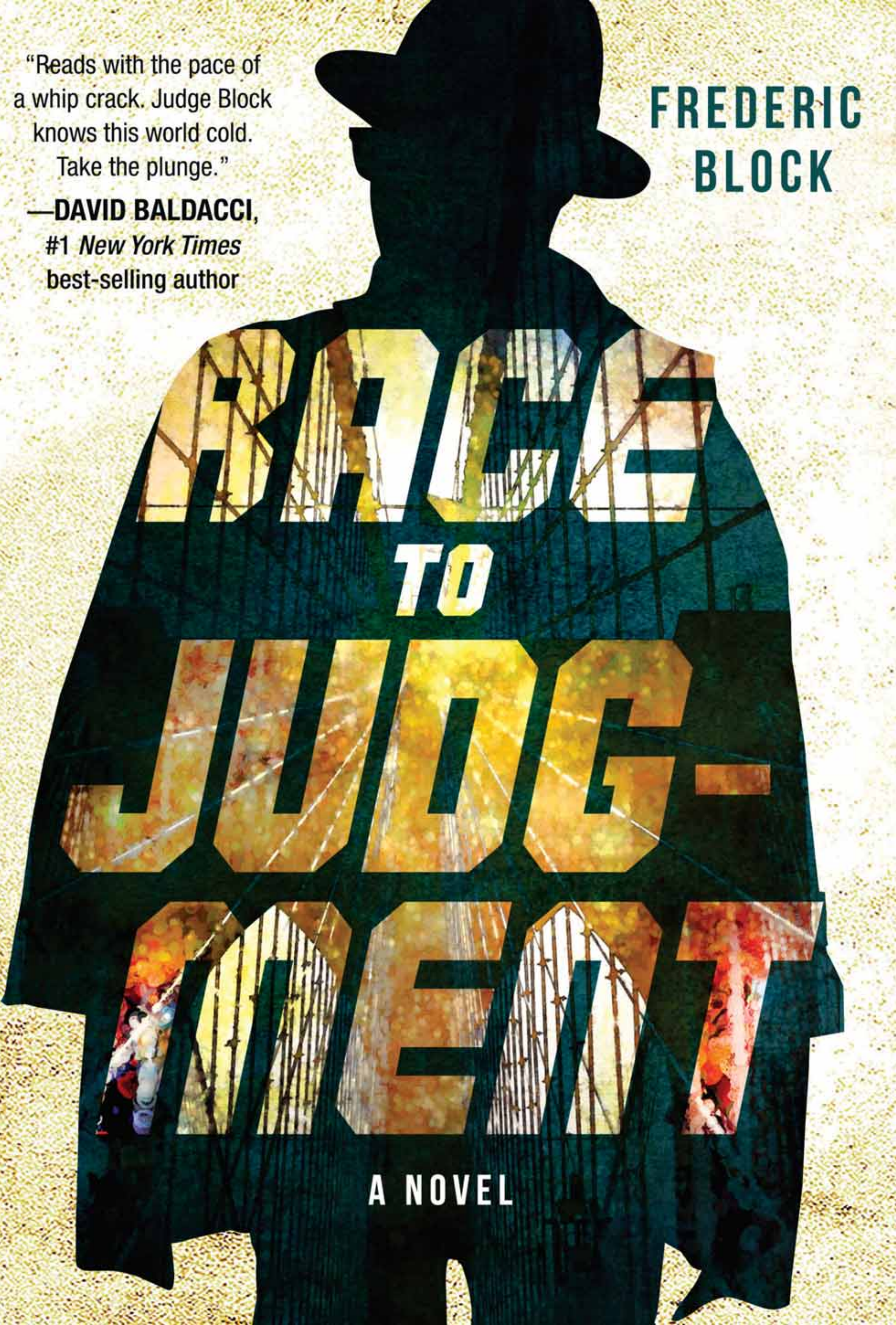


“Reads with the pace of
a whip crack. Judge Block
knows this world cold.
Take the plunge.”

—**DAVID BALDACCI**,
#1 *New York Times*
best-selling author

**FREDERIC
BLOCK**



**THE
TO
JUDGE-
MANT**

A NOVEL

Advance Praise for *Race to Judgment*

“Reads with the pace of a whip crack. Judge Block knows this world cold. Take the plunge.”

—**David Baldacci**, #1 *New York Times* best-selling author

“With heroes and villains as boldly drawn as the tabloid headlines, *Race to Judgment* provides a thrill ride through the bad not-so-old days of the Brooklyn justice system. This first novel by Judge Frederic Block brings a federal jurist’s keen eye to detail as the story powers through grimy holding cells, law offices where the real deal goes down, and courtrooms both ornate and gritty.”

—**Ron Kuby**, criminal defense and civil rights lawyer

“An impactful crime drama. And the music is a joy. Hearing Judge Block sing his songs had me smiling all the way through!”

