

**THE KNIGHTS
OF
REDEMPTION**

A NOVEL

Matt Micros

For my family and friends...

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	<i>henry whitman</i>	7
II.	<i>rogers conner</i>	22
III.	<i>hector rodriguez</i>	31
IV.	<i>matt o'malley</i>	36
V.	<i>mo falls</i>	41
VI.	<i>the breakfast club</i>	45
VII.	<i>the knights of redemption</i>	66
VIII.	<i>delaney</i>	79
IX.	<i>mr. baseball</i>	88
X.	<i>the mexican lawyer</i>	95
XI.	<i>another life</i>	101
XII.	<i>thomas conner</i>	111
XIII.	<i>redemption</i>	117
XIV.	<i>an extraordinary life</i>	123
XV.	<i>a lesson well learned</i>	129
XVI.	<i>a life replaced</i>	138
XVII.	<i>opening day</i>	144
XVIII.	<i>epilogue</i>	150

**THE KNIGHTS OF
REDEMPTION**

We are all Knights of Redemption. Each possessing the power to listen, learn, teach and inspire...

This book is a work of fiction.

No part of the contents relate to any real person or persons living or dead. No events depicted actually happened or are implied to have happened.

I.

henry whitman

What if everyone's life was judged solely by the worst thing they had ever done? World leaders would no longer be judged by a successful economy or their social programs, but rather, for inappropriate advances on underpaid interns. Professional athletes wouldn't be heroes for hitting 50 home runs or throwing 40 touchdowns in a season, but for refusing to sign an autograph for a ten year old boy in a wheelchair.

Long before he became President of one of the most prestigious universities in the country, Henry Whitman was a five year old boy who wrestled his hand from his father's grasp and chased someone two city blocks just to give the man a quarter he had dropped.

When he was ten, he set up a lemonade stand on a street corner with a sign that told customers *exactly* how much each glass had cost him to make, because he didn't want them to feel as though he was unfairly marking the

prices up. When he was a senior in high school and was asked to the Sadie Hawkins Spring Fling by two girls—one of them, a sweet, but not entirely attractive oboe player in the band; the other, the captain of the cheerleading squad and a future Miss Connecticut—he went with the oboe player because she had asked him first.

And when his hard working father couldn't afford to send him to college on his factory worker's hourly wage, Henry put himself through by working two jobs and commuting from home to keep the costs down. Once he finally completed his schooling and began bringing home a steady paycheck—it took him nearly ten years to do it—he gave nearly half of it each pay period to his parents because he was grateful they had allowed him to live at home the entire time. He lived by the words of Mark Twain. *“Always do right. It will gratify some people, and astonish the rest.”* In fact, it would not be a stretch to say that Henry Whitman made the correct moral and ethical decision in his life every single time—except the one that mattered most.

Henry's first job was as a professor of English at a small, but well-known liberal arts college in Boston. His students loved his classes for he taught them not only an appreciation of literature, but also the crucial life skills of

writing and communication. And he did so with an enthusiasm that couldn't possibly have been disingenuous. When they studied Mark Twain, he came to class dressed as Twain. When they studied Fitzgerald, he threw Roaring 20's parties at his house for the entire class and even a few that weren't in it. If students had a problem, whether it be socially, financially or ethically, he was the moral compass they sought out. Which is what made it that much more difficult for them when he was offered to head up the department, and his teaching load was cut in half. He was forced to teach fewer students and had less free time as well. Eventually, he was offered the equivalent position at an even more prestigious college, but when he refused to leave until his current employer had found a suitable replacement for him, he lost out on the other position.

Henry first met his wife at a coffee shop, when he eyed her reading an obscure novel by a long passed away author he admired. He was nearly 40 at the time and said he knew she would be the woman he would marry the moment she peered up at him over the book, her blue eyes looking even larger through a pair of horned rimmed reading glasses. She taught high school freshman English in Watertown, just outside of Boston, but when Henry's parents both grew ill at the same time,

he and his wife moved to Connecticut to take care of them and begin a family of their own.

