

BAILEY'S LAW



MEG LELVIS

BLACK  ROSE
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BAILEY'S LAW

CHICAGO, 1990

First week in homicide. The supervisor, beefy, seasoned detective from the old school, takes him aside. *Don't ever forget, Bailey, the person you work for ain't me, it ain't the chief, ain't even the citizens of this town. You work for the victim. He's your boss. You break your ass getting justice for him, you gotta be his voice, cuz he ain't talkin. ' You got that?*

He got it all right. Know your victim, what makes him tick, and you got motivation. Only problem, what if your victim is your enemy? Sometimes whoever killed so-and-so did society a favor. Know your victim, but you might not like what you learn. Truth is, most victims are victims, and deserve to be treated with respect.

The best cops don't always follow the letter of the law, they enforce the law. They navigate in gray areas of human morals, ethics, scruples. A good cop interprets the law according to his own conscience and understanding of decency and fairness, with public safety the ultimate goal.

From time to time the rules must be bent. The crucial part is knowing the time when you see it.

Jack Bailey's most life-defining time is yet to come.

CHAPTER 1

Twenty Years Later

The minute Lt. Jack Bailey walked through the door of the Richmond, Texas police station, he felt buzzing tension in the air. The entire atmosphere was on high wattage. Several people scurried by him on their way out the door, nodding in hurried greeting.

Detective Hector Reyes approached him. "Just got the call. Big accident out on Warren Road. At least two dead. Head on collision. Fire department was first responder."

"Let's take a look. Hope it's not school kids this time of morning."

Jack didn't bother with accidents unless the department was short staffed, but this sounded more urgent than the regular fender benders that prevailed in Richmond. A salty, fifty-eight-year-old man of solid build, Jack was tough, hardened, and did not mince words. No one could accuse him of impersonating Mr. Rogers. Dark hair streaked with gray crowned a chiseled face that reflected the brooding, tragic image of a film noir actor. Many people called Jack a dead ringer for Liam Neeson. At least they were both Irish.

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As the two men headed south out of town, Hector spoke to the dispatcher. Jack's cell phone rang, and he turned it on speaker mode.

"Yeah, Moose. I'm on the way with Hector. What's the latest?"

"God, Jack, it's a bad one. Don't have ID's yet, but one guy, he's..."

"What?"

"It's unreal. He's all mangled. Got cut in two."

"Jesus," Hector muttered.

"Yeah, a couple of our guys lost their breakfast. So be prepared."

"Right," Jack said. "Is Nolan there?"

"Yeah. She's right here looking green around the gills and shaky, but holding up."

Kathleen Nolan joined the squad a couple years ago. Young, blond, and attractive, she earned the respect of her colleagues through hard work and attention to detail. She was still the target of good natured teasing, but developed a thicker skin as a matter of survival.

"OK, Moose, see you in about five." Jack turned off the cell. "May need a barf bucket for Nolan," he chuckled.

They arrived at the scene, parked behind another cruiser on the shoulder of the two lane road, and emerged from the car. August's early morning heat and humidity shrouded Jack's body and crept into his bones. After six years, he'd learned not to fight it, but he still missed the climate of Chicago on days like this.

The odor of gasoline assaulted their nostrils as their shoes crunched over shards of shattered glass and sidestepped chunks of metal strewn over the road and shoulder areas. Spilled gas blanketed the pavement and glistened in the unrelenting sun. Several patrol cars, two ambulances, and a fire truck parked haphazardly along both sides of the road, their flashing lights invisible against the bright morning sky.

"Anybody figure out what happened?" Jack asked several officers standing about five yards from the crumpled mess of what used to be two cars. A white van had reduced what may have been an Audi to a heap of scrap metal for a junk yard. Another vehicle lay upside down in a ditch alongside the wreckage, its front squashed like an accordion. A tall, stringy-haired photographer in worn jeans darted about, bobbing here and there, camera clicking away, with an attitude of self-important urgency.

