

Praise for the first edition of *Lethal Harvest*

“The technical precision of a Clancy novel and the emotion of a Henry James story. . . . One of the best books of the year—a can’t-miss read!”

—Jason Shepherd, senior writer, *Insight for Living*

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—*Library Journal*

“Like much of modern medicine, the events in *Lethal Harvest* are almost unbelievable, but true! The strong presence of Christ throughout the novel highlights the sacredness of human life even in the coldest scientific experiments.”

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—Amy Nappa, best-selling author

LETHAL HARVEST

A Novel

WILLIAM CUTRER | SANDRA GLAHN

 Kregel
Publications

Lethal Harvest: A Novel

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To our parents

To Joan Cutrer and in memory of Ben Cutrer;
and to Willis and Ann Grafe—
with gratitude to God for their constant love and support.

And to all the other thoughtful people of faith who willingly
struggle with the ethical/theological issues of the day, seeking to
live honorably in a world growing ever more complex.

Preface to the 2016 Edition

Much has changed since the first iteration of this story. Early on, the Christy Awards named *Lethal Harvest* a finalist in the contemporary fiction category, and the book appeared in German as *Gefährliche Saat*. Ben and Marnie, its main characters, went on to appear in a sequel, *Deadly Cure*. And they also made a cameo appearance in our third novel, *False Positive*.

At times these friends seemed so real that their cocreators would find ourselves asking, “What do you suppose Ben and Marnie are doing now?” Dr. Bill’s answer was usually that they were off dancing somewhere.

Although Bill lived in Kentucky and I live in Texas, through the magic of electronic media, we could create both fiction and nonfiction together—a partnership that began with our nonfiction work, *When Empty Arms Become a Heavy Burden: Encouragement for Couples Facing Infertility*, and led to six more books. But fiction was our favorite, and we loved our characters as if we knew them.

After a few years of pursuing our own solo writing projects and my completion of a PhD, Dr. Bill and I had plans to write more stories. But four days after I passed my final examinations, he died

suddenly in July of 2013 of a heart-related condition. He was riding his bike on a beautiful morning, and then next thing he knew, he was in the presence of the Savior he loved.

The message for the funeral scene in this story took on new meaning, as his wife, Jane, told me she had heard him preach it many times. I posted an excerpt of it on my blog, and people from all over the world accessed it. It was quite comforting and completely typical of Dr. Bill that the very person consoling us with the truth in the face of his own death was the good doctor himself. And he was doing so right out of the very narrative he had helped to craft. Indeed, art imitates life.

As I updated this version of *Lethal Harvest* for a new generation of readers, I walked a bittersweet road recalling the pleasant (well, mostly pleasant) hours spent cocreating the work you hold in your hands. The characters remain unchanged—they simply experienced some updates like deleting their wall phones and instead calling and texting from smartphones.

I invite you to spend some meaningful time getting to know Ben, Marnie, Will, Emily, Mavis Beth, and the rest. Laugh with them, cry with them, and let them help you think well about complex issues, because they were created for your pleasure, edification, and edutainment so that you might grow in grace and love.

Sandra Glahn
May 2016
Dallas, Texas

Acknowledgments

This, our third coauthored work, was made easier by the blessing of email and the fifteen-year foundation of solid friendship that has taken us and our families to Russia, Mexico, and across the United States, adding to the richness of our lives and greatly aiding the process of cocreation.

We owe part of the inspiration for Marnie's character to the world's best nurse, Marnie Gaines, who helped make Bill's practice a place of both physical and emotional healing. We are both deeply indebted to her for multiplying joys and dividing griefs. We were also inspired by our friend Dr. Steve Harris—Bill's former partner and Sandi's physician—who teamed with Bill in practice for many years and has continued to provide compassionate, competent medical care.

We are grateful to Dennis Hillman and the staff at Kregel Publications, especially for their guidance early in the manuscript. And we wish to thank Reg Grant and the other professors who have molded our worldviews and helped us develop our writing voices.

