

Chasing Evil

William C. Oakes

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Dedication

To the memory of Angie Rizzo, a great reporter, editor, mentor and friend

To Professor David Carlson for his inspiration and redirection.

To my wife Fran for her encouragement, belief and patience.

Prologue

Summer: 30 years ago

The two brothers were on a mission. Find one more place to hit in this little hick town before returning to their father, wondering if their efforts will meet his approval, or generate his disgust.

West of town they found a new neighborhood. Near the end of the main entrance road, they found an unoccupied area lined with new houses and homes under construction. Moving down the newly paved lane they saw an uncompleted house with the garage door up.

The oldest brother told his little brother to pull up and back into the driveway.

“C’mon this could be full of some good shit. Let’s hurry we might have time to find one more.”

They let down the tailgate of the stolen truck, walked inside the house and began filling their hands and arms.

Introduction

Conrad Cavanaugh walked out of the Hamilton County Bank and Trust in his hometown of Noblesville, Indiana, into the Friday noon-time summer sun. He was relieved despite the heat. A great load was lifted from his shoulders. He didn't even notice the waves of heat rising from the sidewalk as he walked back to his truck.

He had been living with financial risks for over two years, since the death of his wife Elena from stage 4 ovarian cancer. They had planned and prayed over his ambition to move his plumbing and contracting business to full scale housing development.

As those plans were coming together her cancer intervened.

But not for long. Elena refused to let her health overshadow or delay their plans. A mere two weeks before she died the land purchase was closed and the final bank loans were approved. There was no turning back.

Everything they had talked about had come together, just like she said it would.

Until today he wasn't sure. But the real estate closing on the three recently completed homes west of Noblesville put him over the hump. Now, with that money in the bank and all the loans that financed the project settled, the remaining subcontractors can be paid. He and his crew will complete work on the last four unfinished houses and when they are sold it is all profit.

If only she had lived to see it and enjoy the moment with him and their three boys.

In the breast pocket of his shirt was a smiling picture of Elena, held in a plastic sleeve. He never left home without it. He patted the pocket with his right hand, exhaled slightly and swallowed back the lump that lingered in his throat.

Roy Orbison's greatest hits were playing on the truck's CD player as he drove west out of town.

One stop to make before calling it a day. Tonight, will be a night for his family to remember.

Within 10 minutes he turned onto the new pavement that was Harvest Lane, the main entrance to the 50-home development he named Elena Valley. Just 15 years ago all he had was a plumbing business, one truck, a handful of used tools, a new wife, a VA loan and hope.

Had he not been so consumed by this gamble perhaps he could have done more for Elena, got her treatment earlier, faster, with better doctors. She never complained or questioned; she only encouraged and pushed him on.

One of his crews was scheduled to finish the plumbing "rough-in" on the last four houses. He wanted to check their work. If they did finish, he was thinking of giving them the afternoon off once they met back at their office. He was thinking of picking up some beer to share with everyone, to celebrate.

As he crested the slight rise in the lane he managed to smile. The words of Orbison's *Pretty Woman* filled the cab of the truck. Elena would laugh and roll her eyes every time he tried to sing along. He was hoping to see one of the four red Ford pickups with Cavanaugh Construction painted on the side. But there were no red trucks. Sitting

in the driveway of a still incomplete home was a rust spotted Dodge truck, probably over 10 years old.

That got his attention. All the crews and subcontractors knew to stay off the driveways until the concrete finished curing next week. The closer he got the more he sensed something wasn't right. The truck was unlike any that any of the crews and subs used. It was a rust bucket on wheels. As he rolled up to the house the garage door was up, tools and material stacked in the back of the truck.

He pushed the bumper of his Ford F-150 up to the Dodge's front bumper. Turned off the CD player and reached into the driver's side door pocket and retrieved his Smith and Wesson .38 special. A move of caution. The rapidly growing county along Indianapolis' northern border was beginning to feel the impact of crime creeping in from Indiana's largest city and its capital. Fellow contractors had complained recently to local police about thefts from construction sites.

Cavanaugh slipped the pistol into the small of his back, tight against his belt and quietly pushed the truck door shut. As he moved slowly along the passenger side of the Dodge a tall man with long hair and unusually broad and straight shoulders appeared in the garage. Easily standing several inches over six feet, he was carrying a roll of copper tubing on his right shoulder; a reciprocating saw in his right hand and a toolbox in the left. The lower half of his left arm was covered in a multi-colored tattoo.

