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PRAISE FOR  
*MYSTIC RIVER*

'Dennis Lehane establishes himself as one of the greats of crime writing with *Mystic River* . . . Lehane's deceptive art lies not just in the exemplary investigative thriller but in a moving portrait of flawed people caught in a web of pain, told in lyrical prose that brings damaged lives and run-down cities to vivid life without a hint of forced sentimentality' Maxim Jakubowski, *Guardian*

'Get Lehane's *Mystic River*. Boy, does he know how to write' Elmore Leonard

'Haunting and lyrical' Harlan Coben

'Dennis Lehane has become a must-read novelist on the strength of such gritty and forceful thrillers as *Darkness*, *Take My Hand* and *Gone, Baby, Gone* . . . *Mystic River* confirms his status as one of the most vigorous and skilful American talents in years . . . As psychological thrillers go, this one is non-pareil, and has to be read' *Crime Time*

'Throughout the book Mr Lehane moves confidently between characters, elaborating elements of the story from different points of view . . . *Mystic River* is a compelling page-turner whose drama arises not so much from events as from the conflicting perceptions of the main players' *The Economist*

'Confirms Lehane's status as one of the most vigorous and skilful American talents in years . . . A must-read psychological thriller' *Good Book Guide*

'Substantial and thought-provoking' *Sunday Telegraph*

'*Mystic River* is the highly touted Lehane's best yet . . . In this tightly plotted and explosively tense thriller, Lehane wheedles under the skin of his characters and demonstrates that practically anyone has the capacity to be a monster' *Time Out*

## SHUTTER ISLAND

'Chilling, thrilling and so clever you'll be chewing it over long after the final page'

*Mirror*

## PRAYERS FOR RAIN

'Lehane's gritty psychothrillers have carved a distinctive patch on the map of contemporary crime writing . . . One of the most electrifying thriller writers'

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## GONE, BABY, GONE

'Lehane manages to combine sentimentality and hard-boiled cynicism, handling the loss of loved ones and gun battles with equal ease, and delivering a brilliant ending . . . Take my advice and catch up with Lehane soonest'

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## SACRED

'With its tight dialogue, explosive action scenes and heart-wrenching emotional crises, *Sacred* is difficult to put down'

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## DARKNESS, TAKE MY HAND

'Outstanding . . . Lehane's voice, original and straight from the heart, places him among that top rank of stylists who enrich the modern mystery novel'

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## A DRINK BEFORE THE WAR

'Hip, and with a plot in overdrive, relentlessly violent and cathartic'

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*Also by Dennis Lehane*

A DRINK BEFORE THE WAR  
DARKNESS, TAKE MY HAND

SACRED

GONE, BABY, GONE

PRAYERS FOR RAIN

SHUTTER ISLAND

# MYSTIC RIVER

DENNIS LEHANE

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**MYSTIC RIVER**  
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*For my wife, Sheila*



[He] did not understand women. It wasn't the way bartenders or comedians didn't understand women, it was the way poor people didn't understand the economy. You could stand outside the Girard Bank Building every day of your life and never guess anything about what went on in there. That's why, in their hearts, they'd always rather stick up a 7-Eleven.

—Pete Dexter, *God's Pocket*

There is no street with mute stones  
and no house without echoes.

—Góngora



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I  
THE BOYS  
WHO ESCAPED FROM  
WOLVES  
(1975)





# 1

## THE POINT AND THE FLATS

When Sean Devine and Jimmy Marcus were kids, their fathers worked together at the Coleman Candy plant and carried the stench of warm chocolate back home with them. It became a permanent character of their clothes, the beds they slept in, the vinyl backs of their car seats. Sean's kitchen smelled like a Fudgsicle, his bathroom like a Coleman Chew-Chew bar. By the time they were eleven, Sean and Jimmy had developed a hatred of sweets so total that they took their coffee black for the rest of their lives and never ate dessert.

On Saturdays, Jimmy's father would drop by the Devines' to have a beer with Sean's father. He'd bring Jimmy with him, and as one beer turned into six, plus two or three shots of Dewar's, Jimmy and Sean would play in the backyard, sometimes with Dave Boyle, a kid with girl's wrists and weak eyes who was always telling jokes he'd learned from his uncles. From the other side of the kitchen window screen, they could hear the hiss of the beer can pull-tabs, bursts of hard, sudden laughter, and the heavy snap of Zippos as Mr Devine and Mr Marcus lit their Luckys.

Sean's father, a foreman, had the better job. He

was tall and fair and had a loose, easy smile that Sean had seen calm his mother's anger more than a few times, just shut it down like a switch had been flicked off inside of her. Jimmy's father loaded the trucks. He was small and his dark hair fell over his forehead in a tangle and something in his eyes seemed to buzz all the time. He had a way of moving too quickly; you'd blink and he was on the other side of the room. Dave Boyle didn't have a father, just a lot of uncles, and the only reason he was usually there on those Saturdays was because he had this gift for attaching himself to Jimmy like lint; he'd see him leaving his house with his father, show up beside their car, half out of breath, going 'What's up, Jimmy?' with a sad hopefulness.

