

# CHAPTER ONE

October 10, 2013

Brooklyn

Paddy Durr was sweating and thrashing around in the knotted bedsheets in his dormitory bunk. He was in the throes of another of his usual nightmares. Muttering curses at an unseen enemy, and threatening violence, he hadn't hit anything yet. Given that, this would qualify as one of the more benign recurring dreams residing in Durr's REM sleep. When he finally awoke, he would be unable to describe the dream in any detail. All that would be left to him would be the flop sweats and the latent anxiety. Durr woke up most mornings this way. His state of mind would alternate randomly between an uneasy feeling of something not being quite right, and the outright certainty that everything was thoroughly wrong. So he was angry most of the time. The words most frequently used to describe him by the cops and supervisors in the 83<sup>rd</sup> Precinct were *vicious* and *prick*. Kevin White was aware of all this. He had worked at the *eight three* with Durr for the last couple of years. He knew he was surly, but he also knew he was brilliant. His brilliance was needed right now on Wilson Avenue. The last thing White wanted to be doing this morning was waking a bitter and angry detective, but the exigencies of the service demanded it.

The nudge was weak, but insistent, accompanied by a quietly repeated, "Detective." There it was again. Detective Padraig Joseph Durr roused himself enough to realize he was looking into the face of Lieutenant Kevin White, the late tour platoon commander at the 83<sup>rd</sup> precinct. It took Durr a moment

to remember where he was. As his eyes focused, he saw he was in the detective's dormitory. The alarm on his cell phone hadn't gone off. So he checked it for the time—0630 hours. As he became more alert, the detective put these items together. Something had to be seriously amiss for the uniform platoon commander to decide to come into the detective's dorm. Things had to be totally fubar for him to wake the sleeping Durr an hour and a half prior to his scheduled tour.

“What the fuck are you doing in here, Lou?” Durr barked, using the informal diminutive for the rank. Lieutenant White steeled himself for Durr's acrimony.

“We've got a shooting, Paddy—likely to die, outside Angela's Diner on Wilson Avenue.”

That got Paddy's attention.

“Her son's on the job,” Durr remembered. “In the *seven eight*, I think.”

“We're already talking to him. He was in the restaurant this morning. He opened up with his mother. They didn't see the shooting. He said he watched the victim leave with two other guys. Nobody followed them out.”

“Where are the two guys that were with the victim?”

“We got them here in the muster room.”

“Is Night Watch responding?”

“Yeah, they're already at the scene.”

“Okay, now for the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question; if the victim isn't dead, and Night Watch is already there, why are you waking me at the crack of fucking dawn?”

“The guy is pretty well ventilated, Paddy. We counted six holes, including a head shot. EMS hasn’t pronounced yet, but the guy is already a ghost. Plus, I know how you like to get a jump on these things.”

“That was awesome, Kevin. Did you practice that bullshit in the mirror before walking it in here? Or are you just winging it? What are you not telling me?”

“Vito Piombone is the Night Watch detective.”

“Ah fuck!” Durr exclaimed.

“That’s what I figured.”

“Has he screwed anything up yet?”

“Not as far as I know.”

“Alright, here’s what we do. Have that numbnuts call the desk. We need to give him something time consuming, and meaningless to do. Tell him I am catching this case and responding. I want him to identify and interview everyone in the diner. When he’s done, I need the plate numbers on all the cars parked on Flushing and Wilson, two blocks each way. That should keep the idiot busy. And whatever you do, don’t let EMS remove the body till I get there.”

“What are you gonna do?”

“I’m going to take a shower, put on a fresh suit, and solve this thing. Thanks for the heads-up, boss. Heading Piombone off at the pass is going to save me a lot of work.”

Once in the Squad office, Detective Durr left two voicemails with his partners—telling them to get into the office forthwith. This was detective-speak for *we’ve got a fresh body*.

