



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

KEVIN

VICIOUS

O'BRIEN

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He watched her unload the jack, wrench, and spare tire from the trunk of her old Toyota. All the while, Susan Blanchette kept looking over her shoulder. He'd given her the flat tire, his way of welcoming her to Cullen—and an ominous start to the weekend he'd planned for her. Susan had no idea he was calling all the shots. He knew Susan would be coming to Cullen before she did.

And he knew she would die.

He'd been watching her for weeks now, and she continued to fascinate him. He'd seen her coming and going at Dr. Chang's office. He often parked across the street when she picked up Matthew at Yellowbrick Road Day Care. And sometimes he watched from outside her bedroom window as she climbed into bed alone.

He knew the whole layout of her first-floor duplex. He'd even broken in once. He smelled her hair on her pillow—and thought about how he could touch her and smell her as she was tied up.

He could do whatever he wanted to her.

And maybe after he killed her, he would even taste her blood....

ONLY SON

THE NEXT TO DIE

MAKE THEM CRY

WATCH THEM DIE

LEFT FOR DEAD

THE LAST VICTIM

KILLING SPREE

ONE LAST SCREAM

FINAL BREATH

VICIOUS

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KEVIN O'BRIEN

VICIOUS



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*This book is for my friend and fellow author,
David Massengill.*

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Seattle—April 1998

“It’s probably been going on a lot longer than he says, the son of a bitch. I have to be the world’s biggest sap—”

Pamela Milford realized she’d been talking to herself.

Approaching her on the park’s pathway, a fifty-something ash blonde in lavender sweats gave her a puzzled look.

Pamela was pushing Andy in his stroller; so maybe the woman thought she was babbling to her baby. Dressed in a hooded blue jacket, Pamela’s ten-month-old was enjoying the stroll through Volunteer Park on that chilly April night. He’d point to joggers or people walking their dogs, and the squeal with delight. Now he waved to the blond woman.

It was just after seven o’clock, and the park’s lights were on. The walkway snaked around bushes, gardens, and huge, hundred-year-old trees. Up ahead in the distance, just beyond the greenhouse, was a dark, slightly creepy forest area that Pamela had no intention of exploring.

She usually didn’t take the baby out for a stroll this late, but she was furious at her husband right now. Throwing on her pea jacket and grabbing her scarf, she’d told Steve to cook his own damn dinner. Then she’d loaded Andy into his stroller and taken off for the park.

“He’s adorable!” declared the lady in the lavender sweats. She squatted down in front of Andy, gaped at him in mock surprise, and laughed. “Oh, you’re just so cute, you take my breath away!” She caressed Andy’s cheek. “And where did you get that gorgeous curly red hair?”

“Not from me,” Pamela said, with a strained smile. Andy had inherited his father’s red hair.

Pamela’s chestnut brown hair used to cascade down past her shoulder blades. But she’d gotten it cut short after Andy’s birth. Along with the excess pounds from her pregnancy, the haircut made her look frumpy, more like she was forty than thirty-one. Though she’d lost most of her postnatal pounds, she was still waiting for her hair to grow back.

Perhaps Steve had also been waiting for her hair to grow back—before he started to pay attention to her again. The baby had put a crimp in their love life; all the spontaneity and the passion had dissipated. She’d half expected that.

But Pamela hadn’t been prepared for what she’d discovered this afternoon.

She was an editor for the *Seattle Weekly*, and usually spent her lunch hours at Andy’s day care. But today, she’d decided to surprise Steve at work and treat him to lunch at Palomino. Lombard-Stafford Graphics was only four blocks from the *Weekly* offices. Steve wasn’t in his cubicle, and the office was nearly empty. A thin young Asian woman with a pink streak in her hair and a nostril stud, two cubicles away, tersely explained that Steve and everyone else were in a meeting. It was supposed to let out any minute now.

Pamela sat in his cubicle, twisting back and forth in his swivel chair as she waited for him. A “fish-tank” screen saver illuminated his computer monitor. Pinned to the grey cubicle wall were a *Football Side* calendar; Steve’s football team portrait from New Trier High School in Winnetka, Illinois; a cartoon picture of Homer Simpson; three photos of Andy; and one photo of her—back when her hair was still long.

Pamela got tired of waiting and decided to leave him a note and then take off. But first, she wanted to change his screen saver.

