

THE DETECTIVES OF THE 9TH PRECINCT

MOONLIGHTING

PART 4

BAKERSFIELD MUNICIPAL AIRPORT:

"Neal! What took you so long to get here?" Steve replies as he stands on the steps of the plane watching as Neal gets out of a cab.

"What do you mean what took me so long? You and Jack left me back at the house!" Neal replies as he gestures. "What in the hell is that?" Neal replies as he points at the plane.

By now the cab driver has gotten out of the car and he has taken Neal's bags out of the trunk. Now he stands next to Neal with his hand out.

"Mr. Money Bags up there will pay you!" Neal replies as he points to Steve.

Steve makes a face at him as he comes down the steps. "How much?" Steve asks as he takes a deep breath."

"Five dollars and fifty cents." The driver replies.

Steve reluctantly takes out his wallet then he hands the driver ten dollars. "Keep the change."

"Thanks Mister. Nice plane." The driver replies as he turns and walks off.

"Thanks." Steve replies.

"Now what in the holy shades of Hannah is that?!" Neal asks again.

Steve looks back over his shoulder. "Oh that? It's just a Lear Jet."

"A Lear...oh shit! When Jack said that he would get you a plane I didn't think he meant this kind of plane!" Neal replies. "So this is what all the drug lords are using this year?"

"Probably so yes. Come aboard I'll give you a tour." Steve replies as he carries one of Neal's bags and Neal carries the other. They climb the stairs and once inside Steve sits Neal's bag down.

"Oh holy shit!! Look at this! Wow this place is swank! Are these seats real leather?" Neal asks as he reaches out to run his hand over one of them but Steve slaps it away.

"Watch it! Don't get your grubby hands all over it!"

Neal pulls his hand back then he holds them against his chest. "Excuse me Mr. Rockefeller!"

"Of course they're leather!"

"Of course!!" Neal repeats. "What's that over there?" Neal asks as he points.

"This? This is a liquor cabinet." Steve replies as they go over to it.

"Wow! Look at all the stuff in here!" Neal replies.

"Cigar?" Steve asks as he hands one to Neal.

"Don't mind if I do. Do you know how long it's been since I've had a good cigar?" Neal asks. "I'll save this for later." Neal puts it in his pocket. "What's behind this door?"

"That is a closet." Steve replies.

Neal opens it. "Wow! Hey! There's somebody's clothes in here! And luggage too. All these suits are...new." Neal looks over at Steve who's rocking back and forth on his feet looking up at the ceiling.

"Steve?"

"Neal?"

"These are your clothes aren't they?"

"Might be."

Neal reaches into the closet and he pulls out a suit and he holds it up next to Steve. "Custom tailoring. The tags are still on it. So..."

"So?"

Neal holds the suit up. "So. This is where you and Jack went yesterday. I thought as much. You two were sneaking out on me."

Steve makes a face at him as he takes the suit and he hangs it back up in the closet. "We didn't sneak out anywhere! I asked you if you wanted to go with us and but you were talking to Ruby..."

Neal holds up one finger. "And Junior. He was telling me about his day. Actually he reminded me a lot of you."

"How so?" Steve asks.

"He babbles just like you do."

Steve hesitates a minute. "Anyway. As I was saying, you were talking to Ruby and you waved me off. You gave me one of these gestures." Steve demonstrates the gesture. "The gestures that says I'm busy talking to a woman so go away Steve and leave me alone. So I did. We went to dinner..."

"Dinner? You two went to dinner without me?" Neal asks as he points to himself.

Steve looks at the floor as he scratches his head. "I already told you that I tried to ask you to come with us...besides it was just dinner." Steve replies as he looks at him.

"And a shopping spree!"

"I told you that too I need to..." Steve replies.

"I know, I know look the part!" Neal replies using his fingers as quotation marks. "You know it's funny. Just a few days ago you didn't like him. But now! Oh boy!" Neal wags his finger at him. "I see how it is."

"What do you mean?"

"What do you think I mean? I mean he can give you things I can't! Fancy clothes and the like. Where is he by the way?"

Steve gestures. "He's in the flight office. He's filing a flight plan..."

"Wait! You mean to tell me he's a pilot too? For the love of Pete is there anything that Jack can't do?!"

"You're overreacting." Steve replies.

"Oh don't tell me I'm overreacting! I feel...I feel..."

"What?" Steve asks concerned.

"Like I'm being cheated on! There I said it!"

"What? No! I would never do that to you! You're right. At first I didn't like him but now that I got to know him...he's a nice guy."

"Uh huh. Hey where's Turbin? I thought you were supposed to pick him up?"

"Are you joking? He's not riding in my car! He's has a Cadillac! He can drive himself! Besides its bad enough that's he riding in my plane with me!"

"First of all Steve none of this stuff is YOURS!" Neal replies as he gestures around. "When this case is finished this plane and that house goes back to the FBI Store! So make sure you don't take the tags off of anything! Keep all receipts! Secondly, Turbin is our connection, our only connection, to the other end of the pipeline!! What if something happens to him and he doesn't show? What if he changes his mind? What's the name of this person you're going to see? "

Steve stands there with his arms crossed over his chest. "You're a real killjoy you know that? Jack said I could keep the clothes. I'm having fun, okay? Don't spoil it for me!! Turbin won't change his mind. He can't afford to! He'll be here and he didn't give me a name."

"If Jack is flying the plane and Turbine is going to be on the plane, what am I supposed to do? You know I can't be seen with you. How am I supposed to get to Nevada?"

"Relax. When we get to Nevada, Jack is going to drop us off at the airport, then he'll come back and get you. I'm not meeting with them until tomorrow so later today we can meet at the Hotel. We're be in the Penthouse."

"The Penthouse?!" Neal exclaims.

Steve rubs his eyes. "Yes the Penthouse."

"When you say WE do you mean just me and you or is Jack going to be there too?"

"It will be just you and me." Steve replies as he gestures back and forth between them. "Jack's going to be on another floor." Steve replies. "OH SHIT!!" Steve exclaims as he looks out the window.

"What?"

"It's Turbin!" Steve exclaims.

"What's he doing here!? He's early!"

"A minute ago you were bitching and griping because he wasn't here and now you're bitching and griping because he is HERE! I wish you would make up your mind already! He can't see you!" Steve replies.

"I know that!!"

"Here!" Steve grabs Neal while at the same time he opens the closet door. "Damn no room in there! Come here." Steve drags Neal a little ways up the aisle to the next door causing Neal to stumble over his feet.

"What's in there?" Neal asks.

Steve opens the door. "The bathroom! Now get in there!!" Steve replies as he shoves Neal into the room.

"Hey!! Neal protests.

Steve then shuts the door on him. "Just stay there!"

Neal opens the door again and they stand nose to nose. "Distract him somehow! Don't let him get on the plane!"

"Moron! I already know to do all of that! Now get back in there!" Steve replies as he shoves Neal's head back into the bathroom and he shuts the door. Steve then quickly leaves the plane and Neal watches from the bathroom window as Steve walks over to Turbin and they talk then Steve gestures to the office. After Neal makes sure that they are safely in the building Neal leaves the bathroom, he grabs his bags, and he hightails it off of the plane.

THE NEXT DAY SOMEWHERE IN NEVADA:

Steve's apartment back in Oceanview could have easily fit in the Penthouse Suite that Steve and Neal both found themselves in. They explored it and the other posh surroundings of the Hotel. After a

sumptuous meal in the Hotel Restaurant the three of them talked strategy for the next day festivities. It didn't hurt that Jack was the pilot and it also didn't hurt that the plane they were flying in was wired for sound. So Jack knew exactly where they were going to go. Using a map that was spread out on a table in the Penthouse they mapped out the route Steve and Doctor Turbin were going to take. Also Jack was able to ascertain the surrounding area and a different route he and Neal were going to take. They were going to head out early, before the Doctor and Steve, in order to find a vantage point where they can keep an eye on the place Steve was going to. By this time they knew they were going to a house but who would be there, that they didn't know. Steve was going in there blind.

The next morning. Early in the A.M. Neal was worried. Worried about this whole operation. This Mission Impossible type scenario that Jack had thrown out there the night before. But what really worried Neal the most was that Steve took it. Without hesitation. It could be a trap for all they know. Turbin might decide to set something up. Take out the new boss before he could even get started. Neal would watch Steve across the room. Neal knew that he had brought this whole thing on himself. It was like a runaway train now and Neal couldn't stop it if he tried.

All those thoughts and more were running thru Neal's head as Jack drove. As the sun came up Jack turned off the main road and up a mountainous side road. According to the map this road would look directly over the house that Steve and the Doctor would be going to. It was actually a fire road. It was bumpy and rough, rut filled, and not friendly to a Chevy van with bad suspension. With cactuses painted on it that Jack had named the Cactus Motel. When the road became too steep Jack parked the van off to the side, they then grabbed their backpacks.

Before they started off Neal gestures at the van. "If you don't mind me asking how come we get this and Steve...?"

Jack laughs. "I told you. We're supposed to be two hippies. Driving around the country and camping out and Steve is..."

Neal waves his hand. "Yeah, yeah I know Steve always gets the good shit."

They both laugh at this then after adjusting their packs they started off.

It was just a mile hike up the incline to where it leveled out to somewhat of a clearing and just a few feet of the clearing is where the mountain ended. They walked slowly to the edge and as Neal held onto a tree he looked over. Down below and just off across the road was the house. A large two story house. Surrounded by trees. They had a full view. The front of the house and the gate and the long drive was off to the side. They could also see a barn, stables, and a few other buildings. One of these buildings was surrounded by glass walls. But at this distance they couldn't tell what it was.

Neal was mesmerized by the view. Jack grabbed Neal by the backpack and pulled him back. Then he got down on his knees and he took out a camera from his backpack while Neal took out two pairs of binoculars from his.

Neal laid down on his stomach then he trained the binoculars down onto the house.

"Holy shit that is some house!!" Neal replies.

"See anything?" Jack asks.

"Lights. Lights on in the house and...." Neal whistles.

“What?”

“Shit!! Armed guards!” Neal replies.

“What?” Jack grabs the binoculars then he gets down on his stomach as well looking at the house.

“Where?”

“Over by the garage I guess it is and by the back of the house. See?”

“Yeah. Two?” Jack asks.