Right behind by a step was a shorter version of the first man. He was carrying one of Cavanaugh's new right-angle drills and a tool pouch filled with pipe wrenches and a soldering kit. He too had a tattoo covering his lower left arm.

All three made eye contact at the same time. The two men stopped and the taller one broke into a slight smile, revealing crooked, yellowed, nicotine-stained teeth. The short one showed no expression. They could have passed as twins despite the short one's sloping shoulders and short, squat neck.

Conrad, a former marine still in good physical shape, rotated his body and pointed his right shoulder their way. With his left hand he smoothly removed the pistol. He dropped it to the side of his left hip, keeping this arm straight and the gun hidden from their view.

He spoke first. "You men aren't with any of my work crews, so I need to know why you're in my garage and carrying my equipment."

They both slowly bent down and carefully dropped what they were carrying and gave each other a side glance.

Conrad looked at the truck's bed. The tailgate was down and there were miscellaneous tools, bricks, faucet sets, copper pipe and a stack of iron rebar reinforcing rods. Knowing what he had heard lately about the thefts, he concluded this hadn't been their first stop of the day.

He slowly raised the pistol even with his belt buckle so they could see it.

They both raised their hands to the middle of their chests as the tall one said, "Our boss owns the truck mister. He sent us out to collect some of his stuff. Gave us some sketchy directions. We aren't from around here, so maybe we come to the wrong place. We don't want no trouble."

Cavanaugh put his index finger inside the trigger guard and gently touched the trigger.

“What’s this gentleman’s name?”

They both looked at each other and slowly started to separate, Shorty moving left toward the rear of the tail gate on the driver’s side. Broad moved slowly to his right to the corner of the tailgate on the passenger side.

“Ah, yeah, his name. Right.” Looking to his left at Shorty, “It’s Wallace, ah Jim Wallace. We just hired on this week, still finding our way around.”

He paused and Cavanaugh said, “You two stay right there. I’ll get the sheriff out here and maybe he can help us figure out who your boss is and why you’re carrying my tools to this truck.”

Conrad turned to his left to go to the truck and radio his office to call the sheriff. As he did, the tall one grabbed a piece of rebar with his right hand and quickly slid around the rear of the truck, jumped forward and swung at Cavanaugh’s head. Cavanaugh raised his right arm in a reflexive move. The bar hit him just under his arm pit. Cavanaugh staggered to his right against the passenger side of the Dodge, a bolt of pain engulfing his right side. The blow caused his arm to go limp. He raised his left hand holding the gun and pulled the trigger as he staggered left away from the Dodge.

The bullet sliced through the left edge of Broad’s left thigh. He yelled, stepping back and grabbed his leg.

The short one grabbed a brick from the truck bed and heaved it toward Cavanaugh. It caught the right side of his head opening a deep cut above his ear.

Cavanaugh fell onto his back. He instinctively rolled away to give himself some space, coming up on his left hip and fired a shot at Shorty.

The bullet flew over Shorty's head and slammed into the wood trim around the garage door, sending splinters flying.

Cavanaugh rolled two more times as the tall one, blood running down his left pant leg, was winding up for another swing with the rebar. Conrad shot again. The bullet missed just as the rebar hit Cavanaugh with a blow that bounced off the right side of his head above the cut that was bleeding down his neck. His vision went fuzzy, and his brain froze.

Conrad reacted by raising his right arm, and the rebar hit him a third time, striking his right arm inches above his elbow. With that blow he rolled several more times to his left and was able to fire one more shot wildly. The bullet hit the passenger side window and through the cab's rear window. It threw glass into Shorty who was now behind the wheel starting the truck.

Conrad kept rolling away from the truck, his head thumping with pain, trying to regain focus.

Broad dropped the rebar and while holding his leg tight, jumped into the passenger seat. It backed up abruptly knocking out the garage door's opening support. Jerked to the left crushing the right front bumper and fender of Conrad's truck into the front tire. The short one stomped on the truck's throttle and the truck fish tailed off the driveway, through the unlevelled dirt, bumped over the new sidewalk and took a hard right up Harvest Lane toward State Highway 32.

Struggling with a useless right arm, Conrad spun on his hip and fired the last three shots left in the revolver in the direction of the fleeing Dodge.

