

Chapter 1

It is a clear August evening in the West Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago. Nineteen-year-old Lionel Harris, a black male, is walking home along a dark alley after having just completed his last sale of cocaine. It has been a productive night for Harris. He made a total of seven sales, not bad for a Friday night. After paying his supplier, Harris figures he will clear \$250, tax-free. It is two o'clock in the morning, and while the night air is cool, the stench from garbage and urine still hangs in the air. Still, Harris prefers traveling through the alleys to avoid detection from patrolling police officers. If one were to drive down the alley, it would be easy for Harris to hide behind a dumpster or duck into the shadows.

As he continues to walk, Harris notices a dark figure approaching him from the opposite direction. It appears to be a large man dressed in dark clothing. As he gets closer, Harris can see the man is dressed in black, has a beard, glasses, and is wearing a black hat. He's also wearing black leather gloves and appears to be walking with a limp.

Probably just some late-night drunk, thinks Harris. He then notices the man is staring at him as he

approaches. The man stops in front of Harris, blocking his way. Harris attempts to step around the man. The man moves sideways to block his path.

“What the hell, man. Get out of my way!”

“What have you been doing, Lionel?” says the man.

“How do you know my name?”

“I know who you are. You’re a drug dealer, and I’m here to stop you.”

Harris squints his eyes trying to make out who this stranger is. “I don’t know who you are, but I’m going home.”

“No, you’re going to die,” states the mysterious man.

“You’re nuts, man,” remarks Harris as he starts to walk past the stranger.

The man quickly steps to block Harris’s path and pushes him in the chest, knocking Harris backward.

“You’re selling illegal drugs out here, and I’m not going to allow you to do that anymore.”

“Who are you?” asks Harris.

“I’m your worst nightmare.”

Harris is now angry. He lunges toward the man while taking a swing with his right hand. The man swiftly dodges the punch while sweeping Harris’s arm aside. Harris quickly re-establishes his footing and clenches both hands into fists. He then notices the man is holding a silver-bladed knife in his right hand.

“Okay!” shouts Harris. “You want my money?”

Just as he says this, the man lunges forward while plunging the silver blade into Harris’s gut just below his rib cage. Harris instinctively steps back in pain as blood

oozes out of his upper gut. Harris attempts to fight back, but the man again lunges forward, this time grabbing Harris behind the neck with his left hand while plunging the knife again into Harris's upper gut. As he does so, the man turns the knife upward and twists it to cause as much damage as possible to organs and arteries. Harris screams in pain. He soon gasps for breath as blood fills his lungs and esophagus. Harris crumbles to the ground, gasping for breath. The man stands and watches as Harris writhes in pain. It takes less than thirty seconds for Harris to stop moving or making noises.

The assailant reaches down and wipes the knife clean using the victim's shirt. He then calmly places the knife across Harris's chest. He looks up and down the alley to see if anyone has seen the attack. Seeing no one, the man limps down the alley to the nearest street. Once there, he turns the corner and disappears out of sight.

It isn't until approximately 6:30 a.m. the following morning that a shopkeeper enters the alley to dispose of some trash and discovers Harris lying on his back in a pool of blood. Uniformed officers arrive shortly thereafter and confirm Harris is deceased. Detectives are then called to the scene.

It takes detectives Mike Ricci and Ken Lewis forty-five minutes to arrive on the scene. As soon as they observe the body, both detectives know it is the work of the Candy Man Killer.

"He's back," says Lewis.

"This is what, number seven?" asks Ricci.

“Yeah, this makes victim number seven,” replies Lewis. “The Candy Man has returned. Whoever it is, he’s good at not being detected or leaving any evidence behind.”

“He does leave the murder weapon,” Ricci reminds him. “I think it’s his calling card. He wants us to know it’s him.”

“I agree,” replies Lewis. He then turns to one of the officers. “Do we have any witnesses?”

“Not that we’ve found,” says the officer.

“Okay, let’s get the crime scene investigators (CSIs) out here to process whatever evidence they can find,” says Lewis. “Maybe they can come up with something this time.”

