."

Jed spent the night at Chelsea's house, but the next day he was feeling guilty about fighting with his mom. By mid-day he decided to head back down to Red

Mountain and see if his mom was awake. He had made up his mind he was going to apologize to her for yelling at her. Even though he felt like a lot of the problem with the two of them, was her fault. It was the first time he'd ever raised his voice to his mom and he was feeling bad about it. He didn't like the way it made him feel so he just wanted to clear the air with her. He didn't want her upset with him.

When he got home he heard the wailing from Joshua and Justin and knew instantly something was wrong with their mom. He ran into her bedroom where the sound was coming from and saw Lynn just lying there lifeless in the bed. Justin and Joshua were lying next to her crying.

Justin looked up at Jed and said, "I haven't been able to get her to wake up since last night. I thought she was going through withdrawals, like she did before, so I gave her the rest of her drugs. I thought it would help her. They didn't help because I think she's dead. She's just like dad was when he died." When Justin told him about the drugs Jed knew instantly what was wrong with her. He said, "Oh, God! Justin! You didn't!" He went over to her body and she was starting to get stiff and cold and Jed knew she was gone. He checked for a pulse just to make sure but there wasn't one. Once he knew she was dead he just lay down next to her and put his arms around her and cried. He said, "I'm sorry Mom for getting mad at you, for yelling at you and leaving angry. I love you and I'm sorry." He knew she couldn't hear him, but he needed to say those things to her to at least make himself feel better.

After what seemed like an eternity to Justin and Joshua, Jed got up and went over to them and put his arms around them and they all cried together. As Justin and Joshua lay down next to her once more, Jed sat on the edge of the bed. He was trying to figure out what they were going to do next. He knew their mom would want to be buried next to their dad so that was what they were going to do. As he sat there a thousand things were running through his head. He knew he would now have to be in charge of paying all the bills, getting food and clothing for the three of them. He would have to make all the decisions in order to be sure that the three of them were able to stay together.

The one thing he knew for certain was that he wasn't going to let the Child Protection Agency come and get Justin or Joshua as long as he could take care of them and as long as he was alive. He also figured that if they didn't report her death to the Welfare Department then they would just keep putting the monthly check into her checking account month after month. If he had to he would sign her name on everything just like she was still alive. As long as they could get the welfare money Jed knew they would have enough money to pay for the food, clothing and the bills just like they had been doing. He had never realized how lucky the three of them had it when their mom took care of everything. Now all the responsibilities were on his shoulders and he shivered about her death and the thought of it all.

He waited for a while and then told Justin and Joshua that they all needed to go out back and build another box for their mom and dig another hole next to their dad. The thought of burying their mom sent Joshua into hysterical sobbing. Jed had to wrap his arms around him and try to comfort him like Lynn used to do. He said, "I think building the box and digging the hole will help all of us to try and get our minds off mom's death. When we're all ready we'll wrap a blanket around her

and then put her in the box and bury her. We'll leave her there until all of us agree to put her in the ground." Joshua and Justin liked the idea of it taking some time to bury her as they all headed for the back yard.

Before they buried Lynn, Jed tried to remember the words to the Lord's Prayer that Lynn had said over their dad. He couldn't remember all the words, but he did the best he could. It was good enough for Justin and Joshua and that's what mattered to him. Each of them said a few good things about Lynn and told her they loved her before they started putting the dirt over the box. They built the same type of familiar cross they had built for their dad and placed it on her grave once it was all filled in. It was a slow process and Jed wasn't pushing them to make it go any faster. For each of them, the entire time just seemed like things were in slow motion. They had all just gotten over the pain from the loss of their dad and now their mother was gone. They each felt all alone in the world except for the fact that they still had each other.

It was about two weeks after Lynn's death that Jed told Justin and Joshua they needed to go to Ridgecrest with him to do some grocery shopping. Jed told Joshua he could bring Mister along if he wanted. He told them they needed to get some food and other things they had to have in town. On the way to Ridgecrest Jed had a serious talk with them. He told them, "We can't tell anyone what had happened to mom. If the law finds out she died then they'll come and take the two of you away and put you in foster care. Joshua, you would have to give up Mister because they wouldn't let you keep him with you. If anyone asks us what happened to our mom we'll just have to tell them that she went to Tennessee to visit some of her family that lives there." He looked over at Joshua and asked him if he understood what he was saying. Joshua didn't look up as he held his head down and said, "Yes, Jed, I understand." Jed knew he wouldn't say anything to anyone because he knew, that no matter what, Joshua didn't want to lose Mister.

They made sure they went to a different grocery store than the one Lynn used to go to when she went into Ridgecrest. Jed didn't want anyone recognizing any of the three of them and asking any questions about their mom.

It was a completely different experience for Jed than anything else he had ever done as he got what they needed and paid the clerk. He had never been shopping for groceries before and the entire process of shopping was really weird to him.

Jed never said anything to Justin or Joshua about his feelings, but the huge pressure on him to get Lynn the drugs was no longer there. He didn't have to ever deal with getting drugs for his mom or anyone else ever again. He also knew he didn't have to break into houses anymore and steal things unless it was something that he, Justin or Joshua really wanted or needed. Just the weight of that pressure being lifted from him was now going to make his life a lot better.

## **Chapter 11**

### **Justin's Obsession.**

After Lynn's death Jed started spending more time with Chelsea and Justin got restless and bored just sitting around the house. He lost contact with what Jed was doing and he didn't like just hanging out with Joshua. Now he felt trapped and alone. He couldn't quite understand why Jed wanted to spend more time with Chelsea than with him. When Jed was home it was like he was never there because all he did was sleep most of the day. They had done things together since they were little and now Justin was feeling a little abandoned and dejected.

Jed tried to explain to Justin and Joshua about his relationship with Chelsea but they didn't understand it. Jed also tried to tell Justin and Joshua they had to stay inside the property when he wasn't home. He tried to scare them by telling them that someone from the C.P.S. would find out they were living at home without a mother and father and put them away in a foster home or orphanage. Joshua was always preoccupied because he spent most of his time working and being with Mister. All Jed had to tell him was that if he got put away he would lose Mister and that seemed like enough to keep him inside, at least temporarily. Justin's situation was a lot different than Joshua's, he'd been outside the property for several years breaking into houses with his dad and Jed. He wasn't afraid to leave the compound and he knew how to sneak around without being seen.

Once Jed would leave to go see Chelsea, Justin started going out at night by himself. At first it was just for something to do because he was bored and lonely. He wasn't stealing anything, he'd just gotten used to being out on the dark nights and loved the freedom it gave him.

He'd become more interested in girls as he got older but his physical appearance and lack of the social skills always kept him away from them. He became shy and introverted when he got around them. His interest in girls soon became overwhelming and it led him into the hidden world of becoming a peeping tom. He would get sexually excited just from the mere thought of watching women who were getting undressed. He loved the fact that he could observe them from outside the privacy of their own home, without being seen by them. He soon started to go out on his quest to observe the women while they were getting undressed. The women were supposed to be safe, but now he was stealing that safety and security from them instead of their personal belongings.

Justin remembered the two school girls that lived in Red Mountain, he had scared, while they were walking to school. Those two girls soon became an obsession with him and he couldn't get them out his head. Just the thought of seeing one of them undress in front of him made him extremely excited. Once he made up his mind they were his targets, he started going from house to house at night to try and find them. On the nights Jed was with Chelsea, Justin would sneak around looking for the girls' houses. He made sure he wore a ski mask that covered his face and he still dressed in black like they always did when they went out to do their break-ins. He would do the opposite of what they did when they were looking for a house to break into. (He and Jed always searched for a house that looked like there wasn't anyone at home). Now, he was searching for houses where he knew people were home and he could spy on the women hidden in the darkness of the night, just outside their window.

As the days went by, Justin snuck around from house to house peering through the bedroom windows where the lights were on. He would creep around slowly

until he would find one he could watch for a while. The more peeping on women he did the more he loved it. It started to give him a sense of power over them and he felt like he was getting away with something that only he had control of. He had never felt like that before. He felt like he was almost entitled to glance into the women's lives.

He enjoyed searching for that one window where there was a woman or a girl inside that he could observe from just a few feet away without being seen. Sometimes he just enjoyed watching them sit in their bedroom and do nothing but talk on the phone or just sit and read a book. The biggest thrill for him was, just before they went to bed, and he got a chance to see them undress with the lights on. Sometimes he would sit and watch them for hours just watching for the few moments of pleasure he got out of it.

He continued this new found pleasure for several weeks until he found the house of one of the girls that he'd been searching for. He was extremely happy and proud of himself when he finally found her. He clinched his fists, jumped in the air, and said to himself, "Yes! I finally found you. I knew I would. I knew you couldn't hide from me forever!" As he crept up to her bedroom window his heart was beating fast and he could hardly control his excitement. He slowly raised his head up to the corner of her bedroom window so that just part of his head and one eye could see from a tiny corner of her window. He stood there in a crouched position below the window and watched every move she made. He was fascinated with her as he watched her toss and turn on her bed while she was doing her homework or while she talked on the phone to one of her friends. He was captivated by her, even if she wasn't doing anything.

His obsession with ogling her soon became too overbearing for him and he just couldn't get enough. He would come back for several weeks and stay for hours watching every move she made. Sometimes he was able to watch her changing clothes and that would send him into extreme pleasure. On a few occasions, he got a glimpse of her coming out of the shower with just a towel wrapped around her body before she dropped it and put on her panties and pajamas. She would usually turn off the lights and go to bed soon afterwards. Once she turned off the lights he would then head back home. He had spent so much time watching her that in his confused thoughts, he actually believed he had some type of boyfriend, girlfriend relationship with her. He believed he had a girlfriend just like Jed had with Chelsea.

On another night, while he was watching the girl, he forgot to stay hidden and was watching her with both eyes peering straight at her and not from the corner of the window like he usually had. She suddenly looked straight at the window and thought she saw someone looking back at her. She wasn't sure what she saw, but she let out a slight scream and quickly jumped out of bed. Justin figured she must have seen him or a shadow of his face, as she headed toward the window and started to look around outside. By then Justin had ducked away from the window. She couldn't see him crouched behind a large plant, not too far away and in the dark. When she moved away from the window, Justin quickly headed over the fence and away from the property.

A few minutes after Justin left the property, a light came on outside the front of the house and a man came out holding a gun. He began to walk slowly and



carefully, all around the house. Justin watched him from a hidden area as the man searched for several minutes before Justin finally decided to leave. When he got back home he made up his mind, he would stay away from his “girlfriend’s” house for a few weeks before he went back again. He wanted to let her get over the scare of thinking she saw someone.

Justin’s appetite for peeping on girls was growing stronger and stronger and it had increased to the point where he was no longer feeling gratified by just looking in the windows at them. He wanted to get inside their homes, up close, and right next to them. He soon decided that he would wait until his “girlfriend’s” parents left her alone one evening and then he would break into her house while she was sleeping. Once he knew she was asleep he would be able to break in through a window and then get closer than he’d ever been able. He could watch her sleep from her bedside.

He was very patient and determined as he watched her house for several weeks until one night it finally happened. She’d been left alone. Once they loaded up and left, Justin said to himself, “Alright girlfriend, I finally have you all to myself! I’ve waited a long time for this to come!”

Once her parents’ car was out of sight, Justin snuck up to the house and peered in her bedroom window like he had done so many times before. He watched through the window as she went into the bathroom to take a bath. He could hardly wait to get inside the house and be alone with her. He said to himself, “Come on, come on, just go to bed so I can come inside your house.” When she came out of the bathroom she was wearing just a robe with nothing under it. He had seen her in her robe before, but she usually had on her panties and a tank top. Before she turned out the lights and went to bed she took off the robe and threw it over the nightstand. Justin could see her youthful body and he thought to himself, “Wow! She’s beautiful!” At that point he could hardly contain his excitement. This was the moment he’d been imagining in his mind and dreaming about for several weeks. He was so excited he was almost jumping up and down, but he knew he had to control himself. He said, “Take it easy, just calm down.” He started breathing long, deep, quiet breaths to try and calm himself down. When she turned out her light, Justin could see that she had left a light on in the bathroom. It was just enough so he could see the silhouette of her body as she crawled into bed and pulled the covers up to her neck. She turned on her side facing the bathroom light.

Justin waited until he was sure she was deep asleep and then crept around to all the doors and windows to see if any had been left unlocked. He soon found that everything was locked up tight. Not finding an easy entry, he wrapped his ski mask around a small rock and busted a corner of a window on the opposite side of the house. He reached his hand slowly inside and unbolted the lock of the window. He carefully slid the window up until it was completely open. He shook out his ski mask and made sure there was no glass in it and put it back on his head. He then crept back to her window to make sure she was still asleep. When he got there he thought that she must have heard something because she had turned her body in the opposite direction and was now facing the wall. He was just happy that she was still asleep.

He crept back to the open window and hoisted himself head first up and into the room. He inched his body through until he was completely inside the house. Once there, every move he made was slow and deliberate. He made sure he didn't bump anything as he made his way through the kitchen, living room and down the hall to her bedroom. It took him several minutes to just make it to her bedroom door. He peeked in at her from the corner of the bedroom door to make sure she was still asleep.

Once he was comfortable that she was sleeping, he tiptoed ever so slowly up to the edge of the bed until he was standing right next to the back of her head. He stood there several minutes just watching her sleep. Soon both of his legs were touching the edge of the bed as he got very excited. The excitement of everything finally got the best of him and he let out an uncontrollable chuckle. When he did that his legs slightly moved the bed. He had his pants pulled down to his upper thighs and rubbing himself when the girl heard the noise and felt the bed moving. She immediately flipped over and looked up and saw the all black figure standing over her. She began to scream so loud that it momentarily surprised Justin.

Justin was so stunned by her high pitched scream that he just stood there for a few seconds not knowing quite what to do. After he realized she caught him in her bedroom, he pulled his pants up and started to head for the door. In his haste and fear to get out, he ran to the front door and tried to open it. The door had a chain lock on it and when he tried to open it the chain jerked the door back in its place. Not sure what had just happened, he let go of the door knob and headed to the window he had come through when he broke into the house. When he reached the window he dove head first out of it and onto the ground outside. He rolled a few times and then quickly got to his feet. The girl was still screaming when she started turning on all the lights in the house. Justin watched from the fence as she ran into the kitchen and grabbed a huge long butcher knife and called what he thought was the Sheriff's department. Justin knew he had to get out of that area quickly and head home.

On the way back home he was extremely pumped up and excited about getting within just a few feet of his "girlfriend." The satisfaction he got from the entire encounter made him very proud of himself. He kept saying over and over again, "You did it! You got right up next to her bed! I knew I could do it!" He was very happy that he had gotten away with being inside her house. That encounter made him feel better than anything he had ever experienced in his life. None of the stealing he'd ever done came close to the excitement and satisfaction that he was feeling at that moment.

When he got home he decided he would soon start searching for his next female target. He knew that he had to do more girl watching, but he was going to stay away from his screaming "girlfriend's" house for a while. He wanted to give her time to get over him.

The high school girl Justin thought of as his girlfriend called the sheriff's department and reported what Justin's break-in. There were neighbors with her in just a matter of minutes after she called them but it took the sheriff's department about forty five minutes to get there. After a few days of what they called a full investigation, they weren't able to find anything that would point them to a suspect. Not having an explanation or a suspect, they told the girl's parents it was

probably some high school boy she knew just pulling a prank on her. The parents weren't happy with the investigation and the father told the Sheriff, "Even if it was a high school boy pulling a prank on her, I feel like she was violated. If I catch the kid in my house again I'll kill him." The Sheriff told him it would be better if he let the law handle it, instead of killing some kid and possibly going to jail himself.

## **Chapter 12**

### **Mister becomes the Master.**

When Justin started going out so often, Joshua also became frustrated and angry at being left alone at home. He missed being outside the walls of the property just like Jed and Justin. He missed the attacks on the animals that he had trained Mister to kill. He was feeling trapped and much like a caged animal. It was summer time and the temperature had reached around 110 degrees during the day. It was hot and muggy inside the house without any air conditioning. The frustration of being alone, along with the miserable heat caused mounting pressure on Joshua and he wanted to do something about it. He was angry with himself for making a promise to Jed and his mom that he wouldn't take Mister outside the walls of the property again. Even though he knew Jed would be angry with him if he found out about it, he was having a hard time fighting the urge to take Mister out to kill something.

That night while Jed was at Chelsea's and Justin was out peeping in Red Mountain, Joshua decided he was going to have a little fun with Mister. He hadn't forgotten about the time Brutus tried to kill Mister during their last fight. He had come up with a plan that he believed would satisfy his desire to have Mister accomplish what he needed him to do.

He took Mister outside the house and pretended he was outside the walls of the property as he crept slowly around the property and looked for Brutus. He had Mister by his side as he slowly combed the entire property until he found Brutus curled up and sleeping next to Sophie. When he saw Brutus, Joshua approached Brutus like he was stalking a wild animal and he had a loaded gun getting ready to shoot his prey. When Joshua got closer to Brutus, Mister began to growl. Joshua knew that Mister wasn't going to let Brutus get too close to his master. It was a game Joshua was playing in his mind, but it was a deadly game for Brutus.

When Mister started viciously growling at Brutus it only took a few seconds and Brutus stood up snarling back at him. His hair on the back of his neck bristled up and he went into a fighting mode. He balanced himself on all fours and took a fighting stance. Brutus wasn't going to let his young sibling whip him once again. He growled back at Mister and showed his teeth as they edged a little closer to each other. Brutus was just hoping that his defensive posture would be enough to get Mister to back away but it wasn't. Now father and son were locked in a stare down that would soon turn deadly.

Mister bristled and showed his teeth and neither, he nor Brutus were backing away from each other. Joshua was getting a real thrill out of the entire stand off as he laughed and clapped his hands with excitement. After a few minutes Joshua stopped laughing and it then became real serious for him. He looked at Brutus and said, "You shouldn't have tried to kill Mister the last time you got in a fight. Now you are going to pay for it." He made the clicking sound of attack with his tongue and Mister instantly plunged forward toward Brutus. The fierce impact of it knocked Brutus down and Mister bit down hard on the first thing he could get his teeth into. It was Brutus' left front leg and when he bit down on it the bone snapped and Joshua could hear a popping sound as it broke. Joshua just stood there, not saying a word and just watched the fight. He smiled with pride for what Mister was doing to Brutus. Even with the broken leg, Brutus continued to defend himself because he knew he was fighting for his life.

Before Mister realized what had happened Sophie had joined in the fight against him and bit down hard on his back. Now Mister was fighting both dogs and he was fighting for his own survival. He turned his attention away from Brutus for split second and sunk his long fangs deep into Sophie's neck. He had her down and ready to kill her when Brutus attacked him from behind once again. Brutus had a grip on Mister's right thigh when Mister let go of Sophie and spun toward him and Brutus lost his grip. Mister was now focusing his attack back toward Brutus as Sophie limped away hurt and defeated. That's when Joshua had enough of the playing around and gave Mister the signal to kill. Mister then immediately went in for Brutus' throat and it was just a few seconds and he had him down. There was nothing Brutus could do because Mister was just too big and strong. Brutus tried with all his strength to wiggle loose but the death grip Mister had on him was too tight for him to get away. It was as if his neck was in a vice. In an instant, Mister jerked his head sideways a few times with Brutus' neck in his mouth and his neck snapped. Joshua smile when he heard the bone crack and Brutus went limp.

When the fight was over Brutus lay motionless on the ground and Mister was standing over him panting deeply. His tongue was hanging out and he kept licking it and taking deep breaths. He had some flesh wounds that Joshua would have to take care of, but nothing that wouldn't heal. Joshua was angry with Sophie for joining in the fight against Mister and he went over to her and said, "It's your lucky day, Sophie, I'm not going to have Mister kill you yet. He'll get you another time. You should've stayed out of the fight."

