

Hallways in the Night

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Sample Chapters 1-5

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REVIEWS

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1

August 10th, 2:54 a.m.

SOBER, REMO Centrella would have never tried to make the exit. He was almost past it and driving at over ninety miles an hour. On this night, however, baseball's home run king wasn't sober. He was half-drunk and at the tail-end of an eight-week steroid cycle that made him feel invincible. Instead of waiting for the next exit, he cut his wheel hard to the right.

His eyes were locked on the exit ramp, and he didn't see the 18-wheeler riding in the slow lane. But the woman in his passenger seat did. She saw the truck and realized Remo was about to drive them into the side of it.

"Look out," she said.

Remo turned his head in time to see that the truck was about to block their path to the ramp. Even drunk, he realized they were too close to try and slow down. Braking would just guarantee they drove into the truck, at a point of impact that would likely decapitate them. So instead of hitting the brakes, Remo jammed the horn and drove his gas pedal to the floor.

The driver of the truck, a good ol' boy from Panama City, Florida named Chuck Spencer, heard the sound of a horn and squealing of tires to his left. He turned and saw a red Porsche heading at him with a blonde woman in the passenger seat, who was screaming out in terror.

Chuck slammed on his brakes, and his truck began to jackknife. He knew the smart thing to do would be to re-accelerate to try and pull his trailer back in line. But he couldn't bring himself to do it because he knew it would mean a deadly crash for the passengers in the car. He kept his foot on the brakes and tried to steer his way out of trouble.

As Chuck fought to keep control his truck, Remo swerved his car to the left and cut across its nose.

"Sonuvabitch," Chuck said as he watched the Porsche dart up the ramp to safety. He pulled his foot off the brake and pressed down hard on the gas. The burst of acceleration jerked the trailer back into alignment.

The jackknife was averted. Chuck had regained control of his truck, but now he was struggling to breathe. Afraid he might be having another heart attack, he downshifted and drove off the next exit. He came to a stop at the top of the ramp and pulled out the

pack of cigarettes that was tucked into the front pocket of his t-shirt. He grabbed a cigarette, lit it, and took a hungry inhale.

As the smoke settled into his lungs, Chuck's hands stopped shaking and the tightness in his chest went away. A fresh batch of nicotine began to flow through his system, and his feelings of panic began to dissipate.

"False alarm," he said as he finished the cigarette. He stubbed it out and calmly lit a second one.

As Chuck smoked a fresh Winston, he looked to his right and saw the golden dome of the Georgia capitol building. It was shining brightly in the night sky. Ahead in the distance, he saw the upper level of Wilson Field, silhouetted in light from the interstate. Through his side mirror, he could see the slow stream of highway traffic as it continued to roll through the night, oblivious to the fact a deadly crash had barely been avoided.

Chuck thought about calling the cops, but decided it wasn't worth the hassle. He didn't want to waste a couple hours of time answering questions about a driver who would probably never be caught. And he didn't feel like dealing with a cop who might run his license and find out he had been popped for a DUI three years earlier.

"Screw it," Chuck said and flicked his cigarette out the window. Better to keep his mouth shut and continue making progress towards home.

He looked at his watch and decided he would drive south on I-75 for another hour or two, before checking into one of the economy motels that littered almost every exit between Atlanta and the Florida state line.

It was 3:04 a.m. when he put his truck back in gear and rumbled back onto the interstate. Three miles away, Remo Centrella blew through a stop sign before turning left onto Haywood Avenue.

Haywood Avenue was a quiet street in the roughest part of Atlanta, a section of the city that the Atlanta Police Department designated as Zone 3. It was a mile and a half south of downtown and two blocks west of Wilson Field.

The homes on Haywood were row houses. They had been built without garages, a generation before Atlanta's working class could afford cars. In a better location, yuppies would have bought the houses, fixed them up, and called them townhomes. But no amount of renovations could change the fact that the homes on the west side of Haywood Avenue were adjacent to the busiest stretch of highway in the Southeastern United States.

Both sides of Haywood were lined with parked cars. In the haze of the streetlamps, they looked as worn down as the people who owned them. A couple of the cars were probably stolen, but most were bought from "eazy credit" lots that sold the scraps rejected by the brand name dealers.

Halfway up the street, Dave Mackno, a veteran Atlanta Detective, sat inside a late model Chrysler Sebring. He was near the end of a five-hour stakeout and counting down the minutes until he could go home.

Dave had spent most of his career working in Zone 3, but rarely spent much time on Haywood. From a policing perspective, the street was largely irrelevant. There were no retail shops on it and no foot traffic during the day. On most days, the closest commercial activity came from the hookers and dealers who plied their trades on the other side of the highway.

The only time Haywood Avenue came to life was during baseball season, when it filled up with car and foot traffic on the way to Wilson Field for a game. At 3 a.m. on a

summer night, the street was dead.

Dave looked at his watch. 3:05. Twenty five minutes until he could punch out and get a reprieve from the summer heat. He had been trying to kill time by listening to some Springsteen tapes, but the batteries in his Walkman were almost dead, which made it sound like even the Boss was beginning to wilt in the summer heat.

Dave looked across the street to the house he was watching. Its lights had been off for over two hours. "He's not going anywhere tonight," Dave said as he reached into his backseat and grabbed a can of Bud Light from his cooler.

Dave had originally planned to wait until he was officially off the clock to have a beer, but they had been calling his name for almost an hour. He cracked open the can and drank down a third of it. The beer felt smooth and electric. He placed the aluminum can against his forehead and closed his eyes. As the beer worked its magic, everything began to feel, as the brothers in Zone 3 liked to say, *copasetic*.

Dave tilted his head back against the seat and stared out at the top half of Wilson Field, as it hovered quietly above the neighborhood.

"The Keith," as it was known, was home to the Atlanta Barons, one of baseball's most valuable franchises. They had won three World Series titles in the previous decade and were the pride of the South. Their rise, from a mediocre, second division ball club to baseball's winningest team, had paralleled the region's, as it evolved from the Deep South to the New South.

As Dave looked at the Keith, he recalled some of the games he attended, including a Game 6 of the World Series when Remo Centrella hit a walk-off home run against New York to give the Barons their first World Championship. That game was considered one of the greatest in baseball history, and attending it had been one of the highlights of Dave's life. He had never experienced anything else close to the joyous pandemonium of 55,000 fans going crazy after Remo drove a 1-2 pitch from New York's Stacy Williams over the centerfield fence to win the Series. It was an unforgettable moment from a cold October night that felt far removed from a sticky night in August when the temperature was stuck in the middle 90s.

Dave grabbed a handful of ice from his cooler and dropped it down the front of his shirt. The ice felt good as it slid down his chest, but it was no match for the heat wave that blanketed the city. The local forecasters were predicting it would break the record set in 1980, but Dave had his doubts. He didn't think there was any way Atlanta would ever get as hot as it had that summer. That's because 1980 wasn't just a summer of record heat, it was also the second summer of the Atlanta child killings.

In all the years Dave had been a cop, the summer of 1980 had been the toughest. The child killings, which had become a national story, had inflicted huge damage to the city's psyche. Everybody was on edge. Atlanta had begun to turn on itself, and a visceral sense of evil seemed to permeate the air.

As Dave thought back to that summer, he remembered a similarly hot night when he almost killed a black teenager.

By August of 1980, Atlanta felt cursed. June and July had been brutal as the killer had begun to pick up his pace. Five children had been taken and killed in less than 60 days. It was an average of one kid every twelve days: a fucking nightmare.

No one knew why the killer had entered what one FBI profiler described as an "almost manic stage," but every time a call came through his radio, Dave expected to hear another body had been found.

The killer targeted black kids exclusively, and the African American community was convinced he would have already been caught if the victims had been white. Even worse for the cops working in Zone 3, a rumor had taken hold in the projects that the killer was a white cop using his badge to lure kids into his car.

The relationship between the predominantly white cops and the overwhelmingly black residents of Zone 3 was never good, but as the killings remained unsolved, it deteriorated to the point where regular policing had become almost impossible.

With the city near its boiling point, Dave's supervisor, an old school cop named Tommy Platt, was nervous. The Mayor of Atlanta wanted the police to increase their presence inside the projects, but Platt told the officers working for him to ignore the directive. He was convinced one dumb move by a cop, especially a white one, could trigger the kind of riots that made Watts look quaint.

"Be as visible as possible," Platt told his guys, "but don't get too close. Make sure you're not the one who ignites the fuse."

At just before dusk on the first Saturday in August, Dave and his partner, Bobby Morello, were following orders and patrolling their zone. But instead of patrolling too close to the projects and inciting trouble, Bobby convinced Dave they should head over to Haywood Avenue before the Barons game, just in case the killer happened to be wearing a sundress.

Dave and Bobby were cruising Haywood, profiling potential suspects, when a *BOLO* call came across the radio to be on the lookout for a black male, who had attempted to rape a white woman in the parking lot of the Buckhead mall. The dispatcher said the woman had fought off her assailant, who escaped on a Yamaha motorcycle. Reports indicated the suspect was heading south from Buckhead towards Zone 6 and possibly down into 3.

Dave and Bobby turned off Haywood and started to drive a wider vector in search of the suspect. They were nine blocks east of Haywood when Dave turned his car onto Spruce. As soon as he made the turn, he saw a motorcycle speeding towards them.

As the rider got closer, Dave got a clear look at him. He looked nothing like Dave expected. When the dispatcher said a black male attempted to rape a white woman, he had pictured an older, hard looking dude, not a skinny kid with glasses.

The kid panicked when he saw the police car drive around the corner. He squeezed his brakes too hard and dumped the bike on its side. He should have let go, but instead, he hung on as the motorcycle slid sideways down the street for twenty feet before grinding to a stop between the front tires of the car. A wave of dread passed through Dave as he realized the kid, who wasn't wearing a helmet, might be dead.

He and Bobby jumped out of the car. When they did, the kid popped up and started to run towards a vacant lot that backed up to the rear entrance of Father Paneck Village, the toughest housing project in Atlanta.

Straight up, it would have been no contest. The kid would have left Dave and Bobby in the dust, within the first three hundred yards. But the kid's leg was torn up and he was limping badly.

Dave was sprinting hard after him. He might have caught him, except he was getting winded from his pack-a-day habit and had to slow down. Bobby was trailing behind, running like the second-string catcher he had been in high school.

Dave watched the kid, who was silhouetted against the setting sun, run across an empty basketball court into the center building.

