The other foot
by bj62

Summary

This story takes place a year after Steve's departure. It takes place some time after Mike is partnered with Dan Robbins. Mike has been shot.
Chapter 1

Steve sat by the bedside of his former partner and best friend. He still missed the excitement of working the streets, but he refused to be a liability to the man who taught him how to really be a cop in this city by the bay. After he was shot in the heart, he knew that his ability to work as one of San Francisco’s finest would never be the same.

He could not risk the lives of others due to a reduction in his skill... A skill that was sharpened because of the man laying in this hospital bed.

He had trusted Dan to take his place. He knew that although Dan was still a little wet behind the ears, he could take care of Mike. Not that Mike needed taken care of. Mike was a cop for over 25 years, and he would train Dan the same way he trained other cops. The same way he taught him.

He remembered all those years ago when he first met Mike.

Mike had told him the story of losing his first partner in the line of duty during what was supposed to be a routine investigation of the murder of some derelicts throughout the city.

Wino's were prevalent on the streets, but when this particular wino was identified as a member of one of the prominent members of the elite, it had become front page news. The dead man was one of a string of murders in the district. Mike and his partner knew they had to take the chance of going undercover. Each night a different street, with a coin toss as to who would play the man who was living for the next bottle. This particular night they were bosom buddies.

There was one problem... The profile of the perp was wrong. It wasn't one person, but two, who were killing these men who lived for the next drink. Mike had never known what hit him. When he woke, he found himself in a hospital bed with his young daughter beside him.

Her tears were evident, but ignored. He never wanted to see that look on her face again. He realized just how much he had to lose.

Helen had died a year before and they had managed to hang on to each other. The only thing he had not realized was how much the job was taking over and filling up those empty spaces that were once filled with a beautiful woman who meant more to him than the world. When she died, the city took her place.

"Daddy?" Jean asked quietly.

Mike opened his eyes and saw her angel face.

He tried to move, but he felt the world spin when he went to lift his head. He rested and got his bearings. He closed his eyes and held onto her hand.

When he opened his eyes once more, sunlight was pouring into the room. He breathed a sigh of relief and saw his commanding officer at the foot of the bed.

"Mike it took the both of you to nab the bastards, and the price was too high. Mike, Ted is dead. He saw you getting hurt and was knifed by the second perp. By the time we got to him it was too late." Rudy said as he bowed his head to hide the moisture in his eyes.

"How long? How long have I..." he managed to say with a ragged breath.
"You have a rock head. One of the bastards hit you on the hardest point of your skull. Jean stayed with my daughter. And that is where she will stay until they release you. If... If you behave yourself, you may see Ted put to rest." Rudy said.

"Lieutenant I respectfully request that I be released to attend my partner's burial" Mike quietly replied.

"I will not be held responsible for a good cop losing his balance during the honor guard of a fellow officer. Mike when the doctors say you can leave, you can leave. I know what Ted meant to you. We all have connections to those we work with. If he would be here, you know that is what he would say." Rudy said with a crack in his voice.

"Mike you and Ted will be given commendations. You did the city a service getting those two bastards. Killing a cop puts the last nail in their coffin."

Now Steve was sitting with the only partner that defined partner for him. Fresh out of college and wanting to make a difference, he took the road that was seldom traveled. It gave him more than just a job. It gave him a friend and a family that he never expected... Until the day he misread a perp and was shot. He wasn't just shot, he nearly died.

He could not trust himself to be a cop after that. Mike had taught him to trust his instinct. He had misread Barbara from the moment he saw her in the phone booth. He would not risk his partner's life on his uncertainty.

So now he was sitting here, looking at the monitors that meant Mike was still alive. All he could think of was 'There but for the grace of God go I.'

It did not matter how Mike got hurt. Steve did not blame Dan or anyone else in the department. He blamed the perpetrators that thought they could get away with breaking the law. As long as people looked the other way...

He fought the tears that welled within his eyes as he waited. He did it for Mike. He did it for Jeannie. Most of all he did it for himself. Mike had served the city for so long he had become part of it. The wall with all the names of those who served would not have Mike Stone's name on it just yet. Steve would do everything in his power...

He dare not say it even to himself.
Jean could not enter the room where her father lay motionless. She had been there times before, but this was different. Despite the stillness, there were noises from machines. She could not face the idea of sitting by his side. There were too many bandages. Too much of him was covered with white gauze and tape. She saw the oxygen tube that was taped to his face with white tape. She stood for what seemed like an eternity, holding two cups of coffee. One was for Steve, the other was for her father. It was not until she paid for them that she realized she had fixed it the way she liked it, and the way Steve liked it. She stifled a sob and saw Steve startle out of a light sleep.

"How long have you been there? Do you want to sit down?" he asked.

"Steve I can't. That man does not look like Dad. There is too much noise... There is too much white... He is... Oh God I am so scared. Steve? Tell me... Tell me he is going to be o.k. He's my Daddy," she said as her knees buckled and she felt the cups slip from her hands.

Steve's instinct kicked in and he managed to get the cups before they spilled while putting an arm under her shoulders and steered her toward a chair in the hallway. She leaned into him taking the support he was offering. He gave her that knowing look he had. He needed to believe things were going to be alright even though he was not sure... for her sake.

"Jeannie, he will make it. He is part of this city. He won't let something stupid like a gun shot defeat him. He is too damned stubborn." Steve said softly. as if he needed to convince himself as well.

"Steve, he looks so pale... I can't... I can't..." her voice broke.

Steve set the cups down and knelt beside her. He tried to enfold her in his arms and stroke her hair. He had watched her grow up. He was a part of her family within weeks of becoming her father's partner. He shushed her and felt the tears fall from his eyes as well, while never leaving his watch over the room.

"I'll stay with him. I'll stay with him until he opens those baby blues and gives me hell. You and I need to be strong for him until he gets his strength back. We will get the bastard that shot him. I may no longer be a cop. but I still have connections. I am sure that Rudy won't let this happen again. If Mike were on his feet..." Steve let the sentence die. He dare not let her see the fear that was building within him.

Steve took the coffee and the cup meant for Mike. He went back into the room and listened to the monitors. He closed his eyes for a moment and did the one thing he knew Mike would do. He prayed.

Mike was floating in a sea of memories and drug induced sleep. The case he was working on... when was it? He knew the streets of the city like the back of his hand. Walking sometimes helped him think. Dan Robbins was turning into a fine partner. Perhaps not the same as Steve, but he had brains that would get him through. He had hoped that Steve would be his replacement in the department, but that bullet in the heart... There was somewhat of relief knowing that that Steve would no longer take the risk... The price was almost too high.

He never thought of himself being a target. He blended into the city because he was part of it. He was one of the many who lived and breathed as part of the city by the bay.
He felt the lead penetrate from the back. It had missed his heart as he fell forward onto the pavement. It was his good fortune that he was in the Mission district at dusk. It was his good fortune that a few people had seen him being shot and one or two actually ran after the bastard. It was his good fortune that a surgical nurse on vacation saw what happened and tried to staunch the bleeding.

He was lucky.

The first two men who were gunned down in a similar fashion, were retired officers in less conspicuous parts of town. Did he look that old?

He sure didn't feel it. He may not be able to run as fast as he did when he was a patrolman, but he could still think. He could still win over some of the ladies and he was respected by those who knew him. He knew he could get the job done.

So now he was here, lying in a bed and although he could not respond, he could hear the voices. He heard one of his former partners, Steve. He heard the music that was his daughter Jeannie. He was proud of both of them. Steve was as much a part of this city as he was. And Jeannie? He could not be prouder of her accomplishments. He wished he could say he had a lot to do with it, but Helen, his wife, was the stable element in her life. He could only be grateful for the woman who had loved him until cancer took her away.

Mike was still fighting. He wanted to die in his sleep and not by some gunshot wound by an unknown perp. He wanted to be able to look that bastard in the eye and say to to him, that he missed by a mile.

It would take more than a bullet to kill Mike Stone. It would take more than a little piece of lead from a gun...

In his mind he was smiling. Too many people needed him. He still had a job do and by God he was going to do it. He just needed a little more rest. He had to allow himself time to heal. In the meantime he could trust the San Francisco Police Department would find the bastard...
Chapter 3

Dan Robbins paced the floor of Mike Stone's office. What had appeared to be two isolated murders of retired police officers, had become a pattern in Mike's eyes. Mike was shot in the Mission district. He had no idea if the perp knew that he had shot a cop still on the force. He did know that with Mike being the next victim, it solidified the pattern. He needed Mike's expertise to find his way to the killer. He may be smart but he was still learning from the master. During the case where Mike's former partner got shot, he had proved his worth not only to Mike but to the department.

When Keller had gotten shot and decided to retire, Mike could have his pick of any man in the department to be his new partner. Dan was surprised Mike chose him, but was glad of the opportunity. He was bound and determined not to disappoint a man that now lay clinging to life.

That was why he was here in this office pouring over the notes that were barely legible. He guessed that Mike thought the only person who would be reading them would be him alone.

He was tired and much as he needed sleep, he had to admit he needed help deciphering the chicken scratch.

It had been barely 12 hours since Mike was shot. He knew Captain Olsen would have contacted Jeannie and Steve by now. He also knew that the shooting of Mike meant there was a pattern somehow, somewhere. He needed to convince others of it.

Mike's instincts were right. Unfortunately Dan felt deep in his gut, that there would be more murders to come before the perp would be caught. Dan did not want Mike's name to become a statistic.

He grabbed the slips of paper and put them in a folder. He needed help by the one person who knew Mike best, next to his daughter.

He needed the help of former Inspector Steve Keller.

He was glad that Steve was at the hospital and if the Mountain would not come to Mohamed...
Chapter 4

Captain Rudy Olsen was having a hard time keeping the shootings and deaths of three police officers under wraps. When Mike had come to him with the possibility of the first two murders being connected, he was hesitant to mark them as serial killings.

San Francisco was a big enough city without being labeled as a city where crime was rampant.

It would add more fuel to the fire, if the public learned that cops were being singled out. It did not matter if the cops were retired or not. Once a cop always a cop. If the San Francisco police department, could not take care of its own, could anyone be safe?

Rudy knew that it would eventually reach the commissioner. He wanted to have some good solid police work to back up whatever theory they had before he would let the press know. He would rather have it come out of that office. He had work to do...

The work included making sure that this connection was under wraps until he had more solid evidence.

It had been barely a day since Mike had got shot. He was fortunate that the papers had not yet gotten wind of the shooting.

He knew that Steve would be watching the room. That was better than any twenty four hour guard. He wanted to keep it under wraps for just a while longer...

When Dan got to the Hospital, it was just the beginning of a beautiful sunrise.

He reached the floor where they were keeping Mike, he saw the exhaustion on Jean's face. He looked into the room where the monitors kept track of Mike's vitals and saw Steve holding the older man's hand.

He walked to the frame of the door and rapped lightly. Steve looked up and slowly rose, stretching as he did so.

"Dan, I don't know who let me know he had been shot, but if it was you, thanks. I didn't realize how much I still cared." Steve said as he walked out the door. He motioned for Dan to follow.

"Steve, it is good to see you. I need your help deciphering Mike's notes. I have gotten so used to him talking with me that I never expected - what I mean is, how is he?" Dan asked.

"I am grateful for some good Samaritans that helped him when he got shot. All I can do is be there for him when he wakes up. Jeannie looks at him and can't get past the bandages. I'm sorry, did you say you needed my help?" he asked. He shook his head to clear it.

"Can you make out this chicken scratch? I am sure he thought... He thought he would be the only one reading it. He thinks that the murders of two retired police officers are connected. Now that he's been shot, it is looking more and more like that is the case." Dan said.

"Have you spoken with the Captain about this?" Steve asked.

"There hasn't been time. I was in the office when it happened. I wanted to make sure... I mean I
meant..." he stumbled out his words.

"Dan it is o.k. Has anybody else made the connection between the two murders? Did Mike tell anyone else? I need to know. It's important. What can you tell me about it?" Steve asked as he steered them out of earshot from Jeannie.

The two men walked down the hall so that nothing could frighten Mike's daughter. Steve found himself starting to take interest in the case, despite not having been on the force for a year. It was the least he could do for Jeannie. It was the least he could do for Mike.
Chapter 5

Rudy managed to get to Mike's room while Dan and Steve were finishing their discussion down the hall.

Steve looked up just as Rudy was going into Mike's room. Dan grabbed a chair and sat next to Jean, so the two men could talk in private.

"Rudy, do you know who called me to let me know Mike was shot? I know it wasn't Jeannie. I heard the machine's message just as I coming through the door. I don't even remember checking my mail. By the time I got here, he was going into surgery." Steve said as they looked at the man they knew to be Mike Stone.

"I'm not sure who called. All I can tell you is that it doesn't matter and that I am glad you're here. Mike had a feeling that two murders of retired cops were related. Now I think his hunch was right. That scares the hell out of me. I don't want another serial killer on the loose. Let alone one who is taking pot shots at San Francisco's finest."

