

The Hand in the Window

A Mystery by

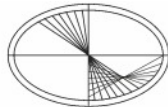
Elizabeth Young



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Dedication

This story was written, in part, to honor the tireless road crews who work throughout our country. Their service all too often goes unnoticed. And, as always, I dedicate the book to my husband and best critic.

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PROLOGUE

GETTING THE KID into the car proved easy. Getting him out at the other end where he was going to be hidden involved chloroform, and too much of that could kill the youngster. They didn't want him dead—the kid would be returned when the money was paid. That part shouldn't take too long, or so his partner assured him.

Everything went according to plan that night. When it was over, he felt relieved. After all, this wasn't a real kidnapping. They were just borrowing the kid to settle a debt, of sorts. He turned off the flashlight and left in the dark.

THE HAND IN THE WINDOW

CHAPTER ONE

RUN, RUN!" the big man next to Jay screamed at the skinny boy heading toward third base. Jay moved a couple of inches away from the man and closer to his wife, Emma, who stayed where she was.

"Good play, Tim," Jay called out to his own son, playing third base, when he tagged out the runner, much to the vocal disgust of the kid's father — or whoever he was. Tim couldn't hear Jay, but Jay would be sure to compliment him later.

One more out and the game would be over, the ten-year-old boys exhausted but pumped, and all of them hungry. Tim's team was about to win by six runs, one of which had been Tim's solo home run in the second inning. "I think you make a great third baseman," Jay told Tim earlier in the summer, which was his way of saying he didn't mind that Tim wasn't pitching, something he himself had done at Tim's age. "You have great hands, great coordination, and you're fast!"

They talked about baseball a lot, and now that Tim was older, he understood and liked the strategy of the game. Sometimes Jay wondered if, without baseball, the separation might have made Tim mad at him, but Tim never talked about it. He seemed a little sad sometimes, especially when Jay would spend an evening at the house, have dinner with the three of them, and then leave to go back to where he was living temporarily — in Alex Rosen's garage apartment. At first he had worried more about how six-year-old Lynn would take it, but she always seemed cheerful when he told her he would be back soon. And, of course, he always came back.

"Come on," he said when the last boy on the Tigers flied out. He held out his hands to Lynn and pulled her up. "Your brother will meet us at the car, and then we're all going out for pizza!"

Lynn wrinkled her nose just a little, reminding Jay of her mother's similar habit when she was annoyed. "Can't I have a chicken sandwich?" the little girl asked, looking from Jay to Emma. Her mother laughed. "Of course you can! We'll go to Dano's, and you can have whatever you like, but your brother will want pizza."

They climbed down from the bleachers and headed over to the van,

which, Jay knew, would be hot. Even when it was running, the air conditioning barely worked. That was one of the reasons he had given his truck to Emma to drive when they separated three months ago. He would drive her van and try to keep it running. Now, in mid-August, he missed the reliability of his Ford 150.

“Dad, I really like the glove—thank you!” Tim gave his father a hug at the door of the van, which Jay started to get the air conditioning going.

“Well, you know how to use it—that last inning was terrific. And so was your homer. Guess I’ll have to get you a new bat next,” Jay said, returning the hug.

Lynn leaned out the window in the back where she and Emma were waiting. “Good game, Timmy,” she yelled enthusiastically. “Get *in*—Dad’s going to take us to Dano’s to eat!”

During the short drive, both kids talked at once, while Emma said nothing. Jay stole a glance at her a couple of times in the rearview mirror. She seemed all right, but he wished he knew how she was feeling. More than that, he wished he knew if she was still seeing Patrick McNaughton from work. They hadn’t separated because of Patrick; he came along later, or so Jay thought. What she said at the time was that she was tired of Jay’s working all the time and basically ignoring her and that she “didn’t want to live like this anymore.” Try as he might, Jay had not yet been able to figure out exactly what that meant. He always tried to be there for important events, and especially for the children, attending school plays, PTA meetings, sports events, and even church events, although he didn’t attend church very often.

“We’ll have two medium pizzas, one ‘supreme’ and one with just pepperoni and cheese,” Jay told the waitress, who had already brought them water and a lemonade for Lynn. “And one chicken sandwich on toasted white bread with lots of mayonnaise.”

“I’d like a 7-Up, too,” Tim added politely, and the waitress smiled at him. With his auburn cowlick and mannerly ways, he usually appealed to adults. People said he looked like his father, but Jay, who was fair with curly black hair, didn’t see it.

Conversation during the meal progressed from details of the game to the outlook for the team to get into the citywide playoffs in three weeks. Finally, Emma looked directly at Jay and asked, “Where are you working next week?”

“Same road,” Jay said, carefully folding his paper napkin and laying

it on the table. "I'm still holding one of the signs. They ran into a problem digging the ditch for the water pipe, so we'll probably be there three or four more weeks. They're trenching, laying, and doing a temporary paving. But no weekend work. I told Alex I'd help him with the orchard, but just for a few hours, so I can help you and the kids most of next weekend."

"Will you come to my game Saturday, Dad?" Tim asked with a mouthful of pizza.

"Don't talk with your mouth full!" Jay answered automatically, and then ruffled his son's hair. "You know I will, and if you get rained out, we'll find something else to do." He saw Emma smile faintly. After he paid for the meal, they piled back into the van and he drove them to the house. *But not my home anymore*, he thought. He wondered if it ever would be again. The children had stopped asking if he would spend the night. He wondered what Emma told them. A couple of weeks ago, when he and Tim were together at Walmart, Tim asked, "Dad, are you ever going to move back in?"

"Your mother and I have some things to work out, Tim, and we're trying to do that. We both love you and Lynn very much. I'll let you know anything we decide once we decide it." Tim had not asked the question since.

After he went in with them, read Lynn a story, examined Tim's ant farm, and went over some bills with Emma, Jay left. It was early, but he didn't feel like going to the Brick Bat for a beer. He drove back to his garage apartment, popped a cold Heineken, and turned on a tennis match. He didn't really care about the match, but his choices were limited with no cable hookup. Tomorrow he was going to work in the orchard with Alex Rosen, his landlord, which he didn't mind. It was good physical work and much more interesting than holding the "stop/go" sign on a country road for eight hours. He reminded himself, however, for all the boredom of that job, the pay was good.

THE HAND IN THE WINDOW

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROBLEM NEARLY every morning that Jay got up to go to work was that he had to dress in layers. Even in August, it could be very cool in the mornings at their elevation, which meant at least a jacket and a sweater over his tee shirt. This Monday morning he added a loose-fitting, long-sleeved cotton shirt over the tee. After gulping his coffee and filling his thermos with what remained of the pot, he added all the top layers of clothes and walked out to the van, which started after the third try. He figured that in two more weeks he would have enough cash to take it into the shop for repairs again. He began his ten-mile drive to the work site.