The truck left a trail of rebar, tools and a spare tire as it bumped over the sidewalk and sped away. A bullet exploded against a steel

toolbox sitting across the front of the bed causing both men to flinch, then another shattered the rest of the broken back window and bored through the windshield.

The concussion and flying glass caused the short one to swerve left and right.

The tall one screamed, getting tossed around the truck seat holding tight down on his leg.

“Mikkie drive the fucking truck.”

“I’m trying, he’s gonna kill us.”

“Just keep driving. I got to fix my leg up fast and we need a new truck.”

As the truck crest the rise in Harvest Lane, he took one last look at Cavanaugh through where the rear glass used to be. “We got that old bastard good. Ever see him again things will be different.”

Cavanaugh struggled to his feet. Laboring to breathe due to the blow to his ribs and the pain in his right arm. He got to his truck and radioed his office manager Sally Whitehead.

“Sally, call the sheriff and send a car out to Elena Valley. Found a couple thieves trying to steal from the site and had a dust up with them.”

Sally: “Are you ok? You need an ambulance?”

“Yeah, I probably do. But first call Jeff Hastings. And call Renee, tell her I’ll be late for dinner, but don’t tell her anything else.”

He slumped down in the seat of his truck. Pissed. Blood matted his hair above his right ear. It was hard to hold his head up straight

and it hurt, bad. His right side hurt so much it was hard to breathe. He looked at his right arm. It is probably broken. The pain throbbed.

He put his head on the steering wheel and exhaled deeply, “Son of a bitch.” In the distance he heard a siren.

-0-

Conrad and Elena had three sons, Conor, 15, Patrick, 10 and Eamon 8. Elena’s death had come suddenly. A trip to the OB/GYN for an annual check, tests at the hospital the next day. Two days later they received the bad news, ovarian cancer. She lived for another four months.

Not a day goes by that Conrad doesn’t wish he’d paid closer attention to her complaints, assuming it was normal female stuff for a mother in her early 40’s. Two years later he has no wife, and his boys have no mother.

Conor like his father keeps his grief locked inside, instead trying to distract his brothers when they get quiet or moody. Patrick and Eamon live in a state of confusion relying on their limited memories of their mother and the loving care of their Aunt Renee.

The course of action against grief for Conor was football and all things having to do with football. Weightlifting, wind sprints, practice, playbooks, whatever it takes to get better. With foot speed and a six-foot and two-inch frame carrying 180 pounds of muscle, his coaches give him daily encouragement. They’ve told the sophomore that in two years he could be up to 220 pounds and a candidate for a scholarship.

Practice with the 7 on 7 team ended at 4 pm and Conor was pushing his Schwinn 10-speed bike hard. It was a 20-minute bike ride

home. He was hungry and dinner with Aunt Renee was over an hour away.

He flew into the driveway and stopped at the garage door to the kitchen. He walked in, dropped his bag and immediately grabbed two Twinkies from the pantry, nearly eating them whole while pouring a glass of milk.

Aunt Renee came out of the basement laundry room.

“Conor. Ride down to Marie Dixon’s house and get your brothers and bring them home for dinner. Your Dad had an issue at work and will be late. Hurry up.”

Renee was Elena’s oldest sister by ten years. When her husband and 8-year-old daughter were killed in an auto accident caused by a drunk driver, it was the young newlywed sister and husband who comforted her and sustained her. Brought her into their family, shared their boys with her. She grew to love them as her own.

Since Elena’s death Renee did all she could to fill the gap left by Elena’s passing. It became a great comfort to her, to Conrad and to the boys.

Conor jumped on the Schwinn and sprinted down the four blocks to the Dixon house.

Marty Dixon, a lifelong friend of Conrad’s, and his wife Marie, after years of trying to build a family, had adopted a boy. He was delivered by a 17-year-old girl whose family wanted no part of the accidental child.

Jonathan and Patrick, both 10, were best friends. The two lived in each other's homes almost as much as they did in their own. Often, they were paired up with Eamon.

Marie, petite at 5'3" and a curvy 100 pounds, is a well-liked neighbor to everyone within 2 blocks. Her short cut auburn hair was a great match for her striking, penetrating blue eyes. The same kind of eyes, ironically, that people often noticed matched Jonathan's.

Conor rolled into the Dixon driveway and Marie was out front watering flowers. He could hear the boys in the backyard playing a game of squeeze play. The baseball slapped leather in between their shouts and laughs.

