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The Next Chicago Police Chief Takes Actions to Address the Chicago Murder Rate

Joseph Scapellato

The next police chief, recently the lieutenant to the previous police chief, a third generation Chicagoan and a second generation police officer, a man, white, in his fifties, decides to get tough on gangs. He orders police officers to identify, locate, and arrest important gang members in a blitz of busts and raids.

Citizens watch the roundup from their stoops and windows, skeptical. After the police vehicles depart, loaded up with citizens who are and aren't important gang members, it happens: a silence rises, steep and encircling. Everybody knows what it means, but everybody gets back to work. The following day,

unimportant gang members, looking to become important, shoot at unimportant gang members from rival gangs and their own gangs, and while doing so, shoot each other's friends and families, as well as citizens who happen to be nearby, such as mothers and sons and daughters and fathers and nieces and nephews and aunts and uncles and grandmas and grandpas and grandkids. The murder rate remains the same. The police chief calls in sick. He stays in bed, eyes half-open. Something bad has begun to happen to his body. His limbs balloon, his organs bobble. The bags on his face fill up. His wife is at work, his sons are at school, and his mother, who until last week had been living in the guestroom, is in hospice. Alone, he staggers out of bed and to his home office, where he lowers himself into his desk chair. He reviews everything he's been reading related to the murder rate—the precincts' reports on the murder victims, the local newspapers' articles on the murder victims, the emails sent to his work account from the families of the murder victims, and the comic books his youngest son writes and illustrates in which the superhero, Captain Police Chief Man, repeatedly apprehends the supervillains, Mr. and Mrs. Murder Rate. The police chief is heartbroken. He's heartbroken by the citizens' heartbreak; he's heartbroken by the unhelpfulness of his heartbreak in the face of the daily fact of the citizens' heartbreak. Not knowing what to do, he returns to re-reading. But there's been a change: he can no longer understand the sentences. They've become unreadable. It's as if every document has been rewritten in a nonsense language, an imitation of communication, a fake system not meant to serve a real society. He squints at the senseless words. When he tries to pronounce them, his breath catches—he falls out of his chair, onto the floor, and into a coma, the one that was long in coming.

The next police chief, recently the lieutenant to the New York City police chief, a fourth generation New Yorker and a third generation police officer, a man, white, in his fifties, decides to get tough on certain groups of city blocks. He designates these certain groups of city blocks as Pressure Points. The Pressure Point Task Force distributes weekly Pressure Point Patrol Maps to Pressure Point Patrol Teams who use them to conduct Pressure Point Patrols when on Pressure Point Patrol Rotation. Some citizens, out of caution, move their legal activities away from Pressure Points, and other citizens, out of prudence, move their illegal activities away from Pressure Points. The murder rate remains the

same. The police chief jumps into an unmarked car. He's puzzled, he admits, but confident. The problem is the citizens, he says to himself. The citizens are the beginning, the middle, and the end of every problem. He drives to Pressure Points on the South Side, the West Side, and the North Side, and at all of them, he sees the same imposed scene: life on pause. At the last Pressure Point he parks. In plainclothes, he walks up and down the blocks. Doors are closed, windows are curtained. There's the feeling of citizens in hiding, holding their breath, listening. Amused, the police chief returns to his car. As he opens the door, a citizen not so far behind him shouts, "Police!" The police chief spins, annoyed and alarmed—he scans the streets and alleys, the yards and porches and windows, the roofs, but he can't spot the citizen. "Police!" the citizen shouts again, closer.

The next police chief, recently the Los Angeles police chief, a second generation Angeleno and a first generation police officer, a man, black, in his fifties, decides to get tough with talk. He assigns police officers to approach at-risk citizens from the communities hardest-hit by the murder rate. Through financial and legal incentives, the at-risk citizens are encouraged to attend meetings in the basements of community centers and churches where specially trained social workers, religious leaders, community organizers, and police officers ask conversation-starting questions about the state of the community. The at-risk citizens are placed into larger and larger groups where they participate in the co-creation of community-specific initiatives designed to reduce the murder rate. The initiatives are put into place. The murder rate remains the same. The police chief accepts a dinner invitation from his sister, who's lived in Chicago for a long time. He meets her, her wife, and their two daughters at a crowded diner. Not one server or customer recognizes the police chief. His sister squeezes his shoulder and smiles. Drinks and appetizers arrive. His sister's daughters, little performers, impersonate celebrities the police chief has never heard of. He excuses himself to the bathroom and steps outside instead. It's cold, dumbfoundingly cold, but everywhere he looks, everybody's going where they want to go. He stands there wishing he still smoked. The root of the problem, he reflects, is that there's more than one root of the problem, and they all run deep. A party bus chugs up to the bar next door. The bar is loud and packed, a seizure of flatscreens and noise. The party bus doors grate open.