Back when they were first married, Steve gave her—as a joke—a 5 x 7 photo of exercise guru Richard Simmons and faked an autograph: *You make me sweat! I feel the heat! XXX—Richard*. Two days later, Pamela surprised him by taping it to the steering wheel of his car. A few days after that, she found he'd left the photo for her in the refrigerator's crisper drawer. The joke had gone on for weeks and weeks. The Richard Simmons Wars, they called them. They'd had time for such silly stuff back then—back when their relationship had been passionate and fun.

Pamela reached for the computer's mouse. She'd go on the Internet and find a photo of Richard Simmons and turn it into his new screen saver. Chuckling, she imagined Steve as he tried to explain to his coworkers why he had Richard Simmons for his screen saver. She clicked the mouse.

That was when Pamela noticed an e-mail from Jill@Evanstonproperties.com, and the smile ran away from her face.

Jill Pondello had been Steve's girlfriend at New Trier High. Evanston Properties was probably a real estate firm or something. And Evanston was close to Winnetka; she knew that much. Pamela glanced up at Steve's high school football team portrait. He still clung to the memories of that time. Steve would be going back to Winnetka in three weeks for the Class of '83 Reunion. He'd asked if she wanted to come, but Pamela had figured she would be bored to tears at the festivities and stuck with her oppressive in-laws the rest of the time. She'd told Steve he could go alone.

It had never occurred to her until that moment in Steve's cubicle: He couldn't really be trusted. Pamela stared at the computer screen and clicked on the OPEN MAIL icon:

Hey, Mister,

Ha! I can't believe U still remember making out in Debi Donahue's basement rec room & the pink panties! U naughty boy! Do U remember what we were listening to??? Air Supply...Even the Nights Are Better. 😊 Maybe I should ask the DJ to play it at the reunion & see if it puts U in the mood again! I'm so glad we'll be doing dinner together after—just the 2 of us. Maybe I can persuade U to stay a few more days. 😊 Like U say, we have a lot of catching up to do. I'm counting the days until I see U (19). I can't wait! Give me another call, OK? E-mails are fine, but I really like hearing your voice. 😊

XXXXXXXXXX—Jill

“What the hell?” Pamela muttered, hunched in front of his computer monitor.

From what she could discern, Steve and this slut, Jill, had been talking on the phone and e-mailing—at work—for a while now. Did this woman even know he was married—with a ten-month-old baby?

Well, if she didn't know, she certainly would now.

Pamela hit the reply key. Her fingers worked furiously on the keyboard:

Dear Jill,

Steve won't be coming to the reunion after all. He needs to spend more time with his wife

and 10-month-old son. Perhaps you can hook up with some other former classmate, ~~someone who is actually single. If you don't receive any more e-mails or phone calls from my husband, I'm sure you'll understand why.~~ ☹ By the way, Air Supply was a suck band.

Sincerely,
Pamela Milford (Steve's wife)

She barely glanced at what she'd written before clicking on the SEND icon. Then she stood up so fast, she almost tipped over Steve's chair. Bolting toward the exit, she heard the young woman with the pierced nose call to her: "Hey, I hear the meeting just got out! Steve should be back any minute now!"

But Pamela ignored her and hurried toward the elevator. Tears welled in her eyes, and she felt sick to her stomach. She jabbed the elevator button. When it didn't arrive right away, she took the stairs—five flights. She just had to keep moving.

There was still time to go to Andy's day care.

More than anything, she longed to be with her sweet baby boy. His adorable face always lit up whenever he saw her walk into the day care's nursery.

"I mean it, he's just adorable," said the fifty-something jogger in the lavender sweats. "Just look at that smile!"

Pamela wished the lady would stop touching Andy's cheek. It always secretly bothered her when strangers came up to Andy and started touching him. Fawning was fine, but not touching. God only knew where that lady's hand had been.

"Tickle, tickle, tickle!" the woman chimed, brushing Andy's chin with her finger. The baby squealed.

Pamela inched the stroller forward. "Wave good-bye to the nice lady, Andy!" She managed to smile at the jogger. "Have a great night."

"Bye-bye!" the woman cooed to Andy as she backed away.

Glancing over her shoulder, Pamela nodded at the blond woman. She turned around again and then stopped dead. Just up the trail, she spotted a tall, lean man emerging from some bushes by a curve in the pathway. She just glimpsed his silhouette. Then as quickly as he'd appeared, the lean figure ducked behind an evergreen tree.

