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JONATHAN KELLERMAN

Author of Guilt

THE A NOVEL BUTCHER'S THEATER

**THE
BUTCHER'S
THEATER**

A Novel

Jonathan Kellerman



BALLANTINE BOOKS

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NEW YORK

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For Faye

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Excerpt from Guilt

ISRAELI POLICE RANKS

<i>Rav nitzav:</i>	Commissioner
<i>Nitzav:</i>	Commander
<i>Tat nitzav:</i>	Deputy commander
<i>Nitzav mishneh:</i>	Assistant commander
<i>Sgan nitzav:</i>	Chief superintendent
<i>Rav pakad:</i>	Superintendent
<i>Pakad:</i>	Chief inspector
<i>Mefakeah:</i>	Inspector
<i>Mefakeah mishneh:</i>	Subinspector
<i>Sgan mefakeah:</i>	Deputy inspector
<i>Rav samal rishon:</i>	Staff sergeant major
<i>Rav samal:</i>	Sergeant major
<i>Samal rishon:</i>	Sergeant
<i>Samal sheni:</i>	Corporal
<i>Rav shoter:</i>	Lance corporal
<i>Tura'i:</i>	Rookie

BOOK ONE

CHAPTER

1

Spring 1985

Yaakov Schlesinger could think only of food.

Idiot, he told himself. Immersed in such beauty and unable to take your mind off your belly.

Unclipping his flashlight from his belt, he beamed it briefly on the southern gate of the campus. Satisfied that the lock was in place, he hitched up his trousers and trudged forward in the darkness, determined to ignore the gnawing from within.

The Mount Scopus Road climbed suddenly, but it was a rise that he knew well—what was this, his two hundredth patrol?—and he remained sure-footed. Veering to the left, he walked toward the eastern ridge and looked out, with a pleasurable sense of vertigo, at nothingness: the unlit expanse of the Judean wilderness. In less than an hour dawn would break and sunlight would flood the desert like honeyed porridge dripping thickly into an earthenware bowl . . . *ach*, there it was again. Food.

Still, he rationalized, a bowl was exactly what it looked like to him. Or maybe a dinner plate. A broad, concave disk of desert, chalky-white, seamed with copper, dotted by mesquite and pocked with caves—a gigantic cracked dinner plate tipping into the Dead Sea. Any terrorist foolish enough to try to cross the wilderness would be as conspicuous as a fly on paper, certain to be spotted by the Border Patrol long before reaching the Ma'ale Adumim settlement. Which made *his* job, he supposed, little more than a formality. An old man's assignment.

He absently touched the butt of the M-1 carbine strapped over his shoulder and experienced a sudden rush of memories. A twinge of melancholy that he suppressed by telling himself he had nothing to complain about. That he should be thankful for the opportunity to volunteer. Grateful for the nightly exercise, the cool, fragrant air. Proud of the slap of the M-1 against his shoulder blades, the crisp Hagah uniform that made him feel like a soldier again.

A scurrying sound crackled somewhere beyond the ridge and caused his heart to jump. He pulled the carbine down, held it in both hands, and waited.

Silence, then another scurry, this time easy to classify: the frantic dash of a rodent or shrew. Letting out his breath, he kept his right hand clamped around the M-1, took the flashlight in his left, and skimmed the beam over the brush. The light caught only rocks and shrubs. A clump of weeds. A filmy swirl of night-flying insects.

Stepping away from the ridge, he commenced walking south. The barrenness of the road was broken at the crest by a stolid, many-roofed mass huddled around a high, peaked tower: the Amelia Catherine Hospital, arrogantly colonial on this Levantine stretch of mountaintop. Because the hospital compound was U.N. property, it was excluded from his route, but sometimes he liked to stop and take a break just outside the grounds. Smoke a cigarette and watch as the odor of Turkish tobacco stirred the goats and donkeys penned behind the main building. Why, he wondered, were the Arabs allowed to keep animals there? What did that say for the hygiene of the place?

