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O'DONNELL**

Author of
A Good Night to Kill

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PROLOGUE

“Day and night they’re marching in front of the house carrying placards and chanting. They’re trying to drive the boy and his family out of their home and your cops aren’t doing anything about it!” Bernard Yost charged, his sonorous voice throbbing with emotion as though he were already addressing a jury.

“We’ve responded to every complaint,” Captain Emmanuel Jacoby replied mildly as he turned the pages of the report in front of him.

“Oh, they go through the motions, sure. They show up; they disperse the demonstrators, and send everybody home. Then they leave. As soon as they’re gone, the people come back out and start all over again.”

Manny Jacoby spread out his pudgy hands in a gesture of futility. “What do you suggest?”

“You could lock up the demonstrators, charge them with disturbing the peace.”

Jacoby, commander of the 20th Precinct, glanced over to Lieutenant Mulcahaney, head of the Fourth Homicide Division, one of the overhead units quartered in the Eighty-second Street station house. She said nothing, admiring the captain’s equanimity. “Lock up a whole neighborhood?” he asked.

"If that's what it takes!" the lawyer, tall, dark, saturnine, thundered. "Unless you're not sure your men can handle the job," he added. Seeing Jacoby's round, hitherto pleasant face darken and sweat glisten in the deep creases of his forehead, Yost knew he had gone too far, so without further ado, he opened his briefcase and took out a piece of crumpled notepaper, smoothed it, and placed it in front of the captain.

"This was tied around a rock and thrown through the Hites' window."

Get out! Sons of Satan! Seeds of evil! You belong in hell. If you don't get out, we'll send you there. Burn forever!

"That tells me they're going to torch the house," Yost concluded.

Jacoby held the paper out to Norah Mulcahaney. She took it, read it, and impassively handed it back.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"What do you want me to do?" Jacoby retorted.

"The least you can do is post a guard."

Jacoby didn't answer right away. The continuing hubbub in the squad room outside emphasized the silence in the small, cluttered, and overheated office. Though Captain Jacoby appeared to be considering the request seriously, Norah Mulcahaney didn't believe he was. Protection for a suspected criminal was far from unusual, but in this instance she found it repugnant and knew Manny Jacoby well enough to believe it was offensive to him, too.

"If you're afraid for your client's safety, why don't you get him to turn himself in?" Jacoby asked.

"Because he's innocent. Because he didn't do it," Yost stated smugly, and whereas up to now he had ignored Lieutenant Mulcahaney, in charge of the Hite investigation, he now challenged her directly. "You can't prove otherwise and you know it. You're hoping the neighbors' demonstrations will frighten my client into confessing."

Norah Mulcahaney was thirty-nine, a twelve-year veteran. She'd made detective within two years of joining the force, an achievement in itself, and shortly thereafter made ser-

geant. Except for a brief period during which she had formed and headed a Senior Citizens Squad, Norah had worked her entire career out of Homicide. She'd started with the elite Homicide North then, with the restructuring of the detectives division into zones, was assigned to the Fourth. Two years ago, having passed the lieutenant's exam, she'd been appointed to head the unit.

Norah was tall, five eight in stocking feet, and carried herself with quiet confidence. Having no need to attract attention, she dressed functionally. Today, she was wearing a light-gray pants suit with a sapphire-blue sweater. She used little makeup and pulled her glossy, dark-brown hair back severely, tied with a scarf that matched the sweater and brought out the deep blue of her eyes. Lines were beginning to show on her brow, around her eyes and mouth, but they were faint except in moments of stress and did not detract from her fine complexion.

Norah Mulcahaney had strong convictions, and she was known to speak her mind. But she was present at this interview at Manny Jacoby's behest as an observer and would not participate unless he indicated she should. So she retained her composure—high brow clear, dark-blue eyes steady, and the blunt, square chin firm, revealing nothing of what she felt.

She felt outrage and indignation and sorrow.

It seemed to Norah that the murders were growing not merely in numbers but in depravity, in heart-numbing contempt for the human condition. This one was particularly shocking. One of the worst she could remember.

