

The Rabbit Factory 3 chapters

Chapter 1

Eddie Elkins ambled down Fantasy Avenue. A light breeze penetrated his costume, and he felt relatively cool inside the furry white rabbit suit.

Of course, these were the balmy days of April. July and August would be unbearable, but for Eddie, it would be a small price to pay.

Six weeks ago he had lied, cheated and bribed his way into the best job in the world. And now, he was Rambo. Rambunctious Rabbit, the most famous character Dean Lamaar ever created. The acknowledged superstar at Lamaar's Familyland.

Eddie waved at the kids as he wandered through the sprawling theme park. Occasionally some wiseass teenager would give him the finger, but for the most part kids loved him.

And Eddie loved kids. In fact, he loved them so much that he was mandated by Megan's Law to register with the Los Angeles police, so they could notify people in his community that he had moved into their neighborhood.

But he hadn't registered. Not this time. He had complied with the law when he lived in Boston. But the Irish bastard across the street keyed Eddie's car, slashed his tires and put dog shit in his mailbox. Eddie tried to explain that there's a big difference between high-risk offenders who are violent and regular guys like Eddie, who would never hurt anyone, but the guy wouldn't listen.

Then one day Eddie made the mistake of saying hello to the man's 10-year-old son. That night two bullets came flying through his bedroom window.

Eddie moved to Rhode Island and registered with the Woonsocket police. Life was better there. Nobody wanted to kill him, but nobody wanted to hire him either. Not for the kind of jobs Eddie wanted. He finally got work as a clerk in a paintball supply store, where he had plenty of time to think about his life.

He was born Edward Warren Ellison in Trenton, New Jersey, majored in English Lit at Rutgers, was never any good at sports and was never really comfortable with women, although he had had sex with four of them. People said he looked like Buddy Holly, or at least what Buddy would have looked like at age 36, if not for that plane crash. Eddie even wore the black horn-rimmed glasses to heighten the effect.

He tried real hard to break his pattern with the kids, especially after the first conviction. He had a smart therapist, but stopping wasn't as easy as the shrinks make it sound. He didn't want to hurt the children, but fondling wasn't hurting. After three months in Rhode Island, he decided it would be easier to find a better job in a big city. Especially if he didn't register.

He moved to Los Angeles. Getting a new name and new identity cards were easier than he thought. Other men like him had done it and there was the New Beginnings Network on the web. His closest confidante, who he emailed almost every day was Vandy333.

Vandy was divorced with two kids of his own and had been a school principal in Tennessee for twelve years. "Changing my identity made all the difference," Vandy had told him.

So Eddie Ellison became Eddie Elkins. He found a nice clean place to live, and set up his new persona just the way New Beginnings instructed him. Finally, came his big break. They told him about Caleo.

Anthony Caleo was a scumbag, but he was a great guy to know. He worked in Human Resources at Familyland. His job was to verify the résumés of people applying for jobs. Caleo didn't care about New Beginnings. He only cared about what was in it for Caleo. He charged Eddie six thousand bucks.

For that he cleared Eddie's bogus résumé and prepped him on how to handle the one-on-one interview with Marjorie MacBride. And that's how Eddie landed the job of his dreams.

His first day at work he reported to the Wardrobe Department. One of the Dressers, a chatty little Mexican woman, whose nametag said Provi, helped him into the furry, white Rambunctious Rabbit costume, with its distinctive red, white and blue denim overalls. Provi was prattling on, but Elkins's mind and heart were racing too loud and fast for him to hear.

He couldn't believe it. He was Rambunctious Fucking Rabbit. More recognizable than The President of the United States. Maybe even The Pope. Children would literally flock to him. How many guys did he know who would trade their left nut for this gig?

"Elkins?"

He looked up, as Provi's thick-toothed black comb raked over his hairy white rabbit arms. The speaker, standing ten feet away, was Danny DeVito tall with an Arnold Schwarzenegger chest. His face and close-cropped gray hair had the wear and tear of a fifty-year-old. But the body, in black nylon warm-up pants and a tight black tank top, had the muscle tone of a college wrestler.

"I'm Dante, your Character Coach," he said. "Let's see what kind of a rabbit you are. Don't put the head on yet. Just let me see you walk over here."

