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**J.A.  
JANICE**

**SECOND  
WATCH**

**A J. P. BEAUMONT NOVEL**

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# SECOND WATCH

J. A. JANCE



WILLIAM MORROW

*An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers*

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# DEDICATION

*For Bonnie and Doug and all those missing years, and for all those other great guys—the ones who came home and the ones who didn't.*

*And also for Rhys, one of the ones who did come home.  
Thank you.*

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## PROLOGUE

We left the P-2 level of the parking lot at Belltown Terrace ten minutes later than we should have. With Mel Soames at the wheel of her Cayman and with me belted into the passenger seat, we roared out of the garage, down the alley between John and Cedar, and then up Cedar to Second Avenue.

Second is one of those rare Seattle thoroughfares where, if you drive just at or even slightly below the speed limit, you can sail through one green light after another, from the Denny Regrade all the way to the International District. I love Mel dearly, but the problem with her is that she doesn't believe in driving "just under" any speed limit, ever. That's not her style, and certainly not on this cool September morning as we headed for the Swedish Orthopedic Institute, one of the many medical facilities located in a neighborhood Seattle natives routinely call Pill Hill.

Mel was uncharacteristically silent as she drove hell-bent for election through downtown Seattle, zipping through intersections just as the lights changed from yellow to red. I checked to be sure my seat belt was securely fastened and kept my backseat-driving tendencies securely in check. Mel does not respond well to backseat driving.

"Are you okay?" she asked when the red light at Cherry finally brought her to a stop.

The truth is, I wasn't okay. I've been a cop all my adult life. I've been in gunfights and knife fights and even the occasional fistfight. There have been numerous times over the years when I've had my butt hauled off to an ER to be stitched up or worse. What all those inadvertent, spur-of-the-moment ER trips had in common, however, was a total lack of anticipation. Whatever happened happened, and I was on the gurney and on my way. Since I had no way of knowing what was coming, I didn't have any time to be scared to death and filled with dread before the fact. After, maybe, but not before.

This time was different, because this time I had a very good idea of what was coming. Mel was driving me to a scheduled check-in appointment at the Swedish Orthopedic Institute surgical unit Mel and I have come to refer to as the "bone squad." This morning at eight A.M. I was due to meet up with my orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Merritt Auld, and undergo dual knee-replacement surgery. Yes, dual—a pair in two knees at the same time.

I had been assured over and over that this so-called elective surgery was "no big deal," but the truth is, I had seen the videos. Mel and I had watched them together. I had the distinct impression that Dr. Auld would be more or less amputating both my legs and then bolting them back together with some spare metal parts in between. Let's just say I was petrified.

"I'm fine," I said.

"You are not fine," Mel muttered, "and neither am I." Then she slammed her foot on the gas, swung us into a whiplash left turn, and we charged up Cherry. Given her mood, I didn't comment on her speed or the layer of rubber she had left on the pavement behind us.

I had gimped along for a very long time without admitting to anyone, most of all myself, that my

knees were giving me hell. And once I had finally confessed the reality of the situation, Mel had said about moving heaven and earth to see that I did something about it. This morning we were both faced with a heaping helping of “watch out what you ask for.”

“You could opt to just do one, you know,” she said.

But I knew better, and so did she. When the doctor had asked me which knee was my good knee, I had told him truthfully that they were both bad. The videos had stressed that the success of the surgery was entirely dependent on doing the required postsurgery physical therapy. Since neither of my knees would stand up to doing the necessary PT for the other, Dr. Auld had reluctantly agreed to give me a twofer.

“We’ll get through this,” I said.

She looked at me and bit her lip.

“Do you want me to drop you at the front door?”

That was a strategy we had used a lot of late. She would drop me off or pick me up from front door while she hoofed it to and from parking garages.

“No,” I said. “I’d rather walk.”

I didn’t add “with you,” because I didn’t have to. She knew it. She also knew that by the time we made it from the parking garage to the building, we would have had to stop to rest three times and my forehead would be beaded with sweat.

“Thank you,” she said.

While I eased my body out of the passenger seat and straightened into an upright position, she hopped out and grabbed the athletic bag with my stuff in it out of the trunk. Then she came toward me looking up at me, smiling.

And the thought of losing that smile was what scared me the most. What if I didn’t wake back up? Those kinds of things weren’t supposed to happen during routine surgeries, but they did. Occasionally there were unexpected complications and the patient died. What if this was one of those times, and this was the last time I would see Mel or hold her hand? What if this was the end of all of it? There were so many things I wanted to say about how much I loved her and how much she meant to me and how, if I didn’t make it, I wanted her to be happy for the rest of her life. But did any of those words come out of my mouth? No. Not one.

“It’s going to be okay,” she said calmly, as though she had heard the storm of misgivings that was circling around in my head. She squeezed my hand and away we went, limping along, the haughty patient patiently keeping pace with the lumbering tortoise.

I don’t remember a lot about the check-in process. I do remember there was a line, and my knees made waiting in line a peculiar kind of hell. Mel offered to stand in line for me, but of course I turned her down. She started to argue, but thought better of it. Instead, she took my gym bag and sat in one of the chairs banked against the wall while I answered all the smiling clerk’s inane questions and signed the countless forms. Then, after Mel and I waited another ten minutes, a scrubs-clad nurse came to summon us and take us “back.”

What followed was the change into the dreaded backless gown; the weigh-in; the blood draw; the blood pressure, temperature, and pulse checks. Mel hung around for all of that. And she was still there when they stuck me on a bed to await the arrival of my anesthesiologist, who came waltzing into the bustling room with a phony smile plastered on his beaming face. He seemed to be having the time of his life. After introducing himself, he asked my name and my date of birth, and then he delivered an incredibly lame stand-up comic routine about sending me off to never-never land.

*Gee, thanks, and how would you like a punch in the nose?*

After a second wait of who knows how long, they rolled me into another room. This time Dr. Auld was there, and so were a lot of other people. Again they wanted my name and date of birth. It occurred

to me that my name and date of birth hadn't changed in the hour and a half during which I had to  
four other people the same, but that's evidently part of the program now. Or maybe they do it just for  
the annoyance factor.

At that point, however, Dr. Auld hauled out a Sharpie and drew a bright blue letter on each of my  
knees—*R* and *L*.

"That's just so we'll keep them straight," he assured me with a jovial smile.

Maybe he expected me to laugh. I didn't. The quip reminded me too much of the kinds of stale  
toasts delivered by hungover best men at countless wedding receptions, and it was about that funny  
too. I guess I just wasn't up to seeing any humor in the situation.

Neither was Mel. I glanced in her direction and saw the icy blue-eyed stare my lovely wife had  
leveled in the good doctor's direction. Fortunately, Dr. Auld didn't notice.

"Well," he said. "Shall we do this?"

As they started to roll me away, Mel leaned down and kissed me good-bye. "Good luck," she  
whispered in my ear. "Don't be long. I'll be right here waiting."