“What do you care?” asks Ricci. “You’re done after next week.”

“I do care, but you know my brother and I have been working on opening a car dealership for quite some time. It will be a good change for me.”

“You won’t miss it?” asks Ricci.

“Parts of it, sure, especially working with my fellow officers. Still, I’ve had enough.”

“You know I’ll probably get some wet-nosed rookie detective to work with, right?”

“It gives you someone new to break in,” smiles Lewis.

Chapter 2

Two Weeks Later

It is the day after the long Labor Day holiday weekend as Chicago Police Detective Juan Garcia reports to his new assignment in Area 4, which encompasses the neighborhoods generally referred to as the West Side of Chicago. Before his transfer, he had been working homicides in Area 5, the northwest section of Chicago. However, due to a staffing shortage and a recent spike in violent crime on the west side, Garcia and five other detectives have been reassigned to assist the Homicide Unit in Area 4. Garcia's new partner will be Detective Mike Ricci, a 34-year veteran of the Chicago PD and a seasoned homicide detective of 13 years.

Area 4 is considered one of the most challenging and hazardous areas to work in. It usually rivals Chicago's south side as having the highest violent crime rates. Much of the crime in these areas is driven by poverty, unemployment, and drug trafficking. Three of the most violent neighborhoods in Chicago, West Garfield Park, East Garfield Park, and North Lawndale, are located in Area 4. The presence of local gangs, usually involved in the selling of drugs for Mexican drug cartels, results in an overabundance of shootings. The number of homicides in Area 4 keeps detectives much busier than they want to be.

Garcia is not particularly pleased with his reassignment, but he understands Area 4 needs assistance. On the positive side, Garcia now has a shorter commute to work. He and his family live in the lower west side of Chicago in the historic Pilsen neighborhood, which borders the Chicago River. Several years earlier, he and his wife, Rosa, had purchased a lovely three-bedroom, two-story brick home. The Pilsen neighborhood is a diverse ethnic community, primarily Hispanic, with a rich Latino culture. However, many African Americans and whites have recently moved into the area. The Garcias like the diversity of their neighborhood, believing it will be an excellent place to raise their three children: 11-year-old Jose, 8-year-old Maria, and 6-year-old Julio.

With redevelopment, the eastern part of Pilsen now attracts artists, galleries, and boutique shops, transforming Pilsen into a desirable cultural arts center. The expansion of the nearby University of Illinois Chicago is a draw for more middle- and upper-class Latinos and whites. Younger families, like the Garcias, are moving in, attracted by the still-reasonable housing prices. The Garcias' early faith in the neighborhood is paying off, as they have seen a nice appreciation in the value of their home.

Garcia's new assignment in Area 4 is located north of the Pilsen Neighborhood and south of Area 5, the northwest section of Chicago. Unless the workload in Area 4 results in longer hours, he anticipates getting home sooner in the evening to spend more time with his family.

Juan Garcia grew up in Chicago, not far from the Pilsen Neighborhood, where he now lives. His maternal grandparents immigrated from Mexico and settled in Chicago, where his grandfather found work in the steel industry. On his paternal side, the family tree traces back to immigrants who arrived in America sometime in the early 1800s. Eventually, both families settled in Chicago. Garcia met his wife, Rosa, while attending Northern Illinois University. After graduation, Garcia applied to be a police officer with the Chicago PD, something he had always been attracted to. His desire grew from watching police drama shows during his childhood. His three favorite shows were NYPD Blues, Law and Order, and CSI: Crime Scene Investigation. Given his education and clean background, Garcia was hired on his first attempt as a 23-year-old rookie officer.

After six years in patrol, Garcia was promoted to the rank of Detective and assigned to the robbery division in Area 5. Garcia proved to be an excellent investigator with a keen sense of people and a knack for knowing when they were lying or hiding something. He seemed to be a natural. His success as a robbery detective led to his assignment to the homicide unit only three years after being promoted to Detective. Now, with two years of homicide experience, he is being sent to one of the most challenging areas of Chicago.