Father Paneck Village consisted of five mid-rise towers built in a horseshoe pattern. They had been configured in a way that was intended to create a close-knit, supportive community, but things had not turned out as planned. Shortly after opening, Paneck's central courtyard, which had been optimistically labeled the "village green," began to take on the dynamics of a prison yard.

Dave had never understood how LBJ's best and brightest could think it was compassionate to bring the poorest people in the South to Atlanta and stack them on top of each other in industrial-looking cinder block buildings. The idea might have sounded good over a hash pipe at Berkeley, but it had been a disaster from the first day FPV opened.

By 1980, Father Paneck Village was as tough as any public housing complex in the United States. Even calling it a village sounded like a cruel joke. That's because kids didn't grow up in FPV, as much as they survived it. It was such a dangerous place that even the killer had stayed away.

As Dave pulled up from his run to try and catch his breath, he saw half a dozen men had stopped what they were doing to stare at him. Even before the "child killer is a cop" rumor took hold, nobody in FPV appreciated seeing a white cop chasing after a black kid.

"Where you at Bobby?" Dave said to himself, hoping the residents couldn't possibly think the killer was actually two cops working together. It took Bobby almost a minute to catch up. When he did, they started walking in lockstep. Both of them were sweating profusely in their dark blue summer shirts as they nodded in acknowledgment to the men watching them.

Dave knew they were in over their heads. The last time he had gone into Father Paneck was to execute an arrest warrant for a gang leader, who was wanted on a murder charge. On that occasion, he was one of a dozen cops, all of whom were dressed out in riot gear. This time, he and Bobby were by themselves and doing exactly what Platt had warned them against.

When they reached building number 4, they went inside. It was silent. Dave pointed to a trail of lightly splattered blood that led to a stairwell. Bobby nodded. They drew their guns and headed up three flights of stairs to a dimly lit corridor. The trail of blood stopped halfway down the hall.

The kid was holed up inside what had been designed to be a public laundry room. The window to the door was missing, and whatever washers or dryers had been there were now long gone.

"Police," Dave said, but the kid didn't answer.

His back was against the cinder block wall on the same side as the doorway. "We found you, Kid. Now come out and make sure we see your hands."

"Don't do anything stupid," Bobby said.

"You ran me over."

"You ran into my car," Dave said.

"Come on out and let's go talk to your mama," Bobby said. "We can get this straightened out."

"Y'all gonna beat me up. I'm not stupid. I know what's up."

Dave looked across the hall at Bobby who was inching forward, ready to pounce. But Dave wasn't ready for Bobby to make a move. He put his thumb up and jerked it back to let Bobby know to ease up.

“We don’t want a problem here, Kid” Dave said. He was breathing easier, but the heat inside the building was oppressive. “We just want to find out what’s going on. Don’t make this worse than it is.”

After a few seconds, the kid said, “Okay, I’ll come out.”

“Good,” Dave said, and wiped his mouth with the back of his wrist. “Drop to your knees and crawl out slowly. Keep your hands out front where we can see them.”

Dave saw a hand break the plane of the doorway. A second one was followed by the kid’s head and shoulders. Before he got halfway across the threshold, Bobby dropped a knee onto his back.

“On the floor!” he said, as the kid let out a painful cry.

Dave stepped forward and pulled Bobby off him.

“Relax!” he said and pushed Bobby towards the wall.

He turned the kid over and saw his lip was bleeding.

“Get up,” Dave said, and picked the kid up with one arm. He saw the kid’s jeans were sliced down the left side. There was blood drying underneath his knee, and black tar marks from the road were seared into the denim. “What unit do you live in?”

“What?” the kid said, looking surprised.

“*Where do you live?*” Dave said, and tightened his grip on the kid’s collar. “This building or one of the others?”

“I don’t live in the projects. I’m from Dunwoody.”

“Bullshit,” Bobby said. “*I live in Dunwoody. There’s no coloreds up there.*”

Dave moved closer to the kid. “Tell us the truth.”

“I am,” the kid said. “I do live in Dunwoody. My father’s an orthodontist.”

“Yeah, sure,” Bobby said. “And I’m George Jefferson.”

“Why would a kid from Dunwoody run into Father Paneck?” Dave said.

“I know some dudes who live here. They told me that cops are afraid to come into Paneck. I figured if I ran in here, y’all wouldn’t come after me.”

“You didn’t think we could trace the bike you dumped?” Bobby said.

“I didn’t care. I just wanted to get away until I could call my father and make sure my rights were protected.”

“What rights?” Bobby said.

“My Constitutional rights, man. I know what white cops do to black men. I knew—”

“You’re not a man,” Bobby said. “You’re just a kid.”

“If I could get home, my father could get a lawyer to defend me.”

“Too late for that,” Dave said. “Now, move. We can call your father from the station.”

Dave escorted the kid by the arm, and read him his rights as they walked down the stairs. As soon as Dave was done Mirandizing him, Bobby said, “Why’d you try to rape that white lady at the mall?”

“What?” the kid said, and looked at Dave pleadingly. “I didn’t try to rape anyone. She dropped her wallet when she walked out of Sears. I picked it up and was trying to give it back to her, but she started freaking out. *Like I was going to steal her purse or something.*”

“Hmm, I wonder why would she think that?” Bobby said.

“I walked up to her and I was like ‘Yoa, Lady, relax, I’m not trying to steal your purse.’ That’s when she started going nuts. Yelling out ‘Rape, rape, I’m gonna be raped.’”

The kid shook his head in disbelief.

“She totally freaked out, man. I tried to calm her down, but then she swung at me.”

The kid pointed to his left ear, where Dave saw a fresh cut, the size of a quarter.

"See that," he said. "That's from her key chain."

"That's called self-defense," Bobby said. "You're lucky it wasn't my sister, she would have maced your ass."

"Why did you take off from the mall?" Dave asked.

"Because I saw two huge dudes running after me, and one of them had a crowbar." The kid turned to look directly at Dave. "They weren't cops, were they? They had no legal right to hold me, so I was like, 'Yoa, I'm out of here.' I hopped on my bike, and that's when I saw a security guard come running out the doors yelling 'freeze,' like he thought he was on TV or something.

"I was like *damn*, all these people going crazy just because some lady freaked out. Part of me thought about staying there and trying to explain what happened, but I knew there was no way they were going to believe me over a white lady driving a Cadillac. *So I took off*. That's when I heard all the sirens. Next thing I know, there's like six cop cars lit up and coming after me from every direction. Crazy."

"Why didn't you go back up to Dunwoody?" Dave said.

"I couldn't make the left onto Peachtree. There were two cop cars coming at me from that direction, so I was forced to turn right. That's when I decided to just out-run them in the City. I was planning to go into Piedmont Park when I remembered one of my boys said cops don't go into Panek at night. I figured if I could get down here, I could hide out for a little while and then head back home when it got dark."

"How much time have you spent in FPV?" Bobby said.

"It's my first time."

"It could've been your last," Bobby said. "The Village Boys don't like strangers that come running onto their turf."

As they reached the bottom of the stairs, Dave gave Bobby a look that said he thought the kid's story sounded plausible.

But Bobby shook his head, "no way."

They opened the door, took a few steps outside and stopped. The half dozen men they had seen on the way into the building had grown to a couple of dozen people who didn't seem to appreciate their crime fighting efforts.

"Where you trying to take that kid?" a tall, older man asked.

"You can't come in here and start taking our kids away, muthafuckas."

"I knew it was a cop."

The crowd was standing about ten feet back from Dave and Bobby. It seemed to be slowly recoiling, as if on the verge of springing forward any second. Dave knew it wouldn't take much, especially within the current environment, to incite them to violence.

"Let the boy go. He ain't done nothing to you."

"Yeah, Crackers, let him go," the tall man said.

Dave gave a sideways glance to Bobby to see if he had any good ideas. He didn't.

The crowd formed a semicircle that didn't leave any openings to pass through. For a brief moment, Dave thought about drawing his weapon, but decided it would likely act as a trigger for mob violence, and that he and Bobby would end up at the bottom of a pile.

Dave took a step back and felt for the door handle. When he did, he heard the lock click. He turned and saw three teenagers inside staring blankly back at him.

“Shit,” he said to himself and moved his hand to his walkie-talkie. His finger was on the red emergency button that would signal “officer down” if he pressed it. The problem was, Dave knew it would take at least ten minutes for the dispatcher or anybody else to figure out their location. Looking at the growing crowd, he didn’t think he had that much time.

2

“THIS KID’S a suspect in the child killings,” Dave announced, in the voice he used for crowd control. “We need to take him in for questioning.”

His statement got the crowd’s attention.

“That him?” the older man said.

“Never seen him around here before,” a woman wearing a blue bandanna said. “He’s wearing glasses, like in the picture.”

“Hold up,” the kid protested. “I’m not the—”

“Keep your mouth shut if you want to get out of here in one piece,” Bobby said in the kid’s ear. “Keep talking and we’ll leave you here to explain things for yourself.”

The crowd was momentarily distracted, and Dave sensed an opening. He pushed the kid forward, and the crowd gave way. Somebody in the crowd smacked the kid in the side of the head.

“Don’t look back,” Bobby said, once they were on the other side of the crowd. “Put a nickel in it, but don’t run. Hear me, Cuz?”

The kid nodded, and the three of them kept walking at a brisk pace until they got back to the police car.

“Stay here,” Dave said.

He went to his radio and called the dispatcher.

“Dispatch, this is Officer 3933. What’s the status on the female victim from the Buckhead mall? Is she available to make an I.D?”

“Negatory, 3933,” the dispatcher said. “She left the scene. She didn’t want to press charges.”

“Repeat?”

“The victim had a dinner engagement,” the dispatcher said, sounding bored.

“Copy,” Dave said and hung his walkie-talkie back up. He shook his head. “Unbelievable.”

He stared out at the kid who looked a lot more scared than tough. “That kid ain’t a rapist,” he said to himself.

Dave walked around to the front of his police car and pulled the bike out from underneath the Crown Vic. The muffler on the Yamaha was dented, and the yellow paint was scratched, but the bike was intact. Dave started it up and revved the engine. The motor sounded good and the tires looked fine. He rolled it to the back of the car and signaled Bobby to come closer.

“I’m gonna cut him loose,” he said.

“You’re what?”

“The victim doesn’t want to press charges.”

“So what?” Bobby said. “We don’t need her. We got him for fleeing the scene of a crime and resisting arrest. That’s more than enough to pinch him.”

