



AMERICAN PREDATOR



THE HUNT FOR THE MOST
METICULOUS SERIAL KILLER
OF THE 21ST CENTURY

MAUREEN CALLAHAN

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VIKING

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Callahan, Maureen (Journalist) author.

Title: American predator : the hunt for the most meticulous serial killer of the 21st century / Maureen Callahan.

Description: New York : Viking, 2019. | Identifiers: LCCN 2018058203 (print) | LCCN 2019016403 (ebook) | ISBN 9780698191068 (ebook) | ISBN 9780525428640 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Keyes, Israel. | Serial murderers—United States—Biography. | BISAC: TRUE CRIME / Murder / Serial Killers. | TRUE CRIME / Murder / General. | BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Criminals & Outlaws.

Classification: LCC HV6248.K44 (ebook) | LCC HV6248.K44 C35 2019 (print) | DDC 364.152/32092—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018058203>

Cover design: Ervin Serrano

Cover images: (Israel Keyes) FBI; (paper tear) zimmytws / Getty Images; (street) Jon Shireman / Getty Images

Version_2

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To the victims and their families, known and unknown.

When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.

—*Sherlock Holmes*

PREFACE

The rarest form of murder is serial. Despite what we see on *CSI* or *Mindhunter* or the films and procedurals that dominate popular culture, people who kill randomly and for no reason are extremely uncommon. It's why they loom so large in our collective mindscape.

It's also why many of us think we know of every such American killer.

But the subject of this book was unlike anything the FBI had ever encountered. He was a new kind of monster, likely responsible for the greatest string of unsolved disappearances and murders in modern American history.

And you have probably never heard of him.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is based on hundreds of hours of interviews with most of the special agents on this case. Passages where someone's thoughts are described are based on information they gave directly.

In some cases, FBI interrogations have been condensed and edited for clarity.

PART I



ONE

On the side of a four-lane road, obscured by snowdrifts five feet high, sat a small coffee kiosk, its bright teal paint vibrant against the asphalt and gray big-box stores. Drivers passing by could see the familiar top peeking above the piles of snow, this cheerful but lonely little shack.

The night before, eighteen-year-old Samantha Koenig had been working this kiosk alone. Now she had vanished. She had been on the job for less than a month.

She was reported missing the morning of Thursday, February 2, 2012, by the first barista to show up at the coffee kiosk that day. That barista felt something was not right—Samantha was usually very responsible about closing the kiosk properly, but this morning things were out of place and the previous day's take was gone.

What little the Anchorage Police Department had learned about Samantha in one day left them with almost no leads. She was a popular high school senior who sometimes cut class and maybe had a history with drugs. She got along with everyone, not just the cool kids. She had two main people in her life: her boyfriend, Duane, who she'd been dating for almost a year, and her single father, James.

So: What to make of this scene? Yes, Samantha could have been kidnapped, but to investigators, it seemed more likely that she had gone off on her own. The police found no signs of a struggle. Inside the kiosk was a panic button, and Samantha hadn't hit it. She'd been using her cell phone before and after she had gone missing—fighting with Duane, texting him to leave her alone, fighting over her certainty he was cheating on her.

Then again, she had also called her dad, asking him to stop by the kiosk with some dinner.

Why do that if she was planning to run away?

To the sergeant of the Anchorage Police Department, this seemed like a good test run for field training a novice. He decided to give the case to Detective Monique Doll, a third-generation cop, thirty-five years old, working her first day in homicide. Doll had spent ten years in narcotics, four of those undercover with the DEA. She had a lot to recommend her.

Doll stood out, too, as one of the most glamorous officers in Anchorage. She looked like her name, blonde and beautiful, though she answered to the androgynous nickname Miki. She was married to another star at APD, the handsome Justin Doll, and they were something of a local power couple.

So the sergeant told Doll: You're lead on this. Suspicious circumstance, he called it.



Across town, FBI Special Agent Steve Payne was tying up a drug case when a friend at the police department called. This is common practice in Anchorage, a big city that runs like a small town. Cops, FBI agents, defense lawyers, prosecutors, judges—everyone knows everyone. It is the paradox of being Alaskan: This state is home to rugged individualists who nonetheless know there will come a time, amid the cold, unpitiful winters, when they will need help.

Payne was told that an eighteen-year-old girl had disappeared early the night before and had sent some angry texts to her boyfriend. One emerging theory had Samantha stealing the day's take to fund a day or two off on her own. Happened in Anchorage all the time.

Yet Payne wasn't so sure. Planning to disappear requires long-range strategy and sophistication. Samantha seemed like a young girl with very little money. Payne was a regular at these roadside coffee kiosks and could only guess how little the baristas were paid, these young girls who often worked alone, were made to wear bikinis in the summer. It was not an easy life.

Besides, where would a teenage girl go by herself on a dark and freezing Wednesday night? The weather had been brutal, just over 30 degrees, snow covering the ground. Samantha didn't have her pickup truck that night; her boyfriend Duane did. Anchorage isn't a walkable city. Samantha just wandering off, alone and on foot, made no sense. If she had gone to a

friend's house, as she'd told Duane in texts last night, chances were the police would already have found her.

He offered to help.

"We've got enough people," came the reply. "We think we know what this is."

Payne hung up. This didn't sit right. As he well knew, the first rule of any investigation was to keep an open mind. You didn't try to fit a personal theory to a possible crime.

He had heard that the police never even taped off the kiosk earlier that morning, when Samantha was reported missing, and her fellow barista then spent the morning serving customers. If the kiosk was in fact a crime scene, it had already been contaminated.

Unbelievable, Payne thought. This was basic stuff, knowing that the first hours of an investigation are everything, presenting as they do the freshest leads, the most telling witness interviews. Crucially, investigators themselves are at their most curious and engaged, confronting a brand-new mystery with brand-new players. This sets the tone for everything to come. With missing people—especially a child, and Payne considered Samantha a child—these earliest moments, handled correctly, will give investigators the best chance of finding them alive and well.

He didn't want to overstep, but he couldn't help himself. He called APD, leaving messages, waiting all afternoon for a reply.



Finally, at eight o'clock that night, Payne's phone rang. It was Detective Doll.

"Some things have changed," she said.

Payne made the twelve-minute drive from the FBI's Anchorage field office over to APD. He was six years older than Doll and had been with the Bureau for sixteen years, born and raised in Anchorage, a rarity. Most folks who live here, like Doll, are expats from the Lower 48. Payne understood the psyche of the city. He understood the bias police could have when it comes to Anchorage's poor and troubled, the lost causes. He didn't want to see Samantha dismissed.

Payne's outward appearance gave little hint of his mettle. No one would ever guess he was a special agent who had worked drugs and violent crime his whole career. Small features, slight frame: He looked like an accountant. Yet Payne was a born investigator, a self-described obsessive-compulsive whose devotion to casework cost him his first marriage. He was a perfectionist who always fell back on the homicide investigators' credo: Do it right the first time. You only get once chance.

He got teased at the Bureau for a few of his favorite sayings—"cause for pause" whenever he found a clue or some kind of useful information, "Murphy's Law" when a case was on the verge of resolving only to fall apart. Payne thought of Murphy as his personal boogeyman.

Doll gave Payne a quick overview of what she'd learned so far. They had just gotten a look at the surveillance video from the kiosk, which the kiosk's owner, nearly twenty-five hundred miles away, had obtained eight hours earlier. This was shaping up to be what Payne had feared—the low prioritizing of an at-risk teenager. Samantha's father had spent the past night calling Samantha's cell phone to no avail, and spent that next day standing outside the kiosk during his daughter's next scheduled shift, from 1:00 to 8:00 P.M., hoping she'd come back.

"Show me the video," Payne said.

Just before eight o'clock, Samantha appears on-screen in her lime green top, her long brown hair worn down. She is relaxed, chatting with a customer through the kiosk's window as she makes coffee.

She looks like a sweet girl, Payne thinks. Happy.

Whoever is outside remains out of camera range. Samantha works very casually and then, two minutes and six seconds into the tape, she suddenly turns off the lights.

There's no audio.

Samantha's hands go up. Now, all that's visible outside the kiosk is a shadowy figure and what might be the muzzle of a gun pointed at Samantha through the window. The aim is high and the window is low to the ground, so whoever this is must be tall. Samantha moves gingerly to the counter, her back to the figure outside. She gets on her knees. She stays that way for

over a minute, fidgeting, and then, three and a half minutes in, she gets up, walks over to the register, and scoops out money from the drawer. The video is so grainy it's hard to tell if she hands it over or puts it down. She returns, calmly it seems, to a kneeling position. Then something else has clearly been said because Samantha wobbles to the window, stops, then turns her back to it.

Here, at the 5:19 mark, a large male figure leans halfway inside. It's hard to see for sure, but it looks like he is tying her arms behind her back.

Two more minutes elapse, which sounds like nothing until you realize that a man with a gun is outside a very popular kiosk that sits between the parking lot of a huge gym and a well-trafficked road. In this context, two minutes is extremely long.

Whoever this is, Payne thinks, either knows what he's doing or knows Samantha. This kiosk is tiny, maybe nine feet by five feet, barely propped up off the ground. The wide-open serving window makes these young girls extremely vulnerable. How odd that no one ever noticed that before.

Seconds later, Payne watches as the man pounces like a cheetah, pushing his way through the window in one swift movement, stomach arcing inward, arms extending, landing gracefully on Samantha's right. It happens so fast.

Now it is clear: The man is very tall. He is also very composed. He looks out the window, seems to shut it, and talks to Samantha. Things seem fairly normal between them.

He picks something up and opens it, showing it to Samantha. It looks like her purse, and it looks like it's empty.

Now, at 8:55, he is kneeling. His broad back is to the camera, his right arm tight around Samantha. There is white lettering visible on the back of his black hoodie, but it is impossible to read. He is so close to Samantha that they look like one melded figure.

He helps her to her feet.

Samantha and the man hesitate, look back, then find themselves facing another surveillance camera. He moves Samantha straight ahead through the kiosk's small door, and the outdoor footage shows her and the man slowly walking away, his arm around her shoulder, through the fresh white snow.

Payne didn't know what to make of the video. Once again, he offered the FBI's assistance, but Doll declined. This might have been her first day, but she was lead and this was APD's case.

Also assigned by APD was Jeff Bell, whose youthful appearance belied a storied seventeen-year-long career in law enforcement: US Marshals federal task force, SWAT, senior patrol officer, and three years with the FBI's Safe Streets Task Force, which gave him top-secret clearance with the Bureau. Bell would be considered the most naturally gifted of the team—a clinical, logical thinker with the charisma to engage the gang members, drug runners, meth addicts, pimps, rapists, and murderers who so gamely contribute to Anchorage's standing as the most crime-ridden city in Alaska.

At APD and the Bureau, Bell was known as the Metrosexual. That was not necessarily a compliment. He was a handsome guy with dark features who kept his hair cut high and tight, military style, and his weight in check. He was always well dressed.

Bell was admired by his colleagues; he had the forthrightness and friendliness so common to his native Midwest. He wound up in Alaska after following his college sweetheart, a native, and here they were married. Long ago Bell came to identify, as nearly everyone here does, as an Alaskan rather than an American; the rest of the country, everywhere else, was Outside. Bell knew Anchorage as Payne did. Nearly every street corner held some kind of memory for him: a robbery, an arrest, a body.

Yet even Bell was stymied by the video. Yes, Samantha put her hands up, and yes, the figure looked like a man, but what was really happening? It was too dark to really see. Why was the conversation taking so long? Bell timed the activity in the video. This man had been outside the kiosk for at least seven minutes and clearly inside for a little over ten. Seventeen minutes total.

What in the world, Bell thought, were they talking about?

These seventeen minutes led to the department's first working theory: Samantha was likely not a victim. They weren't going to tell the press that, but their response made that clear, because APD didn't plan to go public with Samantha's disappearance.

That took another two days, the department's hand forced by Samantha's frantic father.

TWO

James Koenig was standing outside the Common Grounds kiosk on Friday afternoon, his daughter now missing almost forty-eight hours. This was the kind of shock known only to a parent, the sheer inability to believe that your child is somehow, suddenly, nowhere to be found.

How is such a thing possible?

James, a burly, blue-eyed man, was known to most as Sonny. He was a trucker who knew his way around Anchorage's seamier side, the bars, strip clubs, and biker gangs. He was rumored to be in the drug trade. James "Sonny" Koenig was, to some, a bad man.

But there was nothing he wouldn't do for Samantha. When she was first born, he could hardly sleep because he was so consumed by the constant worry that she would suddenly stop breathing. He'd heard people talk about how boundless a parent's love is, but now he knew. Sam was his only child, his favorite person, his world. She would never have gone missing if he'd brought her dinner that night, like she asked. Why didn't he do that? Why?



James focused on the one thing he could do: galvanize Anchorage to search for his daughter. He handed out flyers with Samantha's photo, KIDNAPPED in a big red font above, her name below. Volunteers kept coming, hugging James and taking piles of flyers as snow fell softly.

Reporters were here too. James was willing to talk all day. Samantha was taken, he said, no question.

"I called her cell phone until the battery finally died, and texted it and everything," he said. "It would ring until it just went to voice mail. And then, noon yesterday, it just went to voice mail, straight out."

James was convinced this was proof Samantha had been taken; he and Samantha texted and talked multiple times a day. But police weren't so sure. People go missing in Alaska all the time. Sometimes they wander off. Sometimes they get lost on a dark trailhead or freeze in a snowbank. Sometimes they're found in time, sometimes not. Here it's just a fact of life. For some, it's a gift.

So much of Alaska's lure is its ability to humble. This is a place first inhabited by our ancestors more than eleven thousand years ago and hardly more developed when Russia sold it to America in 1867 for two cents an acre. Yet Alaska remains the "Great Land," as James Michener called it: the closest we have to a time before man, unsullied terrain, nature so titanically overwhelming it's impossible not to be awed and a little afraid. Adventurers and loners, romantics and desperadoes, eccentrics and slow suicides—the luxuriousness of the place, its seduction and savagery, calls to the wildest among us. Alaska, the land of black moons and midnight suns.

In summer, Alaska, and Anchorage in particular, becomes the brightest place on the planet, a theme park for vacationing families engaged in outdoor activities through twenty-two hours of pure sunlight. But when winter descends and tourists depart, the mask comes off. Anchorage's true nature, her uncivilized self, is revealed. Darkness and depravity compete with a collective hunger for light and life. Never does this place feel so literally on the edge of the earth, seesawing between the temporal world and some black chasm of unknown phenomena, as the six months it sinks into near-total darkness. The isolation alone means anything goes.

It is a rough place to be a woman.

"Alaska must be viewed as having two characteristics: great beauty but also implacable hostility," Michener wrote in his 1988 novel *Alaska*. Her survivors, he wrote, "would always be a somewhat special breed: adventurous, heroic, willing to contest the great winds, the endless nights, the freezing winters."

This was Samantha: a special breed. She was tough, just like her dad. She had struggles with her mom and with drugs. She could easily have dropped out of high school, dead-ending to a life of low-paying jobs and dreams deferred, but she stuck it out and was now in her senior year at Anchorage West High School. She thought she might work with animals or become a nurse and join the navy. She was a nurturer who looked out for

strays and misfits, who would see someone eating alone in the cafeteria or hunched off to the side at a pep rally and casually approach, make some small talk. She was kind.

Samantha had a niece she adored and two dogs she was obsessed with. For all their arguments she really loved Duane, who had moved in with her and James eight months ago. Duane too was saving up for better things, working as a dishwasher at the popular seafood restaurant Suite 100.

He had been due to pick Sam up the night she went missing. When he got there, he told police, she was gone.

Now, on Saturday, APD needed to play catch-up. Yes, to find Samantha, but also to calm the public. The story had gone national.

Lieutenant Dave Parker, out of naïveté or desperation, was far too open with the media. “They left on foot, we know that much,” he said. “But beyond that, her disappearance has become a complete mystery.” This only amplified the community’s worry. Samantha’s disappearance spoke to the specific fear of any parent of a young girl here who was working alone, in the dark, in a heavily populated place.

Samantha could have been anyone’s child.

Indeed, public pressure forced APD to show parts of the surveillance video to the press. Again, all police could say was that the suspect was wearing a dark hoodie, maybe a baseball cap, and was significantly taller than Samantha, who stood just five foot five.

“Anyone could be a suspect at this point,” one detective said.

That included James and Duane.

Detective Doll had interrogated both men separately at the station on Thursday morning, within hours of Samantha’s disappearance. Doll’s original assessment of James was of a straightforward man. In her police report, on the 1–10 HONESTY SCALE, she wrote, “10—brutally honest.”

Yet she was puzzled by what James and Duane told her.

Duane said he drove over to Common Grounds in the pickup truck he and Samantha shared at about 8:30 that night. He had been running a little

behind at his own job, maybe by ten minutes.

As Duane pulled up, he said, he noticed the kiosk's inside lights were off. The whole stand was covered in darkness. He got out of the truck and looked in one of the windows. Samantha wasn't there.

"Everything was closed," he told Detective Doll. He noticed napkins strewn on the floor and towels sitting on the countertop, which he found weird. Samantha was a neat freak.

So why didn't Duane go inside?

"I didn't want to trigger an alarm and be accused of breaking in," he said. He figured Samantha got a ride with someone else. Doll asked Duane for proof of his timeline, but as he scrolled through text messages to prove his story, it became clear to Doll that he and Samantha were having significant problems.

No, Duane insisted. It was going well. Yes, things had been rocky, but they were way past that.

Doll didn't think so. She told him to scroll farther back through his texts, and there it was. Okay, Duane said. Yes, he'd been flirting with other girls. Sam knew about that. She hated it. And since detectives could subpoena his phone, he may as well admit that he'd called Samantha the night she went missing, while she was working, and when she said she couldn't talk he said, "Whatever," and hung up. He had to admit that yes, he'd been angry with her.

Doll read the text Duane finally got from Samantha at 11:30 that night.

F.U. asshole. I know what u did I am going to spend a couple of days with friends need time to think plan acting weird let my dad know.

"Acting weird"? Who was acting weird here? Doll went on the offensive.

What had Duane done? How had he been acting weird? Was he cheating on Samantha? Had she confronted him when he came to pick her up? Had he lost his temper with her, gone further than he planned? Did something happen by accident?

No, Duane said. I didn't do this.

Well, Doll asked, what happened next?

Duane said he went home to James and waited up, hoping Samantha would come home. At around three in the morning, he suddenly felt the need to open the front door and go outside.

Why? Doll asked.

Duane couldn't explain. But he said he saw a man with a mask, about six feet away, going through his and Samantha's pickup truck. They each stood there for a moment, staring at each other, and then the man closed the door and walked away.

What did Duane do next?

He went back inside and told James, he said. About an hour later, Duane searched the truck and realized Samantha's driver's license, which she always kept tucked in her visor pocket, was missing. Then he went back in the house and went to sleep. It was a pretty sound sleep. Duane didn't wake up until about 9:30 A.M.

Doll was incredulous. By this point in Duane's story, Samantha had been missing for seven hours. She had texted him and explained how upset she was. Conveniently, a few hours later a strange masked man shows up at their house. He somehow knows where Samantha lives, which vehicle is hers, finds it among all the others parked on a dark street, knows exactly where her license is and takes it, and neither James nor Duane called the police? Or thought to follow or chase this man down the street as he walked away?

Really?

If Duane and James were so worried, why didn't they call the cops? Why did they never report Samantha missing?

Duane had a simple answer: He didn't think police would do anything until Samantha had been missing for twenty-four hours.

Interesting. That was the same thing James Koenig had told Doll in his interview immediately before.

Later that night, Doll sent two officers, armed and unannounced, to James and Duane's house. Doll had some more questions, but her real motive was to get a sense of how the two would react when caught off guard.

What these officers found only made Doll more suspicious. When James came to the door, the officers reported, he wouldn't let them in. Instead, he wedged his way through the doorframe, stood outside, and shut the door firmly behind him. When they asked to speak to Duane, James went back in the same way, and Duane entered and exited the same way too.

These were the actions of a frantic father and boyfriend? You insist your daughter's been kidnapped but you won't let the police in your house?

Jeff Bell was tasked with surveilling James Koenig round the clock.

Days went by.

Could James really have done this? Every investigator on this case thought he was an honest man who truly loved his daughter, but still, they wondered. They tried not to tip their hand.

It didn't matter. James wasn't stupid. He knew he was a prime suspect. He knew he had to push the department to look elsewhere.

He encouraged Samantha's friends to talk to the media.

"A beautiful girl who didn't know she was beautiful," her one-time coworker Heather Cartwright told the press. Cartwright didn't seem to realize she was using the past tense. She said she believed Samantha had been taken, because, she said, Samantha "wouldn't let her dad anguish like this on purpose."

The next Saturday, February 11, hundreds of people gathered for a candlelight vigil in Town Square Park. Children, police, first responders, and strangers all wore small pictures of Samantha pinned to ribbons in lime green, her favorite color. James was there, cradling his daughter's six-year-old pit bull Sheeba and wearing Samantha's picture over his heart.

Back at the FBI field office, Steve Payne was frustrated. Though APD had brought the FBI in three days ago, Samantha's father had done more than the entire police department. He'd set up a tip line and a volunteer site right next to the coffee kiosk. He'd had a huge placard made up, his daughter's face nearly five feet high and propped up against the roadside shack, KIDNAPPED printed in huge black letters. He was asking cross-country

skiers to search for his daughter along trails. Friends and strangers scrawled messages of hope on the snow in neon green spray paint.

It was impossible to live here and not know who Samantha was by now. Rather than losing interest in a missing girl way up in Alaska, the national media became even more intrigued. Producers from *Nancy Grace* wanted to interview James. ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, and Fox News aired the story. Facebook messages were coming in from as far away as New Zealand.

Payne, meanwhile, was laser focused on facts. He had agents contact all the airlines for evidence Samantha had left the state.

Nothing.

How about boats, cruises, ships? Any record of her on a manifest or as a fast hire?

Nothing.

Payne had agents run the names and photos of more than two dozen friends and acquaintances Sam resembled, in case she'd faked her passport or used one of theirs.

Nothing.

Samantha's cell phone hadn't been used since the night she disappeared. It was still turned off. Could she have fled in a car? There were only three main highways out of Anchorage, but none had any real surveillance cameras.

Payne had never seen a case like this: zero physical evidence, nothing to indicate Samantha had been abducted. Yet here was an eighteen-year-old girl, her face all over the news, a city of three hundred thousand people looking for her, with no money—and even if she had stolen from the register, that was maybe two hundred dollars at best—no proof she had even left town. If Samantha wasn't abducted but also hadn't run away, what was the answer?

What were they missing?

Bell thought the same. He was now toggling between the FBI and APD, feeding information to Payne while helping Doll. Bell's role was as much therapeutic as investigative: Payne disliked Doll, who he thought was way too confident for a rookie, and Doll likely resented Payne for bigfooting her first missing persons case. For his part, Bell wasn't as convinced as Doll that James was involved, but nor was he as convinced as Payne that Samantha had been taken.

In fact, Bell was beginning to suspect that Samantha set the whole thing up.

Again, this level of media attention alone would make it impossible for Samantha to hide out in Anchorage. The search of Duane's truck turned up nothing. The only logical explanation was that Samantha staged the abduction, and the man in the video was her accomplice.

The Special Assignment Unit was called in. Vice was called in. Police arrested about fifty people, confidential informants mainly, and asked what they'd heard about Samantha Koenig.

A lot, it turned out.

Detectives were told that the Russian Mafia was involved as payback for something James had done. Or the Hells Angels, same reason. Samantha had been dealing, did the cops know that? Someone else heard her brag that she'd been "doing licks," stealing from suppliers. Others heard she owed drug money and was being held for ransom.

A woman came forward claiming that people close to Samantha knew she was heavily into meth. These same people also alleged that Samantha stole five thousand dollars from James a week before her disappearance. That relationship wasn't as rosy as James claimed, they said. Samantha had always been desperate for her father's attention and would do anything to get it.

On February 15, word flew that Samantha's body had been found.

It wasn't true, but it was an indicator of how out of control this investigation was. The FBI and APD needed to contain the panic and find Samantha, but Bell knew the truth: This was a small department, only 350 police. They couldn't pay overtime indefinitely. Two weeks in and everyone was burning out. The longer this dragged on, the less likely they'd ever find her.

And they had James Koenig, his reward fund now up to sixty thousand dollars and his Facebook page generating lead after lead, making investigators look incompetent at best.

THREE

At 7:56 P.M. on February 24, Duane got a jolt: a text from Samantha's phone number. She was more than three weeks missing.

Conner park sign under pic of albert aint she purty.

Duane and James shared the news with APD and rushed to Connors Bog Park, a popular trailhead for runners. They beat APD by about fifteen minutes.

There, tacked to a bulletin board, under a flyer for a missing dog named Albert, was a ziplock bag containing a rambling ransom note and black-and-white Xeroxed Polaroids of Samantha. In one picture, what looked like silver duct tape covered her mouth and chin. She was wearing eyeliner and looking at the camera, her hair braided. In the surveillance video, Samantha had been wearing her hair down.

In the same photo, Samantha's head was held by a man, but all that was visible of him was one hand and a muscular arm. In the upper part of the picture was a copy of the *Anchorage Daily News* date: February 13, 2012.

Proof of life.

The note itself, typed on plain white paper, only added to the mystery. It referenced Duane's ATM card, gone missing with Samantha.

"I may not use the card much in ak due to small pop," it read, "but as I will be leaving soon I will be using it all over." The note implied Samantha was no longer in Alaska and had been moved through an arid state in the Lower 48. "She did almost get away twice. Once on tudor [road] and once in the desert. Must be losing my touch."

The demand: Thirty thousand dollars, deposited into Duane and Samantha's account immediately. The note went on to say if this and other

demands were met, Samantha would be freed in six months.

This case was now officially a kidnapping, a federal crime. For the first time since Samantha had gone missing, Payne felt something like relief. The case was his now, not APD's, and he could tell James what sounded like a line from a movie, but no less true.

“We can now bring the full force of the FBI to bear,” Payne said. “We don't have to justify anything to anyone.”

Payne felt he had a crack team. Among his investigators was Jolene Goeden, who had years of experience working crimes against children, human trafficking, sex crime, and homicide, plus ten years working with rapists and serial killers. Goeden would say she had heard the worst of the worst, yet her spiritual beliefs gave her both strength and sympathy: So many of the offenders she worked with had been abused as children too. Goeden was a master at separating the person from the crime, but never shied away from brutal truths. She was perfect for this investigation.

Then there was Kat Nelson, a young, vibrant investigator who loved facts and numbers. What would bore most anyone electrified her: sifting through digital footprints, cell phone records, credit card receipts, property records and tax returns, organizing reams of data to create a narrative.

Payne, Goeden, and Nelson, along with Doll and Bell, were a small group on the verge of a very big case.

Payne already had traces on cell phones belonging to Samantha, James, and Duane. When the ransom text had been sent from Samantha's phone to Duane's, Nelson watched in real time. It had taken three weeks, but now there was connective tissue, however thin, among investigators, Samantha, and whoever else was involved.

Payne made sure every investigator had eyes on the ransom note. He sent the original to FBI headquarters in Quantico for processing: fibers, fingerprints, DNA. Payne wanted to know how the note and the photo were made—what typewriter (if it was in fact a typewriter and not a computer), what kind of ribbon, ink, printer. No detail was too small.

He called in the FBI's storied Behavioral Analysis Unit, despite Bell's skepticism. What Bell knew of BAU came from TV and the movies. He pictured clean-cut paper pushers who sat in headquarters, thousands of miles away from a crime scene, with a superior deskside air that somehow resulted in a detailed, bang-on profile of an unknown suspect.

Like many of his fellow investigators, Bell thought these profilers were a notch above psychics. Their predictions of violent offenders were almost always the same: Your suspect will be a young man, probably white, with a low-level job, difficulties maintaining relationships, and lots of anger issues, especially toward women.

Hardly the most surprising conclusion to reach.



One question loomed above all: In those Polaroids, was Samantha alive or dead?

Doll wasn't sure. Payne, Goeden, and Nelson all thought she was alive. Bell thought she was dead.

But, Payne argued, Samantha had no cuts or bruises. She was wearing makeup. Her armpits were shaved. Her hair had been braided. Her skin looked healthy. Holding her head up like that might be for shock value.

BAU brought in an expert in snuff films. That expert had no idea.

The ransom note was riddled with misspellings. Was that intentional? Had to be. Whoever was behind this was obviously smart. Then again, why leave the note beside a main roadway and a popular hiking trail and risk getting caught? Why ask for only thirty thousand dollars? Everyone knew the reward fund was up to seventy thousand. James had made sure of that.

Something else struck Payne as odd: The note made no reference to anything specific about Samantha, not even rumors on the street. There was no mention of drugs or drug debt. No reference to any of her friends, former or current. Nothing to indicate this person knew the first thing about Samantha. But, Payne reminded himself, stranger abductions are so rare. Maybe this was an attempt at misdirecting the investigation?

One detail they agreed not to make public: was the author's promise to return Samantha in six months. No member of the team had ever heard something like that before. None of them believed it.

Now they had to respond to the note. Everyone agreed James had to put money in that bank account. But what should they say? This was another instance when Payne sought BAU's help. What response was most likely to lure the abductor out?

Someone on the FBI's task force suggested canceling Duane and Samantha's ATM card, depositing the cash, then having James text Samantha's cell to ask for a face-to-face meet, the money in exchange for Samantha.

Payne froze. This was the worst idea he'd ever heard. He listened in astonishment as investigators began discussing how it might work.

No way should this happen. The ATM card and Samantha's cell phone were the only links they had to her. Someone who commits this kind of crime, Payne thought, is going to put a lot of distance between himself and the scene. Whoever did this was no amateur.

Payne struggled to stay composed. He had to get his way. He believed that Samantha was still in the state, if not Anchorage itself. With each passing minute, the chances of finding her were only getting worse. Having to fight this nonsense was only putting Samantha in more danger.

Still, Payne knew he had to play it right. For logic to prevail he had to be calm, convincing, authoritative. "If we sever this tie from Samantha," Payne said, "it's going to be a huge mistake. I don't know that we can recover from it."

Instead, he suggested, keep the ATM card active. The author was clearly thinking things through. Samantha's sixteen-digit bank account number was included in the note—showing his bona fides. There was a good chance that once money went into the account, money would come out.

Track the ATM card, Payne said, and we track whoever has Samantha.

Others on the team, Doll among them, were pretty sure they already knew who had the card, because it had already been used—on the very night Samantha disappeared, and more than once.

Did the FBI want to consider James's odd behavior, not letting police into his house twenty-four hours after Samantha went missing? James was rumored to be a drug dealer. Doll had heard James was recently moving more than sixty thousand dollars in pot and may have stolen half that. Why

continue this charade? Why not see what James would do if they suggested arranging a meeting?

Even Bell found Doll's theory far-fetched. Doll, he thought, might be a casualty of undercover work, her years at the DEA resulting in a default focus on drugs. Payne's impulse to keep the card active and deposit the money was the right one.

Payne won.

Their elation was short-lived. As it turned out, James Koenig wasn't so keen on depositing the money.

Four days elapsed as investigators tried to convince James, who said he wasn't sure if the note was real. The photos, he argued, might be fakes. In fact, James said, this whole thing might be one big hoax to con him out of reward money.

Doll couldn't believe it. She'd been sidelined by Payne and now her suspicions were bearing fruit. Why wouldn't anyone listen to her? Was it because she was the only lead woman on this case?

It was a hard theory to refute. Why would James take his time now? He was still begging for money on Facebook. Why? How did he have the wherewithal, less than forty-eight hours after Samantha's disappearance, to go on Facebook and actually post this:

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO DONATE TO THE REWARD FUND FOR THE RESCUE OF SAMANTHA TESSLA KOENIG YOU CAN DO SO BY GOING TO ANY DENALI FEDERAL CREDIT UNION AND USE ACCOUNT #135006, OR I HAVE ALSO SET UP A PAYPAL ACCOUNT GO TO PAYPAL.COM AND ENTER MY EMAIL ADDRESS, ALL LOWER CASE . . . ALL PROCEEDS GO TO THE RESCUE EFFORTS AND REWARD TO ANYONE THAT CAN RETURN HER HOME TO ME SAFELY AND UNHARMED.

Doll knew that James was spending some of that reward money on himself. The whole city was talking about it. The *Anchorage Daily News* even asked James about the rumors, which he didn't deny. "I am having to resort to some of the funds to keep my home running," he said.

This was yet another story Doll found suspect. Shortly after James's odd behavior when investigators stopped by his house, Doll obtained a search

warrant on the residence. She wasn't surprised to find a grow operation in there, and, as any decent investigator knows, growing marijuana indoors, at that level, has to be for illegal purposes.

Then there was the call to APD from a Koenig family friend. She said she'd spent a lot of time with James in the days after Samantha's disappearance, and he was obsessed with money. The reward money in particular. Sometimes he'd go online multiple times a day just to track his donation jar.

"Please check on this," she said. "Because something just isn't right."

FOUR

On February 29, five days after discovering the ransom note, James Koenig called APD. It was 4:55 P.M.

James informed police that he was depositing five thousand dollars of the reward money into Samantha's account. The FBI, he said, told him not to put the whole thirty thousand dollars in. The point was to frustrate whoever was making the demand and push them to make contact.

Over at APD, Detective Joseph Barth was tasked with tracking the bank account Duane shared with Samantha.

The ATM card had first been used right after she went missing, at 3:00 A.M., at a local ATM. There had been no withdrawal. Samantha and Duane had less than five dollars in their account.

Now Detective Barth watched, from his desk, as James deposited the five thousand dollars into Samantha and Duane's account and four hours later watched, amazed, as someone tried to withdraw cash from an ATM in Anchorage.

Bell had to admit he was leaning back toward Doll's theory. Only James and Duane knew about this plan. How coincidental could it be that Samantha's card was used immediately? Not only that: The attempted withdrawal was for six hundred dollars. Most ATMs limit daily withdrawals to five. Whoever did this didn't have experience with electronically accessing this kind of money. Someone who ran an all-cash business, however . . .

Goeden, Nelson, and even Payne had to concede that Doll was probably right, because less than two hours after that first attempt came another, this one successful: five hundred dollars from an ATM at the Denali Federal Credit Union, a six-minute drive away from the site of the first failed attempt.

Back-to-back withdrawals at four minutes to midnight.

Half an hour later and another withdrawal, this one at an ATM across town at Debarr Road, which abutted thousands of square miles of wilderness. Whoever was using this card knew Anchorage extremely well and was a fast learner. He was now withdrawing money on either side of midnight, grabbing a thousand dollars in less than one hour.

The bank activity itself wasn't surprising. The ransom note demanded money, and now there was money. The ATM at Denali, it turned out, had working surveillance, though it would take at least until the next day to see it. But there was no rush by the FBI or APD to obtain video from surrounding businesses.

James was now suspect number one. Doll had been vindicated.



The next morning, March 1, Payne and his team found an interesting story in the *Anchorage Daily News*, which had been covering Samantha's disappearance nonstop. Lieutenant Parker had made yet another ill-advised statement, telling the paper that the investigation was "making progress day by day" and Samantha was, in fact, alive.

This was a major unforced error.

Parker had no proof that Samantha was alive. No one did. It was yet another violation of investigative procedure, and Payne was upset. Everyone over at APD was in way over their heads. How could a veteran cop make such a mistake? If Samantha was, God forbid, no longer alive, her abductor would know how little information these investigators had. If Parker was wrong and Samantha's remains were found, it would make the entire department and the FBI look like idiots.

And what about James and Duane, and the rest of Samantha's family and friends? That kind of promise gives only false hope.

Payne, Bell, Goeden, and Nelson were all working twenty-hour days, frayed to the point of exhaustion. No one shut off, ever. They'd all go home and log on to their computers, looking for leads, and despite their access to top-secret databases, they all relied most heavily on Google.

It wasn't lost on them that they were investigating like any civilian playing online detective. Samantha had now been missing for twenty-nine

days.

Worse than predicted, it took another two days to get surveillance stills from the Denali ATM withdrawal to FBI headquarters at Quantico. There, they landed on the desk of a young image analyst named Chris Iber. Steve Payne's request came without the proper paperwork, but all Payne had to say was "young girl kidnapped" and everything else was pushed aside. Iber knew that the Bureau sometimes looked the other way. He'd worked the Boston Marathon bombing and no one waited for paperwork on that either.

Iber was one of only six agents at the Bureau who did forensic image analysis, and he was also cross-trained in video. He was the best Payne could have hoped for.

Iber never shared this knowledge with agents like Payne, but he'd learned a hard truth: If images wound up with him, they were pretty bad to begin with, and he couldn't make something out of nothing, no matter what websleuths or the millions of people who watched *CSI* might think.

Payne wanted Iber to determine what kind of clothing the man in the ATM surveillance video was wearing, a time-consuming task. First, Iber had to confirm the authenticity of the images, that they hadn't been manipulated in any way. He had to try to enhance the image without distorting it. He had to do photogrammetry, measuring the man's height against the measurements of other objects in the frame. Finally, to make out logos and lettering on the man's jacket, Iber had to do comparison analysis with thousands of fonts.

Iber worked well into the night; he could tell, by talking to Payne, how anxious he was. And Payne was going slightly crazy, whipsawing between theories.

So many signs pointed toward James, but part of him still couldn't believe it. Bell saw each passing day as proof Samantha was dead, while Payne needed to believe she wasn't. He couldn't trust himself to see clearly, but he didn't know whom to talk to: not his girlfriend, already upset over his total immersion in this case, not his team members, not even Bell. He couldn't risk eroding confidence in him as their leader.

Instead, Payne called his best friend and former partner at the Bureau. They'd worked together for twelve years, and Payne thought of him as one of the finest investigators he knew.

"Am I out in left field here?" Payne asked him. "Am I off?"

Payne knew his own limitations. He thrived on order and logic. He had gotten his degree in math and that didn't help him on cases like this, where 1 percent of what the FBI does is black and white and the rest is shades of gray.

"Here's what we know," Payne said. "We have a ransom note. We have a photo. Her skin pigmentation, the way she's posed, she looks like she could be alive. There's no proof she is, but am I letting my hopes cloud the case? I'm trying to be true to the evidence, but we don't have a lot of evidence. Am I doing this right? Am I asking the right questions? Following the right leads?"

"No," Payne's old partner said. "You're not trying to make assumptions. You're doing this right."

The next morning, Chris Iber had good news for Payne. He was able to determine, despite the bulky clothes, that the man had an athletic frame. His dark jacket was possibly hooded. It looked like there was some light-colored paint spatter on the left chest, and the lettering on the back seemed to read "CORPS." Payne emailed the images to Bell, who saved them all on his iPhone. Bell said he thought the suspect was now or had been a Marine.

Iber had more. The man was wearing clear or light-colored eyeglasses, a gray face mask, gray gloves, dark pants, and light or white shoes.

Iber apologized. He wished he could see more.

Payne was moved, not just by Iber's findings but his willingness to work late into the night on a case so far away, for a faceless FBI agent asking for help with one of the 2,300 people who go missing in the United States every day. It was a reminder, in a case that got darker by the hour, that there were still good people out there.

Fear and anger in Anchorage, however, was surging. Bell could feel it, and he knew the community wasn't wrong. They sensed that APD wasn't handling this investigation properly.

If they only knew.

It had taken until February 20, three weeks after Samantha's disappearance, for it to occur to APD to request surveillance video from the Home Depot across from Samantha's kiosk.

Another two days passed before they were able to obtain that footage—the same day the ransom note was posted. And it gave investigators a beginning to this story.

At 7:45 P.M. on February 1, a white truck pulled into the Home Depot parking lot. The resolution was fuzzy, but Bell could tell by the number of letters on the truck's back that it was a Chevrolet. No other American automaker has a name as long.

There were no license plates.

The driver sat for ten minutes, then got out of the truck and walked across Tudor Road, disappearing from view. After nearly twenty minutes, he reemerged across the street, at the same crosswalk, with Samantha. His arm was around her shoulder. Other people walked by. None seemed concerned.

But when the traffic light changed and they started crossing the street, Samantha broke away and ran. Her wrists were tied together and it was now clear that she was in a panic, taken against her will. Did she scream? They couldn't tell.

Within seconds the man tackled Samantha, then stood her upright. He seemed to whisper something in her ear, then walked her over to the white pickup. He waited with her while a few strangers milled about the car next to his.

Oh, no, Payne thought. You have your chance. Yell "Help!" Or "Fire!" Don't let this man take you somewhere else. But Payne knew how this would go. Whatever the man said after that first escape attempt had paralyzed Samantha. She stood and waited until the strangers got in their car and drove off.

The man opened his truck's door, put Samantha in the passenger seat, calmly walked around to the driver's side, got in, and pulled out of the lot.

Payne was crushed. What else had they missed?

Now, with so much time lost, they had to find a white Chevy pickup truck. No problem, Payne thought. Only the most popular truck in Alaska.

FIVE

The next ATM withdrawal was unexpected—in the Lower 48. Payne got the call at 10:30 P.M. on March 7. Samantha’s card had been used just ten minutes earlier, a four-hundred-dollar withdrawal in Willcox, Arizona, a tiny town right off the I-10 corridor. It was now more than a month since Samantha disappeared.

Payne was electrified. Six days had passed since there’d been any ATM activity at all. Now, though Payne and his team were nearly four thousand miles away, they were virtually right behind their suspect.

He got on the phone to the FBI field office in Phoenix. One of those agents knew this bank’s owner, and within the hour they were all on-site, pulling surveillance video and canvassing the scene for hair, fibers, fingerprints, tire tracks.

It wasn’t lost on Payne that this bank, the Western, was too small to have a centralized database for pulling video and financials. It would take a day for the surveillance video to be overnighted to Payne in Anchorage, and then another day to send to the lab at Quantico. Samantha’s kidnapper probably knew this. He was smarter than they’d thought.

Still, a local FBI agent took pictures of the footage from the Willcox ATM and emailed still shots to Payne. Not great, but enough to make out the figure. He looked, Payne thought, like the guy who’d been caught on camera in Anchorage. He was tall, about six feet, wearing bulky clothes to disguise his frame. He had on a hood, sunglasses, and what looked like a face mask. He wore jeans and white tennis shoes.

Just over one hour later, Samantha’s card pinged again.

This was the kind of moment Payne lived for. He alerted his team and rushed to the field office.

That second alert came from Lordsburg, New Mexico, an hour's drive from Willcox. Their suspect was heading east on the I-10, and again had made the mistake of trying to withdraw more than the daily limit, again at a Western Bank. Payne thought that this might be a longtime Alaskan thrown off by complications in regional time differences: Mountain Time an hour behind Central Time; Alaska Time an hour behind Pacific Standard Time.

It was now 2:34 A.M. in New Mexico, 11:24 P.M. in Anchorage. Samantha's card was working on Alaska time. Payne and Bell looked at a map and predicted that whoever had the card would stay eastbound on the I-10. It just made the most sense.

Even though they didn't have a make or model on the suspect's vehicle, they could tell he wasn't driving the white Chevy. He was probably in a rental. Payne put out a BOLO, or "be on the lookout," to law enforcement in LA, San Diego, Phoenix, Albuquerque, and El Paso.

At 2:35 A.M., at the same ATM, the card pinged again. This was a balance inquiry, showing \$3,598.91 left in the account. Another minute went by, and another eighty dollars came out, the suspect pulling close to the daily five-hundred-dollar limit.

Bell was as excited as Payne. He knew the ATM card was going to be it. They all did. But he also reminded himself that there was no way the FBI could rouse the small number of police officers in these tiny towns out of bed and have them patrol the I-10. By the time they even began trying, their suspect could be anywhere. Some of these towns had maybe twenty officers total. Wake up the ones not on night patrol—the majority—and by the time they're on the interstate, their suspect would be long gone, probably doing eighty or a hundred miles per hour on an empty highway.

So Payne and the team sat in a sterile conference room, midnight approaching, staring at the wall, waiting to hear about ATM activity way down in the Southwest. Reality set in. This was a tenuous lead, one they had to trust other agents not to screw up. And they had to hope whoever had that ATM card wouldn't stop using it, even though he seemed smart enough to quit while ahead.

SIX

Steve Rayburn first saw Payne's BOLO at 6:30 A.M. on Monday, March 12. He was having his first cup of coffee at home, scrolling through email on his BlackBerry. The BOLO read like an old-school cable.

**REF: KIDNAPPING SUSPECT
KOENIG, SAMANTHA.**

SUSPECT WILL BE AN UNKNOWN MALE LAST SEEN WEARING A LIGHT-COLORED HOODED SWEATSHIRT. SUSPECT VEHICLE WILL BE NEWER, LIGHT-COLORED PASSENGER CAR.

BASED ON ATM TRANSACTIONS, IT'S BELIEVED THAT THE SUSPECT IS TRAVELING EAST TOWARD EL PASO.

Attached were three pictures. The first, which had been pulled off Facebook, was a picture of Samantha. Real pretty girl, he thought. It was a close-up, Samantha smiling, a green bandana around her head. The second picture was of a small white passenger car. The windows didn't seem tinted. The third picture was the suspect wearing a hooded sweatshirt, blue jeans, and sneakers, his face completely obscured.

Rayburn had been a Texas Ranger for three years. Before that, he'd been a Lufkin police officer for eight, a state trooper for ten. He knew US Highway 59, the over six-hundred-mile main artery linking Lufkin and Houston, extremely well. This roadway, he thought, would probably come into play.

At 10:58 A.M. came an email from Kevin Pullen, Rayburn's immediate supervisor. Pullen wrote that he had been contacted by the FBI for help. There were already three agents on the ground in nearby Humble, Texas, where the ATM card had been used two days before. Attached to Pullen's email was an "Attempt to Locate" flyer. Rayburn opened the file.

REF: KIDNAPPING SUSPECT FROM ANCHORAGE, ALASKA.

SUSPECT USED AN ATM CARD TWICE: ONCE IN HUMBLE, TEXAS, AND AGAIN IN SHEPHERD, TEXAS.

PLEASE SEND THIS FLYER AND RECENT ATM INFO TO ALL IN-CAR COMPUTERS. RANGER STEVE RAYBURN IN LUFKIN WILL BE THE MAIN RANGER ASSISTING THE FBI IN THIS MATTER.

This was the first Rayburn was hearing about his new assignment. He was nervous. He'd never worked with the FBI on an interstate kidnapping before.

