



The  
Devil's  
Myrmidon

JEAN O'DONNELL

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BY  
JEAN O'DONNELL



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# Dedication

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To Michael, Beth, Sean, and Brad:  
Happy night reading.



## Author's Note

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This is a work of fiction.  
All the characters and incidents are of my imagination.  
Although a couple real places are mentioned,  
the descriptions of those places also are fictitious  
and should not be assumed to be accurate.



# Acknowledgments

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## CHAPTER 1

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Tendrils of mist swirled about the car, looking like thin ghosts uncertain of what form they should take.

“Hi, voicemail, it’s me. It’s pretty foggy, so I’m going to take my time driving. Be there when I get there. Love you! Start dinner, okay?” Sue cut off the phone and swerved slightly as a red van loomed up on the right side of the road. “What the . . .?”

A small figure draped in a damp hooded slicker stood by the driver’s side of the van. The vehicle itself was shoved against a guardrail; there was a two hundred-foot drop over the side. Slowly, Sue pulled over, turned on her flashers, and stopped the car. She picked up her cell phone and walked toward the child.

“Honey, are you all right? Where are your parents?” Quickly glancing around and not seeing anyone, she dialed 911. The child just stood there as she knelt beside him. “Yes, this is Susan Markow. I’m on Sundown Road a few miles north of Chilton. There’s been an accident. A van has gone off the road and is up against the guardrail overlooking the cliff. There are no adults that I can see, but it’s quite foggy here. There is a child beside the van; seems to be in shock. I’ll stay with him until someone . . .” The knife slid silently across her throat. The blood flowed over her clothes and the phone.

She felt no pain, but she was so heavy, so very tired. She was in the van. From far away, Sue heard an ignition start and saw

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the blurry vision of her own car gliding by her.

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“Get Ringgold! I don’t care where the hell he is, just get him here.” Tabors shoved his right fist into his left palm; a habit he practiced when things were messy. This was messy. Tim’s wife dead, her car missing; no sign of the owners of the van she was in, and no sign of the kid she had mentioned. He had known these two since Tim first entered the Academy. Sue was seven months pregnant; she and Tim had waited until he had made detective before starting their family. Now, no family. No one seemed to be able to reach Tim or his cousin. And these damned reporters! The angry black fist slammed into his left palm again.

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The roar of the ‘83 Harley engine was music to Ringgold’s ears. His left hand worked the clutch grip; his right boot the shift tabs. Seven months he had labored on this bike and finally he could enjoy it. Not that rebuilding it had been so bad. But now he was about to have the wind blowing on his face as he raced his big six hundred pound beauty down the road. Pure heaven!

He turned to his cousin Tim. “Finally fixed the problem with the charging system.”

“A short, right where I said. Right?”

“Yep. Well, come on, Tim. Your old lady’s gonna have your ass for dinner if you’re late. First night off in two weeks and you better make it a good one.”

“Yeah, one minute.” Tim stood up, put the rest of the tools in the garage, closed the doors, and mounted his Honda. “Just don’t leave me with a face full of dust.”

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For twenty minutes, the two of them raced down the road, sometimes side by side, or with Ringgold flying out in front. He slowed down and Tim caught up. "This is perfect," Tim shouted. "No phones, no pagers." Then, they pulled up in front of Tim's house. "Well, back to reality."

He and Susan had bought the modest yellow Cape Cod three years ago, using every cent they had. There had been no vacations, no real presents; everything had gone into this home. "I want a little Cape Cod, with a garage so you can tinker, a flower garden, a vegetable garden, and a white picket fence," Sue had said. "Oh, yes, and I want the upstairs finished so we can start making our family!" *How cliché*, Tim had thought. Everything was about done; the bathroom and one bedroom upstairs were finished. The other bedroom was just dry walled. Tim knew Sue resented the time he spent with Ringgold "playing" with their bikes. But she also understood. The whole scene was a complete change for him: home, family, responsibility. The bike gave him a sense of still being carefree.

"Come on in," said Tim.

"No, no, no! This is your night alone. Time for just you two."

"Her car's not here. Sue isn't even home yet."

"Well, okay, for just a minute. We'll clean up and I'll help you start dinner. Then, I'm booking it. You go on in; I'll take care of the bikes first."

As he started chaining the bikes to the rack by the driveway, he noticed someone moving to his right. Ringgold quickly spun around. It was a woman: a very attractive woman. Expensive suit, expensive haircut. Note pad and pen in hand. Probably a reporter.

"Excuse me, sir, are you Tim Markow?" she asked.

Instinctively, he rubbed his greasy hands down the sides of his filthy jeans, as if somehow that would make them clean. "No, he just went inside. Why?"

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“I need to talk to him about his wife.”

“His wife’s not here.”

The lady squinted slightly. “You don’t know, do you? And he doesn’t know.”

“Know what?”

“Mrs. Markow was killed about two hours ago. The police have been trying to find Mr. Markow. There was a police car here until about ten minutes ago. The neighbor next door drove up, said he was at his cousin’s, and they took off. Odd they didn’t leave someone here just in case.”

