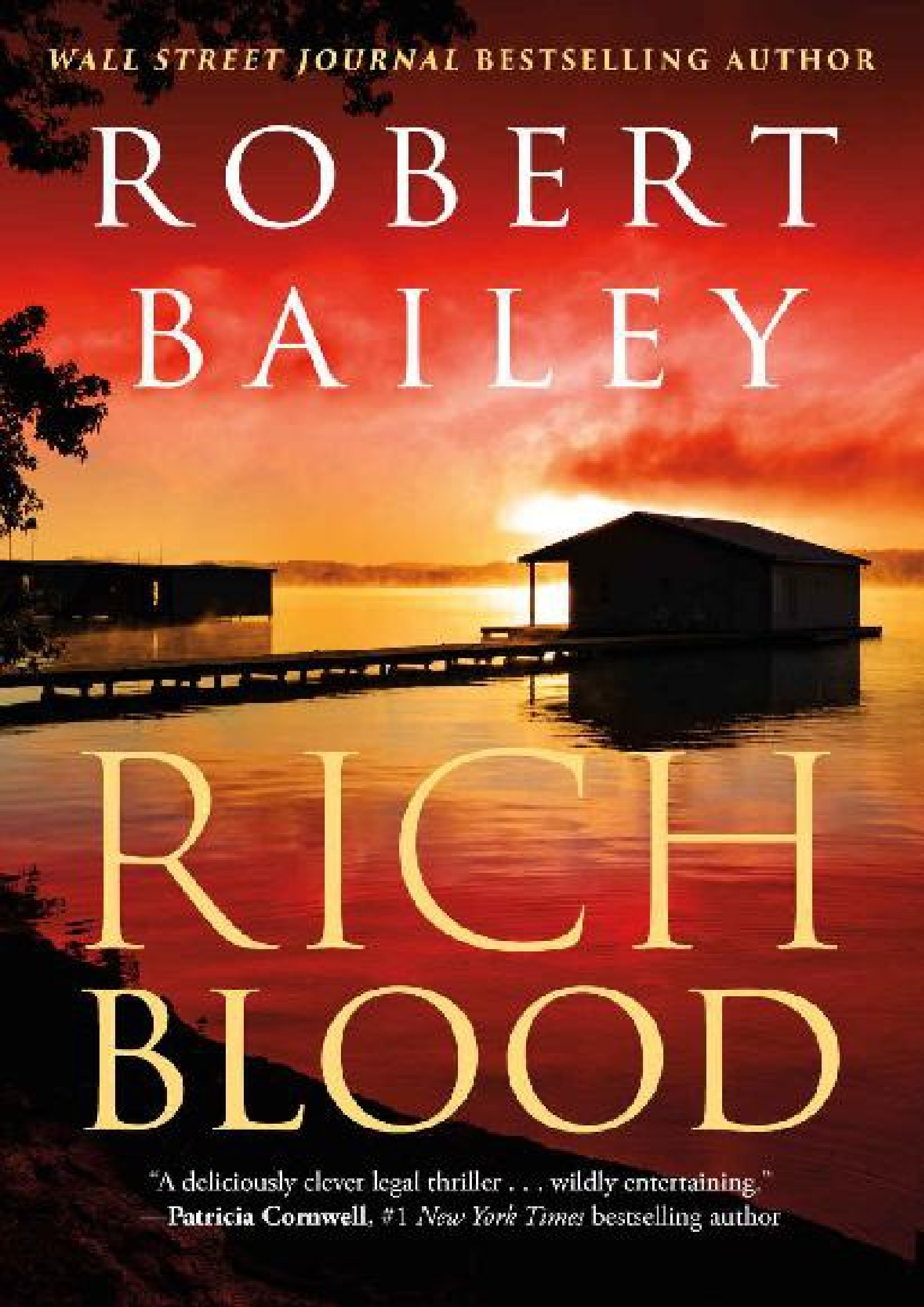


WALL STREET JOURNAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ROBERT  
BAILEY

A sunset over a body of water. The sky is a mix of orange, red, and yellow. In the foreground, there is a wooden pier extending into the water. On the pier, there is a small, dark, rectangular building. The water is calm, reflecting the colors of the sky. The overall mood is serene and slightly mysterious.

