Homicide

A Year on the Killing Streets

David Simon

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Extract

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If a man is found slain, lying in a field in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him, your elders and judges shall go out and measure the distance from the body to the neighboring towns.

Then the elders of the town nearest the body shall take a heifer that has never been worked and has never worn a yoke and lead her down to a valley that has not been plowed or planted and where there is a flowing stream.

There in the valley they are to break the heifer's neck.

The priests, the sons of Levi, shall step forward, for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister and to pronounce blessings in the name of the Lord and to decide all cases of dispute and assault.

Then all the elders of the town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley and they shall declare:

"Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. Accept this atonement for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, O Lord, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent man."

Deuteronomy 21: 1–9

In contact wounds, the muzzle of the weapon is held against the surface of the body . . . the immediate edges of the entrance are seared by hot gases and blackened by the soot. This is embedded in the seared skin and cannot be completely removed either by washing or vigorous scrubbing of the wound.

Vincent J. M. DiMaio M.D.,
Gunshot Wounds: Practical Aspects of Firearms, Ballistics and Forensic Technique

The Players

Lieutenant Gary D'Addario
Shift Commander

Detective Sergeant Terrence McLarney
Squad Supervisor

Detective Donald Worden
Detective Rick James
Detective Edward Brown
Detective Donald Waltemeyer
Detective David John Brown

Detective Sergeant Roger Nolan
Squad Supervisor

Detective Harry Edgerton
Detective Richard Garvey
Detective Robert Bowman
Detective Donald Kincaid
Detective Robert McAllister

Detective Sergeant Jay Landsman
Squad Supervisor

Detective Tom Pellegrini
Detective Oscar Requer
Detective Gary Dunnigan
Detective Richard Fahlteich
Detective Fred Ceruti

ONE

Tuesday, January 19

Pulling one hand from the warmth of a pocket, Jay Landsman squats down to grab the dead man's chin, pushing the head to one side until the wound becomes visible as a small, ovate hole, oozing red and white.

"Here's your problem," he said. "He's got a slow leak."

"A leak?" says Pellegrini, picking up on it.

"A slow one."

"You can fix those."

"Sure you can," Landsman agrees. "They got these home repair kits now . . ."

"Like with tires."

"Just like with tires," Landsman says. "Comes with a patch and everything else you need. Now a bigger wound, like from a thirty-eight, you're gonna have to get a new head. This one you could fix."

Landsman looks up, his face the very picture of earnest concern.

Sweet Jesus, thinks Tom Pellegrini, nothing like working murders with a mental case. One in the morning, heart of the ghetto, half a dozen uniforms watching their breath freeze over another dead man—what better time and place for some vintage Landsman, delivered in perfect deadpan until even the shift commander is laughing hard in the blue strobe of the emergency lights. Not that a Western District midnight shift is the world's toughest audience; you don't ride a radio car for any length of time in Sector 1 or 2 without cultivating a diseased sense of humor.

"Anyone know this guy?" asks Landsman. "Anyone get to talk to him?"

"Fuck no," says a uniform. "He was ten-seven when we got here."

Ten-seven. The police communication code for "out of service" artlessly applied to a human life. Beautiful. Pellegrini smiles, content in the knowledge that nothing in this world can come between a cop and his attitude.

"Anyone go through his pockets?" asks Landsman.

"Not yet."

"Where the fuck are his pockets?"

"He's wearing pants underneath the sweatsuit."

Pellegrini watches Landsman straddle the body, one foot on either side of the dead man's waist, and begin tugging violently at the sweatpants. The awkward effort jerks the body a few inches across the sidewalk, leaving a thin film of matted blood and brain matter where the head wound scrapes the pavement. Landsman forces a meaty hand inside a front pocket.

"Watch for needles," says a uniform.

"Hey," says Landsman. "Anyone in this crowd gets AIDS, no one's gonna believe it came from a fucking needle."

The sergeant pulls his hand from the dead man's right front pocket, causing perhaps a dollar in change to fall to the sidewalk.

"No wallet in front. I'm gonna wait and let the ME roll him. Somebody's called the ME, right?"

"Should be on the way," says a second uniform, taking notes for the top sheet of an incident report. "How many times is he hit?"

Landsman points to the head wound, then lifts a shoulder blade to reveal a ragged hole in the upper back of the dead man's leather jacket.

"Once in the head, once in the back." Landsman pauses, and Pellegrini watches him go deadpan once again. "It could be more."

The uniform puts pen to paper.

"There is a possibility," says Landsman, doing his best to look professorial, "a good possibility, he was shot twice through the same bullethole."

"No shit," says the uniform, believing.

A mental case. They give him a gun, a badge and sergeant's stripes, and deal him out into the streets of Baltimore, a city with more than its share of violence, filth and despair. Then they surround him with a chorus of blue-jacketed straight men and let him play the role of the lone, wayward joker that somehow slipped into the deck. Jay Landsman, of the sidelong smile and pockmarked face, who tells the mothers of wanted men that all the commotion is nothing to be upset about, just a routine murder warrant. Landsman, who leaves empty liquor bottles in the other sergeants' desks and never fails to turn out the men's room light when a ranking officer is indisposed. Landsman, who rides a headquarters elevator with the police commissioner and leaves complaining that some sonofabitch stole his wallet. Jay Landsman, who as a Southwestern patrolman parked his radio car at Edmondson and Hilton, then used a Quaker Oatmeal box covered in aluminum foil as a radar gun.

"I'm just giving you a warning this time," he would tell grateful motorists. "Remember, only you can prevent forest fires."

And now, but for the fact that Landsman can no longer keep a straight face, there might well be an incident report tracked to Central Records in the departmental mail, complaint number 88-7A37548, indicating that said victim appeared to be shot once in the head and twice in the back through the same bullethole.

