

THE DETECTIVES OF THE 9TH PRECINCT

THE DOPPELGANGER

PART 4

LATER BACK AT THE 9TH PRECINCT:

Steve and Neal are both standing out in the hall in front of the interrogation's room one way mirror. Shoulder to shoulder, their arms crossed over their chest both of their heads tilted to the right. Contemplating. Since they brought him to the station it has been a circus. Everybody from I.A. down to the dispatchers have come by to see him. They would look at Steve then they would look at him. And so it went. They should have sold tickets.

"If I haven't seen it with my own two eyes I don't think I would have believed it." Hank replies as he comes up behind them.

They both look over their shoulder at him. His suit ruffled and on his nose a Band-Aid, courtesy of Neal.

"Something on your mind there Hank?" Neal asks as they turn around as Hank stands there with his hands in his pockets looking at the floor.

"I....ah...." Hank replies.

"Yeah Hank say it fast why don't ya it won't hurt as much." Steve replies.

"You two aren't going to make this easy are you?" Hank replies.

"Why should we?" Neal asks.

"I was just doing my job. You two of all people should know that." Hank replies.

"We...of all people?" Neal replies as he gestures to himself and Steve.

"You know Hank this time is a given. Like I told Neal you were doing your job and I can forgive you for that....but I won't forget."

"I'm sorry for the snap judgment...." Hank replies.

"Which time?" Neal snaps back as he stands in front of Hank. "This time Hank or the time you went to I.A. because you thought there was something going on between Steve and myself?" Neal pushes his finger into Hanks's chest. "Even if there was, had been, could've been or might even had been, it was none of your business!"

Hanks pushes Neal's finger away. "It is my business if it's a deterrent to the department!" Neal as he turns and walks away laughs shaking his head. "You two guys are so caught up with each other you can't see passed each other!! You two won't let anybody else in that little circle of yours....!"

Neal then crosses the room grabbing Hank. "Why should we Hank?" Tell me why we should? Huh? Steve....is the only one I trust in this crazy world! Other people Hank have tried to separate us before! As of yet no person on this earth could do that. But Hank do you want to know what would be the one thing, the one and only thing that could separate us? Do you?"

They stand there. All three silent. The only sound was their collective breathing and the incessant ticking of the clock on the wall. Then...

"Death." Steve replies as he looks back over his shoulder at him.

Hank looks over at him and Neal looks at the floor his hands on his hips.

"I'll be back in the morning to get him. For whatever it's worth I am sorry....about everything." Hank then turns and walks off.

Neal looks back at Steve. "You okay?"

Steve shrugs. "Yeah sure. You?"

"It'll take more than Hank to upset me..." They both end up saying at the same time. They smile and laugh as Neal goes over to Steve.

"Do you want the first crack at him?" Neal asks as he points to Billy in the interrogation room.

"He's wearing my clothes." Steve replies. "I wish...." Steve says softly.

Neal moves his head closer to his. "You wish....what?"

"That we could cut his hair or something. I feel like I just arrested myself."

Neal smiles as he scratches his forehead. "How about a hat?"

"It wouldn't help. It would probably be one of my hats." Steve replies matter-of-factly.

"You're much better looking than he is." Neal puts his hand on Steve's shoulder as he leans in closer to him. "He...could never be you. He can grow his hair as long as he wants, wear your clothes but he can never duplicate your smile or that sparkle in your eyes."

"Thanks." Steve replies as he smiles.

"See. That's it! I'll be back in a minute."

Neal goes down the hall to the equipment room and a few minutes later he returns carrying a hat. He waits on Steve and they go into the room together.

"Wow! This is really strange." Billy replies as he looks at Steve.

"Here put it on." Neal replies as he holds it out to him.

"Why?" Billy asks as he laughs.

"Don't ask questions just do it." Neal replies.

"What? You guys can't look at me or something? Or is it just him that can't look at me?" Billy replies as he points at Steve.

"Put the hat on."

Billy takes the hat and he puts it on his head. "Better ladies? You know, me and you Steve it's like looking in a mirror."

"Oh don't flatter yourself." Steve replies.

