



SOLEMNLY SWEAR

A Novel

Joe Porrazzo

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An Alex Porter Novel

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Chapter 6

Boston, Massachusetts

May 27

5:00PM

Because of the high visibility of the case and the inevitable political interference, Vince Vionelli's arraignment was combined with the preliminary hearing, and had taken place almost immediately. I had nervously entered the courtroom with my friend and lawyer, Joe Prater. "What can I expect on the stand?" I asked, not for the first time.

Joe kept walking. He was a few inches taller than me, still physically fit, and had preserved his soldier-like posture. "Expect anything and everything," Joe said without looking back at me.

Okay, that helps.

We took a seat three rows behind the prosecution. We rose on command, and I got my first look at Judge Harold Brennan, who had a reputation for stern sentencing when it came to the Mob. He was a barrel-chested bear of a man, stood at least six foot five, and couldn't have weighed less than 350 pounds. I turned to make a comment to Joe, but his eyes and a slight nod of his head told me to stifle my opinions. Apparently, this wasn't the first time that Joe had been in Judge Brennan's courtroom.

I scanned the room and was not surprised to see that the courtroom had exceeded its seating capacity; it was standing room only. People hugged every wall and some were standing in the aisles. More voices could be heard outside the courtroom. It was a big news day in Boston. Joe had warned me about the unavoidable media frenzy and had advised me not to comment—reporters had been calling me or showing up at my door almost non-stop.

The arraignment had already been delayed for forty-five minutes and showed no signs of starting anytime soon. I spotted District Attorney O'Donnell speaking to the defense. Seemingly, every practicing attorney in New England filled the courtroom. They walked back and forth to the bench providing information and documents. The judge seemed amused by two of the attorneys who engaged in a heated debate, complete with flailing arms and menacing gestures.

Finally, the judge quietly stopped the argument and told everyone to be seated. I liked this judge already.

I had an awkward feeling that someone was staring at me. I nonchalantly glanced to my left and saw that it was one of the defense lawyers who was seated between Vince and his primary attorney. He was one of Vince's backup lawyers, according to Joe, and he had his elbows on the table and was resting his head on his hands as he focused on me. I thought he resembled Larry, one of the Three Stooges, with his receding hairline and curly, shoulder-length hair. I stared back. The man slowly lifted his head, shook it from side to side, and then faced front.

What was that all about?

The judge began the proceedings and one of his first actions was to dismiss me. Joe had warned me that, as the state's star witness, I probably would be asked to wait outside the courtroom during the reading of charges and the entering of the plea. I rose and was again met with a blatant stare from the backup attorney. I glared at him and turned away. Mr. Vionelli, however, hadn't looked at me at all.

As I made my way out of the courtroom, I sensed hundreds of pairs of eyes following my progress. The most threatening belonged to Michael Vionelli. If intimidation was his purpose, then he had met his goal. I squared my shoulders and walked past him and out of the courtroom. Instantly mobbed by reporters, I pushed my way past them with the help of the door guard, who guided me into an empty office. The room was dark and quiet, and I took advantage of the solitude. I was informed that my wait might be minutes or hours. I found a *People* magazine and began to read about the distinguished career of the great movie director, Martin Scorsese.

Two hours later, the same guard came in to tell me that it was time to return to court. I felt eerily similar to a convicted killer about to take the last march down death row to the electric chair. I kept telling myself that I was just an innocent bystander of a hideous crime and that it was just a witness chair that I was walking toward to fulfill my duty as a citizen. Why didn't it feel like the right thing to do?

The guard opened the courtroom door, and all conversation abruptly ended. I walked down the aisle, passing Michael Vionelli without as much as a glance in his direction. Larry the Lawyer was now sitting sideways, with his arm resting on the top of the chair. His eyes seemed to be trying to burn holes right through me. I gave him a quick wink as I passed his table and watched as he quickly found someone else to stare at.