Pamela froze. For a few moments, she just stood there, staring at the towering evergreen. Her hands tightened on the stroller's handles. She thought about heading in the opposite direction, maybe catching up with the blond woman. At least there was safety in numbers.

Andy let out a bored little cry.

"We're heading on home now, honey," she said nervously. Pamela's eyes were still riveted to the evergreen's trunk. She couldn't see the man, but she knew he was behind there, waiting.

She glanced around for other people in the area. Pamela noticed an attractive young brunette strolling up another path that intersected with the one she was on, right by the giant evergreen. Dressed in a trench coat, the young woman was tall and willowy with long, wavy hair. She had a cell phone in her hand and was too busy flipping open the mouthpiece and pulling out the short antenna to watch where she was going. She passed under an old-fashioned streetlight that illuminated only that section of the trail. Soon the young woman would be in the shadows of the big evergreen.

"Miss?" Pamela tried to call to her, but her throat closed up. Her warning was barely a whisper. Her hand came up to her throat as she watched helplessly. The young woman got closer and closer to the towering tree.

“Miss?” Pamela said, louder this time. Her voice cracked. “Excuse me...”

~~All of a sudden, the dark figure leapt out from behind the evergreen.~~

Pamela screamed.

So did the young woman. And then she burst out laughing. “You idiot! You almost made me drop my phone.” The man put his arm around her, and they kissed. “I was just about to call and ask what was keeping you....”

Pamela caught her breath and then pushed Andy onward. Her heart was still racing. She’d almost made a fool out of herself.

Arm in arm, the young couple strolled up the path toward Andy and her. As she passed them, Pamela noticed the girl glancing down at Andy in his stroller—and then at her. “That’s me in a year and a half,” the girl whispered to her companion. “I’ll be pushing around little Justin Junior. I’m going to be her....”

For your sake, I hope not, Pamela thought. Did that young woman—eighteen months from now—really want to discover that Justin Senior, the father of her child, was a cheating slime bucket?

Okay, so maybe Steve hadn’t actually cheated yet, but he’d been working up to it.

Pamela had taken Andy out of Rainbow Junction Day Care early and gone for a long drive. The phone was ringing when she came through the front door with Andy in her arms at 4:30. It was Steve. He’d left several messages for her at the office—and then at home. “Jill phoned me, and said you e-mailed her,” he admitted. “Listen, you’re freaking out over nothing. This e-mail thing with her is all very innocent—and—and *harmless*. It’s so dumb. It started when they sent the notice about the reunion. I was going to tell you about it, only I...well, listen, just do me a favor and stay put. I’m leaving work right now. I should be there in a half hour....”

Pamela waited. She put Andy in his crib for a late nap, poured herself a glass of merlot, and plopped down at the kitchen table. She kept busy painting her nails—a honey-brown color called Cinnamon Sin. Ninety minutes later, she was still sitting there, impatiently clicking her newly painted nails on the kitchen table. She sat there and glared at Steve as he paced in front of her, apologizing, explaining, and groveling.

Apparently, *poor Jill* had just been through a messy divorce and was very fragile. He didn’t want to hurt her feelings by telling her that her e-mails were inappropriate. Yeah, sure, maybe he kind of liked the attention, but it was all very innocent.

“I was going to tell you about it,” he claimed. “Only I knew you’d go ballistic. This is just the sort of reaction I’ve been afraid of. Can you really blame me for not saying anything?”

Yes, indeed, I blame you, you son of a bitch.

She took Andy and left. She just needed to cool off for a while.

That had been nearly an hour ago. Steve was probably going out of his mind with worry. Maybe he thought he’d never see her and their baby again. Well, good, let him think that a little while longer.

Up ahead, past the dahlia garden, Pamela thought she saw him, walking along another intersecting trail. Then she realized—although he had Steve’s loping gait and wore a navy blue windbreaker very much like Steve’s—the man wasn’t her husband. For a few moments, a streetlight behind him cast a shadow over his face. But as he came closer, Pamela saw he was extremely good looking and he was smiling at Andy in his stroller. “Well, well, well, what a handsome little rascal you are!” he said.

Pamela stopped for him. The stranger crouched down to grin at Andy. He wasn’t a toucher. He kept his hands in his pockets. “What’s your name, fella?” he asked.

