

ANTE MORTEM

by

Richard Price

Jimmy Breslin once wrote of Damon Runyon, “He did what all good journalists do—he hung out.” But in *Homicide*, his year-in-the-life chronicle of the Baltimore Police Department’s Homicide Unit, David Simon didn’t just hang out; he pitched a tent. As both a reporter and a dramatist Simon has always held the conviction that God is a first-rate novelist and to *be there* when He’s strutting his stuff is not only legitimate but honorable, part and parcel of fighting the good fight. Simon is a great collector and interpreter of facts, but he’s also junkie and his addiction is to bearing witness.

I say this with authority (it takes one to know one), and the addiction plays itself out like this: whatever we see out on the street—with the police, with the corner boys, with people who are just trying to survive with their families intact in a world sewn with every kind of land mine—only whets our desire to see more, to hang and to hang and to hang with whoever will have us in an endless quest for some kind of urban Ur-Truth. Our bedside prayer: Please, Lord, just one more day, one more night, let me see something, hear something that will be the key, the golden metaphor for all of it, which, as any degenerate gambler knows, is in the very next roll of the dice. Truth is right around the next corner, in the next bit of throwaway street commentary, the next radio call, the next hand-to-hand drug transaction, the next unfurling of crime scene tape, as the beast that is Baltimore, is New York, is urban America, like some insatiable Sphinx whose riddles aren’t even intelligible, continues to gobble up one benighted soul after another.

Or maybe it’s just our inability to meet deadlines. . . .

I first met Simon on April 29, 1992, the night of the Rodney King riots. We had both just published Big Books: Simon’s was the book in your hands; mine was a novel, *Clockers*. We were brought together by our

mutual editor, John Sterling. The moment was almost comical: “David this is Richard; Richard, David. You guys should be friends—you have so much in common.” And so of course the first thing we did was make a beeline over the river to Jersey City, one of the hot spots that night, where we were met by Larry Mullane, a Hudson County Homicide detective and my ace Virgil for the previous three years of my writing life. David’s father had grown up in JC, the Mullanes and Simons had likely crossed paths over the generations, and so it went. The JC riots themselves proved elusive, perpetually around the corner but offstage, and my main recollection of that night is Simon’s compulsion to *be there*, which for me was like running into my long-lost Siamese twin.

Our second encounter was a few years later when, in the aftermath of the Susan Smith horror in South Carolina, I was on something of a Medea tour laying the groundwork for my novel *Freedomland*. There had been a vaguely similar tragedy in Baltimore: the white mother of two biracial girls had torched her rowhouse while her young daughters were asleep. Her alleged motive was to clear any obstacles from the path of true love with her new boyfriend, who she said was less than thrilled about her two kids (a suggestion he later denied).

Working the phones, David hooked me up with whatever principals were available to be interviewed—the arresting detectives, the mother’s boyfriend, the thrice-bereaved grandmother, the Arab who owned the corner store across the street where the mother had fled, ostensibly to call 911. (Her first call, the store owner said, was to her mother, her second to report the fire.) Journalistically, the story was past its expiration date, but Simon, in his willingness to get *me* the story, reverted to work mode. It was the first time I ever had to keep pace with a street reporter both mentally and physically; in addition to securing all the interviews, this also involved unsuccessfully trying to jive and con our way past the uniform still guarding the crime scene; shrugging off the straight-arm and working an end run; circling around and scaling backyard fences until we found ourselves inside the blackened rowhouse; and climbing what was left of the stairs to enter the small bedroom where the two girls died of smoke inhalation. At last we were there, and it was like standing inside the gut of a translucent tiger, the two of us staring everywhere—walls, ceiling, floor—at the charred striations left by the flames. A devastating little chip of hell.

But let’s go back to that first night in Jersey City. At one point during

the evening there were rumors that the rioters were stringing piano wire across the streets to decapitate motorcycle cops, and Larry Mullane, an ex-motorcycle cop himself, abruptly had to leave us. We found ourselves alone in an unmarked police car (an oxymoron if there ever was one), with me behind the wheel and Simon in the passenger seat. Mullane's advice to us was, "Keep it moving—and if anybody comes up on you, just try to look pissed off and floor it." That's basically what we did, which brings me to a question that has always plagued me: Are writers like us, writers who are obsessed with chronicling in fact and fiction the minutiae of life in the urban trenches of America, writers who are dependent in large part on the noblesse of the cops to see what we have to see, are we (oh shit . . .) police buffs?

And the answer I've come to believe is: No more than we are criminal buffs or civilian buffs. But for whoever allows us to walk a mile in their shoes, on either side of the law, we do feel an unavoidable empathy—in essence we become "embedded." But it's not as sinister as it sounds as long as your Thank You mantra goes something like this: As a chronicler I will honor you with the faithful reporting of what I see and hear while a guest in the house of your life. As for how you come off, you dig your own grave or build your own monument by being who you are, so good luck and thanks for your time.

Simon writes with great thoroughness and clarity about the impossibility of the job of homicide investigator. For the murder police in the field, it's not only the body lying before them that has to be dealt with but also what they carry on their backs, which is the entire hierarchy of bosses who answer to bosses—the weight of bureaucratic self-preservation. Despite the overpopularization of *CSI*-style forensic advances, at times it must seem like the only reliable science for these investigators at the bottom of the food chain is the physics of careerism, which simply and reliably states that once a murder hits the papers or touches any kind of political nerve, the shit will always roll downhill. The best of them—those who more often than not, under great if superfluous pressure, turn the red names on the board to black—are left with an air of world-weariness and well-earned elitist pride.

Homicide is a day-in, day-out journal, an intermingling of the mundane and the biblically heinous, and Simon's eagerness and avidity to absorb, to digest, to *be there* and convey the world before his eyes to the

universe beyond, runs through every page. There is a love for everything he witnesses, an implicit belief in the beauty of simply stating that whatever he sees playing itself out in real time is “The Truth” of a world—this is how it is, this is how it works, this is what people say, how they act, act out, dissociate, justify, where they come up short, transcend themselves, survive, go under.

Simon also exhibits a knack for keying in on the enormity of little things: the quality of mild surprise in the half-closed eyes of the freshly dead, the ineffable poetry of a throwaway non sequitur, the physical ballet of aimlessness on the corners, the unconscious dance of rage and boredom and joy. He documents the gestures, the rueful misnomers, the way the eyes cut, the mouth tightens. He records the unexpected civilities between adversaries, the gallows humor that allegedly saves one’s sanity or humanity or whatever the excuse is for making jokes at the expense of the recently murdered, the breathtaking stupidity that propels most homicidal actions, the survival strategies adopted by people living in the most dire circumstances in order simply to make it through one more day. He captures how the streets themselves are a narcotic for the cops as well as the street soldiers (and the occasional writer), everyone jacked for the next predictable yet unexpected bit of drama that will put both sides in motion and send the innocents caught in the middle dropping for cover beneath the bedroom window or huddling in the supposedly bulletproof bathtub—the family that ducks together stays together. And time after time he hammers home the fact that there’s very little Black and White out there, and a hell of a lot of Gray.

Homicide is a war story, and the theater of engagement stretches from the devastated rowhouses of East and West Baltimore to the halls of the state legislature in Annapolis. It reveals with no small irony how survival games on the streets mirror survival games in city hall, how all who engage in the drug war live and die by the numbers—kilos, ounces, grams, pills, profits for one side; crimes, arrests, solve rates, and budget cuts for the other. The book is a realpolitik examination of a municipality in the midst of a slow-motion riot, but through the steadfastness of Simon’s presence *Homicide* offers us the patterns hidden within the chaos. Baltimore, in fact, is Chaos Theory incarnate.

With the success of the television adaptation of this book, Simon has been able to branch out into drama—the brilliant six-part miniseries based on his follow-up book, *The Corner* (co-written with Ed Burns),

and the Russian novel of an HBO series, *The Wire*. With these later projects he gets to kick out the jams a little, to nudge and mastermind the truth into a slightly artificial shapeliness to heighten the big-ticket social issues. But even with the creative freedom of fiction, his work remains an exaltation of nuance, a continuing exploration of how the smallest external act can create the greatest internal revolution—in the life of a single marginalized person or in the spiritual and political biorhythm of a major American city.

All of which is to say that if Edith Wharton came back from the dead, developed a bent for municipal power brokers, cops, crackheads and reportage, and didn't really care what she wore to the office, she'd probably look a little something like David Simon.

The Players

Lieutenant Gary D'Addario
Shift Commander

Detective Sergeant Terrence McLarney
Squad Supervisor

Detective Donald Worden
Detective Rick James
Detective Edward Brown
Detective Donald Waltemeyer
Detective David John Brown

Detective Sergeant Roger Nolan
Squad Supervisor

Detective Harry Edgerton
Detective Richard Garvey
Detective Robert Bowman
Detective Donald Kincaid
Detective Robert McAllister

Detective Sergeant Jay Landsman
Squad Supervisor

Detective Tom Pellegrini
Detective Oscar Requer
Detective Gary Dunnigan
Detective Richard Fahlteich
Detective Fred Ceruti

HOMICIDE

ONE

TUESDAY, JANUARY 19

Pulling one hand from the warmth of a pocket, Jay Landsman squats down to grab the dead man's chin, pushing the head to one side until the wound becomes visible as a small, ovate hole, oozing red and white.

"Here's your problem," he said. "He's got a slow leak."

"A leak?" says Pellegrini, picking up on it.

"A slow one."

"You can fix those."

"Sure you can," Landsman agrees. "They got these home repair kits now . . ."

"Like with tires."

"Just like with tires," Landsman says. "Comes with a patch and everything else you need. Now a bigger wound, like from a thirty-eight, you're gonna have to get a new head. This one you could fix."

Landsman looks up, his face the very picture of earnest concern.

Sweet Jesus, thinks Tom Pellegrini, nothing like working murders with a mental case. One in the morning, heart of the ghetto, half a dozen uniforms watching their breath freeze over another dead man—what better time and place for some vintage Landsman, delivered in perfect deadpan until even the shift commander is laughing hard in the blue strobe of the emergency lights. Not that a Western District midnight shift is the world's toughest audience; you don't ride a radio car for any length of time in Sector 1 or 2 without cultivating a diseased sense of humor.

"Anyone know this guy?" asks Landsman. "Anyone get to talk to him?"

"Fuck no," says a uniform. "He was ten-seven when we got here."

Ten-seven. The police communication code for "out of service" artlessly applied to a human life. Beautiful. Pellegrini smiles, content in the knowledge that nothing in this world can come between a cop and his attitude.

"Anyone go through his pockets?" asks Landsman.

“Not yet.”

“Where the fuck are his pockets?”

“He’s wearing pants underneath the sweatsuit.”

Pellegrini watches Landsman straddle the body, one foot on either side of the dead man’s waist, and begin tugging violently at the sweat-pants. The awkward effort jerks the body a few inches across the sidewalk, leaving a thin film of matted blood and brain matter where the head wound scrapes the pavement. Landsman forces a meaty hand inside a front pocket.

“Watch for needles,” says a uniform.

“Hey,” says Landsman. “Anyone in this crowd gets AIDS, no one’s gonna believe it came from a fucking needle.”

The sergeant pulls his hand from the dead man’s right front pocket, causing perhaps a dollar in change to fall to the sidewalk.

“No wallet in front. I’m gonna wait and let the ME roll him. Somebody’s called the ME, right?”

“Should be on the way,” says a second uniform, taking notes for the top sheet of an incident report. “How many times is he hit?”

Landsman points to the head wound, then lifts a shoulder blade to reveal a ragged hole in the upper back of the dead man’s leather jacket.

“Once in the head, once in the back.” Landsman pauses, and Pellegrini watches him go deadpan once again. “It could be more.”

The uniform puts pen to paper.

“There is a possibility,” says Landsman, doing his best to look professorial, “a good possibility, he was shot twice through the same bullet hole.”

“No shit,” says the uniform, believing.

A mental case. They give him a gun, a badge and sergeant’s stripes, and deal him out into the streets of Baltimore, a city with more than its share of violence, filth and despair. Then they surround him with a chorus of blue-jacketed straight men and let him play the role of the lone, wayward joker that somehow slipped into the deck. Jay Landsman, of the sidelong smile and pockmarked face, who tells the mothers of wanted men that all the commotion is nothing to be upset about, just a routine murder warrant. Landsman, who leaves empty liquor bottles in the other sergeants’ desks and never fails to turn out the men’s room light when a ranking officer is indisposed. Landsman, who rides a headquarters elevator with the police commissioner and leaves complaining that some sonofabitch stole his wallet. Jay Landsman, who as a Southwestern patrolman parked his radio car at Edmondson and Hilton, then used a Quaker Oatmeal box covered in aluminum foil as a radar gun.

"I'm just giving you a warning this time," he would tell grateful motorists. "Remember, only you can prevent forest fires."

And now, but for the fact that Landsman can no longer keep a straight face, there might well be an incident report tracked to Central Records in the departmental mail, complaint number 88-7A37548, indicating that said victim appeared to be shot once in the head and twice in the back through the same bullethole.

"No, hey, I'm joking," he says finally. "We won't know anything for sure until the autopsy tomorrow."

He looks at Pellegrini.

"Hey, Phyllis, I'm gonna let the ME roll him."

Pellegrini manages a half-smile. He's been Phyllis to his squad sergeant ever since that long afternoon at Rikers Island in New York, when a jail matron refused to honor a writ and release a female prisoner into the custody of two male detectives from Baltimore; the regulations required a policewoman for the escort. After a sufficient amount of debate, Landsman grabbed Tom Pellegrini, a thick-framed Italian born to Allegheny coal miner stock, and pushed him forward.

"Meet Phyllis Pellegrini," Landsman said, signing for the prisoner. "She's my partner."

"How do you do?" Pellegrini said with no hesitation.

"You're not a woman," said the matron.

"But I used to be."

With the blue strobe glancing off his pale face, Tom Pellegrini moves a step closer to take stock of what half an hour earlier had been a twenty-six-year-old street dealer. The dead man is sprawled on his back, legs in the gutter, arms partly extended, head facing north near the side door of a corner rowhouse. Dark brown eyes are fixed under half-lids in that expression of vague recognition so common to the newly and suddenly departed. It is not a look of horror, consternation, or even distress. More often than not, the last visage of a murdered man resembles that of a flustered schoolchild to whom the logic of a simple equation has just been revealed.

"If you're okay here," says Pellegrini, "I'm gonna go across the street."

"What's up?"

"Well . . ."

Landsman moves closer and Pellegrini lowers his voice, as if the spoken suggestion that there may be a witness to this murder would be an embarrassing display of optimism.

“There’s a woman who went into a house across the street. Someone told one of the first officers she was outside when the shooting started.”

“She saw it?”

“Well, supposedly she told people it was three black males in dark clothes. They ran north after the shots.”

