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The Black Box

Written by Michael Connelly

Published by Orion Books

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THE BLACK BOX

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First published in Great Britain in 2012 by Orion Books,
an imprint of The Orion Publishing Group Ltd
Orion House, 5 Upper Saint Martin's Lane
London WC2H 9EA

An Hachette UK Company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library.

ISBN (Hardback) 978 1 4091 3431 2
ISBN (Export Trade Paperback) 978 1 4091 3432 9
ISBN (Ebook) 978 1 4091 3433 6

Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that are natural,
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SNOW WHITE

1992

By the third night the death count was rising so high and so quickly that many of the divisional homicide teams were pulled off the front lines of riot control and put into emergency rotations in South Central. Detective Harry Bosch and his partner, Jerry Edgar, were pulled from Hollywood Division and assigned to a roving B Watch team that also included two shotgunners from patrol for protection. They were dispatched to any place they were needed—wherever a body turned up. The four-man team moved in a black-and-white patrol car, jumping from crime scene to crime scene and never staying still for long. It wasn't the proper way to carry out homicide work, not even close, but it was the best that could be done under the surreal circumstances of a city that had come apart at the seams.

South Central was a war zone. Fires burned everywhere. Looters moved in packs from storefront to storefront, all semblance of dignity and moral code gone in the smoke that rose over the city. The gangs of South L.A. stepped up to control the darkness, even calling for a truce to their internecine battles to create a united front against the police.

More than fifty people had died already. Store owners had shot looters, National Guardsmen had shot looters, looters had shot looters, and then there were the others—killers who used the camouflage of chaos and civil unrest to settle long-held scores that had nothing to do with the frustrations of the moment and the emotions displayed in the streets.

Two days before, the racial, social, and economic fractures that ran under the city broke the surface with seismic intensity. The trial of four LAPD officers accused of excessively beating a black motorist at the end of a high-speed chase had resulted in the delivery of not-guilty verdicts. The reading of the jury's decision in a suburban courtroom forty-five miles away had an almost immediate impact on South Los Angeles. Small crowds of angry people gathered on street corners to decry the injustice. And soon things turned violent. The ever-vigilant media went high and live from the air, broadcasting the images into every home in the city, and then to the world.

The department was caught flat-footed. The chief of police was out of Parker Center and making a political appearance when the verdict came in. Other members of the command staff were out of position as well. No one immediately took charge and, more important, no one went to the rescue. The whole department retreated and the images of unchecked violence spread like wildfire across every television screen in the city. Soon the city was out of control and in flames.

Two nights later, the acrid smell of burning rubber and smoldering dreams was still everywhere. Flames from a thousand fires reflected like the devil dancing in the dark sky. Gunshots and shouts of anger echoed nonstop in the wake of

the patrol car. But the four men in 6-King-16 did not stop for any of these. They stopped only for murder.

It was Friday, May 1. B Watch was the emergency mobilization designation for night watch, a 6 P.M. to 6 A.M. shift. Bosch and Edgar had the backseat, while Officers Robleto and Delwyn had the front. Delwyn, in the passenger seat, held his shotgun across his lap and angled up, its muzzle poking through the open window.

They were rolling to a dead body found in an alley off Crenshaw Boulevard. The call had been relayed to the emergency communications center by the California National Guard, which had been deployed in the city during the state of emergency. It was only 10:30 and the calls were stacking up. King-16 had already handled a homicide call since coming on shift—a looter shot dead in the doorway of a discount shoe store. The shooter had been the store's owner.

That crime scene was contained within the premises of the business, which had allowed Bosch and Edgar to work with relative safety, Robleto and Delwyn posted with shotguns and full riot gear on the sidewalk out front. And that also gave the detectives time to collect evidence, sketch the crime scene, and take their own photos. They recorded the statement of the store owner and watched the videotape from the business's surveillance camera. It showed the looter using an aluminum softball bat to smash through the glass door of the store. The man then ducked in through the jagged opening he had created and was promptly shot twice by the store owner, who was hiding behind the cash counter and waiting.

