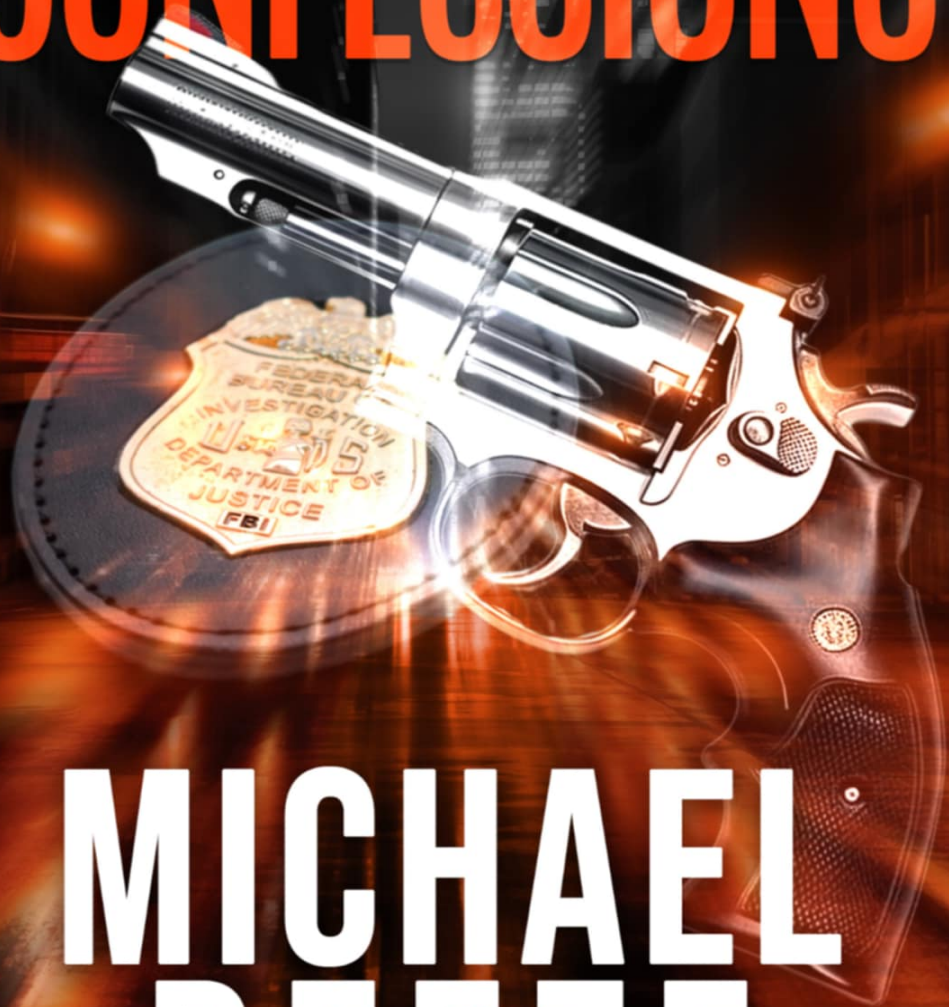


# THE DEATHBED CONFESSIONS



MICHAEL  
DEEZE

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This book is dedicated to two Kate's.  
Without them, writing would be impossible for me.  
In fact, without them I might have trouble being  
a fully functioning adult

I also want to thank,  
Susan, John and Kenny for their help as well.  
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# THE DEATHBED CONFESSIONS

Thomas Quinn Mysteries  
Book One

MICHAEL DEEZE



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When the prison gate slammed shut behind him, Tom Quinn flinched. He flinched again when the one in front of him slid open to a slow-motion ‘clang’ at the end of its travel.

“This way.” The guard placed a hand on his shoulder and directed him forward into a long, brightly lit concrete hallway where another gate awaited at the far end. Only a few steps into the hallway, the last gate clanged shut and he could feel flop sweat soaking into his shirt. This time there was activity on the other side of the upcoming gate. People dressed in the hospital scrubs of medical staff moved around behind long glass windows beyond the gate.

“Open on 19!” shouted the guard behind him. The gate clanked and then slid slowly open.

“Left.”

Tom Quinn turned left.

“I’ll take that jacket and lay your case on the table in front of you please, your watch, rings and any jewelry I can’t see.”

Tom Quinn shrugged out of his jacket, then after hesitating, he loosened his tie and dropped that on the table as well, next to his briefcase.

“FBI Agent Thomas Quinn, here to see prisoner 890547.”

