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**HER
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JUSTICE**

**ROBERT
DUGONI**

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First edition



*To Mom.
My champion. My rock. My anchor.
I will miss you.*

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Prologue

July 1985

Little Saigon

Seattle, Washington

Seattle homicide detective Jack Thompson stepped from the Chevy Caprice onto the sidewalk at the corner of Twelfth Avenue South and South Jackson Street, the business center of what was now called Seattle's Little Saigon. People hustled from one grocery store or restaurant to the next, vendors enticing them in Vietnamese, English, and a mix of the two.

“Xin Chiào! Xin Chiào! Come. Look at produce. Fresh today.”

“Vietnamese coffee. Best prices. You try.”

Traditional Vietnamese music spilled from the businesses and mixed with the cacophony of voices, the hum of passing cars, and the hiss of brakes on the electronic buses hooked by trolley poles to a spiderweb of cables strung overhead.

Thompson reached back into the car and grabbed his suit jacket, slipping it on. He didn't bother to button his shirt collar or cinch tight the knot of his tie.

It was too damned hot.

A heat wave had hit Puget Sound. Temperatures had exceeded ninety degrees for three straight days, and the high temperatures were expected to continue.

His partner, Kyle Mitchell, a newbie to Seattle's homicide squad, adjusted his suit jacket with great care, not a wrinkle in the expensive fabric as he walked around the hood of the car to Thompson. The ten-year homicide veteran had been tasked with showing Mitchell the ropes. Mitchell still dressed to impress in tailored suits, shirts with monogrammed cuffs, and expensive ties. The rookie would soon learn the suit was just a uniform; no one cared how you dressed.

What mattered in this job were the results.

Mitchell unwrapped the foil and rolled a piece of spearmint gum into his mouth, chewing with that cocksure grin. In Ray-Ban Aviator sunglasses

and short, gelled hair, he resembled a taller, more muscular version of the actor Tom Cruise.

“You ever been down here?” Thompson asked Mitchell.

A history buff, Thompson had read of the Vietnamese people’s struggles before, during, and after the war, as well as their resilience and determination in America. As they had done in countless cities, they’d established a community in these few square blocks, first populated by war refugees after the fall of Saigon in April 1975. In what seemed overnight, more than a hundred mom-and-pop restaurants, markets, hair salons, jewelry stores, and professional offices overtook the area, a testament to their hard work despite their displacement, which limited their economic opportunities.

“Nah,” Mitchell said with a dismissive headshake. “Had my fill when I served my tour. No desire to go back. Though I do miss the food. You?”

Thompson took in the savory aroma of pho and grilled pork, chicken and chili-infused beef fat, fresh basil and mint herbs, and the briny scent of seafood. “The wife likes to come down here to shop. Likes to be spontaneously exotic and buy things like jackfruit and rambutan.”

They crossed the intersection to the strip mall of shops now distinguished by multiple police cars, one with its roof lights still swirling, and an ambulance. “My father says this area was once Seattle’s jazz capital,” Mitchell said. “Said Ray Charles and Quincy Jones played in clubs here.”

“Different time,” Thompson said.

A uniformed officer stood outside the glass door to the Tran Jewelry Market, one of several jewelry stores in the area, this one sandwiched between a movie-rental business—VHS videocassettes in the windows—and a grab-and-go Vietnamese deli offering bánh mì sandwiches. Thompson and Mitchell flashed their badges and shook the uniform’s hand. The young man looked pale beneath his snap-back navy-blue police hat. The pavement had to be over one hundred degrees.

“You okay, Officer? You look a little pale,” Mitchell said, his tone and grin baiting.

“I’m okay,” the officer said.

“Make sure you’re drinking water,” Thompson said. “I’ve lost a few pounds just crossing the street.”

“Will do.”

“What do we have?” Thompson asked.

“Looks to me like two murders during a robbery.” The uniform sounded tentative, and Thompson realized the quiver in the young man’s voice, his pale complexion, and sweaty brow wasn’t just from the heat but from what he’d seen inside the store. “A man and a woman.” He gestured to his right. “The movie-rental store owner said husband and wife.” He let out a burst of air, fighting to rein in his emotions.

“Take your time,” Thompson said.

“It’s pretty gruesome, Detective. A lot of blood and spatter and, in this heat, with no air-conditioning . . . the smell is . . . It’s pretty bad.”

“Okay. Just a few more questions, then I want you to find something to drink with sugar in it. A Coke. You understand?”

The young man nodded.

“Who’s been inside the store other than you?”

“Just me and my partner. We checked the two people on the floor for a pulse. Pretty obvious, but we checked. Then we stepped back out and called it in.”