Because the coroner's office was overrun with more death calls than it could handle, the body was removed from the

store by paramedics and transported to County-USC Medical Center. It would be held there until things calmed down—if they ever did—and the coroner caught up with the work.

As far as the shooter went, Bosch and Edgar made no arrest. Whether it was self-defense or murder while lying in wait, the DA's Office would make the call later.

It was not the right way to proceed but it would have to do. In the chaos of the moment, the mission was simple: preserve the evidence, document the scene as well and as fast as possible, and collect the dead.

Get in and get out. And do it safely. The real investigation would come later. Maybe.

As they drove south on Crenshaw, they passed occasional crowds of people, mostly young men, gathered on corners or roving in packs. At Crenshaw and Slauson a group flying Crips colors jeered as the patrol car moved by at high speed without siren or flashing lights. Bottles and rocks were thrown but the car moved too fast and the missiles fell harmlessly behind it.

"We'll be back, muthafuckers! Don't you worry."

It was Robleto who had called out and Bosch had to assume he was speaking metaphorically. The young patrolman's threat was as hollow as the department's response had been once the verdicts were read on live TV Wednesday afternoon.

Robleto, behind the wheel, only began to slow as they approached a blockade of National Guard vehicles and soldiers. The strategy drawn up the day before with the arrival of the Guard was to take back control of the major intersections in South L.A. and then move outward, eventually containing all trouble spots. They were less than a mile from one of those key

intersections, Crenshaw and Florence, and the Guard troops and vehicles were already spread up and down Crenshaw for blocks. As he pulled up to the barricade at 62nd Street, Robleto lowered his window.

A guardsman with sergeant stripes came to the door and leaned down to look at the car's occupants.

"Sergeant Burstin, San Luis Obispo. What can I do for you fellows?"

"Homicide," Robleto said. He hooked a thumb toward Bosch and Edgar in the back.

Burstin straightened up and made an arm motion so that a path could be cleared and they could be let through.

"Okay," he said. "She's in the alley on the east side between Sixty-sixth Place and Sixty-seventh Street. Go on through and my guys will show you. We'll form a tight perimeter and watch the rooflines. We've had unconfirmed reports of sniper fire in the neighborhood."

Robleto put his window back up as he drove through.

"'My guys,'" he said, mimicking Burstin's voice. "That guy's probably a schoolteacher or something back in the real world. I heard that none of these guys they brought in are even from L.A. From all around the state but not L.A. Probably couldn't find Leimert Park with a map."

"Two years ago, neither could you, dude," Delwyn said.

"Whatever. The guy doesn't know shit about this place and now he's all like take charge? Fucking weekend warrior. All I'm saying is we didn't need these guys. Makes us look bad. Like we couldn't handle it and had to bring in the pros from San Luis O-fucking-bispo."

Edgar cleared his throat and spoke from the backseat.

"I got news for you," he said. "We *couldn't* handle it and we couldn't look any worse than we already did Wednesday night. We sat back and let the city burn, man. You see all that shit on TV? The thing you didn't see was any of us on the ground kicking ass. So don't be blaming the schoolteachers from 'Bispo. It's on us, man."

"Whatever," Robleto said.

"Says 'Protect and Serve' on the side a the car," Edgar added. "We didn't do much of either."

Bosch remained silent. Not that he disagreed with his partner. The department had embarrassed itself with its feeble response to the initial breakout of violence. But Harry wasn't thinking about that. He had been struck by what the sergeant had said about the victim being a she. It was the first mention of that, and as far as Bosch knew, there hadn't been any female murder victims so far. This wasn't to say that women weren't involved in the violence that had raked the city. Looting and burning were equal-opportunity endeavors. Bosch had seen women engaged in both. The night before, he'd been on riot control on Hollywood Boulevard and had witnessed the looting of Frederick's, the famous lingerie store. Half the looters had been women.