We are also deeply grateful for the love, faithful encouragement,

and competent input of Bill's wife, Jane; his children, Bill and Elisabeth Cutrer, Bob Cutrer, and Jennie and Casey Snow; Bill's brother, Ken; our friend Virginia Swint; and Sandi's husband, Gary.

Authors' Note

We have endeavored to write an engaging drama set in the context of real-life ethical dilemmas. The rapid advance of scientific knowledge in the areas of cloning and stem cell research limits the number of readers who can (and want to) read highly technical discussions of the subject. Given the social and spiritual implications of this research, however, it is a topic that demands the attention not just of the scientific specialist but of us all.

While the plot and characters of *Lethal Harvest* are fictional, the techniques portrayed in this story are as real as today's headlines. We have taken the liberty of inventing a disease and a few technological procedures, but the research portrayed here (and its potential for good or ill) is both accurate and ongoing.

2000

Chapter One

Three thirty a.m. The gloved figure slid open the back door of the clinic and stepped inside. After removing a black box the size of a cell phone from his overcoat, he attached it to the master alarm touch pad. *Amazingly simple*. In less than fifteen seconds, he had bypassed the code and silenced the warning beeper.

Moving past the reception desk, he shone his smartphone light along the floor and slipped down the hall to the door of the first doctor's office. He worked the lock, entered, and shut the door behind him. The beam from his light circled the room until it stopped on a desk photo—a wedding shot of a smiling bride and groom, both dark-haired and slender. He moved the light to the photo next to it. In it, a little girl with brown hair was blowing bubbles. Another picture, this time a studio portrait of the same couple with the preschooler, confirmed he had the wrong office. He stepped back into the hallway, never noticing the most remarkable photo in the room—a signed photo of the doctor's family with the president of the United States.

He picked the lock on the next office door, entered, and glanced around. Shining his light on the photos decorating the office, he

saw seven or eight shots of a blond man with a wife and three young children. He pulled out the desk chair and sat down. One at a time, he worked his way into each of the locked drawers. For the next thirty minutes, he examined files, charge bills, phone messages. Finally, he leaned back and was still. "Nothing here," he muttered.

Back in the hallway, he easily located the row of vertical files filled with medical records. And there, in the P through S section, he found the file he was looking for: Rivera, Leigh. He thumbed his way through the documents, stopping to photograph two thank-you notes, written about a year apart. But these things were unimportant. *Nothing. Nothing at all!* He replaced the file, reset the alarm, and departed.

Three blocks away, he got into his Audi, lit a cigarette, and drove home.

Several restless hours later, he picked up his phone, scrolled through his contacts, and tapped on one. Far away in Culiacán, a city of several million near Mazatlan in Sinaloa, Mexico, a phone began to ring. It was quickly picked up.

"Mayor Rivera's office," a voice answered. Carlos Rivera had installed a private phone line with instructions that it was always to be answered in English.

"I need to speak with the mayor."

"Yes. He expects your call. One moment, please."

After a wait of about three minutes, Carlos, who spoke excellent English thanks to his education at the University of Texas, came on the line.

"What did you find?" he demanded.

"Nothing."

Carlos cursed. He then remained silent.

Victor felt compelled to speak. "I did find her medical file. Nothing interesting there. Except maybe two thank-you notes. Nothing beyond the usual gratitude, señor. Nothing suspicious."

“No doubt he is smart. He would be careful. When you find out more, you will handle things, no?”

“Of course.”



The tall gentleman in the dark suit brushed the December rain off his overcoat, removed it, and draped it over his left arm. He checked the brass plate beside the door—The Center for Fertility Enhancement—glanced at the address in his hand and after opening the heavy wooden door, walked in. At the front desk he waited silently for the receptionist to look up.

“I need to see Dr. Lucas Morgan, please.”

Lisa looked up. “Do you have an appointment?”

“I need to see Dr. Morgan,” the man repeated.

“He’s seeing patients, sir. Would you like me to give him a message for you?”