“Medical examiner on the way?”

“I . . . I don’t know.”

“Why don’t you find out? If the office hasn’t been alerted, tell them to send someone out.”

Thompson glanced over at the two paramedics waiting near the back of their ambulance. They seemed eager to get inside the store. Not happening. Paramedics were like elephants. They trampled crime scenes.

The senior homicide detective considered the stores in the strip malls on both sides of the street. “Any of the other business owners see anyone going in or coming out?”

The officer pointed to a sign on the door displaying the store hours. “Looks like they’d just opened, so . . . Not that anyone is saying. Not yet anyway. My partner is still talking to the other business owners.”

“Where in the store are the two bodies?”

The officer turned to the storefront. “Just inside. Behind the display counter. A curtain separates the retail section from an area where they cleaned and repaired jewelry. Looks that way to me. There’s also a living area—like maybe the owners spent a lot of time here.”

“They’re refugees. You can bet they did,” Thompson said.

He handed Mitchell a pair of gloves, and they both slipped them on before stepping past the officer.

“Guy was pretty shaken up,” Mitchell said, referencing the uniform and working hard to sound tough, but his smile was no longer so cocksure.

Inside, the temperature felt ten degrees hotter; air-conditioning was an unnecessary expense. It would be like working in a sauna. The glass in the long and rectangular display case had been smashed. Glass shards crunched beneath Thompson’s black wing-tipped shoes. He stepped carefully around pieces of jewelry strewn amid the glass; the stones green, ruby red, and sapphire blue.

“Looks like they were in a hurry,” Mitchell said.

Thompson took mental pictures. He’d have a photographer document and videotape the scene. He stepped around the end of the counter; more glass crunched. Mitchell followed, his Aviators now folded and clipped to his suit pocket.

Thompson smelled the killings, a sharp metallic odor, before he saw the bodies. From the sour expression on Mitchell’s face, he smelled it also. Thompson pulled back the dark-gray blanket hanging by shower rings from a water pipe along the ceiling. Blood, a dark crimson, pooled near the head wounds of a man and a woman. It looked as if they’d been told to kneel on the worn tile floor, their hands tied behind their backs before the gunman shot them, and their bodies had pitched forward. Gruesome didn’t begin to describe the carnage.

“Shit.” Mitchell put a hand to his mouth, like he was fighting back bile. “Goddamn.”

Thompson said, “If you’re going to be sick, do it someplace where it doesn’t contaminate my crime scene.”

Mitchell turned away and worked another piece of gum into his mouth.

Thompson also felt sick, though not physically. These poor people had come to America to escape this kind of violence. He put that thought aside and documented in his head what he would have photographed and drawn to scale. The back room looked maybe twenty by twenty feet, the only light from a pane in a locked back door leading to an alley. And it did look like the couple spent a lot of time here. Maybe even lived here. He stepped to a rectangular Formica table in the center of the room. On it was an opened schoolbook, a piece of paper with math problems not completed, and a

small pencil. Beside the paper was half a glass of some beverage and a plate on which lay half-eaten slices of mango and lychee. His sick feeling returned. He hoped to God a child had not been here, that these were remnants perhaps from a prior study session.

Thompson walked to where a second curtain hung, though not to the floor. Behind it, tucked against the concrete wall, he found a bed, a dresser with drawers, and atop the dresser, a small television set with a rabbit-ears antenna.

He turned, about to leave, then stopped when he spotted a piece of blue fabric sticking out from under the bed. He caught Mitchell's eye, then nodded to the garment. Mitchell released the strap over his .38 Special revolver, put his hand on the grip, and turned to the side, like a gunslinger. Thompson rolled his eyes and gestured with an open palm to stand down. He knelt and gently lifted the corner of a blanket, revealing more of the blue garment. A sweater. A plaid skirt. White ankle socks. Black Mary Jane shoes.

A school uniform.

A young girl crouched on her knees, the way Thompson had once crouched beneath his desk during Cold War nuclear bomb exercises. She lifted her head and looked up at Thompson with the frightened, uncertain eyes of a kitten abandoned too young by its mother.

Thompson turned his head to the right—the direction the girl had been looking. The two bodies, her parents, stared back at her with lifeless eyes.

Part I

Chapter 1

Present Day—December 4 *Seattle, Washington*

Frank Rossi turned the corner and slowed his 1969 Pontiac GTO, custom-painted British racing green; the exhaust pipes rumbling loud as a boat engine. Inconspicuous he was not—which wasn't a good thing when you were the last detective to arrive at a homicide scene.

