

## Wishes on the Wind

*by Deb Walsh*

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ay One: Monday, October 31, 1994

The cavalcade of black limousines wound silently up the long drive, their only sound the snap and flutter of the American flags affixed to their hoods.

Immediately behind marched nearly a thousand state, city and out-of-town police and firemen, full dress uniforms in shades of blue and black a somber note on this crisp, brilliant day. The stream of men and women kept a measured pace as they passed, rank after rank, through the cemetery gates. The steady cadence of their steps was counted out by the beat of a single drum, carried by a member of the police honor guard. Behind the men and women of the police, fire department, and other public safety offices, an impressive sorrel horse strode, riderless, its stirrups turned inward in tribute to the fallen officer.

From its position on the road by a rise to the north of the policeman's grave, the camera crew of WYCX had a perfect view of the proceedings. The hearse entered the cemetery behind the horse, flanked by a motorcycle escort as it passed through the massive wrought iron gates. The other major local stations had similar installations throughout the cemetery, but WYCX had claimed the best position for broadcasting the funeral.

One by one, the sleek vehicles slid into place along the unbroken curve of curbside; one by one, doors opened hesitantly, and figures dressed in black slid wearily out of the cars to stand uncertainly on the perfectly manicured grass, waiting, as if for a cue. Around them glittered the last colors of the season, vivid leaves glistening like living jewels in the late October sunshine, a stark contrast to the subdued hues of their funerary clothing.

The marching column turned toward the grave in a perfect perpendicular angle, passing the people milling near the cars. The horse followed, its head raised high. A handler appeared out of the crowd to grasp its reins, leading it carefully across the tended grass to stand with the assembled safety officers.

When at last the hearse moved majestically into position, it seemed as though some invisible director had yelled "Action!". As one, the mourners turned toward the freshly-dug grave, moving slowly, as though through water. The back of the hearse was opened ceremoniously, and the pallbearers formed up around it to carry the coffin on its final journey.

One final car pulled up to the curve, and the uniformed driver, himself a police officer, hurried around to open the passenger door. He helped a petite, slender blonde woman wearing dark sunglasses out of the car, followed by two younger women, one blonde, the other brunette. Next to exit the shadowed interior of the limousine was a craggy-faced gray-haired man, resplendent in full police captain's uniform, who took his place next to the blonde woman. The driver bent down to offer assistance to a small, bearded, very old Asian man; it was a sign of his grief that he accepted the offered assistance. Finally, a third man dressed in severe black got out of the car, his movements stiff and unnaturally awkward, his jaw-length gray hair lifted momentarily in a snatch of breeze. He lifted his face to that breeze, then turned toward his companions.

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ho the heck is he?" whispered the WYCX sound man to the newswoman.

She consulted her notes and smiled faintly. "The deceased's father. His *real* father. Some kind of a priest, apparently. Shinto or Buddhist or something equally mystical,"

she added with satisfaction. "Better and better. East meets West. The dead cop has two fathers — one a cop himself, the other a priest. Great angle."

"You're a ghoul, Monica," commented the sound man, turning back to his board.

"I'm a journalist," she replied. "Let's get the show on the road, shall we?"



Carolyn Blaisdell McCall and Kelly Blaisdell each took one of their father's arms, while their mother Annie clung to the side of Kwai Chang Caine. Lo Si, known by all as The Ancient, walked silently at Annie Blaisdell's other side.

Ahead of them lay the gravesite, surrounded by the throng of mourners and well-wishers. The police honor guard, the polished buttons of their full dress uniforms gleaming in the bright sunlight, stood at rest, their rifles held stiffly at their sides. The assembled police and fire representatives had moved into formation behind the family and friends of the deceased, both near and yet held at a distance from the personal grief of those who'd known him.

The pallbearers, all of them police officers, and their precious burden had reached the grave. Now the coffin stood suspended over the hole, draped in an American flag and surrounded by mounds of fragrant hothouse flowers. At the head of the coffin stood Monsignor Desjardin of St. Bartholomew's, prayerbook in hand, his face composed.

Kwai Chang Caine looked toward the tableau and drew a ragged breath.



"I'm Monica Cassals, bringing you WYCX's continued live coverage of the funeral of Metro Division Police Detective Peter Caine from the Morningside Cemetery. Police and City officials are now arriving from the funeral service at St. Bartholomew's to lay to rest the latest victim of the 27th Killer, a serial killer who has targeted only police officers over the last several months, always on the 27th of the month," Monica Cassals intoned into her microphone, her voice carefully respectful. "For the fourth time in as many months, almost a thousand police and firefighters, both local and from around the country, have journeyed here to bury one of their own."

"Our viewers will remember that over the last several months, the 27th Killer has taken the lives of police officers Jennifer Simonson, Jerry Fields and Carlos Herrerra. Detective Peter Caine, the 27th Killer's fourth victim, was killed by a sniper's bullet last week after responding to an emergency call while working the night shift. Although Detective Caine was able to call for help, he was declared dead shortly after arrival at City Hospital. The police investigation continues, but no suspects have been arrested so far," she explained. She pitched her voice just right so that in the minds of her viewers, the police would be at fault for not making a quick arrest and making their streets safe again.

She swept her eyes over the scene below and smiled. "The Mayor and Deputy Mayor attended the funeral service at St. Bartholomew's, and accompanied the funeral cortege here to Morningside. The Police Commissioner and his aides have also come out to bid farewell to yet another of our city's fallen heroes." She paused, watching the image on the screen as the camera moved slowly across the crowd. She nudged the cameraman, nodding toward the gravesite, and mimed a close-up. With a curious glance at her, he complied, tightening the focus to capture the grief-ravaged faces of the assemblage. She watched on the monitor, continuing to identify the mourners for the viewing public. "The city's Chinese population has also come out in force this morning to pay their respects to Peter Caine, who was himself part Chinese.

"With tomorrow's city council election looming over them, several of the incumbent Councillors and their opponents have forgone last-minute campaigning to attend the graveside ceremony for Detective Caine. Differences of opinion on the handling of the 27th Killer investigation have been put aside as the city joins together to mourn one of its finest young officers."

The camera had reached the faces of several well-dressed men, and Monica continued her monologue. "There's Councillor Matthews, who has been a vocal detractor of the police department's investigation into the 27th Killer so far. And standing nearby is Council hopeful Milton Silverstein, whose proposal to provide increased funding for special violent crimes investigative units has come under severe attack from the incumbent Councillor."

Licking her lips with something akin to glee, Monica concluded her description of the luminaries in the crowd by focussing on the Governor, who had travelled from the state house to attend the funeral. "Even our Governor has set aside the concerns of state management to pay tribute to the memory of Detective Peter Caine. Today, political and ideological adversaries are unified in one purpose: to bury yet another police officer cut down in the line of duty."

**T**he Blaisdells, Kwai Chang Caine and Lo Si had met Lo Si's niece Xiaoli and Carolyn's husband Todd at the graveside, and taken their places in the front row of seats, within touching distance of the massive coffin. Silent tears slid down Annie Blaisdell's face from behind her dark glasses. Her husband, Captain Paul Blaisdell, stared stoically at the coffin, the rigid set of his jaw betraying his emotion. Kelly Blaisdell, Peter's foster sister, sniffled openly, clutching a tissue to her nose. Her sister Carolyn sat with her arm still wound around their father's, holding tight, her fingers twisting in the heavy fabric of his dress uniform. Her husband sat with his arm around her shoulders, his eyes fixed sadly on the American flag draped over the coffin. With his niece Xiaoli beside him, Lo Si kept his attention divided between Annie Blaisdell and Kwai Chang Caine. Caine stared ahead, his face blank, the tightening around his eyes and the flat set of his mouth the only evidence of his grief.

Around them sat the many people who had known Peter Caine. Detective Jody Powell, sat next to Detective Margaret Mary Skalany, the two women holding onto each other for comfort. Both had been partners to Peter Caine at various times. Jody whispered softly, "Take care of him, Kira," and Mary Margaret smiled faintly. Kira had been Jody's sister and Peter's one-time partner, herself killed in the line of duty. Behind them, Chief Frank Strenlich sat at attention, his face grim, his hand gripped tightly by his wife, Molly. On his other side sat Detective Kelly Blaine, once Peter's lover, now a mourning friend among many.

The police weren't the only mourners at the graveside. Donny Double D, an informant and a casual friend of Peter Caine's, sat next to his girlfriend, Lula, staring at the coffin and shaking his head. "Can't believe it. Not Peter. Thought he was going to live forever," Donny babbled, rubbing at his goatee. He took off his glasses and wiped at the moisture in his eyes. Lula patted his arm, hugging it to her, and nodded. "I know, Donny. I know."

A few seats away, a young woman named Tyler Smith sat, her enormous eyes red-rimmed and bloodshot. Once she had planned to marry Peter Caine, but her conviction that she would one day sit at his graveside like this had forced her to break off the engagement. That she had been right was no comfort to her at all. Her fellow bandmembers stood by for moral support, all aware that Tyler still felt something for the fallen police detective.

They were all there, each mourning the loss of Peter Caine in their own way: the people he'd helped, in some cases the people he'd fought, the people who'd helped him. Some were there to support Peter Caine's fathers, Blaisdell or Caine or both. The one common element was loss and sadness. To the accompaniment of soft sniffles and rustling tissues, Monsignor Desjardin of St. Bartholomew's stepped forward and began the graveside service.

**T**here had been no doubt that Captain Paul Blaisdell of the 101st Precinct would give the final eulogy at Detective Peter Caine's funeral. As the detective's captain, he was the logical choice. But as Blaisdell rose stiffly from his seat and walked over to join the priest at the head of the grave, Monica Cassals revelled in describing his distraught demeanor to her viewing audience. "Captain Blaisdell was not only

Detective Caine's commanding officer, but also his foster father. It is never an easy task to bury a subordinate officer, but for Captain Blaisdell, he is also burying his only son. I know you'll join with me in extending the most sincere condolences to Captain Paul Blaisdell on this doubly-sad day."

At the head of the grave, Blaisdell's words were brief but heartfelt, and they were followed by a 21-volley salute by the assembled police honor guard. The cemetery rang with the aftershocks of those shots fired, and a single bugle mournfully played taps. Blaisdell gently pulled the American flag from Peter's coffin, carefully folding it into a triangle. With a precision of movement indicative of only great pain or great sorrow, he walked to stand in front of Kwai Chang Caine. He snapped a salute, his body rigid, and then handed the folded flag to Caine with solemn ceremony.

"The Captain is now presenting the American flag to Caine's natural father, Chinatown resident and priest, Kwai Chang Caine," came the soft voice of the newswoman. She grinned at her sound man, gesturing to him to turn up the gain. "Our viewers may be familiar with Mr. Caine's name from some of Detective Caine's more celebrated cases."

Kwai Chang Caine looked up slowly, his eyes locking onto Blaisdell's. The two men stared, each lost in his own grief, for a long moment. Then Caine stood slowly, put his hands on Blaisdell's shoulders, and embraced him. He accepted the flag, closing his eyes as he did so. Then he turned to Annie Blaisdell and took her hand, placing it on the folded flag. He closed her hands around it and kissed her on the forehead. Blaisdell patted him on the shoulder as Caine resumed his seat. With a wipe of his hand against his nose, Blaisdell turned and sat down next to his wife, who hugged the flag to her chest, sobbing.

On the crest of the hill, Monica thanked all the gods who smiled on her; this was great television, and sure to draw attention to her work. New York, here I come, she promised herself with a smile.

**T**he tall, young Asian man in a stylish dark suit came over to Kwai Chang Caine after the ceremony and laid his hand on Caine's arm. "Sorry, Caine," Chan said softly. "For a cop, he was okay."

A small smile touched Caine's lips; coming from a career criminal like Chan, that was high praise indeed. "Thank you," Caine replied, equally softly. "I believe he ... learned to like you, too, Chan."

Chan nodded and turned away, slipping back into the crowd.

"Hey, Caine, I'm real sorry about this," another well-wisher told him. Caine looked up into the worried eyes of Cap, a one-time mental institution inmate whom he and Peter had helped. "Peter was a great guy. Always used to stop by and see me at the ice cream stand. We're all gonna miss 'em," Cap continued, twisting his hat into a tight cylinder in his hands. "You call on me if you need anything, hear? You know old Cap'll be there in a flash."

"Yes, I know. Your friendship has always been a light in the darkness to me."

That pleased Cap no end, and he wandered off grinning foolishly. He paused a few steps away, and turned back to Caine, giving him a thumb's-up sign. "You call me."

"Yes," Caine agreed, bowing his head. "I will call you."

Satisfied, Cap walked away.

"Kwai Chang Caine," Lo Si, the Ancient, spoke into his ear, "we go now. You have done enough."

"No," Caine replied. "I ... have lost my son," he added, sighing deeply. "These people ... have lost their friend. My loss is ... no greater than theirs; their need ... no less than mine. I must do what I can to comfort them."

Not happy with the answer, but convinced he'd get no further in urging Caine to leave the cemetery, Lo Si took a step back and stood at Caine's elbow as Caine accepted the condolences of the mourners, and offered what comfort he could in return.

**W**hile the other stations had packed up their gear and left discreetly, the WYCX television crew had started to trek down the hillside to get a better view of the misery of the mourners of Detective Peter Caine. With a single gesture from Captain Blaisdell, Chief Strenlich had snapped to action. Intercepting them halfway down the hill, Strenlich had made it clear that the press was not welcome among the friends and family of Peter Caine. To underline that restriction, he'd posted the police honor guard around Caine and the Blaisdells. Before long, the remote crew had admitted defeat, and trudged back up the hill to return to their sound truck. Strenlich had watched them pack up and pull out before relaxing his vigilance. Only then had Strenlich called off the honor guard and returned to take his place in the queue.

The Blaisdells had joined Caine at some point in the long line of mourners, and he felt bolstered by their presence. By the positions they took, he knew they were protecting him, demonstrating the solidarity of family for him. That they had accepted his son long ago into their family he knew; today he learned that they had accepted him as well. In the depths of his grief, he felt uplifted by their concern for him.

Standing next to Caine was Annie Blaisdell, graciously accepting the condolences of each person who passed by them in the receiving line. Caine concentrated on each person in turn, offering his own strength in return to the people who grasped his hand, murmuring words of comfort.

When the line had at last begun to thin, Annie touched his hand tentatively, and he looked up into her grief-lined face. "Peter's with his mother now," she told him softly.

"Yes," Caine agreed, nodding. "The mother ... he never knew. It is her turn to ... look after our son. To protect him where I ... failed."

Annie's hand moved to twine her fingers with Caine's. "Failed? Caine, Peter was a cop. He knew the risks. It doesn't make this any easier, but you can't blame yourself."

Caine raised his head, staring up at the sunlight filtering through the trees. "Can I not?"

"No. You cannot," she told him firmly, and kissed him on the cheek.

At last the grieving friends and co-workers of his son drifted off, leaving only the Blaisdells, Lo Si and Caine. Paul Blaisdell walked over and patted him again on the shoulder, at a loss for words.

"Our friends will be heading back to the house," Annie said softly. "We should get going."

Paul nodded, still looking at Caine. Caine closed his eyes in a resigned reply. "The ritual of death gives succor to the living," he answered in a soft voice, drained of emotion.

"If you mean by that that familiar things make it easier, maybe you're right," Paul agreed. He sniffed, and rolled his head, his neck crackling from stiffness. "Let's go."

As they turned to leave, Caine reached out for Blaisdell's arm, holding him back. Blaisdell turned back, his face concerned. "Caine?"

"I am troubled, my friend."

As he glanced toward the coffin being lowered into the ground, a bitter smile flashed across Blaisdell's face, gone in an instant. "Troubled?"

"Yes," Caine agreed, nodding. "Not merely by our son's death. By the fact that I cannot sense his spirit, his essence. It is so like when the temple was destroyed ... I could feel no part of Peter then. I assumed then that it was the scale of the deaths ... all the priests and the students ... His manner of death ... the fact that I could not ... perform the proper death ritual ... I fear for his soul. I ..."

Blaisdell stared at him in silence for a long time. Conflicting emotions warred on his face for a long moment, and then his face hardened with decision. "Annie!"

Annie, her daughters, and Lo Si and his family were half-way to the car when she heard Paul call. She turned toward the sound of his voice. "Paul?"

"Caine and I ... we need to spend some time alone, father to father. You go on ahead, all right? We'll be along shortly."

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w, man, I really hate this."

"C'mon, Pete — some people'd give their eye teeth for a bird's eye view of their own funeral. Look at it this way — it's the social event of the season," Detective Kermit Griffin replied without looking up from his laptop computer.

Peter Caine, very much alive, grimaced at his companion. Although stiff from the bandages wrapped around his cracked ribs and the massive plaster cast on his left leg, he had sufficient movement to snort contemptuously as further social comment. "I feel like a friggin' voyeur. Worse. Look at my mom," he added, gesturing toward the television set with the remote control. He was silent a moment as he stared at the grief-stricken image of his foster mother, and his eyes widened as he took in the sight of his natural father. "Look at my dad," he pointed out sourly. He shifted in his nest of pillows, awkwardly lifting the damaged leg into a more comfortable position on the hotel sofa bed as he leaned forward to stare more closely at the images on the television screen. "Look at Eppy! And Tyler? Man, she looks *good*. And ... Jenine? Is that her *husband*? Shit, there's Kelly. Man, I feel like a heel," he announced morosely. "I hate this. I hate watching their pain. I hate knowing I caused it. I hate not being able ... not being able to help," he concluded softly.

At that, Kermit did look up, and he stared at Peter for a long moment before slowly removing his green sunglasses. "You're not the cause. The psycho who shot you and your fellow classmates is the cause. And this would have been for real if you hadn't noticed the pattern and been prepared. *And* we don't know that the killer would've given up after a miss, either."

Peter flexed his arm experimentally, wincing as the pain in his damaged ribs registered. "Not quite a miss."

"But definitely far from a hit. Chill, Peter. Keep making your lists, okay?" With that, Kermit replaced his sunglasses and went back to work on his computer.

"Okay," Peter agreed sulkily, although Kermit's words had cheered him slightly. For a few minutes, the only sounds were Kermit's fingers tapping on the keyboard of the laptop, the soft drone of the television commentator, the steady whine of the VCR recording the event, and the scratch of Peter's pencil on the legal pad in his lap as he noted who had attended the funeral. Suddenly, Peter spoke up again. "Paul's gotta tell my father."

"Tell your father what, Pete?"

"That I'm not dead. That ... that my spirit is definitely not one with the universe," Peter added cynically.

"This is a need-to-know operation, Pete. You, me, Strenlich and Blaisdell. And your doctors. And the managers here. And the funeral director's an old friend of the Captain's. But that's it. We don't know who the shooter is — you know it could be one of our own."

"My father needs to know. He needs to know I'm not dead. I need him to know I'm not dead," Peter insisted.

"You think your dad can help identify the shooter?"

"No. Yeah. Maybe — who knows what he can really do? I certainly don't. No, he needs to know I'm not dead so he won't leave again. If he leaves again, I may never be able to find him again."

**P**aul Blaisdell stared down at his shoes, something he couldn't remember doing since he'd been a child. A few feet away from him, Kwai Chang Caine stood, his eyes cast heavenward as he struggled to take in what Blaisdell had just told him. They had walked in silence deeper into the cemetery, Blaisdell keeping a wary eye open in case the television crew had set up elsewhere. Now they stood in the shadow of an old family mausoleum, shielded from prying eyes by well-tended shrubberies and the cold, lifeless marble of the crypt.

"Alive?" Caine repeated, his voice raspy with emotion.

"Alive. And relatively well," Blaisdell agreed softly.

Caine turned back toward him, eyebrow arched questioningly. "Relatively?"

Blaisdell nodded. "Aside from a couple of cracked ribs where the bullet impacted the body armor. And a broken leg."

This time the eyebrow seemed to take on an attitude of amusement. "A *broken* leg, not a wounded leg. Not ... something that happened when he was shot?"

Blaisdell's expression was grim for a moment longer, but then a smile struggled to the surface. "No. When he called in to report the attempted hit, Strenlich answered the call and went out to collect him. It was all pre-arranged. Peter was admitted to City Hospital. His wound was convincing enough to bystanders — his shirt was covered in blood — not from the shot, I might add. No. Peter managed to give himself a bloody nose hitting the dashboard from the recoil from the shot." He shook his head, an indulgent expression softening his craggy features.

"Dr. Sabourin — she says hello, by the way — declared him dead shortly after arrival at my request, and signed his death certificate. Then he was transported to the morgue. I understand he did not enjoy his trip in the body bag," he added, a grin flashing quickly into view, and disappearing just as quickly. "You know Peter. Quick to act. He fell off the mortuary slab when Nickie Elder was patching up his ribs. The slab was a little too high, and Peter a little too weak." The smile returned, blossomed into an almost evil grin. "Nickie decided to put him in a plaster cast instead of a lightweight one to slow him down. Dr. Sabourin concurred — she knows your son too well, it seems. They'll both keep our secret as long as we need them to," Blaisdell added confidently. "Or Nickie, at least, will answer to me."

"And why must this ... secret ... be kept at all?"

All trace of a smile abruptly left Blaisdell's face. "You've heard about the 27th Killer, the serial killer who's been targeting police officers." Caine nodded, his eyes steady on Blaisdell's face. "It turns out Peter knew every one of the victims so far. He's the one who figured out that he was targeted next."



One month earlier:

Peter Caine entered the squad room at the 101st Precinct dressed soberly in a black suit, his face drawn and grim. The redness in his eyes paid testimony to recent tears; the tension of his movements to anger and frustration. He yanked off his suit jacket, flung it onto the back of his chair, tugged his tie open, and slammed himself into the swivel chair at his desk.

"Bad one, huh?" his frequent partner Detective Jody Powell, seated two desks down, asked in sympathy. She was an attractive blonde, near Peter's age or a little older, and as much a friend as a co-worker. "You okay, Peter?"

"Yeah. Sure. I'm okay," he answered curtly, flipping the "on" switch on his desktop computer. "Just great."

Jody closed her eyes; she knew Peter. Despite his reputation for being a maniac, despite the cynicism and worldliness with which he greeted the world, he *felt* things. Maybe it was his early training at his father's temple. Maybe it was his father. Maybe it was just Peter. Whatever it was, she could feel the pain radiating off her partner like heat off a rock. Her sister Kira had warned her of this; Kira had understood Peter, too, and had never been taken in by the facade Peter effected. After a moment of indecision, Jody nodded to herself, and got up to go over to Peter's desk.

"Pete ..." she began, reaching out a hand to touch his shoulder.

Shrugging the hand off angrily, Peter shook his head vehemently. "No. I'm all right."

"Like hell you are! You're *not* all right. You just buried another friend, another cop, for Chrissake's. I know as well as you do it's not an easy thing to do. It *never* gets easier."

"If you're trying to comfort me, Powell, you're doing a hell of a job," Peter replied caustically.

Jody bit back a retort; she recognized the pattern ... she'd been very like Peter when Kira had died.

Dragging his hand down his face, Peter closed his eyes, leaning his face into his palm. Taking a deep breath, he shook his head again, this time more calmly. Lifting his face, he apologized, "I'm sorry. I'm being a bastard." He turned in his chair to face her. "Thanks. I think ... I think I just need to work through this on my own, okay?"

"No," she answered. "Not okay, Caine. You need to talk to someone about it. What about your father?"

"My father? All he'll say is something profound like 'no one ever dies, their life essence mingles with the oneness of the Tao.' No, that's not fair. I don't know. I guess ... I guess I still find it hard to talk to him about it ... the violence, the death, the ugliness. I don't know why. He knows how I live. He's seen what it's like out there ... I ..."

"Then how about Blaisdell?"

Peter was gnawing at a fingernail, but looked up at her hopefully. "Paul?" Some of the tension drained away as he considered the idea. "Yeah. I'll do that."

**C**aptain Paul Blaisdell looked up from his paperwork to see Peter Caine standing in the doorway of his office. He pulled off his wire-rimmed glasses, folded them and put them in his shirt pocket. "You know, your mother was complaining last night that you haven't been around for dinner lately. How does Sunday night strike you?"

Peter smiled faintly. Trust Paul. "Sounds good," he answered, taking the unspoken invitation and coming into the office. "What're we having?" he asked lightly as he dropped into the visitor's chair.

Blaisdell shrugged. "Does it matter?"

