

*The fathers have eaten sour grapes and
their children's teeth are set on edge.*

JEWISH PROVERB

1. Killing In Cowtown

I was in town when the bishop went down. So I was in on the case from the beginning. This was unusual. I don't investigate normal homicides these days. These cases are pretty simple and local detectives can do a better job than I can. They know the turf and they know the players. They have their own sources of information and their own personal networks. There are favors they can do and markers they can call in, and they clear a lot of murder cases following standard procedure.

When they call me in is when the ship hits the sand. Sometimes it's because an investigation of an important case has been botched. No one likes to admit he's made a mistake or gotten in over his head without knowing it and this is true in spades with cops. We like to call ourselves professional, but the truth is that most of us are neither well trained nor educated beyond the basics. So a lot of us get by on macho and bluff, and admitting a mistake is hard to do.

Yet mistakes are made, even by the best of us, and smart cops know when to ask for help. This is particularly true when a case draws a lot of media flash and the powers that be start pushing hard. A smart chief of police can call in someone like me to fade the heat. The chief gets the credit when I sort things out, and if I don't, I carry the blame. Either way, by hiring me at my outrageous rates, the chief has shown good faith and due diligence.

Even so, most of the homicide cases I'm called into involve multiple murders. Over the years I've developed a reputation for nailing serial killers or people who commit multiple homicides. There is a difference. A multiple killer is someone who finds it necessary to kill more than once and the motive is usually fear or greed. Multiple slayers kill to protect themselves or to gain power, like a mob boss. The victims stand between the killers and what they want and there is not the same intense emotional involvement with the victims. With a serial killer, like Jack the Ripper, the victim is what the killer wants. Murder is how they

take possession.

It was over the years I spent with the Arkansas CID, the state Criminal Investigation Division, that I developed a reputation as an expert on serial and multiple murders. This was not something I chose. Nor was it a matter of luck. Yes, I was the investigator on tap when my first serial case came up, but I was also behind the political eight ball. One of the governor's cousins overextended himself pilfering state money and I caught the case. I was brand new and they must have thought I'd never figure it out. Even if I did, they never thought I'd make a case. When I did both, aforesaid cousin went to prison and the governor was pissed. The director of the CID was led to understand my presence was no longer desired.

The quickest way to ditch someone is to have them blow a major case. So I was the man for the job when one of the nastiest serial cases in Arkansas history broke. The plan was to throw me in over my head long enough for me to make a major mistake, and then to give it to another investigator to make sure it got solved. After that, they could either fire me or send me back to the Highway Patrol.

It might have worked if I hadn't gotten lucky. A good piece of the luck was being thrown together with a young medical examiner named K.C. Jones, who was in as deep caca with his boss as I was in with mine. When Casey was asked to do some things he thought were more than a little out of line, he gave me a heads-up. The plan was to nail us both at once by sabotaging lab results, but Casey was smart enough to cover his ass using an independent lab. The state made Casey pay the expenses out of his own pocket, of course, but he saved my job as well as his own. When I solved the case with Casey's help, it set off a political fire storm that shook up the CID and got us a boss who was more focused on enforcement than politics.

That's how I got started with serial killers. The next time a serial case came up, the new Director handed it to me and Casey and we busted the hell out that one, too. After that, the Director let me have my head and between serial cases I pursued my real passion, which is corporate crime. The irony is that it was that very passion that led me to the governor's cousin in the first place.

The rest of the story is pretty simple, but it's funny how things worked out. After I retired from the CID, I made the mistake of writing down what I know about murder by the numbers. I even called it that. It started as a simple article for a police journal that turned into a long book. To my surprise, it became a best seller among other investigators, and I found myself in demand as a consultant.

I was also much busier than I wanted to be, but I can't complain too much. It brought in enough money that we never had to touch anything I

put away for retirement. It also gave Nellie and me time and money to travel, and it kept me from getting underfoot around the house the way some retired husbands do.