Asshole's looking for the most gruesome shot. Probably hoping for a Pulitzer, Jack thought.

He'd never been able to stand the arrogant prick.

"Jesus," Hector said looking around. "I hate the word, 'surreal', but this is fuckin' surreal."

"We don't know anything yet, Lieutenant," Kathleen said as she joined the group from behind the ambulance. She looked shaken. Her

blond hair was held back in a ponytail, and beads of perspiration dotted her forehead.

"Wait till you see the one body. Remains is more like it. Don't plan to eat anytime soon," another cop warned Jack and Hector.

Jack wasn't worried about himself as they approached lead detective Moose Gustafson and several EMT's, hovering over two covered bodies on the shoulder of the road. Jack had seen plenty of gore when he worked gang-banger and drug-infested neighborhoods in Chicago's turbulent south side.

Moose led the group to a shallow ditch of tall grass beside the over-turned mound of metal.

"Son of a bitch," Hector muttered.

"Hell, in twenty years I've never seen anything like this poor bastard," Jack admitted.

"He must've been in his sixties, maybe seventies."

"What a way to end up," Moose said. "Looks like a magician took a saw and—"

"Well," Jack paused. Waited. "I think it's safe to say he ain't half the man he used to be."

There was dead silence, then the officers broke out in raucous laughter. All except Kathleen, who stood there with an incredulous look on her face.

"That's an awful thing to say, Lieutenant. How can you say something like that?" her voice indignant. "This is no joke. He's probably somebody's father."

"Come on, lighten up, Nolan," Jack said. "I've waited my whole career to use that line. Don't steal my thunder."

Kathleen jammed her hands on her hips. "Excuse me if I don't think it's funny." She turned on her heel and marched away in a huff.

The officers were still snickering. "We told you not to hire her," someone chuckled.

"Well, we need our token blond chick," another cop joked. "Gotta get our laughs somewhere."

"All right, stifle it and get back to work," Jack said.

"I've never heard Nolan speak up like that." Moose smiled. "Maybe she'll get out of kindergarten after all."

"Better not tell her any Ed Gein jokes," Jack said.

"Ed who?" Hector asked.

"Never mind. I'll save it for another time." Jack wiped his face with a white handkerchief and proceeded to work the scene with Moose and Hector, stepping aside so the two CSI guys could complete their tasks. The sun continued to smother their bodies as they examined the wreckage. The grease-ball photographer appeared out of nowhere like an annoying fly.

"You still here? Not enough blood and guts for you yet?" Jack growled.

"Now Lieutenant, you know I'm only here to report the news," the guy sneered, his matted hair stuck to his neck.

"Okay, here's some news to report: you're an asshole," Jack said. "Now get the hell out of here."

"I second that," Hector added. The man backed away, holding up his hands in mock defeat.

"Prick." Moose kept wiping his brow, attempting to keep his straight blond hair out of his eyes. Navy-colored half-moons stained the underarms of his pale blue shirt.

Moose Gustafson, whose stature bore no resemblance to his nickname, was lead detective in the Criminal Investigation Division. Richmond was a small city, with only seven members in the CID, including Jack, who supervised the group. Moose, with his tall, Nordic good looks and amiable personality, was a popular figure in the RPD. He harbored a sweet tooth, ate like a horse, and remained lean as a rail.

"Wanna wrap it up, Jack?" Moose asked after what seemed like an hour. His ruddy face glistened with sweat.

"Yeah, let's go." Jack wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, by now a drenched, wadded up ball. "Heat's a bitch. Need some AC."

"And a shower," Hector added.

No one in the squad knew much about Jack Bailey, except that he relocated from Chicago six years ago. He never spoke of family or anything close to a personal nature. His only real friend, Moose, knew nothing about Jack's background. He sensed his colleagues wondered about him, but that was their problem. They'd never understand his past. Jack chose to remain a closed book.

That afternoon, Kathleen ran into Jack in the hallway near his

office.