"So long as it's not rice," Peter replied with a small chuckle. "My father tells me I hated that at the temple."

"You don't have to remind me — you hated it after you came to live with us, too," Blaisdell said affectionately. "But you didn't come in here to discuss your mother's cooking, or the menu. How did the funeral go?"

Stiffening, Peter grimaced. "Cut right to the chase, huh?"  
"That's what you're here for, isn't it?" Peter nodded. "And?"

"And ... I want in on this one, Paul." He got up suddenly, his body braced for flight. Self-control slipping, Peter raked his mouth with his hand again. Then he pivoted toward Blaisdell, flailing his arm helplessly. "First Jerry, then Jennifer, now Carlos — this is the third guy from my academy class in three months —"

"What? You've known them *all*," Blaisdell said flatly, rising slowly from behind his desk.

"All," Peter echoed, suddenly still. "We were all at the academy together," he added, his eyes unfocussed. Then his eyes shifted back to the Captain as his excitement grew. "That's the link! The common factor we haven't been able to see. We've been looking at current history, not ancient history, just the fact that they were cops, not that they had something in common with each other ..."

"There's got to be more. Some pattern of when, where, something that can tell us who the next victim will be and where. Work with Kermit on this — find me the rest of the link, Peter. Tell me who's going to be next."

**P**resent day:  
"And Peter and Kermit ... found the pattern," Caine concluded softly.

"Yeah." Blaisdell massaged the back of his neck, rolling his head slightly to relieve the tension there. "Class ranking determined the who. When Kermit and Peter started digging, they found that the pattern had actually started about four months earlier, with the death of Detective Miles Bennett over in the 87th. On the actual anniversary of their academy graduation, May 27th. The manner of death had pointed to a gangland execution-style killing, so we didn't notice the connection at first. Bennett was with Bunco, he was a brilliant undercover operative who'd infiltrated Grayson's organization. He also graduated top of his academy class the same year as Peter."

"And so ... he was the first to die. In a manner ... not unlike the methods ... used by the very people he ... attempted to defeat."

"Right." Blaisdell sat down on the edge of the mausoleum platform. "Exactly one month later, it was Detective Fred Hall, Vice, from the 64th. He was found in a warehouse down by the docks with a syringe of contaminated crack discharged in his right arm."

"Second in his class."

"Right again."

"It is perhaps fortunate, then ... that Peter had not ... applied himself fully to his studies. A problem even when he was younger, I fear."

"Yes, well, he always did hate math," Blaisdell answered with a smile. "I might not have met him if he'd liked it, you know. Jerry Fields, Jennifer Simonson, and Carlos Herrera were ahead of him in ranking, and they each were killed in the months that followed Hall's death. Peter was sixth in ranking at the academy, although first in marksmanship."

"Which is why the killer elected to shoot him."

"Peter's one of the best shots on the force. He was also next in line."

**B** laisdell and Caine returned to the grave designated for Peter Caine, and Caine glanced curiously at the massive hole into which the coffin had been already placed. The smell of the freshly mounded dirt filled the air, vying with the heady scent of the flowers that had been placed to the side of the grave.

Glancing up at the north ridge to ensure that the camera crew had indeed gone and that no one else was within earshot, Blaisdell said softly, "It's empty, of course. Weighted to appear that there was a body in it, but no, no one took his place."

"I did not think ... that anyone had." He shrugged slowly, and shook his head. "I was just thinking ... how easily it could have been true. How it might yet be."

Blaisdell turned his head away abruptly, a sudden lump in his throat. "And how close we've come more than once? Yes. I sometimes wonder if I did the right thing, encouraging him, sponsoring him to the academy. Especially now."

"I do not think ..." Caine shook his head. "Peter ... has always been ... driven ... to protect the powerless, even as a child. He has no tolerance ... for the strong preying upon the weak. He gives no thought to his own safety when someone else's is at stake. Had you not ... sponsored him, he would have found another way. It is his nature. And to that nature, he must always return ... no matter the distractions along the way."

Paul looked back at Caine and studied his face for a long moment before replying. "That's not what you expected, is it? Not what you had planned for him."

Drawing a deep breath, Caine shook his head slightly. "The plans we make for our children ... they are but wishes on the wind. Each has his own destiny. We can but show them the way ... illuminate their first steps ... on the path they alone must follow."

Glancing at the lengthening shadows as the afternoon faded, Blaisdell smiled. "We'd better go before we need illumination. Annie's going to skin me alive for leaving her alone with everyone for so long."

**T**he Commissioner's office had arranged for a separate, quiet event for the police and firefighters who had travelled so far to commemorate Peter Caine's death. The gathering that had convened at the Blaisdell home was a sedate one, and most people, after stopping by and paying their respects to Peter Caine's foster mother, had formed little groups throughout the house. Many had left as quickly as courtesy allowed, and it hadn't taken long for the crowd to thin to only those who had known Peter well.

Annie Blaisdell found herself sitting on the sofa, a snifter of brandy in her hand, with Lo Si and Xiaoli on either side of her. Her daughters Kelly and Carolyn had deftly stepped in to take over hostess duties, allowing their mother some rest from the pressure of constantly meeting people and trying to process the stream of new information her senses fed her.

"I wonder what could be keeping them?" she asked softly.

"Kwai Chang Caine and your husband ... there are things which only fathers can share. That they are both father to the same son creates a special bond, a special pain that can find ease only father to father," Lo Si informed her seriously.

"And mothers?" Annie inquired, smiling faintly.

"Mothers must stick together," Xiaoli told her, patting her arm. "And that's just macho bullshit, Uncle. Family is family. And if I know Kwai Chang Caine ... they'll be here soon. He would not leave you alone in your sorrow long, any more than your husband would."

Just then, Xiaoli's children came running over, giggling and screeching. Xiaoli shushed them, but Annie told her it was all right. "Come on, come sit with me," she invited the children.

"Are you Peter's mommy?" whispered the little girl as she wriggled into place next to Annie.

"Yes, I'm Peter's mommy," Annie answered, still smiling but the smile was strained.

"I miss Peter," the child said, and wrapped her tiny arms around Annie, hugging her.

"Me, too," Annie agreed, and tears laced her voice.

**"N**ow, don't say anything to Annie about what I told you," Blaisdell warned.

Caine stood by the car door and looked over at Blaisdell with a quizzical expression. "You ... do not wish her ... to know the truth?"

"Caine," he said with a sigh. "I *wish* her to know the truth more than anything. I'd give anything to avoid putting her through this. I *will* tell her the truth. But not until after everyone has gone. I can't risk the wrong person realizing that Peter is ... I just can't risk it. You do understand?"

Caine considered for a moment, then nodded slowly. "If she were to learn the truth now ... she would be unable to ... fake her sorrow. Yes. And that would place Peter in danger, yes?"

"Yes. Potentially. The hell of it is, we don't know for sure."

"Then I will do ... what I can ... to comfort her. Death ... real or imagined ... brings pain to the people who love. If asked, I will not lie, it is not the Shaolin way. But I can bring comfort to those who mourn. I ... do not need ... to offer them the truth in order to help them."

Paul knocked on the roof and gave Caine a tight smile. "Good. That's good. Now, let's go."

**M**oments later, Caine and Blaisdell presented themselves to Annie Blaisdell for punishment. They found her sitting on the couch, with Xiaoli's daughter in her arms, crooning a lullaby. She lifted her face at their approach, saying, "Paul? Caine? Where have you been?"

Caine bowed, answering, "We have been ... helping each other. To come to terms ... with our loss?"

Annie smiled, turning toward Lo Si. "It appears you were right, Lo Si. Father talk."

"You see?" Lo Si chided his niece.

Blaisdell knelt in front of the couch, reaching for Annie's free hand. "How are you doing, my darling?"

She drew a breath and smiled. "Carolyn and Kelly have everything under control, so I'm just practicing for when we become grandparents."

"Gra — you don't mean that Carolyn —" Blaisdell choked.

A genuine grin spread across Annie's face. "No. Not yet. But I think it's probably inevitable, don't you?"

"Children ... are the gift of tomorrow. You will make an ... excellent grandmother ... when the time comes," Caine told her, bowing again.

"Yeah, well, the blind chick is gonna love knitting baby booties when the time comes. Have you two eaten anything? You must be starving."

"No," Blaisdell replied, standing stiffly. "Not really very hungry right now."

"I ... am not hungry, either. I think ... I think perhaps I will ... mingle? I wish to meet the friends of our son. If you will excuse me ...?"

Annie nodded graciously, resting her cheek against the hair of the little girl who had nodded off in her arms.

**"E**xcuse me, are you Peter's father?"

Caine turned from where he had been looking out the family room patio door into the approaching night, and bowed, hands held in a closed-fist salute. "Yes. I am Caine."

"Well, I'm Tyler Smith, I think we met at Carolyn McCall's wedding?"

"Ah. Yes. The singer. A voice of passion and beauty," he added, inclining his head toward her.

That wasn't precisely what Tyler had wanted to hear, and her grimace proclaimed that fact. "Thanks. I'm still singing at the Agrippa, you know. I ... I hadn't seen Peter for a long time, not ... well, did he ever mention me to you?"

Caine opened his mouth to reply, then closed it and smiled. He gestured toward the sofa in the family room, allowing her to precede him. "My son mentioned you, yes. When I first came to this city ... he mentioned you often. Your relationship ... didn't work out? He told me the problem was, ah, 'time management'. That he loved you and you loved him, but rarely at the same time."

"That about sums it up, yeah."

"And you ... still have feelings for my son?"

"Hell of a thing, isn't it, when you discover that you still love a guy after he's dead?" Tyler asked bitterly, tears welling up in her expressive eyes.

Closing his eyes for a brief moment, Caine shook his head. "Is it not better to ... discover love ... at any time ... than to never know it?"

Tyler looked at him, and her face crumpled. "I ... I always believed he'd end up getting himself killed," she told him, tears flowing freely down her face, her make-up running like tracers in the night. "I didn't think I could face it, that's why I broke off our engagement. But it didn't make any difference. I still ..."

Caine reached for her, and pulled her into an embrace. She wept against his shoulder for a long time. When she had finally spent her tears, she pushed away from him, scrubbing at her face with a fisted hand. "I'm sorry. I don't know why I'm burdening you with this —"

"Please do not apologize. I am honored ... that you share your grief with me." He caressed her cheek, brushing away an errant tear with his thumb. "A burden that is shared lessens the load. I would gladly lift this ... grief ... from you if I could."

Tyler's hand closed over Caine's, pressing his hand against her cheek. "Thank you. Peter said ... he said that you were special."

Caine inclined his head at the compliment, a faint, pleased smile touching his lips. "My son ... exists ... in the thoughts and memories of his friends. It would ... please me ... to learn more about him through you." He removed his hand from her cheek, twisting his hand around to capture hers in his. "If you ever need me, come to Chinatown and ask for Caine. You will find me."

Tears threatened again, but Tyler smiled bravely. "Thank you. I will."

**"S**o who've you got?" Kermit asked that evening, standing up from his computer and stretching.

Peter shook his head. "No surprises. Well, yeah, definitely some surprises, but no one who wouldn't be likely to be there ... well, I mean, I never expected Tyler and no way Jenine, but there's no way ..."

Kermit shrugged. "Well, it was a long shot, anyway, that the shooter would show up at your funeral," he said, sighing. "I've got that list for Blaisdell — everyone in your graduating class and their current location."

"Lemme see," Peter said, putting out his hand.

Kermit retrieved the list from the printer and handed it to Peter. "Maybe you'll see something there I missed, but I'm at a loss."

As Peter accepted the sheets of paper, he looked up at Kermit. "What? You, the Wizard of Cyberspace, have run out of tricks?"

Kermit smiled sourly at his companion. "You know, Caine, you can really be a pain in the ass." "Hey, everybody's got their talents," Peter replied with a chuckle as he turned his attention to the list Kermit had produced. "This everybody?"

"Everyone who was in your class. Or their survivors."

"It's gotta be here," Peter said urgently. "It's gotta be in here *somewhere*." He looked up and addressed Kermit. "No offense, buddy, but I'm not sure how much of this I can take. Nice digs, but I'm startin' to get cabin fever, you know?"

A knock at the door cut off Kermit's inevitable retort. The voice of the Sutton Place Hotel's assistant manager, Alan Carstairs, brought a cynical smile to Kermit's face. "Cabins don't have room service, Petey," he pointed out as he checked through the peephole to ensure that Carstairs was alone. Just in case, he shifted his gun from holster to hand, as Peter dug under the sofa pillow for his Beretta. The two men looked at each other and nodded, and Kermit opened the door, stepping back.

They'd been placed in the Executive Level of the Sutton Place Hotel because it provided excellent security, and Carstairs and the hotel's manager Hans Gerhardt had a history with Blaisdell and Peter. Temporary home to visiting dignitaries and numerous celebrities, the Executive Level was no stranger to the eccentric tastes and privacy requirements of its guests. Both Carstairs and Gerhardt had readily agreed to extend their hospitality to the detectives, and up until now, only one or the other of the two men had been anywhere near their suite, even providing the two men with their own linen and vacuum cleaner for keeping the suite in order.

"Ah, gentlemen!" Carstairs greeted them with the effusiveness native to his line of work. "Some refreshment, I believe?" Tall and dapper in a soft gray suit, Carstairs stepped into the room and back a pace to allow two uniformed waiters to push in a cart laden with covered dishes giving off tantalizing aromas. Clapping his hands together, he looked from Kermit to Peter, his expression sobering for a moment before being replaced by his bright smile. "Everything in order? Good. Call me if you need anything." With that, he stepped out of the room before they could protest over this sudden change in protocol, closing the door smartly behind him.

"Hey —" Kermit started, bringing his gun up as Peter released the safety on his own so that the waiters would be caught in the crossfire if they tried anything. Kermit nearly choked as one of the waiters straightened to reveal himself as Captain Paul Blaisdell. The other bowed, and turned directly toward Peter. "I ... do not believe ... that will be necessary, my son," Caine remonstrated gently.

Peter's mouth fell open, but he automatically clicked the safety back on and twirled the gun back into hiding. "Pop!"

Caine merely looked at Blaisdell, who shrugged eloquently.

"I know, I know — don't call you 'Pop'," Peter corrected himself, shaking his head. "What are you doing here? I mean, I'm really glad to see you, you have no idea, but I thought —"

"Yeah, I thought this was need-to-know, Captain," Kermit put in, his gun neatly tucked away behind his suit jacket.

"Caine had a need to know. And he's got some ideas that might help."

"Pop?" Peter burst out incredulously.

Caine turned back toward Peter, his face stern, his finger raised in warning. Peter fell back against the sofa, his hands held up in a conciliatory gesture. "It's the painkillers, *Dad*. Honest."

"What have I told you about selling your honor cheaply, my son?"

"All right," Paul warned them both. "You'll never break your son of that irritating habit, Caine. No more than his mother's efforts to stop him from making ice cream soup. I don't know why either of you bother to try."

"Hey, I like ice cream soup —"

Caine sighed in reply. "I live ... in hope ... of his eventual enlightenment."

"So enlighten me. What's this idea you have?" Peter demanded.

"Yeah. And can we eat? I'm starving," Kermit added, eyeing the covered dishes covetously.

**P**eter Caine felt better than he'd felt for days. At the sight of his father, a lot of the worry and tension he'd been experiencing had simply melted away. The fact that he was currently enjoying an excellent steak, and an impertinent little wine with which to wash it down, with both his fathers and someone who might be called friend, only added to the glow.

"So. What's this idea, huh?" he asked around a mouthful of steak.

"What did I tell you about talking with your mouth full?" Paul demanded imperiously.

Caine looked up from the bowl of rice he was methodically eating with chopsticks, and shook his head. "Peter has always suffered ... from less than perfect table manners," he observed quietly.

Kermit choked on his own steak, and Peter pounded him on the back until he stopped coughing. "Oh, brother, Caine! Having two fathers must be *hell*," Kermit gasped.

"It's got its good points," Peter said, giving both Blaisdell and Caine an apologetic smile. "Anyway, you said you guys've got a plan, right? So let's hear it."

Blaisdell took a thoughtful sip of wine, and set his glass down again. "One idea involves your mother," he said seriously.

"Mom? How is she —"

"She is ... saddened by the loss of her son," Caine replied. "To learn that he is not only alive ... but that she can help keep him that way ... will be a great source of joy to her."

"No shit, I'm sure," Kermit observed. "So, she has a need to know, too, huh?"

Blaisdell gave Kermit a poisonous look before continuing. Kermit murmured a "Sorry, Captain," and went back to his food while Blaisdell explained. "What we've learned so far links these murders to Peter's academy graduation class. We're all agreed on that. What we haven't been able to find out so far is just who's responsible, only that they seem to know a lot about each of your classmates, Peter."

"Yeah. And that the murders take place on the same date each month."

"The press knows that much. What they don't realize is that the date corresponds to the day of the month of your actual graduation," Kermit added.

"We've identified the pattern. We know who will be next, so we can take steps to protect him. That's Strenlich's job. We know, too, that whoever the killer is, they're privy somehow to information about your particular graduating class. They're involved somehow — maybe a fellow

graduate, maybe someone who didn't graduate, maybe someone whose son or daughter or husband was in that graduating class."

"Maybe somebody at the academy," Peter suggested.

"We haven't ruled out that possibility, no," Blaisdell agreed.

"So how does this involve Mom? She doesn't have any ties to the academy."

"No, but it would be perfectly natural for the mother of one of the murdered cops to create a memorial fund in his name. That would give her — and me, since I'll be taking some 'compassionate leave' — an opportunity and a reason to talk to those people. To try to learn more."

Peter started to protest that this plan could be potentially dangerous to his mother, but Paul quieted him down with a an upheld hand. "I know. That's why she has to know that you're still alive. Why she has to understand what's at stake, and agree to it. I have no doubts that she will. And that's why I'll be officially on leave, so she's not left alone, in case she does stumble onto something."

"Okay. It's not bad. Makes sense," Peter agreed, suppressed energy and worry making him a little edgy. "Mom's a non-combatant, and it makes sense that she'd want to do something like this, so no one should get freaked by it. Okay. All right. You'll be there all the time, huh?"

"I, too, will be on hand to protect her," Caine informed them.

"What, you're moving into Paul's house?" Peter inquired, amused.

"Family solidarity, Peter. Again, perfectly logical under the circumstances."

"Okay. You said this was one idea. You've got another?"



"How could you, Paul?" Annie Blaisdell demanded angrily, every fiber in her slender figure quivering with fury.

"Annie, darling, I had no choice!" Paul Blaisdell told her pleadingly.

"No choice! No choice but to put me, Carolyn, Kelly, *Caine* through *that* ... damn you, Paul Blaisdell, who made you God?"

He reached out for her to comfort her, but she shoved him away savagely, crying, "Don't you touch me!"

"Annie ... Annie, darling, it was the only way. You've got to believe me. Peter and I ... we discussed this for hours, days before the shooting actually happened. We couldn't risk the shooter coming back when we weren't prepared. We couldn't risk ..."

"And so neither of you could risk telling me the truth? You let me believe he was dead, Paul. You let me grieve the death of my son. Tell me, *Captain* Blaisdell, how do you justify that, hmm?"

Blaisdell slumped wearily onto the bed, all fight drained from him. The muscles of his face sagged with pain as he shook his head. "I couldn't let anyone suspect. Not with the news media there, not with the possibility that the murderer might attend the funeral. Your grief had to be real. There could be no doubt, no question, that might lead the killer to try for Peter again."

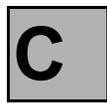
Annie stood still in the middle of their bedroom, turning toward Paul. "And Caine?" she inquired more calmly. "Did Caine know the truth?"

"No. I told him after the funeral. After he told me that he feared for Peter's soul. I hadn't planned to tell him at all, to tell you the truth. But ... my darling, I hate this. I hate what this job demands me to do. I would never have put you or the girls through this without considering all the alternatives. And the alternative was to put you through this for real. No finding out after the fact that it wasn't true. Peter *would* be dead."

Walking stiffly toward the bed, Annie reached out to touch Paul; his hand shot up and captured hers in his. He pressed it against his face, and she could feel his tears against her palm. She curved her hand to caress his face. "I know. I know you would never do anything to hurt me, Paul. And I would never forgive you if you had allowed Peter to risk himself further." She sat down next to him and laid her face against his shoulder. "Can we tell Kelly and Carolyn?"

"No. Too many people know already. The risk increases with each person I've told. If we're lucky ... we'll find this bastard soon. And Peter'll be able to come home."

Annie slid her arms around Paul's shoulders and hugged him. "Our own private miracle. In the meantime, what can I do to help?" she asked him softly. He turned his face and kissed her on the forehead.



Caine arrived at his apartment late that night, prepared to pack a few things and to leave a note for the Ancient. Instead, he found Lo Si there waiting for him, surrounded by flowers, envelopes, and packages. As Caine entered his work room, Lo Si stood and bowed.

"I ... did not expect ... to find anyone here," Caine said softly, returning the bow.

"On the night when a father buries his only son, he should not be left alone," the Ancient informed him soberly.

Caine inclined his head, saying, "Thank you. I shall not be alone. The Blaisdells ... have invited me ... to stay with them, for a few days."

"They seek to comfort you," Lo Si observed.

"As I seek to comfort them. Together, perhaps we can find some small part of Peter's ... essence ... among us," Caine agreed.

"You do your son's memory honor, Kwai Chang Caine," Lo Si told him, bowing formally. "As the people of this community seek to do you honor," he added, gesturing toward the piles of envelopes, the mounds of flowers, and smiled. "Telegrams, cards, flowers, gifts — you are blessed with many friends."

Caine stepped up to the stacks and floral arrangements, his hand shaking as he reached out to touch them. His voice was edged with tears as he said, "I will ... open these later. I ... am truly blessed, my friend. I had no idea ..." he trailed off, shaking his head.

"You have touched the lives of many people, Kwai Chang Caine. As did your son. It is only natural for them to reach out to you in your grief," the Ancient explained gently.

Drawing a shaky breath, Caine nodded. Touching the blossom in one of the arrangements, his face softened, a smile slowly forming on his lips. "I must ... thank them all ... but not tonight. The flowers ... will wilt without care. Do you think those who sent them would be ... offended? if I asked you to give them to the women of the community? Flowers as ... beautiful as these ... would do better ... to brighten their days ... than to sit here, untended while I am away."

The Ancient shook his head. "I will collect the cards, and save them for your return. You will return, will you not, Kwai Chang Caine?" he inquired, his voice betraying his fear that Caine would not.

Caine turned back to Lo Si and laid his hand gently on his friend's arm. "I will return."

**A**s Caine walked slowly up the street where the Blaisdells lived, he was unsurprised to find a camera crew set up a few blocks away. The death of a policeman was news, after all, and the death of a famous police detective at the hands of a serial killer even more so. But he felt a small tremor of anger at the intrusive nature of the newspeople, at their refusal to allow the dignity of grief to his son's family. He knew he would be recognized, and he did not want to bring any further attention to the Blaisdells, so he moved silently into the shadow of trees lining the street, and stepped softly toward the truck.

"Shit, Greg, I don't know what Monica's thinkin', I'll tell you," one of the men up ahead was saying as he blew on his coffee. "The woman's downright ghoulish."

His companion Greg, seated on the edge of the van's rear, swore in reply. "Kinda appropriate for Halloween. Wonder if she's got a witch costume, or she goes as herself. She's hell-bent on getting to New York, Al. Thinks a big story like this'll get 'er there. Some of our footage was picked up by the nationals, but not her voiceover. Boy, was she pissed!"

"Serves 'er right," answered Al. "None of the other stations've got trucks out here. And they all pulled out as soon as the funeral was over. But no-o, we've gotta go down and get up-close and personal. Man, I was happy to see that cop warn us off, y'know? Leave these people alone, let 'em grieve a while in peace."

"No way'll Monica agree to that. I wonder where she is?"

In his hiding place, Caine smiled. These may be newsmen, but they were good men. He slipped out of the shadows and walked over to them, bowing in greeting.

"What the hell ...?" gabbled Al, pulling off his headset.

"I am Caine," he introduced. "You will get no ... news? ... here. My son's family ... has retired for the night. You ... should go home."

"Try tellin' that to Ms. Newshound," complained Greg, putting down his camera. "Hey, Mr. Caine — I'm sorry, y'know? I met your son a few times. Nice guy. Good cop. It's a damned shame."

