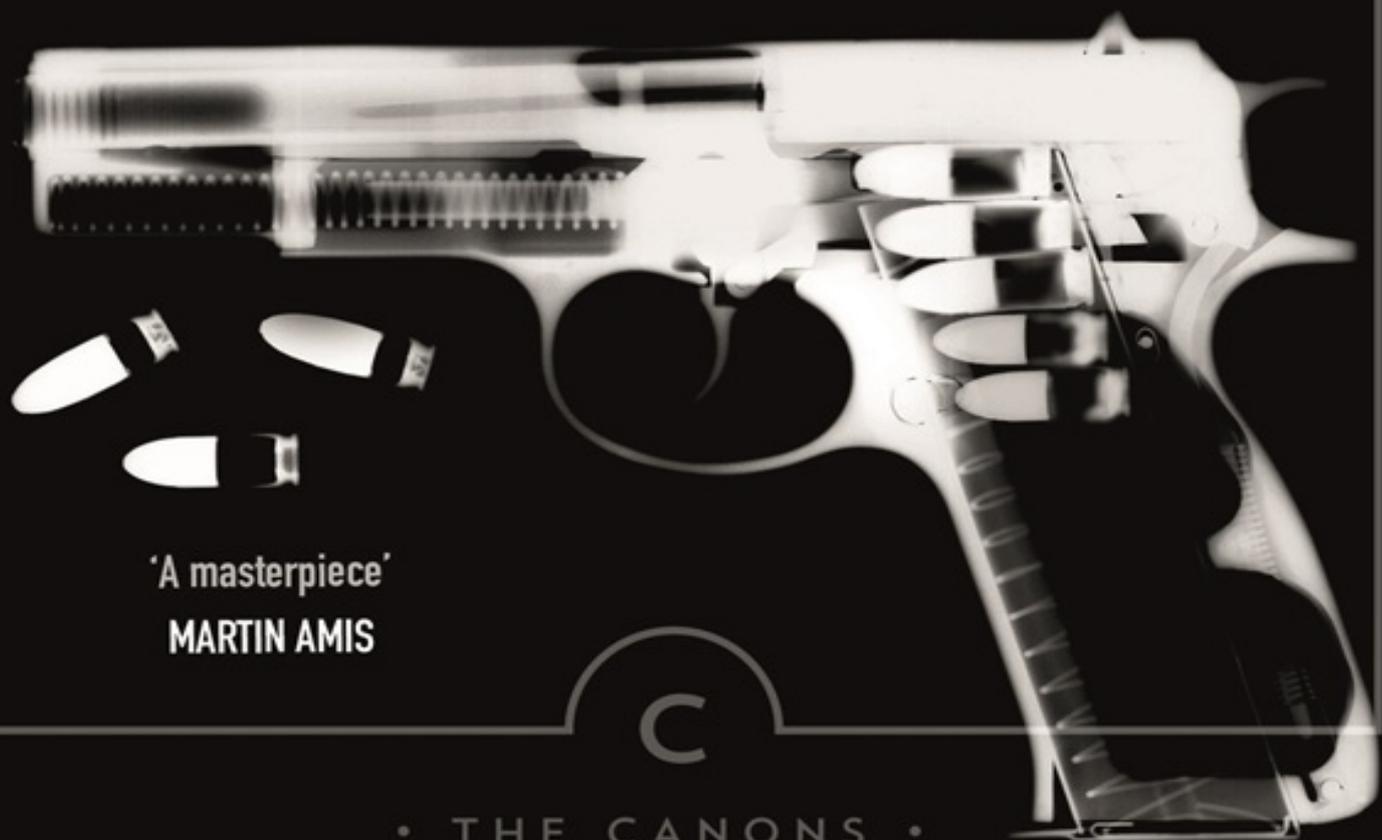


FROM THE CREATOR OF **THE WIRE**

# DAVID SIMON

'The best book about homicide detectives by an American writer' **NORMAN MAILER**

# HOMICIDE



'A masterpiece'  
**MARTIN AMIS**

C

• THE CANONS •

# **HOMICIDE**

**A YEAR ON THE KILLING STREETS**

**DAVID SIMON**



**CANONGATE**

*Edinburgh · London · New York · Melbourne*

*For Linda*

If a man is found slain, lying in a field in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him, your elders and judges shall go out and measure the distance from the body to the neighboring towns.

Then the elders of the town nearest the body shall take a heifer that has never been worked and has never worn a yoke and lead her down to a valley that has not been plowed or planted and where there is a flowing stream.

There in the valley they are to break the heifer's neck.

The priests, the sons of Levi, shall step forward, for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister and to pronounce blessings in the name of the Lord and to decide all cases of dispute and assault.

Then all the elders of the town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley and they shall declare:

“Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done. Accept this atonement for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, O Lord, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent man.”

Deuteronomy 21: 1–9

In contact wounds, the muzzle of the weapon is held against the surface of the body ... the immediate edges of the entrance are seared by hot gases and blackened by the soot. This is embedded in the seared skin and cannot be completely removed either by washing or vigorous scrubbing of the wound.

