

## Chapter 8 Nighttime Reading

In the loft, Big Boy sat on the couch watching ESPN. It was another poker tournament. Maybe dogs really do play poker. He looks disappointed when I turned off the television and switch on the Bose. Al Green's "Let's Stay Together" starts to play.

I grab a bottle water from the frig, plop down in my leather chair and prop my feet up on the ottoman. The red leather chair was my dad's. It's worn on the arms and reminds me of him every time I sit in it. Big Boy looks up, sort of nods approval and stretches out on the couch. He shuts his eyes and grooves to Al. I glance at the clock to see that it's 9:10.

I open the envelope and find a note from Gordon: "This will get your started, Walker. — JG." I do a quick survey of the contents. There are copies of the arrest report of George Polk, the receiving screening reports, incident reports, restraint chair runsheets, the draft of the medical examiner's autopsy report and the typed notes of an interview, presumably by Gordon, of one of the jail infirmary nurses, Sarah Polson. This really should get me started.

"La-La For You" starts to play. Too bad Al Green found religion. I miss the Motown sound.

I start reading the interview notes.

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Mr. Polk was brought to the Escambia County Jail on August 19. An EMT did an extensive healthcare receiving screening. Polk, age 65, denied any medical or mental health problems, as well as a taking any medications. The EMT observed no medical or mental health issues, except for an elevated blood pressure.

Polk refused to sign the healthcare screening form and wouldn't agree to take any blood pressure medication. The EMT referred him to the jail infirmary so that we could monitor his blood pressure.

That's where I met Mr. Polk. He was calm, but firm that he would not take any medications unless "I can see my wife and brother." I asked my supervisor if we could arrange a visit by Mrs. Polk, but was told to ignore the request and not let the inmate manipulate me.

Being new to jail, having only worked there six weeks, I didn't question my superior. Two hours later, I tried to get Mr. Polk to take some B/P medication, explaining that it would make him feel better. He refused to communicate or answer any questions.

"I ain't going to do nothing until I talk with wife and brother," he said. This time Mr. Polk appeared confused. I wasn't sure he knew where he was, and noted that in my progress report. I requested a 23-hour mental health observation and a mental health evaluation.

Mr. Polk refused the mental health evaluation while housed in the infirmary. Without a physician's order, I couldn't get him transferred to a mental health facility. No doctor would give the order without the evaluation. Mr. Polk was caught in a loop that he didn't seem to understand or know how to stop.

The next morning I read in the progress reports that the nighttime nurse had gotten Mr. Polk to take his B/P meds. He let me take his blood pressure, which was still elevated, but not as high as recorded earlier. I noted bruises on his arm that weren't in the EMT's report.

Mr. Polk refused to tell me where he got the bruises. He refused to take any medications, stating, "No meds but you can take BP."

Things were the same with Mr. Polk the next day. I never could get him to take medications, but somehow the night shift could. My supervisor didn't think anything unusual about it and told me to just stay focused on my job.

On August 22, Mr. Polk was very confused. He refused to talk and attempted to run out of the cell. I had to call for the guards. I got permission to call Mrs. Polk.

She told me that Mr. Polk had no current or recent mental health problems and that his last hospital admission was 30 years ago. The more we talked, however, the more learned about past problems.

Mrs. Polk told me that Mr. Polk "was okay until about a week ago" and "had been staying up all night." He has "three personalities, hears voices and sees things."

"I wants to bond him out and take him straight to Lakeview," she said. "It's just the way his is."

I noted all this in Mr. Polk's folder for the psychiatrist who was scheduled to evaluate him the next day. Unfortunately Mr. Polk refused the evaluation so Mr. Polk would have to stay in the infirmary for at least another week since the psychiatrist only visits once a week.

