

CP5: The Framing of the Central Park Five

[It's 1989. A horrible crime has been committed in Central Park. The NYPD immediately arrest 5 youths and secure signed confessions. A few months later they arrest the actual perpetrator. This creates a new problem: How does law enforcement successfully try, convict and jail 5 youths they know to be innocent of the crime they are charged with?]

Time: Present. Place: Police station. Cast: Det. Carlos Montanez, Det. Bill Haggis, Sgt. Greg Gold, Asst. DA Emily Ledstein.

(Montanez, Haggis and Ledstein are meeting to discuss a troubling discovery.)

LEDSTEIN: Who instructed him to look there?

MONTANEZ: This office investigates...We are investigators...He investigated.

LEDSTEIN: Is he dense? Doesn't he watch the news? We had our case..and still he's looking!

HAGGIS: There's a lot of other stuff on TV...Like all those shows about relentless detectives seeking out the bad guys...

MONTANEZ:...rescuing the unjustly accused by finding the real culprits...

LEDSTEIN:...Yeah...from the sloppy work of his lazy superiors who, when they tell suspects that if they confess they can go home, are the ones who really can't wait to call it a day.

MONTANEZ: You taped those confessions. Why didn't you detect something that didn't seem right?

HAGGIS: Your puss was on the screen an hour for each second we got a mention. *Asst. DA Ms. Emily Ledstein wins indictment of suspects in the most heinous crime committed in years.*

LEDSTEIN: I'm just the lawyer who makes a case out of evidence *our finest* have unearthed.

MONTANEZ: Bullshit!...You spent more time at the scene than any one of us...You were...

HAGGIS:...Let's calm down, okay?...we've got some serious fixing up to do. . .

(brief pause)

LEDSTEIN: I suppose we were all blinded by the lights...

MONTANEZ:...But that publicity might get you a big promotion: DA, electoral office,

or maybe even a job in show biz. We can't expect more than a commendation.

LEDSTEIN: *(Brief pause as they look at each other.)* All right...Let's get back to business...What do you know about this fellow?

HAGGIS: A young ambitious guy...Was sent to us from HQ where he did some sort of analytical work.

LEDSTEIN: Has he talked to anyone else?

HAGGIS: He came directly to us...fortunately, a by-the-book guy...follows the chain of command.

MONTANEZ: We told him to put a lid on it until we got verification from the FBI lab.

LEDSTEIN: You didn't....!!?

MONTANEZ: NO!..no...Hell no. Give it to those guys and they'd probably find traces of the victim's blood along with this guy's DNA...then the soup would really be in the shit.

LEDSTEIN: Anything more about this over zealous cop...any infractions...disciplinary actions?...

HAGGIS: No...Greg is as true as blue is supposed to be.

LEDSTEIN: Nothing?...Nothing at all?...

MONTANEZ: *(Thinking)* Hmm...maybe...Hey Billy, did you give him that envelope?

HAGGIS: I told him to pick it up a couple of times but he never did.

LEDSTEIN: Huh? . . What's this?...What's this about an envelope?

HAGGIS: It's his share...you know...his share of the taaa...

LEDSTEIN: *(Turning her head and squinting as if another word would burst her eardrums)*...PULLEEZE!...Not another word! Don't talk about those things in front of me! You want me to have to get warrants for your arrest? If you must bring it up when we talk to him, give me a signal, and I'll go powder my nose or something.

MONTANEZ: Then the answer is no. Officer Gold is as pure as the driven snow on one of those dying glaciers.

LEDSTEIN: And you haven't talked to him about the...about the tricky underlying issues of this case?

MONTANEZ: No, we called you immediately since your neck would be first on the chopping block.

HAGGIS: The price you may have to pay for having your name in lights...and the nicest neck.

LEDSTEIN: Oh...I think being a girl would make it easy for me to shift responsibility.

HAGGIS: Carlos, we need to find another neck for the noose.

LEDSTEIN: For that to work we will need to convince Greg -- see if we can insinuate the consequences of his revelation into his way of thinking. Then we'll know what we need to do next.

MONTANEZ: I hope we don't have to do a Pat Tillman.

LEDSTEIN: Pat Tillman?...Who is he and what does he have to do with this matter?

MONTANEZ: Tillman was the former professional football player and Army Ranger that the feds had to take out when he and Chomsky....

LEDSTEIN: *Don't talk about those things in my presence!* If Gold is as much of a blabbermouth as you guys...we are in deep shit! Now...bring him in and let me begin the questioning.

HAGGIS: Then we'll record it?

LEDSTEIN: Nah...Wouldn't be a good idea to talk to him in the interrogation room.

HAGGIS: No need...We can record everything here...

LEDSTEIN: You're not recording this?!...

MONTANEZ: Christ Almighty!...You need a de-caffienation withdrawal session. What do you take us for?

LEDSTEIN: I don't know...but you guys scare me more than a pack of those wilding rapists.

(Brief pause)

HAGGIS: I suggest that we have our *ultra secret* audio on...just in case.

LEDSTEIN: Go ahead...wouldn't be any good in court...but might be useful in other ways.

