

Chapter Four

It might seem to you that there is a great degree of coincidence in my being where the criminals whom I dispatch are located. Happenstance has little to do with it. The fact is that there is an abundance of felons from whom I can choose, no matter where I go. It is not a matter of seeking candidates, but rather, of winnowing them out.

The ones I find most satisfying to eliminate are the murderers who blame their iniquities on anything or anyone else other than themselves.

You know the defenses. "I was high on drugs, or I was drunk. I have a dependency disease. I am bipolar. My father beat me. My mother left me. I can't help doing what I do." And on and on goes the litany of bullshit excuses. These are the ones who will, more likely than not, never stop killing because in their minds they have rationalized evil. Once a killer excuses his malevolence, he can act without compunction. After all, he thinks, it's not his fault. And God forbid that some judge or jury excuses him because they have become convinced he is a nut case. Nothing emboldens evil more than to exonerate it because of the belief that no sane person could do what the wicked criminal did.

I am not the pot calling the kettle black. I am not a psycho. If I were, you, dear reader, might be in danger. Or some other law-abiding citizen could be in jeopardy. But this is not the case. A crazed individual might do you in someday, but it certainly won't be me.

Distributing retribution means a lot to me. It's what really counts. I find that a lot of what passes for importance is really nothing but sentimental bullshit. I remember the

maudlin sobbing of the thousands who mourned the passing of that renowned druggie, John Lennon. Twenty-five years later they and their kids blubbered again, crowding into Strawberry Fields in New York's Central park to pay homage to a man they called 'genius'. Yoko Ono received as much adulation as Eleanor Roosevelt ever had. I will probably be around to observe the golden anniversary of his achieving room temperature. Oh, happy day. In the meantime, I have bigger fish to fry.

When it comes to killing, I accept that I am small potatoes. Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Ho Chi Minh...were responsible for the deaths of millions. But I can't say for sure that any one of them actually caused a death with his own hand. So what does that make me? A larger menace to humanity? No. I am a threat only to the scummy detritus of a society that breeds murderous villains who have no moral compass that would keep them on the straight and narrow.

Many things have influenced me and led me to the path I'm on. Knowing Joshua Fishbein, for instance. I don't worry inordinately about my health, but if my heart or my colon is about to double-cross me, I want to know about it. Josh Fishbein is a general practitioner in Dallas and has been my family doctor for several years. He actually cried the day he told Dori and me that she had cancer. Dr. Fishbein's grandparents perished at Treblinka. His sister, Sarah, was blown to bits on a bus in Tel Aviv while on vacation in Israel. He has a small oil portrait of her hanging in the waiting room at his clinic. She had been beautiful, with a haunting sadness in her painted eyes. Because of the travail that had been visited upon him and his family, he had become an incredibly empathetic physician. Even all that sorrow never diminished his great sense of humor. I remember one time when I called to see him because of an unusual dizzy spell. By the time I saw

him, I had no more spells to report. In his wry manner, he said, “Well, Duncan, here you are, all dressed up and no vertigo.” I saw him at least once every few months. My relationship with Joshua and my awareness of the tragedies that had affected his life have helped to mold my attitudes about crime and criminals.

My daughter, Elizabeth, and son-in-law, Gerald Corrigan, live in Brooklyn, New York. The day I had long hoped for arrived when Beth gave birth to a sweet baby daughter, Kayla Corrigan. It was on the trip to New York to see my first grandchild that I learned of the circumstances which set the stage for justice to embrace yet another miscreant. There had been an account in the New York Post concerning citizen outrage in a Jersey shore community over the release from prison, three months early, of one Edward Savoy. He was not a well regarded man as you will see.

Janice Lenz had been a cheerleader in high school and later, in college. Unlike many of her friends, she did not date football players unless they were smart. She had more brains than beauty, and that said a lot, as she was indeed a very pretty girl. She fell in love with a boy in her university sophomore class. He was a math whiz and couldn't catch a football, much less throw one. Don Burden told his friends that he had fallen in love at first sight with Janice. That she felt the same way about him was the high point of his life. They were married the day after graduation, at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church in Long Branch, New Jersey. Don went to work for an insurance company as an actuary. Janice found a job at the First State Bank in Long Branch, where she eventually attained the rank of assistant manager. Her work area was adorned with pictures of her family; her husband, Don, and her daughter, Laurie, six months.

