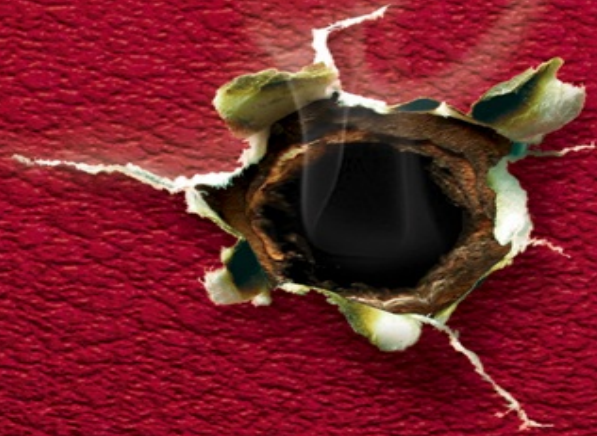


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—New York Times Book Review*

JOHN DUNNING

NATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
THE BOOKMAN'S PROMISE



BOOKED TO DIE

A CLIFF JANEWAY NOVEL

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John Dunning

Booked
To Die

A Mystery Introducing
Cliff Janeway



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About John Dunning

'Two O'Clock, Eastern Wartime' Excerpt

*To Warwick Downing,
who got me started again,
and*

*to the Denver antiquarian book trade:
the good, the bad, and the ugly*

Then and Now

Booked to Die was published by Scribner on January 23, 1992. It was my first novel in ten years, after a checkered career that produced five books at four publishing houses, with long periods of rejection between them. The initial printing was smallish, 6,500 hardbound copies, and I figured it would go like all the others—a flurry of local activity on and around pub day: perhaps, if the gods were smiling, an even smaller second printing; then the slow fade, the gradual trickle-down into the out-of-print (OP) bookstores.

But this was okay. Hey, I was happy just to be alive again. It had been a very long time, and for a writer who's not publishing, who for much of that decade isn't even writing, there's a hollow feeling under the breastbone that I can only call creative death.

At the time I owned an OP bookstore in East Denver. I was eight years into my new career as a dealer in used and rare books. This of course is not the literal truth: a dealer on the street will seldom, if ever, see a truly rare book. He may handle hundreds of pieces that can legitimately be called scarce, but he doesn't hold his breath waiting for *The Bay Psalm Book* to walk in the front door. The notion persists because the dealer likes the sound of it. "Seller of Rare Books" sounds so much classier than the terms "secondhand," "used," or any of the derivatives that conjure up the images and smells of dust, frayed spines, broken hinges and, worse of all, mold.

So he lists himself as "rare" and hopes for a scarcity or two to brighten his week. He doesn't deal in new books, or, if he does, he marks them down from their original cover prices and hopes to sell them at 50 percent off. I had no plans to sell my own book in the store: it was my wife who had the first hunch about *Booked to Die*.

"Let's get twenty-five copies and sell them at full price," she said. I could hardly believe my ears. "My God, we'll still have half of them when Halley's Comet comes around again," I said. But she is not to be denied when she gets that way, so we ordered the twenty-five copies long before pub day and had them well displayed, to my own discomfort, when January 23 arrived.

They sold overnight, all of them gone as if by magic. But the big surprises were yet to come.

The next day I called Scribner to get fifty more but they were out of stock. The entire first printing had sold: the second printing would be off the press in a few weeks. Talk about mixed feelings! Yes, it was thrilling, gratifying, but here I was, allegedly a dealer in "used and rare books," and I couldn't get first editions of my own novel.

Soon I began hearing, through the bookseller's grapevine, startling stories of dealer hoarding. Out-of-print booksellers had bought them by the case and were stashing them in a gamble that the price would go up. Six weeks after publication—just about the time the second printing was showing up in new bookstores—firsts were selling on the OP market for \$50 and up. I began buying them at cover price: whenever I saw one that had slipped through the cracks and was still lingering on a B. Dalton shelf, I snatched it up and happily paid the \$19.95 cover price. When I went to signings and there were firsts unbought, I bought them, greedily, voraciously, without shame.

Eight years later I see the first printings on the Internet for \$500 to \$850, and there is one brassy soul (there's always one of these) who wants \$1,250 for his. The book has gone through four hardcover and at least nineteen paperback printings, and has just been reissued in both hard and paper editions.

How did this happen? Let me count the ways.

In 1992 the book world was a far different animal than it is today. *Booked to Die* caught the trade at the edge of a revolutionary upheaval that is still going on. The Internet was then in its infancy: indeed, though

pockets of wisdom and tradition can still be found, though crusty old-timers will tell you that a rare book can always be reliably sold for more money than you paid for it, in real life the Internet has turned the trade on its head.

A book search was a cumbersome process in 1992, with the venerable old trade journal *AB/Bookman Weekly* at its center. If you wanted a book that was long out of print, you first contacted your local bookseller. If he didn't have it, he placed a one-line ad for it in the BOOKS WANTED section of the *AB*. This fat sheath of eye-straining type, sometimes dozens of pages long, was scanned by booksellers everywhere. If someone had the book, he might quote a price for it by postcard to your neighborhood bookseller, who then quoted it to you, with his profit built into the mix. But all this took weeks to run its course, and in the case of a really scarce book there might not be any response at all.

In 1992, there was still a strong thread of common sense in the book world. The word *hypermodern* had not yet been heard, except perhaps by a few intense collectors whose span of reference for the 500-year-old industry began in 1980. For those who have remained pure in spirit and still haven't heard it, *hypermodern* is a book that has a small first printing, goes immediately into later printings, is touted wildly by word of mouth, and becomes so hotly sought so quickly that people begin paying big money—sometimes insane money—for the first printings while the book itself is still selling well on the new-book market. Does this begin to sound familiar? More about this phenomenon in a moment.

Before 1992 there was a strong belief, even by serious collectors of “modern first editions,” that a book needed at least some age before any kind of realistic value could be established. The rise of the so-called modern classic was slow but sure, maybe 10 percent a year *after* the book had truly gone out of print, maybe a blip on that chart when additional books confirmed the author's stature, maybe another blip when the author died and his or her name was again in the news. After that it all depended on a new generation, and the next generation, and the one after that. But a strong writer could be depended on to grow in value, from one generation to the next, as his books became “classic” and the first editions became “rare.”

