

THE DETECTIVES OF THE 9TH PRECINCT

THE DOPPELGANGER

PART 3

OCEANVIEW CITY COLLEGE:

Neal in the space of a few hours has managed to corroborate Steve class schedule with the appearances of the doppelganger. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays is when he would put on his Steve Suit and take it out for a good airing. Neal even went back to the Pussycat Pit and once again talked to Robert. Robert was very accommodating in his own way. Neal was happy to get out of there and head to someplace a lot cleaner and more serene.

Like the City College. When Neal got there it didn't look very serene but it was a lot cleaner. People were running hither and yon. Trying to get to class Neal thought. In many ways it reminded Neal of when he went to College. Neal went to the office to find Amy's Whittaker's classroom and they told him where it was but once there he found out she wasn't there.

"Can I help you find something?"

Neal jumped at the voice behind him and when he turned he saw a well-dressed, attractive young lady standing there carrying books. Her long reddish blonde hair was held back by a large clip.

"I'm sorry I didn't mean to startle you."

"Oh no it's okay I mean I'm okay. I'm looking for Amy Whittaker."

"I'm Amy Whittaker."

Neal hesitates then he takes out his badge. "I'm Detective Schon with the Oceanview...."

"Did that say Homicide? Is everything okay?" She asks as she starts to show signs of panic.

Neal puts his hand out. "No, no as far as I know everything is okay. I'm here about..."

"Did you say that your name was Schon? Neal Schon?"

Neal nods his head.

"You're Steve's Neal aren't you?" Amy replies as she smiles.

Neal laughs. "Yes I'm Steve's Neal."

"He talks about you all the time. How great you are and funny. But I don't think he mentioned the fact how good looking you are. Even with that black eye."

Neal turns around and looks behind him then he points to himself. "Me?"

Amy smiles then she laughs. Neal notices how her eyes light up when she smiles. Then Neal realizes Amy had spoken to him.

"I'm sorry what?" Neal asks.

"I said is everything alright with Steve? He's usually here by now for class."

"Oh no, no he's fine. Fine. I'm just...ah...just here to get some...you see I'm conducting investigation. Yeah that's it! An investigation! I need to verify where Steve was two weeks ago today. Steve said something about sign-in sheets?"

"Yes I have the sign-in sheets. Do you want to see them?" Amy asks.

"What?"

Amy laughs. "Mr. Schon are you okay?"

"Me? Oh yeah I'm great. Call me Neal and I was just thinking if they had teachers that looked like you when I went to College I might have done better."

Amy laughs. "I get that a lot. You and Steve, I will say, don't look like cops."

"We get that a lot ourselves." Neal replies.

"Thanks for the compliment. The sign-in sheets are in my office. Would you like a cup of coffee Neal?"

"Oh yeah sure! I could use a cup of coffee."

"Come on in and sit down while I find the sign-in sheets." Amy replies.

LATER THAT NIGHT:

Neal had been going ninety to nothing. After he got the sign-in sheets from Amy and her phone number he went by his apartment. He found some clothes that Steve had left there, and a book that he put in a duffle bag which he took back to the Precinct. Once there he found a file from Records that Alicia had put on his desk. Billy Mitchell's rap sheet. It was an interesting read. Then he went down to the holding cell to check on Steve. Steve was curled up on the bench asleep covered by a blanket. Neal wondered where that had come from.

Just down the hall from the holding cells was where the locker room was located. Neal didn't realize just how tired he was until he saw Steve fast asleep. Once in the locker room Neal secured his gun in his locker then he made his way over to one of the cots. Sitting down on it he removed his shoes then he laid down. He laid there for a few minutes looking at the ceiling. Then he turned over on his side and went to sleep.

THE NEXT MORNING AT THE PRECINCT:

Steve was sitting up on the bench in the cell wrapped tightly in the blanket as Neal came around the corner bearing gifts.

"Steve! You're awake!"

Steve rubs his eyes as he yawns. "Yeah. Damn that bench is hard. Watcha got there?"

"Breakfast and a big cup of coffee..."