VINCENT J.M. DIMAIO M.D.,  
*Gunshot Wounds: Practical Aspects of  
Firearms, Ballistics and Forensic Technique*

## ANTE MORTEM

by

Richard Price

Jimmy Breslin once wrote of Damon Runyon, “He did what all good journalists do—he hung out.” But in *Homicide*, his year-in-the-life chronicle of the Baltimore Police Department’s Homicide Unit, David Simon didn’t just hang out; he pitched a tent. As both a reporter and a dramatist Simon has always held the conviction that God is a first-rate novelist and to *be there* when He’s strutting his stuff is not only legitimate but honorable, part and parcel of fighting the good fight. Simon is a great collector and interpreter of facts, but he’s also junkie and his addiction is to bearing witness.

I say this with authority (it takes one to know one), and the addiction plays itself out like this: whatever we see out on the street—with the police, with the corner boys, with people who are just trying to survive with their families intact in a world sewn with every kind of land mine—only whets our desire to see more, to hang and to hang and to hang with whoever will have us in an endless quest for some kind of urban Ur-Truth. Our bedside prayer: Please, Lord, just one more day, one more night, let me see something, hear something that will be the key, the golden metaphor for all of it, which, as any degenerate gambler knows, is in the very next roll of the dice. Truth is right around the next corner, in the next bit of throwaway street commentary, the next radio call, the next hand-to-hand drug transaction, the next unfurling of crime scene tape, as the beast that is Baltimore, is New York, is urban America, like some insatiable Sphinx whose riddles aren’t even intelligible, continues to gobble up one benighted soul after another.

Or maybe it’s just our inability to meet deadlines ....

I first met Simon on April 29, 1992, the night of the Rodney King riots. We had both just published Big Books: Simon’s was the book in your hands; mine was a novel, *Clockers*. We were brought together by our mutual editor, John Sterling. The moment was almost comical: “David this is Richard; Richard, David. You guys should be friends—you have so much in common.” And so of course the first thing we did was make a beeline over the river to Jersey City, one of the hot spots that night, where we were met by Larry Mullane, a Hudson County Homicide detective and my ace Virgil for the previous three years of my writing life. David’s father had grown up in JC, the Mullanes and Simons had likely crossed paths over the generations, and so it went. The JC riots themselves proved elusive, perpetually around the corner but offstage, and my main recollection of that night is Simon’s compulsion to *be there*, which for me was like running into my long-lost Siamese twin.

Our second encounter was a few years later when, in the aftermath of the Susan Smith horror in South Carolina, I was on something of a Medea tour laying the groundwork for my novel *Freedomland*. There had been a vaguely similar tragedy in Baltimore: the white mother of two biracial girls had torched her rowhouse while her young daughters were asleep. Her alleged motive was to clear any obstacles from the path of true love with her new boyfriend, who she said was less than thrilled about her two kids (a suggestion he later denied).

Working the phones, David hooked me up with whatever principals were available to be interviewed—the arresting detectives, the mother’s boyfriend, the thrice-bereaved grandmother, the Arab who owned the corner store across the street where the mother had fled, ostensibly to call 911. (Her first call, the store owner said, was to her mother, her c to report the fire.) Journalistically, the story was past its expiration date, but Simon, in his willingness to get *me* the story, reverted to work mode. It was the first time I ever had to keep pace with a street reporter both mentally and physically; in addition to securing all the interviews, this also involved unsuccessfully trying to jive and con our way past the uniform still guarding the crime scene; shrugging off the straight-arm and working an end run; circling around and scaling backyard fences until we found ourselves inside the blackened rowhouse; and climbing what was left of the stairs to enter the small bedroom where the two girls died of smoke inhalation. At last we were there, and it was like standing inside the gut of a translucent tiger, the two of us staring everywhere—walls, ceiling, floor—at the charred striations left by the flames. A devastating little chip of hell.

But let’s go back to that first night in Jersey City. At one point during the evening there were rumors that the rioters were stringing piano wire across the streets to decapitate motorcycle cops, and Larry Mullane, an ex-motorcycle cop himself, abruptly had to leave us. We found ourselves alone in an unmarked police car (an oxymoron if there ever was one), with me behind the wheel and Simon in the passenger seat. Mullane’s advice to us was, “Keep it moving—and if anybody comes up on you, just try to look pissed off and floor it.” That’s basically what we did, which brings me to a question that has always plagued me: Are writers like us, writers who are obsessed with chronicling in fact and fiction the minutiae of life in the urban trenches of America, writers who are dependent in large part on the noblesse of the cops to see what we have to see, are we (oh shit ... ) police buffs?

And the answer I’ve come to believe is: No more than we are criminal buffs or civilian buffs. But for whoever allows us to walk a mile in their shoes, on either side of the law, we do feel an unavoidable empathy—in essence we become “embedded.” But it’s not as sinister as it sounds as long as your Thank You mantra goes something like this: As a chronicler I will honor you with the faithful reporting of what I see and hear while a guest in the house of your life. As for how you come off, you dig your own grave or build your own monument by being who you are, so good luck and thanks for your time.

Simon writes with great thoroughness and clarity about the impossibility of the job of homicide investigator. For the murder police in the field, it’s not only the body lying before them that has to be dealt with but also what they carry on their backs, which is the entire hierarchy of bosses who answer to bosses—the weight of bureaucratic self-preservation. Despite the overpopularization of *CSI*-style forensic advances, at times it must seem like the only reliable science for these investigators at the bottom of the food chain is the physics of careerism, which simply and reliably states that once a murder hits the papers or touches any kind of political nerve, the shit will always roll downhill. The best of them—those who more often than not, under great if superfluous pressure, turn the red names on the board to black—are left with an air of world-weariness and well-earned elitist pride.

