



Proudly Presents

# **WRECKAGE**

**WRITTEN BY JAKE BARTON**

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## IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ

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One of the very first calls I ever got was about a head-on collision between an 18-wheeler and a mid-size sedan. In the wreckage, both the driver and the passenger in the sedan were killed. When I got there, the driver of the big rig wasn't physically-injured; however, the accident was so traumatic, he was being treated for a heart attack by the paramedics. As for the couple in the sedan, there wasn't a need to check for any vitals. They obviously were killed upon impact. Always a blessing, I guess. When you've slammed head-on into a truck that weighs 40 tons, it's a pretty sure bet that what was once a car—that weighs about 5,000 pounds—is now just going to be a pile of scrap metal. Just the sight of all of that metal is enough to give you nightmares. Try having to retrieve the bodies that were inside that vehicle. Then you tell me my job is easy. Of course, they usually have police officers and medical people that handle stuff like that, but this night they were short-handed. Plus, it was raining like cats and dogs. All you can do is work together and try to pick up the broken pieces of what was once human beings... and place them onto stretchers the best you can.

It was weird. The cops couldn't find any identification. They couldn't run the license plates, because we couldn't find them. Like I said, it was raining something awful that night. So, me and a couple of highway patrol officers, after kicking the largest pieces of glass and debris to the side of the road, were trying to find any papers that might have blown out of the car. We were looking for anything that might have a name on it. It could have been an insurance card, a receipt, a credit card receipt, or anything. After about thirty minutes of combing the highway embankment, I picked up a piece of paper. At first, I had trouble reading it. I don't know. The whole thing was pretty smeared from the rain. But then I could start picking out words. I just stood there. I read it over and over. I finally put two and two together. It was a suicide note. It seems the guy—the driver of the sedan—had asked the passenger—his girlfriend—to marry him that night. I guess she said no. He must have slipped into the men's room or something, and he wrote out this note. I guess he decided that if he couldn't

have her, no one could. He signed his full name and everything. It was like he knew someone would find it or something. I don't know. The whole thing was pretty freaky, if you ask me. It was one of my very first calls on the job. I'll tell you what. Stuff like that stays with you—whether you want it to or not. It stays with you.

Every call isn't bad though. In fact, most of the calls are pretty routine. We get a lot of calls from people stranded on the roadside. They just need their car or truck towed into the nearest repair shop. A fan belt came off, or there's something wrong with the engine. With all of the new thing-a-ma-jigs they put on these newer cars and trucks, it surprises me that I don't get more calls than I do. It's like my grand-daddy once told me, "The more you put on a car, the more that can go wrong with that car." Man, isn't that the truth? Once in a while, I'll get a call about some car that's been abandoned in a neighborhood somewhere. I just pick them up and haul them to the nearest pound. Usually, it's just some domestic dispute. An ex is late on a payment or something, then he's nervous the finance company will come repo it or something. He'll try to hide it in a low-key neighborhood and hope nobody finds it. Then a neighbor calls the cops; tells them it's been there for days or weeks longer than it really has been. The cop puts a warning sticker on the vehicle, and then I get a call a few days later to pick it up and haul it off. Most of the vehicles are recovered eventually, but there are some that find the pound to be the end of the line for them. Their final resting place, if you will. The death of a car.

Strip shopping centers are the worst. Well, they're the best for me, but the worst about calling non-stop. Somebody parks in a space clearly marked for that business or something. Then somebody parks in a spot marked 'For Guido's Italian Eatery Only.' Only Guido's doesn't have a customer in the place! Now, some might say it's because Guido's Italian Eatery isn't worth eating at, but Guido has worked out a deal with the property owner. He is given three or four reserved spots only for Guido's customers. When