STEPHEN KING

THE OUTSIDER

A NOVEL

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For Rand and Judy Holston

Thought only gives the world an appearance of order to anyone weak enough to be convinced by its show.

Colin Wilson
"The Country of the Blind"

THE OUTSIDER

THE ARREST

July 14th

1

It was an unmarked car, just some nondescript American sedan a few years old, but the blackwall tires and the three men inside gave it away for what it was. The two in front were wearing blue uniforms. The one in back was wearing a suit, and he was as big as a house. A pair of black boys standing on the sidewalk, one with a foot on a scuffed orange skateboard, the other with a lime-colored board under his arm, watched it turn into the parking lot of the Estelle Barga Recreational Park, then looked at each other.

One said, "That's Five-O."

The other said, "No shit."

They headed off with no further conversation, pumping their boards. The rule was simple: when Five-O shows up, it's time to go. Black lives matter, their parents had instructed them, but not always to Five-O. At the baseball field, the crowd began to cheer and clap rhythmically as the Flint City Golden Dragons came to bat in the bottom of the ninth, one run down.

The boys didn't look back.

2

Statement of Mr. Jonathan Ritz {July 10th, 9:30 PM, interviewed by Detective Ralph Anderson}

Detective Anderson: I know you're upset, Mr. Ritz, it's understandable, but I need to know exactly what you saw earlier this evening.

Ritz: I'll never get it out of my mind. Never. I think I could use a pill. Maybe a Valium. I've never taken any of that stuff, but I sure could use something now. My heart still feels like it's in my throat. Your forensic people should know that if they find puke at the scene, and I guess they will, it's mine. I'm not ashamed, either. Anyone would have lost their supper if they saw something like that.

Detective Anderson: I'm sure a doctor will prescribe something to calm you down when we're done. I think I can arrange for that, but right now I need you clearheaded. You understand that, don't you?

Ritz: Yes. Of course.

Detective Anderson: Just tell me everything you saw, and we'll be finished for this evening. Can you do that for me, sir?

Ritz: All right. I went out to walk Dave right around six o'clock this evening. Dave is our beagle. He has his evening meal at five. My wife and I eat at five thirty. By six, Dave is ready to take care of his business—Number One and Number Two, I mean. I walk him while Sandy—my wife—does up the dishes. It's a fair division of labor. A fair division of labor is very important in a marriage, especially after the children have grown up, that's the way we look at it. I'm rambling, aren't I?

Detective Anderson: That's okay, Mr. Ritz. Tell it your way.

Ritz: Oh, please call me Jon. I can't stand Mr. Ritz. Makes me feel like a cracker. That's what the kids called me when I was in school, Ritz Cracker.

Detective Anderson: Uh-huh. So you were walking your dog—

Ritz: That's right. And when he got a strong scent—the scent of death, I suppose—I had to hold him back on his leash with both hands, even though Dave's just a little dog. He wanted to get at what he was smelling. The—

Detective Anderson: Wait, let's go back. You left your house at 249 Mulberry Avenue at six o'clock—

Ritz: It might have been a little before. Dave and I walked down the hill to Gerald's, that grocery on the corner where they sell all the gourmet stuff, then up Barnum Street, and then into Figgis Park. That's the one the kids call Frig Us Park. They think adults don't know what they say, that we don't listen, but we do. At least some of us do.

Detective Anderson: Was this your usual evening walk?

Ritz: Oh, sometimes we change it up a little so we don't get bored, but the park is where we almost always end up before heading home, because there's always lots for Dave to smell. There's a parking lot, but at that time of the evening it's almost always empty, unless there

are some high school kids playing tennis. There weren't any that night, because the courts are clay and it rained earlier. The only thing parked there was a white van.

Detective Anderson: A commercial van, would you say?

Ritz: That's right. No windows, just double doors in the back. The kind of van small companies use to haul stuff in. It might have been an Econoline, but I couldn't swear to that.

Detective Anderson: Was there a company name written on it? Like Sam's Air Conditioning or Bob's Custom Windows? Something like that?

Ritz: No, uh-uh. Nothing at all. It was dirty, though, I can tell you that. Hadn't been washed in some time. And there was mud on the tires, probably from the rain. Dave sniffed at the tires, then we went along one of the gravel paths through the trees. After about a quarter of a mile, Dave started to bark and ran into the bushes on the right. That's when he got that scent. He almost dragged the leash out of my hand. I tried to pull him back and he wouldn't come, just flopped over and dug at the ground with his paws and kept on barking. So I snubbed him up close—I have one of those retractable leashes, and it's very good for that kind of thing—and went after him. He doesn't bother about squirrels and chipmunks so much now that he's not a puppy anymore, but I thought he might have scented up a raccoon. I was going to make him come back whether he wanted to or not, dogs

need to know who's boss, only that was when I saw the first few drops of blood. They were on a birch leaf, about chest-high to me, which would make it I guess five feet or so off the ground. There was another drop on another leaf a little further on, then a whole splash of it on some bushes further on still. Still red and wet. Dave sniffed at that one, but wanted to keep going. And listen, before I forget, right about then I heard an engine start up behind me. I might not have noticed, except it was pretty loud, like the muffler was shot. Kind of rumbling, do you know what I mean?

Detective Anderson: Uh-huh, I do.

Ritz: I can't swear it was that white van, and I didn't go back that way, so I don't know if it was gone, but I bet it was. And you know what that means?

Detective Anderson: Tell me what you think it means, Jon.

Ritz: That he might have been watching me. The killer. Standing in the trees and watching me. It gives me the creeps, just thinking about it. Now, I mean. Then, I was pretty much fixated on the blood. And keeping Dave from yanking my arm right out of its socket. I was getting scared, and don't mind admitting it. I'm not a big man, and although I try to stay in shape, I'm in my sixties now. Even in my twenties I wasn't much of a brawler. But I had to see. In case someone was hurt.

Detective Anderson: That's very commendable.

What time would you say it was when you first saw the blood-trail?

Ritz: I didn't check my watch, but I'm guessing twenty past six. Maybe twenty-five past. I let Dave lead the way, keeping him snubbed up so I could push through the branches he could just go under with his little short legs. You know what they say about beagles—they're high-toned but low-slung. He was barking like crazy. We came into a clearing, a sort of . . . I don't know, sort of a nook where lovers might sit and smooch a little. There was a granite bench in the middle of it, and it was covered in blood. So much of it. More underneath. The body was lying on the grass beside it. That poor boy. His head was turned toward me, and his eyes were open, and his throat was just gone. Nothing there but a red hole. His bluejeans and underpants were pulled down to his ankles, and I saw something . . . a dead branch, I guess . . . sticking out of his . . . his . . . well, you know.

Detective Anderson: I do, but I need you to say it for the record, Mr. Ritz.

Ritz: He was on his stomach, and the branch was sticking out of his bottom. That was bloody, too. The branch. Part of the bark was stripped, and there was a handprint. I saw that clear as day. Dave wasn't barking anymore, he was howling, poor thing, and I just don't know who would do something like that. He must have

been a maniac. Will you catch him, Detective Anderson?

Detective Anderson: Oh, yes. We'll catch him.

3

The Estelle Barga parking lot was almost as big as the one at the Kroger's where Ralph Anderson and his wife shopped on Saturday afternoons, and on this July evening it was totally filled. Many of the bumpers bore Golden Dragons stickers, and a few rear windows had been soaped with exuberant slogans: WE WILL ROCK YOU; DRAGONS WILL BURN BEARS; CAP CITY HERE WE COME; THIS YEAR IT'S OUR TURN. From the field, where the lights had been turned on (although it would be daylight for quite a while yet), there arose cheering and rhythmic clapping.

Troy Ramage, a twenty-year veteran, was behind the wheel of the unmarked. As he cruised up one packed row and down another, he said, "Whenever I come here, I always wonder who the hell Estelle Barga was, anyway."

Ralph made no reply. His muscles were tight, his skin was hot, and his pulse felt like it was red-lining. He had arrested plenty of bad doers over the years, but this was different. This was particularly awful. And personal. That was the worst: it was personal. He had no business being part of the arrest, and knew it, but following the last round of budget cuts, there were only three full-time detectives on the Flint City police force's roster. Jack Hoskins was on vacation, fishing somewhere in the back

of beyond, and good riddance. Betsy Riggins, who should have been on maternity leave, would be assisting the State Police with another aspect of this evening's work.