Garcia wears one of his finest dark brown suits for his first day, accompanied by a white dress shirt and a light brown tie. His first task is to meet with Detective Commander John Marshall, a three-year veteran of Homicide in Area 4. Commander Marshall is 47 years old, barrel-chested, with wavy brown hair, wire-rimmed glasses, and a look of all business. He is wearing a well-tailored grey suit with a red striped tie.

"Welcome to Area 4, Juan," greets Marshall. "We've been looking forward to getting some help around here, and you come with an outstanding reputation."

"Thank you, sir," responds Garcia.

"I understand you have a family?"

"Yes, sir. My wife, Rosa, and I have three children. Jose is eleven, Maria is eight, and Julio is six years old."

"Sounds like you have a lovely family. Are you sure Area 4 is the right place for you? It can be dangerous."

"I understand, sir. I did enjoy my time in Area 5, but I know you need the help here, and I'm ready to do what I can to help."

"Hmmm," nodded Marshall. "What does your wife think about this transfer?"

"She's a cop's wife. She'll be fine."

"I see you were a robbery detective and then worked homicide for two years. Is that accurate?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll be honest, Juan, I'm not sure two years is enough experience to handle the number and types of homicides we see in this district."

"I think you'll find my investigative skills are good, sir. You can check with my previous commander."

Marshall smiled. "I already have. Did you think I wouldn't check you out?"

“No, of course not.”

“Well, you’re not going to be alone, Juan. I’ve assigned you to work with one of our best, most seasoned detectives. Detective Mike Ricci will be your new partner.”

“I’ve heard of him, sir. He has a good reputation.”

“Yes. Mike has been in the department for thirty-four years and has been a homicide detective for thirteen. You follow and listen to what Mike has to say.”

“I will, Commander. I still have plenty to learn.”

“Well, I’ve got just a few rules, and if you follow ‘em, you will do fine. First, don’t take any shortcuts. Your cases need to be solid. We have a great conviction rate in this division, and I expect it to remain so.”

Garcia nods.

“Second, no drinking on the job, got that?”

“Of course not, sir,” says Garcia with a surprised look.

“I’ve had to deal with alcoholics in the past, and I won’t tolerate drinking on the job or coming to work with alcohol on your breath.”

“No problem. I rarely drink, sir.”

“Third, it’s dangerous out there. You need to always have your partner’s back. And carry a backup firearm; you never know when you might need it. You may also want to consider carrying a blade. Knives can be used for many things.”

“Okay,” says Garcia.

“Finally, do what Ricci tells you to do. He’s a seasoned detective and knows these neighborhoods better than anyone. Got that?”

“Yes, sir, no problem.”

“VICKIE!” yells Marshall as he looks out his office door.

“Yes, sir, what do you need?” responds Vickie, the Commander’s administrative assistant, as she hurries into the office.

“Take Garcia here and introduce him to his new partner.”

“Will do,” Vickie answers. “Juan, if you follow me, I will take you to your new desk and introduce the two of you.”

Garcia follows Vickie through the maze of desks, room dividers, and filing cabinets that fill the homicide investigative office.

“Mike,” says Vickie as she approaches Mike Ricci, sitting at his desk reading a report. “This is Juan Garcia, your new partner.”

Ricci looks up. “Huh,” grunts Ricci as he looks Garcia up and down. “You look a bit young to be a homicide detective.”

“I’ve already been one for two years in Area 5.”

“I’m not sure Area 5 could have prepared you for this hellhole,” says Ricci.

Vickie, knowing how gruff Ricci can be, steps back and walks away.

“Detective Juan, have a seat,” says Ricci as he motions Garcia to sit at the desk opposite him. “Welcome to the fourth.”

Detective Mike Ricci is 58 years old, and his rugged facial features belie his age. However, His physique looks more like he could be 48. Ricci maintains his excellent shape by working out regularly, three days a week. He is also rather large at 6’3” and 220 lbs, most of which appears to be muscle. Ricci comes from an Italian family, and Garcia notices that Ricci has the characteristic look of someone of Italian descent. His hair is wavy and black with a good mix of gray. Garcia is no slouch, but at 5’10” and 180 lbs, Garcia wouldn’t want to tangle with Ricci.

