

## **Excerpt from Patrick Finneran's *Retribution!***

**The knock at the front door**, gentle and timid though it was, startled Pat Murphy. He checked the time—9:30 p.m. Who could be calling at this late hour? Leaving his wife, daughter-in-law and grandsons in the big family room, he went down the central hallway of the old house to answer the door. As he opened the heavy wooden door, he was surprised to see the screen door open. Before his voice could even begin to form a query, a tall figure dressed in black from head to foot appeared in the doorway, reached out, grabbed him by this shirt, and jerked him forward across the threshold. Almost simultaneously a second person placed a dark, cloth bag over his head. A drawstring tightened around his throat. He was forcefully spun around and forced back into the house. He heard the front door close. Seconds later while his mind was still paralyzed with surprise and terror, his wrists were secured behind his back with a large, nylon, zip-tie. A firm hand was clasped over his mouth as he was shoved forward toward the kitchen down the central hall toward the back of the house. He heard a chair being pulled from the kitchen table. A commanding voice whispered in his ear, “Sit!” He was guided into position. He sat. Regaining some small measure of control over his terror, he became aware of more quiet voices in the house. They weren’t speaking English. Then he clearly heard his daughter-in-law Sally’s voice. She was both angry and scared. Someone entered the kitchen and sat in the chair next to his. Sally’s voice came nearer. He heard his daughter-in-law’s shock as she beheld the scene in the kitchen. Obviously she could see. Pat Murphy’s heart raced. He heard her ask, “Mom? Dad? Are you okay?” He couldn’t find his voice. Before he could respond, he heard his two grandsons enter the room. They were crying and terrified! Sally attempted to calm her sons. Their movements and voices were the only sounds in the room. The noose was loosened at his throat, and the bag removed. Pat Murphy blinked several times adjusting his eyes to the sudden brightness. He raised his eyes and saw that Sally and the two boys were being held at gunpoint across the room by two men in black jump suits, wearing ski masks of some shiny-black material. He looked to his right. His wife and companion of almost forty-eight years was seated next to him. Her eyes filled with disbelief, her face a mask of sheer terror. Just as he shifted his focus back toward Sally and the kids, his wife’s face was suddenly pushed to the table, and a large tube placed at the back of her head. The tube made a popping sound and his wife’s head exploded! Before he could comprehend, his own head was forced forward. Somewhere deep inside his mind a child’s small fearful voice cried out, “Dear God, forgive me!”

**A lonely sigh** escaped Mike Murphy’s lips, as he pulled back the layers of top coat, suit sleeves and shirt cuff to check the time. The elevator gently bumped to a stop at the twentieth floor. 11:30 p.m. The walnut paneled doors slid open. Mike stepped into the silent hallway, turned to his right, and began fishing in his top coat pocket for his keys. Damn these long evenings entertaining out of town clients! He didn’t mind the dinners at all the famous New York eateries, but if he had to sit through one more performance of *Les Miserables* at the Imperial Theater, he thought he’d go mad right there in the theater!

The plush carpet hushed his footfalls as he walked the length of the hall to the apartment. A second sigh escaped his lips as he turned the key in the lock. He dreaded spending another night alone in the big

apartment. God! How he missed the quite joy of embracing his wife greeting him at the door. He missed visiting his sleeping sons' beds, to kiss each on the forehead, and the quiet contemplation of the miracle of these two gifts from God—the joy of his life and the center of his universe.

He wondered whether Sally had called. His mind conjuring a picture of Sally and his sons soaking up the sun and fun of Key West at his parents retirement home. As the apartment door swung open, he flipped on the entry way light, let his top coat slip from his arms, and hung it in the entry way hall closet. His slim leather briefcase already occupied the closet shelf. He wondered once again why he even bothered to bring the damn thing home. Passing through the living room, turning on the table lamps on each side of the large sofa, he glanced out through the living room windows at the twinkling lights of the George Washington Bridge off in the distance to the North. The view normally cheered him, but tonight not even the twinkling lights could overcome the melancholy feeling of loneliness. "Five more days 'till Christmas Eve." He said aloud to the empty apartment. "Five more days and we'll all be together!"

Entering the bedroom he and his wife shared with such joy and sexual abandon, he stripped off his clothes. Within seconds he was standing beneath a pounding warm shower, letting the water wash away the tensions of the day and the chill of the New York City Winter. After several minutes he stepped from the shower stall, and examined his naked body in bathroom's full length mirror. He cast a critical eye. Reflected there, was a man in his late thirties, standing five foot eleven in his bare feet. Strong face and firm jaw. Dark curly hair, deep blue eyes. The waist, thanks to vigorous thrice weekly workouts, holding steady at thirty-three inches. He tensed his abdominal muscles, and was gratified to see the ripple of strong muscles beneath the skin. Like so many men of Irish blood, his body was pleasantly hairy—at least that's what Sally had said on their first sexual encounter almost fourteen years ago. She enjoyed their nightly foreplay. She would trace his body hair from this chest to his manhood. Her finger tips causing electric waves of expectation. The mere thought of it caused him an involuntary erection.

Theirs was a very happy union as their frequent love making would attest. The love affair was still going strong after nearly fourteen years of marriage.

Mike toweled off, wrapped the towel around his waist, cinched it tightly, and padded off to the small corner room he called his study. He flipped on the lights, and stopped for a moment by the window to once again take in the view of the Hudson River and the bridge, twinkling and shimmering in the darkness almost a mile away. His thoughts once again turned to Sally, Pat and Sean. Mike selected a pipe from the rack on his desk and began packing it with tobacco as he imagined his sons, following their grandfather around like loyal puppies, asking questions in a never ending stream as only thirteen and ten year old boys can. In spite of his father's gruff bluster, he knew his dad was in heaven having his grandsons all to himself for the two weeks of Christmas vacation. He was about to turn to leave the study when he noticed the ruby red message light silently flashing on the telephone answering machine. Someone had called—Sally? Returning to his desk, he sat in his desk chair and pressed the playback button.

An electronically disguised male voice spoke from the tiny speaker:

*“Mr. Murphy, we have your wife and sons. They will be safe for the next seventy-two hours. If you do not comply with our demands within that time—they will be put to death. As you were not available to take this call in person, we will call again at two-thirty a.m. Eastern Standard Time. The amount required is five hundred thousand dollars per individual. Make no attempt to go to the authorities. We will know if you do. If you do involve the authorities, it will mean instant death for your family. You now have seventy-two hours. The clock has started.”*

The tape machine mechanism clicked and went silent.