I looked into Mel's eyes and was surprised to see two tears well up and then make matching tracks  
down her surprisingly pale cheeks. Melissa Soames is not the crybaby type. I wanted to reach up and  
comfort her and tell her not to worry, but the anesthesiologist had given me something to "take the  
edge off," and it was certainly working. Before I could say anything at all, Mel was gone, disappearing  
from view behind my merry band of scrubs-attired escorts as they wheeled me into a waiting elevator.

I closed my eyes then and tried to remember exactly how Mel looked in that moment before the  
doors slid shut between us. All I could think of as the elevator sank into what felt like the bowels of  
the earth was how very much I loved her and how much I wanted to believe that when I woke up, she  
really would be there, waiting.

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# CHAPTER 1

Except she wasn't. When I opened my eyes again, that was the first thing I noticed. The second was that I was "feeling no pain," as they say, so the drugs were evidently doing what they were supposed to do.

I was apparently in the recovery room. Nurses in flowery scrubs hovered in the background. I could hear their voices, but they were strangely muted, as if somebody had turned the volume way down. As far as my own ability to speak? Forget it. Someone had pushed my mute button; I couldn't say a single word.

In the foreground, a youngish woman sat on a tall rolling stool at the side of the bed. My initial assumption was that my daughter, Kelly, had arrived from her home in southern Oregon. I had told her not to bother coming all the way from Ashland to Seattle on the occasion of my knee-replacement surgery. In fact, I had issued a fatherly decree to that effect, insisting that Mel and I would be fine on our own. Unfortunately, Kelly is her mother's daughter, which is to say she is also headstrong as hell. Since when did she ever listen to a word I said?

So there Kelly sat as big as life, whether I had wanted her at the hospital or not. She wore a crimson-and-gray WSU sweatshirt. A curtain of long blond hair shielded her face from my view while she studiously filed her nails—nails that were covered with bright red polish.

Having just been through several hours of major surgery, I think I could be forgiven for being a little slow on the uptake, but eventually I realized that none of this added up. Even to my drug-befuddled brain, it didn't make sense.

Kelly and I have had our share of issues over the years. The most serious of those involved her getting pregnant while she was still a senior in high school and running off to Ashland to meet up with and eventually marry her boyfriend, a wannabe actor named Jeff. Of course, the two of them have been a couple for years, and my son-in-law is now one of the well-established members of the acting company at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon.

The OSF offers a dozen or so plays a year, playing in repertory for months at a time, and Jeff Cartwright has certainly paid his dues. After years of learning his trade by playing minor roles as a sword-wielding soldier in one Shakespearian production after another or singing and occasionally tap dancing as a member of the chorus, he finally graduated to speaking roles. This year he was cast as Laertes in *Hamlet* in the Elizabethan theater and, for the first time ever in a leading role, he played Brick in the Festival's retrospective production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in the Bowmer Theatre. (I thought he did an excellent job, but I may be slightly prejudiced. The visiting theater critic for the *Seattle Times* had a somewhat different opinion.)

It was September, and the season was starting to wind down, but there was no way for Jeff to get away long enough to come up to Seattle for a visit, no matter how brief, and with Kayla and Kyle, m



grandkids, back in school, in fourth and first grade, respectively, it didn't seem like a good time for Kelly to come gallivanting to Seattle with or without them in tow just to hover at my sickbed.—

In other words, I was both surprised and not surprised to see Kelly there; but then, gradually, a few other details began to sink into my drug-stupefied consciousness. Kelly would never in a million years show up wearing a WSU shirt. No way! She is a University of Oregon Duck, green and yellow all the way. Woe betide anyone who tries to tell her differently, and she has every right to insist on that!

To my everlasting amazement and with only the barest of financial aid from yours truly, this once marginal student got her BA in psychology from Southern Oregon University, and she's now finishing up with a distance-learning master's in business administration from the U of O in Eugene. She's done all this, on her own and without any parental prompting, while running an at-home day care center and looking after her own two kids. When Kelly turned into a rabid Ducks fan along the way, she got no complaints from me, even though I'm a University of Washington Husky from the get-go.

But the very idea of Kelly Beaumont Cartwright wearing a Cougars sweatshirt? Nope. Believe me, it's not gonna happen.

Then there was the puzzling matter of the very long hair. Kelly's hair used to be about that same length—which is to say more than shoulder length—but it isn't anymore. A year or so ago, she cut it off and donated her shorn locks to a charity that makes wigs for cancer patients. (Karen, Kelly's mother and my ex-wife, died after a long battle with breast cancer, and Kelly remains a dedicated part of the cancer-fighting community. In addition to donating her hair, she sponsors a Relay for Life team and makes certain that both her father and stepfather step up to the plate with cash donations to the cause on a yearly basis.)

As my visitor continued to file her nails with single-minded focus, the polish struck me as odd. In my experience, mothers of young children in general—and my daughter in particular—don't wear nail polish of any kind. Nail enamel and motherhood don't seem to go together, and on the rare occasion when Kelly had indulged in a manicure she had opted for something in the pale pink realm, not the amazingly vivid scarlet, the kind of color Mel seems to favor.

Between the cascade of long blond hair and the bright red nail polish, I was pretty sure my silent visitor wasn't Kelly. If not her, then, I asked myself, who else was likely to show up at my hospital bedside to visit?

*Cherisse, maybe?*

Cherisse is my daughter-in-law. She has long hair and she does wear nail polish. She and my son, Scott, don't have kids so far, but Cherisse is not a blonde—at least she wasn't the last time I saw her. Besides, if anyone was going to show up unannounced at my hospital bedside, it would be my son, not his wife.

I finally managed to find a semblance of my voice, but what came out of my mouth sounded croaky like the throaty grumblings of an overage frog.

“Who are you?” I asked.

In answer, she simply shook her head, causing the cascade of silvery blond hair to ripple across her shoulder. I was starting to feel tired—sleepy. I must have blinked. In that moment, the shimmering blond hair and crimson sweatshirt vanished. In their place I saw a woman who was clearly a nurse.

“Mr. Beaumont. Mr. Beaumont,” she said, in a concerned voice that was far too loud. “How are you doing, Mr. Beaumont? It's time to wake up now.”

“I've already been awake,” I wanted to say, but I didn't. Instead, looking up into a worried face topped with a set of colorful scrubs, I wondered when it was that nurses stopped wearing white uniforms and white caps and started doing their jobs wearing clothes that looked more like crazed flower gardens than anything else.

“Okay,” I managed, only now my voice was more of a whisper than a croak. “My wife?”

“Right here,” Mel answered, appearing in the background, just over the nurse’s shoulder. “I’m right here.”

She looked haggard and weary. I had spent a long time sleeping; she had spent the same amount of time worrying. Unfortunately, it showed.

“Where did she go?” I asked the nurse, who was busy taking my blood pressure reading.

“Where did who go?” she asked.

“The girl in the sweatshirt.”

“What girl?” she asked. “What sweatshirt?”

Taking a cue from me, Mel looked around the recovery room, which consisted of a perimeter of several curtained-off patient cubicles surrounding a central nurses’ station. The whole place was a beehive of activity.

