

# Chapter 1

**O**n a cold, dark, dreary April morning in 2008, two U.S. marshals in an unmarked van pulled out of the headquarters parking lot for the FBI's Witness Protection Program and headed toward the Washington, D.C. beltway and I-95. Deputy John Arnold was driving, Deputy Paul Logan was riding shotgun, and both were dressed in civilian clothes. Traffic reports on their police radio were predicting slow, heavy volume on the freeway due to the drizzle and thick fog. Neither man was looking forward to the long journey ahead of them as the weather forecast had also predicted snow.

Just as they heard that unwelcome news, the van began to slide on the slick road surface, swerved, bounced, and almost crashed into another vehicle. John got the van stopped just short of its turning over and tumbling down an embankment. Paul, sitting in the front-passenger seat, had been oblivious to the dangers of the slippery road conditions until the near-accident. He turned to ask their female passenger behind them if she was okay. He could see she was visibly shaken by the incident, and he offered her some coffee from one of the thermos bottles the agents carried in the van.

Lisa von Bidmont, who was now known only as "Sister Elizabeth" in the Witness Protection Program, shivered and

declined the offer by slowly shaking her head. Her gloved hand reached into her black vinyl purse for a tissue and dabbed at a few tears. The lightweight nun's habit she was wearing was doing little to keep her warm. Wrapping her black cape tightly against her body, Lisa weakly asked if the deputies could please turn up the heat in the van.

Paul was good at reading people, and what he saw in her mournful eyes that morning was deep sadness and loneliness. She reminded him of a lost child. He very seldom felt sorry for the people in the witness program whom he helped transport to their new locations, but this woman was so different. He wished he could climb into the back seat to comfort her, all the while thinking she was the most stunning female he had ever seen. He had seen her briefly when she was in one of the FBI offices earlier that day, dressed in civilian clothes, and he had admired her amazing face and gorgeous figure.

Paul mused, *How in the world could an attractive, sexy looker like her end up as a nun? You'd think the bigwigs in the Witness Protection Program would have picked some other lifestyle for her. Holy cow! She's going to an isolated convent in the Pennsylvania hills... Man, I can't begin to figure out those guys in the Bureau and their ideas for starting a new life. Thank goodness, the program seems to work and keep most witnesses safe...*

With fine features and high cheek bones, Lisa von Bidmont was elegantly beautiful. Her strikingly thick, long lashes accentuated her exquisite, deep-blue eyes. Women envied her blemish-free, smooth-as-ivory skin, rosy cheeks and full lips that when parted, flashed sparkling-white teeth. Natural, long blonde hair seemed to emphasize her five-foot, eight-inch height. Her modest nun's habit obscured high-flying breasts, a firmly rounded derriere and long dancer's legs.

Having such incomparable beauty had given her the ambition to become a top model in the fashion industry. That dream had almost come true after she escaped from a hellish upbringing in

a foster care home. But then fate had shown her another side of living that she never thought could exist.

The heavy morning traffic around Washington, D.C. slowed to a crawl as the fog and drizzle became thicker. It looked as if snow would fall at any minute. Suddenly, up ahead, traffic came to an abrupt halt, and ambulances and police cars went whizzing by the government-grey van with sirens wailing at full blast.

Lisa lifted her hand to the right side of her forehead and rubbed the large scar concealed beneath her hair. For months, the wound had caused excruciating pain, but now only occasional migraines developed under stressful conditions. From time to time, the rubbing helped her to remember bits and pieces of her past, as did certain smells and sounds. When she got into the van, there was a familiar beach smell. She wondered if the last person who had been in the van used Coppertone sun block. The smell triggered memories of the French Riviera, and strolling naked along the nude beach at St. Tropez. It was a joyful reminiscence of the past and brought a hint of a smile to her lovely face. But then the police cars' sirens abruptly changed a fond memory to one of horror.

Lisa gasped and swallowed hard, her hand flying to her mouth. The shrill of the sirens suddenly brought back a dreadful recollection of a bloodcurdling night of gunshots and heartbreaking carnage. For months thereafter, Lisa had slept with a blood-spattered cashmere sweater, refusing to give it up. It was all she had left of a love so strong that she doubted anyone else in the world would ever feel as devoted to another human being. Now she was left with constant nightmares that kept reminding her of the terrible tragedy and a betrayal of such magnitude that it made her thirst for revenge.

Lisa had once been an adventurous, vivacious, kind, trusting person who loved life. Full of spirit and totally optimistic, she had always looked at the bright side of everything and never doubted her faith in God. But after one horrific night, she had lost her faith.

Once the van got out of the Washington/Baltimore area and began heading up I-83 toward Harrisburg, the marshals and their young passenger were making better time, but they were still running late. John, still doing the driving, said in a loud voice that he once lived in that part of Pennsylvania and knew some shortcuts over the mountain to the convent. Then, speaking in a lower voice so the woman in the back seat wouldn't hear him, John continued talking to Paul.

“There were apple orchards all over those hills. In the fall when the apples were ripe, the apple pickers left baskets of apples under the trees. The pickers would come back with a special truck the next day and take them to a nearby roadside stand. A couple of my buddies and I would go out there at night and help ourselves to the baskets. We'd load up the car and then give them to the hot babes that lived near one of the orchards. Christ! What a bunch of sex pots! I'll never forget Maple. Remember that red stuff called Mercurochrome that you put on cuts? Well, she used to smear it all over her nipples so they'd get nice and red. Then she'd put on a tight-fitting, flimsy, white top. Boy, you could see those teats a mile away! I swear they must have been nymphomaniacs. Another chick, I forget her name now, couldn't wait to get it on and pulled down my zipper before I had time to get it up. Oh, man, could she ever give...”

Clearly annoyed, Paul interrupted, but kept his voice down. “Come on now, John, don't talk about that stuff. It's not appropriate to speak like that. Maybe Sister Elizabeth has really good ears and can hear you.” Paul shook his head in disbelief. “What does that have to do with the shortcut over the mountain, anyway?”

John was undeterred. “Hell, those hills were covered with orchards and logging roads, and in the winter we rode our snowmobiles all over the fuckin' place.”

“Hey, John, I really mean it! Watch your mouth and don't swear in front of the nun!”

“Oh, shit! Oops... Well, if she was a real nun I might think differently. But, hell, she's just a regular person that's been put in

the Witness Protection Program. I doubt that she took any of the strict vows that nuns normally have to take...”

“John, you don’t know for sure. For all we know, maybe she did, and this is how she wants to spend the rest of her life.”

“I just can’t imagine someone who’s lived the high life with that billionaire and had the best of everything suddenly changing her life so drastically. Naw, I doubt it.” Maybe we oughta bet on it, what do ya think? I keep forgettin’ she’s even back there, she’s so damn quiet.”

Paul turned in his bucket seat and looked back at Sister Elizabeth, who had her eyes closed.

“I guess she’s sleeping.”

She wasn’t. Once in a while she would look out of the dark-tinted windows and see how the countryside was beginning to wake up from the harsh winter. The trees were budding, the grass was turning a brilliant shade of green, forsythia was blooming, and as they got farther into rolling hills, there were more farms. They were in Maryland now and passing a large, white-fenced horse farm, which jolted her memory...

Lisa watched the tiny snowflakes beginning to fall and remembered how the local farmers in the Pennsylvania Dutch area used to call the late snowfall *Zwiebel Schnee*, or onion snow. They called it that, as it was the time of the year when people planted onions in their vegetable gardens. Her thoughts began to wonder back to her early childhood.