

The Killing Season

MILES CORWIN



Penguin
Random House
EBURY PUBLISHING

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About the Book

Meet Pete Razanskas, 22-year veteran homicide cop and Marcella Winn, a rookie detective who grew up in the 'hood. They're an unlikely partnership whose job it is to attempt to close some of the hundreds of murder cases that happen every year in the gang-infested streets of South-Central LA. Crime reporter Miles Corwin gained unprecedented access to shadow them for the usual hot summer of endless homicide. We meet the cops, the victims and the murders (Crips and Bloods, drug dealers, psychopaths and even killer kids), witness their incredible daily lives and hear their stories in intimate detail. *The Killing Season* is a raw, shocking and riveting story of an extreme place not far from the ordinary world where war rages on the streets and life has little value.

About the Author

Miles Corwin is an award-winning former crime reporter for the *LA Times*. His books *The Killing Season* and *Homicide Special* were bestsellers, while his book *And Still We Rise* was an *LA Times* Book of the Year and winner of the PEN West award for non-fiction. He lives outside Los Angeles.

THE KILLING SEASON

A Summer Inside an LAPD
Homicide Division

Miles Corwin



In memory of my father, Lloyd Corwin



Winn and Razanskas in front of a map of South Los Angeles.

Introduction

The genesis of this book was a summer night that I spent with a homicide detective in South-Central Los Angeles. I was the crime reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, and I followed the detective in order to write about the changing nature of homicide in the city.

On that steamy Wednesday night in August, when the detective was called out to a murder scene, he contacted me. We met at the station and reached the scene at about midnight. A 15-year-old boy had been killed in a drive-by shooting. The boy had been walking home from a friend's house and listening to his Walkman when he was gunned down. He was not dressed like a gangbanger, and he was listening to the love songs of Minnie Riperton—not the gangsta rap favored by the gangbangers in the neighborhood. The detective talked to weeping relatives, neighbors and witnesses and concluded the victim was just a high-school boy caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We were at the scene for about 45 minutes when the detective's beeper went off and he was dispatched to another murder. As a supervising detective for the Los Angeles Police Department, his responsibility was to assist the lead detectives at murder scenes and oversee the initial investigations.

About a mile away from the first murder we found the body of a woman sprawled on the sidewalk near an alley. The crime scene was a testament to the power of crack cocaine. From the time the woman had struggled with the killer, taken a shot in the chest, stumbled back into a driveway and fallen as she slammed her head on the pavement, she continued to tightly clutch a small glass

cocaine pipe in her right hand. We had not been at the scene long when the detective was beeped again and sent to yet another murder. A blue Nissan was abandoned on a ramp leading to a freeway, and the driver was about 100 yards away, lying on his back, beside a concrete wall. He had been shot in the back and the side.

In three hours there had been three murders, all within one square mile. A typical weeknight in South-Central Los Angeles.

Months after the story had run, I continued to be haunted by that Wednesday night in August. I felt as if I had a brief glimpse of a quiet genocide that was taking place.

In more affluent neighborhoods, people whose relatives had been murdered often were unwilling to talk to reporters. But in South-Central families welcomed my presence. Sometimes I would show up weeks after a homicide, and family members would complain that their relative's murder had not merited a single line in the newspaper or even a brief mention on the local news. They felt the news media did not care and the detectives did not care. They simply wanted someone to pay attention to what had happened to their family member, what had happened to their neighborhood. After these interviews, I often thought of the line from *Death of a Salesman* when Willy Loman's wife, infuriated that her husband could so easily be discarded by his firm after a lifetime of service, cried out, "Attention must be paid!"

I decided to pay attention to this mounting murder toll and write a book about homicide in South-Central Los Angeles, about the victims and the killers and the neighborhoods and the detectives.

There is a great clamor about how the media overemphasize crime news. But in South-Central, crime news is *underemphasized*. A home invasion robbery in West Los Angeles or a carjacking in the San Fernando Valley often will lead the evening news. But in 1993—when I spent that

summer night with the homicide detective—there were more than 400 murders in South-Central, and few had received any news coverage, any attention whatsoever. If 400 American soldiers were killed during a peacekeeping mission, it would be debated at the highest levels of government and lead to major changes in foreign policy. If 400 people in West Los Angeles were murdered in one year, the response by police, city officials and the business community would be unprecedented. But 400 murders in South-Central were considered business as usual. A life in South-Central simply seemed to have less value than a life in other parts of the city.