*Get your asses in here right now.* Then after showering and dressing, he got a new reporter's notepad from the supply locker, along with the digital camera and the keys to a squad car. He grabbed his top coat and hat and headed to the crime scene.

As Durr was descending the stairs leading to the back parking lot of the precinct, he encountered his least favorite police officer. The slovenly and obnoxious Ralph Marten had been a cop for twenty-plus years. Because of this, he thought of himself as one of Durr's peers. He imagined they were somehow equals. Durr wouldn't even acknowledge they were of the same species. Marten saw Durr and brainlessly commented.

"Here comes the white knight now. Off to avenge the wrongs of God's misbegotten children. When are you going to realize that these mutts don't deserve the shred off your balls?"

Durr looked critically at the fat cop. Then he punched Marten in the face as hard as he could. He grabbed him by the throat with his left hand and lifted him off the ground, smashing the back of his head against the wall. A rivulet of blood ran down from Marten's nostril, and dripped over Durr's fist. He closed off the flow of air from Marten's trachea and waited a beat for the cop to appreciate the sense he was dying. Paddy leaned in and bit down on Marten's ear, crunching through the cartilage and drawing blood.

"If you ever speak to me again," Durr whispered in the terrified cop's bleeding ear. "If you even look at me, you're a fucking dead man. So help me God, I will end you. Is any of this unclear?"

The choking officer struggled to nod through Durr's tightening grip. Then Paddy dropped him, gasping for breath—in a heap on the floor. Durr drove his shoe into Marten's groin for emphasis. He wiped the blood from his hand on the cop's thinning hair, then spit on him and exited the stairwell—heading out to the parking lot as if nothing had occurred at all.

Number 18 Wilson Avenue was between Noll and George Streets. When Detective Durr got there, the victim was covered by an orange vinyl tarp. He asked the uniform officer who was safeguarding the scene where the tarp had come from. He told the detective it came out of the trunk of his radio car.

“Lose it. It was never here.”

“We just wanted to cover the body,” the young cop said.

“What the hell for?”

“So the neighbors don't get freaked out.”

“How long have you been on the job, kid?”

“Just over a year and a half,” he answered sheepishly.

“Don't be ashamed to admit you're new at this. I know I must look like a dinosaur to you, but I was once a rookie too. We were all shiny and unspoiled once upon a time. After a while, the job rubs the shine right off you, and a dead body becomes nothing more than a piece of rotting meat with evidence on it. Don't sweat the neighborhood either. This is Bushwick. The dead fall from the sky here. You are going to have to do this for a long time to see as many dead bodies as these people. They don't freak out easy.”

The officer removed the tarp and folded it up, placing it back in the trunk of the radio-car. When he was done, he came back over to the detective. Paddy told him he was going to take some pictures and think out loud.

“Stay with me. If you see anything I haven’t already mentioned, you speak up.”

“I’m only a rookie. I don’t know what I should look for.”

“You know what normal looks like, right?”

“Yeah.”

“If you see anything that doesn’t look normal, you tell me about it. Can you do that, Officer Crowe?” Durr asked, reading the cop’s name from the tag under his shield. But Paddy already knew who the young man was, had actually met him twenty-five years earlier when the officer was just a boy. The young cop nodded.

Detective Durr walked over to the body, snapping pictures with the digital camera. He stood next to the body and took pictures in all four directions. He walked west to the corner. Durr slowly walked back toward the body, looking down at the sidewalk. Fifteen feet from the victim he stopped and wrote something in his notepad. Then the detective started talking out loud.

“Victim is a dark-skinned Hispanic male, approximately mid-to-late thirties. He is prone, face down. His left hand is extended in front of him. There is a gunshot wound on the back of that hand. It appears to be an exit wound.”

Durr turned the hand over to examine it.

“The victim has what appears to be an entry wound on the palm. Noted is the presence of stippling, starring and powder tattooing, suggesting a point-contact-wound.”

Durr dropped the hand and continued to examine the body.

