




THE CHICAGO WAY

MICHAEL HARVEY

A KNOPF  BOOK

THE
Chicago
Way

Michael
HARVEY

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[*AUTHOR'S NOTE*](#)

[*A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR*](#)

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In memory of:

Michael Marchetti
2002–2005

Fallon O’Toole McIntyre
2002–2004

Matthew Christian Larkin
1958–1999

It is hard to contend against anger. For whatever it craves, it buys with its life.

—HERACLITUS

You wanna get Capone? Here's how you get him. He pulls a knife, you pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue. That's the Chicago way....

—SEAN CONNERY AS OFFICER JIM MALONE, *THE UNTOUCHABLES*

I was on the second floor of a three-story walk-up on Chicago's North Side. Outside the Hawk blew hard off the lake and flattened itself against the bay windows. I didn't care. I had my feet up, a cup of Earl Grey, and my own list of the ten greatest moments in Cubs history.

For the first half hour I was stuck on number one. Then I realized the greatest moments at Clark and Addison are always about to be. With that I settled in and mapped out the starting rotation for next year's world champions. That's when I saw him.

Actually, I sensed John Gibbons before I saw him. But that's just how it was with Gibbons. From waist to shoulders he was of one dimension, that being massive. His head sat on a bulldog neck, with short ears and gray hair clipped close. His nose showed the back rooms of Chicago's alleys. His eyes were still clear, cool, and blue. He cornered me with a look and smiled.

"Hello, Michael."

Gibbons had been retired from the force five years now. I hadn't seen him in four, but it didn't matter. We had some history. He shook off the rain and threw a chair toward my desk. He sat down as if he belonged there and always had. I put the Cubs away, pulled open the bottom drawer, and found a bottle of Powers Irish. John took it straight. Just to be sociable, I gave Sir Earl a jolt.

"What's up, John?"

He hesitated. For the first time I noticed his suit, uncomfortably cheap, and his tie, a clip-on. In his hands he twisted a soft felt hat.

"Got a case for you, Michael."

He always called me Michael, which was okay since that was my name. I didn't want to derail him, but my curiosity held sway.

"Jesus, John, who's dressing you these days?"

The big man reddened a bit and looked down at the outfit.

"Pretty bad, huh? The wife. Did you know the wife, Michael?"

I shook my head. I didn't know anything about John that wasn't three years old. His personal file at that time read WIDOWER. His first wife, an Irishwoman from Donegal, got a message from her doctor one day about an X-ray. Two weeks later, she was gone. I had sent a card and given John a call.

"The wife, the second wife that is, she left about a year ago," Gibbons said. "She was a young

type, you know.”

John always had a weakness for them. Women, that is. It’s been my experience if you have that sort of weakness, the younger ones tend only to aggravate the situation.

“So you been dressing yourself?” I said.

“For some time.”

“And you get all dressed up to come here?”

A nod.

“To see me?”

Another nod.

“I got a case, Michael.”

“So I gather.”

I freshened his drink and poured a bit more hot water into my mug.

“You remember 1997.”

“Before my time,” I said.

“Not by much. Anyway, it was Christmas Eve. I had the windows rolled down. You remember used to keep the windows down. Even when it was cold. Well, I’m driving the squad by myself. Down in South Chicago.”

I knew South Chicago. A collection of warehouses and whorehouses. Dry docks and rough trade. A nasty bit of Chicago, crumbling at the edges and blending into Indiana gray.

“I hear a shot,” John said. “Roll around a corner and see this girl running down the middle of the street. Head-to-toe blood. The guy is right behind her. He’s got a .38 in one hand and a knife in the other. Sticking her as they run.”

John closed his eyes for a moment and left the room. When he opened them, he was back. I didn’t feel so comfortable anymore.

“Couple decades on the job, Michael. Never saw anything close to it. I get out of the car, she coming right at me. I just catch the both of them. He’s on top and I can still hear that knife. Made like a suction noise. I reach around with my piece and put it to his head. For the first time he registers pain and stops.”

“None of this is ringing a bell, John.”

“It should ring a bell, huh?”

I nodded.