Ten drunk white men in their twenties spill out. One by one, they pause, captivated by the police chief. The first man declares that the police chief looks exactly like a famous actor, the second a famous stand-up comedian, the third, fourth, and fifth a famous musician, the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth a famous athlete. The tenth, the drunkest, mistakes the police chief for the bouncer to the bar and hands him his ID. This is not the first time that this has happened to the police chief. He examines the ID, angling it to catch the glow of a streetlight. In the photo, the man is trying very hard to look blameless. "That's not you," the police chief says, even though it is. The man blushes. "Okay," he says, "but can I have it back?" The police chief bends the ID until it snaps; he hands the two pieces over. The man hurriedly pockets them. "Excuse me," he says, shuffling past the police chief, walking right on in.

The next police chief, recently the principal of a Chicago elementary school, a second generation Chicagoan, a woman, Latinx, in her forties, decides to get tough with after-school programs. She institutes new and newly modified programs in the communities hardest-hit by the murder rate, programs that feature storytelling and math and music, science and dance and psychology, computer programming and community organizing, cooking and baking and baseball, soccer and drawing and basketball, sculpture and football and theatre, literature and swimming, car repair and card games, shop and sewing and yoga, philosophy and foreign languages and film, meditation and debate, and activism. Citizens from the communities in which the programs are instituted are hired, trained, and paid to run these programs. The programs become popular: children and adults alike enjoy and benefit from them. The police chief meets with every staff member of every program every week. The conclusion that they draw, together, is that gangs and gang-related violence are not the problem so much as they are the most conveniently targeted symptoms of the problem. At first, they agree that the problem seems to be a culture of violence in which mundane disputes between young citizens are resolved with firearms, whether or not gang members are involved. But as the conversation progresses, they talk about the problem as something else altogether, something they've known forever, namely, the historical fact of the existential and economic devastation of their communities, the longstanding, ongoing, racist, classist, and systemically unjust arrangements that result in countless

young citizens feeling as if their everyday actions lack meaning, the meaning that those actions possess in less devastated communities, the less devastated communities continually represented in popular entertainment. "How can grades matter if you're getting shot at on the way to school?" says a dad. "If somebody you know is always being murdered?" says a mom. "Because they *do*," says another dad, banging the table, "they've got to, they've got to, they've got to!" There is disagreement, fierce but civil. Two parents touch each other's shoulders and say, "I hear you." The murder rate remains the same. The police chief stands at her desk in the police station, cellphone out. From the hall comes the chirp of radios, the bloop of landlines. She's reading an email from her daughter, who's studying abroad in a country where it's difficult to own a gun. Her daughter loves living there but misses everybody badly. There's a knock at the door—it's the police chief's abuela, bringing homemade hot chocolate. They sit and drink. The abuela explains that the poison was put into the body long before anyone who's here was here, and that although one shouldn't expect any treatment to work immediately, one can hope for it to relieve certain effects, which is no small thing. This explanation is supposed to get the police chief to admit that her efforts aren't for nothing. It doesn't. She thanks and kisses her abuela, who leaves. The police chief goes to the window. She stares at the high school across the street. In one of the classrooms, she can make out the superintendent, a woman she used to know; she's introducing current students to a handsome young man. The handsome young man, it's clear, is a successful recent graduate. His smile is the center of a magic circle—in it, the students radiate wonder, their faces and futures beaming open. The police chief turns away from the window. It used to be that when she saw students looking like that, she'd feel that she was seeing a solution. Now what she feels is exhaustion, dense exhaustion, and darkening its edges, guilt. She sends a reply to her daughter: You don't have to come back.