"No, hey, I'm joking," he says finally. "We won't know anything for sure until the autopsy tomorrow."

He looks at Pellegrini.

"Hey, Phyllis, I'm gonna let the ME roll him."

Pellegrini manages a half-smile. He's been Phyllis to his squad sergeant ever since that long afternoon at Rikers Island in New York, when a jail matron refused to honor a writ and release a female prisoner into the custody of two male detectives from Baltimore; the regulations required a policewoman for the escort. After a sufficient amount of debate, Landsman grabbed Tom Pellegrini, a thick-framed Italian born to Allegheny coal miner stock, and pushed him forward.

"Meet Phyllis Pellegrini," Landsman said, signing for the prisoner. "She's my partner."

"How do you do?" Pellegrini said with no hesitation.

"You're not a woman," said the matron.

"But I used to be."

With the blue strobe glancing off his pale face, Tom Pellegrini moves a step closer to take stock of what half an hour earlier had been a twenty-six-year-old street dealer. The dead man is sprawled on his back, legs in the gutter, arms partly extended, head facing north near the side door of a corner rowhouse. Dark brown eyes are fixed under half-lids in that expression of vague recognition so common to the newly and suddenly departed. It is not a look of horror, consternation, or even distress. More often than not, the last visage of a murdered man resembles that of a flustered schoolchild to whom the logic of a simple equation has just been revealed.

"If you're okay here," says Pellegrini, "I'm gonna go across the street."

"What's up?"

"Well . . ."

Landsman moves closer and Pellegrini lowers his voice, as if the spoken suggestion that there may be a witness to this murder would be an embarrassing display of optimism.

"There's a woman who went into a house across the street. Someone told one of the first officers she was outside when the shooting started."

"She saw it?"

"Well, supposedly she told people it was three black males in dark clothes. They ran north after the shots."

It isn't much, and Pellegrini can read his sergeant's mind: three yos wearing black, a description that narrows the list to about half the fucking city. Landsman nods vaguely and Pellegrini begins making his way across Gold Street, stepping carefully around the patches of ice that cover much of the intersection. It is early morning now, half past two, and the temperature is well below freezing. A bracing wind catches the detective in the center of the street, cutting through his overcoat. On the other side of Etting, the locals have gathered to mark the event, younger men and teenagers signifying, scoping the unexpected entertainment, each one straining to catch a glimpse of the dead man's face across the street. Jokes are exchanged and stories whispered, but even the youngest knows to avert his eyes and fall silent at a first question from a uniform. There is no good reason to do otherwise, because in a half hour the dead man will be laid out on a table for one at the ME's chop shop on Penn Street, the Western men will be stirring coffee at the Monroe Street 7-Eleven and the dealers will be selling blue-topped caps again at this godforsaken crossroads of Gold and Etting. Nothing said now is going to change any of that.

The crowd watches Pellegrini cross the street, eyefucking him in a way that only the west side corner boys can as he walks to a painted stone stoop and hits a wood door with a rapid, three-beat motion. Waiting for a response, the detective watches a battered Buick roll west on Gold, idling slowly toward and then past him. Brake lights flash for a moment as the car approaches the blue strobes on the other side of the street. Pellegrini turns to watch the Buick roll a few blocks farther west to the Brunt Street corners, where a small coterie of runners and touts have resumed work, selling heroin and cocaine a respectful distance from the murder scene. The Buick shows its taillights again, and a lone figure slips from one corner and leans into the driver's window. Business is business, and the Gold Street market waits for no man, certainly not the dead dealer across the street.

Pellegrini knocks again and steps close to the door, listening for movement inside. From upstairs comes a muffled sound. The detective exhales slowly and raps again, bringing a young girl to a second-floor window in the next rowhouse.

"Hey there," Pellegrini says, "police department."

"Uh-huh."

"Do you know if Katherine Thompson lives next door?"

"Yeah, she do."

"Is she home now?"

"Guess so."

Heavy pounding on the door is answered at last by a light from upstairs, where a frame window is suddenly and violently wrenched upward. A heavyset, middle-aged woman—fully dressed, the detective notes—pushes head and shoulders across the sill and stares down at Pellegrini.

"Who the hell is knocking on my door this late?"

"Mrs. Thompson?"

"Yeah."

"Police."

"Poh-leece?"

Jesus Christ, Pellegrini thinks, what else would a white man in a trenchcoat be doing on Gold Street after midnight? He pulls the shield and holds it toward the window.

"Could I talk to you for a moment?"

"No, you can't," she says, expelling the words in a singsong, slow enough and loud enough to reach the crowd across the street. "I got nothing to say to you. People be trying to sleep and you knocking on my door this late."

"You were asleep?"

"I ain't got to say what I was."

"I need to talk with you about the shooting."

"Well, I ain't got a damn thing to say to you."

"Someone died . . ."

"I know it."

"We're investigating it."

"So?"

Tom Pellegrini suppresses an almost overwhelming desire to see this woman dragged into a police wagon and bounced over every pothole between here and headquarters. Instead, he looks hard at the woman's face and speaks his last words in a laconic tone that betrays only weariness.

"I can come back with a grand jury summons."

"Then come on back with your damn summons. You come here this time a night telling me I got to talk to you when I don't want to."

Pellegrini steps back from the front stoop and looks at the blue glow

from the emergency lights. The morgue wagon, a Dodge van with blacked-out windows, has pulled to the curb, but every kid on every corner is now gazing across the street, watching this woman make it perfectly clear to a police detective that under no circumstances is she a living witness to a drug murder.

"It's your neighborhood."

"Yeah, it is," she says, slamming the window.