He hoped to God they weren't going too fast. He had expressed that worry to Bill Samuels, the Flint County district attorney, just that afternoon, in their pre-arrest conference. Samuels was a little young for the post, just thirty-five, but he belonged to the right political party, and he was sure of himself. Not cocksure, there was that, but undoubtedly gung-ho.

"There are still some rough edges I'd like to smooth out," Ralph said. "We don't have all the background. Plus, he's going to say he has an alibi. Unless he just gives it up, we can be sure of that."

"If he does," Samuels had replied, "we'll knock it down. You know we will."

Ralph had no doubt of it, he knew they had the right man, but he still would have preferred a little more investigation before pulling the trigger. Find the holes in the sonofabitch's alibi, punch them wider, wide enough to drive a truck through, *then* bring him in. In most cases that would have been the correct procedure. Not in this one.

"Three things," Samuels had said. "Are you ready for them?"

Ralph nodded. He had to work with this man, after all.

"One, people in this town, particularly the parents of small children, are terrified and angry. They want a quick arrest so they can feel safe again. Two, the evidence is beyond doubt. I've never seen a case so ironclad. Are you with me on that?"

"Yes."

"Okay, here's number three. The big one." Samuels had leaned forward. "We can't say he's done it before—although if he has, we'll probably find out once we really start digging—but he sure as hell has done it now. Broken loose. Busted his cherry. And once that happens . . ."

"He could do it again," Ralph finished.

"Right. Not the likeliest scenario so soon after Peterson, but possible. He's with kids all the time, for Christ's sake. Young boys. If he killed one of them, never mind losing our jobs, we'd never forgive ourselves."

Ralph was already having problems forgiving himself for not seeing it sooner. That was irrational, you couldn't look into a man's eyes at a backyard barbecue following the conclusion of the Little League season and know he was contemplating an unspeakable act—stroking it and feeding it and watching it grow—but the irrationality didn't change the way he felt.

Now, leaning forward to point between the two cops in the front seat, Ralph said, "Over there. Try the handicap spaces."

From the shotgun seat, Officer Tom Yates said, "Two-hundred-dollar fine for that, boss."

"I think we'll get a pass this time," Ralph said.

"I was joking."

Ralph, in no mood for cop repartee, made no reply.

"Crip spaces ahoy," Ramage said. "And I see two empties."

He pulled into one of them, and the three men got out. Ralph saw Yates unsnap the strap over the butt of his Glock and shook his head. "Are you out of your mind? There's got to be fifteen hundred people at that game."

"What if he runs?"

"Then you'll catch him."

Ralph leaned against the hood of the unmarked and watched as the two Flint City officers started toward the field, the lights, and the crammed bleachers, where the clapping and the cheering were still rising in volume and intensity. Arresting Peterson's killer fast had been a call he and Samuels had made together (however reluctantly). Arresting him at the game had been strictly Ralph's decision.

Ramage looked back. "Coming?"

"I am not. You do the deed, and read him his rights nice and goddam loud, then bring him here. Tom, when we roll, you're going to ride in back with him. I'll be up front with Troy. Bill Samuels is waiting for my call, and he'll be at the station to meet us. This one's A-Team all the way. As for the collar, it's all yours."

"But it's your case," Yates said. "Why wouldn't you want to be the one to bust the motherfucker?"

Still with his arms crossed, Ralph said, "Because the man who raped Frankie Peterson with a tree branch and tore open his throat coached my son for four years, two in Peewee and two in Little League. He had his hands on my son, showing him how to hold a bat, and I don't trust myself."

"Got it, got it," Troy Ramage said. He and Yates started toward the field.

"And listen, you two."

They turned back.

"Cuff him right there. And cuff him in front."

"That's not protocol, boss," Ramage said.

"I know, and I don't care. I want everyone to see him led away in handcuffs. Got it?"

When they were on their way, Ralph took his cell phone

off his belt. He had Betsy Riggins on speed-dial. "Are you in position?"

"Yes indeed. Parked in front of his house. Me and four State Troopers."

"Search warrant?"

"In my hot little hand."

"Good." He was about to end the call when something else occurred to him. "Bets, when's your due date?"

"Yesterday," she said. "So hurry this shit up." And ended the call herself.

4

Statement of Mrs. Arlene Stanhope {July 12th, 1:00 PM, interviewed by Detective Ralph Anderson}

Stanhope: Will this take long, Detective?

Detective Anderson: Not long at all. Just tell me what you saw on the afternoon of Tuesday, July 10th, and we'll be done.

Stanhope: All right. I was coming out of Gerald's Fine Groceries. I always do my shopping there on Tuesdays. Things are more expensive at Gerald's, but I don't go to the Kroger since I stopped driving. I gave up my license the year after my husband died because I didn't trust my reflexes anymore. I had a couple of accidents. Just fender-benders, you know, but that was enough for me. Gerald's is only two blocks from the apartment I've been living in since I sold the house, and the doctor says walking is good for me. Good for my heart, you know. I was com-

ing out with my three bags in my little cart—three bags is all I can afford now, the prices are so awful, especially meat, I don't know the last time I've had bacon—and I saw the Peterson boy.

Detective Anderson: You're sure it was Frank Peterson you saw?

Stanhope: Oh yes, it was Frank. Poor boy, I'm so sorry about what happened to him, but he's in heaven now, and his pain is over. That's the consolation. There are two Peterson boys, you know, both redheads, that awful carroty red, but the older one—Oliver, that's his name—is at least five years older. He used to deliver our newspaper. Frank has a bicycle, one of those that have the high handlebars and the narrow seat—

Detective Anderson: A banana seat, it's called.

Stanhope: I don't know about that, but I know it was bright lime green, an awful color, really, and there was a sticker on the seat. It said Flint City High. Only he'll never go to high school, will he? Poor, poor boy.

Detective Anderson: Mrs. Stanhope, would you like a short break?

Stanhope: No, I want to finish. I need to go home and feed my cat. I always feed her at three, and she'll be hungry. She'll also wonder where I am. But if I could have a tissue? I'm sure I'm a mess. Thank you.

Detective Anderson: You could see the sticker on the seat of Frank Peterson's bicycle because—?

Stanhope: Oh, because he wasn't on it. He was walking it across the Gerald's parking lot. The chain was broken, and dragging on the pavement.

Detective Anderson: Did you notice what he was wearing?

Stanhope: A tee-shirt with some rock and roll band on it. I don't know bands, so I can't say which one it was. If that's important, I'm sorry. And he was wearing a Rangers cap. It was pushed back on his head, and I could see all that red hair. Those carrot-tops usually go bald very early in life, you know. He'll never have to worry about that now, will he? Oh, it's just so sad. Anyway, there was a dirty white van parked at the far end of the lot, and a man got out and came over to Frank. He was—

Detective Anderson: We'll get to that, but first I want to hear about the van. This was the kind with no windows?

Stanhope: Yes.

Detective Anderson: With no writing on it? No company name, or anything of that nature?

Stanhope: Not that I saw.

Detective Anderson: Okay, let's talk about the man you saw. Did you recognize him, Mrs. Stanhope?

Stanhope: Oh, of course. It was Terry Maitland. Everyone on the West Side knows Coach T. They call him that even at the high school. He teaches English there, you know. My husband taught with him before he retired. They call him Coach T because he coaches Little League, and

the City League baseball team when Little League is done, and in the fall he coaches little boys who like to play football. They have a name for that league, too, but I don't remember it.

Detective Anderson: If we could get back to what you saw on Tuesday afternoon—

Stanhope: There's not much more to tell. Frank talked to Coach T, and pointed at his broken chain. Coach T nodded and opened the back of the white van, which couldn't have been his—

Detective Anderson: Why do you say that, Mrs. Stanhope?

Stanhope: Because it had an orange license plate. I don't know which state that would be, my long vision isn't what it used to be, but I know Oklahoma plates are blue and white. Anyway, I couldn't see anything in the back of the van except for a long green thing that looked like a toolbox. Was it a toolbox, Detective?