The next police chief, recently a straight-A sixth grader, a third generation Chicagoan, a girl, Latinx and black and white and Native American, in her teens, decides to get tough on families. She mandates Family Breakfast Mornings, Family Game Afternoons, Family Movie Nights, and Family Weekend Trips to well-known city attractions: the lake, Millennium Park, Navy Pier, the Lincoln Park Zoo, the Shedd Aquarium, the Adler Planetarium, the

Field Museum, the Museum of Science and Industry, the Chicago History Museum, the Chicago Art Institute, the Chicago Children's Museum. Police officers enforce these mandates in every community, hard-hit by the murder rate or not. Instead of carrying firearms and tasers and mace and nightsticks and handcuffs, they carry jump ropes and softballs and board games and snacks, and instead of wearing body armor, they wear sandwich boards posterized with the joke of the day. Citizens' families are nudged together. They learn things about each other that they didn't know or had forgotten, the kind of knowledge that creates more understanding. The murder rate remains the same. The police chief, heartbroken, bikes with her three closest cousins to the park where their families throw family reunions. On the way, gunshots crack and roll, blocks off. The police chief and her cousins set their bikes against a bench and sit. Her cousins are also heartbroken. They ask her what she'd like to talk about. "Ghosts," she says. One of the cousins believes in ghosts, one doesn't, and one believes that ghosts exist for some people and not for others. The believer tells them something she's never told anyone: every time someone she knows is shot dead, she's visited by the ghost of her brother. He waits at the curb where he was killed. The cousins hold hands; a shudder travels through them, one that warms their bodies. The police chief says, "When you go to him, what does he say?" The cousin shakes her head, crying. "He tells me I'll forget," she says. "And then I do."

The next police chief, recently the director of a public library, a first generation Chicagoan, gender nonconforming, Middle Eastern, in their seventies, decides to get tough with history. They require every citizen from every community in the city, hard-hit by the murder rate or not, to read five books each on nine subjects: the history of Chicago, the history of Illinois, the history of the American Midwest, the history of the United States of America, the history of nationhood, the history of humanity, the history of questions and answers, the history of the earth, and the history of the universe. One of the five books on each subject focuses on community, one on economics, one on violence, one on the relationship between power and empathy and justice, and one on beauty. Every citizen reads every book. Many stop to talk to one another about inspiring passages. Most begin to look at the city, themselves, and other citizens differently: where they once saw surfaces, they now sense depths. The

murder rate remains the same. The police chief takes a bus to the lake. It's hot, dumbfoundingly hot, but everybody's out, jogging and biking and rollerblading. They walk across the beach and into the water. They slosh in up to their knees. The water is sleepy-warm. They stand with their back to the city, to study the stacking of cloud on sky on lake, and then they stand with their back to the lake, to study the stacking of city on city on city. They remember a time, long ago, when their one wish was for everyone to feel what they were feeling. This was the wish that had shuttled them across the world, into new cultures, languages, and disciplines. They look at their feet in the water, at the refraction. They know that at the bottom of that wish was a bigger wish: for everyone to feel what everyone is feeling, all at once, every day.

The next police chief, recently a grocer, a first generation Chicagoan, a man, Asian, in his eighties, decides to get tough on food. He coordinates the revitalization of community gardens and culinary clubs in the communities hardest-hit by the murder rate. Police officers assist in planting, maintaining, and harvesting the gardens, as well as in hosting the club dinners. The police chief visits every garden and attends dinners with every club. There are cook-offs and potlucks and festivals, and laughter and belching and farting, and some citizens eat and feel better than they can ever remember eating and feeling, and others eat and feel just as well as they've always eaten and felt. The murder rate remains the same. The police chief boards the L in the Loop and rides to the end of every line and back. Grocery stores flash by. He evaluates them based on their storefronts, signage, and parking lots. They fail. At midnight, finished, he gets off in the Loop. He walks between skyscrapers. The wind slams down. He doesn't think about his children, his grandchildren, or his great-grandchildren. He doesn't think about how close he came to walking away, from everyone, back when everything was beginning. Under an overpass he pauses in front of a mural. It's of a farm field, a bright bounty of civic symbolism. The farmhands are faceless. The police chief steps closer, then stops—spread out on the sidewalk in front of the mural is a gathering of homeless men and women, bunkered down with blankets and coats and packed-full shopping carts. He doesn't know how he didn't see them. A homeless man is proofreading what he has just finished writing on a piece of cardboard. The police chief sits beside him, on a couchless couch cushion.

