

# DEATHMAKER



TED TILLOTSON

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by  
Ted Tillotson

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by Ted Tillotson

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are  
either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and  
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is entirely coincidental.

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This book is dedicated to Barbara  
My late wife  
1949 to 2008

~

And to  
Norma Howell my esteemed editor.  
We've disagreed,  
but at the end of the day,  
Norma was always right.

## Authors Note

This book is all fiction except for what isn't.  
Billy Jenkins, Susan Rogers and Sandra Pearlman  
were real people.

Writing is tough.  
If you have what it takes, you'll make it.

*Ted Tillotson*

## Reviews

“Chilling and all too real.”

*-Gary Kelley  
A Kelley Entertainment Company*

“Tightly wound drama unfolds with depth and precision.”

*-Marcia Feese  
Novelist*

“This powerful novel redefines the genre of suspense.”

*-Jennifer Stewart  
Freelance writer/artist*

Wow! How exciting! Hard to put it down. I just want to read more and more.

*-Deni Richter  
Astrologist/writer*



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## *Prologue*

Schenectady, NY, 1949

By the second week in February, Donald Wakeland had formed a plan. Billy Jenkins and his friends tobogganed and sledded down *Killer Hill*, as they called it. They would meet there on Friday nights. That hill was no place for a novice. The downgrade was steep and slick, a place for big kids only.

The hill dropped at a forty-five degree angle for some three hundred yards. There was a natural jump at the bottom, which met a blacktop road leading to Central Park Lake. If a boy didn't slide a sharp right or left before the jump, he would cream himself when he hit the road. Every year the hill claimed its share of victims.

It was a perfect place for Donny to take care of Billy. Setting him up would not be easy, but Donny had to do it—for Susan.

Because the Jenkins bunch did their sledding at night, Donny had to lie to get out of the house. He told his mother he was going ice skating with some kids from school. Central Park Lake was well lighted and monitored by adults. *Killer Hill* was not.

When Donny arrived on the hill, ice skates tied together and slung over his shoulder, he spotted Jenkins and five other boys. They were grab-assing near a stand of fir trees. He watched for a time, listening to their idiotic conversation and foul language.

It was a land of dragons, and Donny didn't belong. The serpents would soon discover him and the taunting would begin. Of course, Billy would be the first to attack him and tear off his face. That is, he would have been on any other Friday night, but not this time. Not *this* night. Donny knew what he had to do. The dragons frightened him, but not quite enough.

"Jenkins! It's me, Donny Wakeland, your favorite *pig-face*."

The laughing and swearing stopped.

With Billy in the lead, all the boys shuffled toward Donny. His heart raced and he swallowed hard. "I'm gonna do it, Susan. I'm gonna!" he whispered.

*You're smarter, Donny. Remember that.* Susan's voice echoed in his head, giving him the strength he needed, the support he lacked.

Donny smiled. He saw what he'd hoped for, Billy pulling his four-man toboggan.

"We don't let *pus-faced* little kids on our hill, Wakeland." Billy sneered and his friends laughed.

"Let's de-pants him an' slide his ass down the hill," the smallest of Billy's bunch suggested. They roared with delight, and one of them walked around behind Donny. Billy pulled his toboggan to the edge of the hill and dropped the rope.

*Perfect.* Donny felt his knees knock inside his high-topped boots and clenched his gloved fists.

Billy grinned, showing yellow teeth. "Wakeland, I'm gonna stomp the shit outta you." The other boys laughed again.

*Now!* Susan's voice screamed in his head.

“I’m gonna stomp *you*, Jenkins!” He jerked the skates off his shoulder, swung around, and hit the boy behind him in the side of the head. Before Billy could react, Donny turned and swung the skates, striking him in the chest.

Surprised, Billy stepped back as Donny slammed into him. Billy cartwheeled as he fell, crashing backward onto the toboggan with Donny on top. “For Susan!” Donny screamed.

Driven by deadly commitment, his strength had doubled. Spitfle flew into Billy’s face as Donny’s hate exploded. “You’re gonna pay, you puke!”

The toboggan shot over the edge of Killer Hill and plunged down the deepest toboggan chute. Donny straddled Billy, holding him down and pinning his legs inside the toboggan.

