

The Tipping Point



The Noah Hunter series

Book One

David Darling

While investigating two brutal murders in Arrow Point, Police Sergeant Noah Hunter discovers a note warning him to stay away or face severe consequences. Noah doesn't back down, and someone close to him pays the ultimate price.

Further clues reveal a crime family in Chicago is responsible, so Noah brings the fight to them as it's personal now.

Sergeant Hunter struggles to protect his friends, colleagues, and everyone else in Arrow Point, while revenge is foremost in his mind.

However, past events have dire repercussions in the present, and Noah's future is uncertain, especially when not everything is as it seems.

"Down these mean streets, a man must go who is not
himself mean, and who is neither tarnished nor afraid."

- Raymond Chandler

"If there must be trouble, let it be in my day,
that my child may have peace."

- Thomas Paine

The Tipping Point

Copyright © 2020 David Darling

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and specific other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the author at the email address below.

Author.david.darling@gmail.com

www.daviddarlingbooks.com

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Chapter 1

Chicago

Mario received a call to take care of a situation in the middle of the night, which came as no surprise. Those types of decisions usually were not made in the light of day but under cover of darkness—where such deeds thrived. What shocked him was the target, but he knew better than to argue.

However, this was the first time a problem fought back with such skill and determination. Little Mario Canetti knew the risk, but what happened at the Greyhound station was close. Too close.

He raised a hand to press against the side of his head, where his ear-lobe used to be.

Blood seeped down his wrist, made a path from his forearm, and steadily dropped off his elbow.

Mario stood six-foot-six, and with his work boots, he had to duck so he would not bang his head on doorframes. At three-hundred pounds, he filled that same opening. He had been the same size since he was old enough to drive, and at thirty years old, he had gained nothing but muscle.

Mario raised the shotgun with his right hand, edged forward around the corner of the building, and scanned the loading docks. The steel factory in South Deering looked abandoned. The only things he could hear were the drops of blood that landed in the dirt at his feet and a plane as it came in for a landing at O'Hare.

Despite the adrenaline and his injury, Mario's breathing remained slow and steady. He had been in similar situations for most of his life, and in his mind, it was simple. Either he would be successful, or he wouldn't. If he failed, someone else would have to deal with the problem.

A glance at the eastern sky told him he had an hour before sunrise. The dark khaki pants and work shirt helped him blend into the shadows, but that advantage would soon be gone.

The receiving docks hadn't seen a truck in over twenty years since Wisconsin Steel closed. It allowed the local gangs and kids to decorate almost every square inch in graffiti and litter the docks with garbage. Not an ideal place, but there had been worse.

Time to wrap this up.

Little Mario pulled his palm away from the side of his head and allowed the blood to flow freely. He would need both hands available for what he had in mind. Mario wiped his hands on the back of his pants and gripped the shotgun tight.

He was ready.

He crossed the open area in several quick strides, and with a light jump, he landed on the loading dock. The heavy metal receiving doors were nine-feet long, dented, and covered in gang tags. The doors were cracked an inch, the gap beckoning him inside.

He used the shotgun muzzle to swing the door open as he stepped to the side, his back to the wall. Mario expected further resistance, his finger twitching outside the trigger guard. He was surprised the hinges were well oiled and opened in complete silence. When no attack materialized, he grinned. It would happen inside. It was just a matter of when.

The moonlight didn't penetrate far past the door, and he quietly waited for his eyes to adjust. Mario could barely make out vague shapes and objects that littered the area. Oil and the sharp smell of urine wafted to him. Kids had used the inside of the door as a bathroom for many years. He forced himself to breathe slowly through his mouth until he grew used to it.

The distant sound of steel scraping on concrete briefly echoed off the walls, and he strained to identify the location, his head tilted to the side. Mario's index finger gently caressed the trigger, and he made a decision.

He tilted the shotgun back on his right shoulder while his left hand blindly swung side to side ahead of him. He stepped forward and made his way deeper into the building as he felt for a wall or an obstacle in his path.

When his boot kicked what sounded like an empty beer bottle, he froze, but it was too late.

It rattled off a wall and skipped across the cement floor before it shattered. The noise echoed throughout the building and announcing his arrival.

I may as well have brought in a marching band.

The large man pulled out his cell phone and turned on the flashlight application. The shadows leaped back, and a small form darted along the base of the wall.

Rats.