Provi gave the suit one final fluff and stood back. Elkins inhaled, took one bold step forward and immediately hooked the front edge of one giant rabbit's foot to the back of the other. Gravity took over and down he went, floppy ears over cottontail, onto the rubber-matted floor. Provi let out a loud aye-aye-aye.

"That's why you don't put the head on yet." Dante said, helping him up. "Don't want you to break it."

"But it's okay if I break my own head? Why didn't you warn me?"

"You learn faster this way," Dante said. "What size shoes do you wear?"

"Ten and a half."

"Well now you're wearing size 24 rabbit's feet and 18 pounds of fur. Why don't you try it again," Dante said, stepping to the other side of the room.

Elkins hobbled his way toward Dante and made it to the other side without falling. "How's that?" he asked.

"Fantastic," Dante said. "If you were one of Jerry's Kids. You gotta be animated. Bouncy, springy," Dante said, bouncing and springing across the room. "Don't worry. By the time I'm finished you'll be dancing around the park like Adolf Nureyev."

It took ten hours. "Tomorrow I'll show you how to find your way around every inch of this park," Dante said. "Then we'll go over the rules for handling kids. There's a right way and a wrong way, and you gotta be real careful. Don't scare 'em, don't drop 'em and don't touch 'em in any wrong places."

They worked with dolls. Eddie had no problem not touching them in any wrong places. On the last day of training, Dante introduced him to a squat, moon-faced woman, with a thick mane of bottled blonde hair, a dozen tiny gold earrings on both sides of her head and eyes that convinced Eddie there was nothing going on between the earrings. "This is Noreen Stubiak," he said, "She'll be your keeper."

Caleo had prepared him for this, but Eddie played dumb. “My what?”

“Every character gets a keeper. They follow you around the park. Somebody fucks with you, bam, she’s right there to help.”

Eddie smiled at her. “So you’re going to protect me,” he said. “You got a gun?” Noreen made a snorting sound that Eddie took for a laugh.

“Don’t give her no ideas,” Dante said. “She’s got a walkie-talkie. Anybody starts up with you, she calls Security to bail you out.”

Eddie knew the truth. Noreen was a spy. He hated the idea of having a watchdog follow him around, but it didn’t take long to figure out that Noreen was the best possible keeper he could have. She was a highly unmotivated, twice-divorced piece of flotsam from the Total Loser’s Section of Trailer Park City, and Stubiak, Eddie decided, was Polish for dumb-as-shit. But she had one redeeming quality. It didn’t take much to get her to look the other way.

Every few days Eddie would give her a little gift. A Faith Hill CD. A bag of scrunchies for her mop of revolting yellow hair. Or a bottle of her favorite perfume, Eau de Wal-Mart. Maybe she knew what he was up to; maybe she didn’t. Either way, she never said a word.

The weeks that followed were the happiest of his life. Four times a day Eddie, dressed as Rambunctious Rabbit, would hop on the Easy Street Trolley and head for Tyke Town. That’s where the younger kids were. Just this afternoon, he had spotted the boy. Asian. Stunning. Six years old, maybe seven. The perfect age. A little shy, but not afraid.

Eddie had waved at him. The kid waved back. Eddie followed up with a little hippety-hoppety dance, and the kid smiled. Then he walked over, purposely almost tripping over his two giant rabbit’s feet. The kid laughed.

Eddie stretched out his white-gloved paws and Mom helped her son jump into the eager arms of Rambunctious Rabbit. Eddie slid one hand between the boy’s legs and the other behind his head. He touched his rabbit nose to the kid’s nose and got another laugh from the boy and a happy shriek from the mother.

The father scrambled for his camera. “Can we get the statue in the background,” he said in surprisingly perfect English.

Eddie snuggled the tiny genitals in his palm and walked toward the thirty-foot bronze likeness of the late Dean Lamaar. Dad took a picture. Then another. Take your time, Eddie thought, re-cupping his hand so that his thumb rested in the crack of the sweet little butt.

This, he thought, as cold, clammy sweat trickled from every pore, is even better than the school bus driving days. Good pay, good benefits and parents who lift up their kids and hand them to me crotch first.

At that moment, Eddie had less than an hour to live.

He spent another twenty minutes in Tyke Town, then he and Noreen headed for the tunnel that led to The Rabbit Hole, the vast underground world hidden beneath Familyland’s 866 acres. Above ground was fantasy. Below ground was the hard reality of hundreds of miles of electric cable, sewage lines, refrigeration pipes, and of course, scores of locker rooms, cafeterias, toilet facilities and rest areas for the 6,200 employees who made the fantasy happen.