“Well, let me finish. So we are all three on the ground. Me with the gun to his head and the girl between us. Her face was about six inches from mine. I could smell the death on her, you know?”

I knew.

“So we untangle. I put the guy on the ground and cuff him. He says nothing. I slap him around a bit. Still nothing. I look at the girl. She’s cut up pretty good, stabbed more than once in the chest. I get a pulse and call for the medics.”

John got up and walked across to the window.

“Hot in here, isn’t it?”

John cracked the window.

“It’s thirty-five outside with freezing rain and gusts,” I said.

“Gusts?” His shoulders turned my way and the rest followed.

“That’s what they called them,” I said. “Gusts. Gusts ain’t good.”

John left the window open and walked back to the chair.

“So we get this girl into an ambulance. She was a looker, Michael. Did I tell you that?”

I was waiting for that part. “Let me guess. You fell for her.”

“Jesus, Michael. She was covered in blood and half-dead. Besides, she was just a kid.”

“Go on.”

“Anyway, I find out she was running from his car. It’s a shit-box Chevy idling in the middle of the street. I pop the trunk and what do I find?”

“Tell me.”

“Sheets of plastic. Rolls of the stuff. And rope. Lots of rope. I open the driver’s door. There’s plenty of blood. Under both seats, I find custom-made carriers. In one, he’s got a bulldog shotgun. In the other, he’s got a machete strapped up there. Over both visors, two more leather fittings. One for the gun he had. The other for the knife.”

“Not the guy’s first dance?”

“No sir,” John said. “So I take him downtown and throw him in the slam. It’s past midnight, I figure

I can sort him out tomorrow.”

“And?”

“I come in the next day. He’s gone.”

“Gone?”

“The chief then. You didn’t know him. Dave Belmont.”

“Heard the name,” I said.

“Nice guy, career cop. Dead now. Didn’t ever want any beefs. Just keep your mouth shut and pass your time in. That kind of guy. Anyway, he takes me into the office. Says forget about it. Says the guy is gone and it’s over. Never happened. Then he gives me this.”

From his pocket John Gibbons took out a piece of green velvet. Clipped inside was a silver Police Medal. The highest award a Chicago cop can get. Score one and your career is made.

“Those are hard to come by, John.”

“Part of the deal. I get the medal, a pay raise, and promotion. In return...”

“You forget about it.”

“That’s right. So I did.”

“And nine years later you want to do what?”

“Well, I really don’t want to do anything. But then I got this.”

From his other pocket John Gibbons pulled a letter.

“And what is that?”

“It’s a letter.”

“I can see that.”

“From the girl. The girl from that night.”

“From nine years ago?”

“Yeah.”

“She didn’t die, I take it.”

“We need to help her, Michael.”

“We...”

“I poked around a bit. “Gibbons shrugged. “Didn’t really get anywhere.”

As a detective, my old partner was a good piece of muscle. Someone to break down doors, even he had no idea what might be on the other side.

“You’re the best I ever worked with,” Gibbons continued. “You know it. I know it. Everyone on the force knew it. If you can help out, I’d be grateful.”

The Irishman threw an envelope across the table. I opened it up and enjoyed the warm feeling money can sometimes give a person. Then I looked up and across the desk.

“Tell me about the girl,” I said.

Gibbons began to talk. I picked up the letter and, reluctantly, began to read.

The phone rang at three-thirty the next morning. I didn't want the phone to be ringing at three-thirty. But there it was.

I reached for the receiver and knocked the whole thing onto the floor. Then I got up to turn on the light and hit my toe on the steel footing of the nightstand. I cursed appropriately and picked up the receiver. The voice at the other end was breathy, but one I didn't recognize.

"Mr. Kelly?"

"Yes," I said.

"Is this Mr. Kelly?"

I answered who else would it be, and wondered about the face attached to the voice.

"Mr. Kelly, this is Lisa Bange calling from Channel 6 Action News."

Three questions buzzed through the early morning fog I call my brain: What kind of woman has last name of Bange? Why was Channel 6 Action News calling me at three-thirty in the morning? And what kind of woman has a last name of Bange?

"Hi, Lisa Bange," I said. "What can I do for you?"

