Chapter 108.5

Trapped

May 10

John Peterson loved being a lawyer. He loved being in courtrooms, he loved arguing the law, and he loved using Latin phrases that no one else knew. He loved that people assumed he was smart and powerful because he was a lawyer. Above all else, he loved the power that came from being a lawyer. A prosecuting attorney, to be exact.

John's first, and only, legal job was at the Thurston County Prosecuting Attorney's Office in Olympia, Washington. He wanted to be a criminal prosecutor, but the only spot they had for him was in the civil division. This meant he would defend the county in civil lawsuits instead of prosecuting criminals.

John loved being a public servant. He loved that he was part of a very important team of individuals who protected people from criminals and greedy capitalists. John didn't mind that sometimes government had to use strong tactics to accomplish this. You need to break some eggs to make an omelet. Sure, some people will end up being inconvenienced so that the government could do what it needs to do. It was unfortunate, but the greater good required that government, run by people like him, needed to have the power to do what it wanted because people like him just want the best for everyone.

John's most prized possession was the badge embossed with "Deputy Prosecuting Attorney." He carried it everywhere. He used it on occasion to get to the head of the line and to let a cop pulling him over know that he wouldn't be getting a ticket that day.

John was very competitive. He got an adrenaline rush when he did whatever it took to win a case. It started early in his career when he was asked to not turn over documents to a lawyer suing the county for over-regulating some land. He knew the law required him to turn them over, but he felt excited, like he was part of the team, by not turning them over. It was like he was a junior member of a gang who had been entrusted with a minor task, like being the lookout for a robbery. He was happy to do it and be one of the guys.

After John hid the documents, however, his superiors had enough on him to get him in serious trouble. Now they had a reliable guy to do whatever they needed. His boss subtly, but very clearly, let John know that if he decided to stop lying and violating the law, they would turn him in and he would lose his law license.

But, John didn't need the threat of losing his law license as an incentive to do whatever it took to win for the county. Winning was everything. He loved it. And he was pretty good at beating people in court. He racked up win after win and got noticed by his bosses as a "go getter" and "team player." It wasn't hard to win when you cheat. When the other side turns over all the documents and tells the truth, it's pretty easy to not turn over documents that hurt the county's case and file false

affidavits—and then win. He loved his job even more when he would win a case because the dumbass on the other side would actually follow the rules.

One of those dumbasses was Grant Matson, the lawyer for the Washington Association of Business. John had a case against Grant and "forgot" to turn over some subpoenaed documents. Grant, the idiot, turned over all the documents he was supposed to and lost. "Better luck next time," John said to Grant, sarcastically, after the judge ruled. Grant was furious, which just made John laugh harder.

A few weeks later, right after the federal government defaulted on it bonds and all the unrest that followed, John was sitting at the Courthouse Café. He was still going to work, although lots of people weren't. Lately, John was winning all his cases because the other side wasn't showing up for court given how dangerous it was. John would brave the crime and occasional riots in Olympia to get to the courthouse right on time and snag another win when the other lawyer didn't show up. He was actually enjoying the Crisis. It was helping his stats.

The Courthouse Café was across the street from the Thurston County Courthouse. It was where all the lawyers and a few judges had lunch. In the past, lawyers from both sides would go there after battling each other in court, have a friendly lunch, and then go back into battle for the rest of the afternoon. That started dying out when things seemed to turn nastier in court. It was hard to have a nice lunch with someone who was lying and breaking all the rules. Slowly, the private lawyers stopped coming to the lunches and more and more government lawyers, mostly deputy prosecuting attorneys, came.

There were more and more of them because the county was adding to its payroll at a stunning rate. The county increasingly regulated things; recycling, landscaping standards, complicated licensing of business, and providing social services to criminals like substance abuse counseling for drunk drivers. It took more and more lawyers to do all this. Now the Courthouse Café was almost entirely prosecutors, court administrators, and a few judges (who weren't supposed to have lunch with people who were appearing in cases before them, but who really cared).

On the day he would never forget, John was having lunch, a turkey sandwich and cup of cheddar broccoli soup, at a table of fellow prosecutors and was talking about his latest case. For some reason, he looked up at the front door.

He shit his pants. He literally defecated in his pants; he could feel the warm gooey poop in his underwear.

There was a man with a ski mask and an assault rifle. The man walked in calmly, looking for tables with people wearing suits, which was most of them. Then, the man pointed his gun at them and started shooting. The man in the ski mask seemed to know what he was doing. He handled the gun like he had military training.

It all happened in slow motion. John saw people next to him explode. Dark red blood was everywhere, along with pink mists of blood when people got shot. The sound was deafening.

John froze. He knew he shouldn't just sit there, but he couldn't move. His brain was telling his body to move, but it wouldn't. Oddly, he was thinking about the mess in his pants and wanted to clean himself. Then he realized what was happening and thought he should dive under the table, but he couldn't.

He just sat there. The gunman finished at two tables near the front door and came up to John's table.

John knew what was about to happen. The gunman pointed his rifle right at him and everything went black.

John woke up in an ambulance. His left shoulder hurt like hell. He passed out again.

He was released from the hospital nine days later. The gunman missed his head and hit his shoulder, instead. John was sure it was Grant Matson, but it turned out it was another guy. Some loser jack-off who had his property taken by the county to sell to a real estate development. Loser.

But getting shot, and maybe the heavy pain killers, caused John to start thinking about what he was doing. When he was going in and out of consciousness over the past several days, he had dreams about what he was doing to people. He would wake up and realize that he was doing horrible things. He was cheating in court and hurting people. He decided to resign as a prosecutor and tell the newspaper all that had been happening in the prosecutor's office.

Then he thought about it. His bosses had enough dirt on him to get his law license taken and charged with crimes. Perjury, for example. Obstruction of justice. He was afraid that if he told on his bosses that the police would magically find some drugs in his car or something. He'd seen that happen before.

Besides, John quickly realized, there were no private-sector jobs for him. He was trapped.

A nurse walked in with a smile. "You're going home," she said. An orderly had a wheelchair for him.

John was glad to be back home, even if he couldn't move his arm and got dizzy if he stood up. At first, it didn't bother him. Then he kept hearing gunfire at night. It was coming from all over Olympia. There were no sirens, though. He thought about that. Then he got worried. In the few days from when he got shot until now, he learned that almost all the police were either not showing up or were protecting the capitol grounds or protecting elected officials. They weren't patrolling and stopping crime.

"Pop, pop, pop!" Those shots are really close, John thought. Then he heard a woman and a child scream. Then a man yelling and more shots. Then nothing.

John was now alert like he'd never been before. He tried to get up and get his golf club to defend himself. He didn't have a gun because, he now realized, he always counted on the police to take care of him. It had always worked before. Now he was terrified and felt pathetic trying to hold a golf club up while trying not to fall over.

It was silent. After a while, he relaxed.

"Crash!" Someone was breaking down John's door. He couldn't believe it. He went to call the police. He dialed 911 and got a recording saying, "All circuits are busy. Please try again." He threw the phone down and picked up his golf club.

The door to his bedroom flew open and two men with flashlights and shiny long knives came at him. He felt a searing pain in his face and then things went black.