"You here for the boys."

"Yes, Dad's going to be late, and Aunt Renee is getting dinner ready."

"Jonathan wants them to spend the night if that is ok with your dad. Marty has some amusement ride tickets to the White River Fair at the fairgrounds. We're going to let them use them up before the fair is over."

"Ok, I'll tell him. Thanks."

He made his way to the backyard and called Patrick and Eamon in.

They came rushing to him both talking at once asking him to convince Conrad to let them spend the night.

"Yes, yes, I will. Now come on Aunt Renee will have dinner ready soon."

They mounted their bikes and headed home. The two younger ones speeding ahead of Conor without checking for oncoming cars. He just shook his head.

The only vehicle on the street was a strange-looking car he thought. Half car and half pickup truck. Green and white, he couldn't help but stare at the car and the driver as it approached.

The driver's left arm hung out the window down the side of the door holding a cigarette. A mass of purple and yellow running up his arm.

Conor noticed he and the passenger were looking back and forth to both sides of the street as they moved slowly past the houses.

As they grew near the driver flipped his cigarette at Conor, hitting him on the left shoulder. He stopped, dismounted looking at the back end of the car, it said El Camino with a local license plate.

He jumped back on the bike and caught his brothers as they rolled into their driveway.

Shorty stared at his older brother.

“What was that. Messing with some punk kid on a bike? Christ.”

Broad glared at him, “just look for the right spot and shut up. This day is damn near wasted.”

That's when he saw the right spot. A woman walking in front of a flower bed. No one around. Every other garage door closed. They would have to work fast. Getting late in the day and people would be heading home soon.

Pulling into an empty driveway and turning around they saw Marie Dixon disappear into the open garage. No car, a bike, a lawn mower, a small tool bench and other evidence of a quiet suburban home.

Broad quietly and slowly pulled into the driveway. He reached under the seat and grabbed the .32 Ruger taken from the owner of the car, making sure the wire bundle ties were in his pocket. Shorty opened the glove box and pulled out the 8-inch, wide blade sailor's knife with a braided hemp handle. A prized souvenir from the burglary of a rural farmhouse in Ohio a couple of months ago. It had cost its owner, a feisty Navy vet, his life during a struggle to defend his home.

They both eased out of the vehicle and walked to the door leading from the garage to the home's utility room. Limping slightly with a blood-stained bandage wrapped around his pant leg. Broad led the way and soon met a startled Marie Dixon.

Broad's strong left hand instantly grabbed Marie by the throat, lifted her 100-pound body and slammed her head into the wood trim around the door to the kitchen. The blow cracked the wood trim knocking Marie unconscious.

With his right hand he grabbed her between the legs, lifted her and dropped her on the wooden kitchen table.

Shorty entered the living room ripped the tv off its stand and sat it down, he saw nothing else of interest. He went upstairs and found the bedroom. Throwing open drawers he found jewelry, a pouch with cash and what looked like an old 9mm German Luger.

Moving back to the stairs he noticed a door ajar in another room at the end of the hallway.

Laying on the floor on the other side of the bed, Jonathan was hidden from Shorty's view. Earphones in his ears listening to the end of the Cincinnati Reds baseball game on his portable radio, reading a comic book Jonathan heard nothing.

Shorty stood just outside the door, looked all around the room. A kids' room. Nothing of value. He returned to the stairs.

Downstairs he found Marie, motionless, on the table with Broad standing between her legs.

Broad turned to his brother. "We're finished here. I'll grab the tv. Let's go."

"What about her, she's seen us."

"She won't be talking to anyone. Give me the knife."

-0-

Sitting in the emergency department at Riverside Hospital waiting for the doctor he grew angrier with each passing second. Already subjected to an MRI of his head, an x-ray of his right arm and chest he wanted a quick fix, Conrad had a family to think about.

A nurse had already put him through a concussion screening without telling him the results. He was about ready to grab the nearest phone and call one of his guys to come pick him up when the doctor came in.

