

# THE MEMORY MACHINE

## BIRTHDAY KILLINGS

### CHAPTER 1

"No, you definitely didn't tell me," Blake said. He stood firm and stared at his wife.

"Yes, I did. I told you right after I hung up the phone. I know this for a fact, because I was surprised you agreed so quickly," Sally said with authority, arms folded across her chest.

Blake smiled with an evil grin. "Well, there's only one way to prove it."

"You're kidding, right?"

"Nope. What'rya afraid I'm right again?"

Sally raised her eyebrows and stared into Blake's eyes. She knew she was in trouble. Or was she? Did she really tell Blake about her friends coming over for dinner tonight? She began to doubt herself.

"No, it's just... you can't use that thing on me every time we have an argument."

"Babes, this is only the second time I've used it on you, and besides, it's not an argument, it's a discussion. I know I'm right, but I'll tell you what. If by some miracle I'm wrong, I'll never use my invention on you again. You have my word."

"And if you're right?"

All Blake had to do was smile.

"Fine."

Blake put the helmet on his annoyed-looking wife. "This is ridiculous. All this just to prove a point."

Blake smiled again with confidence. "Are you ready?"

"Whatever," Sally said smugly.

Blake entered the date and time the phone conversation took place into the back of the helmet and turned on the eighty inch projection screen TV. The electronics in the super hero helmet made a vivid high definition video come to life which now displayed the exact moment in time looking through Sally's eyes.

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*Sally spoke of their son Nathan's upcoming fifth birthday party, clothing, shoes, dieting, celebrities, ex-boyfriends, sex, and everything else young women talk about.*

To Blake, the conversation seemed to go on forever. Blah Blah Blah.

*Sally finally hung up the phone and heard her son call out for her. She went to Nathan's room where he was building a snap-together plastic model car, applying the flamed decals.*

*"Hi, Mommy."*

*"Wow, that's looking really good, sweetie."*

*"Thank you. I'm hungry, Mommy."*

*"Ok dear, Daddy will be starting dinner soon."*

*Sally kissed Nathan's forehead and headed to the garage where Blake was working on the engine of a 1967 Chevy Corvair.*

*"Hey, hun, I'll be right back. Gotta get stuff for tomorrow's dinner. The girls are coming over, okay?"*

*"Uh huh, okay," Blake said as he continued to clean the already perfectly clean engine while watching football on the TV*

*in the corner of the garage. He stretched out his neck for a kiss while his eyes were focused on the game. "Love you."*

*"Love you too. I'll be back in thirty minutes. Maybe you can start dinner too?"*

*"Uh huh. Sure thing, Babes."*

*Sally headed out the door.*

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Blake removed the helmet and the screen went blank.

Sally shouted, "Told ya!" and stuck out her tongue.

"Sorry, Babes. You win."

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Smoke filled the air from the solder gun as Blake worked on his new invention in the lab. He was amazed how far it had evolved and thought about the initial design years ago. Back then The Memory Machine was a blue full leather face mask and gloves that he wore in order to hide his identity and prevent an assassination. While wearing the mask and gloves, all he had to do was program his laptop with a date and time and touch the temples of the one being accused. Images projected onto his laptop screen or monitor of what happened at that exact moment would appear for everyone to see, as if looking through their eyes.

He could still remember the rush he felt when he solved his first crime, the Newberry stabbing. The news spread like

wildfire. The whole world saw every gory detail - every stab, every kick to the stomach, and every punch.

Since no one knew who this masked man was, he had to create a name for himself. His best friend Saleem came up with a superhero name. He was introduced as Blake Stone, on live TV instead of who he really was, Nathan Hickling.

After several years and hundreds of court cases, he married Judge Sally Berneathy, the only judge to ever work with him and his invention. Blake passed his real first name to their son.

Now, seven years later, people knew what he looked like without the mask. Not by choice, thanks to the damn paparazzi. He was recognized as much, if not more, than the President of the United States, who had a direct line to Blake's office.