This cavalier attitude toward murder in South-Central has changed little over the years and is reflected in the 1940 Raymond Chandler novel, *Farewell, My Lovely*. When a South-Central bar owner is killed, a burnt-out homicide detective by the name of Nulty is uninterested in the case because the victim was black.

“Another shine killing,” Nulty tells private eye Philip Marlowe. “That’s what I rate after eighteen years in this man’s police department. No pix, no space, not even four lines in the want-ad section.”

Later, Marlowe says, “I went down to the lobby of the building to buy an evening paper. Nulty was right in one thing at least. The Montgomery killing hadn’t even made the want-ad section so far.”

Media attention is important on a number of levels. When reporters publicize a murder, police department brass usually respond. They often will devote more resources to the investigation, put more pressure on the detectives, scrutinize the investigation more closely. But when hundreds of murders a year are ignored, detectives can lose motivation, and the department leaders, many of whom are highly political, will devote more resources to higher-profile crimes.

The murder rate in South-Central and in most major cities has dropped since the early 1990s. But it still remains appallingly high. And the decline is expected to soon be reversed. While the murder rate among adults 25 and older has been falling, the rate among teenage boys and young men in their early 20s has increased sharply. During the late 1990s, and for the following decade, there will be a surge in the juvenile population. As a result, criminologists expect another marked rise in homicides.

It is often the white suburbanites who are the most outspoken about crime, who have the most clout with politicians, who prompt the crime-fighting legislation. But it is the poor, the inner-city residents, who are victimized the most. And when it comes to preventing and solving crime, these residents often receive unequal treatment. They must rely on an overburdened police department and overburdened detectives—just as they rely on a deteriorating school system and crowded public hospitals.

Homicide detectives in South-Central investigate two to three times more cases than homicide detectives in most other LAPD divisions. The two-detective homicide teams in South-Central handle up to 20 murder investigations a year. Former Bronx homicide commander Vernon Geberth, author of *Practical Homicide Investigation*, says this is “totally inappropriate and unacceptable. It is physically impossible for them to be doing everything they’re supposed to be doing on their cases.” An appropriate caseload, he says, is about six to eight homicide investigations a year.

The onerous caseload has had a profound impact on the overwhelmed, overworked detectives. They, too, are casualties of the murder count.

That August night I tracked the three murders, Pete “Raz” Razanskas headed the homicide investigation of the woman who had been found clutching the crack pipe. I watched him work a few other crime scenes that year, and I enjoyed his sense of humor and was impressed with his ability to spot

obscure details that other detectives missed, details that later proved to be significant.

Razanskas seemed like the ideal guide for the book. He treated people on the street with respect; he seemed to truly care when he talked to the families of murder victims. And unlike most homicide detectives who work in South-Central for a few years and then request a transfer to a quieter division station or a high-profile unit downtown, Razanskas has chosen to spend his entire 22-year career in South-Central, as a patrolman, gang investigator, and detective.

Razanskas also supervises detective trainees, and I thought that the best way for me to learn about homicide in South-Central was to follow him as he trained a new detective. I could learn along with his new partner.

But I wanted to make sure he had the right trainee. I wanted to follow someone who cared about South-Central and didn't look upon the stint there as merely another stage in career advancement. I wanted someone who was bright and knowledgeable enough so I could learn from the trainee as well as from Razanskas. And I wanted someone who was openminded enough to allow a reporter to be, in essence, a third partner. I knew Razanskas was due for a new trainee. If his new partner did not seem like the right choice for me, I had planned on finding another detective team.

I soon discovered that his new partner was a woman named Marcella Winn, a child of South-Central who would now be investigating murders in the neighborhood where she was raised. During her seven years with the LAPD, Winn proved that she had the toughness and the smarts to succeed in a department that traditionally had been white and male. Winn was confident of her abilities, self-assured and very outspoken. She would not be one of those timid trainees who would do something just because Razanskas told her to do it.

As soon as I met Winn, I knew I had found the right detective team. And they assented to my presence because they believed it was important that people learn how the hundreds of murders a year in South-Central take a terrible toll on the residents, the families of the victims, and the detectives.

But while Razanskas and Winn were excellent guides for my journey, I did not want to rely entirely on the two detectives. I did not want to view murder solely from a police perspective.