"If you're going to be a bear, might as well be a grizzly," Rossi said.

He drove through what otherwise appeared to be a quiet residential neighborhood in South Seattle. The car's heater and defroster churned on high against the unseasonably cold weather. Early December in Seattle normally meant a lot of rain, but the twenty-three-degree temperature this morning foretold an early and long winter.

His partner in the Violent Crimes Section, Billy Ford, and their sergeant, Chuck Pan, stood on the sidewalk dressed for the cold weather in knit caps, down jackets, and gloves. Their breaths marked the air with wisps of condensation.

Rossi pulled the Pontiac to the curb and got out, feeling the numbing cold like a slap to the face. He slipped his navy-blue knit hat over his ears, then pulled on his lined leather gloves. Anticipating Ford's questions, he answered before his partner had the chance to ask them. "Yes, I was out late. And yes, I thought it prudent to come straight here and not go downtown and get a pool car."

"I was just going to say, 'Good morning, sunshine. Thanks for making us wait out in the cold,'" Ford said, voice raspy.

Rossi frowned and looked to Pan, who had initiated this party, waking both detectives with telephone calls. Ford and Rossi were the Violent Crimes team on call this week.

Rossi looked about. "We the first to arrive?"

"We'?" Ford said.

"Give it a rest, Billy." Rossi knew from his earlier conversation with Pan that the crime looked to be a double homicide. The uniformed first

responders had secured the house, a one-story rambler, and the detached garage. His Italian mother would have called the house a “baracca”—a small, unimpressive abode.

“Two dead bodies,” Pan said, his breath continuing to mark the air. “A man and a woman. Home is registered to a John Lockett, age forty-three. The woman, according to identification, is Melissa Scott, age thirty-one.”

“Girlfriend?” Rossi asked.

“Undetermined at this time,” Pan said. “Though a reasonable assumption. Lockett was shot and killed in the garage. Scott looks to have been bludgeoned to death in the bedroom. It’s ugly.”

“Murder-suicide?” Rossi asked. It would be rare for a burglar to shoot one victim and bludgeon the other. The gunshot or the bludgeoning presumably would alert the second victim.

“Also undetermined,” Pan said. “First responders said you’ll find drugs and cash inside the house.”

“Dealers?” Ford said.

“Also undetermined, though it’s more than you’d expect for just recreational use. Neither victim has a record.”

“Any gang affiliations?” Ford asked. He and Rossi had worked a narcotics rotation on their way to Violent Crimes. Gangs often ran drugs.

“Again, unknown at this time.”

“Who called it in?” Rossi asked.

“Neighbor. Alex Cortez.” Pan pointed to a house across the street. “A uniform is interviewing him.”

“What was he doing at Lockett’s house so early?” Ford asked.

“Lockett works the graveyard shift at an airfreight company out by the airport. He gets off around four. Neighbor said he and Lockett had agreed to meet at eight to work on the car in the garage.”

“We’ll want elimination prints,” Rossi said to Ford.

“You run him?” Ford asked Pan, meaning the neighbor.

“One DUI, had his license suspended six months. Otherwise not even a parking violation.” Pan looked back at the house. “If this was a drug hit, I’m not sure why the perps wouldn’t have taken *all* the drugs and cash.”

“To make it look like it wasn’t?” Ford postulated.

“Not sure your garden-variety gangbanger is that forward thinking,” Rossi said, subscribing to the theory that most criminals weren’t rocket scientists. “They’d take the money and sell the drugs.”

Pan flipped a page of his spiral notebook. "On a cursory inspection, first responders did not note any spent shell casings."

"The shooter picked up the shell casings?" Ford asked, though he meant his question to be rhetorical.

"Or used a revolver," Rossi said.

"Either could indicate a professional hit," Ford said.

"As could leaving behind cash and drugs, as well as the violent nature of the deaths," Rossi said.

Pan closed his notebook. "You know the drill."

"Too well," Rossi said. "MDOP been called?"

"Been called. Haven't seen anyone yet," Pan said. "CSI and ME have also been called. I've ordered patrol to cordon off the street at the turn up there. Rodgers and Hammerstein are your next up."

Hammerstein's real name was Doug Stein, but the nickname was just too hard for other detectives to ignore. As next-up detectives, he and Phil Rodgers would provide Ford and Rossi support by conducting interviews and scanning the crime scene.

Ford picked out gloves and rubber booties from the go bag at his feet and handed a pair of each to Rossi. "Rock, paper, scissors?"

"Fat chance, Bernstein. This is your symphony," Rossi said, meaning Ford would be the lead detective. They alternated.