They all lived in East Buckingham, just west of downtown, a neighborhood of cramped corner stores, small playgrounds, and butcher shops where meat, still pink with blood, hung in the windows. The bars had Irish names and Dodge Darts by the curbs. Women wore handkerchiefs tied off at the backs of their skulls and carried mock leather snap purses for their cigarettes. Until a couple of years ago, older boys had been plucked from the streets, as if by spaceships, and sent to war. They came back hollow and sullen a year or so later, or they didn't come back at all. Days, the mothers searched the papers for coupons. Nights, the fathers went to the bars. You knew everyone; nobody except those older boys ever left.

Jimmy and Dave came from the Flats, down by the Penitentiary Channel on the south side of Buckingham Avenue. It was only twelve blocks from Sean's street, but the Devines were north of the Ave., part of the Point, and the Point and the Flats didn't mix much.

It wasn't like the Point glittered with gold streets and silver spoons. It was just the Point, working class, blue collar, Chevys and Fords and Dodges parked in front of simple A-frames and the occasional small Victorian. But people in the Point owned. People in the Flats rented. Point families went to church, stayed together, held signs on street corners during election months. The Flats, though, who knew what they did, living like animals sometimes, ten to an apartment, trash in their streets – Wellieville, Sean and his friends at Saint Mike's called it, families living on the dole, sending their kids to public schools, divorcing. So while Sean went to Saint Mike's Parochial in black pants, black tie, and blue shirt, Jimmy and Dave went to the Lewis M. Dewey School on Blaxston. Kids at the Looey & Dooey got to wear street clothes, which was cool, but they usually wore the same ones three out of five days, which wasn't. There was an aura of grease to them – greasy hair, greasy skin, greasy collars and cuffs. A lot of the boys had bumpy welts of acne and dropped out early. A few of the girls wore maternity dresses to graduation.

So if it wasn't for their fathers, they probably never would have been friends. During the week, they never hung out, but they had those Saturdays, and there was something to those days, whether they hung out in the backyard, or wandered through the gravel dumps off Harvest Street, or hopped the subways and rode downtown – not to see anything, just to move through the dark tunnels and hear the rattle and brake-scream of the cars as they cornered the tracks and the lights flickered on and off – that felt to Sean like a held breath. Anything could happen when you were with Jimmy. If he was aware there



were rules – in the subway, on the streets, in a movie theater – he never showed it.

They were at South Station once, tossing an orange street hockey ball back and forth on the platform, and Jimmy missed Sean's throw and the ball bounced down onto the tracks. Before it occurred to Sean that Jimmy could even be thinking about it, Jimmy jumped off the platform and down onto the track, down there with the mice and the rats and the third rail.

People on the platform went nuts. They screamed at Jimmy. One woman turned the color of cigar ash as she bent at the knees and yelled, Get back up here, get back up here *now*, goddamnit! Sean heard a thick rumble that could have been a train entering the tunnel up at Washington Street or could have been trucks rolling along the street above, and the people on the platform heard it, too. They waved their arms, whipped their heads around to look for the subway police. One guy placed a forearm across his daughter's eyes.

Jimmy kept his head down, peering into the darkness under the platform for the ball. He found it. He wiped some black grime off it with his shirtsleeve and ignored the people kneeling on the yellow line, extending their hands down toward the track.

Dave nudged Sean and said, 'Whew, huh?' too loud.

Jimmy walked along the center of the track toward the stairs at the far end of the platform, where the tunnel opened gaping and dark, and a heavier rumble shook the station, and people were *jumping* now, banging fists into their hips. Jimmy took his time, strolling really, then he looked back over his shoulder, caught Sean's eyes, and grinned.



Dave said, 'He's smiling. He's just nuts. You know?'

When Jimmy reached the first step in the cement stairs, several hands thrust down and yanked him up. Sean watched his feet swing out and to the left and his head curl and dip to the right, Jimmy looking so small and light in a big man's grasp, like he was filled with straw, but tucking that ball tight against his chest even as people grabbed at his elbow and his shin banged off the edge of the platform. Sean felt Dave jittering beside him, lost. Sean looked at the faces of the people pulling Jimmy up and he didn't see worry or fear anymore, none of the helplessness he'd seen just a minute ago. He saw rage, monsters' faces, the features gnarled and savage, like they were going to lean in and bite a chunk out of Jimmy, then beat him to death.

They got Jimmy up onto the platform and held him, fingers squeezed into his shoulders as they looked around for someone to tell them what to do. The train broke through the tunnel, and someone screamed, but then someone laughed – a shrieking cackle that made Sean think of witches around a cauldron – because the train burst through on the other side of the station, moving north, and Jimmy looked up into the faces of the people holding him as if to say, *See?*

Beside Sean, Dave let out this high-pitched giggle and threw up in his own hands.

Sean looked away, wondered where he fit in all this.

That night Sean's father sat him down in the basement tool room. The tool room was a tight place of