



THE DOORS
ED McBAIN

Tricks

CHAPTER 1

The pair of them came down the street streaming blood.

No one paid any attention to them.

This was the city.

The taller of the two wore a blood-stained blue bathrobe. Blood appeared to be oozing from a half-dozen crosshatched wounds on his face. His hands were covered with blood. The striped pajama bottoms that showed beneath the hem of the robe were splattered with blood that seemed to have dripped from an open wound in his belly, where a dagger was plunged to the hilt.

The shorter person, a girl mdash;although it was difficult to tell from the contorted mask of her face mdash;wore only a paisley-patterned nightgown and high-heeled, pink pom-pomed bedroom slippers. Her garments screamed blood to the unusually mild October night. An ice pick was stuck to her chest, the handle smeared with blood. Blood was matted in her long stringy hair, bright red blood stained her naked legs,her ankles, and the backs of her hands, and her narrow chest where it showed above the top of the yoke-necked nightgown.

She couldn't have been older than twelve.

The boy with her was perhaps the same age.

They were both carrying shopping bags that seemed stained with blood as fresh as that of their wounds. There could have been something recently severed from a human body inside each of those bags. A hand perhaps. Or a head. Or perhaps the bags had become blood-soaked only from proximity to their own bodies.

They came running up the street as though propelled by the urgency of

their wounds.

"Let's try here," the boy said.

Several teeth appeared to be missing from his mouth. The black gaps were visible when he spoke. A thin line of red painted a trail from his lower lip to his chin. The flesh around his right eye was discolored red and black and blue and purple. He looked as if someone had beaten him severely before plunging the dagger into his belly.

"This one?" the girl asked.

They stopped before a street-level door.

They knocked frantically on the door.

It opened.

"Trick or treat!" they shouted in unison.

It was 4:10 p.m. on Halloween night.

The four-to-midnight shift at the 87th Precinct was only ten minutes old.

"Halloween ain't what it used to be," Andy Parker said.

He was sitting behind his desk in the squadroom, his feet up on the desk, his chair tilted dangerously, as if burdened by the weight of the shoulder holster slung over its back. He was wearing rumpled trousers, an unpressed sports jacket, unshined black shoes, dingy white socks, and a wash-and-wear shirt with food stains on it. He had got his haircut at a barber's college on the Stem. There was a three-day-old beard stubble on his face. He was talking to Hawes and Brown, but they were not listening to him. That didn't stop Parker.

"What it is, Devil's Night steals from it," he said, and nodded in agreement with his observation.

At their own desks, the other detectives kept typing.

"Years ago," Parker said, "*tonight* was when the kids raised hell. Nowadays, you got church dances, you got socials at the Y, you got all

kinds of shit to keep the kids out of trouble. So the kids figure Okay, they want us to be good on Halloween, so we'll pick another night to behave like little bastards. So they invented Devil's Night, which was last night, when we got all the windows busted and the eggs thrown."

Across the room, the typewriters kept clacking.

"You guys writing books or what?" Parker asked.

No one answered him.

"I'm gonna write a book one of these days," Parker said. "Lots of cops write books, they make a fortune. I had plenty experience, I could prolly write a terrific book."

Hawes looked up for a moment, and then scratched at his back. He was sunburned and peeling. He had returned only Monday morning from a week's vacation in Bermuda, but his skin was still the color of his hair. Big red-headed man with a white streak in the hair over the left temple, where he'd once been slashed. He had not yet told Annie Rawles that he'd spent some very pleasant hours with a girl he'd met down there on the pink sands.

"This guy Wamburger in L.A., he used to be a cop," Parker said, "I think with Hollywood Division. He writes these big bestsellers, don't he? This other guy, Kornitch, he writes them, too, he used to be a cop in New York. Ain't nobody who didn't used to be a cop can write books sound real about cops. One of these days, I'm gonna write a big fuckin' best-seller, I'll go live on a yacht in the south of France. Get these naked broads diving off the boat while I sit there doing nothing."

"Like now," Brown said.

"Yeah, bullshit, I already finished my work," Parker said. "This shift's been too fuckin' quiet. Whose idea was it to put on extra men, anyway?"

"The lieutenant's."

"So what's the use of seven guys when nothin's happening? Who's on, anyway? And where the fuck are they?"

"Cruising," Hawes said. "Out there looking for trouble."

He was thinking he himself would be looking for trouble if he told Annie what had happened in Bermuda, even though his arrangement with her was a loose one. Separate apartments, occasional conjugal visits, like they gave prisoners down in Mexico. Anyway, he'd asked Annie to come with him to Bermuda, hadn't he? Annie said her vacation wasn't till February. He asked her to change her vacation. She said she had to be in court all that week. She also said she hated Bermuda. He went down alone. Met this girl who practiced law in Atlanta. She'd taught him some legal tricks.

"It's so quiet, you could hear a pin drop," Parker said. "I coulda been home sleeping."

"Instead of sleeping here," Brown said, and went to the water cooler. He was a hefty, muscular black man, standing some six-feet four-inches tall and weighing two hundred and twenty pounds. There was a glowering look on his face as he pulled a paper cup from the holder and then stabbed at the faucet button. He always looked glowering, even when he was smiling. Brown could get an armed robber to drop his piece just by glowering at him.

"Who's sleeping?" Parker said. "I'm resting, is all. I already finished my work."

"Then why don't you start writing your book?" Hawes said.

"You could write all about how Halloween ain't what it used to be," Brown said, crumpling the paper cup and going back to his desk.

"It ain't," Parker agreed.

"You could write about it's so quiet on Halloween, your hero has nothing to do," Hawes said.

