

ONE

**BABY-FACED
RICHARD MACEK**

In March of 1977, the old road to Waupun, Wisconsin, was somehow eerie and foreboding, not simply rural but isolated in the kind of way that makes you watch your back. About twenty minutes outside of Madison, the colorful, welcoming signs for homey diners and Wisconsin cheddar cheese vanished, and the whole world seemed devoid of life. The sleepy fields along the way were still brown, not yet tinged with green, and there was an uncanny quiet, made heavier by the gray, chilly day. To be quite honest, I was nervous. I was a young doctor about to step into a world brimming with horrible crime and serial murder. It was a world full of macho, hard-drinking law enforcement officials who'd seen too much, and I wondered if I would be accepted or even tolerated not only as a professional, but also because I was a woman. Occasionally, I gripped the steering wheel too hard, as if driving straight and steady on the highway would steady my thoughts. I glanced at myself in the rearview mirror, to make sure the anxiety didn't show. It was important that I appear calm and composed.

I was no stranger to challenges, to tough times. As a child living in a small town near Pittsburgh, I never knew my real parents. It's not

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that I didn't yearn to find out. It just wasn't part of the deal. My parents weren't that kind. Sure, six other children and I had a roof over our heads, and food, but when it came to the real security that love can provide, well, it simply wasn't present. It sometimes seemed that the reason six others and I were children to these people was due to factors not understood, even now. Our lives as children were often unremittingly dark, and we were very alone in the world the parents defined.

But in one way I was ahead of the game. I discovered an early passion for what I wanted to do. At the age of eleven, I watched as eight-year-old Beth, one of my favorite siblings, came down with scarlet fever. The rash of scarlet fever usually looks like a bad sunburn with unsightly but tiny bumps. I often felt like a mother to the rest of my siblings, so as her condition worsened, her chills and shakes, high fever, and vomiting had me worried. As she hallucinated, I was sure she was near death. I became frightened, full of the kind of all-encompassing terror that only children can feel. But when a doctor came to the house to treat her, she soon began to recover. In my young mind, I thought the doctor was a miracle worker. Amazed, I vowed right then to become a doctor. I was working by age twelve to bring in money, and I believed that if I worked harder and longer than anyone else, I could accomplish anything to which I set my mind—including becoming a doctor. It didn't matter if I had to deliver newspapers or if I worked as a waitress or a clerk in a grocery store to do it. Sometimes, I stood restless at the outskirts of our small town. And I imagined myself somewhere else, traveling to the more exotic places I saw in magazines or heard about on the radio. I could get out. I would get out. I had to.

As I drove, I kept thinking about what the FBI agent had asked me. "Have you ever seen anything like this before?" Special Agent Louis Tomaselli obviously had seen a lot in the course of his job, but the gruesome nature of the eight-by-ten black-and-white photographs he showed me had him mystified and concerned. Tomaselli was smooth talking, dark haired, and wiry. He had this way of talking with his hands. Careful but darkly animated, his hands moved not simply to express what he said but also gestured, twisted, and grabbed the air to

help me picture the words. Early in our conversation, he said, “There’s not much difference between me and the bad guys—except the FBI got to me first.” The off-the-cuff comment startled me, but it made sense. If you’re straight and narrow and you’re going in undercover, you may be too conspicuous and your cover will be blown. Like a chameleon, you have to blend into the environment in which you’re working. It never crossed my mind that people could go either way. I was young, from a town so small you might think it was just a bunch of nondescript wood frame houses at a dusty intersection. My sense had been that you were either right or wrong, that the rules in life were very black and white. This was just one of the myriad of core beliefs that would change radically for me in the months ahead.

Tomaselli approached me moments after a seminar I cotaught in 1977 called “The Use of Hypnosis in Criminal Investigations.” At that time, law enforcement was intrigued with the possibilities of using memory-enhancing techniques like hypnosis, so the seminar was well attended. I told them that hypnosis is simply a state of deep, intense focus and has nothing to do with magician’s wands. I myself was the subject, but it wasn’t at all about strutting around onstage like a chicken. I was shown a photograph of a crime on a subway before and after I was hypnotized. The officials in the room were impressed that I was able to recall many more of the details within the picture when I was hypnotized. Everyone in attendance learned that memory could be improved but not manufactured through hypnosis.