Attached to Pullen's flyer was another photo. This was a close-up of the suspect's face. His nose and mouth appeared to be covered with a light-colored mask, and he had glasses on, but the photos were extremely blurry.

Rayburn was dismayed. This is what we're working with? He'd known Pullen a long time, having worked directly under him since transferring to the Rangers in 2009. To be a Texas Ranger had always been a point of pride for Rayburn; they're about as outlaw as a law-enforcement agency gets. Their motto is "One Riot, One Ranger." They took down John Wesley Hardin and Bonnie and Clyde. The Lone Ranger is a Texas Ranger gone rogue. Journalist John Salmon Ford, who served as Ranger captain in the 1850s, described the Rangers this way:

"A large portion . . . were unmarried. A few of them drank intoxicating liquors. Still, it was a company of sober and brave men. They knew their duty and they did it. While in a town they made no braggadocio demonstration. They did not gallop through the streets, shoot and yell. They had a specie of moral discipline which developed moral courage. They did right because it was right."

Rayburn tried to be that kind of Ranger. Now, with these bulletins flooding multiple law-enforcement agencies throughout Texas, he thought it best to draft yet another, emblazoned with the Ranger badge. Every police officer and state trooper knew what it meant when the Rangers affixed their logo to a bulletin: top priority.

Rayburn called the FBI field office in nearby Conroe and learned that an officer in Humble reported seeing a white Ford Focus at an ATM around the time of that withdrawal at 2:23 in the morning. There were two surveillance photos of the vehicle—poor quality but, once again, Chris Iber at Quantico had been able to determine the make and model. The white Ford Focus, it turned out, was the most commonly rented vehicle in the United States. First the white Chevy pickup truck, now this. Their suspect certainly knew how to blend in.

Rayburn sat at his desk and wrote his own, more detailed bulletin, a photo of the white Ford Focus attached, with his Rangers in mind.

ON 2/1/2012, AT APPROXIMATELY 2 A.M. [MST], THE VICTIM WAS KIDNAPPED IN THE STATE OF ALASKA AT HER PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT. HER FAMILY AND BOYFRIEND HAVE SINCE BEEN CLEARED AS SUSPECTS.

ON 3/7/2012, A DEBIT CARD IN THE NAME OF THE VICTIM'S BOYFRIEND, DUANE TORTOLANI, WAS USED AT AN ATM IN WILLCOX, ARIZONA, AT APPROXIMATELY 10:15 A.M.

THE CARD WAS AGAIN USED IN LORDSBURG, NEW MEXICO, AT APPROXIMATELY 11:30 A.M. THE CARD WAS LAST USED IN SHEPHERD, TEXAS, ON 3/12/2012 AT APPROXIMATELY 2:47 A.M.

SHEPHERD IS LOCATED ON US 59. OFFICERS ARE ASKED TO CHECK REST AREAS, TRUCK STOPS, AND MOTELS.

OFFICERS ARE ASKED TO BOLO FOR THE VEHICLE WITH AN OCCUPANT MATCHING SUSPECT OR VICTIM DESCRIPTION. SUSPECT SHOULD BE IN POSSESSION OF TORTOLANI'S STOLEN ATM CARD.

Rayburn had a feeling that the suspect would head up through Lufkin, which sat off Route 59. A lot of highways connect here, and on a map the

conduits look like a wagon wheel. Lufkin was the next nearest city to Humble, about an hour and a half drive north, and the only one with nice hotels. The suspect could also reach Lufkin by heading north on I-45, but that would be a much longer drive, closer to two and a half hours.

In these moments, Rayburn thought of investigative work like fishing or hunting. You had to look at where your target was most likely going. Rayburn also didn't think the Ford Focus would have a Texas license plate. The suspect was probably from Alaska and had already driven through two other states. But Rayburn didn't put that in his bulletin; that was his hunch, not a fact.

He read through his draft once more, and at 1:18 P.M. he electronically distributed the bulletin to law-enforcement agencies in southeast Texas, plus Louisiana and Arkansas.

Next, he printed out a thick stack of color copies and walked them over to the state troopers at the Lufkin Police Department. Technology is a double-edged sword in cases like these; so much information comes through in-car computers and over the radio that even the best officers and troopers suffer information overload. An old-school approach like this, Rayburn always found, made a much more lasting impression: I'm walking this over to you, I'm talking to you, which means this is important.

Rayburn then went over to the Department of Public Safety office and handed a copy of his bulletin to Corporal Bryan Henry, a Texas Highway patrolman. Henry had twenty years with Highway Patrol and twenty-two years with the troopers. He came from a long line of Texas law enforcement.

"I need your help," Rayburn told Henry. "This is the suspect vehicle we're looking for. It's a late-model Ford Focus with no decals or body damage, no tinted windows. We don't know if it's owned or rented." Henry looked at the photos closely. "How can you know this is a white Ford Focus?" he asked.

"That's what the FBI tells us," Rayburn said. "I talked to the field office in Conroe."

Henry was skeptical. So he took the flyer and drove over to the local Ford dealership. Turned out Chris Iber, who identified the Focus using windshield analysis, was right.

Back in Alaska, Payne and his team had gone from elation to frustration. For Payne, Iber's assessment that they were looking for the most commonly rented vehicle in the United States was just another instance of Murphy's Law.

Progress seemed minimal. They had a man, his age, race, and weight unknown, covered head to toe, traveling on major highways in a nondescript vehicle, picking small banks in small towns at odd hours, knowing the risk of getting caught was almost zero. He seemed to have a hyperawareness of video cameras, often parking his vehicle out of frame.

What were the chances they'd ever catch him?

Kat Nelson was a little more optimistic. She tried to encourage Payne. This guy made two bank withdrawals in Texas, one in Humble and one in Shepherd. Texas, of course, is much larger than Arizona or New Mexico, but these withdrawals were taking place in closer and closer proximity. It was entirely possible, Nelson said, that their suspect might be settling in for a few days. "Nesting," she called it.

Yet there was nothing Nelson could actively do. She was stuck up in Alaska, at the mercy of Texas Rangers.

Jolene Goeden felt the same way. Like Nelson and Payne, she toggled between despair and excitement, but as the ATM withdrawals began escalating, she allowed herself to think that it was only a matter of time.

Jeff Bell was less sure. This was one of the thousands of BOLOs going out through the United States every day. Their BOLO couldn't even say for sure where their suspect was going or why, and Bell knew that most who read it would think to themselves, "There's no chance. I'm not even going to try."

Steve Payne agreed. At this stage, he thought, they were relying on luck. They had to count on people to be decent, and last night he'd had one of the most disheartening exchanges of the entire investigation. After another withdrawal in Texas in the predawn hours of March 12, he called the local bank manager in Humble and asked her to go down and look at the security footage.

No, she said.

He was flabbergasted. He begged. Other bank managers across the Southwest had responded immediately, rousting themselves in the middle of the night. A young girl's life is in danger, Payne told her.

Sorry, she replied. But I'm not going to the bank and I'm not sending any of my employees. She told Payne he and his team would just have to wait until the bank opened at nine.

As it turned out, that video was useless, but the whole experience left Payne deeply discouraged. When the day ended with no new leads and no new ATM withdrawals, Payne began to worry that his suspect just might vanish forever in the Lower 48.

For Rayburn, this was only day two, and his anxiety had given way to cautious optimism. He got to the office early and began working on another BOLO; even though he lacked new information, pushing another one would remind everyone to remain vigilant. He was struggling with the wording when his phone rang.

The voice on the other end introduced herself as Deb Gannaway. She was an FBI agent out of Lufkin, but had spent most of her thirty-three years with the Bureau in Houston. Kevin Pullen had given her a call, Gannaway said, asking if she knew about "this missing girl from Alaska and this debit card." The suspect seemed to be moving up from Houston toward Gannaway's area of responsibility. Could she come by?

"Sure," Rayburn said. It was 10:30 A.M. Minutes later, Gannaway was in his office.

With little to discuss—Rayburn knew as much as Gannaway—they talked procedure. Gannaway marveled at the Bureau's ability to identify the most commonplace vehicles in the country through subtle design quirks; Rayburn boasted of Henry taking photos over to the Ford dealership and holding them up, side by side, to an actual Ford Focus. For a Texas Ranger, no job was too small.

Rayburn's cell phone rang. It was nearly eleven o'clock now and Henry was on the line. He'd been driving around local hotel parking lots and had

just come upon a white Ford Focus. The car was parked in front of the Quality Inn on South First Street, and what do you know? That was right off US 59.

Henry had been about to go on his lunch break, but would stick around until Rayburn got there.

Gannaway grabbed her jacket. Rayburn, who followed the Rangers' strict dress code, removed his cowboy hat and necktie. As best he could, he didn't want to look like a Ranger, but he still wore his long-sleeved dress shirt, immaculate blue jeans, and cowboy boots.

Gannaway and Rayburn hopped into his pickup truck and headed over to the Quality Inn. There, they found the Ford Focus parked in front of room 115. This might be it.

Rayburn called his friend Mickey Hadnot, a lieutenant he'd known since the early 1990s when they were on street patrol together. Hadnot now supervised undercover narcotics agents. "I want to put eyes on this car," Rayburn told Hadnot. "Would you send an undercover over?"

Hadnot told Rayburn he was on his way. He'd do it himself.

Meanwhile, Henry told Rayburn he was skipping lunch. This was getting exciting. He'd hang back and keep his eyes on rooms 115 and 215 right above.

In the parking lot, Gannaway got out of Rayburn's truck and walked around the Ford Focus, noting the bar code on the rear window. A rental. There were little girl's clothes in the backseat. The car had Texas license plates. Rayburn ran them through the system.

With Hadnot and Henry keeping watch, Rayburn and Gannaway walked into the hotel lobby and asked for the manager. He gave them the guest list, but nothing connected the Ford Focus to anyone registered at the hotel. Among the Quality Inn and neighboring Holiday Inn and Comfort Suites, there were hundreds of rooms. Anyone could have parked anywhere.

Henry called Rayburn. "I've just seen a guy on the upper floor looking down at this car I've got eyes on," he said.

Then Hadnot radioed in. It was 11:30.

"A white male adult exited room 215," Hadnot said. "He's placing items in the white Ford Focus. He's getting ready to go."

"Henry," Rayburn said. "I need you to set up on US 59. Once that car leaves, you need to find a reason to pull him over. Don't let go of that car."

Henry immediately pulled out and drove over to US 59's center median, which gave him an unobstructed view of the hotel's entrance and exit.

Within minutes, Henry saw the white Ford Focus slowly make a left on US 59 and head north. Henry followed, keeping two cars between him and the Ford.

The driver was doing nothing wrong. Minute after minute elapsed. Once through the residential part of US 59, there would be no traffic lights to stop the driver. And there was a higher speed limit looming.

Rayburn wanted to know what was happening.

"Find a reason," he said again. "Find a reason."

The Ford was now stopped at a traffic light, seven minutes out from the Quality Inn. Henry lasered in on his in-car radar screen. When the light turned green and the Ford Focus accelerated to fifty-seven miles per hour, two miles over the speed limit, Henry switched on his emergency lights and watched incredulously as the driver calmly pulled over and stopped in the parking lot at the Cotton Patch Cafe.

Henry walked over to the vehicle. The driver was a white man, midthirties, alone. He wore black wraparound sunglasses.

"Texas Highway Patrol," Henry told him. "Where are you from?"

"Alaska," the man said.

In his twenty-two years doing traffic stops, Henry had never pulled over anyone from Alaska. "I need to see your driver's license, sir," Henry said. "Please step out of the vehicle."

The man pulled out his wallet, handed his license to Henry, and got out of the car.

An Alaskan in Texas. This was an awfully long way from home. Henry looked at the license, then back at the man. Henry said nothing. "I'm in town for my sister's wedding," the man said. "It's in Wells, fifteen minutes from here."

Henry looked at the license again. The name: Israel Keyes. Born January 7, 1978, living in Anchorage. Henry could see a knife tucked in the man's

front jeans pocket, another in the rear.

“Place the knives on your trunk.”

Henry was nervous. He looked around for Hadnot, who had followed. Henry waved him over, then got in his patrol car to run the license plate. Nothing. No record, no warrants, not even a speeding ticket.

Hadnot called Rayburn and Gannaway, and in the minutes before their arrival, Henry again approached the driver.

“What’s this about?” Keyes asked.

“We’re looking into a kidnapping,” Henry said. “From Alaska.”

“I’ve been mostly staying in Wells,” Keyes said. “But I stayed at the Quality Inn last night with my brother. I have two brothers in town for the wedding. They’re both from Maine.”

These were a lot of unsolicited details. Henry’s training told him: This man was lying.

Henry also noticed that Keyes was sweating profusely, more than usual for the weather. It was a perfect Texas spring day, 85 degrees, no humidity. There were patches of sweat blooming under the man’s thin gray tank top, the kind you buy in a three-pack at the drugstore.

“How long have you been in Texas?” Henry asked.

Keyes paused, as if thinking.

“Last Thursday,” Keyes said. “The same day as the big rain.”

That was right. There had been a massive storm that night, dumping more than four inches of rain, hailstones the size of grapefruit knocking birds out of trees.

“Did you fly down here or drive?” Henry asked.

“The only plane ticket I could get from Anchorage was to Las Vegas,” Keyes said. “So I flew to Vegas and then drove to Texas. Also I flew into Vegas so I could take my daughter to see the Grand Canyon.”

This story was getting more and more convoluted.

“Where is your daughter now?” Henry asked.

“She’s in town with my brother, in Wells,” Keyes said. “She’s ten.”

Rayburn pulled up with Gannaway, relieved to see everyone on the scene. He approached Henry, who gave a quick briefing while unhooking his body

mic and giving it to Rayburn. Careful to stand in the “arena of performance”—within view of the patrol car’s dashboard camera—Rayburn approached Keyes.

Keyes spoke first.

“Does this have anything to do with the officer who drove through my parking lot last night?” he asked.

Rayburn knew nothing about that. He ignored the question.

“Did you stay at the Quality Inn last night?” Rayburn asked Keyes.

Keyes looked to Gannaway, who was quietly circling the rental car, then back to Rayburn.

“Yes, with my brother. The room’s in his name. I’ve been in and out of there for the past two days.” Rayburn peered around Keyes and into the driver’s door. He saw a pair of white sneakers peeking out from under the seat.

“When did you rent this car?”

“A few days ago,” Keyes said. “The day after I flew into Las Vegas. Last Thursday.”

Keyes began stretching his limbs, another giveaway: This guy wasn’t telling the truth. He might be ready to run.

Gannaway walked over.

“I’m Special Agent Deb Gannaway with the FBI,” she said. “So how many states have you stopped in?”

“Well,” Keyes said, “I drove Interstate 40 and stopped at the Hoover Dam. But I didn’t really stay in any state because I only slept for an hour and a half a night. I drove the rest of the time.”

“Never stopped to get gas?” Gannaway asked.

“Oh, yeah, of course. A few times.”

“How’d you pay for it?”

Keyes paused.

“I don’t know,” he said. “Probably cash.”

Gannaway was really intrigued now.

“Again: How’d you pay for the gas?”

“Probably cash,” Keyes said. He was getting annoyed.

Rayburn stepped in. “Listen,” he said. “It’s easy enough to corroborate your story. Can we search your wallet?”

“You guys aren’t searching anything,” Keyes said. “Am I under arrest?”

Steve Payne sat in his car, in line at the Sugar Shack coffee kiosk, staring straight ahead. It was a little after 8:30 A.M. in Anchorage, the sun now finally rising.

He was so tired. Last night he'd been woken up three times, calls about more ATM withdrawals at 2:00, 2:30, and 2:47 A.M. Payne was on the phone with field teams in Texas until 5:00. It was a struggle to get back to sleep.

He was running on fumes, a low-level nervous energy laced with guilt. When Payne wasn't working he was sleeping, but when he was sleeping he wasn't working. What if something happened? Then again, if he wasn't sleeping, he wouldn't be clear enough to think straight—but was that just an excuse, something he was selfishly telling himself?

He sat waiting to order his usual, a twenty-ounce skinny peppermint mocha with whipped cream. Payne got teased about it all the time, his penchant for what he called his “froufrou” coffee, and compensated by drinking a pot and a half of cheap office swill the rest of the day.

The Sugar Shack was a couple of minutes from the FBI field office, and Payne watched the young baristas—two now, never a lone girl in any kiosk since Samantha vanished—serving rush-hour coffees; their breath forming plumes in the cold air; the lightening sky; their worn, fingerless gloves popping in and out of the kiosk's window with cups, cash, credit cards. These girls had been up since 4:30 to open, pushing against all impulses to sleep, warm and cocooned from the unrelenting cold.

Payne knew most of these baristas by name, and so did his girlfriend, a nurse. Some were saving for college; others were working on medical degrees. Payne's girlfriend always made a point of telling them to stick with it. They were good girls, Payne thought, the girls who make my skinny mocha every morning. Any one of them could have met Samantha's fate, whatever that was.

His cell phone rang. Payne didn't recognize the number, but he picked up anyway.

“I'm Special Agent Deb Gannaway with the Lufkin, Texas, field office. We pulled a suspect in your case over for speeding.”

Payne jolted awake.

“We have his driver’s license. He’s from Alaska. His name is Israel Keyes.”

The name meant nothing to Payne. Alaska, though—that was compelling. Still, he reminded himself: Murphy.

“Okay,” Payne said. “What’s happening?”

“We’re asking him where he’s going, why he’s here,” Gannaway replied. “He said he rented a car in Vegas to drive down here to his sister’s wedding.”

“What else?” he asked.

“Well, from what we can see from outside, he’s got a pair of white sneakers under the driver’s seat. I also see a roll of rubber-banded cash in the passenger door pocket. There’s red dye on it. And on the passenger seat there are some maps with highlighting on them.”

Cause for pause, Payne thought. Shoes that match the suspect doing all those ATM withdrawals—generic yes, but a match. Banks preload cash with exploding ink in case of robbery. And paper maps in the era of GPS?

“He’s being uncooperative,” Gannaway said. “He’s agitated and keeps asking why all these questions for a routine traffic stop. What do you want to do?”

Payne felt a surge of adrenaline. He had to think this through quickly but carefully. Did they have enough probable cause to search Keyes’s vehicle? The stuff Gannaway had was pretty thin.

“I don’t know,” Payne said. “Maps and sneakers . . . It’s not much.”

“I agree,” Gannaway said.

“But then you’ve got an Alaska driver’s license and this crazy story,” Payne said. “Is there probable cause?”

Gannaway thought for a moment.

“I don’t want to blow this for you,” she said. “You should know that in Texas, we have a probable cause exemption. If you have enough reason to believe a vehicle has been used in the commission of a crime, you can search it.”

Payne’s decision had to be unimpeachable. The little he had just learned made Keyes an automatic suspect. But if it was later determined that there wasn’t enough probable cause, anything they turned up would be thrown out of court—fruit of the poisonous tree, they called it.

Payne checked himself. He had never thought about a case this way before, caring more about finding someone than losing evidence along the way.

Keyes piped up. "Can I leave?" he asked. "Or at least call my brother?"

Gannaway turned her head, cell to her ear.

"Yes," she told Keyes. "You may call your brother."

Payne made his decision.

"I don't want to cut this guy loose without searching that car," he told Gannaway. "It doesn't matter to me how you do it."

Payne hung up. He was near tears. He got his coffee and parked his car behind the shack. He so badly wanted to stay on the phone with Gannaway, but his training took over. He knew that she and her team needed to focus. He thought about heading over to the FBI, but he didn't want to do that either. He wanted to sit in his car with his coffee, in the quiet, and think.

Could this actually be the guy? Payne was aware of how badly he wanted it to be, and worried that being hopeful might jinx it.

He pushed that fear away. Think like the agent you are, he said to himself. What do the facts, as you know them to be, tell you?

We've got someone from Alaska, he thought, all the way down in Texas. We're remote. This guy can't account for why he took such an odd route to his sister's wedding. The vehicle matches. The dye packs. The maps, the shoes. The shifty demeanor.

This should be the guy, Payne thought. He felt it in his gut. He allowed himself to go a little further: This *was* the guy. He knew it, and once again he felt a surge of hope that Samantha was alive.

Payne looked at the time. Ten minutes had passed. It felt like an hour.

The loneliness, in that moment, was surreal. Here he was, the lead FBI agent on the interstate kidnapping of a teenage girl, sitting in a parking lot with his overpriced coffee quickly going cold, the air crisp and clear, the illuminating sky a harbinger of hope. He was the only person in Alaska who

knew they might have Samantha's kidnapper and the consequences of the next few minutes.

The wait was unbearable. What if these investigators blew it? What if this guy was smarter than they even thought? Who would drive around with evidence of such a crime, especially if he was telling the truth about traveling with his little girl? What if there was no choice but to let him go? Then what?

Twenty minutes went by. Were they coming up empty?

His cell rang. It was Gannaway.

"We got him," she said. "This is the guy."

Payne couldn't believe it.

"What do you have?" he asked.

"Enough," Gannaway said.

Payne thanked her, over and over. They were going to bring Samantha home.

SEVEN

Down in Texas, on the side of the road, the suspect stood, surrounded by five officers.

Rayburn walked back to his pickup, grabbed his Nikon camera, and handed it off to a sergeant on the scene.

“Shoot everything we find,” Rayburn said.

It was 12:26 P.M., almost an hour after Keyes had been pulled over. Rayburn and Gannaway began the search. From inside the vehicle, they inventoried the front. In addition to the highlighted maps of California, Arizona, and New Mexico on the front passenger seat, they found:

- One can of AMP Energy drink, open
- One set of school photos of a child
- One pair of sneakers, white
- One ATM receipt, under driver’s-side floor mat, reading “DEBIT NOT AVAILABLE”
- Sony digital camera containing 200-plus photos of a wedding
- One new gray shirt, with store tags, packaging Winchester brand
- Amber-tinted sunglasses, no packaging
- One T-shirt with one sleeve cut off
- Dark gray fleece Columbia jacket
- Several Walmart bags
- Rolls of cash in denominations of \$5 and \$10

In the backseat they found:

- Walmart receipt stamped “Lufkin, TX, 4:10 A.M., 3/12/2012”
- One sandwich
- One energy drink
- One pair of black sunglasses
- One partial gallon of water
- Laundry detergent
- One pink backpack

In the trunk:

- One green backpack
- One gray DVD case containing pornographic images of a black female
- Pornographic DVDs including transgender pornography
- Alaska Airlines flight confirmation of Israel Keyes and daughter to depart Anchorage on 3/6/2012, arriving Seattle, WA, 5:54 A.M., departing Seattle 3:30 P.M., arriving Las Vegas 5:56 P.M.
- Bottles of alcohol, still chilled, in Walmart bags
- Gray fleece jacket
- Gray hooded sweatshirt with amber shooting glasses and a gray cloth mask in front pocket, gloves in another pocket
- One laptop
- One black Samsung cell phone, slider type, battery and SIM card removed
- Toiletry kit
- One handgun
- One pair binoculars
- One black ski mask
- One headlamp

Rayburn wanted Henry, who'd done the initial traffic stop, to have the honors. “Hook him up,” Rayburn said.

Now that Keyes was under arrest, Rayburn could search his wallet. Inside was a driver's license belonging to Samantha Koenig.

EIGHT

Payne made the five-minute drive over to the FBI, calling APD on the way. Bell and Doll immediately ran a criminal records check on Israel Keyes. They came up empty.

That was unusual. Most people arrested on big charges almost always have a record.

Next, they ran his driver's license and got his home address: 2456 Spurr Lane, in the Turnagain section of Anchorage. That was also unusual. Lots of lawyers, prosecutors, and judges lived in that neighborhood.

Everyone had the same thought: What if Samantha was in the house? What if she was tied up in the basement, alive in Anchorage this entire time?

Doll began writing up a search warrant. Bell, along with the Special Assignment Unit and SWAT, rushed to the house.

Next, Payne called Kat Nelson and asked her to run a search of her own. She also began with criminal history and was surprised to find nothing. Such an unusual name in such a small community, no record? Like Payne, she began doubting herself. “Did I enter this right?” she wondered.

Nelson ran the name Israel Keyes again. This time she used the FBI's internal database. If Keyes had even been mentioned in a prior police report anywhere in the United States, his name would come up.

Nothing.

Desperate, Nelson finally just Googled him. She was looking for friends and family members—“known associates,” in law-enforcement parlance—plus former addresses, hunting and fishing licenses, and whether he was a registered gun owner.

Did he rent a storage unit? Who did he know who had a place to hide Samantha?

Nelson found a couple of clues. One of Keyes's former addresses was in Fort Lewis, Washington. This meant he'd probably served in the military. She made a note to call the army.

The house at Spurr Lane, Nelson learned, was owned by Kimberly Anderson, a nurse at Alaska Regional Hospital. Nelson ran Anderson through an FBI and public records search and learned she purchased the home in 2009. Registered to her was a Nissan Xterra, which had been spotted in some of the early Anchorage ATM withdrawal videos.

What was a smart, professional woman like this doing with Keyes? Could she have been an accomplice? Nelson called the hospital and identified herself as FBI. Is Kimberly Anderson working today? she asked.

Yes, came the reply.

Keep her busy, Nelson said. Don't let her leave until I call you back.

It was now 9:30 A.M. in Alaska. Bell and members of the Special Assignment Unit were taking positions outside the house. It was small, blue, well tended, tucked toward the horseshoe end of a cul-de-sac. There were two sheds off to the right and a trailer. In front sat a white pickup truck, a Chevrolet.

Bell's heart sank. This truck, at this very address, had been checked out by APD right after Samantha disappeared. They had ruled it out.

Officers knocked on the front door. No answer. They looked to the right and saw fresh tire tracks in the snow. Someone had just driven away.

Bell hadn't gotten a judge to sign off on the search warrant yet, which meant they couldn't get in the house or the sheds or the trailer, even though Samantha might be in any one of them. The best they could do was knock on the front and back doors and look through windows.

Bell walked up to the truck. He wrote down the license plate number, FTC990, and the phone number on the driver's-side door, under the words KEYES CONSTRUCTION. He took pictures of everything with his iPhone.

The pickup had a lumber rack attached to the back, over the cargo bed. Looking closer, Bell could see the bolts attaching the rack were brand new,

but the washers were rusty. The pickup on the surveillance video had no lumber rack. It must have been removed before Samantha was taken, then quickly reattached.

Bell needed to get inside that house.

Payne called Detective Doll, who would be flying to Texas with Bell later that day to interrogate Keyes. He was struck by her gracious offer for him to come along.

Payne was honest with her. “I want to come down and talk to this guy so badly I can taste it,” he said. “But we’ve got to charge him or he’s going to get cut loose.” Payne wanted to write the affidavit. The initial charge was limited to Fraud with Access Device, and Payne wanted to make sure it was strong enough to get Keyes extradited from Texas to Alaska.

He hung up with Doll and thought about the puzzling items found in the initial car search. Why so much cash in such small denominations? Most ATMs release \$20 bills. Why was Keyes traveling with a dismantled cell phone? Why was the battery missing? Payne had never seen that before.

Kimberly Anderson was picked up by APD at Alaska Regional Hospital and taken to the station, where she found herself sitting across from Doll. Anderson was horrified to hear that detectives were about to search the house she shared with Keyes and his daughter. She was adamant: Her boyfriend had nothing to do with Samantha’s disappearance. He was at home with her and his daughter the night Samantha vanished, Anderson said. He came into her bedroom several times that night.

Her bedroom? Where was Keyes sleeping?

Anderson went on to say that Keyes checked on his daughter and then rose at 5:00 A.M. to wake her. The two of them were leaving on a flight out that morning, and she had seen them get in a cab to the airport. Check his travel records—he and his little girl flew out of Anchorage, and Anderson met up with them a few days later, for a cruise out of New Orleans.

There was no time for him to have done this, she said.

Down in Texas, as Keyes was being driven to the Lufkin police station, Rayburn and Gannaway stopped at Subway. They grabbed some six-inch heroes and potato chips and talked about how best to approach Keyes.

“I think you should take the lead,” Gannaway said. “We don’t know his temperament.” By this she meant: We don’t know how he’ll react to a female in charge. “Let’s see how he responds to a Texas Ranger,” she said.

When they got to the station, Rayburn and Gannaway took another look at Keyes’s wallet, which he had seemed afraid to hand over at the traffic stop. Inside were credit cards, Keyes’s ATM card, business cards, and, tucked alone in a rear compartment, a green Visa debit card issued to Samantha’s boyfriend with a PIN number scratched on its face.

Rayburn and Gannaway looked at each other, silent.

Keyes sat waiting for them in a tiny interrogation room, audio and video set to record. Bryan Henry and other Rangers stood behind the two-way mirror, eager to hear what this suspect had to say. Keyes seemed quite calm.

At 3:30, carrying their lunch and some bottled water, Rayburn and Gannaway walked in and sat opposite Keyes. They’d been told to keep the arrest quiet as a recent tip had Samantha alive in Wells, Texas, the same town Keyes had been visiting. Apparently Samantha had an aunt who lived there.

Proceed carefully, they were told.

“Would you like a sandwich?” Gannaway asked. “We picked one up for you.”

“No,” Keyes said.

“Okay,” she said. “I’ll leave it on the table in case you change your mind.”

Their attempt at rapport building wasn’t going so well.

“Do you know why you’re under arrest?” Rayburn asked.

Keyes looked at him blankly. “I don’t think so,” he said.

“We found the ATM card, the one belonging to Samantha’s boyfriend, in your wallet,” Rayburn said.

Keyes didn’t flinch. “I don’t want to talk,” he said.

That wasn’t closing the door, Rayburn thought. Keyes hadn’t said, “I want a lawyer.” Rayburn pushed a little further.

“The FBI has pictures of your truck at the crime scene,” Rayburn said. “If they had that,” Keyes said, “they already would have talked to me.”

Keyes was right, and it pissed Gannaway off. His whole demeanor was smug and superior. It just oozed off him: Who were they to interrupt his day? They had found him with Samantha’s driver’s license and Duane’s ATM card, and he had not a care.

“Anchorage is gonna do you for this,” Gannaway told him.

Keyes said nothing.

The conversation didn’t progress much beyond that. Eventually, Rayburn and Gannaway prepared to transport Keyes to federal prison. Rayburn handcuffed Keyes’s wrists in front, then hooked them up to a belly chain with only a few inches of slack. Keyes could barely lift his arms. Then Rayburn shackled Keyes in equally taut leg irons and put him in the front passenger seat of his marked Ford pickup truck, belting him in and then shoving the seat all the way forward so that Keyes was sandwiched tight against the dashboard.

Gannaway sat directly in back of Keyes, no cage separating them. It was now six o’clock in the evening, the longest day either Rayburn or Gannaway had in a while. They set out on the two-hour drive to Beaumont, where Keyes would be held in a federal penitentiary before his arraignment the next day. Or maybe the day after that. The hope was that Anchorage would get their detectives to Texas before the hearing, before Keyes would have a court-appointed lawyer. Once that happened, there was little chance Keyes would say anything.



Bell and Doll were scrambling. They didn’t even have time to go home and pack. They made a pit stop at Walmart to buy some warm-weather clothes, then rushed to the airport and boarded a commercial red-eye. With no direct flights from Anchorage to Houston, they would first spend three and a half hours in the air to Seattle. There they’d connect to a flight to Houston—another four and a half hours, not to mention renting a car and driving nearly a hundred miles to the courthouse, adrenalized and jet-lagged.

They thought about the emergency meeting they’d had with Steve Payne, Jolene Goeden, and two members of the US Attorney’s Office, Frank Russo

and Kevin Feldis. Together, they had all tried to war-game the Keyes interview.

How much should Bell and Doll tell Keyes? Or show? They had the picture of Keyes's truck in the Home Depot parking lot the night Samantha went missing, which really proved nothing. Surveillance stills from the coffee kiosk were useless. Grainy images of a masked man would only show Keyes how impossible it was to ID him.

Those were out.

What about the ransom note? It was entirely possible Keyes didn't write it. Then again, if he had an accomplice, Keyes would still know about that.

If they played it right, the note could work.

Their thoughts went to James Koenig. Payne had called him down to the FBI offices after Keyes's arrest. Payne wanted to do it there, partly because it was a controlled environment, but partly because he wanted James to know how serious they were. The very blandness of the FBI's offices—beige walls, beige carpet, beige furniture—helped give family members a sense of orderliness and competence, underscoring that these were investigators of the highest degree.

Payne told James they had someone in custody in Texas, and they had good reason to believe he was involved in Samantha's disappearance. James wanted to know who.

A man named Israel Keyes, Payne said. We're going through everything we can find on him.

James was dumbstruck. He'd never heard of an Israel Keyes. He could not think of a possible connection between this man and his daughter. None.

You have to keep this very quiet, Payne said. Please don't tell anyone. Please don't go on Facebook and post his name. This is the most sensitive part of the investigation, our best chance of finding your daughter.



Bell and Doll landed in Houston early on the morning of March 14, the day after Keyes had been arrested. It was 73 degrees, bright and clear. They rented a car at the airport and headed out on the drive to Beaumont.

Shortly after eleven o'clock, Bell heard from Rayburn. "You won't believe this," Rayburn said, "but I just got a call—there's an active shooting

on the courthouse steps. It's not Keyes, but you need to stand clear."

Every single thing about this case, still in its genesis, was bizarre.

Bell fought to keep his head clear. He and Doll kept heading northeast toward the I-10, the same corridor Keyes had traveled. Once in Beaumont, at least they could stand outside the taped-off perimeter at the courthouse, bask in the sun, and sweat out their anxiety.

Two hours later, Rayburn greeted Bell and Doll on the courthouse steps. Bell got a kick out of Rayburn's look—cowboy boots, blue jeans, a white ten-gallon Stetson hat, and a single gun on his hip. A Texas Ranger, just like you'd see on TV. Rayburn was much younger than he sounded, his face wide and open.

On their way inside, Bell and Doll conferred quickly. Doll would take the lead; Rayburn had gotten nowhere yesterday. Maybe Keyes would respond to a pretty blond detective who'd flown all the way from Alaska just to talk to him.

Each member of the team had agreed: Only show Keyes the ransom note.

Bell stepped into the interrogation room first. He looked at Keyes and felt the hair on the back of his neck stand up. He did it, Bell thought to himself.

Doll was right behind him, getting the exact same feeling. She slid the ransom note across the table. Keyes began silently reading it.

"Whoever wrote this," Doll said, "whoever did this, is a monster. I don't think you're a monster."

Doll was following the script they had worked on in Alaska, using a classic interrogation technique: trying to connect. She wasn't saying, "I don't think you did this." In effect, Doll was telling Keyes she understood, that she knew there was a reason Keyes took Samantha. She was sympathetic to him.

Keyes said nothing. Doll and Bell hoped that the note would at least get Keyes onto some kind of story. Even a denial would be a starting point.

"There's nothing I can do to help you," Keyes said. He seemed quite interested in Doll though.

“Well,” Doll continued, “how do you explain her boyfriend’s ATM card in your wallet?”

“Oh,” Keyes said. His tone softened. “Now I know how I’m involved in this.”

Doll perked up. Here we go.

Someone, Keyes said, had left a ziplock bag on the front seat of his pickup truck a few weeks ago. Inside that bag was a cell phone and that ATM card with a PIN number scratched on it. Keyes said he had left his driver’s-side window open a crack because he was a smoker, which they’d surely know from the cigars he had in his rental. He assumed that someone he had done construction work for, who still owed him money, left those things as payment.

“Frankly,” Doll said, “that is a ridiculous story. We know you did this. We know you took Samantha.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Keyes said.



After less than an hour with Keyes, Bell and Doll left the room deflated. Keyes had said nothing that could implicate him in Samantha’s disappearance. He was extremely confident. And if Keyes thought that all they could charge him with was credit card fraud, he was right. Bell and Doll knew that Keyes could, if he was smart, avoid ever being charged for kidnapping Samantha.

After Keyes was arraigned, Bell spotted an older woman standing outside the courtroom. She was tall and slender and wore no makeup, her long white hair in a braid down her back. Her simple cotton dress, which covered her from neck to ankle, looked homemade. Bell thought she could be Amish.

Heidi Keyes, Gannaway told the Alaskan detectives. Israel Keyes’s mother.

Bell approached and introduced himself.

“We believe your son knows where a missing eighteen-year-old girl is,” Bell said. “But he won’t tell us anything. Can you help us? Can you ask him, please, to tell you, as his mother?”

“I can’t help you,” Heidi replied. She sounded just like her son.

Bell was stunned. “Please,” Bell said. “I’m begging you. There’s a girl out there whose father is frantic. She’s been missing for over a month.”

“Well,” Heidi said, “if God wants that girl to be found, she’ll be found.” Then she turned and walked away.

PART II



NINE

It would take two weeks to extradite Israel Keyes from Texas to Alaska, and in that time investigators needed to learn as much about him as possible. Kat Nelson found a local website for his business, Keyes Construction, which included a capsule biography. This would be the launchpad for part two of the investigation.

According to his self-report, Keyes had lived in Colville, Washington, from 1995 to 1997, working as a contractor for a man named Kelly Harris. Nelson looked up Colville on Wikipedia. It was a small town, less than three square miles. As of the 2010 census, it had a population of less than five thousand.

Keyes's driver's license, expired by one month when he was arrested—a small violation, but the hint of a criminal—listed his birth date as January 7, 1978. That would put Israel Keyes in Colville from ages seventeen to nineteen, at least. People there might remember him.

The next entry in the biography put Keyes in the US Army from 1998 to 2000, stationed at Fort Lewis in Washington, Fort Hood in Texas, and Sinai, Egypt. He had passed, with distinction, the army's pre-Ranger course, a merciless sixty-one days of training that typically flushes out half its hopefuls in the first week.

Nelson also found an application for a US passport listing the same birthday as his driver's license. He put his birth state as Utah. Under the question "Have you ever been issued a passport before?" Keyes wrote, "Don't remember."

Who doesn't remember getting their passport?

After an honorable discharge from the army in 2001, Keyes moved to a remote part of Washington State called Neah Bay, where he worked for the Parks and Recreation Commission for the next six years.

A Wiki search gave Nelson a thumbnail sketch of the area. Situated on the uppermost western tip of Washington, Neah Bay was a designated reservation for the Makah tribe. Only 865 people lived there. Like Colville, it was less than three square miles. Household income was less than thirty thousand dollars a year.

How did this young man—athletic, fairly good-looking, smart, skilled, with a clear sense of adventure—end up in such poor, rural, isolated pockets of the Pacific Northwest?

And why the sudden move to Anchorage? What was the draw? Had it been Kimberly? That relationship was a whole other mystery; since the arrest, Kimberly had refused to cooperate. She was adamant that Keyes was innocent and that she had nothing to do with any of this either. She was enraged and humiliated that her house had been aggressively searched while Israel was in custody in Texas.

Why would she help them now?

Keyes's biography ended in 2007 with his move to Alaska and the establishment of Keyes Construction. "Have yet to have a dissatisfied customer!" Keyes wrote.

Nelson sent the whole bio to the team. Goeden, who was now co-case agent with Payne, knew that she would have to work on Kimberly herself down the line, once the shock and anger wore off. But as Goeden was learning, Kimberly wasn't the only important woman in Israel Keyes's life. In fact, there were two who knew him well: His mother, Heidi, and Tammie, the mother of his child. Though they were never married, Keyes called Tammie his ex-wife.



Within hours of Israel's arrest, Deb Gannaway was at Heidi's front door. Somehow, she convinced her to open up to an interview.

Heidi was fifty-nine years old, handsome, with a proud bearing. Her house, in the tiny town of Wells, was small and spartan, reminiscent of *Little House on the Prairie*.

Gannaway's first impression was of a serious woman who, unlike Kimberly, was sad but not in shock. This was interesting. Israel Keyes's own mother, in such a raw moment, was silently conceding that yes, it was

possible that her own son was responsible for the kidnapping of a teenage girl, maybe worse. What led Heidi to accept this? What had Israel been like growing up? The team in Anchorage hadn't found a criminal record for him, but that didn't mean no criminal history. It only meant he hadn't been caught.

Gannaway, just like Goeden and Nelson, would want to know everything about the Keyes family. Most pressingly, Gannaway needed to know everything Israel had done on this visit to Texas, all while fresh in Heidi's mind.

That would be fine, Heidi said.

How long had Heidi been living in Texas? Was Israel a frequent visitor?

I recently moved here with four of my daughters, Heidi said. They had all been living in Indianapolis, Indiana, where they met two young men Heidi called "street preachers," charismatic evangelicals who somehow convinced the Keyes women to move nearly nine hundred miles south and join their congregation. First they had moved to Dallas, then Wells. One of Heidi's daughters had just wed a fellow church member in an arranged marriage. That's why Israel had been in Texas.

Heidi relayed this information as though it were utterly normal, and Gannaway kept her face blank. Was Israel a member of their church? Gannaway asked.

No, Heidi said. Israel doesn't believe in God. His atheism was a great tragedy of her life.

Had anything unusual happened? Gannaway asked.

Actually, a few things, Heidi said. She had heard that at least one of Israel's sisters had begged him to accept the Lord, and Israel, normally so contemptuous of such talk, instead became very emotional. He wept, Heidi said. He told his sister, "You don't know the things that I have done."

Had Heidi ever heard the name Samantha Koenig?

No, Heidi said. I have never heard of her until now.

But there was something else Gannaway might want to know.

The week prior, on the night of Thursday, March 8, Israel and his daughter arrived at Heidi's house at around 10:00 P.M. Israel said that they had flown from Anchorage to Seattle, and then to Las Vegas, where he rented a car and drove to Texas.

This was the itinerary that had raised Payne's and Gannaway's antennae during the roadside traffic stop. Had Heidi found it odd, Gannaway asked, that Israel chose such a complicated way to travel, especially with his little girl in tow?

Not really, Heidi said. His sister's wedding had come up suddenly and Israel said those were the cheapest plane tickets he could find.

Gannaway wanted to know more about another trip Israel had taken to Texas back in February, beginning hours after Samantha disappeared. Heidi recalled that one vividly too.

Israel and his daughter, Heidi said, flew from Anchorage to Seattle and then on to Houston, where they rented a car and drove to New Orleans. That's where they met up with Kimberly and boarded their five-day cruise to Mexico.

Another serpentine route from point A to point B.

When the cruise was over, Israel rented another car and drove with his daughter to Dallas, where Heidi was still living. Kimberly had gone off on a road trip with a friend.

This visit, Heidi said, had been the weirdest. It was clear something was very wrong with Israel, because once at Heidi's he snuck out of the house sometime early in the morning, like a teenager. It was February 13, one day before he and his daughter were due on a flight back to Anchorage. He had left a note on his bed.

"Gone to fix the window and find a place to hide my guns," he wrote.

That wasn't unusual, Heidi said. The window referred to the rental car. And Israel always had guns, even as a boy. The whole family had guns.

Gannaway asked gently: What happened after Israel left? When did he come back?

That was the thing, Heidi said. He didn't come back. She showed Gannaway exchanges from a family group text beginning that morning, two hours after they found Israel's note.

8:05 A.M.: "lzy, we can take your guns to [redacted] if you want, no problem."

No word all day. Later that night, Israel texted back. He was stuck in the mud, he said, in the middle of nowhere.

8:34 P.M.: "We wanna get you if you have any idea where you are."

No response.

8:52 P.M.: "We have 4 w drive if you give us an idea where you are we'll come get you."

The next day, February 14, Israel texted to say he was parked near a big shopping center in Cleburne, an hour away. The family drove to pick him up, but when they arrived, no sign of Israel. So they spent the night sleeping in the parking lot, in their van, waiting for his next text. Gannaway did not ask the obvious: Why not just go home, take a shower, get some sleep? Or, if they were that worried, why not call the police? But she didn't want to put Heidi on the defensive. Gannaway let her continue.

On the morning of the fifteenth, finally, a call. Israel said he was on the other side of the mall.

And there they found him, disheveled and incoherent. His rental car, a little blue Kia Soul, was splattered with mud. Israel had a litany of excuses. He ran out of gas, he said. His credit cards had been frozen. He had no cash. He hadn't eaten or slept in two days.

This was unlike the Israel Heidi and his siblings knew. That Israel was calm, neat, and resourceful. He was able to build or fix anything. He could spend hours in the deep woods and never get lost. He was like a superhero. The notion that Israel couldn't find his way around suburban Texas in daylight was ridiculous.

But no one asked him where he had been or what he had been doing. Instead, on February 16, Heidi booked two more plane tickets to Anchorage. And again, Israel left the house for much of the day and the next, finally returning with nine hundred dollars in cash to reimburse Heidi for the flight. Israel and his daughter flew out on the eighteenth, and that was everything Heidi remembered about those two trips.

In relaying all this to Gannaway, Heidi had to admit: Something had been very wrong. There was the extreme emotionality. And Israel seemed to be drinking a lot. Heidi was worried enough to call upon her church elders, who came by to offer counsel.

She had no idea what was discussed, but Israel's willingness to talk to them was another sign something was amiss. He must have been truly distraught to sit with those self-proclaimed elders, who were really much younger than Israel.

For all the things she didn't know, Heidi had given Gannaway more than she realized: Israel's pattern of unusual travel, a burgeoning sense of the Keyes family dynamic, what seemed to be his mental unraveling immediately after Samantha's disappearance, and one crucial takeaway.

As curious as this family was, Israel's behavior disturbed even them, and no one felt they could say a thing. But to Goeden, Bell, Payne, and Nelson, those two days Keyes went missing in Texas weren't such a mystery. He had to have done something.



On Friday, March 30, Steve Payne got word that Keyes, who'd just been transported to Anchorage by US marshals—by way of an unexplained stop in Oklahoma City—wanted to talk.

Here it is, Payne thought. He's going to confess.

Payne's elation was tempered by two demands. One, Keyes wanted the death penalty off the table. Two, he wanted very little information released to the media. He knew his name had appeared in news reports since his arrest in Texas, but anything else he might tell them could not be made public. He didn't want his child to know any of it.

For their first true interrogation, Payne and his team had only a few hours to prepare, and what happened in that room would set the tone for everything to come. Keyes needed to believe the FBI knew more than they actually did. He needed to feel boxed in by evidence that the FBI didn't yet have, to feel not just afraid but terrified. Keyes needed to believe, in his bones, that the person speaking to him had heard it all before, had dealt with criminals far more hardened and depraved, and really didn't care what happened to him—but, if he wanted to talk, maybe the FBI could work something out.

