

GENRE: **SUSPENSE THRILLER**



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Dedication

To My Guruji



“Late. Sri Sri Sri Narasimha Bhat”

(3rd April 1961 – 12th July 2024)

Your wisdom still lights the paths I walk. This story is offered at your feet,
with gratitude that words alone can never hold.

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Published in India by Prowess Publishing,
GJ Complex, Thadikara Swamy Koil St, Alandur,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600016

eISBN: 978-1-5457-6328-5

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication

7 SUSPECTS

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Prologue

The storm had not yet broken, but the city already reeked of blood.

From the highest towers to the narrowest alleys, shadows shifted with secrets too heavy to carry. Someone was about to die, someone else about to kill, and in between—seven faces waiting to be unmasked.

When the first scream pierced the night, the rain answered. And in that sound, the game began.

Chapter 1

The Rain Knows

The city did not sleep; it only shifted between nightmares.

Rain lashed against the skyline, a thousand silver needles stitching shadows to glass. Neon signs blurred into bleeding colors, their reflections crawling across the cracked pavement far below. Sirens howled somewhere in the distance, part warning, part lament, threading through the mist like the city's restless heartbeat.

Detective Ray Donovan adjusted his collar and looked up at the Azure Spire. The penthouse loomed above him like a shrine to ambition—a glass temple that had always reflected greed more than grace. Tonight, it reflected only ruin. The skylight was shattered, jagged edges gleaming under the strobe of lightning, as if the heavens themselves had clawed their way inside.

Inside, *Mark Veylan* lay dead.

The marble floor that had once dazzled party guests was now a canvas of betrayal. Mark's body sprawled across it with grim elegance, his tailored suit soaked dark at the chest, his eyes wide open and glassy. They stared past the fractured ceiling into the night beyond, as though death had stolen his gaze before he had the chance to close it.

Ray stepped closer, the echo of his boots carrying too loud in the silence. He had been here before—different addresses, different bodies, different excuses whispered by men who thought themselves untouchable. But this was different. This was personal to the city. Mark Veylan had been a name

that carried weight: wealthy, charismatic, a man who collected both allies and enemies like trophies. His death was not just a crime. It was a message.

The scent in the air told its own story—bourbon sharp enough to sting the nose, perfume too expensive for discretion, cigarette smoke still clinging to the curtains. Beneath it all was something bitter and metallic, the smell that clung to every murder scene like a signature.

Ray crouched beside the body. A glass of bourbon lay shattered near Mark's hand, amber streaks blending with the crimson pool beneath his head. He picked up one shard, turning it under the light. Clean. Too clean. Not a mark of struggle. Not a sign of panic. Whoever had killed Mark had been close—close enough to lower his guard, close enough to strike without warning.

Lightning forked across the sky, and for a moment the mirrored ceiling flickered with ghostly light. Ray's eyes caught the faintest reflection—seven silhouettes blurred against the storm. They were shadows, half-seen, captured in fragments by the angles of broken glass.

Seven shadows. Seven stories. Seven possible killers.

The thought settled like a weight in Ray's chest.

Behind him, the butler hovered, pale and uncertain, a man so quiet he almost seemed part of the furniture. Ray turned, his voice steady, low.

“Who was here tonight?”

The butler swallowed hard before answering, his tone brittle. “Seven guests, Detective. But I... I saw nothing.”

Ray's gaze lingered on him. Of course he hadn't seen anything. Or so he claimed. But the house reeked of fear, and fear never lingered without reason.

Rising, Ray moved toward the rain-slick balcony. From here, the city sprawled beneath him, restless and merciless, its lights blinking like nervous eyes. Somewhere in that chaos, the truth waited, crouched in the

shadows. But in a city this dark, truth could be as dangerous as the lies that buried it.

A gust of wind swept through the shattered skylight, whispering against the broken glass. The sound slithered into Ray's ears, unshakable, almost a voice:

"Who really killed... the ghost of Mark?"

Ray froze. His pulse kicked once, sharp and cold. A whisper? Or his imagination?

He looked back at the corpse, those eyes still open, still accusing. And for the first time that night, Detective Ray Donovan felt something he had long trained himself to ignore. A chill.



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