

The Sphinx Murder Case by Donald E. McInnis is a legal thriller that infuses the intrigue of ongoing investigations and local [San Diego, California] politics with the suspense of courtroom proceedings. It draws readers in with covered-up corruption and more than one ongoing case to solve. Lawyer A. J. Hawke is clever and crafty in the courtroom [as he exposes] police interrogation tactics.

—Booklife Report

CHAPTER 1

Through the early morning fog a solitary figure emerged, the mist swirling about. Tall and fit, a hoodie pulled snug around the head exposed only dark blue eyes and the contours of a youthful face. Leather gloves covered the hands—the left gripping a shoulder strap of a camo backpack slung over a shoulder. As the figure walked down the dimly lit alley, only colorful surf shorts provided any contrast to the dreary May morning.

The man's pace slowed as the fog thickened in that portion of Mission Beach, where college students from three local universities rented ocean-front apartments and lived an enviable life on the beaches of San Diego, California.

Suddenly, the individual stopped and stepped toward a faint light from an open window. Looking inside, he could see the back of a young woman asleep on her side. The dark bedroom was lit only by a charging cell phone on the nightstand and a small night light. The intruder could see no male companion. *She's alone at last.* The man's breathing accelerated and his pulse quickened, but the pounding surf from the Pacific Ocean—only a hundred yards away—masked any sounds he might make.

He checked the surrounding buildings for any signs of life. The 3:00 a.m. hour had the neighborhood soundly asleep. Reaching both hands up into his hoodie, he unrolled a black ski mask from the top of his head, pulling it over a young, attractive face. The backpack slid from his shoulder to the left elbow as the man placed both gloved hands on the sill of the open

window. Slowly he pulled himself up, levitating briefly over the window's ledge, then softly stepping onto the bedroom floor. He held his breath for a moment as he listened and watched the young woman to see if she awoke. His prey still slept.

Gently, he set the backpack on the floor, and with deliberate steps he approached the bed, pulling a switchblade from the right leg pocket of his surf shorts. Standing motionless, he paused to look at her petite, slender body, her naked bottom exposed below her Sleep Shirt. Long, blonde hair lay feathered across the pillow and sheets. *How beautiful she is.*

He flipped open the knife's long blade and, with a swift move, placed his left hand over her mouth. He shoved his opposite forearm under her right armpit and pulled her body upright, with her back against his chest. Moving his right hand up to her throat, he pressed the blade to her skin. With his mouth close to her left ear, he whispered, "You move, I cut your throat."

Her muffled screams had no effect as she struggled to get free. He pulled her tightly against his body, then slowly pulled the sharp blade across her throat, ever so slightly cutting into her soft skin. A red line of blood appeared and started to run down her throat. As she blinked tears from her eyes, he commanded, "Stop or you die!"

He forced her, face down, onto the bed with his hand still over her mouth and the full weight of his muscular frame on top, trapping her right arm underneath.

He stabbed the knife into the bed and drew it toward him, cutting the sheet and mattress underneath. Raising the knife again, he drove the blade into the mattress next to her head. He then grabbed the cut sheet and tore loose a long piece. He tore a second piece loose, which he jammed into her mouth to silence her. He then tried to wrap the long piece around her head, but she grabbed at the sheet in front of her with her left hand. As he felt her trying to pull away, he slammed his fist twice into the right side of her jaw in quick, successive blows. Stunned, her

body went limp.

The attacker quickly moved to tie the long piece of sheet over her mouth and behind her head. From the right pocket of his hoodie, he pulled out a roll of blue carpet tape. He tore a long piece of tape from the roll and secured the sheet over her mouth.

Pausing, he smiled, knowing he was in total control of her body. He threw the doll-like, semi-unconscious figure face down onto the bed, this time closer to the window. He turned and closed the window, twisting the lock in place. Then he pulled the curtains shut. She was alone with him, cut off from the outside world.

Reaching into the backpack on the floor, he pulled out a long thin piece of rope. He grabbed her left hand while he pressed his right knee onto the back of her head. He knotted the rope around her limp hand. Extending the tied hand forward, he wrapped the rope around the metal frame of the bed's headboard. Pulling her right hand from under her stomach, he tied it with the loose end of the rope, leaving about 18 inches of rope between her hands and the headboard.

Then he stood up and he turned her red and swelling face farther to the right so she could see him.

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Despite excruciating pain in her right jaw and dulled senses, the woman's mind shouted, *Don't pass out. Stay with it!*

She watched as the attacker changed his gloves, replacing them with a dark-blue surgical pair from the backpack. He unzipped and removed his sweatshirt to expose his slim, fit, twenty-something body: narrow at the waist and hips, with a pronounced V-shaped upper body. His

ripped abs, big arms, and chiseled chest displayed a strength she could not have contested.