Detective Anderson: What happened then?

Stanhope: Well, Coach T put Frank's bicycle in the back and shut the doors. He clapped Frank on the back. Then he went around to the driver's side and Frank went around to the passenger side. They both got in, and the van drove away, onto Mulberry Avenue. I thought Coach T was going to drive the lad home. Of course I did. What else would I think? Terry Maitland has lived on the West Side for going on twenty years, he has a very nice family, a wife and two daughters . . . could I have another tissue, please? Thank you. Are we almost done?

Detective Anderson: Yes, and you've been very helpful. I believe that before I started to record, you said this was around three o'clock?

Stanhope: Exactly three. I heard the bell in the Town Hall clock chiming the hour just as I came out with my little cart. I wanted to go home and feed my cat.

Detective Anderson: The boy you saw, the red-headed boy, was Frank Peterson.

Stanhope: Yes. The Petersons live right around the corner. Ollie used to deliver my newspaper. I see those boys all the time.

Detective Anderson: And the man, the one who put the bike in the back of the white van and drove away with Frank Peterson, that was Terence Maitland, also known as Coach Terry or Coach T.

Stanhope: Yes.

Detective Anderson: You're sure of that.

Stanhope: Oh, yes.

Detective Anderson: Thank you, Mrs. Stanhope.

Stanhope: Who could believe Terry would do such a thing? Do you suppose there have been others?

Detective Anderson: We may find that out in the course of our investigation.

5

Since all City League tournament games were played at Estelle Barga Field—the best baseball field in the county, and

the only one with lights for night games—home team advantage was decided by a coin toss. Terry Maitland called tails before the game, as he always did—it was a superstition handed down from his own City League coach, back in the day—and tails it was. "I don't care where we're playing, I just like to get my lasties," he always told his boys.

And tonight he needed them. It was the bottom of the ninth, the Bears were up in this league semifinal by a single run. The Golden Dragons were down to their last out, but they had the bases loaded. A walk, a wild pitch, an error, or an infield single would tie it, a ball hit into the gap would win it. The crowd was clapping, stamping the metal bleachers, and cheering as little Trevor Michaels stepped into the lefthand batter's box. His batting helmet was the smallest one they had, but it still shaded his eyes and he had to keep pushing it up. He twitched his bat nervously back and forth.

Terry had considered pinch-hitting for the boy, but at just an inch over five feet, he drew a lot of walks. And while he was no home run hitter, he was sometimes able to put the bat on the ball. Not often, but sometimes. If Terry lifted him for a pinch hitter, the poor kid would have to live with the humiliation through the whole next year of middle school. If, on the other hand, he managed a single, he would recall it over beers and backyard barbecues for the rest of his life. Terry knew. He'd been there himself, once upon a time, in the antique era before the game was played with aluminum bats.

The Bears pitcher—their closer, a real fireballer—wound up and threw one right down the heart of the plate. Trevor watched it go by with an expression of dismay. The umpire called strike one. The crowd groaned.

Gavin Frick, Terry's assistant coach, paced up and down in front of the boys on the bench, the scorebook rolled up in one hand (how many times had Terry asked him not to do that?), and his XXL Golden Dragons tee-shirt straining over his belly, which was XXXL at least. "I hope letting Trevor bat for himself wasn't a mistake, Ter," he said. Sweat was trickling down his cheeks. "He looks scared to death, and I don't b'lieve he could hit that kid's speedball with a tennis racket."

"Let's see what happens," Terry said. "I've got a good feeling about this." He didn't, not really.

The Bears pitcher wound up and released another burner, but this one landed in the dirt in front of home plate. The crowd rose to its feet as Baibir Patel, the Dragons' tying run at third, jinked a few steps down the line. They settled back with a groan as the ball bounced into the catcher's mitt. The Bears catcher turned to third, and Terry could read his expression, even through the mask: *Just try it, homeboy.* Baibir didn't.

The next pitch was wide, but Trevor flailed at it, anyway.

"Strike him out, Fritz!" a leather-lung shouted from high up in the bleachers—almost surely the fireballer's father, from the way the kid snapped his head in that direction. "Strike him *owwwwt*!"

Trevor didn't offer at the next pitch, which was close—too close to take, really, but the ump called it a ball, and it was the Bears' fans' turn to groan. Someone suggested that the ump needed stronger glasses. Another fan mentioned something about a seeing-eye dog.

Two and two now, and Terry had a strong sense that the Dragons' season hung on the next pitch. Either they

would play the Panthers for the City championship, and go on to compete in the States—games that were actually televised—or they would go home and meet just one more time, at the barbecue in the Maitland backyard that traditionally marked the end of the season.

He turned to look at Marcy and the girls, sitting where they always did, in lawn chairs behind the home plate screen. His daughters were flanking his wife like pretty bookends. All three waved crossed fingers at him. Terry gave them a wink and a smile and two thumbs up, although he still didn't feel right. It wasn't just the game. He hadn't felt right for some time now. Not quite.

Marcy's return smile faltered into a puzzled frown. She was looking to her left, and jerked a thumb that way. Terry turned and saw two city cops walking in lockstep down the third base line, past Barry Houlihan, who was coaching there.

"Time, time!" the home plate umpire bellowed, stopping the Bears pitcher just as he went into his wind-up. Trevor Michaels stepped out of the batter's box, and with an expression of relief, Terry thought. The crowd had grown quiet, looking at the two cops. One of them was reaching behind his back. The other had his hand on the butt of his holstered service weapon.

"Off the field!" the ump was shouting. *"Off the field!"*

Troy Ramage and Tom Yates ignored him. They walked into the Dragons' dugout—a makeshift affair containing a long bench, three baskets of equipment, and a bucket of dirty practice balls—and directly to where Terry was standing. From the back of his belt, Ramage produced a pair of handcuffs. The crowd saw them, and raised a murmur that was two parts confusion and one part excitement: *Ooooo.*

"Hey, you guys!" Gavin said, hustling up (and almost tripping over Richie Gallant's discarded first baseman's mitt). "We've got a game to finish here!"

Yates pushed him back, shaking his head. The crowd was dead silent now. The Bears had abandoned their tense defensive postures and were just watching, their gloves dangling. The catcher trotted out to his pitcher, and they stood together halfway between the mound and home plate.

Terry knew the one holding the cuffs a little; he and his brother sometimes came to watch the Pop Warner games in the fall. "Troy? What is this? What's the deal?"

Ramage saw nothing on the man's face except what looked like honest bewilderment, but he had been a cop since the nineties, and knew that the really bad ones had that *Who, me?* look down to a science. And this guy was as bad as they came. Remembering Anderson's instructions (and not minding a bit), he raised his voice so he could be heard by the entire crowd, which the next day's paper would announce as 1,588.

"Terence Maitland, I am arresting you for the murder of Frank Peterson."

Another *Ooooo* from the bleachers, this one louder, the sound of a rising wind.

Terry frowned at Ramage. He understood the words, they were simple English words forming a simple declarative sentence, he knew who Frankie Peterson was and what had happened to him, but the *meaning* of the words eluded him. All he could say was "What? Are you kidding?" and that was when the sports photographer from the *Flint City Call* snapped his picture, the one that appeared on the front page the next day. His mouth was open, his eyes

were wide, his hair was sticking out around the edges of his Golden Dragons cap. In that photo he looked both enfeebled and guilty.

"*What* did you say?"

"Hold out your wrists, please."

Terry looked at Marcy and his daughters, still sitting in their chairs behind the chickenwire, staring at him with identical expressions of frozen surprise. Horror would come later. Baibir Patel left third base and started to walk toward the dugout, taking off his batting helmet to show the sweaty mat of his black hair, and Terry saw the kid was starting to cry.

"Get back there!" Gavin shouted at him. "Game's not over."

But Baibir only stood in foul territory, staring at Terry and bawling. Terry stared back, positive (*almost* positive) he was dreaming all this, and then Tom Yates grabbed him and yanked his arms out with enough force to make Terry stumble forward. Ramage snapped on the cuffs. Real ones, not the plastic strips, big and heavy, gleaming in the late sun. In that same rolling voice, he proclaimed: "You have the right to remain silent and refuse to answer questions, but if you choose to speak, anything you say can be held against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney during questioning now or in the future. Do you understand?"