Blake still had at least two armed guards with him at all times when he or his wife left home. Brad Williams had been with him since the beginning, but Brad's sidekick, Alan Hidy, was shot trying to protect Blake. Joe Barna was hired as his replacement.

So much had changed. Blake no longer had to worry about traveling to a courthouse every day. All the court cases were now held right here in his mansion's own courtroom. Criminals were brought to him, but he was periodically required to travel to other countries to solve crimes. Even though the mansion was built like Fort Knox, he had eight guards on duty at all times. A little overkill, but ever since the last incident with his guard being murdered in cold blood, he didn't want to take any more chances.

Crime rate was at an all time low. People were afraid to commit any crime, big or small, knowing that if they were tried

under the court system with Judge Stone, Blake would be there, using the mask on the accused to prove what really happened. Not one single person was ever able to hold back their visions as Blake extracted those memories and displayed them for the world to see.

He put down his solder gun and held up the upgraded invention for inspection, the helmet he used earlier on Sally. "Damn, this looks pretty good, if I do say so myself."

His thought process was interrupted by a knock on his laboratory door.

Blake looked up as the door creaked open and Grandma Cherie Dubiac's head appeared. "Blake, dear, Sally asked me to tell you that the girls will be here soon. You've been in here all day. Why don't you take a break?"

Blake put the helmet down and rubbed his tired eyes. "Thanks Gram. Tell her I'll be right down, please." He felt a little guilty. After all, he did spend an awful lot of time in his lab, but there was so much to be done. Heck, his invention already worked just as good as the old one did. It had been tested extensively, but he couldn't wait to figure out how to incorporate a change that would alter the world once again. Even when he did figure it out, he wasn't sure where he would find a recently deceased person to try it out on.

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"Aren't those the cutest shoes?" Heidi said as she walked through the front door.

Sally smiled. "Oh, these old things?" She chuckled. Blake rolled his eyes. He was in for one hell of a dinner. Sally gave Heidi a hug, and then turned to Fran to do the same. "Thanks for coming, ladies. Dinner will be ready in five minutes. Have a seat."

Blake tried to remain in the kitchen as long as possible while he prepared dinner, but he knew he'd have to face the Trio of Terror sooner or later. Seemed Grandma Cherie had the right idea by pretending to sleep in her room.

Within ten minutes, Blake came out of the kitchen and served dinner. Fran tapped Sally on the arm. "You're such a lucky woman, Sally." When Heidi agreed, Blake turned on the charm, batted his eyelashes and replied, "Well, thank you, Mrs. Mayewski and Mrs. Augenti." He nodded to Heidi and then Fran. There were more giggles. Blake sighed. *They haven't even had anything to drink yet!*

Heidi patted Nathan on the hand. "So, what do you want for your birthday?"

Nathan didn't even have to think about it. "Cars!"

"As if you don't have enough already." Fran laughed.

Sally chimed in. "He just doesn't play with anything else. He loves to hang out in the garage when Blake is out there working on his car collection. He'll probably wind up being a mechanic or working in an auto body shop."

Blake was bored, only half-listening to the conversation, and he just smiled and nodded when he heard his name. His mind was on that damn helmet and he was losing sleep over it with thoughts racing through his head as he tried to figure out how

to incorporate that major change. He was nearly there, and he knew it.

An empty bottle of wine sat in the center of the table. Everyone had cleaned their plates except Blake who hadn't eaten much of anything.

"I'm sorry," Blake said when he noticed he was being stared at. "I've got a lot on my mind. Why don't you gals continue and Sally will fill me in about the birthday party later, won't you, Babes?"

"Yeah, no problem, hun. We understand, don't we, ladies?"

Blake cleared the plates, opened a new bottle of wine, refilled their glasses, kissed Sally on the forehead, and took his cold plate of food to his lab.

They all stared while Blake entered his lab and shut the door behind him.