"We are calling to get a comment—"

Lisa stopped and I heard some voices argue at the other end of the line.

"Mr. Kelly?"

"Still here," I said.

A bated Bange breath.

"Sorry," she said.

"So, Lisa. Here we are. Just you, me, and three-thirty in the morning."

"Yes, Mr. Kelly. I'm calling to see if you have any comment on the shooting death of a Mr. John Gibbons."

I keep a copy of the *Iliad* in the original Greek on the dresser next to my bed. Beside it is Richard Lattimore's translation. The only translation worth owning as far as I can see. Behind these volum

sits a nine-millimeter Beretta in a holster. Lattimore might not appreciate the subtlety; Odysseus certainly would. I checked the clip on the Beretta, then the safety. Lisa kept talking.

“He was shot twice. In the stomach, I think. Down by Navy Pier. But not in the water. Mr. Kelly?”

“Yes, Lisa.”

“Well, your business card was found on his person. And so we just thought...”

“Where you located, Lisa?”

She seemed surprised. Like everyone in the city of Chicago knew where Channel 6 Action News was.

“Three hundred North McClurg Court.”

“Do you have footage of the crime scene?” I said.

“B-roll? Sure.”

“I’ll give you a statement, and you let me look at what you have. Deal?”

Lisa was in over her head. But I knew the voices were there. After a moment she came back on the line.

“Deal.”

“See you, Lisa.”

I hung up the phone and got dressed.

The first thing I noticed about Channel 6 was the slant. Not an editorial slant. Channel 6 was built on a landfill and in the process of sliding into Lake Michigan. The smart guys among us would deem both a landfill and the notion of sliding into an abyss appropriate analogies for Chicago's local news. Not being a smart guy, I was there for Lisa Bange.

Not that I didn't care about John Gibbons. I did. But he was dead, and nothing I could do would change that. On the other hand, I was out of my bed at four o'clock in the morning, walking down a sideways plastic hallway, on my way toward a newsroom full of people I would either hate or despise. I would view the tape and try to get a line on Gibbons' killer before the cops dumped the whole mess. I figured that was more than enough for someone I hadn't seen in four years before yesterday. I was doing my best. And if Lisa Bange happened along the way, so be it.

She was sitting in a cubicle at the end of the hall, drinking what looked like coffee and smoking what looked like a cigarette.

She was five feet eight and great-looking in that newsroom sort of way. Picture long sweaters and jeans that hang pretty well. Long-limbed and athletic, with loose brown hair and Irish skin the color of cream. She was worth getting out of bed for. She also wasn't Lisa Bange.

"Down there," she pointed.

"You're not Lisa Bange, are you?"

"Down there." She spoke without taking her eyes off the newspaper. *Tribune* crossword.

"Seven down," I said. "Five-letter word for *nonsense*. Try *hooey*."

She lifted her blues from the accursed ink. "*Hooey*, huh?"

I nodded. She scribbled.

"It fits."

"What can I say? I'm good with words."

She pointed again. "See how good you are down the hall." At least this time she smiled.

Down the hall was the Channel 6 newsroom. For four o'clock on a Sunday morning, it had the action thing down pretty well. I was directed to a long row of gray cubicles. Inside the last one I found a thin set of shoulders, hunched over a TV monitor, stopwatch in hand.

“Lisa Bange,” I said.

A large pair of 1950s cat-eye glasses appeared over the top of the TV. Directly underneath said glasses was a pallid face twisted into a silent shriek, masquerading as a smile. How pleasant it sometimes seems. Until you get out of bed, that is.

“Yes,” she breathed.

I introduced myself. With a pencil Lisa vaguely pointed to a corner set of cubicles. They were green. I assumed that set them apart.

“Over there. Diane wants to speak to you.”

I guess I was supposed to know who Diane was. Not being an avid fan of Channel 6 Action News, I was at a loss. Still, I figured she was the star of this little drama. And she had to be a sight better than Lisa.

“Diane?” I said.

Three heads huddled around a desk turned in perfect sync. They fixed me with a single look, one of practiced disdain. Inside the newsroom Cerberus sat the fatted calf. The pot of gold, if you will, at the end of the *Action 6 News* rainbow. Also known as the anchorwoman.

