

A hand holding a knife with blood dripping from the blade. The background is white, and the hand and knife are in the foreground, slightly out of focus. The blood is a bright red color and is dripping down the length of the blade.

**KILLING**

*Softly*

**GREG SMITH**

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*Dedicated to my wife, Patricia,  
without whose support and prompting  
this book would never had been born.*

## PRELUDE

Perspiration dripped from the tip of her nose. God, no one's done me like this before! The young woman was on her knees leaning forward on one hand that clutched the bedding, her other hand reaching under between her spread legs.

Her body bucked with the action of her lover who was riding her hard, and harder. She hung her head, sweating with hot passion; eyes closed in erotic delight and felt a hand reach under to cup one of her swinging full breasts.

Fingers toyed with the nipple, twisting, pulling, and teasing it. The woman moaned as waves of pleasure washed over her. She marveled at her lover's endurance, having long ago lost count of her numerous orgasms and just going along for the ride now.

Ha! That's a laugh. Look at who's being ridden. God, how much more? Just then, her body involuntarily hunched, as muscles grew taut with the onslaught of another orgasm. Oh, no! Mmmmmm. YES! YES!

She didn't feel the garrote encircle her throat. The fine piano wire suddenly drew savagely tight, cutting deep into the soft damp skin, crushing her windpipe. The woman's body was hauled upright onto her knees as her lover sprang backwards off the bed. Eyes bulged open wide in fear, fingers clawed at the wire in a vain attempt to stop the awful sawing. Breathe—I—I can't—breathe. Need air! Oh, the pain! Stop—someone—stop it. Why?

The frantic struggling, so violent to begin with as the innocent fought for that last spark of life, gradually gave way to convulsive heaves, then twitches ... then stillness. A gurgling came from the torn throat as bloody bubbles accompanied the last rush of air and life.

The body, finally released by its tormentor, slumped onto the blood-soaked sheets. The room was all but silent. The killer stood, chest heaving, exhausted from a night's hard loving.

## CHAPTER 1

“Damn!” Em moaned to herself, as she hauled her weary body from the rumpled sheets. The show must go on, time stands still for no woman ... clichés began scrolling across her mind’s window. She cast a saddened glance at the empty bed then, following a few minutes of ritualistic stretching, padded her way into the kitchen.

Reaching into the refrigerator for the carton of pulp-free orange juice, so recently squeezed and shipped to her from the sunny south as announced proudly by the all too bright lettering, Em leaned back against the cool granite counter and sipped the refreshing fluid. She let it slip down her throat while gazing out at a dreary grey day filtering through the warm wooden slatted blinds.

Poema Hunter—she preferred being called Em—was content with her life. Being born into a wealthy family had certainly provided her with distinct advantages early in life, none of which had compromised the standards instilled in her by her mother. With wealth came privileges most certainly, but also responsibilities—severe at times.

Doted upon by her Polynesian mother, Em was taught strong family values; respect for the older generation; care and attentiveness to the young; but above all, reverence for the patriarchal position of her father.

Stanford Hunter had clawed his way out from under the weight of severe poverty that threatened to crush him as a youth growing up in the 20’s. Vowing to himself that should he ever have a family of his own they would never want for anything, he had eked a bare existence from the back streets of Chicago. Gradually, and with the tenacity of a youth twice his age, Hunter had earned the respect of many local small shop owners by volunteering to do menial jobs for them.

Over the course of several years, his inherent intellect became apparent to the old owner of a shop dealing in second-hand books who had taken the young lad under his tutelage. A whole new world opened up to the young boy, a world full of hope and potential. Then the world had been plunged into the mire of the Second World War.

The under-aged Hunter had lied his way into the Marine Corps, survived the vagaries of war, and emerged a hardened man, old beyond his years and

with a burning ambition for a better life. He started his own salvage and scrap metal company, utilizing the GI Bill for resources, and it wasn't long before he had secured various government contracts to help with the cleanup of the Pacific islands.