“No three. One by the gate.” Neal replies. “Damn it!!”

“He’ll be okay.” Jack replies as he looks over at Neal. “He’ll be with the Doctor.”

“This house is out in the middle of frigging nowhere!! Why do you need that kind of protection?!” Neal asks. “Who lives in that house?”

“I don’t know but we’re going to find out.” Jack replies as he puts down the binoculars and he picks up the camera and starts taking pictures of the house.

“Hey that’s a pool!” Neal exclaims as he points to the glass enclosed structure.

“A pool? See anybody?”

“No but I see a table with food on it. Chairs. Towels. Here comes Steve.”

As they look down to the road they see the limousine that Jack had arranged to pick up Steve and the Doctor and bring them out to the house. It started out as a speck out in the distance but as they watch it gets closer. Far below them, down on the road, the car passes beneath them. As they watch the car slows down and it makes that left turn up into the driveway where it is stopped by the armed guard at the gate. After a short conversation the guard opens the gate then he points to where he wants them to park.

The car drives passed the gate and once inside the gate closes behind them and they parked the car in the garage.

“Damn it!!” Neal exclaims as he looks thru the binoculars. “I lost them! I hate this! Can you pick up anything?” Neal asks as he looks over at Jack as he takes his ear piece out then he puts it back in his ear.

Jack readjusts his ear piece “No. The house is interfering with the signal. All I get is a lot of muffled conversation. Wait. The signal is becoming a little stronger. Their moving. Wait. Somebody said the person they are there to see is out at the pool. They’re going out there. Do you see anybody at the pool?”

Neal looks thru the binoculars. “No...wait. Yeah. Somebody is swimming in the pool. It must be heated. The windows are a little fogged up that’s why I probably didn’t see them before. But I can’t tell...oh wait here comes Steve and the Doctor.”

Neal and Jack watch as Steve and the Doctor are led from the house out to the enclosed pool area. Once inside Steve takes off his coat and leaves it in one of the chairs there. The Doctor then goes over to the table that is there and he helps himself to a cup of coffee.

"Mr. Perry would you like some coffee?"

Steve wanders around. He glances into the pool to see the person swimming there then he wanders over to one of the windows.

"Come on Steve do it. I know you can hear me. Come on buddy." Neal says out loud as Jack looks over at him.

"You know he can't hear you." Jack replies.

"Wanna bet?" Neal replies as he continues to watch thru the binoculars.

Steve still standing by the window takes his hand and he wipes the condensation off of it then he does the same thing at the next window pane, then he looks out of it, then he wipes his hands off.

"Atta boy partner that's why I love you!" Neal replies happily.

"No I don't want any coffee. What I want is to meet the person that I can here to meet. Where are they?" Steve replies as he looks at his watch.

"Be patient. She is almost finished with her lap." The Doctor replies as he gestures towards the pool.

"She?" Jack repeats.

"Did he say she?" Neal asks.

Steve watches as the woman in the pool swims towards them slow and easy and when she gets to the stairs that lead into the pool she stands up. She runs her hands over her wet hair then she puts her hand to Steve and she smiles at him.

"Give a lady a hand?"

"Oh holy shit!! Is she even wearing a bathing suit?" Neal asks as he looks thru the binoculars.

"I can't tell." Jack replies as he points the camera at her.

Steve, unnerved, reaches out and he takes her hand and he helps her out of the pool.

"Damn! Who is that? She's beautiful." Neal asks.

"I'm not sure but she is wearing a suit. Not much of one. Your partner is very calm. Is he always that way around a beautiful woman?"

"If he likes her then no. If he likes her he can get a little wobbly." Neal replies.

"Are you telling me he doesn't like her?" Jack replies as he gestures.

Once out of the pool she reaches for her robe as Steve watches her. She was wearing a bathing suit but it was pointless because since it was wet it was mainly see thru, leaving nothing to the imagination. She was about Steve's height, long dark blonde hair, a killer figure. Confident. She puts her robe on then she turns around and once again she smiles at Steve as she walks slowly towards him.

"Victoria." She replies.

"Steve."

Then she starts to walk around him. Looking him up and down. "I have known Mr. Proctor for some time now and I don't remember him ever mentioning you." She replies as she completes a circle around him then she stands in front of him. She reaches out and she tilts his chin up. "And you I would remember."

"She can't be the boss. She has to be something like a go between. A distraction! Something like that!" Jack replies.

"It's that women's lib thing again." Neal replies as he continues to look thru the binoculars. "She would definitely throw anybody off."

"If it makes you feel any better, Victoria, he didn't tell me anything about you either." Steve replies as he looks at her.

"Thank you Doctor you can go now." She replies without taking her eyes off of Steve dismissing him with a wave of her hand. "You have work to do."

With that the Doctor puts his coffee cup down on the table then he leaves.

"The people I spoke to about you never heard of you. We did hear about Proctor being arrested but we all assumed that Turbin would take over now that he is out of the picture." Victoria replies.

Steve scratches his head as he looks at the ground then he looks back up.

"Here it comes." Neal replies as he looks thru the binoculars at them.

Then Steve flashes that Perry smile at her.

"And Houston we have lift off!" Neal exclaims as Jack laughs next to him.

"Oh baby you know what they say about assumptions." Steve replies.

She laughs. "I do. I like what I see but I don't know you. I don't trust you. I need to make sure that you aren't here under false pretenses. You could be wearing a wire..."

Jack and Neal look at one another.

Steve then opens his jacket. "I'm not wearing a wire, see?"

"No I don't see. Strip." Victoria says to him.

"Wait? What? Did she just say strip?" Neal asks.

"Strip?" Steve laughs. "Are you crazy? You want me to strip? Right here?"

"I always get what I want. I want you to strip. Either do it on your own or one of my men will help you." Victoria replies and with a wave of her hand one of the guards approaches Steve.

Steve watches the guard as he approaches him then he raises his hands up in the air. "Okay. Okay baby. Take it easy."

"Where is it?" Neal asks.

"It's the pin he's wearing on his lapel." Jack replies.

Steve takes off his suit jacket and he hands it to the man standing near him. "Don't wrinkle that! It's Italian!" Steve replies.

Steve then takes off the vest which he also hands to him then he unbuttons his shirt as Victoria watches him. Smiling.

"All we need now is some music." Jack replies as Neal laughs.

Steve then unbuckles his belt and he undoes the button and after unzipping them he steps out of them, his eyes never leaving Victoria's, then he hands them to the man standing there. Now standing there naked Victoria smiles at him.

"I think I'll go for a swim. That is if you don't mind?" Steve asks her as he stands there.

Victoria gestures then she watches as Steve takes a few steps towards the pool, he walks down the steps into the water, then he dives in.

"You know, when I said that you guys had balls, I honestly didn't think I would be seeing them in the literal sense." Jack replies.

Neal laughs as he shakes his head. "Steve will push it as far as it needs to go."

"I was hoping that was the case that is why I recruited you two." Jack replies.

Steve swims a lap then he comes back and once out of the pool he is handed a towel. He wipes his face then he wraps the towel around his waist. He wrings the water out of his hair.

"Satisfied Victoria?" Steve asks.

"For now anyway. You will be my guest. All your luggage has been taken care of. Tonight we are having a dinner meeting."

"A dinner meeting?" Steve asks.

"Yes with some investors. When they heard that you were taking over for Proctor they wanted the chance to meet you. How did you say that you knew Proctor again?" Victoria asks him.

"I didn't." Steve replies as he walks passed her and after he takes his clothes from the man standing there he drapes his jacket over the back of the chair. "How many are going to be at this dinner meeting? Is Turbin going to be there?" Steve asks.

"About six. They will represent different parts of the country and no Turbin won't be there he has work to do." Victoria replies. "I would like it if you sat next to me."

Steve laughs. "Oh I'm sure that you would. If I'm your guest I guess that means all of this is at my disposal?" Steve replies as he gestures.

"Yes of course. Help yourself...to everything." Victoria replies.

Steve looks at her and he smiles at her. "That applies to you as well I take it?"

"I don't usually mixed business with pleasure but for you..." She replies as she looks Steve up and down. "I could make an exception."

"I would love to show you what I have..." Steve replies.

"Oh I already know what you have..." Victoria replies. "But what I want to see is if you know how to use it?"

Steve laughs. "I meant business wise but that sounds like a proposition to me. Was it Victoria?"

"It was. I can make you a better deal than Proctor ever hoped for but on one condition." She replies.

"And that would be...?"

"That you make yourself part of the deal. Give yourself to me for a night maybe two or more?"

"More? You expect a lot don't you?"

"Yes I do and like I said I always get what I want. Now I have things to do to get ready for tonight. Check on the caterers. Enjoy the pool." As she turns and walks off she motions to the other people who were there and they follow her. Steve watches as she walks off and when they all leave the pool area Steve goes back to his jacket that is hanging on the back of the chair. He looks one more time to make sure that they are gone then he picks up the jacket. Pretending to look in the breast pocket as he speaks into the lapel pin

"Did you catch that? A dinner meeting tonight with some investors. A catered dinner meeting. Six to be exact." Steve replies.

Jack looks over at Neal. "We need to find a way to be at that party."

LATER THAT NIGHT:

When Neal all those years ago took that oath to Protect and to Serve he never thought that he would be serving this way. Wearing a uniform, with the name tag Frank, Neal was tending bar. Neal needed to talk to Steve but it was difficult because Victoria would not let him out of her sight. Neal handed out glasses of Champagne and a few glasses of imported beer. When Steve did come over to the bar it was to get Victoria a glass of wine, but then he would leave again and go back to her. Victoria holding tight to Steve's arm like he was her property and in some crazy, sense of the word, he was. Finally Victoria went back into the kitchen to check on the caterers and Steve made his move. Right over to the bar.

"Champagne sir?" Neal asks Steve. "Or we have imported beer."

"Do you have anything stronger?" Steve asks.

"Stronger?" Neal asks.

"Yeah stronger?" Steve replies.

Neal looks back over his shoulder. "I see a bottle of Whiskey."

"That'll do." Steve replies.

Neal looks at him then he grabs the bottle and he pours some into a glass then he adds a little water then he sits it in front of him.

"You don't usually drink the hard stuff." Neal replies.

"Trying something different." Steve replies.

"Jack wants you to get the names of the investors." Neal replies as he wipes down the bar.

