

THE
OTHER
DANIEL

A GRISHAM & SULLIVAN NOVELLA

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THE OTHER DANIEL: A GRISHAM & SULLIVAN NOVELLA

Between 2008 and 2012, Daniel Alexander Sykes savagely murdered twenty-seven people, including the FBI agent who was attempting to capture him. Sykes was a monster in every sense of the word – a true representation of the worst that humanity had to offer. And as the grisly details of his four-year crime spree slowly emerged, no sane person would have dared argued otherwise.

But as you are about to read, there is much more to Daniel Sykes than the man who the world came to know as 'The Circle Killer'. He was a first-grade teacher from Kutztown, Pennsylvania, a loving husband, a doting father, and, dare it be said, a human being. By the time you are finished with this book, you may very well want to label me more pathologically twisted than the subject I am writing about. Or you may come to a more rational and balanced conclusion: that it is very easy to judge someone without first knowing everything about them. But it isn't always fair to do so.

~Excerpt from Jacob Deaver's *THE OTHER DANIEL*

CHAPTER ONE

THE SHARK

The City Perk Café was a trendy little coffee shop located in a section of the city that felt overrun with trendy little coffee shops. Like most of the others, it was normally crowded with wide-eyed college students pounding away at their Apple MacBooks and sipping delicately on their custom-made cappuccinos. If you weren't one of them, the air of determined self-importance created by their collective efforts could be suffocating. As a result, Camille Grisham rarely allowed herself to stay longer than the five minutes it took to make her no-whip skinny mocha.

On this particular morning, however, the City Perk was nearly empty – a first in the two months that she had been coming here. Without the hordes of twenty-something's occupying every square inch of space the atmosphere was bright, like one of those festive French bistros you see on the Travel Channel. Having not spent much time in bright atmospheres lately, she couldn't resist the opportunity to take a seat while she waited for her coffee.

"If you want to hang out, I'd be happy to put this in a mug for you," the barista whose name Camille couldn't remember said when she noticed her sitting.

With little on her agenda other than the fruitless hours she planned to spend staring at a blank notebook with the words PRO and CON written at the top, Camille decided to grab a newspaper, stake out a small table in the back, and take in as much of this Travel Channel experience as she could. "A mug would be great," she told the barista with a smile that wasn't entirely manufactured.

For more than an hour she skimmed the morning paper, sipped delicately at her latte the way the college kids did, and allowed herself to simply exist. Normal, just like everyone else. There had been moments of normal in the past six months, but they were always fleeting, like the illusion of liquid blue in an otherwise barren desert. Even though Camille worried that this moment of normal would eventually meet the same fate, she basked in it nonetheless.

Only a handful of customers entered the café during her time there. A few took up seats in the empty tables around her, huddled in close conversation or staring intently at their electronic tablets. The rest took their orders to enjoy elsewhere.

Camille kept a close eye on each one.

Watching people, studying their movements, their expressions, their body language, had been a habit engrained in her as an FBI profiler. Though it had been some time since she used the skill in any official capacity, she instinctively applied it to every situation she

found herself in. Camille was once afflicted with the notion that she could break down a person's entire psychological make-up within two minutes of meeting them. These days she wasn't nearly as confident. But it didn't stop her from trying.

She knew, for instance, that the middle-aged couple sitting two tables away was in the midst of a relationship crisis that the French bistro cheeriness of the City Perk did little to alleviate. His wandering eye was most certainly to blame. Her blatant indifference didn't help. That wandering eye landed on Camille, as it had every other woman who walked into the café. A couple of the younger girls met the handsome man's gaze with passive smiles and that unmistakable lock-of-hair-tucked-behind-the-ear signal of flirtation. Camille responded with the thousand-yard stare indigenous to prison yards across the country and perfected through her eight years spent in the company of the planet's most hardened criminals.

No great surprise that his eyes failed to find her a second time.