When he got there, two trucks were already parked in the workers' temporary lot, which was really just an open, rutted field. Jay recognized Tyrone's old blue Chevy Tahoe and Carlos' late-model Toyota Tundra, which was a model Jay had his eye on—if he could ever afford a new truck. Carlos, as foreman, almost always got to the job site first. Today he was up in the cab of the front loader, getting it started so he could move it into place for the driver, who always seemed to be late. Jay admired Carlos, who was fair, a hard worker, and skilled—he could run most of the equipment if somebody called in sick or didn't show up.

Jay pulled out his thermos, a large bottle of water, his lunch bag with the usual bologna and cheese sandwich, and an apple. He dumped them all into a white plastic bag and began walking to the equipment shed. By the time he retrieved his sign and walkie-talkie from the locker, greeted Carlos, and walked to his post, he already felt warm. He shrugged off his jacket and saw Tyrone had arrived. Tyrone would be holding the sign at the other end of the construction zone. They used the walkie-talkies to keep in touch, which was necessary as they were working along a curve in the road and could not see each other.

They began stopping the traffic at 8 a.m. and worked until 4 p.m., taking staggered lunch breaks, with one of the other crew relieving them for half an hour. Jay's break would come at noon, with Tyrone getting off at 12:30. If they didn't want to eat in their vehicles, there were some tall pine trees just off to one side of the road, with a sloping bank and soft grass under

them. It made a good shady spot for lunch, although Jay sometimes had trouble staying awake. That's when he usually drank the rest of the coffee in the thermos.

Two of the pipe layers were rolling the "CAUTION—ONE LANE" signs into place on both ends of the construction zone. Jay was already beginning to feel bored. The pay was better than what he had been making at the factory, though, and the job gave him health benefits that covered the family. He hadn't made any close friends on the crew, as this was the first job working with them. He liked several of them well enough, and they exchanged easy pleasantries. Plus, the job gave him time to think. Besides baseball and the van, Jay tried to think about the family and what to do next. Except that as many ideas as he had, they all took more money than he had.

He often considered moving to North Carolina. His mother and stepfather lived there and had a growing nursery business. He had studied agricultural business during his two years at Tech, before he dropped out because of the money. He liked working with plants and knew he was good at it. When he lost the job at the factory, his parents invited him to join them. At the time, he thought Emma wouldn't like that, although he never asked her. His real fantasy involved taking just Tim with him and starting a new life, but then he felt guilty about Lynn and Emma, too.

"Okay, the red Volks with Ohio tags is my last one," Tyrone's voice crackled through the walkie-talkie. Jay waited for the small red car. Then he slowly turned his sign from "stop" to "proceed with caution." The first car in his stopped line eased out; a blond woman was driving, and she smiled at him. Most people never looked at him, and some frowned, as if he, personally, was keeping them in the waiting line. Once in a while someone smiled and waved. Jay let his twenty cars go through before turning his sign back to "stop" and calling Tyrone to let him know that a white Toyota Highlander was his last car.

By the time Jay finished his lunch break under the pine trees, he had shed his sweater as well as his jacket. Since he didn't want to bother walking back to his van, he bundled them up and put them in the plastic bag by the side of the road near him. The traffic in the afternoon was always sparse. No cars came by in either direction for twenty minutes, and by three o'clock Jay was fighting drowsiness. He drained the thermos and began looking around, trying to get interested in something other than the pavement and the four men in white hard hats laying the water pipe.

Across the road he noticed tall corn was growing. He wasn't sure if the corn was for cattle or people. On his side of the road, but well back from it, was a one-story, ranch-style red brick house. The sign halfway up the long drive said "for sale." Jay had noticed the sign the first time he looked at the house, but today he realized that there was no realtor's name—just a phone number.

A car was coming. He made sure his sign was turned to "stop." As he watched to see if more cars were coming, he realized he had never seen anyone near the brick house. He wondered if it was occupied or if the owners had moved out. He did not remember seeing any cars pulling into the driveway. To the right of the house stood scraggly woods made up of some bushes, jack pines, and oaks. The nearest structures to the left of the house were a farmer's shed and a white farmhouse. They were at least fifty yards down the road and even further back from it than the brick house. *Guess you don't see your neighbors very much out here*, Jay thought, turning his sign to let his two cars through after calling Tyrone. They usually waited for twenty cars to get in line before letting the line go, but when there was so little traffic they just used common sense.

Another lull in the traffic. To distract himself, Jay turned toward the brick house. It had a garage on the far right side. The main part of the house to the left of the garage jutted out, with a recessed front door in the middle and three windows about five feet off the ground to the left of the door. Just then his walkie-talkie crackled. "Got three comin' through—last one's a big brown Dodge van." Jay started to turn back toward the traffic that would be coming at him, but his gaze lingered for a second on the front of the house.

Then he saw it. The sight lasted no more than a couple of seconds, but in the window furthest to his left, he saw what he was sure was a hand. A small one, maybe a child's, maybe a woman's, but a hand—the palm facing towards him, the fingers and thumb splayed out. And then it was gone.

Jay spun around to get his sign turned. The first car from Tyrone's end was approaching. Jay felt his heart beating, his adrenalin pumping. Now thoroughly awake, he held his sign steady and concentrated on the traffic. Cars began queuing up on his side, too. Less than an hour to go and traffic was picking up. What rush hour there was started about 4:30 p.m., which was why they quit at 4:00. The men digging today had made some progress, but not much. Several times in the last three weeks they

experienced the ditch collapsing, and Jay saw that happen again today. Now he hoped he wouldn't have to move down the road at least for another day or two. He wanted that much time to see if he could see anything going on at the brick house. In one way, he hoped he had just been sleepy and confused. Could he have just seen a piece of paper flapping in the window? In another way, he wanted to see the hand again.

CHAPTER THREE

TUESDAY BROUGHT NO unusual events on the job. The day dawned warm, and Jay wore fewer clothes. The van behaved. He treated himself to lukewarm fried chicken for lunch, picking it up at a KFC on his way to work. He brought two Cokes and plenty of water. He spent as much time as he could looking at the house, but he saw nothing, and no one came or went. There was no way to tell if it was occupied. During his lunch break, he casually asked two of the other workers if they knew anything about the house, but they didn't. "Why, you thinking of buying it?" one of them asked him, raising an eyebrow. Most of them knew he had been laid off at the factory and that he was glad to have this job; none of them knew he was separated from his wife.

When he turned in his sign and walkie-talkie at the end of his shift, Carlos was locking up equipment. "We will have a new person with us tomorrow," he informed Jay in his slightly formal English. Carlos' family came from Florida, by way of Cuba. "And she is a lady. I will ask you to give her an orientation to your position at some point. She will be working to relieve you and Tyrone and also running one of the tillers."

Jay nodded. He didn't think there was much training required to show anyone what he did, but he was curious about the new worker.

On Wednesday, Jay showed up at the work site even earlier than his usual time. Only one other car, a Hyundai Elantra, had already arrived. Jay hoped that maybe he would see a car parked in the driveway or leaving the brick house, but he didn't. When Carlos arrived in his Tundra, Jay got out of the van and went to collect his sign and walkie-talkie.

