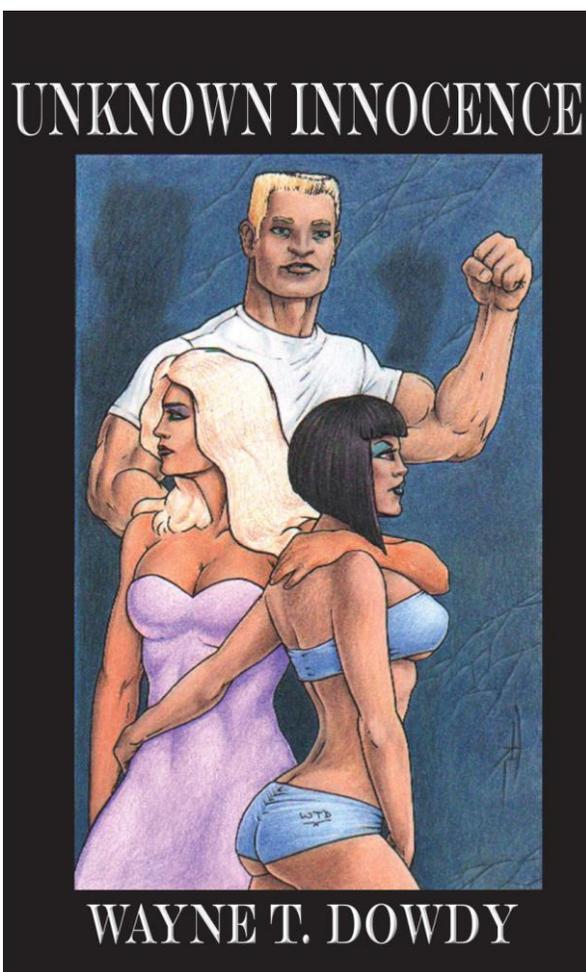


Coming Soon !
Coming Soon !



UNKNOWN INNOCENCE

by
"Mr. D."

His next novel is on the horizon. Find out how DNA and political pressure put an innocent man in prison, and how the lovely ladies of the Lonely Rooster Lounge and the Star Shadow Gentleman's Club help to free him.

Chapter One – SHEILA

Bobby sat on the barstool guzzling a cold one, his twentieth of the evening, most of which he had drank with his college buddy, Roger Johnson, the only son of Senator Leroy Johnson. Sheila had been standing outside smoking a cigarette when Roger dropped him off in the parking lot an hour earlier. She sat on the stool beside him. Her coworkers strutted the stage to the tune of Girls, Girls, Girls. "Let's go, handsome. I'll drive," she said. Then she grabbed him by the arm and led him from the lounge to the passenger door of her second car, a Honda CRX. "It's nothing like your friend's Mercedes, but it works for me, honey." She rushed to the other side. He stood staring. She put her arms on the roof.

He leaned over and grabbed her hands: His encased hers and the car keys she held. "I'm drunker than a boxer who had his bells rang by the champ," he said with slurred words. Lights flickered on their faces from the strip club sign. "I see two of you."

"I can see you fine. Good thing I'm driving."

"Huh, huh." He nodded and then laid across the roof.

"Come on, honey. Let's get in the car so I can get you in my bed to show you a good time."

He raised his head and said, "I'm going to marry you bay ... be. ... What you think about that?"

"Ha, ha, ha, very funny. That would sound so much better if I knew you, big man."

"You sure are pretty," he said, his eyes slightly opened.

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She gently pulled her hands out of his. "Thanks. You're eye-candy, too, but we need to go before the cops come up and shuffle us into jail cells."

"They call me Big Bobby for more than one reason. Let's go so I can show you why." He raised the right corner of his top lip, and then attempted a wink with his right eye, but it stayed closed two seconds too long. He shook his head. "Where we goin'?"

"Come on, now." She hurried around to the other side of the car.

