

# THE SURROGATE THIEF

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ARCHER  
MAYOR



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# Chapter 1

Dispatch to 0-30.”

Officer Paul Kinney unhooked his radio mike and answered, “0-30.”

“Domestic disturbance, 63 Vista Estates. Neighbor called it in. Address listed to a Linda Purvis.”

“Ten-four.”

Kinney replaced the mike and pulled into a smattering of traffic. It was almost midnight, and, even in a town of thirteen thousand like Brattleboro, it was still Vermont, where phoning people after nine and staying up past eleven remained unusual, even slightly inappropriate, behavior.

Kinney was feeling good. It was summer, two days ago he'd been released by his training officer to patrol on his own, and he was flush with self-confidence. To his thinking, all that remained was to learn the ropes thoroughly with the Bratt PD, establish a reputation, put out some feelers, and pick from a variety of plum federal jobs, from the FBI to Homeland Security to God knows what. He felt poised before a veritable trough of opportunities.

He headed west on Route 9 into West Brattleboro, the main town's smaller offshoot. Given its less urban makeup, West B played host to a choice of trailer parks, from the seriously upscale—expansive, complete with paved roads, car parks, and garages—to the barely solvent, where the odds favored Mother Nature repossessing her own.

Not surprisingly to Kinney, the loftily named Vista Estates fit the latter category.

He wasn't concerned. He didn't know this address specifically, but he judged himself pretty adept at handling domestics. He'd studied his FTO's style—an old-timer who'd been a field training officer for too many years—and, as a result, had mostly learned how not to behave. And even though he'd handled only a couple of domestics on his own, Kinney was convinced of the merits of his technique. People under stress didn't need a friendly ear. They were secretly yearning for the comfort of a little imposed discipline.

Vista Estates was to hell and gone, almost out of town, and proffering neither vistas nor estates. A trailer park whose assets were better known to the tax courts than to any Realtor, it was a threadbare clearing among some roughly opened woods, crisscrossed with narrow, root-tangled dirt lanes and populated with as many empty lots as decaying trailers.

The one thing the park owners had bothered with, Kinney noted gratefully, was numbering the addresses. He found 62/63/64 without much trouble, clustered together, although only after he'd used his flashlight to see better out his side window. Vista Estates had clearly deemed street-lamps a luxury.

Kinney drew abreast of the rough scratch in the dirt serving as a trifurcated driveway, told dispatch of his arrival, and pulled himself free of the car. Before him were two



distant trailers and an empty space for a third. The home on the left was blazing with light, its neighbor all but dark, save for a single curtained window.

He drew in a deep breath, both enjoying the cool summer air and preparing himself for the show of command he saw coming, and set off down the driveway.

He considered stopping by the neighbor's first. That was certainly protocol. But instinct and vanity pushed him toward the direct approach. Slipping between the pickup and the small sedan parked out front, without checking their registrations, he climbed the worn wooden steps up to the narrow homemade porch and paused at the thin metal front door.

He certainly sympathized with the neighbor's complaint. There was a knock-down, drag-out screaming match taking place inside, accompanied by the thumping of inner doors and the smashing of crockery.

Kinney passed on simply ringing the bell and removed his flashlight from the slim pocket sewn into his uniform pants.

He used it to smack the door three times.

"Brattleboro police."

The immediate silence was like pulling the plug on an overly loud TV set—utter and complete. In its sudden embrace, he felt abruptly and paradoxically defenseless.

The door flew open without warning, revealing a large man with a beard, a T-shirt, and an oversize revolver in his hand pointed at the floor. "You get the hell away from here or she's dead. Got that?"

Kinney felt his stomach give way, along with his bravado. Transfixed by the gun, he imagined himself as the human-size target he so frequently perforated at the range, and

could visualize the barrel rising to the level of his eye, an enormous flash of light, and then nothing.

Instead, the door was merely slammed in his face.

“‘You get away from here or she’s a dead person.’ That’s all he said. He had a gun.”

Ron Kluszczewski closed his car door and leaned back against the fender. He rubbed his face with both hands, still chasing the remnants of a deep sleep from his brain, before peering into the wary, almost belligerent expression of the patrolman before him.

“You got the call? I mean, you were the one this guy talked to?” Ron spoke deliberately, hoping to project a calming influence. In fact, being the senior officer here, he felt his own anxieties beginning to roil inside him, a nagging insecurity he’d wrestled with all his life.

“Yeah. It didn’t sound like a big deal from dispatch—a routine domestic. I knocked on the door, he opened up, delivered the one-liner, and slammed the door. There was a woman behind him, crying.”

Kluszczewski took in the tight shooting gloves, custom gun grips, and strained nonchalance and identified a neophyte’s attempt to camouflage insecurity with accessories. “She look all right otherwise?”