Both had to make sacrifices to do so. Bernadette accepted the only position available to her—a remedial teaching position at a middle school; a job that caused her to literally count down the days to each vacation and the end of the school year. Middle school students were monsters, filled with energy, hormones and a lack of filters that resulted in some of the most outrageous comments coming from their mouths. Her job was living proof that no good deed went unpunished.

Henry fared quite a bit better due to his background and was offered the position of Head of School at Choate. Five years later, he decided he missed being in the classroom and accepted a full-time professorship at nearby Yale. But even though his love was teaching, he kept getting pulled into administration and two months into the school year, he assumed the Department Chair position on an interim basis when the Chair had a stroke. A year later, Henry had the interim tag removed, three years after that, he became the Vice President of Academic Affairs, and five years after that, at age 62, he became President of the University.

He and his wife had two beautiful and well-behaved teenagers (an oxymoron if ever there was one), a nice house in the suburbs, and enough money to live

comfortably, if not extravagantly. And then, as if overnight, everything came to pieces one April morning. The thing was, it didn't really happen overnight. Henry had just missed all of the signs.

The day had begun just like any other day. Henry had about a half dozen phone messages and two dozen emails to return, along with responding to three or four invites to university functions that he would need to attend. At 10:00am, he had a meeting with a distinguished alum who was interested in donating a million dollars to help fund building a soccer specific stadium on campus. At 11:30, just as he was about to head out for an early lunch, he received the call. He normally would have let his secretary answer it, but he could see she wasn't at her desk, and he also noticed it was an in-house call, so he grabbed it. Couldn't very well call himself a man of the people, if he wasn't accessible *to* the people.

"Hello," he answered as if he was answering his house phone.

There was silence on the other end of the line for a moment or two as the person was undoubtedly caught off guard. "Dr. Whitman?" a female answered at last.

"Yes," he said. "How can I help you—" He glanced at the caller ID, "Cheryl is it?"

"Yes," she said. She spoke very quietly, as if she

was worried about someone overhearing her. “I was wondering if I could have a few minutes of your time. I normally wouldn’t bother you, but I don’t know who else to turn to. It’s really important.”

Henry glanced at his watch, and seemed to be turning over in his mind the effect that an unscheduled meeting would have on the rest of his day, before relenting. “Sure, Cheryl. Come on up. You know where my office is?”

“Yes, I do. Thank you.”

Five minutes later, his intercom buzzed. “A Cheryl Rueben is here to see you,” his secretary said. “She says you’re expecting her?”

“That’s right. Send her in.”

Cheryl worked for Don Peterson in the fundraising office, working primarily on the Annual Fund. She was young—late twenties maybe—and more sexy than pretty, with a slightly worn appearance the result of living a hard life in her teens. She had worked at Yale for slightly more than three years, but he didn’t know much about her other than what he overheard from others. She was a single mother of two little girls to two different fathers, neither of whom she had married. She actually came from old money in Long Island, and had lived a wild life probably in an attempt to rebel against her family as mu-

ch as anything. Cheryl had attended nearby Poquonic College, known for being a country club type refuge for the tri-state area student who didn't want an education to interfere with their social life. After graduation, she worked as an intern in the development office at Poquonic for a few years, before coming to Yale. How she landed her current position was a mystery to most, but she did her job, and Henry hadn't received any complaints about her, so he didn't ask many questions. He trusted that Don knew what he was doing, as evidenced by an ever-burgeoning endowment.

"What can I do for you, Cheryl?" Henry asked curiously. Rarely did he allow himself to take a meeting without being properly prepared first.

"I'm not sure how to begin," she stammered, a bit overwhelmed now that she found herself face to face with the most powerful man in arguably the most powerful university in the country.

"Begin by just telling me what's on your mind."

