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DEAN  
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GOING  
HOME  
IN THE  
DARK

**GOING  
HOME  
IN THE  
DARK**

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**GOING  
HOME  
IN THE  
DARK**

**DEAN  
KOONTZ**

 **THOMAS & MERCER**





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First edition



*This book is dedicated to David Brouwer.  
I'm still here. Thank you!*

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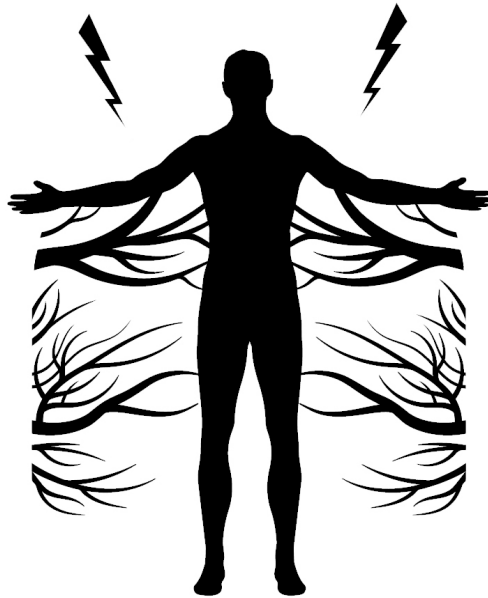
Though a good deal is too strange to be believed, nothing  
is too strange to have happened.

—*Thomas Hardy*

Are you alone?  
Well, I am too.  
Stand together.  
Our time is due.  
The love of friends  
Will see us through.



ONE



OUR  
BELOVED  
DEAD  
AMIGO

# READ THIS FIRST OR LIVE TO REGRET IT FOREVER

The following story is true as far as the truth of anything can be known. All names were changed to protect the privacy—and lives—of the “four amigos” and others who endured these events. Likewise, details of the amigos’ careers were altered for the same purpose but were not revised to make them either more or less impressive. Maple Grove, the town in this story, is real enough, although its name is *not* Maple Grove. Some have suggested the “four amigos” produced this story for money. Absurd. I’ve sworn under oath that in fact none of the four will receive a penny from this book or associated rights.

How I came to know of these events in such specific detail will cause much conjecture that I do not encourage. Already, powerful individuals in my professional life have pressured me to reveal my sources, but I have not done so—and will not—because lives are at stake. The speculation that I am the “fifth amigo” and have expunged my role in this is an unlikely theory that I will neither confirm nor deny for legal reasons.

—Dean Koontz

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## TWO POUNDS FIVE OUNCES

From Rebecca Crane's backyard, forty steps led to the beach, where sharp-billed sandpipers scurried along the fringe of foaming surf, pecking without cease for their sustenance, as if they were an enfevered species that never knew a moment of peace. That morning, she descended the stairs twelve times and climbed them eleven times before she set off on a run along the shore.

At thirty-five, Rebecca wasn't old; however, she wasn't young, either, not by the standards of her profession. In dog years, she was three times dead. If she'd been an elephant, a species that lived seventy years, she would be halfway through her life, but if she had been a gorilla, she would have as little as a week left and certainly not more than several months. If she had been a kangaroo, she would have hopped into the void perhaps twelve years earlier.

She knew the average lifespans of many animals, not because she was a veterinarian or zoologist, but because she had a healthy fear of death that was somewhat greater than the average person's healthy fear of death. She wasn't depressive or paranoid or obsessed with her mortality. Nothing like that. She had a sunny disposition and was quick to laugh even at jokes about death, though when the humor was related to something else, her laughter was more robust.

Her family history did not give her reason to worry that her life might be cut short. Her mother, Sally, was still alive and vigorous and living in Miami Beach with someone named Fernando. Her maternal grandparents, Charlie and Ruth Crane, were alive and playing ferocious pickleball with other octogenarians in Palm Springs. Sally refused to reveal the identity of her daughter's father, whom she hated for reasons she wouldn't discuss. A

year earlier, she told Rebecca that he recently died because he trusted an alcoholic bungee master to measure his jumping cord for him.

Sally wasn't the most truthful person in the world, but in this case she seemed sincere. When she described how "that reckless fool" had slammed full speed into a barge full of garbage that was passing under the bungee bridge, her laughter was unmistakably genuine.

Rebecca never actually died in her dreams but woke just as she was shot or stabbed—or as she was set on fire, thrown off a cliff, run down by a truck, crammed into a wood chipper, strangled with a scarf, beheaded by a scimitar, devoured by something mysterious with a large mouth . . . Not all of her dreams ended with her murder in progress, only 97 percent of them.

As she ran south along the beach, the Pacific Ocean sparkled with morning sunshine, and a formation of pelicans glided along in concert with her. She stayed a respectful distance from the breaking surf because she'd too often drowned in her dreams or been devoured by something weird that came out of the water.

