

Praise for
The Night Watchman

“With dialogue so realistic that it sounds like crime scene dictation, Mynheir renders a flawed, emotionally haunted, staunchly decent protagonist in retired detective Ray Quinn. The reader cannot help but root for him to defeat his personal demons. The warmth of this story rings true and feels deserved.”

—ANTHONY FLACCO, screenwriter and author of *The Hidden Man* and *The Last Nightingale*

“What a rare pleasure it is to discover a suspense novelist as talented as Mark Mynheir—an elegant writer who tells stories about the world of law enforcement that only an insider possibly could. *The Night Watchman* is a powerful, fast-moving tale with rich characters and some great twists.”

—JOSEPH FINDER, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Power Play* and *Paranoia*

“With stakeouts, fake-outs, and shoot-outs, *The Night Watchman* is a terrific crime story. Well written, well plotted, and extremely well done, Mynheir delivers a compulsively engrossing thriller that bears comparison with Michael Connelly and John Sanford.”

—W. L. DYSON, best-selling author of The Shefford-Johnson Case series and *Shepherd's Fall*

“Riveting, revealing, rewarding—classic Mark Mynheir! In *The Night Watchman*, Mynheir has created an intricately woven thriller with a worthy mystery, gut-clenching suspense, and a compelling protagonist, Ray, who has lost everything, including hope and faith.

Yet Ray dares to seek answers intentionally buried, and in doing so, he finds himself...and offers us insights into ourselves. Author to author, I say, 'Bravo!' Reader to reader, I say, 'Don't miss this book. It's loaded with insightful gems!'"

—VICKI HINZE, award-winning author of *Kill Zone* and *Lady Justice*

"*The Night Watchman* delivers high-stakes suspense, the perfect amount of police intrigue, and characters so real they walk off the page and into your soul. This is a story that will keep you awake all night and stay on your mind long after you've placed this novel on your keeper shelf."

—AMY WALLACE, author of *Enduring Justice*

"Mynheir's real-life experience shines through in his creation of new hero Ray Quinn—a hard-edged, never-say-die detective with leathery wit, unable—or unwilling—to quite give up on life. *The Night Watchman* is an intense read you won't put down until the last page."

—TOSCA LEE, Christy-nominated author of *ForeWord Magazine* Book of the Year Silver Award Winner *Demon: A Memoir* and *Havah: The Story of Eve*

"What a ride! In a novel rich in both plot and character, Mark Mynheir has given us a classic noir crime novel. Ray Quinn, the night watchman, may be broken in body, but his mind and heart refuse to quit. A must-read for mystery fans."

—GAYLE ROPER, author of *Fatal Deduction*

THE
NIGHT
WATCHMAN

Other Books by Mark Mynheir

Truth Chasers Series

Rolling Thunder

From the Belly of the Dragon

The Void

MARK MYNHEIR

THE
NIGHT
WATCHMAN



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THE NIGHT WATCHMAN

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*To my mom, whose strength of character and courageous spirit
have been an inspiration to me*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In over twenty years of law enforcement, I've had the opportunity to work with some incredible law enforcement professionals who have provided much of the fodder for my stories. When I first started investigating violent crimes, I partnered with an edgy veteran named George Santiago, who had the decency to take me under his wing and teach me how to be a detective. I'm greatly indebted to his wisdom in those early years, especially his knowledge of interviews and interrogations, in which he is a master.

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1

THE TWO MEN STALKING ME emerged from the shadows and then trailed me though the parking lot.

They lagged behind me about fifty feet. I slowed my pace, not that I wasn't as slow as a tree slug already, to see if they would overtake me or hang back.

They hung back. Not good.

Any human at a normal pace should have passed me by now. I could feel their eyes punching holes in me, waiting for the right time to move.

Since I wasn't up for dealing with any problems, I stepped it out as best I could. With a new-and-improved plastic pelvis and hip, along with ten months of physical therapy, I should be able to hobble a little faster. No such luck. The cane and gimpy leg would only go so fast. Grandma Moses on a pogo stick could hop circles around me.