Billy’s frightened eyes and keening cries fed Donny’s rage. “You bag of guts! You killed Susan.” Whatever words Billy Jenkins said were lost as Donny punched his face again and again.

Donny saw the bank of packed snow and ice rushing hell-bent toward them. “G’bye, pig shit!”

He rolled to his left and plowed into the frozen snow like a tumbling skier on a downhill race. He went over the bank and skidded to a stop at the edge of the blacktop. Billy and his toboggan shot over the jump at full speed. He and the toboggan crashed to the hard pavement headfirst. The front curve of the toboggan splintered.

Billy’s neck and spine snapped like dry kindling.



# Chapter 1

## The Fourth Killing

Schenectady, New York, Dec. 1962

Donald Wakeland turned twenty-three in March and was enjoying his fourth year at Richards Photo, a film-processing lab. He had worked his way up from counter clerk to day manager. On busy days, he would stay after hours to help with print orders. The owner, Brian Richards, encouraged Donny's development in the business.

Donny had almost finished his spot check of the five-by-seven prints being processed in their newest machine, when Brian stepped into the lab.

"Are they consistent?"

"So far. It's running the twenty-second roll without a problem. Five more and we're done here."

He began lining up envelopes to package customer orders. Three professional looking pictures slipped out of the

print cutter and fell into the tray in front of him. “Susan?” he whispered. The image of a little girl in a pink and gray cardigan smiled back from the color photographs. A rush of loss surged through him and he gasped. “Susan,” he repeated.

“What?” Brian turned his attention away from Sandra Pearlman, the operator of the third film processor.

“Nothing.” Donny continued to stare at the child’s picture. He pressed a button to produce another copy of the last print and quickly slipped it into an unmarked envelope. It was a sign. *If Susan’s voice comes back, Billy Jenkins has to die again.*

\* \* \* \*

An hour later, Donny helped Sandra sort the envelopes of customer prints. “We have fewer orders this week,” she said, giving him a flirtatious glance. They often shared coffee breaks during his voluntary night shifts.

“It’s slow before the holidays.” His answer came out flat, his mind full of Susan. Her voice and image hadn’t come to him in over eighteen months, which was the last time he had killed Billy Jenkins. It was happening again. Billy had come back.

“It gets real busy then, right?”

“Yeah.”

“What’s up after work?”

“Huh?” Sandra’s presence was nothing more than a haze. Donny held the image of the little girl in his mind. *Susan, I love you.* Thoughts of her raced through shadows of four blood-soaked encounters with Billy Jenkins—*stinking* Billy, the *beast*.

Sandra nudged his arm. “After we’re done here, we could go somewhere.” Her words were like smoke floating in a closed room.

He thought of Central Park Lake. "Ice skating. You want to go skating?"

"Skating? This late?"

"Sure, why not?" Donny set the basket of film orders on the counter and smiled. *She has rich black hair, dark eyes, and a pretty, gentle face. She doesn't resemble Susan at all.* "Yeah. We'll go skating on Central Park Lake."

"You sure they'll let us go on the ice so late?"

"Who cares? We'll do it anyway."

Sandra beamed. "I love it. Let's do it!"

\* \* \* \*

The last three nights had bitten away a large chunk of the moon. The remaining three-quarters reflected off the frozen lake in eerie phosphorescence. The trunks of tall spruce and pine stood as a black rampart around the ice. Donny sometimes saw the trees as hooded satanic priests gathered at a sacrificial altar.

Frigid wind moaned through snow-laden boughs as if chanting a dark curse. It was there that Susan had died, with Billy Jenkins as the high priest and executioner.

*I'm here, Susan.* The thought slashed his heart like shards of splintered glass. *Tell me who Billy is this time.*

He stared out across the ice at nothing, finding no sense of Susan. Sandra sat on the bench beside him. She laced her rented skates and rattled on about having fun and loving a spontaneous event. Donny heard less than half of it.

"Hurry up. We have under an hour to get our skates back." He had slipped the casino attendant an extra five bucks to let them skate without lights while the man closed up for the night.

"This is great." Sandra's words blew out on a cloud of steamy breath.