Hundreds of investigators like Tomaselli had gathered just outside of Madison, Wisconsin, from around the state for a two-day conference about investigating and solving homicides more effectively. Many of the seminars dealt with hard-to-crack cases. Crime scenes would be set up and the law enforcement professionals in the audience would try to piece together what had happened. In my short career as a resident specializing in child and adult psychiatry and neurology, the cases I’d dealt with were routine, and I knew I wanted a deeper level of involvement and understanding. As a doctor, but more as a human being, I was hungry for knowledge.

Tomaselli had come up against a seemingly insurmountable brick

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wall. He and the FBI could not find the perpetrator of the vile crime captured in the photo. Yet he was not about to quit, even though he had tinkered with just about every possibility he could conjure up. As Tomaselli spoke, I found myself captivated by all of it, the idea of an unsolved mystery, the idea that, in the world of crime and crime solving, there was, in addition to life-and-death drama, room for good, objective science. And perhaps room for me as well.

Tomaselli removed more photos from a manila envelope. The images were of a woman, brutally stabbed several times. She was left on her back in room 18B at the upscale Abbey resort hotel on the shores of Lake Geneva, about fifty miles southeast of Madison, Wisconsin. Violence was unheard of at the Abbey, and the crime shocked everyone within a hundred miles. At least for the moment, the lakeside resort could no longer be considered the “Newport of the West.”

The photos didn’t shock me—it wasn’t as if I hadn’t seen blood or violence before. After finishing undergraduate work at Temple University, I was a medical student in Philadelphia at the height of the riots in the late 1960s. Blood filled the hospital at the Medical College of Pennsylvania, and our ER looked more like a *M*A*S*H* unit, as though war had broken out in the streets. Those days will forever stay with me.

Tomaselli was still holding the photo, and he was focused on something the killer did to the woman’s face. He had taken a penknife and made slits in her eyelids.

“Have you ever seen anything like this?” Tomaselli repeated. I looked closely again, especially at the slits. It almost looked like the kind of primitive, ritual cutting common to ancient cultures. If you look back in history, runic symbols were sometimes cut into the palms of Germanic women during labor and childbirth as early as the third century B.C. But it was clear this modern-day act had nothing to do with long-lost magical symbols expected to promote health, freedom, or valor. This wasn’t about pagans and enchantment; this was barbarism. Here, as the woman lay lifeless on her back, it was clear there were also visible signs of strangulation. But Tomaselli said that according to the coroner and others involved in the criminal investigation,

the murderer continued brutalizing her after she was dead. He stabbed her repeatedly. And then he slit her eyelids.

I said no, I hadn't ever seen anything like it. No longer darkly exuberant, Tomaselli stopped talking and stood there, waiting for me to say more. I looked him straight in the eye. "But if you ever catch him, I'd like to talk to him."

It was exactly what he wanted to hear. He said he'd be in touch.

I didn't obsess about those photos, but I thought it was somehow compelling to see that kind of violence and brutality. It's not just about the horrible idea of someone getting stabbed. It's the whole, unnatural disarray, the chaotic scene of someone's life cut short, and the intense awareness that someone, someone vicious, is still on the loose. What was he doing? Was he scheming, planning his next attack? Was he stalking someone in broad daylight even as I thought about him?

Instead of fear, I felt curiosity. What kind of person would be able to commit that sort of crime and then disappear? What drove him? What went on in his mind? Such foul crimes are most often committed by members of a victim's family, and most people who commit such a crime are caught very quickly. But these crimes were of a different sort, strangers. Here, law enforcement was trying to connect the wretched crimes of one geographical area to those in another area entirely. And it had become clear this killer was a complete stranger to his victims.