Joshua didn't waste any time as he dug a hole about four feet deep in the back yard and pulled Brutus' body over to it and pushed him in. As he was covering him with dirt he said, "Good-bye Brutus, You were a good dog. You shouldn't have tried to kill Mister." He wanted to make sure he buried Brutus before Jed or Justin got home because he didn't want either of them to find out what he'd done.

It wasn't until a few days later that Jed and Justin came into Joshua's room and asked him if he had seen Brutus around the yard anywhere. Jed went up to Joshua and said, "Hey Joshua, I saw Sophie outside, but I couldn't find Brutus. Have you seen him? I've looked everywhere. Do you know where he is?" When Jed asked Joshua that question, he just looked up at Jed and said, "I found Brutus dead a few days ago. I buried him out back. Right next to mom and dad." Jed was shocked as he said, "What? How did it happen? Could you tell what killed him?"

Joshua turned away from Jed with a grin on his face as he said, “No, I couldn’t tell.” Jed shrugged and replied, “Wow! That’s really bizarre, I didn’t know anything was wrong with him.” Jed was wondering, did he get into some of the rat poison that I put out on the property to get rid of the rats? “I wonder why Joshua didn’t tell us about Brutus sooner?”

## **Chapter 13**

### **Justin’s Mistake.**

Justin soon went back to the dark nights of peeping and after a few weeks of empty searching, he found what he thought was his perfect target. There was a young married couple that lived with their son in the middle of Red Mountain. The husband drove an eighteen wheeler all night long and was gone about five to six nights a week. Their son was a toddler but he slept alone in his own room. When Justin first starting spying on them he thought the woman was pretty and sexy, but it wasn’t as much about her looks to him as it was the thrill and thought of being up close to her without getting caught. That overwhelming desire was driving him like a drug that he couldn’t get enough of. The anticipation and excitement of what he was up to just kept building stronger and stronger each day.

It had been about a month since his last encounter with his “girlfriend” and he was feeling anxious and restless to go out again. He made up his mind he was going to make his move on the young mother. He started watching her while she was alone at nights for a few days and couldn’t take the waiting any longer. Once he was ready to break into her house, he checked everything to make sure he was prepared. He dressed just like he and Jed always had done before they went out breaking into houses. When he left the property, he slowly and methodically made his way to her house.

He was anxious as he waited for her husband to leave for work as he watched him drive away. He crept up to her house and started spying on her from the bedroom window. He watched as she put her son to bed and went into her bedroom and took off her makeup. She slipped off her clothes and jumped into bed. She had no idea that she had just exposed her entire body to Justin as he watched from outside his hiding place. A peeping tom was the last thing she was worried about in Red Mountain. She had heard about the Night Crawlers and was more concerned about them breaking in while she was all alone. She wasn’t real worried about them because she had a gun she kept hidden under her pillow just in case they did.

It was around midnight and she had been asleep for over an hour when Justin crept around to all the doors and windows to see if any of them had been left unlocked. Just as he had expected, everything was buttoned up tight as a drum. He took off the ski mask, wrapped a small rock around it as he broke a little corner of the window out. It was just enough to get his hand and arm in so he

could reach the lock in the middle of the window. He then took a second and shook the ski mask out and put it back on his head. He looked around to make sure no one heard the breaking glass or saw him do it. Once he unlocked the window he quietly slid the window up an inch or two at a time until it was completely open.

Once it was open, he quickly crept back to her bedroom window to see if she had heard the breaking of the window. It appeared that she heard something and woke up for a brief moment as she sat up in bed and looked around the room. Not seeing or hearing anything, she laid back down after a few minutes and pulled the covers back up to her neck once again.

Justin watched and waited until he knew she was in a dead sleep once again as he made his way ever so quietly through the open window and into the house. Creeping slowly as he tiptoed toward her bedroom, he felt like he could hear his own heart beating loudly as he made his way from room to room. He thought, "My heart sounds like a drum, pounding in my chest. I hope she can't hear it." He finally made it to her room after several minutes and waited at the doorway. He cautiously peered around the door frame to make sure she was still sleeping. Seeing that she was, he moved very slowly as he tiptoed to the edge of her bed. He waited there a few minutes and just watched as she slept.

When he was able to get up enough nerve, he then lifted the side of the cover just enough so he could crawl into the bed with her. She was laying on her side facing the wall in a curled up fetal position. She had her legs drawn up toward her breast and her arms around a pillow. Justin waited a few minutes to warm his body as he edged himself carefully up against her. He kept edging next to her until he was in a full spooning position with her. Once there, he waited a few more minutes and then slowly ran his hand and arm over her body. Not getting any kind of response from her, he then reached up and cupped one of her breasts with his hand. The entire process took a several minutes, but it seemed like hours to Justin. The entire time, he had a huge smile on his face because he was loving every minute of it. He thought, "This is the ultimate moment for me! Nothing will ever compare to this moment right here!"

When she first felt the warm touch of his hand on her breast she started to wake up. She was still half awake and half asleep when she rolled toward Justin and said, "Hey honey, what are you doing home so early? I thought you weren't going to be home until later in the day?" Justin didn't say anything to her, he just lay there frozen in that position. When he didn't answer her she opened her eyes and faced him. By that time she was fully awake. She suddenly realized it was someone else and not her husband lying next to her. She immediately started kicking and screaming at Justin all at the same time. Justin was giggling to himself as he jumped up and out of her bed and quickly headed for the doorway. He stopped and took a quick glance back at her and saw that she was reaching for something under her pillow. He had just made it to the kitchen window when she started firing her pistol. He was already out of her room, but she didn't care. She wanted was to let him know she had a gun and would kill him if he came back in her room again. He was out of the house by the time she fired her fourth shot and she was screaming the entire time she was pulling the trigger. Justin was lucky she was such a bad shot because none of bullets found their mark.

Once Justin was outside her house he took off running as fast as he could run and was laughing the entire way. He ran until he was several blocks away and he finally stopped to catch his breath. He looked back and could see the lights of several houses starting to go on. By then the adrenaline had started to subside and he took a deep breath and chuckled to himself, I did it, I was lying right next to her and had my hand on her boob. At that moment, he was feeling invincible and he had a great deal of pride and satisfaction in himself because he'd accomplished exactly what he had planned. The most important thing to him was that he had gotten away with being up close to a girl once again. He believed that if he did everything right, he could keep breaking into the women's houses and getting away with it as long as he wanted. When he got home and had time to think about it, the fear of being shot and not willing to take the chance of getting caught made him decide to wait for a while before he went out again.

Justin soon forgot about the woman and the gun when he once again became bored with staying home. It was a lonely night while Jed was visiting Chelsea that he decided he would dress up in his normal gear with his ski mask and dark clothing and go to "The Joint" to look for Jed. He wasn't going to let Jed know that he was there, he was just going to spy on him and Chelsea and see what they were up to. He figured it would give him something to do and he would feel a lot better than just staying home and doing nothing.

When he got to Randsburg he found the familiar hiding place across the street from "The Joint," and waited to see what was going on. There were a few cars parked outside along with a nice looking Harley motorcycle. Once he felt comfortable that no one had seen him, he snuck up to the building and peeked inside. Much to his surprise, Jed and Chelsea weren't there, but he did see a young woman sitting with a huge burly biker guy at one of the tables. He couldn't help but notice, the guy had large over developed tattooed muscles that dwarfed the tank top he was wearing. He had long, bushy brown hair and a full face beard. Justin thought, "Man that is a mean looking dude. I wouldn't want to make him mad. He looks like he could rip a person apart with his hands, limb by limb." The girl was wearing a light colored top that clung to her body and Justin could see that she had a nice set of fake breasts. As he stood there and just spied on her, Justin couldn't keep his eyes off her round breasts. He watched the couple as long as he could without being seen. Justin had noticed they were arguing about something because she looked upset, angry and they shouted at each other. They were so busy arguing with each other that they didn't notice Justin was watching their every move. After a few minutes Justin decided to go back to the hiding place and wait and see if Jed and Chelsea would show up.

After Justin waited about an hour and Jed was still nowhere to be seen he made up his mind that he was going to leave. It was at just about the same time when he saw the girl who was fighting with her biker boyfriend, come stumbling out of the bar. She was yelling obscenities at her boyfriend and Justin heard her say, "I'm through with you! I'm getting out of this place and I'm going to walk home!" She slammed the door behind her and started walking down the darkened street by herself.

Justin waited a few minutes to see if her biker boyfriend was going to chase her down, but nothing happened. She was now all alone and Justin knew she would

soon be lost. With the thought of her large breast still lingering in his head, Justin decided he would follow along behind her and see where she ended up. He watched as she stumbled along down the road for about two blocks when reality hit her and she must have realized walking home was not an option. She then made a turn off the main street and went down and behind some of the old buildings that bordered the street. Justin could tell she was pretty drunk as she found a place to sit down with her back against one of the buildings. Her knees were up and her head hanging down.

It was really dark behind the buildings and Justin thought to himself, this would be the perfect opportunity to get up close to her and see if I can touch her boobs. By that time, all reason had left him and he wasn't thinking about the biker and if he might come looking for her. While she sat there against the building with her legs bent and her elbows on her thighs she had her head cupped in both hands crying. Justin slowly crept over to her and sat down right next to her. She was too drunk to know or care that it wasn't her boyfriend. As he wiggled up thigh to thigh with her, Justin quietly asked, "Are you okay? Not looking up to see who had asked her that question, she murmured, "Yes, but I hate that S.O.B." Justin sat there for a minute just to see what she would say or do if he were to put his arm around her. At that point she was sobbing and saying that she hated her boyfriend and other things Justin couldn't understand. He had his arm around her for a few minutes before he decided to bend over and tried to kiss her. At that same moment, he reached down with his hand and had it on one of her boobs. That's when she suddenly, somewhat sobered up, and realized what was going on. She tried with both hands to push Justin away. Justin then pushed her on to the ground and crawled on top of her. He was rubbing her breasts from under her top as she started to squirm and scream at the same time. This just turned him on more as he ground his pelvis into hers. She continued to scream so he covered her mouth with one hand. She immediately deep into his hand and tasted blood. He instantly pulled his hand away from her face and, as if in shock, momentarily looked at the blood that was now starting to drip down his hand.

Justin was so preoccupied with his attack on the girl that he didn't realize her biker boyfriend had come out of the bar and was looking for her. The bartender had persuaded him that in her condition he needed to go look for her because it may not be safe for her in Randsburg that time of night. He hadn't gotten far from the bar when he heard her screams from down the hill. He ran in that direction and it wasn't long before he came tearing around the corner of the building and saw Justin lying on top of her. She was still screaming as the biker grabbed Justin by the arm, picked him up and started beating on him. Justin was too small and helpless to fight back so he just tried desperately to get away. The biker had a strong grip him as he held him with one hand and continued to pound him with the other. He hit Justin in the face over and over again and kicked him in the chest a few times in between the beating. It was a good thing for Justin that the biker was also a little drunk or he probably would have killed him. While he was beating on Justin the biker lost his footing on the side of the hill and slipped. He almost fell to the ground and he temporarily let go of Justin to brace himself so he wouldn't fall. That's when Justin took the opportunity to run.



The biker tried to chase Justin for about fifty yards until he realized he was no match for Justin in a foot race. He immediately ran back to his girlfriend and she was sitting up crying, hysterically. He picked her up in his arms and carried her back to the bar to clean her up. She had dirt and grass ground into the back of her top from Justin being on top of her. Once the biker realized she was okay, he jumped on his motorcycle and started searching all over town for Justin. He spent the next forty five minutes looking in anything that looked like it may be place Justin could hide. Not being able to find him, the biker finally gave up the search and went back to the bar. By then, the Deputy Sheriff was at "The Joint" and asking the girl questions about her attacker.

Bleeding from his busted lips, battered eyes and teeth marks on his hand, Justin retreated to the safety of his hiding place as he tried to regain his senses. He waited until the biker went back to the bar before he started to head back down to Red Mountain and home. He had never expected the biker to come around the corner, grab him and beat him up like he did. He was angry that he had let his desire take over to the point he didn't even think about the consequences of attacking the girl. All I wanted to do was to get up close to her and feel her boobs. That was all he was thinking about at the time and that's what had been driving him to the point of the attack. He didn't really understand why his compulsion had taken so much control of both, his body and his mind.

He was finally able to drag his beaten and battered body back home to nurse his wounds.

Jed had come home a little earlier that night after being with Chelsea and had been home about an hour when Justin came limping in. Jed was already angry with Justin for leaving the property when he wasn't supposed to. When he saw that Justin had been beaten up, still dressed in black and wearing the black ski mask he knew that he had been up to something. He just knew Justin had gotten into some kind of trouble.

Jed had a hard time controlling his anger as he confronted Justin and he asked, "What the heck happened to you? Did someone beat you up?" Just lied and said, "No, I just fell down a small hill and hurt myself." Jed had a feeling he was lying about it as he said, "Come on, Justin tell me the truth. I know that didn't happen, so what really happened. You don't get beat up that bad from falling down a little hill. What about the marks on your hand, those look like teeth marks?" Justin continued his lie as he said, "I was looking for our next house to break into and when I wasn't watching, I tripped and fell down a hill." Jed was furious with Justin as he said, "You're lying about everything you're telling me Justin because you know that's not your job to look for the houses to break into." Justin tried to defuse Jed as he started heading for bedroom and said, "I know, Jed, you're right. It's not my job. That's your job."

Jed was not only angry but confused about what had happened and why Justin felt he had to lie about it. He didn't believe a word Justin was saying and he couldn't understand what was going on with him. He thought the entire lie seemed a little out of character for him. As Justin went to the bathroom to clean himself up, Jed stood looking down the hallway thinking, "His explanations just aren't adding up and they're not making any sense to me, but there's nothing I can say

or do about it. I can't beat the truth out of him, obviously someone already did that."

After Justin went to bed and was alone, he was angry with himself for letting himself get caught in that situation with the girl and the biker. He was also angry with Jed for reprimanding him. Justin's night of wanting to spy on Jed had ended up backfiring on him. He never planned on attacking the girl, it was just an impulsive thing he did. Now he was going to pay the price for his blunder while his body healed.

A few days later, when Jed was at "The Joint," Chelsea told him about the girl from the bar that had been attacked. She said, "The girl's biker boyfriend had beaten the attacker up pretty bad before he got away. Some of the people in the bar told Jed they thought it might have been the same guy that was the peeping tom in Red Mountain. He fit the same description according to the Deputy that came and investigated the attack on the girl. The Deputy told them, the peeping tom had actually been inside the houses of at least two women that they knew of, in Red Mountain and had fondled one of them while she was sleeping. The woman he fondled fired four shots at him as he fled her bedroom. She wasn't sure if she hit him, but didn't find any blood in the house." Jed had heard rumors of a peeping tom in Red Mountain, but never paid any attention to them, until now.

As soon as Chelsea told him about the peeping tom, Jed had his suspicions that it could actually be Justin that was both the attacker and the peeping tom. He didn't say anything to Chelsea, but that evening, when he got home, he sat down with Justin to talk to him about what he'd heard. He started asking Justin what he knew about the attack on the girl at "The Joint", and the peeping tom. "Have you heard or seen anything when you were out looking for a house to break into?" At first Justin denied knowing anything about any of it as he said, "No, I haven't seen or heard nothing." The more Jed pressed him the more Justin started to break down and tell the truth. Jed told Justin, "I know you attacked the girl from "The Joint" because you had her teeth marks on your hand when you got home that night. She told the Deputy she bit her attacker on the hand. I also think you're the peeping tom. I just want to know why you're doing these things." After a lot of reluctance, he finally admitted that it was him as he said, "It was me, Jed, but I didn't try to hurt anyone." He also admitted that he was one who had been spying on all the women in Red Mountain. He sort of chuckled as he said, "I was just doing it all for fun, I wasn't trying to hurt no one." When he told Jed it was him and he was doing it for fun, Jed detected a bit of smug attitude coming from him and Jed could tell he was proud of himself for terrorizing those women.

Jed instantly became angry with Justin and started raising his voice at him. He said, "Oh God Justin! Are you even aware of the consequences of what you've been doing? If someone doesn't kill you, the law will find you eventually and throw you in jail! Don't you understand what you're doing is against the law? If the law finds out it's you, you're going to be locked up for a long, long time. You'll be in a little six foot by ten foot cell with just a toilet and a bed and that's it! We'll never see you again. Joshua will be taken from us and we'll never see him again either. I'm really frustrated with you and what you've been doing!" Jed's words cut into Justin like a knife. He had never been yelled at by Jed. He'd also never done anything to disappoint Jed before and didn't like the way it made him feel. He loved and

respected Jed and he was the only one left Justin looked up to. Another reason he didn't like the confrontation with Jed was that he felt like he was old enough to make his own decisions regarding what he should or should not be doing. He felt like he didn't need anyone telling him what to do. The only problem with his thinking was that, in his mixed up brain he didn't realize that he wasn't capable of taking care of himself or making grown up decisions on his own.

After calming down a bit, Jed told Justin once again, "You have to promise me that you'll stop spying on the girls in town and that you won't ever attack another woman. It could get you locked up or even worse, killed. I don't want either of those things happening to you." Jed reached over and gave him a hug and said, "I love you, Justin. Please, don't do that again." After quite some time of talking, Justin reluctantly promised Jed that he would stop. In his heart Justin knew that he was lying as he said to himself, "I don't think I can keep that promise. I love watching the girls and I know I can't stop. I'm not hurting no one! I'll just make sure Jed doesn't find out."

## **Chapter 14**

### **The Tweakers.**

After Jed found out what Justin had been doing and had confronted him, he had a talk with Chelsea. He told her he needed to spend more time at home. He told her that Justin and Joshua had been sneaking out at night when he wasn't home. He didn't tell her that Joshua had killed all the cats in Red Mountain and Justin was the peeping tom. He only told her he needed to stay home to reconnect with them and make sure they would follow his instructions and stay inside the property walls.

Jed met with Justin and Joshua and told them he was going to spend more time with them. Jed told them, "I have to be able to trust you guys that you won't leave the property when I'm not around. I guess the only way to do that is to be here and keep an eye on you guys. So far, neither of you've done what I've asked you to do." They were a little embarrassed about what Jed said, but happy to hear he was going to spend more time with them.

Jed told Justin, "We're having a few problems with the old pickup but we don't have enough money to buy another one right now. I believe the only way we can come up with enough money to replace it is to go back to stealing things. We'll have to raise enough money to pay cash for a new one. We'll have to hit all the places around the area like we have done in the past, even the bars in Randsburg." Justin was excited to hear they were back in business and that Jed would be back working with him once again. He believed he wouldn't be as lonely or bored as he had been. Jed foolishly believed it would keep Justin's mind off stalking the girls in Red Mountain.

Jed told Joshua he would have to "hold down the fort" while they were out getting the stolen items they needed to buy the truck. Jed told them, "When we go

to Los Angeles to sell the things we steal, all three of us are going. None of us are staying home anymore on those trips.” Jed knew he wasn’t going to take any chances leaving them alone again. Joshua asked Jed, “Can we take Mister with us when we go?” Jed rolled his eyes and said, “Sure, I guess it’ll be okay, but Mister will have to be on a leash and tied to the bed of the truck.” Even though his heart wasn’t completely into stealing again, Jed believed it was the only way he could get enough money for a new truck and keep an eye on Joshua and Justin at the same time. He was hoping he could keep them out of trouble.

It was only a few days later when, once again, Jed and Justin started going out at night searching for the perfect home to break into. It wasn’t long before they had their target lined up and ready to go. They waited until the right night and put on all their normal gear and left.