"Mr. Cavanaugh I'm Dr. Diskin. I've reviewed the screenings. The good news is you have no sign of a concussion. We closed the cut over your right ear with staples. You'll need to come back in two weeks to remove those. Here's a card with your appointment. You have two cracked ribs on the right side and a complete fracture of your right humerus, just above the elbow. The ribs will heal but there will be pain off and on. Try not to lift anything or twist your torso. The broken arm will need surgery. I've set you up for a pre-op consultation with our orthopedic group for tomorrow morning. That

needs attention within the next two days, so don't delay. We've given you some pain meds, so I recommend you not drive for 24 hours. They're strong so use them only when you need them. We've immobilized your arm and wrapped it with a protective temporary cast. Don't move or use your arm and don't remove the wrap or splint. The surgeons will deal with that. Any questions?"

"Yeah, can I leave now?"

"Yes, but the Sheriff is outside and wants to speak with you first."

The doctor turned, opened the curtain to Sheriff Jeff Hastings standing outside the treatment bay.

Diskin rolled his eyes and looked over his shoulder. "He's all yours Sheriff."

Hastings and Cavanaugh were lifelong friends. Classmates from the first grade and frequent teammates in football and baseball.

Hastings stepped into the bay for his first good look at Cavanaugh. His right arm in a sling, his head wrapped in a bandage that covered his right ear and around his head like a sweatband.

"Christ Con you look all beat to hell."

"I'll be ok when I get out of this damned place."

"I know you talked to the deputies, what else can you remember. Any detail no matter how small."

"Like I told your guys. There were two of them. Looked like brothers. If they were the same size, they could be twins. One was much taller than the other one. Both with long stringy hair. They both appeared to have some kind of tattoo on their left forearms. It was weird. Yellow and purple maybe a snake or a head of some kind.

Things moved fast before they went to shit. So, I'm not sure. I think the big one I nicked him in the leg with my first shot. I may have hit their truck twice."

Hastings looked at him for a moment. "You're lucky my friend. We just found the truck you shot up at the Shackman residence near Westfield. Stolen two weeks ago in northern Ohio. Chuck Shackman and his wife Donna are dead. House ransacked, evidence of blood and used bandages scattered about the house. Dan's prized and fully restored El Camino is missing. Color green and white. Pretty sure it's the guys that hit you."

"Chuck and Donna? Ah damn. We remodeled his house last year. His wife too? Jesus Christ Jeff what the hell is going on?"

Hastings- "They didn't get very far with Shackman's El Camino."

"We found it abandoned quarter of a mile south of the fairgrounds, half stashed in a wooded lot. Guy walking his dog found it a little while ago. Blood trace on the driver's seat a tv in the back. I've got deputies and Noblesville PD has detectives at the fairgrounds. Looking for guys with long hair, tattoos and anyone limping on their left leg. Nothing so far. Come on I'll take you home."

Cavanaugh slowly walked to Hastings' cruiser and within ten minutes was walking into his kitchen.

He could hear Renee and the boys in the dining room. He walked in.

Eamon was the first to see him through the door into the kitchen. "Dad's home. He has an apron on his arm and a big band aid on his head."

Renee, Conor and Patrick looked from their plates at the same time.

Renee gasped at the sight, “My God Con, what happened to you?”

Con waved his left hand, wincing from the broken ribs as he did, “had a run in with some thieves at the Elena Valley project. The Sheriff is investigating. They took me to Riverside Hospital. The damn doctors put all this shit on me. Wrapped my head up like I was leaking my brain out or something. And, I must go back and have some bullshit surgery to put my arm back together.”

Not one to curse and usually admonishing Con to watch his language Renee jumped from her chair, “Good God in Christ, Con, what happened?”

The boys’ heads snapped in Renee’s direction. They’d never heard her use those words before. It is the closest she ever came to cursing.

“Renee it’s just a couple of stiches in my head and a broken arm, I’ll be fine.”

There was a pregnant pause when Conrad refused to speak, choosing to just stare back at his family. He slowly lowered himself into a chair, inhaled as best he could.

“Ok, here’s what happened.”

It took Conrad twenty minutes to recount the events of the day. He finished with Sheriff Hastings’ attempts to track down the Shackman’s killers and combing through their El Camino for evidence.

When he finished Conor leaned forward over his dinner plate.

“Dad, I saw those guys. I saw that car. They drove really slow up our street when I went to get the boys. The one guy threw a cigarette at me.”

Conrad was silent, staring at his son. But before he could say a word the sound of sirens erupted at the far end of their street. They grew louder and soon turned into a constant scream, one after another after another passed their house.

Looking out the dining room window Conrad whispered to himself, “What the hell, now what.”

