




HAUNTED HOUSE

Dean Faiello's house on Elwood Avenue in Newark, New Jersey. *Opposite*, Faiello outside his Manhattan office on October 4, 2002.

Nightmare on



How did Maria Cruz, a 35-year-old analyst for Barclays Capital who vanished on April 13, 2003, end up buried beneath a concrete slab at an old mansion in Newark, New Jersey? The evidence would eventually point to Cruz's laser specialist, Dean Faiello, a former construction worker, who was impersonating a doctor. With the help of Faiello's friends and former lovers, **BRYAN BURROUGH** follows a two-decade spiral of drugs, deception, and denial to its horrifying conclusion

Elwood Avenue

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he was a tiny woman, barely four feet eleven, and quiet, the kind you wouldn't notice on the subway or the crosstown bus. Her name was Maria Cruz. She was 35, but looked 10 years younger. She had come to America alone from the Philippines in 1992, leaving her family in an effort to find a better life. And she found it.

Earnest and industrious, Maria had worked her way through Manila's Maryknoll College, graduating cum laude with a degree in communications, then moved to New York, where she enrolled at Fordham University and received her M.B.A., with honors. After taking an analyst's job at Citibank, she moved with a team of fellow employees to Barclays Capital in 2001, where she was listed as a senior credit analyst. She lived alone in a small, tidy apartment on the West Side and attended Mass every day—one more immigrant success story in a city teeming with them.

What got Maria noticed was something that happened one year ago, on Palm Sunday, April 13, 2003. That day a friend glimpsed her around 11 A.M. in the crowd listening to Mass at St. Malachy's Church, on West 49th Street. After the service, Maria swung by her office, on Park Avenue, to pick up some papers she needed for a meeting the next day.

After that, she vanished.

Maria's boss, Hans Christensen, was among the first to notice she wasn't at work. He called her apartment several times, as did co-workers; no one answered. Everyone agreed it was unlike Maria to miss a day of work without explanation. On Tuesday a co-worker, unaware that Maria had moved, checked an old address; others telephoned Barclays' human-resources department to ask for her emergency contact numbers. On Wednesday, another colleague checked her apartment and found three days of *Wall Street Journals* piled in front of her door.

Worried, Christensen called Maria's contact number, belonging to an aunt in New

Jersey. In turn, the aunt alerted her three sons, two of whom lived in Queens. They arrived at Maria's apartment that afternoon. Turned away by the building manager, they returned with a couple of policewomen and gained entry to Apartment 14A. They found dishes piled in the sink and a bunch of grapes on the kitchen counter. But Maria wasn't there. Friday morning her family began calling hospitals, on the chance that she had been in an accident. That night, with no sign of her, her uncle Jose Navarro went to the N.Y.P.D.'s Midtown North precinct and filed a missing-persons report.

It was thrown atop a large pile of similar reports. More than 18,400 people had been reported missing in New York City in the first five months of 2003; most turned out to be runaways. With little hope police would find her, Maria's family began distributing flyers and phoning reporters; both the *New York Post* and *Newsday* ran stories. A Web page called www.mariacruzmissing.com was put together. Her sisters and brother wrote heartbreaking letters about Maria and posted them on the Internet, hoping they might jog someone's memory.

They didn't. Months passed. Finally a pair of New York City detectives discovered that Maria had been undergoing treatment for an unsightly mouth condition called "black tongue." The Friday before her disappearance, she had canceled an appointment with a Manhattan laser specialist who was treating her. When detectives discovered a credit-card purchase at Loehmann's department store dated the Sunday she vanished, they noticed the store was a block from the specialist's office. Had she rescheduled her appointment?

A check on the laser specialist, whose name was Dean Faiello, uncovered that he had a criminal record—a 1998 conviction for possessing forged prescriptions, and, more recently, a second, for practicing medicine without a license. Detectives contacted his attorney. She said she couldn't find him.

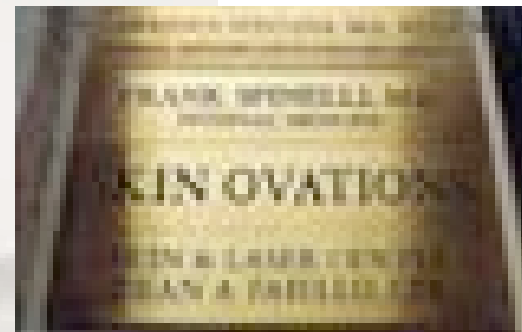
Not for several months, until that December, did an investigator speak with Faiello's longtime companion, a 43-year-old Manhattan designer named Greg Bach. Bach, it turned out, was a very angry man; Faiello had vanished, owing him about \$85,000. When told Faiello was being sought for questioning in the disappearance of one of his patients, Bach remembered that someone had told him the previous spring of a conversation with a panicky Faiello. Faiello had said he rushed a patient to the hospital after she suffered convulsions following the administering of a local anesthetic.

Bach suddenly confronted the possibility that his lover, the man he had supported through all manner of nightmares, might have killed someone. Searching his memory for any indication Faiello might have hidden a body, Bach thought of a strange concrete slab Faiello had poured at the sprawling white house he had sold on Elwood Avenue in Newark. It was there, beneath the concrete Faiello had laid in the storage room at the back of the garage, that on February 18 police found Maria Cruz's decomposing body stuffed in a suitcase wrapped with garbage bags. An arrest warrant was issued, but Dean Faiello was gone.

