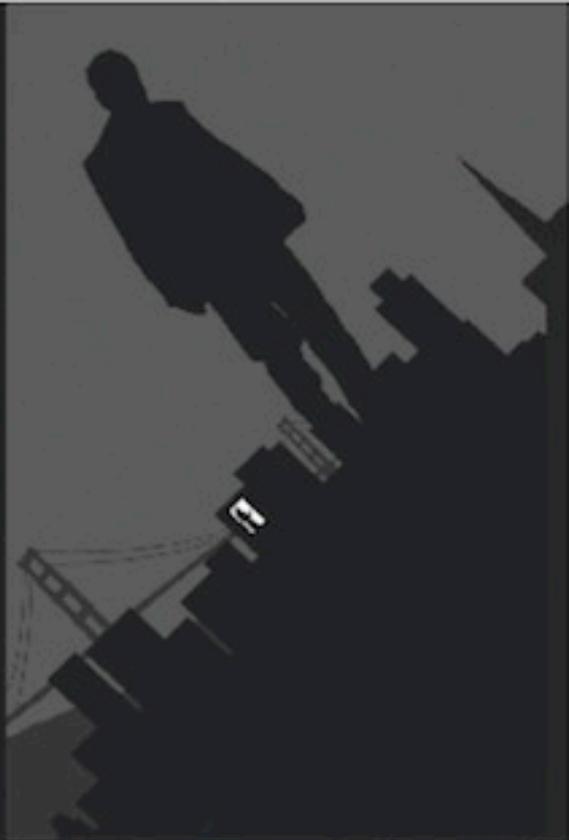


**WRONG
AND
WRIGHT**



**ADAM
HALL**



Alan Wright is a professional, successful hit man. He is ready to move on - to start over. But, when he prematurely rolls the die trying to pin his hopes on the woman he loves, it starts a sequence of events that pull him further and further away from her. Soon, Wright becomes a victim his very self, forcing himself deeper into the life he loves to hate, and away from the life he'd love to have.

Wrong and Wright

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Wrong and Wright

Crime Fiction

Adam Hall

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First Edition

For my family, and with special thanks to Joe, whose
contributions helped shape this story.

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1

Alan Wright pulled up at Ol' Mexico Joe's house in his beat-up Toyota Corolla, looked at himself once more in the mirror, and let himself out of the relative comfort of his air-conditioned car into the humid, Midwest afternoon.

Wright didn't focus on the long lines of cars that were pulled off the gravel road next to the cornfield for nearly a quarter mile in each direction up to the house.

He didn't focus on the sweat that immediately began to bead up on his skin as he made his way up the road and turned into the driveway.

He didn't focus on the stares he was getting from some of the guests, uneasy waves from others, and the more hostile glance from Carlos, the head of security, who was standing at the door.

Wright only focused on keeping in character, planting a small, slightly aloof smile on his face, and getting ready to look not at people if he were talked to, but slightly through them, giving them the impression that he wasn't quite all there.

Twenty-four hours later, Alan Wright walked up to the large, heavy double doors to his penthouse suite, pulled the key from his pocket and put it into the lock. He stopped long enough to look at the ugly burn on his right hand; black

particles singed into the skin from the bottom of his wrist up to the knuckle of his index finger.

Wright could easily see the muzzle flash that had caused the burn the night before, and wondered for the thousandth time since he had been injured just how in the hell he was going to explain it.

The front door to Ol' Mexico Joe's home was open. Wright let himself in, the sounds of a party in full swing greeting him as he stepped through the first door into a small entryway, and then through the second set of doors into the main area.

People were everywhere, the adults dividing themselves up into small social circles with cocktails in their hands, mixed by a bartender who had set up off to the right next to a grand piano. Children were everywhere, running and cutting through the adults as they chased one another to and from the backyard where the pool was.