"That's the truth," Parker said. "This phone ain't rung once since I come in."

He looked at the phone.

It did not ring.

"I'll bet that bothers you a lot," Brown said. "The phone not ringing."

"Nothing to do," Hawes said.

"No ax murders out there," Brown said.

"I had an ax murder once," Parker said, "I could maybe write about that."

"It's been done," Hawes said.

"Be a big fuckin' best-seller."

"I don't think it was."

" 'Cause maybe a cop didn't write it. You got to be a cop to write best-sellers about cops."

"You got to be an ax murderer to write best-sellers about ax murders," Brown said.

"Sure," Parker said, and looked at the phone again.

"You got nothing to do," Hawes said, "whyn't you go down the hall and shave?"

"I'm working on my Miami Vice look," Parker said.

"You look like a bum," Brown said.

"Iam a bum," Parker said.

"You got to be a bum to write best-sellers about bums," Brown said.

"Tell that to Kennedy," Hawes said.

"Teddy? I didn't know he wrote books," Parker said. "What does he write about? Senators?"

"Go shave," Hawes said.

"Or go write a book about a barber," Brown suggested.

"I ain't a barber," Parker said.

He looked at the phone again.

"You ever see it this quiet?" he asked.

"I never even heard it this quiet," Brown said.

"Me, neither," Parker said. "It's like a paid vacation."

"Like always," Brown said.

"I once had a lady choked to death on a dildo," Parker said. "Maybe I could write about that. I had a lot of cases I could write about."

"Maybe you could write about the case you're working now," Brown said.

"I ain't working nothing right now."

"No kidding?"

"I finished all my work. Everything wrapped up till the phone rings."

"Maybe the phone's out of order," Hawes said.

"You think so?" Parker said, but he made no move to lift the receiver and listen for a dial tone.

"Or maybe none of the bad guys are doing anything out there," Brown said.

"Maybe all the bad guys went south for the winter," Hawes said, and thought again about Bermuda, and wondered if he should come clean with Annie.

"Fat chance," Parker said. "This weather? I never seen an October like this in my entire life. I once had a case, this guy strangled his wife with the telephone cord. I'll bet I could write about that."

"I'll bet you could."

"Hit her with the phone first, knocked her cold. Then strangled her with the cord."

"You could call it *Long Distance* ," Brown said.

"No, he was standing close to her when he done it."

"Then how about *Local Call* ?"

"What's wrong with *Sorry, Wrong Number* ?" Parker asked.

"Nothing," Hawes said. "That's a terrific title."

"Or I could write about this guy got drowned in the bathtub. His wife drowned him in the bathtub. That was a good case."

"You could call it *Glub* ," Brown said.

"*Glub* ain't a best-selling title," Parker said. "Also, she cut off his cock. The water was all red with his blood."

"Why'd she do that?" Brown asked, truly interested now.

"He was fuckin' around with some other broad," Parker said. "You shoulda seen the guy, he was a tiny little runt. His wife came in while he was taking a bath, she shoved him under the water, good-bye, Charlie. Then she cuts off his cock with his own straight razor, throws it out the window."

"The razor?"

"No, the cock. Hit an old lady walking by in the street. Hit her right on top of the head, knocked this plastic flower off her hat. She bends down to pick up the flower, she sees the cock laying on the sidewalk. Right away she wonders who she can sue. She picks it up, runs to her lawyer with it. Goes running down the street with this cock in her fist, in this city nobody even blinked."

"Carella and I once worked a case," Hawes said, "where this guy cut off another guy's hands."

"Why'd he do that?"

"Same reason. Love."

"That's *slove* ?"

"Love or money," Hawes said, and shrugged. "The only two reasons there are."

"Plus your lunatics," Brown said.

"Well, that's a whole 'nother ball game," Parker said. "Your lunatics. I once had a lunatic, he killed four priests before we caught up with him. We ast him why he was killing priests. He told us his father was a priest. How could that be, his father a priest?"

"Maybe his mother was a nun," Brown said.

"No, his mother was a registered nurse. Fifty years old, but gorgeous. Peaches Muldoon, her name was. Her square handle, I mean it, she was from Tennessee. Told me her son was nuts for sure, and she was glad I nailed him. Peaches Muldoon. A redhead. A real racehorse."

"Who'd *she* say the father was?"

"Her brother," Parker said.

"Nice case," Hawes said.

"Yeah. Maybe I oughta write about that one."

"You're not a priest."

"Sometimes *I feel* like a priest," Parker said. "You know the last time I got laid? Don't ask."

"Maybe you oughta go look up Peaches," Brown suggested.

"She's prolly dead by now," Parker said, giving the idea serious consideration. "This was maybe ten years ago, this case."

"She'd be sixty by now," Hawes said.

"If she ain't dead, yeah. But sixty ain't old, you know. I laid a lot of sixty-year-old broads. They have lots of experience, they know what they're doing."

He looked at the phone again.

"Maybe I will go shave," he said.

The two women knew each other well.

Annie Rawles was a Detective/First working out of the Rape Squad.

Eileen Burke was a Detective/Second who worked out of Special Forces.

They were in Annie's office discussing murder.

The clock on the wall read 4:30 p.m.

"Why'd they drag you in?" Eileen asked.

"My experience with decoys," Annie said. "I guess Homicide's getting desperate."

"Who caught the squeals?"

"Guy named Alvarez at the Seven-Two."

"In Calm's Point?"

"Yes."

"All three?"

"All three."

"Same area of the precinct?"

"The Canal Zone, down by the docks. You'd think you were in Houston."

"I've never been to Houston."

"Don't go."