(Haggis does something while Montanez gets up to bring in Gold. He opens the door.)

MONTANEZ: Hey, Greg, can you come in for a few minutes? *(Gold walks in)* You know Ms Ledstein.

GOLD: *(Nods to Ledstein)* Sure do...Saw you many times in the park.

LEDSTEIN: (*With displeased attitude*) Yes...Well I guess we were all going full bore for a while to solve this thing. Sorry to keep you waiting, Greg, we have some complications that need to be ironed out, and we need your help.

GOLD: Sure...anything that I can do...though I'm a little pressed...it's my four year old's birthday today.

LEDSTEIN: Oh, that's wonderful. I expect that they're all waiting for you. Shouldn't take long. We'll just need you to sign off on a few things.

GOLD: I guess reversing course will require a new pile of paperwork.

LEDSTEIN: (*Avoiding a response*) You did a great job, Greg, must have been exciting for you being new to the major crimes unit.

GOLD: I'll say...nothing like a desk job. It gave me goosebumps when I connected Reales to the rape committed two days earlier near the jogger scene. I made a mad dash for the DNA as I was certain they would match where they didn't for the five, and sure enough...

MONTANEZ:...Yeah, Greg, but Reales might still be connected to the five...

GOLD: Do you really think so?...I mean, Reales has always been a lone perp.

HAGGIS: We know they were all in the same area of the park at the same time.

GOLD: A whole mob of wrong-doers were, but no sign of Reales. I tried to find a connection between any one of the five...no dice. Well, at least you've got the five for some A & Bs in the park.

MONTANEZ: We also have signed detailed confessions by the five in which they state their part in the jogger rape and beating.

LEDSTEIN: And I have an indictment of the five based on those confessions and the ones that I videotaped.

HAGGIS: Can you now see our problem?

GOLD: Sure, but then this wasn't the run-of-the-mill violent crime...A Wall Street investment banker...white woman raped by blacks...The hysterical tabloid press...Even the mayor...

LEDSTEIN:...Even the mayor...he felt he had to apologize for being required by political correctness to preface references to the five with the word *alleged*.

GOLD: That's just it...The demands...They put the squeeze on you for arrests, confessions and convictions, then don't want to take any responsibility when mistakes are made because of the pressure.

MONTANEZ: What mistakes are you referring to?

GOLD: (*Perplexed by the question*)...Why that Reales is the one, not the five.

MONTANEZ: But we have five signed detailed confessions to the jogger attack..

LEDSTEIN:...and I have five videotaped confessions. They could have recanted their police confessions when questioned and we would have been bound to stop everything for an investigation...but not a single one of them did that...

HAGGIS: Greg...what choices do we have here? That we forced all five to confess, and then they repeated those confessions to the prosecutor...taped confessions...when they were free to say anything. Or, were they all lying for some other reason? No. The only plausible explanation for why we have five confessions, twice told, is because either they did it or knew of the sixth person.

GOLD: (*After brief pause*) Look, if you can connect them with Reales, fine...This is your investigation...It's your case...Since it's got nothing to do with me, I'd like to be going if you don't mind.

MONTANEZ: Greg...we are connected because Reales is your investigation and you tied him to our case with his confession. We need...

GOLD:...You don't need me for anything...The DNA and other physical evidence will tie him to the crime regardless of...

MONTANEZ:...Will you allow me to finish? (*Brief pause*) Thank you. We need you to omit from Reales' confession any mention of the jogger crime...

GOLD:...But we have a recorded confession and evidence. I'm not changing...

HAGGIS:...What's your problem? He's a criminal...it's just a piece of paper.

GOLD: (*Stands up and looks at his watch*) I've got to go. I'm not signing any paper which will probably come back to bite me.

LEDSTEIN: Reales committed a murder along with the rapes. He won't be indicted for this one because we have the five...

MONTANEZ: We'll make him the sixth man at large...Reales will be linked sort of in absentia.

GOLD:...So I'm just to be part of the sewing-up-of-loose-ends process. Is that it? (*His cell phone rings*) Excuse me...(On phone) Hello...Hi sweetie, have you finished dinner?...Oh, you already have the party hat on for your birthday party...Well, I'll be there shortly...What's that?...You've picked out a hat for me?...oh, but if I wore that one I'd have to stand in the corner looking at the wall...Okay, honey...kisses...bye. (*To Ledstein*) Since I'm done here, I'll be leaving.

LEDSTEIN: *(Rising and standing in front of Gold)* Greg, just give us a few more minutes to explain...

GOLD:...There's nothing left to explain...you've coerced confessions from five innocent kids...do it once and the second time is a cinch...and now...

MONTANEZ:...Innocent!....You call those lowlifes innocent?!..

GOLD:...Of this particular crime, yes...and how high in our estimation should we place the cops who arrested five youths in the park immediately after a bloody crime and none of them had a trace of blood on them...Doesn't rape require getting rather close to the victim?

MONTANEZ: They beat her after the rape.

