

THE DETECTIVES OF THE 9TH PRECINCT

MOONLIGHTING

PART 1

“Steve what are you doing?”

“Reading the classifieds.”

“Looking for something in particular?” Neal asks.

“Yeah a part time job.”

“Found anything good?” Neal asks.

Steve looks over the paper at him. “Why?”

“Well because I thought we could get a part time job...why are you shaking your head no?” Neal asks.

“Don’t you remember the first time we moonlighted together?” Steve asks.

Neal looks at the desk as he scratches his head. “So it didn’t really turn out like we planned.”

“Does anything?” Steve asks.

“Do you mean in the past or lately?”

“How about ever?” Steve asks.

“Well sure.”

“Go ahead I’m listening.” Steve replies.

“Well there was the time....”

“Yeah?” Steve replies.

“How about the time we....”

“Yeah?” Steve replies as he rests his chin in his hand.

Neal throws his hands up in the air. “Okay so some times our plans turn out badly. Most of the time it’s not our fault! Sorta like the first time we moonlighted together.”

Steve takes a deep breath. “Okay I suppose I have to give you that one.”

"Yeah this next one started out to be one thing and ended up being something else." Neal replies.

"Funny how that happens. So I guess we're talking about Moonlighting then?" Steve asks.

"Oh look Steve here's one! A dog walker?" Neal replies.

"No."

"Working in a car wash?" Neal asks.

"No."

"Driving a cab?" Neal asks.

"No. Okay folks it started something like this...Neal."

"Bagging groceries at the grocery store?"

"No."

"An exotic dancer..." Neal replies.

"No."

"...For ladies night at the local nightclub..."

"Ladies night? Let me see that!" Steve replies as he grabs the paper out of Neal's hand.

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MONDAY MORNING AT THE 9TH PRECINCT SQUAD ROOM:

"Neal what's all that?" Steve asks as he puts a cup of coffee down on Neal's desk.

"This?" Neal replies as he holds up a stack of envelopes. "This my best friend is a stack of bills from the baby's birth."

Steve takes them. "You've got to be kidding?! All of these? Wow!" Steve replies as he sits down on the end of the desk.

"Yes and let this be a lesson to you!" Neal replies as he points at Steve.

"Me?"

"Yes you! You see kids are expensive! So be careful!"

Steve laughs. "Thanks dad I'll keep that in mind. So are we going to have the sex talk now?"

Neal laughs. "Ha! Ha! All of these bills are from the hospital and the birth. I would hate to think what these bills would look like if there had been complications."

"What about our insurance?" Steve asks. "Didn't it take care of most of it?"

"Yes but this is what I have to pay!"

"What happens if you don't pay it?" Steve asks.

"What do you mean what happens?" Neal asks.

"I mean if you don't pay them what's the worst thing that can happen? Junior isn't a car you know. They can't repossess him. I mean....they can't....can they?" Steve asks as he bites his lip.

"What? Oh no of course not! I mean no! He's a baby not a car! No! Steve why did you have to bring that up?" Neal replies as he slaps Steve on the leg.

"Sorry!"

"Don't be silly! They can't repossess him! They could sue me or they could hound me until I paid them. Here look at this one." Neal replies as he hands Steve a bill.

"Oh holy shit!!" Steve replies as he looks at it his eyes wide. "This can't be right? Can it?"

"Fraid so."

"So what are you going to do?" Steve asks as he hands it back to Neal who tosses it down on the desk.

"I'm going to do what everybody else does in this situation. I'm going to do some moonlighting."

Steve makes a face. "Moonlighting?"

"Yeah moonlighting. Haven't you heard of that before?"

Steve scratches his head. "Maybe. What is it?"

Neal smiles. "It's a fancy term for a part time job."

"Why don't they just call it a part time job? Why do they call it moonlighting anyway?"

Neal shrugs. "I guess because you work by the light of the moon. Hey I have an idea!"

"Oh you know I don't like it when you say that. What's your idea?"

"Why don't you and I get a part time gig together?! You could use some extra money, couldn't you?"

Steve scratches his head. "Yeah sure who couldn't? Now that you mention it I have been thinking about a part time job. There is something I could use some extra money for."

"What?" Neal asks.

Steve laughs. "What do you mean what?"

"What do you think I mean? What could you use some extra money for? I know you want to pay off your car?" Neal replies as he snaps his fingers.

"No." Steve replies.

"No?"

"No. It's for me to know and for you to find out." Steve replies as he pats Neal on the back as he gets up from the desk.

"What does that mean?" Neal replies as he pushes the chair back as he stands up.

"It means I'm not going to tell you!" Steve replies as he adjusts Neal's collar. "You know you're a fine specimen of a man."

"Even thou that's true don't try to change the subject. Can't you give me a hint?"

"No! Tell you what I will do thou." Steve replies as he laughs.

"What?"

"If you guess it then I will tell you. How's that partner?"

"Hmmm okay." Neal replies.

"That's for later now we have work to do." Steve replies as he holds up a tri-folded piece of paper.

"That's not for Jacob is it?" Neal asks as he points at it.

"Fraid so."

"Damn! I don't like that guy." Neal replies.

"I don't either but we have our orders. We know where he's at so finding him shouldn't be too difficult."

"Uh huh." Neal replies as Steve grabs him by the arm and pulls him along.

"Neal you know your hair looks wonderful today. Are you doing something different with it?" Steve asks as he pulls him towards the squad room doors.

"I washed it and don't try to change the subject."

45 MINUTES LATER PIER 26:

"There he is." Neal replies.

"Yes there he is." Steve repeats.

"How big is he again?" Neal asks as he looks thru the binoculars at him.

"Are you talking feet or inches? Because I think he's got us beat in both departments." Steve replies as he raises his eyebrows up and down his chin resting on his hand as he looks over at Neal.

Neal doesn't answer he just turns his head and looks at him.

Steve takes a deep breath as he rubs his eyes. "6'7 and 275. Why?"

"I'm just remembering the fond memories we had when we had to arrest him the first time. If we roll up on him he'll run and I don't feel like chasing him. Too many people around wielding those big hooks. We could use a distraction."

"Well it looks like he's loading up the truck. We could let him leave and catch him on the road."

"Na that truck is too big he'll make us and he'll run us off into a ditch." Neal replies as he continues to look thru the binoculars at him.

"You know it's too bad we don't have a woman wearing a short, leather skirt walk by on the dock." Steve replies.

Neal then looks at Steve over the roof of the car. "What did you just say?"

"I said it's too bad we don't have a woman wearing a short, leather skirt walk by on the dock. What? You just said we needed a distraction! Neal. Why are you looking at me like that?"

Neal puts the binoculars down on the roof of the car. "Steve what size do you wear?"

5 MINUTES LATER IN AN ALLEY:

"Come on Steve he's going to be leaving soon! Give me your pants." Neal replies as he puts Steve's jacket in the back seat of the car.

"Why? It's cold out here and I'm not wearing anything under them! Why can't I just roll them up?" Steve whines.

"Because that dress isn't long enough that's why! You have to be convincing man! So come on now! Give!!" Neal replies as he makes a motion with his hand.

"Oh alright! How come I have to do this?" Steve replies as he hikes up the dress he's wearing then he unbuttons and unzips the pants then he shoves them down and he steps out of them then he tosses them to Neal. "There! Happy now?"

"Yes I'm ecstatic." Neal replies. "Okay now the wig." Neal replies as he hands it to him.

"Oh come on!!" Steve whines again. "What's wrong with my own hair?"

"What man doesn't like a blonde, damsel in distress? Put it on."

Steve just looks at him as he snatches the wig out of his hand and he puts it on his head then with Neal's help he starts shoving his own hair underneath of it.

"Ow!! That hurts!" Steve replies as he hops around.

"Stop your belly aching!! Here put this coat on." Neal hands him the coat and Steve puts it on. "Now let me get a good look at you." Neal takes a few steps back as he looks him up and down. "You know Steve you make a pretty good looking woman. You can fool old Jacob back there."

