

Tough Love

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University Honors in Justice
Fall 2010

To the brave men and women who risk their lives for others every day.
And to their loved ones who anxiously await their return at the end of each shift.

When a Cop Sleeps

Sometimes when a cop sleeps,
the demons come.
The demons bring all the things you want to forget.

The demons bring the tears and sweat,
the spit and the blood.
Oh God the blood.

The demons bring the broken bodies from the wrecks
the sickening smell of death
and the kids...Oh God please, not the kids.

Mainly the demons bring the eyes...

the hatred and desperation in the eyes of the people you fight,
the pleading and pain of the people you try to help,
and the quiet and blankness in death of the ones you couldn't.

The demons bring sounds too...

the sounds of tires skidding and metal crunching from the wrecks,
the gunshots that seem so loud on TV yet so muffled on the street,
the screams and crying that all blend together after a while.

The demons won't leave...
Alcohol and sleeping pills work for a while
but they come back.

Some have used their own deaths to flee from them,
but most of us are scared that in causing our own death...
we'll be with them forever.

But the demons aren't all that bad,
It's better for the demons to come in your sleep,
than for the angels to come during your shift.

(they say that if your time comes on the job, your fallen brothers come back
to take you home)

So the next time you see a cop having a bad day and he seems irritate,
and you think "What a jerk!"
Stop for a moment and wonder:

What demons came to him last night or what new ones did he meet today?

Excerpted from www.police-writers.com

Part One.

The prison guard buzzed my partner and me through the heavy steel double doors and into cellblock C. We walked past cells on either side of us, moving quickly down the hallway. I hated this place. Every time I came here to serve a search warrant I tried to make it in and out as quick as possible. The cold, steel bars everywhere made me think of death, and the smells emanating from the grimy cells on either side of me made me want to throw up. I had been complaining to my partner about how hungry I was prior to entering this hellhole, but I had since lost my appetite.

Engulfed by gray concrete, these inmates had no idea it was a beautiful, warm spring morning outside. I make it a point not to empathize with these thugs, but on this occasion it seemed harder not to. Being stuck in here must really blow, I thought. My compassion ended there, though, and a voice suddenly rang out, “Hey, Mikey? Mike McDonough?”

Unable to tell where the sound was coming from right away, and a little taken aback that someone called me by my childhood nickname, I spun around to face the jail cell to the right behind me. A man, about my age, but severely weathered, stared at me. No fucking way, I thought, it can’t be. “Davy?”

“Yea man, I can’t believe it’s you...you’re a cop!” Davy started laughing as he stuck his hand through the bars that separated him and I. I could see my partner’s eyes widen out of the corner of my eye, waiting to see if I was actually going to grab Davy’s hand. Our C.O. escort snickered behind me, and you could tell this kind of thing didn’t happen often. The guy in the cell next to Davy started teasing, “Oh look Davy knows a 5-O. You come to rescue your boyfriend, po-po?”

“Uh, uh...” I stammered, trying to still play it cool, “it’s been a long time Davy. I don’t think I’ve seen you since Pat’s funeral. What got you locked up in here?”

“Oh you know me, Mikey. Just can’t seem to keep myself out of trouble. Life in here is easier sometimes. At least I know where I’m sleeping tonight. Mary might not be too pleased about where I am, but at least she can’t kick me out of the house.” Davy apparently found his current living situation hysterical, and started chuckling again.

My partner continued to watch this reunion with disgust, and my shirt collar tightened around my neck. I wanted to wrap up this awkward encounter, so I assured Davy I would give my mother his regards, and began walking quickly away from his cell. My partner followed my lead, and as soon as we were out of earshot, he nudged my shoulder. “What kind of fucking company do you keep, man?”

“He was my brother’s friend,” I tried to explain. “I grew up in the apartment next door to him, and after my brother died, he used to come around to see my sister.” It may have made my family sound like a bunch of lowlifes for associating with people like Davy, but I couldn’t help that it was the truth. In my neighborhood growing up, we were all on an even playing field. Everyone was poor, blue-collar, and looked out for each other’s families.

My mother and father both emigrated from Ireland, and would have been happy for me to just graduate high school and get a job on the shipping docks. The look on my mother’s face when I graduated from the police academy, though, was one I’ll never forget. To her, I had successfully made it in the world, and she had played a part. Becoming a police officer, to my family, meant that I had escaped the fate awaiting most of the other kids in the neighborhood I grew up with. My brother, however, wasn’t so

lucky, and after spending eight years in prison for dealing heroin to the local thugs, he overdosed and died a week after his release.

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My partner and I proceeded down the hallway to a cell all the way at the end. Our C.O. escort opened the cell, and pulled its handcuffed inhabitant out by the elbow. A young, black male emerged from the shadows, and grimaced when he saw us standing in front of him. “Yea? What’re you guys here for?”

“We’re here to see you tough guy,” my partner fired back. “Looks like you’ve got some friends who are troublemakers just like yourself.”