“You mean Ms. Lindsay,” said one of the heads.

“I guess so,” I replied.

Quick, like the detective I am, I reached in and spun Her Highness around by the chair. Diane Lindsay gave a bit of a gasp. She had headphones plugged into a small TV set and had not heard a word we said. Across the screen rolled a stretcher. I noted a soft felt hat at the end of the gurney. Two EMTs loaded John Gibbons into an ambulance. Then the tape cut to a single shell casing, cold in the Chicago night.

Ms. Lindsay removed the headset, looked at me, and back at the tape. Then she shut the machine down.

“Mr. Kelly.”

She was good-looking. In a redheaded, cold, clinical sort of way. The kind of person you’d think was attractive if you were into guilt and relentless remorse. I didn’t have a hankering for either. And Ms. Lindsay didn’t seem to take a liking to me anyway. Still, it was four in the morning and I didn’t much give a damn.

“You called me down here,” I said. “I’d like to see the rest of the tape.”

Diane’s acolytes had moved around me in a loose sort of triangle. Two took notes. The other sized me up for the boneyard.

“I believe Ms. Bange told you we could talk about that,” Diane said.

“Yeah, okay. Listen, we don’t talk about anything until we get rid of the audience.”

Diane gave the trio a look, and they loped off to a solitary corner of the newsroom.

“Now, Mr. Kelly. Let’s chat.”

I unclipped the Beretta I’d snuck past the receptionist who, if there was a God in heaven, would have been Lisa Bange. I put the piece on the desk and sat down. Diane took a fresh pencil from the rack and tucked it into the hair tie atop her head. Her eyes fastened on the gun as she rammed the wooden end of her number two pencil into an electric sharpener. She brandished the polished lead and pointed to a stack of legal documents that had surfaced at my elbow.

“You’ll have to sign all of these before we can let you view any tape shot by Channel 6.”

“You mean Channel 6 Action News,” I said.

She smiled. I signed.

“There you go. Channel 6 Action News wants to sue me, they get into that long line heading down the Action News corridor.”

I pointed toward the hall. Diane just looked at me.

“Now, Mr. Kelly, how do you know Mr. Gibbons?”

“You mean how *did* I know Mr. Gibbons? I mean he’s dead, right?”

Diane confirmed with the slightest of nods. John Gibbons was now officially dead.

“He was my partner a while back. On the force.”

“Any idea what he was doing down by the pier?”

“None.”

“He had your card in his pocket.”

“He was a friend.”

“He was shot with a nine-millimeter semiautomatic.” Diane looked across the desk at my piece of paper and shrugged.

“You’re a private investigator now,” she said.

I gave her a nod. This was getting boring.

“Let me see if I can speed this up for you, Diane. No, we were not working together. And you, Diane, I might be lying. If we were working together on something, I sure as hell wouldn't tell you. Not without getting something in return. Now are you going to roll that tape or do I get to take it home with me?”

“Why do you want the video?” she said.

“The cops tipped you to me, right?”

Now it was her turn to demur.

“Either they think I'm good for the murder,” I said, “which is insane, and therefore probably what you suspect. Or they want to know what Gibbons was working on and they think I might know.”

“What was he working on?”

I studied a piece of green cubicle just above Diane's head and to the left.

“Look, Kelly,” she said. “You're right. The cops did tip me. They do want to talk to you.”

The slightest of pauses, and then she continued.

“Now, why would that be?”

I shrugged.

“Here's the deal,” I said. “I get anything I think you can use, I'll let you know. If I can, I'll do it before I go to the cops. But it's a two-way street. You screw me and...”

I shrugged again.

“Just don't screw me.”

“Deal.” Diane stuck out her hand. I held it longer than I wanted.

“Now, how about the tape,” I said.

She pulled a VHS cassette off the desk.

“This is a dub of the footage we shot tonight. You can take it home. With one additional condition.”

“And what might that be?” I said.

“That you take me with you.”

Approximately three and a half minutes later, we were in a cab, heading south on Michigan Avenue.

