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PROLOGUE

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FIELDER FAMILY CHALET
SUN VALLEY, ID*

Charles Fielder froze in horror. The champagne bottle dropped from his hand as he watched the young woman’s head snap forward. Blood spread instantly through her fine blonde hair.

A second woman started to scream, her fingers digging into the chair armrests.

“Noooo—” Charles cried, as he ran toward the man who now pointed his weapon at the second woman.

Another crack from the handgun ended the screaming. Charles stopped running at ten feet away.

The two women sat slumped over in matching wing chairs beneath the rough hewn ceiling timbers of the Fielder family chalet in Sun Valley, Idaho. The shooter, shifting positions like a skilled professional, immediately turned his weapon on Charles, who stood motionless, staring at the shadowy man in black and his stainless steel gun. Charles’ greatest fear had finally been realized. *My partners have betrayed me—I am a dead man*, he conceded to himself. The partnership’s concealed agenda was now no longer a secret.

Just then one of Charles’ partners entered the chalet’s foyer and stood observing from a distance. “Let it be, Charles. We had no choice and you know it.”

Charles recognized Wayland Tate’s voice, but he didn’t bother to turn around. Instead, he advanced in slow, deliberate steps toward the two women and the shooter. He looked down at the limp bodies, the broken fingernails, the blood-soaked hair and red-stained blouses. His eyes filled with tears as he bent over the women, one at a time, trying to prop up their heads, but the chair backs were too vertical. He buried his head in his hands, not realizing that he was smearing the women’s blood on his face. This was a senseless act of brutality that pierced him like a knife, as if gutting him from heart to groin.

“We’ll take it from here,” Tate said, calling off the shooter. Without a sound, the shooter disappeared through the main entrance to the chalet, but not before handing Tate his weapon. Tate nodded to him. So far, the assassin’s services had proved impeccable.

Charles turned, tears running down his bloodstained cheeks. His eyes were daggers as he stared at Tate with contempt. Two more of Charles’ partners abruptly entered the foyer of the chalet. They halted next to Tate, staring at the gruesome scene. All three of them were distinguished, brilliant men with formidable reputations. Charles had known them like brothers for years, but not well enough to have prevented this atrocity. Only one of the three faces mirrored his anguish. “My God, what have we done?” Charles gasped.

“Nothing that can’t be explained,” Tate said, as he and the other two partners walked slowly toward Charles.

“I won’t let you keep this hidden,” Charles said, bracing himself against a chair as he faced the approaching men. Everything they’d set in motion eight years earlier would now have to be exposed, sooner than planned.

“You’re no longer in control,” Tate said, coming within a few feet of where Charles stood. Tate pointed the gun at him, hoping Charles would give him an excuse to pull the trigger.

Still struggling to reclaim his customary mental clarity, Charles reminded himself that what he'd done, he'd done for his son and daughter and their children and generations to come—for the advancement of the human race. But these two innocent women didn't need to die. He coughed uncontrollably, almost vomiting. When he composed himself, he stared at Tate. "You can't really believe *you're* in control, Wayland. Sooner or later, they're going to make you disappear. Your grandfather knew—"

"His was a naïve quest," Tate interrupted, pushing the gun closer to Charles' face. "That's what you fail to grasp, Charles. There will always be people with the means to control every nation on earth, including this one. Nobody will ever beat them."

"For God's sake, they killed our grandfathers," Charles said, his face twisted with emotion. "You know what they're doing."

"Save it for the conspiracy crowd," Tate said with a mocking sneer. "I'm only interested in being on the inside. What you can't fight, you join."

Everything was unraveling prematurely. Charles' years of work and sacrifice were about to become an onerous burden for his family, especially for his son Wilson, who would have to assume the reigns at Fielder & Company and liquidate his considerable assets. Of course he'd planned contingencies for such a possibility, but he had never believed it would actually come to this. *There's only one thing left to do*, Charles said to himself. *Stage my exit. Tate is wrong. I'm still in control.*

Without warning, as if dizzy and about to lose consciousness, Charles let his knees collapse, causing him to fall forward into the arms of his partners. When they reached out to catch his six feet two inch frame, Charles violently wrenched the gun from Tate's hand.