She was used to the attention, even before the tabloids made her face a fixture in hair salons and hospital waiting rooms across America. When it came to her appearance, Camille could be self-effacing to a fault; meeting most compliments she received with a sneer, a sigh, or an eye roll. On really good days an unsuspecting suitor got all three. But the compliments kept coming. Even after a bullet fragment cut across her left cheek, dotting her olive complexion with a one and a half-inch scar, no Camille Grisham news story was ever complete without at least one reference to what they termed her 'fashion runway' looks. The last story even went so far as to suggest that she play herself in the movie version of her life, since very few actresses on the current SAG roster could fit the bill. Little that Camille read about herself inspired genuine laughter. That last bit certainly did. Unfortunately, it didn't make the glare of the spotlight any less harsh.

The stares from admirers and curious onlookers were easy to deal with. Sometimes they pointed, sometimes they took pictures with their cell-phone cameras, but they always did so at a respectful distance.

The cold, hungry stares of the media sharks were something else altogether. There was no casual curiosity with them; no respectful distance. The sharks only wanted blood, and in six months of pursuing Camille's story they had gotten plenty. But true to every shark's nature, it was never enough. No matter how many sound bites they got, they wanted more. No matter how dutifully her ex-police sergeant pit-bull of a father fought them off, they found a way to slip past him. No matter how bright and festive the atmosphere around her was, they managed to darken it.

The man sitting near the café entrance was just such a shark. Camille knew it the moment he walked in, though his humble smile, weathered tweed jacket, and crisp blue linen shirt offered an admirable disguise. Despite making a concerted effort not to look in his direction, she could sense that he had been watching her. His attention was subtle – passing glances mostly – but it was persistent. When she finally returned his attention with the hardest glare she could summon, he shifted nervously in his chair and promptly looked

away. The real sharks rarely looked away, and for a moment Camille wondered if she had misjudged his intentions. Perhaps he was nothing more than the young English Lit professor that his attire suggested him to be. Or maybe it was a rare case of the prey finally getting the best of the predator. Either way, Camille couldn't help but feel relieved when he stood up, took one last pull from his coffee cup, and hoisted his messenger bag around his shoulder.

The thousand-yard death stare strikes again, she thought as she allowed an easy smile to spread across her face. That stare was by far the most effective weapon of defense that she had, and she didn't even need a license to carry it.

Once he was out of sight, Camille turned her attention back to the unhappy couple. The husband's eyes were now firmly planted in a newspaper while his wife's drifted impassively out the window. She was very pretty; elegant yet understated. But behind the carefully constructed veneer, Camille saw a broken woman. A woman not unlike herself. But unlike Camille, there appeared to be no fight left in her; no death-stare capable of combating the predators. She didn't know what tragedies may have stained this woman's past, but she was well aware of the tragedies that stained her own. She lived with them every day. Yet she still had the will to fight, and the strength to push back when she needed to. That strength wasn't always easy to come by, and Camille would need a lot of it in the days and weeks ahead, but she was confident it would be there.

She found herself staring at the woman in an effort to get her attention. She had little more to offer than a smile and a nod of understanding, but she hoped that the quiet acknowledgement from a kindred spirit would be enough to help her find the resolve to look beyond the black hole of hopelessness sitting across the table from her.

Unfortunately, her gaze was not enough to break the spell of whatever daydream the woman had retreated into.

It was enough to attract her husband, however. His eyes narrowed as they fell on Camille and she could sense the makings of a smile come across his chemically-tanned face. Camille smiled too as she imagined his reaction to the stiff middle finger she was about to shoot in his direction. She was on the verge of pulling the trigger when something diverted her attention.

The man with the messenger bag was approaching her table.

Suddenly forgetting about her crusade against Mr. chemical-tan, Camille grabbed her coffee mug and stood up. She had been right about the shark's intentions all along and was upset with herself for not leaving the moment she saw him.

Her abrupt movement caused him to stop a few feet short of the table. He smiled as he extended his hand.

Camille stopped him before he could begin the pitch for whatever it was he wanted to sell. "Sorry, I was just leaving."

He blocked her path as she tried to walk away, still trying to disarm her with his less-than-charming smile. "Just a quick moment of your time. That's all I ask."