At the mention of coffee Steve peels the blanket off of himself then he runs to the bars and he grabs the cup of coffee from him and he takes a big drink.

"Watch out its hot!" Neal replies.

"Oh I certainly hope so! I'm freezing!! What else did you bring me?"

"Breakfast and some clean clothes and a book."

"Clean clothes?! Oh Neal that's why I love you! You anticipate all of my needs!! When I get out of here I'm going to give you a big old kiss and a hug!"

Neal laughs as Steve runs back over to the bench where he sits the cup of coffee down then he takes the other things from Neal. Opening the duffle bag he takes out the clothes then he takes off his jacket then he kicks off his shoes then he unbuttons his pants. Steve has them halfway off before Neal realizes what he is doing.

"Shit!" Neal replies as he turns around.

"Oh come on Neal! You've seen one you've seen them all!"

"Mine is the only one I like to look at. Thank you very much!" Neal scratches the back of his head as he glances over his shoulder. "Now that you mentioned it, it hasn't changed much since you were six!!" Neal laughs as Steve throws his pants at the bars of the cell.

"Ha ha very funny!! I told you I'm freezing! It's called shrinkage!! Hey look my sweatshirt from the Academy!" Steve replies as he pulls it over his head slipping his feet back into his shoes. "I wonder where it had went."

"My apartment is where it went to."

Steve puts his dirty clothes in the duffle bag then he hands it to Neal. Neal then sits it on the floor then he reaches underneath his jacket and he pulls out a folder.

"Is that Billy Mitchell's rap sheet?"

"Yeah. It's very extensive. He has several Grand Theft Autos, a few assaults and batteries, a few B's and E's but he hit the big time when he robbed a gas station. All that stuff together he's done about seven years in prison. He was in CCC."

"CCC? Wow that's a rough place. You know Neal we've sent a lot of people there." Steve replies.

"Yeah. It says here he was only there for a year and a half then he was transferred to another Prison."

"Does it say why he was transferred?"

"Nope." Neal replies as he shakes his head flipping thru the file. "Where did you get the blanket?" Neal asks as Steve takes the file from him.

"Oh from the Jailer. He kept me company last night. We played cards."

"That was nice of him."

"Yeah maybe too nice. I don't want him to get into any kind of trouble for giving me preferential treatment. He has a baby on the way. See! School is helping me! Last year I didn't even know what that word meant! Let alone how to spell it!"

Neal laughs. "Speaking of school I went by the College and I saw your Amy! Steve how do you concentrate?"

Steve laughs. "She is distracting and if there were teachers that looked like her back when I was in high school I might have done better! She's a good teacher and very patient and Neal, she likes guys with curly hair." Steve replies as he points to Neal's hair.

"I said the same thing to her and speaking of which she asked me out."

"She asked you out? See, I told you the tide she is a turning." Steve replies.

"The next time you talk about my good graces to the women folk make sure you tell them how good looking I am. It seems that was the only thing that you didn't say about me."

Steve laughs. "Next time when I have a shindig with the women folk I will mention your good looks. Now your fashion sense is another story." Steve pulls at Neal's shirt. "It looks like you slept in your clothes."

"It looks like it because I did. I slept in the locker room last night."

"Why did you do that? Ah Neal you should have gone home...." Steve replies as he holds onto one bar of the cell looking at the floor.

Neal covers his hand with his. "How could I have done that when you were in here? How could I sleep in a warm and comfy, empty, bed while you were sleeping on that hard bench?" Neal then pats him on the head.

"Thanks. Can you eat breakfast with me?" Steve asks.

"I wish I could but the people from your study group are going to come in and sign witness statements. Stating that you were there Friday night in class and not in L.A."

"That's six people!"

"Seven. Amy's going to sign one too." Neal replies as he smiles.

"That's amazing!"

"Not really. I'm not the only one that knows what a good guy you are." Neal replies as Steve smiles at this. "Then I'm going to make copies of everything. The Captain gets one. I.A. gets one then the copy I'm going to give to Hank I'm going to shove it....!"