He turned to meet her; staggered a few steps away from the car, grinned, and then reached out his massive arms to embrace her. He leaned a little too far forward and staggered into the side of the car.

She slid around him and opened the passenger door.

"We'll have time for that later. We need to get you in the car right now, all right."

At almost seven feet tall and three hundred pounds, he looked like a grizzly towering above her as he moved to get in the front seat.

"Watch your head, sweetie."

He swayed slightly as he ducked his head to get in, backing into the seat. With the back of his head, he missed the door frame by an inch. Sheila helped put his tree-size-legs inside and then closed the door, shook her head. When she climbed in the other side, Bobby stared into her eyes for a moment before his closed.



He opened his eyes and looked around the dimly lit room. Next to him lay a slender, brown-skinned, naked woman, in the fetal position, facing him. She had high cheekbones, a narrow nose, long eyelashes, and streaked mascara under her eyelids. Her breasts were a nice size and held

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their form, probably implants; her hips made a perfect curve as they tapered to the legs and waist. She had a pert look about herself, sassy looking, maybe Native American or of Spanish descent. What time is it, he wondered. He raised his arm. No watch. He scanned the room for a clock. None of the surroundings were familiar to him. Across the room, beside a large window with streaming light shining through a crack in the full-length, burgundy curtains, he saw his watch laying on an end table with his boxer shorts wadded up next to it. Hmm. That's interesting. He raised up on his elbow to get a better view of her. The light reflecting off her raven hair made a halo. Man, what a doll, this one is. Too bad I don't even know her name. When he rolled over to ease out of bed, trying not to disturb whoever the beautiful woman was, she opened her eyes; sparkling amber-colored irises flashed as a smile erupted across her face.

"Good morning, handsome," she said.

"Hey." He massaged his temples to fight the pounding demon inside his head. He squinted; admired her beautiful features, felt the pain and shame for not knowing her name. "You're gorgeous. What's your name?"

She sat up in bed. "You're joking, huh?"

He scanned her full body, smiled. "No."

"Sheila. You really didn't remember my name?"

He looked toward his boxer shorts. "Sorry. I must have drank a little too much." He got out of bed and headed for the end table. "I don't know where I am, how I got here, or much of anything, other than my name. My head hurts. Got any Ibuprofen or aspirin?"

"Yea, I have both," she said as she slid off the satin sheets. "I can't believe you don't remember anything. Last night you wanted to marry me, and now you don't even know who I am or where we met."

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"Sorry." He hopped and stumbled a few steps while putting on his boxers. "I wish I remembered. From looking at you and your beautiful body, I had to have had fun."

"We had lots of fun."

"Damn, I hate not remembering. Please fill me in on what a lovely time I missed with you, Sheila. Start from the top, if you don't mind."

She looked over her shoulder and smiled as she put on her lime-green thong. "One moment and I'll tell you all about it."

"That'll be great. Got any coffee?"

"Couldn't live without it." She strutted through the door wearing nothing but the thong. "I'll be right back with us a cup and your Ibuprofen. How you like it?"

"Straight and black, no cut."

"It's a special blend a friend of mine from Columbia sends me every year for Christmas. That all right?" Her voice echoed from the kitchen.

"Is it a real special blend, like laced with Peruvian flake."

"Not quite. You into that stuff, much?"

"Can't say I am. I did some in college at a few parties but never liked the way it made me feel, nervous, jittery. Always felt depressed after doing it. It affects different people different ways, I imagine. Just not my thing."

"Mine neither. A lot of the other girls live off of it, spend all their money on it and then some, but not me. I only work there to pay the bills, not for the lifestyle."

He walked into the kitchen and put his arms around her waist as she stood at the counter making the coffee. "Work where?"

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"Oh, I forgot. You don't remember. The Star Shadow Gentleman's Club. Your buddy in the Mercedes dropped you off there. You said you had been at some other club with him before coming there. I knew you were drunker than hell when you got out of his car."

