

SKIN CHANGER

By

R. Austin Carver

Prologue 1: The Heretic

It was the dreams that troubled him most...

The caravan of police cars made their way through the snowy December evening like ghosts wafting through cobwebs.

It was late Thursday night, and the run down neighborhood streets were virtually devoid of traffic. Still, there were enough night dwellers out to note their passage. Prostitutes standing in front of seedy hourly rent motels stepped back out of the falling snow and into the misty shadows of the dilapidated buildings. Drug dealers, juking to the songs in their heads and the chemicals in their veins, disappeared from the corners. The night dwellers evaporated as the procession passed. Even though the cars ran without lights or sirens, dealers, prostitutes, and pimps alike, knew there was a bust going down somewhere on Amarillo Boulevard tonight.

Business was now officially closed for the evening.

Lon scanned the misty street from the lead cruiser, his nervous fingers drumming the dashboard rhythmically. All was quiet, still as death itself. Then he saw it, and his heart skipped a beat. He pointed up the street ahead to a half lit neon sign appearing like a ghost ship through the heavy snow.

Hanging Mesa Motel

“There it is,” He whispered hoarsely, his tired eyes locking in on the motel.

Doc Sanders, the local Texas Ranger Sergeant for the Amarillo area, clicked his turn signal on to notify the following cars. Radio silence was not broken.

As they approached the motel, Lon noted the beat up red and white Chevy pickup sitting outside of bungalow number eight and pointed. Doc nodded acknowledgment. They drove by the motel slowly, casing the layout, then pulled into a liquor store parking lot next door.

“We’ve got him,” Lon whispered like a prayer. “We’ve got that rat bastard this time.”

The following line of squad cars pulled into the lot behind them and lined up next to a hedgerow, out of sight from bungalow number eight. Doc and Lon both drew their pistols, Doc's a heavy looking Ranger issue Smith & Wesson .357 revolver, Lon's, a lighter, but no less powerful, Glock 9mm semi-automatic. They checked their weapons, then stepped out into the cold misty air.

The group from the Amarillo Special Crimes Unit and the two Texas Rangers gathered under the neon lit eave of the liquor store to go over strategy. Jen Turner, sergeant for the Special Crimes Unit, shook the wet snow from the shoulders of his navy blue police issue windbreaker and stepped forward to talk positioning and entrance strategy with Lon and Doc. Lon rubbed his naked hands together, and hopped from one foot to the other as he pulled his camel hair overcoat in tight for warmth. Impatiently, he listened to the other two officers discuss the entrance order and tried to control his chattering teeth.

"I m-m-m in f-f-first," Lon stuttered over his quivering jaw.

"He'll s-s-still have the g-g-girl," He added by way of an explanation for his enthusiasm.

Both older officers looked at the young Ranger Lieutenant, sizing him up to the task. Doc, who towered over everyone there at 6'5", peered down at him from beneath his bushy eyebrows for what seemed like an hour in the uncomfortable cold. His iron gray eyes boring straight into Lon's soul, testing the resolve there before finally nodding his approval. Jen accepted Doc's endorsement as gospel, and they went on planning the positioning of the troops.

While the others did this, Lon sloshed through the wet snow to the edge of the hedgerow and peeked around to see the dilapidated shack that was bungalow eight. The light was on in the window, but no shadows passed by the drawn shades, and the snow build up on Johnny's pickup truck indicated it had been there for at least a few hours.

This was a homecoming of sorts for Lon. He'd grown up in the small town of Skelton just about forty miles from here, but he hadn't been back since his dad had died in the line of duty back in 1981. Now he was here on the trail of a serial killer.

"Well this is a fine welcome home," he thought as he peered up at the falling snow.

Johnny was awake – Lon knew that because Johnny never slept. Four years, and as far as Lon knew, Johnny Paup, also known as the Metro Maniac, had not slept a minute of that time.

Four grueling years of investigation, a killing spree that carved a bloody road map from

Dallas, to Fort Worth, down to Houston, west to Austin, and now finally to Amarillo, Texas. Four years, fifteen known victims, countless escapes, thousands of man-hours, and here they were, all on the tip of a Motel owner named Shadir Patel. A slumlord who reported the kinky and illegal stuff that went on in his flop house to the police for small rewards. Four years – how much blood, and how many tears later?

It was personal now. Each murder seemed worse to Lon, more of an affront than the last, only amplifying their failure. It was the waiting that he hated, that and the dreams, but now the wait was over.