*Homicide* is a day-in, day-out journal, an intermingling of the mundane and the biblically heinous, and Simon's eagerness and avidity to absorb, to digest, to *be there* and convey the world before his eyes to the universe beyond, runs through every page. There is a love for everything he witnesses, an implicit belief in the beauty of simply stating that whatever he sees playing itself out in real time is "The Truth" of a world—this is how it is, this is how it works, this is what people say, how they act, act out, dissociate, justify, where they come up short, transcend themselves, survive, go under.

Simon also exhibits a knack for keying in on the enormity of little things: the quality of mild surprise in the half-closed eyes of the freshly dead, the ineffable poetry of a throwaway non sequitur, the physical ballet of aimlessness on the corners, the unconscious dance of rage and boredom and joy. He documents the gestures, the rueful misnomers, the way the eyes cut, the mouth tightens. He records the unexpected civilities between adversaries, the gallows humor that allegedly saves one's sanity or humanity or whatever the excuse is for making jokes at the expense of the recently murdered, the breathtaking stupidity that propels most homicidal actions, the survival strategies adopted by people living in the most dire circumstances in order simply to make it through one more day. He captures how the streets themselves are a narcotic for the cops as well as the street soldiers (and the occasional writer), everyone jacked for the next predictable yet unexpected bit of drama that will put both sides in motion and send the innocents caught in the middle dropping for cover beneath the bedroom window or huddling in the supposedly bulletproof bathtub—the family that ducks together stays together. And time after time he hammers home the fact that there's very little Black and White out there, and a hell of a lot of Gray.

*Homicide* is a war story, and the theater of engagement stretches from the devastated rowhouses of East and West Baltimore to the halls of the state legislature in Annapolis. It reveals with no small irony how survival games on the streets mirror survival games in city hall, how all who engage in the drug war live and die by the numbers—kilos, ounces, grams, pills, profits for one side; crimes, arrests, solve rates, and budget cuts for the other. The book is a realpolitik examination of a municipality in the midst of a slow-motion riot, but through the steadfastness of Simon's presence *Homicide* offers us the patterns hidden within the chaos. Baltimore, in fact, is Chaos Theory incarnate.

With the success of the television adaptation of this book, Simon has been able to branch out into drama—the brilliant six-part miniseries based on his follow-up book, *The Corner* (co-written with Ed Burns), and the Russian novel of an HBO series, *The Wire*. With these later projects he gets to kick out the jams a little, to nudge and mastermind the truth into a slightly artificial shapeliness to heighten the big-ticket social issues. But even with the creative freedom of fiction, his work remains an exaltation of nuance, a continuing exploration of how the smallest external act can create the greatest internal revolution—in the life of a single marginalized person or in the spiritual and political biorhythm of a major American city.

All of which is to say that if Edith Wharton came back from the dead, developed a bent for municipal power brokers, cops, crackheads and reportage, and didn't really care what she wore to the office, she'd probably look a little something like David Simon.

**The Players**

Lieutenant Gary D'Addario  
*Shift Commander*

Detective Sergeant Terrence McLarney  
*Squad Supervisor*

Detective Donald Worden  
Detective Rick James  
Detective Edward Brown  
Detective Donald Waltemeyer  
Detective David John Brown

Detective Sergeant Roger Nolan  
*Squad Supervisor*

Detective Harry Edgerton  
Detective Richard Garvey  
Detective Robert Bowman  
Detective Donald Kincaid  
Detective Robert McAllister

Detective Sergeant Jay Landsman  
*Squad Supervisor*

Detective Tom Pellegrini  
Detective Oscar Requer  
Detective Gary Dunnigan  
Detective Richard Fahlteich  
Detective Fred Ceruti

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## ONE

TUESDAY, JANUARY 19

Pulling one hand from the warmth of a pocket, Jay Landsman squats down to grab the dead man's chin, pushing the head to one side until the wound becomes visible as a small, ovate hole, oozing red and white.

"Here's your problem," he said. "He's got a slow leak."

"A leak?" says Pellegrini, picking up on it.

"A slow one."

"You can fix those."

"Sure you can," Landsman agrees. "They got these home repair kits now ..."

"Like with tires."

"Just like with tires," Landsman says. "Comes with a patch and everything else you need. Now a bigger wound, like from a thirty-eight, you're gonna have to get a new head. This one you could fix."

Landsman looks up, his face the very picture of earnest concern.

Sweet Jesus, thinks Tom Pellegrini, nothing like working murders with a mental case. One in the morning, heart of the ghetto, half a dozen uniforms watching their breath freeze over another dead man—what better time and place for some vintage Landsman, delivered in perfect deadpan until even the shift commander is laughing hard in the blue strobe of the emergency lights. Not that a Western District midnight shift is the world's toughest audience; you don't ride a radio car for any length of time in Sector 1 or 2 without cultivating a diseased sense of humor.

"Anyone know this guy?" asks Landsman. "Anyone get to talk to him?"

"Fuck no," says a uniform. "He was ten-seven when we got here."

Ten-seven. The police communication code for "out of service" artlessly applied to a human life. Beautiful. Pellegrini smiles, content in the knowledge that nothing in this world can come between a cop and his attitude.

"Anyone go through his pockets?" asks Landsman.

"Not yet."

"Where the fuck are his pockets?"

"He's wearing pants underneath the sweatsuit."

