



Elegy

by Deb Walsh

Peter Caine paused, rubbing his chin with one hand, pulling at his hair with the other. He half-turned, took a step, then turned back again, dropping his hands to his sides. Indecision warred on his face, replaced suddenly by resolve; he strode forward quickly, before he lost that resolve once again.

"Hi, Paul. I'm sorry I haven't stopped by for a while. I've been kinda busy. Well, no, not really — been runnin' on autopilot lately. Frank says I'll get over it. It's tough, you know? Sure, you know. But goin' to work every day, seeing somebody else sitting at your desk ... they didn't waste any time, taking your name off the door and putting someone else's on! Shit, I don't know what I expected — they had to put somebody in charge. It's just not the same anymore, though."

He dragged his fingers through his hair again, lifting his face up and closing his eyes. A bitter smile touched his lips and he shook his head, his hand dropping once more to his side. He raised his hand again, sketching a circle with his fingers as he reopened his eyes. "I don't know, Paul. I thought being a cop meant everything to me. I'm a good cop. I used to love going to work, hitting the street, bringing the bad guys down. I thought I could make a difference. Hell, I thought we could make a difference. Together. But now, without you, I just ... I just don't have the fire anymore, the hunger. I never realized how much you being there meant to me being a cop. I never thought about — you were just always there. 'Cept on those occasions you'd disappear, scaring Mom half to death and driving Frank crazy guessing where you were and what you were up to."

Peter chuckled softly at the memory, a fond smile lighting his drawn, tired face. He scrubbed at his face with the palm of his hand, then waggled one finger in the air, continuing, "Frank's convinced you're some kind of James Bond character." He shook his head, still smiling. "I think he's always been a little jealous, you know? You always get to go off on these great adventures, and he gets stuck at the precinct, minding the store." Growing serious, Peter stilled himself for a moment, staring into the distance. "Only they weren't such great adventures, were they? I mean, I know you thought you had to go, they were important, but you and Mom ... you hated being separated from her. The two of you together have always been like ... magic. I'm never gonna find something like that. It's just too special. Maybe my expectations are too high — you and Mom, my father and my mother ... I don't know. And the nightmares. You thought I didn't know, but I know you had them wherever you went, whatever you did ... it hurt you. And you never got over it completely, did you?"

"Hell, I can understand that! I still dream about the temple. Sometimes about the orphanage. Yeah, in the last couple of months, I've been dreaming about the orphanage, about meeting you. Meeting Mom. And Kelly and Carolyn. And sometimes I have nightmares, too. That you turned your back and walked away, and I never got out."

Sighing, Peter massaged his neck for a long moment, gathering his strength. After a long silence, he spoke again, his voice husky with emotion. "But I did get out, Paul. You brought me out and gave me back my life. You gave me a future. You never asked me to give up my past, but you have me my future. I wanted to make you proud of me. I wanted to be a good cop, I never wanted to embarrass you or make you look bad. We made a good team, Captain. No one's ever gonna take your place, Paul."

Slowly, Peter pivoted on his heel, and stared into the sun. "I could always say anything to you, Paul. You'd listen to me no matter what crap I was spouting. You made me feel worthwhile. Like I could do anything if I tried. You have no idea how important that was to that bratty little temple kid, pissed off at the world and lookin' for somebody to take the blame for every rotten thing that'd happened to him." He turned back slowly, extending trembling fingers, jerking them back suddenly at the touch of the cold marble. "I could say anything to you, Dad. How come I can't say goodbye?"

"I knew I'd find you here," the soft, vibrantly alive voice of his mother said from behind him. "How does it look?"



Peter lifted his head from his contemplation of the newly-installed headstone, and smiled. "It's beautiful, Mom," he told her, not turning around. "How did you get here?" he added, rising stiffly from his crouch on the cold, damp ground.

"Your father brought me." She gestured behind her, and Peter turned then and looked down the slope. He caught sight of his father, Kwai Chang Caine, a pool of stillness in the silent graveyard. Caine bowed slightly, his stance communicating encouragement.

"Help me see," she asked him, reaching out for him. Peter caught her hand and held it lightly for a moment before drawing her forward toward the memorial. Together they knelt before the stone, and his hand covered hers as her fingers sought out the chiselled letters. Her lower lip trembled as her fingers read the inscription. "Paul Blaisdell In Loving Memory."

"I still miss him," Annie Blaisdell whispered in a voice like brittle leaves.

"Me, too, Mom," Peter agreed, slipping his arm around her shoulders and pressing her close as though he could shield her from his pain.

"He was so proud of you, Peter," she told him suddenly, leaning her head against his shoulder.

"I'm ... I was ... proud of him, too. No. I *am* proud of him. I'm proud to be his son. I know I didn't say it very often, but I am. I just wish ..."

"He knew, Peter," she reminded him with an affectionate smile. "He used to talk about you all the time, the kind of man you'd grown into, the fact that you'd become a police officer he was proud to have on his team. Having you there in the squad room made going to work a joy for him, Peter."

"Me, too, Mom. Having him there ..." He shook his head. "It's not the same anymore, Mom. His replacement ... she's okay, I guess. But she's not Paul."

"No one could be," Annie said softly. "He was completely, totally unique," she added in a voice tight with unshed tears.

"Mom, I'm thinking about resigning —" Peter blurted out, his face reddening.

"Peter, no! It's hard for you, I know. Harder than for me in some ways —" She held her fingers to his lips to quiet the protest that erupted. "Paul wasn't just your father, he was your commanding officer. But he told me so many times that you were a good cop, Peter. You were the great achievement of his career. And if you'd only survive to grow out of that short temper of yours, you could be a great cop."

"Mom —"

"Peter, I want you to promise me something," she demanded suddenly, her voice steady and resolute, all hint of tears banished.

"Anything, Mom —"

"I want you to promise me you'll stay on the force for a year. Give it a year, and then see how you feel. I don't like the idea of your being a cop, Peter, I never have. But it's always made your father so proud to know that you'd carry on when he was gone. That someone honest, someone with ... passion ... would keep fighting the good fight."

Peter rested his cheek against his mother's hair, breathing in the scent of her, marvelling as always at the miracle of her. His eyes strayed down the hillside to where his natural father stood, and he had the sudden sense that his father knew the turmoil inside him. Kwai Chang Caine closed his eyes briefly, and nodded in recognition. Caine's eyes opened, and seemed to look directly into Peter's soul. He smiled at his son, and Peter felt a weight lift from that soul his father had examined. For a long moment, father and son's eyes locked, and then the Shaolin bowed and turned away, heading back toward Peter's car.

"Okay, Mom," Peter agreed, wrapping his other arm around her to gather her into a fierce hug. "I'll give it a year."

"And you'll do your best, Peter. And you'll stay safe."

He kissed the top of her head and smiled. "I'll do my best, Mom. You might want to talk to Frank about the safe part, but I'll do my best."



"Good," Annie approved. "Now let's go home and get warm."

He helped her up and took her arm in his as he guided her down the hillside. Behind them, the man who'd brought them together laid at rest. Ahead of them, Kwai Chang Caine waited patiently by his son's car. A father lost, a father found, both loved and cherished. The path ahead was no longer clear, but he knew that with the love of his fathers ... both of them ... and his mother, he would find his way.