"Yes," Caine agreed. "Why do you not simply tell this ... Monica? ... no?"

The two men exchanged glances. "No?" repeated Al.

"No," Caine said again.

"No. Hmm. For that matter, why don't we just ... go? She'd be madder'n a hornet ..."

"I'd like to see that, Ms. I'm-So-Important lose her cool," his companion suggested with a grin. "Hey, c'mon, Al — she's half-an-hour late, there ain't nothing gonna happen on this street tonight. And I sure as hell would like to get some sleep for once. Whaddya say?"

"I say Mr. Caine's had a good idea. Nobody ever copped an Emmy for shooting footage of the front of somebody's house in the middle of the night, lemme tell you. Go on, Mr. Caine, we'll pack up here."

Bowing, Caine favored them with a slight smile as he turned and continued on his way. Behind him, he could hear the sounds of the truck's doors being slammed, and a few moments later, the truck pulling away.

He got to the Blaisdells' house and stepped through the gates, waiting silently behind the brick pillar. His vigil was rewarded a few minutes later when Monica Cassals drove up in her car, parking it near where the truck had been. She got out of the car and threw down her purse, cursing loudly. Furious, she picked up her bag and stormed back to the car. Spewing gravel from beneath the tires, the car erupted out of the quiet street back into the night.

Caine smiled, and turned up the drive to the Blaisdells' front door.

**A**

s Paul Blaisdell stepped back to allow Caine entrance into the house, he clapped him on the back, chuckling. "I should put you in charge of press liaison," he told him.

"You were watching?"

"Caught it all. That Monica Cassals is a royal pain in the ass. Always underfoot when something major's going down, getting in the way — she was even shot once, you know, during a hostage situation. But she keeps coming back for more."

"As our son would say, 'stubborn in her beliefs'."

"Stubborn is right. C'mon in — Kelly's staying over at Carolyn's. We can talk freely."

"You have told Annie?"

"Yes, and amazingly, survived to tell the tale," Blaisdell told him as he guided him into the living room.

"He nearly didn't," Annie informed him from the couch. "Paul, perhaps you could fix Caine some tea?"

"Oh-oh — don't you two gang up on me, now," Blaisdell warned as he followed Annie's wishes, exiting for the kitchen while Annie urged Caine to join her on the couch.

"You've seen him," Annie said softly.

"Yes. We ... visited Peter and Kermit ... earlier this evening. He is well. He is worried about *you*," Caine told her.

"I can't wait until I can go see him. Paul said maybe tomorrow." She wrapped his hand in hers, squeezing gently. "You know that Kelly and Carolyn are Paul's daughters, with his first wife. She died when they were very young, and they've been very good to me. But we never had any children of our own. And then Peter came into our lives. He became *our* child, Paul's and mine. What a handful he was!" She smiled at the memory, leaning back against the sofa cushions.

"I would like ... to hear of those times," Caine stated.

She turned her smile on him, and answered gently, "Yes, I imagine you would. Now you're here, and you're a part of our family, too. You don't mind sharing him with us?" When Caine answered her no, she patted his hand affectionately. "Wait here," she ordered him, and got up to go to the bookcase.

"May I help you?" he asked.

"She doesn't need any help — she's the only one who knows how the books are arranged," Paul announced as he came back into the living room with a tray laden with teapot and cups. "All the books are labelled in braille, anyway. What're you looking for, darling?"

"Our photo albums. Caine wants to hear about Peter when he first came to live with us," Annie called over her shoulder as her fingers traced the titles of the books. At last she found the one she wanted, and pulled it out, rejoining them.

"If Caine wants to hear about Peter at 15, he might want something stronger than tea to drink," Blaisdell admonished.

"Was he ... any worse ... than he is now?" Caine questioned seriously.

Blaisdell looked toward Annie just as her head turned toward him. As one, they broke into laughter. It was a few moments before Blaisdell caught his breath and gasped out, "No!"

**A**nnie's fingers moved swiftly over the braille captions in the album, and she smiled as the memories came back to her. Chuckling, she told Caine, "It took us a month to convince him to get his hair cut. It was down to his shoulders by then." She turned the page of the album, and lifted out a small glassine envelope. "We saved the first lock of hair that was cut, just like the parents of an infant. He was so proud of all that hair, and of course, we didn't realize at the time that he'd spent most of his youth bald," she added. "I don't think he realized that getting his hair cut *didn't* mean getting it shaved off!"

"Yes. I imagine Peter had some ... difficulty ... in acclimating to the world outside the temple. If you and your husband had not taken him into your hearts ..."

"He was scruffy and ill-mannered and angry all the time at first. But you didn't have to be a priest to see that he was hurting, and that underneath all that anger, there was a kid just waiting to be loved and to love in return. He was worth it, Caine. *You* made him worth it," she said to him gently.

Caine shrugged slowly. "Peter's is a gentle soul. He does not believe that, but I know it is true. But the man he is today ... he might not have become ... had it not been for your love."

Paul Blaisdell stretched and yawned. "I know Peter would be embarrassed by this mutual admiration society. Why don't we pick this up in the morning — I don't know about you, but I'm dead on my feet."

"C'mon, Caine, I'll show you to your room," Annie invited, closing the photo album. She handed it to him and he accepted it gratefully. "If I know you, you'd rather look through those than sleep. C'mon, sleepyhead — off to bed with you!" she added to Blaisdell.

**D**ay Two: Tuesday, November 1, 1994

"Why the hell didn't Kermit come back for the funeral?" Mary Margaret Skalany was demanding to know from her desk in the 101st Precinct squad room the next day.

"Yeah, he could've flown back, conference in D.C. or no conference in D.C.," Marvin Katz, another of the detectives, complained.

Jody Powell was leaning back in her chair at her own desk, staring absently at the empty desk that had been Peter Caine's. No one had packed it up yet; no one had had the heart to. She glanced from Skalany to Katz and frowned. "Does Kermit even know?"

"Huh?"

"Wha — oh, shit. You could be right. Did anybody think to call him?" Skalany answered worriedly.

"He had to see it on the news. It was on all the wire services, even *NBC Nightly News* had a piece on it," Katz observed.

"Yeah, but if it doesn't have a keyboard, would Kermit know how to turn it on?" Skalany countered.

Chief Strenlich stood in the doorway to his office listening to the exchange. His face was grim as he debated with himself on what he should say to his detectives. Finally, he walked out of his office and into the squad room, announcing, "Kermit knows. I told him myself the night it happened."

"Then why the hell didn't he get his butt back here for the funeral?" Jody contended. "Hell, he and Pete were friends —"

"I know. And he was pretty cut up about it, wanted to get on the first flight back. I checked with the Captain — he decided Kermit should stay where he is."

"Why? That's not fair to Kermit —" Skalany argued, and Strenlich allowed himself a small inward smile; Kermit didn't deserve to be eviscerated for not showing up at the funeral — when this was over, his co-workers were likely to lynch him for not clueing them in on Peter Caine's survival, anyway.

"Blaisdell's orders," Strenlich explained, holding his hands up to forestall further argument. Silently, he apologized to the Captain, but he couldn't encourage the team to question Kermit's absence too closely. Not yet, at any rate.

"Blaisdell's orders," Jody repeated. "Shit. No way we can fault him — Peter was his son as much as Caine's. Captain probably had a reason, or at least one that made sense at the time." Strenlich saw her face go slack a moment, her eyes unfocus; he could tell that her thoughts had slipped back to her sister's death. She shook her head. He knew she hadn't always thought clearly then, either.

"Look, the reason I came out here was to tell you that Peter's father, Caine, has asked if he could set up some time to come in and talk to everyone who'd like to talk to him," Strenlich explained. "About Peter, about ... how you're all feeling about this ... anything at all."

"Caine?" Skalany asked, her voice tinged with worry; Caine was as much a friend to her as Peter had been. "What for?"

"He's a priest, remember? Priests help people deal with things like grief and loss. I think he wants to help. And to be honest, I think it would help *him* to talk to some of Pete's friends. Captain Blaisdell approved it, so we'll be setting aside the conference room on the fifth floor starting tomorrow for this, and he'll make himself available to anyone who wants to talk, either singly or in groups. It's not required. But I think everybody could benefit from it. It's open to anybody, in or out of the department."

"Yeah, that sounds like Caine," Skalany decided with a smile. "Even in his own hour of grief, he's thinking about other people. We'll spread the word, Chief."

"You do that. Now, how about getting some work done, huh?"



ou're gonna get fat, Pete, if you keep eating like that," Kermit observed from his position at the desk in the suite's living room. Peter had numerous file folders scattered across the coffee table. He also had a variety of junk food within easy reach as he studied the contents of the folders.

"I never gain weight," Peter countered, stuffing a handful of potato chips in his mouth.

"You've never been still this long, before, either," Kermit pointed out.

Peter looked up at that. "Sure I have. I've been in the hospital, oh, geeze, I can't remember how many times now. They told me they're gonna let me open my own account there, I've been in so many times."

"Yeah, but you've always been on fluid diets or undergoing physical therapy — you've been here for nearly a week and you've done nothing but eat the whole time, and you've gotten zero exercise."

Peter glanced at the fistful of potato chips grasped in his greasy fingers. "Hmm. Never could have junk food at the temple. Guess maybe I have developed a taste for it. What would you suggest?"

"I would suggest that you practice, my son," came a voice from the doorway to the bedroom. "Your kung fu skills ... are rusty at best. This ... time of inactivity ... would be better used by honing them."

"Po — *Dad*," Peter greeted. "What're you doing here?"

"Yeah, and how the hell did you get in here?" Kermit demanded.

Caine spread his hands, shrugging.

Kermit shook his head, a lopsided grin on his face. "I guess something as mundane as locks wouldn't be much of a problem to *you*."

Caine shrugged again, a small smile on his face. He turned to Peter. "I ... brought you a present," he said, bowing slightly. "An aid to meditation," he added, pulling a flute from his satchel and presenting it in two hands.

"So I'm supposed to practice kung fu *and* meditate, is that it? Balancing on a broken leg and with cracked ribs, right? Okay, I figure there's a way I can do that, and you'll probably show me, but when am I supposed to get time to go through all these files, huh?"

"A wise man knows that to all things there is a season. You will know ... what you should be doing and when. Did you learn nothing in your days in the temple, Peter?"

Peter chuckled. "Sure. The one thing I *didn't* learn was how to play a flute, though."

"Too bad. I was going to ask Blaisdell to get me my 'bone, and we could've started a duo," Kermit observed with a grin.

Caine walked over to the couch, and Peter hurriedly cleared files away so that his father could sit down. "The use of the flute ... in meditation is not necessarily to play music ... but to express the music of the soul. The notes are not important. The concentration, the expression, the ... focus ... these are important."

"So if I sound like a cat in heat, that's what my soul sounds like?" Peter asked sarcastically, barely containing a laugh. Kermit wasn't so lucky, but he quickly cut off the guffaw that the image elicited.

"The flute ... is a gentle instrument. It is not possible ... to make it sound like a ... 'cat in heat'?" Caine reached out his hand and laid it on Peter's chest. "Yours is a gentle soul, my son. No matter what you believe about the effect of violence on it. The music of your soul ... cannot help but be equally gentle."

Peter stared at his father, enrapt. After he wiped it hurriedly on his jeans, he slid his hand over his father's as the two men looked at each other. "I ... I wish I could believe that, Father. I'd like to believe it."

"Believe it, my son. Take the flute. It will aid in your meditations ... it will help to clear your mind. Perhaps ... it will even help you to solve this ... mystery."

Peter blinked back tears and nodded, reaching his hands out for the flute. "Did you make this one, too?" he inquired softly.

"Yes. Many years ago. Even when I ... believed you to be dead, I thought of you ... and I thought of you when I made this. It has always been meant for you."

Sniffing, Peter ran his fingers along the gleaming surface of the flute, feeling the natural bumps and ridges of the wood beneath the polish. He frowned, then lifted it to his lips, his fingers awkwardly searching for the stops. He puffed out his cheeks and blew hard into the mouthpiece, creating a sound that was similar, but not identical to, the sound of a cat whose tail has been caught in a screen door.

Kermit choked back a laugh as Peter jumped back from the offending sound.

"No. Not like that. As I said ... the flute is a gentle instrument. Treat it gently ... blow upon it ... as you would upon a dandelion to scatter its fluff upon the wind."

"That *is* how I'd blow on a dandelion, Pop."

"Ah. Then ... as you might ... upon a woman's hair ... is that a better image for you?"

Peter couldn't suppress the smile the image invoked, and licked his lips before pursing them to blow gently into the mouthpiece. A soft, resonant sound issued from the flute, a near-perfect note with only a hint of breathiness. He glanced up at his father, and was rewarded by an encouraging nod. Smiling, Peter tried again, and the note was clear and sweet this time. He pulled the flute away from his mouth and stared at it in delighted wonder.

"That is better," Caine commended.

"So, Pop," Peter questioned, an impish grin tugging at his lips, "is that what you used to do to Mom? Blow on her hair?"

Caine sat up straighter, and regarded Peter silently. Caine's eyebrow arched in warning, but he said nothing.

Hiding his grin behind his hand, Peter nodded. "Okay, I get the message. 'Don't call you Pop'. Thanks, Dad."

Caine rose to go, pausing to turn toward Kermit. "Make sure he practices. I would not like to see ... my son ... become fat and lazy ... from eating too many potato chips." With that, he left the suite.

For a heartbeat or two, silence reigned in the room. Then both Peter and Kermit broke out into laughter, but Peter held on to the flute as though it were the most precious thing he'd ever owned.

**T**he population of police officers at the Agrippa Club had trebled in the last week, and tonight was no exception. Behind the bar, Terry kept the beers and margaritas flowing, and on stage, Tyler Smith belted out a poignant love song with more fervor and passion than anyone had heard her use in a long time.

At a table not far from the stage, but far enough away from the amps to make conversation possible, Detective Mary Margaret Skalany sat nursing a beer. Across the table from her sat Sergeant Patrick Michael Epstein, "Eppy" to his friends and enemies alike. Detective Janice Morgan sat to his right, and Detective Kelly Blaine sat to his left. Cops from their precinct were scattered throughout the club, and Strenlich was seated at the bar with his wife, Molly.

"So, anybody got a line on this shooter?" Eppy was asking. "I'd like to take his balls and stuff 'em down his throat personally."

Mary Margaret shook her head. "No. Peter and Kermit were working on a theory that the killings were linked to Peter's graduating class from the academy, but they hadn't made any headway on IDing the perp before Kermit went to D.C. and Peter ... no. No line."

Kelly Blaine savaged a nail while she listened to the exchange. "No line," she repeated bitterly. "Strenlich's got protection on the guy they think'll be the next victim. But that doesn't do anything for Peter, does it?" She picked up her drink and downed it in one swallow. "Oh, shit," she added, covering her eyes as tears started to flow again.

"Kelly ..." Mary Margaret said softly, laying her hand on the other woman's arm. She looked helplessly over at Janice, who smoothed her auburn hair back over her ear and shrugged.

With a gulp, Kelly tried to stop crying. She took a deep breath, and scrubbed at her eyes with her fist. "I'm sorry. I just keep thinking ... thinking about ... you know ..."

"What might have been?" Skalany finished for her. "Go easy on yourself. You and Peter both agreed that you weren't working as a couple. Two cops together ..." She shook her head.

Kelly sniffled mightily, folding her arms over her chest and looking off into the distance as she nodded. "I know. I know, and it doesn't seem to make any difference," she added, tears continuing to trickle down her cheeks.

"Eppy's Rule Number 45: Forget the might-have-beens. Remember the facts."

"Shit, Eppy, what's that supposed to mean?" Skalany demanded impatiently into the sudden relative silence left by the end of the band's set.

"It means, don't waste time thinking about what you did wrong and what might have been different. Think about what was right and good and count yourself lucky."

Skalany smiled and shook her head with amusement. "Change the words a little, and that sounds like something Peter's father would say."

"Caine? Yeah, him and me ... we got a lot in common. Both men of the world, wise beyond our years. And don't let those years fool you — there's still a lotta mileage left in this model," Eppy added with a wolfish grin.

"I'd bet there's still a lot of mileage left in the Caine model, too," Skalany countered with a knowing smile. Then the smile faded; it wasn't fun to tease about her attraction to Caine with no Peter to torment. She reached for her beer and took another swig before patting Kelly on the hand. "Eppy's right, Kel. You've got good memories."

"Yeah. Good memories," Kelly agreed, nodding, although she didn't sound convinced.

"Is this a private party, or can any old friend of Peter Caine's join in, Eppy?" came a voice from behind them.

Eppy looked up and grinned anew. "Tyler! Naw, pull up a chair. We're toasting to a good guy, remembering the good times. Got any to share?"

Tyler pulled up a chair and sat down, flipping her dark, curly hair over her leather-clad shoulder. "Good times. With Peter Caine? Yeah, a few."

"Oh?" Kelly asked suspiciously. "How did you know Peter?"

"D'y'mean that in the biblical sense?" Eppy offered whimsically. Janice giggled.

"Eppy, you're incorrigible," Skalany told him, throwing a crumpled-up napkin at him.

Tyler Smith, her own jealousy radar on alert, turned cold eyes on Kelly Blaine. "We were engaged for a while. You?"

Kelly offered her a toothy smile. "We co-habited for a while."

"I see," Tyler replied stiffly.

"Meowwww," Eppy put in impishly.

"Eppy!" Skalany warned. To Tyler and Kelly, she said, "So you have something in common. You both loved Peter. Not, I might add, at the same time. C'mon girls, let's face it — what's the point of jealousy *now*?"

Tyler and Kelly kept their gazes locked for a moment more, and then Kelly shrugged. "You've got a point, Skalany. Truce?" she suggested, offering her hand across the table to Tyler.

Tyler stared at the hand for a beat, then nodded, her lips pursed. "Truce," she agreed, and shook Kelly's hand.

"Good. So, has everyone heard about Caine's session tomorrow?" Skalany inquired, deftly changing the subject.

"Session? What session's this, Skalany?" Eppy queried as he gestured for the waitress to come and take another order for drinks.

"Peter's father?" Tyler frowned.

Skalany nodded. "Strenlich announced it today in the squad room. Caine's going to ... 'make himself available' I think Strenlich said. They're setting aside a conference room for him to, well, to basically try to help us all get through this." Turning to Tyler, she added, "Strenlich said it was open to anyone who knew Peter. So you'd be welcome."

The waitress stopped by the table, and Eppy ordered another round of drinks, pausing to ask Tyler what she wanted. Then he settled back in his chair and listened thoughtfully.

"Hmmpf. I've tried to stay away from the police station, that's part of why Peter and I broke up. But I like his father, he's a good man. Grief therapy? Not a bad idea at that. Thanks. I might stop by."

"Yeah. Me, too," Eppy agreed. "Count me in. Pretzels?" he added, offering the bowl to the table at large.

"Geeze, Eppy, you're so deep," Skalany commented sourly, taking a pretzel.

"Deeper than you can guess, darlin'," Eppy replied.

**"W**e're outside the Agrippa Club, a favorite hangout for police from the 101st Precinct. We understand that over the past few nights, it's been standing-room-only at the Agrippa as Detective Peter Caine's co-workers have thronged here in an effort to drown their sorrows over the loss of their comrade. We'll be talking to some of those co-workers shortly." Monica Cassals paused and nodded to Al, the sound man. "How did that sound?" she asked.

"Just like always," countered Al sourly.

"And what the hell's that supposed to mean?"

Al shrugged. "Let's get this over with," he told her, signalling to Greg, the cameraman.

**F**rank Strenlich looked up from his drink and swore.

"What is it?" his wife Molly asked, touching his hand with concern.

"The press," he told her viciously. "That bitch Cassals won't let up."

"Frank," she warned, tightening her hold on his hand. "Don't start a scene. Blaisdell certainly doesn't need that on top of ... on top of everything else," she finished lamely.

"Yeah, and my detectives don't need some snoopy reporter invading their privacy, either —"

"They're grown-ups. I think they can probably say 'no comment' without prompting from you." When it became obvious that he was still going to get up and confront the newswoman, Molly dug her nails into his forearm, commanding, "Sit, Frank."

He glared at her for a second, and then reached back for his beer, sipping it as he watched the newspeople sullenly.

"Let's wait and see what happens," she told him, keeping a firm grip on his arm.

**"W**atch for it," Eppy was saying.

"Huh?" Skalany inquired. "Wha — oh, shit," she answered herself. "Why doesn't she find herself a nice coffin to crawl into, the bloodsucker?"

"I think it's time for me to do another set," Tyler said suddenly, leaping up to return to the bandstand. "Anybody want to join me?"

"We'll hold her off," Skalany told her, waving her on.

The ready light on the camcorder indicated that the camera crew were recording as they picked its way through the crowd toward Skalany's table. Monica Cassals was speaking urgently into the microphone as she led her crewmembers on a direct course for them.

"So, who wants to be spokesperson?" Skalany suggested.

"Oh, I think you should let Eppy do it. He's so colorful," Janice Morgan offered with a grin.

"Yeah, but this is a family channel," Skalany countered.

"I'm here in the Agrippa Club with some of the detectives who worked with Peter Caine," Monica Cassals was saying just a few feet away from them, her back to them as she faced the camera. She turned toward them, and shoved the microphone toward Skalany. "What is morale like in the precinct following the death of an officer?" she demanded.

"No speakee teevee," Skalany told her, pushing the microphone away from her face.

"Oh, come on, Detective — Skalany, isn't it? Don't you see the value in letting the public know what you all are going through?"

"I see the value in privacy, actually," Skalany told her. "Privacy that you're invading."

"This is a public place, Detective," Monica reminded her caustically.

"Yeah, and this is a public spectacle, is that it?" Kelly Blaine demanded.

Monica Cassals laid her hand on Kelly's shoulder and leaned over with her microphone. She'd barely begun to speak when Eppy piped in with, "That's assault."

Skalany, Blaine and Morgan all looked at him at the same time Cassals looked up and smiled at him sourly. "I beg your pardon?"

"I said, 'that's assault'. In this state, any unwelcome physical contact is technically considered to be assault. If Detective Blaine chooses to swear out a complaint, of course."

Kelly looked to Eppy, then Skalany, then Morgan, a smile spreading across her face. "I think that's an excellent idea, Sergeant Epstein," she told him, nodding.

"Oh, don't be silly," Monica protested. "This is news —"

"Oh, sure it is — a telejournalist arrested for assault on a police officer. Big news. Bet the other stations'd love an exclusive on that, don't you?" Eppy asked as he rose from his seat, flipped out his badge, and added, "Monica Cassals, you are under arrest for the assault of Detective Kelly Blaine. Are you getting all this boys?" he directed to the camera and sound men. They nodded, barely keeping their faces straight. "You have the right to remain silent —"

"This is an infringement on my first amendment rights!" Cassals insisted.

"Wrong court," Eppy told her. To Skalany he said, "I forgot my handcuffs. You got yours?"

Struggling to contain a giggle, Skalany nodded, and dug into her purse for the cuffs. Glancing up at Monica as she handed over the handcuffs, she questioned, "You gonna go easy, or you gonna go hard? Which do you think will get the higher ratings?"

"Where was I? Oh, yeah, you got the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford one, one will be provided for you. Do I need to go through the whole drill or have you heard this song before?"

Monica stood glaring at Eppy as he shrugged and resumed the Miranda warning. All the while, her crew captured the event on tape. Once Eppy had finished, he clapped the cuffs around Monica's wrists, and said to Kelly, "If you'll accompany me downtown, we can get the paperwork done on this and be back before the next set. Comin', boys?" he added to the crew.

"Wouldn't miss it," said Al, snapping off the sound equipment.

"It's news, Monica," Greg pointed out, keeping his camera running.

**B**ack at the bar, Molly nudged Strenlich. "What'd I tell you? Your people know how to handle themselves."

Strenlich grinned from ear to ear. "There'll be hell to pay, but that was worth seeing," he agreed, and raised his glass to toast hers.

**D**ay Three: Wednesday, November 2, 1994

After confirming that Monica Cassals had made bail and had already exited the station with promises of a false arrest suit and charges of police brutality, Skalany clocked in for her shift and grabbed a cup of coffee from the squad room coffee maker. The coffee was definitely newly-made — the dirty dishwater of a new shift, rather than the Oklahoma crude left over from the old shift. She sipped at it diffidently, promising herself a cup of the good stuff later.

