

Jeff P. Jones

Another Cop Story

As they pulled out of the station at 1800 hours, Max glanced over at his latest trainee. The rookie reminded him of his younger self: flattop, mirrored sunglasses, biceps garroted by short-sleeve cuffs, the whole of him going into the world Kevlar-first, taut and ready for action—like a sun-warmed can of beer that'd been shaken and was ready to blow. Max took stock two decades on: a semicircular crown of hair remained, wiry, gray, and in need of a trim; he sported coke-bottle prescription glasses in heavy black frames; a triple roll rode the back of his neck like a package of hot dogs; and he had a belly boat for a gut. All that he'd once considered valuable the twilight tour had taken.

They turned northwest on Third, and the sun's light, reflected brightly off the sound, flashed between buildings in a slow strobe. It was Friday, and the city was humming with weekend anticipation. Max knew that the kid would be focusing on all the wrong details: the hooker in the purple mini-skirt and not the nod of recognition she received from the briefcase-toting suit; at Marion, the puffy jacket on the kid laughing into his cell phone and not the color of his shoelaces; the guy in the wheelchair with the sign that read "Spaceship Needs Fuel—Please Help" resting on his knee stumps and not the man behind him in the Hawaiian shirt, known as Mad Dog, who pimped all the panhandlers in this area. Max knew what the kid was feeling, could sense it in the way he held himself rigid and breathed through his nose. He saw himself as the citizens' newest protector, a bristling crime-fighting machine who was rolling through downtown at fifteen em-pee-ach with a shield on the door panel that said "Service-Pride-Dedication," believing that all of it fell on their blinked eyelids like a kiss.

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