Dave looked and saw the kid was trying his best to look stoic.

“I ran the kid over, Bobby. I almost killed him.”

“He fled.”

“You blame him?” Dave said. “And what are you talking about resisting arrest? He came crawling out when we found him. You almost broke his nose.”

“I was just subduing him after he tried to evade us,” Bobby said, his voice raised loud enough that the kid could hear him. “You know as well as I do that this little nigger’s pulled some other bullshit. Let’s at least take him in and run his name. He probably already has a record.”

Dave walked over to the kid, grabbed him, and pushed him into the back seat of the police car. He pointed at him and said, “Do not move,” before he shut the door.

“What the fuck was that?” Dave said, turning back to Bobby. “What are you doing calling this kid that? He’s not a hardened criminal. This kid can barely shave.”

“That doesn’t mean anything.”

“How many kids you know from the hood wearing an alligator shirt? Or call us ‘Officers?’ This kid ain’t a thug, Bobby. He might not live in Dunwoody, but he’s not from FPV.”

Bobby was shaking his head.

“This is a bunch of bullshit, Dave, and you know it. I’m not out here busting my ass in the heat so you can play Father Flanagan. Some punk leads me on a chase, he’s getting clipped.”

“He’s a kid.”

“Who tried to rape a white woman.”

“I doubt it.”

“Why?”

“The lady already left the scene. You think she would do that if she really thought this kid wanted to rape her?”

“He ran from the police,” Bobby said. “He put our lives in danger.”

“He got scared and panicked. I would’ve done the same thing if I was him.”

Bobby spit on the ground in disgust. “You probably would have,” he said.

“Okay, Dave. I’m not going to fight you on this because I’m not in the mood to fill out paperwork, but you know as well as I do we’ll be arresting this kid in the future. After he does actually rape somebody.”

“I don’t think so,” Dave said and started to walk to the back of the car.

“You’re just postponing the inevitable.”

“Maybe. But if you’re wrong, he gets a second chance to avoid a record.”

“He gets a second chance to do it again,” Bobby said, as he turned away from Dave and lit a cigarette.

Dave opened the back door of the car. “Get out,” he said.

“You’re not arresting me?” the kid said.

“Not today, my man.”

“What about the lady at the mall?”

"What about her? I thought you said you were just trying to give her back her purse?"

"I was."

"Then you're good. Get back on your bike and head home to Dunwoody, or wherever you live."

"I do live in Dunwoody."

"I don't care where you live. Just get the hell out of here before I change my mind."

The kid's expression shifted from fear to relief as he scrambled back onto his bike.

"I'd stay out of Paneck if I were you," Dave said.

"Yes, sir."

"And one more thing," Dave said, as he tapped a Marlboro out of its pack and put it in his mouth. "This is a one time pass. Next time we meet, you don't get a second chance."

Dave flipped open his lighter and lit his cigarette. The kid nodded his head and took off up Spruce. Dave watched as the bike fishtailed for a few feet before the kid straightened it out and rode out of sight.

"*Father Mackno*," Bobby said. "You're getting way too soft on these guys. You know as well as I do, he was just shucking and jiving us."

Dave took a drag off his cigarette as he looked up the street.

"I think he was actually telling the truth. He seemed like a decent kid."

"He just knows how to talk to Whitey," Bobby said. "These little nig-nogs know exactly what they're doing."

"You know what?" Dave said as he took an inhale off his cigarette, "if I'm wrong, he'll eventually get sucked into the system. But if I'm right, we did the right thing."

"Don't say we, Bro. That was all you. If it was up to me, he'd be going to jail. Zero tolerance. That's the only thing that's going to keep this city from turning into Zimbabwe."

"I think running him over was punishment enough," Dave said, and flicked his butt to the ground. "Hop back in the car, Jim Crow. First round's on me tonight, okay?"

"That makes no fucking sense," Bobby said.

"What?"

"Calling me Jim Crow."

"What are you talking about?"

"That's what they used to call the brothers, not the white folks. If you want a little education, it's actually a lyric from a black minstrel song."

Dave nodded his head as if impressed.

"Two history classes at Georgia State and now you're Alex Haley, huh?" Dave said and climbed back into the driver's seat. "Must be nice to be such a genius."

"It can be very frustrating at times," Bobby said and winked.

Dave let out a small laugh, signaling that their disagreement was already in the past.

Dave knew Bobby had not been happy about his decision to give the kid a break back then, but he was pretty sure Bobby would have a different perspective if the same thing happened again.

Dave put the empty can of Bud Light back in the cooler and opened a second one when he heard the sound of a high-pitched engine coming up from behind. He looked in his rearview mirror and saw a set of round headlights driving towards him.

Dave could tell the car was speeding based upon its closing rate alone. But before he could turn around and get a better view, the Porsche sped by so close that the inside of the Sebring shook. Dave figured it had to be going at least 80 miles an hour on a street

zoned for 25.

He would have been tempted to chase the driver down if he had been in his own car, but he knew there was no point of even thinking about it while in his wife's Sebring. It had the speed of a heavily pregnant frog.

"It's your lucky day," Dave said as he watched the car drive up the hill.

The Porsche was just about to disappear over the ridge when it surprised Dave by turning right onto Bruce Webster Drive. That didn't make any sense. Webster dead-ended at the main gate to Wilson Field, which meant the Porsche would have to turn around.

Dave glanced at the house he was staking out. Every light in the place was off. There had been no movement since 1 a.m., and Dave was pretty sure nobody was going anywhere until at least the next morning.

"Hasta mañana, Esteban," Dave said, and saluted, as he pulled out of his parking place.

He felt a rush of excitement for the first time in three nights. He floored the car, but the Sebring had trouble picking up speed. "Come on," he said, and hit the steering wheel with the heel of his hand to try and give the car a little bit of giddy up. He wanted to get onto Webster before the driver of the Porsche had the chance to turn around and get back out to Haywood. He would have a lot more leverage if he could make the approach from behind.

No cop liked making stops in the middle of the night, but Dave wasn't nervous as he made the turn. In his experience, truly bad guys didn't drive Porsche 911 Carreras. He figured that whoever was driving the car was more likely to be strapped with gold bracelets than guns.

When Dave made the turn, he saw the Porsche parked at the far end of the street. He instinctively reached for the glove box to take out his magnetic "bubble" light before remembering he wasn't in his Caprice Classic.

Dave drove closer and saw the passenger door of the car was open. A blonde woman was struggling to get out. The driver had a hold of her by the wrist.

Dave honked his horn, and the driver released her hand. The woman, who appeared to be in her mid to late 20s, turned to look back at Dave. When she did, he saw the glint of a fresh shiner underneath her left eye.

Dave felt himself get angry, the way he always did whenever he knew that a woman had been hit. It was an anger he had carried inside of himself ever since he had seen a man hit his mother.

Dave was eight years old when it happened. It was early spring, late on a Friday night, during one of the times his father wasn't living at home. One of the times when his mother used to tell him that "Daddy went out to look for a job."

Dave had been asleep when a loud voice woke him up. He sneaked up the hall, into the kitchen, and crawled underneath the table, where he could get a clear look into the family room.

The man was very tall and thin. He had short black hair and was wearing a stained white t-shirt.

"Come on Darrell, just leave," his mother said. "My little boy's asleep."

"I ain't leaving," he said.

His mother put her hands on his chest to push him towards the door, and the man responded with a hard slap across her face. It knocked Dave's mother down.

"I said I ain't leaving."

Dave stayed stone still when he saw his mother get hit. Part of him wanted to run out and rescue her, but he was too scared. He prayed the man didn't see him as he walked through the kitchen, close enough that Dave could smell the oil on the man's work boots. The man went into his parents' bedroom and started to yell out for Dave's mother.

"Colleen! Colleen! Col-leen!" the man yelled, as Dave's mother lay on the floor.

He then got louder and angrier.

"*Colleen!*" he yelled out. "*Col-leen! COL-LEEN!*"

His drunken voice filled up the entirety of their small house.

Dave watched his mother sit halfway up. She squinted her eyes closed for several seconds, before standing up and walking past Dave towards her bedroom, leaving a heavy trail of cigarette smoke and perfume in her wake.

Dave didn't move from under the table for almost an hour, until he saw the man leave and his mother go back into her room and shut off the light. When he was convinced his mother was asleep, he snuck quietly back to his room, soaked in feelings of guilt and shame.

The next morning at breakfast, Dave saw his mother had tried to cover up the bruise on her cheek with make-up. He didn't say a word, *he was too afraid of her*, and she acted like her usual distant self.

As Dave grew older, he wondered why his mother, a strikingly beautiful woman, seemed to resent him. He had always been a good kid. His father always seemed proud of him, but his mother never did. He never got the feeling that she felt lucky or blessed to be his mother.

It was only when Dave was older, after his father died, that he found out the reason. While helping his mother pack up some of his father's possessions to donate to the Salvation Army, he came across a copy of their wedding certificate. The date said February 11, 1956. *Five months before Dave was born, and a year later than his parents claimed to have been married.* It was a revelation that answered a lot of questions.

Dave never mentioned the wedding certificate to his mother, just like he never mentioned hiding under his kitchen table to her or anybody else, including his wife. But seeing his mother get hit had a major impact on his personality. It was a big part of the reason Dave ended up becoming an MP in the Army, instead of going to college after being offered a baseball scholarship from Appalachian State.

That change of plans happened because Dave assaulted a kid named Ben Cartwright one night while working the concession stand at Crowley's Drive-In.

Dave didn't know Cartwright, who was a couple of years older than he was, and a student at Mercer State. But he knew the girl with him, Stephanie McClure. She was a couple of years behind Dave in high school, and they had been in typing class together. Stephanie was a quiet girl, who seemed embarrassed about being poor. She and Dave had exchanged a few smiles. He thought she was pretty. The kind of girl he might have asked out, if he wasn't going steady.

Dave smiled in recognition when she approached in line. Stephanie smiled back and made the mistake of blushing, which made Cartwright, who was clearly drunk, upset. He smirked at Dave and started grabbing on her. He pinched her ass hard and winked at him.

“Hey, buddy,” Dave said. “Why don’t you sober up and stop pawing on her, huh?”

Ben turned to Stephanie. “This boy a friend of yours?” he said.

“No,” she said and looked down at the ground.

“Then why’d you smile at him? Why are you smiling at some high school boy who’s supposed to be serving me popcorn, huh?”