—**James Barbour**, Broadway star, *The Phantom of the Opera*

“Block’s *Race to Judgment* is the inside skinny on the justice system from a man who lives it every day, but it’s the story that shines. Read and enjoy.”

—**Reed Farrel Coleman**, *New York Times* best-selling author of
What You Break

“Only an author with a finely tuned sense of drama and an exhaustive knowledge of the legal system could have written this brilliant crime novel. Judge Frederic Block is that man.”

—**Daniel Klein**, *New York Times* best-selling author of
Travels with Epicurus and *Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar*
(coauthored with Thomas Cathcart)

“*Race to Judgment* is a riveting thriller about truth and justice from a courtroom pro who has viewed the bench from both sides. Block’s narrative is taut and compelling, and a wonderful addition to the crime genre.”

—**Linda Fairstein**, *New York Times* best-selling author

“Judge Block’s *Race to Judgment* is a gripping page-turner with the added virtue of realism, thanks to the author’s decades of experience as a lawyer and federal judge. I devoured it in a weekend, and I suspect you will do the same.”

—**David Lat**, founder of AboveTheLaw.com and author of *Supreme Ambitions*

“In his courtroom in Brooklyn, Judge Block has seen it all. It’s those experiences that shape this book, a fascinating kind of companion novel to his memoir *Disrobed*.”

—**Ryan Holiday**, best-selling author of *The Obstacle Is the Way* and *Trust Me, I’m Lying*

Race
to
Judgment



Race
to
Judgment

Frederic Block

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Dedicated to the memory of Ken Thompson

OTHER WORKS BY THIS AUTHOR

*Disrobed: An Inside Look at the Life and Work
of a Federal Trial Judge*
(2012)

Coauthor of the musical *Professionally Speaking*
(music and lyrics)
(1985)

PREFACE

The idea for this novel came to me while I was reading some historical fiction a few years ago. Two works in particular captured my interest: Robert Harris's *An Officer and a Spy* and Ken Follett's *Fall of Giants*, the first of his Century Trilogy. I was intrigued by how the authors based their novels on true events but took literary license with the characters and events to create great stories. A friend of mine suggested that I might think about using a similar format based upon real cases I have handled over the years as a federal trial judge, and events that flowed from them. I was taken by the idea and started to believe that I had a good story to tell by taking literary license with these real-life experiences to develop the plot lines of my novel. I call it reality-fiction.

Thus, the storyline flows from my Crown Heights race riot case in the 1990s; the trial of Lemrick Nelson for stabbing Yankel Rosenbaum to death during the riots; the trial of an African-American, law-abiding twenty-two-year-old young man who was charged with murdering a sixteen-year-old boy six years after the murder; the case of Jabbar Collins, who spent sixteen years in jail on a trumped-up charge of the murder of a Hasidic rabbi before he was exonerated and set free; and the recent defeat of the Irish Brooklyn District Attorney by an African American who campaigned in large part against what he believed was a corrupt DA's office because in addition to the Collins conviction, the former DA's office had obtained a startling number of other unlawful convictions against other blacks.

In the epilogue I explain what is reality and what is fiction. But resist the temptation to look at it now, since it might spoil what I think is a good read.

A Note to the Reader
About the Music in *Race to Judgment*

The protagonist in this book has a hobby as a jazz pianist and a songwriter. Eight of his songs are scattered throughout the book, inspired by events and comments by some of the characters. He has a particular love for country music that “tells a good story,” and six of the songs are “good, old-fashioned country songs.” The others are a tear-jerker, wedding love song and a whoop-it-up party song.

The musical charts for the songs are in the songbook at the end of the book. But if you are curious and want to hear them sung by the characters in the book, there is an album of music that accompanies this novel titled *Race to Judgment* by Frederic Block containing all original music composed by the author. The album is available for download or streaming on all digital music services worldwide and at the author’s website, www.fredericblock.com.

“Good Instead of Bad”

“Look What She’s Costing Me Now”

“Lonesome Together with You”

“Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven”

“Like Father Like Son”

“High and Dry”

“How I’ll Always Love You”

“Se Agapame”

Three of the songs, “Good Instead of Bad,” “How I’ll Always Love You,” and “Se Agapame” are sung by the author/composer.

A white, rectangular sticky note is positioned diagonally on a white background. The note has a slight shadow underneath, giving it a three-dimensional appearance. The text "Part One" is written in a black, casual, handwritten font in the center of the note.

Part One



1

Ken didn't arrive home from his gig at Arturo's until well past midnight when he received the phone call that would forever change his life.

"Who in God's name is waking me up at this hour?" he grumbled as he picked up the phone at the side of his bed.

"Is this Mr. Williams?" came the frightened voice.

He felt foolish.