Steve raises one finger. "Ah Neal! Hank was just doing his job. He didn't know what has been going down here."

"You're awfully forgiving." Neal replies.

"Forgiving is one thing forgetting....is another."

Neal nods his head as he kicks at the bar looking at the floor. "Steve....if it's the last thing I'll ever do...."

"It won't be. He's a bad shot remember?" Steve replies as he looks at him.

"Yeah."

Steve then leans in closer to Neal as he talks in his ear. "By now all of this has probably made the papers and he knows you're going to be coming after him. He also knows you can't hurt him. But there's nothing to stop him from hurting you. He's been in prison. He caused the death of an innocent person, whether he meant to or not." Steve raises his head and he looks at Neal. "That badge doesn't stop bullets. He doesn't have to be a good shot...."

"....Just lucky." They both say at the same time.

Neal takes a deep breath. "We always seem to find ourselves in this position, don't we?"

"Who else do we have?" Steve replies as he smiles and then they grasp hands.

"I'll see you later partner." Neal replies.

“You better....partner.”

LATER THAT SAME DAY:

It was a good thing that Alicia had volunteered to come in and help, otherwise this massive undertaking of taking all the witness’s statements would have been an all-day affair. As it was it took a while. Neal had made copies and he left one on the Captain’s desk and just now he was coming back from I.A. when he ran into Alicia in the hallway carrying Steve’s coffee mug.

“Wait weren’t you wearing pants when you came in earlier?” Neal asks as he looks at Alicia.

Alicia pats her hair as she smiles. “I thought Steve could use some cheering up. I’m wearing his favorite outfit.”

Neal steps back as he looks at her then he points. “Oh! Isn’t that the skirt when you bend over it shows....”

“That’s right...toodles.” Alicia replies as she waves at Neal. “Oh there’s a call holding for you on Line 1.”

Neal just stands there watching her walk away his head leaning to the side his arms crossed over his chest.

“Neal?”

“Huh? Oh yeah. Line 1 call holding. You know Alicia I hate to see you leave but I love to watch you walk away.”

Alicia laughs. “Don’t wait up for me.”

“Uh huh.” Neal replies as he finally tears himself away as he goes back into the squad room. He goes over to his desk and he picks up the receiver then he punches the button that’s flashing.

“Homicide. Detective Schon.”

There’s a pause then the voice says, “Hey Neal how’s it hanging?”

Surprised Neal stands up straighter. “Billy?”

“I heard thru the grapevine that you’re trying to find me?”

Neal looks around the squad room and snapping his fingers he manages to get the other Detectives attention that's in the room. Mouthing the words "Trace" as he points to the phone.

"Yeah tell me where you're at and I'm come and get you." Neal replies as he watches the other Detective get on the phone at his desk.

Billy laughs. "Oh it's not going to be that easy. Remember when we were kids Neal and we used to play tag?"

"Yeah I think so. Why?" Neal replies.

"Because you're it."

"I don't understand." Neal replies.

"Sure you do. You're just trying to trace this call. Follow the clues. Go back to where this all started. And Neal it was good to see you again." Billy replies then Neal heard as the phone on the other end was hung up.

"Damn it!! Son-of-a-bitch! That wasn't long enough was it?"

"No." The other Detective replies as he comes over to Neal's desk. "What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to do what he wants. But first I have to go downstairs to my locker. Do me a favor Joe and call the Captain and tell him what's going on." Neal grabs his jacket from the chair then he walks quickly out of the squad room.

THE PUSSYCAT PIT:

"You guys must be playing a joke on me or something." Robert replies.

Neal rubs his eyes. "I don't know what you mean Robert."

"I mean I read in the paper that your partner is in jail! Armed robbery it said! And now just a little while ago he shows up and hands me this!" Robert replies as he holds up a piece of folded paper. What gives?"

"Robert I told you already. The guy that was here is not, was not, in any shape, form or fashion my partner!! He's a doppelganger!"

Robert gives Neal one of those looks that says he thinks Neal is a lunatic. "Who? What? Doppel...what?! You just made that up!!"