It isn’t much, and Pellegrini can read his sergeant’s mind: three yos wearing black, a description that narrows the list to about half the fucking city. Landsman nods vaguely and Pellegrini begins making his way across Gold Street, stepping carefully around the patches of ice that cover much of the intersection. It is early morning now, half past two, and the temperature is well below freezing. A bracing wind catches the detective in the center of the street, cutting through his overcoat. On the other side of Etting, the locals have gathered to mark the event, younger men and teenagers signifying, scoping the unexpected entertainment, each one straining to catch a glimpse of the dead man’s face across the street. Jokes are exchanged and stories whispered, but even the youngest knows to avert his eyes and fall silent at a first question from a uniform. There is no good reason to do otherwise, because in a half hour the dead man will be laid out on a table for one at the ME’s chop shop on Penn Street, the Western men will be stirring coffee at the Monroe Street 7-Eleven and the dealers will be selling blue-topped caps again at this godforsaken crossroads of Gold and Etting. Nothing said now is going to change any of that.

The crowd watches Pellegrini cross the street, eyefucking him in a way that only the west side corner boys can as he walks to a painted stone stoop and hits a wood door with a rapid, three-beat motion. Waiting for a response, the detective watches a battered Buick roll west on Gold, idling slowly toward and then past him. Brake lights flash for a moment as the car approaches the blue strobes on the other side of the street. Pellegrini turns to watch the Buick roll a few blocks farther west to the Brunt Street corners, where a small coterie of runners and touts have resumed work, selling heroin and cocaine a respectful distance from the murder scene. The Buick shows its taillights again, and a lone figure slips from one corner and leans into the driver’s window. Business is business, and the Gold Street market waits for no man, certainly not the dead dealer across the street.

Pellegrini knocks again and steps close to the door, listening for movement inside. From upstairs comes a muffled sound. The detective exhales slowly and raps again, bringing a young girl to a second-floor window in the next rowhouse.

“Hey there,” Pellegrini says, “police department.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Do you know if Katherine Thompson lives next door?”

“Yeah, she do.”

“Is she home now?”

“Guess so.”

Heavy pounding on the door is answered at last by a light from upstairs, where a frame window is suddenly and violently wrenched upward. A heavysset, middle-aged woman—fully dressed, the detective notes—pushes head and shoulders across the sill and stares down at Pellegrini.

“Who the hell is knocking on my door this late?”

“Mrs. Thompson?”

“Yeah.”

“Police.”

“Poh-leece?”

Jesus Christ, Pellegrini thinks, what else would a white man in a trenchcoat be doing on Gold Street after midnight? He pulls the shield and holds it toward the window.

“Could I talk to you for a moment?”

“No, you can’t,” she says, expelling the words in a singsong, slow enough and loud enough to reach the crowd across the street. “I got nothing to say to you. People be trying to sleep and you knocking on my door this late.”

“You were asleep?”

“I ain’t got to say what I was.”

“I need to talk with you about the shooting.”

“Well, I ain’t got a damn thing to say to you.”

“Someone died . . .”

“I know it.”

“We’re investigating it.”

“So?”

Tom Pellegrini suppresses an almost overwhelming desire to see this woman dragged into a police wagon and bounced over every pothole between here and headquarters. Instead, he looks hard at the woman’s face and speaks his last words in a laconic tone that betrays only weariness.

“I can come back with a grand jury summons.”

“Then come on back with your damn summons. You come here this time a night telling me I got to talk to you when I don’t want to.”

Pellegrini steps back from the front stoop and looks at the blue glow

from the emergency lights. The morgue wagon, a Dodge van with blacked-out windows, has pulled to the curb, but every kid on every corner is now gazing across the street, watching this woman make it perfectly clear to a police detective that under no circumstances is she a living witness to a drug murder.

“It’s your neighborhood.”

“Yeah, it is,” she says, slamming the window.

Pellegrini shakes his head gently, then walks back across the street, arriving in time to watch the crew of the morgue wagon roll the body. From a jacket pocket comes a wristwatch and keys. From a rear pants pocket comes an identification card. Newsome, Rudolph Michael, male, black, date of birth 3/5/61, address 2900 Allendale.

Landsman pulls the white rubber gloves from his hands, drops them in the gutter and looks at his detective.

“Anything?” he asks.

“No,” says Pellegrini.

Landsman shrugs. “I’m glad it’s you that got this one.”

Pellegrini’s chiseled face creases into a small, brief smile, accepting his sergeant’s declaration of faith for the consolation prize it is. With less than two years in homicide, Tom Pellegrini is generally regarded to be the hardest worker in Sergeant Jay Landsman’s squad of five detectives. And that matters now, because both men know that Baltimore’s thirteenth homicide of 1988, handed to them on the second leg of a midnight shift at the corner of Gold and Etting, is an exceptionally weak sister: a drug killing with no known witnesses, no specific motive and no suspects. Perhaps the only person in Baltimore who might have managed some real interest in the case is at this moment being shoveled onto a body litter. Rudy Newsome’s brother will make the identification later that morning outside a freezer door across from the autopsy room, but after that the boy’s family will offer little else. The morning newspaper will print not a line about the killing. The neighborhood, or whatever is left around Gold and Etting that resembles a neighborhood, will move on. West Baltimore, home of the misdemeanor homicide.

All of which is not to say that any man in Landsman’s squad wouldn’t give Rudy Newsome’s murder a shake or two. A police department is fueled by its own stats, and a homicide clearance—any clearance—will always earn a detective some court time and a few at-taboys. But Pellegrini is playing the game for more than that: He’s a de-

tective still in the process of proving things to himself, hungry for more experience and fresh to the daily grind. Landsman has watched him build cases on murders about which nothing should have been learned. The Green case from the Lafayette Court projects. Or that shooting outside Odell's up on North Avenue, the one where Pellegrini walked up and down a bombed-out alley, kicking trash until he found a spent .38 slug that put the case down. To Landsman, the amazing thing is that Tom Pellegrini, a ten-year veteran of the force, came to homicide straight from the City Hall security detail only weeks after the mayor became the odds-on favorite for governor in a Democratic primary landslide. It was a political appointment, plain and simple, handed down from the deputy commissioner for services as if the governor himself had poured the oil on Pellegrini's head. Everyone in homicide assumed that the new man would need about three months to prove himself an absolute hump.

"Well," says Pellegrini, squeezing behind the wheel of an unmarked Chevy Cavalier, "so far so good."

Landsman laughs. "This one will go down, Tom."

Pellegrini shoots back a look that Landsman ignores. The Cavalier slips past block after block of rowhouse ghetto, rolling down Druid Hill Avenue until it crosses Martin Luther King Boulevard and the Western District gives way to the early morning emptiness of downtown. The chill is keeping them in; even the drunks are gone from the Howard Street benches. Pellegrini slows before running every light until he catches the red signal at Lexington and Calvert, a few blocks from headquarters, where a lone whore, unmistakably a transvestite, gestures furtively at the car from the doorway of a corner office. Landsman laughs. Pellegrini wonders how any prostitute in this city could fail to understand the significance of a Chevy Cavalier with a six-inch antenna on its ass.

"Look at this pretty motherfucker," says Landsman. "Let's pull over and fuck with him."

The car eases through the intersection and pulls to the curb. Landsman rolls down the passenger window. The whore's face is hard, a man's face.

"Hey, sir."

The whore looks away in cold rage.

"Hey, mister," yells Landsman.

"I ain't no mister," the whore says, walking back to the corner.

"Sir, would you have the time?"

“Go fuck yourself.”

Landsman laughs malevolently. One of these days, Pellegrini knows, his sergeant will say something bizarre to someone who matters and half the squad will be writing reports for a week.

“I think you hurt his feelings.”

“Well,” says Landsman, still laughing, “I didn’t mean to.”

A few minutes later, the two men are backed into a parking space on the second tier of the headquarters garage. On the bottom of the same page recording the particulars of Rudy Newsome’s death, Pellegrini writes the number of the parking space and the mileage on the odometer, then circles the two figures. Murders come and go in this town, but God forbid you should forget to write the correct mileage on your activity sheet or, worse yet, forget to note the parking space so that the next man out spends fifteen minutes walking up and down the headquarters garage, trying to figure out which Cavalier matches the ignition key in his hand.

Pellegrini follows Landsman across the garage and through a metal bulkhead door to the second-floor hallway. Landsman punches the elevator button.

“I wonder what Fahlteich got from Gatehouse Drive.”

“Was that a murder?” asks Pellegrini.

“Yeah. It sounded like it on the radio.”

The elevator slowly ascends, opening on another, similar corridor with waxed linoleum and hospital blue walls, and Pellegrini follows his sergeant down the long hall. From inside the aquarium—the soundproof room of metal and plate glass where witnesses sit before being interviewed—comes the sound of young girls laughing softly.

Hail Mary. Here be witnesses from Fahlteich’s shooting at the city’s other end—living, breathing witnesses brought forth by the gods from the scene of the new year’s fourteenth homicide. What the hell, thinks Pellegrini, at least somebody in the squad had a little luck tonight.

The voices in the aquarium slip away as the two men move down the hall. Just before turning the corner into the squadroom, Pellegrini looks into the darkened aquarium’s side door and glimpses the orange glow of a cigarette and the outline of the woman seated closest to the door. He sees a hard face, the deep brown features fixed like granite, the eyes offering only seasoned contempt. Helluva body, too: nice chest, good legs, yellow miniskirt. Someone probably would have said something by now if she wasn’t all attitude.

Mistaking this casual assessment for genuine opportunity, the girl saunters from the aquarium to the edge of the office, then knocks lightly on the metal frame.

“Can I make a call?”

“Who do you want to talk to?”

“My ride.”

“No, not now. After you’re interviewed.”

“What about my ride?”

“One of the uniformed officers will take you home.”

“I’ve been here an hour,” she says, crossing her legs in the doorway. The woman has the face of a teamster, but she’s giving this her best shot. Pellegrini is unimpressed. He can see Landsman smiling at him wickedly from the other side of the office.

“We’ll get to you as fast as we can.”

Abandoning any thought of seduction, the woman walks back to join her girlfriend on the fishbowl’s green vinyl couch, crosses her legs again and lights another cigarette.

The woman is here because she had the misfortune to be inside a garden apartment in the Purnell Village complex on Gatehouse Drive, where a Jamaican drug dealer named Carrington Brown played host to another Jake by the name of Roy Johnson. There was some preliminary talk, a few accusations delivered in a lilting West Indian accent, and then a considerable amount of gunfire.

Dick Fahlteich, a balding, bantam-size veteran of Landsman’s squad, got the call minutes after the dispatcher sent Pellegrini and his sergeant to Gold Street. He arrived to find Roy Johnson dead in the living room with more than a dozen gunshot wounds afflicting every conceivable part of his body. His host, Carrington Brown, was on the way to the University Hospital emergency room with four chest wounds. There were bullet-holes in the walls, bulletholes in the furniture, automatic .380 casings and hysterical women scattered across the apartment. Fahlteich and two crime lab techs would spend the next five hours pulling evidence out of the place.

That leaves Landsman and Pellegrini to sort through the witnesses sent downtown. Their interviews begin reasonably and orderly enough; taking turns, the detectives escort each witness into a separate office, fill out an information sheet and write out a statement of several pages for the witness to sign and date. The work is routine and repetitive; in the last

year alone, Pellegrini has probably debriefed a couple hundred witnesses, most of them liars, all of them reluctant.

The process abruptly enters its second, more intensive phase a half hour later when an enraged Landsman hurls a four-page statement to the floor of a back office, slams his hand on a desk, and screams for the girl in the yellow miniskirt to get her ugly, untruthful, drug-ridden self out of his office. Well, thinks Pellegrini, listening at the other end of the hall, it isn't taking Landsman long to get down to business.

"YOU'RE A LYING BITCH," Landsman shouts, slamming the office door against its rubber stop. "DO YOU THINK I'M STUPID? DO YOU FUCKING THINK I'M STUPID?"

"What did I lie about?"

"Get the fuck out of here. You're charged."

"Charged with what?"

Landsman's face contorts into pure rage.

"YOU THINK THIS IS BULLSHIT? DO YOU?"

The girl says nothing.

"You just got a charge, you lying piece of shit."

"I didn't lie."

"Fuck you. You're charged."

The sergeant points the woman toward the small interrogation room, where she slumps into a chair and stretches her legs up over a Formica table. The miniskirt rides down toward her waist, but Landsman is in no mood to enjoy the fact that the woman wears nothing under her skirt. He leaves the door slightly ajar as he yells to Pellegrini across the squadroom.

"NEUTRON THIS BITCH," he shouts before closing the soundproof door to the small interrogation room, leaving the girl to wonder what sort of technological torture awaits. A neutron activation test requires only a painless swab of the hands to determine the presence of barium and antimony, elements deposited after a handgun is fired, but Landsman wants to leave her stewing on it, hoping she's in that box imagining that someone's about to irradiate her until she glows. The sergeant slams his open palm against the metal door one last time for proper emphasis, but the rage is gone even as he walks back into the main office. A staged performance—more vintage Landsman—delivered with gusto and sincerity for the lying bitch in the yellow miniskirt.

Pellegrini comes out of the coffee room and closes the door.

"What does yours say?"

“She didn’t see it,” says Pellegrini. “But she said your girl knows what happened.”

“I fucking know she does.”

“What do you want to do?”

“Take the statement from your girl,” says Landsman, bumming a cigarette from his detective. “I’m gonna let this one sit for a while, then go back in and fuck with her.”

Pellegrini returns to the coffee room and Landsman slumps into a desk chair. Cigarette smoke slips from the side of his mouth.

“Fuck this,” says Jay Landsman to no one in particular. “I’m not gonna swallow two open cases in one night.”

And so a graceless, nocturnal ballet resumes, with witnesses gliding past one another beneath the washed-out glare of tube lighting, each flanked by a tired, impassive detective cradling black coffee and enough blank statement forms to record the next round of half-truths. Pages are collated, initialed, and signed, Styrofoam coffee cups are refilled and cigarettes bartered until the detectives again assemble in the squadroom to compare notes and decide who’s lying, who’s lying more, and who’s lying the most. In another hour, Fahlteich will return from the murder scene and hospital with enough details to vouch for the one honest witness brought downtown that night—a woman who happened to be walking across the parking lot and recognized one of the two gunmen as he entered the apartment. The woman knows what it means to talk about a drug murder and soon wishes she could take back everything she said to Fahlteich at the scene. Sent downtown immediately, she has been kept at a distance from the occupants of the apartment and is interviewed by Landsman and Fahlteich only after the detective returns from Gatehouse Drive. She shakes violently when the detectives bring up the subject of grand jury testimony.

“I can’t do that,” she says, breaking into tears.

“There’s no choice.”

“My children . . .”

“We’re not going to let anything happen.”

Landsman and Fahlteich leave the office to talk softly in the hallway.

“She’s fucking terrified,” says Landsman.

“No shit.”

“We gotta grand jury her first thing tomorrow, before she has a chance to start backing up.”

“We also got to keep her separate from the others,” says Fahlteich, throwing a finger toward the witnesses in the fishbowl. “I don’t want any of them to get a look at her.”

