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Opening Extract from...

The Twelve

Written by Justin Cronin

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PROLOGUE

From the Writings of the First Recorder (“The Book of Twelves”)
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April 16–21, 1003 A.V.

[*Excerpt begins.*]

CHAPTER ONE

1. For it came to pass that the world had grown wicked, and men had taken war into their hearts, and committed great defilements upon every living thing, so that the world was as a dream of death;
2. And God looked upon his creation with a great sadness, for his spirit no longer abided with mankind.
3. And the LORD said: As in the days of Noah, a great deluge shall sweep over the earth; and this shall be a deluge of blood. The monsters of men’s hearts shall be made flesh, devouring all in their path. And they shall be called Virals.
4. The first shall walk among you disguised as a virtuous man, concealing the evil within him; and it shall come to pass that a sickness will befall him, such that he is made into the likeness of a demon, terrible to gaze upon. And he shall be the father of destruction, called the Zero.
5. And men shall say: Would not such a being make the mightiest of soldiers? Would not the armies of our enemies lay down their weapons to cover their eyes at the very sight of him?
6. And a decree shall go forth from the highest offices that twelve criminals shall be chosen to share of the Zero’s blood, becoming demons

also; and their names shall be as one name, Babcock-Morrison-Chávez-Baffes-Turrell-Winston-Sosa-Echols-Lambright-Martínez-Reinhardt-Carter, called the Twelve.

7. But also I will choose one among you who is pure of heart and mind, a child to stand against them; and I will send a sign so that all may know, and this sign shall be a great commotion of animals.
8. And this was Amy, whose name is Love: Amy of Souls, the Girl from Nowhere.
9. And the sign went forth in the place of Memphis, the beasts howling and screeching and trumpeting; and one who saw was Lacey, a sister in the eyes of God. And the LORD said to Lacey:
10. You too are chosen, to be as a helpmate to Amy, to show her the way. Wither she goes you shall go also; and your journey shall be a hardship, lasting many generations.
11. You shall be as a mother to the child, whom I have brought forth to heal the broken world; for within her I shall build an ark to carry the spirits of the righteous.
12. And thus did Lacey according to all that God commanded her, so did she.

CHAPTER TWO

1. And it came to pass that Amy was taken to the place of Colorado to be the captive of evil men; for in that place the Zero and the Twelve abided in chains, and Amy's captors intended that she should become one of them, joining to them in mind.
2. And there she was given the blood of the Zero, and fell into a swoon as unto death; but neither did she die, nor acquire monstrous form. For it was not the design of God that such a thing should come to pass.
3. And in this state Amy lingered through a period of days, until a great calamity occurred, such that there should be a Time Before and a Time After; for the Twelve escaped and the Zero also, unleashing death upon the earth.
4. But one man befriended Amy, and took pity upon her, and stole her away from that place. And this was Wolgast, a man righteous in his generation, beloved of God.
5. And together Amy and Wolgast made their way to the place of Oregon, deep in the mountains; and there they abided in the time known as the Year of Zero.

6. For in that time the Twelve beset the face of the world with their great hunger, killing every kind; and those they did not feed upon were taken up, joining to them in mind. And in this manner the Twelve were multiplied one million-fold to form the Twelve Viral Tribes, each with his Many, who roamed the earth without name or memory, laying waste to every living thing.
7. Thus did the seasons pass; and Wolgast became as a father to Amy, who had none, nor he a child of his own; and likewise did he love her, and she him.
8. And also did he see that Amy was not as he was, nor like any living person upon the earth; for neither did she age, nor suffer pain, nor seek nourishment or rest. And he feared what would become of her, when he himself was gone.
9. And it came to pass that a man came to them from the place of Seattle; and Wolgast did slay him, lest the man should become a demon in their midst. For the world had become a place of monsters, none living but they.
10. And in this manner they remained as father and daughter, each attending to the other, until a night when a blinding light filled the sky, too bright to gaze upon; and in the morning the air was foul with a rank odor, and ashes descended upon every surface.
11. For the light was the light of death, causing Wolgast to fall ill with a lethal sickness. And Amy was left to wander the ravaged earth alone, with none but the Virals for company.
12. And in this manner time passed, four score and twelve years in sum.

