SALLY SQUARE



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Thomas Quinn Mysteries
Book Three

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The Street

I watched the building across the street from the shadow of a bus shelter, hands in my coat pockets, breath fogging in the cold. The neighborhood was quiet at this hour—storefront gates down, streetlights humming, the occasional car sliding past on wet pavement. I wasn't looking for anything specific. Just watching. Listening. Feeling the edges of the city the way I always did when something felt off.

A man stepped up beside me without warning.

Not close enough to be a threat.

Close enough to be intentional.

I didn't turn. I didn't have to. The man wasn't street. His shoes were wrong. His coat was wrong. His posture was wrong. He stood out wrong on a street of normal people.

"You're being watched," the man said quietly. "They would like to meet you."

I finally looked at him. His smile was flat and ice cold.

"I don't like surprises," I said.

"This isn't one," he replied. "It's an opportunity. One that you should take."

He reached into his coat—not fast, not careless—and held out a business card. Thick stock. Embossed logo. A company I recognized from the skyline, not the street.

"I'll be in touch," the man said.

He walked away without waiting for a response, disappearing into the slow drift of traffic, just another overcoat and hat walking with purpose, like he'd never been there at all.

I didn't need the pitch. I knew the type.

Someone with money had decided I might be useful again.

I turned the card over once, then looked across the street.

Katja stood in the recessed doorway of a closed pharmacy across the street, half in shadow, hands in her pockets. She'd seen everything. She gave me a single nod—confirmation, not concern.

I slipped the card into my coat and crossed the street toward her.

"Corporate," she said.

"Yeah."

Katja's eyes tracked the direction the man had gone. "I don't like

him.”

“Neither do I.”

“You going to call him?”

“Not tonight.”

We walked on.

She kept her distance.

She kept her distance on purpose.

I didn’t close the space.

I didn’t take it personally.

Some people needed distance.

Some people were built that way.

The Rectory

Snow drifted down through the haloed streetlights, soft and steady, muting the city to a low hum. The church and rectory stood in the darkness like they had been there forever, solid in a neighborhood that changed by the year. On nights like this, I preferred to walk rather than drive. Tonight, I had things on my mind, and the distance was irrelevant. I was only going to be slightly late. My boots left a trail up the walk. A single light glowed in the rectory window. I knew Reyes wouldn't mind waiting.

I let myself in and shook off the cold and snow.

Reyes was in the kitchen, sleeves rolled up past the elbow, working over a steaming pot on the stove. He didn't turn, just lifted his chin in greeting and tipped his head toward the chair at the table. A bottle of whiskey sat between two glasses already poured. He didn't speak. He didn't have to.

I sat. Reyes set out two plates—rice, beans, bread wrapped in a towel to keep the heat in. Simple food. Familiar. It grounded me more than I'd admit.

We clinked glasses and drained them before we started eating. Reyes refilled the glasses.

"Cubs any good this year?" I asked.

Reyes snorted. "They're the Cubs. Hope springs eternal."

I nodded. "Carlos keeping up with rehab?"

"As much as he ever keeps up with anything," Reyes said. "He's stubborn. That helps and hurts him in equal measure."

We ate quietly for a while. Not tense—just two men who'd done this enough times that silence didn't need explaining. Reyes watched me now and then, the way a friend does when he's trying to read what's underneath. I didn't offer anything. I rarely did unless I had to.

Reyes lifted his glass again. "You're overdue at Mass."

I smirked and wiped my mouth. "That and confession too."

Reyes gave me a wry look. "One out of two would be a start."

I shrugged and raised my glass with a smile. Reyes did the same.

After the last piece of bread was gone, the tone at the table shifted. Reyes refilled my glass and leaned back, eyes wide open; he raised one eyebrow—listening mode.

I leaned back and waved my glass. “Is it always going to be this way?”

Reyes folded his hands. “You’ll have to narrow that down.”

“You know what I mean. People come to you wanting things they shouldn’t have. Things they shouldn’t be trusted with. Justice. Revenge. Vindication. They want someone else to carry the weight.”

“What do you think I do every day around here?”

“Does it ever change? They want judge and jury, but they don’t want to pay the vig.”