"Rudy, I know that I am no longer on the force, but let me work this with Dan and any of the others you can spare. We have to solve this before another cop gets shot." Steve said.

"You are the only one who can read Mike's notes as well as he can." He said making sure he used the present tense.

"I will check with the Commissioner. I'll see that you get what you need, but it has to be kept quiet. So far the papers have not connected the murders. I will do my best to keep it on the QT. I am beginning to think our killer or killers are targeting the old guard. Mike has become such a fixture in this city that they may have thought he was a retired flatfoot. How is he by the way?" Rudy asked as he took a hard look at his friend.

"Jean is scared to come in the room, but it has yet to be even a day since he was shot. I would like to ask you to have a few friends watch over him. You don't want word to get around that if cops are getting shot, that he was one of them. The less fuss the better. Besides, it would keep Jeannie at ease. I want to stay until they kick me out of here, or until I know he is stable." Steve said to his tired friend.

"Agreed. Steve I am sure that besides Jeannie, he would be glad to see you." Captain Olsen said.

"First words out of his mouth will probably include Buddy Boy. I am still getting used to the respect they give me at the University. I don't care what he calls me as long as he wakes up and soon." Steve said as he ushered Rudy out the door.

Jean heard the commotion and looked up Steve, searching for signs of hope. Steve gave her a smile and walked his former Captain to the elevator.

Jean managed to walk to the doorway and look at the man who had never given up on her. She held her breath and took another step toward him. She heard a noise. She yelped involuntarily.

Steve heard the noise and went to her. He looked in the room and studied his friend. After touching Jean briefly, he went toward the bed.

"Michael. Mike if you can hear me move your hand. Mike, do you remember when I was shot? You told me not to quit on you. Well now it is your turn not to quit on me... Not to quit on Jeannie. It's
your turn now Mike. Mike it is time to wake up." he said as he studied his friend for any sign of movement.

Jean stood at the door frame and held her breath. Her tears were running down her face unabated. She tried to concentrate on her father, but could not help but glance at Steve for any sign of life. She waited and she prayed.
Steve watched as well as heard Mike sigh, and then the machines that were monitoring his vital signs went haywire.

People in white rushed into the room and pushed him aside. He managed to reach a frightened Jeannie, whose eyes were taking in everything that was happening. She wanted to be there and she wanted to run. She was thrust back into time, when her mother was dying. She wanted to curl up into a ball. She wanted all the commotion to stop and for her Dad to hold her and tell her things would be alright. Everything was happening too fast. Everything was happening in an instant and yet it felt like things were moving in slow motion.

Steve reached her before she collapsed. He managed to get an arm around her and steer her out of the room.

Steve held her and waited...

The seconds passed like hours until the crew of white dissipated and one man stood before the two of them.

"I am happy to say, that I think he is coming out of it. The extensive damage done to his body is starting to heal. It won't be easy, but I hope this is the turning point. You can see him now." the doctor said.

"But realize his body has gone through a tremendous shock. Let him rest. Don't be surprised if he if doesn't acknowledge you right off. This is only the beginning of a long process of healing." he added.

Jean nodded and practically ran to her father. The bandages still unnerved her, but she needed to let him she was there and and would not leave until someone would drag her away.

Steve followed at a slower pace. He stood beside her, and hoped that Mike would open his eyes at least once. He wanted to make sure before he went to find the man who shot him.

"Daddy. Daddy I swear if you ever do something like this to me again..." she said as she fought the tears. She did not see his eyes but felt his fingers reach out for her.

Steve put his arm around her before her knees buckled. He steered her toward the chair and moved it by the bedside of her father.

"Admit it... you missed me. But this was a hell of a way to get my attention. Next time all you need to do is pick up the phone." Steve said with a smile of relief.

"Mike I want you to know that Rudy has given me permission to find out who did this to you. For the time being I will be in your office working with Dan and the others to put an end to this. I don't want your name to be on the wall. A lot of people are pulling for you. You concentrate on getting well, and I and the San Francisco police department will do the rest." He said as he waited for a sign of recognition.

Mike was coming out of a fog and felt the remnants of pain from being shot. For a moment, he saw the shadow of Helen. He tried to focus and saw Jeannie's tear stained face. He had no strength to lift a finger. He tried to smile as a tear fell from his eye. He closed his eyes and concentrated. A voice broke through the fog and he recognized it. It was his partner. He had no strength left and faded back
to unconsciousness.

Steve held on to Jean. He was not sure if he was giving support or getting it. He wanted to stay, but more importantly he felt the need to pick up the case where Mike left off. He wanted to protect the man in the hospital bed.

His mind went to the perp that did this to the city's finest. He was afraid that Mike might still be a target.

So far Rudy and the commissioner had kept the incidents separate. But the third was the charm.

Mike's instincts were spot on. The third victim would make it front page news. The two retired cops would not just be names but numbers. Mike would be added to the list. Steve knew that the bastard or bastards who did this would be reading the papers, looking for a third name. If he could arrange for Mike's prognosis to be grim, if not fatal, then perhaps he could save him.

He thought that putting Mike's obituary in the back pages of the paper, then the perp would possibly think he had killed again. If that were the case, he might be saving Mike's life by giving them the satisfaction of them succeeding.

Mike could be put in another wing of the hospital and allowed to heal with as little fanfare as possible.

It was now coming to the end of the first 24 hours since he had been shot in the Mission district. He knew that cops had searched the areas where the other men were shot. He knew they were still under surveillance. He knew that the only man who saw the connections between the two shootings was Mike.

He wanted to see the reports and get to work. He would talk it over with Rudy before he put the wheels in motion. In the meantime, he was glad that people he knew and people who knew Mike would watch over him without a lot of fanfare.

He looked at Jeannie who was now able to sit at Mike's bedside. He kissed her forehead and walked out of the room where Dan was waiting.

"He's slowly coming around. Let's get to work and find out who is killing the city's finest." he said as he grabbed his coat and walked toward the elevator. Time was running out. He did not want to see another cop being gunned down in some obscure nondescript part of the city.
Steve found it annoying that the elevator was slow. He needed to burn off some pent up frustration. He looked at Dan and the stairwell.

"I'll meet you in the parking garage. Whoever gets there first buys the coffee when we get to headquarters." Steve said, and made a dash for the nearest exit. He knew that taking the stairs would clear his head. He had to get his mind off Mike and concentrate on the perp.

Some crazy bastard was knocking off San Francisco's finest. He (or she) was not choosing them at random. They were taking their time. Not one of the retired officers were in uniform. The perp had to have known them by sight or had seen them somewhere before.

Steve wondered if the two retired officers were deliberately picked off. He wondered if choosing Mike was a way of getting the attention of those in authority. He hoped it was just Mike's misfortune of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He needed to see Mike's files of the murders. There had to be a reason for him to suspect a connection.

He waited by the elevator for Dan. He was too wired to drive and had no privileges at headquarters. He was no mood for someone to ticket his wheels or worse yet tow them.

Dan was shocked to see Steve waiting for him. Steve smiled. He still knew the ins and outs of Children's Hospital better than the average joe.

"We will take your car. You can fill me in on the first two murders. When we get to office, I will look further into Mike's notes. In the meantime find a big chalkboard so that we can write down any patterns that we might find. We may even find what Mike formulated in his head. By the way I take my coffee with cream no sugar." Steve said.

"I can't believe you beat me down. Next time you take the elevator and I will take the stairs. Here are some of his notes for you to decipher en route." he said as they made it to the tank Steve was so fond of.

"I have an idea that might save Mike from future attempts on his life. I want to run it by Rudy, but let me test it on you. The only person who saw the link between the murders is Mike. I would not put it past the perp to be reading the papers to see the fruits of his labors. Something tells me that he is waiting for Mike's obit in the paper. I think we should put it in the paper and play dumb. So far no one but Mike has made a connection. If this excuse for a human being sees that San Francisco's finest has not linked the murders, he may wait, or he may pick a more prominent target. We need to keep Mike safe. If he is put under wraps while he gets better, that is a better solution than announcing to the public with a display of uniforms guarding his door." Steve said quietly.

"Steve I think that may be a good idea. The only thing I worry about is the amount of people involved in the ruse. How will you convince Jeannie and Mike's priest to go along with it?"

"Like I said it is only a thought. The one thing that worries me is that his obituary will be a self fulfilling prophecy, so lets keep it between us for now. Agreed?" Steve replied.

"I want to be there when you tell the captain. I am sure it will have be authorized by the higher ups. I'm not even sure Rudy released the shooting to the press." Dan said as he drove into the parking lot.

Steve could only nod. For the time being he needed to do what Mike would do in this situation. He would try to cover all the bases and think of every feasible action.
There was a killer or killers on the loose. Much as it scared him he had to get into the mind of some bastard who had a penchant for killing police officers.

They reached the squad room in silence. Steve had tunnel vision and went to the door that had Mike's name on it. He touched the letters reverently for just a second. Then he sent his mind to work and poured over the files that were on his friend's desk while in the back of his mind, he felt time working against them.

He hoped he could find them before they struck again... Before the names of these officers became numbers in some twisted game of cat and mouse.
Steve managed to kick out Dan out of the office around midnight. He needed some rested eyes to start the new day, and he needed some time alone to look over all three cases.

Dan was only a few years younger than he was. He still needed the experience that came with being in plain clothes. Steve was not surprised that the work harness of being a cop slipped back so easily on his shoulders.

He had accepted the idea of being a teacher. It had different stressors, but none were as critical as what a cop goes through each day. Part of him missed the excitement. Part of him missed the crazy hours and the camaraderie of working with others. Part of him missed carrying a gun in the holster on his hip and the occasional need for a spare wrapped around his ankle. It was rare that he had to pull his weapon, but it gave him a security knowing that when someone was out to kill you because you were a cop, you could defend yourself.

Coming into the squad room and hearing a smattering of applause, told him he was coming home. The only thing missing was Mike.

Mike had become such a presence here. He noticed the coat rack in the corner of the office. It needed something. Steve thought the office was naked without a particular grey fedora.

Steve rubbed his eyes, and took a moment to pray for his friend. He needed to believe that, God willing, the man would return to this office. He knew that Mike had a few good years left. Mike was part of this city more than any other man he knew.

That was why, after looking at the cases, he knew instinctually that the only way to protect him was by printing his obituary in the back pages of the papers. He wanted to make the perp believe that no one in the police department had connected the murders. He wanted Mike to be put in a different room with no fanfare. Maybe they should place him near pediatrics. No one would expect to find a healing cop near the children's ward.

The hardest part would be convincing Jean to go through the ruse. Although it had been years since the death of her mother, this charade would be harder to take. It had not been the first time she had seen Mike injured.

The hardest part would be keeping her away from his bedside. He knew how badly Jean wanted to make sure that someone who knew her father would be there when he woke. If the perp would be watching the burial service, he would know something was wrong if Jean were to go back to the hospital.

He thought of a way to circumvent that problem. He could have the announcement that Mike would not have a formal ceremony. He would be cremated and the ashes distributed at sea. That would give Jean and out when it came to grieving at a grave.

He wanted to run this by Rudy and he wanted Dan to be there when it was discussed and hopefully implemented. Maybe even suggest it to the Commissioner.

His main concern was keeping Mike safe. That meant finding the people who did this before they had another cop in their sight. Knowing Mike the way he did, Mike would put his concern on others before he would put it on himself. He knew that being a cop had that kind of risk. It came with the territory.
Since he had taken over the office of his friend, he had called the hospital twice and spoken with Jeannie once. He tried to remain positive, and did believe that Mike had taken a turn for the better.

He laughed inwardly at Mike kidding him about wanting his office. He was relieved to see his name still on the door. He stared at it for a moment and rubbed his eyes. When he opened them, Dan was there with two coffees and bran muffins. He wondered how Mike was coping with a health nut.

They solidified the plans regarding Mike's demise, before heading to the captain's office. It was then that he realized he was in the same clothes he wore when he learned Mike was shot. He would shower and change en route to see Jean.

He wanted to see her in person to set the plan in motion. The one thing that really frightened him was the time line.

There was a month between the first two murders. Only three weeks had passed between the second one and Mike's being shot. He wanted to believe that it was just a coincidence.

Yeah, he thought to himself. If Mike saw a pattern...
Dan sat in the kitchen of Steve's apartment while waiting for him to get cleaned up before seeing Jean at the hospital. Steve's plan had already been approved by both the captain and the commissioner. All it needed was Jean to o.k. the idea.

He agreed that Jeannie should have the last word on it. He also agreed that she be told in person by Steve. If she approved, they would put Mike's obituary in the early editions of the papers. That being the case, he hoped it would buy them enough time to get into the head or heads of the cop killer(s).

So far they could narrow the number to half of the population of the city. They had no idea of the sex of the perp. There had not been enough time to see if any of the cases the retired officers, and Mike had any connection. There was also the possibility that these killings might be at random to hide the real victim.

The terrifying aspect was that they might not be linked at all, or that the culprits would stop, leaving these murders unsolved.