CHAPTER THREE

1. So it was that in the ninety-eighth year of her life in the place of California Amy came upon a city; and this was The First Colony, four score and ten souls abiding within its walls, the descendants of children who had made their way from the place of Philadelphia in the Time Before.
2. But at the sight of Amy the people became frightened, for they knew nothing of the world, and many words were spoken against her, and she was imprisoned; and much confusion occurred, such that she was forced to flee in the company of others.
3. And these were Peter, Alicia, Sara, Michael, Hollis, Theo, Mausami, and Hightop, eight in sum; and each had a cause of righteousness in

his heart, and desired that they should see the world outside the city where they dwelled.

4. And among them Peter was first in name, and Alicia second, and Sara third, and Michael fourth; and likewise were the others blessed in the eyes of God.
5. And together they left that place under cover of dark to find the secret of the world's undoing, in the place of Colorado, a journey of one-half year in the wilderness, enduring many tribulations; and the greatest of these was The Haven.
6. For in the place of Las Vegas they were taken as captives to stand before Babcock, First of Twelve; for the dwellers of that city were as slaves to Babcock and his Many, and would sacrifice one of their number for each new moon, so that they might live.
7. And Amy and the others were cast into the place of sacrifice, and did battle with Babcock, who was terrible to behold; and many lives were lost. And together they fled from that place, lest they too should die.
8. And one among them fell, who was the boy, Hightop; and Amy and her fellows buried him, marking it as a place of remembrance.
9. And a great grief was upon them, for Hightop was the most beloved of their number; but tarry could they not, for Babcock and his Many did pursue them.
10. And after more time had passed Amy and her fellows came upon a house, untouched by time; for God had blessed it, making it hallowed ground. And this was known as the Farmstead. And there they rested in safety, seven days in sum.
11. But two among them chose to stay in that place, for the woman was with child. And that child was to be born Caleb, who was beloved of God.
12. Thus the others continued while two remained behind.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. And it came to pass that Amy and her fellows made their way through the days and nights to the place of Colorado, where they came into the company of soldiers, five score in sum. And these were known as the Expeditionary, from the place of Texas.
2. For Texas was in that time a place of refuge upon the earth; and the soldiers had traveled abroad to fight the Virals, each taking a pledge to die for his fellows.

3. And one among them chose to join their ranks, becoming a soldier of the Expeditionary; and this was Alicia, who was to be called Alicia of Blades. And one of the soldiers elected to join with them in turn; and this was Lucius the Faithful.
4. And there they would have tarried, but winter was upon them; and though four of their number desired to travel with the soldiers to the place of Texas, Amy and Peter chose to press on alone.
5. And it came to pass that the pair arrived at the place of Amy's making, and there atop the highest peak they beheld an angel of the LORD. And the angel said to Amy:
6. Fear not, for I am the same Lacey whom you remember. Here have I waited through the generations to show you the way, and to show Peter also; for he is the Man of Days, chosen to stand with you.
7. For as in the time of Noah, God in his design has provided a great ship to cross the waters of destruction; and Amy is that ship. And Peter shall be the one to lead his fellows to a place of dry land.
8. Therefore will the LORD make whole what is broken, and bring comfort to the spirits of the righteous. And this shall be known as The Passage.
9. And the angel Lacey summoned Babcock, First of Twelve, from out of the darkness; and a great battle was joined. And with a burst of light did Lacey slay him, casting her spirit to the LORD.
10. And thus were Babcock's Many set free of him; and likewise did they remember the people they had been in the Time Before: man and woman, husband and wife, parent and child.
11. And Amy moved among them, blessing each in turn; for it was the design of God that she should be the vessel to carry their souls through the long night of their forgetting. And thereupon their spirits departed the earth, and they died.
12. And in this manner, Amy and her fellows learned what lay before them; though the way of their journey was steep, and only just beginning.