Lon was tired, and anxious for this to come to a close, but at the same time he was frightened at the prospect of life without the Metro Maniac. Frightened at the prospect of returning to his family and an ordinary day. He hadn't felt like this since he had finished his tour in the military.

His marriage was nearly over now. He had been home only once in the last three months. His own small son called the UPS man Daddy sometimes, and he worried that his wife did as well. Not that he could blame her. He had certainly been no Saint in their choppy five-year marriage. He drank too much on occasion, and had been known to end up in the wrong bed at times. Whether or not he was an alcoholic was debatable, at least in his mind, but there was no arguing the fact that he was a workaholic.

"Always on the run from something," his wife once told him.

Dr. Lon Cameron, veritable golden boy, adored by all: Magna-Cum-Laude from the University of Texas at Austin with a PhD in psychology, four years with Army Intelligence, author of one of the defining books on the pathology of the serial killer, and chief forensic psychologist for the Texas Department of Public Safety crime lab.

Then there was the other Lonigan Cameron, the one that lay hidden in his duffle bag between the playboy and the pint of cheap vodka: Bad husband and father, a man with a job that was his substitute for a life, and a bottle that was his substitute for a wife.

This self-realization was a bitter pill to swallow, and the time was at hand. Once this was over, he really had nowhere to go.

While the Special Crimes Unit put on their body armor, Lon went over Johnny Paup's profile in his head for the millionth time:

Johnny Allen Paup, Caucasian male, thirty-four years of age, six foot one inch tall, one hundred and fifty five pounds, shaved head, brown eyes, born and raised in El Paso, Texas.

At the age of twelve, after numerous grand mal seizures, Johnny was diagnosed with Epilepsy. As time went on his seizures became so severe Johnny was forced to miss most of his seventh grade year.

At the age of fourteen, Johnny's family doctor concluded these chronic seizures were life threatening and referred him to a Houston specialist. Johnny's working class parents would have never been able to afford this but for a stroke of luck. The specialist they found was involved in a study on debilitating Epilepsy, and Johnny fit the research profile.

At the age of fifteen, Johnny had brain surgery, an experimental procedure designed to stop the seizures. The procedure was a success, Johnny's seizures stopped all together, but there was a downside. He was arrested one year later by the local sheriff for torturing and killing an entire litter of puppies.

Johnny dropped out of high school that same year. School medical records indicated that he complained of migraine headaches, insomnia, and sensory hallucinations, such as unexplained smells and sounds – classic signs of brain trauma, or early schizophrenia.

At eighteen, Johnny joined the Comancheros, a biker gang composed of Anglos and Hispanics.

These guys were no weekend warriors; they were the real deal, essentially just biker mafia. Gambling, prostitution, fencing, money laundering, and Methamphetamine production, they were into all the honey pots. With connections, and a complex hierarchy to rival the largest New York crime families, The Comanchero's owned the Methamphetamine trade in the Southwest. They were bad news; so much so, an FBI file was immediately started on every known member.

With his cunning and ruthless nature, Johnny rose quickly in the ranks. He made his bones with the gangland style execution of a rival soldier who stepped on his territory.

At twenty-eight years old Johnny was Sergeant-at-Arms and in charge of all Meth sales in the West Texas area. Then, after two years of using far too much of his own product, Johnny disappeared into Mexico for a year with a contract on his head.

No records of his activities could be found for this time span.

When he returned to Texas, he moved to the Dallas area, still a Comanchero, but demoted to an ordinary soldado. By then Johnny was a full-fledged speed freak.

He abducted and murdered his first known victim one month after arriving in Dallas, an eight-year-old Hispanic girl named Maria Armenderas. The body of the girl was found one week later in a bar ditch outside of Fort Worth, her corpse mutilated to the point that identification was only possible through dental records.

The killer was dubbed the Metro Maniac by the local media.

Six victims turned up in the following two years with identical modus operandi: Very young, Caucasian or Hispanic girls, abducted, raped, and killed within seventy-two hours of their apprehension. The victims were mutilated with a knife in a sporadic overkill pattern, and it appeared that he attempted to skin his first two victims, but gave up in both cases after botching the job. In all cases, the victim's fingers were amputated.

There was plenty of physical evidence, but no one to tie it too. The Texas Rangers finally got a solid lead on the Maniac when a woman noticed a biker circling the block of her neighborhood several times before an abduction. A search and destroy was performed, and many outlaw bikers in the Dallas area were roused. All leads pointed to Johnny Paup, but by the time local police and the Rangers closed the noose, Paup had split the scene.

