The Enemy of God

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Extract

The Investigation

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The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner—the city's principal morgue—is at 520 First Avenue. After getting out of his car, Chief Driscoll hesitates, unwilling to face what he knows is ahead of him. He glances at his driver, at his car with its bristling aerials, at traffic passing in the street. Finally he goes into the building.

The waiting room is distinguished from other waiting rooms he knows, his dentist's for instance, principally by the boxes of Kleenex, their tongues sticking out, that stand on all the end tables, the coffee tables too. There are people on one of the sofas even now, both sniffling, an old woman and a younger one, perhaps her daughter. He flashes his shield at the receptionist, whom he does not know, goes past the snifflers and through the door at the end of the room.

Downstairs is the business level of this place. He knows where he is going. He does not need a guide. His shoes ring cheerfully on the steps, and the sound seems to him obscene. To his left now is a wall of stainless steel doors to the refrigerated lockers, 126 doors, someone told him once. It takes no great imagination to visualize what lies behind them: nudes on trays with tags on their toes. Men, women, children, white, black, brown—former people of all ages and kinds, none of them personal to him. Against the opposite wall rise stacks of the cheap wooden coffins most of them will eventually be nailed into.

He tries to get his thoughts off himself, off his grief, off what he is here for. This place is like a store, he tells himself. The lockers contain the inventory, so to speak. The coffins are the eventual packaging. Above the lockers, as if attesting to the freshness of the goods, a digital thermometer monitors the refrigeration inside, its figures flickering between 33 and 35 degrees. The corpses are kept just above freezing. When their turn comes in the autopsy room no one wants them to blunt any knives.

Chief Driscoll is 53 years old, and if he were in uniform there would be three stars on his shoulders. In a 30,000-man department only one cop outranks him, plus the commissioner and his deputies, all of whom are civilians. Driscoll is stocky, baldish, heavier than he once was. He likes to smoke cigars. By the end of the day his clothes tend to smell of them. If a man's career is like a railroad line, then this morgue, for him, has been a regular stop for 30 years. He witnessed his first autopsy when still a patrolman. He has witnessed dozens, but the one coming up he never wanted to see.

He goes through the door into the autopsy lab. White tile walls, and a row of eight stainless steel dissection tables with naked stiffs stretched out on most of them, either waiting their turn or being actively worked on by men in white coats and rubber aprons.

The table he wants is the third one along. Two pathologists, one of whom he has met before, watch him approach.

"Gabe," says the man he knows, offering his hand, "we've been waiting for you, as your secretary requested."

Driscoll, who cannot remember the man's name, nods.

"Now that you're so high and mighty, we don't see you here anymore. Congratulations, by the way."

In New York the world of street detectives is delimited by corpses. Gabe Driscoll was a street detective for most of his career, meaning a student of death, and each unexplained corpse that he was obliged to investigate brought him to this room to watch the autopsy and to

ask questions that the official report, when he received it later, possibly would not answer. But now, as commander of several of the department's most sensitive units, including Internal Affairs, he has risen to a level where he is no longer concerned with what happens on these tables. Until today.

"This is Dr. Paget."

Driscoll shakes hands with Paget.

The corpse on the table is scrupulously clean, but looking at it makes Driscoll wince. Jagged white bone protrudes from the no longer bloody thigh. The broken jaw gives the face a rather wry grin. A disarticulated shoulder lies six inches lower and at a different angle than it should be. The back of the skull is caved in, as are some ribs on the right side. The x-rays would most likely show other damage as well.

"He doesn't look too bad for a jumper," says the pathologist.

"Maybe it was a car crash," says Driscoll.

"You're kidding me."

Driscoll remembers that the man's name is Levin.

"A jumper," says Dr. Levin. "Can't be anything else. Fourth floor I would guess. Am I right?"

Driscoll has a detective's distaste for people who jump to conclusions before the evidence is in. Forced to reply, he says: "I don't know. I haven't seen the building yet. I came here first."

"A free-falling body accelerates at the rate of thirty-two feet per second per second, did you know that? You must have studied it in physics class."

Driscoll never studied it until he became a cop.

"Newton's Law," Dr. Levin says. "From the fourth floor your speed when you hit is not too bad. About thirty-five miles an hour."

Gabe Driscoll does not like the image this presents. The man on the table, alive, in the air, flailing.

"Any higher up he'd look much worse," says Dr. Paget.