August 23 is first entry in the medical records that Mr. Polk had been placed in a restraint chair. The guards who did it were Ed Allen and Sam Tucker. Both have pretty tough reputations. Thank God, I never had to work with them. They walk around like the own the infirmary. Even have "Red Alert" tattooed on their biceps. "Red Alert" is the code given over the PA system when an inmate gets violent and needs to be subdued.

The restraint runsheet showed that Mr. Polk had been kept in the chair for seven hours. I reported to my supervisor a possible case of abuse by Allen and Tucker. A prisoner should not be placed in a restraint chair for more than two consecutive hours. He said he would check into it.

When I came back from two days off, I found Mr. Polk to be even more erratic. He had been placed in the restraint chair two more times for more than six hours each time. The incident reports said that he taken off all his clothes twice. Once he was caught stuffing toilet paper into his toilet in an attempt to flood his cell. The other time he refused to eat and spit at the nurse.

Mr. Polk was very confused when I interviewed him. The reports said that he had not only been taking his BP medicine, but also been given Benadryl and Haloperidol. Mr. Polk let me take his blood pressure and begged that I let him see his wife.

On August 27, I found Mr. Polk strapped in the restraint chair when I came on the floor. He had been tasered four times by Allen and Tucker and was heavily medicated. The incident report said that he was spitting again. I had him released from the chair and helped him to his bed. Mr. Polk cried in his bed and refused to eat his meals.

On August 28, Mr. Polk seemed to be in his own world. The night report said that he had been “uncooperative with the staff” but there was no mention of the restraint chair or tasers. I found out that Mr. Polk’s niece worked in housekeeping and was able to get her up to the infirmary to visit her uncle. I hoped that he might help him.

Mr. Polk told his niece, “Pumpkin, they are going to kill me.” I assured both of them that Mr. Polk was safe. He never said who “they” were.

The next day, August 29, I was off-site for training at the administration building. I got a call from Mr. Polk’s niece at 2 a.m. on August 30 that her uncle was dead.

I resigned when I went into work that day and have never been back.

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Damn.

I thumb through the incident reports. Allen and Tucker’s names are on most of them. I wonder if they were the eavesdroppers at Global.

Big Boy is snoring on the couch. The CD player has stopped. I find the report for August 29. It’s written by Allen at 17:14.

“I was on the floor when the chow cart came. I opened Polk’s cell door and asked him if he wanted to eat. Polk would not reply. I told him to hand me the old Styrofoam tray. Polk refused and said, ‘I’ll get you.’”

I told Polk numerous times to move from his door but he refused and took an aggressive stance with his fist clenched. I immediately deployed pepper spray on Polk’s face and pushed him back with my right hand. He fell backwards and got up slowly.

I called for CO Tucker and we escorted Polk to the shower and decontaminated him with a solution of soap and water. Polk has a foul odor and has been refusing to shower for several days so I left him in the shower. I told him to clean himself.

Polk removed his jumpsuit but refused to shower. He stood at the door spitting at us. CO Tucker opened the door and put a pillow case over his head so he couldn't spit on us. We placed him in a restraint chair and secured him. We put Polk back in the shower and cleaned him. Polk was checked by the medical staff."

I'm surprised Allen and Tucker haven't been given medals.

I find the report from the medical staff. It simply says, "At approximately 2200 hours on August 29, inmate Polk was found without a pulse and was not breathing. CPR was performed and EMS was called. EMS pronounced inmate Polk's death at approximately 2305 hours."

In 11 days, George Polk went from shouting at cars in the street and carrying a toy pistol to dying naked in a restraint chair in jail infirmary. He never got to see his wife. He may not have known where he was.

I dig a little further and locate the autopsy report. It's stamped "Draft." It's late. I don't have time to read all of it so I skip to the last page.

"Cause of Death: Combined effects of arteriosclerotic and hypertensive cardiovascular disease and paranoid schizophrenia."

I never knew schizophrenia could cause death.

"Manner of Death: Homicide"

Sheriff Frost isn't going to be happy.

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