

CHAPTER ONE

Father Rierdon had just finished his weekly bowling game and was extremely happy with himself. At seventy-six years old this was his exercise and he'd just bowled a 185, close to his best game. The air was unusually cool for that June night as he made his way towards his old Chevy Impala. They really need to put more lights up in the parking lot, he thought. Then in the deep shadows of night he saw someone running towards him.

"Father," a female voice called out. "Father Rierdon?"

"Yes? Who is it?" he replied as the young woman finally made her way to his car. There they stood facing one another under the single lamppost. The woman facing him had dark hair and her clothes, though becoming, looked like they had been handed down one too many times.

"It's Alicia, Alicia Monetti, Father."

"I'm sorry, my child, but I don't seem to remember you."

"You're the one who talked to those people, aren't you?" she said becoming agitated.

"What are you talking about?"

"You told those people at the welfare office that I beat my little girl. That was you, wasn't it?" she said, angrily.

Suddenly he remembered her name. He had felt sorry for her and wanted to help her, but the police and welfare officers had taken his statement and used it against her instead. At that time Alicia Monetti was living with some guy whose name the priest couldn't remember. The guy was a drug user and would often beat Alicia and her infant daughter. Father Rierdon had brought his observations to the attention of the welfare office in the hopes of getting her help against her abusive boyfriend. "I'm sorry. I was trying to help..."

"Yeah, sure..."

"No, really! It was the police who turned it all around."

"Stop it. You just wanted to take my kid from me."

"That's not true!"

"It is true, and I got a witness to prove it."

He heard a car door open and saw the interior of a GTO about ten feet from him light up.

"I tell you it was all a mistake. I was trying to..."

"It was a mistake, that's for sure. Somehow I'm going to see that you pay for that mistake."

The silhouetted man in the GTO shouted out, "It was him, Alicia. The priest. He's the one!" Father Rierdon heard the sound of metal scraping along the pavement.

"Make him pay, Alicia. Make him pay now!" the man in the car shouted.

"No! Please! I will try to help as much as I can, but you must believe me it was all an accident, a misunderstanding."

"Let's see if you can misunderstand this," Alicia hissed viciously, thrusting the bayonet deep into his chest.

"May...may God forgive...you," the priest said, falling to the pavement. Even with his dying breath he wished that she would find peace with God.

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I placed the phone down softly in my Chinatown apartment. "I don't believe it," I said to my wife brushing a lock of light brown hair out of my eyes.

"What?" my wife asked while I was yet again being distracted by her long black hair.

"Father Rierdon's just been murdered."

“Was he not your priest before you went to Hong Kong?”

“Yeah. A real nice guy, too.”

“Let me guess. They want you to check it out and you have to leave.”

“Susan, you should be the detective,” I teased.

“No! You are much better, just as you are better at fighting, Detective Nathan Adams,” she replied.

“Maybe,” I said embracing her, enjoying the warmth of her soft body close to mine. It was more than comforting.

“Go,” she replied, putting her gentle hands behind my neck. “You have your work to do and I have my praying to do. That is how I fight alongside you.”

“I’ll be back as soon as I can. I love you.”

Susan looked up and pulled my face to hers. The warmth of her kiss was like being kissed by her soul. “I know. I love you too.”

Our embrace lasted long, but not nearly long enough. How I loved this beautiful angel.

I work out of the 5th Precinct as a homicide detective, first grade. At five feet ten inches and weighing 160 pounds, I had already been through the wringer. I’d lost my family when I was twelve. Raised in an orphanage in Hong Kong where I was treated like dirt until I learned kung fu. That’s where I met my wife, Susan, sister of David Ng, one of my two closest friends, the other being Peter Chen. Although raised as a Catholic, I gave up Catholicism and became a Taoist. There were many great sayings that gave me direction, but none that gave me true strength. During a time when I almost lost Chen in a fire, both he and Susan became Christians. At first, I felt abandoned and angry. Then one day staring at a painting of Jesus on the cross, things started to make sense and soon I too accepted Jesus as my Savior. I never went back to the Catholic Church, but that was just because of the feelings I had from my childhood. I knew that true Christianity isn’t bound to one denomination. Besides, I kind of liked the energy I saw in some of the Pentecostal churches. Not that they were better. I just felt more comfortable there. Yet this phone call brought me back to my childhood. Father Rierdon was one of the Catholics that I felt tried to walk a true Christian life. Although many of my friends said Rierdon shouldn’t call himself “Father,” I believed that the man’s heart was pure before God. And that, after all, is what matters isn’t it?