"They don't have names just numbers." Steve replies as he sips the Whiskey.

"There has to be a list somewhere. Check in her office." Neal replies.

"How am I supposed to do that?" Steve asks.

As in the form of an answer Neal reaches into his pocket and he pulls out a small box and he hands it to Steve.

"What's this?" Steve asks.

"Open it and find out." Neal replies. "Somebody's coming."

Steve quickly puts the box in his pocket as he watches Neal pour the person a drink then after they take it and walk off Steve takes the box out of his pocket and he opens it.

"A ring? What am I supposed to do with this?" Steve asks.

"Wear it for starters and it's not just a ring. It opens. It's for...you know after." Neal replies.

"After what?" Steve asks.

Neal looks around. "Jack thinks it would be a good idea to..."

"To?" Steve repeats as he leans in closer.

"Slip her a Mickey after you slip her some Steve." Neal replies as he winks at him.

"WHAT?" Steve replies loudly.

"Ssshhh!" Neal replies as he looks around.

Steve lowers his voice. "He can't be serious! He wants me to sleep with her? That woman is a Barracuda! When she looked..." Steve holds up one finger for emphasis. "...No when she leered at me, I felt like a ham sandwich and she hadn't had a meal in weeks! I see how it is! You and Jack are pimping me out! Won't that compromise the investigation?"

Neal smiles at that. "No. Jack says it won't. If you can get her to trust you she might tell you some info."

"Neal I don't like her!" Steve replies.

"I told Jack that! He thought you were crazy. Most men wouldn't care about liking her they would just want to get laid!"

Steve points to himself. "I...am not most men!"

"I told Jack that too. Look. Just put a few drops in her drink and after she passes out go find her office and the guest list. Their names have to be somewhere." Neal replies. "Jack wanted me to give this to you too. It's a camera."

Steve takes it. "A camera?"

"Yeah. Once you get into her office you can take pictures."

Steve puts it in his pocket. "I feel like a Secret Agent! Perry. Steve Perry."

"Uh huh. Don't let it go to your head Secret Agent Man!" Neal replies.

"What about the armed guards?" Steve asks.

"Don't worry about them. Jack and I will take care of it. After she is out give us some sort of signal."

"A signal? How? Where?" Steve asks.

"Are these guys going to spend the night?" Neal asks.

"No I don't think so."

"Good. After they leave give her what she wants! You! Romance her! Flash her that Perry smile again! Go to her bedroom and introduce her to Steve Jr."

Steve makes a face at this. "Do you have to be so crude?"

"Anyway. After she passes out raise the blind in the bedroom window. That will be the signal." Neal replies.

"So you and Jack are going to be waiting, is that it?" Steve replies.

"In about thirty minutes or so it should be over." Neal replies.

Steve laughs. "You're out of your mind, you know that! Thirty minutes my ass!!"

"Okay then how long does it take you...?" Neal gestures.

"That is none of your business! So, you and Jack aren't going to be recording this, are you?"

Neal laughs. "Are you out of your gourd?! What do you take us for anyway? Porno directors or something? No! We aren't going to record it! Now the dinner meeting Jack is going to record that."

"So what are you and Jack going to do to distract the guards?" Steve asks.

"Did you ever see the movie 'The Alamo'?" Neal asks.

Steve scratches his head. "Yeah."

"Do you remember the part where they set the outbuilding on fire?" Neal asks.

"You're going to set something on fire?" Steve asks.

"That's the general idea." Neal replies. "Can you think of a better way to get their attention and get them out of the house?"

"Steve?"

They both turn to see Victoria standing there. Steve downs his drink as Neal starts to wash some glasses.

"What are you doing over here for so long? What are you two talking about?" She asks with one hand on her hip her tone accusatory.

"Football." Steve replies as he clears his throat.

"With the hired help?" She asks.

That statement causes Neal to drop a glass and it shatters on the tile floor.

"Sorry Miss Victoria." Neal replies.

"What did you just call me?" She asks angrily.

"I...sorry. I meant to say ma'am." Neal replies warily.

"That will come out of your pocket. Steve dinner is being served." She replies as she holds her hand out to him. "Let's go."

Steve smiles at her as she takes her hand. "I'm starved."

As she leads him off Steve looks back over his shoulder at Neal as he mouths the words, "Help me!"

A FEW HOURS LATER:

Steve stands on the balcony. From here he feels he can reach out and touch the stars. The Nevada night sky is clear. The air cool and crisp. He can see the lights from a faraway city and now he can feel her presence as she comes up behind him. Victoria reaching out to put her hand on his shoulder.

"Are they gone?" Steve asks.

"Yes."

Steve turns around and he takes her in his arms. "They didn't seem to be very happy."

"Do you think they would be? They certainly wasn't happy to hear that Proctor was in the hands of the Feds but when I told them you were taking over his operation. What did you expect to happen?" Victoria asks.

"I'm not greedy. I just want my fair share. Just like you." Steve replies.

"But I am greedy." Victoria replies as she smiles at him then she kisses him and Steve doesn't resist. Steve then reaches up and he removes the clip from her hair watching as it softly cascades down around her shoulders.

"That's better." Steve replies as he gently takes her face in his hands kissing her then he tasted tentatively with his tongue and when he feels her response and hear her moan he pulls her closer to him. His hands moving down to her rear. Steve can feel her hands move over his chest as she begins to

unbutton his shirt. He kisses her neck as she leans back his lips moving slowly up to her ear where he whispers to her.

“Show me just how greedy you can be.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.” She replies as she looks him in his eyes smiling.

“Go ahead. Hurt me. I can take it.”

Victoria takes him by the hand and pulling him away from the railing they walk hand in hand into the bedroom. Steve then turns and he shuts the French doors behind them.

TWO HOURS LATER:

Steve is propped up by pillows as he leans back against the headboard holding Victoria as she straddles him. Moving his hands up her back he kisses her then he gently rolls her over onto her back, their legs entangled. She runs her thumb over his lips then up his cheek and when she gets to his hair she tucks a strand behind his ear. Then she kisses him gently biting his lip before she lets him go.

“I may never let you leave here.” Victoria replies as Steve nuzzles her neck.

“Never? So I guess I didn’t disappoint you?”

“You couldn’t tell?” Victoria asks laughing as Steve lays his head between her breasts.

Then he raises his head up as he smiles at her. “Oh maybe just a little. You’re beautiful.”

“So are you.” Victoria replies as she touches Steve on the nose smiling.

Steve laughs.

Jack looks over at Neal as they sit in the van. Neal looking thru binoculars at the house waiting for the signal.

“What?” Neal asks when he realizes that Jack is looking at him.

“Two hours?” Jack asks. “Does he usually take this long?”

“Why are you asking me? Maybe their playing cards or something!” Neal replies as he shrugs.

Jack makes a noise as he rubs his eyes.

“I’m still curious.” Victoria replies as she twirls a strand of Steve’s hair around her finger.

"You mean after what we just did you're still curious?" Steve replies as he smiles at her.

She kisses Steve on the nose. "I meant I'm curious how you met Proctor." Victoria replies.

"You really know how to kill the mood." Steve replies as he sits up pulling the sheet up. Rearranging the pillows he leans back as Victoria moves next to him. She runs a finger over his cheek.

"Don't be upset baby. If the shoe was on the other foot you would wonder the same thing. Now wouldn't you, hmmm?" She replies.

Steve exhales. "I guess so. I came up with the idea to use chewing gum to transport the Heroin. You see my family ran a small factory in Portugal. We made chewing gum." Steve replies as he leans his head closer to hers. "That's how I met him. Satisfied?"

"For now." She replies as she kisses him.

"I could use a drink? You?" Steve replies.

"I would love a drink. I have some wonderful Kentucky Bourbon in the liquor cabinet. If you don't mind...?"

"Oh no of course not."

Steve throws the sheet off then he stands up and he walks over to the liquor cabinet running his fingers through his hair. He can feel her eyes on him as he stands with his back to her. He gets two glasses and he finds the bottle of Bourbon.

"Water?" He asks as he looks back over his shoulder at her.

"A little."

He fills both glasses with water and Bourbon and then opening the ring Neal gave to him he poured the contents of it into her glass then he closes the ring back up. Then he carries both glasses back over to the bed and he hands one to Victoria. Steve gets back into bed next to her.

"Well if wonders never cease." Jack replies as he looks thru the binoculars at the window where Steve finally raises the window shade. "Two hours and 45 minutes. Whatever he's got I wish I could bottle it."

"Oh no you don't I called dibs on it first." Neal replies as Jack laughs.

"Let's go." Jack replies.

They both get out of the van and pulling the black ski masks down over their faces they move to the back of the van. Opening the doors Jack grabs the one of two gas cans while Neal grabs the other. Tonight the moon is full. All things being equal that could be helpful or it could be a hindrance. A deadly hindrance. The moonlight would bounce off anything metallic and shiny, so Neal and Jack both being aware of that fact, had everything painted in a flat black paint. Including the gas cans.

All Victoria did was just take a few sips of her spiked drink and she was out like a light. Steve was surprised how fast it had happened. After he gave the signal he got dressed. Quickly.

Once they left the van they crossed the road disappearing in the woods there. Neal bringing up the rear. Neal keeping a close eye out for any signs of trouble. The shed they were going to torch was outside the perimeter of the fenced in area. Not near the house but close enough to some trees that it might cause some trouble and that was what they were hoping for. The shed was good sized, solid and locked but with enough gas it wouldn't take much for it to go up. Jack was bending over to take the caps off of the gas cans when he heard it. From behind him. That unsettling sound of a hammer of a gun being pulled back.

"Turn around." The man replies as he points the gun at him.

Jack turns around raising his hands in the air.

"What are you doing back here?" The man replies as he looks at the gas cans. "Come on we're going back to the house." He replies as he walks closer to Jack.

From out of darkness of the tree line Neal appears behind him and he grabs him. The man struggles as Neal clamps his hand over his mouth while Jack grabs the gun out of his hand.

"Sssshhh." Neal whispers in his ear. "Nighty night."

As Jack watches Neal applies the sleeper hold to the guy. At first his struggles are pronounced but as Neal applies more pressure his struggles slows then finally they stop all together. Jack grabs him by his feet as they carry him back into the tree line. Using his belt and shoelaces they manage to tie him up and they use his handkerchief to gag him. They both know there are more where he came from so now they had to hurry. Jack and Neal removed the gas caps then they poured the gas around the outside of the building then they struck a match.

