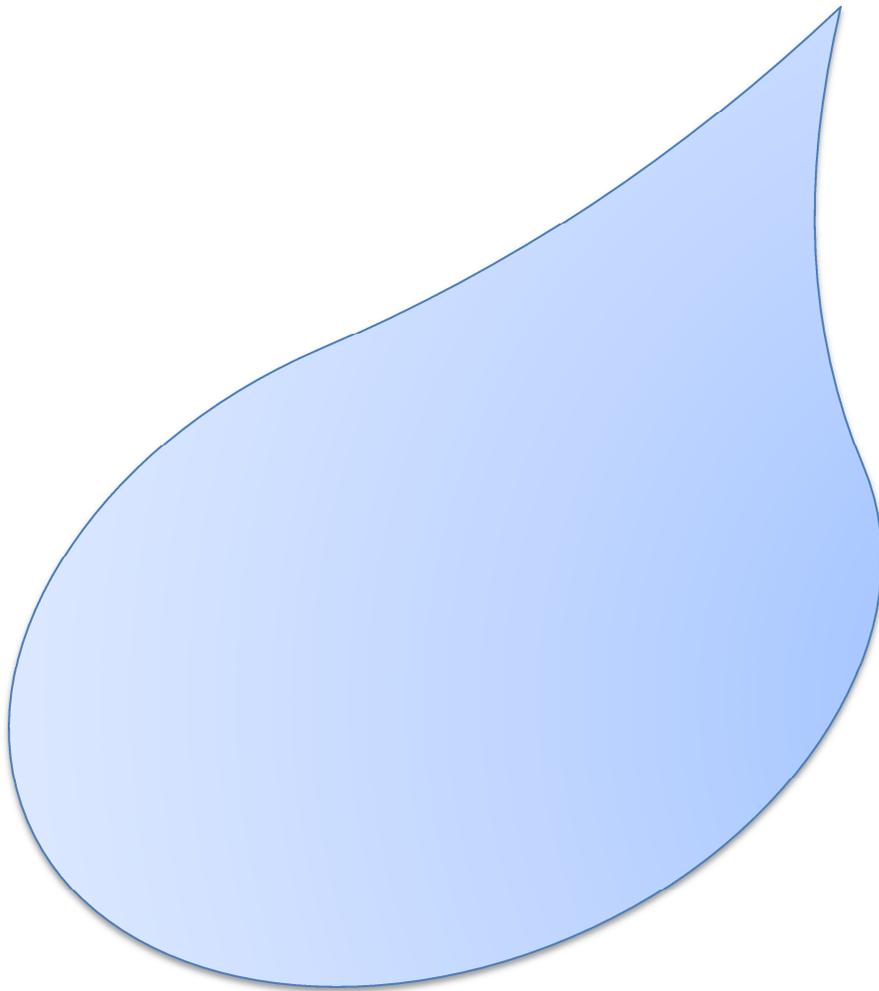


A Single Solitary Teardrop

By Bamboozlepig

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A SINGLE, SOLITARY TEARDROP

A single, solitary teardrop...

The touching, heartfelt eulogies have already been spoken amidst the mourners in the quiet, whispering church. They are just words, meaningless words, to rain down upon the spirit in hopes of soothing solace. Words cannot describe a man alone; for the true measure of him lies not in what deeds he's done, what heroic acts he's committed, what he's accomplished thus far in his life. No, the true measure of a man lies within his heart, his soul; the goodness, the kindness, the gentleness. The love that he has for those in the world around him, his wife and children, his family, his friends. Words can only attempt to offer comfort to those left behind to mourn, and what a hollow comfort it truly is. They cannot soothe a crying child who has fallen off his bike and skinned his knee, they cannot be bold and brave in the face of killing a particularly large spider for a very frightened little girl, they cannot wrap strong arms around a loving wife on raging thunderstorm nights, whispering "I love you" in the deepest dark of the storm. Words cannot be there when you need him the most, in the turmoils and troubles of everyday life. Words cannot be hugged or touched or kissed, or offer a steady shoulder of comfort to a sobbing and wounded heart. They may fall from the lips in whispered prayers, they may caress ears that do not wish to hear, they may be offered up as a gentling balm for the troubled and wearied soul. But that's all they are, just words. Nothing more. Letters forming lines stretched across the fragile threads of time. Most of all, they cannot bring him back, and those are the cruelest words of all...the final goodbye.

A single, solitary teardrop...