I drove a yellow Dodge Dart that was rusting out at the doors and headlights. Why I bought the car is still a mystery to me. I could get to most places in Manhattan just as fast or faster walking or using mass transit. Must be the old Chinese teachings—the need to be alone with my thoughts. And if you’ve ever tried to drive a car through Manhattan you know that I had plenty of time to do that.

Making a left-hand turn into the parking lot near the bowling alley, I noticed the scarring on my right wrist. Some things would never completely go away. I received the scar when I was twelve, trying to break into my house through a window in a failed attempt to rescue my younger brother. The house was on fire and a fireman pulled me from the window moments before a gas explosion in the kitchen blew out the whole side of the house. Yet as I thought of that scar I also thought of other scars, on the hands and feet of One who had reached in and saved me from destruction.

As I pulled up to the yellow crime scene tape, I saw Officer Marcus Jones, an NYPD uniform officer and close friend.

“Yo Nat,” the tall bald black man called out, “they gave you the call on this one?”

“Yeah, Marcus. What we got?”

“Single stab wound to the chest. No other markings on the body. He was standing right next to his car when he got it.”

“Knifed in the chest? That’s odd these days.”

“Tell me something I don’t know. Brothers would’ve capped him, that’s for sure. Anyway, it ain’t a knife wound according to Bernie,” Jones said, referring to Bernard Loomas, the medical examiner on call.

“Then what?”

“According to that thing sticking out of his chest I’m going with a bayonet. I think Bernie agrees.”

“Bayonet? That’s crazy. You know how bulky those things are to carry around?”

“This is the Big Apple, man. Crazy is normal here, remember?”

“Any wits?”

“Not even the attendant. Said he didn’t see nothin’. You know how it is around here. Everybody watches while it goes down, but then nobody really ‘sees’ anything.”

I knew that was true. Thirty people could be watching the murder go down and we’d be lucky if we could find one who would say they weren’t watching TV or something at the time.

“Scene been processed yet?”

“Doing that now.”

“Who’s the CSI?” I asked. NYPD was combining the talents of those in the district attorney’s office, those in the crime scene unit and the detective squads to better fight crime on the streets of New York. I’d been on the Oh-Five’s detective squad since 1999, but this was my first assignment with a CSI as a partner. It marked a further change to deepen relationships between these three groups, but it meant I wasn’t partnered with a regular detective, but a detective whose specialty was in forensic science. I had yet to meet my partner. Today was the day.

“Officer from Manhattan South, Name of Wish.”

“Wish?” I asked.

“Oh, that ain’t the best of it. Name’s Maybelline Kimberly Wish, Crime Scene Investigator.”

“Please don’t tell me...”

“Yep. We got CSI May K. Wish processing the crime scene.”

We began to chuckle softly, unable to contain ourselves as a female officer in a crime scene blue jumper with white letters “NYPD” stenciled on the back came up to us. You could hardly tell whether the officer was man or woman by the clothing, her blond covered by netting to keep it out of the crime scene. Stepping up to us with all the brass of a veteran officer, she extended her hand.

“May K. Wish, crime scene unit,” she said, “and you are...?”

We looked at each other and then at her and were at once ashamed. “Sorry. I’m detective Nathan Adams. This here’s my friend, Officer Marcus Jones.”

“Jones I met coming in. You have that list for me?” she asked, eyes and demeanor cool as steel.

“Yeah. Pernelli, bring that list over here and give it to the detective, will you?”

“Sure thing, Marcus.”

