

THE ★★ ★★
BROTHERHOOD
A PRECINCT 11 NOVEL

JERRY B. JENKINS



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To the police officers in my family:

Harry Jenkins

Jim Jenkins

Jeff Jenkins

Tim Jenkins

Bruce Thompson

Klaude Thompson

Harold Sprague

Rollie Tuttle

Burt Tuttle

With thanks to John Perrodin for research assistance

IT WAS ENOUGH to make anyone want to be a cop. But for the young collegian idly watching the CBS local evening newscast in Chicago one fall evening in 2008, something deep within was stirred anew.

The anchorwoman dispassionately reported horrifying murder statistics the news team had gathered, but the wannabe police officer was taking it personally. Why? He had his ideas.

Maybe it was the similarity between the street gangs doing most of the shootings and the bullies who had terrorized his friends when he was a kid—and who had tried to terrorize him.

More than 120 people had been shot and killed in Chicago that summer. That was almost double the number of American soldiers killed in Iraq during the same time. Beyond that, nearly 250 others had been shot and wounded in Chicago.

If there was anything—even one thing—he could do to thwart these thugs once he earned his badge, he would do it with all that was in him.

1

JUSTICE FREAK

1:58 A.M., FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2011

“Wanna take this one yourself, Rook?”

Boone Drake shot his partner a double take. The 911 dispatcher had broadcast a domestic disturbance in progress at a seedy apartment building on West Jackson Boulevard in Chicago’s most dangerous precinct, Harrison, District 11.

“Myself?”

“I mean take the lead,” Jack Keller said, eyes fixed on the pavement as he maneuvered the blue and white Crown Vic squad through icy streets. “I’ll have your back.”

Boone didn’t want to sound too eager, but there was no way he’d turn this down. He had excelled in twenty-three weeks of training at the academy and was just weeks into his eighteen-month period as a probationary police officer. Boone hoped

someday he would look as comfortable in his gear as Keller did. The press described his partner as rugged or chiseled, not bad for a man in his late fifties with a short crop of gray hair.

Boone took pride in being in shape and athletic, but there was no hiding his youth. He couldn't let that get in the way if he took the lead on this call. He tightened the Velcro on his bulletproof vest and ran his fingers across his Sam Browne utility belt, including his 9mm Beretta.

"It's put up or shut up time, Boones," Keller said as they neared the address.

"Sure, I'm in."

"Head full of all that training? Planning your approach?"

Boone couldn't stifle a laugh. "All I can think of is the POLICE acronym."

Professionalism, Obligation, Leadership, Integrity, Courage, Excellence.

Keller shook his head. "Big help if this guy comes at you. Remember your moves if he's armed?"

"Hope so."

"You hope so. Well, so do I. I don't want to have to put one in a guy because you can't subdue him."

"Long as I know you're there, I'll be okay. You bringin' in the M4?"

"That's way too much firepower for inside. My 9 will be plenty."

Once Keller skidded to the curb out front, blue lights dark to avoid attention, Boone grabbed his nightstick and his uniform cap and slid out. As he slipped the stick into the ring on his belt, some druggies on the corner, their breath illuminated by the streetlight, called out, "Five-oh!"

Keller turned on them. "Shut up or you're next!"

The gangbangers cursed the cops and flashed signals but quickly disappeared. As Boone rushed the front door, it occurred to him that those types were the real reason he was a cop. It was about the gangs. It had always been about the gangs.

Keller grabbed his sleeve and slowed him. "Don't get ahead of yourself."

When Boone got inside and mashed the elevator button, Keller passed him on his way to the stairs. "On the other hand, we don't want to be waiting when someone's in danger."

They trotted up the stairs, gear jangling and leather squeaking, Boone aware of Keller panting as they reached the fourth floor. An apartment door was open a couple of inches and an elderly woman in a bathrobe peeked out, hands clasped as if in prayer. She nodded toward the next apartment.

Keller whispered to her to close and lock her door and back away from it. He unholstered his weapon and fell in behind Boone, who stepped before the next apartment. A man inside shouted; a woman whimpered.