But the sergeant's report had given him pause nonetheless. A woman had been out here in the chaos and it had cost her her life.

Robleto drove through the opening in the barricade and continued south. Four blocks ahead a soldier was waving a flashlight, swinging its beam toward an opening between two of the retail shops that lined the east side of the street.

Aside from soldiers posted every twenty-five yards, Cren-

shaw was abandoned. There was an eerie and dark stillness. All of the businesses on both sides of the streets were dark. Several had been hit by looters and arsonists. Others had miraculously been left untouched. On still others, boarded-up fronts announced with spray paint that they were "Black Owned," a meager defense against the mob.

The alley opening was between a looted wheel-and-tire shop called Dream Rims and a completely burned-out appliance store called Used, Not Abused. The burned building was wrapped with yellow tape and had been red-tagged by city inspectors as uninhabitable. Bosch guessed that this area had been hit early in the riots. They were only twenty blocks or so from the spot where the violence had initially sparked at the intersection of Florence and Normandie, the place where people were pulled from cars and trucks and beaten while the world watched from above.

The guardsman with the flashlight started walking ahead of 6-K-16, leading the car into the alley. Thirty feet in, the guardsman stopped and held up his hand in a fist, as if they were on recon behind enemy lines. It was time to get out. Edgar hit Bosch on the arm with the back of his hand.

"Remember, Harry, keep your distance. A nice six-foot separation at all times."

It was a joke meant to lighten the situation. Of the four men in the car, only Bosch was white. He'd be the likely first target of a sniper. Of any shooter, for that matter.

"Got it," Bosch said.

Edgar punched his arm again.

"And put your hat on."

Bosch reached down to the floorboard and grabbed the

white riot helmet he had been issued at roll call. The order was to wear it at all times while on duty. He thought the shiny white plastic, more than anything else, made them targets.

He and Edgar had to wait until Robleto and Delwyn got out and opened the rear doors of the cruiser for them. Bosch then finally stepped out into the night. He reluctantly put the helmet on but didn't snap the chinstrap. He wanted to smoke a cigarette but time was of the essence, and he was down to a final smoke in the pack he carried in the left pocket of his uniform shirt. He had to conserve that one, as he had no idea when or where he would get the chance to replenish.

Bosch looked around. He didn't see a body. The alley was clotted with debris old and new. Old appliances, apparently not worthy of resale, had been stacked against the side wall of Used, Not Abused. Trash was everywhere, and part of the eave had collapsed to the ground during the fire.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Over here," the guardsman said. "Against the wall."

The alley was lit only by the patrol car's lights and the guardsman's flashlight. The appliances and other debris threw shadows against the wall and the ground. Bosch turned on his MagLite and aimed its beam in the direction the guardsman had pointed. The wall of the appliance shop was covered with gang graffiti. Names, RIPs, threats—the wall was a message board for the local Crips set, the Rolling 60s.

He walked three steps behind the guardsman and soon he saw her. A small woman lying on her side at the bottom of the wall. She had been obscured by the shadow cast by a rusting-out washing machine.

Before approaching any farther, Bosch played his light

across the ground. At one point in time the alley was paved but now it was broken concrete, gravel, and dirt. He saw no footprints or evidence of blood. He slowly moved forward and squatted down. He rested the heavy barrel of the six-cell flashlight on his shoulder as he moved its beam over the body. From his long experience looking at dead people, he guessed she had been deceased at least twelve to twenty-four hours. The legs were bent sharply at the knees and he knew that could be the result of rigor mortis or an indication that she had been on her knees in the moments before her death. The skin that was visible on the arms and neck was ashen and dark where blood had coagulated. Her hands were almost black and the odor of putrefaction was beginning to permeate the air.