Although she didn't put a lot of faith in psychiatry, she'd gone to a therapist who fixated on her dreams and gave them more importance than she believed he should. He insisted that they were rooted in some trauma in her childhood, and his unhinged insistence eventually caused her to stop consulting him.

Yes, she was fatherless, and her mother was a piece of work, ill-suited for the responsibilities of motherhood, always running off with men who had Spanish names. However, Rebecca had grown up in a peaceful and picturesque town in the heartland, much like a place in a 1950s TV program, where she was raised by Grandpa Charlie and Grandma Ruth. Charlie and Ruth pretended to be lovebirds, though in fact they loathed each other, but it worked for them because they took great pleasure in loathing. Although her grandparents' house was a cold-war zone where poisonous words were coated in a candy of faux affection, Rebecca had wonderful friends who, with her, called themselves the four amigos. Three had fled Maple Grove after high school, but they remained in touch with one another almost two decades later.

Her violent dreams and her healthy fear of enduring a horrific death were more likely than not a consequence of her work, which was demanding and stressful. Her profession provided significant income and

emotional satisfaction, but no stability, and half the people with whom she worked were crazy.

After running two miles south, she turned north toward home, though retracing her steps would not be the end of her exercise session. She needed to climb and descend the beach stairs at least six more times because she was two pounds and five ounces over her ideal weight, and she was thirty-five years old, which was almost two hundred fourteen in dog years.

Calves afire, thighs aching, abdominal muscles fluttering, she ascended the stairs from the beach for the last time that day. She stepped through her gate and, with a key, locked it behind her. As she made her way up the sloped garden path, she was dismayed to hear her labored breathing as loud and desperate as if she were again in that cornfield at midnight, fleeing from Judyface, the eleven-fingered maniac in the Judy Garland mask, whom she had failed to kill with a pitchfork in *Shriek*.

There had been a time when, after a morning run and the torture of the stairs, she had *danced* up this brick walkway, past the roses, danced with all the grace of Audrey Hepburn, with the blithe and giggly charm of Goldie Hawn.

Now, when she reached the patio, Rebecca wanted to flop on one of the chaise lounges and stare at the sea until she recovered from the near-death experience of trying to lose two pounds five ounces. However, the patio surrounded the seventy-foot pool in which she swam a hundred laps on days when she didn't run, an ordeal she could not block from memory and that she was loath to contemplate.

She stepped into the kitchen and closed the door and relocked both deadbolts against all maniacs with unusual anatomical features and weird face coverings.

From one of the two Sub-Zero refrigerators she snared a bottle of a foul-tasting but rapid-hydrating beverage rich in electrolytes. Standing in the stink of her sweat, she consumed the witch's brew without the grimacing that would have promoted fine wrinkles at the corners of her eyes.

The exterior of her house was classic Cape Cod. Shingled roof. Shingled walls. Glossy white millwork. The interior, however, was sleek and ultramodern.

Rebecca liked to think the house was the opposite of her; she was Hollywood glamour on the outside, when she wasn't sweating like a pig in

a luau pit, but a small-town down-home girl-next-door type on the inside. She could be just as happy if she had to give up her acting career and earn a living as a waitress in a diner. That was what her publicists wanted her to be, but she believed it was more or less who she really was, just Becky Crane from Maple Grove, except for the wanting-to-be-a-waitress thing.

As she stood in her enormous kitchen—with its full array of stainless-steel appliances and Brazilian-blue quartzite countertops, her perspiration spattering the honed limestone floor—she found it amazing that she'd come from a picturesque backwater like Maple Grove to the bright lights and scary dysfunction of Los Angeles, from girl nerd to celebrated performer, in only seventeen years.

Although the time seemed to have passed faster than clocks could account it, her success had not come overnight. For three years, she'd worked at this and that—as a dog walker, a personal trainer, a waffle-house hostess . . . For two shameful months, she'd engaged in phone sales, making cold calls to peddle something called the Golden Years Medicine Cabinet to seniors, which consisted of an arthritis-pain “diminimizer,” the world's most reliable toe-fungus eliminator, a favored antacid of presidents and kings so exclusive that it wasn't sold in stores, a stool softener guaranteed to cure constipation when all similar remedies failed, and other products for the treatment of warts, age spots, split nails, and the tragedy of uncontrolled flatulence.

Then she got her big break in *Shriek*, which for two weeks was the number one movie in America. Eighteen months later, *Shriek and Shriek Again* doubled the box office of the first film. Rebecca was only twenty-six years old when *Shriek Hard*, *Shriek Harder* completed the trilogy; it was the biggest hit of the three and the first to garner critical acclaim.

Of the scores of young actors who appeared in the franchise, Rebecca was the only one to become a star. All the other characters were killed off after such a short amount of screen time that they couldn't make a lasting impression.