"Think it'll work?" asks the homeless man, modeling the sign. "It can't," says the police chief. The homeless man presses the sign into the police chief's hands. "Try to look less sad," he says to the police chief. "A little sad, that's good. But too sad gets you nothing." A homeless man behind them shouts—he shoves his face into a bag, still shouting, his shouts ripping into screams. Somebody flips on a radio. A homeless woman floats over with a plastic-wrapped sandwich. The police chief, who hasn't eaten all day, trembles. The homeless woman unwraps the sandwich and offers it to him. "I can't accept this," he says, accepting it. "I can't eat this," he says, eating it.

The next police chief, recently an architect, a second generation Chicagoan, a woman, Asian, in her thirties, decides to get tough on buildings. She oversees the radical renovation of every house, housing project, and apartment complex in the communities hardest-hit by the murder rate. Some are individually renovated to generate their own electricity, purify their own water, and filter their own air, while others are communally renovated to minimize environmental impact and maximize energy efficiency. Many of the citizens who live in the renovated buildings report a renewed sense of security and comfort. The murder rate remains the same. The police chief buys a ticket for an architecture tour on the Chicago River. The boat chugs off, lurching through choppy water. "Sorry for the jerky start," says the tour guide. Buildings tower at the banks, lessons in many American eras. Tourists take photos of themselves. There's the smell of sewage, then of sewage-treatment chemicals. The tour guide points to where one flank of the Great Chicago Fire flared, by a beef sandwich shop. The police chief imagines the Fire's rolling roar. Not for the first time, she considers how the foundation for the city's tradition of innovative architecture was laid in soil enriched by the displacement of men, women, and children, by the immolation not only of their bodies and property, but of their memory—their complex and varied lives hammered flat into "tragedy," their tragedy hammered flat into "opportunity." When she was younger, this line of thought would have been enough to render her incapable of eating. Now it makes her think of her parents: of what they fled when they fled the old country, of what they sat with when they sat with cargo in the bottom of a barge. "Best thing to happen to the city since the hot dog," says the tour guide. The boat jumps—it slops from side to side—everybody staggers—

there's a scream: a child has gone overboard. People rush to the edge. The child is already out of sight, a swallowed splash. The captain throws the life preserver anyway. The mother of the child leaps overboard, followed by the father, followed by the brother. The police chief flings off her coat. "You can't help them!" shouts the tour guide, hooking her arm. She shoves him out of the way and steps to the rail. The river has eaten the rest of the family, no one swimming, no one floating. The police chief stops to think. No reflections from the city show in the face of the water. She dives.

The next police chief, recently a hedge fund manager, a second generation Chicago suburbanite, a man, white, in his twenties, decides to get tough with money. He implements a financial incentive system in which households and businesses in the neighborhoods that fail to lower their local murder rates are penalized, quarterly, with fines, while households and businesses in the neighborhoods that maintain or lower their local murder rates are rewarded, quarterly, with tax breaks. The murder rate rises. The police chief stands in line for an ATM downtown, a pit stop on his way to a VIP cash-only auction of ancient indigenous people's artifacts. He's writing an op-ed on his phone, a piece that will be published by a financial magazine run by his brother-in-law. Money, the police chief writes to his brother-in-law, is manmade logic in a world made illogical by man. Properly applied, it's a common sense corrective, a civilization-sustainer. If citizens continue to fail to acknowledge the identity-blind fairness of money, then citizens will continue to fail to flourish. The police chief pauses to insert his debit card into the machine. Hundreds of thousands of dollars ticker out, the bills looking fresh from the Treasury. When he tries to take the money, however, he can't—the hand he'd used to make the transaction is missing. In fact, his entire arm is gone. He pats at the emptied sleeve with his remaining arm. This would worry a lesser person, he thinks. "I get it," he says to the machine, collecting the money with his other hand. By the time he reaches the door, he's armless. He shoulders through to a street uncorked with white-collar workers. Happy hour has ended. His legs go next—he thumps to the sidewalk. Men and women swerve around him, texting and chuckling. He settles onto his back. Some of the men and women, the ones he's worked for, alongside, or above, acknowledge him with nods. He feels no resentment. There's a logic to what's happening, he thinks, a logic that I accept. Acceptance

is understanding: this is *what* people don't understand, as well as *why* people don't understand. A bus he can almost see squeals to a stop nearby. Workers step over him to board it. His face twitches. He understands where these men and women are going; he understands what they believe their motives to be as opposed to what their motives actually are; more than anything else, he understands that whatever appears to be complex is simple, and never in the history of humanity has it ever been the other way around. There isn't anything I don't understand, he thinks, thinking this right up until the moment when he loses his head.