From inside the house Steve heard and felt the explosion. The house rocked from it. That set off a series of alarms and when Steve set foot out of Victoria's room that is when he heard people running. Steve was trying to decide to go to the left or the right when one of the guards came running around the corner.

"Where's Miss Hamilton?" He asks Steve slightly out of breath.

"Who? Oh you mean Victoria? She's alright. I'll take care of her." Steve replies. "What happened?"

"Explosion." He replies as he runs off.

"Well no shit I figured that much out for myself!" Steve yells after him. "Neal! What did you do now?" Steve asks as he looks up at the ceiling shaking his head back and forth.

When Neal came to he was lying flat on his back next to Jack. He shakes his head a couple of times as he sits up on his elbows then he hears the alarms and he suddenly realizes where's he's at and what

they just did. Neal looks at what is left of the shed. Having to use his forearm to shield his eyes. Huge flames lick the branches of the nearby trees. The area now bright enough you easily read a book. Dark smoke, enough to choke everybody in a small village billows upward.

“Jack!” Neal replies as he shakes him awake. “Jack! Come on we have to get going!”

Jack finally comes around holding his head. “Shit!”

Neal manages to get to his feet then he helps Jack holding tight to his arm as he hauls him up to his feet. “What in the hell was in that shed?” Neal asks.

“Good question.”

If the explosion wasn’t bad enough the heat was crippling. Neal snatches the ski mask off of his head for fear it would melt to his face. “Can you walk?”

“I think so. Come on we have to beat feet!” Jack replies as they make their way back into the trees.

It wasn’t hard to figure out which door, down the long twisty hallway, was Victoria’s office. It was the only one that was locked. With everybody out of the house Steve was able to make his way, with the help of a trusty paper clip, which he used to jimmy the lock, into the office. Once in the office he was able to find what he was looking for. The name of the Investors. Using the camera he took pictures of the documents. Finding some financial records he took pictures of those too. Anything he thought might be useful to Jack he took pictures of. It took all of fifteen minutes. After it was done Steve went back to Victoria’s room, undressed, then he got back into bed next to her.

AN HOUR LATER:

“Holy Shit!! They even have their own fire department!” Neal exclaims as he looks thru the binoculars back at the van. “How’s the head?”

“It’s hard so I think I’m going to be okay. I have a theory.” Jack replies.

“I’m listening.” Neal replies.

“It’s crazy but it’s the only thing that makes sense.”

Jack spent the next hour running it down for Neal and Jack was right. It was crazy and slightly farfetched but damn if it didn’t fit. Like that last puzzle piece. Steve was also part of that puzzle. Jack also told Neal that he had to go to Reno in the morning and talk to some people at the FBI office there. So tomorrow Neal would be on his own. Neal was used to that. Neal was also getting use to all of this subterfuge, this Mission Impossible type episode they had going for themselves. At any moment Neal half expected Peter Graves to walk in. As they sat in the van watching people working to put out the

fire they noticed a solitary figure, standing back, wearing boots and a cowboy hat. That is when Jack left the van to talk to him and when he came back he asked Neal a question.

“How do you feel about horses?” Jack asks as Neal raises his eyebrows at him.

THE NEXT MORNING:

For Steve and Victoria, in the morning, there was no basking in the lovemaking afterglow. Not that Steve didn't give it the old college try. Since he was there already. When he woke up he reached out to touch the pillow next to him, the one place where she should have been, only to find she was gone. He rolled over onto his back and he opened one eye. He could hear the shower going in the bathroom. Looking at the table in the bedroom he can see a tray with a coffee pot and cups and covered dishes. Breakfast was served. Curb side service.

Steve sat up in bed. He runs his fingers thru his hair as he yawns. Then he stretches. He pulls the covers back and he stands up. Standing with his hands on his hips, naked, he looks around the room. Since he doesn't have a robe or even a towel he settles on his pants from the night before. He slips them on then he goes over to the table where he pours himself a cup of coffee.

He hears the shower go off and a few minutes later Victoria comes out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel, drying her hair. Seeing Steve she takes the wet towel that she was using to dry her hair and balling it up she throws it at the back of Steve's head.

“Hey!!” Steve exclaims as he grabs the back of his head as he turns around. Bending over he picks up the wet towel from the floor. “What was that for?”

“Why didn't you wake me up last night and tell me there was a fire?” She asks as she approaches him.

Steve laughs. “I tried but you didn't budge!” She grabs one of his belt loops on his pants and she pulls him to her and then Steve kisses her. “Hmmm. There was nothing you could have done until morning anyway. It's still early. Let's have breakfast then you can deal with it later.”

She smiles at him then she tucks a strand of hair behind his ear. “Let me get dressed then we're have breakfast.”

“I'll be waiting right here.” Steve replies.

TWO HOURS LATER:

After Steve had breakfast he came out of the shower to hear Victoria on the phone and that is when she kicked Steve out of her bedroom. Just wearing a towel around his waist. Holding his clothes from the night before. His hair still damp. Standing out in the hallway in front of her door. Steve went back to his own room.

Now they were both outside. Victoria inspecting the damage to the shed as Steve makes his way over to the stables. Looking in the stables he sees two horses tied up out of their stalls as somebody wearing overalls and a cowboy hat were mucking their stalls out.

"Excuse me are you Hector?" Steve asks.

"No." They reply as they sneeze.

Steve comes further into the stable then he peeks around until he can see into the stall. The person is standing there with their back to him covered in hay. Pant legs tucked into rubber boots. Shoveling hay and manure into a wheelbarrow. Sneezing.

"Neal?" Steve asks as he stands in the entrance to the stall with his hands on his hips.

Neal turns around holding a shovel. "Yeah it's me." As he sneezes one more time wiping his nose on his sleeve. "I think I'm allergic to hay."

"And I bet you just adore a Penthouse view!!" Steve replies as he laughs slapping himself on the leg.

Neal holds the shovel up. "See this?"

"Yeah." Steve replies.

"Don't tempt me."

Steve scratches his head. "What are you doing here?"

"What does it look like I'm doing? I'm mucking out the stalls. What are you doing here?" Neal asks.

"Victoria wants me to find Hector. She wants to go horseback riding before she leaves to go to Reno."

"Reno? Why is she going to Reno?" Neal asks.

"To buy some more equipment that was lost in the fire last night. What was all that about last night anyway? What was that explosion? You said it was just a shed? What was in it?"

"Whoa!" Neal replies as he holds up his hand. "Jack and I were not expecting that to happen. We didn't know there was anything in it. So how do you know she's going to Reno to buy more equipment?"

"I heard her on the phone before she kicked me out of her bedroom..."

Neal leans the shovel against up against the wall then he grabs Steve by the arms and he backs him up out of the stall.

"Hey!" Steve replies.

"Let me get this straight! A woman! A real grown, living and breathing woman kicked you out of her bedroom!!? A woman kicked you out of her bedroom!!" Neal replies.

"How many times are you going to keep saying that?" Steve asks as he looks at him taping his foot.

"Until I believe it!! So.....?" Neal replies as he looks at Steve.

"So.....? What?"

"What do you mean what? Last night? How did last night go?" Neal looks at him with a lecherous grin as he slaps him on the arm. "Two hours and 45 minutes? Jack couldn't believe it!"

"Two hours and 45 minutes?" Steve replies.

"Yeah."

"Is that all?" Steve replies seriously.

"Wait? What?" Neal replies.

"To answer your question Victoria was very happy."

"But you not so much I take it?" Neal replies.

Steve takes a deep breath. "This is going to sound silly but I don't like her. Look at that house Neal and these stables, the cars, the pool and everything else here. None of this stuff she got righteously. None of it. Drug addicts, hookers and who knows what else built that house. Those aren't bricks Neal those are innocent people and innocent lives. She's a heartless woman, Neal. I did get the names of the Investors and a few other things as well. So hopefully all of this will be worth it in the end."

"I think it will. Hey, you aren't going to Reno with her are you?"

"Are you kidding? No. I'm good enough to screw but that's about it!"

Neal laughs. "So who's going to go horseback riding?"

"Who do you think? Me and her! It's going to take some time to get the equipment together so she wants to ride something different while she's waiting!" Steve replies.

Neal laughs again. "Oh god. Steve have you ever rode a horse?"

"Well no but how hard can it be? Do you know anything about horses?"

"Not really no. I know they eat, poop, and oh yeah when you mount them..."

"Mount them?" Steve asks.

"Yes. You mount them on the left hand side." Neal replies.

"Did you learn that in College too?"

"No Gunsmoke. So if she's going to Reno she'll be gone the rest of the day, right?"

"Right. She might even spend the night there. Why?" Steve replies.

"Because Jack..."

"By the way where is Jack?" Steve asks.

"I'm fine thanks for asking! Reno! Jack went to Reno to talk to the FBI office there. He took the pictures and the recordings he made. If Victoria is going to be gone it's a great opportunity for us to look around."

"What do you mean look...?"

"Steve?"

At the sound of Victoria's voice Steve shoved Neal. And he shoved him hard. Hard enough that he went backwards into the stall landing into the wheelbarrow that was full of manure and hay.

"Hey!!" Neal yells.

"Who was that? Did you find Hector?" Victoria asks as she looks into the stable.

"Nope. And that? That was nobody. Let's go and find Hector together." Steve replies as he takes Victoria by her hand as he looks back over his shoulder at the stall.

A FEW HOURS LATER:

"Oh for the love of Pete!! Will you come on!! What is taking you so long?" Neal replies as he yells at Steve.

"Why? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

"I would be in pain after riding that horse?! It's killing me!!" Steve replies.

"Did you take some aspirin?"

"Yes mother I took some aspirin!" Steve replies. "It's not really helping!"

"Maybe it's justice! Did you ever think about that?" Neal replies.

"What in the hell are you talking about?" Steve replies as he grimaces.

"Back there in the stable! When you pushed me into that wheelbarrow full of manure!! Remember that, bucko?" Neal replies.

"Victoria showed up! What did you expect me to do?"

"I'll have to borrow some of your clothes now. I didn't bring that many!" Neal replies.

"Okay fine! Now what were you going to tell me back there in the stable?"