It was around two in the morning and they were watching the property from across the street when they spotted something that took them by surprise. Just before they started to go and break into the house they noticed two men sneaking around on the outside of the house. Jed looked over at Justin and said, “Look at that! Those guys are going to break into the same house we were going to hit.” Justin got angry when he saw them and said, “Let’s go stop them.” Jed wasn’t sure what they were up to so he said, “No, let’s just watch them to see what they’re going to do.” When they first arrived at the property the two guys had split up with one going one way around the house and the other one going the other. When they got around to the back of the house Jed and Justin could hear the faint sound of glass breaking as they broke a window near the back door.

They were both inside the house for several minutes until they finally emerged. Each of them carried a white pillow case full of stolen items. Jed looked over at Justin and said, “Those stupid idiots! They didn’t even leave a look-out to make sure no one walked in on them.” Justin replied, “Yea, that’s crazy.” For the first time since they had been in Red Mountain, Jed realized there were other people copying their activity. Justin whispered to Jed, “Do you want to knock them in the head and take their stuff?” Jed wasn’t happy seeing someone else move in on his territory and take his loot, but told Justin, “No, I just want to follow them and see where they go.”

As the two guys left the property they headed toward Johannesburg. Jed thought, “They looked like they’re on a Sunday stroll. Not at all the way we’ve always operated.” They had always done everything slow and meticulous and tried to make sure they weren’t seen by anyone. These guys didn’t seem all that concerned whether someone saw them or not.

Jed and Justin stayed a safe distance behind the duo as they finally arrived at their destination. It was, an older, beat-up, single wide trailer in the middle of town. Once there, the guys went around back to a 10’ by 10’ metal building and put all their stolen goods inside. When they were done they casually headed up to the front of the trailer and went inside. They didn’t seem like they were trying to hide any of their actions.

Once Jed was aware of what these guys were up to, he told Justin that he wanted to let them do all the work. He wanted sit back and observe and then strike when they least expected it.

The following evening, while he was at “The Joint” visiting with Chelsea, Jed went up to the bartender and asked if she had heard of any people in Jo-Burg stealing from the people in any of the little towns around the Rand area. That’s when she told Jed a lot more than he ever expected to hear, “I’ve heard, from some of our local customers, that there are thieves they call the Night Crawlers and they’re from Red Mountain. A lot of people believe they were the ones stealing things out of people’s cars here at “The Joint and The White House Saloon a few months back. I’ve also heard there are a group of people in Jo-burg everyone is calling “Tweakers.” They are the ones that are stealing from people all around the three towns. These people seem to be a lot different than the Night Crawlers. They are methamphetamine users. They’re addicted to and strung out on crystal meth. They’re paranoid and afraid of everything, except death. I heard they will stay up sometimes for two weeks at a time and won’t eat the entire time they’re up. Most of them are just skin and bones and their skin looks grey. Usually they hide during the day, away from the public because of their schizophrenic state of mind. They’ll kill and, even die for the meth. They’ll even do crude sexual acts to get the stuff. Once they’re addicted to it, they want it every day for the rest of their lives. I heard, they start out doing lines, then they smoke it and eventually they graduate to “slamming” it, which is using needles. These people will steal anything they can get their hands on. They’ll steal from people during the day or night, it doesn’t matter to them. They’ll even steal things from their own family. Sometimes they’re homeless because they have been disowned by their families. Often they steal from the very people they pretend to help to find their missing valuables.”

Jed was fascinated with what she was telling him about the tweakers. When he asked her to tell him more she continued, “We had some people in town that saw one of them walking through town pulling a little red wagon and it was full of stolen items! If he saw something of value laying out in the open, he would just throw it in his wagon and keep going. Most of the people in town are afraid to say anything to them in fear of retaliation. These people are dangerous and scary. If they are questioned by the police about stealing something they just deny everything. Even if the sheriff’s department gets a report saying they know where some stolen goods are. By the time the Sheriff shows up with a search warrant, the stolen goods are moved to another location. They move it from place to place to stay ahead of the law. After a lot of fruitless trips from Trona to Jo-Burg, the sheriff’s department pretty much gave up on trying to catch them stealing. They seem to be able to steal enough things or do enough sexual favors for people to get the money they need for their meth habit.” Jed said, “Wow! I had never heard of the tweakers before. They sound like they are a pretty messed up. Thanks for the heads up!”

Jed again thanked the bartender for giving him a better insight to what the tweakers were all about. He was starting to have a good picture of what his mom and dad were going through and why his dad was always stealing from people to support their drug habit. He didn’t like the fact that he and Justin, had in many ways, become like them. They would steal anything of value they could get their hands on. They stayed up at night stealing and sleeping during the day. The idea of being like the tweakers and that they were cashing in on his territory made him angry.

When Jed got home that night, he tossed and turned and kept thinking about what the bartender had told him. As he lay there awake most of the night, he made up his mind to spend the next few weeks just spying on the tweakers and finding out everything he could about them. He was going to try do something that would keep them out of Red Mountain.

He started watching them as he parked down the street a few blocks away. He soon found it was true, they didn't come out much during the day, so he started watching them at night. Some of them lived in beat up trailers and mobile homes and some were in little out buildings that looked like shacks. They didn't have any yards to speak of and they would take things apart then just leave the parts laying scattered all around the places where they lived. A lot of times they would come out and just sit by the backdoor smoking and fooling around with a knife or some other weapon. They never seemed to be in a hurry to do anything.

On a few of the nights, he followed two of the guys that lived in the trailer during their break-ins. He found out that once they were finished for the night, they always came back and stashed their goods in the little metal building. Sometimes they would store up their goods for a few weeks before they took it somewhere and sold it or traded it to other tweakers for drugs.

Jed came up with a plan to steal all the stuff they had stashed in the metal building before they had a chance to sell or trade it. One night while the tweakers were out on a break-in, Jed and Justin crept slowly over to the little metal building and broke into it. Each of them filled up their black bags with as much of the stolen goods as they could carry. They then took the items to an abandoned shack about a quarter of a mile away that Jed had picked out where they could temporarily stash the goods. They repeated this a few times until they had all the stolen goods out of the metal building. When they were finished stealing everything from the tweakers, Jed ran home and got the pick-up while Justin waited at the abandoned building for him to get back. Once Jed returned with the pick-up, they loaded the bed up with all the items.

On the way home, they were laughing about it and hi-fiving each other. They knew the tweakers would flip out when they went in the empty building and saw that all their stolen goods had been stolen from them. While he was laughing about it, Jed got serious for a minute and said, "I'm not through screwing with these guys yet. I have another plan but we'll have to be really careful. These guys could get dangerous."

When the tweakers returned home that night with their new haul of goods they were completely shocked to see that someone had broken into their metal building and taken everything they had. They didn't know what to think at first so they went running around the trailer like lost puppies. As their anger got the best of them, they were screaming and yelling and you could hear them all over town. They started running around to the other tweakers and blaming them for stealing their stash of goods. They continued to blame each other for several days.

That's when Jed and Justin made their next move to get the tweakers really fighting with each other. They dressed like they were going to break in a house but headed to the tweakers. They waited in a hidden spot down the street until late at night and then they slowly crept to one of the places where the tweakers were staying. They took several things from around the trailer and put it in their bag.

They then carried the bag over to one of the other trailers where the tweakers were staying and dumped it near the front door. Once they were done with one they repeated the same thing with three other tweaker places. They had some of each of the tweaker's personal things lying in front of the other tweaker houses. When the tweakers woke up the next morning they found out that some of their things were lying in front one of the other tweaker's houses and they went crazy. They started accusing each other of stealing their stuff and the fighting amongst themselves began.

It caused a lot of uproar in Jo-Burg and the fighting had gotten so bad that the neighbors had to call the sheriff's department out to break it up. The tweakers were brandishing knives and threatening to kill each other. Several of them were arrested and taken to jail.

Jed and Justin didn't get to see all that was going on between them, they were home sleeping when the entire brawl broke out. Jed did find out about it later when he went to see Chelsea. When he got to "The Joint" the bartender called him over and said, "Hey Jed, remember what I was telling you about the tweakers a few weeks ago? He looked at her as if to be surprised and replied, "Yes, I remember." She said, "Well, they all got into a huge fight with each other this morning and one guy stabbed the other one and the sheriff's department had to come out and break it all up. They took several of them to jail." He looked at the bartender and said, "Wow, that's really crazy. What were they fighting about?" She said, "Who knows, probably just over some drug deal." He thanked her for her information but could hardly contain himself as he quickly turned and walked away. He was chucking to himself because his plan had worked and he had at least temporarily interrupted their activities. He couldn't wait to get home to tell Justin their plan had worked!

It was about a month later when Jed and Justin were able to resume their normal activities at Red Mountain and they were feeling good about everything once again. They were sneaking up on a house they wanted to break into when they had an encounter with one of the tweakers. He was on a trail and by himself. Jed couldn't believe what he was seeing. He thought he had temporarily put a stop to these guys. When Jed saw him he told Justin he was going to confront the guy and tell him to go back where he came from. Justin was hidden behind the desert bushes when Jed first jumped out from behind the darkness of a large sage bush and showed himself. At first the guy was startled and stopped dead in his tracks. When he saw Jed, he starting to back up saying, "Wow! What is this?" He didn't even realize Jed was there until he had jumped out right in front of him. The dude was about forty years old but looked much older from all the years of doing the meth. Several of his front teeth were missing and he was skinny, just like the bartender had said. His first reaction when he saw Jed was to yell at him and run but he didn't. When Jed didn't respond to what he first said he then said, "What are you doing out here?" Jed moved closer to get a better look at him and said, "I was about to ask you the same thing." The guy didn't have on any type of disguise or ski mask and for just a short moment Jed thought, these guys were just lucky they hadn't been caught by now with their lackadaisical attitudes. He must be either really stupid or needing drugs pretty bad to go out by himself to burglarize a home.

When the tweaker found out Jed wasn't the law trying to stop him, he took a defensive posture when he answered. Justin was hidden just a few feet away and behind him. Jed asked the guy, "Why are you coming to Red Mountain to steal instead of staying in Jo-Burg and stealing from the people around there?" Before he could answer, Jed told him, "Red Mountain is off limits to you and your people. You need to turn around and go back where you came from. You need to stay out of this area." That's when the tweaker got even more agitated and became aggressive. He started cursing Jed and saying, "I'll do whatever the hell I want to do and go wherever the hell I want to go and nobody's going to stop me. Least of all, not a punk like you." At that point he had raised his voice and he was getting pretty loud. Jed said, "Hey man, you need to calm down a little or you're going to have the law down on you." The tweaker just kept getting louder and more aggressive the more Jed tried to talk to him. Jed figured, "I might as well be talking to a wall because this guy isn't listening to anything I say."

Seeing that he wasn't getting anywhere with the guy Jed was about to turn and leave when unexpectedly the tweaker reached down in his boot and pulled out a long hunting knife. It had a curved handle and long ten inch blade. He started waving it in front of Jed and saying, "I'm going to kill you, punk, if you don't get the hell out of my way." Jed said "You don't need to get violent, you can go do whatever you want." The tweaker replied, "Hey you started this fight and now I'm going to finish it. I'm going to gut you." When he said that, Justin reached down and picked up a rock about the size of a grapefruit and held it in his right hand. As the guy started to lunge at Jed with the knife, Justin leaped from out of his dark hiding place and hit him as hard as he could in the side of head with the rock. They could hear the crunching sound of his skull and the guy went down instantly. Jed thought he looked like he had just been shot with a gun. He lay on the ground and quivered around for several seconds taking his last breath while Jed and Justin stood there wondering what they should do. It wasn't long before the guy completely stopped moving. Jed slowly went over to him, saw that he wasn't breathing so he felt his neck for a pulse. Not getting one, Jed then knew he was dead. As he was kneeling over the body, Jed looked up at Justin and said, "He's dead. You killed him Justin." For just a few seconds Justin began to freak out as he said, "I thought he was going to kill you Jed. He said he was going to kill you!" Jed was still shaking as he said, "I know, I did too. It's okay, you were just trying to protect me and it was self-defense. Just relax. Everything is okay." After Justin calmed down Jed told Justin, "You'll have to stay with him until I go get the pick-up. When I get back we'll throw him in the back and then we'll figure out what to do with him."

Justin was still trembling as he sat down and tried to calm himself by pulling his knees up to his chest. Jed looked at him and said, "Don't do anything, I'll be back in just a few minutes. Just keep an eye on him and if you see anyone else come along, hide the body off the trail and keep yourself hidden." Justin didn't say anything. He just sat there staring at the guy he had just killed. Jed ran back to their house, got the pick-up and was gone for only about twenty minutes before he got back. They made sure no one was watching them as they loaded the body in the back of the pick-up and then drove back to their house, closing the gate behind them.



When they got home Justin was still upset and stressing out about killing the guy. Jed told him, "There was nothing you could've done Justin. The guy was so angry he probably would have killed me if you hadn't stepped in and saved me. We just have to figure out what to do with his body."

They were sitting on the couch and talking about ideas of what they should do with the body when Jed told Justin, "We can't tell the law or anyone else about this guy. They would never understand how or why you killed him. They probably wouldn't even care whether or not it was in self-defense. The law would also have a lot of other questions about what we were doing out at that time of night. With all the burglaries that have taken place in the area over the last few years they would just blame us for all of them. Even the stuff the tweaker's have done." Jed looked over at Justin and laughed as he said, "They might even try to pin the peeping tom guy on us." Justin pretended he didn't hear what Jed said as he sat there deep in thought.

Justin came up with an Idea as he said, "Maybe we should drop the guy in road on highway 395 and let a fast moving car hit him, they'll think they killed him. Maybe we could bury him in the back yard next to mom and dad." Jed didn't like either of those ideas when he told Justin, "We may have a problem with that. What if the car on 395 stopped before it hit the tweaker in the road and they found out that he was already dead and placed there by someone." He also didn't want to bury him in the back yard when he said, "I feel like the back yard is sacred ground because mom and dad are buried there. I don't want that scumbag next to mom and dad, do you?" Justin realized it was a bad idea and said, "No, I guess not." Jed told Justin, "We just need to sleep on it and decide in the morning when we can think straight and then we'll decide what to do with him." They soon went to bed and left the body in the back of the pick-up.

They didn't wake up until mid-morning the next day. When they got up Jed told Justin, "I think I have a perfect place to get rid of this guy. You just have to trust me on this one Justin. We'll take care of it later tonight, once it is dark." Jed waited until the middle of the night and then told Justin to hop in the truck because it was time. He told Justin they were going to take a short ride up to the old abandoned Silver Dollar Saloon. When they got there they turned off their headlights and drove around to the back of the building. Jed told Justin, "There's an old mine shaft behind the Saloon and it's a few hundred feet to the bottom. No one will ever look for a body down there." Justin chuckled and said, "That's an awesome idea, Jed."

When they arrived at the mine shaft, they took the body out of the pick-up and carried it over to the hole in the ground. They then dumped it and waited a few seconds for it to hit the bottom. No one ever went near the old mine shaft for fear of something bad happening to them. Maybe it was superstition or maybe their fear was real, Jed didn't know and didn't care. All he knew was, they would never see that guy again. On their way home they were just trying to forget they ever ran into him.

A few days later, the other tweakers reported their friend missing to the sheriff's department. They had spent three days looking for him all over Red Mountain, Jo-Burg and Randsburg and couldn't find him. When the sheriff's department was finally called, they went out to the tweaker's place and took a report and asked

around, but didn't do an extensive search of the area. They figured the guy had just decided to leave and didn't tell anyone. They believed that one of the other tweakers may have killed him and disposed of his body elsewhere. Either way, they knew there wasn't any chance they would ever be able to find the guy. There was no point in looking for him. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

The tweakers knew something had happened to their friend in or around Red Mountain because that was where he was headed the night he disappeared. He was going to go Red Mountain to break into one of the houses. Of course they couldn't tell that to the sheriff's department or that would have brought the law down on them. Little did they know, their friend was lying dead at the bottom of the mine shaft behind the old Silver Dollar Saloon.

## **Chapter 15**

### **Joshua's Guide Dog.**

After several weeks of stealing, Jed looked over their pile of stolen goods and figured it was time to take a trip to Los Angeles. He told Joshua and Justin to hop in the pick-up and chain Mister to the truck bed. There was a lot of stolen goods under the tarp and Mister was sitting on top. Once they were loaded up, Joshua got really excited. He had never gone on any of the Los Angeles trips with them before and everything was new for him.

During their trip there, when they would see something Joshua had never seen before he would yell out, "Wow! Look at that." Jed and Justin were really getting a kick out of watching Joshua's reactions to seeing everything new.

When they got to Los Angeles, Jed sold all the stolen goods they had brought with them. They had made a pretty nice haul, so when they were getting ready to leave Jed decided they would stop at a local McDonalds and grab something to eat. When they got out of the truck, Jed told Joshua that dogs weren't allowed inside the restaurant so Mister would have to stay in the pick-up while they went in. Joshua wasn't very happy about leaving Mister all alone in the pick-up but went along with it because Jed told him he had to. They went in and sat down at one of the empty tables. Jed asked them what they wanted to order. Once they told him, he went up to the counter and ordered for the three of them.

While they were waiting for Jed, a guy wearing dark glasses came in. He had a big yellow lab with him that had a harness around its body with a handle attached to it. The guy had one hand on the handle controlling the dog and another one on a white cane. He walked up to the counter with his dog and ordered a Big Mac special with a large drink. He asked the person behind the counter if someone could bring his food over to him when it was ready. Once he had ordered he used the dog to guide him over to an empty table and sat down. The dog then plopped down on the floor right next to him.

When Joshua saw the guy bring his dog into McDonalds, he looked like he was confused as he looked over at the dog and then back at Jed. He said to Jed in a

soft voice, "I thought it was no dogs?" His mom had always told him that dogs weren't allowed in stores and other public places but now a dog was being allowed in McDonalds. He didn't understand, especially after Jed told him they weren't allowed. He didn't know why Mister couldn't come in with them, just like that guy. Jed whispered to Joshua, "The guy is blind and he is allowed to bring a dog in to a restaurant because it's a guide dog. If you are blind, you can take your guide dog with you anywhere you go because it helps guide you around." Joshua didn't say anything else, but seemed fixated on the guy and his dog.

After he ate his food, Joshua inched a little closer to the dog and the blind man. He just sat there for several minutes, observing every movement made by the man and the dog. He kept looking at the handle and leather straps that were attached to the dog until Jed said, "What are you doing, Joshua?" Joshua didn't break his stare or say a word because he seemed to be totally captivated by what he was seeing. Jed finally said, "You need to go to the bathroom because we have to hit the road now." Jed got a few hamburgers for Mister and before they left for home they let him jump out of the pick-up and relieve himself.

Once they were on their way back, Jed was curious as he asked Joshua, "What was it about that guy and his dog that you liked so much?" Joshua laughed out loud and said, "I'm going to make Mister a guide dog." Jed didn't have a clue what he was talking about as he said, "You have to be blind Joshua to have a guide dog! Mister can't be your guide dog because you're not blind." Joshua smiled at Jed and said, "We'll pretend." Jed and Justin both laughed and joked with Joshua for about an hour on the drive back about his guide dog.

Making the money inspired Jed and Justin to want to get back out and break into more places so they could get the money they needed for the new truck. They started going out more and each time came home with items they could sell. It was about eight weeks later when Jed figured they had about all the stolen goods they could carry in one trip. He and Justin loaded up the truck. Once he was ready to go, Jed yelled to Joshua to get Mister and hop in, because it was time to head to L.A.