Pellegrini watches Landsman straddle the body, one foot on either side of the dead man's waist, and begin tugging violently at the sweatpants. The awkward effort jerks the body a few inches across the sidewalk, leaving a thin film of matted blood and brain matter where the head wound scrapes the pavement. Landsman forces a meaty hand inside a front pocket.

"Watch for needles," says a uniform.

"Hey," says Landsman. "Anyone in this crowd gets AIDS, no one's gonna believe it came from a fucking needle."

The sergeant pulls his hand from the dead man's right front pocket, causing perhaps a dollar in change to fall to the sidewalk.

"No wallet in front. I'm gonna wait and let the ME roll him. Somebody's called the ME, right?"

"Should be on the way," says a second uniform, taking notes for the top sheet of an incident report. "How many times is he hit?"

Landsman points to the head wound, then lifts a shoulder blade to reveal a ragged hole in the upper back of the dead man's leather jacket.

"Once in the head, once in the back." Landsman pauses, and Pellegrini watches him go deadpan once again. "It could be more."

The uniform puts pen to paper.

"There is a possibility," says Landsman, doing his best to look professorial, "a good possibility, he was shot twice through the same bullethole."

"No shit," says the uniform, believing.

A mental case. They give him a gun, a badge and sergeant's stripes, and deal him out into the streets of Baltimore, a city with more than its share of violence, filth and despair. Then they surround him with a chorus of blue-jacketed straight men and let him play the role of the lone, wayward joker that somehow slipped into the deck. Jay Landsman, of the sidelong smile and pockmarked face, who tells the mothers of wanted men that all the commotion is nothing to be upset about, just a routine murder warrant. Landsman, who leaves empty liquor bottles in the other sergeants' desks and never fails to turn out the men's room light when a ranking officer is indisposed. Landsman, who rides a headquarters elevator with the police commissioner and leaves complaining that some sonofabitch stole his wallet. Jay Landsman, who as a Southwestern patrolman parked his radio car at Edmondson and Hilton, then used a Quaker Oatmeal box covered in aluminum foil as a radar gun.

"I'm just giving you a warning this time," he would tell grateful motorists. "Remember, only you can prevent forest fires."

And now, but for the fact that Landsman can no longer keep a straight face, there might well be an incident report tracked to Central Records in the departmental mail, complaint number 88-7A37548, indicating that said victim appeared to be shot once in the head and twice in the back through the same bullethole.

"No, hey, I'm joking," he says finally. "We won't know anything for sure until the autopsy tomorrow."

He looks at Pellegrini.

"Hey, Phyllis, I'm gonna let the ME roll him."

Pellegrini manages a half-smile. He's been Phyllis to his squad sergeant ever since that long afternoon at Rikers Island in New York, when a jail matron refused to honor a writ and release a female prisoner into the custody of two male detectives from Baltimore; the regulations required a policewoman for the escort. After a sufficient amount of debate, Landsman grabbed Tom Pellegrini, a thick-framed Italian born to Allegheny coal miner stock, and pushed him forward.

"Meet Phyllis Pellegrini," Landsman said, signing for the prisoner. "She's my partner."

"How do you do?" Pellegrini said with no hesitation.

"You're not a woman," said the matron.

“But I used to be.”

With the blue strobe glancing off his pale face, Tom Pellegrini moves a step closer to take stock of what half an hour earlier had been a twenty-six-year-old street dealer. The dead man is sprawled on his back, legs in the gutter, arms partly extended, head facing north near the side door of a corner rowhouse. Dark brown eyes are fixed under half-lids in that expression of vague recognition so common to the newly and suddenly departed. It is not a look of horror, consternation, or even distress. More often than not, the last visage of a murdered man resembles that of a flustered schoolchild to whom the logic of a simple equation has just been revealed.

“If you’re okay here,” says Pellegrini, “I’m gonna go across the street.”

“What’s up?”

“Well ...”

Landsman moves closer and Pellegrini lowers his voice, as if the spoken suggestion that there may be a witness to this murder would be an embarrassing display of optimism.

“There’s a woman who went into a house across the street. Someone told one of the first officers she was outside when the shooting started.”

“She saw it?”

“Well, supposedly she told people it was three black males in dark clothes. They ran north after the shots.”

It isn’t much, and Pellegrini can read his sergeant’s mind: three yos wearing black, a description that narrows the list to about half the fucking city. Landsman nods vaguely and Pellegrini begins making his way across Gold Street, stepping carefully around the patches of ice that cover much of the intersection. It is early morning now, half past two, and the temperature is well below freezing. A bracing wind catches the detective in the center of the street, cutting through his overcoat. On the other side of Etting, the locals have gathered to mark the event, younger men and teenagers signifying, scoping the unexpected entertainment, each one straining to catch a glimpse of the dead man’s face across the street. Jokes are exchanged and stories whispered, but even the youngest knows to avert his eyes and fall silent at a first question from a uniform. There is no good reason to do otherwise, because in a half hour the dead man will be laid out on a table for one at the ME’s chop shop on Penn Street, the Western men will be stirring coffee at the Monroe Street 7-Eleven and the dealers will be selling blue-topped caps again at this godforsaken crossroads of Gold and Etting. Nothing said now is going to change any of that.