At the beginning, the case had moved fast. It started with the victim's mother reporting her nine-year-old son, Pepe, missing. A search was instituted and it didn't take long to find the boy, his body mutilated and abandoned in the very tenement in which he'd lived. He had been hacked to death, the various body parts placed in black plastic bags and set to one side to be put out with the trash for pickup. It didn't take long for Norah and the squad to turn Raymond Hite, who

lived next door and was just fourteen years old, as the only suspect. His parents appealed to Legal Aid for a lawyer and Bernard Yost was assigned. On his advice, young Hite stopped talking to the police.

His refusal to answer stymied them. Norah Mulcahaney admitted it. There was no physical evidence linking Hite to the victim, so there was nothing more the police could do. For five days now there had been no mention of the crime by the media. The case, though technically open, appeared to be destined to be pushed into the background and forgotten.

"I demand protection for my client—for the boy and for his family." Yost addressed himself to both Jacoby and Mulcahaney.

To function as a Legal Aid lawyer, one had to be committed to the concept that no matter how heinous the crime, the suspect was entitled to the best possible defense. Norah accepted that, the justice system was based on it, but she thought she detected a current of desperation under Yost's arrogance. Looking to Manny Jacoby, she got the nod.

"Don't worry, Counselor, we'll make sure he's okay. We're on our way now to pick him up."

That wasn't the kind of protection he'd been agitating for. "Why? On what evidence? The crack?"

In the search of the suspect's home a small amount of crack and the equipment for smoking it was found in Raymond Hite's closet. Deemed as of minor importance, it had been routinely sent to the lab.

"If you want to bust him for possession, go ahead. You know how fast I'll have him out."

"That won't be the charge," Norah told him quietly.

"What then? You've got no physical evidence that young Hite and the victim were ever in contact."

"We have now," she said.

"What? What've you got?"

Captain Jacoby intervened. "That will be disclosed at the proper time."

Yost scowled. He considered. "Let me talk to the boy and

to his family, then we can set up a time and place for him to surrender.”

The evidence on which the arrest would be made was saliva. Spit. His murderer had killed the nine-year-old child, then spit on him. A careful medical examiner had discerned the dried spittle on the child's left cheek, and by way of the seemingly irrelevant crack pipe, using DNA testing procedures, had matched it to Raymond Hite. The dreadful crime had been committed under the influence of crack and it was grim justice, Norah thought, that the drug should serve as the means by which the killer would be convicted.

“It's too late for that,” Jacoby told the lawyer and then nodded to Norah Mulcahaney.

She got up and started for the door. This crime, like so many others recently, would not even have been committed, she thought, B.C.

Before crack.

CHAPTER ONE

It was Saturday, April 29th, the start of New York City's weekend-long celebration to commemorate the two hundredth anniversary of George Washington's inauguration as president on the steps of Federal Hall. A group of volunteers would reenact the ceremony and later the mayor, the governor, and the vice president were scheduled to review the parade of tall ships, before dining with other dignitaries at Gracie Mansion. A spectacular fireworks display on the East River off Wall Street, where Washington landed two hundred years ago, would mark the end of the first day's public festivities.

There would be private celebrations of the event as well, from simple picnics to lavish entertainments—rain threatened but did not dampen enthusiasm. Norah planned to spend the evening with Randall Tye. The television newsman and anchor could have gone to any and all of the official functions, but in deference to the private nature of their friendship, he planned a cookout on the terrace of his midtown penthouse from which the fireworks would be visible and invited Norah along with a few friends. She was eagerly looking forward to it.

In fact, Norah thought as she stood at her closet that morn-

ing trying to decide what she would wear that night, she was thinking a lot about Randall these days as he became an ever more important part of her life. Tye was more than a television journalist. He had his own talk show; he mingled with celebrities, and was a celebrity in his own right, a fact which had put Norah off when she first met him.

With his square, rugged face, wavy blond hair, and amber eyes, Tye would never be lost in a crowd, although he was not outstandingly handsome, either. He had charisma, a force of personality more powerful than mere looks. Randall was a hard worker and prepared his material with meticulous regard for accuracy, but it was the personal quality that put him at the top of his field.

Norah had not imagined any kind of relationship was possible between them, but he was instantly attracted to her and he was hard to resist. When Norah found out that the parties, the shows, the dinners to which he escorted her were all on the cuff, all trade-offs for a mention on Tye's show or at least for an attitude of goodwill when someone else mentioned them, she was disappointed. As a police officer, she couldn't accept handouts. As a private person, she considered them bribes. Randall explained it as part of the job, accepted procedure, but he respected Norah's viewpoint and promised that in the future their dates would be totally "uncontaminated."