The clock proclaimed that it was five minutes to eight, not quite the official start of her shift. She drifted toward the conference room on five, alert for any hidden journalists in high dudgeon. She was not surprised to find Caine already in the conference room, bare-footed and seated in a lotus position on a conference table. She spied him and chuckled, leaning against the door jamb.

"Hello, Caine," she greeted softly.

"Skalany," he acknowledged, twisting around to smile at her.

"So. How you doin', Caine?" she asked, taking a sip of the watered-down coffee.

He shrugged eloquently. "As well as can be expected."

"Knowing you, better," she replied with a smile, tucking a strand of her long dark hair behind an ear.

He shrugged again in reply, but his smile grew. "And you?"

It was her turn to shrug as she pushed off from the wall to walk toward him. He shifted to follow her progress as she made her way around the conference room. Setting the coffee cup down on another conference table, she toed a chair around. She seated herself primly, twisting around slightly to rest her arm on the back of the chair.

"I miss him. We didn't always ride together, but I could pretty much guarantee a few laughs whenever he was around."

"He ... was ... a comedian?"

"A what —" she laughed, "No, no that's not what I mean. Well, yeah, sometimes he'd do shtick, stupid stuff just to make you laugh. On a stakeout, in a tight situation, you know? To cut the tension."

"Most of the time, the really funny stuff wasn't even intentional," Jody Powell added from the doorway, unshouldering her purse and coming over to sit down on the conference table by Skalany. "Peter would be all serious, you know, the 'I'm a real cop' routine, and then he'd walk face-first into a door, or set himself up for some kind of killer one-liner."

"Usually delivered by Skalany herself," offered Janice Morgan, joining the other two women near Caine.

"Powell did her share," Skalany agreed. "Sometimes he just begged for it. But you always knew he could take the joke, and you always knew you could trust him."

"Unless it involved calling for backup. He slipped up on that a couple of times," Jody put in sarcastically.

Skalany nodded, her face growing serious with memories. She picked up her coffee cup and drained it. "Yeah. Backup wasn't Peter's strong suit."

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he room was starting to fill up, detectives and other police officers filtering in. Someone had had the bright idea of transporting one of the coffee makers into the conference room, and was setting it up in a corner. The ambient noise level of the room rose steadily as the ritual of morning coffee was performed.

From the door leading to the utility hallway, Chief Strenlich slipped quietly into the room, unobtrusive and unobserved. He hung back in the shadows, half-hidden behind a projection screen. He stood there with a clipboard in hand, jotting down the names of the people slowly filling the room. A few officers, mostly old-timers who'd come to terms with loss long ago, had volunteered to man the squad room while the younger cops, the cops who'd worked with Peter Caine, took advantage of this opportunity to talk through their reactions to Peter's death.

Kelly Blaine joined Skalany, Powell and Caine, coffee cup in hand. She'd worn no make-up this morning, and her dark brown hair hung limply around her pallid face. She sipped at the steaming liquid, glancing from one to the other of them. "Backup? I don't think that was exactly in Peter's vocabulary."

"Not unless he was the one backing *you* up," observed Carl Hanson, a tall, ebony-skinned man, another of the 101st's detectives. He settled into a seat at a different conference table, and raised his coffee cup in salute to Caine, who nodded his acknowledgement.

"Yeah. You could always depend on him to back you up, that's true. And you could trust him in other ways. He wouldn't deliberately set you up. He always put your safety before his. And he never told your secrets," Jody added, patting Kelly supportively on the shoulder.

"Nobody else's anyway," Skalany affirmed.

"Not his, either. Think about it. What did we really know about Peter, other than what everybody knew? Christ, everybody and their brother knew about his father coming back — no offense, but Peter had a pretty rough time with that," pointed out Powell, her stance a little defensive, awaiting Caine's retort.

Caine nodded silently, accepting the rebuke; Jody stared at him for a moment, then relaxed, a slight smile on her face.

"Yeah," Skalany said. "Peter kept it close to the chest a lot of the time. The stuff that went too deep — he kept that close. Too close, sometimes. *Way* too close. Like, why didn't he tell one of us — you know, about the connection he'd made about the killer? Why was Peter riding solo that night, huh?"

"Let's face it, Skalany — Peter *liked* to ride alone," Jody told her.

"That ain't exactly what I hear — I rode with the bastard for four years, so I oughta know," came a rough voice from the doorway. "Was a time Peter liked having a partner," Eppy announced.

"Eppy! Come over and join the party," Skalany welcomed.

"Some party. Where's the hors d'oeuvres?"

"I did not think ... this early in the morning —" Caine began apologetically.

"Figure of speech, Caine," Eppy corrected, dropping into a chair next to Skalany. He was a big man, muscle tending a little toward fat, but he exuded an aura of barely restrained energy. His trenchcoat pooled around his chair as he slouched down to regard Peter's father.

By now, many of the officers who'd wandered into the conference room had collected their coffee, and many had seated themselves around the conference table, close enough to hear the conversation.

"And like Eppy, his figures of speech are large and relatively useless," Skalany offered.

"Love you, too, darlin'."

"So you ... do not believe ... that Peter was always a ... loner?" Caine asked softly.

"Naw, I didn't say that. Caine was always somethin' of a lone wolf, tough to get to know, tough to get 'im to trust. Big wall around that kid. But once you got through that, he was okay. He was loyal. He was a good friend. But I don't think he always wanted to be alone — young Pete is ... ah, was ... a social animal. He worked best when he had somebody intelligent and discerning to bounce ideas off."

"What? Like you, Eppy? No wonder Peter rode alone so often," Skalany teased.

"Yeah, yeah, say what you like. Peter rode alone not 'cos he liked it, but because it was safer."

Caine looked up, curious. "Safer ... for whom?"

"For whomever he was riding with," Eppy explained with exaggerated grammar. "I don't know. I think Peter felt he carried a curse around with him. First his mom, then you and all the other priests, then that priest who put him in the orphanage ... like he thought he was some kind of bad luck charm. Somehow he kept keepin' on, but everybody around him was targets or something. Riding alone kept 'em safe."

Caine glanced around him, taking in the faces, the attitudes, and cocked his head, regarding Eppy seriously. "Ah," said Caine, "And everyone knew this?" There was a general murmur of agreement from the assembled officers. "Peter's 'secret' was public knowledge?"

"Secret?" Skalany repeated. "Yeah, I guess he did think it was a secret. Peter liked to think he was tough, thought everybody believed the act. But he was mega-marshmallow, a regular Mr. Stay-Puft. He'd do anything for you, he'd be first in line to take the heat ..."

"Like a dressing down from Blaisdell ..." put in Jody with a fond expression.

"Or a serious reaming from Strenlich ..." added Skalany with a smile.

"Or a bullet for you ..." offered Kelly Blaine. Nods of agreement answered her remark; more than once Peter Caine had put himself between a slug and a fellow officer.

"Or the blame from Internal Affairs," Eppy concluded with finality.

"IA? What about IA?" demanded Skalany.

Eppy shook his head. "Nothin'. Just when we were riding together, there was ... an incident, there were questions. Peter tried to take the heat for it. He ended up with a two-week suspension for his pains."

"And you?" Caine inquired.

"I ended up with a demotion. But I got over it," Eppy replied shortly. "It was my fault, but he was willing to take the fall until I knocked some sense into that blockhead of his."

"Peter rode alone that day because he knew it was coming," Jody said suddenly, her voice small.

"Premonition?" Skalany snorted skeptically. "Be real, Jody. Peter wasn't like that." Jody looked up and gazed directly into Caine's eyes. "Maybe not at first. But your coming back changed him," she said to Caine. "It's like something had lain ... I don't know, dormant inside, and it started coming back to life when you showed up. I didn't know him before you came back, but my sister did. What do you think?"

Caine was silent for a moment before responding. Then he said, "I think Peter ... was a ... 'good cop'? I think he ... deduced ... the possibility."

"You don't think he had a death wish? Or that he knew that bullet had his name on it?"

"To wish for death ... would be contrary ... to everything he had learned as a child. We Shaolin revere all life, celebrate it, become one with it. I know that Peter ... believed ... that he was ... irrevocably scarred ... by the violence in his life. The violence every policeman sees ... every day of his life. Even if that were true ... I do not believe that he has ... ever given up on life. Or hope ... no matter what he may claim ... to the contrary."

"In your philosophy, do you believe in life after death?" a voice asked from among the assembled police officers.

The others craned around to pick out the speaker while Caine looked up directly into his eyes. Caine read his name tag from across the room: Tim Sibeal, Records. "Perhaps not ... life ... as you may know it, but the soul does ... live on. Its essence ... continues to exist." Caine frowned, attempting to put into words these people could understand the fundamental principles of the Tao. "Life is a gift, lent to us by the universal. Death is merely ... another stage along the path the soul must follow. When the body dies ... the life force returns to the source, becomes one with the infinite. This ... life essence is all around us, in all things, in us. But the soul does not cease ... with the beat of the heart."

Tim Sibeal, a young sandy-haired man about Peter's age wearing fashionable glasses and a blue uniform, shook his head.

One of the other cops commented before Caine had a chance to address him, "You make it sound like the Force!"

"Does that make you Obi-Wan Kenobi?" called another.

"And Peter's Luke Skywalker!" quipped another.

Laughter, strained but real nonetheless, rippled through the room as Caine's memories were brought into sharp focus. He was reminded of a young boy of 12, fighting imaginary lightsabre battles in the temple corridors. He'd allowed himself to be talked into taking his son to the movies to see *Star Wars*, a rare excursion into the world outside the temple walls, an even rarer treat for his normalcy-starved son. A fond smile played around his lips; apparently, enough of that childhood fantasy lingered that his friends saw the dream still alive in his son.

"It's not funny!" cried Sibeal. He pulled off his glasses and scrubbed at them furiously. "Peter's gone — we shouldn't be making jokes about him!"

The laughter died away in a nervous titter. Caine drew himself back into the present and lifted his face to regard the agitated young man with calm, depthless eyes. "To remember a loved one ... one must remember the good and the bad. The joy and the sorrow. The pleasure and the pain. Otherwise ... we remember only a small part of that person ... perhaps not even the best part."

Tim, his face ruddy with dissipating anger, merely stared at Caine, his brow furrowing.

"You do not agree. You have lost someone ... close to you?"

"My mother. Last year."

"Peter ... lost his mother ... when he was very young. He felt great anger, abandonment, at the loss. He has only recently ... come to terms with that loss."

"You speak of him as if he's still alive," said the young man, his voice cracking slightly.

Caine was silent a moment, considering his reply carefully. Then he answered, "Once, I believed my son ... to be lost to me. And yet I found him, many years later. Those we love ... are never truly lost to us ... they live on in our hearts and memories."

"That's true," Jody said softly. "I was angry and hurt and confused when my sister died. Kira — she was Peter's partner, too. I blamed him, I blamed her, I blamed myself. I blamed everybody but the asshole who killed her. It still hurts. But when I think about her, remember the times we shared, the secrets, the fights ... it's like she's right here. I can almost hear her talking to me ..."

"Man, if I hear Caine talkin' to me, I'm gonna check myself in for observation!" Eppy swore, getting up to investigate the coffee pot.

"Maybe you should do that anyway," Skalany remarked drily. "And make mine black, please," she added, earning a glare from Eppy.

Caine closed his eyes and allowed himself a small smile. "Loss is a part of life ... inevitable ... as the change from day to night. It is not ... easy to bear. When those we love are ... taken from us," he said, sighing, "it is easy to be angry. To lash out. To make those around us ... feel our pain. We must not turn away from that pain, for it is a part of us. We must examine it, embrace it, become one with it. Only then ... can we move on."

"Move on to what?" demanded another detective.

"To life. To living that life as best we can. To achieving harmony ... within ourselves and within the world ... of which we are a part."

"Like a memorial? To live our lives for those who've died?" questioned another cop, a young woman with worried-looking eyes.

"No," Caine answered, shaking his head again. "To live your life ... for those who have died ... serves no purpose. There is no harmony in that. To live your life ... with honor, with balance ... there is great joy and serenity in that. The peace of the spirit ... is not an easily-won goal. The journey ... makes it worth the effort."

"The journey?" repeated Jody.

"Yes. The voyage of ... self-discovery. The reconciliation of the spirit. To achieve balance and wholeness ... that is an endeavor of great worth."

"Balance and wholeness. Has a nice ring to it," Skalany commented.

"A man at peace with himself possesses ... great wisdom ... and deserves great respect," Caine agreed, nodding.

"Like you?" challenged Blake, a bespeckled, basset-houndish detective who specialized in communications.

Caine smiled at Blake, remembering how the man protected his equipment like children. Then he shook his head, his expression saddening. "I ... am not wholly at peace, no. And what wisdom I possess ... like you, I feel anger, I feel pain, I feel confusion. At times, wisdom eludes me ... I act out of emotion. I am a man, no more, no less."

Eppy had drifted back from the coffee urn, handed Skalany her coffee, and stood a few feet away, sipping his coffee thoughtfully. "I never figured Pete to get picked off by some psycho, you know? I always figured him going out in a blaze of glory, taking half the crooks in town with him when he went."

Skalany chuckled sadly at that. "Yeah. That sounds more like Peter's style. Large and in charge."

"Would that be ... less meaningless ... a death than at the hands of a ... sniper?" Caine asked curiously.

"Sure," Skalany replied. "To Peter, anyway. I don't think he'd've minded it so much if he took out the scum when he went."

"You think that ... Peter is angry."

"I ... I imagine he must be. Hell, I am. You're right — it was a meaningless way to die. Shot in the chest in his car? Shit, he wasn't even making a right turn from the left hand lane. Meaningless. Pointless. A waste."

Again, the murmur of approval wafted across the room, the policemen agreeing with Skalany's assessment.

"The death of any cop hurts us. It shows us how vulnerable we are, strips away that veneer of confidence we all hide behind. We're not invulnerable, no matter what we tell ourselves or our families. We like to think that somehow we're blessed, some guardian angel's looking out for us, but in reality, we're targets, moving, sitting, flying, whatever. There's always some scumbag, some junkie, some hard case waiting to take a cop out. It's the law of the jungle, you know?" Jody said bitterly.

In the silence that followed, Strenlich slipped out of the room. Caine looked directly at Jody, his face gentle. "Then ... why do you do it?"

**W**hen at last the police of the 101st Precinct began to get restless, the session started to break up. Through it all, Caine had sat on the table, fielding questions, offering what solace he could, listening to the anger and pain of the officers who believed they survived his son. Some came over to him directly and thanked him, some offered condolences. Skalany, obviously feeling a sense of responsibility for Peter's father, stayed close, not leaving until every other person had left.

"I think you helped some people today, Caine," she told him with a faint smile.

"If that is true ... then I am fortunate, indeed," he answered, nodding. He unwound his legs and stood easily. He touched her cheek gently. "And what of you?"

She smiled sadly. "Yeah, me too. You don't realize how important it is to talk about it, especially the anger. I really want that piece of dirt who took Peter out, you know? I want him so bad I can taste it. I want to make him pay, I want to make him suffer. But that won't bring Peter back."

"No," Caine agreed. "So what will you do?"

"My job. We'll find him. And he'll face the law. There *will* be justice."

"And mercy?"

"Mercy? C'mon, Caine, you've got to be kidding. This slimeball killed your *son*. How can you feel merciful?"

With a slow shrug, Caine shook his head. "To take a life ... there must be great pain. Great anger. A soul in torment. A life out of balance, its chi disrupted. As you say ... killing the killer would not ... bring his victims back. But ... it may be possible ... to help him to achieve ... some peace."

Skalany shook her head. "I don't believe you. You're either a saint or a madman, Caine. And I don't think I'll ever know for sure which." With that, she left the conference room, with Caine smiling gently at her departing back.

**"H**ow did it go?" Paul Blaisdell asked into the telephone.

"Pretty well, I think. At least from the perspective of getting over some of the shock. It was pretty much standing room only this morning," Frank Strenlich's voice came over the line.

"Any surprises?"

"Caine is always a surprise. Epstein showed up, but considering his history with Peter, that wasn't surprising. Most of my gang, a couple of people from traffic, a guy from records, one or two from other precincts ... all pretty much known quantities, people who've worked with Peter in the past."

Paul couldn't mask his disappointment. He hadn't been aware that he'd hoped for something more until he realized it hadn't happened. "Good. And Caine's just hanging around for the day?"

"Yep. When no one stops in, he's just meditating, I guess. Oh, and a couple of people actually stopped by and joined him. Can you believe it?"

"Zen and the art of police work," Blaisdell commented, snorting softly. "Why not? If it works ..."

"Yeah. So what are your plans?"

"We got the list of all the graduates in Peter's class, as well as the survivors of any of them who've died. In addition to our six, there've been three others over the past eight years. One was a traffic fatality, the second choked on a fishbone in a restaurant in Upstate New York. The third we already knew about — Bobby Donaldson, the hostage Peter tried to save a few months ago. Annie and I are going over to the hotel this evening, officially to meet with Carstairs and Gerhardt about setting up a meeting for the alumni and their families, to get the memorial fund off the ground. Annie's itching to go, and I can't very well say no."

"Yeah, sure. She doing okay?"

"She was ... a little angry at first. I'm lucky she didn't throw anything, but it was a close call. She's calmed down now, and she's been working on what she'll say when she starts calling — she's going to start that tomorrow."

"We're getting closer, I can feel it. And I've talked to Davis — he's taking precautions. Just in case, I've also warned Thompson. Both of 'em'll keep an eye out. We've got a couple more weeks before the next scheduled hit, but just in case our shooter's changed his timing ..."

"Good. Okay. Keep me posted. And tell Caine to meet us at the Sutton Place when he's done there."

"Council of war, Captain?"

"You could call it that. Poor Kermit's going to get pretty sick of the Blaisdell-Caine clan by the time this is over. Anything you want from the boys?"

"Tell 'em to clean their room for me, okay?"

Chuckling, Blaisdell said goodbye, replacing the receiver thoughtfully.

"H

e's right in here, Miss ... Smith, was it?" wafted a gravelly voice from the corridor.

"Right. Tyler Smith," replied a feminine voice dripping sarcasm.

"Yeah." The two people entered the conference room, and Caine's eyes fluttered open as he turned his head to look in their direction. "Wait here a minute, will you? I'd like to say something to Master Caine first."

Tyler crossed her arms over her chest and heaved a long-suffering sigh, but she nodded curtly. Desk Sergeant Broderick came brusquely over to Caine and stuck out his hand.

Regarding the hand for a brief moment, Caine inclined his head and accepted the handshake. "You know I didn't always agree with your son. Thought he was a hotshot and a pain in the butt. But he was a good cop, and that's the best compliment I can pay anybody."

"I am ... honored by your honesty," Caine replied graciously. "It is better ... to remember the dead as they were ... rather than ... as we would have had them be."

"Yeah. Yeah, that's good. When you can respect a guy in spite of his faults, that's sayin' something." Broderick clapped Caine on the shoulder and gave him a thumb's-up. "Look, I'm

sorry he's gone. And I think what you're doing here ... it's good for morale. Everybody's talking about it. You're okay, Caine."

Caine bowed slightly, offering Broderick a closed-fist salute. "Thank you," he said soberly.

"Well, Miss 'Smith' is here to see you. I don't think that's her real name, but that's what she told me," the desk sergeant told him confidentially, hooking a thumb over his shoulder at Tyler.

"Miss Smith ... is known to me. She was ... a friend ... of my son's."

"Okay, then. Hey, Miss Smith!" he called, and Tyler, barely suppressing her annoyance, ambled over to join them.

"Keep up the good work," Broderick told Caine, and exited smartly.

"There goes a hell of a guy," Tyler murmured sarcastically to Broderick's retreating back.

"A man of honesty," Caine agreed.

"No, really? Seemed like a jerk to me."

"Rough, perhaps, but honest all the same."

"Yeah, well, I guess I'm one to talk. How are you?"

"I am fine. I have spent the day ... talking about my son ... with the people who know him best."

"And I'll bet they're all telling you what a saint Peter was, right? Never speak ill of the dead?"

Caine spread his hands.

"Yeah. Well, he wasn't a saint. He was a real person. I wish you'd come into his life when there was still time for us."

"Why?"

"I've been spending some time with his friends, too. And everybody tells me that you've had a positive influence on him. I mean, he's still crazy — erm, I mean, he was — but he was calming down. Thinking a little more before doing something stupid. I hadn't seen Peter in a long time, really not since Carolyn's wedding. He hung around the club every once in a while, but ... well, it was over. When you showed up, I guess he had other priorities."

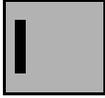
"I am sorry ... if I came between you —"

"No. It really was over. But ... I guess I'm realizing that maybe it wasn't, not completely. Well, I told you that."

"Yes." Caine reached out and took Tyler's hands in his. "My son cared for you. And perhaps ... when you find someone new ... you will look upon him with ... clearer vision."

"To see what can be fixed instead of obsessing about what's wrong? Maybe. That would be nice — to see the potential instead of the danger."

Caine nodded. Sitting down on the edge of the conference table, he told her, "Tell me about my son."



It was nearly time for the next shift change when Strenlich came back to the conference room. There he found Caine sitting quietly with Tyler Smith, Peter's ex-fiancee. Pausing in the doorway, Strenlich shook his head at the twists of fate, wondering how Peter would feel knowing that Tyler was here talking to his father.

"Caine," he called out as he crossed the room to join them. Tyler looked up, her eyes red with recent weeping, and Caine tightened his hold on her hand. "Tyler," Strenlich greeted.

"Chief Strenlich," she responded. "None the worse for wear from last night, I see."

"Last night?" Caine asked.

"Yeah. At the Agrippa. We had a little ... incident ... with the press." He grinned at the memory of Monica Cassals being removed in handcuffs. "Vultures, if you ask me. Monica made bail this morning, and her station issued a formal request for access. As well as a complaint for unlawful arrest, which they retracted when the law was pointed out to them. And the liaison officer turned them down, by the way. For at least a week, anyway. Not that that'll stop 'em for long."

"No." She turned back to Caine and kissed him gently on the cheek. "Thank you. Come to the Agrippa some night. I'll sing for you."

A delighted smile lit up Caine's face as he bowed toward her. "That would give me ... great pleasure. I will come."

"Good. See ya, Chief," she said to Strenlich, and gathered up her jacket and purse and left the conference room.

"Been a rough day for you, huh?" Strenlich commiserated.

"Rough ... day? No. It has been time ... well-spent, I think. I have learned a great deal ... about my son. And I think ... I have given comfort ... to some who needed it."

"Yeah, I think so, too. The mood in the squad room was definitely lighter after this morning. You've helped a lot."

"I must continue to help," Caine told him seriously. "To accept what is lost ... is a difficult thing. To accept what is found ... can be equally difficult."

"I guess you'd know."

Caine nodded.

"Look, Captain called. He wants you to meet him and Mrs. Blaisdell over at the Sutton Place for dinner. Something about planning this memorial fund Mrs. Blaisdell wants to do."

"I will go. But first, there is someone I must see."

"Oh?"

"A young man who is in great pain. His mother died only a few months ago, and he is still very angry." Caine paused for a moment, and added, "And he feels great fear, as well."

"That'll be Sibeal, Tim Sibeal, down in Records. Yeah, it's been tough on him from what I hear — mother was sick for a long time, his father's an ex-cop on a disability pension. Tim took a bullet in the kneecap a couple of years ago that laid him up for a while, and when his mother got sick, he took a transfer to Records so he could have normal hours."

"He was a detective?"

"No, he never took the exam. He was in a patrol car when he requested the transfer. I guess now that she's passed away, he might think about going for it, though. He's a bright kid. Could have a good future. Look, I'll walk you down. You could get lost in this place without an escort."

C

aine bowed to Strenlich in thanks and entered the Records Department in search of Officer Tim Sibeal. He found him at a computer, conducting a data base search.

"I am not disturbing you?" Caine said to him, bowing a greeting.

"Mr. Caine! Uh, no, no, you're not disturbing me. Ah — what can I do for you?" Sibeal asked, pushing his glasses up with a forefinger.

"This morning ... you told me that you had lost your mother. I thought perhaps ... you would like to talk about it. The loss of a mother, a son, a wife, a close friend ... all cut to the heart."

"Yeah. My dad's taken it *real* hard. Not that it's been easy for me, but he ..." Sibeal broke off, a haunted look passing over his smooth face. "Look, it's really nice of you, but ... well ... I guess I don't really feel like talking about it. If you don't mind. Not yet, anyway."