“I don’t know. I’m sorry,” Stephanie said, while staring down at the ground.

“Well, don’t do it again, ya hear?” he said, while pushing his index finger into her cheek and forcing her head to turn.

Stephanie looked like she was about to cry.

“Sober up, Buddy,” Dave said. “You okay, Stephanie?”

Ben turned quickly and stared at Dave.

“Why don’t you mind your own business and do your job?” he said.

They stared each other down for several seconds until Cartwright slowly turned his large bucket of popcorn upside down. He then dropped the empty container onto the ground.

“Uh-oh,” he said. “I guess somebody better get to work.”

Cartwright laughed and pulled Stephanie by the wrist. “Let’s go back to my car. Popcorn boy needs to clean up my mess.”

Dave came out from behind the concession stand, stepped towards Cartwright, and hit him with a right cross that sent two of his teeth flying into the spilled popcorn. Cartwright’s upper body wobbled, and he fell backwards to the ground. He looked like he had been knocked out for a couple of seconds.

Dave knew he was in serious trouble as soon as he hit him. His boss, Mr. Crowley, had seen the whole thing and called the police. Dave was a new employee and Crowley didn’t have any loyalty towards him. It was Crowley’s first summer leasing the concession stand from the town, and the last thing he could afford was one of his employees assaulting a customer.

Twenty minutes after Dave knocked Cartwright to the ground, two cops showed up and placed him under arrest.

“So, let me make sure I understand exactly what happened,” the Judge said to Dave, on the day he was arraigned. “A drunk kid dropped his popcorn, grabbed his girlfriend by the hand and you broke his jaw. That sound about correct?”

“Yes, sir,” Dave admitted, with his father and lawyer standing beside him in court.

“Well then you, your daddy, and your attorney need to decide if you want to enlist in the United States Army or go to trial on these charges, Son. Y’all got one week to let my law clerk know your decision.”

It was an easy choice and one month later, Dave’s father drove him to Fort McClellan, near Anniston, Alabama, where Dave started training to become a Military Police officer.

Almost thirty years later, he was still ashamed of the fact he never called the baseball coach at Appalachian State to tell him he wouldn’t be showing up at school because he hadn’t been able to control his anger. The same exact anger he now felt after seeing the blonde woman’s black eye.

The woman looked scared as she looked back and forth between Dave and the inside of the car. It looked like she was trying to hear what the driver was saying.

Once Dave could see she was no longer actively struggling, he turned on his high beams. When he did, he saw the silhouette of a man’s head inside the Porsche.

The guy was big. He practically filled up the inside of the car and was making quick, jerky movements. He looked like he might be coked up or on meth. With one sudden reach, he pulled the woman back inside the car and shut the door. Both of them were now sitting still, as if the matter were resolved. As if Dave should simply move along.

Dave inched his car forward into the bumper of the Porsche. He had a feeling that a guy who hit women probably wouldn't appreciate his expensive car being hit.

It was then he saw the license plate: BIG STK44. Dave's breathing got a notch tighter when he read it. *Remo Centrella*.

Even though the Porsche was parked outside the gates to Wilson Field, it hadn't crossed Dave's mind that one of the Barons might be driving. Before seeing the plate, he assumed he was probably dealing with a rich prick from the suburbs who had roughed up his girlfriend. But now, after seeing the tag, he knew who it was.

Remo Centrella was no longer the best player in professional baseball, but he was still the game's biggest star. A four time league MVP, he was the major reason three World Series banners flew above the Keith.

Off the field, Remo was a commercial icon who banked millions of dollars a year in endorsements. A mixed race superstar, he had come along at an inflection point for race relations in America, when a person of color could become Madison Avenue's favorite pitchman.

A father of three, Remo was married to a former star R&B singer named Tiffany Hill. And even though Dave didn't read the tabloids, he had seen enough pictures of Remo and Tiffany together to know that the blonde woman in the silver cocktail dress was not her.

Dave got out of the Sebring, un-locked the safety on his holster, and approached Remo. He held his badge out in front of him, elbow high in his left hand.

"Get out of the car!" Dave said, pointing hard at Remo. "Now!"

Remo watched Dave, who looked like a shorter, less handsome version of Tom Selleck, approach his car. "This is not fucking happening," he said and gunned his engines as a warning for Dave to retreat.

"Take a fucking hike, Bro," Remo said to his mirror. "Don't be stupid."

Dave flinched slightly at the roar the engines made, but kept walking forward toward the vehicle. He was trying to make eye contact with Remo.

"Get out of the car!" he said.

"Yeah, okay, Starsky. Here I come," Remo said.

He turned and looked at Dave. "Fuck you!"

"Fuck me? No, sorry, pal, fuck you," Dave said to himself.

"Get out of the car," he ordered.

Remo turned his head and stared straight ahead. Dave stepped up to the Porsche and put the barrel of his gun against the window.

"Exit your vehicle," he yelled, but Remo didn't move.

Dave knew his options were limited. There was no way he, or any cop, was going to shoot anyone for failing to get out of his or her car. But that normally didn't matter because ninety nine percent of the time people followed orders.

Dave banged the heel of his hand hard against the window. "I said get out of the car."

Remo didn't react. He kept staring forward.

"Get—" Dave began, when his words were drowned out by the night-shattering sounds of Guns N' Roses' *Welcome to the Jungle*.

Remo had the loudest Street Blaster that Dave had ever heard, and the music was so loud it hurt his ears. He had to take a step back to re-center himself as Axl Rose's voice screeched through the night.

Remo turned to Dave, pointed to himself, and nodded his head.

"Fuck you, Remo," Dave said to himself. "Let's see how much shit you talk after you sober up."

He re-holstered his gun and started back to his car in order to call for backup. He took a step backward, his eyes still locked on the Porsche, when the music stopped and Remo drove into the fence.

3

THE FENCE didn't break because of its steel crossbar, but the Porsche put a big dent into it before Remo shifted into reverse and executed a 180-degree turn. The car was now facing Dave and blinding him with its headlights. He drew his gun and assumed a shooter's stance.

Dave couldn't see past the high beams to Remo, but he knew Remo could see him. "Turn off the car," he yelled over the noise of the engine.

Remo hit the gas and the Porsche accelerated towards Dave. He dove to his right and shot at the car as it swerved to his left. His first shot hit the front left tire. A second one ricocheted off the ground, as the front quarter panel of the car started to scrape against the pavement.

Remo tried to keep driving for about twenty feet, but the tire stripped away from its mount. Orange sparks started to shoot off the axle as it spun against the pavement.

Dave jumped up. He saw the woman was once again trying to get away from Remo. She was trying to pull free, but he had her by the dress.

The woman was a lot smaller than Remo, but she was a runner, who had strong legs. It was her leverage and desperation against his strength. Remo's wrist was flush against the door jamb as she used her body weight to try and get some separation. She planted her right foot on the ground and used her left foot to "mule kick" the door into Remo's right wrist. The door hit the bone hard and fractured it. Remo yelled out in pain as the woman sprung loose and ran off into the night.

Dave watched her flee, as Remo climbed out of his car. He looked even bigger than Dave expected.

"Yoa," Remo yelled, in a voice that was deep and hoarse. "Get back here, Girl."

"On the ground!"

Remo clasped his right wrist, and grimaced in pain. "Fucking bitch."

Remo was wearing olive green suit pants and a white tank top that showed off massive arms and shoulders. His upper left arm was nearly covered with the dark blue ink of his "Big Stick" tattoo. As Dave looked at him, he realized the whispers were true: Remo Centrella had definitely been juicing. He was huge and bore little resemblance to the wiry kid Dave had once met, long ago, at a Hooters up in Marietta.

Sizing him up, Dave saw a feral aspect to Remo's eyes that surprised him. He assumed the woman must have seen it, too, because the area around Wilson Field was

not the kind of place twenty-something women ran into by themselves. She must have been very afraid.

All of Dave's senses were now on high alert.

"On the ground," he said. "Now!"

Remo's attention snapped from the girl back onto Dave. He had a look of pure contempt on his face, and Dave had no doubt Remo would have attacked him if a gun wasn't aimed directly at his chest.

They were standing close together, but Dave knew there was enough distance between them that he could click off a couple of rounds before Remo could get to him.

"What?" Remo said, disgustedly.

"Go to the ground, Remo. Now!"

Remo looked at Dave, and his expression seemed to change. It was a little less angry, as if, even under the circumstances, he appreciated the fact Dave knew his name. Remo took his eyes off Dave and looked back across the roof of his car.

"Get back here, Girl," he yelled. But there was no answer.

"Stupid bitch," Remo said. He looked up Webster in disappointment before he turned back to Dave. "What's your name, Brother?"

Dave was shocked at the arrogance. "I said to get on the ground."

"Alright, alright," Remo said. His words were slurred. He put up a hand in front of his shoulder. "You know who I am, now put the fucking gun away....Yoa, let me call my agent. He'll fix this shit. He'll get the car towed, and I'll make sure you get paid."

"You tried to run me over, now get the fuck on the ground."

"I wasn't trying to run you over, Bro. I was just trying to get you to back the fuck up."

Remo let out a small laugh.

"Get on the fucking ground, Centrella," Dave said. He could feel the adrenaline pulsing through him.

Remo was looking directly at Dave. He could see the toughness in Dave's eyes, but ignored the warning signs.

Remo was beyond rich and lived in a world where everybody deferred to him. But he had grown up poor, in a working class neighborhood on Staten Island, where he had developed a street instinct that was now telling him Dave was a lot tougher than he looked. The problem was that Remo's instincts were being drowned out by a dangerous mixture of alcohol, ego, and steroids.

"On the ground."

Remo had been insulated from reality for so long he had forgotten bad things could happen to him, and that the ability to hit more home runs than anybody else on the planet did not actually mean that the fundamental rules of life didn't apply.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet. "How much you want, Bro?" he said. "What's this going to cost me?"

Dave tensed, but didn't flinch. He knew from a visual search that Remo wasn't carrying a gun.

"I said to get on the ground. Now!"

"Don't worry, Bro, Remo's going to take care of you. I'm gonna hook you up now, so you can roll out. But don't worry. Gimme your name and I'll make sure Shane spiffs you real nice. He'll get you some tickets and money. I'll tell him to throw in an autographed jersey. You can sell it on eBay, Bro."

Remo looked at his Porsche and shook his head. "Shit. I'ma have to get a fucking

tow," he said as he began to pull some bills out of his wallet.