When it broke that day in February, the news of Maria Cruz's death was classic tabloid fodder. The unassuming Filipina immigrant, the high-living gay "doctor" in the forbidding old Newark mansion, the "concrete coffin" in which he apparently buried her body—it was all irresistible to the New York press. The *New York Post*, nicknaming Faiello the "Killer Quack," carried the story on page one for 6 of the next 10 days. After rumors surfaced that Faiello might be hiding in Costa Rica, a *Post* reporter was on the ground in Central America five days before American investigators.

What makes the story more than just another tabloid sensation is the extraordinary boom in cosmetic procedures going on across the country. Hundreds of thousands of Americans will undergo minor procedures this year to improve their appearance, visiting technicians and doctors who use lasers to do everything from whitening teeth to removing body hair. Yet few know much about the people who perform these procedures. The Faiello case highlights what many in the profession regard as lax regulations on exactly who can do what; even the comparatively minor procedures that were Faiello's specialty—removing body hair and tattoos—can be dangerous when performed by untrained hands.

New York is one of several states that don't require all laser technicians to be doctors, and the state has been less than aggressive in cracking down on people such as Faiello who cross the line from hair removal to minor surgery. The New York attorney general's office, in fact, had received several complaints about Faiello from doctors, but had refrained from charging him until it could build an ironclad case against him for impersonating a doctor, as it had in 2002. Even then, however, Faiello was able to continue practicing, setting up



**IF LOOKS
COULD KILL**

From above: the plaque outside Faiello's office; Faiello in his early 20s; his boyfriend Greg Bach in Newark, in front of Faiello's former house, March 2004; Maria Cruz; the garage where Faiello allegedly buried Cruz's body under a concrete slab on May 27, 2003.

“I’m having all these disturbing thoughts, like: My boyfriend may have killed someone,” recalls Bach.

shop in a friend’s apartment. In fact, at the time of Maria Cruz’s death, he was cooperating with the attorney general’s office, gathering information to prosecute real doctors for medical-insurance fraud.

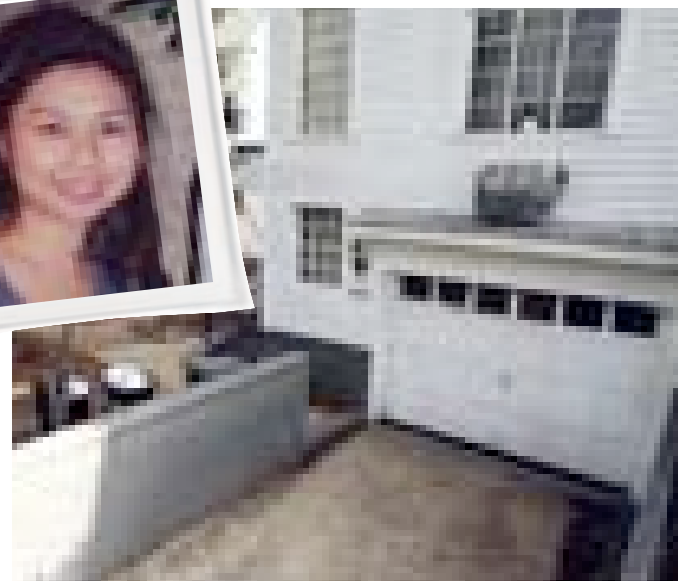
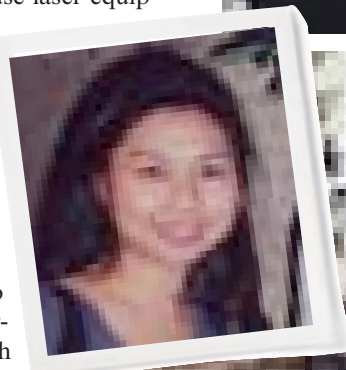
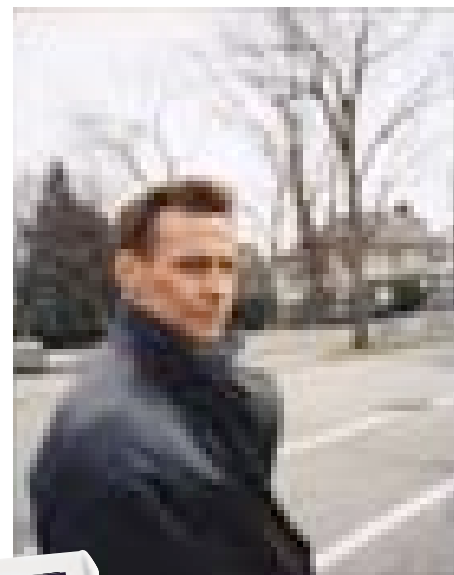
The upshot? If you’re thinking of undergoing any kind of laser procedure, check out the credentials of the person doing it. If you don’t, you could end up in the shaky hands of a man like Dean Faiello.

On the surface, and that was where he always looked best, Faiello was everything you might want if you needed a tattoo removed, or unwanted hair above your lip. He had a receptionist who spoke with a French accent, a roomful of the latest laser equipment, and an Internet page that boasted (falsely) that he had trained hundreds of physicians in the latest laser techniques. Plus, he was easy to look at: jet-black hair, olive skin, bedroom eyes. Admirers describe him as soft-spoken; detractors call him creepy. “He always had a crisp, white lab coat on, groomed and bathed, cologne, very professional,” says Mark Ritchey, a hairdresser who’s known Faiello for nearly 20 years. “But that was

all a front. After five o’clock it all changed.”

After five o’clock, well, we’ll get to that in a moment. Suffice it to say, of his many vices, lying was probably the thing Faiello did best. He told some patients he was a dermatologist. Also, he said he had a civil-engineering degree, though, in fact, he had never graduated from college. Before taking classes to learn how to use laser equipment, he had been a construction worker in his native New Jersey.