Her father, Arthur Lenz, had returned from Vietnam in '68 with a Silver Star on his chest and ambition in his heart. He went to college on his veteran's benefits and became a lawyer. In 1986 he ran for the office of Mayor of Long Branch and was elected. Jan's mother, Katherine Lenz, was a stay at home mom who devoted several hours each week to volunteer service at Monmouth Medical Center. In 1983, she was honored by the hospital as the Volunteer of the Year. The family was held in great esteem by the citizens.

Janice Burden was twenty-five years old when she died. Her death was grisly in the extreme. Her left arm was ripped from her body just before she was decapitated.

She had been driving home from work.

As she crossed Highway 36, a man driving a 1983 Buick ran a red light and smashed broadside into Janice's Toyota. It was estimated that he had been going more than eighty miles per hour. Edward Savoy's blood alcohol registered three times the legal limit. As so often happens when a drunk driver kills an innocent person, the felon escaped with only minor injuries. Mr. Savoy was not a novice drunk driver. He had been arrested eight times before for DUI.

By any measure of the word, Savoy was a loser. And being one gave him the impetus to drink. As he drank, he became in his mind less a loser and more a man, accepted by his only friends, the other habitués of Jersey bars.

Six years before, he had roared through a school zone and killed Millicent Roland, a crossing guard. At the time of that crime, he had no driver's license and no chance of ever having one again. When he was arrested at the scene, he mumbled, in a drunken stupor, "Thank God she was just a nigger." Judge Garner West, a distinguished African-American jurist, presided at Savoy's trial. Judge West was known for his stern

demeanor. However, when he informed Savoy that he would be spending seventy-two months in the East Jersey State Prison at Rahway, he pronounced with a smile. Most people figured that at least half of the sentence was due to Savoy's racist comment about Millicent. Some attributed all of it to Savoy's stupidity. He was paroled in five and a half years, after convincing the parole board that he was sober and would stay that way. His first day on the outside found him showing his good faith by going on a three-day bender. He killed Mrs. Burden a few months later. He was driving his sister's car.

After the smashup with Janice Burden, Savoy was immediately arrested. At the subsequent trial, his defense was that he couldn't help himself, that his alcoholism was a disease. The jury found him guilty of vehicular manslaughter. The judge, who saw something in Savoy that no one else did, gave him only four years and sent him back to Rahway. He was released after doing all but the final ninety days of his stretch. His sister, Juanita Montana, never gave up on Edward. She took him in and offered to help him find a job. The immediate problem she faced was that prospective employers wanted sober workers. She sent Edward out the door each noon with twenty dollars and a copy of the newspaper help wanted ads. She no longer had an automobile, so Eddie was forced to ride the bus. She optimistically circled the advertisements that she thought he might be qualified to answer. After ten days she was out \$200 and Eddie was happy as a clam.

It was about this time that I decided to go looking for Mr. Savoy. I wanted to buy him a drink, always a good way to meet someone. Juanita's name had been mentioned in several of the newspaper accounts of the brouhaha over Savoy's release. She was listed in the Monmouth County phone book at an address in Eatontown, New Jersey. The central Jersey communities of Monmouth County are quiet burghs, existing as bedroom

communities for the most part. Much of the local economy is derived from the summer influx of weekenders and vacationers who came to enjoy the surf at the shore.

It was late spring when I checked into the Holiday Inn in Tinton Falls, adjacent to Eatontown. As I lay in bed that night I put together a plan for Mr. Savoy. I rehearsed in my mind the scolding I would deliver to him before the *coup de grace*. In a macabre way, I thought of such a rebuke as a “Hannibal Lecture.” This pun would not be passed along, but as I nodded off there came a smile to my face. *That was a good one*, I thought.