GOLD: Bullshit!...There was a trail of blood where they dragged her from the path to the bushes. And what about footprints?...5-6 involved...you'd see the grounds all mashed up....and none of their DNA...

MONTANEZ: Billy, get the envelopes.

(Ledstein quietly exits the room)

GOLD: I don't want any envelopes!

HAGGIS: We'll give you our shares plus yours for...Carlos...6 months okay *(Carlos nods agreement)* That's a good nut for a new family. *(Gold gives them a disgusted look)* What's that expression on your face? Your old man was NYPD...but you know nothing?

MONTANEZ: How many ice creams do you think you had on his take?...Not to mention bicycles, prime seats at Yankee games, your John Jay tuition...*(Gold picks up his jacket and walks toward the door. Montanez blocks his way, bumping chests.)* Greg, my boy...surely you know that you won't survive for long in the force if you pull a Serpico. .you either are part of the team or . . .

HAGGIS: *(Pulling Montanez away)* Carlos, leave off, will you? We'll put his share aside in case he changes his mind. *(Gets close to Gold)* Greg...none of this surprises me. I guess your father didn't tell you much about the way things are done. I prepared a simple statement in case all else failed. Should Reales be connected to the jogger case it just says that you heard him say he was in the park that night. No names or descriptions. Since it's pretty much worthless you can bet that we will go all out not to use it – but if disaster strikes it just might be enough to cover our asses.

MONTANEZ: Your precious five will have the finest free lawyers. Let the jury decide which way things fall.

GOLD: But he confessed!

HAGGIS: Reales will be tried for murder. If anyone inquires why he wasn't indicted with

the five, we point to the contradictory statements.

(Gold's phone rings. He looks to see who's calling, but doesn't answer.)

GOLD: Let's see the paper. *(Haggis gets it and lays it flat on the desk while continuing to hold it at the edges. Montanez hands him a pen. Gold reads that it does state what Haggis said and scribbles a signature. Drops pen, and walks toward door. As he opens it Ledstein walks in.)*

LEDSTEIN: *(To Gold)* Just...just powdering my nose....Are you leaving? *(Gold says nothing)*

HAGGIS: We worked something out.

LEDSTEIN: *(To Gold)* That's great. I know this distresses you, Greg, but with violent crime running rampant we sometimes have to do things to protect the reputations of those assigned to suppress it.

MONTANEZ: *(Gold with a look of disgust walks out the door)* See you later, Greg.

HAGGIS: *(As he goes to close the door he calls out to Gold)* Give our birthday greetings to Tina. *(Closes door and walks back in)* That was almost as much of a hassle as getting the five to sign.

LEDSTEIN: And all for nothing...That document is worthless. *(Both cops look at her)* I was listening in...It wouldn't be proper for me to be present for such unseemliness.

MONTANEZ: Then maybe you should not look at this nasty thing. *(He carefully peels off the statement signed by Gold to reveal a different one underneath and shows it to Ledstein.)*

LEDSTEIN: *(Reading)* It's Reales' confession without any mention of the jogger case. But how did you get the signature? It looks like regular blue ballpoint ink.

MONTANEZ: It is. That FBI lab knows how to make good use of the taxpayers' money. We just told Reales we wanted a second copy knowing he wouldn't read it. Gold was the problem, but as you can see, there's his signature, perfectly located and beautiful police blue.

LEDSTEIN: Damn!..You should have kept this spy stuff to yourselves. And I strongly advise you to never use that document.

MONTANEZ: It's just a safety net...We're not going down for doing what they wanted us to do.

LEDSTEIN: What if Gold pushes his case?...I want no Pat Tillman's, or that cop Faulkner in Philadelphia!

MONTANEZ: On Monday Greg will be walking a beat in Staten Island. He'll probably

storm into the chief's office in a rage when he hears about it. That will be made into anger management issue and he will be ordered to have a psychiatric evaluation...which will ruin his credibility should he keep talking. We're the NYPD, not him!

HAGGIS: My only worry is what will come out of the discovery process in a civil lawsuit.

LEDSTEIN: Don't. There is no promise of a quick trial in civil suits. We'll drag it out endlessly – 10, 15 years. You guys will be retired. But if there is a problem, I'll just grant you both pardons from the Oval Office. *(They all laugh. She picks up her briefcase and begins to leave.)* Well, I'll meet with you gentlemen again when the trial date gets closer. *(Opens door)* Goodbye. *(Cops wave)*

HAGGIS: *(As he closes door he gets Montanez's attention and points to something. Montanez pushes a button)* That's great. We even have Emily on the tape. I hope she has a lot of success. It might get us, who knows, into the Secret Service.

MONTANEZ. Nah...Too much like a security guard. Now the FBI – That's a promotion – From being partly above the law to total immunity. *(Both laugh)*

[End]

(April 19, 2014 marked the 25th anniversary of the 'Central Park Jogger' crime. The five youths were convicted and served up to thirteen years in prison. In 2003 they sued the NYPD and the City of New York for damages. The city had stalled the case since then, but after much publicity and public support it finally agreed to a forty million dollar settlement shortly after the day marking a quarter century of disrupted lives.)

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