

COMPULSION

by
Jennifer Chase

Chapter One
Wednesday 0900 Hours

The man strolls down the gravel driveway to his makeshift torture trap disguised as a late model Chevy Suburban. It is in fact a hideous, retrofitted, rolling snare designed specifically for the secure confinement of the innocent. He has already stalked and captured several children between the ages four and ten from their safe homes and familiar yards. They are never to be seen alive again. Their only mistake was their innocence and inexperience of the inexplicable evil that relentlessly wanders the neighborhoods across the nation, wearing a simple mask of normalcy.

Dressed in khaki shorts, cheap superstore sneakers and a loose fitting blue and yellow Hawaiian shirt, the clean shaven, dark-haired man in his late-thirties looked almost like any other man who might have had a decent day job and

perhaps even a family of his own. He doesn't have a single care in the world. He feels a sense of peace and deep relaxation, he's both tired and re-energized.

This particular man has a secret: a dark secret of an unfulfilled need to prey upon the innocent, snatch them from their secure lives, torture them, murder them, and then leave their tiny remains isolated away from civilization. This driving compulsion will never be satisfied, and the hideous crimes will never be fully solved. The police will never find the little victims' remains, and families will never receive closure for their unimaginable loss. Only one promise would prevail, the crimes will continue, remain unsolved and with time eventually be forgotten by the general public. The continuous fantasy re-enactment will never stop as long as the killer is left alive. Death poses the only logical solution to stop this tormenting cycle of death.

He opens the creaky back doors of the Suburban and takes out two white five gallon buckets setting them down on the trash littered street. The back of the vehicle is cluttered with miscellaneous tools and paint supplies that a painting contractor would most likely use. Upon closer inspection, deeper inside the cargo area, there are handcuffs and shackles fixed to stationary hooks

reminiscent of medieval torture chambers. The windows are coated with a thin opaque vinyl that ensures complete privacy.

Absently, the man wipes his sweaty forehead with the back of his calloused hand. The temperature has risen past ninety-six degrees, and the heat borders on unbearable; but, typical for Arizona in the beginning stages of the summer months.

The escalating heat works in his favor. The decomposition of the small human bodies will be accelerated in this climate; therefore, omitting the weary task of burying the bodies below a foot deep. The tiny bones left behind will be scattered by scavengers and other small critters leaving no trace of the once lively existence of the innocent victims.

A small red hooded sweatshirt with a decal of Spider Man lays folded on top of one of the white buckets. Covering the top of the other bucket is a pink and purple backpack and a flowered key chain with a single dangling house key never to be used again. The contents inside the buckets is unknown to the naked eye, but secretly stashed underneath contains the rest of the children's clothing, shoes, and school supplies. These are the man's valuable trophies drenched with the lingering scent of the victims.

Each of the three little victims was taken from familiar areas between home and school. Their final resting place is only one hundred square miles from the abduction site. Most law enforcement agencies generally are unable to connect together crimes from larger distances or link one perpetrator, because of understaffing, large workloads, and budget restrictions. But in reality, most police detectives aren't trained in serial crimes well enough to be able to spot the subtle differences in a homicide crime scene that would indicate a serial homicide or a one-time homicide.

The man slams shut the doors of the Suburban, picks up the two buckets and proceeds back up to the shabby house to stash the belongings in his basement. In his mind, those items are more cherished than any collected artifact or family heirloom could ever be to him. He now rests, eats, and then dreams. The fantasy will slowly begin to replay in his mind - an endless film of reenactment horrors. This disease will gain momentum once again and command more perfect, innocent victims once again.

Several blocks away, concealed by a couple of abandoned, rusted out pick up trucks and a partially torn down grocery store, a high-tech Canon digital SLR camera with a 500 millimeter telephoto lens documents every step

of the child killer. Extreme close up photographs are taken of the man, Suburban, tire treads, license plate, dirt residue, bucket contents, and house with absolute razor-sharp detail. The complete terrifying story is told without words and descriptions, but with actions and direct hard evidence.

An attractive, petite woman with shoulder length blonde hair stands upright and takes a break from taking photographs and refocuses her eyes to the surroundings. She stretches her back and neck. Exhausted from a week and half of stakeouts, she makes her way back to the black Ford Explorer. The heat has taken its toll on her energy and perspiration has soaked through her white t-shirt and stonewashed jeans.

