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“Hey, chief, are you coming to the training session?” called out one of Butch’s officers from the foyer outside of his office. Butch looked at Caleb Freedman a young, enthusiastic, and energetic newly hired officer on Butch’s small team of preservers of the peace. Caleb had graduated from the police academy a few months prior but could not find a position on a regular police force. He so wanted to be a real policeman. Hence, he had accepted Butch’s offer to join the campus police to perhaps create an avenue for eventually achieving his goal. Butch was sitting in his office with his feet propped up on the desk as was usual. He was sorting through a pile of paperwork, including the registration of vehicles and the applications for parking permits. Actually, he was doing everything he could to find an excuse to not go to the training session. He knew what it was going to be – the screening of a video put together by the California Highway Patrol about one’s duty and responsibility to follow proper procedure and be vigilant when stopping and engaging people suspected of some sort of violation.

"Naw," Butch called out, "I've seen it dozens of times before," acknowledging the ritual early in each semester of refreshing the memories and the commitment of his staff to proper procedures and practices. Though the scenario on the video was probably a unique and an

unlikely situation for his four officers, it was recommended by the local and state law enforcement agencies. He knew, more than anyone watching it, how important it could be in reminding them about how they could preserve and protect themselves. He knew all of that because he actually lived through the tragic incident caught on his patrol car's dash camera and augmented by the body cams of his partner and himself. Their identities were blurred out to protect their privacy, but he knew and suffered as he relived every second of the video each time he thought about it.

He was several years into the career he launched after his time serving in the Marines and had gotten inured to the routines of the job. That was his first mistake. It was about dusk when he and his partner were running a speed trap near Buttonwillow just west of Bakersfield. They spotted a pickup truck barreling down highway 58. With no front license plate, required by law for all vehicles registered in the state of California, and the rear license plate was mangled and hard to read as a result of some sort of accident or damage to the rear of the truck, he and his partner Tim Holloway lit them up to stop them and assess the situation. When the truck pulled over, they both followed standard procedure. Tim got out of the driver's side of the patrol car and slowly approached the driver's side of the truck, calling out to the driver to turn off the engine and get his license and registration ready to display. Butch slowly approached the passenger side of the truck and noticed what appeared to be an adolescent or young man sitting there craning his neck to look backward and see what was going on. He did not sense danger, but he did have his hand close to his holster as his habitual precaution.

His partner noticed the driver fidgeting a bit and paused as he approached the truck and again called out to him.

"Fuck you!" the driver clearly said.

Maintaining his professional demeanor, Tim switched to his command voice but still unexcitedly told the driver to please, carefully, and slowly exit the vehicle. He did so slowly but threw out, "What's the matter officer. Got nothing better to do than to harass people?" Tim and Butch knew better than to engage agitated motorists in banter. Butch, always the peacemaker, turned towards the driver, extended his left arm in a calming fashion, and said: "Now, fellow, no need to get all worked up about anything. We are just doing our job."

Thinking the passenger was just a kid, Butch lost track of him momentarily and took his attention and focus off what was his prime responsibility – the other guy. Suddenly the kid swung out of the truck and leveled a pistol at Butch and began shooting. The first bullet exploded on the tip of his right shoulder and the momentum began to spin Butch to his right. The pain was not instantaneous, but he struggled to pull his weapon. Craning his head towards Tim, he raised his weapon to return fire. He saw the driver pull a sawed-off shotgun and blast Tim in the face with it sending him reeling backward and flat on his back on the ground. As Butch also stumbling tried to gather himself, the kid fired two more shots. One hit Butch in his protective vest on his right side just above his right nipple and did no real damage but continued to spin him to his right. The third shot caught Butch in his exposed left underarm puncturing his left lung, missing his heart, but perforating his upper stomach. Butch crashed face down in the dirt almost paralyzed in pain and confusion.

He heard the driver call out to the kid, "What the fuck! Toss me your gun." The kid probably did that as Butch tried to lift his head to see under the wheels of their cruiser what was happening with Tim. He then heard two more shots from the pistol on the driver's side of the car. "Get in!" the driver yelled and the two of them sped away. Butch, laboring to breathe and wincing in pain, struggled to drag himself over to where Tim was. It was immediately obvious to him that the driver had finished him off with a double tap to the head.