The flip side: If Keyes kept his mouth shut, they'd only be able to charge him with fraudulent ATM card use, nothing more. Even as a federal crime, he'd see six months to a year maximum in prison. With his clean record,

though, he'd probably face a fine and probation. Samantha might never be found. Keyes might very well walk. And having committed a crime this severe, Keyes would surely do it again. Or worse.

Do it right the first time, Payne told himself. You only get one chance.

Payne called Bell, Goeden, and Nelson into a conference room at the FBI. Doll was away, and as much as it killed her to physically miss the first sit-down with Keyes, she would listen in by phone.

Payne decided he and Bell should run the interrogation, which would be held, per protocol, at the FBI's offices. No other facility in Anchorage was equipped to deal with such a potentially dangerous suspect: They had the necessary security, down to the consistent, uniform torquing of all the window shades to keep anyone from seeing inside. The interrogation rooms were wired for audio and video. Goeden and Nelson, along with federal prosecutors, would be able to watch and listen from another room, at their computers, verifying or debunking any statements Keyes made in real time. Agents from the Behavioral Analysis Unit at Quantico would be dialed in to direct questioning via text message.

Based on everything they had uncovered so far, the team was confident that Keyes knew where Samantha was.

That morning, an anxious Payne called his contact at BAU and was given one main piece of advice: Let your suspect keep talking. The smarter ones usually like to talk.

Now it was up to Payne and his team to decide what to reveal to Keyes, what to avoid, what to say, and how to say it. The opening salvo was critical. Payne always likened the first meeting with a suspect to telling an author his own story.

And, of course, only the author knows how that story ends.

How to leverage what little they had to get a confession? Especially now that Rich Curtner, one of Alaska's best public defenders, had been appointed by the court to represent Keyes.

"Let's be prepared for the worst," Payne told his team. "If we take the death penalty off the table, we don't have much to bargain with down the road."

“We shouldn’t make our presentation too complicated,” Bell said.

They debated telling the story backward, beginning with the evidence seized from Keyes’s rental car in Texas, but they ultimately decided to present the evidence in chronological order. It was smarter to keep the narrative tight, which would hopefully make Keyes feel overwhelmed by what they did have and worried about what they might be holding back. They all agreed they should stay away from the biggest hole in their knowledge: Keyes’s connection to Samantha.

The script they worked up for Keyes was strong, but it needed the right messenger. Payne asked Bell to do it; he had a quiet confidence, an ability to build rapport while communicating authority.

Bell agreed. He and Payne would enter the room and Bell would open with this:

“Listen,” he’d say. Then he would take a slight pause, letting Keyes know that Bell was in control. “We’re not going to show you all our evidence, because frankly we don’t have that kind of time. And even if we had the time, that’s not the way the process works. But we’re going to make a good faith effort. We’re not going to bullshit you.”

Then they’d bring out the photos. Payne loved photos, because suspects couldn’t lie their way out of them. In this case, they’d keep it to six pictures, another weakness they hoped to turn into a strength.

“Here’s your pickup truck across the street from Samantha’s kiosk the night she disappeared,” Bell would say. “Oh, and by the way, we have a lot more footage, and all of it is with the FBI’s specialists back at Quantico. By the time they’re done I’m going to have eight-by-ten glossies I can hang on my wall.”

They’d let that hang and see if Keyes said anything.

If not, they’d pull out more photos. This was the part that really excited Payne. Some agents loved going into an interrogation room with lots of props, stacking up boxes and binders and saying, “This is what we’ve got.” Payne found less was more. After Bell showed Keyes the truck, Payne would jump back in.

“Here’s the mask, the sunglasses, and the hoodie you wore during those ATM withdrawals,” Payne would say. “Here’s Duane’s ATM card in your wallet. Here’s Samantha Koenig’s cell phone, broken apart and hidden in the trunk of your rental car.”

They'd pause again. If Keyes still said nothing, Payne would continue. "We don't have all the answers yet," he'd say.

This admission, counterintuitively, would work as a sign of confidence.

"But we're not going to stop until we do. We have more evidence, and we're learning more every day." They'd tell Keyes they knew about his girlfriend and his daughter, plus his ex-wife back in Washington State. That they knew he had a rocky relationship with his parents and about the odd religious community in Texas, implying that they knew embarrassing details of his life, his issues with his mother—not that they were here to embarrass him, not at all.

Of everything, this had the best chance to unmoor him.

The final piece of evidence would be the computers they took from his house. True, they hadn't yet found any communication between Keyes and Samantha, but there were some disturbing things on those hard drives. Chief among them were links to news articles about Samantha, contemporaneous coverage of the investigation, and more than one reader comment posted by someone named Israel.

"We have all your computers," Bell would say. "Again, we're not going to bullshit you. It's going to take a while to go through them. But we're going to analyze every cache, every conversation, everything you think you deleted or destroyed. We're very, very good at what we do."

Most suspects believe this, because most suspects learn their tradecraft by watching *CSI*.

Payne, Bell, Goeden, and Nelson all thought it was a winning strategy.

Then they got a phone call. To their horror, the top federal prosecutor in Alaska had another idea.

Kevin Feldis had worked for the US Attorney's Office since 1999 and had been in Alaska since 1997. Feldis was slender and middle-aged with thinning brown hair. He was a graduate of Yale and the University of Chicago Law School who had never been involved with street crime, let alone homicide. He worked strictly white-collar crime, yet here he was, telling Payne that this was his show now.

Israel Keyes, Feldis said, was going to be interrogated not at the FBI but at the US Attorney's Office, and not only would he himself be in the room, but he would be leading the interview alongside his deputy, Frank Russo. The FBI would be his backup.

Payne was dumbstruck. This was not just a supremely bad idea—it was prosecutorial misconduct. But every agent and police officer in Anchorage wanted to stay on Feldis's good side, because it was up to him to put their suspects in prison. No one ever fought back against Kevin Feldis. This was Anchorage and her insularity at its worst; in any other place, an agent in this position might call his boss and have it shut down. If that went nowhere, he could threaten a leak to the media, hoping public accusations of abuse of power would make Feldis back down. If that didn't work, one could actually leak it.

But that just wasn't done here.

Payne would have to try another way.



There were many reasons Feldis had no business being in that room, let alone co-opting the investigation. For one, the US Attorney's Office wasn't wired for audio and video recording of the interrogation. Nor did the building have proper security. Keyes wouldn't be as intimidated, psychologically or physically, as he'd be at the FBI's offices. These were all very real concerns.

Feldis didn't care.

How about this liability? Police officers and FBI agents can, by law, lie to elicit a confession; prosecutors cannot. Investigators can dangle the prospect of a deal with the prosecutor and shade that deal positively or negatively. All that leverage, the ability to distract and distress a criminal who probably wants a deal, would be lost if the prosecutor himself was sitting right there and the suspect could just turn and ask, "Will you give me what I want?"

Then there was the need to physically box Keyes in. There's a reason interrogation rooms are tiny and windowless. It makes the interview subject literally feel like the walls are closing in. There's also a reason only two officers or agents run an interrogation: It keeps the conversational thread

narrow and strict. It allows for rapport building and the classic good-cop/bad-cop dynamic. Interrogating a suspect at a conference table of six or more people would only make Keyes feel important and powerful, not small and weak.

This would be the FBI's first interview with Keyes on their home turf, the place where the crime was committed. It would be the first chance for the team to get a sense of Israel Keyes, and for Keyes to get a sense of them. No one on this team was a better interrogator than Jeff Bell; Payne's ego was healthy enough to admit it. If Keyes sensed that Feldis was intimidated or nervous, or if Feldis let on how little they actually knew, they could lose their last, best chance at finding Samantha.

Feldis was Murphy personified.

This was egregious behavior. If this case went to trial, which right now looked likely, every move the prosecution made from the very beginning would be a matter of public record, because the onus is on the prosecution to prove their case. And public scrutiny allows everyone to walk away certain, as much as possible, that justice has been done fairly. By leading this interrogation, Feldis would be both prosecutor and a witness who could be called by Keyes's defense team.

If at any point prosecutorial misconduct were discovered, even as early as an interrogation, the case could be thrown out. Even a convicted felon could be set free, never to be tried on the same charges again. Prosecutors literally cannot handle real evidence at this stage; it contaminates chain of custody. Any halfway decent defense attorney could say to a judge, "The government shouldn't be able to prosecute," and any halfway decent judge would agree.

Simply put, the consequences could be devastating.

But Feldis would not be dissuaded. This was the biggest case in Alaska since Joshua Wade, the serial killer who had made headlines in 2007, and the Keyes case could be even bigger. Samantha Koenig's disappearance was national news. All of their profiles, especially in the Lower 48, could be elevated. This case was made for *Dateline* or *48 Hours* or any number of true-crime documentaries. It could be a career maker.

Surely Payne and Bell could give Feldis a crash tutorial in Investigation Techniques 101. How hard could it be?

Jeff Bell was equally shocked. He'd seen a lot of politicking in Anchorage but never anything like this. Everybody wanted to be in that room for the first interrogation—of course they did—but you would think that the integrity of the case and the hunt for an eighteen-year-old girl would come first.

Bell talked it over with Payne. As alarmed as they were, they agreed that they had only one option: Try to coach Feldis as best they could. That he had a thin, reedy voice—in contrast to Payne's whiskey-and-nicotine-soaked twang, or Bell's open-throated midwestern warmth—was a distinct weakness, one related to Feldis never having sat across from a bloodless criminal, one sure he's smarter than you. They all think they're smarter than you, which is yet another thing they'd have to explain to Feldis.

At least they had the script worked up. Payne consoled himself with the thought that he'd still be in the room and could redirect the interview if it went off course. Plus, Frank Russo would be there. Both Payne and Bell liked Russo, a careworn, middle-aged New Yorker who had worked gangs and violent crime in Manhattan.

Payne and Bell made the five-minute drive over to the Anchorage Correctional Complex to meet Keyes before transport. For Payne, this would be his first face-to-face with the man who took Samantha. Yet both men wondered the same things: What kind of person did they have in custody? What kind of criminal? Was this a crime of passion? Opportunity? Or was it motivated by something they hadn't identified yet? What was Keyes's baseline personality? Would he give any hint as to the best way to approach him, let alone to get a confession?

When they arrived, Payne thought Keyes looked like the figure in the surveillance video: tall, broad-shouldered, athletic. Leaping into Samantha's kiosk through that window, which was about three and a half feet off the ground, would take agility and upper-body strength, and Keyes seemed to have that. He also easily followed direction. This was not someone who suffered from mental illness or cognitive defects. Keyes was clearly sane.

One thing everyone on this case knew but couldn't say publicly: The Anchorage Correctional Complex wasn't secure enough for a criminal like

Keyes. Anchorage, for all its violent crime, doesn't have a federal penitentiary.

Goeden and Nelson, already at the Assistant US Attorney's Office, were setting up their laptops just outside a conference room. Bell and Payne had little time to give Feldis his crash course in breaking a suspect, skills honed over years of training at police academies, taught to agents and police officers at Quantico by top minds, where even the most experienced investigators will return, again and again, to replenish these perishable skills and learn new techniques.

The information that agents and officers call upon in every interrogation, these deep, vast archives, is most akin to muscle memory. There is no algorithm for eliciting a confession. A good interrogator works with the confidence born of experience yet is smart enough to be humbled by each new suspect and each new challenge.

The best of the breed are psychologically and intellectually nimble. They have to be able to pick up on the smallest tells, the microexpressions that give a suspect away: a slight smirk, shifting feet, a glance at a photo that goes on a beat longer than it should. They have to be so confident that they never even think about how they're coming across to a suspect. The best interrogators are outside of themselves, focused totally on the subject in front of them, improvising from a solid foundation, verbally cornering the worst humanity has to offer.

It is an art form.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" they asked Feldis. "No one will think less of you if you don't."

Feldis insisted. This was his case now.

Payne and Bell, still in disbelief, gave Feldis the only advice they could.

Keep your voice low and steady, they told him. Don't be afraid of silence. Let it hang. Don't rush in to talk. Silence makes people uncomfortable, and you want this subject talking as much as possible. Find out what he wants, and we find Samantha.

TEN

At 5:48 P.M. on Friday, March 30, the team sat down with Keyes at the US Attorney's Office. Of those physically present, only Bell had attempted a face-to-face interrogation with Keyes before, and the detective was not surprised to see his demeanor unchanged. Keyes sat expressionless and when he spoke his affect was flat, as if this was all a bother. Bell could sense the resentment and resignation Keyes felt at having been caught, especially when Keyes said that he was talking now only to make things easier on himself and his family. Down the line, Keyes said, he might have other requests, and he would expect those to be met as well.

Bell put his small tape recorder on the conference table and hit the red button, hoping for the best.

Finally, the story began.



Shortly after 7:00 P.M. on February 1, 2012, Israel Keyes pulled his white Chevrolet pickup out of his driveway and drove to the Home Depot on Tudor Road, fifteen minutes away. He had made the same drive, at the same time, several different days that week, curious about the comings and goings at the Common Grounds kiosk.

After several evenings of observation, Keyes decided to rob it. Even though the kiosk sat alongside a highly trafficked main road, there had been such heavy snowfall that the shack was obscured behind five-foot snowdrifts. The night was cold and extremely dark. He would wait until near closing time, when there would probably be no other customers.

Keyes first stopped at Carrs grocery store, where he'd picked up two favorites, Snickers bars and Wild 'n Mild cigars. Then he made his way over to the Home Depot and parked in the lot, closer to the IHOP. He

grabbed his coffee mug, a pair of plastic zip ties, his headlamp, and his .22 Taurus revolver. He wore a tiny police scanner in his ear.

Keyes got out of his truck, walked west, then crossed the street toward the kiosk.

He wandered around the parking lot for a few minutes. No one else was there.

The investigators stopped him. When did he first meet Samantha Koenig? What was their connection?

“Never met her,” Keyes said. “Never even seen her before.”

Payne and his team had not expected that. They didn’t believe it.

So why did Keyes go to the Common Grounds coffee stand on that night, at that time?

“‘Cause,” Keyes said. “They’re open late.”

The room felt taut. Before saying anything else, Keyes wanted to see what evidence they had.

This was what Payne was afraid of. He held his breath.

FELDIS: All right. Where do you want to start?

KEYES: Um, do you have pictures of the raid you did on my place?

FELDIS: I—I do have some, not a lot of ‘em.

KEYES: Like . . .

FELDIS: . . . Not a lot of ‘em are printed off.

Already, Payne was anxious. This was not how you leveraged a lack of evidence. Now was the moment where you say that you’ve got way too many photos to sort through, that FBI headquarters is enhancing all of them, and suspects don’t get to see everything law enforcement has anyway.

Less than one minute into this interrogation and Keyes was perilously close to realizing how little they knew. If Keyes had killed Samantha—and with the lack of urgency in Keyes’s voice, even Payne had come to accept this likelihood—they had no physical evidence.

They needed to know who else was involved. They needed a confession. Feldis asked Keyes if he’d prefer telling his story backward.

KEYES: Yeah, we can, um—yeah, we can start.

RUSSO: Yeah, I mean I don't know for—for some context, I mean, you wanna tell us, you know, what happened with her?

Keyes paused. He let out a deep exhale.

KEYES: Yeah, I don't know if I'm gonna go into the whole story, like, blow by blow.

FELDIS: Okay.

KEYES: Um, well just—let's—let's just—we'll just start with the end and then we'll work backward so, you, um, pull up a map there of the Palmer area.

A laptop sat on the conference table, and a Google Earth map of Anchorage popped up. Keyes told them to zoom in on Matanuska Lakes State Park, then the lake itself. He said he'd been ice fishing on that lake for about three days in late February, and they'd probably already found proof of that in his shed. That's where he'd built his shack.

Where was this going?

Feldis needed to nail it.

KEYES: Um . . . Pieces of my ice fishing shack, which I mean that's—I don't know if you guys probably have that stuff out of the shed.

FELDIS: Okay, that's the shack from your shed?

KEYES: Yeah . . . You probably don't have all the pieces to it but, um, there was some pieces that I had behind the shed too.

Here was Payne's Murphy. They didn't have any pieces of the shack because they hadn't found any in the shed they took. *Jesus*. Was there another shed? How would Feldis navigate this?

FELDIS: Okay. I'm—I'm gonna—I don't know what—what they took out of your shed, Israel, so, that's why I'm gonna ask about it because I haven't seen everything they took out of your shed just yet so, um . . .

There was only one right response here, as Payne and Bell well knew: Tell him he doesn't get to know that. Tell him the FBI has specialists taking that thing apart piece by piece, and when they're done no jury in Alaska will care about anything else Israel Keyes has to say.

KEYES: Did they take everything out of it?

FELDIS: I don't know that they took everything out of it, but why don't you tell me what—what they should be looking for in the shed.

KEYES: Uh, there is a sled.

FELDIS: 'Kay.

KEYES: And a big tote. I think it's a—I don't know, it's like a thirty- or forty-gallon tote in the sled. . . . That's why I figured once you got a search warrant on my house that's probably—you're probably gonna find something on it.

On that first day ice fishing, Keyes said, he drove out to Matanuska Lake, parked right off the highway, and dragged his sled far along the surface of the ice. He set up his shack out in the middle. Once inside, he cut an 8 x 8-foot hole in the ice, covered it with plywood, and left.

KEYES: I had my truck. You can't—you can't park down by the lake. . . . [I] couldn't pull down more than about, I don't know, maybe one hundred fifty pounds at a time in the sled so that's why I had to make three trips and you're gonna need five different bags.

FELDIS: Okay. Can you tell us what you pulled out in each one of those trips?

KEYES: Uh, the first day was the head, legs, and the arms.

FELDIS: Of Samantha Koenig?

KEYES: Yep.

There it was. Payne was stricken. James Koenig didn't know yet, and these passing hours were the last James would have hope. Spring was coming, the most beautiful time in Alaska, snow and white light, and James would never be able to think of it the same way again.

Feldis pulled up a Google Earth Street View of the home Keyes shared with Kimberly and his young daughter. Keyes was impressed. "Wow, that's really—that's a recent picture, huh?" He chuckled.

Keyes directed Feldis to the back of the house and told him where to find the gray conduit he used to pull the sled, the wood for building the ice shack, the steel bar he used to cut the hole in the iced-over lake, a serrated utility knife with a yellow handle, and the blood on the floor and one wall of the shed now sitting in his driveway.

There *was* another shed. How did not one specialist from evidence recovery find it in such a small yard?

Feldis didn't know anything about this, so he plowed on, pulling out photos of stuff the FBI had taken from the seized shed. The wrong one.

FELDIS: We're showing you some pictures that . . .

KEYES: No.

FELDIS: I think they must've printed out.

KEYES: No, none of that stuff.

FELDIS: Okay, but these—these are taken in the same shed, correct?

KEYES: No.

FELDIS: No, this is not the same location?

KEYES: No, that's the one in the backyard.

FELDIS: Okay, sounds like they got the wrong shed. Okay.

KEYES: Did I just tell you guys all this for nothing?

Yes. Yes, Keyes had. If Payne was honest, that mistake was on the FBI, and the only thing saving this interrogation right now was luck. If this conversation had played out in any other order—if they had first started talking about the wrong shed—Keyes would have had no reason to keep talking. He would have known right then: The FBI had nothing tying him to Samantha's body.

In that moment, Keyes didn't quite realize the magnitude of this error.

"I'm just kidding," Keyes said. "I know you guys already have this stuff, or would have. The bottom line is the computer—that was the only lake I printed out. . . . I'm sure if enough time went by you guys probably would have found her."

Not a chance. Payne knew it.

Phones on the table began buzzing on the conference table like downed bees. Quantico was calling.

ELEVEN

Payne and Bell were the only ones who could regain control of this interrogation. It was clear their biggest challenge wasn't Israel Keyes but Feldis, who picked up on Keyes's last statement about the FBI having access to everything on his computer with this:

"They are—they are gonna need to collect everything, um, so we need to—we need to hear about everything uh, 'cause they're gonna—like you said they're gonna . . ."

"No," Keyes said. "Everything is in that, the white shed. You don't need anything out of that back shed."

Keyes had a burgeoning sense of defiance now, and the more power he took, the weaker every other investigator in the room became. For Payne, the tension was agonizing. Feldis didn't even seem to be aware of this shift. Payne and Bell would just have to interrupt Feldis in a way that Keyes, hopefully, wouldn't notice.

Payne and Bell tried to get Keyes back to establishing a timeline. They needed to focus on facts—dates, times, locations—so they could walk Keyes up to the stuff he was reluctant to talk about. They needed to hear how Samantha traveled forty miles from her kiosk to the bottom of a lake with nobody seeing a thing. They needed details they could corroborate, to make sure they had the person responsible. And since they verified that Keyes and his ten-year-old daughter had left for the airport at five o'clock the next morning, they needed to know who else was involved.

Keyes kept talking, going into something like a trance.

He walked around the Common Grounds kiosk. He couldn't see who was working inside, but he figured it was a young woman. Whoever was

working didn't seem to have a car; there wasn't one parked nearby.

Young girls almost exclusively worked these kiosks. So probably a boyfriend was on the way any minute.

Keyes walked up to the kiosk at five minutes to eight, just before closing, and stood at the large, open window, which he knew would have no Plexiglas, not even a screen. He put down his empty thermos and asked the barista for an Americano. Now he had a good look: She was young, small, pretty, alone.

Samantha Koenig.

As she moved back and forth from the window to the espresso machine in this tiny space, about three feet wide, Keyes began silently running through his plan. Now there was a hitch: Someone was suddenly sitting in a nearby car, engine idling, watching him. It made what he wanted to do all the more challenging.

Samantha handed him the Americano and Keyes pulled out his gun. "This is a robbery," he said.

Samantha put her hands in the air. He could tell she was terrified.

"Turn off the lights," Keyes said.

Samantha moved to the back of the kiosk and switched off the lights, then returned to the window. She didn't scream. If there was a panic button and she'd somehow hit it, Keyes would hear about it on his police scanner. He'd have to wait and see.

"Give me all the cash in the register," Keyes said.

Samantha stiffly moved toward the right of the window, where the register sat hidden from customers. She emptied the drawer and handed the money over.

"Get down on the floor," he said. She did.

Keyes was still outside the kiosk.

Now he broke from his reverie and addressed Feldis.

"I was feeling a little invincible," he said.

"Why?" Feldis asked.

"'Cause she was scared," Keyes said. "And she did everything I said, and I had an adrenaline rush, I guess. Just decided to do it, see what

happened. And, well, you guys have the video so you know what happened.”

Feldis played this part right. “Yeah,” he said, “but I kind of want to get [it] from your perspective.”

It took a moment as Keyes shifted back into his altered state.

He told Samantha to turn off the lights and the OPEN sign. She did.

He watched Samantha while scanning the parking lot. Off in the distance he saw people coming and going from the Alaska Club, the nearby gym.

Whoever was in that idling car finally pulled away and drove off. It was quiet now, just the soft whoosh of cars going back and forth on Tudor Road.

Keyes told Samantha to get down on her knees and turn around at the window. She did. He leaned over, binding her wrists behind her back with the zip ties.

He told Samantha to move out of the way, then jumped inside. He moved his headlamp over the countertop and spotted a set of keys.

“Where’s your car?” Keyes asked.

“I don’t have one,” Samantha said. “But my dad’s coming to get me in half an hour. I mean—he’s going to be here any minute.”

Keyes had second thoughts. He couldn’t tell which was the truth. “Did you hit an alarm?” Keyes asked. “Don’t lie to me. I have a police scanner in my ear. I’ll know.”

“No,” she said.

“If I hear the police being dispatched here,” he said, “I’ll kill you.”

“I didn’t,” Samantha said. “I swear.”

The investigators nodded, silently encouraging Keyes to continue. He did, his tone getting deeper, quieter. His speech slowed down and his voice began to quake. It was the eeriest thing: Keyes sounded both ashamed and enraptured.

He said he asked her what her name was, then shut the windows, barred them, took some napkins and stuffed them in her mouth.

Then he told her they were going for a walk.

This story, so far, was lining up with the surveillance video. Except for the napkin detail. No one had seen that. Now Payne knew why Samantha

hadn't screamed that night: She couldn't.

FELDIS: What were you thinking at that time?

KEYES: What, about taking her with me?

FELDIS: Yeah.

KEYES: I liked her.

RUSSO: You're scheduled to go on a cruise the next day.

KEYES: In a few hours, yeah. That was kind of part of the idea.

As Keyes led Samantha through the parking lot, he found a new Canon camera on the ground. It had to be worth about three hundred dollars. This was new information.

• • •

"I took that as a good omen, I guess," Keyes said.

He bent over to pick it up. Samantha, feeling his distraction, broke away and ran.

"What did you do?" Feldis asked.

"Tackled her," Keyes said. He stopped here to pour himself some water. "There were people everywhere."

Could this be true? Were there, in fact, witnesses to the most high-profile crime in Anchorage in years? Or was Keyes bragging? If there had been witnesses, wouldn't someone have come forward by now?

Keyes regained control of Samantha quickly, he said, by pressing his .22 against her ribs. That gun was small, light, easy to conceal, but most of all, it was quiet. You could shoot someone on a busy street and no one would hear a thing. Keyes knew what he was doing.

He threatened to kill her if she tried to escape again.

Samantha nodded. Keyes told her to stumble around a little, lean against him like she was drunk. He took her across Tudor Road and walked her through the Home Depot lot, then to his truck at the IHOP.

A few people, he said, were lingering around a Chevy Suburban right in front of Keyes's truck. Now he had to rely on Samantha's fear to paralyze her.

In a way, that first escape attempt worked to his advantage.

He moved Samantha to the passenger door as though he were chivalrously opening it. He leaned down and whispered in her ear.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he said. “But this .22 is loaded with very quiet ammo. It will kill you, so don’t make me do it.”

As Keyes opened the door and began clearing out his cluttered passenger seat—he hadn’t planned on using his own truck—Samantha silently watched these strangers, just feet in front of her, clamber into the Chevy and drive away.

FELDIS: So, we saw in the video you’re getting her into the car, into your truck, and then you walked around and you got into your truck and you paused for a few seconds before you drove off.

If Feldis, limited by his position as prosecutor, actually did see this video, it was yet another strike if this case went to trial. That video was evidence.

Compounding this mess, it was clear that neither the Bureau nor APD had thought to pull all the surveillance footage from every business near the kiosk. They’d had no idea about the witnesses at IHOP.

Back in the truck, Keyes was talking to Samantha.

KEYES: I was just telling her how it was going to work.

FELDIS: Wh—which was—what did you tell her?

KEYES: I asked her a lot of questions. . . . She still had her hands behind her when I put her in the truck. I helped her into the truck and I put the seat belt around her and I told her we were going to drive somewhere.

Payne and Bell knew where this was going. Keyes was already using language that minimized what he had done: Samantha “having” her hands behind her rather than forcibly restrained, Keyes “helping” her into his truck rather than pushing, “putting” the seat belt around her rather than strapping her down, “going for a drive” rather than kidnapping her. These were subtleties that Feldis wasn’t picking up on, linguistic cues that told Payne and Bell they were dealing with a very cunning suspect.

Keyes continued. He explained what he told Samantha after pulling the napkins out of her mouth. He was going to hold her for ransom and she would be fine.

KEYES: She kept saying, “Well, my family doesn’t have any money.” I said, “Oh, though the way this works [is] they’ll get the money, so you don’t need to worry about that. I’m going to take care of all that, but you need to do what I say.” After that it seemed like the more I talked to her the more she—I mean, I wasn’t being mean or anything. I wasn’t scaring her at that point. I was trying, you know, to seem like a normal person.

“A normal person.” Keyes had just given them another clue: There was something wrong with him.

He had probably done this before.

There was no way Feldis picked up on this. Jeff Bell would no longer cede the floor.



Keyes drove out of the parking lot.

He noticed that Samantha’s belt buckle wasn’t secure. His truck was old and didn’t have electronic locks on the doors, so if she twisted free and jumped out the passenger door, there wouldn’t be much he could do. He’d have to abandon the plan altogether.

And then, as he stopped at a red light just minutes in, a police car pulled up next to Samantha, two officers inside.

What were the chances of this? Keyes picked this part of Anchorage, on this night, because there was a huge festival across town. He knew from his scanner that almost all the police were over there.

Keyes watched Samantha silently work out her options.

What should she do? If she started screaming or banging her head against the window or even tried to wrest herself free and the cops pulled away before seeing her, this man would kill her. She believed him. He just wanted ransom money and then he’d release her. The cops next to her had their windows all the way up, dispatches constantly coming over their radio—dispatches her abductor was hearing in real time, in his ear! Maybe she should go along with what he wanted.

Keyes, too, was assessing his risks. That same scanner told him that these officers weren’t looking for a missing teenage girl. If Samantha tried something—and really, he thought, at this moment, she should—and the cops pulled him over, well . . . he had his gun. But if he stayed calm and just sat at the light, if he was able to control Samantha here without saying a word, this night would surely go as planned.

The light turned green.

The patrol car drove away, Samantha watching its red taillights dwindle in the darkness.

KEYES: She didn't do anything and then I turned left and drove. . . . I had my cell phone off [and] had the battery out of it the whole time and drove to—I don't know the name of the park. It's the park actually not far from my house.

BELL: Lynn Ary?

KEYES: Yeah, Lynn Ary. Did somebody tell you that?

Bell needed a moment to weigh his answer. Would it matter to Keyes either way? Repeat the question and buy some time.

BELL: Did somebody tell me that?

KEYES: Yeah.

What would matter, Bell realized, would be Keyes catching him in a lie. He'd lose all leverage.

BELL: No, I . . .

KEYES: I was just wondering if anybody saw us down there 'cause I was down there for a while, the lower park in Lynn Ary.

BELL: Down by the baseball fields?

KEYES: Yep.

At the park, Keyes noticed several people in silhouette shouldering ski equipment. They were heading toward his truck. This was yet another opportunity for Samantha to escape, but Keyes felt more confident after that moment with the police.

Samantha sat quietly.

The cross-country skiers loaded up their car and drove away. After waiting a few minutes to be sure they wouldn't double back, Keyes got out of the pickup. He opened the back door, cleared out all his tools on the backseat, and put them in the truck's bed. He covered the seat with drop cloths, tucking them securely.

As he worked, he kept his eyes on Samantha. He noticed her trembling. "Are you cold?" Keyes asked.

She said she was.

Keyes walked over to her. He quickly looped a bunch of zip ties around each other, the way kids make chains out of construction paper, and made a longer restraint to secure Samantha's wrists to her seat belt. He told her to lay down in the backseat and covered her in drop cloths.

Keyes got back in the driver's seat and thought about what to do next. His daughter was probably asleep, but Kimberly was a night owl. It was closing in on 11:00 P.M.

"That's when I kind of realized I had a lot to do and not very much time to do it," Keyes said.

He needed a phone to make his ransom demand. Keyes decided to drive to Walmart and buy a burner, which he figured would be untraceable.

But once he pulled into the parking lot he had second thoughts. There were a surprising number of cars parked outside for this time of night. Surveillance cameras were everywhere. Keyes remembered that Walmart had some of the best in the country.

Another clue for Bell: Keyes not only knew what he was doing, he was probably an expert.

Oddly, Keyes realized, the better option might be returning to the kiosk and grabbing Samantha's phone. As it was, he'd forgotten to lock the kiosk's door, and if he went back to do that, it might give him a greater head start. It would look like Samantha had locked up and left on her own.

Keyes made the ten-minute drive back to Tudor Road, parking behind the Alaska Club. He saw no cars, no people.

"I was sure she was gonna get away at that point, even though I had her tied up pretty good," Keyes said. "I was like, 'I'm only gonna be gone a couple of minutes. . . . If I come back and it looks like you've been trying anything, you know, it's not—not gonna be—not gonna be happy.'"

Payne and Bell recognized Keyes's threat as the mind control of an experienced criminal. Payne had learned it at Quantico and heard variations in countless confessions.

"You'll regret it." "I'll hurt you."

Neither is: "I'll kill you," and that gives a victim hope. The best criminals always leave that window open, because it makes manipulating and controlling someone so much easier. And victims often believe, fatally, that they'll be let go.

Keyes got out of the pickup. The kiosk was as dark as he'd left it when he first took Samantha. He opened the door and found her cell phone, then noticed stray zip ties on the kiosk's floor. He picked them up, his gloves still on, rearranged a few things so it looked like she had cleaned up, then left.

After walking a few feet, he remembered: Samantha's car keys were still in the kiosk. He might need those for later. These were small mistakes, but they were piling up, and he needed to get it together or risk getting caught.

He got the keys and left the kiosk for the third and final time.

This was yet another crushing blow. If someone at APD or the FBI had watched the surveillance video all the way through, they would have known, without a doubt, that Samantha Koenig had been kidnapped that night. Keyes returning not once but twice, without Samantha, would have weakened the theory that Samantha had staged her own kidnapping. In fact, if you watch the surveillance video APD eventually made public frame by frame, you can see, in the final moments as Keyes and Samantha leave, that Samantha's face is fully visible, eyes glistening with tears, her hand over her mouth in terror.

Keyes looked back at Samantha, immobile under the tarp. He checked her cell, a flip phone. She was telling the truth about not having any money.

He drove. After a few moments of silence, Samantha spoke. She had to go to the bathroom.

Keyes thought it could be a ploy, but he couldn't risk an accident in his truck. Her DNA would be everywhere.

He pulled into Earthquake Park's vast, empty lot. They were on the edge of town, near the water, just fifteen minutes from the kiosk. Keyes grabbed some rope from the truck's bed and tied it around Samantha's neck, then cut the binds to her seat belt. He walked her out on the grass, no trees or any sort of brush around, nothing she could hide behind. There was just enough slack in the rope for her to bend down and relieve herself.

KEYES: [I] let her out and by that time you know, we were smoking cigars and stuff I mean.

FELDIS: Who was smoking cigars?

KEYES: Both of us. I mean, we were sharing.

Sharing. Again, Payne and Bell went into overdrive. The only way a bound Samantha could have been smoking was if Keyes held the cigar for her. And how terrifying, to be bound up at night, no one giving you a second look, a large stranger wielding a lit cigar in your face? If this man would kidnap you and hold you for ransom and tie you up and make you pee outside like an animal, what was to stop him from burning you?

Brave girl, Bell thought. She was trying to connect.

FELDIS: When was that?

KEYES: Well, it was about from the time of Lynn Ary on. I mean, I—I—she kept trying to talk to me, you know, so I had to tell her to shut up a few times, but for the—I was still being nice about it . . . So, after Earthquake Park—we were out there a few minutes. There were other people out there.

Other people? This was the sixth time Keyes mentioned potential witnesses. There was the suspicious driver parked near the coffee kiosk, the passersby as Keyes walked Samantha across Tudor Road to the parking lot, the people at the Chevy Suburban in front of his pickup truck near IHOP, the cops at the red traffic light, the skiers at Lynn Ary Park, and now this.

Brazen doesn't begin to describe this guy, Payne thought.

Keyes had another surprise. Out at Earthquake Park, he realized he hadn't planned for such a long night. He was literally running out of gas.

KEYES: [I] realized my truck—the empty light had been on, for, I don't know . . . I was like, “Boy, that would be great. Run out of gas in the middle of nowhere with all this going on.” So—so yeah, just pulled right into the Tesoro, had already changed—I kept changing jackets. I had the dark jacket and I had my other jacket. . . . Just in case it ever came up.

Next, Keyes sent text messages to people who'd been calling Samantha: one to her boyfriend, one to her boss. He wrote as though Samantha was extremely pissed off.

KEYES: And after that I pulled the battery out of the phone.

BELL: What's that do? Why did you do that?

KEYES: You can't track it as far as I know.

BELL: Why not just shut it off?

KEYES: I'm paranoid.

And smarter than most, Bell thought. Keyes was wrong to think a burner phone can't be tracked but right about that.

Finally, Keyes drove home and pulled into his driveway. It was around midnight now, freezing cold, yet there were people out, neighbors walking their dogs. Keyes would have to wait some more.

“I think I told her, ‘Don't try and sit up, don't say anything, just chill out back here and be quiet and I'll talk to you in a minute, there's some stuff I gotta do.’”

He got out of the truck and closed the door. The cab went pitch black.

Samantha probably had no idea where she was. Even if she heard dogs barking, she'd have no way of knowing there were people with them just feet away. She remained quiet as the truck lurched up and down and side to side, Keyes replacing a large rack and toolbox he'd removed earlier.

Not one neighbor said anything to Keyes. They had before, a couple of times, when he had worked with power tools late into the night, but otherwise they left him alone. This was Alaska. If Keyes wanted to do some hard manual labor in the middle of the night—labor, by the way, that had no urgency to it whatsoever—well, God bless you, have at it. No one's business but your own.

KEYES: That rack is heavy. I think it weighs about a hundred twenty to a hundred fifty pounds. [I] screwed in some two-by-fours on it so I could lift it from the middle and put it on there. Bolted that down—I don't know what time it was. It was getting late. Kimberly was still up.

BELL: She really didn't—didn't hear you out there making all that racket putting the toolbox back on?

KEYES: No, she's pretty—she's pretty oblivious when it comes to what I do, so.

FELDIS: So what do you do after you get the rack back on? It's pretty late.

KEYES: Well, I . . .

He took a pause. These were things, Keyes told them, that he had never spoken of before.

TWELVE

There was still only so much detail Keyes was willing to give, but what he would say was more than Payne and his team could've hoped for. In fact, it was everything. Until another mistake gave Keyes pause.

KEYES: What was I thinking? 'Cause the shed was already set up. I had two heaters going in there and I had a big tarp, like a nine-by-twelve tarp, laid out on the floor and there was a radio in there and stuff. And so yeah, I guess it was probably between one and two [A.M.] that I finally got the nerve to like, get her out of the truck and walk her over into the—I had her blindfolded then because you know, I was telling her like, “Don't try to see anything because we've got to get this thing worked out.”

Samantha was now inside the shed.

KEYES: I was telling her . . . “I'll make you comfortable. You just sit here . . . But I'm gonna have this police scanner on me so if I hear reports of screaming from this neighborhood or anything, any disturbance from over here, I'm gonna be back here before the cops get here.”

Samantha had every reason to believe him. He turned his radio way up, heavy metal drowning out any noise she could possibly make.

KEYES: You know, she was very cooperative. She didn't seem like she was going to try anything. . . . I gave her like a five-gallon bucket for her to pee in and then dumped that out onto the trailer and then stuck it back in the shed so she'd have something to sit on and then took a piece of rope and put it around her neck and screwed it to the wall on both sides and I think changed her.

It's unclear whether the court reporter mistakenly wrote “changed” instead of “chained,” or whether Keyes had changed something Samantha was wearing. Keyes, so meticulous thus far, probably figured snow would wash Samantha's DNA, now all over his trailer, away.

KEYES: I—I moved her hands so that they were in front of her so she could smoke and stuff. And yeah, just told her to chill out.

Next he told Samantha to give him her home address and the location and description of the truck she shared with Duane. The ATM card they shared, Samantha told Keyes, was in the truck, either in the glove box or tucked into a visor.

Keyes went back inside the house and pulled up Samantha's address on MapQuest. He checked on Kimberly, now finally asleep. It was about 2:30 A.M. In just two and a half hours, Keyes and his daughter needed to leave.

KEYES: Then I took Kimberly's car. . . . [I] parked three or four blocks away from where [Samantha's] truck was and walked over there and used the key to open the door and the car was right where she said it would be and I was just locking the truck up and some guy came out and obviously knew something was up right away.

Duane. This lined up perfectly with what he had told Detective Doll about the strange figure in Samantha's truck. According to Keyes, Samantha had spent three hours being dragged all over Anchorage, seen by at least twenty people, possibly including two officers. She'd had a real chance.

Now Keyes was facing off with her boyfriend.

They both stood there for a moment, Duane frozen, Keyes waiting to see what Duane might do. Keyes had a knife on him; he'd use it. Suddenly, Duane turned and ran back inside the house. Was it fear? Had Duane somehow felt threatened?

Keyes, ATM card in hand, tore down the street and hid behind a snowbank. No one came back outside the house. He jumped into Kimberly's car and took off.

And Kimberly, he still insisted, knew nothing. Nothing.

Keyes was on his way to an ATM to test the card when yet again he realized he'd made another mistake. He hadn't written down the PIN number Samantha had given him, so now he had to go back to the shed, get the PIN number, keep Samantha calm, and risk exposure for the thirteenth time that night.

The kiosk. The escape attempt on Tudor. The IHOP. The cops in the patrol car. Lynn Ary Park. The skiers. The gas station. The trip back inside

the kiosk, twice. Earthquake Park. Taking Samantha out of his truck, in his driveway, and into the shed. Duane. Now this.

It was, Keyes said, another risk on a rapidly ticking clock.

“I had to go back to my house and then talk to her. . . .” It was as if he had forgotten a bag of groceries at the store.

And after all that, there was ninety-four cents in the account.

KEYES: That wasn't really the issue. I wasn't—I wasn't after the card at that point.

FELDIS: What were you after?

KEYES: That was just a bonus.

FELDIS: Bonus to what?

KEYES: To the whole thing. If I could eventually get some money out of the card, then that was the plan.

FELDIS: It sounds like there is something more to the story.

KEYES: Oh, yeah. There is a lot more to the story.

FELDIS: Okay.

KEYES: I don't know if I'm gonna tell the whole story today, though.

FELDIS: Okay. Well, when you left for your cruise you got that cab—we know when you called that cab.

Keyes called for a ride at 5:00 A.M. sharp. By the time he had tested the ATM card and returned to the shed it was around 3:00 A.M.

What could he have possibly done to Samantha—leaving behind no evidence of any kind—in the hour he had left before showering, changing clothes, waking his daughter, feeding her breakfast, making sure she was packed for their two-week-long trip, and getting to the airport, with his girlfriend staying behind, ostensibly none the wiser?

KEYES: Yeah, I was running late [laugh].

FELDIS: Where was—where was Samantha when you left in the cab?

KEYES: She was in the shed.

FELDIS: Was she alive?

KEYES: Yeah, I might save that story for later.

Payne and Bell had strategized for a moment like this. Feldis got half of it right—the shift to the ransom note with the photo of Samantha and the proof-of-life copy of the *Anchorage Daily News* dated February 13, 2012.

FELDIS: She alive in this photo?

KEYES: Nope.

FELDIS: Was she alive when you got back from your trip on the morning of [February] eighteenth?

KEYES: Nope.

FELDIS: Was she alive when you left?

KEYES: That would seem like an obvious question.

FELDIS: So she—she was alive?

Oh, God. In this moment, Steve Payne knew for sure: Bell should have been running this interrogation. The minute that ransom note came in, Bell said it out loud: Samantha's dead. No one else on Payne's team wanted to believe it. Bell would've undercut Keyes with his unflappability and would never, ever have presumed the answer to something he didn't know for sure. But Feldis would not be stopped.

FELDIS: So she—she was alive?

KEYES: Huh?

FELDIS: She was alive?

KEYES: When I left? No.

FELDIS: 'Kay. But what did you do to her?

This exchange, small as it may seem, was devastating. Keyes was newly defiant. He could run this room, now and in the future. Payne and Bell knew it too. This confession, a victory on paper, could ultimately set them way back. Who knew what the consequences would be? Even Frank Russo felt it and tried to help.

KEYES: I'll tell that whole story but I might not tell it right now.

RUSSO: Is there a reason you don't want to tell it now?

KEYES: Yeah.

RUSSO: Can you tell us what that is?

KEYES: I already know who I want to tell that story to.

FELDIS: Who's that?

KEYES: What's her name—Miki? The lead detective.

BELL: Why do you wanna—why do you want to specifically tell her?

KEYES: Because that's the way I am.

Feldis still wouldn't acknowledge this upside-down power dynamic. He probably wasn't even aware of it. Payne and Bell cringed every time Feldis got folksy and used first person in his questioning: "Tell me this," "I need to know that." Such language implied that he, Feldis, was larger than the

investigation, that his needs and wants superseded those of Keyes, that he was the most important person in the room.

It was quite the opposite. Israel Keyes was the most important person in the room. And Feldis was giving away just how much it meant for him to be here.

FELDIS: That's fine. We understand you're not gonna tell us everything, but the one thing I do need to know before I leave here today is how you killed her.

KEYES: Why?

FELDIS: Well, that's what we—that's one of the things we agreed on . . . right?

That was not a good reason, as Payne well knew.

KEYES: No. I—I mean, it doesn't really matter how it happened. I'm saying that yes, I was responsible, and yes, I told you where she is.

FELDIS: 'Kay. So you are responsible for what? I need you to tell me.

KEYES: For her being deceased at this moment, yes.

FELDIS: So, you killed her?

KEYES: Yes.

BELL: So—so you wanna tell Miki, Detective Doll.

KEYES: I'll tell her the rest of the details if you wanna know—if you wanna know all of them.

BELL: In other words, what you did to her besides just killing her?

KEYES: I'll tell you everything you want to know. I'll give it blow-by-blow if you want.

FELDIS: Well, can you give us a little idea of what it is you wanna tell her about?

KEYES: Why? No.

RUSSO: You wanna just tell us the manner of death without giving us any details?

KEYES: No.

Keyes had other demands: He didn't want his girlfriend's house torn apart anymore. The investigators needed to come to him and ask permission to search it. Maybe he would let them.

And he didn't want them talking to Kimberly, ever. He didn't care if they believed him. She had nothing to do with this.

KEYES: I don't want to hear about you questioning her again. You know, like I say—obviously you have no reason to trust me, but I can tell you right now there is no one who knows me, or who has ever known me, who knows anything about me, really. . . . I'm two different people, basically. And the only person who knows about what I'm telling you, the kinds of things I'm telling you, is me.

RUSSO: How long have you been two different people?

KEYES: A long time. Fourteen years.

THIRTEEN

Miki Doll returned to Anchorage on Sunday, April 1. For the second time in three weeks, she found herself face-to-face with Israel Keyes.

For Steve Payne, this was an unexpected assist. As much as he and Doll clashed, her presence, something of a command performance, would make this interrogation a win for law enforcement. She might neutralize Feldis and maybe even humble him. More important, she would get those details. Miki Doll knew how to play.

Feldis opened by reading Keyes his rights, but instead of handing the lead off to Doll, he segued right into questioning.

FELDIS: Is there a place you'd like to begin or is there . . .

KEYES: Well, um, you're gonna get the abridged version.