Steve stands there wearing a dress and coat, long blonde wig, his hands on his hips tapping his foot. "I would love to punch you right now. My coloring is all wrong to be a blonde. Stop laughing!"

Neal stands there with his hand over his mouth. "Here put on the Go Go Boots." Neal replies as he holds the boots out to Steve.

"I'm not going to wear Go Go Boots." Steve replies in a defiant pose his arms crossed over his chest. "Stop laughing!"

"You can't wear the tennis...shoes." Neal replies as he still covers his mouth with his hand.

Steve takes a deep disgusted breath then he snatches the boots out of Neal's hand. Steve kicks his shoes off and he throws them to Neal who, by now is grinning from ear to ear. Steve puts the boots on then he zips them up.

"Satisfied?"

"Oh I don't know what's funnier. That you look great dressed as a woman or that you can fit into Ruby's old clothes?" Neal replies as he laughs.

"Uh huh. Tell me what I'm supposed to do again and why do you have Ruby's old clothes in the trunk of your car anyway?"

Neal laughs. "I'm supposed to be taking them to the Salvation Army I just haven't gotten around to doing it yet. Be grateful I haven't. We're going to let the air out of the rear tire, then you're going to drive over there. Get old Jacobs attention....he'll come over to help you...." Neal takes a deep breath as he wipes his eyes. "I'll be hiding and then when he gets close I'll pop him. Okay say it like you mean it."

Steve stands with his hands on his hips, one Go Go Boot shod foot tapping as he looks up at the sky.

"Be grateful you said?" Steve clears his throat. "Excuse me sir." Steve replies.

Neal covers his mouth, grinning, as he looks at the ground. "Louder and higher pitched."

Steve takes a deep breath. "EXCUSE ME SIR!"

"That's good. Want me to let the air out of the tire for you, honey?" Neal replies as he laughs.

"If you don't mind. I don't want to get my dress dirty!"

Neal laughs as he kneels down at the rear of the car letting sufficient air out of the tire to make it flat then he opens the driver's side door for Steve.

"I slipped your badge, gun and oh yeah the handcuffs in the pocket of the coat honey."

"Thanks sweetheart! This better work." Steve replies as he gets behind the wheel.

Neal shuts the door. "It will. Even a felon like Jacob can't resist..."

"A damsel in distress. I know. You better not tell anybody about this. Now get your ass in the back seat!"

Neal raises both hands in the air grinning from ear to ear as he lays down in the back seat.

"Stop laughing!" Steve replies as he drives off.

10 MINUTES LATER:

"Yoo hoo! Yoo hoo! Hey Mister!"

Jacob was busy getting his truck loaded when he heard her yelling at him. He looks up then as he looks behind him he sees her from across the street. A woman with long blonde hair standing next to a car with a flat tire. Waving wildly at him.

"Yoo hoo! Mister!"

Jacob points to himself as he looks around. "Me?" Jacob yells at her.

"Yes you! Help me please! I have a flat tire!"

"What's he doing?" Neal asks from his hiding place behind the car.

"He's thinking about it!" Steve replies thru a smile as he continues to wave at Jacob. "Could you help me please I have a flat tire."

"Flash him some leg!" Neal replies.

Steve looks back just a little then he hikes his dress a little higher.

Now Jacob on the other side of the street sees this. She isn't bad looking he thinks. And she does need some help. And blonde women were his type. So he decided his truck could wait until later as he runs across the street to get to her.

"He's coming."

"Good!" Neal replies from his hiding place behind the car.

"Hey baby." Jacob replies as he runs over to her. "Have you got a spare tire?"

"Now is that anyway to talk to a lady and I ain't you're baby!" Steve says as he covers his mouth with his hand.

"Hey! What is this?" Jacob replies as he looks down at Steve. "You know you look familiar but I just can't..."

"What about me Jacob do I look familiar?!" Neal asks as he comes around from the other side of the car standing now behind Steve.

"You!" Jacob replies as he points at Neal.

"Come on Jacob don't give us any grief." Neal replies as he puts his hand out.

"Yeah man look we have a warrant for your arrest. Be a good boy now why don't ya? Don't bust our chops. Come quietly, okay?" Steve replies as he puts his hand on his arm. "Remember what we meant to each other in the past."

Neal scratches his head. "Alright Jacob let's can the bullshit! We..." Neal gestures to himself and Steve. "Have better stuff to do today than chase your sorry, no good ass all over the city. So why don't you be a sweetheart and get your STUPID ASS IN THE CAR! NOW!" Neal replies loudly.

Jacob laughs hard at this. "You two small fries think you're going to take me in? Then you've got another thing coming!" Jacob then reaches out and he pulls the wig that Steve is wearing down and over his face.

"Hey! Where did everybody go?!" Steve yells as he grabs ahold of the wig then Jacob grabs Steve by the arm and turning him around he shoves him hard into Neal. Neal, as a reflex, wraps one arm around him and being caught off guard Neal takes a few steps back holding Steve.

Not wanting to hit the ground hard he reaches out to grab ahold of the only thing in close proximity. The radio antenna on his car. Which as they continue their inevitable fall to the ground breaks off in Neal's hand. They slid down the back of the car bouncing off the bumper before hitting the ground.

Steve landing hard on top of Neal. "Neal? Is that you?"

Neal reaches up and he grabs the wig off of Steve's head as he looks at him. "Who else would it be?!" Neal replies as he throws the wig on the trunk of the car, along with the antenna, while at the same time looking over Steve's shoulder he sees Jacob running across the street dodging traffic.

"Hey that's real hair you know!" Steve replies.

"Get off of me!! He's getting away! Watch out! Don't put your knee there!!" Neal yells.

"Sorry!" Steve replies as he struggles to get off of him. "Is this any way to treat a lady I ask you?"

Neal manages to squirm out from under him and once on their feet Neal picks Steve up and sits him on the trunk of the car. "You're still call me in the morning, won't you?" Steve replies as he looks at Neal who makes a face at him.

"Just try and catch up!!" Neal then turns and runs off across the street putting his hand out to stop a car as he swerves around it. "Jacob! Jacob stop!" Neal yells.

Even thou by now Neal is more than a few paces behind Jacob he can see him run thru the nearby parking lot. Jumping over things and around people with Neal in hot pursuit. Jacob runs across the

dock turning things over behind him in an attempt to slow Neal down but all it does is make Neal more determined than ever.

“Jacob! Damn it! You’re just making things worse!”

Neal yells at Jacob’s retreating back as he rounds a corner of the warehouse and when Neal rounds that same corner he is stopped in his tracks by a couple of men standing there wielding hooks. Neal draws his gun and points it at them.

“Oceanview Police. I’m chasing a felon. Come on guys this has nothing to do with you.” Neal replies.

“Jacob is our friend.” One of the men reply as he swings the hook.

“I didn’t know Jacob had any friends.” Neal replies as he looks at them over the gun.

“If you want him you have to get passed us.” The other man replies as he swings another hook.

“I really don’t have time for this guys. I don’t want to shoot you.” Neal replies.

The guys laugh as they advance on Neal swinging the hooks at him. Neal stands his ground letting one of them get close and when the guy swings the hook at his head that is when Neal fires a warning shot into the ground.

“You missed pig!” The man replies as he comes even closer.

“Alright you asked for it.” Neal replies as he fires another shot but this time it went into the guy’s leg.

The man screamed dropping the hook as he grabbed his leg. “Son of a bitch! You shot me!!” The man replies looking with disbelief at him.

Neal then turned his attention and gun to the other man. “Want me to shoot you too?”

“No man!”

“Drop it then put your hands in the air! Now!”

After Neal got those two corralled he once again went off looking for Jacob. After looking in a few least obvious places he looked in the most obvious place. Purely by accident. Running by is when he saw it out of the corner of his eye. He didn’t want to see it. But he had. He stopped. Backing up he looked over the railing.