Ricci is dressed in beige dress pants, a light blue, long-sleeve button-down dress shirt unbuttoned at the top, and a dark blue, patterned tie hangs loosely around his neck. A large, half-consumed cup of Dunkin’ Donuts coffee sits among the many papers on Ricci’s desk.

“You come with quite a reputation,” states Ricci with a sly grin.

“I just do the job the best I can, sir.”

“Well, the first thing you can do is knock off the sir stuff. You call me Mike, and I’ll call you Dickhead. How’s that?”

Garcia stares back at Ricci with his mouth slightly open, not sure how to respond.

Ricci stares right back at Garcia before breaking out with a big laugh, “I’m just messin’ with ya! I’ll call you Juan, how’s that?”

Garcia nervously laughs back, “You had me there for a minute.”

“You just follow my lead, and we will work fine together. Got that?”

Garcia nods, “Okay.”

“Have you been briefed at all?” asks Ricci.

“Yes, I’ve been told you recently had a homicide that matches a pattern of homicides from a couple of years ago. Drug dealers were being stabbed to death, and after eighteen months, the killer is back, correct?”

“That’s pretty much it. There was a series of six homicides with the same M.O. over a two-year period. The last victim was Javier Santana, a twenty-four-year-old Hispanic male. After that, the killings just stopped. Then, two weeks ago, after an eighteen-month hiatus, we had a homicide with the same type of victim and M.O. The Candy Man Killer is back.”

“Who was the victim this time?”

“Lionel Harris, a nineteen-year-old black drug dealer. He’s now victim number seven.”

“And what makes you think this new case is related to those from two years ago?” asks Garcia.

“The weapon. In each homicide, the victims have been stabbed with a kitchen knife right through the gut, then left to bleed out. What makes it unique is that each time, the perp leaves the murder weapon at the scene, placed right on top of the victim. Our most recent victim, Lionel Harris, was a drug dealer stabbed with the same type of knife, and the knife was left sitting on top of his chest.”

“Really?” replies Garcia. “I’ve never heard of anything like that before.”

“Nope, quite unusual. We call him the Candy Man Killer.”

“Why Candy Man Killer?”

“He only targets drug dealers. Drugs are often referred to as candy on the street. Thus, the Candy Man Killer.”

“I see. Haven’t you been able to get prints or DNA off the knives?” asks Garcia.

“Nothing. The knives have always come back clean. No prints, DNA, nothing.”

“Hmmm, do we have anything to go on?”

“Not really,” answers Ricci. “My guess is that it has something to do with the drug wars over territory. We did get a report of a suspicious person near the scene of one of the homicides two years ago, but nothing panned out. Someone saw a large male wearing a dark windbreaker, dark pants, a full black beard, and dark-rimmed glasses. Oh, and he was supposedly wearing a flat beret-style hat and walked with a limp.”

“Well, that’s something to go on. Do you know the race of the suspect?”

“In this area? Most likely black or Hispanic, but the witness couldn’t tell in the darkness,” says Ricci.

“What about fingerprints?”

“Nope, nothing. The scene is always clean, except for the murder weapon being left behind.”

“What was the brand and type of knife?” asks Garcia.

“They are always a Cardet seven-inch kitchen utility knife with a black handle. The killer carefully places the knife on the chest of his victims.”

“Why do you think he does that?” asks Garcia.

“It’s his calling card. I believe it’s a warning to all drug dealers. He’s telling them this could happen to you if you continue to sell drugs.”

“Interesting. You’re probably right,” agrees Garcia.

“I’ll tell you what, instead of all the questions, why don’t you read the case files first? Here’s a stack of all seven, the six previous killings and the most recent. Start reading, and when you’re done, we can discuss any questions you have.”

Garcia nods. “Who was your partner before me?”

“Ken Lewis. He was a fine detective.”

“Did he transfer out?”

“No.”

Garcia frowns. “What happened?”