Charles fired a single shot that thudded into the raw ceiling timbers.

The other three men jumped back.

A carefully staged exit wouldn't fix things, Charles told himself, but it would provide enough time for the obsessions they'd unleashed to be exposed and extinguished. In one of those fleeting moments of whole-life reflection, he wished he'd told his son Wilson everything in preparation for what was to come. But it was too late for that now. *The letters would have to do. Maybe it's better this way.* At least that's what he rationalized. His son's ignorance would make him less of a target. But would it be enough to keep Wilson alive until the disclosure? The uncertainty twisted deeply in his gut. He prayed his family might someday understand what he'd done and why. "May God have mercy on our souls," Charles said as his anguished eyes surveyed the three men once more and then focused on the one partner who shared his feelings.

Their eyes glistened with tears.

"Trust me. This is the best way to end things," Charles said. Then he shifted his attention back to Tate, pointing the gun directly at his head. "None of us deserve to live another moment, especially you, Wayland."

Suddenly, another bullet discharged into the air as Charles was hurled backwards from a body-slam to his left side. All four men were now flailing on the floor in a vicious life-and-death struggle. One of the partners finally wrestled the gun away from Charles and shoved it into the side of Charles' head. Their eyes met for a brief moment before Charles turned away.

He pulled the trigger, hating himself for what they'd planned. The bullet entered Charles' head just behind his right ear. As the partner stood up, he dropped the handgun next to Charles' listless body and walked away.

Charles Fielder, had accomplished his exit, his mortal torment extinguished, just as he'd planned.

Chapter 1

SUN VALLEY, ID

Wilson Fielder powered his SUV through the drifting snow toward Sun Valley City Hall, primed to confront the police officers who'd charged his father with murder. He'd arrived from Chicago an hour earlier and headed straight to the hospital, where his father was lying in a coma. After questioning the neurosurgeon who removed the bullet and attempting to comfort his mother and sister, Wilson had called the Sun Valley Police, demanding a meeting with whoever was in charge of his father's case.

Once inside the Police Station at City Hall, Wilson gave his name to a female dispatcher who wouldn't stop gawking at his deep hazel green eyes and thick dark hair. Two other women working behind the counter traded schoolgirlish grins while eyeing Wilson's tall athletic body as he took a seat in the waiting area. Ordinarily, he would have been amused.

Within moments, Assistant Police Chief and Resident Detective John Zemke leaned over the counter. "Fielder?" he said in a loud, brusque voice.

Wilson's body tightened as he stood up and walked toward the stocky, sunburned detective.

"Come on in," Zemke said, brushing back his thick, wiry gray-white hair. The fifty-something former Los Angeles homicide captain, turned Sun Valley detective and ski fanatic, wore elk-skin boots, navy blue ski pants, and a red sweater. Zemke enjoyed what he did for a living, but he loved where he did it even more.

Wilson followed Zemke through the western-style swinging doors into an empty office at the rear of the building. He sat down in front of the detective's desk, attempting to control his emotions.

"Look Mr. Fielder, I'm sorry about your father, but facts don't lie. We're not looking for any other suspects. As far as we're concerned, this case is murder and attempted suicide. We found powder burns on your father's right hand. His fingerprints were on the murder weapon. A dozen witnesses put him and the two women together during the evening. What else do you want to know?"

"Who were the two women?"

"Probably high-end hookers. We get a lot of them this time of year. They look like sisters. Same blood type, physical features. Same expensive jewelry. We don't know their names yet. They were carrying phony IDs. But we'll know soon enough."

Wilson decided to ignore the "hookers" comment for the moment. Zemke might be a jaded macho throwback, but he was nobody's dummy. Wilson could see that from his eyes. But regardless of the detective's intelligence, his arrogant rush to judgment would be redressed soon enough. "What kind of gun was it?"