Jed and Justin were standing by the pick-up waiting for Joshua when he finally came around the corner of the house. He had made a device that resembled the guide dog harness and it was wrapped around Mister. It had the sissy bars of an old bicycle and leather straps with buckles that were attached to the bars. It was a little crudely built, but it worked. It was attached to Mister and he was walking right next to Joshua, just like a guide dog. Joshua was wearing a pair of dark sunglasses and he had his right hand on the bar holding Mister. He also had a stripped down umbrella in his other hand and was bouncing it off the ground. He looked at Jed and Justin and said, "Okay. I'm ready." Jed and Justin were cracking up as Jed said, "Where did you get that contraption?" Joshua proudly puffed out his chest and said, "I made it while you and Justin were busy." Jed couldn't stop laughing as he said, "Okay, have your guide dog, guide you over here, get in the pick-up, and let's go.

When they got to Los Angeles, they sold all their items just like before and when they got ready to go back home Joshua said, "How about let's go to McDonalds to eat." Jed said, "That sounds good to me, it's about that time of day anyway." Jed decided they would stop at the same place they went to the last time they were

there. Joshua didn't say anything, he just had a big smile on his face as they drove to the McDonalds. When they got there, Joshua quickly jumped out of the pick-up and put on his dark sun glasses. Mister still had the "guide dog" harness attached to him so Joshua unhooked him from the bed of the truck and had him jump down next to him. He grabbed the handle of the harness and had Mister next to him. He had the handle in one hand and the stripped down umbrella in the other as he had Mister guide him to the entry door. Once inside he had mister "guide" him over to an empty table and he sat down. He then had Mister lay down on the floor next to him and then told Jed what he wanted to order. The entire time, Joshua was very serious in his movement and mannerisms. Jed could hardly contain himself as he headed to the counter to order. Justin was also trying really hard not to laugh as he sat down next to Joshua.

Once they ate their lunch and were ready to go, Joshua had Mister "guide" him into the bathroom and then back to the pick-up. Joshua had Justin attach Mister to the bed of the pick-up as he climbed into the cab. Once everyone was in, Jed and Justin started laughing, as Joshua said, "See, I told you Mister was a guide dog!"

On the way home Jed had time to reflect on the entire incident with Joshua and he thought, "How in the world did he make that harness in the first place? I can't believe he remembered how to make it! Maybe we haven't given Joshua near as much credit as he deserves."

## **Chapter 16**

### **Ridgecrest Close Call.**

After several encounters with the tweakers, Jed thought it would be a good idea if he and Justin left them alone for a while. He knew he couldn't stop the tweakers from going into Red Mountain and he didn't like competing with them. He decided that he and Justin would take the thirty minute drive and do their break-ins in Ridgecrest.

Over twenty eight thousand people live in Ridgecrest and many of the local residents were raised there. The entire town revolves around the Naval Air Station, China Lake, known as "The Base." Almost everyone in Ridgecrest either works at "The Base" or has a service connected job.

There isn't much to do in Ridgecrest except go to the local movie theater. If you're over twenty one years old, there are three bars you can choose from, "Tommy T's, Mikey's and Partners." There are also twelve hotels and three shopping centers. Jed felt like these locations would be perfect for them to break into the cars, just like they had done in Randsburg. He believed they could get the money they needed to purchase the pick-up much faster if they went back to stealing lap tops, iPads, Kindles and other electrical devices from cars. He thought they could get a good used pick-up for around ten thousand dollars, but it would

take them a long time trying to make that kind of money in the Red Mountain area.

Before they started stealing things in Ridgecrest, Jed and Justin spent a few weeks just getting used to the lay of the land and checking out the different locations where the bars, hotels and the shopping centers were located. The town of Ridgecrest was laid out pretty simple. All the streets ran either north and south or east and west. Jed's biggest problem was how they would get the items they stole back to Red Mountain without getting caught. Jed thought if they were pulled over by the Sheriff Department or the highway patrol they would find the load of stolen goods in the back of the pick-up and they would throw him and Justin in jail.

Jed soon came up with an idea of removing the spare tire that was attached underneath the bed of the pick-up and building a metal box that was just a little larger than the tire. They made it nine inches deep and rounded the edges so it fit where the tire used to be. It looked like they had just a metal cover for their spare tire so it wouldn't get stolen. When finished it could hold a lot of the lap-tops and other electrical devices. Once they had the metal box bolted in place, he used a welding torch and cut a twelve inch by sixteen inch section out of the pick-up bed just above the box. He then reattached that section and had two spring loaded hinges at one end of it. They made it so they could quickly open it and drop whatever they stole in the box and in an instant the little trap door would slam shut. They put a thick piece of plywood over the bed of the pick-up to hide the trap door. They then threw the spare tire on top of the plywood so the bed of the truck looked empty, except for that spare.

When they were done with the box, they were ready to put their plan in action. Jed told Justin, "We can't put charcoal on our face like we normally do because if we get pulled over by the police we won't have any way to get it off our faces quick enough. We'll just have to wear the masks when we are breaking into the cars. We'll also take an extra sweatshirt. We can quickly throw them over our shirts, just in case we do get stopped. We'll keep our slim-jims hidden behind the seat when we aren't using them."

It was around nine in the evening when they arrived at one of the bars they had scoped out earlier. They parked their pick-up in a dark location of the bar parking lot. They slid down low in their seats where nobody could see them peeking over the edge of their windows as they watched people go into the bar. They targeted only the cars that didn't have alarms as they started their task of stealing. When they felt comfortable, they made their move. They darted toward their target car, staying real low to the ground. They quickly slid their "slim-Jim" down the side of the window and opened the door. They were able to look inside the car and grab a few things in less than twenty seconds. Once they had what they were looking for, they locked the car, just like they had done at Randsburg. They hit as many cars as they could before they decided it was time to move to their next location. Before they were done, they made their rounds to each bar parking lot. They always made sure they were quick and deliberate in their break-ins in hopes of not being seen. They went from car to car just hoping they could get something of value. Some nights were slow and tedious because a lot of the cars didn't have anything worth

stealing. It became a numbers game for them. The more cars they could get into, the more they could take home.

Jed decided to change it up a little so before the bars got busy, they went to one of the shopping centers and broke into those cars. They waited until dark and then drove to the shopping center. They would watch as someone left their car and went in to do some shopping. They made sure that no one was watching them as they carried out the same plan as when they hit the bars. They kept changing locations as they went to different shopping centers on different nights. They also hit the hotel parking lots in the early morning hours after they were through with the bars and stole from the cars parked outside. A lot of business people that worked at "The Base" would pass through and stay at one of those hotels. They would sneak around and look in the windows of the cars to see if someone had left a briefcase or anything else in their vehicle that looked promising. Sometimes the workers from different companies would stay at the hotels and they would bring their tools with them and lock them up in the tool boxes of their trucks. Jed and Justin made sure they had their bolt cutters with them so they could cut the locks and take what they wanted. Those weren't big money items, but if they couldn't get anything else, they would take drills, auto screw drivers, and other hand held tools they could sell pretty easy.

The more Jed and Justin stole from Ridgecrest, the more the sheriff's department and local police started patrolling the areas where the thefts were taking place. In a matter of a few months Jed and Justin were having to play cat and mouse with the police in the locations they were stealing from.

One of the shopping centers became frustrated with so many complaints they were getting from their customers about items taken out of their cars while they were shopping, they decided to put in a surveillance camera system. They set them up so they would see out into the parking lots to help them catch the thieves. The system worked great for daytime surveillance, but when it came to the night, it was a lot more difficult to see very far out into the parking lot.

It took several weeks of watching the cameras before they finally picked up two dark figures they believed were responsible for the car break-ins. They called in the police department and gave them the camera footage. The police department started examining it and they tried everything they could to enhance the film. All they got was just the two dark male figures going from car to car, but they couldn't make out what they looked like. They were able to see them leave the shopping center in what the police thought was an older pick-up. They couldn't tell much about it because in the dark all they could see of it was the silhouette of it in the distance. They also couldn't make out any special features of the pick-up, color, make or model. They still felt like they had part of a lead and they were going to start keeping an eye out for an older model pick-up around the break-in locations.

One Saturday night, Jed and Justin parked in the parking lot of one of the bars, like they had done many times before. They went through their normal routine of darting from car to car and taking what they could and hiding them in the cubby hole. On this night, there was an off duty police officer that was familiar with the case and he had been in the bar having a few drinks with a couple of friends. When he came outside to leave the bar, he thought he got a glimpse of someone scurrying between two cars and getting into an older pick-up and leaving. He

instantly believed it may be the people they had been looking for. Just to throw the law or someone else off in case they were following them, Jed always went east after they left the break-in locations. He would then make a huge circle on the south end of town and head back west toward Inyo-Kern and highway 395.

The off duty officer ran to his vehicle and called police dispatcher. He told them he believed he saw the older pick-up and the suspects they had been looking for. He told them the pick-up was heading east the last time he saw it. They quickly dispatched an officer to head in the direction of the bar and go east to see if they could find the pick-up. By the time the police officers were there, Jed and Justin were already out of town and heading up toward Inyo-kern where they would take highway 395 to Red Mountain. They weren't expecting anything as they headed south. They had gone about five miles when all of a sudden the right front tire on the pick-up blew out and Jed had to fight it pull over to the shoulder of the road. After he had it under control he found a spot that was wide enough to change the tire. In his frustration Jed said to Justin, "That's exactly why we need a new pick-up. When I get out, grab the jack from behind the seat while I see what we have to do."

It was late and Jed wasn't in the mood for something like this as he jumped out of the pick-up into the cold, brisk mountain air. He shivered as he went over and looked at the tire then grabbed the spare tire from out of the bed of the truck. Justin had pulled the seat forward and grabbed the tools to change the tire. In his haste, he forgot to push the seat back as he handed Jed the tools. They had all their gear behind the seat, including the "slim-jims" that were under some of their extra sweat shirts. Just as Jed was ready to start jacking up the front right side of the pick-up, a highway patrolman put his flashing lights on and pulled in behind them.

Justin panicked for a moment, moved over close to Jed and said, "Oh no! What are we going to do now, Jed?" Jed stood up and waited to see exactly what the policeman wanted. Jed whispered to Justin, "Try to stay calm. Let's just see what happens." Before the policeman got too close to their pick-up, Justin had to fight the impulse to protect them. He moved up next to Jed and whispered, "Do you want me to hit him in the head with the tire iron?" Jed reared back for a minute and looked at him with surprise and said, "No Justin! Don't you do anything! Be quiet and just stay calm! I'll take care of everything." Justin was shaking from both the cold and fear as the policeman approached. The policeman had his flashlight on and was looking all around the pick-up when he asked, "Everything okay here, boys?" Jed tried to appear relaxed as he replied, "Yes, officer, we just had a flat on this old clunker." The door was still open to the cab of the truck so the officer casually strolled over and shined his light in. He then shined his light behind the seat where all of Jed and Justin's stealing gear and sweat shirts were crammed. Jed knew everything was tucked behind the seat so he was hoping the officer didn't start moving things around. When the policeman saw their sweatshirts he said, "It's kind of late to be out this time of night. What are you boys up too?" Jed knew the police officer had seen some of their clothing so he said, "Oh yea, it is late! We've been up visiting some friends that were camped out in the desert." The policeman then stepped away from the door and asked, "So what exactly are you boys doing out in the desert? Jed had his back to the officer

working on the tire again as he bit his lip and said, "We were camping out and riding ATV's with friends. We didn't have enough warm clothes with us to stay out there for the night so we decided to leave." The policeman continued his interrogation of them when he said, "Is that why you have the ski masks and sweatshirts tucked behind the seat?" Jed said, "Yes officer, after the pick-up warmed up we got hot and so we threw them behind the seat. That's all the warm clothes we brought with us so that's why we're heading home so late. We both got pretty cold out there." Then the officer asked, "So, where you boys from?" Knowing he couldn't lie about that, especially since he figured they had already ran his license plates. He already knew it was Sherman's truck so Jed said, "This is my dad's truck. We live down in Red Mountain."

Jed was hoping and praying he wasn't going to shine his light under the pick-up and see the metal tire cover they had built and start asking questions. He was afraid that if he did more investigating he would find the box filled with all the stolen items. He was also hoping Justin wasn't going to panic and do something stupid, like kill the guy. He said to himself, "Come on Justin keep it together, don't do anything stupid." The policeman looked over at Justin and said, "I can't tell if you're just cold or you boys are up to no good the way you're shaking." Justin quickly said, "I'm just really cold, sir." The policeman said, "Why don't you put on your sweatshirt, if you're that cold?" Justin looked over at Jed and then said, "That's a good idea." He walked over to the open door and grabbed his sweatshirt from inside and immediately pulled it over his head. He quickly pushed the seat back so the other gear was not exposed. The policeman went over and shined his light in the bed of the pick-up and didn't see anything except the plywood, just like Jed had planned. He then went back to Justin and asked, "You been drinking tonight, son?" Justin replied, "Drinking what?" He snapped back angrily as he said, "Are you getting smart with me boy?" When Jed noticed the officer was getting a little irritated with Justin he stopped working on changing the flat and stood up. He looked at the officer and said, "Officer, he doesn't know what you're talking about because he has a learning disability. No sir, neither of us have had any alcohol tonight. We don't drink alcohol." It was at that point the officer shined his light in Justin's face. Once he took a closer look, he could tell there was something different about Justin.

Believing what Jed told him was probably true, he told Jed he had gotten a call from the police department in Ridgecrest to be on the lookout for an old pick-up fitting their description. Jed told him, "I can assure you, sir, it's not us you're looking for." The policeman shined the light on Justin's face once again and then back to Jed and said, "I can see that you're right, son. Do you need any help with that tire?" Jed replied, "No sir, I almost have it. I'll have it changed here in no time and then we'll be on our way back to Red Mountain. Thank you sir, for your offer."

The policeman said, "Okay boys, if you think you'll be fine, then I'll be on my way. He went back to his patrol car and sat there for several minutes while Jed finished changing the tire. He was on his radio the entire time. Jed was going as fast as he could to get the tire changed and back on the road. Once he finished, he threw the flat tire in the bed of the truck. They waved to the police officer as they pulled out and headed home.



Once they were out of sight of the policeman, they both let out a big sigh of relief and thanked their lucky stars they didn't end up going to jail that night. Jed excitedly said, "Man! That was a close one! I thought for sure he was going to see our gear behind the seat!" Justin replied, "Yea, me too." Jed said, "Joshua would've been left all by himself if we'd gone to jail."

They'd gotten down the road a bit when Jed looked over at Justin and said, "You know Justin, you can't just kill someone because you get scared or you think you're going to get caught! Especially, a police officer. They would have every police officer in the state after us, if you had done that!" Justin replied, "I know Jed, but I was just scared." Jed patted him on the leg and said, "It's okay Justin. I was scared too. You did good back there and you stayed pretty calm under the circumstances. I'm proud of you for holding it together." That seemed to relax Justin for the rest of the way home.

The next day the boys reflected on their close call, knowing the law in Ridgecrest was looking for a pick-up like theirs. Jed told Justin, "We're going to leave Ridgecrest alone, because its become way too risky for us. Besides, after we sell what we got this past week, we'll have enough money to buy that truck." Justin took his right hand as though he was wiping sweat off his forehead and said, "Phew! Thank you Jed! I was getting scared. I didn't want to go back there again."

After they sold everything, Jed waited a few weeks and then took Joshua, Justin and Mister with him to Lancaster to buy the new truck. They searched everywhere for what they wanted, including the For Sale by owners, and every dealership Lancaster. They spent the entire day searching until they finally found the one that they wanted. It was a dark grey 2005 Chevrolet Silverado, 1500 King Cab pick-up. Jed signed Sherman's name off the title of the old pick-up so they were able to trade the old pick-up and pay nine thousand dollars cash for it. They had already taken off the metal box and put the spare tire back under the bed of the pick-up. They wanted the extra seat the king cab provided so that when the three of them went someplace they could also let Mister ride in the back seat with Joshua instead of the bed of the truck. They were all pretty excited about the new truck as they drove back to home to Red Mountain.

## **Chapter 17**

### **„Whiskey Flat Days”.**

Thinking that things were back on track with Justin and Joshua, Jed soon went back to spending more time with Chelsea. He tried not to stay away from home for long periods of time, but the closer their relationship became, the more she pressed him for his time. She told him several times that she wanted to meet his brothers, but so far he had managed to keep them away from her.

One night, while he was visiting Chelsea at "The Joint," a couple came into the bar and they were talking about an annual "shin-dig" around Presidents Day, (mid-February) in Kernville California. The lady said, "They call the event, "The

Whiskey Flat Days.” It’s held in a little town just over the hill and about two hours west of here. The town is called Kernville and it has an old west look to the town. It’s small and quaint. The beautiful Kern River runs right through the middle of town and the place is absolutely breath taking. They put on a Western type parade every year and they have a “Wild West Shootout during the parade. They have fishing contests, frog jumping contests, and there are tons of booths with homemade crafts and food for sale all along the main street and in the little park. They even put on a rodeo during one of the days. There are thousands of people that go to the event every year just to hang out and have fun for the day or for the entire three day event.” She told them that the event was coming up soon and he and Chelsea should go and just have fun.

When Chelsea heard about it, she got really excited and she said to Jed, “That sounds like it would be a blast. We should go and we should take Justin and Joshua with us. They would love it.” Jed didn’t say anything. He just sat there contemplating what he was going say next. The idea of taking Justin and Joshua with them kind of took him by surprise and he wasn’t expecting her to say that she wanted to take them along. Not waiting for an answer from him, Chelsea asked the lady, “How do we get there? The lady enthusiastically replied, “All you would have to do is go over the hill, hit Highway 14 and go north until you come to Lynch Canyon Road. Just follow the signs from there. I think you’ll love the drive.” Jed thought, “I would love to take Chelsea to a place like that and just have fun with her alone, sight-seeing and mingling with the people, but I’m not real keen on taking Justin and Joshua with us.” She hadn’t met them yet and Jed wasn’t sure how she would react once she saw them.

As Chelsea began pressuring him to take Justin and Joshua along, he looked at her and said, “I don’t think that would be a good idea.” He didn’t try to explain why not, but Chelsea was still very excited about the idea of going there. She said, “That’ll give me the perfect opportunity to meet your brothers.” Jed wasn’t really sure what to say as he raised his voice and said, “I said no, we can’t do that.” He instantly could tell that he had hurt her feelings when he raised his voice to her, but he didn’t stick around to try and apologize as he quickly got up from the table and left. The lady at the bar said, “Gosh, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to upset him.” Chelsea was still trying to figure out what had just happened when she said, “Don’t worry, it wasn’t anything you said that upset him.” She had never seen Jed act like that before and it shocked her a little as thought, I wondered what got into him and why he got so upset?

Jed went home and started thinking about how he had reacted with Chelsea and wasn’t happy with himself for hurting her feelings. He knew he loved her and had to try and explain why he left so suddenly. He knew that if he was ever going to have a relationship with her, he had to be honest with her about Justin and Joshua. The thought of introducing her to Joshua and Justin caused him a lot stress. He had mentioned to her about their learning disabilities before but he never told her about their appearance. He wasn’t sure if it would affect his relationship with her once she saw them. He was raised with them and he loved them and never thought about the way they looked until someone brought it to his attention. He wasn’t sure what he would do if Chelsea couldn’t handle seeing or being with them.

The following evening, Jed went to see her at “The Joint.” He waited until she wasn’t busy and then apologized for his actions the night before. He told her he needed to explain why he had acted the way he did. She sat down across from him with a somewhat puzzled look on her face. Jed slowly started telling her everything about his mom and dad’s addiction to drugs and how it caused some physical and learning disabilities with Justin and Joshua. He told her, “They both look very different compared to a normal person. Neither of them have any friends nor do they leave the house during the day where people can see them. They each have some deep dark secrets that has gotten them into trouble.” He told her they had created some problems with the people in Red Mountain and Randsburg that he couldn’t tell anyone. She immediately spoke up and said, “You can tell me everything, Jed.”