To get a better understanding of the consequences of murder and its impact on a community, I also spent much time talking to therapists and clients at Loved Ones of Homicide Victims, a remarkable South-Central counseling center. There has been much written about black-on-black crime. The founders of Loved Ones decided to create a place for black-on-black healing. They sought out and hired accomplished black therapists to work with their mostly black clientele, who had lost children, parents, spouses and siblings to homicide.

Every Saturday morning, a group of people gathered at the center's headquarters, behind a Baptist church. They were gracious enough to allow me to sit in on their sessions during the summer and fall of 1994, while they met with a therapist and shared their anguish, their fear, their struggle to survive the loss of loved ones.

I shadowed Razanskas and Winn from March, when Winn investigated her first murder, until October, when she and Razanskas split up. I was there in the middle of the night when they picked up their "fresh blood" cases and began their crime scene investigations. I was with them in the interview rooms when they interrogated suspects. I was with them when they notified parents that their children had been murdered. I was with them at autopsies and when they traveled across the country to arrest fugitives and bring them back to Los Angeles.

Although I followed the detectives' cases from spring to fall, the focus of this book is on one summer in South-Central. A summer in South-Central, in terms of murder statistics, is like a year in many other high-crime neighborhoods. Summer is when there is more than one murder a day in South-Central, when weary detectives lurch from crime scene to crime scene, when the bodies stack up faster than the coroner can pick them up. Summer is the most murderous time of year. Summer is the homicide detective's season.

On the eve of the summer of 1994, Razanskas and Winn became partners, and during this prelude to the carnage that summer brings, they had the luxury of time as Razanskas guided Winn through her first cases. Once summer began the pace quickened dramatically. And throughout the summer, Razanskas watched Winn carefully because he knew if she could make it through the crucible of a summer in South-Central, she could make it in homicide.

For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
with most miraculous organ.

—William Shakespeare,

Hamlet

Prologue

Pete Razanskas was a young police officer, just a few years out of the academy, when he and his partner were dispatched to a gang shooting. The homicide detectives at the scene were perplexed by a 3-inch cut on the victim's right palm because there was no evidence indicating a knife had been used.

It was Razanskas who spotted a slight lead-colored smear on the victim's nickel-plated .32 semiautomatic. He told the detectives that when the shooter fired at the victim, one of the bullets probably hit the victim's gun. This could have caused the bullet to fragment, and a sliver from the bullet might have cut the victim's hand.

One of the detectives, an old-timer everyone called Fuzzy, looked Razanskas up and down and nodded. "You got a good eye, kid," Fuzzy told him. "One of these days you ought to work homicide with us."

A few years later, Razanskas picked up his first homicide experience when he was promoted to a specialized unit that investigated Latino gangs. Although nobody in the unit was a detective yet, they were allowed to work gang murders. In the early 1980s, after about ten years with the LAPD, he made detective and was assigned to a station in South-Central Los Angeles where he investigated robberies. This was regarded as the minor leagues then, a training ground for homicide. In those days a lieutenant would approach an up-and-coming young detective and say, "Son, you want to get divorced? How about working homicide?" After a year working robberies, that question was posed to Razanskas.

Years later, he realized that the lieutenant's words had been prophetic. Two of his marriages ended in divorce. The hours had been too long and the pressure too great. He

knew he had spent too much time at the station, time he should have spent at home with his family. He had made it to homicide and he had succeeded there. But Razanskas sometimes wonders if the price he paid was too high.

Razanskas' route to the Los Angeles Police Department was an unlikely and circuitous one. His parents are Lithuanian. He spent his childhood years in Venezuela. He went to high school in southern California. And now he wears Western boots, chews tobacco and dresses and acts like a cowboy.

Razanskas, who is 46, has played the part so long he now even looks a bit like a grizzled cowhand. He is lean, has a broad, gray, droopy mustache and deep-set pale blue eyes with crow's-feet from too much squinting. At homicide scenes, he slowly saunters about, as if he is reluctantly heading out to the barn on a cold morning.

In the early 1970s, when Razanskas returned from Vietnam as an Air Force explosives expert, he considered going to college and studying electrical engineering. But he was married, broke and needed a job. He decided to become a cop.

After graduating from the LAPD academy, Razanskas was assigned to a South-Central police station, a few miles from the home of Marcella Winn, a junior-high-school student at the time, who, 20 years later, would be his partner.