Caine accepted the rejection gracefully. "When you are, come to Chinatown. Ask for Caine. I will be ready to listen."

Sibeal was silent for a moment, but his eyes misted with the threat of sudden tears. He pulled off his glasses and scrubbed the lenses with a tissue to mask his emotion. "Thanks, Mr. Caine. It really is nice of you to take the time, considering you just ... lost your son. I appreciate it."

Again, Caine merely accepted his words in silence, shrugging slightly. "I will go then. When you need me, you will find me."

"Yeah. Sure."

Caine started for the door, but Sibeal's voice stopped him. "Mr. Caine — how do you feel about the person who killed your son?"

Caine considered this for a long moment before replying. Then he inclined his head slightly and said, "I forgive him."

H

aving struck out with Peter Caine's co-workers the night before, Monica Cassals planned a frontal assault on the residents of Chinatown instead. Although Peter Caine had been attached to the 101st, he had been a frequent presence in Chinatown, especially since his father had shown up a year or so ago.

The WYCX truck pulled into an open space by a meter in front of Danny Zhao's meat market, and Cassals sat in the front passenger seat, watching the people on the street for a few moments. "The one we want is called 'the Ancient' — apparently this guy is so old, nobody's knows his true age. But if we can't find him, we can do that old 'man-in-the-street' stuff."

Behind the wheel, Al shrugged. Monica looked at him sourly, and commanded, "Let's go."

"I

'm Monica Cassals, reporting from Chinatown. A quarter Chinese himself, Detective Peter Caine was a frequent visitor to Chinatown. His father, Kwai Chang Caine, is considered by many of the locals to be a hero, the focus of hope and faith in the community. With me now is one of the leading figures in Chinatown, Mr. Lo Si, known as 'the Ancient.'" She turned toward Lo Si, moving her microphone down toward the

old man's mouth. "What is sentiment like in Chinatown with the loss of one of its staunchest defenders?"

"I don't believe this," Peter murmured, staring open-mouthed at the television set. "Lo Si's gonna kill me over this."

"I don't know," Kermit sighed, watching the TV as he lounged back in the sofa. "Looks like he's enjoying himself to me."

On the screen, Lo Si was answering Monica Cassals question. "Peter Caine was a member of this community. He was not born here. He did not grow up here. But he fought to make our streets safe. He became a part of our families. A police officer who is loyal to the people brings a ... sense of order, of justice. His father is a ... Shaolin priest ... he brought hope to this community. Father and son ... both have given much to us all. Many people mourn his loss. Many people will remember him in their prayers. Peter Caine will not be forgotten in Chinatown."

Around the Ancient, his niece Xiaoli, his friend Danny Zhao, and many other members of the community nodded their heads, adding their voices to Lo Si's heartfelt eulogy.

Monica nodded her thanks to Lo Si and turned back to the camera. "Obviously Detective Caine was a rare kind of police officer — a protector to the community that he adopted. An old-fashioned kind of cop who knew everyone on his beat. And this is the kind of policeman who's been gunned down. Why is it that our police department has not made an arrest yet? What kind of message are they sending to communities like Chinatown? That they just don't care about the little people, the people who live and work in our city? That communities like this aren't worth protecting from crime and injustice? We'd like to hear what you think — call our action line with your opinions. We'll be following up on this story tomorrow night on the six o'clock news. I'm Monica Cassals, reporting from Chinatown. Back to you —"

Peter switched off the set with a sneer. "Bitch. What the hell does she know, anyway? Why's she making it sound like we're not doing anything?"

"Hey, she's making you sound like Mother Theresa. A *dead* Mother Theresa, maybe, but you've already got your wings as far as she's concerned. It's the rest of us who're slime."

"Yeah, well, in your case ..."

"Watch it, Caine. I'm not somebody you want to piss off," Kermit told him with a clenched-teeth grin.

"Oh yeah? And what can you do to me, huh?"

"I can short-sheet your bed, and then where will you be?"

**P**aul Blaisdell stared in wonder, not for the first time since he had met his wife Annie so many years before. Dressed soberly in black, she managed to look both bereaved and beautiful all at the same time. As Carstairs greeted her warmly, she accepted his condolences demurely, convincingly. She'd have made a hell of an undercover operative, Blaisdell decided, and felt a resurgent twinge of guilt for not trusting her instincts better before the funeral.

"All of us here at the Sutton Place Hotel are saddened by your loss, Captain and Mrs. Blaisdell," Carstairs was saying. "As you know, we all had cause to hold your son in the highest regard. I hope you won't think me forward, but we anticipated that you would probably want to have dinner while you were here — we've arranged for a private suite for you, on our Executive Level, for us

to meet and discuss your business, and for you to have dinner in private. Does that meet with your approval?" he concluded anxiously.

"Perfectly, Mr. Carstairs. You have anticipated all our needs," Annie replied regally.

"I certainly hope so," agreed Carstairs as he escorted them to the private elevator bank leading to the Executive Level. He gallantly ushered Annie into the elevator before him, waiting at the doors for Blaisdell to follow before boarding the car himself. Using his key, he activated the elevator to rise to the Executive Level. The sound of his natter was vaguely pleasant, meant to fill the void as the elevator slowly climbed up through the levels of the building. A soft, unobtrusive chime indicated they had arrived, and again, Carstairs waited until they had exited the car before locking off the elevator and following them down the corridor. "Right this way," he gestured toward the door at the end of the hallway.

Arriving at the door, Carstairs knocked three times, then again, twice. A muffled voice on the other side asked who was there, and Carstairs answered. The sound of locks being withdrawn preceded the opening of the door, and Detective Kermit Griffin, gun once more in hand, was revealed.

"Put that thing away, Kermit," Blaisdell ordered impatiently, and Kermit grinned, deftly replacing the gun in its holster and stepping back to allow the Blaisdells to enter.

"Where's Caine?" he asked as they passed him.

"Ah. I'll be going, shall I? To collect our other guest?" Carstairs offered, and was gone, the door shut behind him. Kermit quickly restored the locks.

Walking into the room, Annie extended a hand tentatively as she called out softly, "Peter?"

"Mom?" came a voice from another room in the suite. The clump of a cast and a cane heralded his approach as he hurried, as best he could, into the living room area of the suite. "Mom!"

Blaisdell didn't bother to suppress the smile that came to his lips as Peter seemed to fly across the space between him and his mother, and suddenly his foster son was holding her in his arms, and they were both crying. Peter looked up momentarily, his face full of gratitude to his foster father, and then closed his eyes, pressing his face against his mother's golden hair.

"How touching," Kermit observed, earning him a glare from Blaisdell; he merely grinned in reply.

"Don't stand there being useless — tell me what you've found out," Blaisdell ordered gruffly.

"Yes, sir," replied Kermit, his voice just this side of insolence as he continued to grin.

Peter released his mother, but kept an arm around her shoulders as he led her to the couch. Kermit, in the meantime, was retrieving a stack of papers from the desk, and brought them over to Blaisdell as he seated himself in a chair. Kermit dropped into the chair opposite Blaisdell, the coffee table between them.

"Well, isn't this cozy?"

"Stop being an asshole, Kermit," Peter told him, not taking his eyes off his mother.

"And start being a cop. What's all this boil down to, hmm?" Blaisdell demanded.

"Well, in your hands you hold a list of every person connected with Peter's graduating class from the academy — students, instructors, family, administration personnel — the works. Their current

addresses, current assignments where applicable ... death certificates where applicable. The result of a lot of hours of connection time, Captain."

"Your line's secure?"

"You wound me!" he said in mock horror. "I'm dialling anonymously into the system by way of several different nodes which eventually connect me to a secure line in Washington, D.C. — can't have anybody tracing the calls back to here."

"You're sure?"

Peter chuckled at the offended expression on his companion's face. "Nobody plays the net like Kermit. It's like watching an artist at work," he told his foster father.

"Why, Peter, I didn't realize you had the temperament to appreciate my abilities," Kermit responded with a sly grin.

"Yeah, well, I guess I'll keep my opinion to myself from now on," countered Peter.

"That would be a first," commented Annie with a wry smile. Peter tightened his hold on her hand and leaned over to kiss her on the cheek.

"Hey, come on — I thought you were on my side," Peter told her.

"I may be blind, Peter, but that doesn't mean I can't see when you're pulling the wool over my eyes," Annie pointed out, earning her a chuckle from her husband.

Another series of knocks on the door interrupted further conversation, and both Peter and Kermit whisked their weapons out as Kermit leapt up and moved quickly to the door. Verifying that Carstairs was on the other side, Kermit released the locks and stepped back. Carstairs ushered Caine into the room and waved a cheery hello before immediately backing out of the suite.

"Just call me Carleton, your doorman," quipped Kermit.

Caine regarded him seriously. "Why would I do that?"

"Ah ... never mind. Come in and join the party," he added with a flourish.

"Caine!" Annie called, reaching out her hand to him. He hurried over to the couch and grasped the offered hand firmly, smiling down at Peter's foster mother. He bowed a greeting to Blaisdell, and reached over and cuffed his son on the head.

"You are practicing, my son?"

"Well, I'm trying," Peter admitted. "I still haven't got the balance thing down yet, with a cast on my leg and all," he added a little stiffly.

"Yeah, Peter falls spectacularly. Wish I'd had my camcorder," Kermit added wistfully.

Caine looked sternly at his son. "Practice."

"Yeah, right, practice. Got it," he answered, slightly embarrassed. He threw Kermit a dagger-filled glare.

"And your flute?" Caine asked.

Kermit looked at Peter for a split second before saying, "Practice."



ccounting is going to love the bill from this operation," Blaisdell said as he put down the phone from calling room service. "It's a good thing Gerhardt offered us the use of this suite gratis — the food bill alone for the pair of you could pass the national debt."

"Well, sir, you did tell us to make ourselves at home," Kermit pointed out innocently.

Blaisdell turned a reprimanding glance on Kermit, but the computer expert was unfazed. Sighing, he decided that putting his foster son together with his resident computer whiz may not have been the best idea after all. At least he could trust Kermit not to babble about their days before the force, but some of his friend's other habits ... like habitual insubordination ... He shook his head, seated himself again, and picked up his notebook. "All right, we've narrowed down the people we want to speak to first. We've got a couple of real possibles here. I've arranged with Carstairs to hold a reception here at the hotel on Friday night — that gives us two days to reach everyone. You both have done good work," he concluded, nodding toward both Peter and Kermit.

"Now what?" Peter inquired.

"Now I turn over your notes to Strenlich. We've got a lot of people in the squad room itching to work on this case. He'll put a team on it from his end, while Annie and I start calling around. Caine will continue to work with the people at the precinct, right?"

"Yes. There is ... a great deal of pain ... present among your ... officers. A great deal of anger. And fear."

"Fear. How so?"

"As Peter's partner ... Jody? ... put it, the death of a ... cop exposes them all. It reminds them of their mortality, the ... ah ... precarious nature of their lives."

"Yes. The death of a cop always reminds us we're not supermen. You can help them?"

"I must try," Caine agreed, inclining his head. "Some were in pain before this ... terrible illusion. They need help most of all."

"Oh? Who?" Blaisdell asked. He liked to know what was going on with his cops; if someone was suffering extreme duress, he wanted to know about it.

"A young man who recently lost his mother," Caine told him.

"That'll be Tim Sibeal," Peter put in. At Blaisdell's questioning look, he added, "Used to be a beat cop, but transferred to Records a couple of years ago when his mother got really sick. He was in my class, too, nice guy, third-generation cop," Peter added.

"He transferred to Records for his mother?" echoed Annie. "Does that mean if I were to ask ...?" She left the sentence hanging, turning her head toward Peter to gauge his reaction.

"I, uh, well — help me out, here, Paul!" Peter stammered.

"You're on your own with your mother, Peter," Blaisdell replied, chuckling.

"That's all right, Peter. I wouldn't ask. I might as well ask a bird not to fly as ask you not to be a cop." She patted his hand affectionately as she turned toward Caine. "Has he always been like this?"

"Yes," Caine replied with a firm nod of his head. "Always."

For the third time that evening, a knock at the door heralded the approach of hotel staff. "Nice to know there are some constants in the universe, Peter," Kermit observed as he stepped into his role of border guard again.

Stifling a chuckle, Peter tried to appear long-suffering as he said, "I don't know about this family business. Seems like you're all ganging up on me."

"It ... takes us all ... to match your ... enthusiasm ... for getting into trouble?" Caine replied with a ghost of a smile. Blaisdell and Annie laughed out loud at that, and after a moment of offended silence, Peter joined in.

"Hey, dinner is served, my friends," Kermit called out, pushing the food cart into the room.

Day Four: Thursday, November 3, 1994

**D**arcy Four: Thursday, November 3, 1994  
Marcy Bennett stared at the telephone as though it was both her enemy and her savior. In the six months since Miles's death, life had become so complicated and yet so simple. Money had only just begun to get tight, but she knew how to stretch those dollars from when Miles had been at the academy. Old habits. She nibbled at her thumb, worrying a hangnail as she stared at the phone. Since the day Miles's captain had shown up at her door, his face grim and his news even grimmer, nothing had seemed real. Not his funeral, not the birth of their second child two months later, not the kindly efforts of his co-workers and hers. She'd gone back to work because it was the thing to do, and her mother had moved in with her to look after the children. After the first few awkward weeks, no one at work had mentioned Miles again, and she'd been able to pretend that nothing had changed. She just moved through her days on ... auto-pilot, that was the word. She'd been on auto-pilot for six months.

And now this phone call. Out of the blue? Another soul in torment. Another survivor. This woman had lost her son to a bullet, just like she'd lost Miles. And this woman's son had gone to the academy, a friend of Miles back in the old days. The old days. If she just closed her eyes, she could hear Miles pulling up in the driveway, slamming the car door and jingling his keys. He was just outside the kitchen door, fitting the key into the lock. If she just kept her eyes closed, he'd come through the door, and everything would be back to normal.

But she opened her eyes, and the kitchen was still empty. Except for the phone. The phone still sat on the counter, the receiver in its resting place, silent. A lifeline to the outside world. An open door for intruders.

Annie Blaisdell seemed like a nice woman. She'd heard about her, the blind wife of Captain Paul Blaisdell. A nice woman. A woman who wanted the world to remember her son through the good work a memorial fund could do. College scholarships for the surviving children of policemen killed in the line of duty. Low-cost loans for the surviving spouses. A lifeline. A reproach?

Mrs. Blaisdell had been kind. She had reached into Marcy's heart and exposed it to the world, the pain she'd been hiding from these last six months. Kindness? She looked down at her thumbnail, not surprised to find it bleeding where she'd torn at the nail with her teeth. A reception on Friday night, that's what Mrs. Blaisdell had said. No, she'd told her to call her Annie. Annie said. A reception to bring together everyone connected with Miles's and Peter's academy class. To mourn together. To plan for their children's future.

She cast a panicky glance toward the outside. Her cocoon was gone, shredded in a single phone call. She wasn't sure she could go outside, unprotected, exposed. Her glance fell back on the phone. She could call, tell Annie she couldn't come, tell her it was just too much.

But she knew she would go. Knew she needed to go. And she felt she could almost see Miles's smile reflected in the faceted surface of the telephone.

**A**

nnie Blaisdell replaced the receiver in the cradle with exaggerated delicacy, her face turned sadly toward the instrument. Paul looked up from the files he was reviewing, glasses perched on the bridge of his nose, and frowned. "What's the matter, babe?" he asked.

"That poor woman. Miles Bennett's widow, Marcy. Did you know she was pregnant when he was killed?" Annie replied, her voice ragged.

"I heard something about it, I'm sure it was on the news." He dragged a weary hand over his mouth and chin. "This is tougher on you than I'd thought. Maybe —"

"Maybe nothing. We're going to do this, Paul. For real. The Class of '86 Memorial Fund. Oh, I know we're naming it after Peter now, but when this is settled, when he comes back home — we can't very well name it after someone living. But we've got to do it," she told him urgently.

Blaisdell got up from his chair, pushing back the sleeves of his sweater as he did. He went over to Annie, and touched her face. "We will, my darling." His fingers slid around to cup her chin, and he raised her face toward his. "Have I told you lately how much I love you?"

She smiled. "Every day of your life."

**"W**

hat I can't figure is how the sniper knew where Pete was going to be at that exact moment," Katz was saying as he stacked matchboxes into a tower to represent the building from which the sniper had fired.

"That's the easy part, Marvin," Jody told him caustically. "Phone log shows an anonymous 911 call at 8:35 p.m., emergency reported at 10th and Magnolia. Peter's territory. He'd have to go through that intersection to get there."

"Yeah, but what if someone else'd answered the call?" Marvin pressed, placing a toy car at the intersection of two rulers.

"Maybe somebody else'd be dead," Skalany offered. "Maybe he'd have waited. Found some other way to get to Peter. Maybe right here at the precinct when he went off-shift. Who knows? That's one mind I don't want to crawl around in."

"But that's exactly what we need to do, isn't it?" Jody sighed. "Get inside the mind of the killer. We know the next likely who and when — the day, at least. Ted Davis on the 27th. We gotta figure out the where. And the whodunit. Otherwise we're gonna have another funeral next month."

"Okay. We've got all this stuff Kermit sent from D.C. Who wants to start sloggin through it?" Skalany asked, holding up a thick wad of computer printout.

"Gimme half," Jody instructed, reaching out for it. "We'll let Marvin play with his toys, and you'n'me'll do the *real* police work," she added with a sour smile.

"Hey, I'm working out logistics, here," Katz complained.

"Yeah, sure," Jody commented, and turned her attention to the printouts Skalany had handed her.

**J**ason Sibeal put down the receiver and stared at the empty chair across the living room from him. A hand-crocheted afghan was thrown over the chair, and on the low table beside it sat a stack of crossword puzzle magazines, a well-worn pencil resting on top of the pile. A thin layer of dust had formed on the cover of the topmost magazine, a reminder that he hadn't cleaned the house in a few weeks. He'd have to do that, he told himself. Have to clean the house before ... before what? Lillian wasn't coming home. And Tim didn't come by much these days now that his mother was gone.

Oh, he'd stopped by last week, after Peter Caine had got himself shot. Another classmate from the academy had died, another cop had snuffed it. He should feel something about that, he'd been a cop for 30 years before the blast from a terrorist's bomb had blown off his hand and taken half his face. Taken him down. But as he continued to stare at the empty seat, he found it hard to feel anything but his own loss.

And then this woman calls, this Annie Blaisdell. Captain's wife. He'd fought down the urge to salute; she was, after all, only a civilian. Like he was now. Only Tim was left on the force, a records clerk, for Chrissake's. That had been his mother's doing, although she'd never come right out and said so. But it had made her happy when her son had requested a transfer off the street. It had given her some peace of mind during the last years of her life.

But Lillian had been gone for more than six months, and Tim still showed no signs of getting his career back on track. He still reported each morning to the Records Division at the 101st. Same precinct as Peter Caine. Hot shot Peter Caine. Dead Peter Caine.

Jason Sibeal reached under the coffee table and retrieved a book, opened it in his lap with his good hand, stabilizing it with the prosthesis that was the legacy of that bomber's blast. He flipped through the pages, staring at the young, eager faces of Tim's academy class. He paused at the page listing the class ranking. Peter Caine had been sixth in his class, first in marksmanship. His finger traced a path down the list. Tim had been tenth in his class. He remembered feeling faintly ashamed that the son of a cop, the grandson of a cop, had fared so poorly at the academy, although Lillian had pointed out that tenth out of nearly 100 was nothing to be ashamed of. And yet, he'd also felt proud, since neither he nor his father had attended the academy. Tim had been on the track, but Tim had thrown it away to please his mother.

Captain Blaisdell's wife, Peter Caine's mother, wanted to sponsor a memorial fund in her son's name. To secure the future. To provide assistance to the survivors of the members of Tim's class who had died. He glanced back at the empty chair. Charity, empty in the face of loss.

Resolutely, Jason Sibeal closed the book with a snap.

**A**nnie tapped away at the keys of a braille typewriter, writing up her notes from the phone calls she'd made. Paul was on the phone now, talking to Bobby Donaldson's mother. She didn't remember him very clearly, but she remembered when he'd died — they'd almost lost Peter then, he'd been in a coma and Caine had feared for his soul. From the tone of his voice, she could tell Paul was talking to someone anxious to talk about her own son, and she shivered involuntarily. How easily that could have been her, she told herself. How easily it might one day be.

She paused in her typing, recalling her conversation with Jason Sibeal. The man was definitely bitter, about the loss of his wife, about the direction his son's career had taken. About his own disability, his own career cut short. She tilted her head in Paul's direction, drinking in the sound of his voice. So often he'd slipped away, to places he wouldn't talk about, on missions he wouldn't mention, taking risks she couldn't bear to think about. Ties to covert agencies, ties to danger. She couldn't imagine life without him, the very thought filled her with a fear that was too huge to look at. And yet he took risks, sometimes bigger risks than Peter took, and together they

treated it as business as usual. Her hands clenched with the sudden anger that welled up in her. Business as usual!

"Annie, honey, what's wrong?" Paul was saying, his voice low and urgent.

She turned toward the sound of his voice and smiled, reaching out a hand to touch his face. She heard him move closer, and his hand caught hers, pressing it against his cheek. She pulled him into an embrace, fierce, demanding.

"What's wrong, baby?" he asked again, his breath warm against her hair.

She started to speak, but the anger, the tears, threatened to swallow her voice. She took a deep breath and started over. "All this ... sadness. All this loss. I — I don't want to lose you, Paul. Not you, not Peter," she whispered.

He pushed her away, his hands grasping her shoulders firmly as he searched her face. "I'm not going anywhere, Annie. Peter's fine —"

"Today. Today you're here. Today Peter's fine. But what about next week? Next month? The next time the phone rings and it's someone from Washington? The next time a junkie needs a fix and he thinks Peter's wallet will buy it for him? What then?"

She could hear the working of his jaw as his mouth opened and closed while he stalled for time. There were no answers to her questions. "Annie, darling," he said softly. "What if you walk across a street and get hit by a truck?"

"It's not the same, Paul. I don't walk into situations that I know are dangerous," she told him angrily.

"No," he agreed. "And I don't walk into situations where I don't have a handle on the danger. Where I haven't taken precautions to minimize that danger," he explained patiently. "You know that. You know I study, I plan, I take calculated risks, yes, but I don't do it blindly," she smiled bitterly at the word, and she could hear the swish of fabric, the grate of his neckbones as he shook his head. "I'm not going to take foolish risks and chance not being able to grow old with you," he concluded, releasing his hold on one of her shoulders and touching her face gently.

"And Peter?" she inquired, turned her face toward his hand, rubbing her cheek against his palm.

"Peter's learning. Having his father around is helping. That Shaolin training is starting to kick in, I think," he added with a chuckle. He grew serious again as he amended, "But he's a cop. Being a cop doesn't mean the badge, the gun. It's something inside."

"A need?"

"If you like," he answered her, shrugging.

"Not very much, Paul. Not today. Maybe I never have."

"I know. All I can promise is that ... that I won't and Peter won't take chances unnecessarily. If I have to break the other leg, then fine, that's what I'll do." He traced her lips with his finger, and she smiled.

"If you think two broken legs will keep that boy down for long, you haven't been paying attention the last 14 years, Paul Blaisdell," she told him.

"Maybe so," he agreed, smiling. "But as his commanding officer, I can have an influence, just like Caine. Just like you can."

She rested her head against his chest and sighed. "The job is never over, is it? Carolyn, Kelly, Peter — we never stop being parents, never stop worrying. Never stop hoping."

"No," he answered simply, massaging the back of her neck. "No, we never stop hoping."

"P

hone log identifies the caller as a man," Skalany announced.

"A man? Anything else?" Jody asked.

"I just talked to the dispatcher. Caller's voice sounded older, gruff."

"Could be someone younger disguising their voice," mused Jody. "Any chance it could have been a woman?"

"Dispatcher didn't think so. She played back the tape for me, and I don't think so, either. I couldn't guarantee you that whoever it was wasn't disguising their voice, but I think we're definitely looking for a man, probably an older man," Skalany concluded.

"An older man with a grudge against cops."

"An older man with a grudge against a specific group of cops," Skalany amended.

Jody and Skalany's eyes met over the piles of papers and folders on each of their desks. Wordlessly, they returned to study Kermit's printouts.

"D

amn them anyway," Monica Cassals was saying from behind her desk at the WYCX studios.