Ringgold stood still and looked at this woman, this stranger, as she told him what she knew. He couldn’t speak, couldn’t ask questions; he just stood there. He’d known Susan as long as his cousin had and although Tim had been the one to marry her, Ringgold had always remained a close friend with her. It had to be a mistake, someone who looked like her.

“All they have to go on right now is the van and the call she made. They can’t find the boy or her car: an older beige Saturn, I believe.”

“Look, Miss . . .”

“Stahl, Barbara Stahl. *New York Times*.”

“Ms. Stahl. I think you’d better leave now. I don’t think Tim will be up to talking to any reporters.”

“I’ll do that, Mr. . . .”

“Ringgold.”

“Mr. Ringgold. But here’s my card. I’m staying at the Crofton Motel. The number’s written on the back. Please have him call me. He’ll have to talk to someone and you know how we reporters are.”

He watched her turn and walk toward her car. Then he headed for the house. Telling Tim would be one of the hardest things he had ever done. It had to be a mistake.

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As Ringgold opened the door, Tim was just coming out of the bathroom. He had put on clean slacks and a sweater, and his sandy brown hair was still damp from the shower. “Thought you got lost, old buddy. Want to take a shower? You can borrow some of my clothes; the tan baggy slacks ought to fit you.”

“Tim.”

“I’m going to put on some chicken. Can you make a salad when you’re done? Sue left a message a few hours ago. She’ll be late.”

“Tim. Sit down for a minute.”

He was rubbing his hair dry with a hand towel. “I’ll chill some wine. No wine, she’s pregnant: sparkling cider. Listen, if you’d like, stay for dinner and then get lost.”

“Sit down, damn it!”

Tim stopped rubbing his hair and turned his head toward Ringgold. Then he slowly, dramatically strode to his recliner and sat. “Okay?”

“Tim, you said that you checked your phone messages?”

“Yeah. Well like I said Sue called, said she’d be late because it’s foggy near Chilton. Once I knew she was all right, I hung up. I can check the rest of the messages while I’m making dinner. Why? What’s wrong?”

Ringgold walked to the liquor cabinet, poured two fingers of Scotch in a glass and handed it to Tim. “Here, have a drink.” This wasn’t like Ringgold. He rarely drank, or pushed drinks on others.

“What’s wrong?” asked Tim.

“Tim, there was a reporter outside. She said . . . we’d better listen to your messages.” Tim redialed his voicemail. Together, they listened to Sue’s bubbly voice saying she’d be late. So alive!

The next message was more serious. “Tim, Tabors. Please call me as soon as you get in. Thank you.”

“Tabors doesn’t say ‘please’ or ‘thank you’ to anyone except

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his wife,” remarked Tim.

The next call was from Gert at the station. “Tim, please call Captain Tabors or me as soon as you get in.” Two more similar messages. Then . . . “Mr. Markow, this is Tom Freeman from *The Reporter* . . .” Ringgold quickly shut off the machine and turned to Tim.

“Tim, something has happened to Susan. I don’t know all the details, but something happened to her while she was driving back. She stopped to help someone.”

“An accident? She’s been in an accident? Is she all right? Is the baby okay?”

“No. The reporter, Barbara somebody, said she’d been murdered. I think we’d better call Tabors.”

“What are you talking about? She’s wrong. It has to be a mistake. Sue . . .” Tim sat staring at the table. “Call Tabors. We have to talk to Tabors. He’ll straighten this out. She left a message. You heard her; she said she’d be late. Call Tabors.”

Ringgold picked up the phone, dialed, and sat across from Tim. “Gertie, Ringgold. Forward me through to Tabors . . . I’m with him now. Thanks. Sir? Ringgold. I’m with Tim. What’s going on?”

“I have to see her. Where is she? Let me talk to him.” Tim grabbed the phone from Ringgold. “Sir, Tim . . .”

There was nothing Ringgold could do. Tears were forming in Tim’s eyes. He was running his left hand up his face and into his hair while listening to Tabors. It hadn’t really set in yet. It had to be a mistake. Where was she? What had happened? Tim quietly hung up the phone. “Come on, Ringgold. They’re on Sundown Road near Clayton’s Cliff. She’s still there. They’re waiting for us.”

Ringgold drove Tim’s red F-150. It was just starting to rain when they neared the site. The right lane had been closed off and the occasional drivers were being directed to the left side of the road.

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As soon as Tim and Ringgold pulled up, activity ceased. Most of these men worked with Tim and had at least met Susan. At first, no one spoke. Then there were quiet murmurings: “Tim, I’m really sorry. Anything I can do . . . We’ll get them.”

Tabors stood in front of Tim. Quietly, he put his arm around his shoulder and led him to the van. The coroner was there with a body bag. But Susan was still in the van.

“She was killed here, then pulled into the van . . .” Ringgold’s partner Nathan stopped as Tim and Tabors approached. “Tim, man. I’m really sorry. I promise you, we’ll get the mother . . .”

“Let me see her.” No one stopped him as Tim went to the van. She was so white: almost the color of new snow. Blood was everywhere. The phone was still in her hand.

“No, Susan! Susan, it’s me. Come on, baby, don’t leave me! Don’t do this, honey.”