Using the rearview mirrors on the cars parked along Lake Avenue, I kept tabs on my new friends without being too obvious, a little trick I picked up when I worked undercover. No need to give them more of an advantage than they already had.

The big one, a black kid maybe twenty years old, wore a white wife-beater muscle shirt and black jean shorts. Mini-dreads jetted from his head like a frayed ball of yarn. The other kid, probably the

same age, was an anemic white with a tattoo sprawled on his neck and a shaved head that glistened under the streetlights.

With each glance I caught, they feigned like they were talking to each other, but I could sense they were planning to pounce. And why not? I was an easy mark—a crippled guy negotiating the Orlando streets alone at night. One more block to go until I was at work.

Eleven months ago I would have enjoyed this game of cat and mouse. But then I would have been the cat, a big hungry one ready to swallow those thugs like the rodents they were.

I hoped they were just playing a game.

I stole a furtive glance behind me, and my tails were nowhere in sight. I stopped and shifted all the way around. Gone. Must have headed up an alley. Maybe I was just losing my mind. Hadn't been out much lately.

I used to love the Orlando nightlife, the clubs and things to do; the pulse of the city at night energized me. It had changed so much in a short amount of time. Faster, meaner, a stranger to me. Like I was living on a different planet. I had grown up here, not long after Mickey scurried in, back when Orlando was more of a cowtown. Now it's a big city plagued with big-city problems.

As I approached the corner of Lake and East Jackson, Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dumber raced around the corner right in front of me, both out of breath. They must have sprinted down the alley behind the store to cut me off just before I reached the intersection.

This wouldn't end pretty.

"Hey, old man." The ugly white kid checked up and down the street, like felons do when they're preparing to do something monumentally stupid.

His buddy invaded my personal space on my left. "How about some spare change?" he said with an accent, maybe Haitian.

"Don't have any change." I eyed possible escape routes, though escape wasn't likely in my condition. And I couldn't count on anyone to help me, or even to notice, for that matter. On this corner, in a city of over two hundred thousand people, I was on my own...as usual.

"Then give up your wallet, or I bust your head like your leg is." The black kid pressed in on me.

"Okay. Okay." I held up my right hand while leaning more on the cane with my left. "I'll give you my wallet. Just don't hurt me."

"Hurry up!" The white kid spit as he spoke, clenching his fists at his sides. "I ain't got all night." He was the alpha dog of the two. If they were going to attack, he would lead. He needed to be tamed.

I reached back with my right hand, brushed past my wallet in my back pocket, and slipped my hand up into my waistband. I let go of the cane. The brass handle clanked as it bounced off the concrete, echoing around us. Huey and Dewey beaded in on it, drawing their attention down for the second I needed.

I unsnapped my Glock 9mm from its holster, then drew it to eye level, setting my night sights on the white kid's forehead. A stupefied look crossed his face, which must be a regular event for him. He wasn't so alpha dog now.

"The leg's busted, scumbag, but my finger works fine." I gritted my teeth and leaned forward. "You wanna test it out?"

Both raised their hands. "We're just playin' around, man." The black kid glanced toward his partner, who peered down the barrel of my pistol.

"I'm not. You got ten seconds to run before I call the cops. Ten. Nine." They were half a block away before I hit five.

Retired cops can legally carry guns, even if they're medically retired. At least I had that going for me. If not, I'd have been a quick lunch for those creeps. I thought about calling Dispatch and reporting it, but something told me my new friends would think twice for a while before robbing someone again, and I didn't relish the idea of being listed as a victim again on an incident report with my old department.

I slid the pistol into its holster at my back, then snapped it in. I combed my fingers through my hair. The May air was thick and still. The adrenaline surge from the game with my buddies wasn't all bad. For the first time in a while, I felt alive, energized. Too bad it would die down soon.

My cane lay on the sidewalk, which shouldn't have been a big deal. But everything was a big deal these days. As I stood without support, I felt like I was balancing on a dry, cracked twig ready to snap at any moment, sending me crashing to the concrete. My own legs were under someone else's spell, because they certainly didn't obey me anymore. I used to be able to roundhouse kick a heavy bag so hard it would bend in half. Now I had to mentally prepare to bend over and pick up my cane so I wouldn't fall on my face like an idiot...or worse, a helpless child.

