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THE DEAD ZONE  
"The Gun"

Revised by Michael Piller

Imagine the stories it might tell if a gun could talk. In the hands of Johnny Smith, it can. In this episode, Johnny follows the Byzantine trail of violence a gun has traveled for half a century as he solves a mystery cloaked in the shadows of the Boston underworld.

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Running. Footsteps. Alleys. A man is in trouble. His face turns out of a shadow. It's Bruce. And he's scared. He hears footsteps behind him... searches for an escape but as he turns a corner, he's grabbed.

The men he's running from are low level enforcers, collectors for a bookie that Bruce is in trouble with. Turns out that the little jokes we've heard him make about gambling cover something of a chronic pastime. Sometimes gamblers lose. Bruce has had a run of bad luck on his weekly football bets - and he's behind on his account.

Leg, he tells the guy, completely serious... break the leg, I need the arm for my work.

Relax, Bruce. We don't want an arm or a leg, says the guy. We want an introduction.

End of tease.

Act one fades in to what seems a typical comedy runner, perhaps one we've discussed in which Johnny buys a car. Imagine yourself in this baby, says the salesman, as he hypes a sports car. Okay, says Johnny who touches it and has a vision of himself driving the car. Does it come in a convertible?, he asks in the vision. And the car changes to a convertible.

But Bruce is obviously preoccupied during the sales trip and finally shares his dilemma with Johnny. When Johnny hears the trouble Bruce has gotten himself into, he's genuinely angry and the two of them have the first real fight in their relationship - a fight that can only bring them closer together in the end because a secret no longer stands between them. Johnny agrees to at least hear the man out. Bruce says it'll be nothing, maybe just a day at the racetrack, a trifecta. Johnny shakes his head - he's uncomfortable at the very possibility.

The address they've been given offers a surprise: an orchid greenhouse. Bruce has never been here before so he isn't sure it's the right address... as they move inside and Johnny touches the petal of an orchid... which sends him into a vision of a mob style execution - a man about forty being blasted away among the rows and rows of orchids, glass of the greenhouse shattering... and as

Johnny returns to reality, he finds himself facing the man killed in the vision. Johnny Smith, isn't it?, asks the orchid grower. I've been looking forward to meeting you.

This is CATHAN (pronounced Cay'-han) DONEGAL, of Irish descent and one-time member of Boston's notorious Donegal crime family. He doesn't look like a gangster and the truth is, he admits, he isn't a very good one. Which is why he left Boston and allowed his brother, GARRETT to run the family business. He prefers his orchids to bullets anyway.

I'm willing to forgive your friend's debt, Cathan tells Johnny, on the condition you agree to do me a significant favor. You see apparently there's a contract out on my life.

Cathan takes Johnny into his modest home, introduces him to his Maine born wife and there are several kids too. The men go into a den where Cathan reaches into his desk and takes out a case. He opens the case to reveal a beautiful Smith and Wesson .357 magnum with a burnished wood handle. Beautiful, isn't it, says Cathan. One of the first models of .357s ever manufactured way back from the 1930s. Cathan offers it to Johnny to hold... and as soon as Johnny picks it up... *he finds himself in a quick vision holding the gun as a technician in 1930s garb, assembling*

*and inspecting it at the manufacturers... the birth of a gun...* and in a split reality, Cathan joins him in the past, saying: the story of my family is in this gun, Mr. Smith. My great grandfather bought it as a birthday present for my grandfather at a gun shop on 'L' Street in Southie in 1937....

And now, the vision takes Johnny to a street in 1930s Boston and he's dressed in a silk suit with a perfect hat that makes him look a little like Jimmy Cagney... but the gun is still in his hand as he fires at a car passing with a tommy gun rat-a-tat-tatting back... a classic 30s gangster shot... and Johnny is riddled with bullets as he dies a gangster's death. The vision ends. Johnny reacts, has to drop the gun... and sit... looks at Cathan: your grandfather was killed the day after he bought it, says Johnny.

Cathan's eyes narrow as he realizes Johnny's reputation is not exaggerated. He picks up the gun where Johnny dropped it -- It's been handed down from generation from generation to generation in my family, he tells Johnny, looking at his son playing in the other room. I haven't lived a perfect life, he admits. But I want it to stop here. I don't want my son to ever hold this gun.

He always thought the quiet existence in Maine had led him far from the street violence of South Boston. But now it seems to be reaching out to him again. It's only a rumor on the street, a tip from an old friend. But it's been a long time since he counted any enemies among the regulars of Southie. The only explanation he can offer is that it must be a family vendetta. A payback from someone the Donnegan Family crossed who knows when - from another son of a son of a son. Cathan doesn't need to ask Johnny if he is going to be killed. If the rumor is true, he knows he will be killed. It is inevitable. And if he is killed, his son may feel the obligation to take revenge when he gets old enough to pick up the gun.

He asks Johnny to come with him to Boston as he tries to track down the truth. Johnny's powers might help keep him alive... the world's first psychic bodyguard... as he tries to make peace with whomever wants him dead. In return, Bruce's debt will be retired.

In a way, Johnny identifies with Cathan as a man who, like himself, lives with a stigma from which he cannot escape. But he adds one more stipulation: Cathan will not accept any future bets from his friend. Wait, Bruce says, have you seen the spread on the Steelers' game this

weekend? I've not only seen it, says Johnny, I've seen it beat you.

Deal, says Cathan.

So Johnny goes to Boston and Bruce goes with him, afraid he's gotten Johnny into something bigger and more dangerous than he ever intended.