By morning, they will have a nickname and general description for the missing gunman, and by the end of the week, his full name, police identification number, mug shot and the address of the North Carolina relatives who are hiding him. A week more and the kid is back in Baltimore, charged with first-degree murder and a weapons violation.

The story of Roy Johnson’s murder is brutal in its simplicity, simple in its brutality. The shooter is Stanley Gwynn, an eighteen-year-old moon-faced kid who served as bodyguard to Johnson, a New York cocaine connect who had armed his true and loyal subordinate with an Ingram Mac-11 .380 machine pistol. Johnson visited the Gatehouse Drive apartment because Carrington Brown owed him money for cocaine, and when Brown wouldn’t pay, Gwynn ended the negotiations with a long burst from the Ingram, a weapon capable of firing six rounds a second.

It was an impulsive, awkward performance, the sort of thing to be expected from a teenager. The attack was so clearly telegraphed that Carrington Brown was afforded more than enough time to grab Roy Johnson and use him as a shield. Before the scene in front of him registered in Stanley Gwynn’s brain, he had machine-gunned the man he was supposed to protect. The intended target, Carrington Brown, lay bleeding from four bullets that had somehow found their way past the dead man, and Stanley Gwynn—who will later take a second-degree plea and twenty-five years—ran in panic from the apartment building.

When the dayshift detectives bring early relief at 6:30, the Roy Johnson murder, case H88014, is tucked neatly inside a manila folder on the administrative lieutenant’s desk. An hour later, Dick Fahlteich is headed home for a quick shower before returning downtown to attend the autopsy. For his part, Landsman will be in his own bed by 8:00 A.M.

But as sunlight and the sounds of the morning rush hour seep through the sixth-floor windows, the flotsam and jetsam of H88013—the murder at Gold and Etting—are still scattered in front of Tom Pellegrini, a coffee-logged wraith who stares vacantly at the first officer’s report, at supplementals, evidence submission slips, body custody and fingerprint forms for the person of Rudolph Newsome. Fifteen minutes either way and Pellegrini could have been dispatched to the Gatehouse Drive shooting, where a living victim and living witnesses were waiting to give up a murder and add one more to the list of clearances. Instead, Pellegrini

went to Gold and Etting, where a twenty-six-year-old dead man stared up at him with sudden, silent comprehension. Luck of the draw.

After Landsman's departure, Pellegrini works the edges of his little disaster for another ten hours—pulling the paperwork together, calling an assistant state's attorney about a grand jury summons for the Thompson woman and submitting the victim's effects to the evidence control unit in the basement of headquarters. Later that morning, a Western District patrolman calls the homicide unit about some corner boy who got locked up for drugs by the midnight shift and claimed to know about the Gold Street shooting. Seems the kid is willing to talk if he can make a lower bail on the drug charge. Pellegrini finishes his fifth cup of coffee before going back out to the Western to take a brief statement from the boy, who claims to have seen three men running north off Gold Street after hearing shots. The kid says he knows one of the men, but only by the name Joe—a statement just specific enough to match the true scenario, just vague enough to be of no practical use to the detective. Pellegrini wonders whether the kid was even there or whether he picked up what he could about the Gold Street murder while sitting in the lockup overnight, then did his best to turn the information around and try to barter out from under the drug charge.

Back in homicide, the detective slips the notes from the interview inside the case file for H88013 and then slides the folder underneath the Roy Johnson file on the desk of the administrative lieutenant, who has come and gone on the eight-to-four shift. Good news before bad. Then Pellegrini gives a man on four-to-twelve the keys to his Cavalier and goes home. It is a little after 7:00 P.M.

Four hours later, he's back for the midnight shift, hovering like a moth around the red pilot light of the coffee machine. Pellegrini takes a full cup into the squadroom, where Landsman begins playing with him.

"Hey, Phyllis," says the sergeant.

"Hey, Sarge."

"Your case is down, isn't it?"

"My case?"

"Yeah."

"Which case would that be?"

"The new one," says Landsman. "From Gold Street."

"Well," says Pellegrini, the words rolling out slowly, "I am ready to get a warrant."

"Oh yeah?"

“Yeah.”

“Hmmm,” says Landsman, blowing cigarette smoke at the television screen.

“Only one problem, though.”

“What’s that,” says the sergeant, now smiling.

“I don’t know who the warrant is for.”

Landsman laughs until the cigarette smoke makes him cough.

“Don’t worry, Tom,” he says finally. “It’ll go down.”

This is the job:

You sit behind a government-issue metal desk on the sixth of ten floors in a gleaming, steel-frame death trap with poor ventilation, dysfunctional air conditioning, and enough free-floating asbestos to pad the devil’s own jumpsuit. You eat \$2.50 pizza specials and Italian cold cuts with extra hots from Marco’s on Exeter Street while watching reruns of *Hawaii Five-O* on the communal nineteen-inch set with insubordinate horizontal hold. You answer the phone on the second or third bleat because Baltimore abandoned its AT&T equipment as a cost-saving measure and the new phone system doesn’t ring so much as it emits metallic, sheeplike sounds. If a police dispatcher is on the other end of the call, you write down an address, the time, and the dispatcher’s unit number on a piece of scratch paper or the back of a used three-by-five pawn shop submission card.

Then you beg or barter the keys to one of a half-dozen unmarked Chevrolet Cavaliers, grab your gun, a notepad, a flashlight and a pair of white rubber gloves and drive to the correct address where, in all probability, a uniformed police officer will be standing over a cooling human body.

You look at that body. You look at that body as if it were some abstract work of art, stare at it from every conceivable point of view in search of deeper meanings and textures. Why, you ask yourself, is this body here? What did the artist leave out? What did he put in? What was the artist thinking of? What the hell is wrong with this picture?

You look for reasons. Overdose? Heart attack? Gunshot wounds? Cutting? Are those defense wounds on the left hand? Jewelry? Wallet? Pockets turned inside out? Rigor mortis? Lividity? Why is there a blood trail, with droplets spattering in a direction away from the body?

You walk around the edges of the scene looking for spent bullets, casings, blood droplets. You get a uniform to canvass the houses or busi-

nesses nearby, or if you want it done right, you go door-to-door yourself, asking questions that the uniforms might never think to ask.

Then you use everything in the arsenal in the hope that something—anything—will work. The crime lab technicians recover weapons, bullets and casings for ballistic comparisons. If you're indoors, you have the techs take prints from doors and door handles, furniture and utensils. You examine the body and its immediate surroundings for loose hairs or fibers on the off chance that the trace evidence lab might actually put down a case now and then. You look for any other signs of disturbance, anything that doesn't appear to conform to its surroundings. If something strikes you—a loose pillowcase, a discarded beer can—you have a technician take it down to evidence control as well. Then you have the techs measure key distances and photograph the entire scene from every conceivable angle. You sketch the death scene in your own notebook, using a crude stickman for the victim and marking the original location of every piece of furniture and every piece of evidence recovered.

Assuming that the uniforms, upon arriving at the scene, were sharp enough to grab anyone within sight and send them downtown, you then go back to your office and throw as much street-corner psychology as you can at the people who found the body. You do the same thing with a few others who knew the victim, who rented a room to the victim, who employed the victim, who fucked, fought or fired drugs with the victim. Are they lying? Of course they're lying. Everyone lies. Are they lying more than they ordinarily would? Probably. Why are they lying? Do their half-truths conform to what you know from the crime scene or is it complete and unequivocal bullshit? Who should you yell at first? Who should you scream at loudest? Who gets threatened with an accessory to murder charge? Who gets the speech about leaving the interrogation room as either a witness or a suspect? Who gets offered the excuse—The Out—the suggestion that this poor bastard needed to be murdered, that anyone in their circumstance would have murdered him, that they only killed the bastard because he provoked them, that they didn't mean it and the gun went off accidentally, that they only fired in self-defense?

If all goes well, you lock someone up that night. If all goes not so well, you take what you know and run with it in the most promising direction, kicking a few more facts loose in the hope that something will give. When nothing gives, you wait a few weeks for the lab work to come back with a positive on the ballistics or the fibers or the semen. When the lab reports

come back negative, you wait for the phone to ring. And when the phone doesn't ring, you let a little piece of you die. Then you go back to your desk and wait for another call from the dispatcher, who sooner or later will send you out to look at another body. Because in a city with 240 murders a year, there will always be another body.

Television has given us the myth of the raging pursuit, the high-speed chase, but in truth there is no such thing; if there were, God knows the Cavalier would throw a rod after a dozen blocks and you'd be writing a Form 95 in which you respectfully submit to your commanding officer the reasons why you drove a city-owned four-cylinder wonder into an early grave. And there are no fistfights or running gun battles: The glory days of thumping someone on a domestic call or letting a round or two fly in the heat of some gas station holdup ended when you came downtown from patrol. The murder police always get there after the bodies fall and a homicide detective leaving the office has to remind himself to take his .38 out of the top right desk drawer. And, most certainly, there are no perfectly righteous moments when a detective, a scientific wizard with uncanny powers of observation, leans down to examine a patch of bloody carpet, plucks up a distinctive strand of red-brown caucasoid hair, gathers his suspects in an exquisitely furnished parlor, and then declares his case to be solved. The truth is that there are very few exquisitely furnished parlors left in Baltimore; even if there were, the best homicide detectives will admit that in ninety cases out of a hundred, the investigator's saving grace is the killer's overwhelming predisposition toward incompetence or, at the very least, gross error.

More often than not, the murderer has left behind living witnesses or even bragged to someone about the crime. In a surprising number of cases, the killer—particularly one unfamiliar with the criminal justice system—can be manipulated into a confession in the interrogation rooms. On rare occasions, a latent print taken from a drinking glass or knife hilt will match up with someone's print card on the Printrak computer, but most detectives can count on one hand the number of cases made by lab work. A good cop goes to the crime scene, gathers the available evidence, talks to the right people and with any luck discovers the murderer's most glaring mistakes. But in that alone there is talent and instinct enough.

If the pieces do fall into place, some unlucky citizen gets a pair of silver bracelets and a wagon ride to an overcrowded tier of the Baltimore City Jail. There he sits as his trial date is postponed for eight or nine

months or however long it takes your witnesses to change addresses two or three times. Then an assistant state's attorney, who has every intention of maintaining a better than average conviction rate so that he can one day come to rest in a better than average criminal law firm, calls you on the telephone. He assures you that this is the weakest homicide indictment he has ever had the misfortune to prosecute, so weak that he cannot believe it to be the work of a legitimate grand jury, and could you please round up the brain-dead cattle you call witnesses and bring them down for pretrial interviews because this thing is actually going to court on Monday. Unless, of course, he can convince the defense attorney to swallow manslaughter with all but five years suspended.

If the case isn't plea-bargained, dismissed or placed on the inactive docket for an indefinite period of time, if by some perverse twist of fate it becomes a trial by jury, you will then have the opportunity of sitting on the witness stand and reciting under oath the facts of the case—a brief moment in the sun that clouds over with the appearance of the aforementioned defense attorney who, at worst, will accuse you of perjuring yourself in a gross injustice or, at best, accuse you of conducting an investigation so incredibly slipshod that the real killer has been allowed to roam free.

Once both sides have loudly argued the facts of the case, a jury of twelve men and women picked from computer lists of registered voters in one of America's most undereducated cities will go to a room and begin shouting. If these happy people manage to overcome the natural impulse to avoid any act of collective judgment, they just may find one human being guilty of murdering another. Then you can go to Cher's Pub at Lexington and Guilford, where that selfsame assistant state's attorney, if possessed of any human qualities at all, will buy you a bottle of domestic beer.

And you drink it. Because in a police department of about three thousand sworn souls, you are one of thirty-six investigators entrusted with the pursuit of that most extraordinary of crimes: the theft of a human life. You speak for the dead. You avenge those lost to the world. Your paycheck may come from fiscal services but, goddammit, after six beers you can pretty much convince yourself that you work for the Lord himself. If you are not as good as you should be, you'll be gone within a year or two, transferred to fugitive, or auto theft or check and fraud at the other end of the hall. If you are good enough, you will never do anything else as a cop that matters this much. Homicide is the major leagues, the center ring, the show. It always has been. When Cain threw a cap into Abel, you

don't think the Big Guy told a couple of fresh uniforms to go down and work up the prosecution report. Hell no, he sent for a fucking detective. And it will always be that way, because the homicide unit of any urban police force has for generations been the natural habitat of that rarefied species, the thinking cop.

It goes beyond academic degrees, specialized training or book learning, because all the theory in the world means nothing if you can't read the street. But it goes beyond that, too. In every ghetto precinct house, there are aging patrolmen who know everything a homicide man knows, yet somehow they spend their careers in battered radio cars, fighting their battles in eight-hour installments and worrying about a case only until the next shift change. A good detective begins as a good patrolman, a soldier who has spent years clearing corners and making car stops, breaking in on domestics and checking the back doors of warehouses until the life of a city becomes second nature to him. And that detective is further honed as a plainclothesman, working enough years of burglary or narcotics or auto until he understands what it means to do surveillance, to use and not be used by an informant, to write a coherent search and seizure warrant. And of course there is the specialized training, the solid grounding in forensic science, in pathology, criminal law, fingerprints, fibers, blood typing, ballistics, and DNA-genetic coding. A good detective also has to fill his head with enough knowledge of the existing police information data base—arrest records, jail records, weapons registrations, motor vehicle information—to qualify for a minor in computer science. And yet, given all that, a good homicide man has something more, something as internalized and instinctive as police work itself. Inside every good detective are hidden mechanisms—compasses that bring him from a dead body to a living suspect in the shortest span of time, gyroscopes that guarantee balance in the worst storms.

A Baltimore detective handles about nine or ten homicides a year as the primary investigator and another half dozen as the secondary detective, although FBI guidelines suggest half that workload. He handles fifty to sixty serious shootings, stabbings and bludgeonings. He investigates any questionable or suspicious death not readily explained by a victim's age or medical condition. Overdoses, seizures, suicides, accidental falls, drownings, crib deaths, autoerotic strangulations—all receive the attention of the same detective who has, at any given moment, case files for three open homicides on his desk. In Baltimore, investigations of all shootings involving police officers are conducted by homicide detectives

rather than internal affairs men; a sergeant and a squad of detectives are assigned to probe every such incident and present a comprehensive report to the departmental brass and the state's attorney's office the following morning. Any threat on any police officer, state's attorney or public official is channeled through the homicide unit, as is any report of an attempt to intimidate a state's witness.

And there is more. The homicide unit's proven ability to investigate any incident and then document that investigation means that it is likely to be called on to handle politically sensitive investigations: a drowning at a city swimming pool where civil liability might result, a series of harassing phone calls to the mayor's chief of staff, a lengthy probe of a state legislator's bizarre claim that he was abducted by mysterious enemies. In Baltimore, the general rule is that if something looks like a shitstorm, smells like a shitstorm and tastes like a shitstorm, it goes to homicide. The headquarters food chain demands it.