“Damn it! Jacob! Don’t tell me you can’t swim!” Neal replies as he looks around. Then after taking off his gun, jacket and shoes he dove in the water.

“NEAL!!”

Neal heard his name far too late. He was already in the water. Coming up from the cold, murky depths he looks up at Steve who is standing at the railing looking down at him with a bemused look on his face. Neal treading water.

“Neal! What in the holy shades of Hannah are you doing down there?!” Steve asks as he looks down at him.

"What do you mean what I'm I doing down here? I saw Jacob floating in the water!" Neal replies pointing at the body that is floating just a few feet away. His teeth now chattering.

"Jacob? Jacob is right here." Steve then steps back a few feet and grabbing Jacob he pulls him over to the railing. "See!" Steve replies as he points at him.

Jacob laughs at Neal. "I might be a criminal but I'm not stupid! I wouldn't jump in the water! It's cold!"

Steve looks at Jacob then he looks back at Neal. "Yeah he's a criminal but he's not stupid."

"If Jacob is up there then who is this?" Neal replies as he points. "Steve call Sam and get me out of here! Now!"

After getting some help to get the body out of the water and after getting some more help to haul Neal's own, cold, wet ass out of the same water he now sits in the back seat of a squad car wrapped in a blanket. Drinking a big cup of hot coffee. Steve stands watch over him drying his hair briskly with a towel.

"Ow! Shit! That hurts! Where did you get that towel?" Neal asks as he tries to push his hand away.

"At times like these beggars can't be choosers. It was in the trunk of your car."

"You mean the greasy, dirty towel I use when I change the tire towel?" Neal asks as he looks up at him.

Steve shrugs at this as he smiles at him. "You took a swim in the dirtiest, nastiest water in Oceanview and you're worried about a little grease on a towel getting in your hair. You could catch Typhoid. Did you swallow any of that water?" Steve asks.

"I don't think so. Why?"

"Because if you did I want you to get your shots before you kiss me again. I don't want to catch anything." Steve replies.

"Steve what took you so long back there?" Neal asks.

"What do you mean what took me so long? Besides the obvious back there I couldn't run in those Go Go boots. I don't know how women do it. Anyway, I had to put my shoes on then I was experiencing one helluva of a draft! I might want children one day, you know! So I had to put my pants on. Then I heard two gunshots..."

"That was me fending off those two lug nuts with the hooks! I identified myself as a duly sworn officer of the law then I fired a warning shot off across his bow but he didn't take the hint so I shot him! He ain't dead! I shot him in his stupid leg, he was lucky I was in a good mood! I could've aimed higher!"

Steve laughs. "After I heard the two gunshots I called for back-up."

"I appreciate the fact that you were looking out for my best interests but...what took you so long!!" Neal asks again.

Steve laughs as he puts his hands in the pocket of the coat. "All in all everything turned out all right. We caught Jacob, you found a dead body, and you didn't drown my fish-like friend. I like this coat can I keep it?"

Neal takes a sip of hot coffee as he looks at him. "How did you catch Jacob?"

"Oh it was easy. When you fired off those two shots it scared him. Old Jacob couldn't believe we were shooting at him so he sorta turned himself in to me. Neal look the Captains here."

Neal stands up as the Captain approaches them. "Boys. I heard about the shooting is everybody...?" The Captain then glances over at Steve. "Detective Perry."

"Yes sir?" Steve replies.

"Are you wearing...a dress?!" The Captain asks him.

Steve looks down at himself. "Well I...yes. Yes I am Captain. It's a long story."

"I suppose that also explains the report we had of a blonde woman, who was standing next to a car, being assaulted." The Captain asks.

"Yes sir quite possibly as it were." Steve replies

"Just make sure it's in triplicate Detective."

"Oh yes of course sir." Steve replies.

"Detective Schon are you alright?" The Captain asks him.

"Oh yes sir just peachy. We got Jacob Weathers that is all that matters." Neal replies.

"Well I.A. is going to want to talk to you about the shooting. Sam has taken the body back to the morgue and I think you two should get back to the Precinct and change clothes. We're talk more once you get back there. Good work boys."

"Thank you sir." They both say at the same time.

"Oh Captain by the way my car has a flat tire..." Neal replies.

"A flat tire?" The Captain repeats.

"Yes sir you see it had to do with the Damsel in Distress scenario." Steve replies matter of factly.

The Captain rubs his forehead. "The Damsel in Distress....just make sure it's in the report. You two can ride with me and I'll call the garage to come out for the car."

"Thank you sir." Neal replies.

As the Captain turns to walk away they fall into step next to him. "Detective Perry."

"Yes sir?"

"That is a wig in the pocket of the coat isn't it?" The Captain asks.

"Oh yes sir! It's real hair!" Steve replies.

"Yes of course it would be." The Captain replies as he shakes his head.

THE NEXY DAY AT THE MORGUE:

"Hey partner! That had to be the fastest I.A. investigation ever!" Steve replies.

"Well Bart..."

"Bart?" Steve replies.

"Yes it's short for Bartholomew."

"Uh huh." Steve replies as he crosses his arms over his chest.

"Bart decided to cooperate. As did his buddy that was wielding the other hook. They actually told the truth."

"Imagine that!" Steve replies.

"Yeah I couldn't believe it myself. So Sam what's happening? Any info on our John Doe?"

"Like I was telling Steve here your John Doe was pretty fresh. He was shot once in the back of the head. He died quickly then he was dropped in the drink."

"I'm guessing no wallet?" Neal asks.

"Are you kidding? It's not going to be that easy. Here are his personal effects." Sam hands Steve a plastic bag with some items in them. "Also besides the obvious he was very healthy. Early thirties. A strapping young man but I will say he had some bad teeth."

"How so?" Neal asks.

"Cavities and such. Also I don't think that your victim was from here." Sam replies.

"When you say not from here do you mean California?" Steve asks.

"No I meant from the United States." Sam replies.

"How can you tell that?" Neal asks.

"His dental work boys. See." Sam opens his mouth wider as Steve and Neal look.

"Oh! Yeah!" Steve replies.

"That's interesting." Neal replies.

Sam smiles. "You two don't see it do you?"

Steve shakes his head. "No not really."

Neal shakes his head.

"The material used for the crowns and fillings aren't from here. I'll say he's from a foreign county. Also no fluoride in the water. Also his hands. In the past he's done hard work but now not so much. He also walked with a limp."

"Huh! Sam that is amazing how you find all that stuff out." Neal replies.

"Yes very impressive I must say." Steve replies.

"Oh boys it's nothing." Sam replies as he covers him back up.

Keys, money, and some sticks of gum and a faded key ring. That's it?" Steve asks as he looks at the plastic bag.

"Afraid so boys." Sam replies.

"Sam why are the sticks of gum in another plastic bag? Did you do that?" Neal asks.

"Nope. They were in his pants pocket like that."

"Now why would you put sticks in gum in a plastic bag and carry them around with you?" Steve asks.

"Just right off the bat I'm thinking you want to save them, preserve them for some reason." Sam replies.

"Keys." Neal replies.

"Any car keys?" Steve asks.

"Doesn't seem to be any. This one either belongs to an apartment or a rooming house. 2B." Neal replies.

"Okay then if he didn't have a car then maybe he would walk to work. We should start at the beginning. Where you found his body. Floating in the drink." Steve replies.

"Good idea. He might have worked at the docks. Lived close by. There are quite a few rooming houses and a few apartments...." Neal looks up to see Sam watching them. "Anything to add Sam."

Sam takes off his glasses. "No. I'm just fascinated by how you two work. Very impressive."

Steve laughs. "Thanks Sam. Oh we could use a picture of our victim there."

"Okay. I'll slip his face back into place and then I'll call Phil to come and take some pictures. What's wrong?" Sam replies as they both stare at him.

"Did you just say slip his face back into place?" Neal asks.