“Andy,” Pamela answered for her son.

The handsome stranger looked up and locked eyes with her. He had such a sexy smile. Pamela felt herself blush. She could always tell when guys were interested in her, and this one was interested

Not that anything would happen, but it sure was nice. In fact, this impromptu flirtation in the park was just what the doctor ordered to make her feel desirable again.

The man glanced down at Andy once more. “Is this beautiful lady your mommy?”

Pamela let out a coy laugh. “Well, I don’t know about ‘beautiful,’ but I’m the mommy.”

He locked eyes with her again. “Listen, *Mommy*,” he said quietly. “I have a gun aimed at Andy right now. Unless you want to see his little head blown off, you’re going to do exactly what I tell you to do.”

Pamela wasn’t sure she’d heard him right. Dumbfounded, she gazed at the man. The smile disappeared from her face. She glanced down at his hands—still in the pockets of his windbreaker. She could tell he was holding something in his right hand.

Andy let out a screech and squirmed in his stroller. He clapped his little hands and giggled.

The man furtively pulled the automatic out of his pocket for a moment—the barrel pointed at Andy’s face.

“Oh, God, please, no,” Pamela murmured, paralyzed with fear. White-knuckled, she clutched the stroller handles. She glanced around to see if there was anyone else in the vicinity—anyone who might help her. A man in track shorts and a sweatshirt ran along another paved trail about thirty feet away—but he was moving too fast to even notice them. Within moments, he was gone.

Tears stinging her eyes, Pamela gazed at the stranger. “What—what do you want?”

With an odd, little smile, he nodded toward the greenhouse—and the dark, wooded area beyond it. “Let’s take a walk down there, and I’ll tell you what I want.”

Pamela hesitated.

He reached up and gently tugged at the pale green scarf around her neck. “C’mon.”

Pamela swallowed hard and then started walking toward the darkened woods. Her legs felt wobbly. Wincing, she felt something grind against her spine, and realized it was the barrel of his revolver. Pamela realized something else. She was going to die.

As she pushed Andy in his stroller, she could only see the little hood covering the back of his head. He let out a squeal, then giggled and kicked.

“Please...please, don’t hurt my baby,” she whispered to the man.

“I won’t hurt him,” he promised. “Just you, *Mommy*, just you...”

Pausing under a park light, Hannah McHugh pressed two fingers along the side of her neck and ran in place. Warily, she glanced back at the winding pathway. The strange man had been on her tail for about ten minutes now, and he was still there—about twenty feet behind her. He was dressed in tan corduroys, a flannel shirt, and a light jacket—and he was *jogging*. He wasn’t even wearing running shoes. From this distance, they looked like loafers, for God’s sake.

A paralegal in a law office downtown, Hannah had been varying her after-work running course from day to day, and it had paid off. She’d gone from a size 10 to size 6. Divorced and thirty-eight years old, Hannah had convinced herself forty wouldn’t be fatal. She’d recently made the transition from medium-brown brunette to Sassy Ginger (at least, that was the name on the Clairol box) and joined an online dating service, www.lifeconnexxions.com. So far, the guys she’d met had been drips but Hannah wasn’t giving up. Though she hadn’t been in the mood to run tonight, she’d still donned her sweats and taken the Volunteer Park route. Just her luck, her persistence was paying off in the guise of some weirdo following her around the park’s paved trail.

Hannah continued to jog in place and watched the bizarre man coming closer and closer. She studied his brown crew cut and the determined expression on his pockmarked face. He passed by her

without even a glance her way. He was muttering to himself in an odd, singsong monologue. Hannah couldn't make out the words. She watched him retreat down the darkened pathway past the greenhouse—until he disappeared in the shadows.

"Talk about strange," someone said.

Startled, Hannah swiveled around and gaped at the man.

With his hands tucked in the pockets of his blue windbreaker, the handsome stranger gave her a crooked grin. "Looks like he just stepped off the crazy bus," he said.

Hannah shyly smiled, wiped the sweat from her forehead and flicked back her Sassy Ginger hair. She nodded toward the darkened trail in front of them. "Yeah, I think I'll wait a minute before I head down there. He's probably harmless, but I'm giving him a wide berth just the same."

"Smart," the handsome man replied. "A pretty woman like you shouldn't take any chances at this hour." He gave her a little wave. "Well, take care." Then he started to walk away.