By now, I imagine you are somewhat taken aback by what appears to be a cavalier attitude I have shown in my dealings with the people I dispatch. Actually, I don’t care what you think. I believe that I am doing society’s work, where society can’t or won’t. As we are all part of mankind, the excision of the criminals among us is self-defense. Look upon me, if you will, as a white corpuscle in the body of man. Your life is infinitely better because of my dedication. I do not believe God will punish me for the men I killed in Vietnam. My hobby is an extension of that war, no more, no less. And of course, you’re quite welcome.

The next morning I drove to the local Staples Office Supply. I purchased a sturdy executive office chair, the kind with nice wheels. Staples was coincidentally next door to The Home Depot. After loading the chair into the back of my Jeep, I visited the super hardware store and bought duct tape, a knife, and a sixty-foot length of rope. After a stop at Dunkin Donuts, I parked across the street from Juanita Montana’s wooden frame house. The yard was a mess, the paint was peeling and one window had masking tape criss-crossed on it to hold it together. It appeared that Edward was no help at home either.

As I waited and watched, clouds began to roll in while I listened to a talk show on WABC radio. It was after two in the afternoon before Savoy exited the house and meandered down to the corner bus stop. I recognized his sallow face from the newspaper clipping on the seat next to me. He was a skinny man, typical of those who attain most of their sustenance from a bottle.

After he boarded the bus ten minutes later, it moved off in a pall of diesel exhaust. I followed it down Broadway Street until Savoy got off. He waited for the bus to depart, then scurried eagerly across the thoroughfare and entered a nondescript tavern. I waited for an hour before I left my car and entered the lounge.

McNulty's Bar in Long Branch is a neighborhood lounge where the same faces can be seen nearly every day. Dark inside, until your eyes adjust to the dimness. Smell of stale beer and decayed dreams. A non-future with a head on it. The opposite of "*Cheers.*" That was Brian McNulty's place, the place where Eddie Savoy chose to spend his days and his sister's money.

There were a half dozen people in the joint. Eddie was sitting at the bar, a draft beer in front of him. He was alone, and seemed interested more in drinking than anything else. I took a stool two seats away from him. The bartender, whom I took to be McNulty, was a taciturn man who responded to his customers' needs without extraneous conversation. Eddie was already four Buds toward becoming a scintillating conversationalist.

His comment when he saw me was, "New here, aren't you?"

I looked at him a moment before I responded. "Yeah, just passing through. I'm on my way to Atlantic City. Drove down from Boston. Got leg cramps, so I checked into a

motel here. That happens to me a lot. I'm supposed to take potassium for it, but I forgot my pills. I'll pick up some tomorrow before I leave."

He nodded sympathetically. "Going to try your luck at the casinos?"

I answered, "Yeah. An insurance man doesn't get a lot of excitement.."

McNulty moved to where I sat. "What'll you have, mister?"

"Bourbon, neat, with a large glass of water." I ordered it that way so I could get rid of the whisky surreptitiously without drinking it. I would be sober as a judge (ha,ha) when I made my move.

I said to Savoy, "My name is Jefferson Clement." I stuck out my hand. He shook it with a soft, weak paw and told me his name.

I asked, "What do you do?"

He answered, "You mean besides drinking?"

I laughed. We were already buddies. This might be easier than I had thought.

He continued, "I was in the merchant marine. An oiler. Mostly on foreign registry tubs, non-union. I've been around the world three times. That's where I learned to drink. Nothing else to do. Couldn't develop a relationship with anyone because I was never any place long enough to learn her last name. It's not easy to get blackballed in the third world navy, but I did. They will allow a drunk to work, but not to fuck up. I laid up a Panamanian freighter with ruined bearings because I was shit-faced on the job. That did it. So now I'm looking for a land job. They aren't easy to find. Especially when I have to ride a fuckin' bus everywhere. Soon as I get some money ahead, I'm going to buy a car."

Eddie back behind the wheel of an automobile was the very last thing New Jersey needed.