“I’m delivering legal papers, ma’am. I need to do it in person.” He opened his suit coat just enough to indicate a letter in the inside pocket.

Lisa’s eyes widened. “Just a moment.” She started to push the button on the intercom, then stopped herself. She walked back toward the hallway. “It could take a few minutes. The schedule is pretty tight on Monday mornings,” she said.

Actually, it was booked solid with new-patient interviews, ultrasound scans, and office visits. In fact, the doctor rarely took time for lunch. Hopeful patients with their lists of questions would be waiting quietly in the reception area, anxious to hear the doctor’s interpretation of laboratory values or their in vitro fertilization—IVF—cycles.

Lisa found Dr. Luc in his office. He was on the phone and pacing. The thirty-nine-year-old physician was always on the go,

never still for long. Lisa could tell from his side of the conversation that the voice at the other end was Tim Sullivan, the clinic's embryologist. She patiently waited for the two men to finish their rundown of the weekend caseload.

"Got some patients waiting. Glad you're on your way in . . . Good . . . Okay, bye." Having finished his conversation, Luc raised his eyebrows at Lisa.

She bit her lip and, pointing with her thumb toward the lobby, said in a low voice, "There's a guy out there who wants to give you some legal papers. He says he needs to talk to you himself. Want me to have him wait?"

Luc stared at her momentarily, then smiled and ran his fingers through his hair. "All those traffic violations finally caught up with me, eh?"

Lisa's mouth opened. "You don't pay up when you get a ticket?" That seemed out of character for the conservative, law-abiding doctor.

Luc just shrugged and maintained his no-worries look. "Send him back."



"Dr. Lucas Morgan?" The man stepped through the doorway.

"Guilty. Or perhaps I shouldn't say that. How can I help you?"

"It's my job to present this to you, sir. It's an intent-to-sue document."

Luc felt his heart jump. "Who from?"

"Don't know, sir." The man was shaking his head. "Delivering the envelope's my job. Knowing what's inside isn't."

"All right. Thank you," Luc muttered, not feeling thankful in the least.

"Appreciate your attitude," the dark-suited man said. He started

to walk out, then turned back to face the doctor. “You wouldn’t believe some of the things people say when they get served.”

Luc half smiled. The man offered a polite nod and disappeared into the hall. Sitting at his desk, the doctor put on his reading glasses and reached for his letter opener. He quickly scanned the document.

“Malpractice?” He felt a wave of nausea. Case number, plaintiff attorney—his eyes fixed on the name Carlos Rivera, and his chin dropped. Carlos Rivera was the wealthy mayor of a large, modern city in western Mexico. His wife had undergone a successful IVF transfer in the past year. As far as Luc could remember, everything had gone perfectly.

He walked out to the rack in the hallway and pulled Leigh Rivera’s chart. As he opened it, a photograph of beautiful twin girls fell out. Somebody hadn’t closed the clasp on the file correctly. As he leafed through the documents, he exclaimed, “This is absurd! Incredible! A perfect outcome. I waived half their fee for the sake of international relations and look what happens. What a rip!”

“What’s a rip, Dr. Luc?” His office manager had been passing down the hall and overheard him. Luc muttered something unintelligible and walked back into his office.

It was beyond understanding how the Riveras could name him in a lawsuit. He sat down behind his desk but, unable to remain still, he stood again and began to pace as he paged through the history and physical examination records of their former patient.

Leigh Rivera. I liked her. Delightful woman. A real California girl.

The mayor’s wife was a tall blonde with crystal blue eyes, in contrast to her husband, who was comparatively short, with dark features. Mrs. Rivera’s initial work-up had proved normal, but Mr. Rivera had had a low sperm count. The couple had come to the center because of its international reputation for excellence and

the high success rates enjoyed by its three doctors, Luc Morgan, Tim Sullivan, and Benjamin McKay.

