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STEPHEN
KING

THE OUTSIDER

A NOVEL

SCRIBNER

NEW YORK LONDON TORONTO SYDNEY NEW DELHI

For Rand and Judy Holston

Thought only gives the world an appearance of order to
anyone weak enough to be convinced by its show.

Colin Wilson
“The Country of the Blind”

THE ARREST

July 14th

It was an unmarked car, just some nondescript American sedan a few years old, but the blackwall tires and the three men inside gave it away for what it was. The two in front were wearing blue uniforms. The one in back was wearing a suit, and he was as big as a house. A pair of black boys standing on the sidewalk, one with a foot on a scuffed orange skateboard, the other with a lime-colored board under his arm, watched it turn into the parking lot of the Estelle Barga Recreational Park, then looked at each other.

One said, "That's Five-O."

The other said, "No shit."

They headed off with no further conversation, pumping their boards. The rule was simple: when Five-O shows up, it's time to go. Black lives matter, their parents had instructed them, but not always to Five-O. At the baseball field, the crowd began to cheer and clap rhythmically as the Flint City Golden Dragons came to bat in the bottom of the ninth, one run down.

The boys didn't look back.

Statement of Mr. Jonathan Ritz [July 10th, 9:30 PM, interviewed by Detective Ralph Anderson]

Detective Anderson: I know you're upset, Mr. Ritz, it's understandable, but I need to know exactly what you saw earlier this evening.

Ritz: I'll never get it out of my mind. Never. I think I could use a pill. Maybe a Valium. I've never taken any of that stuff, but I sure could use something now. My heart still feels like it's in my throat. Your forensic people should know that if they find puke at the scene, and I guess they will, it's mine. I'm not ashamed, either. Anyone would have lost their supper if they saw something like that.

Detective Anderson: I'm sure a doctor will prescribe something to calm you down when we're done. I think I can arrange for that,

but right now I need you clearheaded. You understand that, don't you?

Ritz: Yes. Of course.

Detective Anderson: Just tell me everything you saw, and we'll be finished for this evening. Can you do that for me, sir?

Ritz: All right. I went out to walk Dave right around six o'clock this evening. Dave is our beagle. He has his evening meal at five. My wife and I eat at five thirty. By six, Dave is ready to take care of his business—Number One and Number Two, I mean. I walk him while Sandy—my wife—does up the dishes. It's a fair division of labor. A fair division of labor is very important in a marriage, especially after the children have grown up, that's the way we look at it. I'm rambling, aren't I?

Detective Anderson: That's okay, Mr. Ritz. Tell it your way.

Ritz: Oh, please call me Jon. I can't stand Mr. Ritz. Makes me feel like a cracker. That's what the kids called me when I was in school, Ritz Cracker.

Detective Anderson: Uh-huh. So you were walking your dog—

Ritz: That's right. And when he got a strong scent—the scent of death, I suppose—I had to hold him back on his leash with both hands, even though Dave's just a little dog. He wanted to get at what he was smelling. The—

Detective Anderson: Wait, let's go back. You left your house at 249 Mulberry Avenue at six o'clock—

Ritz: It might have been a little before. Dave and I walked down the hill to Gerald's, that grocery on the corner where they sell all the gourmet stuff, then up Barnum Street, and then into Figgis Park. That's the one the kids call Frig Us Park. They think adults don't know what they say, that we don't listen, but we do. At least some of us do.

Detective Anderson: Was this your usual evening walk?

Ritz: Oh, sometimes we change it up a little so we don't get bored, but the park is where we almost always end up before heading home, because there's always lots for Dave to smell. There's a parking lot, but at that time of the evening it's almost always empty, unless there are some high school kids playing tennis. There weren't any that night, because the courts are clay and it rained earlier. The only thing parked there was a white van.

Detective Anderson: A commercial van, would you say?

Ritz: That's right. No windows, just double doors in the back. The kind of van small companies use to haul stuff in. It might have been an Econoline, but I couldn't swear to that.

Detective Anderson: Was there a company name written on it? Like Sam's Air Conditioning or Bob's Custom Windows? Something like that?