That was on the video and that was what his staff was about to watch. Without finding fault, the video instructor then asked the audience to process what they had just seen and offered their views on what went wrong and what could have been done better. Butch had lived nearly every day since then asking those questions and feeling guilty for failing to protect himself and Tim by controlling the kid. Those haunting memories eventually led to Butch's resignation from the CHP and accepting what he hoped would be a mild and peaceful stint as Chief of Police at City College. His staff went off to the conference room to watch the video and be reminded to always be on guard and Butch turned back to the mild and prosaic issues of parking, vehicle registration, and traffic control as students and staff were beginning to stream onto campus.

After the training session, the crew of four campus officers waltzed back to the station's common area outside Butch's office to get themselves a cup of coffee and a couple of the donuts that Butch had brought. They were still discussing and debating the prompt questions the presenter on the video had posed about who did what, what was right and what went wrong and why. Overhearing that, Butch cringed as he replayed all of those searing inquiries in

his head for the umpteenth time. Looking through his office door he noticed that Caleb bore a slight resemblance to Butch's partner that night. That only heightened his inner turmoil.

He then remembered meeting Caleb's father when Caleb first got hired. The father compellingly asked Butch to keep his son safe. Butch promised as much but thought, this is a campus police department almost nothing dangerous or threatening happened in this jurisdiction. Still, just the same, Butch had maintained perhaps a slightly greater watchful vigilance of Caleb and his activities to keep his promise.

About that time, Roland had to take care of the mundane duty of getting the appropriate parking permit for his car. He still had a permit from Mesa College accepted temporarily by the parking monitors, but as he was planning to stay at City College for a long time – he thought he would convert to a proper permit. Still pretty new to campus he struggled a bit to wind his way through the labyrinth of buildings to find the Chief of Police's office and get the sticker. When he got there, Butch had a stack of papers on his desk and was somewhat wistfully looking out the window.

"Hi, it's Roland, right?"

"Yes, Roland McNally."

"Welcome, come on in. What can I do for you?"

"I need to exchange my Mesa parking sticker for a valid one from here."

“Ok, here’s a form to fill out with a little information and we can get you fixed up right away.”

As Roland took the form from Butch, he happened to notice a framed picture on Butch’s desk. It was apparently of Butch years ago in what Roland recognized as a Marine uniform. He was a buck sergeant and the background looked like jungle foliage. He had a cigar in his mouth and his hands on his hips and he was looking for all he was worth like a bad-ass dude. On the corner of the picture frame was a medal – a bronze star. A dam of memories burst inside Roland. He began to spin downwards into a hell he had done everything to seal off and contain within some secure inner sanctum of his memories.

He instantly knew that Butch was a Nam vet. Roland had been in Nam as well, but not like Butch apparently had been. Roland's stomach roiled, his palms began to sweat, and his heart pounded more fiercely. Roland remembered that after he had his freshman floundering at Wooster College, he had basically dropped out of college to find himself. Returning to Columbus, Ohio, and placating his parents by taking a few courses part-time at Columbus State Community College, he unexpectedly got drafted. Rumor had it that the African American community of the region had been demonstrating and raising protests over what they deemed as the disproportionate selection of Blacks for the draft and the local draft board was anxious to suck in some middle-class white boys to undercut the criticisms. Whatever lead to Roland's being drafted, he seriously thought about what to do.

He was opposed to the war in Vietnam and had even participated in some demonstrations which contributed to his flaming out at Wooster. His conscience was not so

well developed then to sustain going to jail in protest of the war. He had at least one high school buddy self-exile to Canada – which might have in some way repeated his grandparent's experiences and their expulsion from Russia but there was nothing comparable to their situation in Russia and his. He was a loyal American and had to admit that he had benefited and enjoyed the privileges of US citizenship. Besides, he had been thinking for some time about the terrible situations all his contemporaries were shuttled into via the draft. Regardless of what one felt about the war, someone ought to care about them. He decided to accept whatever fate awaited him as he followed instructions and appeared at the induction center to take his physical and be sifted and sorted by the military machine.

He was somewhat relieved that an apparent compromise, middle road, might be available. As he was put through his physical exam and processing, amidst dozens of other young men who had shown up with all sorts of excuses, strategies, and tricks to try to fail the exam and or be rejected by the army he quietly complied with the process. He got to a sergeant who asked him if he had any idea of what specialty he wanted to pursue if drafted. They all had been given a one-page cheat sheet of the major organizational substructure of the army and what was known as the MOS, Military Occupational Specialties, within each branch like the infantry, field artillery, or quartermaster corps. Scanning that Roland had noticed that there was a Medical Corps. Roland asked about that, and the sergeant smiled.