“Oh, they keep paying the vig. That’s the only way they can justify their righteous anger.”

“They expect miracles. They expect enlightenment. They want what they don’t want, and they want it without any strings. No favor for a favor, only secrets. Bloody secrets.”

Reyes nodded slowly. “Yes. They do. And most of the time, what they’re asking for isn’t what they really want.”

“That’s the problem,” I said. “There’s the right of it, the wrong of it, and then there’s the part where you’re standing in the middle trying to decide which god you’re supposed to answer to today.”

Reyes studied me. “And you think you’ve been answering to the wrong one.”

“I think,” I said, “that every time I take on one of these ‘business opportunities,’ it leaves a mark. Not the kind you see. The kind you feel later.” I didn’t say it like a confession—just a fact I’d finally decided to acknowledge out loud.

Reyes leaned back in his chair. “If you take the high ground, you don’t have that conflict. The lines you cross don’t involve that. You’re Catholic enough to feel the guilt of it, and that’s where the torture begins for you. You’ve been holding the line a long time. Longer than most men could. But the line moves. And sometimes you don’t notice until you’re standing somewhere you didn’t mean to be.”

I didn’t answer. I didn’t need to. Reyes wasn’t wrong.

A faint sound came from the doorway. Not a knock. Not a step. A presence. We both felt it and turned toward the doorway.

The darkness redefined itself, and Katja stood in the shadows, snow melting on her shoulders, her expression unreadable. She didn’t speak. She didn’t move. She just watched us. She always watched first.

Reyes rose immediately. “Katja. Come in. Let me get you a chair.”

She stepped forward, took the bottle from the table, and drank straight from it before straddling the chair Reyes offered. She rested her forearms on the back of it, the bottle hanging loosely from her hand.

“They’re asking about you,” she said. “Not the usual people. People

who don't talk unless they have to. People who don't ask unless they already know the answer."

Reyes leaned over and took the bottle from her hand. He poured both glasses a healthy amount and handed the bottle back. I stayed silent. I'd learned that when Katja came in like this, it was better to let her finish.

Katja took another small drink. "Your name is moving through places where nobody volunteers anything. And money is starting to move with it. Quiet money. The kind that stays in envelopes."

She turned her head toward Reyes. Not me. Reyes. That told me more than anything she'd said so far.

"It feels dark. There's power behind it. Either way it feels like a commitment. It's going to an 'in' or 'out' decision. What do you want me to think?" she asked him. Her voice wasn't sharp. It was something closer to tired. "Tell me how to handle this."

Reyes folded his hands on the table. He didn't answer right away. He looked at her the way he looked at people in confession—seeing the weight they were carrying. I recognized that look. I'd worn it myself more than once.

"It's Quinn who has to decide. Justice or revenge. Greed can look like revenge too. Sometimes you have to take the low road to find the truth. But he's on a slope now. If you follow him down it, you'd better know why."

Katja nodded once, like she'd been waiting for that. She didn't look at me. She didn't need to. She already knew what I was capable of.

Reyes turned to me then, his voice lower.

"Justice and morality aren't the same thing," he said. "Justice is what the world demands. Morality is what you answer to when the world is quiet. One of them will keep you alive. The other will keep you human. You have to decide which one you're serving before this goes any further."

I picked up my glass, emptied it, and set it down. I didn't argue. I didn't deflect. I just accepted the truth of it.

"It's going to be a bitch being popular," I said.

About the Author

Michael Deeze writes emotionally charged, character-driven fiction that blends suspense, grit, and a deep understanding of the human condition. A lifelong observer of people and the quiet tensions that shape their lives, Deeze crafts stories where ordinary individuals collide with extraordinary circumstances, and where the truth is rarely simple.

His work is known for its rich atmosphere, sharp dialogue, and the kind of moral complexity that lingers long after the final page. Whether exploring the shadows of small-town secrets or the inner battles of flawed heroes, Deeze brings a steady hand and a storyteller's instinct to every book he writes.

Quinn continues his tradition of immersive, tightly woven narratives that challenge, provoke, and captivate. When he's not writing, Deeze can be found researching historical oddities, refining new story ideas, or enjoying the quiet moments that spark his next novel.