“I see nurses and patients,” Mel said. “I don’t see anyone in a sweatshirt.”

“But she was right here,” I argued. “A blonde with bright red nail polish a lot like yours. She was wearing a WSU sweatshirt, and she was filing her nails with one of those pointy little nail files.”

“A metal one?” Mel asked, frowning. “Those are bad for your nails. I haven’t used one of those in years. Do they even still sell them?”

That question was directed at the nurse, who, busy taking my temperature, simply shrugged. “Beau,” she said. “I’m not big on manicures. Never have been.”

That’s when I got the message. I was under the influence of powerful drugs. The girl in the sweatshirt didn’t exist. I had made her up.

“How’re you doing, Mr. B.?” Mel asked. Sidling up to the other side of the bed, she called me by her currently favored pet name and planted a kiss on my cheek. “I talked to the doctor. He said you did great. They’ll keep you here in the recovery room for an hour or two, until they’re sure you’re stable and then they’ll transfer you to your room. I called the kids, by the way, and let everybody know that you came through surgery like a champ.”

This was all good news, but I didn’t feel like a champ. I felt more like a chump.

“Can I get you something to drink?” the nurse asked. “Some water? Some juice?”

I didn’t want anything to drink right then because part of me was still looking for the girl. Part of me was still convinced she had been there, but I couldn’t imagine who else she might have been. One of Ron Peters’s girls, maybe? Heather and Tracy had both gone to WSU. Of the two, I’d always had a special connection with the younger one, Heather. As a kid she was a cute little blond-haired beauty whose blue-eyed grin had kept me in my place, properly wrapped around her little finger. At fifteen, barely recognizable Heather, one with hennaed hair and numerous piercings, had gone into full fledged off-the-rails teenage rebellion, complete with your basic bad-to-the-bone boyfriend.

In the aftermath of said boyfriend’s death, unlamented by anyone *but* Heather, her father and stepmother had managed to get the grieving girl on track. She had reenrolled in school, graduated from high school, and gone on to a successful college experience. One thing I did know clearly—that was September. That meant that, as far as I knew, Heather was off at school, too, working on a Ph.D. somewhere in the wilds of New Mexico. So, no, my mysterious visitor couldn’t very well be Heather Peters, either.

Not taking my disinterested answer about wanting something to drink for a real no, the nurse handed me a glass with water and a straw bent in my direction. “Drink,” she said. I took a reluctant sip, but I was still looking around the room; still searching.

Mel is nothing if not observant. “Beau,” she said. “Believe me, there’s nobody here in a WSU sweatshirt. And on my way here from the lobby, I didn’t meet anybody in the elevator or the hallway who was wearing one, either.”

“Probably just dreaming,” the nurse suggested. “The stuff they use in the OR puts ’em out prett

good, and I've been told that the dreams that go along with the drugs can be pretty convincing."

"It wasn't a dream," I insisted to the nurse. ~~"She was right here just a few minutes ago—right where you're standing now. She was sitting on a stool."~~

The nurse turned around and made a show of looking over her shoulder. "Sorry," she said. "Was there a stool here? I must have missed it."

But of course there was no stool visible anywhere in the recovery room complex, and no crimson sweatshirt, either.

The nurse turned to Mel. "He's going to be here for an hour or so, and probably drifting in and out of it for most of that time. Why don't you go get yourself a bite to eat? If you leave me your cell phone number, I can let you know when we're moving him to his room."

Allowing herself to be convinced, Mel kissed me again. "I am going to go get something," she said. "You do that," I managed. "I think I'll just nap for a while."

My eyelids were growing heavy. I could feel myself drifting. The din of recovery room noise retreated, and just that quickly, the blonde was back at my bedside, sitting on a rolling stool that seemed to appear and disappear like magic at the same time she did. The cascade of swinging hair shielded her face, and she was still filing her nails.

I've had recurring dreams on occasion, but not very often. Most of the time it's the kind of thing where something in the dream, usually something bad, jars me awake. When I go back to sleep, the dream picks up again, sometimes in exactly the same place, but a slightly different starting point can lead to a slightly different outcome.

This dream was just like that. I was still in the bed in the recovery room, but Mel was gone and I was my nurse. Everyone else in the room was faded and fuzzy, like from the days before high-doses appeared. Only the blonde on the stool stood out in clear relief against everything else.

"Who are you?" I asked. "What are you doing here? What do you want?"

She didn't look up. "You said you'd never forget me," she said accusingly, "but you have, haven't you?"

I was more than a little impatient with all the phony game playing. "How can I tell?" I demanded. "You won't even tell me your name."

"My name is Monica," she answered quietly. "Monica Wellington."

Then she lifted her head and turned to face me. Once the hair was swept away, however, I was appalled to see that there was no face at all. Instead, what peered at me over the neck of the crimson sweatshirt was nothing but a skull, topped by a headful of gorgeous long blond hair, parted in the middle.

"You promised my mother that you'd find out who did it," she said. "You never did."

With that she was gone, plunging me into a strange existence where the boundaries between memory and dream blurred somehow, leaving me to relive that long-ago time in every jarring detail.

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## CHAPTER 2

When it comes to boring, nothing beats second watch on a Sunday afternoon. It's a time when nothing much happens. Good guys and bad guys alike tend to spend their Sunday afternoons at home. On a sunny early spring day, like this one, the good guys might be dragging their wintered-over barbecue grills out of storage and giving them a first-of-the-season tryout. The bad guys would probably be nursing hangovers of one kind or another and planning their next illegal exploit.

Rory MacPherson was at the wheel of our two-year-old police-pursuit Plymouth Fury as we took a cruise around the streets of Seattle's Central West Precinct. We were supposedly on patrol, but with nothing much happening on those selfsame streets, we were mostly out for a Sunday afternoon drive, yakking as we went.

Mac and I were roughly the same age, but we had come to Seattle PD from entirely different tracks. He was one of those borderline juvenile delinquent types who ended up being given that old-fashioned bit of legal advice: join the army or go to jail. He had chosen the former and had shipped out for Vietnam after (a) knocking up and (b) marrying his high school sweetheart. The army had done what it promised and made a man out of him. He'd come home to the "baby killer" chorus and had gone to work for the Seattle Police Department because it was a place where a guy with a high school diploma could make enough money to support a wife and, by then, two kids. He had been there ever since, first as a beat cop and now working patrol, but his long-term goal was to transfer over to the Motorcycles unit.

Mac's wife, Melody, stayed home with the kids. From what I could tell from his one-sided version of events, the two of them constantly squabbled over finances. No matter how much overtime Mac worked, there was never enough money to go around. Melody wanted to go to work. Mac was adamantly opposed. Melody was reading too many books and, according to him, was in danger of turning into one of those scary bra-burning feminists.

From my point of view, letting Melody go out and get a job seemed like a reasonable solution. It was what Karen and I had decided to do. She had been hired as a secretary at the Weyerhaeuser corporate headquarters, but we had both regarded her work there as just a job—as a temporary measure rather than a career—because our ultimate goal, once we finally got around to having kids, had been for Karen to stay home and look after them, and that's what she was doing now.