I shouldn't have been too worried, though. Me and my physical terrorist—I mean, therapist—Helga, had been working on this. Her name really wasn't Helga, but I liked to call her that. A linebacker-sized woman with viselike man hands, sweet Helga and I would rendezvous three times a week—whether I wanted to or not. (If I didn't go to my therapy and doctors' appointments, I didn't get my medical retirement checks.) I imagine Helga's former job was as an interrogator in a Russian gulag somewhere deep in

Siberia, slapping, twisting, and pounding confessions from the prisoners. I've cried out for mercy more than once on her medieval torture table.

I drew in a deep breath, then exhaled as we practiced. I eased down, shifting all my weight onto my left foot while rolling my right foot on its heel, stretching it out. Throbbing bolts of pain fired up my leg then my spine, like multiple shots from a Taser. I wobbled as my fingers brushed the cane, as if I were petting the head of a snake. My middle finger caught the lip of the hawk-bill handle, then drew it into my hand. I stabbed the tip into the concrete and pressed myself up. What a production.

As I righted myself, I took a second to compose, the nerve endings in my lower half signaling their dismay and rebellion. I checked my watch. If I was gonna make my shift as the night watchman at Coral Bay Condominiums, I'd have to hustle. I'd hate to lose my new job. But then again, I didn't have much respect for someone who's never lost anything.

My name is Ray Quinn. Eleven months ago, I lost everything.

2

WHILE I USED TO WAGE WAR in the streets against felons and thugs, my largest battle now was staying awake for an entire shift. The height of last week's drama at the condo was when Mrs. Ragland's Yorkshire terrier left an unwanted deposit on the carpet in the lobby. In a short time, my world had disintegrated into this.

I navigated my way across Jackson Street to the glass double doors of Coral Bay Condos. The eight-story building was about twenty-five years old. The sign above the doors read Where Luxury and Comfort Meet.

I rapped my knuckles on the glass. The doors were locked from 8:00 p.m. until 5:00 a.m., and my shift started at 9:00. The second-shift guy, Hank Karpinski, was sitting in my chair at the front desk. Hank didn't move. I doubted he could hear me. He was easily a hundred and thirty years old and the only person on the planet I might be able to take in a dead sprint. I rang the door chime. His gray head bobbed my way, and I waved. He squinted, then pressed the metallic buzzer to let me in.

I pushed through the door. "How are things going, Hank?"

"Crazy as usual, Ray." Hank made his way around the counter. "Mrs. Campola is off her medication again. She's been mean as a snake all day, calling down and hollering at me."

"Sounds nice."

"Busy, busy, busy." The old man shuffled past me toward the

door. “Watch Crevis tonight too. He’s already here and fired up as usual.”

“I figured.” I eased into the cushioned swivel chair at the front desk, then propped my cane on the table next to me. Hank had kept my seat warm.

Four security monitors hung on the wall behind me, covering different areas of the complex—the front door, the back, the underground parking garage, and the elevators. The front desk faced the lobby and the glass double doors.

Two maroon couches were in the lobby, so residents could sit and talk. At night, they were virtually unused, which was one of the reasons I volunteered to work the midnight shift. I could sit back in my little kingdom, alone, watching the world pass by. Like a wrecked voyeur of sorts, my life was more of a spectator sport now.

The job wasn’t too bad, though. I answered phones, buzzed folks in and out, watched the monitors, and called for help if we needed it (usually an ambulance, since many of the residents were elderly). The pay wasn’t great, although it did supplement my retirement benefits. A friend suggested I pursue a second job, if for no other reason than to get out of my apartment more. He might have been right.

Stretching out my right leg, I massaged it, hoping it wouldn’t cause me too much discomfort tonight. The walk and near rumble left me a bit sore. I needed to talk with management about letting me park on the premises. I thought parking a couple of lots away would give me some exercise, but now I wasn’t so sure.