She paused for a moment before beginning. "I was really excited when I got this job. I meet interesting people every day. I get to go to great events..."

"But..."

"I'm being harassed by Don Peterson," she blurted out at last.

"What do you mean by harassed? Yelled at for your

work?”

“Sexually harassed.”

“By Don?” he asked incredulously.

“It started shortly after I started working for him. Emails at first, telling me what to wear to department meetings. Low-cut tops, short skirts, stiletto heels. I thought he was joking, but then he started refusing to sign off on my vacation days, even though I had some coming. Eventually, he started calling me late at night, saying sexually explicit things and demanding phone sex, so he could—this is really uncomfortable for me,” she said, stopping herself short.

“I don’t mean this to sound insensitive, but did you in any way, even inadvertently, give him any indication it was reciprocal? Don’t get me wrong. He’s married and it would still be wrong, but I’m just trying to understand it because it sounds so out of character for the Don I know.”

She thought about it for a moment before answering. “I’ve wondered that same thing for a long time, but the answer is no. I would tell him I was going to sleep. I even stopped answering the phone.”

“And did it stop?”

“It got worse. He would berate me in front of the others. Then he started demanding oral sex or he’d fire me.”

“When?! Where?!”

“In his office. He’d lock the door and close the blinds. But everyone knew what was going on. It was mortifying.” She was crying now.

“That was my next question. Who else knows about this?”

“The other men in the office,” she sniffled. “Because he told them they could run the train on me.”

“I don’t know what that means,” Henry said.

“One of them would have sex with me from behind, while I was forced to give oral sex to the other.”

The immortal words of Gary Coleman in *Different Strokes* came immediately to mind. “*Whatchu talkin bout Willis?*” Henry had lived a pretty sheltered life, and this was an area he had very little experience in. He was mortified, but decided to try and stick just with the facts.

“Do you have any emails or texts from him?” he asked.

“He makes me delete them all. He stands right over me while I do it.”

“I see.”

She was sensing that he didn’t believe her. “I know this is all pretty difficult to believe. But it’s true. Every word of it. And the only reason I didn’t come forward sooner is because I really need this job. I’m a single mother, trying to raise two kids. My parents cut

me off long ago when I made some poor decisions.”

“Is there anyone else who can corroborate your story? Anyone at all?”

“There are others. They’ve never said anything to me, but I can tell.”

“How can you tell?”

“Because they have the same look on their face that I see every time I look in the mirror.”

“Do you think any of them would speak up?”

“I doubt it.”

Henry walked across the room. Poured himself a glass of Scotch. It was a little early in the day, but if ever there was something that warranted it, this was it. “You do realize without any proof or any other people backing up your story, it will be difficult to do anything about this.”

“I know, but I had to say something.”

“I’ll look into this,” Henry promised. “But understand, as soon as I do, you could get some pushback. And I can’t do anything about that without proof. So what I’d do in the meantime, is get some proof.”

Cheryl nodded a disappointed nod and let herself out.

The moment she left his office, a hundred thoughts competed for a place within his mind. On one hand, Don

Peterson appeared to be a family man. Married for more than twenty years with three children, he coached his son's little league baseball team and his wife was by his side for every Yale function. On the other, was that Henry had always found him to be a bit of a slickster—part corporate executive fundraiser, part used car salesman, complete with the jet black, slicked back hair. Another red flag should have been the turnover within his department since taking over five years ago. When he began the job, he had seven men and three women working under him, with an average age of somewhere in the vicinity of fifty years old. Now there were seven *women*, all extremely attractive, and just three men working there with an average age that couldn't have been even thirty. Henry had chalked it up to a natural turnover that occurred whenever you had an older staff to begin with, plus his new staff had been extremely successful. The Yale endowment had never been higher.

He decided to meet individually with the other members of the department to see what they knew, but if they knew anything, they weren't saying.