Feeling comfortable with her, Jed started to explain to her what each of them had done. He told her about Joshua sneaking out at night with Mister and killing the cats and the dog at Red Mountain. He said, “Remember the incident with the girl that was attacked here in Randsburg and the peeping tom in Red Mountain? She said, “Yea, sure I remember.” He said, “Well, that was Justin. He was sneaking out at night when I was with you. That’s why I’ve had to keep an eye on them. I couldn’t stand to have them taken away from me and put in jail or an institution. I promised them I would spend more time with them. I was hoping I could keep them from getting lonely or whatever it was that possessed them to do what they did. I can’t trust them to leave them alone very long.

When he first told her these things she was in shock and didn’t know what to say. At that point Jed was afraid he had told her way too much when he said, “See, I knew I shouldn’t have said anything to you about what they’ve done.” She quickly regained her composure and said, “I love you Jed, your brothers are part of you and they’re all you have left in this world besides me. I don’t agree with what they’ve done, but I would never make fun of them or disrespect them in any way. I wouldn’t do anything that could have them taken away from you.” Chelsea was actually a little relieved Jed had told her everything. She had all kinds of thoughts that she had imagined why Jed wouldn’t introduce her to his brothers. She kissed Jed and said, “You can always trust me Jed, I’ll never say anything to anyone about what you’ve told me, I promise you. Thank you for sharing everything with me.” One of the things he had been most worried about, was that she may not be willing to keep what he had told her a secret. He knew that if she told anyone, he would lose Justin and Joshua and his relationship with her would be over.

Jed was a little surprised that Chelsea handled what he told her as well as she did. Believing that he could now trust her with everything, he said, “I’ll introduce you to my brothers if you think you would feel comfortable seeing them and being around them. I’ll even take you guys to “Whiskey Flat Days” if that’s what you really want.”

He knew there was no way he was taking Chelsea to his house to have her meet Justin and Joshua there, so he told her that one day when she was in town shopping, he would bring them there to meet her. She agreed that would be okay with her. A few days later when he loaded up Justin, Joshua and Mister and they headed into town. When he first introduced her to Justin he just said hello. He

seemed be either a little shy or a little embarrassed as he held his head down and stuck out his hand to shake her extended hand. When Jed introduced Joshua and Mister to her, Joshua blared out loud, "You're pretty." Chelsea blushed and said, "Thank you, Joshua." As he pulled Mister up close to her, he said, "This is Mister. He's my buddy." Everyone laughed and that broke the ice with all of them as they stood around talking for several minutes.

When they were getting ready to go back to Red Mountain, Jed and Chelsea were alone for just a few minutes and she said, "They seem pretty harmless to me Jed. I don't have a problem going with them to the "Whiskey Flat Days" celebration if you really wanted to take us." Jed told her, "We'll go if you're being totally one hundred per cent honest with me that you don't mind being seen with them." She reassured him as she said, "I'm totally okay with them and their appearance doesn't matter to me." Jed instantly felt like a ton of bricks had been lifted from his chest when she told him that. He'd been dreading that day for a long time and soon found out that the fears in his head were a lot worse than what her reaction turned out to be.

On their way home, Jed told Justin and Joshua about the trip to Kernville and "The Whiskey Flat Days," celebration. He told them that Chelsea wanted them to go with the three of them and have some fun. Jed said, "We'll take some of the left over money from when we bought the truck and have a good time with it. The event is still a month away but when it's time to go I'll let you know." Joshua asked, "Can I take Mister with us? Jed thought for a minute and said, "I guess we can have Chelsea ride in between me and Justin in the front and the two of you can ride in the back seat." They were very happy to be getting out of the compound during the day and going someplace different.

When it was time to go to Kernville they loaded up Mister then went by and picked up Chelsea. She jumped in between Jed and Justin. Jed was joking with Justin when he said, "I know she's pretty Justin, but keep your hands off of her." Justin blushed and replied, "I will Jed, I promise."

They headed west and hit highway 14 and went north until they came to a sign to the left that said, Lynch Canyon Road, (highway 178) just like the lady at the bar had told them to do. They were soon in Walker Pass with its narrow twisty two lanes road. Chelsea was reading the signs along the road that said sometimes the road is closed that time of year because of the snow and falling rocks. One sign she read said that area is a "National Historic Landmark" and has remained the same since it was discovered in 1834.

As they were heading down the pass, Chelsea pointed out the Joshua Trees to Joshua and he said, "I've seen them before. Jed told me they named that tree after me?" They all just laughed as she said, "Yea, I guess they did." The road was open all the way through the pass and even though there were signs saying beware of cattle in the road, they didn't see any. They continued down past Caneback, Onyx, Wofford Heights, Mountain Mesa, Lake Isabella, Weldon and then followed the signs around Lake Isabella until they arrived in Kernville.

When they got there the party was in full swing. The cars and people were everywhere. Jed said, "Wow! There must be ten thousand people here." There were hundreds of motorcycle riders with their bikes parked in front of a couple of the main street bars. The drove by "The Hut, Kernville Saloon, Kern River Inn and

each one of them was packed with people. Joshua became real excited when they passed a little carnival while they were trying to find a place to park.

The parade was getting ready to start when they finally found a parking spot about a half mile away. Joshua quickly jumped out and he had on his sunglasses and the umbrella in one hand and the harness that was attached to Mister in the other hand. Jed had warned Chelsea that Joshua would probably do something like that, but she still thought it was funny to see as she chuckled at the sight of him and Mister. Mister seemed just as excited and eager as Joshua as he pranced around proudly.

They finally found a spot in the crowd where they could watch as the parade started. Jed told Joshua he would hold onto Mister as Joshua edged his way closer to the front where he could get a better look. The little parade didn't last long but everyone loved it. They especially loved the Eagles women's auxiliary in their blue and white uniforms passing out candy and the shoot-out. They kept talking about it as they started to make their way around the town. Justin and Joshua kept imitating the gun slingers with their hands, pretending it was a gun and drawing on each other. They spent time watching the frog jumping contest and then they visited the carnival where Justin and Joshua each got to ride some of the rides. Chelsea and Jed were holding hands as they walked down to the river and watched some of the kids that were in the fishing contest. They went all over town looking at the booths with all the hand-made crafts. Jed gave Justin and Joshua money to buy a souvenir and he bought Chelsea a hand-made Turquoise native Indian bracelet. Mister got a huge chew bone as his souvenir but he wasn't getting it until he got back home. They went over to the ice cream parlor and got an ice cream cone and then walked around the little park looking at all the booths.

They made an entire day out of the event and nobody wanted to leave. The mountains hide the sun in the late afternoons in Kernville and it was starting to go down when Jed thought it was about time to leave. Just as they started to head to the truck, there was a middle aged biker that approached them. He was a big man with long hair pulled back in a pony-tail and he was dressed sharp. He walked up to Jed and said, "I hate to bother you, but I've been watching your dog ever since you got here. He's one of the most beautiful animals I've ever seen. What kind of dog is he?" Jed looked at Mister and saw the muscles bulging from every inch of his body. He hesitated, and then looked at Joshua to see if he was going to answer as he said, "I believe he's fifty percent Pit Bull Terrier and fifty percent Rottweiler, but we don't know for sure. He just kept admiring Mister when he said, "Man, he is huge and really powerful looking, especially when you get up close to him. He looks like he might have a little Cane Corso in him." Jed replied, "All we know is what they told us when we got his mom and dad at the SPCA." The man finally introduced himself as he said, "My name is John Jackson but most my friends just call me Johnny." Jed introduced everyone to him and Johnny as he went back to admiring Mister. Jed said, "Yea, he's a nice looking boy, but he belongs to my brother over there." He pointed to Joshua and he could see Joshua's chest start to puff up with pride the more Johnny talked about Mister.

Johnny then asked Jed what he thought was a strange question, when he asked, "Is Mister a good fighter." Before anyone had a chance to answer he said, "The main thing I want to know is, does he have that that gameness and ability to

finish a fight?" Jed wasn't sure what all that had to do with Mister as he asked, "What do you mean?" Johnny said, "Well, the Pit Bull is the ultimate canine gladiator. They'll fight to their death, "on stumps" with two or more broken legs and sometime in worse condition than that." Chelsea spoke up and said, "Ooh! That sounds gross!" Jed answered back and said, "I don't know if he fights, we've never seen him fight." Joshua had been listening intently to the entire conversation and he piped up and said, "Yes, he's a good fighter." He knew the truth about Mister that no one else knew. He knew that Mister had killed both, the neighbor's dog and Brutus. Johnny said, "I have a big solid white, Pit Bull Terrier female and she'll be coming into heat soon. I would love to breed her to this big guy. I would be willing to pay you a thousand dollars to breed her to my girl - If he can fight?"

Jed was taken aback by the offer and said, "Wow! I don't know, we don't have any way to prove if he can fight or not." Johnny hesitated for a few minutes, like he was thinking of something and said, "You know, I have a smaller male in my truck and we could let them fight for a few minutes, just to see if he'll fight back." Jed was very apprehensive about the offer and said, "I don't think my brother here wants to see his dog get hurt." Joshua looked at the Jed and then Johnny and smiled and said, "It's okay Jed. He won't get hurt."

Deep inside Joshua really wanted to show Jed and everyone that Mister could hurt or kill another dog on his command if he wanted Mister to kill them. Johnny replied, "If you follow me out back behind the buildings, where I'm parked, I will give you a hundred dollars just to see if that big guy will fight my male. I promise you, I won't let your guy get hurt. I'll break it up before it gets too far out of hand. I have a "breakstick" to break them up before it gets that far." Jed didn't know that the owners of Pit Bulls sometimes have to carry a "breakstick." He asked Johnny, "What the heck is a breakstick?" Johnny replied, "It's a tool used to pry open a pit bulls jaws when they accidently get into a fight with another dog. Pit Bulls have developed enormous jaw strength, as well as a tremendous "hold and shake bite" style of fighting. They tend to attack the deep muscles, to hold on and shake, causing ripping of the tissue which is a lot like a shark attack. They are the only dog breed that possess that bite style and they can never be fully trusted. Sometimes you have to pry their jaws apart to get them to release the animal they attack." Jed looked a little perplexed by it and said, "I don't know Joshua that sounds like it could be a little dangerous for Mister. Are you sure you're willing to let Mister to do that?" Joshua looked up at Jed with a smirk as he said, "It's okay, Jed. Mister will be ok." Jed told Johnny that if Joshua was okay with it, then he was too. Besides, Jed felt the hundred dollars would pay for a lot of what they had spent for the day.

While they were following Johnny to the truck, Chelsea said, "If it's okay with you Jed, I'll just wait in the truck while you boys have your fun." She wasn't really interested in seeing any animal get hurt, especially Mister. She was already starting to get pretty attached to him. Jed went over and kissed her and gave her the keys to the truck. He said, "We'll be back in a little while. Just lock the door to the truck and wait for us."

When they arrived at Johnny's truck, Jed told Johnny that before they did anything, he had to hand over the hundred bucks. Johnny gladly and quickly

reached in his pocket and pulled out a big wad of money folded together. He pulled out a one hundred dollar bill and gave it to Jed. Johnny had both the pretty white female and a smaller tan colored male Pit Bull Terrier under a camper shell of his truck. As they approached, each of them lunged at the back of the truck until Johnny yelled at them to relax. The boys got up a little closer to take a look at the white female and she was a beautiful dog, just like Johnny had said. Jed understood why Johnny wanted to breed her to Mister. The male was a little smaller and they could see that he had a few scars on his face as he growled angrily out the back.

Johnny snapped a chain to the collar the male dog was wearing and had him jump out of the truck as he told everyone, "This is Sam." Joshua had Mister standing about twenty feet from the truck as the Johnny had unloaded Sam. He told Joshua, "You can take your dog's harness off and hold him and when I unchain Sam you can let go of Mister to see what he'll do." Joshua just nodded his head in agreement as he took the harness off. He didn't have to hold Mister back because he knew Mister wouldn't do anything unless he gave him the correct command. Mister was standing next to Joshua just waiting in anticipation. He was ready and willing to "mix it up" with Sam.

As soon as Johnny unchained Sam, Joshua gave Mister the command to attack with the clicking sound of his tongue. That's when Mister's primitive instincts to kill or be killed was awakened. He charged Sam and knocked him to the ground with his chest, but Sam was a warrior as he came up snarling and biting. Mister bit down hard and clamped on to Sam's hind leg muscle. There was a snap of the bone and in an instant Sam was seriously injured. Johnny saw all that he needed to see as he yelled at Sam and Mister to stop. He knew that wasn't going to do any good so he headed to the cab of his truck to get an ax handle to try and separate them. He knew full well that with Pit Bulls, if you tried to stop them during a fight you could also get seriously injured. Sometimes the only way to stop them during an attack is to shoot them. The ax didn't work and the two dogs kept fighting. That's when Johnny went to the cab of his pick-up to get the breakstick.

While Johnny was getting it, Mister had managed to avoid all attempts by Sam to grab him in a choking hold. Mister swung his body in on Sam like he had done to Brutus and he instantly had Sam by the throat and was ready to kill. He waited for the signal from Joshua as he held Sam there defenseless. Joshua smiled and looked over at Jed and Jed was looking back at him. He clicked Mister the signal to kill and the fight was over almost before it started. Mister was then standing over the limp and lifeless Sam. By the time Johnny got back with the Breakstick his dog lay dead. Mister had a few cuts that Joshua would have to attend to but nothing deep and serious. Joshua clicked the signal for Mister to return to his side. He patted him on the head and said, "Good Boy."

Jed looked over at Johnny and said, "Well it looks like he can fight. I'm sorry about your dog, Johnny." He now had mixed emotions about what had just happened and he was still in shock because it had happened so fast. He was very disappointed that his dog was dead, but he was now, more than ever, willing to pay the thousand dollars to have Mister breed his female. Before they left, Jed got his address and phone number and told him he would call him in a few weeks to

coordinate with him when it would be a good time to get Mister and his female together.

When they got back to the pick-up, Chelsea was waiting patiently but also a little apprehensive of what she thought may have just happened to Mister. She looked at Mister and he didn't look like he had even been in a fight. He didn't look hurt in any way as she said, "Wow, that didn't take very long. Was everything ok?" Jed looked at her, held up the money in front of her and said, "We got the hundred bucks." Chelsea said, "That's great, but what happened. Did Mister fight his dog?" Joshua piped up from the back seat and proudly said, "Yep, he killed him." Chelsea's eyes and mouth opened wide and she didn't say anything as she looked at Jed and he shook his head up and down as to confirm what Joshua was saying was true. She was surprised, the only thing she could say was, "Are you serious? Oh my gosh! I'm glad I didn't watch." Jed was still in a little bit of shock himself as they left Kernville and headed up the mountain. Jed had seen all the things Joshua had taught Mister since he was a puppy, but he had no idea how much control over Mister that Joshua really had. The more he thought about it, the more he believed, Mister is a lot like Joshua having a loaded gun, and that is scary.

On the way home they tried to put the dog fight behind them as Jed and Chelsea started talking about what a great time they all had. Justin told Jed and Chelsea that they all should go on another trip again someday. They were talking and joking around all the way back to Chelsea's house. When Jed dropped Chelsea off she made Jed promise her they would go to "Whiskey Flat Days" again next year.

## **Chapter 18**

### **Joshua Crosses the Line.**

Jed had been thinking about the money Johnny Jackson said he would pay them if they would let Mister breed his female. He figured it would be an easy way to make a thousand dollars and they could use the money. Joshua agreed.

Jed waited until the two weeks was up and then called Johnny to see if his female was in heat and if he still wanted to breed his dog to Mister. Johnny told him that she was just coming into heat and that it would be about a week before she was ready. Jed asked him if he was still willing to pay them a thousand dollars to breed her to Mister. He very excitedly, said, "Yes, I sure am. Call me the following week, and if you don't mind, would you bring Mister down to my house in Palmdale? You can stay overnight while Mister and my girl mate." Jed liked that idea because he didn't want Johnny bringing his dog to their house.

Jed told Joshua what the plan was, but told him Johnny's female wouldn't be ready for another week. Joshua was really excited. He liked the idea of Mister having some puppies. Jed told him, "Now Joshua, you do know that because Johnny is paying us to breed his dog to Mister we don't get to keep any of the



puppies? They'll belong to Johnny." Joshua asked, "Is he going to drown them?" He had remembered what happened to Mister's brothers and sisters a few days after they were born. Jed laughed and said, "No, he is going to keep all of them for himself. We get a thousand dollars and he get the puppies." Joshua was just happy to hear Johnny wasn't going to drown them in a gunny sack.

The week of waiting must've seemed like a month to Joshua as he kept coming up to Jed every day and asking him if it was time to go yet. Jed would always tell him, "No, it isn't time yet, Joshua. I'll let you know when it is." That didn't stop him, he kept asking right up to the day it was time to go.

On the day they were leaving, Jed called Johnny and made sure he had the right address, then he, Justin, Joshua and Mister piled into the truck and headed to Palmdale. Joshua was like a kid that was going to get a new bicycle for Christmas. He couldn't wait to get there as they drove through Mohave and on down to Johnny's house. His place was at the end of a road and back away from any other houses. As they drove up to the house, Jed could tell he was a man that liked his privacy. The house was set back, off the road about thirty yards and it looked like an older home that was built during the 1950's. It had a nice paint job and looked like it had been kept up very well. The front yard had only a few large trees and there was no grass or plants out front. It appeared to Jed that people were using the front yard as a parking area because it was almost all dirt.

As soon as they arrived, Johnny came bounding out of the house to greet them. He had a big smile on his face as he went up and shook Jed's hand. He said, "Did you have any trouble finding the place?" Jed answered, "No, It was pretty easy to find." Johnny looked down at Mister and said, "Hello big guy, you ready to get it on?" Joshua piped up and said, "He's ready."

Johnny told Jed he had cleared out one of the bedrooms in his house where the three of them could spend the night. After they put their things away in the bedrooms Johnny had them come outside. He wanted to show them what he had in his metal building about thirty yards behind the house. He told Joshua, "You'll have to keep Mister outside because I have a lot of dogs in there and I don't want them getting all riled up." Justin knew Joshua was anxious to also see what was going on inside so he told Joshua, "I'll stay out here with Mister while you go in and take a look around." Joshua was a little apprehensive about leaving Mister outside, but knew Justin would keep a good eye on him.

When they walked inside the building, some of the dogs began to bark and growl when they saw all the strange faces. There were fourteen cages inside the building where Johnny housed all his dogs. Each cage had an area that was six feet wide and ten feet long and there were a row of seven on each side of the building. Each stall had total privacy from the other one so the dogs couldn't see out into the walking area or each other. At the end of each pen was an "Igloo" dog house for the dogs to sleep in. Each dog also had dog door where they could go outside whenever they wanted. It was about the same size on the outside as it was on the inside pen. The entire building had heating and air conditioning, just like most houses.

There was a worker inside who looked like he was taking care of some of the dogs as he was moving from place to place. He wasn't paying much attention to them when they came in and he didn't appear to be too friendly. He didn't even

look over at them as he went about his business. Johnny said, "That's Carlos over there and he takes care of the dogs for me." He was a Hispanic male, thirty one years of age, and about five foot seven inches tall. He had his hair in a ponytail just like Johnny.