"Yes. Boys you know what happens when a body is in water for a while. Slippage. Of the skin as it were. The hands, the face and sometimes the feet. Are you two all right? You look a little pale."

"No Sam we're okay. After you do...that...have Phil bring the pictures upstairs to us." Steve replies.

"Sure boys no problem."

THREE HOURS LATER:

They decided to split up. After getting the picture of their victim they hit the streets. Neal took the picture while Steve took the key to 2B. They would go into the apartment building or rooming house and while Neal showed the picture around Steve would find 2B and try the key and they agreed to meet back at the car. So now Neal is waiting. There was no good reason for Steve to take this long and he was just about to go and look for him when Steve rounded the corner.

“What took you so long?”

But before Steve can answer a window up on the second floor was suddenly flung open and a man leaned out the window.

“Hey! I told you to get out of here or I’m going to call the cops!” The man yells as he points at Steve.

“And I told you if you call the cops I’m going to show up because...I am a cop!!” Steve replies as he yells back at him.

“Peeping tom!” The man yells back at him.

“I told you my name is Steve and you should keep your door locked!”

“You!” The man yells as he points at Neal.

“Me?” Neal replies as he points to himself.

“Yes you! Are you his keeper?” The man replies as he points to Steve.

“His keeper?” Neal replies.

“Yeah his keeper! Somebody needs to keep an eye on him!” The man replies loudly as he slams the window down.

Neal looks at Steve. “What did you do now?” Neal asks him.

“Me? Why is it always me? I was doing what you told me to do. His apartment is 2B so I was trying to see if our key opened his door.”

“Did it?” Neal asks.

“No. The door was already unlocked. Neal you know some people really do vacuum in the nude.”

Neal scratches his head as he looks at the ground. “What!?”

“People really do vacuum in the nude.” Steve repeats.

“Steve please tell me that you saw his wife....”

“Nope.” Steve replies as he shakes his head.

“....His girlfriend.”

“Nope.”

Neal points at the window. "It was him wasn't it?"

"Fraid so."

"Steve I can't take you anywhere can I?"

"Can I help it if people have weird habits?" Steve replies as he shrugs.

"Come on. Let's go eat then we'll go and look at some more places."

A FEW HOURS LATER:

"No." Steve replies as they go into the rooming house.

"Oh come on Steve....give why don't ya!" Neal replies.

"I already told you. If you guess it then I'll tell you. I have to have some fun you know." Steve replies as they walk up the hallway then they stop at the Manager's door and Steve knocks. When no one answers Steve knocks again.

"Yeah! Yeah! I'm coming!" The voice says on the other side of the door then it is open still locked by the night chain. "Yes I have rooms for rent. Ten dollars a week. Fifty for the month. I don't allow any funny business. No children. No pets. Come back tomorrow. It's late." Then he shuts the door in their faces.

Steve and Neal look at one another. This time Neal knocks on the door.

"I said come back tomorrow!!"

"Oceanview Police. Now open the door." Neal replies.

When he opens the door again Neal and Steve hold their badges up so he can see them. Then he shuts the door again, takes off the night chain then he opens the door.

"Yeah? What do you clowns want?"

Steve and Neal look at each other then Steve looks at him. "That's nice. What's your name?"

"Who's asking?"

"I'm Detective Perry and he's Detective Schon we're with Homicide...."

Neal takes the picture of their victim out of his pocket and he shows it to him. "Do you know...."

"Wow! What's wrong with him?" The man asks as he snatches the picture out of Neal's hand.

Steve scratches his forehead. "I guess you miss the part about us being from Homicide didn't you? Now what's your name?"

"Roger Tidwell."

"Spell that." Steve replies as he takes his notepad and Roger spells it for him.

"He's dead that's what wrong with him. We want to know if you know him, maybe he lived here?" Neal asks.

"Dead?! It's hard to say. It's not a very good picture you know." Roger replies.

"Well no shit! Like we said, he's dead. Do you know him?" Steve asks again.

"That could be Ivan."

Steve and Neal look at each other then they look back at him. "Did you say Ivan?" Neal asks.

"Why don't you two come in? It doesn't look good for cops standing out in the hallway."

Roger opens the door wider and he lets them in then he shuts the door behind them. Then he goes into a back room and he comes back with a book.

"We found a key in his personal effects that has 2B on it if that helps any." Steve replies.

He opens the book and he flips thru a few pages. "2B. 2B. Ah there it is. Yeah Ivan Gunter." He replies as he runs his finger down the page.

Steve takes out his notepad. "Ivan? Spell the last name." He does and Steve writes it down.

"Does anybody live with him? Does he have any family?" Neal asks.

"No he lives by himself. He's not from around here." The man replies.

"Where's he from?" Steve asks.

"I think he said Russia or someplace like that." The man replies.

Steve looks at Neal. "That fits what Sam told us."

"Sam?" Roger asks.

"The Coroner." Neal replies.

"So he's really dead?" Roger asks.

"Yes he's really dead. Do you know where he worked?" Steve asks.

"He drove a truck that's all I know. He was quiet, he paid his rent and he didn't have you guys coming around. As long as he paid his rent that is all I cared about."

Steve shakes his head. "So you two didn't talk? You didn't ask him how he was doing. How his family was, nothing?"

Roger shrugs. "No. Like I said...."

"We know just so long as he paid his rent that is all you cared about." Neal replies.

"Right. Look. What's with you two guys? Are you the morality police too?" Roger asks. "Do you know how many people live in this building? Well do you?"

Neal and Steve both shake their heads.

“Try at least fifty. This place keeps me busy and I don’t have time to talk to everybody. I don’t know anybody in this building that well. Like I said...”

Steve raises his hand to stop him. “We know, we know. Did he get any mail here?”

“Sure of course. Who doesn’t get mail? The mailboxes are down the hall there.”

“We have the key to his room do we have your permission to use it and look in his room?” Neal asks.

“Sure. Go ahead suit yourself. What do I do with all his stuff?” Roger asks.

“What?” Steve asks.

“I said what do I do with all of his stuff? I’m sorry he’s dead and all and he was a good tenant but I have a waiting list....”

Neal laughs. “What? You have a waiting list? For this place? You’ve got to be kidding!”

Roger then comes closer and he puts his finger on Neal’s chest. “No I’m not kidding.”

“Don’t touch me.” Neal replies with a serious tone.

Roger then backs up. “Sorry.”

Steve shakes his head. “No. No you aren’t. Not even the least little bit. Come on Neal let’s go. I think we got what we came for.”

“Don’t bother we’re show ourselves out.” Neal replies as they head for the front door.

Once out in the hallway they head for the staircase. Up on the second floor they find 2B and using the key they unlock the door and go in. Using the light in the hallway they find a lamp on a table then they turn it on and Steve shuts the door behind them.

“That guy made my skin crawl.” Steve replies.

“Yeah cold blooded bastard. It took all I had not to deck him.”

“So all this luxury is worth ten dollars a week?” Steve asks as he looks around.

It was actually one big room. One corner was the living room with a sofa, end table, coffee table and television. In the other corner was a bed, night table and dresser. A desk and a closet. In the other corner, covered by a curtain was a kitchen. Stove, a small kitchen table underneath a window, refrigerator, sink. A few cabinets and pantry. Then in another room was a bathroom. Shower stall, toilet and sink. Medicine cabinet.

Steve goes over to the desk where a stack of mail is laying. “Neal look letters from Russia.”

Neal comes over as Steve opens one of them up and takes out a letter. “So that is what Russian looks like.” Steve replies.

“Four pages. A heart on the last page. In English or Russian that means the same thing. Love.” Neal replies.

"Yeah dammit and I think we just found his next of kin. Do we know anybody that speaks or writes Russian?" Steve asks.

Neal shakes his head. "No I don't think so." Neal replies as he wanders into the kitchen. "Steve look what I found in the trash can." Neal replies as he holds up a used book of matches.

