



Chapter One

THE NIGHTMARE UNFOLDS

These are the times that try men's souls.

~ Thomas Paine ~

The telephone rang, piercing the stillness of our home in the wee hours of the morning. I remember hearing it, but I was not quite sure if I was dreaming or not. I do not have a phone in my bedroom, so I hurried down the hall to the kitchen to grab the closest one. I thought to myself, *Who could possibly be calling here at this ungodly hour?*—it was just after three a.m.

I actually thought that Matthew had already come home during the night; he always took great care to come in quietly, hoping not to rouse the two big dogs sleeping in the front of the house.

I kept thinking it was probably a wrong number, but I was wrong. When I picked up the receiver, I heard the voice of Matthew's close

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friend, the one he had been with that evening. He told me that Matthew had been assaulted, and that he was calling me from the back of a police car, as the officers wanted to question him. None of what he said made sense, of course, and I began to shout at him, asking him where Matthew was, how this had happened. He had no answers for me. All he could say was he had overheard the officers saying Matthew had been taken to Royal Columbian Hospital.

I hung up the phone, ran to my bedroom and told David what I had just heard. I quickly grabbed the white pages, still not even sure what I was supposed to be looking for. In my stupor I leafed through it to the Hospital pages, ripping half the pages as I went along. I dialled the emergency ward number that was listed for the hospital, and the phone rang for what seemed an eternity. The voice on the other end patched me through to the emergency department, and they confirmed that a young male had been recently admitted as a “John Doe,” someone without any identification.

I told the nurse that I suspected it might be my son, and began to give her a description. The nurse stated that it sounded like a match, but that we should come in to confirm. I told her that we were on our way, and was told not to hurry—there was no rush.

The drive to New Westminster never seemed so long. We drove quickly, but not crazily, trying to think positively, as all parents must at a point like that. I kept thinking that he was probably banged up, maybe needed stitches. I tried to interpret what the nurse had said—that there was no need to rush. Nothing could have prepared me for what followed.



Upon arrival at Royal Columbian Hospital, we identified ourselves to the nurse at the emergency desk, and after she spoke to someone on the phone, we were directed into a small room off the waiting area. It seemed strange, as the general waiting room was not that crowded. It was still so early in the morning.

After just a short wait, another nurse appeared and introduced herself. She told us that the medical staff believed, based on our description of him, that they had Matthew in the emergency ward. He had been assaulted and was unconscious. However, as there was no ID on him, they needed someone to confirm it was really him.

My husband explained that I was pregnant, and that he thought he would be better able to go, given my state. The nurse led David down the corridor to a trauma room where several nurses and doctors were busy working on a prone form on a stretcher. My husband later told me that, at that point, the nurse escorting him grabbed him firmly by the upper arm, perhaps fearing he might collapse at the sight. David approached the boy on the gurney as the doctors and nurses, as if by some silent cue, backed away and allowed him room to stand at the bedside. All stood quietly while David looked at the face of the young man on the stretcher. My husband was taken aback. Along with the usual blood, abrasions and bruising that is common to any violent altercation, he was also surprised by the amount of swelling in the face. He had to look carefully, recognizing his stepson not as one usually would with a casual glance, but by purposefully scanning for a familiar mole, and finally recognizing

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the camouflage boxer shorts Matt was always wearing around the house. It was Matt, and he was in bad shape.

They led David back into the waiting room where I had been rocking myself back and forth on a cold vinyl couch, praying that Matthew would be okay. The nurse was clutching David's upper arm as she led him back into the room. David was pale, and looked like he had just witnessed something he would take to the grave with him. I had never seen that look on my husband's face before.

I knew something was wrong—very wrong. David looked at me, looked away, and then back again before saying, “It's Matty, but I had a hard time recognizing him.”

The police officers in the room with us asked us all sorts of questions. They wanted to know who Matthew had been with that night, what time he had left the house, everything and anything to help them put together a timeline of the evening's events.

David and I answered all the questions as thoroughly as possible in hopes of helping them. They told us that they had two people in custody, and that they were certain they were the ones who had assaulted Matthew. At the time, that was all they could tell us, but they promised they would keep us informed.

Doctors soon joined us in the room—the walls now seemed to be closing in on us. I couldn't breathe, couldn't think—my normal world was falling apart right before my eyes; I could do nothing to stop it.