Ritz: No, uh-uh. Nothing at all. It was dirty, though, I can tell you that. Hadn't been washed in some time. And there was mud on the tires, probably from the rain. Dave sniffed at the tires, then we went along one of the gravel paths through the trees. After about a quarter of a mile, Dave started to bark and ran into the

bushes on the right. That's when he got that scent. He almost dragged the leash out of my hand. I tried to pull him back and he wouldn't come, just flopped over and dug at the ground with his paws and kept on barking. So I snubbed him up close—I have one of those retractable leashes, and it's very good for that kind of thing—and went after him. He doesn't bother about squirrels and chipmunks so much now that he's not a puppy anymore, but I thought he might have scented up a raccoon. I was going to make him come back whether he wanted to or not, dogs need to know who's boss, only that was when I saw the first few drops of blood. They were on a birch leaf, about chest-high to me, which would make it I guess five feet or so off the ground. There was another drop on another leaf a little further on, then a whole splash of it on some bushes further on still. Still red and wet. Dave sniffed at that one, but wanted to keep going. And listen, before I forget, right about then I heard an engine start up behind me. I might not have noticed, except it was pretty loud, like the muffler was shot. Kind of rumbling, do you know what I mean?

Detective Anderson: Uh-huh, I do.

Ritz: I can't swear it was that white van, and I didn't go back that way, so I don't know if it was gone, but I bet it was. And you know what that means?

Detective Anderson: Tell me what you think it means, Jon.

Ritz: That he might have been watching me. The killer. Standing in the trees and watching me. It gives me the creeps, just thinking about it. Now, I mean. Then, I was pretty much fixated on the blood. And keeping Dave from yanking my arm right out of its socket. I was getting scared, and don't mind admitting it. I'm not a big man, and although I try to stay in shape, I'm in my sixties now. Even in my twenties I wasn't much of a brawler. But I had to see. In case someone was hurt.

Detective Anderson: That's very commendable. What time would you say it was when you first saw the blood-trail?

Ritz: I didn't check my watch, but I'm guessing twenty past six. Maybe twenty-five past. I let Dave lead the way, keeping him snubbed up so I could push through the branches he could just go under with his little short legs. You know what they say about beagles—they're high-toned but low-slung. He was barking like crazy. We came into a clearing, a sort of . . . I don't know, sort of a nook where lovers might sit and smooch a little. There was a granite bench in the middle of it, and it was covered in blood. So much of it. More underneath. The body was lying on the grass beside it. That poor boy. His head was turned toward me, and his eyes were open, and his throat was just gone. Nothing there but a red hole. His bluejeans and underpants were pulled down to his ankles, and I saw something . . . a dead branch, I guess . . . sticking out of his . . . his . . . well, you know.

Detective Anderson: I do, but I need you to say it for the record, Mr. Ritz.

Ritz: He was on his stomach, and the branch was sticking out of his bottom. That was bloody, too. The branch. Part of the bark was stripped, and there was a handprint. I saw that clear as day. Dave wasn't barking anymore, he was howling, poor thing, and I just don't know who would do something like that. He must have been a maniac. Will you catch him, Detective Anderson?

Detective Anderson: Oh, yes. We'll catch him.

3

The Estelle Barga parking lot was almost as big as the one at the Kroger's where Ralph Anderson and his wife shopped on Saturday afternoons, and on this July evening it was totally filled. Many of the bumpers bore Golden Dragons stickers, and a few rear windows had been soaped with exuberant slogans: WE WILL ROCK YOU; DRAGONS WILL BURN BEARS; CAP CITY HERE WE COME; THIS YEAR IT'S OUR TURN. From the field, where the lights had been turned on (although it would be daylight for quite a while yet), there arose cheering and rhythmic clapping.

Troy Ramage, a twenty-year veteran, was behind the wheel of the unmarked. As he cruised up one packed row and down another, he said, "Whenever I come here, I always wonder who the hell Estelle Barga was, anyway."

Ralph made no reply. His muscles were tight, his skin was hot, and his pulse felt like it was red-lining. He had arrested plenty of bad doers over the years, but this was different. This was particularly awful. And personal. That was the worst: it was personal. He had no business being part of the arrest, and knew it, but following the last round of budget cuts, there were only three full-time detectives on the Flint City police force's roster. Jack Hoskins was on vacation, fishing somewhere in the back of beyond, and good riddance. Betsy Riggins, who should have been on maternity leave, would be assisting the State Police with another aspect of this evening's work.

