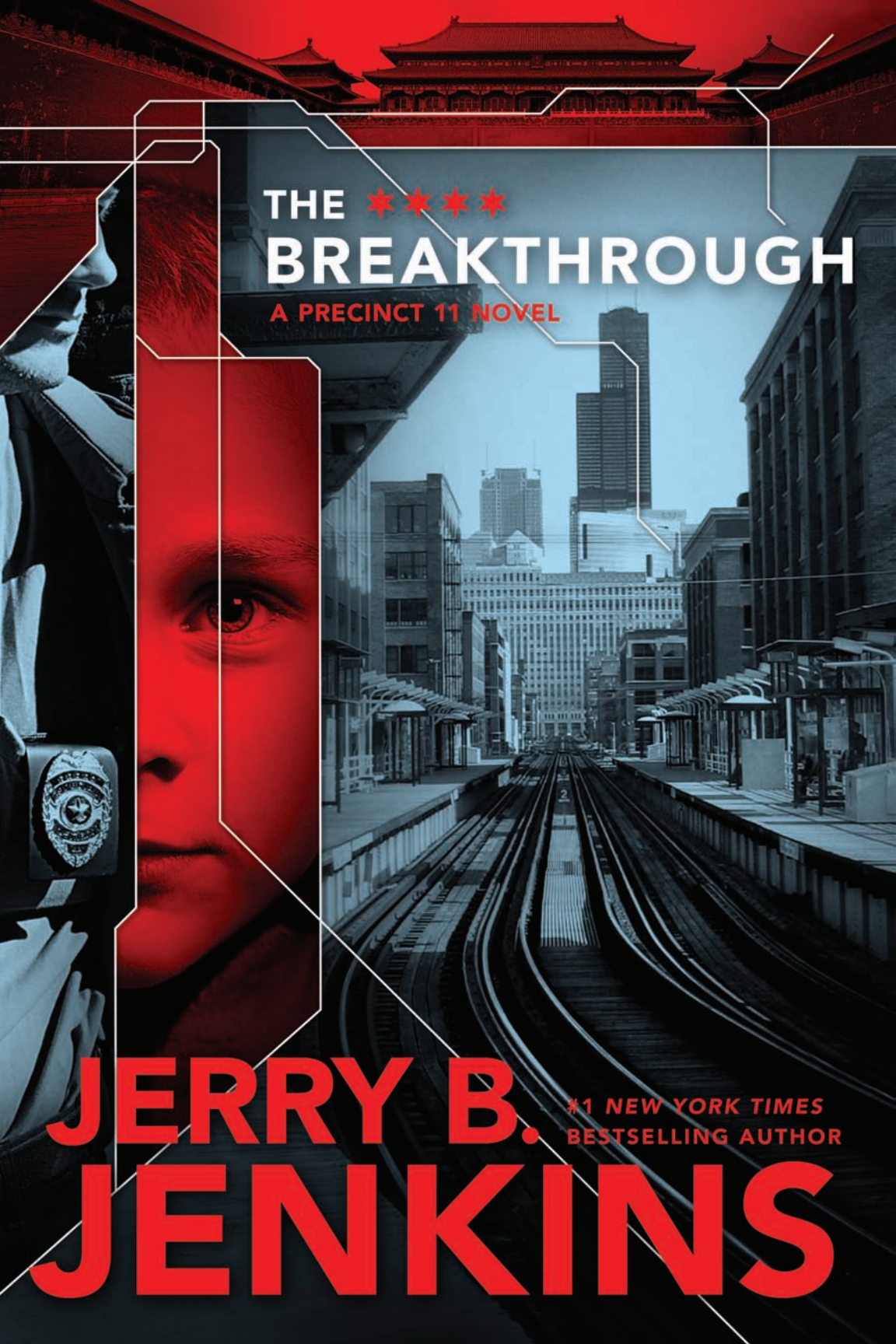
THE ✶✶✶✶
BREAKTHROUGH
A PRECINCT 11 NOVEL
JERRY B. JENKINS
#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

THE ★★★★ BREAKTHROUGH

A PRECINCT 11 NOVEL

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The Breakthrough

Designed by Erik M. Peterson

The Breakthrough is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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DREAD

JUNE 21

The last time Boone Drake felt so sunny about life, storm clouds beyond the horizon unleashed a torrent that washed away everything he loved.

