

FOREVER
MARKED

TARGET UNDERCOVER BOOK I

FOREVER MARKED

A NOVEL

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DEDICATION



The men and women who are loyal to this country,
protecting those who govern it
even at the risk of losing their lives.

BOOK ONE

*Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.*

—Prov. 29:25 (NIV)

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story off the ground.

PROLOGUE



THE CASKET HAD a bronze cast to it. The inside lining was pink and gathered at the center in the shape of a rose. The form of a loved one lay inside. Her head rested on a pink pillow; her hands were clasped in front of her, a rosebud beneath them. Her soft, dark shoulder-length hair was straight, parted in the middle—the way she always wore it.

It was time for Brad Reynolds, his son, Martin, and daughter, Freda, to bid a final farewell to wife and mother before closing the lid. Tears streaked Brad's face as he thought about that fateful evening. Who would have known that a simple stroll into the night air not far from their home would end up stripping him of the one he loved most? Gazing at her form, his mind forced him back to the night she had breathed her last.



Fireworks exploded, beautifully arrayed in red, white, and blue sparkles, the dark sky providing a grand backdrop. It was a perfect end to a perfect Fourth of July. Marilyn gasped as the next one exploded.

“That was beautiful, wasn't it, Hon,” he commented. He felt her body jerk and tightened his arm around her. He caught her as she collapsed and eased her to the pavement.

XII FOREVER MARKED

When she opened her eyes briefly, he saw surprise as well as pain reflecting from them. He looked further down her body and saw blood oozing from her beige cotton blouse. He ripped the blouse at the tear, knowing what he would see. Quickly, he took off his shirt, put it over the wound, and applied pressure.

“No!” he screamed and covered her with his body. “No!”

Freda and Martin dashed down the sidewalk toward them.

“What happened?” Freda shouted.

“Get back!” their father yelled. “Call 9-1-1. Your mother has been shot! Stay in the house!”

“Hang on, Babe!” he sobbed. “Help’s coming. Just hang on.”

Marilyn grabbed at his hand, gasping. “Brad . . . honey . . . promise me,” she said. Her voice quivered. “No revenge. No rev . . .” her voice trailed off and her eyes fixed straight ahead.

“No!” Brad cried. “Marilyn! Marilyn!” He sobbed loudly. Piercing sirens announced the arrival of medical attention that was too late.



Captain Meyers put a hand on his shoulder and brought him back to the present. “Come on,” he said, tugging on Brad’s arm. “Let’s go.”

As he walked away, Brad heard his daughter make a commitment. He turned back and watched as she sobbed uncontrollably.

“I’ll hunt him down, Mom,” she said. “I’ll make him pay if it’s the last thing I do.”

The captain opened the passenger front door of the patrol car for Brad and opened the back door for Freda and Martin. Once they were all inside the car, Brad turned and looked at his son and daughter.

He pointed a finger at them. “Stay out of it!” he demanded. He was silent until he gathered his composure. “You don’t know what you’re getting yourself into.”

“That’s my mother!” Freda cried. “My mother is in that casket, soon to be buried beneath the dirt. I’ll make him pay! I’ll find out who her murderer is and I’ll make him pay!”

CHAPTER ONE



“WALLET FOUND IN Cafe.” Brad Reynolds glanced at the news article. He read the next line out loud, “In the toilet tank?” He wished the newspapers would report something other than crime. Every time he looked at one, it was an unwelcome reminder of his profession—the profession from which he had been forced to retire. At one time, he was like many others. Police work was exciting—or so he thought.

“Humph,” Brad muttered. “Exciting!” He shook his head and tossed the paper on the table. Now he just thanked God he was retired.

He was tired of the beatings he had to endure. Many of those beatings came from members of the police force. Brad couldn’t say anything to his fellow officers to let them know he was on their side—much to the contrary. His job was to pose as a crook in order to catch a crook, who ended up being someone from his own profession.

Brad soon discovered those who would sell out to the wrong side for one reason or another—usually for money. Captain Wilford Meyers of the Wellsville, Kansas, Police Department, would send him in among the rookies to report those who were unfit to be a public servant. Now past the age of fifty, he remembered the first time he met the captain. Brad had just moved from Washington, DC.



Twenty years earlier.