He proposed marriage. He offered a partnership of love, companionship, and a careful separation of their professional lives.

"Try it and you'll like it," Randall Tye had urged.

She said no, but he wouldn't give up. He even accepted her refusal of premarital sex.

Norah caught herself daydreaming about Randall Tye during work. That had only happened once before, with the man she'd married—Joseph Antony Capretto. She had not thought it could happen again, certainly not after the way Joe had died. That was over four years ago and she couldn't forget, nor did she want to. The union with Joe had been complete

and fulfilling. They shared everything including—and maybe superseding all else—The Job. Randall Tye argued for another way. He offered support without intrusion. Norah was beginning to wonder how long she could abide by the rules she herself had set down.

The atmosphere at the Two-Oh was almost festive when Norah arrived for work Saturday morning. A major percentage of the uniformed force would be assigned to crowd control for the next two days. Along with sanitation and other services the bill to the taxpayers for the pomp and pageantry was anticipated at \$6.1 million. Two million people were expected to enjoy the events of the first day. The atmosphere was different from that of a visit by a foreign dignitary; on such occasions there was the danger of terrorist attack. Today, it would be all celebration and patriotic pride. There would be pickpockets out to work the crowds, some muggers, some drunks, and always the drug dealers, but the heavy crimes, specifically homicides, should be down.

According to the latest statistics a homicide occurred in New York City every five hours, but in the Fourth Zone the incidence had decreased. That was chance, of course, Norah knew. However, the solution rate was up, way up, and for that she and the squad could take credit.

“Morning, Lieut,” Detective Simon Wyler greeted Norah. “Got a minute?”

“Sure. Come on in.” She led the way into her office.

Wyler had just turned thirty. He had reached his present rank of Detective, First Grade, four years ago and transferred from midtown South two and a half years ago. He had become one of Norah’s mainstays. He was six foot two, slim, jaunty, dapper. His dark, wavy hair swept back from a sharp peak; his nose was aquiline. He favored wide-brimmed fedoras and long, narrow topcoats. He was intelligent, low key, a good interrogator who didn’t need to rely on physical intimidation. Norah frowned on her people allowing a situation to deteriorate to the point where force was required.

That suited Wyler and so did the assignment to the Fourth. After stints at Safe and Loft, Community Relations, and a Narcotics Task force, Wyler had found his slot.

"About the Hite case, Lieut . . ."

Wyler and Julius Ochs had made the collar on the Monday. Norah had been present, along with additional RMP (Radio Motor Patrol) cars, not because supervision was necessary, but because the neighborhood situation was so extremely volatile. Both precautions had turned out to be unnecessary. When the men and women in the picket line saw the blue-and-white official cars and the unmarked vehicles belonging to the detectives lining up in front of the Hite building, they stopped chanting and parted ranks to let Detectives Wyler and Ochs through. When, after a short period, they emerged with the young suspect, his head bowed—in remorse, humiliation, or defeat—a low murmur rippled through the crowd. The police, particularly the two detectives flanking Raymond Hite, pretended not to be aware of the rumble. But even if they hadn't heard it, the emotion was palpable. It hung in the air like a heavy, clammy fog.

Norah watched from her car as Wyler and Ochs escorted the suspect out the front door of the dilapidated brownstone and down the steps from the stoop to the street. She wished Wyler and Ochs would move him along a little faster, get him into the safety of the police car, and drive away. At the same time, she knew that any indication of haste was to be avoided. It would suggest anxiety and stimulate and encourage action against him. So she could only wait, counting the steps that remained before they reached the car and the seconds it took to open the rear door and get him inside. As the doors shut, Norah breathed a sigh of relief. And then she heard it—a sound she did not at first recognize.

Applause. Cheers.

Some of the neighbors of West Ninety-third laughed, some cried, but all applauded.

The booking and arraignment had proceeded routinely. On Thursday morning, the 27th, Raymond Hite's case had

been heard by the grand jury and the indictment handed down. A trial date was yet to be set.

"So? Has he made bail?" Norah asked. The judge, citing both the depravity of the crime and the feelings of the neighborhood, had set bail at \$500,000. No one expected the Hites to raise it. If they did and the suspect was on the street, the problem of his safety, bad enough while he was in custody, would be exacerbated.