His wife.

His son.

His home.

His faith.

His passion for police work.

His reason for being.

That in just a few years he was back on top left him reeling. If Boone could only take credit for doing more than merely hanging on while his world slowly rebuilt itself . . .

Now he enjoyed a new wife, a new son, a new home,

a renewed faith, and an even deeper passion for his work. And all, it seemed, in spite of himself.

Grateful didn't begin to describe how Boone felt about everyone and everything that coalesced to salve his raw existence, to restore him. *Obligated* was more like it. At his most despairing, people who cared about him had seemed to conspire to force him to hang on until the arduous healing could begin.

Why was it, then, that being back to a pinnacle in his personal and professional and spiritual lives left Boone wary? Was it all too good to be true? Surely there was no guarantee that a guy could be metaphorically stomped to within an inch of death only once in his life.

What might be looming?

Was Boone's unease a character flaw, a chink in the armor of his faith? Didn't he deserve success and happiness?

Well, of course he didn't. He knew what he deserved. When he had gotten serious about his spiritual life, he had come to understand where he stood with God. He had deserved all the bad stuff. This abundance was grace, pure and simple.

It was not a wise man, Boone knew, who looked for trouble. One in his profession, however, had to be ever vigilant. With that alertness came intuition, street smarts. And Boone's were telling him he might be luxuriating in the tranquility before a tempest.

Even his pastor, a master of texting just the right Scripture reference at just the right time, had appeared to drop the ball today, the first day of summer. Boone's phone chirped a little after 8 p.m., just as he was preparing to leave his Major Case Squad office for home. He gathered his stuff with one hand

and thumbed the tiny screen with the other. The note from Francisco Sosa read: Job 5:7ff.

Normally Boone waited till he had a moment to look up the references, but this he had to see. Sosa had found some nugget of encouragement for him in Job, really?

On the elevator at the Area 4, District 11 stationhouse on West Harrison Street, with everything else tucked under his arm, Boone accessed his mobile Bible and brought up:

> People are born for trouble
> as readily as sparks fly up from a fire.

On that cheery note, the youngest bureau chief in the history of the Chicago Police Department headed wearily to his car. The thermometer had hit triple digits that afternoon—which rarely, if ever, happened before late July in the Windy City—and Boone had had to endure a rare day in uniform.

He preferred a suit and tie, as did most detectives, but when Downtown decreed a uniform for some official to-do, even chiefs obeyed. Boone had wanted to decline, but he had to pick his battles. He had endured enough politics in his new role. The chiefs of four of the other five major bureaus within the department—Patrol, Detectives, Organizational Development, and Administration—didn't see the need for another. The fifth happened to be Jack Keller, chief of the Organized Crime Division (OCD), and critics said he backed Boone only because he had been his partner, then his boss and mentor.

Keller, steely gray and pushing a taut sixty, advised Boone to stay above the fray. "It's not your fight," he said as they

worked out together one day. "It's what the super wants, and it's been approved by the city council's subcommittee, so it's gonna happen, end of story."

Boone put his uniform cap on the backseat, removed the leather Sam Browne belt that carried his handcuffs, ammunition, and service sidearm, and placed it on the floor. He hung his coat near the rear passenger door to keep it from blocking his vision when he drove. As he slid in and checked his mirrors, he was stunned afresh to see the single star on his collar. It likely hardly registered to anyone not on the job, but Chicago coppers knew what it meant. He was one of six chiefs, making him one of the nine top cops of more than thirteen thousand in the city.

The temperature was still in the nineties, though the sun had begun to sink, and Boone felt fortunate the AC kicked in fast in his brand-new BMW 760Li—a sedan he wouldn't have sprung for if not for his wife. Not to mention he was also driving to a house he would not have enjoyed but for her.