The crowd watches Pellegrini cross the street, eyefucking him in a way that only the west side corner boys can as he walks to a painted stone stoop and hits a wood door with a rapid, three-beat motion. Waiting for a response, the detective watches a battered Buick roll west on Gold, idling slowly toward and then past him. Brake lights flash for a moment as the car approaches the blue strobes on the other side of the street. Pellegrini turns to watch the Buick roll a few blocks farther west to the Brunt Street corners, where a small coterie of runners and touts have resumed work, selling heroin and cocaine a respectful distance from the murder scene. The Buick shows its taillights again, and a lone figure slips from one corner and leans into the driver’s window. Business is business, and the Gold Street market waits for no man, certainly not the dead dealer across the street.

Pellegrini knocks again and steps close to the door, listening for movement inside. From upstairs comes a muffled sound. The detective exhales slowly and raps again, bringing a young girl to a second-floor window in the next rowhouse.

“Hey there,” Pellegrini says, “police department.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Do you know if Katherine Thompson lives next door?”

“Yeah, she do.”

“Is she home now?”

“Guess so.”

Heavy pounding on the door is answered at last by a light from upstairs, where a frame window is suddenly and violently wrenched upward. A heavysset, middle-aged woman—fully dressed, the detective notes—pushes head and shoulders across the sill and stares down at Pellegrini.

“Who the hell is knocking on my door this late?”

“Mrs. Thompson?”

“Yeah.”

“Police.”

“Poh-leece?”

Jesus Christ, Pellegrini thinks, what else would a white man in a trenchcoat be doing on Gold Street after midnight? He pulls the shield and holds it toward the window.

“Could I talk to you for a moment?”

“No, you can’t,” she says, expelling the words in a singsong, slow enough and loud enough to reach the crowd across the street. “I got nothing to say to you. People be trying to sleep and you knocking on my door this late.”

“You were asleep?”

“I ain’t got to say what I was.”

“I need to talk with you about the shooting.”

“Well, I ain’t got a damn thing to say to you.”

“Someone died ...”

“I know it.”

“We’re investigating it.”

“So?”

Tom Pellegrini suppresses an almost overwhelming desire to see this woman dragged into a police wagon and bounced over every pothole between here and headquarters. Instead, he looks hard at the woman’s face and speaks his last words in a laconic tone that betrays only weariness.

“I can come back with a grand jury summons.”

“Then come on back with your damn summons. You come here this time a night telling me I got to talk to you when I don’t want to.”

Pellegrini steps back from the front stoop and looks at the blue glow from the emergency lights. The morgue wagon, a Dodge van with blacked-out windows, has pulled to the curb, but every kid on every corner is now gazing across the street, watching this woman make it perfectly clear to a police detective that under no circumstances is she a living witness to a drug murder.

“It’s your neighborhood.”

“Yeah, it is,” she says, slamming the window.

Pellegrini shakes his head gently, then walks back across the street, arriving in time to watch the crew of the morgue wagon roll the body. From a jacket pocket comes a wristwatch and keys. From a rear pants pocket comes an identification card. Newsome, Rudolph Michael, male, black, date of birth 3/5/61, address 2900 Allendale.

Landsman pulls the white rubber gloves from his hands, drops them in the gutter and looks at his detective.

“Anything?” he asks.

“No,” says Pellegrini.

Landsman shrugs. “I’m glad it’s you that got this one.”

Pellegrini’s chiseled face creases into a small, brief smile, accepting his sergeant’s declaration of faith for the consolation prize it is. With less than two years in homicide, Tom Pellegrini is generally regarded to be the hardest worker in Sergeant Jay Landsman’s squad of five detectives. And that matters now, because both men know that Baltimore’s thirteenth homicide of 1988, handed to them on the second leg of a midnight shift at the corner of Gold and Etting, is an exceptionally weak sister: a drug killing with no known witnesses, no specific motive and no suspects. Perhaps the only person in Baltimore who might have managed some real interest in the case is at this moment being shoveled onto a body litter. Rudy Newsome’s brother will make the identification later that morning outside a freezer door across from the autopsy room, but after that the boy’s family will offer little else. The morning newspaper will print not a line about the killing. The neighborhood, or whatever is left around Gold and Etting that resembles a neighborhood, will move on. West Baltimore, home of the misdemeanor homicide.

All of which is not to say that any man in Landsman’s squad wouldn’t give Rudy Newsome’s murder a shake or two. A police department is fueled by its own stats, and a homicide clearance—any clearance—will always earn a detective some court time and a few attaboys. But Pellegrini is playing the game for more than that: He’s a detective still in the process of proving things to himself, hungry for more experience and fresh to the daily grind. Landsman has watched him build cases on murders about which nothing should have been learned. The Green case from the Lafayette Court projects. Or that shooting outside Odell’s up on North Avenue, the one where Pellegrini walked up and down a bombed-out alley, kicking trash until he found a spent .38 slug that put the case down. To Landsman, the amazing thing is that Tom Pellegrini, a ten-year veteran of the force, came to homicide straight from the City Hall security detail only weeks after the mayor became the odds-on favorite for governor in a Democratic primary landslide. It was a political appointment, plain and simple, handed down from the deputy commissioner for services as if the governor himself had poured the oil on Pellegrini’s head. Everyone in homicide assumed that the new man would need about three months to prove himself an absolute hump.

“Well,” says Pellegrini, squeezing behind the wheel of an unmarked Chevy Cavalier, “so far so good.”

Landsman laughs. “This one will go down, Tom.”