He let go of her waist and rubbed the stubble on his block-jaw-chin. "Well, ... I. I don't know what to say. I can't remember much more than going into the Lonely Rooster Lounge with Roger and drinking a few beers."

"From the looks of you when I saw you get out of his car, you'd had quite a few," she said, putting emphasis on the last three words. "Here." She handed him a porcelain cup filled to the brim. "Careful, it's hot."

"Thanks."

"I had finished my last dance of the evening and went outside to smoke a cigarette before figuring up my earnings. That's when I saw the Mercedes pull into the parking lot. I had seen it a few days earlier and knew it belonged to Leroy Johnson's son. He, the son, used to go there all the time until he got into it with the bouncer for grabbing one of the girls by the tits."

"Now, you're joking, right?"

"I'm as serious as pollution to the planet."

"An environmentalist, huh?"

"Kind of. Anyway, you came up and flirted with me some."

She sat down her cup and then reached into a cabinet. "I thought you may be a keeper, so I led you inside."

"For real," he said, kissed her on top of her head.

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"You know it. Anyway, we sat at the bar in the back of the lounge. You had a couple more beers as I counted my money." She handed him a bottle of Ibuprofen.

"What happened after that?"

"Not much. We sat around for maybe a half hour and then we went to the car. Oh yeah, you in a CRX," she said, then giggled. "I played hell getting your big ole self inside the cracker box."

"Hmm. I imagine you did." He sipped his coffee.

"When I carry you home we're going in my Escalade."

"You kicking me out so soon?" He sat down his cup before pulling her close to him. "Was I that bad in bed?"

Light danced on her pupils. "Depends on what you call bad. Bad as better than good, or bad as not good."

"Bad as not good." He smiled as he stared into her amber eyes. He said to himself, no woman has ever said I was bad in bed or didn't please them.

"Hell, no, you weren't that kind of bad. You were great. You reached parts of me I didn't know existed until I felt you there." She laughed and then smiled as she gazed up at his smiling face; put her hands on his hips.

"Want to try it again?" He caressed her shoulders.

"I'd love too, honey, but I have to go pick up my son at my ex-husband's house. I get him twice per month. I'm a divorcee. That bother you?"

"Not really."

"Marco's only five. Me and Timothy got a divorce last year, and because of my job, the court didn't want to give me full custody."

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"Oh." He wondered what had led to the divorce.

"He wasn't a terrible husband, just unfaithful. He never beat me or Marco, or I'd be in jail for shooting him, so it wasn't like that. He just couldn't keep his pecker in his pants, like some of our Presidents." She frowned.

"You sure are pretty. Are you Native American or part Spanish?"

"I'm mostly Cherokee, but there's always a cracker in the wood pile," she said, and then giggled. "I guess that's where my eye color came from, passed on from somewhere down the line. I think my great grandfather was from somewhere across the ocean. How's your headache?"

"Still throbbing. I'll be okay, though. I've had 'em before. They usually go away by noon."

"What type of work do you do?"

"If I tell you you're probably going to be shocked."

"Try me. Men have shocked me many times."

"Well, I'm a social worker who works with disadvantaged children at the juvenile center in Charlotte."

"You're right, I am shocked. That's something I'd never have thought." She stepped back from him and looked up. "That is really good of you. What led you to doing that?"

"I had family issues and then got into trouble with the law when I was fourteen-years-old. A social worker got through to me by reaching out, and it changed my life, so I decided I wanted to do the same thing for someone else."

"Amazing."

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"I enjoy what I do. It's wonderful when I can see I made a difference in one of their lives, you know, watching them change, get off the streets," he said.

She wrapped her arms around his sides. He bent down and gave her a short kiss on the lips before he continued. "Some struggle with adjusting to a new way of dealing with things the right way, without breaking the law."

"I'm truly impressed."