I pulled my *Sudoku Masters* book from my pocket, then flipped

to my current puzzle. I loved a good puzzle. As a kid, I wore out a dozen Rubik's Cubes.

"Ray!" Crevis Creighton rounded the corner from the first-floor hallway and burst into the lobby. "I got a new knife at the flea market. Wanna see it?"

So much for being undisturbed. "No."

He plopped his size-twelve hoof on the chair next to mine and drew a dagger from a sheath tied to his boot. Crevis's face lit up as he held the blade in front of him.

Crevis was my nighttime co-worker who walked the property while I manned the desk. I couldn't bring myself to say *partner* in the same sentence with Crevis; it violated all good standards of decency.

About my height, a good six foot, Crevis had a wiry build and was a little lighter than me (especially since I'd put on some pounds recently). With a bright red flattop haircut and long gangly arms, he resembled a spider monkey with a pencil eraser glued to its head—with all due respect to the little primates who might have a couple of IQ points on him. He was in his late teens or early twenties and had ruddy skin, pitted with acne scars like a wall-spackling job gone awry.

"Pretty cool." Crevis twirled the implement of war, mesmerized by the shiny dagger in a way that should cause concern to any person with even a rudimentary understanding of psychology. "Wanna hold it?"

"No."

Crevis held it out to me. I glared back at him.

"Okay, okay." He slid it back into its sheath and stood tall, his

PR-24 police baton dangling on his web belt. The guy had every security gadget known to man on that thing—pepper spray, handcuffs, an expandable baton, plastic Flexicuffs, a flashlight, a Leatherman tool, and a Velcro pouch containing who-knows-what, and I didn't dare ask him.

“Wanna hear what happened at the flea market?”

“No.”

“When I was looking at the knife case, these three guys were behind me. One of them started gettin' mouthy because he said I was standing in front of him. They all got in my face, so I stepped back, ready to go at it with them.”

Crevis raised his hands and took a feeble karate stance. “I told them to bring it on. They just backed up and walked away. They were scared.” Crevis planted his hands on his hips and puffed his chest out like it should have a large S on it.

“Lucky for them.” They could have damaged their fists on his face.

“You know it.” Crevis worked a quick series of jabs and hooks in the air, a triumphant smirk sliding across his uneven teeth. “They had no idea who they were dealing with. I'm a weapon of death and destruction.”

This conversation needed to end. I glanced at the garage monitor and rolled my chair closer, seemingly fixated on the screen.

“You see something?” Crevis hurried around the front desk and went shoulder to shoulder with me, eyes locked on the monitor.

“I'm not sure. I thought I saw a shadow or something move in the garage area by one of the vans there.” I tapped the screen with my finger. Pausing a second for effect, I waved a dismissive hand in

the air and leaned back in my chair. "It was probably nothing. I wouldn't worry about it."

"You never know. I'm on it." Crevis scampered down the hall toward the stairs, his gear rattling. "I'll call you if I see something."

Worked every time. One night I must have sent him to a dozen different shadows and movements. The kid had been lacquered in a healthy sweat before that shift ended. I almost felt sorry for him...almost.

After just a few minutes, Crevis crept past the garage camera, gazed back, and gave me a thumbs-up, as if I cared. Flashlight in hand, he slipped out of view. That should be good for a half hour, maybe forty-five minutes. His parents must have been hippies who ingested large quantities of narcotics in their day. There's no other rational reason why someone would name their child Crevis.

I positioned my chair so I could keep an eye on the monitors and the front door, then I returned my attention to my puzzle. Didn't want my back to the door; old cop habits were hard to break. One of the benefits of this job was lots of time for my Sudoku. I checked the puzzle pattern to this point and added two more numbers when the buzzer drew me to the front door.

An attractive blonde in her late twenties knocked on the glass and waved. She wore blue jeans and a white shirt, and her hair was in a ponytail. I'd never seen her before. Then again, I hadn't been working here all that long.

"May I help you?" I said through the intercom, resting my unchallenged puzzle on the desk.

"I'm here to see my brother."

"Did you ring his unit?"

“He won’t answer. Please let me in.” She rested a hand on the glass. “I’m worried about him.”