"You too!" Hannah called. "Take care!" Biting her lip, she watched the good-looking man wander toward the shadowy trail. *Don't just stand there, stupid*, she thought. *He's cute. Go after him, talk to him!*

"Hey, wait a second, okay?" Hannah called. She hurried to meet up with the man.

Stopping, he turned and half smiled at her.

Suddenly, she was a little breathless. "Listen, would you mind if I walked with you—just to be on the safe side?"

"No problem, c'mon," he said, taking a step toward her. For a moment, Hannah thought he'd touch her arm. But his hands remained in the pockets of his blue windbreaker. He nodded toward the paved pathway that snaked through the gloomy woods ahead. "I'll make sure no one bothers you. Do you live close by?"

"Yes, near the Cornish School," Hannah answered, strolling beside him. "Lucky for me you can walk along."

He didn't respond. They'd just passed under the last streetlight for a while, and now headed into the wooded section. A few empty cars were parked on the side of the winding road. Hannah kept a lookout for the weird jogger, but she didn't see him in the darkness ahead. She didn't see anyone at all.

She felt the stranger's shoulder brush against hers. Was he flirting? She stole a furtive sidelong glance at him. No, he wasn't even looking at her. He seemed to be scoping out the area. Maybe he was on the lookout for the crazy jogger, too.

A cool wind kicked up. Tree branches and bushes seemed to come alive for a moment. She could hear the man's breathing grow heavier. Hannah glanced at him again. He looked so serious—and tense. His gaze shifted from side to side as if he were making sure no one else was around. Then he peered over his shoulder.

Hannah glanced back in the same direction. There was no one behind them. "So—did you lose something?" she asked.

"What?" he said.

"I was wondering if you'd lost your dog or your cat, the way you keep looking around as if you..." She trailed off.

He wasn't listening. As they walked side by side, Hannah became more and more uncomfortable. Finally, the stranger paused and whispered, almost to himself. "We're all alone here, aren't we?"

Hannah swallowed hard and tried to veer away from him ever so subtly. "You know, I think I'm okay now," she said, finally. "I—I'm going to finish my run. It was—it was nice of you to—"

"Did you hear that?" he interrupted, stopping suddenly.

Hannah stopped, too. "Hear what?"

He took hold of her arm and led her off the trail—toward some bushes. Twigs snapped under their feet. “Listen to it,” he said. “Sounds like whimpering....”

Hannah’s whole body stiffened up. She gently pulled her arm away. Any minute now, she expected him to slap a hand over her mouth and drag her into the bushes. She thought about making a break for it—while he was staring into the thicket. But then she heard it, too: a strange, muffled whining. It sounded like a wounded animal.

He weaved around some bushes. “You’re gonna think I’m crazy,” he said, his back to her. “But I recognize that crying....”

Hannah didn’t move. She gazed into the woods, but couldn’t see anything beyond the first group of shrubs and trees. There was just darkness. Still, she heard the whimpering.

“Sounds like my kid,” the man said. He squinted over his shoulder at her. “Earlier, you didn’t see a pretty brunette with a baby in a stroller, did you?”

Confused, Hannah just shook her head.

He heaved a sigh. “My wife and I had an argument tonight. She left with the baby. Last time she blew up at me, she came to this park. That’s why I’m here....” The man ran a hand through his red hair, then turned and gazed into the forest. “I can’t hear him anymore,” he said, a panic in his voice. “Pam?” he called out. “Sweetie? Is that Andy I hear? Sweetheart?”

Hannah dared to venture a few steps farther into the woods. At the same time, she widened the gap between her and the man. Just beyond a cluster of shrubs, she detected movement. Moonlight reflected off something shiny and metal; it looked like a fallen bicycle’s handlebars. With apprehension, Hannah moved in closer. The muffled whimpering became louder. The man was right. It sounded like a baby’s stifled cries.

“Andy, is that you?” the man called, heading in the other direction. “Pam?”

Hannah crept around the bushes and gasped. It wasn’t a bicycle’s handlebars shining in the moonlight. She could see the baby stroller now—and the gleaming metal struts. “Over here!” she screamed.

