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# MARSHALL KARP



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# NYPD RED 7

THE MURDER SORORITY

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—JAMES PATTERSON

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# CHAPTER 1

**MY PHONE CHIRPED**, and I looked down at the gray text bubble on my screen. It was from Selma Kaplan at the District Attorney's Office. The message was one I had seen or heard hundreds of times over the course of my career as a cop. Six words that I knew had the power to change people's lives. What I didn't know—what I could not even have possibly imagined—is that this time those words would change my life. Forever.

THE JURY HAS REACHED A VERDICT.

I looked up at my partner, Detective Kylie MacDonald, who had gotten the same text. "It's about goddamn time," she said. "How long have they been sequestered? A week? A month? A year?"

"Four and a half days," I said.

"It doesn't matter, Zach," she said. "You know how it goes. The longer the jury deliberates, the worse it is for our side. Convictions come fast. Acquittals take forever."

"Four and a half days isn't forever."

"It is this time. Our testimony was airtight. Selma's closing

was brilliant. The case was a slam dunk. If they were going to find him guilty, they could have done it in four and a half hours.”

“Ye of little faith,” I said, grabbing a radio. “Let’s go. Judge Hollander isn’t going to wait for us.”

“Twenty bucks says Hellman walks,” Kylie said.

“You’re betting *against* us?”

“I’m betting with my head, Zach, not my heart,” she said as we headed down the stairs. “Warren Hellman is filthy rich and has the power to turn ordinary mortals into superstars. There were five women on the jury, and he was eyeball-fucking every one of them. Juror number seven barely looked at me when I testified. She just gawked at him. She probably went home every night, flipped on the TV, and masturbated to his reruns. If anybody turned the jury, it was her.”

A minute later we were speeding toward the Manhattan Criminal Courthouse at 100 Centre Street. Normally we’re too busy to drive downtown and sit through the proceedings just to hear the verdict read. We wait for a call from the DA’s Office and win or lose, we move on without missing a beat.

But this was different. This time it was personal, and we both wanted to be there when Warren Hellman went down. He’d killed a cop.

The first time I met Jonas Belmont, I was working in the Three-Two up in Harlem. I was a rookie, and he was a legend—a detective first grade with more medals of honor than anyone in the history of the department.

That night, I brought a homeless guy into the station. The desk sergeant got one whiff of the man and asked me what the charges were.

“He was jaywalking, sir.”

The sergeant exploded. “Are you fucking serious, Jordan? Give that bag of shit a summons and get him the hell out of here.”

“I will, sir,” I said, “but if I could just talk to a detective for two minutes.”

“Get him out of here,” the sergeant repeated. “Now.”

I started to leave when a voice boomed out. “Hold it right there, Officer.”

I turned around. A hulk of a man was walking toward me. Six six, ginger hair, muscled chest straining against his suit jacket, and steel-blue eyes that were lasered in on me and my homeless persona non grata.

“Detective Jonas Belmont,” he said.

I knew who he was. Everybody knew who he was. “Jordan, sir. Zach Jordan.”

“How much time do you have on the job, kid?” he said.

“Two years next month, sir.”

“And how many foul-smelling, raggedy-ass jaywalkers have you arrested?”

“This is my first, sir.”

“And I’m betting you’re smart enough to know he doesn’t have the means to pay for a summons even if you slapped him with one.”

I felt a smile coming on, but I held it back. Belmont was on my wavelength. He knew what I was up to, and he was ready to inform the sergeant that he was about to join the party.

“You’re going to have to hold your nose a little while longer, Hank,” Belmont said, “This astute young officer and I are going to take this egregious jaywalker upstairs for questioning.”

The sergeant gave him a sour stare. “You working traffic violations now, Detective Belmont?”

Jonas pointed at the derelict’s feet. “The shoes, Sergeant. The shoes.”

