

Imperfect Justice

By

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Chapter 1

Silicon Valley, California

“Oh God.”

I stood for a moment in shock, not only from the horrific scene, but the fact that I had verbally reacted. I never express my thoughts in words, but what I saw would crack the resolve of even the strongest individual.

My usual response is to smile and say nothing, or more likely, release a torrent of smartass comments. I guess I use humor to release the pressure of stressful situations, but in this case I couldn't think of anything even the slightest bit ironic, or remotely funny.

I felt the bile rising in my throat, and grit my teeth to maintain some measure of composure. I knew I should call for help, but when I pressed the transmit button on my shoulder mounted microphone, the words wouldn't come out. It was as if I couldn't force air through my vocal cords. I swallowed hard and shoved my emotions as far as I could below the surface, but it didn't help and my vision blurred as mist began to form in the corner of my eyes.

I hadn't actually expected a body to be here. The last few calls like this had been mistaken identity. Some moron saw a pile of clothes next to a dumpster and assumed it was a dead body. I had no reason to think that this situation would be any different, but when I turned the corner to the address given to me by the police dispatcher, there was the bloody mess. Instead of seeing a homeless person sipping on a bottle of cheap wine, it was a body with an ear to ear gash across her throat.

Along the edge of the cut, a stain of blood traveled down the front and left dark streaks on her once tan blouse. On the ground, the twin headlight beams of my cruiser sparkled off the surface of pools of blood. Since the blood wasn't yet dry, that meant one thing, this had just happened.

The smell of rotting garbage assaulted my nose as I took a step closer, trying for a better view. I scrambled once more for the microphone, yanking it off the clasp near my left shoulder.

"Dispatch." I croaked.

I paused for a moment, trying once more to force air through my throat.

"Dispatch." That was better, but now I was trying to figure out what to say.

"Oh God, I need help." I managed.

I was quiet for a moment, but after a few seconds, I couldn't hold it back anymore and completely lost control. It was as if a river of emotions, pounded over me, wracking my entire body in wave after wave of sobs.

I don't know how long I stayed that way, but my training soon kicked in, and forced its way to the surface. Crying about it wasn't going to help. Get your sorry ass in gear and do your job. I ran over as close to the body as I could get, and knelt down. I still couldn't believe she was lying here like this.

The radio had been quiet for a few seconds, but suddenly squawked to life.

"This is dispatch, say again."

I ran my hand over my face to wipe off the tears, and took a moment to respond.

"I, I need help. Please send help."

"Caller give me your callsign and location."

My mind had gone completely blank from the stress. It was as if I had completely forgotten what to say. I tried to visualize the number on my car, but couldn't. I turned to read the number from the side of the car, but the tears blurred it out of focus. Just as a tear was about to fall to the ground, I put my hand to my eye to catch it. I didn't want my DNA to contaminate the scene. It went against every instinct I had, but I had to move back.

"Caller? Are you there?"

Her repeat call jogged my memory, and helped me regain a little control over my emotions. I sniffed, and keyed the microphone.

"Dispatch." I stifled a sob "this is one adam twenty." Another quick sob "I am behind the Denny's on north first." A long pause "I need an ambulance here ASAP."

It took a while, but she finally responded.

"Affirmative, one adam twenty. EMTs are rolling."

She waited for a couple of seconds.

"One adam twenty, you OK?"

"Been better."

"Do you need anything else?"

I paused for a moment.

"Just tell the EMTs to get here fast."

"Roger that."

I wiped my eyes on my sleeve and knelt down close to her once more. I didn't have to look close to realize that she was already dead. Her eyes were fixed, open, and unmoving. From the amount of blood on the ground, there was no way she could still be

alive. I looked closely, hoping to see that she was still breathing, but her chest wasn't moving.

There was no need for the ambulance to hurry. By the time they reached the scene, there would be nothing for them to do, but stare at the body. I probably should have let the dispatcher know that the EMTs didn't need to hurry, or to forget the EMTs, and just send the coroner, but I couldn't. At least this way, I'd get the chance to spend a little more time with her. When the coroner got here, they would load up her body and she would be gone. I wasn't ready to let her go just yet. As hard as it was not to run and put my arms around her, I knew I couldn't. Disturbing the scene wasn't an option.