"I'm sorry. It was a long day. Who's been arrested?"

"How do you know that?"

"No one calls me at this hour to wish me happy birthday."

She started to cry. He backed off.

"Alright. What precinct is he at?"

"They took him to the 70th."

"They'll keep him overnight. He'll be arraigned in the criminal courts building tomorrow morning. I'll arrange to have someone meet you there."

"Mr. Williams, I'm sitting in the waiting room of the precinct right now. My husband has been arrested for murder."

"What's his name?"

"Troy. Troy Jackson."

"I'll be right there."

As soon as he jumped out of bed, he called the precinct.

"Sergeant Markham here."

"This is Ken Williams. You got a Troy Jackson there. I'm recording this call. He's not to be questioned. Play it straight. Mug shots and prints—and nothing else."

“Fuck you, Williams.”

“Watch your language, Markham, or you’ll be on night desk duty for the rest of your life. I’m coming right down.”

Ken hated the 70th. It’s where wacko cops had shoved a broomstick up Abner Louima’s ass. The 1997 case had become a national symbol of police brutality and reinforced beliefs that New York City police officers were harassing and abusing young black men as part of a city-wide crackdown on crime.

Ken was in his last year at New York University Law School when it happened. It outraged him, but in a way, as shocking as it was, it didn’t surprise him. He was one of the lucky ones who had escaped from the projects unscathed, but he had seen the cops rough up a lot of kids there. He swore that one day he would do something about it.

He donned a pair of black trousers and a gray turtleneck. No need to wear his lawyer uniform. He was not going to court. He quickly brushed his teeth, tossed some water on his face, and ran his fingers through his short-cropped hair.

He liked what he saw in the mirror.

“Not bad for a guy a little over forty,” he mumbled. “Not exactly Denzel Washington, but close. A little gray at the temples. Makes me look distinguished.”

It was cold. He grabbed his three-quarter-length black leather jacket. In minutes he was parking his yellow MINI Cooper in front of the precinct. Trish Jackson was waiting. Her head was buried in trembling hands as she sat in the gray metal chair nearest the entrance. But her petite good looks and well-cropped Afro stood out. So did the bulge in her belly.

“How much longer do you have?” Ken asked.

She slowly lifted her head before she answered.

“About three months. What is going to happen to my husband?”

“We’ll talk later. Try to compose yourself, if you can. Let me try to find him.”



Sergeant Markham was sitting behind the glass wall. He glared at Ken.

“You can’t see him yet, big shot. They haven’t finished with the intake.”

“Don’t jerk me around, Markham. You don’t need any more problems.”

Ken knew that Markham was up on charges for beating up a black kid whom he had stopped and frisked for no legitimate reason.

The cop begrudgingly got up from behind his desk and led Ken into a small room with a few metal chairs around a metal table. Within minutes, the door opened and a scared-looking, well-built, tall young man with curly black hair was led in by two shorter burly police officers.

“You’ve got ten minutes,” the taller one said.

“Leave us alone, Hurley.”

They sat across the table from each other. As soon as the officers left, the frightened young man sobbed.

“Mr. Williams, please get me out of here. They tell me I’ve been arrested for murder. It can’t be. It can’t be—It just can’t be!”

“Try to stay calm, Troy. We’ll get to the bottom of this soon enough. Right now, try to get some sleep. I told them not to ask you any questions. Don’t talk to anyone. You’ll be arraigned tomorrow morning. I’ll see you there. You’ll say ‘not guilty’ when the judge asks you how you plead. Not another word.”

“Will I be able to go home?”

“No. I’ll ask for a bail hearing, which probably won’t happen for a day or two, but the chances of getting bail are zero. I’ve never seen it granted yet for a black dude charged with murder. Nonetheless, it will give me an opportunity to put some wheels in motion. They’ll send you to Rikers. Be careful who you talk to there. Don’t say anything to anyone about what’s happened. I’ll get there tomorrow afternoon.”

"I can't believe this is happening to me, Mr. Williams."

"I know it's terrible, Troy, but for the sake of Trish and your soon-to-be new baby you've got to hang in and tough it out. I'll get my investigator on it as soon as I can, and we'll find out what's going on."

"I remember when you came to my school and spoke at the assembly, Mr. Williams. The kids idolized you. I know your reputation for taking on the police in racially tense situations. And I know from the press that you are representing a brother who's been sitting in jail sixteen years after he was convicted on what you claim was a trumped-up phony charge by the Brooklyn DA."

"Do you have any idea why this has happened to you?" asked Ken.

"None."



Ken drove Trish home. Her hands were still trembling as she fastened her seat belt.

"We live at 293 Hooper Street in Williamsburg," she told him, her eyes still brimming with tears. His GPS took him there in about ten minutes. He wondered how they were able to afford the new condo in that happening part of town. After they had driven for a few minutes, Ken broke the silence.