His stomach growled. *Absurd*. He'd eaten a hearty dinner at eight, spent the next four hours sitting on the balcony while slowly ingesting the food Eva set out for him before she went to bed: dried apricots and apples, a string of fat Calimyrna figs, tea wafers, lemon cookies, marzipan, tangerines and kumquats, toasted gar'inim, jagged chunks of bittersweet chocolate, jelly candies, halvah. Topped off by an entire liter bottle of grapefruit juice and a Sipholux full of soda—the last in hopes that gas bubbles might accomplish what solid matter had failed to do: fill him up. No such luck.

He'd lived with his hunger—and its accomplice, insomnia—for more than forty years. Long enough to think of them as a pair of living, breathing creatures. Abdominal homunculi implanted by the bastards at Dachau. Twin demons who scraped away at his peace of mind, evoking constant misery. True, it wasn't cancer, but neither was it trivial.

The pain fluctuated. At best, a dull, maddeningly abstract hollowness; at worst, real, grinding agony, as if an iron hand were clamped around his vitals.

No one took him seriously anymore. Eva said he was fortunate to be able to eat whatever he wanted and remain skinny. This, as she pinched the soft ring around her own thickening waistline and examined the latest diet brochure handed out at the Kupat Holim clinic. And the doctors delighted in telling him there was nothing wrong with him. That the experiments had left no tangible scars. He was a superb specimen, they insisted, possessing the alimentary tract, and general constitution, of a man twenty years younger.

"You're seventy years old, Mr. Schlesinger," one of them had explained before settling back with a self-satisfied smirk on his face. As if that settled it. An active metabolism, another had pronounced. "Be thankful you're as active as you are, *adoni*." Still another had listened with apparent sympathy, raising his hopes, then dashing them by suggesting that he visit the Psychiatric Faculty at Hadassah. Which only illustrated that the man was just another civil-service idiot—the gnawing was in his belly, not his head. He vowed to cease all dealings with the clinic and find himself a private doctor, cost be

damned. Someone who could understand what it was like to feel as if you were starving amid plenty, who could appreciate the bottomless ache that had plagued him since the Americans had discovered him, a barely breathing skeleton, lying limply atop a mound of stinking, broken corpses . . .

Enough, fool. Ancient history. You're free, now. A soldier. The man in charge, armed and masterful. Privileged to patrol the most beautiful of cities at the most beautiful of hours. To watch her awaken, bathed in lavender and scarlet light, like a princess rising from a bed canopied with silk . . .

Schlesinger the poet.

He took a deep breath, filled his nostrils with the sharp perfume of Jerusalem pine, and turned away from the looming silhouette of the hospital. Exhaling slowly, he gazed out over the steeply sloping terraces of Wadi el Joz, toward the view from the southwest, the one he always saved for last:

The Old City, backlit in amber, turrets and battlements stitching a flame-colored hem across the pure black sky. Beyond the walls, faint shadowy contours of domes, spires, steeples, and minarets. At the southern end the vertical thrust of The Citadel. Dominating the north, the Haram esh-Sharif plateau, upon which sat the Great Mosque of the Rock, its golden dome burnished rosy in the half-light, nestled within the sleeping city like a brooch cradled in gray velvet.

Immersed in beauty like that, how could he think of his belly? And yet, the ache had intensified, quickened, taken on a pulse of its own.

Angry, he picked up his pace and crossed the road. Just off the asphalt was a shallow gully leading to the empty fields that anticipated the wadi. Casually, he ran the flashlight over familiar terrain. The same damned contours, the same damned shadows. This olive tree, that row of border stones. The rusty abandoned water heater that had been there for months, glints of broken glass, the sharp stink of sheep dung . . .

And something else.

An oblong shape, maybe a meter and a half long, tucked into a terraced pocket near the top of the north wall of the gully. Lying inert at the base of an olive sapling. Unmoving. A bomb? His instinctive answer was no—it looked too soft. But one couldn't be too careful.

As he considered his options, his arm began to move, seemingly of its own volition, sweeping the flashlight beam over the shape. Up and down, back and forth. This was definitely something new. Striped? No, two tones of fabric. Dark over light. A blanket over sheeting. A shroud. Glistening wet and dark around the edges.

The light continued to wash across the gully. Nothing. No one. He considered calling for help, decided it would be needlessly alarmist. Better to check first.

Carbine in hand, he inched to the rim of the gully, began climbing down, then stopped, legs suddenly leaden. Short of breath. Fatigued. Feeling his age. Deliberating some more, he berated himself: *Milksop*. A pile of blankets turns you to jelly? Probably nothing.