Wright took a moment and stopped, studying the layout of the entryway. Immediately ahead of him was a staircase that led to the second floor of the house. One of Ol' Mexico Joe's men, Wright believed it was Juan, stood on the staircase to make sure no one went up. The house then cut around the stairs in both directions. Heading to the right led through the dining room, past a custom made wooden table with 18 chairs and into the kitchen, which had large windows overlooking the backyard and pool. If Wright walked left, he'd wind up in the living

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room, which was connected to the kitchen. A 64" flat-panel TV was on, playing a children's movie for eight small kids, still in their swimming trunks, all sitting on the floor, shoulder-to-shoulder, looking up raptly at the picture on the screen oblivious to the noise and commotion around them.

Wright made it halfway through the living room before Carlos approached him. Carlos walked up to Wright and stuck out his hand, a big fake smile plastered on his face. "Mr. Thames, right? I'm surprised to see you here. I'd thought you would be working today."

Wright smiled and met Carlos's gaze indirectly, remembering to stay in character.

"Well, the Lord works in mysterious ways. I was planning on working today, but I think everyone in the county is here right now. So, I decided to come and see what all the fuss was about. I've heard of nothing but his party now for two weeks. It's so nice of Joe to do this for everyone." Wright ended many of his sentences with a small, nervous chuckle.

Carlos nodded once, distracted, looking sharply over at a group of teenaged newcomers, who were expressing a little too much interest in the open bar. Wright took the opportunity to glance at the bulge that was distinctly visible in his sports coat.

"That's great. Enjoy yourself. I just want to make sure you understand that this is a party. So, please, do not approach any of the guests with your business." Carlos broke his gaze from the teens—who were slowly making their way to the

bartender—to make eye contact with Wright. “Do I make myself clear?”

“Oh, of course. Even the good Lord Himself rested on the seventh day. I won’t be a bother to anyone.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Carlos said, his voice indicating he was anything but. “Now, if you’ll excuse me.”

“Oh, before you go,” Wright said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a Bluetooth ear piece. “I found this on the floor. Someone might be looking for it.”

Carlos looked at the Bluetooth and then took it from Wright, dropping it in his pocket. “Yeah, thanks, I’ll be on the lookout.”

Wright watched Carlos work his way through the crowd to the group of teenagers, who had edged precariously close to the bar. Wright doubted very much that the boss, Joe, would be pleased to have underage kids drinking at one of his community functions, particularly since the main purpose of said function was to build goodwill and trust.

Wright turned his gaze from Carlos and the teenagers and made his way through the living room, noting the size of the couches, and the small step that went from the living room into the kitchen. He walked outside through the glass doors, smiling inwardly as he noticed people doing their best to avoid eye contact. Wright didn’t blame them; he’d spent the better part of the last three weeks knocking on doors, peddling premium King James Bibles, and getting to know all he could about Ol’

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Mexico Joe and his crew. And, in the sparsely populated county, where most families had roots going back at least three generations, a Mexican immigrant moving in and opening up three large distribution centers was something to gossip about, even if it was to another out-of-towner who seemed slightly off. Some gossip was so juicy it had to be passed on, regardless of to whom.

It was clear to Wright that Ol' Mexico Joe had gone out looking to becoming a visible but harmless friend to the community. Wright could think of no other reason why he would wear the moniker given to him by a drunken guest at a community fundraiser so proudly...“Ol' Mexico Joe.” It sounded like the name of a gardener for Christ's sake. But when Joe had heard it, everyone said he had only laughed loudly, smiled broadly, and clapped the man on the shoulder saying “Ol' Mexico Joe...I like it!” And the name had stuck.

Of all the people Wright had talked to over the last weeks, the *only* person who expressed any concern about their presence was Mrs. Malloyd, the night school English teacher. She had said as much to Wright as they were sitting at her kitchen table in a small but cluttered kitchen, Wright enjoying a cup of coffee as he made his pitch.

“I've been teaching English to people for nearly fifteen years now Mr. Thames,” she had said, the expression on her face making it clear that she was concerned. “And never in that time have I seen men take to it as seriously as those four men

that Joe brought up with him. They're fervent in their dedication. Almost like their lives depend on it."

In that, Wright thought, she was probably not far from the truth.