“Nolan,” he smiled. “Glad to see your color is back. That shade of green didn’t suit you.”

“Very funny. You know, I’d heard about your gallows humor before, but that comment this morning was—can’t think of a word. Anyway, I’ll get over it.” She walked away, yellow pony tail swinging.

“Wait,” Jack called. “I’m not the hard ass you think I am. I have a lot of sympathy for that poor guy. In fact, I hope he rests in pieces.”

“Not funny,” Kathleen retorted, still walking.

At least she was starting to show some balls.

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Several days later, the accident victims were identified and paperwork completed. The unlucky dismembered gentleman was from out of state visiting relatives. Forensics guys surmised he was speeding, lost control, and hit the oncoming van head on, causing a third vehicle following the van to crash into it. Another fatality was an eighty-year-old woman, and three other adults sustained non-life-threatening injuries. The case was wrapped up, but no one in the department would forget the grisly scene anytime soon.

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Things were tedious at the station the rest of the week, and Jack was restless. Lately he felt more depressed with his life. Downright bored. He missed the pulse of city life. True, Richmond was only thirty miles from Houston, but on weekends he was too lethargic to make the tiresome drive into town for quality restaurants, museums, and theaters. He hadn’t been to the Alley since *King Lear* two years ago. Jack told no one about his cultural interests. Didn’t want to ruin his image. But they were diversions from the root of his problems. All things considered though, relocating to Richmond as an escape seemed like the best answer six years ago. Now? Who the hell knew.

CHAPTER 2

The next morning started out like any other. Jack unlocked his office, surveyed the clutter, retrieved his Chicago White Sox mug from a pile of papers on his desk, and headed for the kitchenette for his jump-start for the day. Freshly made coffee was always ready, and today, some kind soul had brought doughnuts. Jack grabbed a couple before they disappeared.

"Leave some for Moose," Hector said as he reached for a blueberry filled.

"Yeah, if only he'd gain a pound." Jack chomped into a glazed one.

Hector, who made detective last year, was about Jack's height, but could afford to drop twenty pounds. At age fifty, he sported a thick head of black hair and a heavy mustache. A Richmond native with a large extended family, he bristled when people asked where he was from. He informed them that his great-grandparents emigrated from Mexico in the 1800's, and he was as American as anyone else who worked and paid taxes.

"All right, chocolate icing!" Moose joined his friends. "Surprised there's any left." All three wore short sleeved cotton shirts and khaki's, their standard summer uniform. They kept ties on hand for meetings and such. As a lieutenant, Jack should be wearing his uniform, but he bent the rules and got by with it.

"Anything on board for today?" Moose bit off half his doughnut as they walked toward their desks.

"Just usual paperwork and maybe tie up loose ends on the bust on Second Street last week."

Jack entered his office as the others walked on. His phone buzzed.

"Yeah, Jill. Just walked in." He placed his mug and extra doughnut on his desk and listened in silence to his long-time office

assistant. "Got it. We're on our way."

He pressed another button on his phone. "Moose let's go. We got a body." Finally, some excitement around here.

As the men emerged from the station, suffocating heat once again engulfed them in its grip.

"Another sauna," Moose muttered. "I should move back to Wisconsin."

"How many times have I heard that?" Jack unwrapped a stick of gum and put it in his mouth.

They hurried through the parking lot and into the cruiser, while Jack relayed what information he knew. "The vic is a young guy, probably in his twenties, single gunshot to the chest. Roommate found him a little while ago. Don't know the exact time. It's a house in the west part of Pecan Grove."

"Did Jill say anything else?" Moose asked.

"That's about it. Hector'll stay put to question the roommate."

Jack sped east down Preston Street away from the downtown area. The AC kicked in, bathing them with cool relief. He darted in and out of traffic and eight minutes later entered Pecan Grove, an area known for its upscale homes, tasteful landscapes, and Christmas light displays. However, in the older section, property values had declined over the years. Although yards and houses looked shopworn, it was still considered a safe, comfortable place to live.