He resumed his descent, zigging and zagging toward the shape, extending his free arm horizontally in an attempt to maintain balance. Stopping every few seconds to aim the flashlight. Radar-eyed. Ears attuned to alien sounds. Prepared at any moment to drop the light and pull the M-1 into firing position. But nothing moved; the silence remained unblemished. Just him and the shape. The foreign shape.

As he lowered himself farther, the ground dipped abruptly. He stumbled, fought for equilibrium, dug his heels in, and remained upright. Good. Very good for an old man. Active metabolism . . .

He was almost there now, just a few feet away. *Stop*. Check the area for other foreign shapes. The hint of movement. Nothing. Wait. Go on. Take a good look. Avoid that mound of dung. Step around the panicky scatter of glossy black beetles. Tiny black legs scampering over clots of dung. Onto something pale. Something extending from the sheeting. Pale lozenges.

He was standing over the shape now. Kneeling. Chest tautened by breath withheld. Tilting his light downward, he saw them, soft and speckled like small white cucumbers: human fingers. The soft pad of palm. Speckled. Night-black. Edged with crimson. An outstretched hand. Beseeking.

Pinching a corner of the blanket between his fingers, he began peeling it back with the foreboding and compulsion of a child turning over a rock, knowing all the while that slimy things lived on the underside.

There. Done. He let go of the fabric and stared at what he'd exposed.

Lock-jawed, he moaned involuntarily. He was—had been—a soldier, had seen his share of abominations. But this was different. Clinical. So terribly reminiscent of something else . . .

Averting his eyes, he felt them swing back again and lock on to the contents of the blanket, imbibing the horror. Suddenly he was reeling, swaying, bobbing helplessly in a sea of images. Memories. Other hands, other nightmares. Hands. The same pose of supplication. Thousands of hands, a mountain of hands. Begging for mercy that never came.

Rising unsteadily, he took hold of an olive limb and exhaled in fierce, hot gusts. Sickened to the core, yet not unaware of the irony of the moment.

For what lay within the sheets had demolished the demons, freeing him for the first time in more than forty years.

He felt his viscera begin to churn. The iron hand letting go. A burning tide of bile rose uncontrollably in his gullet. Retching and heaving, he vomited repeatedly in the dirt, one part of him curiously detached, as if he were observing his own defilement. Careful to direct the spray away from the blankets. Not wishing to worsen what had already been done.

When he'd emptied himself he looked down again with a child's magical hope. Believing, for an instant, that his emesis had served as a ritual, a sacrificial atonement that had somehow caused the horror to vanish.

But the only thing that had vanished was his hunger.

CHAPTER

2

The Ford Escort ran the red light at the intersection fronting the mouth of Liberty Bell Park. Turning left on King David, it hooked onto Shlomo Hamelekh as far as Zahal Square, then sped northeast on Sultan Suleiman Road, hugging the perimeter of the Old City.

The promise of daybreak had been newly fulfilled by a fiery desert sun that rose steadily over the Mount of Olives, warming the morning, tossing splashes of copper and gold across the ashen city walls with the abandon of a painter gone mad.

The Escort rushed through brightening cobbled streets, past sidewalks and alleys dotted with early risers: Bedouin shepherds nudging their flocks toward the northeast corner of the Old City walls in preparation for the Friday livestock market; veiled women from the nearby villages settling down with bright bolts of fabric and baskets of produce for the curbside bazaar at the entrance to the Damascus Gate; Hassidim in long black coats and white leggings walking in pairs and trios toward the Jaffa Gate, eyes affixed to the ground, hurrying to be in place at the Western Wall for the first *shaharit minyan* of the day; stooped, skullcapped porters bearing massive crates on narrow backs; bakers' boys carrying rings of sesame-studded *bagelah* suspended from stout iron bars.

Under other circumstances the driver of the Escort would have noticed all this, and more. His feelings for the city had never dimmed and no matter how many times he experienced her sights and sounds and smells, they never ceased to enchant him. But this morning his mind was on other things.

He turned the wheel and swung up Shmuel Ben Adayah. A quick left brought him onto the Mount of Olives Road toward the peak of Mount Scopus. The highest point in the city. The Eye of Jerusalem, where the outrage had taken place.