FELDIS: Okay, what does that mean?

KEYES: I'm gonna leave out some stuff.

FELDIS: And why is that?

KEYES: There's too many—there's too many people in here, so.

FELDIS: Okay, so what is that about?

KEYES: There being too many people?

FELDIS: Uh-huh.

KEYES: Um, some of the stuff is very, uh, personal to me.

FELDIS: Sure, understand.

KEYES: And, um, yeah—hard to describe, but I don't feel comfortable telling it to a lot of people so it's up—it's up to you.

This was a no-brainer, Payne thought. Leave Keyes with Doll, Curtner, and maybe Bell, if that was okay. Whether this guy was getting off on telling his story to a stunning young detective or whether he really required some form of cosmetic privacy didn't matter to Payne. They needed those details.

FELDIS: Well, why don't we do this. Since we don't know where we're headed—I don't know where we're headed, Israel, only you know that, right? So let's start and see where we end up, okay?

Feldis was not leaving that room without a fight.

Doll took this moment to work her way in. This would not be the kind of hard-core, sanctimonious interrogation as seen on TV. She would, correctly, play humble. She would apologize for interrupting and show a detached respect. She might hear the worst atrocities one human being can visit upon another and respond only with "Gotcha." If her subject laughed, she would laugh along, no matter how repulsed she might be.

Doll began by telling Keyes that even though she'd listened to yesterday's interview over the phone, the connection was poor. Most of the voices sounded "like Charlie Brown's teacher." She wasn't up to speed and needed his help.

DOLL: I'm not really sure if you want me to ask you questions or if you . . .

KEYES: If you have questions, that's fine.

She had just laid the groundwork for a new dynamic, one that recalled the relationship between Clarice Starling and Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*. This was not by accident. The search of Kimberly and Keyes's house two weeks back had yielded scores of books, fiction and nonfiction, about serial killers. Those days Keyes went missing in Texas were now of even deeper concern, and given what they now knew about Samantha's abduction, it was clear Keyes had done this before. How many times? If Samantha wasn't his first victim, was she, in fact, his last? He said he'd been "two different people" for fourteen years and that there was a lot more he had to say. The team was absorbing the likelihood that Keyes could be a serial killer. If so, he would clearly see himself in the pantheon, worthy of an interrogator who had movie-star quality.

Doll certainly had that.

Her first question was pointedly not about Samantha but about Keyes's daughter, who had been in Texas with his mother. Payne and his team knew the child was Keyes's soft spot.

DOLL: When we spoke in Texas—and it might be completely wrong and if I’m completely off base, tell me—but I got the distinct impression that you didn’t want [her] to be raised by your mom.

KEYES: Very perceptive.

DOLL: Is that something you’re concerned about?

KEYES: Not anymore.

DOLL: Okay, sure. I won’t waste any more time about it. Like I said—

“Like I said.” Subtle. Perfect. Doll had clearly listened closely to the confession, because she’d picked up and mirrored one of Keyes’s verbal tics: “Like I say.” She was building rapport.

DOLL: —I don’t really know where you guys left off and why there were some things you only wanted to talk to me about. Um, so I don’t know what questions to ask.

KEYES: You don’t have to ask—um, like I say, I’ll give you a detailed account of everything that happened. If you want a blow-by-blow account, then I won’t do it—you know, like what I was thinking or what was said between her and I—that stuff stays with me unless there’s fewer people in this room.

RUSSO: How many people you—

DOLL: At least your attorney has to stay.

FELDIS: Well now, let’s—let’s—let’s just start with the abridged version and then we can go from there.

Feldis was gripping the conference table with white fingertips. It was now clear that case agents should have done whatever it took to keep him out of that room from the beginning.

The way Keyes talked to Feldis was markedly different than the way he talked to Doll. She, he wanted to help. He referenced their first meeting in Texas. “You’ve got your monster,” he said. It was almost like he was proud of her.

Feldis, he wanted to dominate. Humiliate.

KEYES: Well, before I go into anything . . . Some of the details, regardless of which version I tell you, are going to be very graphic. And I don’t want to hear about them being on the media . . . I don’t imagine that you are going to want them on the media either. At least I can’t imagine why. So, you know, I’m assuming that this video is just for your review or someone else’s review.

FELDIS: You gotta talk to me about that ’cause I’m the lawyer on the case. So go ahead.

This was exactly why Keyes shouldn’t be talking to Feldis, but Keyes didn’t know that.

The investigators assured Keyes that they would keep all details from the press, including the extent of Samantha's captivity and the location of her remains. Most important to Keyes, they would do everything they could to keep his daughter's name and location secret.

So far, reporters knew only that an Anchorage man named Israel Keyes had been arrested in connection with Samantha's disappearance. A critical irony was not lost on Payne, Bell, and Doll: They, too, didn't know much more. The analysts at BAU had stressed control, that everyone in the room should make Keyes feel like he had more than anyone. The truth was, they didn't have to do anything. Keyes really did have all of it.

He was back in the shed.

KEYES: On the floor there was a tarp and a foam mat and a sleeping—or not a sleeping bag really but like a fleece sleeping bag of sorts.

DOLL: Did you put the tarp down to catch any blood?

KEYES: No. Just to keep anything from her transferring to the shed.

DOLL: Gotcha.

Keyes said he prepped the shed a couple of days earlier. He had no specific plan or person in mind, he said, though he'd been "looking at the Huffman area" because it was also full of coffee stands that were open late, in isolated areas, staffed by teenage girls, almost all of whom were alone.

That night, he'd come upon Samantha. He liked the look of her and he went ahead. "Even, I guess you could say, against my judgment." He had thought about waiting for whoever was going to pick her up—a boyfriend, as he had correctly guessed—and taking both of them, but decided not to risk it.

After breaking into Samantha's truck, stealing her ATM card, and testing the PIN number at a local machine, he returned home. He went into the kitchen and poured a glass of wine for himself and water for Samantha.

Then he returned to the shed.

Samantha was remarkably composed. She asked if everything was working out.

Did you reach my dad? she asked.

Yeah, Keyes told her. It's fine.

He knelt down and unscrewed the rope from the wall. He cut her cable ties. He knew what he was doing: Igniting that last spark of hope, letting her think he'd be getting the ransom money while untying her, allowing her to think that surely, this was the end. That, as he had promised all night, he'd be letting her go.

He would not.

Keyes restrained Samantha again, this time in a more complicated way, using ropes rather than cable ties.

"She knew at that point," Keyes said.

He left the shed again and checked on Kimberly.

"She was awake," he said.

This was different from what Keyes had said yesterday. In that version, he waited until Kimberly had gone to sleep. What was going on here? Did Keyes really act alone? The timeline he was insisting on—Payne and his team still didn't buy it.

Again, Keyes returned to the shed. Space heaters had pushed the temperature inside to 90 degrees. Deafening heavy metal shook the walls. The acrid smell of smoke and urine and sweat permeated.

Keyes said he raped Samantha twice. It took, he said, "awhile . . . maybe two or three songs" on the radio. When he was done, he stood above her, naked. Samantha asked if he was going to kill her. She tried to talk him out of it. Her fortitude was remarkable, Keyes said. Admirable. But it left him unmoved.

KEYES: Then, uh, I put my leather gloves on.

DOLL: Why did you put leather gloves on and not rubber gloves?

KEYES: 'Cause it's hard work to strangle somebody. . . . I knew—I knew from the minute she walked out of that coffee stand she wasn't—she wasn't gonna live. . . . She never made a sound.

DOLL: How long did it take her to die?

KEYES: It was taking—I mean, it's always—it's hard to tell when, um . . . It was taking awhile. I remember thinking, "I still have to shower." . . . Anyway, I'm not gonna tell all that part but I, um . . .

DOLL: Why?

KEYES: I stabbed her once right below her right shoulder blade in her back . . . and it wasn't going very deep. I'm not gonna go into that, but anyway she—I didn't really stab her to make her die faster or anything. It was something else, but, um, I took . . .

DOLL: Did you stab her because you were still attracted to her?

KEYES: No, I'm not gonna go into that. . . . I finished my wine and put my pants on and went back into the house and took a shower.

Then he woke his daughter. While she got ready, Keyes returned to the shed yet again. The space heaters had been left on to slow rigor mortis. He rolled Samantha's body in a tarp, opened up his lower cabinets, hid her remains, turned off the heaters, double-locked the shed door, and called a cab.

FELDIS: What was your plan? You were getting on a plane and her body was in your shed. What were you thinking?

KEYES: I was thinking it was twenty degrees outside and I didn't have anything to worry about.

FELDIS: Were you worried about getting caught?

KEYES: No.

FELDIS: Why not?

KEYES: Partly because it's Anchorage. . . . I'd been listening to the police scanner a lot recently and just kind of felt like by the time anybody figured out what had actually happened, the trail would already be cold, and even if they had pictures of my truck, they wouldn't know whose truck it was. They wouldn't have tire tracks. They wouldn't have forensic evidence. They wouldn't have shoe prints. They certainly wouldn't have fingerprints or DNA or anything so I didn't worry about it.

This was sobering and, if the investigators were honest with themselves, more than a little embarrassing. Keyes was right. He had predicted their response, or, really, lack thereof. To commit a crime of this magnitude, to drive around with a missing teenage girl for three hours with plenty of witnesses, and not worry about getting caught “because it's Anchorage”—that was a damning indictment of the police department. It was true. James Koenig knew it. The hundreds of people who showed up for Samantha's candlelight vigil knew it. If the media ever heard this, all of Alaska would know it. This confession would never be logged with the court or documented anywhere. It would be kept hidden for years.

That morning, aware only that the FBI had a suspect in custody, James had posted another plea on Facebook.

NOW THAT IT'S GETTING WARMER AND THE SNOW'S MELTING PLEASE
KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN FOR ANYTHING THAT MIGHT BE OUT OF
PLACE, CHECK YOUR SURROUNDINGS YOU JUST NEVER KNOW
WHERE THAT ONE LEAD MIGHT COME FROM TO BRING OUR
SAMANTHA HOME!!

FOURTEEN

Steve Payne was most interested in the ransom note. Keyes had already told them that Samantha wasn't alive when he photographed her. Now they knew her body had been left in his shed for two weeks while he was traveling with his daughter.

How did he do it?

Keyes returned home to Anchorage in the early morning hours of February 18. He'd been checking the weather remotely and knew it was getting warmer in Anchorage.

He went to the shed to assess the body. Kimberly was still traveling in the Lower 48, until the twenty-second. He had a little time.

Keyes waited until Monday the twenty-first, after his daughter went to school, and began taking the shed apart from the inside. He dismantled cabinets, shelving, lights. He worked around Samantha's remains, still in the lower cabinet, and chopped everything he'd ripped out of the shed into firewood.

He rolled Samantha's body—triple cocooned in the foam mat, sleeping bag, and tarp—out of the cabinet and onto a piece of Visqueen. The sleeping bag she'd been on, he said, "was pretty much soaked with blood."

He contradicted himself here. Earlier, he'd characterized Samantha's stab wound as minimal. They'd have to be extra alert to every detail.

Keyes took everything Samantha had been wrapped in, cut it all up, and tossed each piece into a double-layer contractor bag. The clothes he wore that night, along with his shoes, would get burned or go in the landfill. He took out Samantha's purse and riffled through it, tossing aside almost everything except her cell phone and a small amount of change. He took the coins inside and mixed them with his own in a jar.

Why bother with that?

KEYES: I was probably really paranoid, but I was thinking like technically there could be some of her DNA on that, so.

DOLL: Did you braid her hair?

KEYES: Not right away.

After his daughter got back from school, did her homework, had dinner, and gone to bed, Keyes built a fire in the living-room fireplace. It was about 1:00 or 2:00 A.M., now February 22. He burned the tarp and everything Samantha had touched.

Back in the shed, Keyes took a large piece of plastic and tacked it all along the floor and walls, which he had scrubbed earlier with a bleach-filled grout sponge. To keep the surface area of the floor unobstructed, he'd hung Samantha's body up, lifting her arms above her head, tying rope around her wrists, and screwing the rope into the wall.

DOLL: What happened next?

KEYES: Well, this is where you get the abridged version. Let's just say I, um, thawed her out and, um, had a table made in the shed at that point.

DOLL: After you thawed her out, was she still—was she not rigid?

KEYES: No. No, she was very floppy.

FELDIS: What'd you do?

KEYES: [sighs] Well, I wouldn't tell you this part except you're gonna find out anyways, so.

FELDIS: Why wouldn't you tell us? If we're gonna—

KEYES: I told you the stuff is—

FELDIS: —find out.

KEYES: —private. There's too many people in here. But, um, I had sex with her. Her corpse. And, um, you know, she was warm and . . . I guess I lost track of time.

It was morning now. His daughter came looking for him, knocking on the shed's door.

KEYES: I said, you know, "I'll be out in a minute. Go back inside and eat your breakfast."

And, uh, 'cause she was—I mean at that point, anytime I opened the door, she was like right there.

He laughed softly in the retelling.

Keyes cleaned himself up and went inside to get his daughter ready for school, leaving Samantha's body out in the shed all day. Once his daughter was gone, he ran through his checklist. Kimberly was getting back the next day. He still had a lot to do.

The ransom note was next.

Keyes picked his daughter up from school that afternoon and took her to their local Target, where he bought a Polaroid camera. To his frustration, the store didn't stock matching film. He'd have to wait until after homework and dinner. Once his daughter was asleep, he left her alone in the house and made the hour-long drive to a Target in Wasilla.

At some point he also bought a big foam sled, tote bags at Home Depot, carbon ribbon and paper for a typewriter he'd found at Goodwill, a sewing kit, and ten-pound fishing line. He pulled a copy of the *Anchorage Daily News*, dated February 13, 2012, from a dumpster behind Carrs supermarket.

DOLL: Why did you pick the thirteenth?

KEYES: 'Cause I wasn't in Anchorage on the thirteenth [clearing throat]. And yeah, so once I had all that stuff—I really can't remember. But I know it took me all night to do it.

DOLL: To do what?

KEYES: All night. To get the makeup done.

Aside from the cell phone and ATM card, Keyes had saved the makeup Samantha kept in her handbag. He bought more at Walmart and also used makeup that Kimberly had left stashed in their garage. It seemed another day had gone by.

“Kimberly was home for sure at that point,” Keyes told them, “because I waited until it was really late one night.”

Keyes spent hours trying to position Samantha's body for the ransom photo, but the biggest challenge was her face. Samantha's muscles had gone slack, and no amount of makeup was going to give her an expression. She had been dead for approximately twenty-one days.

KEYES: That's when I kind of gave up on, on like the mouth and stuff. I just, uh, decided to tape it. I taped it so that, you know, it looked like her face had some texture to it, I guess. And then I was still having problems with her eyes—or her forehead, you know, 'cause there was no expression. And, um, I tried superglue; that didn't work. And so I took the needles I had—I had a big, curved needle. I forget what they call it. But I had that and then I had that ten-pound test fishing line and I, uh, sewed, uh, took the needle and went down through her brow, like right between her eyebrows and down—up, uh, along her nose cartilage, under the skin, and came out and then went back up along the same path and did it again and then pulled it tight to make it look like she was squeezing her eyes shut. And then I took a test picture, just to kinda see what it was gonna look like. And I think I put a little more makeup on her after that and I already had her hair braided at that point and, uh . . .

PAYNE: Where did you put the makeup on her?

KEYES: Everywhere. I had to put foundation—like every part you see in that picture has foundation on it, two or three different kinds.

PAYNE: Why did you do that?

KEYES: Well, she didn't look good. I mean her skin—you could see it, start to see the blood under the skin and, um, I mean she was still in good shape but, you know, she definitely didn't look alive.

Keyes said it took between three and five hours to get the makeup done. Then he began taking test pictures, which was also more difficult than he'd anticipated. He'd need to hold Samantha's head up.

KEYES: I think it took about five or six pictures before I finally had one that showed what I wanted.

DOLL: Did you cut the corner off?

KEYES: Yeah. Well, I cut the edges off the whole photograph. At first I was thinking of giving the Polaroid [picture] and have the note separate. And then I decided it would be harder for you to figure out if I scanned the picture with a printer. Not through the computer, but just with the scanner onto the paper, and that way you probably wouldn't know for sure that it was a Polaroid. So, yeah. That's what I did.

DOLL: Did you cut the corner off because it showed the mark on your arm?

KEYES: Well, it wasn't so much the brand that was showing, but I have some moles on my arm and I was—I looked at it pretty carefully, and I—yeah, I guess I was just thinking that it might show something. I was thinking to keep a minimum amount of my arm in there and get the message across.

PAYNE: Why did you go to all the trouble to do this? You did a lot of work.

KEYES: Um, well, it—put it this way: I mean, it's obvious why I did it. I did it—the bottom line was to get money out of it. But at the same time, it's not like I didn't want to do it.

Earlier Keyes had told them the opposite: That he wasn't in it for the money—that was just a bonus. Yet Keyes was poor enough to warrant a public defender. One of his last trips, that flight and cruise with his daughter, had been expensive. It would take time to go through his finances, but obviously he was struggling. How could this elaborate scheme not, in part, be about money?

Doll asked him how he came upon thirty thousand dollars as the ransom amount. Keyes said he'd begun following media coverage of Samantha's disappearance and was astonished by how much money was raised so quickly.

That's why, Keyes said, he saved only Samantha's cell phone and ATM card, to demand money and retrieve it. He told them he had no idea his

movements could be tracked by using that card, which was hard to believe. He had been scrupulous. He really didn't know ATM cards could be tracked?

Keyes swore he didn't.

With Kimberly back from her travels, her friend Kevin now a houseguest, Keyes needed to remove Samantha's body. The weather was getting warmer. There was no way he could contain the burgeoning smell and he couldn't risk a wild animal demolishing the shed. He had to move fast.

KEYES: I remember that there was a lot going on, but there was one day that there was nobody around at the house and I brought the typewriter into the house and it didn't take me that long. I opened that pack of computer paper I got and put it in the typewriter and the thing worked fine and [I] typed up one draft of the ransom note, stuck it in the printer feed tray, hit copy with the picture in there . . . I had latex gloves on the whole time I was typing it and I never touched the paper or anything.

RUSSO: So you purposefully misspelled stuff in the ransom note?

KEYES: I didn't, no. I wasn't really that concerned about the wording of it. I had an idea with, like, the message I wanted to get across.

FELDIS: What was with the desert? You said she escaped on Tudor and that was true—almost escaped on Tudor. That was true, right? And then you said, "and once in the desert."

KEYES: That was a calculation that I had in my head. From the time the picture was taken to the time the ransom note was given was about ten days.

This too conflicted with what Keyes had just said—that he purchased the camera and film used for the ransom demand two days before posting the note. In the interest of momentum, investigators let him continue.

KEYES: I was thinking, Make it sound as if she had been sold as a sex slave somewhere in Mexico. That's about how long it would take to drive there from the thirteenth and get back to Anchorage.

Latex gloves still on, Keyes put the ransom note and the photo into one ziplock baggie, which he then put into another ziplock baggie. He tacked the package to the Connors Bog Park community board around 6:00 A.M. He knew someone would find it.

Keyes used Kimberly's car that morning, and the light snowfall meant fresh tire tracks. He wanted to see the response but knew he'd need to wait.

Later that day, after dropping Kimberly and Kevin at a friend's house, he found his opportunity. Most of Anchorage was down at the annual Fur Rondy winter festival. Keyes practically had run of the town.

He drove to the Carrs parking lot, went to a back corner, and turned on Samantha's phone. As soon as he sent the text to Duane, Keyes removed the phone's battery and headed home. It was 7:56 P.M.

Keyes wasn't sure how much time elapsed, but he got back in Kimberly's car and drove back to the park, where, to his satisfaction, he saw a couple of patrol cars and a crime scene van. The cops, he said, were extremely low key. This pleased him.

"I knew right away," Keyes said, "that the message had got through."



He drove home. Kevin was now inside for the night and Kimberly was out with friends. Keyes debated removing Samantha's body from the shed.

He had to calculate his risks. Was it safer to wait until Kevin went home? Kimberly wouldn't go near the shed; ever since she discovered he'd been growing weed in it, her anger and resentment was palpable. He couldn't blame her. For all her independence, Kimberly was now very lonely. Keyes was never home. He was drinking way more than usual. His credit cards were maxed out. Kimberly went to work and took care of their two dogs and kept the house in order and Keyes was increasingly distracted.

Keyes knew it was over. He had been depressed about it. But Kimberly had never wanted children and never really warmed to his daughter. It was time to go. He was going to take his kid and relocate somewhere in the Lower 48, where he would initiate the second part of his "grand plan."

But that was in the future. Right now he had to get Samantha out of the shed.

KEYES: You know, she was starting to smell a little bit so I, um—I wanted to keep her. I didn't want to do it right then. . . . I was thinking I could put her out in the backyard and bury her in the snowbank and, uh, finish it up later. But then I just decided it was better just to do it—get it done and figure out some excuse as to what I was doing for three days. So I rolled her off the table and took the table apart, cut up the plywood that it was made out of,

and burned that, and had a big, rolling tote—it wasn't very deep, about five or six inches deep. And that's what I cut her up in.

Keyes made three trips, over three separate days, out to Matanuska Lake, always removing the battery and SIM card from his own cell phone. He chose daytime because it was less suspicious, driving an hour each way.

On day one, Keyes walked out toward the center of the lake, about two hundred yards. He was dragging a chainsaw, lead weights, a snow shovel, a 16 x 30-inch piece of plywood, and some parts of the ice hut, which he'd pitch the next day, on a sled.

None of this would look unusual on a winter afternoon in Alaska. Still, Keyes wasn't taking chances.

"I think I had my fishing stuff with me that day too," Keyes said. "Just for appearances."

He thought cutting the hole would be easy. He was wrong.

"It took me forever," he said. "The chainsaw would not—it kept dying on me." The ice was 20 inches thick, and Keyes was trying to cut a 13 x 20-inch hole.

There was a witness this day, Keyes said, another man out on the lake ice fishing, looking at Keyes quizzically.

"Why do you think?" Doll asked.

"Well," Keyes said, "he had an ice drill right there." It was odd that Keyes didn't ask to use it.

After cutting the hole, Keyes tied twine through two of the lead weights and dropped them down to check the water's depth. He'd asked Kevin, who worked for Fish and Game, for the best lakes for ice fishing. Kevin said Matanuska, eighty feet at its deepest.

"I think it ended up being only about forty feet," Keyes said. "But I figured that was deep enough."

After that, he packed everything back up, covered the hole with plywood, covered the plywood with snow, and left.

On day two, Keyes said, he packed some of Samantha's remains into tote bags, triple-bagging them to contain any blood. He made the drive that morning during the work commute, not concerned at all that he could be pulled over or involved in an accident.

At the lake, under cover of his ice shack, Keyes removed Samantha's remains from his tote and weighted them. Then he dropped them down the hole.

"The first day, like I say—dumping the body took me about five or ten minutes once the ice shack was set up." Then he left to go to a parent-teacher conference for his daughter.

"How did you stay calm enough to do that?" Feldis asked.

"I didn't really think about it," Keyes said. It was a quick meeting, just him and the teacher, talking about the gifted and talented program his child was enrolling in.

It took two more days, Keyes said, purely due to logistics. He couldn't have moved Samantha's remains all at once, and he didn't want to create suspicion at the lake. He said he never saw anyone else out there again, just a car parked near his truck on day two or three. He couldn't be sure, only that it was a day he was submerging the remains, and it caused no alarm.

"I could tell by the tracks that they'd just gone, like, cross-country skiing," Keyes said. "Yeah, they never even came down by the lake. They probably didn't even see me on the lake."

Very disciplined, Payne thought. Very methodical.

After the last of Samantha's remains sank, Keyes sat at the edge of the hole and went fishing.

Finally, Payne and his team had their blow-by-blow account of what had happened to Samantha. They knew where she was. They could bring her home. This case was closed, but Payne knew there was more to come. For one thing, they would have to corroborate, as best they could, what Keyes had told them. A confession without a body—without any physical evidence at all—was hardly ideal. What if Keyes recanted? Said he'd lied about some of it? All of it? Claimed an unnamed accomplice?

Fourteen years.

The Bureau couldn't risk any more mistakes. They had to find out if Samantha was where Keyes said she was—immediately.

This, too, would be harder than it seemed.

FIFTEEN

After Keyes's initial confession on Friday, Steve Payne and Jeff Bell drove out to Matanuska Lake. The two men wanted to see for themselves if this wild story, Keyes spending three days disposing of Samantha's body at a popular ice fishing spot, could possibly be true.

Bell mapped the coordinates with his iPhone's compass, and the two walked out about fifty feet toward a fresh pack of snow. Bell kicked aside the pile and there it was: a cut in the ice, like a fresh scar from any other wound. They knew this was the place.

Back at the Anchorage field office, Special Agent Liz Oberlander was reaching out to the FBI Dive Team. Oberlander worked Evidence Response and had been on the periphery of the Koenig investigation until the confession. Now it was on her to call the Dive Team and ask to break protocol, which otherwise gave months of prep time for dangerous recoveries all over the world.

She knew what the response would be: Your victim is dead, it's cold, what's the rush?

Oberlander hoped the enormity of the case—Samantha's age, what was done to her, her father's anguish, the city's fear—would convince them otherwise.

Bobby Chacon got the call early that Friday evening while idling in traffic in LA. On the line was agent Charles Bartenfeld, who everyone called Bart. "There's a kid up in Anchorage who's been dismembered," Bart told Chacon. "They need you right away."

Chacon got off at the first exit and sped back toward the Dive Team's warehouse. He didn't need to hear anything else: Children were always a

special circumstance. Once on-site, he rolled up the gate, ducked inside, switched on his computer, and sent his team an email blast: Report immediately.

Chacon was scrambling. His team had six or seven divers, but for a job like this he would need two more: it takes ten people to put two in the water. He called Quantico for help, then the FBI in Anchorage to make sure this information was solid.

“We have a confession,” they told him. “She’s in the lake.”

Chacon had been with the FBI’s Dive Team for nearly twenty years. Almost nobody knows what they do or that they exist, even within the Bureau. Yet Dive Team members see more death and mutilation than the average FBI agent, who might deal with one homicide in an entire career.

At forty-eight years old, Chacon was the team’s elder statesman. There was no one better prepared or more experienced to lead a dive of this physical difficulty and sensitivity. Before his guys filed in, Chacon began doing prep work, relying, like his colleagues to the north, not on some super-secret database but Google. He plugged in the names Samantha Koenig and Israel Keyes, then called Oberlander in Anchorage.

She told Chacon they had a state trooper sitting on the location. She gave him the lake’s coordinates, its depth, and the average temperature this time of year.

“Do you have a forklift?” he asked.

Home Depot had loaned Oberlander one for the shed recovery; she told Chacon his team could use that. Most importantly, she needed him to know the conditions of Samantha’s remains. They were weighted down but not wrapped in anything. She was naked and dismembered. This would make her remains even harder to recover. There would not be much to grab on to.

Chacon needed to choose carefully. Who on his team could handle this job best, mentally and emotionally? He knew all too well: the youngest victims never leave you.

Once Chacon’s guys arrived they began loading up two U-Haul trucks with gear: an ice auger, anchors, remotely operated vehicles (ROVs), sonar, monitors, and chainsaws greased with vegetable oil to cut the ice cleanly.

Chacon also told Oberlander that he needed four or five pop-up shelters, two so his team could get dressed on the ice, two to cover his monitors from direct sunlight, and one to shield Samantha's remains from the press.

Chacon landed in Anchorage early Sunday afternoon. He was struck by how often he saw Samantha's face on signs posted in shop windows, on telephone poles, in restaurants and coffee shops, at his car rental place. He drove by her coffee kiosk and saw a sign that read

WE'RE PRAYING FOR YOU, SAMANTHA

Chacon hated arriving in cities and towns where such a high-profile case has gripped the community, because the minute he and his team pulled out their government IDs, word always spread quickly: Strange federal agents are here now. That can't be good.

April 2, 2012, was a perfect Alaska day: crisp and clean, no snow, no wind, no rain, fifteen hours of sunlight. Matanuska Lake was as white as the moon.

The day before, Sunday, Chacon went to the FBI's Anchorage field office to meet Oberlander. She took him to their vehicle processing unit, where they were storing Keyes's shed.

The shed was small yet large enough to inhabit. Tools, clothes, plastic bags, and spare parts were everywhere, stacked in multiple shelving units, slung on hooks, falling in piles on the floor. This was an organized chaos that evoked malevolence. It reminded Chacon of the Unabomber's cabin, where Ted Kaczynski had lived alone for decades, no heat or hot water, no plumbing or electricity, building and mailing bombs all over the United States from his Montana hovel until his arrest in 1996.

Kaczynski had been a domestic terrorist, but he was also a genius. If even half of Keyes's confession was true—and agents on the case believed most of it—that could make Keyes as organized and lethal as Kaczynski, himself a master at leaving false clues and no forensic evidence. Kaczynski

was an off-the-gridder, a loner, a paranoid man with a profound distrust of the US government. Would Keyes share some of these traits? It was a possibility.

As it was, Kat Nelson was having a hard time finding Israel Keyes in any public filings. No property records. No documentation of parents or siblings. No address history, no gun licenses, no academic transcripts. He wasn't on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. He had left nearly no digital footprint, no paper trail—and this was a guy with an unusual name.

If he hadn't been in custody, Nelson would have a hard time believing Israel Keyes actually existed.

By now, the FBI had brought in a specialist who worked with victims' families. They had to prepare James for this terrible likelihood: His daughter was gone. They wouldn't know for sure until the FBI searched the bottom of the lake. His thinnest thread of hope, translucent and breakable as spider's silk, was that this confession could possibly be a hoax.

It sounds real to us, they told him. We have reason to believe it. Brace yourself as best you can.

James went on Facebook.

PLEASE EVERYONE SAY A QUICK PRAYER. THANK YOU.

The Dive Team began setting up at noon. Payne, Bell, and Nelson were all on hand. Goeden was out sick and Doll was on assignment, but Payne wished both of them were here. It was important, he thought, to be part of the resolution, no matter how tragic. It was humbling. He felt awe at the sheer force and precision of the Dive Team, which he had never seen in action, and sadness over what was about to happen. Recovering Samantha's remains would make her death real.

Bart, Chacon's choice to lead the dive, was an eight-year army veteran. He now oversaw all four of the FBI's Dive Teams from Quantico; for this mission, he partnered with his friend and former Quantico roommate Joe

Allen. Both men were protective of their teammates, some of whom had only recovered weapons, never a dead body, let alone a dismembered young woman. Bart didn't want that to be a diver's first experience.

Allen had two unique qualifications. He was the only certified ice diver on the team who was also an advanced care paramedic. He was an obvious choice, because, as he often said, "I've seen the worst of everything."

Though Keyes had said the ice had been less than two feet thick, Chacon found it closer to three. He quickly handed off cracking it to Alaska's investigators, some of whom brought their own tools. White pop-up shelters went up; a sonar head went down, giving Chacon and his team an aural sense of the lake's bottom. It took nearly two hours to set up, but once on the lake's floor, sonar pinged five distinct targets, just as Keyes described.

"There she is," Chacon said. Someone over his shoulder kept asking Chacon if he could call it in, almost giddy with excitement.

"No," Chacon said. He wouldn't allow it until he saw the remains with his own eyes. Those targets could be anything. It was something he'd tried to convey to Liz Oberlander—dives are a process. Everyone needs to be patient.

Chacon turned his attention to the SWAT team.

"Go over and cut a hole," he said. Next to go down would be the four-propeller ROV, which would transmit visual images. Again, once on the lake's floor, the ROV almost immediately hit something.

It was a foot. A human foot. Even Chacon was taken aback. He'd been told the remains weren't wrapped, but somehow he hadn't visualized it. Yet there it was, in the bottom right-hand side of his monitor, naked and swollen, preserved in the cold freshwater.

It was 4:42 P.M., nearly five hours after the team began setting up. Chacon turned to Oberlander. He both loved and hated this part. His team's success was a family's tragedy.

"I can now confirm to you that I have human remains," Chacon said. He watched everyone get on their cell phones.

The energy on the lake was electric, and Chacon was worried. There was pressure now, an urgency to get Samantha up immediately so the police and

FBI could get their credit.

This was against everything Chacon's Dive Team stood for. His first recovery had been the search for 230 passengers and crew lost in the 1996 TWA crash off Long Island, and though it had taken four months, every day, the team found the DNA of each victim. The first Chacon recovered was a twelve-year-old girl. Baptism by fire, Chacon said. He regarded his work a calling.

Before beginning Samantha's recovery, Chacon had his team gather in one of the tents, where they were invisible to cameras and agents on the ice. They observed a moment of silence, and as they exited, they saw an enormous bald eagle circling overhead. Chacon took it as a sign that Samantha was watching over them. The divers looked at each other, nodded, and silently went to work.

Allen handed off the remote and went to suit up. SWAT was dispatched to cut yet another hole: this one a triangle, ten feet long on each side, for the divers to shimmy themselves down while hanging on a 45-degree angle, getting leverage going in and out.

Allen and Bart had a team of ten prepping them; divers work so hard underwater they do nothing for themselves on land. Suiting up in one hundred pounds of gear takes two hours, which gives divers plenty of time to think. Allen pushed away images of what he would find and focused on logistics: what they might need, how long they might be down there, the order of the recovery. Anything other than the girl below and what had been done to her.

Bart did the same. Look at these conditions, he thought. They're perfect. The ice was so thick you could drive a tank across it. The water below was clear as glass.

A small village of people were on the ice, and more had gathered in the distance. The press had arrived.

Bart went in first. It was now 7:00 P.M.

It took him fifteen minutes to make the descent, forty-one feet from the surface of the lake to the bottom. He had to wait another fifteen minutes for Allen to come down. As each man softly landed, silt rose up, blacking out

their entire field of vision. For minutes they stood perfectly still, the hiss of their oxygen tanks a familiar comfort, watching as these tiny dark particles lowered like a heavy curtain.

Bart landed where he'd hoped, right near the torso.

He knelt down and unhooked a body bag from his chest, then spread it over his legs. Allen made his way over, and the two men struggled to keep the bag still while securing the torso. It kept slipping out of their hands, so they decided to roll the torso into the body bag, which proved only slightly less arduous. Keyes had wired weights to Samantha's remains, evidence that couldn't be removed.

It was early in the recovery, but Bart and Allen were both surprised by how hard this was. Weightless in water—that's a myth. The torso alone, coupled with the anchors, made the body bag incredibly heavy.

Allen left Bart with the bag to retrieve Samantha's arms, which were wired together nearby. While walking them back to Bart, one of Allen's gloves snagged on the wire and exposed part of his hand to the freezing water. They still had to recover Samantha's legs and head.

Chacon talked to Allen from above.

"Can you gut it out?"

"Yes," Allen said.

A few minutes later, all of Samantha's remains, found in close proximity, were in their possession. Allen and Bart dragged the body bag directly under the hole they'd dived through, where it lay in a shaft of nighttime sunlight.

They waited while a white pop-up shelter was pitched above the hole, blocking the media's view.

Once they got the signal, Bart and Allen attached three small nylon lift bags to the body bag and watched it rise. At the surface, Chacon knelt down and looked inside. The first thing he saw was Samantha's face. Her eyes were wide open.

Bart and Allen spent another thirty minutes underwater, waiting for all the necessary procedures to be completed, for the waterproof chain of custody forms to be filled out for the FBI.

Steve Payne and Jeff Bell stayed at the site, helping to break down all the equipment until the last tent was folded. It was the only way they could help. Bell finally drove home around 9:00 P.M. Now, each time he drove by

Samantha's kiosk, there would be no more questions. He knew exactly what happened to her, in such minute detail that part of him wished he'd never heard it. He knew exactly the route Keyes took that night. He knew every opportunity Samantha had to escape. Bell was a father, too, and now he had more sorrowful sites in his personal constellation of landmarks: an arrest, a shooting, a body.

He called his wife and told her he'd be home soon, weeping on the way.

After wrapping up at the lake, Chacon and his team, exhausted and starving, went in search of dinner. It was a little after 10:00 P.M. Showered and shaved now, they all looked the same: buzz cuts, khaki pants, black jackets. Chacon joked that it was as close as they could get to wearing "FBI" across their chests.

They found a quiet, low-key spot, only about four people in the place. But the nightly news was on, the recovery of Samantha's remains the big story. Chacon and his guys quietly took two booths in the back.

The manager came over and bought them their first round of drinks. "We know you can't tell us who you are," he said, "but we know what you did. Thank you."

When the team flew out the next night, Anchorage felt different. Chacon always felt it, this palpable shift from communal hope to grief. Driving in, he'd seen that sign at the kiosk, the city praying for Samantha. Driving out less than thirty-six hours later, he saw the sign had changed.

OUR WARMEST CONDOLENCES TO THE KOENIG FAMILY

When Chacon returned to the team's LA warehouse, he put photos he'd taken of both signs on his wall, next to artwork other divers had drawn and painted over the years. These images are striking in their similarity: the divers, anonymous under their helmets, kneeling over small children or babies, their tiny arms outstretched for help. One member of Samantha's Dive Team drew Samantha as an angel cradling a dove while a diver lifted her out of the water.

Chacon retired in July 2014, and at his going-away party said the one thing he'd never miss was pulling another dead child out of the water. He meant it as a joke, but it left his colleagues stunned. To this day, he suffers from post-traumatic stress. He will probably have it the rest of his life. He sometimes thinks that the reason he and his wife were never able to have children despite years of trying, specialist after specialist offering no solution, was so he'd never have to know a parent's grief.



James Koenig had been calling Steve Payne all day, and Payne's thoughts were mostly with him now. James had wanted to know everything that happened to his daughter, and Payne really wanted him to think that through. Those pop-up tents on the ice were really so that James wouldn't have to see Samantha's recovery in the paper or on the evening news or forever on the internet.

But there was no dissuading him. Payne would remember this as the longest conversation of his life and one of the most crucial yet gentle arguments he'd ever lost. But to James, the least he could do for his daughter was bear witness to those last hours of her life. All Samantha's hard-won hope and promise, her essential sweetness, taken at random. His little girl had fought to the end. The world had been better with her in it. James so badly wanted to say good-bye to his daughter, to see her one last time. It had been left to Bell and Goeden to tell James that he really didn't want to see his daughter that way.

PART III



SIXTEEN

Now that Samantha's body had been recovered, her family and friends—and Anchorage, to a smaller but no less heartfelt degree—could begin to mourn. Now was the time to honor Sam, to focus the community's emotion and attention on comforting James and Duane and memorializing her all too short life. This story, for them, was coming to an end.

For investigators, it was just beginning. As Keyes himself had told them, "I've got lots more stories to tell."

That statement left Payne and his team with three big questions. What were those stories? How many were there?

And just who was Israel Keyes?

The FBI would now have full control of this case. Miki Doll was lobbying to stay on board, but that could go either way. Payne wanted her off the case for good, but Keyes liked talking to her.

The core four were still in place: Payne, Bell, Goeden, and Nelson. This was the team Payne thoughtfully built from the outset, and now he felt vindicated. He knew how rare it was to work with a group of investigators who got along and how valuable that was to solving a case.

Payne had a new directive. Run down everything you can on Israel Keyes as fast as possible.

There was no shortage of data. Payne had the hard drives from the two computers seized from Kimberly's house copied bit by bit. Nelson was

seeking financial and travel records for Keyes and Kimberly. They had to comb through cell phone records for both, and they needed to know if Keyes's own cell had been on the night he took Samantha. Meanwhile, Payne was calling car rental companies throughout the Southwest, looking for any evidence of Keyes in other states they didn't yet know about.

This, Payne thought, was the laborious stuff that *CSI* turns into a cybertrick: punch in a code and get your coordinates in seconds, cell phone records in a flash. If only. This stuff would take weeks to sift through and sort out.

Yet there was real movement. On March 15, two days after Keyes was arrested in Texas, the FBI had set up a tip line, producing several tangible leads.

Seventeen calls came in from locals who had hired Keyes to work on their homes, and these were overwhelmingly positive. Keyes did great work. He was reliable and friendly. One caller said Keyes had access to her money and her lockbox and nothing ever went missing. Another said Keyes had the run of his house while working and still had full access. One couple, both attorneys with multiple homes, hired Keyes often and let him work without supervision. They hoped his arrest was a misunderstanding, because they had never seen or heard Keyes do anything remotely inappropriate.

Heather Andrews, who had also hired Keyes repeatedly, said that she and her husband knew Keyes and Kimberly through mutual friends. When he worked in the summer, he'd bring his daughter along every day, and was "adorable" with her. She didn't know much about him, only that he had mentioned growing up in a kind of commune and saying something like, "Religion poisons people." He also said his daughter's mother had serious substance abuse issues and he had taken full custody. He worked alone and never seemed to need help.

"He was as strong as a bull," Andrews said. "He could carry a beam over his shoulder without apparent effort. He had strength that had elegance. It seemed superhuman."

But, Andrews said, two recent incidents disturbed her. There was one day—she couldn't quite recall when—that she caught Keyes giving her a look that leveled her. Andrews felt real fear, but when she put it in context with the Izzy she knew, she convinced herself it was nothing. Then, about a

week before Samantha went missing, Keyes didn't show up to work and wouldn't return her calls. Alarmed, she went over to his house and knocked on the door for minutes.

Keyes finally answered around 9:00 A.M. Andrews could smell the alcohol. He was disheveled and hollow-eyed. She had never seen him anything other than composed and asked if she could help.

No, I'm okay, Keyes replied. It's just the Alaska winters. They've got me down.

Andrews believed him.

Another caller had a similar experience. This one was a woman who had hired Keyes in February 2011. He had been very nice, she said, bringing his daughter along to do the estimate, so she hired him. Once the work was done, however, she felt relief. She never hired him again.

Several other tips were of value. One caller, an online sleuth, found Keyes had a Facebook page under an alias. Posted was a military photo of a man resembling Keyes. And someone named Israel had posted a five-page-long response on KTVA's CBS News website under a video report on Samantha's case. Another caller had come across someone identified only as Israel on a local news site in Utah, selling a Glock 27 for \$350, well under value. The ad was dated March 11, 2012, when Keyes would have been—or should have been—in Texas, just two days before his arrest.

Both tips would be worth checking out, the gun especially.

The next noteworthy tip came from an anonymous caller who said Keyes had a sister in Smyrna, Maine, who belonged to the Amish community. This caller also said that when Keyes was a young man, his sister and parents lived in Idaho with a Christian identity group that preached white supremacy.

Two other tips had to do with Heidi's church. The first caller was from Wells, Texas, who said the town had recently been taken over by a cult. Israel Keyes, the tipster said, was a member.

The next, another caller from Wells, provided far more detail.

“About three months ago, the pastor of this group drove into Wells, Texas, in a Winnebago and began buying up homes. The group now owns approximately fifteen homes in Wells, many of them located next to or near the elementary school. [REDACTED] believes the group are Koreshian, followers of David Koresh. They have interrupted other church services,

yelling, ‘You are all going to hell!’ They clean guns in their front yards and have talked about explosives. Men from the group have multiple wives who are young and often teenagers or preteens. Men from the group walk into people’s front yards. [REDACTED] witnessed one man about six feet tall force-march a woman and three young girls (ages five to eleven) up and down her street from 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. [REDACTED] and her neighbors are scared to death for their safety and their children’s safety, not letting them play in the front yard or walk to school alone.” The caller said the police were doing nothing at all, and at one point she asked an officer if she should buy a gun. The answer? It wouldn’t make a bit of difference.

“They won’t just kill you,” the officer said. “They will kill lots of people.”

Just what was the Church of Wells?

One of the last tipsters, an Anchorage local, reported seeing a white Ford pickup truck in Wasilla and Anchorage with KEYES CONSTRUCTION painted on the doors. Affixed to the truck were three signs, all the same, just like the ones James had posted around town.

KIDNAPPED, \$41,000 REWARD: SAMANTHA KOENIG.



APD found several metal filing cabinets in Kimberly’s basement, but these were a mess, stuffed with travel records and receipts and tax filings. Keyes told investigators he had used both computers; the laptop was his and the tower was Kimberly’s. There had been a third, another laptop, but he’d smashed that with a hammer and taken it to the landfill, right around the time he took Samantha.

That laptop, investigators thought, must have been the most valuable. They had low hopes for Kimberly’s computer. Keyes was too careful; chances were there was nothing on it.

But when Nelson started looking at what was hidden inside, she was stunned.

One by one they popped up. Faces. And there were hundreds of them. Children, women, men. Middle-aged and old. White, black, mixed race.

Slim and overweight. Some looked polished and well off. Others looked like drug addicts or sex workers.

These photos, in many cases, were attached to news articles reporting each disappearance. Some were attached to “Missing Person” flyers. Others were pulled off Facebook or other websites.

Among them were photos of Samantha Koenig. So many, Nelson thought, it looked as though Keyes had stalked her.

No way, she thought. No fucking way.

Payne got in touch with Armin Showalter, one of the Bureau’s top criminal profilers. Serial killers were Showalter’s area of expertise, and Payne needed his help. All these images on one computer. What did it mean? What could the FBI do here?

Showalter told Payne he didn’t know what to say. He’d never heard of a kidnapping and murder like this before. None of the BAU specialists on this case had.

He suggested that Payne send those images to FBI headquarters. Digital experts there would run each one through facial recognition.

Payne’s stomach dropped. That would be only so much help. There was no national database for missing persons. There was no law that required missing adults be reported to police. And there was no way to tell so far whether Keyes just liked reading about missing persons or was cataloging his victims.

Showalter would do his best to work up a profile. But right now, all he could advise was to keep Keyes talking.

At 11:00 A.M. on April 2, before the Dive Team’s recovery operation was fully under way, Payne and Doll had talked to Keyes at the Anchorage Correctional Complex. They reassured him that the media would have extremely limited information about what happened to Samantha.

“The intended press release upon finding the body,” Doll said, “is that: ‘We have found the remains of Samantha Koenig. We believe that the person who is responsible for it is in custody.’”

Keyes said nothing.

“That’s as much as we can control it,” Doll said. “I figure that, you know, it’s going to just take a matter of hours before the press puts two and two together and figures out there’s only one reason why dive teams are out on Matanuska Lake.”

Doll reiterated that law enforcement would not release any details.

Keyes understood. He was good with that. It seemed like a fair trade for what was to come.