"You better believe it," says Levin, who begins to expound on Newton's Law, and how it relates to jumpers.

"Not a bad way to go," says Paget. "Can't get much quicker in fact."

They are joking about it.

Pathologists working on corpses are almost always lighthearted, and sometimes funny. Presumably it is how they stay sane, and in the past, at this table or another, Driscoll himself has contributed a joke or two. But in the presence of this corpse here he cannot bear to listen to jocular comments. So he interrupts. "I'm in a bit of a hurry, Dr. Levin. I'd appreciate it if we could get started."

Levin seems to feel he has been rebuked. For a moment his fingers toy with his tools. He has a number of them laid out, scalpels, bone saws, loppers that could take the branch off a tree. Tools uglier than corpses, Driscoll thinks.

A microphone hangs over the table. Levin turns it on and begins to dictate what will be, once it is typed up, the official autopsy report: "Body is that of a well-developed white male about fifty years old—"

"Fifty-three."

"Oh," says Levin, switching off the mike, "you knew him."

Driscoll nods.

"And that's why you're here. How do you know him? What was he, a cop?"

"A priest. Father Redmond. Frank Redmond."

"Catholic priest?"

"What other kind is there?"

"Priests don't normally jump off roofs. It's against their religion."

"We don't know yet what happened."

"I don't think I've ever worked on one."

Driscoll says: "Can I ask you to look for signs indicating a struggle?"

"Foul play, you mean. Someone pushed him off, threw him off. Murder not suicide. External trauma compatible with a life-and-death struggle. That what you want me to find?"

"I want to know what happened."

"He was a friend?"

"Yes."

"Close friend?"

"Yes."

"I see."

Levin doesn't see at all. Grief is a private emotion. Driscoll can't share it with Levin, or with anyone.

The pathologist moves his tools around. "What did he land on?"

"Part of the stoop, the sidewalk."

"You want to know about lacerations, surface hematoma, something of that nature. It's difficult to tell. The landing would have covered it up, whatever it is."

"No stab wounds, bullet wounds? Nothing like that?"

"He's got three broken teeth on the left side. But the fall could have done that."

"You can't be sure?"

"No."

Dr. Paget hands Levin a scalpel. "Height six feet three inches tall," Levin says into the microphone. "Scale weight 202 pounds, obvious visible trauma include compound fracture right femur—" Again switching off, he says to Driscoll: "He was a big guy."

"Yes."

"Nice musculature."

"He worked out regularly."

"It shows."

"He was a priest. He was such a decent man."

Levin makes the Y-shaped incision into the abdominal cavity.

Driscoll says: "Any abnormalities you might find in there, I want to know about that too. Maybe he was dying of cancer, or some goddam thing. If he jumped, which I don't believe, maybe that's why."

Levin's scalpel moves up and down. He dictates. From time to time Paget hands him other tools. Bones crack.

"You all right, Gabe?"

"Just do your job."

"You don't look so good."

In Driscoll's earliest memory Frank Redmond had been as naked as this. Driscoll also. They were 14 years old and trying out for the Fordham Prep swimming team along with other boys their age. They had been ordered up onto adjacent blocks in the Fordham pool on the Rose Hill campus. The chamber was barely heated, the air felt frigid. The water, they knew, would be colder still, and it looked rough down there. Naked and shivering they waited for the coach, who was also their algebra teacher, to blow his whistle and send them plunging in to swim twenty laps. Swimming that year had been considered a minor sport. By the time Frank Redmond, Gabe Driscoll, and the others graduated they were the best in the city and the stars of the school.

Levin has begun to extract Frank's internal organs. Each is weighed and the weight read into the microphone. The liver weighs so much, the kidneys, the heart. Driscoll, who cannot bear to watch, stares at the floor.

"He seems to have been in pretty good shape internally as well," Levin comments, "near as I can tell. Liver is fine."

"He rarely drank."

"Of course we can't be sure until the lab work comes back."

Driscoll remembers, more or less, how Frankie's body looked that first day. Smooth hairless skin pulled taut over a boy's pointy bones: the clavicle, ribs, knees all prominent. Still almost a baby, he himself the same. Not a surgical mark on either of them.

And now this.