It was during this phase of his life that he met Em's mother, Temoe, and married her. Em was born in Papua New Guinea and spent her early years growing up among the local native children in Lae. As his business empire grew, her father removed himself gradually from the dirty, hands-on labor, concentrating his efforts more on the boardroom chores, until the family relocated to Virginia to be closer to the source of government contracts.

The deterioration was insidious. It took time but eventually the convoluted machinations of wheeling, dealing, and socializing on the Washington circuit, began to corrode the foundations of the Hunter household. Excessive late nights, cocktail parties and meetings all contributed to the bonds between parents and their only daughter dissolving.

Soon they resorted to the services of a live-in nanny, which only helped further the generational rift. Em was all-too-often left to her own resources to occupy her time at home and as a result grew more and more independent and strong-willed.

Now, years later, looking back with perfect hindsight, Em did not place any blame at her parents' feet for the eventual destruction of her family. Her heart was only filled with sorrow—for them all, but especially for her parents. From the moment the Hunters had established themselves in Virginia it was as though they fell under the spell of some major evil, a force which took them into its clutches and began sucking the very goodness from their souls, depreciating their values and replacing them with a dark, vile, selfish hunger.

Em shook her head to clear it of the melancholy reverie. Her mind began its habitual scanning of the day's schedule, noting several staff and management meetings, lunch with a new client (promising?); yet more meetings, then the arrival time of Mac's flight from Florida. A silky smirk of a smile drew itself across her lips and the dark-haired beauty ran the tip of her tongue around them savoring the juice glistening there.

"Just you wait," she murmured to herself, returning the carton to its place among the fully stocked shelves in the fridge. It's been way too long since she'd laid hungry eyes on her life-long friend and a tingle of anticipation rippled through her body at the thought of having her friend here at home for

several weeks ... all to herself.

Em moved quickly out of the kitchen, its elevated position overlooking a jungle-lush dining and living area, alive with stands of bamboo, exotic tropical plants flaunting their brightly colored flowers, and the ever-jubilant waterfall tumbling into the clear rock pool. Off to one side, entirely hidden behind a screen of thick, tall bamboo was the guest shower and facilities. Her naked body threw a bouncing shadow over the stones ahead as she followed the path to the shower enclosure.

Minutes later, hot water, steamy and luxuriating, coursed over her body and Em could sense her whole being relaxing. Subdued lighting, sifted by the bamboo surrounding her sleek body, danced and sparkled on her glistening skin; wisps of steam swirled up from around the woman's feet and the water gurgled down through the stone floor to the hidden drain underneath.

A fragrant aroma permeated the air as she lathered the soap and began massaging her supple skin. *I'm so glad I had inherited a golden color from my mother, thought Em, otherwise I, like so many people, would be subjecting myself to the tanning booths chasing after that ever-so-youthful glow. And likewise, my hair is a midnight black blue, falling in luxurious thickness to past my waist, another gift from my mother. Oh how I miss you, mum.* A tear blended with the shower.

Nostalgia gave way to a strange sense of foreboding as Em toweled off. *What the hell is this about? Am I becoming paranoid or something?*

*I haven't had this kind of feeling for ages, and never this strong before.* She quizzed her pensive reflection in the mirror but no answers were forthcoming. Dark green eyes stared intently back at, gold flecks like so much glitter swam in those two quizzical pools.

*Shit!! I don't need this—not today!* The woman poked a pink tongue out at herself and hurried off to dress for her first meeting.

Being predictable was one trait no one could assign to Em. As a young girl growing up in Papua New Guinea, what had started out as a game between herself and her parents in order for Em to keep them on their toes and for the young girl to maintain some modicum of control over her small world, Em learned the secret of being ever-changing.

In exasperation, Em's mother would exclaim at least once every day that she "could never work her out"; that she couldn't tell from one day to the next what devious new ways her daughter would devise to surprise both her and Em's father, be it a new game of hide-n-seek, new imaginary friends, etc.