That was then: this is now.

Now the *AB* is gone, a casualty of the Internet.

Now anyone with a home computer can do his own book search—in seconds, not weeks. This is fine on the face of it, but it has led to a mentality of *what-is-it-worth?* above all else, the blind leading the blind, recalling Oscar Wilde's acid-dipped comment about the people who know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Today, there is a feeling that if something sells quickly, it must've been underpriced. There is a tendency to go ever higher until that brick wall is hit and the book will no longer sell. Ironically, this then becomes fixed in a common mind-set as “the going rate.”

Now hypermoderns “go through the roof” almost before publication, and you hear of booksellers raving about titles that they have in quantity but have never read.

Today, books are said to be worth three-figure prices years before the remainders—often with first editions generously mixed in—hit the Barnes & Noble sale tables. Once there was a saying in the book business, the “today's remainder is tomorrow's collectible.” Forget that. Today's collectible is now tomorrow's remainder.

Now there are collectors building large home libraries of modern books, who will not collect a dead author.

There are flea markets and junk shop proprietors who look up books on the Internet and price them accordingly with no idea of what makes a book desirable or valuable (and what's more, they have no idea that bozo in Sheboygan, who was the source of that price, knows either). Then these people wonder why they can't sell their ratty dog-eared copy for the same money that some dealer with twenty-five years experience is asking for a pristine first with a money-back guarantee if the customer is not satisfied.

Today there's a consortium of multimillionaires making a mighty effort to corral the trade, buying up estates and books by the hundred-thousands, hoping to create a brand name of used books reminiscent of Wal-Mart.

Let's face it, we have been swamped by impatience and greed. People want to go straight from the streets to the top levels of the book world, with only (as that other Oscar—Levant—put it) a smattering of ignorance. I know booksellers who have been in the trade for eight years and they still can't tell a first edition.

Do I sound bitter? Well, believe me, I'm not. I'm the last fellow on earth with any reason to be bitter about anything. I love what has happened to my book, and I know full well that it was the hypermodern collector who started that ball rolling. But I do get angry when I see a bookseller trying to get \$200 for James Finney's *Time and Again*, and I look and it's the \$6 book club edition, and the dealer is suspicious and resentful when I tell him.

I am annoyed, to use a polite word, when hypermodern tom-toms herald the arrival of a literary lion and I find his stuff unreadable. I remember sharing a laugh with Larry Moskowitz, a great bookseller who was then one of the principals in the well-respected Santa Barbara bookshop called Joseph the Provider. Larry came into my store just after the *Booked to Die* phenomenon got started and said, "This had to figure, didn't it? You wrote a novel about the bum-of-the-month club...."

He was too much a gentleman to finish the thought, so I finished it for him: "Then I became the bum of the month."

• • •

This long preamble seems necessary because Cliff Janeway, the hero of the little brew you are about to read, is a creature of that other time, that watershed era when the feeding frenzy had not yet reached its wailing peak. Janeway is a cop who happens to collect books (and before you ask, yes, there are cops who collect books, and yes, some of them did come into my store, though Janeway the man is probably a mixture of my own attitudes and a few cops I knew long ago, when I was a reporter for *The Denver Post*). He collects books for all the right reasons. He buys what he loves and he loves seeing those fine first editions on his shelves. He's enough of a capitalist to pick up bargains, but price is seldom his main motivation. He has a small unread collection of Faulkner, which will someday challenge him to read this difficult writer who defeated him years ago. At the turn of this century Janeway is probably ready for Faulkner and not gushingly admiring of, say, Thomas Harris, as he was in 1992. I haven't visited him in a while, but I imagine he's angry, as I am, at what Harris did to Clarice Starling in that ill-conceived *Hannibal*. What a monumental screwup for an author who had given us the best female sleuth of our time. Starling had everything, and good looks were the least of it. She had brains, courage by the bucket, an unshakable sense of right and wrong. But her creator sold her down the river, violating everything she is and believes for a trumped-up effect in a cartoonish sequel.

Hannibal made Harris a rich man, but I don't think it did much for his reputation. There was a flurry of interest in his earlier books—after all, *Hannibal* was launched with a shriek by his publisher, and it had been eleven years since Starling made her unforgettable debut in that crime masterpiece, *The Silence of the Lambs*—but this quickly calmed down and the interest waned. Granted, *Silence* had a huge first printing and copies are plentiful, but I see no great surge of activity in *Red Dragon* (another near-masterpiece) or in his first novel, *Black Sunday*. It's probably too early to tell, but I suspect *Hannibal* diminished the earlier work and did actual damage to the two Hannibal Lecters that preceded it. Prices for *Silence* remain at \$50–\$65, for *Red Dragon* at \$85–\$100, and for *Black Sunday* at \$150–\$200, and at this point the interest is lukewarm.

I come here not to dump on Tom Harris. The point is that money drives the OP trade as never before.

Prices double overnight, but sometimes they take equally sudden reversals, like the stock market on a bad day. *Booked to Die*, I hope, gives a true picture of its time. But as my friend and fellow bookseller Jim Pepper said recently, "Those prices you cited in that novel are really beginning to look quaint."

What would you get today for that copy of *Grapes of Wrath* with the ribald Steinbeck inscription that Rita sells to Janeway for \$1,200? That seems like pocket change now, when unsigned copies are selling for \$5,000, and dealers are buying back high spots at the same prices they sold them for only a year ago. A first of Chandler's *Lady in the Lake*? Janeway thinks of it as a \$1,000 book, but today you couldn't touch it for less than \$5,000, and it might go to \$10,000 by the time the ink is dry on these pages.

The prices of the great copies of the great books are soaring. This has contributed to the hypermodern nonsense, for here are "valuable" books that can still be "found," often inexpensively, sometimes on sale tables in huge quantities. I use the word "nonsense" reluctantly; many people I know and like are in the hypermodern field. But it *is* nonsense when you sell *The Bridges of Madison County* for \$500 at the peak of its heat, or ask \$3,500 for John Grisham's *A Time to Kill* when the author has yet to prove that he can last beyond his first decade as a collected writer. If you think this is not nonsense, check current prices on those titles. *Madison County* now languishes at \$100, and a dealer I know recently had five copies of the Grisham that had taken him two years to sell at \$1,500.