*Thus, as our events unfold, the centerpiece to our story is the violent journey of the gun as it moves through time, creating a number of possible suspects who might carry a blood feud across generations. We'll see Johnny as Cathan's father kill a wiseguy in a barber chair in the 1950s... and then see his death, shot with his own gun... in another vision, the gun might be stolen from a police locker in the 1980s as evidence in the murder trial of Cathan's brother... and then in one horrifying tangent, a two year old girl at a Donnegal family St. Patrick's day party might find the gun in the closet and as she begins to play with it and just as we're certain the child is going to kill herself with it, Cathan (age 25) walks in on the scene and grabs it away from the little girl who wails at losing her 'toy', never realizing that the bad man saved her life. A few years later, Cathan is given the gun by Garrett and ordered to even the score against the murderers*

*of his father. Cathan, who just doesn't have the make-up for this line of work, botches it... and Garrett has to come in and clean it up at the last minute. All of this is played against the steady decline of the Donnegal crime family and Garrett is bitterly disappointed in Cathan when he says he can't stay in the family business any longer. Thus, his self-imposed exile to Maine.*

*As this narrative description continues, we will not elaborate on these visions but they will provide the foundation for the entire episode, driving the story forward with each new clue.*

Whatever they may have expected from old gangster movies is quickly dispelled when they get to Boston. The crime families are not glamorous or even all that organized any more. Johnny and Bruce meet brother Garrett, an aging golden boy who seems past his prime but he's a nice guy in a mob context and protective of his little brother. Garrett complains to Cathan times are tough in the rackets, all the lotto and Indian casinos have taken their toll. Guys sit around and talk about: you should have seen this town when. Crime families are barely making ends meet... he says all the young wiseguys go to Harvard Business and then become corporate auditors...

He has no idea why anyone would want to kill Cathan.

The gun continues to prompt Johnny's visions and the evidence grows that the rival O'Bannon family is likely behind the contract on Cathan. Johnny tries to get to the Donnie O'Bannon, leader of the clan. He tells Bruce he might be able to confirm with a touch of his hand that the O'Bannons are responsible. But when Johnny goes to Donnie's (illegal) gambling club, O'Bannon refuses to see him. So if he can't get into the boss' office, he tells Bruce, maybe we can get the boss to come out. So he starts gambling. And winning. And winning. And winning. And finally, no one else is gambling, they're all watching Johnny break the bank of the casino. For Bruce, it's a nightmare and a lesson - here's Johnny doing everything he's ever dreamed of but there's nothing in it for him. And finally O'Bannon comes out. He knows who Johnny is from the questions he's been asking around town (Johnny's psychic fame has not spread to Boston yet).

Alone, Johnny admits that he's got certain abilities and returns all the money (as Bruce's heart almost stops) and asks for a favor in exchange. He tells O'Bannon that he's trying to find out about the hit on Cathan. O'Bannon denies it and indeed when Johnny touches him, in a reversal of expectations, Johnny senses O'Bannon is innocent and had



nothing to do with the murder contract. Johnny still has no clue to who's responsible.

At the same time, federal agents who have all of these players under surveillance suddenly have a new player to consider and before long Walt gets a visit from an agent from the Bangor FBI office telling him that Johnny is involved with organized crime figures in Boston, gambling heavily. Walt tells Sarah who can't believe it. He's in some kind of trouble, she tells her husband and you have to help him. So off Walt goes to Boston, not as a cop but on a personal mission.

The feds in Boston have charted a new criminal conspiracy identifying Johnny as Cathan's new front guy, calling him "The Maine Man". Clearly, Cathan's making a big play to regain power in Boston. It's the biggest underworld initiative they've seen in this region in years. Walt hears all the plans and nods and gets the hell out of there to find Johnny.

Meanwhile, Johnny gets a quick flash that Cathan is about to be killed in a drive-by shooting... pushes him out of the way... but as a consequence, Bruce is wounded instead. It's in the shoulder and not serious and he swears to Johnny he'll never gamble again.

Walt finds Johnny is not the same man he knew at home. The gun and its overpowering history of violence has taken a toll on him. He's colder, more remote and as Walt comments on this, Johnny realizes that he's doing everything he can to emotionally disconnect from the experiences of the gun that he's forcing himself to relive. In essence, he's beginning to understand how a gangster distances himself from his own feelings in order to live with himself. By the end, he can barely bring himself to pick up the gun.

Ultimately, it's Garrett who is revealed by Johnny's touch to be the architect behind the hit of his own brother. A clue to the reason could be found in one of Johnny's visions from the gun: tied to the events which led Cathan to abandon the family business and head to Maine. He had left Garrett alone who had the impossible task of holding together the old crime family and protecting their father's legacy. In his failure, he had become embittered toward his weak brother, blaming him for the fall of the Donnegals.

It leads to one final confrontation with the gun.

This time it's in Cathan's hands, aimed at his brother... about to kill him... Johnny tries to talk him down... and then Cathan does an extraordinary thing - he

puts the gun in his brother's hand. If you want me dead, do it yourself with our father and grandfather's own gun, he says. Garrett aims it at him and for a moment we think he just might pull the trigger. But he can't bring himself to do it. He drops the gun and it's over. It's the end of the trail for the Donnegal Crime family. And the end of the trail for the gun.

In the tag, with a warm welcome home from his wife and kids, Cathan gives Johnny and Bruce the gun. Keep it as a souvenir, he says. I don't need it any more. (And he warns Bruce if he lays any bet in New England, he'll know about it.)

Johnny tells Bruce to stop the car on the Piscataquis Bridge. He gets and throws the gun into the river... as he watches it disappear into the water... we...

FADE OUT

THE END