He hoped to God they weren't going too fast. He had expressed that worry to Bill Samuels, the Flint County district attorney, just that afternoon, in their pre-arrest conference. Samuels was a little young for the post, just thirty-five, but he belonged to the right political party, and he was sure of himself. Not cocksure, there was that, but undoubtedly gung-ho.

“There are still some rough edges I’d like to smooth out,” Ralph said. “We don’t have all the background. Plus, he’s going to say he has an alibi. Unless he just gives it up, we can be sure of that.”

“If he does,” Samuels had replied, “we’ll knock it down. You know we will.”

Ralph had no doubt of it, he knew they had the right man, but he still would have preferred a little more investigation before pulling the trigger. Find the holes in the sonofabitch’s alibi, punch them wider, wide enough to drive a truck through, *then* bring him in. In most cases that would have been the correct procedure. Not in this one.

“Three things,” Samuels had said. “Are you ready for them?”

Ralph nodded. He had to work with this man, after all.

“One, people in this town, particularly the parents of small children, are terrified and angry. They want a quick arrest so they can feel safe again. Two, the evidence is beyond doubt. I’ve never seen a case so ironclad. Are you with me on that?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, here’s number three. The big one.” Samuels had leaned forward. “We can’t say he’s done it before—although if he has, we’ll probably find out once we really start digging—but he sure as hell has done it now. Broken loose. Busted his cherry. And once that happens . . .”

“He could do it again,” Ralph finished.

“Right. Not the likeliest scenario so soon after Peterson, but possible. He’s with kids all the time, for Christ’s sake. Young boys. If he killed one of them, never mind losing our jobs, we’d never forgive ourselves.”

Ralph was already having problems forgiving himself for not seeing it sooner. That was irrational, you couldn’t look into a man’s eyes at a backyard barbecue following the conclusion of the Little League season and know he was contemplating an unspeakable act—stroking it and feeding it and watching it grow—but the irrationality didn’t change the way he felt.

Now, leaning forward to point between the two cops in the front seat, Ralph said, “Over there. Try the handicap spaces.”

From the shotgun seat, Officer Tom Yates said, “Two-hundred-dollar fine for that, boss.”

“I think we’ll get a pass this time,” Ralph said.

“I was joking.”

Ralph, in no mood for cop repartee, made no reply.

“Crip spaces ahoy,” Ramage said. “And I see two empties.”

He pulled into one of them, and the three men got out. Ralph saw Yates unsnap the strap over the butt of his Glock and shook his head. “Are you out of your mind? There’s got to be fifteen hundred people at that game.”

“What if he runs?”

“Then you’ll catch him.”

Ralph leaned against the hood of the unmarked and watched as the two Flint City officers started toward the field, the lights, and the crammed bleachers, where the clapping and the cheering were still rising in volume and intensity. Arresting Peterson’s killer fast had been a call he and Samuels had made together (however reluctantly). Arresting him at the game had been strictly Ralph’s decision.

Ramage looked back. “Coming?”

“I am not. You do the deed, and read him his rights nice and goddam loud, then bring him here. Tom, when we roll, you’re going to ride in back with him. I’ll be up front with Troy. Bill Samuels is waiting for my call, and he’ll be at the station to meet us. This one’s A-Team all the way. As for the collar, it’s all yours.”

“But it’s your case,” Yates said. “Why wouldn’t you want to be the one to bust the motherfucker?”

Still with his arms crossed, Ralph said, “Because the man who raped Frankie Peterson with a tree branch and tore open his throat coached my son for four years, two in Peewee and two in Little League. He had his hands on my son, showing him how to hold a bat, and I don’t trust myself.”

“Got it, got it,” Troy Ramage said. He and Yates started toward the field.

“And listen, you two.”

They turned back.

“Cuff him right there. And cuff him in front.”

“That’s not protocol, boss,” Ramage said.

“I know, and I don’t care. I want everyone to see him led away in handcuffs. Got it?”

When they were on their way, Ralph took his cell phone off his belt. He had Betsy Riggins on speed-dial. “Are you in position?”

“Yes indeed. Parked in front of his house. Me and four State Troopers.”

“Search warrant?”

“In my hot little hand.”

“Good.” He was about to end the call when something else occurred to him. “Bets, when’s your due date?”

“Yesterday,” she said. “So hurry this shit up.” And ended the call herself.