Only a few things bothered Mario; being shot at and dying were strangely absent from the list, but rats and spiders were near the top. His knuckles cracked on the walnut stock of the shotgun as his grip tightened.

"I have a pocket of shells," he whispered to the rodents. "Stay back, or I'll start firing."

An old mattress leaned against the long wall, and garbage filled the area. Mario knew there wasn't a chance he could have made it through silently unless he had night-vision goggles. Straight ahead, a hallway led farther into the building, and an old metal sign hung sideways on the wall.

Driver's check-in with the shipping office.

Mario carefully stepped over the trash and passed the sign moving farther into the building. With the cell phone in his left hand, he leveled the twelve-gauge across his forearm. The cool barrel grew sticky with his blood.

After a dozen steps, he called out. "Just hand over the money, and this will go a lot easier."

Mario's deep voice echoed inside the building and was lost to the shadows. He'd inadvertently announced his arrival and had nothing to lose, nor did he expect an answer, but when a low chuckle echoed throughout the derelict building, it made the hair on his arms stand on end.

There was no way to pinpoint the location, but it sounded distant. As he moved forward, deeper into the building, glass crunched under the soles of his work boots. He kept an eye out for more vermin, his imagination playing tricks on him as the shadows moved. The cell phone didn't illuminate the far walls, but it showed the hazards at his feet well. He was in a vast room, possibly a warehouse floor.

Out in the open, he was a sitting duck. He quickly tried to turn off the flashlight but lost his grip in the slick blood covering his hand. The cell phone dropped to the concrete floor, where it bounced a few times, settling at his feet. The screen had cracked and lay face up with the LED flashlight aimed at the bottom.

As if that were the signal, the assault began.

A muzzle flash lit up the darkness twenty yards away—at the same time, the sound from small arms fire reached him. The round passed harmlessly overhead, and he ducked in reflex. He raised the shotgun and fired the twelve-gauge toward the flash.

He couldn't tell if he hit anything or not, but he didn't want to wait around to find out. If he could see their weapons fire, they could see his.

Mario ran forward, angling to the side when the second round caught him on the upper right arm. His hand spasmed, and the shotgun clattered to the floor. The force of the impact drove him back several steps, and he spun around in a half-circle. It didn't hurt right away, the feeling of

numbness radiating outward. He dropped to his knees and tried to make himself less of a target while gripping his biceps to stop the bleeding.

The dim light from the cell phone only showed the immediate area, where a dark liquid stained ground.

I'm bleeding too much.

Mario tried to remove his belt to use as a tourniquet, but the arm wouldn't respond properly. Lightning flashes of pain exploded behind his eyes as feeling in his arm returned.

Another round struck the concrete floor to his left before it ricocheted off a distant wall.

He had a good visual of where the shots were coming from, but he needed a distraction. From his pants pocket, he pulled out a handful of shotgun shells. Blood slicked his left hand, and it wasn't easy, but he threw them out into the darkness. They bounced and rattled across the floor, but nothing happened.

Mario's choices were limited, and retreating wasn't an option.

He struggled to crawl forward and swept his left arm out in a circle on the cold floor, hoping to find the Remington. The pain in his arm and ear didn't help, and with clenched teeth, he did his best to ignore it. When his fingertips brushed against an object, Mario was momentarily confused.

It was a rounded piece of rubber.

A shoe someone was currently wearing.

"I ain't going back. Ever."

Mario heard the pistol being cocked above his head.

"I'm just doing my job." He was out of options. "Please, give me a moment to pray first."

Silence.

Mario mumbled his way through the Lord's prayer. Despite the crosses around the house and all the days he was dragged to church by his grandmother, he still didn't know the full prayer.

His work for the family came first. He had sold his soul at a young age for wealth, not faith.

With that in mind, Mario lunged forward and tried to hook the ankle in front of him. The sudden movement saved him, at least for the moment. The bullet hit him in the back of his shoulder, instead of the top of his head.

The impact slammed his chest into the floor, and the air shot out of his lungs. As he struggled, it felt like a car had pinned him to the ground. He absently noted that he couldn't tell if the concrete was cold on his cheek or not.

"Sorry, Little Mario, I'm looking out for number one now."

"It's not too—"

Two rounds fired from three feet away, both entering his back.

As he lay there dying, the figure picked up his cell phone and quickly disappeared into the darkness.

This isn't my problem anymore.

It did not take long before he stopped breathing altogether.

Despite it not being his problem, Mario had known others would take the job.

They were family.