"So?"

"So. They are from a Russian bar. The Russian Lounge." Neal replies.

"I didn't know they were any Russian Bars in Oceanview." Steve replies as he takes the book of matches from Neal.

"I didn't either. But it stands to reason. We have China Town so why not have a place where the Russian people would get together. A place where they would feel at home. California is a long way from Russia." Neal replies as he puts his hands in his pockets.

"True. Maybe somebody there can help us with these letters. Neal just look at this place. It's neat and tidy. He has everything he needs here. Who would want to kill him? He was a truck driver for god sakes!"

"I don't know. Steve you and I both know people have been killed for less. He ruffled somebody feathers somewhere. But we'll figure it out. We always do." Neal replies as he puts his hand on Steve's shoulder.

Steve takes a deep breath. "I hope so. Neal I have an idea."

"You want to pack his stuff up and send it back to his family, right?" Neal replies.

Steve smiles. "You can read me like a book."

"I had the same thought. We can get some boxes and pack this place up. Shouldn't take more than a couple of hours." Neal shakes him. "But that is for tomorrow for now let's look thru this place and see what we can find. Okay?"

"Okay."

THE NEXT DAY IN THE SQUAD ROOM:

"Boys. What's all that?" The Captain asks as he watches Steve and Neal and Alicia carry some boxes in and set them down on the floor by their desk.

"This Cap is from our victim's room." Neal replies.

"His personal stuff that we are planning to send back to his family." Steve replies.

"Oh good you found his next of kin. Did you tell Sam so he can contact them?" The Captain asks.

"That's going to be our next stop." Neal replies. "Now we just have to figure out how to get it there and how much it's going to cost."

"Just get a voucher from Alicia and take it to the post office." The Captain replies.

"I don't think the post office delivers that far north Cap." Steve replies.

"Why?" The Captain looks between them. "Where are they going?"

"Russia." Neal replies.

"What? Russia?" The Captain replies.

"Moscow to be precise." Steve says.

"Wow. Well boys I'll make some phone calls and see what I can find out." The Captain replies as he goes back to his office.

"Thanks Cap." Steve replies.

"Okay let's run down what we have so far on our victim." Neal replies as sits at his desk and he finds a notepad.

Steve sits down a cup of coffee on Neal's desk before he sits on the corner of the desk sipping from his own cup of coffee.

"You found him floating in the ocean with a gunshot to the back of the head." Steve replies.

"Robbery? His wallet was gone."

"Na. I'm not liking the robbery angle. If you rob them and drop them you usually leave them where they land. You don't shot them in the back of the head and drop them in the drink. So no." Neal replies as he taps his pencil on the desk.

"Maybe something bad followed him here from Russia."

Neal makes a face. "I don't think so. That's a long way to come to off somebody."

"So what you're thinking partner?" Steve asks.

"My gut tells me that Ivan stumbled onto something. What I don't know. Shooting somebody in the back of the head is execution style. It's meant to send a message, a warning. He pissed somebody off."

"Neal you don't think..."

Neal rubs his eyes. "God I hope not. I hope it's not the Mob. Russian or otherwise."

"I have an idea..."

"Uh oh!" Neal replies as Steve laughs. "What is it?"

"Why don't we go to that Russian bar? Somebody there probably knows him and talked to him, besides we need one of those letters translated."

Neal slaps Steve on the leg. "That is a good idea! Let's go and talk to Sam on the way out."

THE RUSSIAN LOUNGE 1250 WESTERN BLVD THE RUSSIAN DISTRICT:

“Wow this is some place isn’t it Neal?” Steve replies as they come into the bar. They pause for just a minute as they look at the paintings and the tapestries that were hanging on the walls. “Listen to that music. I don’t think I ever been in a bar like this before.”

“This place is busy. Look I think I see a table over there.” Neal grabs Steve’s arm as he leads him over to the table.

They haven’t been sitting there long when a pretty young lady, with shoulder length dark hair, wearing an ornate Russian costume comes up to their table and she hands them two menus. “добрый вечер!”

Steve smiles at her as he glances at Neal. “What did she say?”

“Beats me.” Neal replies.

“Oh I am sorry I thought you were Russian. We rarely have non Russians in here. I said good evening.” She replies with just a slight Russian accent.

“Oh good evening!” Steve replies.

“Would you like something to drink? We have the finest Russian Vodka.” She asks.

“No thanks. You see we’re still on duty.” Neal shows her his badge as Steve does the same.

“Yeah we’re Homicide Detectives from the Oceanview Police....”

At the mention of the word ‘Police’ all conversation stops and everyone in the place turns and looks at them. Steve and Neal look around the room at the people looking at them. The girl standing at their table looks back over her shoulder at the people in the room. As they watch some of the people either finish their drinks and leave, while others just leave.

“Hey Miss what gives?” Neal asks as he gestures.

“Yeah what’s going on?”

“Many of the Russian people don’t like the police. In Russia the police are corrupt. No trust. The Russian police have hurt many people.”

“Oh hey look we’re sorry....” Neal replies.

“We didn’t know...”

“Ava!!! в чем дело, что случилось?” A man yells at her from behind the bar.

“Он, отмечая папа немного непонимания!” She says over her shoulder. “My father. He wanted to know what was going on.” She replies as she looks again at Steve and Neal.

"We didn't mean to cause all of this trouble. We just needed some help with a homicide investigation." Neal replies.

"You see he's from Russian and we thought we could talk to somebody here." Steve replies.

"Nobody here will talk to you."

"Okay. Well then I guess we should go." Steve replies as he looks at Neal.

"But I will." Ava replies. "Do you have a card?"

"Oh sure." Steve reaches into his pocket, pulls one out, then he hands it to her. "It's Ava right?"

"Yes that is right. It might be late." Ava replies as she looks at the card.

"That's okay. We're always around." Neal replies as he gets out of the chair and Steve follows.

Steve then stands close to Ava as he whispers in her ear. "Ava. We are sorry but we could use your help. Call us. Please."

Ava then looks back over her shoulder at them as they walk across the bar to the door and once there Steve looks back at her and smiles.

THE COPS AND ROBBERS BAR:

"Neal!"

"What?!"

"Don't do that!!" Steve yells.

"Don't do what?" Neal asks as he laughs.

"That! Stop it!! Neal!! Move out of the way!" Steve yells. "Quit it!"

"Hey what are you two doing back there?" Fred yells from the bar as he wipes a glass.

"Nothing!" Neal yells. "Take that!"

"Stop it! Neal! It's going to....shit!"

The next thing Fred hears is the pinball machine as Neal tilts it.

"Don't touch me!!" Steve yells.

"Come here!"

"No! Neal! I'm going to call your mother! Quit it!"

"Hey! You two morons I just had that fixed!"

The next thing Fred sees is Neal pushing thru the curtain with Steve in a head lock as he tries to push Neal's hand away.

"Stop...it!"

"Say Uncle or risk an Indian head rub!"

"No! Never!"

"Alright! You asked for it!" Neal replies as he rubs his knuckles quickly across the top of Steve's head.

"Ow!!! Neal!"

Fred shakes his head as he goes into the back room to check on the pinball machine which he unplugs.

"You two guys sure are frisky for this time of morning." Fred replies as he goes back to behind the bar.

"Say Uncle!" Neal repeats.

"No!"

"Can't you two go play someplace else?" Fred asks.

Steve takes Neal's hand that is on his head and he bends it back causing Neal to let go of his neck as he goes up on his tippy toes. Steve, now standing up, takes Neal's arm and he bends it behind his back.

"Who's going to say Uncle now? Huh?" Steve says in Neal's ear.

"Not me!" Neal replies as he reaches behind him with his other hand which places on the back of Steve's head then with his other hand, which he pulls away from Steve's grasp he grabs Steve's arm and draping it around his neck he leans over and easily flips Steve over his shoulder and onto the floor. Where Steve lands with a dull thud.

