

You Have The Right to Remain Silent by Ron Dailey
Prologue & 1st Chapter here. Reads fast. Take a moment.

Prologue 1971

Minutes before stopping at the Chevron station, Curtis Bagwell felt his kidneys would burst. Feeling relieved, he grabbed a white paper towel from the aluminum dispenser. He wiped his hands and scrubbed a grease spot on his pinky until the lubricant disappeared. He lobbed the used towel in the trashcan.

Almost unconsciously, he looked into the cracked mirror above the sink. Still a handsome man, about forty with blond hair, the image looking back at him showed strong blue eyes. Even at his age, he looked as if fabricated from steel. All those years of weightlifting paid off. He proudly stood six foot two and weighed a solid 225 pounds.

Curtis reached into his back pocket for a comb. At the sound of the door opening, he turned his head in the direction of the stealthy man who entered the restroom. Dark sunglasses covered his eyes. He wore a hot spacious trench coat in the dead heat of summer. Curtis needed to see his face and hand. What could he be hiding inside his arm?

Without combing his hair, Curtis stuck the comb back into his pocket. Carefully, he backed two steps away from the sink. The sly man stepped into the lavatory stall and shut the door.

"Curtis, can we make a deal or not?" the voice in the stall said. "No need for anyone to know nada."

No mistaking that voice. It belonged to Harry. They completed cadet training together, about twenty years ago, even shared a few drinks on the town. On one occasion, Harry spent a night over at Curtis's pad because Harry felt too intoxicated to drive.

Could Harry be in on the corruption too? Could the whole world be in on it? There had to be at least one clean cop on the force besides himself.

"They're going to be exposed, Harry," Curtis said. "The entire force is going to be exposed. They're into everything. I've been there, seen it: dog fights, cockfights, prostitution, guns, dope, and worse. It's all the way to the top. The mayor and the chief of police are involved."

"That should tell you, you can't win," Harry said. "No deals. No bribes. No more lies."

"We have to make a deal. You have no choice. There are no options."

"There're always options," Curtis said. "The press will help." "Not this time."

Curtis sensed danger. The sixth sense he developed over the years kicked in. His left hand moved toward the gun holstered on his shoulder.

The stall door opened. Harry knelt into a shooter's stance. He fired his silencer muzzled gun before Curtis could pull his weapon. Bullets tore into Curtis's abdomen, hurling him backward, crashing him headfirst into the urinal and facedown onto the urine-spotted floor.

"Too clean for your own good, Curtis," Harry said, sticking his gun into his holster. "It hurt to have to waste you, but I didn't have a choice. You or me, they said. Some choice, huh, Curtis?" Harry opened the door and exited.

Curtis blinked at the red pool of blood in which he lay. He'd bleed to death before an ambulance could get him to the hospital. Even if the ambulance showed up in time, the police would arrive too. He

couldn't trust the police. Either way, he'd be a dead man.

He needed to get home and tell his boy, his boy, Lee. His boy could be in danger too. Curtis dragged himself across the checkered tile floor, around the metal trash can, and to the door. He didn't have any feeling in one of his legs, and it dragged like dead weight.

Curtis managed to open the door a crack. From the floor he looked outside. The attendant who pumped his gas when he entered the bathroom now lay sprawled by Curtis's two-tone '53 Chevy. Harry probably used a 12-gauge on the attendant.

Curtis didn't recall hearing a shotgun blast. Did he pass out? Maybe for a minute he did. Could Harry still be around? He opened the door wider and dragged himself outside.

It had turned dark, and because of the station's location outside the city limits, it could be five minutes or so before another car pulled in to get gas. It didn't matter. He felt the urgency to make it to his car, get home, and warn his twelve-year-old son, his entire world.

Crawling across the black asphalt, Curtis looked to his left. He spotted another dead person, the nice lady who gave him the key to the bathroom. Wasted, blood still trickled from her nose, and her eyes looked fixated. Curtis couldn't help her now. The oath he took to protect the public meant very little. He could hardly help himself.

Curtis dragged himself ten more feet, halfway to his car. His lower torso offered little help. He crawfished across the pavement. Hair stood on his neck, and he couldn't shake the feeling that Harry would creep up behind him.

Why didn't Harry finish him off in the first place? It would be just like the bastard to shoot him in the head as soon as he reached his destination. The few times the two spent together, Curtis figured Harry harbored a dark side. After a sickening minute, his instincts took hold and told him that Harry left the station.

Curtis's body shook, and only a concentrated effort would keep him from passing out. If he did, he'd never wake. "Lift, drag, lift, drag" hammered in his brain. He continued to drag himself, one body length at a time, leaving a bloody trail behind.

Finally, having reached the car, he pushed himself up, careful not to put weight on the leg with no feeling. He opened the car door and fell inside. Several blocks away, sirens screamed, coming his way. He twisted the key he'd left in the ignition, slammed the gearshift in drive, and squealed out of the parking lot.