“Oh...he’s been pretty specific. He wants no visitors.”

“I bet! Half of Chicago wants him dead, and I don’t blame ‘em either.” Then he softened, “Listen, the Feds want to get a few statements from him, you know, maybe wind up a case or two that’s still out there so they sent this ‘pencil neck.’”

“I’m standing right here.” Thomas was insulted.

The orderly looked him up and down and smirked, unimpressed.

“That’ll be fun. Hope you’ve got fire insurance um,” he consulted the sign-in log, “...Agent Thomas Quinn. He’s gonna burn you down.”

“I’m pretty sure that I’m no threat. I’d just like to ask him a few questions.” Tom Quinn pulled himself up to his full five-foot-nine-inch height and tried to meet the guard's steady gaze.

“Okay kid, but get your seat belt fastened. You’re about to meet Harry Beech, and may god have mercy on your soul.”



# Thomas Quinn

My sister Lily died on my fourteenth birthday. At the time, I forgot all about it and missed the date completely, only to realize it weeks later. Lily had been my partner and my friend. Irish twins we were, her only nine months older than I but miles smarter and pretty where I was homely. It had been a fluke, something for my parents to watch but nothing any of us believed could be actually fatal. She had a hole in her heart, something that was supposed to close as she grew, but then it hadn't. Instead, she had become weaker and weaker. At the end, she could only lie on the couch while I did my best to entertain her. Then she had simply closed her eyes and gone to sleep and I lost my friend. My mother and father shooed me from the room while my mother cried and my father made phone calls. I locked myself in the bathroom and set the toilet paper on fire.

Lily had been the last sibling. Joshua had gone first. Blood poisoning after stepping on a rusty nail. He was stiff as a board when he stopped breathing. Gwen died of the whooping cough and so did Donny. But Lily was the last straw; Ma was never the same after that. She lost direction and disappeared into herself. Eventually, she found her excuse and when the cancer came, she embraced it. Within months she too was gone and she left me.



I had chosen not to walk the stage or shake hands with the academic bureaucrats. I was getting my Master's degree and no handshake or piece of paper, no matter how well framed it was going to be, could tell the tale of what a struggle it had been. I spared myself the smarmy graduation ceremony with the proud parents and grandparents taking group photos all over the campus. I didn't have anyone who would have attended the ceremony anyway. No proud parents, no fawning girlfriend. I gave the registrar my forwarding address and went home early to contemplate my bleak future.

I had graduated from high school only a month after my father had died. I had no expectations of college; tuition, room and board put it out of reach. At the last career day before graduation, I stopped at the Army recruiter's table. The fantasy of going to college on the government's dime sounded pretty good to me. I didn't investigate further; I signed up for ROTC. Four and a half years later I had looked into the blinding blowing sands of the Iraqi desert and watched the men of my squad die. I had been one of the last ones to fall, but I had fallen none the less.

I did their rehab; I ran on their treadmill. I took their pills. I took my sessions with their psychiatrist. I passed and they put me back on the street. Back on the

street with no place to go and nothing to do.

My counselor assured me that a Master's degree would guarantee a good job in law enforcement, especially law enforcement that didn't necessarily involve guns and explosives. I was accepted to a relatively prestigious school thanks largely in part to a honorable discharge and a bunch of ridiculous medals for things that I may or may not have done alone. With the help of two almost full-time jobs, I was able to finally earn a degree in Forensic Psychology. A great degree in a narrow field but with a career arrow pointed nowhere in particular.

I had mailed countless resumes and received several tepid responses but nothing with any meat on its bones. I went back to my small upstairs studio apartment and my bartender's job at night and waited for the mailman every day like my life depended on it, which in a sordid sort of way—it did.

And that's when the Federal Bureau of Investigation came calling.

# Harry Beech

The world had caught up to Harry Beech on a beautiful spring morning. Those magical mornings in late spring when the air is cool and the dew is heavy and you can just catch a faint glimpse of your breath. Harry had missed the nuance; he'd been preoccupied. On that magnificent June morning, police responded to a 911 call in a quiet residential neighborhood on the west side of town. When they arrived they found Harry sitting in a swing rocker on the front porch of a neat two-story frame home at the end of a cul-de-sac. Harry still had the phone in his hand.