The man, a human dumpster from his head to his ankles, was wearing a brand-new pair of rich brown Ferragamo alligator

leather oxfords. As soon as I saw him shuffling across Broadway against the red light, I figured they had to cost a thousand bucks. I was wrong. They were twelve thousand, and two days earlier they had been inside a suitcase that disappeared from a taxi rank outside the Pierre Hotel.

Belmont took it from there, and I watched in awe from the other side of the two-way mirror as he sweet-talked a confession out of the man and got him to give up the name of the pawnshop that was dealing in stolen luggage.

When he was done, he gave me his card. “Good job, kid. Keep in touch.”

Did I ever, hanging around the squad room like a fanboy. Even after he retired, we stayed friends, and every couple of months I’d meet him for dinner and listen to him tell war stories and, of course, brag about his kids.

Evan, who had always wanted to be a cop like his dad, was now a detective working out of the Tenth Precinct in Manhattan. Vivian, who’d had the acting bug ever since she was a kid, had followed her dream to the High School of Performing Arts, then NYU, and was now out there occasionally landing a small part and waiting tables at a restaurant near Lincoln Center, hoping for her first big break.

And that’s where she met Warren Hellman. It started with a simple “Here’s my card. Call my office.” Then came the audition. She was perfect to star in his upcoming series. But of course, other young women were also perfect. The way Hellman spun it, beauty and talent were just the cost of entry. If he was going to work with an actress week in, week out, for the next five years, he had to make sure they had chemistry.

Vivian knew what that meant. Fuck the producer; become a star. The classic show business *quid pro quo*. She didn’t hesitate.

It was heady at first. Restaurants, clubs, paparazzi, a key to

his suite at the Sherry-Netherland. She knew there was a price to pay. Sex with a man who repulsed her in every way. But she could do it. She was an actress, and his bedroom was just another stage. The alcohol and the cocaine helped.

The heroin came later. One night she was soaking in the tub, a glass of champagne at her side. The bathroom door opened. "I'm Jeff," the man said. "Warren had to go to London. He sent me."

"For what?"

"To keep you company till he gets back," he said, peeling off his clothes.

"Jeff, please . . . I think . . ."

"No," he said. "You don't think. Warren doesn't want you to think. That's not part of the deal."

He stood there naked except for the gold wedding band around his pudgy ring finger. "I'm an executive producer on the new show. The networks love the premise, love you, but they're screaming for script changes before they sign off. Fuck-ing networks, right?"

He produced a glassine envelope and tapped some powder onto the edge of the tub. "Help yourself."

She put her finger to one nostril and snorted the white line with the other. Nothing. He licked his lips, waiting. And then it hit her. It was like nothing she'd ever felt before. Her body slipped back into the tub as the first wave of heroin bliss enveloped her. She felt his hand between her legs.

"Beats the piss out of cocaine, doesn't it, sugar?" he said, sliding into the tub with her.

She couldn't stop him. She didn't want to stop him. She never felt so good in her life.

Three months later, hooked on heroin, forcibly removed from the hotel suite, unable to face her friends and family, Vivian Jean Belmont went down into the Columbus Circle subway

station and threw herself in front of a moving train. The last dozen calls on her cell phone were all to Hellman. He never picked up. He was three thousand miles away in Hollywood, no doubt exploiting the dreams of other young beautiful women.

A month later Kylie and I were called to a town house on East Seventy-First Street. An intruder had broken in, and the homeowner had shot him in self-defense. The shooter was Warren Hellman.

My knees buckled when I saw the body. The man sprawled on the rug with a bullet through his head was my friend, my mentor, my hero: Jonas Belmont.



## CHAPTER 2

**THERE ARE THREE CLASSES** of people in New York City: the haves, the have-nots, and the most rarefied of them all, the have-lots. They are the superrich, the overprivileged few, the 1 percent of the 1 percent. Of course, there's a downside to having all that money. A lot of people want to get their hands on it.

One of those people was Stanley Spellman, our former mayor. Stanley came up with an ingenious plan for winning the love and financial support of his richest and most powerful constituents. He ordered the police commissioner to create a special squad dedicated to solving crimes committed against them.