"Troy?" Terry could hardly hear his own voice. He felt as if the wind had been punched out of him. "What in God's name is this?"

Ramage took no notice. "Do you understand?"

Marcy came to the chickenwire, hooked her fingers through it, and shook it. Behind her, Sarah and Grace were

crying. Grace was on her knees beside Sarah's lawn chair; her own had fallen over and lay in the dirt. "What are you doing?" Marcy shouted. "What in God's name are you doing? And why are you doing it *here*?"

"Do you understand?"

What Terry understood was that he had been handcuffed and was now being read his rights in front of almost sixteen hundred staring people, his wife and two young daughters among them. It was not a dream, and it was not simply an arrest. It was, for reasons he could not comprehend, a public shaming. Best to get it over as fast as possible, and get this thing straightened out. Although, even in his shock and bewilderment, he understood that his life would not be going back to normal for a long time.

"I understand," he said, and then: "Coach Frick, get back."

Gavin, who had been approaching the cops with his fists clenched and his fat face flushed a hectic red, lowered his arms and stepped back. He looked through the chickenwire at Marcy, raised his enormous shoulders, spread his pudgy hands.

In the same rolling tones, like a town crier belting out the week's big news in a New England town square, Troy Ramage continued. Ralph Anderson could hear him from where he stood leaning against the unmarked unit. He was doing a good job, was Troy. It was ugly, and Ralph supposed he might be reprimanded for it, but he would not be reprimanded by Frankie Peterson's parents. No, not by them.

"If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided to you before any questioning, if you desire. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Terry said. "I understand something else, too." He turned to the crowd. *"I have no idea why I'm being arrested! Gavin Frick will finish coaching the game!"* And then, as an afterthought: "Baibir, get back to third, and remember to run in foul territory."

There was a smatter of applause, but only a smatter. The leather-lung in the bleachers yelled again, *"What'd you say he did?"* And the crowd responding to the question, muttering the two words that would soon be all over the West Side and the rest of the city: Frank Peterson's name.

Yates grabbed Terry by the arm and started hustling him toward the snack shack and the parking lot beyond. "You can preach to the multitudes later, Maitland. Right now you're going to jail. And guess what? We have the needle in this state, and we use it. But you're a teacher, right? You probably knew that."

They hadn't gotten twenty steps from the makeshift dugout before Marcy Maitland caught up and grabbed Tom Yates's arm. "What in God's name do you think you're doing?"

Yates shrugged her off, and when she tried to grasp her husband's arm, Troy Ramage pushed her away, gently but firmly. She stood where she was for a moment, dazed, then saw Ralph Anderson walking to meet his arresting officers. She knew him from Little League, when Derek Anderson had played for Terry's team, the Gerald's Fine Groceries Lions. Ralph hadn't been able to come to all the games, of course, but he came to as many as possible. Back then he'd still been in uniform; Terry had sent him a congratulatory email when he was promoted to detective. Now she ran toward him, fleet over the grass in her old tennis shoes,

which she always wore to Terry's games, claiming there was good luck in them.

"Ralph!" she called. "What's going on? This is a mistake!"

"I'm afraid it isn't," Ralph said.

This part he didn't like, because he liked Marcy. On the other hand, he had always liked Terry, as well—the man had probably changed Derek's life only a little, given the boy just a smatter of confidence-building, but when you were eleven years old, a little confidence was a big deal. And there was something else. Marcy might have known what her husband was, even if she didn't allow herself to know on a conscious level. The Maitlands had been married a long time, and horrors like the Peterson boy's murder simply did not come out of thin air. There was always a build-up to the act.

"You need to go home, Marcy. Right away. You may want to leave the girls with a friend, because there will be police waiting for you."

She only looked at him, uncomprehending.

From behind them came the chink of an aluminum bat making good contact, although there were few cheers; those in attendance were still shocked, and more interested in what they'd just witnessed than the game before them. Which was sort of a shame. Trevor Michaels had just hit the ball harder than ever before in his life, harder even than when Coach T was throwing meatballs in practice. Unfortunately, it was a line drive straight to the Bears shortstop, who didn't even have to jump to make the catch.

Game over.

6

Statement of June Morris {July 12th, 5:45 PM, interviewed by Detective Ralph Anderson, Mrs. Francine Morris in attendance}

Detective Anderson: Thank you for bringing your daughter down to the station, Mrs. Morris. June, how's that soda?

June Morris: It's good. Am I in trouble?

Detective Anderson: Not at all. I just want to ask you a couple of questions about what you saw two evenings ago.

June Morris: When I saw Coach Terry?

Detective Anderson: That's right, when you saw Coach Terry.

Francine Morris: Since she turned nine, we've let her go down the street by herself to see her friend Helen. As long as it's daylight. We don't believe in being helicopter parents. I won't after this, you can be sure of that.

Detective Anderson: You saw him after you had your supper, June? Is that right?

June Morris: Yes. We had meatloaf. Last night we had fish. I don't like fish, but that's how it goes.

Francine Morris: She doesn't have to cross the street, or anything. We thought it would be okay, since we live in such a good neighborhood. At least I thought we did.

Detective Anderson: It's always hard to know when to start giving them responsibilities. Now June—you went down the street, and that took you

right past the Figgis Park parking lot, is that right?

June Morris: Yes. Me and Helen—

Francine Morris: Helen and I—

June Morris: Helen and I were going to finish our map of South America. It's for our day camp project. We use different colors for the different countries, and we were mostly done, but we forgot Paraguay, so we were going to start all over again. That's also how it goes. After that we were going to play Angry Birds and Corgi Hop on Helen's iPad until my daddy came to walk me home. Because by then it might be getting dark.

Detective Anderson: This would have been at what time, Mom?

Francine Morris: The local news was on when Junie left. Norm was watching while I did the dishes. So, between six and six thirty. Probably quarter past, because I think the weather was on.

Detective Anderson: Tell me what you saw when you were walking past the parking lot, June.

June Morris: Coach Terry, I told you. He lives up the street, and once when our dog got lost, Coach T brought him back. Sometimes I play with Gracie Maitland, but not too much. She's a year older, and likes boys. He was all bloody. Because of his nose.

Detective Anderson: Uh-huh. What was he doing when you saw him?

June Morris: He came out of the trees. He saw me looking at him and waved. I waved back and

said, "Hey, Coach Terry, what happened to you?" and he said a branch hit him in the face. He said, "Don't be scared, it's just a bloody nose, I get them all the time." And I said, "I'm not scared, but you won't be able to wear that shirt anymore, because blood doesn't come out, that's what my mom says." He smiled and said, "Good thing I've got lots of shirts." But it was on his pants, too. Also on his hands.

Francine Morris: She was that close to him. I can't stop thinking about it.

June Morris: Why, because he had a bloody nose? Rolf Jacobs got one on the playground last year when he fell down, and it didn't scare me. I was going to give him my handkerchief, but Mrs. Grisha took him to the nurse's office before I could.

Detective Anderson: How close were you?

June Morris: Gee, I don't know. He was in the parking lot and I was on the sidewalk. How far is that?

Detective Anderson: I don't know, either, but I'm sure I'll find out. Is that soda good?

June Morris: You already asked me that.

Detective Anderson: Oh, right, so I did.

June Morris: Old people are forgetful, that's what my grandpa says.

Francine Morris: Junie, that's impolite.

Detective Anderson: It's okay. Your grandpa sounds like a wise man, June. What happened then?

June Morris: Nothing. Coach Terry got into his van and drove away.

Detective Anderson: What color was the van?

June Morris: Well, it would be white if it was washed, I guess, but it was pretty dirty. Also, it made a lot of noise and all this blue smoke. Phew.

Detective Anderson: Was anything written on the side? Like a company name?

June Morris: Nope. It was just a white van.

Detective Anderson: Did you see the license plate?

June Morris: Nope.

Detective Anderson: Which way did the van go?

June Morris: Down Barnum Street.

Detective Morris: And you're sure the man, the one who told you he had a bloody nose, was Terry Maitland?