"It's like they say time changes all things but some things....never change." Billy replies.

"Meaning what?" Neal asks.

"Meaning we grew up but you two are still as thick as thieves. Still that tight knit twosome just like when we were kids. So tell me guys are you still turning away all comers....?" Billy asks as he leans back in the chair waiting for their reaction.

Then Neal looks over at Steve as he shrugs. "I don't know what...."

Steve then stops Neal by putting his hand on his arm looking harder at Billy. "He means in a roundabout sort of way that you and I....had something to do with all of this."

Neal looks over at Billy.

"Ding! Ding! Give that man a cigar! Damn you're good! You two do live up to all the hype. I thought it was all just talk but now that I've seen you two in action...."

"I don't understand what do you mean by all the talk?" Steve asks.

"Oh you didn't know? You guys are famous!" Billy replies.

Neal scratches his head. "Famous? Famous how?"

"Where?" Steve asks.

"In prison."

Steve and Neal look at one another then Neal starts to pace the room.

“Worried Neal? Maybe you should be.” Billy replies seriously which causes Neal to stop. “I know you ran my rap sheet and while you were checking up on me, I was checking up on you. Did you know that out of all the precincts in this city, this precinct has the highest rate of arrests and that, you two...” Billy replies as he points at them. “.....are credited with most of those. Can anybody guess where all those people went to?”

“The CCC.” Steve replies.

“Ding! Ding! Give precious there another point!!” Billy replies as he points at Steve. “You’re in the newspapers and on TV. and while I was there, you two were the hottest topic of conversation. Probably still are. There are people there that don’t like you. Actually I can go so far as to say that they hate you. Yeah. They hate you.” Billy is silent for a moment then he looks up at them. “Whatever god you believe in...you might want to start praying to him. Because if the people you put there ever get out....”

Neal comes over to the table and he leans on it as he looks down at him.

“Were you raped in prison Billy? Is that why you’re doing this? Whatever happened to you in prison is not Steve’s fault!”

Billy slams his hands down hard on the table then he stands up so quickly the chair falls over. “They didn’t have a chance to rape me I was in Solitary until they transferred me to another prison!”

Neal stands up. “You were in Solitary for a year and a half?” Steve asks.

“I hadn’t thought about you guys in years. Years. That is until I was sentenced and sent to CCC. My hair wasn’t even this long but they thought I was you!!” Billy replies as he points at Steve. “I was stabbed in the yard! Want to see the scar? A cop being in prison? They thought that was funny. I didn’t even know what was going on until I saw your picture in the newspaper. I couldn’t believe it. The other inmates there, they couldn’t or wouldn’t believe it either. They had a hard time believing that I wasn’t you! They put me in solitary for my own protection. I was in a cell, no bigger than this room. I had my own rec area. They let me out for two hours every day. I had time. Time to read. But I did a lot of thinking. I thought back to when we were all kids. Remember Neal?”

Neal rubs his face. “Yeah I told you about the lunch line in elementary....”

Billy shakes his head. “No before then.”

Neal is shocked and Billy can tell by the look on his face.

“I...”

Billy raises his hand. “It was a long, long time ago. Before you met....” Billy points at Steve. “We were little shavers...you and I. We were outside playing and this big dog chased us...”

Neal then snaps his fingers as he now remembers. "It was Mrs. Carmichaels German shepherd!"

Billy smiles. "That's right. That dog chased us right up that big, old oak tree. We were so scared. You and I. Like I was saying I had a lot of time to think. And I thought if everybody in that prison thought I looked like you I might as well...capitalize on it. It kept me going. I grew my hair long and I lost a lot of weight. I mean a lot of weight. At the other prison they transferred me to I was safe, they didn't know who you two were. There I thought about being you when I got out. And the rest they say is history. You see I couldn't get your attention when we were kids...did I get your attention...now?"

"You did all of this, became me, because you wanted to get....our attention?" Steve asks.

Billy thinks about this for a minute. His hand cupping his chin, his eyes looking up at the ceiling as his he taps his right foot. As Steve watches this he realizes he has done this exact same stance himself.

"Stop it!" Steve yells at him.

