THE SNITCH[i]

In Scott Kimball, the FBI thought it had found a high-value informant who could help solve big cases. *What it got instead was lies, betrayal, and murder.*

By **Jordan Michael Smith**

CHAPTER 1

Carle Schlaff wanted more out of his job. As an FBI agent, he'd spent more than ten years working low-level drug cases in the bureau's Denver office. He eventually moved up to investigating organized crime—only to be transferred to the violent-crimes squad and made the liaison to a low-security prison called Englewood, in Littleton, Colorado. It was the sort of job that was good for a rookie, not a veteran. "I was kinda pissed," Schlaff said.

Schlaff was 42, with two kids, an easy smile, and an unpretentious manner. He was the type of FBI agent who read crime novels in his spare time. He'd

grown up watching *Hawaii Five-0*. He wanted to take down mob bosses, catch serial killers, expose international drug cartels.

In August 2002, Schlaff's luck changed: He learned that a prisoner at Englewood named Scott Kimball knew about a murder plot. Schlaff and a colleague met with Kimball in a small interview room at the prison. Kimball was 36 at the time, a weathered, stocky man who wore a goatee and had a long scar in the center of his forehead. He shared a cell with Steve Ennis, a young drug dealer. Kimball claimed that Ennis had talked about recruiting someone to kill

witnesses preparing to testify against him.

“I would be willing to do some undercover work for you guys,” Kimball told Schlaff and his colleague.

If the offer seemed blunt, it was because Kimball already knew how the FBI operated. After being arrested for check fraud in Alaska in 2001, he told authorities that his cellmate, Arnold Wesley Flowers, planned to order the murders of a federal judge and a prosecutor, along with a witness in the case against him. (Flowers was facing fraud charges of his own, according to court records.) The FBI worked with Kimball and an undercover agent to

record Flowers organizing the hits with help from his girlfriend. In March 2002, the couple were charged with murder for hire, witness tampering, and attempting to murder federal officials.

There was more: Kimball told the FBI that another Alaska prisoner, Jeremiah Jones, had bragged about murdering Tom Wales, a prominent assistant U.S. attorney shot to death through a window of his Seattle home in October 2001. While it investigated the matter, out of concern for his safety, the FBI transferred Kimball to his native Colorado in April 2002. Now, at Englewood, it seemed that Kimball had yet more valuable intelligence to offer.

Before Schlaff went chasing Kimball's story, though, he wanted to know what type of person he was dealing with. He didn't mind so much if someone had committed nonviolent crimes, but he didn't want to work with an informant who could be easily discredited.

"What's the worst thing you've ever done?" Schlaff asked Kimball.

Kimball admitted that in addition to his crimes in Alaska, he'd committed fraud in Montana and served time there. He excelled at check forgery, Kimball said, but he wanted to go straight. It sounded plausible to Schlaff, who'd reviewed Kimball's record—he didn't have any

convictions for violent crimes—and had checked for outstanding warrants.

Schlaff scribbled down on a notepad what Kimball told him. After leaving Englewood that day, he made contact with the Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. Attorney's Office, which were both working the Ennis case. Kimball was soon reactivated as an informant, with Schlaff as his handler. Their goal was to foil the alleged murder plot, and charge Ennis for orchestrating it.

All the pieces were falling into place: This was exactly the kind of case Schlaff had been craving.

It takes a thief to catch a thief, as Schlaff likes to say—that's the logic behind using jailhouse snitches. In the United States, the practice has a history as troubling as it is long. Incentivized by the promise of reduced sentences, better prison conditions, and financial compensation, criminal informants sometimes offer cops and prosecutors bad information, which can lead to wrongful convictions and other miscarriages of justice. And too often, authorities treat informants as if their lives matter less than the work of law enforcement.

In recent years, there have been efforts to reform the way authorities handle

informants. But back when Kimball started working with the FBI, there was less communication among law enforcement agencies and relatively minimal scrutiny of an informant's history. It was easy to miss the kind of facts from a person's past that might have made authorities think twice before using them as an informant.

Born in Boulder in 1966, Kimball was ten when his parents divorced, after his mother came out as gay. Around that time, according to Kimball and his brother, a neighbor began molesting them. Kimball told me the abuse continued until he was in his teens. The neighbor was ultimately sentenced to

seven years in prison for sexual abuse of a minor. According to people who knew him as a young man, Kimball seemed haunted by his past. He once tried to end his life but only managed to wound himself—the source of the scar on his forehead.

By early adulthood, Kimball had a long rap sheet. In 1988, he received his first felony conviction for passing bad checks. In another instance, he was charged with running an illegal outfitting business in Montana, helping out-of-staters hunt elk, bear, moose, and deer. Kimball continued to commit nonviolent offenses, the kind that Schlaff later saw on his criminal record.

There were other allegations against Kimball, far more unsettling ones, but due to a series of decisions made by law enforcement, finding them would have required some digging.

In June 1993, Kimball married a woman named Larissa Mineer. They moved to Spokane, Washington, and had two sons. Though they divorced in 1997, they maintained a relationship until December 1999, when, Mineer alleged, Kimball raped her at gunpoint. Kimball claimed he hadn't harmed or threatened Mineer—according to a police report, he said that his ex was trying to sway a custody dispute over their sons in her favor. After Mineer failed a polygraph,

the police decided not to file charges. (Polygraphs have been deemed unreliable by the American Psychological Association and the National Academy of Sciences, but law enforcement still use them to quickly ascertain whether someone might be telling the truth.)

In 2000, Kimball landed in prison in Montana, convicted of violating probation, which he'd been serving for a fraud offense. After a year in lockup, Kimball was transferred to a halfway house, but a month later he went on the lam. Mineer alleged that he came back to Washington, broke into her home, and then kidnapped and raped her. This

time the Spokane police issued a warrant for his arrest. But when Kimball was picked up for fraud in Alaska in 2001, and then became an FBI informant, the kidnapping and assault charges went away. (The FBI said it did not request that local law enforcement drop the charges.)

Carle Schlaff

As a result, when Schlaff looked up Kimball's record, none of Mineer's accusations were on it. The escape from the halfway house was there, but Schlaff wasn't too worried about that—Kimball had been near the end of his sentence

when he'd slipped away. Schlaff spoke to Colton Seale, an FBI special agent in Alaska, who said that Kimball had been helpful in the case against Flowers and his girlfriend. Seale, who is now retired from the FBI, told me that he has no memory of whether he knew about Kimball's kidnapping and assault charges at the time.

At worst, Schlaff thought, he was working with a petty con artist. "He was a typical wise guy," Schlaff told me. "He had an answer for everything." But Kimball wasn't a child molester or a murderer. He seemed like the type of informant who might be good before a jury.

The truth was something else entirely.

Schlaff visited Kimball in Englewood again, and together they devised a plan: Kimball would tell Steve Ennis that, once he was released from prison, *he* would kill the witnesses that Ennis wanted dead. The men would strategize, and once Ennis moved to carry out the murder plot, the feds would charge him. Soon Kimball reported to Schlaff that Ennis had bought the scheme and even suggested a next step: Ennis's girlfriend would introduce Kimball to Ennis's drug-dealing partner on the outside, who would provide him with a gun.