"Trish, we don't have to talk tonight if you're not up to it. Come to court for the arraignment tomorrow morning. We'll be able to talk more then."

"Will I be able to talk to Troy?"

"No, but I'm sure he would like to see you there. They'll be taking him to Rikers Island after. I'll make sure you can visit him the next day."

As tears trickled down her cheeks, she haltingly told Ken what had happened that night.

"We moved here just last summer and were planning to spend our first Christmas in our new home this month. We both teach.

I teach science at Corpus Christi Junior High. Ken is a high school guidance counselor for troubled African-American kids at Bushwick. We were able to get a jumbo mortgage. It was our dream come true. We were sound asleep. It was a school night. We had to be up by 7:00. Suddenly, there was loud knocking on the front door and a shout I'll never forget: 'Open up! Police!' We jumped out of bed. I had my nightgown on. Troy was sleeping in boxer shorts. We ran through the living room into the hallway, looked through the peephole, and saw the heads and torsos of four policemen. They threatened to break the door down if we didn't open it right away."

"I'm sure they didn't have to break in," said Ken.

"I hid behind my husband as he unbolted the latch and started to slowly open the door. The first officer shoved it hard. We almost fell. I wrapped my arms around Troy's waist and screamed. The police all jumped in. Two of them jerked Troy loose from me, grabbed his arms, and pulled them behind his back. One of them put handcuffs on Troy. The third one stood at the entrance with his gun drawn and asked the officer who had cuffed Troy if they were sure they had the right guy."

"What exactly did the guy with the gun say?"

"Are you sure this isn't one big fuckup, Sarge? This whole thing just doesn't seem to add up. Nice apartment, good-looking, clean-cut couple, a pregnant wife. I don't get it."

"Well, Trish, obviously it didn't stop them from arresting Troy."

"No. They told us he was being arrested for murder and read Troy his rights. They wouldn't give us any more information. Troy said there must be a terrible mistake. My knees just crumbled as I tried to hang onto him. I thought I was going to faint and I started to cry. The police officer who had handcuffed Troy said I looked like I was in shock. He grabbed a chair and had me sit. He got a glass of water from the kitchen and made me drink it. I couldn't understand why they did this in the middle of the night."

"They knew what they were doing, Trish. If they arrested him during the day they would have to arraign him right away. At night,

they can keep him until the morning. He's tired and more vulnerable to questioning. Most confessions happen under those circumstances, but don't worry, I told the police not to question him and I told Troy not to talk—to them or anybody. What happened next?"

"Somehow I got myself together. The officer who gave me the water walked me into our bedroom, and I got Troy a clean white shirt, a light gray sweater, and charcoal pants. And I took out his black leather dress boots and a smart-looking leather winter jacket. I didn't want my husband to look like a criminal."

"What about you?" Ken asked.

"I was only thinking about Troy and never thought about getting dressed. I didn't even realize I was still walking around in a flimsy, pink nightgown. Troy was still in the hallway when I got back. They took the handcuffs off him so he could get dressed. After he put on his clothes they put the handcuffs on him again. They pushed Troy toward the door and told me they were taking him to the 70th Precinct. Troy tried to turn and yelled over his shoulder, 'Call Ken Williams and tell him to come get me!'"

"I'm glad you did, Trish. I can appreciate how traumatic all this must be."

As her tears started again, she cried out. "Mr. Williams, our dream has turned into a nightmare."

Ken parked his car in front of the No Parking sign at the glass entrance to the building and walked Trish to the lobby.

"I can get my fiancée to stay with you tonight," he said.

"Thank you, but I think I can manage. I'll call my mother. She lives near here. She'll come and stay with me. Anyway, if you leave that car there you'll get a ticket."

"Won't be the first time, Trish."

She smiled, and her hands finally stopped trembling.

Seconds after Ken left, Trish was on the phone.

"Why are you sobbing, my baby?"

“Mama, Troy’s been arrested for murder.”

“Lord Jesus,” her mother said. “What did he do? Where is he?”

“Nothing, Mama. He’s in jail like an animal.”

“I’ll be right there, dear.”



2

Ken was only able to get a few hours of sleep. Before he left for court in the morning, he made two phone calls. The first was to Betsy.

“How’s my favorite prosecutor doing?”

“Working like a dog. Had to prep witnesses for the big trial next week.”

“That’s the price you gotta pay, baby, if you want to try cases for that lousy DA. I wish you’d quit and come work with me. I’m getting a ton of new business lately, and I could use more help.”

“Someday, Ken, but not right now. Since I’m no longer in General Crimes, soon they are going to have me trying real heavy-duty felony cases. I want that, Ken. I’ll be getting great experience. A couple more years as an ADA in Brooklyn and I’ll be ready to join you—as long as the letterhead reads Brown and Williams.”