"Well, don't make me out to be more than I am. I'm honestly not anyone special, so please don't take this like I'm arrogant and full of myself, but I really do seem to be able to reach some of the more unruly ones that my coworkers claim no one else could get through to." He stopped speaking for a second. A broad smile illuminated his face. "I don't know why. Maybe it's my size, who knows."

"Could be. Maybe it's your personality. You are certainly a likeable person," she said, as she raised her head and pursed her lips.

She giggled when he reached down to pick her up. "You are really likeable," he said, and then gave her a long, passionate kiss before sitting her back down.

Her cheeks glowed and her eyes sparkled. "Now, that was a kiss, honey."

"I wish we had time for me to give you more than that," he said. He picked up the coffee and sipped it. "I know you've got to hurry up and get ready to leave, though, so maybe we can try again one day."

At first she smiled but then the smile turned to a frown. "Dog gone it, darling. I really do wish I didn't have to leave. If it wasn't for my son, we'd go straight to the bed." She grabbed him by his waist again and put

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her head on his stomach while pulling him closer. "When do you think you'll be free so we can get together again?"

"How about next weekend? Is that too soon?"

She let go of him and then picked up her coffee cup and took a sip. Then she paused and grinned as she watched him watch her. "How about tomorrow? My mom wants me to let Marco spend the night with her because I have to work. After I get off we can come back here to have some really good sex that you're sure to remember, this time," she said, and then popped him on the rear.

Blood ignited the capillaries in his face before the brightness from his eyes rushed to release a short burst of laughter. Still smiling, he stopped to stare into her eyes. "I can't get over how pretty you are, sweetheart. Damn, I hate that I can't remember anything. What all did we do in bed, anyway?"

She sat her coffee cup on the counter. Her eyes lit the room. "Honey, you ravaged my body like it was your favorite piece of candy. You are really a kinky one under the sheets. I almost pulled my hair out, it felt so good."

"If you thought I was good last night, just wait until tomorrow night when I know what I'm doing. I might not even drink so I can make sure I don't forget my name."

Both laughed. He picked her up by the elbows to kiss. After kissing, he sat her down so they could get dressed. Fifteen minutes later she carried him home in her Escalade. "I will see you at the club, okay?" she said before he got out.

"Bet. I can't wait." He opened the door and climbed out.

"I can't wait, either, you big handsome rascal."

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He stuck his head back in and gave her another long kiss. "I like you a lot, Sheila. Maybe this thing between us will turn into something, huh?"

"It's possible. We'll see, honey. See you tomorrow." They kissed again and she drove away, smiling.

Chapter Two – THE FEDS

"That's him," Senator Johnson said. He bowed his head for a moment and then turned and walked away from the cold stainless steel slab, where his son laid with a large hole in the side of his head. Detective Rodriguez from local law enforcement, and Special Agent Ward of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, trailed behind him. Outside the doorway, exiting the morgue, Senator Johnson stopped to compose himself. "I guess you're going to have jurisdiction over this Agent Ward, since he was found on Military property."

"Yes, your Honor, we will."

Senator Johnson's face was pale. "Roger was my only son. He and I had hopes of him taking my seat when I ... retired," he said, stopping to dab his eyes with a handkerchief. "Now, some bastard has robbed him of his life and ruined our plans."

"I'm sorry it happened, Sir," Detective Rodriguez said.

"I want him or her brought to justice. Understand?"

"I promise you, we'll put every man we have in North Carolina on it, and call in for more assistance until we have the person behind bars."

"You do that. I want swift justice."

News reporters stirred frantically on the other side of the parking lot, with cameras rolling. Several state and federal agents kept them away from the Senator's limousine.

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"We will get the one who did this," Agent Ward said. "We already have a person of interest that we plan to bring in by tomorrow. His prints were in the car."

"Who is it, if I may ask?"

"Off the record, it's Robert Sanders, aka, Big Bobby. Witnesses said they were arguing before both left the Lonely Rooster Lounge in the Mercedes."

"I recall Roger talking about him a few times; went to college with each other, I believe," he said, and then rubbed his right eye.