Brad sat in a chair on the other side of Captain Meyers' desk and smiled nervously as the captain looked over his résumé. The captain looked up, then read aloud. "Brad Reynolds, Special Services Agent. It says here you left the agency on your own."

"Yes, sir," Brad said.

"I take it working undercover for the US government wasn't that exciting," the captain commented. "You're only in your mid thirties."

"To be truthful, sir, I couldn't stand the thought of my family being targeted by those who didn't appreciate my services."

"According to this, you have a G-7 clearance."

"That is right, sir," he answered.

"Well, your stats are in good shape." The captain rose from his chair and kicked it aside. He held out his hand. "Welcome aboard, Reynolds. I've always wanted an undercover man. I've got just the spot for you."

Brad grinned broadly, his white teeth appearing even whiter beneath his dark brown mustache. He shook the captain's hand. "Thank you, sir."

"Just between you and me, it's Cap," the captain told him. "What is your name of preference?"

"Brad, sir."

"Do you have a family, Brad?"

"My wife, Marilyn, and my kids, Freda, who is eighteen going on thirty, I think. My son, Martin, is thirteen. He's more laid back."

"Good," Captain Meyers said. "Sounds like a nice family. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?"

"Yes, sir," Brad said. "Do you know of a good church I could take my family to?"

"Come try the one I go to sometime," Cap told him.

"Thank you. I'd like that," Brad said.

"In fact, I'll swing by your place and pick you up on Sunday at 10:00 A.M." He held up Brad's application. "I already have your address."

"Thank you, sir."

"Other than that, I'll meet you in Edgerton on Friday at 8:00 A.M." The captain gave him the address and directions.

"Edgerton, sir?"

“People in this town like to speculate when they see the head of the police department meet with an individual. They are good people; they just have their faults. Plus, the fewer people who see you, the better. I’m sure you understand, having worked undercover before.”

“Yes, sir, I do.”



The ringing telephone brought Brad out of his stupor and into the present. He answered it on the fourth ring.

“Yeah, Cap.” He listened for several seconds. “Yes, I glanced at the paper this morning, but I didn’t read the entire article.”

He rubbed his forehead as he listened.

“The wallet belonged to Steve Parsons . . . of course I remember him. He was the rookie who was taking advantage of the vagrants. But what does that have to do with me?” He was silent for a moment. “The only time he’s ever seen me was when I posed as a homeless person, so he wouldn’t know who I was, right? . . . A mole in the department . . . Do you know who it is . . . Oh, wonderful! Just wonderful!”

He paused, listening to the captain, and then spoke. “Okay, Cap, I’ll see you when you get here. Maybe we can figure out something together.”

Brad laid the phone on the counter and wondered who the mole was. It had to be someone who had known him before he moved to Wellsville. He hoped his former partner hadn’t followed him. He didn’t think Steve Parsons would be watching for a way to get even with him.

Steve Parsons. Brad closed his eyes and ran his hands through his short graying hair as he remembered the incident that had brought him and the ex-rookie face to face.



Twenty years previous, Brad was in his late thirties posing as a vagrant—sometimes it was at the end of Main Street near the railroad tracks, at other times in the alley behind the buildings. There were those who had found hard luck on their side and Brad was able to find his way into their camps.

Brad and Marilyn wanted to find a way to help these men and women after he became one of them and saw the conditions of their lives. Some had been wealthy at one time and had lost everything. Others simply gave up after losing a loved one.

After watching and listening to things that went on in the “world of the vagrant,” he realized that these people had been living this life for so long that most of them did not want to change the way they lived. Still, he sensed that a few would give anything to change their way of living. They just didn’t know how to do so.

The site where he had assumed his role as a homeless person was the beat Steve Parsons patrolled. Someone had been beating up the homeless and leaving them for dead. In some cases, as Brad had seen, the person had been injured so badly, it would have been better if he had died. This person who had been so cruel didn’t care that he or she not only stripped the homeless of their meager possessions, but had also stripped them of any hope or dignity they might have had. He had to know who was behind this and why.

Steve Parsons was a young rookie assigned to that area and should have been able to provide protection to some extent for the men and women who had been treated worse than animals. Brad leaned against a building, his thick, matted dark brown hair disheveled, and his body reeking of perspiration and other odors.

