

Return of the Sphynx

An A. J. Hawke Legal Thriller

Booklife Reviews Editor's Pick

Nail-biting legal thriller

*A scrappy lawyer must use sophisticated science,
and his fists, to aid a client.*

Sharp-witted lawyer A. J. Hawke uses an unusual genetic condition to defend a client against rape in this sequel to The Sphynx Murder Case.

Author Donald E. McInnis mines his years of experience as a trial lawyer to bring a high level of reality to the trial prep and courtroom scenes. He has a talent for making the minutiae of trial work interesting.

While most of the suspense centers on the courtroom, the finale shows Hawke can also be an effective action hero—and, fortunately, leaves open the possibility for more Hawke adventures.

Great for fans of Scott Turow, Phillip Margolin.

CHAPTER 1

Early Sunday Morning

A thin ray of sunlight trickled into the dark room. At a snail-like pace, the light traveled across the room, widening as it went until it illuminated clothing strewn about the floor in a narrow path toward a large platform bed. A man, nude, lay prostrate on the king-size bed, legs spread-eagled across the width of the silky blue bedsheets.

A hand reached toward the head of the bed, grasping the sheets as though he was trying to find something until his hand touched one of two large, three-foot-long pillows. He pulled the pillow up against his chest, burying his face, blocking out the rising sun. Instinctively, he drew his legs up to the pillow as though he were still caressing the body of the lovely woman from the night before. There the man lay on his left side, fully asleep, nudging his groin from time to time against the pillow as if he was still with her. The increasing morning light bathed the man's body, revealing a youthful physique with a small waist, a V-shaped back with well-defined muscles and a patch of brown hair at the small of his back. A thin trail of the hair went down the groove between his buttocks, emphasizing his tight, athletic butt and narrow hips. He lay hugging his pillow for a good forty-five minutes until the warmth of the growing sunlight caused him to stir.

A low, melodic male voice quietly echoed in his head:

Love and devotion

Deep as any ocean

Don't play by anybody's rules

With your carousel of horses

And your unforeseen forces

You're running with the

Caravan of Fools

Slowly, he rolled over onto his back, clutching the pillow to his torso.

Caravan of Fools

Caravan of Fools

*You're running with the
Caravan of Fools*

Over and over again the song's words repeat in his mind:

*Caravan of fools, caravan of fools,
You're running with the caravan of fools.*

He finally spoke, "Tami, what time is it?"

"It's seven-forty. Good morning, Hawke."

Still half asleep, he softly queried, "Tami what happened to your Southern accent?" There was no response. Again he asked, "Tami, where's your Georgia drawl?" No response. He stared at the loft ceiling. *I thought I correctly changed the computer voice program to answer in a Southern accent.* Hawke turned his head to the right, toward the desk with his voice-activated computer and the stacked tower of audio equipment on the floor next to it. Rubbing his eyes so his morning vision could clear, he saw a woman seated next to the audio equipment.

Startled, the man swings himself up into a seated position onto the edge of the bed, the pillow clutched by both hands covering his groin.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Good morning, Hawke."

"Estrada . . . Silvia Estrada? What are you doing here?" Before she could answer he demanded, "How did you get in?"

"My boyfriend let me in."

"Boyfriend! Shit, did I leave the security system off again? Is that how you got in?"

"You will have to ask him."

"Who's 'him' and what are you doing here?"

"Oh, dear, aren't you a demanding one. The cranky type in the morning, is that it Drew Hawke?"

"Cranky? Shit. You break into my home, what do you expect? Again, what are you doing sitting there watching me sleep?"

"You gave me no choice. You wouldn't return my phone calls. That secretary of yours keeps putting me off with the lamest excuses. So I am here, and we need to talk."

The woman reached over to the audio/video receiver and turned down the volume of the song "Caravan of Fools" by John Prine.

Observing how familiar the woman was with his audio equipment, Hawke demanded, this time more forcefully, “What the hell do you want from me? Why have you broken in?”

“I didn’t break in. I told you that already. Let me try to explain. My boyfriend and I followed you when you left that woman’s apartment early this morning.”

“Who’s your boyfriend?”

“Jacob.”

“Well, you tell Jacob I will kick his ass if he tries that again.”