June Morris: Sure, Coach Terry, Coach T. I see him all the time. Is he all right? Did he do something wrong? My mom says I can't look at the newspaper or watch the TV news, but I'm pretty sure something bad happened in the park. I'd know if school was in, because everybody blabs. Did Coach Terry fight with a bad person? Is that how he got the bloody—

Francine Morris: Are you almost done, Detective? I know you need information, but remember that I'm the one who has to put her to bed tonight.

June Morris: I put myself to bed!

Detective Anderson: Right, almost done. But June, before you go, I'm going to play a little game with you. Do you like games?

June Morris: I guess so, if they're not boring.

Detective Anderson: I'm going to put six photographs of six different people on the table . . . like this . . . and they all look a little like Coach Terry. I want you to tell me—

June Morris: That one. Number four. That's Coach Terry.

7

Troy Ramage opened one of the rear doors of the unmarked car. Terry looked over his shoulder and saw Marcy behind them, halted at the edge of the parking lot, her face a study in agonized bewilderment. Behind her came the *Call* photographer, snapping pictures even as he jogged across the grass. *Those won't be worth a damn*, Terry thought, and with a certain amount of satisfaction. To Marcy he shouted, "Call Howie Gold! Tell him I've been arrested! Tell him—"

Then Yates had his hand on top of Terry's head, pushing him down and in. "Slide over, slide over. And keep your hands in your lap while I fasten your seatbelt."

Terry slid over. He kept his hands in his lap. Through the windshield he could see the ballfield's big electronic scoreboard. His wife had led the fund drive for that two years before. She was standing there, and he would never

forget the expression on her face. It was the look of some woman in a third world country, watching as her village burned.

Then Ramage was behind the wheel, Ralph Anderson was in the passenger seat, and even before Ralph could get his door closed, the unmarked was backing out of the handicap space with a chirp of the tires. Ramage turned tight, spinning the wheel with the heel of his hand, then headed for Tinsley Avenue. They rode *sans* siren, but a blue bubble-light stuck to the dashboard began to swing and flash. Terry realized that the car smelled of Mexican food. Strange, the things you noticed when your day—your *life*—suddenly went over a cliff you hadn't even known was there. He leaned forward.

"Ralph, listen to me."

Ralph was looking straight ahead. His hands were clenched tightly together. "You can talk all you want down at the station."

"Hell, let him tell it," Ramage said. "Save us all some time."

"Shut up, Troy," Ralph said. Still watching the road unroll. Terry could see two tendons standing out on the back of his neck, making the number 11.

"Ralph, I don't know what led you to me, or why you'd want to arrest me in front of half the town, but you're totally off the rails."

"So say they all," Tom Yates remarked from beside him in a just-passing-the-time voice. "Keep those hands in your lap, Maitland. Don't even scratch your nose."

Terry's head was clearing now—not a lot, but a little—and he was careful to do as Officer Yates (his name was

pinned to his uniform shirt) had instructed. Yates looked as if he'd like an excuse to take a poke at his prisoner, cuffs or no cuffs.

Someone had been eating enchiladas in this car, Terry was sure of it. Probably from Señor Joe's. It was a favorite of his daughters, who always laughed a lot during the meal—hell, they all did—and accused each other of farting on their way home. "Listen to me, Ralph. Please."

He sighed. "Okay, I'm listening."

"We all are," Ramage said. "Open ears, buddy, open ears."

"Frank Peterson was killed on Tuesday. Tuesday afternoon. It was in the papers, it was on the news. I was in Cap City on Tuesday, Tuesday night, and most of Wednesday. Didn't get back until nine or nine thirty on Wednesday night. Gavin Frick, Barry Houlihan, and Lukesh Patel—Baibir's father—practiced the boys both days."

For a moment there was silence in the car, not even interrupted by the radio, which had been turned off. Terry had a golden moment in which he believed—yes, absolutely—that Ralph would now tell the big cop behind the wheel to pull over. Then he would turn to Terry with wide, embarrassed eyes and say, *Oh Christ, we really goofed, didn't we?*

What Ralph said, still without turning around, was, "Ah. Comes the famous alibi."

"What? I don't understand what you m—"

"You're a smart guy, Terry. I knew that from the first time I met you, back when you were coaching Derek in Little League. If you didn't confess outright—which I was hoping for, but didn't really expect—I was pretty

sure you'd offer some kind of alibi." He turned around at last, and the face Terry looked into was that of an absolute stranger. "And I'm equally sure we'll knock it down. Because we've got you for this. We absolutely do."

"What were you doing in Cap City, Coach?" Yates asked, and all at once the man who had told Terry to not even scratch his nose sounded friendly, interested. Terry almost told him what he had been doing there, then decided against it. Thinking was beginning to replace reacting, and he realized this car, with its fading aroma of enchiladas, was enemy territory. It was time to shut up until Howie Gold arrived at the station. The two of them could sort this mess out together. It shouldn't take long.

He realized something else, as well. He was angry, probably angrier than he'd ever been in his life, and as they turned onto Main Street and headed for the Flint City police station, he made himself a promise: come fall, maybe even sooner, the man in the front seat, the one he'd considered a friend, was going to be looking for a new job. Possibly as a bank guard in Tulsa or Amarillo.

8

Statement of Mr. Carlton Scowcroft {July 12th, 9:30 PM, interviewed by Detective Ralph Anderson}

Scowcroft: Will this take long, Detective? Because I usually go to bed early. I work maintenance on the railroad, and if I don't clock in by seven, I'll be in dutch.

Detective Anderson: I'll be as quick as I can, Mr. Scowcroft, but this is a serious matter.

Scowcroft: I know. And I'll help all I can. There's just, I don't have much to tell you, and I want to get home. I don't know how well I'll sleep, though. I haven't been in this station since a drinking party I went to when I was seventeen. Charlie Borton was chief then. Our fathers got us out, but I was grounded for the whole summer.

Detective Anderson: Well, we appreciate you coming in. Tell me where were you at seven PM on the night of July 10th.

Scowcroft: Like I told the gal at the desk when I came in, I was at Shorty's Pub, and I seen that white van, and I seen the guy who coaches baseball and Pop Warner over on West Side. I don't remember his name, but his picture's in the paper all the time because he's got a good City League team this year. Paper said they might go all the way. Moreland, is that his name? He had blood all over him.

Detective Anderson: How was it you happened to see him?

Scowcroft: Well, I got a routine for when I clock off work, not having a wife to go home to and not being much of a chef myself, if you know what I mean. Mondays and Wednesdays, it's the Flint City Diner. Fridays I go to Bonanza Steakhouse. And on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I usually go to Shorty's for a plate of ribs and a beer. That Tuesday I got to Shorty's at, oh, I'm gonna say quarter past six. Kid was already long dead by then, wasn't he?

Detective Anderson: But at around seven, you were out back, correct? Behind Shorty's Pub.

Scowcroft: Yeah, me and Riley Franklin. I ran into him there, and we ate together. Out back, that's where people go to smoke. Down the hall between the restrooms and out the back door. There's an ash bucket and everything. So we ate—I had the ribs, he had the mac and cheese—and we ordered dessert, and went out back to have a smoke before it came. While we were standing there, shooting the shit, this dirty white van pulled in. Had a New York plate on it, I remember that. It parked beside a little Subaru wagon—I think it was a Subaru—and that guy got out. Moreland, or whatever his name is.

Detective Anderson: What was he wearing?

Scowcroft: Well, I'm not sure about the pants—Riley might remember, they could've been chinos—but the shirt was white. I remember that because there was blood down the front of it, quite a bit. Not so much on the pants, just some spatters. There was blood on his face, too. Under his nose, around his mouth, on his chin. Man, he was gory. So Riley—I think he must have had a couple of beers before I showed up, but I only had the one—Riley says, "How's the other guy look, Coach T?"

Detective Anderson: He called him Coach T.

Scowcroft: Sure. And the coach, he laughs and says, "There was no other guy. Something let go in my nose, that's all, and it went like Old

Faithful. Is there a doc-in-the-box anywhere around here?"

Detective Anderson: Which you took to mean a walk-in facility, like MedNOW or Quick Care?