He laughed. “Maybe by that time it might even be Williams and Williams. Gotta run. Can’t talk longer. Got an arraignment to handle on a new case. See you tonight. Remember, it’s Queen’s night out. Love you.”

The other call was to his investigator.

“Get your ass down to the arraignment part, Mickey. We got work to do.”



The massive Criminal Courts building swooped over downtown Brooklyn like a giant vulture. Perched on the southwest corner of Adams and Schermerhorn Streets, it had seen better days. In 2012

it was the last of the great Renaissance Revival edifices in the borough, but now—almost one hundred years old—its once luminous granite base and limestone clad exterior walls had turned a sullen gray. Pigeons were lined up like toy soldiers at the tops of its ten Corinthian columns. The early morning lines of people waiting to pass through the ominous triple-arched entryway and the metal detectors inside often snaked around the corner. They were helpless targets for the birds' droppings.

Although lawyers did not have to wait in the long lines, once inside Ken would be stuffed into one of the antiquated, cramped, and smelly elevators. Since he suffered from a touch of claustrophobia, he frequently climbed the six floors to courtroom AP1. He decided to do this on the day of Troy's arraignment.

Once out of the stairwell, Ken had to weave his way through the packed corridor leading to the courtroom past the old wooden benches along the walls. He was always amused by the range of carvings embedded in them—from every initial to all sorts of "I love you's." As he approached the courtroom, he wondered why the janitors had still not sanded off the "fuck you" carving on the top of the bench next to its entrance.

Inside the courtroom Ken spotted Trish sitting in the last of the seven wooden rows of public benches. A well-groomed and slender gray-haired woman was sitting next to her. They both stood as Ken came toward them. Trish was quick to introduce her.

"Mr. Williams, this is my mother."

"Glad to meet you, ma'am," Ken said softly. "Trish certainly needs your support. Troy will be coming into the courtroom soon. He'll be with other detainees, and they'll be seated in the jurors' box just to the right side of the judge's bench. We won't be here long. While Trish can't speak to Troy now, when I'm at Rikers this afternoon I'll arrange for her to visit him tomorrow morning. I'm glad you both came. Troy needs to know his family will be there with him all the way, especially his wife."



It was as Ken said it would be. After about fifteen minutes, the prisoners were brought into the courtroom and placed in the front row of the jury box. There were seven of them. Troy was in the second seat. He immediately spotted Trish and his mother-in-law and meekly waved. He looked as if he hadn't slept, but he stood out from the others. The clothes that Trish had insisted he change into before the police took him away were a little wrinkled, but he looked well-dressed compared to the other prisoners. He didn't look like he belonged in their company.

Soon there was a knocking on the other side of a door next to the judge's bench and the familiar cry "Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! All Rise!" rang through the courtroom as the door opened and the bailiff and judge entered. Ken recognized Judge Archibald Spatt. He was new to the bench, and as a rookie judge had been assigned for six months to the mundane job of handling *pro forma* criminal complaint arraignments. He would not be the trial judge.

When the bailiff shouted, "People of the State of New York versus LaTroy Jackson," Troy was taken from his seat by a court officer and brought in front of Judge Spatt. Seeing how well-dressed he looked, the judge was surprised to read that he was being charged with murder. He then handed the criminal complaint to Ken.

Ken couldn't believe what he read.

"Troy, according to this, you killed someone named Menachem Mendel Bernstein seven years ago on Chess Street."

"It's crazy, Mr. Williams. I was only seventeen then, and I haven't lived on that street since I was fourteen. I've never even heard of a Menachem Mendel Bernstein."

"Do you wish to have the charges publicly read, Mr. Williams?" asked Judge Spatt.

"That won't be necessary," said Ken.

"How does your client plead?"

“Not guilty,” shouted Troy.

Although his lawyer had told him not to say anything else, Troy Jackson could not contain himself: “I’m innocent,” he screamed. “Why is this happening?”

“Calm yourself,” answered the startled judge.

“I don’t mean to be disrespectful, Your Honor, but I have a pregnant wife and a full schedule of kids back at school waiting to see their guidance counselor today. If they find out I’m locked up in jail, all the work I’ve put in to keep them off the streets and winding up in Rikers will be a complete waste. Please let me go home. I promise I’ll be back here whenever I’m needed.”

Although he was new to the bench, Judge Spatt had quickly developed a reputation for being a strong but sensitive and caring jurist. He took his owlish glasses off his benign, rotund face, placed them down, leaned forward, and spoke softly:

“Young man, I know nothing about your case. You may well be innocent and this may all be a travesty. But given the fact that you are charged with murder, and if convicted could be sentenced to jail for the rest of your life, I just can’t let you go now. However, you have an excellent lawyer, and he knows what to do to properly represent you.”

Judge Spatt then turned to Ken. “Mr. Williams, do you have an application?”