I pushed the button, feeling a little guilty for not buzzing her in right away.

She hurried to the counter and leaned her elbows on it. “I’m sorry to bother you, but I haven’t been able to reach my brother since yesterday. He hasn’t answered his cell or house phone. This isn’t like him at all.” Her hazel eyes were a nice complement to her pretty face.

“What’s his name?” I pulled the resident listing book from next to the telephone.

“David Hendricks.”

I wasn’t familiar with his name either. I found his number and picked up the phone. “I’ll call his apartment.” I got an answering machine with a man’s voice, probably her brother, telling me to leave a message at the tone. I didn’t leave one.

“Answering machine.” I shrugged.

“Can you please let me in his apartment? He’s a pastor and runs Outreach Orlando Ministries. He didn’t show up for work today and didn’t call in.” Her voice cracked, but she caught herself and regained composure. “Something’s wrong; I just know it.”

After fifteen years of police work, I was pretty good at spotting trouble and troubled people. She was neither. I had the master key and would escort her up to his unit. I could have let Crevis do it while I attended to my puzzle, but even though I didn’t know this lady, she’d given me no reason to subject her to Crevis.

“Hey, Crevis,” I called into my radio. “You need to cover the front desk for a minute. I’m going to let someone in an apartment on the fourth floor.”

“On my way.” He was out of breath and no doubt running to the desk, as he did with every request.

She leaned over the desk and touched my forearm as I stood. “Thank you.”

“No problem.” I got my cane and started down the hallway. She followed.

“Everyone at the mission is worried. David is the most responsible person I know.”

A pastor? Fifteen snarky responses piled up in my head like rush-hour traffic. I have a filter in my brain that’s often “out of order” and allows whatever I think to flow way too freely across my lips. It’s been my undoing more than once. But today, for some reason, I shut off the comments and didn’t tell the lady what I thought of pastors, religion, or anything else, for that matter. Didn’t know how long the filter would keep working, so I’d best get this done and finish my puzzle.

“What’s your name?”

“Ray.” I fumbled with the keys in my hand. “Ray Quinn.”

“I appreciate this, Ray.” She scooted ahead of me to the elevator and pushed the Up button. “I’m Pam Winters.”

I nodded. Different last name than her brother, no wedding ring, but a rather fresh indent on her ring finger. Must be a story there. I pay attention to hands. When I was a cop, it was a matter of life or death. The hands were what could cripple or kill you. Not to watch them was a dereliction of duty. Now it was just an annoying remnant of my former life.

We were on the fourth floor before I knew it. Pam exited first, well in front of me. I did what I could to keep up with her brisk pace.

She stopped at room 419 and knocked. No answer. I knocked. I didn't want to be jiggling the door with the key and have some goofy, scared resident pop a few rounds my way. Maybe this guy just wanted to be left alone for a day. I'd had whole months where I didn't want to be bothered.

Pam tapped her foot and then pounded on the door. "David. It's Pam. Open up. Are you okay?"

I waited for a second. Still nothing. I unlocked the door and eased it open. "Mr. Hendricks, it's the night watchman. Are you all right?"

"David." Pam stepped around me as we entered the living room. No one was there.

The living room was nice with an open kitchen area. Nothing opulent, but not a bad place for a single guy. Sure beat my digs.

Pam walked into the kitchen and over to the phone on the counter. The message light flashed.

I stayed where I was because I didn't feel comfortable milling around someone's apartment. But I didn't want to leave her alone here either, just in case I was being duped and she was some crazed stalker chick or something.

She called to her brother again and then moved down the hallway toward the bedrooms. As she opened a door on the left, her scream could have peeled paint off the wall. I ran forward as best I could, nearly stumbling in the hallway.

Pam halted at the doorway, hand over mouth, another shriek tearing through the air. I stepped into the room and found out why.

I pulled my radio from my belt. "Crevis, call 911 now!"

"What?"

“Call OPD right now. We’ve got two people down.” I switched hands with my cane and grabbed Pam by the arm because she looked as if she was going to faint.

“Tell them it’s a homicide.”