Pellegrini shakes his head gently, then walks back across the street, arriving in time to watch the crew of the morgue wagon roll the body. From a jacket pocket comes a wristwatch and keys. From a rear pants pocket comes an identification card. Newsome, Rudolph Michael, male, black, date of birth 3/5/61, address 2900 Allendale.

Landsman pulls the white rubber gloves from his hands, drops them in the gutter and looks at his detective.

"Anything?" he asks.

"No," says Pellegrini.

Landsman shrugs. "I'm glad it's you that got this one."

Pellegrini's chiseled face creases into a small, brief smile, accepting his sergeant's declaration of faith for the consolation prize it is. With less than two years in homicide, Tom Pellegrini is generally regarded to be the hardest worker in Sergeant Jay Landsman's squad of five detectives. And that matters now, because both men know that Baltimore's thirteenth homicide of 1988, handed to them on the second leg of a midnight shift at the corner of Gold and Etting, is an exceptionally weak sister: a drug killing with no known witnesses, no specific motive and no suspects. Perhaps the only person in Baltimore who might have managed some real interest in the case is at this moment being shoveled onto a body litter. Rudy Newsome's brother will make the identification later that morning outside a freezer door across from the autopsy room, but after that the boy's family will offer little else. The morning newspaper will print not a line about the killing. The neighborhood, or whatever is left around Gold and Etting that resembles a neighborhood, will move on. West Baltimore, home of the misdemeanor homicide.

All of which is not to say that any man in Landsman's squad wouldn't give Rudy Newsome's murder a shake or two. A police department is fueled by its own stats, and a homicide clearance—any clearance—will always earn a detective some court time and a few attaboys. But Pellegrini is playing the game for more than that: He's a de-

tective still in the process of proving things to himself, hungry for more experience and fresh to the daily grind. Landsman has watched him build cases on murders about which nothing should have been learned. The Green case from the Lafayette Court projects. Or that shooting outside Odell's up on North Avenue, the one where Pellegrini walked up and down a bombed-out alley, kicking trash until he found a spent .38 slug that put the case down. To Landsman, the amazing thing is that Tom Pellegrini, a ten-year veteran of the force, came to homicide straight from the City Hall security detail only weeks after the mayor became the odds-on favorite for governor in a Democratic primary landslide. It was a political appointment, plain and simple, handed down from the deputy commissioner for services as if the governor himself had poured the oil on Pellegrini's head. Everyone in homicide assumed that the new man would need about three months to prove himself an absolute hump.

"Well," says Pellegrini, squeezing behind the wheel of an unmarked Chevy Cavalier, "so far so good."

Landsman laughs. "This one will go down, Tom."

Pellegrini shoots back a look that Landsman ignores. The Cavalier slips past block after block of rowhouse ghetto, rolling down Druid Hill Avenue until it crosses Martin Luther King Boulevard and the Western District gives way to the early morning emptiness of downtown. The chill is keeping them in; even the drunks are gone from the Howard Street benches. Pellegrini slows before running every light until he catches the red signal at Lexington and Calvert, a few blocks from headquarters, where a lone whore, unmistakably a transvestite, gestures furtively at the car from the doorway of a corner office. Landsman laughs. Pellegrini wonders how any prostitute in this city could fail to understand the significance of a Chevy Cavalier with a six-inch antenna on its ass.

"Look at this pretty motherfucker," says Landsman. "Let's pull over and fuck with him."

The car eases through the intersection and pulls to the curb. Landsman rolls down the passenger window. The whore's face is hard, a man's face.

"Hey, sir."

The whore looks away in cold rage.

"Hey, mister," yells Landsman.

"I ain't no mister," the whore says, walking back to the corner.

"Sir, would you have the time?"

"Go fuck yourself."

Landsman laughs malevolently. One of these days, Pellegrini knows, his sergeant will say something bizarre to someone who matters and half the squad will be writing reports for a week.

"I think you hurt his feelings."

"Well," says Landsman, still laughing, "I didn't mean to."

A few minutes later, the two men are backed into a parking space on the second tier of the headquarters garage. On the bottom of the same page recording the particulars of Rudy Newsome's death, Pellegrini writes the number of the parking space and the mileage on the odometer, then circles the two figures. Murders come and go in this town, but God forbid you should forget to write the correct mileage on your activity sheet or, worse yet, forget to note the parking space so that the next man out spends fifteen minutes walking up and down the headquarters garage, trying to figure out which Cavalier matches the ignition key in his hand.

Pellegrini follows Landsman across the garage and through a metal bulkhead door to the second-floor hallway. Landsman punches the elevator button.

"I wonder what Fahlteich got from Gatehouse Drive."

"Was that a murder?" asks Pellegrini.

"Yeah. It sounded like it on the radio."

The elevator slowly ascends, opening on another, similar corridor with waxed linoleum and hospital blue walls, and Pellegrini follows his sergeant down the long hall. From inside the aquarium—the soundproof room of metal and plate glass where witnesses sit before being interviewed—comes the sound of young girls laughing softly.

Hail Mary. Here be witnesses from Fahlteich's shooting at the city's other end—living, breathing witnesses brought forth by the gods from the scene of the new year's fourteenth homicide. What the hell, thinks Pellegrini, at least somebody in the squad had a little luck tonight.

The voices in the aquarium slip away as the two men move down the hall. Just before turning the corner into the squadroom, Pellegrini looks into the darkened aquarium's side door and glimpses the orange glow of a cigarette and the outline of the woman seated closest to the door. He sees a hard face, the deep brown features fixed like granite, the eyes offering only seasoned contempt. Helluva body, too: nice chest, good legs, yellow miniskirt. Someone probably would have said something by now if she wasn't all attitude.