Agent Ward walked with the senator to the car. The chauffeur opened the door. "I'm not sure but I'll keep you apprised of the situation as it develops."

"Why would someone want to harm my son?"

"I plan to find you the answer to that one real soon, your Honor."

The senator reached out and shook hands with each agent before he stooped to get into the limousine. The chauffeur closed the door. Detective Rodriguez rushed over to his men holding back the crowd. Once inside, the senator rolled down the window. "You do that and I'll see that you get recognized by the right people. How would you like that?"

"That'd be great. Thanks," Agent Ward said.

Senator Johnson rolled up the window as the limousine sped into the darkness. High above in the sky, the stars of Hydra danced in the warm summer night.



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Before the sun illuminated the Eastern horizon, the FBI, with the assistance of the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation, surrounded the southeast building of The Conquistador apartments on the northeast side of Charlotte.

Bobby Sanders laid sleeping in his bed, his feet hanging over the end of the mattress. The gentle tones of Elevator music came from his elaborate sound system. His air conditioner hummed as it cooled the apartment. Bobby jumped when a loud noise jolted his sleep cycle.

Bam, bam, bam. "Open the door. FBI."

Before he could roll over in his bed to go open the door, wood splintered as the door cracked under the pressure of a battering ram. The door flew off its hinges. Armed agents filled his apartment in seconds. Five rushed into his bedroom with guns drawn. "Don't move, Sanders," the lead agent said, "or we will shoot."

"What have I done?"

"You are the prime suspect for murder on a federal reservation. Do you have a gun or weapon on the premises?"

"Yeah. It's in the top drawer, right there," he said and pointed at the night stand.

The agent standing on that side of the bed, holstered his Glock and opened the drawer. "That's a nice one," he said, staring at the dull, black finish of the gun. "Desert Eagle, huh? Big gun for a big man."

"It's registered. I have licenses."

"Run a check on it, Bill."

"Yes, Sir." He used two fingers to pick up the gun up by its handle; placed it in a one-gallon, Zip-lock, plastic bag. Holding the gun as if it

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were a baby, he ambled along toward the door. "I'll have you something on it in a few minutes."

"Good," Agent Ward, said. Then he glared at Bobby. "Keep your hands where I can see 'em and slide to the edge of the bed."

Bobby kept his hands above the sheets. He gritted his teeth and eased to the edge. "This is bullshit."

"Okay, Mr. Sanders. Turn real slow and get out of bed. Keep your hands in sight."

He did as instructed and stood, towering above everyone inside the room. Every agent in the bedroom gazed at him in awe.

"Now turn around and face that wall."

"This is one big dude," Agent Smith said. "You're going to need more than one pair of handcuffs for him, Ralph."

"I don't think they'll work: Wrists are too big. Get the shackles from the car."

"I'll be right back."

Some of the agents searched the room while Agent Ward stood watching Bobby as he waited for Agent Smith to return.

Bobby stared at the wall. Agent Moran stuck his thumbs behind his thick leather belt. A moment later Agent Smith returned. "Here you go," he said and handed him the shackles.

Agent Ward stood staring at the muscles rippling all over Bobby's massive back. "Where's your shirt?"

"One's on that chair in the corner."

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Agent Moran was closest to it.

"Toss it to me, Joe," Agent Ward said.

"All right." He handed Bobby a blue and white striped pullover. "Put this on. Don't try anything stupid."

"I don't know why y'all are bothering me. I haven't done anything wrong." He pulled the shirt over his head and slid into it.

"Do you know your Miranda rights?"

"I have a degree in Sociology and work with disadvantaged children. Of course, I know my rights."

"Give him those trousers, too."

Agent Bill Smothers walked back into the room. "It's clean, like he said. It's registered to him and I checked his license. He has a valid permit for carrying it in North Carolina."

"I told you," Bobby said.