Donny smiled and brushed a lock of her hair back under the hood of her wool coat. "It's also dangerous in the dark."

"I know. I like it that way." Her dark eyes sparkled in the blue-white moonlight.

Donny liked Sandra, as he had many other girls over the years, but none could replace Susan. Like Sandra, they were nice to touch and feel, and their skin was soft and warm. They reminded him of Tina, the fifteen-year-old girl who took his innocence when he was thirteen

Susan's innocent affection when they were only nine brought on Donny's burgeoning sexuality. But Susan was special. Anything beyond childish kisses or holding hands was forbidden.

The seed of a double standard took root early in Donny's values and became a misdirected guideline. Now twenty-three, he *fucked* the Sandra Pearlman's in his life, but *loved* the long-departed Susan Rogers.

"Catch me if I fall, okay?" Sandra could skate circles around him, but she seemed to love being fragile at the moment.

"We'll have to stay close together then." Donny skated onto the ice behind her.

"Yes, I want you close to me."

He caught up with her and they stopped. Her submissiveness touched the marrow of his bones. Tonight he would love her, *fuck* her, and explode with her. He breathed a sigh, enjoying the lust of the moment and grinned. "What if I fall on top of you?"

"I'd love it if you did."

"Let's skate for now." Donny pushed away, skating backward. He loved showing off for her.

Sandra skated toward him. "Can we fall down later?"

"Maybe." Donny laughed. *I really like her.*

"You're teasing me." Sandra circled around and hugged him from behind.

“Yes, I am.” He pulled away and skated backward again.

“I love it. You make me feel so alive.”

“I don’t really know you, Sandra Pearlman.”

“You will, I promise you will.”

Donny skated off and circled Sandra twice. She laughed.

“You said you’d stay close. Now you’re teasing *me*.”

“I am and I will, till you burst.” He skated up to her, held her. “That just might happen.”

“I can’t wait.”

He kissed her, pushed away, and smiled. “Who’s gonna catch who?” He skated off into the moonlight.

Their figures became black forms on the moonlit surface of the frozen lake, moving, twisting, turning, and racing across the white cover of a dead summer past. Gliding, sliding, and then almost flying. Donny slid to a stop in front of Sandra. He touched her face with his gloved hands. “I like you.”

“I want you to love me, Donald.” She circled him and then darted off across the ice, headed for the place where Susan had broken through and fallen into freezing, dark death.

“Stop!” Donny shouted, waving his arms. “Stop!”

Sandra skidded to a halt. She looked behind her, then back to Donny. “What’s wrong?”

“Don’t go there.” He gestured for her to come toward him.

She glanced back once more and then skated up to him. “Why not?”

“Don’t go anywhere near that part of the lake, okay?” He pulled her toward the shore. “Just don’t ever go there.”

“Okay, I won’t. You frightened me.”

“Sorry ... I’m sorry.” He held her for a moment and then peered across the frozen lake, seeing a jagged black hole in the ice that wasn’t there. He saw Susan’s agonized face sinking into the freezing water for the last time. A moaning sound, like a wind-borne death chant snaked through the waving boughs of

spruce and pine. He saw Billy Jenkins, who wasn't there, laughing and sneering. Donny watched Billy lean over the edge of the ragged black hole and push Susan under the ice into the freezing darkness of her death.

"Stop it!" he screamed at the rows of sentry-like black trees. "Stop it!" His voice cut through the stillness with the splitting *crack* of breaking bones.

"Are you all right?" Sandra managed to pull free from his crushing grip.

The image of Billy grinned defiantly.

*Who is he now, Susan? Tell me!* He waited. But she did not answer.

"Donny." Sandra shook him and looked into his rigid face.

"I'm fine. Forget it. Let's get the hell out of here."

Sandra hugged him, and stared into his eyes. "We can go to my place."

"Good. Yeah ... let's do that."

\* \* \* \*

Donny's blue 1959 Mercury Monterey had barely warmed up on the short drive from Central Park Lake to Sandra's flat. He was surprised she lived so close to his place. They climbed the stairs to the ground floor entrance.

"How long have you lived here?" he asked.

"Two years as of the first of the month."

Donny held the storm door. Sandra let them into the front hall and took off her boots.