The woman's face was largely obscured by the long blond hair that had fallen across it. Dried blood was visible in the hair at the back of the head and was matted in the thick wave that obscured her face. Bosch moved the light up the wall above the body and saw a blood spatter-and-drip pattern that indicated she had been killed here, not just dumped.

Bosch took a pen out of his pocket and reached forward, using it to lift the hair back from the victim's face. There was gunshot stippling around the right eye socket and a penetration wound that had exploded the eyeball. She had been shot from only inches away. Front to back, point-blank range. He put the pen back in his pocket and leaned in farther, pointing the light down behind her head. The exit wound, large and jagged, was visible. Death had no doubt been instantaneous.

"Holy shit, is she white?"

It was Edgar. He had come up behind Bosch and was look-

ing over his shoulder like an umpire hovering over a baseball catcher.

"Looks like it," Bosch said.

He moved the light over the victim's body now.

"What the hell's a white girl doing down here?"

Bosch didn't answer. He had noticed something hidden under the right arm. He put his light down so he could pull on a set of gloves.

"Put your light on her chest," he instructed Edgar.

Gloves on, Bosch leaned back in toward the body. The victim was on her left side, her right arm extending across her chest and hiding something that was on a cord around her neck. Bosch gently pulled it free.

It was a bright orange LAPD press pass. Bosch had seen many of them over the years. This one looked new. Its lamination sleeve was still clear and unscratched. It had a mug shot–style photo of a woman with blond hair on it. Beneath it was her name and the media entity she worked for.

Anneke Jespersen
Berlingske Tidende

"She's foreign press," Bosch said. "Anneke Jespersen."

"From where?" Edgar asked.

"I don't know. Germany, maybe. It says Berlin…Berlin-something. I can't pronounce it."

"Why would they send somebody all the way over from Germany for this? Can't they mind their own business over there?"

"I don't know for sure if she's from Germany. I can't tell."

Bosch tuned out Edgar's chatter and studied the photograph on the press pass. The woman depicted was attractive even in a

mug shot. No smile, no makeup, all business, her hair hooked behind her ears, her skin so pale as to be almost translucent. Her eyes had distance in them. Like the cops and soldiers Bosch had known who had seen too much too soon.

Bosch turned the press pass over. It looked legit to him. He knew press passes were updated yearly and a validation sticker was needed for any member of the media to enter department news briefings or pass through media checkpoints at crime scenes. This pass had a 1992 sticker on it. It meant that the victim received it sometime in the last 120 days, but noting the pristine condition of the pass, Bosch believed it had been recently.

Harry went back to studying the body. The victim was wearing blue jeans and a vest over a white shirt. It was an equipment vest with bulging pockets. This told Bosch that it was likely that the woman had been a photographer. But there were no cameras on her body or nearby. They had been taken, and possibly had even been the motive for the murder. Most news photographers he had seen carried multiple high-quality cameras and related equipment.

Harry reached to the vest and opened one of the breast pockets. Normally this would be something he would ask a coroner's investigator to do, as jurisdiction of the body belonged to the County Medical Examiner's Office. But Bosch had no idea if a coroner's crew would even show at the crime scene, and he wasn't going to wait to find out.

The pocket held four black film canisters. He didn't know if this was film that had been shot or was unused. He rebuttoned the pocket and in doing so felt a hard surface beneath it. He knew rigor mortis comes and goes in a day, leaving the

body soft and movable. He pulled back the equipment vest and knocked a fist on the chest. It was a hard surface and the sound confirmed this. The victim was wearing a bulletproof vest.

"Hey, check out the hit list," Edgar said.

Bosch looked up from the body. Edgar's flashlight was now aimed at the wall above. The graffiti directly over the victim was a 187 count, or hit list, with the names of several bangers who had gone down in street battles. Ken Dog, G-Dog, OG Nasty, Neckbone, and so on. The crime scene was in the Rolling 60s territory. The 60s were a subset of the massive Crips gang. They were at endless war with the nearby 7-Treys, another Crips subset.