The minister exhorts us to not question God's reasoning behind this tragic death, we are not to wonder why. We are reminded that God has plans for us all, and surely, as mere earthly beings, we are not privy to God's special plans, but one never expects the spectre of Death to be lurking around the corner of a dark little alleyway on a vicious rainy night. Why was there no warning of Death's approach upon his pale horse, the ghostly hoofbeats heralding the departure of a good, decent human being? It simply doesn't make sense. Death is supposed to visit the old and infirm, those that have already lived out the most of their lifetimes in decades past. The Grim Reaper isn't supposed to come for a man so full of life, love and promise, who had so much going for him in his future...a future so brutally cut short at the hands of another. It's a bitter pill to swallow, the scarring acid burning down our throats as we angrily question the reasoning behind it all. The prayers slip from soft murmuring lips, the Psalms are incanted to guide the soul's passage to Heaven on gossamer angel wings, the hymns are sung to uplift and comfort those that mourn. Like sheep, we follow along with our bleats, our responses ingrained into us from childhood, spoken by rote of singular memory. And we are soundly assured that yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we shall fear no evil, for the Lord is there to comfort us. A serene mind may picture that valley as a peaceful green one, with gently rolling hills in the background, fluffy clouds dotting a clear blue sky, the sun shining its smiling face down upon humanity as it strides through that valley with the vanguard and shield of God by its side.

But as police officers, we know better than that. That valley becomes a tenement crowded with people who wouldn't hesitate to shoot us; it becomes a stretch of desolate road between here and hell, where the car we've just stopped for a minor infraction contains a very desperate man who'd rather use a gun on us and kill us just to avoid being arrested. It becomes a house where junkies hang out and peddle drugs to those in need of pharmaceutical relaxation, or a warehouse with armed burglars prepared to protect their

ill-gotten gains with guns. And yes, it becomes that squalid little alleyway on a dark rainy night. We go forth into that valley because it is something we have chosen to do. We can only hope that God truly walks with us, protecting and comforting us, since the fear of death always lurks behind us, beside us, in front of us. And Psalms and prayers are only token reassurances as we gaze into the dead face of one of our own, felled by fate, as fear shoots cold through our guts and we realize with stark horror that it *could* be us, it *might* be us, it *will* be us lying there the next time. And we wonder, without answer, just where in the hell God was when this awful tragedy happened. It doesn't seem fair, it doesn't seem right, it doesn't seem just...but it has happened. And there is nothing more we can do except mourn him, bury him with honor, and move on.

A single, solitary teardrop...

The procession has left the church, a colorfully somber snake of cars, all following the shiny black hearse, falling quietly into line as it leads the way to his final resting place. It is a breathtaking convoy to behold in an outsider's eyes; a cadre of motorcycle officers preceding the hearse, offering a dignified escort to the cemetery. They will ride all along the procession, keeping the line neat and tidy, but it's not really that necessary at all. For the cars following the hearse and the black family limousine instinctively know how to act in such a sad, muted parade. With their top lights flashing and sunlight gleaming off of their polished metal bodies, the line of police cars glide slowly behind, the only sound the hiss of their tires upon the pavement. Cars pull off to the side of the road as the procession approaches, a custom to honor the dead. Ordinary citizens watch in silence as the parade of police cars pass by. Some are awed, some are saddened, some just don't give a damn. And some, as they gaze at the vehicles filing past, think that he got what he deserved. After all, he was a cop, a pig, the fuzz. They don't care that the badge doesn't get in the way of grief. We're all human, we all mourn. Just because we wear a badge doesn't mean that we are incapable of emotions. The heart that beats inside of us is the same as the one that beats inside of you.

But it is ours that are breaking on this sad, sad day, for we are burying one of our own. So we close the ranks, our badges heavy over our hearts, as we fall in solemnly behind the hearse. It's a tough tribute to pay to one killed in the line of duty, a show of solidarity in the face of such harsh, untold grief. And right now, no one deserves it more than he...the fallen officer who made the ultimate sacrifice of his life for his job. It's something we don't like to think about, it's something that we don't like to discuss, even among ourselves, but it's always out there. Like a ghostly presence hovering around, we all know that a split-second of time, edged between past and present, the then and the now, can spell untold disaster for us. It might be one *us* that will be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice, laying down our life on the job, killed because we were only doing our duty as a police officer. 'Tis a noble sacrifice, to be sure, but no one truly wants to make it. And our thoughts as we follow the lonely black hearse down that stretch of road is that we hope that it will not be us the next time inside that hearse, with our fellow officers following slowly behind in somber tribute to a fallen comrade.