So I was in Cowtown when the bishop got hit and Chief Joe McClellan drafted me right away. Nor was there any way I could gracefully decline since I was already on his payroll for the week. The chief had brought me in for a training session with his junior investigators and I jumped at the chance to get out of Ft. Smith for a while. Dee and I were going through a slow time after an incredibly busy two years. There was not enough to keep us both busy. What cases we had fitted Dee's talents much better than mine.

Even so, there was a more urgent reason I wanted to get away. To put it simply, the house has never been the same since Nellie died. There are too many memories gathered there over too many years. Even after all these months now I still expect to see her smile when I walk into the kitchen in the morning or come home at night. And that's when it gets me, early in the morning and through the long evenings. So I work a lot and I travel and it helps.

Yet, staying busy doesn't always work and there is a downside to travel. There are always the empty hours after class and every time I explored all the wonderful places Ft. Worth has to offer, I couldn't help wishing Nellie were there to share them.

The afternoon the bishop got shot, I was having an early dinner by myself in a well known local place. About halfway through the meal, I caught myself starting to ask Nellie how she liked the food. It damned near broke my heart when I remembered she was gone and I choked up. I don't normally lose it in public, but that time I did. This got me some odd looks but I told the waiter in a louder voice than necessary that I was all right. I told him I'd bitten my tongue and everyone relaxed. I paid the bill and left a hefty tip. Then I got the hell out of there.

I was just walking in the door of my motel room when the phone rang. It was the chief asking me if I'd like to ride along to check out a crime scene. I was tired and felt wrung out, but I heard myself agreeing to go. This surprised me because I've never gotten used to the harsh realities of a crime scene. Nor do I understand people who have. Yet at that point, anything was preferable to spending another evening alone with my ghosts in a strange city. The second anniversary of Nellie's death had come and gone the week before and they were riding me hard.

The chief picked me up in his white Crown Victoria. I had to smile when I got into the car. Except for leather seats and the usual police equipment, it was a twin to my own car in Ft. Smith. I always get a chuckle out of the way other drivers hit the brakes when they see me

coming, and looking like a police car has its uses in dealing with rude truckers. A car salesman once told me cops sit on their taste buds when it comes to cars, but that's not true. We do tend to be conservative but most of us will tell you that a Jaguar is pure sex on wheels and we'd love to drive one. The problem is the Jag doesn't fit departmental budgets or what we need in a car. (Try cramming someone big and handcuffed into a two-door coupe.) The Crown Vic works well and cannot be beat for reliability and comfort. We put a lot of miles on our cars and we don't need something that's always in the shop.

Chief Joe McClellan is not a cheerful soul and his mind was apparently on his own dark thoughts. We drove most of the way to the crime scene in brooding silence. Yet as we drove up a broad avenue to the crime scene, he surprised me by chuckling, though it sounded more like a sneeze. "See that big-ass church up there, Jazz?" He snorted, pointing. "That's where we're headed. Hell of a place for a crime scene, isn't it?"

I looked where the chief was pointing. High on a hill overlooking several acres of lawn was one of the largest churches I'd ever seen. Later on I found out this was a common mistake. The setting made the church seem much bigger than it was. The neighborhood where it sat was an older part of the city and the houses around the church were much smaller than most houses today. The church architect must have taken this into account, for the clean Gothic lines of the structure accentuated the height of the building. The whole effect was like a European cathedral, built for the ages, solid and unmoving.

Somehow, the sight of the church reminded me of a well-known hymn, but I was still trying to figure out what it was when Joe interrupted my thoughts with another snort. I wondered if he was one of those strange people who found murder cheering.

"You know what local pastors call that big barn, Jazz?" he asked. I shook my head. "They call it Ft. God," he told me, snorting again.

For a moment I thought Mac had read my thoughts. The hymn I'd been trying to remember was "A Mighty Fortress." Then I laughed, too. "I can see why. All it needs is cannon ports. What is it, Catholic or Episcopal?"

"Neither one," Joe replied, clearly pleased to have information I did not. "It's not even Lutheran. It's honest-to-God Presbyterian."

I looked at the building again. The stone facing was a tawny color favored by many of the wealthier Presbyterian churches I've seen, but the red Spanish tile used on the roof of the nave seemed a little gauche for staid Calvinists. Even at this distance I saw the building was shaped in the cruciform favored by catholic traditions.