A year before Razanskas joined the LAPD, Winn, who was 13, moved to South-Central with her family from a small Texas town near the Gulf of Mexico. South-Central was a far different place then. The gangs and drugs had not yet taken hold. Industry had not entirely abandoned the area. The Latino influx had not yet begun.

Winn learned about hard work from her father. He was up at five o'clock every morning, collecting garbage for the city. He worked his route alone; he felt that a partner would slow

him down. When he returned home in the early afternoon, he showered, ate lunch and headed off for his second job as a mail handler at the post office. He returned home after midnight, was up at five, and did it all over again.

By the time Winn was finishing high school, her neighborhood had changed. The Rollin 60s began covering the walls with graffiti and doing drive-bys. Some of the boys on her street ran with the 60s, but Winn's parents were strict and would not let their daughters associate with them. Winn was a good student and was known as a girl who did not hang out.

After high school, Winn worked at a law office and attended community college and, later, a state college. When she was 30 units shy of her degree in political science, she quit school. She was bored in college and she wanted to make some money. Winn had considered becoming an attorney but decided she was too restless to spend her life at a desk.

She decided to become a cop, in part because police work was a way for her to protect her neighborhood from some of the forces that were destroying it. She was angry that everyone she knew seemed to have lost a family member or a close friend to homicide, angry that people did not feel safe on their own streets. She wanted to do something to change her neighborhood, to bring it back to the way it once was.

Many of her friends were shocked by her decision to join the LAPD, which had a long-standing reputation in the black community for racism and brutality. Being a black cop in South-Central adds just one more difficulty to an already difficult job. When she first began working patrol, suspects would ask her, "What you want to arrest a brother for?" She usually deflected comments like this with a quip, "If you can't take the heat, get your ass off the street." It was too complicated to explain to them why she became a cop.

Winn is a tall, imposing woman and can be intimidating when she needs to be. She has spent a lot of time lifting weights in the police academy gym, but she does not have the mien nor the manner of a body builder. Winn, who is 35 and single, can quickly lose the wary cop demeanor and turn on the charm when she needs something from a surly desk sergeant.

Since Winn has joined the homicide unit, she has heard fewer snide comments on the street. While patrol officers, particularly black patrol officers, often are challenged in South-Central, their usefulness questioned, their motives impugned, residents cut homicide detectives some slack because they share a common goal: They both want the killers off the street.

South-Central is not an isolated, monolithic neighborhood of crumbling high-rise tenements, like East Coast slums. Much of the area consists of vast tracts of stucco bungalows, small apartment buildings and palm trees that belie the danger on the streets.

When visitors travel through South-Central, they often ask, "Where's the ghetto?" The answer always surprises them: "You're in it."

South-Central is a microcosm of Los Angeles, and, like the city, it is a pastiche of many neighborhoods. It is composed of working-class neighborhoods with well-kept single-family homes; pockets of dilapidated apartments, rock houses and corner hookers; crumbling commercial strips dominated by liquor stores and check-cashing shops. This is a Los Angeles that is unknown to most residents of the city, a city so sprawling and segregated, it is still possible to spend an entire lifetime in Santa Monica or Encino and never find a single reason to visit South-Central.

More than 500,000 people live here, about a third of the households subsisting below the national poverty level. It is a multiethnic city within a city—once mostly black, now

about half Latino—with simmering racial tensions and dozens of warring gang factions.

Razanskas and Winn lived through the changes in the area—he as a police officer, she as a schoolgirl—that created the burgeoning homicide rate that has kept them in South-Central and led to their partnership.

Razanskas and Winn are assigned to South Bureau Homicide, which is responsible for all murders in Los Angeles' killing fields, a jagged strip of streets that runs from South Los Angeles to the harbor. This is such murderous terrain that if it were a separate city it would rank among the nation's top ten for homicides. Razanskas and Winn work the most violent sector in a violent bureau: 77th Street Division, the heart of South-Central.

Razanskas, a supervising detective, and Winn, a detective trainee, are partners. For a while Razanskas also will be Winn's mentor and teach her the rudiments of homicide investigation.

It is no accident, not simply the luck of the draw, that Razanskas, an easygoing good old boy, and Winn, an intense, ambitious black woman, are partners. Lieutenant Sergio Robleto, who heads South Bureau Homicide, often pairs up detectives with disparate temperaments and divergent backgrounds. He believes the partnership will develop a greater range than the sum of its parts. He knows Razanskas has the patience of a hunter who likes to slowly stalk his quarry before making a move. But sometimes Razanskas can be too patient, can approach a case too deliberately. Robleto wants Razanskas to be occasionally prodded by a young, gung-ho detective who will push him and force him to justify any delay.