A single, solitary teardrop...

The cemetery that he is to be buried at is a peaceful place, as cemeteries should be. Tall pines flank the gated stone entrance, elaborate and ornate headstones take their places among the plain and simple ones. Death is an equalizer in that sense, no matter what your station was in society's eye while you were alive, once you're dead and buried, class distinction disappears under the sod. The sun beats down on all those in attendance, a wicked slash of irony amongst such a dark, dark day. It should be written somewhere that funerals require wild bucking clouds swirling about in an overcast sky, with icy rain pelting down and stinging the faces of the mourners, the whole world in a storming, raging torment of sorrow. But that would not be right, for funerals take place every day, and the world can only stand so much sorrow after all. So let the sun shine down upon the gathering, it will not matter anyway to those in attendance. Grief has an odd way of stealing the sun from the sky and palling everything in muted shades of grey and black. No colors exist on this day, nor do any sounds other than the muted weeping of sorrow. Life has been wreathed and wrapped in a heavy shroud of fog, dulling everything, dimming everything. We pay only scant attention to the scarlet streak of a cardinal flashing by, the sassy scolding of blue jays in the pines, the whisper of the breeze across the rolling green hills in the distance. The wind ruffles the leaves of the trees, as cotton-ball clouds play hide-and-seek with the sun in the azure sky overhead. Sorrow, as it turns out, can withstand a sunny day...and all the sunny days ahead.

A single, solitary teardrop...

It is a funny emotion, sorrow. It can hit you hard like a ton of bricks, or it can creep up on you like a cat slinking across a yard in hunt of a bird. It is the loneliest emotion of them all; for others can always share in your happiness, your outrage, your dismay, your wonder. Those feelings can spread, from one soul to another, until all that you know and love is on display in the faces of your family and friends. Joy is the easiest emotion to catch. You can find joy in the simple things in life, such as a butterfly dancing along the petals of a flower; or you can find joy in the expensive things in life, like a new car or a trip to a faraway place. But now sorrow...well, others can share in your grief, to be sure, but no one can share in the private grief inside your heart. It is locked away within your soul, chains binding it tightly to your being, an invisible cloak wrapped around you like a burial shroud. It is a heavy emotion, weighing down upon you like grey lead. It can steal the song from the birds, the laughter from a child, the sparkle from an eye. And it does not care, sorrow. It delights in the melancholy, in the despair, in the deep, dark sadness within.

It touches you, and suddenly you become aware of what the poets are trying to tell you with their weeping words, verses of such sharp feeling that as you read them, you begin to find yourself understanding their meanings quite clearly. They have loved and lost, and now so have you. But sorrow is singleminded. You can tell others what you're feeling, but they truly will not fathom what is in your heart until they have experienced it themselves. No one can quite comprehend that you take your sorrow to bed with you each night, wrapping yourself forlornly in its chilly black comfort. They cannot know that you wake up with it pressing heavily on your heart, as you drag yourself through yet another depressing day. You may go through the motions of getting over your sorrow, but it still remains, like a tiny golden arrow lodged deep within you. And eventually, over the slip of the hourglass sands, your sorrow will lessen, or at least that is your one hope...that it will ease over the passage of time and become just a lingering memory.

A single, solitary teardrop...

The casket has been removed from the hearse, lifted weightlessly by the solemn pallbearers, their white gloves flashing against the bright blanket of the American flag draped across the coffin. They carry it to the gravesite, their steps measured and paced as they march across the grass that is painted a lush vivid green underneath their feet, their footsteps whispering softly across the fragile blades. Muted drums count out a somber cadence...*tum, tum, tum, roll...tum, tum, tum, roll...*a heartbeat, a thrum, an echo of the bitter, aching loneliness that resounds within. Placing the casket gently on the bier over the grave, they move off to the side, awaiting the final prayer and words of committal to the ground, as the others move in behind them to stand at stiff attention...fellow officers from all over, neighboring districts, neighboring cities, neighboring states. Sheriff's deputies, state troopers, police officers of all stripes and uniforms are here to pay their respects to the dead. It is only the fitting, proper thing to do. The thin blue line is colorblind in regards to a fallen comrade.