"Sure looks Spanish to me," I said. "Maybe Anglican."

Joe McClellan laughed again. "Looks Catholic as all get-out to me. They use a lot of tile like that in Santa Fe. Wait until you get inside. They got stained glass windows all over the place. They're the old fashioned kind with lots of lead and angels spearing devils. The only thing missing is all the statues." He must have realized how his remark might be taken. "No offense, Jazz. You're not Catholic are you?"

I assured him I was not and that no offense was taken. "Did I misunderstand?" I asked. "I thought you told me a bishop was killed."

"That's the odd thing," he answered. "The victim is a bishop. Not Catholic but an Episcopal."

"Any idea what he was doing in a Presbyterian church?" I asked.

"Not a one," the chief told me. "The first officer on the scene didn't know and the detectives weren't there yet when I got the call."

"Do they normally call you out on a homicide?" I asked. While the chief would know about the death through the chain of command, some micromanage more than others. I doubted this was standard procedure in Ft. Worth, but I needed to know.

"Almost never," McClellan answered. "They called me because this one is going to raise some heat." He gave me a jaundiced look. "Political heat."

That explained why he asked me along. "You mean because he's a bishop?"

Joe looked at me and grinned. It looked like he was baring his teeth to bite. "No, because this particular bishop is a real asshole and very public about it. And you didn't hear me say that, either, Jazz."

"Didn't hear you say what?" I asked, grinning back. Seven years as head of CID made me glad this was McClellan's problem and not mine.

"I'm going to let the investigators fill you in," he answered. "I want you coming in with a fresh mind."

"I don't want to get in their way, Joe," I answered. "They may resent me being dumped on them."

"They won't," he reassured me. "I gave you Adams and Kowalski. You know them from the course this week."

I had a vague impression to go with the names, but not much else. "All right, but they get credit for any collar," I said. "All I'm is a consultant."

McClellan looked at me with surprise. "Hell, Jazz, I hoped you would head this one up all the way. On the job training for my best boys."

"I'm not a certified peace officer in Texas," I explained. "The law has changed and I'm not sure exactly what it is here."

"You are certified in Arkansas, aren't you?" McClellan asked. "You said you were current there. That's good enough."

“Yes, that’s my deal with the state there,” I answered. “As long as I consult with them I’m carried on the rolls as an active officer and I can carry a gun. I don’t know how that translates here, or if it does.”

“Aw, hell, Jazz,” Joe replied. “You don’t need to pack a pistol for this one. You got two officers to take care of you if you get in a crunch.”

I was having trouble believing my ears. A common sense rule of law enforcement is that when you go after a murderer, you go armed. Some departments require their people to carry a pistol at all times, even off duty. “Let me get this straight. You want me to go after a murderer unarmed?”

The chief gave this some thought. “Yeah, you’re right,” he said. “I’ll write you out a temporary permit when we get to the office. I guess you’ll need a gun, too.”

I was liking this less and less the more I heard. I know how things work and I know how lawyers are, particularly ambitious prosecutors. The problem would not come in carrying a weapon. The problem would occur if I had actually had to shoot someone, even in self defense. Thank God, I never had, but it’s not reasonable to carry a gun if one doesn’t accept that possibility. I certainly didn’t want to get left hanging out to dry over a murder charge in Texas.

“Come to think of it, that’s not necessary,” I answered. “I’ll carry a walking cane.”

McClellan gave me a strange look, but nodded. At that moment I was tempted to get out of the car and thumb my way back to the motel. I hate manipulation and it felt like I’d just been had. I decided to push back. “One thing you need to understand, Joe. This is over and above the training fee. I’ll have to charge you full rates and for extra expenses, too. My minimum is three days. Agreed?” Up to that point, I didn’t have a minimum, but he didn’t know that.

It was clear McClellan had been counting on a freebie and I was glad I’d put it on the table now. He didn’t like it much, but he nodded.

“Good,” I told him. “You can type me out a letter of intent when we get back to your office.” I smiled reassuringly. “Don’t worry. You’ll get your money’s worth.” When I said it, I had no idea just how true that would be.