"They all, tell me," Agent Ward said. He used his fingers to make quotation marks when he said Tell Me, "And it's usually a lie."

"Well, it wasn't this time. I have no reason to lie about anything to you or to anyone else about anything I've done or haven't done." Bobby seethed as he put on the pants.

"Get those shoes for him over there by the closet door and let's get him to the detention center." Agent Ward pointed at a pair of black leather shoes.

After Bobby had put on his shoes, Agent Moran said, "I need to put these on you, Mr. Sanders. Put your hands behind your back and lace your fingers together."

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"This isn't right, man. I'm telling you, I haven't done anything wrong."

Agent Moran looked at how large Bobby's wrists were and shook his head. "I don't know either way. If you're innocent, though, you should be able to prove it in court. Maybe you can get out on bond before then."

The chains jingled when he began attaching the cuffs to Bobby's wrists. Even though they used leg shackles to bind his hands, his wrists were so large that there wasn't much extra space between the stainless steel cuffs and his skin.

After they had him secured with the chains, Agent Ward grabbed the links joining the cuffs to escort him from the apartment. "Let's go."

Moments later he was in the back seat of an unmarked car. He leaned forward to speak to Agent Ward. "Who was I supposed to have murdered?"

"Remember your rights before you speak. If you are guilty as charged, then I don't want you getting off on some sort of technicality. This conversation is being recorded as we speak, so don't say anything you don't want used against you in court."

"I have nothing to hide."

"Do you know who Senator Leroy Johnson is?"

"Yeah, I know him. His son is my friend."

"His son, Roger Johnson?"

"Huh, huh."

"He's dead."

"What?"

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"He's dead. You are a suspect."

Bobby shook his head and fell back into the seat. "This must be some kind of a nightmare. I can't believe this shit. Roger is my friend. I wouldn't hurt him for anything."

"Where were you on Wednesday night?"

"With Roger to start with, but we got separated at some point during the night and I ended up with some girl. A stripper. I don't know where I lost Roger. All I know is we went out to the clubs to get drunk and to watch the girls dance."

"Who's the girl you were with?"

"I believe her name is Sheila."

"Sheila what?"

Bobby looked out the window. "I'm not sure. I don't think she ever told me her last name."

"Where does she live?"

He leaned forward to reposition his arms to alleviate the pain from the cuffs on his wrist. "Uh, well, I don't really have an address. I kind of remember the area, though. A lot of expensive houses are in the neighborhood, over near the lake."

"Do you have a phone number or some way for us to contact her?"

He looked at Agent Ward for a second, and then turned to stare out the window. After a few seconds, he lowered his voice and said, "No."

Agent Ward turned sideways in the seat to face him. "I think you're lying, Mr. Sanders."

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"I don't care what you think. I am telling you the truth."

"Then why don't you know who the girl is, where she lives, or have some proof of where you were at when the murder occurred?"

Bobby seethed inside, wanted to kick the window out, to snap the cuffs, break Agent Ward's jaw. He pulled on the chains holding the cuffs together at the center. The chains rattled. Suddenly, he whirled around and saw Agent Moran watching him in the mirror. Agent Ward leaned toward the front of the car. Bobby clinched his teeth for a couple of seconds before he blurted, "I drank too much. I don't remember anything." He paused, took a few deep breaths, shook his head.

Both agents cast glances at each other and sat without speaking. Agent Moran accelerated to pass a line of vehicles. The engine whined as the car picked up speed.

Bobby slid down in the seat. His legs hit the back of the front seat. He sat back up. "After we went into the Lonely Rooster Lounge, some big titty girl gave both of us a lap dance. I remember that," he said, and then smiled. "I guess I kept drinking until I blacked out. I don't know." He shook his head, flexed his leg muscles. "I just don't know."

"Who are you referring to when you say we?" Agent Ward asked.

"Me and Roger."

"Roger Johnson?"

"Yes."

"What can this Sheila girl tell us if we find her?"