Zemke leaned back in his chair, staring at the ceiling. He didn't like Wilson's father, or any of the other wealthy landowners in the area who acted as if Sun Valley was their private playground. "Smith & Wesson Sportsman .22 LR caliber automatic, stainless steel, ten cartridge clip, six-inch barrel, thirty-nine ounces, designed for concealment. Five bullets were discharged. Each woman was shot in the back of the head while sitting in matching chairs in your father's chalet. Both were fully clothed. Blood soaked. They died instantly. No evidence of a struggle except for a few broken fingernails. These women obviously knew they were going to die. But they didn't have time or were too scared to do anything but grab the arms of their chairs."

"And my father?"

"We found his body lying on the floor next to where the women were executed. Blood from at least one of the women was on his hands and face. Bullet entered his head just below the right ear. Gun was lying next to his right hand. That's about it," Zemke said, anxious to end the interchange.

"What about the other two bullets?"

"Both embedded in the ceiling beams. Either threatening or torturing shots," he said while turning his attention to a file he'd picked up from his desk.

Wilson didn't say anything. There was a momentary twinge of uncertainty about his father's innocence, but he refused to believe that his father killed anyone. He knew his father. Of course he would never know all the details or secrets of his father's life, but he was well acquainted with his father's character—and it had nothing to do with corruption or injustice. His father's life had been devoted to liberation and enlightenment, for himself, his family, his clients, and anyone else he could influence. Wilson had questioned and tested his father's soul for long enough to know.

Zemke looked up from the file, "Unless there's something else, son, I've got a lot of work to do."

"A few things you should know, detective," Wilson said with measured delivery as he stood up. "My father abhorred guns and he never used his right hand for anything requiring mechanical precision or applied pressure because of an old injury. He would not have pulled the trigger of a gun from his right hand. As to your explanation of the two bullets in the ceiling beams—*threatening or torturing shots* is how you put it. It's not something my father would do under any circumstances, which brings me to my last point. The comment you made about the two women being hookers not only represents gross speculation on your part, but piss-poor police work. The only whore here is you, detective. My father didn't kill anyone."

Zemke was stunned, his eyes blazing, but he held his tongue. He slowly surveyed Wilson first with biting anger, then genuine curiosity. He hadn't expected such a tongue lashing from Charles Fielder's son. The open file on his desk was no longer a distraction. "Look, son," he said in a calm respectful voice. "We haven't established a motive yet. Until we do, this case will remain open."

"Thank you," Wilson said, his anger mostly vented. He needed Zemke to consider the possibility that someone other than his father had murdered those women. Otherwise, he'd be conducting the investigation on his own.

"Has your father showed any signs of regaining consciousness?"

"Not yet."

"I'm sorry. Let us know if his condition changes."

"Sure," Wilson said, knowing that Zemke had his own channels of information. But he was pleased that Zemke had at least attempted to express some level of concern. Maybe there was a measure of humility tempering the detective's impudence. As long as he kept the investigation open, that's what Wilson needed. "One more thing detective, I want access to the family chalet where it happened."

"Can't do that. It's a crime scene," Zemke said, his hard-bitten demeanor returning.

Wilson turned around to squarely face the detective. "Who would you like me to call?"

Zemke's eyes were suddenly on fire again, but he knew Wilson would eventually get what he wanted. Besides, everything had been gone over multiple times. "Fine," he said, his brusque voice returning. "Just don't move anything."

Wilson left the detective's office and returned to the hospital and his father's ICU room, where he joined his mother and sister. They looked so much alike. The expressive eyes, elegant noses, and slender frames, it was not uncommon for them to be mistaken as sisters. *They seem so helpless*—as was he. *But not for long*, Wilson said to himself. He told his mother and sister about his visit with Detective Zemke. They both seemed relieved that Wilson was taking care of such matters but expressed new concerns about keeping his father in Sun Valley. Wilson had already come to the same conclusion. His father needed better care than the Wood River Medical Center staff could provide.

When the neurosurgeon who'd operated on his father returned to the room, Wilson took him by the arm and walked him into the corridor outside the ICU. "I want my father prepared for an immediate airlift to Massachusetts General in Boston."