“Like I said, there are going to be more conversations,” Keyes said. Right now, though, was not the time. He was already trying to fire Rich Curtner and represent himself. He didn’t say why but did say that anything else he had to tell them, stuff that had nothing to do with Samantha, would be on his terms.

“There are very specific things that I want,” Keyes said, “and I’m not going to talk about anything until I know whether or not those things are possible.”

Doll told him that was smart. “I don’t blame you,” she said. “I would do the same in your position.” She underscored how hard everyone, up the entire chain of command, was working to keep Keyes out of the news.

This resonated.

“Well, I will say, um . . . there are more things that I am going to talk to you, or someone, about,” Keyes said. But he wanted assurances that things would move quickly.

“This case is not the end,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” Doll said.

“It doesn’t matter, in my mind, whether I talk or not,” Keyes said. “I’m not just going to do it for the heck of it. There’s not anything they can threaten me with or say to me or take away from me or give to me except for what I want.”

He still wouldn’t say what that was. He knew how to deliver a cliffhanger.

“Like I say, I’m happy to help,” Keyes said. “But it’s on my terms.”

Payne thought Keyes was still most concerned about media coverage. Keyes swatted that away. “I know it’s inevitable,” he said. “I’m not in this for the glory. I’m not trying to be on TV.”

When Bell heard the tape of this interview, the word “glory” struck him. It was another tell. Who calls the rape and murder of an eighteen-year-old a thing to be glorified for?

Payne and his team had come to believe they were dealing with a serial killer. And Keyes had just told Doll and Payne: You’re right. And you’ll never find another body without me.

They needed a second confession.

On the morning of April 5, Payne and Doll paid Keyes a visit at the Anchorage Correctional Complex, hoping to shake something loose. To their surprise, Keyes gave them a bit of leverage. He needed their help. He still hadn’t been able to fire his attorney.

I have time-sensitive information to give you, Keyes said. What can you do for me?

The FBI had no say in attorney-client relations, but they could talk to Keyes about other possible crimes, because Curtner only represented him on charges related to Samantha Koenig. All Keyes had to do was forgo his lawyer and say he was representing himself in other cases.

Payne set the next interrogation for less than twenty-four hours later, Friday, April 6.

This boded well. Keyes would be limited to talking only about another victim. This was incredible movement, two confessions in less than one week.

The next morning Payne, Doll, Russo, and Feldis sat at a conference table at the US Attorney’s Office, Keyes at the head.

Feldis, like an unwieldy bull, led off. He rambled about Samantha and about everything the investigators had done so far. He tried to threaten Keyes. You only have leverage now, Feldis said, because you have information. But if we find another body, or investigators somewhere across the country find one—and we know how much you like to travel—we won’t be able to control it. We won’t be able to control local cops and we won’t be able to control the media. You’ll lose all your power here.

Keyes didn't buy it. "They won't find enough," he said.

"I don't know," Feldis said. "I don't know that. I'm not bluffing you."

Feldis told Keyes he had maps of his travels. This meant nothing to Keyes. Maps? So what? They'd never put together the way he traveled. He didn't travel like other people.

But Feldis would not be humbled. "I'm never going to bluff you, Israel, okay? I've got maps that I know come up with a bunch of other states. I've got Washington, Texas, Utah, Montana, I've got like—I can't list them out for you. I didn't bring them all here today."

"Here's. The deal." Keyes spoke now with contempt. "I know what you have, because I know you have the computer. I'm only going to give you the dots that I know you're going to eventually connect. And frankly, if I hadn't been picked up in Texas, that computer would be in the landfill right now. So I'm telling you—I'm not going to talk about those things unless I know that I'm going to get what I want."

"Tell me what you want," Feldis said. "I don't know what you want."

"I want an execution date."

The room went silent. **This was the exact opposite of Keyes's initial demand—no death penalty.** After a few beats, Feldis sought to clarify.

"For you?"

"Yes. I want this whole thing wrapped up and over with as soon as possible. I mean I could end up in federal Supermax prison somewhere for the rest of my life, which is what—if my attorney had his way, that's where he wants me to go, and that's not what I want."

It all made sense now. Curtner was among the staunchest anti-death-penalty defense lawyers in the state, if not the country. He would never be party to a client's wish to be put to death even if guilty, as Keyes was. And Keyes had given this a lot of thought. He wanted to make that clear, to the people in this room and to anyone else listening, that he was of sound mind.

"I want this whole thing done in a year," he said. "From today, start to finish, basically. I'll tell you about everything, I'll give you—plead guilty to whatever, I'll give you every single gory detail you want, but that's what I want."

He had a very simple reason. "I want my kid to have a chance to grow up," Keyes said. "She's in a safe place now. She's not going to see any of this. I want her to have a chance to grow up and not have all this hanging

over her head. If I end up in prison for who knows how many years—ten years, twenty years down the road—I know how this works. You’re going to keep looking, you’re going to keep going back, and I don’t want news about me. And frankly I already talked to my attorney about this, there’s no —”

“Don’t tell me,” Feldis said. It was against the law for the prosecutor on this case to have any information about constitutionally protected conversations between Keyes and his attorney; Feldis should have removed himself from the room right then. But he would not. He would never. Keyes kept going.

“There’s no jury in the world, or in America, that if I went to trial and got convicted, there’s no jury in the US that would not vote for the death penalty. I already know that.”

“I can help you with that,” Feldis said. “Give me something to start with.” He meant another body.

“You already have something to start with.”

Feldis said that Samantha wasn’t enough. “You give me a body, let’s move on that.”

“Like I say, there’s only so many cards I’m going to play.”

“Hold most of ’em back, Israel, hold most of ’em back. Give me something that I’m going to find anyway. Don’t let this take years and years.”

“It’s not *going* to,” Keyes said. He sounded like a petulant teenager.

Payne had enough. Feldis couldn’t see it, but Payne could: the opening. Keyes had something to give in exchange for something he wanted. Desperation was not the play here.

“There’s a firestorm coming, Israel,” Payne said. His voice was low and gravelly. “Bosses get nervous. They’ll get out their FBI playbook—and I can tell you that there is one—and that playbook says we send out leads to all the field offices and they go and interview people and they put pictures in the media and then it takes on a life of its own. That gives us less control. If we have a card to play with those people, those bosses, to say, ‘Hey, we want to control this and do it a little quieter, and he is going to cooperate on this’—maybe there is something we can do to put the brakes on that.”

Keyes looked at Payne, then sighed. He said nothing.

Please no one rush to fill in this silence, Payne thought. Please.

More than a minute went by.

“All right,” Keyes said. “I’ll give you . . . two bodies. Two bodies and a name.”

Seventeen

In that very conference room moments later another map was pulled up, this one a Google Earth view of Burlington, Vermont. As Keyes had with Samantha, he wanted to tell this story backward, starting with the end.

The Bureau's top criminal profilers were listening in at Quantico, always. Whenever Keyes said something of interest, or an interrogator was on the verge of making a mistake or said the wrong thing, a text would come in and the room would vibrate with a low-level telltale hum:

BZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ.

Watching and listening from another room, Goeden and Nelson Googled "Missing couple, Vermont" and found a picture of Bill and Lorraine Currier. The photo was taken outside, under a tree. It looked like a picnic or a family gathering. They were dressed casually except for Lorraine's corsage and Bill's boutonniere. They were smiling, Bill's arm around Lorraine.

They sent the picture to Feldis.

"Are those the two people you killed?" Feldis asked.

"Yup," Keyes said.

"Had you ever met them before?"

"Nope."

"Had you run into them before?"

"Nope."

The Curriers looked to be in their fifties, an average, middle-class couple easing into retirement. They were both overweight, but Bill especially was a big guy. It wouldn't be easy to take and control one of them, let alone two.

On June 2, 2011, Keyes flew from Anchorage to Seattle to Chicago, where he rented a car and began driving east. He was going to visit his brothers in

Maine, he said, but along the way he stopped in Indiana for a couple of days, then at an old farmhouse he owned in upstate New York, then on to Burlington before reaching his final destination.

Two days in another state? Jeff Bell made a note: Missing persons, Indiana, June 2011.

Nelson made her own: They needed the address of that farmhouse.

Five days later, on June 7, Keyes checked into the Handy Suites in Essex, Vermont. He said he had never been to Essex before.

That afternoon, he went shopping at Lowe's, then drove around a bit. He went fishing that day and the next in a national park, a three-day fishing license in his pocket. As the sun went down, he took a stroll around town. It was a beautiful spring night.

As Keyes approached this part of the story, he became physically excited, bobbing his knees, jangling his shackles, rubbing against his armchair so hard he scraped a layer of wood clean off. This would become another tell, his signature expression of sexual excitement. A substitute, essentially, for masturbation. It would be the way investigators knew there was much truth to his story. Stories.



On that night, his last in Essex, Keyes waited until the sun went down, then left his hotel on foot. He dreamed this scenario back in Anchorage, but like all his plans it also required improvisation. Challenging himself to greater degrees made each new experience that much more exciting.

Keyes carried a backpack of supplies, some brought from home, some, like the portable camping stove, newly purchased at Lowe's. He'd unearthed other supplies earlier that afternoon from a cache he'd buried in Vermont two years before.

A cache? Feldis wanted to know what that meant.

Several years back, Keyes said, he had taken a five-gallon Home Depot bucket and filled it with zip ties, ammunition, guns and silencers, duct tape, plus Drano to accelerate human decomposition—things like that—and buried it there. He had more buried all over the country. He'd get to that detail later. Maybe.

It was around eight or nine o'clock now in Essex, raining and dark. Most people would be home from work. He wandered around with his cell phone off, battery out.

As Keyes got deeper into his story, he went into another trance, his voice dropping two octaves and trembling.

KEYES: [I] went across the road from the hotel and had an apartment complex there staked out. And I was waiting for someone to come in. Alone. I was actually looking for a guy. And it was pouring rain, big lightning storm, and there was a guy who came in. He was in a yellow V-dub Bug, a newer one. So I walked out of this little wooded area, and I was walking up behind his car—[I'm] walking along the line of cars toward his car and he kind of jumped out and he had like a newspaper over his head and he ran into the apartment to keep from getting wet. And he almost—he almost got it that night. If he had been about five seconds slower getting out of his car and going into his apartment, he would have been The One that night.

Keyes was disappointed but not deterred.

KEYES: So when that didn't work out, I wasn't worried about it. I was just walking around, and I think I went back to the hotel for a little while, to wait till after midnight. And there was nobody out that night, 'cause it was still raining off and on. I decided I was going to look for a house. With a couple in it.

A little after midnight, about three hours after his aborted kidnapping, Keyes again left the Handy Suites. He was on foot. He found himself, five minutes later, looking at the house at 8 Colbert Street.

The home was a simple ranch with an attached garage. He peered in the windows, walked around the backyard. He got the sense an older couple lived here, which was good, because he had another idea, but this one required a woman. There was an aboveground pool and a barbecue in the backyard, no toys or floaties, no sign of children or pets.

Keyes interrupted his reverie. That was part of his code, he told them. No children. Or dogs. Dogs were just a hassle, but children were different.

“The one thing I won't do is mess with kids,” Keyes said.

Payne, Bell, Goeden, and Nelson were intrigued but unmoved.

Keyes crept around the house, found the phone line and cut it: no alarm system. His work in construction, he said, helped him predict floor plans pretty easily. He found only one window-installed air-conditioning unit and figured that was the master bedroom.

It faced the street.

Keyes waited in the backyard, in the trees and the dark, as a next-door neighbor and his dog came in and out, the man smoking each time. That house had sensor lights. He wouldn't go near it.

It felt like an eternity, Keyes said, waiting for this guy to go to bed. In actuality, Keyes waited out there an hour, smoking a cigar himself, risking detection each time he inhaled, each time the tip lit up red then went to black, blinking like a light on a Christmas tree.

Keyes was sure he hadn't been spotted. He was wearing leather batting gloves and a backpack, dressed head to toe in black. Strapped to his skull was an unlit headlamp.

Finally, at 2:00 A.M., the chain-smoking neighbor went in for the night.

Keyes waited a while more to be sure. He would have about three hours before sunrise.

He tied a cloth mask over the lower two thirds of his face, took a plastic patio chair from the back deck, and carried that to the side of the house. He climbed up, removed a ventilation fan lodged in the garage window, then hoisted himself through and set the fan down. A green Saturn sedan was parked inside. He unlocked the garage's main door, which lead to the backyard. From there, he could come and go without making a sound. He grabbed a crowbar from the wall. A man lived here.

What was Keyes doing? Was he planning to rob the house?

No, Keyes said. "The main reason I was there was for them."

He opened the Saturn's door and slid inside. He opened the glove box and found the car was registered to a Lorraine Currier. His hunches were proving right: a man and woman lived here.

He unlocked the screen door to the kitchen, prying it open with his knife. "It's a pretty low-quality lock on those storm doors," he said.

But Keyes was surprised to find the inner door locked too. When people have two doors, he said, they usually lock just one. This inner door had a dead bolt, which he could have broken with the crowbar, but that would

have created too much noise and taken too long. Faster to just break one of the door's windowpanes and open the lock from the inside.

So he did.

Keyes switched on his headlamp and found himself in the kitchen. It was a straight shot down the hallway and into the bedroom.

The headlamp's beam kept his field of vision narrow. He passed a birdcage with a blanket over it.

The whole thing took six seconds, he said, from breaking in to the bedroom to getting the Curriers awake and zip-tied. A blitz attack, he called it.

At first, Keyes said, Bill and Lorraine didn't understand what was happening. It took a few seconds for them to fully wake and realize: This wasn't a nightmare. A large masked man with a gun, a total stranger, was really in their bedroom.

Keyes knew how they would react. He knew the tactical advantage that would give him.

He turned his attention to Lorraine, demanding to know if there were any guns in the house. Yes, Lorraine said, a loaded .38 Smith & Wesson in her nightstand.

Keyes was pointing his own gun at her, steady and assured. He opened her nightstand drawer and grabbed her .38.

Lorraine had been sleeping in a T-shirt and shorts, Keyes said, but he took lingerie from her dresser drawer.

Did he make her change clothes?

"I don't know if I want to go into that," Keyes said.

He did say that his motive with both Curriers was purely sexual. This completely defied a truism among BAU analysts: A couple like the Curriers taken at random is almost unheard of. A couple taken for sexual purposes? Also extremely unusual.

Keyes ordered Bill and Lorraine to roll over on the bed, on their stomachs, and zip-tied their wrists while barraging them with questions: Do you have a safe? Other guns? Prescription drugs? Where's your jewelry? ATM card? He demanded their PIN number and scratched it into the card's surface, then grabbed two suitcases and began stuffing them with clothes and jewelry. He found some bottles of Vicodin and Percocet and took those too.

At one point, while Keyes was stripping everything off the bed, Lorraine took her chance. She fought hard, attempting to roll herself onto the floor. Before she knew it, Keyes was grabbing her by the neck and smashing her face into the pillow. He threatened her the way he had Samantha: If you try that again, I won't be happy.

That really made him angry, Keyes said, the idea that these people weren't taking him seriously.

Lorraine went still, and Keyes went back to rummaging through their drawers, then riffled through a spare room where he found a military insignia called an Electric Strawberry. What a coincidence. Bill Currier had served in the same unit as Keyes, the Army's 25th Infantry Division. Keyes mentioned that to Bill. He allowed Bill to think that this might affect the night's outcome.

After fifteen minutes, he told them they were all leaving the house. Mindful of the broken glass he'd left on the kitchen floor, Keyes made Bill and Lorraine put on their slippers. No blood trail. No DNA.

He interrupted his story to brag a little. He never left physical evidence behind, ever. It was a point of pride. "I seriously doubt you're going to find DNA or fingerprints anywhere," Keyes said. As he had with Samantha, he wore leather batting gloves.

Keyes marched the Curriers out to the garage, putting Lorraine into the front passenger seat, hands still zip-tied behind her back, and belted her in. He restrained Bill the same way in the back passenger seat, then put the garage's ventilator fan back in the window and the crowbar back on its hook.

He got in the driver's seat. With the car's interior dome light on, he saw both of them watching him. Yes, he was wearing a mask, but he knew they could see his eyes, could see that he was white with long brown hair in a ponytail.

He slowly drove the Saturn out of the garage.

They begged. Bill needed his medicine. They had no money. They hadn't even seen his face. If he'd just let them go, he could take the car, the little cash they had—everything. They'd never tell a soul.

Oh, don't worry, Keyes told them. This is just a kidnapping for ransom. I'm bringing you to a drop house. Other people will take it from there. You'll be fine.

Inside his backpack was a pan, water bottles, fifty feet of coiled nylon rope, duct tape, latex gloves, and that small propane stove.

It was around 4:00 A.M., quiet and dark, the road and sky horizonless when Keyes pulled the Saturn up to an abandoned farmhouse off Route 15. That had been the reason for his drive earlier that day, to look at houses for just this moment.

The house he'd settled on was empty, a FOR SALE sign staked in the brown grass.

"I always stop at empty houses," Keyes said. "Especially if they have FOR SALE signs."

This one was an old-school farmhouse, ancient, two stories, falling apart, set back on a hill from the main road and partly obscured by a large tree. Forbidding, even in broad daylight as he'd walked right inside, through the decrepit screened-in porch, sure that no one had lived here for a long, long time.

He was right. The living room had only a couch, a recliner, and a fifty-year-old console TV. Otherwise the house was largely free of furniture. Most of the inside doors were off their hinges and propped up against walls. Boilers had been left in more than one room. The basement, aside from a shovel and some garbage, was empty. Up in one bedroom were two mattresses stripped bare on a bed frame. A gaping hole in the roof shot right through the second floor down to the living room, as if a cannonball had been dropped from above.

This house was perfect.

When Keyes took people, he was acutely attuned to their animal response: the acid flush of adrenaline flooding the veins, color draining from faces, pupils dilating in fear. He could smell it in their sweat. He liked to extend that response as long as possible.

In tonight's setting, he'd imagined his victims bound in a car, driven into the rural blackness, the only light for miles around coming off the headlights as they came closer and closer to a place they'd never leave.

Down the road was a police car, parked about a hundred yards away. Keyes imagined his captives catching a glimpse of that car and having hope.

Keyes cut the lights and ignition, leaving Lorraine tied in the front seat. He marched Bill through the basement's outdoor entrance and down the stairs, tying him to a stool within minutes. Impassively, Keyes walked up and outside.

There was Lorraine, out of the car, standing up.

She saw him. She ran as fast as she could, straight toward Route 15, but Keyes was faster. He tackled her and dragged her back to the house, pushing her up the stairs and into the bedroom, the one with the holes in the roof and the floor. He couldn't believe it: She almost got away. This made him angrier.

He strapped Lorraine's arms and legs to the bed with duct tape, then wrapped a rope around her neck and under the mattress, tying it off with a compound knot. She fought the whole time.

Shouts came from the basement, echoing through the house.

Where's my wife? Where's my wife?

Keyes checked his knots: secure. He grabbed his knife—the one he had on him in Texas, he said—his .40-caliber revolver and his water bottle. He went down to the basement.

Why the water bottle?

I'm not sure I want to get into that, Keyes said.

Bill was partway free, the stool in pieces. The only light came from Keyes's headlamp, the sight of Bill thrashing around as if under a strobe light.

Why are you doing this? Bill asked him. You don't need to do this. Just leave and we'll never tell. You haven't done anything that bad yet. Why not just go?

Now Keyes felt rage. Bill wasn't just disrupting his plans. He was fighting back hard. He was actually managing to shove Keyes around.

Where was the abject fear? How was Keyes on the verge on losing control?

“When things got physical . . . That pissed me off,” Keyes said. “Because there’s a very specific way I want things done, very specific way I want things to happen, and I have the whole thing planned out, I have everything I need to do it.”

What were his plans for Bill?

“I’m not going to say what I was going to do to him.”

Investigators didn’t need to hear it. They knew: Keyes had planned to rape Bill too.

“And so when somebody messes up that plan—it kind of surprised even me,” Keyes said, “that I lost control that way.”

He hit Bill with a shovel he’d found in the basement, but Bill didn’t go down. It took at least one more hit to knock him to the floor.

Keyes ran upstairs. The propane stove he had set up had fallen through the hole in the bedroom floor. He panicked. The house was dry wood. It wouldn’t take much for it to flame up fast.

He raced down to the living room and retrieved it, then back upstairs and went through his options.

He couldn’t shoot Bill with his .40 caliber, he said. It would make too much noise. But he had a 10-.22 upstairs, loaded with a 10-round magazine and equipped with a silencer. He grabbed that and flew down to the basement, where, incredibly, Bill was back up on his feet and yelling.

Keyes said he just started firing, like a reflex. He shot Bill in the arms, head, neck, and chest.

Bill Currier was still standing. Keyes had never seen anything like it.

Then, with his last breath, Bill fell to the floor. His eyes were closed.

Unnerved, Keyes stood there for a moment. He took the silencer off his gun. He went outside to have a cigar and pull himself together. This night was going sideways.



If Keyes was so careful about not leaving any DNA behind, what did he do with his cigar butts—here and in the Curriers’ backyard?

Never a problem, Keyes said. As long as you crush them up good with your foot, they just look like any other leaves on the ground. He let Lorraine smoke that night too, he said, in between what he did to her.

What was that?

Keyes went back inside and upstairs. It started raining again, and he remembered water pouring in through that hole. He lifted some of the freestanding doors and covered the bedroom windows, which faced the road.

Then he boiled water on the propane stove.

What was that for?

Keyes chuckled. "I don't know if I want to get into that today," he said.

He cut off Lorraine's clothes with his knife, Lorraine still fighting. He gagged her with paper towels and duct tape and raped her twice, using condoms both times. During the second rape, he said, he choked Lorraine until she lost consciousness.

He wasn't ready to kill her yet, Keyes said. But these investigators had seen enough to know that Keyes was trying to reassert his dominance here. Bill had emasculated him.

In this scenario, Keyes was supposed to be God.

How much time elapsed Keyes didn't say, but once Lorraine came to, he untied her and brought her down to the basement, where he sat her on a bench and presented his final scene: her husband, shot to death, lying in his own blood.

There was so much blood, Keyes said. That wasn't a mistake he usually made.

He put on his pair of leather batting gloves. Then he stood behind Lorraine Currier and strangled her with a rope. Even after he felt the life go out of her, he needed to make sure; this couple, though older and sick, were tougher than Keyes could have imagined.

He wrapped a zip tie around Lorraine's neck and pulled. Nothing.

Keyes was running out of time now. He dragged Lorraine's body over to Bill's and cut off their restraints. He poured Drano over their hands and faces, bagged each of their bodies in two fifty-five-gallon trash bags, then rolled their remains over to the basement's southeast corner, piling garbage and wood on top. He was in such a rush he left all his shell casings on the basement floor.

The sun was up, people traveling Route 15 on their way to work. He had planned to burn the house with the bodies inside but it was too late. Not really a problem—he was sure that whoever bought this house would do it for the property and tear down or torch it. The smell from the basement would be so putrid it would keep the most curious at bay—plus, the likely assumption would be that a wild animal wandered in and died. No, he was not worried about anyone finding the remains.

Keyes grabbed most of his stuff and drove the Curriers' car to the nearby Rite-Aid parking lot, where he'd left his rental the night before. He left the green Saturn as far from surveillance cameras as he could and walked to his own car, head down and covered with a hoodie. Keyes got in and left the state, headed up to Maine.

Six hours, start to finish.

The investigators were stupefied. Why would he do this? Keyes didn't understand.

"I don't consider myself that different than hundreds of thousands of people," he said. Look at the pornography they'd found on his computer: bondage, S&M, gay, transgender. Did they really think he was the only person on earth attracted to that stuff?

"I just take it to the next level," Keyes said. "The sexual fantasies, the money, the adrenaline rush . . . Once you get started, there's nothing like it."

Payne thought of a documentary he'd seen the other night about ambush predators: animals that kill with lightning speed and vanish just as fast.

That's what this guy is, Payne realized. A true ambush predator.

All those gruesome details had given them another insight: the similarities between what Keyes did to Lorraine and Samantha. Both had rope tied around their necks. Both had been bound and gagged almost identically, down to stuffing their mouths with paper products used, typically, to clean. He allowed Lorraine and Samantha to smoke with him. He used a knife on both and raped each of them twice, the same exact way.

In this regard, an MO was surfacing. To a lesser extent, there were similarities with the Curriers' ATM card too. The couple had told Keyes there was only a hundred dollars in their account, and he believed them. He

decided it wasn't worth the risk, an admission that meant he knew he could be tracked that way.

As with Samantha, Keyes put hundreds of miles between himself and the crime scene within hours of killing and hiding the remains, hopscotching through multiple states in a compressed time frame. His actual itinerary, it turned out, was even more complicated than he had led them to believe. He always had a plan.

On this trip, he had flown from Anchorage to Seattle to Chicago and, as he'd said, driven to Indiana to visit family, then to New York and Vermont. But after killing the Curriers, he also went to New Hampshire, where he visited a campground and went deep into the woods, burning most of their belongings. Then he drove to Maine to visit his brothers, and on the way home drove back through Vermont—right past the Curriers' home. He was satisfied to see the police, clueless and flummoxed, investigating.

Oh, and one other thing: Keyes was also aware that a witness had come forward, claiming to have seen a white man with long brown hair driving the Curriers' car. He had seen the police sketch but wasn't worried. It bore very little resemblance to him.

Before Payne could absorb the enormity of it all, Keyes offered a little more. He had another story to tell if they were interested.

About the curious incident his mother had described to investigators: that time he went missing in Texas.

EIGHTEEN

The town, he thought, was called Alto. A-L-T-O. Once again, up came a map.

Five days after the Currier confession, Keyes was back at the US Attorney's Office. He had reason to talk about Texas: He knew the FBI already had some information about his time there, and he knew he had been getting sloppy. He wasn't always turning his cell phone off. He was using credit cards and ATMs. And there was all that marked money in his rental car, the dye pack exploded after what was clearly a bank robbery, seized upon his arrest. Keyes knew that they knew the National Bank in Azle, Texas, had been robbed during Keyes's time there. Bell had gone to Bandit Tracker, the website that catalogs surveillance images of bank robbers, and found a masked man who looked like Keyes robbing that bank. And guess what else was on Keyes's laptop? Links upon links to Bandit Tracker.

In a conversation the week before, Keyes had reiterated his motive for confessing. "The bottom line," he said, "is everybody sitting in this room wants the same thing. You want all the information I can give you. I want to give you all the information I can reasonably give you. You want me to be punished and I want to be punished. I'd like to try and make it happen, because that'll make it easier on everybody. I'm not a patient person. I don't think I've ever lived anywhere more than five or six years. I get bored easily. So you can see why sitting in jail year after year, waiting for this stuff to resolve, is not really that attractive to me."

Payne's and Bell's suggestions, so far, were working. Keyes believed it was smarter to control his narrative and build goodwill before the FBI discovered anything else. He needed that execution date.

“You already have a lot of information about the bank robbery in Texas,” Keyes said. “If you want, I can give you arson in Texas. I burned a house down. But I want a cigar for it.”

He laughed. Bell had come prepared, a box of Wild 'n Mild at the ready.

One of the things Keyes liked to do in Alaska was pull up small towns on his computer, ones all over the Lower 48, out-of-the-way places that had about three or four different routes in and out. Towns that rarely saw crime and had inexperienced police.

Next, Keyes would research how many banks were in any given area and how many surveillance cameras each bank probably had. He preferred small banks, which often had limited surveillance, little infrastructure, and were completely unprepared for an armed robbery. He would research the best place to park and how far each bank was from the local police department, timing out his escape while evaluating what direction cops would most likely come from once the alarm was tripped.

Keyes was on a supersonic high after what he'd done in Alaska. It was all he could think about. Killing Samantha in his own backyard was the biggest, riskiest thing he'd ever done, and he had gotten away with it. He admitted that yes, he felt so emboldened he was commenting online, on the *Anchorage Daily News* website, using his own first name to offer theories as to why the police would never find Samantha Koenig.

No one suspected him, yet people were paying attention. He liked it more than he ever expected, this paradoxical anonymous recognition. He loved seeing an investigation play out in the news, he alone knowing the gap between what police suspected and what really happened. He was omnipotent. He felt an overwhelming urge to do something else immediately.

He had hoped that the family cruise would take the edge off. It had not.

“Did you take someone?” Bell asked.

“No,” Keyes said.

Bell was skeptical. Two days missing just to rob a bank? Not likely. But Bell kept that to himself.

Okay, he said. So what did you do?

Drove around, Keyes said.

“What all did you find to do?” Bell asked again. “You found the house to burn?”

“Yeah,” Keyes said. “I was thinking about taking someone too.”

Once again, Bell’s instincts were right.

“I was looking for an abandoned house,” Keyes said, “and I was looking for out-of-the-way ATMs. I was going to grab somebody from an ATM and take them to the house. But there were a lot of cops in Texas so I guess I chickened out a little bit on that. I don’t know.”

Bell thought Keyes was lying here. He may not have taken someone from an ATM, but he took someone. Keyes insisted he did not.

“I didn’t have my gun with me, the one I usually bring. You’ll find two of them in New York.”

Another kill kit to find.

“With the silencer?” Bell asked.

“Not the silencer but those 10-.22s,” Keyes said. “Normally if I’m going to do something like, broad daylight, that crazy”—e.g., crazy things are normal to me—“then I have one of those. They’re like a sawed-off .22 rifle basically, and I carry them under my coat. My logic being that if I ever did get caught in the act, and if it’s a small enough town, and I have, if I have one of those sawed-off .22s, they’re really accurate. And I have like a hundred rounds in different magazines for them, and usually I have a scope or a sight on them, so . . . I was never planning on being taken alive. Let’s put it that way.” He laughed.

Bell wouldn’t let his suspicion go.

“But when you left on this trip your intention was to find a house, take somebody, use the ATM, and then the bank ended up being what you did because the other didn’t work out? Or did you plan on robbing banks?”

“I didn’t plan on doing anything in Texas,” Keyes said. “If I had stuck with my plan when I left Alaska, the plan was to bury the guns somewhere.”

“So when you were out there looking,” Bell said, “you didn’t find anybody that you had an opportunity to—”

“Well,” Keyes said, “it was one of those things.”

Bell was wearing him down.

“I got there and . . . we had just got back from vacation”—the cruise —“and I was thinking that would mellow me out. I was thinking about banks, I guess, a little bit, but I don’t think I was thinking seriously—it was one of those things like where if I found the ideal one, a one-horse town with one bank in it and virtually no risk, then I was thinking I might do it.”

But while in Texas, Keyes couldn’t stop thinking about Samantha.

“I was checking the Alaska news a lot and I just got kind of amped up I guess, and decided I wanted to go out and do *something*. Preferably take someone. But . . . I don’t know.”

“Did you take someone?”

“No.”

Feldis interjected. “Why not?” he asked. After all, Keyes told them he’d planned to go back to Vermont within the year and burn down the farmhouse where he’d left the Curriers. If Keyes was going to use arson to cover up a double homicide there, why not in Texas?

Keyes shifted to minimizing.

“I mean . . . it’s a pretty good way to cover up a burglary too,” he said. “When I was in Vermont, I was looking for a church to burn. That’s what I really wanted to do. And when I was in Texas I was looking at a lot of churches too.”

Bell stopped him here. Why churches?

“Oh, just . . . It’s like a personal thing. It’s not so much that I care, but . . . I had it in my mind that I was going to start using churches.”

This wasn’t a surprise to Bell. He had spent a lot of time looking at Keyes’s computers, and Keyes had spent a lot of time looking at two kinds of real estate online: abandoned houses and remote churches. What was your plan with those? Bell asked.

“Well, if it’s an out-of-the-way church, there’s usually nobody there on the weekdays. That’s what I was looking for in Vermont, was a church.”

“To take the Curriers?” Bell’s tone was calm and low key.

“To take someone to,” Keyes said. “Yeah.”

Keyes thought about holding his victims, whoever they might be, in a small-town church, raping and torturing these strangers as they begged for their lives to a God who didn’t exist. Keyes would maybe stage their bodies on the altar, a tableau of sex and mortification waiting to be discovered by a

priest, a nun, or better, the next day's congregation. Or maybe he would just burn the church down with his victims in it.

But, Keyes said, neither plan worked out.

"Let me just—you said it was a personal thing," Feldis said. "Does that come from the thing that your mom is involved in?" Feldis asked. "The religious group?"

"Naw," Keyes said. "It just has to do with my general—I mean I'm sure it has something to do with the way I was raised. But for the most part it's just my general outlook on life and humanity, I guess."

Keyes would say no more about his childhood, and his refusal to discuss it convinced the team, Goeden and Nelson especially, that this was fertile ground. For these two investigators, the mystery of how Israel Keyes got this way was as compelling as discovering other victims.



Back to the morning of February 13. Bell, Goeden, Russo, and Feldis wanted the full account, as promised, of his lost time in Texas. Heidi had said Israel snuck out of her house in Dallas and left a note on his bed, reading in part, "Gone to find a place to hide my guns."

That was true, Keyes said. He really did want to bury his guns.

Caches in Texas, Bell wrote.

Did this alarm his mother? His sisters?

No, Keyes said. They all had guns.

Anyway, he had flown down from Alaska with all the pistols he had—he wouldn't say how many, or how he bypassed the TSA—and was looking to stash them somewhere. Maybe Texas, maybe near the Grand Canyon.

"There were two reasons for that," Keyes said. "One of them was, I was planning on leaving Alaska, and I knew I couldn't drive them through Canada so—"

The investigators' phones began to buzz. Keyes traveled through Canada? He knew where he could and couldn't travel with guns?

"—I was going to leave them down in the States."

But, Keyes said, he didn't immediately bury the guns. That night and the night after, he went looking for victims, driving around tiny towns in the

northeastern part of the state. One town was Cleburne. The other was Glen Rose. He'd been looking at cemeteries.

Bell knew about that too. They had found a MapQuest search for a Glen Rose cemetery on Keyes's phone.

"What did you go to the cemetery for?" Bell asked. "Is that a disposal site? An abduction site?"

"Not an abduction site," Keyes said. "Just somewhere to take somebody."

Take in this context, Bell realized, could also mean *bring*.

Keyes spoke in a low voice now, rubbing his arms hard against his pants.

"A lot of those cemeteries have maintenance sheds and stuff that are pretty easy to get into," he said. And with any public outdoor space—campgrounds, trailheads, the mountains, riverbanks, lakes, cemeteries—it's always way easier, he said, to explain what you're doing there, especially in areas that happen to be remote.

Churches and cemeteries. Birth and death. Celebration and grief. Hope and abandon.

Next, Keyes said, he staked out some river trails. That's when he saw her.

Nelson Googled "Glen Rose TX river trails." Up came the top two hits: the Paluxy River and the Dinosaur Valley State Park. Knowing how much Keyes loved state and national parks, there was a good chance it was the latter.

"It was getting pretty late, and there was a woman that came, and she was going for a walk on the trails up and down the river," Keyes said. "And I almost went after her. She had a big dog, like a mastiff or something. I was going to shoot the dog."

He thought about it: moving a woman and a large dog—too much trouble. He let them pass.

Texas was proving harder than Keyes thought. People here were openly suspicious of outsiders. At least one person actually came right up to him while he smoked a cigar, right across from the bank he was about to rob, and asked who he was and what he was doing there.

How he replied, Keyes didn't say. It wasn't enough to stop him, but Texans were living up to their image as straight-talking shitkickers. Also, too many people had guns! He said this in all seriousness: Almost no one

took their personal safety for granted. “I was surprised that security is actually pretty tight,” Keyes said. “Most people have locked gates and so it took me awhile to find that place.”

It was February 16, he said, when he found the house.

“Probably the easiest way to find it is to do a Google search for ‘Fire, Alto, Texas,’” Keyes said.

Kat Nelson didn’t find a fire in Alto, but there had been a house fire in Aledo, Texas, on February 16, 2012. It was easy to see how Keyes could mix up the names. Aledo was probably the one. She texted Bell.

Goeden spoke up, her tone gentle. “How did you pick that house?”

“It was a ways out of town,” Keyes said. “I couldn’t really tell if there were local police or not, but I figured if I started the fire, that would get them all away from town and then I’d hit the bank right after that.”

An arson and a bank robbery on the same day, Bell thought. Hunting right before. By his own admission out of control. What were the chances this arson was used to cover up a body, just like he’d planned in Vermont?

While Keyes was proud of his crimes and his MO, he had made it clear from the outset: He was only going to give them information that they would inevitably discover themselves. If they somehow found a body without him, that would be their win, and he would confess. Otherwise his victims were his alone. It was strange for him to be talking about any of this. He never had and thought he never would.

And he was ramping up his crimes, he said. For so much time, all he wanted to do was stay off the radar. He traveled like a ghost, leaving no digital footprint or cell tower ping. He lived all the way up in Alaska. A house burns down, fueled by accelerant, in a desolate part of Texas? Police are looking at the owner for insurance fraud. Someone goes missing? Police are looking at the victim’s friends and family. Maybe the person he kills isn’t even from, say, Texas. Maybe they’re on vacation from another state or another country. Who’s going to link him to that? Keyes knew that stranger abductions are rare. He knew his way of doing things was even more so.

But now he found himself conceiving of elaborate crimes, ones that would make the news—not just local, national. That was why the churches. A serial killer targeting churches would cause a nationwide panic.

Keyes said his urge for infamy built over time. For years he would only ever check media coverage of what he had done at airports or libraries,

public computers only. But as his crimes became more brazen, news lasting not days or weeks but months or years, Keyes became frustrated. He wanted the world to know: In the history of monsters, he was a great. “I definitely got carried away with the publicity,” Keyes said.

“And the Curriers were big news,” Goeden said. “Big news for that area.”

“Yeah, they were,” Keyes said. “And I think that’s when it started. I just kept checking back on the story and getting kind of a kick out of . . . because obviously, I know what happened. And seeing the difference from their perspective versus my perspective, and then on top of that, when people would read the news story everyone wants to comment on their theories of what happened. And so I got really hooked on that too.”

He could no longer wait. “I would be home late at night and be like, Wow, I wonder if there’s any more stories. A couple of glasses of whiskey and I’d be like, I’m going to check on that. And I’d do searches and read and start commenting on stuff. I knew that I was—I knew that I was getting stupid, I guess. But I was still planning ahead.”

He still believed that he would never get caught.



Keyes said he found the Aledo house while driving around and just broke in. “It was a mess,” he said. “Every room was packed. The place was a freaking fire hazard—they had like two or three freezers running around the house and extension cords running to everything. The place basically looked like it had just been abandoned.”

This was interesting. Keyes was describing a house similar to where he took the Curriers. His vocation was building houses, but what he really wanted to do was burn them down.

He found gas in the garage. He opened all the windows plus the attic door, then made a trail out of clothes and bedding, front to back, doused everything in gasoline, and set it all on fire.

“It went up really fast,” Keyes said. He watched for a while, longer than he’d planned, hiding far back, near a church on a hill. The response to this fire was so much bigger than he’d hoped, cops and firetrucks and regular

people rubbernecking, local news media speeding in while traffic backed up everywhere.

Was this planned as a diversion—get all the first responders here so he could go rob a bank?

Keyes was offended. “I didn’t *need* a diversion,” he said. Another contradiction. Just minutes earlier, Keyes said he considered that very eventuality.

And he took advantage, driving half an hour north to the tiny town of Azle and robbing a bank, a takeover with a disguise and a gun, walking out with ten thousand dollars. “You got a lot of money in that bank robbery,” Bell said.

“Not really,” Keyes said.

“You’ve gotten more?”

Keyes laughed.

Over the course of this conversation, investigators noted that Keyes had accounted for what he did on February 13, 14, and 16, but had skipped over February 15 altogether.

That was the day Keyes had been found next to his rental car, filthy and erratic after two days missing.

“Did you actually get stuck in the mud somewhere?” Bell asked.

“Yeah,” Keyes said. “I just—the longer I stayed out of Dallas, the longer I was down south, the more I was thinking I . . . wanted to do something else.”



What happened in Texas in the early morning hours of February 15? By his own description, Keyes had been driving thousands of miles on very little sleep, fueled by adrenaline, watching the police, as he said, “running around like ants in a frying pan” trying to solve the crime back in Anchorage.

All that time he went missing, Keyes said, was only to bury his guns. Bell remained skeptical. He was sure at least one kill kit was buried in Texas, probably more—Keyes’s family gave perfect cover for regular visits.

Another thing: In searching Kimberly’s house, police recovered a piece of paper with random numbers listed: 5, 79, 105, 633, 1.5, 5, 5.

Bell Googled them. Up came “Police frequency, Stephenville, Texas.” He pulled up a map of Stephenville—5 was the highway coming into it; 105 was the highway out.

Then Bell Googled “1.5-5-5, Stephenville TX.” Up came the scanner frequency.

Keyes told them the truth: He had planned these escape routes in advance, back in Anchorage, four thousand miles away. Stephenville was only an hour’s drive from Aledo and Cleburne, where Keyes had been found by his family. He had used his police scanner on that trip.

“He took someone in Texas,” Bell said. “He had to. He wasn’t capable of stopping. I know it. I know it.”

NINETEEN

Missing persons, Texas, February 15, 2012.
Jimmy Tidwell.

Tidwell had been last seen in Longview, two hours outside of Dallas, on February 15, 2012. He was an electrician on the night shift, leaving work at 5:30 in the morning to head home.

He was never seen again.

Days later, police found Tidwell's white Ford pickup truck parked five miles from his residence, near the intersection of I-315 and Farm to Market 95. There was no sign of forced entry or foul play. Nothing was found inside the vehicle except Tidwell's eyeglasses lying on a seat. His cell phone, wallet, and keys were all gone. No clues or foreign DNA had been left behind.

Nothing about Tidwell made him a high-risk victim. He was fifty-eight years old and married with two grown children. He had worked at the same company for ten years. He was close to his family. He was a punctual and reliable employee. In his spare time, he carved wood. He had no enemies, no dangerous pastimes, no criminal record.

Jimmy Tidwell was an average American in every way. The notion that he would suddenly park his truck parallel to an interstate highway and walk off into the woods, or hitchhike somewhere to start a new life, was unfathomable.

"I do not believe that he voluntarily, willingly left that truck he loved and walked away," Tidwell's sister said.

The police didn't either. They set off on a days-long manhunt. State and local law enforcement, mounted patrol, and canine units searched a five-

mile radius deep in the woods. Friends and family joined in. A three-thousand-dollar reward was offered, one thousand dollars of that by his employers.

Not a single clue.

This would fit Keyes's MO. Tidwell had been driving in the early morning hours when few other cars were on the road. Keyes said he liked to take people from one location, move their cars to another, and dispose of their bodies at a third site to confuse police, then disappear.

Tidwell often wore a white hard hat on the job. The bank robber picked up on camera in Azle, Texas, the day after Tidwell went missing was wearing a white hard hat, long wavy chestnut hair flowing below.

Keyes wore his hair shorter than that, but Tidwell's hair looked just like the bank robber's. And Keyes had let a tantalizing clue slip: While committing the Azle bank robbery, he hadn't been wearing a wig. Bell and Russo, in their casual way, would broach the disguise with Keyes.

"Where do you buy real hair?" Russo asked.

Keyes knew there was nothing casual about this question. He went silent for quite a while.

"You don't have to buy real hair to get real hair," Keyes said. He laughed.

"You just take it, don't 'cha?" Bell said.

Keyes laughed again.

"Hair is free. Everything's free if you take it," he said. "Well, famous last words. You've got to pay for it eventually."

TWENTY

Over at the FBI's offices, in what they now called the War Room, Jeff Bell tacked a large map of the United States to the wall. On it, he drew five big circles. The circumference of each was based on what they knew of Keyes's travels: which city he flew into, where he rented a car, how many miles he put on that car over how many days. One circle went around Alaska. One went around Washington State. Another around Texas. One around Illinois and Indiana. The last went around the entire northeast: New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Maine.

Bell began with the trip Keyes took to Texas right after killing Samantha. Keyes had rented a car at a Thrifty in Houston and put 2,847 miles on it over ten days.

"Worst-case scenario," Bell said. "If he picked up that car and drove as far as he could, and still had that car back with 2,800 miles, what—what are we looking at, for areas where he could have killed somebody or robbed a bank?"

To begin, Bell halved the mileage. It wasn't scientific, but it was a starting point: half for Keyes to get where he was going, half to return. Using a compass, a pencil, and a string, Bell began drawing circles radiating 1,423.5 miles outside of Keyes's known travels. When he finished, he stepped back and looked at the map in total.

"This is unbelievable," Bell said. He had drawn circles around thirteen states.

A theory was coalescing. What if Keyes moved some of his victims through multiple states? Killed them in one, dumped them in another? That would make it nearly impossible for any local or state agency to find a victim. In confessing to killing the Curriers, Keyes said he had never settled

on Vermont; it just worked out that way. “It could have been New York,” he said. “It could have been Maine. It could have been New Hampshire.”

He had burned the Curriers’ possessions in New Hampshire and confessed to burying the gun he used in Blake Falls Reservoir in upstate New York. That, too, turned out to be true. Investigators had thrown up yet another Google Map, and Keyes directed them to two large rocks near the reservoir, one leaning against the other to form a triangle, smaller rocks piled up in the formation’s shade.

“Underneath that slab is an orange Home Depot bucket, and it’s well hidden,” Keyes said. He got excited talking about even this, clearing his throat and jangling his chains. “It’s got, um, a bunch of brush and other rocks and moss and stuff piled and packed in around it.” Inside was an additional gun plus a silencer. He used desiccant to protect them from moisture and sealed the bucket tight, then threw the gun he’d taken from Lorraine Currier in the reservoir.

If Keyes went to all that trouble to hide and dispose of weaponry, why wouldn’t he do the same with a victim? It would explain his outsize confidence, his threats. When it came to the victims he might give up, he said, “That’s just the United States.”

Meanwhile, the FBI had gone through the hundreds of images on Kimberly’s computer and were able to identify forty-four people using facial recognition software against all the images on NamUS, the National Missing and Unidentified Persons website. Eleven of those were teenagers. Ten were small children. The two youngest were each one year old.

One thing I won’t do is mess with kids.

Now investigators had even more reason to doubt this credo. For one, it was ridiculously self-serving: Look at me, a serial killer with a conscience! Investigators were parsing every single utterance. Even if Keyes was telling the truth, and his daughter’s birth catalyzed a fundamental shift in him, that alone would imply that before she was born he *had* targeted children. And while investigators didn’t necessarily think Keyes was responsible for all of the missing kids on his computer, their inclusion was disturbing. Who reads about missing children and babies for kicks?