“I doubt that will happen.”

”Oh, you do!”

“Drew, let’s move on to more productive things.”

“No! Who’s your boyfriend? What’s his name, uh, last name I mean, and where do I find him?”

“His name is Jacob Wellington and that’s why I am here. Jacob wants you to represent his twin brother. And before we continue on, getting nowhere, yes, his name is Jacob Wellington. The Aussie I labeled the Sphynx in my news broadcasts.”

“The Sphynx rapist?”

“Yes.”

“Are you shitting me?”

“No. I love him and I’ve been living with him for several months.”

“Holy shit! What in the world is wrong with you? The rapist! Have you gone crazy?”

“I know. I never thought I would do anything like this. But I did. I love him and he needs your help.”

“Here’s how it is Silvia. No! I’m not going to help him or you or his brother!”

“Please, Drew. His brother has been arrested for the crimes Jacob committed.”

“You mean for the rapes and murder the Sphynx committed.”

“Yes, the rapes. But Jacob swears he didn’t kill that girl.”

“God! You will do anything for a story. You’re the most egotistical, selfish, driven female reporter I know. And all in the name of love you say. Bullshit.”

“Driven, yes, but so are men. So what’s wrong with wanting to be the best? Besides, what do you know about love? You can’t think past a boner. If you were a woman, you’d be called a slut.”

Drew's mouth fell open. Shocked as he sat there, nude, staring at the woman, not knowing what to say. His face flushed red with anger as he began to speak, but Silvia wouldn't let him.

"Hawke, it doesn't matter what we think of each other. You can call me all the names you wish. But Jacob thinks you are the best one to help his twin brother. The only one who can save Joshua."

"Well tell Jacob to turn himself in. That should clear everything up."

"He can't. They will send him away for life. I won't let Jacob do that. I told you I love him. I . . . need . . . him, Hawke"

"Look, you created this mess. You clean it up."

"Please, Hawke. Joshua isn't at all like Jacob. He'd never hurt anyone."

"Listen to you. Are you totally out of your mind? You know exactly what is wrong with Jacob and yet you live with him. You even let him fuck you. Woman, you need help."

"I couldn't help it Drew. I fell madly in love with him. He's told me everything about his past. What he's done and why he did it. The bottom line is, will you help Joshua? Will you save an innocent, God-fearing man? I will help you. Jacob said he will pay you. Money is not a question. Jacob has information the police don't even know about—proof that Joshua isn't the Sphinx rapist. He wasn't even in the country at the time some of the rapes occurred. Please, Drew. Do the right thing."

Drew Hawke looked into the pleading woman's eyes and forcibly asked, "Is Jacob outside?"

"No, he left. He said the two of you would fight again if he stayed."

As Drew looked at the loft door, Silvia stood as if to prevent Drew from standing and moving toward the door. "He's gone, Hawke. Packed his things hours ago and is now in Mexico."

"Where in Mexico?"

"I don't know exactly. He has a secluded place somewhere in Baja and another across the Sea of Cortez, north of Culiacan on the Mexican mainland. I've never been to either. Once you agree to take care of his brother, I'm to call him on a phone he gave me. We can do it together; if you wish, you can talk to him. Please do the right thing."

"So you think the cops have the wrong person?" Hawke asked, his voice more curious than argumentative.

“I know so! Once you meet Joshua, you will also know—he is not the one who raped all those women.”

Drew paused in thought. *If Joshua isn't the Sphynx, maybe I could use Joshua to smoke out his rapist brother, Jacob. This could help David Caine's recovery from his guilt over the rape and death of his girlfriend, Claire Rewake.* Silvia stood there, her face wracked with emotion as if she was about to break down and cry.

“OK, OK. I will go and talk to his alleged twin brother, but no promises. You understand, I haven't agreed to defend the man.”

“Oh, thank you, Drew. Thank you. We are both counting on you. Joshua is the only one in Jacob's family that has ever loved him. Jacob says he can't live with himself if anything happens to his brother.”

“Now do you mind? I'd like to get dressed. You obviously know where the door is.”

“You needn't be shy, Hawke. I saw everything already.”

With that, Drew stood up, threw the pillow on the bed, and, naked, walked past her to a dressing screen.