"We're neighbors." Donny smiled and removed his scarf and windbreaker. "I live five blocks from here on Division Street."

"Alone?"

"With my mom. My father died eleven years ago."

Sandra removed her coat, took his, and hung them side by side in the hall closet. He slipped out of his overshoes and set them on a newspaper beside her boots. She led him through the living room to the kitchen.

He looked around. "This place is the same as my mother's, except for the furniture and wallpaper."

Sandra switched on a small lamp over the kitchen table rather than the brighter ceiling light. "My grandmother lived here. She died three years ago at a feisty eighty-six."

"My dad wasn't even fifty. Heart attack."

"I'm sorry."

Donny took a chair at the yellow Formica-topped table.

"My grandmother went in her sleep." Sandra took down two crystal wineglasses from the cupboard and set them on the counter. "I was in Syracuse at the time." She opened the fridge and took out a bottle of Chablis.

"What's in Syracuse?" Donny studied her moves. She was open to him and he wanted her. A fist closed tight in his stomach and thrust a fever through his loins.

"That's where I completed my degree." She slid a drawer open and held up a corkscrew. "Would you?" She handed him the bottle and the tool and stepped back.

"What was your major?" He supported the bottle between his legs and fumbled with the corkscrew.

"Chemistry." She chuckled, arching an eyebrow.

"A degree in chemistry to develop pictures?"

"My degree gives me an edge."

"Like a vintage wine and a fine woman. Who are you, Ms. Pearlman?"

She smiled again, holding a glass in each hand. "I hope to show you. Let's go in the front room."

"How about the bedroom?"

“You’re awfully bold.” Her breathing quickened and she retreated toward the living room. “I need to talk with you a little more.”

“Maybe I can’t walk that far.” He grinned.

“You flatter me. Let’s just sit in there and talk for a few minutes. Okay?”

“Yeah, I’d like to.”

Her presence and the light scent of her perfume invited him. He took her arm and they strolled into the dimly lit living room.

Sandra led him to a chair and set their wine-filled glasses on a small table. “My grandmother left me all this.” She indicated the expansive room with its richly appointed furniture.

“This is all yours?” Donny sampled the chilled wine.

“All of it.” She raised her glass. “I own the house and the flat above. That’s rented to an elderly couple.

“Where are your parents?”

“Dad’s dead. Heart attack, same as your father. Mom lives in Troy with my stepfather, Ben. They have a house there. He comes over and does things for me. You know, plumbing, painting ... that sort of thing.”

Donny watched Sandra twirl the glass in her slender fingers. She turned him on, but it was more than that. He liked her and wanted to know her better. That was bad. He should only want to fuck her like all those other girls, but he wanted more, much more.

*Dammit, how could I want such a thing? Sandra’s a nice girl.*

The double standard. Donny loved Susan, but he wanted to *have* Sandra. He stared into his wineglass.

*Susan’s long dead but I’m not. Can’t I have Sandra sexually? Yes, I damn well can. Will I still like her? Yes, I damn well might.*

“This is dumb, but I have to say it. I’ve wanted to be alone with you since we met.” She swallowed some wine and held out her glass. “Fill it for me. You’re always so cool at work. You’re confident and so involved with the business.”

Donny’s hand trembled as he poured. “Brian gave me a chance to learn something I could really get into. I owe him the best work I can do.” *She’s getting personal with me.* He watched Sandra lick the rim of her glass. Warm light from the wall lamp made her more attractive.

“Brian hired me right out of the army. I was a kid, barely twenty. He gave me a good job with a future, so when I’m in the lab, I stick to business.”

“Yeah, and you’ve missed several of my little hints.”

“Is that what you’ve been doing?”

“Donald Wakeland, you know damn well I’ve been coming on to you since my first day there.” She grinned and circled the rim of her glass with a slender forefinger. “Why are you so shy?”

“I don’t just push it like some guys.”

“Jesus! I’ve given you the green light every day. You want a written invitation?”

“Well, knowing I’m on the right track wouldn’t hurt. I’m not the pushy type. Besides, I respect you too much.”

He shook his head. *Why did I say that? What the hell’s happening here? What is it about this girl that’s different?*

Sandra raised her glass “A toast to a young man with good character.” They *clinked* glasses together.

