

## *Prologue*

It was 6:35 p.m., and Elinore was expecting dinner. She hoped it wasn't going to be that awful Chinese food. She hated Chinese food.

There was a knock, and she opened the door expecting Tim, the cop on the evening watch, to give her dinner. Instead, two husky Italian-looking men forced their way into her room, and locked the door behind them.

“Expectin’ Italian for dinner, Elinore? Well, you got it.”

The shorter one of the two quickly put duct tape over her mouth while the other slammed her into the chair near the small table in the far corner of the room.

“My friend and I here...we heard you have a big mouth, and you’re wantin’ to be pointin’ the finger at my boss and my associates. Well, we ain’t too happy ‘bout your plans and are here to give a little testimony of our own that maybe will send you and those other snitches a message ‘bout what can happen when you cross the Gambrelinis.”

Elinore was mindless with fear, unable to fathom what they were going to do. With the duct tape on her mouth, her muffled sounds were barely audible. The taller of the two did all of the talking and told his partner to hold her steady. He did so by keeping Elinore’s arms behind her back. It hurt terribly as he held them tightly against the wooden chair.

While the shorter one held Elinore still, the talkative one pulled out a knife from his boot-like shoe. It was long, shiny and sharp. Elinore’s eyes got big and fear penetrated every inch of her being. They were going to kill her; she was absolutely certain of that.

The talker continued, “Now, if we had a little more time, Elinore, I’d do some of my fancy carving, being in the meat business and all, but we got a dinner engagement, so I’ll just make it nice and quick and deep.”

He grabbed her hair and pulled it back, stretching her neck until she thought it would snap, then dragged the long blade slowly and painfully down the left side of her cheek. He started at the temple and worked down to the jaw line. Blood began to gush immediately. She could feel it dripping down her cheek, down her neck, soaking into her blouse. The pain was excruciating, but she was still alive, at least for now.

“Gee there, Elinore, did I mess up your pretty face? I do sincerely apologize, but in the future when you look in the mirror, you’ll see what a snitch-bitch looks like.”

Elinore thought the two were going to leave. She prayed they would. She kept hoping that the police officer who was supposed to be guarding her would appear, but no help came.

The one with the knife suddenly took Elinore’s right arm from behind the chair, grabbed her hand, and forced it flat on the surface of the little round table in front of her.

“Now, Elinore, we have one more little message we need to leave you with if you aren’t getting the picture yet. I’m only going to say this once, and I hope you’ll remember it always. Never point your finger at the Gambrelinis.”

With that, he sliced off the top half of her right index finger.