This was the point were the real police work began. It was long, arduous, and very aggravating. How many cases were worked by these three men? How many were worked with each other? There were too many questions. There were not enough answers. No wonder Steve had sent him out of the squad room. He needed at least one pair of fresh eyes to go through the files and find that connection that Mike knew was there.

If Mike saw the connection, then there had to be one.

Steve allowed himself the luxury of soaking under the hot jets of the shower for one more minute. He still felt the clock ticking down in his mind. The sooner Mike's obituary ran in the paper, the sooner he would be safe, or at least Steve hoped he would. It would buy them some much needed time.

Finding a needle in a haystack would be easier than finding the connection to the three men.

Each cop worked a different part of the city. Each cop had been on the beat a different time. Despite the changing of the times, cops had always walked the beat on the streets. The hairstyles, clothes and rhetoric may have changed, but you could always rely on seeing them among the hustle of the city.

Steve shaved quickly and allowed himself to relax in the comfort of clean clothes. He did not know when he would get the chance to do this again.

He was glad Rudy Olsen let him pick up where Mike left off. Once word got out that the killings were linked, he was sure that all hell would break loose. It was his job to work with the others and to keep the connections under wraps for as long as possible. It was his job to make sure that another cop would not become a target. It was his job to narrow down the possibilities to a precious few before word got out that there was a serial killer, and the killer or killers were aiming at the cops who protect the city.

It was his job to protect the man laying in a hospital bed, that had taught him the meaning of to serve and protect.

Time was ticking...
Jean had not strayed from Mike's bedside unless a team of white went in and cleaned her father up. He had not wakened, but there were signs that he was fighting to wake and be among the land of the living.

He moaned softly and Jean was there to hold his hand. Occasionally she got a brush of his fingers over hers. She could not help the tears that might fall on those hands who had held her so often.

She never stopped praying.

She was startled when Steve showed up the following morning. He brought her coffee and an egg sandwich. He nodded toward Dan and had him switch places with her.

Once in the hall, Steve put his arms around her.

"Honey, I am glad he is slowly improving. There is nothing I want more than to stay with you, but we are hunting a killer. I don't want another cop to have his name on that wall. I need to ask you to do something that may be the hardest thing to do in your life." Steve said as he found some seats in the hallway.

"Let the other foot drop. What could be worse than sitting there waiting for any sign that he will wake up? His death?" she said.

"As a matter of fact, it is his death that I want to talk about. In order to keep him safe and buy us more time to find out who did this to him, I thought of a way to keep him safe. With your permission, I want to place his obituary in the papers. It is the only way I can think of to keep him safe and to let whoever did this to him think he has succeeded. It may buy us more time to catch him."

"You are kidding, right?" she asked.

"The clock is ticking. It was a month between the first and second murder. It was three weeks between the second cop and Mike. If the papers get wind of Mike's shooting at the mission district and report that he is still alive, then the person or persons we are after may try again at the hospital. I don't want that to happen. I want to move Mike out of this ward, and let him play dead while we find out who did this. There is still time to put it in the next editions of the papers. That may give us enough time to find a lead. I know what I am asking..." Steve said as he held her hand.

"I have run it past Captain Olsen and he is getting it approved by the commissioner, but if you say no, it will go no further than this. It means that people will give you sympathy and you must keep up the ruse. I know I am asking a lot, but I want to keep Mike safe. This is the only way I can think of to do it." Steve said without letting go of her hands, and looking her in the eye.

"You still have a cop's instincts. If the situation were reversed... Just don't make it a self fulling prophecy. I am counting on YOU to keep him safe. Before you do, run it by him..." she said as she stood up. She led him to the room and watched as he traded places with Dan.

Dan vacated the chair and looked at Steve, seeing the nod that would set the plan in motion. He took Jean out of the room to let the two men have some privacy.

"Mike I need to talk to you. Ever since I heard you were shot, I knew that the only way to find out who was responsible was by keeping you safe. I spoke with Olsen and with Jean. Mike the only way I know how to keep you safe, is by putting your obit in the papers. Let me know if you agree." Steve
said as he touched Mike's hand and looked at his face.

Somewhere in the recesses of Mike Stone's mind he heard what Steve was saying and smiled. That smile made it to his face... just barely. He still needed time to heal... He rested, and let Steve and the others do what he couldn't... find the killer
Chapter 10

Steve talked with Rudy and the Commissioner. They finalized the details and leaked to the press that Mike was dead. Much as Steve wanted to tell the others in the squad room that Mike was alive, he dare not risk Mike's life. Steve was not taking any chances. As far as he knew everyone was a suspect. This included cops. The less people knew about Mike's actual condition, the better. Steve figured that when the whole thing was over, they could blame him and he would go back to teaching. Mike's life was on the line and he did not want to take any risks.

He needed Rudy to tell everyone in the squad room, that Mike was dead and that for the time being Rudy was assigning him to the case. This meant that Mike's office was going to be his. Before he took the job teaching, Mike had razzed him about wanting the office. Steve had never envisioned sitting in that chair on a permanent basis. It was Mike's chair. Just like the coat rack needed that grey fedora he favored.

There were some grumbles throughout the squad room when Rudy announced the assignment. It also meant that when it came to cases of the murdered policemen, Steve would have final say. He had been off the force for barely a year and he was sure there would be some resentment for him taking over the office. It didn't matter. Some one or more than one was killing cops.

That perp was out there planning his next move, while the entire police force was concentrating every possible suspect, and there was only one in a million. Steve wondered about the sense of power he had having gunned down three of San Francisco's finest.

The perp was anonymous. Not one person had seen him pull out a gun and fire. He did it at times when people were centered on their own personal tasks. With a city as vast as this, there is no way to cover the streets.

Each cop was shot at a different location, weeks and hours apart.

The first was shot by a 32 caliber at approximately seven in the evening. The street traffic had dwindled down to just a few people. No one had heard the gunshot. No one had found the body until the following morning. Had he been in the nearby park, his body may not have been found until much later. He was an isolated incident. His name was John Banks. He had retired from the force six years earlier. He was not yet a number, he was a name.

The second officer was shot at five in the morning and on the opposite side of the city. He was found within an hour of being shot. It was near a BART station. He was one of the loners that loved to walk a night beat. He lived close to where he worked. Although he was retired for two years, his body was accustomed to that rhythm. His wife had died not long after he retired. His name was Ben Adams. Because he was shot at a different time, and in a different part of the city, his murder was considered an isolated incident... Until Mike Stone saw something that connected the two.

Maybe it was because the murders came across his desk. Maybe it was because both of the murders were unsolved. Maybe because they were cops, Mike was looking at them with different eyes.

Steve knew that Mike was working the murders with Dan when he got shot. He could not take the risk of anyone knowing Mike was still alive. It had to be on a need to know basis.

Mike would often walk various parts of the city to help him think. In all the years he had lived here, he had become a part of it. Although New York City was considered the city that doesn't sleep, San Francisco could run a close second. Mike loved nearly every aspect of this city. That is why when he
was shot, the bullet entered from behind.

Steve had been poring over the files of the murders since yesterday afternoon. He was still looking for a connection and was even pulling the arrest records of the retired officers. They all were from different classes of the academy. They may have met in passing, but that was unlikely. Banks worked Chinatown and Adams worked the business district. Steve looked at the autopsy reports. Both cops were shot with a 32, but the rifling was different. It did not take much to re bore a gun. Hell, all you had to do was run a piece of metal through the barrel and it could pass as a different gun. That is if you felt like using the same weapon.

The perp was smarter than the average bear. That was why Steve needed to know if the shooting of Mike was pre-planned. Did the person who shot Mike know that Mike was working the other two murders? For that reason, did he know the cops he was shooting?

There were so many variables. The perp had the advantage over the police because he knew what his (or her) next target was. He had all the answers and Steve did not have any. He needed time to think. He needed to ask Mike if he had a clue as to who shot him. He knew it was a miracle that Mike was alive. He did not realize how much he had missed this. But he was not sure if he was up to the challenge.

Could he pull out a weapon and fire like he had before? Could he cover another cop, like he had Mike for all those years? He still needed to keep the pretense that Mike was dead so that he could find out who pulled the trigger.

Putting Mike on the pediatric ward was in part self serving. His niece was being treated for cancer, so if anyone would check the phone logs, it would appear that he was keeping tabs on family.

While waiting for the paperwork to be processed, he tried to get into the mind of the perp that was doing this. Part of him had a fear that it may be a cop. The more he thought about it, the more realistic it became.

In the commotion that followed Mike getting shot, there was not one single description of the perpetrator that did this.

Looking at the files of the other two murders, he found that both men were shot at different times of the day, either the early morning before dawn, or (as in Mike's case) at dusk. In all three cases, people were going home or to work.

In a city as big as this, it was common to see pedestrians self absorbed with personal business.

In a city like this you had to make your own space regardless of where you were. People had a tendency to take for granted familiar structures. So many city dwellers were self absorbed. Peripheral vision varied from one person to the next. Any number of people could give descriptions of the same person that would differ with height, race and hair color.

Because of the times and locations of the shootings, few were willing to come forward. If it had not been for that critical care nurse in the Mission district, Mike could easily have been the third victim.

Steve wanted nothing more that to go to the hospital and talk with Mike. He wanted nothing more than to see his friend. If anything he wanted Mike's fedora where it needed to be. He used that as an excuse to get out of the tension filled squad room.

He ignored the glares and nodded toward Dan. Once he decompressed, he might see what he was missing... what Mike had seen all along. In the meantime be hoped that Dan's perspective would give
him a different insight when he got back.
Chapter 11

Steve found himself at the hospital. He was there as they were declaring Mike dead and admitting Mickey Sokulavich into pediatrics.

He had a valid reason to be there. His niece was being treated for cancer. It is a hard thing to see when adults get the disease, but she was only seven years old. She was diagnosed with Leukemia only a month earlier. What was once a vibrant thriving little girl who had her uncle wrapped around her finger, was slowly turning into a fragile waif with thinning hair.

He could not believe that this child was going through treatments that adults had a hard time facing. Each time he saw her, she had a smile that was meant for him. His sister and her husband had brought her here because of the success they had in these types of cancers. He had offered them shelter until they could find a place of their own. It was difficult living with two other people, but he would not have it any other way.

Mike being shot meant that he would not be home at a decent hour, if at all. Stacy was his younger sister, and he had always looked out for her. Since their parents died, they had no one but each other. He suddenly realized how fragile life was. He would make every effort to help in any way he could. His beautiful little niece had every right to live. Children's Hospital was known for their success rate. He would be able to slip into Mickey's room while seeing his niece.

He would make an effort to see her as the case progressed. He wanted nothing more than to see the perp or perps find their way into a courtroom. He looked forward to putting them away. More importantly he wanted to find them before another cop lost his life.

He knew that it had been less than a day, but he was glad that he started to see a pattern forming. He hoped and prayed that it was not a cop, but that was becoming more likely.

The two retired police officers were in plain clothes and were where they had been when they were walking the beat. It may have been probable that they were recognized with or without their uniform. It may have been possible the killer had taken his time.

The thing that confused him was Mike being shot. The first thing that came to mind is that Mike was not supposed to be there at that time, at all in fact because he was no longer walking the beat, and hadn't for some time. Steve had looked at Mike's history, and he had never patrolled that area on a regular basis. Steve could only surmise that one of two things was possible. Either the perp was aiming for someone else, or the perp was getting more brazen with who he was killing. One other possibility stood out. The perp knew Mike and saw the opportunity...

The times between the murders was something else to consider.

There always had to be a first murder. No one would make a connection until more murders started taking place. The second murder took place in the morning and the body was found within the hour of its occurrence. No eye witnesses, but there still might be someone who heard or saw something. Now that some time had elapsed after the murder, it might be worthwhile to check the place out again.

He was tired. He went into Mickey's room. The painted balloons seemed out of place. On one of the chairs was the grey fedora.

Steve touched it reverently. He took a moment and sat by his friend.
"Mike it is my duty to tell you that Rudy and the Commissioner have informed the squad room and the papers that you died during the night. The one thing I want from you is for you to make that premature. Understand me. Mike that should be the farthest thing from your mind. I want your death to be an exaggeration. I promised Jeannie. I promised Jean that you would pull through and we would solve these murders. San Francisco's finest will solve this before another cop gets shot. Help me keep that promise. I need you Mike. The city needs you. I have to go, but I am waiting for you to call me 'buddy boy' again. Don't quit on me. Jeannie or this city. I will give you your hat back when you wake. Wish me luck." Steve said.

He touched the man's shoulder and said a little prayer. He needed to find the bastard who did this. He needed to find him yesterday. He could feel the clock ticking. Unfortunately the only way he could think of, meant doing something that put too many at risk... But considering the killer had too many advantages, he was running out of actions to take.
Steve had one more thing to do before he went back to Mike's office. He had to see Jeannie. He knew she couldn't bear to be there when they declared Mike dead, but he also knew it had to be done. Mike had always told him to trust his gut and his gut told him that this was the best thing to do.