They may go lower yet. Suddenly, I realize how different this new world is. The computer has shown us that even some classic titles of the thirties are not rare, they're just expensive, and hypermoderns are salable only as long as the heat is on the book. The collector value of a new author is always one bad book from an eclipse, and a brilliant start will only ensure that his subsequent works are going to be scrutinized as he never have believed possible. Surely some of the hypermoderns will stick and become classics of the future. But many more, perhaps most, will fade slowly and disappear. Eventually the authors will die. And what will happen to those books when they reach a new generation of collectors who will not buy a dead author?

I suspect that the best of them will survive despite the odds. They will transcend human silliness, touching future generations with their magic. With all its recent annoyances this is still the greatest game. The thrill of the hunt, the lure that drew Janeway into the book world, remains as rich and strong today as it was when she first felt it more than twenty years ago. I know that even in the worst of times the trade is too vast to be harmed much by silliness, or to be harnessed by millionaires with Wal-Mart ambitions.

I am a born bookscout, I might as well admit it. My workshops are my playgrounds, scattered across Denver in dusty corners and bookstores, in out-of-the-way fishing holes where sometimes a big one lies in wait. I get that rush as I hit the front door: my heart beats faster with the thought that, today, among all the junk, a truly killer book might lurk. It still happens, in spite of the nonsense. "Books can be found anywhere," Pepper reminds me when I sink into cynicism. And just the other day I found one: *The Water Wide*, by Pat Conroy, a near-fine bright copy, an \$800 book, stuck in a thrift store for two bucks. And I think, *what a country*, and again all's right with the world.

John Dunning
Denver, Colorado
May, 2000

Bobby the bookscout was killed at midnight on June 13, 1986. This was the first strange fact leading to the question, *What was he doing out that late at night?* To Bobby, midnight was the witching hour and Friday the thirteenth was a day to be spent in bed. He was found in an alley under one of those pull-down iron ladders that give access to a fire escape—another odd thing. In life, Bobby would never walk under a ladder, so it would seem ironic to some people in the Denver book trade when they heard in the morning that he had died there.

You should know something about bookscouts and the world they go around in. This is an age when almost everyone scouts for books. Doctors and lawyers with six-figure incomes prowl the thrift stores and garage sales, hoping to pick up a treasure for pennies on the dollar. But the real bookscout, the pro, hasn't changed very little in the last thirty years. He's a guy who can't make it in the real world. He operates out of the trunk of a car, if he's lucky enough to have a car, out of a knapsack or a bike bag if he isn't. He's an outcast, a fighter, or a man who's been driven out of every other line of work. He can be quiet and humble or aggressive and intimidating. Some are renegades and, yes, there are a few psychos. The one thing the best of them have in common is an eye for books. It's almost spooky, a pessimistic book dealer once said—the nearest thing you can think of to prove the existence of God. How these guys, largely uneducated, many unread, gravitate toward books and inevitably choose the good ones is a prime mystery of human nature.

They get their stock in any dusty corner where books are sold cheap, ten cents to a buck. If they're lucky they'll find \$100 worth on any given day, for which an honest book dealer will pay them \$30 or \$40. They stand their own expenses and may come out of the day \$30 to the good. They live for the prospect of the One Good Book, something that'll bring \$200 or more. This happens very seldom, but it happens. It happened to Bobby Westfall more often than to all the others put together.

In one seventy-two-hour period, the story goes, Bobby turned up the following startling inventory: *M. J. President*, the story of the Truman administration, normally a \$6 book unless it's signed by Truman, which this was, under an interesting page-long inscription, also in Truman's hand—call it \$800 easy; *The Recognitions*, the great cornerstone of modern fiction (or the great unreadable novel, take your pick) by William Gaddis, also inscribed, \$400 retail; *The Magus*, John Fowles's strange and irresistible book of wonder, first British edition in a flawless jacket, \$300; and *Terry's Texas Rangers*, a thin little book of ninety odd pages that happens to be a mighty big piece of Texas history, \$750. Total retail for the weekend, \$2,000 to \$2,500; Bobby's wholesale cut, \$900, a once-in-a-lifetime series of strikes that people in the Denver book trade still talk about.

If it was that easy, everybody'd be doing it. Usually Bobby Westfall led a bleak, lonely life. He took in cats, never could stand to pass up a homeless kitty. Sometimes he slept in unwashed clothes, and on days when pickings weren't so good, he didn't eat. He spent his \$900 quickly and was soon back to basics. He had a ragged appearance and a chronic cough. There were days when he hurt inside: his eyes would go wide and he'd clutch himself, a sudden pain streaking across his insides like a comet tearing up the summer sky. He was thirty-four years old, already an old man at an age when life should just begin.

He didn't drive. He packed his books from place to place on his back, looking for a score and a dealer who'd treat him right. Some of the stores were miles apart, and often you'd see Bobby trudging up East Colfax Avenue, his knees buckling under the weight. His turf was the Goodwill store on Colfax and Havana, the DAV thrift shop on Montview Boulevard, and the dim-lit antique stores along South Broadway, where people think they know books. Heaven to Bobby the Bookscout was finding a sucker who thought he knew more than he knew, a furniture peddler or a dealer in glass who also thought he knew books. On South Broadway, in that particular mindset, the equation goes like this: old + bulk = value. An antique dealer would slap \$50 on a worthless etiquette book from the 1880s and let a true \$150 collectible like Ann Tyler's *Celestial Navigation* go for a quarter. When that happened, Bobby Westfall would be there with his

quarter in hand, with a poker face and a high heart. He'd eat very well tonight.

~~Like all bookscouts, Bobby could be a pain in the ass. He was a born-again Christian: he'd tell you about Christ all day long if you'd stand still and listen. There was gossip that he'd been into dope years ago, that he'd done some hard time. People said that's where he found the Lord, doing five-to-ten at Canon City. None of that mattered now. He was a piece of the Denver book world, part of the landscape, and the trade was a little poorer for his death.~~

He had been bludgeoned, battered into the bookscout's hereafter by a heavy metal object. According to the coroner, Bobby had felt no pain: he never knew what hit him. The body was found facedown in the alley, about three blocks from the old *Denver Post*. A cat was curled up at his feet, as if waiting for Bobby to wake up and take her home.

This is the story of a dead man, how he got that way, and what happened to some other people because of his death.

He was a gentle man, quiet, a human mystery.

He had no relatives, no next of kin to notify. He had no close friends, but no enemies either.