Most of his body felt like ice. Sleep, that's what he needed, to lie down and take a nap. He couldn't remember where he was going...someplace important...oh, to see Lee, his son. Could he make it home? There's Adams Street. He'd cut down that road to stay off the main streets. Sweat spurted out of his forehead. He felt dizzy... needed to stay awake... Stay awake, he told himself. Help me stay awake, Lord. His whole body felt cold, but his chest and right leg the coldest.

He swung a hard left onto Adams and goosed the accelerator with his good leg. His peripheral vision gave way to a narrow path directly in line with the hood ornament. Gripping the steering wheel tighter, he ran the stop sign and just barely kept his Chevy on the road. He turned right onto Francis Street. Two more turns, and he would be home. Would Lee be there? Curtis's wife died in a car wreck several years back, and that left no one to take care of Lee but him. Lee suffered from hyperactivity. He stayed in trouble at school, but his medication promised hope, and Lee might be all right.

Curtis wheeled into the driveway and came to a screeching halt. He slammed the horn down with both hands, knowing he didn't have the energy to make it to the front doorstep.

Releasing the horn, he leaned his head into the steering wheel with no energy reserve left. His pale blue shirt, soaking wet with blood, would scare his boy. He couldn't help that now. He panted for air and hoped his son heard the horn. He felt the frigid air when the passenger door opened.

"Daddy, what happened?" the blond-headed boy shrieked. "You're shot! I'll call an ambulance."

"No!" Curtis mustered the strength to holler. "Get in." Tears ran down his face, not from the pain of being shot, but from the knowledge that he ran out of time to prepare for his son's existence.

Lee climbed in. "You need help, Daddy. You're bleeding to death. Please, let me get help."

"They're dirty." He could feel the awkward pulsating tumble of his heartbeat.

"Who's dirty?"

"All cops. They're all dirty." "What do you mean, dirty?"

"Crooked. They're...all...crooked. Chief of police...he's crooked, the whole force...crooked. From the lowest traffic... cop to...the...commissioner." Blood squirted down both corners of Curtis's mouth. "I know...you have...your heart...set on... being...a...cop. Don't, son. Be CIA. No cop. All...cops dirty."

"Daddy, Daddy...please don't die. Please, please, please!

Don't die."

"Harry did..." Curtis mumbled, and his head dropped onto his boy's shoulder.

CHaPTeR 1

Thirty-one years later, Watermaker stood at the tail end of his car. He looked up at the bronze sun and squinted. It poured down like a blazing fireball that glared and bounced in the sky. He opened his red trunk lid covered with lime green pollen.

Mike tossed in a cardboard box filled with Mason jars.

Sliding his massive fingers into his gloves, Watermaker removed a revolver and an automatic rifle, an AK-47, and placed them on the front seat. He sneezed. To him, he seemed allergic to crap in his own hometown, more so than all the vast grounds he traveled.

Mike slammed the trunk. "Packing heavy?" His left brow inched up his forehead.

Watermaker spun around and looked directly at him. "Suppose. I don't give a shit. I work with the Macon Police Department."

"Say what?" Mike's tone sounded disapproving.

Watermaker laughed. "I teach those swinging dicks how to shoot."

Mike tilted his head, his long black hair an oily sheen. "Don't bring those dicks around my place. Don't need the attention."

Watermaker placed his hand on the top of the door. "Shut the hell up. Do any damn thing I please." He stepped into his car and slammed the door.

"Don't get so mad, man." He gave Watermaker a thumbs-up. Watermaker backed out of his driveway, ignored Mike, and peeled off. He made a turn, increased the volume on the radio, and started bopping his head to the sound of rock and roll. He came to a four-way stop and streaked right through.

Detectives Bruce King and Amos “Jockamo” Tiraboschi had made the curve when the red 2002 Camaro flew by.

“What’s his hurry?” Bruce asked. It felt great riding shotgun down those curvy roads where it dipped and rippled like a huge black ribbon. Hills like a girl’s breast they drove up and down, and the pines and oaks arched over the road like a tent revival.

“Don’t know, but he had New York plates,” Jockamo said. “Get closer.”

“It’s not our problem.” “Could be. Get closer.”

“It’s out of our jurisdiction.” “Get closer, dammit.”

Watermaker pounded the steering wheel with his palms. “Po Po,” he muttered under his breath. Stinking bacon. He hated the police and didn’t entirely understand why. As a boy, he didn’t have time to properly mourn his father’s death. Because of his uncontrollable behavioral problems, his relatives pushed him from one to the other.

He’d longed for a home and felt he found it when he landed at a drunken uncle’s house. His behavior began to improve, maybe because he outgrew his hyperactivity.

Gripping the steering wheel tighter, he chanted, “Watermaker, Watermaker, Watermaker” while looking into the rearview. Steering with one hand, he pulled a black ski mask out of the dash, placed it on his head, adjusted his dark shades, and continued the chant.

Jockamo’s hesitation irritated Bruce. “What are you going to do, follow him all day?” Bruce asked. His gaze bore into Jockamo’s, seeking a reaction, then flickered with irritation when he found only calm.