When he got to the house in the early morning hours, he was not the least bit surprised to see the lights on. He walked up the stairs and before he had a chance to knock on the door, Jean opened it and collapsed in his arms. He held her in the doorway for what seemed like hours. He managed to usher her into the house and get her on the couch.

"So did you see Mickey? And you know I am not talking about a mouse." she said trying hard to add some brevity to the situation.

"Jean, if there were any other way I could think of to keep your dad safe... I just came from seeing Mickey. He hasn't woke up yet, but his color is returning I know that he is fighting to come back to us. Honey I know how hard this is for you because it is so hard for me. I swear to you..." Steve said. He was afraid to say more because he could not let himself think of the day that this ruse would become a reality.

"Steve, tell me this will work. Tell me that in the coming days, he will be able to stand with you and Rudy and the Commissioner and say that news of his death was greatly exaggerated." She said as she allowed her to be comforted for a moment longer.

"Jean, he is my mentor, my friend, and no matter what, my partner. I just feel that time is against us and there has to be something that will lead us to whoever did this. I am having Dan go over the files and I have pulled the records of the cops that were killed. Your father is one of the best cops I know. I will do everything in my power to make sure that we will find who did this and see justice done." Steve said.

She pulled away from Steve and went to the coffee on the stove. Was it only a day or two that she had gotten coffee for her dad without thinking? She intentionally fixed a cup of coffee the way he liked it and gave it to Steve.

"Here's a cup of joe that will get you through the rest of the night. Steve, this may sound corny, but do this for me, do this for Mike, and do it for the City." she said as he got up and walked toward her.

"Do I look like I need it that bad?" he said as he smiled and took a sip. It was hot, not too sweet and it was black. It was not to his liking but he thought he would get used to it, until Mike could take back his office.

"Tell Dan I said hi. I'll be here, twiddling my thumbs. If you hear or learn anything..."

"I will let you know before the words touch the report." He said as he swallowed the rest of the coffee.

Steve headed back to the squad room as if by rote. The city shined at night. The street lights were diamonds in the dark of the sky. How many times had he burned the midnight oil with Mike? How many times had he gotten a call to report to the office at three in the morning? Much as he hated to admit it, he missed this. He stopped himself from getting further distracted. He wanted to hit the ground running, once he got back. He expected a few nasty looks, but he knew he would spend the night along with Dan reading reports, looking for something... Something that Mike may have seen
but not had the time to scribble on a note...

Mike was walking the mission district to get a different perspective on what appeared to be two random murders. The first to come across his desk was a retired cop who had been killed the night before his body was found. He vaguely remembered meeting the man a some police function. His name was John Banks. He was one of the faceless cops that patrolled a beat, night after night. He kept the city safe during the 50's and was known by everyone and forgotten by everyone. He gave the constituency peace of mind by showing up in his uniform and being there to keep the peace. He had no family, and had retired a few years back in part because he was getting too old for the job.

The initial investigation had led Mike to believe that it was a random shooting. No shell casings were found at the scene of the crime. His body had been found where he had fallen. He had laid on the sidewalk from dusk to dawn. He was shot in the back. The bullet was a thirty two caliber. Whoever shot him, knew how to point a gun. At least it was quick. Mike made a note to go to the funeral, but he was not sure if any of the higher brass would attend.

In some ways Banks would be just a number on the growing list of homicides. Although it was one of there own, with very little to go on, Mike was sure that another case would take precedence.

That is until a few weeks later when another retired police officer was killed in the early morning hours in the business district. Ben Adams was a widower who had walked the same beat for over fifteen years. The day was just starting. People were on their way to work. Papers were being delivered and the sky was just starting to change color for the day. Everyone was going about their usual routine. The shot rang out and not a single person could give a description of the shooter. Not one person had seen a thing. He and Dan had staked out the street for a couple of days to see if there were familiar faces that could have seen anything, but when they were questioned they either gave a different description, or all they saw was the gun and not the face.

He knew there was something there. He had convinced Dan and the Captain that there was more to this. Something told him that this was the beginning of a string of murdered cops..He just didn't have any proof. He could not tie the two cases together based on a hunch. His instinct told him that there was more to go on than just the same caliber used in both shootings. Ballistics didn't match, but a thirty two could easily be carried and the rifling changed.

Mike needed to get out and clear his head. He found himself lost in thought when he heard the shot. He tried to twist in that direction and felt the lead enter his back. He knew what damage could be done and fell where he stood. The pain radiated outward and he could not even put his hands out to protect himself.

He drifted. He felt everything go black. He heard voices. He thought he heard Steve and Rudy. He sensed the presence of Jeannie. He was tired. His body needed rest, but his mind would not shut down. There was something he had to remember. It was something he needed the others to know. In the last moments before he fell, he managed to notice something. What was it? He needed to remember... It would have to wait. His body demanded rest.

His eyes opened briefly and he smiled as he drifted away on a pink ballloon.
Chapter 13

Steve went to office and saw a skeleton crew. Dan was reading the reports of the two retired officers once more. He kept thinking that if he studied them once more, he would find a link that no one had seen before. He knew he was a good cop, but he also knew that he had a lot more left to learn.

When he heard Mike had been shot, he saw a connection that Mike had told him had to be there. He knew that he would be spinning his wheels at the hospital and wanted to get a headstart. He had no idea it would lead to him working with Steve again.

The last time he saw Steve, he was getting ready to teach.

This was the part of the job that piqued his curiosity. It was like a jigsaw puzzle. You just needed to know which of the pieces fit. You also had to find the piece amidst objects that looked like pieces.

Mike and Steve had more experience at knowing what to look for, but that did not stop him from trying to help. He found another link that the others may not have seen. All of them at one time or another had medals of commendation. All these men had received recognition that made the news and their pictures were printed up in the newspapers. It may not seem like much but it was another link. It could also mean that there were more cops that would be targets.

Maybe Mike was not such a random target after all. He could be on a list that the perp had and when he saw Mike walking the Mission district, he saw the opportunity and took it.

Maybe, just maybe, the times of the shootings were coincidental. The person (or persons) doing the killings could have seen the opportunity and nabbed it.

Dan went to records and started digging into the obituaries. John Banks may not have been the first... He may have been the first that the police had recognized. And it wasn't the police that caught it, it was Mike. He looked over the homicides of the last five years. He narrowed it down to police officers who walked a beat. He noticed the pattern went deeper than first thought. He found two more murders that were considered to be unsolvable and separate incidents. They involved cops that had received commendations and had their pictures in the paper. It may not seem like much, but it may be a start. The murders took place a year ago and eight months respectively. No one would know to look for a pattern, until Mike saw it.

Mike got shot before he had the time to dig further. Mike may have been a random target.

Dan needed to get copies of the reports of the other two officers. It would have to wait a few hours.

In the meantime he had to wait and check the cases one more time...

Dan was startled out of sleep by a hand on his shoulder.

"This used to be my desk. Sorry I took so long, but there were things that I needed to take care of. Did you find anything?" Steve asked and he handed him a cup of coffee. He knew it was not Dan's drink of choice, but it would have to do, considering the circumstances.

Dan rubbed his eyes and took the proffered cup. He took a sip and winced.

"It's an acquired taste, but it does help on the long nights. I would have brought you carrot juice, but I did not know where to get it at this hour. I checked on our friend Mickey, and he was resting when I left. The hardest part will be when he wakes and sees the walls painted with a circus theme. I don't
think that will help with his spirits. I am hoping they list him as stable instead of critical. So anything new?" Steve asked.

"As a matter of fact, I think that John Banks may not have been the first cop to be murdered. Mike did not know to look in the back files. I think our perp has been doing it for quite some time. Something may have happened to speed up his timetable. Mike didn't have the time to find this out himself, before he got shot. I think he would have."

"Don't be so sure, Mike is a good cop, but he surrounds himself with good people. The only reason he thought the cases were related may be that they came across his desk. Do you know who the other cases were assigned to?" Steve asked.

"No but I planned on going to records once they open. Do you really think that these murders were done at random?" Dan asked.

"We won't know for sure until we do some more digging. When you do, go back five years. There are too many homicides in this city to solve every one of them. If our perp targeted retired police officers to start, that may mean that the connection would have gone unnoticed. He may have started with a different weapon. He could have changed caliber... Banks was found near a park. He may have changed his M.O. or perhaps gotten more brazen. He shot Mike at dusk. I am beginning to thing Mike being shot was merely him being at the wrong place at the wrong time. We need to find out who walked the beat in that district, Maybe the perp was looking for someone else and Mike just happened to be there."

"Dan I want to thank you for doing such good work. Mike was right about you being smart. With the groundwork you have done we may yet find this bastard before he does it again, When you are ready we will start using the chalkboard. Our unenviable task is to narrow down the field of suspects from a million or so to preferably a select few. The only way I know to do that is to find the similarities between the murders. Mike said you have to get into their heads, I really don't want to do that. Unfortunately we need to understand why, Once we have that, we may be able to find him." Steve said.

He walked into Mike's office and placed the grey fedora on the coat rack. It was as much a part of this office as Mike was. It would give Steve no greater pleasure, than to give up that chair and see his friend and partner back behind this desk.
Chapter 14

Steve and Dan went back five years in the open murder investigations involving police officers. Mike had been onto something. The reason the pattern had gone unnoticed was because the murders were too sporadic. The initial murders were five months apart. Steve wondered if they went even further back, would they find more. He felt the clock ticking louder than before.

The killer had sped up the time table. Something happened to lessen the times between murders. Surely the killer who had taken his time to kill the other officers would enjoy the fact that the police had not found the connection between the murders. He had to have been watching the news and reading the papers. Steve wondered if he enjoyed playing cat and mouse.

The murders were were too random. Granted that when you looked at the cases individually, you would not see a pattern, but when you put them together...

The first target, as near as they can tell, was a man in his seventies. He was a cop who retired and lived out in Napa Valley. The report said that he had been out at sunrise, getting a paper and coffee. No one had seen the shooter. It was still too early in the day. The sun had just started to rise. Steve read the papers.

It was the man's usual ritual to start his day in this fashion. He had retired with honors. He was living off his pension and had gone to help with the family business. The poor man never knew what hit him. Because it was outside the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Police Department, it made barely a mention in the papers. It was barely a mention of it and it was in the back pages.

Dan saw it. Steve and Mike would easily have missed it. Dan knew what he was looking for and his keen eye may just give them the edge to find the killer sooner than later.

This 'supposedly' first case, gave them impetus to search more thoroughly.

In all, they found a total of fifteen cases, spanning over five years. The space would vary from a few months to three weeks. The timing was erratic. No wonder no one could find a pattern. The only way they found it, was because they were looking for it.

The only reason they were looking for it, was because Mike had seen the thread.

Mike.

Mike who was now fighting for his life under the name of Mickey Solukavich.

Steve needed the break and took the opportunity to see his niece. He had Dan go through the files once more while he went to the hospital.

Jeannie was getting frustrated. She was glad there was going to be no formal service for Mike, but that only meant that she had to stay away from the hospital. Steve told her he could not risk her coming and going to see him after Mike was dead. He could not be sure that she was being watched.
She was scared for her father... She was scared that he would wake up in unfamiliar surroundings and not know anyone. She gathered up her white clothes and her white sneakers. She would go into the hospital as a nurse and head toward pediatrics. She might even check on Steve's niece while she was at it.

She knew that if she got caught, she would hear the riot act, but her instincts told her to be near her father when he woke up for the first time.

Her ruse worked. She smiled. She felt like she was going under cover.

She went into his room. She saw the painted walls and the balloons. She remembered growing up. On one particular birthday, her father had come home with a dozen helium balloons. He peered out from under them. He hugged his daughter and her mom was beaming ear to ear. She smiled. They could not have picked a better room.

She drew the chair closer to the bed and touched his hand.

"Daddy, I just had to see you. I didn't want you to wake up alone. I didn't want you to be scared. Daddy I need you to wake up. Daddy, Steve is taking over the case. He is helping Dan and they're going to find out who did this to you. Daddy, I will be here as long as you need me, but you have to wake up soon because I am scared." She said as she closed her eyes.

When she opened them Steve was touching her shoulder.

"Jeannie what are you doing here?" He asked as she looked up at him.

"I knew your niece was here, and thought because he was in the same ward... Please Steve, let me be here when he wakes up. I don't want him to be alone and not know what is going on. I need to be with him, so that he knows." she said

"I understand Jeannie, but I cannot risk someone seeing you here. I will give you more time, but if he doesn't wake, I need you to go home. I need a few minutes alone with him. Go get some coffee and I will be here." Steve said as he sate in the vacated chair.

When he heard the door shut, he spoke softly.

"Mike, Dan found a lead. We went back five years. Whoever did this to you has been busy. Dan has traced the murders back five years at least. The reason we did not see it is because different teams have got them and he is sporadic when he kills. Mike i need you to wake up. I need to know what you saw no matter how insignificant. Come on Mike. It is time to open those baby blues and give me hell. Mike I know you are fighting to get back to us I need you to know that we are going to find this bastard, no matter what. We need to find him before he goes after another cop. Anything... Anything you know will help us find him. I want to get the bastard that did this to you. I don't expect to understand the reasons. I just want to stop him before he does it again." Steve said.