Wishing to be back on the California coast where the air is cool and refreshing, Emily Stone takes three large gulps from a warm bottle of Fiji water. Several empty bottles of water, Gatorade, and diet Coke cans lay on the back seat.

A state-of-the-art Dell notebook computer with several back up hard drives, extra digital cameras, various lenses, video equipment, two store bought cell phones, binoculars, tape recorder, maps, hand scribbled notes, and expanding file with newspaper clippings ride shotgun.

A Glock 9mm Model 17 semiautomatic handgun is stashed just within reach with extra clips slipped easily into the map pockets of both front car doors. A Beretta 21 Bobcat Pistol is conveniently concealed in her personal ankle holster, loaded with seven rounds for easy access. Clipped to her belt is a Blackberry turned to vibrate that alerts her to incoming text messages, emails and Internet alerts.

Emily knows that her subject will be inside for at least eight to ten hours recharging his strength before finalizing his job and trolling again for new victims. Maybe this time he will lead her to where the tiny gravesites are located. Some serial killers have the need to revisit their victims, especially when they have the overconfidence and arrogance that they will never be caught. Emily relies on this type of criminal behavior to give her the clues and the evidence she needs to stop this pattern of terror. Many serial killers solemnly explain out loud over the improvised graves of their extinguished victims that they are in a better place now, and it was for the better good.

Rubbing her neck and taking a seat behind the wheel, Emily takes a couple of slow even deep breaths from her diaphragm to control her heart rate. She feels an anxious tightening of her neck and body, which in the past has

allowed a panic attack to surface during stressful situations. She closes her eyes and counts from one to ten with slow even breaths, and then back from ten to one again. She then opens her eyes, and refocuses her energy on the important task ahead.

Emily turns the engine over and blasts the air-conditioning on her face and torso feeling a sense of reprieve. She had only been to Arizona twice in her thirty-two years of life. With the oven-like stifling heat, she knew why she hadn't returned. Her work had taken her to many states, but her hunt mostly took her to the western states. It was partly due to the higher population aspect, which in turn increases the crime factor and greater possibilities for unsuspecting victims. The FBI estimates that there are forty serial killers roaming the United States at any given time, but Emily knows all too well that number is closer to ten times higher.

This particular case was especially disturbing since the three children had already been murdered and there was nothing that she could do about it. There's a permanent knot in her gut that never loosens, but merely grips her emotions into an unbearable command to keep forging ahead.

Emily has tracked cases throughout Arizona and Nevada about abducted, missing, and mutilated children. It still

amazed her how law enforcement agencies who have endless resources at their disposal failed to connect the simple crime patterns just outside their jurisdictions, but well within their investigative reach.

It took Emily less than a day to profile and track down where this particular type of predator would hunt and strike based on the public information of the missing children. Using Internet maps that illustrate parks, malls, and elementary schools, Emily carefully narrowed the search of possible abduction points and easy escape access. She began staking out areas of choice for sex offenders and other types of predators including the names and addresses on the Megan's Law website. With luck and intuition mostly on her side, she was able to find and track the most likely suspect. Sometimes, her hunt took weeks and on one occasion it took two months. This particular hunt took her just under two weeks to track the child murderer, but it was not quite fast enough to save the little victims. This inevitable development in the case only adds to the already heavy burden Emily carries with her every day.

Emily eases the Explorer into drive and leaves the cover of her perfect hiding spot to wait and map out her next move. Her work has only just begun as the child murderer sleeps and dreams of new efficient tortures to use

on his next victims. She glances at an open file folder on the passenger seat showing several pictures of missing children. One of the photos shows a smiling freckle-faced boy of seven wearing his favorite red Spider Man sweatshirt.

Chapter Two
Thursday 0530 Hours

Detective Sergeant Ray Rivas diligently prioritizes his growing pile of telephone messages from victims, witnesses, other department detectives, and his demanding Lieutenant. He was also agonizing over his newest detective, a female officer transplanted from New York City. It's barely 0530 and the Yuma Police Department Homicide Unit is deserted. Just a soft hum of computers and a few buzzing fluorescent overhead lights keep him company until the day shift arrives at 0800 hours.

Detective Rivas has put in more time than all of his other detectives combined in the past six months. Drowning himself in his work, it helps him to forget his nasty divorce proceedings and the law firm in charge of impending divorce, or rather his wife's divorce. In his mind, once

you're married you stay married no matter what happens. Although being a wife of a cop wasn't always easy, it most certainly wasn't impossible either. There were good times - once.