It wasn't that Boone had married into money. Well, he had, but he hadn't meant to. The former Haeley Lamonica's seven-figure settlement from the City of Chicago for false arrest had actually been won late in their courtship and paid early in their marriage.

Neither Boone nor Haeley had ever been people of means. She had been a single mother, struggling to get by. He had been well compensated for his age but certainly was not wealthy. His new role paid in the neighborhood of ten thousand dollars a month, but that was nothing compared to Haeley's windfall. It had resulted from a sordid case that had

exposed corruption at the highest levels of the CPD. What to do with the money became a dilemma.

Boone had wanted nothing to do with it. "It's yours alone to do with what you want."

"I don't want it at all," Haeley had said. She took seriously the admonition that it was harder for a rich person to get into heaven than for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle. "I mean, who wouldn't want to be rich?" she said. "But it's not what we're about, and it terrifies me."

Yet Boone, along with Haeley's attorney—who was entitled to a third of the money—had persuaded her to take it. And they had all celebrated one warm spring evening the previous year on *The Settlement*, newly anchored at Belmont Harbor.

"You can give your two-thirds away for all I care," Friedrich Zappolo, Esquire, told her. "My third went for—"

"This boat, I know," she said.

Haeley told Boone she had finally concluded that she would accept the money because, for one thing, she was entitled to it. And she had caveats. "First, I want to give you a gift."

"No need," Boone said. "You and Max are all I want, and—"

"Don't deny me. When else in my life would I ever be able to give you anything really worth something?"

He had acquiesced, and she had bought him the car of his dreams—but one that wouldn't raise too many eyebrows at the department.

The second condition was that she wanted a nice, big home with a fireplace in a safe neighborhood. In Chicago that hardly meant ostentatious, but it did mean a place beyond the reach of even a bureau chief.

Zappolo, who had helped with tax ramifications, told her,

"You know, even after the house and the car, you still have well over a million left. You talked before about investing in a side fund to put your kid through college."

"Makes sense, Hael," Boone said. "Put a chunk away; let it grow for Max."

Zappolo had referred them to a lawyer experienced in family law, who had accomplished Boone's adoption of the beautiful blond boy.

"A college fund is nonnegotiable, Fritz," Haeley said, running both hands through her long, dark hair. "But it might not be just for Max."

Zappolo showed her on paper how she could ensure three kids would go to college and still have more than a million dollars left. "Plenty to treat yourself with."

"The rest goes to charity," she said.

"Sorry?"

"You heard me, Mr. Zappolo."

"I know I did. I just didn't want to. It's nice to be generous and all, but . . ."

"The balance," she said, "all of it, goes to our churches."

"Plural?" Zappolo said.

"Well, we're going to Community Life now, but I used to go to North Beach, and they're struggling."

"That so?" the lawyer said. "I advise you to be careful how much you give to a small nonprofit."

"I'm listening."

"How big is this church? What's their budget?"

She shrugged and looked at Boone. "Less than fifty people, a pastor who also works on the side. Maybe fifty thousand a year for everything?"

"Well, you know I'm not a church guy, but I've worked with a lot of nonprofits, and I'm just sayin', you give a place like this more'n, say, double their annual budget, and you're gonna have problems. I've seen little outfits go under because they just can't handle it. All of a sudden the director—in your case, the pastor—gets a new car or spruces up his office or quits his other job, and people start talking; you know how it goes."

"A hundred thousand would be wonderful for them," Haeley said.

"Okay, now you're down to about one and a quarter mil. Me, I'd be buying a place on the Continent. You?"

"Community Life. They have a multimillion-dollar budget and ministries all over the city. They'd know what to do with it, and they'd do it right."

"You're a bigger woman than I am," Fritz said. "I mean . . . you know what I mean."

So Haeley had been both generous and sacrificial. The only hard part for her in having married and relocated, she told Boone, had been giving up going to her own little church. He offered to go to hers instead, but she insisted. "Community is where you need to be—where *we* need to be. And I don't feel so bad about leaving North Beach now that I can give them a gift like this."