I

THE GHOST

SUMMER, 97 A.V.
FIVE YEARS AFTER THE FALL OF FIRST COLONY

*Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land.*

—CHRISTINA ROSSETTI,
“Remember”

ORPHANAGE OF THE ORDER OF THE SISTERS,
KERRVILLE, TEXAS

Later, after supper and evening prayer, and bath if it was bath night, and then the final negotiations to conclude the day (*Please, Sister, can't we stay up a little longer? Please, one more story?*), when the children had fallen asleep at last and everything was very still, Amy watched them. There was no rule against this; the sisters had all grown accustomed to her nighttime wanderings. Like an apparition she moved from quiet room to quiet room, sidling up and down the rows of beds where the children lay, their sleeping faces and bodies in trusting repose. The oldest were thirteen, poised at the edge of adulthood, the youngest just babies. Each came with a story, always sad. Many were thirdlings left at the orphanage by parents unable to pay the tax, others the victim of even crueler circumstances: mothers dead in childbirth, or else unwed and unable to bear the shame; fathers disappeared into the dark undercurrents of the city or taken outside the wall. The children's origins varied, yet their fates would be the same. The girls would enter the Order, giving their days to prayer and contemplation and caring for the children they themselves had been, while the boys would become soldiers, members of the Expeditionary, taking an oath of a different but no less binding nature.

Yet in their dreams they were children—still children, Amy thought. Her own childhood was the most distant of memories, an abstraction of history, and yet as she watched the sleeping children, dreams playfully flicking across their slumbering eyes, she felt closer to it—a time when she herself was just a small being in the world, innocent of what lay ahead, the too-long journey of her life. Time was a vastness inside her, too many years to know one from the other. So perhaps that was why she wandered among them: she did it to remember.

It was Caleb whose bed she saved for last, because he would be waiting for her. Baby Caleb, though he was not a baby anymore but a boy of five, taut and energetic as all children were, full of surprise and humor and startling truth. From his mother he had taken the high, sculpted cheekbones and olive-hued complexion of her clan; from his father the unyielding gaze and dark wonderings and coarse black cap, shorn close,

that in the familial parlance of the Colony had been known as “Jaxon hair.” A physical amalgamation, like a puzzle assembled from the pieces of his tribe. In his eyes Amy saw them. He was Mausami; he was Theo; he was only himself.

“Tell me about them.”

Always, each night, the same ritual. It was as if the boy could not sleep without revisiting a past he had no memory of. Amy took her customary position on the edge of his cot. Beneath the blankets the shape of his lean, little-boy’s body was barely a presence; around them, twenty sleeping children, a chorus of silence.

“Well,” she began. “Let’s see. Your mother was very beautiful.”

“A warrior.”

“Yes,” Amy replied with a smile, “a beautiful warrior. With long black hair worn in a warrior’s braid.”

“So she could use her bow.”

“Correct. But most of all she was headstrong. Do you know what that means, to be headstrong? I’ve told you before.”

“Stubborn?”

“Yes. But in a good way. If I tell you to wash your hands before dinner, and you refuse to do it, that is not so good. That is the wrong kind of stubborn. What I’m saying is that your mother always did what she believed was right.”

“Which is why she had me.” He focused on the words. “Because it was . . . the right thing to bring a light into the world.”

“Good. You remember. Always remember you are a bright light, Caleb.”

A warm happiness had come into the boy’s face. “Tell me about Theo now. My father.”

“Your father?”

“Pleeease.”

She laughed. “All right, then. Your father. First of all, he was very brave. A brave man. He loved your mother very much.”

“But sad.”

“True, he was sad. But that was what made him so brave, you see. Because he did the bravest thing of all. You know what that is?”

“To have hope.”

“Yes. To have hope when there seems to be none. You must always remember that, too.” She leaned down and kissed his forehead, moist with childlike heat. “Now, it’s late. Time for sleep. Tomorrow is another day.”

“Did they . . . love me?”

Amy was taken aback. Not by the question itself—he had asked this on numerous occasions, seeking assurance—but by his uncertain tone.

“Of course, Caleb. I have told you many times. They loved you very much. They love you still.”

“Because they’re in heaven.”

“That’s right.”

“Where all of us are together, forever. The place the soul goes.” He glanced away. Then: “They say you’re very old.”

“Who says so, Caleb?”

“I don’t know.” Wrapped in his cocoon of blankets, he gave a tiny shrug. “Everyone. The other sisters. I heard them talking.”

It was not a matter that had come up before. As far as Amy was aware, only Sister Peg knew the story.

“Well,” she said, gathering herself, “I’m older than you, I know that much. Old enough to tell you it’s time for sleep.”

“I see them sometimes.”

The remark caught her short. “Caleb? How do you see them?”

But the boy wasn’t looking at her; his gaze had turned inward. “At night. When I’m sleeping.”