In that regard, our story was different from Mac and Melody's. The two of us had met in college where I had snagged Karen away from the clutches of one of my fraternity brothers, a pompous asshole named Maxwell Cole. Due to the advent of the pill, we did *not* get "in trouble" before we got married, but it wasn't for lack of trying. My draft number came up at about the same time I graduated from the University of Washington, so I joined up before I was drafted. Karen was willing to get married before I shipped out; I insisted on waiting.

Once I came home, also to the by-then-routine “baby-killer” chorus, Karen and I did get married. I went to work at Seattle PD, while Karen kept the job at Weyerhaeuser she had gotten while I was in the service. It’s possible that Karen had a few bra-burning tendencies of her own, but it didn’t seem like that big an issue for either one of us at the time, not back when we were dating. For one thing, we were totally focused on doing things the “right way.” We put off having kids long enough to buy the house on Lake Tapps. Now that Scott had just turned one, we were both grateful to be settled.

Yes, I admit that driving from Lake Tapps to downtown Seattle is a long commute. That’s one of the reasons I drove a VW bug, for fuel economy, but as far as this former city kid is concerned, being able to raise our kids in the country rather than the city makes the drive and the effort worthwhile.

I was raised in Seattle’s Ballard neighborhood, where I was one of the few kids around with a single mother. My mom supported us by working at home as a seamstress. Growing up in poverty was one of the reasons I was determined to raise my own kids with two parents and a certain amount of financial security. I had my eye on being promoted to investigations, preferably Homicide. I had taken the exam, but so far there weren’t any openings.

Karen and I had both had lofty and naive ideas about how her stay-at-home life would work. However, with one baby still in diapers and with another on the way, reality had set in in a very brutal way. From Karen’s point of view, her new noncareer path wasn’t at all what it was cracked up to be. She was bored to tears and had begun to drop hints about being sold a bill of goods. The long commute meant that my workdays were longer, too. She wanted something more in her life than all Scotty, all the time. She also wanted me to think about some other kind of job where there wouldn’t be shift work. She wanted a job for me that would allow us to establish a more regular schedule, one where I could be home on weekends like other people. The big problem for me with that idea was that I loved what I did.

So that’s how me and Mac’s second-watch shift was going that Sunday afternoon. We had met up at Bob Murray’s Doghouse for a hearty Sunday brunch that consisted of steak and eggs, despite the warning on the menu specifying that the tenderness of the Doghouse’s notoriously cheap steaks was “not guaranteed.” I believe it’s possible—make that likely—that we both had some hair of the dog. Mac had a preshift Bloody Mary and I had a McNaughton’s and water in advance of heading into the cop shop in downtown Seattle.

Once we checked our Plymouth Fury out of the motor pool, Mac did the driving, as usual. When we were together, I was more than happy to relinquish the wheel. My solitary commutes back and forth from Lake Tapps gave me plenty of “drive time.” During Mac’s and my countless hours together in cars, we did more talking than anything else.

Mac and I were both Vietnam vets, but we did *not* talk about the war. What we had seen and done there was still too raw and hurtful to talk about, and what happened to us after we came back home was even more so. As a result we steadfastly avoided any discussion that might take us too close to that painful reality. Instead, we spent lots of time talking about the prospects for the newest baseball team in town, the second coming of the Seattle Rainiers, to have a winning season.

Mac was still provoked that the “old” Seattle Rainiers, transformed into the Seattle Pilots, had joined the American League and boogied off to Milwaukee. I didn’t have a strong feeling about any of it, so I just sat back and let Mac rant. Finished with that, he went on to a discussion of his son, Rolly, short for Roland. For Mac it was only a tiny step from discussing Seattle’s pro baseball team to his son’s future baseball prospects, even though Rolly was seven and doing his first season of T-ball, complicated by the unbelievable fact that Melody had signed up to be the coach of Rolly’s team.

My eyes must have glazed over about then. At our house, Karen and I were still up to our armpits in diapers. By the way, when I say the word “we” in regard to diapers, I mean it. I did my share of diaper changing. From where I stood in the process of child rearing, thinking about T-ball or even Litt

League seemed to be in the very distant future.

What I really wanted right about then was a cigarette break. Mac had quit smoking months earlier. Out of deference to him, I didn't smoke in the patrol car, but at times I really wanted to.

It must have been close to four thirty when a call came in over our two-way radio. Two kids had been meandering around the railroad yard at the base of Magnolia Bluff. Somewhere near the bluff they had found what they thought was an empty oil drum. When they pried off the top, they claimed they had discovered a dead body inside. I told Dispatch that we were on our way, but Mac didn't exactly put the pedal to the metal.

"I'll bet dollars to doughnuts this is somebody's idea of a great April Fool's joke," he said. "Want to bet?"

"No bet," I agreed. "Sounds suspicious to me."

We went straight there, not with lights and sirens, but without stopping for coffee along the way, either. We didn't call the medical examiner. We didn't call for the Homicide squad or notify the crime lab because we thought it was a joke. Except it turned out it wasn't a joke at all.

We located the two kids, carrot-topped, freckle-faced twin brothers Frankie and Donnie Dodson waiting next to a pay phone at the Elliott Bay Marina where they had called 911. They looked to be eleven or twelve years old. The fact that they were both still a little green around the gills made me begin to wonder if maybe Mac and I were wrong about the possibility of this being an April Fool's joke.

"You won't tell our mom, will you?" the kid named Donnie asked warily. "We're not supposed to be down by the tracks. She'll kill us if she finds out."

"Where do you live?" I asked.

"On Twenty-third West," he said, pointing to the top of the bluff. "Up on Magnolia."

"And where does your mother think the two of you are?" I asked.

Frankie, who may have been the ringleader, made a face at his brother, warning Donnie not to answer, but he did anyway.

"She dropped us off at the Cinerama to see *Charlotte's Web*. We tried to tell her that's a kids' movie, but she didn't listen. So after she drove away, we caught a bus and came back here to look around. We've found some good stuff here—a broken watch, a jackknife, a pair of false teeth."

Nodding, Frankie added his bit. "Halfway up the hill we found a barrel. We thought there might be some kind of treasure in it. That's why we opened it."

"It smelled real bad," Donnie said, holding his nose and finishing his brother's thought. "I thought I was going to puke."

"How do you know a body was inside?" I asked.

"We pushed it away from us. When it rolled the rest of the way down the hill, she fell out. She wasn't wearing any clothes."

"That's why we couldn't tell our mother," Donnie concluded, "and that's when we went to the marina to call for help."

"How about if you show us," Mac suggested.

We let the two kids into the back of the patrol car. They were good kids, and the whole idea of getting into our car excited them. Kids who have had run-ins with cops are not thrilled to be given rides in patrol cars. Following their pointed directions, we followed an access road on the far side of Pier 91. There were no gates, no barriers, just a series of NO TRESPASSING signs that they had obviously ignored, and so did we.

