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The Overlook

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MICHAEL CONNELLY

THE OVERLOOK



ONE

The call came at midnight. Harry Bosch was awake and sitting in his living room in the dark. He liked to think that he was doing this because it allowed him to hear the saxophone better. By masking one of the senses he accentuated another.

But deep down he knew the truth. He was waiting.

The call was from Larry Gandle, his supervisor in Homicide Special. It was Bosch's first call-out in the new job. And it was what he had been waiting for.

'Harry, you up?'

'I'm up.'

'Who's that you got playing?'

'Frank Morgan, live at the Jazz Standard in New York. That's George Cables you're hearing now on piano.'

'Sounds like All Blues.'

'You nailed it.'

'Good stuff. I hate to take you away from it.'

Bosch used the remote to turn the music off.

'What's the call, Lieutenant?'

'Hollywood wants you and Iggy to come out and take over a case. They've already caught three today and can't handle a fourth. This one also looks like it might become a hobby. It looks like an execution.'

The Los Angeles Police Department had seventeen geographic divisions, each with its own station and detective bureau, including a homicide squad. But the divisional squads were the first line and couldn't get bogged down on long-running cases. Whenever a murder came with any sort of political, celebrity or media attachment, it was usually shuttled down to Homicide Special, which operated out of the Robbery-Homicide Division in Parker Center. Any case that appeared likely to be particularly difficult and time consuming – that would invariably stay active like a hobby – would also be an immediate candidate for Homicide Special. This was one of those.

'Where is it?' Bosch asked.

'Up on that overlook above the Mulholland Dam. You know the place?'

'Yeah, I've been up there.'

Bosch got up and walked to the diningroom table. He opened a drawer designed for silverware and took out a pen and a small notebook. On the first page of the notebook he wrote down the date and the location of the murder scene.

'Any other details I should know?' Bosch asked.

'Not a lot,' Gandle said. 'Like I said, it was described to me as an execution. Two in the back of the head. Somebody took this guy up there and blew his brains out all over that pretty view.'

Bosch let this register a moment before asking the next question.

'Do they know who the dead guy is?'

'The divisionals are working on it. Maybe they'll have something by the time you get over there. It's practically in your neighborhood, right?'

'Not too far.'

Gandle gave Bosch more specifics on the location of the crime scene and asked if he would make the next call out to his partner. Bosch said he would take care of it.

'Okay, Harry, get out there and see what's what, then call me and let me know. Just wake me up. Everybody else does.'

Bosch thought it was just like a supervisor to complain about getting woken to a person he would routinely wake up over the course of their relationship.

'You got it,' Bosch said, and hung up.

He immediately called Ignacio Ferras, his new partner. Ferras was more than twenty years younger and from another culture, and they were still feeling their way. The bonding would happen, Bosch was sure, but it would come slowly. It always did.

Ferras, awakened by Bosch's call, became alert quickly and seemed eager to respond, which was good. The only problem was that he lived all the way out in Diamond Bar, which would put his ETA at the scene at least an hour off. Bosch

had talked to him about it the first day they had been assigned as partners but Ferras wasn't interested in moving. He had a family support system in Diamond Bar and wanted to keep it.

Bosch knew that he would get to the crime scene well ahead of Ferras and that would mean he would have to handle any divisional friction on his own. Taking a case away from the divisional squad was always a delicate thing. It was a decision usually made by supervisors, not the homicide detectives on the scene. Any homicide detective worth the gold trim on his badge would never want to give away a case. That just wasn't part of the mission.

'See you there, Ignacio,' Bosch said.

'Harry,' Ferras said, 'I told you. Call me Iggy. Everybody does.'

Bosch said nothing. He didn't want to call him Iggy. He didn't think it was a name that matched the weight of the assignment and mission. He wished that his partner would realize that and stop asking him.

He thought of something and added an instruction, telling Ferras to swing by Parker Center on his way in and sign out a car for them to use. It would add more minutes to his arrival time but Bosch planned to drive his own car to the scene and he knew he was low on gas.

'Okay, see you there,' Bosch said, leaving names out.

He hung up and grabbed his coat out of the closet by the front door. As he put his arms into it he glanced at himself in the mirror on the inside of the door. At 56 years old he was trim and fit and could even stand to add a few pounds while other detectives his age were getting round in the middle. In

Homicide Special there was a pair of detectives known as Crate and Barrel because of their widening dimensions. Bosch didn't have to worry about that.

The gray had not yet chased all of the brown out of his hair but it was getting close to victory. His dark eyes, though, were clear and bright and ready for the challenge awaiting him at the overlook. In his own eyes Bosch saw a basic understanding of homicide work, that when he stepped out the front door he would be willing and able to go the distance – whatever that entailed – to get the job done. It made him feel as though he was bulletproof.

He reached across his body with his left hand to pull the gun out of the holster on his right hip. It was a Kimber Ultra Carry. He quickly checked the magazine and the action and then returned the weapon to its holster.