By the start of the following season, both having sprouted pubic hair, they had looked with disdain at younger boys waiting their turn

to swim. "Look at those babies," Frankie had remarked one day. "If we could sell them a tonic that would grow hair on their balls we could make a fortune." There was always something raunchy about Frankie. He used to bring salacious poems to school. When he decided on the priesthood it greatly surprised Gabe Driscoll, who had never figured him for piety.

Nor for an end like this either.

Levin goes on cutting, weighing, dictating until the abdominal cavity is almost empty. "Not much blood left in him," he remarks.

"He was lying in a pool of it," Gabe manages to say.

"That makes sense." Levin goes in with a soup ladle and scoops out what there is.

Making an intermastoid incision across the scalp the pathologist peels the skin down over the face. Frankie's wry grin becomes a leer, then disappears. Again Driscoll stares at the floor. Levin picks up a Skilsaw. Driscoll hears him saw off the top of the ruined skull. Having removed what is left of Frankie's brain, he weighs it, and sets it aside.

"You sure you're all right, Gabe?"

"Fine." He feels Levin looking at him.

"You really don't look so good."

"I said I was fine."

"You could wait outside. I can bring the report to you outside."

"Just finish the goddam job."

"You didn't used to be as squeamish as this."

It didn't used to be Frankie on the table either.

When the autopsy ends Driscoll must stand out on the stoop for a time trying to catch his breath. He feels he is suffocating. He can't get enough air. His driver, standing beside the car, watches him curiously.

But Chief Driscoll's day is not over. An almost equally unpleasant job comes next. While being driven uptown he studies the checklist

attached to his clipboard. He has already made many calls. Undertaker, cemetery, flowers, and headstone have all been crossed off the list, but not the funeral itself, which is still up in the air. Monsignor Malachy, Frank Redmond's pastor, has decided on his own authority that the dead priest was a suicide, and has refused to allow him a mass of Christian burial or to be buried from the church he served.

On the phone the pastor had sounded adamant. None of Gabe Driscoll's arguments changed his mind. In the first conversation the detective chief attempted to talk patiently. By the end of the second it was all he could do to keep from screaming.

Frank's church is St. Ambrose on 148th Street in Harlem, located about two blocks from the patch of sidewalk where he was loaded into a body bag. The parish is small in numbers of faithful for in Harlem there are many denominations, some operating out of storefronts. The St. Ambrose parochial school has been closed for some years. Lately there have been only the two priests, Frank and the pastor. There must have been more once.

A cleaning woman or housekeeper or whatever she is shows Gabe Driscoll into the parlor, where he waits staring out through dirty curtains to the street. Finally Monsignor Malachy enters, cassock swaying.

"I'm afraid you've wasted your time coming up here," the pastor begins. "That man is not going to be buried from my church."

He is short, a bit stout. His cassock does not look clean. Its red piping denotes his monsignorial rank. He looks to be about 60, and speaks with a faint Irish brogue. "Canon law is firm on the subject. According to doctrine, suicide is the one unforgivable sin. You're a Catholic, are you not?"

Chief Driscoll nods.

"So you already know that. You also know that the Catholic Church cannot condone suicide, or seem to condone it. Suicide is a sin against the Holy Ghost."

Driscoll remembers hearing these arguments at Fordham Prep and later, and at the time believed them himself. They are arguments that as a grown man he has come to scorn. Much of Catholic doctrine he has come to scorn, as well as priests like this one.

"Suicide is the worst of all sins because it denies God's final grace."

"We don't know yet whether it was suicide or murder," Driscoll interrupts.

"One of your detectives was here. He says suicide."

"I don't think he could have said that."

"Suicide seems clear to me, and it's what I must act on."

"There's no way my detective could know yet. The investigation is just starting."

"Suicide. Nothing could be more obvious."

"Or somebody pushed him or threw him off that roof. Killed him."

"Suicide," the pastor says. "The unforgivable sin."

"I've just come from the autopsy. He had three teeth knocked out. That's consistent with a terrific fight. Somebody hit him with something and threw him over."

The pastor shakes his head.

"Here is the preliminary autopsy report." Driscoll holds out the pages.

"I don't need to look at that, and I won't."

"This is a tough neighborhood you live in, Monsignor. Frank was out in the street at all hours, I'm told. Some people called him the missionary to the junkies. Any one of those people could have killed him."

"I'm not going to listen to any more nonsense on the subject. You're not going to change my mind."