Billy laughs then he slams his hand down hard on the table. "We were friends until you came along!" Billy points at Steve.

"Billy we had to be, what, five years old?" Neal replies.

"So!? What does it matter how young we were? All I wanted was friendship. But oh no you two...couldn't see passed each other."

Steve and Neal both look at each other reminded of the words spoken by Hank.

"Has anybody? Anyone? Ever come between you two?"

Neal and Steve doesn't answer.

"I'll take that to be a no. Neal can you and I talk? Alone? Without your shadow?"

"Steve?" Neal looks over at Steve.

"You have to ask his permission?" Billy asks as he laughs.

"We're partners Billy. We work together." Neal replies as he gestures back and forth between them.

"Sure. I have stuff....see you later Neal."

They watch as Steve turns and he leaves the room.

"So what do you want to talk about Billy?" Neal asks.

"Old times. Can I have a Coke?"

"Oh yeah sure." Neal feels his pockets for some change just as Billy takes a quarter out of his pocket and tosses it to Neal.

Neal catches it then he tosses it up in the air as he smiles remembering the very first time this happened. "I'll have to bring you a quarter tomorrow."

"Don't worry about it. I know....you're good for it." Billy replies.

TWO HOURS LATER:

Steve was sitting in his car, listening to the radio, drinking another bottle of Coke when Neal tapped on his driver's side window.

Steve rolls down the window. "Hey."

"Hey yourself. Can I come in?" Neal asks.

"Sure. It's unlocked." Steve replies.

Neal walks around the car to the passenger side and after he gets in Steve hands him a bottle of Coke. "Why can't they have a beer vending machine?" Neal asks.

Steve laughs. "How did you know where to find me?"

Neal takes a swig of Coke. "Besides the fact there's a homing device I put in your wallet so I can keep track of you...." Neal laughs at the look on Steve's face. "...I knew you would go someplace where you could be alone. The locker room was full and the squad room ditto....so this was the next most likely place."

"Old Hank would have a field day with that homing device remark!" Steve replies.

"Hank can kiss my ass." Neal replies.

Steve smiles as he lays his head back against the seat of the car the Coke bottle resting on his knee. Neal's foot tapping lightly to the music on the radio.

"Long conversation." Steve finally replies after a few minutes of silence between them.

Neal scratches his head as he looks at Steve. "Billy's....not well."

"So I gathered." Steve replies.

"He wanted to talk to me while he was waiting for his...."

"Lawyer to show up?" Steve asks.

"No his doctor." Neal looks at Steve.

"So I'm guessing when you say his doctor you really mean his...."

"Shrink." They both say at the same time.

"Yeah his shrink. That one phone call everybody gets? He used it to call his shrink."

"Oh." Steve replies.

"He....ah....told me about all kinds of stuff we did together as kids. He and I. He remembered all of it." Neal replies.

"You didn't remember it?" Steve replies.

"I remembered it differently." Neal replies. "I thought it was you."

"Oh."

"Needless to say it was a very confusing conversation." Neal replies.

"You've been doing this longer than I have. Have you ever....?"

"Have I ever ran into this before?" Neal asks.

"Yeah."

"No. I have absolutely nothing in my past experience to fall back on. That's why I decided to talk to the shrink myself."

"What did he say?" Steve asks.

"Aside from all the medical jargon the jest of the matter is all of this is more about me than it is about you." Neal replies as he points to Steve.

"Come again?"

"The way the doctor explained it to me Billy has something called Attachment Disorder. It can start in early childhood. The doctor thinks that Billy developed an attachment to me. Some sort of traumatic event can kick it off. The traumatic event in this case....rejection. "

Steve moves closer to him. "You're not saying you think this, the way Billy is, is your fault? You can't be serious."

"Billy told me he found out he was adopted. The way it was explained to him was his real family didn't want him, he was rejected by them. Then I can along then I rejected him for you."

"Neal come on." Steve replies.

"I didn't say I believe it. I'm just telling you what the Doctor told me. That was why he was trying to be you. He thought if he became you I would like him....the only way he thought I would pay attention to him again...was becoming you! In every way possible....and the only

*way for that to happen he would have to....you would have to be....” Steve then looks at Neal.
“Steve...don’t make me say it.”*

Neal then sees recognition in Steve’s eyes. “I....would have to be out of the picture....literally.”