Don himself simply stated, "She's just pissed because I refused her vacation time two days before our big gala dinner dance because there was a ton of work that needed to be done. As you know, it's the biggest

event of the year and we needed all hands on deck. She wanted to go to Cabo with a few of her friends. Anyway, she's been pissed off ever since."

It sounded plausible. Don had a way of making anything seem plausible. Which was probably also why he was so good at his job.

"Do you recall ever saying anything that she could have misconstrued as being sexual in nature?"

"Absolutely not."

"What about telling her what to wear into the office?"

"If anything, I tell them all to tone it down a bit. Some of them, her in particular, tend to dress like they're going clubbing."

Still not completely satisfied, Henry sought out someone in the computer technology department. Stephen Schuler had worked there for a little over three months, but had quickly gained Henry's trust. He was sharp, reliable and discreet.

"Schu, is it possible to retrieve someone's work email even if it's been deleted?" Henry asked.

"Yes, but I'd need the actual computer to do it."

Since Don always took his laptop home with him at the end of a day, anything that was going to be done needed to be done *during* the day. While Henry took

Don to lunch one afternoon, Schuler cloned Don's computer and swapped it out with the original, so he could have enough time to thoroughly search the hard drive. Don would be none the wiser.

Two days later, Schu walked into Henry's office with a memory stick. "You're not going to like what I found," he said.

On the stick were hundreds of emails, mostly graphic in nature, covering not only what to wear to work, but how nice certain body parts of hers looked, And they weren't just to her, but to several, if not all of the other female members of the office as well. It was more of a smoking gun than OJ racing down the 405 Freeway in his Ford Bronco.

It left Henry with four choices to choose from.

Ignore it, and hope the girl eventually quit. With no evidence to support her claims, she would have a difficult time proving anything. But heaven forbid she could...

He could offer to buy her silence by paying her off with a confidentiality clause that would prevent her from talking about it to anyone. Since she needed the money, this was an appealing option, although getting approval from the Board of Directors without a proper explanation, might be a bit tricky.

He could fire Don on the spot. But that would

likely result in a very ugly, very public mess that the media would pounce on. The statement that “there’s no such thing as bad publicity” did not apply to institutions of higher learning.

He could force Don into an early retirement. That wouldn’t be easy to do since Don was only 51, but looking at a nice severance package, and a reference for future employment while staring at a memory card full of evidence, might be enough to coerce him to go away quietly. But if it wasn’t, things could get ugly.

“What do you want me to do, Dr. Whitman?” Schuler asked.

“Is this the only copy?” was Henry’s response.

“Yes.”

“Well, I guess there’s only one thing *to* do. I’ll take care of it, Schu. Thanks.”

Henry sat motionless at his desk after Schuler left, holding the memory stick in front of him with both hands for five or ten seconds, before snapping it in two and throwing it into the garbage.

That night as he and his wife prepared for bed, his doorbell rang. Henry answered it in his bathrobe and was greeted by two uniformed police officers. “Can I help you?” he asked.

“Dr. Whitman?” one of the officers asked.

“Yes?”

“We have a warrant for your arrest.”

II.***rogers conner***

Rogers Conner was named Sports Illustrated's "Athlete of the Year" after smashing 52 home runs and coming within one out of leading the Chicago Cubs to their first World Series title since 1908. He was a twenty-six year old rookie. Down 5-2 in the bottom of the 8th inning, he hammered a 2-2 fastball deep into the Chicago night, sending Wrigley Field's fans into a frenzy.

The Grand Slam, his history making 6th home run of the series, gave the Cubs a 6-5 lead heading into the ninth inning. But when their normally reliable closer let the game slip away, and his teammates couldn't rally in the home half of the inning, it was just another horrific ending for a franchise that had suffered no shortage of them over the years. It was the irony of ironies that Rogers had been named after a Hall of Famer who had played for the Cubs biggest rival, the St. Louis Cardinals. Luckily his father never lived to see him suit up for the

Cubs.