On December 18, 2002, Kimball left Englewood; the FBI and the

Department of Justice had persuaded a judge to free him on a $10,000 unsecured bond. He would be required to appear in court, including at an eventual plea bargaining hearing, where a judge would determine his sentence for the Alaska charges. It was expected to range from six to twelve months, which he'd already served, plus a few years of parole—far less than the ten years in prison he otherwise might have served for check fraud. He was not placed on probation at the time, because individuals on federal probation can't be FBI informants. A Montana prosecutor fought to have Kimball face charges for his escape from the halfway

house, but the FBI said it needed him free so he could help the bureau.

Kimball moved in with his mother, Barb, a life insurance agent, and her partner, Kay, in their suburban Denver home. Larissa Mineer had relocated to Colorado, and though she was afraid of her ex-husband, she still shared custody with him, so Kimball was able to see his young sons. He started flipping houses and soon set up an organic meat distributor, Rocky Mountain All Natural Beef Company, with a $15,000 investment from his mother and $50,000 from his brother, Brett.

Schlaff equipped Kimball with a cell phone and an earpiece to record

conversations relevant to the Ennis investigation. He paid Kimball in cash at the men's regular meetings. During his time working with the FBI, Kimball received a total of $50,000.

One day the two men met at a coffee shop. As Schlaff sipped his latte, he prodded Kimball for prison gossip from his Englewood contacts. "Who all is talking?" Schlaff asked. Kimball told him that a prisoner named Steve Holley, another former cellmate, was planning to escape. Holley had managed to break out once before, if briefly; chances were he'd learned from the mistakes that got him caught. Holley had nothing to do with the Ennis case, but Schlaff felt

obligated to report what he knew: He called Englewood, and prison authorities put Holley in solitary confinement.

In late December 2002, Kimball phoned Ennis's girlfriend, Jennifer Marcum. Twenty-five years old and originally from Illinois, Marcum had dropped out of high school, married and divorced, and moved to Colorado with her toddler son. Marcum had trouble supporting herself and her child on the money she earned as a fast-food worker, so she began dancing at Shotgun Willie's, a suburban strip club. By the time Kimball called her, Marcum was desperate for a career change.

Schlaff sanctioned the first meeting between Kimball and Marcum, but Kimball soon began seeing her on his own accord. Kimball lied about himself to Marcum, telling her he owned a chain of coffee shops in Seattle. He suggested that she move there and run one of them. With her head-turning looks, he told her, she could be a great saleswoman. Marcum loved the idea. She joked about selling coffee in A cups or B cups, a reference to her breasts, which she'd augmented with implants.

Kimball eventually contacted Schlaff and asked for permission to have sex with Marcum. Schlaff said no—Marcum was a source of information,

and a possible suspect, in the case the FBI was building against Ennis. “I thought it was an unusual request,” Schlaff admitted, “but since Kimball had been in custody for 14 months prior, it seemed innocent.”

On February 17, 2003, Marcum told Ennis she was meeting Kimball for dinner. When Ennis didn’t hear from her in the weeks that followed, he was confused. She’d always been so devoted, he later told authorities. He tried contacting her, but the call went to voice mail. He wrote her letters; she never responded.

According to FBI records, at one of their meetings Kimball told Schlaff that

Marcum had recently called him to say that she'd taken a JetBlue flight to New York, where she sometimes danced and worked as a call girl. As far as Schlaff was concerned, there was no reason to think Kimball was lying about Marcum's whereabouts, or about anything else.

CHAPTER 2

Lori McLeod met Scott Kimball at the Lodge Casino in Black Hawk, Colorado, in early 2003. A 39-year-old single mother, McLeod worked at a salon. She'd been through two tough divorces and didn't date much. She was too focused on her daughter, Kaysi, who at 19 struggled with a meth addiction and had already run away from home a number of times. Recently, Kaysi had taken steps to turn her life around—she was living with her mom, had gotten clean and made new friends, and was about to start a job at a Subway sandwich shop.

McLeod was playing Boston five-card poker at the casino when Kimball walked up, pushing his mother, who had multiple sclerosis, in a wheelchair. What a sweet guy, McLeod thought. Kimball moved some chairs out of the way so that Barb could play cards. Then he sat down beside McLeod and introduced himself. He was “very charming,” McLeod told me. “He was just easy to talk to, easy to be around.” Kimball told McLeod that he was an FBI agent, a statement that neither his mother nor her partner, Kay, who’d also come to the casino, and was introduced to the table as Barb’s sister, made an effort to correct. Kimball and McLeod

flirted as they played hands. Kimball talked about his sons, Cody and Justin; McLeod talked about Kaysi. As McLeod later recounted to the NBC news program *Dateline*, when Kimball went to use the bathroom, the dealer at the table looked at her. "Lori, give this guy your number," the dealer said. "You're driving him nuts."

When Kimball returned, McLeod wrote her number on a piece of paper and slid it under his poker chips, keeping her fingers on the note. "Just so you know, this is how you can get ahold of me," she said. "Wait—you're not a felon or anything, are you?"

“Lori,” he replied, “you know I work for the FBI.”

They went on their first date on Valentine’s Day, three days before Kimball’s last known meeting with Jennifer Marcum. Kimball brought flowers. “I don’t want there to be any lies between us, so I need to tell you something,” he said. “Kay is not my Aunt Kay—she is my mother’s wife.” McLeod was impressed that he’d set the record straight. He seemed like a good man who had his life together. “I was a single mom at this point,” McLeod told me. “It was pretty obvious that he could afford to pay his own bills, and he was generous with me.”

McLeod and Kimball spent more and more time together after that, camping, eating at expensive restaurants, and visiting national parks. In a photo from the period, the couple are standing on a boat, and Kimball proudly holds aloft a massive fish covered in blood. He showed McLeod an FBI badge and a laptop with the bureau's seal—both emblems were fake. He told her about the beef business he ran on the side. McLeod gushed about her new man to her family and introduced him to her daughter. "He would always bring something for Kaysi, just making sure that she felt part of everything, that she

wasn’t an outsider,” McLeod told me. Kaysi liked Kimball and his two sons.

Sometimes McLeod thought Kimball looked at Kaysi strangely, almost like he was checking her out, but she tried to ignore it. Her involvement with law enforcement before meeting him was limited to two speeding tickets. Kimball’s job, working for a government agency, made him upright in McLeod’s eyes. If the FBI trusted him, why shouldn’t she?

Kimball traveled often for work and told McLeod that, for her own protection, he couldn’t say where he was going. When McLeod pressed him, Kimball said only that he was working

what could be a major case—a girl named Jennifer might have been murdered.

On March 10, 2003, unbeknownst to McLeod, Kimball pled guilty to the Alaska fraud charges from a courthouse in Denver. Sentencing would happen later in the year. An assistant U.S. attorney and the judge agreed to seal the records in the case because they indicated that Kimball was working with the FBI. Should knowledge of his status become public, his life could be jeopardized, as could the work of the DOJ and the FBI on important cases.

The next day, Kimball flew to Seattle to meet with Jeremiah Jones, the man he

claimed had confessed to murdering an assistant U.S. attorney. The FBI's Seattle office wanted Kimball to buy a gun from Jones, who had been released from jail since Kimball last saw him; hopefully, too, Kimball could get Jones talking about the murder. But according to an agent on the case who wished to remain anonymous, when Kimball met with Jones, he didn't use any of the talking points the FBI had given him. What's more, Jones spoke as though he barely knew Kimball, much less that he'd confided in him about committing a high-profile killing.