My partner and I had been detectives for six months now. We had gotten a call for a shooting last night, and showed up on the most gruesome scene I had ever been present at. The stench of blood was so strong I could taste it as soon as we entered the house. The fact that that disgusting metallic tang would stay with me for the rest of the day was reason enough for me to find the guy that did this and bring him to justice.

As it turned out, the dead guy belonged to a gang on 13th street. Their gang had been beefing with another local street gang in the area, and it looked like their little turf war had finally come to a head. After some salient convincing by my partner and myself, a well-known associate of the gang finally gave us some information, leading us right to Chris Knight. Chris, the guy my partner and I came to see in prison, had apparently been instigating a lot of the violence on the outside. We had come that morning to search his cell for letters he had written back and forth with the suspect from the shooting the night before.

I hated searching cells. It didn’t happen very often, but it was one of my least favorite things about the job. The kinds of things you find in a prison cell are not meant

to be seen, smelt, or touched by anyone. Contraband was of no concern to my partner or I, though. We had come to the prison with one purpose in mind and one purpose only: to find letters that would help us put the guy responsible for the horrific scene last night away for a long, long time.

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When I got home from work that night, Maureen was sitting in our living room watching some terrible TV show about crime scene investigators.

“Don’t you know that none of that shit actually goes on in real life, honey? The only time those guys show up at a scene is if it’s a homicide, and even then all they do is dust for fingerprints. People these days think there’s DNA on just about everything. It’s absurd.”

“Alright, alright, Michael. It’s just a stupid television show. There’s no need for you to get upset about it. I’ll turn it off.”

I knew it was coming; Maureen never failed to ask. Here came the question I hated most and dreaded coming home to every night.

“So how was work today, babe?”

The question was sincere, and I knew Maureen was genuinely curious about how my day went. I had no interest in talking about it, though. All I wanted to do was change out of my suit into sweats, grab a cold beer from the fridge, and sit in front of the TV for the remainder of the evening. It’s not that I don’t want Maureen to be involved in my life. She’s my base, and has always been supportive of everything I’ve done. But when I leave work, I like everything to stay there too.

What am I supposed to say anyways? *Well, honey, at 9 this morning we got a call for a stabbing. We went down there to find a young woman lying dead on the sidewalk*

with her guts spewed all over the sidewalk. Homicide wanted to take it from there, so I rode back to the office with Detective Jensen, who told me all the while about the 23-year-old bartender he's fucking. Oh and Mrs. Jensen? She's pregnant with their third...due next month! Isn't that wonderful, honey?

But it doesn't stop there, babe, because after we got back to the office, a call came out for an armed carjacking. The guy whose car was "hijacked" turned out to have been smoking PCP with his buddy earlier, and when he didn't have money to pay for the drugs, his buddy whipped out a gun and demanded his car. It's a crazy city we live in, honey, but don't worry, I really do want to have a baby with you, and to bring a child into this messed up world.

Unlike some, I prefer not to lie to my wife, and I don't like to worry her either. So instead I always go with the usual, "My day was fine, how was yours?"

Lingo

This is how it goes
when you're dating
a cop.

You say, "Will you be home for dinner?"
He says, "Negative."

You say, "Do you like this dress?"
and he says, "It's a good visual."

"Face to face" is a meeting,
not a kiss or a snuggle.
"Fuck you" means hello.
"To dust" is to kill.

On Valentine's when I say
my bra size is 34B,
saying the "B" twice, so
the embarrassing "D" cup won't be purchased, he
says, "Oh, yeah, 34 BRAVO."
I smile, hoping he'll find
a color lace I don't already have
under my own police uniform.

What isn't said is I love
you. Don't get shot tonight
on shift by a cop-hater. Don't die
before I die, alone
in an alleyway or on a bright street
in widening pools of blood.

Excerpted from Cortez's book of poetry, How to Undress a Cop

Part Two.

Michael and I first met after the apartment I lived in was broken into. My roommate at the time, a girl friend of mine from college, walked into our small apartment one cold, winter evening to find the living room trashed. She called me panicked, and after rushing home from work, I suggested we call the police. Michael was the officer that responded.

When I opened the door, and he stood opposite me, I was immediately struck by how handsome he was. He was a good deal taller than me, with strong, broad shoulders; just the type of guy I would want to protect me from all the bad guys in this world. He had such kind eyes, and although it was apparent he took his job very seriously, I could just tell he wasn't so tough after all. As I let him into our apartment, I quickly glanced down at his left hand. When I didn't see a gold band on his ring finger, my childish crush immediately took hold.

After discussing the details of the break-in, Michael told us that his beat was our neighborhood, and to call him if we were ever concerned. He gave us his card, and I immediately began drumming up scenarios in my head that would require his assistance. My opportunity came three weeks later, when my roommate and I were planning a holiday party. We decided that it would be a friendly thing to do to invite our local neighborhood policeman by for a few mugs of eggnog. Luckily, he accepted our invitation, and came by the following week. I guess you could say the rest is history.