"He's really is a good man, Sally," Heidi said.

"Yeah, I know. He's just trying to get his project done."

"How's it coming along?"

"He says it's nearly complete. It's going to be hard to test it until we can find a cadaver to try it on."

The expression on Fran's face made the giddy Heidi and Sally laugh again.

"Well, as you know, the mask shows what happened from the one being accused, as if looking through their eyes. He had to wear that damn thing whether it's fifty degrees or a hundred degrees. The helmet will still be one that the accused wears but will hopefully work on deceased persons, too. Blake's research shows that after someone dies, their brain still holds memory."

Heidi's eyes bolted wide open and her mouth dropped.  
"That's incredible!"

Sally continued. "Yeah! But... those memories are wiped away after twelve hours."

Fran took another sip of her wine. "So as long as you get to the body before twelve hours have passed, you'll be able to see what the deceased saw right before they died?"

Sally proudly nodded.

"That's amazing! Is that information from a reliable source?"

"Blake says it is. He's positive of it, and he's counting on it. He's in there literally the entire day doing all kinds of research. He really thinks he's nearly there. This isn't public yet, so please don't mention it to anyone."

After another hour of chatting, Heidi put her hands on her head. "Well, I think I should be heading out. It's getting late, and I have work in the morning."

"Me too," said Fran.

"Okay. Please drive extra carefully. You both had a lot to drink. Can you call me when you get in?"

"Sure thing," they both said, giggling at the fact that they each said the same thing at the same time.

"Hey, at least if something does happen to me, you'll have my body to test that device on," said Heidi, giggling some more. She looked around the room. No one else was giggling. She realized how bad her joke sounded and how horrible her head felt. "On second thought, do you have an extra room? I'd rather not risk it. I'll call off work tomorrow."

"We have twelve extra rooms. Take your pick."

"I'll take one too," Fran said.



Sally showed them the way to their rooms and reminded them once again, "Remember, what's said at the Stones' house stays at the Stones' house."

Heidi and Fran nodded in confirmation as they closed their doors.

## CHAPTER 2

Kasa rubbed his face and felt the bristle of the stubble that would soon form a beard. "How do you propose we pull this off, boss?"

Smith zoomed in on the Stone's mansion using Google Maps and pointed with his finger. "I'm going to have you stationed here." He moved his finger two streets over, "and I'll be here."

Kasa scribbled down some notes. "I'm glad it's finally time, boss. We've been at this for months now. How many on our team anyway?"

Smith flipped his notebook open and moved his pencil point to each line on the page as he counted names. "We'll have eight people that day watching, including us. I don't think we'll need any more than that. After the first two or three people die, there won't be a problem anymore."

"And they all know to be here tomorrow?"

Smith smacked Kasa on the back of the head with his pistol. "Oh, no, I forgot to tell them. Thank you so much for reminding me," he said sarcastically as he got up from the chair in the run-down abandoned home ten blocks away from the mansion. Smith opened the door and motioned for Kasa to leave.

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Sally awoke to an empty bed - again. She let out a huge sigh, put on her robe, and walked to the laboratory. Blake was talking on his Bluetooth headset with his best friend Saleem, frantically soldering again and acting all jittery as if he had too much coffee. He didn't even notice her come in.

"Are you okay, hun?"

Blake looked up and motioned for Sally to come over. "I'll call you back, Saleem." Blake pushed his earpiece to hang up the phone. "Yes! Yes I am! Better than ever! I think I did it, Babes! I finally found some very detailed resources about the brain, put two and two together, and the solution clicked in my mind - just like that!" Blake said as he snapped his fingers. "I just finished soldering the last wire in place. The solution was right under my nose the entire time. I knew I was close!"

"Excellent!" Sally threw her arms around Blake and gave him a huge hug to share his excitement. She still didn't believe this was even possible, but supported her husband 100%. "How are we going to test this?"

"At the morgue, of course!"