4

Statement of Mrs. Arlene Stanhope [July 12th, 1:00 PM, interviewed by Detective Ralph Anderson]

Stanhope: Will this take long, Detective?

Detective Anderson: Not long at all. Just tell me what you saw on the afternoon of Tuesday, July 10th, and we’ll be done.

Stanhope: All right. I was coming out of Gerald’s Fine Groceries. I always do my shopping there on Tuesdays. Things are more expensive at Gerald’s, but I don’t go to the Kroger since I stopped driving. I gave up my license the year after my husband died because I didn’t trust my reflexes anymore. I had a couple of accidents. Just fender-benders, you know, but that was enough for me. Gerald’s is only two blocks from the apartment I’ve been living in since I sold the house, and the doctor says walking is good for me. Good for my heart, you know. I was coming out with my three bags in my little cart—three bags is all I can afford now, the prices are so awful, especially meat, I don’t know the last time I’ve had bacon—and I saw the Peterson boy.

Detective Anderson: You’re sure it was Frank Peterson you saw?

Stanhope: Oh yes, it was Frank. Poor boy, I’m so sorry about what happened to him, but he’s in heaven now, and his pain is over. That’s the consolation. There are two Peterson boys, you know, both redheads, that awful carrot red, but the older one—Oliver, that’s his name—is at least five years older. He used to deliver our newspaper. Frank has a bicycle, one of those that have the high handlebars and the narrow seat—

Detective Anderson: A banana seat, it’s called.

Stanhope: I don’t know about that, but I know it was bright lime green, an awful color, really, and there was a sticker on the seat. It said Flint City High. Only he’ll never go to high school, will he? Poor, poor boy.

Detective Anderson: Mrs. Stanhope, would you like a short break?

Stanhope: No, I want to finish. I need to go home and feed my cat. I always feed her at three, and she’ll be hungry. She’ll also wonder where I am. But if I could have a tissue? I’m sure I’m a mess. Thank you.

Detective Anderson: You could see the sticker on the seat of Frank Peterson’s bicycle because—?

Stanhope: Oh, because he wasn't on it. He was walking it across the Gerald's parking lot. The chain was broken, and dragging on the pavement.

Detective Anderson: Did you notice what he was wearing?

Stanhope: A tee-shirt with some rock and roll band on it. I don't know bands, so I can't say which one it was. If that's important, I'm sorry. And he was wearing a Rangers cap. It was pushed back on his head, and I could see all that red hair. Those carrot-tops usually go bald very early in life, you know. He'll never have to worry about that now, will he? Oh, it's just so sad. Anyway, there was a dirty white van parked at the far end of the lot, and a man got out and came over to Frank. He was—

Detective Anderson: We'll get to that, but first I want to hear about the van. This was the kind with no windows?

Stanhope: Yes.

Detective Anderson: With no writing on it? No company name, or anything of that nature?

Stanhope: Not that I saw.

Detective Anderson: Okay, let's talk about the man you saw. Did you recognize him, Mrs. Stanhope?

Stanhope: Oh, of course. It was Terry Maitland. Everyone on the West Side knows Coach T. They call him that even at the high school. He teaches English there, you know. My husband taught with him before he retired. They call him Coach T because he coaches Little League, and the City League baseball team when Little League is done, and in the fall he coaches little boys who like to play football. They have a name for that league, too, but I don't remember it.

Detective Anderson: If we could get back to what you saw on Tuesday afternoon—

Stanhope: There's not much more to tell. Frank talked to Coach T, and pointed at his broken chain. Coach T nodded and opened the back of the white van, which couldn't have been his—

Detective Anderson: Why do you say that, Mrs. Stanhope?

Stanhope: Because it had an orange license plate. I don't know which state that would be, my long vision isn't what it used to be, but I know Oklahoma plates are blue and white. Anyway, I couldn't see anything in the back of the van except for a long green thing that looked like a toolbox. Was it a toolbox, Detective?

Detective Anderson: What happened then?

Stanhope: Well, Coach T put Frank's bicycle in the back and shut the doors. He clapped Frank on the back. Then he went around to the driver's side and Frank went around to the passenger side. They both got in, and the van drove away, onto Mulberry Avenue. I thought Coach T was going to drive the lad home. Of course I did. What else would I think? Terry Maitland has lived on the West Side for going on twenty years, he has a very nice family, a wife and two daughters . . . could I have another tissue, please? Thank you. Are we almost done?

