

FURY

STEVEN JAMES





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*For
Elisabeth, Katherine and Mei Li*

There are four government agencies that do not appear in the national budget. Officially, they have no staff. Their funding is not recorded.

The United States federal government continues to deny that they even exist.

One of those agencies searched for nearly a year to find an appropriate location to conduct its research.

And it found one.

Near a state prison in the isolated forests of northern Wisconsin.

PROLOGUE

“Do you know why you’re here, Daniel?”

Daniel Byers found himself blinking and tilting his head to the side. A stark fluorescent light stared down at him. He was in a bed, on his back, disoriented. “What?”

“I asked if you know why you’re here.”

Looking around, he saw that he was in a hospital room. A window on the far wall had heavy shades drawn across it, letting only a muted smear of sunlight in around the edges. It was impossible to tell what time of day it was. He had a piercing headache, his thoughts twisting in strange, uncontrollable threads. But one thing he did remember clearly. “They said I hurt somebody,” he mumbled.

Who? Who would you have hurt?

“Is that all?”

“Yes.”

A looming man with a detective’s badge stood beside the bed. The gaunt doctor next to him was wearing a white lab coat, but he remained silent as the detective spoke. “So you don’t remember what happened with your father?”

“My father?”

Daniel thought hard, tried to remember, but all that came to mind were dim images of his high school basketball game the other night, of visiting a barn, of standing in the snow beside a dead wolf—twirling, merging worlds of waking and sleeping and dark nightmares cycling in on themselves.

There was no way to tell which images were memories and which were dreams.

You're still in a dream. This is a dream.

It has to be a dream.

Your dad's okay.

Nothing happened to him.

Daniel tried to sit up, but found it impossible. He looked down at the bed. His wrists and ankles were strapped down.

What is going on here?

“What did that nurse mean when she said I hurt somebody? Did she mean my dad?”

“So you don’t recall anything about last night?”

“Tell me if he’s alright. You have to—”

“Blood,” the detective interrupted. “Does that jar your memory?”

“What?”

“Blood.”

“I don’t know anything about any blood.”

He leaned over Daniel. “Who’s Madeline?”

“Madeline?”

“We have your phone. We know about the texts. What did you do with him, young man?”

“With who?”

“Your father.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

But he did remember the texts.

And he did remember the name Madeline.

“He needs to rest,” the doctor said. “It’s time for his medication.”

“Tell me what’s going on,” Daniel demanded. “Is my dad okay?”

The detective looked severely at Daniel. “That’s what we need you to tell us.”

“I’m going to give you something to help you sleep.” The doctor gestured toward the doorway and a nurse entered. She produced a syringe and handed it to him and he bent over Daniel.

“I don’t want to sleep.” He wrestled against the straps holding him down. “I want to remember!”

The detective finally stepped aside as the nurse held his arm still and the doctor stabbed the needle into it.

“No!”

But the world was already going bleary, fading out like a light on a dimmer switch that someone was slowly dialing off.

Daniel could only think of one word while the deep, sweeping nothingness swarmed over him: blood.

Then he remembered.

Yes.

He remembered the blood on his hands, the blood splattered everywhere.

What did you do to your dad, Daniel?

What did you do?

And then everything went dark.

PART I
TEARS OF BLOOD

48 HOURS EARLIER
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 21

CHAPTER ONE

7:55 A.M.

Daniel stared at his locker.

Someone had taped a DVD of the old movie *Psycho* to the outside of it.

So. Someone knew.

Ty Bell?

Maybe. Probably. He was one guy who would do this. But how he might've found out what was going on was beyond Daniel.

Over the last couple months Daniel had done his best to keep what was happening to him a secret. His closest friends knew about it, yes they did, but he trusted them and he knew they wouldn't tell.

They wouldn't have left the DVD there.

He tore it off the locker and stuck it inside for the time being, then retrieved his books and headed to his first hour English class.