Scowcroft: That's what he meant, all right, because he wanted to see if he needed it cauterized up there inside. Ouch, huh? Said he had it happen to him once before. I told him to go down Burrfield about a mile, turn left at the second light, and he'd see a sign. You know that billboard by Coney Ford? It tells you about how long you'll have to wait and everything. Then he asked if he could leave his van in that little parking area behind the pub, which is not for customers—as the sign on the back of the building says—but for employees. And I said, "It's not my lot, but if you don't leave it too long, it should be all right." Then he says—and it struck both of us as weird, times being what they are—that he'd leave the keys in the cup holder in case somebody had to move it. Riley said, "That's a good way to get it stoled, Coach T." But he said again that he wouldn't be long, and about how someone might want to move it. You know what I think? I think maybe he wanted someone to steal it, maybe even me or Riley. You think that could be, Detective?

Detective Anderson: What happened then?

Scowcroft: He got into that little green Subaru, and off he went. Which also struck me as weird.

Detective Anderson: What was weird about it?

Scowcroft: He asked if he could leave his van for a little while—like he thought it might get towed, or something—but his car was there all along, safe and sound. Weird, right?

Detective Anderson: Mr. Scowcroft, I'm going to put six photographs of six different men down in front of you, and I want you to pick out the man you saw behind Shorty's. They all look similar, so I want you to take your time. Can you do that for me?

Scowcroft: Sure, but I don't need to take my time. That's him right there. Moreland, or whatever his name is. Can I go home now?

9

No one in the unmarked said anything else until they turned into the police station lot and parked in one of the spaces marked OFFICIAL VEHICLES ONLY. Then Ralph turned to survey the man who had coached his son. Terry Maitland's Dragons cap had been knocked slightly askew, so it sat in a kind of gangsta twist. His Dragons tee-shirt had come untucked on one side, and his face was streaked with sweat. In that moment he looked guilty as hell. Except, maybe, for his eyes, which met Ralph's dead-on. They were wide and silently accusing.

Ralph had a question that couldn't wait. "Why him, Terry? Why Frankie Peterson? Was he on the Lions Little League team this year? Did you have your eye on him? Or was it just a crime of opportunity?"

Terry opened his mouth to reiterate his denial, but

what was the point? Ralph wasn't going to listen, at least not yet. None of them were. Better to wait. That was hard, but it might save time in the end.

"Go on," Ralph said. He spoke softly, conversationally. "You wanted to talk before, so talk now. Tell me. Make me understand. Right here, before we even get out of this car."

"I think I'll wait for my lawyer," Terry said.

"If you're innocent," Yates said, "you don't need one. Put a pin in this, if you can. We'll even give you a ride home."

Still looking into Ralph Anderson's eyes, Terry spoke almost too softly to hear. "This is bad behavior. You never even checked on where I might have been on Tuesday, did you? I wouldn't have thought it of you." He paused, as if thinking, then said: "You *bastard.*"

Ralph had no intention of telling Terry that he had discussed that with Samuels, but not for long. It was a small town. They hadn't wanted to start asking questions that could get back to Maitland. "This was a rare case where we didn't need to check." Ralph opened his door. "Come on. Let's get you booked and printed and photographed before your lawyer gets h—"

"Terry! *Terry!*"

Instead of taking Ralph's advice, Marcy Maitland had followed the police car from the field in her Toyota. Jamie Mattingly, a neighbor, had stepped up and taken Sarah and Grace to her house. Both girls had been crying. Jamie had been, too.

"Terry, what are they doing? What should *I* be doing?"

He twisted momentarily free of Yates, who had him by the arm. "Call Howie!"

It was all he had time for. Ramage opened the door marked POLICE PERSONNEL ONLY and Yates hustled

Terry inside, none too gently, with a hand planted in the middle of his back.

Ralph stayed behind for a moment, holding the door. "Go home, Marcy," he said. "Go before the news people get there." He almost added *I'm sorry about this*, and didn't. Because he wasn't. Betsy Riggins and the State Police would be waiting for her, but it was still the best thing she could do. The only thing, really. And maybe he owed her. For her girls, certainly—they were the true innocents in all of this—but also . . .

This is bad behavior. I wouldn't have expected it of you.

There was no reason for Ralph to feel guilty at the reproach of a man who had raped and murdered a child, but for a moment he still did. Then he thought of the crime scene pictures, photos so ugly you almost wished you were blind. He thought of the branch sticking out of the little boy's rectum. He thought of a bloody mark on smooth wood. Smooth because the hand that left the print had shoved down so hard it had peeled the bark away.

Bill Samuels had made two simple points. Ralph had agreed, and so had Judge Carter, to whom Samuels had gone for the various warrants. First, it was a slam-dunk. There was no sense waiting when they already had everything they needed. Second, if they gave Terry time, he might take off, and then they'd have to find him before he found another Frank Peterson to rape and murder.

10

Statement of Mr. Riley Franklin {July 13th, 7:45 AM, interviewed by Detective Ralph Anderson}

Detective Anderson: I'm going to show you six photographs of six different men, Mr. Franklin, and I'd like you to pick out the man you saw behind Shorty's Pub on the evening of July 10th. Take your time.

Franklin: I don't need to. It's that one there. Number two. That's Coach T. I can't believe it. He coached my son in Little League.

Detective Anderson: It so happens he also coached mine. Thank you, Mr. Franklin.

Franklin: The needle's too good for him. They ought to hang him with a slow rope.

11

Marcy pulled into the parking lot of the Burger King on Tinsley Avenue, and took her cell phone out of her purse. Her hands were trembling, and she dropped it on the floor. She bent over to get it, thumped her head on the steering wheel, and began to cry again. She thumbed through her contacts and found Howie Gold's number—not because the Maitlands had a reason to keep a lawyer on speed-dial, but because Howie had coached Pop Warner with Terry during the last two seasons. He answered on the second ring.

"Howie? This is Marcy Maitland. Terry's wife?" As if they hadn't had dinner together once every month or so since 2016.

"Marcy? Are you crying? What's wrong?"

It was so enormous that at first she couldn't say it.

"Marcy? Are you still there? Were you in an accident or something?"

"I'm here. It's not me, it's Terry. They've arrested Terry. Ralph Anderson arrested Terry. For the murder of that boy. That's what they said. For the murder of the Peterson boy."

"*What?* Are you *shitting* me?"

"He wasn't even in town!" Marcy wailed. She heard herself doing it, thought she sounded like a teenager throwing a tantrum, but couldn't stop. "They arrested him, and they said the police are waiting at home!"

"Where are Sarah and Grace?"

"I sent them with Jamie Mattingly, from the next street over. They'll be okay for now." Although after just seeing their father arrested and led away in handcuffs, how okay could they be?

She rubbed her forehead, wondering if the steering wheel had left a mark, wondering why she cared. Because there might be news people waiting already? Because if there were, they might see the mark and think Terry had hit her?

"Howie, will you help me? Will you help us?"

"Of course I will. They took Terry to the station?"

"Yes! In handcuffs!"

"All right. I'm on my way. Go home, Marce. See what the police want. If they have a search warrant—that must be why they're there, I can't think of anything else—read it, see what they're after, let them in, but don't say anything. Have you got that? Don't say *anything.*"

"I . . . yes."

"The Peterson boy was killed last Tuesday, I think. Wait—" There was murmuring in the background, first Howie, followed by a woman, probably Howie's wife, Elaine. Then Howie was back. "Yes, it was Tuesday. Where was Terry on Tuesday?"

"Cap City! He went—"

"Never mind that now. The police may ask you about that. They may ask you all sorts of things. Tell them you're keeping silent on advice from your lawyer. Got it?"

"Y-Yes."

"Don't let them coax, coerce, or bait you. They're good at all three."

"Okay. Okay, I won't."

"Where are you now?"

She knew, she'd seen the sign, but had to look at it again to be sure. "Burger King. The one on Tinsley. I pulled in to call you."

"Are you okay to drive?"

She almost told him she'd bumped her head, then didn't. "Yes."

"Take a deep breath. Take three. Then drive home. Speed limit all the way, signal every turn. Does Terry have a computer?"