Dave swiped hard at Remo's hand and hit the part of his wrist that had been broken. Remo's hand opened in pain, and he dropped his wallet.

"What the fuck?" Remo said, and looked disappointed, as cash and credit cards slid loose across the pavement.

Dave had sprung forward and retreated back in one quick move. He was quicker than he looked, and Remo hadn't seen it coming.

"Keep your fucking money to yourself, and get your ass on the ground," Dave said.

Remo looked down at the ground and shook his head.

"You for real?" he said.

Remo's eyes narrowed in confusion for a couple of seconds, and then he got a slight smirk on his face. His heavy head swiveled back and forth as he stared in confusion at Dave.

"You're so fucked," he said after several seconds. "You know that, Bro? You really think you're going to pull this shit with Remo?"

Remo turned his head to his right and spit.

"This is my fucking city," he said. "I own it."

"On the ground, Remo. Now."

Remo turned his head, spit again, and then looked back at Dave.

"Stupid bastard," he said.

"On the ground."

"You got me, okay?" Remo said, raising his voice. "You fucking got me. I was fooling around with a woman I shouldn't have been, and you caught me. Don't make this into an international fucking incident where you end up losing your job, because that's what will happen, Bro."

"Think about who you're dealing with. I got people that fix shit for me and you don't. That ain't bragging, Bro, that's a fact. You don't even know."

"You hit that woman, now get on the ground."

"That woman? Is she what you're so mad about?"

Remo looked up and to his right for a couple of seconds, as if trying to process what he just heard.

"She came at me first, Bro," Remo said. "But I ain't worried. She'll keep her mouth shut."

"On the ground."

"Stop fucking saying that, dude. You're like a broken record."

"You're under arrest."

"Yeah, right." Remo shook his head. "You got no fucking clue, Bro. You know that?"

"On the ground."

It was the middle of the night, but Remo Centrella looked around as if the world was watching. He tilted his chin up and started bobbing his head in defiance. He was staring up into the sky, trying to deny what was happening. He closed his eyes, like he was struggling to think. It was an amateur mistake in a situation where there was no room for unforced errors.

"You got a fucking choice here, dude," Remo said as he clenched his fist and raised his voice. "What the fuck do you—"

Dave sprung up underneath the inside of Remo's left arm. He hooked his right arm up to the back of Remo's shoulder and clawed his fingers into the side of his neck.

“Shit,” Dave thought to himself. Remo’s neck felt like a tree trunk. Because Dave was spotting Remo so much size, he knew he better get him on the ground if he wanted to keep the upper hand.

Dave shifted his balance onto his left leg. He leg-whipped Remo with his right leg, knocking him off-balance and taking him to the ground. Dave stabbed his right knee into Remo’s ribs.

He grabbed Remo’s right wrist and twisted it backwards. The move forced Remo onto his stomach, and Dave shifted his knee onto Remo’s back. He put his left hand onto the side of Remo’s head and used his full body weight to press down hard. Remo spun reflexively, but Dave moved his knee up towards Remo’s neck and pinned it against the ground.

“Give it up,” Dave said, his voice muffled by his heavy breathing.

With Remo pinned, Dave pulled out his handcuffs and cracked one of the bracelets onto Remo’s right wrist, *the one that was fractured*. Remo swore out in pain.

Dave thought the cuff was locked on, but Remo’s wrist was too big. The bracelet caught, but it didn’t fully lock.

Shifting his body weight, Dave jump-switched knees on Remo’s back. He had Remo’s right arm, *the one he thought was cuffed*, pinned behind his back and was using his knee to drive the metal ring deep into Remo’s wrist. Dave knew the technique caused excruciating pain. He was now using his weight and knees to keep Remo trapped on the ground, which kept his two hands free to try and grab Remo’s flailing left arm.

Dave had the advantage of leverage and experience. He knew all he had to do was get Remo’s second hand cuffed. At that point, the fight would be over. Nobody could fight back once they were in handcuffs.

But Remo wasn’t giving up. The steroids in his system were super-charging his adrenaline. Instead of realizing he was simply being arrested and that Dave would disengage once he submitted, Remo was fighting back like he was in a battle for life or death. He let out another loud grunt, and the skin on his face turned clay red. His eyes looked like they were trying to force their way out of their sockets.

Dave was trying to get Remo’s left arm cuffed, but he couldn’t lean forward enough because he had to use his knee to keep Remo’s right arm pinned against his back.

“Gimme that arm,” Dave said.

He inched forward, but misjudged the distance, and got hit in the face by the back of Remo’s hand. Remo’s World Series ring tore open Dave’s upper lip. He tasted metal as the ring slammed into his mouth, and he felt one of his teeth rip away from his top gum. Blood began to fill his mouth and drip down his chin.

Remo’s arm came back towards Dave, and this time he grabbed it. He clamped onto Remo’s wrist with both hands and started to pull it back over Remo’s shoulder. But Remo was shifting his weight onto his side making it harder for Dave to pull.

Dave was stunned by Remo’s strength. He was using his full body weight to bend Remo’s arm backwards, but it was just barely starting to give. Dave knew he would have the leverage he needed if he could just pull it back a couple of more inches. He almost had the arm cuffed when blood from his mouth landed on Remo’s cheek and began to trickle into his mouth.

Remo started pumping his legs back and forth furiously on the ground to try and get some traction. His suit pants ripped as his legs pumped like pistons against the pavement. Remo was able to rotate his hips sideways, which was enough to make Dave

lose his balance. He planted his knee on the ground to try and get some stability.

With Dave off-balance, Remo pulled his left arm free and brought it underneath his chest. He braced his forearm against the pavement and used it to lever himself off the ground.

As Remo rose to one knee, Dave lost control of Remo's other arm. He was still on Remo's back and began hitting him in the head, but his punches had no effect.

Remo started to spin around. He was reaching back, yelling, and trying to grab the back of Dave's head with his hands.

Dave knew he was in trouble and switched into defensive mode. He tried to get a chokehold on Remo, but Remo pinched his chin down to his chest. Remo bent forward and tried to flip Dave off him, but Dave held on. Remo grabbed Dave's arms and tried to pry them apart, but Dave pulled his hands loose and fell off Remo's back.

Remo was now free and turned around to see where Dave had landed.

Dave wanted to run, but he was trapped between Remo and the fence. Remo's slacks were torn down the front, and blood was running down his legs from his knees. He looked directly at Dave, but didn't speak. He growled and looked down at the handcuff on his right wrist.

Remo spit and yanked it hard. The cuff broke off, and he let out a triumphant yell at what he thought was his display of strength. He was now within ten feet of Dave.

Dave reached for his gun, but it was gone. It had flown out of its holster when Remo had tried to flip him forward.

Remo exploded towards Dave, who sidestepped to his right. Remo missed, but he was able to grab a handful of shirt. Dave tried to back away, but Remo held onto him by the collar. Dave's polo proved stronger than expected, and Remo reeled him in close enough to throw another punch down at his head. Dave lifted his left arm and blocked most of it, but the hit still connected with enough force to get his head ringing. Remo followed up with an off-balance punch that landed above Dave's right ear. It stung, but didn't do any damage.

Remo saw Dave's gun on the ground and made a move towards it. Dave lunged underneath him and had a clear shot straight into Remo's groin. Dave coiled his arm back to release an upper cut. He unleashed it right as Remo stunned him with a roundhouse kick to his head. The kick hit Dave with full force and sent him stumbling backwards. Remo followed up with a fast two-kick combination to Dave's head and midsection that he delivered with a karate style yell.

Dave fell into the broken part of the fence. Remo crouched halfway over him. His knees were bent and his hands were in attack position. He was exultant as he hissed into Dave's face. Remo had seen Dave making a move towards his groin and had been too quick for him.

"I got a black belt in jujutsu, motherfucker!"

Remo wiped his mouth with the back of his wrist.

"Nobody fucks with Remo Centrella," he yelled. "Nobody!....You feeling me, Bro? You feeling Remo?"

Remo picked his right knee up in the air and pulled his hands down across it like he was breaking a bamboo stick in half. He then let out an open-jawed scream as he slowly dragged an imaginary knife across his throat.

4

ON EARLY Thursday morning, the East Coast of the United States woke up to news of a shooting outside Wilson Field. Details were not known, but the Atlanta news desks were reporting that based upon the large number of police vehicles at the scene, it was a serious situation. Initial reports indicated there was at least one fatality.

The headline of a shooting at the Keith was added to the cable networks' morning queue, but it was still just getting a brief mention until the 7:25 local hit. That's when a production assistant for WBC in Atlanta reported to her counterpart in New York City that she was hearing a rumor Remo Centrella may have been involved.

Just the possibility that baseball's reigning home run king might be involved in a shooting moved the story to the top of the list, and the headline was immediately added to the station's ticker. When WBC came back on air at 7:30, the story had been elevated to "Breaking News" status.

Behind the scenes, show runners at the networks demanded their staffs get more information on what happened, but it was tough. Police scanners, normally one of the best sources of information, were not carrying much traffic about the shooting, other than requesting more assets to report to the scene.

At 7:45 AM, the Atlanta Inquirer, Atlanta's flagship newspaper, uploaded a headline on its website which read:

Remo Centrella victim of attempted Car Jacking at Wilson Field. Attacker dead. Centrella transported to Grady Memorial Hospital with life threatening injuries. More information to follow.

Because it was from the Inquirer, the headline was taken as fact and picked up by wire services across the country. The reaction on TV was serious and fast paced. Regular segments were cut, and scheduled guests were told they would have to be re-booked. A shooting involving one of the biggest names in sports was going to get bumper-to-bumper coverage.

In Atlanta, the local media split up between Grady Memorial Hospital and the stadium, while GSN, the 24 hour Sports Network based in Syracuse, was using the temporary quell in the story to discuss Remo's career. Left unspoken, but not unthought, was what impact the shooting would have on the playoff races. Nobody would be stupid enough to say it on the air, but everyone who followed baseball knew it would

be good for St. Louis if Remo ended up being out for the season.

It wasn't until 8:10 a.m. that the Inquirer learned the facts. When they did, they immediately put up a correction on their homepage:

CORRECTION: Remo Centrella Killed. This story is a Correction: Remo Centrella not in surgery. Never sent to Grady. Dead at scene. Shot by off-duty police officer. Police shooter in surgery with life threatening injuries.