Before he could say another word, Jeannie came in with coffee. She handed him a cup and touched her father's hand.

"He's warmer. Steve I think he is trying to wake up.

Mike heard her voice, and started to moan.

"Jeannie?" He rasped.

"Thank God. Mike it's Steve. I'll be back in a few hours. Jeannie will take care of you." Steve said.
He wiped a tear from his eye. He needed to tell Rudy and Dan. He could not wait to tell Rudy there was a break in the case. He was glad to see his friend become coherent. Now if he could find out who did this to him and to the rest of San Francisco's finest. He said a silent prayer, hugged Jean and left the room with a sense of hope that he didn't have before.

The clock may be ticking, but he felt they were getting closer. It was only a matter of time.
Steve had just spent the last two hours with Dan, Captain Rudy Olsen, and eventually the Police Commissioner explaining what Dan and he had discovered. When you looked at the files, each of them had a vague signature of the perp. When you looked at them searching for a link, there were three connections that stood out.

First and most importantly was they were all cops at one time or another. The youngest was thirty four years old, coming back after an injury he received while doing his duty. He had been back on the job for almost a week when he was shot once more, this time fatally. It was in the early evening hours... He was walking the streets at dusk. The lights of the city glimmered, making it come alive in the dark when he was shot in the back. No witnesses; no one even heard the gunshot. He was found when he failed to report in. The gun was a thirty two caliber and did not match any of the other murders.

He was the fifth victim. No one had seen the connection because not one of the murders was sent to the same investigators, and the work load was such that after the leads dried up, there was always another case on the desk.

Even the connection of the type of gun was overlooked because of the timing between murders and there were too many thirty two calibers on the street.

This particular perp made the murders appear unrelated. All the officers received commendations for their work in the line of duty. But that was not noted because the space between their commendation and murder were considered insignificant. Some had received their commendations early in their careers. Others had maybe a week to enjoy it before they were killed. The problem was the killer was not making a straight line.

Steve knew that they were facing someone who knew how the department worked. He tried to get into the mind of the killer. The perpetrator could have something deeply personal against the men he killed. He could not pick women as his victims. No matter how obscure, they would be noticed because of the gender. People had a tendency to notice more when a woman was shot as opposed to a man. That was why Steve knew the perp was paying attention to the obituaries. All the bastard had to do was slip up once regarding the rifling of a thirty two and they would be a step closer to getting him. He wanted to check the slugs again. No one would pay attention to a slug shot four years ago and one from a month ago. No one would think to compare the two cases.

Somewhere in the recesses of Steve's mind was the nagging possibility of their killer being a cop. He was praying he was wrong. There was also the annoying possibility that it could be an ex-con planning revenge. He knew he had to dig further. There may be a tie to a few of them: some tie to a case that any number of the officers worked on and because the time had passed, it was overlooked. He wanted to get started on that once he got to the office.

For the first time since he had seen Mike in the hospital, unconscious, he was optimistic. 'My God' he thought to himself, He was thinking like a cop. It hadn't taken long to get back into the swing of things. He hadn't even minded the lack of sleep. He realized how much he missed it.

Teaching gave him a different thrill. Showing young minds how to think was important, but nothing could replace the sense of accomplishment you got from solving a case.

They were now no closer to finding the bastard that did this than when they found the connection. They dare not acknowledge that there was a serial killer on the loose. Worse yet one who was
targeting cops. How could the city protect the constituency if they could not protect their own. This had to be on a need to know basis to avoid panic in the city.

That aspect that scared Steve the most was that the killer just might go after another cop, before they could catch him. It scared the hell out of him because it could be any cop that had had his picture in the paper after receiving a commendation from the past twenty years.

The killer had the edge because although some of the elite in the department knew what was going on, they were still no closer to identifying the perp who was killing cops.
Mike swore he could hear voices, but he wasn't sure. He thought he was in some horrible nightmare. Images flooded through him. He tried to remember what he was doing last. He remembered being in the office with his new partner, Dan Robbins, and he had found a link between two supposedly unrelated murders. They were retired cops who were shot walking the streets they used to walk when they were on the beat.

He tried to remember.

He drifted. Images crossed his mind. Images of his wife, Helen: of seeing her walk down the aisle... of giving birth to their daughter. He recalled being at her bedside when she took her last breath. He remembered learning that life goes on and how he had to be both mother and father to their daughter Jeannie. Images flashed of his first partner and their idea to go undercover searching for the perp that was killing winos. Images of making the rank of Lieutenant. Images of Jeannie... of walking the beat... of Steve being shot...

He fought for consciousness. He felt a hand holding his.

"Daddy? Hi Mike, it's me, Jeannie. Oh Daddy please open your eyes. I really need for you to wake up. You have been out for so long. For a while there, we thought you weren't going to make it." She stood by his bedside and took hold of his hand. She wanted to wrap her arms around him, but was afraid of hurting him.

"Jeannie?" he whispered.

She hit the call button for the nurse. She wanted to make sure that it was real. She looked at the walls with balloons and smiled. She wanted to call Steve and let him know.

"I'll be right back. Let the nurses take care of you and I will be back Daddy I promise."

Steve was starting to see double. He had been at this for almost forty eight hours and knew that even the most seasoned cop could not live on coffee forever. He was getting ready to kick Dan out of the office and to pick up where they left off in the morning, when he got the call.. Dan was in the office going over reports and saw Steve's face brighten;

"I'll be there as fast as I can. Dan is in the office and I am sure that he will be glad of the news too." Steve said as he put a hand over the mouthpiece and mouthed the words, 'he's awake' to Dan.

Steve nodded toward the door and urged him out of the office.

"I'll see you in about eight hours. We both need the sleep. And clear heads are better than tired ones.
I will go sit with Jeannie and give her your regards." Steve said as he turned out the light and locked the office.

"Make sure you get some sleep as well. If you want I will bring carrot juice and some bran muffins." Dan replied.

Steve nodded and tried to give the appearance of exhaustion while adrenalin surged through his being.

He wanted to smile but under the circumstances, did not dare. Mike was 'dead'.

The streets of the city shined at night. Steve managed to control himself as he drove to Children's hospital. He managed to get to the hospital by ten. He forced himself to walk nonchalantly and was surprised to see Jeannie waiting for him.

"Honey is Mike o.k.?' Steve asked.

"He woke and he recognised me. I called the for the nurse and they are checking on him. Steve, Steve he has to get better.

"Jeannie, it may take a little time, but he will come back to us. He is part of this city. If it weren't for him, we would not have linked all the murders." Steve said as he put his arms around her and waited. He was relieved to know that Mike had woke, but he would not relax until he saw him for himself.

The doctor came out and smiled.

"He is out of the woods. It will take a while, but the worst is over." he said with a tired voice.

"Is he up for a few questions?" Steve asked. His mind went by rote. He knew then and there that he was a cop again.

"Steve don't. He needs to rest. He almost died."

"I know Jeannie, but the killer is still out there. We need to get him off the streets before he does it again. We need to get him before the news media gets wind of these murders being tied together. If they learn about what has been happening, there would be panic, and the killer may speed up his timetable. Honey, if the situation were reversed, Mike would be doing the same of me. I promise, I won't push and I would like you to be there. Then, I want to take you home. I think we both could do with some sleep." Steve said as he quietly her toward Mike's room.

Mike loved the circus and even had a make up was made just for him during one the cases they were on. Steve saw the paintings as if for the first time and thought how appropiate it was to see the festive walls. For some odd reason it seemed appropriate.

He put Jean back in the chair she had vacated earlier. He looked down at his partner and studied his face.

There were a few more lines here and there but it was the face that he had known for years. His eyes were closed but when he heard the commotion, he opened them up.

"Steve you are going to be o.k. You were shot. You were shot in the chest. How?!? What happened to me? Where is my hat?" Mike said as he ran his hand over head.

"Mike, your hat is in your office. You've been shot... You were walking in the mission district. Mike you had found a link between a couple of murders that involved retired police officers. Mike, you
were shot with the same caliber gun as the other two cops. I was called and I sat there beside you after you got out of surgery. Mike do you understand?" Steve asked as he looked for some sign of recognition.

Mike's eyes focused. He barely nodded his head and smiled.

"Mike, the cases of two retired police officers came across your desk. They were a little less than a month apart. Both cops were shot walking their old beats and the slugs retrieved from the bodies were a thirty-two caliber. You saw a pattern, and you were working with Dan when you were shot. Rudy has let me take over the investigation. Dan and I have gone back five years and have linked fifteen murders, but we don't have usable evidence to tie them together. Mike, before you go back to sleep, do you remember anything that happened to you? Anything at all?" he asked as Jean took his hand and touched his face.

"I am sorry, Steve. Maybe tomorrow. Take Jeannie home. I missed you Buddy Boy. Let me sleep." he said as he squeezed Jean's hand and closed his eyes.

Steve breathed a sigh of relief. He looked down at his mentor and partner and touched his arm to make sure he was real. He looked at Jeannie and took her hand.

"Wait here. There is one thing I need to do." he said as he walked down the hall.

He came to the room that held a little girl. On a cot beside her was a young man, only a few years older than his sister. The man's hand was touching the child in sleep. Steve touched the window pane and walked back to Jean.

She had watched him in silence and could not stop the tear from falling. She wanted nothing more than to go home, and to know that Steve was resting on the couch in the living room. Morning would come soon enough.
Chapter 17

Jeannie leaned into Steve as he drove her home. He knew that the charade was wearing thin, but he knew in his heart that this was the best way to keep Mike safe. There were times when Mike had risked his life for others, but this was the first time he was afraid for his friend. Until he heard him talk... Until he was sure that he was going to make it..., Steve had been holding his breath without realizing it.

He parked the car, and looked at her face. It was serene. He felt a tenderness for her and gained strength and comfort from her. He hated disturbing her, but he needed to get her back where she belonged. Tonight he was too relieved and too tired to do anything else.

He nudged her awake and followed her up the stairs. He took the keys from her hands and unlocked the door. He walked through the house to make sure that nothing was wrong and handed her the keys.

"Goodnight Jeannie, get some sleep." he said as he turned to leave.

"You need some too. That sofa is comfortable and right now it has your name on it. Rest and I will get you up in the morning. You will be able to catch an extra hour if you stay here. Please, I will feel safer knowing you are here." she said as he turned away. She touched his hand and could not hide the tears of relief.

Steve took her to the couch and held her.

The next thing he knew he saw the changing in the sky that signaled another dawn about to break. He cursed and tried to reposition Jean so that she would not wake.

He felt the knots in his muscles and swore under his breath.

He kissed Jean on the forehead and got out the door before the rush hour traffic would start. Despite the lack of sleep, he was optimistic. Mike was alive and they were one step closer to finding the killer.

When Steve got to the office, Dan was there looking over the files yet again. He had written names on the chalk board. All the names were categorized by age. He included Mike's name on the list as well. They separated the murders into three groups that he could see out of the sixteen.

The first group was categorized by age. There was a small group that was seventy and older. There was another group that started at fifty and up, and the last were the youngest, That one contained the fifth victim who was thirty four.

The next category was those with families. Although this may seem irrelevant, they wanted to cover all the bases. Most of the men had families. There were a few who were widowers (like Mike), and then there were the loners.

The police who had families were the largest group. Steve did not want to investigate this route if at all possible. He hated the part of the job where you had to talk with the families about the death of their loved ones. He had seen first hand how some police officers would treat the family of an
unsolved cases. Some cops would berate the family members as if they were suspects involved in the crime. It was bad enough to lose a loved one, but to be treated as the culprit... He remembered far too well when he was asked about the death of his parents in a freak accident. The police treated it as a crime scene, not the accident that it was Until the reports came in that it was an accident, the police had treated his Uncle as if he tampered with the brakes. Why else would his father drive directly into the headlights of oncoming traffic.

He remembered trying to protect his little sister from the whispers. Did their Dad have a drinking problem, why wasn't Mom wearing her seatbelt... They had been driving in the early hours of the morning... Surely they could have seen the oncoming headlights.

Steve shook it off and studied the last category. This one tied the names to the others. At one time or another the names were tied not just by commendations but by partnerships. This was the link that frightened him the most.

Mike's name was on the list. It was tied to an older cop named Thompson. He had been murdered a month before Steve was partnered with him. Mike was not permitted to work on the case because of his relation to the victim. It had been a number of years since they were partners. Thompson had been one of Mike's mentors.

Mike had not connected the murders because he had not dug as deep as Steve and Dan had. He was shot before he had the chance.

Steve could not help but wonder if there were any others that might have a living connection to those who were shot. Part of him had the nagging feeling that either Dan or he could be next.

He pushed it aside and needed to check for another category. How were the ages staggered. Did the perp go from age group to the next? Did he kill partners one after the other? He took a deep breath and started writing down the dates.

There was yet another pattern emerging, but not the way he expected it to.