“No I didn’t just make it up Robert! He’s an imposter! I told you that!! My partner is in jail for something this other guy did!! This guy is yanking my chain big time!! Do you understand now?!”

Robert just looks at him. “You guys must be playing a joke on me or something!!”

Neal heaves a deep sigh. “Could you give me that note please?”

Roberts hands it to him and then Neal unfolds it and he reads it. “Thanks Robert.”

OCEANVIEW PUBLIC LIBRARY:

“Are you here to pay the fine too?” The Librarian asks Neal as she holds on to one end of the note as Neal holds on to the other end.

“Ah excuse me? What? What fine?”

“Mr. Perry checked out two books two months ago. He has yet to return them.” The Librarian replies as she tugs gently on the note and she pulls it back in her direction.

Neal gently pulls the note back to him. “Why didn’t he pay it when he was here dropping off this note?”

The Librarian pulls the note back to her. “I don’t know. He said when you came here to get this that you would pay it because....”

Neal pulls it back. “Let me guess. Because I’m good for it?”

The Librarian pulls it back towards her. “Something like that. It’s \$10.50.”

Neal pulls it back towards him again. “Okay if I don’t pay it what happens?”

“We cancel his Library card.” The Librarian replies.

“Cancel?” Neal lets go of the note.

“Revoke...”

“Revoke?” Neal repeats. “Oh no no no! Steve loves coming to the Library. Okay damn it!” Neal takes out his wallet and counts out the money. “Technically you can’t hold that note hostage! It’s mine!”

The Librarian just looks at him as she takes the money then she hands him the note.

“Since I paid that fine I think I have the right to know what books he checked out.” Neal replies.

She sighs as she goes over to the cabinet and she looks it up then she comes back over to the counter.

“One book was about police procedures and the other about killers who pleaded insanity.”

“WHAT?”

She looks at the card again. “Police procedures...”

Neal waves this off. “No what was that other book again?”

“The insanity defense....”

“Can I get a receipt please?” Neal asks.

She writes one out and she hands it to him. Neal takes the receipt from her then he leaves. Once outside he reads the note.

LATER THAT AFTERNOON:

By now Neal had been pushed and pulled and strung along. He went from the Library, to the grocery store that Steve uses to a little Mom and Pop diner, where Neal grabbed a late lunch. So now that’s where he sits looking at the number on his pager. He doesn’t recognize it, it doesn’t even look remotely familiar. He gets up and pulling a dime out of his pocket he goes over to the pay phone. He puts the dime in then he dials the number.

It rings once then twice then the receiver is picked up.

“Neal! Hey buddy.”

“Billy?”

“So are you having fun? I know I’m having fun seeing you run around like a chicken with its head cut off.”

Neal laughs. “Oh just wait until I get my hands on you.”

“And you’ll do what? Not a damn thing if you don’t want Steve to take the rap for what I’ve done.”

“Is that a confession?” Neal asks.

Billy laughs. “Of sorts.”

“When will this be over?” Neal asks.

“When I say it’s over. You better get going the next stop is the Zoo.” Billy replies then he hangs up.

“Billy? Billy?” Neal replies then he hangs up.

So Neal heads for the Zoo. He wanders around until he finds the office and there he finds another note. Reading it he realizes this next place is way over on the other side of town. Looking at his watch he knows it will be dark soon. If this how Billy wants to play it, and it’s the only way to save Steve then Neal will get in his car and go to the other side of town. Which is at least a good thirty to a thirty five minute drive away. Neal leaves the Zoo. Taking with him a very bad feeling.

THIRTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER:

Neal sits in his car, holding the steering wheel in a death grip, as he looks out thru the windshield at the next place that Billy has sent him to. He should have recognized the address. This place. He wondered how Billy knew of this place. This place Neal now finds himself at was the old soup factory on the outskirts of town. The place where he saw the future with Steve. Before Steve became a cop. The place where Steve, instead of using a gun, was throwing soup cans down on the bad guys.