Flares and metal barriers had been laid across the road. Behind the barriers stood a border policeman—a Druze the driver knew, by the name of Salman Afif. Afif maintained an impassive watch, legs spread and planted firmly, one hand resting on his holstered pistol, the other twirling the ends of enormous black mustaches. When the Escort approached he motioned for it to halt, came to the open window, and nodded in recognition. After a cursory

exchange of greetings, the barriers were pulled aside.

As the Escort passed through, the driver surveyed the hilltop, examining the vehicles parked along the road: the mobile crime van; the transport van from the Abu Kabir pathology lab; a blue-and-white, its blue blinker still flashing; Afif's jeep; a white Volvo 240 with police plates. The technicians had already arrived, as had uniformed officers—but only two of them. Next to the Volvo stood Deputy Commander Laufer and his driver. But no police spokesman, no press, no sign of the pathologist. Wondering about it, the driver parked at some distance from the others, turned off the engine, and set the hand brake. There was a note pad on the passenger seat. He grasped it somewhat clumsily in his left hand and got out of the car.

He was a small, dark, neat-looking man, five foot seven, one hundred and forty pounds, thirty-seven years old but appearing ten years younger. He wore simple clothes—short-sleeved white cotton shirt, dark trousers, sandals without socks—and no jewelry except for an inexpensive wristwatch and an incongruously ornate wedding band of gold filigree.

His hair was thick, black, and tightly kinked, trimmed to medium length in the style the Americans called Afro, and topped with a small black *kipah srugah*—knitted yarmulke—bordered with red roses. The face below the Afro was lean and smooth, skin the color of coffee liberally laced with cream, stretched tightly over a clearly delineated substructure: high, sharp cheekbones, strong nose anchored by flared nostrils, wide lips, full and bowed. Only the upper surface of his left hand was a different color—grayish-white, puckered and shiny, crisscrossed with scars.

Arched eyebrows created the illusion of perpetual surprise. Deep sockets housed a pair of liquid, almond eyes, the irises a strange shade of golden-brown, the lashes so long they bordered on the womanish. In another context he could have been taken for someone of Latin or Caribbean descent, or perhaps Iberian melded with a robust infusion of Aztec. On at least one occasion he had been mistaken for a light-skinned black man.

His name was Daniel Shalom Sharavi and he was, in fact, a Jew of Yemenite origins. Time, circumstance, and *protekzia*—fortuitous connections—had made him a policeman. Intelligence and industriousness had raised him to the rank of *pakad*—chief inspector—in the National Police, Southern District. For most of his career, he'd been a detective. For the last two years he'd specialized in Major Crimes, which, in Jerusalem, rarely referred to the kind of thing that had brought him to Scopus this morning.

He walked toward the activity. The transport attendants sat in their van. The uniformed policemen were talking to an older man in a Civil Guard uniform. Daniel gave him a second look: late sixties to early seventies, thin but powerfully built, with close-cropped white hair and a bristly white mustache. He seemed to be lecturing the policemen, pointing toward a gully off the west side of the road, gesticulating with his hands, moving his lips

rapidly.

Laufer stood several yards away, seemingly oblivious to the lecture, smoking and checking his watch. The deputy commander wore a black knit shirt and gray slacks, as if he'd lacked the time to don his uniform. In civilian clothes, bereft of ribbons, he looked pudgier, definitely less impressive. When he saw Daniel approaching, he dropped his cigarette and ground it out in the dirt, then said something to the driver, who walked away. Not waiting for Daniel to reach him, he moved forward, paunch first, in short, brisk steps.

They met midway and shared a minimal handshake.

"Horrible," said Laufer. "Butchery." When he spoke his jowls quivered like empty water bladders. His eyes, Daniel noticed, looked more tired than usual.

Laufer's hand fumbled in his shirt pocket and drew out a pack of cigarettes. English Ovals. Souvenirs from the latest London trip, no doubt. He lit a cigarette and blew the smoke out of his nose in twin drafts.

"Butchery," he said again.

Daniel cocked his head toward the Hagah man.

"He the one who found it?"

Laufer nodded. "Schlesinger, Yaakov."

"This part of his regular patrol?"