Faiello grew up in the middle-class suburb of Madison, where he was an avid skier and a good student, president of the National Honor Society. He was close to his mother, but his parents’ divorce, coupled with his emerging gay lifestyle, led to an estrangement from his father. Intending to become an engineer, Faiello enrolled at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in upstate New York, but dropped out after five semesters. He ended up living at home, working construction, *CONTINUED ON PAGE 219*



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON (BACH)

Nightmare on Elwood

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 197 and haunting Manhattan's gay nightclubs, where his dark good looks made him a sought-after commodity.

The first time Christopher Buczek laid eyes on Faiello, he knew he had to have him. It was 1982, they were both in their early 20s, and in no time they were in bed. "I was one of a long line of people who were obsessed with Dean, who was someone unobtainable that I wanted very badly," says Buczek, a Virginia communications consultant. "If you break down everything that's attractive about Dean, there's a lot of things. Good-looking. Very charismatic, very charming. Great voice. Honestly, great in bed. But all those things don't add up to the power he has over people. The real thing that drew people to Dean was that soft-spoken manner. He knew what to say and what not to say. You know, he was an expert at creating infatuation. For years he just kept circling around in my bloodstream, like a virus."

Faiello was not one to volunteer his secrets, but, by prodding, Buczek learned of his ambitions. "He talked a lot about what he wanted in New York," Buczek says, "and I remember him being very clear about one thing: at the time in gay circles in New York, there was something called the Gay 500. It was kind of the informal A-list, the 500 guys who were the most successful, the richest, the ones who got invited to all the openings and the best parties. His sole ambition in life was to be one of those guys." The deeper Buczek dug into Faiello's persona, however, the less he found. "He knew how to make you feel you wanted to get to the essence of him," Buczek says. "But Dean has no interior life. I finally figured that out."

Faiello bounced from boyfriend to boyfriend and construction job to construction job throughout the 1980s, at one point starting his own contracting company. In time he had saved enough money to buy a striking three-story frame house on Elwood Avenue in Newark, in a relatively safe neighborhood of historic homes a mile north of downtown and only a 20-minute train ride from Manhattan. Ringed by a high wrought-iron fence, and with an apartment over the garage, the house was locally renowned as the onetime home of Maria Jeritza, an internationally known opera singer.

It was during the late 1980s, while doing construction work on a Christopher Street spa called the Beach, that Faiello met the man who changed his life. His name was Michael Hart, he owned the spa, and he put an end, at least temporarily, to Faiello's hard-partying lifestyle. Faiello had been a heavy drinker and user of cocaine and other party drugs. It was Hart, a reformed drug dealer, who forced him into rehab and poured out all the alcohol in Faiello's Newark home, Mark Ritchey says. "He was a totally different person with Michael Hart, because Michael cracked the whip," remembers Ritchey, who had a home a few blocks from Faiello's in Newark. "He made Dean go to A.A. meetings religiously."

Faiello and Hart split time between a Manhattan apartment and Faiello's house, their free hours spent at Broadway shows and

time went on," remembers Chris Buczek. "He just looked plucked, to me."

In the mid-1990s, Michael Hart got sick, with AIDS, and by the time he died, in November 1995, Faiello had already moved on to a new companion, a decision that angered many of the couple's friends. "When Michael lay dying down in Florida, Dean was already running around on him," says Ritchey. "He doesn't care about anyone."

Hart's passing triggered several changes in Faiello's life. He briefly went to work at another downtown-Manhattan spa, SoHo Skin & Laser Dermatology, run by a dermatologist named Laurie Polis, whose celebrity clients reportedly include Mel Gibson, Madonna, and Drew Barrymore. Faiello's new companion, a Broadway performer named Jason Opsahl, who appeared in the

Broadway-musical version of *The Full Monty*, introduced Faiello to a new world of black-tie openings populated with Hollywood stars. The problem was, Hart's absence removed all restrictions on Faiello's drug use, which friends say began to grow with his income.

"Dean was always into drugs," says Chris Buczek. "What we did were party drugs, microdot, stuff you did when you were going out dancing. Ecstasy. But Dean did harder drugs than I did, like cocaine. I know he had problems with coke and alcohol."

It was his work with lasers that led Faiello to his true love, the drug that by the late 1990s got him through the day: Stadol NS, an opiate nasal spray made by Bristol-Myers Squibb. Stadol is taken via a spray pump. Two milligrams of its active ingredient, butorphanol, are the equivalent of 10 milligrams of morphine. It is very calming—and very addictive.

Faiello had doctors prescribe Stadol as a painkiller for his patients who needed one—a situation that arose more and more when he later branched out into tattoo removal and a procedure known as "laser skin resurfacing," a technique that kills skin at the surface, allowing fresh new skin to replace it. Stadol can make a user drowsy, and Faiello was in the habit of pilfering Stadol bottles that his sleepy patients had left in his office. Much of his spare cash went into buying more Stadol—at nearly \$100 a 2.5-milliliter bottle—for himself.

"It's a clean, state-of-the-art pharmaceutical," says Greg Bach, "and Dean could easily go through a bottle of it a day."

Bach should know. Until last summer, he



CATCH ME IF YOU CAN

Faiello in jail in San José, Costa Rica, February 27, 2004. He was arrested 120 miles away at a beach resort, where he had been hanging around the pool.

good restaurants. It was Hart who persuaded Faiello he could make more money working at his spa than renovating houses. Under Hart's tutelage, Faiello quit construction and went to work as a body waxer at the Beach. During the early 1990s, with the emergence of handheld lasers that could be used to remove body hair, Faiello took several classes and became a laser hair-removal technician.