Pellegrini shoots back a look that Landsman ignores. The Cavalier slips past block after block of rowhouse ghetto, rolling down Druid Hill Avenue until it crosses Martin

Luther King Boulevard and the Western District gives way to the early morning emptiness of downtown. The chill is keeping them in; even the drunks are gone from the Howard Street benches. Pellegrini slows before running every light until he catches the red signal at Lexington and Calvert, a few blocks from headquarters, where a lone whore, unmistakably a transvestite, gestures furtively at the car from the doorway of a corner office. Landsman laughs. Pellegrini wonders how any prostitute in this city could fail to understand the significance of a Chevy Cavalier with a six-inch antenna on its ass.

“Look at this pretty motherfucker,” says Landsman. “Let’s pull over and fuck with him.”

The car eases through the intersection and pulls to the curb. Landsman rolls down the passenger window. The whore’s face is hard, a man’s face.

“Hey, sir.”

The whore looks away in cold rage.

“Hey, mister,” yells Landsman.

“I ain’t no mister,” the whore says, walking back to the corner.

“Sir, would you have the time?”

“Go fuck yourself.”

Landsman laughs malevolently. One of these days, Pellegrini knows, his sergeant will say something bizarre to someone who matters and half the squad will be writing reports for a week.

“I think you hurt his feelings.”

“Well,” says Landsman, still laughing, “I didn’t mean to.”

A few minutes later, the two men are backed into a parking space on the second tier of the headquarters garage. On the bottom of the same page recording the particulars of Rudy Newsome’s death, Pellegrini writes the number of the parking space and the mileage on the odometer, then circles the two figures. Murders come and go in this town, but God forbid you should forget to write the correct mileage on your activity sheet or, worse yet, forget to note the parking space so that the next man out spends fifteen minutes walking up and down the headquarters garage, trying to figure out which Cavalier matches the ignition key in his hand.

Pellegrini follows Landsman across the garage and through a metal bulkhead door to the second-floor hallway. Landsman punches the elevator button.

“I wonder what Fahlteich got from Gatehouse Drive.”

“Was that a murder?” asks Pellegrini.

“Yeah. It sounded like it on the radio.”

The elevator slowly ascends, opening on another, similar corridor with waxed linoleum and hospital blue walls, and Pellegrini follows his sergeant down the long hall. From inside the aquarium—the soundproof room of metal and plate glass where witnesses sit before being interviewed—comes the sound of young girls laughing softly.

Hail Mary. Here be witnesses from Fahlteich’s shooting at the city’s other end—living, breathing witnesses brought forth by the gods from the scene of the new year’s fourteenth homicide. What the hell, thinks Pellegrini, at least somebody in the squad had a little luck tonight.

The voices in the aquarium slip away as the two men move down the hall. Just

before turning the corner into the squadroom, Pellegrini looks into the darkened aquarium's side door and glimpses the orange glow of a cigarette and the outline of the woman seated closest to the door. He sees a hard face, the deep brown features fixed like granite, the eyes offering only seasoned contempt. Helluva body, too: nice chest, good legs, yellow miniskirt. Someone probably would have said something by now if she wasn't all attitude.

Mistaking this casual assessment for genuine opportunity, the girl saunters from the aquarium to the edge of the office, then knocks lightly on the metal frame.

"Can I make a call?"

"Who do you want to talk to?"

"My ride."

"No, not now. After you're interviewed."

"What about my ride?"

"One of the uniformed officers will take you home."

"I've been here an hour," she says, crossing her legs in the doorway. The woman has the face of a teamster, but she's giving this her best shot. Pellegrini is unimpressed. He can see Landsman smiling at him wickedly from the other side of the office.

"We'll get to you as fast as we can."

Abandoning any thought of seduction, the woman walks back to join her girlfriend on the fishbowl's green vinyl couch, crosses her legs again and lights another cigarette.

The woman is here because she had the misfortune to be inside a garden apartment in the Purnell Village complex on Gatehouse Drive, where a Jamaican drug dealer named Carrington Brown played host to another Jake by the name of Roy Johnson. There was some preliminary talk, a few accusations delivered in a lilting West Indian accent, and then a considerable amount of gunfire.

Dick Fahlteich, a balding, bantam-size veteran of Landsman's squad, got the call minutes after the dispatcher sent Pellegrini and his sergeant to Gold Street. He arrived to find Roy Johnson dead in the living room with more than a dozen gunshot wounds afflicting every conceivable part of his body. His host, Carrington Brown, was on the way to the University Hospital emergency room with four chest wounds. There were bullet-holes in the walls, bullet-holes in the furniture, automatic .380 casings and hysterical women scattered across the apartment. Fahlteich and two crime lab techs would spend the next five hours pulling evidence out of the place.

That leaves Landsman and Pellegrini to sort through the witnesses sent downtown. Their interviews begin reasonably and orderly enough; taking turns, the detectives escort each witness into a separate office, fill out an information sheet and write out a statement of several pages for the witness to sign and date. The work is routine and repetitive; in the last year alone, Pellegrini has probably debriefed a couple hundred witnesses, most of them liars, all of them reluctant.

The process abruptly enters its second, more intensive phase a half hour later when an enraged Landsman hurls a four-page statement to the floor of a back office, slams his hand on a desk, and screams for the girl in the yellow miniskirt to get her ugly, untruthful, drug-ridden self out of his office. Well, thinks Pellegrini, listening at the other end of the hall, it isn't taking Landsman long to get down to business.