"Hey! Don't break anything! Like I said you two can't play someplace else?"

"We're waiting on a phone call." Neal replies as he turns Steve over onto his stomach then straddling him he sits down on him.

"Hey! Get off of me! You big lummo!" Steve yells.

"You can't wait, oh I don't know back at the Precinct, sitting at your desk?" Fred asks.

"No! Where closer here than we would be at the Precinct and besides the Precinct doesn't have a pinball machine." Neal replies.

"After tonight I probably won't either." Fred replies as he watches Neal tickle Steve's ears.

"Stop touching me!!" Steve yells as he kicks his feet trying to bat Neal's hands away.

"Say uncle!!" Neal replies.

Fred laughs. "How can you be so sure that they are going to call you?"

"Because old Steve here flashed that Pepsodent smile at her! And no woman on God's green earth can resist that smile? Right Steve?"

"Right!! Now get off of me!!" Steve yells.

"Say it!!"

"Oh alright if it makes you happy! AUNT!!!" Steve replies as he laughs.

Neal laughs. "Close enough." Neal gets up but not before he gives Steve a swat on the butt.

"Ow!"

Neal then grabs Steve hand and he helps him to his feet just as their pagers go off.

"Now you know why I won't go anywhere with you two. You two wore me out just watching you. I'm going to go to bed. Just lock the place up when you get done and turn off the lights, okay?"

"Will do Fred and thanks." Steve replies as he looks at his pager.

"Goodnight Fred." Neal replies as he goes over to the pay phone where he punches in the number and for a few minutes he talks to somebody then he hangs up.

"That was dispatch. Ava called. I'm going to go and pick her up. Wanna come with me?"

"Na. Fred was nice enough to fix us something to eat so I think I'm going to clean up for him. "

"Alright. Make sure you lock the door behind me sweetheart." Neal replies.

Steve laughs. "Okay honey." Steve replies as he follows Neal to the door unlocking it then when Neal leaves Steve locks it behind him.

25 MINUTES LATER:

"Okay Ava a lady always gets her beer in a clean glass. And Neal. Here's your bottle of beer." Steve replies as Neal takes her coat and hangs it up.

"Thanks Steve." Neal replies as he walks over to the bar and he takes a drink.

"Do you two own this bar?" Ava asks as she sits at the bar looking around.

Steve laughs as he stands behind the bar. "No. A friend of ours owns it."

"He's a retired cop." Neal replies. "It was a dream of his."

"You are lucky to have been born in a country where you can have dreams and go after them." Ava replies.

Steve looks at Neal.

"That is why my family came here. To be free. Here you can walk down the street and no one bothers you. You can speak your mind without worry that you or somebody that you love will disappear. The newspapers are free to print what they want, not what the government tells them to."

"When did your family come here?" Steve asks her.

"When I was six. Some of our family is still in Russia. My father, he wouldn't like me being here. With you." Ava replies as she looks at them.

"Because we're cops right?" Neal replies.

"Yes. In my country the police are very corrupt. No one trusts them. People are afraid of them."

"There has to be a few good ones right? I mean they can't be all bad? Right?" Steve asks.

"Yes there might be a few good ones. What is it that you say? One bad apple spoils the whole bunch?" Ava replies.

"Well we all seem to come from immigrants. My family came from Italy and Steve there was the first one in his family to be born in America. Isn't that right Steve?"

"Neal's right. My family is from Portugal. There were farmers."

"Farmers? Hard working people then?" Ava replies.

"Yeah. Yeah they were."

"Ava. You don't have to be afraid of us. We're here to help you. You can trust us." Neal replies.

"I have seen you two on the news. The murders you have solved. The danger you have to be in. Most people would run from it but you run to it....why? Is it the money?" Ava asks.

Neal smiles as he looks at Steve. "No Ava it isn't about the money."

"A hundred and sixty five dollars a week just like clockwork." Steve replies.

"After taxes." Neal replies as he raises his beer bottle then he takes a drink.

"Then why?" Ava asks.

"It's called the Thin Blue Line." Steve replies as Neal looks at the bar.

"The Thin Blue Line?" Ava asks.

"Yeah. You see Steve and I are that thin blue line that protects the people of Oceanview." Neal replies.

"We separate the prey from the predators. We are the only thing that stands between them. We..." Neal looks at Steve. "...are all they have."

"It's a calling. We do it because we want to. We want to help the people that live here and protecting them is the best way to do that." Steve replies.

"You risk your life for them. Do they ever tell you thank you?" Ava asks.

Steve and Neal look at each other. "Sometimes. But they don't have to we would do it anyway." Steve replies. "Right Neal?"

"Right. A toast to the fine people of Oceanview." Neal replies as he raises his beer bottle and Steve raises his and they touch them. "And also to you Ava." Neal replies.

Ava smiles. "You said I could trust you. Who do you trust?"

"Each other." Steve replies as he smiles at her. "Oh I almost forgot! Could you translate something for us?"

"Yes of course." Ava replies as Steve runs off to go and try to find it.

"Ava I need for you to look at a photo for me but I want to warn you in advance. It's not good. Okay. He's dead. But I need you to look at it and tell me if you've ever seen him before. Okay?"

Ava nods her head.

"Ready?" Neal asks her.

"Yes go ahead."

Neal takes the picture out of his pocket and after he unfolds it he hands it to her. "Take your time."

As Ava takes it she gasps then she covers her mouth.

"Ava do you know him?" Neal asks as he leans into her.

Ava nods her head. "Yes that's Ivan Gunter. He's from Moscow. His family is still there."

Steve comes back to the bar and he sits down next to her holding two letters. "We found a stack of letters in his room. We picked these two because this one was sent to him recently and this other one looks like Ivan was writing it to somebody. I know they're personal but could you translate them for us?"

"Yes of course I would like to help." Ava replies as she takes the letters from him.

"Do you know where Ivan worked? We know he drove a truck. Do you know the name of the company he drove for?" Neal asks.

"No. He mentioned he drove a truck but I never heard him say the name of it. We mostly talked about Russia and his family. He worked a lot. He was trying to make enough money to bring them over here. This letter is from his mother." Ava replies as she holds it up. "And this letter he was writing back to her. It says here that he had saved up \$1,500 American dollars."

Steve looks at Neal.

"What?" Neal replies.

"We didn't find any money in his room." Steve replies.

"Maybe it's in the bank..." Neal replies as Ava shakes her head.

"No? It's not in the bank?" Steve replies.

"Ivan told me he didn't trust banks. When we first came here my father didn't trust them either but after he open the bar he needed the banks. It took a while for him to trust them. He used to keep all the money in the safe."

"A safe? Ivan didn't have a safe. Neal we didn't see a safe did we?"

"Nope not that I recall. Where else would he keep it?" Neal asks.

"Under the mattress? Did he have any books?" Ava asks.

Steve scratches his head. "A few I think. We packed up all his stuff from his room. I guess we could go back thru it. His family should have that money."

"Hey Ava could you help us get his stuff back to his family? We're not sure how to go about doing that."

"Yes. We still send things back to our family in Russia. I can help you do that. Whenever you get ready just let me know."

"Sure. Thanks. Anything else in that letter?" Steve asks.

"He mentions something about getting a lot more money, it says here he had a plan. And that they would all be together soon."

"A plan?" Steve replies.

"Oh look at the time! I should go!" Ava replies as she looks at the clock.

"Shit!! It is late isn't it? Come on we're take you back home." Steve replies as he stands up and he goes to retrieve her coat then he helps her put it on.

"Can I keep the letters?"

"Sure when you get finished with it just page us. We're...." Neal replies.

"I know you're always around." Ava replies as she smiles at Steve.

"Yeah something like that." Steve replies as he looks at the floor.

"Hey you know I had an idea..." Neal replies as Steve looks up at him and he makes a face at him.

"What?" Ava asks.

"Yeah what Neal?" Steve asks suspiciously.