Mistaking this casual assessment for genuine opportunity, the girl saunters from the aquarium to the edge of the office, then knocks lightly on the metal frame.

"Can I make a call?"

"Who do you want to talk to?"

"My ride."

"No, not now. After you're interviewed."

"What about my ride?"

"One of the uniformed officers will take you home."

"I've been here an hour," she says, crossing her legs in the doorway. The woman has the face of a teamster, but she's giving this her best shot. Pellegrini is unimpressed. He can see Landsman smiling at him wickedly from the other side of the office.

"We'll get to you as fast as we can."

Abandoning any thought of seduction, the woman walks back to join her girlfriend on the fishbowl's green vinyl couch, crosses her legs again and lights another cigarette.

The woman is here because she had the misfortune to be inside a garden apartment in the Purnell Village complex on Gatehouse Drive, where a Jamaican drug dealer named Carrington Brown played host to another Jake by the name of Roy Johnson. There was some preliminary talk, a few accusations delivered in a lilting West Indian accent, and then a considerable amount of gunfire.

Dick Fahlteich, a balding, bantam-size veteran of Landsman's squad, got the call minutes after the dispatcher sent Pellegrini and his sergeant to Gold Street. He arrived to find Roy Johnson dead in the living room with more than a dozen gunshot wounds afflicting every conceivable part of his body. His host, Carrington Brown, was on the way to the University Hospital emergency room with four chest wounds. There were bulletholes in the walls, bulletholes in the furniture, automatic .380 casings and hysterical women scattered across the apartment. Fahlteich and two crime lab techs would spend the next five hours pulling evidence out of the place.

That leaves Landsman and Pellegrini to sort through the witnesses sent downtown. Their interviews begin reasonably and orderly enough; taking turns, the detectives escort each witness into a separate office, fill out an information sheet and write out a statement of several pages for the witness to sign and date. The work is routine and repetitive; in the last

year alone, Pellegrini has probably debriefed a couple hundred witnesses, most of them liars, all of them reluctant.

The process abruptly enters its second, more intensive phase a half hour later when an enraged Landsman hurls a four-page statement to the floor of a back office, slams his hand on a desk, and screams for the girl in the yellow miniskirt to get her ugly, untruthful, drug-ridden self out of his office. Well, thinks Pellegrini, listening at the other end of the hall, it isn't taking Landsman long to get down to business.

"YOU'RE A LYING BITCH," Landsman shouts, slamming the office door against its rubber stop. "DO YOU THINK I'M STUPID? DO YOU FUCKING THINK I'M STUPID?"

"What did I lie about?"

"Get the fuck out of here. You're charged."

"Charged with what?"

Landsman's face contorts into pure rage.

"YOU THINK THIS IS BULLSHIT? DO YOU?"

The girl says nothing.

"You just got a charge, you lying piece of shit."

"I didn't lie."

"Fuck you. You're charged."

The sergeant points the woman toward the small interrogation room, where she slumps into a chair and stretches her legs up over a Formica table. The miniskirt rides down toward her waist, but Landsman is in no mood to enjoy the fact that the woman wears nothing under her skirt. He leaves the door slightly ajar as he yells to Pellegrini across the squadroom.

"NEUTRON THIS BITCH," he shouts before closing the soundproof door to the small interrogation room, leaving the girl to wonder what sort of technological torture awaits. A neutron activation test requires only a painless swab of the hands to determine the presence of barium and antimony, elements deposited after a handgun is fired, but Landsman wants to leave her stewing on it, hoping she's in that box imagining that someone's about to irradiate her until she glows. The sergeant slams his open palm against the metal door one last time for proper emphasis, but the rage is gone even as he walks back into the main office. A staged performance—more vintage Landsman—delivered with gusto and sincerity for the lying bitch in the yellow miniskirt.

Pellegrini comes out of the coffee room and closes the door.

"What does yours say?"

"She didn't see it," says Pellegrini. "But she said your girl knows what happened."

"I fucking know she does."

"What do you want to do?"

"Take the statement from your girl," says Landsman, bumming a cigarette from his detective. "I'm gonna let this one sit for a while, then go back in and fuck with her."

Pellegrini returns to the coffee room and Landsman slumps into a desk chair. Cigarette smoke slips from the side of his mouth.

"Fuck this," says Jay Landsman to no one in particular. "I'm not gonna swallow two open cases in one night."

And so a graceless, nocturnal ballet resumes, with witnesses gliding past one another beneath the washed-out glare of tube lighting, each flanked by a tired, impassive detective cradling black coffee and enough blank statement forms to record the next round of half-truths. Pages are collated, initialed, and signed, Styrofoam coffee cups are refilled and cigarettes bartered until the detectives again assemble in the squadroom to compare notes and decide who's lying, who's lying more, and who's lying the most. In another hour, Fahlteich will return from the murder scene and hospital with enough details to vouch for the one honest witness brought downtown that night—a woman who happened to be walking across the parking lot and recognized one of the two gunmen as he entered the apartment. The woman knows what it means to talk about a drug murder and soon wishes she could take back everything she said to Fahlteich at the scene. Sent downtown immediately, she has been kept at a distance from the occupants of the apartment and is interviewed by Landsman and Fahlteich only after the detective returns from Gatehouse Drive. She shakes violently when the detectives bring up the subject of grand jury testimony.

"I can't do that," she says, breaking into tears.

"There's no choice."

"My children . . ."

"We're not going to let anything happen."

Landsman and Fahlteich leave the office to talk softly in the hallway.

"She's fucking terrified," says Landsman.

"No shit."

"We gotta grand jury her first thing tomorrow, before she has a chance to start backing up."

"We also got to keep her separate from the others," says Fahlteich, throwing a finger toward the witnesses in the fishbowl. "I don't want any of them to get a look at her."