He was, as it turned out, Richard Otto Macek, a man alleged to have killed at least five women. As I drove northeast from Madison in my eight-year-old Datsun station wagon, I had no specific idea of what to expect. I only had Macek's name, his date of birth, and a general sense of the crimes for which he was suspected. Of course, I remembered the photographs of the brutalized maid, black-and-white photos that now had all the depth and brilliance of Technicolor as I thought about them. In my mind, I envisioned various fuzzy images of people who are violent and could cause destruction. I imagined that Macek would be dark, hulking, disheveled, and wild-eyed, intimidating in every way.

When I passed through the placid streets of Waupun, I noticed sculptures of pioneer women on the streets and in front of City Hall, the

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eyes of which looked up to the skies in a kind of hope. They had names like *Dawn of Day* and *Morning of Life*, a kind of expectant optimism that did little for the depressing place. I supposed Waupun needed anything that would cheer its citizens, since the town of ten thousand housed not one but three prisons, including Central State Hospital. I'm not sure why there were three jails; I only know they kept a lot of people employed.

While he awaited trial for the Abbey murder, they kept Richard Macek in a highly secure and heavily guarded room at Central State Hospital in Waupun, a place where the criminally insane received the help they needed. The authorities suspected Macek of five murders—including that of the maid and one in Illinois—but Macek claimed he couldn't remember the crimes. Both police and doctors were highly suspicious of his story, but at Central State, the best psychiatrists couldn't get much out of Macek.

The hospital was housed in an old stone building, ugly and standing low amid desolate, barren fields. The gulag-like place was surrounded by a barbed-wire high fence. After double-checking that my bag held a cassette tape recorder, extra batteries, some pens, and a notepad, I made my way to security, which was much tighter than I expected. The guards were off-putting and rude, like high school bullies. After the requisite metal detector, I was told I couldn't bring in my tape recorder. The thing that got me was that use of the device had been prearranged. The guards themselves were condescending and kept repeating, "You can't carry this tape recorder in. You don't have permission from the warden." And I said, "I do." And so it went around in circles. Sometimes I think the guards in these institutions are worse than the prisoners. These particular guards proved the cliché that power corrupts. This was their turf and it was their rules, petty as they were. And it would be their rules without exception.

They held me up for forty-five minutes before Agent Tomaselli arrived to whisk me through. I forced the confrontation with the guards from my mind as we walked quickly through a maze of halls. Tomaselli explained that police caught Richard Macek after a woman he attacked in a Laundromat fled. She freed herself from his grip and jumped from

his car at a stoplight. When questioned, she explained to police that his car had a broken red taillight. Before I could hear more, a squeaky door with a wire-reinforced window opened into a small, airless meeting room with green walls. Inside sat the warden, an investigator from Illinois, and one from Wisconsin. As I looked around, I felt like I was intruding on a private old boys' club.

The warden, seemingly bored, sat in a Hawthorne chair, his bulk bulging through the oak slats. Staring past me, the warden blandly asked, "How can you help us?"

I said that through hypnosis, I might be able to bring out what Richard Macek had forgotten, especially the specific details of the murders he may have committed.

"Hmmm," said the warden as though he didn't believe me. "Hmmm," as if my response didn't merit even a word. Their nonchalance bewildered me. Did they want to get to the bottom of the murders for which he was suspected or not?

Throughout the meeting, they didn't look me directly in the eye, and they often spoke as if I weren't present in the room. It was quite clear that the law enforcement people had an agenda much different from mine. They wanted to use me as their agent to coax Macek into confessing to a crime in Illinois—to the murder of a teenager named Sally Kandel. On January 25, 1973, warehouse worker Richard Milone was jailed and later convicted of the murder, but Milone protested that he was innocent, and a group of people, including Tomaselli, believed Milone. A small but growing amount of public pressure made the supposedly closed case fester like an open wound. The murder of young Sally Kandel was particularly appalling because the killer had bitten her severely. It most likely was Macek, but he had pulled out all of his teeth before forensic odontologists got to her case. Since he now was without his real teeth (he now wore dentures), it would be far more burdensome to link Macek to the bite marks.