After making his way through the kitchen, and gazing out at the back yard for a few minutes, taking note that Raul had been put in charge of lifeguard duties at the pool, and Ricardo in charge of cooking the pig, which was slowly roasting over a large bed of coals in an industrial-sized grill, Wright turned and left the way he came. He hadn't seen Ol' Mexico Joe himself, but he knew he was there somewhere.

Over the past two weeks, one constant had been said over and over again: Ol' Mexico Joe knew how to throw a good party, and he was *always* there to see his guests off.

The only sound that greeted Wright when he entered his penthouse was the echo of the door as it slammed shut behind him. Wright dropped his single piece of luggage on the floor, next to a box that the maid had brought inside for him. He bent down and looked at who sent it before walking through the main area, a huge hybrid state-of-the-art of kitchen and living room, to the back door that led out to his deck and a tremendous view of the San Francisco skyline. As often as not it seemed the fog that rolled into and out of the city on a whim would block the view, but today, the view was crystal clear.

Wrong and Wright

Wright had come to San Francisco in the tumultuous time after his first job some 20 years earlier. It had been necessary to get away, far away, and quickly, and San Francisco seemed to be as good a place as any. He'd never been. Once he was there, though, Wright never thought about living anywhere else. He loved how the city had so many different identities. Each neighborhood had its own distinct feel and culture. From the working class ethnic melting pot of the Mission, to the yuppie Marina, a cosmopolitan downtown, and the flamboyance of the Castro, San Francisco seemed like seven cities in one. A change of clothes and a walk or drive down to a different neighborhood and you could completely re-invent yourself in the eyes of those who saw you on the street. Over the years, Wright's job had taken him to nearly every major metropolitan area in the United States, and he had yet to find another that came close to giving him the feeling of satisfaction that San Francisco provided. So, he stayed.

Wright walked across his living room on the hardwood floors—enjoying, as he always did, the sound his shoes made as they clicked across the wood, and to a lesser degree, how the sound reverberated and echoed around the empty room—to the wet bar, which he had built into the wall close to the entertainment center.

He pulled out a rocks glass, looked over the six different kinds of bourbon that enjoyed the space at the front of the bar, letting his fingers brush the front of each bottle as he went over

them twice, before selecting one that had been recently delivered from a micro distillery. Wright reached down and scooped the glass in the small ice machine that was built into the bar, filling it up. Then he poured the glass three-quarters of the way full with bourbon, topped it off with some sweet vermouth, before adding a splash of Grand Marnier, cherry juice, and two maraschino cherries. He stirred the drink with his finger and then walked to the French doors that led out to the deck, sucking his finger clean.

Wright stepped outside, enjoying the cool, wet air, and looked out onto the Bay Bridge. This was Wright's favorite part of his house, and the reason he had searched nearly two years for such a place to purchase. A large gas grill stood next to a charcoal grill, which stood next to a smoker off to his right. Just ahead of that, over some benches and small flower beds that were overflowing with different herbs, was a large, circular table that had been ordered from Jordan. On the table was a mosaic of the Tree of Life, painstakingly crafted with tiny stones.

Wright went to the table and sat down at his spot, where the lion was eating the antelope beneath the tree, took a sip of his drink, and pulled his cell phone out of his pocket, placing it on the table. He was expecting a call.

After leaving the party, Wright went back to his beat-up Toyota Corolla, and drove around to the back side of the

Wrong and Wright

cornfield that surrounded Ol' Mexico Joe's property. He pulled off the main gravel drive into one of the service roads that cut through the seemingly endless fields of corn and drove slowly through until he was about a half mile off the road, and a half mile away from Ol' Mexico Joe's house.

Wright pulled off to the side, not worrying about anyone finding him here (the farmer of this particular parcel was at the party, along with everyone else), and popped the trunk. Inside the trunk was a wooden box. Wright looked around, then pulled the top off. There were about a dozen bibles inside, which Wright pulled out and placed neatly to the side. Then he reached down, feeling with his fingers in the corner, and pulled out the case's false bottom, which revealed a silenced Beretta FS92, and a six-inch hunting knife.

Wright had finished his drink and was considering going in to make another when his phone rang.