Neal nods his head. “The doctor....in this case....said we got off easily. An emotionally death is better than a physical death.”

Steve falls heavily back into the seat his hand covering his mouth as he looks out of the windshield.

“It’s crazy.” Steve replies.

Neal shrugs. “We’ve had other people do some crazy shit for crazy reasons. Other times there are no explanations. At least this time....” Neal hesitates before he continues. “Billy copped to everything. Breaking into your apartment, stealing your things. We already knew about the class schedule. He even had a police radio in his car. That’s how he knew where we were going to be. He didn’t mean to kill the Liquor Store owner. He just wanted his son to open the safe.” Neal replies.

“What happens to him now?” Steve replies.

“For now he’s 5150. He’s going to Brookhaven on a 72 hour hold. He’s on his way there now. The doctor is of the opinion that Billy will never make it to a trial. Speaking of which, how did you get out of jail?”

“Oh well it was those witness statements you provided. The Captain went to I.A. and I.A. went to the LAPD....”

“Wait! You mean Internal Affairs went to bat for you?” Neal asks.

“Yeah. Then even went over Hank’s head to his boss. They had the warrant rescinded.”

“Wow!!” Neal laughs.

“They didn’t have much choice in the matter, what with those witness statements and the sign-in-sheets. After I got out I went over to dispatch. I needed to know that you were alright. And after I heard what was going on with you, and that you needed help, I got to you as fast as I could. I will always....get to you....as fast as I can.”

Neal smiles. “I know.”

“Do you think it’s true?” Steve asks as he looks over at Neal.

“What Hank and Billy said?”

“Yeah. I mean do we do that? Do we push other people away who want to be our friends? Is it true we can’t see passed each other? Can two people be too close?” Steve asks.

Neal rubs his eyes. "First of all I stopped caring a long time ago what people thought of us and I don't think we're too close. We're best friends, we're supposed to be close!"

Steve laughs. "True."

"Secondly you're so much more than just a pretty face."

"Thanks Neal I appreciate that and you know all this time I just thought I was a Trophy partner!" Steve replies as he laughs which causes Neal to laugh.

"You know what I meant. It's about what's inside. What's inside here." Neal replies as he puts his hand over his heart. "And thirdly it's not true that we don't let anybody else into our little box...." Neal replies as he draws a square in the air.

"Circle." Steve corrects as he draws a circle in the air.

"Really?"

"Positive." Steve replies.

"Anyway. I have a date tomorrow night with Misty. A home cooked meatloaf dinner! Does that sound like somebody who won't let anybody else into their circle?"

"Neal you know it's funny that you mentioned that date with Misty. I have a date tomorrow night too, that is, if you don't...."

Neal sits up. "If I don't what....? Uh oh! We're about to have THAT conversation aren't we?"

Steve sits up as he raises both of his hands up. "Now Neal I want you to understand, I'm not off to someone new. I don't even have one....waiting in the wings!"

"So....it's not like we're thru?"

Steve shakes his head. "No. I'm just going to the baseball game."

Neal takes a deep breath with his hand on his chest. "Who....?"

"Erik."

Neal thinks on this a minute. "Erik? Erik? Oh no wait!! Not Erik the motorcycle jockey?! That Erik?"

"Yeah well he has tickets and he invited me to go with him."

"Steve? When did that happen?" Neal asks.

"When? Earlier today when I was in the...."

"....HOLDING CELL?!"

Neal says rather loudly which causes Steve to grimace.

"You were entertaining visitors in your holding cell while I was out rescuing the damsel in distress and getting shot at!!"

"It just sorta worked out that way." Steve replies. Besides you have a date with a woman for god sakes! So is it okay if I go out with him?"

"You don't have to ask my permission you know." Neal replies.

"I don't know you seem a little upset." Steve replies.

"DO I?"

"Yes you do. Just a little upset. It's just a baseball game. Look at it this way, you're going on a date with a woman and you have a 50/50 percent chance of getting laid. And....!" Steve replies as he holds up one finger. "...You don't have to pay for the dinner!!"

