

LIBRARY ANGEL



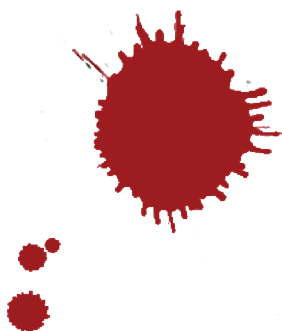
SUZANNE M. SYNBORESKI

LIBRARY ANGEL

Also by Suzanne Synborski

Behind Lace Curtains

YOU WILL BE MINE



LIBRARY ANGEL

A NOVEL

SUZANNE M. SYMBORSKI



Cauchemar Media LLC

CHAPTER 1

THE WHIRLING SAW BLADE BUZZED through flaxen hair, flesh, then bone. It spawned a smell that reminded him of burning garbage. He loved that part. He inhaled deeply, wrinkling his nose under the bile-green surgical mask. It tickled. He shuddered and turned to rub his nose against his shoulder.

Beads of perspiration burst from his pores, then crept down behind blood-spattered safety glasses, stinging when they reached his eyes.

Some day he wouldn't have to operate under such primitive conditions.

Some day he would be rich and famous.

Some day he would have a flurry of nurses dancing to his commands.

Some day....

She moaned, ever so slightly. Golden lashes fluttered like shimmering butterflies. A tear trickled from the corner of one of her eyes and merged with a scarlet rivulet.

He placed the Stryker saw on a makeshift instrument tray, the tools rattling in response. With trembling fingers, he twisted the cap off a bottle of chloroform and sprinkled a few drops of the volatile chemical on the paper cone that covered her nose and mouth.

She grew quiet again.

The butterflies became still.

He glanced up at the man-in-the-moon wall clock. Damn. He was behind schedule. She wouldn't be able to hold out much longer. Hurry. Squinting to keep more sweat from slipping into his eyes, he turned back to his work.

When the end of the bloody gash that encircled her skull met its origin in the middle of her forehead, looking like a snake devouring itself tail first, he whipped the saw away, forgetting to take his finger off the trigger. Drops of blood leapt from the spinning blade and lashed a streak of scarlet tears across his apron. Damn saw. It was meant for slicing open plaster casts. But it was all he had. It had to do—for now.

Without looking away from his work, he fumbled among the tools on his tray until he found what he wanted. He forced the blunt metal wedge into the oozing furrow and slammed his palm against the black and yellow handle of the screwdriver. With a delicious sucking sound, the top of her skull popped off and spun to the floor, then landed with a wet thump. He shuddered. That sound—it always sent a galvanic thrill through his entire being.

“Shhhhhh,” he whispered. “Not yet.”

Then he hollowed out her skull with the slotted spoon his mother often used to beat him with when he didn’t finish his homework. Like scooping out a Halloween pumpkin, only he didn’t have to wait for October because he was in control—like God.

Ecstasy.

He unbuckled his belt with trembling hands, unzipped his jeans, and fondled himself.

“Okay, Einstein, you better hurry. Can’t let her get cold. You know the rules.”

He whipped off the blood-spattered sheet that covered his diminutive patient and slid onto her naked body.

“Bitch! I told you I’d fuck your brains out, didn’t I. Thought you were so smart, little Sally.

Who’s laughing now?”

CHAPTER 3

HE SLIPPED A PLASTIC BAG OVER SALLY'S HEAD and tied a knot at her neck. Then he stretched a thick rubber band over the bag and let it snap tight around her neck. Too bad she was dead; he couldn't hurt her any more. No more fun. Well, not exactly. Feeding her brain to the neighbor's dog would be fun.

Dressed in clean, green scrubs, he cracked the darkroom door and peered outside, listening for evidence of life other than that of the huge oaks draped with Spanish moss. His eyes focused on the center of the yard—a blank space devoid of flowers and rose bushes—so unlike the rest of the yard. Only grass. Why did that spot always make him feel sad, like he needed to go there, to stand in that spot and try to remember something? He shook off the feeling.

No signs of Grandpa—of anybody. It was late, almost midnight, and the old man was always asleep by nine. Luckily, the immense moat of honeysuckle surrounding Grandpa's yard guaranteed total privacy. He inhaled the perfume of the green and yellow barricade, then snorted it out. It spoiled his memory of burning flesh and bone.

Sure it was safe, he dragged Sally outside. She lay face down in the grass, verdant blades harshly crushed under her weight. He locked the door and buried the key under a granite slab that served as a front step to his darkroom.