His cats would miss him.

No one could think of a reason why anyone would kill Bobby. Who would murder a harmless man like that?

I'll tell you why. Then I'll tell you who.

Book 1

The phone rang. It was 2:30 A.M.

Normally I am a light sleeper, but that night I was down among the dead. I had just finished a thirteen-hour shift, my fourth day running of heavy overtime, and I hadn't been sleeping well until tonight. A guy named Jackie Newton was haunting my dreams. He was my enemy and I thought that someday I would probably have to kill him. When the bell went off, I was dreaming about Jackie Newton and our final showdown. For some reason—logic is never the strong point of a dream like that—Jackie and I were in the hallway at East High School. The bell brought the kids out for the change of classes; Jackie started shooting and the kids began to drop, and that bell kept ringing as if it couldn't stop.

In the bed beside me, Carol stirred.

“Oh, Cliff,” she groaned. “Would somebody please get that goddamn telephone?”

I groped for the night table, felt the phone, and knocked the damn thing to the floor. From some distant galaxy I could hear the midget voice of Neal Hennessey, saying, “Cliff?... Cliff?... Hey, Clifford!” I reached along the black floor and found the phone, but it was still many seconds later before Hennessey took on his bearlike image in my mind.

“Looks like we got another one,” Hennessey said without preamble.

I struggled to sit up, trying to get used to the idea that Jackie Newton hadn't shot me after all.

“Hey, Cliffie... you alive yet?”

“Yeah, Neal, sure. First time I been sound asleep in a week.”

He didn't apologize; he just waited.

“Where you at?” I said.

“Alley off Fifteenth, just up from the *Denver Post*. This one looks an awful lot like the others.”

“Give me about half an hour.”

“We'll be here.”

I sat for another minute, then I got up and went into the bathroom. I turned on the light and looked in the mirror and got the first terrifying look at myself in the cold hard light of the new day. You're getting old, Janeway, I thought. Old Andrew Wyeth could make a masterpiece out of a face like that. Call it *Clifford*. *Liberty Janeway at thirty-six, with no blemish eliminated and no character line unexplored.*

I splashed cold water on my face: it had a great deal less character after that. To finally answer Hennessey yes, I was almost alive again. The vision of Jackie Newton rose up before me and my hand went automatically to the white splash of scar tissue just under my right shoulder. A bank robber had shot me there five years ago. I knew Jackie Newton would give a lot to put in another one, about three inches to the left and an inch or so down.

Man with an old bullet wound, by Wyeth: an atypical work, definitely not your garden-variety Helga picture.

When I came out of the bathroom Carol was up. She had boiled water and had a cup of instant coffee steaming on my nightstand.

“What now?” she said.

As I struggled into my clothes, I told her it looked like another derelict murder. She sighed loudly and sat on the bed.

She was lovely even in a semistupor. She had long auburn hair and could probably double for Helga in a pinch. No one but Wyeth would know.

“Would you like me to come with you?”

I gave a little laugh, blowing the steam from my coffee.

“Call it moral support,” she said. “Just for the ride down and back. Nobody needs to see me. I could stay in the car.”

“Somebody would see you, all right, and then the tongues would start. It’d be all over the department tomorrow.”

“You know something? I don’t even care.”

“I care. What we do in our own time is nobody’s business.”

I went to the closet and opened it. Our clothes hung there side by side—the blue uniform Carol had worn on yesterday’s shift; my dark sport coat; our guns, which had become as much a part of the wardrobe as pants, shirts, ties, badges. I never went anywhere without mine, not even to the corner store. I had had a long career for a guy thirty-six: I’d made my share of enemies, and Jackie Newton was only the latest.

I put the gun on under my coat. I didn’t wear a tie, wasn’t about to at that time of night. I was off duty and I’d just been roused from a sound sleep; I wasn’t running for city council, and I hated neckties.

“I know you’ve been saying that for a long time now, that stuff about privacy,” Carol said dreamily. “But I think the real reason is, if people know about me, I make you vulnerable.”

I didn’t want to get into it. It was just too early for a philosophical discourse. There was something in what Carol said, but something in what I said too. I’ve never liked office gossip, and I didn’t want people talking about her and me.

But Carol had been looking at it from another angle lately. We had been seeing each other, in the police vernacular, for a year now, and she was starting to want something more permanent. Maybe bringing our arrangement into the public eye would show me how little there was to worry about. People did it all the time. For most of them the world didn’t come to an end. Occasionally something good came out of it.

So she thought.

“I’m going back to bed,” she said. “Wake me when you come in. Maybe I’ll have a nice surprise for you.”

She lay back and closed her eyes. Her hair made a spectacular sunburst on the pillow. I sat for a while longer, sipping my coffee. There wasn’t any hurry: a crime lab can take three hours at the scene. I’d leave in five minutes and still be well within the half hour I’d promised Hennessey. The trouble is, when I have dead time—even five minutes unfilled in the middle of the night—I begin to think. I think about Carol and me and all the days to come. I think about the job and all the burned-out gone-forever days behind us. I think about quitting and I wonder what I’d do. I think about being tied to someone and anchoring those ties with children.

Carol would not be a bad one to do that with. She’s pretty and bright, and maybe this is what love is. She’s good company: her interests broaden almost every day. She reads three books to my one, and I read a lot. We talk far into the night. She still doesn’t understand the first edition game: Hemingway, she says, reads just as well in a two-bit paperback as he does in a \$500 first printing. I can still hear myself lecturing her the first time she said that. Only a fool would read a first edition. Simply having such a book makes life in general and Hemingway in particular go better when you do break out the reading copies. I listened to myself and thought, This woman must think I’m a government-inspected horse’s ass. Then I showed her my Faulkners, one with a signature, and I saw her shiver with an almost sexual pleasure as she touched the paper where he’d signed it. Faulkner was her most recent god, and I had managed to put together a small but respectable collection of his first editions. You’ve got to read this stuff, she said to me when she was a month deep in his work. How can you collect the man without ever reading what he’s written? In fact, I had read him, years ago: I never could get the viewpoints straight in *The Sound and the Fury*, but I had sense enough at sixteen to know that the problem wasn’t with Faulkner but with me. I was trying to work up the courage

to tackle him again: if I began to collect him, I reasoned, I'd have to read him sooner or later. Carol shook her head. Look at it this way, I said, the Faulkners have appreciated about twenty percent in the three years I've owned them. That she understood.