The “list” was a list of everyone who came into the crime scene before processing it could be completed. It was used to eliminate “evidence” brought into the crime scene after the

crime had been committed, cops mostly. They usually got so involved in a scene they hardly ever took precautions in preventing the scene, and that's always ticked me off.

"Good job," Wish commented. "You guys managed to keep it under fifteen this time."

"Catch you later, Marcus," I said and then addressed May K. Wish. "Looks like they're putting us together on this one."

"That's right. Problem?"

"No, not at all. Just wish you hadn't come in and heard that joke at your expense, is all."

"Detective, two things. First, if I worried about every single thing a person said to me, I'd never have time to do my job, which, by the way, I take very seriously. Second, if you simply wanted to be out of earshot says to me you would have said it anyway. Seems to me I once heard justice defined as 'doing what you know to be right when no one is looking.' Or words to that effect."

"Point well taken. I'm sorry."

"Apology accepted."

"Find anything in there?"

"Not much more than the ME gave us," she began taking off her hair net to reveal blond hair cut and curled inwards above her shoulders. May had the most amazing green eyes of anyone I'd ever met. She was rather short, around five feet five inches, and thin, nearing 100 pounds. Yet the way she hefted her crime scene kit showed me that she was anything but weak. Her face was hardened by something other than just defending her name. "Of course we have the bayonet. The good news is there are prints on it. The bad news is who in the world would carry a bayonet around with them? I mean that'd be premeditation for sure."

"I'd have to agree with you there."

"I did find some scratches on the pavement near the vic, so I'm wondering if the perp was actually carrying the bayonet themselves."

"You think there was a third party?"

"Hey, I just process the scene. I'm no magician, but yeah, that's my guess."

"Anything else, Ms. Wish?"

"Call me May and get it over with, will you?"

"What?"

"The laughter over my name's going to keep ringing in that thick head of yours. Maybe if you'd call me by my name it'll let the demon out," she said with a smirk. It struck me that I seemed to be having a harder time with her name than she did.

"Okay then, May, did you find anything else?"

"Nothing of any value that I could tell. Vac'd up the body and area for 'trace,' but I'm not holding my breath."

"Well, at least we got prints."

"And the weapon," she said, leading me over to the lifeless form of Father Rierdon.

"Notice anything else?"

"Not that I can see," I replied.

"By the positioning of the body it doesn't look like he was trying to defend himself, and yet it does indicate he was talking to someone."

"I see what you mean. So, we're looking for someone that knew him, someone he possibly knew?"

"That'd be my guess. Look at his black robe on either side of the bayonet."

"It's wet. Blood?"

“AB+ according to the field test,” Wish stated. “You can see by the semicircular markings, one on either side. Whoever this was pushed the handle when it wouldn’t go in any further and struck his chest.”

“Right.”

“So why didn’t they take the bayonet with them?” I asked.

“That much the ME has figured out. Seems the angle and placement actually wedged it between the fourth and fifth ribs just left of center. Bernie tried to get it out after I took prints and couldn’t,” she explained.

I pulled on a pair of latex gloves, reached down and tugged on the handle.

“Careful. I don’t want things messed up any more than they are.”

“I think I can get it out, but I’ll have to turn the blade slightly,” I said.

“That will leave marks that aren’t there now!”

“So, mark it down. That way you’ll know they’re made by me.”

“But what if there’s something there we can’t see, something your twisting the blade will destroy?”

“Then we lose it and I take the rap.”

“It’s your funeral.”

I reached down and grabbed the handle of the bayonet firmly, then ever so gently twisted it to the right. Before I had hardly twisted it at all I pulled back gently and the blade slipped easily from the body.

“How’d you do that?”

“That was easy. See the blade was thrust in vertically so it was acting like a rib spreader and jammed itself in place. By turning it just a little I was able to dislodge it and remove it easily.”

“Not bad for a detective. Learn that on the force?”

“Actually I learned that in Hong Kong. And if I’m going to call you May you should be calling me Nat.”

