

MARTHA McMINN

Finding Justice





Attorney Joe Benedict is shattered when his client is executed. An emotional breakdown leads him to Portland, Oregon where he finds an abandoned Rottweiler puppy he names Justice. Justice helps Joe start his road toward healing. Just when he thinks he has found a new life, he receives a call from his best friend in Savannah who has been accused of murder by the same prosecutor responsible for the execution of his client.

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CHAPTER 1

1994

“Joe Benedict, just the man I’ve been looking for. Do I have an offer for you,” Betsy said.

“Has my name come up on your list of lucky guys in line for a federal court appointment?” I said.

“Well, I don’t know if you would call this luck, hon, but what we have behind door one, if you chose to take it, is a challenging opportunity to represent a kid named Robby Wright on his federal habeas.”

“I’m definitely up for a challenge. Send it over.”

“This is a death penalty case, so, Mark Hansen from Atlanta will be appointed as co-counsel. If you want to think it over that’s fine. No one’s gonna blame you if you pass on this one.”

“Betsy, I expect to take the good with the bad and the ugly, send it over. It’s a pleasure to work with you and I know you wouldn’t call if you didn’t need me.”

Robby Wright was 28 years old. He had been raised near Sand Fly a seedy, rural, run down section of Savannah. When he was 19 years old, he was involved in the brutal murder of Jimmy Taylor, a gay man who had worked as a sous chef at the Pirate’s House for 10 years. Another boy, Chad Winslow, was also involved. The threesome had met at a bar on River Street early on a Saturday afternoon, spent the rest of the day drinking and using cocaine in the bathrooms of various establishments. About 2 a.m., they were climbing up the very steep stone steps from River Street. When they were about 10 feet from the top of the stairway, something happened. No one would ever know for sure what, or how, but Jimmy Taylor’s broken body lay on the

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cobblestones at the bottom of Factor's Walk and about \$2,000 in jewelry he had been wearing that night was gone.

I didn't pay much attention to the case at the time. Savannah was developing a large tourist industry. City planners referred to the money provided by tourists as smokeless dollars, and they smelled better than the smoke which emanated from the huge paper mill perched on the river about a mile and a half west of downtown Savannah. You can't have people getting killed near places you want tourists to come. You start having people murdered two blocks from the Pirate's House and right across the street from a new, but historical looking hotel, and people will stop coming.

As I looked through the three boxes of material which comprised Robby Wright's file, more of the details of the case came back. Robby's buddy, Chad Winslow, had immediately confessed and named Robby as the main perpetrator. Winslow plea bargained for a 25 year sentence and testified against Robby. Robby maintained his innocence and claimed that it was Chad who was directly behind Jimmy and that it was Chad who held a knife to Jimmy's throat and told Robby to remove the jewelry, and it was Chad who pushed Jimmy over the railing as he was screaming, "Please don't hurt me. You can have the jewelry, but please don't hurt me." In Chad's version, it was Robby who held the knife, Chad who removed the jewelry and Robby who pushed Jimmy to his death.

When I arrived home that evening, I was greeted by my wife, Elizabeth.

"Do they have to announce on the evening news that you are representing that disgusting killer, Robby Wright?" she said

"I didn't tell them, but lots of times they go through the court records every day. But I didn't know you were acquainted with that disgusting killer."

"I'm certainly not acquainted with him, but I remember how much damage it did to my tour business when that happened."

"Well, that's certainly enough to merit the death penalty." I opened my first beer of the evening and walked across the kitchen to the pantry.

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“Joe, I will never understand why you insist on representing the pond scum of the world.”

“Are we out of cheese crackers?”

“If you haven’t put them on the list we may be. I still don’t understand why you have to represent such loathsome people.” Elizabeth turned away and walked toward the dining room

“I know, Elizabeth, I know you will never understand and that’s okay.”



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