He looked down at who was calling and smiled as he put the phone against his ear. "Hey, Melissa, how are you?"

"I'm good. Back from your trip?"

"Just walked in the door."

"Good. Listen, I got your message, and tonight really isn't going to work out for me. I have a ton of studying I need to do. Do you think we can get together for dinner tomorrow night, instead?"

Adam Hall

“Actually, that works perfectly. A new toy came while I was away and now I’ll be able to use it.”

“Oh?”

“Yes, an immersion cooker. You can cook things for days using it. We’ll be able to have meat that will literally melt in your mouth. It’s called *sous vide*.”

Melissa laughed on the other end, a shrill, high-pitched affair that Wright had come to love.

“Whatever you say; just make sure it’s good.”

“Don’t I always?”

“Can’t say I’ve had any complaints yet. How’d your trip go?”

Wright paused for the slightest of moments, looking down again at the ugly burn on his hand before responding. “It went well. Actually, one of the smoothest jobs I’ve had recently.”

2

Wright shrugged out of his outfit and into the coveralls that were also stored in the trunk, tucking the gun in a makeshift slit he'd made in the back. Then he went back to the passenger-side door, pulled out a pair of binoculars and another Bluetooth before ducking into the cornfield and heading toward the back of Ol' Mexico Joe's house.

He made his way through the cornfield and dropped to his stomach about ten yards from the back of Ol' Mexico Joe's lawn, his slender frame well hidden by the tight rows of corn. Wright pulled out his binoculars and peered through them. From this vantage point, he had the entire back yard in view. Children were still scrambling to and from the pool, jumping in and splashing and shrieking and laughing under Raul's watchful supervision. Adults were still in their small social circles, talking and drinking and enjoying the appetizers that waiters were bringing around on trays.

Carlos was walking toward Ricardo, who was still keeping an eye on the pig that was slowly turning on the spit above the bed of hot coals. Wright reached over and clicked on the Bluetooth that was in his ear. It made an electronic beep to indicate that it was on, and then several more beeps as it searched for, and connected with, its partner that was in

Carlos's pocket, forgotten. Wright focused the binoculars on Carlos and Ricardo.

"How long before the pig is ready, Ricky?"

"Should be good to go in about another hour. Then all we have to do is let it rest and then pull it."

"Good. The sooner the better." Carlos looked around to make sure no one was listening, and then turned back to Ricardo. "I hate these fucking things."

Ricardo laughed good-naturedly. "You need to learn to relax, Carlos. These parties are the only time we get off. Try to enjoy yourself. You know the boss always lets us cut loose once they're done."

"Easy for you to say. Your only concern is the pig. I have half the damn county walking through here. How the hell am I supposed to know if a *federale* comes through? They can walk right in and see what there is to see and then disappear without a trace. It's a good way to be caught with our pants down."

Now it was Ricky's turn to look around. Wright got the distinct feeling that discussing Ol' Mexico Joe's true business venture was something the boss forbade.

"You're being paranoid. We haven't even been here two years yet. You know how slow they do things in this country. It takes three years of investigating before anything happens. And that's *if* they even know about us yet."

"It's just a matter of time. The trial period is just about over. Soon, we'll be moving two hundred-fifty K of product a week

through those warehouses. And it's only going to increase from there. With that much product, people are going to be asking where it's coming from."

"Yeah, and by the time they figure it out, we'll be rich and retired. That's the beauty of our thing. Joe wants out. He wants out for all of us. This is our shot, Carlos. Three years from now, when the DEA is ready to pull their thumbs out of their asses and actually begin raiding, we'll be long gone, off on a white-sand beach somewhere, living out the rest of our lives away from all of this. No worries."

"You really believe Juarez will let us up and run away?"

"No, but they won't have a choice when we all fall off the grid." Ricky reached over and clapped Carlos on the back. "Relax, enjoy the party. Leave the heavy thinking to Joe. It's why he makes the really big bucks and guys like you and me, we just make big bucks."

