

I am a police. That may sound like an unusual statement—or an unusual construction. But it's a parlance we have. Among ourselves, we would never say I am a policeman or I am a policewoman or I am a police officer. We would just say I am a police. I am a police. I am a police and my name is Detective Mike Hoolihan. And I am a woman, also.

What I am setting out here is an account of the worst case I have ever handled. The worst case—for me, that is. When you're a police, "worst" is an elastic concept. You can't really get a fix on "worst." The boundaries are pushed out every other day. "Worst?" we'll ask. "There's no such thing as *worst*." But for Detective Mike Hoolihan this was the worst case.

Downtown, at CID, with its three thousand sworn, there are many departments and subdepartments, sections and units, whose names are always changing: Organized Crime, Major Crimes, Crimes Against Persons, Sex Offenses, Auto Theft, Check and Fraud, Special Investigations, Asset Forfeiture, Intelligence, Narcotics, Kidnapping, Burglary, Robbery—and Homicide. There is a glass door marked Vice. There is no glass door marked Sin. The city is the offense. We are the defense. That's the general idea.

Here is my personal "ten-card." At the age of eighteen I enrolled for a master's in Criminal Justice at Pete Brown. But what I really wanted was the streets. And I couldn't wait. I took tests for state trooper, for border patrol, and even for state corrections officer. I passed them all. I also took the police test, and I passed that, too. I quit Pete and enrolled at the Academy.

I started out as a beat cop in the Southern. I was part of the Neighborhood Stabilization Unit in the Forty-Four. We walked foot patrol and did radio runs. Then for five years I was in the Senior Citizens Robbery Unit. Going proactive—decoy and entrapment—was my ticket to plainclothes. Later, another test, and downtown, with my shield. I'm now in Asset Forfeiture, but for eight years I was in Homicide. I worked murders. I was a murder police.

A few words about my appearance. The physique I inherited from my mother. Way ahead of her time, she had the look now associated with highly politicized feminists. Ma could have played the male villain in a postnuclear road movie. I copped her voice, too: It has been further deepened by three decades of nicotine abuse. My features I inherited from my father. They are rural rather than urban—flat, undecided. The hair is dyed blonde. I was born and raised in this city, out in Moon Park. But all that went to pieces, when I was ten, and thereafter I was raised by the state. I don't know where my parents are. I'm five-ten and I go 180.

Some say you can't top the adrenaline (and the dirty cash) of Narcotics, and all agree that Kidnapping is a million laughs (if murder in America is largely black on black, then kidnapping is largely gang on gang), and Sex Offenses has its followers, and Vice has its votaries, and Intelligence means what it says (Intelligence runs deep, and brings in the deep-sea malefactors), but everyone is quietly aware that Homicide is the daddy. Homicide is the Show.

In this second-echelon American city, mildly famed for its Jap-financed Babel Tower, its harbors and marinas, its university, its futuristically enlightened corporations (computer software, aerospace, pharmaceuticals), its high unemployment, and its catastrophic inner-city taxpayer flight, a homicide police works maybe a dozen murders per year. Sometimes you're a primary investigator on the case, sometimes a secondary. I worked one hundred murders. My clearance rate was just above average. I could read a crime scene, and, more than once, I was described as an "exceptional interrogator." My paperwork was outstanding. When I came to CID from the Southern everybody expected my reports to be district quality. But they were downtown quality, right from the start. And

I sought to improve still further and gave it a hundred percent. One time I did a very, very competent job, collating two rival accounts of a hot-potato homicide in the Seventy-Three: One witness/suspect versus another witness/suspect. "Compared to what *you* guys give me to read," pronounced Detective Sergeant Hen-rik Overmars, brandishing my report at the whole squad, "this is fucking oratory. It's goddamn Cicero versus Robespierre." I did the work as best I could until I entered my own end-zone and couldn't do it anymore. In my time, I have come in on the aftermath of maybe a thousand suspicious deaths, most of which turned out to be suicides or accidentals or plain unat-tendeds. So I've seen them all: Jumpers, stumpers, dumpers, dunkers, bleeders, floaters, poppers, bursters. I have seen the bodies of bludgeoned one-year-olds. I have seen the bodies of gang-raped nonagenarians. I have seen bodies left dead so long that your only shot at a t.o.d. is to weigh the maggots. But of all the bodies I have ever seen, none has stayed with me, in my gut, like the body of Jennifer Rockwell.

I say all this because I am part of the story I am going to tell, and I feel the need to give some idea of where I'm coming from.

As of today—April second—I consider the case "Solved." It's closed. It's made. It's *down*. But yet the solution only points toward further complexity. I have taken a good firm knot and reduced it to a mess of loose ends. This evening I meet with Paulie No. I will ask him two questions. He will give me two answers. And then it's a wrap. This case is the worst case. I wonder: Is it just me? But I know I'm right. It's all true. It's the case. It's the case. Paulie No, as we say, is a state cutter. He cuts for the state. He dissects people's bodies and tells you how come they died.

Allow me to apologize in advance for the bad language, the diseased sarcasm, and the bigotry. All police are racist. It's part of our job. New York police hate Puerto Ricans, Miami police hate Cubans, Houston police hate Mexicans, San Diego police hate Native Americans, and Portland police hate *Eskimos*. Here we hate pretty well everybody who's non-Irish. Or nonpo-lice. Anyone can become a police—Jews, blacks, Asians, women—and once you're there you're a member of a race called police, which is obliged to hate every other race.

These papers and transcripts were put together piecemeal over a period of four weeks. I apologize also for any inconsistencies in the tenses (hard to avoid, when writing about the recently dead) and for the informalities in the dialogue presentation. And I guess I apologize for the outcome. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry.

For me the thing began on the night of March fourth and then evolved day by day and that's how I'm going to tell this part of it.

### *March 4*

That evening I was alone. My guy Tobe was out of town, attending some kind of computer convention. I hadn't even started on dinner: I was sitting there with my Discuss Group biography open on the couch, next to the ashtray. It was 20:15. I remember the time because I had just been startled out of a nod by the night train, which came through early, as it always does on Sundays. The night train, which shakes the floor I walk on. And keeps my rent way down.

The phone rang. It was Johnny Mac, a.k.a. Detective Sergeant John Macatitch. My colleague in Homicide, who has since made squad supervisor. A great guy and a hell of a detective.

"Mike?" he said. "I'm going to have to call in a big one."

And I said, Well, let's hear it.

"This is a bad one, Mike. I want you to ride a note for me."