Detective Anderson: Yes, and you've been very helpful. I believe that before I started to record, you said this was around three o'clock?

Stanhope: Exactly three. I heard the bell in the Town Hall clock chiming the hour just as I came out with my little cart. I wanted to go home and feed my cat.

Detective Anderson: The boy you saw, the redheaded boy, was Frank Peterson.

Stanhope: Yes. The Petersons live right around the corner. Ollie used to deliver my newspaper. I see those boys all the time.

Detective Anderson: And the man, the one who put the bike in the back of the white van and drove away with Frank Peterson, that was Terence Maitland, also known as Coach Terry or Coach T.

Stanhope: Yes.

Detective Anderson: You're sure of that.

Stanhope: Oh, yes.

Detective Anderson: Thank you, Mrs. Stanhope.

Stanhope: Who could believe Terry would do such a thing? Do you suppose there have been others?

Detective Anderson: We may find that out in the course of our investigation.

5

Since all City League tournament games were played at Estelle Barga Field—the best baseball field in the county, and the only one with lights for night games—home team advantage was decided by a coin toss. Terry Maitland called tails before the game, as he always did—it was a superstition handed down from his own City League coach, back in the day—and tails it was. “I don't care where we're playing, I just like to get my lasties,” he always told his boys.

And tonight he needed them. It was the bottom of the ninth, the Bears were up in this league semifinal by a single run. The Golden Dragons were down to their last out, but they had the bases loaded. A walk, a wild pitch, an error, or an infield single would tie it, a ball hit into the gap would win it. The crowd was clapping, stamping the metal bleachers, and cheering as little Trevor Michaels stepped into the lefthand batter's box. His batting helmet was the smallest one they had, but it still shaded his eyes and he had to keep pushing it up. He twitched his bat nervously back and forth.

Terry had considered pinch-hitting for the boy, but at just an inch over five feet, he drew a lot of walks. And while he was no home run hitter, he was sometimes able to put the bat on the ball. Not often, but sometimes. If Terry lifted him for a pinch hitter, the poor kid would have to live with the humiliation through the whole next year of middle school. If, on the other hand, he managed a single, he would recall it over beers and backyard barbecues for the rest of his life. Terry knew. He'd been there himself, once upon a time, in the antique era before the game was played with aluminum bats.

The Bears pitcher—their closer, a real fireballer—wound up and threw one right down the heart of the plate. Trevor watched it go by with an expression of dismay. The umpire called strike one. The crowd groaned.

Gavin Frick, Terry's assistant coach, paced up and down in front of the boys on the bench, the scorebook rolled up in one hand (how many times had Terry asked him not to do that?), and his XXL Golden Dragons tee-shirt straining over his belly, which was XXXL at least. "I hope letting Trevor bat for himself wasn't a mistake, Ter," he said. Sweat was trickling down his cheeks. "He looks scared to death, and I don't b'lieve he could hit that kid's speedball with a tennis racket."

"Let's see what happens," Terry said. "I've got a good feeling about this." He didn't, not really.

The Bears pitcher wound up and released another burner, but this one landed in the dirt in front of home plate. The crowd rose to its feet as Baibir Patel, the Dragons' tying run at third, jinked a few steps down the line. They settled back with a groan as the ball bounced into the catcher's mitt. The Bears catcher turned to third, and Terry could read his expression, even through the mask: *Just try it, homeboy*. Baibir didn't.

The next pitch was wide, but Trevor flailed at it, anyway.

"Strike him out, Fritz!" a leather-lung shouted from high up in the bleachers—almost surely the fireballer's father, from the way the kid snapped his head in that direction. "Strike him *owwwwwwt!*"

Trevor didn't offer at the next pitch, which was close—too close to take, really, but the ump called it a ball, and it was the Bears' fans' turn to groan. Someone suggested that the ump needed stronger glasses. Another fan mentioned something about a seeing-eye dog.

Two and two now, and Terry had a strong sense that the Dragons' season hung on the next pitch. Either they would play the Panthers for the City

championship, and go on to compete in the States—games that were actually televised—or they would go home and meet just one more time, at the barbecue in the Maitland backyard that traditionally marked the end of the season.