"All right," says Driscoll. "Assume for a moment that suicide is what it is. In recent years the Church has become more reasonable, a bit more Christian, you might say." His words sound stilted to him. He is virtually making a speech, but it is one that has to be made.

"The Church now accepts the possibility that a man who has killed himself is so distraught as to be counted insane, unable to tell right from wrong. And therefore still entitled to a Catholic funeral."

The pastor is again decisively shaking his head.

Driscoll's voice rises. "Frank Redmond was a Catholic priest, for Christ's sake."

"Don't take the Lord's name in this house."

"A Catholic funeral is what he would have wanted. And I'm here to see that he gets it."

"He was a bad priest," the pastor says, and his voice too has begun to rise. "I could have predicted this is how he would end up."

"A bad priest?"

"He did not care about doctrine. Listening to him preach you were listening to heresies, one after the other. He condoned artificial contraception, for instance."

"Refused to preach the party line on birth control. What else?"

"Ignored the teaching of the Holy Father in Rome. He believed that a marriage sanctified before God could be dissolved by divorce. He condoned heinous sins."

Having turned away, Chief Driscoll has begun contemplating part of the wall.

"Man had other problems too. Of an amorous nature. Do I make myself clear? I couldn't control him. He couldn't control himself. Yes, he was out on the street at all hours, but not always on Church business. I asked the Chancery to remove him. They said they would, but it wasn't done. Not in time, it wasn't."

Driscoll's voice goes low, menacing: "I've arranged for a priest from Fordham, one of Frank's former teachers, one of mine as well, to come in here and say the mass. I also talked to the auxiliary bishop to whom you report." The detective chooses his words with exaggerated care. "Bishop Ahern, his name is. He is sending up an order that the funeral is to take place. He did not like the sound of

what you are doing, trying to do, with regard to the funeral, so perhaps there will be a letter of reprimand along with it. The funeral is tomorrow at noon."

"Funerals in my church are at ten A.M."

"Noon, so as to give his parishioners a chance to get there. Now are you going to make the arrangements, or do I go back to Bishop Ahern?"

Driscoll heads for the door. He is amazed at the intensity of his feeling. His mouth seems clogged with venom. At the door he turns snarling. "It's because of men like you that people are leaving the Church. I hope you know that."

In his car he draws a line through the word "funeral," after which his grief comes down hard once again. He has only one more job left to do.

TROY SITS IN A HOTEL ROOM IN WASHINGTON trying to write for tomorrow's paper. His column appears three times a week on the Op-Ed page. Some days he writes it as fast as he can type. Other days are like this one. So far he has managed only his byline:

By Andrew L. Troy

Since then an hour has gone by. He has sat studying his own name, or paced the small room, or stared out the window smoking, all the while waiting for something to happen in his head. But nothing has happened, the words are not there, do not come. He imagines he knows why. He is trying to write about the senior senator from Texas whom he interviewed that morning and whose views he despises. The man himself he despises, but he can't say so in print. A columnist like Troy is in many ways a law unto himself. He can lay his opinions out for all to read. It is thought by people who do not know that he can write anything he pleases. But he can't. There are rules even for columnists. The senior senator from Texas is an

elected official, and his office must be respected, if not the man himself.

Troy has spent his entire career on this paper, working his way up from copyboy to reporter to foreign correspondent—he reported from Vietnam during part of the war there, afterward living nine more years abroad, heading the paper's bureaus in Berlin, South Africa, and finally Moscow. Hating Moscow, his wife went back to America after the first winter, taking their two daughters with her. He stayed on alone, and won a Pulitzer Prize for his reports on Kremlin intrigue during the war in Afghanistan, which he also covered. He was named a columnist shortly after.

He lives now in New York, insofar as he lives anywhere. He travels the world, almost always alone, for his wife and daughters no longer wish to accompany him. Next week he expects to be in Lebanon, and from there will go to India, Thailand, and Hong Kong. He has come to Washington this week to arrange briefings from State Department contacts, chiefly the men manning the various foreign desks. When he gets to where he is going he needs to know who holds power and how much, and which problems preoccupy each country. He needs to know who to try to see, and which questions to ask.