"Yes. From Old Hadassah, around the university, down past the Amelia Catherine, and back. Back and forth, five times a night, six nights a week."

"A lot of walking for someone his age."

"He's a tough one. Former palmahi. Claims he doesn't need much sleep."

"How many times had he been through when he discovered it?"

"Four. This was the last pass. Back up the road and then he picks up his car on Sderot Churchill and drives home. To French Hill."

"Does he log?"

"At the end, in the car. Unless he finds something out of the ordinary." Laufer smiled bitterly.

"So we may be able to pinpoint when it was dumped."

"Depending on how seriously you take him."

"Any reason not to?"

"At *his* age?" said Laufer. "He says he's certain it wasn't there before, but who knows? He may be trying to avoid looking sloppy."

Daniel looked at the old man. He'd stopped lecturing and stood ruler-straight between the policemen. Wearing the M-1 as if it were part of him. Uniform pressed and creased. The old-guard type. Nothing sloppy about him.

Turning back to Laufer, he lifted his note pad with his bad hand, flipped it open, and pulled out his pen.

"What time does he say he found it?" he asked.

"Five forty-five."

A full hour before he'd been called. He lowered the pen, looked at Laufer questioningly.

"I wanted things quiet," said the deputy commander matter-of-factly. Without apology. "At least until we can put this in context. No press, no

statements, a minimum of personnel. And no needless chatter with any personnel not on the investigating team.”

“I see,” said Daniel. “Dr. Levi’s been here?”

“Been and gone. He’ll do the necropsy this afternoon and call you.”

The deputy commander took a deep drag on his cigarette, got a shred of tobacco on his lip and spat it out.

“Do you think he’s back?” he asked. “Our gray friend?”

It was a premature question, thought Daniel. Even for one who had made his mark in administration.

“Does the evidence fit?” he asked.

Laufer’s expression made light of the question. “The site fits, doesn’t it? Weren’t the others found right around here?”

“One of them—Marcovici. Farther down. In the woodlands.”

“And the others?”

“Two in Sheikh Jarrah, the fourth—”

“Exactly.” Laufer cut him off. “All within a half-kilometer radius. Perhaps the bastard has a thing for this area. Something psychological.”

“Perhaps,” said Daniel. “What about the wounds?”

“Go down there and look for yourself,” said the deputy commander.

He turned away, smoking and coughing. Daniel left him and climbed nimbly down into the gully. Two technicians, one male, one female, were working near the body, which was covered by a white sheet.

“Good morning, Pakad Sharavi,” the man said with mock deference. He held a test tube up to the sunlight, shook it gently, and placed it in an open evidence case.

“Steinfeld,” acknowledged Daniel. He ran his eyes over the site. Searching for revelations, seeing only the gray of stone, the dun of soil. Torsos of olive trees twisting through the dust, their tops shimmering silver-green. A kilometer of sloping rocky field; beyond it the deep, narrow valley of Wadi el Joz. Sheikh Jarrah, with its jumble of alleys and vanilla-colored houses. Flashes of turquoise: wrought-iron grills painted in the hue the Arabs believed would repel evil spirits. The towers and steeples of the American colony meshing with tangles of television antennas.

No blood spatter, no trail of crushed foliage, no bits of clothing adhering conveniently to jutting tree limbs. No geographical confession. Just a white form lying under a tree. Isolated, ovoid, out of place. Like an egg dropped out of the sky by some giant, careless bird.

“Did Dr. Levi have anything to say after his examination?” he asked.

“Clucked his tongue a lot.” Steinfeld picked up another test tube, examined it, put it down.

Daniel noticed several plaster casts in the case and asked, “Any clear footprints?”

“Just those of the Hagah man,” the technician said disgustedly. “If there were others, he obliterated them. He also threw up. Over there.” He pointed to a dry, whitening patch a meter to the left of the sheet. “Missed the body.”

Good aim, eh?”

The woman was a new hire named Avital. She knelt in the dirt, taking samples of leaves, twigs, and dung, scooping them into plastic bags, working quickly and silently with an intent expression on her face. When she'd sealed the bags she looked up and grimaced. “You don't want to look at this one, *adoni*.”

“How true,” said Daniel. He got down on his knees and lifted up the sheet.