By morning, they will have a nickname and general description for the missing gunman, and by the end of the week, his full name, police identification number, mug shot and the address of the North Carolina relatives who are hiding him. A week more and the kid is back in Baltimore, charged with first-degree murder and a weapons violation.

The story of Roy Johnson's murder is brutal in its simplicity, simple in its brutality. The shooter is Stanley Gwynn, an eighteen-year-old moon-faced kid who served as bodyguard to Johnson, a New York cocaine connect who had armed his true and loyal subordinate with an Ingram Mac-11 .380 machine pistol. Johnson visited the Gatehouse Drive apartment because Carrington Brown owed him money for cocaine, and when Brown wouldn't pay, Gwynn ended the negotiations with a long burst from the Ingram, a weapon capable of firing six rounds a second.

It was an impulsive, awkward performance, the sort of thing to be expected from a teenager. The attack was so clearly telegraphed that Carrington Brown was afforded more than enough time to grab Roy Johnson and use him as a shield. Before the scene in front of him registered in Stanley Gwynn's brain, he had machine-gunned the man he was supposed to protect. The intended target, Carrington Brown, lay bleeding from four bullets that had somehow found their way past the dead man, and Stanley Gwynn—who will later take a second-degree plea and twenty-five years—ran in panic from the apartment building.

When the dayshift detectives bring early relief at 6:30, the Roy Johnson murder, case H88014, is tucked neatly inside a manila folder on the administrative lieutenant's desk. An hour later, Dick Fahlteich is headed home for a quick shower before returning downtown to attend the autopsy. For his part, Landsman will be in his own bed by 8:00 A.M.

But as sunlight and the sounds of the morning rush hour seep through the sixth-floor windows, the flotsam and jetsam of H88013—the murder at Gold and Etting—are still scattered in front of Tom Pellegrini, a coffee-logged wraith who stares vacantly at the first officer's report, at supplementals, evidence submission slips, body custody and fingerprint forms for the person of Rudolph Newsome. Fifteen minutes either way and Pellegrini could have been dispatched to the Gatehouse Drive shooting, where a living victim and living witnesses were waiting to give up a murder and add one more to the list of clearances. Instead, Pellegrini

went to Gold and Etting, where a twenty-six-year-old dead man stared up at him with sudden, silent comprehension. Luck of the draw.

After Landsman's departure, Pellegrini works the edges of his little disaster for another ten hours—pulling the paperwork together, calling an assistant state's attorney about a grand jury summons for the Thompson woman and submitting the victim's effects to the evidence control unit in the basement of headquarters. Later that morning, a Western District patrolman calls the homicide unit about some corner boy who got locked up for drugs by the midnight shift and claimed to know about the Gold Street shooting. Seems the kid is willing to talk if he can make a lower bail on the drug charge. Pellegrini finishes his fifth cup of coffee before going back out to the Western to take a brief statement from the boy, who claims to have seen three men running north off Gold Street after hearing shots. The kid says he knows one of the men, but only by the name Joe—a statement just specific enough to match the true scenario, just vague enough to be of no practical use to the detective. Pellegrini wonders whether the kid was even there or whether he picked up what he could about the Gold Street murder while sitting in the lockup overnight, then did his best to turn the information around and try to barter out from under the drug charge.

Back in homicide, the detective slips the notes from the interview inside the case file for H88013 and then slides the folder underneath the Roy Johnson file on the desk of the administrative lieutenant, who has come and gone on the eight-to-four shift. Good news before bad. Then Pellegrini gives a man on four-to-twelve the keys to his Cavalier and goes home. It is a little after 7:00 P.M.

Four hours later, he's back for the midnight shift, hovering like a moth around the red pilot light of the coffee machine. Pellegrini takes a full cup into the squadroom, where Landsman begins playing with him.

"Hey, Phyllis," says the sergeant.

"Hey, Sarge."

"Your case is down, isn't it?"

"My case?"

"Yeah."

"Which case would that be?"

"The new one," says Landsman. "From Gold Street."

"Well," says Pellegrini, the words rolling out slowly, "I am ready to get a warrant."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Hmmm," says Landsman, blowing cigarette smoke at the television screen.

"Only one problem, though."

"What's that," says the sergeant, now smiling.

"I don't know who the warrant is for."

Landsman laughs until the cigarette smoke makes him cough.

"Don't worry, Tom," he says finally. "It'll go down."

This is the job:

You sit behind a government-issue metal desk on the sixth of ten floors in a gleaming, steel-frame death trap with poor ventilation, dysfunctional air conditioning, and enough free-floating asbestos to pad the devil's own jumpsuit. You eat $2.50 pizza specials and Italian cold cuts with extra hots from Marco's on Exeter Street while watching reruns of *Hawaii Five-O* on the communal nineteen-inch set with insubordinate horizontal hold. You answer the phone on the second or third bleat because Baltimore abandoned its AT&T equipment as a cost-saving measure and the new phone system doesn't ring so much as it emits metallic, sheeplike sounds. If a police dispatcher is on the other end of the call, you write down an address, the time, and the dispatcher's unit number on a piece of scratch paper or the back of a used three-by-five pawn shop submission card.

Then you beg or barter the keys to one of a half-dozen unmarked Chevrolet Cavaliers, grab your gun, a notepad, a flashlight and a pair of white rubber gloves and drive to the correct address where, in all probability, a uniformed police officer will be standing over a cooling human body.

You look at that body. You look at that body as if it were some abstract work of art, stare at it from every conceivable point of view in search of deeper meanings and textures. Why, you ask yourself, is this body here? What did the artist leave out? What did he put in? What was the artist thinking of? What the hell is wrong with this picture?