And so NYPD Red was born. Mayor Spellman lost his bid for reelection, but by then the Red team had made its mark, and the new mayor wasn't about to deprive the city's movers and shakers of their elite task force.

On the night that he shot and killed Detective Jonas Belmont, Warren Hellman made two calls. One was to 911. The system identified Mr. Hellman as one of New York's platinum frequent flyers, and his case was routed to NYPD Red.

When Kylie and I arrived at the house, Sonia Blakely, Hellman's lawyer, met us at the front door. She was the first call he had made, and phone records would verify that there was a ninety-two-minute gap between the time he called her and the time he reported the crime. A solid hour and a half for the two of them to concoct a believable story.

She led us to Hellman's office, where Chuck Dryden and his crime scene investigators were already at work. Kylie pulled Chuck aside while I knelt beside Jonas, whose ginger hair was now caked with dark-red blood, his blue eyes fixed in a death stare.

"His name is Jonas Belmont," I said to Blakely. "He was a police officer."

"I know who he is, Detective, and don't try to hide that man behind a badge," she said. "He's a deranged psychopath."

I knew her reputation. I'd seen her in court. She's a barracuda who attacks perfectly reliable witnesses, chews them up, and decimates their testimony. Her favorite defense tactic is to vilify the victim, and she wasted no time in creating the myth that my dead friend was a monster.

I stood up. "Counselor," I said, my jaw clenched, "Jonas Belmont was a decorated cop."

"Of course he was. That's the culture at NYPD. Kill someone, get a medal. So why stop just because he retired? Your *hero cop* came here to murder my client."

She was baiting me to do or say something I'd regret, and I might have if Kylie hadn't stepped in.

"Is your client okay?" she asked. "Does he need medical attention?"

Kylie almost never plays the good cop. It doesn't matter who she's up against. She doesn't kiss ass; she butts heads.

"We can have an officer drive him to a hospital," she said, gilding the lily.

“That won’t be necessary,” Blakely said. “He’s in the living room trying to regain his composure.”

“I’m sure he’s in shock, and the last thing he wants to do is rehash what happened,” Kylie said. “But as you know, the best time to talk to him is now while the details are still fresh in his mind.”

“Right,” Blakely said, leading the way. “But make it brief.”

Warren Hellman was sitting in a wing chair, regaining his composure with the aid of a bottle of Johnnie Walker Blue.

“It was self-defense,” he said as soon as we entered the room. “He came at me with a gun. He was going to kill me.”

“Calm down, Warren,” Blakely said. “Let the detectives ask the questions, and then you answer them to the best of your ability.”

“Oh, yeah, right,” he said, which I took to mean he’d already forgotten the ground rules she laid out for him earlier.

“Let’s start with how you discovered the man was in your house,” Kylie said.

Hellman gave her a vacant look. “I didn’t discover him. He rang the doorbell, said he was a cop and he wanted to talk to me, so I let him in.”

“Oh, I was confused,” Kylie said, “because you told the 911 operator that he was an intruder. Now you’re saying you invited him in.”

“Stop right there, Detective,” Blakely said. “The man rang the bell, flashed a badge, and my client did what any law-abiding citizen would do. He *granted* him entry. But he was a total stranger, not an invited guest. He used his police credentials the same way a burglar would use a crowbar. He *was* an intruder.”

“I understand,” Kylie said. “Did he say what he wanted?”

“Yes. He was here to serve me papers. He was suing me for the wrongful death of his daughter. I . . . I was dumbfounded.

I said that's impossible. Who is your daughter? He told me her name—Vivian Belmont.”

“Did you recognize the name?”

“I did. She was a wannabe actress. Not very good at all, but I didn't want to tell him that, so I said I never heard of her. That was my mistake. He went berserk and started screaming, ‘You killed my daughter, and now you're going to deny even knowing her?’ He pulled a gun from his waistband. He was standing between me and the door. I had nowhere to run. I was in fear for my life, but I knew I had a gun in my desk drawer.”