“That’s right,” Luc murmured. “Because of the distance, we decided Leigh and Carlos would be good candidates for IVF following gentle ovarian hyperstimulation.” He read through the chart, remembering that Mrs. Rivera’s response to hyperstimulation had pleased everyone. “Egg harvest under ultrasound guidance, easy retrieval,” he quoted from the chart. He was remembering more of the facts now that the file had jogged his memory. *What could have gone wrong?*

He read a note in Tim’s handwriting. The embryologist had indicated excellent egg quality. Normal sperm prep. It was a fairly straightforward case—take the eggs, expose them to the prepared sperm, watch for signs of fertilization. Allow the zygote to divide, transfer only three to the uterus, limiting the risk of triplets, avoiding the risk of high-order multiples. Freeze the remaining embryos. They didn’t want to have to decide later about multifetal pregnancy reduction. Luc nodded. *I totally agreed with the ethics.*

Luc’s memory had always served him well. He’d graduated third in his class at medical school and since then had steadily risen to the top of his field, especially when he and Tim had discovered the Uterine Implantation Factor. After the *New England Journal* published their research, the phones at the center had not stopped ringing for a month.

An ideal scenario. They should have been thrilled. What in the world’s going on?

Luc read that the initial embryo transfer had been unsuccessful, but Mrs. Rivera had returned alone during her next natural cycle. Three embryos survived the thaw from cryopreservation and had been transferred to her uterus. A twin pregnancy had resulted. *That’s right! Second cycle. I came in over Christmas. Just about a year ago exactly.*

Looking closely at his notes, Luc felt his pulse quicken. His

palms became so moist that the paper stuck to them. His own sparse notes reminded him that it was he, along with his nurse, who had performed the transfer.

Mrs. Rivera's "prime time" had fallen over the Christmas holidays. Tim and Marnie had taken a long-overdue vacation to Hawaii. Luc wished that he had provided more generous notes, more details in the chart. Tim's would have been much more detailed. Luc had come in over the holiday, asking his nurse to join him—not too unusual since the peak moments for implantation were hard to control precisely. Mrs. Rivera was on a natural cycle and couldn't be controlled at all. Lab tests had shown the rise in her LH, signaling the hormonal environment would be perfect at just the wrong time as far as convenience went.

It would have been easier to do it with Tim present, because of his filing system, but Luc and his nurse had done the procedure without him many times. The way Tim stored and tracked the cryopreserved embryos was complicated, but he insisted on using his system. Color codes and numbers, as well as names. Computer records in addition to notebook copies. Checks and rechecks. No possibility for error—but inconvenient for anyone except Tim to decipher.

Tim and Marnie had planned that vacation for months. Only time he'd ever been away. With the file to jog Luc's memory, more details came back. *I went to the lab. Didn't even try to open his computer files. Who knows what kind of security that self-proclaimed computer guru had. Searched through the notebook records for cryopreserved embryos.*

The clinic kept sperm, eggs, and embryos all in separate areas of the refrigeration unit, each under lock and key. Only the three doctors had access. He'd found Tim's books with the names and coding system. It had taken awhile to locate Mrs. Rivera's frozen embryos. But he'd found them in the second refrigerated area. *Code numbers matched with Mrs. Rivera's chart. Didn't see a color code on*

the dish, but everything else was perfect. Both the name and the code number on the specimens. It had to have been the correct embryos for transfer. They didn't have any other patient by the name of Rivera. The procedure went without a hitch. No problems. Mrs. Rivera was so grateful they'd agreed to come in over Christmas to do the transfer for her. She liked us. Now they're suing us?

He pulled out the picture of two healthy infants, wondering if they'd died of SIDS or something. Then he stared at the harshly worded intent-to-sue papers.

The fact that he found nothing suspicious in the chart failed to soothe him. He needed to get Chris Winston, his personal attorney and tennis partner, on the phone. He found the number in his cell phone and initiated the call. He kept leafing through Mrs. Rivera's chart as he listened to the ringing on the other end. *Why are they suing us?* The name of the attorney filing the document was unfamiliar to him. He swallowed hard when he thought of the bad publicity a high-profile lawsuit could bring to the clinic.