"YOU'RE A LYING BITCH," Landsman shouts, slamming the office door against

its rubber stop. “DO YOU THINK I’M STUPID? DO YOU FUCKING THINK I’M STUPID?”

“What did I lie about?”

“Get the fuck out of here. You’re charged.”

“Charged with what?”

Landsman’s face contorts into pure rage.

“YOU THINK THIS IS BULLSHIT? DO YOU?”

The girl says nothing.

“You just got a charge, you lying piece of shit.”

“I didn’t lie.”

“Fuck you. You’re charged.”

The sergeant points the woman toward the small interrogation room, where she slumps into a chair and stretches her legs up over a Formica table. The miniskirt rides down toward her waist, but Landsman is in no mood to enjoy the fact that the woman wears nothing under her skirt. He leaves the door slightly ajar as he yells to Pellegrini across the squadroom.

“NEUTRON THIS BITCH,” he shouts before closing the soundproof door to the small interrogation room, leaving the girl to wonder what sort of technological torture awaits. A neutron activation test requires only a painless swab of the hands to determine the presence of barium and antimony, elements deposited after a handgun is fired, but Landsman wants to leave her stewing on it, hoping she’s in that box imagining that someone’s about to irradiate her until she glows. The sergeant slams his open palm against the metal door one last time for proper emphasis, but the rage is gone even as he walks back into the main office. A staged performance—more vintage Landsman—delivered with gusto and sincerity for the lying bitch in the yellow miniskirt.

Pellegrini comes out of the coffee room and closes the door.

“What does yours say?”

“She didn’t see it,” says Pellegrini. “But she said your girl knows what happened.”

“I fucking know she does.”

“What do you want to do?”

“Take the statement from your girl,” says Landsman, bumming a cigarette from his detective. “I’m gonna let this one sit for a while, then go back in and fuck with her.”

Pellegrini returns to the coffee room and Landsman slumps into a desk chair. Cigarette smoke slips from the side of his mouth.

“Fuck this,” says Jay Landsman to no one in particular. “I’m not gonna swallow two open cases in one night.”

And so a graceless, nocturnal ballet resumes, with witnesses gliding past one another beneath the washed-out glare of tube lighting, each flanked by a tired, impassive detective cradling black coffee and enough blank statement forms to record the next round of half-truths. Pages are collated, initialed, and signed, Styrofoam coffee cups are refilled and cigarettes bartered until the detectives again assemble in the squadroom to compare notes and decide who’s lying, who’s lying more, and who’s lying the most. In another hour, Fahlteich will return from the murder scene and hospital with enough details to vouch for the one honest witness brought downtown that night—a woman who happened to be walking across the parking lot and

recognized one of the two gunmen as he entered the apartment. The woman knows what it means to talk about a drug murder and soon wishes she could take back everything she said to Fahlteich at the scene. Sent downtown immediately, she has been kept at a distance from the occupants of the apartment and is interviewed by Landsman and Fahlteich only after the detective returns from Gatehouse Drive. She shakes violently when the detectives bring up the subject of grand jury testimony.

“I can’t do that,” she says, breaking into tears.

“There’s no choice.”

“My children ...”

“We’re not going to let anything happen.”

Landsman and Fahlteich leave the office to talk softly in the hallway.

“She’s fucking terrified,” says Landsman.

“No shit.”

“We gotta grand jury her first thing tomorrow, before she has a chance to start backing up.”

“We also got to keep her separate from the others,” says Fahlteich, throwing a finger toward the witnesses in the fishbowl. “I don’t want any of them to get a look at her.”

By morning, they will have a nickname and general description for the missing gunman, and by the end of the week, his full name, police identification number, mug shot and the address of the North Carolina relatives who are hiding him. A week more and the kid is back in Baltimore, charged with first-degree murder and a weapons violation.

The story of Roy Johnson’s murder is brutal in its simplicity, simple in its brutality. The shooter is Stanley Gwynn, an eighteen-year-old moon-faced kid who served as bodyguard to Johnson, a New York cocaine connect who had armed his true and loyal subordinate with an Ingram Mac-11 .380 machine pistol. Johnson visited the Gatehouse Drive apartment because Carrington Brown owed him money for cocaine, and when Brown wouldn’t pay, Gwynn ended the negotiations with a long burst from the Ingram, a weapon capable of firing six rounds a second.

It was an impulsive, awkward performance, the sort of thing to be expected from a teenager. The attack was so clearly telegraphed that Carrington Brown was afforded more than enough time to grab Roy Johnson and use him as a shield. Before the scene in front of him registered in Stanley Gwynn’s brain, he had machine-gunned the man he was supposed to protect. The intended target, Carrington Brown, lay bleeding from four bullets that had somehow found their way past the dead man, and Stanley Gwynn—who will later take a second-degree plea and twenty-five years—ran in panic from the apartment building.

When the dayshift detectives bring early relief at 6:30, the Roy Johnson murder, case H88014, is tucked neatly inside a manila folder on the administrative lieutenant’s desk. An hour later, Dick Fahlteich is headed home for a quick shower before returning downtown to attend the autopsy. For his part, Landsman will be in his own bed by 8:00 A.M.