Ton's of evidence was collected from Paup's filthy trailer house. Evidence that proved conclusively Paup was in fact the killer. More disturbing facts came to light. While it was generally known that Paup did not sleep, and had not slept in an ordinary fashion since his surgery. It was discovered Paup had a propensity for sadism and self-mutilation, even going so far as to amputate his own ring finger while in Mexico.

After Dallas/Fort Worth, Paup disappeared without a trace for almost two months. Then, like a bad penny, another body turned up in Houston. Before the FBI was on the ground, another surfaced, that made two in a three-day span. Paup was making up for lost time.

His connections with organized crime allowed Paup to travel and hole up in virtual anonymity, and by the time the Rangers and FBI had a bead on his whereabouts; they had another four victims. But when they raided his flop, he was already two or three days gone.

The Houston hideout was a nightmare. There were blood splatters all over the walls like some bad Jackson Pollack knock off. Most disturbing, Paup had apparently castrated himself in

an orgy of self-mutilation. They found his testicles on a strange shrine, a shrine that could not be identified to correspond with any specific religion or sect.

Paup seemed to disappear into thin air.

Four months later a victim turned up in Austin. Two more followed in rapid succession. Then all went quiet for almost six months.

Lon guessed that Paup returned to Mexico during this time.

When Paup returned to Texas in the early winter months of 1999, he killed two more victims before the Rangers flushed him out again. Same as before, Paup went silent for almost a month.

Then Lon heard about the child abduction in Amarillo.

Something about it sent up a red flag in Lon's mind, so he parted ways with the FBI and caught the first flight to Amarillo. The evening he arrived a report came in that a very strange looking bald man was sharing one of Shadir Patels bungalows with a young girl dressed only in her underwear.

They had trapped him in the middle of his feeding time, and Lon was sure he would not break pattern and run while his prey remained alive, which according to his modus operandi, would be for another twelve to twenty-four hours at the very least.

In Lon's official profile he had listed Paup as both a psychopath and sociopath, a very rare occurrence. True psychopaths were rare because they hardly ever lived long enough to be diagnosed. Their own self-destructive impulses took them out long before the police or psychologists got involved. As a rule the only one who got to examine a true psychopath was the coroner.

Sociopaths were usually too smart to get caught – Paup's IQ had once been measured at one hundred and forty-two.

Johnny's psychotic rages typically built themselves over a forty-eight to seventy-two hour period as he raped and tortured his prey. When his rage reached its crescendo, he mutilated his victim ferociously, sometimes viciously enough to wound himself. He kept the fingers of his victims as trophies of his conquests, keepsakes – mementos.

Lon often wondered if Paup's speed addiction was a chemical substitute for the endorphin high he received during these titanic rages. Endorphins severely depleted from

chronic sleep deprivation.

But it went beyond chemical imbalances; Paup had no conscience, no regret for his crimes. The girls were merely toys put there for his pleasure. Discarded as soon as they were broken, and replaced just as quickly. Other people meant nothing to Johnny Paup; he didn't even consider them to be within his species. From a clinical standpoint this dual psychosis was the most dangerous a serial killer could possess, both for the victims and law enforcement.

Did this psychosis result from Paup's experimental brain surgery, or just some bad genetics? It was an interesting question. A question Lon had pondered long and hard. Paup was the worst predator he had ever been witness to in his eight years with the Rangers, and that made him quite a specimen.

From the very beginning Lon had caught himself forming grand plans to delve into Johnny Paup's psychosis. The diagnostic book on Johnny Paup could be the defining case study of a psychopath. Lon already had a title, *The True Psychopath*.

But first, Paup had to be taken down, alive.

Doc tapped Lon on the shoulder causing him to startle. Doc grunted and nodded towards the crumbling bungalow.

"Lock and load that effeminate pea-shooter Dr. Cameron. It's time to get this hoedown started."

Lon laughed, it was the first time he could remember laughing in almost a year.

"You just wish you were comfortable enough in your masculinity to carry a gun like this."

"I'll take my hand-cannon any ol' day," Doc grumbled.

"Well, You know what they say," Lon said as he pulled the Glock from his shoulder holster. "Size doesn't matter."

"Only guys with small guns say that," Doc allowed as he stepped out from behind the shrubs.