Resisting her first instinct to shove him into the table, Camille rigidly stood her ground. “If you start by telling me you’re with the Post or the Mile High Dispatch, that moment will be quicker than you can possibly imagine.”

“I promise I’m not with either one. My name is Jacob Deaver and I should say, in the interest of full disclosure, that I am a former journalist with the Boston Globe. *Former* being the operative word. No respectable news agency would touch me with a ten-foot pole now.”

“And this is supposed to make me feel *better* about talking to you?”

He chuckled nervously. “Probably not. But I swear my intentions are good.”

“A journalist with good intentions. That would certainly be a first.”

“That’s precisely why I left journalism.”

“If you aren’t angling for a story then why are we talking?”

“I never said I wasn’t angling for a story. I merely said I wasn’t an active journalist.”

His voice was laced with a know-it-all smugness that reminded Camille of the college kids who usually occupied the café. Despite his thick beard and conservative appearance, he probably wasn’t much older than any of them. He certainly wasn’t any more tolerable to be around. “Did you come in here with the intention of invading my personal space or did the notion just randomly strike you?”

The self-assured grin he fought to maintain suddenly abandoned him and the hand he had prepared to extend fell into his pocket. “I didn’t follow you here if that’s what you’re suggesting.”

Camille didn’t believe him, but saw no benefit in belaboring the point. “Either way I don’t have time to chat. And even if I did, it wouldn’t be with some kid who has nothing better to do than waste his time pursuing a story that has already been told a million times.”

“I’m not a kid, Ms. Grisham. And I can guarantee this story hasn’t been told.”

She had been prepared to walk away, but his unwavering tone gave her pause. “What makes you so sure about that?”

“Two minutes. Please.” With that, he lowered his messenger bag and pushed a chair back from the table.

Camille watched with wary eyes as he sat down. She continued standing. “Who are you?”

“My name is Jacob Deaver.”

“You’ve already told me your name. But you haven’t told me who you are.”

“I’m someone who wants to give you an opportunity that no one else has.”

She couldn’t help but roll her eyes. “And what opportunity would that be?”

“The opportunity to let the world hear from you in an unfiltered, unedited way. Your thoughts, your experiences, your opinions.”

“Same spiel I’ve heard countless times, Mr. Deaver. Still not interested.” Camille turned to walk away, but the words he said next stopped her cold.

“What if I told you that a major publisher has solicited Daniel Sykes for the rights to his authorized biography?”

“I’d say that has absolutely nothing to do with me and I’d keep walking,” she answered in a voice that came dangerously close to faltering.

“What if I said that it has everything to do with you?”

Camille suddenly felt the urge to sit. “Then I guess I’d ask you to explain.”

Jacob cleared his throat as if he were about to recite a rehearsed speech. “I’m a former employee of the publishing house behind the book and I personally know the author who has been hired to write it. It’s going to be published, Ms. Grisham. And the timetable for getting it to press is very short.”

“How short?”

“Five, maybe six months at most.”

“And you said this is an authorized biography of Daniel Sykes, meaning he has an active role in the project?”

“From what I understand, he has been corresponding with the author for at least three months. Sykes had apparently lobbied for in-person interview sessions, but the prison refused to sign off on it.” He smiled. “I don’t think the author was too keen on the idea either.”

Camille failed to see the humor. “Explain what you meant when you said this has everything to do with me.”

Jacob’s smile went away. “You might want to sit down.”

“I still haven’t decided whether or not this conversation is worth my time.”

“Fair enough. The book was originally designed to be a tell-all of Sykes’ life, from his childhood through the present. But during the process of creation it was decided that the focus should be narrowed.”

“Narrowed to what?”

“His capture. Specifically, the role that you and Agent Andrew Sheridan played in that capture.”

Camille’s legs felt wobbly and she could no longer fight the urge to sit. “What are you talking about?”

“Based on what I’ve heard, Sykes has no plans to discuss the details of his murders, the reason he committed those murders, or anything else related to his past. He only agreed to do the book if you and Agent Sheridan were the featured topics.”

“How could they allow him to do that?” Camille asked, as if she hadn’t already known the answer.