The family is seated in chairs across from the casket; the mourning widow and her two small children, a sister, a few others who can claim blood kin, but have only come together due to this tragedy that has struck out of the blue. It's a sad thing that brings families together like this; even sadder still, the family ties will slowly dissolve and disintegrate, eroding over time, until only a thin thread bonds them to each other. She will be comforted now, by them, and by the larger family of her husband's brother officers, but eventually that too will disappear. He will always be a name, a face, a picture on the memorial wall, but her name and those of her children will be forgotten, erased and eroded, lost to a faint, distant memory. And maybe someday, someone who knew him will wonder "whatever happened to...?" But her name will have already been faded from the mind, and the question will remain forever unanswered; her fate, her children's fate, all lost to the march of time.

A single, solitary teardrop...

The final prayer has been said over the casket, by a minister who did not know, who could not know, the man who lies within. Solace can so easily slip from his mouth in words of false comfort. It is the role, the duty of the minister to make sure that the soul of the dearly departed is committed to the Heavenly chorus above; and his prayer, while spoken by rote of memory, is a token offering to God, it is of little comfort to those left behind, the friends, the family, the co-workers. One can only take so many spiritual platitudes before one begins to grow weary of it all...for he did not *have* to die. And it was not a quiet death at all. He did not die a hero, rescuing some poor innocent soul from an evil fate, his brave and hearty actions garnering headlines and praise from an embittered society that doesn't believe in heroes anymore. No, those laurels were not meant for him in death. He died shockingly and ingloriously; the hand of another man firing the gun that drove the bullets into his heart, crumpling him to the ground in that alley, as the cold, harsh rain beat down and washed his blood away. He died a stupid, senseless death, an act of malicious cowardness ending his life right there.

And blood cries out for blood, but it will not be granted, for the shedding of his blood will not get the justice it deserves. His killer will not be executed for his crime. He will not go to the gallows, the gas chamber, the firing squad, as he so rightly should. Instead, he'll be spending the rest of his nasty, evil life locked away in a prison cell among other killers and criminals who glorify a cop-killer, while the man he so ruthlessly gunned down spends the rest of eternity in a coffin. There is no justice in that, not at all. But justice is a hard thing to mete out, a lightning flash in the dark of night, as realization hits hard that

justice truly *is* unjust and blind. All the world knows it, but it is cold comfort for those left behind. No, he did not die a hero's death, he died a cop. The world's heroes now are those unworthy of such adulation; killers, drugged-out musicians, society's rebels. And while he may not be considered a grand and glorious person in the eyes of others, he is certainly something in mine. It takes a helluva lot of guts and courage to put on that badge every day, never knowing how your shift is going to end. And anyone who can do that, day in and day out, without questions or qualms, with only the faith in himself and the love of his family to keep him going...well, that is a *true* hero to me.

A single, solitary teardrop...

The twenty-one gun salute has been fired, the sharp, cracking shots echoing across the cemetery, frightening the birds into scared silence. His young son, so proud of his father, sits stoically through the firing of the three volleys, as he has throughout the whole funeral service. It is what his father would expect him to do. Be brave in the face of such daunting sorrow. Hold your chin up high, son, and never let them see you cry. There'll be plenty of time to do that, in the tomorrows to come, an endless stretch of the future, when you'll wish like hell your father were there to give you some advice...or when you wish he were just there, period. It's a tough thing, to grow up without a father, even tougher still when you started out life with a dad, but have now had him cruelly whisked away from you in a moment's whisper. There will be no more games of catch in the backyard, no more tinkering on the family car on lazy Saturday afternoons, no more fishing trips to the cabin by the lake. No more catching lightning bugs in the deepening twilight as your parents share quiet, intimate chuckles, no more ghost stories to share on dark, stormy nights. Your father will not see you grow up into a fine young man, he will not be there to cheer you on at football games, he will not be there to give you advice about girls, he will not be there to see you graduate from college.

No, because he is no longer there, you must be a man now, a role that has been pressed upon your young self by the fickle hands of fate. You must watch out for your mother, sitting forlornly beside you, and your small sister, who flinches and draws in her breath at the sound of the shots being fired. She does not know why they are being fired, only that they are loud and they scare her, and her father is not there to comfort her like he usually is. She has no comprehension of the larger world of good and evil, and you yourself have not much more idea of it either. No, the two of you, your sister and you, must bind together now, and cling tightly to the what scant memories you have of your father, and keep them alive for yourselves. That is the only way that his legacy and his deep love for the two of you will live on.