“You ask a lot of questions, don’t you?”

“I guess. I’m just curious.”

“Ken simply got sick of the crime. Dealing with the same bullshit all the time can damage your soul, if you let it. He and his brother now manage a car dealership.”

“You’ve never gotten tired of it?”

Ricci chuckles. “No. I love putting assholes behind bars. I never get tired of it.”

“Yeah, I can understand that,” grins Garcia.

Garcia then takes the stack of seven case files from Ricci, gets as comfortable as he can in his desk chair, and opens the first file. It will take him several days to get through all the reports. He also plans to get up to speed on the drug and gang activity within Area 4.

Later that evening, Ricci is on his drive home thinking about Garcia and what he brings to the table. Ricci's initial impression is that Garcia has the potential to make a good homicide detective, but still has a lot to learn about how things work in Area 4. Ricci's drive home is longer than Garcia's. Ricci lives in Forest Glen, a neighborhood in northwest Chicago. It's an upscale neighborhood of upper-middle-class residents, and while there's some diversity, most residents are white. Ricci's home is a well-maintained two-story brick home with three bedrooms, three baths, and a two-car garage on a tree-lined street. He has converted half of his garage into a woodworking shop. His yard, like most in the neighborhood, is neatly trimmed and well-maintained.

Ricci has lived in the home alone for the past five years following the death of his wife, Ella, from a brain aneurysm. He has a son, Chris, who is a 28-year-old attorney living in Naperville, a city approximately 33 miles west of Chicago. His oldest child, a daughter by the name of Lisa, died unexpectedly in Los Angeles six years ago. Ricci believes the stress of his daughter's untimely death contributed to his wife's aneurysm. He has struggled to recover from both his daughter's and his wife's deaths. He often helps himself get to sleep by having one or two Bud Lights in the evenings.

When not working, Ricci spends most of his free time maintaining the house, working in his makeshift woodshop, and exercising to maintain his strength and fitness. One of his woodworking favorites is making beautiful birdhouses. He sells most of them at a local craft store and gives others away as gifts.

Ricci has worked at the Chicago PD for thirty-four years. His interest in law enforcement was honed while serving in the Air Force Military Police for four years after high school. Upon leaving the Air Force, Ricci worked as a security guard at a plastics fabricating plant for six months before being hired by the Chicago Police Department. He could have retired at age 55, but after the death of his wife, Ella, Ricci couldn't see the point in retiring. What else would he do? Besides, he still had things he wanted to accomplish as a detective.

When Garcia arrives home, he is greeted by his wife, Rosa. "How did your first day go?"

"It was interesting," says Garcia. "My new partner is an older, seasoned veteran. My first impression is that he will be an old-school type of detective."

"Is that good or bad?" asks Rosa.

"Neither, really. I believe I'll learn a lot from him. He certainly has more experience in homicide than I do."

"Whatever experience you lack, you'll make up for in hard work."

"Where are the kids?"

"Jose is at football practice, and the other two are upstairs playing some game on their iPads."

"When is Jose's first game?"

"They play next Saturday morning at ten. I hope you won't miss the game."

“I don’t plan on it, unless I get called out.”

“How often do you think that will happen in your new district?” asks a concerned Rosa.

“Unfortunately, the homicide rate in Area 4 is much higher than in my last district. I expect to be called out more than either of us will like.”

Rosa frowns. “I don’t like it, but I understand. How long do you think you’ll be in Area 4?”

“I have no idea. Probably at least three to five years.”

Rosa is silent for a moment before saying, “I worry about your safety in that district.”

Garcia smiles. “I’m a detective, Rosa. Detectives typically arrive on a scene after the crime has been committed. Much of my time will be as before. There isn’t a lot of danger in processing crime scenes and interviewing witnesses.”

“You still make arrests of dangerous people,” protests Rosa. “And this district is dangerous.”

“True, but in most cases, we have patrol back-up for dangerous suspects. Stop worrying, Rosa. I’ll be fine.”

“Well, dinner is ready. I made chicken fajitas.”

“Sounds great, I’ll go get the kids.”