In New York City, the Mississippi born morning anchor for SUN News stopped talking to the reporter doing a live shot from Atlanta, and instead turned to address a producer standing behind the camera.

"Are you sure Allison?" he asked. "Are you absolutely sure?"

People watching the morning show only heard one side of the conversation, but Allison must have been sure, and the news must have been bad, because everyone saw the look on the anchor's face grow dark, as he sucked in a long breath and announced, "Ladies and gentlemen, SUN news has just been informed that baseball star Remo Centrella is not, in fact, under going surgery at a hospital in Atlanta."

He paused out of necessity.

"Ladies and gentleman, it is my sad duty to report that baseball's home run king, Atlanta Barons' star, Remo Centrella, has been killed. Gunned down outside Wilson Field, in the early morning hours, apparently by an Atlanta police officer."

A "church bell" sound effect rang as the anchor finished his statement, and a huge "Breaking News" banner came hurtling across the screen, followed by the headline:

DEATH of an ATHLETE: Remo Centrella Shot Dead.

A second year cop named Pete Windham was drinking coffee at a Waffle House when the first call about a possible carjacking at Wilson Field had come through. He had hustled to his car and was the first officer to arrive.

He parked his car, stepped out, and took in the scene. Dave's dark green Sebring was parked with its hazard lights on. Remo's candy-apple Porsche was parked off at an angle, its driver side door open and front-left tire blown out. The front corner of the Porsche was crumpled where it had been dragged across the ground.

Pete saw a wallet with several hundred-dollar bills and credit cards spread out nearby. Looking at the scene, he had no doubt it was a carjacking turned deadly.

As Pete walked toward the cars, he could see a stocky-looking man lying fifteen feet past the Porsche, up against the fence. He looked dead. Next to the Porsche, he saw a pair of black Gucci loafers and tan ankles sticking out past the front bumper. He walked past the edge of the Porsche to get a look at who was wearing the shoes. They were big, so Pete had expected to see a big guy on the ground. He just never expected to see his favorite athlete splayed out dead on the concrete.

Remo's suit pants were shredded, and a sweat stained muscle t-shirt was still tucked into his pants. The gold Rolex on Remo's left wrist glimmered in the night. Remo's neck was turned and his head was resting on its side against the concrete. His thick black hair was matted down, and his face glistened under a glaze of 5 o'clock shadow.

As Pete stepped closer, he saw a thin maroon pool of coagulating blood under Remo's head. Coffee came up into his throat when he saw where Remo was shot.

Pete crouched down like a catcher to try and stabilize himself. As he made the sign of the Cross, he saw the gun that killed Remo on the ground next to Dave. He knew not to touch it before the CSI arrived.

“Where the hell is everybody?” he said.

After an almost five minute wait, Pete heard sirens approaching in the distance and his breathing eased. He turned and started back to his squad car when he caught a glint of movement from Dave’s watch. He processed it instinctively and ran back to help him.

Pete got down on his knees and grabbed Dave’s wrist. He felt a faint pulse. Without moving him, Pete used his thumb to push up Dave’s eyebrow and pry open his eyelid. Dave’s eyes didn’t engage his, but they moved involuntarily in response to his eyes being forced opened.

“Can you hear me, Bro? Bro, wake up,” Pete said. “Come on, Buddy, you hear the sirens? That’s help. Stay with me.”

As Pete was talking to Dave, two ambulances pulled up, one after the next. Pete waved his left arm to signal the driver while his right arm gently held Dave’s hand.

“Priority here,” he yelled. “This guy’s alive.”

Four EMTs jumped out of the ambulances.

“What happened?” the first EMT asked, as she shined her silver mini flashlight into Dave’s pupils.

“Car jacking. Remo Centrella’s dead.”

“No shit?” she said.

The techs ignored Remo. It was a pure triage situation, and under the rules of engagement, dead men got lowest priority. Even if they had been a World Series’ MVP.

The EMT put her hands on Dave’s side to prepare to pick him up, but pulled them back reflexively. “This guy must have been run over,” she said.

“He probably was,” Pete said.

“Let’s hope he makes it to Grady. We’ll see if they can perform some of their magic.”

One of the other EMTs put his hands under Dave’s back.

“No. Keep him curled up,” the lead EMT instructed. “Who knows what might rip open if we unfold him.”

As the EMTs worked the scene, two more police cars arrived. Pete went over and briefed them on what he had seen. They saw Dave being loaded into the back of the ambulance and peered ahead to take a quick look at Atlanta’s most famous athlete.

Once Dave’s gurney was loaded in the ambulance, the siren lights were turned on and they sped away. The ambulance reached the emergency entrance at Grady Memorial Hospital shortly after 5:15 a.m. The paramedics had radioed ahead and a full trauma team was posted at the door waiting to receive him. Because his wallet had slid under Remo’s Porsche during the confrontation, no one knew his name and he was checked in as a John Doe.

By 6 AM, a phalanx of first shift cops and investigative personnel had arrived at Wilson Field, where Remo lay covered under two crisp white sheets. As part of their crime scene investigation, one of the cops pulled Darlene’s registration information and showed it to his supervisor.

Mackno wasn’t a common name, but nobody at the scene made the connection to Dave because everybody was thinking Remo had been shot by a carjacker. It wasn’t until one of the cops on the scene, a third-year guy named Jerry Huffman was looking underneath the cars that he found Dave’s badge. He brought it to his Sergeant, Jimmy

Coyle.

"You think it was Mack?" Coyle said.

"He was shot with a revolver, not a semi-automatic," Huffman said

Coyle looked puzzled. "Why the hell would Mack shoot Remo Centrella?"

"I don't know," Huffman said, before lowering his voice, "but Cowan found a six-pack of beer and a cooler in the car. Two were empty."

Coyle shook his head. "Alright, you know the drill."

Jimmy Coyle walked over to the Sebring. He nodded at the two police officers standing next to it and opened the back door. Coyle leaned in, gathered up the beer cans, and removed the cooler from the car. He then walked back to his vehicle, put the cooler in his trunk, and went back to surveying the crime scene as if nothing had happened. Nobody reacted to what he had done.

Coyle's arms were crossed as he looked around at the other cops on the scene. After about a minute, he called over to a cop who was about twenty feet away.

"Reardon, you know Dave Mackno pretty good, don't you?" Coyle said.

"I do."

"I want you and DeSantis go to Grady and get me a positive I.D. In the meantime, I'm going to send Umphress up to notify his wife."

"Aye, Sarge," Huffman said.

At shortly before 9 a.m., Atlanta's Police Chief, Ronnie Berzanski, walked into the front entrance of Grady Memorial Hospital and called the assembled press together for a statement. Camera clicks filled the air as he began to address the press.

"Good morning," he said, looking shaken up. "I'm here to announce that preliminary reports indicate Remo Centrella was killed by an Atlanta Police officer, who was on duty in an official capacity, in what appears to have been an act of self-defense."

Flashes were going off like strobe lights, and audible sounds of surprise filled the air.

"We won't be releasing the name of the officer until his family has been notified. Obviously, as with any killing involving a police officer, this department, in conjunction with our Internal Affairs unit, will conduct a full and complete investigation into the shooting."

Berzanski paused for a moment to maintain his composure.

"This is obviously a tragic day for the City of Atlanta. I'm fully aware what Remo Centrella means to this community. *What he means to this State.* I know a lot of you will have questions, and I can assure you that each and every one of them will be answered in due time. For now though, I ask the people of Atlanta for their patience and to pray for the full recovery of our downed colleague. He's a veteran of our police department who has committed his life to protecting the people of this city. I thank you very much."

The assembled reporters began shouting questions at Berzanski.

"No questions at this time," he said.

Berzanski put his hat on, lowered his head, and walked out a side door.

Within minutes of the briefing, Dave's name had been leaked to the media. It took about five seconds of soul searching before one of the national news channels announced it on the air.

The decision was probably unavoidable. The networks were in the middle of a "sweeps week," which meant the stakes were too high to risk getting scooped by a rival.

And besides, the producers told themselves, it wasn't like Dave was dead. He was merely in surgery.

It didn't take long before an old headshot of Dave, taken in his dress uniform, became the stock photo shown on almost every channel. Contrasted against the picture of Dave, was a seemingly endless loop of Remo Centrella photographs and videos.

The exact scenario that Ronnie Berzanski wanted to avoid, ending up happening. Five minutes before Officer Umphress rang the doorbell at her house, Darlene Mackno learned from Good Morning America that Dave was undergoing surgery in an attempt to save his life. She nearly passed out when she heard the news. It would be another three hours before a surgeon walked into the chapel at Grady and told her that Dave had survived.

A day after the shooting, Dave's condition improved enough that his doctors announced he had been upgraded from critical to stable.

"Great, more bad news," Atlanta Barons owner, Ray Manning, said when he saw the headline cross. The senior executives with him laughed nervously, even though they didn't think he was joking.

A day earlier, as Remo's body was found outside Wilson Field, Ray had been in Europe with his two oldest children. Halfway through an annual summer trip, they had spent the day hiking in the mountains near Lake Geneva, Switzerland.

It had been a perfect summer day. They were returning back to the Montreux Palace when the concierge met them at the entrance and whispered to Ray, "We've just received some very troubling news from America, sir. One of your players, Remo Centrella, has been hospitalized after being shot."

Ray was stunned by the news, and he and his kids headed upstairs to their suite. He couldn't understand how Remo could have been shot near the stadium. Ray knew the area around Wilson Field was rough, but none of his players had ever had a problem.

"Who the hell would want to shoot Remo?" he asked.

He was in the process of placing a call to his attorney in Atlanta when he heard CNN's International anchor announce, in her crystal clear English accent, "In breaking news from the United States, American baseball star Remo Centrella has been killed overnight by an Atlanta police officer."

"Killed?"

Ray dropped the phone back into its cradle and sat down. He couldn't speak and simply signaled for his son to bring him a drink.

A headshot of Remo in his Barons' uniform was displayed on the television screen above the CNN anchor's shoulder. Ray drank down a large glass of bourbon as he stared at the screen in disbelief. His hands began to tremble as memories from his nearly 20-year relationship with Remo began to flood his mind.

On the field, Ray and Remo had won three World Series titles together. Off the field, they had become close friends. *Sport Magazine* said they had the closest owner-player relationship in professional sports. Close enough that Remo had served as the Best Man in Ray's third wedding. And close enough that for almost a decade, they spent a week together in the offseason fishing the Southern Caribbean on Ray's yacht, *Diamond Money*.