The FBI in Seattle wondered if Kimball had made the whole thing up. The office

brought him in for a polygraph and asked if Jones had really admitted to the murder. Kimball said yes, but the polygraph indicated that he was lying.

The Seattle agents were enraged. The bureau had gotten Kimball transferred to Colorado, then out of Englewood on a plea deal. It had paid him thousands of dollars and helped him avoid facing other charges. One of the Seattle agents emailed Schlaff to tell him that Kimball was “untrustworthy,” according to Schlaff and another FBI employee who saw the message.

It was one thing to decide that Kimball wasn’t helpful, Schlaff thought—but putting in writing that he was unreliable

posed risks to several ongoing cases. In criminal trials, defendants have the right to examine all materials generated by law enforcement. If an attorney saw the email about Kimball, investigative targets like Jeremiah Jones and Steve Ennis could use it to discredit testimony or intelligence Kimball had provided as an informant.

“What the hell are you doing?” Schlaff asked when he called the agent who sent the email. “You don’t like him, that is fine, but don’t put it in writing!”

Schlaff said he knew Kimball was legitimate. He’d met his sons and his girlfriend, Lori; he’d spoken with his mother, Barb; he’d visited him as he

gutted houses. Plus, Kimball had been a good informant for the Alaska office; he had a proven track record. Still, the other agent, whose name Schlaff would not reveal in interviews, was adamant that Kimball was lying.

Schlaff was so confident in Kimball that when the two men met up a few weeks later, in April 2003, he didn't mention the email or the failed polygraph. As far as he was concerned, they had important work to do: Kimball was scheduled to meet Jason Price, Steve Ennis's drug-dealing partner, at an Applebee's.

Lori McLeod

As they drove to the restaurant, Schlaff asked Kimball if he had heard from Jennifer Marcum since her trip to New York.

"I hear she's dead," Kimball said.

Schlaff was startled. Marcum had what he called a "high-risk lifestyle"—she often associated with drug dealers. It wouldn't have surprised him if she got herself into some trouble. But *murdered*? Schlaff had a hard time believing it. He pressed Kimball for more information, but Kimball said he didn't know any of the details.

Schlaff put Marcum out of his mind as they pulled into the Applebee's parking lot. He ran a microphone and wires under Kimball's shirt. Inside the restaurant, Kimball talked to Jason Price for nearly two hours. Price mentioned a new cocaine connection; Kimball said he had someone in Alaska who could move it for him. Price discussed the witnesses who were set to testify against Steve Ennis, but he didn't suggest using violence to stop them. Still, Schlaff later said, he thought the meeting "was very fruitful."

Bullish about the progress of the investigation, Schlaff shared what he'd learned with the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Not long after, he got word that the case was being put on hold. According to FBI documentation, there was "trouble gaining cooperation with the [U.S. Attorney's Office] of using Kimball as a cooperating witness." Schlaff was upset, but there wasn't much he could do about it. Besides, his attention was suddenly needed elsewhere: Like many people working at the FBI in the years immediately after the September 11 attacks, Schlaff was being given new responsibilities in counterterrorism.

On May 28, Kimball was scheduled to fly to Anchorage to consult on the trial of Arnold Wesley Flowers. Because it was official FBI business, Schlaff

offered to give him a ride to the airport. Kimball parked his Jeep Cherokee outside the bureau's Denver office and got into Schlaff's black SUV. As he drove, Schlaff blasted country music, which both men loved. But the mood was tense: Schlaff thought Kimball seemed distracted and nervous, almost paranoid. "Is anything wrong?" Kimball asked at one point. Schlaff found the question strange, almost like something was amiss and Kimball was probing to see what Schlaff knew.

After dropping him off, Schlaff returned to his office and ran a check on Kimball for any outstanding warrants. A new one for his arrest had been issued in

Spokane; it didn't specify the charge. Schlaff was livid—at Kimball for doing whatever he'd done in Spokane, at the agent in Seattle for saying Kimball was a liar, at the U.S. Attorney's Office for hitting pause on the Ennis investigation.

Screw it, Schlaff thought. He decided he was done with the whole thing.

When Kimball returned to Denver the following month, Lori McLeod picked him up at the airport and they went straight to a casino. Later that night, they drove to where Kimball had left his Jeep. When Kimball got into his car and put the key in the ignition, the engine wouldn't start. Suddenly, red and blue lights appeared around him. "Within 30

seconds, it felt like, there were cop cars everywhere," McLeod told me.

An officer walked up to the Jeep. "Sir, is this your vehicle?" he asked. When Kimball said yes and gave his name, he was placed under arrest. McLeod was bewildered—"freaking out," in her words.

"Calm down," Kimball told her. "Call Carle. Tell him exactly what is going on."

Then Kimball turned to one of the cops putting him the back of a squad car. "Call Carle Schlaff," he said.

The cop looked Kimball in the eye and smiled. "Who do you think told us to arrest you?"

Schlaff had had Kimball's Jeep disabled so that, when law enforcement surrounded him, he couldn't escape. "He was being squirrely with me, so I decided to be squirrely with him," Schlaff said. "Plus, it was good for agency relations to throw some meat to guys who have guns and cuffs but rarely get a chance to use them."

Schlaff went to see Kimball two days later, in the Denver County jail. Kimball looked disheveled. By then, Schlaff had learned that the Spokane warrant was issued because of a minor probation violation related to Kimball registering his address. Kimball would have to go to court in Washington, but that wasn't

Schlaff's problem. He was only at the jail, per FBI regulations, to inform Kimball that the bureau no longer needed his services. Through official channels, he'd been deactivated as an informant.

But as the two men sat across from each other in a private meeting, Kimball said something that stopped Schlaff short: Jason Price had confessed to strangling Jennifer Marcum to death.

Schlaff stepped out of the room and called Englewood to see if Marcum had recently visited Ennis—turned out, she hadn't been to the prison since February. Next Schlaff called Suzanne Halonen, the DEA agent working the

stalled Ennis case. Halonen, who joined the agency in 1987, had spent nine months monitoring conversations between the case's major players, particularly Price and Ennis. She came to the Denver jail, along with another DEA agent, the district attorney, and Kimball's public defender. Everyone sat in stainless-steel chairs around a table and asked Kimball what he knew.

Kimball said that Price had shown him a picture on a laptop of Marcum's body, naked, bound, and gagged. He claimed that Price had told him he strangled Marcum and placed her in the trunk of his Mercedes before driving to Rifle, Colorado, about 150 miles west of

Denver, and stashing Marcum at the bottom of a creek. Kimball said Price later asked him to retrieve the body and cut out Marcum's breast implants, fearing they might be traceable. (Kimball did not say whether he agreed to help Price.)

Halonen didn't buy the story. She felt like she knew Price pretty well—she'd listened to dozens of hours of him talking—and she thought he was meek, even a wimp. "He'd had drugs stolen from him, he'd been ripped off, and he just wasn't a violent person," she told me. And what reason did he have to kill Marcum, who'd done nothing to cross

him that Halonen knew of? The whole thing struck her as absurd.

