

DELETED SCENE from TAKE ME THERE

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*The following scene originally came at the end of chapter 30 on page 217.*

The only thing on my mind is putting as much distance between myself and that red brick fortress as possible, but as I walk to the old Ford, I see something that draws me to the Walls like a mosquito to a bug zapper.

A TV crew has set up three folding chairs right in front of the building with the huge clock looming overhead. In the middle seat sits the CNN reporter Marianne. On her left sits my father's lawyer, Buster Cartwright, and on her right is Arnie Golden. Protestors gather behind the men holding up signs like DIE DAWSON, AN EYE FOR AN EYE, GIVE MERCY A CHANCE, and DON'T KILL THE DOZER.

As I approach, I realize they're in the middle of a debate, right there in front of the Walls and the death house. Behind Arnie Golden stand three other Texas Rangers along with Tornado T. and his mother, who cries and dabs her eyes with a tissue. I look around for the black Jeep, but it's nowhere in sight. Then I slip behind one of the protestors so I won't be seen.

Mr. Cartwright is speaking. "Statistics show that the death penalty has never deterred crime. In fact, states that impose the death penalty actually show a much higher murder rate."

Marianne turns to Arnie, "Mr. Golden, your response?"

"You got the tail waggin' the dog," he tells Cartwright. "States with higher murder rates understand the importance of capital punishment. Imagine how high those crime rates would be without the death penalty. As for statistics—what about the statistics that show death IS a deterrent. Numbers can say whatever you want 'em to say. You and I both know that. But one thing is indisputable, once you put a murderer to death, he is forevermore 'deterred' from killing anyone else."

Mr. Cartwright leans into the camera. "We are straining our relationship with the international community and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who all say we should abolish the death penalty."

Arnie Golden, who is much more composed than I would be under the circumstances, looks hard at my father's lawyer. "The judicial system is responsible for taking care of the law enforcement officers who protect our citizens, because without those men, who are willing to risk their lives each and every day, this great nation of ours would crumble to pieces. What does it say about our respect for life if the only punishment a man receives for shooting down a police officer in cold blood is that we feed and house and clothe the killer for the rest of his life? It's all fine and good to talk about countries and societies and UN commissions that we may or may not agree with, but let's talk about my brother. He was twenty-five years old, a decorated war hero. He left behind a wife and a child. They are not statistics. They are people. Look at them!"

I look at Tornado T., trying to stand tall next to his mother, and I can almost forgive him for putting that gun in my mouth, because I know I might have done the same. If it was my father dead and his father sitting on death row, I'd want somebody to pay. But then he hasn't learned, as I have, that although the first taste of vengeance is sweet, you can choke to death on its bitter aftertaste.

I will never be able to forget the look on Two Tone's face as he took his last breath. It still haunts me, even if I didn't mean to kill him. Even if he would have killed Wade.

"Since 1973 one hundred and twenty-one people have been released from death row," says Cartwright, fighting to hold his own against Arnie. "The risk of sending an innocent man to his death is just too great to justify capital punishment."

"Most of 'em were let out on technicalities," says Arnie. "And there is not one shred of evidence to suggest that any of the people actually killed by lethal injection were innocent, which only goes to prove that the appeals process we have in place is sufficient and reliable."

"Not every murderer gets sentenced to death," retorts Cartwright, loosening his tie. "Everybody knows the system is arbitrary. The people who get the death penalty are not always those who have committed the worst and most heinous crimes. They are usually minorities and people too poor to afford their own counsel, who rely on overworked and underpaid public defenders."

"Which is precisely the reason," says Arnie, bitterly, "That the state should not back down from executing D.J. Dawson, a white man... with a private lawyer."

Mr. Cartwright stares blankly at the camera and for the first time since I've met him, he is at a loss for words.