That perks Neal up. "You know your right. Okay, yeah you can go out with him that is if I can borrow your shirt."

"This shirt." Steve points to the one he's wearing.

"No you goofball! The button down one with the stripes. You know the one you bought at Sears?" Neal asks.

"Oh sure. It's at my apartment we can run over there and get it."

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it." Steve replies.

"You know I really like that shirt." Neal replies as Steve starts the car.

"When I said don't mention it I really meant don't mention it."

"Oh I just thought it was a figure of speech." Neal replies as Steve puts the car into gear.

"It's permanent press." Steve replies.

"What is?" Neal asks.

"What do you mean? What is? What have we been talking about? My shirt for god sakes!"

"Oh I thought you said not to mention it."

"Never mind." Steve replies.

SUNDAY NIGHT 1420 BLOOMFIELD RD APT 4C MISTY APARTMENT:

Neal has just finished putting a record on the record player when Misty comes out of the kitchen.

“Misty you know you are an excellent cook! That meatloaf was wonderful!”

Misty takes the wine glass out of Neal’s hand then she sits it down on the coffee table then she puts her arms around him as they sway to the music.

“Well I’m glad that you liked it. What about the apple pie?”

“Oh that was wonderful too! I hope I didn’t make a pig out of myself.” Neal laughs. “No pun intended. How did you know that apple pie was my favorite?”

Misty laughs. “Oh it’s alright. Leftovers are so overrated anyway. Steve told me.”

“Which one?” Neal asks as he holds her closer.

“Your partner!” Misty replies as she looks at him.

“Which one?” Neal replies again as he laughs.

Misty plays with the buttons on his shirt then she puts her arms around him slowly pulling the shirt out of his pants. They stop in the middle of the living room as they tentatively kiss once, then twice. The third time the kiss is harder and longer as Neal’s hands find their way down past her waist. Resting on her rear as Misty unbuttons his shirt.

“Steve also told me something else.” Misty replies breathlessly as they continue to kiss.

“Hmmm. What was that?” Neal asks as he kisses her.

“He said something about a dry spell?” Misty replies as she smiles at him.

“Uh oh. He told you that?” Neal replies.

“And I’ve been thinking....” Misty replies as she finishes unbuttoning his shirt.

“About?” Neal asks.

“How would you like some...RAIN....to end your dry spell?” Misty asks as she winks at him then she kisses him.

Neal smiles at her. “Oh you’re clever!” Then he scoops her up into his arms and he spins her around as Misty squeals. “Show me.” Misty points over his shoulder then Neal turns and carries her to the bedroom.

THE NEXT MORNING AT THE 9TH PRECINCT SQUAD ROOM:

Neal blows thru the doors of the squad room carrying a box of donuts. On top of the box of donuts he's also carrying a box of cigars, one of which he has in his mouth and a bouquet of a dozen red roses.

"Good morning my fellow Detectives!! And it's a lovely morning indeed! The skies are blue and the birds are singing! Joe! Where are you?"

Joe comes over to him. "Neal?"

"Congratulations on your twins! Here's a box of cigars for you!" Neal replies as he hands the box to Joe which causes the other detectives to laugh.

"Thanks Neal but the twins are about four years old now."

Neal looks surprised by this bit of news. "Really? Okay so I'm a little late! Time flies! Look! I also brought donuts for everybody!" Neal replies as he sits them down on the table then he goes over and he opens up the blinds on the window.

"Alicia!! Where is our lovely secretary? Alicia!!" Neal yells louder. Alicia peeks around the corner then she comes out into the squad room.

"Yes Neal?"

"These roses are for you! Of course your beauty makes them pale by comparison! For all your hard work." Neal hands them to her.

"Oh they are beautiful! What's the occasion?" Alicia asks as she smiles then she smells them.

"No occasion. None at all! I'm just in a good mood! It's a beautiful day!" Neal replies happily.

"I have to put these in some water. Thank you Neal." Alicia replies as she goes back to her office.