The road intersected with the path the barrel had taken on its downhill plunge. Its route was still clearly visible where a gray, greasy film left a trail through the hillside's carpet of newly sprung springtime weeds and across the dirt track in front of us. What looked like a bright yellow fifty-gallon

drum had come to a stop some fifteen yards farther on at the bottom of the steep incline. The torso of a naked female rested half inside and half outside the barrel. The body was covered in a grayish-brown ooze that I couldn't immediately identify. The instantly recognizable odor of death wafted into the air, but there was another underlying odor as well. While my nicotine-dulled nostrils struggled to make an olfactory sense of that second odor, Mac beat me to the punch.

"Cooking grease," he explained. "Whoever killed her must have shoved her feet-first into a restaurant-size vat of used grease. Restaurants keep the drums out on their loading docks. Once they're full, they haul them off to the nearest rendering plant."

I nodded. That was it—stale cooking grease. The combination of rotten flesh and rotting food was overwhelming. For a time we both stood in a horrified stupor while I fought down the urge to lose my own lunch and wondered if the victim had been dead or alive when she had been sealed inside her grease-filled prison.

Eventually the urgent cawing of a flock of crows wheeling overhead broke our stricken silence. Their black wings flapped noisily against the early April blue sky. I'm a crossword puzzle kind of guy. That gives me access to a good deal of generally useless information. In this instance, I knew that a flock of crows is called a murder, and this noisy bunch, attracted by what they must have expected to be a sumptuous feast, seemed particularly aptly named.

Mac was the first to stir. "I guess it's not a joke," he muttered as he started down the hill toward the body. "I'll keep the damn birds away. You call it in."

Mac was a few years my senior in both regular years and in years on the force. He often issued what sounded like orders. Most of the time I simply went along with the program. In this instance, I was more than happy to comply.

I went back over to the car and leaned inside. Donnie and Frankie were watching, wide eyed, from the backseat. "Did you see her?" Donnie asked. At least I think it was Donnie.

"Yes," I said grimly. "We saw her. While I call this in, I want the two of you to stay right where you are. Got it?"

They both nodded numbly. It wasn't as though they had a choice. There was a web of metal screening between the cruiser's front seat and the backseat. The doors locked from the outside, and there were no interior door handles. Frankie and Donnie Dodd weren't under arrest, but they weren't going anywhere without our permission. They sat there in utter silence while I made the call, letting Dispatch know that they needed to summon the M.E. and detectives from Homicide. When I finished, I hopped out of the car and skidded down the steep incline. Mac was already on his way back up.

"I gave up on the damn birds," he muttered. "She's already dead. How much worse can it be?"

"That's all right," I said. "I think I'll go have a look anyway."

"Suit yourself," Mac said with a shrug. "Some people are dogs for punishment."

We had worked together long enough that he knew I wanted a cigarette, but we were both kind enough not to mention it. I waited until I was far enough down the hill to be out of sight before I lit up. I figured out of sight is out of mind and damn the smoke smell later.

Still, smoking was what I was doing when my eyes were inevitably drawn to the body. People passing car wrecks on the highway aren't the only people guilty of rubbernecking. Cops do it, too, and at that time in my career I was enough of a newbie that seeing dead bodies was anything but routine.

I found myself staring at the dead woman—what I could see of her, at least. She lay sprawled facedown on the weedy hillside, half in and half out of the barrel. A tangle of what looked like shoulder-length blond hair spilled out over the ground. A moment later, something red caught my eye sticking out through the layer of greasy slurry. At first I thought what I was seeing was blood spattered, but that wasn't possible. Clearly the woman had been dead for some time. Once blood is exposed to the air, it oxidizes and goes from red to muddy brown. This was definitely red. Bright red. Scarlet.

Inhaling a lungful of smoke, I moved a step or two closer to get a better look.

What I was seeing, of course, was nothing but tiny little patches of bright red nail polish glowing in the sunlight. And that was the single detail that stayed with me from that crime scene—the nail polish. Wanting to look pretty for someone, the victim had gone to the trouble of having a manicure, or else she had given herself one. Had she been going to a dance or a party, maybe? Had she been out on the town for a night of fun?

Whatever it was, when she'd done her nails, she hadn't expected to be dead soon, or that the vibrant red nail polish would be the only thing she'd be wearing when someone found her body.



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## CHAPTER 3

**J**onas! Jonas. You really do need to wake up now.”

That’s my name—Jonas Piedmont Beaumont—but other than my mother and grandmother, both deceased now, almost no one calls me that—at least no one who actually knows me. I’m J.P., or Bear, or sweetie pie, or Mr. B. as far as Mel is concerned. I’m Dad for my kids and Grandpa for the grandkids. As a consequence, I wasn’t exactly eager to wake up and see who was yelling Jonas somewhere near my left ear.

When I opened my eyes, I saw that the person behind the very loud voice was short and very stout. I was no longer at the base of Magnolia Bluff, dealing with a dead body and a crime scene. Instead, I was in a brightly lit hospital room with someone shaking my shoulder insistently.

“There you are!”

I was momentarily confused, but the woman, another nurse in scrubs, soon set me straight.

“This is called the recovery room,” she announced with a smile. “No more sleeping. I brought you some beef broth. Would you like to try it?” She handed me a paper cup filled with steaming liquid, but my nose was still full of the smell of death. My gag reflex cut in, and I almost barfed.

“Oops,” the nurse said, taking back the cup. “Looks like it’s too soon for that, then. We’ll try the broth a little later.”

Somewhere along the way I must have fallen asleep again. It was hard to differentiate how much was dream and how much was memory, although I didn’t remember any other time when I’d had a dream that came complete with smells. I lay there for a time. While the room bustled around me, I struggled to put the pieces together. I understood that the girl who had appeared to me earlier, the one with the bright red fingernail polish, was Monica Wellington—the Girl in the Barrel—although at that time, the dead girl was a body without a name.

From my hospital bed in 2010, that case from 1973 seemed to be a very long time ago, but all of it was filed away in my memory bank. On that Sunday afternoon, it wasn’t my case right then because the time I had been assigned to Patrol rather than Homicide.

I remembered that I had turned away from the body and stubbed out my half-finished smoke, then I pocketed what was left and gone back to the patrol car, where Mac and the two boys were awaiting the arrival of reinforcements. Surprisingly enough, Dr. Howard Baker, King County’s newly appointed medical examiner, beat everyone else to the scene.

Even then, Doc Baker arrived at crime scenes reeking of cigar smoke and with a rumpled look that resembled an unmade bed. He always favored gaudy ties and tweedy jackets that never quite buttoned around his ample middle. In later years his hair would go completely white, but back then it was rapidly going from brown to gunmetal gray, and he wore it in a scraggly crew cut. Whole new generations of weather guys have to use hair gel to achieve that kind of spiky look. Doc Baker can

by his naturally.

“What have we got?” he asked.

Mac stepped out of the driver’s seat to do the honors. “Down there,” he said, pointing. “That’s where the body is—in that barrel down there. These two kids claim they found the barrel farther up the hill and rolled it down to where it is now.”