There was still another half-hour till quitting time, and Eddie needed a smoke. As soon as they got through the tunnel, Eddie pulled off the rabbit head. “I got something to do before I change,” he said. “See you tomorrow.”

“Goodnight Eddie,” Noreen said. “Thanks again for the video.”

Eddie had picked up an old Brad Pitt movie at a flea market for two bucks. “My pleasure,” he said. “I know how much you like him.”

The entire Rabbit Hole was a No Smoking Zone, but Eddie knew a spot where he could light up out of view of the security cameras. He wended his way through a maze of ductwork, plopped down on the cool tile floor and set the giant Rambo head down next to him. He lit a Marlboro Light, inhaled deeply, leaned back against a water pipe, and exhaled the smoke from his lungs with a long, slow breath.

It was his last.

The rope came from nowhere, cutting deep into his neck. He tried to scream, but nothing came out. He tried to inhale, but nothing came in.

Thirty-seven seconds later, Eddie Elkins, a.k.a. Edward Ellison, sex offender, child molester and convicted pedophile had his last conscious thought.

God, I was so happy. Why now?

He knew better than to ask *why me?*

Chapter 2

I wish I still smoked. Some occasions just seem to go better when I inhale deadly toxins. Like opening Joanie's monthly letter. But I gave up tobacco seven years ago, so I had to resort to other self-inflicted pain. Exercise.

I did 45 minutes on the bike, managed a hundred and fourteen sit-ups, then hit the shower, slowly edging the hot water from invigorating to excruciating. I switched to cold just before my back started to blister.

I was out of coffee, but there was half a pot of Juan Valdez's finest still on the counter from yesterday. I poured a cup and nuked it. It tasted like Juan's donkey's finest, but at 7 in the morning, I'll take my caffeine any way I can get it.

I poured myself a bowl of Cheerios. Andre heard me chewing and showed up before I swallowed my first mouthful. "We're giving out numbers this morning," I told him. "I'm one. You're two. Wait your turn."

Andre does not grasp the finer points of math, but he got my gist and sprawled out on the floor, waiting patiently for his number to be called.

I propped the envelope against the cereal box. On the front was my name in Joanie's girly-girl handwriting. Plus the number 6. Only she didn't write the number. There were just hash marks. Like an inmate counting days.

I sat there staring at the envelope and spooning up my Cheerios. Andre remained a polite two feet away, both eyes riveted on the spoon. "Explain something to me," I said to him. "How come the Cheerios commercials always show happy Moms with perky breasts, Dads who seem to be on the right career path and teenage kids with no substance abuse problems? What about real families like us? A middle-aged widower and his Cheerio-loving dog?"

Andre shifted positions and started licking his dick. "You keep doing that at the breakfast table," I told him, "and we'll never wind up on television."

I always put in too much milk, so I grabbed another fistful of cereal, to establish better oats-to-milk ratio in the bowl. I still wasn't ready to open the letter, so I read the box, and was delighted to find that Cheerios may reduce my cholesterol if I make them part of my heart-healthy diet. I decided not to order a Cheerios T-shirt for only \$4.99 and wondered why they had to print "limit 4 T-shirts per household." Are there actually households that need more than four? And if so, why would General Mills deprive them?

I left an inch of milk and about two dozen floaters in the bowl and set it down on the floor next to Andre. He stopped gratifying himself sexually and immediately dove into the heart-healthier choice.

I waited for him to finish so I could pick up the bowl, otherwise Rosa, my cleaning lady, would find it on the floor and have to go to church to ask God to forgive me for feeding the dog out of my dead wife's good dishes.

Andre finished his Cheerios and went back to his dick. I put the bowl in the sink, went back to the bedroom and plopped down on the big stuffed chair. I used Joanie's best cake knife to open the envelope. *Dios mio*; pray for me, Rosa.

Dearest Mike,

Are these letters driving you crazy? Tough shit. I've never been dying before, and I'm trying to figure this out as I go along. It serves you right for marrying a first-born, perfectionist, Gemini, control freak.

Assuming you're following my orders and reading these on schedule (if you don't I'll come back and haunt you) it's been six months. Hopefully Rosa is still coming, or by now there are 180 pair of dirty socks and underwear piled up on the bedroom floor.