At the Beach, and later in his own suite of offices, Faiello used a fountain-pen-size laser "wand" to slowly sear individual hairs in their follicles; patients describe the sensation as akin to having a rubber band snapped against one's hand. Faiello practiced the technique on his own body, eventually eliminating the hair from every area but his lower left leg, which he kept hairy to experiment upon. Old friends found this unnerving. "His look got a little creepier as

Nightmare on Elwood

was Faiello's loyal companion for five very long years. He was there, in fact, the day that Faiello is thought to have buried Maria Cruz under that concrete slab.

“Sometimes I called him ‘my vampire,’” Bach is saying. His hands are shaking lightly as he speaks publicly for the first time about Faiello, whom he knew better than anyone. A taut, handsome man, who makes a nice living decorating Manhattan parties, Bach chain-smokes Merits as we sit in the living room of his airy, rent-controlled corner apartment on 30th Street, in a building thronged with bustling families of Chinese immigrants. “I called him the vampire because he slept all day and stayed up all night,” says Bach, brandishing a bottle of Transylvanian “Vampire”-brand Merlot he once gave Faiello. “Of course, I didn’t realize then how sinister it would all become.”

According to Bach, they met after Faiello broke up with Jason Opsahl. Bach had seen Faiello in the clubs for years and secretly coveted him. A mutual friend introduced them, at a Chelsea bar called G. “He was everything I wanted—everything,” Bach says with a sigh. “I mean, he was the guy for me. So many people were obsessed with Dean. He had a way of leaving you wanting more.” That night they talked for hours. The next day Bach was overjoyed when Faiello sent him a dozen red roses. At dinner a few nights later, Bach mentioned he was seeing a Long Island lawyer. Faiello joked, “Oh, I can handle the competition.” Bach swooned.

They began dating. There were long talks on the telephone every night, movies, the theater. Faiello usually paid, flipping out a bulging roll of bills he kept in his pocket, often \$2,000 or more. Bach was impressed. By then Faiello had opened his own laser business, Skin Ovations, in a suite of offices in a swank Upper East Side medical building, where his fellow tenants included Dr. Ruth Westheimer.

At first Bach had no idea how heavily Faiello was into drugs. At Bach’s apartment, where he began staying during the week, Faiello slept late most days. He opened the office around noon, worked till eight or nine, then lifted weights at Equinox, and brought home dinner. Suddenly, in October 1998, he disappeared. Bach heard nothing from him for three days. Then he got the call. Faiello was at his sister’s house in New Jersey. He had been arrested, he said. The charge was forging prescriptions.

It turned out Faiello had been writing Stadol prescriptions, apparently for his personal use, from a pad of scripts he had stolen from Laurie Polis’s office; it was Polis

who had alerted police. The judge was lenient, sentencing Faiello to three years’ probation and mandatory drug rehabilitation. He spent six weeks in an upstate-New York clinic. Bach was waiting for him when he returned. “I decided to stick with him,” he says. “It wasn’t a hard decision for me, because I loved him. You don’t leave someone because they have a problem.”

For a time, everything was normal. Faiello seemed committed to sobriety. But his legal troubles and the rehab, having taken him away from the office, caused financial problems. He had expensive leases on his laser equipment, and once he returned he was forced to work long hours and weekends to regain his financial footing.

“That began a pattern,” says Bach. “He would work real hard for a time. But then, when things were going well, he sabotages everything. The drugs start up again. The problems start up again.”

It was during this period, in the wake of his first arrest, that Faiello expanded his business from hair removal into tattoo removal and laser skin resurfacing. He attended several seminars to learn the new procedures, then leased equipment to perform them. His business boomed. Bach says he drew an exclusive Upper East Side clientele, including some actors.

Then, in early 1999, Faiello’s mother had a recurrence of cancer, first diagnosed years earlier. He took the news hard; worse, his workload meant he was unable to spend much time at her bedside. He began drinking again. Bach suspected he was back at the Stadol too, but rarely said anything, not wanting to heighten strains that were already beginning to show in the relationship. Bach initiated a renovation project at Faiello’s Newark house, hoping it would be something they could do together.

It didn’t work. As his mother’s illness worsened—she eventually died—Faiello began missing days of work; Bach would find him sleeping at the Newark house. Now he was certain Faiello was back doing drugs. “I saw him getting out of control,” Bach says. He appealed to a mutual friend, a doctor, who persuaded Faiello to return to rehab, this time at a Manhattan outpatient clinic he visited three mornings a week.

“Afterward, he’s good,” says Bach. “I was just praying that he could stay straight. We talked about it a lot. We talked about why he did drugs, why he was unhappy. I think it was some kind of childhood trauma. I could never find out what it was. I’m a happy person. But Dean once said he had been born unhappy.”

Soon, though, Faiello showed signs of relapsing. Bach threw up his hands. “I just gave up,” he says. “I couldn’t effect any change.” Once again, Faiello began missing

days at work. Sometime in 2001, he told Bach he had fallen behind on his mortgage payments. Bach lent him \$6,000. Soon they were arguing about money.

The strains grew so bad at one point that Faiello rented his own apartment, a studio in a high-rise on West 43rd Street. Bach argued against it, insisting that the \$1,700 rent was beyond Faiello’s means. And it was. Desperate to raise cash, Faiello rented the Newark house to a young couple, only to see them back out at the last minute after their moving van got lost and took them on a tour of some of Newark’s nastier neighborhoods. Faiello fell deeper and deeper into a funk.