Boone spread his feet, rapped hard, and called out, "Police department! Open the door!"

The couple fell silent.

"Now!" Boone said, laboring to sound authoritative.

The man whispered; the woman whined.

"Open the door, sir!"

"He's got a knife to my throat!"

"And I'll cut her if you try comin' in!"

"You don't want to do that, bro! Now open up and let's talk about it."

The man swore.

“Don’t do anything you’ll regret, man. Come on now.”

The door swept open and there the man stood, reeking of alcohol, the woman locked in the crook of his arm, a six-inch steak knife at her Adam’s apple. Boone ran through all his training in an instant. He knew where to grab, where to twist, how to use his weight, the angles, everything.

But when the man threw the woman aside and lunged at him, everything left Boone. He threw an uppercut so vicious that when it caught the bad guy under the chin, Boone feared he might have killed him.

The knife, which dragged a jagged tear under Boone’s shirt pocket but had not damaged his vest, went flying. The man’s head snapped back, his feet left the floor, and when he landed, he tumbled back and smacked his head against the far wall as he dropped in a heap.

The woman squealed and ran to him, falling to her knees. Boone held her back as Keller radioed for an ambulance.

Two hours later, as Boone banged out his report, the woman had been pronounced healthy and returned home, her boyfriend was in the drunk tank with a concussion, and Keller was still chuckling. “You gonna teach that move at the academy, Boones?”

“Am I in trouble for that?”

“You kiddin’? You were in imminent danger. And so was she. And so was I. You subdue an arrestee any way you need to. Though I got to say, that was creative. Must’ve felt good, eh?”

Boone nodded. “Can you believe she’s refusing to press charges?”

“Predictable. But *you’re* going to press. He came at you with a deadly weapon.”

It had become Boone’s routine at the end of the first watch every night to change clothes in the downstairs locker room while listening to the veterans swap war stories. Domestic cases were one thing. Standing up to the ultimate playground bullies—that was living. Sometimes he would slowly change out of his uniform, just to hear another story of gangbangers getting theirs. That early morning a heavysset veteran regaled his colleagues with an arrest he and his partner had made at the end of the shift.

“Perps are liars, right? We all know that. We’re patrollin’ a neighborhood where the Latin Kings been terrorizing people. See a kid, early twenties, cruisin’ like he’s casing a house. Pull him over. He wants out of the car right now, ya know? I tell him to stay right where he is and show his hands. I call in the plate, and ’course it’s stolen.

“When I approach, he’s giving me all the is-anything-wrong-Officer bull. Covered with tattoos. We roust him out and cuff him and start asking what he’s doing, whose car is it, all that. He says he’s just coming from his cousin’s. I ask him his cousin’s name. Clearly makes one up. I ask him the address, he fumbles with that too. I ask him whose car he’s driving, he swears it’s his but left the title home. I ask him can we search the car, he says sure.

“While my partner is searching the car, I’m quizzing this guy six ways from Sunday, telling him I think he’s lying, that he knows nobody around there and I don’t believe it’s his car. He’s swearin’ on a stack of Bibles and his mother’s life and

his baby girl's life that it's his car. Partner turns up a .22 and a little stash of coke.

"I say, 'That's on you, bro.'"

"He says, 'Not mine. Never saw it before.'"

"I say, 'Found in your car.'"

"He says, 'Ain't my car.'"

The locker room resounded with laughter.

On his way home, Boone's amusement at the story turned to a hard resolve. He had learned early that cops embellish their arrest stories to make themselves look good and the gang-bangers look like buffoons. And while some of them might be, the sad fact was that the Chicago PD was losing the war with the gangs. They were more organized than ever, growing at unprecedented rates, and gaining ground all over the city.

Boone had never wanted to just work a shift, put in his time, and collect a check. He'd heard all the stories of wide-eyed, idealistic rookies coming in with grand ideas of changing the world, only to become jaded cynics who realized they were never going to make a difference. That's how the gangs won. They were more dedicated to their tasks than the cops were to theirs. Boone simply would not accept that.