Harry Bosch was ready. He opened the door.

The lieutenant had not known a lot about the case but he had been right about one thing – the crime scene was not far from Bosch's home. He dropped down to Cahuenga and then took Barham across the 101 Freeway. From there it was a quick run up Lake Hollywood Drive to a neighborhood of homes clustered on the hills surrounding the reservoir and the Mulholland Dam. They were expensive homes.

He worked his way around the fenced reservoir, only stopping for a moment when he came upon a coyote in the road. The animal's eyes caught the headlights and glowed brightly before it turned and sauntered slowly across the street, disappearing into the brush. It was in no hurry to get out of the way, almost daring Bosch to do something. It reminded him

of his days on patrol when he saw the same challenge in the eyes of most of the young men he encountered on the street.

After passing the reservoir he took Tahoe Drive farther up into the hills and then connected with the eastern terminus of Mulholland Drive. There was an unofficial overlook of the city here. It was posted with 'No Parking' and 'Overlook Closed at Dark' signs, but these were routinely ignored at all hours of the day and night.

Bosch pulled in behind the grouping of official vehicles – the forensics van and the coroner's wagon as well as several police cars, marked and unmarked. There was an outer perimeter of yellow police tape surrounding the crime scene and inside this boundary was a silver Porsche Carrera with its front hood open. It had been sectioned off by more yellow tape and this told Bosch that it was most likely the victim's car.

He parked and got out. A patrol officer assigned to the outer perimeter took down his name and badge number – 2997 – and allowed him under the yellow tape. He approached the crime scene. Two banks of portable lights had been erected on either side of the body, which was in the center of a clearing that looked down upon the city. As Bosch came closer, he saw forensics techs and coroner's people working on and around the body, as well as a tech with a video camera who was documenting the scene.

'Harry, over here.'

Bosch turned and saw Detective Jerry Edgar leaning against the hood of an unmarked detective cruiser. He had a cup of coffee in his hand and appeared to be just waiting. He pushed himself off the car as Bosch came over.

Edgar had been Bosch's partner once, when they had both worked in Hollywood Division. Back then Bosch was a team leader on the homicide squad. Now Edgar was in that position.

'Been waiting on somebody from RHD,' Edgar said. 'Didn't know it would be you, man.'

'It's me.'

'You working this solo?'

'No, my partner's on the way.'

'Your new partner, right? I haven't heard from you since that mess over in Echo Park last year.'

'Yeah. So what do you have here?'

Bosch didn't want to talk about Echo Park with Edgar – or with anyone, as a matter of fact. He wanted to stay focused on the case at hand. It was his first call-out since his transfer to Homicide Special, and he knew there would be a lot of people watching his moves. Some of them would be people hoping he would fail.

Edgar turned so that Bosch could see what was spread out on the trunk of the car. Bosch took out glasses and put them on as he leaned in close to look. There wasn't a lot of light but he could see an array of evidence bags, each containing separate items taken from the body. These included a wallet, a key ring and a clip-on name tag. There was also a money clip with a thick fold of currency and a BlackBerry cell phone that was still on, its green light flashing and ready to transmit calls its owner would never make or receive.

'The coroner's guy just gave me all of this,' Edgar said. 'They should be done with the body in about ten minutes.'

Bosch picked up the bag containing the ID tag and angled it toward the light. It said Saint Agatha's Clinic for Women. On it was a photograph of a man with dark hair and eyes, smiling at the camera and identified as Dr. Stanley Kent. Bosch noticed that the ID card was also a swipe key that could open locked doors.

'You talk to Kiz much?' Edgar asked.

It was a reference to Bosch's former partner, who had transferred after Echo Park to a management job in the OCP.

'Not too much. But she's doing fine.'

Bosch moved on to the other evidence bags, wanting to get the conversation off of Kiz Rider and onto the case at hand.

'Why don't you run down what you've got for me, Jerry?' he said.

'Happy to,' Edgar said. 'The stiff was found about an hour ago. As you can see from the signs out on the street, there is no parking up here and no loitering after dark. Hollywood always has a patrol swing by here a few times a night to chase lookyloos away. Keeps the rich locals up here happy. I'm told that house over there is Madonna's. Or it was.'

He pointed to a sprawling mansion about a hundred yards from the clearing. The moonlight silhouetted a tower rising from the structure. The mansion's exterior was striped in alternating hues of rust and yellow like a Tuscan church. It was on a promontory that afforded anyone looking through its windows a magnificent, sweeping view of the city below. Bosch imagined the pop star up in the tower looking down on the city that lay at her command.

He looked back at his old partner, ready for the rest of the report.

'The patrol car swings around about eleven and sees the Porsche with the front hood open. Engine's in the back of those Porsches, Harry. It means the trunk was open.'

'Got it.'

'Okay, so you knew that already. Anyway, the patrol car pulls up, they don't see anybody in or around the Porsche so the two officers get out. One of them walks out into the clearing and finds our guy. He's face down and has two in the back of the head. An execution, clean and simple.'