“It's perfectly legal,” Blakely said. “I can get you the permit.”

Kylie ignored her. “Go on, Mr. Hellman.”

“I backed away and sat down in my desk chair, sobbing, begging for my life. I said, ‘You're a police officer. How can you do this?’ He said, ‘The best thing about being a cop is getting away with murder,’ and he began to move toward me. I reached into the drawer, pulled out my gun, and I shot him.”

“Which drawer was your gun in?” Kylie asked.

“Bottom right drawer of my desk.”

“And you keep it loaded?”

“Yes.”

“Thank God for that,” Blakely said.

“So you backed away from the assailant, sat down in your chair, pleaded with the man not to shoot you, but he kept advancing toward you, so you opened that bottom right drawer, pulled out the gun, and shot him,” Kylie said. “Is that basically it?”

“Yes,” Hellman said. “That's exactly it.”

“Detective, I think you got what you came for,” Blakely said. “My client has cardiac issues. He's been through enough stress for one night.”

“Absolutely,” Kylie said. “Your client's well-being is our primary concern. If you give me your card, someone from the

District Attorney's Office will want to speak to you tomorrow. I think it best if Mr. Hellman finds another place to spend the night. Our crime scene people will be here for several hours. Thank you so much for your help."

Blakely handed over a business card, and Kylie and I returned to Hellman's office.

*"Your client's well-being is our primary concern? Thank you so much for your help?"* I said. "What happened to the nasty-ass cop I used to work with?"

"Have no fear," Kylie said. "She's back, and she's going to nail that dirtbag's balls to the wall." She bared her teeth. "One at a time."

She wiggled a finger at Chuck Dryden, who has a not-so-secret crush on my blond, green-eyed partner, and he came right over, thrilled to be the man she wanted, even if it was strictly professional.

"Chuck, tell Zach what you told me," she said.

"Well, this is strictly preliminary. Nothing official," he said, giving his standard disclaimer. "The weapon that killed Detective Belmont is a Glock 9mm Model 43. The bullet penetrated his head, just above the left eyebrow at about a forty-five-degree downward angle. The autopsy will give us the exact trajectory."

"Which means that Hellman, who is at least eight inches shorter than Jonas, could not have been sitting in his chair pointing the gun up at him," Kylie said. "He was standing up, aiming down. My best guess is, Hellman pulled the gun, and Jonas bent down to retrieve his from his ankle holster."

"He never got to it," Dryden said. "Detective Belmont's weapon, a Smith & Wesson .38 special, is still in the holster."

"But Hellman said that Jonas pulled a gun from his waistband and came at him with it," I said.

"That would be the Taurus .357 Magnum Model 65 that

was found next to the body. It hadn't been fired," Dryden said, "and I would be surprised if Detective Belmont had it in his waistband. It's a heavy gun, and he wasn't wearing a belt that would secure it."

The story that Warren Hellman and his attorney had slapped together was full of holes, and three days later the DA's Office decided they had a strong case against him, and he was charged with murder two.

He spent one night in jail and the next ten months confined to his home, an electronic monitor strapped to his ankle. The trial took three weeks, and the jury was out for almost another five days.

Nearly a year had passed since the deaths of Vivian and Jonas Belmont, and as Kylie pulled the car into an illegal space two blocks from the courthouse, I was more than ready for the verdict.

What I wasn't ready for was the shitstorm that would follow it.

## CHAPTER 3

**THE TRIAL HAD BLOSSOMED** into a media circus. The private tragedy that had befallen the Belmont family had turned into a public spectacle. Centre Street was lined with satellite trucks, and Collect Pond Park, the tranquil urban green space that sits directly opposite the courthouse, had given up its serenity for as many as fifty camera crews, all jostling for position to get the best shot of the key players as they entered the building for their day of reckoning.