Consider:

Commanding the homicide unit's two shifts of eighteen detectives and detective sergeants are a pair of long-suffering lieutenants who answer to the captain in charge of the Crimes Against Persons section. The captain, who wishes to retire with a major's pension, does not want his name associated with anything that gives pain to the colonel in charge of the Criminal Investigation Division. That is not just because the colonel is well liked, intelligent and black, and stands a good chance of getting kicked upstairs to a deputy commissioner's post or higher in a city with a new black mayor and a majority black population that has little faith in, or regard for, its police department. The colonel is also shielded from pain because whatever may arouse his displeasure requires only a brief elevator ride before it reaches the attention of Yahweh himself, Deputy Commissioner for Operations Ronald J. Mullen, who sits like a colossus astride the Baltimore Police Department, demanding to know everything about anything five minutes after it happens.

To mid-level supervisors, the deputy is simply the Great White Mullen, a man whose consistent escalation in rank began after a brief stint in Southwestern District patrol and continued unabated until he came to rest on the eighth floor of headquarters. It is there that Mullen has made his home for nearly a decade as the department's second-in-command, secured in his post by unswerving caution, good political sense and genuine administrative gifts, yet denied the police commissioner's office because he is white in a city that is not. The result is that

commissioners have come and gone, but Ronald Mullen remains to keep track of who put which skeletons in which closet. Every link in the chain, from sergeant on up, can tell you that the deputy knows much of what goes on in the department and can guess most of the rest. With one phone call, he can have what he doesn't know and can't guess reduced to a memorandum and brought upstairs before lunch. Deputy Commissioner Mullen is therefore a pain in the ass to street police everywhere and an invaluable resource to Police Commissioner Edward J. Tilghman, a veteran cop who spent three decades amassing enough political capital to warrant appointment by his mayor to a five-year term. And, in a one-party town such as Baltimore, the mayor's office at City Hall is a heaven-kissed summit, a place of unfettered political power currently occupied by one Kurt L. Schmoke, a black, Yale-educated incumbent blessed with an overwhelmingly Democratic, overwhelmingly black metropolis. Naturally, the commissioner is only permitted to breathe air after first responding to the needs of the mayor, who can better contemplate reelection when His police department causes Him no humiliation or scandal, serves Him in whatever manner He sees fit, and fights crime for the common good, in approximately that order.

Underneath this towering pyramid of authority squats the homicide detective, laboring in anonymity over some bludgeoned prostitute or shot-to-shit narcotics trafficker until one day the phone bleats twice and the body on the ground is that of an eleven-year-old girl, an all-city athlete, a retired priest, or some out-of-state tourist who wandered into the projects with a Nikon around his neck.

Red balls. Murders that matter.

In this town, a detective lives or dies on the holy-shit cases that make it clear who runs the city and what they want from their police department. Majors, colonels and deputy commissioners who never uttered a word when bodies were falling all over Lexington Terrace in the summer drug war of '86 are now leaning over the shoulder of a detective sergeant, checking the fine print. The deputy wants to be briefed. The mayor needs an update. Channel 11 is on line 2. Some asshole from the *Evening Sun* is on hold for Landsman. Who's this guy Pellegrini working the case? New guy? Do we trust him? Does he know what he's doing? Do you need more men? More overtime? You do understand that this thing is a priority, right?

In 1987, two parking attendants were murdered at 4:00 A.M. in the garage of the Hyatt Hotel at the Inner Harbor—the glittering waterfront development on which Baltimore has pinned its future—and by early af-

ternoon the governor of Maryland was barking loudly at the police commissioner. An impatient man given to sudden, spectacular histrionics, William Donald Schaefer is generally regarded to be the most consistently annoyed governor in the nation. Elected to Maryland's highest office in no small part because of the restored harbor's symbolic appeal, Schaefer made it clear in a brief phone call that people are not to be killed at the Inner Harbor without his permission and that this crime would be solved instantly—which, in fact, it pretty much was.

A red-ball case can mean twenty-hour days and constant reports to the entire chain of command; it can become a special detail, with detectives pulled out of the regular rotation and other cases put on indefinite hold. If the effort results in an arrest, then the detective, his sergeant, and his shift lieutenant can rest easy until the next major case, knowing that their captain's ear will not be gnawed upon by the colonel, who is no longer worried about turning his back on the deputy, who at this very moment is on the phone to City Hall telling Hizzoner that all is well in the harbor town. But a red-ball case that won't go down creates the opposite momentum, with colonels kicking majors kicking captains until a detective and his squad sergeant are covering themselves with office reports, explaining why someone the colonel thinks is a suspect was never questioned further about some incoherent statement, or why a tip from this brain-dead informant was discounted, or why the technicians weren't ordered to dust their own assholes for fingerprints.

A homicide man survives by learning to read the chain of command the way a Gypsy reads tea leaves. When the brass is asking questions, he makes himself indispensable with the answers. When they're looking for a reason to reach down somebody's throat, he puts together a report so straight they'll think he sleeps with a copy of the general orders. And when they're simply asking for a piece of meat to hang on the wall, he learns how to make himself invisible. If a detective has enough moves to still be standing after the occasional red ball, the department gives him some credit for brains and leaves him alone so he can go back to answering the phone and staring at bodies.

And there is much to see, beginning with the bodies battered by two-by-fours and baseball bats, or bludgeoned with tire irons and cinder blocks. Bodies with gaping wounds from carving knives or from shot-guns fired so close that the shell wadding is lodged deep in the wounds. Bodies in public housing project stairwells, with the hypodermic still in their forearm and that pathetic look of calm on their faces; bodies pulled

out of the harbor with reluctant blue crabs clinging to hands and feet. Bodies in basements, bodies in alleys, bodies in beds, bodies in the trunk of a Chrysler with out-of-state tags, bodies on gurneys behind a blue curtain in the University Hospital emergency room, with tubes and catheters still poking out of the carcasses to mock medicine's best arguments. Bodies and pieces of bodies that fell from balconies, from rooftops, from marine terminal loading cranes. Bodies crushed by heavy machinery, suffocated by carbon monoxide or suspended by a pair of sweatsocks from the top of a Central District holding cell. Bodies on crib mattresses surrounded by stuffed animals, tiny bodies in the arms of grieving mothers who can't understand that there is no reason, that the baby just stopped breathing air.

In the winter, the detective stands in water and ash and smells that unmistakable odor as firefighters pry rubble off the bodies of children left behind when a bedroom space heater shorted. In the summer, he stands in a third-floor apartment with no windows and bad ventilation, watching the ME's attendants move the bloated wreck of an eighty-six-year-old retiree who died in bed and stayed there until neighbors could no longer stand the smell. He steps back when they roll the poor soul, knowing that the torso is ripe and ready to burst and knowing, too, that the stench is going to be in the fibers of his clothes and on the hairs of his nose for the rest of the day. He sees the drownings that follow the first warm spring days and the senseless bar shootings that are a rite of the first July heat wave. In early fall, when the leaves turn and the schools open their doors, he spends a few days at Southwestern, or Lake Clifton, or some other high school where seventeen-year-old prodigies come to class with loaded .357s, then end the school day by shooting off a classmate's fingers in the faculty parking lot. And on select mornings, all year long, he stands near the door of a tiled room in the basement of a state office building at Penn and Lombard, watching trained pathologists disassemble the dead.

For each body, he gives what he can afford to give and no more. He carefully measures out the required amount of energy and emotion, closes the file and moves on to the next call. And even after years of calls and bodies and crime scenes and interrogations, a good detective still answers the phone with the stubborn, unyielding belief that if he does his job, the truth is always knowable.

A homicide detective endures.

MONDAY, JANUARY 18

The Big Man sits with his back to the green metal bulkhead that separates the homicide and robbery offices, staring abstractedly at the city's skyline through the corner window. His left hand cradles a glass mug in the shape of a globe, filled to the Arctic Circle with brown bile from the very bottom of the office coffeepot. On the desk in front of him is a thick red binder with the notation H8152 stamped on the front cover. He turns away from the window and stares at the binder with malevolence. The binder stares back.

It is a four-to-twelve shift, and for Donald Worden—the Big Man, the Bear, the only surviving natural police detective in America—it is the first day back from a long weekend that did nothing to change his disposition. The rest of his squad senses this and gives him wide berth, venturing into the coffee room only on errands.

“Hey, Donald,” offers Terry McLarney during one such sortie. “How was the weekend?”

Worden shrugs at his sergeant.

“Did you do anything?”

“No,” says Worden.

“Okay,” says McLarney. “So much for small talk.”

The Monroe Street shooting did this to him, stranding him at a corner desk in the coffee room like some iron-bottom dreadnought run aground in the shallows, waiting for a tide that might never come.

Five weeks old and no closer to a resolution than the morning after the murder, the death of John Randolph Scott in an alley off West Baltimore's Monroe Street remains the police department's first priority. Reports written by Worden and his partner are copied not to his sergeant and lieutenant, as with any other investigation, but to the administrative lieutenant and the captain who commands Crimes Against Persons. From there, the reports travel down the hall to the colonel, then to Deputy Commissioner Mullen, two floors above.

The reports suggest little that can be called progress. And in every conversation with a superior, a sense of paranoia is palpable. Donald Worden can almost feel the department's chain of command rustling nervously. In Worden's mind, too, the Monroe Street case is a tinderbox, waiting only for the right community activist or storefront preacher to grab hold of it and scream racism or police brutality or cover-up loud enough and long

enough for the mayor or the police commissioner to start calling for heads. Worden often finds himself wondering why it hasn't happened yet.

Looking west out the coffee room window, Worden watches the winter sky fade to dark blue as the pink-orange light of the falling sun slips behind the skyline. The detective finishes his first cup of coffee, lumbers over to the metal coat rack and pulls a cigar from the inside pocket of a beige overcoat. His brand is Backwoods, a mean, black cigar sold at fine 7-Elevens everywhere.

A thin curl of acrid smoke follows Worden as he walks back to the desk and opens the red binder.

H8152

Homicide/Police Shooting

John Randolph Scott B/M/22

3022 Garrison Boulevard, Apt. 3

CC# 87-7L-13281

"What a piece of shit this turned out to be," Worden says softly, leafing through the office reports at the front of the file. Pushing back in his chair, he props one leg on the desk and opens a second binder to a series of color photographs, stapled two to a page on a set of manila dividers.

John Randolph Scott lies on his back in the center of the alley. His face is smooth and unworn; he looks younger than his twenty-two years. Locked, empty eyes stare south toward the red brick side of a rowhouse. His clothes are those of any kid on any corner: black leather jacket, blue jeans, beige shirt, white tennis shoes. Another photo shows the victim rolled on his side, the rubber-gloved hand of a detective pointing to the small hole in the back of the leather jacket. An entrance wound, with the corresponding exit found in the left center chest. Above the young man's eye is a bloody contusion caused by his fall to the concrete.

The medical examiner later determined that the bullet that killed John Randolph Scott fully penetrated his heart at a slightly downward angle, consistent with the downward slope of the alley in which he was found. Scott died almost instantly, the pathologists agreed, shot in the back while fleeing from officers of the Baltimore Police Department.

In its earliest hours, the Scott case was regarded not as a murder but as a police-involved shooting—a bad police shooting that would require some careful writing if a cop wasn't going to be torn apart by a grand jury, but nothing that anyone was going to start calling a crime.

The victim was one of two young men in a Dodge Colt that a two-

man Central District car made for stolen and chased from Martin Luther King Boulevard down I-170 and then onto Raynor Avenue, where Scott and a twenty-one-year-old companion bailed out and ran in separate directions through the alleys of the rowhouse ghetto. As the two Central uniforms jumped from the radio car to begin a foot chase, one of the officers, twenty-seven-year-old Brian Pedrick, stumbled and fired one shot from his service revolver. Pedrick later told investigators that the shot was an accident, a wayward round fired when he lost his footing while staggering from his car. Pedrick believed that his gun was pointed down and that the bullet struck the asphalt in front of him; in any event, the round seemed to have no effect on the suspect he was chasing, who disappeared into the labyrinth of back alleys. Pedrick lost sight of the kid, but by then other cars from the Central, Western and Southern districts were rolling through the nearby side streets and alleys.

Minutes later, a Central District sergeant called for an ambulance and a homicide unit as he stood over a body in an alley off Monroe Street, about three blocks from where Pedrick had fired his one round. Was this a police-involved shooting? the dispatcher asked. No, said the sergeant. But then Pedrick himself walked up to the scene and admitted letting one go. The sergeant keyed his mike again. Correction, he said, this is police-involved.

Worden and his partner, Rick James, arrived at the scene minutes later, looked over the dead man, talked with the Central District sergeant and then inspected Pedrick's service revolver. One round spent. The patrolman was relieved of the weapon and taken to the homicide unit, where he acknowledged that he had fired one shot but declined to make any other statement until he had talked with a police union lawyer. Worden knew what that meant.

A union lawyer has a standard response to a detective's request to interview a police officer as part of a criminal investigation. If ordered to do so, the officer will submit a report explaining his actions during a shooting incident; otherwise, he will make no statement. Because when such a report is written in response to a direct order, it cannot constitute a voluntary statement and therefore cannot be used in court against the officer. In this case, the state's attorney on duty that night refused to order the report and, as a consequence of the legal impasse, the investigation fixed itself on an obvious course: proving that Officer Brian Pedrick—a five-year veteran with no prior record of brutality or excessive force—had shot a fleeing man in the back with his service revolver.

For twelve hours, the Monroe Street investigation was certainty and cohesion, and it would have remained so except for one critical fact: Officer Pedrick did not shoot John Randolph Scott.

On the morning after the shooting, the medical examiner's attendants undressed Scott's body and found a spent .38 slug still lodged in the bloody clothing. That bullet was compared by the ballistics lab later that afternoon, but it could not be matched with Pedrick's revolver. In fact, the bullet that killed Scott was a 158-grain roundnose, a common type of Smith & Wesson ammunition that hadn't been used by the police department in more than a decade.

Worden and several other detectives then returned to the scene of the pursuit and in daylight carefully searched the alley where Pedrick was believed to have fired his weapon. Picking through trash in that alley off Raynor Avenue, they found a mark in the pavement that appeared to have lead residue from a bullet ricochet. The detectives followed the likely trajectory of the slug across the alley and came to an adjacent lot where, incredibly, a resident was cleaning debris on that very morning. Of all the trash-strewn lots in all the ghettos in all the world, Worden thought, this guy's gotta be cleaning ours. Just as the detectives were about to begin emptying every one of the half-dozen trash bags filled by West Baltimore's last Good Samaritan, they discovered the spent .38 slug, still partially buried in the dirt lot. Ballistics then matched that bullet to Brian Pedrick's weapon.

But if Pedrick wasn't the shooter, who was?

Worden had no taste for the obvious answer. He was a cop and he had spent his adult life in the brotherhood of cops—in station houses and radio cars, in courthouse corridors and district lockups. He didn't want to believe that someone wearing the uniform could be so stupid as to shoot someone and then run away, leaving the body in a back alley like any other murdering bastard. And yet he couldn't turn away from the fact that John Randolph Scott was killed with a .38 slug while running from men with .38 revolvers. In any other investigation, there would be no debate as to where and how a homicide detective should begin. In any other case, a detective would start with the men who had the guns.