As he crossed through the hallway, the other students parted to let him by, the guys nodding to him, the girls smiling shyly and tipping their gaze to the side.

Sports were huge at his school and as their quarterback and all-conference point guard, Daniel was someone the guys respected and the girls tended to be drawn to—not that he was looking for a girlfriend, though. He was with another junior, Nicole Marten, had been since October.

Thankfully, things had been going pretty well lately, not just with her, but on other fronts too. A lot better than they had been.

The blurs—visions, hallucinations, whatever you wanted to call them—had stopped, at least for the time being. Everything seemed to have settled back to normal after what'd happened in September when the girl's body was found and he saw her sit up in her coffin, heard her beg him for help, felt her grab his arm.

That day at the funeral was the first blur, the first time reality had lied to him.

But it hadn't been the last.

That whole week had been weird, surreal, but once the guy who'd killed Emily and the two other girls from the schools in the area was out of the picture, the blurs hadn't come back.

All that was over.

All that was in the past.

The blurs died when the murderer did.



Today was the last day before winter break and Daniel had an AP Calculus final, but the rest of his exams were over and other than that one test, things were light, winding down for vacation. Their last basketball game before Christmas was tonight against Coulee High.

He mentally ran through his schedule for the day: go to classes this morning, grab lunch with Kyle rather than Nicole, since she had class that hour, then head to his doctor's appointment before swinging home. Finally, at four forty-five or so, return to school to leave on the team bus for the seven o'clock game.

Daniel glanced out the window. Snowflakes were falling lightly onto the foot of snow that had already accumulated over the past month. For some parts of the country it might have seemed like a lot, but this far north in Wisconsin they were actually behind what they'd gotten by this time last year.

People around here were used to driving on snow so it took a pretty serious storm for a game to be postponed or cancelled. Still, Daniel hoped the weather wouldn't get any worse.

He caught up with Nicole just down the hall from their English classroom.

Though she normally had walnut-colored hair, she'd dyed it red a few weeks ago. She'd always gone light on the makeup—she was one of those girls who didn't really need it. Today the sweater she'd chosen matched her perceptive, green eyes. Quirky and fun, she was someone Daniel had

been friends with for years, even before they started going out a couple of months ago.

“Hey, you.” He gave her a kiss.

“Hey.” She seemed agitated.

“What is it?”

“Did you hear they found another one last night?”

“Another one?”

“Another wolf. Over by the lake.”

“Was it . . . ?”

“Yeah. Shot and left for dead—just like the others.”

“So, that’s four,” Daniel said half to himself.

“Four that’ve been found. Who knows how many others have been killed—you know, but that no one’s come across. I can’t believe someone’s doing this.”

Timber wolves, or gray wolves, were protected by law and had been making a comeback over the last decade or so in the wide, expansive forests surrounding the town of Beldon. But now someone was poaching them.

It wasn’t for their fur.

It was just for sport.

If you could call it that.

An anonymous tip line had been set up at the forest ranger’s station and Daniel’s dad, who was the sheriff, had been working with local game wardens to try to find out who was killing the wolves, but from what Daniel had heard, they weren’t making a whole lot of progress.

Nicole took caring for the environment seriously and ever since she’d first heard about the wolves being killed,

it'd troubled her deeply. This latest news was only going to make that worse.

"It'll be alright," Daniel told her. "My dad's gonna find whoever's doing this."

"I hope they put 'em away for a long time."

They entered the room and headed for their seats. Daniel's friend Kyle Goessel was already there. He flicked back a strand of his shoulder-length blond hair and nodded to Daniel. "What's up?"

"Not much," Daniel replied distractedly, still thinking about the wolves.

He'd been following the news about the wolf shootings online, reading everything he could about them.

So, four had been found.

How many more were out there?

Why only wolves in this area? Does the poacher live nearby?

Questions that needed to be answered.

But that was going to have to wait until later.

The bell rang and English class began.