“The victim has a gunshot wound to the back of his head. The orientation of the protruding brain matter and bone fragments suggest an exit wound, as does the absence of starring or stippling. The victim has an additional five gunshot wounds observed on his back. His white denim jacket has very little blood around the wounds, suggesting these were entry wounds. The shape of them further suggests the shooter stood over the victim and fired straight down. There are no shell casings at the scene. The weapon was most likely a revolver. Approximately fifteen feet west of the victim, there is a large blood spatter with flecks of what appear to be bone and brain matter. There are droplets of blood leading up to the body. They are tear-drop-shaped and appear to have fallen from the victim as he moved in an easterly direction.”

Detective Durr asked Officer Crowe if he noticed anything significant. The young cop pointed at the top of the wrought iron gate in front of 18 Wilson Avenue. There, in iron letters it said *The Pearly Gates*.

“Damn, he almost made it,” Durr laughed. “How much you want to bet, when we find out who he is, he’s in the *other* place?”

“What makes you say that?”

“Somebody wanted this man very dead. You don’t get shot this many times at point blank range without having seriously pissed someone off. On top of which, the victim has tear-drop

tattoos at the corner of his eye. I see three of them there under the left eye. That's a gang thing. Each tear is supposed to represent a body the wearer dropped. And if you look over here, he has a gun tattooed between his thumb and forefinger. Also a gang thing, it means he was a stickup guy. All in all, I'd say the probability is he's already burning, if you believe in that stuff."

Detective Durr pulled out two sets of heavy rubber gloves from his inside coat pocket. He tossed one set over to the rookie officer.

"What are these for?"

"You put them on your hands."

"I know where they go. Why are we wearing them?"

"We gotta flip him over and search him. Do you want to do that with bare hands?"

"Oh hell no!" the officer exclaimed, with a mixture of confusion and horror.

"Relax. I'll do most of the touching. I'll be looking for a wallet and a cell phone. You write down where I find them. You're gonna need that information when you voucher them."

Durr grabbed the victim's shoulders and told Officer Crowe to grab the victim's pants at the hips. On the count of three, they turned the body over on its side. The front of the victim's clothing was saturated in blood. More blood was copiously pooling where he had lain. In the blood, Durr noted several deformed lead bullets, definitely from a revolver.

"What do we do with those?" Officer Crowe asked.

“We leave them right where they are. Crime Scene will recover and bag them for you to voucher and send to Ballistics.”

Durr then reached inside the victim’s blood-soaked jacket and extracted a silver flip phone with a Mercedes Benz logo on its face.

“Inside right jacket pocket,” Durr noted.

They turned the victim back over onto his belly. Durr reached into the victim’s right rear jeans pocket and removed a brown leather wallet. Embossed on the wallet were the words *el hombre malo*.

“*The bad man*. If nothing else, he knew what he was. I’m gonna hold on to these until I can copy the contents. When you come into the squad with the other evidence to voucher, these will be waiting for you, along with the money in the wallet. Do you want to count it, or do you trust me?”

Officer Crowe looked uncomfortable as he stammered, not sure how to answer. Durr had a good laugh. He opened the wallet and pulled the cash from it. He quickly counted it in front of the young cop.

“Four twenties, US currency--that’s eighty bucks. I hope you didn’t think I would imperil my career for eighty dollars. There’d have to be two million of them to even get me to think about it. Then I’d think again, and voucher every penny. I’m not here to be a bad guy. I’m here to catch them.”

The detective saw the Crime Scene Unit van pull onto the block.

“Good news, kid. Crime Scene is here. You’ll be able to start the vouchering just in time to make the lunch order.

Beginner's luck I guess. You wrote everything I said down, right?"

Officer Crowe had a look of abject terror on his face.

"Ahhh!" Paddy Durr said laughing at the young cop. "I'm just fucking with you. I got it all right here," he said tapping the side of his head.