“When you’re dreaming, you mean.”

The boy had no answer for this. She touched his arm through the blankets. “It’s all right, Caleb. You can tell me when you’re ready.”

“It’s not the same. It’s not like a dream.” He returned his eyes to hers. “I see you too, Amy.”

“Me?”

“You’re different, though. Not how you are now.”

She waited for him to say more but there was nothing. Different how?

“I miss them,” the boy said.

She nodded, content for the moment to let the matter pass. “I know you do. And you will see them again. But for now you have me. You have your uncle Peter. He’ll be coming home soon, you know.”

“With the . . . Expe-dishunary.” A look of determination glowed in the boy’s face. “When I grow up, I want to be a soldier like Uncle Peter.”

Amy kissed his brow again, rising to go. “If that’s what you want to be, then that is what you’ll be. Now, sleep.”

“Amy?”

“Yes, Caleb?”

“Did anyone love you like that?”

Standing at the boy’s bedside, she felt the memories wash over her. Of

a spring night, and a wheeling carousel, and a taste of powdered sugar; of a lake and a cabin in the woods and the feel of a big hand holding her own. Tears rose to her throat.

“I believe that they did. I hope they did.”

“Does Uncle Peter?”

She frowned, startled. “What makes you ask that, Caleb?”

“I don’t know.” Another shrug, faintly embarrassed. “The way he looks at you. He’s always smiling.”

“Well.” She did her best to show nothing. Was it nothing? “I think he is smiling because he’s happy to see you. Now, sleep. Do you promise?”

He groaned with his eyes. “I promise.”

Outside, the lights were pouring down: not a brightness as total as the Colony’s—Kerrville was much too big for that—but, rather, a kind of lingering dusk, lit at the edges with a crown of stars above. Amy crept from the courtyard, keeping to the shadows. At the base of the wall she located the ladder. She made no effort to conceal her ascent; at the top she was met by the sentry, a broad-chested man of middle years with a rifle held across his chest.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

But that was all he said. As sleep took him, Amy eased his body to the catwalk, propping him against the rampart with his rifle across his lap. When he awoke he would possess only a fragmented, hallucinatory memory of her. A girl? One of the sisters, wearing the rough gray tunic of the Order? Perhaps he would not awaken on his own but would be found by one of his fellows and hauled away for sleeping at his post. A few days in the stockade but nothing serious, and in any event, no one would believe him.

She made her way down the catwalk to the empty observation platform. The patrols moved through every ten minutes; that was all she had. The lights spilled their beams the ground below like a shining liquid. Closing her eyes, Amy cleared her mind and directed her thoughts outward, sending them soaring over the field.

—Come to me.

—Come to me come to me come to me.

They came, gliding from the blackness. First one and then another and another, forming a glowing phalanx where they crouched at the edge of the shadows. And in her mind she heard the voices, always the voices, the voices and the question:

Who am I?

She waited.

Who am I who am I who am I?

How Amy missed him. Wolgast, the one who had loved her. Where are you? she thought, her heart aching with loneliness, for night after night, as this new thing had begun happening inside her, she had felt his absence keenly. Why have you left me alone? But Wolgast was nowhere, not in the wind or the sky or the sound of the earth's slow turning. The man he was, was gone.

Who am I who am I who am I who am I who am I who am I?

She waited as long as she dared. The minutes ticked away. Then, footsteps on the catwalk, coming closer: the sentry.

—You are me, she told them. You are me. Now go.

They scattered into the darkness.

2

SEVENTY-SIX MILES SOUTH OF ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO

On a warm September evening, many miles and weeks from home, Lieutenant Alicia Donadio—Alicia of Blades, the New Thing, adopted daughter of the great Niles Coffee and scout sniper of the Second Expeditionary Forces of the Army of the Republic of Texas, baptized and sworn—awakened to the taste of blood on the wind.

She was twenty-seven years old, five foot seven, solidly built in the shoulders and hips, red hair shorn close to her scalp. Her eyes, which had once been only blue, glowed with an orange hue, like twin coals. She traveled lightly, nothing wasted. Feet shod in sandals of cut canvas with treads of vulcanized rubber; denim trousers worn thin at the knees and seat; a cotton jersey with the sleeves cut away for speed. Crisscrossing her upper body she wore a pair of leather bandoliers with six steel blades ensheathed, her trademark; at her back, slung on a lanyard of sturdy hemp, her crossbow. A Browning .45 semiautomatic with a nine-shot magazine, her weapon of last resort, was holstered to her thigh.