He has, in addition, interviewed American politicians earlier this week, particularly congressmen and senators with seats on the two foreign relations committees. He has asked his questions while concealing his distaste for the men across the table from him. He sees them as smarmy, venal men, bland and arrogant at the same time. He sees politicians as men without principle, their only object to get reelected, and become rich. Every one of them will sell his vote to the highest bidder, and describe whatever comes in as a campaign contribution. They are men who pay for nothing and would be surprised if anyone asked them to. Lobbyists pay, or journalists, or rich constituents, or they charge it to their campaigns. They never con-

sider themselves dishonorable men. Troy's own code, a remnant of his Jesuit upbringing, is strict. If he behaved like any one of them he would not be able to live with himself.

The typewriter on the desk is an Olivetti portable. There is something a bit staid about Troy. He tends to adhere to the old values. His paper went over to the new computers a year or so ago, but Troy himself did not. This typewriter is good enough for him, and his fingers know how to work it. He intends to hold out as long as he can.

Now he sits down and types out a lead paragraph, but after staring at it a moment, gets up and paces again. He takes his glasses off and rubs his eyes.

The telephone rings, and it is Gabe Driscoll.

"I've been trying to reach you. Don't you ever call in for messages?"

Most often the paper has only a vague idea where Troy is, and he keeps it that way. When on the road he works out of hotel rooms, not the paper's bureaus. He sees this as necessary to maintain his independence. Editors who can't find a man can't lean on him. His wife seldom knows where he is either, and in recent years has not seemed to care. The downside is that Troy lives a lonely, isolated life. He meets regularly with world leaders, so called, but in his free time has no one.

Troy says: "How's Barbara?"

Barbara is Driscoll's wife, who suffers from Parkinson's disease, and can no longer walk unaided. "About the same," Driscoll says.

"And the boys?"

"They're fine."

Troy waits to hear the purpose of the call. Even for a detective like Gabe Driscoll, running him down in Washington could not have been easy.

Driscoll says: "Are you coming to the funeral?"

"What funeral?"

"Frank Redmond."

"Frankie?"

"I left messages for you."

A stricken silence. "Frankie?"

"I've made most of the arrangements. I'd like you to be there. I need you there."

"Heart attack?"

"No, he went off a roof."

"A roof?"

"You're named as an executor in his will. So am I."

"Somebody killed him, pushed him off."

"Or he got tired of living and jumped."

"This is Frankie you're talking about."

"Yeah."

"It's impossible."

"When you've been a cop a long time what you learn is, nothing is impossible."

Troy says: "I hadn't seen him in a while."

"Funeral's tomorrow."

"I guess I haven't seen anyone in a while."

"You coming or not?"

"I have an interview with President Reagan tomorrow."

"You can't put it off?"

"Do you know how long I've been waiting for this interview?"

After what Troy senses is a disappointed silence, Driscoll says: "Reagan's senile, I heard."

"I'll let you know after tomorrow."

There is a second silence before Troy says gently: "The reason you go to funerals is not for the deceased. It's to show support for the grieving relatives. Frankie didn't have any relatives, and he himself won't know if I'm not there."

"The only grieving survivors are you and me."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"I was hoping you'd be there. It's been tough to go through alone."

"When and where is the funeral? I'll try to get there. I'll get to the cemetery at least. I'll try to get to both."

When he has hung up Troy phones his wife in New York, and tells her about the funeral. He asks her to attend.

"Where will you be?"

"I'm not sure I can get there in time. I have an interview with the president."

Troy wants the interview badly, for it will prove—again—both to his readers and his bosses that he is big enough to demand and be accorded an exclusive interview in the Oval Office. On the day the column appears his prestige, already high, will go higher. But he must get to Frankie's funeral too. In his head he has begun rearranging his schedule.

His wife says: "You should be at the funeral."

"I'll get there if I possibly can."

"Your place is at the funeral."

"I've been waiting weeks for this interview."

"Cancel it."

"I want you to go in case something goes wrong. As my representative."

"I'll be there. I'll be representing myself."

This causes silence at both ends of the phone.

"Your place is at the funeral," Maureen Troy says again.

"I'm almost sure I can get there. I'll see you there."

"I can't wait," says Maureen Troy.

After another silence, both hang up.

At the White House the next morning Troy sits in an anteroom waiting for President Reagan, who is in the last year of his second term, to get around to seeing him. The journalist drums his fingers on his knee, swills coffee he doesn't want, and can't get his mind off

Frank Redmond. Frank's smile. How physically big he was. When Troy and his typewriter first got to Vietnam Frank was already there, a Marine Corps chaplain. They met whenever they could, and several times got shelled and shot at together. The world called Troy a world traveler, but when he got to Africa during the time of Apartheid Frank was there already too, a missionary living in a hut on the Zambezi River.