Difficult as it was, investigators needed to try to cross-reference every single person reported missing in the United States with Keyes’s known

travels. Anyone who disappeared during the timeline had to be considered a possible victim.

To keep rapport, investigators agreed, to their great frustration, to give Keyes other, smaller things he wanted. Cigar breaks during interrogations were a painstaking process that involved shackling Keyes's handcuffs and leg irons to his belly chain, taking him down a secure and empty elevator to the below-ground parking garage, letting him smoke while making small talk, then hauling him back up without anyone seeing. Keyes had other requests, also met: *The New York Times* delivered to his cell every day, access to the internet, Americanos, candy bars.

Then there were the bigger things. By now investigators had learned Keyes had nine siblings scattered all over the country, but they listened when he said, Leave my brothers and sisters alone. Heidi was another story. If she still wanted to talk, Keyes said, let her talk. If she decided to stop, leave her alone.

Keyes had all the power here. His only other true care was for his daughter, but using her as a pawn, even a false one, was never up for discussion.

Liz Oberlander and her team had spent two days dismantling the shed Samantha had spent her last moments in, searching for evidence of blood, hair, fingerprints, fibers. Despite the near-month her corpse had been left inside, then later made up, hair French braided, underarms shaved, photographed for ransom, subject to necrophilia before being dismembered, still they found nothing.

Same with his pickup truck. The magnitude was sobering. The few interviews Keyes gave seemed, at first, hubristic. Most of the case agents thought Israel Keyes had to be, to some degree, exaggerating.

No more.

The Bureau's top criminal profilers were at a loss. The only thing they could tell the team was that Keyes was one of the most terrifying subjects they had ever encountered. There was no precedent for a serial killer with

this MO: no victim type; no fixed location for hunting, killing, and burying; putting thousands of miles between himself and his victims; caches buried all over the United States. He avoided detection through travel. Travel! They thought about how onerous travel itself could be: booking flights; clearing post-9/11 security and searches; hoping a flight isn't delayed or canceled; doing the paperwork involved in renting a car and then relying only on paper maps, no Garmin satellite or Google; checking into a hotel or setting up a campsite; filing for hunting and fishing licenses—to say nothing of successfully finding a victim, or victims, while trying to retrieve some cache buried months or years ago, the locations only in his head; then expertly disposing of his victims' remains and leaving no evidence behind. The sheer efficiency and time management Keyes displayed was staggering.

Breaking apart his cell phone and removing the battery was something the team hadn't seen before either. For Kat Nelson, those dark spots in his history, the hours that his phone gave off no signal, would be a tell. That's when Keyes was doing something.

Then there was the driving, the ability to stay awake without the aid of drugs, just his Americano coffees and soaring adrenaline, moving through five states in as many days. Until Samantha, Keyes had left no digital trail, no cell phone or credit card activity. Until Samantha, he swore he'd never killed in his own backyard. Decades of mayhem, geographical boundaries unknown.

If an Israel Keyes existed, someone even more diabolical would follow. They needed to understand the forces that built Israel Keyes, the first sui generis serial killer of the twenty-first century.



Some agents, like Steve Payne, stuck to traditional investigative methods: the interviews Gannaway was conducting with Heidi; searches through financial records, computers, datebooks, and journals; interrogations with Keyes himself. For other agents—Jeff Bell, Jolene Goeden, and now Ted Halla and Colleen Sanders, two FBI special agents who were starting to research Keyes down in Washington State—the few serial killers Keyes referenced were a source of fascination and, they hoped, insight. These agents began reading and watching every book, film, or TV show Keyes

had consumed, building little libraries in their respective field offices and comparing notes.

Keyes had told investigators that there were two texts that he studied closely, both written by pioneering behavioral profilers in the FBI: *Dark Dreams: Sexual Violence, Homicide, and the Criminal Mind* by Roy Hazelwood, and *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit* by John Douglas, in turn the model for Jack Crawford in *The Silence of the Lambs*.

Bell hadn't read *Dark Dreams* before, and it was a revelation. Hazelwood wrote of the specific deviations of sexually sadistic criminals, and Keyes had nearly all of them: No criminal record prior to arrest. A seemingly happy domestic life. Compulsive driving—this stood out to Bell. It had seemed so specific to Keyes, yet Hazelwood explained that this was a shared tendency among psychopaths, feeding an overarching need for control, freedom, and constant visual stimulation to counter the boredom they so often feel.

Another passage nailed Keyes:

“The sexual offender is never fully inactive,” Hazelwood wrote. “He may not be acting out against a specific victim, but he will be making plans, selecting new targets, acting out against other victims, or gathering materials. He is never dormant.”

Keyes was a cluster bomb. Investigators were learning that some of his tactics were borrowed from different predecessors, reconstituted for the modern age.

Ted Bundy, who Keyes called his great hero, killed all over the country. James Mitchell “Mike” DeBardleben, the basis for Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs*, kept at least one kill kit. John Robert Williams was a long-haul trucker who killed in one state and left bodies in another. Dennis Rader, the BTK (“bind, torture, kill”) Strangler, posed at least one of his victims in the basement of his church, tied up in sexually degrading positions.

Before his death in 2016, Hazelwood spoke about Keyes. Hazelwood's decades of service had left him with a cynical view of the FBI's truthfulness in general, and he believed stranger abductions are far more common than the Bureau insists. He was convinced that the proliferation of hard-core pornography, so easily and anonymously accessible online, has contributed

to increasingly sadistic crimes and murders. He believed that technology, the mainstreaming of violent pornography, advances in ever-faster travel, and an overall culture of misogyny, from politics to entertainment, would only continue to breed more aberrant and dangerous criminals. He made this prediction in 2001.

Keyes, Hazelwood agreed, was among the top criminally organized minds he had ever encountered. But Keyes should not be mistaken as lacking emotion. Far from it, Hazelwood said. Psychopathic sadists such as Keyes have pushed their emotions down so deep only extreme acts evoke any feeling whatsoever. It's why their crimes, horrific even in the beginning, must escalate, typically from the torture of small animals to rapes and murders increasingly elaborate in planning and realization. Palpable gratification comes only through multiple victims and greater suffering.

Not all psychopaths are serial killers, but all serial killers are psychopaths. The latter, lust-driven serial murderers, will share a common denominator: how they think. For example, Keyes had once considered becoming a police officer, and when asked why, Keyes said, What better way to hunt for victims? A police officer pulls you over on the side of the road, late at night . . .

Mike DeBardleben, while pretending to be a police officer, victimized and murdered untold young women this way.

Yet Hazelwood offered some comfort: Sexually motivated serial killers are truly rare. And Keyes was the 1 percent of the 1 percent.

As they read further, the agents got a sharper look into not just Keyes, but how out of their depth they were. Upon first reading John Douglas's *Mindhunter*, Keyes told them, he felt like he was reading about himself. "Put yourself in the position of the hunter," Douglas wrote. "That's what I have to do."

Douglas drew a parallel to Payne's metaphor, Keyes as ambush predator. "If you could get a galvanic skin response reading on one of them as he focuses on his potential victim," Douglas wrote, "I think you'd get the same reaction as from [a] lion in the wilderness."

Keyes never knew that before—that his psyche and physiological reactions weren't unique. He'd had the same epiphany, Keyes told them, with *Dark Dreams* and, though it was fiction, Dean Koontz's *Intensity*. Told from the alternating viewpoints of a serial killer and his abducted victim, Koontz's novel crystallized Keyes's thoughts and urges: the love of pain, self-inflicted and imposed; the ultimate pointlessness of human existence; the disbelief in God or any other higher being; the power and transcendence that only taking, torturing, and killing could provide. This made him feel, ironically, like the God he didn't even believe in.

Koontz described his serial killer thusly: "He does not believe in reincarnation or in any of the standard practices of an afterlife that are sold by the world's great religions. . . . But if he is to undergo an apotheosis, it will be brought about by his own bold actions, not by divine grace; if he, in fact, becomes a god, the transformation will occur because he has already chosen to *live* like a god—without fear, without remorse, without limits, with all his senses fiercely sharpened."

All of forensic criminal psychology is haunted by one question: Are psychopaths born or made? The debate is as old as Socrates, who believed that human beings were incapable of deliberate evil. Wrongdoing was born of ignorance or delusion. "There is only one good, knowledge," he said, "and one evil, ignorance."

Two thousand years later, we know little more than this: Evildoers have forever been among us. But why? What makes them so?

As the great writer Ron Rosenbaum once put it, "the discourse of evil" is endless and no longer the province of psychology, psychiatry, or philosophy. We look to medicine and technology for explanations, even though the science isn't there yet. No brain scan can definitively detect a tendency toward psychopathology. Social psychiatry is just as useless. Studies of twins have shown that psychopathy may be a trait more heritable than environmental, yet good children can thrive despite bad parents, and vice versa.

We are not far from where we were thousands of years ago, theorizing that some people are simply born this way. Heidi Keyes, after all, raised ten

children. Only one was an aberration.

The youngest subject Hazelwood knew to exhibit psychopathic behavior was a three-year-old caught by his mother in the act of autoerotic asphyxiation. That toddler grew up to become a serial killer. Children as young as nine, who live in stable homes with normally developing siblings, have been documented exhibiting such extreme psychopathic behaviors that their parents fear their own child might kill them. The mythology of the bad seed has knotty, primal roots, and the best people to ask the questions “How?” and “Why?” may be serial killers themselves.

The behaviorists at the FBI think so. In 2008, the Behavioral Science Unit founded the Evil Minds Research Museum, dedicated to the study of serial killers and their development since infancy. Analysts use artwork, journals, and other personal possessions in an attempt to map each killer’s mind, hoping to create a kind of master profile. The core belief is that each monster would, from time to time, let the mask of sanity slip.

Keyes, for one, proved this thesis wrong. As he told investigators from the outset: “There is no one who knows me, or who has ever known me, who knows anything about me, really. . . . I am two different people.”



Every investigator lucky enough to catch this case—and among Payne’s team, Keyes was regarded as “once in a lifetime”—wanted to crack his origin story. It was irresistible, the notion that if they could understand everything specific to him and his upbringing, they could possibly locate a reason. A why.

Keyes wasn’t willing to give investigators any of that. When asked why, he’d say, “Why not?” Investigators suspected he may have been abused as a child, a hallmark in the development of such criminals, but Keyes denied it. Besides, he didn’t believe in childhood trauma as the cause of anything. He thought it was Freudian bullshit. Over and over he insisted that none of this was his family’s fault. They were good people, he said, who loved him.

One upshot of Keyes’s legal wrangling for the death penalty was a court-ordered psychiatric evaluation. All of the investigators knew Keyes was sane. The long-range planning, the lengths to which he concealed not just

his crimes but his true self—this was someone who understood right from wrong and the consequences of getting caught.

But the psychiatric evaluation—Goeden and Nelson especially wanted that. It would give the most detail yet into his background. It would surely explain something.

Right?

TWENTY-ONE

On Friday, April 27, Keyes sat across from Dr. Ronald Roesch, a forensic psychologist from Washington State and Canada, at the Cook Inlet Pretrial Facility in Anchorage. They would speak for six and a half hours.

Roesch's report, along with interviews agents had been conducting in Alaska, Texas, and Washington plus the journals seized from Keyes's home allowed investigators, finally, to build a history. This was like uncovering a pentimento, an original portrait finally visible underneath a newer image, the altered composition designed to face the world.

Israel Keyes was born in the tiny town of Cove, Utah, on January 7, 1978. His parents had met as teenagers in their native Los Angeles, drawn together as misfits. Heidi Hakansson had been adopted by a late-in-life couple who were married seventeen years before beginning their family.

Heidi was something of a loner. She didn't dwell, at least outwardly, on her biological parents or why they gave her up. She was mature for her age. She didn't care about football games or hanging out at the beach; she preferred the company of adults. John Jeffrey Keyes, who went by Jeff, was much the same. He spent his free time with his family, or learning how to fix anything that was broken, or alone with an ever-present book. Both were Mormons.

Heidi was twenty-one and Jeff twenty-two when they wed. The most formative experience in Heidi's life thus far had been her eleven years as a Girl Scout. For Jeff, it had been his missionary service in Germany. They were both good, wholesome, God-fearing people who wanted nothing more than to raise their children in nature. The first time Heidi ever walked into

the woods, she thought, Why would anyone live in a city? What man-made metropolis could compare to God's creation?

So they moved to Utah. Their first child, a girl named America, was born in 1976. It was a home birth, as would be the births of the nine children to follow, all delivered by Jeff. Hospitals had too many rules—at least that's what they told people. The truth was Jeff hated doctors and didn't believe in modern medicine. He had never been immunized and didn't want his children to be either. Heidi agreed; she had never been sick herself. And none of their children would have birth certificates or Social Security numbers or attend school. No one else, certainly not the government, would have a say in how their children were raised.

But Heidi and Jeff had neighbors, and they were concerned enough to call authorities about this strange little family with two toddlers who were rarely seen outside. That's when Heidi and Jeff decided to pack up and move hundreds of miles away to Washington, where property was cheap and there were no neighbors to pry. With money saved from Jeff's repair work and Heidi's babysitting, they purchased 160 acres on top of a mountain in Colville, near a national forest. They would live off the land, obscured by soaring trees and mountains five thousand feet high. Nature would be their fortress. For most of the children, it would be something of a prison.

Israel, the second oldest, was somewhere between ages three and five when Jeff and Heidi rented a one-room cabin in Washington. Here, the growing family would live without heat, plumbing, or electricity for the next seven years, while Jeff eked out a living as an appliance repairman, traveling three miles up and down the mountain each day to his shop. He would fix things for other families, but barely provided for his own. Yes, he was building them a house, but he was doing it alone, even chopping down trees by himself, a task that would take years.

Every day before work, Jeff would go into the woods for a long time and pray. He was a private man, even with Heidi. She often didn't know what he was thinking or feeling. Though deeply religious herself, she found his religiosity extreme.

Heidi and Jeff loved their children but also regarded them as what they sometimes called assets, sources of free labor. The Keyes children had few friends, just a small menagerie of dogs and cats. There was no TV, no radio,

no computer or telephone, no contact with the outside world. Without knowing what they were missing, they sensed, as children do, that they were deprived. Forget about trips to Disneyland—they never watched cartoons over sugary bowls of cereal, or heard pop music, or went to a movie theater, a bowling alley, an arcade, a playground, a McDonald's. It's one thing to grow up in poverty. It's another to have all the small pleasures of childhood denied.

As the Keyes children learned to read they were forced to memorize Scripture. They wore hand-me-down clothes and too-small shoes; in Israel's case, his toes would be disfigured, a permanent reminder of how much his parents withheld. The children farmed and cleaned slop buckets and chopped firewood and babysat each other, and Israel especially emerged as a leader. In Jeff's absence, he became the man of the house. He learned how to cook and to sew, how to braid his sisters' hair, and he would take his time with all of them, even though he longed to be outside. His siblings adored him.

Heidi believed her children loved this way of life. She convinced herself of it. And it made her feel superior, her lack of need for material things, her individualism, her nonconformity. Here she was, raising all these children on her own in the forest, without science or capitalism or the government or any outside institution to help.

Every two years another baby came along. The cabin got so crowded that from April to November, Israel and his sisters would live outside in a tent. In winter, Heidi took them to California, where Jeff's mother let them stay in her trailer in Palm Springs. By the time Heidi was about to give birth to her fifth child, she begged Jeff. I can't have another baby in a tent, she said. She needed to be in a real house.

Jeff had his ever-ready reply: It was in God's hands.

They grew their own vegetables and shot game. The children never saw a doctor or a dentist or the inside of an emergency room. No matter the ailment, bronchitis to broken bones, Heidi treated them with herbs and oils. She didn't even keep Tylenol in the house. Peppermint tea and a hot bath, she said, could cure most anything.

Not long after leaving Utah, Heidi and Jeff quit Mormonism. Neither ever explained why, but in Colville they began attending a militia-based

white supremacist anti-Semitic church called the Ark. Israel, now around twelve years old, took great interest.

Heidi would elide this part of her family's history, as would Israel. That, to investigators, was a clue to its significance. These were formative years for Israel, the family venturing from their hermitage and exposing their children to a sliver of the outside world. It was around this time he befriended two brothers who lived half a mile away off Aladdin Road.

Chevie and Cheyne Kehoe were close in age to Israel. They had six siblings and all were homeschooled, lived off the grid, and belonged to the Ark. Their father was planning for a race war. The Kehoe brothers knew all about guns: shooting them, hiding them, stealing them, moving them on the black market.

This excited Israel. He had been obsessed with guns since he was six years old. He began learning all he could about the make and model of most guns, the different operating mechanisms, which ones were banned and how to get them. He got his hands on publications like *Guns & Ammo*. His grandfather gave him at least one gun and had taught him how to shoot. His parents, he said, were concerned, but there was little they could do.

"I learned all the details about guns even if I had never seen them," Keyes said. "It got worse when I got guns. I found out how easy it was to steal them." He was already breaking into homes, sometimes with a friend, and though he didn't name either Kehoe, it seems likely one was an accomplice. Sometimes Keyes off-loaded his stolen guns at local sales or swaps. It was so easy back then. Even though he was still a child, no one ever asked him for ID or why he had all these weapons.

Aside from the Kehoes, there was one other person he could be himself with, his younger sister Charity. Israel would take her into the woods where they would shoot BB guns at houses, and if no one came outside, break into them. Sometimes they'd take stuff; sometimes they'd just move things around, then hide outside and wait for the owners to come home and freak out.

They would start fires and scare animals. "But she talked too much about it," Keyes said. "People found out about some of the stuff I did—like my parents, and parents of other kids who would hang out with me. So I quit doing things with her."

His behaviors escalated, and he began to realize how different he was from most of his peers. At fourteen, Keyes and a friend—the one he broke into houses with—were out in the woods, and Keyes wanted to try something new. “I shot something,” he said. “A dog or a cat. He couldn’t handle it. And that was the last time I did stuff with him.”

Keyes didn’t understand that reaction at all, and not long after, he verbalized his first real threat. “There was a cat of ours that was always getting into the trash,” Keyes said. “It was my sister’s. I told her, ‘If that cat gets into the trash again, I’m going to kill it.’”

One day, Keyes grabbed the cat and set out into the woods, his sister and two of their friends trailing behind. “I took a piece of parachute cord and tied it to a tree,” Keyes said. The cord was ten feet long, and he wrapped the other end around the cat’s neck. Keyes was carrying a .22 revolver. “And I shot the cat in the stomach and it ran around and around the tree, and then crashed into the tree and started vomiting. And for me, I didn’t really react. I actually kind of laughed a little because of the way it was running around the tree, but I looked at the kid who was my age and he was throwing up. Kind of traumatized, I think. And he told his dad about it, and of course, his dad talked to my parents about it, and that was pretty much the last time anyone went into the woods with me.”

What Keyes was describing was the textbook progression, from childhood, of a sadist and a psychopath. Torturing and killing small animals, pets especially, is experimentation in controlling and killing another living thing for pure pleasure. It is practice, the last step before graduating to humans. Even as an adult, Keyes claimed not to understand the cruelty of these acts. When asked during the psychiatric evaluation if he had ever hurt anyone badly when he was a child, he minimized.

“A few minor scuffles,” he said, completely serious. “I am pretty much nonconfrontational.”

Despite Keyes’s claims to the contrary, Heidi insisted she had no recollection of this incident with the cat. She maintained that no other parent ever told her or Jeff about it. It seemed that one part of her needed to believe it never happened, while another part of her conceded it was possible. This may have been the only way she could live with herself—believing that Israel’s childhood had no part in making him a monster, even as, deep down, she might have suspected that wasn’t wholly true. “His

upbringing really didn't surface negatively until the last few years of his life," Heidi said.

When he was fifteen, Keyes began building a cabin about one mile away from his parents. He had learned by watching, then helping, his father, and had taken a construction job with people from the Ark. He was sixteen when he finished the build and moved in alone. Heidi didn't approve, but she didn't try to stop him. "I thought he was too young," she said. "I believed his family was a much healthier environment."

By now, Jeff had finished building the new home, and the rest of the family moved in. There was a generator, a range for cooking, and propane lights. The family boiled water in the fireplace.

But none of this mattered to Keyes. He was focused on one thing, and he needed to be alone to do it.

"I would hunt anything with a heartbeat," he said. He learned that hunting was as much about patience as marksmanship and trained himself to go still for hours, to heighten his senses for the scent of an animal, hear its smallest movements, how to camouflage himself expertly. He mainly shot deer, he said, and knew how to dress and butcher the meat, which he would give to his family. But hunting for survival was no longer the point. Hunting animals was no longer the point.

"Stalking through the woods, you see somebody in the woods and they don't see you. . . ." Keyes said he would sit, hidden, and watch people for hours. He would think about how easily he could take someone out there and make them disappear. "I can remember doing that from the time I was thirteen, fourteen years old," he said.

In 1994, when Israel was sixteen, he was arrested down the mountain for shoplifting. He got off with community service, but Jeff and Heidi had enough. After searching his cabin and finding a bunch of stolen guns, they forced him to move back home, return the weapons, and chop firewood to further pay his victims back. Keyes thought there was something hypocritical about Heidi and Jeff's attitude. Hunting those animals wasn't legal, and they knew it, but they encouraged him to do it anyway. It was to their benefit. Why was shoplifting any worse?

Heidi recalled a real shift in Israel after that. In hindsight, she felt he might have been trying to let her know who he really was. She already sensed that he was pulling away from religion and worried he was pulling

away from her. They were driving down the mountain one day, Heidi in the passenger seat of his truck, when Israel asked her a question.

“Mom, has it ever crossed your mind that all of your children might not choose to live the way you and Dad live?”

“Israel,” Heidi said, “you don’t know what you’re saying.”

“Well,” he said, “we’re all not going to necessarily want to do—the way you and Dad have lived.”

This was devastating. Heidi felt it was a rejection of her and Jeff entirely, not just by Israel but her other children. How many of them felt this way? How many would reject God? How many would leave? Would Israel leave? That was unthinkable. Surely, Heidi thought to herself, they’ll come to their senses.

Not long after, Israel told his parents that he no longer believed in organized religion. His father had already pulled away from the Ark after the 1993 siege at Waco, and Israel thought he would understand. Yet Jeff disowned him. Once the favored son, he was now emotionally cast out, except by Heidi. She would not go along with her husband here. Heidi loved her son, even if he no longer loved or believed in God.

“Mom saw past that,” Keyes told the doctor. “She cared about me.”

Still, he felt oppressed by Heidi and her beliefs, especially when it came to his burgeoning romantic life. He was eighteen years old, working construction, and had begun seeing his boss’s daughter. He was ashamed of his sexuality. “I had sinful thoughts today about my girlfriend,” he wrote in his journal. Those pages were otherwise covered in Bible verses. When Heidi and Jeff learned of this relationship, they forbade Keyes from seeing the girl. He could write letters to her only, which he did.

In fall or winter of 1996, Heidi and Jeff decided it was time to move again. Israel wasn’t the only child causing them trouble.



As she later wrote in a testimonial posted to the Church of Wells website, Autumnrose Keyes, along with two of her sisters, had also rebelled. This testimonial would provide great insight into the psychodynamics of the Keyes home.

She began by quoting Psalm 51:5. “In sin did my mother conceive me,” she wrote, before listing her wrongdoings. “I . . . was a grief to my mother, which she told me. . . . I let my conscience become seared. I would watch what I considered ‘good’ movies. I started struggling with impure thoughts and sins. I started listening to contemporary ‘Christian’ music. I would confess these sins and sometimes seek to stop, but things got worse and what I watched got worse. I was in this state when, praise the Lord, I became utterly condemned.”

The Keyes children seemed to believe moral ruin was the way to salvation.

Autumnrose began to doubt the Bible, she wrote, and Christianity itself. Her six-page account was strewn with words of damnation: She called herself wicked, a leper, a burden, forsaken. She described herself as fearful, distraught, lost, questioning, plagued, and unquestionably going to hell. “Rid me of this dark unrest,” she wrote. Her torment was palpable, as was her belief that she was saved only by those random street preachers who parked their RV in Heidi’s driveway back in Indiana in November 2009 and never really went away. “I could see that God was with them and that they were not like me,” she wrote, “in that serving the Lord was their delight.”



This spiritual crisis, Autumnrose wrote, spurred her parents to take the children and leave Colville for Oregon. Not mentioned in her testimony was the exclusion of her beloved older brother Israel, who stayed behind for at least one month. Why is unclear, but there would again be rumblings of an excommunication, that Israel’s behavior was alarming enough to separate him from his siblings. Heidi would later deny this.

Israel expressed resentment. He told his girlfriend that his family relied on him too much and that his mother sought to control him. This manifested in ways big and small. One example: Before the family relocated to Oregon, he badly needed to replace the tires on his truck, a yellow pickup with an attached rack he’d built himself. But Heidi told him the family needed that money. It was the perfect metaphor for their relationship, Israel’s girlfriend thought, Heidi intent on keeping him from ever moving

on, or away. Heidi needed Israel to do what Jeff would not: parent the eight younger children and be a support to her. A surrogate partner.

Keyes did move to Oregon one month later, joining his family in the tiny town of Maupin. He was there to help his father build a new house, one they planned to sell, while the family once again lived in tents. Whether any of the Keyes children verbalized or even recognized this as punitive at best, sadistic at worst, is unclear. What's not in dispute is that as their father built large homes—homes they would live in briefly, or never at all—the children watched through tent flaps, hungry bellies against hard ground, wondering why they were, in effect, kept homeless.

In 1997 the Keyes family, for reasons unknown, moved again, this time clear across the country. Jeff bought property in upstate Malone, New York, and, perhaps as an apology, signed the deed over to Israel. One year later the family moved again, to Smyrna, Maine, where they decided to make honey and live among the Amish.

Except for Israel. He was done. He had had it with itinerant living and what he saw as cult shopping. The Amish, he thought, were silly. His parents had dragged them through Mormonism to Christian fundamentalism to what he later called “crazy white people with guns.” His journal entries from late 1997 indicate regret over not living his own life. He missed the girl he'd left back in Colville. He couldn't stop thinking about her and worried that he would never get over this heartbreak, his first. “I thought to myself in Maupin, What's wrong with you, can't you give her up? No, I guess I couldn't.”

He wrote about guilt over leaving his family, but ultimately concluded he had tried. He was tired of making life harder than it needed to be. The world was on the cusp of a new millennium and his family insisted on pioneer living and paranoia. Enough.

He stayed back at the house in New York, another barely habitable dwelling, this one a tiny farmhouse on ten acres of land, right near the Canadian border. He was happiest here, alone in the woods. He took a few courses to get his high school equivalency diploma and struggled only with math. He was a big reader growing up, an autodidact who could teach himself most anything.

Keyes needed that diploma to realize his next goal: joining the military. He never said as much, but his most recent ex, Tammie, and his first fiancée

both later had the same impression, that Keyes enlisted as another rebellion against his parents. And somehow, in 1998, even without a birth certificate or a Social Security number, he talked his way in to the US Army.

“I didn’t exist on paper, really,” Keyes said.

He was twenty years old and already a very dangerous man.

Keyes didn’t much want to talk about the army. He said he could give investigators names, later, of guys he had served with, but none of them would know anything. Well, maybe one. Keyes recognized something of himself in that friend, and it was possible he had maybe shared too much with him. That was a regret.

Otherwise, he said, he liked the army. To his own surprise, he was a good soldier. He was infantry, stationed at Fort Hood in Texas and later Fort Lewis in Washington, with about six months in Egypt. He never saw combat. Keyes thrived under the structure he never had growing up, but struggled to make friends. He really didn’t know how to relate to the other guys. He had never had a drink or tried drugs. He had no knowledge of popular culture. He didn’t know what football was, or who Brad Pitt or Nirvana were. When the other guys reacted with open mouths and blank stares, Keyes would give them a shorthand explanation. I’m Amish, he would say. I mean, was.

In the army, he tried LSD twice, but only hallucinated lights, never voices. Then he tried cocaine, which he loved. He snorted a hundred dollars a day in coke for weeks and then stopped cold turkey. He didn’t like the way it was making him feel, out of control. He wanted to stay in control.

Drinking was different. Keyes really took to alcohol. It relaxed him and made it easier to talk. He began drinking fairly regularly, then every night. He didn’t think he had a problem, because he could go weeks without alcohol while training, but there were a few times, he said, when he got blackout drunk. He got a DUI in the army, not long after he got back from Egypt, arrested on post by the military police. Losing control was still a concern, Keyes said, but he quickly built a high tolerance and was careful not to drink around his family, afraid he’d let something slip about the things he had done.

Could he mean things he had done before the army? He never clarified, but from what he had said so far, it seemed his psyche had split long before fourteen years ago.

On base, Keyes began watching football games with the other guys and learning everything he could about the game and the players. Someone took him to his first rock concert, the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Stone Temple Pilots at Seattle's KeyArena. He was still involved with the girl in Colville, who knew none of this. In fact, despite this chaste long-distance relationship—they had never had sex—they had recently become engaged. That moment was the first they had ever kissed. She was a virgin who wanted to wait until marriage, and Keyes told her he felt the same way.

He was already very good at lying. His fiancée did not know that Keyes was out looking for other women, ones willing to have sex, and that he had been with at least one prostitute.

There was something else Keyes kept from her: He was bisexual. He spoke of this in his psychiatric evaluation as something he always knew and accepted about himself. Only Kimberly ever found out, he said, and that was because he got sloppy after drinking too much one night and cruising online. She found those chats on his computer and confronted him, but that was all he would say about that.

In late 2000, still engaged, he met another woman online. Tammie.

She was ten years older, had an eight-year-old son from a previous marriage, and lived less than ten miles from his army base in Neah Bay, a postage-stamp-sized reservation in Washington State.

They had their first date, lunch, in early December. Tammie recalled seeing Keyes for the first time and being unimpressed. She was pretty and voluptuous. He was lanky, with a narrow face and large nose. He wore small, wire-rimmed glasses and seemed like a nerd. He said he went by Iz. He was white and she was half Native American, half black.

They hit it off. Lunch turned into a drive and then dinner and a movie. They bonded over their traumatic childhoods. Tammie had grown up in Neah Bay without plumbing or electricity and knew the deprivation and humiliation, what it was to never feel clean enough, worried that others were snickering over poor personal hygiene that you, a child, had little control over. She knew what it was to be raised in squalid conditions yet

surrounded by a breathtaking landscape, emerald trees and water of the clearest blue. She knew how this could comfort and could hurt.

Her home life was so chaotic and violent that Tammie wound up cycling through multiple foster homes. By seventeen she was attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

But Tammie never felt sorry for herself. She tried hard at school, made friends, worked for the tribe from age thirteen, and tried to build a good life. Her optimism and independence were attractive to Keyes. He was surprised to find an older woman out in the real world, not part of his parents' lunatic fringe, who had such a similar backstory. He had nothing to feel ashamed of with her. For the next two months, he and Tammie were inseparable.

Keyes never shared with her his white supremacist past. Nothing in his demeanor, nothing he said, ever caused her suspicion.

They had other things in common. They both loved heavy metal and hard-core slasher films, but were most bound by lust and alcohol. Despite Tammie's time in recovery, she drank with Keyes, a lot. The sex was amazing. The best lover, hands down, I have ever had, Tammie said.

At the end of eight weeks she was pregnant. She called Keyes at Fort Lewis. She knew his reaction could go either way.

I'm not ready for this, Keyes told her. I think you should get an abortion.

Tammie was heartbroken. She wanted this baby, and she wanted him.

I'm going to have it, she said. So just forget about me and move on with your life.

She had no idea there was another woman in Colville.



In a journal entry dated September 25, 2000, Keyes wrote that for all his guilt, he also felt relieved on the day he left his parents. On October first, he made a down payment on an engagement ring, and picked it up on October 10.

He did not write about the proposal, but the girl in Colville said yes. The last known entry about her is dated November 4, 2000.

His ex-fiancée, in talking to agents, filled in the rest. In spring of 2001, she said, after visiting Keyes at Fort Lewis, she felt something was off. He made it clear that he didn't want her meeting any of his army buddies. He

would tell her he wouldn't be able to call for days, that he was off on a training exercise, then call her incessantly. Or weeks would pass when she wouldn't hear from him, even though she knew he was on base, because she'd reach his commanding officer and he would tell her: Yes, he's here, he's fine, I have no idea why he's not calling you back.

They were due to be married in August or September. Keyes had told her he was depressed, but in May he told her more, that she didn't really know who he was. He had slept with someone else, and he no longer believed in God.

He did not tell her about Tammie, who he had begun seeing again. He had changed his mind about the abortion. He felt she was his best shot at a stable life.

Keyes also did not tell her that Tammie, unlike his fiancée, never really held him to account. Tammie never called him on his obvious lies, like when he'd claim to be working late but come home wasted, or ask him why he was talking to other women online, or ask where he'd been after he'd disappeared for days at a time. Life was pretty easy.

And he had thought about becoming a dad a lot. He thought he would be good at it. He had practically raised all his younger siblings; part of him was a natural caretaker. He liked cooking and cleaning. He liked little kids. This would be a chance to break the cycle, to give a child all the care and attention he never got.

And a child who was part Native American, part black, would be yet another rebellion.

So he left his fiancée and went back to Tammie, who had never stopped loving him. And of course, she didn't ask him what he had been thinking all that time or why he had left in the first place.



That July, Keyes was honorably discharged from the army and the expecting couple set up house on the reservation. Keyes got a job in Parks and Recreation, an outsider hired out of goodwill toward Tammie. Their three-bedroom, one-bathroom rental was yet another dilapidated house, but Keyes spent months fixing it up. He made sure Keaton, her son from a previous relationship, felt included—not threatened by a new baby, or this

new man living with his mom. Keyes was sensitive to this small boy's anxieties, and over time Keaton would come to accept and love Keyes as a father figure.

That wasn't to say that their family life was harmonic; far from it. His time in the army, especially his six months in Egypt, had made Keyes insufferable on the topics of American foreign policy and economic injustice. He would hector Tammie and her friends about how unsophisticated they were, how ill informed and ill traveled, how they were just like the worst of America, caught up in superficiality and materialism while entire populations lived in extreme poverty. It was not lost on Tammie that she and Keyes knew exactly what extreme poverty was like. But he would become so smug and superior she'd just let him talk himself out.

Tammie began to see his insistence on tending to all the housekeeping for what it was, control. Keyes always needed to be in control—except at the end of the day, every day. That's when he began drinking, far more than he had during their brief courtship. Now he was putting away a bottle of wine, a fifth of Jim Beam, and a six-pack of beer every night. Sometimes when he was drunk, he would tell her things that didn't make sense to her. "I'm a bad person," he would say. "I have a black heart."

She refused to believe it. This was his childhood trauma talking, she thought. Even when he began marking himself with satanic imagery, branding an upside-down cross on his chest and getting a pentagram tattooed on the back of his neck, Tammie rationalized it as a delayed reaction to his religious upbringing. His parents had driven him to it, Tammie thought, his mother especially. She could hear the condescension and piety dripping through Heidi's voice whenever she called, reciting Old Testament invective. Heidi had no plans to meet Tammie and Tammie didn't see that changing, not even once the baby was born.

This was another area that was off-limits with Keyes: his parents. He almost never mentioned his father and clearly had a complicated relationship with his mother. He yearned for Heidi's approval even as he felt contempt for her choices. His childhood, too, remained a mystery to Tammie. He rarely described anything so detailed—a story, an experience, a significant moment—that she could picture in her mind's eye, evoke the boy he was and what had helped him survive.

An aperture opened briefly one night while the couple watched a true-crime special. The subjects were Cheyne and Chevie Kehoe, who were fugitives even before cable news began playing and replaying dashcam footage of a highway shootout between the brothers and two police officers who had attempted to arrest them. Eventually the Kehoes were captured, and in 1998, after receiving a sentence of twenty-four years, Cheyne implicated his brother in the Oklahoma City bombing, claiming Chevie was Timothy McVeigh's accomplice. Chevie denied it and was never charged.

One year later, Chevie was convicted in the 1996 triple homicide of a young family, including an eight-year-old girl, and sentenced to three consecutive life sentences.

I know them, Keyes said. I grew up with them.

Tammie was stunned. The Kehoes were terrifying. She wanted to know: Were you friends? Were they part of your church? Were they violent? Did you believe the same things? Did you ever do anything bad with them?

Keyes would only give Tammie vague answers and shoulder shrugs. He made it very clear: I don't want to talk about this. And not wanting to get into a fight, Tammie let it go.



Early in the morning of October 31, 2002, Tammie and Israel's daughter was born. This was one fight Tammie had not backed down from: she insisted on a hospital birth, and Keyes went along even though, he said, he had birthed enough lambs growing up to deliver a baby.

But once Tammie went into labor, Keyes was a wreck. He was by her side the whole time, and when their daughter came into the world, Tammie saw it with her own eyes. His entire being shifted. "I saw his life change when she was born," Tammie said.

Two weeks later, on November 13, Keyes got word that his father had died. The circumstances would remain murky, and even Tammie would not know much, but as best the FBI could piece together the Keyes family had been traveling by train—flying was against their new Amish belief system—from Maine to Indiana, where they were relocating yet again. At some point during the trip, Jeff became ill and his condition worsened rapidly. He had long suffered from a thyroid disorder that could have been treated

medically, but again, medicine was forbidden. Jeff deteriorated to the point where the train's staff intervened and told the family: You have got to get off this train and get this man to a hospital.

The Keyes family was removed from the train, but it's unclear whether Jeff ever saw an emergency room. It's doubtful. No record of his death exists—no obituary, no death certificate the FBI could find, no gravesite. All Tammie recalls is Keyes flying to Maine for the funeral.

Whether there was ever a funeral in Maine is unknown.

Keyes never spoke of his father with Tammie or anyone else, really. A few of his army buddies got the distinct sense that Keyes and some of his siblings had been abused by Jeff. One recalled Keyes telling a younger sister, about to run away from home, to stay put, that she was too sheltered to go it alone. If worse comes to worst, Keyes told her, I will come and get you.

Payne and Goeden, too, would also wonder. That Keyes never spoke of Jeff implied, paradoxically, that Jeff had a profound impact on Keyes, likely a bad one. They would always wonder if Keyes had been abused by him. Payne, on nothing more than his gut, would always wonder if Keyes had anything to do with his father's untimely death. That there was no record of Keyes near his father in the months and weeks prior to his demise, Payne knew, meant nothing.



After his trip back east, Keyes returned to Tammie. He seemed fine, focusing all his attention on the baby. He would let Tammie sleep in and change their daughter's diaper, feed her, and take her to day care. Both Tammie and Keyes needed to work now, and Tammie's job with the reservation's Education Department demanded a lot of overtime.

When their daughter was eight months old, things began to fray. The baby developed a serious respiratory infection, and they fought over how best to treat it. Then Tammie, who had suffered severe abdominal pain since giving birth, was diagnosed with uterine cancer and forced to have a hysterectomy. Everything that had once seemed so perfect was now so tenuous. Tammie could have died. Now she was entering menopause in her early thirties. Would Keyes, so much younger than her, stick around?

Doctors had given Tammie opiates for postsurgery pain, and she found they also helped with her anxiety. She became increasingly reliant on the drugs, and it was easy to tell herself that since Keyes was so good with their daughter, it was fine if she slept in or nodded out. He really loved the toddler phase, picking out clothes, braiding his little girl's hair, packing her lunch. Tammie couldn't see it then, but she was outside the family now. Keyes had effectively taken on the role of a single father.

There was, for Keyes, an unspoken upside to Tammie's numbness. Now she *really* never knew where he was or what he was doing. The worse she got the more freedom he had. It was a fine line, what was good for him and what was safe for the baby. He watched Tammie's calibrations carefully.

By 2003, Tammie was worsening and Keyes withdrew. He was done. In the summer of 2004 he took their daughter and moved to a nearby house on the reservation. A part of him would always love Tammie, but he would not expose his daughter to chaos.

Among the tribe, Keyes was a catch—a hard worker, talented, able to fix anything, devoted to his child. He dated at least three women in Neah Bay before meeting Kimberly Anderson, a travel nurse living in Port Angeles, on a dating website in 2005.

At forty-one, Kimberly was older than Tammie. She was financially successful, independent, and well traveled, a real threat to any chance Tammie had at winning Keyes back. And Tammie wanted to reconcile badly. The more it seemed Keyes would truly leave the reservation, the more Tammie self-medicated, and she created her own worst fear: Driving while high, she crashed her car in Neah Bay. Tammie was sentenced to twenty-five days in jail and two months of inpatient rehab, and if she had ever had a flicker of a chance with Keyes, she had just extinguished it for good.

But Keyes, out of concern or self-interest—probably both—allowed Tammie to believe they still might work it out. Once she got out of rehab, Tammie began coming around his house more often, partly to see the baby, partly to see Keyes, and even though she knew he was still seeing Kimberly, they began sleeping together again. That fall, Tammie assumed they would celebrate their daughter's birthday together, but the night of, Keyes surprised her and said he'd already made plans to see Kimberly. Tammie stifled her hurt. If you want to go, she told him, you should go.

He went.

Desperate, Tammie snooped online and found Kimberly's work address in Port Angeles. She made the nearly two-hour drive one afternoon and left a vicious little tell-all note on Kimberly's windshield.

Kimberly didn't engage. Tammie had no idea what was really going on until one day in late 2006 or early 2007, when Keyes told her that Kimberly was moving to Anchorage and had asked him to join her. He wanted to go. He was burned out on Neah Bay. He needed a change. There was no chance he and Tammie would ever be a couple again.

Tammie had one last move, her checkmate. Their child. I won't allow you to take her, she said. So now you have to choose. Some woman you met online? Or your daughter?

Keyes wasn't prepared for Tammie to fight him in court, but this had at least one positive outcome: To prove she was a fit parent, Tammie really had to get sober. She began functioning better. And this, ironically, allowed Keyes to say to her: Okay, you win. You can have custody. I am going to Alaska to start over with Kimberly.

It was the first time Tammie saw this side of Keyes—cold-blooded. He outmaneuvered her. There was really no fighting him. He was going to do whatever he wanted.

Tammie was devastated. She recalled him driving away, for good, on March 1, 2007. But even the best memories are fungible, and all that is known for sure is that at twenty-nine years old, Israel Keyes moved to Alaska on March 9 of that year. Immigration records showed him crossing through the Alaska Highway and telling US officials he was moving to the state, and that's backed up by his journal entry for that same day. "Get keys and move to new house," he wrote.

Yet he didn't settle with Kimberly in Anchorage right away. Over the next three months Keyes traveled up and down the West Coast and into Mexico. He spent most of his time in California, ostensibly working in Oakland, Anaheim, San Diego, Martinez, Kettleman City, Napa Valley, Santa Rosa, Healdsburg, Calistoga, Long Beach, and Los Angeles. He traveled to Seattle and Tukwila, Washington. He crossed the border into Mexico at San Ysidro and San Diego and frequently visited Tijuana.

And he had nothing to say to the doctor or the FBI about that either.

TWENTY-TWO

Now that Keyes had finally revealed parts of himself, investigators had a new challenge: Identify and locate victims without his help.

Quantico had flown in two analysts to help Nelson. Their timeline was blooming.

They went back to the teenage Keyes, in near isolation, training himself in the Colville woods. Investigators had to ask themselves: Could he have taken someone back then?



Julie Harris went missing in 1996. She was twelve years old, five foot one and 115 pounds, a double amputee who wore prosthetic feet. She had won a gold medal in downhill skiing at the Special Olympics and was the most famous person in Colville.

Julie left home early on the morning of March 3, wearing a black skirt and a sweater with pink-and-black stripes. She left behind the stuffed puppy she otherwise carried everywhere. She was never seen again.

Initial suspicion fell on her mother's live-in boyfriend, who had admitted to yelling at Julie the night before to finish her homework. But her mother insisted he was innocent, and he was never charged in connection with her disappearance.

Police later reported that Julie had last been seen "with a man in a trench coat." Keyes, nearly six feet tall by age fourteen, would have been eighteen years old.

One month later, Julie's prosthetic feet were found by the banks of the Colville River. In 1997 the rest of her remains were discovered three miles from Colville by children playing in the woods.

Bell would ask Keyes about Julie Harris. A child with such a disability, literally unable to run away, would be a low-risk—and cowardly—target for a beginning serial killer.

Investigators were also curious about another little girl who'd gone missing in Colville in late June 1997. Like Julie, Cassie Emerson had been twelve years old when she vanished. She had lived with her mom, Marlene, in a trailer and she was reported missing after their trailer was destroyed by arson, her mother's body found inside.

I'd start fires in the woods, Keyes had said. Arson covers up murder.

As with Julie, police had no leads and very few suspects.

Cassie's remains, decomposed and ravaged by animals, were found the following April in the woods near Kettle Falls, a thirteen-minute drive from Colville. Police believed the same person killed Cassie and her mother.

Neither case has ever been solved. Keyes left for Maupin, Oregon, in 1997, and the kidnapping and murders of little girls in Colville ceased.

Keyes would never admit to killing either girl, but later he would tell investigators: The first thing I ever burned down was a trailer. And when his ex-fiancée really thought about it, she remembered something one of his relatives said to her after they broke up.

“You were his last hope. I don't know what's going to happen to him.” She wondered at the time what that meant. Now the realization was dawning.

At the end of the interview, agents asked if she had any questions for them. Yes, she said. “Did he kill those two little girls in Colville?”

TWENTY-THREE

The psychiatric evaluation was filed with Kevin Feldis on Monday, April 29. The next afternoon, Feldis, along with two agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, secretly interviewed Keyes. Feldis never logged this interview with the court and it seems he planned to keep its contents and existence from Payne and his team. Exactly why is unknown, but the turf war was escalating.

Almost immediately, Feldis blew it.

Keyes began by asking about Vermont. He knew that FBI agents had been sent to the farmhouse and wanted to know if the Curriers' remains had been recovered yet. More than three weeks had passed since he confessed to that crime.

The FBI was beginning a search, that very morning, of a landfill in Coventry. Payne and Bell wanted to limit the amount of information they passed along to Keyes about this; the chances of finding Bill's or Lorraine's body in one hundred acres containing four hundred thousand tons of trash six months after the murders were, to put it mildly, not great.