To his credit, the patrolman became clearly embarrassed. “I guess. I was sort of looking at the gun. That’s when I figured I better call for backup.”

Kluszczewski studied him for a beat before asking, “You okay? Did he point it at you?”

There was a moment’s hesitation, as if Ron had asked a trick question. All traces of initial swagger vanished at last in the response. “No. I mean, yeah, I’m all right, but no, he didn’t point it at me. It was a little scary, is all. Not what I

was expecting. But I'm fine . . . And she's fine . . . I'm pretty sure . . . The woman, I mean."

Brattleboro's police department was known either as a lifer colony, where laid-back older veterans spun out entire careers, or as a turnstile agency, where baby cops hung around just long enough to decide between a flashier law enforcement job elsewhere and getting out.

Ron wondered if the latter option wasn't circling this one's head right now. As it was, he was so new that Ron couldn't remember if his name was Paul or Phil. His name tag just read "P. Kinney."

"How long ago did this start?" he asked him, deciding he looked like a Phil.

Kinney checked his watch. "Maybe half an hour ago." He keyed the mike clipped to the epaulet of his uniform shirt and muttered into his radio, "Jerry? It's Paul. You remember when I called for backup?"

"Twenty-three fifty-three," came the brisk reply.

Okay, Ron thought, so it's Paul. Things better improve from here. "The scene secure?"

Kinney nodded. "Only three sides to worry about. Jerry's covering the west and north. We're on the east, and Henry's got the south. Good thing the trailer park's half empty. Makes life a lot easier."

That last line was delivered with pale, leftover flair. Ron shivered slightly. Even summers in Vermont could get chilly, especially if you were fresh from a warm bed. "You've got more coming, though, right?"

"Oh, sure. The state police are sending a couple. The sheriff, too. I asked Dispatch to get hold of the chief and Billy Manierre, but no luck so far."

"They're both out of town," Ron said with some regret. He was head of a four-man detective squad and the depart-

ment's only hostage negotiator, both positions that put him closer to the upper brass than to the uniforms chasing tail-lights—the latter of whom he envied right now.

"You better show me around."

Paul Kinney stumbled over an exposed root as he turned, increasing his awkwardness. "Watch your step," he said needlessly. "It's just around the corner, past that fir tree."

They weren't using flashlights. The moon supplied enough light to see by, and they didn't want to stir up the man in the trailer in case he was looking out.

Kinney lowered his voice as he drew abreast of the tree. "There it is."

Klescowski peered into the gloom. Looking slightly deflated, like a small grounded blimp needing air, the trailer sat alone in the middle of a narrow hardscrabble yard. To one side of it was a blank rectangle showing where a similar home had once stood. To the other was a second trailer, some twenty feet away, lights blazing from every window. In the distance, a row of trees and a hill blocked off the scene like a set piece on a stage. A swaybacked pickup and a rusty compact were parked next to the home they were interested in.

"Jerry's out behind?" Ron asked, pointing at the trailer.

"Right, and Henry's alongside the other one."

"Why're all the lights on in there? Are the neighbors still inside?"

Kinney answered more emphatically than the question deserved, making Ron think he might have addressed this problem later than he should have. "No, no. We got them out. And I talked to them, too. Got some good information. I guess we forgot about the lights."

"We can turn them off after the tac team gets here," Ron placated him, noticing that the primary trailer had only one

lighted window, its curtains drawn. "How did this go down?"

"Neighbors complained," Kinney explained. "Said they were screaming at each other next door and breaking things. That's sure what they were doing when I arrived."

"We know who 'they' are yet?"

"Linda Purvis is the owner of record, and according to the neighbors, the man sounds like her ex, Matthew. That matches the two vehicle registrations and the physical descriptions I got."

"Any kids?"

Kinney's face turned toward him in the half light, looking blank. "I don't know," he stammered. "I didn't ask."

"So, there may be others in there." It wasn't a question.

"Yeah," the younger man admitted. "I guess so. If it helps," he added, "Dispatch said this wasn't the first time. Purvis is in the computer for prior domestics here, complete with a restraining order issued yesterday."

Which was probably what triggered this, Ron thought. One of the hallmarks of these kinds of situations, taught during his negotiator's training, was the so-called precipitating event. Almost without fail, it was lurking somewhere, usually acting as the proverbial one straw too many. In the worst cases, you got what they called the triple—three cataclysms striking virtually at once, like a freakish planetary alignment.

"You smell liquor on his breath?" he asked.

Kinney nodded. "Big-time."

Such as a drinking binge, Ron thought. He turned away and looked down the rutted road leaving the park. He saw the twinkle of blue strobes approaching in the distance.