My apartment looked like an adjunct of the Denver Public Library. There were wall-to-wall books in every room. Carol had never asked the Big Dumb Question that people always ask when they come into a place like this: *Jeez, d'ya read all these?* She browsed, fascinated. The books have a loose logic to their shelving: mysteries in the bedroom; novels out here; art books, notably by the Wyeths, on the far wall. There's no discrimination—they are all first editions—and when people try to go highbrow on me, I love reminding them that my as-new copy of Raymond Chandler's *Lady in the Lake* is worth a cool \$1,000 today, more than a bale of books by most of the critically acclaimed and already forgotten so-called masters of the art-and-beauty school. There's nothing wrong with writing detective stories if you do it well enough.

I've been collecting books for a long time. Once I killed two men in the same day, and this room had an almost immediate healing effect.

I've missed my calling, I thought. But now was probably years too late to be thinking about it.

Time to go.

"Cliff?"

Her eyes were still closed, but she was not quite asleep.

"I'm leaving now," I said.

"You going out to see Jackie Newton?"

"If this is what it looks like, you better believe it."

"Have Neal watch your flank. And both of you be careful."

I went over and kissed her on the temple. Two minutes later I was in my car, gliding through the cool Denver night.

I crossed the police line and walked into the alley. The body was about thirty yards in. Strobe lights had been set up and pictures taken. The lights were still on for the benefit of the sketcher, and the narrow canyon was ablaze. The sketcher stood at the edge of things, working with a pencil and clipboard while two assistants checked measurements with a tape. The coroner had arrived only a short time before me, but an assistant coroner had been there for more than an hour. The two men stood over the body talking. I didn't interrupt: just hung back and watched. Hennessey appeared out of the gloom with two cups of coffee. I took mine and he filled me in on what little he knew. Police had responded to an anonymous call at 1:32 A.M.: report of a dead man, which checked out affirmative. Officers arrived at 1:37: homicide detectives had been sent over and the crime lab summoned. Then, because the case strongly resembled a series of such apparently random derelict murders, Hennessey had been called. Hennessey was my partner and he called me. We had been working that chain of cases for two years; if this one fit the pattern, it would become ours.

There had been no one to interview at the scene. The caller, who was described by the dispatcher as a white-sounding male, probably under fifty, had hung up when asked for his name. Later we'd want to listen to a tape of that conversation, but I didn't have much hope for it. Chances were we'd never find the guy because, chances were, he was just someone who had stumbled over the body and didn't want to get involved.

The scene itself wasn't a good bet for evidence. The alley was narrow and paved. On one side was an old department store; on the other, an old hotel. The walls of the hotel were red brick, worn smooth by many years. The department store had a fake marble facade, which continued into the alley to just about the place where the body lay. Orange powder had been dusted on both sides, and it looked like they'd come up with some prints. In all probability they'd turn out to be everyone but the mayor of Denver and the guy we wanted.

That was all we had. That was all we ever had. The first murdered bum had been found in an alley much like this one two years and two months ago, April 1984. His head had been kicked in. There had been three more that year and two the next, all the same general method of operation: a helluva beating, then death. The guy's hatred for street people, winos, and the homeless seemed compulsive. Hennessey thought he might be a skinhead, one of those jerks with a brownshirt mentality and an irresistible need to take on society's lower elements. I thought his motives were simpler. He was a sadist: he didn't care who he killed, as long as he got his little shot of violence when he needed it. Street people were easy marks, so he did street people. If you murder women and children, society will try to track you down, but the best effort society gives the killer of a bum is a quick shuffle. Time is fleeting and manpower limited: we do what we can, and sometimes a killer gets away because we can't do enough.

It turned out Neal and I were both right. The guy we'd fingered for all these jobs was Jackie Newton, ex-con, refugee from the coast, a real sweetheart in anybody's book. Jackie wasn't a skinhead but he might as well have been: his mind worked the same way. We now knew all about his sadistic streak. Jackie hated everybody who didn't think, act, and look just like him. He particularly hated people whose personal, racial, or intellectual characteristics could be summed up in one cruel gutteral word. Queers, freaks, spics, shingoes, dopes—Jackie hated them all, twenty-four hours a day. And let us not forget cops. Pigs. Jackie was a product of the sixties, and pigs were the group he hated most of all.

The feeling was absolutely mutual on my part. There's something in the book, I know, about a cop

keeping his feelings out of his work. If detection is a science, which I believe, it should probably be done with unfettered intellect, but God damn it, I wanted Jackie Newton dead or locked away forever. Don't tell me it shouldn't be personal: we were way beyond that little phase of drawing room etiquette, Jackie and I had been working on him two years and was no closer to putting him away than I was when I first heard his name, almost three years ago.

He had blown into town, broke, in 1983. Today he was involved in two \$30 million shopping center deals and owned property all over the city. There are guys who have a streak of genius for generating money and Jackie, I will admit grudgingly, was one of them. He owned an estate in undeveloped Jefferson County where he lived alone and liked it, and reportedly he was connected to what passes in Denver for the money. This alone brought him to our attention before we learned that he murdered drunks for a hobby. It was a strange case that way: we knew who the killer was before the first victim was killed. A cop in Santa Monica told us not to be surprised by a sudden rise in derelict deaths. This had happened in California and Newark, where Jackie lived fifteen years ago. We knew before the fact what Newark knew, what Santa Monica knew, and we still couldn't stop it and we couldn't prove it once it had started. It had almost seemed too pat, and we went through a phase of exploring other ideas—the skinhead, the unknown sadist—before we learned, without a doubt, that Jackie was our boy.

In the killing of Harold Brubaker, we'd had a witness. Jesus, you never saw such a beating, our boy had said: this guy has sledgehammers in his fists and what he does with his feet... it's like something inhuman. The witness was a highly credible young man who had watched from a dark doorway less than ten feet away a kid working overtime who had stepped out for a smoke and seen it all. It was like Providence was suddenly in our corner. A light had come on and Jackie had looked straight up at it. The kid had seen him clearly, no doubt in the world. I had the son of a bitch where I wanted him at last. I brought Jackie in and ran him through a lineup. The kid had no trouble picking him out: he was a first-rate witness all the way. I did everything according to Hoyle and the Miranda ruling: the last thing I wanted was for the bastard to slide out tainted evidence or technical bullshit. We threw a protective shield around the witness, for Jackie had friends in slimy places, but what can I say? Things happen... court dates get postponed, his attorneys drag it out weeks become months, and in all that time there's bound to be a breach. They got to our boy, and when they were done he had no heart for testifying against anybody. They never put a hand on him, but they sure made him see things their way. He stammered in court, he hesitated, he wasn't sure... and the case against Jackie Newton went down the drain.