Perched on the corner of her desk, Al the sound man shook his head. "It's not like there's a cover-up going on, Monica. It's not like there's some big story you gotta break. Those cops are probably more interested in catching the killer than you are."

"Sure, but what if it turns out the killer's a cop himself? You think they're gonna release that, huh? No way, Al. They protect their own. They find it's a cop, and there *will* be a cover-up. You just wait and see."

Sipping from his cup of lukewarm coffee, Al thought about the man he and Greg had met outside Blaisdell's house two nights before. He remembered Caine's eyes. And he remembered Blaisdell's face at the funeral. "I don't think so," he said simply.

"Oh? You got the inside track on this? Something you haven't shared with me?"

"No. But look at it, Monica. Peter Caine was Blaisdell's foster son. You really think he's gonna let his son's killer walk, cop or no cop? If you do, you're sicker'n I thought."

Monica snorted contemptuously. "You just don't have it, do you, Al?"

"What?"

"Killer instinct. You back away from a story if it gets too sticky, don't want to hurt anybody's feelings."

"I just don't see any point to interfering with a police investigation, or intruding on a family's grief to get a story that ain't there, Monica. And no way do I think you're taking me with you when you hit the bigs, so why should I bother, huh?"

Monica fidgeted uncomfortably at Al's words. Al allowed himself a small smile; that one had hit close to home. He was going to have to talk to the station chief to request a transfer to somebody else's unit soon ...

**B**reathing slowly, Peter Caine closed his eyes and concentrated on balance. He'd finally found the right center of gravity to allow him to do at least a few of the t'ai chi moves his father had taught him without ending up on his ass. His hands moved fluidly as he shifted that center of gravity carefully, and he could feel the flow of energy as he moved slowly, methodically.

"In all things, there must be balance," he heard his father's voice saying. "Darkness must have light, force must have release, grief must have joy. One gives way to the other, in infinite cycles of progression. One without the other is brittle, unstable, out of harmony."

"But Father," the voice of his youth countered — oh, how his father had hated those inevitable questions! Well, he'd assumed he'd hated them, even though he knew his father didn't hate anything. "What if someone can find no joy, no balance? What if there is only grief?"

"Then harmony can never be achieved. Balance can never be found. That way lies madness," his father's voice told him.

Peter's eyes opened suddenly. "Madness," he repeated.

"Say what, Pete?" Kermit asked from his inevitable position at the computer.

"I said 'madness'. If there is no balance, if there is only grief without joy, that way lies madness," he elaborated, his voice distant with memory. He looked up toward Kermit, and was relieved when he saw his friend nod.

"Focus," Kermit agreed enigmatically.

"Narrow the search," Peter translated.

"You got it, buddy," Kermit told him, turning back to the laptop, flexing his fingers like a concert pianist.

**A**nnie was exhausted. Between her and Paul, they'd managed to contact nearly everyone on the list Kermit had produced. Some calls had been okay, people who were anxious to offer her condolences, making nice sounds and promising to attend the meeting on Friday night. Some, like Fred Hall's brother, Adam, had been difficult. He'd tried to be kind, but his own grief was still too recent to be set aside to deal with hers. She felt like a fraud, accepting people's kindness when Peter was still alive, and then talking to people whose losses were real. Worse, she kept thinking about what it would be like if Peter's death had been fact instead of fiction.

"You've done a good day's work," Paul told her, stretching the kinks out of his shoulders as he spoke. He picked up a pencil and tapped the stack of notes they'd both amassed through the many phone calls they'd made. "I'm going to give Strenlich a call, see what the kids have come up with." Taking off his glasses, he rubbed at his eyes wearily. "Wanna go out to dinner? Or shall we call out for pizza?"

"The Sutton Place?" she suggested hopefully.

"I don't think it would be a good idea to spend too much time there. It might look suspicious. We'll be back tomorrow night. After everyone leaves ..."

Sighing, Annie agreed. "How about Chinese?"

He chuckled in response. "Just remember to order lots of white rice for Caine."

"Hot sauce for me," she countered, grinning.

**A**

t the precinct, Caine was sitting in the conference room, talking quietly with Donny Double D. Peter's snitch had wandered in about an hour earlier, his nose for news sniffing out the fact that his friend's father was talking to all of Peter's friends at the police station.

"The word on the street is silent," Donny was saying. "Well, it's never silent, but nobody's taking credit for this. Nobody's got a clue. And you can bet I've been asking around," he added vehemently.

"You do my son honor by your ... tenaciousness," Caine acknowledged with a slight nod.

"Yeah, well, Pete may have been a cop, but he was a good cop. Clean, if you know what I mean. Never took advantage ... although there were one or two occasions when I would have argued the remuneration I received for information provided ..." He coughed, straightening. "But he was straight. Lotta cops, they treat an informant like scum, y'know? Pete was more like a friend with a wallet, if you know what I mean."

"You are loyal to my son," Caine observed.

"Loyal? Yeah. Yeah, I guess I am ... was." Donny looked at Caine, nodding. "Yeah. It's tough enough to find a friend in this world. When you do find one ... you hold on tight. Always play fair, give 'em the straight dope, never mess with their head."

"It is ... an unusual circumstance, for a ... snitch? ... to be friendly with a police officer?"

"Well, I prefer the term 'information broker', but yeah, it's unusual."

"And this relationship has caused you ... no difficulty in ... finding information?"

Donny smiled, snorting softly. "Not so's you'd notice. I've got a lot of contacts, you know? A regular network of information. And I can be pretty unobtrusive, the old fly-on-the-wall routine. So I pick up bits and pieces, move the pieces around a little, see the pattern, make educated guesses. It's a science, you know? Gathering information and making connections."

It was Caine's turn to smile as he nodded agreement. "Much like ... a detective," he observed.

"Yeah. Think of me as the detective's detective," Donny concluded, grinning. "I'm really gonna miss Pete, though."

Caine's eyes closed for a brief moment, and then he laid his hand on Donny's arm. "True friendship ... is a rare harmony. Like music that echoes in your mind. The memory of the time spent together ... is always with you. A cherished possession ... which never tarnishes with age."

"Yeah," Donny said again, sighing. "Pete'n me, we had some good times. Some rough ones, too. A couple of times, he really saved my bacon." A grin flitted across his face at a specific memory. "And once or twice, I hauled his ass out of the proverbial fire."

"Then you were ... as good a friend to him ... as he was to you," Caine pointed out gently.

"Yeah." He turned toward Caine, the grin now firmly in place. "Yeah, I was." He patted his suit jacket, found a small case, and pulled out a business card. "Look, you ever need ... information, assistance with anything, backup, muscle, anything — that's my number," he informed Caine, passing the card to him. "I'd take it as a personal favor if sometime, you did call, okay?"

Bowing deeply, Caine accepted the card. "You honor me with your trust," he said solemnly.

Donny scooted off the edge of the table where he'd been sitting, and bowed in kind. "You honor me, Master Caine," Donny rejoined, backing up in the direction of the door. He straightened and turned toward the exit, then looked over his shoulder with a grin, "And there's no charge for the first time," he added impishly, and was gone.

Caine bowed to the empty space where Donny had been standing, and smiled to himself. "Your friends are strange and diverse, my son."

"Was that Donny Double D I just saw leaving?" asked a voice from the doorway. Tim Sibeal stepped into the room, glancing over his shoulder. "Peter had a lot of friends, didn't he?"

Caine bowed to the newcomer, and replied, "Yes. He ... rich is the man who has friends and people who love him," Caine told him cautiously.

Rubbing at the back of his neck, Tim looked as though he might bolt at any second. Caine waited patiently for him to decide his course of action. After a moment of internal struggle, Tim came further into the room.

"Everybody's talking about how much it helps to have you here. I even heard somebody suggest that we should have you or someone like you on call all the time. This cop killer isn't the only way cops die," he added sadly.

"No. A policeman's life is ... fraught with danger. Evil takes many guises. Small evils are petty ... they can kill the body as ... effectively as great evil can kill the soul."

"Yeah, well, I'm pretty safe tucked away in Records," Tim told him, picking at a cuticle as he moved gradually closer.

"I understand you ... chose to work there ... for the benefit of your mother," Caine ventured.

"Yeah. It seemed the right thing to do at the time, get off the streets, get normal hours. My mom was pretty sick, and my dad's disabled, so I needed to be able to spend more time at home."

"And now?"

"Now ... my dad wants me to go for the detective's exam, jumpstart my career again. He doesn't exactly approve of a cop who rides a desk all the time," Tim informed him with a trace of bitterness.

"But you do not want to return ... to the field?" Caine guessed. "You have perhaps ... found some satisfaction in what you do."

A tentative smile played around Sibeal's mouth. "Yeah. I'm good at what I do. Not as good as Detective Griffin, but good. And half a cop's job is putting together information into a logical whole. It's a job someone's gotta do, so why not me?"

By this time, Tim had inched his way across the room to stand only a few feet from Caine, and Caine gestured toward a chair, inviting the young man to sit down. "Nah, I can't stay. I just wanted to stop in and say hello."

"When my son was young ... I hoped he would follow in my footsteps, the footsteps of my ancestors. But he has taught me that ... each man's destiny is uniquely his own. That a father ... can only light the way, but the son ... must choose the path."

"Then you're not disappointed that Peter became a cop? Instead of what — a priest?"

Caine pursed his lips for a moment, then shrugged. "A small disappointment, perhaps. Like all small things ... it can easily be embraced ... and let go. Peter ... has been a good cop. Everyone I have spoken to here has told me of this. I cannot fail ... to be proud ... of the path my son chose since he ... has followed it with honor."

Tim's face held great sadness as he nodded. "I wish my father would feel that way."

"Perhaps ... I could speak with him. I, too, lost my wife, many years ago." He spread his hands, and shrugged again. "I am not unfamiliar with loss."

"No, no, you're not." Sibeal sighed. "Look, my dad called me and told me he got a call from Mrs. Blaisdell. She's trying to put together some kind of memorial fund in Peter's honor. For the people we graduated with, the survivors. There's a meeting at the Sutton Place Hotel tomorrow night. Are you going?"

"I will be there."

"Then maybe he'll let me introduce you to him then. It might help him, you know, to come to terms. With losing my mother."

"And you?"

"My mother was sick for a long time." He looked at the floor, his face solemn. "To be honest, I think we had her longer than we should have. She was in a lot of pain. I like to think she's not hurting anymore," Tim finished, looking up at Caine with eyes bright with unshed tears.

"Survival is perhaps ... the most difficult thing of all," Caine told him gently, reaching out and touching him on the shoulder.

"Does it ever get any easier?"

"Perhaps. The pain recedes ... becomes ... easier to bear. But the burden ... never goes away entirely. You must ... embrace the pain. Make it a part of you. Only then can it cease to harm you."

Tim nodded, and glanced at the clock. "I've gotta go. I've got a few things I need to finish up before I go off-shift." He rose stiffly, awkwardly, and thrust his hand out to Caine. "Thanks," he said as Caine accepted the hand gingerly. "It's no wonder Peter was a hell of a guy — his dad's a hell of a guy, too."

Caine bowed in thanks, and Tim left quickly. Shaking his head at the pain that surrounded the young man, Caine turned to gather up his belongings and return to the Blaisdell home.

ou're sure?" Peter Caine was saying into the telephone.



"Skalany and Powell both checked it out with the dispatcher. The caller was definitely a male, probably middle-aged or older," came Blaisdell's voice over the phone.

"Well, unless the caller was hired to make the call, or the shooter's imported

firepower, that narrows the field. But those are a couple of big ifs, Captain," Peter countered.

"You don't like things simple, do you, Peter?" Blaisdell demanded with a hint of humor.

"Simple? I love simple. I just don't trust it," Peter retorted.

"Well, see what you and Kermit can do with the information I've given you. We're close, I can feel it."

"Will do. Give my love to Mom. Oh, and Paul — how's my father doin'?"

"Caine? Just like always. He's turned the 101st on its ear from what Strenlich says. He might have to re-open that kwoon of his if he's not careful, he's attracting so many potential acolytes. I don't know, maybe we need more of his philosophy at the station. Maybe it balances out all the slime and filth we face every day."

"Yeah, maybe," Peter agreed absently. "Okay, I'll pass this stuff on to Kermit, see what he can dig up. I'll talk to you later."

After Blaisdell had said goodbye, Peter replaced the receiver thoughtfully.

"So, what did our esteemed captain have to say, eh, Peter?" Kermit inquired as he re-entered the room from his bedroom.

"Hmm? Oh, he gave me a list of people he wants deeper background on. He's gonna have Strenlich have Skalany and Jody check for alibis." Peter ripped off the pages from his notepad and held them out for Kermit.

As his companion crossed the room to retrieve the papers, he asked, "And that bothers you?"

"Huh? No. No, I was just thinking — Paul said that my father's had a ... well, a positive effect on everybody at the station, and there are some who've expressed interest in training with him. I just had this image of ... I don't know ... cops in yellow robes!"

"Somehow I doubt the Commissioner would go for that," Kermit observed wryly, glancing over the notes Peter had given him. "Although ... there are some who might not look all that bad in yellow ... There's this girl down in traffic — she's definitely a 'summer' —"

Kermit had just enough time to duck as Peter's notepad came flying through the air at him.

**H**alf a block away from the Blaisdell residence, Monica Cassals was grinning broadly. Seated in the back of a panel truck with her friend Jose Kilkeny (Puerto Rican mother, Irish father, 200 proof, as he always claimed), she listened to the telephone conversation between Captain Paul Blaisdell and the not-so-late Peter Caine. Jose was a communications specialist who wasn't too concerned with the niceties of law and privacy, and it had taken almost a month's pay, but she'd persuaded him to work his magic on the Blaisdell phone line. As she listened to the exchange, she knew she'd gotten her money's worth.

"Well?" Jose prompted. "Get what you wanted?"

"Oh, and more, Jose. And more. Can you make me a dupe of that tape — I don't want to risk something happening to the original."

"Sure. No charge," he added, shrugging.

Good thing, Monica thought to herself. She wasn't sure she'd be able to declare an illegal act on her expense report. But to get the inside track on a police sting operation ... that was worth it.

Jose popped the tape out of the recorder, and placed it in a dubbing unit. A high-pitched whine accompanied the high-speed duplication of the tape, and within minutes he handed her the two tapes.

"You get nailed for this and I don't know you," he told her seriously.

"Oh, don't you worry, Jose. Don't worry about a thing."

ay Five: Friday, November 4, 1994

**D**

"C'mon, Chief, you're not serious," Jody Powell was protesting the next morning over the list of names Strenlich had provided her.

"The Captain and Mrs. Blaisdell said all of these people sounded possible. I want their alibis checked and double-checked, is that clear?" Strenlich ordered, irritated.

"The Cap and his missus are conducting their own investigation, huh? Didn't think Blaisdell could stay off the case for long," Jody smirked. She scanned the list again and shrugged. "Okay. How do you want us to play this?"

"Easy for now. Ask around, keep it discreet for the moment. If one of these people is our killer, we don't want to spook them. But keep digging 'til you get some answers." He glanced around the squad room, spied Marvin and his mock-up of the street on which Peter had been shot, and smiled sourly. "And take Katz with you, for Chrissake's. All we need is for the Commissioner to walk in here and find him playing with tinker toys."

"Right, Chief," Jody smothered a chuckle.

Strenlich retired to his office and closed the door. The Captain said they were getting close. He could feel it, too, the net growing smaller, tighter. If only they had the perp in the net, they'd be home free. His phone rang just then, and he snatched it up, barking, "Strenlich here. Who's this?"

"Oh, be nice, Chief," came Monica Cassals' honeyed tones. "I was just calling to ask how Peter Caine's feeling these days."

"What the hell are you talking about, Cassals? We buried Peter Caine three days ago. What is this — some kind of post-Halloween trick? Haven't you got anything better to do with your time than make stupid crank calls?"

He started to hang up the phone, but something in Cassals' voice held him off. "You know and I know he's still alive. You're holding him somewhere for safekeeping while you track down his, ah, murderer? And you and I both know that if I go live with that information, his life could be in danger. And maybe this time, he'll snuff it for real. Now, can we talk exclusive, or do I take that information to the airwaves?"

Strenlich cursed a blue streak inside, but to Monica Cassals he said, "I don't know what you're talking about, Monica. I saw Peter Caine's body myself when it was brought to the morgue. He was dead. D-E-A-D, dead. Not a very pretty sight with his face half blown off, either. I suggest you check your sources, lady, 'cos they're way off."

"You're going to leave me no choice, Chief Strenlich. This is news —"

"It's nothin' if you don't have corroborating testimony. And I guarantee you, no one's gonna back up your story. You'll be the laughing stock of the news business. And you'll probably have a lawsuit on your hands from the Blaisdell family."

"Why would they sue me when they know I'm right?" she countered,

Strenlich smiled. He knew now where she'd gotten her information, and he had a good idea how. All he had to do was prove it, and he could put her in jail and this time he'd make the charges stick. "You know, Monica, you should pick your sources better. Somebody's sold you a bill of goods. Go on the air with your 'scoop'. We'll see how far you get with it. Have a nice day."

Strenlich felt great satisfaction hanging up the phone as Monica Cassals stammered at the other end. He had to get to the Captain's house; obviously his phone line had been compromised. And he had to get to Peter and Kermit before the noon newscast.

**Y**

ou told her to go ahead and broadcast that?" Blaisdell demanded, pacing in the living room of his home and running his fingers through his hair.

"Sure. She goes on the air with that news and we've got her. The only way she could have gotten the information was tapping your phone line. I put an APB out on Jose Kilkenney, by the way. He's probably the way she tapped into it. When we make the announcement that Peter's alive, we can arrest her for illegal wire-tapping. Especially if we make a deal with Kilkenney for immunity on this one."

Blaisdell turned slowly toward Strenlich, a slow smile spreading across his face. "Slick, Frank." His expression grew serious again. "But what if our shooter believes her? What if he goes after Peter again?"

"He's gotta find 'im first. I figured I'd stop by the hotel —"

"No. No, we don't want to draw attention to the hotel. Annie and I will be going over there this afternoon to make the final arrangements for the meeting tonight. We'll warn him and Kermit then. Look, I want some extra firepower there tonight. Get Skalany, Powell ... ask Peter's old partner, Eppy, too. Have them meet me at the Sutton Place at six o'clock tonight. We're going to have to break the news to them at some point, and it might as well be when we could use them. In the meantime, I'll give Carstairs a call and ask him to let the boys know to tune into the WYCX news at noon. All right?"

Strenlich nodded. "Okay. How you holding up, Captain?"

"I'll be happy when we've got the perp in custody, Frank."

**A**

t 11:45, Monica Cassals was worried. Her phone call to Frank Strenlich at the 101st hadn't gone quite the way she'd planned. She couldn't play the tape she'd made the night before without implicating herself in an illegal wiretap. Her tape of her conversation with Strenlich didn't prove anything; in fact, it threw her claim out the window, truth or no truth.

Jose was nowhere to be found, and he hadn't answered any of her calls that morning. She really didn't have enough to go on the air with, not with Strenlich denying everything. The man was a good actor; she *knew* she was right, but she couldn't prove it without going to jail. And although there was little she wouldn't do to get a story, risking incarceration wasn't among the things she would do.

It galled her to admit that Strenlich had called her bluff. She could claim "informed sources" and maybe get away with it. But without corroboration, all she had was a rumor, and rumors had a way of blowing up in people's faces.

Okay, so she'd keep quiet for a little while longer. Skip the twelve o'clock news. She'd get her unit over to the Sutton Place Hotel for that shindig Blaisdell was hosting tonight. She'd get the truth then, she could feel it in her bones.

**A**

At 12:30, Peter Caine aimed the remote at the TV and switched it off. "What was the big deal?" he asked Kermit.

"Don't know. Pretty routine stuff, if you ask me. Carstairs said the Captain wanted us to watch it? Why?"

Peter shrugged and picked up the flute his father had given him. He ran his fingers over the polished wood, a dreamy expression settling over his face.

"If you're gonna meditate, I'm gonna go into the bedroom and work. With the door *closed*," Kermit told him archly, picking up his laptop and leaving the room with a sniff.

Peter smiled, and lifted the flute to his lips. The sound that emanated from it sounded suspiciously like a good old-fashioned Bronx cheer.

**"D**

Dad, come on, it'll be good for you to go," Tim Sibeal was urging his father. "You spend too much time cooped up in this house. And you'll have something in common with some of these people. Peter Caine's dad — well, he lost his wife a long time ago, but he's been through it. You'll like him, Dad."

Jason Sibeal adjusted the patch over his eye and grimaced. "You don't think I'll scare people, looking like this?" he asked, gesturing toward his ravaged face with his prosthetic hand.

Tim looked at his father, and shook his head. He'd gotten used to his father's face years ago; he'd had to after the accident. Livid scar tissue was all that was left of the right side of his face, and reconstructive surgery had salvaged only part of his mouth. The eyepatch hid the empty socket where his right eye had been. "Dad, most of these people are cops, or are related to cops. They'll recognize you for what you are — a hero. Say you'll come," he added pleadingly.

Sighing deeply, Jason nodded. "Okay, son, if it's that important to you."

"It is. Thanks, Dad."

**"M**

Marcy, calm down!" Millie Childs told her daughter. "The children will be just fine. We've rented a movie, and we're having pizza delivered. They'll have a great time."

"Oh, I know, Mom. I just ... oh, God, why did I agree to go to this?" Marcy demanded, sinking defeatedly into a kitchen chair.

"Well, I'm glad you did. It's about time you got out a little. And these people ... some of them knew Miles. That'll be good for you. You won't have to explain anything to them. They'll know what you've been through." She walked over to her daughter and grabbed both her hands in hers. "When your father died, I wanted to crawl into a hole, too. And you need to, for a while. But sometime you've got to come out. For yourself and for your children," she added gently, letting go of one of Marcy's hands to touch her on the cheek.

"I know," Marcy sighed. "And Mrs. Blaisdell — Annie — seemed so nice on the phone." She leaned her elbow on the kitchen table, and dropped her head into her hand. Rubbing wearily at

her forehead, she added, "I'll be okay. And you're right — it'll be good for me." She looked up again, into the worried eyes of her mother. "Don't let the kids stay up too late, okay? They get cranky in the morning otherwise."

Millie smiled down at her daughter and nodded.

**A**dam Hall's hands trembled slightly as he knotted his tie before the bedroom mirror. He smoothed the tie down and stared critically at his reflection.

Where his brother's had been thinning, his hair was still full and wavy, still untouched by gray, where Fred's had been salt-and-peppered. Crow's-feet had just begun to appear around his eyes and mouth; Fred's face had been weathered, ageless-looking. Curious that the younger brother had looked older, but Fred used to tell him that his slightly seedy appearance was perfect for a narc. No one gave him a second glance, really. Somebody did. Somebody gave his brother a second glance, and a fatal dose of narcotics.

Adam hadn't known Fred's friends from the academy, but he remembered some of the names. Peter Caine's was definitely one of them. Fred had described him as an angry kid with a demon eye and uncontrollable energy. Adam recalled Annie Blaisdell's phone call and shook his head. Well, he'd be among friends tonight, even if he'd never met any of them before. Survivors.

He shrugged on his suit jacket and twitched the lapels into position. It'd have to do.

**J**ody Powell stared at Frank Strenlich, her mouth hanging slack and her eyes looking dull. Skalany did a slow doubletake, comprehension gradually dawning on her face. Epstein slapped his knee and crowed. Strenlich shook his head. What a group.

"You're shittin' me, right? Right, Frank? This is a joke, right? I mean, we buried Peter three days ago, right?" Jody was demanding, her voice slightly hysterical.

"Wrong. We buried a coffin. We did not bury Peter Caine."

Skalany looked at him, and looked away, a smile beginning to form on her lips. "That old devil," she said softly.

"Who? Peter?" Jody nearly snarled.

"No. Caine. Here I thought it was more of his mystical shtick, when he talked about Peter in the present tense. Son of a bitch. Well, they say Shaolin don't lie. What a scam — tell the truth no one expects to hear, and they'll believe what they want to believe." She shook her head in admiration.

"So where is the bastard?" Eppy demanded, still chuckling.

"You find this funny, Epstein? Caine *did* take a bullet, you know. He *would* be dead right now if he hadn't been wearing body armor," Strenlich pointed out acerbically.