Before Doc Baker could do anything other than look, Detectives Larry Powell and Watty Watkins showed up. Watty was ten years my senior. He’d been a detective for five years, but his knees were giving out, and he was angling for a desk job. Powell was ambitious. Everybody had him pegged for being on a fast track for assistant chief, but right then they were still equals, and they’d been partners for as long as I had been on the force.

Once Mac had briefed the new arrivals on the situation, Detective Powell took charge. He looked into the car where Donnie and Frankie were still waiting. “Can you show us where you found the barrel?”

Donnie or Frankie nodded. “Okay, then,” Powell said, looking down the steep hillside to the spot where the barrel had come to rest. “Mac, you and Watty take the boys up onto the bluff to show you what’s presumably the crime scene. I want you to locate it, and that’s all. We’ll need to process the scene, and I don’t want it disturbed by a bunch of people tramping around in it. After that, Watty can take the boys’ statements and then drop them off at home. In the meantime, Officer Beaumont, you’ll stay with me.”

Powell probably picked the Beaumont part off my name badge. Even so, I was still new enough on the job that I was gratified to think one of the Homicide guys knew me by name. As soon as Mac and Watty drove off and we started down the hill, Powell clarified the situation and put me in my place.

“Watty’s knees are giving him hell,” he muttered. “Climbing up and down something this steep would kill him.”

At the time, the idea of my ever having bad knees myself was inconceivable, but if Watty’s failing joints gave me a chance to work with Larry Powell, one of Homicide’s hotshots, who was I to complain? After all, that was where I hoped I’d be going eventually—to Homicide. When it came time to make the move, having someone like Powell in my corner wouldn’t hurt a bit.

So I trotted down the hillside after him, determined to make myself useful. Minutes earlier the circling flock of crows had been the only visible scavengers at the scene. That had changed. The crows were now duking it out with an equally noisy flock of seagulls, but the flies had turned up as well. Somewhere in the fly world, the dinner bell had rung, and the troops had arrived en masse for the promised feast. A black cloud of them had appeared from out of nowhere. They swarmed around the barrel and its spilled contents.

With his evil-smelling stogie gripped between his teeth, Doc Baker waded into the mess to do his preliminary assessment. Once Powell and I came to a standstill behind him, I reached for my half-smoked cigarette. Seeing it, Powell gave a warning shake of his head.

“No smoking,” he said.

“What about Doc Baker’s cigar?” I asked, regretting the words as soon as I said them.

“Doc Baker’s not my problem,” Detective Powell said pointedly. “You are.”

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a small camera along with several rolls of film, and handed them over. “You’re in charge of photos,” he added. “Now make yourself useful.”

I did as I was told and went about snapping one picture after another.

Eventually the M.E.’s beefy helpers turned up with their gurney. By then it was clear that the only thing in the barrel besides the body was the rest of the grease. The victim was naked. There was no clothing and no identification, so the investigation’s first problem was going to be identifying who she was. As the M.E.’s assistants wrestled the dead woman into a body bag for transport, Powell motioned

to me.

“Let’s work our way up the hill.”

Spotting the track was easy enough, even if climbing the hill to follow it was not. The rolling barrel had left a clear path as it careened down the hill. In the process it had torn through thickets of blackberries and left a trail of flattened ferns and broken sprigs of grass along with slick patches of slimy spilled grease. Gravity had worked for the barrel on the steep hillside, but it worked against us. So did the thick tangles of blackberries. If you’ve ever hiked through blackberry brambles, you know climbing uphill through them isn’t exactly a stroll in the park.

The sun was almost gone by the time we finally made it to the spot where Donnie and Frankie had found the barrel hung up on a bramble and pried off the lid. The lid was still there, and so was the stick the two boys claimed they had used to unleash what turned out to be their own private nightmare.

“Poor kids,” Detective Powell muttered. “They had no idea what they were letting themselves in for.”

By then enough time had passed that it was going on full dark. I was using the flash to take a few more photos when Mac came roaring down the hill with Detective Watkins limping along behind him.

“Are you about done?” Mac asked. “I’m parked up there,” he added, pointing toward the top of the bluff.

“Did you see anything important?” Powell asked.

Mac shook his head. “There’s a vacant house up there. It looks like the barrel started down the hill right at the end of the driveway.”

“Any vehicle tracks?” Powell wanted to know.

Mac shook his head. “No such luck,” he answered. “Asphalt.”

I looked to Detective Powell for direction. “You two don’t have to stick around here,” he said. “I’ve called for lights and generators that should be here soon. In the meantime, I’d like you two to go back up and start canvassing the street. See if anyone noticed any unusual traffic coming or going from the house.”

Expecting to be unceremoniously sent back out on patrol, I was glad to be given another job to do. Once we clambered our way to the top of the hill, however, we had a nasty surprise waiting for us. Someone had alerted the media. A clutch of reporters, attracted by the flashes of the camera, stood waiting for us next to the patrol car. Among them was one of my least favorite people in the whole world, a cub reporter named Maxwell Cole.

As I mentioned before, Max and I had been fraternity brothers at the U-Dub. We had not been friends. We became even less so when he showed up at a dance with a very cute girl named Karen. Not only did I snag her away from him at the dance, I married her, too. Talk about adding insult to injury, and Max was still pissed about it. While I was off doing my duty in Vietnam, Max found a way to stay home. He had gone to work for the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, where he was now firmly ensconced on the police beat.

“Hey, Beau,” he said when he saw me. “What’s the deal down there? I understand some neighborhood kids found a dead woman. Can you confirm that?”

He made it sound like we were the best of pals. The other reporters in the group, thinking he had some kind of an in, backed off and gave him the floor. It did my heart good to tell him, along with the rest of his newsie gang, everything I was allowed to say, which was pretty much nothing.

“Sorry,” I said. “Can’t confirm or deny.”

Grimacing, Max went trudging after MacPherson, but Mac already knew there was no love lost between me and the *P-I*’s self-proclaimed ace reporter.

“You heard the man,” Mac said. “Mum’s the word. Check with the public information office.”

We got into our patrol car. Mac took off like a bat out of hell, and nobody bothered trying to follow

us. If they had, they wouldn't have had to go far, since we stopped again two blocks up the street where Amherst Place West intersects with W. Plymouth Street.

"You take that side, I'll take this one," Mac said. "And you could just as well skip the house back there on the corner of Twenty-third. That's where Donnie and Frankie live. Their mother was screaming banshee when we brought the boys home. She threatened to tear those poor kids limb from limb when she found out they had been down on Pier Ninety-one instead of where she thought they were, safely stowed at a movie."

"She was probably just worried about the boys messing around down by the railroad tracks," suggested.

Mac gave me a wink and a lip-smacking, lecherous grin. "Maybe so," he said. "But I doubt it."

"What do you mean?"

"I think it had a lot more to do with Watty and me interrupting whatever it was she and her boyfriend were doing when we brought the boys home. From the looks of it, I'd say the two of them were getting it on pretty hot and heavy. The guys from Homicide are the ones making the big bucks. Since they'll most likely have to talk with the boys again, why should we have to deal with a lacrosse tiger?"