“Gnat? You mean like the insect?”

“Okay, I deserved that. It’s Nat, short for Nathan.”

“And you learned that trick in Hong Kong?”

“It’s not really a trick, but that’s a whole other story,” I said. “Got a paper evidence bag? I’ll sign off on this and send it to the lab with the rest of the stuff.”

“It ain’t stuff,” she said firmly, but playfully. “It’s evidence.”

“Yes, Investigator Wish!”

“May!”

“Yes, May.”

I spotted a coffee shop that was still open. “Can I buy you a cup of coffee?” I asked.

“Nope!”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to seem...”

“...but you can buy me a cup of tea.”

“You like tea?”

“Love it.”

“Me too!”

“You mean you’re not one of them macho coffee-guzzling cops you read about in those cheesy detective novels?”

“Hardly. I grew up in Hong Kong, Kowloon actually, and developed a taste for good strong orange and black pekoe-blend teas.”

“Decaffeinated of course, right?”

“Heaven forbid! I guess in that regards I’m like the coffee guzzlers, I need my caffeine.”

We walked into the greasy little café. It was open, but dimly lit, like they were trying to save money by using twenty-watt bulbs or something. I led the way to a table by the greasy window. From there we could still see the crime scene. I motioned to the deep red fake leather upholstered seat and May K. Wish slid in, then I took the facing seat. Before we had a chance to say anything a middle-aged woman, brown hair, weary, brown eyes, a frumpy 140 pounds or so, came over to the table.

“Hi, hon! Can I take your order?” the waitress asked.

“Two hot teas, one decaf and one regular,” I said.

“That all?”

“That’s all.”

The waitress nodded and left.

This was how I always liked to get to know the new people I worked with. I let her ask me about my past, my time in Hong Kong, that scar on my right arm. Then I began to ask some questions of my own. I found that she was the only daughter of Arthur & Mattie Wish, but that she had four older brothers, Kevin, Alan, Frank and Dennis. They lived in various parts of the U.S. Kevin was a computer programmer out in Cleveland. Alan was an insurance agent in Tallahassee. Frank and Dennis were both cops, although only Frank worked as a beat cop in Manhattan. Dennis worked as a deputy sheriff in the town of Woodbury, New Jersey.

As it turned out, May had actually wanted to go into physical therapy, but Frank managed to talk her into taking the entrance exam for the NYPD. She passed in the upper ten percent of applicants. Always one to confront her obstacles straight on, May went to the academy, mostly because of all the taunting she got because of her name. May pretty much shut them up when she graduated third in her class. She especially excelled in self-defense class. Although not a full martial arts class with belts and all, she proved herself to be more than capable. One time, as she tells it, the instructor had asked her to come up and defend herself from him. He was playing the attacker. This instructor, she said, was a sergeant weighing about 190 pounds of pure muscle. Anyway, he came at her, and she sidestepped him to the left and with her right hand gave him a knife chop to his throat. He went down gasping for breath, at which point the class froze, hoping that she hadn’t permanently hurt him. In less than a minute he was breathing freely again, but his face was red. He never did use her for a volunteer again in his class.

She was hard, or that’s what she wanted people to think. Beneath there seemed to be someone who was kind and gentle. In many ways I could see myself in her before I became a Christian, even before I learned kung fu. After getting to know one another some, I steered the conversation, ever so gracefully, back to the case we were working on.

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The Honorable Judge William McGrath had spent a long day in criminal court, but the day promised to be much longer. He kissed his wife, Hattie, good night and headed for the den in their elegant East 82nd Street home. He had left the long black robe back in his office but was still dressed in a dark blue suit, white shirt and a blue and red striped tie. Although over sixty years old he looked spry for his age, and some might say, distinguished. His full head of hair was almost completely white, cut and combed to perfection. His clean-shaven face displayed a remarkable strong, square jaw, clear gray eyes and hardly a wrinkle in sight, except at the

corners of his eyes. He was a proud man, an honorable man, but still a man, something that even he tended to forget from time to time. This office also served as a mini library where he stored most of his law books. The bookshelves, like all the other wood trim, were of highly polished white oak. He's even searched and spent a good deal of money to buy a large white-oak desk, which at the moment was covered with case files. The leather chair was shiny from all the wear and tear it got. That too was something he had to have to fit his position as a district criminal court judge.