And he disappeared again. His receptionist telephoned Bach, who telephoned Faiello’s new apartment. There was no answer. Every day for five days Bach went to the building and buzzed the apartment. There was never an answer. Finally, on the sixth day, he persuaded their doctor friend to intervene. The doctor left a message on Faiello’s answering machine threatening to call the police if they could not get into the apartment. Only then did Faiello re-establish contact. He had been in the apartment all along—on a drug binge, Bach suspected.

In the summer of 2002, Faiello’s financial picture suddenly brightened when his personal physician, a doctor named Lawrence Fontana, agreed to rent him space in his 18th Street offices, located near Gramercy Park. The move downtown, however, did nothing to stabilize Faiello’s life. “He was getting nuttier and nuttier,” Bach recalls. “Staying up all night reading medical Web sites. Drastic mood swings. For a while, I actually thought he had multiple personalities. You know, ‘Who am I talking to?’ It was like someone else was in his body.” At the Newark house, Bach opened a linen closet and found a Pyrex dish with a straw inside—a possible sign that Faiello was using cocaine. “I tried to get him to talk about [what he was feeling], but he said, ‘It’s just work.’” Bach sighs. “I tell you, I should’ve gotten the Boyfriend of the Year award for five years straight.”

Finally, Bach began calling rehab centers, asking for advice. And something else was bothering him. One day, walking out with Faiello from his office, he heard a worker at a parking garage address him as “Dr. Faiello.” It wasn’t the first time Bach had worried that Faiello might be misrepresenting himself; he had seen mail addressed to “Dean Faiello, M.D.” “You don’t tell people you’re a doctor, do you?” he asked as they drove home.

“No,” Faiello said.

“You know how much trouble you can get in if you do,” Bach said. And that was that. “The thing about an addict like Dean is that they have to hit rock bottom before

they get help,” Bach says. “When he got caught forging scripts, I thought that was rock bottom. When he fell behind on the mortgage, I thought *that* was rock bottom.” He sighs. “I didn’t know what rock bottom was.”

Another thing Bach didn’t know was that he wasn’t the only one who suspected Faiello was impersonating a doctor. By the summer of 2002, in fact, no fewer than three separate undercover investigations of Faiello’s practice were under way: one by a reporter from the *New York Post*, another by New York’s UPN 9 television station, and a third by the New York State attorney general’s office. The *Post* reporter, Jeane MacIntosh, got a tip from a friend; UPN and the attorney general were alerted by Laurie Polis.

Both MacIntosh and the UPN reporter, Barbara Nevins Taylor, paid undercover visits to Faiello, posing as patients. MacIntosh noticed that Faiello’s eyes were bloodshot; Taylor thought he appeared drowsy. To both, he claimed he was a doctor. Worse, Faiello volunteered to perform minor cosmetic surgeries on both women—procedures that New York law did not permit him to do. Faiello could legally remove body hair and tattoos, but only a doctor can perform surgery.

By early September, all three organizations had representatives staking out Faiello’s 18th Street offices; at various times, reporters and state investigators actually waved at one another. When MacIntosh and Taylor separately confronted Faiello on the sidewalk outside, he denied everything—so convincingly that MacIntosh almost believed him.

The first Bach learned of the investigations was a phone call Faiello received at his apartment. It was his receptionist; a camera crew was in his office. “You can’t let them in there,” he heard Faiello say. “Put her on the phone. . . . Yes. Yes. I don’t want you in the office with cameras.” Faiello then left for the office, still unclear why the camera crew was there. That night, when Faiello returned to the house, “he was shocked, a little scared,” Bach remembers.

A few nights later, Friday, October 4, UPN broadcast its report, showing hidden-camera footage of Faiello telling one of its producers, who was masquerading as a patient, that he was a doctor.

Around this time, Bach was at the Newark house with a young student named Rafath, who was renting an upstairs room.

“Is Dean a doctor?” Rafath asked.

“No,” Bach said.

“He told me he was a dermatologist.”

“Well, he’s not.”

On Sunday, the day Jeane MacIntosh’s report on Faiello appeared in the *Post*, Faiello’s sister arrived to strategize. At one point,

she asked her brother whether he had, in fact, represented himself to be a doctor. “I don’t remember,” he said.

Two days later, after Bach forked over \$7,500 to retain a lawyer named Margaret Shalley, Faiello turned himself in. The charges of practicing medicine without a license carried a possible prison sentence of up to four years. Waiting outside, as Faiello was moved to Central Booking, was a group of reporters that included MacIntosh. “Good morning, Miss MacIntosh,” Faiello said with a cool smile. Bach paid a \$5,000 bond, and Faiello was released that afternoon.

The morning after his release, Faiello went to his office. “I thought he was going to start packing,” Bach says. “But it turns out he was going to give someone a treatment!”

After friends protested, Faiello reluctantly agreed to stop. His decision, however, meant that he had no income to pay his bills. The specter of bankruptcy loomed. He and Bach met with an accountant friend and came up with a financial plan. Faiello’s debts topped \$500,000. His only hope, the accountant said, was to sell the Newark house; it could fetch around \$450,000. Morose, Faiello agreed to put the house up for sale.