Why indeed? With that, Mac and I hit the bricks.

It was close to dinnertime. As expected, the warm April weather had brought out the early-bird outdoor cooks. Smoke from a dozen separate Weber grills filled the evening air on the southern end of Magnolia Bluff. Residents of Seattle recognized this early bit of faux summer, the exact opposite of Indian summer, for what it was. Soon the sunshine and dry weather would be gone, not to return until sometime in early July. The people we dragged in from their backyard activities weren't especially welcoming or eager to talk to us. Other than using up some shoe leather, we gained precious little information in the process.

The house where the barrel's track originated had been vacant for several months, caught up in the midst of a rancorous divorce. One neighbor mentioned that she thought a sale was now pending, even though the real estate sign in the front yard didn't mention that. No one had noticed any unusual activity around the house in the past several days, although the same neighbor, a Mrs. Jerome Fisk said she thought some of the neighborhood kids had been hanging around in the backyard of the vacant house and using it as a hideout for smoking cigarettes.

"I didn't turn them in for it, though," she told me. "Those poor boys have a tough enough row hoe. I didn't want to add to their troubles."

"You're saying what exactly?" I asked.

"Their mother, you know," Mrs. Fisk added confidentially. "Amelia Dodd's a bit of a wild thing. Gentlemen callers coming to the house at all hours of the day and night."

"Gentlemen callers? You mean there's no husband in the picture?"

"Not so as you'd notice," Mrs. Fisk replied. "There are probably plenty of husbands in that group of men swarming around the honey pot, but I doubt any of them belong to her."

"You're saying she's a . . . professional?" I asked.

Mrs. Fisk shrugged. "Believe me, she has plenty of special male friends, and she doesn't appear to have any other kind of job, so you tell me. When I see those two boys left to their own devices so much of the time, it breaks my heart."

I know more than a little about what it's like to be raised as a fatherless boy. I looked at the house on the street. When I was growing up, my mother and I lived in a tiny Ballard-area apartment located over a bakery. Because of the ovens down below, the apartment was warm in the winter without our having to turn on the heat, but it was hot, hot, hot in the summer. I remember very clearly that when clients came to my mother's place for fittings, I was expected to make myself scarce.

Nevertheless, this Magnolia neighborhood was a big step up from the walk-up apartment where I was raised. I suppose there were plenty of people back then, including my own grandfather, who called my mother a “loose” woman because there was no man in our lives and no ring on Mother’s finger. Her fiancé, my father, died in a motorcycle wreck soon after she got pregnant and before they had a chance to marry. Defying her father’s wishes, Mother refused to give me up for adoption. Instead, she had raised me entirely on her own. At the time I was interviewing Mrs. Fisk I had no idea that one day in the far distant future I would be reunited with long-lost members of my father’s family.

At the time, I regarded Mrs. Fisk as a mean-spirited gossip, a little too eager to condemn her attractive young neighbor to anyone who would listen. It seemed likely that any number of old biddies had probably concocted and spread similar stories about my own mother. In many close-knit neighborhoods and small towns, the single mother was, and still is, a target of scrutiny, if not suspicion.

But even if it was true—if working as a lady of the evening turned out to be Frankie and Donnie’s mother’s only means of support—she must have been successful in her line of work. After all, Magnolia Bluff was one of Seattle’s solidly middle-class neighborhoods. If a working gal was able to earn enough money to maintain a house there, she had to be more of a call girl than a streetwalker, or at least with a well-heeled, generous clientele with maybe a few power brokers added into the mix.

I may have been relatively new to the force, but I was smart enough to figure out that in a pissin’ match between power brokers and a uniformed cop, I was the one who was going to come up with the short end of the stick.

In other words, Mrs. Fisk’s comments combined with what Mac had said earlier about the mother-in-law question made me more than happy to give Frankie and Donnie’s house a wide berth. By the time we had finished our canvass of the neighborhood and returned to the patrol car, the enticing aroma of grilling burgers had done its trick. It was now long after dinnertime, and we were both famished.

“Dick’s?” he said, putting our police-pursuit Fury in gear.

“Amen,” I said.

And that’s where we headed, for Ballard and the nearest Dick’s Drive-In.

When the first Dick’s opened in the fifties, it was in Seattle’s Wallingford neighborhood. For a kid too young to drive back then, it was close but no cigar. The only way to get there was to drive. I was a junior in high school when the one in Ballard opened, and it was cause for a school-wide celebration. That’s where we headed now.

We were parked in the car munching burgers and fries when Mac said, “I wouldn’t mind a piece of that.”

For a moment I wasn’t sure if he was talking about my burger or about the shapely carhop who had just delivered our food. Turns out it was neither.

“I’m talking about Frankie and Donnie’s mom,” he explained. “The woman may have been mad as all hell, but she was a dish, all right—blond, stacked, and gorgeous.”

That was when I finally got around to telling him what Mrs. Fisk had said about Frankie and Donnie’s mom. When I finished, Mac shook his head sadly. “Too bad. She’s probably out of my league.”

“What’s the matter with you?” I said. “You’re married.”

“That’s right,” he said. “But I’m not dead, and neither are you.”

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## CHAPTER 4

Somewhere along the way I had fallen back asleep. When I awoke again it seemed like I was still smelling one of Dick's hamburgers, but it turned out Mel was sitting in the chair next to my bed, munching away on a burger of her own.

"Hey, sleepyhead," she said. "When are you gonna wake up? It's time."

It took a moment for me to make the transition from the world as it was in 1973 to the world as it is now, and it was quite a jolt.

"That was weird," I said.

"What was weird?"

There was a lot of stuff in my head right then that I didn't particularly want to discuss with Mel Soames. Generally speaking, we didn't talk about my life with Karen back when the kids were little about what I referred to as the "good old days." Discussions of those always seemed to introduce a certain level of tension into the conversation.

I suppose I need to clarify this some. I'm not talking about old love affairs here. I'm referring to my carousing days when I'd have a drink or two before going to work without giving it a second thought. That, by the way, is one of the reasons I'm in AA now. So rather than go into any of those gory details with Mel, I glossed them all over.

"I was dreaming about hamburgers," I said, "and here you are eating one."

"Sorry about that. I was hungry, but don't expect me to share, because you're not allowed solid food yet. Jackie will be back in a minute."

"Who's Jackie?"

"Your nurse. She's on a break, but she gave me strict orders before she left. You can have water or you can have broth. That's it."

Right that minute, neither water nor broth was very high on my wish list. In fact, I still had to fight to keep my eyes open.

"Whatever they gave me really knocked me on my butt," I said.

"It's supposed to," Mel told me. "It's called anesthesia."

The same nurse reappeared—the stout one. This time I noticed that her name badge said she was Jackie Morse. That sounded familiar. Wait, Nurse Jackie. Wasn't that a television show of some kind? From what I remembered of the show, that particular Nurse Jackie wasn't exactly a picture of sweetness and light. It turned out this one wasn't, either.

"Okay," she said after checking my vitals one more time, just for the hell of it, "let's give that broth another try."