Ricardo laughed again. Carlos, not seeming any more pleased about any of it, turned and went back to the party, disappearing into the crowd. The sound in Wright's ear drowned out to static as Carlos walked farther away. The device didn't have all that great of a range, but it had done its job, and confirmed what Wright already knew about Ol' Mexico Joe and his crew.

Now all he had to do was wait for the guests to leave. Then he would strike.

Alan Wright settled down on the ground, clearing his mind of all thoughts, ignoring the sweat and stink of bug repellent as the two intermingled around him. Ignoring the fact that the once cold gun, which had felt refreshing pressed against his lower back, was now just as hot and clammy as the rest of him. He let all thoughts slip away, keeping an eye out only for any wayward children that might decide to play hide-and-seek in the cornfield where he was. He watched. And waited. A predator looking for an opportunity.

That opportunity came nearly five hours later. Wright watched from his position as the pig was served to the guests, as some guests drank to the point where Carlos had to gently escort them away from the party. He watched and from time to time got glimpses of Ol' Mexico Joe himself as he worked through the crowd, charming his guests. No one shot Ol' Mexico Joe uneasy glances. Everyone was happy to talk to him. Wright knew by talking with dozens of people over the last few weeks that there were no small number of questions regarding how Joe had come to be so wealthy, but no one was willing to really examine those questions. Joe's plan had worked perfectly. The people wanted to like him, and so they did.

The party had thinned out considerably by the time the sun had dropped below the horizon, and the last of the guests left shortly after dark. Still Wright waited. He waited while the last of the catering company employees finished the cleanup. Then he waited and watched while Ol' Mexico Joe, Carlos, Raul, Juan,

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and Ricardo pulled out the tequila and a dominoes game and began playing.

Wright waited as they finished a bottle of tequila, Joe excused himself and headed upstairs, then waited and watched as the rest of the men finished off a second bottle, and got halfway through a third before calling it a night.

Wright watched as they all headed toward the sprawling couch, and watched as the lights turned off one by one, until the house was in darkness, and the only light on the lawn came from the fireflies that were still sparkling and dancing through the air in erratic patterns.

Wright waited another ten minutes, and had just gotten up, stretching out his stiff limbs when he heard the sliding glass door open. Looking up, he saw Raul heading out into the backyard on unsteady feet, leaving the sliding glass door open behind him.

It was time to move.

Wright crouched down, pulled the hunting knife out of its sheath, and snuck into the yard, keeping a low profile, using the darkness for cover, being careful to walk silently, his sneakers making the slightest *whising* sound on the grass, covered up by the crickets' chirping.

Raul had walked over to the pool and was breathing in deeply, very drunk. Wright angled his approach so that he stayed behind him, though he doubted even if Raul turned

around and looked right at him, that he would be able to shout a warning before being eliminated.

Once he was at the pool, Raul put his hands in his pockets, and stared at the water, the reflection of stars sprinkled across it, unaware of Wright's silent form as he crossed the lawn. Wright watched as he pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, fumbling first to get a cigarette out, then with the lighter as his drunken fingers refused to cooperate. Finally, Raul lit the cigarette, leaned his head back, looking at the stars, and took a long drag. He was still looking back when Wright seized the knife by the handle, came up silently behind him, grabbed his forehead with one hand, and sank the knife to the hilt in Raul's brainstem, separating it from the rest of his body, killing him instantly.

Wright tried to grab onto Raul's hair. He had used a knife instead of the gun to get a silent kill, but the greasy hair slipped through Wright's fingers, and there was a small splash as he fell halfway into the pool, his body still in death spasms.

Shit, Wright thought as he turned toward the house, pulling out his gun.

Wright quickly cut across the deck and through the sliding glass door into the living room. He paused in the house just long enough to make out the three sleeping forms that were on the couch. Then, without hesitation, Wright lifted up the silenced gun and pulled the trigger twice, hitting the first target

Wrong and Wright

squarely in the head. A wet squelching sound indicated his brain and skull had separated from one another.

Wright turned the gun to the second form, and did the same thing. Before he could get the gun trained on the third person, the form stirred and leapt from the couch, swiping at Wright's gun, knocking it out of his hand.