"Jack thinks he knows why they have all these armed guards here and it's not to protect Victoria's assets!"

“Well! What are you waiting for? Dramatic music or something? Tell me!” Steve replies.

“Jack thinks there is a Lab here somewhere.” Neal replies as he points to the house. “Have you seen Turbin since you two got here?”

“No. He thinks there’s a lab in the house? Oh come on!”

Neal gestures. “Not in the house itself! He thinks it might be underground. He wants us to look for it!! Didn’t Victoria say that Turbin had work to do? What if there is a lab here and he is extracting the Heroin from the gum!”

“Well okay but we haven’t seen any delivery trucks or anything like that. Where’s the entrance?” Steve replies.

“That is what Jack wants us to find out! Come on let’s walk around the property...”

“Walk? I think I should be soaking in the hot tub!” Steve replies.

“There’ll be time for that later, now we have work to do.”

They walk around the side of the house to the patio and just as they turn the corner they see an armed guard standing there, smoking a cigarette. Steve tries to back up but all he succeeds in doing is stepping on Neal’s foot which causes Neal to cry out. Steve is in too much pain to try to get away but by now it’s too late anyway because the guard sees them.

“Hey you!” The guard points at Steve.

“Me?”

“Yes you!” The guard replies as he walks over to them. “Mr. Perry?”

Steve looks over his shoulder at Neal who just shrugs then he looks back at the guard. “Yeah? You know who I am?”

“Are you looking for Miss Hamilton?”

Steve scratches his head. “Well yeah okay sure. Where is she?”

“She went to Reno with Dr. Turbin.”

“Oh with Dr. Turbin you say? You know who Dr. Turbin is?”

“Yeah. Little guy, glasses, bald spot. Yesterday he gave me some stuff for my cold.”

“Oh he did? Do you feel better?”

Neal who was standing behind Steve gives him a swat on the rear, which was Neal’s way of saying without using any words for Steve to hurry up. Steve jumps grabbing his rear in pain as he shouts.

“Shit!”

“Hey I know you too!” The guard replies as he points at Neal.

“Me?”

"Yeah I saw you in the stables this morning." The guard replies.

"Oh yeah sure that was me. Steve is just showing me around the place." Neal then reaches out and he messes up Steve's hair. "Aren't you buddy?" Steve rolls his eyes as he looks at the ground. "Just out of curiosity how did you know who he was?" Neal asks as he points at Steve.

"Oh that's easy he's her latest boy toy." The guard replies as he points at Steve.

Neal laughs at this as he pushes Steve. "Ha!"

"Wait? Her latest what?" Steve replies feeling slightly offended.

"Her latest boy toy." The guard replies again.

"Just so you know I am a business partner of hers and she wanted me to take a look at the Lab. You know check it out. But you know with all the excitement last night I kinda forgot where she told me it was. If you know what I mean?" Steve replies as he hits the guard on the arm smiling.

"Gotcha!" The guard replies.

"Who cares about some silly old lab when a beautiful woman is...well you know! I don't have to tell you, right?" Steve replies as he winks at him.

"No sir! The door to the lab is around the corner. It looks like a cellar door."

"Hey thanks." Steve replies as he slaps Neal on the chest. "Let's go."

Neal follows Steve off the patio and around the corner of the house and indeed there was a door. It did look like a cellar door, wooden, painted the same color as the house, surrounded by bushes as if to conceal it and included in this package a shiny padlock.

Neal picks the lock up. "It's locked."

"Not for much longer." Steve takes his wallet out of his back pocket and he takes out a paper clip.

"A paper clip? You walk around with a paperclip in your wallet?" Neal asks.

"You never know Neal when you might need a paperclip." Steve replies as he bends it and he inserts it into the lock.

Neal looks back over his shoulder. "How long is this going to take?"

"You can't rush perfection my friend." Steve replies and in a few seconds Steve has the lock opened.

"See. Nothing to it." He replies as he takes the lock off then he opens the door hanging the lock from the door handle.

Steve slowly opens the door the rest of the way looking inside.

"Well?"

"It's a hallway." Steve replies.

"Dark?"

"No there's lights. The hallway makes a turn to the right." Steve replies.

"What's your gut telling you?" Neal asks.

Steve scratches his head. "No bad feelings. I say let's go and have a look."

"Age before beauty. As it were." Neal replies as he gestures and Steve looks at him as he shakes his head.

Steve opens the door further then he slowly goes down a small flight of steps. Neal follows as they now walk down the hallway and once they get to the corner they both stop as Steve peeks around it.

"Anything?" Neal whispers.

"Another door. Another padlock."

"Uh huh." Neal replies.

Steve goes around the corner with Neal close behind him and when they get to the door Steve unlocks that padlock too. He slowly opens the door looking thru the crack.

"Nobody."

Once inside the room they have to shield their eyes from the brightness.

"Wow look at all of this stuff." Steve replies.

From one end of the room to the other are tables. Beakers. Numerous glass ware. Bunsen burners. In the corner was an office. Off to one side were cardboard boxes.

"Look familiar?" Neal replies as he points. "I'm going to take some pictures." Neal takes the camera out of his pocket that Steve had given back to him.

"Neal do you know what any of this stuff is?"

"What do I look like to you? Betty Crocker?" Neal asks as he continues to take pictures.

"Betty Crocker is a baker not a lab operating type person!" Steve replies with his hands on his hips.

"I think we found the base of operations. So this is where Turbin would extract the Heroin from the gum?"

"Oh when your right your right, boys."

"Who said that?" Neal asks Steve.

"Who do you think?"

They both grimace as they look slowly back over their shoulders to see Victoria standing there holding a gun on them and behind her they also see Turbin, the big guard from the patio and another guard also.

"Shit." Neal replies.

"That one right there! He's a cop!" Turbin replies as he points at Neal.

"Hey Bozo! Didn't your mother ever tell you it's not polite to point?" Steve asks him as he turns around. "He's a cop?" Steve tries his level best to seem surprised as he looks at Neal.

"What are you doing down here?" Victoria asks him as she continues to point the gun at them.

"I followed him down here! I watched him jimmy open the padlocks! I was just about to kick his ass out of here when you showed up!"

Neal stands there looking at Steve with his hands on his hips as he shakes his head back and forth.

"Really? We talked to Proctor today while we were in Reno." Victoria replies.

"And he doesn't know you!! Never heard of you!!" Turbin replies.

When Neal hears this he stands up straighter then Steve glances over at Neal.

"What?" Steve laughs. "How did you talk to him? He's in the Federal lockup!" Then Steve wags his finger at them as he continues to laugh. "Oh you almost had me baby! Oh you really had me going for a minute..."

"He's never been to Portugal." Victoria replies. "Never heard of you or your gum making family. Turbin was supposed to take over his operations."

"See I told you!!!" Turbin replies as he once again points his finger at them.

Steve takes a step forward. "Point that finger at me again and I swear I'll break it off and make you eat it!!!"

Victoria takes a step in front of Turbin still pointing the gun at them then she reaches out and grabs Steve by his hair and she pulls him to her. "It's a shame really, you're the best lover that I've had in a while. I was hoping for a repeat of last night. It's a good thing that I don't talk in my sleep...."

Steve smiles at her. "You didn't have to baby I already have a lot of information. Enough rope to hang you all with it!"

"Oh that's a pity. Tsk. Tsk. That you won't be alive to tell anybody about it." Victoria replies.

"What?" Neal replies.

"BAH! She's bluffing! She's not going to do anything!!!" Steve replies.

"Steve shut up!" Neal yells.

"Try me. Alright boys take them out to the woods and shoot them..."

The guards come up and one of them grabs Steve by his arm, hoisting him up high enough, that they are dragging him by his toes. While the other guard does the same thing to Neal.

"Wait!" Neal replies.

"...In the back of the head." Victoria replies.

"No wait! You know that's not very innovative..." Steve replies as he's being dragged away.

"Steve! Shut up!" Neal replies again.

"Just so you know it's very crass to shoot somebody in the back of the head! It's so beneath you Victoria!!" Steve yells louder as he struggles against the guard dragging him. "Guns make noise you know!" Steve points out to her.

"STEVE!!" Neal yells.

"We're out in the country sweetheart." Victoria replies.

"Oh! Okay!! How about this then!? Guns are messy! Yeah! That's right! You said yourself that I am beautiful!! You don't want to mess this up do you?" Steve replies as he points to his face. "Besides you don't want two dead bodies buried in your back yard! That was so last year!!"

"STEVE! YOU MORON SHUT UP!" Neal yells.

"Wait." Victoria replies as she walks over to Steve and the guard. Holding her hand up she says, "You know Steve your right..."

TWO HOURS LATER:

"Neal! Old buddy, old pal are you awake?"

"Yeah, yeah I think so and don't call me that! Oh! What was in that syringe?" Neal asks.

"I don't know. A sedative maybe."

"Steve?"

"Yeah?"

"Is it dark in here or am I...?"

"No it's dark in here alright." Steve replies.

Neal exhales. "Oh good. Steve?"

"Yeah?"

"Where are we?" Neal asks.

"Well you see I have a theory about that."

"Steve?"

"Yeah?"

"We're moving aren't we?" Neal asks.

"It would seem so yes." Steve replies.

"Steve?"

"Yeah Neal?"

"We're in a box aren't we?" Neal asks.

Steve clears his throat. "Actually. It's more like a crate."

"A...a crate?"

"Yeah. You see a box is usually made out of cardboard and this is made out of wood. So ergo..."

"Ergo?"

"It's a crate."

"Steve?"

"Yeah Neal?"

"This is your fault, you know that, right?"

"How is this my fault?" Steve asks.

"Because you couldn't keep your big mouth shut! That's why!"

"Bitch! Moan! And groan! Did you want to get shot in the back of the head? Huh? Well did you!! At least we're alive you moron!!" Steve replies. "At least this shows some imagination and finesse!"

"Yes we're alive for now! It's no telling where we're going! We're in a truck Steve! We're in a box..."

"A crate." Steve points out.

Neal takes a deep breath. "...A crate! Going god knows where!! And it's no telling what they are going to do to us once we get to wherever we're going!! That is if we don't suffocate first!! Why do these things keep happening to us!?"

"I don't know and we haven't suffocated yet have we?" Steve asks.

"Oh that's brilliant I must say!!"

"Thank you."