"She told me that she was standing out in front of the other club and was watching when I got out of Roger's Mercedes."

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"Which other club?"

He twisted in the seat. "Uh, uh, I can't remember right now. It's the one she worked at. Give me a few minutes, I'll think of it."

"Did anyone else see him leave there?"

"Not that I know about but somebody had to of."

"A friend of mine did a quick run on the prints in the car and on a beer bottle we found in it. They matched the ones from when you were arrested and went to jail a few years ago."

"I told you me and Roger were friends. I don't deny that I was with him. We partied every time we could arrange it." He stopped talking and then exhaled loudly. He leaned forward as far as he could toward Agent Ward. He spoke softly with an edge in his voice, almost a guttural growl. "Of course, my prints are in his car. The beer bottle I don't remember leaving but probably did. What's the big deal about that?"

"The big deal is that, one," Agent Ward said, holding up his right index finger, "we have a murder victim that was found on a federal reservation." He held up the finger next to it. "Two, witnesses last seen the victim with one very large fellow named Robert Sanders." He repositioned himself to sit on the edge of the seat; held up a third finger and narrowed his eyes, making furrows on his forehead. "Three, now, we have the suspect who claims he's innocent but doesn't remember anything."

Bobby twisted in the seat and glared at Agent Ward.

Agent Ward leaned closer to Bobby, held up four fingers. "And four, the suspect cannot prove where he was when the murder occurred. That's the big deal," he said.

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Bobby leaned back against the seat and looked out the window at the passing cars before he spoke. "I don't have anything else to say, other than that I want to speak with a lawyer before I say anything else."

"That's fine. But, if you get a lawyer, I don't have anything else to say to you. I believe you are guilty and I will do my best to have the United States Attorney push for the death penalty."

Bobby remained silent and continued looking out the window for the rest of the ride. Ten minutes later Agent Moran pulled the car into the detention center's rear entrance. Another car with FBI agents had pulled in before them and then another one waited behind the one he was in. He sat on the edge of the seat and observed the surroundings. As he looked at the chain link fences lined with razor wire, he became engulfed by a feeling of extreme dread that only someone else could appreciate, whom had been humiliated when captured and chained like an animal pending slaughter.

Agent Moran turned off the engine and opened the door. "This'll be your home for a while, I imagine."

Bobby just stared out the window at the building.

Agent Ward opened his door and grabbed a few personal items from the front seat, and a stack of papers from the dash compartment. "You've got plenty of back up. Wait until someone comes to help before you get him out, Joe. Can't take chances with this one. I'm carrying this stuff inside. All right?"

"All right. I got him. He won't give us any trouble, will you," he said, glancing back at Bobby.

"Y'all are the ones causing the trouble."

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Two other agents approached the side of the car. Agent Moran got out and opened the back door. "Watch your head when you get out."

Bobby twisted and wiggled to get his legs over the edge of the car seat. He almost had to bend over to the point where his chest touched his thighs, in order for him to get out of the car without bumping his head. The chains behind his back rattled as the cuffs ate into his wrists. He grunted and stood tall; looked around at each agent near him and then started walking when Agent Moran gently grabbed him by the crook of his right arm.

After entering the jail through the double-doors, a deputy met them. "I'll take him from here, so you can get your paperwork done, Joe. I'll bring your cuffs to you once I get him secured in the Book-In holding cell," the deputy said, and then escorted him down the shined hallway to a holding cell outside the Book-In area.

The keys clanged against the heavy-duty tumblers as the deputy opened the steel reinforced door. Once inside, he said, "Let me get those off you. I know you're tired of them."

"Yeah, I am." Bobby turned to put his back toward him to let the deputy remove the cuffs.

"It looks like they were a little tight."

"I don't complain much, but, yeah, they were. I've had 'em on me before, many years ago. I didn't think I'd ever have to wear them again."

"You don't seem like a bad guy," the deputy said, before he turned and walked to the door. "Someone will come take your prints in a few minutes."