"Why don't we all go out to dinner sometime? Ruby, she's my wife, would love to hear about Russia...." Neal looks up and over Ava's head to Steve, whose standing behind her waving his hands back and forth mouthing the word 'No' until she turns around then he suddenly moves his hand up to his head as he smiles at her. Then she turns back to look at Neal. "Steve over there would be happy to take you to dinner. Wouldn't you Steve?"

"Oh sure yeah I would love to." Steve replies.

Ava thinks about this for a minute. "Yes I think I would like that. We could have Russian food if you like. I look forward to it."

"Great! Great! We better go. Steve?"

"Let me grab my jacket. Come on Ava we're go out the back way." Steve grabs his jacket off of the chair then he takes Ava by the arm as he leads her around behind the bar to the back with Neal following close behind. Shutting the lights off as they go.

THE NEXT DAY BACK AT THE SQUAD ROOM:

Neal was sitting in the conference room at the conference table sorting thru Ivan's belongings when Steve came up behind him and slapped him on the back of the head with the folder he was carrying.

"Hey! What in the hell was that for?" Neal replies as he grabs the back of his head. "That was for making you say Aunt yesterday, wasn't it?"

"Moron!" Steve replies as he tosses the folder down onto the table. "Why did you do that?"

"Do what?" Neal asks.

"Tell Ava that I would take her to dinner? You know I have a thing with Nancy."

"Yeah but I'm not such just what kind of thing you have with Nancy. Besides you two aren't going out alone! It's a group date. Besides Ava isn't bad looking. She has nice legs."

"You old dog you." Steve replies.

"Hey I'm married I'm not dead." Neal replies.

Steve laughs. "She does have a nice...."

"Her eyes...are up here...old boy." Neal replies as he points to his own eyes.

Steve laughs. "Okay, okay she is nice looking and I did notice a few things, you know, about her."

"What color are her eyes?" Neal asks.

"Green."

"Good for you! Besides I've never met anybody from Russia before. I would like to hear more about it. Ivan was from there too. It'll help us understand more about him too. Last night I was thinking about what Ava said."

"In regards to what?" Steve asks as he sits down next to Neal at the conference table.

"A lot of things. How she said that we were lucky to be born here. All the freedoms that we have. How corrupt the police are. Stuff like that. And what was in that letter he was writing to his mother. The money he saved up and how he had plans to make more money. Enough to bring them over here. And where is that money?"

"Speaking of Ivan I have his file. Sam gave it to me."

"Bad?"

"Shit! Sam found rope marks on his wrist. His hands may have been tied behind his back. And he was dragged. Sam also found bruises on his upper arms. Here." Steve points to the place on his own arms. "The bruises are in the shape of hand prints."

"Jesus."

"Sam also found scrape marks on his knees and on the toes of his shoes. He was begging for his life and they drug him off and shot him in the back of the head. For what? For what reason? I keep thinking of his mother. She's so far away and she has no idea what has happened to her son. She thinks that he is here, in Oceanview, making a life for them. When he is actually downstairs in the morgue. She put all her hope in him."

Steve wipes his eyes as Neal puts his hand on his shoulder. "Did you find the money yet?" Steve asks.

"No not yet." Neal pats him on the back as Steve nods his head. "You can look thru these books see if there is an envelope full of money in any of them."

"I'm sorry."

Neal grabs him by the neck and pulls him closer to him. "Don't ever apologize for being human. The day you stop being human is the day you need to turn in your badge. I cried last night for him. Today is when we start to find who did this. And we will find them. Yesterday was for grieving and today is for us to get good and pissed off!"

Steve smiles. "We work better when we're pissed off."

"That we do partner. That we do. Now. Look thru these books." Neal replies as he slides them over to him.

A FEW HOURS LATER BACK AT THE ROOMING HOUSE:

"Roger!! Open the door! This is the police!" Neal yells as he bangs on the door as Steve stands next to him.

As Neal bangs on the door again one of the tenants comes out of his room and he goes over to the mailboxes. "Hey man you're wasting your breath. He ain't here."

"Do you know where he went?" Steve asks him.

"Or when he's going to be back?" Neal also asks him.

The man shrugs as he goes thru his mail. "He's probably out robbing the blind." He replies as he shrugs. "As for when he's going to be back? Who knows? Every time he leaves I hope he never comes back. But he always does. That guy is a weasel."

In the midst of this guy bending their ears Neal and Steve look up the hallway and coming in thru the door, carrying a grocery bag, was Roger. Neal takes a few steps forward as does Steve and the minute Roger realizes who it is he drops his grocery bag and he turns and bolts for the door.

"Damn!" Neal exclaims as he takes off at a full run having to sidestep the guy at the mailbox. Steve takes off and he runs the opposite way. Down the hallway to the left and down to the back entrance just in case Roger decides to run that way. Steve hits the door at a full gallop hitting it hard enough that it bangs loudly up against the wall and as he rounds the corner he sees Neal who by now has caught up to Roger at his car.

"Where in the hell do you think you're going?" Neal yells at him as he reaches into the car and he grabs Roger roughly by the back of his jacket and he hauls him up and out of the car. Then he kicks the door closed with his foot then he shoves him back against the car with his arm up against his throat.

"Let...me...go!! You...lousy...cop!!" Rogers manages to spit out.

"Not until you give us back the money!" Neal replies as he applies more pressure.

"I...don't...know...what...you're...talking...about!"

"Yes you do! You piece of crap scumbag!" Steve replies. "We want the money you took from Ivan!!"

"We know you have it!! It wasn't in his room!" Neal replies.

"We know that because we looked again just now! We have the key remember? And it wasn't in any of his stuff! Nowhere!" Steve replies.

Neal takes his arm from his throat as he coughs then Neal grabs him by the front of his jacket as he pulls Roger to him and he shakes him like a rag doll.

"That money was for Ivan's family and I'll be damned if you are going to take it from them! Now cough it up! You hear me!" Neal shakes him again for good measure.

"Listen Roger our patience is wearing thin! We're going to take you back to that hole you call a room and you are going to give us that money! And it better be all there! Do you read me?" Steve asks him.

"Answer him!" Neal replies as he shakes him.

"Yes!! You lousy pigs! Now let me go!!" Roger replies.

Neal then lets him go then he shoves him ahead of him. "Walk!" Neal yells at him.

"Run. I dare you." Steve says to him as he walks beside him.

They go back into the building. Pass the grocery bag that Roger had dropped to see the tenant still standing there with a few others with their doors opened listening.

"Nothing interesting on television?" Neal says to them as Steve watches Roger unlock the door to his room. "Go back where you came from! Now!" Neal yells at them then he watches as they all close their doors and the other tenant that was still out in the hallway scurries back to his room slamming the door behind him.

Once the door was unlocked Roger runs into the room and right over to the kitchen table with Steve right behind him. Steve was just a millisecond faster as they both reached for the gun at the same time that was on the kitchen table. Snatching it out of his reach just as Neal comes into the room slamming the door behind him.

"Tsk, Tsk Roger you naughty boy!" Steve replies as he looks at it.

"Is it loaded?" Neal asks.

"For bear." Steve replies as he spins the cylinder then he dumps the bullets into his hand. Putting the now empty gun behind his jacket, tucked into his waistband. Dropping the bullets into his jacket pocket.

"I can have a gun! This is my home. I use it for protection! This is a bad neighborhood!"

"Do tell. Go ahead. Get the money." Steve replies.

They follow him back into another room that serves as an office and they watch as he takes a box down from the closet, takes off the lid, then he takes an envelope out of the box and he throws it at Neal who catches it. Neal counts it.

"Is it all there?" Steve asks.

"Right down to the last penny." Neal replies.

"You two got what you came for. Now get out! And if you ever come back here again I'll have your badges."

This causes them to laugh. "Better people than you have tried..."

"...And we'll still be here. Let's go Steve." Neal replies as they turn and walk out of the room.