Someone in the room asked Kimball how he knew for sure Price had killed Marcum—maybe Price had taken the picture after she died or had gotten it from someone else. Kimball explained that Price was in the picture, standing over Marcum's body, with his reflection showing in a nearby mirror.

The law enforcement officials went into the hallway to discuss the situation. Halonen was adamant. "He's a fucking liar," she said. In fact, Halonen continued, she was starting to suspect that *Kimball* had killed Marcum.

“If Scott is the one who did it, prove it,” Schlaff told her. “I am not going to cover for him or anything like that. Just give me a motive.”

Halonen admitted that she didn’t have one. All she knew was that she found Kimball creepy and believed he was lying about Price. She pointed out that, at the very least, it seemed as if Kimball had divulged information about a purported murder as a get-out-of-jail-free card—he had a motive not to tell the truth. “It’s crazy to believe this guy,” she said. The group asked Kimball to take a polygraph, and he agreed. The test indicated that he wasn’t lying.

Soon after, various authorities gathered again for a meeting in downtown Denver. Halonen sat at one end of a conference table, Schlaff at the other. For more than an hour, they argued heatedly over whether Kimball should be reactivated as an FBI informant. Since orchestrating Kimball's arrest, Schlaff had had a change of heart. He reasoned that Kimball's probation violation in Spokane was small-time, certainly not the kind of thing that should stand in the way of an investigation into Marcum's alleged murder. "Are you telling me to not use his information and use him to find a dead girl?" Schlaff asked the room. The

FBI could wiretap Kimball and get Price to confess, Schlaff added.

Halonen argued that if he was released from custody, Kimball might be dangerous—did federal authorities really want to risk enabling him? But she was overruled. A judge agreed to drop the warrant for Kimball's arrest in Washington.

On June 20, 2003, Kimball was released from jail. He told Lori McLeod that the arrest had been a ruse, part of his cover as an FBI agent. Because he was released so quickly, she had little reason to question the story. Once again Kimball began working as an informant. He wouldn't last long.

CHAPTER 3

Schlaff planned to record a conversation in which Kimball would coax a murder confession out of Price, or at least get more details about what had happened to Marcum. But when Kimball called him, with the FBI listening, Price immediately hung up. Schlaff asked what happened. Kimball couldn't explain why Price wouldn't talk to him.

Without Marcum's body, there was no homicide to investigate. She was missing, but there were some 800 active cases just like hers in Denver at the time. By tracing Marcum's license plate number, Schlaff discovered that the Denver police had located her 1996

Saturn at the airport earlier that year and impounded it. There was no surveillance footage of the car being parked and no record of Marcum flying to New York—as Kimball once said he'd heard—or anywhere else. Schlaff had the car examined by forensics, but there was no evidence of foul play.

Marcum's parents later told reporters that they believed their daughter might have got into trouble with drugs or been arrested, and that for some reason she didn't, or couldn't, contact them. In time they put up posters around Denver advertising her disappearance. Few tips came in. The search went nowhere.

The Marcums weren't the only family at a loss for answers about a missing woman. In August 2003, Lori McLeod's daughter, Kaysi, failed to show up for her shift at Subway. Two days passed. She wasn't answering her phone. "I was distraught," McLeod told me. At the time, Kimball was away on what he said was a hunting trip; when he came back, he consoled his girlfriend and said he would use his resources at the FBI to help search for Kaysi.

McLeod eventually went to the police. According to McLeod, they wouldn't let her file a missing person report—Kaysi was over 18, and adults were allowed to go missing if they wanted to. Kimball,

who stayed out of McLeod's interactions with police, seemed to agree: He assured her that Kaysi was grown-up and self-reliant. She had run away before. She would come home when she was ready.

When McLeod talked to Kaysi's boyfriend, he told her that Kimball had picked Kaysi up from the motel where the couple were staying the night she disappeared. He'd even paid for their room, the boyfriend said. Kimball denied the story. He told McLeod that the boyfriend was on drugs. "I was extremely confused," McLeod later said. She thought that Kimball might be in touch with Kaysi—that he might

know where she was but for some reason wouldn't say.

Soon after, Kimball told McLeod that they should get married. He said it would make it easier for him to help find Kaysi. McLeod, dazed and depressed, wanted to keep him happy and do whatever she could for her daughter. She and Kimball married at a drive-through chapel in Las Vegas. When they returned, they visited Kimball's mother, who was still an insurance agent. "We need to protect each other," Kimball told McLeod. She took out a life insurance policy, with Kimball as the sole beneficiary. It was

the same type of policy Kimball already had for both of his sons.

That December—as ever, without McLeod's knowledge—Kimball appeared in court to be sentenced for his fraud conviction in Alaska. The U.S. Attorney's Office requested the least punitive sentence. Prosecutors admitted that Kimball hadn't exactly been a model citizen since his release from Englewood—he'd failed to check in with his probation officer, for example—but they cited his cooperation on the Ennis and Flowers cases as evidence of his value to the FBI. They also said that Carle Schlaff still believed Kimball could help the bureau solve a murder.

The judge ordered Kimball to pay a $5,000 fine and $8,287.94 in restitution to Wells Fargo, the bank he'd defrauded in Alaska. Kimball also got three years of federal probation, which ended his official work with the FBI: He could call Schlaff and volunteer information, but the FBI couldn't direct him to do anything as a paid informant. With Kimball's value diminished, and with no substantial developments in the Ennis case or the investigation into Marcum's disappearance, Schlaff and Kimball fell out of touch.

The first year of Kimball and McLeod's marriage was difficult, and not only because Kaysi never came

home. Kimball was away more often than ever, and when he was around he could be cruel. He called Justin, his elder son, “Susie” to mock his gentle personality, which Kimball considered feminine.

On July 14, 2004, Kimball and McLeod were at home with the boys. “They were out in the back digging holes in the field and just doing boy stuff,” McLeod recalled. Just after 9 p.m., Cody came inside and asked McLeod if she had any flashlights—it was getting dark, and they were trapping mice. He grabbed sodas from the fridge and went back outside. Moments later he returned,

yelling: “Dad said to call 911! Justin has been hurt! Call 911!”

McLeod scrambled for the phone. “I need an ambulance!” she said to the 911 dispatcher. “My stepson has been hurt!” Cody said something about Justin’s leg. “It may be a broken leg. I don’t know!” McLeod said into the phone. Kimball carried ten-year-old Justin in his arms, screaming about his back. “Oh, my god. I think we have a back injury, too,” McLeod told the dispatcher. “We just need an ambulance!” But then Kimball ran outside to his Jeep, placed Justin in the passenger seat, and drove away. McLeod told the dispatcher they didn’t

need an ambulance after all—her husband was on the way to the hospital.

McLeod and Cody followed suit. When they arrived, they found Justin on a gurney, convulsing and vomiting, with blood smeared around him. McLeod asked a nurse what happened. “The fall was really hard on his little body,” the nurse said.

McLeod was confused. Justin had fallen? From what? A car, the nurse explained. “No, no, no,” McLeod said. “He was injured at my house. He wasn’t in a vehicle.”

At that point, Kimball entered the conversation. He said that he’d been playing outside with the boys when a

metal grate fell on Justin. En route to the hospital, Justin had felt the injury he'd sustained to his head—his hand traced a gaping, bleeding hole. He tried to unroll the car window to throw up but accidentally opened the door instead, which sent him falling onto the road. "I was going about 60," Kimball said. "There is no way he is going to make it."