"Jay, I would like you to meet Rebecca Franz. She is now part of our crew." Carlos smiled at both of them as a woman who looked to be in her mid-twenties got out of the Hyundai.

"It's Becky," she said in a low, pleasant voice, smiling at Jay.

"Jay Berg here," he said, giving her a small smile.

"I will put her with you first today," Carlos explained. Becky was carrying a dark blue satchel that Jay thought probably contained her lunch and whatever else she had brought. He felt disappointed that he wouldn't

have time to do any surveillance of the house right away on his shift, but then he admitted to himself that training Becky might be interesting, and there probably wouldn't be anything to see at the house anyway.

"We wait for twenty cars to line up, and then we talk to each other and confirm what's happening at the other end. For example, Tyrone will tell me the make and model of the last car in his line, so I know when his line ends. I wait about five seconds and then turn my sign. We don't get all that much traffic out here. Just sometimes in the late afternoon. Carlos keeps the key to the locker in the shed, so if you need batteries for the walkie-talkie or anything, that's where to get them." Jay paused, feeling a little awkward now. "And if you need a rest break or anything, switch your walkie-talkie to Carlos' frequency and ask him to send a man to relieve you."

Becky smiled. "Sounds easy enough. How long have you been on the job?"

"It's my fourth week. Mainly been holding the sign, but Carlos said he may use me for some of the trenching work later. Looks like the work on this road is going to last through September. You going to work with us full time?"

"For now. I'm going to school at the community college nights, starting in September. I need the money, and I'm hoping I can juggle the schedule so I can work here during the day."

Jay looked at his watch. Five minutes to start time. "Do you want to take the sign for the first run?" He turned on the walkie-talkie. He had seen Tyrone arrive about ten minutes ago. "Ty, we're ready here—Becky's taking the first run." Jay assumed Carlos had told Tyrone about Becky.

"All ready here," Tyrone radioed back, and Jay handed the walkie-talkie to Becky.

Thirty minutes later, Becky radioed Tyrone that she'd like to come down and work with him. He agreed, so she turned back the equipment to Jay. "Good going," Jay said, smiling, and Becky returned his smile. She picked up her satchel from the side of the road and began walking away from Jay. Jay observed that she was shorter than Emma, who was nearly as tall as Jay, and Becky certainly had more curves. Jay liked his women lean and admired long legs, but he found Becky walking away very sexy even in old blue jeans and a work shirt. Her short, black hair looked like a cap over her head, covering her small ears. Emma seldom wore jeans and always dressed up a little bit, even to work. Sometimes, when Jay asked her to, she also wore perfume, which he liked.

By midafternoon, storm clouds were gathering west of the work site. "Gonna quit early," Tyrone radioed to Jay. "Carlos jus' came over to tell me and said for me to tell you. Hafta wait for the work crew to move their stuff, then we can cut off. Should be 'bout three o'clock." Jay suddenly felt let down. Not that the work stimulated him that much, but nothing had happened at the brick house, and he hadn't seen Becky more than in the distance since the morning. She was working with the tiller in the middle of the day, and Tyrone spelled Jay off at lunch while Becky stood in for Tyrone.

Fifteen minutes later, they heard the first rumbles of thunder. Fortunately, the two men assigned to the closing-down tasks were folding up the "Caution—One Lane" signs, after which Jay and Tyrone could quit. Within ten minutes, splashes of rain started, and by then, all of the crew were sprinting toward their vehicles. Jay got to the shed last and handed in his equipment. "Becky did fine with us," he told Carlos, who smiled as he locked up.

"Check the web site in the morning to see if we work," he reminded Jay. "No rain is predicted, so I think we will." Jay nodded and hoped Carlos was right. They didn't get paid for days off because of bad weather.

Jay got into his van very slowly and pretended to be stowing his bag. He wanted to be the last one to leave the parking field. He turned the van north on the road and drove back to where he had been standing all day. Two trucks were headed toward him, going in the opposite direction. There was no one behind him when he drew abreast of the house. He had already decided what he would do. He turned into the driveway, turned off the ignition, and slouched down in his seat. If anyone came or challenged him, he would say he was thinking about buying the house. But no one came. The rain poured down heavily, but Jay could see blue sky beyond the overhanging cloud.

After twenty minutes, Jay was ready to give it up. The rain had stopped, leaving the air cooler, so he lowered a window, but the van still felt stuffy. No sign of life at the house. Jay started the engine. He could back out or turn around in the driveway. He decided to turn around.

He gave the house one more glance, especially the high windows on the left—and he saw it again: the hand at the window. This time, it seemed smaller. Then Jay realized that the fingers were curling inward, as if someone was clawing at the glass. In his mind, he heard a scream. The fingers moved for a few seconds, and then the hand disappeared.

Jay cut off the engine and simply sat, staring at the house. His heart was racing. "I should do something," he said out loud, but he couldn't imagine what. What if someone was in there, maybe a child, in trouble? He gripped the steering wheel hard. "Maybe I should tell someone," he said, hardly hearing his own voice. And who would that be? The deputy sheriff, his brother-in-law, who had told Jay to his face that he thought Jay was an alcoholic, just because Jay had been hitting the beer pretty heavily for a time after the separation. He couldn't imagine convincing Vic that he was stone cold sober while seeing a mysterious hand at the window of an apparently vacant house.

He thought about telling Carlos but rejected the idea because Carlos might have heard that Jay used to drink—and Carlos had the power to fire Jay.

As he looked again at the house, he knew the windows were too high for him to see directly in. He would need a ladder to do that. Then he had another idea. *What if I'm not imagining this and someone's in there, someone in trouble? Maybe I can look in the newspaper or go online and see if there's been any kind of a kidnapping or a missing person report.* The Telegraph served as a weekly county newspaper, and while it carried lots of ads, it did report on community and state news. Jay had only a vague idea about how to use the Internet to check on missing persons in the area, but he knew he could try.

He sat in the driveway another twenty minutes, but nothing appeared again at any of the windows. So he started the van and headed for his house. He hadn't said he would be over for dinner that night, but Emma always seemed to cook extra, and he knew that Tim and Lynn would be happy to see him. At least he hoped so.

CHAPTER FOUR

DAD, COME AND see my charts!" Tim had taken Jay's hand after dinner and practically dragged his father from the kitchen table. When they got to Tim's room, Jay saw his son had used the computer to make elaborate charts of which American League teams were winning, who they would play for the rest of the season, and who might survive to the playoffs and the World Series. The Boston Red Socks figured prominently in Tim's hopeful calculations.

"They're really good, Tim," Jay said with honest admiration. In school, Tim excelled at math, a talent Jay hoped had come from him.

"Dad, if the Sox win the pennant, will you take me to the World Series?"

Jay laughed. Tim had asked him this question every year. Jay put a sober look on his face and said in a solemn voice, "We'll see." His son groaned, knowing that the answer probably meant "no," but he half hoped that this year it would be different.