Arriving at his apartment, Boone slipped silently into bed with Nikki, his wife of three years. As usual, he remained awake until she rose to tend to the baby, Josh. Then they would rehearse their respective days before Boone went to sleep.

Josh slept in longer than normal that morning, yet not only could Boone not drift off, his excitement also woke Nikki early.

“So what happened, big guy?” she said, rolling to squint at him. “You obviously have something to tell me.”

She clearly did not find Boone’s first collar as amusing as Jack Keller had. He pushed her long, dark hair away from her face. “C’mon, babe. This is a big deal.”

“Well, of course I’m proud, but really, Boone, is every arrest going to be this dangerous?”

“Nah. Well, maybe. Some even more. You know if that guy had caught me with the knife, Keller would’ve shot him dead.”

“How pleasant.”

“I’m just saying . . .”

When they heard Josh, Nikki fetched him and brought him into their bed. Still breast-feeding, their son was focusing now, able to lock eyes with his mother and dad and be coaxed into smiles and coos. Presently she passed him to Boone, who sat up and burped him, then held him before his face. “You know you and your mom are my life, don’t you? Yes, you do.”

Nikki laughed. “Is that how you talk on the job? Is it? Yes, it is.”

Soon she darkened the room, took the baby to the farthest end of the flat, and let Boone sleep. He dreamed of a house. Nothing spectacular. He and Nikki always said they wanted just enough grass to mow. Boone had started as a PPO with a salary in the midforties, to increase by a thousand a month after a year and then to nearly sixty thousand at the end of eighteen months. That was their timeline, their goal. A house with a yard before Josh was two.

No one was surprised that Boone Drake had grown up to be a policeman. From his days of grade school and Sunday

school, through Little League, Scouting, junior high, high school, and college, he had been a better-than-average student and a star athlete. More importantly, he and his three younger brothers had been raised in a small town in central Illinois by an old-school ex-Marine civil servant (who eventually became a city manager) and a mother who sacrificed and pinched pennies so she could stay home until the kids were in high school.

Something in the mix made Boone a black-and-white kid. He actually loved rules. While it had never been beyond him to get into mischief as boys will do, he avoided serious trouble. By fifth grade he became known among friends as Honest Abe and was often called upon to settle disputes. Boone soon earned a reputation as the one kid bullies avoided. Once in junior high, when a half dozen had surrounded him, he looked each in the eye and called him by name. "You cowards do whatever you're going to do with all your buddies around, but when I find you alone—and you know I will—you're going to regret it."

Seeing the fear in their eyes so emboldened Boone that he became known as a protector. A nerd, a dweeb, a geek threatened by a bully would run to Boone, and soon the word was out that anyone who terrorized the weak had to answer to him.

There were no gray areas with Boone Drake.

He met Nikki, the daughter of a military lawyer who lived in a neighboring town, at church when they were both in elementary school. They were acquaintances, then friends, then ignored each other, grew up to date others, and finally discovered each other again at community college. He was

studying criminology, set on being a Chicago police detective so he could do to gangbangers what he had done to bullies. She wanted to teach kindergarten.

Their relationship began with a frank discussion that Nikki always said had come from out of the blue. They found themselves together in line for something or other and cordially brought each other up to date.

“And are you still a justice freak?” she said.

Boone laughed and told her of his major. “And are you still blunt?”

“Guilty.”

He asked her to sit with him at lunch, and there he asked if she was seeing anyone.

“Now who’s being blunt?”

“I am,” he said. “Are you or not?”

She smiled. “Well, I’m dating . . . but no, I’m not committed.”

“Anyone you’d like to be committed to?”

She furrowed her brow. “None of your business.”

Boone shrugged.

“Fact is,” she said, “I’ve got three guys interested. One I kinda like more than the other two, but I can’t see it going anywhere.”

“Tell all three of them the truth.”

Nikki sat back. “Boone! We haven’t talked for what, two years, and now you play big brother?”

Boone cocked his head. “Maybe I want to be more than your big brother.”

She stared at him. “You’re not just trying to run my life the way you’d like to run everyone else’s?”