He shut the blinds of Mike's office. This information needed to be on a need to know basis. He did not want anyone in the office to see what they had found. He still was not sure that the perp was not a cop. He could not take the chance.

The murders were too sporadic. The perp had planned it to the last detail, and the beauty of it was that there was no real rhyme or reason to it. If you did not know what you were looking for, you would not see it.

Steve asked Dan to get them lunch and studied over the chalkboard once more. He was hoping some form of divine intervention would lead him closer to person doing this.

He wanted to force the person out of hiding. He wondered if he could be a decoy and force whoever it was, to see him as a next target.

He could not let the rest of the squadroom know the links that he and Dan and found, but he needed to trust Rudy and the Commissioner. He was even leery of them.

He needed to see Mike and to use his skills to confirm his suspicions. He hoped that he and Dan were right. He had no desire to see their names, or the names of any other cop on that wall. He needed to stop the perp in time.

The time was ticking.
Chapter 18

Steve waited outside the hospital room of his friend and mentor. He waited until the doctors and nurses were done taking care of him physically. He kept going over it and over it in his mind.

The last thing he learned, he did not share with Dan. He knew the link he found might draw the bastard out. He knew it put more than one person's life at risk. He knew there would be resistance in the department, if he put his plan in action. He wanted to be sure that Mike would approve of what he was going to attempt.

Every time a cop went on the beat, he or she was a possible target. There would always be someone out there looking to put down one of any of the city's finest. Some warped mind would have it in their head to put a notch on the bedpost.

Steve thought about this serial killer who had quite a number of trophies to his name. He wondered how many perps were out there wanting to make a name for themselves.

How many serial killers were known, while their victims remain nameless? How many killers and bank robbers were romanticized and larger than life?

The names you could rattle off so easily. Billy the Kid, Bonnie and Clyde, Al Capone, and Robert Stroud, the birdman of Alcatraz.

He did not want this son of a bitch to have the notoriety. He knew if word got out, he would be remembered and not the victims...

But there was nothing he could do to stop it. Nothing but stop his killing spree here and now.

He walked toward the room with the painted balloons. He hoped that the charade would be for just a few more days. He wanted to catch the perp before one more cop got shot.

Steve managed to put a smile on his face as he entered Mike's room.

"Spill it Buddy Boy. I know a fake smile when I see one. Have you caught the person that shot me yet?" Mike asked. He was looking better and he was more coherent.

Steve was more than relieved, he knew that Mike would like to be brought up to speed. He was glad of it.

"Mike, Dan and I have been working on this case, since you said you found a link. We went back five years and found a total of fifteen unsolved cases where cops were the victims. Mike one of them was your mentor, Paul Thompson. I would not have thought of looking at partnerships if you hadn't been shot. Mike this guy has been sporadically and methodically killing off partners within the span of the last five years. I think there is a tie to Alcatraz. Thompson was the first target." Steve said.

"I looked up Thompson's file and saw he was one of the last guards before they shut it down. He was there when the last prisoners were transfered out. He was your second partner. He showed you
the ropes the way you showed me. Mike I think the next targets are Dan and me. I'm counting on it.” He added.

"No Steve, I don't like the idea of you and Dan being targets. Steve you left the force because you could no longer trust yourself as a cop. I know you said it was time, but I saw the look in your eye when you told me you were going to leave. Steve everyone has doubts about drawing his weapon. You weren't just afraid for yourself, but for your partner whoever that may be. I was glad you got out when you did." Mike said.

"I was glad to see you. I was glad to see you taking care of Jeannie. When you said that you and Dan were working the case together, I was too weak to say anything. I was happy to be alive. I need to get back on my feet again.” Mike said strongly.

"Mike I tried to ask you before. Can you tell me what happened? No one has come forward with any clue to the shooter. We had three descriptions, and not one was similar to the other. I think the perp that shot you was lucky to be there at the same time you were. Near as we can figure, the perp took his time and caséd out each cop, but one." Steve said.

"Me. I was walking and thinking. That area has special meaning for me. You know how it is. You get lost in thought and lose your attention to detail. I felt the bullet enter my back, but that was all. They tell me a trauma nurse helped stop the bleeding. I must have instinctually turned away at the last second. If he would have hit me like the others there is no way I would have survived." He said simply.

"For all intensive purposes you are dead... Mike I think that something may have happened to mess with his time table. The other cases led us to believe the the perp knew the patterns of the cops he shot. We know he uses a thirty two, but none of the slugs match and he staggers the killings. He has never killed in the same area twice. He never kills the partners in pairs. Near as we can tell until you saw the connection, we did not know what to look for. We saw three connections. One was the caliber of weapon; the second was the commendations along with their pictures in the paper. Lastly was how many of them were partners. I want to nail this psychopath before they kill one more cop. The only way I know of to do that is to put myself and possibly Dan out as bait. The perp thinks you're dead. What better way to choose his next victim if he leads the chain from one partner to another partner to another?" Steve said.

"You've been thinking like a cop since you sat at my bedside, haven't you." Mike said as a statement of fact.

"You have been a cop too long. You are part of this city. Your instincts were right regarding my decision to quit. I am not asking that we be partnered again because I know what you can teach Dan. But when I asked Rudy to be on this case, it felt good to feel the old rhythm back. Mike I think enough time has passed. I think I can be a good cop again." Steve said.

"I never doubted your ability. I knew when you got shot, that you would question your instincts. I accepted your decision. I did what Jeannie asked and knowing you were no longer a target gave me a sense of relief. Wearing that badge means that you not only serve this city but perps will identify you as an obstacle. I was surprised to see you and to hear your voice. Steve, we had been partners for a long time. We knew each others movements. We made a good team.” Mike said.

"That is why I want I want to get control of the situation. I want Dan and I to become targets to nab whoever is doing this. I want your 'murder' to be the last one, before the media gets wind of the connections. This may be our only chance of drawing him out into the open.” Steve said.

"How do you plan on doing it? Will you walk the mission district?” Mike asked.
Despite his injuries, he was eager to get out of the bed and watch over his two partners. He was glad that some of the ways he taught Steve stuck with him. He understood Steve's desire to become a cop again. He was glad that Rudy let him step in when he got shot.

"I'm still working out the details. What I do know is that we should try to solve these murders before another cop gets shot. If the plan does not work, he may go into hiding once he realizes the press know about the patterns. Worse yet, he might speed it up. Regardless the price is too high. Please tell me you agree." Steve said.

Mike looked at his former partner. He suddenly felt very old and very tired. He was far from being out of the woods. The only thing he knew for sure was that he was playing dead. He had to continue the charade, until...

"Mike, I will come back later. I spoke too soon. Listen, you concentrate on getting better and I will pound the streets. Listen to Jeannie and the doctors. The doctors know what is best. I am sure that they will say worrying about a former partner is not in your best interest." Steve said as he got up from the chair.

He waved down another comment and left the room. He needed to cross check the findings. Part of him wanted to go back further, just to be sure.

He heard a clock ticking. He wanted to be the next target. This way they would be waiting for him. This way they would flush him out and put an end to this killing spree.
Chapter 19

Steve was glad to have the Mike he knew back. There was no way he was going to go through with his plan without his approval. By rights Mike was officially dead. He wanted to set up the meeting with Rudy as soon as possible. But before he did that, he had to check on his niece.

When Jean had not been able to enter Mike's room, he understood far too well. He stood a few feet from the door. It wasn't the sickness he was afraid of, it was her fragility. She looked so pale against the white sheets. She looked so tired and yet one of her hands touched a stuffed grey kitten.

He had given it to her on her last birthday... 'Oh please God' he thought to himself. Don't let it be her last. She was only eight. She had not even gotten into the double digits.

Tears welled in his eyes. He did not want her to see him that way.

A hand touched his arm. He startled out of his reverie, and looked into the face of his sister. He wiped his eyes, and held her close. He took a few minutes to regain his composure. He hid his face.

"Steve, you need to see her. Please can't you sit with her a bit?" She asked.

"I promise you when this case is over, I will be there. In the meantime, she has the kitten." he said quietly.

"You are back to being a cop I see, but all I am asking is five minutes of your time. She named the kitten Smoky and I know that you would boost her spirits. She won't break you know... She misses her favorite uncle." Stacy said.

:"I'm her only uncle." he said and smiled. He gathered up the courage to go to her. He thought he would rather face a bullet. But after nearly losing Mike, he couldn't take the risk of losing her as well.

When he went through the door he could hear the whir of machines. He had to touch her hand but was afraid. She was so frail, he could not bear the idea of hurting her.

"Megan? I am sorry I didn't come sooner, but I was afraid. I need some of your bravery. I love you darlin. Smoky will be here. When you need me, hug him and will be like a hug from me. When you get well, we will go pick out a cat for me. I will need your help getting just the right one. I need to go, but when I can I'll be back. I will try to come when you are awake." He said as he reached out for her hand.

Her hand was so frail. He touched it as if it were a petal from the sweetest rose. He blinked away a tear and smiled at his sister as he left the room. He needed to get his mind back on the task at hand.

He needed to convince Dan, Rudy and the Commissioner that the only way to flush the killer out was by using him and Dan as targets. The key was not to make it so blatant an attempt as to scare him off. If that happened, they may never catch the person who was out to make a name for themselves. At least there was not a trace in the papers about it being a serial killer... yet.

He took the elevator, and decided to go back to his apartment to freshen up. As he reached the door to his apartment he could swear he was being watched. He wondered if it were the killer... He was sure that the papers had hinted that Steve was filling in for Mike Stone. Steve knew that Rudy putting him in Mike's office was unorthodox to say the least, but there were reasons. He knew that putting him and Dan out as targets would mean that he really was coming back. He would resign from teaching. Whoever he would be partnered with, he would be glad.
Sure the hours were lousy, and the pay wasn't great. Sure he was a target for some maniac, but he had made enemies before leaving the department. Who was to say that being a teacher was any less hazardous;

He would not be afraid in his own home. He was tempted to parade in front of the window naked in case the killer was out there, but there was just time enough to shower, shave and meet Dan before presenting a united front in front of Rudy and then the commissioner.

Mike may not like it. Mike may even hate it, but if it meant the end of a killing spree...
Chapter 20

Something in the back of Steve's mind was nagging at him.

Ever since Mike had been shot, his senses were on alert. He did his normal routine... He made coffee and looked at the latest paper. There was no sign of the murders being linked. He saw the notice under obituaries. He was relieved that Mike was still listed. At least there would be one less cop out there for the killer to aim at.

He had pored over the reports. Not one of the cops had been shot at close range. With the commotion that was common at any given moment, he was surprised that an innocent bystander had not been shot in the ruckus. Most of the murders were when the light was changing. It was in the twilight hours before night and before dawn that a cop was a prime target.

He wondered if he was being paranoid, or was the instinct that was honed by being a cop was returning back to him. He wondered if it ever left...

He could feel someone watching him. He headed back to the office keeping an eye on his rear view mirror before turning in and parking in a space meant for guests.

When he got to the office he saw Dan sitting on the other side of the desk, leaving Mike's chair empty. He sank into it gratefully.

"Dan I think the killer is moving up his timetable. I spoke with Mike and he thinks my idea is lousy, but even he admits that at one time or another cops can become targets. Are you ready to see Rudy and set this up?" Steve said as he put his hands on Mike's desk.

"Since we started this, and I am glad that you came on board because you know Mike so well. I have had a feeling that we are being watched. I may be getting paranoid, but just knowing someone is out there with us in his sites makes me wonder. I feel that you and I have the edge because we know that someone is out there using us as targets. I wonder if keeping this between a select few, puts other cops in danger until we catch the bastard." Dan said ominously.

"When you're a cop, you subconsciously go on the assumption that you will not be liked by all. You don't always think you are a target. You sure as hell don't go in it for the recognition because the more anonymous you are the more you can learn from how people act. You learn the truth of things not only by what they say, but what they don't say." Steve replied.

"You have to realize that this guy is one of the few and far between. That is why it is so damned difficult to flush him out. I am not sure if I am being paranoid or just more aware of my surroundings since Mike got shot. Knowing that the bastard has done this before means that one man can be connected with the fifteen that were killed and the one who shot Mike. I am hoping that by making you and me targets, he will be too eager to kill us both. We would be the link between Mike and Thompson. Thompson was his mentor and Mike was ours. I am hoping that by us being targets we will give him something he can't resist." Steve said.

"But how and who do we know we are looking for? He could be any race, and age, any gender. He may be more than one. So you and I go out. We appear as if we are not aware of him killing partners. We only know for sure, that he is doing it in the twilight hours. We don't know where the killer is..." Dan said.

"But we know that he is looking for us. Say he has a mole in the police department. Once we start
working the streets, he will know our habits. You always go to the same shop for bran muffins right?" Steve asked.

"And you always go home the same way... so all the killer has to do is see when we connect, have some undercover cops in the area and..." Dan said.

