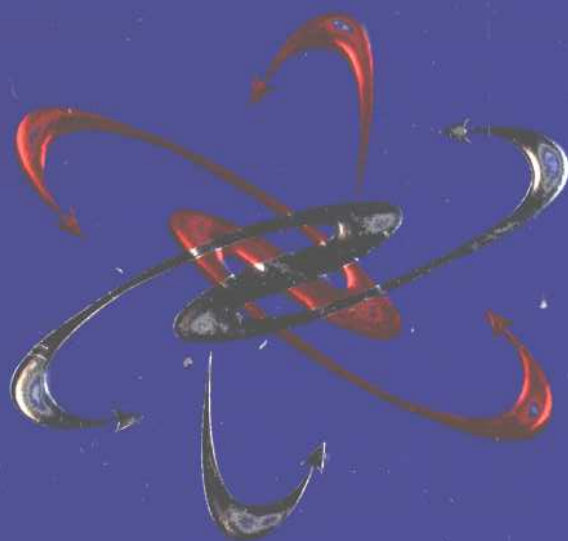


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*When careers tear lives apart,  
despite the best intentions . . .*

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GOING HOME

*To my very, very wonderful children,  
Beatrix, Trevor, Todd, Nick, Samantha,  
Victoria, Vanessa, Maxx, and Zara.*

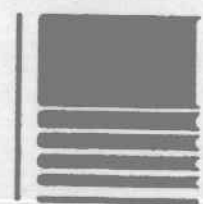
*And with special thanks to Tom,  
for the red herring and the green shoe,  
and our own irresistible forces.*

*With all my love,  
d.s.*



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## Chapter 1

IT WAS A brilliantly sunny day in New York, and the temperature had soared over the hundred mark long before noon. You could have fried an egg on the sidewalk. Kids were screaming, people were sitting on stoops and in doorways, and leaning against walls beneath tattered awnings. Both hydrants on the corner of 125th Street and Second Avenue had been opened, and water was cascading from them, as squealing children ran through it. There was an ankle-deep river running through the gutter. At four in the afternoon, it seemed as though half the neighborhood was standing around in the heat, talking and watching the kids.

And suddenly, at four ten, shots rang out in the noise of the talk and laughter and the sound of rushing water. They weren't an unfamiliar sound in that part of town, and everyone stopped as they heard them. People seemed to pause motionless for a moment, waiting for what would come next. They pulled back into doorways, shrank against walls, and two mothers ran



forward into the geyser of water from one of the hydrants and grabbed their children. But before they could regain the safety of the doorway, another burst of shots rang out, this time louder and closer, and three young men ran into the midst of the crowd standing near the hydrant. They knocked over kids as they ran, and hit a young woman so hard she fell sprawling in the water, and suddenly there were screams as two cops appeared, running around the corner, in hot pursuit of the young men, guns drawn, bullets flying into the crowd.

It all happened so fast, no one had time to clear a path for them, or to warn each other, and in the distance there were already sirens. And over the distant wail of police cars approaching the scene, there was another round of gunshots, and this time one of the young men fell to the ground, bleeding from his shoulder, at the same time one of his companions wheeled and shot a police officer cleanly through the head, and suddenly a little girl screamed and fell to the ground in the fierce spray from the hydrant, and everyone nearby was shouting and running in all directions, as her mother ran to her from the doorway where she'd been watching in horror, as the child fell.

And an instant later, the chase was over. Two of the young men were lying facedown on the ground being handcuffed by a flock of policemen, an officer lay dead, and the third suspect was being tended to by paramedics. But only a few feet away, a child lay dying from the bullet that had hit her. It had passed cleanly through her chest, and she was bleeding profusely, as her mother knelt next to her, soaked by the continuing spray from the fire hydrant, and sobbing hysterically as



she held her unconscious child in her arms, and the paramedics wrested the five-year-old girl from her. Within less than a minute, she was in an ambulance, and they pulled her mother in with her, still crying and dazed. It was a scene all of them had seen dozens of times before, if not hundreds, but one that only meant something when you knew the people at the core of the drama, the perpetrators, or the victims. The ones who got arrested, or those who got injured or killed.

There was a vast tangle of cars at the corner of 125th, as the ambulance tried to disengage from them, with siren screaming and lights flashing. And people stood on the street looking stunned by what had happened. A second ambulance took the injured suspect from the scene, and blue and white cars seemed to come from everywhere as they heard on the radio that an officer was down. People in the neighborhood knew what it would mean for them once word got out that he had been killed. Tempers would flare, and smoldering resentments would burst into flame. Worse yet, in the deadly heat, anything could happen. This was Harlem, it was August, life was tough, and a cop had been murdered.

And in the ambulance, as it sped downtown, Henrietta Washington clung to her child's hand, and watched in silent terror as the paramedics fought for her life. But for the moment, it didn't look like they were winning. The little girl was gray and still and her blood was everywhere, the floor, the sheets, her arms, the gurney, her mother's face and dress and hands. It looked like a slaughter. And for what? She was another casualty in the endless war between the cops and the bad guys, gang members, drug dealers, and narcs. She

was a pawn in a game she knew nothing about, a tiny sacrifice among warriors whose goal was to destroy each other. Dinella Washington meant nothing to them, only to her friends and neighbors, her sisters, and her mother. She was the oldest of four children her mother had had between sixteen and twenty, but no matter how poor they were, nor how tough life was for them, or the neighborhood in which they fought to survive, her mother loved her.