Ray was struggling to process information that felt impossible to believe. *Remo*

couldn't be dead.

He didn't know what to say or do, other than he knew he had to find a way to get back home. His Gulfstream V was parked in Atlanta and wasn't scheduled to return to Switzerland for another week. He had his daughter call the concierge, who arranged for Ray to be flown back to the States on a private jet owned by a Geneva based commodities trader.

Ray didn't get back to Atlanta until almost 2 a.m. He was hung-over and exhausted, but when his alarm went off at 7 a.m. he woke up. Even with jet lag and the emotional trauma of Remo's death, he forced himself to do 30 minutes of cardio on his treadmill before taking a hot shower and heading into his office at the Keith.

Ray had already begun drinking by the time he convened his front office staff to a 10 a.m. meeting to try and figure out a strategy for dealing with Remo's death. Nobody in the Barons' front office was surprised to see Ray knocking back drinks at such an early hour. He had always been a heavy hitter. The fact was, the ability to consume vast quantities of alcohol was practically a job requirement for working in the Barons' front office. If you weren't a drinker, you didn't last. You took a job with a different team, one whose owner hadn't learned to drink on Bourbon Street.

Ray Manning was a 53-year-old Louisiana native who inherited the Barons, along with the Donergy Oil Exploration company, from his father, Chet, who died from a massive stroke at the age of 58. Six foot three, with a square face and fashionably long reddish brown hair, Ray was just 34 years old when he took control of the team.

Chet had picked up the Barons as part of a larger financial transaction and was never willing to spend any money on the team. "They're a good tax write-off," was the way he had once described the team.

But Ray loved baseball and was determined to turn the perennial cellar dwellers into winners. He made his intentions clear during his first press conference when he announced he planned to be a hands-on owner who would do whatever it took to bring a World Series title to Atlanta.

Ray's first major decision was to overrule the team's long-time General Manager and select Remo with the 9th pick in the draft.

Ray had taken a trip north to Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven, where he watched Remo play in a double header against La Salle. Remo went 4-for-7, including two home runs, and Ray came away convinced he had the potential to become a big-time power hitter.

But his GM, a baseball lifer named Jay Perla disagreed. He said Remo was too much of a risk, and that the Barons were going to draft a left-handed pitcher from Arizona State instead.

"Centrella's too slow and he's got the mentality of an ox when he's at the plate," Perla lectured Ray. "He's a middle second, possibly even third round pick at best. If he's around at that point, I'll consider drafting him."

But Ray overruled Perla, reminding him he was now the one signing the checks.

"I know my father might have given you complete control, Jay, but he no longer owns the team. *I do*. So, if you want to keep working for the Barons, you'll be working for me.

"The days of you acting like this is your team are now over," he said. "We're drafting Centrella. End of discussion."

Perla resigned in protest, insulting Ray through the press in the process.

"There's a reason Chet never trusted the kid with any responsibility," Perla said in an

interview with Baseball Digest's P.J. Foley. "He knew his son didn't have what it takes to manage a complex organization. He thought Ray was at least twenty years away from being mature enough to handle the responsibility.

"Chet must have told me a hundred times that he wanted me to continue to run the team if anything ever happened to him. The kid knows it, too. Unfortunately, Ray's the type of kid who doesn't have enough respect to honor his father's wishes. He didn't respect his father when he was alive, and he doesn't respect him now that he's dead.

"He's a know-it-all who is just going to do whatever the hell he wants. That's just who he is. It used to drive Chet crazy. You can mark my words—this kid will turn the Barons into a train wreck."

But Perla had been dead wrong. The pick of Remo turned out to be one of the best decisions the Barons ever made. And it ended up being the first of many picks that gave Ray a reputation for being one of the best talent evaluators in baseball. If anything, Ray's guidance of the Barons proved that Chet Manning had been a terrible judge of his son's abilities.

Remo was the foundation upon which the Barons' dynasty was built, and he was the major reason they went from being a punch line for Chris Berman to the most dominant team in baseball for over a decade. During that run, Remo became baseball's biggest star, and the team became more valuable than Ray's father ever imagined.

That explained why, even though the Barons' P.R. department had issued the requisite press release stating that the team's prayers were with Dave and his family, Ray was continuing to lament that it was Remo, and not Dave, who was dead.

Ray Manning might not have been happy that Dave's condition was upgraded, but Remo's fans were. Not because they were overly concerned about an Atlanta cop they had never met, but because it meant they could now openly mourn Remo without being emotionally conflicted about the fact he might have killed a cop.

Within a couple of hours of the report that Dave was going to make it, a small number of Remo's fans began to make a pilgrimage down to the Keith. Two of the first were a father and son carrying flowers. A reporter doing a live shot for Channel 5 was there when they arrived. The son was a photogenic kid who looked to be about six or seven years old. He had one hand in his father's and the other in his baseball glove.

The son was crying as his dad led him towards Wilson Field's "Ring of Honor." With the cameras rolling, the father instructed his son to place the flowers in front of the mural of Remo. A picture of the kid ended up on the front page of the Inquirer.

Soon after the kid set down the first bouquet of cellophane-wrapped flowers, other fans began to follow his lead. Within 24 hours, hundreds of Remo's fans gathered to hold a vigil and build a makeshift memorial out of flowers, hand-written signs, and Barons' memorabilia.

On Sunday afternoon, three days after the shooting, and five hours before the Barons were scheduled to play their first game since Remo's death, thirty thousand fans piled into a painfully hot Wilson Field for a memorial service. Remo's huge white coffin was displayed on an altar at home plate, while Monsignor Federici presided over a funeral mass.

Highlights from Remo's career were played on the stadium's Jumbotron, while Ray delivered a eulogy that was carried live by GSN and the local networks in Atlanta.

When the ceremony ended, and Remo's coffin was loaded into a hearse, a small flock of news helicopters took to the air and followed its slow procession to Oakland cemetery, where Remo was buried in a private ceremony.

Remo's death marked the end of an era and the beginning of some serious problems for Ray Manning.

5

TWO WEEKS after the shooting, Dave met with a couple of detectives from Internal Affairs, who were in charge of the investigation. His upper body was still in a cast, but his meds had been lowered to a level at which he was alert and could think coherently. Bobby, who had been alternating shifts at the hospital with Darlene, was allowed to sit in on the interview, as a professional courtesy.

Everything about the process was standard operating procedure. Any time a cop discharged his weapon while on duty, an investigation was automatically triggered. And any time a cop actually shot someone, he or she was immediately put on suspension until a full review was completed.

Dave had been through the routine once before, back when he was a younger cop and killed a 20-year-old kid who was in the process of strangling his girlfriend.

Dave had been a police officer for a little less than three years when he shot the kid on a cold night in the middle of December. At the time, he was taking night classes at Georgia State in pursuit of his Bachelor's Degree. He had just returned to his car after a final and was planning to head up to Pop Young's Tavern for some beer and chili, when he heard over his walkie-talkie that there was a possible stabbing in progress at 1949 Kingsley Avenue.

Kingsley was less than a dozen blocks away from Georgia State's campus, so instead of turning left to meet up with some buddies, Dave turned right and headed south. When he pulled up to the row house, he saw the front door was swung open, despite the temperature being in the low 30s. He jumped out of his car and ran up the steps. Once inside, he saw a wild-eyed kid who had a pregnant girl in a neck lock.

The living room of the cramped house had been tossed. A TV was knocked backwards on the floor, and the bottom end of a marble statuette was sticking out of its broken screen.

The girl, who looked close to full term, had gone limp and was dangling like a puppet. Her eyes were open, but when Dave tried to make eye contact, she didn't acknowledge him.

Dave stepped forward with his gun drawn and badge displayed. The kid pulled a switchblade and pressed it against the girl's pregnant stomach.

"Get outta here or I'll cut this bitch," he said.

The girl's black skin was starting to turn grey, and her legs were bent backwards.

"It's cool," Dave said, trying to stay calm. "I don't want a problem. We cool."

The inside of the living room was cold, but Dave was sweating through his flannel shirt. The kid looked depraved. He was wearing tight, acid washed jeans and a blue

nylon jacket with a faux fur collar. His pupils were the size of pin pricks.

"She stole my money," he sniffed. "Took two hundred dollars off me while I was asleep."

The kid was pushing the blade into the girl's stomach without even realizing it.

Dave listened to see if he could catch the sound of a siren, but the night was silent. He looked at the girl and thought she might have stopped breathing.

"Okay, I got you," he said. "It's between y'all."

Dave made a show of putting his gun back into his holster and putting his hands up to show they were empty. "Y'all work this out," he said and started to walk backwards.

The kid sniffed his nose again and gave Dave a couple of jerky nods of his head. He took his eyes off Dave and re-focused them on the girl.

"Where's my money?" he said and raised the knife up underneath the girl's chin.

Dave squeezed off three quick shots, *pop, pop, pop*, towards the right side of the kid's head. The first shot landed in the drywall behind the kid's shoulder, but the second and third shots hit their target. The kid dropped dead, and the girl fell to the floor. Dave ran to her and started performing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation until another cop and an ambulance showed up. When the EMTs arrived, they strapped an oxygen mask on the girl, transferred her to a gurney, and rushed her to Grady. Forty minutes later, she delivered a healthy baby boy by Caesarian Section. Doctors later told Dave and his Sergeant that both the mother and the baby would have likely died if Dave had not started performing CPR when he did.

The next night, the guys on Dave's beat took him out to Pop's to celebrate. Bobby said the department should have thrown Dave a parade for saving a baby and his mother, but the problem was two white cops had killed two unarmed black teens in the previous six months. Because of the political fallout from those shootings, there was no way APD was going to celebrate the death of anybody black at the hands of a white police officer.

Dave didn't care. He didn't think he had done anything different than any other cop would have done.

The Internal Affairs investigation into the shooting of a junkie strangling his pregnant girlfriend was nothing more than a rubber-stamped formality. *It might have been the least controversial shooting in APD history*, but Dave knew the investigation into his shooting of Remo Centrella was going to be a lot more scrutinized.

When the two investigators from Internal Affairs arrived, Dave walked them through the events of the confrontation with Remo. He told them about seeing a fresh welt on the woman's eye and explained he didn't call for backup right away because he had not expected to be attacked.

"It was Remo Centrella," he said. "I was a fan just like everybody else."

He described how the confrontation escalated. "I was heading back to my car to make the call when Centrella tried to run me down. I dove out of the way and shot out his tire. It was a purely defensive measure to avoid getting run over."