Before leaving the room, Jay glanced at Tim's computer and saw a page about Morse code up on the screen. A printed copy lay in the printer tray.

"Are you studying that?" Jay asked.

Tim nodded. "For my scouting badge. My scoutmaster says it's good to know. He says people use computers and things too much, and we need to know how get along without them."

Jay nodded. "Morse used to be what people on ships used. I had a friend when I was your age, and we studied Morse, too. Is it hard for you to learn?"

"Nah—I memorized everything pretty much right away."

Jay realized some time ago his son probably had close to a photographic memory. And he liked to read, which made Jay feel good—he and Emma gave both children books for presents even when they were very young.

"I'm going to read your sister a story, and then let's toss some balls outside before it gets dark," Jay said, ruffling Tim's hair.

Emma had cleaned the kitchen and was sitting in the living room, reading a book. She smiled when Jay came into the room. He smiled back. "Is it okay if I put Lynn to bed and read her a story?"

“Sure, she’d like that. She’s into the ‘Chronicles of Narnia’ right now—it’s on the table by her bed.”

Jay found Lynn sitting on the front porch, intently watching a caterpillar that was crawling very slowly down the steps. He sat down with her. “Do you think that caterpillar will turn into a butterfly?” he asked seriously.

“Yep. But first it turns into a cris-liss!”

“You mean a chrysalis,” Jay said, smiling.

“Whatever!”

“How about I read to you from your book and tuck you in tonight? It’s about your bedtime.”

Instead of arguing, Lynn got up, took his hand, and led him back into the house.

Nice family picture, Jay said to himself with a twinge as they walked by Emma, who looked up from her book. *Wish it was true*. He thought about asking Emma how things were at work—meaning, of course, whether she was still seeing Patrick—but then he felt that he couldn’t really deal with all that tonight.

Earlier, when he was driving to the house, he remembered his and Emma’s first date—at a ball game. Jay had loved the way Emma wore her long hair up, the smooth skin on her arms and hands, and her scent. Two more dates and a long weekend together in the mountains and he was ready to propose. They were happy together those first few years. They made love most nights, and when Tim came everything seemed perfect. Where did it all go?

When he came back into the living room after reading two chapters to a sleepy Lynn and tucking her in, he said, “Tim and I are going out to play catch for a while before I go.”

“Mmmm,” she said, not looking up. Jay went outside where Tim was already warming up his throwing arm by aiming the baseball against a large oak. Half an hour later, with most of the light gone from the sky, Jay said, “That’s it for tonight, Tim. I’ll be at your game Saturday if I don’t get back here before then.” For just a second, Jay saw Tim’s mouth droop, but then he smiled at his father and simply said, “Okay—thanks for working with me on my throwing. Coach says I’m getting better. He might even let me pitch next season!”

After returning briefly to the living room to say goodbye to Emma, who did not get up, Jay got into the van and realized he did not want to go back to his apartment. Going out for a drink didn’t appeal to him either, so

he found himself heading back to the job site. It was past nine o'clock. He didn't know what he expected to see, but he knew that what he was going to do was to watch the brick house for a while.

Jay rolled the windows of the van down so he wouldn't have to run the air conditioning, which put a load on the old battery. He was approaching the house from the south. Suddenly he saw a car coming toward him with no lights on. He slowed down. The car got to the driveway of the house and turned in. Jay could make out that it was a sedan, but he couldn't see much else and certainly not the license plate. With his own lights still on, he drove past the driveway and continued for half a mile, looking for a good place to turn around and double back. When he got to a turn off on the road, he reversed his direction and drove back. This time, when he was almost abreast of the driveway, he came to a stop. The car he had seen was at the end of the driveway, near the front door of the house. No lights from the car and none from the house.

Jay wished he had binoculars. He didn't know how long he could just stay stopped on the road before some other cars came, but he half hoped the person who drove the sedan would come back, get in, and drive down the driveway so at least Jay could see something more about the car. When, after ten minutes, that didn't happen, Jay slowly accelerated and headed for home. He drove carefully, but he was working on a plan. He also thought that if he could borrow some binoculars, he could watch the house after dark the next night.

But an hour later, back at his apartment, Jay felt frustrated. When he called the number on the "for sale" sign, he got a message "this number is no longer in service." Then he looked at a "multiple listings" web site to see if the house was listed for sale. No luck. He entered the address of the house into several web sites that promised to give owner information if you had the address, but he kept getting a "no listed owner" message. It certainly seemed to Jay that someone must own the house, as someone was trying to sell it. Jay felt frustrated enough to end his search. Then he thought of something else.

His brother-in-law, Vic, once showed him — and Tim — how to log on to crime sites. Tim found it fascinating. Jay hadn't paid much attention, but he remembered enough to do it now. When he got to the site for his county, he found plenty of listings of unsolved breaking and entering incidents, arrests, names of people wanted for parole violation and the like, but there were no kidnappings or missing persons listed for the last year.

Well, I guess I could camp out in the woods tomorrow night, Jay decided. That idea seemed a little foolish to him now, but he didn't have any other plan. He knew it would help if he had somebody he could talk to about all of this. He went over his short list of friends and wondered if Becky might be interested in the mystery. In his short time knowing her, she seemed smart. Maybe she would even have some suggestions.

Jay sat in the dark, with only the glow of his laptop screen illuminating the apartment and thought about the next day. He'd talk to Becky either before they started work—if she got there early—or during the lunch break. If she had a good idea about something else he could do, short of sitting in the woods in the van in the dark, he'd listen. Or maybe she'd like his idea and volunteer to come with him.

"Yeah, sure," Jay said out loud, getting up to turn on the TV for the late news. But he had to admit he was looking forward to going to work on Thursday.

CHAPTER FIVE

THURSDAY MORNING JAY arrived at the work site thirty minutes before his start time and felt gratified when Becky's Elantra pulled up right next to his van. He got out first and opened her door for her. She laughed at that and said, "Your mama must have brought you up right!" Jay didn't know what to say, so he launched right into what he been thinking about all night.

"If you have a minute after we check in, I want to ask you about something," he said, keeping his voice low.

Becky's eyebrows went up. "You sound serious. If you mean that, sure. I'll follow you down to your station. I think I'm going to be working with the rolling crew this morning, then spelling you at lunch, but I can come with you for a few minutes now."

They checked in. After Jay retrieved his walkie-talkie and sign they began walking down the road. "I know you're going to think I'm crazy, but I've seen something, and I don't know what to do about it." Becky stopped walking and turned to look at him.

"Come on, keep walking," Jay said, glancing behind him. Some of the men were starting up their machines, and the noise level on the road was picking up.

"There's this house, the red brick one with the 'for sale' sign that I've been standing in front of. Nobody ever seems to come or go there, but two days ago and then again yesterday when I was sort of looking at the house, I saw a hand in one of the windows." He paused to let this sink in.