But I had my own agenda; I wanted to begin a scientific study, one that looked into what made a serial murderer take innocent lives repeatedly. I kept thinking this was a necessary and interesting research project. If things worked well, it might really reveal something important about the many unknown aspects of a serial murderer, from his

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childhood to plotting the act of killing. It might even be beneficial to other crime investigations in the future. But they kept thinking that hypnosis was an unusual way to get him to confess.

The investigator from Illinois, a skinny man with a snipe-like nose that was too long and ears that were too large, blanched at the prospect of a scientific study.

He cleared his throat. "Scientific study," he mumbled, tapping his pen on the table as though he were aggravated. I began to wonder why Tomaselli had invited me at all.

I felt an unspoken condescension in the room, one that asked, What is an attractive, probably not competent, woman like you doing here? I tried my best to alleviate the situation; to put them at ease and make myself less threatening, I smiled at them even though they didn't smile at me. Without Tomaselli's urging, I didn't think I'd be there. But one thing became clear as I listened to them talk—they felt that Macek had committed *many* more killings than the brutal stabbing of the maid. And that's why I was here. They were so baffled they might even let a young doctor still in residence into their cloistered world of criminology—if it helped to unravel the case. I would have to prove myself in these few minutes we had before Macek came into the room.

Bear in mind that it wasn't yet a great time for women in the workplace. These still were the early days of the feminist movement, and women generally were not treated like equals. The National Organization for Women was not yet a decade old, the first battered women's shelter had just opened, and *Ms.* magazine was considered to be radical, bordering on Communist. As recently as 1972, the Equal Rights Amendment had passed the Senate, but only twenty-two of the thirty-eight required states ratified it. Women then held slightly more than a dozen seats in Congress. It was thought to be a revolutionary time, but a difficult time as well. Women had to act either aggressively to change their circumstances or had to focus clearly to keep plodding away in the trenches. I was certainly not a burn-your-bra kind of feminist. I didn't attend protests or marches or meetings. Yet I was of a single mind—to be the best doctor I could be, and no one was going to stop me.

Therefore, I was determined not to become annoyed by the officials in the room, no matter how I was treated. My approach was assertive and workmanlike. I thought, I'll let the insulting behavior wash away like water off a duck, but let's get done what needs to be done.

When two guards brought Richard Otto Macek into the meeting room, I couldn't believe what I saw. He was nothing like what I had anticipated. He was a short man in his thirties with whitish hair that bore remnants of blond and an unmemorable, babyish face. He was dressed in a drab brown shirt and pants issued by the prison hospital. Macek himself was physically odd. He was powerfully built, short and stocky, and he struck me as having brawny arms and a massive torso, reflecting enormous strength. Paradoxically, he struck me as pudgy with a peculiar combination of male and female characteristics, including a roundish body and soft, almost delicate, features.

Although he had shackles on his feet, he was not at all the odious murderer I expected. He looked right at me, smiled brightly, and shook my hand with a manly grip. It was as though this were a social event and he was trying to play the part of attentive host. He smiled again, this time showing his somewhat ill-fitting dentures.

"How's the weather? How was the drive?" he asked. He put his hands on his hips. "Are you comfortable in that chair? If not, we could get another chair."

When he spoke, his manner was exceedingly friendly. In a way, it was almost like role-playing—as though someone had given him a script and said this is how you're supposed to behave. He minded his manners. He joked, laughed, and generally kept the conversation light and breezy. He seemed pleasant, someone you could talk with easily. It was absolutely puzzling—how could a cold-blooded murderer act so convincingly polite?

The law enforcement people left after Macek signed a release stating that any and all of his words to me could be used in any way, even for Illinois or Wisconsin to convict him. As we sat in the room alone, I continued to be struck by the overall impression that he appeared to be a nice man, that perhaps they had jailed the wrong guy. In the com-

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ing twelve months, however, I would speak to Richard Macek for over four hundred hours. I would get to know him better than most of his family ever did. It wouldn't take a full year to really get to know Richard Macek, however. Within weeks, what I found out about him would have stunned his closest relatives.