Worden being Worden, he had done precisely that, compelling nearly two dozen police from three districts to submit their service revolvers to evidence control in exchange for replacement weapons. But for each .38 submitted, a corresponding ballistics report indicated that the fatal bullet had not come from this officer's duty weapon. Another dead end.

Was a cop carrying a secondary weapon, another .38 that had since been thrown off some Canton pier? Or maybe the kid was running from police and tried to steal another car, only to get himself shot by some irate civilian who then disappeared into the night. That was a long shot, Worden had to admit, but in this neighborhood nothing was impossible. A more likely scenario had the kid getting a gun of his own, a .38 taken off him in a struggle with an arresting officer. That could explain why the spent bullet wasn't department issue, just as it could explain the torn buttons.

Worden and Rick James had recovered four of them at or near the victim's body. One button appeared to have nothing to do with the victim; three were determined to be from the dead man's shirt. Two of those buttons were found near the body and were bloodied; the third was found near the mouth of the alley. To Worden and James both, the torn buttons indicated that the victim had been grabbed in a struggle, and the presence of the button near the mouth of the alley suggested that the struggle had begun only a few feet from where the victim fell. More than a straight shooting by a civilian suspect, that scenario suggested an attempted street arrest, an effort to grab or halt the victim.

For Donald Worden, the death of John Randolph Scott had become a dirty piece of business, with each possible outcome more unsettling than the last.

If the murder remained unsolved, it would resemble a departmental cover-up. But if a cop was indicted, Worden and James would become, as the men responsible for the prosecution, pariahs to the people in patrol. Already, the police union lawyers were telling members not to talk to homicide, that the Crimes Against Persons section was synonymous with IID. How the hell would they work murders with patrol against them? But in some ways the third alternative, the slim possibility of civilian involvement—that John Randolph Scott was shot by a local while trying to break into a home or steal a second car to elude the pursuing officers—was the worst of all. Worden reasoned that if he ever came up with a civilian suspect, the brass would go out of their minds trying to sell it to the city's political leadership, not to mention the powers-that-be in the black community. Well, Mr. Mayor, we thought the white officers chasing Mr. Scott may have done it, but now we're pretty much convinced that a black guy from the 1000 block of Fulton Street is responsible.

Yeah. Sure. No problem.

Twenty-five years in the Baltimore Police Department and Donald

Worden was now being asked to put the crown on his career by solving a case that could put cops in prison. In the beginning, the notion had seemed abhorrent—Worden was as much or more of a street police than any man out there. He had gone downtown after more than a decade in the Northwest District's operations unit and then only reluctantly. And now, because of this thieving kid with the bullethole in his back, patrolmen in three districts were idling their radio cars side by side, hood to trunk, in vacant parking lots, talking in hushed tones about a man who was on the street when they were hurling spitballs in grade school. Who the fuck is this guy Worden? Is he really gonna go after a police on this Monroe Street thing? He's gonna try and fuck over another police because of some dead yo? What is he, a rat or something?

"Uh-oh, Worden be looking at that nasty file."

Worden's partner stands in the doorway of the coffee room, holding a piece of scratch paper. Rick James is ten years younger than Donald Worden and has neither his instincts nor his savvy, but then again, few people in this world do. Worden works with the younger detective because James can manage a homicide scene and write a good, coherent report, and for all his virtues, Donald Worden would rather eat his gun than sit at a typewriter for two hours. In his better moments, Worden regards James as a worthy project, an apprentice on whom to bestow the lessons of a quarter century of policing.

The Big Man looks up slowly and sees the scrap paper in the younger man's hand.

"What's that?"

"It's a call, babe."

"We're not supposed to be taking calls. We're detailed."

"Terry says we should go on it."

"What is it?"

"Shooting."

"I don't handle homicides anymore," says Worden dryly. "Just give me a fucked-up police shooting any day."

"C'mon, babe, let's go make some money."

Worden downs the last of his coffee, throws the remains of the cigar into a can, and for a second or two allows himself to believe that there may just be life after Monroe Street. He walks to the coat rack.

"Don't forget your gun, Donald."

The Big Man smiles for the first time.

“I sold my gun. Pawned it for some power tools down on Baltimore Street. Where’s this here shooting?”

“Greenmount. Thirty-eight hundred block.”

Detective Sergeant Terrence Patrick McLarney watches the two men prepare to leave and nods his head in satisfaction. It’s been more than a month since the Monroe Street shooting and McLarney wants his two men back in the rotation, handling calls. The trick is to do it gradually, so as not to suggest to the chain of command that the Monroe Street detail is in fact on its last legs. With any luck, McLarney figures, Worden will catch a murder with this call and the admin lieutenant will get off his ass about the Scott case.

“Detail leaving, sergeant,” says Worden.

Inside the elevator, Rick James fingers the car keys and stares at his blurred reflection in the metal doors. Worden watches the indicator lights.

“McLarney’s happy, ain’t he?”

Worden says nothing.

“You’re a bear and a half today, Donald.”

“You drive, bitch.”

Rick James rolls his eyes and looks at his partner. He sees a six-foot-four, 240-pound polar bear masquerading as a gap-toothed forty-eight-year-old man with deep blue eyes, a rapidly receding line of white hair and rising blood pressure. Yes, he is a bear, but the best part of working with Donald Worden is easily understood: The man is a natural policeman.

“I’m just a poor, dumb white boy from Hampden, trying to make his way through this world and into the next,” Worden would often say by way of introduction. And on paper, he appeared to be exactly that: Baltimore born and bred, he had a high school education, a few years of navy service, and a police service record of impressive length but with no greater rank than patrolman or detective. On the street, however, Worden was one of the most instinctive, inspired cops in the city. He had spent over a quarter of a century in the department and knew Baltimore like few others ever would. Twelve years in the Northwest District, three in escape and apprehension, another eight working in the robbery unit, and now three years in homicide.

He hadn’t come to the unit without second thoughts. Time and again, squad sergeants in homicide had urged him to make the switch, but Worden was a man of the old school and loyalty counted for a lot. The same lieutenant who brought him to the robbery unit wanted to keep him, and

Worden felt beholden. And his relationship with his partner, Ron Grady—an unlikely match between a would-be hillbilly from North Baltimore’s all-white enclave of Hampden and a beefy black cop from the city’s west side—was another reason to stay put. They were a salt-and-pepper team of legendary proportions and Worden never hesitated to remind Rick James and everyone else in homicide that Grady was the only man he could ever truly call his partner.

But by early 1985, working robberies had become a numbing, repetitive existence. Worden had run through hundreds of investigations—banks, armored cars, downtown holdups, commercial jobs. In the old days, he would tell younger detectives, a cop could go after a better class of thieves; now a Charles Street bank job was more likely to be the impulse of some nodding addict than the work of a professional. In the end, the job itself made the decision for him: Worden can still vividly remember the morning he arrived at the office to find a report of an Eastern District incident on his desk, a liquor store robbery from Greenmount Avenue. The report was filed as robbery with a deadly weapon, which meant the incident required a follow-up by a downtown detective. Worden read the narrative and learned that a group of kids had grabbed a six-pack and run from the store. The counterman tried to chase them and got hit with a piece of a brick for his trouble. It wasn’t felony robbery; hell, it wasn’t anything that couldn’t have been handled by a district uniform. For Worden, who had been a robbery detective for almost eight years, that incident report was the end of the line. He went to the captain the next day with the transfer request to homicide.

Worden’s reputation preceded him across the hall and during the next two years he proved not only that he was ready for murders but that he was the centerpiece of McLarney’s squad, no small thing in a five-man unit that included two other men with twenty-year histories. Rick James had transferred to homicide in July 1985, only three months before Worden, and James quickly sized up the situation and paired up with the Big Man, following him so closely that other detectives gave him grief about it. But Worden clearly enjoyed the role of an elder sage and James was willing to hold up his end by doing a good crime scene and writing the necessary reports. If Worden taught him half of what he knew before taking that pension, Rick James would be in homicide a long, long time.

The bad thing about working with Worden was the black moods, the sullen brooding because he was still working for a patrolman’s wage when

he should be taking a pension and living a life of leisure as some security consultant or home improvement contractor. Worden was strangely self-conscious that he was still out there running down ghetto murders when most of the men who came on with him were retired or working a second career; the few that remained on the force were ending their days in the districts as desk sergeants or turnkeys, or in the headquarters security booths listening to the Orioles drop a double-header on a transistor radio, waiting out another year or two for a higher pension. All around him, younger men were getting out and moving on to better things.

More often than not these days, Worden found himself talking seriously about packing it in. But a large part of him didn't even want to think about retirement; the department had been his home since 1962—his arrival in homicide marked the last curl in a long, graceful arc. For three years, Worden's work in the unit had sustained and even revived him.

The Big Man took particular delight in his ongoing effort to break in the younger detectives in his squad, Rick James and Dave Brown. James was coming along all right, but in Worden's mind Brown could go either way. Worden never hesitated to press the point, subjecting the younger detective to a training regimen best characterized as education-by-insult.

The least experienced man in the squad, Dave Brown tolerated the Big Man's bluster—in large part because he knew Worden genuinely cared whether Brown stayed a detective, in smaller part because there was no real choice in the matter. The relationship between the two men was perfectly captured in a color photograph taken by a crime lab tech at a murder in Cherry Hill. In the foreground was an earnest Dave Brown, collecting discarded beer cans near the shooting scene in the vain and excessively optimistic hope that they might have anything at all to do with the killing. In the background, sitting on the front stoop of a public housing unit, was Donald Worden, watching the younger detective with what appears to be a look of unequivocal disgust. Dave Brown liberated the photograph from the case file and took it home as a memento. It was the Big Man that Brown had come to know and love. Cantankerous, annoyed, ever critical. A last, lonely centurion who sees both his affliction and his challenge in a younger generation of menials and incompetents.

The photograph showed the Big Man at the height of his powers: abrasive, confident, the nettled conscience of every younger or less experienced detective on the shift. And, of course, the Cherry Hill case went down, with Worden getting the tip that led to the murder weapon at the

home of the shooter's girlfriend. But that was when Worden still felt some delight at being a homicide detective. That was before Monroe Street.

Climbing into a Cavalier on the mezzanine level, James decides to risk conversation one more time.

"If this is a murder," he says, "I'll be the primary."

Worden looks at him. "You don't want to see if someone's been locked up first?"

"No, babe. I need the money."

"You're a whore."

"Yeah, babe."

James rolls the car down the garage ramp, over to Fayette, then north on Gay Street to Greenmount, preoccupied with the complex computations of anticipated overtime. Two hours at the scene, three hours of interrogation, another three for paperwork, four more for the autopsy; James thinks about how sweet twelve hours of time-and-a-half will look on his pay stub.

But it is not a murder on Greenmount; it isn't even a straight shooting. Both detectives know that after listening to a sixteen-year-old witness rattle through an incoherent three-minute monologue.

"Whoa, start from the beginning. Slowly."

"Derrick came running in . . ."

"Derrick who?"

"That's my brother."

"How old is he?"

"Seventeen. He come running through the front door and upstairs. My older brother went up and found him shot and called nine-one-one. Derrick said he was at the bus stop and got shot. That's all he said."

"He didn't know who shot him?"

"No, he say he just got shot."

Worden takes the flashlight from James and walks outside with a patrolman.

"Are you the first officer?"

"No," says the uniform. "That's Rodriguez."

"Where is he?"

"He went to shock-trauma with your victim."

Worden shoots the patrolman a look, then walks back toward the front door of the house and turns the flashlight on the floor of the porch. No blood trail. No blood on the door handle. The detective scans the brick front of the rowhouse with the light. No blood. No fresh damage.

One hole, but too even to be from a bullet. Probably an old drill hole for a light fixture.

Worden takes the flashlight back down the front walk toward the street. He walks back inside the house and checks the rooms upstairs. Still no blood. The detective walks back downstairs and listens to James questioning the sixteen-year-old.

"Where'd your brother run to when he came in the house?" Worden interrupts.

"Upstairs."

"There's no blood upstairs."

The kid looks at his shoes.

"What's going on here?" says Worden, pressing him.

"We cleaned it up," the kid says.

"You cleaned it up?"

"Uh-huh."

"Oh," says Worden, rolling his eyes. "Let's go back upstairs then."

The kid takes the stairs two at a time, then turns into the clutter and disarray of a teenager's room, replete with pinups of models in bikinis and posters of New York rappers in designer sweats. Without further prompting, the sixteen-year-old pulls two bloodstained sheets from a hamper.

"Where were those?"

"On the bed."

"On the bed?"

"We turned over the mattress."

Worden flips the mattress. A red-brown stain covers a good quarter of the fabric.

"What jacket was your brother wearing when he came in?"

"The gray one."

Worden picks up a gray puff jacket from a chair and checks it carefully, inside and out. No blood. He goes to the bedroom closet and checks every other winter coat, throwing each on the bed as James shakes his head slowly.

"Here's what happened," says James. "You were in here playing around with a gun and your brother got shot. Now if you start telling the truth, you're not going to get locked up. Where's the gun?"

"What gun?"

"Jesus Christ. Where's the goddamn gun?"

"Don't know about no gun."

"Your brother has a gun. Let's just get the gun out of the way."

“Derrick got shot at the bus stop.”

“The fuck he did,” says James, simmering. “He was fucking around in here and you or your brother or someone else shot him by accident. Where’s the fucking gun?”

“Ain’t no gun.”

Classic, thinks Worden, looking at the kid. Truly classic. A prime example of the Rule Number One of the guidebook of death investigation, the page 1 entry in a detective’s lexicon:

Everyone lies.

Murderers, stickup artists, rapists, drug dealers, drug users, half of all major-crime witnesses, politicians of all persuasions, used car salesmen, girlfriends, wives, ex-wives, line officers above the rank of lieutenant, sixteen-year-old high school students who accidentally shoot their older brother and then hide the gun—to a homicide detective, the earth spins on an axis of denial in an orbit of deceit. Hell, sometimes the police themselves are no different. For the last six weeks, Donald Worden has listened to a long series of statements by men wearing the uniform in which he has spent a lifetime, listened to them as they tried to get their stories straight and explain how they couldn’t possibly have been anywhere near that alley off Monroe Street.

James begins moving toward the bedroom door. “You tell us what you want,” he says bitterly. “When your brother dies, we’ll be back to charge you with the murder.”

The kid remains mute, and the two detectives follow the uniform out the front door. Worden holds his temper until the Cavalier is rolling back down Greenmount.

“Who the hell is this guy Rodriguez?”

“I guess you’re going to have something to say to him.”

“I’m gonna have a lot to say. The first officer to arrive protects the crime scene. And what do they do? They go to the hospital, they go to headquarters, they go to lunch and let the people pick the scene apart. What good he was gonna do at the hospital, I don’t know.”

But Rodriguez isn’t at the hospital. And there is no satisfaction for Worden in a brief discussion with the victim’s distracted mother, who sits with two other children in the trauma unit’s waiting room, clutching a tissue.