The general public was for the most part under the impression that the gang wars that gripped most of South L.A. and claimed victims every night of the week came down to a Bloods versus Crips battle for supremacy and control of the streets. But the reality was that the rivalries between subsets of the same gang were some of the most violent in the city and largely responsible for the weekly body counts. The Rolling 60s and 7-Treys were at the top of that list. Both Crips sets operated under kill-on-sight protocols and the score was routinely noted in the neighborhood graffiti. A RIP list was used to memorialize homies lost in the endless battle, while a lineup of names under a 187 heading was a hit list, a record of kills.

"Looks like what we've got here is Snow White and the Seven-Trey Crips," Edgar added.

Bosch shook his head, annoyed. The city had come off its hinges, and here in front of them was the result—a woman

put up against a wall and executed—and his partner didn't seem to be able to take it seriously.

Edgar must have read Bosch's body language.

"It's just a joke, Harry," he said quickly. "Lighten up. We need some gallows humor around here."

"Okay," Bosch said. "I'll lighten up while you go get on the radio. Tell them what we've got here, make sure they know it's a member of the out-of-town media and see if they'll give us a full team. If not that, at least a photographer and some lights. Tell them we could really use some time and some help on this one."

"Why? 'Cause she's white?"

Bosch took a moment before responding. It was a careless thing for Edgar to have said. He was hitting back because Bosch had not responded well to the Snow White quip.

"No, not because she's white," Bosch said evenly. "Because she's not a looter and she's not a gangbanger and because they better believe that the media is going to jump all over a case involving one of their own. Okay? Is that good enough?"

"Got it."

"Good."

Edgar went back to the car to use the radio and Bosch returned to his crime scene. The first thing he did was delineate the perimeter. He backed several of the guardsmen down the alley so he could create a zone that extended twenty feet on either side of the body. The third and fourth sides of the box were the wall of the appliance shop on one side and the wall of the rims store on the other.

As he marked it off, Bosch noted that the alley cut through a residential block that was directly behind the row of retail

businesses that fronted Crenshaw. There was no uniformity in the containment of the backyards that lined the alley. Some of the homes had concrete walls, while others had wood-slat or chain-link fences.

Bosch knew that in a perfect world he would search all those yards and knock on all those doors, but that would have to come later, if at all. His attention at the moment had to be focused on the immediate crime scene. If he got the chance to canvas the neighborhood, he would consider himself lucky.

Bosch noticed that Robleto and Delwyn had taken positions with their shotguns at the mouth of the alley. They were standing next to each other and talking, probably sharing a complaint about something. Back in Bosch's Vietnam days, that would have been called a sniper's two-for-one sale.

There were eight guardsmen posted inside the alley on the interior perimeter. Bosch noticed that a group of people were beginning to congregate and watch from the far end. He waved over the guardsman who had led them into the alley.

"What's your name, soldier?"

"Drummond, but everyone calls me Drummer."

"Okay, Drummer, I'm Detective Bosch. Tell me who found her."

"The body? That was Dowler. He came back here to take a leak and he found her. He said he could smell her first. He knew the smell."

"Where's Dowler now?"

"I think he's on post at the southern barricade."

"I need to talk to him. Will you get him for me?"

"Yes, sir."

Drummond started to move toward the entrance of the alley.

"Hold on, Drummer, I'm not done."

Drummond turned around.

"When did you deploy to this location?"

"We've been here since eighteen hundred yesterday, sir."

"So you've had control of this area since then? This alley?"

"Not exactly, sir. We started at Crenshaw and Florence last night and we've worked east on Florence and north on Crenshaw. It's been block by block."

"So when did you get to this alley?"

"I'm not sure. I think we had it covered by dawn today."

"And all the looting and burning in this immediate area, that was already over?"