I wrote the first five letters when I was between chemo sessions. Today I'm vomiting between paragraphs, so bear with me.

I'm sad for you. The hardest part of this whole ordeal is not that I'm dying (although believe me that sucks big time). It's trying to imagine you without me.

How can I not be there every morning when you roll over all shaggy, scruffy and if I'm lucky, horny. How can I not be there on Sunday nights at Gino's to split a sausage and pineapple pizza and a bottle of dago red? How can I not be with you? How can you be – how can you exist – without me?

I don't know how many more letters I've got left in me, but I'll write #7 tomorrow. Just to whet your appetite, I promise to reveal the biggest secret I ever kept from you. No cheating. You can't open it for another month.

Michael, my sweet lover, I know these messages from your dear departed wife must be like getting greeting cards from the Surreal section of the Hallmark store. But I can't stop writing. I've accepted the fact that I can't hold onto my own life. I just can't let go of being part of yours.

I will love you for eternity. Give Big Jim and Andre big wet kisses for me.

Joanie

I closed my eyes and let it soak in. Then I read the letter again. I was about to read it for the third time when the annoying little voice that lives rent free inside my head told me to put the fucking letter away now.

I try not to argue with the voice. I extricated myself from the sagging green chair as gracefully as one can extricate 180 pounds from anything.

I walked over to Joanie's dressing table, and picked up the double-sided silver picture frame she gave me for our first anniversary. On the left side of the frame was our wedding picture with her handwritten inscription below. *"To my darling Mike, We've only just begun. Love, Joanie"*

On the opposite side was the identical picture, but through the miracle of Photoshop, Joanie had digitally aged us fifty years. My hair was silver and thinning, but at least she gave me hair. I was thirty pounds heavier, and my face was lined with crags and crevices.

Joanie was even harder on herself, thickening out her middle, bluing her beautiful strawberry blonde hair and adding liberal amounts of wrinkles and liver spots to her glowing skin. But she didn't change her eyes. There were crow's feet on the outside, but inside they were still the color I told her was Cavu Blue. My father flies a Piper Warrior on the weekends, and CAVU is pilot talk for a sky that has Ceiling And Visibility Unlimited. To me nothing is bluer.

"I resent the fact that you think I can't function without Rosa cleaning up after me," I said to the left side of the frame. "For your information, I was recently honored by *Good Housekeeping* as one of the only men on the planet who have actually mastered the art of picking up his own dirty socks and underwear. And you thought I couldn't live without you."

Andre paddled in. Andre, just for the record, is a 6-year-old black Standard French Poodle. Not the kind of dog you'd expect to be living with a cop. But this dog has instincts like Sherlock Holmes and better communication skills than a kennel full of movie Lassies.

He cocked his big curly head, and gave me his most serious man-to-man look, which I clearly understood to say, "Hey, Lomax, I heard you talking, and now I see that it's just you and the picture of your dead wife. I'm starting to worry about you, pal."

I half-put the frame back down on the dressing table, then pulled it back to my lips, pressed my face to the glass and finally, set it back down. Andre, realizing that this was a

private moment, and that there was nothing edible in it for him, toddled off back to the living room.

The phone rang. It was my partner, Terry Biggs.

“Hey, Mike, we got a live one.” A live one was Terry’s standard lame joke for a homicide victim.

“Ask me if the vic was a man or a woman,” he said. Terry is a wannabe stand-up comic, but he’s never sure he’s going to get the straight line, so he helps you serve it up to him. I was in no mood to resist.

“Okay, Terry, who bought it? A man or a woman?”

“A rabbit,” he answered, hoping to get a bigger reaction from me than I was capable of giving. “Actually a guy in a Rambo Rabbit suit. It happened out at Lazaar’s Familyland.”

“Familyland?” I said. “Is no place sacred?”

“I guess the scumbags are branching out. More work for you and me,” Terry said. “I’ll pick you up in 15.”

I hung up. The letter was still in my other hand. There was a wooden box on top of Joanie’s dressing table. I had found it gift wrapped at the bottom of my shirt drawer a few days after the funeral.

A brass plaque on top was engraved “*Mike and Joan... till death us do part.*” That’s where I found the letter. I put number 6 back in the box. There were still three more to be opened.