“Yes, Your Honor, I would like the case to be set down promptly for a bail hearing.”

“How about two days from now?” asked the judge.

“Fine, Your Honor,” answered Ken. “One more thing. My client intends to testify before the grand jury.”

Ken knew the rules. In the absence of a waiver, the DA had five days after an arrest to hand up an indictment. This would require his office to present its case to a grand jury; only it had the power to indict. If it did not happen by that time, the accused had to be let out of jail; however, the charges would not be dismissed unless an indictment was not rendered within 180 days from the date of the

arrest. The grand jurors were drawn from the same random pool as regular jurors, and twenty-three was empaneled to sit for a month. Rarely did they all show up every day. Only a majority of twelve was needed to indict.

There was an ongoing debate in the criminal justice community about the value of the grand jury. It was a one-way street. The assistant district attorney handling the case before the grand jury was the only lawyer involved, and all the ADA had to do was present enough evidence to convince the grand jurors that there was probable cause to warrant an indictment. It was not a trial. The defendant's lawyer was not allowed to participate or cross-examine the witnesses. And, with one exception, the defense attorney was not even allowed to be present. The exception was that the defendant had a right to testify, and his lawyer could sit next to him and listen—that was all. He could not ask his client any questions or present any evidence on his behalf. In fact, he could not talk at all. The common saying among defense lawyers was that “the DA could get a grand jury to indict a ham sandwich.”

When an indictment did not occur, it was usually when the defendant did choose to testify. But it was the extraordinary case when a lawyer would allow his client to do that. Testifying was fraught with peril. The ADA could cross-examine the defendant, attack his credibility, and bring out any prior convictions. And if the defendant chose to testify at the trial, his grand jury testimony could be used against him. Since many defendants have checkered pasts, going before the grand jury could only make matters worse, and a good criminal defense lawyer would rarely let his client “be fed to the wolves.”

Nonetheless, a good attorney would want to keep his options open and would routinely give notice that his client wished to testify. This is exactly what Ken had done when he appeared before Judge Spatt. The ADA was now required to fix a date and time for Troy to “put up or shut up.” Unless the prosecutor obtained an extension

from the judge, this had to happen before the five-day period ended. Ken would then have to decide whether he would really permit Troy to testify.

As soon as Ken told Judge Spatt that his client would go before the grand jury, the ADA snapped: "The day after the bail hearing at 2:00 p.m."

The ball was now in Ken's court.

As Troy was being taken out of the courtroom by the court officers, Ken spotted Mickey sitting close to Trish.

"Trish, you go home with your mom. I'll catch up with you after I see Troy at Rikers. Mickey, let's grab some lunch at Junior's after I swing by the office, and we'll talk this over before I go."

"You're the boss," said Mickey.



Ken loved Mickey Zissou, although he was a little rough around the edges. He was a certifiable character, but a crackerjack "private eye." Mickey had a knack for gaining the trust of lots of bad folks; he looked and spoke like he could be one of them. Mickey's mother was a dark-skinned beauty from Jamaica. She came to the U.S. on a work visa when she was nineteen and landed a job as a waitress at a Greek diner in Brooklyn Heights. Mickey's father owned the place and, even though Greek men usually do not marry outside their own kind—let alone a black woman—he was smitten by her.

Mickey's dad, Costantino Zissou, didn't exactly look like Apollo. He was short and fat with black curly hair and a scrunched-up face. But he was rich and charming, and Mickey's mother was poor and desperate. She liked Costantino in spite of his funny looks. She often told him that if they got married, they would have great kids. "They could have my great looks and your great brains," she would say. And he would tease: "What if they had my looks and your brains?"

"I was the second born," Mickey would explain. "They gave me a Greek name, Mikali, but I wanted an American name so I said I was

Mickey. My younger sister came out tall, fair, and good-looking, but a little on the dumb side. I came out short, dark, and ugly, but smart.”

Mickey was raised in Astoria’s large Greek community across the Queens Midtown Bridge from Manhattan. College was not his thing, and he dropped out after two years. Costantino Zissou was disappointed when his son told him that “the restaurant business is not my thing either.” Mikali wanted more action in the real world and because of his natural smarts got a job as an investigator for the New York City Housing Department. It didn’t pay much, but he liked the work. He made some good contacts, and soon he was picking up some PI jobs on the side for a few criminal defense lawyers.

Mickey decided to live in the crime-infested Armstrong low-income housing project on Clifton Place in the middle of Bed-Stuy. It was cheap and, more importantly, he got to blend in with the druggies and gangs, which would prove to be invaluable for his burgeoning clientele. After a few years with the Housing Department, he had enough new business to become a full-time criminal investigator. As part of his networking, he had joined the Chisholm Democratic Club where he met Ken. They hit it off immediately. Soon Mickey Zissou became Ken Williams’ chief investigator.