"The risks of transferring him in his state are very high, unless you have medical personnel—"

"That's why you're going with him. I'll make sure you have a flying ICU by this evening."

"I can't just—"

"You'll have the opportunity to personally turn him over to a group of highly respected neurologists and neurosurgeons at Mass General. I think you know Dr. Joseph Malek. He's one of the leading physicians in your field. He's also a personal friend of my father's, and he will be looking forward to working with you when you arrive. I don't think I need to tell you that every step of how you handle this is going to be scrutinized by the press."

"What about the police?"

"You let me handle them; just get my father ready to fly. I want to leave tonight."

After the neurosurgeon left to make his preparations, Wilson remained in the corridor pacing back and forth while talking on his iPhone and sending emails to arrange for his father's flight to Boston.

Forty-five minutes later, his father's attorney, Daniel Redd, called to inform Wilson that he'd just arrived in Sun Valley. The timing couldn't have been better for what Wilson needed next.

"There's been a change of plans. We're moving my father to Mass General tonight," Wilson said over the phone.

Daniel immediately concurred with the decision, just as Wilson expected he would. He'd known Daniel for several years but never really dealt with him one on one. What Daniel said next both surprised and pleased Wilson: "I'll take care of the legalities," Daniel said. "The Sun Valley Police won't want your father to leave its jurisdiction, but we won't give them a choice. Just make sure his doctor supports your decision and is willing to make the trip with your father."

"Already arranged. Do you anticipate anything we can't overcome?"

"Not if we can demonstrate medical need. I'm licensed to practice law in Idaho and we know a few judges in town. If we run into serious problems, we'll have the FBI claim jurisdiction; they owe us a

few favors. But that's a last resort. Don't worry Wilson. One way or another, I'll make sure your father can leave Idaho. Need any help arranging for a medical airlift?"

"Air Ambulance is a client. The CEO promised me that an Air Ambulance jet would be at the Sun Valley airport by eight tonight," Wilson said.

"I'll have all the legal issues relating to medical transport resolved by five o'clock. Can we find somewhere to meet privately after that? There are a few things I need to discuss with you face to face."

Wilson hesitated a moment, wondering why Daniel needed private face time before leaving Sun Valley. Then he dismissed it as nothing more than Daniel's usual anal-retentive behavior. "I want to spend some time at the chalet before we leave. Why don't we meet there?"

"See you there," Daniel said.

Chapter 2

NEW YORK CITY, NY

Wayland Tate simmered with boredom as he listened to his client ramble on about a recent *Business Week* article that had criticized his company's management practices. The only thing Tate despised about his chosen place in the world were clients who'd become overly dependent upon him. Tate's pale blue eyes roamed restlessly to the wall of plasma screens at the back of his office, where the news channels showed clips of Charles Fielder every half hour. *The pictures make Charles look older than he is*, he thought.

Tate stood up, walked to the closet behind his desk, and retrieved a bottle of moisturizing lotion from the top shelf. "I know what you mean," he said automatically as he looked across the desk at his client to reassure him that he was still listening. *If Charles regains consciousness*, Tate thought, *we'll have to extract him from the hospital immediately*. But there was nothing to worry about, preparations had already been made. He removed his gold cuff links and carefully rolled up the starched sleeves of his monogrammed shirt. While interjecting an occasional "uh huh," into his client's litany of woes, Tate rubbed the lotion onto his tanned arms and elbows in slow rhythmic motions.

Caring for his physical attractiveness and personal magnetism had always been priorities for Wayland Tate, making him one of corporate America's more interviewed and photographed executives. *GQ* magazine had recently included him in its "100 Most Influential People in the World" issue, touting "his gorgeous, gray head of hair," "an intensity behind the eyes that makes you wonder what he's going to do next," and the fact that he was "sporting a six-pack at age 56." But those closest to Tate knew his high visibility had more to do with shrewd publicity management than good looks or charisma. Almost half of the firms on *Fortune's* 500 list were either current or former clients of Tate Waterhouse, one of the fastest-growing international advertising agencies in the world, and he made sure everyone knew about it. It was the only criticism his new European and Asian investors had asserted—his high visibility. Fortunately, Tate didn't need the attention like he had in his younger days. Promising to tone things down had not presented a major problem for him. Access to their limitless resources was more than enough motivation.