The first row of the gallery on the prosecutor's side was reserved for family and friends, and Kylie and I sat down next to Jonas's son and daughter-in-law, Evan and Trish. Next to them were five cops, all retired—Jonas's crew from back in the day.

Normally, fewer than half a dozen court officers are on hand. Today, I counted twenty-eight lining the walls, and there was another contingent in the hallway outside.

Every seat was filled. Noticeably absent was Warren Hellman's brother Curtis. Three years ago, Curtis was also responsible for the death of a young actress. According to TMZ, he picked

up the woman at a party in LA and invited her to drive with him to his house near Joshua Tree National Park.

Starstruck and high on coke, she said yes. Two hours later, Curtis pulled over onto the side of a dark desert highway, yanked her out of the car, and sped off. Her body was found the next morning. Cause of death: snakebite.

The rest of the details were sketchy because he paid her family three million dollars for their silence, but the smart money says that he wanted sex, she said no, so he dumped her on the side of the road because nobody says no to the king.

It was Sonia Blakely's decision to keep Curtis out of the spotlight. During the trial, she had painted a grim picture of Jonas. He was a failed father whose daughter grew up to be a hopeless junkie—a gun-happy cop who would rather settle a dispute with a bullet than with a law book. The last thing Sonia needed in the courtroom was for Curtis to show up and remind the jury of the evil that coursed through the Hellman family bloodlines.

Instead, she made sure that the gallery was peppered with Hollywood's biggest and brightest. The entourage changed daily, and it had to have an effect on the jury. If these superstars support Warren Hellman, how bad can he be?

The bailiff announced, "All rise," and the assemblage stood as Judge Mark Hollander entered the room.

I liked Hollander. He was fair, impartial, and less of a hard-ass than most. He took the bench. "Please remember that this is a courtroom," he said. "I respect that emotions are high, but I will tolerate no outbursts from the gallery."

It was a standard speech at the close of any case as charged as this one. The crowd was divided. No matter what the outcome, a lot of people were going to be unhappy. Outbursts were inevitable, and I suspected Hollander would bang his gavel, but he would let the crowd have their moment.



The jury filed in, and finally, the moment of truth had arrived. “Will the forewoman please read the verdict?” Hollander said.

The woman, a fifty-year-old professor at Baruch College, stood up. “In the case of the People of the State of New York versus Warren Hellman,” she said, her voice shaky, her pitch high, “we the jury find the defendant not guilty.”

Bedlam. The zero-tolerance speech forgotten. The rapping of the judge’s gavel echoed through the chamber.

Selma Kaplan, the prosecutor, who had done an outstanding job, buried her face in one hand and shook her head. I closed my eyes and felt that gut punch of emotions cops go through when they know the charge was good, but a person of wealth and power has beaten the system.

But Evan Belmont couldn’t keep his outrage to himself. He jumped to his feet, waving his fist at the jury. “How could you!” he screamed. “My father dedicated thirty-five years to protecting this city. And this is the payback he gets?”

Hollander had had enough. “Officers,” he yelled above the din, “remove Detective Belmont from my courtroom!”

Two officers approached. Evan held his arms up in surrender, turned, took his wife’s hand, and walked down the aisle and out of the room. Kylie and I, along with the five retired cops, joined him in solidarity.

We followed him out of the courthouse into the bright summer sunshine. A podium and a phalanx of microphones had been set up, and a swarm of reporters who now knew the verdict began yelling questions, none of which were worth responding to.

Evan stepped up to the podium, and the noise died down.

“My father always left this courthouse knowing he did the best he could for the victims he was representing. But today that didn’t happen for him,” he said. “My father did not go to Warren Hellman’s house that night to kill him. He went there to expose

him, to tell him that my sister Vivian's tragic death was on his hands and that he would dedicate his life to finding every woman whose lives Hellman destroyed, and bankrupt him in civil court. Hellman's response was to shoot my father in cold blood."

"Why do you think the jury found him not guilty?" a reporter yelled out.