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Grandma Cherie sat home taking care of Nathan while Blake, Sally and their two armed guards arrived at the morgue just one hour later, despite Sally's protests that Blake get some rest first. Sally knew he had a valid point - he wouldn't be able to sleep, anyway.

The undertaker, Mark Mizenko, shook Blake's hand firmly. "I'm so glad to finally meet you Blake. I can't thank you enough for what you do, but for what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?"

"Well, what I'm about to tell you is highly confidential. I need to have your word that what I'm about to say won't get out to the public just yet, and if it does, you know I can find out if you're the one who 'let the cat out of the bag.'

Mark knew he was right. All Blake had to do was use The Memory Machine on him.

"Do I have your word?"

"You have my word."

Blake cleared his throat. "Do you have any deceased that just came in, say, less than twelve hours ago?"

Mizenko looked confused. "I usually do, but it's only nine a.m., Blake. Why do you ask?"

*I didn't know there was a certain time that people die,* Blake thought.

Blake hadn't thought this through. He should've asked questions first instead of going through his spiel, but he was on a mental high. He didn't want to explain it just yet - the less people who knew about it, the better.

Blake handed Mizenko a business card. "Well, sorry to waste your time, then. Please call me when you know that one is on its way, or as soon as a 'fresh one' comes in."

Mizenko was now annoyed. "You can't leave me hangin', what's this all about?"

Blake felt bad about what he did. "I'm sorry. You'll find out soon enough. Thank you for your time."

As the door closed behind Blake, Mizenko scratched his head, nodded, and went back to whatever morticians do at nine in the morning.

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It was a long shot, but the visits to the nursing home and hospital had even worse results. It was the same 'We'll call you' scenario. People apparently didn't die every single day in either of those locations. This time Blake didn't start the conversation like he did with Mizenko, but everyone was still confused as to why Blake was asking such an odd question.

"What do we do now?"

Blake and Sally were being chauffeured back home. He slouched down in the back seat and just stared out the side windows as the world passed him by. The rush was now drained out of him. He turned to Sally. "Other than visiting every single nursing home, hospital and morgue in the area, I guess we'll just have to wait. I think it's for the best anyway - we need to focus on the party."

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The next morning, Blake called Saleem. "Sorry it took so long to get back to you. I've been so busy with the mask upgrade and we've got this huge party to plan. Plus, I still have to mow the yard, set up the tables and tents and finish the baking and cooking!"

"You still do all that shit? You have eight guards. Have them do it!"

"If all I did is work on that damned helmet, I'd go crazy. I don't mind all the other chores... unless you're offering to come help?"

"Uh, that's ok Mate," said Saleem and then quickly changed the subject. "So, how'd it go? Does your upgrade work?"

"I don't know. I'm sure it does, but we weren't able to find a fresh new dead body to try it on."

"That sounds so wrong, Mate."

"Tell me about it," said Blake, not expecting a response. "I'm desperate to try it, but I have to be more focused on this weekend. My kid is my world. You're still going to be there, right?"

"I'll be there! Wouldn't miss it for anything. Can't miss it! I wouldn't be able to lie and say 'something came up' because you'd know."

Blake gave a true hardy laugh.

"How many pizzas do you want me to bring?"

Blake took a mental count of the people he expected to show. "However many pizzas will feed 30 adults and 18 children."

Saleem didn't even seem fazed. "No problem. It's a good thing I own the place. This is going to be one hell of a party."

"This time I hired Tyme Band to play for two hours, plus there'll be a magician and a clown. Only the best for my boy. The party starts around noon, but I was serious when I asked for help. I don't want you to cut the grass, but I could use some help getting things ready. This way, we'll have time to go see Beyond Fallen at 'The Factory: Underground' tomorrow night if

you're interested. I thought it would be good to do something different and go see a heavy metal band. Its been such a long time since we did anything together."

"Sweet idea, Mate! Count me in!"