He tears open the wrapper of an energy bar, takes a bite and then tosses it into the trashcan. The bland piece of cardboard sprinkled with a few peanuts doesn't satisfy his sweet tooth and doesn't taste very healthy either. Instead, he opens his bottom file drawer and retrieves a dark chocolate Milky Way bar. He takes two bites and washes the wonderful silky chocolate down with room temperature police station coffee.

"Now that's high-energy snack," he muses to himself. He looks at the photo on his desk of two smiling kids at the local water park and his thoughts fall back to the divorce proceedings.

He pushes unpleasant thoughts from his mind and concentrates on his work at hand. He has seen his fair share of homicides over the years and they usually all boiled down to money, jealousy or revenge. Two of the worst homicide cases he has seen in his seventeen-year career sat on the right corner of his desk.

The kidnapping, torture, and brutal murder of a child are what haunt Detective Rivas' dreams, both during the day

and at night. To the detective, it keeps the balance of the world in perspective with the steadiness of good versus evil. At least that's what he keeps telling the sarcastic series of thoughts that run in a never-ending loop through his suspicious cop mind.

What's even more disturbing is the epidemic of missing children in the Arizona area over the past year. Every year across the nation there are more than eight hundred thousand children reported missing. That is an unacceptable number in Detective Rivas' mind. Once a runaway or parent abduction is ruled out, there is a whole new breed of predators that begin to emerge in the scenario. The possibilities are endless and disturbingly vile from the kiddie porn industry to sadistic serial murderers that make up more than fifty thousand abducted children each year in the United States. The missing children files for the Yuma area are stacked on the left side of his desk seem to be glaring at him.

The computer terminal behind Detective Rivas softly chimed that there was incoming email, which interrupted his derailed train of cynical thought. He swiveled his chair around to glance at the email subjects on the flat computer screen. There are three listed birthdates of years from 1998 and 2001 with close jurisdictions and cities in

several of the subject lines. What's more, the sender consists of four symbol characters that usually represent error messages on most computers.

Detective Rivas squints his eyes and then exhales, "What the hell"?

The firewall and high-tech IT technology for government agencies was supposed to stop any incoming viruses or worms from getting access to their mainframe. Maybe the deviant hackers have found another way to make law enforcement's life a pure hell.

Detective Rivas stares at the computer screen frozen. Snapping out of his trance, he flips open one of the missing person's folder from his desk. He quickly scans the information and shows the date of birth as March 12, 1998 Scottsdale, Arizona. He begins furiously flipping open other folders and matches the missing children's birth dates to the emails on his screen. He blinks his eyes a few times to focus closer on the numbers.

Detective Rivas wastes no more time and clicks on the first email. It quickly loads several photos and a video showing a man clearly digging in a deserted rural area. The detective's blood turns cold and he feels sweat trickle down his neck. He watches the man in the cheap neon Hawaiian shirt talking to himself explaining how sometimes

dying is the right thing to do and how brave the little boy was to die for him. A small shadowed body appears in the shallow grave, limp like a rag doll almost too tiny to have been a living and breathing child.

The Detective watches as a photo of the vehicle and license plate, clearly identifiable, comes into view along with other evidence. It was like watching a re-enactment of a cold case file on the Discovery Channel.

Clicking on the other emails, Detective Rivas obtains detailed metro-scan maps from the Yuma county assessors office and clear photographs of the suspect with a complete background of criminal and personal history. An entire detailed investigation unfolds in less than five minutes in front of him from a phantom super sleuth. He notices that all of the emails and their attachments have also been sent to forensic services.

Detective Rivas grabs several of the missing persons files and sprints to the stairwell on his way down to the basement where the forensic identification division is located.

* * *

The lights in the corridor are extremely dim due to the fact that there are only a scarce few law enforcement personnel in the building at this early hour. The county government has to pinch more pennies somewhere besides in the hiring and cost of living increases; the next best thing was the utilities.

The dim and deserted hallway eerily echoes with the quick footsteps of Detective Rivas. He is now invigorated with the prospect of catching a child killer or perhaps a serial killer. Many possible scenarios are running through his mind of who actually sent him the information. Was it a retired cop or family member? Maybe it was an angry ex-girlfriend who wanted revenge. It could be the killer himself with a partner who is documenting the crimes for morbid historical purposes.

It is now 0545. Fifteen minutes had barely passed since the first incriminating anonymous emails passed through the police department's computer software firewalls and security encryptions.