"Or the women that love them," Lon laughed.

The wet snow sucked at their feet as they made their way across the gravel parking lot in a crouch. Doc motioned Lon to the left hand side of the door as they approached. Lon glanced in the pickup's cab as he went by, and saw nothing unusual except for an Indian medicine bag

hanging from the rear-view mirror.

As they were crossing the final few feet, one half of the split windows of the bungalow swung outward on its rusty hinge. Lon and Doc stopped in their tracks and crouched down. The blinds of the bungalow remained tightly closed.

“Hole up there boys,” A high warbling voice called from inside the bungalow.

They were made.

Lon cursed under his breath. His hope had been to raid the bungalow with the element of surprise. He felt surprise, as was usually the case, was the best way to save the girl, and the safest way for the officers to take down Paup. Plan “A” was now just good intentions.

“Don’t come crashing our party now. I ain’t got enough beer for everyone, and my little girlfriend is downright shy. You fellers just dig yourselves a comfortable hole out there and wait on me – I’ll be out shortly.”

Lon and Doc retreated back to the pickup and hunkered for cover beside it, though Lon doubted Paup had a gun. Paup liked a more personal touch; he was a knife man.

Doc looked to Lon for advice on the situation, but Lon was concentrating on the bungalow. Cursing, Doc clicked the collar radio he wore and advised the rest of the team to hold position. At the same time he told Jen to come around front to the pickup – there had been a problem. At that moment the horizontal blinds parted just enough for something small and pink to be dropped out onto the clean white snow beneath the window. A skinny arm jutted outside through the blinds and pulled the cracked window closed with a bang.

“Can you get a shot?” Doc yelled.

Lon took aim with the Glock, but it was too late.

Lon shook his head, “He’s gone.”

“What is that?” Doc asked, squinting at the small pink object enfolded in the wet snow.

“Her finger,” Lon said sadly, but with little excitement.

“Holy shit!” Doc cried in wide-eyed amazement and fury.

Jen Turner rounded the bed of the old pickup in a crouch and looked to Doc for an explanation, but Doc, in his frustration and fury, was at a loss for words.

“We’ve been made,” Lon explained coolly, his eyes never leaving the bungalow.

“Now what Dr. Cameron?” Jen asked. “You want me to call in the cavalry?”

“Not yet, I have a plan. What’s the little girl’s name?” Lon asked.

“Katie Somerall,” Jen said as he waited patiently for Lon to explain his plan, but instead Lon replaced his gun in the shoulder holster beneath his over coat, stood up, walked calmly to the bungalow door, and knocked politely.

Jen and Doc were both too stunned to speak.

Lon looked down at the amputated finger in the snowdrift beneath the window and grimaced. He was about to knock again when the nervous voice called out.

“Come in Dr. Cameron.”

Lon took a deep breath and grasped the doorknob. He halted to look back at Jen and Doc, who were still crouched beside the pickup; their mouths open in shock. Then he turned the knob and slowly opened the squeaky door.

A blast of heated air struck him and almost took his breath away. The room was like an oven. His eyes watered as they adjusted to the light and the heat. He opened the door just enough to enter and slipped in smoothly. Once inside, he closed the door firmly behind him, and put his hands in the air to show Paup, wherever he was, that he was unarmed.

Lon scanned the room. It was small and boxlike, furnished only with a mirror, a dresser, a double bed, and a nightstand. The bathroom was in the back. There was no closet, just a hanging rack, and an old black and white TV sat atop the dresser – on it, a rerun of Seinfeld was playing without sound.

The room was dingy; stains dotted the brown shag carpet, and the walls were nicotine yellow instead of the intended white. The whole place smelled of stale cigarette smoke, and industrial disinfectant.

In the corner, between the bed and the back wall, sat Paup’s skeletal form, with the naked girl in his lap. Johnny looked up at Lon and tittered like a nervous rat. Lon looked directly into his feverish eyes and was forced to avert his gaze. If there was ever a poster child for insanity, Paup was it.

“Have a seat Dr. Cameron, but keep those hands where I can see them,” Paup squeaked, motioning for Lon to sit down. “You know I read your book. I found your theories on head traumas in connection with violent behavior very enlightening. I think you’ll do just fine – he said you would, he’s had his eye on you I think.”