"Sure. In his office. Plus an iPad, although he doesn't use it much. And we both have laptops. The girls have their own iPad Minis. And phones, of course, we all have phones. Grace just got hers for her birthday three months ago."

"They'll give you a list of the stuff they mean to take."

"Can they really do that?" She wasn't wailing again, but she was close. "Just take our stuff? It's like something out of Russia or North Korea!"

"They can take what their warrant says they can take, but I want you to keep your own list. Do the girls have their cell phones with them?"

"Are you kidding? Those things are practically grafted to their hands."

"Okay. The cops may want to take yours. Refuse."

"What if they take it, anyway?" And did it matter? Did it really?

"They won't. If you haven't been charged with anything, they can't. Go on now. I'll be with you just as soon as I can. We are going to sort this out, I promise you."

"Thank you, Howie." She began to cry again. "Thank you very, very much."

"You bet. And remember: speed limit, full stops, turn-blinkers. Got it?"

"Yes."

"Headed to the station now." And he was gone.

Marcy put her car in drive, then put it back in park. She took a deep breath. Then two. Then three. *This is a nightmare, but at least it will be a short one. He was in Cap City. They'll see that, and they'll let him go.*

"Then," she told her car (it seemed so empty without the girls giggling and squabbling in the backseat), "we will sue their asses off."

That straightened her spine and brought the world back into focus. She drove home to Barnum Court, keeping to the speed limit and coming to a full stop at every stop sign.

12

Statement of Mr. George Czerny, {July 13th, 8:15 AM, interviewed by Officer Ronald Wilberforce}

Officer Wilberforce: Thank you for coming in, Mr. Czerny—

Czerny: You say it "Zurny." C-Z-E-R-N-Y. The C is silent.

Officer Wilberforce: Uh-huh, thanks, I'll make a note of that. Detective Ralph Anderson will also want to talk to you, but right now he's busy with another interview, and he asked me to get the basic facts while they're fresh in your mind.

Czerny: Are you towing that car? That Subaru? You ought to get it impounded so no one can pollute the evidence. There's plenty of evidence, I can tell you that.

Officer Wilberforce: Being taken care of as we speak, sir. Now I believe you were out fishing this morning?

Czerny: Well, that was the plan, but as it turned out, I never even wet a line. I went out just after sunrise, to what they call the Iron Bridge. You know, out on Old Forge Road?

Officer Wilberforce: Yes, sir.

Czerny: It's a great place to catch catfish. Many people don't like to fish for them because they're ugly—not to mention that they'll bite you sometimes while you're trying to get the hook out of them—but my wife fries them up with salt and lemon juice, and they taste pretty damn good. The lemon's the secret, you know. And you have to use an iron skillet. What my ma used to call a spider.

Officer Wilberforce: So you parked at the end of the bridge—

Czerny: Yes, but off the highway. There's an old boat landing down there. Someone bought the land it's on a few years back and put up a wire

fence with NO TRESPASSING signs on it. Never built anything yet, though. Those few acres just sit there growing weeds, and the landing's half under water. I always park my truck on the little spur road that goes down to that wire fence. Which is what I did this morning, and what do I see? The fence is knocked down, and there's a little green car parked on the edge of that sunken boat landing, so close to the water that the front tires were half-sunk in the mud. So I went down there, because I figured some guy must've left the titty-bar drunk the night before, and run off the main road. Had an idea he might still be inside, passed out.

Officer Wilberforce: When you say titty-bar, you mean Gentlemen, Please, just out at the town line?

Czerny: Yeah. Yes. Men go there, they get loaded, they stuff ones and fives into the girls' panties until they're broke, then they drive home drunk. Don't understand the attraction of such places, myself.

Officer Wilberforce: Uh-huh. So you went down and looked in the car.

Czerny: It was a little green Subaru. Nobody in it, but there were bloody clothes on the passenger seat, and I thought right away of the little boy that was murdered, because the news said the police were looking for a green Subaru in connection with the crime.

Officer Wilberforce: Did you see anything else?

Czerny: Sneakers. On the floor of the passenger side footwell. They had blood on 'em, too.

Officer Wilberforce: Did you touch anything? Try the doors, maybe?

Czerny: Hell no. The wife and I never missed an episode of CSI when it was on.

Officer Wilberforce: What did you do?

Czerny: Called 911.

13

Terry Maitland sat in an interview room, waiting. The handcuffs had been removed so his lawyer wouldn't raise hell when he got here—which would be soon. Ralph Anderson stood at parade rest, hands clasped behind his back, watching his son's old coach through the one-way glass. He had sent Yates and Ramage on their way. He had spoken to Betsy Riggins, who told him Mrs. Maitland hadn't arrived home yet. Now that the arrest had been made and his blood had cooled a little, Ralph again felt uneasy about the speed at which this thing was progressing. It wasn't surprising that Terry was claiming an alibi, and it would surely prove as thin, but—

"Hey, Ralph." Bill Samuels hurried up, straightening the knot in his tie as he came. His hair was as black as Kiwi shoe polish, and worn short, but a cowlick stuck up in back, making him look younger than ever. Ralph knew Samuels had prosecuted half a dozen capital murder cases, all successfully, with two of his convicted murderers (he called them his "boys") currently on death row at McAlester. That was all to the good, nothing wrong with having a child

prodigy on your team, but tonight the Flint County district attorney bore an eerie resemblance to Alfalfa in the old *Little Rascals* shorts.

"Hello, Bill."

"So there he is," Samuels said, looking in at Terry. "Don't like to see him in his game jersey and Dragons hat, though. I'll be happy when he's in a nice pair of county browns. Happier still when he's in a cell twenty feet from the go-to-sleep table."

Ralph said nothing. He was thinking of Marcy, standing at the edge of the police parking lot like a lost child, wringing her hands and staring at Ralph as if he were a complete stranger. Or the boogeyman. Except it was her husband who was the boogeyman.

As if reading his thoughts, Samuels asked, "Doesn't look like a monster, does he?"

"They rarely do."

Samuels reached into the pocket of his sportcoat and brought out several folded sheets of paper. One was a copy of Terry Maitland's fingerprints, taken from his file at Flint City High School. All new teachers had to be fingerprinted before they ever stepped before a class. The other two sheets were headed STATE CRIMINALISTICS. Samuels held them up and shook them. "The latest and the greatest."

"From the Subaru?"

"Yep. The state guys lifted over seventy prints in all, and fifty-seven are Maitland's. According to the tech who ran the comparisons, the others are much smaller, probably from the woman in Cap City who reported the car stolen two weeks ago. Barbara Nearing, her name is. Hers are much older, which lets her out of any part in the Peterson murder."

"Okay, but we still need DNA. He refused the swabs." Unlike fingerprints, DNA cheek swabs were considered *invasive* in this state.

"You know damn well we don't need them. Riggins and the Staties will take his razor, his toothbrush, and any hairs they find on his pillow."

"Not good enough until we match what we've got against samples we take right here."

Samuels looked at him, head tilted. Now he looked not like Alfalfa from *The Little Rascals*, but an extremely intelligent rodent. Or maybe a crow with its eye on something shiny. "Are you having second thoughts? Please tell me you're not. Especially when you were as raring to go as I was this morning."

Then I was thinking about Derek, Ralph thought. *That was before Terry looked me in the eye, as if he had a right to. And before he called me a bastard, which should have bounced right off and somehow didn't.*

"No second thoughts. It's just that moving so fast makes me nervous. I'm used to building a case. I didn't even have an arrest warrant."

"If you saw a kid dealing crack out of his knapsack in City Square, would you need a warrant?"

"Of course not, but this is different."

"Not much, not really, but as it so happens, I do have a warrant, and it was executed by Judge Carter before you made the arrest. It should be sitting in your fax machine right now. So . . . shall we go in and discuss the matter?" Samuels's eyes were brighter than ever.

"I don't think he'll talk to us."

"No, probably not."

Samuels smiled, and in that smile Ralph saw the man

who had put two murderers on death row. And who would, Ralph had little doubt, soon put Derek Anderson's old Little League coach there, as well. Just one more of Bill's "boys."

"But we can talk to *him*, can't we? We can show him that the walls are closing in, and that he'll soon be so much strawberry jelly between them."