He checked the rubber band around her neck to make sure the bag would stay in place. Rubber gloves squeaked against the plastic bag. Little mouse sounds. Cleaning his darkroom was bother enough. The hassle of scrubbing bloodstains off car seats would be too much. And the police. He always had to worry about them. Little precautions and hours of watching crime TV made life so much easier—safer.

Cramming her into Grandpa's Volkswagen Bug was a challenge, as usual, even though he always picked little ones. Arms flopped. Hair caught on door handles. They always had to give him a hard time, right up to the end.

"Whore!" He slammed the door and turned to walk around to the driver's side. Fingers protruded from the groove that ran around the grass-green door. He froze. Were they moving? No. Were they pointing at him? He swallowed hard and scanned the yard again to be sure nobody saw. "Damn. Thought you could get away, huh?"

He yanked the door open and shoved her arm back where it belonged, tossed a white sheet over her naked figure, and arranged magazines and newspapers over the small mound she formed on the back seat. He slipped into the car and turned the key.

Casting off the protection of Grandpa's yard, he headed out into the fragrant Louisiana night, windows open, radio crooning, his arm stretched out across the top of the empty passenger seat. He drove with extreme care, so as not to attract any attention.

It was springtime in Lafayette, and hotter than usual. The blended odors of indigenous flowers hung in the heavy, damp night air—jasmine, honeysuckle, gardenia. When he passed a hamburger drive-in, the heavy night air smuggled the scent of sizzling meat and yesterday's grease into his car, usurping the perfume of spring.

"Hungry, Sally?" He giggled as he waited for her to reply. "Didn't think so. Guess she's mad, eh, Einstein?" Jimmy sighed. "Women: can't live without'em, can't live with'em. Don't worry, buddy. I'll stop on the way back home." He moved his hand to his lap and fondled himself.

The moist spring air caressed him. He purred as he drove aimlessly, waiting for the perfect location to call out to him. Someplace safe.

Railroad tracks rumbled under the car, rattling him back into the past with the ferocity of a snake-black, carbon-belching locomotive. Childhood memories screamed at him like a train whistle.

* * *

"You useless moron!"

He jerked awake as Mom's car rumbled over the railroad tracks. His pants were wet. So was the back seat.

Not again! Oh, no! Not again—

“What did you do? I smell it! You stupid pig! How could you be my son?”

He closed his eyes and pressed his hands over his ears. Mommy slowed her car then whipped it onto the narrow, barren path that ran alongside the railroad tracks. He shivered. Mom braked, spitting gravel into the air, against the car. He whimpered as she dragged him out of the vehicle. She pulled off his wet pants and punished him. There. Alongside the tracks. With cars passing.

He didn't cry.

He wouldn't let them see him cry.

When Mommy finished beating him, she shoved him back into the car, sat him on the wet spot, and yanked his clammy pants down over his head. The legs dangled like flaccid rabbit ears. He felt them against his arms, rough corduroy, wetness against his scalp and face. The smell of urine gagged him.

“Stupid! You're dumber than dirt.” Mommy yelled and whipped the car into traffic.

He tried to hold his breath all the way home.

* * *

He shook his head, dismissing apparitions from the past. His foot still pressed on the brake, he wiped tears from his face and checked for more in the rear view mirror. He grinned at himself, revealing yellow baby-corn teeth peppered with black, rotten spots. He checked to see that his mustache was in place.

“Okay, Einstein, this is it. This is the perfect spot.”

He nosed the car onto the drive alongside the same railroad tracks, slowly guiding it down a hard-packed gravel path. The Volkswagen's tires slammed against ruts and ditches, clattering his teeth as though he were locked in the grip of a fever's chill. When far enough from the road, he braked.

The railroad tracks slashed though the field just to the left of the Volkswagen. On the right, waist-high stalks of wild golden grass glowing in the moonlight swayed in the gentle breeze, a million fingers pointing at the night sky, whispering accusations to each other. He ignored them and stared straight ahead, straight down a path that ran with the railroad tracks. Kids on four

wheelers. That's who had made the path. He'd seen them there before, and down by the river. The rich kids. The pretty kids. The popular kids. Suddenly he felt small and alone. Crickets chirped in accordance as if led by an invisible conductor. A chorus of tiny hearts beating together, marking time. Afraid to face the moon, he lowered his eyes and slipped out of the car.