You look for reasons. Overdose? Heart attack? Gunshot wounds? Cutting? Are those defense wounds on the left hand? Jewelry? Wallet? Pockets turned inside out? Rigor mortis? Lividity? Why is there a blood trail, with droplets spattering in a direction away from the body?

You walk around the edges of the scene looking for spent bullets, casings, blood droplets. You get a uniform to canvass the houses or busi-

nesses nearby, or if you want it done right, you go door-to-door yourself, asking questions that the uniforms might never think to ask.

Then you use everything in the arsenal in the hope that something—anything—will work. The crime lab technicians recover weapons, bullets and casings for ballistic comparisons. If you're indoors, you have the techs take prints from doors and door handles, furniture and utensils. You examine the body and its immediate surroundings for loose hairs or fibers on the off chance that the trace evidence lab might actually put down a case now and then. You look for any other signs of disturbance, anything that doesn't appear to conform to its surroundings. If something strikes you—a loose pillowcase, a discarded beer can—you have a technician take it down to evidence control as well. Then you have the techs measure key distances and photograph the entire scene from every conceivable angle. You sketch the death scene in your own notebook, using a crude stickman for the victim and marking the original location of every piece of furniture and every piece of evidence recovered.

Assuming that the uniforms, upon arriving at the scene, were sharp enough to grab anyone within sight and send them downtown, you then go back to your office and throw as much street-corner psychology as you can at the people who found the body. You do the same thing with a few others who knew the victim, who rented a room to the victim, who employed the victim, who fucked, fought or fired drugs with the victim. Are they lying? Of course they're lying. Everyone lies. Are they lying more than they ordinarily would? Probably. Why are they lying? Do their half-truths conform to what you know from the crime scene or is it complete and unequivocal bullshit? Who should you yell at first? Who should you scream at loudest? Who gets threatened with an accessory to murder charge? Who gets the speech about leaving the interrogation room as either a witness or a suspect? Who gets offered the excuse—The Out—the suggestion that this poor bastard needed to be murdered, that anyone in their circumstance would have murdered him, that they only killed the bastard because he provoked them, that they didn't mean it and the gun went off accidentally, that they only fired in self-defense?

If all goes well, you lock someone up that night. If all goes not so well, you take what you know and run with it in the most promising direction, kicking a few more facts loose in the hope that something will give. When nothing gives, you wait a few weeks for the lab work to come back with a positive on the ballistics or the fibers or the semen. When the lab reports

come back negative, you wait for the phone to ring. And when the phone doesn't ring, you let a little piece of you die. Then you go back to your desk and wait for another call from the dispatcher, who sooner or later will send you out to look at another body. Because in a city with 240 murders a year, there will always be another body.

Television has given us the myth of the raging pursuit, the high-speed chase, but in truth there is no such thing; if there were, God knows the Cavalier would throw a rod after a dozen blocks and you'd be writing a Form 95 in which you respectfully submit to your commanding officer the reasons why you drove a city-owned four-cylinder wonder into an early grave. And there are no fistfights or running gun battles: The glory days of thumping someone on a domestic call or letting a round or two fly in the heat of some gas station holdup ended when you came downtown from patrol. The murder police always get there after the bodies fall and a homicide detective leaving the office has to remind himself to take his .38 out of the top right desk drawer. And, most certainly, there are no perfectly righteous moments when a detective, a scientific wizard with uncanny powers of observation, leans down to examine a patch of bloody carpet, plucks up a distinctive strand of red-brown caucasoid hair, gathers his suspects in an exquisitely furnished parlor, and then declares his case to be solved. The truth is that there are very few exquisitely furnished parlors left in Baltimore; even if there were, the best homicide detectives will admit that in ninety cases out of a hundred, the investigator's saving grace is the killer's overwhelming predisposition toward incompetence or, at the very least, gross error.

More often than not, the murderer has left behind living witnesses or even bragged to someone about the crime. In a surprising number of cases, the killer—particularly one unfamiliar with the criminal justice system—can be manipulated into a confession in the interrogation rooms. On rare occasions, a latent print taken from a drinking glass or knife hilt will match up with someone's print card on the Printrak computer, but most detectives can count on one hand the number of cases made by lab work. A good cop goes to the crime scene, gathers the available evidence, talks to the right people and with any luck discovers the murderer's most glaring mistakes. But in that alone there is talent and instinct enough.

If the pieces do fall into place, some unlucky citizen gets a pair of silver bracelets and a wagon ride to an overcrowded tier of the Baltimore City Jail. There he sits as his trial date is postponed for eight or nine

months or however long it takes your witnesses to change addresses two or three times. Then an assistant state's attorney, who has every intention of maintaining a better than average conviction rate so that he can one day come to rest in a better than average criminal law firm, calls you on the telephone. He assures you that this is the weakest homicide indictment he has ever had the misfortune to prosecute, so weak that he cannot believe it to be the work of a legitimate grand jury, and could you please round up the brain-dead cattle you call witnesses and bring them down for pretrial interviews because this thing is actually going to court on Monday. Unless, of course, he can convince the defense attorney to swallow manslaughter with all but five years suspended.

If the case isn't plea-bargained, dismissed or placed on the inactive docket for an indefinite period of time, if by some perverse twist of fate it becomes a trial by jury, you will then have the opportunity of sitting on the witness stand and reciting under oath the facts of the case—a brief moment in the sun that clouds over with the appearance of the aforementioned defense attorney who, at worst, will accuse you of perjuring yourself in a gross injustice or, at best, accuse you of conducting an investigation so incredibly slipshod that the real killer has been allowed to roam free.