“I don’t know, honestly,” she tells the detectives. “I was sitting with my other son, watching TV, and I heard a noise, like a firecracker or the sound of glass breaking. Derrick’s brother James went upstairs and said

Derrick had been coming home from work and got shot. I told him not to play like that.”

Worden interrupts.

“Mrs. Allen, I’m gonna be frank with you. Your son was shot in his room, more than likely by accident. Except for the bed, there was no blood anywhere, not even on the jacket he was wearing when he came in.”

The woman looks at the detective blankly. Worden continues, explaining her children’s effort to conceal the shooting scene and the probability that the handgun that has sent her son to surgery is still in the house.

“No one is talking about charging anyone. We’re from homicide and if it’s an accidental shooting, then we’re wasting our time and we just need to get it straightened out.”

The woman nods in vague agreement. Worden asks if she would be willing to call home and ask her children to turn over the weapon.

“They can leave it on the porch and lock the door if they want,” Worden says. “We’re just interested in getting the gun out of the house.”

The mother abdicates.

“I’d rather you do that,” she says.

Worden walks into the hall and finds Rick James, who is talking with a medical technician. Derrick Allen is critical but stable; in all probability, he will live to fight another day. And Officer Rodriguez, says James, is back at homicide, writing his report.

“I’ll drop you at the office. If I go back now I’m going to jump in someone’s shit,” says Worden. “I’ll take another trip by the house for the gun. Don’t ask me why I should care whether they keep the fucking thing or not.”

A half hour later, Worden is rechecking Derrick Allen’s bedroom and finds a hole in a back window and a spent bullet on an outside rear porch. He shows the slug and the window to the sixteen-year-old brother.

The kid shrugs. “I guess Derrick got shot in his room.”

“Where’s the gun?”

“Don’t know about no gun.”

It is a God-given truth: Everyone lies. And this most basic of axioms has three corollaries:

A. Murderers lie because they have to.

B. Witnesses and other participants lie because they think they have to.

C. Everyone else lies for the sheer joy of it, and to uphold a general principle that under no circumstances do you provide accurate information to a cop.

Derrick’s brother is living proof of the second corollary. A witness lies

to protect friends and relatives, even those who have wantonly shed blood. He lies to deny his involvement in drugs. He lies to hide the fact that he has prior arrests or that he is secretly homosexual, or that he even knew the victim. Most of all, he lies to distance himself from the murder and the possibility that he may one day have to testify in court. In Baltimore, a cop asks you what you saw and the requisite reply, an involuntary motor skill bred into the urban population over generations, is delivered with a slow shake of the head and an averted stare:

“I ain’t seen nothing.”

“You were standing next to the guy.”

“I ain’t seen nothing.”

Everyone lies.

Worden gives the kid one last, steady look.

“Your brother was shot in this room with a gun that he was playing with. Why don’t we get that gun out of the house?”

The teenager barely misses a beat.

“I don’t know about no gun.”

Worden shakes his head. He could call for the crime lab and spend a couple hours tearing the place apart in a search for the damn thing; if it were a murder, he’d be doing just that. But for an accidental shooting, what’s the point? Pull a gun out of this house and there’ll be another in its place by the end of the week.

“Your brother’s in the hospital,” say Worden. “Doesn’t that mean anything to you?”

The kid looks at the floor.

Fine, thinks Worden. I tried. I gave it a shot. So now keep the god-damn gun as a souvenir, and when you’ve shot yourself in the leg or put a round through little sister, you can call us again. Why, thinks Worden, should I waste time on your bullshit when there are people waiting in line to lie to me? Why hunt for your \$20 pistol when I’ve got the quagmire that is Monroe Street on my desk?

Worden drives back to the office empty-handed, his mood even darker than before.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20

On the long wall of the coffee room hangs a large rectangle of white paper, running most of the room’s length. It is covered by acetate and divided by black rules into six sections.

Above the three right-hand sections is a letterplate bearing the name

of Lieutenant Robert Stanton, who commands the homicide unit's second shift. To the immediate left, below the name of Lieutenant Gary D'Addario, are the three remaining sections. Underneath the nameplates of the two lieutenants, affixed to the top of each section, is the name of a detective sergeant: McLarney, Landsman and Nolan for D'Addario's shift; Childs, Lamartina and Barrick for Stanton's command.

Below each sergeant's nameplate are brief listings of dead people, the first homicide victims of the year's first month. The names of victims in closed cases are written in black felt marker; the names of victims in open investigations, in red. To the left of each victim's name is a case number—88001 for the year's first murder, 88002 for the second, and so on. To the right of each victim's name is a letter or letters—A for Bowman, B for Garvey, C for McAllister—which correspond to the names of the assigned detectives listed at the bottom of each section.

A sergeant or lieutenant trying to match a homicide with its primary detective, or the reverse, can scan the sections of the white rectangle and in a matter of moments determine that Tom Pellegrini is working the murder of Rudy Newsome. He can also determine, by noting that Newsome's name is in red ink, that the case is still open. For this reason, supervisors in the homicide unit regard the white rectangle as an instrument necessary to assure accountability and clerical precision. For this reason, too, detectives in the unit regard the rectangle as an affliction, an unforgiving creation that has endured far beyond the expectations of the now-retired sergeants and long-dead lieutenants who created it. The detectives call it, simply, the board.

In the time that it takes the coffee pot to fill, shift commander Lieutenant Gary D'Addario—otherwise known to his men as Dee, LTD, or simply as His Eminence—can approach the board as a pagan priest might approach the temple of the sun god, scan the hieroglyphic scrawl of red and black below his name, and determine who among his three sergeants has kept his commandments and who has gone astray. He can further check the coded letters beside the name of each case and make the same determination about his fifteen detectives. The board reveals all: Upon its acetate is writ the story of past and present. Who has grown fat on domestic murders witnessed by half a dozen family members; who has starved on a drug assassination in a vacant rowhouse. Who has reaped the bountiful harvest of a murder-suicide complete with a posthumous note of confession; who has tasted the bitter fruit of an unidentified victim, bound and gagged in the trunk of an airport rental car.

The board that today greets the shift lieutenant is a wretched, bloody piece of work, with most of the names etched beneath D'Addario's sergeants written in red. Stanton's shift began the new year at midnight, catching five murders in the early hours of January 1. Of those cases, however, all but one were the result of drunken arguments and accidental shootings, and all but one are in the black. Then, a week later, came the shift change, with Stanton's men going to daywork and D'Addario's crew taking over on the four-to-twelve and midnight shifts and catching their first cases of the year. Nolan's squad took the first murder for the shift on January 10, a drug-related robbery in which the victim was found stabbed to death in the back seat of a Dodge. McLarney's squad picked up a whodunit the same night when a middle-aged homosexual was shotgunned as he opened his apartment door in lower Charles Village. Then Fahlteich caught the first murder of the year for Landsman's squad, a robbery beating in Rognel Heights with no suspects, after which McAllister broke up the red ink with an easy arrest on Dillon Street, where a fifteen-year-old white kid was stabbed in the heart over a \$20 drug debt.

But the murders were all wide open the following week, with Eddie Brown and Waltemeyer arriving at a Walbrook Junction apartment house to find Kenny Vines stretched out on his stomach in a first-floor hallway, a red puddle of wetness where his right eye used to be. Brown didn't recognize the corpse at first, though he actually knew the forty-eight-year-old Vines from years back; hell, everyone who ever worked the west side knew Kenny Vines. The owner of a Bloomingdale Road body shop, Vines had for years been deep into numbers and stolen auto parts, but it was only when he started to move a lot of cocaine that he began making serious enemies. The Vines case was followed two nights later by Rudy Newsome and Roy Johnson, the split decision for Landsman's crew, which was followed in turn by a double murder on Luzerne Street, where a gunman broke into a stash house in a dispute over drug territory and began firing wildly, killing two and wounding two more. Naturally, the survivors didn't care to remember much.

The grand total came to nine bodies in eight cases, with only one file closed and another on the verge of a warrant, a solve rate so low that D'Addario could be fairly described as one of the police department's least satisfied lieutenants.

"I can't help but note, sir," says McLarney, following his supervisor into the coffee room, "as I'm sure you, in your infinite wisdom, have also noticed . . ."

“Go on, my good sergeant.”

“. . . that there is a lot of red ink on our side of the board.”

“Yes, quite so,” says D’Addario, encouraging this pattern of courtly, classical speech, a favored ploy that never fails to amuse his sergeants.

“A suggestion, sir?”

“You have my undivided attention, Sergeant McLarney.”

“Maybe it would look better if we put the open cases in black and the closed ones in red,” McLarney says. “That would fool the bosses for a while.”

“That’s one solution.”

“Of course,” adds McLarney, “we could also go out and lock some people up.”

“That’s also a solution.”

McLarney laughs, but not too much. As a supervisor, Gary D’Addario is generally regarded by his sergeants and detectives as a prince, a benevolent autocrat who asks only competence and loyalty. In return, he provides his shift with unstinting support and sanctuary from the worst whims and fancies of the command staff. A tall man with thinning tufts of silver-gray hair and a quietly dignified manner, D’Addario is one of the last survivors of the Italian caliphate that briefly ruled the department after a long Irish dynasty. It was a respite that began with Frank Battaglia’s ascension to the commissioner’s post and continued until membership in the Sons of Italy was as much a prerequisite for elevation as the sergeant’s test. But the Holy Roman Empire lasted less than four years; in 1985, the mayor acknowledged the city’s changing demographics by dragging Battaglia into a well-paid consultant’s position and giving the black community a firm lock on the upper tiers of the police department.

If the outgoing tide stranded D’Addario in homicide as a lieutenant, then the men under him owed much to affirmative action. Soft-spoken and introspective, D’Addario was a rare breed of supervisor for a paramilitary organization. He had learned long ago to suppress the first impulse of command that calls for a supervisor to intimidate his men, charting their every movement and riding them through investigations. In the districts, that sort of behavior usually resulted from a new supervisor’s primitive conclusion that the best way to avoid being perceived as weak was to behave like a petty tyrant. Every district had a shift lieutenant or sector sergeant who would demand explanatory Form 95s from people ten minutes late to roll call, or scour the district’s holes at 4:00 A.M. in the hope of finding some poor post officer sleeping in his radio

car. Supervisors like that either grew into their jobs or their best men ducked and covered long enough to transfer to another sector.

Up in homicide, an authoritarian shift commander is even more likely to be held in contempt by his detectives—men who would not, in fact, be on the sixth floor of headquarters if they weren't eighteen of the most self-motivated cops in the department. In homicide, the laws of natural selection apply: A cop who puts down enough cases stays, a cop who doesn't is gone. Given that basic truth, there isn't much respect for the notion that a cop shrewd enough to maneuver his way into homicide and then put together forty or fifty cases somehow needs to have a shift commander's finger in his eye. Rank, of course, has its privileges, but a homicide supervisor who exercises his divine right to chew ass on every conceivable occasion will in the end create a shift of alienated sergeants and overly cautious detectives, unwilling or incapable of acting on their own instincts.

Instead, and at some cost to his own career, Gary D'Addario gave his men room to maneuver, providing a buffer against the captain and those above him in the chain of command. His method carried considerable risk, and the relationship between D'Addario and his captain had frayed around the edges during the last four years. By contrast, Bob Stanton, the other shift lieutenant, was a supervisor more to the captain's liking. A buttoned-down veteran of the narcotics unit handpicked by the captain to command the second shift, Stanton ran a tighter ship, with sergeants exerting more overt control over their men and detectives pressured to hold down the overtime and court pay that lubricates the entire system. Stanton was a good lieutenant and a sharp cop, but when compared with the alternative, his frugality and by-the-book style were such that more than a few veterans on his shift expressed an eagerness to join D'Addario's crusade at the first opportunity.

For the sergeants and detectives blessed by D'Addario's benevolence, the quid pro quo was both simple and obvious. They had to solve murders. They had to solve enough murders to produce a clearance rate that would vindicate His Eminence and his methods and thereby justify his benign and glorious rule. In homicide, the clearance rate is the litmus test, the beginning and end of all debate.

Which is reason enough for D'Addario to stare long and hard at the red ink on his side of the board. Not only does the white rectangle offer ready comparisons between detectives, it offers the same superficial com-

parison between shifts. In that sense, the board—and the clearance rate it represents—has divided Baltimore’s homicide guard into separate units, each shift functioning independently of the other. Detectives old enough to have experienced life before the board remember the homicide unit as more of a single entity; detectives were willing to work cases that began or ended on another shift, knowing that credit for clearances would be shared by the entire unit. Created to promote cohesion and accountability, the board instead left the two shifts—and each of the six squads—to compete against each other in red and black ink for clearances, as if they were a pack of double-knit salesmen moving marked-down cars for Luby’s Chevrolet.

The trend began long before Stanton’s arrival, but the lieutenants’ different styles helped to highlight the competition. And for the last several years, detectives from one shift had interacted with those from the other only at the half-hour shift changes or on rare occasions when a detective pulling overtime on a case needed an extra body from the working shift to witness an interrogation or help kick down a door. The competition was always understated, but soon even individual detectives found themselves contemplating the white rectangle, silently computing clearance rates for opposing squads or shifts. That, too, was ironic, because every detective in the unit was willing to concede that the board was itself a flawed measurement, as it represented only the number of homicides for the year. A squad could spend three weeks of nightwork knee deep in police shootings, questionable deaths, serious assaults, kidnappings, overdose cases and every other kind of death investigation. Yet none of that would be reflected in black and red ink.

Even with the murders themselves, much of what clears a case amounts to pure chance. The vocabulary of the homicide unit recognizes two distinct categories of homicides: whodunits and dunkers. Whodunits are genuine mysteries; dunkers are cases accompanied by ample evidence and an obvious suspect. Whodunits are best typified by crime scenes where a detective is called to some godforsaken back alley to find a body and little more. Dunkers are best typified by scenes at which the detective steps over the body to meet the unrepentant husband, who has not bothered to change his bloodied clothes and requires little prompting to admit that he stabbed the bitch and would do so again given the chance. The distinction between cases that require investigation and cases that require little more than paperwork is understood and accepted

by every man in the unit, and more than one squad sergeant has accused another of rushing a detective out to a call that sounded on the radio as if it were a domestic murder or, worse yet, ducking a call that had all the markings of a well-executed drug slaying.

The board, of course, does not delineate between dunkers solved by circumstance and whodunits solved by extended investigation: The ink is as black for one as the other. As a consequence, the resulting politics of whodunits and dunkers becomes part of the mind-set, so much so that veteran detectives watching an old western on the office television will always offer the same remark when gunfighters are shot down on frontier streets crowded with God-fearing townfolk:

“Yeah, bunk. There’s a dunker.”