"A *hand*? You mean like a real live human hand?" This time, Becky kept up their pace, but she turned her head to look at him again.

"Yeah, like somebody was below the window and holding up their hand. It looked small, like maybe a child's or a small woman's. Last night, after we quit, I drove back there, went up the driveway and waited almost half an hour. That's when I saw it the second time. I drove back here after dinner, too, and I saw a car drive in the driveway. I think it didn't have any license plates, but I couldn't tell for sure."

"You think it might just be something hanging above the window and it comes into view now and then?"

"I thought of that, but I couldn't see a string or rope or anything. And it's coming up at the bottom of the window. My eyesight's pretty good. It looked like a real hand."

Becky was silent for a moment. "Do you know anything about who owns the house? Can you go on line and find out?"

"Tried that, and no, I can't find out anything. There's a phone number on the 'for sale' sign, but it's not a working number. Nobody on the crew seems to know. I've asked some of them. I looked at the house sale listings online and it's not listed, and none of the web sites I checked show an owner's name. Kinda strange if it's really for sale."

They were almost at his station, and start time was ten minutes away. Becky paused. "I have a friend who sells real estate part time. She could probably find out who owns it."

"I'm going back there tonight," Jay blurted out. He hadn't planned on revealing this right away, but it just came out. "I'm going to borrow some binoculars and park the van in the woods and wait to see if the car comes back—or if I can see anything else."

"I could text my friend and then call her when I'm on break," Becky said, and he was relieved to see that she was not laughing at him. "If she can find out something, maybe you wouldn't have to camp out in the woods." Now he did hear a little humor in her voice. "I'll let you know what she says." She paused. Then, looking right at him, "Have you thought about going to the sheriff's office?"

Jay didn't feel like explaining his relationship with his brother-in-law, so he simply said, "Yeah, but I'd feel foolish if this was all some kind of a trick or something that I am just imagining. So I feel like I should have some more information first."

"Sounds reasonable. I'll get back to you." Becky shifted her work bag to her other hand and headed back down the road to where she would be joining the crew who did rolling to smooth the ditches before the pipe was laid. Jay envied her the physical labor, but for once he didn't mind standing with his sign. At least it gave him the opportunity to observe the house, which in the morning light looked no different than it had the day before—no car in the driveway, and nothing to be seen at the windows.

Four hours later, Becky arrived back at Jay's station. "I'm your lunch replacement," she said cheerfully. Then, looking around to see if anyone

else was in earshot, she added, "Got a text message back from my real estate friend. She says the listed owner of the house is the estate of Carver Billingsley. Taxes are current. She didn't tell me anything else. Anything else you need?"

"Well, that helps. I can look up Carver Billingsley later. At least it's something."

Jay handed her the sign and walkie-talkie. He wanted to get out of the sun and had a shady spot under a pine picked out where he could eat his sandwich. "Thanks. I appreciate your checking." He almost added that maybe the whole thing was nothing, but he really didn't feel that way, and he didn't want to pretend with her. He walked over to the side of the road to pick up his bag.

"I wouldn't mind going with you tonight," Becky called to him as he started off to his lunch spot.

Jay stopped, turned around, and realized that this was exactly what he hoped she would say. "Well, that's fine, but let's talk about it when I come back. I'll be back in twenty minutes." And for once, he didn't mind taking a shorter lunch break.

CHAPTER SIX

JAY TOLD BECKY he would pick her up at just before dark, then drive back to the house, and find a place in the woods to park the van. “We should get there just before it’s really dark,” Jay told her. “And it might be a long wait, but if it’s all right with you, I plan to stay until midnight.” She agreed and offered to bring water and some cheese crackers.

Now it was dusk, and Jay was driving the van along a rutted path that led into the woods close enough to the house so they could watch it with Alex Rosen’s night vision binoculars. Alex didn’t ask why Jay wanted to borrow them but simply said, “Don’t lose them!” when Jay picked them up after dinner.

“Hope this isn’t going to be too long a night for you,” Jay said to Becky as he was maneuvering the van into a tight spot between two stands of pines. He felt a little awkward with her now since this wasn’t a work occasion, but it certainly wasn’t a social one either.

“I took a nap when I got home earlier. And I had my call with Ben, so I’m fine.”

“Who’s Ben?”

“My fiancé. He’s stationed at Fort Hood right now. Maybe going to Germany, but he doesn’t know for sure. We talk most nights and text a lot.” She paused. “I didn’t exactly tell him about this little assignment. He’s kinda jealous and has a temper sometimes.”

Jay was at a loss for words, so he changed the subject. “How good is your eyesight? Can you see the house clearly from here?”

He parked the van facing the left side of the house about seventy-five yards away. Jay figured that they were reasonably well-concealed by the trees and small bushes. The almost-full moon shone brightly, and there would be a full sky of stars later.

“I can see it fine. I don’t think we’ll need the glasses until the car comes and we’re trying to see who’s in it or get the license number or something,” Becky answered.

“Let’s keep the windows down as long as we can—unless we get bugs,” Jay suggested, pressing the buttons to lower the van’s side windows. Becky

nodded. Then Jay turned off the engine. For a while, neither of them spoke, and they could begin to hear the night noises—crickets, frogs, and the occasional rustling of grass and leaves from the passage of some small animal. Jay wondered if deer foraged here at night. If they saw the van, they would probably shy away. After thirty minutes when they had seen nothing unusual, Jay said to Becky, “Where you from originally? I can’t place your accent.”

She laughed softly. “Don’t think I have one. I’m an Army brat. Both of my parents served. I was born in Kansas, moved to California, then Tennessee, then South Carolina. That’s where my mom and dad are now. He’s running a CarMax lot. I came here because of a boyfriend, but that ended and I stayed. Then I met Ben through a friend when he came to visit here. He used to live in Florida where his folks are—he still has a little place there, but he likes it here and we plan to settle down once he gets out of the service. By then, I want to have my college degree and get a real job.” She arched her back and leaned as far back in the seat as she could to get more comfortable. That gave Jay a good look at her full breasts, which were stretching against the white cotton tee shirt that she had tucked into her khakis. “How about you?”

Jay sighed. He didn’t want to get into his personal life with her, but he felt she deserved some kind of response. “Born and raised in the state but not in this county. Dad died when I was eight; Mom remarried. They live in North Carolina now, running a nursery. I started to study agriculture business at Tech, but the money ran out. I came here because of a job at the factory; my wife found a job there, too. Then they scaled back, and I was let go. That’s when I got on the road crew. I have two kids—a boy and a girl.”

“And your wife doesn’t mind that you’re sitting in the woods in the dark with another woman?” Jay could almost see Becky’s eyebrows arching.

“We’re separated. I live alone.” He bit back the need to tell her more—to tell her that he didn’t know what would happen next—a divorce, reconciliation, maybe just staying like this in limbo. That he hated Patrick McNaughton. That he wasn’t even sure how he felt about Emma. That he loved his kids more than anything in the world.