Kimball was wrong—Justin did make it. And after two weeks in a medically induced coma, his first words were: "Why did Dad do this to me?"

Justin claimed that, in the backyard, Kimball had pushed the metal grate onto him. Then, Justin said, while they

were riding in the Jeep, his dad had opened the passenger-side door and shoved him out. Law enforcement looked into the matter, but it was Kimball's word against his son's. According to McLeod and Larissa Mineer, Justin's mother, the boy's neurosurgeon said his injuries were affecting his memory. McLeod told me that the doctor consoled Kimball for having to hear such an awful accusation. Complicating things, the grate injury had occurred in one jurisdiction and Justin's fall from the car had happened in another; it wasn't clear who should take the lead on the legal front.

Ultimately, law enforcement let the matter go. “That was beyond frustrating,” Mineer said. She had no doubt that Justin was telling the truth. Mineer told me that she’d already tried in vain to strip Kimball of his parental rights. She could never win full custody, so even after Justin was hurt, she had to send the boys to their dad’s every other weekend.

While Justin was still in the hospital, Kimball’s uncle Terry had come from Alabama to help take care of Cody. Heavyset, with a bushy mustache, Terry was a Navy vet who had wandered the West working as a firefighter, groundskeeper, handyman, and

construction foreman before winding up in the South. Terry arrived at Kimball's with a tractor-trailer, two dogs, and a briefcase filled with thousands of dollars he'd withdrawn from his savings account after his divorce. He was socially awkward and a terrible houseguest. According to McLeod, he drank often and walked around naked.

One day, McLeod came home from work to find the furniture in the house rearranged. Kimball was standing in the backyard by a white leather sofa covered in a large, fresh stain of some kind.

"What the hell happened to the couch?" McLeod asked.

“One of Terry’s dogs threw up on it,” Kimball said.

“That is *not* dog vomit,” McLeod replied.

Maybe Terry had vomited and blamed the dog, Kimball suggested. Either way, he said, Terry was gone, and he wasn’t coming back—he’d won a small prize in the lottery and left for Mexico with a stripper. McLeod didn’t ask questions. She couldn’t imagine any woman finding Terry attractive, but she was glad he was gone.

CHAPTER 4

One day in January 2006, McLeod heard a knock at her front door. When she opened it, a young detective from the Lafayette, Colorado, police department was there. “I need to speak with Scott Kimball,” Gary Thatcher said.

Earlier that month, a Lafayette bank manager had reported that someone had forged $83,000 in checks. Thatcher, who investigated fraud, learned that the checks had been deposited into an account for Rocky Mountain All Natural Beef Company, which Kimball still owned. Bank surveillance videos

showed the deposits were made by a stocky man with a goatee.

Thatcher met with the person whose checks had been stolen, an optometrist named Cleve Armstrong. It turned out that Armstrong had an office in the same building as Kimball's beef distribution company and his mother's insurance business. When Thatcher interviewed Barb's employees, he learned that they had found some of Armstrong's mail on Kimball's desk. The detective suspected that Kimball had taken Armstrong's checks and forged his signature so that it looked like the doctor had bought beef from the company next door. As Thatcher

continued digging, he found that Kimball had also stolen money from a business partner and even from Barb. Now he was at McLeod's door, asking where her husband was.

"Well, he didn't come home last night, so your guess is as good as mine where he is," she said.

McLeod's relationship with Kimball was disintegrating. "He managed to make me feel like I was just not cutting the mustard," she later said. He stayed out more, searched for Kaysi less. McLeod thought he might have a girlfriend in California, where his brother lived and where he'd started spending a lot of time.

McLeod agreed to go to the police station to answer questions. Thatcher led her to a bland interview room and gave her a bottle of water. A camera hung from the ceiling, recording the meeting on VHS. The room had an audible echo.

As they talked about Kimball's fraudulent behavior, McLeod appeared visibly nervous but unsurprised by what Thatcher told her. At one point, McLeod's phone rang—it was Kimball. She answered and turned the volume up loud enough that Thatcher could hear Kimball's voice.

"I'm just getting ready for the day," McLeod told her husband.

“It sounds echoey in there,” Kimball said.

“Oh, yeah, I’m in the bathroom,” McLeod replied.

Kimball asked if the police had contacted her—he was wondering, he said, because they’d reached out to Barb. McLeod said no. Kimball asked her to get some mail from the beef company’s office. McLeod said she missed him, and the call ended.

Thatcher observed that McLeod lied easily to Kimball. He worried that she was lying to him, too. Thatcher asked about Kimball’s work, by which he meant meat distribution. But McLeod said Kimball worked for the FBI.

“Guys who work for the FBI don’t steal checks from their moms,” Thatcher replied. Surely, he thought, McLeod was kidding.

But no—Kimball had told his wife he was an FBI agent, talked about working undercover, and showed McLeod a badge. McLeod told Thatcher she’d even watched Kimball receive envelopes stuffed with cash from another member of the bureau. Thatcher wondered if, on top of forging checks, Kimball was impersonating a federal agent.

McLeod told Thatcher about Kaysi, who by then had been missing for two and a half years. Kimball, McLeod

explained, was among the last people who'd seen her daughter alive. "He had been taking her to and from work," McLeod said. She told Thatcher that she thought Kimball might know where Kaysi was living or what had befallen her.

After his interview with McLeod, Thatcher kept investigating. He learned that a Louisville, Colorado, detective had looked into Kimball for the attempted murder of his own son. Two suspicious situations linked to Kimball —Kaysi's disappearance and Justin's accident—might have been coincidence, but Thatcher couldn't stop thinking about the possibility that something else

was going on. On March 8, 2006, he decided to contact the FBI to let them know that Kimball might be impersonating an agent. He was patched through to Schlaff, who by then had transferred to the bureau's headquarters in Washington, D.C. "Yeah, he's one of ours," Schlaff said of Kimball. "He's one of our informants."

An *informant*—that made more sense to Thatcher. "I am working a white-collar case on Scott," he explained.

"There is a big shocker," Schlaff quipped. He knew all about Kimball's history of check fraud. Schlaff explained that Kimball had been an informant in the unresolved case of a

woman who disappeared. Her name, Schlaff said, was Jennifer Marcum.

Holy cow, Thatcher thought. Another suspicious incident. And three, as they say, is a pattern.

"Are you aware of Kaysi disappearing?" Thatcher asked. Schlaff said he was, and that McLeod had suggested her daughter might have run away. He didn't know any other details.

"Are you aware that Scott was the last person seen alive with her?" Thatcher continued. "He disappeared for a couple of days around that time period." Thatcher was referring to the hunting trip Kimball said he was on when Kaysi vanished.

In that moment, Schlaff realized that he'd never asked McLeod about Kimball's relationship with Kaysi. He'd been focused on what Kimball could tell him about Steve Ennis, Jason Price, Jennifer Marcum—anyone who might help Schlaff close a major case.

"Shit, Gary, I did not know that," Schlaff admitted. "I am sorry. You are the first one to tell me."

Schlaff was silent for a moment. "Well, Gary," he finally said, "you might have a serial killer on your hands."