By anybody else’s standards...it was certainly....odd. Neal knew he had been had. But that wasn’t the odd part. It wasn’t even odd that he finds himself here. What was odd was what was hanging off the big gate in front of this place. It stuck out like a sore thumb. Hanging from a wire hanger. It was bright and new. A shining beacon in this dark place that was gently moving in the breeze. It was....yellow.

Neal couldn’t take his eyes off of it as he gets out of the car and he walks over to it. He knew what it was but he wasn’t sure what it meant. It was a slicker. In other words...a rain coat. On closer inspection Neal could see there was a note and it was safety pinned to it.

Neal reaches out and he yanks the note from the safety pin, tearing it slightly, then he opens it.

It was just three little words.

“WHEN IT RAINS....”

Neal reads it again then he looks at the rain coat then all of a sudden....his eyes widen with recognition. It hits him.

Then he turns and runs for the car.

OCEANVIEW PLAYHOUSE THEATRE:

Billy was waiting and watching. He had been sitting outside at the little Café across the street from the Playhouse for some time now. Watching the people as they came out after each performance of the play. This time was the last performance of the day. He was waiting for one person. He had sent Neal on a wild goose chase just so he could get to this point. It took a good ten minutes for the patrons to leave, then he saw her. At the glass door, opening it as she walked outside. Looking in both directions.

That is when he runs across the street. "Misty."

She turns at the sound of her name then she takes a step back when she sees who it is.

"Oh it's you." Misty replies.

Billy walks up to her smiling. "Come on. Is that any way to greet somebody?"

"No I just meant....I thought Neal was here." She replies as she clutches the strap of her purse tighter.

"Neal is busy so he sent me to pick you up and bring you back to the precinct." Billy replies as he flashes his version of his best Steve smile.

"The precinct? Why does he want me to come to the precinct?" Misty asks as she takes another step back.

"To fill out a statement. So let's go." Billy replies as he takes her by the hand and he tries to pull her along. "What's wrong baby? You look confused."

"I...I read in the paper this morning that you were in jail."

Billy laughs. "Don't believe everything you read in the papers. I'm right here. Let's go."

Once again he grasps her tightly by the hand as he pulls her to the car that is parked around the corner. Misty tries her best to drag her feet. Not wanting to get in that car. Billy by now has to practically drug her to the car. Once there he opens the passenger side door for her.

"Go ahead baby get in."

Misty shakes her head as Billy grabs her arm. "No! I'll scream."

Billy then grabs her tighter as he pulls her roughly to him putting his arm around her holding her close.

"No you won't." He shows her his gun. "You'll be a good girl and get in the car. I won't hurt you."

Misty tries to struggle against him. "I know who you are!"

Billy smiles at her. "You know baby when you struggle like that, you really turn me on. Just who am I?"

"You're that imposter Neal has been looking for! You aren't his partner! Let me go!"

Billy looks at her. "You know those times I was alone in your apartment with you I thought about doing this. Just grabbing you and kissing you." Billy takes his hand and puts it on the back of her head pushing her towards him then he kisses her. Misty fights against him. Hitting his chest with her hand until he finishes kissing her. "Let's go back to my place. I'll make you forget about Neal. Come on baby don't make me hurt you."

"No! I'm not going anywhere with you!"

"Didn't you hear the lady Billy? She said she doesn't want to go with you. Let her go."

At the sound of his voice they both look and standing there was Neal. Then Billy draws his gun putting it underneath Misty chin.

"Neal!" Misty cries out.

"Don't come any closer. I have already killed one person and I won't mind killing her."

Neal puts his hand out. "Billy listen to me. That man in the liquor store, I know you didn't mean to kill him and Misty, she hasn't done anything to you. So let her go. I swear I'm not armed."

"Show me! Take off your jacket. Slowly." Billy replies.

Neal raises both hands in the air then he slowly takes off his jacket dropping it on the ground. Then he turns around to show him he doesn't have a gun tucked in his waistband. "See Billy I told you. I'm telling the truth. This is between you and me. Just let her go."

Billy jams the gun farther under her chin as Misty closes her eyes. "Do you like her?" Then when Neal doesn't answer quick enough he asks again this time louder. "I SAID DO YOU LIKE HER!"