Robleto knows that Winn is a hard charger, an intense, impatient detective who is eager to rack up arrests and quickly move on to the next case. He wants Winn to work

with someone who knows the value of slowing down an investigation.

Razanskas has such a strong personality he can easily intimidate a trainee. But Robleto knows Winn is not easily intimidated. It is not easy for a black woman cop to succeed in the LAPD, where sexual harassment and racism in the ranks have long been a problem. Winn learned that to endure and prevail in the department, she had to follow one factum: Don't take any shit. She does not intend to get pushed around on the street, nor in the squad room.

Homicide in South-Central is a young detectives' game. Most of the detectives are in their 20s and 30s. Razanskas is the second-oldest case-carrying detective in the unit. Most of the detectives he started with have retired, or are now supervisors. Most cannot sustain the pace of working 24 hours, even 48 hours at a stretch, juggling dozens of old cases while attempting to keep track of an inexorable wave of new ones. This takes its toll. And a few of Razanskas' supervisors believe it has taken its toll on him.

He still can be dazzling at crime scenes. His knowledge of firearms, trajectories, ammunition types and other nuances of homicide still is highly respected. He still has a remarkable memory and can recall arcane details from ancient cases. But his supervisors have been carping at him lately about late reports and insufficient follow-up work on cases. They believe he is approaching burnout. If he can't convince them otherwise, he may be forced to leave the bureau.

In some homicide units, detectives can go on, year after year, aging gracefully until retirement. Their experience and years of service are looked on as an asset. But these are units where detectives may work only a handful of homicides a year. At South Bureau, detectives have one of the heaviest workloads in the country. Some cannot take the grind. They work a year or two and then request a transfer.

Razanskas has been investigating homicides almost 15 years.

As Razanskas and Winn begin their partnership, Winn has to prove she belongs in homicide. And Razanskas has to prove he is still the detective he once was. At the same time, he has to teach Winn how to investigate homicides in some of the most violent neighborhoods in the nation, during the most murderous time of year.

From the overcast days in June when the fog never seems to burn off and the murder rate holds steady, to the sweltering days in July when the homicide toll begins to rise, to the bloody days in August when there are sometimes more than a dozen murders on a single weekend, to the final deadly heat wave of summer when the Santa Ana winds howl down the mountain passes and people begin pulling triggers for no apparent reason, this is a summer in South-Central.

CHAPTER 1

The First Murder

Friday, March 25

Homicide detectives in South-Central Los Angeles usually do not wait long for a murder. On Detective Marcella Winn's first weekend on call, she spends an edgy Friday evening at home, waiting for the call of death. She watches a video of the movie *Tombstone* and munches on popcorn, but cannot keep her mind on the plot. She keeps waiting for the phone to ring. Before going to sleep she lays out her gold linen blazer, beige blouse and green rayon slacks; she does not want to have to fumble through her closet in the middle of the night looking for the right color combination. Winn has been in the homicide bureau only two weeks and this will be her first murder investigation. She would just as soon get started tonight. But this is a rainy March night, one of the rare Friday nights in South-Central when people are not being battered, bludgeoned, knifed or shot to death.

On Saturday morning, she cancels her pedicure appointment. She is afraid of having to race to a murder scene with wet nails. Winn spends a few hours watching reruns on television, but she cannot relax. Waiting for a homicide call is like waiting for that big sneeze that just won't come.

When the sun goes down, Winn is sure that tonight will be the night. After all, this is Saturday night, the most murderous night of the week. She is number one on the weekend rotation, which means she rolls on the first murder of the weekend. And there is a full moon, which usually

kicks the pace of mayhem and murder into a high gear. She bakes a chicken breast and a potato and watches a video of *A River Runs Through It*. At 9 P.M., she turns in, hoping to catch at least a few hours' sleep. She tosses and turns, waking up every hour or two to check her answering machine and her beeper, to make sure she has not slept through a call.

By Sunday morning Winn is a wreck. She buys a paper and discovers people were murdered all over the city this weekend. Just not in South-Central. She takes her beeper and cellular phone to the gym and spends a few hours on the treadmill and weight machines, hoping to work off some nervous energy. It is drizzling Sunday night, and she invites a friend over to play dominoes. After a few games, she tells him, "You better go home now. I may get one." Then Winn thinks for a moment and says, "I don't think so. This is Sunday night."