"I'll call you tomorrow night. I think I really need this. Sally did tell me I'm working too hard and need to get out more anyway, but we can't drink a lot - neither of us should hangover for the weekend."

### **CHAPTER 3**

"Let's get started," Smith said, while he passed out maps of Blake's mansion to everyone. Each map was unique, for it had a different surrounding street circled. "As you all know, Blake's kid's party is in two days. How this is going to work is quite simple. The red circle on your map indicates where I want you stationed, and the number in the circle indicates when it's your turn. There'll be a clear view of anyone leaving the party from your location. This took months of planning so the location where I listed you has already been well investigated. I want every single car that leaves the party followed until it reaches what appears to be their home. Since I'm the first on the list, when the first car leaves, I will follow it. Kasa, you have a number two on your map. You are next, and so on."

Smith spoke to them as if they were two-year-olds. Too much planning had gone into this for someone to misunderstand him. He continued, "If the car goes to Walmart before going home, then you'll stay at Walmart until they leave and follow them home. I want a picture of the driver exiting the vehicle. I want a

picture of their house, and I want the complete address of their destination. Write that information down, and get it to me by the following day."

Ryan tapped his pen on his forehead, then pointed it at Allan, the leader of this particular group. "But what if it appears to be their home, but it's just a friend's house?"

"Just please get me the address the car pulls up to, Mr. Kasa, regardless."

"Yes sir."

"Are there any other questions?"

Linda 'Bad-Ass' Edwards, the chick with the enormous spiked mohawk spoke up. "What time do you want us at our stations?"

"Eight a.m. Any other questions?"

The huge man at the back of the room, only known to a few people as Gandzyk, spoke with a booming voice so deep and loud, it almost seemed to rattle what was left of the already-broken windows. "If I understand correctly sir, we get paid twice?"

"Yes. Once I get the information requested, you get paid. Then when someone dies, you get paid again. To make it fair for everyone, you only get to kill the person you followed, but you must not kill them until I give the go-ahead. And keep in mind, it's possible that not everyone may get a chance to kill, or it may be days, weeks, months, who knows. Do I make myself perfectly clear?"

Everyone in the room nodded yes.

"Are there any more questions?" Smith seemed a bit impatient.

"We don't know your name. What do you want to be called by?"

Smith looked at his watch, glared around the room and ignored the question. "Any other questions?"

No one spoke up - because either they were afraid of Mr. Allan Smith, thought he was an asshole, or they had all the information they needed.

Smith closed his notebook. "Pay attention to the cars leaving. Take your turn as indicated on your maps. If you don't, two of you may wind up following the same car. If you waste my time, I'll waste you. I want you back here Sunday at eight a.m. You all better have the address and photos of the person you followed. Don't show up if you don't have your information, and if you back out, I will personally hunt you down and kill you myself. Understand?"

Everyone shook their heads again, including Bad-Ass, who also gave Smith the middle finger, hidden behind someone who was standing in front of her.

Within seconds, Edwards felt a gun to her temple. "Is there a problem?"

"No sir," Linda said with a totally changed attitude.

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"You did tell me to get out more Babes. I didn't think it'd be a problem. I finished everything I needed to do... didn't I?"

"It's not a problem. It's usually not. It's just that tomorrow is our son's birthday party. I know you can hold your liquor but I



don't know about Saleem. I don't want him hung-over at the party, and it would've been nice to let me know ahead of time."

Blake looked like a dog that had just scolded. "Sorry. I do have a lot on my mind. I just forgot. Do we have everything we need for the party? I still have time to cancel with Saleem."

"Yes, we have everything we need, but that's still not the point. Never mind. Go enjoy, you do need a break." Sally kissed Blake on the cheek. Without that kiss, Blake would have considered the "go enjoy" comment to be the 'test' between husband and wife - kind of like when a woman says 'I'm fine,' when actually she's pissed off.

"We won't stay until the bar closes. We'll only be there till about midnight, ok Babes?"