Lon gingerly took a seat next to the dresser, caddy corner from where Paup sat. He had no idea what Paup was talking about, he doubted Paup did either. Lon examined the little girl with his watering eyes, trying to gauge her condition. She could not have been more than ten years of age. She was pale, sweating, and sickly looking. Thankfully for her, she was unconscious. A small washcloth had been wrapped around her hand in an only partially successful attempt to stem the flow of bright red arterial blood from her amputated finger. Paup held the child close to his chest and rocked her as her blood ran in a steady trickle down onto his groin. Lon considered drawing his gun and going for a quick head shot, but dismissed the idea when he noticed the glittering knife Paup's bony hand held to the child's throat.

Paup was in bad shape. His bald head gleamed from the light of the exposed bulb that hung from the ceiling, and his pupils were constricted to pinholes, indicating he was speeding. Large dark bags hung under his bulging yellow eyes, and cold sores dotted his thin cracked lips. His bony tattooed arms and chest reminded Lon of a holocaust victim. It seemed as though Paup was every bit as near to death as the girl he held.

Paup had several fine cuts covering his arms, chest, and abdomen. There were scars where there were no cuts, further evidence of his propensity for self-mutilation. He was naked, his only adornment was a string of finger bones that hung from his sinuous neck like a wreath of death.

Lon looked up from the necklace to find Paup grinning at him through brown rotten teeth. He visibly winced as Paup smiled at him. The chillingly vacant smile reminded him of psychology textbook pictures of Charles Manson.

"We have a lot we could talk about Dr. Cameron, but I bet you don't have time now, do you?" Paup said regretfully, his wavering high voice grating on Lon's jangled nerves.

"You know I don't," Lon grated, attempting to keep his composure and hide his revulsion. "I can help you Johnny, but you have to let little Katie go and come with me. It's your only way out of here."

Paup's reply to this was hysterical laughter that made Lon want to throttle him.

"Oh no Dr. Cameron, that's not the only way out," Paup purred after his cackling had subsided. "Don't you wonder how I knew you were coming? I'm a disciple of the Black Curandero – his herald. The end of time is at hand heretic. His choice is made – the wheels are

already set in motion. No Dr. Cameron, there are many ways out.”

Lon had no idea what Paup was rambling about but he didn’t like the direction it was taking, so he decided to change the subject.

“What do you want out of this Johnny?” Lon asked, trying to sound earnest. “You just name it and I’ll try to help. I promise.”

“Oh I know you will,” Johnny told him, once again breaking into nervous laughter.

“Can I turn down that heater Johnny?” Lon asked as Paup’s laughter subsided.

“No.”

Lon was sweating buckets beneath his heavy overcoat, but made no move to take it off. Johnny would put two and two together soon enough.

“If it’s hot, why not take that five hundred dollar coat off?” Paup chided, giving Lon a sly smile.

Lon remained silent, and wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. Here it came.

“Where is your gun Dr. Cameron?” Paup hissed, suddenly growing very serious and edgy.

Bingo

Paup’s vice like embrace on the girl tightened, the knife’s razor-like edge biting deeper into the flesh of her pale throat, as he rocked back and forth faster.

“It’s under my coat, in a shoulder holster,” Lon said evenly, carefully watching Paup’s hand that held the slender knife.

“Well, let’s see it.”

Paup was practically inviting Lon to take his best shot.

Lon stood up and carefully opened his long coat. His heart was pounding in his ears as he slowly undid the safety clasp of the holster. With his thumb and index finger he withdrew the weapon and brought it out in front of him. Sweat was stinging his eyes as he held it out for Johnny to see.

“A Glock nineteen; nice piece. Drop it and kick it over here,” Paup said licking his cracked lips with his white-coated tongue.

“Bullshit Johnny,” Lon said as he calmly shifted the gun till it rested normally in his

hand.

Johnny watched almost hypnotized as the gun was slowly leveled at his head. Then he laughed.

For a split second Lon had a shot, but he hesitated. He needed Paup alive, and there was still a chance.

“You think I’m gonna give this morsel up Dr. Cameron?” Paup chuckled. His mood suddenly swung like a pendulum and he instantly grew enraged. “Do you think I’m some kind of a fucking moron?”

Paup pulled the unconscious girl up against his chest until she shielded him almost completely. The blade against the girl’s throat began to draw blood as Paup’s grip tightened further. Lon’s finger tightened down on the trigger.

The shot was gone, but Paup didn’t know that.

“Wait!” Paup screeched, his black eyes wide with the realization this was no bluff. “Wait, not yet damnit!”