MUCH LATER THAT NIGHT BACK AT THE PRECINCT SQUAD ROOM:

Steve and Neal come thru the doors together, laughing and talking to each other, as they make their way over to the desks but before they can even get close Alicia runs out of her office and she grabs Steve.

"Where have you two been? I been paging you all afternoon!" Alicia replies as she whispers at them while at the same time looking back over her shoulder.

"We were at Ballistics." Neal replies.

Steve laughs. "What's wrong? Why are you whispering?"

"The Captain is very pissed! You have to get out..."

"ALICIA!"

At the tone of the Captain's voice everything stops in the squad room. All conversations. Pens and pencils that are writing, are raised and stopped in mid-sentences as they all look at the Captain. For as long as anyone can remember they have never, ever heard him raise his voice in such a fashion as he has right now.

"ALICIA!"

Alicia grimaces as she slowly turns around to face the Captain. "Yes sir?"

"Go back to your office."

"Yes sir." Alicia replies as she quickly walks back to her office.

"I want to see you two in my office! Right now!" The Captain replies as he points at them.

Steve and Neal look at each other as they slowly go to the Captain office and once inside they stand in front of the desk. The Captain slams the door which causes them to jump. They can hear the Captain take a deep breath as he walks passed them then he stands behind the desk.

"Do I look any different to you two?" The Captain asks slowly.

Steve shakes his head.

"No sir I don't think so." Neal replies sheepishly.

"Well I should because I just had my head handed to me on a platter!! What in the hell were you two thinking?!" The Captain replies as he slams his hand down onto the desk. "What possessed you two to go over to that rooming house and threaten Mr. Tidwell? He's screaming police brutality, strong arm tactics and he said Detective Schon that you choked him? Did you do that?"

Neal looks at the floor. "I..."

"Did you do that? Yes or no Sergeant?"

"Yes sir I guess I did." Neal replies.

"And Sergeant Perry where were you when this was going on?" The Captain asks him as looks at him.

"Sir I was standing...." Steve tries to explain.

"You were standing right next to him weren't you?" The Captain asks.

"Yes sir I suppose I was." Steve replies.

"Then why didn't you try and stop him?" The Captain asks him.

"Because he deserved it sir." Steve replies.

"I'm sorry Sergeant I don't think I heard you correctly. Say that a little louder for me!"

"I said because he deserved it! Sir!" Steve repeats it but this time he says it louder.

"Captain..."

"Yes Sergeant Schon?"

"Sir. Steve had nothing to do with this. It was my decision to go over there. He couldn't have stopped me if he had tried." Neal replies.

"Nice try Sergeant Schon. You both are partners and you both are going to take the fall for this."

"Captain you don't understand! That creep took our victim's money! It was all the money that he had! He was going to use it to bring his family here!" Steve replies.

Neal slams his hand down on the desk. "His mother is in Moscow! She has no idea what has happened to her son!! That money belongs to them! There was no way in hell I was going to stand by and let him keep it! It was our victim's money!!" Neal replies as he raises his voice.

"Stand down Sergeant!" The Captain replies which causes Neal to take two steps back standing with his hands behind his back.

"Yes sir." Neal replies.

"Don't speak to me with that tone. You can save your righteous indignation for another time. Mr. Tidwell might be a creep but he is still a tax paying citizen of Oceanview! He pays my salary and yours too! What did you do with his gun?" The Captain asks.

"We took it to Ballistics sir." Steve replies. "We wanted to see if it matched the one that killed our victim."

"Is he a suspect?"

Steve and Neal look at one another. "Well no sir not exactly." Steve replies.

"So you had no probable cause to seize that weapon?" The Captain replies. "Even if ballistics finds it to have fired the bullet that killed our victim it will be thrown out of court for unlawful search and seizure! It's called fruit from the poisonous tree!"

"It was lying in plain sight on the kitchen table!" Neal replies.

"It was loaded and when we went into his room he made an attempt to grab it but I beat him to it. I am one hundred percent positive if he would have gotten ahold of it he would have shot me or Neal." Steve replies.

"I am sure with what had happened to him he might have been justified." The Captain replies.

"What? No Captain! You don't understand...." Neal replies.

"No you two don't understand. You assaulted that man Sergeant. For no other good reason other than because you could."

"No!! We were there on our victim's behalf! That money belong to Ivan Gunter and his family! That jerk had no claim to it!!" Neal replies. "You didn't see his room! It was full of stuff. Stuff that he took from people's rooms...."

"You don't know that Sergeant!"

"That gun was probably stolen...." Steve replies.

"That gun was his. He bought it and he registered it! He has a right to own a gun. He is not a felon. He has not even been arrested! Ever! You don't have to preach to me about standing up for our victims Sergeant, we are all in this together. My goal is the same as yours! Justice. You know I usually look the other way when you two do things but this time I can't."

"What do you mean Captain?" Steve asks.

"I mean Sergeant Schon you're lucky your ass isn't in jail right now! If Mr. Tidwell's lawyer had had his way there would have been an arrest warrant issued for you for Assault and Battery!"

"What? Captain you can't be serious?" Neal replies.

"And I don't have to tell you what happens to cops in prison, do I Sergeant Schon?"

"No sir."

"You don't know what I had to do today to save your badges. What hoops I had to hump thru!" Steve looks at him with his arms crossed over his chest as Neal looks at the floor. "They came here to file a formal complaint against you two and their next stop was I.A.!"

"What?" Steve replies.

"You heard me. And the Chief called me too." The Captain replies none too happily.

"The Chief?" Neal replies.

"Captain we didn't mean...." Steve replies.

"Oh it's too late for that now. The Chief yelled at me for an hour and a half. He wanted me to fire both of you..." The Captain replies slowly with just a touch of sadness in his voice.

"Fire...fire us?" Steve replies.

"Oh yes it was this close." The Captain replies as he holds his two fingers close together. I begged him boys, begged him, to give you two another chance."

"Jesus." Neal replies as he rubs his hands over his face.

"So instead of firing you he decided to suspend you two for a month...."

"A month?" Steve replies.

"...Without pay." The Captain replies.

"Without pay?" Neal replies. "But what about the homicide case we're working..."

"I'll turn it over to two other Detectives to work...."

"No! That's our case! You can't do that!" Steve replies.

"What did you just say Sergeant Perry?"

"I mean, all due respect Captain, that's our case. You can't let somebody else work it." Steve replies.

"We already have too much invested in it!" Neal replies.

“That is what I told the Chief. I told him that you two were knee deep in this homicide investigation and it wouldn’t benefit anybody to pull you two off of it. So we all reached a compromise. Mr. Tidwell’s lawyer won’t press charges, he won’t even file a complaint but one of you will have to pay the price for this.”

“What do you mean pay the price?” Neal asks.

“One of you will be on suspension for a month without pay. Both of you will have a formal written reprimand put in your jacket. That will affect any chance you both may have to advance. So if either of you had the thought to take the Lieutenant’s exam that is coming up you can forget it for at least a year. You both will have six months’ probation. If you have any more complaints filed against you in that time frame, or if you even have the slightest bit of impropriety I can bust you both back down to the street. Wearing a uniform walking a beat!! Do we understand each other?”

“Yes sir.” They both say at the same time.

“Sergeant Schon and Perry I am very disappointed in you two.” The Captain wipes his eyes. “I never thought I would ever say those words to you two. You don’t know how much it killed me to have to do this to you.”

“Captain it probably doesn’t mean much but we’re sorry. We didn’t mean for this to happen.” Neal replies.

“We’re sorry Captain that we put you thru this. That wasn’t our intention. We were just trying to...I guess our emotions got the better of us.” Steve replies.

“People don’t understand that cops aren’t robots. We have feelings and emotions. Things affect us and they affect us badly. But boys sometimes you can’t act on those emotions. Like now. You’re human. So now one of you has to make a decision. Which one of you will take the hit?”

TO BE CONTINUED....