A few days later, Thatcher arrived at the FBI office in Denver to meet with Jonny Grusing, a tall, reedy special agent assigned to help clean up what

increasingly looked like a massive blunder on the part of the FBI. He wanted to put Kimball in custody, but he wasn't sure how. No evidence proved that Kaysi McLeod or Jennifer Marcum was dead, let alone murdered, and there wasn't sufficient cause to arrest Kimball for either woman's disappearance. Meanwhile, Thatcher was still building the latest fraud case against Kimball, for the forged checks he'd deposited at a Colorado bank.

Then Kimball's brother, Brett, told Thatcher and Grusing about some guns his brother had given him—guns that Kimball, as someone convicted of a felony, should not have possessed. The

FBI put out a warrant for Kimball's arrest on a weapons charge.

Kimball was in California at the time, but police weren't sure where until McLeod gave them his cell phone number—it was new. Authorities traced it to a four-block radius in the Coachella Valley. They alerted police in Riverside, 50 miles from Los Angeles. U.S. marshals swarmed the area, with local cops as backup. FBI reports and news accounts describe what happened next.

Around 2:30 p.m. on March 14, 2006, Kimball left his 31-year-old girlfriend, Denise Pierce, at her office. (McLeod had been right about Kimball cheating.) Two marshals spotted Kimball's maroon

Ford F-350 weaving through heavy traffic. Plainclothes officers pulled up on the right side of the truck in an unmarked gold minivan. When one of the cops tried to pull Kimball over, he sped away. As he barreled recklessly through Riverside, Kimball phoned Pierce. She heard a helicopter and sirens and urged him to surrender. Kimball said that if he did, the police would kill him.

So he drove. Down dirt roads and over irrigation pipes, through school zones and orchards. He nearly ran into other cars. A helicopter and dozens of police vehicles were on his tail. He reached 80 miles per hour and narrowly missed

hitting a local news crew. Police dropped spikes to puncture Kimball's tires, but instead of driving over them, he turned off-road.

After more than three hours and 260 miles, Kimball drove into a farm field. Behind him, a black minivan parked and half a dozen men armed with assault rifles and body armor emerged. Kimball weaved through other cars that had pursued him into the field. Then he ran out of gas. His Ford sputtered to a stop. Authorities could see that Kimball was on his cell phone, but they couldn't tell if he was armed.

Kimball stepped out of his truck, then got back in. He did it again. He put a

gun to his head, answering the question about whether he was armed, and threatened to kill himself. He yelled to the marshals that he wanted to speak to Carle Schlaff.

Schlaff was at a Washington Capitals hockey game when his phone rang. "We've got Kimball stopped," a marshal told him. Would Schlaff be willing to try to talk Kimball out of suicide? Kimball was patched into the line. "I've got nothing to live for," he sobbed. "My life is over." Schlaff half-heartedly reassured Kimball that his life had value and then hung up.

Eventually, Kimball stepped out of the truck and knelt on the ground. He was

giving up. After he put down his phone and laid with his face in the earth, police handcuffed him.

Kimball was transferred to Denver, then quickly to Montana, where a local prosecutor had him jailed for skipping out on probation in 2001. For the time being, Grusing and Thatcher weren't too concerned about where and for what crime Kimball was incarcerated—they just wanted to make sure he was behind bars somewhere while they developed their case against him. In Montana, Kimball was charged, convicted, and sentenced to two years in prison.

On May 22, 2006, he was brought to Denver to face the weapons charge.

Kimball told the judge he wanted to change. “I would like to get whatever help I can to keep me from coming back to this—this situation, this cycle that I’m in,” Kimball said, according to court records. He was referring, it seemed, to his scams and other relatively minor offenses. The judge gave him ten months in jail and six months in a halfway house, to be served after he’d finished his sentence in Montana.

Law enforcement now faced a ticking clock: Thatcher and Grusing hoped to gather evidence against Kimball that would implicate him in multiple murders, but they needed to do so

before he was released. They traveled to Montana to question him about Jennifer Marcum and Kaysi McLeod; Kimball denied knowing anything about what happened to either of them.

Grusing and Thatcher also contacted Kimball's family, friends, and associates. Larissa Mineer still maintained that Kimball had raped her on two occasions; she also told the agents that she suspected he'd tried to poison her. Brett Gamblin, a man Kimball had shared a Montana jail cell with, told Thatcher that he'd visited Kimball in Denver and helped out with the beef business. He recounted a story eerily familiar to the one Kimball told

about Jason Price when he accused him of murdering Marcum: One night, Kimball and Gamblin were drinking together when Kimball asked, “Are fake titties traceable?” They were, Gamblin said, because implants contain serial numbers. “Oh man,” he remembered Kimball replying, as if he was worried. According to Gamblin, Kimball later asked if he would help retrieve something from a dead body, as a favor to a friend. Gamblin said that he told Kimball no.

Gamblin admitted to being scared of Kimball. He said he was “under the impression” that his friend might have killed, or helped kill, two women. He

claimed that Kimball once told him he knew about a drug dealer who paid "someone" $10,000 to kill a female witness in a case. "They will never find her," Gamblin recalled his friend saying.

Back in Colorado, Lori McLeod was sorting through the detritus of her failed marriage. Shortly after her husband's arrest, she was evicted from their condo. She'd stowed many of Kimball's possessions in boxes—things he'd kept from prison or that McLeod had quickly gathered as she vacated their home. In one of them, she found Kaysi's handwritten work schedule from Subway. It was for the week her

daughter went missing. How did Kimball get it, and why had he kept it?

FBI records show that, at this point, McLeod began working closely with authorities. She turned over Kimball's laptop, a Toshiba. When Grusing and Thatcher searched it, as well as Kimball's desktop computer, they found hundreds of images and videos of women being tortured, maimed, and held at gunpoint. They found that Kimball had also read numerous news stories about a serial killer in Kansas who had bound, brutalized, and killed women.

Among the disturbing items on Kimball's computers was a seemingly

benign one: a photograph of a young woman, healthy and smiling. None of Kimball's family or friends knew who she was. But Steve Holley did.

Holley was the prisoner at Englewood who, right after Kimball's release to work the Ennis case, had been placed in isolation because Kimball told Schlaff he was plotting to escape. When Grusing and Thatcher interviewed him, Holley identified the woman in the picture as LeAnn Emry, his former girlfriend. Holley hadn't heard from her since early 2003. But he was sure that she and Kimball had been in touch.

As it turned out, Holley *had* wanted to escape, and when Kimball was still

incarcerated at Englewood, he'd promised to help. The plan was amateur verging on laughable: Once he was released, Kimball would drive a truck up to one of the prison's walls and toss a ladder over it. After someone created a diversion on the other side of the facility, Holley would climb the ladder and get into the truck on the other side. Kimball would then reunite Holley and Emry in Mexico. From prison, Holley told Emry to follow Kimball's instructions.

Emry was 24, short, with hazel eyes, and known in her family for her boundless compassion. Emry had postponed her professional ambitions to

care for her mother after she suffered an aneurysm, her family later told authorities, taking up exotic dancing to pay the bills. Over the years, she adopted two chinchillas, a rabbit, a ferret, three dogs, two cats, a turtle, a hamster, and a goat. Emry also suffered from bipolar disorder and had attempted suicide. According to the FBI, after connecting with Emry in late 2002 at Holley's behest, Kimball convinced her to help him steal credit card checks from discarded mail at post offices in the Denver area.