As they walked along and looked in the pens, Jed soon found they were all Pit Bull Terriers and they all had their ears trimmed back. He instantly realized what Johnny was up to. He was using his dogs as fighting dogs in a ring. He looked over at Johnny and said, "Hey Johnny, can we talk outside for just a minute?" He told Joshua to stay inside and look around at the dogs while he talked to Johnny. When he said that Johnny replied, "Sure, no problem," and headed outside.

Once outside, Jed confronted Johnny and told him he now knew that he was one of those people that raised his dogs to fight in a ring. He told Johnny, "I'm not sure Joshua is going to be okay knowing that Mister's puppies would be raised to fight and possibly end up dead." Johnny laughed and said, "I don't fight my girl in the ring. She's my pride and joy and I would never let that happen to her or her puppies. I just believe she and Mister would make some awesome, quality dogs."

Jed and Johnny continued to talk outside as Joshua made his way around the building looking at all the dogs one by one. Johnny had eleven males and two females. One of the females looked like she was getting ready to have puppies and the other one already had five she was nursing. Carlos was moving some of her bedding around and taking care of her when Joshua went up next to the cage and said, "Hi, I'm Joshua." At first Carlos didn't say anything to Joshua, he just gave him an irritated look. Joshua wondered what that was all about and then Carlos walked up close to the gate and almost right in his face, and said, "I know who you are, you stupid little freak, your dog killed Sam. I don't like you and I don't like your dog. You're both nothing but freaks to me." It hurt Joshua's feelings when he called him a freak and he immediately backed away from the pen. He hadn't felt that kind of jabbing, hurting pain since he had first tried to go to school with the other kids in kindergarten. He stood there for a minute just staring deeply into Carlos's eyes until Carlos turned away and starting working again.

Johnny and Jed came back into the room a few minutes later and it looked like they had everything worked out because they were laughing and talking. Joshua went up to Johnny and asked him, "Why do all your dogs have short ears?" Johnny laughed out loud and said, "If they get in a fight with another dog sometimes the dogs will hold onto their ears and pull their ears off if they are long. We cut our dogs ears short so that won't happen." Joshua didn't ask him any other questions, he just walked around the building looking at all the dogs. He would occasionally looking over at Carlos to see if he was looking back at him.

Johnny told Jed he wanted to leave Mister and Princess together for at least one entire day to make sure she "would take" and would be pregnant. He showed them to their room and then brought Princess into the house and introduced her to Mister. They first acted like they wanted to fight each other but Joshua gave Mister the signal to retreat and he started wagging his tail. They sniffed around on each other for several minutes until they were comfortable with each other. Princess started to lay down on her back in a submissive posture and they started to play like they were puppies again. Johnny looked over and said, "They're going to get along fine." At that point, Mister wasn't paying too much attention to

Joshua or anyone else, he had something else on his mind. It wasn't much longer after that when they hooked up. Johnny let out a big laugh and said, "I think we're going to have some puppies, boys." Joshua clapped his hands and said, "Yippeel!"

Johnny had them make themselves at home as he barbequed a couple of big tri-tips and put together a huge dinner for them. Carlos had a place where he stayed and slept out in the corner of the building where the dogs were kept. Johnny went and got him and had him join them for dinner. He wasn't very friendly as he quickly ate dinner and then headed back to the building. Joshua looked over at him a few times and he could still see the anger in his face. Johnny told Jed, "He's an illegal, but I've had him working with me for several years and he takes really good care of the dogs. There are a couple of the dogs that don't like him and he has to be especially careful around them. Sam was one of his favorites so, if he isn't very friendly, that's the reason." Jed didn't know that Carlos had called Joshua a freak or he wouldn't have been very happy about it. They probably wouldn't have stayed the night if Joshua had told him.

That night, they left Mister and Princess together in a porch room in back of the house, as everyone went to bed. It was just after midnight, while everyone was sleeping, that Joshua snuck into the porch room where Mister and Princess were and got Mister. He made sure Princess laid back down as he took Mister out of the room and headed for the dog building. He was angry with Carlos for calling him a Freak. Before he opened the door to the dog building, he gave Mister the signal to not bark and to not growl as they went in. He very slowly and quietly opened the door, making sure he didn't wake the other dogs. They crept over to the corner of the building where Carlos was sleeping in his single bed. He was lying on his back and had his head turned toward the wall, with his neck exposed. As they got very close to the bed, Joshua said to himself, I'm not a freak. You're the freak. He gave Mister the signal to kill and Mister instantly grabbed Carlos by the neck and gave it a few quick jerks before Carlos knew what had happened. Mister had snapped his neck just like he had with the dogs he had already killed. He didn't even have time to try and fight or scream out for help.

Joshua had kept most of his meat from the BBQ and he threw it on Carlos's dead body before he turned and said to Carlos before he walked away, "You won't call me a freak anymore." He slowly took Mister outside and told him to stay, as he patted him on the back and said, "Good Boy!" He then crept slowly back inside the building and unlatched the doors to the pens of all the dogs. He opened them so they would be free to roam the building and find the meat on Carlos's body. He figured the dogs would fight over the meat and it would look like they killed him. He then took Mister and put him back in the room with Princess and went back to his sleeping area. He was very satisfied with himself and Mister as he lay there thinking about what they had done. He wasn't going to let anyone call him names ever again, especially as long as he had Mister as his protector.

It was in the early morning hours when Johnny and the boys heard a lot of commotion coming from the dog kennel. It sounded like there were a lot of dogs fighting with each other as Johnny grabbed his "breakstick" and headed to the building. Jed, Justin and Joshua were right behind him and he told Jed to keep everyone back as he entered the building. When Johnny first looked inside the room, there were two dead dogs, near the back of the building where Carlos slept

and a few other dogs still fighting with each other. Johnny yells out, "Holy crap! I got dead dogs in here!" After several minutes, he was finally able to put the dogs back in their cages and then go over and check on Carlos who was on the floor. When he found Carlos he was pretty badly mangled, lying next to his bed. Johnny yelled out, "Christ, what the hell happened here, Carlos?" He went over to see if Carlos was still breathing, it looked like he had been mauled by the dogs. He checked for his pulse and soon found out, he was dead.

After several minutes, Johnny came out of the building, he looked haggard and tired as he said, "Somehow, the dogs got out in the middle of the night and two of them are dead. While they were out, they killed Carlos." Jed really didn't know what to say as he went over to Johnny and put his hand on his shoulder. He said, "Man that is sick! What are you going to do?" He told Jed, "I have no idea. I'm totally devastated right now. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before." He looked like he was dazed and confused as he continued, "I can't call the police or they'll come and get me then throw me in jail for raising fighting dogs, especially now that they have killed a man." Jed told him, "Maybe you ought to think about it for a while before you make any rash decisions. Does Carlos have any family that live around here?" Johnny said, "No. All of his family still live in Mexico and he just sends them money each month." Jed said, "If you don't want to get in trouble with the police, then maybe you should think about burying him out back here someplace where no one will ever know he was killed by your dogs. If that's what you decide to do, we'll all help you dig the holes to bury him and your two dogs."

Johnny had his dogs fight illegally all over the state and he had buried a few of the dogs on his property that were killed in the ring, but he felt he had never been in this kind of trouble before. He'd never had any of his dogs attack a person before. The more he thought about it, the more he felt Jed was right. He knew he didn't have any choice in the matter, unless he wanted to spend several years locked up behind bars. He told Jed, "If we do this, you guys will have to keep this our secret. If anyone finds out about it, I'll be in big trouble. I might even have to spend the rest of my life in jail." As he looked over at Joshua and Justin, Jed said, "Don't worry Johnny, we're good at keeping secrets. He looked over at Joshua and Justin and winked as he said, "We have a few secrets of our own," They looked back at Jed with somewhat of an embarrassed grin on their faces because they knew exactly what he was talking about.

Jed and the boys spent the entire day helping Johnny dig the holes for the body of Carlos' and the two dogs. They waited until dark, so no one would see what they were doing. They carefully carried Carlos' body out of the building and buried it. They also did the same thing with the two dogs. When they finished they had to spend time trying to calm Johnny down before Jed told him they had to head back to Red Mountain before it got too late. Johnny thanked them for all their help and gave them the thousand dollars he had promised them plus, an extra two hundred dollars for all their help. As they were leaving, he still looked totally overwhelmed and defeated as they got in their truck. Jed said, "I'll call you in about nine weeks from now to see how many puppies you have. Try to forget about what happened last night." Johnny waved good-bye as he said, "Okay. I'll try."

On the way home, Jed had a funny feeling something just wasn't "quite right" about the dogs and how they had gotten out of their cages. Everything about the incident with the dogs just didn't make a lot of sense to him. Johnny had been raising and fighting dogs for years and he had never had any problems with his dogs getting out of their cages. As Joshua sat in the back seat with Mister, he seemed extra ordinarily happy with himself for some unknown reason. Jed had both hands on the wheel as he looked over his right shoulder and said to Joshua, "Did you have anything to do with what happened back there to Carlos?" Joshua looked back at Jed as he smiled and said, "He deserved it. He called me a freak." Jed instantly screamed out in anger, "I knew it! I knew you had something to do with it, I just didn't know what. So what did you do? Did you turn the dogs loose inside the building!?" Joshua said, "Yes, I let Mister kill him." Jed was in shock that he admitted it so willingly. Usually he had to keep pushing Joshua to get a straight answer out of him when he did something wrong. When Joshua said that, Jed said, "Christ Joshua! You can't just kill people for calling you a name. You should've told me and we would've taken Mister and gone home." Joshua smiled and replied, "It's okay Jed, I took care of him." All the way back to Red Mountain Jed was wondering, "What is going on in Joshua's head?" Joshua had now turned into a vengeful killer with a deadly weapon. Jed also wondered, "Will he kill someone again if they call him a name, and if they do, how can I stop him?" Jed's body shivered at just the thought of the way Joshua had taken out his anger on Carlos.

## **Chapter 19**

### **The Follower.**

When they got home from Palmdale, Chelsea was anxious to see Jed. He told Justin and Joshua he was going to spend time with her. He felt like he really needed to just get away from both of them for a while, especially after what had happened to Carlos. He needed time to think about what Mister and Joshua had done.

Justin didn't quite understand why Jed was wanting to spend more time with Chelsea. He felt like Jed was choosing her over him and Joshua. Jed was one of the only people that ever accepted Justin for the way he looked. All Justin really ever wanted from people was for them to like and accept him for who he was. When Justin looked in the mirror he saw what other people saw. What hurt him the most was that he didn't believe he was that much different than everyone else. When Jed wasn't around all Justin had in his life was Joshua and he was always in his own private little world.

Justin felt bad that none of the girls he and Jed had ever met on their trips were interested in him. Believing that he would never have a "real girlfriend" in his life made it a lot easier for the evil part of his brain to take control. It fueled his desire to spy on women and his desires were becoming more of an uncontrollable

compulsion than anything else. The strong need to watch women undress was a constant struggle Justin was having with both his body and mind. The older he had gotten, the more the man voice in his head kept telling him it was okay to feel the way he felt. The voice kept telling him to go out and just have some fun watching girls through their windows. The voice and his urges had outweighed the stern warning from Jed telling him he needed to stay cooped up behind the property walls.

As Justin sat alone on his bed he thought, "Jed don't get it. He doesn't have to sit home all by his self, hearing the voice telling him he's ugly, that no girls wants him. Jed's not trapped in a prison, behind walls, like me. Jed's got Chelsea. He's not my boss! No one's my Boss! Jed don't know how good it feels to watch girls. I don't hurt no one. I don't hurt them girls and it makes me feel so good. It's almost like having a real girlfriend and I want that too." Even though Justin loved Jed deeply, he also resented him because he wished he could be more like him.

Justin once again began to give in to his deep desires and started leaving the property whenever Jed would go see Chelsea. Justin would dress up in his black gear and go out searching for women to spy on. He would only go out for a few hours at a time, always making sure he made it back home before Jed.

Joshua would watch as Justin left him all alone and he soon became curious about what Justin was doing outside the property. After several nights, he decided he was going to take Mister and follow Justin. It was during one of those nights when Joshua and Mister weren't too far behind him. They stayed hidden, but far enough away from Justin that he didn't see them. Justin wasn't paying attention because he had other things on his mind. He also wasn't expecting someone to be following him from his own house.

There was a cluster of mobile homes and trailers bunched closely together on a few lots in the middle of Red Mountain. Jed and Justin always stayed clear of this property because there were a few rough looking characters that lived there. Sometimes they would party all night long, shoot off fire crackers or M-80's and guns, while they were getting drunk or doing their drugs. Some people of Red Mountain believed these people may also have had something to do with all the stealing that was going on, in and around the area.

As Joshua followed Justin, he noticed a guy that had come from the cluster of those homes and had spotted Justin. Joshua ducked for cover and began to follow Justin. He stayed a safe distance from him but seemed to be real interested in what Justin was up to. Joshua wasn't sure why the guy wanted to follow Justin, but wanted to find out. Maybe the guy was just curious or maybe he thought that if Justin was going to steal something, he would rob him along the trail. Whatever his reason, Joshua figured he was up to no good. The guy followed Justin as he went from house to house in search of a bedroom window with a light on. Joshua and Mister stayed a safe distance from the guy as he tailed Justin from place to place. The guy never made any attempt to confront Justin.

After about an hour of going from house to house, Justin decided he needed to head back home before Jed got back and caught him out again. He didn't want to get into another fight with Jed about staying home. While on his way back, the guy following Justin stayed on his trail, not letting him get too far ahead of him.

Joshua decided that he and Mister were going to circle around in front of Justin and the guy to see if he followed Justin home. Joshua believed that if the guy followed Justin all the way home he was either going to try to kill Justin or report him to the sheriff's department. Whatever the guy had planned, Joshua knew he wasn't going to let it happen. He and Mister were going to stop him before he got the chance.

Joshua and Mister ran ahead until they had circled around and were ahead of Justin and the guy. They were only about two hundred yards from home and hiding along the trail in a clump of Yucca plants. It was several minutes later when Justin made his way past them. Joshua didn't say anything to him as he passed by. He wanted to see if the guy was still hot on Justin's heels and was going to follow him all the way home. He didn't have to wait long when the guy came creeping along the trail.

Joshua lowered his body and told Mister, "Stay down boy. Get ready." Mister was starting to get anxious as the guy approached their position. Joshua whispered to him, "It's okay boy, calm down." Just as the guy passed them, Joshua gave Mister the signal to attack and kill. Mister instantly went charging the guy and struck him from behind. He knocked him to the ground and as he fell forward, a shot rang out from a gun he was carrying. Joshua quickly ran over and put his foot on the guy's arm and held the gun to the ground. By then Mister was already going for his throat. It was only a matter of seconds before he had him. Joshua once again gave Mister the signal to kill. With the guy's neck in his strong jaws, Mister gave a couple of violent jerks back and forth. Joshua smiled as he heard the guy's neck snap. He then gave Mister the signal to retreat and as he backed off patted him on the head and said, "Good boy, you done good."

Justin heard the shot and thought someone had fired a round at him. He ducked down and slid off the trail. He waited a few minutes to see if someone was going to take another shot at him before he made a move. He heard the muffled commotion of Mister's attack as he sat hidden with anticipation. When the noise subsided, Justin waited a few minutes. He grabbed a huge rock, ready for whatever would happen next.

It was only a moment later when Joshua came moving slowly along the trail with Mister looking for Justin. As he moved along, he was whispering, "Hey Justin, it's me. It's Joshua." When he finally got close enough for Justin to see him he said, "What the hell are you doing here, Joshua? Didn't you hear that gun shot?" Joshua replied, "Yea, we got the guy." By then Justin was a little confused and moved in close to Joshua and asked, "What guy?" Joshua replied, "The guy that was following you. Justin was shocked to hear this as he said, "I didn't see anyone following me." Joshua said, "Well he did! He followed you all the way home! We killed him for you! Me and Mister! He's back there on the trail!" Justin said, "Are you kidding? Let's go take a look!" He wasn't sure if he believed Joshua, but someone had fired a shot in his direction.

When they got back to the guy, Justin said, "Holy crap! I never saw him!" Mister had mangled him up pretty bad and his twisted clothes and body were lying across the trail just like Joshua had said. They could see he was in his late twenties or early thirties. Justin said, "Look Joshua! I think this guy might be another one of those tweakers. Look how skinny he is. He aint got no teeth in front

neither, just like them tweakers.” Joshua said, “I watched him come from the trailers and follow you. I don’t know if he’s one of them guys, Justin.”

After Justin stood there looking at him for a minute, Joshua asked, “What are we going to do with him?” Justin thought for a minute and said, “We don’t have time to take him to the mine shaft before Jed gets home. We can’t let Jed know about this guy. He’ll know we were off the property and he’ll be mad at us. Go back to the house and get the wheel barrow. We’ll take him back to the house. I’ll wait here until you get back. Make sure no one sees you.” Joshua replied, “Ok, Justin, I’ll take Mister. We’ll be right back.”

It took Joshua several minutes before he was back with the wheel barrow. They loaded the guy’s body, along with his gun, into it and Justin said, “We’ll take him home and bury him in the back yard. We’ll bury him on the other side of the house from where mom and dad are buried. Jed won’t ever know he’s there. We won’t build a box for him because it’s too late. We’ll just bury him like he is.” Joshua replied, “Okay Justin that sounds good to me.”

When they got his body back to the property, they wheeled him around to the dark side of the house they didn’t see very often. They took turns digging until they had a hole about six feet deep and wide enough for his body. When they were finished with it they rolled his body out of the wheel barrow and into the hole. They threw the gun in on top of him and covered it.

After everything was completed they went into the house and sat down on the couch with a glass of chocolate milk to collect their thoughts. Justin told Joshua, “Thanks for being there for me. I never saw him behind me. I don’t know what that guy was up to, but now he won’t be able to tell anyone where we live. I’ll have to be more careful the next time I go out.” Joshua looked over at Justin and said, “Maybe you should stay home Justin, like Jed said.” Justin didn’t seem to like what Joshua was saying as he said, “We can’t ever tell Jed about this guy because he would never understand why we didn’t listen to him and stay home. You’ll get in trouble too, Joshua.”

About a week later, when Jed was at “The Joint” he heard the story about a missing person from Red Mountain. The talk was starting to get a little more serious now that two people had gone missing in the past several months. When Jed first heard about it, he thought, at least they can’t blame this one on me and Justin. He didn’t realize it but, the guy was buried in his own back yard.

## **Chapter 20**

### **Justin Can’t Stay Home.**

Even though Justin and Joshua had caused yet another tweaker’s death, the torment in Justin’s soul was driving him crazy. As he lay awake at night, the voices in his head took over once again. They were sounding more like a command than a suggestion. It was something that consumed Justin and his every thought. He felt it was something he just couldn’t fight, no matter how hard he tried. He



knew the only thing he could do was go along with his uncontrollable desires or he would end up all alone behind the lonely walls. Having Jed get upset with him for leaving the property seemed like it was the lesser of two evils. After wrestling with his demons, he made up his mind. On the nights that Jed was with Chelsea, he wasn't going to just sit home anymore and feel trapped. He was going to go out and do what he liked to do more than anything else in the world. He thought, "No one is going to tell me what to do no more and no one's gonna stop me from doing what I wanna do. It's my life and I'll do whatever I want."

Justin waited until the next night when Jed left to go see Chelsea when he slipped out of the gate all alone, once again. As soon as he closed the gate behind him, he took in a deep breath of the cold mountain air. He looked up at the millions of stars and said, "I'm free again." He almost felt like shouting out loud as he started making his way around the same familiar Red Mountain area. His mind was no longer thinking about right or wrong, he was just looking to fulfill his overwhelming and yearning desire to see a woman getting undressed. What he loved most about what he was going to do had become very clear to him. Sure he loved looking at the women undress but the fact that he could see them undress and they couldn't see him, excited him beyond what any words could describe.