This used to be Harry's room, their son. He moved away after graduating from Harvard Law School and gotten himself married to some hussy in the Southwest. That was just over four years ago. Although Judge McGrath disapproved of Samantha he attended the wedding, but he told Harry how he felt she was clinging to him just for his money. They hadn't talked to each other since. No phone calls. No visits. No cards at Christmas or Easter. It was as if they had disowned one another. Harry was just as stubborn as his father and that caused some of the problems, but even when the judge received letters in the flowery hand of a woman from Harry's home in Fort Worth, he threw them away. So complete was his displeasure with his son that he turned his old room into his private study, erasing as many memories as he could, hiding where the bed was with the huge desk. The walls once covered with posters and trophies were now covered with bookshelves. Not a single item of Harry's remained in the room. Yet with all the camouflage, he still felt Harry's presence when he came into the room. He wouldn't admit it to anyone, not even to Hattie, his wife of forty-seven years, but the reason he spent so much time in his den was to feel close to Harry. He still remembered some tender moments they had shared when Harry was growing up. He would not tell anyone about those treasures in his heart, but they were there just the same.

The file on top of the pile on his desk was that of a man recently released from prison. His name was Adam Deveraux, but he called himself the "Bishop" and had formed his own religion, "The Church of the 3rd Covenant." The Bishop had just finished serving time for assault, but was also suspected of crimes far greater than these. He possessed an uncanny ability to seemingly read minds and claimed he was a prophet of God, yet his words reeked of profanity and hatred. He managed to exert a type of charisma about him among certain people. These would follow him blindly, doing whatever he asked of them as if God Himself were asking them to do such vile things. Part of the information retained in this folder was the fact that Judge W. McGrath had been the one to sentence the Bishop to ten years in prison. At that time the Bishop had looked at the judge and simply said, "One day I will be judge and executioner. One day I shall sentence you for what you have done today." He hadn't thought about it much. He'd heard so many idle threats over the years as judge. Yet next to the pile of case files lay his newspaper opened to the story about the death of Father Rierdon. Was it coincidence that this murder took place only days after the Bishop's release? One of the reasons McGrath thought these two events might be connected was that Father Rierdon was the judge's priest. He looked at the case filed and argued within himself as to whether to make this known to the investigating officials. After two and a half hours, he finally picked up the phone and dialed. A sleepy, female voice answered on the other end of the line. "This is Judge McGrath. I apologize for waking you up at such a late hour, but would Detective Adams be there?"

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"Hey, hero," Susan Adams began, half asleep, "it is for you."

I took the phone and exchanged a few pleasantries with Judge McGrath, who wanted to get right to the point. "I heard you're the detective they gave this Father Rierdon case to."

“Yes, sir. But I can’t talk about an ongoing investigation. You know that, your honor.”

“I don’t want information. I want to supply you with information that may have a bearing on the case.”

“This couldn’t wait until morning, sir?” I asked.

“I don’t know if it could or not. It may be that my life’s in danger.”

I was wide awake now. “Why do you say that, sir?”

“A few days ago, a real scumbag was released from prison. His name’s Adam Deveraux.”

“The Bishop?” I asked, amazed. I thought they’d locked that guy up for good, even if it was only assault. Trouble is...I had seen the file. Deveraux had beaten a Catholic nun senseless and then stuck her crucifix in her chest like a knife. It was only by some miracle she hadn’t died. Friends on the force who investigated the case said that the Bishop was responsible for a dozen other beatings and a few murders in NYC over a period of three years prior to his arrest for the assault. With this thick Southern drawl, you’d expect the tall, lanky white guy to be racially prejudiced. What investigators found out was that his prejudices took on religious overtones, even political, but never racial. This was oddly complex, since he formed his own religion, which he claimed was just another Christian denomination. The Church of the 3rd Covenant was nothing more than another hate group, drawn along his religious and ideological lines rather than racial.