Once both sides have loudly argued the facts of the case, a jury of twelve men and women picked from computer lists of registered voters in one of America's most undereducated cities will go to a room and begin shouting. If these happy people manage to overcome the natural impulse to avoid any act of collective judgment, they just may find one human being guilty of murdering another. Then you can go to Cher's Pub at Lexington and Guilford, where that selfsame assistant state's attorney, if possessed of any human qualities at all, will buy you a bottle of domestic beer.

And you drink it. Because in a police department of about three thousand sworn souls, you are one of thirty-six investigators entrusted with the pursuit of that most extraordinary of crimes: the theft of a human life. You speak for the dead. You avenge those lost to the world. Your paycheck may come from fiscal services but, goddammit, after six beers you can pretty much convince yourself that you work for the Lord himself. If you are not as good as you should be, you'll be gone within a year or two, transferred to fugitive, or auto theft or check and fraud at the other end of the hall. If you are good enough, you will never do anything else as a cop that matters this much. Homicide is the major leagues, the center ring, the show. It always has been. When Cain threw a cap into Abel, you

don't think the Big Guy told a couple of fresh uniforms to go down and work up the prosecution report. Hell no, he sent for a fucking detective. And it will always be that way, because the homicide unit of any urban police force has for generations been the natural habitat of that rarefied species, the thinking cop.

It goes beyond academic degrees, specialized training or book learning, because all the theory in the world means nothing if you can't read the street. But it goes beyond that, too. In every ghetto precinct house, there are aging patrolmen who know everything a homicide man knows, yet somehow they spend their careers in battered radio cars, fighting their battles in eight-hour installments and worrying about a case only until the next shift change. A good detective begins as a good patrolman, a soldier who has spent years clearing corners and making car stops, breaking in on domestics and checking the back doors of warehouses until the life of a city becomes second nature to him. And that detective is further honed as a plainclothesman, working enough years of burglary or narcotics or auto until he understands what it means to do surveillance, to use and not be used by an informant, to write a coherent search and seizure warrant. And of course there is the specialized training, the solid grounding in forensic science, in pathology, criminal law, fingerprints, fibers, blood typing, ballistics, and DNA-genetic coding. A good detective also has to fill his head with enough knowledge of the existing police information data base—arrest records, jail records, weapons registrations, motor vehicle information—to qualify for a minor in computer science. And yet, given all that, a good homicide man has something more, something as internalized and instinctive as police work itself. Inside every good detective are hidden mechanisms—compasses that bring him from a dead body to a living suspect in the shortest span of time, gyroscopes that guarantee balance in the worst storms.

A Baltimore detective handles about nine or ten homicides a year as the primary investigator and another half dozen as the secondary detective, although FBI guidelines suggest half that workload. He handles fifty to sixty serious shootings, stabbings and bludgeonings. He investigates any questionable or suspicious death not readily explained by a victim's age or medical condition. Overdoses, seizures, suicides, accidental falls, drownings, crib deaths, autoerotic strangulations—all receive the attention of the same detective who has, at any given moment, case files for three open homicides on his desk. In Baltimore, investigations of all shootings involving police officers are conducted by homicide detectives

rather than internal affairs men; a sergeant and a squad of detectives are assigned to probe every such incident and present a comprehensive report to the departmental brass and the state's attorney's office the following morning. Any threat on any police officer, state's attorney or public official is channeled through the homicide unit, as is any report of an attempt to intimidate a state's witness.

And there is more. The homicide unit's proven ability to investigate any incident and then document that investigation means that it is likely to be called on to handle politically sensitive investigations: a drowning at a city swimming pool where civil liability might result, a series of harassing phone calls to the mayor's chief of staff, a lengthy probe of a state legislator's bizarre claim that he was abducted by mysterious enemies. In Baltimore, the general rule is that if something looks like a shitstorm, smells like a shitstorm and tastes like a shitstorm, it goes to homicide. The headquarters food chain demands it.

Consider:

Commanding the homicide unit's two shifts of eighteen detectives and detective sergeants are a pair of long-suffering lieutenants who answer to the captain in charge of the Crimes Against Persons section. The captain, who wishes to retire with a major's pension, does not want his name associated with anything that gives pain to the colonel in charge of the Criminal Investigation Division. That is not just because the colonel is well liked, intelligent and black, and stands a good chance of getting kicked upstairs to a deputy commissioner's post or higher in a city with a new black mayor and a majority black population that has little faith in, or regard for, its police department. The colonel is also shielded from pain because whatever may arouse his displeasure requires only a brief elevator ride before it reaches the attention of Yahweh himself, Deputy Commissioner for Operations Ronald J. Mullen, who sits like a colossus astride the Baltimore Police Department, demanding to know everything about anything five minutes after it happens.

To mid-level supervisors, the deputy is simply the Great White Mullen, a man whose consistent escalation in rank began after a brief stint in Southwestern District patrol and continued unabated until he came to rest on the eighth floor of headquarters. It is there that Mullen has made his home for nearly a decade as the department's second-in-command, secured in his post by unswerving caution, good political sense and genuine administrative gifts, yet denied the police commissioner's office because he is white in a city that is not. The result is that

commissioners have come and gone, but Ronald Mullen remains to keep track of who put which skeletons in which closet. Every link in the chain, from sergeant on up, can tell you that the deputy knows much of what goes on in the department and can guess most of the rest. With one phone call, he can have what he doesn't know and can't guess reduced to a memorandum and brought upstairs before lunch. Deputy Commissioner Mullen is therefore a pain in the ass to street police everywhere and an invaluable resource to Police Commissioner Edward J. Tilghman, a veteran cop who spent three decades amassing enough political capital to warrant appointment by his mayor to a five-year term. And, in a one-party town such as Baltimore, the mayor's office at City Hall is a heaven-kissed summit, a place of unfettered political power currently occupied by one Kurt L. Schmoke, a black, Yale-educated incumbent blessed with an overwhelmingly Democratic, overwhelmingly black metropolis. Naturally, the commissioner is only permitted to breathe air after first responding to the needs of the mayor, who can better contemplate reelection when His police department causes Him no humiliation or scandal, serves Him in whatever manner He sees fit, and fights crime for the common good, in approximately that order.