The front door was wide open, braced by the body of a man lying flat on his back, his feet extended out onto the porch. He lay in a pool of his own blood. His dead eyes were last focused on the small hole that had sprouted in his forehead. At the end of the entry hallway, another inert form lay across the back of a recliner: a woman, her sightless eyes gazing down at the still form of a child in her arms. The child, also deceased, apparently killed by the same bullets that had killed the woman. Then, as if the tragedy wasn't enough already, in the kitchen, a small toddler lay inert on the counter, its head face down in the full kitchen sink. The faucet still ran, and the water spilled across the flooded kitchen floor. Next to the child on the counter was a Ruger .38 caliber revolver; all cylinders appeared to have been fired.

Harry Beech had been convicted on four counts of homicide, although no motive could be established. The defense rested after only one day of testimony, and Harry Beech refused to testify in his own defense or to utter one word about the incident.

Due to the heinous nature of the crime, additional penalties were exacted by the judge beyond the jury's recommendations and he received four life sentences to run consecutively. Harry had requested the death penalty, but they deemed that he didn't deserve that kind of mercy and instead gave him no hope for parole.

# Introductions

Now Harry was finishing his life sentences, all four of them at once. His cancer was advanced and the handwriting was on the wall. He would be getting out but leaving feet first. They say when someone dies, it's like having a library burn down. My station chief was afraid that Harry's library would burn down before Harry felt like telling anyone all the stories hiding somewhere inside him. Most specifically, the many cases, still technically open cases, that had never been solved and had at least a tangential relationship with Mr. Beech. The chief reasoned that Harry had nothing to lose now and that maybe he could unburden his conscience and help us out in the long run. And maybe give some families peace of mind after so many years of doubt. And maybe he'd be willing to share some of these secrets with the new guy.

A lot of maybes.

Harry you see, had been around a long time before the incident that got him convicted. Harry had been a well-known antagonist on the streets of Chicago for many years. He, at times, would seem to be involved in some crime, major or minor, but then, he would recede from view, and there was always insufficient evidence to take Harry's involvement anywhere beyond suspicion. The suspicions were multiple and frequent, yet Harry had never come to justice or even seen the inside of a courtroom beyond arraignment and bail posting. He seemingly had a guardian angel, and he had always walked away. Until the fateful spring morning when his involvement was blatantly obvious, and his guardian angel turned her back on him.

I stood in the narrow hallway, looking at him through the glass of his isolation suite. He was propped up in a half-seated position. From his file, I knew how old he actually was, but he appeared much older than his years. His face was all sharp angles; a hard jawline, high sharp cheekbones, and a broad ridge above his eyes made his eyebrows seem overly prominent. His lips were in a tight line, and his face seemed tight behind a nasal cannula inserted in large nostrils. Below his legs had emerged from beneath the bedsheets and appeared shrunken and overly skinny. Large, purplish bruises appeared randomly over much of the surface of his legs and forearms.

"The bruises are from the blood thinners he's on. It's not because of anything we did in here." Was the orderly's response to my questioning look. "He's on a shitload of pain medicine, probably in a lot of pain all the time still, but he don't talk about it. Shit, he probably hasn't said ten words since he got down here. Just lays there staring out through the glass. Kinda' creepy, if you know what I mean."

I'd looked at Harry's mug shots; they had spanned a few decades. A time lapse

of the aging process in one man. Always well dressed, but you didn't notice that at first; what you noticed was the relentless and riveting gaze of his hawklike eyes from beneath hard brows. It was not the face that you wanted to meet on a dark street corner. The face I looked at through the glass window hadn't changed since his last photograph. It was daunting, even with his eyes closed, and it made me hope I wasn't in over my head. I pushed open the door and entered, but not before noting that his left wrist was handcuffed to the bedframe.

Once in the room, I found myself trying not to make a sound. As quietly as I could I set my briefcase down and sat in the plastic chair in the corner, content for the moment to let him sleep and not risk jarring him into wakefulness. The room was packed with the gantries and machines that accompany the very sick. A white robot machine in the corner clicked and wheezed, breathing in and out with measured rhythm. A display of instruments beeped and ticked as cursers ran across screens with numbers above his bed. All of the wheezing, ticking and beeping somehow seemed hypnotic as I waited.

“What?” His voice wasn't the least bit sleepy.

“What?”

“What do you want?”

“I'm Agent Thomas Quinn of the FBI. I'd like to ask you a few questions, Mr. Beech.”

“Get lost.”

He had never opened his eyes, but it seemed he hadn't been asleep after all.

“I'd like to. To be honest, I'd really like to, but they will probably just send me back again.”

“See ya' next time then punk. Roberto will let you back out.”

And with that, the interview was over.