In the following weeks, Faiello fell into a deep funk. He stayed in bed much of the time. He quit going to the gym and began gaining weight. He shaved only intermittently. “He just seemed to fall apart and do nothing, which only made things worse,” Bach recalls. When Faiello refused to even retrieve his mail, Bach got it for him. What he found stunned him: piles of unpaid bills. The Newark mortgage was three months behind; the mortgage company was threatening to foreclose. Bach realized Faiello’s financial hole was far deeper than he had feared. They would need nearly \$100,000 just to keep his creditors at bay long enough to sell the house.

To Bach’s surprise, Faiello’s New Jersey neighbors rallied around them. A potluck dinner that October turned into an impromptu barn raising: Faiello’s friend Mark Ritchey and several other neighbors began spackling and drywalling in an effort to get the dilapidated house ready to show to prospective buyers. On weekends, neighbors came by to help spruce things up. “There was a great community effort to help us, which was really inspiring,” says Bach. “It becomes really fun there for a while. Sad, but fun.”

Once on the market, the house sold quickly, fetching close to the \$450,000 asking price. The closing was set for the following spring. Another of Faiello’s old friends, a woman named Patty Rosado, began appearing at the house regularly; the two would sit up until dawn watching DVDs of

Six Feet Under and *Sex and the City* she had brought. In time Rosado took over planning for a tag sale they would hold in January. Eager to help Faiello, neighbors bought items of furniture but never picked them up, allowing someone else to buy them again. A festive Christmas party was well attended.

It was during this period that Faiello received two pieces of welcome news. According to Bach, Margaret Shalley had managed to cut a generous plea bargain with state prosecutors. In return for their reducing his prison sentence to six months, Bach says, Faiello agreed to help the attorney general’s office investigate at least two Manhattan doctors suspected of medical-insurance fraud, apparently stemming from the doctors’ unauthorized writing of prescriptions for Faiello. Neither Shalley nor a spokesman for the attorney general’s office would comment on the deal, but, according to Bach, Faiello essentially went to work for the attorney general, divulging information he had on the doctors and nosing around for more.

Faiello received the second piece of news late that fall. His onetime lover Jason Opsahl had died in late October, after a heart attack suffered in the wake of surgery to remove a brain tumor. To Faiello’s surprise, Opsahl had named him the beneficiary of pension moneys he had accrued through his membership in the Actors Guild. According to Opsahl’s brother Bart, a Florida computer executive, the money due Faiello came to about \$85,000.

“Dean lent Jason some money years ago, a couple of grand, so Jason put Dean on the top line of the pension fund when it was worth a couple of grand,” Bart Opsahl told me. “And he never bothered to change that. I called Dean and explained the situation. I said, ‘Listen, I have Jason’s diaries and journals, saying the money ought to go to his family.’ I said, ‘How do you feel about that?’ He said, ‘Well, I think it ought to go to me.’ He came back to us with a plan saying he would split it with us, but of course that never happened.”

There were complications. To receive the money, Faiello apparently had to prove that Jason Opsahl had no children. “Dean made a lot of phone calls, asking us to sign off on a release saying Jason didn’t have children,” Bart Opsahl says. “And, frankly, we didn’t know [if he had any children]. I wouldn’t sign it. Dean didn’t like that. He wanted that thing signed. He called around to members of the family and offered them money to sign it.” The matter was ultimately settled, and plans were made for Faiello to receive the money later that year.

It did little to lift his spirits, however. For much of the winter Faiello remained despondent, obsessed with the specter of pris-

Nightmare on Elwood

on. He slept most days, stayed up at night, and began writing long e-mails to his old friend Chris Buczek. "He talked a lot about prison," Buczek remembers. "He would have killed himself if he had to go to prison. He had no idea how he could survive in that place." Faiello avoided talking about his crimes. "We talked around it," Buczek says today. "I remember he used an interesting term in one of the e-mails. He called himself 'The Pretender.' It was a good verbal shorthand way for him to allude to what he had done."

Fix-up work on the house, required by the buyers before closing, continued, much of it paid for by Bach, whose out-of-pocket expenditures were nearing \$100,000. At the same time, Bach could feel Faiello drawing away; their five-year relationship was nearing an end. The money arguments continued. Bach was careful not to give Faiello more than \$100 at a time, for fear he might buy drugs. At one point, Patty Rosado told him not to bother. "Don't give him any more money," she told Bach. "He's got his own money now." Bach suspected what that meant: Faiello had gone back to work, which, though not entirely illegal, wouldn't be welcome news to the authorities. Bach dreaded a confrontation. Instead, he talked to Margaret Shalley. She said there was little she could do.

Rosado, Bach says, had "found out Dean had offered an old friend some exorbitant amount of money to use his apartment" to work on clients. "Patty confronted him. Dean felt thoroughly invaded. They really had it out. Huge fight." After that, Bach says, neither he nor Rosado asked much about what Faiello was doing when he left the house, even though they both now suspected he had gone back to performing laser treatments.

One of the days Faiello dragged himself out of bed to leave the house was Sunday, April 13. It was the day Maria Cruz went missing. Looking back, neither Bach nor Mark Ritchey, both of whom visited the house that weekend, recalls anything unusual about that Sunday. It was shortly after this that Faiello did something odd. He asked Ritchey to help him change all the house's locks; both were growing tired of Bach, whom they regarded as a whiner, and Faiello said he wanted Bach barred from the house. A morning or two later, Bach arrived to continue cleanup chores in preparation for the closing, which had been delayed until late May. To his surprise, he found the gate's lock had been changed. Icked, he climbed a tree and dropped into the driveway.

Approaching the back door, he found its

lock, too, had been changed. Exasperated, he propped a ladder against the house, climbed onto a balcony, and kicked open the bedroom door. Faiello, as usual, was asleep. "He was rather shocked to see me standing there, yelling at him," Bach remembers. "At that point, I finally came unhinged."