All this time Steve has been standing at his desk drinking his coffee, rolling his eyes, shaking his head slowly back and forth doing his level best not to laugh. Then Neal sees him and he walks over to him with his arms open wide.

"There he is!! The best partner in the world! The absolute best!" Neal takes the coffee mug out of Steve's hand then he sits it on his desk then he grabs him and gives him a big hug and a kiss on the forehead. "Steve have I told you lately....that I love you?!"

Steve can't stop himself as he starts to laugh. "Wow! Who in the hell are you and what have you done with Neal?"

"I'm just in a good mood!" Neal replies as he pats him on the back.

"Once again I'm going to ask who in the hell are you and what have you done with Neal? I'm guessing dinner went well?" Steve replies.

Neal takes the cigar out of his mouth. "Dinner was wonderful! Dessert was wonderful and breakfast...wasn't bad either!" Neal replies as he winks at Steve who laughs.

"Wow! Well then I guess the Dodgers weren't the only ones that hit a homerun last night!" Steve replies. "If this is what a little sex does to you, we should buy it in bulk, and keep it in the storage room. On second thought I wonder if it has to be refrigerated."

Neal laughs then he pinches Steve on the cheek. "Oh you are so witty! That is just another reason why I love you!! So what's on the schedule for today partner? Arrests? Chasing the bad guy? Shootouts?" Neal asks.

"Nothing that exciting I'm afraid. I hate to dampen your bright mood but I.A. wants to see us upstairs just as soon as you got here. The Captain is up there with them too." Steve replies.

"I.A.? What about? I thought we worked all that out that earlier?" Neal replies.

"Well yeah it seems there's a problem with the expense report we submitted."

"The expense report? What's wrong with the expense report? We submitted all the receipts, filled out all the paperwork. And since when does I.A. care about our expense report?"

Steve stands with his hands on his hips. "Since you put the receipt on there for that massage Misty gave you. Remember when I was in the holding cell?"

"Oh yeah. Well it was a legit business expense! I paid for it out of my own pocket!" Neal replies.

"Yeah that maybe true but I think they had a problem with the Massage part. For some strange reason they don't think it's a legal massage!! Go figure!"

"They are a jaded lot I must say! And if it was an illegal massage why in the holy shades of Hannah would I staple the receipt to the expense report? I don't think illegal massage parlors even give receipts!" Neal replies.

Steve just looks at him as he shakes his head. "Be that as it may they still want to see us upstairs! So you can explain that receipt. So let's go. The sooner we get this started the quicker it will be over!" Steve replies as Neal falls into step next to him.

"Steve."

"Yes Neal?"

"Have I told you lately....that I love you?"

"Yes. Yes you have. Just a few minutes ago as a matter of fact. I love you too."

"Steve."

"Yes Neal?"

“Do you know why I.A. is always one floor above the squad room?”

“Because shit runs downhill?” Steve replies as they both laugh.

“Very good partner very good!!”

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“Misty was quite a gal. Now she owns a chain of Sweden Massage Parlors.”

“Still legit all the way. For these six months or so when you two were going at it hot and heavy I never thought I would ever see you that happy again. That is until Ruby.” Steve replies.

Neal picks up the picture of Ruby off of his desk and he looks at it. “My Ruby. My Jewel.”

“Have you heard from Billy lately?”

“Yeah he sent me a letter. He always talks about getting out but he won’t be getting out. It’s sad really. I just wonder what happens to people to make them do the things that they do. We just go on living our lives not realizing the impact we have on other people.”

“We can at least say that Hank was wrong when he said that we never let other people into our circle. Look at you and Ruby. And me and Nancy. And you and I are still together.” Steve replies.

“I wouldn’t want it any other way.” Neal replies.

“Me either partner. Me either. You know I think I’m going to go and get a massage.” Steve replies as he stands up.

“Would that be a legal massage or an illegal massage?” Neal asks as he puts his arm around Steve’s shoulders.

“You know I haven’t decided yet. What one would you suggest?” Steve asks.

“The legal one and her name is Inga.”

“Inga?” Steve replies. “Do I need to put the receipt on our expense report?”

“Oh I wouldn’t! I wouldn’t! Neal replies.