"Is someone actually listening to classical music?" Ford asked as they walked toward the front door. The uniformed officer held the sign-in log. He looked half frozen.

"Watched the movie," Rossi said, referring to *Maestro*, which depicted the life of Leonard Bernstein. He removed his leather gloves and felt the bitter cold as he took the pen, clumsy in his hands, and scratched his name and badge number beneath Ford's.

"How was it?" Ford asked.

"Bradley Cooper did a good job, but they didn't play enough of Bernstein's music. At least the stuff I'd recognize."

"You see it with your new lady friend?"

Rossi handed the pen back to the uniform. "'Lady friend'? How old are you?"

"Can we call her a girlfriend?" Ford asked. "I don't really care, but Allysia would like to know. She thinks I'm withholding juicy gossip. She

won't believe we spend all day together and I don't even know this woman's name."

Allysia was Ford's wife and the mother of their three boys.

"Tell Allysia I don't like to put labels on things."

Ford laughed as he slipped on his booties. He looked to the lowered garage door, then asked the uniform, "Is there another entrance to the garage?"

"Around the side." The officer pointed across the driveway, past two cars parked side by side. Frost covered their windows.

Ford and Rossi stepped around the cars to round concrete pavers leading to the door on the side. A second uniformed officer in a fur hat and long coat, which made him look like a Russian sentry, also held a sign-in log.

"Detached from the dwelling, so we thought we might need a second sign-in sheet," he said, sounding cold. The log was not just a way to monitor who went into and out of a crime scene; it also served as a deterrent. Those who crossed the line were required to file a report, which was the bane of every officer's existence, especially the brass.

Rock music spilled out the door, guitars and heavy drums—AC/DC.

"Assume the music was on when you arrived?" Ford asked the uniformed officer.

"It was," the officer confirmed. "We didn't touch the stereo in case it had fingerprints on the dials."

"Dials?" Ford said.

"It's old school," the uniform said.

Rossi and Ford stepped inside the garage, where it was noticeably warmer. "Thunderstruck" burst from tower speakers. Rossi also heard a hum followed by a click and looked up at a space heater attached to a wooden joist.

"I think we can turn the music off before it gives us both a headache," Ford said, pressing the power switch.

"That's AC/DC," Rossi said. "It's a classic." In his younger years he'd been a metalhead.

"I'm glad, at least, that you didn't call it *music*," Ford said.

A 1951 Packard, a sweet-looking ride with a pale-green body and yellow hardtop, took up half the garage. The hood was up. A light bulb in a

protective cage illuminated the engine. Tools lay strewn about, a ratchet set on the grill, a tire iron on the garage floor.

Rossi gestured to the car. “That’s worth some money.”

“If it runs,” Ford said. “Until then, Allysia would call it a large paperweight.”

“Says the guy with a piano, half a dozen guitars, a violin, *and* a saxophone.”

“All of which are used regularly.”

The other half of the garage looked to have been converted into a rustic man cave. A flat-screen television, mounted to the wall studs, faced a brown leather couch and matching chair on a rust-colored carpet. Behind the couch was a well-used pool table, the green felt worn and bald in places. Face down on the concrete floor between the pool table and the car lay the body of a white male. Blood, a dark crimson, pooled from the back of his head, indicating the body had not been moved or otherwise disturbed. The man wore a grease-stained T-shirt and black Carhartt work pants.

“Focused on the car?” Ford said.

Ford deduced, as Rossi had from the gore and the blood spatter, that the man had been shot at close range. “The music was loud enough to have masked the killer’s approach,” Rossi said.

Rossi and Ford backed out carefully to await the CSI van carrying the team of detectives who would photograph and record the garage from a million different angles, dust for latent fingerprints, collect DNA, and otherwise examine the scene for forensic evidence.

They made their way back to the uniformed officer at the front door and changed shoe coverings before stepping inside the house. The interior was modest. The furniture dated and sparse. On a table, bags of pills and powders spilled from opened Blue Horizon Air Cargo packages, along with some cash. Rossi recognized the company name—an airfreight service out near the airport.

A shaken-looking officer motioned to a narrow hall with doors on each side. “Last door on the right.”

Rossi and Ford stepped inside the bedroom, encountering the reason the young officer looked sickened.

Ford swore.

Rossi made the sign of the cross, another habit he’d inherited from his mother, who did so each time she passed a church or a wreck on the

highway—or anything else unnerving.

The woman, presumably Melissa Scott, lay naked on bloodstained sheets, her limbs and body twisted and contorted.

“This looks like rage to me,” Ford said.

“Or somebody leaving a message,” Rossi said. “Either way, they got the message across.”