Not till months later would Bach appreciate the significance of the locked gates. And only later would Mark Ritchey remember something strange about those weeks after they changed the locks. He had allowed Faiello to store boxes in the garage of his nearby house. At one point, Ritchey realized there was a foul odor in the garage. Ritchey owns a Great Dane, and his house abuts a Newark park. At the time, he thought his dog must have killed an animal and left it somewhere in the garage.

On Tuesday, May 27, Faiello woke up in Newark before noon, which was unusual. He had lots to do. The home's sale was closing the next day, and Ritchey was bringing over his pickup truck to take the last of Faiello's belongings that night. A Dumpster had been set up on the sidewalk outside, and Bach spent much of the day lugging out household items and tossing them inside. Around two, he was surprised to see Faiello drag a large plastic pan toward the garage, into which he dumped several bags of Quikrete concrete mix. "What are you doing?" Bach asked.

"Gotta fix the plumbing," Faiello said, waving him off.

Bach thought it strange that the task took so long. Two hours later, as he continued carrying things to the Dumpster, Bach began to grow irritated. He wandered into the garage, wondering what Faiello was doing and why he couldn't help him.

He found Faiello on his knees at the rear of the garage, smoothing out a newly poured concrete slab inside a storage room cluttered with old strips of insulation and discarded iron gates. Faiello sensed his presence, turned, and said, "Would you get outta here?"

They were building toward a fight. That evening, after Faiello finished his odd concrete job, he spilled a bag of pistachio nuts in the kitchen. He asked Bach to pick them up. Bach snapped at him.

"Fuck off, you fucking asshole," Faiello said.

Bach stormed out of the kitchen, gathered his things, and returned to Manhattan. It was the last time he ever visited the house.

After the sale of his home, Faiello moved into the third floor of Mark Ritchey's house, filling the garage with even more of his boxes. For Ritchey, the new tenant was a nightmare. Faiello stayed up all night doing cocaine and slept all day. He left the doors unlocked. He went through Ritchey's

drawers. And despite Ritchey's pleas, he wore his clothes.

"At one point, I left a note on my dresser: 'Dean, Leave my fucking clothes alone, Mark,'" Ritchey recalls. "I come home that night and he has my jeans on."

It got worse as the summer wore on. Faiello ran the air-conditioning units all day, leaving Ritchey with a \$475 electric bill in July, six times more than he usually paid. Nothing Ritchey could say or do changed anything. Finally, after talking to an attorney, who said he could be held liable if police found drugs in his home, Ritchey on August 14 told Faiello to leave. Faiello lingered for a month past the deadline, then moved in with Patty Rosado. According to Ritchey, Rosado, too, evicted Faiello, who then washed up in a Secaucus motel.

His belongings, however, had packed Ritchey's garage since May. One day in early August, Ritchey had been re-stacking the boxes when he heard something shifting around in a small piece of luggage he was moving. Opening the bag, he found a purse. Inside, there were tampons, an address book, credit cards, and a driver's license for a woman named Maria Cruz. He remembers saying out loud, as if speaking to Faiello, "What have you done now?" Ritchey flipped open the address book, took out his cell phone, and called two of the numbers listed. No one picked up. When he called a third number, the person who answered said he had never heard of Maria Cruz. "At that point, I put the purse back in the bag and said, 'I do not want to know,'" he says.

In Manhattan, meanwhile, Greg Bach was growing angrier by the minute. He and Faiello had ended their relationship, agreeing to remain friends. But while Faiello's sister, who was handling Dean's affairs, had sent Bach a check for \$10,000 after the Newark home's sale, every time Bach asked for the remaining \$85,000 he felt he was owed, Faiello had an excuse. "It was always double-talk; he wants to pay me back, but he can't," Bach says.

Things came to a head in August. "The last time I talked to him on the phone he was still giving me this runaround about the money," says Bach. "So I told him, if he was gonna fuck me over on this, I was gonna fuck him over back. He said, 'No, you're not. You're not that type.' And I'm not. And he was like, 'What are you gonna do?' And then he pretty much laughed at me. Well, I knew he had been working, and I felt that was something I could threaten him with. But before I could do it, he hung up the phone."

Faiello had pleaded guilty in June to the charges of practicing without a license; he was awaiting sentencing while he continued to cooperate with the attorney general. Ac-

cording to Bach, he missed a court date. A lawyer for the attorney general's office "was threatening to revoke his plea bargain," Bach says. "Even Margaret Shalley couldn't find him. The bail bondsman was looking for him. So another date was set. He didn't show up for the second one, either."

Then, late one night in August, Faiello took a drive into Belleville, a Newark suburb. Apparently he was looking for a new home to buy. When he walked up and peered into the windows of one, someone got suspicious and called the police. The officers who confronted Faiello found him unable to produce a driver's license, registration, or proof of insurance. What they did find was cocaine. Faiello telephoned Rosado, who bailed him out the next day.

It's unclear whether Faiello's subsequent decision to leave the country came out of fear the arrest might jeopardize his plea-bargain agreement or because he had caught wind that New York detectives were asking around about Maria Cruz. According to one source, detectives had contacted Margaret Shalley in August. Mark Ritchey learned of Faiello's intent to flee when Continental Airlines called to confirm a flight he had booked to Costa Rica.

He caught the flight September 19.