Eight and one, was the saying. Eight for the virals, one for yourself. Eight and one and done.

The town was called Carlsbad. The years had done their work, sweeping it clean like a giant broom. But still some structures remained: empty

husks of houses, rusted sheds, the becalmed and ruined evidence of time's passage. She had spent the day resting in the shade of a filling station whose metal awning somehow still stood, awakening at dusk to hunt. She took the jack on her cross, one shot through the throat, then skinned it and roasted it over a fire of mesquite, picking the stringy flesh from its haunches as the fire crackled beneath it.

She was in no hurry.

She was a woman of rules, rituals. She would not kill the virals while they slept. She would not use a gun if she could help it; guns were loud and sloppy and unworthy of the task. She took them on the blade, swiftly, or on the cross, cleanly and without regret, and always with a blessing of mercy in her heart. She said: "I send you home, my brothers and sisters, I release you from the prison of your existence." And when the killing was done, and she had withdrawn her weapon from its lethal home, she touched the handle of her blade first to her brow and then her chest, the head and heart, consecrating the creatures' deliverance with the hope that, when that day should come, her courage would not fail her and she herself would be delivered.

She waited for night to fall, doused the flames of her fire, and set out.

For days she had been following a broad plain of lowland scrub. To the south and west rose the shadowed shape of mountains, shoulders shrugging from the valley floor. If Alicia had ever seen the sea, she might have thought: That's what this place is, the sea. The floor of a great, inland ocean, and the mountains, cave-pocked, time-stilled, the remains of a giant reef from a time when monsters unimaginable had roamed the earth and waves.

Where are you tonight? she thought. *Where are you hiding, my brothers and sisters of blood?*

She was a woman of three lives, two before and one after. In the first before, she had been just a little girl. The world was all lurching figures and flashing lights, it moved through her like a breeze in her hair, telling her nothing. She was eight years old the night the Colonel had taken her outside the walls of the Colony and left her with nothing, not even a blade. She'd sat under a tree and cried all night, and when the morning sun found her, she was different, changed; the girl she'd been was no more. Do you see? the Colonel asked her, kneeling before her where she sat in the dust. He would not hold her for comfort but faced her squarely, like a soldier. Do you understand now? And she did; she understood. Her life, the meager accident of her existence, meant nothing; she had given it up. She had taken the oath that day.

But that was long ago. She had been a child, then a woman, then: what? The third Alicia, the New Thing, neither viral nor human but somehow both. An amalgamation, a composite, a being apart. She traveled among the virals like an unseen spirit, part of them but also not, a ghost to their ghosts. In her veins was the virus, but balanced by a second, taken from Amy, the Girl from Nowhere; from one of twelve vials from the lab in Colorado, the others destroyed by Amy herself, cast into the flames. Amy's blood had saved her life, yet in a way it hadn't. Making her, Lieutenant Alicia Donadio, scout sniper of the Expeditionary, the only being like herself in all the living world.

There were times, many times, all the time, when Alicia herself could not have said precisely what she was.

She came upon a shed. A pockmarked and pitted thing, half-buried in the sand, with a sloping metal roof.

She . . . *felt* something.

Which was strange, nothing that had happened before. The virus had not given her that power, which was Amy's alone. Alicia was yang to Amy's yin, endowed with the physical strength and speed of the virals but disconnected from the invisible web that bound them together, thought to thought.

And yet, did she not? Feel something? Feel *them*? A tingling at the base of her skull, and in her mind a quiet rustling, faintly audible as words:

Who am I? Who am I who am I who am I who am I . . . ?

There were three. They had all been women, once. And even more: Alicia sensed—how was it possible?—that in each one lay a single kernel of memory. A hand shutting a window and the sound of rain. A brightly colored bird singing in a cage. A view from a doorway of a darkened room and two small children, a boy and a girl, asleep in their beds. Alicia received each of these visions as if it were her own, its sights and sounds and smells and emotions, a *mélange* of pure existence like three tiny fires flaring inside her. For a moment she was held captive to them, in mute awe of them, these memories of a lost world. The world of the Time Before.