It was a twenty-minute walk down Fulton Street—a few blocks from the Criminal Courts building—to Ken’s law office on Flatbush Avenue. In the early ’80s that seven-block stretch of Fulton was transformed into a pedestrian mall. Over the years, the Fulton Mall became a shopping mecca for downtown Brooklyn. It was home to more than 230 stores. As Ken and Mickey walked down the mall, it was apparent that the retail catered to African Americans. It was representative of the demographic changes sweeping through Brooklyn’s roughly 2.75 million population—the largest of New York City’s five boroughs. In fact, recent statistics revealed that Brooklyn’s Caucasian population had dipped below fifty percent; “white” was the new minority. Ken Williams believed that Brooklyn’s extraordinary diversity—African Americans, Hispanics, Jews,

Italians, Russians, Chinese, Arabs, and just about every other ethnic stripe—was truly reflective of the dynamic melting pot that helped make Brooklyn great.

In the middle of the first block, Mickey stopped and stared at the large Lane Bryant billboard draping the building across the street.

“Hey, Ken, look at that bitch’s big ass in that bikini. She’s fire. What a difference between a black woman and those scrawny Victoria’s Secret white girls. Maybe I’ll luck out and find me one like her.”

“You’re going to have to find one that’s a lot shorter,” quipped Ken, “let alone one that doesn’t mind hanging with an ugly dude like you.”

“Go fuck yourself, big shot. Just because you’ve got a hottie doesn’t mean I can’t have one, too.”

As they walked along Fulton Street, Mickey stopped in front of Spike’s Tattoo. A short, thin white guy who didn’t look old enough to buy booze was standing outside. The mosaic of multicolored tattoos rimming his neck and cascading down each arm looked like a work of modern art that belonged in the new Whitney Museum in the Meatpacking District in Manhattan.

“Hey, Mickey, how’s that evil eye I did for you last month?” Spike asked. “Bet you’re getting lots of looks. Why don’t you do one on the other arm? I’ll give you a discount.”

“You charged me too fucking much, Spike. I could have gotten it cheaper down the street.”

“Yeah, but it wouldn’t be as good as the one by the master. Just ask your buddy. How cool does that look?” he asked, looking at Ken.

Spike was right. Ken had been impressed when Mickey first showed it to him the week before. It covered his whole left upper arm, from the shoulder to the elbow. You could tell it was meant to be an eye. There was a black dot in the middle surrounded by a small yellow circle and then a larger light blue one. A circular strip of white rimmed it. Dangling from the eye was a brown twisted rope holding a dazzling array of multi-colored beads. The last one, which touched the tip of Mickey’s elbow, was a tiny teardrop replica of the big eye.

“What do you think, Ken?” Mickey asked. “Should I do another one on the other arm? It’s kind of cool. The evil eye is called a *mati-asma* in Greek. Every Greek household has one to ward off the evil spirits. And in my business there’s lots of them around all the time.”

“Well, for you it serves a double purpose, Mickey,” was Ken’s response. “It sure is fitting for a private eye, but I think one’s enough.”

Mickey told Spike he would think about it. The lawyer and his favorite investigator crossed Duffield Street, also called Abolitionist Place, dating back to the days of the Civil War. Mickey stopped by an outdoor blackboard on the sidewalk in the middle of the street. It was leaning up against the entrance to a two-story walk-up. He gazed at the chalk hand-written message scratched on it: “Dentist Upstairs (718) 555-3200 The Best Down Town.”

“I can’t believe I let that quack pull my rotten molar,” Mickey mumbled. “It hurt like hell. The guy should be in jail.”

Ken didn’t hesitate to respond. “If you weren’t such a cheap son-of-a-bitch you would have gone to a real dentist.”

Finally they reached Albee Square, where Fulton Street turned into DeKalb Avenue. They stopped and stared at the gleaming mammoth white stone granite building looming ahead of them. A replica of an alien culture of a bygone era with different aesthetic values, it would not look out of place if it sat next to the Acropolis or the Roman Colosseum.

“Look at that sucker,” exclaimed Mickey. “It never ceases to amaze me. It looks so strange in the midst of all these tattoo parlors, pawn shops, and pizza joints.”

Ken agreed: “The world’s just not what it used to be, Mickey. Not all progress is linear. I sometimes think we’ve lost our way.”

“Just look at that marble exterior and all those colonnades, and that soaring dome, Ken. I’d put my money in that place if it were still open.”

The old Dime Savings Bank of Brooklyn built the building in the neoclassical style at the turn of the last century. Its big daddy successor, the Dime Savings Bank of New York, ran the third-largest

savings bank in the country there until it closed its doors in 2002, the victim of an acquisition that ultimately failed in the next financial crisis. The building had lain fallow ever since. The facade at the top of the twin-columned bronze door entrance still bore the original name, "Dime Savings Bank of Brooklyn," chiseled indelibly into the stone. Its remarkable exterior was matched by its equally remarkable interior, boasting large gilded Mercury-head dimes and twelve red marble columns supporting the rotunda.