"The one thing that we know for sure is that he shoots in the back and uses a thirty two. If you and I were to start a routine of being out on the streets at dusk, he might watch us for a day or two and strike. For the two of us, he might use the same thirty two. Dan I am counting on it and much as Mike would like to have the rumors of his death be lifted, it might be wise to have him wait until the killer strikes." Steve said.

"I would like to flush him out faster and I don't think you are going to like what I suggest. How is Mike coming along?" Dan asked.

"It may take a while for him to get back on his feet. I plan on asking Rudy to reinstate me. I haven't told Mike yet, but I think he knows already. He is too good a cop." Steve answered.

"Let me run this past you. Let's announce that Mike is alive. We'll say that he is being released from the hospital in a few days after an attempt on his life. What would you do if you were the killer? We have to assume that this was his only target that wasn't killed. He might aggravate the hell out them." Dan said.

"He might risk going into the hospital to finish the job or wait until he is headed home, or is home. The possibilities are many at best. If there were only a way to narrow it down. Go over the files once more and let me know if you come up with anything." Steve said as he got up from Mike's chair.

"I need to see my niece. And i might check on the boy as well." Steve said as he exited the office. He found that the eyes in the back of his head were making sure he was not followed. Dan may have come up with a way to speed things up. Childrens Hospital would give them an easier location to be surveilled. At least that would limit the exits. It might work. If Rudy and the commissioner would cooperate they might finally get the bastard once and for all.
Chapter 21

Steve stood in the doorway once more. Megan was with her mother and dad. He need not be here, but he stood there nonetheless. She appeared to be more fragile than before. Steve could see her chest move with each breath. Each one was slower than before. He held his breath, waiting. He prayed. Before he walked away, he heard his sister moan and her husband hold her. He left them there, and prayed as he went to see his friend.

Wiping a hand over his eyes, he went into Mike's room. He waited for the man to speak.

"So you want to be a cop again. Huh Buddy Boy? You are going to go into the thankless job with lousy pay and lousy hours. Better yet you are going to be a target for the bastard who shot me to take a good look at you and shoot you and possibly Dan in the back while Rudy looks on, is that it?"
Mike said as he sat up in bed.

"Mike this is the only way I can think of to flush him out. I don't want whoever is out there to kill someone else. He has killed too many. He has killed too many good cops to continue. If it is within my power to stop the bastard, then I owe it to you and to the others. They were good cops Mike. They deserved better than to be shot and left for dead." Steve said with conviction.

"You are forgetting one thing. It wasn't you who started this. It was some sicko's sense of betrayal that led them to killing them off in some warped timetable. Steve there is nothing you can do for those cops who bravely died in the line of duty. You are not responsible for me being shot!" Mike replied.

"You know, I was really starting to feel like I fit on campus. I was teaching a couple of great kids about law and the techniques you taught me on being a good investigator. It was nice not to carry a gun or a badge. It was nice to come home at a decent hour. But a few days back, I heard the answering machine and before I could get my key out of the door, I was back in my car, coming here. I don't know who was comforting whom, when Jeannie rushed into my arms." Steve said as he took a breath.

"And then Dan came in with your chicken scratch, and I knew." Steve added.

"I faked your death with the help of the police force and I put you where it would look like I had another reason to come here. But the time is running out and I really REALLY want to nail the bastard before he strikes again. Is that too much for me to want to do?" He said with a crack in his voice.

"But what if you are wrong? What if it backfires and the killer strikes someone else? How will you live with yourself?" Mike asked.

Steve looked at his friend and remembered going over the files of all the cops that had been murdered by this maniac. Something told him that it was one individual. Something in his gut was nagging at him. There may have been something he missed, but time was running out. He wanted to make sure that he was the last target and was hoping that it would lure the maniac out. He and Dan would be the final targets, and if he had anything to say about it, he wanted to lure the bastard out by using himself as bait.

It suddenly hit him. The reasons for being a cop were still there and although he knew he wanted to be back on the force doing what he did so well, it wasn't until he looked at Mike Stone that he knew for sure. This was who he needed to be. This was who he was.
But there were casualties along the way. Before he left the hospital he would check on his niece and check on his sister. He would tell her that he had seen what happened. He would let her cry until her husband held her or until there were no more tears to be shed. He would hold Megan and give her his strength as if by osmosis. That was all he knew how to do as the drugs worked in her system. His faith in God was being tested, but if he could do anything to help that beautiful angel.

He was finally able to leave the hospital and contacted Dan. He made arrangements to see Rudy and set the plan in motion. He hoped it would lure the killer out and that it would finally be over and done with.

Nothing would give him more pleasure than telling the press they missed a notorious serial killer. That is after San Francisco's finest had him dead or in custody.

He pressed the pedal to the metal to get there just a little bit fast. There was No time like the present.
Chapter 22

He put up with resistance from higher ups before, but Steve saw Rudy cave in. Much as he had hoped that the plan would lure the killer out, he was afraid that he might be wrong. He could not allow that possibility to enter his psyche.

The plans were set that Steve would be reinstated as a police officer in a quiet ceremony where Rudy would be the official and Dan would be standing next to him. The ceremony would take place on the courthouse steps so the public would see Steve reinstate his oath at five the following afternoon. A reception would be held afterwards in a small restaurant on Market. He was almost certain the attempt on his life would be at a party afterwards. Steve had decided that it be fitting to take the cable car to the restaurant. He intentionally would be out in the open. He did not want to make it too obvious that he was a target. He made sure that it was a spot that the killer had not shot a cop at before. It would be virgin territory for them both.

He knew the whole squad room would be there. Every one except Mike. He would leave the party for a bit at dusk. He had no idea who or what he was looking for, but he could trust his instinct since being shot in the heart. There was a part of him that was glad of it. He knew that it would not be unusual to see cops lingering about. They could be anyone, including the killer. This was what he was counting on.

Regardless it would be over either way. There was no possible way to keep Mike's death a charade for much longer. He was sure that the nurses in pediatrics might have let it slip that they had a V.I.P. in a certain room. Besides which Steve would not be able to keep Jeannie from seeing her father. He had known all along that he was buying time enough to flush the bastard out of hiding.

So far no one fitting that vague description has surfaced. All they had to go on was a person with a thirty two, they had no idea as to what race or gender. Short or tall. Fat or thin. They did not even have a description of the gun, or if it was the same gun but with a different rifling pattern. By rights all they had to go on was that cops were being killed. There were no direct links to the officers.

Now came the hard part. He had to wait. He told Dan to get some time to decompress. He was going to rely on his eyes to spot the shooter. He would not allow the possibility that he was wrong enter his mind. He knew that the maniac was out there waiting, This time they would be ready for him.

He was tired but too keyed up for sleep. He got into the car and found himself driving to Mike's.

He did not need to knock on the door and some wonderful smells were coming from the kitchen.

"Steve. Is something wrong with Mike?" She asked.

"No. Jean I wanted to tell you that hopefully within the next twenty four hours I should have this wrapped up and your father's death will be greatly exaggerated." He said and forced a smile.

"You obviously have a plan. From the look on your face, Dad did not go with it. You want to discuss it over dinner? Whenever I get worried I cook. I have Mike's tuna casserole, a roast with potatoes, and chicken for a picnic. What's your pleasure?" Jean asked as she offered him a seat at the table.

"Mike's casserole will suit me just fine. You know I don't remember the last time I was hungry. This case has had me tied up every which way to Sunday. You've been his daughter for too long." he said laughing.
"I wouldn't know any other way to be. Not being with him while he is in the hospital has been exasperating. He may not admit it, but he needs me. I need him." She replied.

"Jean, if things work out the way I hope, he will be back in his office before you know it. He is part of this city. She accommodates those who love her, but she can be demanding at times. Jean thank you for this. I suppose I should tell you I am going to rejoin the force." He said as a matter of fact.

"I knew you would when I saw you with Rudy. I just hope you are doing it for the right reason. Please don't do it because Mike was shot." She said looking at him for a long moment.

"Jean the night I got shot, I totally misread the girl who shot me. That scared the hell out of me. I was wide open. She could have killed me, hell I thought I was dead. The idea of being on the force in a desk job was not my idea of being a cop. I know I pushed Rudy into letting me take over this case, but I am one of the few who can read your dad's chicken scratch and once I saw what he and Dan uncovered... Well it felt like I was putting on the suit again. No matter what I do, no matter where I am, I will always be a cop." Steve said.

"I understand more than you know. I am sure you know it isn't easy. It is not my first choice, but I was born into it. Steve before you go through this, make sure for you. No one else matters." Jean said as she touched his hand.

"I know that you haven't gotten out since someone shot Mike. Considering the rest of the squad will be there after my swearing in, would you like to come with me and be my escort?" He asked shyly.

"Are you sure?" Jean replied.

"Tomorrow Rudy will announce Mike's death was premature. He will then swear me back in. Then we are headed to the restaurant on Market, close to where the cable cars stop. If I am right. The murderer will be out there waiting. Rudy and the others will find the bastard and get the answers to the questions since this began with Mike's old partner, Thompson. Jeannie this has to flush him out. If not he may never get caught. I won't be able to live with myself. This has to work. I am counting on it. I cannot think of failure. If this doesn't work then the papers will get wind of a serial killer on the loose killing cops. If that happens all hell will break loose. The city will never be the same." Steve said as he got up from the table.

Jean looked at him and digested what he said. They had been through a lot these last couple of days. She knew she would be there because Mike couldn't.

It was getting late. She stared at his shoulders and began cleaning the table off. She started washing them without a word and Steve was drying them. He felt the exhaustion kick in. He needed to go home, to keep up appearances. He kissed her forehead and left without saying a word. He got in his car and stared at the steering wheel.

His practicality kicked in, and he headed home. A hot shower and a good night's sleep was what he needed before becoming a moving target. Morning would come soon enough. A visit with Megan and walking up the steps to correct the mistake he made a year ago. Then all he needed to do was catch one maniac before one more cop was killed in the line of duty.
Megan no longer had a concept of time, she woke at odd hours and slept more than stay awake; Her mommy had told her that cats sometimes sleep up to twenty hours a day. She did not have a real cat of her own, but her favorite uncle had bought her a stuffed kitty to stay by her side while the doctors were making her better. She no longer had the energy to run, or even get out of bed, but the doctors said the medicine they were giving her would make her better. She would get well so that she could go back to school and play with her friends.

Her uncle would take her with him to the shelter and pick out a kitty that would be hers when she would visit, but that he would take care of when she was away. She wanted one that wasn't perfect. She wanted one that had a booboo and that needed a little extra love, so that she could give it to the cat when she would visit her uncle when she was better.

She found herself thinking about it more and more. She woke up and looked into the eyes of her toy kitty, Smoky. She looked up and was surprised to see her uncle. He was looking at her with a smile and his eyes as bright as ever.

"Hello sweetheart. Your Mom and Dad looked tired, so I told them to go to my place and rest. I have someone here at the hospital besides you who I need to see, but I wanted to ask you if I was making the right decision. Are you up for me to ask you a few questions?" he said as he held onto her hand.

She smiled and went to touch his face instead.

When he saw what she was trying to do, he leaned in and when she touched his face he moved so that his lips kissed her hand. His smile grew wider. For someone so frail and so little, she had more strength than he had when he looked at her through the window. He saw a wisdom that comes with age in her small form. He knew then and there that this was the right decision.

He touched her hair and the skin of her cheek. He patted Smoky on the top of his stuffed little head and looked once more into the eyes of his niece.

It was a little past three in the morning. He had gone home to rest and prepare himself for what he hoped would be nailing the assailant. But he found himself thinking and awake in the dark. He called the hospital only to learn that his sister had not left Megan's side. He knew his place would be quiet and they could use the break. He owned up to his responsibility of being an uncle for bad times as well as good. He did not expect to receive the gift that was given by an eight year old, but ageless soul.

"Are you hungry or do you want to sleep some more?" He asked.

"Tell me about getting a live kitty." She said.

"Well, we will have to see about getting just the right kitty. It will have to be gentle and love you more than me, I will take care of it and it will remind me of you and it will be so happy when you visit. It will purr when I am there. I will take a picture of you and the kitty and make copies so that you will have one when you are home, and I will have one to remind me of you. It will sit in your lap and be gentle, and it will have to tolerate my crazy work hours. It can be any color you want, but it has to have the right personality so that it can stand up for itself, I hope it will make you laugh when you can spend the night. It has to be as loving as you." Steve said as he patted Smoky once again.
He wanted nothing more that to see her play with a cat. He wanted nothing more than to see her
back to being a little girl who would run and play. He wanted her well enough to jump into his arms
and laugh...

He had one more person to see before he left the hospital. He had to compartmentalize his niece and
not allow her to distract him for the task at hand. He prayed that the killer would be too tempted by
him and Dan in the same location. Dan and he were the link between Mike and the first target,
Thompson.

Being a cop meant being patient for things to happen. Being a cop meant being in the right place at
the right time.