"Hellman is a Hollywood showman," Evan said. "He lied, and despite the prosecution's brilliant job of refuting those lies, the jury bought it. My family and I are heartbroken, and I'm sure that many New Yorkers who knew and respected the legend of Detective Jonas Belmont are equally devastated."

A barrage of questions, but Evan waved them off. He'd said his piece. Just as he finished, there was another roar from the crowd.

Warren Hellman and Sonia Blakely, flanked by a cadre of Hollywood royalty, exited the courthouse and walked toward the media frenzy.

Hellman, smiling, ebullient, took center stage. Two fingers of each hand were raised high in a V, and he stood there beaming, obnoxiously victorious, without a trace of humility or concern for the lives he had crushed.

"He got away with murder and he's proud of it," Kylie said to me.

He stepped up to the microphones. "This has been quite an ordeal for my family and me," he said. "But justice has prevailed. I'd like to thank my attorney, Sonia Blakely, and her outstanding team, and I'd especially like to express my gratitude to the twelve men and women—a jury of my peers—who believed in my innocence. Thank you for giving me my life back."

Bullets can travel faster than the speed of sound, so I saw the geyser of blood erupt from his neck a split second before I heard the gunshot.

Kylie and I instinctively hit the ground, drawing our pistols, scanning the surroundings for the shooter, and scrambling for cover before the next bullet ripped through the air. But there was no second shot.

“Thank you for giving me my life back” would be Warren Hellman’s last words. His life was over even before his body crumpled to the ground. And while we didn’t know it at the time, the assassin, wherever he was hiding, was already breaking down his weapon and following through with his exit strategy.

The crowd, conditioned by mass shootings over the years, ran for their lives. People in the courthouse evacuated out the back. Judges were secured in windowless offices. Within ten minutes, NYPD had locked everything down, and the area was secured.

There were no eyewitnesses who could help us pinpoint where the bullet came from, but half a dozen earwitnesses all agreed that it came from somewhere north of the courthouse.

A team of cops fanned out to canvass the area. Kylie and I zeroed in on the nine-story office complex on Centre Street between White and Walker. At least two dozen people were standing outside.

As soon as they saw the shields on our lapels, several of them pointed at the roof.

“The gunshot came from up there,” one man said.

“What did you see?” I asked.

“Nothing. But I heard it loud and clear. I was in the waiting room at the dentist’s office on the ninth floor. It definitely came from the roof.”

“Did you go up there?”

“Hell, no. I raced down nine flights of stairs. I’m an accountant. Going up there is your job, man.”

I nodded. I was going up there. But I sure as hell wasn’t going alone.

## CHAPTER 4

**THERE WERE AT LEAST** a hundred cops on the street. Kylie saw the one she was looking for. “Captain!” she yelled.

He turned and glowered at her. This man was not used to being barked at.

“Sir,” she said, “Detectives MacDonald and Jordan from Red.”

Red was the magic word. He walked toward us, the scowl fading rapidly.

“Sir, we believe the shot came from the roof of this building. Can we get some backup?”

“What do you need, Detective?”

“A team to cover the lobby. Nobody comes in. Anybody wants to leave, they get searched. A floor-by-floor canvass and another team to accompany us up to the roof.”

Within seconds, dozens of uniformed police poured into the building. Six got in the elevator with us. We drew our guns, got off on the eighth floor, and took the stairs to the roof.

Kylie and I weren’t wearing vests, so two of the uniforms took the lead.

The rooftop door was open. “The screamer’s been disabled,”

one of the cops said, pointing at the wires dangling from the alarm.

Whoever killed Warren Hellman had silenced the security system, found his position on the roof, and taken the shot from here. Odds were, he didn't stick around for the cops to show up, but we weren't taking any chances.

My adrenaline kicked up a notch. I split the eight of us into four teams and hand-signaled the game plan to breach the roof. On my go, we charged through the door and fanned out in our assigned directions. The shooter was gone.

