

Fighting Time
Excerpts

Chapter 3

Shock
Amy Banks

Brewer, Maine 11 p.m.
April 12, 1979

The sound was unforgettable. The guttural, high-pitched screaming that woke me from a deep sleep was foreign and utterly terrifying. It was the soul-crushing wail heard in horror films and in movie scenes of women who are in the earliest stages of a deep, dark, disbelieving grief. It was both disorienting and clear; something was gravely wrong. I heard voices and footsteps as I walked slowly up the two flights of stair from my bedroom and was flooded by the memory of my brother mistakenly and tragically stepping on our new kitten on these very same steps just months before. At the time, I had climbed the same route to find the poor little kitty seizing, her body flopping from side to side before falling dead on the landing in the doorway. My parents and brother were watching, helpless in the face of the life-and-death battle the kitten was fighting. The same frantic energy entered the house the night my father was murdered, just a thousand times worse. Halfway up the stairs I ran into Joanne, a dear friend of my parents. With no preparation, her face twisted in pain, she blurted out, "There's been an accident –your father has been shot and killed."

It was a simple, direct statement that would forever change my life. All experiences would now be filtered through this new lens, but in the moment there was no place to hold it in my brain and body. Nothing had prepared me for that devastating statement. And so my mind made a rapid association with a recent *McMillan & Wife* episode that I had watched with my father. In it, a masked gunman had stormed a restaurant opening fire with an automatic weapon and killing a number of guests, some in mid-chew, others while they tried to flee the carnage. IN the absence of any concrete details about my father's murder, my brain decided that this was how my father had died. Strangely, after the actual details of his killing became known, the image of the gunman storming

the restaurant never disappeared – it still sits in my head, alongside the details of what actually happened. After hearing Joann’s start words, I didn’t scream or cry and she did not offer a hug, or even an “I’m sorry”. There would be no comfort for any of us that night, or in the days that followed. Joanne had always been a gentle soul – her husband of sixty years recently described her as an angel. The explanation for her carelessness was simple: shock. By the time we met on the stairs she had known about the murder for at least forty minutes, and she had already entered the freeze state biologically designed to protect her for pain that is simply too overwhelming to bear. Only years later, as a psychiatrist, did I fully understand how traumatized everyone in our lives had been that night. The news of my father’s death was like a sudden volcanic explosion at Pompeii, an entire community frozen in place.

Chapter 5

Arrested

Isaac Knapper

The day I was arrested for murder began earlier than most. The sun was barely starting to rise on May 19, 1979 at 5:45 am when I was abruptly woken by the sounds of men screaming at the top of their lungs. It felt as if I had been dropped into a terrifying nightmare. When I opened my eyes, I found myself staring directly into the barrel of a gun. In fact, the small room I shared with my brothers was filled with cops, each pointing a gun at my face. They yelled, “Get up now!” but I was confused and my mumbled “What?” was met with more violent screams to “Move it!”

My brother Larry, sitting up in bed, stared at the cops, wide-eyed and motionless. As I stood up, feeling particularly vulnerable in only my underwear, I could see my momma just outside my bedroom door demanding an explanation for this early morning raid. The cops spun me around, forced my hands behind my back, and snapped he handcuffs so tight that they painfully pinched my wrists.

One of the cops told me that I was under arrest for murder. My head spun as he read me my rights. I had no idea who I was accused of murdering and who had identified me as a murderer. As the cops dragged me to the door my momma protested my innocence, emphatic that they had made a mistake. Momma asked

if I could get dressed first, but the cops told her that she could bring my clothes to central walk-up. I sat in the back seat of the cop car, bare legs sticking to the vinyl seat and my heart racing. I didn't understand what was happening. I hadn't killed anyone, but those words kept running through my mind: *I am going down for murder. I am going down for murder.*