She hurried toward the baby. Writhing and kicking in his stroller, he wore a hooded blue jacket and held a little stuffed yellow giraffe that looked a bit tattered. Someone had wrapped a green cloth around the lower part of his face. Hannah wondered how the baby could breathe with that thing over his nose and mouth. The cloth—it looked like a scarf—muted his cries but didn’t stop him from trying to shriek in protest. His face was red, and tears slid down his cheeks. He vainly swatted at the scarf with one little hand. The other hand clung to the dilapidated stuffed animal.

Instinctively, Hannah lifted the wriggling baby out of his stroller seat. *How could his stupid mother just abandon him like this?* She held him tightly with one arm and started to unravel the scarf from his face. “You poor thing,” she murmured. It was hard holding on to him; he kept squirming and twitching. His little face was so red, it almost matched his hair.

The man staggered through the bushes. “Oh, Jesus, Andy!” he cried, reaching out for him. “It’s Daddy....”

Hannah gave the child to his father, but kept unraveling the scarf—careful not to scratch the baby’s cheek with her fingernails. His screams became louder, and he wiggled fiercely. “What in the world?” she muttered. To her horror, Hannah found part of the silky material crammed into the baby’s little mouth. She pulled out the makeshift gag, partially stained with his saliva and tears.

The little boy gasped, then let go an ear-piercing scream. He trembled in his father’s arms. The man kept hugging him and kissing his forehead.

“Do you know whose this is?” Hannah asked, showing him the green silk scarf. She had to shout over the baby’s cries.

“That’s his mother’s,” the man replied, dazed. He rocked the baby in an effort to calm him down.

“She—she had it on when she left the house earlier. But she—she wouldn’t have done that to him, no Pam. She’s a good mother, she—”

Hannah gazed at him and shook her head.

The man seemed to choke on those words, *She’s a good mother*. Tears came to his eyes as he stared at the frayed stuffed giraffe in his son’s grasp. “Oh, my God, that’s not his.... It’s not his toy... Oh, Jesus, this isn’t happening....”

In horror and disgust, he knocked the stuffed animal out of the boy’s hand. The child shrieked even louder, and his father held him against his chest. He anxiously glanced at the dark woods around them. “Pam?” he screamed. “Sweetheart? Pam?”

The green scarf slipped out of Hannah’s grasp. Numbly, she stepped back and bumped into a tree. But she barely felt it. She couldn’t feel anything beyond the terrible sensation in her gut.

Most everyone in the Seattle area knew about the string of recent murders. Three women had disappeared in the last few months. Their ages varied, but they had one thing in common. They were all mothers, each one abducted in front of her son. In what was becoming an eerie calling card, their abductor always left behind a used toy for the child.

And each of the mothers was later found dead.

The local TV and newspapers had given this killer a name: *Mama’s Boy*.

People in the Seattle area were scared—especially women with young sons. But maybe Andy’s mother hadn’t been thinking when she’d taken her baby for a walk after dark. Didn’t her husband say they’d been quarreling? In the heat of anger, she must have grabbed her son and left the house in a hurry.

“Pam?” the man screamed over his son’s wailing. He kept rocking the baby in his arms. “Honey can you hear me? Pam? Sweetheart...”

Hannah stood with her back against the tree. She listened to the man crying out and the baby’s screaming. She felt sick to her stomach. A cool wind whipped through her. Leaves scattered. Shuddering, Hannah stared down at the frayed, stuffed yellow giraffe, leaning against one of the wheels of the child’s empty stroller.

Hannah had an awful feeling that no matter how many times this man called out for her, Andy’s mother would never answer him.

Two days later, someone found Andy’s mother. The story made the front page of *The Seattle Times* on April 5, 1998:

FOURTH VICTIM DISCOVERED IN ‘MOTHER’ KILLINGS

‘Mama’s Boy’ Continues to Elude Police

LATEST CASUALTY LEFT BEHIND AN INFANT SON

SEATTLE—An intense, 36-hour search for a missing Seattle woman, Pamela Baiter Milford, 31, ended early Friday morning, when workers found her body partially buried under a tarp at a Greenwood area construction site. According to sources at the King County Medical Examiner’s Office, the victim had been beaten and strangled to death at least 24 hours before her body was discovered.

Seattle Police Detective Keith Stuckly, on a special task force for homicide investigation, said: “Ms. Milford’s death has all the earmarks of another *Mama’s Boy*

killing. The circumstances of her disappearance and death all but confirm it.”