"Naw, Chief, I don't find this funny. I find this fuckin' hysterical. Last few days, we've all been beatin' our breasts, keenin' over Peter's death, and where is he? Here? Dining on room service? Bet he's gained ten pounds in the last week. I've seen that kid eat."

"Peter and Kermit have been working together to track down our killer," Strenlich said. "They've done a good job. Just as you three have. It's been a team effort."

"And you think we're close to nailing our perp, huh?" Skalany asked. "How?"

"How'd those checks go, Powell?" Strenlich countered, putting Skalany's question on hold for a moment.

Jody flipped open her notebook and scanned through her notes. "Marcy Bennett's right out. Neighbors say she's terrified to leave the house most of the time, but they saw her with her kids getting into the car about ... 9:15 that night. On their way to Chuckee Cheese's, apparently. No way she could have been downtown when Peter got shot."

Skalany picked up the thread from her own notes. "Adam Hall was at a meeting, right here at the Sutton Place. Company board meeting, at least fifteen witnesses."

"Tim Sibeal was at the Agrippa that night." Jody looked up from her notes. "He's a possible. No one could say for sure when he got there or when he left, and he was in the neighborhood." She shook her head then. "I don't see it, not Tim."

"Okay, what about his father?" Strenlich pressed.

"Oh, come on, Frank — the man's a cripple. He wears a prosthetic hand and he's only got one eye."

"You only need one eye to look through a gun sight," Strenlich reminded. "Well?"

"Nothing. That's his poker night. Apparently, he hitched a ride with his son, and he showed up and played poker," Jody told him, exasperated.

"Where was this poker game?"

Jody gave him an address, also in the neighborhood of the shooting.

"And he never left the room, not even to go to the bathroom?"

"Well, the witnesses weren't too clear on that — seems there was a lot of beer on hand that night."

"So he's a possible, too, then. Okay — what about the others?"

**A**

nnie and Paul Blaisdell were at the door, greeting people as they arrived for the meeting. Caine was on hand to guide people to chairs as they entered, gracefully accepting condolences and offering welcome as he did so.

A buffet table had been set up on one side of the room with hors d'oeuvres, and soft drinks and bottled water were resting on ice at the end of the long table. Chairs had been set up in rows, with an aisle down the middle toward a low dais and a podium. Strenlich was standing by the ice sculpture, trying to figure out what it was supposed to be. Eppy was standing by the door that led to the service corridor, casually sipping at a can of Diet Coke. Skalany was passing out name badges and pens for people to write their names with. Jody was stationed in the lobby, where she chatted amiably with Alan Carstairs, her eyes roving around the room, wary and expectant.

As Monica Cassals swept in with her camera crew, Jody's hand snatched at Carstairs' sleeve. "What — oh, for pity's sake,"

Carstairs swore, drawing himself up and nodding an apology to Jody. "I'll take care of them," he told her.

Jody leaned back against the pillar and crossed her arms over her chest to watch the fireworks. If Carstairs was half as good at his job as she'd heard from Strenlich, Monica Cassals had finally met her match.

"I'm sorry, but there's no press allowed. This is a private affair," he announced as he crossed the lobby in long strides.

Monica Cassals turned the full force of her charm on him, smiling demurely as she said, "But I was informed that this was a charity event. Surely the people organizing it will want press coverage — it can't help but boost their contributions."

"Well, I'm sorry, but it's just not on. You were incorrectly informed."

"Then it's not a charity event? What is it, then?" she asked sweetly, surreptitiously signalling her new sound man to turn on the recorder. Her camera man, also someone new, clicked the camera onto record.

Carstairs saw the red light of the camera and shook his head. "I'm sorry. This is a private meeting, and I'll have to ask you to turn off that contraption and leave, Ms. Cassals. I'm sure if you put your request through the proper channels, Captain and Mrs. Blaisdell will be happy to speak to you about the memorial fund in their son's name. But tonight's meeting is off-limits," he concluded in clipped tones.

"So you're denying the freedom of the press," Monica challenged.

"I'm protecting the privacy of a grieving family," he corrected archly. "And now, if you won't leave, I shall have to call hotel security to have you removed."

Monica bristled, frowning at him. "Can I quote you on that, Mr., ah —"

"Carstairs. Alan Carstairs. Assistant Manager in Charge of Administration. And yes, you may quote me. The Sutton Place Hotel protects the privacy of its guests, Ms. Cassals. You can quote me on that, as well. Now, if you please ..." he gestured toward the door, and as Monica stiffly signalled her crew to follow, escorted her off the floor, and out of the building.

Strenlich had drifted out of the meeting room, and now stood just behind Jody. "Glad he's on our side," he commented wryly.

"I think he was a bouncer in a previous life," she noted with a smile.

**B**y eight o'clock, the meeting room was full. Annie listened to the buzz of conversation, feeling gratified. Many of the people who had come tonight were not survivors, but members of Peter's graduating class, or their parents. They'd come with a genuine desire to help.

Carstairs had come back and assured Paul that the press had been dealt with, asking if there was anything else he could do. Paul had told him that they'd start the meeting on time, and thanked him for his help. The rustle of clothing told her that he bowed slightly as he exited the room, closing the doors after him. She could imagine him posting himself outside the door, like a palace guard. The image made her smile.

"Mrs. Blaisdell?" a soft, worried voice asked.

"Yes? Marcy, isn't it? I'm so glad you came," she said, reaching for Marcy's hands. The woman allowed her hands to be grasped, and Annie could feel the trembling in them. "Sit with me. I don't know many people here, either."

"How did you know it was me ...?" Marcy questioned as Annie led her to a chair.

"I recognized your voice, of course." She felt along the backs of the chairs, identifying two seats together, and gestured for Marcy to sit down. "It's true what they say — your other senses do become more sensitive when one sense is gone."

Marcy seated herself, still holding on to Annie's hand as Annie took the aisle seat. "I'd always heard you were an amazing woman, Mrs. Blais — ah, Annie. I'm sorry, I'm not used to calling a captain's wife by her first name."

Annie smiled encouragingly. "That's okay. Sometimes I'm not so used to being a captain's wife. It's difficult being married to a policeman. Even worse having one for a son."

"Yes, I'm sure it must be. I guess it's not unlikely my son will want to follow in his father's footsteps. But I hope not. I don't think I could go through it again, not like this."

Her smile falling away, Annie tightened her grip on Marcy's hand. "No. Not like this," she agreed grimly.

Just then, they heard the sound of a loud tap against the microphone at the podium. "Um, excuse me?" Conversation trickled away as Paul commanded attention.

"Well, I want to thank you all for coming, especially on such short notice. As I'm sure you can appreciate, this is a difficult time for us. But I agree with my wife, Annie, that our son's ... death ... needn't be in vain. Several of us in this room have suffered losses over the last several months, and some of you earlier in the years since 1986. Our hearts go out to you, who share our grief. Several of you have young families, or parents who are getting on in years. A policeman's pension isn't the largest sum of money in the world," he paused for a current of self-conscious laughter, "and we both know that a little help from our friends can't hurt. We'd like to start a memorial fund in our son's name, a fund that will be available to anyone who needs it connected with the academy class of 1986."

A general murmur of approval rippled through the crowd. "Now, I'm not going to ask anyone for money tonight. I know that some of you just don't have it to give. What I'd like to ask of you is your time and energy to help us get this fund off the ground. We'd like to organize fund raisers, solicit contributions from our community. Anything you can do to help will be appreciated."

**F**

rom his vantage point in the far corner of the room, Kwai Chang Caine studied the crowd of people with his inner eye. In general, he got a sense of purpose, a positive energy flowing from the people seated toward the man at the podium. But somewhere in that assemblage, there was a deep anger, a hatred that had slipped into madness. He concentrated, filtering out the positive emotions, centering on the negative. He was unsurprised to find the source of the turmoil suddenly look up and turn toward him.

**Q**

uestions and answers had followed Blaisdell's opening remarks, but soon the meeting broke up into smaller interest groups, each beginning to make plans to organize this idea into reality. Tim Sibeal took the opportunity to steer his father toward Peter Caine's father.

"Mr. Caine, I'd like you to meet my father, Jason Sibeal," Tim introduced. "Dad, Peter Caine's father, ah, Kwai Chang Caine. Did I pronounce it right?" he asked Caine.

Caine bowed. "Yes. I was ... sorry to hear of your loss, Mr. Sibeal. I, too, lost my wife ... when my son was very young. It is not ... an easy thing to bear ... at any age," Caine told the older Sibeal solemnly.

"No, no it isn't. Lillian was sick for a long time. You'd think that would've prepared me. But it didn't."

"No," Caine agreed. "My wife ... Laura ... had been ill for some time ... but for a time ... the medicines I prepared for her ... seemed to strengthen her. But her time in this life ... was destined to be short. Peter was but an infant when she died."

"And you left with a kid." Sibeal glanced at his own son and shook his head. "Musta been tough, raising a son on your own."

"My son has always been a ... source of joy and pride to me. Even as a child ... he was headstrong and full of opinions. But his overriding desire was ... to do good. That, I think, is why he felt ... compelled ... to become a policeman."

"We're a police family. My father was a cop, forty years on the force. Me, I served 30 until this happened," he gestured with his prosthetic hand toward his face. "Tim's been in what ... eight years?"

"Nearly nine," Tim agreed, watching his father anxiously.

"A proud tradition. My son, I fear, had not the ... temperament ... to follow my path. Instead, he found his own."

"Yeah, well, Tim's been riding a desk the last couple of years to please his mother, but he'll soon get back in harness, won't you, Tim?" Jason encouraged, clapping his son on the back.

"Well ..." Tim hesitated.

"Oh, come on, Tim, you can't tell me you like being a clerk!" his father scorned.

"Well, Dad, I do. I'm not a clerk, anyway. I head up the Records division at the precinct. It's an important job, and I do it well. And I like it," Tim concluded defensively.

"Tim, your mother's gone. You don't have to pretend anymore," Jason insisted.

"I'm not pretending, Dad. I *do* like what I do, and I do it well. Ask Captain Blaisdell. Or Chief Strenlich. They'll tell you."

"Well, this ain't the place to argue about it, is it?" He wiped his left hand on his pants and thrust it out toward Caine. "Sorry about your son. It's the risk any cop takes. Any cop on the street, anyway," he added, glaring at his son. With that, he turned and stalked away.

"I guess I could have handled that better," Tim said, watching sadly as his father moved through the crowd.

"Your father has ... great anger. Great pain. Perhaps too great."

Tim stared at Caine, and again, that haunted look came over his face. "I ... I'd better stick with him. Thanks for trying, Mr. Caine."

Caine bowed as Tim quickly took his leave. Like Tim, he kept an eye on the progress of Jason Sibeal.

**A**

adam Hall found Annie Blaisdell still sitting with Marcy Bennett, and introduced himself nervously. She invited him to join them, and when Marcy would have excused herself, tightened her hold on Marcy's hand to force her to stay.

"Mr. Hall's brother was killed the month after your husband. The two of you have something in common. Marcy — you've held it in long enough. And you, Mr. Hall —"

"Call me Adam, please," he offered, watching the two women tensely.

"And you, Adam — don't either of you see how much you hurt yourselves by cutting yourselves off from the world? Yes, it's important to grieve — my God, I know that — but if you let someone else into these shells you've built around yourselves, you can help each other."

Marcy and Adam exchanged shy glances, glances which darted back to Annie almost immediately. "What do you do, Adam?"

"I'm a financial advisor. I think ... I think I can help with this fund. Offer my services, my contacts. At first, I didn't want to think about it, but you're right. And doing something positive, well, it helps a little, I guess."

"And Marcy — what do you do?"

"I'm a computer programmer." She glanced at Adam again and shrugged. "I guess ... I guess I could contribute a ... program or something to help track the people who are connected to their class, maybe something for tracking money ..."

"You see? We have our first committee. We're on our way."

**"H**

ow you doing, babe?" Paul Blaisdell asked as he came up to Annie much later in the evening. He put his arm around her shoulders and hugged her to him, kissing her forehead.

"All right," she answered, but he could hear the weariness in her voice. "It's all going very well."

"Yeah. I think we might actually make this work. It's gratifying to see so many people interested in making it a reality." He glanced around the room, pausing at Marcy Bennett, and shook his head. "There are definitely people who could use the help, huh?"

"You must be looking at Marcy. What she needs is someone to talk to more than anything. I gather that her mother moved in with her and the children. But her mother can't really understand what it means to be a cop's wife."

"And you can?" he suggested with a smile. "Why do I think we'll be seeing more of Marcy Bennett?"

"Because we will. I like her, Paul. She's a good woman. And I wouldn't mind having another woman friend, either. Even if she is closer to my son's age than mine."

"You don't think it's possible that she could be the killer?"

"No way, Paul. Her husband was the first, and she's devastated by it. You don't think so, either."

"No, no I don't," he agreed absently, his eyes sweeping across the room.

"And I don't think Adam Hall had anything to do with it, either," she told him firmly.

"No? Women's intuition?"

"Gut instinct. I've met Jerry Fields' parents, too, and I think you can forget about them as far as the murders are concerned. Jennifer Simonson's husband, too. And Carlos Herrera's fiancée."

"You're probably right," he sighed. "I don't think any of them were involved, either."

"But you have an idea who is," she said suddenly, her voice dropping. "Someone here."

"Yeah. Look, you look tired. Why don't we ask Carstairs to take you up to the suite so you can lie down? This isn't going to wind down for a while yet, and Caine can give me a hand."

"I am tired. If you're sure?" He agreed that he was sure, and escorted her to the door to find Carstairs. As expected, the Assistant Manager in Charge of Administration was posted at the door, keeping an eagle eye open for journalists and terrorists. Blaisdell smiled; from Carstairs' perspective, there might be no difference.

**J**

ason Sibeal wasn't listening to his son's exhortations. Instead, he was watching the Captain's wife. Something didn't feel right about her — for a woman who had just lost her son, she just wasn't grieving like she should. She should be at home, weeping, not out and about like this, memorial fund or no memorial fund. And to host this stupid shindig! No, something wasn't right at all.

And the Captain, he didn't feel right, either. And that Chinaman, he was a strange one, but you couldn't figure them any day of the week.

Alarms were going off in his head. Something was definitely wrong, something that somehow threatened him. He didn't know what, and he didn't know who, but he sure as hell was going to find out.

When the Captain escorted his blind wife from the room, Jason made some excuse about needing the bathroom. Tim was all solicitous, offering to go with him, but a man can take care of himself in the john, fake hand or no. He'd been taking care of himself long enough, he didn't need the help of a cowardly son at this point.

**K**

wai Chang Caine looked up from his conversation with Mary Margaret Skalany, his eyes roving the room. Something was wrong. Something was missing. It took him a moment to identify it, and as he did, he put his glass down on the table beside him.

"Caine? Caine, what's wrong?" Skalany was asking worriedly.

"I ... do not know," he replied. "Something ... where is Captain Blaisdell?"

Skalany looked around the room and shrugged. "Dunno. Maybe Mrs. Blaisdell wasn't feeling well." She stared at him more closely. "You sense something, don't you?"

"I ... sense ... something out of place ... out of balance." He glanced at her, his face hardening into resolve. "I must go."

"Not without me, Caine," Skalany told him firmly. She signalled to Jody, who came over quickly to join them.

**C**arstairs fitted the key into the elevator lock, releasing it to the Executive Level. The elevator car moved smoothly upward, with barely a hint of motion. He smiled down at Annie, then realized that she couldn't see his face, saying instead, "A good lie-down will do you good. These types of affairs can be very stressful."

"Yes," she agreed. "Even though ... well, yes, it is difficult. So many of these people have lost their loved ones. It's very sad."

"You're a very brave woman, Mrs. Blaisdell," Carstairs told her sincerely.

"Brave? No. I'm just a mother," she answered, sighing.

**S**ibeal observed as Captain Blaisdell handed his wife off to the hotel manager. The Captain stood there a moment watching them go, and then turned back to the party. Sibeal waited for the Captain to pass by his hiding place before following the Captain's wife.

He arrived at the elevator bank after the doors had closed. He watched the indicator climbing up through the floors in the hotel, stopping at last at the Executive Level. His gut instinct told him there was definitely something wrong; he hadn't been a cop for 30 years for nothing, after all.

Glancing around the lobby, he saw that the area was deserted. Smiling faintly to himself, he called the other elevator, waiting impatiently as it descended to the lobby. When at last it arrived, he got in, studying the control panel.

Access to the Executive Level was key-controlled. An old-fashioned physical key, not one of those new-fangled electronic keys. He could handle that. He pulled a kit from his back pocket, a gift he'd received many years earlier from a safecracker named Fingers Malloy. Despite his missing right hand, he'd trained his left hand to work almost as well, and quickly had the elevator climbing to the Executive Level.

**B**laisdell met Caine and Skalany as they were leaving the meeting room. The look on Caine's face caused Blaisdell to halt, waiting for them to reach him.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Caine here thinks something's going down, Captain," Skalany explained. She had her weapon out, checking the chamber. "Shall we?" she added, gesturing with her gun. Caine reached out and pushed the gun away. "There is ... no need ... for that," he told her firmly.

She looked at him, and then smiled sourly as she tucked the gun back in her shoulder holster. "If you say so."

"Let's move, people," Blaisdell urged.

**T**he elevator car arrived at the Executive Level with a soft chime. As the door opened, Jason Sibeal glanced quickly up and down the corridor. Satisfied that it was empty, he slipped out and moved cautiously down the hall, checking the doors as he went. He found the service room and tried the handle; unlocked. He slid into the little room, not bothering to turn on the light, and held the door ajar so that he could see movement in the corridor.

He didn't have to wait long. At the far end of the corridor, fortunately on the leg in which he was hiding, he heard the voice of the hotel manager wishing someone goodnight. He cracked the door open a little more, just enough to poke his head out and see Carstairs backing out of the suite at the end of the hall. His eyesight in his one remaining eye was still good, and he cursed

as he made out the figure of Detective Peter Caine seated on the couch in the suite Carstairs was leaving.

Quickly, he shut the door, entombing himself in darkness. Caine was still alive. His heart pounded in his chest as he felt for the gun secured in the holster over his shoulder. He'd had to learn to do a lot of things when he'd lost his hand so many years ago; he'd re-qualified with a pistol using his left hand a few years ago, and he had a valid permit. He listened, over the sound of his heart, for the soft footfalls of Carstairs as he returned to the elevator. After a few moments, the telltale chime of the arriving elevator told him Carstairs had left the floor. He inched the door open again, peering out into the hallway. Empty.

**A**s the elevator doors opened, Alan Carstairs found himself looking directly into Paul Blaisdell's anxious eyes. "Captain! I —" he paused as he took in the grim expressions on Blaisdell's and Skalany's faces, and the determined look on Caine's. "Something's wrong?"

"Possibly. Can you lock off the other elevator?" Blaisdell demanded as he passed by Carstairs into the car. Caine and Skalany joined him. "We're going up to the Executive Level," he added, holding out his hand for the key.

Carstairs nipped around the corner and fitted the key in the lock, turning it quickly. "I'll need these if I'm to lock off the other car. Good luck," he added with a thumb's-up and a grin as the doors closed.

"Okay," Blaisdell said as they waited for the elevator to reach the Executive Level. "Where do we stand?"

"Jody and Eppy have the stairways covered, and the Chief was calling for back-up when I left the meeting room," Skalany reported tersely. "Peter and Kermit are armed —"

"But Annie isn't," Blaisdell reminded them grimly. He looked up at the steady climb of the floor indicator and sighed deeply.

**K**ermit was resetting the locks as Peter stopped playing and put down his flute to greet his mother. She nodded toward the instrument doubtfully, as he laid it carefully on the coffee table and levered himself off the sofa.

"Can you actually play that thing?" she asked him, her voice laden with mirth.

"No," Kermit provided tersely.

"Hey, I'm learning. Besides, my father said that it's not the notes that count — it's ... 'the focus' ..." he told them grandly, and then grinned. "Actually, it's kind of relaxing. I might even take lessons," he shrugged as he hobbled over to hug Annie.

"Just let me know when, and I'll be on vacation. On the *moon*," Kermit told him.

"Oh, Kermit, you sound just like a big brother," Annie chided, laughing.

"Then that's a good excuse for zero population growth," Kermit countered. He was just stowing his gun in its holster when there was another knock at the door, this time a simple knock, not the pattern they'd established with Carstairs. Exchanging wary glances with Peter, he leaned against the door and called, "Yes? Who is it?"

"Room service," came the muffled reply.

Kermit locked gazes with Peter, and Peter nodded. "C'mon, Mom, go into the bedroom," he told her soberly, unholstering his own gun as Kermit's whipped up to shoulder level.

"What — why?" Annie protested as Peter shoved her toward his bedroom.

"Because we didn't order room service," he told her quickly. "Go!"

Annie hurried into the bedroom and pulled the door shut behind her. She pressed her back against the door, trying to get the sudden thudding of her heart under control. She heard Kermit call, "Just a minute," and then the sound of the locks being disengaged again. She couldn't bear not knowing; she turned around and cracked open the door so she could hear better, crouching down out of sight.

**P**

eter was pressed against the wall next to the door, his Beretta held tensely at shoulder level. He looked over at Kermit, who held his Glock in a similar attitude, and nodded. Drawing a deep breath, Kermit returned the nod, and released the last lock. Abruptly, he swung the door open into the room, standing half-hidden behind it.

For the space of a heartbeat, nothing happened. Then the muzzle of a gun extruded into the room, held in a steady hand. Peter brought his own gun hand down hard on the wrist of the gunman, knocking off the aim of the gun as an involuntary shot was fired, shattering a lamp. The hand holding the gun suddenly flashed upward, slamming into Peter's face; he was thrown back against the wall, and his center of gravity lost, he thudded to the floor.

The man moved fully into the room, gun trained on Peter. Peter wiped away at the blood trickling from his nose, glaring up at the intruder. He looked up into the barrel of the gun and a face scarred and twisted by pain and anger, one eye covered with a patch, the mouth pulled back in a permanent sneer of damaged flesh. His own gun was inches away from the hand he'd used to balance himself on falling. "You're supposed to be

dead," said the man tightly. "You're gonna be dead —"

Stepping out from behind the door, Kermit shoved his gun into the would-be killer's back. "Drop it," he ordered.

"I can still shoot him, finish the job," the man snarled.

"I'm not as fast as Peter, but at this range, I don't have to be."

The man relaxed slightly, dropping the arm holding the gun. Then suddenly, his right hand smashed back into Kermit's face, the solid material of the artificial hand knocking the detective backward. He kicked back with his foot, sending Kermit sprawling on his backside. Kermit's gun slid out of his grasp as he hit the floor, but he was up and scrabbling for it almost instantly.

In the meantime, Peter had shimmied closer, grunting with the effort to lift the casted leg and ram it into the man's ankles. Bracing himself with both arms behind him, Peter swung his leg toward his executioner at the same time he heard the trigger clicking back. With a cry of pain, the man slammed against the door, the gun dropping from his hand, discharging over Peter's head against the wall. His cry was drowned out by Peter's scream as his momentum carried the broken leg crashing into the wall, shattering the cast and sending a shower of plaster pieces flying through the air.

"Peter!" screeched Annie from her hiding place.

The man was trying to right himself, spitting out the grit of the airborne plaster, but Kermit had regained his feet and was standing over him, gun trained steadily on him. He'd scooped up the

man's gun and tucked it into his belt. He smiled sourly as Peter rolled up into a ball, cradling his damaged leg. "Spectacular as always, Caine, if a little overdramatic," he commented. Directing his attention back to the man who'd tried to kill Peter, he said, "You, you're under arrest for the attempted murder of Peter Caine. And, I imagine, the murders of Detectives Miles Bennett, Fred Hall, Jerry Fields, Jennifer Simonson, and Officer Carlos Herrera."

"Annie! Peter! Kermit!" they could hear suddenly from the hotel corridor.

"In here, Captain! We got 'im!" Kermit called, then gestured for the surly perpetrator to get up as he reeled off the Miranda warning.

Annie came out of the bedroom, arms outstretched to feel her way. "Peter?" she called plaintively.

"Over here, Mom," Peter groaned, trying to sit up. "Damn! I think I re-broke my leg!"

"Oh, Peter," she scolded gently, slowly making her way along the couch. "What are we going to do with you?"

"They shoot horses, don't they?" Kermit suggested with a grin.