"I come off that bad?"

"You come off like you know better. And maybe you do. So let's say I quit playing the field. What's in it for me?"

"I am. I've known since I met you that we were meant for each other."

That made her laugh aloud. "We were kids! If you really felt that way, you had a strange way of showing it. You never even gave me an inkling."

"Making up for lost time."

"You sure are. And it's creeping me out."

"Sorry."

"Well, you have to imagine how this hits me."

"Sure, if you had no idea. You were never interested in me?"

"As a boyfriend?"

"No, as a justice freak. Of course as a boyfriend."

"Who wasn't? Big, good-lookin' guy. A little rigid, but hey . . ."

"So can we hang out a little and see where it goes?"

That had meant the start of conventionality for Boone. From that day on, he was careful not to overwhelm Nikki but rather to court her. He was chivalrous, deferential, even gallant. And when it came time to propose, he did it right. No assuming. No dancing around the edges. It came on a Christmas-season walk down the Magnificent Mile and ended with him on one knee in front of a high-end jewelry store.

She taught kindergarten during the first two years of their marriage and planned to return to her career when Josh and any more children were school-age.

Something about the way things had turned out confirmed in Boone's mind that an ordered life was rewarded. He owed that to his parents, he guessed. Having a goal, a plan, and following through paid off. He wasn't sure of the precise definition of the American dream. All he knew was that he was living it.

Did he deserve it? Sure, why not? He knew his own mind: he *was* a justice freak, and everything was working out the way he had hoped and planned. He and Nikki even found a great church, Community Life on the Near North Side. It was a large, multicampus, cross-cultural congregation pastored by a man not Boone's senior by more than ten years, Francisco Sosa. The engaging leader had persuaded Nikki to teach Sunday school while Josh was in the nursery, and Boone to get involved with junior boys' ministries when his schedule allowed.

Boone had to admit he found it disconcerting to hear Pastor Sosa discuss "the Lord" as a constant presence in his life. It wasn't that Boone didn't consider himself devout. He prayed before meals, prayed when he was in danger, went to church, tithed, and served. He just wasn't obsessed with spiritual things or so up-front about them. Of course, he also spent at least eight hours a day around men and women with the worst language on the planet. Most were also closet drinkers and divorced, some many times over. Jack Keller had three ex-wives. No wonder he was that rare old-timer who still loved the job and had not grown disillusioned or jaded, despite being the very definition of a grizzled veteran. The job was all he had.

One Sunday after Boone—in uniform—had spoken to

Sunday school classes about his job, Pastor Sosa told him that he saw something in him that could really be developed. "You've got a gift for communicating. Hone it and use it."

The pastor also said he thought about Boone often and prayed for him when he knew he was on duty. Boone thanked him, but the truth was, that kind of talk made him nervous. He got the impression that Sosa assumed Boone prayed before every shift. Which he did not.

3:10 A.M., SATURDAY, JANUARY 21

Boone and Keller were on patrol when Keller pulled in front of an all-night convenience store for coffee. While Boone sat waiting in the passenger seat, he noticed a pickup truck slowly maneuvering into the alley behind the storefronts on the other side of the street.

He radioed Keller. "Jack, you on your way out? Just spotted a suspicious truck."

"I'm nuking a bagel. Should I come right now?"

"I'll check it out and call if I need you."

Boone got out and jogged around to the driver's side, then pulled the squad down the block, switching off his headlights before turning into the alley about three hundred feet behind the pickup. He gradually gained on the slow-moving truck as it cruised, stopped, started, and repeated the cycle. He suspected the two occupants were casing the area with burglary in mind and radioed in the license plate number.

Finally Boone eased up behind them and turned on his blue lights, calling out over the PA for them to remain in the vehicle. He approached cautiously, pausing by the rear left bumper and watching to see if they were reaching for

anything. When he stepped to the window, staying back so the driver had to crane his neck to see him, Boone asked for license and registration.

The driver was a big redheaded man in coveralls. His license appeared in order, but it bore an Arkansas address. The truck had Illinois plates.