I picked up my gun and my shield and had one more go at the picture. “This is not easy reading, Joanie,” I said. “Don’t be surprised if I come home tonight and flush all these fucking letters down the toilet.”

“Don’t be an asshole,” said the annoying little voice inside my head who hasn’t paid a day’s rent in 42 years.

Chapter 3

A horn honked and my partner pulled up in his 2002 silver Lexus ES 250. “Hey, kids,” he yelled out the window. “We’re going to Familyland. Yayyyy!”

That’s Terry, the Fun Homicide Cop.

I got into the Lexus ES 250, which I love to remind Terry is actually a Toyota Camry with a wood paneled dash and a few other non-essentials to jack up the price. “Good morning, Detective,” I said. “Are you looking for the guy who slapped a Lexus logo on the front of your Camry?”

“Nice way to talk to the man who brought you breakfast.” There was a container of Starbucks in the cup holder plus a bag of Krispy Kremes on the floor. “Today’s the 18th,” he said, pulling away from the curb.

“Yeah, I saw that,” I said sipping the coffee and trying hard to ignore the aroma of fried dough and sugar wafting up from the waxy bag of carbs at my feet. “It made Page One of today’s paper.”

Terry was one of three people who knew about Joanie’s letters. “It’s that time of the month,” he said. “You get mail?”

“Yeah.” I said. “She’s having a great time. I don’t get the sense she’s coming back.”

Terry was there for me when Joanie was dying. Not intruding. Not giving advice. Just there. A lifeline. He knows when to keep quiet, and this was one of those times. Carbs, be damned, I decided. I unbagged a glazed donut as we headed for the 405 South.

Terry Biggs is the best partner I ever worked with. For starters, he’s not very L.A. He’s one hundred percent Da Bronx. From the time he was a kid, he knew he was going to become a cop. But in the late 70’s when he was ready to apply, the city of New York was in financial hell, and the NYPD had a hiring freeze. Los Angeles, on the other hand, had money, criminals and jobs. Terry switched coasts and joined LAPD.

Terry is tall, dark and ugly. Don’t get me wrong. I love him. We’ve been friends and partners for seven years. But he’d be the first to back up my description. Six foot three, a mop of greasy black hair and a face that’s kind of muley, but more pock marked than a real mule. The man is butt ugly.

Until he speaks. And his voice, soft and sweet as honey, warms you. He’s funny, charming, loving, and before you know it, you’re thinking what a beautiful guy. Women are particularly vulnerable to his special brand of ugliness. Terry Biggs has no problem getting girls.

Keeping them is a different story. He’s had three marriages go south. But number four was the charm. Marilyn. She’s with LAPD Rescue. They met on the job.

About ten years ago, Terry stops at the Ralph’s on Robertson. He’s just parked his car when two guys with guns come tear-assing out of the market carrying a sack, which later turns out to contain \$18,000 in cash and food stamps.

Terry pulls his service revolver and yells the standard “Police, drop your guns, etcetera, etcetera.” Now Terry is off duty, so he’s wearing plaid shorts and a New York Yankees T-shirt. Apparently, this is not an intimidating outfit, and the robbers keep running. They jump into a moving car, and in two seconds flat, the car is barreling down on Terry.

He dives out of the way, but a fender catches his foot in mid air and breaks his ankle. He still manages to get off three shots, and blows out two of their tires. The car plows into one of those metal dividers where they collect the shopping carts. The driver gets a face full of air bag. One of the gunmen pulls his own trigger on impact and shoots himself in the leg.

And before the last guy can figure out where the door handle is on their stolen car, Terry limps over and is singing “You Have the Right to Remain Silent.”

The headline in the paper the next day says, “One of LA’s Finest Bags Three of LA’s Dumbest.” But there was a second part to the story that got even more coverage. Lots more.

A few minutes after Terry nails the bad guys, about a dozen black and whites converge on the scene, followed by LAPD Rescue. The cops are screaming “officer down, officer down” which lets the Rescue Squad know to bypass the dirtbag who is bleeding to death and take care of that cop over there with the Camel dangling from his mouth.

The ambulance screeches to a stop, the driver’s side door flies open and out jumps Marilyn Cavanaugh. Marilyn has green eyes, curly red hair and a big Irish smile. Sounds pretty good on paper, but she’s what they politely refer to in the Personals Ads as full-figured. She’s a hefty lass, Marilyn is, weighing in at about fourteen stone. But she’s also a top-notch paramedic, and no one ever complains that their Angel of Mercy is too chunky. Certainly not Terry.