He once again began creeping his way around to some of the houses where the lights were still on. He would move slowly over to their bedroom windows and peer in. If he didn't see what he came for, he would leave and make his way down the street to another house. He always made sure that no one could see him as he sneaked slowly from house to house.

Justin finally found a house where a woman was in her bedroom, with the light on. She was sitting at a dresser in just her panties and bra. She was combing her hair out before she went to bed. That was exactly what he was searching for. He took a crouched position and watched her through the corner of the window. He got so excited that he pulled down his pants and started playing with himself as he watched. When she turned out the lights and went to bed he pulled up his pants and looked around to make sure no one had seen him. He then proudly made his way back to the house.

He enjoyed spying on the women so much that he continued to do it, night after night, while Jed was with Chelsea. One night, he impulsively decided he would go back to the same house where the young high school girl lived where he had broken in and stood by her bed. It had been close to a year and feeling safe again, she had finally taken the shades down from her windows. There he was, in that same familiar spot he had been to so many times in the past watching from outside her bedroom window. He very excitedly watched as she got ready for bed but even though he was excited, it wasn't the same as when he had been inside her house and up close to her. His driving desire was urging him to get inside her house, but he would need to catch her alone again.

He was patient as he waited night after night to see when the time would finally come. When it happened, he crept over to her bedroom window and waited until she finally decided to go to bed. She didn't waste any time as she quickly took off her clothes and jumped in bed. He went around to break the same window he had broken once before. When it shattered an alarm immediately sounded, blaring loudly. Justin quickly turned and started to run, jumping the fence. Lights came

on from the next door neighbor's house and out ran the home owner wielding a rifle. He aimed and took a shot at Justin as he headed down the street. Justin heard the bullet as it zinged past his head. He wasn't thinking about getting shot as he kept running deeper into the darkness. His heart was still pumping hard when he finally made it home and sat down on the bed. Once there, he thought to himself, "Now, I'm having fun again."

Some of the men in Red Mountain formed a neighborhood watch group shortly after the reports of the peeping tom being back in town. They were determined they weren't going to let someone go around breaking into their houses and terrorizing their women again. The neighborhood watch group was made up of the young man whose wife had taken four shots at Justin, the father of the high school girl, and four other Red Mountain men. They each were assigned streets that were their responsibility. They were supposed to walk the streets and report any suspicious activity to the sheriff's department. During one of their meetings some of the locals over heard one of the men say, "We'll spread the word around town that we formed the group and our motto will be, "We catch – we kill." Even if the rest of the town wasn't totally okay with that motto, everyone in their group supported that stance. A few days after the meeting, they started walking the streets at night, with guns loaded, waiting for the peeping tom or any Night Crawlers to come creeping around.

Justin didn't have any kind of contact with the people in town so he didn't hear about them forming the neighborhood watch group. He didn't know they were walking around at night with guns, watching for the peeping tom and the Night Crawlers. A few nights later, oblivious to the vigilantes, Justin it headed out once again looking for the house he hoped would fulfill his intense needs and desires. He spent time going from house to house until he came to one with a light on in the bedroom. He'd been there for some time peeking through the window and watching the woman. He was so preoccupied with her and his needs that he hadn't noticed he'd been spotted by the neighborhood watch. The guy was about fifty yards from Justin when he ducked behind a bush and waited. He watched for a several minutes to make sure Justin was the peeping tom and not an innocent neighbor checking on someone. When he was convinced it was the peeping tom, he took careful aim with his rifle and fired off a shot. Justin heard the sound of the gun just about the same time he felt the burning sensation of the bullet go deep into his chest. He was temporarily knocked off his feet and crawled around until he regained his balance. Once he was on his feet he ran from the house. That's when the guy took another shot at him and hit him in the upper part of his back. Justin went down again. Even though he was severely wounded, his instincts took over and he managed to get him up and head toward home. The gunman knew that he had hit his target at least once as he tried to follow after Justin. He didn't get far before he lost sight of Justin who was deep into the darkness and hiding behind the plants.

Justin was staggering and struggling to stay on his feet as he made it to the familiar spot behind a clump of Yucca plants. As he tried to keep from passing out, he continued to look back over his shoulder to make sure that the gunman wasn't following him. He finally made his way back to the house and fumbled around to get the gate open. Once inside, he slammed it closed behind him, barely

making it through the back door. He collapsed just inside and from there all he could do was crawl. He was breathing sporadic as air was escaping through a collapsed lung he had suffered from one of the bullets, he had taken in the back. He knew he wasn't going to last long and was losing consciousness. He'd already lost too much blood from both wounds. He tried to call out for Joshua but could only let out little more than a whisper. He managed to crawl toward Joshua's room when he passed out in the hallway floor.

Joshua heard the thump of Justin's body hit the floor when he collapsed and went running into the hallway to see what had made the noise. That's when he saw Justin lying face down in a pool of blood. He tried to get Justin to say something as he rolled him over. All he could hear was the wheezing sound coming from Justin's damaged lung. He searched Justin's body to see what had happened to him and found the two bullet wounds. Justin looked up, and with his dying words said, "Tell Jed I'm sorry." When Justin took his last breath, Joshua panicked and started crying. He went into the living room and started running in circles. He had his arms next to his body and he was flipping his hands wildly up and down as he was screaming and crying out loud. It took him a very long time to finally calm down before he went back over to Justin and tried to shake him a few times to get any kind of reaction out of him. With no response, Joshua knew Justin was dead. He didn't know what else to do so he curled up next to Justin and just lay there. He knew Jed would come home later in the night and find them on the floor. He would know what to do.

Jed didn't get home until close to two in the morning but when he walked into the house he saw the blood on the floor and knew something was wrong. He frantically followed the blood trail into the hallway. That's when he saw Justin and Joshua lying on the floor next to each other. Both were covered in blood and Jed wasn't sure which one was hurt. He ran over to Joshua and grabbed him by the arm to ask him if he was alright. Joshua started crying uncontrollably once he saw Jed and he looked up and said, "Justin's dead. He got shot." Jed quickly opened Justin's shirt and saw the two bullet holes with blood still oozing out of them. He instantly knew there was nothing he could do as he felt for Justin's non-existent pulse. He leaned up against the wall, with his body facing Justin, and slid down with his feet out in front of him and began to cry. He pulled Joshua close and embraced the small teenager in his arms, each comforting each other. As he sat there holding Joshua, Jed believed he knew exactly what happened. Even though he had a pretty good idea he asked Joshua, "Did he go out again?" Joshua was sobbing deeply as he said, "Yes, he did." Jed yelled, "Dammit, Justin I told you not to do that." Joshua said, "He told me to tell you before he died, that he was sorry." Those words cut Jed like a knife, but he was the one who was sorry. He felt like he had let Justin down. "I told him! I warned him the people in town would kill him if he started peeping around again! He just wouldn't listen." Even though he was angry with Justin for not listening, he also blamed himself for not being there for Justin when he needed him the most. He knew that he would now have to live with that guilt for the rest of his life, knowing there was nothing he probably could have done that would have stopped him.

He knew that Joshua was too hysterical to think about doing anything with Justin at that moment so he lay down next to Justin said, "We won't do anything

until morning and then we'll have to build another box for him and bury him next to mom and dad."

Jed didn't sleep all night. He just sat there next to Justin's body and holding Joshua. All the things he and Justin had been through together ran through his head. When morning came Jed woke Joshua and said, "Its time." Joshua screamed and said, "Do we have to?" Jed told him, "We don't have any choice, we can't keep him here like this." That's when Joshua cried out to Jed, "Let's find out who did this to Justin and kill him! Jed felt the same way but he knew they couldn't do that and told Joshua, "We can't do that Joshua." Joshua replied angrily, "Why not?" Jed hesitated for a second as he took a couple of deep breaths. He was trying give Joshua the best answer he could think of, "If we do anything, the law will come after us and lock us up. They may even kill us. Regardless, you'd never see Mister or me again." Joshua didn't seem to like that answer, but didn't say anything, just continued to cry.

Jed soon got up. He went outside and starting building on the box. It took a while, but Joshua finally joined him and started helping out. After they finished it, they went back in the house and wrapped Justin's body in a blanket. Jed picked him up and carried him out to the box and carefully placed his body in it. They managed to get the box to the bottom of the hole they had dug and bury him. They put the little cross above his grave when they were finished. Jed tried to say some good words about Justin, but got all choked up and couldn't finish. Jed felt that losing Justin was even worse than losing his mom and dad. The two of them were so close. He knew deep inside it was going to take a lot of time to get over Justin's death. The two of them were not only brothers, but partners in crime, best friends and they loved each other.

## **Chapter 21**

### **Joshua's Revenge.**

That afternoon, Jed knew he had to tell Chelsea about Justin or he was going to explode. He told Joshua he was going to go to see her and tell her all about what had happened to Justin. Jed didn't want to leave Joshua alone. "I'll take the truck and you can come along if you'd like, but they won't let Mister in the bar." Joshua said, "Me and Mister will wait in the truck, Okay." Jed was fine with that so they loaded in the pick-up and headed for "The Joint."

When they got there the place was a little busy so he stuck his head inside and got Chelsea attention, motioning for her to come outside. She immediately knew something was wrong since he didn't go inside like he normally did. She told the bartender she'd be right back and hurried outside. Jed was waiting for her just outside the door. He stood there with his hands in his sweatshirt pockets and tears running down his face, "Justin's dead." She put her hands to her face in shock as she said, "Oh my God, Jed, what happened?" Jed could hardly get the words out, "Justin must've been out peeping on women again because someone

from Red Mountain shot him, twice. He shot him once in the chest and once in the back, but he made it back home before he died.” Chelsea couldn’t believe what she was hearing. She asked, “Did you call the sheriff’s department?” Jed was nervously shuffling his feet on the sidewalk. He tried to explain to her, “I can’t go to the sheriff’s department or let anyone else know about his death. They’ll do an investigation into how and why he died and they’ll take Joshua away from me. I can’t let that to happen. I won’t lose Joshua too.” She knew he was right. “What did you do with Justin’s body?” Jed said, “We buried him right next to mom and dad in the back yard.” Chelsea still couldn’t wrap her head around what she was hearing. She asked Jed, “Do you know who shot him?” Jed just shook his head no and said, “I don’t have a clue who did it. Right now I wish I did. The way I feel.” Chelsea saw that the entire conversation was becoming too much for him. She pulled Jed close to her body and held him very tightly with both arms wrapped around him. She said, “I’m so sorry Jed! That just kills me inside! Is there anything I can do?” Jed shook his head no and replied, “Just knowing you’re here for me is enough.”

Jed told Chelsea that Joshua and Mister were with him so she took a few steps toward the pick-up and waved to Joshua when she saw that he was crying. He had his mouth half open and his eyes were squinty as he raised his hand with a half-hearted wave back to her. She asked Jed if he wanted to come in for a minute to just collect himself. He said, “No, I just needed to let you know what happened. I need to spend some time alone with Joshua and make sure he’s alright. He needs me right now.” Chelsea asked Jed if he wanted her to take the rest of the night off and be with him. He told her that he wouldn’t be much fun to be around for a few days. He told her that he would see her soon, once he felt Joshua was a little better. In his heart he knew he also needed time alone to come to grips with losing Justin. They gave each other a kiss and said they would talk to each other later. She wiped the tears away as she turned and went back inside to finish her shift.

Jed spent the entire following week hanging out with Joshua and trying to reconnect with him. They went to town, bought a video game player and played video games with each other. They spent time going into Ridgecrest and eating at some of the fast food restaurants and taking Mister with them.

He called Johnny and found out that Princess had eight puppies. She had two pure white, four that were black and white and two completely black, like Mister. They were already almost two months old so Jed took Joshua to Palmdale for the day so he could spend some time with them. Joshua loved that trip, but Jed had a hard time pulling him away from the puppies. He wanted to bring one of the black ones back with them. For that entire week, Jed didn’t let Joshua out of his sight and Joshua loved all the attention. They both were having a hard time missing Justin. That was one of the most difficult things for Jed to get over, Justin had always been right there by his side since the day he was born.

Jed knew he had to get up to Randsburg and see Chelsea and told Joshua he was going to head up that evening to check on her. It had now been over a week since he told her the news about Justin and he was missing his time with her. He really needed to see her and talk with her. He asked Joshua if he wanted to come along to keep him company but Joshua told him he wanted to stay home and play

the video games. He was really enjoying the games and was starting to get hooked on playing them. He also somehow knew he would just be in Chelsea and Jed's way if he tagged along.

When Jed got to "The Joint" Chelsea gave him a big hug and a kiss, then asked him if he was doing better as she led him to a table. He told her he was a little better and sat down to visit with her. She curled up next to him then carefully pulled a piece of folded up paper out of her pocket. She had scribbled at the top "Neighborhood Watch" and below it she had the names and addresses of six people. One was circled. Chelsea said, "I've been waiting to give this to you. It's the names and addresses of the six neighborhood watch guys that were out patrolling Red Mountain when Justin was killed. The one circled is the guy that's going around bragging about shooting the peeping tom. Everyone was having a hard time believing him because they never found a body. You have to promise me you won't do something stupid." For a split second, just the thought of someone shooting Justin sent a wave of rage all over, his face turned red and he clenched his fists. He wanted to kill the guy, but reason took control of him. He knew he couldn't get away with it. He said, "I won't do anything, I promise." Chelsea said, "Here, it's yours just in case you change your mind and decide you want to turn the guy in for killing Justin." Jed looked at her and asked, "Where did you get these names?" She said, "I overheard people talking at the bar about the different neighborhood watch guys and wrote down their names. When I got home I looked up where they all lived." Jed knew there was nothing he could do, except take the law in his own hands and he wasn't going to do that. He knew if he did, he would lose not only Joshua, but Chelsea too. He wasn't sure what he was going to do with the list but he thanked Chelsea for it and stuck it in his shirt pocket.

When he got home later that night, he walked into the kitchen to get a drink of water and took the note out of his pocket and threw it on the kitchen table. He wasn't giving it much thought at that point, it was just a list of names to him. He then went in and checked on Joshua to make sure he was okay before he went to bed. He told Joshua, "You doing alright Joshua? I'm going to hit the sack, I'm tired. If you're okay, I'll see you in the morning." Joshua didn't look up as he just kept playing the game he was playing and said, "Okay. See you in the morning, Jed."

About an hour after Jed went to sleep Joshua went into the kitchen to get a snack before he went back to his game. That's when he saw the folded note lying on the table. He picked it up, opened it and looked at it. He could see it was a list of people's names and addresses but didn't know what it said at the top of the paper. He took the note and stuck it in his pocket. The next day, when he and Jed were playing video games together, they stopped to take a break. Joshua took the note out of his pocket and said to Jed, "You left this on the table. It looks important so I wanted to make sure you didn't lose it." Joshua knew it was something important or Jed would've just thrown it in the trash as soon as he got home. Jed grabbed the note from Joshua's hand and said, "It's nothing, just a list of people that live here in Red Mountain." Joshua had the feeling Jed was trying to hide something from him. He asked Jed, "What does it say at the top of the paper?" Jed didn't really want to explain it all to him but he replied, "It says neighborhood watch." Joshua had never heard that term before so he asked Jed

what neighborhood watch meant. Jed was a little hesitant to tell Joshua because he didn't want him asking too many questions about it. Jed could tell he wasn't going to let it go until he told him what it was and what it said. He reluctantly said, "It's a group of people that keep an eye out in the neighborhoods to see if someone is doing something bad or illegal." Joshua asked Jed, "Do they carry guns?" Jed stumbled through his words very carefully as he said, "Yes. Maybe. I don't know." By then Joshua believed he had figured out what the note meant as he yelled to Jed, "They're the ones that killed Justin, aren't they?" Jed crumpled up the note and stuck it in his pocket, "We don't know that for sure Joshua." He really didn't know what else to tell Joshua at that point so he said, "Let's get back to our game." Joshua stopped talking about it and just glared angrily at the video screen, as they started playing the game once again.

Joshua knew there was a reason Jed had the note and now he was sure he knew what it was. He believed Jed knew the people on the note were the ones that had killed Justin even though he didn't tell him they were. For the rest of the day he followed Justin around waiting for him to do something with the note that was stuck away in his pocket. Jed didn't realize what Joshua was doing as he followed Jed from room to room and watched his every move. There was a point when Jed went into the kitchen alone and took the crumpled up note and threw it in the trash bag under the sink. He hadn't noticed that Joshua was peeking around the corner of the room and watched him throw it away.

Later that night, after Jed went to sleep, Joshua went to the trash bag in the kitchen and retrieved the note. By now he was convinced these were the men who had killed Justin. He began to memorize the names and addresses before he hid the note in his room.

Things were going pretty smooth between Jed and Joshua and they spent as much time with each other as they could over the next few weeks. Jed was able to spend time with Chelsea when Joshua was busy with the video games and didn't want to leave the house. One night when he was going to see Chelsea, Joshua asked if he could go and just wait in the pick-up until Jed was ready to go. Jed told him it was no problem and gladly let him and Mister tag along. When they loaded up and headed toward Ransburg Joshua asked Jed if they could make a circle around Red Mountain before he went to see Chelsea. Jed thought that was a strange request because Joshua had never shown too much interest in the town before. Jed had come to realize with Joshua he never knew exactly what he was feeling or thinking so he just went along with it.

As they drove around Red Mountain Jed didn't realize that Joshua was memorizing the numbers of the street. While making their round Joshua asked Jed, "What do the numbers on the houses mean, Jed?" Jed told him, "Each person's house has a number and that way they can get all their mail sent to that address and it also helps the police find a person if they need too." Now Joshua had figured out how he could find each person that was on list that he had memorized. He had made up his mind that it was just a matter of time before he was going to kill the ones that had killed Justin. He wasn't going to let Jed know about his plan and kept everything to himself.

The neighborhood watch group had pretty much fizzled out after Jake Crider went around town bragging to everyone that he shot the peeping tom. A few of the

guys didn't want to claim any responsibility for the shooting and immediately gave up on the program. Jake was a single, middle aged man and many people from Red Mountain believed he just used the neighborhood watch group as an excuse to do exactly what he did and that was shoot someone. The others that were left in the group hadn't seen anyone creeping around for a few weeks after Justin was shot so they soon quit going out at night.

Joshua started pretending that he was going to be playing his video games for hours as Jed left to go see Chelsea. He told Jed, "Don't worry about me Jed, I'll just be playing games while you're gone. I'll be okay." As soon as Jed left, Joshua started sneaking out with Mister and checking out the names and addresses he had managed to memorize. Over the next several nights when Jed was gone, he was able to locate the house of each person that was on the list.

Jake Crider was going to be one of the first people he went after, but he had to figure a way to kill him. He spent a lot of time sneaking around Jake's property after dark until he felt comfortable sneaking up close to him. Jake would get drunk a lot of the nights so he was easy to sneak up on. Joshua figured that once he killed a few of neighborhood watch guys, Jed would find out and stop him. Joshua was going to try and kill as many as he could and as quickly as he could, before Jed found out. He was even going to try and kill at least two of them on the same night.

Another person on Joshua's list was Mark Crisfield. He was the father of the high school girl that Justin enjoyed peeping on so much. He worked in Ridgecrest and didn't get home until just after dark on most nights, unless he stopped at Tommy T's or one of the other bars on his way home. Since the shooting of Justin, he seemed to stop at one of them more often than he normally did. Joshua had figured out where he parked his car near the house every night before he went inside.