Lon lessened the tension on the trigger and lowered the gun slightly.

“Take the knife off of Katie’s throat Johnny, drop it, and give her up. Then we can talk for as long as you like. Otherwise, I’m gonna put air holes in you.”

Paup licked his cracked lips, a smile twitched across his hollow face, as he took furtive glances around the room. He resembled a sick animal in a trap.

“If I drop the knife, will you drop your gun?” Paup squeaked, his feverish eyes narrowing to slits. “It’ll just be me and you Dr. Cameron. Wouldn’t you like to know my secrets?”

Paup pulled the blade off of the girl’s throat in an apparent show of good will. A red line and a bloody nick emphasized the sharpness of the blade. The little girl stirred, her small face so young, so innocent.

Lon sensed this would be his last opportunity; he could bring his gun up and end Johnny Paup’s pathetic existence in less than a heartbeat. He just needed one lucky shot. The girl would be safe, he would be safe, and no one would ever ask why.

The title of his planned book flashed across his mind.

The True Psychopath

“How ‘bout it Dr. Cameron?” Paup hissed, the knife still held menacingly over the girl’s throat as he cowered behind her. Paup stopped rocking back and forth.

Something was wrong; the whole deal was going hinky.

“*Take the shot!*” part of him screamed.

But there was no shot, the girl covered too much of Paup’s skeletal form. Lon cursed himself for not taking advantage when he’d had his chance.

“Just let the girl go Johnny. Let’s try to work this out,” Lon said shakily, sweat now stinging his eyes.

“Oh that’s too bad,” Paup said.

Johnny smiled almost sadly, and mumbled something foreign under his breath. With shocking quickness he pressed the knife blade down against the girl’s throat, and with one terrible swipe, ended her short existence on this Earth. In the same fluid motion he flung the knife across the room, and assumed a crucifix pose with his arms.

“I surrender!” he screamed loudly enough for the police outside to hear.

Lon watched dumbstruck as the thin blade flashed across the girl’s tender throat. Her bright blue eyes sprang open, her pale lips parted for one muted cry. After a perceivable pause, the blood surged forth in a flood.

The knife had parted her neck almost to her spine.

Blood gurgled and sprayed as it flowed down her trachea and into her failing lungs. Her pale blue eyes rolled back in her head as the oxygen supply to her brain ended. She lurched with a death spasm in her killer’s naked lap.

Lon felt the air squeezed out of his lungs as his stomach seemed to vault into his throat. His face and body froze in an expression of supplication.

His mind was barely able to comprehend the width and depth of his failure.

“Oh God no!” Lon screamed as his body jerked into action.

Chortling softly from his crucifix position, Paup stared down, wide-eyed and fascinated at the angelic creature in his lap.

Lon brought his pistol up, and in two lunging steps he crossed the room, the Glock level with Johnny Paup’s bald head.

Lon’s lips pulled back from his teeth in a grimace of inner pain, his red-rimmed eyes on

fire with helpless rage. But before he could pull the trigger, the door of the motel room came crashing in, frame and all. Doc and Jen fell into the room, pistols drawn and leveled at Paup. Doc read the situation in a heartbeat and holstered his gun.

“Don’t do it Lon,” he said evenly as he stepped cautiously towards the shaking Lieutenant. “Think about this. Think about your career...”

The True Psychopath

Paup, still transfixed on the dead little girl in his lap, chuckled under his wheezing breathe as more police poured into the room. The blood was so thick it looked like it had been sloshed around him with a bucket. Lon could smell it.

“And he died for our sins,” Paup mumbled incoherently. “I surrender.”

The psychotic animation that had propelled Paup earlier was apparently spent. Gone, like the life fire of the poor child in his lap.

The smell of the blood, salty and metallic, made Lon’s mouth go cotton dry. His cheek twitched twice, as tears spilled over his eyelids.

A string of drool slithered unnoticed down Paup’s chin and landed in a twinkling septic pool on the innocent child’s face.

Lon saw all this as if it were in slow motion, and felt his heart crumble to dust in his chest. He had failed, utterly defeated by a madman. His hands began to shake violently.

“*Think about your career...*” Doc’s words echoed through his mind.

He closed his tear filled eyes, and deliberately pulled the trigger.

An Excerpt from Prologue 1

SKIN CHANGER

A novel by

R. Austin Carver

Copyright © 2000-2001 by R. Austin Carver, All Rights Reserved