Tate's boredom was beginning to burn calories when one of his administrative assistants interrupted with an urgent message that David Quinn, CEO of The J. B. Musselman Company, was calling for the fourth time. After graciously excusing himself from his client, Tate disappeared into a small corridor that ran along a wall of windows overlooking the East River and the South Street Seaport near Wall Street. He unlocked the door to his private quarters and took his time walking through the luxurious space, which looked more like an exclusive bar than an apartment. Picasso, Renoir, Warhol, and Kandinsky originals filled the walls. The two Van Gogh's, one above each fireplace, were Tate's favorites.

He climbed the spiral staircase that led to his silk-walled bedroom and marble bathroom. As he stood in front of the bathroom's gilded mirror between two freestanding water basins, he rolled down his sleeves, and replaced the cuff links. Then he reached for a small tube of eye ointment, squeezing out a small amount and applying it under his eyes and along his eyebrows with his left index finger. The anti-wrinkle ointment cost seven hundred dollars an ounce, but he knew it was worth every penny. He could still easily pass for a man ten to fifteen years his junior.

After sitting down in the bedroom's black leather lounge chair and placing his feet on the matching ottoman, Tate turned his attention to David Quinn, CEO of The J. B. Musselman Company. The company was a twenty-five billion dollar wholesale distribution conglomerate headquartered in Chicago, and Tate sat on its board. He picked up the phone. "David. Sorry I missed your earlier calls."

"I need your help to get Kresge & Company off my back, permanently," Quinn said, noticeably irritated.

"Weren't they your idea in the first place?" Tate said, glibly.

"You know the board forced me into this. It was their idea from the beginning. I simply recommended which firm, but that was before the bastards started analyzing ways to break up the company. I need your help to get rid of them before they convince the board."

"I hate to say I told you so, David, but Fielder & Company would have been a smarter choice than Kresge & Company. You would have had more control," Tate said, smiling to himself.

"It's Fielder's kid who wants to breakup the company into regional businesses to exploit what he calls 'the growing niche-oriented needs of local customers' and give employees more opportunity for ownership," Quinn said, seething with anger and defensiveness. "He told MacMillan I was the single biggest obstacle to Musselman's future growth and profitability."

"Well, I don't think you'll have to worry about Wilson Fielder for a while. He's got his hands full with other things right now."

"Don't get me wrong. I would never wish what happened to his father on anyone, but I'm glad to get that arrogant little prick out of my life. Now, I want him and his firm to stay out."

Tate remained silent and smiling.

"You went to school with his father didn't you?" Quinn asked.

"I did. We were close friends," Tate said, remembering the poetry readings at the SoHo bar where he first met Charles Fielder. He could still hear the words of Charles' revolutionary verse: *Generations of concealed corruption enslave us in a system of coerced consent*. He would miss his old friend.

"Do you believe he killed those women?"

"I don't want to believe it, David," Tate said. "But people change."

After a pause, Quinn returned to his original agenda. "How do we make Kresge & Company go away for good?"

"My guess is that Wilson will take a leave of absence, which should slow things down long enough for us to launch the new advertising campaign. Musselman will reposition itself as *The Next Generation in Mass Merchandising*. Kresge & Company becomes old news. I'm already working on a presentation for MacMillan and the rest of the board."

"You know I'm not ready to leave this place."

"Stop worrying, David. No one is going to remove you from the helm. The advertising campaign alone will send Musselman stock soaring. The board will think they're in heaven. Trust me."