"Yes, sir, happened first night, from what I've been told."

"Okay, Drummer, one last thing. We need more light. Can you bring back here one of those trucks you have with all the lights on top?"

"It's called a Humvee, sir."

"Yeah, well, bring one back here from that end of the alley. Come in past those people and point the lights right at my crime scene. You got it?"

"Got it, sir."

Bosch pointed to the end opposite the patrol car.

"Good. I want to create a cross-hatching of light here, okay? It's probably going to be the best we can do."

"Yes, sir."

He started to trot away.

"Hey, Drummer."

Drummond turned around once more and came back.

"Yes, sir."

Bosch whispered now.

"All your guys are watching me. Shouldn't they be turned around, eyes out?"

Drummond stepped back and twirled his finger over his head.

"Hey! Turn it around, eyes out. We've got a job here. Keep the watch."

He pointed down the alley toward the gathering of onlookers.

"And make sure we keep those people back."

The guardsmen did as they were told and Drummond headed out of the alley to radio Dowler and get the light truck.

Bosch's pager buzzed on his hip. He reached to his belt and snapped the device out of its holder. The number on the screen was the command post, and he knew he and Edgar were about to be given another call. They hadn't even started here and they were going to be yanked. He didn't want that. He put the pager back on his belt.

Bosch walked over to the first fence that started from the back corner of the appliance shop. It was a wood-slat barrier that was too tall for him to look over. But he noticed it had been freshly painted. There was no graffiti, not even on the alley side of it. He noted this because it indicated that there was a homeowner on the other side who cared enough to whitewash the graffiti. Maybe it was the kind of person who kept their own watch and might have heard or even seen something.

From there he crossed the alley and dropped to a squatting position at the far corner of the crime scene. Like a fighter in his corner, waiting to come out. He started playing the beam of his flashlight across the broken concrete-and-dirt surface of

the alley. At the oblique angle, the light refracted off the myriad surface planes, giving him a unique view. Soon enough he saw the glint of something shiny and held the beam on it. He moved in on the spot and found a brass bullet casing lying in the gravel.

He got down on his hands and knees so he could look closely at the casing without moving it. He moved the light in close and saw that it was a 9mm brass casing with the familiar Remington brand mark stamped on the flat base. There was an indentation from the firing pin on the primer. Bosch also noted that the casing was lying on top of the gravel bed. It had not been stepped on or run over in what he assumed was a busy alleyway. That told him that the casing had not been there long.

Bosch was looking around for something to mark the casing's location with when Edgar stepped back into the crime scene. He was carrying a toolbox and that told Bosch that they weren't going to get any help.

"Harry, what'd you find?"

"Nine-millimeter Remington. Looks fresh."

"Well, at least we found something useful."

"Maybe. You get the CP?"

Edgar put down the toolbox. It was heavy. It contained the equipment they had quickly gathered in the kit room at Hollywood Station once they heard they could not count on any forensic backup in the field.

"Yeah, I got through but it's no-can-do from the command post. Everybody's otherwise engaged. We're on our own out here, brother."

"No coroner, either?"

"No coroner. The National Guard's coming with a truck for her. A troop transporter."

"You gotta be kidding me. They're going to move her in a fucking flatbed?"

"Not only that, we got our next call already. A crispy critter. Fire Department found him in a burned-out taco shop on MLK."

"Goddamnit, we just got here."

"Yeah, well, we're up again and we're closest to MLK. So they want us to clear and steer."

"Yeah, well, we're not done here. Not by a long shot."

"Nothing we can do about it, Harry."

Bosch was obstinate.

"I'm not leaving yet. There's too much to do here and if we leave it till next week or whenever, then we've lost the crime scene. We can't do that."

"We don't have a choice, partner. We don't make the rules."

"Bullshit."