It wasn't something as noble as wanting to keep the chain of evidence intact so that the killer could be convicted in a court of law. I could care less about the chain of evidence, or the court of law. While I had sworn an oath to uphold the law, that didn't count in this situation, at least not for me. The person who murdered this woman was never going to see the inside of a courtroom. Once his or her identity was revealed, I was going to see to their justice personally.

If a perp kills another human being, I'm going to take them down. If they kill another cop, the entire police force will mobilize to bring them down. If they decide to mess with another cop's family, it's another situation altogether. They will have awakened the angry bear that is a police force in a frenzy not only to bring them to justice, but also add a little payback along the way. It's like the difference between a bottle rocket and a nuclear tipped missile. Not only is the force focused on finding the perp, but the chances that the perp once found will arrive in one piece at the station, are somewhere between zero, and nonexistent.

Whoever this perp was, they didn't realize the bucket of shit that they had just stepped in, but they soon would. I wasn't about to let my wife's murderer go away unpunished, and neither would the rest of the guys on the force.

Chapter 2

I stamped my boots on the ground, and stared toward the street. Where the hell was the calvary? It felt like it had been an hour since I had made the call, and yet no one else had shown up. My job was to preserve the scene until they got here, but they sure were taking their time.

A vehicle screeched to a stop behind me, its bright lights casting red pulsating shadows on the back wall of the restaurant, framing me as if I were 20 foot tall. The police cruiser's engine stopped, and then the voice of a young man sounded from that direction.

The same voice also came from the small speaker near my left shoulder. The other officer had just announced his presence at the scene, but he hadn't announced himself as the detective, so I was going to have to wait a little longer before I'd be able to get out of here. Wait patiently while the love of my life lay in a bloody heap behind a cheap diner, in a bad section of East San Jose.

The feeling of wanting to stay with Linda, had long since passed. It probably would have been different if I could actually be with her, instead of having to watch from afar. But I guess it was probably the fact that I couldn't touch her, that made it the hardest.

I didn't turn to look at him, mainly because I didn't feel like talking with anyone right now. I wanted to turn control over to someone else, and get the hell out of here so I could start looking for her killer, but something about the details of what happened troubled me. How did Linda get here? We live in secure gated community in the city of Fremont, over 10 miles to the northeast. How could her body end up behind this restaurant?

Did she drive here and then get attacked? Did the killer grab her at our house, and then bring her here? I didn't know, and until the evidence was examined, there was no way to tell. That was troubling, but it wasn't quite what was worrying me.

What was really troubling was a hunch that prickled the hair on the back my neck. What if the killer knew that I worked this neighborhood as part of my shift? What if the killer arranged it so that I would one of the cops that responded to the call? What if? And I shuddered to think about it. What if the killer had arranged her death, so that I would be the first responder?

A sick feeling traveled in waves through my gut, and my blood pressure spiked into the stratosphere. That was it. That's exactly what had happened. The killer had set the scene so that I would be the one that found her.

I reacted without really realizing it. My weapon was in my hand before I even thought about what I was doing. I scanned the area behind the Denny's aiming down the gun sight, sweeping the weapon in my outstretched arm slowly back and forth. I heard a noise to my right, swung the weapon to the source, and fingered the trigger. Something had moved. It was him. It was the killer. He was sitting by the corner of that dumpster, watching me, getting his jollies from my pain. There was another sound, and something twitched down low. I opened fire.

I kept firing round after round walking to my right peppering the corner of the dumpster with supersonic projectiles of lead. I fired five, six, seven, now ten rounds, twelve, fifteen, until my clip was empty, and the slide locked back. With the weapon still pointed at the corner of the dumpster, I let out a primal scream so long and hard that my

voice cracked halfway as it slowly turned into a cry of grief. I wanted him to know the rage that I felt for him. I hoped like hell that he was now dead.