“Yes, the Bishop,” Judge McGrath replied. “What you may not know is that he threatened me in court during the sentencing. You see, I was the judge who put him away.”

“Why do you think this murder has something to do with his keeping his threat?”

“I’ve received lots of threats in the past, but Deveraux was different. His statements were almost like promises he intended to keep, not simply threats. And he knew that Father Rierdon was my priest.”

“You think he’ll hurt you by hurting those around you?”

“At first. Then he’ll come for me. Detective, I’m an old man. I don’t have the fight in me I used to have. I’m afraid that if he does come for me he will succeed and he may also harm my wife. I can’t have that.”

“Sir, I want you to call Captain Isaiah Williams and tell him just what you’ve told me. I’m going to make a couple of calls and then be over there. I can’t see moving you at this hour, but I’ll put myself on the clock until Captain Williams can move the paper on something substantial.”

“I appreciate that, Detective.”

“Just be sure to call. I don’t care if you wake him up...and you can tell him I said so.”

“I will,” McGrath said, and the line went dead.

I called Marcus and left a message on his answering machine. Chances are the uniforms would get the security detail on this anyway so I might as well give my buddy a head’s up. Then I called May.

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“I’m not here,” Wish said, answering the phone. I could tell she had been sound asleep only moments before.

“May, it’s Nat!”

“What’s up?” she asked, the foggy sound in her voice all gone now.

“I just received a call from Judge McGrath.”

“What’s he want?”

“Protection. He’s been reading the papers and thinks our murder case has something to do with him.”

“How so?”

“A guy he sent to prison six years ago is back on the streets. This guy actually threatened him in court.”

“And he’s taking it seriously?”

“Yeah, and I think we should too. It’s the Bishop,” I said. “I met him and he’s the sort of things urban legends are made of. Anyway, I’m going over there now. We can double up in the morning. Hopefully Williams will assign some people permanently to him so we can get back to investigating this think. See you around eight?”

“You think this guy’s the real deal?”

“I know he’s one of those people you don’t want to put back out on the street. Of course he may have changed, but judging from the fact that his latest book was just released two months ago I rather doubt it.”

“He’s a writer too?”

“Oh yeah. Don’t know how much money he makes, but I know he stirs up a lot of muddy waters.”

“What’s the title of his latest book?”

“America: Nation of Prostitutes,” I answered.

“Don’t think I’ll get a copy. See you in the morning.”

“Thanks. Later.”

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May tried to get back to sleep but couldn’t. Why did Adams have to call and wake her if she was just going to relieve him in the morning? Couldn’t he just wait until he wanted to be relieved? Her mind was going a mile a minute. Like a supercomputer every fact, no matter how small, was being examined, categorized and thoroughly processed at an extraordinary rate. Unfortunately, you can’t do that and sleep at the same time. She thought about the bayonet, the fact that it had been jammed in with all the might a person could muster. She thought about the marks on the pavement, the position of the priest’s body. Why a bayonet at all? Why not a butcher’s knife, a machete, or whatever? There were plenty of different cutting tools the perp could’ve used to achieve the same results. Why a bayonet? Lab boys downtown were checking the weapon out, but one of them had already said he recognized it as an American WWII bayonet. The blade was long enough to do the job, but not as long as the Japanese bayonets of the same period. It sported a wooden handle that was quite thick. No one in their right mind would carry that around as a weapon, unless they wanted to kill someone. And just how does this “Bishop” guy fit into all this? What was his angle? Was he the killer? If so, why did he do it in such an obvious manner right after getting out of prison? Why would he even attempt something like this with the death threat in court records? May tried to process all this information and only found more questions. She had no answers, well very, very few answers, anyway. She finally drifted off into a troubled sleep around 5 AM. At 5:30 AM. her alarm went off. She began the day by swearing at me for waking her up with this news which had basically kept her awake all night.