But something else. Wrapping each of these memories was a shroud of darkness, vast and pitiless. It made Alicia shudder to the very core. Alicia wondered what this was, but then she knew: the dream of the one called Martínez. Julio Martínez of El Paso, Texas, Tenth of Twelve, sentenced to death for the murder of a peace officer. The one Alicia had come to find.

In Martínez's dream, he was forever raping a woman named Louise—the name was written in a curling script on the pocket of the woman's blouse—while simultaneously strangling her with an electric cord.

The door of the shed was hanging kitty-corner on its rusted hinges. Tight quarters: Alicia would have preferred more room, especially with three. She crept forward, following the point of her cross, and eased into the shed.

Two of the virals were suspended upside down from the rafters, the third crouched in a corner, gnawing on a hunk of meat with a sucking sound. They had just fed on an antelope; the desiccated remains lay sun-dered on the floor, clumps of hair and bone and skin. In the dazed after-math of feeding, the virals took no notice of her entry.

“Good evening, ladies.”

She took the first one in the rafters with her cross. A thud and then a squeal, abruptly squelched, and its body crashed to the floor. The other two were rousing now; the second released its hold on the rafter, tucked its knees to its chest, and rolled in the midst of its decent to land on its clawed feet, facing away. Dropping the cross, Alicia drew a blade and in a single liquid motion sent it spinning into the third, which had risen to face her.

Two down, one to go.

It should have been easy. Suddenly it wasn't. As Alicia drew a second blade, the remaining viral turned and swatted her hand with a force that sent the weapon spiraling into the dark. Before the creature could deliver another blow, Alicia dropped to the floor and rolled away; when she rose, fresh blade in hand, the viral was gone.

Shit.

She snatched her cross from the floor, loaded a fresh bolt, and dashed outside. Where the hell was it? Two quick steps and Alicia launched herself to the roof of the shed, landing with a clang. Quickly she surveyed the landscape. Nothing, no sign.

Then the viral was behind her. A trap, Alicia realized; it must have been hiding, lying flush to the far side of the roof. Two things happened simultaneously. Alicia spun on her heels, aiming the cross instinctively; and with a sound of splintering wood and tearing metal, the roof gave way beneath her.

She landed face-up on the floor of the shed, the viral crashing on top of her. Her cross was gone. Alicia would have drawn a blade, but both of her hands were now occupied in the stalemated project of holding the viral at arm's length. Left and right and left again the creature darted its

face, jaws snapping, toward the curve of Alicia's throat. An irresistible force meeting an immovable object: how long could this go on? The children in their beds, Alicia thought. That's who this one was. She was the woman looking through the doorway at her sleeping children. Think about the children, Alicia thought, and then she said it:

"Think about the children."

The viral froze. A wistful expression came into its face. For the thinnest instant—not more than half a second—their eyes met and held in the darkness. Mary, Alicia thought. Your name was Mary. Her hand was reaching for her blade. *I send you home, my sister Mary*, thought Alicia. *I release you from the prison of your existence.* And with an upward thrust she sank her blade, tip to hilt, into the sweet spot.

Alicia rolled the corpse away. The others lay where they had fallen. She collected her blade and bolt from the first two, wiped them clean, then knelt by the body of the last. In the aftermath Alicia usually felt nothing beyond a vague hollowness; it surprised her now to discover that her hands were shaking. How had she known? Because she had; with absolute clarity, she had known that the woman's name was Mary.

She pulled the blade free, touched it to her head and heart. *Thank you, Mary, for not killing me before my work is complete. I hope you are with your little ones now.*

Mary's eyes were open, gazing at nothing; Alicia closed them with her fingertips. It wouldn't do to leave her where she was. Alicia hoisted the body into her arms and carried it outside. A rind of moon had risen, washing the landscape in its glow, a darkness visible. But moonlight wasn't what Mary needed. A hundred years of nighttime sky were enough, Alicia thought, and laid the woman on a patch of open ground where, come morning, the sun would find her and cast her ashes to the wind.

Alicia had begun to climb.

A night and a day had passed. She was in the mountains now, ascending a dry creekbed through a slim defile. The feeling of the virals was stronger here: she was headed toward something. Mary, she thought, what were you trying to tell me?