The face had been left intact. It lay tilted in an unnatural position, staring up at him with half-closed, clouded eyes. Horribly pretty, like a doll's head fastened to the carnage below. A young face, dusky, roundish, lightly sprinkled with pimples on forehead and chin, wavy black hair, long and shining.

How old could she have been? he thought. Fifteen, maybe sixteen? A hot anger kindled in his abdomen. Avital was staring at him and he realized he was clenching his fists. Quickly he relaxed them, felt the fingertips tingle.

“Was the hair like this when you found it?” he asked.

“Like what?” asked Steinfeld.

“Clean. Combed.”

The technicians looked at each other.

“Yes,” said Avital.

Steinfeld nodded and paused expectantly, as if waiting for another question. When none came he shrugged and went back to work.

Daniel leaned in closer and sniffed. The stench of death had begun to issue from the corpse but through it he made out the clean, sweet scent of soap. Someone had washed her.

He raised his head and continued examining the face. The mouth hung slightly agape, revealing a hint of white but widely spaced teeth. The lower ones were crowded and chipped. An upper canine was missing. Not a rich girl. Pierced ears but no earrings. No tribal tattoos, scars, birthmarks, or blemishes.

“Any identification?”

“Life should be so easy,” said Steinfeld.

Daniel stared a bit longer, then ceased his inspection of individual features. Shifting his perspective, he regarded the face as an entity and searched for ethnic characteristics. She appeared Oriental, but that meant little. It was a rare Jerusalem face that told a definite ethnic story—Arab, Ashkenazi, Druze, Bukharan, Armenian. Each had its prototype, but the overlap was substantial. He'd seen too many blond, blue-eyed Arabs, too many swarthy Germans to be confident about racial guesses. Still, it would have been nice to find something, somewhere to start . . .

A shiny green fly settled on the lower lip and began exploring. He shoed it away. Forced his eyes downward.

The throat had been cut deeply from ear to ear, severing gullet and trachea, separating the ivory knobs of the spinal cord, millimeters from complete decapitation. Each small breast was circled by stab wounds. The abdomen had

been sliced open under the ribs on the right side, swooping down to the pelvis and back up to the left. Glossy bits of tissue peeked out from under the flap of the wound. The pubic region was an unrecognizable mass of gore.

The fire in his belly intensified. He covered the body from the neck down.

“She wasn’t killed here,” he said.

Steinfeld shook his head in agreement. “Not enough blood for that. Almost no blood at all, in fact. Looks as if she’s been drained.”

“What do you mean?”

Steinfeld pointed to the wound flap. “No blood on the body. What’s visible under the wound looks pale—like a lab specimen. Drained.”

“What about semen?”

“Nothing conspicuous—we took scrapings. Levi’s internal will tell you more.”

Daniel thought of the destruction that had been visited upon the genitals. “Do you think Dr. Levi will be able to get anything from the vaginal vault?”

“You’ll have to ask Dr. Levi.” Steinfeld snapped the evidence case shut.

“Someone cleaned her up thoroughly,” said Daniel, more to himself than to the techs.

“I suppose.”

There was a camera next to the case.

“You’ve taken your pictures?”

“All the usual ones.”

“Take some extra ones. Just in case.”

“We’ve already shot three rolls,” said Steinfeld.

“Shoot more,” said Daniel. “Let’s not have a repeat of the Aboutboul disaster.”

“I had nothing to do with Aboutboul,” said Steinfeld, defensively. But the look on his face bespoke more than defensiveness.

He’s horrified, thought Daniel, and fighting to hide it. He softened his tone.

“I know that, Meir.”

“Some defective from Northern District on loan to the National Staff,” the technician continued to complain. “Takes the camera and opens it in a lighted room—bye-bye evidence.”

Daniel’s mind longed to be somewhere else, but he shook his head knowingly, forced himself to commiserate.

“*Protekzia?*”

“What else? Someone’s nephew.”

“Figures.”

Steinfeld inspected the contents of his case, closed it, and wiped his hands on his pants. He glanced toward the camera, picked it up.

“How many extra rolls do you want?”

“Take two more, okay?”

“Okay.”

Daniel wrote in his note pad, rose, brushed off his trousers, and looked again at the dead girl. The static beauty of the face, the defilement . . . Young