He kicked off his Vans but left his socks on. Reaching to the top of his Billabong surf shorts, he undid the draw string and yanked open the Velcro closure. He pulled down the shorts, exposing his hard, erect penis. He stood so she could see it, along with his tall, naked frame, masked face, and sculptured body.

From her prone position, still blurry-eyed from his blows, she kept telling herself, *Focus. Got to focus. Come on. Concentrate. Look for some mark—a tattoo, a scar that could identify him later.*

She saw none, and then she realized he had no body hair. His chest, arms, and legs—even his armpits and groin—were totally bare. The lack of hair seemed to accentuate his alabaster white skin and the muscular angles and shapes of his body. She stared . . . afraid, but mesmerized. He was frightening to look at, and yet, attractive—a young, beautiful male figure.

Why would he have to do this? What's wrong with him? Is this guy a psychopath? Is he going to kill me? A cold chill ran through her body and she began to shake uncontrollably as fear overtook her.

From the backpack the attacker pulled a small, black, foil package with *Trojan* written across it in gold lettering. He tore it open and unrolled the condom onto his erection. He looked down and on the floor next to the night stand he saw her purse. He walked over and picked it up. She watched as he rummaged through it, finding her driver's license.

“So, you're Margret Lange,” he said. “I always wondered what your name was since I first saw you on the boardwalk skating in your bikini. Took me forever to figure out where you lived, even longer to find out when your roommate spends the night with her boyfriend.”

The fact that this animal had been stalking her, knew about her roommate and when she

would be gone, sent a feeling of hopelessness through Margret. For the first time she felt totally isolated, with no hope of escape or rescue. Her home, a quiet place to escape from the outside world—her sanctuary—had become her prison. A living hell visited upon her by that very same outside world.

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“Let’s see, Margret,” he said, looking at her driver’s license. “Age twenty, blonde hair, blue eyes, five foot-six, and one hundred-fifteen pounds. Not bad, Margret. A real nice photo of you, too.”

He moved closer, his penis just inches away from her face. As she lay on her stomach, she tried to turn her face away, but he stopped her. Sliding the back of his right hand across Margret’s forehead, then his palm down her left cheek, he gently cupped her chin. She winced in pain and pulled away.

“Sorry about that, but you shouldn’t have fought back. You know, you’re real pretty. I like pretty girls. They like me. Too bad I can’t let you see my face. We’d make a great couple.”

When she did not react, he continued. “Well, Margret, I’m your big bang for the night. I’m a healthy, six-foot-two, hundred-eighty-pound bloke, with an eight pack and not an ounce of fat. I’m just pure muscle. I can go all night!”

He paused again to look for a reaction. None.

“You know, women think I’m a real good catch. Look at me, Margret! Wouldn’t you agree?”

Again no reaction—not a nod or muffled noise. Only a dazed, blank stare from Margret, who appeared thoroughly petrified with fear as her attacker rambled on.

“Well, one thing is sure, pretty one. You ain’t ’had a lover like me before. I’m nothing like the nerdy boys I’ve seen you with. What do you think, Margret? Or is it Mags? No, I’ll call you Moggy. Ya like that name? Moggy? Do you?”

Tears filled her eyes as she turned her face away.

“Oh, come on, Moggy, don’t cry. I intend to drive you wild tonight. I reckon you like what ya see. Let’s play, pretty one.”

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Later That Morning

A crowd gathered on the beach. It pressed against the yellow police tape stretching from the apartment building across the Mission Beach Boardwalk and out into the sand in front of the building. Folks, young and old, wanted to know what was going on.

Among the look-y-loo crowd stood a tall, long-haired blond man holding a surfboard. “Hey, mate, what’s with all the coppers?” he asked the guy next to him.

“Don’t know, probably a drug bust. From the look of all the spookies with masks, they may have raided a meth lab. Been a lot of undercover narcs on the beach doing busts lately.”

“Wow, really?” The young man laughed. But he knew otherwise. The men wearing gloves, goggles, booties, breathing masks, and white jumpsuits were the police Crime Scene Investigation team examining chemicals found at the crime scene and other physical evidence—including DNA—that could lead them to an arrest.

After several more minutes of watching the gawking crowd, the young man walked north, carrying his board along the beach to the Pacific Beach pier and an area just north, where the waves were normally good for surfing. But on this day, the tide was out and the breaks were

lousy. *No bombs and aerals today.*

Besides, he was exhausted from the previous night. He headed for an outcropping of rocks and placed his Firewire surfboard against the cliff. Taking the beach towel from around his neck, he spread it out and lay down between several large rocks.

As the midday sun baked his body, his mind faded in and out to thoughts about the young woman from the night before. He smiled, thinking about her. It was one thing to dominate a man—beat him to the ground and stand over him with a Mohamed Ali glare of victory. But to have a woman emotionally and physically want you—need you—sexually, that was something else.

“That’s the ultimate as a man,” he said out loud, with a broad smile. “To be sexually needed. Wow. That’s dominance. That’s doing what other fahkin’ men can’t do.”