“Sorry,” Becky said softly, and then they were both quiet again. She opened a bottle of water and offered it to him.

A few minutes later they could see the stars, and the nearly full moon had risen high above them.

Within five minutes, a dark sedan approached the driveway to the house and turned in. Jay reached for the binoculars, which were under Becky's feet. She opened her bag and retrieved a small pad and pencil while he focused the binoculars. But their viewing angle was not good for seeing the license plates—if there were any. "Damn," Jay said very softly. And then the car swung ninety degrees in front of the house and stopped, and Jay could see the rear end quite well.

"He doesn't have any plates!" He handed Becky the glasses. She adjusted them slightly and held them up for a minute.

"He's got something in his hands, though," she said, quickly giving the binoculars back to Jay.

Jay readjusted them and looked. "Seems like a big sack or a garbage bag or something," he said, still look through the glasses. "He's got a key to the front door." The figure disappeared into the house. No lights came on, but they could both see a small pinprick of light that seemed to be moving around. "He must have a flashlight," Jay added, although the binoculars didn't help him to identify anything more now.

"Do you want me to sneak over there while he's inside and get a better look at the car?" Becky asked.

Jay turned to look at her and realized she was serious. "No! We can't risk letting him know that he's being watched." Privately, he had the same idea but didn't want either of them to get in trouble. "You know, he could just be the owner, and he comes at night because he works during the day. Maybe there's nothing strange about any of this. We have to be careful."

The pinprick of light entered the room with the window where Jay had seen the hand. Then it seemed to go out or at least become invisible. They waited. Jay adjusted the binoculars again but couldn't see anything more than the front of the house.

About half an hour later, the light reappeared in the window near the front door. Then it went out. The door opened. Still carrying a good-sized sack, the same figure emerged, turned, did something with the door—probably locking it—and got into the car. No headlights came on as the car slowly turned and drove down the driveway. Jay kept the binoculars up. "Looks like a late-model Chevy, probably black, but I can't be sure," he told Becky, who wrote this down.

"Do you want to follow him?" Becky asked before the car came to the main road.

"No, I don't want him to see us. And this damn van doesn't go very

fast, so we'd probably lose him." They watched as the car came to the end of the driveway and turned to go in the direction away from where they were parked. They saw the tail lights come on a few seconds later, which meant he had finally turned on his headlights. Then the car was gone.

"Do you want to get into the house?" Becky asked.

"Not tonight," he said firmly, although he wanted to do that more than anything. "We need more information. Even if there's nothing going on in there, I want to find out a few things. Tell you what. After I take you home, I'll try to find out about this Carver Billingsley."

"Why don't you let me do the research? I'm pretty good with the on-line searches, and I can report back to you in the morning."

"Good idea. You're probably better at doing this online research than I am." Jay took one last look at the house with the binoculars. It was completely dark, and there were no signs of life.

He started the van's engine and carefully backed out of the small space. They drove to Becky's apartment in silence, but both of them were thinking. Jay briefly thought about asking her to join him at the Brick Bat for a beer, but he didn't feel like he wanted to turn this into a social occasion.

After he left her off, Jay checked his watch since the clock in the van had stopped working months ago. He decided to head to the Brick Bat. He needed time to think about what they'd seen and to decide what to do next, but he didn't want to go home to his small apartment and be by himself just yet. The Brick Bat would have news on the TV, too, or maybe a baseball game. He really missed cable.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ALL TWELVE TABLES at the Brick Bat were taken, so Jay moved to the bar and pulled out one of the high stools. Two men a couple of seats away were nursing beers and talking, while one gray-haired man sat alone at the end of the bar, drinking coffee. Jay ordered a Heineken. Both TV monitors were on, and he hoped to see some news and sports scores. One thing he liked about this bar was that they didn't play loud, inane music, and they would change the channels on the TV screens if you asked.

"And so I sent her a registered letter and told her that, if she didn't let me see Colley this weekend, I was going to call a lawyer." The younger of the two men near Jay reached for his glass.

His companion nodded. "Should scare her into it."

"Yeah, but I really can't afford it. So I hope it does. That bastard she's seeing probably thinks it's funny that she won't let me see my own kid."

Jay tried to tune out their conversation and concentrate on the sports scores. The Red Sox were having a good season and looked like World Series contenders, but so did the Minnesota Twins. They were playing each other tonight, in Minneapolis, and the score was tied at the bottom of the eighth. Other scores appeared on the crawler, and Jay watched them absently. He needed to decide how to get more information about the house and the mysterious car if he could. Plus, if there really was someone inside the house who needed help, he needed to do something soon.

The two men on his left had just ordered another round of beers. When they came, the older one said, "What's this new boyfriend of hers do, anyway? Is he maybe some kind of lawyer who's telling her how to get around your visitation rights?"

"Haven't any idea. I've never seen him real good—just that one time when he pulled up in his car when I was already in mine and going to leave. Colley ran into the house when he saw him, so I don't think Colley likes him, but Deb sure seems to. Says she's been seeing him for 'quite some time now'—whatever that means. Car looked kinda new. Maybe he deals drugs for all I know."

"So how long since you seen Colley?"

“Four weeks and counting.”

Jay turned around to look directly at the two men. He moved over to the empty barstool next to them. “Mind if I horn in on your conversation?” For Jay, who seldom interrupted anybody and never insinuated himself into a group, this was completely out of character.

Both men turned to look at him, the older one frowning and the younger one raising an eyebrow. “It’s a free world,” he said listlessly.

“Thanks,” Jay said, placing his beer bottle in front of him and signaling the bar tender for another Heineken. “It’s just that I couldn’t help overhearing part of what you were saying,” he said, nodded at the younger man, “and I’m going through a bad separation from my wife. Haven’t gotten to the point of divorce yet, but it sounds like you have some experience – and I’ve got two kids I want to protect and keep seeing.” The beer came and Jay took a long swallow. He hoped he had opened the conversational door.

Instantly, the younger man loosened his grip on his beer glass and gave Jay a half smile. “Sure, join the crowd. Name’s Sid. This is my friend, Louie. I know *all* about divorce. Louie’s been through it, too. But lately I’m thinking I did the whole thing wrong. Maybe should have stayed with her. Now my ex won’t even let me see my son.”

Jay merely nodded and said, “Bad scene, I guess.” He took another swallow of his beer. “How old’s your son?”

“Just turned six. Last time I saw him was at his birthday party. We took him to that party restaurant where they give the kids balloons and they make them into animals. He loved that.”

Louie, who had been eyeing Jay curiously, broke in. “I think she wants more money from you, Sid. She knows about your dad dying and all. Has she asked for more?”

Sid stared at the bar. “Well, she did say something about I should be ‘more generous’ with her and Colley now that my old man had died, but I told her I was sticking with the alimony and support payments we agreed to in court. Fact is, he didn’t leave me all that much, and they have to probate the estate first before I see any of it. I told her that.” Sid looked up and glanced briefly at the TV monitor with the sports scores. “She mentioned it again but I still said ‘no’ and she got mad, but then she let it go.”