First he shoved the sheet and magazines away from the door, then he grabbed his acquiescent passenger by a wrist and dragged her down the path, delighting at the abstract scratch patterns left by brambles and stones as they raked across her glacial flesh. She glowed in the moonlight, alabaster against the swarthy earth. Just far enough from the trail to hide her presence in the undulating field of grass, he let her arm flop to the ground and used the toe of his shoe to roll her face down on the dirt, so she could look like—like anybody.

Out of a paper bag, he dumped her meager belongings. Plop, atop the pile of clothes, landed the crown of her skull. He ripped the plastic bag off her head and stuffed it into his pocket.

A sordid child playing in a moonlit nightmare sandbox, he sat on the ground and used a flat rock to scrape up a small pile of dirt. Frenzied insects scrambled out of the path of his primitive blade as he packed her skull with the dark, squirming soil. He crammed the top back in place.

"Okay, Sally. Now you're dumb as dirt, too."

He rose and snapped off his gloves. He puffed up his chest with a deep breath, then tipped his head back slowly and flaunted his face to the moon. She was full and grinning down at him. A giant pearl in the sky. He smirked back at her.

He headed back to his car and hesitated when the past stumbled over its own feet in his memory. A smile crept across his face. He turned and walked back to Sally, then scrounged through her clothes to find her silk panties and stretched them down over her head.

* * *

He tiptoed into the shadowy house, still burping onions from the quickie hamburger he had picked up on the way home from the railroad tracks. As he plodded down the hallway toward his bedroom, the grandfather clock ticked like the heart of a monster.

Everything reeked of lemon oil. Before entering his room, he went into the parlor and turned out the light Grandpa always left burning in the front window, just in case his little boy stayed out after dark.

Jimmy's watchband caught the doily covering the back of the chair that stood between him and the lamp. Jimmy hated doilies. They were for women. The whole room reeked of woman, of slut. Lampshades with ruffles, white ruffled curtains arching across the windows, little statues of old-time bitches wearing frilly gowns holding ruffled umbrellas. He ripped off the doily and headed toward the back of the house, toward his room. He passed Grandpa's room. Soft snoring whispered through the door.

He stepped into his own room and locked himself in.

"Damn lemon oil! I can still smell it! Even in here." He tossed Sally's book bag onto the nightstand next to his bed. Something seemed wrong. He scanned the room. His drawers were all shut. His poster of Merlin still hung over his bed. His television was on the stand at the foot of his narrow bed. The floor was strewn with dirty laundry.

The window. The shade on his window was up. He jerked down the crackling, yellowed shade and yanked the night-black curtains over it to be sure no fissure of light could knife its way into his room. Ever since he was a child, he had hated to look out that window, to see that spot where no flowers grew. Feeling relieved, he locked the door and pushed his back up against the white-painted hardwood molding that haloed the entrance to his inner sanctum. He pressed himself back hard and struggled to make his spine as straight and tall as possible.

Fumbling around behind his back, he captured the yellow pencil that hung from a length of tattered twine, reached up and leveled it on the top of his head, then gouged a black slash on the white woodwork.

Breathing heavily, with his eyes closed, he clenched his teeth and turned slowly. His face close to the wall, he squinted at the black line, compared it with all the others.

"Fuck! Five-foot, five again. Fuck! Fuck!"

He kicked the door, slammed his arms against it, whirled around and kicked at the books stacked next to his bed, sending

them scuttling into the darkness underneath. Tangles of soiled laundry wound around his feet as he stomped over to his dresser. He pounded the polished oak surface, hung his head down, and supporting himself on clenched fists, breathed deeply to calm himself. He glanced at Sally's book bag. No. Don't open it yet. Wait for the right time. Wait.

He removed his clothing, dropping each item to the floor while watching himself in the mirror in a leisured appraisal. He drew a finger along the small scar that ran down the center of his chest, measuring it. No. It hadn't grown any larger. Damn. Why don't scars grow with the person, he wondered. He had survived heart surgery when he was a child, and the scar was no larger than it was then. A huge scar would make him look like a warrior. Maybe, some day, he'd go in for the second operation. Then he'd get a real scar. No. Then he'd have to give up his smart pills. No way.

He glanced around his room. Something seemed different. He caught his breath and held a hand over his heart. Something. Jimmy lowered his brows and eyed his room, sniffed the air.

Lemon oil.