"Get on the radio and tell everyone to respond Code Two. I don't want to crank this guy any tighter than he is."

Kinney did as asked, and they both watched the strobes wink out moments later, while the headlights kept bouncing toward them over the uneven ground.

Kluszczewski didn't look at Kinney as he continued, "As soon as everyone gets here, I want those smaller tire spike kits quietly placed under both Purvis cars, all other trailers within easy shooting range evacuated, and a perimeter established and sealed."

"Who's the shift commander tonight?" he finally asked.

"Captain Washburn. It was supposed to be Lieutenant Capullo but he's out sick."

Ron looked up at the night sky, dread settling in. That made Washburn top dog for the duration, since the chief and his second in command, Manierre, were out of town. Negotiation by its nature was tough enough, especially when you had as little experience as Ron had. Adding Washburn's built-in animosity for him wasn't going to make it easier.

The only missing stressor now was a gung ho tac team, champing at the bit to turn that trailer into the Alamo. And that much was a given with the team's new leadership—a transplanted Boston cop named Wayne Kazak. Ron smiled at the irony. Now he had his own triple to deal with.

He sighed softly and said, "Okay, let's get the van down here and set up a command post. Better count on this taking a while."

## Chapter 2

Two hours later, Ron Kleszczewski was sitting in an airless van, headphones binding his ears, his eyes half closed in concentration, listening to Matthew Purvis ranting on the other end of a dedicated line. This last detail was actually the PD's "throw phone," which Ron had managed to get him to accept after forty-five minutes of persuasion, using the ruse that Ron's cell, which he wasn't actually using, was running low on power.

The advantage of the throw phone over a standard line was being revealed right now, since Purvis wasn't actually talking to Ron, but yelling yet again at his estranged wife. Since the unit was unfamiliar to him, he'd merely put it down instead of hanging it up as he might have normally.

Which in turn was helping to enhance one of the pillars of good negotiation: information gathering. Anything the negotiator could learn about the subject, using all available methods, gave him something extra with which to defuse the situation.

"It's sounding like Linda thought Matt was cheating on

her with her own sister," Ron murmured, still eavesdropping. "Either that or she's deliberately heating him up." Directly across from him, a whiteboard was mounted on the van wall, attended by a patrolman who now carefully wrote down, "Matt slept with Linda's sis?" and added the exact time.

Already there was quite a lot on the board, acquired from Ron's observations; computer searches; interviews with neighbors, friends, and family; and anecdotal tidbits from any officers who'd dealt with either Linda or Matthew Purvis in the past. Despite the hour, all across town, Ron had people digging for more. Even the town clerk was awakened for access to any records she might have.

Ron waited for a pause in the argument before punching the button on his console that made the throw phone ring whether it was off or not, noting in the back of his mind that Linda was standing her ground, giving as good as she got.

The phone rang twice before Matt picked it up.

"What?"

"It's Ron, Matt. I was a little confused when you put me down just then. I thought we were working a few things out."

"Like what? Like how you're going to blow me away as soon as I shoot this bitch?"

"That's not what I was hearing," Ron said quietly, knowing that the man's emotions needed to resettle after his last screaming match. "Before we were interrupted, we were talking about what you've just been through—how we might be able to put your life back together."

There was a third man in the van with Ron: an official liaison with the incident command post outside, equipped with a pair of headphones connected to the ICP, and



assigned the task of passing notes to and from the negotiator as directed. The notes were color coded according to their urgency. The one he placed before Ron now was purely informational. Kleszczewski glanced at it and passed it along to the officer at the board, who wrote, "Fired from job two days ago." With this morning's restraining order and his by now admitted alcohol dependence, that earned Matt Purvis the "triple" designation Ron had mused about earlier.

"There's nothing left to put together," Purvis was yelling. "Don't you get it? I'm not fucking around here. I will kill this bitch because she's world-class evil, and then I'll kill myself to save you the trouble."

"Jeez, Matt. I'm hearing a lot of frustration."

"No shit, Sherlock. You'd be frustrated, too, all the crap I have on my plate."

"Maybe you'd like to get some of that out of your system."

There was a pause, then a tentative, "What're you saying? More talk? I'm sick of talking."

The liaison handed Ron another, higher-priority note. Ron silently read "Let's get moving"—clearly Washburn's words—crumpled it up, and dropped it on the floor. There were others like it already scattered about, making him ever more grateful for the protocol prohibiting all but a select few from entering the van. The incident command post was only fifteen yards away, near the trailer park's entrance.

"I'm talking about blowing off a little steam. You ever scream at the night sky? Just let her rip?"

"Everybody's done that."

"That's all I'm saying. Maybe it'll help a little—clear your head some."

Matt Purvis was incredulous. "What? Step outside and start yelling? That's crazy. You'll shoot me."