A single, solitary teardrop...

And then there is his daughter, a tiny, pretty little thing with long blonde hair and her daddy's eyes and smile. She gazes with rapt curiosity at those in attendance, wondering why so many men in uniforms just like her father are standing there like toy soldiers, their postures perfect and erect. She cannot grasp the concept of death, her young mind cannot fathom it. She only knows that her daddy didn't come home the other night, nor last night, and he will not come home tonight. She cannot understand why her father won't won't be there any longer to read her a bedtime story, why he won't be there to soothe her when the scary monster in the closet that moments ago was going to eat her alive, turns out to be just a dress hanging there. There will be no more piggyback rides upon his shoulders, no bouncing upon his knee, pretending she is a cowgirl on a wild pinto pony. There will be no dancing with her daddy, her tiny feet upon his large ones, as he swoops and giddies her around the room, making her shriek with delight. As

she studies the men standing mutely across from her, she looks for her father, but he is not there. He will never be there again. Not for her first day of school, her first dance, her first prom. He will not be there to comfort her when a boy has broken her heart, he will not be there to walk her proudly down the aisle on her wedding day, lifting her veil and kissing her cheek as he gives her to her new husband, her new life. No, she cannot understand the cruel, harsh injustice of it, of her father being gone forever from her young life. But she does know that he wasn't there today, after her mother combed her shiny golden hair and put white silken ribbons in it, to go with her pretty blue velvet dress, the one that makes her feel like a little princess...and her daddy wasn't there to call her that, his favorite nickname for her, and that's what confuses her and hurts her the most.

A single, solitary teardrop...

"Taps" has been played, the mournful notes cascading from the bugle like silver tears, singing soaringly into the bright blue sky, an eagle's cry floating upward on hushed wings. There are words to that song, a call to the end of the day, a call to remind us that God is nigh...a call to the end of a life. Nestled within the lyrical poetry of that song is the whispered promise of tomorrow, for it will always come what may, no matter what. But for us, for here, for now, "Taps" is a solemn reminder of what we have lost, something so dear, someone so precious and loved, whose tomorrows will come nevermore. The notes echo and resound across the cemetery, carried along like rain riding before the wind, harkening to distant, far off places, letting the world know that sorrow sings that song. And as the notes ring out, the final salute is given, a sign of deep respect for the fallen man among all the law enforcement officers in attendance, a grim reminder of there but for the grace of God go I. We don't have to speak it, it does not fall from our lips like a silent prayer; but it winds itself within our brains, whispering that truly, the next time, it might be one of us lying in that casket. And we don't wish to think of that now. Later, maybe, but not now. There is still too much to do here, too many tasks of honor to carry out yet for our dear brother.

Two of us step up to fold the American flag that drapes his coffin, a bright glint of red, white, and blue, amidst so much black, amidst so much sadness. The breeze catches the flag as we fold it, ruffling it softly, caressing the crisp cloth with gentle fingers as we tighten it into a triangle...a shape that could represent much in this world. Could it be the holy trinity of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit? Or could it be the three ideals that one is supposed to possess in life, that of faith, hope and charity? It is a banner of glory...a proud banner of blood, sweat, and tears; of past hard-fought wars and noble sacrifices, of bloodshed of many innocents on foreign soil, on our own soil, of countless battles against tyranny and injustice. For there is no greater battle that can be fought than that of good versus evil, and it has been already foretold that evil has won this battle round. The good will be buried today. And it makes you wonder if the battle is truly worth it in the end, for at what cost to life, a staggering loss such as his, can be claimed in the long run as being a necessary death.

A single, solitary teardrop...