Jack followed the GPS onto America Court, a cul de sac with five houses in close proximity.

All were small, one story homes painted in light colors, most in obvious need of enhancement. One patrol car sat in front of a pale blue residence with shabby white shutters and a faded wooden door.

Jack parked the car behind the cruiser, and the two men hurried up a cracked sidewalk, past overgrown hay-like grass and dying shrubbery. He pounded on the door and yelled, "Bailey here, open up."

He jerked the handle, pushed inside, and was met by Denise Williams, a veteran patrol officer, who chimed in a jocular voice, "Bailey, about time you showed up." Her dark skinned, smiling face showcased a set of gleaming pearls. "He's over there on the sofa. Taking a siesta."

Moose followed Jack through the dim, gloomy entryway to the living room at the right. It lacked even minimal decor. Nothing on the colorless walls, no end tables or lights except a plain black pole lamp beside a brown threadbare easy chair. A faded gold sofa sat against the far wall, a clump of stuffing peeking out of torn fabric on an arm rest.

A male body slumped forward at the other end of the couch. An average-sized young white guy with wavy brown hair, he sat with his chin resting on his now crimson white t-shirt, as if he were taking a snooze. His left side leaned into the arm rest with his wrists crossed over his upper thighs.

Ragged tan cargos were splashed with dark red blotches, and black rubber flip flops halfway rested on his long feet. The sweet metallic tell-tale odor familiar to all cops permeated the room.

"Holy shit," said Moose. "Made more mess than I thought from a single shot."

"Shame to ruin this nice sofa," Jack said as he took in the copious blood stains. "Any ideas, Williams?" He reached in his shirt pocket, retrieved another stick of spearmint gum, and popped it in his mouth. Damn, he missed smoking.

"Not much. I got here about eight minutes ago. Heard it on dispatch on my way in." Denise tried to smooth down her wiry black hair. "Roommate was all shaky. Couldn't talk straight. Claims he spent the night at his girlfriend's apartment. Found the body like that this morning."

"Where's the roommate now?"

"Fitch was here right on my heels and took the kid to the station for further questioning. Wanted him gone before the scene got crowded. Looked about twenty to me." After another futile attempt to smooth her unruly hair, Denise took a red scrunchy from her pocket and created a make-shift bun.

"Okay, the team'll be here any minute," Jack said as he leaned in, observing the body from different angles, careful not to touch. "Looks staged, almost sitting up with the wrists crossed."

"Yeah, that's what first struck me," Denise added, still fiddling with her hair.

"I agree. I'll start searching now," Moose said. "Doesn't look like

robbery." He fished out latex gloves from his pocket, pulled them onto his large paws, and headed left toward the kitchen. Jack frowned as he noticed darker splotches of blood on the corpse's groin area. A sex crime? Hmm...

"No evidence of forced entry or struggle. Here's more info." Denise flipped open a small notebook. "Roommate's name is Derek Walls. Deceased was Todd Kaplan. Both worked at the Olive Garden at Brazos Mall. Worked last night till 10:00 or so, and roomie and girlfriend left together. Todd supposedly went home."

"Okay," said Jack looking toward the front door. "Here's the team."

"Coming in," shouted a voice at the front door as five squad members descended on the scene, including Kathleen. Two forensics guys opened their black cases, donned latex gloves, and retrieved instruments and cameras, while Jack pointed out the body's private area to the team. Kathleen's face turned a rosy pink. Another detective and a patrol officer listened as they glanced around the room.

"Secure the perimeter," Jack instructed the officer, who immediately headed outside to cordon off the yard with yellow tape. Several neighbors congregated on the street and sidewalk, gawking with curiosity at the blue house and appearing to speculate amongst themselves.

Jack hoped one of them might have information about why someone would bump off young Todd Kaplan. The autopsy report would also tell its tale in the next day or two and explain the extra blood below Kaplan's waist. Who was this guy?