Today would lead to one of two things happening. Either their ploy would scare the killer off, or
draw him out. If they drew the bastard out, then only one more fatality would take place if the aim
was true. If the bastard hid, then every single cop killing would be part of the file that Dan and he
had aquired in the last few days. Not one cop would be safe. Not one cop would be shot in the line
of duty if the perp was not caught. They would be added to the list of those killed by the Twilight
Cop Killer, as Steve had started thinking of him. He would be even harder to catch, if he could be
captured at all.
Chapter 24

Steve had opened the door to see Mike sleeping and was relieved enough to shut the door and go back to his office. It had only been a few days since this all started and he could not believe he felt at home in Mike's office. He must be tired.

It was Mike's office but it was starting to feel like his. It had the chalkboard and the files and other items that Mike had not gone through. Steve had gotten there at the change of watch.

In about eight hours he would be reinstated as a police officer for the city he loved.

He felt like he was missing something, so with time to kill, he went over the files one last time. He kept feeling like there was something he overlooked. He started at the beginning. He read the file on Thompson. Thompson was the Mike's first partner when he was promoted from street cop to plain clothes.

Thompson was also one of the last guards to have be assigned to Alcatraz. Steve wondered if Thompson was the only guard tied to the list of targets. He found a list of the names he was after. Then he found it.

If he hadn't been reading over the files, he would not have seen it. It made the whole thing come full circle. Times and places suddenly formed a complicated web of cops being at the right place at the right time. Instead of starting out at the beginning of a line, he used Thompson as a starting point and spread out the names. He then found a map of the city and marked the points and the dates of each murder. He saw another pattern emerge.

He cursed under his breath.

It all began to make sense in some twisted way. He remembered Mike telling him that you sometimes had to think like the perp to understand why and what moves he might make next. He was kicking himself for not having seen it sooner.

He now knew that the next murder would be the last. He was almost certain as to when it was going to take place.

He rubbed his eyes and double checked his figures. He knew he should wait, but left a note for Dan and went down to Rudy's office. He noticed a picture in his office that he had not seen before.

It was an old black and white photo of a couple of men in uniforms. In the background were the cement structures and towers of Alcatraz. The date on the photo was March 23, 1963.

Steve stood there. He was stunned.

He recognized two of the men in the photo. One was Thompson and the other was Captain Rudy Olsen.

Here was the link that had been missing. He did not know the specifics, but the pattern fell into place. It wasn't a jagged line, it was a cross. And there in center of the cross was a point, where Christ's head would be resting.

He knew then and there that he was not the target. But he needed to convince others of the pattern. He needed to convince them that the next target would be the last and he had eight hours to set the trap.
He still didn't know who the killer was. He had a suspicion that she was female or transgender. He realized that whenever a cop had been shot, all they needed to do was act as a bystander. All they need do is look as if they were wondering where the shot came from. A thirty two was not a big weapon. Who would pat down a woman?

He was lost in thought when Rudy came into the office.

Steve got up and looked into the eyes of his friend and captain.

"Rudy I think I have figured it out. I know who the next target is. Rudy, I think it is you." Steve said bluntly
"Steve, you have to be kidding. The only way I am tied to these cops, is by possibly being their commanding officer." Rudy said.

"I could not sleep last night, and I got here at change of shift. I went back to the beginning and found a pattern. Unfortunately I think the pattern will end by my being reinstated to the force on the courthouse steps. I think this will draw out the killer, but I thought me or Dan would be the prey. My thinking was that we would be too good of a target to pass up. Going over the files I found something that we missed." Steve said as he got up to the photos adorning the wall.

"Steve that photo is ancient history." Rudy said.

:"Two guys from the left is Thompson, our first victim. You never told me that you were a guard at Alcatraz. This was the day the prison shut down. Rudy, he started with Thompson. It wasn't just partners, he was after, it was locations. Dan and I were thinking linearly, and we should have tied the locations down too." Steve said.

Steve took a small map of the city and placed it on his desk.

"Rudy in less than seven hours we are going to be here. The papers know it, so whoever it is that is doing this will know for certain that the three of us are going to be here at five to reinstate me as a police officer for the city of San Francisco. I wanted to draw them out because I thought the killer would not be able to resist killing Mike's two partners. I thought that we could be able to have enough plain clothes surrounding the area to nab the perp. Now if my guess is right, i gave him the gift of having you officiate the ceremony. You can see by the diagram, we are giving the perp exactly what he wants. He took his time over the years. Mike was shot here." Steve said pointing to an inner corner of the cross.

"Not only will he be killing you, but he will put you dead center of the cross. That would complete the diagram, and we will never have another chance to nail the bastard. Rudy I have to believe I am right about this. I don't think we should take the chance with your life. If we have the entire courthouse staked out with plain clothes than we may have our only chance at nabbing the son of a bitch." Steve said bluntly.

"Steve I let you take the case over because Mike was shot. I think that you an Dan did some fine work investigating the murders and coming up with the links, but I could give this same information to anyone else and they might find different results. You know as well as I do that you could be grasping at straws. You know as well as I that if you look at something long enough and hard enough you can see whatever you want to believe. You are asking me to put on extra manpower to find someone that may not exist. Thirty twos are found everywhere. Not only that, this will not fit the profile you and Dan have come up with. He kills before dawn and at dusk. Five p.m. is bright daylight. I know that you were counting on luring him out because you and Dan would be easy targets. Now you are telling me that I am the target based on the fact that I was a guard when Alcatraz was shut down? I need one piece of evidence that you are right. Bring me some proof dammit." Rudy replied.

"How about if I run it past Mike? We have around seven hours left. Rudy I don't think you should swear me in because that is what he is expecting. If the perp sees the commissioner, than he may settle for Dan or me. If we catch him off guard, then Parsegian or one of the others can disarm him. I am sure that if I ask anyone in that squad room to cover the steps, they would do it for Mike in a heartbeat." Steve said.
"The bastard has MURDERED fifteen cops! Mike taught me well. I tried to get into the shoes of the killer. Mike told me to trust my gut. I may very well be wrong, but then, I may very well be right. Do you seriously want to take the risk that this whole set up will not lure him out? Do you want to take the risk of losing our one chance at catching him? Because regardless of the circumstances, the press will get wind of a cop serial killer and he will bury himself so deep that we will never find him. Then any time a cop gets killed they will associate it with the serial cop killer of San Francisco." Steve said as he paced the room.

"Mike taught you well. Let me show it to the commissioner and we will see about getting more cops out to cover the courthouse. If he approves then we will get them in position with a few of them out there two hours before you are sworn in." Rudy said softly.

"I am still not certain that it may not be a cop. I want to thank you for keeping the investigation on a need to know basis. I hope we catch the murderer alive. I would like to know what triggered off the murders in the first place. One more thing, get a few bullet proof vests. This may be his last one and he may aim at a different part of the anatomy. Regardless, this should put an end it it once and for all." Steve said as he leaned on the edge of the door.

"Just don't get any recruits until I give the word." Rudy replied as he sat behind his desk and started dialing.

Steve nodded and prepared to go over everything with Dan. He knew one thing for certain. It would be over before nightfall. The murderer would go into hiding, be shot, or await trial.

Steve wanted to see the face of the person who shot Mike Stone.
Steve paced the length of the step. He had gotten into his dress blues and felt like the tie was on just a bit too tight. He hated this part of the job. He hated the waiting. He looked out over the courthouse steps and saw the men in place. He laughed at the hot dog vendor. Tony was normally one of the best dressed cops in the city, and here he was in a t-shirt and bright red apron with a grimy baseball cap on his head.

He saw a few law clerks prep for the ceremony. They carried out a table and placed a slightly worn Bible on it. He waited for the Commissioner to walk down the steps.

He kept all his senses on high alert. There weren't many people loitering around. He saw some lawyers discussing business on the lower steps. He saw a photographer from The San Francisco Chronicle checking his lenses.

Nothing was out of the ordinary. He wished he had asked the nurse who helped save Mike, to the ceremony. Someone had to have seen something... He was frustrated because he had no idea as to what to look for. Once the gun was out, it would be too late.

He trusted his instinct and the instincts of the cops surrounding the steps, that someone would find something out of the ordinary. There had to be something or someone out of place. He played out the possibilities in his mind as he searched the area. It was getting close to five and the time where he would not have a chance to blend into the backround.

Then he saw what was out of place. Instead of going up the steps to meet the commissioner, he slipped into a rare spot of shade and caught sight of what others would have overlooked. What was a diamond ring doing on a poor lady in ragged clothes?

"Dan!" he shouted as he pulled out his pistol and ran toward the homeless woman who was kneeling down and feeding the gulls.

The woman cowered and hid her face.

"I didn't hurt nobody. What you pointing that gun at me for? I wouldn't hurt a fly. You ask my children here." She said pointing at the gulls.

Steve still had his gun pointed at her. The other officers looked at him like he was some kind of maniac and went to restrain him when he turned and saw a nondescript woman wearing a grey suit, button down blouse and black shoes, aim a thirty two caliber pistol at Captain Rudy Olsen.

Steve did not hesitate. He pulled the trigger. Her gun went flying and the old homeless woman screamed.

She ran toward the woman in the suit and cradled her head while searching for the wound.

"Amelia, you hurt my Amelia. You son of a bitch! How could you shoot a woman?" She asked as she looked into Steve's eyes.

The plain clothes policemen looked on as they saw the thirty two on the steps. The woman was in the homeless woman's arms. Steve was not sure if he had killed her. He searched for Rudy and saw a
crease in his suit where the woman had shot him.

Chaos reigned for a few moments while the commissioner came into view and started issuing orders. For a brief time, Steve was left alone to digest what happened.

He went toward Amelia and checked for a pulse. He found one, and said a prayer under his breath. He placed a hand to apply pressure and waited for an ambulance.

The man from the Chronicle was thrilled to have pictures of what transpired. What was to be a small article on the back pages, may warrant page one.

Steve was grateful that Rudy was not seriously shot.

The ambulance took the two women away and some cops followed them to the hospital. Others milled about and came to pat Steve on the back.

Steve noticed the blood on his dress blues. It was then that he realized that he had not been sworn in as a police officer. He wondered how that would work on the report of the shooting.

He was glad it was over. He wanted to be sure that they had found the killer. He wanted to interrogate her, but he was not yet sworn in. He wanted to see Mike and Jeannie. He wanted Mike to come back from the dead, so to speak.

He would clean the desk and have it ready for him. He would accept any position they would have for him as long as it was plain clothes.

He took a breath and realized he had to change. He did not want to panic his niece with the blood on his dress blues.

Someone touched him on the shoulder... It was the Commissioner.

"Steve are you ready to be sworn in? I think that saving Rudy qualifies as an act of courage. You might even get another commendation. Let's make it official." He said with a grin.

"Thank you Sir, but if you don't mind, now that we have the killer, can we do this with Dan holding the Bible?" Steve asked.

The man smiled and with the remaining plain clothes officers surrounding him, he took the oath. It was an oath to this city and the people that made it a place he called home.

With handshakes all around, he smiled and made it to his apartment to change. He wanted to see Mike, but first had to see a young lady that had taken his heart.

He may just be in on the interrogation of Amelia. If not he would make sure that he found out the reason why.

He would find out about the guns that were used. He would not be a bit surprised if the old woman was related to one of the last prisoners of Alcatraz, but he would not speculate until he was sure.

When he made it to the Children's ward at Children's, he saw Mike in a wheelchair, Jeannie beaming from ear to ear and his sister Stacy holding the hand of a frail young lady holding a stuffed cat.

His focus went directly toward her. He lifted her in his arms and introduced her to Mike. Mike let Steve place her in his lap and he hugged this brave little girl.

"I'm glad he's a cop again." She whispered.
"Me too, but he said something about a cat. Do you want to tell me what that is about?" Mike asked. Steve smiled. He knew there would be others, but the Twilight Cop Killer was in custody and he was glad of it. He hugged Stacy and went to sit down.

The next thing he knew, he woke in a hospital bed. Jeannie was smiling at him.

"How many hours of sleep did you get since Mike was shot?" She asked.

"There was no real time to sleep. Not with a serial killer after cops. I knew I could sleep when it was over. It IS over isn't it?" He asked.

"Steve let me take you home and tuck you into bed." She smiled at the thought.

"Jeannie I am back to being a cop again. What was I thinking when I took the oath?"

She smiled and walked him out of the room. She was glad he was where he belonged. She was sure he made a great teacher. But he made a better cop. The city needed him. He had become part of it, just like Mike had years earlier.

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Chapter End Notes

I debated as to adding another chapter, but decided against it. June 2 is my birthday and I liked the way the last chapter ended.

The killer was the daughter of one of the last prisoner's of Alcatraz. She killed because her mother blamed a few guards for her husband losing his mind and never being released from prison. He was found hung in his cell. The reason she chose the twilight hours was because no one would suspect a woman of killing cops. All she had to do was appear as an innocent bystander.

All of this is fictitious, but I thought for you who wanted reasons that might fit your bill.

I am glad you are reading it, and like my style. Sometimes the stories take a life of their own and this was no exception. I appreciate the feed back.

be well

Barb

this piece is dedicated to a late great friend Carol who i miss dearly

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!