But dunkers had lately been few and far between for D’Addario’s shift, and the lieutenant’s dependence on both the board and the clearance rate had become even more acute in the wake of Worden’s investigation into the Monroe Street shooting of John Scott. The captain had taken the extraordinary step of removing both D’Addario and McLarney from the chain of command, ordering Worden and James to report directly to the administrative lieutenant. On one level, the decision to preempt McLarney made sense because he was close to so many of the patrolmen in the Western, some of whom were potential suspects in the murder. But D’Addario had no divided allegiances, and after nine years in homicide he had seen enough red balls to know the entire drill. The suggestion that he continue to devote his time to routine matters rather than contend with a sensitive investigation such as Monroe Street could only be taken as an insult. Inevitably, D’Addario’s relations with the captain were now more strained than ever.

Gary D’Addario was by reputation a man slow to anger, but Monroe Street had clearly shortened his fuse. Earlier that week, Terry McLarney had typed a routine memo requesting that two Western officers be detailed to homicide to help with an ongoing probe; he had then forwarded the missive directly to the administrative lieutenant, bypassing D’Addario. A minor oversight in chain-of-command courtesy, but now, in the quiet of the coffee room, D’Addario brings it up, using humor and overwrought formality to make his point.

“Sergeant McLarney,” he says, smiling, “while I have your attention I wonder if I might inquire as to an administrative matter.”

“That’s not my whiskey bottle in the top right drawer,” blurts out McLarney, straight-faced. “Sergeant Landsman put it there to discredit me.”

D'Addario laughs for the first time.

"And," McLarney deadpans, "I would respectfully like to point out that Sergeant Nolan's men have been using the cars without signing the vehicle book as I have properly trained my squad to do."

"This is about another matter."

"Something to do with conduct unbecoming an officer?"

"Not at all. This is purely administrative in nature."

"Oh." McLarney shrugs, sitting down. "You had me worried there for a second."

"I'm just a little concerned because a certain memo you penned was addressed to a lieutenant in this police department other than myself."

McLarney sees his mistake immediately. Monroe Street has everybody stepping light.

"I didn't think. I'm sorry."

D'Addario waves off the apology. "I just need to have your answer to one particular question."

"Sir?"

"First of all, I take it you are of the Roman Catholic faith."

"And proud of it."

"Fine. Then let me ask: Do you accept me as your true and only forgotten lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir."

"And thou shalt have no other lieutenants before me?"

"No, sir."

"And thou shalt forever keep this covenant and worship no false lieutenants?"

"Yes."

"Very good, sergeant," says D'Addario, extending his right hand. "You may now kiss the ring."

McLarney leans toward the large University of Baltimore band on the lieutenant's right hand, feigning a gesture of exaggerated subservience. Both men laugh and D'Addario, satisfied, takes a cup of coffee back to his own office.

Alone in the coffee room, Terry McLarney stares at the long white rectangle, understanding that D'Addario has already forgotten and forgiven the wayward memo. But the red ink on D'Addario's side of the board—that's cause for some real concern.

Like most supervisors in the homicide unit, McLarney is a sergeant with a detective's heart, and like D'Addario, he sees his role as largely

protectionist. In the districts, the lieutenants can order their sergeants and the sergeants can order their men, and it all works as the general orders manual says it should—chain of command is suited to patrol. But in homicide, where the detectives are paced as much by their own instinct and talent as by the caseload, a good supervisor rarely makes unequivocal demands. He suggests, he encourages, he prods and pleads ever so gently with men who know exactly what needs to be done on a case without having to be told. In many ways, a detective sergeant best serves his men by completing the administrative paperwork, keeping the brass at bay and letting the detectives do the job. It is a reasoned philosophy, and McLarney holds firm to it nine out of ten days. But every tenth day, something suddenly compels him to attempt a pattern of behavior consistent with the sort of sergeants they warn you about in the academy.

A heavysset Irishman with cherubic features, McLarney drapes one stubby leg over a desk corner and looks up at the white rectangle and the three red entries below his nameplate. Thomas Ward. Kenny Vines. Michael Jones. Three dead men; three open cases. Definitely not the best way for a squad to start a new year.

McLarney is still staring at the board when one of his detectives walks into the coffee room. Carrying an old case folder, Donald Waltemeyer grunts a monosyllabic greeting and walks past the sergeant to an empty desk. McLarney watches him for a few minutes, thinking of a way to begin a conversation he doesn't really want to have.

"Hey, Donald."

"Hey."

"What are you looking at?"

"Old case from Mount Vernon."

"Homosexual murder?"

"Yeah, William Leyh, from eighty-seven. The one where the guy was tied up and beat," says Waltemeyer, shuffling through the file to the five-by-seven color photos of a half-nude, blood-soaked wreck, hog-tied on an apartment floor.

"What's up with that?"

"Got a call from a state trooper in New Jersey. There's a guy in a mental institution up there who says he tied up and beat a guy in Baltimore."

"This case?"

"Dunno. Me or Dave or Donald is going to have to go up there and talk to this guy. It could all be bullshit."

McLarney shifts gears. "I always said you were the hardest-working man in my squad, Donald. I tell everybody that."

Waltemeyer looks up at his sergeant with immediate suspicion.

"No, really . . ."

"What do you want, sergeant?"

"Why do I have to want anything?"

"Hey," says Waltemeyer, leaning back in his chair, "how long have I been a policeman?"

"Can't a sergeant compliment one of his men?"

Waltemeyer rolls his eyes. "What do you want from me?"

McLarney laughs, almost embarrassed at having been so easily caught playing the role of supervisor.

"Well," he says, treading carefully, "what's up with the Vines case?"

"Not much. Ed wants to bring Eddie Carey back in and talk to him, but there isn't much else."

"Well, what about Thomas Ward?"

"Talk to Dave Brown. He's the primary."

Pedaling with his feet, McLarney rolls his chair around to the side of Waltemeyer's desk. His voice drops to a conspiratorial tone.

"Donald, we've got to make something happen with some of these fresh cases. Dee was in here looking at the board just a few minutes ago."

"What are you telling me for?"

"I'm just asking you, is there anything that we're not doing?"

"Is there anything *I'm* not doing?" says Waltemeyer, standing up and grabbing the Leyh file off the desk. "You tell me. I'm doing everything I can, but either the case is there or it isn't. What should I be doing? You tell me."

Donald Waltemeyer is losing it. McLarney can tell because Waltemeyer's eyes have begun to roll up into his forehead the way they always do when he gets steamed. McLarney worked with a guy in the Central who used to do that. Nicest guy in the world. Pretty long fuse. But let some yo with an attitude ride him too far, those eyeballs would roll up like an Atlantic City slot. It was a sure sign to every other cop that negotiations had ended and nightsticks were in order. McLarney tries to shrug off the memory; he continues to press the point with Waltemeyer.

"Donald, I'm just saying it doesn't look good to start out the year with so many cases in the red."

"So what you're saying to me, sergeant, is that the lieutenant came in here and looked at the board and gave you a little kick, so now you're gonna kick me."

The whole truth and nothing but. McLarney has to laugh. "Well, Donald, you can always go kick Dave Brown."

"Shit rolls downhill, doesn't it, sergeant?"

Fecal gravity. The chain of command defined.

"I don't know," says McLarney, backing away from the conversation as gracefully as possible. "I don't think I've ever actually seen shit on a hill."

"I understand, sergeant, I understand," says Waltemeyer, walking out of the coffee room. "I been a policeman a long time now."

McLarney leans back in his chair, resting his head against the office blackboard. He absently pulls a copy of the police department newsletter off the top of the desk and scans the front page. Grip-and-grin photographs of commissioners and deputy commissioners shaking hands with whichever cop managed to survive the last police shooting. Thank you, son, for taking a bullet for Baltimore.

The sergeant tosses the newsletter back on the desk, then gets up, giving one last glance at the board on his way out of the coffee room.

Vines, Ward and Jones. Red, red and red.

So, McLarney tells himself, it's gonna be that kind of year.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26

Harry Edgerton begins the day right, his freshly shined loafer narrowly avoiding a piece of the dead man's ear as he pushes through the screen door of a Northeast Baltimore townhouse.

"You just missed his ear."

Edgerton looks up quizzically at a ruddy-faced patrolman leaning against a living room wall.

"What was that?"

"His ear," the uniform says, pointing down at the parquet floor. "You just missed stepping on it."

Edgerton looks down at a pale lump of flesh next to his right shoe. It's an ear, all right. Most of the lobe and a short, curled stretch of the outer ridge, resting just beyond the welcome mat. The detective glances at the dead man and the shotgun on the sofa, then moves toward the other end of the room, choosing his steps carefully.

"How does that line go," says the uniform, as if he had practiced it for a week. "Friends, Romans, countrymen . . ."

"Police are some sick fucks," laughs Edgerton, shaking his head. "Who's handling this one?"

“Straight-up suicide. She’s got it.”

An older patrolman points to a younger uniform sitting at the dining room table. The officer, a black woman with delicate features, is already writing out her incident report. Edgerton makes her immediately for a uniform new to the street.

“Hey there.”

The woman nods.

“You found him? What’s your unit number?”

“Four-two-three.”

“Did you touch him or move anything around?”

The woman looks at Edgerton as if he’s just dropped in from another solar system. Touch him? She doesn’t even want to look at the poor bastard. The woman shakes her head, then glances over at the body. Edgerton looks over at the red-faced officer, who understands and accepts the detective’s silent plea.

“We’ll walk her through it,” the older uniform says quietly. “She’ll be okay.”

The academy had been turning out policewomen for more than a decade and as far as Edgerton was concerned, the verdict was still out. Many women had joined the department with a reasonable understanding of the job and a willingness to perform; some were even good cops. But Edgerton knew there were others out on the street who were absolutely dangerous. Secretaries, the older hands called them. Secretaries with guns.

The tales became worse with each telling. Everyone in the department had heard about the girl out in the Northwest, a novice who got her gun taken from her by that mental case in a Pimlico convenience store. And there was that female officer in the Western who called in the Signal 13 while her partner was getting the shit kicked from him by a family of five in a Sector 2 rowhouse. When the radio cars came racing up the street, they found the woman standing at the curb, pointing toward the front door of the house like some kind of crossing guard. Stories like that could be heard in every district roll call room.

Even as other sections of the department became grudgingly familiar with the idea of women officers, the homicide unit remained a bastion of male law enforcement, a lewd, locker room environment where a second divorce was regarded almost as a rite of passage. Only one female detective had ever lasted for any length of time: Jenny Wehr spent three years in homicide, time enough to prove herself a good investigator and

exceptional interrogator, but not long enough to begin anything that could be considered a trend.

It was only two weeks ago, in fact, that Bertina Silver had transferred into the homicide unit on Stanton's shift, making her the only female among thirty-six detectives and sergeants. In the judgment of other detectives who had worked with her in narcotics and patrol, Bert Silver was a cop: aggressive, hard, intelligent. But her arrival in homicide did little to change the prevailing political view among many detectives, who regarded the decision to give badges to women as unequivocal evidence that the barbarians were rattling the gates of Rome. For many in the homicide unit, the reality of Bertina Silver did not contradict the established theory, she was simply an exception. It was an unjustified but necessary contortion of logic that kept her out of the accepted equation: The women officers are secretaries, but Bert is Bert. Friend. Partner. Cop.

Harry Edgerton would have been the last person to complain about Bert Silver, whom he regarded as one of the unit's better recruits. This opinion held despite a continuing campaign of aggression and hegemony being waged by Bert for partial control of Edgerton's desk. After years of having a place to call his own in the homicide office, Edgerton had been told at the beginning of the year to double up with Bert because of a space shortage. He did so grudgingly and soon found himself on the defensive. Once such innocuous additions as family portraits and a gold statuette of a policewoman were granted space on the desktop, they were followed by hairbrushes and loose earrings in the upper right drawer. Then came the unending assault of the lipstick canisters and the arrival of a perfumed scarf that kept finding its way back to the bottom drawer, where Edgerton kept his suspect files from several previous drug investigations.

"That's it," said the detective, pulling the scarf out of the drawer and stuffing it into Bert's mailbox for the third time. "If I don't fight back, she'll be putting curtains up in the interrogation room."

But Edgerton didn't fight back, and eventually Bert Silver had half the desk. In his heart of hearts, Harry Edgerton knows that is as it should be. Then again, this young thing writing an incident report at the dining room table is no Bert Silver. Despite the older officer's assurance, Edgerton takes the uniform aside and speaks softly.

"If she's the first officer, she's going to have to wait for the crime lab and then do the ECU submissions."

The comment is almost an open question. More than once a medical

examiner has turned a seeming suicide into a murder, and God knows it won't do to have some recent academy product tangling up chain-of-custody on every item submitted to evidence control. The uniform understands without another word spoken.

"Don't worry. We'll walk her through it," he repeats.

Edgerton nods.

"She'll be okay," the officer says, shrugging. "Hell, she's more on the ball than some we're seeing."

Edgerton opens his small steno pad and walks back into the dining room. He begins asking both uniforms the standard questions, pulling together the raw material for a death investigation.

On the first page, dated 26 Jan. in the upper right corner, the detective has already recorded the details of his own notification by a police dispatcher at 1:03 P.M.: "1303 hours/Dispatch #76/serious shooting/5511 Leith Walk." Two lines below that, Edgerton has recorded his time of arrival at the scene.

He adds the name of the young female officer, her unit number and time of arrival. He asks for the incident number, 4A53881—4 representing the Northeastern District, A signifying the month of January, the remaining digits the basic tracking number—and writes that down as well. Then he records the number of the city ambulance unit that responded and the name of the medic who pronounced the victim. He finishes off the first page with the time of the ambo crew's pronouncement.

"Okay," says Edgerton, turning to take his first interested look at the dead man. "Who do we have here?"

"Robert William Smith," says the red-faced officer. "Thirty-eight, no . . . thirty-nine years."

"He lives here?"

"He did, yeah."

Edgerton writes the name on the second page followed by M/W/39 and the address.

"Anyone here when it happened?"

The female officer speaks up. "His wife called nine-one-one. She said she was upstairs and he was down here cleaning his shotgun."

"Where is she now?"

"They took her to the hospital for shock."

"Did you talk to her before she left?"

The woman nods.

“Write what she told you in a supplemental report,” Edgerton says. “Did she say why he might’ve killed himself?”

“She said he has a history of mental problems,” says the red-faced officer, breaking in. “He just got out of Springfield Hospital on the eleventh. Here’s his commitment papers.”

Edgerton takes a creased green sheet of paper from the officer and reads quickly. The dead man was undergoing treatment for personality disorders and—bingo—suicidal tendencies. The detective hands the paper back and writes two more lines in his notepad.

“Where did you find that?”

“His wife had it.”

“Is the crime lab on the way?”

“My sergeant called them.”

“How about the medical examiner?”

“Lemme check on that,” says the officer, walking outside to key his radio. Edgerton throws his notepad on the dining room table and pulls off his overcoat.