Big as she is, Marilyn is lightning on her feet. Wham, bam she takes Terry’s vitals and quickie-splints his ankle. Then together with her co-pilot, Marty Delaney, they hoist Terry onto a gurney and wheel him into the back of the bus. Marty hops in with the patient. Marilyn slams the rear doors, jumps in the cab and flips on the siren. Terry, who has been operating on pure adrenaline, knows he’s finally headed for a fistful of Advil, a six pack of beer and at least a week’s paid leave. He closes his eyes and thanks God for another mission accomplished. Marilyn, feeling all the pressure of being responsible for an Officer Down, peels out, hell bent for Cedar Sinai.

And that’s when the A-M-B-U and the L-A-N-C-E part company. The back doors fly open, and the gurney catapults out onto the macadam, where it rolls about thirty feet until it runs head on into a Soccer Mom parking a minivan. The cops, who are still on the scene, scramble to help Terry, who now has a concussion to go along with his broken ankle. When they realize this is not particularly life threatening, they all have a huge laugh. But the camera crew from News Channel 4 has the biggest laugh of all. They had been shooting the departing ambulance for the evening news when the doors burst open. The video ran incessantly for three nights.

About sixty seconds later, a totally humiliated Marilyn returns for her Officer Down Twice. And that’s how they met.

After that, she visited him every day, first in the hospital, then at home, offering to do whatever she could to make him happy. One night, it seemed that the thing that would make Terry the most happy was a roll in the sack. No problem for Marilyn. Rarely does a nice Irish girl get the opportunity to have sex with a man and actually diminish her Catholic guilt.

One thing, as they say, led to another and despite the fact that Marilyn had 7-year-old twin daughters, and a third, age 5, Terry signed on for the whole package. And that’s how a guy from The Bronx winds up living in Sherman Oaks with a wife and three teenage Valley girls.

We plugged along the 405. “No sense using lights and sirens,” Terry said. “With all this traffic, we’d wind up causing an accident. Besides, the guy we’re going to see is already dead, so what’s the hurry? You been to Familyland?”

“A bunch of times. You know Joanie,” I said. “She was a kid at heart.” What I didn’t say was how much she wanted kids. We both wanted them. We spent three years and thousands of dollars trying to make one. It was our fertility doc who actually discovered the

ovarian cancer. Congratulations, Mrs. Lomax. You're not going to have a baby, and you're going to die.

"I always thought of Lumaar as a rip-off of Disney," Terry said. "But that's sort of like saying Pepsi is a rip-off of Coke. There may be truth in it, but it's still an 800-pound gorilla on its own."

He was right. Lumaar, like Disney, had started out as a small animation house. Rambunctious Rabbit, Slaphappy Puppy, McGreedy the Moose, and a shitload of terminally jolly characters had captured the public's heart and transformed the little cartoon studio into a global entertainment company.

Today Lumaar made movies and TV shows, owned music and toy companies, operated hotels and a cruise line, licensed cartoon characters and was traded on the New York Stock Exchange. Familyland was just one small piece of the corporate pie.

Terry recapped the highlights of his last two trips to Familyland with Marilyn and the girls. He made sure to give me some tips on how to get back-doored, which is theme park jargon for entering a ride or attraction without waiting on line. Apparently, his ability to buck the long lines and get the VIP treatment at Familyland had made him even more lovable in the eyes of the four women who already adored him.

We don't like to talk about a case before we get to the scene, so Terry segued into the upcoming college hunt for the twins, who were Juniors in High School. He never once mentioned how expensive it would be, which if you know Terry is just like him. He was just a button-popping proud Dad, who wanted the best for his girls. We were discussing the merits of applying for early admission when he pulled onto the off ramp. The arrow on the sign for the main entrance to Familyland pointed right. Terry turned left.

"They said don't go to the front gate," he told me. "We're going to the admin building on Happy Landings Boulevard. They want to keep this investigation low profile, so try not to look like a cop."

That's the nice thing about Terry. Sometimes he lobs out a straight line for me to take. "Okay," I said. "I'll leave the donuts in the car."

Terry gave a little chuckle, which from him is a rave. I, in turn, bowed to thank him for the setup line. Sometimes homicide can be a lot of fun.