Jackie had been quiet since then: we had scared him with Harold Brubaker and he had been lying low. Now he was starting up again, and I'd bet there'd be another one before long. Success breeds success. There's nothing worse than a cunning killer who strikes down people he doesn't know, for no reason other than blood lust.

I waited until the coroner was finished, then I moved in for a look at the body. They had turned him over, and he lay on the pavement with his arms crossed gently over his chest. He looked like he might get up and walk away. His eyes were closed and he had the unwashed, unshaved look they all had. But there was something different about this one, something vaguely familiar, as if I had known him once, long ago.

“What can you tell us, Georgie?” I said.

The coroner, a spectacled man in his fifties, spoke while his assistant looked on.

“It’s a lot like the others, but there are some significant differences. As you can see, the victim is a gutter-snipe, body not well nourished, white male, probably mid-thirties, five foot seven inches, hundred and fifty, sixty pounds. Murder weapon was a heavy blunt instrument, a pipe wrench or a crescent wrench or some steel tool would be my guess. The victim was hit twice in the center of the rear cranium, once for business and once for good measure. There was no doubt in the mind of the killer what the objective was. I think the first one did it—we’ll know more in the morning. Time of death was within the last three hours.”

“Call came in about one-thirty,” Hennessey said.

“He had probably been dead a little over an hour then,” the coroner said.

I looked at the face of the dead man and again felt that disquieting rumble deep in my brain.

“There’s some evidence he was killed somewhere else, then dumped here,” the coroner said.

“That’s new,” Hennessey said.

“What evidence?” I asked.

“I think there’s a good deal of blood unaccounted for,” the coroner said. “Again, we’ll know more in the morning, but let’s say I’m about eighty percent sure. That pipe really opened his head up. A wound like that will bleed like a geyser, but this one didn’t, or, if it did, where’s the blood? This little puddle’s just leakage, as if the heart had stopped some time prior to his being put here. I think that’s what happened. Somebody dumped this man in somewhere else, then dropped him here.”

“Any signs of a beating?”

The coroner gave me a look. “You don’t consider this a beating?”

“I mean injuries to other parts of the body... indications that he was beaten severely before he was killed.”

“Nothing so far. Looks like he was hit twice and that’s that.”

I shook my head. “I’ve seen this guy somewhere. I can’t make him.”

Hennessey asked the coroner if they had a name. The coroner looked at his notes and said, “The deceased had no driver’s license. There was a fragment of a social security card. Most of the number had worn away, but we were able to get a name. Robert B. Westfall.”

The name clicked. “Yeah, I know him,” I said. “He’s a bookscout.”

“A what?”

“A guy that hunts for books. That’s where I’ve seen him, selling books in the neighborhood stores.”

“I always heard you were the intellectual type, Janeway,” the coroner said.

“Is that what you hear?” I said dryly.

“It’s a small world, my friend, and the night has a thousand eyes.”

“You’ve been observed reading books again, Clifford,” Hennessey said. “I guess I’m the man of action on this team.”

I turned my attention back to the corpse. The coroner hung over my shoulder like a scarecrow. I was

trying to place the guy, to remember where and when I had last seen him.

~~“In the bookstores they call him Bobby the Bookscout,”~~ I said. ~~“He was pretty good, from what I hear.”~~

“How does a bum get to be good at something like that?” the coroner asked.

“They’re not bums in the usual sense. Most of ’em work like hell, don’t drink, and stay out of trouble.”

“What about the ones that don’t like to work, do drink, and don’t stay out of trouble?” Hennessey said.

“I guess there are some of those.”

“I don’t know much about this kinda stuff,” Hennessey said. “You tell me, Cliff. Could one of these boys find something, say a book, since that’s what they look for, that’s so valuable another one might kill him for it? And where does that leave us with Jackie Newton?”

“I’ll let you boys hash that out,” the coroner said. “Call me tomorrow.”

“Thanks, George.”

We stood for a moment after the coroner had left. Hennessey’s questions kept running through my mind. I felt a pang of disappointment that Jackie Newton might slide on this one for the plain and simple reason that he hadn’t done it.

“Cliff?”

“Yeah, Neal. Just give me a minute.”

I watched them cover the body and take it away. The sketcher had left and the lab men were packing up. The sad saga of Bobby the Bookscout was just about over. All that was left was the hunt for his killer.

“We sure can’t rule out the possibility of Jackie,” I said.

Hennessey didn’t say anything.

“Let’s go see the son of a bitch,” I said.

“I’ll call Jeffco.”

As peace officers, we were empowered to investigate and arrest anywhere in the state of Colorado. Usually the procedure when you went out of your jurisdiction was to take an officer from that district along, in case something happened. Thirty minutes later we had arrived at the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Department where Officer Ben Nasses was waiting for us. Officer Nasses was young and articulate, one of the new breed. He was also very black. Jackie Newton would love him.

Jackie lived in an expensive villa a few miles south of the town of Morrison. He wasn’t quite in the mountains, but the house was perched at the top of a bluff where you could see most of Denver and the front range south, halfway to Colorado Springs. We pulled into the driveway. The house was dark, with no sign of life. I had a sinking feeling that we’d find Jackie Newton asleep, that he’d been asleep all night. I had the feeling, not for the first time, that I’d never be able to make him on anything.

But Jackie wasn’t home. Nasses rang the bell three times and knocked, but no one came. “What now?” he said. I told him we would wait, if he had nothing better to do, and he said that was fine. “I’d like for us not to be visible when he comes home,” I said, and Hennessey went to move the car on down the street. By the time Neal came back, Nasses and I had moved off the step and onto a gravel walkway that skirted the house. Hennessey was nervous. “I don’t think we want to mess around here, Cliff,” he said. He had been my partner for a long time; he knew all about my impatience with oppressive procedure, and he also knew how much I wanted to put Jackie away. Don’t be stupid—that’s what Neal was saying. But I was very much aware of the rules of evidence. I had never had a case thrown out because I was weak in court, and Hennessey knew that too. Sometimes you play by the book, sometimes you had to take a chance.