Donny felt his stomach roll over.

“I’m going to the bedroom. You have my permission. I want you to stay the night. I need you to.”

“How can I respond to that?”

“Don’t.” She touched his lips. “Open another bottle for us and bring it to the bedroom.” She brushed back a lock of his

hair. "I trust you, Donny. I've dreamed of this night since I first saw you." She kissed him with the softness of a gentle breath.

*Would you trust me if you really knew about me? Would you feel the same, knowing I'd killed a boy and three men?*

\* \* \* \*

When Donny entered Sandra's bedroom with a chilled bottle of wine, he paused, stunned. A dozen scented candles played soft shadows and warm light about the room. The dim glow brushed the figure on the bed. She sat up, legs tucked under her, sipping the last of her wine. "May I have some more?" She held out her empty glass.

"My dear girl, you can have anything you want." He poured for both of them. "Sandra ... I haven't been with a woman for a long time."

"Love me, Donny—all the way. Just make love to me."

\* \* \* \*

Sandra's legs felt smooth and rich to Donny's moving fingers. Her scent engulfed him, excited him. The woman was on fire. Her half-nakedness quickened his heart and sent flames up and down his spine. She turned and twisted, murmuring words of desire.

Donny tasted her, lightly at first and then with abandon. Sandra tossed from side to side as he pleased her and gasped when he turned her on her side to bite her neck. "I want you. Now!"

In a frenzy of passion, he felt her thighs with hot hands. "Yes," he mumbled, pulling Sandra to him and entering her in that position.

She threw her head back against his shoulder and cried out in pleasure. "Don't stop!"

\* \* \* \*

Donny rolled onto his back and took a long, deep breath.

“I’ve dreamed about having sex with you every day.” Sandra’s breathless words circled the room in the half-light and faded into soft silence.

Susan’s face drifted before him, and he rolled onto his side, staring into the darkness beyond the bed lamp. He had fucked Sandra and he liked her. *That* could not be. To allow it would violate the purity of Susan’s love. He had to find a reason to dislike Sandra, but at the moment he couldn’t think of one.

Sandra snuggled against him and kissed his shoulder. “You’ve never mentioned anyone. A girlfriend, I mean.”

“There’s no one.”

She laid her head on Donny’s arm and gently traced her nails up and down his thigh. “With the talent you have, you don’t have a steady girl?”

“No.” Donny closed his eyes and floated on waves of rising guilt. *I’m sorry, Susan. I didn’t mean this to happen.* He shivered as the thought ran through his heart, tearing as it went. The women and girls he’d had since he was thirteen were the kind you *fucked*. You didn’t *love* them—nobody did. Those encounters didn’t matter. Susan said it was all right.

“Are you cold?” Sandra asked, caressing his thigh.

“Just had a little chill.” He got up, slipped into his shorts and trousers, and then turned to look at her. Now that his lust had abated, her partial nakedness seemed cheap.

“You’re upset.” Sandra pulled the sheet over her breasts as if she sensed his judgment.

He turned away and buttoned his shirt. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have used you like that. It wasn’t right.”

“I wanted to make love.”

“But I didn’t make love to you, I fucked you.” He leaned against the highboy and pulled on his socks. “We’re not in love, Sandra.”

“It could happen.”

He sat on the edge of the bed and picked up his shoes. “I have love. What we just had was sex, and it was wrong, dammit.”

“You said there isn’t anyone.” She blinked back tears.

“There isn’t. I can’t explain it, but there’s no way I can love anybody.” He finished tying his shoes, thinking he’d found a way out of his dilemma.

“Someone’s hurt you. Is that it?”

“Yeah. Now you know.”

“I’m sorry, but that fades with time, Donny.”

He stood. “It hasn’t faded in fourteen years. Jesus Christ  
....”

“For God’s sake, you must have been a kid!”

“So was she.”

“Where is she now?”

“Dead.”

“Oh, Donny ...” She reached out to him.

“I made a commitment to that little girl and I intend to keep it.”

Sandra climbed out of bed, dragging the cover sheet with her. She held him, pressing her face into his chest. “Stay friends with me. Let me have a tiny part of you. I won’t ask for more, I promise.”