"Stay as long as you want hun." When Blake didn't get a kiss this time, he thought maybe she really was pissed.

Blake picked up the phone, hesitated, looked at Sally who was already immersed in her book "The Ex Who Wouldn't Die," and made the phone call. "Hey Bud, are ya ready?"

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The music was fast and loud! Karavis belted out Blake's favorite tune 'Blood on the Ice.' Blake's neck was getting sore from all the head banging. People kept going up to the famous Blake Stone to offer him drinks, but Blake kept refusing. The body and security guards were not amused, for they had to be on extremely high alert in this dimly-lit bar. It definitely was a good idea to triple the security tonight. It didn't matter to Blake, he was having the time of his life with his best friend of 20

years. Saleem had been there for him through everything and he wasn't sure if he'd have made it this far without him.

It was now midnight, and the band just finished up their second set, ready to take a break. Blake and Saleem took this opportunity to leave before they got sucked in for more fist-pounding tunes.

As the chauffer stopped at Saleem's house, Blake reached over and gave Saleem a man hug. "Thanks bud, I needed that."

"No problem Mate. What time you want me there tomorrow?"

"10 a.m. too early?"

"See you tomorrow, 9:45."

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"Hi, little guy!"

Nathan folded his arms across his chest. "My name's Nathan. Not little guy."

Saleem almost laughed out loud until he saw Nathan's facial expression. "Of course you are. Are you excited about your party?"

Nathan's expression changed from a frown to a huge smile. "Yeah! There's going to be a clown and a magician coming just to see me! And music. And presents. And cake. And candy. And soda!"

"You sure you didn't have enough of that already?"

"Humpf..." And with that, Nathan ran off to find his mom.

Blake gave Saleem a shrug. "Thanks for coming. How ya feeling?"

"Perfectly fine, thanks. The yard looks good! You must've been up early. What do you need me to do?"

"Can you help Sally decorate with the banners and streamers in the living room?"

"Sure thing, Mate."

Blake was now alone in his lab. He clicked through his computer calendar, looked at the upcoming court cases and thought, *I just can't stop! Here it is, my son's birthday, and I'm looking at the upcoming cases for this week.* Blake was addicted to his job.

He clicked on Monday, April 21. Up came the entry that Sally entered into the court system for him. Alicia Hope, accused of pushing her husband off a cliff. Alicia stated that her husband slipped and she tried to hold on and pull him up but she wasn't strong enough. She needed to be investigated because neighbors state that they always heard shouting coming from the Hope residence, a sign of a not-so-perfect marriage, but then again, who had a perfect marriage these days? Blake smiled. *I do.*

Then he sighed. Anytime a murder case like this came through their court system, the accused was found innocent 90% of the time. They just had to go through the motions to clear their name so they wouldn't wrongfully go to prison. However, there were still people who thought they could hide their actions from Blake Stone. How the world has changed, and oh, how it will change again.

There was a knock at the door. Even without a response to come in, it creaked open.

Sally stood there with her hands on her hips. "Really, hun? Come on, Nathan's party is in an hour. It's time to stop with work and come enjoy."

"Sorry." Blake turned off the monitor and went out to do the meet and greet thing.

The decorations were perfect! Plastic car streamers with real working headlights, Disney's "The Cars" movie paper cups and plates, Matchbox cars placed at each kid's designated spot at the table, paper hats with cars painted on them (designed by Nathan himself,) and bowls of snacks.

Blake grabbed a pretzel from the bowl. "Wow, this looks great Babes!"

Sally looked at her watch. "It does, doesn't it? I could use your help with blowing up some more balloons, though. I'm outta breath."

Blake kissed Sally and started heading to get the balloons when Saleem came up behind him. "Hey Mate, I think I should head out to get the pizza. By the time I get back it should be about 12:15."

"Extra pepperoni for me, if it's not too late!"

"You got it, Mate!"