Bosch nodded at the ID tag in the evidence bag.

'And this is the guy, Stanley Kent?'

'Looks that way. The tag and the wallet both say he's Stanley Kent, forty-two years old from just around the corner on Arrowhead Drive. We ran the plate on the Porsche and it comes back to a business called K and K Medical Physicists. I just ran Kent through the box and he came up pretty clean. He's got a few speeding tickets on the Porsche but that's it. A straight shooter.'

Bosch nodded as he registered all the information.

'You're going to get no grief from me taking over this case, Harry,' Edgar said. 'I got one partner in court this month and I left my other one at the first scene we caught today – a three-bagger with a fourth victim on life support at Queen of Angels.'

Bosch remembered that Hollywood ran its homicide squad in three-man teams instead of the traditional partnerships.

'Any chance the three-bagger is connected to this?'

He pointed to the gathering of technicians around the body on the overlook.

'No, that's a straight gang shoot 'em up,' Edgar said. 'I think this thing is a whole different ballgame and I'm happy for you to take it.'

'Good,' Bosch said. 'I'll cut you loose as soon as I can. Anybody look in the car yet?'

'Not really. Waiting on you.'

'Okay. Anybody go to the victim's house on Arrowhead?'

'No on that, too.'

'Anybody knock on any doors?'

'Not yet. We were working the scene first.'

Edgar obviously had decided early that the case would be passed to RHD. It bothered Bosch that nothing was done but at the same time he knew it would be his and Ferras's to work fresh from the start and that wasn't a bad thing. There was a long history in the department of cases getting damaged or bungled while in transition from divisional to downtown detective teams.

He looked at the lighted clearing and counted a total of five men working on or near the body for the forensics and coroner's teams.

'Well,' he said, 'since you're working the crime scene first, did anybody look for foot impressions around the body before you let the techs approach?'

Bosch couldn't keep the tone of annoyance out of his voice.

'Harry,' Edgar said, his tone now betraying irritation with Bosch's annoyance, 'a couple hundred people stand around on this overlook every damn day. We coulda been looking at

footprints till Christmas if we wanted to take the time. I didn't think we did. We had a body lying out here in a public place and needed to get to it. Besides that, it looks like a professional hit. That means the shoes, the gun, the car, everything's already long gone by now.'

Bosch nodded. He wanted to dismiss this and move on.

'Okay,' he said evenly, 'then I guess you're clear.'

Edgar nodded and Bosch thought he might be embarrassed.

'Like I said, Harry, I didn't expect it to be you.'

Meaning he would not have dogged it for Harry, only somebody else from RHD.

'Sure,' Bosch said. 'I understand.'

After Edgar left, Bosch went back to his car and got the Maglite out of the trunk. He went over to the Porsche, put on gloves and opened the door on the driver's side. He leaned into the car and looked around. On the passenger seat was a briefcase. It was unlocked when he popped the snaps and it opened to reveal several files, a calculator, various pads, pens and papers. He closed it and left it in its place. Its position on the seat told him that the dead man had likely arrived at the overlook by himself. He had met his killer here. He had not brought his killer with him. This, Bosch thought, might be significant.

He opened the glove box next and several more clip-on IDs like the one found on the body fell to the floorboard. He picked them up one by one and saw that each access badge had been issued by a different local hospital. But the swipe cards all bore the same name and photo. Stanley Kent, the man presumed to be lying dead in the clearing.

On the reverse side of several of the tags Bosch noticed there were handwritten notations. He looked at these for a long moment. Most were numbers with the letters L or R at the end and he concluded that they were lock combinations.

He looked farther into the glove box and found even more IDs and access key cards. As far as he could tell, the dead man – if he was Stanley Kent – had clearance access to just about every hospital in Los Angeles County. He also had the combinations to security locks at almost every one of the hospitals. Bosch momentarily considered that the IDs and key cards might be counterfeits and used by the victim in some sort of hospital scam.

Bosch returned everything to the glove box and closed it. He then looked under and between the seats but found nothing of interest. He backed out of the car and went to the open trunk.

The trunk was small, and empty. But in the beam of his flashlight he noted that there were four indentations in the carpet lining the bottom. It was clear that something square and heavy with four legs or wheels had been carried in the trunk. Because the trunk was found in the open position it was likely that the object – whatever it was – had been taken during the killing.

'Detective?'

Bosch turned and put the beam of his light into the face of a patrolman. It was the officer who had taken his name and badge number at the perimeter. He lowered the light.

'What is it?'

'There's an FBI agent here. She's asking permission to enter the crime scene.'

'Where is she?'

The officer led the way back to the yellow tape. As Bosch got close he saw a woman standing next to the open door of a car. She was alone and she wasn't smiling. Bosch felt the thud of uneasy recognition hit his chest.

'Hello, Harry,' she said when she saw him.

'Hello, Rachel,' he said.