"Okay, guys, let's shut it down and wait for Crime Scene to get here," I said. I radioed Central to let them know that the roof was clear.

One by one, the cops went back into the building.

"Zach," Kylie called out. She was standing on the east side of the roof, looking out at the courthouse.

"What have you got?" I said.

"Look at this," she said. "There's a clean line of sight from this spot to the podium where Hellman was standing. Dryden can verify it with a laser, but the evidence is starting to mount up. There's no security, the building is easy to get in and out of, the rooftop alarm was cut, and the guy in the dentist's office one floor below heard the shot loud and clear. This has to be it. And our shooter was a pro—a long-distance sniper who was smart enough to take the shot, disassemble the weapon, and leave without a trace."

"Yo! Dee-tee. Dee-tee."

Hearing the street slang for "detective," we both looked around.

"Yo! Dee-tee. Up here. The Tombs."

Directly across the street from where we were standing was the Manhattan Detention Complex, better known as "the

Tombs” because the original structure built in the nineteenth century was inspired by a picture of an Egyptian tomb.

Today it has been replaced by two towers that house close to a thousand male inmates, most of them awaiting trial at the courthouse. One of those men was desperately trying to get our attention. He was on the top floor of the jail, three barred windows in from the corner of White Street.

“I saw him take the shot,” he hollered.

Kylie pointed to a spot on the parapet.

“No. Not there. Over more.”

She started to her right.

“No. The other way.”

She walked along the rooftop wall.

“Keep going.”

She took a few more steps.

“Right there! You got it. Right there.”

She bent down and studied the limestone slab on top of the parapet. “Looks like traces of gunpowder stippling,” she said. She took a deep breath. “I can smell the burnt powder.”

She stood up.

“I told you! I told you!” the man yelled triumphantly. “I saw him. Come over here and get me out. Tell the CO you want to talk to Elroy.”

“Looks like we’ve got a witness,” I said.

“But altruism doesn’t permeate the halls of the Tombs,” Kylie said. “Elroy is going to be angling for a get-out-of-jail-free card in return for his generous cooperation.”

“If he gives us the guy who just put a bullet through Warren Hellman’s neck,” I said, “I’m pretty sure Selma Kaplan will escort him out the front door herself.”

My phone rang. It was our boss, Captain Cates. I put her on speaker.

“Jordan,” she said, “where are you and MacDonald right now?”

“We’re on a roof two blocks from the courthouse. It’s where the shot came from,” I said. “Crime scene is on the way, but we’re running over to the Tombs to talk to one of the inmates who witnessed the shooting.”

“No, you’re not,” she said. “I’ll send another team down there. I need the two of you uptown forthwith.”

“Captain,” I said, “this has been our case since the day Warren Hellman killed Jonas Belmont. We have an eyewitness to the shooting. What’s going on uptown that’s more important than this?”

“A runner was stabbed to death on the West Side Highway jogging path,” she said.

“And you can’t lay that off on someone else?” I said.

“No, I can’t,” Cates said. “And even if I could, you wouldn’t want me to. Your newest victim is your current victim’s brother—Curtis Hellman.”

## CHAPTER 5

**THE HUDSON RIVER GREENWAY** is a thirteen-mile jogging path that runs from the tip of Manhattan to the top. To the west are expansive views of the water and the Jersey shoreline, to the east highway traffic that at rush hour can creep along slower than the joggers.

Curtis Hellman met his demise at 102nd Street. When we got there, the path had been cordoned off three hundred feet in either direction.

Ordinarily, I'd expect to see eight to ten cops working the scene. But this was no ordinary victim. And on top of that, he was the city's second celebrity homicide in a few hours. So it came as no surprise that the place was crawling with uniforms, many of them white shirts. Brass. Including the borough chief, who let us know that he was counting on us, and whatever it takes, blah, blah, blah. The usual bullshit.

Olivia Dorsey-Jones was in charge of the crime scene unit. She's every bit as good as Chuck Dryden and a hell of a lot less socially awkward.