The elusive serial killer dubbed “Mama’s Boy” is believed to be responsible for at least three other Seattle-area murders in the last eight months. Each victim was abducted in front of her son and later found beaten and strangled to death.

Milford was last seen with her only child, a 10-month-old boy, around 6 p.m. Wednesday in Capitol Hill’s Volunteer Park, four blocks from her home....

The article went on to explain about the three others before Andy’s mother.

On November 8, 1997, an intruder attacked the first victim, Sarah Edgecombe, twenty-four, in her home in Auburn while she was giving her three-year-old son a bath. Her husband, Kyle, had stepped out for cigarettes. Returning home twenty minutes later, he discovered the traumatized young boy, shivering in the cold tub. In the boy’s bedroom, on his pillow, Kyle found a dilapidated teddy bear. Hikers spotted Sarah’s remains three days later in the woods at Seattle’s Discovery Park. Unfortunately, woodland scavengers had found her first. Police had to scour nearly a mile of the forest before they found all of her, and even then, it was mostly bones, picked near-clean. Sarah was the only one who had been dismembered.

After that, it seemed Mama’s Boy wanted his victims to be discovered—eventually.

Anita Breckinridge, forty-three, disappeared on December 29, 1997, in a Safeway supermarket two miles from her Lynnwood home, leaving her four-year-old son in the shopping cart’s child seat. The abandoned boy’s screams resonated through the store for ten minutes. In the cart, a store employee found an old Raggedy Andy doll. The boy’s father confirmed that it didn’t belong to his son. The following morning, a jogger noticed Anita’s nude corpse in a ditch near the Burke-Gilman Trail by Lake Union in Seattle. The jogger called 911 from her cell phone. “For a moment, when I saw that pale thing lying there in the gully, I thought it was a dead deer,” she said.

With his learner’s permit in his back pocket, fifteen-year-old Greg Sherwood drove his mother, Lila, forty-nine, to China Gardens in Ballard on March 22, 1998. It was raining that night. Greg parked in an alley behind the restaurant. He left the motor running and his mother in the front seat while he dashed into the restaurant to pick up their carryout order. Greg returned five minutes later with two bags of Chinese food. He found the car’s passenger door open, and the windshield wipers still moving and squeaking. One of his mother’s shoes was in a puddle by that door. In the passenger seat was an old G.I. Joe doll. Lila Sherwood’s body was discovered in a Dumpster behind a Texaco station in Issaquah the following morning.

The toys Mama’s Boy left behind were all used, slightly damaged, and untraceable.

Psychologists on the case speculated that the killer’s mother must have deserted him, and there was probably abuse, too. It would explain why this killer was acting out. Typically, they would have expected all of the victims’ children to have been the same specific age—the age the killer might have been when abandoned by his mother, or when he might have experienced a severe trauma.

But that just didn’t apply to Mama’s Boy—and his killing pattern. The oldest surviving child was fifteen, and the youngest, Andy Milford, was ten months old.

No one saw the man who had abducted Andy’s mother in the park that night.

A twenty-seven-year-old construction worker, Chad Schlund, was the one who had found her. The building site was for a proposed forty-unit luxury condominium, Greenlake Manor. A two-story-deep giant hole had been excavated for the basement and underground garage. A black tarp covered most of the vast crater, and that was where Chad Schlund wandered off from his coworkers to have a cigarette break. The ground beneath the tarp was hard and flat. So when Chad stepped on something soft and mushy beneath the black plastic sheeting, he balked. He noticed a bulky lump in the tarp and figured

large raccoon or dog must have made its way under that plastic sheet and suffocated.

~~Chad almost moved on. He had only a few minutes left of his break. Already one of the tall cranes began to sweep across the grey horizon again, and his coworkers were lumbering back to their workstations. Chad figured he had time for only half a cigarette now. Yet he stopped, and with his foot, pushed back the loose piece of tarp. He stopped when he saw the woman's hand sticking out from under the tarp's folds. The skin was so pale, it was almost blue. And her fingernails were the color of cinnamon.~~

The Seattle Times article on April 5, 1998, included a photo of Mama's Boy's fourth victim. The picture of Pamela Milford showed a pretty, fresh-faced woman with a big smile. Andy's mother looked so full of hope. The picture had been taken around the time Pamela found out she was pregnant—back when her hair was still long.

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