"So what is the deal with the Curriers as far as the investigation?" Keyes asked Feldis. His tone was as casual as if he were asking about the weather. "I mean, where are they at, the people back east?"

"They haven't found the bodies yet," Feldis said.

Keyes was incredulous. "You're *kidding*."

"No."

"You're sure they have the right house?"

"I think so. We could get out Google Maps and go over it again."

Feldis had forgotten: Keyes had access to the internet. He was following local coverage of the investigation.

“Cause the article I read said they quit digging a week ago Friday or something,” Keyes said. Today was Tuesday.

Feldis paused. “They’re still looking, I guess is what I’m saying.”

“Well, you just said they haven’t found the bodies. That’s pretty—”

“They haven’t found the bodies,” Feldis said. “Yeah, so . . . they’re going to have to keep looking.”

The power had shifted, once again, to Keyes. Feldis didn’t seem to realize this.

“It wasn’t that big of a house,” Keyes said.

“Well, I think what the concern is, Israel, is that they may not be in the house anymore. The house was demolished and stuff was carted away.”

Long pause. If that was true, Keyes knew, the bodies would be in the landfill by now.

“Hmmm,” Keyes said. “Wow. That is . . . crazy.”

“Well, what do you think?” Feldis asked. “Any other things you want to tell us to help about it, or . . . ?”

Keyes didn’t think so. He wouldn’t be giving them anything else about the Curriers, or any other victims, because one thing was now clear: The FBI would never have tied Keyes to the Curriers without his confession, even though stories about their disappearance were all over his computer. The Bureau had not one piece of evidence connecting him in any way.

He was better than he even knew.

Feldis did one thing right. He hinted that the ATF agents were impressed by Keyes’s ability to build guns and silencers, which Keyes found gratifying. He had never been able to talk about his inventiveness with guns or show anyone how beautifully he built them. This he would happily discuss.

Keyes may have borrowed ideas here and there, but he continued to stress his originality. He broke apart revolvers and rifles and retrofitted them to his own specifications. He built his own silencers and used scopes and infrared sights. He devised a moving target system that he’d practice on

in the woods. He tested the silencer he used to kill Bill Currier in his own front yard. “You could do a headshot at fifty yards, easy,” he said. “When I was building it I was shooting in my shed right next door to the neighbors. . . . I had big plans for that gun.”

Keyes declined to elaborate. He would, however, share some other plots and fantasies.

One involved staking out a backwoods road, late at night, a place where people “don’t really expect any[thing] to happen to them,” he said. There would be very little traffic, one car every five or ten minutes, and Keyes pictured himself set back on the side, watching drivers through binoculars. “You know, like shopping,” he said. “You shoot out someone’s tire, she’s by herself, and she doesn’t have much choice but to stop. . . . Probably within half a mile of where you shoot it out.”

That plan wasn’t original. One of Hazelwood’s subjects relayed the same thing in *Dark Dreams*.

But talking about that planned ambush led Keyes to a surprising admission. Even though he had sworn that before taking Samantha he had never done anything in Anchorage, that wasn’t totally true. He had tried, more than once. As he’d said, over the past year or so he’d been having trouble suppressing his urges. He admitted to staking out Earthquake Park over several nights in spring 2011, looking to take a couple, ultimately deciding there was too much traffic.

He told them about the night he bicycled out to a smaller park, a well-known lovers’ lane located at the end of an unlit shore. The area was isolated and silent, flat and open. The only place to hide was behind the lone outhouse, and that’s where Keyes took position. He had his scope and his silencer.

“It was about ten or eleven o’clock,” Keyes said. His voice got low and his speech came slower. “There was a young couple out there in a car. I was just itching for trouble.” Keyes was about fifty yards away, enveloped by darkness, the water and sky a seamless black.

Keyes heard another vehicle snaking down the narrow road and into the lot. It was a patrol car, but this wasn’t an obstacle. It was exciting. “I was thinking about shooting the cop,” Keyes said. “Ever since I was a kid, it’s like . . . [my] white supremacist roots or something, that I was going to ambush a cop. And for some reason that night I had been sitting there long

enough, and I was just bored enough and just amped up enough that I almost did it.”

But the first police officer called for backup, an unusual move for busting trespassers. Within minutes, another patrol car arrived. “I almost got myself into a lot of trouble with that one,” Keyes said. “That one got really close, because I had no way—I didn’t think that he would call in for backup just for some kids sitting out in a park. Almost pulled the trigger, even with him there. . . . I mean nobody would have known.” Keyes was physically excited now, rocking back and forth and jangling his chains.

“Even if I had shot them, you wouldn’t have heard anything. You would’ve just been standing at the window one minute and the next minute they just would have been on the ground. They wouldn’t have even known what happened. But fortunately for everybody, once the other guy showed up I just decided to get back under control for a couple of more weeks or whatever.” Keyes got on his bicycle and rode off into the night, four unwitting people still alive only because he chose restraint.

He resolved to buy a police scanner and never to hunt in Anchorage again.

Except, he said. He had also buried a cache near two hiking trails at the North Fork at Eagle River. He had gone out there a couple of times to see if an opportunity would present itself. None had, he swore to it. Instead, “I decided to go back to my old stomping grounds,” he said. “Back east.”

Another clue. Had Keyes killed more on the East Coast than the West? They could tell he was getting off on telling investigators things they’d never heard nor had ever known to fear. It could be difficult to tell how much he was exaggerating, but so much of what he had told them bore out. They were inclined to believe him.

“I have hundreds of plans,” Keyes said, “and a grand plan.”

Feldis asked what that was, but Keyes was done giving them anything more. Not until the Curriers were found, and not until he got to see pictures. Feldis didn’t follow.

“Pictures of what?” he asked.

“The crime scene,” Keyes said.

“For what?”

“Where they find the bodies.”

“Oh.” Feldis still didn’t understand. “Explain that just so I know what you’re talking about.”

“I want to see the *pic-tures*.”

“Of the bodies?” Feldis was shocked.

“Yeah.”

Feldis got very quiet. In this moment, finally, he was humbled. The Curriers had been dead for nearly a year.

“Why do you want to see them?”

Keyes laughed. “So I know that you found them,” he said.

Feldis understood: That wasn’t the reason. Keyes wanted to revel in what he had done. Feldis wasn’t just scared now. He was petrified, and Keyes saw it all over his face.



It didn’t take long for Steve Payne to find out about Feldis’s secret interrogation, and when he did, there was, finally, a confrontation. A friend of Goeden’s had first heard about the interview down at the courthouse, and when Goeden was told she didn’t believe it at first. This stuff just didn’t happen, especially with such a high-value suspect. Goeden had to make several phone calls to find out: Yes, it’s true. The prosecutor on your case is totally out of control.

The potential damage could be incalculable. In the micro, Payne’s team had worked so hard, with so much deliberation and forethought, to build rapport with Keyes. Jeff Bell was the one who went over to the jail every day just to see if Keyes wanted to talk. Bell was the one who strip-searched him before every visit and was in the room for every interrogation. Keyes liked Bell, his outdoorsy bent and no-bullshit demeanor, the best. They all knew it.

They had also successfully navigated the removal of Doll. Once the case went federal, it was up to Payne and his superiors whom to retain. Bell was concerned about taking Doll out of the room because Keyes had asked for her specifically, and Doll’s presence in that second confession had elicited more details. Keyes was a control freak, and if he insisted Doll be present, they would have to make that happen.

But after Doll left the case Keyes asked for her once or twice, then never mentioned her again. He was likely more concerned with firing his lawyer and getting an execution date.

Otherwise, Payne stressed stability. He was a constant presence, his role to answer any questions Keyes had about the status of the investigation and FBI protocol. Payne and Bell were the ones who realized, early on, that if any member of the team didn't know something they should just admit it, because Keyes would undoubtedly see through them.

Goeden's prior experience was invaluable, and as the lone woman in the room she was their secret weapon. Women in authority—women Keyes wasn't attracted to—made him uncomfortable. Goeden was to their advantage this way. There were times they wanted her to press a specific question or point, to make him embarrassed enough to slip up. And Goeden had a finely honed sense of when to push forward and when to retreat. She never raised her voice.

Adding to this sense of routine, Payne's team brought Keyes the same candy and cigars each time, letting him know, even in small ways, that these agents were people he could rely on and who knew exactly what they were doing.

If Goeden and Payne hadn't learned of Feldis's sit-down and Keyes brought it up their next interview—and why wouldn't he? He was obsessed with every aspect of their backroom dealings, the veracity of their stated attempts to fast-track the death penalty—all he would see was confusion. These agents, for all their experience and training, were human. There was no way they'd be able to hide their surprise. In that moment, all the credibility they'd so carefully built over six weeks would evaporate, probably for good.

It would also tell Keyes: There's a schism here. The left hand doesn't know what the right is doing. He would know to exploit this.

In the macro, they were in new territory. Keyes wanted that execution date and they were working hard against fixed institutional roadblocks to make that happen. Even without that demand, this was an extraordinarily complex case comprised of multiple jurisdictions across the country; state and local law enforcement that needed to be involved but not informed; and a unicorn of a deal secretly made at the highest levels of government. If the FBI hadn't been informed of this interview, it was highly unlikely the

Department of Justice had—and DOJ was the final word, the lone authorizing agency on federal death-penalty cases.

Investigators and prosecutors had to do everything—*everything*—by the book. And Kevin Feldis was pissing all over it.

Nor was this an isolated example. At one point, Feldis wrote up an actual script, lines for himself, Russo, Payne, Bell, and Goeden to say during an interrogation, along with the responses he expected Keyes to give.

The team had pushed back. This was never the tactic in conducting an interrogation. Besides, wasn't it clear by now that there was no way to predict anything Israel Keyes would have to say?

That's how they do it in the Lower 48, Feldis had said.

No, it wasn't.

Feldis's bravado only grew as the rest of them maintained a healthy respect for the very real threat that was Israel Keyes. The team was never unarmed in a room with him. Agents watched as his eyes roamed around, alighting on a plastic utensil or a straw or an electrical outlet, the wheels visibly turning in his head. They knew Keyes was thinking of ways to escape and was smart enough to try it. There were times Jeff Bell felt real fear, especially when Keyes started rubbing himself.

This guy would just as soon kill me as talk to me, Bell thought.

Feldis remained clueless.

Finally, complaints about the federal prosecutor were made through the proper channels, and these went all the way through chain of command to Washington, DC. Word came back to Feldis: Your behavior is unacceptable.

And yet, incredibly, Kevin Feldis remained in the interrogation room, often leading the charge. To this day, no one will say why that was allowed to happen.

TWENTY-FOUR

Every day revealed a new complication in a case that was already complex, but its biggest problem was Keyes's demand for an expedited execution. Keyes had six conversations with investigators throughout April, and in each one he wanted to know: What was going on with the death penalty? They could talk all day, but Keyes wasn't giving up any other victims without a date.



As early as April 12, one month after his arrest, Keyes was in a room with Feldis, Russo, Goeden, and Bell, hammering away on this very topic as Feldis tried to claw the conversation back. Death-penalty cases take a long time, he'd say. Federal death-penalty cases take even longer. There are far too many mechanisms in place, immovable ones, to avoid a wrongful death at the hands of the US government. There were protocols, multiple players, paperwork. There was no way to get an execution date within a year.

Keyes sighed.

"If it's that much paperwork then the federal government needs to discover email. Because there is no way it should take a year, regardless of how many people you have to talk to or how much paperwork you have to file. It should *not* take a year."

Keyes wasn't naive about the law. Ever self-motivated, he had been clocking time in the prison's law library and knew the right questions to ask. He wanted to see if Feldis had done his homework, or was incompetent, or was maybe just stalling.

"I'd like to know recent history, last ten years, federal cases: What was the average body count? What do I have to do to get that?"

Keyes knew his request wasn't unprecedented. "Timothy McVeigh, after Oklahoma City, he waived all his appeals and he went to death row pretty quick."

Feldis acknowledged that. "But you have to understand people look at that very, very differently—a terrorism thing."

"To a point," Keyes said. "But there's a lot of people, people that I grew up with, who looked at him as a patriot. As a hero." Whether Keyes felt the same, he did not say. Bell circled back to McVeigh's execution, which had been fast-tracked at McVeigh's request.

"You know why it went so quickly for him?" Bell asked. "The sheer numbers of what he did. To put it bluntly, and we can't put it any more bluntly than this, sheer volume is going to get you toward your goal."

"But I don't want volume," Keyes said. "I think what I've given you is enough to get me to my goal and if it's not, so be it. I mean, I'm not at all convinced that you can at this point, 'cause you said a lot of this stuff is out of your hands."

Checkmate. Feldis and Russo had told Keyes repeatedly that the final decision rested not with them but the Capital Case Section at the Department of Justice.

"Maybe I should do some of my own reading," Keyes said. "I mean, there haven't even really been that many federal death-penalty cases, have there?"

Feldis reacted as if this was news to him. "Oh!" he said. "No. There aren't as many as there are in some states. That's true."

Russo tried this as a way in. "If there are states that there are victims in, we can research what the laws of that state are in case it gets you closer to what your goal is."

"I would rather involve as few states as possible, let's put it that way," Keyes said. "We've already got two states involved, so . . ."

Russo tried another tactic. "Local cops, man—if they start getting wind that they can close some cases by blaming it on you? They may do that. They may give you credit for things you didn't even do."

Keyes laughed. "I don't think they'll go that far. They've got to have remains at least."

This was another clue for Bell. It was possible Keyes had burned most of his victims, or buried them, or dumped them in bodies of water. Even

victims left above ground, as the Carriers had been, would be long decomposed.

Russo went another way. Keyes was a father. Surely he could understand that parents needed closure, right?

Not really, Keyes said. "I'd feel better off thinking they were just on a beach somewhere in Mexico than knowing they were horribly raped and murdered." He laughed. "The bottom line is, everybody sitting in this room wants the same thing. You want all the information I can give you. I want to give you all the information I can reasonably give you. You want me to be punished and I want to be punished. So, I mean obviously we're all working toward the same goals, whether or not we agree on how we get there."

For Bell, the entire exchange was a waste of time. Keyes had hijacked an interrogation about other victims and turned it into a debate over the death penalty. "All right," Bell replied. His tone, normally so unflappable, was clipped. He switched off the tape recorder in disgust.

It was all so frustrating, not just Keyes's manipulations but Feldis's grandstanding. All of it was costing momentum. That they had identified three possible victims without Keyes didn't matter; they couldn't close those cases, let alone inform the families, unless he confessed. Risky as it was, they had to keep pushing. They needed more bodies.

PART IV



TWENTY-FIVE

The FBI threw all its resources behind the search for the Curriers. Each morning, hundreds of agents set out shoulder to shoulder in the summer heat, beneath gulls and vultures in shape-shifting formations. Some of these agents were volunteering their own vacation time to help, picking through ten thousand tons of molting trash with potato rakes, fighting through the stench of methane gas and pure rot.

Weeks went by. As Payne and Bell understood it, this was the largest such recovery search in FBI history.

And guess what?

“They have not found the bodies.”

Keyes sat across from Feldis at the FBI’s offices. It was May 16, and when Feldis told him this, actually began the conversation with this, Keyes laughed in his face. The FBI had been searching since he confessed that first week of April.

“Guess I spoke too soon on that one,” Keyes said. “Why don’t they turn the dogs loose?”

“It is a dump,” Bell said. “It’s not safe for . . .” Even he was reaching.

Now Keyes wanted to wait to see if the FBI would ever find the bodies.

With each day that passed, Bell knew the FBI was losing credibility. He tried to pierce Keyes’s sense of omnipotence, the idea only he could give them other homicides.

“In just the little bit of investigating that we’ve done,” Bell said, “you’re probably not going to be shocked at how many people are missing. Thirty trips that we have, there are at least as many missing people or more, everywhere you’ve been.”

“Right,” Keyes said.

Again, Bell stressed control. So far, even with this massive search in Vermont, they had kept Keyes’s name out of the media, and this was a big story there. The Dive Team had recovered the murder weapon at Blake Falls with zero media coverage. The only way, Bell said, to keep his bosses from reaching out to other jurisdictions was another confession. After all, Keyes was trying to protect his family, wasn’t he?

“They’ve been getting threats and things like that from the public,” Keyes admitted. “And it’s hard for them because they’re all still convinced I’m innocent.”

Bell couldn’t hide his surprise. “Your family in *Texas*? Or your family here?”

“Mostly here,” Keyes said. Kimberly would come visit and say things like, “I know you didn’t do this,” and Keyes wouldn’t reply, allowing her to think it was true. Keyes was concerned what would happen to Kimberly when she finally accepted the truth.

“Everybody I’ve known, to a certain extent, you could say they’re my victims too,” Keyes said. “Because they’re going to have to pay for this for a lot of years to come.”

Bell circled back to keeping Keyes’s existence secret. And there was a part of Keyes that wanted to talk. He was enamored with all the attention in this room, the fascination he held for the FBI and the behavioral analysts. He impressed and confounded them all.

“Well . . .” Keyes said. “Do I get a cigar today?”

“If it’ll help,” Bell said.

“It’ll help,” Keyes replied. “I can give you something on—I’m not going to give you a body yet, and I’m not going to talk about anything that happened on that trip, but I will give you something that can verify the timeline of what I’m talking about.”

Amazing. Keyes was getting close to giving them another victim.

“All right,” he said. “So New York. Don’t remember the exact year but there was a bank robbery in Tupper Lake. That was me and I’m sure that was probably the only bank robbery in that town for a while, so that will give you a time stamp or whatever. A time frame.”

Listening in from another room, Kat Nelson Googled “Bank robbery, Tupper Lake, NY.” The top hit was a news report dated April 21, 2009. She

texted Bell the date.

Keyes said he had first gone to Vermont to dig up some guns, one of which he would use, two years later, in kidnapping the Curriers. He used this same gun in Tupper Lake, a town so small that the bank robbery brought out the entire police force and the SWAT team, which put the local school on lockdown. This was the biggest thing that happened there in years, if ever. Keyes read one or two news stories about it but never followed up, burying the guns and money in two different locations before driving away.

So there: They had a new piece of information to trade to Vermont.

That wasn't good enough, Feldis said. They needed something bigger, something high stakes. "I thought you were going to tell us that there's a body in New York," Feldis said. "I can take that and say, 'We've got something solid.'"

"Well, like I say, there are—" Keyes paused, then chuckled. "There are . . . more things I could talk about in New York, but I'm not going to give any specifics right now."

Feldis asked again. They needed a show of good faith to convince their bosses. If Keyes wanted to protect his family, if he wanted to remain largely unknown, he had to give them something big. Not a name, not a date, just a body. Or bodies. How many bodies in New York?

Keyes mulled this over in silence. Four minutes went by.

"There's one in New York."

Was this person from New York?

Keyes wouldn't say.

Did that person make the news? Feldis asked.

Keyes wouldn't answer.

"So there was some news about it," Bell said.

"Yeah," Keyes said.

"The remains," Bell said. "Are they buried or in water? Are they going to be retrievable eventually?"

"Good question."

"Buried?"

Keyes grunted. "There should be something."

Now they had a fourth victim. No age, no gender, no home state, but recent enough that Kat Nelson could retrace Keyes's movements all along

the northeast, then match his travels against people who went missing in that time frame. If they could crack this, if they could identify this body, they might make Keyes begin to doubt himself.

TWENTY-SIX

Meanwhile, Nelson's joint timeline for Keyes and Kimberly was coming together. The team now believed that Keyes and Kimberly were telling the truth, that Kimberly knew nothing of his crimes or his true self. But he did travel with her extensively and often put plane tickets and hotel rooms on her credit cards, so Nelson would now have to merge the couple's travels together, then break apart the dates when Keyes left Kimberly to travel alone.

The Bureau would eventually make one of their timelines public. A much more detailed one would be kept for the FBI's internal use only.

Agents were getting a broader sense of Keyes's most frequent destinations: Oregon, California, Wyoming, Utah, New York, Maine, Indiana, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Florida, Ohio, Minnesota, Arizona, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, Illinois, Hawaii.

And not just tiny towns but major cities: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland, Sacramento, San Diego, Boston, New Haven, Manchester, Chicago, Seattle, Portland, Salt Lake City, Cleveland, Jackson, Mobile, Omaha, Phoenix, Las Vegas, Orlando, New Orleans, Denver, Albuquerque, Houston, Oklahoma City.

He crossed the border into Canada often. "Canadians don't count," he once told them, and though he tried to pass it off as a joke, investigators took that seriously. He spent time in Montreal as a young man, easy enough travel from upstate New York, and Keyes would eventually admit only to hiring prostitutes there. But investigators knew what that was about: practice, especially with bondage. It's common among serial killers, allowing for the bifurcation between public face—good husband, solid family man—and the true one. If something goes wrong, risk is minimal;

missing prostitutes are rarely high priority, and Keyes hired them often. Upon his arrest in Texas, investigators found a list of names and numbers for sex workers, some transgender, in Louisiana. He hired prostitutes in Anchorage, meeting them at local motels. He wouldn't go into detail, but admitted that investigators had a good sense of his proclivities. After all, they had his porn collection.

Keyes also crossed the border into Mexico often, sometimes on foot. But as Kat Nelson learned from his journal entries, these trips were about more than prostitutes or hunting. And they were fairly recent.

May 12, 2006: "Travel to surgery," entered one day after he'd driven to San Diego. Keyes noted an unspecified procedure the next day and a two-day stay in an unnamed hospital. "Travel back to Washington" on May 15.

June 21, 2006: "Mexico for surgery follow-up."

There was no reason to believe these entries were about anyone else. The Keyes family didn't believe in doctors or medicine. Israel himself had no close friends. He was still living with Tammie in Neah Bay, and she reported getting all her medical care locally. These were surgeries that Keyes kept secret. Why?

April 24, 2007: "Travel to SD for dental work and medical lap band fill."

April 27, 2007: "Fill & DDS 11 am"; "10 am fill."

Nelson noted here that a Google search of a phone number Keyes logged was for the office of Dr. Lourdes Perez in Tijuana, Mexico.

April 28, 2007: "Fill."

These entries, a little less than two months after he moved to Anchorage, were very odd. Not so much the dental work but the gastric band. Keyes was a tall, rangy guy, always had been. Aside from his military record, investigators learned he had also been a marathoner. His first recorded race was in early 2006 in Olympia, Washington, and he later ran at least one more in Port Angeles. He had been a manual laborer from a very young age. Why was a lean, strong athlete, then just twenty-eight years old, getting elective surgery to limit his food intake?

That wasn't all. On April 29, 2007, Keyes had an appointment at COSMED, a plastic surgery clinic in Tijuana. Travel records put him there. The FBI had some pictures of Keyes in the army, and those were nearly twenty years old. He didn't look all that different. What, exactly, had he changed?

Keyes spent the next two days, likely recovering, at the Calistoga Golden Haven Hot Springs Spa and Resort in Napa Valley, California.

An entry for October 8, 2007, read only, "Pre-op."

October 10, 2007: "Op."

It's unclear if investigators ever asked Keyes about these entries or elective surgeries, or why he would schedule them out of state or out of the country, keeping them secret from Kimberly and his daughter. That said: DNA cannot be altered, but science can minimize how much of it someone might leave behind. Fingerprints can be surgically modified. Body hair can be lasered off. Perspiration can be short-circuited with Botox. Keyes admitted the one thing he worried about leaving at the Currier's house was DNA from his sweat that night.

Most telling was the gastric surgery. Keyes was nothing if not a time-management master. If investigators thought about it, Keyes could easily go at least twelve hours without eating, as he seemed to have done on the nights he took Samantha and the Curriers. Here was something else—far less pressing but no less sinister—to consider: Had Keyes begun biohacking his own body in his quest to become the perfect serial killer?

As Jeff Bell would come to say: "Anything's possible with him."

TWENTY-SEVEN

For all they had learned about Keyes, agents still knew little about his time in the army. As promised, Keyes had given Payne and his team names of guys he had served with, all in the interest of containing media attention. In truth, this was just faster than waiting on the Department of the Army to dig up records from 1998, no doubt boxed in some warehouse basement.

They worked up a list of questions for all his fellow soldiers:

Was Keyes ever physically violent?

Did they know him to harm animals?

How did he describe his upbringing?

What was his religion?

Was he a white supremacist?

Where were you stationed?

What kind of training did Keyes have?

Did he display any particular aptitude?

Did he drink? Use drugs?

Did he have any pornography? If so, do you know what kind?

What did they know about his brandings?

Was Keyes homosexual?

Was Keyes racist?

How old was he?

What were his plans after the army?

What was his physical appearance back then?

Could that last question have gone to those elective procedures? At the very least, it had to do with the brandings, some of which predated his army

service.

Each man told the FBI that Keyes stood out in several ways. One was his sheer size. Keyes stood between six foot two and six foot four and was built like a rock, 230 pounds of muscle. They recalled him having a huge nose, just enormous. He was about twenty-two years old.

Keyes described his family as Amish or like the Amish. He said he had been disowned for joining the military. He occasionally talked about his mother and some siblings but never his father. His commanding officer told agents that Keyes called his parents “‘nomadic hippies’ who moved from ‘cult to cult to cult.’” At the time, Keyes said his parents were living in Idaho—something the agents hadn’t heard before—with the Amish. “Keyes was close to his younger sisters and was trying to save money to get them out of the lifestyle,” the CO said. “It was never spoken, but [my] impression was that Keyes or his sisters were abused by their father.”



Some of the guys said Keyes was so nonviolent he took a punch and never hit back. Others said he broke someone’s nose and once threw a mortar tube through a TV. Some said he had at least one girlfriend who came to visit. Others said they never saw her. Some recalled him as clumsy. Others recalled a superior athlete. Some swore Keyes had no prejudice at all. Others recalled a homophobic white supremacist.

On a few things, they all agreed. It was immediately obvious that, for all his physical strength, Keyes was an “awkward dude” who was probably still a virgin.

There was one guy in particular who Keyes worshipped. In fact, some of the guys often joked that they were more like a couple than army buddies. This was probably the same individual who took Keyes to his first concert, at the KeyArena on September 22, 2000, and from that night on, “Keyes liked what [the other soldier] liked.” This transparent and somewhat desperate desire Keyes had to belong, to have someone help him become something he hadn’t known existed—cool—explained so much: the bingeing on alcohol and drugs, the secrecy about his childhood, even the brandings. No one thought the brandings were about anything more than rebellion.

But they were. This was something Keyes would share with agents. His brandings, at first, represented his rejection of God and his interest in Satanism. Initially, Keyes thought, there had to be a higher reason he was like this—why it was he liked hurting animals and people and never felt guilt or even shame. Ultimately that logic didn't hold, because Keyes realized he couldn't believe in the devil without believing in God. Evil was something else entirely.

“At first I was pretty conflicted it about it,” Keyes said. “But that was all because of the way I had been raised and stuff. And I grew up with good people. I was never—everybody's nice to each other and everything's all sunshine and roses and uh—so that's why it was disturbing to me. Because it seemed like for a long time I was—I thought everybody else was faking it and everybody was like me and they just didn't act like it. Or I figured that I was a demon child or whatever. I don't know.”

At some point in his twenties, Keyes said, he had come to accept himself. He had also come to accept that he, too, might never know a why.



Another thing the guys in his platoon agreed on: All that heavy drinking never impacted his performance. Keyes was a “supersoldier” who thrived in training. He once carried over 110 pounds on a 15-mile march. He could fix anything. He was extremely intelligent, a jack-of-all-trades. He spent a lot of time and money at the tactical tailor near base, improving his gear and even building his own ghillie suit, an elaborate, three-dimensional piece of head-to-toe camouflage.

It's not clear how Keyes learned to do this; even specialists need months to make just one. And why would he even need it? He was in mortar. Ghillies are for snipers. Most military snipers make their own.

Was Keyes trained as a sniper?

That remains unclear. The Department of the Army released only a few pages of his military record. Missing was any mention of the monthlong special training he underwent in Panama in 1999, training a fellow soldier recounted to the FBI, or his time on the Egypt-Israel border from 2001–2002, or his visit to Saudi Arabia, or how close he came to joining the Army Rangers.

Back in Anchorage, the team was at least relieved that Keyes, so far, had been largely truthful. He had been the best soldier in his unit, a model one. Even his CO called Keyes's performance excellent. He was such a star that when the FBI called, his CO assumed it was for a background check so Keyes could work for the government.

Yet there were two incidents the CO didn't seem to know about. One was the night Keyes left Egypt for some "rest and relaxation" in Israel.

Keyes often crossed that border while in Egypt, but this night stood out. A member of their unit said that he, Keyes, and some other guys rented a hotel suite and hired a prostitute. They had all been drinking, and when the woman arrived, she went into a separate room with Keyes.

Half an hour had elapsed when the woman came flying out, Keyes close behind. He tried giving her cash but she wouldn't take it, and he got in front of her and blocked the door. In a panic, she kicked Keyes hard enough to get away.

The other guys, this soldier claimed, were in shock. They kept asking: What did you do to freak her out so much? Nothing, Keyes said. "I threw her around a little bit," he later told Jeff Bell. "I wasn't going to let her run the show."

Again: control.

There had been another girl, Keyes said, this one a Norwegian exchange student, very young, who he met in Tel Aviv. Keyes knew where her dorm room was because she had told him, so of course he went to see her.

"I wouldn't say that was, like, an outright rape, because were we hanging out and stuff," he said. "And I was going to—I almost—well, I did lose control a little bit as things progressed. And that's when I realized that if I was going to do that kind of stuff it had to be just complete strangers from then on." He realized he couldn't do anything where he lived or while he was in the army.

And once he got out, he said, "It didn't take long."

Yet Keyes still didn't seem to recognize his other defects. He didn't see that his attitude toward animals, what he called his hatred of them, was not normal. It's possible Keyes thought it was impressive to tell some of the guys about the cat he tortured and killed in Colville, or how he loved chasing squirrels with a chainsaw, or to volunteer what he called "the best way" to kill a goat, offering specifics of the violent and agonizing death to follow, or to put two scorpions in an ammo can, as he sometimes did on base, and watch them fight to the death, inviting the guys to watch too.

It didn't take long for most of his platoon to realize Israel Keyes was fucked up. This assessment, Keyes knew. He had told the agents in Anchorage that almost everyone recognized what he euphemistically called his "psychosocial issues." They all began keeping their distance.

Except for one guy, he said, a soldier named Perkins. Keyes still called him "Perk"; they had been very close. This was the one Keyes mentioned to investigators, the one he recognized as most like himself.

When the FBI found Perkins, he agreed to talk. He and Keyes were such confidantes that Keyes had told Perkins all about his future plans.

Back then, Perkins said, he and Keyes had "normal Army talk," about how to commit crimes and steal money. Lots of it. This would begin once Keyes got out of the military. First, Keyes said, he had a plan to rob a string of banks along one stretch of rural highway. He thought he could get away with it as long as he struck at the right time in the right town.

But he had an even bigger idea. Keyes, Perkins said, "talked about his plans to kidnap people and hold them for ransom on a mass scale."

Did Perkins think Keyes was kidding?

He did not.

It remains unclear if by "mass scale" Keyes meant many people at once, or a large number of people he would take individually and incrementally. It's certainly possible he envisioned the former, or wanted to work toward that, but if the FBI ever thought they needed more proof, here it was: Israel Keyes wasn't exaggerating. They had been right to cast their net across the

United States. Now they had to alert Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Panama for missing persons that fit his timeline.

Perkins continued. Keyes said the ransoms would have to be “a reasonable amount of money that people could actually come up with.”

Then what?

Well, Keyes said, of course he could never give anyone back. His captives could identify him.

When Keyes said he’d never “give anyone back,” agents asked Perkins, what did he take that to mean?

“I assumed he meant that he’d have to kill them,” Perkins said. “Or dispose of them.”

Are you surprised, they asked, that Keyes has been arrested for kidnapping and murder?

“I’m surprised he . . . got caught,” Perkins said. “He was smarter than that.”

TWENTY-EIGHT

On Wednesday, May 23, 2012, in a packed federal courtroom, bound by leg irons and handcuffed to a belly chain, seated at the defense table surrounded by eight armed guards, four on each side, with at least six US Marshals in the back, Keyes had another surprise.

He made a run for it.

Jeff Bell, seated next to Steve Payne in the gallery, thought that Keyes was planning something. Bell had watched as Keyes turned away from the defense table and looked off to Bell's right, where an attractive young woman was seated. What was he doing? Bell and Payne watched as Keyes's expression hardened.

Bell got up and moved two seats over, positioning himself between Keyes and the woman. Frustrated, Keyes turned around to face the judge, and as his lawyer began addressing the court, Keyes sprung out of his chair, free from his leg irons and handcuffs.

Suddenly he was over the gallery's railing and jumping rows, leaping from chair to chair to chair, never making a sound as he dragged one guard trying to stop him. Bell and Payne leapt up and reached for him, ending up in a tumble of three more guards all trying to restrain Keyes.

Such was his strength that it took a Taser to bring him down. Bell watched as electricity coursed through his body, eyes wide open, Keyes in ecstasy.

It lasted mere seconds, but the escape attempt was a grave embarrassment. The most wanted man in Anchorage, now under guard by the FBI and the

US Marshals, had nearly escaped federal court. Everyone who had eyes on Keyes that day, from his transport from the Anchorage Correctional Complex to the unmarked van to the hearing, bore responsibility.

James Koenig had been in the courtroom. He had done everything the FBI asked, and the task force had just let him down.

For Keyes, the attempt was in line with his overall philosophy: Why not? They could lock him up with chains and bolts and he'd break them. He could show brazen contempt for the court and still represent himself. He could not be contained, even in solitary confinement twenty-three hours a day.

Now that Keyes had almost escaped, there was no reason he wouldn't try again.

Payne and Bell talked to Keyes the next day. In a less official capacity, Payne would deal with Feldis and Bell would deal with the jail. In typical Alaskan fashion, all involved knew best: Let's not leave a paper trail.

Bell had known Lieutenant Rick Chandler, the officer who ran the Anchorage Correctional Complex, for years. He made it a point to play in a monthly poker game with corrections officers. In his line of work, rapport was everything.

But even Bell was having a hard time remaining affable. Keyes was the most high-value, high-risk inmate Alaska had ever seen. If Bell had his way, Keyes would be held in a federal Supermax—if only Alaska had one.

What had Chandler been doing all this time? Keyes had been held at ACC since extradition in late March. That was two months to get it through his officers' heads: This prisoner was not like the others.

Yet Chandler and his guards remained ill-equipped for an inmate like Keyes. Really, they should have been trained and retrained. Chandler should have called in the warden and top corrections officers from Spring Creek, the maximum-security prison for men down in Seward, for help. Chandler should have been looking into high-security, high-tech restraints:

Taser-like Stun-Cuffs or coded-key handcuffs and leg irons. Or he could have just put Keyes's cuffed hands in a box and locked that.

It was time for a come-to-Jesus moment, but Bell needed to be honest about his own failings here too. In the go-along-to-get-along culture of Anchorage, Bell had been reluctant to officially sound the alarm about ACC. As it was, he had already let some mistakes go.

Like the day he came to strip-search Keyes before transport and had been left with him, alone, in a small, locked room. No armed guards had been stationed inside, and the armed guard who stood watch outside had simply wandered off. Bell knew that Keyes could kill him with his bare hands. He had had to put his face to the window and yell—with more authority than panic, hopefully—for a guard to come unlock that door.

Bell had truly been afraid that day. He didn't think Keyes would actually harm him, but what did his best guess matter? Then there was the day Bell caught sight of Keyes from across the table at the FBI's offices making ever-so-slight motions with his jaw. Bell, more suspicious than anyone in the room, forced Keyes to spit out what was in his mouth—a sliver of wood. The guards were giving Keyes pencils. He had been whittling them into lock picks with his teeth.

Bell warned Chandler, and Chandler had promised: No more pencils.

Then came the day Bell caught Keyes wearing a thin plastic bracelet. Out of Keyes's earshot, Bell asked the guards: What's this? Oh, came the reply. He takes a bagged lunch to court. That's the cellophane from his sandwiches.

Bell was floored. "You know, he can make stuff out of that," Bell said. Same with the dental floss they kept giving him. Bell told the guards: From now on, unwrap his food and throw everything away.

Bell's warnings had not been taken seriously. In fact, they had not been taken at all, because that was how Keyes had nearly escaped. In the three hours between transport and the court hearing, Keyes had been given lunch, the standard meal for the standard inmate: a brown bag containing a carton of milk, an apple, and a sandwich wrapped in cellophane. Keyes had used his stored-up pencil slivers to pick the locks on his cuffs and leg irons, then used the cellophane to make his leg irons look tied together.

Chandler promised Bell that they would do better. Keyes was in a ground-floor cell with thick Plexiglas frontage, and the unit's guard had a

desk ten feet away and a straight, unobstructed sight line to Keyes—except when seated, but no big deal. Sneakers and shoelaces had been confiscated; now Keyes would only wear slippers. And no more pencils, no more cellophane.

Bell wasn't sure this would be enough, but at least he had some say in Keyes's transport. Double leg irons, now and forever. The first time Bell strapped them on, Keyes cracked a joke. "This gives me six hours," he said—he had needed only three to unlock the single.

Bell couldn't help but chuckle, even as he wondered: Where did Keyes learn to do this? All of this? What would he do next?

Twenty-four hours after the escape attempt, Payne and Bell spoke to Keyes at the FBI. Their goal was two pronged: Get Keyes back on track by highlighting a problem he'd created—the attention and media coverage he'd drawn to himself—while promising they could fix it. Vermont would still withhold his name. The prosecutors were still on board with getting him an execution date, quickly and without a trial. The team hadn't made anything public about the body in New York, even though they had, without his help, identified ten missing persons that fit his timeline. They weren't even punishing him for attempting to escape. The unspoken consensus in that room was that really, it was pointless. There was no point in pretending otherwise.

Bell wanted to know, aside from the obvious, why Keyes had done it. "What's changed since yesterday?" he asked.

"Everybody knows what my bottom-line concern is," Keyes said. "That I wanted this all wrapped up as quickly as possible. And I was in open court yesterday and obviously that's not happening." He believed that lawyers on both sides were dragging out the process. He was beginning to turn on Russo and Feldis—nothing against Payne and Bell, whom he trusted. To a point. But they were more than two months in and no closer to an execution date, let alone a global agreement covering future confessions.

"If I have to do it, I will," Keyes said. "If I have to take the next step and just freaking . . . it's going to turn into even more of a three-ring circus."

Five days later, Frank Russo presented Keyes with a letter signed by Vermont's federal prosecutor promising not to charge Keyes in the Curriers' homicide and, as best they could, to shield Keyes's name from the press. Russo told Keyes he was still working on the global agreement, but the escape attempt had made that more difficult. It would still happen, Russo said, but the delay wasn't their fault. Keyes understood that.

"I think this is a great amount of progress," Russo said. "I think it's going to help us move the ball forward."

"I do want to continue to cooperate," Keyes said. "I have a few ideas . . . It all depends on how we can work it out."

"What are your ideas?" Payne asked.

Keyes had a question about Washington State. He had some things he might like to talk about, but he wasn't sure they would help his case unless they were federal. Russo could help. Washington, Russo said, had two federal districts, east and west. Seattle, for example, was eastern.

"Ellensburg," Keyes asked, "is west or east?"

"East," Russo said.

Keyes laughed. "You're going to need both districts," he said. He had something of a makeup gift for them.

Bodies in Washington State.

TWENTY-NINE

There were four, Keyes said. Two on one side of the state, two on the other.

The first two victims he murdered sometime between July 2001 and 2005. They had been together.

The other two he took and killed separately, sometime in the summer or fall of 2005, he said. Maybe 2006.

In one case he used a Bayliner boat he'd purchased years ago—from Tammie's ex-husband, actually—to dispose of at least one body, maybe two, in Lake Crescent. Keyes said he had a lot of plans for that boat but wouldn't elaborate. He chose that lake because it's one of the deepest in Washington, maybe seven hundred feet at its lowest point. Keyes didn't think anyone had ever been to its bottom.

He took one male and female pair, he said, and another female-female pair, but wouldn't explain their relationships to each other. And for today and going forward, there wasn't much more Keyes would say about these victims. He gave investigators just enough to tantalize, Washington the perfect state with all of her missing hikers and campers and boaters, so many disappearances and deaths presumed accidental. There were two states he went through a lot, he said: New York and Washington. They thought they could solve cold cases without him? He'd like to see them try.

And they would. Investigators had to work Washington State alone, but his taunting here raised a possibility: just as he liked to move his victims' cars or bikes far from where he took them, could Keyes be moving details and dates to fool investigators? He remembered every single aspect of his crimes; the names of all his victims; how, where, and when he killed them; where and how he left them; the locations of every single buried kill kit; how he got in and out of every town, city, and state. Why give such a huge

time frame for the first two victims? Why say he took the latter two separately yet also imply they were together? Was he worried that investigators might be able to identify them?

He very well might have been, because when Kat Nelson looked at his cell phone records, she found him in close proximity to a double murder in Washington. A very high profile one.

Early on July 11, 2006, four people set out on the remote Pinnacle Lake Trail in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. It was a warm and clear summer day, a Tuesday, no wind, sight lines for miles. One pair were mother and daughter, who made fast friends with the other pair, husband and wife. They set out together, chatting amiably, until they reached a Y-shaped fork.

The husband and wife went right, toward Bear Lake.

The mother and daughter went left, toward Pinnacle Lake.

Sometime after, the wife heard a loud noise off in the distance, like thunder. But the sky was blue and clear, so the couple hiked on, eventually stopping to picnic before slowly making their way back.

It was 2:30 in the afternoon, four and a half hours since their hike began, when the couple encountered the mother and daughter again. They looked like they were squatting, or hunched over. Their bodies had been posed right along the trail.

The man grabbed his ice ax and the couple rushed down the rocky terrain. “We have never spent a more terrifying half hour than our hike back to the trailhead,” he recalled.

Mary Cooper had been fifty-six years old. Her daughter, Susanna Stodden, was twenty-seven.

First responders—park staff—couldn’t tell how Susanna and Mary had been killed. There were no visible wounds. Homicides in Washington State parks were extremely rare. Or so went the thinking.

The case was so odd, so random and macabre, it made national headlines and was covered in *People* magazine. Both women were kind, bookish, well-loved in their community—hardly your typical murder victims. Weeks into the investigation, even with the FBI’s help, authorities had to admit:

This was likely the rarest of crimes, an arbitrary double murder in broad daylight. Mary and Susanna had each been shot once in the head with a .22. Unclear, though, was whether the shooter was at close range or a sniper.

No real leads ever emerged.

Nelson put Keyes near that park. His cell had pinged towers in Neah Bay and Port Angeles that day starting at 3:53 A.M. and ending at 5:54 P.M.

Port Angeles, where Keyes spent a lot of time, is a three-hour drive from the Pinnacle Lake trailhead. Someone like him could make it in two. Also: He liked a .22. He was a sniper. He liked national parks and forests and loved naive and inexperienced rangers. He liked remote locations. He liked targeting pairs. He talked about staging bodies. He had spent hundreds of hours in the woods, utterly still, waiting for the perfect victims.

“Back when I was smart,” Keyes told them, “I would let them come to me.”

Between the hours of 1:48 and 4:41 P.M. the day Mary and Susanna were murdered, Nelson found that signature tell: Keyes’s cell phone had gone dark.

THIRTY

S ometime after the escape attempt—when, exactly, the FBI will not say—Keyes’s prison cell was searched while he was not in it. Inside was a letter to one of his brothers. “They can’t convict a dead man,” Keyes wrote. He had also written, in a separate document, of at least six victims, all unnamed, but three identifiable as Samantha and the Curriers. The Bureau would spend months trying to analyze this.

Also recovered was a noose, likely made from a bedsheet. Keyes had made allusions to suicide all along, but now the FBI knew for sure that Keyes had imminent plans. And surprise, surprise: Bell’s warnings still went unheeded. Whether it was haplessness or stupidity or laziness, nothing had changed at ACC. Even when Chandler learned that Keyes was still shaving with disposable razors—against express orders—he did nothing more than tape a handwritten sign to Keyes’s cell.

DO NOT GIVE THIS MAN A RAZOR BLADE.

Chandler had purchased an electric razor, which Keyes was only to use under direct supervision, but guards were ignoring that. Bell asked Chandler, in essence: What the fuck? Did his guards want Keyes to kill himself? Or were they just that dumb?

Chandler sighed. He could only write the note and post it on the door. “And if these idiots don’t read it,” Chandler said, “there’s nothing I can do.”

There’s nothing I can do.

No sentiment captured this stage of the investigation more. Bell couldn’t get Chandler to do his job. Payne couldn’t get Feldis out of the room. Keyes

couldn't fire his attorney or get an execution date. There was no one in charge, not one person or panel or institution that could fix it.

And they couldn't even keep their core team together. Payne, Bell, and Goeden, who had come to regard themselves as the Three Musketeers—who had developed the best rapport with Keyes, who shared everything from their theories of his crimes to the emotional toll this case was taking—were breaking up. Payne got word that summer that the Bureau was taking him off the case. He would be out formally by October, when he would report to Quantico for his next assignment. It was time to start transferring himself out and turning the role of case agent over to Goeden.

Now Feldis would be her problem.

And Feldis, who kept telling Keyes “the buck stops with me,” who kept saying he alone could keep Keyes out of the news and get the death penalty, was the one Keyes trusted least. “It's not that I don't believe you,” Keyes recently told Feldis, “but no offense, I don't believe you.”

And Keyes exploited their desperation, soon trading his hated paper slippers for sneakers and shoelaces and getting his newspapers. He even had a wilderness survival guide in his cell. Shock didn't begin to cover Bell's reaction when he found out. Didn't Chandler know that Ted Bundy had escaped from prison twice? Keyes idolized Bundy.

Chandler wasn't all that open to criticism. Bell may have issues with him and his guards, but at ACC, they were all suspicious of the feds. The big rumor was that the FBI had cut a backroom deal with Keyes, who seemingly got whatever he wanted. How else had his mandatory stay in psych suddenly been commuted?

Bell and the team denied it, but whatever the truth, it didn't really matter. There was nothing they could do.



Things got worse. Early on the morning of July 18, Bell, Goeden, and Russo sat down with Keyes at the FBI. They had to admit their latest failure before he heard it from someone else.

The Bureau was calling off the landfill search. “Throwing in the towel,” was the dispiriting cliché Russo used. Keyes had beaten them again.