After dating for a year, we both decided it was time to move in together, and 6 months after that we were married. I was 25 and he was 28. Our relationship moved quickly and we were both ok with it. I accepted the late night shifts Michael had to pull, and that he sometimes seemed more passionate about his career than about our marriage.

I knew work was important to him, and that he loved what he did day in and day out. That was eight years ago, though, and I would be lying if I said Michael's lifestyle didn't take a toll on our relationship. As I came to find out, you see, being a police officer isn't so much a career as it is a lifestyle. And being married to one is no cakewalk either.

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They say marrying a cop is like marrying into the mob, and it's completely true. It's a whole different ball game, and no one can tell you quite what to expect until it's too late to turn back. I realize that normal couples share things with each other, but I've come to terms with the idea that Michael and I just don't fit into the realm of normal couples. When Michael comes home, I ask him how work was and each day it's the same answer. I know his day isn't always fine, and that he shouldn't keep everything inside, but at this point I've let it go.

Early on in our relationship, I would press on until he finally gave in and talked to me. I didn't usually like hearing what he told me, though, and I never felt in a position to give him any good advice. Eventually, I stopped forcing him to rehash all the dirty politics of the office and horrific crime scenes of the streets. I wanted our home to be the one place where Michael could come to get away from all of the problems he dealt with every day. Even though it's true I get concerned about him, I'd hate to be the one to add to his stress.

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It took me a long time to get used to hanging out with cops. I never grew up having relatives or family friends who were police officers, so I wasn't aware how strong the camaraderie between officers was until Michael and I got married. Now all of Michael's friends are fellow officers and I'm pretty sure they see him more often than I

do. Even though other police wives warned me early on in our marriage that this would happen, it still seemed to take me by surprise. I never imagined how much I would have to sacrifice marrying into the police family, so to speak. Some say that the blood of the police brotherhood runs deep and it runs true. The way Michael says it, other cops are the only people he can stand.

While Michael's career as a police officer has certainly strained our relationship at times, I wouldn't give it up for anything. I admire Michael for his commitment to the community, and can't begin to imagine how tough the challenges of his job really are. How hard it must be to go to work every day knowing that the people you risk your life to protect often don't appreciate it. The day I met Michael, I sensed how much he cared for other people, and I really believe that, no matter how cynical he sometimes sounds, he still feels the same way today.

Fallen Heroes

The bagpipes play Amazing Grace as people file into the church;
Dress blues and a sea of black are filling the pews;
Tributes spoken and dedications given by loved ones;
Memories recounted;
Stories told;
Tears shared as the Honor Guard stands at attention;
Outside the K-9's sit next to their handlers;
Mounted patrols stand sentry;
The 21-gun salute sounds as the motorcade begins;
The hearse carries the flag-covered casket;
And leads a line of cars that stretches as far as the eye can see;
Helicopters fly overhead as the white doves are released;
Somber faces express the sorrow felt by all as the call signs ring out;
Today we say good-bye to our Fallen Heroes.
Gone but Never Forgotten.

Part Three.

Ring. Ring.

“Detective McDonough.”

“Hey, did you hear about that rookie in 4D who was shot last night?”

“Yea, just got a call from the Lieutenant. I heard he’s in the hospital. You think he’s going to make it?”

“The doctor pronounced him dead 20 minutes ago. His wife just found out she was pregnant last week.”

“Shit, it never gets easier finding out about stuff like this.”

“Never...the funeral is on Friday downtown. I figured we could take a squad car down there and show some support. You up for it?”

“Yea, of course. His family should know that we’re thinking about them.”

“Okay, well then, I guess I’ll see you tonight man. You’re working evenings tonight right?”

“Yea, I’ll be in a little early. I need to finish up some paperwork on that case last night.”

“Alright, tell Maureen I say hi, and see you tonight.”

Click.

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Another officer killed. That makes four this year. And a young kid too. Twenty-four, I think. Interrupted a robbery in progress, and wound up with three bullet holes in his face. Just doing his job. It’s always when they’re just doing their job. What a shame. No one wants to go out with his or her brains splattered all over the city sidewalk.

I've never cried in front of Maureen, but today I can't stop. I'm not afraid that my own fate may be lying in that flag-covered casket. I'm angry that a young man's life was taken from him by a thug who probably won't ever even see the inside of a prison cell for it. Justice won't be served. Another woman will be husbandless; another child fatherless.

Days like these force you to reflect on your own life, and to think about the people in your life without whom you'd be lost. After seeing so many families fall apart after a tragedy like this, you also start to wonder what your family would do if you were to not come home one night. It's not just that you need them. They need you too. I've always known that I need Maureen, but to think that she needs me just as much puts things in perspective.

Most cops genuinely want to protect those less able, even though many act like it's just about the power trip. You don't sign up to do this job unless a part of you gives a shit about other people, though. What most cops forget, however, is that their loved ones need protecting too. We take our homes, and often times our families, for granted, and it's times like these, after tragedy strikes, that we remember just how important our loved ones really are.