RICH  
BLOOD

*"A deliciously clever legal thriller . . . wildly entertaining."*

—*Patricia Cornwell, #1 New York Times bestselling author*

## PRAISE FOR ROBERT BAILEY

### *Rich Blood*

“*Rich Blood* is a deliciously clever legal thriller that keeps you turning pages fast and furious. Robert Bailey’s latest is wildly entertaining.”

—Patricia Cornwell, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

### *The Wrong Side*

“Bailey expertly ratchets up the suspense as the plot builds to a surprise punch ending. Readers will impatiently await the next in the series.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“Social tensions redoubled by race intensify a workmanlike mystery.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

### Previous Praise

“*The Professor* is that rare combination of thrills, chills, and heart. Gripping from the first page to the last.”

—Winston Groom, author of *Forrest Gump*

“Robert Bailey is a thriller writer to reckon with. His debut novel has a tight and twisty plot, vivid characters, and a pleasantly down-home sensibility that will remind some readers of adventures in Grisham-land. Luckily, Robert Bailey is an original, and his skill as a writer makes the Alabama setting all his own. *The Professor* marks the beginning of a very promising career.”

—Mark Childress, author of *Georgia Bottoms* and *Crazy in Alabama*

“Taut, page turning, and smart, *The Professor* is a legal thriller that will keep readers up late as the twists and turns keep coming. Set in Alabama,

it also includes that state's greatest icon, one Coach Bear Bryant. In fact, the Bear gets things going with the energy of an Alabama kickoff to Auburn. Robert Bailey knows his state, and he knows his law. He also knows how to write characters that are real, sympathetic, and surprising. If he keeps writing novels this good, he's got quite a literary career before him."

—Homer Hickam, author of *Rocket Boys / October Sky*, a *New York Times* #1 bestseller

"Bailey's solid second McMurtrie and Drake legal thriller (after 2014's *The Professor*) . . . provides enough twists and surprises to keep readers turning the pages."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"A gripping legal suspense thriller of the first order, *Between Black and White* clearly displays author Robert Bailey's impressive talents as a novelist. An absorbing and riveting read from beginning to end."

—Midwest Book Review

"Take a murder, a damaged woman, and a desperate daughter, and you have the recipe for *The Last Trial*, a complex and fast-paced legal thriller. Highly recommended."

—D. P. Lyle, award-winning author

"*The Final Reckoning* is explosive and displays every element of a classic thriller: fast pacing, strong narrative, fear, misery, and transcendence. Bailey proves once more that he is a fine writer with an instinct for powerful white-knuckle narrative."

—*Southern Literary Review*

"A stunning discovery, a triple twist, and dramatic courtroom scenes all make for a riveting, satisfying read in what might well be Bailey's best book to date . . . *Legacy of Lies* is a grand story with a morality-tale vibe, gripping and thrilling throughout. It showcases Bailey once more as a writer who knows how to keep the suspense high, the pacing fast, the narrative strong, the characters compellingly complex, and his plot full of white-knuckle tension and twists."

—*Southern Literary Review*

“Inspiring . . . Sharp in its dialogue, real with its relationships, and fascinating in details of the game, *The Golfer’s Carol* is that rarest of books—one you will read and keep for yourself while purchasing multiple copies for friends.”

—Andy Andrews, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Noticer* and  
*The Traveler’s Gift*

RICH  
BLOOD

ALSO BY ROBERT BAILEY

BOCEPHUS HAYNES SERIES

*The Wrong Side*

*Legacy of Lies*

MCMURTRIE AND DRAKE LEGAL  
THRILLERS

*The Final Reckoning*

*The Last Trial*

*Between Black and White*

*The Professor*

OTHER BOOKS

*The Golfer's Carol*

# RICH BLOOD

ROBERT  
BAILEY

 THOMAS & MERCER

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*For Joe and Foncie Bullard*

# CONTENTS

## PART ONE

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

## PART TWO

9

10

11

12

13

## PART THREE

14

15

16

17

18

## PART FOUR

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

[28](#)

[29](#)

[30](#)

[31](#)

[32](#)

[33](#)

[34](#)

[35](#)

[36](#)

## [PART FIVE](#)

[37](#)

[38](#)

[39](#)

[40](#)

[41](#)

[42](#)

[43](#)

[44](#)

[45](#)

[46](#)

[47](#)

[48](#)

[49](#)

[50](#)

[51](#)

[52](#)

[53](#)

[54](#)

[55](#)

[56](#)

## [PART SIX](#)

[57](#)

[58](#)

[59](#)

[60](#)

[61](#)

[62](#)

[63](#)

[64](#)

[65](#)

[66](#)

[67](#)

[68](#)

[69](#)

[70](#)

[71](#)

[72](#)

[73](#)

[74](#)

[75](#)

[76](#)

[77](#)

[78](#)

[79](#)

[80](#)

[81](#)

[82](#)

[83](#)

[84](#)

[EPILOGUE](#)

[ACKNOWLEDGMENTS](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

# PART ONE

Waylon Pike had never killed anyone before.