"Sure, you passed the aptitude tests well enough that we could funnel you towards 91A – Medical Corpsman. Right now, we need a lot of them." Not knowing exactly what he was reaching for but feeling morally rectified in trying to preserve life rather than end it and to help

his cohort of recruits rather than specializing in killing faceless enemies, Roland said that that's what he would like to do if possible. Later when he found out that the slogan of the Medical Corps was "To Conserve Fighting Strength" he felt affirmed in his choice. He went through basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and Advanced Individual Training, AIT, at Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio Texas. All the while he pretty much knew he was headed to Vietnam. But that was alright with him. He began to strongly feel that if he could save just one life, preserve just one soul, give a future to someone who might not otherwise have one – then his life would be validated and vindicated. If he could give comfort and succor to someone, he might be able to end the war for at least one person or alleviate its ravages in some minuscule way. He would never ever have to ponder or be nagged with thoughts of not being worthy of the energy and efforts that fate had mixed up to produce his life. It would go a long way to repairing the damage his irresponsible behavior and activities at Wooster College had wrought on his family. In training he was increasingly impressed and proud of the statistics the sergeants shared with them of how Nam medics were doing a better job at saving lives than any previous war in American history. Over and over, they were told that if they could just stabilize the wounded and get them on the medivac choppers, then the chances of survival were great. Less than one percent of the wounded who survived the first 24 hours died. Roland knew he could live with that and maybe even be a little proud of doing his part to achieve that statistic.

At the end of April 1970, he was shipped out to Vietnam. He was as nervous and fearful as anyone else. His greatest fear was that under pressure, he would buckle and fail to do his best to preserve life. All he could hope for would be that the combination of his training,

adrenaline and his urge to save lives would get him through his tour. But then there was a swerve in the arc of his life. On the morning of May 5th, 1970, while Roland was still in the replacement center getting organized and waiting to be sent to a unit, the Armed Forces Network broke the news of the shootings at Kent State University back in Kent, Ohio. Roland had grown up in Ohio and he had started his college career at Wooster College, just 46 miles from Kent. He knew some people who were students at Kent and certainly could empathize with unarmed students being shot by Ohio National Guardsmen. He began to hungrily listen to and gather as much information about the incident as possible.

A sergeant named Robert E. Lee something-or-other entered the barracks and saw him listening to the radio. Roland was always amazed at the number of NCOs he met in the army named Robert E. Lee something-or-other. He sometimes wondered what it was with southern mothers and fathers who were so unoriginal in naming their babies. The sergeant approached and shouted at him.

“What are you doing?”

“Just listening to the news, sarge.”

“News about those commie pinko kids being shot in Ohio, eh?”

“Yes.”

“Well, if you ask me, they should have mounted up a 50 caliber and killed them all. Those traitors and cowards,” the sergeant ground out through his clenched teeth and

gesticulated with his fists as if to strike blows at enemies. He went on to rail against peaceniks and demanded to know from Roland if he were one of them. Then Roland should be shot too.

A detail of men was returning to the barracks just then. By their account, Roland literally flew through the air and caught the sergeant by the neck as he took him down to the floor. As they scuffled and Roland positioned himself atop of the sergeant, the other men rushed in to break them apart. Roland never really landed any blows on the sergeant, but he was about to. Still, he was guilty of a serious infraction of insubordination and "assaulting" a superior. Over the next couple of days, the system, and the sergeant, devised Roland's punishment. He was assigned to the mortuary unit at Tan Son Nhut airbase just outside of Saigon. He would be one of the slightly over one hundred men and civilian employees whose task was to receive the bodies of the men killed in action and prepare them for being sent back to the United States. All but Roland were volunteers for the work; he had "volunteered" courtesy of the sergeant he assaulted. The grim grist mill of death began to grind Roland up.

Helicopters and C-123s delivered the fallen from a dozen or so collection points in the field. In an isolated corner of the base, the zippered body bags were received and taken into a room where the remains would be positively identified. The space could handle 250 bodies but often there were more there. The process was extensive and sometimes grotesquely grueling as frequently the bodies were burnt, bloated, covered with maggots, and not whole. In such cases, someone had to determine if all the pieces, and the right pieces, of the deceased, were in the bag. Using dog tags to establish identity was often erroneous since soldiers sometimes exchanged dog tags and or wore other men's dog tags for different reasons. Dental charts were

made and checked with Army records, and fingerprints were taken and sent to the F.B.I.

Birthmarks and tattoos were noted. Someone would go through whatever personal belongings might still be in the man's pockets looking for more clues or confirmation of suppositions as to who the man was.