Struggling to get up from his chair, Conrad, followed by the boys, went to the living room picture window for a better view down their street.

A group of police cars had converged on an area several blocks from them, with more cars coming. County sheriff cars, Noblesville and Indiana State Police in a high-speed parade.

Turning to Conor, Conrad said, “so the boys were playing with Jonathan? What time did you bring them home?”

“I’m not sure. I got home about 4. By the time I rode down there, got them and rode back it was probably 4:15 or so. Marie said Mr. Dixon had tickets for the carnival at the White River Fair they could let Jonathan and Patrick and Eamon use. She said they could spend the night too.”

Conrad stared out the window. He was in the ER from about 12:30 until past 5. He realized that was plenty of time for them to kill the Shackmans and come this way.

“Son, I don’t think that is going to happen. Where were you when they hit you with the cigarette?”

“I only went a couple houses when that happened.”

After less than a minute more of thinking Conrad turned away from the window, “ok guys help Aunt Renee clean up the plates and the kitchen. Conor, you come with me.”

Patrick interrupted, “Dad, can we go? We can go to the carnival with Jonathan, can’t we?”

“I’m not sure son. Let me go see if Marty is home. Go on and help Renee. We’ll be back.”

The two of them walked without talking toward the police cars as fast as the pain would allow Conrad to move. Conrad could see quickly that something bad had happened at the Dixons.

In the front yard he saw Sheriff Hastings with a hand on Martin Dixon’s shoulder talking to him. Dixon’s face frozen in tortured agony, his left hand covering his eyes. His right arm was around Jonathan, who was hugging his father’s waist. Jonathan was crying.

The crime scene tape was strung from the front door out to a maple tree in the front yard and stretched at an angle to the corner of the garage.

Conrad with his sling and head bandages stood out in the crowd while Conor stood a half-a-head taller than his father and most onlookers. Hastings turned to the crowd momentarily, and spotted Conrad. He motioned to a deputy who stepped up to him, listened, then turned and walked to Conrad.

“Sheriff said for you to come over and join him and Mr. Dixon.”

The deputy lifted the tape and Conrad stepped forward as he turned to Conor, “stay right here, may need you in a minute.”

Hastings met him halfway, leaving Dixon standing next to the tree.

The three men, Hastings, Cavanaugh and Dixon played sports together throughout high school. Dated some of the same girls. After graduation in 1966 they went their separate ways but stayed in contact. Cavanaugh to the Marines. Hastings to Indiana State University to play baseball, then the Indiana State Police as a road trooper. He retired as a lieutenant before being elected Sheriff three years ago. Dixon served in the Air Force, trained as an air traffic controller and took a controller job after discharge. Now he is a supervisor for the FAA at Indianapolis International Airport.

“My God Connie this has been the worst day of my career. Someone broke into Marty’s house. Killed Marie, some kind of big knife through the middle of her chest. About 20 minutes before Marty got home Jonathan went downstairs and found her, strapped to the kitchen table blood all over the place. He ran upstairs and hid under his bed. Marty comes home, finds her, freaks out looking for Jonathan and then calls 911.”

Conrad- “Jeff I think I know who did it.”

“What?”

“It’s the same guys who hit me. Conor brought the boys home from Jonathan’s and saw Shackman’s El Camino, the two long-haired guys. He said the driver threw a cigarette at Conor while he was riding his bike back home.”

“Holy shit, we need to talk to him, now.”

Pointing over his shoulder Conrad said, “yes, he’s right over there.”

Hastings looked around, saw his lead detective Hank Schyler and Noblesville PD detective Vince Purvis. He asked Conrad to get Conor.

“Hank, Vince, we have a witness who might have seen the subjects. Conrad Cavanaugh’s boy, Conor. He’s right over there.”

Conor followed his dad to the three cops.

They put Conrad and Conor in Purvis’ city car and with Schyler following, drove both men to the Sheriff’s Department Headquarters. They set up the video camera and questioned both Cavanaugh’s for almost 2 hours.

It was dark when Purvis drove them home. He said he might come back to talk to them if anything else came up.

They walked into the living room. Renee, Patrick and Eamon were waiting on the sofa.

“Conrad what is going on? Something happen to the Dixons?”

He put his left hand on his hip, looked at the floor for a few seconds, took a breath and tried not to look at his two youngest sons.