He'd done other things. Terrible, awful things. Some of which he'd served time for doing. Some he hadn't.

But in his forty-two miserable years on this earth, he'd never taken a life.

He'd thought it would be harder. That there would be cold feet, nerves, something.

But Waylon didn't feel a damn thing.

As he waited for the car that would take him on his way to do the deed, Waylon cast his rod back in the water and gawked at the fireworks lighting up Lake Gunter'sville. He wondered how many of these pyrotechnic devices had been purchased at one of the outlets in and around his home in South Pittsburg, Tennessee. Waylon had worked a job in high school at the supercenter off the interstate and learned quite a bit about roman candles, smoke bombs, missiles, rockets, crossettes, ground spinners, and every other kind of firework you could think of. He'd always had an affinity for explosives. Both the ones that provided visual entertainment . . .

. . . and the devices that did a little more than decorate the sky.

His first brush with the law had been for lighting a roman candle in a friend's truck and shooting the projectile out the window at an oncoming car. He'd gotten youthful offender status, and the misdemeanor didn't even show up on his record. Waylon should have been relieved to escape punishment, but, if anything, his initial foray into crime only made him want to go further. When he was nineteen, he'd torched a restaurant at the behest of the owner for the insurance proceeds. The fire was investigated, but he was never charged or suspected of arson. The owner gave him 10 percent of the payout, and Waylon was on his way to a career of being a "fixer" for people.

And a life of trouble. He had a rap sheet that included convictions for theft, arson, and possession of cocaine, and he'd served two different stints

in prison, the last of which had wrapped up a year ago.

Waylon wondered as he reeled his line back in and recast if he'd ever had a chance in life. If the stars were just aligned for him to be a criminal.

When he'd met Jana Waters, he'd felt that his luck had changed. She was a rich, bored housewife who seemed to be tortured by her life of affluence. They'd met at a bar and gotten drunk, and then he'd enjoyed her talents inside her vehicle in the parking lot of the bar. Waylon smiled at the memory. Since that initial romp, Jana had hired him to do an endless array of handyman tasks at the family mansion on Buck Island. She'd also referred him to some of her rich friends, and so he'd made a handsome wage these last nine months. Waylon had been a terrible student, but he was great with his hands. Whether he was hired for engine repair, house fixer-upper projects, or boat maintenance, he was a "good man to have around," as Jana had told him and her friends. He had to admit that he enjoyed going legit. Doing honest work and getting paid for it. Of course, he was screwing another man's wife, but all was fair in love and war, right? Adultery was a sin, not a crime. And he was going to hell anyway. Might as well go happy.

Waylon had known it couldn't last. Before long, he figured he'd be dragged back into his old life. Something or someone would pull him to crossing over again. It was as inevitable as Auburn rolling Toomer's Corner after a big win or an Alabama loss.

He hadn't figured that Jana Waters would be the instrument behind his return to his seedier past, but life was full of surprises, wasn't it? He glanced at his watch and then back at the lake. The night was dark now, but there would be more fireworks. It was the Fourth of July after all.

He reeled the line back in and grabbed his tackle box. Then he crossed the highway and climbed into his truck. Just a fisherman finishing up for the day.

He still had a few minutes before the pickup would happen, but he remained calm. Cool. Almost numb.

In approximately sixty minutes, he would kill a man.

Waylon Pike watched the fireworks show. And waited.

Jana Waters gazed into her almost empty glass of vodka. She bit her lip and then drank the rest before sliding it across the bar and standing.

“Leaving us so soon, Ms. Waters?” the bartender asked with a tease in his voice.

On a normal night, Jana might blow the handsome young lad a kiss. What was his name? Keith? Kenny? She couldn’t remember. But tonight, her heart wasn’t in it.

“Will you be here tomorrow?” he asked.