It was nearly dawn by the time she reached the top of the ridge, the horizon jumping away. Below her, in the wind-scraped blackness, the valley floor unfurled, none but the stars for company. Alicia knew it was possible to parse discrete figures from their arbitrary-seeming arrange-

ment, the shapes of people and animals, but she had never learned to do this. They appeared to her only as a random scattering, as if each night the stars were flung anew against the sky.

Then she saw it: a gaping maw of blackness, set in a bowl-like depression. The opening was a hundred feet tall or more. Curved benches, like an amphitheater, carved from the rocky face of the mountain, were situated at the cave's mouth. Bats were flicking through the sky.

It was a door to hell.

You're down there, aren't you? Alicia thought, and smiled. *You son of a bitch, I've found you.*



II

THE FAMILIAR

SPRING
YEAR ZERO

*'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world.*

—SHAKESPEARE,
Hamlet

Denver Police Dept.

Case File 193874

District 6

Transcript of Interview with Lila Beatrice Kyle

VIA: Det. Rita Chernow

3 May 4:17 A.M.

RC: Let the record show that the subject has been fully apprised of her rights and has declined to have an attorney present at this interview. Questioning conducted by Detective Rita Chernow, Denver PD, District Six. The time is four-seventeen A.M. Dr. Kyle, would you please state your full name?

LK: Lila Beatrice Kyle.

RC: And you're an orthopedic surgeon at Denver General Hospital, is that correct?

LK: Yes.

RC: And do you know why you're here?

LK: Something happened at the hospital. You wanted to ask me some questions. What is this room? I don't know it.

RC: We're in the police station, Dr. Kyle.

LK: Am I in trouble?

RC: We talked about this, remember? We're just trying to figure out what happened in the ER tonight. I know you're upset. I have just a few questions for you.

LK: There's blood on me. Why is there blood on me?

RC: Do you recall what happened in the ER, Dr. Kyle?

LK: I'm so tired. Why am I so tired?

RC: Can we get you something? Coffee maybe?

LK: I can't drink coffee. I'm pregnant.

RC: Water, then? How about some water?

LK: Okay.

(Break.)

RC: So let's start at the beginning. You were working in the emergency room tonight, is that correct?

LK: No, I was upstairs.

RC: But you came down to the ER?

LK: Yes.

RC: At what time?

LK: I'm not sure. Sometime around one A.M. They paged me.

RC: Why did they page you?

LK: I was the orthopedist on call. They had a patient with a broken wrist.

RC: And was that patient Mr. Letourneau?

LK: I think so, yes.

RC: What else did they tell you about him?

LK: Before I went downstairs, you mean?

RC: Yes.

LK: He had some kind of animal bite.

RC: Like a dog bite?

LK: I suppose so. They didn't say.

RC: Anything else?

LK: He had a high fever. He'd vomited.

RC: And that's all they told you?

LK: Yes.

RC: And what did you see when you got to the ER?

LK: He was in the third bed. There were only a couple of other patients.

Sunday's usually quiet.

RC: What time would this be?

LK: One-fifteen, one-thirty.

RC: And did you examine Mr. Letourneau?

LK: No.

RC: Let me rephrase. Did you see the patient?

(Pause.)

RC: Dr. Kyle?

LK: I'm sorry, what was the question?

RC: Did you see Mr. Letourneau tonight in the ER?

LK: Yes. Mark was there, too.

RC: Are you referring to Dr. Mark Shin?

LK: He was the attending. Have you talked to him?

RC: Dr. Shin is dead, Dr. Kyle. He was one of the victims.

LK: *(inaudible)*

RC: Could you speak up, please?

LK: I just . . . I don't know. I'm sorry, what did you want to know?

RC: What can you tell me about Mr. Letourneau? How did he seem?

LK: Seem?

RC: Yes. Was he awake?

LK: He was awake.

RC: What else did you observe?

LK: He was disoriented. Agitated. His color was strange.

RC: How do you mean?

(Pause.)

LK: I have to go to the bathroom.

RC: Let's just get through some questions first. I know you're tired. I promise I'll get you out of here as quickly as I can.

LK: Do you have children, Detective Chernow?

RC: I'm sorry?

LK: Do you have any children? I was just curious.

RC: Yes, I have two boys.

LK: How old? If you don't mind my asking.

RC: Five and seven. I have just a few more things to ask you. Do you think you're up to that?