"That wasn't a compliment!!!" Neal replies loudly.

"You big meanie! You don't have to yell I'm right behind you!!"

"Steve?"

"Yeah Neal?"

"We're handcuffed together aren't we?" Neal asks.

"You could say that, yes."

"I could say...where did she get the handcuffs and why did they handcuff us together?" Neal asks.

"I don't know where she got them from and why are you asking me that? I don't know. As to why I don't know that either! Maybe they have a sense of humor!"

"I thought maybe, she and you, when you and her, you know." Neal replies.

"No! She wasn't kinky just you know..."

"What?" Neal asks.

"Bossy!! I told her to stay in her lane I already know how to drive!!" Steve replies.

"Steve?"

"Yeah Neal?"

"Why did you tell her that you met Proctor in Portugal and that your family was in the gum making business of all things?"

"It seemed like a good idea at the time!! I was making it up as I went along! And where did you hear that?"

"Back in the lab remember?" Neal replies.

"Oh yeah right! I thought maybe you were listening when Victoria and I..."

"Oh no! Oh no! I don't want that in my head for the rest of my life and the way things are going the rest of my life could end today!" Neal replies.

"You know Neal I'm worried about something..."

Neal laughs. "So am I! I mean they could drop us in the ocean, or, or drop us in a big incinerator or..."

"Bah! I'm not worried about this!" Steve replies.

"You're not! Why not? What are you worried about then?"

"Nancy."

"Nan...Nancy?" Neal replies.

"Yeah how do I explain to her about what happen with Victoria?" Steve replies.

"Steve sometimes I think your two sandwiches shy of a picnic."

"Why do you say that?" Steve asks.

"Our demise maybe imminent and you're worried about Nancy." Neal replies.

"See right there! Maybe is the optimum word! If we don't die I still have to figure out what to say to Nancy."

"Easy. You don't say a damn thing! You don't tell her!"

Steve laughs. "Now you're the one whose elevator doesn't go all the way to the top floor! Not tell her! For your information we tell each other everything! I can't keep anything from her! She'll figure it out eventually. Have you ever tried not to tell Ruby something?"

"Well..."

"I'll take that to be a no!"

"Nancy isn't an ordinary woman, you know that. She's a cop. She'll understand why you had to do it."

"But she's still a woman!" Steve points out.

"Just make sure you tell her over the phone...hey...do you hear that?" Neal asks.

"Yeah, yeah I do what is that?"

"Hey!!" Neal starts to laugh. "Their playing our song toots! Sirens! Its sirens!! The Calvary to the rescue!"

"See I told you!!"

From inside the crate they feel the truck come to a stop as the sirens grow louder and closer.

"Steve do me a favor."

"What's that?"

"Could you please move your hair off of my face!? It's annoying."

"Neal."

"Yeah Steve?"

"I'm sorry that you think my hair is annoying but I got news for ya...that isn't me!!"

"What?"

"I said that isn't my hair!!" Steve replies.

"If that isn't you then it has to be a...."

"SPIDER!!!" They both yell at the same time.

Then they begin to use their hands and feet to kick the inside of the crate.

"HELP! HELP!"

"HELP US! WE'RE IN HERE!!" Steve yells.

THE NEXT DAY AT JACK'S OFFICE:

"Hey Neal look at this!" Steve replies as he is standing in front of a bookcase pointing at a football.

"Jack played football in College!"

"Uh huh do tell. First he's an FBI agent, then a pilot and now a football star in College. Let me guess? Quarterback?"

"Yeah how did you know?"

"Lucky guess." Neal replies.

The door opens and Jack comes in with a file tucked under his arm carrying a tray filled with sandwiches and Cokes and he sits it down on the table.

"Okay gentleman lunch is served."

Steve and Neal find their seats and their sandwiches as Jack sits down across from them. They make small talk as they eat their lunch and when they finish Jack opens up the file.

"Her name was Victoria Hamilton but we like to call her the Black Widow." Jack replies.

Steve takes a swig of his Coke then he starts to choke on it then he starts to cough as Neal pats him on the back. "Are you okay?" Neal asks him.

Steve nods his head. "You like to call her what?" Steve asks as he tries to clear his throat wiping his chin.

"The Black Widow. She had three husbands. They'll all dead. The last one fell off his yacht two years ago. His name was Richard Hamilton. He was a banker, financier, made money in Real Estate and he ran the Heroin gum operation until he died. Then Victoria took it over."

"You said he fell off his yacht? I remember hearing about that, they never found him, did they?" Neal asks.

"Nope. Victoria was on the Yacht when it happened but of course she knew nothing about it. She was a suspect but never implicated. Nobody could ever prove she did anything. So when he died she inherited everything."

"So I'm guessing her first two husbands were rich also?" Steve replies.

Jack nods his head. "Filthy. Both of them. The first one was from Texas, he was in Gas and Oil. He went out to check on one of his oil rigs and he never came back. The second was the owner of an airplane company..."

"Let me guess. He took one of his planes out on a test flight and it crashed?" Neal replies.

Again Jack nods his head. "Bingo."

Steve rubs his forehead. "Jesus. It's always the beautiful ones. She was married three times? Wow. She had to be really young when she got married for the first time, I mean she's my age." Then Steve sees Jack looking funny at him then Steve looks over at Neal. "What? I mean she's close to my age, isn't she? She is in her twenties isn't she, Jack?" Steve laughs. "Come on Jack..."

"Well we never really know for sure. She has lied before about things. Her birthdate being one of them."

"Jack!! Thirties?" Steve asks hopefully.

"Try 45." Jack replies.

"WHAT?" Steve replies then he covers his eyes as he rocks back and forth in the chair.

"Damn! She was in good shape for 45. You guys can make these charges stick?" Neal replies as he looks over at Steve.

"Oh yeah. We got her on RICO charges, distribution, and a boatload of other charges and those so-called Investors you got the names of we're going to be rounding them up soon."

"So-called?" Neal replies.

"Yeah. They were actually a link in the chain. They were the suppliers to the pushers out on the street and Victoria...."

"Was their main connection." Steve replies as he lays his forehead on the table.

"That's right. Victoria got her supply from Proctor and Turbin was able to extract the Heroin and from there, well, her Investors got their supply."

"Our deal still stands right?" Neal asks as he pats Steve on the back.

"Oh absolutely. Turbin is all yours. He knows he's in some deep shit so it shouldn't be too hard for you two to get him to talk. I have copies of everything. It's all yours too. And to sweeten the pot even more for you guys I'll have my boss call the Chief of Police and have him tell him what a great job you two did. It might help you get off suspension." Jack replies as he points to Steve.

"What are you going to do now?" Neal asks.

"Well I think I deserve a vacation. God knows I have the time. Somewhere in L.A. I know I have a house but I'll be damn if I can remember where it's at, it's been so long since I've seen it."

Neal and Steve laugh. "No wife?" Steve asks as he raises his head from the table.

Jack laughs. "Are you kidding me? I have yet to find any woman who would put up with this craziness for very long. But if I could find her I would be willing to make changes. How about you guys, wives, kids?"

"Me no." Steve replies. "But my lady is a cop."

"Cool. That makes it easier. Neal?"

Steve gives Neal a little shove. "Go ahead show him the pictures."

Neal smiles. "Nah you know that's boring!"

"Come on Neal!" Steve prompts.

"Yeah Neal I would like to see them." Jack replies.

Neal takes his wallet out of his back pocket then he shows Jack the picture of Ruby and the baby, Joey, and of course Steve's.

"Good looking kids. You know Neal your lucky, to have found a woman who can deal with all of this." Jack replies.

"I tell him that all the time." Steve replies as he looks over at Neal.

"You know I always thought by now I would be married and have a couple of kids. A house with a big back yard, a dog even. It's funny how things work out." Jack replies.

"Well Jack you know you're still young it's not like your pushing seventy or anything like that." Neal replies.

Jack laughs. "Actually you know some of it might be my own fault. The kind of woman I would like to find is in short supply here in California."

"Really?" Steve asks.

"Maybe we can help." Neal replies.

"This is going to sound silly but you two wouldn't happened to know any Russian women, would you?"

"Who?" Steve replies.

"What?" Neal replies.

Steve leans over the table in Jack's direction as he looks at Neal. "Well Jack as a matter of fact we do." Steve replies.

TWO DAYS LATER THE RUSSIAN LOUNGE:

"You know I'm tired." Steve replies.

"You're tired? I don't think I've ever danced this much in my life. First I danced with Ruby then Ava."

"Yeah I've danced with Ava then Ruby. Jack has danced with both of them. Neal..."

"Don't say it."

"Jack is a good dancer." Steve replies.

"I told you not to say it." Neal replies as he rubs his hand over his face.

"He makes me look like I have two left feet." Steve replies as he gestures.

"Well at least it seems he and Ava have hit it off." Neal replies.

"Uh huh. Ruby seems to like him too." Steve replies.

From the table they watch the girls grab their purses and go to the Ladies room then Jack goes to the bar and he buys three bottles of beer and he brings them back to the table. Neal and Steve slide over to make room for him.

"The girls went to the Ladies room." Jack replies.

"We saw." Neal replies.

Steve takes a sip of beer. "I bet they told you that they wanted to freshen up, didn't they?"

"Well yeah how did you know that?" Jack asks surprised.

Neal laughs. "And you call yourself a cop."

"What do you mean?" Jack asks.

"Jack you don't know Jack about women, do you?" Steve asks.

"Well I..."

"When women say they are going to the Ladies room to freshen up that is actually a code." Neal replies.

"A code?" Jack asks.

"Yeah a code. When a woman says that and there are other women at the table that's means lets go to the Ladies room to talk about the men at the table." Steve replies as he wriggles eyebrows at Jack.

"Really? Well who are they talking about?" Jack replies.

"You! You silly goofball!" Neal replies.

"Me?" Jack replies as he points to himself.

"Yeah. Ava and Ruby are talking about you. Right about now Ava is asking Ruby's opinion about you." Steve replies.

"They are probably jumping up and down squealing like two school girls as Ava gushes about you. Did you see his green eyes...?"

"Blue." Jack replies.

Steve looks at them. "Sorry. Oh did you see his blue eyes and the way he smiled? He's just so dreamy don't you think Ruby?" Steve replies as he does his best woman's voice.

Neal laughs as he looks at the table.