“Tim.” Tabors’s hand was on his shoulder. Gently, he guided Tim away and nodded to the coroner. Slowly, the body bag came out. As they started zipping the bag, Tim turned back again. He gently touched her face, her hair. “I want to work this. I want this case.”

“No.”

“I want to work on this. I have to.”

“Tim, I’ll keep you informed every step of the way. But this is not your case. Or yours, Ringgold.”

“Come stay at my place tonight, Tim,” Ringgold said. “We’ll stop by your house, pick up some things.”

“No, I’m staying at home.”

“Tim . . .”

“Let me be. I’m all right. It’s something I have to do. I have to be there alone, face things. Listen to her again on the tape . . .” His voice drifted. “If I stay with you, I’m just putting it off. Ringgold, I’m not one to cry in front of another man.” He turned

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his face away. "Just get me home. I'll see you in the morning." They pulled into the driveway and Tim walked up to the door. "Thanks, Ringgold. I'll see you tomorrow."

Ringgold unchained his bike, looked at the house for a minute, and headed home.

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Strains of Vivaldi's *Concerto in G for Two Mandolins* floated through the house. Ringgold turned on the shower and stood for several minutes, letting the steam envelop him while the warm water poured over his body. The ache inside him would not go away. Susan. Why Susan? Even the long hot shower couldn't help ease his mind. Why Susan? To steal a car? Did the killer have any idea at all what kind of person he had murdered? She had made so many people happier by her presence. She'd influenced Tim's and his own life, gotten them going in the right direction. Tim . . . What he must be going through right now. There was just no way for Ringgold to help ease his pain, other than just to be there for him.

He threw his towel over the rack and reached for his robe. Then he walked into the bedroom and opened the case he kept on a table by his bed. He held the flute in his hands, slowly stroked his fingers along it. Susan was the only person who had heard him play in recent years. After his dear Meghan had died, it had been Susan who had comforted him, sympathized with him, and got him back to the land of the living. And now she was gone. He put the instrument back in its case and stood staring at it for a long time.

Slowly, he wandered down to the kitchen. He poured a cup of coffee, added milk, and sprinkled in some nutmeg, then stood out on the deck. It was dark, and cold, and wet, but he didn't

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notice. He looked out over the darkened woods to the outline of the hills beyond. "Susan, I promise you. Whoever and wherever he is, I'll get him, no matter what it takes. He'll pay for what he's done."

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Tabors eased into his chair, took a deep breath, and blew out his version of a sigh. Once, he had been more muscular. Through the years, more paperwork than footwork had eased some of his muscles, making him not fat, but portly. He was not in any way a weak man. His body was still strong, his personality forceful. Not a man to tangle with, physically or verbally. He folded his hands and looked across his desk to Nathan.

"Nathan, you're handling this investigation. I'll assign you a temporary partner. Ringgold is Tim's cousin and was too close to Susan to handle things clearly right now. Maybe in a few days I'll bring him in. I don't know."

Nathan nodded slightly. "Sir, we've got an APB out on Susan's car. We've got information on the owners of the Chevy van. They're a couple from Pittsburgh: the Turners, early thirties, on vacation, no kids. We're checking to see if they could have had a nephew or someone with them. Might explain the boy Susan saw. Could be we add kidnapping to the murder charge. I'm going to run home and get a few hours of sleep. The guys will call me if anything comes in. Do I keep Tim informed?"

"Yes, but clear things with me first. I don't want him too close right now, especially if we find the bastard. You have a particular preference for a partner, other than Ringgold?"

Nathan glanced at Tabors. "I really want Ringgold. He's methodical and I skip around, which means we work well together, and we know how to watch each other's back. We've

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been partners for four years, and it would take time to adjust to someone else.”

Tabors leaned forward slightly. “See me in the morning. I’ll talk to him, see how he’s doing. Best I can do right now.”

“Good enough. See you in the morning, sir.”

Nathan stopped by his desk and picked up the phone. “Hi, baby, I’ll be there soon. I know; I’ve got the case. We’ll talk when I get there. How are Kia and Nat? See you soon, Gracie.”

Nathan strolled outside, pulling up his collar against the rain. It was getting cold, really cold for October. He got in his car, but before he started it, he sat back and closed his eyes, both hands on the steering wheel. “Lord, give me strength,” he whispered. Then he headed home.

Nathan Stone and Ringgold had been partners for over four years now. At the time he came to the department, aside from Tabors, he had been the only black man. Now there were several. His first partner, though not openly prejudiced, had seemed “uncomfortable” with Nathan’s marriage to petite, blond Gracie. After a few weeks, the partner had been transferred.

From their first day working together, Nathan and Ringgold had hit it off. They complimented each other even though they were almost complete opposites. Although both were about six feet tall, Ringgold was muscular with long, reddish brown hair. Nathan was lean, almost thin, very dark and almost bald. Nathan “jumped” from one lead to another. Ringgold paid attention to all the details. Together, they came to solid conclusions. They had a good record of cases solved, much higher than average.

Gracie was waiting up when he got home. She reached up for a kiss and they held each other for a long time. They sat over cups of tea that soon grew cold and talked together well into the night.

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