The next police chief, recently a college student, a third generation Chicagoan, a woman, black and white, in her twenties, decides to get tough on jobs. She rebuilds the police force's community outreach arm into a temp agency, negotiates a series of hiring contracts with local employers, and provides every unemployed citizen with a job in service or retail or management or labor or tech or law, for big or small businesses, for the municipal or state government. Many of the employers are scrupulous, and refrain from exploiting their employees, but many aren't, and don't, and most of the citizens are reliable employees, and work hard, but some aren't, and don't. The employers back out of their contracts one by one. The murder rate stalls, then rises, then remains the same. The police chief rides the bus to campus. She walks to the student union, her backpack the heaviest it's ever been. The semester has begun: cheerful orientation assistants, beacons of confidence, show panicked new students the way to academic buildings. The police chief sits at a patio table and opens her laptop to a map of the United States. There are a lot of cities that aren't Chicago. For every one of these cities, there's a version of her that's moved there for a job. She addresses these versions of herself, reminding them that a job is not the point: the point is a life. A city provides a job, a job provides a life. A life provides a what? Upperclassmen stroll across the campus, looking okay with where they're going. A young man passes by, the first person to try to rape the police chief when they were first-years. He waves. A second young man passes by, the person who helped the first young man try to rape the police chief when they were first-years and who later tried to rape her himself, on his own, when they were sophomores. He doesn't see her: he's high. A third young man passes by, the person who, when they were juniors, raped the police chief.

He stops to sit at her table. She meets his stare with her own. "Weren't you graduating early?" he says. "Or transferring, or something?" "I stayed," she says. He nods. "Cool." He stands but doesn't leave. The police chief can see that he's mulling over what sort of feeling he wants to leave her with, a feeling that, whatever it is, will say: You're not in charge. She stands, too, hoisting her overloaded backpack. The young man says, "Where you headed?" "Turn around," she says, "close your eyes." Grinning, he does. She raises her backpack like a readied weapon. She sees a version of herself using it to smash him in the head—to knock him down, to strike him again, again, again. She sees him murdered. She sees herself seeing him murdered. She sees that even in this scenario he will have taken something from her. All of this makes her want to go to sleep, to sleep until she starts to die. "What now?" says the young man, nervous. She holds still. "Walk away," she says.

The next police chief, recently and currently homeless, a Chicagoan of an untraceable generation, gender nonconforming, their race unknown to them, their age unknown to them, decides to get tough on drug laws. They suspend the enforcement of drug-related criminal offenses, then remodel police stations—holding cells are converted into recreational drug outlets that regulate, package, and sell drugs to interested citizens, while interrogation rooms are converted into addiction counseling and treatment centers, their services free. Some citizens who have never done drugs do them, and abuse them, and some citizens who'd been abusing drugs quit, and stay quit. After an initial rise in addiction rates, the numbers drop to lower than they were before. The murder rate remains the same. The police chief picks through a police station storeroom, gathering emergency blankets. Outside it's snowy, dumbfoundingly snowy, but everybody's finding ways to get to where they want to go. The police chief walks from the West Side police station they've been sleeping outside of to the famous homeless-friendly South Side diner they've been meaning to visit. Clanking plows crush snow onto parkways. Citizens shovel out each other's cars. The police chief encounters homeless men, women, and children, many they know, many they don't, and to everyone who asks, they give a blanket. When they arrive at the diner, they're down to one blanket, worn cape-like. They sit at the counter, pleased. It's the sort of diner that's so aligned with the police chief's idea of "the diner" that all of its qualities, even the ordinary ones,

are extraordinary. The server asks them what they'd like. "For the murdering to stop," they say. She pours a coffee. "A guy in here the other day," she says, "not a regular, he tells me, 'They're just killing their own kind. Let them. Let them kill each other into some personal responsibility.'" She shakes her head. The police chief stirs cream and sugar into their cup. They've come close to being murdered and to murdering others. They'd like to say that because of these experiences, they understand the how and the why of it. A few stools over, a kid turns the page on a comic book. Jagged burns stripe the backs of her hands. Her lip is split, swollen. The police chief unties their last blanket and presents it to her. Without looking up, she says, "A lot of good that'll do me." The server tells her to never say no to kindness, but she just keeps reading. "What's your name, kid?" says the police chief. "Kid," says the kid. The police chief laughs. "Kid, I need your help. Tell me the first thing you'd do, if you were in charge." The kid closes her comic book, done. On the cover, a costumed woman hovers in an alley, her body glowing with out-of-body power. "Use your imagination," she says.