"Okay, tell you what. We give it fifteen minutes. We take a few pictures, bag the casing, put the body on the truck, and then we shuffle on down the road. Come Monday, or whenever this is over, it isn't even going to be our case anymore. We go back to Hollywood after everything calms down and this thing stays right here. Somebody else's case then. This is Seventy-seventh's turf. It'll be their problem."

It didn't matter to Bosch what came later, whether the case went to detectives at 77th Street Division or not. What mattered was what was in front of him. A woman named Anneke from someplace far away lay dead and he wanted to know who did it and why.

"Doesn't matter that it's not going to be our case," he said. "That's not the point."

"Harry, there is no point," Edgar said. "Not now, not with complete chaos all around us. Nothing matters right now, man. The city is out of control. You can't expect—"

The sudden rip of automatic gunfire split the air. Edgar dove to the ground and Bosch instinctively threw himself toward the wall of the appliance shop. His helmet went flying off. Bursts of gunfire from several of the guardsmen followed until finally the shooting was quelled by shouting.

"Hold your fire! Hold your fire! Hold your fire!"

The gunshots ended and Burstin, the sergeant from the barricade, came running up the alley. Bosch saw Edgar slowly getting up. He appeared to be unharmed but he was looking at Bosch with an odd expression.

"Who opened first?" the sergeant yelled. "Who fired?"

"Me," said one of the men in the alley. "I thought I saw a weapon on the roofline."

"Where, soldier? What roofline? Where was the sniper?"

"Over there."

The shooter pointed to the roofline of the rims store.

"Goddamnit!" the sergeant yelled. "Hold your fucking fire. We cleared that roof. There's nobody up there but us! Our people!"

"Sorry, sir. I saw the—"

"Son, I don't give a flying fuck what you saw. You get any of my people killed and I will personally frag your ass myself."

"Yes, sir. Sorry, sir."

Bosch stood up. His ears were ringing and his nerves jangling. The sudden spit of automatic fire wasn't new to him.

But it had been almost twenty-five years since it was a routine part of his life. He went over and picked up his helmet and put it back on.

Sergeant Burstin walked up to him.

"Continue your work, Detectives. If you need me I'll be on the north perimeter. We have a truck coming in for the remains. I understand that we are to provide a team to escort your car to another location and another body."

He then charged out of the alley.

"Jesus Christ, you believe that?" Edgar asked. "Like Desert Storm or something. Vietnam. What the hell are we doing here, man?"

"Let's just go to work," Bosch said. "You draw the crime scene, I'll work the body, take pictures. Let's move."

Bosch squatted down and opened the toolbox. He wanted to get a photograph of the bullet casing in place before he bagged it as evidence. Edgar kept talking. The adrenaline rush from the shooting was not dissipating. He talked a lot when he was hyper. Sometimes too much.

"Harry, did you see what you did when that yahoo opened up with the gun?"

"Yeah, I ducked like everybody else."

"No, Harry, you covered the body. I saw it. You shielded Snow White over there like she was still alive or something."

Bosch didn't respond. He lifted the top tray out of the toolbox and reached in for the Polaroid camera. He noted that they only had two packs of film left. Sixteen shots plus whatever was left in the camera. Maybe twenty shots total, and they had this scene and the one waiting on MLK. It was not enough. His frustration was peaking.

"What was that about, Harry?" Edgar persisted.

Bosch finally lost it and barked at his partner.

"I don't know! Okay? I don't know. So let's just go to work now and try to do something for her, so maybe, just maybe, somebody sometime will be able to make a case."

His outburst had drawn the attention of most of the guardsmen in the alley. The soldier who had started the shooting earlier stared hard at him, happy to pass the mantle of unwanted attention.

"Okay, Harry," Edgar said quietly. "Let's go to work. We do what we can. Fifteen minutes and then we're on to the next one."

Bosch nodded as he looked down at the dead woman. *Fifteen minutes,* he thought. He was resigned. He knew the case was lost before it had even started.

"I'm sorry," he whispered.