“Don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out.”



Later Sunday morning

Drew Hawke sat at an outdoor table of his favorite Gas Lamp bistro, the Barleymash Café, reading the Sunday edition of the San Diego Herald newspaper. He slowly sipped on an extra-strong cup of cappuccino in hopes of fighting back the urge to close his eyes as he read about the arrest of the Sphynx. With one leg on the metal table, Hawke flipped through the paper to page eight as he continued to read, slowly rocking back and forth on the hind legs of his chair.

An overweight, sixtyish man with balding hair approached the young lawyer.

“Well, this had better be important Drew Hawke. The missus is upset that I once again ducked out of church services this morning.”

As the young man looked up at Pat DeLuca, his trusted investigator, he playfully replied, “I'm sure Father O'Connor will be asking her where you are. Has he stopped wanting to know when I will be attending Sunday services?”

“Drew, he gave up on you going to church years ago.”

“Ha, Ha. Very funny, Pat.”

The detective pulled back the second chair and sat down. “Now, what is so urgent that you had to get me in trouble not only with Mrs. DeLuca but Father Joseph O’Connor as well?”

“You heard about the Sphynx?” Drew asked, holding up the front page for Pat to see.

“Yes. In fact my old partner Sergeant MacNeil called me last night.”

“What for?”

“He said the police chief had basically ordered Detective Clayton and his special crimes unit not to ask the district attorney to issue murder charges against the Aussie rapist for the death of Claire Rewake.”

“Really. That’s interesting. The D.A. is quoted in today’s paper as saying he is considering filing murder charges. Why would the chief take such a strong stand?”

”Don’t know. MacNeil and I used to take cases with less circumstantial evidence to him all the time, and he would tell us to ask for murder charges. It just doesn’t make sense.”

“Here’s something else that doesn’t make sense,” said the young man as he leaned forward and whispered in a low tone. “I woke up this morning with Silvia Estrada watching me sleep.”

“At the loft?”

“No shit. She said she had been watching me for several hours. I demanded to know how she got in and guess what she said—‘My boyfriend let me in.’ When DeLuca frowned, Drew continued. “It gets better. Estrada said she has been with the Sphynx rapist for the past several months!”

“You needn’t be so dramatic, Drew.”

“Oh, yeah. Believe me, it is justified. Let me be more specific. She’s the girlfriend of the Sphynx rapist—Jacob Wellington.”

“Really?”

“Unbelievable isn’t it. And Estrada claims the guy in jail isn’t the Sphynx rapist. She says the police have arrested Jacob Wellington’s twin brother, Joshua Wellington. On top of everything else, Estrada wants me to represent the twin in jail. She said Jacob Wellington thinks I’m the best attorney to help his brother. Estrada said money was no object. The Sphynx would pay anything to free his brother.”

Pat sat back in his chair and brought his hand to his chin.

“I know, Pat, I know what you’re thinking. Use the jailed twin to bring the Sphynx out of hiding and get him arrested.”

“Yes. But something is wrong. Why wouldn’t the police ask for murder charges? Are they thinking the same thing we are? Do they know they only have the twin brother?”

“Not according to the paper. The chief of police and the D.A. say nothing about a twin.

The Feds were the ones who arrested him when he entered the U.S., and the Feds don’t usually make identity mistakes. Not with their rabid use of DNA.”

“Are you going to take the case?” Pat asked in a cautious way.

“I don’t know. But Estrada presents an intriguing opportunity. If the guy in jail isn’t the rapist, and I can lure the real one out into the open, it might help my ex-client David Caine to recover from his guilt of not being with his girlfriend when the rapist struck.”

“You know, Drew, you can’t trust a person in love. Silvia may say and do anything if she is indeed the girlfriend of the rapist. You know the real rapist might be the one in jail and Estrada is lying through her teeth. Something’s fishy. Why would the Sphynx rapist tell Estrada you are the best attorney to represent the guy in jail? There are other more experienced defense attorneys. You’ve been practicing on your own just a few years. Be careful.”

“You’re right. I think the best thing to do is go visit the guy in jail and see if he is or isn’t the Sphynx. In the meantime, I’ve got to get some sleep. This double shot of cap hasn’t helped at all.”