They watch television for a few hours, he heads home and she crawls into bed. The weekend was a wash, Winn figures. All that worry for nothing. She dozes off at 11.

On this cool, breezy spring weekend, Felipe Angeles Gonzales spends Friday night at home, a small South-Central bungalow that he shares with nine other recent immigrants from Mexico City. He and a few roommates watch a movie called *El Coyote y La Bronca* on the Spanish language television station. On Saturday morning he is up at 5:30. Gonzales and a friend, who both work at a stereo manufacturing company, buy a few car stereos, amplifiers and speakers from the owner and spend the day selling them at a swap meet.

He is separated from his wife, who lives in Mexico with his four daughters, but he sends money home every month. His father drives a beat-up Volkswagen for a taxi company because he cannot afford his own cab. When Gonzales was 16 he, too, began working for the taxi company, and he

spent more than 10 years driving a company cab. Gonzales' dream is to save enough money so he can return to Mexico, buy his own taxi and house and live near his daughters.

During the week, Gonzales works 10 to 12 hours a day, gluing fabric on speaker boxes. He attends English classes every weeknight and works most weekends at the swap meet. His one release, his one break from the long hours, the monotonous work, the homesickness, the danger he feels every day on the streets, is dancing. On Saturday night, after working at the swap meet all day, he drives to a friend's birthday party where he knows he can dance to his favorite music: cumbia, an earthy Afro-Columbian sound popular among young Latino immigrants. He begins dancing from the moment he arrives at the apartment, tiring out a number of partners, and dances until midnight, when the party breaks up.

Gonzales returns to the swap meet on Sunday. In the evening he and a few roommates prepare a dinner of *carne asada* with tortillas, salsa and one of Gonzales' favorite dishes-*nopales*, sautéed cactus leaves. They listen to cumbia for a few hours, until two of Gonzales' roommates decide to pick up a six-pack of beer at a liquor store. Gonzales asks them to do him a favor. On the way back from the store, he wants them to stop by the apartment of a woman he knows. He wants to see if she is there. They pick up the beer and drop him off near her apartment, at the corner of 49th and Figueroa.

"Wait for me," he tells them, as he climbs out of the car. "I'll be back in a minute."

It seems to Winn that she had just closed her eyes when the telephone finally rings. She checks her alarm clock. It is a few minutes before midnight. "This is it," she says to herself. "No one else would call this late."

"You got one," the night supervisor tells her.

"What's the story?" she asks him.

“Male Hispanic. Shot in the chest. On the street. Two possible witnesses.”

“Where?”

“Forty-ninth and Figueroa.”

Winn meets Detective Pete “Raz” Razanskas, who is waiting at a police station parking lot in an unmarked squad car, engine running. Winn is a detective trainee and Razanskas is her supervisor—and her partner. Winn has passed the written detective exam and is waiting to take her orals. She has all the responsibility and authority of a detective. Now she must earn her shield.

Razanskas pulls out of the parking lot and asks Winn, “What you got?”

“One vic,” she says. “Forty-ninth and Fig. Two possible wits.”

“Did you write it all down?”

“No.”

“You got to write down the details,” he tells her. “Who told you and at exactly what time.”

Winn stares glumly out the window. This night, she thinks, is getting off to a bad start.

Razanskas and Winn pull up to the murder scene, an intersection lined with ramshackle two-story apartment buildings, storefront churches, a used-car lot and an auto repair shop advertising the installation of “Sun Ruffs.” A few palm trees break the weathered monotony of the neighborhood, a hint of the tropics in the ghetto. The area is blocked off with yellow crime-scene tape. A handful of bystanders strain against the tape, trying to get a look at the body. There is an eerie quiet on this early Monday morning; the only sounds are the staccato dispatches from the squad car radios and the hissing of the flares.

Razanskas and Winn grab their flashlights and walk to the edge of the flares. He looks off into the distance and impersonates Robert Duvall playing the whacked-out colonel

in *Apocalypse Now*. “Ah,” says Razanskas, breathing deeply through his nose. “I love the smell of flares at a murder scene. It smells like victory.”