Joshua pretended to be just like Jed and Justin as he waited for just the right time. It was a night when Jed had left to go see Chelsea and it was a dark and windy outside. Joshua put the charcoal on his face and patted Mister on the back as they headed toward Mark Crisfield's house. They crept along slowly, making sure no one saw them until they were up close to where Mark usually parked his car. He wasn't home yet so Joshua and Mister hid in a large bush right next to the house until he got home.

When Joshua finally saw the lights of Mark Crisfield car pull in, Joshua told Mister, "Get ready boy. It's time to kill him." Mister didn't make a sound as he stamped up and down in anticipation. As soon as Mark parked his car, Joshua darted over to the car, opened the passenger door before Mark had gotten out of the car and locked it up. He let Mister in and immediately gave him the signal to kill. Joshua then ran around to the other side of the car to make sure Mark couldn't get out. Mark was screaming and kicking as Mister clamped onto his neck and didn't let go. It happened so quick Mark didn't have time to reach for his gun under the driver's seat. He struggled for a few minutes, trying to reach the gun before his body went limp.

Joshua had brought a small sledge hammer with him from home. He opened the driver's door and Mark's head and shoulders fell out. He was now lying half way in the car and half way out. Joshua gave Mister the signal to retreat and he



quickly backed out of the car. Joshua slammed Mark in the head with the hammer three or four times just to make sure he was dead. He didn't want Mister to have all the fun, he wanted to get his own blows in on one of the guys that killed Justin. It was over in just a few minutes but Mark's wife heard the commotion and went running to the door yelling to see if Mark was alright. She caught a glimpse of Joshua and Mister as they ran from her yard, but it was too dark to make out who or what they were. She ran over to the car and saw Mark lying there dead and immediately started screaming. Joshua was laughing to himself as he could hear her screams become faint in the distance as he moved toward Jake's house. He said to himself, "That one's for you Justin."

When he got to Jake Crider's house, he crept over to the window and made sure he was inside. Jake was sitting at the kitchen table with his back to the back door and he was eating his dinner. Joshua waited with Mister for a few minutes and then went to the back door was open. He and Mister crept slowly inside making sure they didn't make a sound. Joshua tiptoed over behind Jake and was standing just a few feet behind him. He snickered a creepy little smirk just to get Jake's attention. He wanted Jake to see his face before he killed him. Jake heard the noise and turned around in his chair with a startled look on his face. By then Joshua and Mister were only inches from him. Joshua smiled at him and said, "You killed Justin. Now you're going to die." He gave Mister the signal to kill and in an instant, and before he could stand up, Mister had Jake by the throat. Jake dropped to the floor on his back and was squirming around trying to get free. He still had the steak knife in his right hand. He had been using it to cut the food he'd been eating, before he got interrupted. He was swinging wildly with the knife, trying to stab Mister with it but Joshua went over and stepped on his arm. He then hit Jake in the head with the sledge hammer and he immediately dropped the knife and went limp. Joshua let Mister's attack continue for a while, before he gave the retreat signal. Joshua then went over and gave Jake two more hard blows to the head with the hammer, just to make sure he was dead. He said to Jake, "Those two hits were for Justin."

Mark Crisfield's wife had called the sheriff's department and they had their sirens on as they made it to her house. They began several hours of investigation and they determined Mark had been killed by either a large animal or blows to the head, they weren't sure which until they could do an autopsy. When they asked Mark's wife what she'd seen, she told them that all she saw was a dark figure and a large dark animal as they darted away. The sheriff's department knew they had a homicide on their hands, who or what was responsible was yet to be seen.

Jake's body wasn't found until the next day when one of the neighbors went over in the morning to pick him up for work. He knocked on the door several times before he looked through the window and saw Jake's mangled body lying on the kitchen floor. He called the sheriff's department and they came out again. After their investigation, they knew it had the same M.O. as Mark Crisfield's murder. Now they had two homicides and the only thing they knew for certain was they now had a serial killer on their hands.

Joshua waited until the next night when Jed was with Chelsea once again to go after his third victim. It was Tom Silvers and he was one of the ring leaders of the neighborhood watch group. He was an older retired man who lived with his wife.

His kids were grown and gone so it was just the two of them living in Red Mountain. They didn't go out much except to go into Ridgecrest occasionally and watch a movie. He foolishly was the one pushing the rest of the group to shoot first and ask questions later. A mistake that would soon cost him his life.

That night, Tom's wife was going to be gone until later in the evening. It was her night to play bridge with a few women in Johannesburg. Joshua had gone through all his preparations of putting on all the dark clothes, putting on the charcoal, then getting Mister ready. He was still angry about Justin's death and wasn't going to be satisfied until he killed every last one on the neighborhood watch list. His anger had heightened as he arrived at his next target. Tom was lying on the couch watching television and he looked like he was half asleep when Joshua looked through the window at him. Joshua took Mister around to the unlocked back door and they very quietly snuck in. He tiptoed and Mister crept slowly along the carpet, over to where Tom was laying. Tom had his head turned away from them toward the front door. Joshua and Mister were only a few feet from him when he thought he heard something and started to raise up. Joshua gave Mister the signal to attack and he lunged at Tom's throat. Tom tried to fight off Mister's attack as he kicked him back with his feet and arms. Joshua rushed him and said, "You killed my brother. You killed Justin. Now you're going to die." He hit Tom several times in the upper chest and head until Mister had him by the throat. Tom struggled violently as he fought for his life. While on the floor, with Mister on top of him, Joshua went around and hit him a crushing blow to the head. He instantly stopped fighting back. Joshua gave Mister the signal to finish the job. Mister mangled Tom's body as Joshua went over and gave him a few more blows just for fun. Joshua said, "This is for neighborhood watch." He then turned and he and Mister quickly left the house.

When Tom's wife got home she found the mangled body of Tom and called the sheriff's department. They came out yet again, but when they came out this time there were four cars that came out on the call. They had two that stayed at Tom's house investigating the murder while the other two deputies drove up and down the streets looking for their suspects.

Joshua was already hiding at his fourth target's home by the time the sheriff's deputies started looking all over town for him and Mister. They were using their flashlights and the lights on their cars searching everywhere for Joshua and Mister. Realizing they were looking for him, Joshua got scared and told Mister, "Come on boy, we gotta get home."

Joshua and Mister had made it almost home before they were spotted by Deputy David Stokes. He was the same deputy that had chased Jed and Justin that night in Randsburg when Justin got bitten by the snake. When he was within fifty yards of them he jumped out of his car with his gun drawn and yelled for them to halt. He thought, Man, look at the size of that dog, it's huge. Joshua didn't pay any attention to him as he continued to head, for what he thought, was the safety of his house. When Joshua didn't stop, Stokes fired a warning shot in the air but Joshua still acted like he didn't hear the shot, and he just kept heading home.

Joshua and Mister made it to the fence and snuck quickly through the gate, closing it behind them. Once they were inside the property they didn't go inside

the house, Joshua knew Deputy Stokes was right behind him so he took Mister to the secret hiding room outside the house. Joshua coaxed Mister to jump to the floor of the room as he tried to help him down. Mister almost made it but went stumbling across the floor when he hit the bottom. Joshua, wrapped his arms around him and tried to comfort him as he said, "You're okay boy, you're okay? Seeing that he was, Joshua went to a corner of the room and quickly threw a tarp over himself and Mister. He had just his head peeking out to see if Stokes had followed them in. He was shaking and afraid as he and Mister sat there all alone.

When Stokes approached the gate to the property that Mister and Joshua had just gone through, Sophie saw him and attacked the fence. She was barking furiously as she lunged her body against the tin wall. When she hit the wall, it was so loud that it startled Stokes and he immediately jumped backwards. He was shouting the entire time, "Get back! Get back!" Even though Sophie was on the other side of the fence he was still a little afraid to make another move without backup. He believed Sophie was the huge dog he had seen with the dark figure he chased into the enclosed property.

Stokes called for back-up, "I found our suspects. I followed them to a house with an enclosed fence at the south end of town. It looks like our suspects are a guy and a huge, I mean huge, dog." He gave them the address and soon, all the deputies from the sheriff's department had the property surrounded, their car lights flashing and guns drawn. They shot Sophie with a taser gun as they went through the gate and one of the officers took her and tied her to the fence and out of the way. While he was doing that, the deputy yelled to Stokes, laughing as he said, "Hey sissy, the dog doesn't look that big." Figuring they had the dog under control, they then started looking for Joshua. They very carefully searched every inch of the house and property but couldn't find him. They called the animal control department to come out and take care of Sophie while they continued their search.

After searching the entire property and about to give up, Stokes said, "Let me look out back just one more time. I know he's here somewhere." He was shining his light around in the back of the house when he stumbled across the trap door opening to the secret hiding room. He slowly lifted the door with the leather strap. It was pitch black inside. He couldn't see anything so he shined his light down and into part of the room. He thought to himself, "Oh man! I don't know if I want to go down there or not. If he has a gun he'll kill me before I can defend myself." He called the other deputies over and said, "I think I've found him, I think he's down there." He pointed to the room below the trap door. The other two officers pulled their guns and pointed them at the opening of the room. Stokes peeked his head down into the room and yelled out, "Whoever is in there, you better come out now, or we're coming in after you." There was no response from Joshua, because he was too scared to move. He was sitting in the back corner of the dark room, now trembling with fear. Not only was he afraid for himself but afraid of what they might do to Mister.

One of the other deputies laughed and said, "I don't really think anyone is down there." Stokes replied, "He has to be down there, we've looked everywhere else and I know I saw him go through the gate. The fence is too high for him to get over and we've already checked to see if there were any holes in the fence where he could've

escaped.” Then Stokes yelled down into the room again, “We know you’re down there, so you might as well come out right now. Come out with your hands in the air and you won’t get hurt.” He wasn’t really convinced the guy he’d seen was hiding down there, but he didn’t know where else he could be.

Joshua and Mister weren’t moving, as they sat there under the tarp, not making a sound. Joshua wasn’t about to surrender because he knew they would take Mister away from him, just like Jed said they would. His hands were trembling as he tightly held onto Mister and whispered, “It’s okay boy. You’re okay.” Mister could feel the tension in Joshua’s body and was starting to get a little antsy. Moving nervously, he let out a low growl. Stokes peeked his head down through the corner of the opening and shined his light as far back as he could, but still couldn’t see all the way into the corner of room. He said to the other two deputies, “There’s no use, it’s just too dark in there for me to see all the way to the back. I guess I have no choice, I have to go down and check it out.” One of the deputies joked as he smirked and said, “I’m glad it’s you and not me, man. Keep your weapon drawn just in case he’s down there.” He looked over at the other deputy and smirked again. He didn’t really believe anyone was there.

Stokes had just about made it to the bottom of the ladder and Joshua realized they had been caught. He wasn’t going to give up Mister without a fight so he gave Mister the signal to attack Stokes. Mister immediately charged Stokes and had him by the leg as he sank his fangs deep into his thigh. Stokes let out a painful scream as he yelled out, “He’s down here. The dog’s got me by the leg.” Realizing Mister had him in a death grip, he pointed his gun in the direction of Mister’s body and shot three times. There was a yelp from Mister and he was hit in the upper chest and head area. As Mister dropped to the floor Stokes immediately felt the release from his leg. Mister lay on the floor and fighting to take his last breath. By then Stokes was standing at the bottom of the room trying to figure out what had just happened to him.

Seeing that his best friend now lay dying on the floor sent Joshua into a rage. He had his hammer raised and ran full force at Stokes yelling, “You killed my dog! You killed Mister. I’m going to kill you.” He started hitting Stokes with the hammer wherever he could hit him. Stokes temporarily lost his gun as it dropped to the floor when Joshua hit him on the arm. Stokes used his flashlight to ward off the hammer attacks by Joshua. He hit Stokes a few more times before he was able to push Joshua back with his arms and one leg. Joshua was relentless and continued to attack Stokes. “He was crying and just kept yelling, “You killed my dog! I’m going to kill you!” Finally, Stokes was able to push him away just long enough to retrieve his gun that was laying on the floor. When Joshua came at him again Stokes was able to fire two rapid shots at him. One of the bullets hit Joshua in the neck and upper chest and he instantly fell to the floor. As soon as he dropped to the floor, he crawled over to Mister and wrapped his arms around him. As he took his last breath, Stokes could hear him say, “I love you Mister.” Although Stokes was in a lot of pain from the attack from both Mister and Joshua, he shined his light around the room to make sure there wasn’t anyone else down there ready to attack him.

As Joshua and Mister lay dead on the floor Stokes shined the light on Joshua’s face and said, “Man, he’s only a kid.” The other deputies helped pull Stokes up

and out of the room and had him immediately see the paramedics who'd been on standby. The two deputies then went down into the room and checked things out. When they shined the light on Mister one of the deputies said, "Holy crap! Look at the size of that dog. Stokes was right, he's a monster." They then shined the light on Joshua and the deputy said, "Stokes was right about him too, he's just a kid. A strange looking one at that."

After Jed left Chelsea's he made it to within a quarter of a mile from his house when he saw all the flashing red lights from the sheriff's cars that had his property surrounded. He brought his pick-up to an abrupt halt and turned off the lights. He knew something serious was going on. He waited a few minutes, but couldn't see what was going on. He then got out of the truck and crept up as close as he could to the property, without being seen. He waited and watched from a safe distance as an ambulance vehicles loaded a person in it and a coroner's vehicle loaded up a person. He could tell the person that got in the ambulance was a deputy and he was able to walk into the ambulance on his own. He then watched as several animal control people carried a large dead animal out and laid it near the road. He instantly knew it was Mister and he got a deep sinking feeling in his stomach. He now believed that Joshua had done something terribly wrong. He didn't see Joshua come out of the property so he figured that he must've been the one who had been put in the coroner's vehicle. When the driver of the coroner vehicle and the police weren't near the vehicle he snuck up as close to it as he could get from the dark side of it and peered in the window. They had a white sheet over him, but Jed thought it could possibly be Joshua. He quickly retreated back into the darkness and far enough away that no one could see him. He went behind some Yucca plants and sat down and tried to collect himself. He had all kinds of thoughts going through his head. He was both angry and sad about Joshua but feared now for his own life. He knew that he would never be able to go back to that house again. After sitting there for a few minutes, he decided to head back to his truck and get out of there before someone spotted him and realized he was Joshua's brother.

The only place he now believed he was safe was back at Chelsea's house. Once he got there, he had to see if she would drive down to his house and find out for sure what had happened to Joshua. He explained to her about all the Sheriff and Police cars surrounding his property and that he needed to find out what was going on. When he told her about what he had seen, her first reaction was, "Oh my God! This can't be happening." Jed was shaking and tears were starting to roll down his face, "I don't really know yet, but I need to find out if Joshua is dead. I know Mister is dead and I think Joshua is too. Maybe we can drive down and see if you can find out for me? I'll stay hidden in the car while you talk to someone."

They took her father's car and drove down close to Jed's house, but stayed far enough away not to be noticed by the police. When they got there Chelsea said, "Stay down and I'll find out what happened." By then, there were several Red Mountain neighbors that were standing around talking about what had taken place. She went running up to one of the women standing there watching and said, "What happened here?" The woman immediately told her everything she knew as she said, "A boy that lived here and his dog killed three people in Red Mountain over the past two days and the sheriff's department deputies followed

him back to this property and killed him and his killer dog after they attacked the deputies.” Chelsea let out a gasp and put her hands to her face as she said, “Oh! That’s horrible!” She didn’t tell the woman she knew the boys that lived there and the woman didn’t have time to ask her if she did, before Chelsea thanked her and immediately ran back to her car. Once inside the car, she put her face in her hands and cried. She told Jed what the woman had told her. It was just as Jed had suspected. He sat back in the seat and began to cry. Chelsea turned the car around and headed back to her house. Jed was totally devastated as he cried out in anger. He wasn’t really talking to Chelsea when he said, “I can’t believe he did that. I told him over and over again to stay inside the property. I told him we couldn’t get revenge on anyone for Justin’s death. Why didn’t he listen to me?” Chelsea said, “It wasn’t your fault, Jed. You did everything you could do. You can’t go back there or they’ll know who you are and want to question you about everything. You can stay with us until we can figure out what we need to do next.”

## **Chapter 22**

### **Leaving Red Mountain.**

The next day in the Ridgecrest Independent Daily News the headlines read:

**“NIGHT CRAWLER’S REIGN OF TERROR SQUELCHED IN RED MOUNTAIN:  
THREE MURDERED: TEENAGE SUSPECT AND HIS DOG KILLED.**

The Trona sheriff’s department put an end to the Night Crawler’s stealing activities in Red Mountain. Night Crawlers is the name the locals were calling the family they believed had been responsible for stealing from them for years. The dead teenage boy and his huge dog were believed to be responsible for the murder of three local residents who were found murdered in their homes on Friday. According to the sheriff’s department, they had been mauled by the boy’s killer dog and each of them had, what appeared to be, blows to the head from a hammer or other blunt object. When the sheriff’s deputies tried to apprehend the boy and his dog they were killed after they attacked the officers. According to Red Mountain locals, the three local men who were killed were part of a “Neighborhood Watch” program. They believe they were responsible for killing one of the boy’s family members suspected of being a peeping tom. The three murdered Red Mountain victims appear to be the result of revenge by the young suspect for the killing of his brother. The sheriff’s department stated, that during their investigation, they also found the buried remains of three males and one female at the property. The investigation is ongoing to find out the identities of the bodies but they believe the bodies are the suspect’s mother and father and his two brothers. The sheriff’s department also believe that all five people that lived at the residence are now accounted for.”

Once Chelsea showed Jed the paper, he was surprised to hear about the three male bodies that were uncovered at the property. He only knew of two and wondered who the third one might be. Regardless, he believed it would give him time to plan his escape while they did an autopsy of the bodies. He knew he couldn't stick around Red Mountain very long, the sheriff's department and other law enforcement agencies would soon find out the third male body wasn't him. He believed they would soon start putting his connection to Chelsea together and be questioning her and her family. Jed also believed he would have to go to prison for a long time because of his stealing and other things he had been involved in over the years. There was the tweaker they had killed and tossed his body in the mine shaft and also Carlos's body he had helped bury. He had taken money from the Welfare department, pretending his mom was still alive. There were the years of stealing things from people in the Red Mountain area. There were just too many reasons he couldn't stick around. He knew he if he went to prison he would lose, not only his freedom, but he would never see Chelsea again. He also knew he couldn't leave Red Mountain without her by his side. He told her, "I would rather let the law enforcement kill me than leave here without you."

They both knew that if he stuck around it was just a matter of time before the police would have him behind bars. That's when he asked Chelsea if she would be willing to go with him if he fled the area. He had some money put aside and it would be enough to start fresh somewhere else. He told Chelsea he could get a job as a mechanic somewhere, since he knew a lot about car engines. He told her he would do whatever he had to do to take care of her, if she came along. He knew he was asking a lot for her to leave her home, but he didn't have any choice. Chelsea knew her dad was never going to change and her brothers were now old enough to take care of themselves. Chelsea talked with her dad and brothers and told them she loved Jed and was leaving with him. Her dad instantly became angry with her and started yelling at her. Her brothers were also not very happy about her leaving. She wasn't sure if they were upset because they were going to miss her or because they were losing a slave. As she was leaving, she told them she would call and keep in touch with them when they got to where they were going. She hugged her brothers and tried to hug her dad as she and Jed packed her things and left.

Jed knew his mom and dad's family lived in Tennessee and figured they could go there as a last resort. Once they were in the pick-up and all packed up, they were ready to leave. Jed reached over and took Chelsea's hands in his and said, "You're the only family I have left now Chelsea and I love you very much. Thank you for coming with me." Chelsea pulled one of her hands away from Jed and put the palm of it on her stomach. She rubbed it in a circular motion as she smiled at him and said, "You mean WE'RE the only family you have left."

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