Was Grandpa up to his old tricks again, sneaking into Jimmy's stronghold to neaten up? He surveyed the floor. Dirty clothes. Maybe not. But Grandpa had done that before, left some things the way they were to cover his trail. He glanced around his room. The bed was made. The television on the card table at the foot of his bed had been dusted. The screen was free of fingerprints. To calm himself, Jimmy again rested his fists on the dresser top and looked down along his arms. His comb, brush, and favorite cologne were all rearranged, lined up neatly. Clean.

"How dare he!"

Jimmy lashed his arm across the surface of the dresser and sent his things plunging, tumbling across the floor.

"There now."

He leaned close to the mirror and peered into the glass, his nose only a few inches away from the merciless surface. At least his mustache was coming along. It would be hard for them to tell. It barely showed. Maybe they wouldn't be able to see his

lip, wouldn't know his mother was a boozier, wouldn't know his mortifying secret.

Jimmy posed, his jaw jutting out, his muscles flexed. "I picture you here," he murmured, then closed his eyes and let his head fall back.

In a faraway place in his mind, a beautiful girl slipped her arms around him from behind. She whispered in his ear, *Cher bebe, you're so gorgeous. And smart too. I'm so lucky you chose me. All the other girls are soooooo jealous.*

The grandfather clock in the hall struck twelve. The booming metallic notes reverberated deep inside Jimmy's belly. He shivered, then gathered his thoughts as gooseflesh ran up his spine. It was midnight, time for his favorite television show. He flicked on the television, jumped into bed, and crawled beneath the covers. While the credits rolled across the screen, he adjusted his pillows. A gentle sigh escaped his lips as he snuggled down and got comfortable.

Plastic surgery. Not again. Boring. He watched the operation for a few minutes, then glanced at Sally's bag again. The surgeon's words were squelched beneath the tick-tock of the grandfather clock echoing down the hall, creeping under the door and into his room. The surgeon made a cut just under the patient's eye. He had seen it before—doctors making spoiled bitches look good on the outside.

His legs wouldn't hold still. He felt phantom bugs crawling over him.

"Enough!"

He kicked off the covers, scrambled over to the end of the bed, and jammed a videotape into the VCR. A tape of his favorite operation show.

Brain surgery.

He watched for a while, but still his eyes kept wandering away from the television—over to the nightstand next to his bed. On top, Sally's book bag waited to be plundered. The scent of Lily of the Valley taunted him.

He couldn't stand it anymore.

He grabbed the bag and jerked it open. He paused to sniff the perfumed contents, then shoved his hand inside. With his

other hand gripping Einstein, he rummaged through the treasure trove. His lungs pumped like bellows fanning a blacksmith's fire. Heat blazed over his flesh, settling on his face. He closed his eyes, stopped to calm himself, afraid he would hyperventilate, afraid he would erupt into flames.

When his lungs stopped heaving for air and his heartbeat slowed, he dug back into the bag. A zipper case of pens and pencils, a calculator, books and—her term paper. Oh, blessed day. He never thought he could be so lucky. Reverently, he lifted the report folder from the bag and held it against his chest.

"You were mine, little Sally. Mine, all mine for a little while."

Tomorrow he would hide his newest holy relics with the rest, with all the other things he had inherited from the others.

"Wait till Mom sees this. Can't wait for Mom to get back." He slipped the paper under his pillow and scanned the room for *The Magician*, his visualization book, the book that showed him how willpower could make anything he wanted happen, how his mind could confer upon him—omnipotence.

"Fuck!"

It's probably kicked under the bed, he thought. So what. He wouldn't visualize this night. Didn't need to. Everything had already turned out fine. "I'm smarter than all of them put together. And I just keep on getting better."

He rolled over, closed his eyes, and slipped off into dark dreams of girls with blonde hair. Know-it-all girls who looked just like Mom.



Sometimes we become so absolutely possessed by the past that only divine intervention can free us.

Jimmy and Julia, two college students, are haunted by oppressive memories of tyrannical, deceased mothers; Julia responds by becoming a reclusive overachiever and Jimmy, a serial killer.

Their lives become inextricably intertwined by a shared fixation for a missing library book that contains marginalia detailing plans for the brutal murder of a local woman.

Julia, believing she has uncovered information that can stop a string of serial killings, struggles to find a way to prevent the murderer from striking again, never realizing she has embarked on a perilous, unconscious quest for freedom from the past.

And Jimmy goes hunting . . . for Julia.

ISBN 978-0-9913760-3-2



9 780991 376032