It had taken Tate three years to get to this point with David Quinn. He'd spent the first year landing the J. B. Musselman account for his advertising agency, Tate Waterhouse. The next two years were spent getting appointed to the company's board of directors, which meant letting go of the advertising relationship, at least on the surface of public disclosure. Four months ago, after a heated board meeting that resulted in the hiring of Kresge & Company to assist in reorganizing Musselman's operations, Tate asked Quinn for a private meeting. During dinner at Everest, one of Chicago's more private and exclusive restaurants, Tate presented a plan for turning The J. B. Musselman Company into the most visible discount merchandiser in North America. *America's Warehouse* was Tate's name for the new Musselman vision.

Quinn eventually bought the idea, mostly because it gave him another way out of his current difficulties, which was precisely what Tate had anticipated. As Kresge & Company began its analysis of Musselman's operations, Quinn engaged Boggs & Saggett, an advertising firm with hidden ties to Tate Waterhouse, to develop a marketing campaign for *America's Warehouse*. Initially, Quinn had hoped the two efforts would prove to be synergistic. But when Kresge & Company expressed doubts about a mass discounting strategy and began pushing the breakup of Musselman, Quinn decided to bet the company's future on Tate's *America's Warehouse* strategy.

"There's another thing I want to talk about," Quinn said. "I've decided not to use Morgan on our next stock offering. You recommended someone at KaneWeller at our last board meeting."

"Jules Kamin."

"Right. Do you have his contact information?"

"Sure," Tate said, grinning broadly. "What are you doing for the next few days?"

"Warehouse visits in North and South Carolina, Georgia, and then Florida."

"Can someone else handle them?"

"Depends on what you have in mind."

"St. Moritz," Tate said, as he reflected on how much easier it was to manipulate people when they were separated from familiar surroundings and placed in the lap of luxury with limitless opportunities for pampering, pleasure, and moneymaking. *But further manipulation of David Quinn would not be easy, even in St. Moritz*, Tate mullied. Quinn was a no-nonsense individualist, a man of principle and integrity who prided himself on being able to come up with a viable solution to any problem 99.9 percent of the time. It was a common malady among CEOs. The trick, as always, would be to discover what Quinn wanted badly enough to abandon his usual high road. Getting rid of Kresge & Company would be a good start.

"One of those client retreats you're always raving about?" Quinn asked.

"Jules Kamin will be there."

There was silence on the line as Quinn considered Tate's invitation. He needed Tate's help and he wanted to meet Jules Kamin. A few days in St. Moritz would also give him some needed downtime. "Let me see what I can do," Quinn finally said.

"One of our chartered jets will be leaving Chicago O'Hare at eight tomorrow night."

"I'll let you know if I can't make it," Quinn said. "Otherwise, plan on me."

"See you in St. Moritz. We'll have lunch when you arrive," Tate said.

After hanging up, Tate called his vice president of client relations. She was a beautiful Japanese American woman blessed with a graceful body and stunning black hair, but it was her flair for orchestrating events and arranging entertainment to the sheer delight of Tate's clients that made her invaluable. "One of the planes needs to pick up Mr. Quinn at O'Hare tomorrow night. Aren't we picking up someone else in Chicago?"

"Yes. Mr. Toffler and Mr. Anderson," she said.

"Good. Make sure Quinn receives the full treatment. I don't want to lose him. Let's assign Vargas."

"We'll take care of everything."

"What would I do without you?" Tate said, not expecting a response. People like Tate and his vice president of client relations had used pleasures of the flesh to manipulate their customers since the beginning of time, but never with the finesse and subtleness practiced by Tate Waterhouse. "Has there been any change in Charles' condition?" Tate asked.

"No change," she responded. "We now have someone on site monitoring everything."

"Perfect," Tate said before hanging up the phone. He walked once again through his luxury apartment to resume his conversation with the client waiting in his office, but not without musing on the colorful chaos of Kandinsky's *Composition VII*, an apocalyptic hurricane of swirling masses and colors. It had been Charles Fielder who taught Tate how to use the world's colorful chaos to exploit his love of manipulation. The rewards had proved to be beyond his wildest imaginations. *Control, or be controlled*, Tate mused. *Charles taught me well.*