Haeley added one more condition. "The gifts are anonymous, Fritz. Nothing named after me or us, no announcements, no thank-yous. Can you make that happen?"

"You think these pastors live under rocks, girl? They watch the news. They know I defended you against the city. Everybody in town knows of the settlement. You're going to be hearing from friends you never knew you had."

"I can just say it's already all accounted for. I'm not a bank."

"That's the right line," Fritz said, "but I all of a sudden show up with big checks, and you don't think these pastors are going to put two and two together? There's no way around that they're going to know. Let's do this: I'll let the pastors know it came from you but tell them that if anyone else finds out, it's revocable."

Haeley held a hand over her rumbling abdomen as she closed the drapes for the evening. A small foreign car in the cul-de-sac didn't look like any of the neighbors', and they never parked in the street anyway.

It hadn't been that long ago that she had seen another strange car, twice the same day. She had taken Max back to their old church because Boone had had to work one Sunday. Max had been excited to see Aunt Flo, the black lady from North Beach Fellowship who had stayed with him often before Boone and Haeley married. They had spent the afternoon at Florence's apartment, where Haeley noticed the same car on the street outside the building that she had noticed in the strip mall parking lot after church—a dark-blue vintage four-door Buick with Illinois plates.

Haeley told herself she had become overly suspicious as the wife of a cop and decided not to mention it to Boone. But this one? Maybe she should.

Boone merged onto the Eisenhower Expressway as remnants of an orange sun played peekaboo between buildings. He was glad rush-hour traffic had largely dissipated, but that reminded him he would get home after Max was in bed. He

hated that, as did Max and Haeley. Fortunately, it was rare with his new role. There were still occasional cases that saw him work into the night, but the hours were nothing like they had been in Organized Crime.

He looked forward to getting out of uniform, settling on the couch with Haeley, and enjoying the spacious house. Could life be better? Even his generous salary was not exorbitant these days, but without a mortgage, they were comfortable.

And that troubled Boone. He'd never done well with comfort. He should be on top of the world—and in many ways he was. But could it last? According to Job 5:7, maybe not.

Boone slipped his cell phone from his shirt pocket and inserted it into a docking station installed under the dash. At the last bureau chiefs' meeting, the head of Patrol had reported that the prohibition against texting and using other than hands-free phones while driving had reduced cell phone involvement in crashes. "But," the Patrol chief said, "to our embarrassment, our own employees remain chronic offenders."

It's hard to get the public to obey laws that you yourself flout.

Boone hit a speed-dial button and turned on his radio, set to an FM frequency that, in essence, broadcast his phone in the car.

"Hey, babe," Haeley said. "You close? Keeping your plate warm."

"A few minutes. Max down?"

"Yeah, and he wasn't too happy to miss you."

"Me either, but I can run him to school in the morning on the way in."

"How're you doing on your letter to him?"

"Still working on it. I'll get back to it. What's up, Hael?"

"Hmm?"

"You sound different. Anything wrong?"

"You're good, Chief. I've felt a little punky all day. Not hungry. And there's a car I don't recognize in the cul-de-sac."

"Anybody in it?"

"I think so. Hard to see."

"Can you see a plate number?"

He heard the rustle of a curtain. "Can't make it out, but it doesn't look like an Illinois tag. Dark background."

"What color?"

"Can't tell from here."

"What kind of car?"

"Foreign. Compact. Old, shabby."

"Hon, my binoculars are on the shelf in the front closet. See if you can give me a tag number."

He heard her set the phone down and rummage. She called out, "Found 'em!"

A few seconds later she was back on the phone. "Solid background, maybe a little lighter than navy, three white numbers and three white letters, can't make out the state."

"Indiana," Boone said. "Read 'em off to me."

"You won't be able to write them down."

"C'mon, Hael. Memorizing plate numbers is a hobby of old street cops."

She recited the numbers and letters.

"I'll run it, but don't open the door to anyone you don't recognize."