"Is she gonna die?" Henrietta asked in a strangled voice, her huge eyes looking into those of a paramedic, and he didn't answer. He didn't know.

"We're doing what we can, ma'am." Henrietta Washington was twenty-one years old. She was a stereotype, a number, a statistic, but she was so much more than that. She was a woman, a girl, a mother. She wanted more than this for her kids. She wanted a job, wanted to work, wanted to be married to a good man one day, who loved and took care of her and her children. But she had never met a man like that. Her kids were all she had for the moment, and she had nothing to give them but her love.

She had a boyfriend who took her to dinner once in a while, with three kids of his own to support. He hadn't been able to find a job in six months, and drank too much when he took her out. There were no easy solutions for either of them, just welfare, an odd job from time to time, and a hand-to-mouth existence. Neither of them had finished high school, and they lived in a war zone. And the life they led, and where they lived it, was a death sentence for their children.

The ambulance screeched to a stop outside the hospital, and the paramedics raced out with Dinella on the



gurney. She had an IV in her arm, an oxygen mask over her face, and all Henrietta knew was that she was still breathing, but barely. She ran into the emergency room after her, in her bloodstained dress, and she couldn't even get near her little girl. A dozen nurses and residents had closed around the child and were running down the hall with her to the trauma unit, as Henrietta followed, wanting to ask someone what was happening, what they were going to do. She wanted to know if Dinella would be all right. A thousand questions raced through her head as someone stuck a clipboard and pen in front of her face.

"Sign this!" the nurse said bluntly.

"What is it?" Henrietta looked panicked.

"We have to operate—fast—sign it!" Henrietta did as she was told, and a second later, she was standing alone in the hallway, watching other gurneys rush past, and nurses and doctors in hospital scrubs hurry toward operating rooms and other patients. She felt completely lost and terrified as she stood there and began to sob in total panic. And a nurse in green hospital pajamas came toward her and put an arm around her. She led her to a little cluster of chairs, sat her down, and crouched beside her to reassure her in a gentle voice.

"They're going to do everything they can for your daughter." But the nurse had already heard that the child was in very critical condition and not likely to survive.

"What are they going to do to her?"

"They're going to try and repair the wound and stop the bleeding. She lost a lot of blood before she got here." It was a massive understatement. Just looking at

the condition the child's mother was in, they both knew how dire the situation was. Henrietta was covered with blood.

"They shot her . . . they just shot her. . . ." She didn't even know if it was the police or the men they'd been chasing who had done it. It didn't matter now. If Dinella died, what did it matter who had killed her? Good guys or bad.

As the two women held hands and Henrietta cried quietly with a look of despair, the nurse could hear the PA system paging Dr. Steven Whitman. He was second in command in the trauma unit, and one of the best men in trauma in New York, and she said as much to Henrietta. "If anyone can save her, he will. He's the best there is. You're lucky he's on call." But Henrietta didn't feel lucky. She had never felt lucky in her entire life. Her father had died when she was a child, gunned down in a street fight just like this one. Her mother had brought her and her sisters and brothers to New York, but their life here was no different. They had just taken their troubles from one place to another. But nothing much had changed. If anything, their life in New York was worse. They had moved to New York so their mother could find better work, but she hadn't. All they had found was the tough life they lived in Harlem, a life of poverty and no hope for a better tomorrow.

The nurse offered Henrietta some water or a cup of coffee, but she just shook her head and sat miserably in her chair, still crying and looking as terrified as she felt, as a huge wall clock ticked away the minutes. It was five minutes to five by then.

And at five o'clock sharp, Dr. Steven Whitman exploded into the operating room, and was rapidly filled



in by the resident who'd been in charge until he arrived. Steve Whitman was tall and powerful and intense, with short dark hair and eyes that looked like two black rocks in an angry face. It was his second gunshot wound of the afternoon, the previous one had died at two o'clock, a fifteen-year-old boy who had managed to shoot three rival gang members before they shot and eventually killed him. Steve had done everything he could to save him, but it was too late. At least Dinella Washington had a chance. Maybe. But according to the resident, it was a slim one. Her lung had been perforated, and the bullet had grazed her heart before it exited, and caused an extensive amount of damage. But even listening to the grim recital, Steve Whitman was not willing to give up hope yet.

Steve barked orders at them for an hour, as he fought to keep the child alive, and when they started losing her, he massaged her heart himself for more than ten minutes. He fought like a tiger to keep her going. But the deck was stacked against them. The damage had been too great, the child too small, the odds too slim, the evil forces more powerful than even his expertise or his scalpel. Dinella Washington died at 6:01 as Steve Whitman let out a long grim sigh. Without a word, he walked away from the operating table, and pulled his surgical mask off with a look of fury. He hated days like this, hated losing anyone, particularly a child who was nothing more than an innocent victim. He had even hated losing the boy who had shot three people before they killed him. He hated all of it. The uselessness of it. The waste. The despair. The pointless destruction of human life. And yet when he won, as he often did, it all seemed worthwhile, the long hours, the