The next police chief, recently a superhero, a second generation Chicago suburbanite, a man, white, in his forties, decides to get tough on citizens who've murdered other citizens. Every night, he marches onto the roof of the Willis Tower, claps his hands to his head, and uses his superpowers to enter the citizens' collective unconsciousness. He sifts through individual minds, skimming memories. As soon as he comes across a citizen who's murdered another citizen, he closes his eyes; he isolates the citizen's involuntary neurological functions; he applies pressure; he puts the citizen to death. It might be by aneurysm, it might be by stroke—it might take a moment, it might take till morning. The murder rate remains the same. The police chief stands between the spires of the Willis Tower in the middle of a sky-cracking storm, hands to his head. Walls of cold rain fall. He's killing a young man. He pauses to concentrate, but instead he sneezes, loud and messy. He waits to see if he's going to sneeze again, and the next thing he knows, he's accidentally listening to the citizen he's killing. Confused, he listens more closely. He's shocked to find that the citizen's conscience is crosshatched in ethically complex contradictions, contradictions that might not be contradictions at all. The police chief begins listening to everyone he's killing. He paces between the

spires. He kills a young woman. He kills a young man. He notices that although the citizens who've murdered other citizens possess free will and are responsible for their actions, the circumstances of their lives have been shaped by legacies of injustice, different distinct legacies for different distinct citizens, every legacy enforced knowingly or not by individuals and organizations in power. He kills a teenager. Additionally, the reasons that the citizens possess for murdering one another aren't definitively connected to any one motivation—his former superhero sidekick often tagged the accused with a catch-all "lack of respect for life"—but are, on the contrary, disconcertingly multifaceted. This complexity doesn't excuse the citizens for their actions, thinks the police chief, but it's a troubling complication, one that ought to give any moral person pause. He kills an old man. He kills an old woman. He kills a boy. A commonality emerges, an element present in every citizen who's murdered another citizen. At first, all the police chief knows is that this common element is some sort of intensely desperate desire, but as the night goes on, the storm waning, he understands it as an overwhelming need to transform the complex act of killing a complex entity into the simple act of killing a simple entity. The police chief freezes. The storm has broken. Dawn is layering in over the lake. A harrowing thought has come to him: what would it be like to kill a citizen while simultaneously acknowledging the citizen's complexity? He tries to imagine doing this. He can't. He presses his hands to his head, and with the help of his superpowers, forces himself to imagine it. He screams—it's an aneurysm—he screams—it's a stroke—he slams to his hands and knees. Fear and pain and shame rake through him, slow and barbed. The things he's trying to think, the things he's trying to feel—everything is taking too long. He loses the ability to scream. The city glints in sunrise, slashing yellow, stabbing red. There is no more wind. The police chief struggles in a dumb crawl across the roof, feeling for the edge, but he doesn't know where it is or how to get there, and before he makes it very far, he's dead.

The next police chief, recently the guardian spirit of an ancient annihilated civilization, raceless, man and woman and woman-man and man-woman, currently woman, in her five hundred thousands, decides to get tough on firearms. She uses her powers to make it so that every firearm in the city, when fired, bursts into a handful of seeds. The murder rate halts. Citizens from every