So now, standing before the full-length mirror, Em smiled to herself as she ran a critical eye over her attire.

*My staff never knows what to expect me to wear to the office from one day to the next so they all regard me as somewhat of an enigma as far as bosses go. I even suspect someone of running an office pool on what I may turn up in, or at least what my “color for the day” may be. And today I am determined not to disappoint them.*

Black was Em’s color for today. From head to toe she was clad in black semi-aniline leather. Her preferred choice of clothing fabric, leather doesn’t itch and it doesn’t scratch when you put it on. Leather is at first cool to the touch, and then warms to your body temperature, forming to your shape, much like your favorite pair of jeans.

However, nothing smells quite like leather. All leather has its own aroma that is unmistakable. The smell of new expensive shoes or boots ... the interior of a luxury car ... Em loved it. The pants were tucked into knee-high boots with stiletto heels; the jacket with collar turned up in anticipation of the outside cold accentuated a wide-shouldered frame and was cinched in at the waist by a 3-inch-wide studded belt. Apart from the leather thong, Em wore nothing else under her outer shell.

To enhance the diabolic look, her lips sported a glossy fire-red. To finish off the ensemble, she slipped a Glock 28 subcompact pistol into its concealed holster inside the jacket. After all, a girl can never be sure when a dinner date may become overly amorous and not want to accept ‘no’ as a directive. Satisfied with the overall look, Em turned on her heel and headed down to the subterranean garage.

The spiral staircase between the main bedroom and the kitchen delivered the black-clad beauty into the garage. Sensors detected her descent and illuminated the spacious area with incandescent lighting.

The focal point of the garage was the sleek black Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren. Em’s new pet was a sports car and supercar automobile co-developed by Daimler Chrysler and McLaren Cars. It was one of the fastest automatic transmission cars in the world.

Most people presume “SLR” to stand for “Sportlich, Leicht, Rennsport” (German for “Sport; Light; Racing”), while it actually meant “super-leicht, Rennsport” (super-light, racing). The 722 Edition referred to the victory by Stirling Moss and his co-driver Denis Jenkinson in a Mercedes-Benz 300 SLR with the starting number 722 (indicating a start time of 7:22 a.m.) at the

Mille Miglia in 1955. The “722 Edition” created 650 bhp, with a top speed of 210 mph and 0-60mph in 3.6 seconds.

All in all a good match for Em’s life-style ... besides, she just loved the gull-wing doors. The inside of the SLR was as exotic as the Batmobile exterior, with carbon-fiber seat shells covered in fine leather and a cockpit built of contrasting colors and textures.

Slipping on leather driving gloves, Em turned the stubby key, flipped a cover at the top of the gear selector, and thumbed the button that hid there to bring the 5.4-liter, V-8 rumbling to life.

The whisper-quiet garage door cycled opened and the sleek sports car, emerging like some black panther from its lair, slid out onto Mapleton Ave, now slick from a light drizzle and roared off into the misty grey morning. A shadow detached itself from an adjacent dark doorway and slit eyes watched as the car disappeared around a far corner, and then shifted their intent gaze to the recently vacated house.

## CHAPTER 2

Despite the dreary weather and the pall of weariness it had leveled on everyone shuffling about the city, Em was most content with the day's business. All the meetings had started on time for a change and all attendees had been keen to have the proceedings done with as quickly as possible. It was Friday after all. The luncheon, too, had been more than fruitful, bearing a new 10-year contract for the company—the Capricorn Account—and a rain check for a future dinner date for herself.

Em smiled wickedly. *And I hadn't had to use any undue force to secure that last, either, just a surreptitious touch of Mr. Jefferies' inner thigh* . She glanced up at a leaden evening sky.