Jana blinked, managing to find her patented fake smile. “If you’re lucky.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said, his face blushing.

Jana turned and walked toward the exit. Fire by the Lake was a restaurant that sat right on Lake Gunterville off Highway 69. It had been one of her favorite haunts for years, even before the ownership changed. She felt eyes on her as she strode toward the door. That was nothing new. Jana Waters always left a wake coming and going.

She walked to her car, keeping her shoulders back and eyes forward. The wind off the lake was warm and sticky. When she reached her Mercedes SUV, she gazed out at the blacktop, glaring at the huge billboard that hugged the edge of the road.

### **INJURED AT WORK? GET RICH.**

Below the tasteless slogan was her brother’s smiling face and the message to call an equally crude telephone number—1-800 GET RICH—for legal services. She hadn’t seen Jason in three years, but he was never very far from her thoughts because she passed at least five of these monstrosities every time she drove anywhere. Gunterville to Boaz on Highway 431. I-65 all the way to the beach. Hell, even Lusk Road past Signal Point to Alder Springs.

It didn’t matter. Jason’s billboards were everywhere, and in each of the highway posters he flashed his bleach-whitened teeth and dirty-blond stubble, which some woman—probably his trashy ex-wife or his bitchy



law partner—must've told him looked cool. Jana thought he looked ridiculous, and she'd told him as much the last time they'd spoken. She'd told him a lot of things then, and he'd fired some choice words back. Seeing him now, smiling down at her as if he were enjoying the crisis she was in, made her want to vomit. She stuck her middle finger at the advertisement and slid into the driver's seat. Before starting the car, she sucked in a deep breath and felt her heart rate speed up.

She glanced at the clock on the dash. 8:55 p.m. The meeting was supposed to happen at 9:00. As she backed up her vehicle and turned for the exit, she glanced out the window at the dark water and full moon. A cascade of roman candles lit up the sky followed by the machine-gun sound of God knew how many other kinds of fireworks.

It was the Fourth of July. She should be sitting on the screened porch of her home on Buck Island, watching the show with her husband and daughters. Maybe walking down to the dock for a better look. Grilling dogs and burgers. Listening to Darius Rucker or Kenny Chesney or some other lake-appropriate artist. Maybe the girls could've had friends over. Or perhaps a boyfriend?

Jana felt her eyes welling up, and she ground her teeth, refusing to wipe away the tears. She glared at the billboard of her brother again.

She would not be weak. That had never been her style, and it wouldn't be now.

She pulled the Mercedes onto Highway 69 and accelerated east toward town. As the strip mall drew near, she clicked the right-turn blinker and pulled into the lot. She parked under an unlit streetlamp. Ten seconds later, the passenger-side door opened, and a man climbed inside. He smelled of mint chewing gum with the slightest tinge of body odor. Jana fought the urge to gag.

“Ready?” he asked.

Jana tried to speak, but the words wouldn't come. She glanced at him, nodded, and edged out of the space.

Seconds later, she was back on the road.

As she passed the causeway, fireworks illuminating the lake, Jana thought of her girls. And Braxton. Her husband.

*What in the hell am I doing?*

The club felt good in the surgeon's hand.

The grip was sticky, and though he wasn't wearing his customary FootJoy StaSof glove, he still had firm control over the eight iron. He looked down at his feet, which were adorned with blue-and-black Texas, and then the scuffed Titleist golf ball. He wagged the clubhead and set it behind the ball on the green nylon mat. Then he began his swing, turning his shoulders behind the ball and cocking his wrists. At the top, he shifted his weight from his right leg onto his left and fired the clubhead at the ball. There was a satisfying thwack at impact, and the ball lifted into the air and out over Lake Guntersville. Because of the full moon and the fireworks being shot in every direction, he could see that the ball curved gently from right to left, traveling perhaps 130 yards before disappearing into the dark water.

Dr. Braxton Waters breathed in the humid air and took a few seconds to admire his handiwork. He was hitting balls off the dock just like in his favorite Darius Rucker song, "Beers and Sunshine," which he'd listened to a few minutes earlier. Now playing on his Alexa: "Wagon Wheel," another goody by the pop star turned country artist. Normally, these tunes would have lifted his spirits, even if he was in a bad mood. Launching balls into the water usually helped relieve stress as well, and the shot he'd taken was as close to perfect as could be.