Donny softened and put his arms around her. He couldn’t bring himself to dislike Sandra. Deep inside, he wanted to tell her everything—how it happened, the three killings, the agony of Susan’s death, but he could not. Susan still lived within him and would not approve.

“I didn’t mean to get mad.”

“You’re hurting, Donny. I can feel it.” She gazed into his eyes, tears trickling down her cheeks. “Just let me be here for you whenever you need me.” She squeezed him. “You’re not *using* me, okay?”

“Okay.”

They embraced for a long time and let their contrasting emotions find a place to rest.

\* \* \* \*

On his way home, Donny wrestled with guilt. *Nothing like Sandra has happened before, Susan. I still love only you. Sandra and I are just friends, that’s all. Just friends....*

\* \* \* \*

He stopped for the light at Becker and Elm Streets. What had been a mom & pop grocery store in his childhood was now a neighborhood bar. He saw three people in the parking lot, a woman and two men. The larger man appeared to be pounding the hell out of the smaller one. Their voices were muffled, but the woman’s terrified shouting reached him.

The light changed and Donny pulled to the curb, watching from a distance. *That big guy is goddamed Billy Jenkins!* From what little he could hear during the bloody exchange, it seemed the little guy had challenged the bully for insulting the woman

*It is Billy. Susan said he’d come back. Must there be another killing?* The thought turned his stomach.

*Donny ...*

“Susan, you were right. He’s back.” The winter night chilled his blood.

*He’s the one, Donny – kill him!* Susan’s voice filled Donny’s mind and shook him to the core.

“Why has he come back?” He buried his face in his gloved hands, trying to shake off images of the last time he’d killed Billy Jenkins.

*You haven’t killed him like the boy in our story. You must take his head and heart, Donny. Bury them separate from the body. Burn them, or the beast will not die.*

Susan’s voice echoed in his head and triggered a sharp migraine that exploded in his brain every time Billy Jenkins returned from the dead. “I’ve shed enough blood. You’ve made me a murderer. I’ve become a beast just like Billy.”

*You must do as I say. Billy has to die by your hand.*

“Please, I can’t do what you ask—I can’t.” He peeked through his fingers to see the bully beat his victim senseless.

*I saw what you did tonight—All of it.*

“I’m sorry, Susan I told you that.” He turned away from the violence in the parking lot. “Why didn’t you come to me at the lake? I needed you.” In a trance, he opened the glove box and took out an eight-inch hunting knife. It was honed and ready for the fourth killing of *stinking, dirty* Billy Jenkins.

*You were with her at the lake. You were making love to her. I didn’t come because you were with her.*

“Susan—I love you, no one else.” He slipped the knife into his coat and glanced toward the parking lot. The smaller man was on the ground with his back against a car door and the sobbing woman knelt beside him.

The big guy laughed and, kicked the victim three times in the ribs. He laughed again and walked away.

*Do it now, Donny. Kill Billy again. For me ...* Susan’s voice faded.

Donny waited until the man he saw as Billy was half a block away, then he shifted into drive, pulled up beside him, and lowered the passenger window. “Got a ride?”

“Who the fuck are you?”

“Get in before the cops nab your ass.”

They looked back. The weeping woman stood in a phone booth next to the building, placing a call.

“Get in.” Donny gestured toward the man. “I’ll get you out of here.”

The stranger climbed in and slammed the door. Donny sped away from the curb. “I saw what went on in the parking lot.”

“So what did you see?” The man’s eyes were full of fire, his breath rank. Billy was back.

“You gave the creep what he deserved.”

“How the fuck would you know?” He unbuttoned his pea coat. “Drop me at the nearest bus station and I’ll be on my way.”

“They’re all wimps aren’t they, Billy?”

“The name’s Brewster, Hank Brewster.”

Donny pressed the accelerator to the floor and the big Mercury shot forward with a squeal of rubber.

“What the fuck are you doin’?”

“You’re dead again, Billy.” Donny slammed on the brakes with both feet. Brewster plowed into the dashboard, ramming his head against the windshield support. The car skidded to right. Brewster fell back, moaning. Donny hit the brakes full-force, and Brewster’s head slammed into the right corner of the windshield.