corner of the city are stunned. There is relief and alarm, panic and glee. Some plant the seeds, which sprout into fruit- and vegetable-bearing varieties previously thought to be extinct. Many store them in their pockets, pantries, and freezers, planning to roast and eat them. Others throw them away. And a few discover that they can use their own inherent powers—the power-to-be, the power-to-become—to warp the seeds back into handguns and shotguns and submachineguns and rifles. The murder rate returns to where it was. The police chief attends the Taste of Chicago. She brings her date, a paramedic. They wriggle through the crowd. It's muggy, dumbfoundingly muggy, but everybody's eating as much as they can. The police chief and the paramedic visit stall after stall, sampling tacos and ribs and tamales, jerk-chicken and turkey legs, kielbasa and bratwurst, pierogi, pizza, donuts, cheesecake. Full, they wander towards a stage where a local band is playing a cover of a song by a more beloved local band. The audience is overjoyed. The police chief holds the paramedic's hand—this is a first. "Where you come from," says the paramedic, "is there love?" The police chief rolls her eyes. "That's all there is." The paramedic is intrigued. "That's all there is where *you* come from, or that's all there is *everywhere*, even here?" "Look," says the police chief, waving their linked hands at the crowd, at the people from the city and the suburbs, from other states and countries. Together, these people are admirable and reprehensible. They're embodied and ephemeral. They're oblivious and aware and ecstatic and wretched, living into death, dying into life. The paramedic says, "I hate this broken city and I hate these broken people. But I love this broken city. I love these broken people." "That's where we're different," says the police chief. "You think in opposites, even though you know there's no such thing. You can't help it. It's how you're made. It's how you make yourselves." The paramedic says, "What will happen if I kiss you?" "You'll unmake yourself," says the police chief, tugging him close. He hesitates. She lets go of his body. "Only when you're ready," she says, stepping back, her smile quick. "I'm ready," he tells her. But he doesn't move. There is no universe, at least not yet, in which he does. With a yawn, the police chief disappears—no flash, no fade—just gone—first from the people, and then from the city, and then from all of living memory.

The next police chief, recently a murdered man, his generation, race, and age made insignificant by murder, decides to get tough on the murdered. He directs police officers to deliver the bodies of the murdered to every community. The murdered are tossed onto streets and sidewalks. They're dragged into stores and restaurants and bars. They're pushed into churches and community centers, and shoved into classrooms and playgrounds and parks, and jammed onto buses and L trains, and stacked in theatres and museums and libraries, and kicked into the river, and kicked into the lake, and forced through the doors of the boardrooms of corporations and banks and government agencies, and dumped into the bedrooms and living rooms and kitchens and basements of homes. They bleed and ooze, they flop and rot. They buzz with rings of flies and rats. They stink. They heap up, too high to count, men, women, children, children, women, men, and at their own pace, they go to pieces. The murder rate remains the same. The police chief staggers into a news station for a live interview. In the studio the anchor shakes his hand, seats him next to her. A light beeps on; the floor director gives the signal; music rolls. The anchor says, "The violence in our city is out of control. Previous police chiefs have taken actions to address the murder rate, but nothing, so far, has solved the problem. Every citizen—and indeed, the nation as a whole—demands to know: what's your plan?" The police chief doesn't speak. He stares, murdered. The anchor says, "Do you have a plan?" No response. "Let me put it this way," says the anchor. "What are you doing about it, right now?" The police chief pulls a handgun out of his pants. He presses his face to the newsdesk, sets the handgun to the back of his head, and shoots. He shoots himself again. He shoots himself until he's emptied the clip. Blood prints in spattered blasts, this way, that way. He drops the handgun, rises to his feet, draws a knife from his pocket, and stabs himself in the stomach, the chest, the neck, the face. Blood flashes with every plunge. The blade breaks. The police chief drops the knife and climbs onto the newsdesk, standing. He unslings a submachine gun. He shoots himself up and down, dozens of rounds, his body shredding and sloughing, plopping and dripping and splashing—muscle and fat, skin and bone, brains, organs, blood—until the magazine is out. The police chief drops the submachine gun. He returns to his seat. He strangles himself.

Blood streaks the newsdesk, the cameras, the camera operators.

Smoke sits, a busted stone.

The anchor, drenched, is professional. She shows no sign of having an opinion. She blinks in blood.

She says, "Tell us what you're doing."

The police chief, strangling himself, attempts to speak.

His words are hard to hear.

The anchor says, "What are you trying to say?"

He gargles and moans.

He spits and splutters.

He grunts—he howls.

The anchor says, "What do you want us to know?"

With one hand, he gestures for the anchor to keep going, as if she's almost arrived at the answer, and with the other, he strangles.

The anchor says, "You want me to repeat the question?"

The anchor says, "That's it?"

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