In a decade of practice, Luc had received two other letters suggesting a "cause of action." But in both cases, early in the discovery phase, no evidence of malpractice had been uncovered, and no one had ever formally pressed charges. There had never been a hint of impropriety. In an industry that suffered from bad publicity—sometimes deserved—Luc took pride in the clinic's perfect reputation.

"Hey, Luc. What's up?"

Luc felt a flood of relief when he heard his friend's voice. "I seem to have a problem here. I was just served some papers."

There was a momentary silence. "I don't suppose they were informing you that you'd just won the lottery?"

"I've been named the primary defendant in a lawsuit. They're suing all of us, along with the clinic. Gee, Merry Christmas."

“Welcome to the club.” Chris sounded unworried. “What do the papers say?”

Luc told him all he knew.

“Get me the case number and the name of the plaintiff’s attorney,” Chris said. “Better send me a copy of the medical file too. Let me make a few calls, and I’ll get right back to you.”

“Thanks. Thanks a lot, Chris. I can’t imagine there’s any real problem here. It was the kind of case most patients dream about. A good outcome and a grateful family. I just don’t know what their gripe could be.”

“Sorry, friend.” Chris’s voice softened. “Just remember, it’s not usually about good and bad, right or wrong. Justice isn’t the issue. It’s money. Money’s the issue—and who gets the most.”

Luc grunted his disapproval.

“Just hang in there. I’ll get back with you as soon as I find anything out.”

“Thanks, Chris.”

Luc hung up the phone and leaned back in his chair. The reception area would now be filled with patients, but he waited in his office with the door shut until he regained his focus. Abruptly, he stood up and shut the Rivera file, determined to leave his thoughts in the folder. But just as he laid his hand on the doorknob, he heard a knock.

Luc opened his door to find Tim Sullivan, his embryologist, holding a coffee cup. Tim was one of the skinniest rich guys Luc had ever known. He sure wasn’t much to look at. Still, as the nephew of the US president, the man possessed superior breeding and a bright intellect, even if he did dress like the old men Luc’s dad played golf with. And he had managed to win the heart of Marnie Boralis, the stunning journalist who had covered their big breakthrough. “What’s up? You had a visit from the law?”

“Word travels fast.”

“Something about speeding tickets? Everyone’s amused. Except that the reception area’s backed up to Maryland.” Tim remained oblivious to Luc’s tension.

“I’m afraid it’s a lot worse than that.”

Luc briefly told his colleague the bad news and then, leaving him to mull it over, headed into one of the exam rooms to meet with a waiting patient.

The embryologist stood reading through the file. Suddenly he sank into a chair and threw the chart down on the desk.



About lunchtime, Lisa caught Luc as he was coming out of an exam room. “Chris Winston’s been holding for you,” she said. “For about seven minutes. I told him you were with a patient, but he said he wanted to stay on the line rather than have you call back.”

Luc handed her the file he was carrying, pivoted, and strode back to his office. He picked up the phone and pressed the blinking light. “Chris?”

“Yeah.”

“What did you find out?”

“Not good.”

“Tell it to me straight.” How often had he heard his patients say that when he had bad news? He felt a twinge of guilt. Many of those times he’d sugarcoated the facts.

“He’s asking for two million in actual damages for medical malpractice and ten million punitive for loss of affection/alienation of affection from his wife. He claims she’s seeing someone at the clinic.”

Luc stared at the wall, wide-eyed.

“Luc, you there?” Chris asked.

“Yeah.”

“I’m sorry, man.”

Luc remained silent. The clinic was his life. As one of the owners, he knew its assets would be subject to recovery. This case could destroy him. Totally. He could lose everything. Not just his reputation—his license, his earnings, his future.

“Remind me. How much insurance are you carrying these days?” Chris asked.

“Only a million per occurrence. No coverage for punitive.”