“I’m going to take a look in the garage,” I said.

Hennessey whimpered but stayed with me. I moved around the house. “You boys’re crazy,” Nasses called. He wasn’t going anywhere. Hennessey tugged at me in the dark. “Cliff, the kid’s right. This makes no sense. Even if you find something you won’t be able to use it. Let’s get out of here.”

“If I find something, I’ll find a way to use it.”

“The bastard’s liable to come rolling in here any minute.”

“Then let’s do it quick.”

The garage was locked but that was no problem: I had it open in less than half a minute. There were two vehicles inside, a Caddy and a Jeep four-wheel. There was an empty space for the third car, the one Jackie Newton was now driving.

I felt the hood of each car, then went through the glove compartments. There was just the usual junk—papers, ownership, registration. John Randolph Newton was listed as the owner of both vehicles, but I knew that. I knew where and when he had bought them, that he’d bought the Jeep on time, paid it off in six months, and paid cash for the Cadillac. I knew the salesman who had dealt with him. *A real laid-back guy*, one salesman had said, *a pussycat*. Money wasn’t anything to a guy like Jackie: he had made, lost, and made again three times over more money than those boys would see in their whole lives. That’s one thing you could say for Jackie Newton: he was free with his money, and salesmen loved him.

There was an unpaid ticket on the seat of the Caddy. I took down the information. Jackie had been tagged for speeding—fifty-five in a twenty-five, a four-pointer. This was good news: the last time I’d looked at his record he had had nine points against his license. Jackie liked to drive fast, and it was costing him. I knew he hadn’t paid the ticket because of the points: he’d have his lawyer go in and plead it down, try to get two points knocked off in the city attorney’s office before it ever got to a judge. A word from me in the ear of the city attorney might not be out of order. Anything that hassled Jackie Newton was a good use of my time. From little things big things grow. Get Jackie’s license suspended and I knew he’d drive anyway. Then I could bust him for something bigger. Al Capone never got indicted for murder, just tax evasion, but it was enough.

I put everything back the way it was. Hennessey was standing at the door, the man of action watching for headlights. I looked along the shelves. There were paint cans, tools, boxes of screws, all meticulously in their places. Jackie Newton was a neat man: the compulsively neat killer.

“Cliff,” Hennessey said. His voice fluttered in his throat.

“All right,” I said. “There’s nothing here.”

I turned off the lights and locked the door. We started across the yard but a vision brought me up short. I thought I saw a body hanging from a tree. It was one of those sights that makes you wonder if your eyes are getting old. “Look at that,” I said, but Hennessey still didn’t see. I took out a penlight and cut across the lawn, and slowly the thing came into focus. It was a dog, the Doberman, hung by the neck like some western desperado. “It’s Bruno,” I said numbly. Again I realized what an obsession Jackie Newton and I had become to each other: I knew everything about the guy, even the name of his dog. Supposedly, Jackie had loved the dog: the only thing Jackie Newton had ever been said to love. This was what happened if he loved you: you didn’t ever want to give him cause to hate you, as I had.

“Looks like somebody’s got it in for Jackie,” Hennessey said.

“I don’t think so, Neal. I think he did it himself.”

I was playing my light around the barbecue grill, which had been turned over and spilled. There was a half-eaten steak in the grass, many hours old. The steak had been chewed as if by an animal. Beside it were two upset plates. “I’ll tell you what happened here,” I said, “you tell me how it sounds. Jackie had been entertaining somebody—probably a woman since there were just the two of ’em. Something happened to take him away for a minute... maybe the phone had rung... but something made him go inside. When I came back, the dog had turned over the grill and eaten one of the steaks and was starting on the other. Jackie went into a rage. We’ve seen him in action, we know how he can be. He strung the poor bastard up with the clothesline. Then he did what he always does when he gets like that. Took his fastest car, the Lamborghini

and went out for a drive. That's where he's been tonight, out in the country driving at a hundred and fifty miles an hour."

"You could make me buy that," Hennessey said.

"Then I'll tell you what else he did. He couldn't get rid of it, the rage just wouldn't go away. Nothing worked. He hated killing that dog, hated himself for doing it, so he went downtown and killed the bookscout. Somebody he didn't know or care about... just an outlet for all that murderous energy. That's why the bookscout wasn't beaten before he was killed: that's why he was different from all the others. Jackie didn't do this one for pleasure, he did it because he needed to."

"I don't know about that part," Hennessey said.

"What's the matter with it?" I snapped.

"For one thing, you want it too much. You want it to fit, Cliff. I know where you're coming from with Jackie Newton, you'd pin the goddamn Kennedy assassination on Jackie if you thought you could make it stick."

"It does fit," I said impatiently. "It fits, Neal."

Hennessey didn't say any more, which was probably a good thing. We didn't touch the dog except to confirm that it had been dead for some time. It was very stiff. Its eyes were open. If a dog's face can show feelings, this one showed shock, sadness, and, finally, disbelief. Its front paws had been clawing the air and had finally come to rest, frozen there, in a posture much like a man in prayer. I had to fight an impulse to cut it down. Hennessey was right: we had no warrant, no authority, no right to be here. This was very bad police work. The dog didn't exist for us, even assuming that it might be relevant to our case, until we established some proper groundwork.

We had pushed luck about as far as it can go. We went around to the front of the house, where Officer Nasses again told us his opinion, no offense intended, that we were out of our minds. I still wanted to be here when Jackie came rolling in: I wanted to see what time it was, how he looked, what his car looked like. I wanted to see as much as possible of what he did, what the state of his mind was. I put Hennessey and Nasses out front, in the trees across the road, and I went around to watch the back. This could be a very long wait. Jackie might be in Wyoming by now: that's the kind of state a Lamborghini was made for, empty roads and wide-open spaces and cops who didn't care how fast you went. He might be gone for a week.