Not having any prior mortuary experience, Roland was assigned the most menial and often the most grotesque tasks. He and the rest of the unit learned how to breathe differently as the smell in the room was vicious. The odor eventually permeated his clothes and he and everyone else working there carried it with them wherever they went. That contributed to the isolation they all experienced as practically nobody else wanted to have anything to do with the men or their work. To many, they were walking reminders of death.

The bodies wrapped in a plastic sheet taped securely were placed in an aluminum case to be sent back to the United States. Nine cases would go on a pallet and efforts were made to keep the movement of the remains from looking like cargo being shipped. In fact, they never spoke of shipping the bodies back to the United States for just that reason. Remains were repatriated, evacuated, or merely transported. Despite receiving no respect from anyone else, they did their work as respectfully and reverently as possible. Yet day in and day out it took its toll on Roland. He had accepted being drafted and gone through the training to be a field medic in the perhaps naive and possible juvenile hope of saving someone's life or giving comfort to the sick and wounded. He was doing none of that. Instead, he was death's servant. Gradually he became more and more depressed and despondent. He self-medicated with

alcohol and smoke. When his tour was over and he rotated back to the states, he was a lost, burned out, and a hollow shell of his former self.

Butch noticed Roland was fixated on his picture on his desk but also far away. "Did two tours and barely a scratch," Butch said nodding towards the picture. "How about you – you in the Nam?"

"Ah... er...yeah," Roland said in such a way as to signal that he did not want to talk about it any further. Roland's breathing was short and quick suggesting some anxiety.

"Well, here's your parking sticker, Roland. Put it in the lower-left corner of the windshield and you'll be good."

"Thanks," Roland almost whispered as he was swallowing hard. He got up, established his balance, took the sticker, and left Butch's office. As he exited the building he was disoriented and looked around. He was confused. In fact, he really was bordering on being lost – not so much in a physical sense but in an existential sense. He had long ago determined that he had spent much of his life getting lost and then finding himself again. As he walked towards a vaguely familiar building, he remembered those days of chasing girls, drinking beer, and demonstrating against the war at Wooster College that ultimately seduced him into a forest of failed exams and unacceptable behaviors. Then even more profoundly he experienced the same thing after he returned from Nam.

Taking advantage of the GI Bill and thinking that he had a second chance at a fresh start, he did not return to Ohio but stayed in California. He got himself enrolled in Berkeley to finish

his undergraduate degree. But he had not cleaned himself up very much and in the month or so he was waiting for classes to start, he continued his bad habits. He just felt helplessly alone and without any real direction or purpose. One day when he returned for the third time to the same liquor store to buy another bottle of MD 20/20, he looked upon the obvious wino in line in front of him. He raised his eyebrow disapprovingly and watched the man stagger out. The counter clerk called out to him when it was his turn, "What are you looking at? That's you in another couple of years."

No way, Roland thought, I'm going to graduate from Berkeley. Are you? He thought. Taking stock of everything, Roland summoned the courage to admit that he was lost – men just hate to ask for direction, eh? He then sought out and found some VA counseling services and a totally good fellow Nam vet who had been there and done that enough to connect with Roland on eye level. They formed a friendship that helped Roland get over some humps and it ripened into a real friendship that sustained Roland all the way through his undergraduate and his master's degree days there at Berkeley. They sort of lost touch with each other when Roland got the fellowship to work on a doctorate at Princeton University. The distance between New Jersey and California was a bit daunting. But Roland always felt that he had been thrown a life preserver by a stranger becoming a friend during those years. Deep down inside he began to desperately wish and hope that he might one day have the opportunity for redemption by saving someone's life physically or figuratively.

He also found himself a life raft in the person of Mary Malley. A bright, spunky, green-eyed redhead that he noticed standing in line at a restaurant on Durant Avenue a block from

campus. She seemed so fetching that, even though he had eaten lunch just half-an-hour before, he slid into line behind her to attempt some manner of connection. She did not seem repulsed at his faltering attempts to start up a conversation. They ate together and the seeds of romance were sewn. Having found each other through kismet, they subsequently forged what he eventually realized was a transition love affair. They each, in their own way, helped the other transition away from crisis in they were recovering from to more placid plains of life.

As Roland stood in the middle of a sidewalk and slowly rotated looking at the buildings and trying to figure out which way to go to get back to his office, he happened to see Astrid walking towards him.

“Hey, Roland, what’s up?” she chirped.

“I’m still trying to get my bearings. Are you going back to your office?”

“Sure am.”

“Then can I tag along to get to mine?”

“Of course, Roland. No problem. Glad to be of service,” she smiled.

“Yeah, glad you found me.”