One evening in particular, as he leaned against a building, a man walked toward him. There was evidence that the shirt the man wore had at one time been light blue, but it was now a dingy gray; a dark brown spot covered the right side of it. The dingy black slacks had blotches of food stains on them. Except for the straggled gray hair that was matted together and covered the man’s ears in strands, he looked to be in his early forties.

“Evenin’,” Brad mumbled.

“Good evening,” the man said. “Listen, my friend, you’re new around here. I thought I should warn you.”

The gentleman looked both ways. Seeing no one coming, he continued.

“The patrol officer here is very particular about who comes around. If he does not like you, you will wish you had stayed out of this area.

If he decides he likes you, he'll make you stand on the corner while holding this ungodly sign."

The man held up the sign for Brad to read. PLEASE HELP. UNABLE TO WORK. GOD BLESS. He looked up and down the street before he spoke again.

"The patrolman found out that if he added the phrase "God bless," people give more readily of their meager substance. How could someone do that in the name of God Almighty?" His voice quivered and he sniffed. "Even at that, when some kind soul gives us money, he forces us to give it to him. If we don't receive any, he hits us with that horrid nightstick he carries. Poor Frederick. He was one who didn't receive any. Poor Frederick," the older man repeated, shaking his head. "Poor Frederick."

Brad noticed tears in the older man's eyes. This man's perfect use of the English language increased Brad's curiosity. He wondered what could have possibly caused this man to be in the throes of this type of life.

A patrol car turned the corner and the vagrant moved on quickly. Brad watched as the patrol car stopped and the driver got out. The officer walked toward him, swinging his nightstick, whistling, and stepped onto the sidewalk. His uniform was starched and ironed, every crease in place. His uniform cap was without flaw, the bill a black and shiny patent leather. His black shoes had that spit-shined appearance.

When the older man started to run, the officer grabbed him. Brad staggered toward them and heard the officer speak in a hushed tone. He struck the older man with his nightstick several times.

"Unhand me, sir!" the older man cried out in pain, trying to get away. "Unhand me, I say!"

Brad stumbled close and bumped into the officer, mumbling loudly.

"Hey, leave 'im 'lone! He ain't hurtin' nuttin'."

The rookie replied, "Just go on and mind your own business, pal, or you'll be next!"

Brad looked the patrolman in the face. It was Steve Parsons—the officer paid to offer protection to these people to keep someone from molesting them. He wanted to shake the officer and shout a warning to him: "Don't you know what you're doing to these people and yourself?"

You're causing them irreparable harm and you're plunging yourself toward destruction!" But there was nothing he could do. Brad hoped the stench of perspiration, foul-smelling breath, and facial stubble would repulse the rookie. He was pleased with the results. The rookie gave him a shove and told him to beat it.

As Brad began stumbling, he heard Parsons order the man to give him the money he had. When he told him he didn't have it, Parsons began shouting and beating him harder. Brad turned so quickly he surprised himself.

"Leave 'im 'lone, pig!" Brad said and spat on the officer.

For his efforts, he received a smarting blow to his head. "You're next, pal!" Parsons told him.

Brad fell to the ground in a stupor. It wasn't until Parsons returned to the patrol car and drove away that Brad rolled over. He moaned and winced as he rubbed the place on the side of his head. Several minutes later, he got up, staggered toward the injured man, and knelt over him.

"You 'kay?" Brad slurred his words. "He shun't have dun that. He jus' shun't have."

Two days later, he and Captain Meyers met at a café in Edgerton. He gave the captain his findings.

"I'm afraid Parsons may kill the vagrant," Brad said. He picked up his cup and took a drink.

"Of course, I'll have Parsons removed from the force and his actions will earn him time in jail," said the captain.

Brad nodded. "I just wish there was something more I could have done to help him. You know, I believe he had been someone of importance. You should have heard the way he spoke. Not just any homeless person uses the English language like he did."

The captain rubbed his chin and looked down for several seconds. "If you see him again, bring him by my office. I want to meet him. In the meantime, you be careful. How's the goose egg?"

Brad rubbed his head carefully. "Still smarts."

"Like I said, be careful. I don't get many chances to have a good man with your experience and I don't want to replace you. I'd say the Special Services Agency's loss was my gain."