A press officer enters the anteroom. "The president will see you now," he announces.

Troy has waited 35 minutes past his scheduled appointment. He is furious. He may miss his plane and the funeral. He is reminded of still another reason he despises pols. They are never on time. It never occurs to them that other people might have pressing business apart from them.

The press aide escorts Troy into the Oval Office. The president gets up from the big desk and comes halfway across the room to shake hands, his greeting as effusive as if they are best friends. A White House steward in a white jacket materializes, and Troy is offered more coffee he doesn't want.

The three men sit down in armchairs, for the press aide is staying for the interview, it seems. Troy switches on his tape recorder and the press aide does likewise. This gives the president deniability if the interviewer, Troy in this case, should try something funny with the quotes.

As Troy brings forth his questions the president's actor's smile, the one the country seems to be in love with, is out in full force, and Troy, looking into it, imagines he might eventually describe it for a paragraph or two if, as is probable, the man says nothing newsworthy during the next half hour.

Sometimes government officials use an interview like this one to make an official announcement. A policy change of some kind. But

not today. This president only wants to be friendly. Troy is so conscious of the minutes passing that he cannot concentrate on his questions.

Frank Redmond was worth ten of you, he thinks.

Abruptly he gets to his feet, cutting the interview short. He thanks the president for his courtesy and walks out.

He has a car waiting, but as he runs out from under the White House portico and yanks open its door a hard rain is falling. The traffic on the bridge is backed up solid. It takes 30 minutes to cross. At Washington National he finds all flights delayed. He drinks still more unwanted coffee while remembering Frank. When Troy's marriage started to go bad, Frank was the one he wanted to talk to. They sat in a bar for hours drinking beer while Troy poured out his aching heart. Frank didn't have any answers for him. He also did not offer pious inanities. He just listened. He was a beautiful listener. At the end he apologized that he had never been married, that maybe if he had been he could help, would know what to say. But in fact he had helped so much.

Troy's flight is delayed still again. This means he is not going to make it even to the cemetery. He pictures Gabe Driscoll standing more or less alone over an open grave with this same rain pelting down. There will be police photographers present, if he knows Gabe. They would have been at the funeral too. They will be standing some distance away, photographing every face. In terms of photographers Frank's farewell will resemble a Mafia don's, no different, for Gabe is an exact kind of guy, and afterward he will scrutinize the photos. If Frank was pushed or thrown off that roof, maybe whoever did it showed up to watch the ceremonies.

Will Barbara Driscoll be at Gabe's side? She moves about in a wheelchair now, would have to be pushed to the graveside over muddy ground, so he supposes not. Maureen Troy will probably be

there, but not himself. There will be one or two of Frankie's fellow priests, probably. Frankie's Harlem parish is of course poor and few people have cars. So there won't be many parishioners.

Good-bye, Frankie, Troy thinks. I'm sorry, Gabe, he thinks. I wish I could have been there for you both.

THE NEXT MORNING TROY AND DRISCOLL meet on West 146th Street in Harlem, outside a four-story brownstone that, when built a hundred or so years ago, must have been the last word in elegance. Now it is a tenement. The steps of the stoop are half broken away, and one of the wrought-iron balustrades is missing.

Driscoll leads the way into the building and up the narrow staircase four flights to the door to the roof, where he pulls out a key.

"It was in his pocket," he explains.

They go out onto the roof.

The roof is flat, the surface tar paper, and it is taller by eight or ten feet than every other roof on the street. Except for that, one might walk from one corner to the next by stepping over low parapets.

"He used to write to me," Troy says, "particularly when I was in Moscow. He was always up on these rooftops apparently, looking for junkies he could help. Or else just sitting under the stars trying to feel close to God."

"Was that the way he put it?"

"Yes, trying to feel close to God. On the nights that it worked it was a sublime experience, apparently. So he said."

"I wonder what he really believed."

"Do you still go to mass, Gabe?"

"No. Not in years. And you?"

"No."

After a silence, Chief Driscoll says: "I don't think there were often junkies on this particular roof. It was kept locked, I'm told."

"That key of yours means nothing," Troy says. "Anybody could have had a key. Or could have got up here from one of the other buildings in the row, and lain in wait for him."

"Yes, it's possible."