So you're thinking you're going to turn the page and find me in flagrante delicto with Red. Right? Wrong. Diane was just joking. Some strange brand of anchorwoman humor, no doubt.

She did, however, buy me a drink. In Chicago, at a few minutes before five in the morning, the choices are limited but endlessly interesting. We went to the Inkwel, a local hangout for news types tucked into the shadow of the Michigan Avenue bridge.

"So, Mr. Kelly." Diane drank her whiskey neat with a water chaser. I had a Lite beer from Miller. I figured we were both putting on airs.

"So, Ms. Lindsay."

"Here's to your friend."

"Associate," I said and cracked my tooth on a peanut shell that felt like it was filled with cement. When I opened it, petrified peanuts turned to dust and fell to the floor.

"I hadn't seen John Gibbons in four years before yesterday afternoon."

"That's how he got your card?" Diane said.

"He wanted some help on a case. A woman was assaulted. Long time ago."

I motioned to the bartender. He was asleep, so I threw a peanut at him. It nearly knocked him into the beer cooler. He came out with another Lite.

"And less than ten hours later, Gibbons winds up shot," Diane said. "Shot as in dead."

"The worst kind," I said.

Diane drained her glass. A fresh one appeared at her elbow.

"You know what we call that in the news business, Mr. Kelly?"

"A coincidence?"

"No, Mr. Kelly. In the news business, that's a story."

"I don't know much about news stories. But I do know a little bit about murder. Gibbons wasn't the type to go into anything blind. He could handle himself and knew it."

My little speech gave Diane pause.

“Your friend was shot at a range of one to two feet,” she said and passed over a copy of the initial police report. “He wasn’t carrying a gun and there were no signs of a struggle.”

I glanced through the report and laid it down by my elbow.

“That’s interesting, Ms. Lindsay. But let me ask you a question. How much do you make for living?”

The anchorwoman shot her glass back to the bar and got up to go. I stopped her in an easy sort of way.

“Now don’t go off getting offended. Let’s say it’s a half million.”

She started to get up again.

“Okay, okay. Let’s say it’s a million. Why does someone who gets paid a million dollars go to her TV station in the middle of the night to cover a story about a retired Chicago cop who gets stiffed?”

Diane smiled. Maybe a little too quick for her own good. Then she turned back to the bartender, shrugged, walked to a window, and looked out. It was the gray just before morning. Buildings blurred and crowded close together. Wisps of fog slid across the surface of the Chicago River, running fast and steady from the locks and Lake Michigan beyond.

Diane sidled close and offered a fresh drink. This time it was whiskey, like hers. She laid her forehead against the window. The last whispers of night pushed gently against the glass. We stayed that way and watched for a while, until the first cold fingers of dawn brushed the top of the Wrigley Building, moved down the white lady, and pretended to warm the city below.

“What’s your deal, Kelly?”

“Huh?”

She turned and gave me a look only single women over thirty can manage.

“You’re what, thirty-two, thirty-three?”

I took a sip of whiskey and nodded. I was really thirty-five, but what the hell.

“Ever been married?”

I shook my head.

“Engaged?”

Another shake.

“Afraid?”

I shrugged.

She shrugged.

“With these kinds of conversation skills, you should be.”

“I love it when you’re charming,” I said.

“What do you know about the TV business in Chicago?”

“I turn on the TV and there it is.”

“Chicago’s the third-largest market in the country,” she said. “Far and away, the biggest snake pit I’m in the last year of my contract with a news director who likes blondes and bodies. I have neither.”

I was about to disagree but thought better.

“I need a big story or six months from now I’m shooting consumer pieces in Flint, Michigan. After five years in Chicago, Flint doesn’t work for me. In fact, Flint never worked for me. Bottom line, just don’t have a lot of time here, Kelly. Then again, if the police are any indication, neither do you.”

At least she smiled when she said it.

THE SKY WAS TINGED a smoky sort of pink as we exited the Inkwell. I held the door open for a couple of cops I knew, out-of-uniform guys. They ducked their heads when they saw Diane, but she didn’t seem to notice. She was quiet. Maybe she was thinking about the murder. Maybe she was thinking about going to bed with me. Maybe she was just drunk.