"Thanks. I appreciate that," Bobby said, then sat on a long stainless steel bench against the back wall.

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"Yeah, man," the deputy said.

The sound of the keys rattling in the door echoed inside the cell when the deputy was shutting the door. Silence engulfed the room after he left. Bobby sat staring at the graffiti marked, etched, and scraped on the dingy yellow walls. From working with the disadvantaged children, he recognized some of the different gang insignias that he had seen tattoos of on some of the children he had worked with in juveniles. A few minutes later he heard footsteps and the rattle of keys.

A female deputy opened the door. "Bobby Sanders?"

"That's me."

"Come with me and I'll get your prints so you can get dressed out and go to a cell."

"Sounds exciting."

"I'm sure it does," she said, and then smiled, revealing a tiny diamond on her left front tooth.

She escorted him down the hallway to another room and did the fingerprints; one finger at a time, then the thumbs, then four fingers together, and then palm prints. She handed him a few brown paper towels, "Here you go," she said. "You can use that sink right there to clean up."

"Thank you." He had started washing his hands when she walked over and stood beside him a couple minutes later.

"Mr. Sanders, I didn't want to really say this because I know what you're going through right now, but maybe it will make you feel better."

Bobby turned off the water and began drying his hands on the paper towels. "What's that?"

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"I want to let you know that I appreciate what you do with the juveniles."

"If you don't mind my asking, how did you know about that?"

"I have a nephew that you helped a couple of years ago. Marvin Jones. He used to talk about you when I'd see him at my sister's house. She's a single parent, you know," she said as she stood gazing at him.

"I remember him. He always yells at me when he sees me on the street."

"Yeah, that's good. He's been doing real well since he stopped hanging out on the corner and no longer runs around with those hoodlums," she said. Then she giggled for a couple of seconds.

"I'm glad to hear that. I know he always seems pleasant and has a smile on his face when I see him. That's always a good indicator about how they are doing. They usually try to dodge me when they're up to no good. It's good to know he has stayed off the streets."

"Yeah, it is. Anyway, I wanted to tell you that, and to let you know that if there's any way I can help you while you're here, for you to let me know. I'll do anything I can." He smiled and then reached to shake her hand. When she didn't offer hers in return, he put his down.

She looked up at him for a second, but then looked down to gaze at his black leather shoes. "I'm sorry, Bobby. I hope you don't mind that I called you by your first name."

"I don't mind. It's okay." He smiled briefly as he inspected her dark brown face and slender neck.

She grinned while she used both hands to push a few loose strands of hair behind her ears. "We're not supposed to do that or I'd give you a hug." She nodded toward a surveillance camera hanging in the corner. "Big Brother is always watching in here."

Unknown Innocence

"I understand. I wouldn't want you to get in trouble."

"They don't particularly like me around here because I try to be nice to y'all, but I'm not going to let them make me into a bitter person like they are. You know what I mean?"

"Yes, I do. I deal with a lot of different personalities working with juvenile officials. Some seem to be good people and some are just downright evil. The kids told me about some of the things that went on inside and it made my temperature boil. I'd love to teach them a lesson about messing with those children, but, ... I have to respect the children's confidence in me to not say anything, and unless it's something like sexual or physical abuse, I can't breach the confidentiality agreement between us."

"I know what you're saying. It's tough. Bad things go on in here, too," she said and then put her right hand over her lips to cover her mouth. "That's another reason why they don't like me. I reported four of them for beating a drunk one night."

"Oh, I see what you're saying, now."

"Well, I need to be going," she said, and then turned away and started walking toward the door. She looked back over her left shoulder and smiled. "I have to go do the paper work. Someone will be here in a minute to escort you upstairs."

"Great."

"I know, but it is what it is. I'll be seeing you. Just ask for Deputy Jones if you need me and I'll come see you when I can get away from down here. Thanks again for helping him," she said. Then she stepped out in the hallway and locked the door.