“There is some bad news I have to tell, but I, I don’t know how,” he said shaking his head slowly.

“Marie was hurt bad, real bad.”

Patrick- “She’ll be ok, won’t she?”

After a moment of silence Conrad said, “No son, I’m sorry she isn’t going to be ok. But Jonathan is ok.”

Eamon looked around confused. "But we just saw her today. Can't they fix her at the hospital?"

"No Eamon they can't fix her."

Patrick looked up, his eyes blinking away tears. "So, now Jonathan has no mom just like us?"

Conrad turned to Renee, "you need to help me here, I can't do this." And he walked away.

Chapter 1

Conor Cavanaugh, Detective Captain for the Indiana State Police, has halfway through his first cup of coffee at his desk reading the Indianapolis Star's coverage of yesterday's news conference.

There was a front-page photo of Cavanaugh, State Police Superintendent Malcolm Waters and three county sheriffs. Together with the ISP and the county deputies had cracked a large drug operation centered in Indianapolis that was operating in their counties. A one-day sweep of the combination of the ISP and 25 deputy sheriffs netted 75 arrests.

Cavanaugh was credited with leading and coordinating the six-month long operation.

His profile in Indiana law enforcement was growing. A former Army Special Operations officer who came home from Afghanistan with a purple heart and silver star, he and members of the ISP investigations team had been at the center for four major investigations and prosecutions in the last two years.

The coverage by the Star and the Indianapolis TV stations during their news blocks that morning seemed a little too heavy in their notice of his role he thought. It was the undercover county deputies who did all the work, took all the risks.

He'd make some calls today to those sheriff's and give them his personal thanks for their efforts and called the media relations office to offer a sit-down feature interview with him so he could emphasize publicly his thanks for and admiration of the deputies' work.

He was thinking about that when his phone buzzed. It was his dad.

“Hey dad, what’s on your retirement agenda today?”

“Not much. I wanted to talk to you for a minute. Got a call from Marty Dixon last night. Hadn’t talked to him in years. He was asking about you and Patrick and Eamon. We talked about some old times. Then he mentioned something I wanted you to know. Yesterday was the 30th anniversary of Marie’s murder. Is that ever going to be solved? Isn’t there something you can do?”

Cavanaugh was caught off guard by the question. He periodically gave thought to that day and the role he and his father played. When he asked veterans at ISP about it over the years it was characterized as the coldest of cold cases.

“I don’t know dad. That one has sat untouched for a long time. Thirty years have passed.”

“But you’ve got all this new technology now, that DNA stuff, arrest records and fingerprint files from everywhere. There must be something out there to help.”

His dad had a point. Why did that never occur to him?

“That’s true dad, but our hands have been full investigating today’s problems. But tell you what I will think about it, give it another look real soon.”

After making sure his dad was doing ok and keeping busy, they promised to talk soon and Conrad said he would stop by Franklin to see Allie and Ethan soon.

The more he thought about the call, the more he thought his dad had raised a good question. Investigations are much more sophisticated

today than there were 30 years ago. Marie's murder deserved another look, the Shackmans did too.

It took him the rest of the morning and part of the lunch hour to make phone calls and write emails trying to collect everything in the ISP, Hamilton County Sheriff's Department and the Noblesville Police Department archives on the Dixon and Shackman murders.

For now, that was all he could do.

It was early afternoon when his phone vibrated on the desktop. He looked at the screen and said softly to himself, "oh brother, not now."

He answered, "Don, how are you? What's up?"

There was a small chuckle at the other end of the line. "That's supposed to be my opening line Capt. Cavanaugh. So, I'll say it. How are you? What's up with you. You've cancelled our last two sessions."

Cavanaugh took a deep breath, "Well these are busy times right now."

"So, I gathered from the article in the Star this morning and the tv news I saw," Conyers said.

Don Conyers was Cavanaugh's VA appointed counselor at the Roudebush VA Hospital in Indianapolis. His job is to monitor Cavanaugh for symptoms of PTSD. They are part of a Department of Defense long term tracking study of veterans who had been diagnosed or who had exhibited some of the symptoms. Cavanaugh was in the latter group. Without being formally diagnosed he once told Marta he often felt like a functioning alcoholic, some feelings never went away, just hidden from view.