Back when he was a five foot nine inch, one hundred-sixty-five pound high school center fielder in Redding, Connecticut, that had more bunt singles than home runs, Rogers had always exhibited the epitome of sportsmanship and even a modicum of modesty. It was in large part due to the influence of his father. A competitive athlete in his day, he lived by the rule that you played hard, but when it was over, you shook hands and exhibited the same sportsmanship in losing that you would if you won. Rogers found at an early age that piano lessons instead of baseball were more of a promise than a threat. He had once made the mistake of leaving the field after losing a game without shaking his opponents hands, and he found himself playing Chopsticks and Heart and Soul for the next month before he was allowed to pick up a baseball bat again.

But two things happened over the summer following his junior year that changed his life forever. The first was that he grew six inches. The second was that he lost his father to a heart attack. The first gave him a long, loping swing that enabled him to reach pitches he could only previously wave at. The second resulted in a glaring lack of discipline and sportsmanship when confronted with his newfound success. His mother was a wonderful person. She was just tired and scared at

the prospect of having to raise two kids by herself, along with the financial responsibilities that came along with it, on her teaching salary of forty thousand dollars a year.

Rogers's only way to college was through a scholarship, so he spent nearly every free moment working out and working on his fundamentals. The result was fifty additional pounds of muscle mass, and a .434 batting average with twelve home runs his senior year. The problem was, by the time that happened, there wasn't much scholarship money still available. But when a player who had committed to USC, decided to sign with the Orioles minor league system instead, it opened up a scholarship at the last minute. Not to mention, USC's assistant coach had been a childhood friend of Rogers' American Legion coach.

About the same time, he received a phone call telling him the Cubs had drafted him in the amateur draft despite being told he was heading to college. With money tight, even with a full scholarship in hand, Rogers surprised everyone and signed a pro contract with a \$200,000 signing bonus. He spent three years at Class A ball, as he tried to make the adjustment to four pitch pitchers, instead of the part-time ones he had faced in high school who just heaved the ball as hard as they could when they weren't playing in the outfield. He eventually made it to Triple A on his power hitting

potential alone, but twenty-three year olds who had already spent five years in the minors and hadn't yet had a "cup of coffee" in the majors were labeled as career minor leaguers.

Three years later, injuries and rain outs forced the big league club to play five games in three days to wrap up the season, and as one of only two first basemen still healthy on their forty man roster, Rogers was finally called up from Des Moines, Iowa and summoned to Chicago. He arrived at Wrigley an hour before first pitch and saw that his name had been penciled into the lineup card in the 5th spot. They were using the game as a throw away against the league's top pitcher, and sat four regulars. The Cubs lineup was a Who's Who of nobody's and never will be's; or so they thought, until Rogers smashed the first pitch he ever saw in the majors, over the left field wall. Two additional home runs later, and Rogers Conner became the first player in Major League history to hit home runs in his first three at bats. He never returned to Iowa.

The following spring, in his first full season in the majors, he led the Cubs to the World Series. In the days that followed, however, after very publicly blasting his teammates in the media, he quickly became persona non grata in Chicago. His accomplishments were met with tepid acceptance, while his failures were met with

boos and catcalls. Eventually, when his accomplishments began to far outweigh his failures, and he learned to keep his mouth shut when things didn't go his way, he gained a broader fan base—and a new contract worth \$172 million dollars for eight years. But as he approached his mid-30's, and his numbers began to decline, the Cubs decided to let him walk for the final years of his career, rather than get into a bidding war with the Yankees, Phillies and the Los Angeles Dodgers.

After years of feeling like he was always arriving a day late for the prom, Rogers felt as though he was finally in demand, and successful. He had fame. He had fortune. He had no shortage of women after him. In fact, he was successful in every manner except the one that would have mattered to Thomas Conner most. He was despised. Literally. He was voted the "Player You Would Least Like to Play With" by an anonymous straw poll of players done by Sports Illustrated.