So I'd wait. If the wait got too long, I'd let Hennessey and Nasses go in, but I would stay. Jackie Newton was turning me into an eccentric. I had a disturbing vision of myself waiting here for days, then weeks, in the changing seasons, my beard coming in, my clothes becoming tattered and worn, Hennessey bringing me food and water once a day. I was like Fred Dobbs in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*: I had started out as a sane and decent man and slowly the obsession had turned me crazy. I looked at my watch: the sky was getting light in the east. Sanity came with the dawn. I'd give him till eight o'clock, nine at the latest, then I'd go in and catch him later. Hennessey was right again: I had nothing on Jackie. It didn't fit, the pattern was broken. For once, Jackie Newton wasn't my man.

I snuffed that thought fast. One of my problems was beginning to resolve itself. In another twenty minutes it would be daylight: then, I thought, we could see the dog from the road. That would make a legitimate discovery, as long as Jackie didn't find out that we'd been here earlier. I wasn't going to tell him. Hennessey wasn't. Nasses was the unknown factor. I gave up the idea of confronting Jackie as he stepped from his car. I decided to do it by the book from here on out. I would join the boys in the bushes across the road. When Jackie did come home, we'd go get the car and pull up in front and ring his doorbell, as proper as Emily Post.

Let the fun begin, I thought.

We waited almost another hour before Jackie came home. We heard him first—the squeal of the tires, the angry, impatient growl of the engine. “Helluva way to treat a car like that,” Hennessey said. The Lamborghini roared past in a swirl of dust. It made the turn and went behind the house and into the garage. Jackie came out, looking as he had the first time I’d seen him, like some plastic hero from Muscle Beach. He was a serious bodybuilder: his arms looked like a pair of legs, his chest like a fifty-gallon drum. He had grown himself a mustache and he needed a haircut. The image was formidable, a guy you don’t mess with. He stopped for a moment and looked at the dog, and the anger began again. “Get out of that car!” I shouted, and the woman peeped meekly through the open garage door. “Come on, come on!” Jackie said. She was none too happy about it: I could see that even from where we crouched in the bushes. Jackie grabbed her by the scruff of the neck and pushed her toward the house. They disappeared inside.

We waited. Nothing happened.

“Looks like the ball’s in our court,” Hennessey said.

“Yeah. Let’s go see the son of a bitch.”

We walked down the road to the car; then we drove back and turned into Jackie Newton’s drive, through the officers of the law, proper to the bone. We stepped out and started up the walk. You could see the dog even from there, swinging grotesquely from the tree.

“Jesus, look at that,” Nasses said. “You boys see that last night?”

“See what?” I said.

Nasses gave a dry laugh. “Play it that way, then. I’ll help if I can.”

“Translate it for us, Nasses.”

“Don’t ask me to lie to cover your ass. I won’t volunteer anything, but don’t ask me to lie.”

“Ring the doorbell,” I said.

I had my badge pinned to my belt, like some cop on a TV show. I was pumped up: I always was when I was about to face Jackie. I heard him coming. The door opened and he filled the space.

“Mr. Newton?” Nasses said.

Jackie had seen me right off. He looked straight through Nasses and locked eyes with me. He probably didn’t even notice yet that Nasses was black.

“I’m Officer Nasses, Jeffco Sheriff’s Department. These gentlemen are from the Denver police. They’d like to ask you a few questions.”

His eyes cut to my badge. Nasses had taken a little involuntary step to one side. There was nothing between Jackie Newton and me but two feet of violent air.

“Hello, Jackie,” I said.

“What the fuck do you want, Janeway?”

“You must be having trouble with your ears. The man just told you, I want to ask you a few questions.”

“You arresting me for something?”

“Maybe.”

“Go fuck yourself. Bust me right now or come back with a warrant.”

“How do you know I don’t have a warrant?”

“If you did you’d use it. Go away, you’re wasting my time.”

He started to close the door. I stepped past Nasses and put my foot in it. I started reading him his rights, thinking maybe it would throw him off, buy me a minute. At least if he slipped and said something, we’d be

protected.

He listened, uncertain.

“Where were you last night?” I said.

“I drove out on the plains. I was gone all night and, yeah, I had company. I got an alibi for any goddam thing you want to dream up about last night.”

“Where’s your alibi, Newton? I want to see him.”

“Her, flatfoot, her... my alibi’s a girl.”

“Bring her down.”

“Come back with a warrant.”

Again he tried to close the door. Again I put my foot in it.

“I told you, Newton, you’ve got the right to remain silent. That doesn’t mean you can keep me from witness. Now bring the girl down here or I’ll have your ass in jail for obstruction of justice.”

It was a bluff and I figured Jackie would know it. He didn’t know it, not for sure. He went and got the girl, who actually was a woman in her late twenties.

He had slapped her at least three times: there were that many distinct welts on her face. In another d she’d look like she’d been face-first through a gauntlet.

“Would you step outside, miss?”

She did. She was blond, and might’ve been pretty in a glassy kind of way. She wasn’t pretty now.

“What’s your name?”

“You haven’t got to tell him one fucking thing,” Jackie Newton said. There was an implication in his voice that she’d better not.

“What’s your name, miss?”

“Barbara.”

“Do you need help?”

She looked confused, scared.

“We can take you out of here if you want to go,” I said.

“She doesn’t want to go anywhere with you, cop,” Jackie Newton said.

“Miss?” I tried for eye contact, but I couldn’t get a rise out of her. “Did this jerk beat you up?”

“She ran into a door,” Jackie Newton said.

“You’d better get that door fixed, Newton. Looks like she ran into it three or four times.”

“She ran into a goddamn door, okay? You want to make something out of that?”

“Miss,” I said, “do you want to go with us?”

“I don’t know,” she said shakily.

“We could go over to the car and talk it over. Come on, let’s do that.”

“She’s going nowhere with you, cop.”

“Don’t pay any attention to that,” I said. “If you want to go, you go. Fatso’s got nothing to say about it.”

I knew that would get to him. He balled up his fists and said, “I’ll show you fat, motherfucker. Take off your badge and I’ll beat your fuckin’ head in.”

I gave him a bitter, pathetic smile, the kind you’d give a talking worm. I kept looking at him the whole time I was talking to her. “I want you to be very sure, miss, what your options are. It’s all up to you. If the jerk beat you up, you can file charges against him. He can do some good time for that. Maybe when he gets out he won’t feel so frisky.”

“I’ve had about enough of this shit,” Jackie Newton said.

“I don’t think so, Newton. You and me, we’ve got a long way to go with each other.”

“You wanna go now, Janeway? You wanna go now, huh? What do you say, cop, just you and me, bar

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