Donny drew the knife and plunged it between the man’s left ribs. “Die, you sonofabitch!”

The car fishtailed and stopped sideways in the road. Donny stabbed Brewster again. “Die for good, Billy Jenkins.” He thrust the blade into Brewster’s throat and twisted it, then struck him again, severing the jugular. Thick, dark blood spurted onto the plastic-covered seat of Donny’s Monterey and onto the rubber floor mat.

Donny jerked the knife free, slashing at Brewster's face. "Die, Billy. You bastard—die." He sank the blade into the bully's chest. "You're dead again, Puke-Face."

Headlights reflected in the side-view mirror. "Shit!" Donny left the knife in Brewster's chest and drove toward Central Park Lake. "Jesus..." He shook his head. *Albany. Yeah, I'll take him there. He'll have to settle for a railroad yard instead of the bus station he wanted.*

\* \* \* \*

It was 3:15 a.m. Donny had about two and a half hours to get rid of his dead passenger. A little more than eighteen miles stood between where he was and Albany, and roughly twenty by the time he got to the east end of the railyards. Plenty of time to think. He had to work out the details.

The first time he killed Billy, they called it an accident.

"Poor Donny. Such a horrible thing to live with. A nine-year-old boy responsible for the accidental death of a schoolmate."

So everyone said. Donny almost believed it himself, but he knew better. He wanted *stinking* Billy Jenkins dead. Billy killed Susan—didn't he?

The second Billy's death remained an unsolved murder. The body of Billy Three had rotted for six days in a filthy trailer in El Paso, Texas. Billy Four would appear to be just another accident victim, but disposing of Hank Brewster, would take planning and attention to detail.

Donny talked to the dead man, as he drove toward Albany.

"Billy, we're gonna take care of your carcass in a manner befitting the garbage it is." He reached across the front seat, wrenched the hunting knife out of the body and dropped it

on the floor. The corpse slumped against the passenger door. To a passing motorist the dead man would appear to be taking a nap.

“I doubt you have any ID, but I’ll take care of it if you do.”

The back road to Albany had less traffic. That was the way to go. It would take longer ... Donny needed the time.

*His head and heart, Donny ... you must take them or Billy will come back ....*

“I can’t do it like that, Susan. I’ll find another way.” The smell of blood and death filled the car and made Donny sick. He pulled over, got out, and threw up. It was the same every time he tried to kill the beast. He pounded on the roof of the car. “Four times, you sonofabitch—I’ve killed you four fucking times. Stay dead.”

*Head and heart, Donny. You must or Billy will come back ....*

“Shut up. You’re dead, Susan. Stop haunting me.” An eighteen-wheeler rumbled by, drowning out his plea.

Later that morning the fourth killing would be documented with the others in Donny’s diary of death, but first he had to dispose of the body.

\* \* \* \*

An hour and a half later, Brewster’s coat and shoes were ashes in the bottom of a rusted drum. Donny had removed them at the east entrance to the New York Central railroad yard, and then dumped the body on the tracks over which a westbound train was now passing. He shook his head and felt a fist in his guts. *How clever. A tramp, robbed of his shoes and coat, tragically cut to pieces by a train.* He opened Brewster’s wallet and pocketed \$140.00 and change. He’d dispose of the identification back in Schenectady.

\* \* \* \*

First light over Central Park Lake revealed mottled gray sky. Donny stood at the edge of the ice staring out at a jagged hole that didn't exist. He watched the imaginary drama of Susan's death.

"It's done, Susan. Billy's dead again."

*You didn't sever the dragon's head and cut out its heart.*

Susan's voice came out of an image in the blackness of the open hole. Half submerged, the spectral figure raised its arms toward him. Susan's once-beautiful blonde curls were pasted to her skull in dripping icicles of filth and mud.

"Please, Susan. This killing is enough. I can't be the boy in the story ... I can't do it."

Donny sat in the snow and wept.

*You have to. Billy's still laughing, I can hear him. He will come back again.* The vision blurred, and then faded.

Donny's mind drifted back across the years to 1948 and Billy's first attack.

*"As in darkness,  
the beast is also  
in the nature of man."*

The Book of Dark Shadows