I said, “Yeah, jobs are hard to come by sometimes. I was lucky. I was never out of work for very long. And the insurance business isn’t too bad. You have to have the gift of gab, and I’ve been blessed with it.”

“I thought about insurance sales, but what do you do when you run out of relatives?” He chuckled at his lame attempt at humor.

“That’s not really where the business comes from. Represent a good line of companies and sell a variety . . . life, home, car. Spread it out.”

By now, I was sure that everyone who heard us was convinced I was an indemnity salesman. For an hour, Eddie pissed and moaned about his bad luck, but never talked about his prison record. When I offered to buy him a drink, he accepted without shame, and since he wasn’t paying, he switched from beer to *Absolut Vodka*.

By eight that evening, Savoy was wobbling, in danger of falling off his seat. The free liquor had been too tempting.

Outside, I could hear the rumbling of a spring storm. Before long, even above the jukebox noise, I could hear the drumming of rain on the roof.

There was a puddle of whisky on the floor where I had been disposing of the Maker’s Mark. The only sober person in the place, besides me, was McNulty, and I didn’t think he had seen me dumping my drinks.

I said to McNulty, “I hope we haven’t bored you with all our blather.”

He said, “No sweat. It’s all research for my book. Going to call it, ‘*Drinking Out Loud.*’”

I laughed and said, "That's a good one on which to end the evening. I better head back to the hotel. I would wait for the rain to end, but it doesn't sound as though it's going to let up."

I turned to Savoy and said, "You got a way to get home?"

McNulty looked at me over his glasses. "He doesn't have a car anymore. He rides the bus."

I cocked my head as though I was thinking that comment over. I said, "What the hell, Eddie, I'll give you a lift to your house if you would like."

Nearly comatose, Savoy shrugged assent and struggled to stand erect. I grabbed him under the left armpit. I nodded to McNulty and said, "I'll take him home. No doubt, he'll see you tomorrow."

The barkeep nodded, his hands on the mahogany surface in front of him. "Need any help with him?"

"Naw, I can handle it okay. Good night."

Outside, the downpour had not abated. As I steered Savoy toward my Jeep, rain sloshing down his neck partially revived him. He looked at me in the dim light of the tavern sign. "Who are you?"

"I'm Jeff Clement, the insurance guy. Remember?"

His head bobbed drunkenly as he slurred, "Oh, yeah. I need to get home. I gotta catch the bus."

"Eddie, I'll take you home. Give me your address before you pass out."

He mumbled a street name and number. I didn't catch all of it, but it made no difference. We weren't going there anyway.

I opened the passenger door and pushed him onto the seat. He dragged his legs in and slumped down. I shut the door and sloshed through the rain to my door and opened it. The wet clothing made it chilly. I started the engine and turned on the heater. The smell of alcohol emanating from Eddie was strong.

Savoy was out cold. His fun was over.

I drove to a large shopping center on State Highway 35 and pulled in. The stores were still open, so I drove to a place in the parking area where there were no cars. I waited there until one in the morning, when all the stores were closed and everyone had gone home. By then the storm had passed. The streets were wet, reflecting refractions of the street lamps. My passenger slept soundly, snoring most of the time.

There were several exits from the center. One of them had shrubbery growing on both sides of the opening. It was ideal for what I had in mind. Eddie Savoy had destroyed people with two tons of speeding metal. It was only appropriate that he face the same fate. Remember, this is not revenge by proxy I am describing. It is elimination of a criminal threat living in our midst. The method I had selected would assist him in understanding why he deserved what was about to happen to him.

The rain had stopped and a thin ground fog had rolled in from the shore. I opened my door and went to the back of the SUV. I swung open the rear door and removed the chair. I stuck the roll of duct tape into my pocket. I rolled the chair to a spot adjacent to the passenger door of the vehicle. I opened it and shook Savoy awake. He was still drunk. He muttered, "Are we home?"

"Not yet, Eddie. You need to get out of the car for a minute. Here, I'll help you."