“Apparently there was some initial opposition to the idea, mostly fueled by fear of a libel lawsuit. But ultimately there was too much money to be made not to go forward. Same sad story as always.”

Camille had been fully prepared for the bright atmosphere of the City Perk Café to fade at some point, and that's exactly what happened. What she wasn't prepared for was how dark it would actually get. "So what's your interest in this?"

"Like I said before, I want you to have the chance to tell your side of the story. Make no mistake, Ms. Grisham, this book will not be objective. The goal is to cast you, Agent Sheridan, and possibly the entire Federal Bureau of Investigation in the most negative light possible. In my opinion there has to be some kind of counterbalance to that."

The mention of Agent Sheridan in the same sentence as 'negative light' almost brought tears to Camille's eyes. Her name had been dragged through the mud in almost every way imaginable. She was used to it and wouldn't lose a moment's sleep if it happened again. But to go after Andrew Sheridan, a man who was a hero by any measure of the word, a man who was no longer here to defend himself, was downright criminal. And Camille knew it was something she absolutely could not let happen. "It will never make it to print. I'll make sure of it."

"I'm afraid that ship is already sailing."

The measured confidence in Jacob's voice shook her. "He has a wife and nine-year-old daughter for Christ's sake. How could someone even think about—"

"I understand that. But what you have to understand is that you have a lot more to lose in this situation than anyone else. If this book is released with even half the garbage that Sykes is trying to put out there, it could seriously stain your reputation. With everything you have going on – Elliott Richmond, the questions about your friend's murder – you can't afford to have anyone undermining your credibility. The best option you have is to go on the offensive; strike down anything that Sykes says before he even has the chance to say it."

"And how am I supposed to do that?"

Jacob hesitated, as if his response was one that he had to pull from the depths of his being. "Write your own book."

Camille bit down on her lip to stop herself from yelling. Of all the ways the sharks had ever attacked her, Jacob Deaver's attack was by far the most brutal. In less than five minutes he'd managed to tap into every vulnerability that she had – Daniel Sykes, Andrew Sheridan, her best friend's murder, and the person responsible for it – and he used it to pitch a book. Even if everything he said about Sykes was true, Camille didn't believe for one second that he tracked her down out of some altruistic need to save her reputation. He saw an opportunity to build his own.

"I think your two minutes are up."

Jacob's hooded eyes widened. "Ms. Grisham, please hear me out. I've read everything there is to read about your story. I know you tried to save your partner. I know you tried to save those two girls that Sykes ended up killing. But the people behind this book are going to say something very different. How do you think it's going to be for the families of those victims to hear only one version of the story? *His* version of the story? It will be devastating. You have the opportunity, right now, to stand up for their belief that you did everything

possible to save the people they loved. You have the opportunity to confirm what you and I both know is the truth. For your sake, for the sake of those families who are still mourning, don't let that opportunity pass."

In Camille's mind she was screaming at him, throwing coffee mugs, pushing over tables, calling him every obscene name imaginable. When she opened her mouth to actually speak, she could only manage the faintest of whispers. "Goodbye, Mr. Deaver."

As she stood up from the table he gently grabbed her hand. Aside from the fact that he was a stranger, something about his touch made her recoil.

"I know this has probably been a lot to take in, and I apologize if you feel ambushed. That was honestly the last thing I wanted to do. But everything I'm telling you is true, as is my sincerity in wanting to help you. Perhaps with the benefit of time you'll be able to see that. If you do and would like to talk more about it, I'm staying at the Brown Palace Hotel." He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a piece of paper on which he had already hand-written a telephone number. "You can call the front desk and they'll connect you to my room. I'd be happy to meet with you whenever, where ever. All I ask is that you consider it."

Camille studied the paper a moment longer than she intended to. The hesitation bothered her. "There's nothing to consider," she replied, hopeful that the sudden doubt in her heart did not reveal itself in her voice. Then she took a deep breath, cast one last glance at the French Bistro cheeriness of the City Perk, and walked away from Jacob Deaver.

When she reached the door, she looked back at him. The hand that he held the paper in was still extended, as if he fully expected her to come back for it.

Much to Camille's horror, she almost did.