Several of the forensic lab doors were closed and dark. Detective Rivas passes the DNA and serology labs. His step quickens as he sees a faint light at the end of the hallway. He knew that it could only mean one thing: the forensic supervisor and criminalist, John O'Brien,

worked as many hours at the department as he did. The detective swipes his security card and enters forensic services.

There's a distinct hum that gives the impression that you're in a quiet vacuum and the world is far away. Linear workstations surround much of the perimeter with moveable tables to allow for multiple users of any particular assignment. Each section has been defined for a particular purpose with a gas chromatograph mass spectrometer and a 310 genetic analyzer that allows for examinations of microscopic evidence. A long hallway from one end of the lab to the other gives the layout a cohesive unity and allows for vertical circulation.

Detective Rivas stands illuminated in the doorway and discovers a tall thin man in a white lab coat bent over a scanning electron microscope.

Detective Rivas clears his throat, "John."

The thin man looks up at once and smiles, "Hey detective, I think you have more hours clocked in at this place than I do."

Scarcely able to contain his excitement, "You need to see this." He walks in through the lab and meets the criminalist.

"What's up?" John takes his glasses off, curious because of the detective's intensity. He knew that Detective Rivas was a serious and somewhat conservative police detective.

"Have you checked your email?"

"No, not yet. I try to wait until at least eight before I open that Pandora's box."

"Trust me, you're going to want to pull up your emails right now."

Detective Rivas rolls up a chair next to John, sits down and anxiously waits.

John spins around to his computer workstation and swiftly clicks the mouse twice. Two seconds pass, and his email inbox appears on the screen. He sees the three emails with the unknown sender identification of four strange symbols.

"What the?"

"Trust me, just open the files." Detective Rivas opens his missing children manila files to show John the matching dates of birth.

The computer screen illustrates detailed photographs taken in a crime scene evidence approach of close up, medium, and overall perspectives. John then clicks on the

video and once again it reveals an entire chronological crime scene narrative.

John is speechless and barely manages to say, "Wow."

"I need you to verify the authenticity of the images and video while I get the info on the perp and vehicle."

John begins scrolling through the photographs again.

"John can you prioritize this?"

"Yeah, no problem. This is amazing; this is better equipment than we have here in the lab. Not to mention whoever took these is an expert."

"I need to get everything lined up before I go to a judge to get the search and arrest warrant. You good on this?"

"No problem. Give me about two hours."

Detective Rivas smiles, "Not a minute more." He gets to the door.

"Do you have some kind of detective guardian angel watching over you?" John is still impressed looking over the evidence again.

The detective disappears around the corner out of sight to gather all of his information before his detectives begin to arrive.

Chapter Three
Thursday 1900 Hours

The early evening shadows descend on the rural Arizona desert just northeast of Yuma, and the heat of the day is slowly dissipating to a more comfortable level, casting an orange yellow backlit sky. The air is filled with the remnants of well-seasoned soil and native desert plant life from the scorching day.

Just a mile, east at the secondary crime scene of the final resting spot of seven-year-old Randy Jeremiah Johnston, Emily watches the circus-like investigation take shape through binoculars. She is careful not to draw any attention to her vantage spot with any reflection or lights that might catch someone's curious eye. Her heart races and skips an occasional beat. This is the best part of her tedious work watching the events unfold with the reactions of those who are hired to protect and serve.

Police patrol vehicles, crime scene van, four-wheel drive special units, and the coroner scatter around the area of interest. Several uniformed and plainclothes police officers disperse onto the scene in a well-rehearsed manner. Flashlights dance around the vast countryside and large spotlights are being set up by crime scene technicians to search for any possible clues as they secure the area. Several police department civilians carrying silver briefcases filled with portable measuring devices, digital cameras, and other containers for casting and retrieval of evidence get to work. A tall lanky man, obviously a police criminalist, helps to cordon off the specific area of interest and give instructions to less experienced identification technicians.

Without warning, a set of headlights steadily approaches where Emily has carefully hidden herself. She quickly returns to her Explorer, releases the emergency brake and slowly pushes the sport utility vehicle farther into the overgrown brush. Emily tucks herself back against the side of the vehicle and waits for the car to pass.

A police patrol car slowly passes Emily's vantage point, obviously they got lost trying to access the entrance to the crime scene. It's just off rural highway 8 on the dirt bike trails before entering the Anza Trail.