"I already knew he was gonna jump bail; I could feel it," says Bach, recalling that one of Faiello's favorite movies of recent years was *Catch Me if You Can*. "I could see him in a hammock somewhere, sipping a piña colada, and I'm heading for a psych ward with a sippy cup. Because I'm that mad. I said, 'Enough with being his enabler. I'm gonna be his dis-enabler.'" Bach, who was no longer speaking to Ritchey and knew nothing of the flight to Costa Rica, realized sometime in September that Faiello had disappeared. He telephoned a lawyer in the attorney general's office and asked if they were looking for Faiello. She said they were. She asked for Faiello's credit-card information to track him down, but Bach didn't have it.

For weeks Bach stewed, unsure what to do. Finally, just before the holidays, he phoned one of the attorney general's investigators, a onetime New York City detective named Brian Ford. Ford said he found Faiello's disappearance inexplicable. "Why would he leave?" Ford asked. "He hasn't done anything that bad. Maybe it was because we wanted to question him about a missing person." A woman.

The remark stopped Bach cold. "What missing person?" he asked. "Was she a client?"

"Yes," Ford said. Her name was Maria Cruz.

Bach immediately recalled a conversation he'd had with one of Faiello's friends. Ac-

cording to the friend, Faiello had called that spring in a panic, saying one of his patients had passed out after experiencing an adverse reaction to a local anesthetic, apparently lidocaine. The patient had recovered, Faiello claimed, after he had rushed her to St. Vincent's Hospital. Ford said he wanted to know more.

"He told me he wanted to talk to me further," Bach says. "They were really busy working on some other case. The holiday season was right on us. They would get on it right after the holiday."

After the conversation, Bach began thinking. Could Faiello have killed someone? Could that explain his disappearance? Bach called around, casting about for any hint that Faiello might have harmed someone. At one point, he talked again to the friend Faiello had called in a panic, and this time the friend said Faiello had claimed his patient had no vital signs. "That's when I thought, Uh-oh, that's different," Bach says.

Bach brooded on the matter for days. If Faiello had killed Maria Cruz, what would he have done with the body? "So then one day," Bach goes on, "I was decorating a Christmas tree at a private home on Park Avenue when I started remembering that Dean had done this mysterious thing with the concrete in that room in the garage. I was talking to this girl I was working with. I'm just talking the whole thing out loud to her, and I'm having all these disturbing thoughts, like: My boyfriend may have killed someone. I tell the whole story to this girl, and she starts crying. That's when I realized I was probably right."

He wrote Brian Ford a letter, but received no reply. Then, one day in early January, he took a phone call from another of Faiello's friends, who had just received a rambling e-mail from Faiello complaining about how almost no one in his new—and unidentified—"tropical" home spoke English. Bach sent the woman to Brian Ford. The next day Ford came to his apartment, eager to listen. For the first time Bach told Ford, and later a New York City detective, about Faiello's concrete slab.

A month later, detectives arrived at the Newark house with a search warrant. Stunned, one of the new owners took the warrant to Mark Ritchey's house. "I opened the front door and I could see something was bothering her," Ritchey remembers. "I said, 'What's wrong?' She said, 'Then you don't know. We were just served. Dean murdered someone and buried the body in the garage.'"

That day, Bach was at his gym when he received a call on his cell phone. It was one of the Newark neighbors. The house on Elwood Avenue was surrounded by a small army of New Jersey state troopers,

police from New York and Newark, and camera crews from a half-dozen television stations. They had found Maria Cruz.

Even before finding Maria's body, police had suspected Faiello was in Costa Rica. He had sent e-mails to several friends, which were easily traced to the Costa Rican capital of San José; Mark Ritchey confirmed that Faiello had flown there in September. The *Post's* Jeane MacIntosh was the first reporter to arrive in Costa Rica, just two days after Maria's body was found. She began showing Faiello's picture around San José's gay nightclubs and found he had been there all autumn. She even managed to find the Internet café where he read his e-mails.

In the end, it didn't take long to find him. After Faiello's photograph was printed in the local newspapers, the manager of a beach resort in the town of Samara, 120 miles west of San José, called police to say Faiello was there. He had been hanging around the pool, downing beers, and hitting on the bartenders for several days. When Costa Rican police arrived to arrest him, he offered no resistance. Back in San José, he actually grinned when he recognized the attorney general's investigator, Brian Ford, who had arrested him in 2002.

"Hi, Brian," Faiello said. "Nice to see a familiar face." When Greg Bach heard about the exchange, he thought it was akin to a line Leonardo DiCaprio had muttered to the detective played by Tom Hanks, who tracked him down in *Catch Me if You Can*.

Today, Faiello is fighting extradition from a Costa Rican jail cell. It was there, wearing jeans and a sky-blue Hawaiian shirt, that he gave a brief and exceedingly polite interview to the intrepid Jeane MacIntosh. He wouldn't discuss the case, but admitted, "I'm scared to death."

He should be. Faiello has been charged with second-degree murder, which carries a sentence of 25 years to life. Investigators suspect Maria Cruz died after suffering an allergic reaction to lidocaine, though an autopsy failed to determine the exact cause of death. Why Faiello didn't rush her to a hospital may never be known. He may have been high. Or he may have been frightened that police would have discovered he was working.

Whatever his mental state, Faiello is believed to have crammed Maria's body into a tiny suitcase on wheels, rolled it out to his car, and taken it to Newark, where he wrapped it in garbage bags and kept it in his garage, and possibly Ritchey's as well, for six long weeks. "That's the part I just can't fathom," says Greg Bach. "All that time, while we were filing in and out of those garages, Maria's body was there. I just . . . I just don't think I'll ever get that image out of my head." □