Schlaff had no idea that Kimball was involved in planning Holley's escape when he informed the prison of Holley's

intentions. When the guards moved Holley to isolation, Emry suddenly couldn't reach him anymore. She became more reliant on Kimball than ever, even as she grew increasingly wary of him. "He's a dangerous person to fuck with," she wrote in an email to her cousin Heather on January 10, 2003. "But if you don't fuck with him, he's your best friend. I need him right now. He can do things that I can't right now. Plus, I'm too involved right now to back away, not that I want to back away, but still."

A few days later, Emry told her family that she was going caving. In fact, she was about to embark on a crime spree

with Kimball. Emry called her sister, Michelle, the night she left. “In case something happens to me,” Michelle recalled her saying, “I want you to know that I love you.” Michelle was worried, but she’d expressed concerns about Emry’s lifestyle and choice in men before, to no avail. What else could she say? Kimball and Emry spent two weeks traveling through Wyoming, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington, stealing checks and racking up charges on her credit card. All told, they committed at least $15,000 in fraud, though neither of them would be linked to the crime until much later. Emry also used her credit cards to buy gas at a

filling station and a laptop from Best Buy—the Toshiba where the FBI later found her photograph.

One day, Emry phoned Heather from a hotel room. According to statements Heather gave the FBI, the women chatted for more than two hours. Emry talked about Holley, whom she still couldn't reach. She talked about the dangers of stripping at private parties and some crooked cops she claimed to be hanging around with. "If [Kimball] comes back, I've got to hang up," Emry explained at one point. "If he knew I was talking to you, he'd kill you and me."

"Are you safe?" Heather asked.

“Pretty safe.”

Emry said she couldn’t tell her cousin what she was doing or where she was, and Heather was reluctant to pry. Emry began to cry, saying this might be the last time they ever talked. “If you don’t hear from me, know that I love you,” she said, echoing her words to Michelle. “I’ve got to go now.”

She hung up. Heather never heard from her again.

Sometime later, the sheriff’s department in Moab, Utah, called Emry’s father, Howard, to inform him that her car had been found. Howard began looking for his daughter and learned that she was known to associate with a former

Englewood prisoner. But as he later told reporters, he couldn't track down the man's name or get authorities interested in finding his daughter.

Grusing and Thatcher now suspected that Kimball had killed at least three women: Jennifer Marcum, Kaysi McLeod, and LeAnn Emry. They also suspected that he'd killed his uncle Terry—that the story about Terry going to Mexico with a stripper was a lie. They were amassing rafts of information, but little direct or forensic evidence.

Then, in April 2007, Thatcher found a grocery-store receipt in one of the boxes from McLeod's home. It showed that

Kimball had been in Walden, Colorado, the day after Kaysi disappeared. Walden is a small town in a vastly wooded part of the state. Grusing bought a map of the area from the Forest Service and mentioned that he was investigating a homicide. As it happened, rangers had recently found a skull that likely belonged to a young woman. DNA testing confirmed that it was Kaysi's.

The skull and receipt didn't prove that Kimball had killed Kaysi. Still, as Thatcher told me, it "gave us a lot more teeth to solicit cooperation from Scott."

Colorado law penalizes so-called habitual criminals. With new evidence about his many financial scams,

including the forged checks he'd deposited into the account of his meat business, prosecutors were prepared to charge Kimball as a serial con man. For that he faced 48 years in prison. The state offered him a deal: Plead guilty to the fraud charges and lead investigators to the bodies of all of his murder victims; if the remains were recovered, and Kimball pled guilty to the killings, he'd do no additional time for them. If Kimball rejected the deal, investigators would continue looking for the bodies while he was locked up as a habitual criminal. Once Grusing and Thatcher had proof that he'd committed murder,

they warned Kimball, he could face the death penalty.

Kimball took the deal.

CHAPTER 5

Kimball led the FBI to LeAnn Emry's body—he'd shot her and then left her between some rocks in Book Cliffs, a remote part of eastern Utah named for sandstone buttes that rise from the desert floor. Next, he guided agents to Terry's body, which he'd buried near Vail Pass, Colorado, after taking the suitcase of cash that he'd arrived from Alabama with. Kimball also led the FBI to several places where he claimed Jennifer Marcum was buried, but searches turned up nothing. Eventually, Kimball said he'd forgotten exactly where he'd left her.

The officials working the case suspected he was toying with them. What's more, Grusing told me he believes Kimball murdered more people. "If you look at how quickly he killed his four victims, this can't be his first homicide," he explained. Grusing said that circumstantial evidence links Kimball to at least two other murders, but the FBI has yet to find definitive proof of his guilt.

Without Marcum's remains, the original plea deal was off. Kimball now faced additional penalties for the murders. Shortly before his October 2009 sentencing hearing, he gave a set of documents to his public defender, who

shared them with Kimball's cousin, Ed Coet, a former Army intelligence officer. Among them were a series of FBI 302s—official summaries of the interviews that investigators had conducted with people who knew Kimball. Coet and the public defender were shocked by the contents. "The FBI had withheld key information from the families of the murdered victims," Coet later wrote in a self-published book, *SLK* (Kimball's initials), about his initial reaction to the documents.

According to one of the files, the FBI had granted Steve Ennis immunity for revealing that Kimball helped run a rape-porn business with him. That

would explain the graphic videos and images agents found on Kimball's computers. Ennis also reportedly told the bureau that Marcum and Emry had brought drugs into Englewood, and that Kimball had killed them on behalf of gangs that ran the prison's drug trade and didn't want the women on their turf. (Coet did not reach out to Ennis about the 302s.)

Coet believed he had evidence that the FBI knew Kimball was violent and failed to stop him. He planned to say as much in the Boulder courtroom where Kimball was set to be sentenced. The hearing was attended by family and friends of the victims, as well as cops,

reporters, and curious spectators. Cameras flashed and journalists jostled for interviews with Kimball's relatives, who were seated in the courtroom's back row. Kimball arrived in a red prison jumpsuit and glasses. He was stoic through the proceedings.

The judge asked Kimball how he pled to murdering LeAnn Emry, Jennifer Marcum, Kaysi McLeod, and Terry Kimball. "Guilty," he responded each time. The victims' loved ones were allowed to speak. Marcum's family told Kimball that he wouldn't find peace until he told them where she was. (As of this writing, Marcum's remains have not been found.) "He made the deliberate

choice to murder, and he made that choice at least four times," Emry's mother said. McLeod spoke, too, but with compassion. A year earlier, she'd had her marriage to Kimball annulled. "I believe that Kaysi has forgiven Scott Kimball," she said, crying. "I choose to forgive Scott Kimball."

Afterward, in the hallway, Coet spoke to the media. He wore a camouflage cap and a black leather jacket, and read a statement on Kimball's behalf: "I deserve to be held accountable and punished for my crimes. However, I did not act alone." Through Coet, Kimball said that he'd been an FBI informant working for Carle Schlaff. "I gave him

only useless information," the statement read, "but he was able to direct me deep into a criminal underworld that was exciting and intriguing but turned out to be very dangerous and deadly." The implication, it seemed, was that Kimball had gotten in over his head and Schlaff had done nothing to help.