Right now, Russo informed Keyes, prosecutors in Vermont were meeting with the Curriers' families. Then they would issue a statement to the local media, which had questions about the hundreds of FBI agents in their small town, picking through the landfill. It hadn't been hard for reporters to figure it out and demand answers.

Vermont, Russo said, wanted to renege on their earlier agreement and name Keyes for the murders. Not just that—they wanted to charge him. Russo's voice was shaking.

"I wish I kept my mouth shut," Keyes said. "How is it that they even have any evidence on me for the Curriers? Because it's all your evidence. All you have is my interviews."

Russo tried deflection. He said he didn't really know. It was probably some rogue reporter out east, and what could he do about it all the way up in Alaska? Besides, Vermont had the right—the responsibility—to reassure the community, to get justice for the Curriers' families.

"It's a tough sell," Russo said.

Not really, Keyes replied. "They haven't found anything at the dump. They can tell the family whatever they want." He was rubbing himself now.

Russo kept going. There could be positives to this, he said. Keyes could spin it to his family however he wanted—maybe even make himself look kind of good here, giving answers to two grieving families. Despite all the plans he'd presented to Keyes for a global agreement with the feds, Russo never had a plan for dealing with potential fallout in Vermont, and he admitted this to Keyes. But, Russo said, he could definitely come up with one going forward.

Not to worry, he continued. These things move slowly. It would probably be a month before Vermont even decided whether to name Keyes.

Two days later, an NBC affiliate in Vermont named Keyes.

Bell knew they might not ever recover from this. For months, they had been selling themselves as the all-powerful FBI, keeping this case under seal. They promised over and over they could tell other jurisdictions what to do and when to do it.

They had fucked up. Keyes was incensed.

“I told you from the get-go, before I told you where the freaking bodies were left, I told you that I didn’t want the locals involved. And the first thing you do is make a big scene and do a big freaking archaeological dig right alongside a main road.”

Russo backpedaled furiously.

“You can’t just walk in there and say, ‘We’re the feds.’”

“Well, you told me you could.”

“I—I don’t think we did.”

“No. You said you would control it.”

“Yeah,” Russo said, his voice going slack. “And to whatever extent we could, we did.”

“You haven’t controlled it at all,” Keyes said. Where was his global agreement? Where was his execution date? Four months had gone by. What was their problem? If the FBI wanted more names and locations, they’d better move faster, because all those bodies?

“Frankly,” Keyes said, “they’ll keep.”

Bell wanted to throw Keyes off, to find a victim without his help. He had taken Keyes at his word, that if they could identify a victim without his help, he’d confess. During the Currier confession, Keyes said he’d traveled through Indiana on the way to Vermont. He had typed “Missing persons, Indiana, June 2011” into Google’s search bar.

And what do you know: There was a missing persons case that fit. Another high-profile one.

On the night of June 3, 2011, Lauren Spierer, a twenty-year-old sophomore at Indiana University, went out for a night of drinking and was never seen again.

Her station in life—young, white, pretty, blond, a well-raised coed who doesn’t just run away—made her case national, covered by CNN, *People*, Fox News, *The Huffington Post*, *The Jewish Daily Forward*, *USA Today*, *America’s Most Wanted*, *Dateline*, and *20/20*.

Kat Nelson had been able to put Keyes driving through three tollbooths in Indiana that night. Like Samantha, Spierer was an attractive young woman who'd vanished in the dark. Like the Curriers, there had been not a single clue to go on.

Bell talked it over with the team and they concluded: Why not ask him about Lauren? If they could show Keyes they knew where he was that night, at a tollbooth right outside Bloomington—and Bloomington was where Lauren was last seen—maybe they could dazzle him with their *CSI*-ish powers.

So Bell brought in a photo of Spierer and confronted him.

“Did you do this?” Bell asked. “People are going to think you did this. You were in Indiana that night.”

Keyes laughed.

“That’s how hard it’s going to be,” he said, “for you guys to figure it out.”

THIRTY-ONE

There were, investigators believed, a few victims that Keyes might have allowed to live. This hunch was the product of a moment when luck swung the right way, days before Keyes was named in Vermont, days before he decided to stop talking, stonewalling investigators for six weeks.

It had been a Saturday in July. Keyes, out of boredom or frustration or just to toy with them, decided he wanted to talk. Bell, Goeden, and Feldis met him at the FBI's offices.

Bell opened gently. He reminded Keyes of his comment that he had been two different people for fourteen years, and they were curious. What happened back then? "It's about the time you went into the military," Bell said, "isn't it?"

"It's significant," Keyes said. But he had gotten going earlier than that. It was at least a couple of years before he went into the military, he said, that "I could do it and get away with it."

"What kinds of things?" Bell asked.

It was around 1996 or 1997, Keyes said, the summer his family had moved to Oregon. He would have been eighteen or nineteen at the time. There was a beach they all went to alongside the Deschutes River.

"That's what gave me the idea, I guess." His voice got lower and his words sounded physically smaller, mangled somehow. "There were these, um, like remote restrooms in these random little beach areas. And I took somebody to one of those but I didn't, you know . . . I didn't kill her."

"How long had you planned to take somebody before you actually got up the nerve to do it?" Feldis asked.

"For that one?" Keyes asked. "Or—"

Feldis cut him off. "For that one, yeah."

This was a mistake. Keyes had opened a door and Feldis had slammed it shut.

“Well, that one—” His voice was trembling. “I got down there in the spring and I think that was late summer when I, when I did it but I—I had been thinking about it for *years* before that.”

Bell suspected just how much Keyes had planned. “So back then, did you develop some kind of kit where you had rope and—”

“Oh, yeah,” Keyes said. His voice was so low. “I had all the stuff with me.”

The beach was accessed through a gate that was locked at night. Keyes got there late one afternoon wearing only his swimsuit and hid in the trees, watching. He was waiting for inner tubers on the river to thin out with the waning sun, as they always did. And as dusk began to fall, along came a group of teenagers, four or five of them, one girl bobbing behind all her friends.

“I just jumped out of the bushes and grabbed her.”

“How’d you get her to the bathroom?” Bell asked. “I guess I’m assuming you didn’t know her.”

“No, I didn’t know her,” Keyes said.

“She white, black, Asian?”

“She was white.”

“About your age?”

“I don’t know . . . She could have been anywhere from fourteen to eighteen.”

Eighteen sounded better than fourteen, Keyes knew. She had likely been a child.

“Blond, brunette?”

“Uh, she was like dirty-blond.”

“Was that the first time you sexually assaulted somebody?”

“No, but I mean that was the first time I took it to that level. I had it all planned out.”

Keyes was giving them the formation of his dark matter, the things he considered mistakes, the budding patterns that would reappear in his later

crimes. And he had just admitted that he had taken someone before, which could only have meant Colville.

“It was a small bathroom,” Keyes said. “There wasn’t running water or anything. They probably only cleaned it out maybe once a year.” Another site of filth and degradation, but Bell focused on the logistics.

“Permanent-type bathroom or like rent-a-can?”

“Permanent, like the ones you see at forest service campgrounds with the big concrete tank under them. That’s why I picked it. I was waiting for someone who was pretty small ’cause I was gonna dump them down in the tank.”

Just like human waste. But Keyes said he chose the tank as the best place to hide a body, nothing more. “It was a really dark tank,” he said. “They probably wouldn’t have been found for a year or something. I don’t know.”

A smaller victim, again, would have been easier for a teenage Keyes to control.

Keyes forced the girl into the outhouse, a handicap-accessible shack with bars along the walls, then roped her neck to one of the bars and tied her arms out so she couldn’t move, similar to the way he restrained Samantha and Lorraine. “And I had, like, the lid of the outhouse closed and I had her tied over that, on her stomach.” The knots were tight enough to leave bruises. He raped her once, he said.

“You didn’t cut her or anything,” Goeden asked, “with a knife?”

“No,” Keyes said. “But I had all the knives and stuff with me. I probably would have choked her.”

“So what do you think stopped you from taking it to that level?”

“She just, um . . . I think maybe she had had something like that happen or thought about what she would do. It seemed like she knew what to say and stuff. Like everybody else I took always seemed completely surprised, like they didn’t expect it, like they had never even thought of a scenario like what they were in.”

The girl kept talking, Keyes said. She told him he was a good-looking guy who didn’t need to be doing this. She would have gone out with someone like him. What he was doing right now wasn’t that big of a deal, she said. He could let her go and she’d never tell anyone. Through the whole attack, she also hadn’t shown much fear. A sadist like Keyes needed real fear. It startled him.

“I mean, she was scared, but in a lot of ways I think she was more calm about it than I was. I kept telling her to shut up and she wouldn’t. She wouldn’t. So I guess I kind of changed my . . . I just lost my nerve right at the end.” She had managed to make Keyes see her as a person. She had even told him her name. “Lea, I think,” Keyes said. “Lena? Something *L*. But she didn’t tell me her last name. I didn’t ask.”

After the rape, Keyes said, he untied her and let her go, putting her back on her inner tube and pushing her down the river.

“That was major,” he said. “That to me at the time was a big deal, a big deal. I don’t remember if I was worried about DNA at the time but I was convinced that there was, like, some big investigation trying to figure out who had done this. When in reality, twenty-twenty hindsight, maybe she never even told anybody.”

The moment Keyes let her go he regretted it. He checked the local papers constantly, waiting for the day her story appeared, for the cops to arrest him. When months passed with his name never coming up, no phone call or door knock, no investigation that he knew of, he didn’t feel smart. He felt lucky.

“For years after that I kept telling myself, ‘I should have killed her.’”

“So,” Bell asked, “you didn’t make that mistake again?”

“HA HA!” Keyes leaned back in his chair. “Well . . .”

THIRTY-TWO

For Jeff Bell, Florida was a particular state of interest. Why? He never said specifically, but Keyes had family there and had spent time working construction. And a serial killer there shared an MO with Keyes. This one was known as the Boca Killer.

At around one in the afternoon on August 7, 2007, a woman and her toddler son roamed the posh Boca Raton mall. After a few hours, the woman took her son through the Nordstrom exit to the mall's parking lot, remotely unlocking her black SUV and opening the hatch. She put her son in his car seat first and walked around back to stash his stroller.

"Mama! Mama!"

She leaned forward and saw, sitting right next to her two-year-old, a man in sunglasses and a floppy green hat, holding a gun. She froze. She couldn't believe this was real.

"Get in the car," he told her.

She couldn't move.

"Get in the car." He pointed the gun at her son.

She got in the car.

This woman, even today, is known only as Jane Doe.

The man ordered her to get in the driver's seat, to give him her cell phone, and head to an ATM. "Just do what I say," he told her, "and I'll take you back to the mall." He kept his gun pointed at her baby.

Jane Doe did everything he said. She gave him her cell phone, then drove to an ATM, where she withdrew two hundred dollars and gave it to

him, then another two hundred and another two hundred and another two hundred, and on that last one was denied. She'd hit her daily limit.

The man told her to get back on the road. Traffic was slow, and in her rearview mirror she could see her son's little face. He had somehow fallen asleep, which told Jane Doe that, on some level, she was keeping it together. She stole small glances out of her tinted windows. No one had any idea of the terror inside. She thought to herself: Nobody knows I'm going to die today.

She thought about crashing her car. Then she thought, What if I fail? What if that makes him madder?

She kept driving. The man told her to pull into the parking lot of a Hilton hotel. It was deserted. He told her to get out of the car. She didn't want to leave her baby.

"Please don't kill me," she begged. "Please don't kill me."

"I'm not going to," he said. "I don't need any more problems than I already have."

He wanted to switch places, him driving, her in the backseat. Then she saw the glint of the sun bounce off something in his hands. A pair of silver handcuffs.

Oh, God, she thought. This is it. She'd already given him money—what else could he want? Was he going to rape her? Kill her and her baby? Leave their bodies in the middle of nowhere? He cuffed her wrists behind her back and put her in the backseat. Out came the zip ties. He bound her ankles first, then her neck around the headrest, pulling tight. He took out a pair of dark sunglasses and duct-taped them around her eyes. Now she could hardly see.

Jane panicked. She strained against the plastic zip tie, her face reddening, her tears hot and thick. She was gagging and choking. She couldn't breathe. And just like that, her kidnapper loosened the tie. "Is that better?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. The man pulled back into traffic and drove for a while. Jane had no idea where they were going, but this act of kindness—how odd to think of it that way—gave her a bit of hope.

Suddenly the man stopped driving. She could hear him rummaging through something, like a plastic bag. The knife, she could see. "Please don't hurt me," she begged. "Please don't kill me."

“I’m not,” he said. “Just stay still. Don’t move.” He twisted around and pushed himself off the driver’s seat to reach her, moving the cold blade along her face and down her neck.

He cut the tie and started driving again, saying nothing. Her toddler, now awake, dropped his bottle. He started crying, watching as it rolled right under the driver’s seat. Jane braced herself. Would this push the man over the edge?

He picked up the bottle, turned sideways, and gave it to her son. The boy stopped crying.

Four hours had gone by. He had shown them two small mercies. Maybe he wouldn’t be able to go through with it. Then he said, “I’m going to put the zip tie back around your neck.” In the next breath, he promised to let her go—not her and her baby, just her. She had no idea what to believe.

“I’m going to let you call someone,” he continued. “You can say your truck broke down and they need to come get you. Who do you want me to call?”

Why would he tie her by the neck again if he was letting them go? It didn’t make sense, but she didn’t question it, just gave him the name of her son’s father. If something was going to happen, he should be her last phone call. He would know she would never disappear with their child.

By now Jane’s eyes had adjusted, and she saw that they were back at the Boca Raton mall. The man dialed and held the phone to her face. Her ex picked up. “My truck’s broken down,” she told him. “Please come get me.” The man zip-tied her to the headrest.

“Now,” he said, “when the police come, I want you to tell them I am short, fat, and black.” Here he made a mistake: He removed the sunglasses he’d taped to her face, and Jane Doe got a good look at her captor. He was tall, athletic, and white, with long, wavy brown hair, but otherwise seemingly hairless. He still wore that olive-green floppy cap, which she now recognized as military style, and sunglasses.

He took her driver’s license, then pulled out a pair of blacked-out swim goggles and strapped them over her eyes.

“If I see anything on the news,” he told her, “with my face or my picture, my description—I will come after you.”

He closed the door and was gone.

Once the man left, Jane pulled her bound hands under and over her legs, then ripped off the goggles and somehow cut the neck tie. She got in the driver's seat and raced to the mall's valet stand, where she begged the valet to call the cops.

"I was just kidnapped," she said.

"Are you kidding me?"

But the valet called the police, and when they arrived they didn't believe Jane Doe either. Things like this didn't happen in Boca Raton. There had been no witnesses. There was no physical evidence found in her SUV. They didn't believe a young woman, tied up as Jane described, could have escaped such restraints. They didn't believe she and her son could be driven around for hours with no one seeing a thing. Her story, frankly, was bizarre.

Detectives asked Jane Doe to take a lie detector test. She told them she had nothing to hide.

Three months went by with no word. Then, one day in November, Jane got a call from the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office. They were working a cold case, the abduction of a woman from the Boca Raton mall back in March. She, too, had been driving a black SUV with tinted windows and had been taken from the garage around the same time as Jane Doe, 1:15 in the afternoon.

Her name was Randi Gorenberg. Thirty-nine minutes after her abduction, a call came in to 911. The caller said he had seen the passenger door of a black Mercedes SUV open and a woman, slumped over, fall to the ground. It looked like the driver had pushed her out and taken off.

The caller got closer to the body. "Oh, my God. She—she's dead. She got two shots in her head, my gosh."

Gorenberg had been fifty-two years old, married to a wealthy chiropractor, and living with her husband and their two children in a \$2 million house in Palm Beach. She had no enemies, no serious problems, no debts. No one in her life had motive. She had been found five miles from the Boca Raton

mall, her shoes and handbag missing but her valuable jewelry—a diamond necklace and ring and Cartier watch—intact.

Gorenberg's SUV was found nearby, abandoned behind a Home Depot. Jane Doe was their only lead.

Shortly before midnight on Wednesday, December 12, nearly four months to the day after Jane Doe and her toddler were abducted, a Boca Raton mall guard approached an idling black SUV in the Sears parking lot. Inside were the bodies of forty-seven-year-old Nancy Bochicchio and her seven-year-old daughter, Joey. Nancy's wrists and ankles were bound, her neck strapped to the headrest, blacked-out swimming goggles over her eyes. Joey had also been restrained with zip ties.

Both had a single gunshot wound to the head.

Responding officers thought of Jane Doe, and when Jane saw the story on the news her heart dropped. She knew this was the same man.

So did police. In reconstructing Nancy and Joey's movements that day, they found striking similarities to the two earlier abductions. Surveillance video showed mother and daughter last seen exiting the same doorway as Randi Gorenberg. Nancy was captured on security cameras withdrawing money from the same ATM Jane Doe was forced to use. Nancy had been found in handcuffs just like the ones brandished at Jane.

Jane Doe had told police: This man came with a kit. That was what he called it—"my kit." Inside were the zip ties, the cuffs, the duct tape, the sunglasses and goggles, the knife, the gun. He seemed to know exactly where ATM surveillance cameras were and avoided them. She sensed that he had done this before.

Police were later able to trace the zip ties and duct tape used in the Bochicchio double murder to a big-box store in Miami, purchased shortly before Nancy and her little girl were murdered. No physical evidence or DNA was recovered. Circumstantially, the Doe and Bochicchio cases were identical. Otherwise the cops had nothing.

The Boca Raton task force was dissolved a year later, but not before Jane Doe gave the police sketch artist a detailed description. The physical resemblance to Keyes, the mouth especially, is startling.

Equally startling is every known detail of this case. Keyes hunted in daylight, taking people within seconds. He almost always took victims in their own cars. There was the botched ATM withdrawal, as if the abductor did not know daily limits, and the skilled avoidance of surveillance cameras. The kit Jane Doe described. Gorenberg's cell phone, later found on a homeless person, was also consistent with a favorite tactic of Keyes—he told investigators he would sometimes dump a victim's phone in areas where the homeless congregated. The targeting of pairs, mothers and children—could this be rage at his own mother? His confession that every time he traveled he'd be “looking for places to do stuff.” That his only victim preference was “lightweight.” That knives were his favorite weapon. Tying up women by the neck. The directive to tell the cops he was black. None of the agents believed his so-called code about children.

The zip ties, which the FBI, in the Bochicchio case, called as unique as a fingerprint. They had been purchased the same day at a local big-box store, as Keyes described having done before abducting the Curriers.

Jane Doe said her abductor wore his wavy brown hair in a ponytail down the back of his neck. Why, in hot summer? Why not up, under the hat? Was that to conceal a branding? Keyes had that pentagram on the back of his neck.

Keyes's whereabouts during these abductions and murders are unknown, but the FBI does know that during each of these crimes, he was traveling.

Jane Doe told police she followed every instruction the abductor gave and kept talking to him, just like everything was otherwise normal. She thinks that's why she and her son survived.

State and local authorities later learned of another near miss, a few days after the Jane Doe abduction. This attempted kidnapping took place in the parking lot of another well-to-do shopping center. The intended victim, a woman, had been walking toward her car when an armed man confronted her, ordering her to drive him to an ATM. She flung her handbag far afield and started screaming, “*Leave! Leave!*”

That quick thinking saved her life. She later looked at the police sketch Jane Doe helped work up and the man, she said, looked exactly the same.

There has never been another attack. The Bochicchio case remains open.

THIRTY-THREE

Shortly before and during the three months Keyes stopped talking, investigators were able to make progress. They had recovered the Eagle River cache buried sometime in May 2011. In Neah Bay, Ted Halla and Colleen Sanders had searched the Bayliner boat Keyes had left behind but recovered no real evidence. Agents now had a total of eight victims, three identified, and the rest, despite all their hunches, unknown.

Except, maybe, for one. The team may have been pretty confident about Jimmy Tidwell in Texas, but Bell felt even more confident that they had identified the body in New York.

By late October, Keyes was back at the table and the FBI had a new strategy. Apply some pressure, lightly. Blame the bosses. Make a threat. Keyes had run every other interrogation as one long taunt, dangling possible victims as investigators begged for just one more, all while Keyes drank his Americanos and smoked his cigars and basically flipped the finger to the federal government.

Gently suggest that his name might leak, they were told. Stress that his name had only surfaced in Vermont, nowhere else, and that was down to the case agents in this room. Now was the time to tell Keyes that these same agents were losing patience and so was the Bureau. Now they would tell him that Quantico had a new timeline.

“Frankly, the ground is freezing, Israel,” Feldis said. He was speaking literally and metaphorically. “So we don’t have a lot of time to play with, and without any movement, there wouldn’t be anything we could do anymore.”

“Be that as it may,” Keyes said, “nothing else that I’m involved with is weather dependent.” As he’d said before, all those other bodies would keep.

“Your patience is probably getting better with your situation you’re in,” Bell said, “but everybody else’s patience is growing thin—our bosses, at least, have been pressuring us for progress.”

Keyes told them that leaking his name wasn’t much of a threat anymore, because he had been considering what he called “maximum publicity.” He could easily go to any national news outlet and expose the federal government’s refusal to give him the death penalty in exchange for more victims. He was feeling spiteful. “If I wanted to make a point using my case as an example, the media would potentially give me a pretty big soapbox,” he said. “There’s not much more you can offer me.”

Threats, Keyes said, wouldn’t work either. “This is the day where you say, ‘Give us more information or else,’ right?” He laughed.

The contempt was infuriating. Now was the time to rattle him.

“Debra Feldman,” Goeden said. She smacked Feldman’s photo on the table. Agents were fairly sure she was the body in New York. A drug addict and a prostitute, Feldman had gone missing from New Jersey on April 8, 2008, while Keyes had been traveling through the state on that very day.

“We had talked about her before,” Goeden said. In fact, they had shown Keyes her photo before, and his reaction—subdued, surprised—led agents to believe he had killed her.

“New Jersey is looking into her more,” Goeden said. “FBI is looking into her more.”

Keyes began rubbing himself. “All right,” he said, voice low.

“I thought that might be a place where we could start,” Bell said.

“No,” Keyes said.

BZZZZZZZZZZ.

“Her name was on your computer,” Feldis said.

The rubbing got harder. “I’m not going to talk about what’s on the computer,” Keyes said. Get him a deal and that would change.

“There’s something more to the story with Debra that you don’t want to tell us now,” Feldis said.

“Yeah,” Keyes said. “I just don’t want to talk about it.”

On October 30, Halla and Sanders came up from their field office in Poulsbo, Washington, just to interview Keyes. This surely fed his ego. In Texas, he had been disappointed to be sitting across from a Texas Ranger and an FBI agent from a local field office. Even Bell and Doll flying in from Anchorage hadn't been good enough. If he had to be questioned, Keyes wanted the FBI's top agents, and two of them flying in from his home state was gratifying. For months he'd been curious about who they were and what they had been learning.

At this point, Halla and Sanders had distinct advantages over the Alaska team. Neah Bay had long been part of their beat. They had handled Tammie, who now had custody of her daughter and who spoke to Keyes by phone weekly, with great sensitivity. They had been interviewing the people he knew and who were a connection to his past life. And the pure novelty of Halla and Sanders's presence could potentially dislodge new information.

Halla was similar to Bell in his folksiness. He sounded so casual, even though inside he was afraid. He hadn't expected to be. He and Sanders had listened to all the Keyes interviews and thought they knew what they were getting into.

"Did you have any questions for us about any of the stuff we've done?" he asked Keyes. Halla told him they also had spoken to Tammie's mom and his friend Dave, who had been his boss.

Sanders felt pretty confident sitting across from Keyes. This surprised her, too—she'd expected to feel fear. She began by asking Keyes what his early days in Neah Bay had been like.

"What were you doing to get by?"

"I was on unemployment," Keyes said. It took a few months for the tribe to hire him. "It was interesting to have the shoe on the other foot," he said, "to be working on one of the buildings there and have people drive by and yell, 'Go home, white boy!'" But after a year or so, when everyone saw his work, the way he tried to beautify the reservation, they came to accept him.

Halla shifted the conversation to Colville. "Were you there in '96?"

"Yeah," Keyes said. "I was there in '96. That would have been the last year I was in the Colville area."

“When you were living in Colville,” Halla said, “do you remember the case where Julie Harris, she was a double amputee, went missing?”

“Ninety-six?” Keyes asked. The rubbing began.

“She lived, I think, pretty close to you,” Halla said.

“I do remember hearing about that. I remember the name. I don’t remember the details of the story.”

Those details had been grisly. Keyes would have relished them.

“I remember that it seems like it was a pretty big deal,” Keyes said. “It was in local news and stuff. I was working construction at the time so I would hear stuff. But I never took a personal interest in it. It was one of those passing . . . passing kind of interest things.”

Goeden said she thought a big story like that would have had an impact on Keyes.

Not really, he said.

No one believed him, but they let it go. Halla shifted to Washington’s national parks and forests. Was it true Keyes had never killed in any of them?

“No,” Keyes said. That, agents believed, was a lie. Back in July he had told Bell and Feldis that one of his victims had actually been found, but that the death had been presumed accidental. Bell suspected that victim would have been a hiker found at the bottom of a cliff or a body discovered in water.

“It was a mistake,” Keyes had said. “It was kind of the same situation as the Curriers. I just wasn’t in a position to get rid of it right away so I decided to try and make it look—I mean, it was already going to be assumed that it was an accident of some sort . . . Anyway, I’m sure we’ll talk about it at length eventually.”



Halla tentatively approached the victim in Lake Crescent.

Why, Halla asked, had Keyes purchased that Bayliner? Was that premeditated, part of a plan to dispose of bodies? Or had that been an afterthought?

“Well, I’ve always been interested in boats,” Keyes said. “I’ve been building them since I was like fifteen. The boat was just an opportunity that

popped up. It was fun while it lasted.”

Agents hadn’t known that Keyes built boats. Keyes proudly elaborated, telling Bell he mainly built canoes and rowboats, a kayak here or there—on top of the guns, moving targets, rope bridges, houses, and God knows what else.

Keyes said he wanted a motorboat, like the Bayliner, big enough to carry camping gear.

Goeden and Sanders said they found other titles for boats in Keyes’s records. He only had one other, he said, an oceangoing boat. It needed so much work that he abandoned it.

“Our understanding is that there were likely victims that were disposed of by the boat,” Halla said. They suspected the other victims might be at the bottom of Lake Ozette, which Keyes frequently visited. They knew those victims had been left in Washington, but were they *from* Washington?

“Yeah, I don’t want to . . . I don’t want to give details on that yet,” Keyes said.



How about the statement Keyes made about family and coworkers unwittingly helping him out? Halla and Sanders knew that he wasn’t always honest on his time sheets, often putting in for “funeral leave.” That somehow never raised suspicion—one young man with so many people dying all around him.

Keyes admitted that he lied to everyone.

“The reasons I would ask people to do things, or the reasons I would give for why I was doing them, were seldom realistic with what was actually going on,” he said. “I’d take trips to eastern Washington and say I was going to see old friends or go to see the old place and, you know—”

“Went to Oregon,” Bell said.

“No, not necessarily,” Keyes said. “I may have gone to eastern Washington but not to see old friends. I don’t have any old friends in eastern Washington.” He laughed and began rubbing himself again.

Halla tried to catch Keyes off guard. “Would you pass your cell phone off to other people to hang on to?” Keyes wouldn’t bite, but did admit to

always keeping his timeline tight so his involvement in any murder would seem impossible—just as he had with Samantha.

Halla and Sanders wondered about his state of mind long before he took Samantha. Was overworking himself a way to stave off his cravings? What about when he met Kimberly? Was the excitement of a new relationship enough?

Not really, Keyes said. “There were lots of distractions along the way. It’s like one hobby after another with me. But when the sun goes down, it’s all . . .” He chuckled. “It doesn’t matter how many hobbies you have. It all comes back to the same thing eventually.”

This was perhaps the only thing BAU had been sure of, and it had come from listening to all those earlier interviews: Keyes wasn’t motivated by money or psychosis or anything other than pleasure. He did it because he wanted to do it. Even the things he tried to distract himself with were always related to his ultimate desire. As Roy Hazelwood wrote: Some people just rape and kill because they enjoy it. And Hazelwood was right, because Keyes had said it too: Once he got going, there was no other rush like it. And once he built a tolerance for that rush, he had no choice but to escalate.

“Like, guns were always a big hobby for me,” Keyes said. “Explosives and stuff.”

It took a moment for Bell to absorb this.

“*Explosives?* You make bombs?”

“Nothing too exciting, but yeah, I would tinker around. Mostly just designing stuff. I never . . .”

“Where do you go to blow that up?” Bell asked. “You don’t do that in the backyard.”

“There are lots of places in Neah Bay,” Halla said. There was nervous laughter all around.

“No,” Keyes said. “I gave most of my bomb-making stuff away before I came up here.” He said he mostly worked with black-powder-based explosives and would use them sometimes while committing another crime, sometimes not.

“Were you breaching with explosives?” Halla asked. He meant blowing doors open—something only trained military or law enforcement does in extreme circumstances.

Yes, Keyes said. He had started doing that at age fourteen. “The first time, I blew a lock with a pipe bomb.”

“Like to a shed or a garage or something?” Bell asked. He was still in enough shock not to realize: Think bigger.

“No,” Keyes said. “It was a forest service gate, I think.” Government grounds. That admission transformed this case.

Within minutes, bomb squads on both sides of the country were deployed: one to the Anchorage house, one to the New York property.

How had the FBI missed this? Interviews with Keyes’s army buddies, the very few he had, pointed in this direction. Keyes had told at least one of them that on the upstate New York grounds he had buried nine thousand rounds of Black Talon ammo, so-called cop-killer bullets that are also often used in mass shootings. At the Anchorage house, agents recovered a number of doors, hinges removed, one spray painted with the words Church of Arlington and YouMustBeBornAgain.org. Both were former names for the Church of Wells.

What had Keyes plotted? He spoke to agents of his many plans, and then his grand plan. He had been looking to burn down churches; it wasn’t hard to believe he might blow them up instead. He told agents he fantasized about killing police and admitted to nearly killing the APD officers at that lovers’ lane. He talked to his army friend Perkins about kidnapping people on a mass scale. He had denied being a white supremacist yet referenced his white supremacist roots. He had been friends with Chevie and Cheyne Kehoe, one of whom implicated the other in the Oklahoma City bombing. Keyes had been raised to hate the federal government. He himself told agents that people he grew up with regarded Timothy McVeigh as a hero. He did not disavow himself of this.

What was recovered in New York that day, the Bureau will not say. But they added a new classification to the Keyes case: terrorism.

THIRTY-FOUR

What Keyes ultimately planned, or what larger crime he may have gotten away with, we may never know. Sometime after ten o'clock on the night of December 1, 2012, Israel Keyes committed suicide in his prison cell with a razor blade and a noose. He left twelve skulls on the wall, drawn with his own blood, the words WE ARE ONE written underneath.

He also left the team one final clue, also scrawled in blood:

BELIZE

Bell and Payne maintain that Keyes murdered eleven people and that the twelfth skull was likely his. They believed Keyes when he said his final number was “less than a dozen.” To Payne, ever the math guy, a dozen was always a weird number; most people count by fives or tens. Less than a dozen, to him, meant eleven. Other agents who worked this case, Gannaway and Chacon among them, believe Keyes killed far more people than that.

EPILOGUE

Any one of us could have been a victim of Israel Keyes. After the FBI went public with the case, sightings and encounters involving Keyes were reported everywhere from the Appalachian Trail to California to Montague, Massachusetts, to San Padre Island, Texas, to New York City's Union Square.

It's worth asking: In a post-9/11 world, how did a self-employed construction worker with below-average income purchase so many one-way plane tickets and never get flagged by Homeland Security? Was Keyes a beneficiary of racial profiling? He sometimes traveled with guns, breaking them apart and stashing them in carry-ons, yet was never once questioned by the TSA.

Multiple people told the FBI they believed Keyes had approached them on beaches, in national parks, on trailheads, and in campgrounds—even at their homes, walking right up to their doors or porches or driveways. He would try to make conversation or offer help. If he knocked on your door he was an insurance salesman. Several people reported the same scene, having witnessed Keyes, sometimes with another man, in various parts of the country, emerging from woods or cemeteries carrying a shovel.

A woman in Texas believes she was followed by Keyes while driving. Another believes she was followed and nearly kidnapped by him on a dark, deserted stretch of Highway 112 in Port Angeles in 2001 or 2002. In a lengthy email to the FBI, she recounted what happened after filling up her tank at a Shell station and noticing a man watching, in a midsize truck.

“For the next forty miles,” she wrote, “he would pass me when he could and then slow down in front of me . . . Very slow. To about five miles an hour and look in his rearview mirror at me. He stopped several times in our lane, and I was forced to pass him. The final time he pulled in front of me, he got out of the truck and stood beside his driver's-side door and looked at

me. . . . It was very dark, and raining, and cold. He raised his hand as if to wave me to stop and I drove past him, though he stepped toward my car.”

She had no cell service but held up her illuminated cell anyway. The man turned around and drove away.

She believes this man was Israel Keyes. The FBI can't rule him out.

Other victims may yet be recovered and identified, and that work may come together sooner than later. If Keyes was telling the truth about the body in Lake Crescent, Washington, and investigators believe he was, it's still there. An expert at the Bureau told Goeden that the conditions of that lake, pristine freshwater with very little marine life, would preserve the remains considerably. That they were weighted down would make them easier to find.

Halla and Sanders requested a search, but the Bureau told them they didn't want to spend the money.

As for Keyes telling investigators that he had been two different people for fourteen years, Payne believes it. He theorizes that Keyes did not kill until he was discharged, and Heidi Keyes believes the same. She stopped short of saying she had direct knowledge, but feels quite sure he murdered his first victim shortly after leaving Fort Hood, probably that summer. Keyes has still not been ruled out in the murders of Julie Harris in 1996 or Cassie Emerson and her mother, Marlene, in his hometown of Colville in 1997.

On January 9, 2013, little more than one month after the suicide, Tammie told the FBI she had a nagging suspicion. Back in December 2000 or early 2001 her neighbor's husband had gone missing while on a hike. She had not seen Keyes that day or night, which now struck her as weird. Sometime later the body was found, and the death was ruled accidental.

After Keyes's suicide, a closed-door hearing regarding procedural failings at the Anchorage Correctional Complex was convened.

According to what little was released, this report determined that Keyes had slashed and strangled himself between 10:12 and 10:24 P.M., bleeding out all over the floor. It was only when a day-shift correctional officer arrived at 6:00 A.M. that Keyes's body was found.

Or so this story goes. Much of it is hard to believe. Arbitrators blamed the death on two factors. "One or more people"—who, we do not know—"moved him out of a suicide cell and . . . gave him a razor." The Anchorage Correctional Complex, the Alaska Department of Corrections, and state attorneys are so corrupt that in 2016 these attorneys advised prisons not to keep records and not to document causes or circumstances of inmate deaths. In January 2018, the *Anchorage Daily News* reported that ACC had secretly wired visitation rooms Keyes used, and that these rooms remained wired ever since, illegally recording attorney-client conversations.

The prison, despite multiple requests by the press, has kept everything regarding Keyes's suicide secret. The video and audio recording of that night and the medical examiner's report have never been released. But the Department of Corrections Special Incident Report, obtained through a FOIA request, provides some details.

At seven P.M., Keyes was escorted to the prison's law library for the third night in a row. Two hours later, he was escorted back to his cell. The corrections officer on guard in the Bravo Module, where Keyes was housed, said that he performed his duties that night, conducting security checks and updating paperwork, and was relieved twice for half-hour breaks. He said he did his last security check at 5:30 A.M. and went off duty ten minutes later. "At no time did I see anything out of the normal in Keyes, Israel, cell number three," he said. "Keyes was rolled up in his blankets as he was every night I had been on shift with no parts of his body showing."

At 5:57 A.M., as another guard performed a security check and head count, he "saw what looked like blood" in Keyes's cell. He said he called for help, hollered to Keyes, and after there was no response, touched the body, still cocooned. Keyes was facedown with his head turned to the right, arms crossed underneath his chest. He was slathered in blood.

"His body was stiff," this guard said. When the nurse arrived, the guard yanked off the bedcover. "It was evident from looking at prisoner Keyes he was deceased. He had no pulse and no color to his skin." In her statement, the nurse reported the body cold and in rigor mortis, the face blue. That

would mean Keyes had been dead for at least three to four hours. A large amount of blood, she said, had soaked through the upper part of his quilt and more was pooled on the floor.

The prison went on lockdown.

When paramedics arrived at 6:10 A.M., they found a curious scene. Blood was not just all over the bunk but contained in two cups, size unknown, and two milk cartons. By 8:25 Alaska State Troopers, US Marshals, and FBI agents were on the scene, Jeff Bell among them.

The last time Bell had spoken to Keyes was days ago, just before Thanksgiving.

“Your intent is still to tell us everything, right?” Bell asked.

“Yes,” Keyes said.

He had taken a razor blade, embedded it in a pencil, and used it to slash his left wrist—Bell’s worst fear. As insurance, Keyes had looped a bedsheet around his neck and tied it to his left foot, strangling himself. He left behind a multipage suicide note soaked in blood, and the portions released by the FBI offered little in the way of clues. One forensic psychiatrist believed Keyes used specific verbiage—calling one or more of his victims “my dark moth princess,” “my pretty captive butterfly”—in hopes he’d forever be linked with the novel and film adaptation of *The Silence of the Lambs*, in which such imagery abounds.

Keyes also indicted the United States, for which he harbored a near-lifelong hatred. “Land of the free, land of the lie, land of the scheme Americanize!” he wrote, a refrain that appeared twice. “Consume what you don’t need, stars you idolize, pursue what you admit is a dream, then it’s American die.”



This case provoked the FBI to beg for the public’s help—but just as quickly, they decided to obscure much of the case and Israel Keyes from public view. Approximately forty-five thousand pages of case files remain unreleased by the Department of Justice, under claims of national security. The official timeline of Keyes’s travels, issued by the FBI shortly after his death, remains heavily edited. Knowledge of any terrorist activities or potential plots remains secret.

In his very last interview, three days before his suicide, Keyes was openly contemptuous of the investigators, sorry, he said, only for giving them the Curriers and not murdering more people.

Jeff Bell believes that Keyes took his own life to condemn what he saw as the ridiculousness of the American justice system. More likely Keyes saw his suicide as a final expression of control and cruelty—his ultimate act of sadism.

Would we have learned much more had he lived? Possibly not. It took months for the FBI to realize that Keyes was less interested in confessions than he was in manipulating and frustrating them. Perhaps he would have identified other victims, but the notion that he would have disclosed all of them is hard to believe. He coveted them; even in death, he said, his victims belonged to him.

Much information about his childhood came from the psychiatric evaluation, and even there Keyes only revealed as much as necessary. Beyond that, agents learned very little about his life or family or inner workings—in fact, the more he sensed they wanted to understand him, the less he was willing to illuminate. Keyes understood how to tell a story, and for nearly two decades, how to survive: study *CSI*, FBI profilers, and other horrors like him to become an analog killer in a digital age. He was a better monster because of that.

He admired Ted Bundy and H. H. Holmes for what he saw as ingenuity, and Keyes wanted his own recognized. He told agents of an imminent plan: he was going to leave Alaska and become an itinerant carpenter. What better cover for traveling often and extensively than extreme weather patterns? Where better to take people than disaster areas, where the missing are presumed dead anyway? He later planned to build a house with a dungeon, as Holmes had, to keep his victims alive for much longer.

What else he had planned we may never know, as we will never know his full victim count. But just as Keyes told his stories backward—starting at the end—the end of his life is perhaps another beginning. He made sure of it, dropping clue upon clue before committing suicide, certain of one outcome: His case will never be closed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful to the FBI special agents and other investigators who spoke to me for this book. Steve Payne in particular was steadfast and loyal, spending nearly every week for more than one year submitting to interviews. Jeff Bell not only did the same but toured me through Anchorage's creepiest Keyes-related sites. Payne and Bell are brilliant minds and generous folks. Both have my eternal gratitude.

Thanks to Jolene Goeden, Kat Nelson, and Liz Oberlander. Bobby Chacon shared not just tactical expertise but the deep emotional toll of his work—that's bravery. Thanks also to Charles "Bart" Bartenfeld, Joe Allen, and the agents and law enforcement in multiple states who helped solve this case and re-created it here: Texas Ranger Steve Rayburn; Deb Gannaway; and Kevin Pullen; Lieutenant George Murtie in Vermont; Chris Iber; Michelle Delpha in the Albany, New York, FBI field office (though she does not appear here, her insights were helpful); and Ted Halla and Colleen Sanders, who also toured me through the uppermost western parts of Washington State related to this case.

The great FBI profiler and author Roy Hazelwood spoke to me for this book in March 2016. For someone who spent the majority of his life confronting the worst of humanity, he was one of the kindest, most joyful people I have ever encountered.

Thanks to Heidi Keyes for speaking to me about Israel's childhood, their life in Colville, and what she called his evil. I hope her willingness to help may extend to help other investigations.

This book had many gifted minds guiding it: Emily Murdock Baker, the editor at Viking who acquired it; Melanie Tortoroli, who inherited it and whose edits were generous and invaluable; and Laura Tisdell, who executed the heavy lift and saw it to completion with sharpness and care. Amy Sun, Jane Cavolina, and all at Viking—I am deeply grateful.

Huge thanks to my warrior-agent Nicole Tourtelot. Every author should be so lucky—Nicole is who you want on your side of the table.

Thanks too to David Kuhn for encouraging this book at the outset and Dana Spector for seeing its potential.

First Amendment lawyer nonpareil Kate Bolger and her team embarked on a lengthy Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) battle with the Department of Justice on my behalf almost pro bono, simply because they believed it was the right thing to do. Eternal thanks to Kate and attorneys Patrick Kabat, Matthew L. Schafer, and Matthew E. Kelley for shaking loose case files, FBI witness interviews, and countless documents that had never been released, filling in gaps of knowledge that were otherwise cavernous.

In Anchorage, attorney Jeffrey W. Robinson and his team did the seemingly impossible, swiftly winning our challenge in federal court to obtain interviews with Keyes that had been kept secret for years. Jeff, too, took me on at a generous rate; my education was a bonus. Kate and Jeff: You are my heroes.

Thanks to J.T. Hunter, author of *Devil in the Darkness: The True Story of Serial Killer Israel Keyes*, for his research assistance. Interviews he conducted with Tammie in particular helped flesh out an essential part of the narrative. Reporters Michelle Theriault Boots and Casey Grove covered this case in Anchorage and shared their recollections and advice, helping whenever asked—not often the case among competitive journalists.

At the *New York Post* I have learned from some of the toughest and smartest editors around. Steve Lynch allowed me to pursue this story first for the *Post* in 2012 and then as a book; his whipsaw first-read helped narrow my focus, and he has my profound thanks for his support. Paul McPolin has one of the finest investigative minds I have ever encountered and the questions he asked made this book a deeper, richer read. Margi Conklin offered a closer edit than her time surely allowed and helped redirect the book's final chapters at a crucial moment. To my great friend Susannah Cahalan, who read several drafts and offered edits while pregnant with twins *and* working on her own book—you're a marvel. And cheers to my former *Post* colleague and Alaska native Josh Saul and his family for watching out for me in Anchorage.

Finally, to all my family and friends who offered support, interest, encouragement, and optimism when most needed—especially my dad, who defied all medical diagnoses and prognoses to (among other things!) read this book—thanks and love.

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A NOTE ON SOURCE MATERIALS

This book is based on hundreds of hours of original interviews, as well as thousands of previously unreleased documents. These include the Samantha Koenig confession, provided to me by an anonymous source; Lieutenant George Murtie's personal diary of the Currier investigation and his own interrogation of Keyes via phone; the FBI's internal timeline based in part on Keyes's journals, FBI witness statements, lab reports, affidavits and search warrants, emails, court documents, contemporaneous news reports, Keyes's arrest records and military records, and portions of the original Anchorage Police Department case file. Though names had been largely redacted, it was easy to identify sources based on information I had obtained through investigators.

Monique Doll declined to speak for this book. Her part in the investigation is based on the APD case file, one unpublished interview with me, previously published interviews she has given, interview transcripts with Keyes, and recollections from other investigators who closely worked the case with her. James Koenig also declined, and I relied upon previous interviews he has given, along with the APD case file and the recollections of Payne, Bell, and Goeden.

I interviewed Kevin Feldis for my original article in 2012 but he opted not to participate in this book. I did reach out to him again in December 2018 to ask if he would explain his thinking, as federal prosecutor, to not only be present in most of the Keyes interrogations but often lead them. He would not comment.

Thirteen hours of hidden interviews with Keyes were made public after my lawyer requested a hearing in Alaska federal court in 2018. These had never been officially logged or docketed with the court, which meant that there was no way to know of their existence. (Previously released interviews, plus documents unsealed through the Freedom of Information

Act, allowed me to piece together references to those missing interrogations. I have since learned that such obfuscations are more common than we know.) After the interviews were released, my lawyer asked the prosecutor's office several times if any others remain hidden. We have not received a response.

The psychological evaluation, also unsealed due to that same federal court order, is the greatest known self-report we have of Israel Keyes's upbringing and development. Perhaps at some point the FBI will release the contents of his journals, in part if not in full.

Details of what happened at the Anchorage Correctional Complex during Keyes's incarceration and the night of his suicide came from the Special Incident Report, news reports, and were also provided directly by anonymous sources. Yet much of what actually happened, and who was responsible for Keyes obtaining razor blades, remains a mystery. One source maintains that Keyes's blood was visibly leaking out of his cell that night as guards routinely walked past.

After Keyes's suicide the FBI was finally able to communicate with law enforcement all over the United States and in other countries. In many cases, local police and surviving family members reached out to the FBI first, curious as to whether Keyes could be responsible for specific unsolved missing persons and murders. The cold cases revisited in this book are largely ones in which agents or law enforcement suspected Keyes. The Boca Killer is the exception here, considered for multiple reasons: Jeff Bell's interest in Florida, the strikingly similar MO, and the undeniable resemblance between Keyes and the police suspect sketch.

So far, the FBI is comfortable naming only Debra Feldman, whose body was recovered in New York, as another victim of Israel Keyes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maureen Callahan is an award-winning investigative journalist, author, columnist, and commentator. She has covered everything from pop culture to politics. Her writing has appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *New York*, *Spin*, and the *New York Post*, where she is critic at large. She lives in New York.



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