“Tell you what,” she said. “Why don’t you read through the police report and look at the tapes. That way we can touch base.”

A taxi pulled to the curb. She stepped into the back and rolled down the window.

“Nice meeting you, Mr. Kelly.”

“Bye, Diane.”

The cab began to pull away, then paused.

“Oh, and Mr. Kelly...”

I leaned forward. She did the same. Our faces hovered at the precipice, inches apart.

“Yes, Diane.”

“Whoever killed your friend fired from close range. Makes me think Gibbons must have known h

attacker. Probably trusted him.”

I nodded.

“And well, Mr. Kelly, doesn’t that make you a legitimate suspect?”

She blinked once and waited.

“Talk to you, Diane.”

I gave the cab a rap and off it went. She was right, of course. John Gibbons had to have known his killer. And trusted him. Unless the killer was a woman. Then all bets were off.

The cabbie dropped me a half block from my flat. His rig belched white smoke as it drifted around the corner, and I tasted the grit at the back of my throat. My apartment was one of three in a walk-up graystone. Not a bad place, but better in the summer when Wrigley Field was only two blocks away.

I fully expected to find Chicago's finest camped on my stoop. Instead, I found the Sunday morning paper and a Saturday evening blonde. Not necessarily in that order.

She scattered a smile around the corners of my doorstep. I stepped forward to inhale as much as I could. I figured she hadn't opened her mouth yet and this might be as good as it got. I was right.

"Hi, Mr. Kelly," she said. "My name is Elaine Remington. I'm the woman from John Gibbon's letter. The one who almost got killed."

From her bag Ms. Remington pulled a more than capable-looking nine millimeter and pointed it in the general direction of my left eye.

"I'd like to talk to you," she said.

"Sure," I said.

My keys came out of a pocket but had trouble fitting in the lock. Capable-looking nine millimeter will do that to a set of keys.

"If you see any cops inside, yell and I'll shoot them," I said.

She wasn't smiling anymore.

"Better yet, why don't you just shoot them yourself?"

She motioned with the gun and I went inside.

I sat her down on the best chair in the best corner of my flat. I figured it was the gentlemanly thing to do. Besides, she had the gun and would take it anyway.

"Want some coffee?" I said. She shook her head and pulled my piece off my hip.

"Thanks," I said. "How about some orange juice?"

"Sure," she replied. "Orange juice is a good source of potassium. Women need that, you know."

I didn't know and didn't argue.

She unloaded my gun and checked the pipe. I rustled through my fridge looking for another suitable weapon. Nothing came to mind. She had already figured this out and kept talking.

“Sorry about the gun, Mr. Kelly. It’s just a precaution. Girl needs to be able to protect herself.”

I placed the orange nectar squarely before her and took a less-than-comfortable perch on the sofa.

“How do I know you’re the woman from the letter?” I said.

She got up from the chair. With one hand, she began to undo the first few buttons of her top. To my credit, I kept my eye on the nine. It didn’t waver.

“Here,” she said.

The scar was purple, thick, jagged, and heading south from just under her collarbone.

“It goes to just about here.” She pointed halfway to her waist.

“You know how many pints of blood the human body holds, Mr. Kelly?”

I didn’t.

“Eight. I lost six. They basically reinflated my body. With blood, I mean.”

The gun faltered just a bit. Then found its focus.

“He raped me, too, Mr. Kelly. Did Gibbons tell you that? Probably not. Tied me up like a hog. Laughed about that for a while. Then he raped me.”

She flicked her hair back, and the skin under her right eye twitched once.

“Listen, Ms. Remington,” I said. “Why don’t we put the gun down and talk about it.”

“Gibbons was supposed to help,” she said. “Now he’s dead.”

“How do you know that?”

“I saw him last night. A bar called the Hidden Shamrock over on Halsted and Diversey. Gibbons liked to hang out there. You know the place?”

I did.

“I met him there,” she continued. “He told me about you maybe helping us and said he had a lead. Said he had to meet a guy down at Navy Pier.”

“And you followed him?”

Now her eyes slid away.

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