But as sunlight and the sounds of the morning rush hour seep through the sixth-floor windows, the flotsam and jetsam of H88013—the murder at Gold and Etting—are still scattered in front of Tom Pellegrini, a coffee-logged wraith who stares vacantly at the first officer’s report, at supplementals, evidence submission slips, body custody and

fingerprint forms for the person of Rudolph Newsome. Fifteen minutes either way and Pellegrini could have been dispatched to the Gatehouse Drive shooting, where a living victim and living witnesses were waiting to give up a murder and add one more to the list of clearances. Instead, Pellegrini went to Gold and Etting, where a twenty-six-year-old dead man stared up at him with sudden, silent comprehension. Luck of the draw.

After Landsman's departure, Pellegrini works the edges of his little disaster for another ten hours—pulling the paperwork together, calling an assistant state's attorney about a grand jury summons for the Thompson woman and submitting the victim's effects to the evidence control unit in the basement of headquarters. Later that morning, a Western District patrolman calls the homicide unit about some corner boy who got locked up for drugs by the midnight shift and claimed to know about the Gold Street shooting. Seems the kid is willing to talk if he can make a lower bail on the drug charge. Pellegrini finishes his fifth cup of coffee before going back out to the Western to take a brief statement from the boy, who claims to have seen three men running north off Gold Street after hearing shots. The kid says he knows one of the men, but only by the name Joe—a statement just specific enough to match the true scenario, just vague enough to be of no practical use to the detective. Pellegrini wonders whether the kid was even there or whether he picked up what he could about the Gold Street murder while sitting in the lockup overnight, then did his best to turn the information around and try to barter out from under the drug charge.

Back in homicide, the detective slips the notes from the interview inside the case file for H88013 and then slides the folder underneath the Roy Johnson file on the desk of the administrative lieutenant, who has come and gone on the eight-to-four shift. Good news before bad. Then Pellegrini gives a man on four-to-twelve the keys to his Cavalier and goes home. It is a little after 7:00 P.M.

Four hours later, he's back for the midnight shift, hovering like a moth around the red pilot light of the coffee machine. Pellegrini takes a full cup into the squadroom, where Landsman begins playing with him.

"Hey, Phyllis," says the sergeant.

"Hey, Sarge."

"Your case is down, isn't it?"

"My case?"

"Yeah."

"Which case would that be?"

"The new one," says Landsman. "From Gold Street."

"Well," says Pellegrini, the words rolling out slowly, "I am ready to get a warrant."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Hmmm," says Landsman, blowing cigarette smoke at the television screen.

"Only one problem, though."

"What's that," says the sergeant, now smiling.

"I don't know who the warrant is for."

Landsman laughs until the cigarette smoke makes him cough.

"Don't worry, Tom," he says finally. "It'll go down."

This is the job:

You sit behind a government-issue metal desk on the sixth of ten floors in a gleaming, steel-frame death trap with poor ventilation, dysfunctional air conditioning, and enough free-floating asbestos to pad the devil's own jumpsuit. You eat \$2.50 pizza specials and Italian cold cuts with extra hot sauce from Marco's on Exeter Street while watching reruns of *Hawaii Five-O* on the communal nineteen-inch set with insubordinate horizontal hold. You answer the phone on the second or third ring because Baltimore abandoned its AT&T equipment as a cost-saving measure and the new phone system doesn't ring so much as it emits metallic, sheeplike sounds. If a police dispatcher is on the other end of the call, you write down an address, the time, and the dispatcher's unit number on a piece of scratch paper or the back of a used three-by-five pawn shop submission card.

Then you beg or barter the keys to one of a half-dozen unmarked Chevrolet Cavaliers, grab your gun, a notepad, a flashlight and a pair of white rubber gloves and drive to the correct address where, in all probability, a uniformed police officer will be standing over a cooling human body.

You look at that body. You look at that body as if it were some abstract work of art, stare at it from every conceivable point of view in search of deeper meanings and textures. Why, you ask yourself, is this body here? What did the artist leave out? What did he put in? What was the artist thinking of? What the hell is wrong with this picture?

You look for reasons. Overdose? Heart attack? Gunshot wounds? Cutting? Are those defense wounds on the left hand? Jewelry? Wallet? Pockets turned inside out? Rigor mortis? Lividity? Why is there a blood trail, with droplets spattering in a direction away from the body?

You walk around the edges of the scene looking for spent bullets, casings, blood droplets. You get a uniform to canvass the houses or businesses nearby, or if you want it done right, you go door-to-door yourself, asking questions that the uniforms might never think to ask.

Then you use everything in the arsenal in the hope that something—anything—will work. The crime lab technicians recover weapons, bullets and casings for ballistic comparisons. If you're indoors, you have the techs take prints from doors and door handles, furniture and utensils. You examine the body and its immediate surroundings for loose hairs or fibers on the off chance that the trace evidence lab might actually put down a case now and then. You look for any other signs of disturbance, anything that doesn't appear to conform to its surroundings. If something strikes you—a loose pillowcase, a discarded beer can—you have a technician take it down to evidence control as well. Then you have the techs measure key distances and photograph the entire scene from every conceivable angle. You sketch the death scene in your own notebook, using a crude stickman for the victim and marking the original location of every piece of furniture and every piece of evidence recovered.

Assuming that the uniforms, upon arriving at the scene, were sharp enough to grab anyone within sight and send them downtown, you then go back to your office and throw as much street-corner psychology as you can at the people who found the body. You do the same thing with a few others who knew the victim, who rented a room to the victim, who employed the victim, who fucked, fought or fired drugs with the victim. Are they lying? Of course they're lying. Everyone lies. Are they lying more