It wasn't any one thing he did that made him unpopular, but rather every thing he did. He stopped speaking to reporters following the World Series because he felt he was misquoted. He never went over to congratulate a teammate for a big hit, pitch or play in the field. He rarely signed autographs, reasoning that the ones he did sign for people would be worth more. He kept to himself in the locker room, sat by himself on the

plane and ate alone on the road. If he went out, it was usually with equally self-loathing, disguised as arrogance, Hollywood types. He wasn't married, but he had been dating the same woman with whom he shared a child he didn't see much, for the past eight years. But the relationship could hardly be classified as monogamous with his weakness for cocktail waitresses that spanned more than twelve major league cities throughout the country.

And yet, amazingly, Rogers found himself oblivious to the way others perceived him, until one fateful April day made it impossible to ignore any longer. He was in New York to sign with the Yankees and decided to take in a Knicks game at night. Seated courtside at Madison Square Garden in between Kevin Costner and Eva Longoria, his face suddenly appeared on the giant Jumbotron above the court, but what he expected would be a raucous ovation from fans he thought were desperately excited to see him swing the lumber in a few short days, could have been more accurately described as indifference at best, and a hailstorm of negativity at worst, with catcalls raining down from the blue seats in every direction. It was noticeable enough that he bid Kevin and Eva a hasty farewell and went into the private Delta Club for a beer.

It was largely empty at this point with the game

going on, save for a woman who slid up next to him at the bar. Her face wasn't exactly that of a bulldog chewing a wasp, but she was certainly more sexy than pretty, with curves in all the correct places that were accentuated by the form fitting blue dress she was wearing.

"Didn't like the fans reaction, huh?" she said.

"Stupid New Yorkers," he said, not even looking up.

"I agree with you. But you know, you are kind of an asshole."

Normally that type of comment would result in Rogers cursing at the person and walking away, but he was intrigued by this woman for some reason. That and he sensed it wouldn't bother her much if he did.

"Now, how do you know that? We just met."

"I read the papers. I've also seen you blow past your share of kids looking for a high five or autograph," she answered.

"What are you? A stalker or something?" he asked. He had met his share of those.

"No," she laughed. "I used to date the Assistant General Manager for the Phillies, so I get to a lot of games."

"So that's it. You wanted me to play for the Phillies."

“Oh, I could have cared less where you decided to play. He and I broke up ages ago. I just thought you were hot and you looked like you needed a friend.”

“I’ve had lots of friends. They didn’t take,” he said before taking another generous swig of his beer.

“In that case, friendship’s overrated. I just think you’re hot.”

Rogers looked her over from head to toe. “You want to go somewhere?”

“Where?” she asked.

“I have access to a suite here at the Garden,” he responded.

She raised her eyebrow, knowing exactly what he meant.

“Lead the way, bat boy,” she said with a seductive smile.

They had made it about five feet inside the room before Rogers shamelessly had her dress halfway over her head. He was having his way with her, an attractive but far from beautiful complete stranger, for no other reason than he could. Five minutes after he had given her what he thought was probably the best thirty seconds of her life, the door to the room was thrown open and two NYPD detectives entered along with arena security.

“Rogers Conner,” one of the detectives began, “You’re under arrest.”

“Under arrest?” he responded defiantly as he pulled on his pants. “For what?!”

“For solicitation of sex.”

He spun around to face the woman in question. “You’re a prostitute???”

She shrugged. “Did you think I slept with you because you were cute?”

“Umm, it has happened before,” Rogers said.

“Well, not this time, sport,” the other officer said.

“I didn’t offer to pay her anything!”

“Guess we’ll just have to sort this out down at the station. “Mr. Conner, please place your hands behind your back.”

As they read him his rights, a loud cheer could be heard inside the arena, as the Knicks took the lead. The only cheer that might have rivaled it, would have been if the sight of Rogers in handcuffs, being escorted from the Garden, had been shown on the Jumbotron.