

# Beneath A Weeping Sky

*A River City Crime Novel*

By  
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*Rain falls into the open eyes of the dead  
Again again with its pointless sound  
When the moon finds them they are the color of everything  
- William Stanley Merwin*

Part I  
March 1996  
RIVER CITY, WASHINGTON

*Life being what it is, one dreams of revenge.*

--Paul Gauguin,  
French Post-Impressionist painter (1848 – 1903)

ONE  
Wednesday, March 6<sup>th</sup>  
0807 hours

Heather Torin never intended to be a victim.

No one ever does.

She ran the same route every day except Sunday, when she didn't jog at all. It was two and eight-tenths miles long according to the odometer in her Honda Accord. She would have preferred to jog a three-mile course, but the route was just too perfect and so she sacrificed the two-tenths in the interest of aesthetics.

Running was the one thing she did entirely for herself. She enjoyed the firmness it gave her legs and buttocks, but it was the mental benefits that kept her going out day after day. After her three miles, almost every frustration from her day was flushed out, pouring out of her with the sweat on her forehead.

Wednesday's run was usually the hardest run of the week for some reason. Saturday morning runs were her favorite. She left before anything in her day had happened and with no frustrations to burn off, she experienced a calm that she imagined was similar to meditation.

Her breathing was deep and fluid as she padded along through the damp streets of River City's north side. It had been a mild winter, even though traces of snow still littered the ground where it had been piled high during the winter months. March began as a very wet month, but it had none of the iciness of January and February. Heather enjoyed the coolness of the air as she drew it in and released it, trying to keep her breathing as slow as possible. Trees lined the street beneath an obscured, grey sky above.

She passed the two mile mark. *It's all on the way home now*, she told herself. Good thing, too, since her legs felt a little weak today for some reason. She forced herself to keep up the pace as she approached the park.

Heather liked zigging and zagging along the trail of the small, heavily-wooded park. The coolness in the air was palpable. She could almost taste the wetness and the bark on the pine trees. The damp earth muffled her footfalls. She skipped over a root that protruded from a massive pine.

She sensed the movement rather than saw it. The blow struck her in the rib cage, sending a shock wave of pain through her chest. She felt a pair of arms wrapping around her waist, grasping at her. Those arms slid downward until they clutched at her legs. Like a running back caught in open field, she took two stumbling steps to her left and she fell to the ground. The bulk of her attacker's weight was not on her. She tried to squirm loose.

"Don't move," a man's cold, angry voice growled at her.

Fear lanced through her belly. She opened her mouth to scream but he clamped a hand over her mouth and chin. His fingers mashed her lips into her teeth.

*Oh, God. He's going to rape me.*

Heather thought of her parents and her sister. She saw her funeral in a flash of light.

The attacker kept one hand firmly sealed over her mouth and the other arm around her waist as he half-carried, half-dragged her off the small trail and into the wooded brush. She kicked and struggled gamely, but his grip was strong and she could not break it.

Heather sobbed once underneath his strong, smooth hand. She didn't want to die.

"Shut up, bitch," the man whispered. "Shut up or I'll lay the whammo on you."

Heather's breath raced in and out of her nose. She couldn't get enough air.

The attacker flung her to the ground. She landed on her back with a dull thud. She felt a curious pain in her chest and realized that her wind had been knocked out of her. *Funny, she thought. That hasn't happened since she was about eleven and fell out of the tree in Grandma's—*

The attacker fell on top of her, forcing her legs open.

He forced her running shorts down her hips and tore at her panties. The action registered slowly with Heather.

*He's going to rape me.*

Heather shuddered.

*My God. He's going to kill me after he rapes me.*

She struggled to get air into her lungs as she swam in darkness.

*I should open my eyes. In case he doesn't kill me, I can identify him.*

She forced her eyes wide open and stared up into her attacker's face. It was covered with a ski mask. The impersonal wool scared her even more. She tried harder to inhale so that she could scream.

Still no breath came.

The attacker fumbled with his pants, his hips still pressed against her thighs. She felt him shudder momentarily. His breath came in ragged gasps. Then he stopped.

For a moment, all was still. There were no human voices, only the distant sound of automobiles and closer, the evening sounds of birds. Heather stared into the man's eyes and searched for mercy. She could find nothing behind the impenetrable gaze.

He rolled her over onto her stomach.

"Don't move, bitch or I'll lay the whammo on you."

Her lungs ached.

"Please," she tried to say, but there was no breath to propel the words out her mouth.

She waited for the pain, expecting him to force himself into her and terrified at not knowing when the attack would come. She felt her fingers and toes twitching.

*Will he kill me afterwards?*

After an eternity, the smell of wet earth and leaves filled her nostrils.

Smell. She could smell. And breathe.

She took two short breaths.

No attack came.

Still breathing in short breaths, she twisted her neck and looked behind her.

He was gone.

She rose to a sitting position, full of disbelief. She hadn't heard him leave. But he was definitely gone.

Heather stood shakily, pulling her running shorts up and brushing the dirt and leaves from her hair. She stood perfectly still for what seemed like an hour or a lifetime, afraid he would come back and kill her for moving. But no one came. She stood alone in that small wooded area, where she first cursed God, then thanked him.

She eventually walked home on rubbery legs, her mind dazed and racing.

What had she done to cause this?

Who was going to know?

Her mother?

She drew in a deep, wavering breath.

Oh, God, her *father*?

What was everyone going to think?

Right then, Heather Torin decided not to tell anyone about what happened to her. But she stopped jogging that very day.

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## 0822 hours

The dank smell of the laundry room sickened him, but not as much as his own weakness. Cursing, he ripped the pieces of clothing from his body and slapped them into the empty washer. The sweatshirt and pants were soaked in sweat, as was the woolen ski mask. His underwear was soaked in semen, which he wiped away from his body. The rubbing caused him to twitch half-erect.

*Don't touch that! Dirty little boy!*

His erection faded.

He hurled the wet, sticky underwear into the washer. Then he quickly added soap and turned on the machine.

*Dead.*

*Dead.*

*She was dead.*

He shook his head. He needed a shower.

Trudging upstairs, a sense of great failure enveloped him. He'd failed.

Failed to lay the whammo on that bitch in the park because he'd been too excited.

More than that, he'd failed to show his mother who was stronger. And now she was forever gone from his grasp. He'd stood in his dark suit just yesterday as they lowered her into the ground. His girlfriend held onto his arm and cried for him because he didn't let a single tear fall.

He couldn't cry.

He didn't want to cry.

He'd wanted to scream.

He'd wanted to laugh.

He'd wanted to rip her from the casket and lay the whammo on her.

But he only stood at the graveside, solemn. Letting no one know. Not any of the mourners. Not the priest. Not the faking bitch at his side. No one knew his mind. No one knew his plan.

But now his plan had failed.

*He had failed.*

The warm water that pulsed from the shower head did little to wash that feeling away. He turned the water on hotter yet, but the scalding heat did not make a difference. It didn't burn away his shame. He stood under it as long as he could stand it, then twisted the dial back down to a comfortable level.

"I really should have laid the whammo on her," he told the flowered tile of the shower stall.

Things were going to change.

This was an inauspicious beginning.

He would have to do better the next time.