Jay reached for the peanut bowl on the bar and pushed it toward Sid. “Does she work? Mine’s at least got a good job. Makes more money than I do. Don’t know what that would mean in a divorce.”

Sid’s mouth worked into a tight little smile. “She told the judge she only

works ‘part-time’ and that she volunteers a lot, but fact is she gets paid at the thrift shop where she volunteers, so she’s got money, and they let her buy things dirt cheap. I’m regular with the alimony and support. She doesn’t save though. She was always out buying stuff we didn’t need.”

“Who takes care of Colley during the day, I mean now that it’s summer?” Jay asked, feeling that Sid’s answer would determine whether the conversation would end here or not.

“Used to be our next-door neighbor, but she moved. I’ve asked Deb that same question and got told it was none of my business. That worries me, too. I suppose she’s got someone else to agree to do it—and for free.”

“You really gotta talk to a lawyer, Sid,” Louie said firmly. “She’s going to yank you around and yank you around about this money—that you don’t even have—and she’s going to use Colley to do it.”

Sid turned again toward Jay. “So, you see, I got the divorce, nice and legal, paid for it, and now I’m being screwed. Maybe you ought to make up with your old lady.”

Jay did not want the conversation to focus on his problems, but he wanted to try for one more piece of information. “My wife’s seeing somebody, too. He works in the same place she does. I don’t know if I could sue him or anything if we really do get a divorce.”

“Wouldn’t try that. You can’t get very far with that ‘alienation of affections’ stuff anymore—courts don’t allow it,” Louie offered, finishing his second beer.

“Don’t know where this guy works—if he works—that my ex-wife is seeing,” Sid added. “Someone at work said he heard a rumor that the guy had served time once. Asked her and she got real mad. Probably doesn’t matter, as long as he doesn’t hurt her or Colley.” Sid drained his glass.

Jay picked up his tab, slipped some bills onto the bar on top of it, and stood. “Thanks for letting me join you. And for the advice. Sure sorry about your not being able to see your son. You got any options other than spending money on the lawyers and going back to court?”

“I won’t do that, yet,” Sid answered, taking out his wallet to pay. “She’ll probably come around, unless this money thing is a bigger deal with her than I’m figuring.”

Jay stuck out his hand to Sid. “My last name’s Berg. Jay Berg. Maybe I’ll see you both in here again.”

Louie was paying his tab. Sid took Jay’s hand. “Mine’s Hartman. Maybe we will. Good luck with your problem.”

Jay left the bar ahead of them and got into the van. All evening, he was thinking of what he could do next about the house. When he got home, he opened a drawer in his tiny kitchen and found a pad of sticky notes. He put the pad in his lunch box, along with a marking pen. He set his alarm for 5 a.m. He wanted to be at work again early the next morning.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ON FRIDAY, JAY arrived at the job site early. He gambled he would be ahead of everybody else by at least fifteen minutes, and he was right. He drove down the road, past the field where the crew parked, and past the brick house. No one was in the driveway, and there were no signs of life there, as usual. After a quarter of a mile, he turned the van around and drove south again. Except this time, when he came to the driveway, he turned in and drove straight to the front door of the house.

After he parked, he opened his lunch box, took out the pen and pad, and wrote something on the backside of the first sticky note, just below the sticky part. He got out of the van, looking carefully around him. He saw a couple of cars driving north on the road but otherwise no one in sight. He walked over to the far window. It was about five feet off the ground—too high to see into but not too high to reach. With his right hand, he quickly lifted the small scrap of paper with the adhesive and stuck it in a corner at the bottom of the window. He had no idea how well the glue would hold against the glass, but he couldn't think of any other way to do this.

He looked around again and did not see anyone observing him, so he walked hurriedly back to the van, got in, and drove down the driveway. In two minutes, he was pulling into the field and saw Carlos driving in just behind him.

"Morning," Carlos called pleasantly when he saw Jay. Jay nodded to him and fell into step beside him as they moved toward the storage shed.

"How much longer are we gonna be working this stretch of road?" Jay asked.

"I think the trenching should be done by Monday night. If we lay pipe Tuesday and Wednesday, we might be able to move up a quarter of a mile or so on Thursday. Do you wish to get out of holding the sign next week?" Carlos turned to look at Jay, who realized the offer was a friendly one.

"Nah, I'm fine. Just asking. Hope the weather holds." He waited for Carlos to unlock the shed and took his sign. Counting today, he would have maybe three more workdays to be within sight of the house. Well,

he had decided one thing. No matter what happened today, he would go to the sheriff's office on Saturday. With any luck, his brother-in-law, Vic, would be off duty and Sheriff Carlson would be on.

Since Becky's car wasn't in the field, Jay walked to his station and stowed his bag. At five minutes before start time, he saw the Elantra. But apparently Carlos was assigning Becky to the trenching detail because he saw her disappear toward the south end of the road and figured he wouldn't get to talk with her until their lunch break.

He was right. At 11:30, she came trotting up the road, and when she saw him, she had a grin on her face.

"Hi," she said, a little out of breath. "Sorry I didn't get here earlier, but I was running late this morning. Had to stay up to do a little research."

"And?" Jay asked, smiling back at her.

"Well, Carver Billingsley died two years ago. His estate is all tied up in the courts. It's not even clear who will end up owning the house, but it's in the estate right now. So, I don't know who would be selling it. This morning, I got a message from my friend Lillie. She was able to do a little checking on the phone number on that 'for sale' sign. She said the number hasn't been assigned for more than 12 months." Becky took a swallow of water from the runner's bottle she carried on her belt.

Jay turned to glance at the house and then turned back to Becky. "Thanks. I don't know where we go from here." He decided not to tell her about the sticky note—at least not yet.

"Are you going to tell the sheriff?"

"Maybe. I was just hoping to have some more information." Even to himself this sounded lame, so he added, "My brother-in-law is the deputy, and I don't have much confidence in him, plus he doesn't like me. But the real sheriff is a good guy." He paused. "How about I think about it until tomorrow and then I'll call you or text you and tell what I've done. Is it all right to call you?"

"Sure! But be careful with the law—they may not believe you if it sounds too crazy. Ben always says they hire the dumbest ones to be county cops. Anyway, I'm usually home all day, but I might be out in the morning doing errands. If there's anything you need me to do, I can probably do it. And maybe you'd like to share a pizza or something tomorrow night?"

Jay rapidly calculated what his Saturday would be like. He would spend the morning helping Alex in the orchard and then see if Emma needed any help. Tim's game was at three. He might get invited to a family dinner.

"I'm fine if we make it kind of late. My son has a ball game tomorrow. I'm not sure what's happening afterwards. How about I call you about eight and see where we go from there? If you're hungry before that, go ahead and eat." He knew this didn't sound very gracious, but it was the best he could think of at the moment.

"Fine with me. I'll wait to hear from you." She clipped the water bottle back on her belt and started off down the road. When she was about twenty feet away, she turned and gave him a little wave.

