

**HORSE OF A  
DIFFERENT  
COLOR**



**JOHN L.  
LANSDALE**



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**JOHN L. LANSDALE**

BookVoice Publishing 2017

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**ISBN**

978-0-9990361-4-3

BookVoice Publishing

PO Box 1528

Chandler, TX 75758

[www.bookvoicepublishing.com](http://www.bookvoicepublishing.com)

[www.bvpstore.com](http://www.bvpstore.com)

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*For Pam,  
A real detective*



*"Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men."*  
**The Shadow** radio drama



# PROLOGUE

## *Officer Down*

*Fifth Ward projects  
Houston, Texas  
12:05 A.M.*

She lay on the bare mattress, naked, in a spread-eagle position on her back; her beautiful body drenched in sweat and her wet green eyes wide with fear. Her mouth was covered with duct tape and her hands and feet bound to the bed post with leather straps. A foul smell of dampness and decay filled the empty room.

Rain drops tapped on the dirty windows and the car lights made the rain drops look like sparkling rhinestones as they slid down the windows in the wee hours of the night.

A door opened and a tall, wet shadow appeared in the open doorway. She could make out the vague image of a gun. Tears ran down her cheeks; she fought at the straps.

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She screamed but no sound came out. The shadow stepped inside the door and shined a flashlight on her.

"It's alright, I'm a cop," he said.

She closed her eyes and sighed. They found her. She had been rescued. Her prayers were answered.

Suddenly, a second shadow appeared in the doorway behind the first, holding something long and shiny. She squirmed and darted her eyes back and forth, shook her head up and down as a warning, but the dark night betrayed her and the cop kept moving toward her.

Then she saw it. It was a knife, a killing knife, in the hand of the dark figure behind the cop. In the blink of an eye, the knife plunged into his body. Blood gushed out and ran down his back. He crumbled to the floor, his gun sliding from his hand.

*Houston Memorial Hospital  
One Month Later*

In Room 649 of the physical rehabilitation ward, Rustin Kemp struggled to raise his thirty-year-old, six-foot-three body up in bed on the pull-up bar. His blue eyes showed the pain as he tugged on the bar.

Sunlight splashed across the walls of the room through a window on a bright autumn day, painting them with a multi-colored pattern. A red porcelain vase with a dozen red roses in it and a card propped against it read, "Get well soon - from all the gang."

Rustin's boss, Captain Bill Lucas, stood beside the bed, his thin brown hair showing a shiny bald spot. Sagging jaws rested on the collar of a white shirt under a dark blue suit coat and a red tie draped over a pudgy belly swung back and forth like a pendulum.

"Everyone wanted to let you know they were thinking of you," he said. "Thought I would deliver the flowers and

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see how you were doing. The son of a bitch left you for dead.”

Rustin dropped his hands from the pull bar, adjusted his pillow and looked at Bill Lucas.

“Can’t walk yet,” he said, “but the Doc thinks I will. I won’t be doing any dancing, but I may be able to get around good enough to find that bastard if it’s the last thing I ever do.”

“I hope so, Rustin, but as my daddy used to say on the farm, ‘We got a hard row to hoe.’ No DNA, nothing except the horrific things he did to her. Homicide has had a crew on the case ever since you went down. It looks like she partied too hard and ran into the wrong guy. He may be in jail for something else, or laying low for a while.”

“He’ll show up,” Rustin said. “The sick ones always do. I have to get out of this bed. There’s something in the back of my mind that keeps bugging me. Something I need to remember that won’t come to me.”

“Rustin, if you hadn’t been chasing that crackhead and stumbled in on her she may have disappeared like a lot of the others, and then no one would have known what happened to her. Unfortunately, it didn’t turn out good. But at least her family got to bury her.”

“All the more reason I have to find him, Bill.”

“What you need to do is concentrate on getting well.”

“I am, and I’ll be planning how I’m going to catch that son of a bitch, too.”

“You’re a hard-headed man, Rustin.”

“Been told that before.”

Bill laughed and patted Rustin on the arm.

“Oh, I’m going to walk again. You can count on that.”

“If you need anything let me know.”

“I will. Tell everyone at the station I said thanks.”



# **PART ONE**



# 1

## *One Year Later*

Julie Crawford just turned twenty-one. She was celebrating her adulthood on a Saturday night in downtown Warfield, Texas with friends and some of the club regulars at Griffin's Bar and Grill. Griffin's looked like a bastard cousin to Applebee's, with a smaller menu and a longer bar.

"Hey everybody," Julie said, standing up. "This is my last night at Griffin's. My grandpa left me a bundle; I'm headed to Hollywood to be an actress! I don't have to worry about going to law school anymore to please mommy and daddy."

A tall, thin, elderly gentleman in the back of the room with white hair to his shoulders stood up holding a glass of beer. "I propose a toast to the birthday girl," he said. "She's certainly pretty enough to be a movie star. I'm old enough to

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remember June Allison. Julie reminds me of her, and the world could use another June Allison.”

Everyone stood up, raised their glasses, gave a cheer and drank.

“Thanks everybody!” Julie said. “That’s Mr. Rod Burger, my private drama coach who proposed the toast. He’s a little prejudiced since my folks pay him a small fortune to train me.”

Everyone laughed.

About midnight, Julie went to pee and never came back.

Two days later, two guys fishing found her mutilated body floating in the Trinity River. The police report said it would be a week before the cause of death could be determined.

At the request of the Warfield Police Department, Dallas PD sent fifteen-year veteran Detective Thomas Mecana to investigate.

Mecana was a tall, square-jawed, good-looking poster-type ex-Marine with brown wavy hair and penetrating gray eyes. He prided himself on staying fit and looked ten years younger than his forty-two-year-old body: A complete opposite to the Police Chief of Warfield, who looked like an eggplant.

Mecana’s wife divorced him and moved to Austin ten years ago with his two daughters. For caring more about his job than his family, she claimed.

After researching a variety of recent murders, Mecana discovered that a murder in Houston had something in common with Julie. The vagina had been removed from both victims. Could be this sicko had come to Warfield, Mecana thought, and there would be more murders. Most of the information Mecana passed on to the Warfield Police was wasted. They wanted it all to go away and to get back to

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writing speeding tickets and working security for private businesses for extra money.

Warfield Police Chief David Orr was working on his second McDonalds Super Breakfast when the telephone rang.

“Warfield Police, Chief Orr speaking.”

“Chief, my name’s Rustin Kemp. I was involved in the Belmont murder case here in Houston last year. The Crawford murder sounds like the same MO.”

“Yeah, you’re not the only one. We got a detective here on the Crawford case that thinks it might be the same guy. I remember reading about you last year,” Orr said. “He stabbed you and got away.” Orr stuck a fork in a piece of sausage and jammed it in his mouth. “You still on the Houston force?”

“Doing private eye work now. I want that son of a bitch bad. I wanted to come up and take a look.”

“Don’t have a problem with that. I’ll take all the help I can get, but you’ll have to clear it with Detective Tom Mecana in Dallas. He’s the lead guy on the case.”

“I’ve heard of him. I’ll call him, Chief. Thanks.”

“No problem,” Orr said, and went back to eating his breakfast.