Through the windshield the street lights and headlights of passing traffic appeared as a glossy oil painting, colors leaking into one another as pools of water tentatively touched each other, racing to form into larger palettes of shimmering rainbows. The tires of Em's car hissed as they swished through puddles stretching across the road.

Up ahead the city's taller buildings rose from the swirling tendrils of fog hugging the wet earth. She was excited to see Mac again after so long a break, and her breath fogged the glass forcing her to turn on the air to clear it.

The rush of cold air swirled around her, reached under Em's coat, and teased her nipples into hard, excited nubs of sensitivity. They rubbed on the inside of her coat and the pleasurable tingle coursing down her back made Em let out a soft moan and she squirmed in her seat. Em had had time after work to dash home and change into a thigh-length leather jacket. The night was full of promises.

The McLaren pulled up under the outstretched entry of Mac's hotel, the Marriott Boulder, Canyon Blvd and she was already waiting for Em. At first the blonde didn't notice the car and Em took the opportunity to run her eyes over her friend's lithe body as she stood chatting with the burly doorman. He said something to cause Mac to throw her head back and laugh generously and Em's eyes followed the sensuous curve of the neck till it met the plunging vee of Mac's black shirt.

Em's breath caught and her pulse quickened. It was all she could do not to

call Mac's name yet the blonde turned at the sound of the masculine grumbling emanating from a strange car. The lights from a passing vehicle illuminated the face inside the waiting car. She pecked the doorman on the cheek causing him to blush, then glided over to the car and let herself in.

"New wheels, I see ... I like very much," said Mac. For a few seconds nothing else was said ... hot silence sat between the two friends as they both drank in each other. Then the spell was broken. Mac let out a soft laugh, leaned over and kissed Em softly, full on the lips and settled back into her seat. Em laughed, tossing her thick hair, and gunned the Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren out into the flowing traffic. "—and the car's not too bad either." Mac smiled wickedly as her companion cast a smoky glance her way.

They cruised down Canyon Blvd and their conversation kept pace as both endeavored to make up for lost time by recounting every second that had passed since they were last together. The interior of the car filled with companionable warmth, friendship ... and love.

Outside, Em could see people huddled down against the falling rain as they made their way home to their own loved ones. *At least, I hope they are not alone on a night like this*, she thought to herself. The SLR grumbled down through the gears as if it resented having to slow down when Em swung off Canyon Blvd and right onto Broadway. The car crossed Pearl and 4 blocks later, left into Mapleton Ave. This section, between Broadway and 9th featured some impressively large properties for being so close to downtown Boulder. Mac saw the warm glow of lights spilling from cosy homes onto large front yards. The car swung into the second driveway on the left and rolled down into the underground garage even before the door was fully retracted. Mac arched an exquisitely curved eyebrow.

"New place, too, hun," Em said. Noticing the other's expression, she smiled. "It's been a good year."

As the two mounted the spiral stairs Mac couldn't take her eyes off Em's figure moving sensuously ahead of her. The glow from concealed lights were captured, then thrown back randomly in muted tones, from the ultra-soft red leather coat Em wore which fell to mid-thigh.

It was cinched in at her narrow waste by a wide leather tie knotted casually on the left hip. The collar was turned up at the back against the weather but couldn't contain the thick dark tresses that cascaded over Em's shoulders and most of the way down her back.

The tip of Mac's tongue flicked out and licked her lips as her eyes glided

down Em's legs to her feet cupped in soft, red-leather ankle boots that matched the coat. Em's hips swayed seductively up the stairs and Mac sensed a warm sensation of anticipation.

Once the door had closed behind them, the blonde woman couldn't help but catch her breath as she took in the surroundings. The carpet was thick and a rich coffee bean color; the walls, a dark green, seemed to softly shimmer as flecks of imbedded gold caught and threw back the light emanating from somewhere above—or from among the dense stands of bamboo, she couldn't determine which.

The sound of rippling water intermingled with an aroma suffused with the smell of lush jungle and tropical blooms. She sensed rather than heard the strains of music flowing among the leaves in some primeval rhythm. Mac caught Em smiling at her as she suddenly realized she'd been holding her breath for some time.