"Yes Billy I like her."

"Do you like her more than your partner? Well Neal do you?"

Neal moves a step closer. "Yes Billy I like her more than my partner."

"What about me Neal? Huh? I bet you don't even remember me do you? Do you!" For emphasis he jams the gun into Misty chin causing her to cry out.

"I remember Billy. Elementary school. In the lunch line you gave me a quarter for a carton of milk. Tell you what. Let Misty go. She'll just weigh you down, get in the way, like women do. Do that then you and I will go somewhere and talk about old times. You know catch up? But before that can happen...."

"You want to talk about old times with me?" Billy asks.

"Sure. You know guy talk." Neal says as he looks at Misty tears running down her face.

"Okay. Sure. If you want her then you can have her."

Then Billy shoves her. Shoves her hard right into Neal. She is shoved so hard into him that they both fall to the ground and just as they are falling Billy fires at them. Neal wraps his arms around her as he rolls them across the ground and behind Billy's car coming to a rest there.

"Are you okay?" Neal asks her.

"I don't know I guess so."

Just then they hear a car door slam and Billy's car start. Neal grabs Misty by her arm and pulls her roughly to her feet and in a crouching position they run down the sidewalk in the direction of Neal's car as Neal feels another bullet fly pass his head. They duck as they round the corner and once to his car Neal pulls the passenger side door open and he pushes Misty into the front seat slamming the door behind her.

Neal runs around to the driver side of the car. He jumps in and starts it and he takes off even before his door is closed in hot pursuit after Billy.

"You didn't get hit did you?" Neal asks her as he puts the bubble light on the roof of the car.

"No, no I don't think so."

"Up the road here is a grocery store. I'm going to let you out there. You'll be safe there." Neal replies.

"Why can't I go with you? You might lose him if you stop to let me out."

"First of all honey it's not safe to be with me right about now and don't worry about him getting away. He won't get far." Neal replies.

Neal reaches for the radio mike. "Victor 7 to dispatch! Victor 7 to dispatch.

After a few seconds. "Go ahead Victor 7.

"Shots fired. I repeat shots fired. I'm in pursuit of a black 69 Chevy Chevelle. California license plate 676 Boy Nora Tom. Repeat California 676 Boy Tom Nora. We're headed East on Fairfield. Request back-up. Dispatch have them run silent."

"10-4 Victor 7. Attention all units! Attention all units! Shots fired! Victor 7 is in pursuit. Black 69 Chevy Chevelle. California license plate 676 Boy Nora Tom. 676 Boy Nora Tom. Any units in the vicinity of East Fairfield Officer requests assistance. Officer requests silent running."

“Victor 7 to dispatch. I also have a civilian that I’m going to drop off at the 24 Hour Grocery on 523 Fairfield. Have a black and white pick her up.”

“10-4 Victor 7. Attention all units! Attention all units!....”

“Does this happen to you every day?” Misty asks as she holds onto the door handle.

Neal looks over at her. “Not every day no but yeah a good majority of the time. So now I guess I’ve scared you off huh? No home cooked meal now?”

Misty laughs despite the situation. “You’re worried about a home cooked meal...now?”

Neal shrugs as he laughs. “When you get the rare opportunity for a home cooked meal you don’t want anything to screw that up.”

Misty shakes her head. “You’re crazy you know that?”

“So I’ve been told.” Neal replies as he pulls up to the grocery store. “Okay honey. Stay inside till the black and white gets here. I’ll see you later.” Neal smiles at her.

Misty opens the door and she gets out. “Meatloaf.”

“I love meatloaf.” Neal replies as he smiles at her.

Misty looks at him. “Neal be careful.”

Neal smiles at her again as he simply nods his head then she closes the door and Neal puts it into gear.

Earlier when Neal said that Billy wouldn’t get far he meant it. Neal knew a shortcut and once he was back in the city he went by Misty’s apartment. Not finding her there the next logical place had to be...the Playhouse. He rolled up and spotting Billy’s car he stopped and back into the alley around the corner. After finding a little piece of rock, so small if it ended up in your shoe it would have driven you to distraction, he went over to Billy’s car. He wedged that little piece of rock into the valve stem of his left rear tire. A slow leak.

