

Chapter 1: Birds Caw at Night

"There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That will be the beginning."

—Louis L'Amour.

The harvest moon smiled in the twilight, illuminating the white sands of the oceanfront estate section of Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. One could dance in the traditions of moon gazing beneath its glow. The crashing waves of the Atlantic Ocean were at full tide, surging forward with powerful energy. The swash and pounding left their marks as soon as they touched the shore, only to retreat with a soothing rhythm. This give-and-take was both defiant and bold. The moon glowed in the stillness of the night, causing the sands leading to the high-elevation estates to glisten from the evening rain. It exuded elegance, inviting relaxation for its visitors. It was a moment of serenity in one of Florida's wealthiest beach communities. The moon's glow served as both a mask and a reminder that, by morning, the sun-kissed beach—a perfect spot for sunbathing—would be warm and inviting. However, the evening had a different temperament and motive.

The estate section featured a mile of expansive homes along the oceanfront and across the street on the marshland side. This community was quiet and affluent, governed not by a homeowner's association but by a sense of peer respect and compatibility. Two private clubs were within walking distance—just a short jog away for these high-net-worth individuals. During the rainy season, the clubs were merely a golf cart ride apart. Against this picturesque backdrop stood a 7,436-square-foot Mediterranean-style mansion on the Atlantic coast of Ponte Vedra Beach in northeast Florida. It was just 10 minutes from Jacksonville and 15 minutes from the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville. The mansion boasted two levels with no basement and sat on a 25-foot elevation, on 1.49 acres. The chirping of birds, their nocturnal songs to establish territory or attract mates, filled the air with joyful sound, soon buffered by the rumbling noises emanating from within the estate home.

A young lady in her 30s, statuesque and hastily dressed, rushed from the primary bedroom on the second floor down to the first floor, grabbing her Prada Padded Renylon Shoulder Bag as she approached the marbled foyer. Another woman, considerably older and dressed in a marshmallow crew-neck lounge with pockets, rushed behind her, unable to catch her. Without a single word, she fired a shot at the young lady from inside the foyer. The moment the bullet left the gun, the silence of the fabulous night was shattered. The home security system alarm was triggered, and the annoying beeping was activated. The chirping quickly became intermittent. Through the picturesque rear oceanside door of the mansion, the young lady staggered onto the balcony. Not satisfied with the first shot, the shooter released a second bullet, aiming again at the victim, who slumped, tripped over her own feet, and fell to the ground, dying at that moment. The shooter stood over the young lady with a stoic, fixed stare, like a mortician viewing a corpse. She paused with a twitch, then moments later grabbed her cell phone from her robe, made a call by pressing speed dial, placed her gun on a

kitchen counter, and rested her backside against the counter firmly. Before the call connected, she glanced at the body once more to ensure the task was complete.

Before 911 picked up, she whispered, "I love you, and I am sorry."

"This is 911. What is your emergency?" asked the respondent.

"There has been a shooting. She has been shot to death. Please come to my home. I'm at 1211 Ponte Vedra Blvd., PVB. This is Dr. Avery, the Medical Examiner. Hurry!"