“Pull him over and arrest his ass.”

“You know we can’t do that.”

“Do it any way. He could be holding.”

Jockamo flipped the switch on for his blue light and siren. The suspect rolled down his window and leaned his head out-

side the car. He popped off three caps with his revolver—through their windshield—right where Bruce’s head would have been before he ducked to the floorboard.

“What’s his problem?” Bruce yelled. “Slow down! Get some distance!” He felt like grabbing the shit handle above the window, but their squad car didn’t have one. Who was this wheelman in the Camaro anyway? Why didn’t he seem scared? In all Bruce’s years as a detective, he never saw anyone this bold.

“Call for backup. I’ll keep him in sight,” Jockamo said.

A flicker of apprehension coursed through Bruce. He snagged the mike. “Dispatch, this is Macon PD, x-ray 15. Code 103, 103. We’re in hot pursuit of a candy apple 2002 Chevrolet Camaro and need backup. Tag number is New York 2154 Robert Frank. We’re on Highway 49, eastbound, marker 41. Assist, over.” “10-4, 10-12.”

Bruce unsecured the shotgun from the floorboard and pushed his blond hair over his head when he leaned up. “Stay with him!” A sinking feeling that they’d be caught short crept over him.

“He’s not trying to lose us,” Jockamo said.

The suspect, about a quarter mile out front, appeared to be traveling about sixty miles an hour. Jockamo pursued the perpetrator for ten miles when four sheriff’s cars and an unmarked brown car pulled in behind. Bruce felt relieved they were still out in the country. It would be safer to apprehend the fugitive

before they entered the city limits.

Watermaker slowed, turned onto a dirt road, and sped up. He drove another half mile, made a turn, increased the throttle, and skyrocketed over a small hill. The pigs behind him wouldn't be able to see for the dust trail. He felt confident about the tricks up his sleeve, and most of them lay in the trunk of his car.

Racing over another small hill, he reached a wooden bridge that crossed the Ocmulgee River. He stopped for a second, debated his next move, and revved the engine. He crossed half the bridge, slammed the gearshift in park, and the car rocked.

Jumping out, he dashed to the trunk. Opening it, he grabbed a jug of moonshine and started splashing it over the bridge. Grabbing two more jugs, he spattered the contents on the planks. He threw the empty containers in the trunk and slammed it shut.

He pulled a handkerchief out of his back pocket and twisted it into a roll. Pulling out his Zippo, he struck a flame off the side of his leg, lit the cloth, and threw it in the middle of the puddle. Watermaker jumped into his car, left his door wide open, raced over the remainder of the bridge, veered up an incline, and parked. Laying his AK-47 on top of the trunk, he squared his eye over the barrel. Feeling great about his hidden '65 Ford Mustang parked only a mile away, he aimed in the direction of the cars that pulled up. Holding the trigger down, he released a barrage of automatic fire.

With his left hand, Bruce snared the binoculars on the dashboard. He cracked open his car door. His face smashed the ground from his dive from the squad car. He tasted wet dirt. From the ground, he watched the officers jump from their cars. His knees could have been stirred with a fork as the men scattered and hit the soggy ground behind their vehicles.

Mud flipped up behind Bruce's shoes as he crawled behind a huge downed tree. His eyes barely peeked over the edge. He pulled his firearm from his holster. He popped a round.

"Jockamo, what are we going to do?" he yelled. The anxious look on Jockamo's face told him Jockamo knew their weapons were of little value. The daring asshole shooting at them from the Camaro stood out of range for a handgun or shotgun. How could Bruce get closer? He couldn't cross the burning bridge. In clear view, he couldn't swim across the river.

The perpetrator already proved that he was a crack shot. If Bruce could sneak downstream, he might be able to find a way to cross and slip back up. No, that wouldn't work; he'd be out in the open. Even if he could find a place to cross, the current looked too rough.

Looking through his binoculars, Bruce spotted the fugitive's head crouched behind the trunk of the Camaro. The outlaw's face spread into a sadistic smile as the orange flames above the bridge lit up the sky. He seemed to be chanting something and in no hurry to go anywhere. Bruce watched the crazy man load his automatic assault weapon with what looked like a tracer round, a shell designed for volatile damage. "Take cover!" he screamed.

Bruce heard a single shot, and the gas tank of the unmarked car blew up instantly, scattering flaming gas and exploding bits of burning metal. Part of an orbited flaming fender crashed into Detective Todd Minter's upper torso and engulfed him in flames. Todd stood and ran in panic. The wind-swept oxygen fed the hungry scorching fire. The flames crept upward and over his body. Jockamo jumped to his feet, stood in Todd's path, and grabbed him with both hands. He pushed him to the ground and rolled until

the only thing left of the blaze was the trail of swirly gray smoke.

“Helicopter, now! Call one in, Bruce!” Jockamo yelled, lying on top of Todd. He lowered his voice. “Don’t worry, Todd. We’ll get you out of here. You’re going to be okay.”