They walk to the front of the roof where the parapet is no more than two feet high.

"Here's where he went over," Gabe Driscoll says, pointing.

"He could even have fallen off by accident, a parapet as low as that. I just don't believe he jumped."

"He used to give us—me, I mean—information on dangerous criminals in the precinct. Over the years it resulted in some good arrests, even once a promotion for me."

"You never told me."

"He didn't want me to. He was a modest guy. He didn't want to be considered a hero."

"That's your answer." Troy peers over the parapet. "One of those people threw him off."

"There was no sign of a struggle up here." Driscoll glances around as if looking for one.

"The guy surprised him. Someone he knew."

"Maybe."

Troy looks at him. "What about internal abnormalities?"

"No."

They hear doves or pigeons cooing. Walking back, they peer behind the door-housing at stacks of cages containing pigeons, ten or more cages stacked one on top of the other. Nearby is a ten-gallon can that, when Troy pries off the lid, turns out to be birdseed.

"Frankie's?" Troy inquires, pointing to the cages.

"I don't think so."

"I never heard of him being interested in birds."

"No."

"Somebody's been up here feeding them though. Who?"

"It's a kid, we think. Keershawn Brown. He's about seventeen. We're trying to find him."

"So he had a key too?"

"I guess so."

"He pushed Frankie off the roof. Or somebody did."

"Maybe."

"Nobody loved life more than Frank. It's inconceivable that he would do away with himself."

Driscoll says: "I'm trying to keep an open mind. But I'm like you. I can't really believe that Frank could do such a thing."

"But what?"

"Trouble is, there's no evidence to the contrary."

"Actually, there's no evidence either way, from what you tell me."

Downstairs on the sidewalk, they stand beside Chief Driscoll's department car.

"Another thing that idiot monsignor said—I wasn't going to tell you, but perhaps I should. He said Frank had trouble with women."

"Do you believe that?"

"I don't know."

"More probably," the journalist says, "he was like all these priests. They cozy up to any housewife who'll invite them to a home-cooked meal once in a while."

Driscoll laughs. "You're a cynical bastard, aren't you?"

Troy looks pensive. "What did the monsignor say exactly? How did he phrase it?"

"He said Frankie had problems of an amorous nature."

"He didn't mention women specifically?"

"Come to think of it, no."

"You know what that could mean?"

"Horseshit," says Gabe Driscoll, "absolutely not."

After a pause, Troy says: "How many detectives are working the case?"

"Two. And they're not shining lights either one of them. Furthermore, people clam up in front of detectives. Especially people in precincts like this one."

"Put more on."

"I can't. It doesn't demand more. I'd be severely criticized. There are no suspects, no evidence as yet. And it isn't my jurisdiction anyway. I'd have to ask colleagues to assign men, because detectives assigned to me work only against cops who have gone bad. They don't work murder cases."

Troy looks off down the street. It resembles many other New York residential streets except that the once-noble brownstones have become tenements, their stoops broken, their walls streaked with graffiti. And there are few white faces on the sidewalks, or going by in cars.

Driscoll says: "I'd like your help. You can ask questions detectives can't ask, or wouldn't think to ask. You can get close to people who won't talk to cops. I want you to find out what was going on in Frank's life. Why was he on that roof? Who might have been on it with him? If it's murder, why? If it's suicide, why?"

Troy gives a wry laugh.

"Did I say something funny?"

"I just realized I've seen almost nothing of him in the past several years. I don't know where to start."

"Lately I haven't seen much of him either," Gabe Driscoll says. "We talked on the phone occasionally. I saw him at John's funeral a few months ago." John is Mr. Small, their former swimming coach and algebra teacher.

"I didn't know John died."

"You live a pretty isolated life, don't you?"

Andy Troy shrugs.

"I'm not asking you for a police investigation. We'll handle that part."

"I've always thought that journalists and detectives are the same," Troy says. "The good ones even to the bravery."

"I'm not asking you to do anything dangerous. You come upon something dangerous you let us investigate it, is that clear?"

"I can give you two weeks," says Troy.

Driscoll looks up at the building, Troy too.

Troy says: "Part of our boyhood went off that roof with him."

"Most of what was left, yes."

"Once there were four of us." He is speaking of their relay team, which dominated the leagues in which they competed in high school and college both.

"Just you and me now."

They gaze at each other, then Driscoll opens the door to his car. "Can I drop you somewhere?"