LK: But I bet you're trying for the girl, aren't you? Believe me, there's nothing like having a baby girl of your own.

RC: Let's focus on Mr. Letourneau for now, would that be okay? You said he was agitated. Can you elaborate on that?

LK: Elaborate?

RC: Yes. What did he do?

LK: He was making a funny noise.

RC: Can you describe it?

LK: A clicking sound, in his throat. He was moaning. He seemed to be in a great deal of pain.

RC: Had they given him anything for the pain?

LK: They'd given him Tramadol. I think it was Tramadol.

RC: Who else was there besides Dr. Shin?

(Pause.)

RC: Dr. Kyle? Who else was there when you examined Mr. Letourneau?

LK: One of the nurses. She was trying to calm him down. He was very upset.

RC: Anyone else?

LK: I don't remember. An orderly? No, two.

RC: What happened then?

LK: He started to seize.

RC: The patient had a seizure, you mean?

LK: Yes.

RC: What did you do then?

LK: Where's my husband?

RC: He's right outside. He came with you. Don't you remember?

LK: Brad is here?

RC: I'm sorry. Who's Brad?

LK: My husband. Brad Wolgast. He's with the FBI. Maybe you know him?

RC: Dr. Kyle, I'm confused. The man who came with you is named David Centre. He's not your husband?

(Pause.)

RC: Dr. Kyle? Do you understand what I'm asking you?

LK: Of course David is my husband. What a strange thing for you to say. Where did all this blood come from? Was I in an accident?

RC: No, Dr. Kyle. You were at the hospital. That's what we're talking about. Three hours ago, nine people were killed in the ER. We're trying to figure out how that happened.

(Pause.)

LK: It looked at me. Why did it just look at me?

RC: What looked at you, Dr. Kyle?

LK: It was horrible.

RC: What was?

LK: It killed the nurse first. There was so much blood. Like an ocean.

RC: Are you speaking of Mr. Letourneau? He killed the nurse? I need you to be clear.

LK: I'm thirsty. Can I have some more water?

RC: In a minute. How did Mr. Letourneau kill the nurse?

LK: It happened so fast. How could anybody move that fast?

RC: I need you to focus, Dr. Kyle. What did Mr. Letourneau use to kill the nurse? Was there a weapon?

LK: A weapon? I don't remember a weapon.

RC: How did he do it then?

(Pause.)

RC: Dr. Kyle?

LK: I couldn't move. It just . . . looked at me.

RC: Something looked at you? Was there somebody else in the room?

LK: He used his mouth. That was how he did it.

RC: Are you saying that Mr. Letourneau bit the nurse?

(Pause.)

LK: I'm expecting, you know. I'm going to have a baby.

RC: I can see that, Dr. Kyle. I know this is very stressful.

LK: I need to rest. I want to go home.

RC: We'll try to get you out of here as quickly as we can. Just to clarify, is it your statement that Mr. Letourneau bit the nurse?

LK: Is she all right?

RC: She was decapitated, Dr. Kyle. You were holding the body when we found you. Don't you remember?

LK: (inaudible)

RC: Can you speak up, please?

LK: I don't understand what you want. Why are you asking me these questions?

RC: Because you were there. You're our only witness. You saw nine people die tonight. They were ripped apart, Dr. Kyle.

LK: (inaudible)

RC: Dr. Kyle?

LK: Those eyes. It was like looking into hell. Like falling forever into darkness. Do you believe in hell, Detective?

RC: Whose eyes?

LK: It wasn't human. It couldn't have been human.

RC: Are you still speaking of Mr. Letourneau?

LK: I can't think about this. I have to think about the baby.

RC: What did you see? Tell me what you saw.

LK: I want to go home. I don't want to talk about this anymore. Don't make me.

RC: What killed those people, Dr. Kyle?

(Pause.)

RC: Dr. Kyle, are you all right?

(Pause.)

RC: Dr. Kyle?

(Pause.)

RC: Dr. Kyle?

4

Bernard Kittridge, known to the world as “Last Stand in Denver,” realized it was time to leave the morning the power went out.

He wondered what had taken so long. You couldn't keep a municipal electrical grid running without people to man it, and as far as Kittridge could tell from the nineteenth floor, not a single human soul was left alive in the city of Denver.

Which was not to say he was alone.

He had passed the early hours of the morning—a bright, clear morn-