"You know that was pretty good." Jack replies.

"Thank you." Steve replies.

"He's had plenty of practice." Neal replies.

"So if women go to the Ladies room to talk about men where do men go to talk about women?" Jack asks.

"We stay at the table where the women left us." Steve replies as he laughs.

"So what do you think about Ava?" Neal asks.

"I like her a lot I really do. My mother will adore her, you see my mother is from Russian. Ava said she made the dinner tonight. Ava is pretty, smart, a good cook and you know what the best part is?" Jack asks.

"What?" Steve and Neal both ask.

"She seems to like me too!" Jack replies happily.

"What about what you do for a living?" Neal asks.

"I already know about the Russian's distrust of cops and all of that but I like her father and he said that you two made him change his mind, so maybe, I might have a shot. Also, I plan on transferring to the L.A. office. She and I will have to discuss it later, how do you guys feel about skiing?" Jack asks.

"Skiing?" Neal asks.

"Water or snow?" Steve asks as Neal looks at him.

"Snow." Jack replies.

"Steve you can ski?" Neal asks him.

"Well I...a little...back when I was a...you know. I went on a couple of ski trips. It was nothing major I was just one step up from the bunny slope. It was fun." Steve replies.

"Why are you asking?" Neal asks.

"Because I have a cabin in Mammoth Mountain..."

Neal coughs. "You have a cabin in Mammoth Mountain?"

"Yeah you two heard of it?" Jack asks.

Steve scratches his head. "Yeah that is a pretty expensive place."

"Well actually it's my parent's cabin but I can use it whenever I want, which lately hasn't been a lot. What?"

Jack looks over at Steve and Neal who both have their mouths open and they look like two fish waiting on a hook.

"Did I say something wrong?" Jack asks.

"Jack, your parents are they rich?" Neal asks.

"Well I guess it depends on your definition of the word rich." Jack replies.

"Does their bank account balance remind you of a telephone number? You know six figures?" Steve replies.

"Well yeah I guess you could say so." Jack replies.

Neal slaps his hand down on the table. "Damn! He's rich too!!"

"No now I said that was my parents. That isn't my money. My dad wanted me to do what he does but I wanted to do something different."

"What does he do?" Steve asks.

"I'm afraid to say now because you guys seem really freaked out." Jack replies.

"No Jack it isn't that it's just that...you're a FBI Agent, a pilot, played football in College..."

"Quarterback no less..." Steve replies.

"And now we find out you come from a rich family..." Neal replies.

"And you're such a nice guy!" Steve replies as he pounds the table with his fist.

Jack laughs. "My dad is in Banking, I mean he owns some banks. Anyway. I didn't want to do that. I just thought we all could go skiing. The place is big enough for everybody. Just think about it."

"Hey look guys the girls are back." Steve replies as they all slide out of the booth and they stand up. Neal puts his arms around Ruby and he kisses her.

"Neal I think we should go home and check on the baby." Ruby replies as she smiles at him knowingly.

"Oh yeah we should get going. Come on Steve we're give you a ride home." Neal replies.

Steve shakes Jack's hand. "You two kids have a good evening. Bye Ava." Steve replies as he kisses her on the cheek.

THE NEXT DAY STEVE'S APARTMENT:

Neal has had a very busy day. First thing in the morning Jack had Turbin brought in to the Precinct where Jack let Neal have his way with him. Jack sat back and watched the show. Neal ranking Turbin over the coals. Pulling him one way then pushing him back another way. The Art of Interrogation in full blown Technicolor and Neal was the director. Jack was impressed.

As far as Neal was concerned Turbin was a small time criminal. That is until he dug deeper. Neal was impressed with Turbin's flair for the dramatic and it didn't take much. When Neal pressed hard Turbin folded...like a cheap suit. That was the easy part. Now came the paperwork.

Calling in of the stenographer to take down Turbin's confession, then Neal doing the report in triplicate. Then taking all reports that Jack gave him...well it took hours. Then it took numerous attempts to get ahold of Ruby on the phone. She was talking to somebody all afternoon. It was Ava Neal found out. So Neal missed lunch and now dinner. Neal looked up at the clock, gathered up all the paperwork and reports and put them into a folder then he went to Steve's apartment.

Neal could hear music coming from Steve's apartment and he was just raising his fist to knock when the door was flung open by Steve.

"Oh I'm sorry." The girl replied to Neal as she runs into him in the threshold of the doorway causing Neal to drop the folder. The papers floating their way to the floor.

Aside from the fact that she was holding a toaster Neal noticed that she was wearing a cocktail waitress outfit. She was pretty, young and blonde. Long legs in fishnet stockings. Steve went about retrieving the papers from the floor.

"Oh my gosh I am so sorry I didn't see you there." She replies as she hands Neal some of the papers.

"That's okay I didn't see you either so I guess we're even." Neal replies as he takes the papers from her.

"Thank you again Steve for fixing my toaster." She replies as she kisses him on the cheek.

"You're welcome Deidre just remember no more forks. Okay? Oh sorry. Neal this is my neighbor Deidre. Deidre this is my partner and best friend Neal."

They shake hands. "Steve told me about you. Do you know that Steve is a good guy?" Deidre asks Neal as she smiles.

Steve leans against the door jamb his arms crossed over his chest brushing a strand of hair from his eyes as he smiles. Looking at the floor as he blushes.

"Yeah I do know. It's nice to meet you Deidre."

"You too Neal. Bye Steve."

Steve waves at her. "Bye."

Neal walks passed Steve as he goes into the apartment then Steve shuts the door.

"Neighbor?"

"Yeah from down the hall. She just moved in. I was checking my mail and she was going to throw the toaster out but I told her I could fix it. So..." Steve replies as he shrugs. "I thought I would help the girl out."

"She's pretty. I see what you have been doing all day while I was slaving over a hot interrogation table." Neal replies as he hands Steve the folder.

"Wow it looked like he spilled his guts." Steve replies as he thumbs thru the paperwork.

"Oh it didn't take much I leaned on him just a little and he caved."

"It says here that he killed Ivan and Roger." Steve replies.

"He didn't pull the trigger but he hired the two hit men that did and guess who bankrolled it."

"Victoria."

"Bingo!" Neal replies. "It seems that Ivan had figured out what he had been hauling and he wanted it analyzed and he knew of Turbin from the bar. Turbin was in a bad way and he knew it. If word got out about the gum it would be chaos so when Ivan came to see him he knew he had to shut Ivan up. He thought giving him that money would do it but it didn't." Neal replies.

"Ivan came back for another bite at the apple." Steve replies.

Neal nods his head. "Yeah. He needed more money to bring his family over here and Ivan pushed him."

"Turbin pushed back didn't he?" Steve replies.

"Turbin said that Victoria threatened him. Now he knew that she wouldn't, couldn't kill him. Since he was the only one who could extract the heroin from the gum so he knew this life was safe, but his wallet wasn't."

"Victoria was going to withhold his payment from him, right?" Steve asks.

"Bingo again. So he had to get that money back. He found the two hit men and Victoria wrote the check."

"He says here their names were Ronald Fletcher and Wayne Sawyer. Where are they now?" Steve asks. "Off the clock?"

"Oh yeah sure I could use a beer."

Steve goes into the kitchen throwing the folder down onto the kitchen table as Neal follows him. Hanging his jacket up then he pulls out a chair and he sits down. Steve comes back out of the kitchen and he sits a glass down at Neal's place then he pours the beer into it. Then he sits at his place.

"Clean glass?" Neal asks him as he smiles.

"Yeah. You've had a rough day and nothing says love like a beer in a clean glass." Steve replies as he raises his bottle of beer then he takes a sip smiling at him. "So...those two goons do we know where they are? We could put some feelers out there on the street maybe..."

"Steve...their dead." Neal replies slowly.

"Oh."

"Remember the two guys that chased us across the desert? That was them. Fletcher and Sawyer. So in a roundabout way we solved Ivan's and Roger's homicide way back at the start of this whole thing."

"And we didn't even know it." Steve replies.

"Nope."

"What about Roger Tidwell?" Steve asks.

Neal shrugs. "Turbin sent those two goons on a retrieval mission to find the money he gave to Ivan and somehow they found out about Roger. When they found out he didn't have the money they killed him and took the gum instead. We had the money." Neal replies as he points to himself and Steve. "Speaking of money Jack wants to help to bring Ivan's family over here."

"Really?"

"Yeah. He told me that his parents are always giving money to charities and such and when he told them about Ivan and his family, they wanted to help. His mother remembers what it was like. Steve, why didn't you ever tell me that you could ski?"

"It never came up. Like I told you I went a couple of times." Steve replies.

"Where did you go?"

"Vail Colorado." Steve replies.

Neal whistles. "Impressive. Jack invited all of us to go because he wanted Ava to go and he didn't think it would be proper just to invite Ava alone since he doesn't really know her yet. She and Ruby could room together and so could we."

"Damn! He has morals too along with everything else!" Steve replies. "And speaking of morals I told Nancy about Victoria."

"Oh! How did she take it?"

Steve moves his head back and forth. "Pretty good actually. She knew it was for duty and humanity and she understood when I told her I didn't like doing it."

"I had to explain that to Jack today. He still didn't get it. I told him that you didn't care so much about a person's exterior you were more impressed with their interior. Their heart and soul. Jack thinks you're a very complicated person."

Steve laughs. "Sometimes I think I'm a very complicated person! I'm in the mood for some pizza. You?"

"Yeah pizza sounds great." Neal replies as he gets up and he grabs his jacket. "I missed lunch today."

"Want to call Ruby?" Steve asks as he puts his jacket on.

"No I already talked to her. Tonight is girl's night. Ava is coming over to the house, they are going to talk about Jack. Wooooo!" Neal replies as he waves his hands in the air.

Steve laughs. "Well I must say I do like Jack. He's a great guy."

"Yeah he is. And he kept his promise he had his boss talk to the Chief about us. I have his business card. It might come in handy, you never know when we might need an FBI Agent in our corner. And then again there's always the cabin in Mammoth Mountains."

"And we owe him. Big time!" Steve replies.

"Oh yeah we do. Since he's the one who broke us out of that..."

Steve holds up one finger as he smiles.

"Crate." Neal finishes.