She handed me a cup with a straw in it. The stuff inside the cup was no longer hot—far from it—but to my surprise, when I swallowed a sip, it actually tasted good.

“We’ll wait long enough to check your vitals one more time, Jonas,” she said. “If you’re still steady as she goes, we’ll get you wheeled out of here and up to your room. That way you’ll be somebody else’s problem.”

When people call me by the name of Jonas, I can never quite wrap my head around the idea that I’m the person they’re addressing. Of course, in Nurse Jackie’s case, when she used the word “we,” wasn’t the royal we, by any means. It was the dismissive form of the word, the one favored by grade school teachers talking down their noses to classrooms full of bored kids.

It must have been the better part of another hour before Nurse Jackie finally pronounced that “we” were sufficiently recovered for me to leave the recovery room. As two uniformed attendants wheeled me into the hallway, I felt as though I had finally graduated from one of the levels of Dante’s Inferno. They rolled me down the hall, into the elevator, and then up into a room that was bigger than some of the hotel rooms I’ve seen. It had windows, a view of other buildings, and room for more than one bed, although only one bed seemed to be called for at the time.

Once in my new digs I was sufficiently awake to be less concerned about Nurse Jackie and far more worried about what was to come. What if my new knees didn’t work? What if I fell flat on my face the first time they tried to stand me up? What if I was destined to spend the rest of my life on one of those little scooters that they’re always advertising on the boob tube? Mel was right there, of course, but he didn’t mention any of those worries to her. Why would I? Instead, I lay in the bed, with Mel dozing off and on in the chair beside me. The only sound in the room was the soft whisper of the bedsprings preventing mattress under me. Other than that, I did my worrying in complete silence.

Fortunately, however, the orthopedic group didn’t leave me there stewing and worrying forever. In advance of the surgery, I had read all the “what to expect” booklets my orthopedic surgeon had sent out. Yes, I had read the part about the “recovery team” getting people back on their feet as soon as possible. Somehow I didn’t expect it to happen so soon, not the very same day as my surgery, but it did.

A bare three hours after I had been rolled into the new room, I was approached by a band of three waiflike young women, stick figures every one, who announced they were my PT squad and that they were there to get me out of bed and “up and at ’em,” as the one who looked to be in charge told me jauntily.

I didn’t share their enthusiasm, or their positive mental attitude. My first, unspoken response was a heartfelt “No way!” I was convinced it was much too soon and that the very idea of expecting me to stand up was an invitation to disaster. I’m sure I outweighed all three of them put together. I doubted they’d be able to support my weight. I could see myself falling to the brightly polished floor and smashing the new synthetic joints in my knees, to say nothing of my face, to pieces, but it was three to one—four, counting Mel—and they were not to be dissuaded. With the help of a strategically placed hoist, they pulled me up into a sitting position and then eased my legs over the edge of the bed. Once I was upright, they planted me in front of a walker.

I remember taking a very deep breath. The next thing I knew, I took my first step and didn’t fall down. That’s when a very real miracle happened. For the first time in at least ten years or so, I realized that my knees didn’t hurt. Of course, I was on plenty of pain meds at the time, but the steady pain that had ground away at me for years, waking and sleeping, simply wasn’t there anymore.

With my helpers and Mel cheering me along, I took one small, careful step after another. I didn’t walk all that far—out of the room and into the hallway. I went as far as the nurses’ station and then back to my room, where they returned me to my bed. The whole excursion left me feeling inordinately proud of myself—as though I’d just run the equivalent of a marathon. Before my head hit the pillow, I was back in never-never land.

Through the years, booze has always been my drug of choice—booze and, a long time ago,

cigarettes, too—but I've never been tempted to wander into the world of harder drugs. For one thing, my fear of needles makes it unlikely that I'd ever manage to be a successful IV drug user. But now, for the first time, lost in the dreamland world of medicinal narcotics, I got a taste of their allure.

For one thing, under the influence of the pain meds my dreams were astonishingly vivid and, in some cases, entirely welcome. Regular dreams tend to dissipate the moment I awake, but that was not the case here. The details stayed with me long after the dreamscape itself was gone. For all intents and purposes, it was a trip down memory lane.

Scenes from forty or even fifty years ago danced back through my head in full Technicolor splendor and in almost 3-D detail. In one, I was standing outside a hospital nursery looking down at the sweetly sleeping swaddled baby that was my newborn son, Scott. In another, I was a callow twenty-year-old youth, still a student at the University of Washington, sitting at my mother's hospital bedside and watching the morphine drip as she slowly, ever so slowly, lost her battle with breast cancer.

In others I walked long-ago crime scenes in more or less chronological order with partners both living and dead. In one I stood on the sidelines while medics tried to revive Milton Gurkey when he suffered a fatal heart attack after a violent confrontation with a homicide suspect. In some I was back in the car with Ron Peters, my former partner, when he was a young, gung-ho guy as well as a newly minted vegan. At the time, he hadn't yet taken his nosedive off a highway overpass and wasn't in a wheelchair, and I was still trying to figure out if I could work every day with a partner who wasn't a carnivore. In others, I was partnered with Big Al Lindstrom. In one I was even back in the elephant enclosure in the Woodland Park Zoo.

Eventually, in the dreams, as I had in real life, I found myself working with Sue Danielson. Even in the depths of sleep, my heart filled with dread, knowing that soon I would once again find myself in Sue's living room reliving the horror that had been part of my life from that day to this. Unable to help her, I had watched my partner and a great cop bleed to death on the floor of her own living room, gunned down by her enraged estranged husband. By the time I finally awoke fresh from the all-too-familiar scene of Sue's fallen-officer memorial, I was exhausted, physically and emotionally, and my cheeks were wet with tears.

That was about the time I began questioning whether I was dead or alive. Maybe I had died on the operating table and this trip through dreamland was God's way of having a little joke with me. Maybe He was using pieces of a lifelong jigsaw puzzle to allow my whole life to pass before my eyes in one disjointed scene after another.

But what had jostled me awake this time was the appearance of yet another nurse. This one was beefy, much-tattooed guy named Keith who came to take my vitals, check my drains, and see if I needed more pain meds.

Why do they do that? People are in hospitals for a reason—to get better from an illness or to recover from surgery. If patients are sleeping peacefully, why wake them up to see if they're all right? Why not let them sleep until they wake up on their own, at which time they can ring the bell and let someone know if more medication is in order? But let's not even go there, because that's not the way hospitals work, and it isn't going to happen.

So after Nurse Keith confirmed that I was still alive, if not kicking, I tossed around for a while. Wide awake, I would have been glad to have Mel's company about then, but when Keith had woken me up, I'd finally insisted that she go home to get some rest. She had been at the hospital all day long and would willingly have stayed longer, but I told her I was in good hands and that she was the one who needed relief. She had issued instructions to all our friends that no one was to show up at the hospital that first day. It comes as no surprise that not a single person had dared disobey Mel's orders.

So there I was, alone and awake, with only the haunting memories elicited by those vivid dreams to keep me occupied. Karen was always a big Simon and Garfunkel fan, and one of her favorite songs b



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