The bailiff directed me to the witness chair. The view was unnerving as I sat down and looked out at all the observers. Judge Brennan asked me a few quick questions: Was I there of my own accord? Had anyone involved in the trial tried to contact me? He also reiterated that this was just a preliminary hearing to discover if there was enough evidence to force the defendant to stand trial. I knew the main purpose was deciding whether the government has produced enough evidence to convince a reasonable jury that the defendant committed the crime charged. The judge told me not to be nervous and to just state the facts as I had witnessed them. But it was too late. His questioning had already made me nervous.

The lawyer for the prosecution spoke first, asking me to state what had happened on Revere Beach on that late July evening. I told the court that the Vionellis had passed me at a high rate of speed and that they appeared to be fighting for control of their SUV. When I described the near-miss of an accident with my car, the crowd in the courtroom collectively gasped, and the judge threatened to close the court if there were any more outbursts. But their outbursts became even louder when I described the details of the scene of the accident.

Judge Brennan pounded with his gavel, and the courtroom quickly became silent once more. Again, he warned the spectators to display the proper decorum or he would clear the courtroom. The judge nodded for me to continue. I described the amount of broken glass and the blood that seemed to be everywhere. As I spoke, I glanced over at Vincent Vionelli. His elbows were on the table, and his face, which seemed quite flushed, was in his hands. Larry the Lawyer had his arm around Vince, as if he were trying to console him. Two rows back, Michael Vionelli sat staring at me, his eyes unblinking.

I looked at Joe as I wrapped up my testimony. He gave me a wink for support. My hands were visibly shaking, so I put them on my lap, out of view of the court. This arraignment was turning out to be more difficult than I had expected, and I suspected things were going to get much worse before they got any better. Joe had told me that I might be on the stand for hours. I looked around the courtroom again. The number of hostile faces in the crowd far outnumbered the friendly or neutral ones. I was glad I had made Kate promise to stay away from the proceedings.

Vionelli's defense attorney had money written all over him. It didn't surprise me. I knew the Mob had deep pockets; they could easily afford this big-name lawyer. Johnny Shepherd looked the part, from his expensive suit to his gold watch and rings to his Gucci shoes. This career consigliere was notorious for protecting the Mob—he had a track record to back it up.

Joe had also warned me that the defense's strategy would be to discredit my testimony. I just didn't know how low they were prepared to go. It took fewer than five minutes to find out.

I could smell Shepherd's cologne as he approached the bench. He smiled at me, showing his perfect teeth. Laugh lines creased his tanned skin at the corners of his eyes, which were green and piercing, reminding me of a cat. He seemed like the type of guy I might befriend—until he pounced.

"Mr. Porter, please state your full name for the court," he said. I thought his tone was annoyingly condescending.

"Alexander James Porter."

"Mr. Porter, had you been drinking on the night of the accident?"

I glanced at Joe; he smiled and nodded. "I had one beer with dinner," I answered.

"Are you sure it was just one beer?" Shepherd asked smoothly.

"Yes," I quickly replied. "I'm quite certain."

"How long after having that drink did you witness the accident?"

Joe was on his feet in an instant. "Objection, your honor!"

“Overruled,” the judge said. “The information has relevance. But I remind you, Mr. Shepherd, this is an arraignment, not a trial. Stop speeding in my courtroom and adhere to arraignment procedures.” He turned to look at me. “You may answer the question, Mr. Porter.”

“About forty-five minutes,” I said.

Shepherd smiled. “Mr. Porter, I understand you live in Peabody. Please tell us what you were doing in Revere that evening.”

Where was he going with this? “I ... I just felt like driving to the beach. It was always a favorite spot for my wife and me.”

“Where is your wife now, Mr. Porter?”

I felt the blood rush to my face. This asshole knew my background better than I did.

Joe was back on his feet, but the judge waved him down. “Continue, Mr. Shepherd—but tread lightly.”

I took a deep breath. “She died over six years ago.”

“Mr. Porter ... didn’t your wife kill herself?”