Blaisdell was coming through the door, gun drawn, and right behind him were Skalany and Caine. Plaster crunched under their feet as they entered the room, surveying the damage. Seeing that Kermit had the felon in hand, Blaisdell deposited his gun in its holster and shook his head while Skalany hurried over and secured handcuffs on Jason Sibeal's wrists. Even after Skalany had cuffed Sibeal, Kermit kept a tense eye on him, his gun held steadily in the area of the man's heart.

"Sitting down on the job again, huh, Caine?" Skalany teased Peter as Caine helped him to his feet, with Annie hovering over them both anxiously. Peter grimaced at her and stuck out his tongue.

Looking around him, Blaisdell demanded, "Who's going to clean up this mess, huh?"

**B**laisdell had called down to the front desk to locate Carstairs, and the message was quickly passed to his people that the murderer had been captured. Strenlich, accompanied by Powell and Epstein, quickly reached the Executive Level and took Jason Sibeal into custody. Right behind them was the house doctor, who herded Peter into the bedroom to look at his leg before Jody and Eppy had time to say more than hello to their newly-resurrected friend.

"Powell, Epstein, Skalany, with me," Strenlich ordered.

"Aw, Chief, we wanted to find out what's been happening," Skalany complained, nodding toward Kermit.

"Yeah, and we thought we'd take Peter out dancing," Eppy put in wryly. "To celebrate the capture of the Joker, here."

"There'll be time enough for that later. Let's get this ... gentleman," he snarled at a subdued Jason Sibeal, "down to the station for booking. And Skalany — I want you to go find Tim Sibeal. Have him meet us in the garage."

Sobering immediately, Skalany nodded tensely. "You want me to explain the situation to him, Chief?"

Strenlich considered this for a moment, then obviously decided not to levy this onerous duty on his subordinate. "No. Just tell him something's happened to his father, and to come meet us in the garage. I'll tell him."

"Good work, all of you," Blaisdell commended, massaging the back of his neck. He walked over to Sibeal and looked at him critically. "Off the record ... why?"

Jason Sibeal shrugged. "They stood in my son's way."

Blaisdell continued to stare at Sibeal for a few moments longer, then angrily gestured for them to move. "Get him out of my sight," he commanded.

Strenlich didn't bother to be overly gentle in tugging Sibeal out the door, Skalany, Epstein and Powell right behind him. Kermit closed the door, but this time he didn't bother with the locks.

"Anyone for room service?" Kermit proposed conversationally.

**T**

he doctor came out of Peter's room shortly after Strenlich left the suite, and announced that Peter would in fact live, although he needed to get to the hospital to have his leg reset and re-casted. He offered to have a wheelchair brought up to the suite to help them get Peter out, and Blaisdell thanked him for his consideration as he left.

Throughout the ordeal, Caine had been silent, and now Annie came over to him and laid a hand on his arm, gently demanding his attention.

"You're still troubled, my friend. Peter's fine, the murderer is caught. What's wrong?" she asked softly.

"So much pain. So much hatred. A man who becomes so ... obsessed ... with his own dreams for his son ..." he shook his head sadly. Then he looked down at her. "I must go. Our own son is safe. But that man's son ... he should not be alone."

"You don't believe Tim knew anything about this, do you?"

"I believe ... he feared. And in his fear ... he was confused. Now, he is orphaned ... in spirit ... if not in fact."

"You're a very special man, Kwai Chang Caine. But say goodbye to your own son before you leave," she suggested.

Bowing and pressing his fist against his palm. Caine did as she suggested.

**I**

t was late when Caine arrived at the precinct, but it didn't take him long to locate Tim Sibeal in the waiting room near booking. As he walked quietly up to the young man, Caine bowed deeply to him.

"Mr. Caine!" Tim gasped. "What — what are you doing here?"

"I came ... to offer ... comfort ... to a friend," he explained softly.

Tim laughed bitterly. "A friend? That's a good one. I just find out *my* father killed *your* son, and you call me a friend! Mr. Caine, you're either a saint or a madman."

Caine seated himself, drawing his legs up into a lotus position. He considered what Tim had said for a moment before replying. Shrugging, he told him, "I have been called those names ... before. I am neither. I am a man. As is your father," he reminded the distraught man beside him.

"My *father* is a murderer. He's killed six people, classmates of mine, for some crazy idea that they were standing in the way of my career! My career! As if I could have one now," he added, his voice breaking with emotion.

"My son ... once asked ... what if there is only grief and no joy in a man's life. I told him ... that way lies madness. Your father ... fell upon that path. His soul is in darkness." He turned to Tim, and touched his arm. When Tim didn't look at him, he reached out and turned Tim's face toward him. "Do not let your father's madness create ... another tragedy. He ... could not accept ... that his dreams were not your own. He ... failed to see ... that each man ... must follow his own path."

Tears trickled down Tim's face as he nodded. He ran his fingers through his hair, entangling them, tugging at the roots. "I can see my path fading away," he said in a tear-laden voice. "He's confessed, you know. Waived the right to an attorney. Everything I've worked for ... I can't stay here. I can't stay on at the 101st, not after Peter —"

"Peter is alive," Caine told him gently, grasping his arm as he appeared ready to bolt. "He and Kermit ... observed the pattern of the deaths. Peter was prepared, and ... although ... he did not escape unharmed, he lives. He will return to his life."

Tim took a ragged breath and looked away. "I have no life to return to. My mother's dead. My father will stand trial for murder. Or end up in an insane asylum for the rest of his life. I'm the son of a cop killer." He turned back to Caine, his eyes pleading. "What life do I have left?"

"Whatever you make of it," Caine told him simply.

ay Six: Saturday, November 5, 1994

**D** Strenlich had ordered Skalany, Powell and Epstein to keep quiet about the events of Friday evening until after he made the announcement. Calling all the personnel of the 101st in on Saturday morning, he convened a meeting in the conference room on the fifth floor. He'd also gotten the names of non-police personnel who had stopped by during the week from Caine, and had invited them as well. Blaisdell planned a press conference shortly afterward to make the announcement publicly.

At the podium in the conference room, Strenlich looked out over the assembled faces, assigning names and personalities to many of them. He saw Tyler Smith sitting next to Epstein, hugging herself and glancing around the room at the police personnel. Donny Double D was also on hand, looking warily about him; Strenlich had to smile at that. Tim Sibeal was nowhere among the crowd, and that did not surprise him. It saddened him, however, that a good cop's career may have been destroyed by the madness of his father. He cleared his throat to command the attention of his audience, and plunged ahead.

"As you know, we have been conducting an investigation into the murder of Detective Peter Caine. Also the murders of Miles Bennett, Fred Hall, Jerry Fields, Jennifer Simonson, and Carlos Herrera. Last night, we made an arrest. The ... alleged ... murderer will be arraigned on Monday. Some of you know what's happened, and I appreciate the fact that you've kept quiet until now. For those of you who don't, I'll explain."

Strenlich paused, searching for the right words. He took a sip of water to mask his delay, then resumed his announcement. "Our evidence pointed to someone connected somehow to the police academy graduating class of 1986. Peter Caine's class. Through the joint efforts of members of our detective division, Patrick Michael Epstein — on loan — Captain and Mrs. Blaisdell, Detective Kermit Griffin, and ..." he paused, sweeping his eyes over the crowd. "And Detective Peter Caine," he announced clearly, and had to pause again at the uproar the name caused, "a list of possible suspects was developed. And yes, before you assume that I've lost my mind, Peter Caine *is* alive.

"Captain Blaisdell and I agreed that the only way we were going to catch this killer was by allowing everyone to believe that Peter Caine was dead. Perhaps we could have done it some other way, but it seemed the appropriate course of action to take to keep him safe while we continued with the investigation. I'm happy to tell you, it was successful."

He stepped back from the podium to allow the consternation and protests of the police there to wash over him. He saw Tyler Smith break down, burying her face in her hands. Eppy reached over and put his arm around her shoulders, awkwardly trying to comfort her. Donny Double D sat stunned, his mouth agape. Kelly Blaine looked like she might commit murder on the spot, and he wouldn't be surprised to learn that he was the intended victim.

"Okay, people, that's enough!" Strenlich admonished, taking to the podium again. "Peter will be back to work Monday, a little worse for wear, but definitely alive. Kermit will be returning at the same time. Peter's father, Mr. Caine, has offered to continue to make himself available to you. I have agreed to that, since I suspect that some of you will have some difficulty in acclimating to the fact that Peter *isn't* dead."

A sibilant murmur ran through the crowd in affirmation of Strenlich's comment.

"Okay. Now, I'm sure you want to know just who has been charged in this case. I want you to understand one thing — this man acted alone. He has already confessed to his crimes, and will be undergoing psychiatric evaluation. To be honest, there's every reason to believe that he's insane. I'm telling you this because his son works at this precinct, and I do not want to hear of even one incident involving him, is that understood?"

A scattering of "Yes, sirs," answered him, but he demanded it in total from the men and women assembled there. A forceful "Yes, sir!" resounded against the walls before he took up his tale again.

"Right. You'll hear this later on the news, I'm sure, following Captain Blaisdell's press conference. The man we currently have in custody charged with these murders is Jason Sibeal, Tim Sibeal's father."

Now the room erupted in noise, and Strenlich took a step back in reaction. He let it play itself out, believing that if they got it out of their systems now, the repercussions to Tim wouldn't be as great later.

When the sound level finally dropped back within human tolerance, Strenlich stepped up to the microphone again. "I also want to announce that the memorial fund announced by the Captain and Mrs. Blaisdell is real, and has been renamed the 'Class of 1986' memorial fund. I will expect each and every one of you to do your part in helping them get that fund off the ground." He paused, glanced again around the crowd, and nodded to himself.

"Dismissed."

**B** laisdell's press conference at noon consisted of a prepared statement, after which he entertained questions from the audience of print, radio and television journalists. In his statement, he extended his apologies to his fellow policemen, especially to those police and firefighters who had travelled so far to attend the funeral of his foster son. He assured the press corps that the operation had been limited to very few personnel, but that the Commissioner and Mayor had retroactively approved the expenditures and actions taken by his select unit.

He explained in some detail the mechanics of their investigation, concluding with the announcement that Peter Caine would resume his duties as a Metro Division detective on

Monday. He also took a moment to thank the senior management of the Sutton Place Hotel, for their assistance in wrapping up the case.

Blaisdell had already answered several questions about the investigation and subsequent arrest when one journalist inquired if Peter would be making an appearance today. Blaisdell shook his head. "He's under a doctor's care at the moment. Last night's ... altercation ... undid the progress his leg had made so far. But Peter's resilient, and we fully expect that he won't sit still for long, and he'll be back to work Monday."

Blaisdell took another question from the crowd, and as he did so, Chief Strenlich moved cautiously through the journalists to stand by Monica Cassals. She glared at him, but handed her microphone off to her new sound man.

"Well, this time you won, Strenlich," she applauded him sourly.

"Yeah, and this time you stay out of jail. We found Jose, by the way, and he signed a statement concerning a little late night wire-tapping on Captain Blaisdell's line. In exchange for immunity, of course. You didn't go public with it, so we won't prosecute. But if there's a next time ..." He let the sentence hang, content that she would understand the threat.

"If you cooperated a little more with the press, Strenlich, it wouldn't have been necessary," she told him flippantly.

"If you had an ounce of integrity, it never would have been an issue," he shot back, and walked away.

Fuming, Monica Cassals grabbed back her microphone, but Blaisdell was already leaving the podium.

**P**eter Caine spent the weekend with his family, satisfied to be surrounded by the people he loved. Paul had called Carolyn and Kelly on Friday night, demanding that they meet him at the hospital. There, he'd given them the good news that their foster brother was still among the living. After a period of hitting, crying and shouting, all directed at their father, Kelly and Carolyn had finally calmed down enough to demand to see Peter. Together, they'd all returned to the Blaisdell home.

Peter's father had returned to Chinatown, anxious to break the news to the Ancient and the community at large himself. Peter would have liked to have gone with him, to see Lo Si and apologize directly for putting him through the ordeal, and to congratulate the Ancient on his instant TV stardom. Confined to crutches, Peter wasn't as mobile as he'd have liked, but he knew that soon he'd be as good as new. Dr. Sabourin had given him a lightweight cast this time, with orders to take it easy, but the glint in her eyes had told him how little she believed he would.

The fact was he had no choice but to take it easy and stay put. His car had been impounded as evidence in his "murder," and he was facing a considerable fight and at least a mountain of paperwork to extricate it from Evidence. He could return to his apartment if he chose, but his mother's plaintive urgings hadn't taken long to convince him to stay at the Blaisdell's for a few days. Paul had covered November's rent, forestalling questions from his landlord with a story about not having the heart to dismantle his foster son's home so soon after his "death." Paul had also spoken to Peter's bank manager to keep Peter's checking account open "for a little while" so that Peter's bills could be paid "posthumously." So Peter had a home and money, and had already reimbursed Paul for his rent.

Now, he sat on the couch in his parents' living room, the same living room that had been a haven to him in his adolescence, and tootled absently on the flute his father had made for him. The notes he played were melancholy, and as Annie came into the room, she paused, listening.

"That's a sad tune you're playing," she said when he stopped for a moment.

"Mom!" Peter greeted warmly, squirming around on the couch to reach out and take her hand. She came around and sat next to him, patting his knee fondly.

"The doctor says you'll be able to go to work on Monday. Frank and your father have broken the news that you haven't exactly risen from the dead. You're home where your mother can spoil you — so how come you're sad?" Annie asked, chuckling softly.

Looking at the flute in his hands, he shook his head. "Pop said that the flute would ... express my soul. I guess I am a little sad. I mean, I'm alive, but the others ... they're still dead. No hocus-pocus is going to bring them back. And then there's Tim — Dad said he's gonna leave the force."

Pressing her lips together, Annie nodded. "Yes, he mentioned that. Paul will give him an excellent recommendation, but I think he's right — he's never going to be able to forget what his father did. And despite Frank's intention to order everyone to forget about it, they won't. Tim doesn't deserve to have that hanging over his head the rest of his life."

"The sins of the father ..." Peter said softly.

**D**ay 8: Monday, November 7, 1994

Monday dawned clear and bright. Still staying with the Blaisdells, Peter cadged a ride to the precinct with Paul, bracing himself for an emotional onslaught when he got there. He was vaguely disappointed when everyone simply acted as though he'd never left, completely ignoring his condition, and generally ignoring him.

Seating himself at his desk, he sorted through what was there, and found that his favorite paperweight, a little stone figure he'd retrieved from the temple as a child, was missing. "Hey, who took my paperweight?" he called out to the squad room at large.

Jody, sitting at her desk, cleared her throat and hooked a thumb toward Marvin Katz. Shrugging, she said, "Marvin's not above picking over the artifacts of the dead, Pete."

"Hey, Marvin, gimme back my paperweight!" Peter demanded, more irritated than the act warranted.

Marvin looked up from his desk, unable to keep the grin in check, and tossed something at Peter. Catching the object, Peter stared at it. It wasn't his paperweight; that, Marvin brought over directly and placed in front of him. Instead, the object was a small, brightly-wrapped package, with a card on it saying, "From all of us — glad you're not dead."

Skalany sidled over and said, "Open it, stupid. We didn't have a lot of time to pick it out, but we think it'll do the job."

Grinning foolishly, Peter tore the paper off the small parcel, revealing a slender jeweller's box. He looked up conspiratorially at Skalany, trying to guess what was in the box. "Open it," she ordered.

He took off the lid, and stared down at a gold fountain pen.

"For signing your cast," she told him triumphantly.

He looked up, suddenly realizing that the squad room was packed. For a moment, silence reigned; then it was obliterated by a sudden cheer. He didn't see Strenlich's door close, or the Chief smile to himself, as Peter Caine's welcome-back party began.

**K**

elly Blaine perched herself on the corner of Peter's desk, looking down at him with a curious expression. At a loss for what to say, Peter merely nodded at her, masking his embarrassment by taking a swig of his soda. She reached over, removed the cup from his hand, and grabbed his tie, pulling him toward her. She planted a kiss designed to melt carbon steel on his lips, and released him to sway in his chair.

"Don't do that," he gasped. "I'm not a well man."

"Then call me when you are," she enunciated each word distinctly. Smiling seductively, she flounced off, leaving Peter to gape at her. His reaction earned him a laugh from his co-workers, but Peter blushed furiously, frantically picking up his cup again and burying his face in it.

The festivities continued, but finally Peter knew he had something left to do. Waving off everyone's good humor, he hauled himself up and tucked his crutches under his arms, and clumped off out of the squad room.

He took the elevator down to the second floor, and made his way toward the Records section. Pausing to check the signs, he finally found Tim Sibeal's office. Balancing himself on his crutches, he knocked at the door jamb.

Tim's head shot up, and the expression he gave Peter was one of pure terror. "Peter!" he croaked.

"Tim," Peter greeted. "You didn't come to my welcome-back party. Everybody's signed my cast but you," he told him with a slight smile.

"Yeah, well, I didn't think I'd be welcome," Tim replied nervously. "You're the *last* person I'd expect to come ... to come see *me*," he added, shrugging anxiously.

"Yeah, well, I'm the *first* person who should come see you. I know you're leaving the force. I also know that Blaisdell's trying to find you another position. And, my father thinks pretty highly of you. I just wanted to let you know ... I do, too. What your father did ... it's not your fault, Tim."

Tim straightened slowly, the contents of the files he was packing falling from his hands, forgotten. His mouth hung open as he stared at Peter in shock.

"Look, my great-grandfather killed a man, and that ... stain ... dogged our family for three generations. It ate away at my great-grandfather, my grandfather, and my father until a chance came along to ... gain absolution for that killing. I don't want to see you go through the same thing. I know we haven't been close, but you're a fellow cop, and you're a good cop." Peter paused, licking his lips. "I want you to know, I don't blame you. Your father's sins ... aren't yours. If it means anything to you, I ... well, I *know* ... you aren't responsible for what he did," he said solemnly, shrugging slightly.

"You're as crazy as your father, Peter Caine," Tim told him. But Peter could tell by the look in his face, by the tone of his voice, that Tim was enormously relieved.

"Yeah, well, I've heard that before," Peter said with a lopsided grin. "And, I'll probably hear it again. Today, maybe."

For the first time in what seemed a lifetime, Tim Sibeal laughed, and Peter Caine knew that his old classmate would be all right.

**P**

eter remained in Tim's office for a while, talking, reminiscing, and finally saying goodbye. Tim had finally agreed to sign Peter's cast, and when he did, he did it with a flourish. When Peter left, Tim was lighter in spirit, although his determination to leave

the force had not dimmed. As Peter made his way toward the elevators to return to his desk, he found his father waiting for him.

"Pop — ah, Dad," he greeted. "What are you doing here?"

Caine nodded toward Tim's office, smiling. "I came to see a friend. But I see there is no need for me here." He reached out and laid his hand on Peter's shoulder. "I am proud to call you son," he said, his voice formal. "Yours is a generous spirit, Peter."

Chewing his lower lip, Peter smiled. "I didn't see any need to torture him. He's innocent of his father's crimes. It'll be tough enough on him without any help from me."

"And his burden has been lightened by your generosity," Caine agreed.

Peter smiled at that, and Caine slapped him lightly on the cheek. "Now get to work," his father told him affectionately.

Chuckling, Peter hobbled toward the elevators, at peace with himself. His father stood next to him, watching his face. "What?" Peter finally asked.

"I was wondering ... what it is that women ... see in you?"

"Huh?"

"You will join me tonight," Caine decided, nodding.

"Tonight?" Peter repeated doubtfully.

"Yes. I have been ... invited ... to hear a lady sing. I would have you ... accompany me." The elevator arrived, and the doors slid open. "Say ... eight o'clock?"

Peter shuffled onto the elevator, but Caine remained standing on the floor. "Okay," Peter agreed, frowning. "But where are we going —" He was cut off by the doors closing.

Caine merely smiled and walked toward the stairs.



eter had one more shock to absorb that first day back on the job. When he arrived back at his desk, Strenlich was waiting for him. The Chief could barely suppress the grin that threatened around the corners of his mouth.

"Okay, lay it on me — I've got to pay for my week at the hotel, right?"

As Peter slipped the crutches out from under his arms and lowered himself carefully into his chair, Strenlich shook his head. "No, there's no problem with covering that. It's just that ... well, your paycheck's gonna be a little late this week."

"My what?" Peter repeated incredulously.

"Well, you've been dead for over a week, Peter, and you've been taken off the payroll. It's going to take Personnel some time to straighten this out. They said in a month or two, it should all be okay," Strenlich added, getting up and walking toward his office.

"A month or two?" Peter protested.

"Yeah. It ain't easy being dead," Strenlich called back over his shoulder, laughing. "And resurrection? The paperwork is hell."

**A**t eight o'clock, Caine arrived at the Blaisdells to meet Peter. In deference to Peter's injury, Caine had arranged for a cab to pick them up at the Blaisdells' home. As they settled into the back seat of the cab, Peter asked again where they were going, but Caine remained steadfastly silent. He'd already given the cab driver their destination, so he had no clues there. Peter grumbled and cajoled, but as the cab began to take turns onto familiar streets, he began to suspect, his pleas turning to complaints. When they pulled up in front of the Agrippa Club, Peter was openly protesting, but Caine forestalled those protests with an upraised hand.

"Tyler ... told me to come, she will sing for me. I wish to share this ... with my son. I may even ... allow you to buy me a drink."

"What, a mineral water? C'mon, Dad, Tyler isn't going to want to see me —"

"You may be surprised," Caine told him enigmatically, and they got out of the cab, Caine handing the driver the money for the fare. Peter looked askance at his father handling money, but Caine merely shrugged and gestured toward the stairs leading to the club.

It took some maneuvering, but Peter managed to make his way up the stairs to the front door, and down the steps into the club. All around him, old friends and acquaintances called out greetings. The manager caught sight of them and ushered them — as quickly as Peter could follow — to one of the best tables in the club. A waitress darted over and took their orders immediately.

Settling back in his chair, Peter glanced around him. "I could get used to this kind of treatment," he said wistfully.

"Don't."

"Yeah, I know. By tomorrow, I'll be yesterday's news."

"You will ... miss? ... being the ... ah ... center of attention?"

"Naw," Peter sighed. "What I really want is to get my life back to normal." He smiled up at the waitress who had returned with their drinks, a lite beer for him, a fruit juice for his father. He dug into his pocket for his wallet, but the waitress held up her hand, telling him that their drinks were on the house tonight. He lifted his glass to salute her, and she left them.

"Everybody loves a hero," he commented, sipping at his beer. "Man, that tastes good."

"Is that what you are? A hero?" Caine asked, tasting his juice. He set the glass down on the table and settled back to regard his son.

"A hero?" Peter repeated, biting his lower lip as he considered his answer. "No. I was part of a team. We solved this case because everybody worked together," he elaborated, looking seriously at his father. "Everybody, including you." He raised his glass to his father, who bowed his head in acceptance of the compliment. "No, what I am is a very lucky man," Peter continued. "I have good friends who stand by me, and a family that is ... out of this world."

"You are rich, indeed," Caine agreed.

"Yeah. Yeah, I am," Peter acknowledged with a smile.

"Well, you came," a new voice said, pleased. Peter and Caine looked up to see Tyler Smith standing there, gorgeous in a low-cut leather dress with silver jewelry draped over the bodice.

Peter cut off the low whistle he was about to make, and nodded to Tyler. She placed her hands on her hips and regarded him saucily. "So, you really are alive, huh, Peter?"

"Alive, but not quite kickin' yet," he allowed, indicating his cast.

She leaned over toward him, grasped his shirt front in her hands and told him, "Stay that way." Then she, like Kelly had, gave him a kiss that seemed to raise the ambient temperature in the club to solar radiation levels. She released him and he fell back in his chair, slumping down, staring open-mouthed at her.

"Play your cards right, and I might do that again," she told him with an impish smile. She turned toward Caine, and gave him an affectionate kiss on the cheek. "Thank you for coming. And for bringing 'Gimpy' here. And for everything," she added sincerely. "What do you want to hear?"

Caine spread his hands, smiling delightedly. "Whatever you wish to sing," he told her.

"Okay. I know just the one." With that, she made her way back to the stage and signalled her band to start up a song she'd selected for Caine.

At their table, Caine looked over at his son, still in shock from the greeting he'd received from Tyler. "Perhaps, my son, you suffer from ... an embarrassment of riches?"

Peter's mouth closed with a snap as his head swivelled toward his father. Then together, they burst out laughing.