Everything about Dave's account jibed with what the investigators expected to hear, and at the end of the interview they confided that a pack of steroid vials and five hypodermic needles were found in a gym bag in the trunk of Remo's Porsche. Official results would take a few weeks to confirm, but initial indications were that Remo's blood samples had tested positive for both Trenbolone, a steroid designed to increase the muscle quality of cattle, and Testosterone Decanoate, a drug known throughout major league locker rooms as "Mexican Beans."

“He was apparently double-stacking the drugs during his cycle,” the lead investigator, a woman with a thick southern accent, told Dave. “We think his personal trainer was the one supplying him. We’re pursuing that angle aggressively.”

“That’s good,” Dave thought, knowing a lot of Remo’s fans would want to make sure somebody was held accountable for his death.

At the end of the interview, the investigators brought in a sketch artist to draw a picture of the woman who had run from the car. Dave gave them as much detail as he could, but the sketch ended up looking like half the women out in Buckhead on a Thursday night.

Three days after the interview with Dave, the police department called a press conference where they unveiled the sketch and announced an arrest warrant had been issued in the name of “Jane Doe.” Now officially a fugitive, she was wanted for multiple charges, including obstruction of justice, fleeing the scene of a crime, and accessory to the battery and attempted murder of a police officer.

When the press conference was over, the police spokeswoman pulled a reporter from the Inquirer aside and leaked the information on Remo’s initial blood sample. The leak was a scoop for the paper’s Metro Desk, and the story was still hot enough to command front-page real estate in the paper’s Sunday edition.

The two thousand-word piece quoted Dr. Stuart Seewald, an endocrinologist from Georgia Tech, who declared, “an eight week steroid cycle could absolutely effectuate a person’s mind chemistry to the point where normal anger was transformed into uncontrollable rage.”

The story also quoted an un-named veteran pitcher on the team who said he had noticed Remo’s increased bulk and shrunken testicles back in Spring Training. The same pitcher said there was no way that Barons’ manager, Nick Katzenbach, could not have known Remo was taking steroids.

“Katzie had to know what was going on. Remo was swinging the bat like he was 27 years old again,” the pitcher said. “Not to mention the fact his head got so big they had to get him a custom-made batting helmet. Everybody in the clubhouse knew what was going on, especially when they started letting his personal trainer have full access to the facilities down in St. Pete.”

The information about Remo’s use of steroids was another black mark on baseball and more proof the steroid era was in full swing. The national media jumped on the reports and demanded to know when professional baseball was going to clean up its act. Without betraying even a trace of irony, many of the same sportswriters who had praised Remo’s resurgence at the plate wrote articles condemning his use of PEDs.

P.J. Foley, the self-appointed Dean of American baseball writers, wrote a scathing article in *Baseball Digest*, in which he declared the use of steroids tainted Remo’s career. He wrote, “It makes complete the pall of suspicion that has descended over this game I still yearn to love.”

Foley said the record books should put an asterisk by each of the Barons’ World Series titles, and that Remo Centrella would never get his vote for the Hall of Fame.

Ray was livid when he read Foley’s article. He had expected the baseball community to rally around Remo after his death, not bring out the long knives. Especially Foley, to whom the Barons had given a ton of preferential access over the years in a tacit

exchange for stories that flattered Ray and the organization.

"It's hard to stomach getting lectured by a guy who's got half the hookers in Philly on speed dial," Ray said to his wife after reading Foley's piece.

He was feeling increasingly under siege since Remo died. In addition to having to work through the emotional pain from Remo's death, which was worse than he expected, Ray also had to contend with the financial fallout from it.

From a purely dollars and cents perspective, Remo's death could not have come at a worst possible time. Ray was more dependent than ever on cash flow from his baseball operations because his oil company was in the middle of a project in Alberta, Canada that was hemorrhaging huge amounts of cash. To make things even worse, the Barons' life insurance company was claiming they did not have to pay out on the 45 million dollar policy the team held on Remo.

Less than two weeks after Remo had been killed, a certified letter arrived at the Barons' offices from their insurance carrier, All-Life Insurance. The letter was a formal denial of Ray's claim to collect on the policy the team had taken out the same day Remo signed a three-year contract extension.

The letter from All-Life was signed by its General Counsel and stated it was denying the claim based upon the insurance policy's "felony clause."

Ray had never heard of a felony clause, but his attorney, Johnny Wiemer, explained it was a standard rider on every life insurance policy.

"Think of it this way, Ray. Guy robs a bank and the security guard guns him down in the process. His widow can't collect on his life insurance. Because of the felony clause, the act of robbing the bank, *a felony*, nullifies it."

"But Remo wasn't committing a felony. He was a victim of excessive force. I've been saying that since day one."

"Emotionally, I agree with you Ray, but from a legal perspective, it's an uphill battle," Wiemer said.

"This is a bunch of bullshit," Ray said as he studied the letter, which included a quote, highlighted in yellow, that Ronnie Berzanski had given to WBC. Berzanski's quote stated, "Detective David Mackno was forced to shoot Remo Centrella in self-defense. If he had not shot Mr. Centrella when he did, Detective Mackno would almost certainly be dead."

"Why the hell is Ronnie Berzanski shooting off his mouth before Internal Affairs finishes their investigation?"

"I don't know, Ray" Wiemer said.

"Somebody needs to tell him to shut his yap."

Ray shook his head in disgust.

"Bottom line it for me, Johnny, they're just trying to force a settlement, right?"

"I called and asked that same question, Ray. I spoke with their G.C. up in Stamford and asked if she had a number in mind."

"What did she say?"

"She told me she could probably get us four million dollars if we signed a full waiver and release."

"Does she think we're stupid? We've been a customer of All-Life since Chet owned the team. They're crazier than hell if they think they can screw me out of money. I'll drag their ass down here to Atlanta and stick them in front of a jury stocked with Baron fans."

"I already have a call into Artie Nierengarten about a lawsuit."

“What did he say?”

Wiemer inhaled before saying, “He wasn’t too encouraging. Artie said that based on the police reports, All-Life’s got the facts on their side. He said we could tie them up in litigation for a few years if we want, but at the end of the day, we’ll probably lose and end up having to pay their attorneys’ fees.

“Which,” Wiemer added, “All-Life will run into the millions. He’s advising against litigation.”

“Tell Artie I appreciate the advice, but remind him that will be my call to make. If he doesn’t have the cojones, I’ll find somebody else who does. Call Ellie Corcoran,” Ray said, and picked up a cigarette from a tin on his desk. “She won’t be afraid of them.”

Ray lit the cigarette as he leaned back in his chair and put his feet on his desk.

“Okay, worst case scenario, Johnny,” Ray said as he exhaled. “Let’s assume they don’t pay. How do we void the contract?”

“Void the contract, Ray?”

“Yeah. Remo left his family plenty of money. Tiffany had millions before she even met him. She sure as hell doesn’t need 45 million more from me.”

Wiemer looked directly at Ray.

“We can’t void the contract, Ray. *It’s fully guaranteed.* Shane Straka insisted on it. According to the terms, we need to pay the remaining amount in a lump sum to Tiffany within 180 days of Remo’s untimely death.”

“Lump sum?”

“There’s an acceleration clause.”

“All you fucking lawyers,” Ray said. “Do they actually teach you this shit in law school?”

Wiemer didn’t answer.

“I don’t have 45 million dollars,” Ray said, after a minute of silence. “I got no cash. Alberta is eating me alive, and Cohen, Wolfe is threatening to call my loan if I miss another installment.”

Ray rubbed his forehead.

“The fucking squids, moving in for the kill now they know I’m bleeding.” Ray stubbed out his cigarette and picked up a printout off his desk. “Look at this. We’re 2-9 since Remo died, and attendance hit another fucking low last night. We’re down sixty five percent from July. I was already bleeding red ink from Canada, and now I’m losing money on my cash cow.”

Ray shook his head as he studied the spreadsheet.

“I got another ten million due to Cohen, Wolfe in a week, and I’m not going to be able to make it. I’m completely illiquid. All my equity is either tied up in the club or buried in the ground in Canada. That means I’m looking at a default. You’re looking at the brokest billionaire in the United States.”

Ray stood up and walked slowly towards the large window of his office that looked down onto the field.

“There’s no way I can come up with 10 million for the Wolfe and 45 million for Tiffany Hill. I’d have to shut down Alberta, which would end up bankrupting me.”

“What about an equity raise against the team?” Wiemer said. He knew Ray wouldn’t want to hear it, but he felt bound, as a fiduciary, to bring up all the options he could think of.

“Tapped out. I already borrowed a hundred million against my share last year for

phase two of Alberta. The rest of it's either cross-collateralized or in trusts I can't borrow against. I got one too many divorces on my resume. The only way I can get access to any more equity is if Monica agrees to re-structure Chandler's share, or if I sell a controlling stake in the team to a non-affiliated third party. Neither one of those scenarios is an option. Monica still isn't speaking to me, and I'll never sell a controlling interest in the team."

Ray stared down at the field for several minutes.

"Alright, here's the plan," he said, after several minutes. "Don't acknowledge the letter until I speak to Cutter directly. I'll convince him to honor the policy. We can get Dale Agee involved if we have to. I'll have him threaten to drop All-Life as a sponsor if they don't follow through on their commitments."

"Okay, I'll sit tight until further instructions," Wiemer said and stood up to leave.

As Johnny Wiemer walked out of Ray Manning's office, he thought about how Ray's call to the Commissioner of baseball might go. It had only been a few months since Ray told the *Sporting News* he thought Dale Agee was the least competent executive in all of professional sports.

The pull quote, which GSN had highlighted throughout a full 24-hour news cycle, was when Ray said the Commissioner had done such a lousy job negotiating the last collective bargaining agreement, that he doubted if Agee "could convince the Pope to go to church on Sundays."

End of Sample.

I hope you enjoyed reading the first 5 chapters of Hallways in the Night and that it has convinced you to read the rest of the book. Hopefully this sample gives you confidence that the rest of the book will be engaging and that it will hold your attention throughout.

If you decide to purchase the book, you'll find out what happens to Dave and there will be several plot twists and some additional interesting characters along the way.

Any questions, please feel free to email me at rcowriting@gmail.com

Also, as an independently published author, the best compliment I could get would be if you recommend the book to another reader.

Thanks so much for reading and enjoy the rest of the book!

Sincerely yours,

R.C. O'Leary