I exploded. “What the hell does that have to do with anything?”

“I *object* to this line of questioning, your honor!” Joe called out.

The court was now a madhouse, and the judge banged his gavel repeatedly until order was restored. “Sustained.” Then he looked at me. “Mr. Porter, please restrain yourself.” He pointed his gavel at Shepherd. “Counselor, one more infraction will result in a charge of contempt.”

“I withdraw the question.” Shepherd took a moment to look contrite for the judge. Then he stared at me for a few seconds and asked, “Mr. Porter, how long did it take you to reach Mr. Vionelli’s car after you witnessed the accident?”

“A few minutes,” I answered.

“Mr. Vionelli’s statement indicates that the accident caused him to lose consciousness, and when he came to, he found his wife with a shard of glass protruding from her neck. Isn’t it possible that you arrived on the scene just as he was trying to dislodge that shard of glass?”

“No,” I replied without hesitation. “He was drawing the glass across her neck, not pulling it out.”

“Bullshit!” Michael Vionelli leaped from his chair, red faced and pointing at me. “He doesn’t know what he’s talking about!”

Again the courtroom erupted, and again the judge pounded his gavel and demanded order. Michael Vionelli was removed from the courtroom by two guards. Through all of this, Vince hadn’t moved. Larry the Lawyer bent over and whispered into Vince’s ear, but Vince held up his hand, as if telling Larry to stop.

The judge took a deep breath. “One more outburst,” he said evenly, “and I will clear the courtroom. This will become a private arraignment, complete with an official gag order.”

I looked around the room; people were staring in eager anticipation as if they were attending a Broadway show instead of sitting in a court of law. Shepherd continued. “Mr. Porter, isn’t it possible that Mr. Vionelli was, in fact, attempting to save his wife’s life and that it was your guilt—and your guilt alone—over not being able to save your own wife that—”

I was on my feet and reaching for his throat before I knew what was happening. The place went crazy, and guards quickly restrained me. The judge ordered one of the guards to escort me back to the holding room.

Joe later told me how close I had come to being held in contempt for my outburst. The judge did slap Shepherd with a contempt charge. And the case was ordered to trial.

Keep reading for book information and author reviews of Solemnly Swear...

Solemnly Swear

What if a man witnesses the brutal murder of a mafia boss' wife, by the mafia boss himself, subsequently receives bribes and threats not to testify--including a bomb wired to his car--only to find there is someone more sinister that wants him dead?

After a career of excitement and danger, former U.S. Air Force special agent Alex Porter retires and looks forward to leading a simple, civilian life. He celebrates the successes of his daughter, a college honor student and pilot candidate in the ROTC program, and is just starting to dip his toe into the dating pool again.

But when he comes upon an accident-turned- crime scene involving New England Mafia don Vince Vionelli, Porter lands in serious hot water. Vionelli is charged with murder, and Porter is the U.S. Justice Department's star witness against the crime boss. With the trial just days away, Vionelli's son terrorizes Porter and his daughter, forcing Porter to choose between testifying against the Mob and saving his own and his daughter's lives. But when other, even more deadly threats begin surfacing, Porter suspects there's yet another player in this ruthless game-one who wants him eliminated no matter what.

Full of danger, deceit, and revenge, Solemnly Swear is an action-packed suspense thriller that explores the fragile balance between justice and self-preservation.

Book Critic Acclaim for *Solemnly Swear*

“Joe Porrazzo’s debut novel is an accomplished first effort. *Solemnly Swear* takes the reader on an exciting, top-down and pedal-to-the-metal ride in a Mercedes SL...and the story flows effortlessly toward its excellent ending.

Joe Porrazzo has clearly written what he knows best. The author is a retired U. S. Air Force officer and the experience shows clearly in the composition of *Solemnly Swear*. The editing of *Solemnly Swear* is up in the stratosphere with the best. Although I love the taut editing, Joe Porrazzo's compositional style could easily have retained my interest through twice the page count. *Solemnly Swear* is a very technically competent book, certainly professional enough to sit with its peers on the Barnes and Noble shelf.