McLeod confronted Coet in a scene captured on video by a local newspaper reporter. "What would be the purpose of him marrying me and murdering my daughter?" she asked.

Coet told her that, according to Kimball, Kaysi was involved in a criminal conspiracy, just like Marcum and Emry were, bringing drugs into Englewood.

McLeod stared at Coet for a beat. “Absolutely not,” she said before walking away. (McLeod died of breast cancer in 2019, at the age of 60. After her diagnosis, she said that she was looking forward to being reunited with Kaysi. She always blamed herself for introducing Kimball to her daughter.)

A few weeks after the hearing, Coet emailed copies of the 302s to the producers of the CBS investigative news show *48 Hours* and to reporters in Denver. *48 Hours* interviewed Coet for an episode it was planning on Kimball, in which the 302s would be key elements. Both CBS and the *Boulder*

Daily Camera confronted the FBI with the documents and asked for comment.

Soon after, one of the reporters contacted Coet. The FBI had informed them that the 302s were forgeries. Behind bars, Kimball had used a computer and printer to fabricate documents so convincing that Coet and Kimball's public defender believed what they said.

The revelations about Kimball compelled the FBI to reexamine everything he'd ever said and done as an informant. One by one, the lies unraveled, starting with the Arnold Wesley Flowers case in Alaska. Grusing discovered that, although Kimball had

convinced his handlers that Flowers planned to have witnesses murdered, what Flowers actually said was ambiguous—along the lines of, *Tell that person not to testify and everything will be fine*. (A jury found Flowers guilty of witness tampering, not attempted murder. After his release, he was convicted in 2016 of wire fraud in an unrelated case; he remains in prison.)

Someone had to answer for the humiliation Kimball had caused the FBI. The bureau's Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR), which investigates employee misconduct, sent agents to Colorado, Alaska, and Washington. Most of its

efforts focused on Carle Schlaff. “It was almost like the leadership was embarrassed, like they had to do something, and that something was punish Carle,” said Nick Vanicelli, a retired FBI special agent.

In 2012, Schlaff walked into a conference room at the FBI’s national headquarters, eager to clear his name. What transpired that day was described to me by Schlaff and another agent. Schlaff shook hands with Candice Will, the OPR’s assistant director. Will outlined her division’s findings: Kimball’s history of frequenting sex workers, the rape porn on his computer, his alleged abuse of Larissa Mineer.

Why hadn't Schlaff known about any of it? "We don't go to ex-wives of potential informants and ask them about their sexual appetites and behaviors," Schlaff said.

Will listed other missteps, including Schlaff's decision to use Kimball after an agent in the Seattle office said he was unreliable. Little was said about Kimball's time working for the FBI before he was transferred to Denver, or the kidnapping and assault charges that were dropped when he first became an informant. (When reached for comment, the OPR said the FBI does not comment on internal disciplinary matters.)

Schlaff was suspended for three weeks without pay. He appealed, and the suspension was reduced to two weeks. But his reputation at the bureau never recovered. U.S. attorneys didn't want him testifying in cases. The head of the Denver office told him that the organization didn't want him involved in any criminal investigations, period.

Schlaff left the FBI in 2013, after 23 years on the job. He operated a taxidermy business and provided security for oil companies before joining the police department in Fairplay, Colorado, in late 2020. He told me he isn't bitter about what happened, but he also feels that attention was

unduly focused on his errors. The FBI had already used Kimball on two cases before Schlaff ever got involved with him; his supervisors knew who his informant was. Schlaff feels he's been judged from the convenient vantage of hindsight. "Everything is always clearer on Monday morning," he said. "All the families lost loved ones. If they feel better to blame me for it, that's fine."

What about the moment he realized that Kimball might be a serial killer? Did it shake him to learn his informant was so violent? He said no. "I am not that shocked about what people do to each other anymore," Schlaff said. "People kill for a whole lot less."

Kimball was sentenced to 70 years, to be served concurrently with the fraud and weapons sentences. Though the authorities had threatened him with the death penalty, he avoided facing it when he was sentenced in liberal Boulder County. He won't be eligible for parole until 2054, when he's in his late eighties.

While in prison, Kimball married Elizabeth Marie Francis, a woman in her twenties who is in a Kansas prison for child abuse. They have never met in person. Kimball, whom I spoke to several times for this story, told me that he killed his uncle Terry because he was a child molester, and Jennifer Marcum,

LeAnn Emry, and Kaysi McLeod because they were either trying to blackmail him or intended to inform on him to the FBI. On one occasion he changed his story: He told me that he killed the women at the behest of a biker gang. There is no evidence corroborating any of Kimball's claims about his victims.

In 2015, Kimball began sharing his cell at Colorado's Sterling Correctional Facility with Jimmy Tanksley, who was serving a 35-year sentence for robbery and attempted murder but was soon to be released on parole. Once Tanksley was free, Kimball had a plan for him: Kimball would pay Tanksley to kill a

former business associate he knew had money, and they would split the take. Because the target was roughly the same height and build as Tanksley, Kimball even suggested that Tanksley could assume his identity. Another prisoner, Marc Sylvester, who was serving a 48-year sentence for murder, requested a hit of his own: He wanted Tanksley to kill his father. He drew detailed maps of his father's neighborhood and the interior of his home. He said that his dad had guns and gold that Tanksley could steal.

Once Tanksley had committed the murders, Kimball said, he should rent a helicopter from an airfield north of

Denver and threaten the pilot until he agreed to land it in the Sterling Correctional yard. Kimball and Sylvester would climb aboard and fly to a spot where Tanksley would make sure a car was waiting. They would then drive to Montana, where Kimball told the other two men he'd once buried a million dollars. From there they would flee to Alaska.

Tanksley was paroled in March 2017. Over the next few months, he spoke by phone with Sylvester and Kimball about the escape, using coded language. "We're still on the good, I got that ride, that new ride, that's strapped down and ready to go," Tanksley said. "I'm fixin'

to let the clutch on it, see how fast it'll go."

The escape was set for September 22. That afternoon, Kimball and Sylvester went to the prison yard in ball caps and sunglasses. They sat at a table for nearly two hours. Kimball glanced periodically at his watch. The helicopter never showed.

That's because Tanksley was working with the FBI.

He had relayed Kimball's plot to the DEA, which then contacted Grusing. The FBI monitored and recorded Tanksley's calls with Sylvester and Kimball. The two men were charged with attempting to escape prison and for

solicitation to murder. In January 2020, Kimball pled guilty to the former charge and received four years in prison, concurrent with his existing sentence. (The murder solicitation charges were dropped after the local DA was indicted on drug charges.) Tanksley, who was later picked up on a DUI, is back behind bars—he told me that, as a known prison snitch, he's afraid for his life.

After his plea, Kimball was on lockdown for 20 hours a day. He was eventually transferred to Colorado State Penitentiary in Cañon City. During our various interviews for this story, he boasted more than once about being smarter than the FBI. "They have tunnel

vision, and that is a problem," he told me. "Once they get something in their mind, they are not going to let it go, even if they are wrong."

"Those feds," Kimball told me, "are so fucking stupid."

[i] Source: https://magazine.atavist.com/the-snitch-fbi-scott-kimball-informant-killer-colorado/?utm_source=pocket-newtab-global-en-GB.

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