He does not move directly toward the body but instead walks around the perimeter of the living room, looking along the floor, walls and furniture. For Edgerton, it has become second nature to begin at the periphery of the crime scene, moving toward the body in a slowly shrinking circle. It is a method born of the same instinct that allows a detective to walk into a room and spend ten minutes filling a notepad with raw data before taking a serious look at the corpse. It takes a few months for every detective to learn that the body is going to be there, stationary and intact, for as long as it takes to process the crime scene. But the scene itself—whether it happens to be a street corner, automobile interior or living room—begins to deteriorate as soon as the first person finds the body. Any homicide detective with more than a year’s experience has already collected one or two stories about uniformed men walking through blood trails or handling weapons found at a murder scene. And not just the uniforms: More than once a Baltimore homicide detective has arrived at a shooting scene to discover some major or colonel wandering through a fresh scene, pawing the shell casings or going through a victim’s wallet in a determined effort to put prints on every conceivable bit of evidence.

Rule Number Two in the homicide lexicon: The victim is killed once, but a crime scene can be murdered a thousand times.

Edgerton marks the direction of spatter from the body, reassuring himself that the spatter of blood and brain matter is consistent with a sin-

gle wound to the head. The long white wall behind the sofa and to the dead man's right is marred by one red-pink arc extending upward from a half foot above the victim's head to nearly eye level at the front door frame. It is a long, curled finger of individual spatters that seems to point, in its final trajectory, toward the piece of ear near the welcome mat. A smaller arc extends across the top cushions of the sofa. In the small space between the sofa and the wall, Edgerton finds a few shards of skull and, on the floor just below the dead man's right side, much of what had once occupied the victim's head.

The detective looks closely at several of the individual spatters and satisfies himself that the blood spray is consistent with a single wound, fired upwards, into the left temple. The calculation is a matter of simple physics: A blood droplet that strikes a surface from a 90-degree angle should be symmetrical, with tentacles or fingers of equal length extending in any and every direction; a droplet that strikes a surface at an odd angle will dry with the longest tentacles pointing in a direction opposite the source of the blood. In the case at hand, a blood trail or spatter with tentacles pointing in any direction other than from the victim's head would be hard to explain.

"Okay," says the detective, pushing back the coffee table to stand directly in front of the victim. "Let's see what you're about."

The dead man is nude, his lower half wrapped in a checkered blanket. He is seated in the center of the couch, with what remains of his head resting on the back of the sofa. The left eye stares at the ceiling; gravity has pulled the other deep into its socket.

"That's his federal tax form on the table," says the red-faced uniform, pointing to the coffee table.

"Oh yeah?"

"Check it out."

Edgerton looks down at the coffee table and sees the familiar cover page of a 1040.

"Those things drive me crazy, too," says the uniform. "I guess he just lost his head."

Edgerton moans loudly. It is still too early in the day for unchecked constabulary wit.

"He musta been itemizing."

"Police," Edgerton repeats, "are sick fucks."

He looks at the shotgun between the victim's legs. The 12-gauge is resting with its stock on the floor, barrel upward, with the victim's left forearm

resting on the upper barrel. The detective gives the weapon a once-over, but the crime lab will need a photograph, so he leaves the gun resting between the victim's legs. He takes the dead man's hands in his own. Still warm. Edgerton convinces himself that death was recent by manipulating the ends of the fingers. Every now and then, some irate husband or wife wins the argument by shooting the significant other and then spends three or four hours wondering what to do next. By the time they seize on the notion of staging a suicide, the victim's body temperature has dropped and rigor mortis is evident in the shorter facial and finger muscles. Edgerton has had cases where the killers caused themselves much useless aggravation by attempting to push the rigid fingers of the not so recently departed inside the trigger guard of a weapon, an effort that fairly screams foul play by giving the body the appearance of a department store mannequin with a prop glued to its ungrasping hand. But Robert William Smith is one very fresh piece of meat.

Edgerton puts pen to paper: "V. braced gun between legs . . . muzzle to right cheek . . . large GSW to right side head. Warm to touch. No rigor."

Both uniforms watch as Edgerton pulls on his overcoat and deposits the notepad in an outside pocket.

"You're not staying for the crime lab?"

"Well, I'd love to but . . ."

"We're boring you, aren't we?"

"What can I say?" says Edgerton, his voice dropping to something approximating a matinee idol baritone. "My work here is done."

The red-faced officer laughs.

"When the guy gets here, tell him I just need photos of this room, and tell him to get a good shot of the guy with the gun between his legs. We're going to want to take the gun and that green sheet."

"The discharge papers?"

"Yeah, that goes downtown. What about securing this place? Is the wife coming back?"

"She was pretty messed up when they took her out of here. I guess we'll find a way to lock the place up."

"Yeah, good."

"Is that it?"

"Yeah, thanks."

"No problem."

Edgerton looks over at the female uniform, still seated at the dining room table.

"How's your report coming?"

"It's done," she says, holding up the face sheet. "Do you want to see it?"

"No, I'm sure it's fine," says Edgerton, knowing a sector sergeant will review it. "How do you like the job so far?"

The woman looks first at the dead man, then at the detective. "It's okay."

Edgerton nods, waves to the red-faced officer and walks out, this time carefully sidestepping the ear.

Fifteen minutes later, he is at a typewriter in the homicide unit's administrative office, converting the contents of three notepad pages into a single-page 24-hour crime report, Criminal Investigation Division form 78/151. Even with Edgerton's hunt-and-peck typing skills, the details of Robert William Smith's terminus are condensed to a manageable memorandum in little more than a quarter hour. Case folders are the essential documentation for homicides, but the 24-hour reports become the paper trail for the activities of the entire Crimes Against Persons section. By checking the log containing the twenty-fours, a detective can quickly familiarize himself with every ongoing case. For each incident, there is a corresponding one- or two-page missive with a brief, declarative heading, and a detective flipping through the log can look at those headings for a complete chronological account of Baltimore's violence:

". . . shooting, shooting, questionable death, cutting, arrest/homicide, serious shooting, homicide, homicide/serious shooting, suicide, rape/cutting, questionable death/poss overdose, commercial robbery, shooting . . ."

Dead, dying or merely wounded, there is a form 78/151 for every victim in the city of Baltimore. In little more than a year in homicide, Tom Pellegrini has probably filled in the blanks on more than a hundred twenty-fours. By that same estimate, Harry Edgerton has gone through five hundred forms since transferring to homicide in February 1981. And Donald Kincaid, the senior detective in Edgerton's squad and a homicide man since 1975, has probably typed well over a thousand.

More than the board, which tallies only homicides and their clearances, the 24-hour log is the basic measure of a detective's workload. If your name is on the bottom of a twenty-four, it means you were picking up phones when the call came in or, better still, you volunteered yourself when another detective held up a green pawn shop card with an address scrawled on it and asked a question older than the headquarters building itself: "Who's up?"

Harry Edgerton didn't volunteer often and among the other members of his squad, that simple fact had turned into an open wound.

No one in the squad doubted Edgerton's abilities as an investigator and most would admit that, personally, they kind of liked the guy. But in a five-man unit where the detectives all worked one another's cases and handled every kind of call, Harry Edgerton was something of a lone wolf, a man who regularly wandered off on his own extended adventures. In a unit where most murders were won or lost in the first twenty-four hours of investigation, Edgerton would pursue a case for days or even weeks, running down witnesses or conducting surveillance on a time clock all his own. Perennially late for roll calls and shift relief on nightwork, Edgerton might just as easily be discovered putting together a case file at 3:00 A.M. when his shift had ended at midnight. For the most part, he worked his cases without a secondary detective, taking his own statements and conducting his own interrogations, oblivious of whatever storms were buffeting the rest of the squad. They regarded Edgerton as more of a finesse pitcher than a bullpen workhorse, and in an environment where quantity seemed to matter more than quality, his work ethic was a constant source of tension.

Edgerton's background only added to the isolation. The son of a respected New York jazz pianist, he was a child of Manhattan who joined the Baltimore department on a whim after glancing at an ad in the classifieds. Whereas many of those in homicide had spent their childhood on the same streets they were now policing, Edgerton's frame of reference was Upper Manhattan, tinged with memories of visits to the Metropolitan Museum after school and nightclub engagements where his mother would accompany the likes of Lena Horne or Sammy Davis, Jr. His youth was as far removed from police work as a life could conceivably be: Edgerton could claim to have seen Dylan in the early Greenwich Village years, and he later sang lead for his own rock 'n' roll group, an ensemble with the flower child name of Aphrodite.

A conversation with Harry Edgerton was apt to wander from foreign art films to jazz fusion to the relative quality of imported Greek wines—an expertise acquired through his marriage into the Brooklyn family of a Greek merchant who had brought his family to New York after several successful years of trading in the Sudan. All of which made Harry Edgerton, even at the settled age of forty, an enigma to his colleagues. On midnight shift, when the rest of his squad might be sitting together, watching Clint Eastwood fondling the largest and most powerful handgun in the world, Edgerton could be found writing out an office report in the coffee room, listening to a tape of Emmylou Harris singing Woody Guthrie.

And during the dinner hour, Edgerton was likely to disappear into the back of an East Baltimore Street carryout, where he would park in front of a bank of video games and lose himself in a fevered effort to blast apart multicolored space critters with a laser death ray. In an environment where a willingness to wear a pink necktie is held suspect, Edgerton was a certified flake. One of Jay Landsman's throwaway lines pretty much summed things up for the entire unit: "For a communist, Harry's a hel-luva detective."

And though Edgerton was black, his cosmopolitan background, his coffeehouse leanings, even his New York accent so completely confounded expectations that he was regarded as inauthentic by white detectives accustomed to viewing blacks through the limited prism of their own experience in the Baltimore slums. Edgerton crossed up stereotypes and blurred the unit's preconceived racial lines: Even black detectives with local roots, like Eddie Brown, would routinely suggest that while Edgerton was black, he certainly wasn't "po' and black," a distinction that Brown, who drove a Cadillac Brougham the size of a small container ship, reserved for himself. And on those occasions when white detectives needed someone to anonymously call some West Baltimore address to see if a wanted suspect happened to be at home, Edgerton would be quickly discouraged.

"Not you, Harry. We need someone who sounds like a black guy."

Edgerton's detachment from the rest of the unit was furthered by his partnership with Ed Burns, with whom he had been detailed to the Drug Enforcement Administration for an investigation that consumed two years. That probe began because Burns had learned the name of a major narcotics trafficker who had ordered the slaying of his girlfriend. Unable to prove the murder, Burns and Edgerton instead spent months on electronic and telephone surveillance, then took the dealer down for drug distribution to the tune of thirty years, no parole. To Edgerton, a case like that was a statement of a kind, an answer to an organized drug trade that could otherwise engage in contract murder with impunity.

It was a persuasive argument. Close to half of Baltimore's murders were believed to be related to the use or sale of narcotics, though the solve rate for drug murders was consistently lower than that for nearly any other motive. Yet homicide's methodology hadn't changed with the trend: Detectives worked the drug-related murders independently, as they would any other homicide. Both Burns and Edgerton had argued that much of the violence was related and could only be reduced—or,

better still, prevented—by attacking the city’s larger narcotics organizations. By that argument, the repetitive violence of the city’s drug markets betrayed the weakness in the homicide unit, namely, that the investigations were individual, haphazard and reactive. Two years after that initial DEA case, Edgerton and Burns again proved the point with a year-long probe of a drug ring linked to a dozen murders and attempted murders in the Murphy Homes housing project. Every one of those shootings had remained open after detectives followed the traditional approach, yet as a result of the prolonged investigation, four murders were cleared and the key defendants received double life sentences.

It was precision law enforcement, but other detectives were quick to point out that those two probes consumed three years, leaving two of the unit’s squads short a man for much of that time. The phone still had to be answered and with Edgerton reporting to work at the DEA field office, the other members of his squad—Kincaid and Garvey, McAllister and Bowman—would each be handling more shootings, more questionable deaths, more suicides, more murders. The fallout from Edgerton’s prolonged absences had served to push him further from the other detectives.

True to form, Ed Burns is at this very moment detailed to a sprawling FBI probe of a drug organization in the Lexington Terrace projects—an investigation that will eventually consume two years. Edgerton originally went with him, but two months ago he was shipped back to the homicide unit after a nasty budget dispute between federal and local supervisors. And the fact that Harry Edgerton is now back in the standard rotation, pecking away at a 24-hour report on something as menial and undramatic as a suicide, is a source of glee to the rest of the shift.

“Harry, what’re you doing at the typewriter?”

“Hey, Harry, you didn’t handle a call, did you?”

“What is it, Harry, a big investigation?”

“Are you gonna get detailed again, Harry?”

Edgerton lights a cigarette and laughs. After all the special details, he knows he has this coming.

“Pretty funny,” he says, still smiling. “You guys are a fucking riot.”

Carrying paperwork of his own to the other admin office typewriter, Bob Bowman leans over and looks at the headings on Edgerton’s twenty-four.

“A suicide? Harry, you went out on a suicide?”

“Yeah,” says Edgerton, playing the game. “See what happens when you answer the phone?”

“I’ll bet you’re never gonna do that again.”

“Not if I can help it.”

“I didn’t know you were allowed to do suicides. I thought you only did big investigations.”

“I’m slumming.”

“Hey, Rog,” says Bowman as his squad sergeant walks into the office, “do you know Harry went out on a suicide?”

Roger Nolan only smiles. Edgerton could be a problem child, but Nolan knows him to be a good detective and is therefore tolerant of his idiosyncrasies. Besides, Edgerton has more than a simple suicide on his plate: He caught the first murder of the year for Nolan’s squad, a particularly vicious stabbing from the Northwest that showed no sign of going down easily.

It was the first leg of a midnight shift two weeks back that Edgerton met Brenda Thompson, an overweight, sad-faced woman who finished twenty-eight years in the rear seat of a four-door Dodge found idling at a bus stop and pay phone in the 2400 block of Garrison Boulevard.

The crime scene was largely the Dodge, with the victim slumped in the back seat, her shirt and bra hiked up to display a chest and stomach marked by a dozen or more vertical stab wounds. On the floor of the back seat, the killer had dumped the contents of the victim’s purse, indicating an apparent robbery. Beyond that, there was no physical evidence in the car—no fingerprints, no hairs, no fibers, no torn skin or blood beneath the victim’s fingernails, no nothing. Without witnesses, Edgerton was in for a long haul.

For two weeks, he had worked backward on Brenda Thompson’s last hours, learning that on the night of her murder she was picking up money from a stable of young street dealers who sold her husband’s heroin along Pennsylvania Avenue. The drugs were one motive, but Edgerton couldn’t discount a straight-up robbery either. Just this afternoon, in fact, he had been across the hall in CID robbery, checking knife attacks in the Northwest, looking for even the slimmest of new leads.

That Edgerton has been working a fresh murder doesn’t count for much. Nor does it matter to anyone in his squad that he took the suicide call with little complaint. Edgerton’s workload remains a sore point with his colleagues, Bowman and Kincaid in particular. And as their sergeant, Roger Nolan knows that it can only get worse. It’s Nolan’s responsibility to keep his detectives from one another’s throats, and so, more than anyone in the room, the sergeant listens to the banter with the understanding that every comment has an edge.

Bowman, for one, can't leave it alone. "I don't know what we're coming to when Harry has to go out and handle a suicide."

"Don't worry," mutters Edgerton, pulling the report from the typewriter, "after this one, I'm done for the year."

At which point, even Bowman has to laugh.