By three o'clock, cumulus clouds were forming in the west. By three-thirty, the first drops of rain started, and Carlos gave the signal to take the signs down. Jay hated to leave since nothing was happening at the house, and he felt sure his sticky note would get washed off the window by the rain. As he started down the road to return his sign, the first streak of lightning cracked close by. Jay stopped and looked back at the house. Just then a huge clap of thunder broke over the fields. Jay couldn't move. He was getting drenched, but he had the strongest premonition he had ever had in his life. He stared at the house.

He saw the wave. Just a little motion, right to left. And again, right to left. The hand at the window withdrew. Jay could no longer see if his sticky note was on the window, but he knew what he had written: "I'm here. Wave if you need help."

THE HAND IN THE WINDOW

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ALSO BY ELIZABETH YOUNG



Fugo: Terror From the Sky

In November, 1944, the Japanese began launching 9,300 unmanned bomb-carrying balloons (Fugo) that were carried east over the Pacific Ocean by the jet stream. Now, almost 70 years later, a group of terrorists using modern technology will try and succeed where the Japanese failed. It will be up to an unlikely group to find a way to stop one of the deadliest terrorist attacks on US soil.

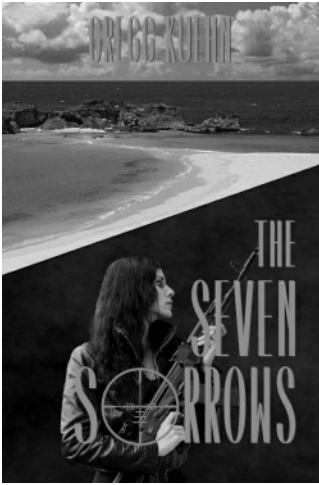


Do You See Him Now

(May 2011, Infinity Publishing)

Ellie Courtland has been haunted for thirty-three years, having witnessed the murder of her mother, an FBI agent. She has always hoped to remember more about the murderer. Suddenly, she sees a picture that looks like him. She teams with the FBI to identify him. But he is looking for her, too, and her search tips him off. Everyone is a suspect—her mother's former partner, a friend's father, even her own long estranged father. While Ellie juggles the two men in her life, her teaching and her search, the murderer is closing in.

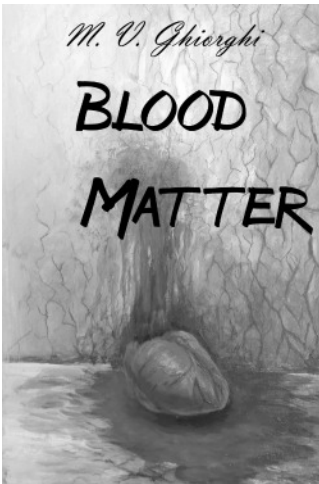
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The Seven Sorrows

by Gregg Kuehn

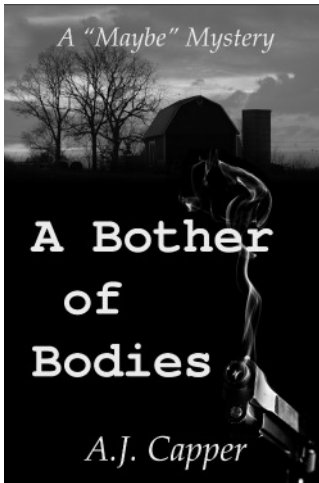
A set of still-lethal handheld tactical nuclear weapons, stolen from the United States Army during the Cold War, has been hidden deep in a cave on the island of El Fortunato, British West Indies, since the Cuban Missile Crisis. KC Jameson finds himself in a race to retrieve the weapons. Can KC decipher the one clue to the missiles whereabouts before they fall into the wrong hands? And exactly whose hands are the wrong hands?



Blood Matters

by M.V. Giorghi

A broken-hearted FBI Agent on the run from his demons...a sadistic genius with a penchant for vengeance...a beautiful forensic psychiatrist with a monstrous past...A doomed love triangle born of crime. Can Agent Vasquez survive the *Blood Matter*?



A Bother of Bodies

by A.J. Capper

Mabel Fuller and her brother are on the run because of Mabel's attempt to kill their mother fifteen years ago. But they're not worried about the law. Their main concern is the family that raised them, the McAllisters. Mabel and Dean manage to avoid the large Irish network with frequent moves and aliases. Or, so they thought. When dead bodies turn up in Dean's newly-purchased barn, the brother and sister fear the McAllisters have found them. Until they realize it's something worse...



The 8th Doll

by Chris Rakunas

When the body of geologist Charlie Landry is found beheaded beside the cenote at Dzibilchaltun, Skips Kane calls his old friend Professor Alex Guidry. Their only clue turns out to be a small doll with the number "8" written in Charlie's own blood. The mystery of the 8th doll will take Kane and Guidry down the winding paths of the Yucatan where they will discover the answer to the age old question: what will happen when the Mayan calendar ends?

Jay ended the call without waiting for Emma to reply. He could not bear having to tell her that he thought their son might have been taken again. Maybe this was all a big mix up. Then he realized that he had not seen the sheriff's car, not on his way back and not since he had been here. Where was it? Maybe one of the deputies had picked Tim up. But wouldn't Mitch have mentioned that it was a sheriff's car that Tim got into? It was time to call Sheriff Carlson...

Vic Bartle was talking to himself. It was a habit when he was angry or disturbed. "I should have done something sooner. I should have gotten Goertz out of the way sooner. I knew he was a bad actor back when we did the drug bust." No telling what the boy might eventually remember...

He was keeping so many secrets—from Louise, from his family. And now someone was going to pay for them. Vic drove carefully. He needed to concentrate on where he was going, but he also needed to decide what to do next...

Jay Berg's life could have been better. He had recently separated from his wife after losing his job at the factory where they both worked. His wife was now seeing another coworker, Jay was living in an apartment at a friend's house, and his days consisted of holding a traffic sign at a construction site.

Then Jay saw the hand in the window...

Could Jay make his brother-in-law, Vic Bartle, believe there was something going on at the vacant house near the work site? Would Vic think this was a merely a result of Jay's drinking? And when Jay's son went missing, would Jay be able to help solve the mystery of the hand in the window...



About the Author: Elizabeth Young has worked in the telecommunications and satellite industries since starting her career in radio in Washington, DC. After serving as President of the Public Service Satellite Consortium, she joined COMSAT as VP and General Manager of Aeronautical Services, and after a brief retirement spent teaching and writing, she became a General Manager SITA, the international company providing communications services to the aeronautical industry. She lectures frequently and maintains a consulting practice that includes clients in the US, Europe, and Australia. She has held teaching appointments at The American University, Ohio State University, Emerson College, and Christopher Newport University. Her doctoral degree is from Columbia University. She is the author of *Fugo: Terror from the Sky* and two children's books: *Dozens and Dozens of Cousins and Oodles and Oodles of Poodles*.



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