14

Statement of Ms. Willow Rainwater {July 13th, 11:40 AM, interviewed by Detective Ralph Anderson}

Rainwater: Go on and admit it, Detective—I'm the least willowy Willow you ever saw.

Detective Anderson: Your size isn't at issue here, Ms. Rainwater. We're here to discuss—

Rainwater: Oh yeah, it is, you just don't know it. My size is why I was out there. There are ten, maybe twelve cabs waiting around at that panty palace by eleven o'clock most nights, and I'm the only woman. Why? Because none of the customers try to hit on me, no matter how drunk they are. I could have played left tackle back in high school, if they let women on their football team. And hey, half those guys don't even realize I'm a gal when they get in my cab, and many still don't know when they get out of it. Which is just hunky-dunky with me. Only thought you might want to know what I was doing there.

Detective Anderson: Okay, thanks.

Rainwater: But this wasn't eleven, this was about eight thirty.

Detective Anderson: On the night of Tuesday, July 10th.

Rainwater: That's right. Weeknights are slow all over town since the oil patch more or less dried up. A lot of the drivers just hang around the garage, shooting the shit and playing poker and telling dirty stories, but I got no use for any of that, so I'm apt to go out to the Flint Hotel or the Holiday Inn or the Doubletree. Or I go out to Gentlemen, Please. They got a cab-stand there, you know, for those who haven't drunk themselves stupid enough to try driving home, and if I get there early, I'm usually first in line. Second or third at worst. I sit there and read on my Kindle while I wait for a fare. Hard to read a regular book once it gets dark, but the Kindle's just fine. Great fucking invention, if you'll pardon me for lapsing into my Native American tongue for a minute.

Detective Anderson: If you could tell me—

Rainwater: I am telling you, but I've got my own way of telling, been this way since I was in rompers, so be quiet. I know what you want, and I'll give it to you. Here and in court, too. Then, when they send that kid-murdering son ofabitch to hell, I'll put on my buckskins and my feathers and goofy-dance until I drop. We straight?

Detective Anderson: We are.

Rainwater: That night, early as it was, I was

the only cab. I didn't see him go in. I got a theory about that, and I'll bet you five dollars I'm right. I don't think he went in to see the pussy-prancers. I think he turned up before I arrived—maybe just before—and just went in to call a cab.

Detective Anderson: You would have won that bet, Ms. Rainwater. Your dispatcher—

Rainwater: Clint Ellenquist was on dispatch Tuesday night.

Detective Anderson: That's correct. Mr. Ellenquist told the caller to check the cab-stand in the parking lot, and a cab would be there soon, if not already. That call was logged at eight forty.

Rainwater: Sounds about right. So he comes out, right over to my cab—

Detective Anderson: Can you tell me what he was wearing?

Rainwater: Bluejeans and a nice button-up shirt. The jeans were faded, but clean. Hard to tell under those arc-sodium parking lot lights, but I think the shirt was yellow. Oh, and his belt had a fancy buckle—a horse's head. Rodeo shit. Until he bent down, I thought he was probably just another Oilpatch Pete who somehow held onto his job when the price of crude went to hell, or a construction worker. Then I saw it was Terry Maitland.

Detective Anderson: You're sure of that.

Rainwater: Hand to God. The lights in that parking lot are bright as day. They keep it that

way to discourage muggings and fistfights and drug deals. Because their clientele is such a bunch of gentlemen, you know. Also, I coach Prairie League basketball down at the YMCA. Those teams are coed, but they're mostly boys. Maitland used to come down—not every Saturday, but a lot of 'em—and sit on the bleachers with the parents and watch the kids play. He told me he was scouting talent for City League baseball, said you could tell a kid with natural defensive talent by watching 'em play hoops, and like a fool I believed him. He was probably sitting there and trying to decide which one he'd like to cornhole. Judging them the way men judge women in a bar. Fucking pervo deviant asshole. Scouting talent, my wide Indian ass!

Detective Anderson: When he came to your cab, did you tell him you recognized him?

Rainwater: Oh yeah. Discretion may be somebody's middle name, but it ain't mine. I say, "Hey there, Terry, does your wife know where you are tonight?" And he says, "I had a spot of business to do." And I say, "Would your spot of business have involved a lap dance?" And he says, "You should call in and tell your dispatcher I'm all set." So I say, "I'll do that. Are we headed home, Coach T?" And he says, "Not at all, ma'am. Drive me to Dubrow. The train station." I say, "That's gonna be a forty-dollar fare." And he says, "Make it in time for me to catch the train to Dallas, and I'll tip you

twenty." So I say, "Jump in and hold onto your jock, Coach, here we go."

Detective Anderson: So you drove him to the Amtrak station in Dubrow?

Rainwater: I did indeed. Got him there in plenty of time to catch the night train to Dallas—Fort Worth.

Detective Anderson: Did you make conversation with him on the way? I ask because you seem like the conversational type.

Rainwater: Oh, I am! My tongue runs like a supermarket conveyor belt on payday. Just ask anybody. I started by asking him about the City League Tourney, were they gonna beat the Bears, and he said, "I expect good things." Like getting an answer from a Magic 8 Ball, right? I bet he was thinking about what he'd done, and making a quick getaway. Stuff like that must put a hole in your small talk. My question for you, Detective, is why the hell did he come back to FC? Why didn't he run all the way across Texas and down to Old Meh-hee-co?

Detective Anderson: What else did he say?

Rainwater: Not much. He said he was going to try and catch a nap. He closed his eyes, but I think he was faking. I think he might have been peeking at me, like maybe he was thinking of trying something. I wish he had. And I wish I'd known then what I know now, about what he done. I would have pulled him out of my cab and tore off his plumbing. I ain't lying.

Detective Anderson: And when you got to the Amtrak station?

Rainwater: I pulled up to the drop-off and he tossed three twenties on the front seat. I started to tell him to say hello to his wife, but he was already gone. Did he also go into Gentlemen to change his clothes in the men's room? Because there was blood on them?

Detective Anderson: I'm going to put six pictures of six different men down in front of you, Ms. Rainwater. They all look similar, so take your t—

Rainwater: Don't bother. That's him right there. That's Maitland. Go get him, and I hope he resists arrest. Save the taxpayers a piece of change.

15

When Marcy Maitland was in junior high (that was what it was still called when she went there), she sometimes had a nightmare that she turned up in home room naked, and everyone laughed. *Stupid Marcy Gibson forgot to get dressed this morning! Look, you can see everything!* By the time she got to high school, this anxiety dream had been replaced by a slightly more sophisticated one where she arrived in class clothed but realizing she was about to take the biggest test of her life and had forgotten to study.

When she turned off Barnum Street and onto Barnum Court, the horror and the helplessness of those dreams returned, and this time there would be no sweet relief and

muttered *Thank God* when she woke up. In her driveway was a cop car that could have been the twin of the one which had conveyed Terry to the police station. Parked behind it was a windowless truck with STATE POLICE MOBILE CRIME UNIT printed on the side in big blue letters. Bookending the driveway was a pair of black OHP cruisers, with their lightbars strobing in the day's growing gloom. Four large troopers, their County Mounty hats making them look at least seven feet tall, stood on the sidewalk, their legs spread (*as if their balls are too big to keep them together*, she thought). These things were bad enough, but not the worst. The worst was her neighbors, standing out on their lawns and watching. Did they know why this police presence had suddenly materialized in front of the neat Maitland ranchhouse? She guessed that most already did—the curse of cell phones—and they would tell the rest.

One of the troopers stepped into the street, holding up a hand. She stopped and powered down her window.

"Are you Marcia Maitland, ma'am?"

"Yes. I can't get into my garage with those vehicles in my driveway."

"Park at the curb there," he said, pointing behind one of the cruisers.

Marcy felt an urge to lean through the open window, get right up in his face, and scream, *MY driveway! MY garage! Get your stuff out of my way!*

Instead, she pulled over and got out. She needed to pee, and badly. Probably had needed to since the cop had handcuffed Terry, and she just hadn't realized until now.

One of the other cops was talking into his shoulder mic, and from around the corner of the house, walkie-talkie in