The counseling with Conyers started a couple of months prior to his actual discharge and continued for several months after that. Cavanaugh felt that was how the military sucked you into the study. Order you to participate while still under their control and encourage participation following discharge. Under Marta's urging he had stuck with it diligently for about 4 years. Less so in the last 12 years as his ISP career was established, and his rank and responsibilities increased.

Those responsibilities and the added stress surrounding Ethan's Aspergers Syndrome diagnosis provided the excuse he was looking for to push away from the counseling, gradually. He was dealing with things in the present, time to walk away from the past. And, to keep his participation in the PTSD follow up study private. From everyone, including the ISP. His participation was considered protected government information.

Conyers had sensed the change over time but was persistent without being a pain in the ass.

“How's your family?”

“Marta and Allison are fighting like mothers and daughters do. I try and stay as far away from that as possible. Ethan is making slow progress, coping better, I think. We discovered with my dad's help that he has a talent for seeing, understanding and being good at mechanical things. Taking random things apart and putting them back together. He's great with puzzles, designing and building things with Lego blocks. I watched him, with Dad disassemble and reassemble a Glock 17. Pretty amazing. Marta wasn't impressed.”

“Does he understand what guns are and what they can do?”

“I think so. Dad takes him to shoot. He understands processes and orderly functions. So, the steps to safely handle a gun, how to properly hold it, shoot it and control it are helping him. I’ve observed the way Dad has taught him. Pretty amazing, he’s a different guy around Ethan. Yes, Ethan gets it and enjoys it. They go target shooting almost every week. I think it helps him stay focused and calm.”

“Are you participating in that, making yourself a part of this?”

“Yes, as much as he’ll let me. I try not to push myself on them. Frankly, he likes my dad better.”

“Does that bother you in anyway?”

“No, not now. I have a son that doesn’t enjoy sports or the things I like. Trying to nurture who he is and what he can do. We’re not as close as I’d like, but we’re working on it.”

“You say you’ve been busy. Any new levels of stress, any more flashback moments or thoughts? Any unexplained feelings of anger or anxiety?”

The question made Cavanaugh uncomfortable. “No, I’ve been fine, really. Nothing like that in many years. I must be the most uninteresting subject you have. I’m good, honest.”

He wasn’t getting any deeper with Cavanaugh. Conyers decided to close the discussion. Their monthly conversations and sessions have now been reduced to quarterly phone calls when they weren’t cancelled by Cavanaugh. Besides they weren’t revealing much.

“Well, you know where I am and how to find me. Don’t be shy and,” Conyers paused to laugh slightly, “don’t try hiding from me.”

They agreed to have lunch soon and mutually ended the call.

Cavanaugh was looking forward to the day the calls from Conyers would end. Conyers never knew why Cavanaugh was in the monitoring program, it was all because of the pre-discharge label some bureaucrat in the Army had given him. But there were memories. So many he never shares and can't forget.

Most related to the field action report he had filed after his team landed near the downed helicopter to rescue the chopper's crew. The pilot was the only uninjured crew member. He and two wounded members of the crew were valiantly trying to fight off a growing group of Taliban fighters. Some of the fighting soon became close in, even hand-to-hand as Cavanaugh's team arrived.

His team set a perimeter around the helo and fought off the Taliban's advance effectively and administered aid to the wounded. They were vastly outnumbered. Eventually Cavanaugh and two of his men decided to breach the Taliban line and spread their fire deeper into their right flank.

The fighting intensified and lasted 45 minutes. As he retreated to the helicopter, he found the body of one of the crewmen, a good 50 yards from the crash site. He would later learn the soldier had tried to set up a perimeter around the crash but after a while he stopped shooting.

Stripped clean of his equipment and ammo, his dog tags were gone, his pockets turned out evidence of a chest wound and a single shot to his forehead from close range. He directed a team to retrieve the body and wait for his return. Cavanaugh followed the path of the Taliban retreat. Climbing over and around rocks for over 200 yards until he heard talking ahead of him.

With a full magazine in his Army issued FN SCAT, special ops forces combat assault rifle, he was able to ambush the three Taliban while they sat under a rocky overhang. He severely wounded all three, approached them and kicked away their weapons. He found the soldier's tags, watch and personal gear. He stood over each one. Put a bullet in each of their foreheads. In his mind, justice served.

His field action report never mentioned the final encounter with the Taliban. He decided his final act of justice would remain with him. But the memory remains fresh, the lingering anger and hate mostly restrained. More reason to never mention it to Don Conyers.