She felt sorry for them, though not really. Hollywood is a dog-eat-dog environment, which is no reflection on dogs, only something that people say.

Between the *Shriek* films, there were marking-time roles, but following the third movie came the biggest break. She was cast as one of five hot young strivers in the city, an edgy situation comedy called *Enemies*.

Like *Friends* but mean, full of snark and vicious put-down humor, it was a *Friends* for this new, less friendly, more desperate, cynical America—an immediate hit. The eighth and final season, which had finished filming a week before Rebecca’s run with the sandpipers, would begin to air this coming October.

She was booked to start a major film in four months, a period drama as elegant and emotional as *Downton Abbey*, although with a violent sociopathic nephew living in the attic unbeknownst to the family below and a supernatural surprise in a secret cellar under the horse stables.

On this fine August morning, after a long shower, she ate an egg-white omelet with kale and zucchini cooked in a tablespoon of olive oil, garnished with thin slices of avocado. In the screenplay, her character was described as “wasp-waisted,” which did not imply that the woman was insectile, only that she was voluptuous top and bottom but minimalist in the middle.

As always, after eating, Rebecca hand-washed and dried her plate, the flatware, the frying pan, the whisk, and other utensils. She left everything in the kitchen sink for one of her housekeepers to arrange in the dishwasher. For reasons she did not understand and never analyzed, she experienced a profound uneasiness bordering on anxiety at the idea of anyone seeing traces of oil or a smattering of crumbs that were a consequence of her having eaten a meal.

Although the compulsion to clean up after herself was stronger at home than beyond the walls of her house, it sometimes overcame her in a restaurant. She carried a pack or two of wet wipes in her purse. On occasion, after finishing each course, she swabbed the plate clean before the waiter returned to collect it, although only when dining with companions who had such colorful eccentricities of their own that they wouldn’t even raise an eyebrow at her wet wipes, which was just about everyone in her social circle.

This benign obsession wasn’t consistent in all aspects of her life, but it manifested at places other than the dining table. When she finished taking a shower, she squeegeed the walls and floor, and then wiped them dry with towels to ensure no one discovered water spots or clusters of shampoo bubbles or, God forbid, a loose hair from either her head or elsewhere. She wiped the bar of soap to be sure it was clean, scrubbed the soap dish, polished the showerhead, the handles, and the other hardware. The

bathroom sink was cleaner after she brushed her teeth than before she attended to that task.

However, if the mess was not of her making and was in no way related to her person, Rebecca could be as indifferent to it as if it didn't exist. One Christmas Eve, when the house staff had been given four days off, an inebriated guest had cast the contents of her stomach across a living room sofa. Rebecca had closed the door on the fragrant chamber and allowed the voluminous upchuck to seep so far into the padding that purchasing new furniture proved to be cheaper than reupholstering the saturated sectional.

So, after the dishes and instruments of breakfast preparation were washed, dried, and stacked in the sink for the attention of a housekeeper, Rebecca headed for the front door. She intended to keep a series of appointments—hairstylist, nail technician, leg waxer. She stepped onto a front porch large enough and properly furnished to host at least one of a cocktail party for at least fifty people.

Her candy-apple-red EV waited in the driveway to convey her in style or perhaps disintegrate when its three-thousand-pound lithium battery burst into flames, most likely the former. An acquaintance of hers, a famous director, had barely escaped with his life when his EV terminated itself in that fashion. The next day, he bought two more because, as he said, "My devotion to this technology is the foundation of my faith, and we all need to believe in something."

Rebecca's property manager, William Plantagenet, saw to it that the colorful sedan was always charged, immaculate, and waiting where she needed it when she needed it. His name was Ned Farkus before he changed it to be an actor and then failed at acting so crashingly that he considered returning to court to reacquire his birth name. However, there had been nothing about Farkus to recommend it.

As Rebecca settled behind the steering wheel and pulled the door shut, she had the disturbing feeling that something was about to happen that would change the course of her life, something worse than an exploding lithium battery.

[The previous sentence is a flagrant example of *foreshadowing*, a plot device that creates a pleasant anticipation in the reader. However, as the author, I feel the need to be honest with you, even at the cost of this intrusion, and I'm compelled to acknowledge that besides contributing to a building atmosphere of menace, Rebecca's "disturbing feeling" also serves



as an effective way to end Chapter One before it grows too long. Studies indicate that modern readers prefer shorter chapters. Before purchasing a novel, they conduct a “flip-through” to sample the prose, consider the readability of the typeface, and be sure the number of chapters promises a quick read. Because Rebecca is rich and glamorous and one of the film-business elite, we expect her to be an insufferable narcissist, but she is a likable, vulnerable person whose “disturbing feeling” concerns us and whose fate matters to us just enough to propel us to Chapter Two, which is shorter than Chapter One.]