The flag has now been folded and given to the family, presented with such solemnity to his wife, who strokes it gently for a moment, then hands it to her little boy. He hugs the flag tightly to him, as if somehow his grip could magically bring his father back. A sad trio they are, their sustaining life force removed without so much as a warning. Now they must somehow gather up the courage to go on in the world, as cold harsh reality sets in, touching them with bleak bony fingers. He is gone, he is gone, he is truly truly gone. The widow weeps silently behind her black veil, the wind lifting it gently, like his fingers stroking across her face. She will have nothing more than memories now, to hold him to her, to bind him to her. She will remember the small things; his habit of leaving his socks on the floor, his eyes flashing merrily at her as they laughed over a silly joke together, his hands gliding across her body in the night as they made love. She will remember the big things, too; the day he asked her to marry him, their wedding day shared among many happy friends and family, the birth of their first child, the birth of their second. All the fights, all the quarrels, all the wonderful making up...well, she'll recall those, too. And she'll remember how she sent him off to work that night, with the usual kiss and admonition to be careful out there. And a wife's whispered prayer each night to keep her husband safe is not a shield enough against fate, it cannot stop the wheels once they are set in motion. The faces of the police officers, dear friends of theirs, will remain etched in her mind forever, as she stared at them on that awful night, trying to wrap her brain around what they were telling her...he was gone. He was not coming back, not that night, not ever. There will be no more wedding anniversaries now. He will not be there with her to watch their beautiful children grow up into fine young people, nor will he be there to joyfully celebrate the birth of their first grandchild. They will not grow old together, as they had planned, their bright hopes for the future forever shattered.

She cannot draw her comfort from her husband now, so she must turn to her children, both too young to really comprehend what has happened to their family. And, with dawning, she realizes that she must now be both mother and father to the children, and she despairingly wonders how in the hell she'll do it. Someone must teach the son about life, someone must teach the daughter. It is the cruelest blow of all that has been dealt to them, and she knows that she cannot allow herself to sink and wallow in self-pity, she must pick herself up and go on, if only for the sake of the children. So she will spend the days filling in the empty spaces in their lives where their father belonged...all the while missing him and wishing him back with her, especially in the cold, lonely nights, when the heart needs solace the most. It will be a difficult task, but she must gather her strength about her, pulling the ghosts and memories of their life together around her like a protective cloak, and struggle onward...alone. And she will save her tears for the night, as she weeps silently into her pillow, needing him, wanting him, missing him. Her eyes meet mine across his casket, begging me, imploring me, to somehow take all of this damned senseless tragedy away from her and bring her beloved husband back to her arms. If I could perform such a miracle I most certainly would, but I cannot, and I find that I must look away from her gaze, afraid that she will see my own human frailty, my own weakness, my own sorrow, my own guilt.

A single, solitary teardrop...

The gathering of mourners at the cemetery has broken up, the widow and her children escorted to the black limousine which will take them to their new life from now on, one without him. The solid ranks of uniformed officers has left, going back to their lives, too, with a whispered prayer that they hope like hell it will not be them the next time, nor the time after that, or the time after that, that will be lying dead in a coffin, brought down only because they were just doing their job. The minister has also departed, along with the higher brass of police officials that always turn out to put on a great show of dignity and respect for the fallen officer...even though it's likely that they will barely be able to recall his name after today. Police funerals are funny that way; it draws out the high and mighty, who can mouth all the bright pretty words to describe him, calling him a brave man, a strong man, a good man. But, in the face of such high and rewarding praise, they tend to forget one thing: he was *just* a man. Heroes come in all shapes and sizes, but the truest hero is the one who takes life one day at a time, working hard to provide for his family, facing whatever obstacles life throws in his way. It takes a hell of a lot of courage to tackle the daily tasks of life, without complaint, without pity, and without frustration. Glory sometimes is not to God in the highest, it is to the common man, one who keeps his nose to the grindstone, day in and day out. And he was just such a man. A good man, a brave man, a strong man...but in the end, just a man. And that is what truly counts, after all is said and done.

A single, solitary teardrop...

I am the only one left now in the cemetery, the hush of my footsteps whispering across the grass as I slowly approach his casket one last time. The gloves, white gloves that we wore for the funeral today, now lay atop his casket, a flash of bright against the dark wood. Laying the gloves on the casket is a gesture of respect and solidarity, a final tribute to the man inside, and it's one that I have done only a few times in the past. It's a hard thing to do, act as a pallbearer for the man you called your friend, carrying his casket to its final resting place here within the quiet cemetery. I pause by the coffin, alone with my thoughts. Memories of he and I flash through my mind...the two of us grinding through the police academy and finally graduating at the top of our class, acting as his best man at his wedding to his beautiful wife, being there for the happy births of their two children, swapping stories before roll call at the station, facing down the arduous tasks of our everyday duties as police officers; the boring, the mundane, the downright scary. And we always knew that we had each other's backs, no matter what, until that awful night when no one had his back, least of all me. He chased down that alleyway alone, thinking that his partner was right behind him. Instead, his partner was still a-ways back, trying hard to keep the bright yellow slicker of his compatriot in his line of sight as his footsteps pounded down the rainy sidewalk in pursuit, the wail of an approaching squad car heralding the arrival of the cavalry. But his partner and the cavalry arrived a hairsbreadth too late, for three shots rang out in that alley...three deadly shots that ended the life of a good friend. I will blame myself forever for not pushing the damned squad car to go faster, despite the fact that the horrible weather conditions might have resulted in us getting into an accident. Had I been there, he might not be dead now.