He turned to look at Marcy and the girls, sitting where they always did, in lawn chairs behind the home plate screen. His daughters were flanking his wife like pretty bookends. All three waved crossed fingers at him. Terry gave them a wink and a smile and two thumbs up, although he still didn't feel right. It wasn't just the game. He hadn't felt right for some time now. Not quite.

Marcy's return smile faltered into a puzzled frown. She was looking to her left, and jerked a thumb that way. Terry turned and saw two city cops walking in lockstep down the third base line, past Barry Houlihan, who was coaching there.

"Time, time!" the home plate umpire bellowed, stopping the Bears pitcher just as he went into his wind-up. Trevor Michaels stepped out of the batter's box, and with an expression of relief, Terry thought. The crowd had grown quiet, looking at the two cops. One of them was reaching behind his back. The other had his hand on the butt of his holstered service weapon.

"Off the field!" the ump was shouting. *"Off the field!"*

Troy Ramage and Tom Yates ignored him. They walked into the Dragons' dugout—a makeshift affair containing a long bench, three baskets of equipment, and a bucket of dirty practice balls—and directly to where Terry was standing. From the back of his belt, Ramage produced a pair of handcuffs. The crowd saw them, and raised a murmur that was two parts confusion and one part excitement: *Ooooo*.

"Hey, you guys!" Gavin said, hustling up (and almost tripping over Richie Gallant's discarded first baseman's mitt). "We've got a game to finish here!"

Yates pushed him back, shaking his head. The crowd was dead silent now. The Bears had abandoned their tense defensive postures and were just watching, their gloves dangling. The catcher trotted out to his pitcher, and they stood together halfway between the mound and home plate.

Terry knew the one holding the cuffs a little; he and his brother sometimes came to watch the Pop Warner games in the fall. "Troy? What is this? What's the deal?"

Ramage saw nothing on the man's face except what looked like honest bewilderment, but he had been a cop since the nineties, and knew that the really bad ones had that *Who, me?* look down to a science. And this guy was as bad as they came. Remembering Anderson's instructions (and not minding a bit), he raised his voice so he could be heard by the entire crowd, which the next day's paper would announce as 1,588.

"Terence Maitland, I am arresting you for the murder of Frank Peterson."

Another *Ooooo* from the bleachers, this one louder, the sound of a rising wind.

Terry frowned at Ramage. He understood the words, they were simple English words forming a simple declarative sentence, he knew who Frankie Peterson was and what had happened to him, but the *meaning* of the words eluded him. All he could say was "What? Are you kidding?" and that was when the sports photographer from the *Flint City Call* snapped his picture, the one that appeared on the front page the next day. His mouth was open, his eyes were wide, his hair was sticking out around the edges of his Golden Dragons cap. In that photo he looked both enfeebled and guilty.

"*What* did you say?"

"Hold out your wrists, please."

Terry looked at Marcy and his daughters, still sitting in their chairs behind the chickenwire, staring at him with identical expressions of frozen surprise. Horror would come later. Baibir Patel left third base and started to walk toward the dugout, taking off his batting helmet to show the sweaty mat of his black hair, and Terry saw the kid was starting to cry.

"Get back there!" Gavin shouted at him. "Game's not over."

But Baibir only stood in foul territory, staring at Terry and bawling. Terry stared back, positive (*almost* positive) he was dreaming all this, and then Tom Yates grabbed him and yanked his arms out with enough force to make Terry stumble forward. Ramage snapped on the cuffs. Real ones, not the plastic strips, big and heavy, gleaming in the late sun. In that same rolling voice, he proclaimed: "You have the right to remain silent and refuse to answer questions, but if you choose to speak, anything you say can be held against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney during questioning now or in the future. Do you understand?"

"Troy?" Terry could hardly hear his own voice. He felt as if the wind had been punched out of him. "What in God's name is this?"

Ramage took no notice. “Do you understand?”

Marcy came to the chickenwire, hooked her fingers through it, and shook it. Behind her, Sarah and Grace were crying. Grace was on her knees beside Sarah’s lawn chair; her own had fallen over and lay in the dirt. “What are you doing?” Marcy shouted. “What in God’s name are you doing? And why are you doing it *here*?”

“Do you understand?”

What Terry understood was that he had been handcuffed and was now being read his rights in front of almost sixteen hundred staring people, his wife and two young daughters among them. It was not a dream, and it was not simply an arrest. It was, for reasons he could not comprehend, a public shaming. Best to get it over as fast as possible, and get this thing straightened out. Although, even in his shock and bewilderment, he understood that his life would not be going back to normal for a long time.