"No." Wyler replied.

"Well?"

"Three different people on the block now remember seeing the victim, Pepe, go into the Hite house by the back door. Ray Hite followed a few minutes after."

"These individuals were already interrogated in the canvass?"

"Right."

Their earlier silence had been based on fear. Norah knew that; so did every man and woman on the force. Everybody in the city was afraid—the old of the young, the whites of the blacks, the rich of the poor. Protection couldn't be guaranteed to every potential witness. Getting maimed or killed was a high price to pay for being a good citizen.

"What made you go back?" Norah asked.

"I had a hunch. Those three people looked to me like they were holding back," Wyler explained. "I made a note to try again if I got the chance."

The case would be made on the DNA evidence, Norah thought. This new testimony was circumstantial, but it would serve to bolster the other.

"Are they willing to appear in court?"

"They are."

"Good work, Simon."

By noon Norah and Ferdi Arenas were working on next month's chart. The way things were progressing, she'd have no problem getting away to change for Randall's cookout. They sent out for lunch and were breaking for a few minutes to eat it.

"What are you doing tonight?" she asked Ferdi.

"We got a neighbor to baby-sit and we're going to the concert in the park."

"Nice," Norah said and smiled. The bond between them was strong. Ferdi had been with her since her first command—the Senior Citizens Squad. She had been a sergeant then, and he a rookie, but the warmth of their friendship was based on more than the years together on the force. Each had lost a loved one to The Job—Norah, her husband; and Ferdi, the woman he'd intended to marry. After five years Ferdi had found the inner peace and the courage to love again. Now he was married and the father of twin girls and an infant son. He would have liked to help Norah find her way to new happiness, but he was shy about intruding into her personal life. It seemed to him that she had given him an opening.

"What are your plans?" he asked.

"Randall's having a cookout on his terrace." She looked at him expectantly.

"You like him, don't you?"

"Very much." She hesitated. "He's asked me to marry him."

"Oh." Ferdi hadn't expected anything like this. Did she want advice or just someone to listen?

"I don't know what to do," Norah blurted out as surprised as Ferdi. She hadn't meant even to mention the proposal. So she must be considering it more seriously than she'd realized herself. "I could resign . . ."

"Resign? From The Job? Turn in your shield?" Arenas was stunned.

"I don't think the marriage could work otherwise."

Stunned enough to overcome his reticence. "You love The Job! For sure the marriage wouldn't work if you gave it up. You tried that once before."

After Joe's death.

Her life was divided into before and after Joe's death. She remembered every detail of that day. Joe, then a captain, was working out of the office of the C of D (Chief of Detectives)

in the Big Building, One Police Plaza. Norah was, as now, at the Two-Oh, though not in command. She was still a sergeant. They had been married six years and after a shaky period were finding each other again. That night they'd planned to eat out in a new and elegant restaurant near their home. Norah caught a squeal at the very end of her shift, one she could easily have passed on to the man who was scheduled to relieve her, but the details were intriguing; she wanted the case. So she called Joe to say she'd be late. Under the circumstances, Joe decided he might as well work late, too, and by the time he left his office, the streets around One Police Plaza were dark and nearly empty. As he entered the parking lot under the bridge where he kept his car, Joe Capretto heard a woman scream. He had interrupted a rape. The assailants and Joe went down. He was able to draw his gun, but before he could shoot, they were in their car and heading straight at him. He was caught in the undercarriage and dragged through the streets.

The funeral had been the department's way of showing respect for the slain officer, and was a consolation for Joe's mother, Emilia Capretto, and his seven sisters. For Norah it was merely an empty ritual. His killers had not been apprehended. She knew a massive investigation had been organized, but the two thugs had disappeared into the adjoining, tortuous maze of Chinatown. They would be found, Chief of Detectives Luis Deland promised the widow. Inspector James Felix, a friend of many years first to Joe and then to Norah, had been more honest and had added: sooner or later. That meant the police might have to wait till the perpetrators committed another, similar offense.

That was when Norah resigned, or tried to. Jim Felix refused to accept the resignation, telling her to take some time off, to get away. As Ferdi now reminded her, it hadn't helped. In two months she was back. The Job had become more important than ever.

"It would be different this time," she assured Ferdi and tried to convince herself. "Back then when I tried to break