“My god, this is ... is ... beautiful!” Mac felt a compulsion to whisper.

Em shucked off her boots and, hooking a finger, beckoned her friend to follow her deeper down the passage, which seemed more like a jungle trail than a hallway. Leaving her shoes at the head of the stairs, Mac followed her barefooted, reveling in the deep carpet pile; it seemed to her that they were walking on heavy moss. She stretched her toes in sensual delight.

Making a left turn and walking a half-dozen steps the women emerged from the bamboo-lined trail and stopped at the edge of a sweeping set of wide stairs—or rather, various planes of rock shelves. At least, that's what they looked like as they led down to a lower level ... that resembled a jungle clearing, as the room was filled with yet more bamboo in cohabitation with lush tropical greenery, gorgeous arrays of orchids, and numerous other equatorial flowers.

It's only when she felt Em take her hand that the spell was broken and Mac suddenly noticed the water running among the stone stairs and spilling into a good-sized rock pool from a ten-foot-high waterfall at the edge of the clearing. Em led her gently down beside the cascading water till they were standing at the poolside.

“Care to join me?” Em asked, slipping out of her leather jacket. She was completely naked underneath. Her skin appeared to have an inner glow all its own; the subdued light only helped to enhance the very fine golden hair on her skin. The twin globes of her full, supple breasts were tipped with the hard nubs of her nipples and as she stepped up to Mac her breasts jiggled

ever so slightly with her feline movement.

The deep emerald of Em's eyes twinkled with mischievous intent as she helped her friend out of her short black skirt, letting it pool at her feet like a discarded shadow. Their bare breasts pressed softly at first, then harder as Em took Mac in a passionate embrace.

Her tongue glided around Mac's lips—savoring her taste, insinuating itself past her teeth and deep into her inviting mouth—as the blonde uttered a guttural moan, and her eyes flickered, closing with delight. Em's tongue was alive in the other's mouth, reaching around every curve, massaging her tongue and all the while they both moaned and mewed with sensual pleasure.

Em's hands were in Mac's hair feeling its rich texture; one hand slipped gently to her neck where it teased the fine hairs there and she felt a shiver course through Mac's body. She pressed harder to her—ground her hips against Mac's. Both her hands clasped Mac's arse, squeezed, kneaded the supple fullness, and pressed her even tighter into Em's own body.

She took her mouth away and dropped her head to Mac's neck biting, nibbling, sucking like some vampire while Mac threw her head back and let out a loud moan. Em continued to nuzzle Mac's neck as she drew her down gently until they were both kneeling.

Em pushed her lover further till she was lying on her back. Mac's eyes were closed in ecstasy, her arms raised above her head, her fingers digging deep into the carpet. Em gazed down at her wonderfully full breasts now that they were stretched up and apart. She ran her tongue along their underside—first one, then the other—while her hand kneaded its twin.

Her thumb reached up and played around one hardened nipple, rocked it back & forth, round & round. Em's lips closed over the other nipple, sucked it into her mouth—she teased it with the tip of her tongue, flicked it. Her tongue circled the nipple that grew even bigger, even harder under her attention. Mac moaned and twisted her body, taking short, sharp breaths as her breasts and nipples grew more and more hot and sensitive at Em's touch.

Mac's hands came down and pulled Em's head harder to her breast, urging Em on. While Em continued working on one nipple and breast, alternatively sucking and licking, her hand left the other breast. She raked her fingernails ever-so-lightly over Mac's stomach—around her belly button—down to the edge of her black panties.

One finger, then two, then her whole hand sloooowly slid under the band of the panties; fingertips touched the silky curls of Mac's hidden bush,

pressed down gently onto her mons. A loud moan escaped Mac's lips, and she arched her back, pushing her hips up to meet Em's hand down there.