And it is a bitter thought that strikes through me so harshly as I stand here alone, among the peaceful world of the dead, trying to draw some measure of comfort to soothe my soul. I cannot, though, as anger, sorrow, and despair wash through me, tinged with an edge of guilt...yes, guilt. Guilt steals in around the edges of my mind as I think that I should have somehow shoved back the emotional barriers we always so cautiously put up, letting him know in some small way how truly grateful I was for his friendship. And the hardest guilt to bear of all is that of the fact that I am ever so slightly glad it was him that took the bullets, instead of me. I shouldn't feel that way, not at all, for the next time it truly *might* be me, and it will be my partner who will be standing over my grave, feeling guilt for being ever so slightly glad that it was I who died and not him. I place my hand on the dark wood of the casket, now warm to my touch from the bright sunlight overhead. The casket gleams and shines, the smooth wood polished to a mirror-like finish. Such beauty for such a sad job, that of holding the body of the deceased. Soon it will be covered in dirt and a layer of sod, with a headstone to mark the final resting place. Life will begin to go on once more, slipping us back into some semblance of normalcy, where we pick up the broken pieces of the past before us, in order to ensure a safe passage to our future. We won't forget, no, but we cannot continue to mourn indefinitely. He would not want that, not at all.

A single, solitary teardrop...

And now there is nothing left. Nothing but memories of good times, of bad times, of anger, pain and sorrow. The tenets of love, of friendship, of respect, all washed down that alleyway on that harsh rainy night, sliding forever away on the crimson rivulets of his blood as it stole quietly from his still body. You can apply several wonderful words listed in the thesarus to describe the man in that coffin, he was all of them...to someone somewhere. His picture will be hung on the memorial wall honoring those that have gone before him, offering their lives up in sacrifice to the duty of their job, just like him. His name will be etched in the shiny gold tag underneath the photo, listing his birthdate, his years of service on the force, and the night that those years came shuddering to an abrupt, violent halt. People will pass by that photo every day, without sparing much more than a cursory glance, if even that. Names and pictures hanging on a wall mean little to the average person. He lived, he was a cop, he gave the ultimate sacrifice of his life...for nothing...absolutely nothing. A two-bit crook with a yen for some easy cash put an end to it all.

More ink will be wasted in the newspapers as they follow *his* trial with avid, morbid eagerness, than the ink that was used to portray the vicious murder of the police officer that originally landed the lowlife scumbag in jail. Modern society doesn't want to read about the deaths of cops, of pigs, of fuzz. Why should they? We're the Man, the Establishment, the Gestapo pigs that keep the righteous downtrodden. We're soundly vilified and crucified, while the criminal is sickeningly glorified; in a weeping, sob-sister story that tells his sad, pathetic little life, from the horrible childhood, to the life as a teenage thug, to the crime that has now landed him behind bars. And I ask, where in the *hell* is the justice in all that? Since when did evil become so worthy of hero-worship, of adulation, of garish celebration? It's a sorry comment on the state of our society, that we hark and herald the bad, while we shut out the good completely. And it's even sorrier still, to think that we continue to allow it to happen, without anyone doing a damned thing to rectify it.

A single, solitary teardrop...

And if there must be a final postscript to all of this, then let it here be noted: the coffin will soon be buried, he will be forgotten, except by a very few...out of sight, out of mind; and strangely enough, in view of current custom. No one will raise a placard to denounce his senseless murder. No one will raise indignant cries of protest at the shedding of his blood. No one will march in anger because of his death. And you wonder if it was truly all worth it, his death. It certainly wasn't to his wife and children, to his friends and co-workers. And that is the harshest irony of all...for as much as we mourn, the world itself turns an uncaring head, antipathy the easiest thing to produce. I allow my hand to rest a moment longer on his casket as I close my eyes, turning my face to the cheery sun overhead. I let the breeze gently caress my face as I whisper, "Keep the peace, Tom Porter." Then my hand drops back to my side. A single, solitary teardrop slips from my eye and glides softly down my cheek...and then I slowly turn and walk away.