I know what you're thinking at this point: Come on, Mr. Nitpicky Book Critic, drop the other shoe. Surprise! The second shoe boots *Solemnly Swear* into the five-star bracket!

As Alex Porter begins to defog his brain and take the offensive against his mobile captors, the author picks up the pace and heads for the goal line...the final chapters and the ending are five-star-excitement quality!

Don't you dare pick up this book and begin reading in the middle, particularly toward the end! You will seriously regret spoiling the story for yourself. When Joe Porrazzo whips out the plot twists from Alex Porter's brain, *Solemnly Swear* kicks some serious butt.”

—**Floyd M. Orr, Author of *Timeline of America***

Book Critic Acclaim for *Solemnly Swear*

“Solemnly Swear is retired U.S. Air Force Officer Joe Porrazzo’s first, in hopefully a long line, of suspense novels.”

Mr. Porrazzo’s portrayal of the lead character Alex Porter gives the reader an instant connection with Porter’s well-developed and believable military personality. The reader bonds with Alex, a trustworthy and incorruptible friend, and Porrazzo gives us more than enough reasons to care about what happens to him.

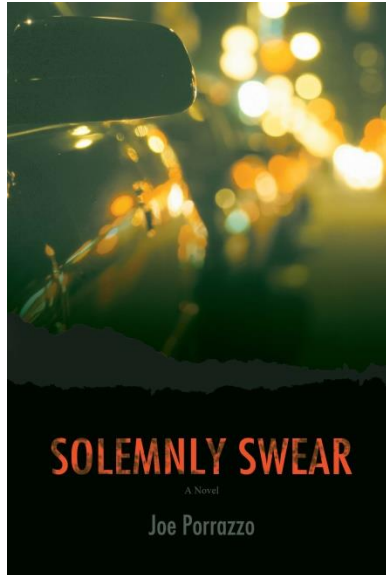
Alex is a former U.S. Air Force special agent whose retired life isn’t far removed from the dangers of his previous life as an American soldier. Riddled with guilt over the untimely death of his wife, troubled by nightmares associated with witnessing a grizzly crime scene involving a powerful mafia boss, and struggling with the obstacles of fatherhood, still Alex stands strong and resilient against the pressures of the untouchable antagonist; mobster Vince Vionelli.

Mr. Porrazzo’s thought-provoking storyline draws the reader in with one of the most impossible dilemmas a person (fictional or otherwise) can ever find themselves in – doing what’s morally right no matter what the cost – or protecting oneself and the ones we love.

The narration is smooth and easy to read. The dialogue is refreshingly realistic. And each chapter ends with just enough enticement to make the novel impossible to put down.

If you’re in the mood for a good mystery/thriller, I highly recommend, Joe Porrazzo’s *Solemnly Swear*. The plot is unique ... the pace is fast ... the direction is unpredictable ... and the final pages are shocking. What a great book with which to spend a weekend!”

—Claudia Pemberton, Author of *Love Leads the Way*



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Joe Porrazzo is a former U.S. Air Force officer and currently works for the Department of Defense. He earned a bachelors degree from Southern New Hampshire University and a masters degree from Central Michigan University. He also taught Aerospace Science for Air Force ROTC at the University of New Hampshire. A native New Englander, Porrazzo currently resides in Tucson, Arizona. You can visit his official web site at <https://www.joeporrazzo.com/>

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DELIBERATE DECEPTION

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By JOE PORRAZZO

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Seven months after leaving New England, and some unfinished business with an angry Mob boss; Alex...still grieving the tragic deaths of his wife and daughter...is asked by friend and lawyer, Joe Prater, to investigate the mysterious death of an old Army Ranger buddy in Arizona. Alex, now living in Tucson, takes on much more than he bargained for in this action-packed adventure.

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