Underneath this towering pyramid of authority squats the homicide detective, laboring in anonymity over some bludgeoned prostitute or shot-to-shit narcotics trafficker until one day the phone bleats twice and the body on the ground is that of an eleven-year-old girl, an all-city athlete, a retired priest, or some out-of-state tourist who wandered into the projects with a Nikon around his neck.

Red balls. Murders that matter.

In this town, a detective lives or dies on the holy-shit cases that make it clear who runs the city and what they want from their police department. Majors, colonels and deputy commissioners who never uttered a word when bodies were falling all over Lexington Terrace in the summer drug war of '86 are now leaning over the shoulder of a detective sergeant, checking the fine print. The deputy wants to be briefed. The mayor needs an update. Channel 11 is on line 2. Some asshole from the *Evening Sun* is on hold for Landsman. Who's this guy Pellegrini working the case? New guy? Do we trust him? Does he know what he's doing? Do you need more men? More overtime? You do understand that this thing is a priority, right?

In 1987, two parking attendants were murdered at 4:00 A.M. in the garage of the Hyatt Hotel at the Inner Harbor—the glittering waterfront development on which Baltimore has pinned its future—and by early af-

ternoon the governor of Maryland was barking loudly at the police commissioner. An impatient man given to sudden, spectacular histrionics, William Donald Schaefer is generally regarded to be the most consistently annoyed governor in the nation. Elected to Maryland's highest office in no small part because of the restored harbor's symbolic appeal, Schaefer made it clear in a brief phone call that people are not to be killed at the Inner Harbor without his permission and that this crime would be solved instantly—which, in fact, it pretty much was.

A red-ball case can mean twenty-hour days and constant reports to the entire chain of command; it can become a special detail, with detectives pulled out of the regular rotation and other cases put on indefinite hold. If the effort results in an arrest, then the detective, his sergeant, and his shift lieutenant can rest easy until the next major case, knowing that their captain's ear will not be gnawed upon by the colonel, who is no longer worried about turning his back on the deputy, who at this very moment is on the phone to City Hall telling Hizzoner that all is well in the harbor town. But a red-ball case that won't go down creates the opposite momentum, with colonels kicking majors kicking captains until a detective and his squad sergeant are covering themselves with office reports, explaining why someone the colonel thinks is a suspect was never questioned further about some incoherent statement, or why a tip from this brain-dead informant was discounted, or why the technicians weren't ordered to dust their own assholes for fingerprints.

A homicide man survives by learning to read the chain of command the way a Gypsy reads tea leaves. When the brass is asking questions, he makes himself indispensable with the answers. When they're looking for a reason to reach down somebody's throat, he puts together a report so straight they'll think he sleeps with a copy of the general orders. And when they're simply asking for a piece of meat to hang on the wall, he learns how to make himself invisible. If a detective has enough moves to still be standing after the occasional red ball, the department gives him some credit for brains and leaves him alone so he can go back to answering the phone and staring at bodies.

And there is much to see, beginning with the bodies battered by two-by-fours and baseball bats, or bludgeoned with tire irons and cinder blocks. Bodies with gaping wounds from carving knives or from shotguns fired so close that the shell wadding is lodged deep in the wounds. Bodies in public housing project stairwells, with the hypodermic still in their forearm and that pathetic look of calm on their faces; bodies pulled

out of the harbor with reluctant blue crabs clinging to hands and feet. Bodies in basements, bodies in alleys, bodies in beds, bodies in the trunk of a Chrysler with out-of-state tags, bodies on gurneys behind a blue curtain in the University Hospital emergency room, with tubes and catheters still poking out of the carcasses to mock medicine's best arguments. Bodies and pieces of bodies that fell from balconies, from rooftops, from marine terminal loading cranes. Bodies crushed by heavy machinery, suffocated by carbon monoxide or suspended by a pair of sweatsocks from the top of a Central District holding cell. Bodies on crib mattresses surrounded by stuffed animals, tiny bodies in the arms of grieving mothers who can't understand that there is no reason, that the baby just stopped breathing air.

In the winter, the detective stands in water and ash and smells that unmistakable odor as firefighters pry rubble off the bodies of children left behind when a bedroom space heater shorted. In the summer, he stands in a third-floor apartment with no windows and bad ventilation, watching the ME's attendants move the bloated wreck of an eighty-six-year-old retiree who died in bed and stayed there until neighbors could no longer stand the smell. He steps back when they roll the poor soul, knowing that the torso is ripe and ready to burst and knowing, too, that the stench is going to be in the fibers of his clothes and on the hairs of his nose for the rest of the day. He sees the drownings that follow the first warm spring days and the senseless bar shootings that are a rite of the first July heat wave. In early fall, when the leaves turn and the schools open their doors, he spends a few days at Southwestern, or Lake Clifton, or some other high school where seventeen-year-old prodigies come to class with loaded .357s, then end the school day by shooting off a classmate's fingers in the faculty parking lot. And on select mornings, all year long, he stands near the door of a tiled room in the basement of a state office building at Penn and Lombard, watching trained pathologists disassemble the dead.

For each body, he gives what he can afford to give and no more. He carefully measures out the required amount of energy and emotion, closes the file and moves on to the next call. And even after years of calls and bodies and crime scenes and interrogations, a good detective still answers the phone with the stubborn, unyielding belief that if he does his job, the truth is always knowable.

A homicide detective endures.