"There you go!" Steve replies as he slaps Neal on the back. "Hey, do you still want to work that part time gig with me at Sears tomorrow? It's the Saturday before Thanksgiving. It's one of their busiest times of year."

"Sure. We're talk about it over pizza and this too." Neal replies as he holds up the file folder. "Let's go."

THE NEXT DAY AT SEARS:

“Steve?”

“Yes Neal?” Steve replies as he stands next to Neal wearing his Security Guard uniform that now fits him perfectly. Scanning the crowd for any signs of trouble or mischief.

“When you asked me to work with you here I thought I would be doing the same job as you. Wearing the same uniform as you. But when I got here this morning I find out I was going to be wearing this! This!”

“Neal I told you it’s only until noon. After they get here you’ll put on your uniform and work with me. You don’t have to do that all day.” Steve replies as he gestures. “Besides it’s not hard what you’re doing. Every time that bell rings up there...” Steve points to the bell over the door and the counter attached to it. “That means that person is the hundredth customer. The confetti drops, the lights flash, and the hundredth customer gets a voucher for a free Thanksgiving Turkey from the grocery store up the street.”

“But in the meantime before that bell rings I have to stand here and look stupid! Why couldn’t they give me a Pilgrim costume to wear?” Neal replies.

“Because Neal you aren’t giving away free Pilgrims you are giving away free Thanksgiving Turkey vouchers! Ergo...”

“Ergo?”

Steve exhales. “Ergo...that is why you’re wearing the Turkey costume! Besides they didn’t have any Pilgrim costumes! Hey Neal look its Joe from the Precinct! Hi Joe!” Steve replies as he waves.

“You told him to come here didn’t you?” Neal asks.

“No I didn’t! This is the Saturday before Thanksgiving so it’s going to be busy!” Steve looks over at Neal who is rubbing his back up against a pole. “What are you doing? Stop that!”

“This thing is itchy!! Arrrgggghhhh! I feel so ridiculous!”

“You’re supposed to wave and be a happy Turkey!” Steve points out.

“Don’t be silly! Have you ever seen any happy turkeys during Thanksgiving? Well! Have you! No! There is no such thing as a happy turkey during Thanksgiving Steve!! Speaking of which, you are coming for Thanksgiving aren’t you?”

“Yes of course. So is Ray. What about your mother?”

“Yes she’s coming down. She’s going to stay the weekend. She wants to look at some houses. Remember?”

“Oh yeah that’s right!” Steve replies.

“You’re going to be there aren’t you? I need some backup.” Neal replies.

“No! I’m leaving Friday morning to go and spend the weekend with Nancy. I told you that.”

“Shit I forgot!!” Neal exclaims.

“Neal!!”

“What? Oh sorry. I guess happy turkeys don’t swear, do they?” Neal asks.

“Wave Neal.” Steve prompts.

Neal feigns a smile as he waves at a little boy walking with his mother.

“Gobble, Gobble! Happy Thanksgiving!” Neal replies.

Almost immediately the little boy bursts into tears as his mother picks him up he looks back over his shoulder at Neal sticking his tongue out.

“Did you see that Steve? I scared that little boy then he stuck his tongue out at me!” Neal replies as he points.

“He’ll get over it.” Steve replies.

“It could take hours to reach the hundredth customer!” Neal whines.

“Let me remind you of something bucko! Remember back in the motel room in Bakersfield?” Steve asks.

“The one where you threw the ashtray in the direction of my head?”

“Yeah!” Steve replies.

“Yeah. So this is my comeuppance isn’t it?” Neal replies.

“Yeah! Remembered you agreed to do what I wanted you to do if I went along with Jack’s idea! And I did! Now’s it’s your turn!!” Steve replies.

“Okay, okay I got it.”

“Look at it this way Neal it could be a lot worse!!” Steve points out.

“How?” Neal asks as he flaps his wings.

“It could be Christmas! You could be wearing an elf costume you know!!” Steve points out.

Neal thinks about this for a minute. “Good point.”

“Hey you!! Yes you! I saw that! Pick that gum up right now! No littering! There’s a trash can right...what do you mean I’m not a real cop? Wanna bet bucko!!” Steve yells at them.

In the meantime...”Gobble. Gobble. Happy Thanksgiving!” Neal replies as he waves.

A MONTH LATER:

Neal didn't want to drive the box truck into there so he left it out on the street. The day before Steve had taken off. His suspension now over Steve was back to work. Except for yesterday and today. Steve had gotten a phone call. That much Neal knew. Then he saw Steve go into the Captain's office and 15 minutes he came out. Steve then came back to the desk, grabbed his jacket and his bag and he left the squad room. Not saying a word to Neal.

That night Steve called Neal and left a message with Ruby. Steve knew that Neal was taking the box truck to Hanford. To his mother's house. But he wanted Neal to make a stop on the way.

And now Neal finds himself here. The big main gate to the place was open. Other cars parked in various places. Steve told him it wouldn't be too far from the entrance. Off to the left. All the roads here had names. Trinity. Peaceful Valley and the one Neal was looking for Serenity. It wasn't hard to find. Steve's car was parked there. And that is where he found him.

Neal stopped. Watching. Not wanting to disturb Steve. But now Neal knew the reason that Steve was moonlighting. Neal looked at the ground. His hands in his pockets. Then he looked up. His head tilted to one side.

"Need any help?" Neal asks softly.

Steve is down on both knees making sure the rose bush has enough soil around it. He looks back over his shoulder at Neal.

"Sure. I have one more to plant. One that end there." Steve replies as he points.

"Is it okay if I..." Neal replies.

Steve gets up brushing the dirt off the knees of his jeans as he walks towards him.

"You don't have to ask you know. You're welcome here anytime." Steve replies.

"I didn't want to intrude. You seemed so peaceful. Were you talking to them?" Neal asks.

"Oh sure. I always talk to them when I come here but now it's going to be easier. Come on and take a look at it." Steve replies as he pulls Neal by the arm.

"So this is what you were earning that extra money for." Neal replies as he looks at it.

Steve takes the rag then he wipes the dirt off of his hands before he touches it. Running his hand over the red granite.

"Your Mom's and Step-Dad Headstone. It's beautiful Steve."

"Do you like it? She picked it out a long time ago. After they got married my mother got on this crazy kick about burial plots. She said she was planning for the future. I thought it was morbid. She picked this cemetery and this burial plot. It had to be perfect. Not too close to the road but not that far either." Steve replies as he holds up one finger.

Neal smiles at this.

"It took her a long time to find the right headstone. The right color and the style of lettering. She picked this one. It was expensive but the people she bought it from was nice. So they gave her some leeway. She and Marv paid on it when they could. Then when Marv died money was even tighter. But

they understood. I was with her in the hospital. Even on her death bed she was worried about me. Me Neal. Not herself. Just me."

Neal puts his hand on Steve's shoulder. "You were always her little boy."

Steve nods his head. "She didn't want to go. She didn't want to leave me here, by myself. I made a lot of promises to her that night Neal and this was one of them. I promised her I would finish paying it off, then make sure they engrave her favorite saying on it."

"I'll meet you in the left-hand corner of...heaven." Neal replies.

Steve nods his head as he wipes his eyes. "It took me awhile but I finally did it. You know Neal when someone is dying all you have to give to them...is promises. There's nothing left. She also wanted rose bushes on either end of it so I'm doing that too for her. They put it in yesterday."

"So that was the phone call you got yesterday."

"Yeah. I sent them the last payment. They called and asked me if I wanted to be here to supervise and to make sure the headstone was right. Then I went into the Captain's office and here we are. Neal I miss her."

"I know you do."

"I wish she was here. To see us back together again. She always talked about you. I wish she was here to see what I have become. I wanted her to be proud of me." Steve replies.

"Oh Steve she was proud of you and Marv too. Your mother was a great woman. I have a lot of great memories about her. I think she would be surprised that you became a cop." Neal replies.

Steve smiles. "You're right. She would be. When I think about it I wasted a lot of time. Not being with her or Marv. There were plenty of times I would call her and she wanted me to come home but I didn't want her to know how I lived...what I did to survive. I see now I should have. God, I told myself I wasn't going to cry."

Steve covered his eyes as Neal put his arm around him and he pulls Steve to him. "Go ahead I think you're overdue." Neal replies. Neal was right. It had been awhile since Steve had cried over his mother. It was a good ten minute crying jag. Neal's shirt was wet and he found himself crying with him. He held him and he didn't mind. Neal thought that they made a funny picture. Two men. Holding each other. Crying.

"I hate crying it makes my head stuffy." Steve replies as he takes the rag from his back pocket and he wipes his eyes.

"I wish I could have been there, to help you, after she passed away. After they passed away." Neal replies as he wipes his own eyes.

"It's okay. You're here now. Neal I know your mother drives you crazy sometimes but at least you still have her. She loves you."

"I know and I love her too. I should appreciation her more and stop complaining about her. I need to remember that your mother is gone and you have told me this before...I'm lucky."

"Really? Do they install it for you too?"

"Sure." Steve replies.

"You know I have been wanting a new 8 track tape player. Let me call Ruby..." Just as Neal reaches for the phone it rings.

"Hello?"

"Ruby? What's wrong? The what? The hot water heater is dead? All over the garage? Well at least it wasn't in the house. Oh. You already called the plumber? How much?" Neal rubs his eyes. "Okay I'll go to Sears and buy a new water heater. Yes. No. I mean. I'm fine. Just...fine. Yes. I love you too. Bye."

Neal hangs up the phone. "I guess you heard that?"

"Yeah. So I guess we're going to Sears?" Steve replies.

"Yeah. There goes some of my moonlighting money."

They stand up and grab their jackets and they are just about to leave when Alicia stops by the desk and drops some mail on it.

"Where are you guys going?"

"Sears." They both say.

"Sears!? Oh can I go?" Alicia asks.

"Sure I guess. What do you want to buy?" Steve asks her.

"I need to buy some more panty hose! See I have a terrible run." Alicia slides her skirt up to show them. "See!"

"Hmmm yeah that is pretty bad alright." Steve replies. "Neal isn't that bad? Neal!" Steve replies as he shoves him.

"What? Oh yeah! Yeah!"

"Wait right here I'll get my purse!" Alicia runs back to her office and she grabs her purse. Opening it she looks in it then she takes out a pack of gum. "Do you guys want some gum?"

Neal and Steve look at one another.

"NO!"