The young cop ran up behind me and crouched next to my right side. With his weapon drawn, he aimed at the corner of the dumpster.

“Did you get him?”

I didn't respond. I was still in the grips of the rage that triggered the outburst.

“Was there someone back there?” he asked, sounding a little perturbed.

I think I heard him, but it was as if his voice was coming from someplace far away. I searched the area around the dumpster, scanning for any movement, but there was none. I had got him.

He sat beside me for a moment, but slowly realized that something wasn't quite right. He alternately stared at the dumpster, then back at me. Finally satisfied that whatever was back there was of no threat, he stood, and put an arm on my shoulder.

“You OK sir?”

I had been leaning against the right front fender of my cruiser, staring at my feet, so I wouldn't have to look him in the eyes. If I did, I knew officer Sparks would see right through me.

“You sure killed him good.” Tony said.

I continued to stare at the ground, but said nothing.

“I'd say you got him with at least 5 shots. I surprised he was still in one piece.”

He chuckled.

“You must have been using hollow points cause the holes were like this big.”

He made a circle about the size of a plum with his index finger and thumb.

I looked up at him, and nodded sheepishly.

“I’d never seen a rat with that many holes in him.”

I shrugged in embarrassment.

The smile left his face, and was replaced by a serious scowl.

“Did you really think the perp was back there?”

I looked up at him once more, and gave a weak shrug.

“I don’t know. I just heard a noise.”

“But you didn’t announce that you were a police officer or anything. You just started shooting?”

I didn’t know what to say, so I shrugged once more.

He stared at me for another moment, and shook his head.

“I guess it’s not that big of a deal. No one got hurt, except the dumpster.... and I guess the rat, but then again, I don’t think anybody will be missing him.”

I shot him a weak smile.

Tony walked toward the rear of my cruiser, and stopped by the rear tire.

“You got any tape?”

I nodded and angled my head toward my trunk. I reached in my pocket, extracted the keys, and tossed them to him.

He caught them, looked down at his hand for a moment, then back at me.

“Look,” he paused “I feel like we got off on the wrong foot or something. Did I do something to piss you off?”

The tears had filled my eyes again. I didn't want him to see me like this, but I looked up anyway, and shook my head.

"It's not your fault."

From the moment he saw the tears, his posture wilted. He took a step toward me, and read the name on my badge.

"Officer Ross?"

"Call me Dan."

He stared at me for a moment.

"Uhh OK, Dan, what's going on?"

I angled my head in the direction of Linda's body.

"That's my wife."

A look of horror instantly filled his face.

"Oh shit. Sorry, I mean, what the hell?"

He strode forward and grabbed my arm.

"Maybe you should come with me."

Chapter 3

I stared out the back of the ambulance at the sea of flashing lights. It was approaching dawn, and the gray light of early morning was beginning to make its presence felt over the low hills surrounding the Santa Clara Valley. Years ago this valley had been covered in fruit orchards, as far as the eye could see, in any direction. Now it was covered in tilt-up concrete structures full of engineers. Some of the brightest minds in the world toiled over their computer workstations, dreaming up some of the most complicated computer systems and software. At the north end of the valley were the latest Internet startups, with their social media software like Facebook and Twitter. At the southern end of the valley were the silicon chip, and communications giants. On one block you'd drive by Intel, the provider of CPUs for most of the computers on the planet. On the next block was Cisco, provider of most of the switches and routers that made up the Internet. For a high technology professional, it was Mecca.

In another half an hour, the bright yellow orb of the sun would slide over the tops of the hills, transforming all those concrete buildings into radiators of heat. After working the entire night shift I was beginning to feel like crap from exhaustion, but that didn't matter right now. I had lots to do, and this day was going to stretch out even longer.

I wondered who knew I was working this shift. I wondered how they knew that I would be the closest unit, or maybe they didn't. Maybe that was just luck, though given my current frame of mind, I didn't consider that to be even the slightest bit of luck.