"It's a landmark building, Ken, but I read that some money-hungry vultures bought it and plan to incorporate it into a new super-tall skyscraper. Fucking Trump's probably behind it."

"It's a shame, Mickey. It's just the way our corrupt political system seems to work. We do the best we can in our own way to try to make a difference, but it'll probably take a revolution."

Next to the Dime Savings Bank, on the corner of DeKalb and Flatbush Avenues, was another Brooklyn landmark. Junior's Restaurant had been serving "The World's Most Fabulous Cheesecake" there since 1950. With its red- and white-striped menus, flashbulb-adorned signs, rust-colored booths, and wooden bar, it was a shrine to the Brooklyn of old, but its neon exterior looked strangely out of place next to the elegant old bank.

"Get a table, Mickey, and order me a brisket sandwich and a diet cream soda. I'm just going to drop by the office for a second."

Ken crossed Flatbush Avenue and walked past the entrance to the DeKalb Avenue Subway Station to the wood-framed storefront building next to it. For good luck, he always touched the gold-leafed sign, "Law Offices of Kenneth Evers Williams," every time he opened the faux mahogany door.

A young, attractive, African-American woman, who Ken thought looked a little like Betsy, was there to greet him.

"How'd things go in court today, Ken?"

"New case, I'll tell you all about it later. Mickey's waiting for me at Junior's. Here's the criminal complaint. Open a file. People v.

Jackson. I'm going to Rikers after. Probably be back late afternoon. You can make appointments for after four."

As he was walking out the door, Ashanti told him, "Zeke dropped by and told me to tell you he has two tickets for the Islanders hockey game tonight at the Barclays Center. 'They're playing their nemesis, the New Jersey Devils.' That's what he said."

Ken had been hesitant to hire Ashanti as his secretary and gal Friday. She had no real legal experience, but he couldn't say no to her uncle, the boss of the Brooklyn Democratic Party. Ken would need Ezekial "Zeke" Thomas's support if he ever decided to run for public office.

"Tell him I'd love to go," said a disappointed Ken, "but I'm too tied up with the new Jackson case."

Hockey was Ken's favorite sport, and the New York Islanders were his favorite team. He was the only African-American player on his college team, but he was happy to see that professional hockey was gradually shedding its reputation as purely a white man's sport. His favorite black player, Kyle Okposo, was a star for the Islanders. Ken was at the game against the hated Devils several years ago and saw Okposo net his first goal as an Islander on a game-winning power play.

The Islanders were playing then in the Nassau Coliseum on Long Island. But a few years ago they moved into the new Barclays Center, just a short walk from Ken's office, where Flatbush Avenue crosses Atlantic Avenue. The new sports complex was the centerpiece of a major commercial and residential development project that was in the throes of transforming that blighted part of Brooklyn into a modern, urban center.



The brisket sandwich was waiting for Ken at Junior's, and Mickey's remaining molars were chomping away at a big, gooey hoagie.

"Don't tell me you're eating another one of those brisket melts, Mickey. The cheese is dripping down your chin."

“You know it’s my favorite,” mumbled Mickey. “The plain brisket is fucking boring. Anyway, what’s up?”

“They’ve arrested this clean-cut black kid for a murder committed seven years ago on Chess Street. It makes no sense. Neary must be out of his mind again. Find out what this is all about. There were probably newspaper accounts you can get at the big library, and check out that neighborhood. See who knew what was happening back then. This smells worse than that sandwich you’re eating. And try to tone down that cursing. It’s not becoming. You sound worse than Officer Markham.”

“Look, Ken. Get off my case. I’ll swear all I want. There ain’t no fun I ever had when I was good instead of bad.”

“Alright. I know I’ve got to put up with it because there’s no one better than you at your job. But at least try not to be so vulgar when you’re around Jackson’s wife. She’s a classy woman. And by the way, Mickey, you just gave me a good hook for another country song.”

“What the fuck. Anyway, I’ll try to be a good boy when I’m with her.”

“Talking about women,” continued Ken. “How’s your love life these days?”

“None of your business. But I’m a lot happier ever since I left that bitch of an ex-wife. Thought I’d be living happily with Lorelee, but little did I know she was cheating on me.”

Ken did a double take, “Not only did you give me the hook, you also gave me the first line. Anyway, well, knowing you, you’ll be hitched again in no time.”

“I doubt it. All they’re after is your money,” Mickey snarled, as he sunk the rest of his teeth into the brisket melt.

Ken couldn’t resist. “Well, it certainly won’t be for your good looks.”

“Fuck you, man,” snapped Mickey as Ken paid the check.