I grabbed him by the arm and pulled him out. He wobbled as I pushed him into the chair. He looked around groggily. Confusion showed on his face as he asked, “Where are we? What the hell am I doing in a chair?”

I said, “Hold still for a moment.” I hurriedly wrapped the tape around his chest, arms and the chair, completing a half dozen turns.

He began to emerge from the haze and said, “What are you doing?”

I didn’t answer. Instead, I wrapped some tape around his ankles.

I looked at him as he sat there. He struggled futilely before giving up. He wasn’t going to get loose.

I went back to the rear of the Liberty and removed the coil of rope. When I returned to Savoy, I said, “Let me jog your memory, Eddie. Do you recall Millicent Roland or Janice Burden?”

He didn’t respond.

“Sure you do, Eddie. They are both six feet under, and you put them there. Mrs. Roland’s head split open when it hit your windshield. Mrs. Burden’s head was lopped off when you hit her car. I think it might be sweet justice if something similar happened to you.”

I held up the rope. “I’m going to tie this to your chair. Then I’m going to stretch it across this street. I’ll wait on the other side for an eighteen-wheeler to come along, and then at the last possible second, I’ll pull on the rope and drag you in front of the truck. With luck, the huge mass of metal will mangle your body very painfully. It should kill you, but if it doesn’t, you will probably wish that it had.”

Fright spread across Savoy's face. "In God's name, why are you doing this. I never did anything to you!"

And then, the old familiar refrain. He said, "I've done my time. I've paid my debt to society, for God's sake. You can't do this. You can't." He began to cry, tears streaking his cheeks.

I studied him for a moment, then said, "Well, actually, Edward, I can. As for the reason why I am doing this, it is primarily to deter you from repeating your sins. But there is a larger issue. Look at it this way. There are thousands of people who have maimed and killed others by causing wrecks while they were driving drunk. Now, logic dictates that it would be nigh impossible to take them all out, so I have chosen you. I am going to crucify you, figuratively speaking. Edward, you're going to pay with your life for all those sinners' transgressions. You're the chosen one, the man who will lift the burden from the backs of all the alcoholics who have murderously crapped on the rest of us. Your name should be on a plaque in every bar in the country, but I'm afraid it won't be. But I'll know what a great sacrifice you will have made."

His crying became a wail. He sobbed, "I'll never do it again, Mister. I've learned my lesson. I'll quit drinking. I can turn my life around. Please, for God's sake, give me one more chance."

"Sorry, Eddie, but you've had all the chances you are going to get."

He began to scream. I wrapped tape around his mouth. He groaned like a soulless animal.

I bent and tied the rope to the base of the chair, then reached underneath and released the spring that held the chair in a low position. It bobbed up high enough that

Savoy's feet were off the ground. He was positioned in the shopping center exit, hidden from both directions by shrubbery. I waited until there was no traffic and trotted across the roadway, letting the line lay on the pavement. I squatted by the curb, hidden by a postal collection box. A few cars went by. No one seemed to notice the rope. Finally, I could hear the engine and tires of a large truck approaching.

"Do you hear that, Eddie?" I called out "That's the devil, coming to get you."

Dimly, I could see him trying to break free. I couldn't see his eyes, but I am sure they were full of terror. At least I hoped they were.

The huge vehicle came closer, and closer, and at the exact right moment, I hauled the line as rapidly as I could. A split second before it smashed into Eddie, the driver hit the brakes. Too late. Savoy and the chair tumbled end over end fifty feet down the roadway, stopping finally beneath a street lamp. I could see he was a bloody mess. As the driver dismounted and ran toward Savoy's remains, I slipped across the road behind his truck. I walked swiftly to my car and left the parking lot unnoticed. Another enemy combatant had bitten the dust.

News of Eddie's demise made the front page of the local paper. The police said they had no clues. I guess the rope, the chair and the tape didn't qualify as evidence. When they identified Savoy, the reports of his death moved quickly to a cold case file jacket. As the detective assigned to the case said to a reporter, "Too many suspects. Half the population of Long Branch, or more."

E-mail the author: mcdougal8@verizon.net