"OH ... OH ... my ... my god!" Mac exclaimed aloud. She whipped her head back and forth. Em forced her head up despite Mac's hands pulling her down, so Em could watch the action between Mac's legs which were now wide apart, slightly bent.

"NO, no ... let ... me..." Mac abruptly sat up and tugged her panties off and slumped back with a sob. She abandoned herself to desire. Her hand and fingers pumped in, out, in, out—faster, faster. Fingers searched out Mac's G-spot. Mac's hands grabbed her own breasts and kneaded them hard. Sobs and moans escaped her lips as her tongue darted in and out, licking. Em moved around till she was between Mac's legs. She glanced up over the rising and falling stomach, between Mac's quivering breasts now beaded with perspiration. Mac bit her lips.

Time dissolved away as the two women consummated their intense friendship. Both their bodies were bathed in sweat; they glistened and shone in the soft room lighting.

Mac's breathing slowly returned to normal and she had one arm flung across her face. Now only an occasional shudder went through her body. With a sobbing sigh she relaxed—totally spent, exhausted. Em flopped down beside her, cupping one of Mac's beautiful domed breasts, the nipple still hard. Mac shuddered one last time at her touch.

"Welcome home, hun," Em whispered in Mac's delicate ear. The blonde stretched languidly, turning a beautifully wistful smile to her lover. Her eyes shone with contented inner warmth and slowly she rolled onto her stomach so that her face was close to Em's.

"Thanks. That was worth the wait—utterly mind-blowing. You haven't lost your touch." Em simply smiled back at her. Mac wriggled closer so that she could kiss Em—her lips brushed the others so gently. Her tongue snaked out and flicked back and forth teasing Em's mouth open. Mac cradled Em close to her as shudders rippled back and forth through Em's spent body. Em could hardly breathe. They kissed hungrily, savoring each other again; they both collapsed on their backs.

Glazed eyes stared up at a dark ceiling twinkling with a myriad of tiny lights. Noises rushed back to life in the room around them; once again they could hear the water tumbling over the rock ledge into the pool. Em's heart slowed, no longer racing crazily around inside her chest. She pulled Mac to

her, cradled her damp head into the crook of her shoulder and they found themselves drifting off into a welcome sleep.

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A butterfly flittered and skipped across one gently rising and falling round breast, touched lightly down on its pinnacle of a nipple. The peak was still so sensitive that even this gossamer touch caused it to raise itself from a languid sleep, nestled in the soft pinkish-brown areola. A ring of gooseflesh accompanied the excitement.

Em moved to sit up with a sigh and unconsciously touched each nipple, hefting the weight of her breasts. She hadn't felt this relaxed for so long—funny! She smiled at the thought of the torrid session they both had not that long ago. Sex is so good, she thought to herself. She glanced down at her friend, still asleep; there was a satisfied smile on the young face and Mac was fondling herself—must be dreaming.

Rising quietly, Em slipped into the pool. The water was just below body temperature, slightly cool but still refreshing. Ahhhhh—a sigh escaped her lips. Bliss! She lay back and allowed the water to cradle her body, her breasts appeared as twin islands topped with hard peaks.

The tall beauty backstroked towards the waterfall. Gliding up to a specific spot, she positioned herself and the stream of water shooting from this side of the waterfall struck her with a hard pulsating pressure. Em's eyes closed, her head fell back. *AHHHHH ... ohhhhhh*. The jet of water massaged her body like dozens of hungry fingers.

“Whaaaaa...?” Em snapped from her reverie.

“You woke me with all your moaning.” Mac glided through the turbulent water to her friend's side. Together they reveled in the therapeutic pummeling of the waterfall. After a time, and completely revitalized, both women swam to the edge of the pool and hauled themselves out of the water. Mac followed Em along a short path through a stand of bamboo to the guest bedroom. Here, after a parting kiss, Em left her friend to retire for the night and, with a tired smile, turned and made for her own bedroom.