



YOU CAN RUN

A Kramer and Shadow Novel

GREG SMITH

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**A Kramer and Shadow Crime Novel
Book 2**

Greg Smith

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the women and men, and service dogs, who have the daunting task of guarding our borders, and enforcing the laws set in place to enable the rest of us to enjoy the luxury of freedom.

Also by Greg Smith

THE KRAMER and SHADOW SERIES

The Pits

INDEPENDENT TITLES

Killing Softly

CHAPTER 1

She scrambled on her hands and knees, worming her way deep into the thick underbrush. Her lungs and throat burned from frantic breathing. The pain of branches and rocks tearing and bruising her skin went unfelt. Terror coursing through her young body immunized her senses to any injuries.

She bumped into the base of a tree, its rough bark scraping her face. Her arms wrapped around the trunk welcoming the sense of security offered. The girl shuffled around and leaned her back against the tree and drew her knees up to her chest.

She squeezed her eyes tight and listened.

Blood pounded in her ears. She struggled to dampen the infernal noise and gradually her hearing cleared. At first there was nothing then suddenly she heard it—a distant crackling and popping. Her brow wrinkled in concentration as she worked to put a name to the sound. Her eyes flew open. Fire.

Despite the dense underbrush and the distance she had placed between herself and the house, she spotted the flickering light. Night lay thick and heavy all around her and there was no mistaking the flames reaching out through her bedroom window. Tears ran down her face and sobs racked her as images of her parents flashed before her mind's eye.

"Sarah, time for bed, dear." Her mother had sent her off to bed early tonight because her father wanted to leave at first light tomorrow morning. It was to be the family's first vacation to Disney World and the young twelve year old was ecstatic, to say the least. She argued she didn't think she could sleep a wink but her mother still insisted she try.

Sleep must have snuck up on her because the house was totally dark when the crash of splintering wood jerked her wide-awake. At first she thought she dreamt the noise, but as she sat up in bed wondering, sound of glass shattering came from somewhere downstairs, toward the front

of the house. Then she heard the back door burst open.

She leapt out of bed and dashed to the bedroom door. Sarah remembered watching her mother ease it close and blowing her a goodnight kiss. Now she stood at the top of the stairs staring fearfully down into the darkness. Her parents' room lay at the bottom of the staircase. Suddenly her father threw the door open, startling her. A shaft of light spilled from the bedroom throwing his shadow starkly against the opposite wall. He stared up at her wild-eyed for a second, and swiveled his head back and forth as chaotic sounds came from both ends of the house.

"Get back in your room and close the door, Sarah," he hissed.

But before she could do as ordered something caught her father's attention and he turned from her. He was a large man, strongly built, and his frame blocked the passage to the kitchen at the back of the house. Sarah took a tentative step down the stairs when her father must have noticed someone coming from the living room up front.

"What the dickens is going on?" her father shouted. "Who are you? What the hell do you want? You have no right—"

Everything seemed to happen at once.

Sarah's mother appeared. Her face contorted with fear, her eyes snapping up at her young daughter. Sarah's father braced himself as a figure charged at him out of the dark. As the two collided in a melee of swinging fists, another man joined the fray. He must have come from the kitchen.

Her mother screamed. Sarah screamed even louder. Her ear-piercing screech resounded in the house, now a scene of an ugly brawl.

"Get out. Now!" Father's muffled command came from inside the tangle of bodies on the floor.

Sarah's mother attempted to move to the stairs but a hand lashed out from the scuffle, seized her ankle, and brought her crashing down hard. The woman's head struck the bottom hardwood stair with a dull crack. A trickle of blood seeped down her face as she stared up at Sarah in horror.

"Grab the kid." The voice belonged to one of the house invaders.

A sudden thunderous roar rose out of the fighting and with herculean effort, father heaved himself up sending one of the strangers hurtling down the passage. The other pulled something dark and ugly from his belt.

An explosion filled the hallway. Sarah's hands flew to her ears as she let out a long, high-pitch shriek. Her father toppled to the floor, but not before his shocked and sorrowful expression seared itself into the young girl's mind.

She turned and bolted.

Toys and clothes littered her room but these she simply ran around or jumped over. She focused on her bedroom window—her only avenue of escape.

Her hands grabbed the wooden frame and, using all her youthful strength, she hefted the window up. Fear clutched her throat. She could barely make out the ground some twelve feet below. Footsteps pounded up the stairs. Sarah held her breath, said a very short prayer, and flung herself into the night.

Judo and gymnastic lessons at school came into play and she tucked and rolled as she hit the ground. She sprang to her feet and ran straight for the forest bordering the family property.

Now, hunkered down and shivering from shock and fear, the girl was mesmerized by the sight of her home burning. Regarded as inquisitive by everyone who knew her, Sarah always had a question to pose. Even as her tears glistened in the glow of the fire her mind raced.

If the strangers were after her why hadn't they simply come through her bedroom window? Why did they break into the house so savagely? And why, oh why, did they have to hurt her parents like they did?

A man emerged from the house. Instinctively Sarah froze; every muscle taut. Only her eyes moved. They followed the man as he walked the edge of the flames, his figure silhouetted against the fiery glare. He reached the area where Sarah's bedroom used to be and stared at the conflagration. He glanced up as his partner came from around the rear of the house and joined him.

The two men stood for a long moment, gesturing at the fire and each other. Sarah guessed from their body language they were angry, probably at how the night's events had turned out. One of the men looked down, fingers scratching his chin as if he were in deep thought. Suddenly his whole body stiffened and he dropped to one knee. He touched the ground with his fingertips and his head turned slowly as his eyes tracked a line of some sort.

His arm rose and pointed straight at the tree. Right where Sarah hid.

Fear seized her. She could not breathe. Cold sweat appeared along her hairline and trickled down her chest. Her stomach lurched and the sudden urge to vomit swept over her as bile boiled up her throat. She shot to her feet. She had to run, had to—.

A man blocked her escape. Someone she hadn't seen before. He grabbed a handful of her hair.

"Gotcha, ya little minx," he hissed close to her ear, and louder, "Over here, guys. I have the kid. She ain't going nowhere."