Eventually Neal knew that when that tired heated up the air would escape faster and Billy would find himself....stuck. Another advantage was the fact that Neal knew this city and these streets better than Billy did. If Billy continued on this road he would end up at the docks.

Neal drove by slowly on the street. Looking at all the little sides streets and dead ends and alleys were Billy could leave a car. And then he spotted it. Back into an entrance to the alley. The car listing badly to the left.

To Neal it was a clear invitation to a set up. A trap as it were. Neal not one to disappoint someone, since Billy had come all this way and all, decided to accept the invitation....by parking his car.

“Victor 7 to dispatch. Show me out at 11417 East Fairfield. The alley next to the Dock Master’s office. Assistance requested. All responding unit’s silent running.”

“10-4 Victor 7. Attention all units in the vicinity of 11417 East Fairfield. Officer requests assistance. All responding unit’s silent running.”

Neal then puts the mike down in the front seat as he looks at Billy’s car. Reaching down to his right leg he pulls the pant leg up then he takes the gun out of its holster that he has strapped to his leg. Getting out of his car he moves ever so slowly to Billy’s car. Looking under and around it and in it. Nothing.

Neal moves slowly around the car until he gets to the corner.

“Olly, Olly oxen free. Come out, come out wherever you are Billy.” Neal sings out.

And as an answer Billy fires off one shot. Neal can hear it as it zings off the brick of the alley walls. Eight. Eight is the number of bullets that the Colt holds. Neal knows that was the third shot. But what Neal didn’t know was how many bullets he had in there to begin with. And if old Billy boy had an extra clip on him. Neal looks around and then he sees the lid to a trash can. He needed to get at least a good sense of where Billy might be in the alley so he picks it up. Standing at the corner he tosses the trash can lid out into the air and in quick succession Billy fires off two shots at it. The shots were to the left.

Peeking around the corner Neal spots a dumpster down the alley. Neal takes a deep breath then he runs across the alley to the dumpster as Billy shoots at him. Neal does his best to duck and dodge and he was raising his gun to return fire when he tripped.

Neal wasn’t sure what he tripped over, trash, his own two feet or something placed there on purpose. He fell onto his right side and as he did so his gun left his hand. It flew lazily thru the air and when it hit the pavement of the alley, it skidded and bumped its way across the pavement.

When it finally came to rest Neal was up quickly on his knees running crablike across the pavement and he could see it. Resting there. Just within arm’s reach. He reached out with his right hand to retrieve it when suddenly a foot in a Steve tennis shoe covered it. As Neal is on all fours, his right hand outstretched towards his gun, so close to it, he looks up. When he looks up he is staring at the barrel of the Colt. He slowly raises his eyes upward, looking pass the gun, to the man who holds it.

Billy standing there looking so much like Steve it was scary. The long hair hanging down passed his shoulders. The jacket, pants and shoes. An evil smile. The only real difference Neal now notices as he looks him in the eyes, are his eyes. Dark and sinister devoid of any sort of light. That stupid saying flashes thru Neal’s mind. The lights are on but nobody’s home.

Billy shakes his head slowly back and forth. “Neal. Shame on you! You lied to me! You did have a gun after all. I don’t like it when people lie to me.”

“Do you really think I would have come out here looking for you without it? If you thought that....then you are...crazy.” Neal replies as he looks up at him.

Billy pulls back the hammer on the gun as he continues to point it at Neal. “You best be careful Neal....what with you being out here....by yourself.”

Then in the confines of the alley they heard a sound. The sound of another gun being cocked.

“Who said anything about Neal being out here by himself” Steve replies as he stands behind Billy pointing his gun at his head. “Just like the commercial says there ain’t nothing like the real thing, baby.” Steve replies as he pats himself on the chest. “Give me your gun. Oh, and while you’re at it Billy take your foot off Neal’s gun, it’s expensive.”

TO BE CONTINUED: