

A H.S. track star witnesses a brutal beating and his life begins.

Darkness Descends

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Scott Frank

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CHAPTER 1

Chris didn't feel as if he could run anymore.

It had been at least ten minutes since he fled from that alley behind the 7-Eleven store. He didn't think that he had ever run this fast, not even in the state sprint championships. And, for good reason. This time, he was running for his life.

His strides were long. He could feel his feet hitting the ground, one after the other, in a rapid succession.

While he had not really been looking back as he ran—any good runner knows that doing such a thing slows you down, if only a little bit—there was no way that he was going to reduce his speed to see if there was anything or anyone following him. At least he couldn't hear any movement or noises. That must be a good sign.

Why did he have to go there tonight.

Why did he have to witness that spectacle.

A body. She appeared tall. But who could tell for sure. Her body was contorted, for lack of a better word. Maybe twisted or bent was a more suitable description, though how does one convey the form of a human body in such a fashion? She also seemed somewhat familiar. She might have been blonde, except that it was quite dark, not much light at all back there to see clearly.

But, then again, who could tell. Who could be sure.

Maybe I should have stayed and tried to help, Chris thought to himself as he ran, *but it looked like such a hopeless situation. And what could I do?*

She looked mangled. That was the word that best represents what he had seen. And the blood. Gads, there seemed to be quite a lot of it flowing around her head to where it couldn't have been anything other than pure mayhem that occurred in that alley.

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And then, while trying to get closer for a better view after he had heard a voice, he kicked that damned red and white Campbell's soup can and a man turned and looked, spotting him. He thought he had seen at least two men.

At the time one of them did see him, though. He knew it. For suddenly there was a shout for him to stop. "Hey, you, stop!" What were they, fools. Stop. No way. Then and there Chris turned and made his swift exit from the mouth of the alleyway around the corner of the store and down Minaret Street, the way he'd come.

He started running. Full steam ahead. *I am a high school track star, a champion*, he thought to himself, as he launched into full stride (Warp Factor 10, he used to say to himself when he was competing), *but this is where I earn my real varsity letter, outrunning these guys.*

However, being that he was a sprinter, these past ten minutes at a break-neck pace that one would normally only use for up to the 800-meter run had started taking their toll. He was feeling the effects of total and complete exhaustion—sweat starting to consume his entire body, long deep breaths that started to hurt—but still he went on, not knowing whether or not he was being followed.

His legs were beginning to feel like rubber, but they kept moving forward, one in front of the other, taking him farther and farther from the alley. It was as if they were on automatic.

He had taken a few turns now and again just in case there was a tail and he was currently running alongside Highway 41, in an open field of grass and weeds, to the southeast of the shopping center. There wasn't much in the way of lighting, just enough to allow him to miss dangerous holes and mounds—the kinds of things that twist ankles and ruin running careers, though they occasionally broke his pace.

His breathing was quite heavy, his mouth was attempting to suck in oxygen but his body didn't seem to want to expend the effort to do so. He forced himself. He kept running. Running for his life.

Another few minutes scurrying under the freeway and he was nearing the place he decided to go where he felt he would be safe. The club.

Good ole Reuben's, he thought. *There will be friends there. I should be safe there. At least for the rest of tonight. I wonder if he saw my face. I didn't get that good of a look at his.*

He slowed as he neared Reuben's and started walking towards the entrance, looking over both shoulders and then, suddenly he saw a car turn the corner coming, it seemed, straight at him. It appeared to be

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moving just a bit too fast in a parking lot. *Shit! How could they have tracked me coming from that direction?*

He quickly leaped behind some shrubs, landing on hands and knees, and peered over the plants to look. His head stuck just above the greenery so his eyes could take in the view and he spied the car. *Just some punks out joy-riding.* He shook his head, but he realized then just how scared he had been. His heart was pounding wildly, wanting to escape the confines of his chest. He got up, took a deep breath to calm himself, and strolled briskly to the doorway, jerking the handle, he walked in silently, alone.

CHAPTER 2

Ted and Roger needed women. They had just escaped from prison and had successfully avoided being “manhandled” during the three years they were incarcerated. Thirty-eight months and eleven days (to be exact) of what was to be 20 years.

When they saw the blonde walk out of the 7-Eleven and head for her Jeep parked around the corner at the entrance to the alley, they knew it had to be her. Both wanted her. Now.

She was tall—about 5’8” from the looks of it—and her hair was shimmering, straight and long, down past the mid-section of her back. Her face was radiant and beamed, reminding Ted a bit of Bo Derek in that movie, “Ten,” with Dudley Moore—what a nerd, when she was running towards him on the beach. *How did guys like that ever get a woman like this*, he wondered, *well, that was Hollywood, wasn't it*. But, he'd seen it in real life, too.

She was wearing fairly tight jeans, somewhat faded with a small hole above the left knee—and even there it looked as if she was deeply tanned—and she had a slight, yet provocative, wiggle to her butt as she walked. Her blouse, a creamy-color, was not buttoned all the way up, allowing a view of her healthy cleavage, the type that would make Pamela Anderson proud.

She was laughing as she left the store, and Ted presumed she must have heard a joke or someone had made some comment she thought funny. The laugh brought with it an even cuter look to her already photogenic face.

Her complexion was on the bronzed side, which perfectly complimented her corn-silk blonde hair, and she used very little make-up, some eyeliner to really show off those rich blue eyes of hers. She had a cute button nose just above very full lips.

What a looker!

She paused just outside the door and reached into the bag she had brought from the store. Looking around, as if to see if anyone she knew was watching, she slowly pulled out a pack of Kool 100's and, taking it in her left hand, used the fingers on her right to undo the thin cellophane strip that would release the protective covering. Casually, she tossed the wrapping in a trash receptacle.

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She was pulling a cigarette out of the fresh pack when they glanced at each other and nodded.

Big grins developed on both of their faces, individually knowing the familiar feelings that were stirring very deep inside. *Shit, it's been over three years*, Roger thought. *Three very dry years*.

Roger approached her first, as she reached the edge of the building, the cigarette dangling loosely in her mouth, just about to be lit. He was hoping to get her to join them without a struggle using the promise of a good time, or maybe money that, of course, would never be paid—couldn't really be paid, as a matter of fact.

Standing about 5'11" and weighing in at 185, Roger wasn't a bad looking guy. His brown hair was on the slightly curly side, cut short enough to look respectable, letting it lay, as it will. As long as it didn't get too long it generally appeared neat to the casual observer.

His biggest distraction to getting the women of his dreams, in his own mind, was the one and a half inch scar beneath the hair line on the left side of his forehead. He had received that—compliments of a crew of ex-Marines he and some friends had picked a fight with—in a barroom brawl a few years ago.

Though there were some ladies who were partial to men with marks or blemishes that looked like "battle wounds"—it made them come across as tough or something—it wasn't ever the right woman. Never had been. Then again, Roger wasn't exactly sure what the right woman was. He had always supposed it was one that looked like Catherine Zeta Jones and went down on him whenever he wanted it. Beyond that, there were no other even vague requirements. This one was blonde. Oh well. She looked worthy.

"Hey good lookin'," Roger began, adding a smile, "how about showing an outta-towner some fun tonight?" He'd used that one on Hollywood Blvd. successfully some years ago and it had worked then.

"Thanks, but no thanks," came Courtney's terse reply. She kept walking, hoping this creep would get the message and leave her be. She didn't seem quite as interested in lighting the cigarette now, taking it from her mouth quickly with her left hand.

Perhaps this time it was the clothes Roger was wearing. (He had just acquired them from a friend and what he was able to get didn't fit all that well.) Or maybe it was that he hadn't showered or bathed in a couple of days. (He only did that twice a week in prison and they hadn't had a chance to get a hotel room just yet.)

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“Ahh, come on. I think you and I could have a swell time,” he said with what he considered his best broad smile. “Can I light that smoke for you, cutie?”

“No, please, I have to leave now.” Courtney was now starting to walk faster, wanting nothing more than to jump into the safety of her Jeep, lock the door and drive home, where she already should have been.

Whether it be the clothes or some putrid smell or anything else, she wanted nothing to do with him. Nothing at all. And she had let him know it in no uncertain terms.

Arrogant bitch! “I gotta buddy, too, who’s just dying to meet you,” he said, not nearly as friendly this time as his earlier attempts had been.

Courtney’s intuition now told her she must leave as quickly as possible. “No, thank you,” she replied, rapidly trying to think of something to say that would make this cretin leave her alone.

Her mind raced, almost as fast as her pulse at this point. “My boyfriend is expecting me soon. In fact, I’m late and he knows where I am,” she added, looking at her watch, hoping this creep would believe her.

She wasn’t too convincing, however, as her nervousness was starting to show through. Roger, looking at her intensely, knew she was frightened and it excited him. That feeling of control. Of power.

Walking even more briskly, she pulled her keys out of her purse so she would be ready to unlock the door to her Cherokee Chief the second she reached it. In doing so, her cigarette dropped to the ground. She looked down at it rather automatically and thought *why did I have to leave early and stop to sneak some cigarettes?* as it started rolling, due to the slight gentle breeze, under the Jeep.

Fortunately for Roger she was far enough away from the store entrance by this time, and no one else was outside in the adjacent parking lot so there was not a soul around to hear her struggle. He quickly grabbed her right arm and spun her partially around, just when she had reached out for the door of the Jeep. The bag dropped from her grip as he did so, her snacks and cigarettes spilling out on the asphalt.

He forcefully started directing her to the small alley, around the corner of the 7-Eleven.

As she started to fight back, Roger ended up nearly dragging her—she kicking and fighting, biting and scratching—down that small access road.

Roger selected a spot behind the back of the narrow building that was partially hidden from view, near the store’s dumpster. While that did

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provide some level of security for them, the odors emanating from the metal container were almost enough to make one gag.

Courtney, in her strife, connected with one very sharp fingernail just below his right eye and ripped a good gash, and he felt blood running down his cheek. It might even have been hard and deep enough to give him another scar.

That wasn't particularly what he was looking for from her.

In fact, it really pissed him off. But then, that didn't take much. He was pretty hotheaded and the slightest provocation could send him over the edge.

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