"Zach, Kylie," she said. "I spoke to Chuck. He thinks the



downtown hit was a professional job. It looks like we've got the same thing here."

"Hey, Livvy," I said. "Lay it out for us."

"Start with the location. Look around. This running path is in full view of the parkway. Until you get here. This clump of trees, which is maybe eighty feet long, is so thick that it's nearly impossible for drivers to see the joggers even if they're sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic." She held up a hand before we could comment. "Now, that doesn't mean the killer is a pro. Maybe he's just smart. Or he got lucky. Take a look at the body."

The dead man was wearing blue running shorts, a gray T-shirt, black Nikes on his feet, and a Garmin heart monitor on his wrist. A water bottle and an MP4 audio player were on the ground. There was blood everywhere.

Dorsey-Jones knelt beside the body. "I bagged his hands," she said. "They're manicured, pristine. He didn't put up a fight. He likely never saw the killer coming. Now, here's where it gets interesting."

She pointed to the dark-red line that started at Hellman's right ear. "Cause of death: an edged weapon sliced the trachea and slashed him to the jugular, nearly decapitating him. Most stab victims get knifed in the torso, but this has all the earmarks of someone who knew exactly where to plunge the blade so that he'd bleed out fast. One slice. One and done."

"You have a time of death?" I asked.

"Forty-five to seventy-five minutes ago."

"Shit," Kylie said.

"I know," Dorsey-Jones said. "That's just about when his brother was shot ten miles from here. Based on the timing and the method of execution, it looks like you're looking for two different killers, both of whom are virtuosos at their craft."

“You have a way with words, Livvy,” I said.

“I only sound like that on the job. Ten years of working with Chuck Dryden will do that to a girl from a Hundred-and-Twenty-Eighth and Lenox.”

“Detectives.”

Kylie and I turned around.

“Detectives Buddy Henry and Alma Cardona from the Two-Four squad,” the man said. “We were called to the scene before the case was kicked up to Red.”

“What’ve you got?” I said.

“We just interviewed the people who made the 911 call. Two women, regulars, they take this path three, four times a week. They walked past this spot going north and turned around at a Hundred-and-Sixth Street. Ten minutes later when they got back, there he was. No one in sight. Just the body. One of them is a retired nurse, so she checked for signs of life. Otherwise, they didn’t touch anything.”

“What time did they call it in?” Kylie asked.

Cardona checked her notepad. “Eleven-oh-nine.”

Kylie gave me a look. That put the time of death at about eleven a.m. We were definitely looking for two different killers.

“Witnesses?” I said.

Henry shook his head. “We’re canvassing, but nothing yet. We’ll hit up the local homeless, and we’ll be back tomorrow morning handing out flyers to joggers. I wouldn’t get my hopes up. This is a hot spot for muggings. Clump of trees, solo runner, mugger jumps out. Even if the vic doesn’t have much money, they grab his phone, jewelry—whatever they can.”

“Cameras?” Kylie asked.

“No, ma’am,” Cardona said. “We sure could use them. But the city isn’t paying for cameras.”

“Has the family been notified?” I asked.

“We wouldn’t do that without running it past you,” Henry said.

“We’ll take care of it,” I said.

Cardona checked her notes again. “The victim’s wife is Brooke Hellman.”

“Thanks,” I said. “We’ve met her.”

“Oh, good,” Cardona said. “It’s always better to come from someone you know.”

“Not in this case,” Kylie said. “We’ve met Mrs. Hellman. And she’s definitely not a fan.”

Hi,

It's Marshall.

I hope you like NYPD RED 7: THE MURDER SORORITY so far (and I didn't even get to the best parts).

If you'd like to read the other 72 chapters, you can pre-order the book or the audio on amazon, bn, or from your favorite local bookstore now.

Thank you for supporting my life of crime.

Marshall

PS - If you hate it, please tell me. If you love it, please tell everybody you ever met on social media.