“I understand,” he said, and then: “Coach Frick, get back.”

Gavin, who had been approaching the cops with his fists clenched and his fat face flushed a hectic red, lowered his arms and stepped back. He looked through the chickenwire at Marcy, raised his enormous shoulders, spread his pudgy hands.

In the same rolling tones, like a town crier belting out the week’s big news in a New England town square, Troy Ramage continued. Ralph Anderson could hear him from where he stood leaning against the unmarked unit. He was doing a good job, was Troy. It was ugly, and Ralph supposed he might be reprimanded for it, but he would not be reprimanded by Frankie Peterson’s parents. No, not by them.

“If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided to you before any questioning, if you desire. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Terry said. “I understand something else, too.” He turned to the crowd. “*I have no idea why I’m being arrested! Gavin Frick will finish coaching the game!*” And then, as an afterthought: “Baibir, get back to third, and remember to run in foul territory.”

There was a smatter of applause, but only a smatter. The leather-lung in the bleachers yelled again, “*What’d you say he did?*” And the crowd responding to the question, muttering the two words that would soon be all over the West Side and the rest of the city: Frank Peterson’s name.

Yates grabbed Terry by the arm and started hustling him toward the snack shack and the parking lot beyond. “You can preach to the multitudes

later, Maitland. Right now you're going to jail. And guess what? We have the needle in this state, and we use it. But you're a teacher, right? You probably knew that."

They hadn't gotten twenty steps from the makeshift dugout before Marcy Maitland caught up and grabbed Tom Yates's arm. "What in God's name do you think you're doing?"

Yates shrugged her off, and when she tried to grasp her husband's arm, Troy Ramage pushed her away, gently but firmly. She stood where she was for a moment, dazed, then saw Ralph Anderson walking to meet his arresting officers. She knew him from Little League, when Derek Anderson had played for Terry's team, the Gerald's Fine Groceries Lions. Ralph hadn't been able to come to all the games, of course, but he came to as many as possible. Back then he'd still been in uniform; Terry had sent him a congratulatory email when he was promoted to detective. Now she ran toward him, fleet over the grass in her old tennis shoes, which she always wore to Terry's games, claiming there was good luck in them.

"Ralph!" she called. "What's going on? This is a mistake!"

"I'm afraid it isn't," Ralph said.

This part he didn't like, because he liked Marcy. On the other hand, he had always liked Terry, as well—the man had probably changed Derek's life only a little, given the boy just a smatter of confidence-building, but when you were eleven years old, a little confidence was a big deal. And there was something else. Marcy might have known what her husband was, even if she didn't allow herself to know on a conscious level. The Maitlands had been married a long time, and horrors like the Peterson boy's murder simply did not come out of thin air. There was always a build-up to the act.

"You need to go home, Marcy. Right away. You may want to leave the girls with a friend, because there will be police waiting for you."

She only looked at him, uncomprehending.

From behind them came the chink of an aluminum bat making good contact, although there were few cheers; those in attendance were still shocked, and more interested in what they'd just witnessed than the game before them. Which was sort of a shame. Trevor Michaels had just hit the ball harder than ever before in his life, harder even than when Coach T was throwing meatballs in practice. Unfortunately, it was a line drive straight to the Bears shortstop, who didn't even have to jump to make the catch.

Game over.

***“THIS IS BAD BEHAVIOR.
I WOULDN’T HAVE EXPECTED IT OF YOU.”***



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A living nightmare has come to Flint City, Oklahoma, as an eleven-year-old boy is found brutally murdered in a local park—an unspeakable crime that rocks local law enforcement to its core as the most heinous atrocity anyone there has ever witnessed. Equally stunning is the identity of the prime suspect: Terry Maitland, one of Flint City’s most popular citizens, as well as Little League coach, English teacher, and devoted husband and father. Detective Ralph Anderson, whose own son Maitland once coached, orders a quick and very public arrest. Multiple eyewitnesses and irrefutable evidence mean an ironclad case . . . until the investigation expands, and horrifying new details begin to emerge. Terry Maitland seems like a nice guy, but is he wearing another face? When the answer is revealed, it will shock you as only master storyteller Stephen King can.

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