“What’re you boys doing out here tonight?” Boone said.

“Looking for the Piggly Wiggly store, but we must have the wrong address. We got a friend who works there all night, and somebody told us it was around here.”

Boone had never seen a Piggly Wiggly grocery store in Chicago, though he knew of a few in the suburbs. “You find that registration?”

The passenger made a show of digging through the glove box. “No, the wife must have taken it out. It’s usually in here.”

“How long have you lived in Illinois, sir?”

“’Bout six months.”

“And what is your current address?”

As the man was hemming and hawing, obviously pretending to try to come up with it, headquarters reported back to Boone’s walkie-talkie in code that told him the truck was stolen. He was about to make two serious collars, and he imagined himself herding the men out of the truck and into the back of the squad.

Boone had formulated the orders he would bark and was ready to cuff the men one at a time, but suddenly he couldn’t speak. Something inside cautioned him to go by the book, to engage his partner, call for backup, and take no unnecessary risks.

Nothing he had seen scared him about these suspects.

They were big, sure, but he hadn't detected alcohol, nor did he suspect they had guns stashed—though of course he would pat them down. The more Boone imagined himself making this double arrest alone, the more he liked the idea of the admiration that would ensue from Jack and their watch commander, not to mention everyone else in the district. Maybe he would even be cited.

He intended to instruct the driver to step out of the vehicle with his hands up and the passenger to stay where he was. But instead he said, "Turn off the engine and hand me the keys." The man slowly handed them out.

Boone radioed Jack, told him where he was, and asked him to call for backup.

"What's the problem, Officer?" Redhead said.

"Just sit tight and we'll straighten this out."

Eventually the pickup was impounded, and the suspects were on their way to central booking, charged with grand theft auto. Boone's shift was long over, but Keller had to stay at headquarters for a morning meeting anyway, so he said he would finish the interrogation and write the report. "Don't worry; you'll still get credit for the collars."

"I appreciate it, Jack, but you know the collars I really want."

"Don't start with this again, kid. You can't force it. You don't take it to the gangs. You wait till they bring it to you."

"That's the problem! We ought to be taking it to them. Wade in there, show 'em we won't be intimidated. This is our city, not theirs."

"Good way to get yourself killed, Boones. But I'm not saying I don't appreciate the passion."

The middle of the next afternoon, when Nikki allowed Josh to crawl on the bed and wake his dad, Boone roused to see her with a page in her hand. He roughhoused with the giggling Josh, then asked her what it was about.

“Something strange from my mother,” she said. “Found it in my e-mail in-box this morning and printed it out.”

Josh squirmed into his lap as Boone sat up and studied the paper.

Nikki, maybe this is nothing, but I can't sleep, and I certainly don't want to call and disturb you. Is Boone working tonight?

At twelve fifteen this morning I was awakened from a sound sleep with such an urge to pray for Boone that I had no choice but to slide out of bed and kneel to do just that. Now you know we've never knelt to pray, and I've never had a vision or a dream or any urging like this. But it was so overwhelming that, as I say, I had no choice.

Call me when convenient. Needless to say, I'm dying to know if it was something serious or just something I ate.

Love, Mother

“Hmm,” Boone said. “Interesting.”

“Well? What can I tell her?”

“Pretty quiet shift, actually. Only two incidents. One was a drugstore owner telling us that a kid ran off with some phone cards just before he closed at midnight. The other was a stolen vehicle, but it turned out to be routine, and that was around three fifteen.”

“That’s it?”

“Pretty sure. I would have remembered anything dangerous.”

“Boone, three fifteen here is twelve fifteen in Anchorage.”

“Well, that’s true. But like I say, turned out to be a standard GTA, no resistance, no danger.”

That night when Boone showed up for his shift, Keller asked him to sign off on the arrest report from the previous night.

“You’ll get a kick out of the end.”

Boone sat and read it through. The last paragraph read:

Offender 1 told reporting officer that arresting officer was “lucky he waited for backup. If he had tried to take us himself, we were going to jump him and shoot him with his own gun.”