Winn still seems half-asleep, but Razanskas is full of energy, laughing and pacing beside the flares. This is the part of the investigation he enjoys the most, when there is just a body and a few possible witnesses who may or may not have seen anything, and he has to search for threads of evidence, vague leads, shades of clues, sort it all out, and ultimately figure out what happened. Razanskas enjoys working with trainees at murder scenes. This is his stage and he is playing his favorite part—the lead.

He and Winn approach a uniformed officer who is leaning against a squad car. The officer tells them he was only able to locate one witness, who is back at the station giving a statement. The witness will be of little use because he saw the killing from a distance. All he knows is that three men in a car were shot in what looked like a botched robbery. Two of the victims, who were bleeding heavily, sped away and left the slain man on the sidewalk. Both victims in the car were shot several times and now are in surgery. One may not make it.

Razanskas turns to Winn and says, “You got one victim tits up. You got another victim circling the drain. If he goes down, you got a twofer.”

The detectives have little to go on. Was it an attempted carjacking? Or was it a straight robbery? Did the men resist? Or were they shot anyway? How did the victim end up on the street?

Razanskas starts with the physical evidence. The body is laid out on the sidewalk under a white sheet. Two shell casings, the victim’s glasses and a can of beer he had been drinking are all circled in chalk. The drizzle has stopped and the skies have cleared. Shallow puddles by the curb glisten under the full moon, and the white sheet looks like it is glowing.

Razanskas shows Winn how to diagram the crime scene. He tells her to include the location of the streetlamps and the flood lights from a storefront church. This will make it difficult for defense attorneys to impeach witnesses—if any turn up. He tells her to record that there is a full moon tonight and to include the temperature. He demonstrates how to record the location of evidence with a measuring tool that looks like a golf club with wheels. She records the data while he calls out, “Shell casings one inch south of the north curb . . . beer can forty-three inches north of the north curb . . . eyeglass fragment fifteen inches east of the east curb.” The one thing they cannot do at the scene, Razanskas explains, is go through the victim’s pockets and search for clues or identification. In fact, they are not allowed to even touch the victim until the coroner investigator arrives. He has first crack at the body.

“I’m just walking you through this now because it’s your first one,” he tells Winn after all the evidence is logged. “But you’re not my secretary. You’re my partner.”

A hooker wanders by and tries to climb underneath the crime-scene tape to get to the other side of the street. A uniformed officer berates her. Razanskas calls him off.

“The uniformed guys hate hookers,” he whispers to Winn. “But I love ’em. Treat ’em right and they can be a good source of information for you.”

He walks over to the hooker and says, “Hey, want a date tonight?”

The hooker, who is wearing a tight black skirt and spike heels, scowls at him for a moment. But as he walks closer she recognizes him and smiles broadly. “Hey, Raz,” she says. “Wha’s up?”

Razanskas investigated her brother’s murder a few years ago and caught the killer. He asks her softly, so other bystanders cannot hear, if she knows what happened. She says she does not, but promises to ask around.

Razanskas and Winn approach the victim's body, and she spots a syringe and a few balled-up scraps of paper. She crouches, shines her flashlight on the syringe and studies it, concentrating intently.

"Don't worry about the needle," Razanskas tells her. "All that crap was left by the paramedics who came and went before we got here."

Winn is embarrassed, flicks off her flashlight and slaps it on her palm. She shakes her head. Everything is so new and unfamiliar to her. She feels self-conscious following Razanskas like a puppy, wandering about in the dark, not knowing what she is supposed to be looking for. And she is worried. Although this is her first murder, Winn is listed as the primary investigator on the case—partners usually alternate—which means she is responsible for solving it. And this case looks to her like a loser. There are no decent witnesses and there is no solid evidence. She bemoans her rotten luck. Why did she have to get stuck with this one? Why couldn't she have picked up a slamdunker for her first case? Maybe there is more to the case, but she cannot see it.

Winn has been promoted quickly and often during her seven years with the Los Angeles Police Department: from patrol to a gang task force, to vice, to an elite burglary unit, to a detective trainee in bunco forgery, where she investigated a number of complex white-collar crimes. She has been successful in every unit she has worked. But now Winn worries that murder cases might exceed her abilities, that she simply may not have the skills to be a homicide detective.

She decides if she is responsible for solving the case, she is going to take some initiative. She is going to search for some evidence on her own. She wanders off into the darkness in the hopes of finding more bullet slugs.

Ten minutes later she returns. With the first break of the case. She found a witness. A true eyewitness. She is so