Wright had time to look down at Carlos, who looked up, comprehension dawning on his drunken face. "You."

Carlos, though drunk, was still deft, and pulled a revolver from his side. Wright caught him by the wrist and in the struggle, the gun fired off, the muzzle flash burning Wright's hand, the report echoing loudly in his ears.

Wright finally caught Carlos' wrist in a good grip, and twisted it hard. He let out a small yelp as the bone snapped, and dropped the revolver.

Wright grabbed Carlos by either side of his head and looked him in the eyes. "Yes. Me."

Then he brought his right leg up and stomped through Carlos's left knee. Carlos's eyes went wide as he heard the sickening crunch of his kneecap exploding and dropped. Wright used the momentum of the falling body and twisted his head along with the weight, allowing it to snap Carlos' neck as he landed in a lifeless heap on the floor.

One more. Wright breathed in deeply, trying to keep the adrenalin in check that was now rushing through his veins,

making it hard to keep his hands and legs from shaking uncontrollably.

Wright breathed in again, and then heard a door open upstairs. Looking up, he saw that the hallway that went over the living room was visible. Wright quickly bent down and dragged Carlos's body into the shadows, hiding it from view.

Joe stumbled down the hallway, stopping to look downstairs at the open door, muttering something about dreaming beneath his breath, before turning and continuing on, half plodding, half shuffling down the hallway.

Wright watched and waited. He hadn't picked up his gun yet, and the shot wasn't a sure thing.

Joe was still mumbling sporadically in Spanish as Wright listened to him come down the stairs on the other side of the house. Wright quickly walked and picked his gun up off the floor, silently stalking Joe around from the living room to the kitchen, staying in the shadows.

Joe walked to the sink with the rough stumble that is the specialty of those who are both drunk and tired, and reached up to the cupboard for a glass. Wright had the chance to lift up his gun and finish the job, but waited, knowing that the shakes would only get worse when he tried to extend and stiffen his arm, negatively affecting his aim.

Wright watched Joe as he filled up the glass at the sink. Then he stopped, squinted, and leaned forward, looking

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outside. Wright watched as he put the glass of water down and rubbed his eyes, looking outside again.

Joe mumbled something else and then reached over and flipped a switch. The backyard suddenly flooded with light. Wright saw the color drain from Joe's tan face as he saw the body floating in the pool in an inky cloud of blood that was still lazily spreading.

"No, no, no!" Joe turned and ran toward the living room, oblivious of Wright, shouting at his men in Spanish.

Wright heard the light in the living room switch on and the shouting cut off as if Wright had put a bullet in the back of his head. There was a thud as Joe stumbled backward, then a small quiet sob, one that Wright had heard more times than he cared to remember. It was the sob of a man who knew his time was soon to come to an end.

Joe reached up again and turned off the light to the living room, and walked back into the kitchen in shock. He didn't see Wright in the hallway between the living room and the kitchen as he passed—suddenly seeming more sober—across the kitchen to the refrigerator, a blank stare on his face. It was time.

Wright crossed into the kitchen behind Joe, who reached up to open the refrigerator door. He stopped when Wright placed the warm silencer against the back of his head.

Ol' Mexico Joe paused for a moment, breathing in a deep, shuddering breath. "Why?" he whispered, so quietly that Wright could barely hear it, even in the silence.

Adam Hall

"I wasn't told. I'm usually not."

Ol' Mexico Joe nodded his head once, as if that was the explanation he was expecting.

"You're not the type of man I can buy, are you?"

Wright thought about this for a moment. "No."

"That's okay. Just know that I tried to be good. What I do, it's a dirty business. But I kept it as clean as I could. I am . . . was, one of the good ones."

Wright paused for a second, then said, "I like to think I'm one of the good ones, too."

Then he pulled the trigger.



Alan Wright is a professional, successful hit man. He is ready to move on - to start over. But, when he prematurely rolls the die trying to pin his hopes on the woman he loves, it starts a sequence of events that pull him further and further away from her. Soon, Wright becomes a victim his very self, forcing himself deeper into the life he loves to hate, and away from the life he'd love to have.

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