A shrimp of a woman in a light suit walked to the back of the ambulance. She was so tiny I thought she probably bought her suits in the Macy's children's section. But after thinking about it for a moment, it had to be that other store that catered to people of

different size. It obviously wasn't Rochester's Big and Tall, more likely it was the Rochester's Small and Short store, if there was such a thing.

She was one of our department detectives, Charlene Kwan, obviously joining the force after women were allowed, and the physical restrictions relaxed. I didn't have much of an opinion one way or another about letting women on to the force, but someone her size, well, that was another story. If she actually got caught in a dark alley with a dude the size of a linebacker, she wouldn't have a chance. It didn't feel fair somehow, but it was her choice.

"I'm so sorry Dan." she said and offered a hand not much larger than my nephew's.

I shook it and nodded in her direction.

"Did you find a murder weapon?"

She shook her head and let the silence between us stretch on a little too long. We both knew what was coming next.

"Do you know of anyone that would want to hurt her?"

I shook my head.

"You've been to our house, I'm sure you agree she was one of the nicest persons that you'd ever met. I can't think of any reason for this."

She nodded.

"She didn't have any enemies that you knew about?"

I smirked at her.

"I think you know the answer to that."

She nodded.

"Sorry, I have to ask."

I sighed, and nodded. Yes, she did, it was her job. Not that I gave a rat's ass about what she had to do at the moment, especially that rat that I just shot, but it still didn't make it any easier. The worst part was that I knew the hard questions were yet to come.

"Anybody been making threats lately? Any threatening phone calls? Road rage? Anything like that?"

I rolled my eyes and gave her a "What do you think?" look.

"Dan, come on," she paused "you know that if I don't ask this crap, the prosecutor is going to have my ass."

I paused for a moment and blew out a forced breath.

"Not that there's much there to get." I mumbled under my breath.

"What?"

I brushed off the comment with a wave.

"No, she didn't receive any threats from the other PTA mothers, none of the other soccer moms have tried to run her off the road, and as far as I know, no babies have tried to come after her for stealing their candy."

Kwan shot me an exasperated look, but seemed to shake it off, and wrote a note in the tiny notepad in her right hand. I wondered where she kept the pad, because from what I could see, none of her pockets were large enough to hold it.

She looked up at me again, and hesitated.

And here it comes, I thought.

"You two been getting along lately?"

And there it was, the question we'd both knew was coming, but she'd had to go through his little song and dance first before she could get around to asking it.

There are parts of this job that are idiotic. I get the whole idea that in an investigation the detective has to be thorough, follow every lead, leave no stone unturned, and a hundred other cliché's, but this was stupid. Kwan knew me, and she also knew Linda. Hell, she'd been over to our place at least twenty times over the last year or so.

I knew that she was right. If she didn't get answers to the questions she was asking, then it would be her ass being grilled by the prosecutor. But there was a problem with this whole scenario. If I really was guilty, did anybody in their right mind think that I was going to answer her questions in a way that would incriminate myself? I don't think so, and neither did Kwan. So here we were trading verbal barbs just so Kwan could check off in her little notebook that she'd asked all the "right" questions. Stupid.

"We got along great. Always have." I said.

"No fights?"

"Everybody fights."

"No I mean lately."

"Well then, why didn't you ask me that?"

I was in no mood for this shit. All these stupid questions were wasting valuable time, time that I could be using to track down Linda's killer.

Kwan shot me an evil eye.

"Look Dan, I'm not enjoying this anymore than you. Let's just get through it, OK?"

"Kwan, you and I both know that I had nothing to do with this, so let's stop dancing around the maypole and you ask me the question."

She shot me a smirk, and after a couple of second delay, nodded in my direction.

"Did you kill her?"

“No detective Kwan, I loved her more than anything. I did not kill her.”

She dropped her dark eyes back to her notebook and scribbled a few words. She stared straight into my eyes.

“Sorry I had to do that.”

I nodded, reached out, and put an arm on her shoulder.

“Look, I’m the one that’s sorry. I know you were just doing your job, but I feel like we are wasting time, and I just want to find who did this.”

Her face steeled into an angry stare.

“So do I.”