Not an easy location to find in the dark. Perhaps they were called to the area to assist with the perimeter security, but more likely they just wanted to view the horrendous crime scene of a serial killer. Emily waits until the police radio is barely audible before she moves from her position.

Emily breathes a sigh of relief and knows her job is done; there is no guesswork or speculation anymore. It is now up to the authorities to determine what happens to this serial killer and how they will proceed. Whether there will be a trial, plea bargain or death penalty, it's out of her hands now. The families can only take slight comfort in knowing what happened to their children. It will never replace their precious child or fill the forever void that is now an inescapable part of their lives.

But it's only a hollow victory for Emily. She is exhausted and wants to get back home as soon as possible. She decides that a break from this entire trauma of events is greatly needed. No more pedophiles, serial killers, missing children, and dead mutilated bodies for a while. Not until the next child abduction. And maybe this time, she'll get there before it's too late. The mere hope is what drives her.

Emily walks back to her Explorer, leans in and turns on the low buzz of activity on the police scanner that sits on the passenger seat. She exits the vehicle again watching the investigation. She puts on lightweight headphones, picks up a listening device and aims the digital sound cannon toward the crime scene and begins recording from her remote computer. After fine-tuning to a particular conversation of significance between two police detectives, Emily listens.

* * *

Detective Rivas stands on the edge of the crime scene and takes in everything from left to right and back again. He watches all personnel go about their duties, but he still insists on studying the crime scene personally for his own notes and observations.

Detective William Grant who has only been in Yuma Homicide for six months meets Detective Rivas and waits for instructions. He's a good cop with sound intuitions, but he hasn't had the experience of a massive investigation such as the job they are currently facing.

"I want you to write down everything I say as we walk the crime scene in a grid pattern. Then I want you to observe and speculate what you see after I'm done."

"Is it true that the killer contacted you directly?"
The rookie asks.

Detective Rivas stops and looks directly at his rookie detective, "We don't know who sent the information, but for now, let's walk the crime scene."

Detective Grant flips open his notebook, "Ready."

Detective Rivas describes to his rookie partner that the tire tracks lead directly to the gravesite. The vehicle was probably a truck or SUV based on the size and dimension of the tire treads left at the scene. The footprints were completely contaminated; the same set was trampled several times with multiple walks back and forth to the vehicle. This led Detective Rivas to believe, unfortunately, that there would be more than one gravesite and more than one body. He continues his observations and makes brief sketches, while an identification technician takes the proper photographs documenting the entire scene.

John O'Brien instructs one of his best technicians to take a full cup of soil samples from the gravesite and surrounding areas to use as an exemplar to compare to anything found on or with the suspect.

The exhausting task begins for John, he must prepare the crime scene gravesite for excavation of possible evidence. During his entire career, he has had the experience of body excavation in thirty-seven homicides. He expertly sets the datum and grid of the grave areas. The location of any artifacts or evidence from the surface is documented in a notebook and with various photographs.

The tedious task continues as the removal of all surface debris begins in order to locate any possible evidence. John and his assistant begin to sift two inches through twigs, foliage, and soil to get to the first layer of the grave. As he reaches the second layer of the grave, clothing and a small skull appear. This evidence is again documented. It never gets any easier; in fact, it gets more difficult for John. The remains of a small boy are unearthed. For a moment there is strong silence among the crew as they stare into the shallow grave at the tiny broken body.

"John find anything to identify the perp?" Detective Rivas breaks the awkward silence.

"One last possible hiding place", John carefully removes the small body and lays it on a white plastic tarp.

From underneath the body is a perfect footprint impression.

"I'd say a cheap running shoe, size ten."

An identification technician begins to prepare the impression in order to take a complete casting.

A middle-aged petite woman meets up with Detective Rivas, "Detective".

"Dr. Randall, can we get a preliminary educated guess on the manner and cause of death?" Detective Rivas motions to the tiny body.

Dr. Randall is one of the most respected medical examiners from the Yuma County Coroner's office. She has been the expert witness on many cold cases around the globe. Detective Rivas trusts her judgment and respects her opinion.

"There is some inbending where blunt force trauma impacted the frontal part of the skull with some type of tool like a small hammer. There are signs of sexual assault and strangulation, but cause of death was blunt force trauma. Looks like death was between twelve and eighteen hours ago." She looks up at the Detective. "This child was tortured over a period of time and death was not instantaneous."

"There are two more small graves", Detective Rivas replies.