Alas, nothing seemed to be working tonight. He set the club down and grabbed his empty pint glass, then stuck it under the keg tap and began yet another pour.

Braxton took a long pull from the glass and then snatched the bottle of tequila and poured another shot. Chasing Patrón with pale ale. *The rich man's guide to getting wasted*, he thought, chuckling bitterly and kicking back the shot. Then he raised the pint glass and took a long sip of beer. No lime. No salt. No problem.

Braxton burped and grasped the golf club, stumbling back to the mat as Darius sang about dying free in Raleigh.

“Dying free,” Braxton bellowed out over the lake, knowing his words would be drowned out by the wind and sound of firecrackers. He placed another ball on the green carpet and gazed out at the muddy water. Then he turned back to his empty house, lit only by the overhead chandelier in the den. There was a time when the Fourth of July had meant that the lawn between the boathouse and mansion would be filled with people of all ages mingling, drinking, and dancing. Four years ago, he’d hired a live band, and a lot of the neighbors had come over along with some of the girls’ friends. That was while things with Jana were still cordial.

Braxton sighed and lined up to the golf ball. He jerked the club back and brought it down onto the mat. The ball squirted dead right. A cold shank. The worst shot in golf.

“Figures,” he said. He rolled another ball over and hit another “lateral shot,” as he preferred to call it, hating even to whisper the word *shank*. Braxton closed his eyes and felt unsteady on his feet. He thought of his oldest, Niecy, a rising sophomore at Birmingham Southern College. He’d almost begged her to come home. “Your sister could really use some time with you,” he’d pleaded. He dropped the club and pulled out his phone to look at her text, which had been nice but firm.

I’m sorry, Dad, but I can’t be around Mom right now. Every time I come home, she sucks me into her drama and it becomes a huge fight. I’m going to Destin with some friends. I asked Nola to come with us, but she said no.

Braxton flung his phone into a lawn chair and picked up the golf club, wagging it several times in frustration. *Nola* . . . his youngest daughter was sixteen. About to be a junior in high school, assuming she passed her summer classes. She’d been hit the hardest by his and Jana’s estrangement. Due to her poor grades, they’d had to pull her out of Randolph, the private college prep school in Huntsville, and she was barely getting by at Guntersville High. Once a bright-eyed, curious, happy-go-lucky child, she’d become a moody and edgy teenager who’d withdrawn into herself, barely speaking to him or her mother.

Jana said it was Braxton’s fault. That he hadn’t spent enough time with her. That he’d spoiled Niecy with attention and glossed over his youngest.

For a while, he’d believed her spiel. He was an orthopedic surgeon.

One of the best in north Alabama and, by far, the most proficient in Marshall County. He had a ridiculous schedule of operations and worked sixty to seventy hours a week almost every month of the year. He'd tried to cut back when Nola switched schools, but dropping hours meant fewer surgeries and less money. Braxton was well off, but the mortgage on their house was steep, and Jana's spending habits and drug use kept him in constant danger of being in financial peril. He was forty-nine years old, in the prime of his medical career. He needed to be working.

Braxton rolled another ball over. He took a three-quarter swing and this time hit the ball flush. He breathed a sigh of relief. Even when he was drunk and at the end of his wits with his crazy wife, the last thing he wanted to add to his plate was a case of the shanks.

He giggled at the absurdity of the thought and then plopped down in the lawn chair, surveying his texts. The only message from Jana today had come in around 6:00 p.m.

Out tonight.

Braxton scrolled down, pausing briefly at a message from Colleen, the CRNA who'd been with him for over a decade. For the past few years, since Jana's craziness had escalated, they'd engaged in an on-again, off-again affair that was currently off.

Happy fourth! I wish things could have been different . . .

Braxton gave his head a jerk. He wasn't sure how he felt about that. Truth was, he hadn't been the perfect husband. He'd made mistakes, but his indiscretions were nothing like his wife's. They hadn't put his family in danger.

He clicked over to his phone call summary and looked at a set of unfamiliar digits with a Boaz location. Braxton had screened the number at least five times before answering yesterday afternoon. He'd figured it was another extended-warranty reminder and had readied himself to hang up, but instead the voice that had come over the line had sent a shiver up his arm.

"Dr. Waters, this is Tyson Cade. I'm sure you know who I am. Your wife owes me \$50,000. She hasn't paid, though she's done other things to grant herself more time." There'd been a pause, and Braxton had forced